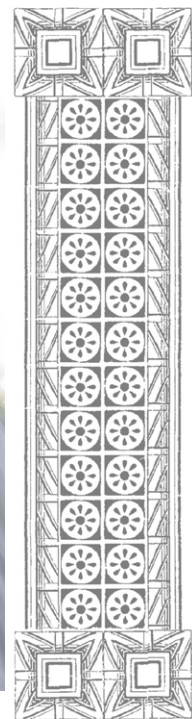
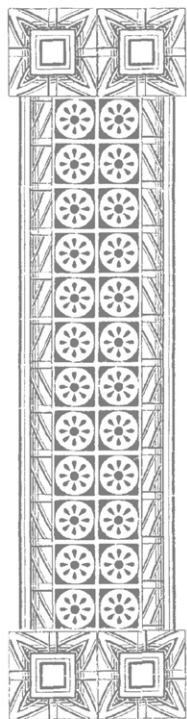


Blessings of the Beyond



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THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES THE ROLES blessings and charms can play in a campaign, and adds a new type of supernatural gift: *benisons*. Benisons fill an area in between blessings and charms; they are powerful magical effects, but they can only be used once and only in the pursuit of a specific goal.

Magic is the lifeblood of a fantasy game, and the hallmark of what makes a story fantasy. Magic comes in many different forms, from impossible creatures to physics-defying landscapes and architecture to characters who can warp the very fabric of reality with a few words and gestures. In some cases, as a reward for facing (or in preparation to face) a difficult task, characters may be granted a supernatural gift.

In the core rules, supernatural gifts come in two forms: blessings and charms. Though different in style and application, both provide Game Masters with an excellent tool to give characters a little extra oomph to handle an upcoming task or fight, or provide an alternate solution to a puzzling situation. Supernatural gifts are also a way of providing temporary magical assistance to a party—useful for GMs wanting to give their players a leg up but leery of flooding their campaign with magical items. Both blessings and charms can provide substantial benefits, but the two operate differently and offer different ways of enhancing a campaign. Generally, blessings are provided by a deity or other powerful extraplanar entity, whereas charms are provided by powerful creatures in the world.



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VALUE TO THE CHARACTERS

The first and most obvious benefit a party gains from a supernatural gift is simple power. A blessing or charm can add a substantial boost to a character’s capabilities, especially since blessings are permanent. A +2 bonus to an ability score is no minor treat, and a temporary ability such as seeing in darkness or summoning animals will prove useful to creative players.

A supernatural gift can also help a party that lacks certain magical resources, such as a specific type of spellcaster. A party without a cleric may be in desperate need of magical healing, a one without a wizard could benefit from a few enchantments here or there. In cases where magic is needed or useful in overcoming a challenge, the use of supernatural gifts in the campaign allows a party lacking the typical magical resources to remain viable and be successful. Supernatural gifts can also provide access to spells restricted to certain characters or character types, so a party that lacks a bard or druid, for example, can gain a means of casting spells only available to those classes.

A cleverly applied gift can serve not only as a reward for the player but as foreshadowing of things to come. A Game Master whose campaign includes snakes and serpent people as a common enemy might have a character’s deity or patron reward them with defenses against poison, along with fragments of a mysterious legend describing granite statues of dozens of forgotten heroes. Then, when this bit of foreshadowing has faded into memory, the characters suddenly find themselves pitted against a medusa and her gorgon servants. Used in this way, the gifts can provide a means of linking otherwise disparate adventures together and integrating them into an overarching narrative.

VALUE TO THE CAMPAIGN

A supernatural gift can provide plot hooks and previews as described above, but can also serve as a springboard to generate player ideas and thereby increase player involvement. For example, a party that is granted a charm which allows them to add a magical property to a weapon may begin to speculate about where and how such a property might be useful. Listening to the discussion can provide invaluable plot ideas to the Game Master, who can work some of them into upcoming adventures. This way, the players have a direct effect on the development of the campaign and feel more integrated.

Supernatural gifts can also help define and expand the campaign world. For example, the GM could have a prominent NPC instruct a group to seek out a charm from a hag coven in the mountains. The purpose of the charm might be to assist the party in whatever quest they are currently pursuing, but soliciting the charm could lead to additional adventure opportunities. The coven might be preparing magic to fend off hostile giants in the nearby crags, and require rare ingredients as payment for providing the charm. The situation could even lead to greater roleplaying situations; what if the PCs discover that the coven is in fact trying to intrude into the giants ancestral homelands? Such situations can help shape the political and cultural landscape of the campaign.

A campaign where supernatural gifts are available might also take a different view of wizards, clerics, and other spellcasters. Some might track down spellcasters to beg for gifts and favors, but others might feel that the availability of magical favors devalues casters and makes them less special. After all, if one can procure magic potions from the faerie court in the Old Woods, why bother seeking out the suspicious hag in the creepy tower in the first place?



Who Can Grant Supernatural Gifts?

While the rules seem clear on what sorts of creatures or entities can grant charms and blessings, there is no reason to abide strictly by those guidelines. For example, blessings are described as being granted by deities as a reward to their loyal worshippers, but fantasy literature is full of examples of “ordinary” creatures providing powerful boons to adventurers. In Tolkien’s *The Two Towers*, the ent Treebeard provides a special “ent-draught” to Merry and Pippin, and after drinking it, they find themselves stronger and taller than they were before. There is no reason a treant can’t provide a similar “blessing” to the PCs in your campaign.

VALUE TO THE GAME MASTER

Anything that brings value to any part of a fantasy RPG benefits the GM as well. By providing opportunities and tools to the players, the Game Master provides opportunities to draw off of the ideas they generate and develop the campaign world from there. But supernatural gifts provide a manner of operating outside the normal parameters of a campaign, and can help establish a distinctiveness in a setting and provide greater depth to the world.

For example, if it is widely known that hag covens can provide charms that can cure diseases and blindness, they would like become famous amongst the populace for that fact. Bargaining with such creatures for the benefit of oneself or a loved one would become the stuff of fable and legend. If spirit nagas are known to provide charms that increase the lifespans of those who receive them, it could be worth seeking out and dealing with such dangerously capricious creatures.

For Game Masters lamenting the lack of a magic item economy in the game, supernatural gifts also prevent a possible solution. Since the gifts described within the core rules mostly duplicate the effects of magic items and potions, bargaining for charms and/or blessings could be an effective surrogate. Characters can seek out fey



or other creatures to barter for charms and visit old forgotten shrines or more powerful creatures to petition for blessings—all of which helps keep the magic level of a campaign under control and intrinsically tied to the world's history and lore.

NEW SUPERNATURAL GIFT TYPE: BENISONS

A benison is a moderately powerful supernatural gift which falls in between charms and blessings in terms of its power level and effect on the game. Benisons are focused and can only be used in the pursuit of a discrete goal. For example, a benison might be granted to characters tasked with toppling an evil overlord, bringing peace to warring clans or factions, or permanently defeating a dragon or other powerful creature. For this reason, a benison simply won't function if a character tries to use it for any purpose other than its intended goal (the benison is not lost in such cases; calling upon the benison merely fails to have any effect). This allows characters to make mistakes in the pursuit of the goal without being penalized for misusing the gift.

The source of a benison can be any appropriate entity: a deity or a powerful extraplanar being, or a more mundane (though still highly magical) creature such as a dragon, fey lord, or lich.

A benison can only be used once. Most benisons duplicate the effects of spells, and a character can use a benison without spending a spell slot or providing any components (verbal, somatic, or material). In addition, a benison can't be removed from a creature by anything short of divine intervention or the *wish* spell.

For benisons which duplicate spells that have expensive material components, the benefactor granting the benison may require a donation or service equaling the normal cost of the component, or the patron may choose to pay the cost of the spell themselves when granting the gift. Take into account the source of a benison when deciding this: deities can easily pay this cost, but more worldly entities such as dragons, fey lords, or liches might choose not to.

The ritual that imbues a character with the benison may be as simple as the benefactor laying its hands upon the recipient's head and chanting softly or as complex as a ceremony involving multiple participants, candles, and chanting.

Example benisons are provided on the next page. The text of a benison addresses its user. A typical benison is similar to the effects of a 6th- or 7th-level spell, so it is easy to create more benisons of your own, if you like. Benisons that replicate spells that require concentration do not require you to maintain concentration.

BENISON OF SERVILE CONJURATION

This benison allows you to cast the *planar ally* spell as an action, with the following changes: the creature you summon is friendly to you, is sympathetic to your cause, and requires no payment for the services rendered, but will undertake only nonhazardous tasks that align with its ethos.

BENISON OF THE DISTANT GATE

This benison allows you to create a teleportation circle on the ground within 10 feet of you. A second linked circle appears at a point of your choosing within 500 miles; you do not have to be able to see the destination as long as you have seen it at least once before. These circles are filled with opaque mist and hover above the point you chose; creatures who pass through one circle maintain their momentum as if they were directly adjacent to both points.

BENISON OF DIVINING LOCATION

This benison allows you to cast the spell *find the path* as an action, but the spell lasts until you arrive at your destination. In cases where the destination might move (such as a flying tower or the tent of an army general), the spell will lead you to the location where the destination will be in one week.

BENISON OF THE EVIL EYE

This benison allows you to cast the *eyebite* spell as an action.

BENISON OF ARCANESIGHT

This benison allows you to provide truesight out to a range of 120 feet for yourself and all creatures within 60 feet that are friendly to you. Using the benison takes an action and the effect lasts for 24 hours.

BENISON OF TRANSPORT

This benison allows you to cast the *teleport* spell as an action with the following changes: when casting the spell there is no chance of a mishap or arriving in a similar area. Using this benison can transport you to destinations on other planes of existence, though it will not provide protection from environmental dangers once you arrive or a means of return.

BENISON OF THE CRYSTAL SPHERE

This benison allows you to cast the *screaming* spell as an action. 