

Busiris RPG – The Temples

Introduction

More than in many roleplaying games, Busiris is dominated by its Deities. The people of the Empire worship six main Deities and a host of minor spirits and their ancestors. This worship is direct and heartfelt, there are no atheists in the Empire as the evidence of these deities' existence is seen every day.

Nothing happens in the Empire without the acquiescence of the Temples, and even the Emperor - a living Deity himself, has to take into account their needs and wishes. A wise Emperor will set each Temple off against its rivals, a foolish one will be dominated by one or more of them.

You will note that in the listing for each Deity no clear ethical viewpoint is described. This is because the huge priesthoods of each Deity includes individuals of every ethical and moral colour.

The ambition of each temple and its priesthood is to make their Deity pre-eminent in the Empire, and many of the ways they try to achieve this could be seen to be morally ambiguous at best.

Lay membership

People who dedicate themselves to a single Temple are referred to as 'Lay Members'. Although they are expected to sacrifice regularly to their Temple and to follow the key edicts of their Deities there are also many benefits such a cheaper healing and political support. These are described below.

All Lay Members are expected to display a small symbol or icon of their Temple on their person. There is an entire trade involved in manufacturing a bewildering variety of devotional icons and sellers can be found at most Temple gates.

Initiate membership

People who make a permanent commitment to a Deity may become 'Initiates'. They take on voluntary duties for the Temple, often supporting priests at celebrations. They tithe one twelfth part of their earnings into the Temple and make regular sacrifices. In return they get free healing for themselves and their families.

Many Adventurers become Initiates and carry out their service through missions for their chosen Temple.

They also are granted use of single Blessings by the Deity. An initiate can request one Blessing per day. Initiates who are asked to go on missions for their Temples are often granted further single use Blessings suitable to their task.

The priesthood frequently recruit from amongst the families of the Initiates, which is considered to be a great honour. Children are normally admitted at seven years old, though this is entirely voluntary. No priesthood wants an unwilling recruit.

Initiates often bear tattoo's declaring their commitment on their breasts or foreheads.

The Gods of Busiris

Khemi

The Deity of the Earth, the very land beneath the Emperor's feet. He is the husband of Heptah and the brother of Bubastis. All creatures of the earth owe fealty to him and he is very popular amongst farmers and land-slaves.

The Temples of Khemi are often very small, little more than shrines, tended by a couple of priests at most. These Priests can be identified by their dark red robes and long, flowing topknots. They tend to be competent healers and are very pragmatic in their approach to their duties.

The priesthood of Khemi have no need for Nubian Temple Guards. The Imperial Court often look down upon these priests and brand them as rabble-rousers, an opinion often not far from the truth.

The standard sacrifice to Khemi are domestic livestock. White bulls are especially favoured.

Lay members and Initiates must make sacrifice at least four times a year at the equinox's and the solstices. They are also expected to help Khemite priests who are in need or peril.

Bubastis

The Deity of Magic. She is the sister of Khemi and draws much of her power from his domain. She is very mysterious and many conspirators make sacrifice to her.

Other than the main temple in Thebis, the priesthood of Bubastis have no other sacred places. Always on the move they will meet only to celebrate her high holy days or to face some threat to the Empire. They often have small groups of lay people and initiates working for them which they call 'covens'. When on temple business they wear sky blue robes and bind their heads with golden scarves.

All cats are sacred Bubastis and woe betide the man seen harming one, for the priestesses consider it to be murder. The favoured sacrifices are doves or other small birds, which the priestesses feed to their cats.

The priesthood are known for sponsoring expeditions into far flung and exotic places where they believe there might be new magic. In return the expeditions are expected to allow the Priesthood first refusal on any surplus magic items. The Priestesses will normally give a fair price. They are also expected to help Bubastite priests who are in need or peril.

Afet

The Deity of Death. All people of the Empire revere him for all will be judged by him in the afterlife. He is the brother of Heptah upon whose divine waters the souls of the dead are transported to him.

Afet's mortuary temples preside over the cremations of the common folk and guard the necropolises of the rich. These are manned by his priesthood. They can easily be recognised by their flowing bone-white robes and high headdresses. Every town and city thus has a Temple and accompanying priesthood. Travelling priests maintain shrines to Afet in the villages and other outlying communities.

The Temple Guards of Afet are renowned for their ferocity, as well as their knowledge and fanatical hatred of the Undead. They are very well equipped for this task and are often called upon by City and provincial officials to clear out dens of ghouls and other such pests.

Afet requires no sacrifices.

Lay Members and Initiates must respect the houses of the dead, and never knowingly aid a Tomb Robber. They should at the very least report the presence of any Undead they encounter to a priest, if not attempt to destroy it themselves. They are also expected to help Afetic priests who are in need or peril.

Heptah

The Deity of Water, from whom flows all life. She is the wife of Khemi and it is their combined powers that bring fertility to the Empire. She is also the sister of Afet as described above. The great river crocodiles are her sacred animals.

Her temples are always alongside a source of water, be it a river, oasis or the sea. Her priests wear short, close-fitting blue tunics, baggy white pantaloons and conical red hats. All of them can swim well, for Heptah would never drown a pious priest. No ship's master will set sail upon the ocean without the blessing of a priest of Heptah.

The Temple Guards of Heptah frequently act as marines for vessels important enough to carry one or more priests.

The common sacrifice to Heptah is one of fish. The more rare and exotic the variety the better. Lay Members of Heptah should make a sacrifice at every New Moon. They are also expected to help Heptite priests who are in need or peril.

Khosa

The Deity of the Moon and Mother of the Empire. All Emperors claim descent from her, as do the Old Kingdom peoples. She is the twin sister of Aton with whom she dances above the earth, and the daughter of Khemi and Heptah. All creatures of the night, especially Owls, are sacred to her. She is known as the Mother of Secrecy and most merchants sacrifice regularly to her.

Every major city and town in the Empire has an elaborate temple to Khosa. Her priestesses wear simple black robes heavy with silver jewellery. Most imperial councils will have a priestess of Khosa in attendance, and thus they wield considerable influence.

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The Temple Guard of Khosa is the most numerous of all the Temples. Many important positions in the Emperor's armies are filled by Senior Khosa Guardsmen. All of them are eunuchs.

Suitable sacrifices to Khosa include silver and gems, especially sapphires.

Lay Members should make a sacrifice to the Priesthood of any juicy bits of information they come across in their travels. They are also expected to help Khosite priests who are in need or peril.

Aton

The Deity of the Sun and the Sky. He is the twin brother of Khosa, and the son of Khemi and Heptah. Every day he rides his fiery chariot through the heavens and brings light to those below.

His worship is widespread even beyond the borders of the Empire. His priests frequently act as emissaries and diplomats for the Empire, their golden tongues bringing peace to the councils of the wise. They wear simple robes with dark blue capes embroidered with gold thread.

All birds are sacred to Aton which does bring his priests into frequent conflict with the priestesses of Bubastis. There is no love lost between these two priesthoods.

The Temple Guards of Aton include a great many charioteers and are the only Guard force to admit non-Nubians.

The best sacrifice for Aton is to pay for a day of chariot races.

Lay Members of Aton should make a sacrifice by killing at least one cat per full moon, or free birds they see in cages, or gamble away at least one sixth of all money they earn on the races. They are also expected to help Atonic priests who are in need or peril.

Other Deities & Temples

There are many other Deities and Temples in the world beyond the Empire. The players will come into contact with these, especially in Busiris where one or two have even been permitted to set up their shrines in the city itself.

Here is a short list of those the players may notice:

Baal

The primary Deity of those Bedu who hail from beyond the Empire. Baal is a fire Deity and is the source of the Bedu's fierce pride. A small Fire Temple is allowed in Busiris for the use of the Bedu who work there.

Abaddon

The brother of Baal and lord of the Mogadai nomads of the salt deserts. These distant cousins of the Bedu worship this ancient snake Deity. Priests of Abaddon are killed on sight in Busiris.

Belial

The Deity of women who dance and sell their bodies for the pleasure of men. It is more of a sisterhood than a true religion, though there are rumoured to be vengeful priestesses who hunt down those who abuse women.

It is almost certain that a sect of Belial exists in the Street of Red Lanterns in Busiris.

Mumbata

The jungle tribes of the interior worship a plethora of spirits and minor Deities. There is one amongst them though that stands out and that is the worship of the Ape Lord Mumbata.

Although there are gory tales of human sacrifice associated with this Deity, the Governor of Busiris has agreed to the erection of a Temple outside the walls of the city. This he has done to placate the tribal chiefs with whom a great many trade treaties have been made.

Ushakh

The Lord of the Undead is a long time enemy of the Empire. His Necromancer-Priests constantly gnaw at the fabric of imperial society, trying to lure its people away from the funerary practices of the Temple of Afet.

Unlike most enemies though they attack from within the Empire itself. In Busiris, as in most imperial cities, there is likely to be one or more Ushakhti cults in the darker places.

Jeremboah

Less a Deity, more an immortal hero. Jeremboah was the leader of the only successful slave revolt in the Empire's history. He managed to get the status of slaves recognised in Imperial Law and won the many protections that slaves now enjoy.

He was, of course, martyred for his sins, but lives on in the prayers and dreams of his 'people'.

It is rumoured that some Ghola have been found with his image hidden in their rags.

Crom Cruach

This ancient Frost Wyrms is the living deity of the Kymeri. Anyone captured in war, or convicted of a crime, is fed to it as it makes its way across the taiga on its annual migrations.

The Kymeri believe the Wyrms gives them the strength to bear arms and prevents the sky from falling.