

UNDERSTANDING ALIGNMENT

For Tabletop Roleplayers

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INTRODUCTION

Alignment is possibly the most hotly debated element in traditional roleplaying games. Many people find it to be a useful way to get a handle on character motivation. Others find it far too vague to be an effective tool. It is literally two-dimensional and absolute; a person is either good or evil, lawful or chaotic, or a perfect balance. There is no room for subtlety or nuance in the rules as written.

Even different editions of games using alignment offer varying explanations of what combinations are possible, and what those mixtures mean. In systems that otherwise provide numeric representations and statistical models for success and failure, alignment is open to interpretation. Aside from some restrictions on and prerequisites for character abilities, it's left for players and gamemasters to sort out.

Yet alignment remains virtually unchanged where other elements of classic fantasy roleplaying have either evolved or fallen away. The reason is because arguing about alignment can be fun. We want alignment to make sense. People like to discuss whether a celebrity, historical, or fictional character is one alignment or another. Memes are shared, online quizzes are generated, and motivational posters are created. All of which goes toward developing some meaning and practical utility.

This is not the definitive resource on alignment. The topic is so subjective that nothing could be. What this book presents is one possible interpretation of alignment, and a system for using it to enrich your game. It presents an alternate way to describe alignment, as a means of customizing your character's personality, goals, and beliefs. There are simple mechanics to reward characters who embody the tenets of their alignment, and penalize those who stray. If it doesn't answer all of your questions about a character's stance toward morality, you should at least find enough fodder to continue the never-ending conversation.

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USING THIS BOOK

This book is broken into sections, each expanding on what alignment can mean and how it can be used in your game.

DEFINING ALIGNMENT

The way the elements of good and evil, law and chaos are used throughout this book is explained. The ranking system is detailed, along with how the elements of alignment might be quantified. Various other terms are defined.

DIMENSIONS OF ALIGNMENT

The physiological, sociological, and psychological influences on the character's alignment are explained. Reasons why the same general alignment can represent different motivations and world views are expounded upon.

DESCRIBING ALIGNMENT

How to write an alignment statement that zeroes in on what the character is about. This covers ways that alignment can be customized to reflect the specifics of your campaign world and the nuances of morality and belief.

THE NINE ALIGNMENTS

This is an exploration of each permutation of law and chaos, good and evil, and neutrality. It includes explanations of shades and variations available with the alignment, and examples of alignment statements.

USING ALIGNMENT

Ways that alignment can be used to enhance roleplaying opportunities. This section also covers how alignment can be enforced by providing bonuses and penalties for adhering to alignment statements and playing in character.

DEFINING ALIGNMENT

Alignment, as defined here, is a reflection of an individual's approach to morals, ethics, and attitudes. The key word there is *approach*. It's not necessarily a reflection of the values that the person adheres to; it's the values they aspire to. If you think that it's important to heal the sick and feed the hungry, but you don't stop to give a coin to a beggar one time, you're not radically out of alignment. Your action in that instance isn't in line with your professed beliefs over time, but you probably had reasons or extenuating circumstances. If you don't really care about the poor but you toss a gem in their direction, it doesn't mean you've had a sudden change of heart; maybe you had a moment, maybe you had a motivation that played into a larger scheme. Alignment is about where an individual's thoughts and actions find their level in the big picture.

A range of personality types and personal philosophies are represented by alignment. This means that two characters with the same combination of elements can be quite different from one another. Think about religions, political parties, or any organization that has a professed ethos or moral stance. The bit of dogma or doctrine that speaks to one person isn't the same bit that drew in another person. There are bits of the platform that you're passionate about, and others that you just sort of go along with because it's part of the package deal.

Think of alignment is climate, rather than weather. A region might be tropical, but that doesn't mean it's hot and humid all day, every day. It might be arctic, but there can be variations as to how cold it is at any given time, or how much snow may fall from season to season. In the same way, an evil person doesn't have to display that even in every single action they undertake. A lawful character doesn't need to be completely rigid about rules and discipline during every waking moment. It's just what their behavior averages out to over time.

ALIGNMENT ELEMENTS

When you see a reference to elements, or alignment elements, it denotes a single piece of the combined alignment: *law*, *chaos*, *good*, *evil*, and *neutrality* are alignment elements.

COMBINED ALIGNMENTS

When you see a reference to a combined alignment, it means the traditional, two-part alignment: *lawful good*, *chaotic neutral*, *neutral good*, and *chaotic evil* are all combined alignments.

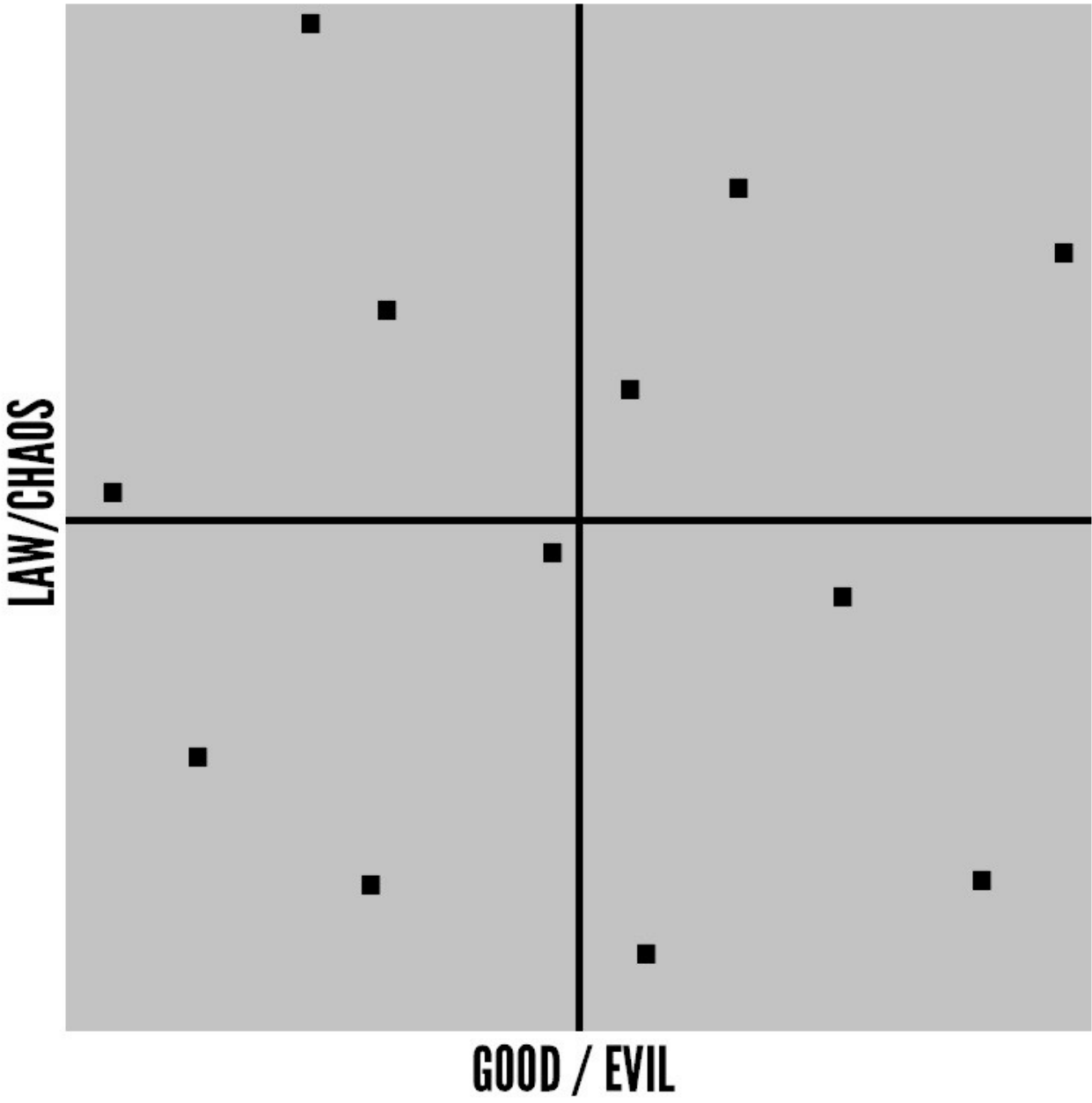
LAWFUL GOOD	NEUTRAL GOOD	CHAOTIC GOOD
LAWFUL NEUTRAL	NEUTRAL	CHAOTIC NEUTRAL
LAWFUL EVIL	NEUTRAL EVIL	CHAOTIC EVIL

BOXES VERSUS SCATTER GRAPHS

Each of the combined alignments represents a very broad cross-section of thought and belief; there's a lot of room for interpretation within each of those blocs. The typical representation of alignment is as nine fixed boxes, arranged in a neat grid. This gives you the impression that these are fixed things; alignment goes into one of these clearly-defined boxes and that's all there is to it. It's very concrete, and not in the least bit abstract.

A better way to look at alignment is as a scatter graph. You've got an *x axis*, good and evil. You have a *y axis*, law and chaos. The center plot (0,0) would be true neutral. Anything on an axis line would be neutral as regards the elements along that axis. You are able to see that there's more range and more variety possible in a combined alignment. There are degrees good and evil, shades of law and chaos. There is variation within each of those quadrants, and along the neutral lines. Distinctions blur a bit.

Disclaimer: I'm not about to present a literal system that outputs a scatter graph. It's a metaphor. It's a visual aid to help you begin to think about alignment differently.



RANKING ALIGNMENT ELEMENTS

The alignment elements you'll encounter in this book have descriptive rankings. These reflect the degree to which a character adheres to the elements of good and evil, law and chaos. Each element is ranked separately. The ranking levels are:

Low Element – *The alignment element is abnormally weak or totally absent.*

Below Baseline Element – *The alignment element is less prevalent than normal.*

Baseline Element – *The alignment element presents typically for the setting.*

Above Baseline Element – *The alignment element is conspicuous and prevalent.*

High Element – *The alignment element is strong and clearly dominant.*

A character with a low ranking in evil is technically still evil, but barely beyond neutral. At the baseline, the character meets the expectation of what a person with that element would be in that setting and campaign. A high ranking means that that character practically exudes that elements from their pores, and anyone paying attention can sense it.

ROLEPLAYING RANKINGS

From a story perspective, rankings help to flag potential conflicts. Not only will you have the potential to pit good versus evil or law versus chaos, you can create drama with differences within an element. A character with a high level of good might feel another character whose good is below the baseline poses a problem. Someone with a low level of chaos might find someone with an above baseline chaos ranking to be frightening.

GOOD VERSUS EVIL

Good versus evil, as used in this book, boils down to selflessness versus selfishness. Are you serving your own interests, or the greater good? Are you going to go slay that dragon because the village needs to be saved, or because you stand to turn a tidy profit? This is where some shades of alignment come into play. Many characters may jump at the opportunity to gather fortune and glory, but they might do what needs to be done simply because it's the right thing to do even if there was no promise of reward.

Definitions of good and evil that rely on hurting and killing other beings are problematic. Most tabletop roleplaying games, especially in the fantasy genre, revolve around combat and other acts of violence. If hacking up living creatures and people is inherently evil, then all characters would by definition be evil. Without violence, they'd be dead. Simply opposing evil is not enough to define one's self as good, though. Nor does fighting against good-aligned beings make one evil. Characters with like elements can and do oppose each other. Those who cite the lack of realism in typical applications of alignment are right when they point out that the real world is far more complex than that. It once more comes down to motivations and intentions.

Good versus evil is about why the person in question is willing to engage in violence, and the types of harm they're comfortable with inflicting. Selflessness, or good, seeks to protect innocent life and preserve the dignity of others. There is some sense of justice to it, and likely some element of sacrifice. Selfishness, or evil, is okay with debasing and destroy innocent life, implementing murder and oppression for fun and profit. There is a distinct lack of compassion evident in their actions.

Neutrality is closer to a balance between being selfless and being selfish. The character may lean more toward one direction than the other, but they recognize that in general there is a time and place to look after one's own interests and well-being, and a time for putting the welfare of society and one's fellow first.

Animals are often thought to be incapable of moral action. Their instincts are for self-preservation, or a devotion to their pack, pride, herd, colony, or other grouping. For this reason, animals are generically tagged as neutral, because conscious decisions about right and wrong don't matter when you're looking for food or protecting your young.

RANKING GOOD

These are the general degrees of good that a character may display. From these guidelines, you can develop character- and setting-specific criteria for selflessness.

Low Good – The character displays obvious selfish tendencies, but would never intentionally do anything that caused other people harm.

Below Baseline Good – The character looks out for their own interests sometimes, but would never harm others to do so.

Baseline Good – The character displays the socially normative level of selflessness expected within the campaign setting.

Above Baseline Good – The character makes personal sacrifices for the benefit of others, serving as an example to others.

High Good – The character is almost completely selfless, to the point of creating their own suffering and hardship.

RANKING EVIL

These are the general degrees of evil that a character may display. From these guidelines, you can develop character- and setting-specific criteria for selfishness.

Low Evil – The character displays a few selfless tendencies, but wouldn't help anyone at the expense of their own needs.

Below Baseline Evil – The character might be selfless, but never if it costs them anything or impacts their own needs.

Baseline Evil – The character displays the socially normative level of selfishness expected within the campaign setting.

Above Baseline Evil – The character openly places their desires ahead of the needs of others, and actively harms people.

High Evil – The character is absorbed with his or her own desires, and has a complete disregard for the suffering caused to others by their selfishness.

LAW VERSUS CHAOS

Law and chaos imply a sense of structure. On one end, there are rules, authority figures and hierarchies. There's process, methodology and tradition, which arise from a sense of security and efficiency. The advantages of law are consistency and an assurance that things are going to get done. The downside is that there's an inherent lack of flexibility, an unwillingness to change and adapt, and a tendency toward being closed-minded and judgmental.

At the other end there's chaos. It's instinct and creativity and a sense of freedom. Embracing change, embracing a willingness to adapt and staying flexible are all good and necessary traits. Someone needs to figure out how to deal with new things. Chaos can also mean recklessness, irresponsible behavior, a disregard for processes that work, and disrespect toward authority figures that get things done.

Neutrality means recognizing that there's balance between the needs of individuals and the larger society. Someone has to make sure the fields are tended, and the ale gets delivered, but there's also a need to dance, sing, make art, and dream about the possibilities of life.

Animals and other creatures considered incapable of moral action are again pegged as neutral by default. The logic is that while animals can be trained, and patterns of behavior passed down to insure their survival, this isn't really "lawful" behavior. Bees don't gather pollen and build hives, and stray dogs don't bite random strangers, based on any sort of ideology.

RANKING LAW

These are the general degrees of lawfulness that a character may display. From these guidelines, you can develop character- and setting-specific criteria for a sense of social responsibility.

Low Lawfulness – The character mostly obeys the law and follows the rules, more out of habit than ideology.

Below Baseline Lawfulness – The character believes some things that aren't in the interest of society, but mostly supports order.

Baseline Lawfulness – The character displays the socially normative level of lawfulness expected within the campaign setting.

Above Baseline Lawfulness – The character is deeply invested in the ideals of order and discipline, and follows the rules.

High Lawfulness – The character is obsessed with discipline, and lives strictly according to a code or set of rigid laws.

RANKING CHAOS

These are the general degrees of chaos that a character may display. From these guidelines, you can develop character- and setting-specific criteria for a sense of individual entitlement.

Low Chaos – The character rejects the status quo, more out of laziness than for a higher ideology.

Below Baseline Chaos – The character isn't wild about discipline and tradition, but goes along to get along.

Baseline Chaos – The character displays the socially normative level of chaos expected within the campaign setting.

Above Baseline Chaos – The character ignores the status quo and does what he or she wants with no regard for the rules.

High Chaos – The character is philosophically opposed to rules and laws and actively seeks to break them.

DIMENSIONS OF ALIGNMENT

Every character exists in three dimensions: their *physiology*, their *sociology*, and their *psychology*. Each contributes to shaping the character's view of themselves and of the world around them. They are the source of beliefs and attitudes, and impact whether the character is more selfish or selfless, or inclined toward the needs of society or the freedom of the individual.

The dimensions lean heavily on the character having a well-developed back story. How they were raised, what they have experienced, and the way other people have treated them all come into play. For more information on developing a detailed character back story, check out the book *Building Character* published by Dancing Lights Press.

This section will cover each of those dimensions in depth. The elements of each dimension will be explored. How each dimension serves to shape the character's alignment elements is explained.

PHYSIOLOGY

Physiology is the character's physical being. It impacts how people feel about themselves, and how others perceive them. It's not just about what the character looks like, but how their appearance affects their outlook on life. In prose fiction, the character's physiology is often the least important thing about them. In visual media it's still not important a lot of the time, but it can still matter.

ELEMENTS OF PHYSIOLOGY

When thinking about a character's physiology, consider things like their age, their height and weight, and their overall state of health. How do those things color the way they look at life, the compassion they show to others, and their views on society versus the individual? Things like feelings about their sex and gender, distinguishing marks and how they got them, and the way they choose to dress, can stem from the same formative experiences that inform their alignment elements.

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

Physiological needs are the most basic requirements for human survival. These are absolute necessities like food, clothing, shelter, breathable air, and drinkable water. If these requirements can't be met, the character's body will ultimately fail. Physiological needs have to be met before a character can even begin to address their sociological and psychological needs, or worry about making it to the next stage of life. Both resources and circumstances can contribute to the state of the character's physiological needs.

If a character has many physiological needs, their alignment elements may be driven by what is required to address those needs. If the character has few physiological needs, their alignment elements will be around what it takes to rise higher, or at least fall no further.

PHYSIOLOGY AND ALIGNMENT

A good alignment element can manifest in a character if they are comfortable with their physiology overall. Even difficulties can cause them to have compassion for other people who suffer similar limitations. If their physical abilities are above the baseline, they may lean toward good out of gratitude.

An evil alignment element can arise if the character's physiology causes them any sort of suffering. Their difficulties make it hard to think about anything other than their needs, or to have empathy for others in similar situations. If their physical abilities are above baseline, they may feel entitled.

A lawful alignment element can stem from the character fitting in because of their physical abilities and appearance. If they are above or below baseline in some area of their physiology, they aren't treated any differently. If the structure of society has provided for their physiological needs, they may feel a sense of duty.

A chaotic alignment element can appear if the character doesn't fit in because of their appearance or physical abilities. If they are above or below the baseline, they are treated differently. If they are left to struggle with their physiology, or feel oppressed because of it, they may place individualism above conformity to social order.

SOCIOLOGY

Socioeconomic status is the character's social and financial class. It affects the character's quality of life, as well as their self-esteem. It can impact how others perceive them inasmuch as they know the character's background, or can see behaviors assumed to stem from such a background.

ELEMENTS OF SOCIOLOGY

A character's sociological influences include their religion, their political views, and even their race and ethnicity. It can extend to their level of education, the prestige of their occupation, and the acceptance of their preferred forms of entertainment. If the character is accepted and included, or shunned and vilified for who they are, it will be reflected in their alignment elements.

SOCIOLOGICAL NEEDS

Sociological needs include friendship, intimacy, and family ties. Lacking those emotional connections can impact the character's wellbeing and their ability to form and maintain healthy relationships. The character needs a feeling of belonging and acceptance within social groups and organizations. The character's personality, the actions of other characters, and general circumstances can contribute to the state of the character's sociological needs.

If a character has many sociological needs, their alignment elements may be driven by what is required to address those needs. If the character has few sociological needs, their alignment elements will be around what it takes to rise higher, or at least fall no further.

SOCIOLOGY AND ALIGNMENT

A good alignment element can manifest in a character if they are comfortable with their socioeconomic status. If they have been treated fairly, they will be kind to others. If they have been oppressed or abused, they will have compassion for others in similar situations.

An evil alignment element can arise if the character has been beaten down as a result of their socioeconomic status. No one has helped them, so they feel no obligation to help others. If their status is above the baseline they may feel that they are deserving, or that they need to protect what they have from the underserving.

A lawful alignment element can stem from the character being accepted and supported by society. They feel an element of gratitude and in return have a sense of

duty. If their socioeconomic status was poor, they may be driven to create change through order and discipline.

A chaotic alignment element can appear if the character is ostracized by society. If they have been oppressed, they may feel that they owe no loyalty to others. Experience has shown them that every individual is on their own, and responsible for their own livelihood.

PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology is in many ways the synthesis of physiology and sociology. The character's ambitions, attitudes, frustrations, and complexes are built upon from their physical and socioeconomic influences. It reflects their conscious and unconscious decisions and behaviors.

ELEMENTS OF PSYCHOLOGY

A character's psychological dimension is influenced by several factors. Their emotional stability is how well they remain calm under pressure. Impulse control shows how well they can regulate their desires. Open-mindedness is how accepting they are of new and different ideas. Social engagement and social harmony reflect their willingness and ability to work and play well with others.

PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

Psychological needs include the character's feeling about their security, self-esteem, and behaviors. This can include either stress or comfort about physical safety, financial well-being, health, and relationships. It could be the condition of their overall mental health, or how they regard their ability to make sound life decisions.

If a character has many psychological needs, their alignment elements may be driven by what is required to address those needs. If the character has few psychological needs, their alignment elements may be around what it takes to rise higher, or at least fall no further.

PSYCHOLOGY AND ALIGNMENT

A good alignment element can manifest in a character if they have a generally positive and healthy outlook on life. They can picture themselves in the place of others, and express empathy and compassion. The character likes people and gets along with others, so he or she wants to see them taken care of.

An evil alignment element can arise if the character is resistant to new ideas and different sorts of people. They do not get along well with others, and may see them as a threat to their desires. The character isn't willing or able to identify with others, so they embrace selfishness.

A lawful alignment element can stem from the character if they possess the ability to regulate their impulses. They are very concerned with the welfare of others, and take comfort in social order. The character has the self-discipline to keep their emotions in check.

A chaotic alignment element can appear if the character possesses little ability to control their emotions or impulses. They have little in the way of self-discipline, and revel in their feelings. Other people aren't their concern, although they should be free to pursue their own fates.

DESCRIBING ALIGNMENT

Rather than writing “lawful good” or “chaotic neutral” on your character sheet, create a descriptive phrase. Come up with something that reflects why the character behaves the way they do, or the manner in which they express their moral or ethical stance. Express personality traits, and take note of important details in their background. Lean on the character's relationships with political, religious, or philosophical movements or organizations. Discuss the way they're dealing with goals they're working toward. An alignment statement can reflect a reputation they've earned or an obligation they carry. Here are a few examples:

- *Knight of the Order of the Orphaned Saint (lawful good)*
- *Justice is blind (lawful neutral)*
- *Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven (lawful evil)*
- *Death before dishonor (neutral good)*
- *Everything in moderation (neutral)*
- *Compassion is for the weak (neutral evil)*
- *Kings should serve the people; people should not serve kings (chaotic good)*
- *Change is the only true law in life (chaotic neutral)*
- *I like to hear them scream (chaotic evil)*

When thinking of an alignment statement for a character, there are two things to keep in mind. First, how might the alignment statement help you? Under what circumstances would you leverage it for a benefit for your character? Start thinking about ways it can work to your character's favor. Tie it into the events in the campaign setting, the rest of the party's attitudes, and even the character's other abilities.

Next, think about how it might hurt the character. When it would be used against them? What sorts of things would it prevent them from doing, or make harder for them to accomplish. How can that belief or thought, their sense of morals or lack thereof, present an obstacle for the character? Have an idea how it presents a downside in relation to the setting, the rest of the party, and their race and class.

The final thing that alignment statement can do is create details within the game. You don't have to roll dice or do anything to make this happen. Just by virtue of having the alignment statement *Knight of the Order of the Orphaned Saint*, you've proven that your character is a knight and that there is an organization called the Order of the Orphaned Saint. Having the alignment statement *kings should serve people; people should not serve kings* shows that the setting has kings and that they're probably oppressive, not operating in the best interests of their subjects.

THE NINE ALIGNMENTS

The nine alignments define all of the possible combinations of the law/chaos axis and the good/evil axis. Within each, the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. A good person will view chaos differently than an evil person; a lawful person has different perspectives on evil than a chaotic one. Each component influences and shapes the other.

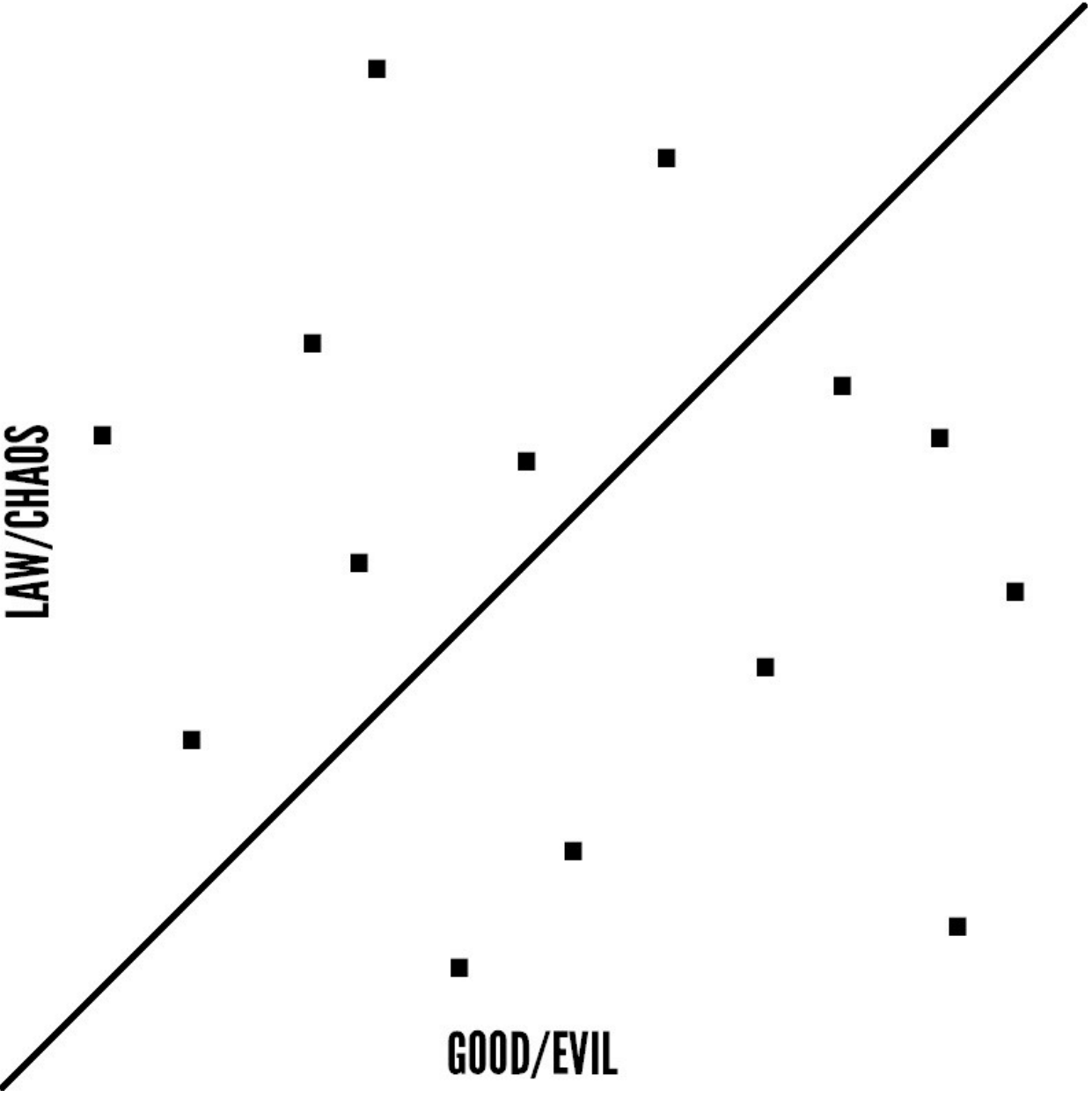
A character might also lean more toward one element than the other. A chaotic evil person isn't automatically devoted to both equally. They may be more dedicated to evil, and chaos feels like the most effective way to express that. A character might embrace the chaos and the evil seems, philosophically and emotionally, a better "fit" for them. Once again, no alignment can be boiled down to a simple, cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all label.

An effective way to picture this is as a line graph. It's another scatter graph, really. Think about whether a character has a closer affinity to good or evil, or whether their morals and ethics have more to do with law or chaos. They may be lawful good, but strongly lawful and marginally good; they could be chaotic evil, but sturdily evil and only barely chaotic. They might be very intensely both; they might be just this side of neutral on both. Within any given combined alignment, there will be shades and subtleties.

This is just a matter of intensity. It doesn't even begin to address motivations, beliefs, how they approach the components of their alignment. It quantifies it a bit, but doesn't qualify it or explain the how and the why, only how much. It does, however, get you thinking about what proportions of each you want to express in your character's personalized alignment statement.

Now that we have some perspective on how to view alignment and how it may mean different things to individual characters with varied world views and experiences, let's dig into the meat of the nine alignments themselves.

LAW/CHAOS



GOOD/EVIL

LAWFUL GOOD

A lawful good character behaves in the way a virtuous person is expected, and in some instances required, to act. She combines a commitment to help others with respect for authority and faith in the rules and structures of society. She is truthful, honorable, and cares about appearances. She obeys the law and expects others to do the same. The needs of the many, meaning organized society, outweigh the needs of any individual.

MORE LAWFUL THAN GOOD

A character that is more lawful than good might believe that selflessness is the natural outcome of discipline. When everyone follows the rules, is obedient to the doctrine of the deity, and obeys the laws of the land, it benefits everyone. Lawfulness leads to prosperity for all, universal happiness, and a deep and meaningful sense of contentment. The ordered pattern of things, those methodologies of society, were established to get the results that they do in order to create and maintain an environment where the greater good can flourish.

MORE GOOD THAN LAWFUL

A character that elevates good over law believes that the way to accomplish the greatest benefit to all is to codify and quantify evil. By identifying and defining immorality, we can follow logical steps to deal with it and eliminate it. Law is the best possible way to insure that good will triumph and evil will wither and die on the vine. It will be systematically shut out, and deprived of any opportunity to thrive.

WHY TO CHOOSE A LAWFUL GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT

Lawful good is the alignment to choose if your character has a sense of honor, appreciates tradition, and possesses deep respect for authority. If the character displays a great deal of empathy, and places the needs of others ahead of her own desires, she may be lawful good.

HOW A LAWFUL GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's actions benefit from their knowledge of and adherence to the rules, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus. This applies whether the statement references a code of conduct, a methodology, or a religious or political doctrine,

If the character's actions include an element of self-sacrifice, putting herself at risk in order to protect, defend, or otherwise help other people, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus as well.

HOW A LAWFUL GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's action clearly breaches the alignment statement, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent the character from taking that action or impose a penalty. This includes violations of protocol, infringement of the law, clear breaks with traditions, and other desecrations of the established code of conduct.

If the character's actions represent placing her own needs and interests significantly ahead of the needs of others, the gamemaster might cite this character's alignment description to prevent her from taking that action or impose a penalty. This excludes instances of self-defense and survival requires so that the character can live in order to help others,

HOW A LAWFUL GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

An alignment statement based on lawful good might reflect the existence of a chivalrous order, religious organization, or other formal body. It will show that the character follows a stringent code or established hierarchy. They actively promote charity as well as aid and protect the innocent.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON LAWFUL GOOD

- *Fellow of the Temple of the Blameless Martyr (lawful good)*
- *Devotee of the Divine Right of the Consecrated Sovereigns (lawful good)*
- *Adherent to the Ancient Traditions of my Ancestral Healers (lawful good)*
- *Sworn to place the well-being of others ahead of my individual longings (lawful good)*

NEUTRAL GOOD

A neutral good character acts in the best interests of other people. It might involve working with authorities to organize processes, or creating the rules needed to insure the greatest benefit to the most people. It might comprise performing random acts of kindness on an individual basis, as long as the greater good is being served. The needs of both society and individuals must be served. It is wrong to consider one more important than the other.

MORE GOOD THAN NEUTRAL

A character has strong feelings about good, but is ambivalent about law or chaos. They are simply tools that can be used to further the cause. One isn't better than the other, and each can be leveraged under different circumstance. The only thing that matters is that other people are being cared for.

MORE NEUTRAL THAN GOOD

The character cares more about the balance of law and chaos than about the promotion of good. However, good is always the preferred outcome. Neither the individual, nor society as a whole, hold more importance than the other. Evil may stem from the disruption of that balance, if order stifles the spirit and chaos creates physical danger.

MORE LAWFUL THAN CHAOTIC

The character considers the balance between law and chaos to be essential, but the character's personal preferences lean toward being organized. They prefer to follow proven methodologies and to have a well-ordered process. This may be a reaction to the world being random and confusing in the eyes of the character. They see the need for a bit more discipline to regain perfect equilibrium.

MORE CHAOTIC THAN LAWFUL

The character feels the balance between chaos and law is essential, but their feelings lean toward a free-wheeling, in-the-moment approach. Rules get in the way of doing what's necessary to effectively help others. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too rigid and restrictive, and in need of a bit more randomness and mayhem to regain perfect equilibrium.

WHY TO CHOOSE A NEUTRAL GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT

Neutral good is the combined alignment to choose if the needs of others outweigh the character's personal desires. The world is made up of both order and chaos, and the opposition of those forces is what makes things work. If the character doesn't care about the means by which that greater good is served, she may be neutral good.

HOW A NEUTRAL GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's actions represent striking a balance between law and chaos, or create an internal conflict regarding the nature of law versus chaos, the player may leverage this alignment to ask for a bonus.

If the character's actions include an element of self-sacrifice, putting herself at risk in order to protect, defend, or otherwise help other people, the player may point to this alignment a cause for a bonus.

HOW A NEUTRAL GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's action actively seeks to strengthen or weaken authority for reasons other than the promotion of a greater good, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty.

If the character's action represents placing her own needs and interests significantly ahead of the needs of others, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty. This excludes self-defense and survival actions needed to insure that she can live to help others.

HOW A NEUTRAL GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

An alignment statement based on neutral good might reflect the existence of something that promotes the ideals of selflessness and compassion. This might be a philosophical treatise, political writing, or religious belief. Organizations will be unstructured with no formal hierarchy, more like casual alliances built around common ideals.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON NEUTRAL GOOD

- *Acolyte of the Goddess of Fruitful Abundance (neutral good)*
- *Follower of the Writing of the Benevolent Hermit (neutral good)*
- *Supporter of the Peasant's Rights Coalition (neutral good)*
- *Under a vow to never harm an innocent creature (neutral good)*

CHAOTIC GOOD

A chaotic good character cares about others, but does what her conscience and her gut tell her rather than following the proper procedures. She doesn't care what other people think, and has little use for laws and regulations. She has her own moral compass, and sees the needs of individuals as more important than the needs of an organized society.

MORE CHAOTIC THAN GOOD

Good is a natural outcome of unrestricted freedom. When everyone gets to do what they want, the way they want, whenever they want, it benefits everyone and leads to happiness and contentment. The pattern of things was established to get the results that they do, in order to restrict and maintain an environment where the greater good can't truly flourish.

MORE GOOD THAN CHAOTIC

The way to accomplish good is to limit authority and oppose the establishment. Identifying and defining evil only leads to logical steps for implementing oppression and atrocity. Chaos is the best possible way to insure that good will triumph, because evil will be denied the opportunity to become institutionalized and entrenched as an accepted societal norm.

WHY TO CHOOSE THIS ALIGNMENT

Chaotic good is the alignment to choose if the character is a free spirit intent on making her own way in the world. Trust is placed in people, not institutions or titles. If the character possesses a great deal of empathy, and places the needs of others ahead of her own desires, she may be chaotic good.

HOW A CHAOTIC GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's action challenges the status quo, opposes oppressive authority, or goes against harmful traditions, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

If the character's actions include an element of self-sacrifice, putting herself at risk in order to protect, defend, or otherwise help other people, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

HOW A CHAOTIC GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's action helps to establish or strengthen authority, affirms the power of tradition, or actively restricts individual freedoms, the gamemaster might cite this

alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty for the action.

If the character's action represents placing her own needs and interests significantly ahead of the needs of others, excluding self-defense and survival so that she can live to help others, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty.

HOW A CHAOTIC GOOD ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

The character's beliefs and attitudes likely stem from internal, rather than external, sources. Personal experiences, uplifting events that they have witnessed, people they admire and wish to emulate, or even inspirational screeds that they have read. An alignment statement based on chaotic good will establish that these persons, events, and writings exist or have existed in the game world.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON CHAOTIC GOOD

- *Itinerant Lay Preacher of the Fifth Temple of the Holy Schism, Reformed (chaotic good)*
- *Comrade of the Anti-Monarchist Resistance League (chaotic good)*
- *Devotee of the writing of the Libertine Prophet (chaotic good)*
- *My personal oath is to oppose tyranny and care for the oppressed (chaotic good)*

LAWFUL NEUTRAL

A lawful neutral character obeys the rules, adheres to tradition, and values order and organization above all. She may believe in personal standard and follow a doctrine or code of honor, or favor a strong, organized government that keeps society functioning. No individual is more important than the needs of an orderly society, but neither should society be oppressive to the productive individual or honest citizen.

MORE LAWFUL THAN NEUTRAL

The lawful neutral character has strong feelings about order and discipline but is ambivalent about good or evil. They are simply tools that can be used establish and maintain order. One is not better than the other, and each can be leveraged in the service of lawfulness

MORE NEUTRAL THAN LAWFUL

The character choosing the lawful neutral path cares more about the balance between good and evil than about the promotion of law. Order is seen as the outcome in establishing that balance, and chaos may stem from the disruption of that balance.

MORE GOOD THAN EVIL

The balance between good and evil is essential, because there cannot be good without evil. The character's personal preferences and methodologies lean toward charity and selflessness, but the value of occasional selfish pursuits in the world is recognized. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too sinful and in need of a bit more virtue to regain perfect equilibrium.

MORE EVIL THAN GOOD

The balance between evil and good is essential, but the character's personal preferences and methodologies lean toward their own interests. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too coddling, charitable, and in need of a bit more self-reliance and tough love to regain perfect equilibrium.

WHY TO CHOOSE THIS ALIGNMENT

Lawful neutral is the alignment to choose if the character is honorable and reliable. People should be free to pursue their own interests, but governments and organizations should in turn exist to aid those in need. So long as order is maintained, anything is theoretically permissible.

HOW A LAWFUL NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's action benefits from their knowledge of and adherence to the rules, whether that's a code of conduct, a methodology, or a religious or political doctrine, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

If the character's action represents striking a balance between good and evil, or creates an internal conflict regarding the nature of good versus evil, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

HOW A LAWFUL NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's action clearly breaches protocol, infringes the law, breaks with traditions, or otherwise violates her code of conduct, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or to impose a penalty.

If the character's actions actively promote charity over individual self-interest, or selfishness over the needs of organized society, other than in the pursuit of greater order, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or to impose a penalty.

HOW A LAWFUL NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

An alignment statement based on lawful neutral might reflect the existence of a military order, religious organization, or other authoritarian body that follows a strict code or traditional hierarchy in order to actively promote order, enforce the law, and acts as stewards of societal customs.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON LAWFUL NEUTRAL

- *Apostle of the Chantry of the Divine Clockmaker (lawful neutral)*
- *Supporter of the Canonical Orthodox Parliament (lawful neutral)*
- *Pledge of the Ancient Lodge of Cultural Sisterhood (lawful neutral)*
- *Self-anointed champion of the traditions of my people (lawful neutral)*

NEUTRAL

A neutral character does what seems to be the best in the moment. She finds too much structure to be oppressive, but doesn't like total disarray either. People in need should get some help, but not to the detriment of people who just want to do their own thing. She may be ambivalent about everything and have no strong opinions or beliefs, judging each person and idea on relative merits and context. She may also advocate a philosophy of moderation and a middle path that maintains balance.

MORE GOOD THAN EVIL

The balance between good and evil is essential, because there cannot be good without evil. The character's personal preferences and the methodologies they use lean more toward compassion and selflessness, but the role of pursuing self-interest in the world is recognized. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too egocentric and in need of a bit more charity to regain perfect equilibrium.

MORE EVIL THAN GOOD

The balance between evil and good is essential, but the character's personal preferences and methodologies lean toward protecting their own interests. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too soft and compassionate and in need of a bit more self-sufficiency to regain perfect equilibrium.

MORE LAWFUL THAN CHAOTIC

The balance between law and chaos is essential, but the character's personal preferences and methodologies lean toward structure and authority. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too disorganized, perplexing, and in need of a bit more formal organization to regain perfect equilibrium.

MORE CHAOTIC THAN LAWFUL

The balance between chaos and law is essential, but the character's personal preferences and methodologies lean toward anarchy. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too authoritarian and in need of a bit more freedom and autonomy to regain perfect equilibrium.

WHY TO CHOOSE THIS ALIGNMENT

Neutral is the alignment to choose if the character can see the benefits and necessity of all sides. If the character likes to weigh all options, looks for compromise, and can advocate moderation without prejudice or compulsion, she might be true neutral.

HOW A TRUE NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's action represents striking a balance between law and chaos, or good and evil, or creates an internal conflict regarding the nature of opposed forces and ideologies, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

HOW A TRUE NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's actions actively promote one ethos over another, be it law versus chaos or good versus evil, other than in the pursuit of a better balance, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty.

HOW A TRUE NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

An alignment statement based on neutrality may reflect ideals of balance and moderation in all things. This may stem from a philosophical treatise, a political writing, or a religious belief that promotes those values. Organizations will be unstructured, with no hierarchy, more like casual alliances built around common ideals.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON TRUE NEUTRAL

- *Proselyte of the Cosmic Balance (neutral)*
- *Believer in non-belligerent political policies (neutral)*
- *Devotee of the writings of the Harmonic Poet (neutral)*
- *My goal is to live a life free from judgment (neutral)*

CHAOTIC NEUTRAL

A chaotic neutral character is an individualist above all. She values her freedom to do what he wants, but does not actively strive to protect others' rights to do the same. The character does not intentionally disrupt authority or the status quo, but has little use or respect for structure and tradition. She doesn't actively wish harm to come to others, but feels it's up to them to find ways to help themselves.

MORE CHAOTIC THAN NEUTRAL

The character has strong feelings about freedom and anarchy but is undecided about selfishness versus selflessness. Either can be an acceptable point of view if it's what feels right in the moment. One is not better than the other, and each can be employed in the service of shucking off the fetters of authority and the limitations of too much structure.

MORE NEUTRAL THAN CHAOTIC

The character cares more about the balance between good and evil than the overt promotion of chaos. Too much authority, strict adherence to tradition, and the discipline of doctrine are seen as obstacles to growth and freedom. She believes that order may overshadow and destroy the natural balance of good and evil.

MORE GOOD THAN EVIL

The character's personal preferences and methodologies lean toward compassion and selflessness, but the role of pursuing self-interest in the world is recognized. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too egocentric and in need of a bit more charity to regain perfect equilibrium.

MORE EVIL THAN GOOD

The balance between evil and good is essential, but the character's personal preferences and methodologies lean toward protecting their own interests. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too soft, compassionate, and in need of a bit more self-sufficiency to regain the perfect equilibrium.

WHY TO CHOOSE THIS ALIGNMENT

Chaotic neutral is the alignment to choose if the character feels that their own personal freedom outweighs everything else. The needs of others and the needs of society are none of their concern. The character is willing to help others when they choose to, but is as likely to put their own needs first.

HOW A CHAOTIC NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's action challenges the status quo, or opposes oppressive or restrictive authority or harmful or repressive traditions, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

If the character's action represents striking a balance between good and evil, or creates an internal conflict regarding the nature of good versus evil, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

HOW A CHAOTIC NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's actions help to establish or strengthen authority, affirm the power of tradition, or actively restrict individual freedoms, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action.

If the character's actions actively promote charity over individual self-interest, or selfishness over the needs of organized society, other than in opposition to the status quo, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action.

HOW A CHAOTIC NEUTRAL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

An alignment statement based on chaotic neutral may stem from internal rather than external influences. Personal experiences, oppressive events they have witnessed, people they admire have shaped their views and opinions. An alignment statement based on chaotic neutral will establish that these persons, events, and writings exist or have existed in the game world.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON CHAOTIC NEUTRAL

- *Holy Agent of Sacred Discord (chaotic neutral)*
- *Believes that all aristocracy should be abolished (chaotic neutral)*
- *Inspired by the teachings of the Aimless Philosopher (chaotic neutral)*
- *Scarred by memories of abuse at the hands of authority (chaotic neutral)*

LAWFUL EVIL

A lawful evil character uses authority and the power of tradition to get what she wants. The rules provide a clear path to achieve personal gain and acquire power, and she will use those tools. She does not care about the freedom, dignity, or lives of others, only about how order benefits her. When the rules are stacked in her favor, it doesn't matter whether they are unfair or oppressive to anyone else.

MORE LAWFUL THAN EVIL

Order and authority are desirable things. Those who fail to follow the rules need to be punished and made an example of, and this is perfectly acceptable. Lawbreakers brought these actions upon themselves, after all, by not toeing the line. The needs of others are less important than the needs of structure and discipline.

MORE EVIL THAN LAWFUL

The character believes that rules can be established in such a way that they benefit the few, or the one, to the detriment of the many. Selfish needs, whether they reflect greed, personal desires, or taking delight in the suffering of others, can be met through the exercise of authority and rigid codes of conduct.

WHY TO CHOOSE THIS ALIGNMENT

Lawful evil is the alignment to choose if the character embraces authority and traditions, but also places her own desires about those of everyone else. If the character is methodical, intentional, and frequently selfish, callous, and even cruel, she might be lawful evil.

HOW A LAWFUL EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's action benefits from their knowledge of and adherence to the rules, whether that's a code of conduct, a methodology, or a religious or political doctrine, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

If the action clearly advances the cause of the character's own interests ahead of the needs and desires of others, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

HOW A LAWFUL EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's action clearly breaches protocol, infringes the law, breaks with traditions, or otherwise violates her code of conduct, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty.

If the character's action places the needs of others ahead of selfish desires and vested self-interests other than in the pursuit of a larger plan that will result in an even greater gain, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty.

HOW A LAWFUL EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

An alignment statement based on lawful evil might actively benefit the ruling class at the expense of the rights and freedoms of the underclass. It may reflect the existence of a doctrine promoting martial power, a religious cult, or a totalitarian body that enforces an authoritarian hierarchy.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON LAWFUL EVIL

- *Primate in the Cult of the Prosperity Idol (lawful evil)*
- *Supporter of the Elitist Oligarchy (lawful evil)*
- *Upholder of the writings of the Avaricious Merchant (lawful evil)*
- *Those beneath me can never hold back my ambition (lawful evil)*

NEUTRAL EVIL

A neutral evil character is out for herself, pure and simple. She sheds no tears for other people, and doesn't have any vested interest in adhering to authority and tradition or defying and tearing down those structures. If it will get her what she wants, she will go along with it and have no problem changing sides when it's to her benefit.

MORE EVIL THAN NEUTRAL

The character doesn't care about law or chaos. Whichever stance serves her selfish interests in the moment is the best approach to use. Whether it's supporting structure and authority, or disrupting the establishment and overthrowing stabilizing influences, it doesn't matter. The means justify the ends, so long as the ends are the fulfillment of personal desires.

MORE NEUTRAL THAN EVIL

The balance between law and chaos is the most important thing; one cannot exist without the other. If striking that balance works to the personal benefit of the character, that's an added benefit. This view might stem from her perception of too much charity, compassion, and weakness in the world, and the need for more suffering to toughen people up in order to restore balance.

MORE LAWFUL THAN CHAOTIC

The balance between law and chaos is essential, but what gets the character what they want is being prepared and methodical. This may be a reaction to the world seeming to be too disorganized and stupid, and in need of a bit more retribution to regain perfect equilibrium so that evil can thrive.

MORE CHAOTIC THAN LAWFUL

The balance between chaos and law is essential, but mayhem and disorder work to the benefit of the character. This may be a reaction to the world's structure and authority working against the character's aims. Any order may simply feel too limiting, with the world in need of more uncertainty and turmoil to regain perfect equilibrium that fosters evil.

WHY TO CHOOSE THIS ALIGNMENT

Neutral evil is the alignment to choose if the character is completely selfish and self-centered with no true concern for other people. She has no concern for institutional authority or individual liberties. If she'll follow the rules when it suits her, then turn

around and break those same rules when that's more advantageous, the character may be neutral evil.

HOW A NEUTRAL EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's action represents striking a balance between law and chaos, or creates an internal conflict regarding the nature of law versus chaos, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

If the action clearly advances the cause of the character's own interests ahead of the needs and desires of others, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

HOW A NEUTRAL EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's actions actively seek to strengthen or weaken authority for reasons other than the advancement of her personal agenda, especially if it is for the direct benefit of other people with no clear advantage for herself, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty.

If the character's action places the needs of others ahead of selfish desires and vested self-interests other than in the pursuit of a larger plan that will result in an even greater gain, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action, or impose a penalty.

HOW A NEUTRAL EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

An alignment statement based on neutral evil might reflect the ideals of self above society. This could stem from the existence of philosophical ramblings, political manifestos, or religious cults. Organizations will be unstructured with no formal hierarchy, more like temporary alliances built around completing mutually advantageous goals.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON NEUTRAL EVIL

- *Zealot in the Cult of the Supremacy of Ego (neutral evil)*
- *Defender of the doctrine of political apartheid (neutral evil)*
- *Supporter of the doctrine of culling the weak and dependent (neutral evil)*
- *I will get what I want by any means necessary (neutral evil)*

CHAOTIC EVIL

A chaotic evil character loves herself and hates authority. Tradition is a straightjacket that keeps her from getting what she wants. Honor is nothing more than allowing other people to oppress you by forcing you to behave the way they want you to, rather than allowing you to express yourself. Compassion is just an excuse for letting other people take what's rightfully yours.

MORE CHAOTIC THAN EVIL

The character wants freedom from oppressive authority and doctrine. She craves the autonomy to do what she wants, because that serves her own selfish interests best. That structure and order benefit other people doesn't matter. It's not even that the character wants to do evil acts; their opposition to tradition and organizations with power simply outweighs concern for others.

MORE EVIL THAN CHAOTIC

The character's selfish interests aren't best served by law and order. Authority is seen as the primary obstacle to achieving selfish desires. Therefore, disruption of the status quo is the best way to insure that evil can survive and thrive and bring about the fulfillment of the character's greatest desires.

WHY TO CHOOSE THIS ALIGNMENT

Chaotic evil is the alignment to choose if the character is both selfish and anti-establishment. If keeping other people from fulfilling their desires is as satisfying as actually fulfilling her own, the character might be chaotic evil.

HOW A CHAOTIC EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU

If the character's action challenges the status quo, opposes restrictive authority or repressive traditions, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

If the action clearly advances the cause of the character's own interests ahead of the needs and desires of others, the player may cite this alignment for a bonus.

HOW A CHAOTIC EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT HURT YOU

If the character's actions help to strengthen authority, affirm the power of tradition, or in any way sacrifice the character's own individual freedom, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action or impose a penalty.

If the character's action places the needs of others ahead of selfish desires and vested self-interests, the gamemaster might cite this alignment statement to prevent her from taking that action or impose a penalty.

HOW A CHAOTIC EVIL ALIGNMENT STATEMENT MIGHT DEFINE A CHARACTER

Alignment statements based on chaotic evil may stem from internal, rather than external, sources. They have been influenced by personal traumas, horrific events that they have witnessed, people who have abused them and taught them that's how the world works. The alignment statement will confirm that these persons, events, and writings exist or have existed in the game world.

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNMENT STATEMENTS BASED ON CHAOTIC EVIL

- *Acolyte of the Cult of Sacred Destruction (chaotic evil)*
- *Backs the disruption of organizations that coddle the weak (chaotic evil)*
- *Has memorized the forbidden writings of the Profane Diviner (chaotic evil)*
- *I will gain revenge on the society that made me what I am (chaotic evil)*

USING ALIGNMENT

The following systems attempt to make the concept of alignment less abstract. Applying some numerical rigor brings them in line with the mechanical components of the game system, and illustrates their importance. Having concrete applications for alignment also makes characters' moral and ethical stances more useful within the context of your game.

Alignment remains primarily a roleplaying function. All of these systems hinge on the character's actions, and whether those actions are appropriate or inappropriate in respect to their stance toward good and evil, law and chaos. It's not as simple as declaring that because the character has a certain alignment element, they get a bonus. They need to play it out, and the effect of the character's action has to either clearly support the promotion of their world view, or visibly run contrary to it.

Players respond to rewards and receiving bonuses for leaning into alignment when choosing their actions encourages them to roleplay. It gets people thinking about what a character should do, and would do, based on their alignment. This means sometimes foregoing the obvious and most advantageous, tactical choices and doing something because the character would think it the right thing to do, or the way to create the most mayhem, or otherwise address their personal needs and conform to their ideologies.

Not all of these systems will fit with every game or group. The gamemaster can use one or all of these systems, depending on what is suitable to the type of campaign being run. Because these are optional rules, you can try them on, see if they work, and then drop them or apply your own house rules to them in order to make them function best for your particular group.

COMPLIANCE AND DEVIATION

As discussed in the section on the nine alignments, when the character behaves according to the tenets of their alignment elements they can request a bonus. If the best thing to do tactically isn't what the character should do according to their stance toward good and evil, law and chaos, and they choose to follow their alignment, they should get the bonus. This rewards actual roleplaying, promotes drama and story, and offsets perceived penalties for not behaving the way the rules as written were designed to support.

So when a good character has a choice between doing the good thing or the strategically sound thing, and they do the good thing, they get a bonus. When the evil character has a choice between doing the thing that, tactically, will give them the greatest advantage and doing the evil thing, and they do the tactical thing, they get a penalty. It balances out rules and roleplaying.

GOOD/EVIL COMPLIANCE

When good characters do good things, they are in compliance; when they fail to demonstrate altruism and kindness, they're out of compliance. When evil characters do evil things, they are in compliance; when they fail to serve their own interests ahead of others, they're out of compliance.

Good - *Compliance is acting selflessly; deviation is acting selfishly.*

Good/Evil Neutrality - *Compliance is doing what is necessary; deviation is doing things because they are right or wrong.*

Evil - *Compliance is acting selfishly; deviation is acting selflessly.*

LAW/CHAOS COMPLIANCE

When lawful characters do lawful things, they are in compliance; when they fail to follow the rules and demonstrate discipline, they're out of compliance. When chaotic characters do chaotic things, they are in compliance; when they fail to follow their own heart and mind, they're out of compliance.

Law - *Compliance is putting social order above the individual; deviation is putting the individual above social order.*

Law/Chaos Neutrality - *Compliance is doing what is necessary; deviation is putting either social order or the individual ahead of the other.*

Chaos - *Compliance is putting the individual above social order; deviation is putting social order above the individual.*

BONUSES AND PENALTIES

The system is simple. When a character does something that clearly demonstrates one of their alignment elements, they get a +2 bonus. When their action supports both elements of their combined alignment, they get a +4 bonus. If they act against one of the alignment elements, they get a -2 penalty, and if their action breaks with both elements of their combined alignment, they suffer a -4 penalty.

The bonuses are cumulative, but they can also cancel each other out. If a chaotic good character does something that's clearly the chaotic thing to do (+2), but in no way represents the good thing to do (-2), the bonus and penalty cancel each other out (0 modifier).

-4	The character has violated the tenets of both parts of their alignment.
-2	The character has violated the tenets of one part of their alignment.
0	The character has acted in accordance with both part of their alignment.
+2	The character has embodied the tenets of one part of their alignment.
+4	The character has embodied the tenets of both parts of their alignment.

ALIGNMENT RESTRICTIONS

Alignment statements assume no restrictions. Compelling fictional worlds are made up of all sorts of people, just like the real world. It's difficult to fairly judge people on their beliefs or how they think about ethics; only their actions provide a tangible look into who they really are.

Gamemasters are free to restrict which alignments characters can choose from. Remember, though, that drama arises from conflict. Having characters with deep moral and philosophical differences can make for some great roleplaying moments.

The gamemaster can also decide whether or not to restrict character abilities according to alignment. Knowing how to do something does not, in and of itself, make the character good or evil, lawful or chaotic. The way it's used might, and there are clearly abilities that are strongly tied to one particular element or not.

It's recommended that that gamemaster let players do what they will, then apply bonuses and penalties based on compliance. If using poison is considered evil, but a good character wants to do it, let them – but apply the -4 penalty for not behaving as someone who professes to be good should. When an evil spellcaster wants to use a good-aligned magical weapon, let them – with the -2 penalty. A lawful character casting a spell whose effects are clearly tied to chaos can do it, but there have to be penalties on damage, effects, or concentration.

This is only the beginning, of course. There should be consequences within the story for not complying with alignment. Deities will be upset, for a start. Organizations that the character belongs to, who have codes of conduct based around alignment elements, will have something to say. The characters themselves might have guilt, existential crises, or doubts about their beliefs.

DETECTING ALIGNMENT

The ranking of an alignment element is an indicator of its prominence. A character with a below baseline element isn't clearly demonstrating the telltale behaviors, making it harder to detect. When elements are above the baseline, they're more obvious, so determining the character's alignment becomes easier.

Whether the means of recognizing a character's alignment depend on trained perception or magic, the strength of the alignment elements will offer bonuses or penalties. These modifiers are cumulative, and add together. If a lawful evil character has a low lawfulness (-2) and a below baseline evil element (-1), the penalty to detect that character's alignment is a total of -3. If a neutral character is below baseline on their law/chaos axis (-1) and above baseline on their good/evil axis (+1), the modifier is 0. If a chaotic good character is above baseline on their good element (+1) and high in chaos (+2), the total bonus to determine their alignment is +3.

-2 Low Element – The character displays no obvious tendencies associated with the alignment element.

-1 Below Baseline Element – The character shows few of the behaviors that indicate the alignment element.

0 Baseline Element – The character exhibits the normal signs and tendencies of people with that alignment element.

+1 Above Baseline Element – The character displays behaviors clearly indicative of the alignment element.

+2 High Element – The character exudes the alignment element to the point that they practically embody it.

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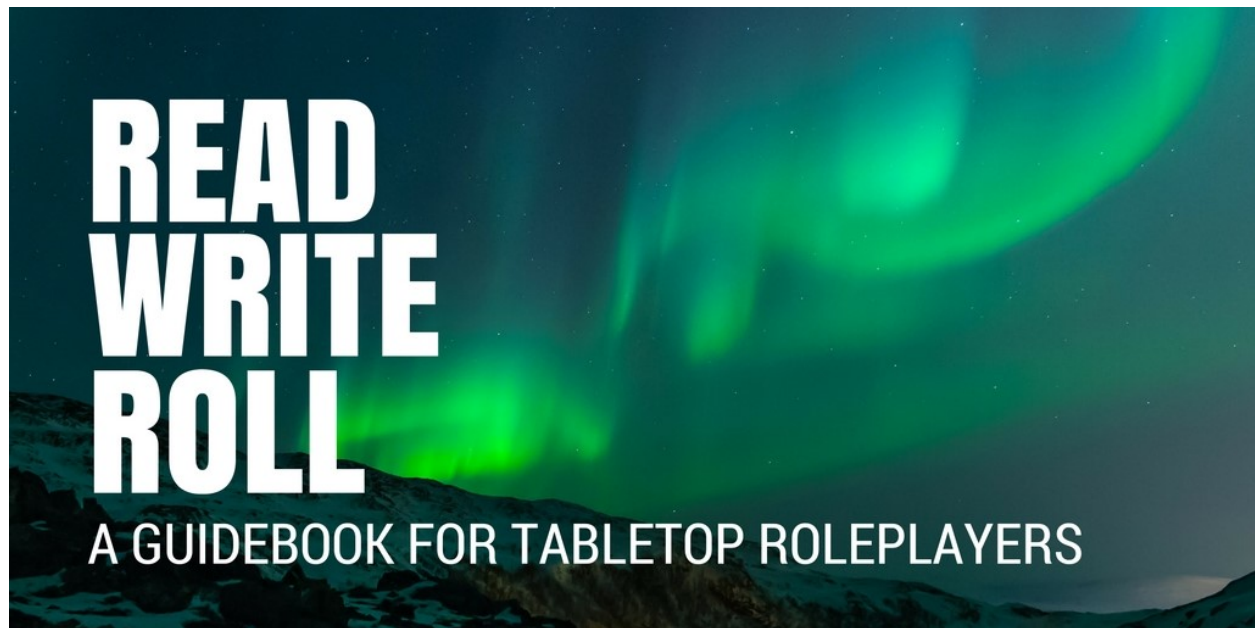
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Reading, writing, and roleplaying are all part of continuum for me. You read the books, you write characters, settings, and adventures, and you roll dice and tell stories together with friends. Then you read some more, to fill in the knowledge gaps or find fresh inspiration. You write some new things for the game or based on it, and you head back to the table to share and conspire with your group. Read, write, roll, repeat.

Most roleplaying games aren't designed around the way stories are created and told. A lot of people will argue that that's not the job of a game rulebook, even though the game is based on acting out characters and telling stories. They like the tactical aspects, the bits that stem from the hobby's wargaming roots. Their point of view and preferred style of play is absolutely valid, and more power to them; that I want something different from my roleplaying experience doesn't make them wrong. Some will point out various indie game that do put story firmly at the center of the experience, and a lot of those games are awesome; I play and enjoy a few of them myself, every opportunity that I get. Just as there are books published for every taste and interest, and just as there are many methods of telling stories, there are wide varieties of roleplaying games. This is just one of them. It's intended to fill a specific niche. It's not the last word on any topic by any means, but will hopefully become part of the ongoing conversation.

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In this book, we'll explore what goes into crafting memorable and enjoyable characters. While the focus is on tabletop roleplaying games, I'll be using writing terms rather than RPG jargon. It's not going to be about crunching numbers or picking abilities. I'll talk about writing your character, rather than just playing them. Because while there are other hats that we wear around the table, including those of performer and tactician, we're all writers. Even if we never put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, it's the writer's craft that we're dabbling in.

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The term worldbuilding gets thrown around a lot by both writers and roleplayers. It's most frequently used in reference to the construction of a fantasy realm or an entire fictional universe. There are maps, and histories, and complex back stories, and all sorts of engaging little details. While these worlds are allegedly being created as the grand stage for a work of fiction, which includes novels, films, television shows, and games, worldbuilding is often an end unto itself. It's an intellectual exercise, a creative outlet, and just a whole lot of fun.

This isn't a book about worldbuilding. This is a book about telling stories.

What I mean to say is, this book isn't about worldbuilding for its own sake. You're not going to learn how to create an encyclopedia for an alternate universe. I'm not going to show you how to write the ultimate travel guide for an imaginary place. It's not a book full of checklists and random tables. This is about assembling the critical details that you will need in order to tell a story.

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This book will help you to leverage basic story structure and use it to your advantage. You'll be able to say what you want while keeping your audience engaged. The three-act structure and its variations will be discussed in detail, along ways this structure can be expanded beyond a single story and into a series or campaign. In the end, you'll have new tools in your storytelling toolbox, along with the knowledge of how and when to use them in your own creative works.

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