

Fighters With a Cause

Rethinking the Paladin

By Leonard and Ann Wilson ©1995

GM: "You what?!"

Player: "I want to play a paladin of Sune."

GM: "Sorry. Sune's chaotic good – flighty, vain. . . . Her religion's just not paladin material."

Player: "C'mon. Just because she's not some stuck-up, stuffy old god of justice doesn't mean there's not a serious side to her religion. If a love goddess doesn't deserve champions to serve her, who does?"

GM: "So play a devout fighter."

Player: "That'd be missing the point."

GM: "Then a dual-classed fighter/priest."

Player: "Would she get to use swords? The Player's Handbook doesn't say, but multi-classed priests have to keep their weapon restrictions. Wouldn't it be just as much a violation of the priesthood for a dual-class character?"

GM: "Well..."

When second edition AD&D™ made allowances for the presence of different types of priests, it was one of the biggest steps forward the game had ever seen.

Before that, gamers who played clerics fell largely into two categories: those who didn't

care a thing about role-playing and just wanted a spell caster who could wear good armor, and those who (being the last in their group to create a character) would grudgingly throw together a stereotypical Christian-style priest to worship some faceless deity and act as a magical medic.

Now priests are the most varied and one of the most interesting character classes in the game. Players who wouldn't dream of touching them before are not actually getting excited about playing them. So in the new age of three-dimensional clerics, why are we still putting up with one-dimensional paladins?

The paladin detailed in the **Player's Handbook** is an excellent example of the idealized saintly Christian warrior, but formal Christianity appears in precious few of the make-believe worlds in which AD&D™ campaigns are run. Most game worlds feature a whole host of deities – some good, some bad, some neither – and some are home to more than one pantheon. To say that "saintliness" is the same throughout these worlds as it is in our own society is patently ridiculous. A saint is

devoted to the dictates of his religion, whatever they may be, not necessarily to the cause of some abstract universal “good”.

There is even a paladin of pagan ideals who slipped into the legendary examples of the class in the **Player’s Handbook**. Though Sire Gawaine was said to convert to Christianity to appease a medieval audience in the legends that have been handed down to us, his true pagan beliefs are explicitly betrayed by the great number of his wives and lovers. All in all, Gawaine was a much more earthy character than Lancelot or Galahad (the other two knights of the Round Table listed as paladins), but then his was a much more earthy religion. He was probably not lawful good, or at least not as rabidly lawful as his peers, but in his own way he was just as saintly as they were. So, as the generic cleric has made room for the priest class in AD&D, let’s ask the generic paladin to make room for the champion:

The Champion

Ability Requirements:

Strength 12

Constitution 9

Wisdom 10

Charisma 17

Prime Requisites: Strength & Charisma

Races Allowed: Any

The champion is a pious and heroic warrior who serves as a shining example of the virtues

of his religion, and he must remain true to its ideals at all times. Any race of character may become a champion, and may advance as far as the maximum level allowed to a fighter of his race.

All champions must have minimum ability scores of Strength 12, Constitution 9, Wisdom 9, and Charisma 17, and must also meet the minimum ability requirements of a specialty priest of whatever religion they ascribe to. A champion with Strength and Charisma scores of 16 or higher gains a 10% bonus to all experience he earns.

A champion may use any weapon and wear any type of armor. He gains experience levels and hit dice as if he were a paladin.

A champion must live his life in complete devotion to the beliefs of his religion. If he ever knowingly fails to take an action which the tenets of his religion say he should take, he must seek a priest of his religion who is 7th-level or higher, confess his sin, and do penance as dictated by the priest. If he fails to do so as soon as it becomes feasible, he will lose the use of all his special abilities and function as an ordinary fighter until he does do penance, and that penance is likely to be much harder on him than it otherwise would.

If he ever knowingly and willingly performs an act which goes directly against the tenets of

his religion, he immediately loses his status as a champion, and nothing can ever restore it. He becomes a simple fighter in the same manner as a paladin who has committed an evil act.

A champion who performs an act which goes directly against his religion while enchanted or controlled by magic still loses his champion status, but may regain it by atoning for his deed. This is done in exactly the same manner as for a paladin who committed an evil act while under such influence.

Potentially, a champion may be of any alignment, but he must be of the same alignment as his deity, and a DM may choose to exclude chaotic evil champions from his campaign, and possibly exclude chaotic neutral and neutral evil champions as well. By definition chaotic evil characters have no ideals to ascribe to, and the other two alignments aren't much better. If the DM allows such champions to exist in his campaign, they should be treated as powerful pawns who exist solely to carry out the whims of their deities. If they fail at any time to please their gods (and such gods are notoriously hard to please), other than lose their status as champions, they will probably be struck down by their master's divine wrath and have their souls imprisoned in torment in the most horrible part of the appropriate outer plane. Not even a wish can bring a champion back to life if he suffers such a fate.

All champions have the following special abilities in common:

- A champion receives a +2 bonus to all saving throws.
- A champion is immune to all forms of disease. If the champion serves a god of pestilence, he could still be a carrier for all sorts of nasty diseases, but would suffer none of the debilitating effect himself.
- A champion is surrounded by a 15' radius aura of courage. All friendly creatures within the aura, including the champion himself, receive a +4 bonus to saving throws against magically instilled fear. All friendly creatures within the aura also receive a +2 bonus to morale (and to Fear Checks, if you are using that rules introduced in the **Ravenloft** boxed set).
- A champion may call for his war horse upon reaching 4th level, or anytime thereafter, in exactly the same manner as a paladin.
- A champion can cast priest spells once he reaches 9th level. Like a paladin, he gains no bonus spells for a high Wisdom score, and he uses the Paladin Spell Progression chart. A champion is restricted to the use of spells from the combat sphere and from three other

spheres assigned by the DM. These spheres are the same for all champions of a given deity, and should be the three spheres the DM deems most important to that deity. A champion cannot cast spells from scrolls, and is in all ways restricted to using only those magic items allowed to the warrior group.

In addition to the standard benefits granted to all champions, a champion receives any special abilities normally granted to priests of his religion, though he receives them two level later than a priest would. For example, 1st-level druids start off with a +2 bonus to all saving throws versus fire and electrical attacks, and with the ability to speak the secret druidic language. A druidical champion would also gain these abilities, but only once he achieved 3rd level.

At 9th level, the champion would become immune to charm spells cast by woodland creatures, exactly as a 7th-level druid would.

Note that a druidic champion would not gain the powers of a hierophant, no matter what level he achieved. Hierophants are essentially a class unto themselves.

All champions are subject to the following restriction:

- A champion may not possess more than 10 magical items, not to exceed more than one suit of armor, one shield, four weapons (not counting arrows and bolts), and four other magical items. All excess items which come into his possession must be donated to a temple of his religion.
- A champion must tithe, donating 10% of any income he receives to a temple of his religion.
- A champion may only employ henchmen of his own alignment, and will not endure the company of anyone who openly violates the tenets of his religion. This does not mean he will only associate with folk who share his beliefs, but does mean he will only associate with folk who are willing to respect them.

In addition, if a champion is eligible for more than four granted powers because of his religion, no matter what level he would gain them at, the amount of experience he requires to attain each level should be increased by 5% per granted power after the fourth (e.g.: since druids can gain up to seven granted powers – counting their private language – as they advance through the levels, a druidical champion would be required to earn 15% more

experience than normal for each level he gained.)

Role-Playing the Champion

Of course, using the champion class will require you to put some real thought into the religions of your world. It's impossible to role-play a character bound to a strict code of conduct without knowing what that code is, and it's that role-playing restriction which keeps champions from unbalancing the game.

You should always spell out exactly what conduct is expected from a champion to prevent abuses of the class. The generalized insistence in the Player's Handbook that paladins must always behave in a lawful and good manner leaves all sorts of gray areas that many players will gleefully take advantage of if given half a chance. What constitutes lawful behavior, for instance, varies drastically from one society to the next. And is it evil to slay a psychopathic killer while he's lying unconscious on the ground? If you can put together an airtight argument for either answer to that question, you've solved the modern controversy over capital punishment.

If you don't spell out what behavior is expected of a champion, his player will have to decide for himself at every turn, and will probably choose the most favorable interpretation for himself. If you try to penalize

him for that, he'll have every right to cry foul. It's not his fault you didn't tell him how he was supposed to act.

Make a list of the virtues and code of conduct for each type of champion who enters your game. The code of chivalry given for the first-edition cavalier class in **Unearthed Arcana** would make an excellent model if you have access to it. Not that you should use the chivalric code itself as the starting place for the code of a champion – just borrow the basic format, and resist any temptation to follow the code's examples of elegant speech. How many people really understand the phrase, "Courage and enterprise in obediences to rule"? Curb any poetic urges you might have and write it all out in simple, concise, direct, modern English. Clarity is essential.

It will help you in figuring out the details of the codes of different types of champions in your campaign if you remember that all the deities of a single pantheon will share some common expectations of their worshippers. The Norse gods, for example, all hold courage and ferocity in battle as the highest of all virtues, regardless of their personal spheres of influence.

Finally, don't be afraid of accepting player input in devising the code of conduct for a new type of champion. If the player is genuinely

interested in role-playing the character, he'll probably have some preconceived notion of what behavior will be expected of him. You can cut down on your own work load by asking him to define what he thinks his champion's code of conduct should be, then modifying the result if necessary to fit your own conceptions of the religion and to make sure it's sufficiently strict.

Player: "I want to be a champion of Sune."

DM: "Okay." [flips through campaign notes] "You're chaotic good, and you'll need at least a 12 Wisdom, plus the other requirements of a champion. When you reach 3rd level, you'll be able to turn undead and cast one charm person per day. As one of Sune's champions, you're a patron of romance, and it's your sworn duty to help lovers overcome any obstacles which lay between them..."

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