

A TREATISE ON PRIESTS

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Herein I present some heretical ideas on how to treat priests in AD&D, as currently I tend to think that they A) serve too small a role considering their religious-social stratum and B) are too powerful in relation to other character classes (only slightly less combat efficient than the fighter, and capable of casting more spells with more choices than the mage, plus the ability to cure wounds, which mages are disallowed from? C'mon...).

SOME HERETICAL IDEAS ON PRIESTS

1) The priest does not choose the spells. This is sorta hinted at in AD&D books, and is occasionally mentioned, but overall, most DMs tend to think it's too much trouble to pick out the priest's spells everytime. However, it does not have to be. Let the player choose the daily selection, but restrict what his choices are -- don't let the priest of a pacifist select something like Magic Stone, for example. Also, some holidays and seasons may change the spell list slightly -- imagine a Priest of God trying to fight evil on Christmas Day? It is also possible to have the player select the spells he prays for, and then gives the list to you. Make any corrections you want then. Also, don't let a spell be used for purposes the god would not approve of. Even if the priest HAS the spell, that does not mean the god will give it the power to work. In fact, you may have the spell not only not work, but be lost as well!

2) The priest does not know what he gets. Two parts to this. First, when the player hands you his wish-list, make your corrections, change one or two if need be, and then DON'T GIVE IT BACK. The player may make another list of what she ASKED for, but will not know exactly what she really got. That way, when he prays for a miracle, which is essentially what priest spells are, you can decide what his god decides to do for him. The second part is to not go by the AD&D 'number of spells a day' as precisely as it intends. During powerful periods of time, maybe bump it up by a spell or two in each level, or maybe just a couple of extra first level spells. On bad hair days for the god, drop a spell level or two, maybe dropping the highest level spell the priest can cast. This isn't really hard -- just have an idea of what days are good days, which ones are bad ones. If it's a god of chance or some such, roll a 50-50% chance of it being good or bad. The priest can keep track of good days and bad days, of course, but won't know precisely how you've altered the

spell number -- in other words, he'll have to ask each time in order to find out if his god is doing something for him this time. Note that you may also decide to penalize for asking way too much -- if a priest oversteps his quota too often, maybe penalize his spell number the next day -- this will foster the appropriate attitude of submission and not taking one's god for granted. It will also help the priest be careful about every spell request to his god.

3) Give priests something to do. Their god exists, usually, in a PANTHEON. This means that the god is usually opposing someone, right? So keep a list of just who the priest's diety doesn't like. Maybe have some ideas of what is going on with the pantheon at the time -- is the priest's diety weakened by some plot of another diety? Is she stronger due to some win she made? If stronger, perhaps the priest will be asked to take advantage of this, and you could have an adventure idea for cementing the god's position, such as clearing out a section of wilderness for a shrine. Note that this might count as a good day under note 2). Is the god in trouble? Ask the priest to go kick some other church's backside into the spot it belongs. The priest may recieve fewer spells at this time due to budget problems, but if it turns into a real quest with serious problems, the god may give the priest more spells later on out of desperation. Remember -- most gods in trouble can be very generous to the kind soul who helps them out.

4) Give the power to the people. Let commonfolk have miracles in time of great need, too (this assumes that the commonfolk person is truly holy or religious). For that matter, know who each party member worships -- as long as the character has been true to his faith, let him have a first, possibly second or third level spell at the higher levels when in great need. Don't tell her that this is possible (or if she knows, don't let her know you are doing so), but in a time of great need, let a miracle come off. This may not be appropriate for mages, depending, and it is not appropriate at less than about 5th level or so.

5) Heretical behavior on the part of the priest should result in penalties, not just in spells, but in other things (this is why I can't cast DM spells anymore?). For example, perhaps a priest of Zeus who is using the sacred temples as a place to seduce young women, Zues may strike him impotent, or worse. In addition to the priest losing spells (Hmm.. perhaps Zeus wouldn't punish this particular transgression tho - difficult call for the god of rape and thunder).

6) Remember, the priest is, in most religions, the link between the common people and their god. The priest, while not always being assured of miracles from on high, is almost always assured of her social power.

Here I have covered a few religions to give a DM some ideas. It is in no wise complete, as that was not my purpose (nor my ability ;).

AMERINDIAN MYTHOS

As in Dieties & Demigods, I am lumping most of these together. This is primarily because of strong similarities in the animism (belief in spirits of all things) religions found commonly throughout. This animism is important to understand, for it is the source of a priest's (or shaman's) power. Essentially, every tree, blade of grass, bird, lizard, wind, rock, stream, etc., has a spirit behind it. These forces are not necessarily intelligent by our definition, but they are as real, and possess as many rights, as any human being. In addition to these spirits, there are usually a unifying force behind each type -- sky, raven, earth, tree, etc. These unifying forces are not connected with a specific spirit, but are greater spirits which represent all of that spirit. For purposes of this text, they will be referred to as totems. These greater spirits are powerful, ancient, and at least as intelligent as a human being.

When a tribal priest wishes to do something, it almost always involves a trade (this is so in more developed religions, but more subtly) between the shaman and spirit, or the shaman's tribe and spirit. For example, hunting an animal always involves a trade with its spirit -- the whole tribe sings the praises to the spirit, and act its part in a dance. In many tribes, the dead are given to the spirits who have died in past.

In addition, a tribal priest usually has a totem with which the shaman is most powerful (note that Amerindian priests are links to ALL of the supernatural world, not just one diety). Spells specifically given from this spirit are cast at the priest's normal level -- those given by others are one level lower. Note also, that because of the strong bargaining quality involved, that my heretical comments on not knowing are not really applicable -- but make the priest pay for each spell. Also, some trades may involve a constant spell (that is, rather than trading for it each day, the priest will get it each day automatically. However, it still takes up a slot of what the priest can have).

The tribal priest has many responsibilities to the tribe. She makes magic, keeps the tribe up on the activities of spirits, applies the war paint and blesses the warriors, asks the buffalo spirits for a good hunt and thanks them when the hunt ends, asks for rain and thanks sky when it comes, etc.

In all, an Amerindian priest might be better off without spells at all, at least those spells which can be found in the AD&D manuals. Let the priest trade with those spirits, especially those of his totem, for the miracles he performs.

AN EXAMPLE:

Uhi, an indian shaman, has as his totem Raven. He chose Raven as a child because of a vision he had, involving Raven being chased by several of the more powerful Totems. Raven flew into a tree, where they surrounded her. Raven then spoke to each, convincing them that they should kill the others before hunting her, as she was not much of a meal, and would be best split among a group of one. Greedy and hungry, each attacked the other, and soon there was just one left, who was limping and hurt. 'Ha!' he said, 'Now only I will be able to eat you!'. Raven smiled at him and dived, plucking his eyes with her talons, for against just one who was

hurt, even Raven was a match. 'No' she said, 'for your greed has weakened you, and now my wisdom has blinded you. You will eat no Raven tonight!' And since he could no longer pursue her, she flew away. Uhi follows Raven's wisdom and trickery, as they are greater than strength of arms or power. He saves his strength for when it truly matters, and when it is best suited, or his enemies weak.

Spells:

* Uhi has traded several services (most of which involved weakening the enemies of) with Coyote in return for Fire, which is Coyote's great gift. Therefore, Uhi can, whenever he want, light a fire with flammable materials, though the fire is weak and must be built up. In addition, prayer to Coyote for fire based spells is likely to be successful. However, Uhi must perform a service once every year to Coyote of Coyote's choice. This service is never beyond Uhi's abilities, for Coyote wants the task to be completed, but it does force Uhi to ask himself if he really really wants Fire. he can give up a task at any time, but will never be able to ask Coyote for Fire again, unless a serious penitence is taken.

* Uhi, because he follows Raven, has a closer relationship with Raven than with other spirits. Because he forwards her cause, and has raised her status to other spirits, she often gives him spells at the asking. These spells are usually more indirect, however, and may be devious in their true use.

* Uhi has also made a great trade with Raven. His tribe never hunts the raven, and he personally has helped many ravens against larger predators, such as the hawk. In return, he is given strength in battle against his foes, and good luck on the hunts (the exact effect of this varies from battle to battle, and hunt to hunt).

CHINESE MYTHOS

The best way to think of the Chinese mythology is too think of feudal Chinese government. First there is a lord, or ruler, of a particular region or town. This lord associates much with the other lords, all of whom rule their region slightly differently. Serving each lord is a vast array of servants, vassals, chancellors, personal samurai, diplomats, scholars, and heads of minor bureacracies. Keep in mind also, that many of the higher class sevants, such as samurarii, are often given a portion of the lord's domain to rule, second to him, and that these will have much the same list, although it is always smaller and less impressive. Each of these servants, in addition, will have servants which handle the details for them. For example, a head of economics may have several minor officials who handle a specific area of the lords domain, and these in turn will have someone who goes out and counts heads and incomes. There are also those who serve in more menial measure, such as the serf who waits upon a samurai master -- the serf's position in society is elevated by this task.

In the celestial bureacracy, there is a supreme god, similar to the chinese emperor, to whom the 'lords' or dieties, serve. In return they are granted a section of 'land', or a sphere of influence, over which they may exercise absolute control as long as what they do does not go

against the wishes of the emperor. Each has servants to handle the details, who in turn have servants, and so on. To use the beings given in the Dieties and Demigods book, for example, there are at the bottom, Spirits of Air. These are commanded in turn by a west wind, east wind, etc. These winds follow a policy which is outlined by either Fei Lein & Feng Po (the counts of the wind) or Lei Kung (Duke of Thunder). There are probably a good many other lesser dieties who use them for everyday affairs as well, or who have them on call. Fei Lein & Feng Po, in turn, make their policy (but otherwise do what they want) underneath a lesser god who's duty is to handle all of the winds in the world (but who is not mentioned in the DD). This diety, in his turn, works under Shan Hai Ching (God of wind & sea), who would also have a similar structure beneath him for the sea. Shan Hai Ching is most likely a 'lord' beneath the emperor, given the realms of sea and wind in return for his services.

The priests of this Bureacracy are not held to any material lord. They follow the priest above them, who follows the priest above him, etc., up to the material emperor, who is considered partially divine, and is head of both church and state. Because of this structuring, any priest is considered to be in a separate territory for purposes of lordship, regardless of where their feet stand. Also, those priests who are higher up, directly beneath the emperor, are considered equal in status to a lord of a region, and are attributed all necessary honors and bowing. All priests who are lords, however, remain in the emperor's court unless he specifically affords them material land as well.

A priest's duties are whatever the emperor or the priest's superior say they are (which is generally keeping the populace religious, and sometimes maintaining some affairs of state). The only exception to this is the hermit subtype, which will be covered in a bit. The lowest order of priests, it should be noted, do not perform miracles except in greatest need. The lowest rank of priest who gains spells regularly would be those with at least a few priests ranking below him. Spells are gained by the portion of the bureacracy that the spell falls under -- in other words, only those gods that are currently pleased with the priest will give spells, so the priest must in many cases choose who he will please, and who he will displease. This will determine what types of spells the priest can use, and how many he receives. In addition, higher level/power priests will gain abilities commensurate with their position. These abilities, depending, may be the ability to change into a bird, or to spit fire, or to have hardened skin (+2 bonus to AC). These powers are given by a god who is particularly pleased with the priest, and will be appropriate to the god. Note that these powers are not given out lightly -- it is rare for two priests with powers to meet in a lifetime! In some emperor's courts, there may be two to four lords who each have a power or two. If two are possessed, the second one is generally kept a secret by that lord. Also note that priest's are NOT the only ones who might be given these abilities -- they are just more likely.

Hermits are a special case, and are both feared and admired in many ways, for they represent a step completely outside of the rigid chinese social ranks. There are both holy hermits and other hermits. Other hermits are not nearly as feared, as their powers are not always more than skill in martial arts. The holy hermits, however, often wield great power, and may cause great change in areas. They are treated with great respect, and are usually servants of a single god, or celestial 'lord'. This lord gives the hermit the ability to perform miracles and spread

wisdom, as well as sometimes giving the hermit a power (with same chances as for a priest). A hermit is essentially a priest (usually of third level or better) who is simply not within the priest bureacracy. Often, of course, an emperor will try to get one to swear fealty, thereby making him a priest/lord, but this rarely works. Most priests dislike hermits intensely, but fear them too greatly to counter them or ignore them.

Most priests of the chinese mythos are very similar to those of AD&D, with perhaps a stronger link to the material world. They are considered to be wise beyond normal mortal knowledge, and powerful. Which they usually are.

EGYPTIAN MYTHOS

It is important to understand that the Egyptian gods were not stable through Egypt's history. They changed often and much, at one time being a completely monothestic religion! Every pharaoh, who was head of church, changed the religion in some way or another, and when he died, he would become yet another god! There are some strong, common themes, however. There are also several 'most popular' gods in the modern world, such as Set (similar to our satan), and Ra (a sun god -- the god's god). Also, there are a few gods which have leaked into other areas, such as Bast in some versions of Wicca (Bast is a female cat goddess). There was also a definite structure to Egyptian belief.

The pharaoh was the closest thing to god on earth known in history, except perhaps for Jesus in the New Testament. Anything he said was law, then and there. If he ordered someone dead, they died, usually happily. There were no pagans, were no heretics. There was only the pharaoh, and the priests.

The priests themselves were an interesting bunch. Usually trained from birth to follow a particular god, they had to balance between the wishes of the pharaoh of the time, and past pharaohs and gods. A single priest would worship a single god or goddess as her main thing, and promote the temples of that god with miracles and great shows. In addition, the priest had to obey the pharaoh in all things. This meant that if the pharaoh told the priest to tear down the temple, and build a new one to a monotheism, the priest had to do so, probably angering his own god (this actually occurred in Egyptian history -- the pharaoh was, I believe, assassinated. Part of the reason Tutankh amen became the boy-king so early..). The priest was half televangelist, half subject of the pharaoh.

In return for this precarious position, the priests were afforded spells to impress the populace, advance the god's interests, and give the priest a relatively comfortable life style. Note that priests did not have the same power as the pharaoh did over the people -- priests oftentimes would literally beg for worshippers to come to their temples.