

Alien Versus...Druid?!

NOTE: This 1st edition AD&D article is based on a couple of lines from EGG's many on-line postings. One stated that druids do not worship any deities, and the other that they regard many of the monsters of AD&D as alien intruders. That is the total contribution from any "official" source for the train of thought that the rest of this text represents. Also note that the text assumes *Unearthed Arcana* is in use at least in regards to Druids.

IN THE BEGINNING—THE DRUIDS' WORLDVIEW

The world was once inhabited by animals and plants who's "purpose" was to survive and thrive in a pure "survival of the fittest" environment which favoured the breeding of those populations which were best suited to that environment.

When each living thing died its spirit or soul would be reincarnated again in a new form or, having seen all it wanted of life as an individual, would join with the spirit of Nature itself. This spirit is the closest thing the druids have to a god and they often refer to it as a female. Their chief duty is to protect her from attack by unnatural beings.

As each spirit travelled around the cycle it learnt and grew and so the world developed and changed and became ever more complex, sophisticated, and beautiful but still red in tooth and claw, for that is the power that drives the engine of development. In other words, druids are evolutionists, and this is the philosophical origin of their ceremonial combats.

At some point, several species arose which had free-will and sentience. In turn, free-will allowed for personal dispositions and these led to behaviours which are now thought of as the nine alignments, including neutral but excluding True Neutral.

The appearance of these proto-alignments was of no initial concern to Nature as they simply represented survival strategies and as such were just part of the never-ending natural struggle. Even if one of these had become dominant it would not have represented any more of a threat to the natural order than when one animal develops a better poison and all those members of the species who do not possess it are out-competed, while at the same time the race begins to find a counter to the new development, and so the balance of nature is preserved.

THE GREATEST GAME

When the first sentient creatures were starting to take and espouse ideological and philosophical stances, and perhaps for a long time afterwards, the world looked much like our own. There were few, if any, "monsters" of the sort that are not found on Earth today. (EGG, for example, has stated that Oerth was very similar to Earth about 2500 years before the initial assumed game date).

Alas, the world is not alone within the Prime Material Plane. It is only one of an infinite set of possible worlds, separated by the dimension of probability as two people are separated by the dimensions of distance, or two events by the dimension of time.

Only the greatest of druids can walk this axis, visiting alternative worlds where greater distances represent worlds less and less like the traveller's native world (and, to the inhabitants of each, of course, theirs is **the** original world and the *others* the alternatives). The DM might, for game purposes, find it convenient to treat our real Earth as the "Most Probable" end of this axis. What the other end might be is literally anyone's guess.

Alien Gods

But Hierophants of the Cabal are not the only beings able to traverse the planes of existence. The druids teach the higher members of their order that a war has raged for untold eons across the Prime Material Plane. This war has taken on the form of a great game with pieces being moved across the vast board by shadowy players. The players are what are commonly termed "The Gods", and their servants are the playing pieces in a game designed to make inter-deity conflict as rare as possible—better that worshippers die than the shining gods should ever perish!

The druidic view of the gods is that they are beings who roam the alternative universes of the Prime Material Plane looking for worlds where intelligence has arisen and then attempt to bend that intelligence to worship of themselves. Worship is one of the things which makes a deity stronger and more powerful and thus able to conquer new worlds. Even greater power is gained from those followers who become so identified with a deity that their soul journeys to live on that god's plane after death.

The druids claim that once a world is converted to exclusive worship of the deity or pantheon in question, they move on, revisiting only in order to reap the harvest of their worship and so refresh themselves for the ongoing struggle to master the whole of the Prime Material Plane. These "gods" are all

convinced utterly of their own correctness or, at the least, of the unworthiness of those who would oppose them. It is said that this arrogance is part of what makes a god a god. It is also a trait which many would claim the druids share.

Nevertheless, once these self-styled gods found the campaign world, they set about using it and its inhabitants for their own ends. For many, not just the evil ones, this involved making changes to both the world and the living things in and on it.

Suddenly the natural order was thrown into disarray as these *Outsiders* (actually a derogatory term originating with the druids) used their powers to introduce allied races from other worlds, or create new races and creatures either from whole cloth or moulded from existing species. Many native inhabitants were dominated by awe or force. These beings formed the pieces in the great chess game of the gods. The means used varied largely by the alignment of the deities but all contributed in some way to establishing the new world order.

Artificial Life

As a rough rule, any race which is listed in **THE MONSTER MANUAL** has having an inherent alignment is seen by the druids as literally alien or, at best, a native who has been perverted by the efforts of the gods who wish to rule them and use them as their tools on the Prime Material Plane.

The DM should draw up a list of which races are viewed as native by the druids and so exempt from their Great Plan of purification. The DM must decide for him/herself what the relationship between druids and the creatures of the fairy realm is but I would recommend treating them as totally native to the campaign world and likewise ill-disposed to the newcomers and their fancy religions and churches. The demi-humans but be decided on too, but elves and hobbits can be druids by the book and so presumably are accepted as native to the game world. Giants are another strong possibility for native status too, in my opinion.

The world—Nature—rebelled against the invasion in much the same way as a body does when invaded by disease. Instead of anti-bodies, Nature produced the druids who are charged with using whatever means necessary to eject the invaders. The DM might like to imagine the druids' attitude as being similar to that of R.A.F. pilots shooting down Luftwaffe planes over the cliffs of Dover. The objective is to return to normality and any blame for the death and destruction caused by the struggle is squarely placed on the shoulders of the invader.

The Cabal

Many of the hierophant druids (16th level and up) are employed by the uppermost elite of the druidic order: the Cabal. The Cabal's membership requirements are strict and simple—one must be a 23rd level druid and willing to work towards the overthrow of the Great Wheel of the outer planes. Many of the highest level druids are multi-classed elves who have had perhaps two thousand years to accumulate arcane knowledge and magical equipment. Their henchmen will be followers of "the Old Faith" and at least 18th level of experience in their classes, although lower level characters right down to 1st level will be used by proxy on many occasions. All (knowing) associates of the Cabal must be "non-aligned" in the same way druids are.

Such an organisation is not to be safely disregarded even by those who rule entire planes, despite its relatively small size.

The ultimate goal of the Cabal is to find a way to permanently close off access to the Inner Plane to these interlopers, or at the very least to seal their own native world. If the Cabal ever succeeded in this goal, then some even amongst the eternal gods wonder if eternity might turn out to be a good deal shorter than expected.

The Great Wheel and the Broken Cycle

The reason for all this opposition to the Great Game, and the main motivation for the druids is what happens after death.

Although the gods who rule the outer planes gain some power from the devotion of the living, they value the actual souls of the dead much more. Each inhabitant of, for example, Gladshiem, feeds the power of the ruling pantheon which inhabits it, and especially the specific deity worshipped by the individual. Each dying worshipper's acts and thoughts in life somehow activate a connection to one of the planes of the Great Wheel which then draws their soul or spirit to it to spend eternity serving and powering its ruler(s).

Once a spirit/soul is ensnared by the worship of a god and the conscious adherence to an alignment, it is trapped in the single experience of its afterlife. While it is true that for many this is exactly what they desire, the druids' view is that they have been duped and that even such an existence in the Seven Heavens is a myopic parody of the endless vistas of everlasting and ever-changing life which are lost forever, while the undesirability of the fate of those who inhabit the Abyss or Hell is beyond debate.

This "theft" of souls and the breaking of the cycle of reincarnation is, to the Cabal, the ultimate crime. The gods are quite literally stealing the very souls of their worshippers. No matter what justification is offered to them there is little chance that they would ever bring themselves to a permanent reconciliation with even the most benign-seeming of celestial beings.

Each meeting of the Cabal begins with the members speaking the phrase "The cycle must be unbroken" in unison, and ends likewise with the phrase "The cycle *will* be unbroken".

THE ORDER OF THE DRUIDS

All of the above is, of course, not revealed in one huge burst to hopeful candidates for acceptance into the more mundane Order of non-hierophant druids. The opponents of the Cabal are the gods themselves and consequently secrecy is a constant in their workings. It takes literally years for a person to build up enough trust with them before they would even discuss the ideas in this article. The gods have a great deal of patience; the druids must have too.

If a DM wishes to use this vision of druidism in their game, and their players have not read this document, I would suggest not mentioning anything to Ovates and only letting Initiates into the fact that there is a degree of animosity between the druids and the gods worshipped by others. As the character climbs the ladder, s/he can be fed more information and the final step to becoming a full druid at 12th level should be accompanied by a complete "history of the world" as seen from the druid perspective.

From 3rd level onward, the druid receives their spells through some Nature-spirit. This spirit will act as their "handler" and will attempt to gauge and guide their feelings towards the ultimate elimination of the gods. Initially this spirit will stress the artificiality of the other alignments. If a character seems to be unable to take on, even in the small way that an Initiate of the 1st circle does, a long-term plan to return the world to a state of godlessness, then it may become apparent at this point. As they climb the circles, any such issues will become more and more of a concern although they do not automatically become a barrier until hierophant ranks are reached.

Any character who ever *knowingly* rejects any or all of the orthodox druidic view will, of course, no longer be in harmony with the source of their powers and will therefore immediately lose all their druid abilities and spells, including first and second level spells. Don't cross Mother Nature!

RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

From the above it can be seen that the Cabal's long term goal is one of cosmic significance against which the issues of short term alliances with non-neutrals pale into insignificance. Thus, it is clear that the traditional outside view of druids—that one can not trust them because they may change sides *mid-fight* to "preserve the balance"—is nonsense. Such short-term thinking is very unlikely to serve the druid's long term goals at all.

Nor can one say that druids wish to see the world given over to equal amounts of Law, Chaos, Good, and Evil except insofar as that amount is *nil*. They reject **all** the alignments and wish the world rid of them **all** completely.

An individual druid can and will certainly make friends and allies, particularly amongst the races which the DM has determined are "native" for the game world and insofar as these *may* include kobolds, orcs, dragons and so forth (as the DM decides) there will plenty of reasons for them to mix with other characters.

A druid will almost certainly find it much easier to work with a Chaotic Good Treant than a Lawful Evil Devil, and possibly a Chaotic Evil Quasit even less so, but these are really issues of trust than any sign that Chaotic Good is accepted as a "correct" philosophy. Outsiders and their agents (e.g., clerics) will always be treated with more suspicion but as a practical matter those representing Good will probably be favoured in the short-term over those representing Evil, simply because the latter is more immediately destructive compared to the former.

As people, druids generally love nature and wild places but most also see Humans and Demi-humans and their towns, farms, and so forth as no more unnatural than an ant's nest or a bee hive. All native creatures are entitled to find their own survival strategies and the sentient races no less so.

Druids do, of course, feel that they are endowed with a particular insight which can advise those who will listen as to which strategies are too short-term and will ultimately lead to destruction. If they feel that a group of

creatures—"native" or not—are causing havoc (by any means) for no purpose, then they will intervene. But they are not simply opposed to all human development of land, for example.

The Gods

The gods and, by extension, their higher level clerics, know that the druids oppose their very presence in the world and their views on the subject vary by alignment and religion.

The Evil powers, especially, do not care at all about the druids, their desire for independence, or their plans. The vast majority of these beings are far too arrogant to ever consider such a small group as anything other than a sideshow compared to their everlasting struggle with the forces of Good (to say nothing of their everlasting struggles with the other forces of Evil). Asmodeus may occasionally ponder the issue but He is secure in the belief that no mortal power can reshape the multiverse. He may or may not be right.

The Good deities, when they teach anything at all on the subject, generally teach that the druids are simply misguided and will in time come to realise that the newcomers are no more threat than the appearance of a new species and can, once the disruption of Evil is overcome, be integrated into the "natural" world in a harmonious way. Indeed, they say, "natural" is not really a valid term to use in connection with druids who can call up flame strikes and cause a person's heart to stop beating with the point of a finger.

The LN and CN alignments viewpoints on the druid issue are very similar to each other, ironically enough, and basically amount to "Things have changed; get over it". This underscores another misconception about druids—they do not feel any more connected with the "semi-neutral" alignments such as LN.

Nature Gods

Nature gods are a tricky issue that requires some thought from the DM. The druids do not have to worship any such god but, if the DM desires, they may view some of these beings as more powerful analogues of themselves. Just as they are empowered in relatively large numbers to protect Nature, so She may also have created a few much more powerful beings—*aspects* of herself—to muster those who are not druids to her defence.

An alternative for some or all such deities, is to treat them as the ultimate usurpers who desire to replace Nature completely. Obviously, as such they will be a particular target of Druid activity. This would be my interpretation.

True Neutral

"True Neutral" is not a term used by druids in connection with themselves. The druids view themselves as *non-aligned*. The druids do *not* want a balance of the other alignments, they want to eliminate them all, at least as idealised goals.

Good, Evil, Law, Chaos are all options to those with free-will but animals and plants get by without such notions and the druids believe that they are simply too rigid. While any of the nine primary alignments can be a sensible approach to particular situation, the druid way of thinking is that these positions should be discarded when the situation changes. Nature has granted the intelligent races a great power of flexibility in the form of free-will and intelligence and it is foolish to abandon this in order to cling to a particular moral or ethic which may have outlived its usefulness.

The plane of Concordant Opposition was initially introduced in **DEITIES AND DEMIGODS** as the home of those beings which do follow the True Neutral philosophy, often ascribed to the druids, which desires a balance of alignments. They do not wish to see Good overcome Evil, or Chaos overcome Law, or *vice versa*, they wish a more-or-less equal mix of all. Once again, the druidic view is that these beings are using the world for their own ends and they are as much their foes as any other Outer-Planer beings. Possibly moreso than most, in fact, as Concordant Opposition and True Neutral could be taken as a parody or insult to the druidic viewpoint, a sort of "counter-propaganda".

Other-Planer Allies

Across the multi-verse, the Cabal may find others that feel as they do and are willing to work together towards a common goal of cutting the Outer Planes off from the Inner Planes. One example might be the Blasphemous Accelerators of Tekumel (AKA Empire of the Petal Throne), and another could perhaps be Elic and the inhabitants of Moorcock's Tanelorn. These and other alternative Prime Material Plane allies might be factors in a high-level campaign where the Cabal is active.

If you use this idea and run an exceptionally high-level campaign, it can be expected that Cabals from alternative realities know of each other and exchange information. Such information may or may not "travel", of course.

It can also be assumed by the DM that all such Cabals have been betrayed for various reasons down the centuries and are cautious, careful, and secretive in all their dealings.