

TWISTED GODS

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Some of the concepts described in this file, I used in text-based RPG/strategy game, simulator of the evil overlord: <https://adeptus7.itch.io/dominion> .

Introduction

In RPG and fantasy, we are often faced with a situation where the existence of gods is an empirically confirmed fact, rather than a matter of belief. Two extremes can be distinguished in the representation of these entities (note - I do not claim that all creation adopts one of these two extreme points of view). On the one hand - the trend adapted by e.g. most of the settings for D&D - gods are personification of certain values professed by people, not infrequently they are even "born" from the faith of mortals or at least derive power from it/are shaped by it - gods described as "good" are simply good in the conventional sense of the word, they sincerely care about their followers and you know what to expect from them. On the other side, we have motifs that can be considered taken from Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythology - the gods are incomprehensible, distant beings, completely unconcerned with human worldviews and so-called "good and evil", mostly indifferent to humanity (and if by chance their paths intersect with humanity's ones, humanity is screwed) - at the same time, it is not uncommon for most mortals to be unaware of their existence, instead worshipping imaginary, more anthropomorphic deities tailored to their emotional needs.

In this article, I wanted to present deities standing somewhere in the middle - entities whose goals, yes, are not fully understood by mortals, but nevertheless close enough to human morality that worshippers can find some commonality (real or imaginary) with their patrons. These gods are usually directly interested in some way in the lives of their worshipers - although not necessarily in the way those worshipers would like. At the same time, I wanted each description to contain a hook, an important point where the devotees' understanding of the deity diverges from its real nature - and whose discovery could be a significant twist.

1. Mother of Peace

The Religion of the Mother of Peace, or the Cult of Harmony, is a strictly pacifist religion. Strictly and absolutely. No violence is allowed, ever, anywhere, in any situation. If you see a psychopath murdering children with an axe, you have no right to use force to prevent him from doing so. You cannot stun him, disarm him, knock him over, or even grab his arm. At most, you can ask him to stop, try to distract him, or stand up to the blow to give the children a chance to escape. Why do people follow such religion? First, the philosophy appeals to some - in the real world, Gandhi said something like "applying the eye-for-an-eye principle will make everyone blind." - Followers of Harmony believe that violence begets violence, while peace begets peace. If they

consistently turn the other cheek and don't resist evil, they will stop winding up the spiral of violence and constant revenge and eventually evil will disappear naturally. Second - following the path of Harmony brings concrete benefits. Holy priests, who have long been non-violent, receive healing powers from the Mother of Peace - but they only work on other followers, so the policy of "I do violence, and the pacifist priest of Harmony heals me" is impossible. To use healing, you need to sincerely renounce violence - which, on the one hand, reduces your chances of survival in an encounter with hostile beings, on the other - if you come out of it alive, all your wounds will be healed, plus you gain protection from natural diseases and other threats. Third - the priests of Harmony preach that those who live and die, observing the principle of non-violence, will be taken into the bosom of the Mother of Peace after death, who will give them happiness incomparable to earthly suffering - so it is "profitable" to trade your life in exchange for heavenly pleasures.

The religion of the Mother of Peace may be perceived differently in society. It is possible that the authorities are actively against it - it makes the subjects unwilling to fight, which reflects on the combat power of the state. Or perhaps they support it, seeing it as a tool to pacify potential rebels? Ordinary people may regard the Children of Peace as annoying lunatics - or treat them with deep respect. Even if healing powers may not work on "infidels," after all, the Children may be able to help them in other ways - such as using conventional medicine (while remarking "Join us and you'll see real miracles!").

Well, what is the catch? Yes, the Mother of Peace actually exists. But her goal is by no means to create a utopia where people can live in happiness and peace. Her goal is to weaken the population of a given world/planet/country. When a sufficient portion of the population is transformed into followers of Harmony, for whom the use of violence - even for defense - is unthinkable, and even if it were thinkable, they would become too weak to use it, the time for reaping comes. The True Children of the Mother, hordes of bloodthirsty, voracious creatures, come out to prey and consume the pacified people. The devoured people continue to make prayers to the Mother, who continues to appear from time to time, assuring her followers that this is the final test and whoever perseveres without putting up a fight against the monstrous invaders will be saved.

During the course of the game, players may encounter followers of Harmony. It would be good for the GM to present them as something more than detached hippies, to make the players start to wonder if they are right. Maybe they'll come across a reformed bad guy - e.g., a psychopathic follower of the god of murder who massacred a village of Harmonious heretics, but their indomitable will and serenity in the face of death made him convert and join them? Or more life-like - a husband who stopped beating his wife and children and is now an exemplary head of the family? Players can act as defenders of persecuted Harmonists (although this will involve some

ambiguity - "Harmonists are decent people, but without people like us, who are not afraid to get their hands dirty, they would survive"). They can have discussions with the priests about the legitimacy of pacifism. Maybe one of the player characters will start thinking about becoming a Harmonist after his career as an adventurer ends? The more sympathetic players become to the cult of Harmony, the more shocked they will be to discover indications that the Mother of Peace may be a much darker entity than it appears. At first, they may trivialize rumors like "Harmonists are actually a fifth column preparing the world for an invasion by dark forces!" as typical denigration of the new religion by the old clerical establishment. But as time goes by, the evidence will become stronger and stronger... Until finally there will be an invasion of the True Children that the players will have to face. Or maybe they will have the chance to prevent it, and will face the dilemma "Whether to believe the critics of the Harmonists and obstruct the great ritual, which, according to the Harmonists, is supposed to help bring universal happiness, but in fact open the gates of the dark dimensions.... Given that in order to do so, we will have to massacre a crowd of unarmed civilians, including women and children?"

The Mother of Peace is portrayed by her followers as a goddess with, one can easily guess, maternal qualities. Perhaps even as a pregnant woman? This is a play on the ambiguous nature of this entity - the presumed spiritual mother-protector of the followers of Harmony, and the actual fecundator of the swarm that will consume them. Players may come across disturbing references to "the coming of the True Mother's Children" in sermons and hymns - priests may (sincerely or not) explain that it's such a metaphor, that it's about the era when people truly dedicated to peace will come.

2. Enemy of Superstition, Destroyer of Magic, Defender of Normalcy

There are many arguments that are made against magic. It is source of obscurantism, superstition and charlatanism, a way to fool people. It violates the natural order of things. It is the work of demons, leading to possession or by destroying the veil of the worlds to demonic invasion. It is the theft of the power due to the gods, a manifestation of human pride. It distracts people from giving honor due to these gods. It brings madness, sucks the life out of the environment, causes the risk of explosions or other side effects. Leads to inequality, as mages can exalt themselves over ordinary people. Or something.

Depending on the setting, each of these accusations may or may not be true. But that doesn't stop the Defender cult from preaching them. Inquisitors and witch hunters roam the world, collecting magical artifacts, books and even arresting anyone who manifests magical talents. No, they don't burn them at the stake. All items and people associated with magic go to the Bottomless

Wells located in temples - supposedly the only way to effectively annihilate them. Importantly, the hunters are ordered to take mages alive if possible and throw them into the wells - supposedly a mage eliminated in the wrong way turns into a wraith, or something like that. Inquisitors are aided in this work by the magic-blocking powers provided by the Defender.

Witch hunters can be treated by the people as terrifying villains - or as heroes. The reason for the latter attitude is not necessarily solely propaganda and "fear of otherness." It is possible that the land has actually suffered a lot at the hands of mages - perhaps it has just liberated itself from the rule of an evil sorcerer and his disciples, or it is fighting a fierce battle against a nation that uses magic in a fierce way. It would be worthwhile for players to see some of the negative effects of magic use with their own eyes, so that at the very least they would develop doubts about whether the Defender's followers are wrong.

What is the truth? It's easy to guess that the Defender is not concerned with defending the innocent from witchcraft. But neither is he driven by any other selfish yet high-minded motivations along the lines of "magic takes the glory away from the gods." The truth is that for the "Defender," magic is just darn tasty. Bottomless Wells are portals leading directly to his insatiable maw. It's possible that the founder of the Inquisition managed by some miracle to communicate with this entity and make a pact "I will provide you with food, you will lend me and my disciples your anti-magic powers, which you use to safely digest objects radiating magic - and we will use them to incapacitate mages."

What will happen when the players reveal the truth about the Defender? Maybe the inquisitors will be furious that their holy crusade turned out to be nothing more than feeding an inter-dimensional monster, they will turn their backs on their god, to which he will react with rage (not because of his violated dignity or some other irrelevant value, but because of the vision of being cut off from a steady supply of grub), through one of the wells he will enter the world and the players, along with the inquisitors, will have to face him? Or maybe the inquisitors will react with a shrug of the shoulders and the statement "So what if the Defender is not a noble god, but a voracious monster. Magic is still a threat, and he is the best means to eliminate it." Perhaps, using the method of the cobbler Skuba (Polish legend), players will toss a special object emanating "toxic" magic into one of the Wells, which will poison the Defender?

3. Truthsayer

God of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. People swear by his name. He is also worshipped as the god of justice and knowledge, so judges and scholars worship him. Lying

brings his curse.

The Truthsayer doesn't lie about himself - in fact, he wouldn't be able to even if he wanted to (and he definitely doesn't want to). The problem is that the people themselves have sung too much about him. As I pointed out above - he is the god of truth and ONLY truth. Justice does not matter to him, it is a totally foreign concept to him.... If he helps the investigators uncover the machinations of the villains, it is only so that the truth will come out, but he does not care whether the result will be the administration of justice. He might as well help the villains discover the heroes' forays and subterfuges. As for acquiring knowledge - yes, he assists scholars in their research, in order to reveal the truth. However, if a scholar spins unsubstantiated speculations and hypotheses (which happen to be contrary to the truth), even in good faith - he draws the wrath of the Truthsayer. Simply put, untruths make the Truthsayer suffer. This applies to any untruth. Also fantasy. If the Truthsayer's followers perform a ritual to increase his presence in the material world, they will bring a terrible calamity. From now on, the curse will fall on actors and poets, on anyone who utters a harmless lie like "You don't look fat in that clothes," "I'm not mad at you," or "I'm on my way out," as well as anyone who uses deception (no, the Truthsayer doesn't care about the nobility of the cause - if you put on camouflage to sneak under the headquarters of the bad guys and rescue their innocent hostages, you are a hideous LIAR and deserve to be punished). Bah, people in ordinary conversations must be careful not to use metaphors and phraseological compounds. A Truthsayer may even go so far as to seek to eliminate words like "nice," "tasty" or "good" - after all, they are subjective, and what is not objective truth, is a LIE.

Good player characters can help prepare a ritual to summon the avatar of the Truthsayer - after all, "God of Truth" sounds like a decidedly good dude, right? At some stage, they may realize that the world of absolute truth will be something terrible (maybe some conversation with a philosopher?) and try to sabotage the ritual. Maybe they will be able to accomplish this in advance... Or maybe the avatar will already begin to pass into our world? Then maybe they will succeed in playing him off by pointing out the paradox - people summoned him because they believed he was the avatar of goodness, justice and knowledge - if he exploits this ignorance of theirs, he will benefit from lying, and this would be unacceptable. Or a character with an exceptionally high bluffing skill or somethin like that might try to spew a tale so full of lies and absurdities that the avatar of Truth will go bonkers just from listening - but a half-hearted success will only enrage him!

For the Truthsayer, as an antithesis, I would see a god of lies and fantasy - not the typical sinister "Prince of Lies" in the style of the Christian Satan, or some malicious trickster, but a deity whose motto is "Such is the world! A wicked world! Why is there no other world?" (B. Lesmian) or

"Be guided in life by such foma (harmless lie) as will give you courage, goodness, health and happiness" (K. Vonnegut), who lies not for some selfish purposes, but because he firmly believes that lying IS GOOD. The real world is cruel and unfair, lying helps to endure it and achieve at least a little happiness - through escapist fantasies, small daily lies "From tomorrow I will take charge of myself and achieve something!" "You look nice", "Don't worry, you're not a failure at all" through big lies like "Good is always rewarded and evil is punished". In this arrangement, both the god of lies and the god of truth would be morally neutral in practice (both can assist followers in certain situations, but at the same time pose a danger - the god of truth mercilessly punishes anything that is not the absolute truth, the god of lies can entangle you in a web of delusion) - but in theory, it is the liar who is driven by more altruistic motivations and loves mortals.

4. Prince of Blades, Lord of Sharp Angles and Edges

Centuries ago, the Prince of Blades was worshipped as a deity of war, or even slaughter. Legends say that he made the weapons of his worshippers - and even their teeth and nails - exceptionally sharp and dangerous to enemies. And the legend is true - albeit the Prince was never a god of war. He is the personification - or perhaps the source? - of all sharpness. He doesn't care about harming anyone, although that's very common side effect, he just wants things to be sharp. Or rather - in passing, by his very existence, he makes them so?

Let's say there is a place where strange phenomena occur. Babies are born with long and exceptionally sharp claws and fangs. Swords and axes made by local blacksmiths are famous for their exceptional sharpness (maybe the player characters just came here to get their hands on them?). There is a temple of the Prince underground, and its influence radiates to the surface. Cultists come to the town to unearth it - they believe in the Prince in his aspect of the god of war and believe that he will help them triumph over their enemies. When they realize their goal, they are met with a surprise. The cultists are transformed into living avatars of sharpness. Invisible blades cut them so as to eliminate all contortions (a head clipped to a cube is not a pleasant sight), their hands turn into scythes, and in their brains all thought of their own is replaced by a single imperative - cut! What's more, the Prince's influence is more and more visible in the neighborhood - everything becomes sharper. The most visible effect from a mechanical point of view is that all weapons (edged weapons to a slightly lesser extent, but other ones too) deal more damage. But as the influence increases, even rubbing clothes against skin starts to be painful, then every touch hurts, until finally the very movements of air cut the skin. If players don't close the temple, the effects can be really nasty. It is possible that earlier players encountered a strange artifact - a sponge ball. If they didn't get rid of it, it will turn out to be a "statue" of Our Soft and Oblique Lady, the

opposite of the Prince, which will mitigate the effects of opening the temple. The battle will take place not between good and evil, order and chaos, or other abstract constructs, but between Sharpness and Softness.

5. Mistress of Natural Instinct

A goddess of wildlife, her followers preach the need to return to a life in harmony with nature and reject the defiling influence of civilization. Oh, it would seem - another "mother Gaia" with a pseudo-ecological cult. The thing is, the Lady is not at all angered by the fact that people are poisoning rivers and cutting down forests, as her followers believe. What she doesn't like is that they are rational. Reason, consciousness, morality, are evolutionary dead ends. They only multiply pain and suffering. Do animals - or even so plants - waste time and resources on some foolishness like art? Do they risk their lives and the lives of others for abstracts like honor? Do they suffer from offended dignity, boredom or lack of meaning in life? People simply philosophize too much to be happy. The return to nature is not primarily about rejecting technology (although that will probably be a side effect of it), but liberating people from the unnecessary baggage of excess thoughts. Let them become like animals - free, innocent and amoral. This is the purpose of the Lady, which is not grasped (possibly except by the high priests) by her followers. Yes, during ecstatic rituals some of them fall into a trance, during which they walk on all fours, howl and growl. And the priests are able to bring this trance on their enemies... But are the followers ready to accept the truth that, according to the will of their mistress, this is how life should be, forever?

6. Sufferer

The Sufferer is a very compassionate god. The epitome of empathy. He feels everything what human feel. Many people would consider this a good thing... The problem is that the Sufferer is also an extreme, absolute masochist. Not that human suffering is his food or source of power. He doesn't inflict pain on people to make them obey him. Simply put, experiencing human suffering gives him immense pleasure.

Much of his worship resembles the realization of the "ideals" of medieval ascetics. Self-flagellation, cilices, fasting, kneeling or lying cross-legged for hours. This is done by the pious followers. Of course, all offenses are punished corporally - often by a long and painful death (one can draw on humanity's rich heritage of torture), but also by mutilation, whipping or stocks. Unlike in medieval Europe, there is a lack of hypocrisy towards executioners - they are not pariahs and "necessary evils," but saintly, respected priests. The Sufferer shows mercy to those who inflict pain

on themselves and others - he protects them from the negative effects of old age and disease - other than pain, of course. As a follower of the Sufferer you will live a long and painful life - he does not care about human death, on the contrary, after all, as long as you live, you suffer. That's why, in addition to torture rooms, clerics also run hospitals - of course, all procedures are carried out without anesthesia. Priests may (consciously or not) mask the true nature of their god. They may explain the necessity of human suffering, for example, as a form of atonement for sins or a training in endurance and strong willpower needed to face evil (which may be, for example, the god of doom described below). But there may also be cults that know the true nature of the Sufferer, such as sects organizing clandestine orgies that have more in common with BDSM than asceticism, or hordes of psychopathic sadists subjecting entire settlements to torture and rejecting any semblance of "penance for sins."

The sufferer may be served by some kind of angels - reminiscent, for example, of the cenobites from Hellraiser. In addition to simply prolonging life, he can also offer other blessings - such as mutations that increase the strength of followers - at the price, of course, of incessant, excruciating pain to the enhanced body parts. Mechanically, he can grant player character following him e.g. bonuses to stats when they are injured - or possibility to cast spells using their HPs as "mana". Of course most of these spells would focus on inflicting pain in many ingenious ways.

What is the twist and originality of this deity? After all, this is not the first god of pain in dark fantasy. Well, as above - being the god of suffering, he is also the god of life, the enemy of death. His opponent may be the god of annihilation - a merciful genocidist, wishing to exterminate the living in order to liberate them from pain - both pain caused by the Sufferer and the ordinary suffering, which inherent part of life. Hosts of howling in pain, covered with scars and piercings fanatics vs legions of silent undead. If the main conflict that defines the world is not good vs. evil, or even order vs. chaos, but suffering vs. annihilation, we're dealing with a truly awful universe. Will the player characters side with life and pain, or death and eternal peace? Or will they will decide to attack sun with a hoe and try to fight the followers of both crazy gods? Will the players believe the followers of the god of doom claiming that the god worshipped by their characters is a sadomasochistic demon, or will they take it as an attempt to confuse their minds by perfidious evil?

Another twist could be the players' realization that the Sufferer is the one true god of their universe, the god behind all the religions of their world. This includes the fiercely monotheistic ones. After all, inter-religious conflicts multiply suffering. Each religion can contribute to this in its own way. The religion of the god of war or the harsh god of justice provide executioners. The religion of a pacifist goddess-commanding humble acceptance of wrongs (another way to twist concept of the Mother of Peace)-provides victims. Religions can oppose the development of magic

and technology, calling for "living in harmony with nature," aim to block solutions that make human life easier. And behind all this is the Sufferer. What will the heroes (especially the more spiritual ones) do when it turns out that the god of their religion is also the prince of demons condemned by that religion? Again - will they believe it?

7. Great Uniter

This religion looks like an ideal. It promotes "universal human values" that players will probably agree with (and if not, modify its ethos to fit players' views). Zero pathology. No embarrassing verses in holy books that can be used for a bad cause. Zero fanaticism. Zero corruption among the clergy - any greedy, lying or perverted priest is immediately exposed and denounced by the deity himself. God is actively involved in human life, punishing evil (but without excessive severity, seeking the conversion of sinners rather than their death) and rewarding good.

What's the catch? Well, god does all this for purely selfish reasons. Yes, the souls of good people will reunite with god after death. Literally. In his stomach. They just taste so much better than the souls of sinners. No, you won't meet your loved ones or great people after death. You won't have time to catch up on the pleasures you didn't have time for while you were alive. You won't even sing hymns. You will be devoured. When the players discover this, they may be shocked. But some priest, privy to the true nature of the Uniter, may present them with another point of view "Okay, the Uniter is not a good being at all, he is a selfish glutton. But so what? Whatever his motives are, he promotes goodness. He makes people's lives better. And that the price for this is to be devoured after death? So what. Who knows what would have happened to our souls after death if the Uniter had not eaten them. Maybe they would have dissipated into nothingness. Maybe they would have been kidnapped by demons who would have tortured them for centuries. Aren't a few decades of earthly, undoubtedly existing life under the protection of a powerful deity more important than an uncertain "eternal life?" Against this rationale, there may be heretics claiming that if the Uniter didn't eat human souls, a paradisiacal afterlife or reincarnation would await them - and that people can be good without the "care" of their "breeder." Who is right? And whom will the players believe?

8. Progress Guide

This god values the development of science and technology above all else. He speaks to people through dreams and visions, inspiring them to new discoveries. His temples are laboratories, schools and repositories of knowledge. He has helped humanity climb out of the dark ages and

climb to the heights.

What is the catch?

Centuries ago, a damaged research and reconnaissance ship of a galactic empire fell from the sky. The wreckage plunged to the ground with all its momentum. The crew perished, only survivor was well-protected Main Brain - computer or organic - containing the knowledge accumulated during the research expedition. The Brain carries out a programmed imperative - to contact the Empire so that its envoys would arrive and retrieve the collected data. After analysis, Brain devised a plan. Although his telepathic transmitter is too weak to reach the nearest planet colonized by the Empire, it allows him to send mental images into the minds of what are the more sensitive - though still primitive - natives. These simpletons, as a rule, are unable to comprehend the knowledge sent by the Brain, but once in a while one of them catches something useful from the vision and turns it into practice. And in this way the Brain gradually, generation after generation, stimulates the development of the natives. Each generation, enriched by the knowledge of its predecessors, understands more and more. The pinnacle of development planned by the Brain is to teach the natives how to build a transmitter that will allow them to make contact with another civilization - that is, the Empire. The problem is that the Empire is absolutely, ottally racist, and when it realizes that the "black box" has crashed on a planet inhabited by alien sub-beings, it will arrive not only to retrieve Brain, who is buried under rocks - it will exterminate the entire local population in the process. Brain doesn't care. He does not pity or despise his followers. He has no emotional attitude toward them. He does his job, and the natives just happened to be an available resource.

What will the players do when they find out? Will they undertake an expedition to find and destroy the Brain? That would be the safest way. But the remaining knowledge of the Brain, which could help humanity, will be lost. Maybe the players will blackmail the "god", for example, on the principle of "You must not persuade humanity to make contact with the Empire. Yes, such are your orders. But if it tries to do so, we will destroy you, and then you will lose all chance to fulfill your mission." Maybe players will try to hack the deity and remove imperial orders. Maybe they will be fooled by Brain's promises that if they help him, he will induce the imperial landing force to spare the players' characters and, for example, the city of their choice?

9. Equalizer

For many people, equality is a value in itself, although it is interpreted in many different, often contradictory ways. But it is certainly very important to the Equalizer. Simply put, the Equalizer supports the weak against the strong. Some people consider him a defender of the

"smallfolk", the disadvantaged and the poor. Others as a being whose purpose is to punish pride. Perhaps he wants to help mortals develop, which is why he offers support to the weak, and constantly poses new challenges to the strong so that they do not fall into the complacency? Or maybe he is a trickster who is amused by the constant chaos that elevates some and humiliates others, and is bored by the stagnation resulting from the permanent domination of one person/group? Of course, it's also possible that it's just an impersonal force of nature striving for balance.

In any case, the Equalizer doesn't care about the righteousness of the cause. If a lone avenger wants to exact justice on a powerful tyrant, he will aid the avenger. If a psychopath wants to murder a good leader loved by the nation, he will support the psychopath. He is always on the side of the weaker against the stronger. By the way - do you remember this joke "Robin Hood took from the rich to give to the poor, but then the poor became rich, so they had to take from them to give to the former rich, who thus became rich again...". For Equalizer, this approach is not a bug, it's a feature. If the players (also thanks to his support) become too strong at some point, the Equalizer will immediately turn against them, often starting to support their rivals whom he himself had previously weakened. But this should not always be considered in terms of conflict. Let's imagine a certain community, poor, plagued by diseases, technologically backward, etc. The Equalizer will probably pay attention to it and start supporting it in various ways. Thanks to this, the community will develop into an advanced, prosperous civilization. Maybe then it will start oppressing other, weaker nations... But it doesn't matter. Even if a civilization becomes a model of goodness, if it uses all its strength to support its poorer neighbors, the Equalizer will still begin to exterminate it the moment it decides that it has become too strong.

The Equalizer does not care about human honor. Yes, if you are weak, prayers can attract his attention and encourage him to help you. But if you become strong, no amount of thanks for your help will stop him from turning against you.

How to use the Equalizer in a scenario? For example, as a starting point - the civilization to which the players belong must face an unexpected wave of disasters and plagues. The priests have no idea why the patron saint of their country has suddenly become angry. Maybe players will initially look for ways to reverse the bad fate until they finally discover the true nature of the patron? Will they accept this and allow their country to be weakened enough, or will they turn against the Equalizer to stop the cycle?

Mechanically, however, being a cleric/chosen of the Equalizer can produce specific "equalizing" effects. For example, a character will receive bonuses when fighting a numerically superior enemy or dueling a monster of a higher level - and, conversely, receive penalties when

fighting a weaker opponent. You could say that the Equalizer is the god of power scaling.

10. Gods are players too

Let's imagine people playing a strategic game in which each of the playable factions has a philosophy assigned to it, which both shapes the plot and translates into mechanics. This, of course, does not mean that the player must in any way identify with the philosophy of a given faction. It's just a game after all.

Well, gods are such players. For them, good, evil, justice, courage, mercy are just empty words with a purely aesthetic meaning, something like the colors of banners or elements of the chosen tactics. When the gods start the game, they say things like "I will play a faction that will exterminate all enemies and then turn them into undead", "And I will play a faction that uses persuasion to bring enemy units to its side and that uses healing to limit its own losses", "Today I feel like playing a faction that worships nature, these treants and unicorns create a nice atmosphere", "I choose the technological faction that will cut down your trees, haha".

Of course, every game has a purpose. Maybe one game lasts a certain amount of time (e.g. 1000 years), or maybe it ends when one of the players scores a certain number of points? What will happen then? What will the characters do in the service of the player, whom they consider to be the god of goodness, life and light, when they finally defeat the evil forces in his name, and then a voice will be heard from the sky: "Hehe, I won. Now I will try to play with the Undead Horde, just for variety. Or to show that I can?"

Even earlier, characters may come across some suggestions about the nature of the gods. Ancient records, considered heretical, suggesting that the roles in the pantheon of gods were long ago distributed completely differently than they are today. Strange orders from the gods (e.g. visions insisting on conquering a specific place, devoid of strategic importance), suddenly make sense - there are no "unexplored judgments", it's just that this place was worth a lot of points according to the rules of the game.