



Alignment

Michael Duxbury, illustrated by Melissa Trender

Nutshell

In a caste-based city state where all citizens have their moral alignment magically divined, an oppressed social underclass of "Evils" struggle to survive under the tyranny of the righteous.

Setting

The pseudo-medieval city of Brighthaven stylises itself as the lone bastion of civilisation in a corrupt and darkened world. Its imposing walls, garrisoned by the finest soldiers in all the world, protect the homes of one hundred thousand citizens, drawn from dozens of distinct species. Diverse as these inhabitants are, they all have one thing in common. Following a tradition that has lasted a hundred years, all Brighthaven citizens of Sorting Age must be brought before the Crown of Alignment: an immensely powerful magical artefact that is said to read the soul of any sentient being who places it upon their brow.

What is the Sorting Age? Infancy, puberty, or the onset of adulthood? To what extent is a person's Alignment influenced by their upbringing prior to Sorting?

Upon assessing the spirit of its wearer, the Crown burns one of nine marks upon their foreheads, nine marks that the wisest clerics have interpreted as corresponding to the ethical/moral imperatives of Lawful Good, Neutral Good, Chaotic Good, Lawful Neutral, True Neutral, Chaotic Neutral, Lawful Evil, Neutral Evil and Chaotic Evil. Whilst wildly (almost impossibly) open to interpretation, the Lawful/Neutral/Chaotic axis is commonly defined as an individual's commitment to obedience, honesty and upholding the societal framework of Brighthaven. It has a moderate influence on how the citizen can expect to be treated by others, and what profession they're accepted into. The impact of the Good/Neutral/Evil axis is far more severe - in Brighthaven, all positions of authority are held by "Goods", as only they can be expected to lead benevolently instead of selfishly. The "Evils", on the other hand, are judged an intrinsic danger to all of Brighthaven, and are confined to a rigidly patrolled ghetto where their corruption can be contained. Their sustained burdens are justified as a societal necessity, for if any Evils were allowed to assume a position of power, they would surely abuse it for their own ends and the city as a whole would suffer.

In Alignment all PCs have been Sorted as "Evil".

Where do the citizens of Brighthaven derive their understanding of Good and Evil? Do they claim inspiration from religious texts, or measure the distinction some other way?

Good

Those sorted as Good, known as "Gooders" or simply "Goods", are the moral elite of Brighthaven society. The ruling council of the City, known as The Sovereignty, is composed exclusively of (and elected by) Gooders - who else could be trusted to endure the corruption that comes with power? Even those Gooders that don't join The Sovereignty invariably hold some form of authority or political office, regardless of their species, family, background or intellect. Good does not discriminate.

To most citizens in Brighthaven, the Goods are a homogenous ruling class - the distinctions between Lawful, Neutral and Chaotic Goods are largely academic. They matter hugely to the Gooders though, who tend to form into factions of similarly-Aligned individuals. Though the Lawful Goods (or

"Conservatives") tend to be the most enthusiastic supporters of the Alignment system, they usually don't hold any more power than the Neutral Goods ("Moderates") or Chaotic Goods ("Reformists"). This is the first defence that Gooders present against accusations of tyranny: how could the state be corrupt if it is not only ruled by benevolent authorities, but benevolent authorities that represent the whole spectrum of ethical and political belief? (In practice, even the most radical Chaotic Goods only lobby for change within the framework of the Alignment system that already exists. They know which side their bread is buttered.)

Who holds power in Brighthaven when your game is set?

Neutral

Most citizens of Brighthaven are morally aligned as Neutral. They are brought up to revere their holier-than-thou overlords, who shelter them from Evil, and make the difficult decisions for their own Good.

The most enthusiastic supporters of the Alignment system are the Lawful Neutrals, or "Loots". Just as Lawful Gooders are drawn to politics, the Loots are drawn to law enforcement. They patrol the ghetto and keep the Evils oppressed - cynics say that when a Gooder needs a bad thing doing, it usually gets delegated to the Loots. To most Evils, they are the face of the enemy, and many Loots admit they would wipe out the Evils entirely if they were in charge. Luckily, the Goods are on hand to explain to their morally-deficient comrades that murder is an Evil act.

True Neutrals, or simply "Newts", are the silent majority of Brighthaven society. Since they aren't systematically disadvantaged by their Alignment, they tend not to give it much thought, and instead prefer to focus on living their own lives. At the other extreme, the Chaotic Neutrals, or "Cutes", are an extremely vocal demographic. They are widely stereotyped as untrustworthy, uneducated troublemakers. Though generally regarded as an anti-social nuisance, the Goods tend not to come down too hard on them - after all, they aren't Evil, they're just trying to express themselves. Unsurprisingly, since the Cutes know that they're likely to get lenient sentences for criminal activity, they are much more inclined towards criminality. So long as the Cutes are rebelling within socially-acceptable limits, no-one tends to get too upset.

Evil

It is the view of The Sovereignty that anyone Aligned as Evil is a menace to society and potential danger to non-Evil citizens. To prevent Brighthaven from falling to ruin, Evil citizens are therefore confined to the city's walled ghetto, and segregated from non-Evils. In a show of mercy and Goodness, basic accommodation, food, water and other survival needs are supplied to the ghetto by The Sovereignty. Otherwise, the Evils get on with leading themselves.

Life in the ghetto is extremely difficult. What little luxuries can be found are fiercely contested, and even scavenging enough to get by can be a struggle. Invariably, the toughest and meanest rise to the top; the Loots manning the walls say this proves how Evil the ghetto's residents really are. Since some species are far more likely to be Aligned as Evil than others (orcs, for example, are universally judged as Evil by the Crown of Alignment), self-imposed segregation within the ghetto is also common, as inhabitants form gangs with others of their species.

Who holds power in the ghetto when your game is set?

Unsurprisingly, given the unpleasantness of the ghetto, many Evils want out. Though their enemy has the best equipment, defences and social leverage, many Evils believe they can overthrow their persecutors by forming an organised resistance. These revolutionaries call themselves "The Axes of Evil", and are both a symbol of hope for oppressed Evils and a convenient hate figure for the ruling

Gooders. Both Goods and Evils tend to present The Axes as a united front, but in truth it is anything but. Though everyone agrees the status quo is bad, its supporters have wildly different ideas about what the new system should look like, and what is and isn't justified for the sake of the revolution.

Since few people self-identify as villains, most Evils reject the legitimacy of the Alignment system entirely. However, it's been observed that Lawful Evils are more likely to advocate for micro-revolution (e.g. stealing the Crown of Alignment and forming a new ruling Sovereignty of Evil) and Chaotic Evils for comprehensive social upheaval (e.g. a complete deconstruction of the system, up to and including the destruction of Brighthaven). Most prefer not to think about what the implications of this distinction could be.

Beyond (the city of) Good and Evil

Assuming that they want to retain a dramatic (rather than procedural) focus, GMs will probably want to keep most of the action in the Brighthaven ghetto. Forced company, and the need to cooperate for survival (or escape) will produce the most interesting character relationships. However, the world around Brighthaven might still be relevant even if it's never visited, for the sake of long term planning or character backstories.

The Sovereignty characterises Brighthaven as a lone point of light in an otherwise dark world where the forces of Evil hold sway. It holds theoretical dominion over many leagues surrounding the city walls, and expects its inhabitants to offer themselves up for Alignment, but in practice many dangerous Unaligned bandits prey upon the countryside's unwary. For the roving bands of Good and Neutral citizens rampaging across the land in search of riches (otherwise known as "Adventurers"), Unaligned sentients are fair game. Though The Sovereignty calls for these rebellious citizens to be incapacitated and brought forward for Sorting, killing them in self-defence is entirely acceptable.

Beyond that, The Sovereignty warns that the many empires of Evil are an omnipresent menace, and Brighthaven is usually embroiled in one war or another. So long as the killing happens a long way away, this is of little concern to most citizens.

Do empires of Evil truly exist? If so, would they welcome those Sorted as Evil by the Crown of Alignment?

Characters

All PCs in Alignment have been Sorted as Evil, and reside in the Brighthaven ghetto.

Why does your character believe they have been Aligned as Evil? Do they see darkness in their own souls? Do they believe the Crown as been corrupted by those truly Evil, to denounce and punish those truly Good? Do they belong to a species that the Crown regards as exclusively Evil? Since meditations on the nature of Good and Evil are likely to crop up in-game, it's best not to decide these things as being objectively true or false – players should just decide what their character believes.

What species exist in this fantasy world? What is the measure of a sentient species? For example, are dragons entirely absent, a rarely-sighted pseudo-mythological creature, a dangerous wild animal, or fully sentient citizens that are Aligned and resident in Brighthaven? Maybe someone would like to play one.

To what extent is magic a part of this world? The Crown of Alignment is the most powerful magic item in existence. If other magic items and spellcasters exist, they are likely also controlled by the authorities. However, maybe one of the players will want to be an Evil spellcaster, with all the additional benefits and risks that brings.

As well as a name, age, gender and other generic character options, players will have to choose a few setting-specific details for their character. The first is Alignment: Lawful Evil, Neutral Evil or Chaotic Evil. This may or may not impact how the character behaves, but it will certainly impact on how other people react to them. After all, each character's Alignment will be burned into their forehead for all to see, and concealing one's Alignment is a crime.

Players will also need to choose a species. Some species are particularly likely to be Aligned as Evil: orcs, ogres, goblins, kobolds, trolls, sentient undead or demons, for example. However, Evils exist of all species, and players should feel free to roleplay as human, elf, dwarf, halfling, gnome, faerie or any other fantasy species they like. Generally, these citizens can expect to be treated better by the Loots, and treated worse by their fellow Evils.

Suggested character archetypes in Alignment include:

- Black sheep of a noble/politically prominent family
- Formerly Unaligned bandit, dragged to the city for Alignment and incarceration
- Old ghetto veteran, a jaded survivor
- Black market smuggler
- Established gang boss, respected in the community
- Ambitious gang boss, on the rise
- Bewildered innocent
- Axes of Evil saboteur
- Mercenary thug
- Preserver of a species' pre-Alignment culture
- Revolutionary leader
- Messenger runner
- Guardian angel, defending the weak
- "Friend" to the Loots
- Last of a species, destined to die in captivity
- Self-declared lawmaker and enforcer

Themes

Given the nature of the setting, Good vs Evil and Law vs Chaos will likely be reoccurring themes within a campaign. Some suggested permutations of that include:

- **Necessary Evil:** Many Evils strive to do Good, to prove the illegitimacy of their Alignment, but how practical is that when life in the ghetto is so hard and the tyranny of the state is everywhere?
- **Determinism vs Free Will:** If the Crown can truly prophesise whether an individual will commit Evil or Good, how much power do we really have to choose our own path?
- **What They Always Said You Were:** If a person is told they are something often enough, will they become so?
- **My Good is Better than Your Good:** How do distinct species and cultures view the nuances of Good and Evil differently?
- **Not My Revolution:** How is it that a state can achieve such unification of ideology and its opposition can be so fractured?
- **Living vs Survival:** How much principle are the Evils willing to sacrifice for the sake of continued existence?

- **On the Inside:** Is collaboration and "behind the scenes" manipulation more effective than outright resistance?
- **I Am Not A Number:** Are Evils as guilty of judging individuals by their Alignment as the Goods are?
- **Special Profiling:** Why do the inhabitants of the ghetto flock to others of their species, and why does the Crown discriminate against some species more than others?
- **Rule in Hell:** How does holding power in the ghetto compare to holding power in Brighthaven, and what does it indicate about the Gooders' mentality?
- **The Enemy of My Enemy:** Who can be trusted as an ally when you've all been branded Evil?
- **Grass Is Always Greener:** If the revolution achieves its aims, does it actually result in a better system?
- **The Lesser Evil:** Do the Loots and Gooders truly present a greater threat than the Evil gang bosses running the ghetto?
- **The Gilded Cage:** Why might someone prefer to stay where they are in the ghetto?
- **I Am Become Evil:** What satisfaction can be found in choosing to embrace Evil, and to what extent is one absolved of personal responsibility when acting as the system encourages?

Tightening the Screws

The four triggers below are solid starting points for a campaign – a break from the established status quo that explains why the action is beginning now.

- One of the PCs arrives in the ghetto, still fresh from Alignment, and immediately attracts attention.
- An ambitious Good politician outlines new measures to clean up the ghetto, one way or another.
- Tensions between rival gangs have reached an all-time high, and the ghetto is soon to be plunged into conflict.
- If one or more PCs fight for the Axes of Evil, they are tasked with recruiting the other PCs, or an important NPC.

After that, the relationships defined between PCs during character creation should be enough to get the plot moving.

The additional triggers below can be introduced by a GM to stir additional drama into the mix when required. Most likely they will generate enough conflict to last a session or so, but they can be used as spines for whole seasons if inter-party action takes a backseat to the procedural.

- Someone new arrives in the ghetto, related by blood or circumstance to one of the PCs.
- The Axes of Evil begin gearing up for a major act of sabotage and it's all hands on deck.
- Someone born into the ghetto is approaching Sorting Age. If they are Aligned as non-Evil, they'll be separated from their family, but hiding them could be tricky...
- A fighter in the Axes of Evil gets captured by the Loots. Who will they implicate under interrogation, and how far will the Evils go to prevent them from talking?
- A Gooder politician undergoes a Realignment Ceremony, a common enough PR stunt wherein an Aligned citizen bears the Crown a second time, always returning the same result. This time though, the Crown Realigns the politician as Neutral. The system comes under scrutiny, presenting a new opportunity for the Evils to argue their case.
- The Evils discover crucial arcane knowledge about the Crown of Alignment's magic, and discuss how best to exploit it.

- The ghetto starts to become dangerously overpopulated. Whilst their masters plan how best to cope with the influx, the Evils plot how to use the situation to their advantage.
- A citizen from an always-Evil species is Aligned as Good, and The Sovereignty start promoting them as their token minority. Some of their species hope that new representation will help things to improve; others say they're nothing but a blood traitor.
- The Axes of Evil suspect a spy in their ranks. The rat needs to be exposed and taken care of.
- A murder is committed in the ghetto. As rival gangs square off against one another, scrutiny from the Loots is higher than ever before.
- A Chaotic Gooder undergoes a crisis of conscience, and offers to help the Evils escape their oppression in some way.
- A Good commits an act of indisputable Evil. Whilst the Loots rush to cover it up, the Evils look for a way to reveal the truth.
- A prominent gang leader or revolutionary dies, leaving a power vacuum. Someone has to step up.
- Resources are scarcer than ever, and someone powerful is hoarding their supply. It's time to redistribute the wealth.

The triggers below are events that dramatically upset the established status quo of the setting. They are best used for moments of climax, either to wrap up a season or kickstart a new one.

- The ghetto erupts in outright revolution, and in the chaos the PCs slip out into the city at large.
- Brighthaven is besieged, and as a last resort, the Evils (PCs included) are press ganged to fight in the war.
- The Crown of Alignment is corrupted, depowered, stolen or destroyed.

Names

The name chart below indicates many common names that might be used for citizens of Brighthaven. The medieval names are drawn from actual history, whilst the fantasy names are more extravagant. The "evil" names are a mix of mythological villains and other suggestions for species like orcs or goblins, usually with lots of hard consonants. Using fantasy names for Goods, medieval names for Neutrals and evil names for Evils is just one way of choosing names for your setting.

	Fantasy Names	Medieval English Names	"Evil" Names
Male			
	Uther	Ralf	Throgg
	Eladin	Nicholas	Uruk
	Austus	Walter	Grom
	Solomar	Gilbert	Koros
	Mordru	Henry	Necro
	Varthor	Hugh	Shade
Female			
	Helma	Isabella	Zilda
	Sentinelle	Rohesia	Hecate
	Alwynda	Joan	Siska
	Boadacea	Matilda	Moragg
	Andromeda	Agnes	Elphaba
	Kasia	Beatrice	Harka