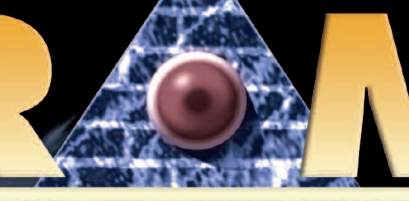


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/19 May '10

TOOLS OF THE TRADE: CLERICS

AURAS OF POWER



by Antoni Ten Monrós

THE SIN EATERS

by J. Edward Tremlett

SANCTUARY AND RIGHT OF CLERGY

by Stephen Dedman

TEMPLARS

by Graeme Davis

THREE HOLY ARTIFACTS

by Steven Marsh

THE TRICKS OF THE SHAMAN

by Alan Leddon

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CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR	3
AURAS OF POWER	4
<i>by Antoni Ten Monró</i>	
THE SIN EATERS: AN UNCLEAN CLERICAL CALLING	12
<i>by J. Edward Tremlett</i>	
WAREHOUSE XXIII: THREE HOLY ARTIFACTS	17
<i>by Steven Marsh</i>	
MIRACULOUS EVENTS!	21
TEMPLARS: THE FIGHTING PRIESTS	26
<i>by Graeme Davis</i>	
THE TRICKS OF THE SHAMAN	32
<i>by Alan Laddon</i>	
SANCTUARY AND RIGHT OF CLERGY	35
<i>by Stephen Dedman</i>	
RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE: TURNING CLERICS BY DOING AN ABOUT FAITH	37
<i>by Steven Marsh, Pyramid Editor</i>	
ODDS AND ENDS	39
<i>featuring Murphy's Rules</i>	
ABOUT GURPS	40



Article Colors

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)

Dark Blue: GURPS Features

Purple: Other Features

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IN THIS ISSUE

This month's issue is devoted to tools and tricks a cleric needs to make it in this sinful world. Here at *Pyramid*, we definitely believe in higher powers: you – the magazine-buying public! So, what do we have to placate our PDF-purchasing pantheon this time?

There's *something* about some clerics . . . it's like they radiate divine energy. Perhaps it's one of the *Auras of Power*, a new form of clerical aid that can buff up allies or smite foes. You'll get complete *GURPS* stats for divine abilities – especially suitable for *Dungeon Fantasy!* – that gods can give to their most devoted followers, plus a mighty new “meta-enhancement” that makes these auras possible.

Sometimes mortal souls pass to the great beyond with unresolved matters still staining their souls; rather than allowing them to rise to their reward, this weight drags them back to our realm, as members of the undead. *The Sin Eaters* do their part to help because their hidden history compels them. In this systemless article, learn the secrets of one of the more unsavory and unpopular types of clerics, and why they are so important.

Using a real-world holy martial organization as a template, *Templars* offers insight into how to add a company of fighting priests to a fantasy setting. Although suitable for any system, this article by Graeme Davis (author of *GURPS Middle Ages 1*) is especially useful to *GURPS* players.

While many clerics truly have gifts from the gods, some folks resort to more earthly methods. *The Tricks of the Shaman* reveals the basics of how to convince others you can channel spirits, useful for faking it or making sure customers get their money's worth when you're dealing with invisible forces.

There are often perks to being part of the clergy (or pretending to be!), including a more lenient judicial system. *Sanctuary and Right of Clergy* offers an overview of the rise and fall, uses and abuses of such worldly benefits, providing systemless inspiration for adding such laws to your own fantasy campaign.

We explore the depths of *Warehouse XXIII* (as it might have been known in times of old) to reveal *Three Holy Artifacts*. Discover the ways that these seemingly mundane items can unleash some of the most amazing effects that faith can power.

As ordained by prophecy, this issue is rounded out with a system to track holy events and obligations (*Miraculous Events!*), *Odds and Ends*, *Random Thought Table*, and *Murphy's Rules*. May the forces of good gaming be with you!

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FROM THE EDITOR

COMMUNITY MATTERS

Like many PC professions, clerics are largely defined by their communities. It's rare to have a "rogue maverick cleric" (although it's possible; see this month's *Random Thought Table*, on p. 37). However, clerics are often as much fun to play because of the support network they represent. Are you in trouble? Bitten off more than you can chew? No problem: There's a friendly temple and a dozen well-armed friends waiting to help out. (Of course, those same friends might call on your assistance someday, too . . .)

The gaming community relies on networks, too. Most games aren't as much fun alone, and part of the pleasure that comes from playing a commercially available system is realizing that others are enjoying it, too. (Anyone who spends a few minutes on the Steve Jackson Games forums can appreciate that folks from all over the world *love* to discuss our games!)

Expanding on that analogy a bit, what's also interesting is that most parties don't consist entirely of clerics from one faith. No, usually it's a single cleric hanging out with people who may or may not hold their views. From a gaming point of view, it's often logical for those clerics to try to sway those undecided souls to their worldview – maybe making a few new converts along the way.

Extrapolate that to the real world. Many of us spend time with others who aren't gamers. Or don't play the same games we do. Or don't enjoy certain aspects of gaming. I've always found it amusing that a large game convention can have a dozen different

factions of gamers, each looking over at the others and going, "Wow! What *losers* those folks are!"

So the next time you're in a heated debate about a favorite system, or playing a game in public, or _____, remember that you're acting as "clerics" for your game of choice. In the same way many don't respond well to people standing on street corners yelling about God, some uninitiated folks are understandably skittish about overly zealous gamers who yell at them that they're not playing the game right, or that they can't possibly be having any fun doing it that way, or that they'd have so much more fun if only they'd see things *our* way.

Food for thought. Go forth and spread the good news about gaming . . . but leave the mace at home.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

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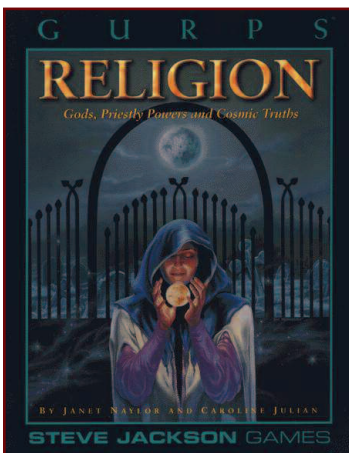
GURPS
Temple of the Lost Gods
AN 425 ADVENTURE SETTING FOR GURPS™ FROM STEVE JACKSON GAMES FOR 2 TO 6 PLAYERS
Written by Chad Underkoffler
Edited by Scott Hastings
Illustrated by Josh Stebbins, Dan Smith, and Gary Herwell
Maps by Scott Reeves

“Welcome to the Temple of the Lost Gods! This multi-session setting is set in the strange, ancient, lost city of Uruk, a city of a half a century of advanced, futuristic, and magical. From the phantoms of the past, through the growth of the city, to the eventual collapse and decay, each person offers different adventures, opportunities, and challenges, and allows you to bring the Temple into your current campaign, whether, wherever, or whenever it fits in.”

This book is a quick and easy introduction to the GURPS rules called GURPS Lite, designed to get you and your players right into the action. GURPS Lite is available free at www.sjgames.com/gurps/.

About the Author
Chad Underkoffler has spent his entire career in the computer industry by day and a freelance game writer by night. He's been gaming since 1972, in the comfort of his family. His column "Campaign as a Game" appears monthly at www.sjgames.com/pyramid/ along with several articles in the magazine Pyramid. He has written for the magazine Pyramid, and his articles can be found at www.sjgames.com/pyramid/. He is the first author to create the Steve Jackson Games Lite from its inception. Pyramid will be able to find him at www.sjgames.com/.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES
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AURAS OF POWER

BY ANTONI TEN MONRÓS

Literature, video games, and other RPGs are filled with examples of how holy men or great military leaders can boost the abilities of allies and friends well beyond what excellent morale could justify. These abilities are often called auras. *GURPS Fourth Edition* presents multiple ways of modeling such effects, but most of them are rather complex or have costs out of proportion for the effect. Despite its name, the Aura modifier (p. B102) is not suitable by itself for this purpose, but it is at the heart of Aura of Power (below), a “meta-enhancement” that forms the basis of the abilities presented here.

Aura of Power

Variable

This is a new special enhancement for Affliction (p. B36); it must be combined with one or more of Advantage, Attribute Penalty, Disadvantage, Incapacitation, Irritant, or Negated Advantage. Aura of Power turns the Affliction into a two-yard area effect, centered on the adventurer, that affects any targets he wishes. The first level is a +175% enhancement; each additional level adds +50% and cumulatively doubles the area-of-effect radius.

The user must take a Concentrate maneuver and make an appropriate Will-based skill roll to bring up the aura. (The skill is dictated by the ability; see *Aura Skills*, p. 5.) If he fails, he may try again on later turns, but each successive attempt costs 1 FP. If successful, then the aura is active for the next minute.

For a beneficial Affliction, the user may make roll of the aura's skill (as a free action) when someone he wants to bless enters his area of effect, at a penalty equal to the distance between them. Success means that person is blessed; note the margin of success. On a failure, he may continue to roll once per second (again, as a free action) with no penalty or cost, until successful in blessing that subject. Those blessed stays that way until they leave the area or the aura ends, in which case the effects of the aura linger for seconds equal to the user's original margin of success for that person.

For a hostile Affliction, the user may attempt to curse anyone entering the area of effect. This works the same as blessings, but is treated as a Quick Contest of the user's aura skill versus the target's HT. The victim suffers the effects for seconds equal to the user's margin of victory.

The user must make a new aura skill roll each minute to keep his aura up. If he fails, the aura drops; on any subsequent turn he may pay 1 FP, take a Concentrate maneuver, and make an aura skill roll to bring it back up. He may also turn it off voluntarily at the beginning of his turn (as a free action); if so, there is no FP cost to switch it back on. Also, if he wishes to use an *aura technique* (p. 5), he must switch the aura off and reactivate it; this takes a single Concentrate maneuver.

The adventurer must decide how the aura acts against targets of which he is not aware. He can choose (when buying the ability) whether to affect all unknown targets. Either option is balanced; the decision depends on whether the user would rather risk targeting someone who shouldn't have been or risk not noticing a potential (but unseen) target until it's too late.

Statistics: Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Aura, +80%; Malediction 1, +100%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Reduced Duration, 1/60, Only after the target leaves the area, -30%; Requires Will Roll, -5%; Selective Area, +20%; Takes Extra Time, -10%. Further levels add additional Area Effect.

You need not ask if whether or no you are a Mystic. Every soul contains within itself the attributes of the divine. They may be repressed and crucified, to the eternal loss of the Ego, or they may be made to bloom, like the lotus, to a beauty and power able to set inferior limitations of existence at any length.

– Willis F. Whitehead,
The Mystic Thesaurus

Having access to auras is great justification for other traits that a player might want to give his cleric.

Aura Skills and Techniques

The following aspects can be applied to any Affliction with Aura of Power. They go hand in hand; users of a power should not have access to aura techniques unless they also take an aura skill.

Aura Skills

Divine auras need more than a simple instant of focused will; they require a silent prayer by the cleric. This means the Will rolls to activate and bless (or curse) the targets in the area are replaced by a roll against an aura skill – a Will/Hard skill that defaults to Will-6. Each aura ability requires its own, distinct skill. For further details, see *Skills for Everyone* (**GURPS Powers**, p. 162).

Aura Techniques

Each aura ability has one or more *aura techniques*, representing additional tricky uses of the corresponding aura ability. An aura technique is a Hard technique that defaults to the aura skill at a certain penalty, and that can not exceed that skill. In essence, aura techniques combine the

concepts of power techniques and temporary enhancements (**GURPS Powers**, pp. 162 and 172), allowing users to add new modifiers to the Affliction advantage “on the fly.” The default penalty is normally -1 per +10% in enhancements being added. Since beneficial auras affect the user *and* his subjects, though, all techniques that modify granted advantages are twice as harsh (-2 per +10%).

Use of an aura technique costs 2 FP (waived with a critical success). Success means the effects of the aura technique are active for the next minute. On a critical failure, in addition to the normal effects, the user has angered the powers above (or below) – the ability is unusable for 1d seconds, and all current effects end.

If the penalty to use a technique is too steep, the cleric can improve his chances of success by spending FP. Every FP spent reduces the penalty for the technique by 1. This can never be used for a net bonus.

Often, multiple techniques can be combined. Add the relative levels of all the techniques you wish to use, and pay the 2 FP cost only once.

DIVINE AURAS OF POWER

Deities and other powers above (or below) often grant special abilities to their most dedicated followers, and the capability to instill courage or greatness on their allies just by their presence is a common gift. These Auras of Power are specially suited for followers of a deity with a limited portfolio, though omnipotent deities could grant *any* of them if the GM deems it reasonable.

An aura ability is designed from Affliction with the Aura of Power modifier (see p. 4). If the aura grants an advantage to both the cleric *and* the targets in the area, the ability *also* includes the advantage with Accessibility, Only when the aura is active (-10%). Auras often come in levels, with additional levels providing a stronger effect to those in the area. In addition to buying a higher level, users can also increase the radius, at +5 points per doubling. The exact build of each aura ability is noted after the description, but players are free to put only aura names and their levels on character sheets, followed by the aura radius – e.g., “Aura of Courage 5 (8 yards) [55].”

Auras are affected by sanctity, as each includes the Divine or Holy power modifier (abbreviated “PM”) – to change this, see *Other Sources* (p. 10). Each aura ability requires a specific skill, and offers *optional* aura techniques (see above for an explanation of these). A critical failure when activating the aura is equivalent to a failure casting a divine spell, requiring a roll on the same table (**GURPS Thaumatology**, p. 257). If the result is that the cleric “forgets the spell,” he forgets the aura skill and any associated aura techniques, but does not lose the ability itself.

In *Dungeon Fantasy*, the Auras of Power are part of Holy or Unholy Might, and thus the aura skills gain a bonus for

Power Investiture, Holiness, or Unholiness, and can be taken by both clerics and holy and unholy warriors. The aura description includes the divine element(s) from **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies** that suit each aura. Clerics and holy warriors can thus only take Auras of Power associated with the elements of their deity. (For those without access to **Allies**, Divine Elements represent facets of the deity’s power and essence. Clerics and holy warriors have access to Good plus two others, while evil clerics and unholy warriors have access to Evil plus two others.)

Aura of Chaos

32 points

Divine Elements: Chaos.

Skill: Epitaph of Confusion (Will/Hard).

The gods of Chaos can confuse the minds of mortals with horrible visions. Those cursed by the aura see nightmarish visions overlaying their perceptions, as per *Hallucinating* (p. B429). Thus, before each skill roll, each must roll against Will. On a success, the victim suffers only a -2 penalty to the action, due to disorientation. On a failure, the penalty is increased to -5 and lasts for 1d seconds. On a critical failure, the hallucinations become so real that the victim loses touch with reality for 3d seconds: Roll 1d at the beginning of each of the victim’s turns. On 1-3, he treats foes as friends and friends as foes; on 4-6, the visions are too confusing and the victim just stands still, unable to act or perform active defenses.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Aura of Power 1, +175%; Hallucinating, +50%; PM, -10%) [32].

A few aura suggestions based on other traits: Danger sense? “Aura of awareness!” Charisma? “Aura of respect!”

But this alone would not be sufficient to explain the persistence, through thousands of years, of such singular veneration. It must be attributed also to the effects of a long and successful practice of the Way, throughout twenty-five centuries, which has enhaloed the Sutta, as it were, with an aura of power that inspires deep reverence.

*– Nyanaponika Thera,
The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Epitaph of Confusion-5; cannot exceed Epitaph of Confusion skill.

The cleric can double the radius of his aura, at full effect. In addition, for every 5 points by which his (modified) aura skill roll succeeds by, he may *further* double this radius, cumulatively.

Aura of Cloud-Walking

47/59/91 points for levels 1-3

Divine Elements: Air.

Skill: Prayer of Weightlessness (Will/Hard).

Summoning the power of his divine patron, the cleric can render himself, his allies, and even their mounts nearly weightless. Level 1 allows those blessed by the aura to tread over smoke and water vapor (including steam, fog, and clouds) as if it were solid ground. Level 2 extends this to walking on air, while level 3 permits outright flight. However, being weightless makes those affected susceptible to strong winds. Wind moves targets one yard per second in the direction it is blowing, per 5 mph of wind speed. For those with level 1, this can be very dangerous, as it can move them off of what they consider solid ground!

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Walk on Air (Lighter Than Air, -10%; Specific, smoke and water vapor, -30%), +120%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [39] + Walk on Air (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; Lighter Than Air, -10%; PM, -10%; Specific, smoke and water vapor, -30%) [8]. Level 2 removes the Specific limitation [45 + 14]. Level 3 is Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Flight (Lighter Than Air, -10%), +360%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [63] + Flight

(Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; Lighter Than Air, -10%; PM, -10%) [28].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Weightlessness-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Weightlessness skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (above).

Aura of Courage

31/35/38/42/45/49/54 points for levels 1-7

Divine Elements: Fire, War.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Courage (Will/Hard).

The cleric's presence and faith hammers his allies' determination into steel, allowing them to face the horrors of the abyss untouched by fear. Levels 1-6 give a bonus to Fright Checks equal to the level, while level 7 grants immunity to Fright Checks to those blessed by it.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Fearlessness 1, +20%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [29] + Fearlessness 1 (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; PM, -10%) [1.6]. Levels 2-6 increase the Fearlessness level in the aura [+2/level] and on the cleric [+1.6/level]. Level 7 replaces Fearlessness with Unfazeable [42 + 12].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Courage-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Courage skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (above).

In addition to defining divine spheres of influence, Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies provides details (including stats) for creating your own supernatural help.

Know No Fear

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Courage-26*; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Courage.

Sometimes it's not just courage that is needed; it's unyielding determination that the situation requires. This technique allows the cleric to temporally boost the level of the Aura of Courage to 7 for a minute, and is thus useless for those with Aura of Courage 7.

* The listed default is for those with Aura of Courage 1. This technique receives +4 to its default level per level of Aura of Courage above 1, but this cannot make the technique level exceed the Prayer of Divine Courage Skill. The GM should allow users to move points spent on this technique back into Prayer of Divine Courage skill as the level of the aura is raised.

*I must not fear. Fear is the
mind-killer. Fear is the little-death
that brings total obliteration. I
will face my fear. I will permit it
to pass over me and through me.
And when it has gone past I will
turn the inner eye to see its path.
Where the fear has gone there will
be nothing. Only I will remain.*

– Frank Herbert,
“Bene Gesserit Litany
Against Fear”

Aura of Cowardice

29/31/34 points for levels 1-3

Divine Elements: Fear.

Skill: Epitaph of Despair (Will/Hard).

Maybe colors dim around the cleric, or he seems larger than he really is. Whatever the effect, this aura saps the courage of those it curses. Level 1 gives Fearfulness 5 and negates five levels of Fearlessness. (Until all the target's Fearlessness levels are negated, he is immune to the Fearfulness effect.) Level 2 increases this to 10 levels of Fearfulness and 10 negated levels of Fearlessness. Level 3 also negates Combat Reflexes and Unfazeable.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Aura of Power 1, +175%; Disadvantage, Fearfulness 5, +10%; Negated Advantage, Fearlessness 5, +10%; PM, -10%) [29]. Level 2 raises levels of Fearfulness and Fearlessness affected to 10 [+2]. Level 3 adds Negated Advantages, Combat Reflexes and Unfazeable [+3].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Epitaph of Despair-5; cannot exceed Epitaph of Despair skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of Darkness

37/47/56/66/75/85/95/104/114/123 for levels 1-10

Divine Elements: Darkness.

Skill: Prayer of Swirling Shadows (Will/Hard).

Those blessed by this aura seem to be impossible to directly look at. For levels 1-9, subtract the level of the aura from attempts to see or attack those blessed by it. At level 10, those affected are impossible to see. This only affects normal vision; foes using Infravision, a Scanning Sense, etc., are unaffected.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Obscure 1 (Defensive, +50%; Stealthy, +100%), +50%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [32] + Obscure (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; Defensive, +50%; Stealthy, +100%; PM, -10%) [4.6]. Additional levels increase the Obscure level in the aura [+5/level] and on the cleric [+4.6/level].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Swirling Shadows-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Swirling Shadows skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of Fascination

32 points

Divine Elements: Beauty.

Skill: Epitaph of Fascination (Will/Hard).

The gods of Beauty often give their followers the ability to enthrall lesser beings. Those cursed by the aura are dazed (p. B429) and can do nothing, unable to perform active defenses until the effects end or they're stuck, slapped, or shaken. Once the victim recovers from the daze, he is mentally stunned.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Aura of Power 1, +175%; Daze, +50%; PM, -10%) [32].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Epitaph of Fascination-5; cannot exceed Epitaph of Fascination skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

These auras don't require line of sight; they might work for clerics above or below their allies or targets.

Aura of Focus

36 points for level 1, plus 9 points per additional level

Divine Elements: Order, Wisdom.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Focus (Will/Hard).

The cleric's presence strengthens the minds of his allies. This beneficial aura grants +1 to Will per level to all those blessed with it.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Will+1, +50%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [32] + Will+1 (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; PM, -10%) [4]. Additional levels increase the Will bonus in the aura [5] and on the cleric [4].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Focus-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Focus skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Iron Will

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Focus-10; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Focus.

The cleric channels the perseverance of the divinity to steel the minds of those under his influence. The Aura of Focus grants an extra Will+1 – and for every 10 points by which the (modified) roll succeeds, add *another* +1 to Will.

The mere presence of a person strongly charged with prana, is often enough to cause an overflow into the aura of other persons, with the resulting feeling of new strength and energy.

– Swami Panchadasi,
The Human Aura

Aura of Frailty

26 points for level 1, plus 1 point per additional level

Divine Elements: Disease.

Skill: Epitaph of Frailty (Will/Hard).

The cleric's presence drains the life force of his enemies, leaving them more susceptible to diseases and supernatural effects. Level 1 gives HT-1, and further levels give another -2 to HT per level.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Attribute Penalty, HT-1, +5%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [26]. Additional levels increase the HT penalty by 2 [1].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Epitaph of Frailty-5; cannot exceed Epitaph of Frailty skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of Free Movement

66 points

Divine Elements: Nature, Travel.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Mobility (Will/Hard).

The power of the divinity opens all paths. Plants move away, snow hardens, sand gives good traction, ice becomes less slippery, and so on. Those blessed by this aura suffer no DX or Move penalties due to poor or unstable terrain.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Terrain Adaptation (Active, +300%), +200%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [47] + Terrain Adaptation (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; Active, +300%; PM, -10%) [19].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Mobility-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Mobility skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of Illusion

57 points

Divine Elements: Deception.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Deception (Will/Hard).

It is a trivial thing for gods to cloud the minds of mortals, making victims see what the divine power wishes them to see. This aura grants the cleric the same capability. He can concentrate for 10 seconds to alter the appearance of himself, his allies, and his mounts as per the Elastic Skin advantage, for as long as they are within his aura. However, those that look closely can find small flaws in the illusion, thus enabling them to overcome it. Resolve this as a Quick Contest between the cleric's Prayer of Divine Deception and the person's Will – if the cleric ties or loses, the person sees through the disguise.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Elastic Skin (Requires Will vs. Will Roll, -15%), +170%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [44] + Elastic Skin (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; PM, -10%; Requires Will vs. Will Roll, -15%) [13].

"The enemy cleric is in the level above! Send the rogue to sneak upstairs and kill him!"

A Blending entity with sufficient strength was able to generate an aura of protection about a large number of flesh forms. Once the auras were established, they were sustained by the power of the flesh forms themselves.

*– Sharon Green, **Deceptions***

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Deception-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Deception skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of Might

36 points for level 1, plus 9 points per additional level

Divine Elements: War.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Might (Will/Hard).

The cleric's presence inspires those around him to fight harder against their foes. This beneficial aura grants +1 to Striking ST per level to all those blessed with it.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Striking ST +1, +50%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [32] + Striking ST +1 (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; PM, -10%) [4]. Additional levels increase the Striking ST level in the aura [+5/level] and on the cleric [+4/level].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Might-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Might skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Heroic Strikes

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Might-10; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Might.

The cleric channels the might of the divinity to grant him and his allies a burst of additional strength. The Aura of Might grants an extra level of Striking ST – and for every 10 points by which the (modified) roll succeeds, add *another* level.

Aura of Mortality

32/45/60 points for levels 1-3

Divine Elements: Death.

Skill: Epitaph of Oblivion (Will/Hard).

The gods of Death don't approve of those who cheat their grasp or hide in their domains. Level 1 will negate the Unkillable 1 advantage on those it curses. Level 2 adds Unkillable 2 and Insubstantial to the list of advantages negated, and level 3 expands the list to Unkillable 3 and Injury Tolerance (Diffuse).

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Aura of Power 1, +175%; Negated Advantage, Unkillable 1, +50%; PM, -10%) [32]. Level 2 raises Negated Advantage to Insubstantiality and Unkillable 2 [45]. Level 3 raises it to Injury Tolerance (Diffuse), Insubstantiality, and Unkillable 3 [60].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Epitaph of Oblivion-5; cannot exceed Epitaph of Oblivion skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of Protection

38 points for level 1, plus 11 points per additional level

Divine Elements: Earth, Peace.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Protection (Will/Hard).

The cleric summons the power of his god to dampen the blows given to him and his allies. Those blessed *and* anything they're carrying gain DR equal to the level of the aura.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, DR 1 (Force Field, +20%), +60%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [33] + DR 1 (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; Force Field, +20%; PM, -10%) [5]. Additional levels increase the DR level in the aura [+6/level] and on the cleric [+5/level].

Perhaps a deity has told a cleric that he has one or more auras of power, but the god won't tell which one(s)! This can lead to a fair bit of experimentation ("Okay; maybe I can protect you all in battle. Let's attack!") and may lead the heroes to prevail through their own gumption.

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Protection-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Protection skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Other Options

Depending on the needs of the campaign, there are other possibilities for modifying the underlying premises here.

Alternate Builds

There are other ways of obtaining an aura-like effect. For example, one simple method is to take the base trait, and add Area Effect, at +50% per level, and Affects Others, at +50% per additional individual affected. The problem with this is that the number of targets is limited by the level of the Affects Others enhancement. In addition, the cost quickly becomes prohibitive: An aura capable of affecting 10 targets in an eight-yard radius area would need a +650% enhancement. For a 15-point advantage, such as Unfazeable, this would cost 128 points, while *Aura of Courage* 7 (8 yards) costs 64 points and has no limit on the number of targets.

Other Sources

In the statistics for each ability, the *PM* – short for *power modifier* – assumes that these auras come from a Divine (-10%) source. They can be easily adjusted to other power sources, however, by changing the source of the power modifier and (optionally) adjusting the skill and technique names. As most power modifiers are worth -10%, the cost may not even have to be recalculated.

In *Dungeon Fantasy*, the presented auras could suit those with magical or bardic powers. As Bard-Song (*Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*, p. 21) abilities, they affect everyone in the area that also hears the bard sing or play a musical instrument, thus representing another staple of video games and other roleplaying games.

Aura of Resistance

37/47/56/66/75 points for levels 1-5*

Divine Elements: Peace.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Resistance (Will/Hard).

The power of the cleric's faith wards those under his protection from magic. Those blessed by the aura gain improved Magic Resistance equal to the level of the aura. This Magic Resistance does not interfere with their own spellcasting.

* This is an open-ended ability. Further levels cost +9.6 points per level; round up *after* totaling the cost.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Magic Resistance (Improved, +150%), +50%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [32] + Magic Resistance (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; Improved, +150%; PM, -10%) [4.6]. Additional levels increase the Magic Resistance level in the aura [+5/level] and on the cleric [+4.6/level].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Resistance-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Resistance skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of True Sight

70 points

Divine Elements: Light.

Skill: Prayer of Unclouded Vision (Will/Hard).

The gods' vision is unclouded by the deceptions of mortal wizardry. This aura makes those blessed with it see through magical deceptions, negating the effects of all spells that alter visual perceptions, such as Invisibility, Illusions, and Blur, as well as those caused by magical abilities.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, See Invisible (Magical; True Sight, +50%) +230%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [50] + See Invisible (Magical; Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; PM, -10%; True Sight, +50%) [20].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Unclouded Vision-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Unclouded Vision skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of Vigor

45 points for level 1, plus 18 points per additional level

Divine Elements: Earth, Life.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Vigor (Will/Hard).

The cleric summons the power of his god to anchor the life force and invigorate the bodies of him and his allies. Those blessed by the aura gain HT equal to the level of the aura.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, HT+1, +100%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [37] + HT+1 (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; PM, -10%) [8]. Additional levels increase the HT bonus in the aura [10] and on the cleric [8].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Vigor-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Vigor skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

What are some challenges or quests dieties might devise to select clerics worthy of receiving an Aura of Power?

Aura of Warding

36/40 points for levels 1-2

Divine Elements: Good or Evil.

Skill: Prayer of Divine Warding (Will/Hard).

There are two variations of this aura, depending on the inclinations of the bestowing god. Those worshipping with good deities can purchase Aura of Warding (Evil), while those associated with evil deities can purchase Aura of Warding (Good). Level 1 gives all those blessed by the aura +3 to resist supernatural effects of the opposite source, while level 2 increases this bonus to +8.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Resistant to [Good or Evil] Supernatural Powers (+3), +50%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [32] + Resistant to [Good or Evil] Supernatural Powers (+3) (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; PM, -10%) [4]. Level 2 increases the bonus to +8 both in the aura [34] and on the cleric [6].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Divine Warding-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Divine Warding skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

Aura of Water-Walking

54 points

Divine Elements: Water, Travel.

Skill: Prayer of Water-Walking (Will/Hard).

The cleric, his allies, and their mounts can cross water and other liquids as if it were solid ground. This does not protect them from the noxious effects of the crossed liquid!

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Walk on Liquid, +150%; Aura of Power 1, +175%; PM, -10%) [42] + Walk on Liquid (Accessibility, Only while the aura is active, -10%; PM, -10%) [12].

Expand Area

Hard

Default: Prayer of Water-Walking-5; cannot exceed Prayer of Water-Walking skill.

As for *Aura of Chaos* (p. 6).

We come to expand the circle of protection. We come to teach mankind to keep the fires of the heart with all diligence and to conserve the crystal-flowing waters of life that issue forth from the luminous fount of love, wisdom, and power.

*– Kuthumi and Djwal Kul,
The Human Aura*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Antoni Ten is a 28-year-old IT specialist and Java developer. He lives in Alboraya, Valencia, Spain, where he enjoys two **GURPS** games a week, one as a GM and one as a player. This is his second *Pyramid* article, the first being *The Mystic Knight*, from *Pyramid* #3/13: *Thaumatology*. Special thanks to Emily “Bruno” Smirle, who acted as his proofreader and source of inspiration when he got writer’s block.

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THE SIN EATERS: AN UNCLEAN CLERICAL CALLING

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

When I was a child, our village had a sin eater – a dirty, terrible-smelling old man who lived in a squalid, stone hut by the graveyard.

No one liked him. He was a foul-mouthed drunk, and a letch. Most days he wandered among the graves for hours, haranguing their occupants and wanting to know if they were happy. An ill feeling followed him like a dark cloud, along with the terrible smell of the grave, and no one dared look directly at his face for fear he might strike them down.

My father was both the village healer and undertaker, so I had the unpleasant job of going to fetch the sin eater. When someone was dead or dying, I would lead that old man by his dirty, greasy hand to my father's house. There, in exchange for food, drink, and coin – all handed over the chest of the deceased – he would take that person's evil within himself, large or small, thus allowing the body to sleep and not be resurrected. Then he would depart as noxiously as he came, but thankfully alone.

No one liked the sin eater, but we needed him. The dead have walked these mountains of old, and vampires are never far behind.

So we tolerated him when he pounded on doors and demanded food and supplies. We considered it a good sign if he appeared at a wedding and demanded a kiss of the bride. We tried to ignore his loud, drunken revels out by the graveyard, or the horrible, bone-chilling songs he would sing in the dark under the moon, in order to ward off evil.

For all his foulness, he kept us safe.

But then came the new ways. Pilgrims from the cities came to tell us of the Lady Erzabet. We were told that we needed only believe in her, and her word, and we would be saved from the darkness of the mountains. We were told that sin eaters were a tired superstition whose time had long since passed.

So we turned to her ways, and away from the old. My father led the mob that drove the sin eater from our own, and I helped destroy his hut. Then we all threw the horrid-looking things we found within it on a pyre at the urging of the Pilgrims of Erzabet.

Over the roar of the fire I could hear the far-off screaming of that old man, as he cursed us for fools and announced our damnation. I had heard him angry, sad, and drunk, before. Never had I heard him heartbroken, or defeated.

Our village had a sin eater when I was a child. Would that we still did. For had we not driven him out, my village would still be standing, and not a noxious tomb filled with the living dead.

Not all clerics are holy persons, openly revered for what they do. Some are chosen by the gods to walk a dark and difficult path – a road that leads past the boneyard and into the worst, most god-forsaken parts of the world. These special clerics, known as sin eaters, are charged with taking on the failings and faults of the dead and the dying, so their bodies and souls might be safe from necromantic and vampiric depredation. They are also empowered to learn not only the spells of their own, brighter gods, but those of the enemy, so as to better anticipate their movements and defeat them in battle.

For a look at the rise and fall of a religion (and have some adventures along the way), discover the GURPS Classic: Temple of the Lost Gods.

In areas where churches and temples are rare, sin eaters make it highly difficult for the dead to be used for foul purposes. They are often unpleasant company, due to the mental and spiritual strains caused by what they do. However, in those shadowed and lonely stretches where the dead walk at night, and small villages and hamlets are at the mercy of things too horrible to name, they are often the only defense against the encroaching darkness.

They are tolerated, and sometimes respected – but never revered or befriended by those they watch over. They are only mourned when dead.

This systemless article presents sin eaters as specialized clerics who give the dead their due through a combination of innate gifts, clerical spellcraft, and combat with the undead. They can be included in any fantasy campaign featuring the living dead as a major adversary, including many commercial settings.

It presents their mythical history, speaks of their development and skill sets, and contains tips on integrating them into a campaign. There is also a discussion of the new, rival cult of Erzabet, which is making life more difficult for sin eaters – but not for reasons anyone suspects.

FEASTS OF LEGEND

Sin eaters have walked the world since the earliest days, though no one can say who was the first or from whence they came. The gift is clearly not passed from parent to child, which makes tracing it along family lines impossible. Though the sin eaters are widespread, they often avoid each other's company just as they avoid the company of the living, which makes mapping their lineage backward a difficult task indeed.

However, sin eaters do have a legend – one told by all mentors to their novices at some time during their period of instruction. It is not a pleasant tale, but it is one each must know.

The sin eaters say that the gods of daylight and the gods of night once forgot themselves and allowed their petty struggles to overwhelm their senses. In the urge to defeat their opposites, both sides set whole nations to war with one another, concocting strange and terrible weapons for them to use. One of these weapons was a disease that turned those killed by it into walking corpses, which sought to spread death to all they devoured.

The disease got out of control, becoming known as the Great Contagion. The restless dead rose in endless waves to attack and turn the living. When the gods of the daylight looked down at the carnage these revenants brought, they realized their hand in this horror and cried tears of shame and regret. The people those tears fell upon were given the promise that such a horrible thing would never happen again. In time, they bore children who would make that promise manifest, and these children were the first true sin eaters.

As these strange children came to adulthood, the gods whose tears had made them came among them, informing them they had a special gift to ensure that the dead would not rise. After they learned more skills and magic by these gods, the sin eaters came among the clerics of the many gods of the

The Great Contagion Was . . .

- *The result of the war of the gods* (described under *Feasts of Legend*, below). Most religions have allowed the event to be conveniently forgotten, and allowed to fall into the mists of legend. Some still remember, though they are loath to speak of it for fear of divine retribution.

- *The event that brought the curse of undeath, itself, into the world.* One god's forbidden love for a mortal, and its tragic consequences, led to the barriers between the living and the dead coming down for a year and a day. Before the barriers could be put back up, enough damage was done so that supernatural "overlap" between the realms would henceforth be a problem.

- *A horrible plague caused by the greatest of the first true necromancers.* He created a self-motivated miasma of pestilence that killed the living and turned them into undead soldiers for his army, marching it across continents until most of the gods finally chose to intervene. The remnants of that plague "live" on as the various kinds of undead or their subspecies.

- *An entirely fictional event.* The first few sin eaters created the legend in order to cover up their true origins, which are much less noble than they would like the world to know. With the passing of those sin eaters into the mists of death, the full truth may never be known. However, there are some elder vampires, liches, and other abhorred things out there that remember it well.

daylight, presenting themselves as a weapon to be used against the dead. Thus reinforced, the clerics rallied; although the undead fought tooth and nail to retain their hold on the world, their numbers slowly diminished as they found it harder to replenish their armies.

Once it became clear they could not hold onto their abhorred kingdoms and dark empires any longer, the undead armies retreated into the shadows and the night. Except for those lonely places where temples are rare and the sun shines rarely (if at all), the nightmare spawned by the Great Contagion was over.

Unfortunately, the sin eaters' gift was not a pleasant burden, and they knew they could not rest. While others celebrated their victory over the darkness, the sin eaters slunk back into the shadows, not desirous of cheer or company – not even one another's.

They wandered alone, finding those places where the undead hordes had retreated to. In those lost and forgotten corners they laid down their roots and plied their dangerous, soul-freeing task, with only their gods and the sleeping dead for company.

Is this legend true? None care to say, least of all the gods, themselves – who may be remaining silent out of shame. Still, it is the truth as the sin eaters know it, and they will tell it so long as they are needed.

For help in adding more details to the faith tradition outlined here, check out GURPS Religion.

THE PRESENT COURSE

Sin eaters are a loosely affiliated subset of specialized clerics. They can follow any god, so long as that god is generally “good” or neutral, and believes that undeath is an unnatural abhorrence. They can always turn their back on one god and choose to follow another, or get out of the profession altogether; but they may suffer social, magical, or divine penalties for such apostasy.

They are most prevalent in areas where the undead are frequently found, and they tend toward small villages and hamlets where their work can do the most good. Every so often, one will set up a mission in a larger city, provided he thinks the clerics there need aid – especially among the poor, who aren’t always tended to properly in death. It is a rare thing for two or more established sin eaters to be working within a day’s travel of one another; in spite of their shared profession, they don’t tend to work well together, as seeing another of their kind often fills them with envy or disgust – sometimes both.

The ability to be a sin eater is an innate talent that develops when a person comes of age. Nascent sin eaters develop a fascination with death, the dead, and the rituals and means by which a body is interred into the earth. Looking at the newly dead, they can see the bad things the deceased did in life and have yet to atone for; can tell if the death was from natural causes or from curses; and whether the deceased was recently turned by a vampire. When they walk the rows of a graveyard, they can just discern the panicked whispers of those interred there – their souls silently praying for deliverance from their own misdeeds.

TO LEARN THE DIET OF SINS

Sin eaters can usually tell one another on sight, which makes recruitment somewhat easy. Kindly clerics who know of the sin eaters’ ways may also discern potential members, based on their developing mental and social problems, and may help shuttle the prospective student off to an established mission. Other clerics may also poach them for their own purposes, in the hopes of having a member of their order with a sin eater’s abilities. However, such maneuvers are highly unwise: Rescuing “abducted” members is one of the few things that will get sin eaters to cooperate among themselves.

Training is harsh and unforgiving, much like that of clerics in more martial orders. Sin eaters are taught to come to grips with the ways of their gift – especially how to absolve their absorbed sins, and how to use meditation, prayer, and mental exercises to quiet and eventually banish the memories. They learn how to worship their chosen god, pray for the spells that divine entity chooses to grant, and talk that presence into giving access to spells he might normally abhor, such as ones from violent or necromantic paths. They also learn the ways and means of the enemy: the dark lore of the walking dead and the necromancers that raise them; the habits and haunts of ghosts and devils; the many foul forms and signs of vampires; and the terrible names and methods of demons and the evil gods they serve.

The sin eater is charged with ensuring the dead he tends are safe from the depredations of dark creatures, and he also protects the living under his charge. He watches the skies and horizons for signs that evil is on the way, and – if he deems it necessary – goes on the hunt before that evil can come to them. To serve both ends, all sin eaters are trained in several forms of combat: bladed, missile, and hand-to-hand are prominent, along with – ideally – skills in fighting with fire or while blinded by total darkness.

At some point, the sin eater’s mentor decides the student is ready to go and unceremoniously kicks him out. Thus begins a period of wandering by the fledgling sin eater until he finds a place without one, where he then sets up a mission by the largest or most remote graveyard. By tradition, the village has three days to tell the sin eater he’s not welcome; tradition holds that he must comply with their wishes, however foolish. Such effrontery used to be fairly rare, but is unfortunately becoming more common, thanks to the growing influence of the Cult of Erzabet (see p. 16).

*And the goat shall
bear upon him all their
iniquities unto a land
not inhabited: and he
shall let go the goat in
the wilderness.*

– Leviticus 16:22

THE LOOK OF THE ASSUMPTIVE

Sin eaters are usually unsettling in appearance. They prefer to wear dark, ragged clothing that billows and unfurls around them in a fight, both to look more imposing and to confuse enemies. Their hair is often long, greasy, and unkempt – sometimes home to insects, befriended mice, and other vermin. They also like to paint their face black with soot in varying designs, some of which echo the holy symbols of their chosen gods, and some of which denote their status within the disparate ranks of sin eaters: years in operation at a single mission, number of necromancers and vampires killed, demons vanquished, and so on. Their homes are cluttered hovels filled with necromantic objects, charms against evil and the undead, skulls and other grisly trophies, and things more worthy of fear than description.

Adventure idea: Sin eaters encounter body scavengers from The Vulture Squad (found in Pyramid #3/4: Magic on the Battlefield).

Digesting the Darkness

The quality that makes one a sin eater, as opposed to a regular cleric, is the awesome but terrible ability to devour the spiritual darkness that remains in a person at the end of his life. It is this self-generated darkness that allows the corpse to be raised by necromancy, and the consumption of the darkness by the sin eater makes raising the body extremely difficult. In the case of vampires, the extra darkness that overwhelms the living body and transforms it into a vampire can also be devoured, so long as the curse hasn't been completed and the vampire risen from the grave. After that point, they must be destroyed as normal.

The devouring of spiritual darkness is a relatively easy thing to do, but not at all easy to live with. The taking of those sins is not just symbolic, but actual. Not only does the sin eater relive those horrible memories while he takes them into himself; he also remembers them as though they happened only an hour before, bearing their spiritual weight as though those sins were his own.

The bargain is fairly simple: The sin eater needs only to agree to take on the sins of the dead or dying. The time-honored ritual has someone else – usually a family member – passing food, drink, coin, or some combination of the three over the body and to the sin eater, who accepts these tokens as he takes on the sins.

In truth, the sin eater doesn't *need* these things; so long as he's willing, the darkness will flow invisibly from the dead body into his own, flooding his mind and soul with the horrible things he's agreed to take on. The food, drink, coin, and other person's presence just gives him something to focus on while the transfer takes place – otherwise he might scream or go berserk as his soul is fouled that much more.

The sin eater's bargain is highly corrosive to his psyche and soul. The jarring and jagged collection of memories of others' questionable, bad, and occasionally evil deeds drive sin eaters toward anti-social, self-loathing, and self-harming behaviors. While the weight of those sins can be excised by doing acts of penance on the dead person's behalf, the memories can only fade with time, and they never vanish quickly enough.

A large part of a sin eater's training includes finding ways to separate himself from others' misdeeds, but some sin eaters never receive a proper education in these sanity-saving techniques. Even those who do learn the methods find that the strategies eventually fail, leaving the sin eater to find other, less wholesome ways to deal with the mental strain.

ADVENTURING IN SIN

Sin eaters can be inserted into just about any fantasy campaign, so long as there are clerics and the undead are a concern. The story of the Great Contagion (p. 13) does not have to be universally known or believed – much less wholly true – for the sin eaters to exist. They can be great allies against the undead, dogged rivals while adventuring in undead country, or dire enemies if the adventurers are dabbling in necromancy or are heavily tainted by exposure to the dead.

The mechanics for sin eaters depend on the game system. The ability to absorb the spiritual darkness of the newly dead is more of a strategic talent, though it's great for dealing with just-turned vampires who have yet to rise – saving a lot of mess and trouble. The true bonuses of the sin eater are the ability to receive spells that a deity wouldn't normally give out, plus advanced meditation techniques to calm the mind. They also know a great deal of lore of the undead of their region, and ways to effectively fight them.

The true drawbacks are twofold: the psychological and social disadvantages that come with eating spiritual darkness, and the contract with the people under his charge. The former may take the form of disadvantages, quirks, or simply good roleplaying, depending on the system. The contract is much more concrete; if they tell him to leave and he refuses, he should receive substantial negative modifiers for defying their wishes. His ability to withdraw the darkness of others cannot be penalized, but his abilities to deal with his inner darkness, cast spells against the

undead, and fight them should be heavily affected. These penalties vanish as soon as he either wins the majority of the townspeople back to his side or leaves his mission altogether.

The best way to get a sin eater into a PC group is to have him be between missions, thus explaining why he's out on the road and not at home with his charges. For starting or lower-power parties, the hero could be either a recently released novice who's been judged worthy to leave his mentor's side, or someone who's just discovered he's a sin eater and is out to find a mentor or learn the craft on his own. His clerical skills and abilities will complement a group, as will his weapons skills, understanding of the enemy, and necromantic spells. He may not be the most socially adroit member of the party, and the group peacemaker may have to keep him from being pummeled by the easily offended. But hopefully his pluses will outweigh his minuses long enough for him to get where he's going – wherever that is; in the meantime he can benefit from combat experience, learning new techniques, seeing the world, and teaching the enemy to fear him.

For higher-power parties, the hero could be an established sin eater who's just been driven out of his mission. Maybe he lost the fight for the village, or maybe the Cult of Erzabet took hold and had him tossed out. He could have also failed to eat the sins of someone important, and now that individual is stumbling through the woods looking for brains and the sin eater's been run out of town as a charlatan. Not only does this give him a reason to be out on the road at his level of development; it also acts to fuel his need to improve himself – or get revenge.

Sin eaters might have a long-standing animosity toward the entire City of the Dead in GURPS Banestorm: Abydos.

He may be even *less* socially adroit than a novice, causing more challenging problems for the party's peacekeeper, but his advanced abilities will come in very handy.

A sin eater is a person who has the capacity to sense, draw out, and consume the suffering of others.

– Isaac DeLuca, *Sin Eater*

It is also possible to have a party made up mostly or totally of sin eaters. Such groupings are traditionally only found at the direst of times, such as when another Contagion is threatened, a developing sin eater is kidnapped, or it's discovered that one of the so-called dark kingdoms is reaching its tenebrous hands out into the world to reclaim its glory. At such desperate times,

established sin eaters will seek another out, leave their missions – possibly putting their novices in charge – and form a war party to deal with the enemy.

Such groupings can be as hazardous as they are rare – it's estimated that fewer than one in 10 sin eaters ever return from a war party against an undead army. But glory and the final atonement awaits the martyr who falls in such battle, for his brother sin eaters will take his borrowed darkness upon themselves.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid*, has been the editor of *The Wraith Project*, and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.

The Cult of Lady Erzabet

About 50 years ago, a new religion appeared in some of the major cities – one stressing love, devotion, charity, and good will. Its adherents speak of a Lady Erzabet, who was said to have performed healing miracles for her beloved subjects. However, jealous priests in the thrall of her cruel uncle – the king – charged her with crimes she did not commit, and the king ordered her bricked up within a castle tower for the rest of her life.

All the while that she was imprisoned, she never stopped praying for those who she had cared for, and those who had wronged her. She healed the sick from afar and even saved her uncle from death, though he did not know it. When she died, the walls of the tower exploded open, and the Lady Erzabet was reborn as a goddess.

The clerics of other gods can't verify or deny her claim, and readily admit that her order does good deeds and great works of charity, especially among the poor. Besides, who could argue with a belief that stresses that love and generosity will conquer all things?

However, they find it puzzling that they have yet to meet any clerics of Lady Erzabet – just pilgrims who go out among the downtrodden and impoverished, feed and clothe them, and give them something to do. They note with some cheer that these same pilgrims are leaving the cities to take the word to isolated villages and hamlets, which is something few city-based clerics care to do.

They might not be so happy if they knew what was happening out there.

First, the pilgrims show up and arrange for some miracles to happen. Then they tell the simple folk that the power of love and good will can keep the darkness and its undead servants at bay. Faced with miracles and an organized message, many villagers opt to turn to Lady Erzabet's minions for protection, turning out their abusive sin eaters as soon as they're able.

That shortly proves to be a terrible mistake, for the undead eventually arrive, and the pilgrims do nothing to stop them. This is because they were expecting them all along.

The Cult of Lady Erzabet is a cover for particularly sneaky city vampires who've found a way to remake their dark kingdoms under the guise of human religion. They have invented a legend, based in some measure on fact – however altered – about an apotheosized martyr that cannot be directly disproven. Those in charge of the cult direct its actions behind a few layers, so that clerics and other fighters of the undead won't realize they're behind it; so long as no one gets turned or obviously enslaved no one has any reason to suspect them of anything.

The Lady's pilgrims are weakly ensorceled servants of vampires; they possess enough shared power to perform a few token "miracles." They wear special talismans that mask the energy their magic gives off, and hide the fact that their wearers have been infected with vampiric blood. The disguise is so perfect that clerics and sin eaters' detection abilities are befuddled, and they can't tell that the pilgrims are vampiric servants. By the time they realize something's wrong, they may have already lost the battle for their missions' soul and been run out by angry mobs.

The vampires' overall plan is to get as many sin eaters tossed out of villages as possible, so that they can move in and turn entire areas, or at least enslave them. When the time is right, they will move forward and begin mass production of new vampires, ship these armies into the cities, and place them in strategic locations in preparation for the day when they have just enough soldiers to overwhelm the clerics.

Then the cities will fall, one by one, and a new Dark Kingdom will begin.

WAREHOUSE XXIII

THREE HOLY

ARTIFACTS

BY STEVEN MARSH

Unlike their pointy-hatted wizardly counterparts, clerics often rely less on *stuff*. Sure, there's precedent for staves and maces, but it's not quite the same as beakers, wands, magic carpets, enchanted rings, and so on.

Part of this lack of focus on accoutrements stems from the fundamental otherworldliness of clerical power. As (the perhaps apocryphal) Saint Tiberius once asked, "What does God need with a [star chariot]?" Many have expressed this same sentiment that incredibly powerful deities shouldn't need to channel their might through mundane objects.

While this is true to a certain extent, the gods sometimes provide physical manifestations of their might because *people* often need tangible things. It's one thing to get an inner "attaboy!" from an invisible entity; it's another to get a Holy Thingamabob from one's deity as a tangible token of appreciation.

Perhaps most importantly, physical objects help spread the faith, by both giving something for nonbelievers to view and focus on, and providing useful objects that can be given or traded to nonbelievers (or those on the fence).

Here, then, are a few objects that are of use to clerics and those with ties to the divine. Although *GURPS* is used to suggest game mechanics, the descriptions should prove generic and insightful enough to help the GM add these wonders to any campaign, regardless of the system.

THE HYMNAL OF EVERHERE

Many religions feature expansive, far-reaching organizations that practice their rituals in a formalized fashion over vast geographic areas. For such faiths, this uniformity brings comfort to its practitioners – regardless of where in the world you can attend the god of order's religious services, you know it's at the same time, with the same rituals, and the same structure.

Some faiths have managed to take this uniformity and use it to serve their communities. A hymnal of everhere is one such

item, providing a tangible focal point for a god to showcase the benefits of uniformity and order.

Each hymnal of everhere is tied to a specific faith tradition – not just a god. Of course, in many campaign worlds, "worshipping a god" may mean the same thing as "going to a temple that worships that god," but it's not a given. The "First Universal Order of Thor" may have somewhat different beliefs and traditions than the "Grand Field of Thorites" – in which case, there might be different, incompatible hymnals of everhere for both the First Universal Order of Thor and the Grand Field of Thorites, despite worshipping the same deity.

The hymnal of everhere superficially resembles an ordinary book of songs, and – indeed – it fulfills that function quite nicely. However, whenever a priest sings (or reads) from a hymnal of everhere during an organized prayer gathering, he is able to transport himself to any other organized prayer gathering that is taking place at (roughly) the same time, provided the reader/singer has utilized that hymnal in the destination temple or gathering spot previously.

Example: Father Sarvis is a member of the Followers of Light, who worship the god of light. All Followers of Light are welcome to attend a daily prayer meeting in their temples, which always occurs at high noon. Father Sarvis sings from the hymnal of everhere during a noontime prayer meeting on Islandia. A week later, a hundred miles away in far-off Festivus, Father Sarvis finds himself singing from the hymnal of everhere again during a noontime service. Because he is now "attuned" to the temples at both Islandia and Festivus, he may transport between the places of worship during any religious service that takes place at (roughly) the same at both, provided he reads or sings from the hymnal of everhere at the appropriate time in the proceedings. Later on, if he were to use the hymnal at another Follower of Light temple during their noontime service, he would both attune himself to that temple and could then transport back and forth between the Islandia and Festivus locales.

Of course, the "hymnal" doesn't need to be a book. Anything's possible! It could be a prayer cap or beads. Maybe it's a silent meditation that clerics can utter during a service to attune them to that temple.

Time After Time

When used, the hymnal appears oddly disconnected with temporal concerns (in much the same way the gods often seem). In general, the hymnal seems content to transport the singer to another temple provided there is (or will be) another religious service that takes place at roughly the same time. Thus, if Father Sarvis (from the example on p. 19) were to attempt to go to a temple to which he was attuned during a noontime ceremony, he would succeed, even if the destination temple was hundreds of miles away latitudinally . . . which would mean the “noontime” service were either further forward or backward in time (since high noon depends on locale).

For the most part, such temporal chicanery is unnoticed by clerics; after all, “time zones” are not exactly a

pressing concern in low-tech societies. However, this effect tends to drive more scientific-minded souls to fits; the idea that a cleric ceases to exist for several hours while he “catches up” to a service in the future is bothersome, and the possibility that a cleric could conceivably arrive at his destination hours before he leaves is deeply disturbing.

The hymnal – and its empowering gods – generally forbids any attempts to take significant advantage of these temporal anomalies. The book is meant as a means to permit its faithful a convenient way to move among its associated places of worship, and any attempts to take further advantage of the gods’ good graces may meet with failure, disappointment, and locusts.

Although it’s a very dramatic effect, the underlying power behind the hymnal forbids its use in a flashy fashion. Thus the reader does not vanish from view; rather, those who are in attendance at the religious rite may find their eyes drawn away from one of their fellows; when they look again at where he was, he’s no longer there. (They’ll think that perhaps he stepped outside or moved to another part of the worship area.) Similarly the arriving cleric does not erupt from nothingness in a flash of smoke; he simply appears in an unviewed corner of the temple, continuing to sing mid-verse the song he departed during. Because of this, the hymnal cannot be used if attention *must* be paid to the reader – for example, the leader of a religious ceremony could not use this to teleport to another temple *during* a service when all eyes are upon him. Still, there is nothing that forbids the user of the hymnal from informing others that he will be using it beforehand (“Brother Cavala? I need to go to Parisia during today’s service . . . do not be alarmed if you cannot find me.”); the hymnal will still work to distract or otherwise avert the eyes of the other attendees when the time comes.

Game Notes

The hymnal of everhere allows clerics (or other religious folks) to take advantage of a teleportation-like effect similar to those wizards always brag about, while maintaining connections to the core ideals of this style of piety: tradition and adherence, ties to the community, and reliance on a higher power. Although its restrictions are significant (unlike magical teleportation it can’t be used anywhere at any time, and is limited to temples to which the reader is attuned), it also has a number of advantages. There is no cost (in fatigue or other expenses) to one who uses the hymnal; it could be relied on as often as desired during the course of the divine service, permitting the religious person to appear at any number of previously visited temples. In settings where rapid communication is difficult or impossible, the hymnal of everhere enables a church to maintain an incredibly informed information network –

which could make them treasured allies or bitter enemies of other authorities.

There are rumors of “greater hymnals” that permit a reader to bring along others in his transport – probably by the joining of hands. Legend tells that these tagalongs need not even be of the same faith as the reader. Such artifacts would be greatly treasured (if they exist), permitting whole bands of adventurers to travel the lands quickly and safely.

THE SEEDS OF FAITH

Depending on the setting and game system, many clerical powers are often tied to ground that is consecrated, or is holy to the cleric. Temporary sanctification doesn’t last long (typically, about a day), and permanent consecration has many, sometimes inconvenient requirements. That’s where the seeds of faith come in.

Seemingly paradoxically, these seeds are both miraculous and mundane. What type of mundane vegetation the seeds of faith are derived from depends on both the deity they represent and more practical concerns. When planted, the seeds of faith act exactly as normal seeds of their type; it is only when they fully sprout that their unearthly power is revealed. Each plant that springs from a seed of faith turns the area within about 18 inches of it into permanently consecrated ground. (For games that use one-yard hexes, such as *GURPS*, this means that one seed/plant is enough to increase the sanctity of one hex.) More interestingly, the resultant plants can form a perimeter of piety; if the seedlings’ areas touch or overlap, all area fully encircled by the holy vegetation is considered hallowed, too, even if no seeds of faith were planted within the space. (See the illustration on p. 19 for a *GURPS* example.)

If multiple seeds of faith from the same deity are planted less than 18 inches apart, their effects do not amplify (ground is either consecrated or not). However, additional plants can serve as protection from the perimeter effect being brought down by the death of one or more plants.

For the GURPS mechanics of sanctity and ritual space, see GURPS Thaumatology, pp. 68-69 and 126.

Should multiple seeds of faith from *differing* gods be planted in the same area, their effects overlap, *even if the underlying theologies contrast*. Thus if a hex had two sprouted seeds in it – one for the god of water and one for the god of light – then the ground would act as if it were consecrated for *both* gods.

Once planted, the seeds are unable to be moved, replanted, or otherwise relocated without permanently removing its miraculous effects. Similarly, planting them in movable pots or other means of transport will cause them to fail. (It's up to the GM to determine what happens if a large enough area including a seedling is moved; if the entire hex of earth containing the plant is able to be relocated at once or moved as an undisturbed mass, it might retain its powers. Regardless of the answer, it could provide a surprise to assumptive heroes . . .)

In all other ways, the seeds act as entirely normal plants; they need water, food, nurturing, and so on. Their blessings do not activate until they sprout, and at any point, they can be killed, cut, eaten, trampled, etc. This also means that any effects – magical or mundane – can be used to promote their growth, including spells or potions that keep plants alive, make them grow instantly, enable them to sprout in impossible territory, etc.

This can make druidic ties or alliances *very* useful. Regardless, the one-yard effect is still limited per seed (not volume, size, or any other metric); thus a dandelion from a seed of faith provides no less or greater benefit than a sprouted acorn, outside of the physical limitations of the respective plants. Neither seeds of faith nor their resultant plants are directly detectable in any fashion, although it might be possible to observe or deduce the effects they generate.

Gods who grant followers these seeds usually limit them significantly. They typically bestow no more than a few dozen are given at any time (24 seeds would be enough to just barely encompass a circle with a radius of four yards); the deities know how powerful it is to consecrate an area, and they don't want to spark an agricultural war among followers. The cuttings and seeds of plants grown with seeds of faith are entirely mundane. In short, while it's quite feasible to use the seeds to generate a makeshift "sanctuary," it probably won't be possible to (say) encircle the ground above a dungeon with seeds.

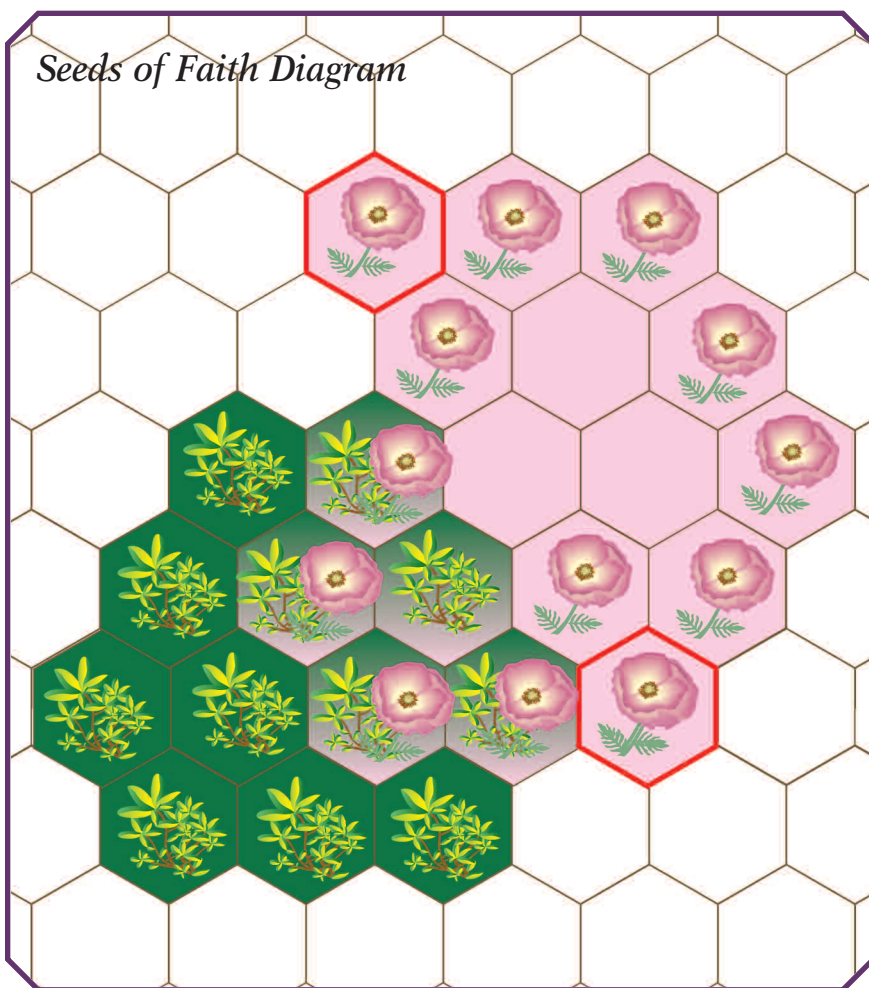
Example

The *Seeds of Faith Diagram* (this page) shows two rival groups with seeds trying to influence the same area. The green hexes (in the left of the diagram) all have one sprouted seed of faith for its religion; even if any of its plants are killed or removed, the remaining hexes are unaffected. The pink hexes (right) have a perimeter-defined area because of its seedlings. If either of the red-bordered plants is killed or disturbed, the effect is retained (except for the effect within the hex where the plant is eliminated). However, if any other pink plants are killed, the four central hexes *without* pink plants lose their sacred status – although the sacred effect is still retained in each hex containing a seedling.

The five combined hexes are considered sacred ground to both religions, although if the pink-plant perimeter is breached then the one combined hex without a pink plant loses its sacred status for the pink-tied religion *only*.

Game Notes

The seeds of faith are powerful but subtle. For clever players (especially those whose heroes have access to plant-based abilities), the seeds can provide a way to turn the tide or support a backup plan. Conversely, they can also allow a challenging threat from adversarial clerics who may have managed to prepare unexpected ground or otherwise infiltrate seemingly safe soil surrounding the heroes.



Adventure idea: The cleric of an important temple is going out to do battle with the forces of evil – who, in turn, are about to attack the temple! Do they aid the cleric or defend the temple?

THE SELF-CANDLE

Those who pray are often called to self-sacrifice in their duties; this is especially true when there is a need to defend the faithful – or strike first against enemies of the faith. The self-candle is perhaps an extreme manifestation of this need.

The self-candle gains its name because the materials used in its construction come from the cleric *himself* – human fat is a perfectly suitable material from which to make a candle. *How* this fat is drawn from the cleric depends primarily on the religion. Clerics dedicated to peace or light might have a ritual or divine method for extracting the fat from the body, while darker or more martial-minded miracle workers may utilize blades or other implements in a more direct method. Regardless, it's a painful process – one no cleric undertakes lightly.

Once created, the candle is stored in a safe place – usually the cleric's sanctuary or other holy area. When the time comes for the cleric to protect his people or the holdings of his faith, he (and he alone) may light the candle. So long as the candle is lit and remains lit within ground that is consecrated to the cleric's religion, he is *impervious* to physical harm, including magical damage, regardless of how far he travels from the candle. (He does not need to carry the taper with him.) In addition, he has increased magical and spiritual protection. He is immune to any magical or spiritual coercion that would require him to act against the precepts of his faith ("Now, priest – I command you to burn down your church!"); in addition, any adverse mental or spiritual effects allow for double the opportunities to resist. (For example, in *GURPS*, any adverse effect that permits a Will roll would allow the cleric to roll twice and take the best result.)

However, as with many sacrifices, the self-candle is not without its limitations. Perhaps the most significant is that the candle only bestows its benefits for a limited time. The candle must be extinguished by the cleric who lit it (who is also the one receiving the benefits); if the candle goes out for any other reason – natural or unnatural – the cleric dies immediately. The candle must also remain within an area sacred or hallowed to the cleric's deity; it can be moved, but moving it outside such a boundary causes its light to extinguish immediately – along with the cleric's. Only one self-candle may be attuned to a cleric at a time, and each self-candle is only tied to the one

whose flesh was used in its composition. Each self-candle can only be used one time for its special benefits; once it is extinguished, safely or unsafely, it is a mundane candle (albeit one made from human flesh) and may be used normally.

Finally, self-candles are themselves immune to any unnatural effects that would prolong or prevent their burning . . . while remaining all-too vulnerable to any effects that would snuff its light.

A new benefit for sacrificing one's self.

Game Notes

The construction of a self-candle should be significant and not without price. The cost to self for constructing a candle should depend on how *big* the candle is. As a rough system to approximate this sacrifice in *GURPS*, 1d damage inflicted to self is enough to carve off enough of one's own body to produce a half-ounce of tallow (double this if a successful Surgery roll is involved; halve if the cleric is Skinny, and double if Fat or Very Fat). An ounce of tallow can be used to make a candle that can burn for about 45 minutes; a pound can be turned into a candle that burns for 12 hours. The damage can be healed as normal, and the cleric can take as little or as much time as he needs to accumulate tallow (it doesn't go bad provided it's in roughly airtight conditions), but the GM should limit the amount of tallow that can be extracted from one's own body – one pound extracted over the course of a year would be reasonable.

From a game standpoint, the self-candle is, of course, a potentially powerful offensive tool. Its primary limitation is that it requires consideration and preparation to use; the self-candle needs to be lit by the cleric himself, and – assuming he wants to live – he needs to get back to the taper before it burns out. This probably makes it very difficult for the cleric to (say) use the self-candle to go out dungeon-crawling. This is especially true because the self-candle needs to remain within sacred ground. (Of course, if the cleric can figure out a way to turn a safe area of a dungeon into sacred ground, he might have a chance).

In addition, the self-candle only protects the cleric from (most forms of) damage. It doesn't bestow any particular offensive capabilities. Perhaps most importantly, it doesn't provide any protection from entangling or other methods of restraint or detention; a simple pit trap or skilled wrestler could thwart the power of the self-candle entirely.

As a plot device, the self-candle provides the GM with an interesting and compelling obstacle. A god of good may make it known that the heroes can't directly face a rampaging enemy cleric – but they can kill the foul priest directly if they extinguish one candle . . . which happens to be somewhere hidden within a protected sinister temple.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has been editing *Pyramid* for 10 years. For more details, read his *Random Thought Table* in this issue.

Shadow of a Doubt

Rumor has it that if a cleric were to willingly and knowingly violate the tenants of his faith while enjoying the benefits of the self-candle, the powers of the candle would dissipate immediately. In other words, it would no longer provide protection, but it would also no longer provide a threat to the cleric.

Whether this is true or not has been hard to pin down (and may depend on the governing deity). If a god of pacifism permits the creation of a self-candle, it is probably okay with the cleric taking martial action against enemies of the faith even if the tradition would normally frown upon that. However, if a follower of a god of war were tricked or coerced into showing mercy for a fallen foe, that might be enough to revoke the self-candle's protection!

MIRACULOUS EVENTS!

Many religions have numerous important events throughout the year. It's especially important for clerics (and their players) to be able to track their various obligations, duties, and opportunities. These cards are intended to help clerics and other folks with a religious bent keep track of these events.

Each card provides space for the following information.

Period: Indicate here how often during the year the event takes places – daily, weekly, monthly, etc.

Duration: Specify here how long the event lasts – either the exact time period it occurs (say, 5:30-6:30 p.m.), or something more general (such as number of hours or days).

Event: Put here the name of the event or a brief yet evocative description of the occurrence.

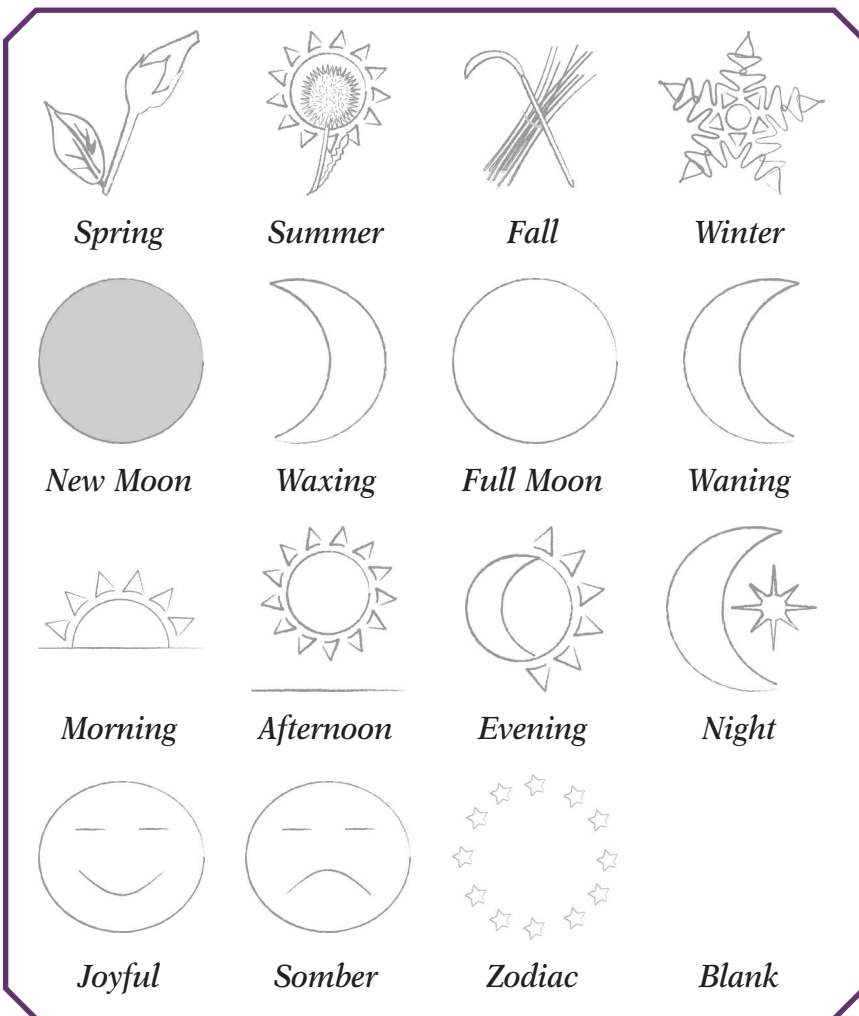
Observed: List here the effects on event participants if they participate in any rituals, etc. associated with the event.

Neglected: Detail here what happens to those who do not participate in the event.

Notes: Describe here any other important details, such as location, proper dress, necessary offerings, etc.

Each card also features a background image representative of certain times of the year, to aid in sorting and as a visual aid. See the box for suggested definitions, or create your own.

Each card also includes a row of hole markings. Use these with the instructions for *Tracking Cards* in *Pyramid #3/12: Tech and Toys* to aid in organization and sorting (note that the holes are currently undefined).



Example 1: Followers of the Temple of the Sun need to pay homage to the god of light each day at noon by meditating for 10 minutes. Doing so grants a +1 bonus to miracles worked for an hour afterwards, while failure to do so causes them a -1 penalty to miracles for the rest of the day. The player of such a cleric could fill in that information on an “Afternoon” card, as follows. Period: Daily. Duration: 10 minutes. Observed: +1 miracles for 1 hour. Neglected: -1 miracles until dawn. Notes: Meditation; no special tools or environment needed.

Example 2: The goddess of love requests her followers attend a temple service to her every Wednesday. There is no bonus for doing so nor penalty for failing to attend (although after enough failings the goddess might notice and strip a cleric of miracles). Using the “Evening” card, write in the details as follows. Period: Weekly (Wednesday). Duration: 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. Observed: No effect. Neglected: No effect (unless too often).

Example 3: The Order of Righteous Might demands its warrior-clerics attend a training event one week every season. Use one of each of the four season cards, filling each one in as follows. Period: Seasonal. Duration: [list dates of event on each card]. Observed: Access to free training. Neglected: Booted from Order unless on mission or received dispensation.

TEMPLARS: THE FIGHTING PRIESTS

BY GRAEME DAVIS

The founding of the Knights Templar created the concept of a military monastic order. Along with the Knights Hospitaller and the Teutonic Knights, the Templars dominated the era of the Crusades.

Given how noteworthy they have been in popular imagination, any setting that uses clerics can benefit from their inspiration. Here, then, are some ideas on how to introduce templars to *GURPS* fantasy game settings. (The term “templars” – without the initial capital – is used here to distinguish fantasy religious warriors from the historical Templars.)

Templar Religions

Although war deities are the most obvious patrons, any religion needs elite warriors to act as bodyguards to its senior priests and provide security for its temples and holy relics. Martial training can also be used as a tool for spiritual development; Shaolin kung fu developed largely as a physical and mental discipline to help the spiritual training of Shaolin monks.

TEMPLAR RANKS AND ORGANIZATION

While the most visible arm of a templar order will be its religious knights, they are actually in a minority. They are supported by non-knightly troops, artisans, and other brethren.

Heroes entering a templar order will be admitted according to their abilities. Those of noble birth become Pages or

Squires, while other fighter types are inducted as Brothers of Horse or Foot; clerics become chaplains; and so on.

GRAND MASTER

The supreme head of the order is as powerful as a contemporary monarch. At the height of their power, the Knights Templar answered only to the pope, and Templars were independent of the monarchs in whose lands they operated.

GRAND COUNCIL

The Grand Council serves the Grand Master, and its members have their own individual responsibilities.

The **Knight Commander** is the “general” in charge of the templar knights, acting as a chief of staff overseeing the order’s military operations.

*Think not that I am come to
send peace on earth: I came
not to send peace, but a sword.*

– Matthew 10:34

*For a templar-like template, see *The Mystic Knight* in *Pyramid* #3/13: *Thaumatology*.*

The **Master of Foot** commands the order's infantry forces. The **Master of Horse** oversees the order's non-knightly cavalry.

The **Grand Turcopole** (or some similar title: this is derived from the historical Templars' use of local Turcopole mercenaries in the Holy Land) commands any mercenary forces employed by the order.

The **Grand Castellan** commands the lesser castellans who head castle garrisons and are responsible for the defense and upkeep of the order's castles and forts.

The **Grand Admiral** commands the order's ships, which provide a naval striking arm as well as logistical support in transporting and supplying ground forces.

CHAPTERS

The above organization is mirrored at the local level. Each chapter has its own Master and Council, with similar responsibilities within the chapter's territory.

*To the vows of the monk
and the austere life of the
convent, they added the
discipline of the camp, and the
stern duties of the military life,
joining "the fine vocation of the
sword and lance" with the holy
zeal and bodybending toil of a
poor brotherhood.*

– Charles
Greenstreet Addison,
*The Knights
Templars*

KNIGHTS

Junior knights are usually given the rank of Squire and are assigned to a ranking knight as a trainee and personal servant. The sons of noble families entering the order for chivalric training are usually called Pages, and must complete this level of training before becoming Squires.

Some knights are pure fighters, with Religious Rank and other social advantages deriving from their membership in the order. Others have a mix of fighting skills and clerical magic.

Senior knights of the order might receive Auras of Power (see pp. 4-11) before they go into battle.

CHAPLAINS

The chaplains lead religious ceremonies and observances. There may be a Grand Chaplain, or the Grand Master may fill this role. Lower-ranking clerics have titles such as Acolyte and Adept. Those who are already clerics of the order's religion are normally inducted into the chaplaincy; others with strong religious leanings may also be inducted as initiates, receiving Clerical Investment and the other advantages necessary to begin a religious career.

In most other religions, the chaplains will also be the order's scholars and lawyers, but templar orders dedicated to a deity of knowledge may have a separate Librarian branch headed by a Loremaster or Master of Scrolls.

ORDINARY BROTHERS

Non-knightly members are called Brothers and fall into a number of categories. Brothers of Foot and Brothers of Horse are the troops who form a templar army around the core of knights. They also provide castle garrisons and the fighting crews of the order's ships. Non-noble warriors are assigned to these branches according to their skills and experience.

Craft brethren provide skilled labor, from crewing templar fleets to building castles and making and maintaining equipment. They often have titles, such as Brother Armorer, to denote their craft as well as their rank. (Since craft brethren have limited opportunities to go adventuring, these ranks consist mostly of NPCs – although a player character with suitable skills and experience may be inducted as a craft brother at the GM's discretion.)

LAY BRETHERN

The lowest brethren are the equals of the serfs and servants attached to noble houses. They provide unskilled labor, farm the order's estates, and act as general servants. Like craft brethren, lay brethren are generally unsuited for an adventuring life, although it might make an interesting challenge for an inspired player.

FANTASY CAREERS

In a fantasy setting, an order's magicians may form a branch of their own, headed by a Grand Magus, or they may be part of the Chaplain or Librarian branches along with other scholars.

Depending on the stance of a templar order's religion, rogue types may or may not be admitted. In some templar orders, a branch dedicated to espionage, sabotage, assassination, and intelligence gathering may have an innocuous-sounding name such as the Questing Brothers; if the order follows a deity of assassins, though, a more dramatic name such as Red Brothers or Swords of Darkness may be appropriate, and this branch may actually outrank the Knights. The *thuggee* of India and the *hashashin* of Islam – or rather, their popular image in the West – can provide a model for this kind of order.

JOINING A TEMPLAR ORDER

In order to join a templar order, an adventurer must first be a devout follower of its patron deity. This need not be supported by traits like Fanatic or True Faith, but it must have been proved by the hero's actions in the past.

The second requirement is to have a sponsor who is already a member of the order. Whole adventures can revolve around making a suitable impression on an NPC templar, gaining an introduction to the order, and passing any trials or requirements for induction.

If a PC wishes to serve in a particular group, such as the knights, he must satisfy all the necessary conditions. An ambition to serve as a templar knight can be a hero's driving motive throughout an entire campaign as he gains the necessary skills and advantages and cultivates useful contacts. As in the military, though, suitability alone will not guarantee the desired posting. Unique challenges and opportunities arise from being unexpectedly placed in a different branch.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Membership in a templar order confers a range of advantages and disadvantages. Some of these are automatic, and others depend upon a person's branch and rank.

Patron and Duty

A member of a templar order must take equal levels of the Patron advantage and the Duty disadvantage. This reflects the fact that all new members swear an oath of loyalty and obedience to the order in return for the advantages of membership.

A templar organization can make a good patron for a PC in almost any setting. Depending on the level of the Patron advantage taken, support may come from a senior member of the

adventurer's own branch, the Master of that branch, or the Grand Master himself. In addition, the hero can command the support of inferior members of the same branch and is assured of a sympathetic hearing from members of other branches. In theory, templar knights can often command inferior members of any branch, but there may be friction if a knight is too arrogant in doing so.

While members owe complete obedience to their superiors in the order, they can appeal to their own superiors against commands from members of other branches.

The templars' oath dictates that the PC may have no attachments outside the order. Therefore, all other Patrons, Duties, and similar advantages and disadvantages must be bought off or renounced before taking the oath.

Clerical Investment

Only the chaplains have the advantage of Clerical Investment. This reflects the fact that only chaplains may conduct religious ceremonies, as is the case with monastic orders.

Religious Rank

Knights and chaplains both gain the Religious Rank advantage at a level appropriate to their rank within the order. This takes the place of any other advantages that confer social status on the grounds of rank within secular society. Despite being members of a religious organization, ordinary and lay brethren do not receive Religious Rank.

Wealth

If the order requires new members to swear an oath of poverty, no member may have any income or personal property. Everything belongs – in theory, at least – to the order, and must be returned to it upon command.

[A Templar] is truly a fearless knight, and secure on every side, for his soul is protected by the armor of faith just as his body is protected by the armor of steel. He is thus doubly-armed, and need fear neither demons nor men.

– Bernard of Clairvaux

Templars get along very well with the Knights of St. Eustathius, the alternate world-hopping secret society presented in GURPS Infinite Worlds: Collegio Januari. An interesting campaign might revolve around the Templar clean-up committee charged with fixing all the problems the Knights turn up. Heroes don't know exactly what's going on, but they still get to have "fun" dealing with problems!

SKILLS AND SPELLS

Belonging to a templar order means that, although a member never needs to find a teacher for skills and spells, he only has the opportunity to learn those skills and spells that the order judges appropriate.

As well as pure knowledge, a templar order's secrets may include powerful magic that is taught only to its members. Templar spell lists can include spells that are not available anywhere else in the campaign world.

It is not normally permitted for a templar to teach skills and spells to others outside the order, although this restriction may be eased in the case of an order that serves a deity of learning. In any case, it is forbidden to learn from or teach a member of another religion – violating this prohibition can lead to accusations of heresy or even treason.

Knights

Knights can learn martial skills and spells that the order judges useful for mounted combat. They must satisfy all prerequisites in order to learn or improve a particular skill or spell.

Pages and Squires are restricted to simple spells and more basic skills. Senior knights may have the opportunity to learn skills and spells normally reserved for members of other branches, if they can find a willing teacher.

Chaplains

As noncombatants, an order's chaplains are restricted to the normal clerical spells and skills of their religion. However, they are often less bound by the prohibition on teaching or learning from outsiders. Unless their order is especially secretive, templar chaplains can learn from and teach clerics of the same religion, either freely or by permission of their Grand Master.

In addition, chaplains are usually allowed access to knowledge-based skills because of their status as scholars.

Ordinary Brethren

Ordinary brethren can teach and learn from each other but do not normally have access to training from members of other branches. Brothers of Foot and Horse follow a normal military training regimen, while craft brethren follow a course similar to craft and guild apprenticeships.

Lay Brethren

Lay brethren do not normally have the opportunity to learn or improve skills, but an exceptional individual (such as a PC) may be able to earn the notice of a more senior templar and be transferred to another branch according to his abilities.

Rogues

If the order includes a rogue branch, its members can train in appropriate skills and spells. Their regimen will blend special forces-type military training with a fantasy thieves' or assassins' guild apprenticeship.

Magicians

If they are part of the order's chaplain branch, magicians are treated as priest-wizards (*GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 71) for training purposes. If they have their own branch, their training resembles that of a fantasy magicians' guild or magical order. The notes on paths in *GURPS Thaumatology* (chapter 5) will be useful to the GM in this case.

Creating Skill and Spell Lists

Unlike many other game systems, *GURPS* is not based upon character classes with fixed levels and packages of skills, spells, and other abilities. In drawing up lists of skills and spells for a particular branch and rank within a templar order, the GM is mirroring the process of creating character classes. This is not so much work as it may seem.

Character Templates

Many *GURPS* worldbooks contain templates that list skills and other game stats for characters of various types, including knights. The GM can use the templates from any relevant supplements (such as the *Dungeon Fantasy* series) as a basis for drawing up lists of approved spells and skills.

Tailored Lists

GURPS Thaumatology (pp. 69-71) offers some guidelines on creating priestly spell lists according to the interests of a particular deity. Having drawn up such a list for the order's religion as a whole, it is a fairly simple matter for the GM to divide the list according to branch and rank. The only caveat is to ensure that the list for each rank includes all the prerequisites for the next rank's list.

EQUIPMENT

Historically, the Templars required members to swear an oath of poverty and renounce all personal property. This meant that all their equipment came from the order. Issued equipment consists of the basics required by the adventurer's role within the order; special equipment may be given on loan for specific missions, but must normally be returned once the mission is accomplished.

Spell Ingredients

A templar order always has access to any materials required for casting spells on its list. These ingredients may be grown or manufactured by the order's members or acquired on an ongoing basis by trade or other means. Like training and mundane equipment, ingredients will not be freely available, but will be issued by the order for a specific purpose.

A -5-point sample Templar lens (for the Yrth setting) is presented in GURPS Banestorm (Knightly Lenses, p. 209).

Relics

Just as the historical Templars were said to have the Holy Grail and other artifacts, a fantasy templar order may own one or more relics of its religion. These are always heavily guarded and available only to the highest-ranking members of the order. The most powerful and sacred relics will each have a dedicated keeper who is the only person permitted to use or even touch it.

In a fantasy campaign, a templar order may also have possession of holy (or unholy) relics of enemy cults, which are kept closely guarded. The order may be content to keep them out of enemy hands, or they may be actively researching ways to destroy them.

Esoteric and Forbidden Knowledge

Severe restrictions are placed upon those who are permitted to consult rare tomes or learn deep secrets. When secret knowledge is required for a mission, lower-ranking members are detailed to escort a senior brother who has the knowledge rather than being given the knowledge themselves.

Like (un)holy relics, tomes of forbidden or heretical lore are closely guarded and may only be consulted by those whose faith is unquestioned – either through possession of an advantage like True Faith or by gaining the order's highest trust through extensive roleplaying. Templars tend to be more pragmatic about forbidden tomes than their brethren in the mainstream priesthood, perhaps because of their military leanings; such volumes may give precious insights

into an enemy's way of thinking, which can prompt strategies to defeat him.

Places of Power and Sanctity

GURPS Thaumatology includes information on places of power (p. 12) and sanctity (p. 68).

A templar order may control one or more places of power or great sanctity, comparable to the historical Templars' association with the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem.

Nearly all templar strongholds of any size include a sanctified area, from a chapel to a major temple. Access is normally restricted to members of the order (although monarchs and high-ranking priests of the same faith may be able to trade favors for access), and access to the holiest or most powerful places may even be restricted to the order's Masters.

Secret Knowledge

One of the most enduring legends about the historical Knights Templar tells that they *found something* – a secret that gave them great power and ultimately led to their downfall. According to *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and *The Da Vinci Code*, this was proof that Jesus lived on Earth – and even left descendants – instead of ascending to Heaven as the Gospels claim. According to other stories, it was a holy relic of incalculable power, sometimes the Holy Grail and sometimes a piece of the True Cross. Yet other stories have the Templars falling into heresy, demon worship, and witchcraft.

If the order has any secret knowledge, its members are absolutely forbidden to pass it on, even to other members of the same order, without a direct command by their Grand Master or the head of their chapter or branch. The penalties for doing so are always severe.

ADVENTURES

A templar order gives the GM a perfect tool for passing missions to heroes who are members. The nature of these assignments depends mainly on the branch of the order to which the PCs belong.

Knights are primarily given combat and escort missions, although they may also be detailed to conduct investigations of other knights – for example, if a chapter is suspected of falling into heresy or planning to break away from the order – where their own knightly status provides them with a way in.

Chaplains are given religious missions, such as researching and recovering lost relics. They are also charged with rooting out heresy and sedition within the order. This can range from an action-heavy witch-hunt to negotiating a theological and political minefield inspired by actual Templar history or historical fiction like *The Name of the Rose*. Diplomatic missions can involve smoothing over tensions between the templar order and the leadership of its parent religion, or friction with kings or nobles who resent the order's independent presence within their territory.

Craft brethren are assigned missions that require their particular expertise. Brothers of Foot or Horse are assigned

as military support to missions led by knights or chaplains. A brother mason may be assigned to a group sent to locate and repair a lost temple, or to strengthen the defenses of a frontier castle. An ambitious craft brother might luck into the opportunity to curry favor with members of the more influential branches and even become a knight or chaplain if the conditions are right.

Lay brethren are assigned to missions as servants and beasts of burden, but like craft brethren, they have the opportunity to make a good impression on the more influential branches and rise through the ranks.

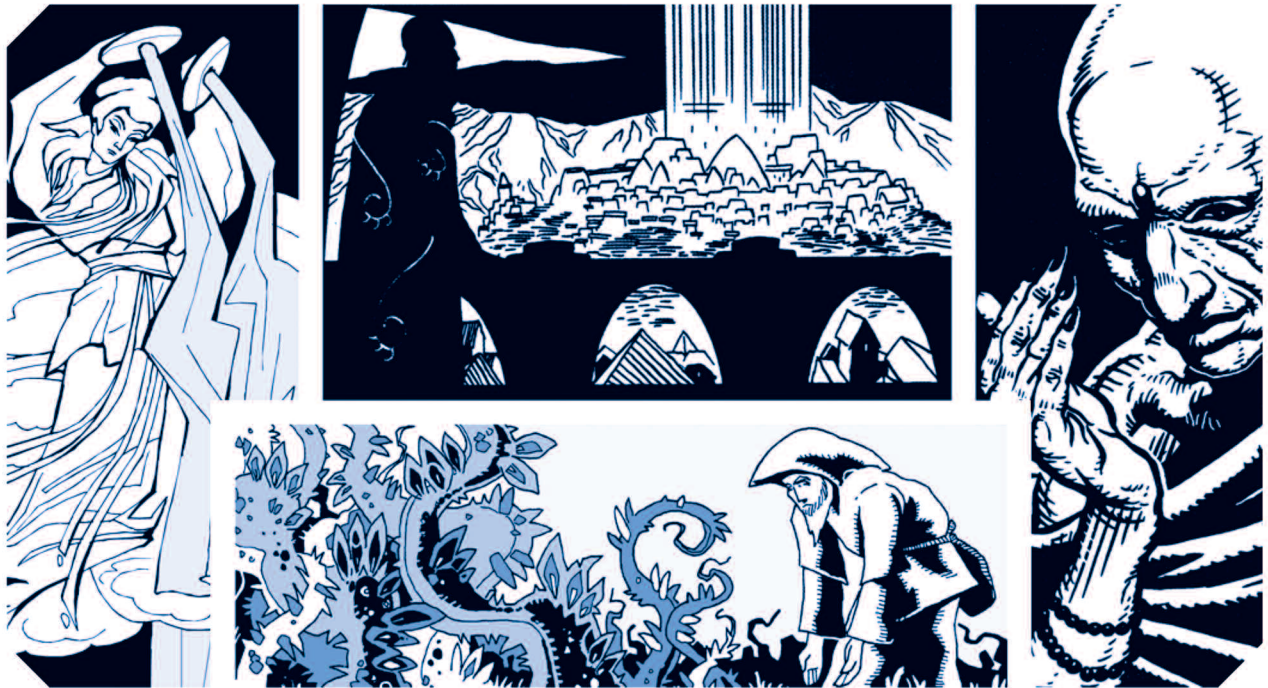
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graeme Davis is the author of *GURPS Vikings*, *GURPS Middle Ages 1*, and *GURPS Faerie*. After spending far too much time playing roleplaying games at college in the early 1980s, he worked for Games Workshop developing *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, and has been freelance – with various jobs in the video games industry – ever since.

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THE TRICKS OF THE SHAMAN

BY ALAN LEDDON

Like any figure with arcane and misunderstood knowledge – priests, physicians, and so on – the shaman is called upon to perform mysterious duties by those who do not understand the means by which he performs those tasks. Like any worker, the shaman must be compensated for his tasks – and therein lies the problem. A physician can hand someone a pill (leaf, root, bottle of snake oil); the patient either gets better or sicker, but he knows the physician did something. The priest performs a complex ritual or ceremony in front of everyone, and everyone knows that the priest did what he was contracted to do.

SPIRITS IN A MATERIAL WORLD

The shaman – whether he truly directs supernatural powers, or is a fraud – sometimes needs to prove that he accomplished the job for which he was contracted in order to receive payment or avoid punishment.

This is not to say that people receiving the shaman's care don't believe in his work, as Micheal Fobes Brown notes in his treatise "Dark Side of the Shaman" (*Natural History*, 1989). Friends and family of sick people under the care of an Aguaruna Indian shaman, for example, shout encouragement to the shaman during his desperate battles with unseen spiritual forces; they also remind him that, should unwanted influences remain in a victim, others may accuse the shaman of putting them there. Brown states unequivocally that the mere fact only shamans can see those influences does not diminish the belief those influences are there.

But what of the warnings? "If you don't get all of them, others will think you put them there": This is not merely a gentle reminder or an admission that the shaman is human (and may leave forces behind due to laziness or carelessness, or put dangerous ones in for personal reasons or payment); it is a warning against attracting unwanted attention, at least in some cultures. Among some peoples, "sorcery" (using spiritual powers to cause harm to another) is attempted homicide, and the penalty is death. In all, the shaman may very well need to prove his success and good intentions!

DEMONSTRATIONS

A shaman might occasionally arrange a demonstration of his power. For example, a shaman may summon together the members of his village and explain that he has "had a vision" of the entire village burning to the ground; the vision could be actually sent by spirit forces (through the GM), a drug-induced hallucination of dubious accuracy, or a flat-out lie on the part of the shaman. The shaman goes on to explain that powerful magic is needed to prevent the catastrophe; he directs every member of the village to provide a small model of their homes and other buildings, making a mock village. With the entire mock village set up, the shaman performs a ritual and lights the mock village on fire, assuring the villagers that the magic will protect their homes and property. If nothing happens, the shaman explains that the ritual saved the village. If the village burns anyway, the shaman points out that his vision was correct. If the town floods, the shaman explains that the magic he directed was *too* powerful – but the village was indeed protected from fire! In any case, the demonstration provides evidence of the shaman's proactive actions on behalf of the people he serves. In **GURPS**, Acting and Performance skills are important here.

The main principle of Shamanism is the attempt to control physical nature. Hence the term embraces the various methods by which the spirits can be brought near or driven away.

– Charles G. Herbermann et al.
(editors), *The Catholic Encyclopedia*

*For shamans who can truly summon spiritual aid, players might want to grab **Dungeon Fantasy 9: Summoners**. This supplement includes a shaman template and stats for supernatural beings, and details on the gift from and risks of calling on supernatural beings to gain power.*

ENTERTAINMENT

In real-world cultures with shamans, such spiritual leaders provide the important service of putting on an enjoyable show for their paying customers. In *The Heathens* by William Howell (Doubleday, 1948), Howell describes how the actions of a shaman are “full of drama” and that observers enjoy watching – the encouragement described previously may be like a sports fan cheering his team from the sidelines!

Performances occur in the dark, which helps hide any fraudulent activities. The shamans provide music by beating drums and singing. For example, a Siberian shaman acts as though possessing spirits speak through his mouth, and uses “expert ventriloquism” to make it appear that spirits are making sounds a distance away from him (if this is a trick, it’s hidden by the dark). A shaman wishing to do this should be skilled in Mimicry and Ventriloquism as well as Singing. These abilities also serve to reinforce to credulous watchers or participants that the shaman has power; did they not personally observe the shaman call forth and interact spirits, right there in the darkened hut? The shaman need not charge for these “educational” performances; they help him get paid later for contracted work.

Because shamans control spirit darts, people fear that a shaman may be tempted to use the cover of healing as an opportunity to bewitch his own clients for personal reasons. The clients therefore remind the shaman that they expect results – and if such results are not forthcoming, the shaman himself may be suspected of, and punished for, sorcery.

– Michael F. Brown,
“Dark Side of
the Shaman”

INTIMIDATION

Lots of folks earn their living through intimidation. A shaman may practically hold his people for ransom (“Pay me not to call spirits to harass you” is a popular magical – or

fraudulent – protection racket), or he may subtly encourage a deadbeat to cough up payment (“I can just put this evil spirit back where I got it from . . .”). Likewise, a shaman’s Reputation may be enough to intimidate those who don’t want to meet their obligations; as Howell puts it: “right thinking people simply don’t antagonize shamans.”

PHYSICAL PROOF

Sometimes, a shaman provides physical proof – possibly through real powers. For instance, in *GURPS* terms, a healing power or a variant of the Cure Disease spell may permit the shaman to literally pull a parasite or tumor from a person’s body and display it; other diseases may appear as vapors or liquids. If the shaman does not possess the correct powers, he may palm an insect, stone, chicken liver, or other small object, perform his healing ritual, and produce the item at a properly dramatic point as proof: “I have pulled this item from the body of your wife and cast out the evil spirits – rejoice in my power!” Or, “This is the corpse of the evil spirit that troubled your child.” If the shaman’s powers are real but do not provide visible proof through their use, the shaman may still resort to such sleight of hand and trickery to ensure his payment and to avoid the consequences inherent in (perceived) failure. It’s usually good to provide players’ heroes with a roll (at a substantial penalty) to spot this kind of trickery; PCs who perform this kind of trickery should be given bonuses to conceal it if they provide good explanations on how the prestidigitation is accomplished. Sleight of Hand skill is helpful here.

Evidently, some shamans perform their trickery very well. Howell relates that a female Chukchi shaman was seen by Waldemar Bogoras to take a rock between her hands (in order to “prove” that this was real, and not a trick, she was shirtless) and – without changing it in any way – “produce a pile of smaller stones from it.” She performed this trick for Bogoras several times, and he was unable to discern how she did it.

In some cases, Sleight of Hand is all-important. Claude Lèvi-Strauss, in his work *The Sorcerer and His Magic*, tells the tale of Quesalid, who became a shaman in order to find out if shamans were frauds. He was taught by his culture’s shamans to conceal a tuft of fur or feathers in his mouth before a ritual, and to bloody the tuft by biting his tongue during the ritual, and to spit out the bloody tuft as proof he had “sucked out” the source of illness. He observed people to become well after he used this “power,” despite his own conviction that shamanism was fraudulent.

However, some tribes, such as the Azande Indians, are well aware that their shamans perform the kinds of artifice described here. Howell explains how they laugh off the shaman’s trickery, knowing that “a doctor will fail completely when tested by so simple a question as what is in a pot.” Azande shamans sometimes make a game of “shooting beetles or bones into one another, or spectators if they are unruly,” but “this is generally known by the Azande to be sleight of hand, good as it is.” Nevertheless, these shamans believe in their own magic, and – when the Azande become sick – they go to these people.

*If a shaman actually has the power to curse (see *Cursing*, p. 34), he might want to get creative. For some unusual ideas, see *Tooling With Curses in Pyramid #3/1: Tools of the Trade – Wizards*.*

CURSING

Occasionally, a shaman will simply resort to cursing. If he has an appropriate power (e.g., the Curse spell, or Visualization with the Cursing enhancement), this is a simple matter. If he is a fraud, or if he lacks suitable powers, he must resort to trickery – or worse.

The simplest “curse” of all is to poison somebody, accomplished in any creative (or not-so-creative) fashion. The poison could be a mild emetic – the subject throws up, the shaman performs his ritual, the subject gets better (as he would have without the shaman). Laxatives can work in a similar way.

Another possible curse is the infliction of inconvenience. For example, the shaman might warn a rival of an impending problem, then sneak out to infuse an important location (pasture, barn, slaughterhouse) with the musk or feces of large predators. (This would cause the rival’s cattle to be unwilling to approach the location.) If anyone questions the shaman’s fatigue the next day, he states that he has spent the night in battle with spirits, guarding the people while they slept – and he might also make it known that his rival has offended the spirits and will pay the price today.

A more extreme possibility is to murder someone. The shaman can hide the body or feed it to something, keeping some possessions. The shaman then kills an appropriate animal, puts the victim’s possessions on it, and puts it somewhere it is sure to be located in a day or two. He returns before it is found, babbling about some horrible curse coming from the spirits, someone has offended the spirits of the animal the shaman chose, and so on. In a day or two, the dead animal is discovered with the missing person’s items . . . and the shaman is proved to be in communication with the spirits. He might also be paid to intercede with the spirits to prevent a similar fate from happening to others.

A shaman may pass blame off on someone else. If he is unable to cure an illness, or if he is deliberately harming someone, he can “enter a trance,” then awaken with the name of a rival, stranger, or former lover, accusing that person of sorcery against the victim. A seemingly heartfelt apology, with the explanation “his powers are stronger than mine” makes the shaman seem sincere (who admits such weakness untruthfully?), excuses failure, and takes the focus off of the shaman’s failure and directs that attention elsewhere. The shaman has done no wrong; he has obtained results. The others are likely to believe he would never lie

about such a thing; the consequences to an innocent victim could be horrendous, and no right-thinking person would do that. A shaman trying this had best be safe against Detect Lies and Empathy, and needs to be sure that diviners will take his side (or, if necessary, that their jewelry and other possessions are found in company of a dead animal).

Adventure Seeds

Cursed! One or more heroes are cursed by a foe, and the affliction is working. When they spend the night in a remote village, the local shaman offers to remove the curse for a steep price. Other villagers laugh at the shaman, but encourage the adventurers to meet his price. Should they pay up or play along?

Rival: The position of a PC shaman is challenged by a rival (see Sean Connery in *Medicine Man* for inspiration). The challenger accuses the PC of a number of heinous crimes; then, one day, missing possessions of several villagers are found in the hero’s home.

THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE

All told, the most important “tool” of shamans in realistic or low-power games is simple trickery. The shaman can be thought to intervene with spirits, appear to remove diseases and curses, even seem to protect his people from disasters, all based on a few simple tricks and some misdirection.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan lives in Madison, Wisconsin, with his wife, Bekki. They are the parents of a preschool daughter, Raven, which, in practice, means that Alan is vaguely aware of some goblin-like critter that lives in his home and occasionally calls out suicidal comments like “Daddy, wake up” and “No! Never!”

Alan is infinitely grateful to Jason Levine, without whom he would never have gotten to the point of publishing his first *Pyramid* article (in *Pyramid* #3/16: *Historical Exploration*), and to his Tuesday night gaming group, without whom he would never survive the stress of alternating work as a nurse and a telephone operator.

Dion Fortune’s attitude to the material planes was the same as that of most occultists and spiritually minded persons – that is “the end result of a long chain of evolutionary processes that have gone on in the subtler planes, the realms of spirit mind and astral ether.” In other words, we are spirits in a material world, and everything here “will have a kind of soul, as it were, composed of factors from each of these levels of manifestation.”

– Kala Trobe, *The Witch’s Guide to Life*

SANCTUARY AND RIGHT OF CLERGY

BY STEPHEN DEDMAN

Among the many advantages that come from having a cleric in the party or as an ally, sanctuary and “right of clergy” offer adventurers protection from prosecution by secular authorities, which can be used as a “Get Out of Jail Free” card under certain circumstances.

SEEKING SANCTUARY

In areas where both the church and the secular authorities recognize *sanctuary*, an individual fleeing arrest may seek it by entering a house of worship. The Council of Orleans in 511 A.D. passed a ruling that runaway slaves or anyone accused of a crime – including murder, theft, or adultery – could seek asylum in a church or a bishop’s house.

Under English law, from the seventh century to 1623, anyone seeking sanctuary had to surrender any weapons, confess any sins, and place himself under the supervision of the priest or abbot. He then received the church’s protection for 40 days, after which time, he was required to either stand trial for any crimes of which he was accused, or confess his guilt and swear to abjure the realm – in other words, leave the country forever. The latter involved giving all land to the crown and all other possessions to the church, then walking barefoot and bare-headed along a major highway to a port nominated by an official. Anyone returning to the realm without first receiving a royal pardon could be executed by the secular authorities, excommunicated by the church, or both.

Sanctuary could be sought inside any church (though sometimes the fugitive might have to ring a certain bell, use a particular door-knocker, or sit in a specific chair), or in the grounds surrounding certain churches and abbeys licensed by the king (the limits of these areas – up to 1.5 miles from the building – were marked by stone crosses). It was not always granted: When William Fitz Osbern – a revolt leader – sought sanctuary in a church in 1196, the Archbishop of Canterbury had it burnt down around him.

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRIESTHOOD

After 1170, Englishmen who didn’t reach sanctuary quickly enough to avoid arrest had the option of claiming *benefit of clergy* – declaring themselves beyond secular law, by virtue of being priests. Between 1170 and 1351, this required them to arrive at court in ecclesiastical costume, including a tonsure, but a law passed in 1351 extended benefit of clergy to anyone who could read Latin. In most cases, the accused could demonstrate this by reading one verse from the Bible, and the clerics usually chose the first line of Psalm 51: *Miserere mei, Deus, secundum misericordiam tuam* (“O God, have mercy upon me, according to thine heartfelt mercifulness”). Even illiterates who had memorized the appropriate passage (popularly known as the “neck verse,” because it saved men from being hanged) were able to claim benefit of clergy – unless the priest had already decided that the man deserved punishment by the secular courts, and asked him to read a different verse.

O God, have mercy on me . . .

– Psalm 51:1

The ecclesiastical courts were usually far more lenient than their secular counterparts (the maximum sentence being a year’s imprisonment). Because this benefit of clergy was so widely abused, Henry VII ruled those unable to prove they actually had been invested as clerics could only claim benefit of clergy once – afterwards, such individuals had their thumbs branded with an “M” as a sign that they had done so. (Peers of the realm were excused this after 1547.)

Alternate world campaign idea: Heroes have reason to witness someone invoke the Benefit of Clergy, only to discover the psalm he’s quoting is subtly (or significantly) different – but correct! Is there some mystery behind these biblical differences?

In 1402, Parliament decreed that sanctuary and benefit of clergy did not extend to those accused of high treason. In 1496, murder and petty treason were also ruled “felonies without benefit of clergy”; by 1769, the list had grown to 160 offenses including rape, arson, witchcraft, stealing from churches, picking pockets, sacrilege, poaching, burglary, highway robbery, stealing lead, forgery, and counterfeiting. By this time, women could also plead benefit of clergy, but the literacy test had been abolished and the maximum sentence had been increased to seven years in North America (where John Adams used a literacy test to gain benefit of clergy for two soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre of 1770).

The English finally abolished the legal status of sanctuary in 1623, and benefit of clergy in 1827. Sanctuary has no legal standing in the U.S., but churches will occasionally offer it to those it feels deserve protection from the government – for example, to those fearing deportation, or to conscientious objectors in wartime.

Timeline

- 511 A.D.** – Roman Catholic Church grants asylum to anyone taking refuge in a church or a bishop’s house.
- 600s** – Right of sanctuary formalized in English law.
- 1000s** – All English churches and some church grounds declared sanctuary under English law.
- 1170** – “Benefit of clergy” introduced, protecting clerics from being tried by secular authorities.
- 1351** – Benefit of clergy extended to any man literate in Latin.
- 1402** – Benefit of Clergy Act of 1402 decrees that benefit of clergy does not apply in cases of high treason.
- 1496** – Benefit of Clergy Act of 1496 decrees murder and petty treason to be “felonies without benefit of clergy.”
- 1575** – Benefit of Clergy Act of 1575 adds rape and burglary to the list of “felonies without benefit of clergy” and rules that benefit of clergy can only be claimed between conviction and sentencing.
- 1623** – Legal standing of sanctuary abolished in Britain.
- 1624** – Benefit of clergy extended to women.
- 1706** – Literacy test for benefit of clergy abolished in Britain (but not in colonies); maximum sentence increased to two years of hard labor.
- 1718** – Maximum sentence increased to transportation to America (later, to Australia).
- 1779** – Branding abolished as punishment in Britain.
- 1827** – Benefit of clergy abolished in Britain.

ROLEPLAYING USES

Claiming sanctuary and/or benefit of clergy may be of use to any adventurer in the appropriate place and time, in either a historical, alternate historical, or *Infinite Worlds* campaign. The idea of sanctuary may also be recognized in myth parallels (*Infinite Worlds*, p. 94) such as Nottingham or the Camelots, or by many religions and governments in fantasy worlds such as Yrth. Someone with the Clerical Investment advantage may

also be able to offer protection by declaring an area a sanctuary (temple, shrine, hallowed ground, etc., according to the local law), or by claiming someone is a cleric.

Illiterate people in a world that offers Benefit of Clergy to the literate may attempt to memorize the “neck verse”: With *GURPS*, for example, roll on Law, Religious Ritual, or IQ-6, with a +5 for Eidetic Memory. The GM should assume that the verse the person is asked to read is Psalm 51 unless the priest has a Very Bad or worse reaction to the accused. Before the introduction of the literacy test, those wishing to claim benefit of clergy will need to acquire the necessary vestments and/or documentation, or create them with use of Disguise and/or Forgery skills.

ADVENTURE POSSIBILITIES

Back in Black: A mission to a 14th-century echo (*Infinite Worlds*, p. 85) goes horribly wrong, and the heroes are accused of various crimes, including witchcraft. The only way to protect themselves, their wounded comrade, and The Secret is to flee to the nearest church and claim sanctuary while they wait for rescue. Unfortunately, the plague has made people wary of strangers, so the PCs will have to be particularly persuasive.

Get Thee to a Nunnery: An Infinity survey team in an echo suspects that an all-female team of Centrum agents are using an English priory as a base of operations. To learn out more, the investigators will need to find a way inside. To complicate matters, the priest who visits the nuns every Sunday is an Adamite, who believes that worship should be performed in the nude.

Saving Faith: After the heroes escape arrest in Nottingham by claiming benefit of clergy, villagers are sufficiently impressed that they ask them to exorcise a young woman they believe to be possessed.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen Dedman is the author of *GURPS Dinosaurs* and the novels *Shadowrun: A Fistful of Data*; *The Art of Arrow Cutting*; *Shadows Bite*; and *Foreign Bodies*. He has also written a number of *Pyramid* articles and other RPG material, plus more than 100 short stories published in an eclectic variety of magazines and anthologies.

He is co-owner of Fantastic Planet, a science fiction and fantasy bookshop in Perth, Australia, and is trying to save enough experience points to buy off the long-standing Wealth (Struggling) disadvantage. For more information, check out stephendedman.com.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

TURNING CLERICS BY DOING AN ABOUT FAITH

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

"I focus my powers by reminding myself who's really in charge," explained the cleric as he clutched a holy symbol.

"I do the same thing," nodded the wizard as he looked into a mirror.

Let's start with assumptions, and then see if we can't shake up the snowglobe to come up with something new.

From both a conceptual and game-mechanic standpoint, the biggest difference between clerical and wizardly power is that clerics lay claim to their power by attempting to better serve the will of an external force, while wizards use their powers to serve their own wills. Sure, wizards can be serving someone else (a noble, community, or even deity), but at the end of the day, it's their choice how they are using their powers.

Clerics, meanwhile, don't have much say in the matter, if they want to keep accessing their abilities. Sure, they have a lot of leeway about *how* they want to serve their higher power – smiting demons, healing the sick, and building temples are all things that any self-respecting goddess of light would be happy about – but her priests probably can't open a people-injuring parlor with a few demon buddies and expect to retain their powers.

Okay; so we have the ground work, right? Excellent. Let's mix up the ideas.

A CLERIC-LIKE WIZARD

Let's start with the easier example first. What would a wizard who is like a cleric look like? Well, he'd probably be a standard wizard, with lots of limitations on when and how he can act. These restrictions might be self-imposed; he's serving a faith tradition because he *wants* to, not because his abilities depend on it – a volunteer, as it were. Or the limitations might be enforced by the religion; really, in this regard, he's not terribly different from anyone else

with sanctioned authority to use powers on behalf of a religion – when the Followers of Light want to revoke the authority of a warrior-knight who's tied to the order, they send a few *inquisitive*-minded friends with weapons to chat. (Sure, there's an outward distinction between "I can't do my thing because church elders tell me I can't" and "I can't do my thing because I've lost my connection to my divine source of power," but the outcome is the same.)

Some of the more obvious tweaks to make a more cleric-like wizard include:

- A weakening or strengthening of abilities depending on the holiness of the area he's in.
- An obligation to uphold the tenets of the faith.
- An increase in social standing (everyone loves clerics – they're much safer than those nutjob wizards!).
- An ability to use clerical items (such as the goodies on pp. 17-20!).

Rules? Hah!

Although game-mechanical nuts-and-bolts about how to implement the ideas here are left as an exercise to the reader, the biggest fact to remember is that "a disadvantage that doesn't limit actions isn't a disadvantage." Thus if a cleric finds himself with access to all his cool clerical powers without needing to do anything to gain or retain them, then he shouldn't be getting any points for standard clerical disadvantages and may even need to pay additional character points for the privilege of such freedom.

Some of the ideas in this article can be introduced after character creation – the hero has unknown blood, or the deity is experimenting.

A WIZARD-LIKE CLERIC

Okay; now let's think about the interesting one. How would you go about making a cleric who seems more like a wizard?

The best way I can think of is to realize that "wizardry" is usually associated with "freedom" – in other words, the ability to use one's magical abilities however one wants.

In most gaming groups, there isn't as much divergence as may seem in the mind. After all, it's not like most sane wizards are looking to set off a fireball in the middle of an innocent marketplace anymore than a good cleric is looking to deny a healing spell to a dying beggar. And, really, there isn't a huge difference between "my hero is going to spend his downtime communing with his deity for a few hours" and "my hero is going to spend his downtime mixing chemicals, tapping mana, and seeing what blows up in new and interesting ways." Still, the idea that abilities could be revoked for not toeing the line is one that makes many players nervous – and that may be justified, if the GM is too adversarial. ("Ha-ha! Your miracles don't work now because you ticked off the wrong omnipotent being!" "Yeah, and I think he's sitting behind the GM's screen, right now . . .")

So, let's look at that: clerical freedom. How can we do that? By changing the rules.

The core assumption of almost every clerical rule system is that miracles stem from dedication and self-sacrifice; in exchange for this discipline, the adherent gets new powers – which he's expected to use to serve the deity he signed up with.

But what if the hero gets those powers without the dedication or self-sacrifice? How would that happen? (And how can the GM restrict it? For ideas, see p. 39.)

I focus my powers by reminding myself who's really in charge.

"Saturn: A Different Kind of Deity"

The easiest way to permit freedom in clerical pursuits is to say that the god in question doesn't *have* any restrictions on how its bestowed powers are used. This is best suited for more chaotic or freedom-loving deities – Eris, Goddess of Discord, would be a good example.

The problem with this option is that it's hard to feel terribly special or different from a wizard (if that's what you're after). After all, if "act like a nutjob" is a core tenet of your faith, then you're not stepping outside the box by doing what thou will . . . you're conforming. Nonetheless, players (or the GM) should realize that deities do exist who are willing to grant access to many of the usual cool clerical powers, but don't really have very stringent requirements.

The Power of Blood

Perhaps divine power flows on the mortal realm not through dedication, but through blood. Perhaps anyone from the bloodline of Awopbabbaloubouawopbamboo has the ability to access clerical powers. On Earth, there are religions that believe that divine favor is predetermined by birth; it's not a stretch to expand that to divine powers.

If the GM wants to introduce this option into an already-established campaign, he can say that some deities offer their gifts to all comers (with the usual clerical restrictions), and that some grant their powers only to certain families (or even specific people who meet stringent criteria). There can even be overlap; the god of light and god of dawn could provide access to the same powers, but the former accepts anyone willing to follow the religion's tenets, while the latter is limited to the Dundundawn bloodline but imposes no restrictions on power usage.

Experiment

As perhaps the least disruptive and potentially most interesting possibility, what if the deity is willing occasionally to grant access to its miracles with no requirements and no questions asked? Its reasons for doing so are probably mysterious and inscrutable (and might even form the basis for an ongoing mystery), but the effects are the same: all the miracles of a cleric serving [whoever], without any of the usual pesky requirements, restrictions, or obligations.

This possibility is an excellent way for a player to create a PC who doesn't follow traditional patterns – say, a thief with curative powers or a merchant with "god of war"-style smiting abilities.

Why would a god choose to do this? As a few possibilities:

- Maybe the deity thinks its followers have gotten too stagnant. By introducing radical new ideas into its fold, it might either force its followers to evolve and adapt, or cause them to refocus upon their ideals and deal with the interloper. (Of course, the latter means that such an experimental "carefree" cleric might be the enemy of the rest of the religious order!)

- Perhaps the god believes the test subject has the makings of becoming a good (traditional) cleric for the order, and it hopes that he will come to that decision on his own. How long can a callous happy-go-lucky thief have unfettered access to healing spells *without* feeling a tug at his heart to do charitable curing?

- It might be a "publicity stunt." The divine power may think the new follower will be a good way of showing others what the deity can bestow, which might cause others to seek out traditional conversion (unwittingly): "Wow! that one cleric of death I met was *really* nice and not spooky at all, plus she had cool powers . . . where do I sign up?"

- The god might be going insane. It would be a bittersweet revelation to discover that the unprecedented access to these miracles was only because the giver is slowly losing its mind. (As a twist to the twist, perhaps unrestricted use of these miracles is the only way to *cure* the deity!)

So the next time you're looking to create a different character, consider a devout wizard or a lackadaisical cleric – sometimes true enlightenment can come from denying a universal truth.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

ODDS AND ENDS

TEN UNUSUAL QUIRKS FOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS

- They live on a 23-hour day (devoting the “saved” hour to the deity); their schedules float slowly into and out of phase.
- They believe in not showing *any* emotions – except for one favored by their deity. (This would result in a very unusual encounter: emotionless, emotionless, *boundless sorrow!*, emotionless, emotionless . . .)
- They think that by “curing” injury they are actually “draining” pain into the coffers of their dark, inscrutable deity. As a result, they’ll heal minor damage for *free*, and may even pay to heal major injuries!
- They believe all [type of common animal] are sacred.
- They believe all [type of common animal] are evil incarnate – to be avoided or destroyed!

- They posit that everything in the universe is edible to someone/something else, and accordingly address all things (and people) as “food.”
- They consider the world to be the center of the universe – just not *our* universe.
- They fully support using their ability to raise the dead, but only if the deceased didn’t have a sufficiently dramatic death or interesting “last words.” They are able to commune with the dead to make sure of this fact.
- They commune with spirits, but categorically deny that they do so, or even acknowledge that spirits exist – even if a spirit is waving its arms right next to one of their clerics and yelling, “Hey! Hey! I’m doing this guy a favor!”
- They believe truth is found in flames. They’re not full-fledged pyromaniacs (for the most part), but they enjoy fire an *awful* lot – in a way that probably makes people nervous.

Dealing With an Avalanche of Unique, Beautiful Snowflakes

Assuming you introduce one or more of options presented in this issue’s *Random Thought Table* (pp. 37-38), what is to keep these “restriction-free” clerics from running rampant? Usually the counterbalance can be found by carefully considering the source itself.

- If a god grants powers without any restrictions, maybe it “makes up” for it by limiting the amount of chaos the person can cause on the mortal realm. If all followers of Eris, Goddess of Discord, are granted full access to miracles without any restrictions, but they’ll keel over dead in five years, there probably still won’t be many takers. (This is still a viable PC option; five years is plenty of time for adventuring!)
- If the divine power is granted through bloodlines, maybe it’s a conscious choice that all members of that bloodline must make (say, when they reach puberty): If you tap this divine power, you forever forsake your own fertility. This would keep the number of clerics down to a reasonable level; if everyone in a generation taps the power, then the bloodline ends there.
- If the god is granting unrestricted divine powers to a PC as an experiment, then that’s a one-off event anyway – it’s up to the deity to figure out if it wants to expand the experiment in the future.

MURPHY’S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



Got a Murphy's Rule of your own? Send it to murphy@ejgames.com

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