

War of the Mountain King

A alternate-history RPG fantasy campaign setting

#5 Mindset

The Pasalans and the Americans... do not like each other, at least on the geopolitical level. Individual Americans will like individual Pasalans, and vice versa: but the two cultures can be remarkably far apart on a lot of basic issues. And it's not always clear which culture is correct.

The great Pasalan societal flaw lies in its collective inability to generalize ethical principles. Pasalans, American stereotyping to the side, **are** capable of telling the difference between good and evil; they just generally do not expect anybody to take the difference seriously in a crisis situation. It's nice when somebody does, of course. But if a Pasalan in the desert sees a man dying of thirst, nobody he is with will say anything if that Pasalan simply keeps walking. Or if that Pasalan rescues the man. Or if that Pasalan kills the man and loots the body, for that matter. It's not a matter of respecting private moral decisions; it's a matter of indifference to them.

This is not absolutely universal, of course: otherwise Pasalan society would not survive at all. On a practical level, Pasalans form attachments with family members, friends, small groups, and guilds: they also respect authority figures, although 'fear' is a better term. So Pasalans are capable of producing kingdoms, and even large ones, but typically not very strong ones. And the kingdoms that are produced are not particularly stable, although that might also be due to the fact that everybody speaks more or less the same language. Harder to create unique nation-states that way, which is why the True Emperor set things up like that in the first place.

The Americans, of course, do not have this problem. They have a generally-accepted universal morality and a coherent ethical system... which they then apparently ignore. 'Hypocrisy' is a strange, and extremely

distasteful, concept to a Pasalan. For that matter, so is 'racism' and 'sexism,' but that may be for more pragmatic reasons: if you go around telling people that they're inferior to you because of their ancestry and/or sex, eventually you will run into a mage who will proceed to prove you wrong by turning you inside out.

At any rate, while a Pasalan understands lying about one's beliefs to score an advantage, he will not particularly understand why anybody would sincerely believe in an ethical system that he cannot actually live up to. Put another way: a Pasalan can comprehend the Golden Rule, and even think it admirable. He will not be upset if nobody else follows it, and will not necessarily be upset if somebody lies about following it - but he *will* become upset if somebody tries to follow it, and fails. Particularly if trying and failing involves him somehow.

As a result, the average Pasalan largely considers Americans to be a bunch of vicious bigots who will inexorably hurt people simply for not following a set of rules that no American can actually follow all the time. And the average American generally thinks that Pasalans are utterly callous barbarians who would march an army over a field of babies if it would save them a half hour. There is perhaps no small truth to either of these two stereotypes.

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