

Divine Decisions
Wednesday – 09.14.62

TODAY I WAS TIRED OF WORKING ON MINIONS. I HAD SOME ideas about how to improve my minions, but in order to do that I needed more runes, which I still hadn't gotten access to. So all I needed to do was discover more runes, right?

That would be a long and tedious process that I wasn't certain would help much for this weekend. So yes, I was going to be working on that all day, but I also wanted to work on something else. Something John had sent me a text about in the middle of his workday, based on what he'd heard from others.

So I spent most of the day switching between looking up gods who I could make minor offerings to and whose bonuses would be useful in the dungeon and carefully burning large chunks of mana attempting to discover new runes. Of course I could choose from the rather large group of Christian religions if I wanted, but a part of me shied away from that possibility.

The old religions, the ones that existed before the system arrived, were fairly well fractured as gods began appearing and were in fact the first groups to receive religious jobs and the resulting medicals. But not everyone was comfortable with an active and talking god after thousands of years of silence. This led to fractures, many groups breaking apart and doing their own thing to avoid the "demons" that had co-opted their old religious forces.

I had no desire to try and weed out the groups that saw the system gods as demons from those who had a more practical outlook on things. And none of that took into account issues that stemmed from those groups that held fundamental teachings in absolute and those who allowed new revelations.

All told, the new gods were far simpler from an outsider's perspective, and none of the new gods required a monotheistic dedication, unlike some, though not all, old world religions, whether Christian or not. The fact that these gods tended to have a more focused view of the world meant that cherry-picking your personal pantheon was rather common, even encouraged. For me, that meant gods with blessings/domains that dealt in combat, dungeons, and monsters. Travel as well, in a few rare cases. Honestly, it was a lot more interesting than I had previously thought it would be.

Interesting or not, it was deadly serious. I'd followed a number of Divers on YouTube and Dungeon Mapper over the years. Of them, three had died in the dungeon, two were crippled, and one appeared to have lost the desire to continue on. Those were often people who have been running dungeons for two decades. So I knew it was dangerous from more than just statistics.

And I feel the fact that I have to explain this to myself at least once a day is an indication of something. I just don't care to find out what.

Anyways, back to the gods. I had narrowed it down to three whose combined blessings would be useful and who I could reliably use every week. I planned to run the dungeon more often than once a week, but I didn't know

for certain that I'd be able to do that. Not being able to would cause issues though, so hopefully it wouldn't be too hard.

Toohr was the first god I chose. He was a god of wanderers and travelers and as a result gave bonus to assist in that situation. Toohr's blessings tended to make travels safer or more productive. Either one could be useful in the dungeon, as Toohr was explicit that he didn't test travelers with life or death. If he sent a test your way, it was a moral one.

All this meant was that Toohr wasn't going to send an unusually dangerous encounter my way just to fulfill the "make this more profitable" part of his blessing.

Syaos was a goddess of magic with a focus on independent study. She was more of a preparatory goddess, as her blessings were more for developing new knowledge. Depending on what you prayed for you could get a bonus to observation, mostly in the sense of better understanding of the world, a divinely enhanced chance of inspiration from your environment, or even increase mana regeneration outside of stressful situations. All of which would be useful when getting ready to enter the dungeon.

The last goddess I chose to sacrifice to was a bigger gamble. Much like Syaos, Zilena's blessing changed. But rather than several predictable choices, it was more of a "whatever Zilena wants." While that part filled me with unease, I found myself fascinated investigating Zilena's lore.

Being a new god, Zilena's story began with the system. She rose to oversee the "Valley of Dust," a section of reality "spirits" pass through. Based on what I'd learned from my

Golem Creation skill, these were the spirits called upon to create and drive the undead I was going to be creating.

Zilena's job appeared to be to ensure that souls didn't end up trapped in the valley. Exactly how much of her time was spent on this process was a bit vague. But she also governed all those who stood between life and death. Or in more detail, those whose jobs it was to put themselves between danger and the innocent, or at least those who didn't walk that line deliberately.

Dungeon Divers were obviously a part of that, given the role we played in preventing dungeons from going critical. But this group also included police, military, and even firefighters. Others would probably work as well, so long as their job was dangerous and helped prevent others from falling to danger. Zilena was pretty chill about the whole thing, which was really appreciated. At least by me.

There was a lot more here. Codes of conduct. Discussions of gray areas. How someone's role and their actions outside of those "dangerous situations" mattered. Her relationships with the other gods. And a whole host of other things. Unsurprisingly, the first thing the first worshipers of a given god were asked to do was set up a website. Full text of the lore was there for free—all the gods with priests or priestesses seemed to follow this example.

The best part of all this was that Zilena's lore was the first I'd seen with mentions of Necromancers. And this wasn't in a negative light, or a positive one either. In fact, it mostly focused on how Necromancers interacted with her domain and contained do's and don'ts for anyone dabbling in the Valley of Dust. The passages there were

quite interesting; they were clearly hinting at something I wasn't picking up on. I needed to actually practice the minion creation spells. Maybe it would be worth attempting during orientation weekend.

Now all I needed to do was locate a place to sacrifice. I could set up a home shrine, but I didn't know how I felt about that. Apparently shrines, alters, and temples were places the gods had access to in some way, and I didn't know how I felt about having a place of worship in my home. However, if I did set one up here, it would mean I wouldn't have to go somewhere and maybe talk to people. Even to me, that sounds like a bad reason to do, or not do, things. But still.

In between searching for deities and getting side-tracked reading up on Zilena's "birth," I'd been trying to discover new runes, I had made one. I just didn't know at all what it did. I think it was a kind of anchor rune, based on how it interacted with mana, but I'd never seen an anchor like this. Which meant I needed to do some more experiments. This is why I suspected things would take too long.

However, I had some shopping to do, and I needed to head to one of the new god temples to see if they had room for a new shrine, and more importantly, if they would let me set up one to Zilena. I hadn't found an existing one in the city so far. At least not a public one.

The closest new god shrine temple was in the Guild District. That wasn't that surprising, largely because the new gods were more likely to offer blessing that boosted diving. On the other hand, it seemed like a place that more than just the new gods should have considered a good

location to put a place of worship. If anyone was seeking an optimistic afterlife, it should be people who were at risk of dying early.

The temple itself was called The Hall of Shrines, and it was built like every building I had seen in this district, to endure a full-on assault. Its walls weren't as impressive as the ones around the Sanctified Devils' building, but something told me there was more to these walls than met the eye. They also had enough room for a helicopter to land. The Hall itself looked like a small warehouse that had been converted. On the inside it was better off, and you could see that care was put into each of the small worship rooms in the wide-open spaces.

A quick look at the directory showed that both Syaos and Toohr were represented here, there were open spaces, and there was enough room for every new god to be represented here eventually. They even had a track pamphlet on how the Hall worked and what needed to happen for the Hall to support more shrines. So I grabbed that.

A quick scan made me wince. The Hall needed to be able to support personnel to maintain the premises, and it had to have "employees" because legally it was a business. As the Hall wasn't being controlled by a group that could claim to be a religious organization, more like numerous small ones working together, they had to be a business. And that required employees and profit margins. There was a movement to get the law to change to support these kinds of things, but the old guard in congress was dragging its feet.

I had the information I needed, but I hadn't honestly been in a place like this ever before, so I took a moment to walk around. Despite each "shrine" simply being basic walls in a much larger room, it felt extremely authentic. It had that "worship space" feel that its appearance simply didn't really seem to support. Maybe it was the knowledge that the gods were actually present here, or at least could keep an eye on what was happening.

Some of the shrines were decorated more completely than others, with art or benches for people to come and worship on their own. Others were little more than a shrine with some mats on the ground in case you wanted to sit. Not knowing enough to make any kind of guess, I had no idea which was which.

I did end up leaving. I would need more personal money, or to organize other Zilena worshipers in the city, to set up a shrine in here. Which meant I'd need to make at least a temporary shrine in my apartment. Oddly, I felt like I'd to check my lease. Something about places of worship in the apartment rang out to me.

Shopping, then back to the apartment for more studying. And maybe setting up a shrine to Zilena. Little things like this always made life so much more annoying than it needed to be.