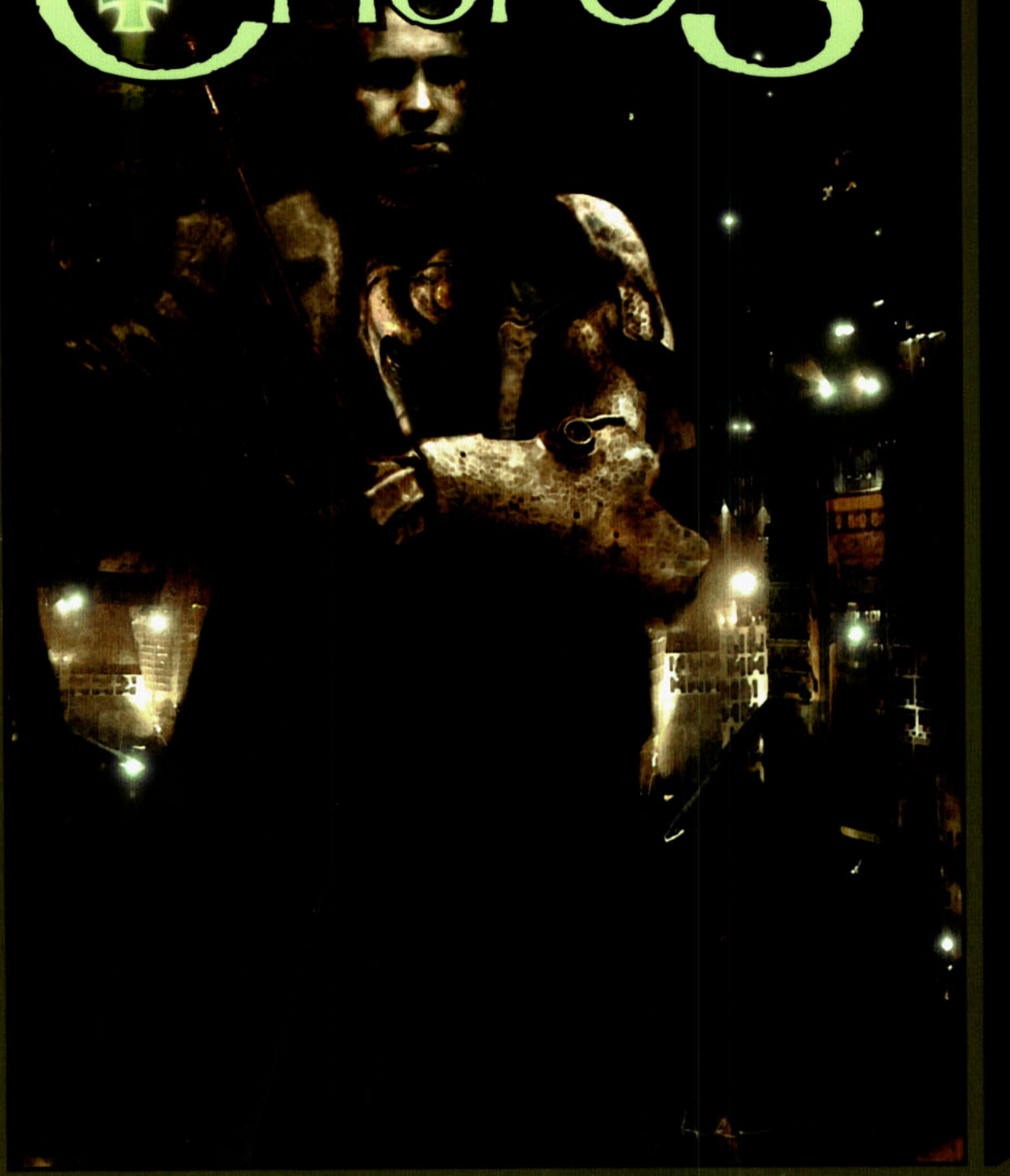
TRADITION BOOK

Celestial Chorus™



TRADITION BOOK:

Celestial Chorus™

Wherever the Soul Shines

Persecuted for their faith, called heretics for their belief in One face of the divine, blamed for the Inquisition and divided inside by their disparate visions of Heaven, the members of the Celestial Chorus persevere nonetheless. One Song — the very pulse of creation itself, a cosmic harmony in which they all join — reverberates through their hearts. With this faith, they hope to bring humanity into communion with the divine, but they can do so only once they unify themselves. Be they saints or sinners, the Chorus' mages hope for redemption. But whose faith is correct? In the wake of the Reckoning, unity may not come in time for them to survive Armageddon.

There is Heard the Song of the One

At last, a revised look at the Traditions for Mage: The Ascension. Completely new material covering history, practices, beliefs, special character rules and more. Examine new roles in the wake of the Reckoning and the hidden secrets and powers of the surviving Traditions.

MAGE®
THE ASCENSION

Mind's Eye Theatre

www.white-wolf.com
ISBN 1-56504-457-6
WW4665 $14.95 U.S.
51495
9 781565 044579
PRINTED IN USA

White Wolf Game Studio

World of Darkness®

TRADITION BOOK:

Celestial Chorus™

BY JEFF CISNEROS, RICH RUANE AND MALCOLM SHEPPARD

Credits

Authors: Jeff Cisneros, Rich Ruane and Malcolm Sheppard
Development: Jess Heinig
Editing: Carl Bowen
Art Direction: Aileen E. Miles
Interior Art: Rebecca Guay, Leif Jones, Vince Locke, Matthew Mitchell
Cover Art: Christopher Shy
Cover Design, Layout & Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles

735 Park North Blvd.
Suite 128
Clarkston, GA 30021
USA

© 2001 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages, Mage the Ascension, Hunter the Reckoning, World of Darkness and Aberrant are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Werewolf the Wild West, Mage the Sorcerers Crusade, Wraith the Great War, Trinity, Mind's Eye Theatre, Laws of Ascension, Tradition Book Celestial Chorus, Dragons of the East and Dead Magic are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

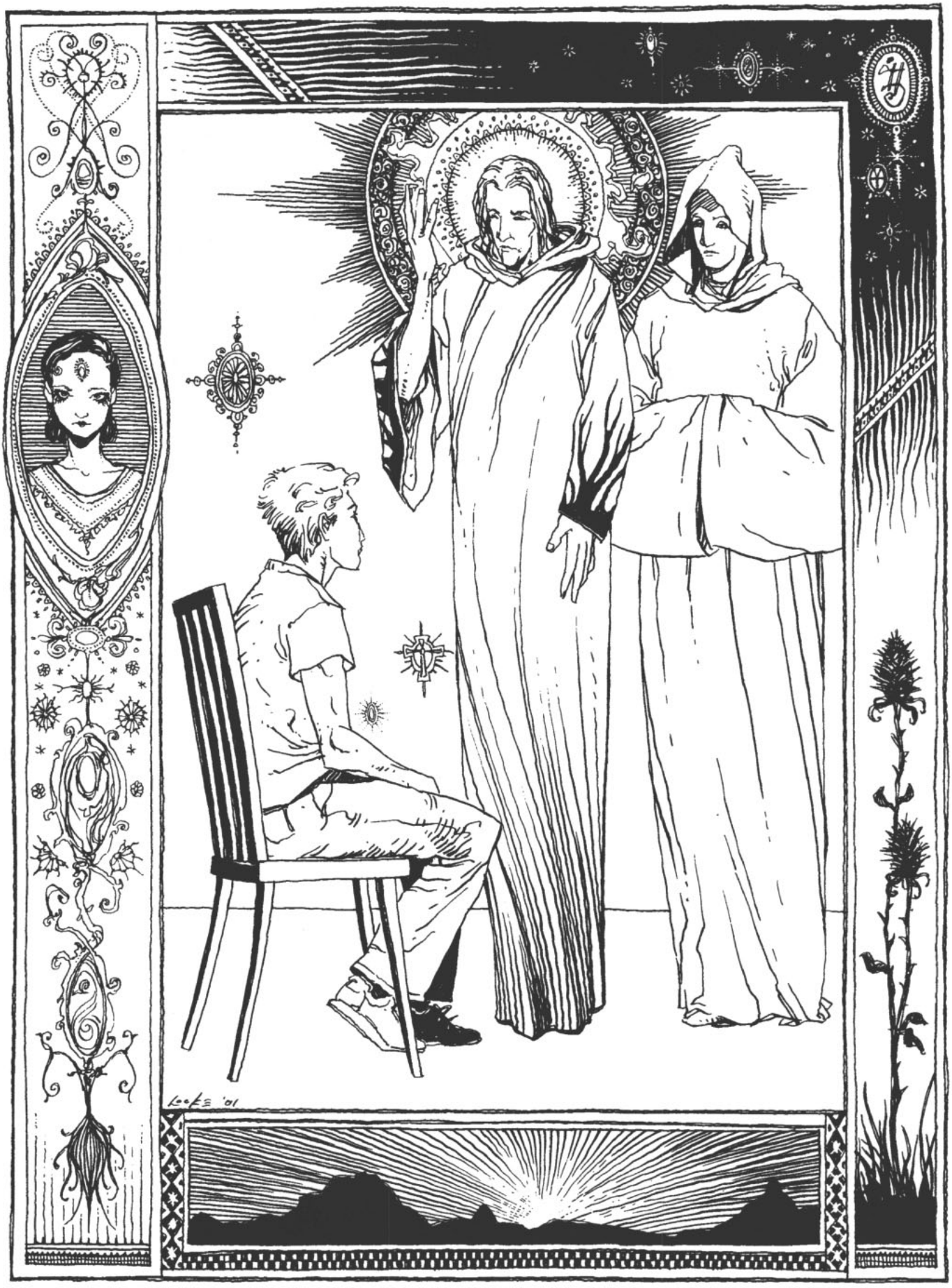
For a free White Wolf catalog call 1-800-454-WOLF.
Check out White Wolf online at
http://www.white-wolf.com; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

TRADITION BOOK:

Celestial Chorus™

Contents

Prologue: A Rude Awakening	4
Introduction: Finding Faith	8
Chapter One: St. John's Words	12
Chapter Two: Holy Tasks, Sacred Paths	26
Chapter Three: Scattered Souls	66
Epilogue: Something Precious	99


LOOFS '01

PROLOGUE: A RUDE AWAKENING

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

—Hamlet (II, ii)

The wait was long and filled with many apprehensions. To Jeremiah it seemed like another lifetime since he had Awakened to the Song. At first he was confused as the sound of the Song filled his senses, then the voice in his head told him to be strong and keep his faith, for a great journey awaited. It was not too long thereafter that Father Bernard came knocking on the door to change his life irrevocably. In the following days, he learned that magic was real and that a higher state of being existed, although it could be attained only with hard work and diligence. Then came the many questions... Jeremiah was afraid to ask them at first, but he was told that those questions were important if he was to study and become part of the Celestial Chorus. After the questions came the waiting... then finally acceptance.

On that day, he was ushered into a white room with a simple table. Two chairs sat behind it, and one chair — his chair — faced them. After he was given some time to contemplate this next step in his spiritual growth, two men in simple robes entered the room and sat down. The first man to speak was tall and wiry, with blonde chin-length hair, but his eyes were black and piercing, threatening to transfix Jeremiah. He spoke with a voice that was seemingly too powerful for his body.

"Greetings, Apprentice Jeremiah, and welcome to the Celestial Chorus. You have much to study and learn before you are released from your catechumenate... what you would know as an appren-

ticeship. I am Simon Pain, and I have the privilege of introducing you to the gentleman who is going to familiarize you with the internal workings and some of the history of our Tradition. I am reliably informed by the Curia that this is good for the catechumen, so I am not in a position to argue.

"All sarcasm aside, do feel free to ask any questions of your mentor. Remember this, the road to Ascension is arduous. Seek the truth of divinity, celebrate the diversity of the Chorus, and respect the differences of your brother and sister Choristers. There... pep talk done. I now turn you over to the tender mercies of William Rathman." Simon grimaced in distaste once his short speech was done. Perhaps it was the formality of it, or the finality. Regardless, his pronouncement took Jeremiah a bit off guard. Yes, the Chorus had taught him serious things... but he couldn't decide whether this treatment was part of a longer ritual, or just the nature of a very circumspect man.

The second man was slight and unassuming in his build with short brown hair. This soft-spoken man with his wholly unremarkable shell would have been mistaken for the common man on the street except for the fact that his gray eyes flickered rapidly at every motion around him, missing absolutely nothing. The British accent that made him sound like a gentleman ordering tea was even more disconcerting.

"Pray forgive Simon, Jeremiah. He has just returned from a rather disconcerting research trip to the Arctic Circle. He is usually more cheerful. I have been tasked with your education, and this is a matter I take quite seriously. In the course of years, I have taken few Catechumen, so you are being given an opportunity many others might envy. The first lesson you must learn is that envy is one of the most dangerous and destructive of human emotions, and I do not tolerate it. This is the sole reason why I take few apprentices. I grant you the respect you earn. How shall I teach you? By harnessing your curiosity and powers of observation. Note that I will not resort to using guilt in any way. This is the province of weaker faiths. Since you have now Awakened and seen the face of the One, we may dispense with such puerility. Ask questions, but do not expect quick and easy answers. Finally, focus on the positive aspects of the rise to Ascension. Leave the negative to the Dark Singers, for such things lead to the Fall. Come with me, Jeremiah. Your journey is about to begin."

Simon Pain smiled and spoke, "I will see you soon, Apprentice. Brother Rathman, don't scare the poor young man to death, eh?"

Jeremiah didn't quite know what to make of the two men, except to think that perhaps his learning in the Celestial Chorus was going to be much more involved than he'd first thought. An order of devoutly religious theocrats he'd been prepared for, but the rigidity of his instructors unnerved him. He hoped that these first few teachers were just designed to weed out the chaff, like one would find in most new schools.

Preface to the Fifth English Edition

In an attempt to better communicate with our contemporary readers and interested parties, we have eliminated the hymns and songs in the *Book of Ages*, and we will publish them in a separate place for our Catechumen to study. The purpose of this edition is not to enforce canonical acceptance of certain texts over others, but to show what the most commonly accepted forms of worship in the mainstream of our Congregation are. In addition, later chapters will examine how the Art is practiced within the Chorus and present some notes on key figures in our Congregation and Curia.

Many of the stories told in this book predate the written variants by many generations, surviving in oral tradition and transmitted through generations of Choristers. The *Book of Ages* likely did not exist in a written format until the second millennium BCE as Mentuhetep started to unify many disparate worshippers into one Celestial Chorus Congregation. From that point, the *Book of Ages* grew as various communities contributed stories to it. Some of these stories regrettably fell by the wayside as the Chorus grew and matured, or space considerations began to demand a more rigid approach to judging the worth of these chronicles, while others gained a wider acceptance through these writings. The *Book of Ages* grew in this manner, and it continues to grow thus to this day. The fact that the stories have been translated from many different learned tongues is a testament to the universality and plurality of our Chorus.

The first English translation of the *Book of Ages* was from the Latin tongue. It was very common for most educated individuals in the Middle Ages to be versed in Latin, which was especially true for the members of our Congregation due to their deep ecclesiastical ties to the Roman Catholic Church. In the early 1300s, when a movement away from Latin toward vernacular languages began to gain ground in our Congregation, it became apparent that vernacular editions of the *Book of Ages* would soon become necessary. Translation efforts began, and the First English Edition came in 1465. Subsequent editions followed in 1645, 1838 and 1996.

Many argue that the poetic quality of the previous works would be lost if we compiled a more contemporary translation of the *Book of Ages*. However, we were given permission to move on with this project by the Curia and the Pontifex Maximus with the understanding that we should preserve the teachings of the Celestial Chorus and that a separate work of the hymns and songs would be published later.

The documents that make up our scriptures are the living testament of all those who have gone before us, that they may guide us in wisdom toward reunion with the One. We pay homage to all that have gone before us, and we pray that the One will guide us to the conclusion of this edition to the benefit of the Chorus and all who aspire to worship within its holy body.

Locke '01

Introduction: Finding Faith

You hold in your hands the revised Tradition Book for the **Celestial Chorus**. We can be reasonably certain that a number of you are going to ask why, and that a number of you are going to say "Thank heavens!" With the revision of the core game rules came the necessity to adapt the Traditions to the changes. But, we are not here to address the minutiae of game publishing. You hold this book in your hands right now. Enjoy.

So... why a Tradition that specializes in the Ascension to the divine state? Perhaps that question might be answered in the example set by vast amounts of people. Their pursuit of eternal life is exemplified by attending church or worshipping the deity of their choice. People have been endlessly fascinated with deity and the divine state in human culture. Here we attempt to provide the reader with the option to explore the possibilities without repercussions.

The Celestial Chorus labors under many stereotypes in the context of the **Mage** game and in the real world as well. To many players, Choristers are all priests, Christians and stuck-up holier-than-thous. To mages, the Chorus often seems a looming monument to the problems of splintering faith and dogmatic religion. Obviously these stereotypes wouldn't exist if they weren't true, but they don't apply to every member of the Chorus. What really makes the Chorus tick, and how can you walk the line between stereotype and playable individual? Hopefully this book will answer this conundrum for you.

"Why Would I Want to Play a Conservative Christian?"

Aside from the fact that many Choristers are *not* conservative Christians, this question is valid. Christianity does get a bum rap from much of the gaming community. Why then would you want to play one of these guys?

First off, remember that in the strict sense, Choristers aren't necessarily all Christians. Many Choristers don't hold to Christian dogma or trappings. More importantly, Choristers don't even have to be devoutly religious!

What's that? A Chorister without religion?

Sure. The Celestial Chorus explores a way for humanity to commune with the One in the role of servant, partner or friend. That doesn't necessarily mean that Choristers are *religious*; it means that many have a strong faith. They can feel in their bones the essential *rightness* of being that comes with knowing that you have a purpose in the universe. It's a strong thing, to feel like you have a purpose in life.

On the flip side, a Chorister doesn't have to go around spouting Bible quotes or persecuting people who have other beliefs. If you can stretch your imagination to play other characters as heroes, why not the Chorus?

A good Christian and a good Chorister are alike in that both have a full measure of compassion, love, tolerance and mercy. *Anyone* can be spiteful, mean-spirited or hateful. To paint all Christians with this brush — even with the specious arguments that Christians tortured people to death in the Crusades or that they persecute people in today's society (which are things that no *good* Christian would condone) — is, dare we say it, prejudicial.

In short, anyone can be a bastard. You'll find fanatics in every pot. Show a little tolerance for your fellow man, and look for the good in everyone.

Theme: Schisms and Compromises

The Chorus suffers from practitioners of many different religions all trying to reconcile with individual faiths. At some point, each Chorister feels a twinge of doubt or despair over the many different interpretations of canon. Ideally, the Traditions and the Chorus hope to merge disparate groups in order to create a stronger whole. Yet how much must the individual give up? Where are the lines of compromise? If you have a faith that sustains your soul, will you give it up in order to promote some greater community that shuns your enlightenment? Some days, it's a wonder that Choristers manage to work with any other mages (or each other) at all. Each Chorister eventually finds this variety a point of strength, though. He takes it as a means to see other views, to reaffirm his own beliefs and to learn to judge every individual on a personal basis.

Mood: Hope and Faith

In spite of their tenuous ties to religious groups — the Chorus' beliefs are heretical to many worldly religions — individual Singers prosper and thrive on the strength of faith. The Awakening may provide a proof of faith, and the miracles that come with enlightenment certainly seem to do so, but the Chorister must recognize that such miracles stem from his personal connection to the Divine. While it is the Chorister's will to perform magic, it is the conviction of faith that makes the Chorister's will one with divinity. Therefore, the Singer's whims are simply extensions of heaven.

From this faith comes a great wellspring of hope. While other Traditions fight, die or squabble over political and secular agendas, the Chorus knows that a greater fate awaits mankind. The universe may not be caring and nurturing — growth comes through adversity and trial, as shown often in holy writ — but the Chorus recognizes that some greater destiny awaits humanity. Every Singer who sees a greater hand behind creation understands that somehow, someday, humanity will find a way to touch that hand. Choristers are confident that people will speak to and know the Creator some day. In that faith, the Chorus knows that even if the Ascension War is over, if the masses reject faith and the world grinds toward Armageddon, there's always a door to hope for those who take up the search.

Contents

The Chorus exemplifies reverence as an everyday part of life. In their search for the Divine, Choristers apply the quest of faith to every task. One doesn't have to be a priest or a prophet to do so. Anyone can live a life filled with the awareness of grace. However, the Chorus recognizes that each individual must have a unique perspective on the Divine. The whole of God is too great, and every person is too special, for a single design to suffice for every Chorister. Not that this stops them from *trying* to establish a sole vision of one deity...

Since the Chorus celebrates the wondrous variety of creation, Choristers also find room for diversity within their ranks. As you read the tale herein, you'll find many paths to the divine.

Chapter One: St. John's Words — A historical exploration of the Celestial Chorus and what has occurred since the founding of the Tradition. Also, where Choristers can be found today, as well as what they believe.

Chapter Two: Holy Tasks, Sacred Paths — The organization of the Tradition, how Apprentices are found and trained, internal politics and justice, factions, paradigm and foci, Resonance, perks, problems, rotes and artifacts of the Tradition. All the tools of the trade, so to speak.

Chapter Three: Scattered Souls — Some key figures in the Chorus (past and present), legends, character templates and advice on how to run a game with a group composed solely of Singers.

Lexicon

Book of Ages: The sacred scriptures of the Celestial Chorus.

Catechumenate: An Apprentice's period of study and training.

Curia: The Chorus' administrative council.

Dark Singers: Nephandi. Also colloquially applied to any ill-willed mage.

Enchiridion: (Greek, "handbook.") Portion of the *Book of Ages* that sums up the Chorus' beliefs.

Faithful: The Celestial Chorus. Those mages who follow the One's purpose of placing humanity on Earth.

First Singers: The first and most powerful mages.

The Four Ages: The concept that divides the history into four ages that each represent a different epoch in Chorus history.

First Age: The earliest days, the time of prehistory, when the First Singers walked the Earth. This age ended in the second century BCE.

Second Age: The time from the establishment of the Congregation (second century BCE), to the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312 CE).

Third Age: The period of Christian ascendancy within the Congregation, from the Battle of the Milvian Bridge to the Convention of the Ivory Tower in 1325.

Fourth Age: The reign of the Technocracy, from the 14th century to the present day.

Great Adytum: The Chorus' seat of authority and main Horizon Realm.

The Three Inquistions: The three inquisitions of the Roman Catholic Church, included due to the enormous ecclesiastical influence wielded by the Roman Church and the sea change that was the result of these Inquisitions.

Longaevi: Alternative term for the fae.

Messianic Voices: The Christian faction within the Congregation which, starting in the fourth century CE, rose in power to become the dominant voice.

Office of the Inquisition: The part of the Chorus assigned the task of investigating ecclesiastical crimes committed by members of the Chorus. Power derived from the Curia.

Office of the Academy: The part of the Chorus assigned the task of teaching new Apprentices and developing curriculum for study by the Apprentices.

Pontifex Maximus: The central authority figure for the Chorus.

Metempsychosis: The ancient belief of reincarnation.

Rebels: Those who struggled against the One's authority; also known as **The Defiant.**

Reconciliation: The End Times, in which all creation shall be united. The One's followers shall be rewarded; His opponents will be destroyed. Some believe that a great war will occur.

Wesleyan Revival: Occurred during the 19th century CE in response to the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church. Converted 250,000 new followers for the Presbyterian and Methodist factions of the Christian religions. Included as first evidence of loss of secular and ecclesiastical power of the Roman Catholic Church. Confined to the West.

Variant Terms

These terms are used commonly within the Congregation in favor of the Curia's common parlance.

Adytum: Chantry. This term may vary to include Sanctuary, Temple, Basilica, etc.

Catechumen: Apprentice.

Exarch: Master.

Praecept: Mentor.

Presbyter: Adept.

Chorister: Mage.

The Song: Magic.

BCE and CE

The Chorus recognizes that not all of its members view the birth of Jesus Christ as an axial moment in time. Therefore, BCE (Before Christian/Common Era) is preferred over BC (Before Christ), and CE (Christian/Common Era) to AD (Anno Domini, Year of Our Lord).

Lock '01

Chapter One: St. John's Words

"And the key of the House of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut."
Isaiah 22:22

"What say you to that, Jeremiah?" Brother William inquired. The sound of William Rathman's voice brought Jeremiah out of his reverie. With a hint of uncharacteristic mischief Rathman spoke again. "I once was in your position in yonder abbey," he said, pointing in the general direction of the University. "The Brothers and the abbot thought me too undisciplined to be schooled in history, especially that of the Roman Catholic Church. Then one evening I had an epiphany. The world was not going to collapse around my ears just because I found certain of my monastic Brothers to be complete bores."

Looking around at the natural beauty of the arboretum, Jeremiah replied candidly. "I'm sorry, William. I grew up in New York City. If we want to see nature there, we have to go to Central Park. It's... compelling here. In answer to the quotation from the Book of Isaiah, I guess I can only say I'm as prepared as the One wills me to be."

Brother William nodded. "You have been playing to fox me, you young rascal. You heard every word I said." Chuckling ruefully he added, "You are as ready as you can be made for the task of learning the history of the Chorus. I sometimes forget that Pain has an eye for gifted ones. It's a lesson in humility that I will not soon forget again."

Rising from underneath the trees of the arboretum, William and Jeremiah walked until they were in the shadows of St. John's Abbey. "It has been some time since I left these walls as a member of the Chorus. Many of the teachings that you shall hear from me will have the flavor of the Benedictine Order. Do not let this discourage you or sway you from your beliefs. I merely present them to you in a frame of reference familiar to me. It is your duty and your task to dissect, question, debate and apply them to your beliefs as you see fit. Come with me. Abbot Kelly and I are old friends and besides, I oversee the Adytum here."

The First Age

Deep within the abbey, where monks and abbots have debated, prayed and held Eucharist since 1857, Brother William introduced Jeremiah to Abbot Kelly in quiet tones.

"Jeremiah, this man is my mentor, confessor and dear friend. He may not work in the world at large, but holds my deepest confidences. He is the very devil with a ruler, but he still enjoys a nip of the Irish whiskey with his Johnny Bread. Sean, this is my newest pupil."

With a surprising spryness for his age, the white-haired abbot rose and shook Jeremiah's hand.

"I am Abbot Sean Kelly, Jeremiah, and welcome to the Abbey of St. John. I pray your journey that begins here will be for the greater glory of God. This old goat is one of my greatest students, and if he has consented to teach you, then you are blessed. Besides, his occasional lapses into dogmatic lectures are amusing at times. One would almost believe William should have been a Jesuit or Dominican, not a simple Benedictine." Sean smiled with the expression of a man who'd been through these jokes many times in youth and found them only truer with time.

The two older men laughed at the banter, then with a deep breath Brother William returned to his serious mien and continued.

"Pay attention, Jeremiah. This lays the foundation of your training, but you won't likely hear it again." Jeremiah nodded, hoping that he could catch everything important. He didn't want to have to stop and ask questions later.

"We must begin at the Shattering — the period from the beginning of time to about two centuries before the Christian era. The most deeply devoted historians have only been able to piece together a frustratingly incomplete picture of the First Singers. It is said they were the most powerful of the Singers. They were Exarchs of such power that even our most esteemed minds have trouble comprehending their feats of faith and magic.

"Of the First Singers there are five that need mention, though there are more besides. These five were of such prominence that their tales are still extant. Mitras, Gunder, Enoch, Bhishma and (it is believed) Gilgamesh comprised the five. They spent spans of time caring for humanity and defending them from the perils of a stormy beginning. The feats of Gilgamesh are recorded and assumed to be fiction in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. I highly recommend that you read this book. It speaks of a man who performed many wondrous acts, and it is said he sought out immortality in a quest. Of course, like all men he was flawed, but nevertheless he is quite an inspiration. The other First Singers, much like Gilgamesh, heard the call of the One and traveled the lands giving, caring and protecting the people until the time would come that the call of the One was to be heard by all.

They were hard times, times of great temptation. Some fell to the Dark Song. The forces that oppose us were at work even then, subverting the word and will of the One. We of the Chorus believe that all may be redeemed — well, for the most part. Yet, there is a force that even now dogs our heels. The Dark Singers, the Nephandi... are of the deepest evil. They believe in the total destruction of the universe and the One, for what dark purpose I pray I never see or comprehend. They are nefarious, and they bring even the most divided of dark factions together. They are a blight upon the world.

"In the fullness of time, the First Singers passed, were corrupted by the Dark Singers, and all passed on their points of view. Those days of near divinity are long gone now. We are mortal men that face off against mortal men... divided and surrounded by our enemies."

Heroes of the First Age

In many Celestial texts, Mitras (later Mithras) is called the first among the five Singers of his age. It is said that he remembered even the days before man, when the One remained whole and pure, and all things communed with Creation. Like his contemporaries, he fought against the forces of darkness, if tales are to be believed, and it's said that he even rose up from death because his spirit was too strong to be quashed.

Gilgamesh, Bhishma, Enoch and Gunder have similar tales. Gilgamesh is said to have attained immortality, but nobody knows where he now resides if he did — doubtless in some Umbral realm far from the modern Earth. Tales of the other heroes are more confused. Some Chorus scholars assert that the five Singers are really archetypes from a greater time when heroes stood taller over humanity, and that each hero is simply a legend formed by the amalgamation of many tales from such heroic feats. Other academics claim that some or all of these people were real and true individuals, or even that they were emanations of the One. The Sons of Mithras certainly believe in the divinity of Mithras, after all.

Regardless, the First Singers remain examples to be emulated, for all Singers harbor the potential to perform great works on behalf of mankind. Many Choristers read the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and some study esoteric works about Enoch or Mitras in order to find inspiration for later heroic deeds. Indeed, following in the footsteps of one of the heroes can help to focus one's magical powers.

The Second Age

After the brief beginning of the tale, Jeremiah took note that both Abbot Kelly and Brother William remained silent for a while. Jeremiah didn't want to break the silence, but he watched them both uncomfortably for the better part of a minute.

As per his custom, William broke the silence unceremoniously. "Forgive me, but having an incomplete history to tell disturbs me. In time, acceptance of the loss of the complete history is inevitable, but I am not yet at that point."

"What happened to the histories?" Jeremiah asked.

William harrumphed while Abbot Sean broke in softly. "It's not a matter of what happened. It's what never was. I mean to say, these are times so far removed that no reliable writings of them remain. We have scattered stories, second-hand accounts, things of that nature. Occasionally an angel deigns to tell us a little, but they are loath to speak of other ages of man. And even the greatest prophets cannot tell us what happened beyond the veil of time, so far in the past."

Jeremiah nodded. "Perhaps it's just another lesson. Maybe it tells us to be satisfied with our time, to make the most out of what we can do now, not to agonize over some past that's gone and done with."

William nodded in agreement and smiled pleasantly. "An astute analysis. Fortunately, we have slightly more information. As time marches on, our records become better. Are you prepared to continue?"

Jeremiah nodded.

"Good. The details of the Second Age are far more complete and accurate. I am going to dispense with doctrine and try to tell of this Age with an eye to completeness, not blind rote.

"The Second Age came with the gathering of Singers into a single congregation. This is attributed to a priest named Mentu-hetep. Mentu-hetep was born in Iunu (referred to as On in the Bible, Heliopolis by the Greeks and Romans). He served the court of the Pharaoh Amenhotep IV in the city of Thebes. He worshipped a single god called Aten, and his Pharaoh promoted the worship of this single sun god.

"History tells us that this belief in one deity resulted in much scorn and mockery for Mentu-hetep. In his despair, he wandered into the desert for 40 days and 40 nights where he fasted and prayed to Aten for guidance. For his penitence and sacrifice, he received a visitation by Aten in the form of a burning corona in the dark of night. He asked of Aten what he should do to best serve the All-Singer and thus receive his divine mandate. These are the first recorded words of the One.

"'Gather my children unto me, for they have drifted. You and your brethren have sung unto the peoples of the world for millennia, but more have fallen from my ways with each passing generation. Even the faithful have forgotten the meaning of harmony. Too often you sing alone, and you now must sing together as one. Send forth your brothers and sisters, those who remember me by any name. Gather together in unity, that your purpose may be given new strength. Sing together in harmony, that my Song may be perpetuated.

"'Many more will fall by the wayside, and they shall be spurned as they have spurned me. But you shall give each other new strength, wisdom and unity of purpose. So then shall the Sleepers be guided toward me, and all shall be One once more. The voices shall fill the air, and the Chorus shall fill the heavens. Know you are celestial in origin, and your song heavenly.

"'Let your Celestial Chorus unite!'

"When this visitation ended, Mentu-hetep's eyes were seared from their sockets in the brilliance of the All-Singer's passing. Blinded but undaunted, he returned to call all of the Singers of the Chorus to him.

"From Thebes, and with the assistance of the Pharaoh, Mentu-hetep used means magical and mundane to call forth those who still heard the Song from across the world. Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, now calling himself Ikhnaton, abandoned the city of Thebes to build a city dedicated to the One. His priests were much displeased, and they foretold of the doom of this city, yet he persevered along with his faithful Mentu-hetep. Many rejected the summons of Mentu-hetep, yet many others heeded the call and came to this place in the desert called Akhenaten. They all remembered the All-Singer by one name or another. Some came by day, others came by night. They represented many factions of worship. They were the Knights of Aten, the Chosen of Abraham, Gilgamites, Mithradites and many others descended of the First Singers.

"This First Congregation discussed, held fellowship and sang the hymns of rejoining, harmony and the future. Prophecies were revealed and discussed in great depth. Such was the power of Mentu-hetep's holy words that it was resolved that no one Singer could attain heaven without the aid of others in the faith. It was further resolved that the names of the One were many, but all were names of the same God. Thus, many years passed and the Sacred Congregation grew in the name of the All-Singer."

William looked gravely at Jeremiah and added, "There is more, but no tale of this magnitude comes without tales of woe, betrayal and great distress. As long as man is man,

there will always be greed, cynicism and self-centered politics. The path you walk is a hard one, rife with temptation, trials and tribulations. You will read screed so vile, hear words so bitter that you will not believe man capable of love, charity and self-sacrifice. Do not lose hope because of these things; see them as obstacles to be overcome."

Seemingly satisfied with this brief lecture, he looked to Abbot Kelly. "Sean, don't forget to contribute some to young Jeremiah here. I am going to have to release him to others for a more practical education all too soon, and I would have him hear you speak of some of the history."

The abbot smiled and said, "Leave it to William to let me speak of the destruction of Akhenaten. It is not pleasant, my son, and it is one of many tales of greed, jealousy and hatred to be told of mankind. I think we would be remiss in our teachings if such a tale were not included."

"The first Grand Council convened shortly after Mentu-hetep's call. They represented the various factions, and although they had little authority, they tried to facilitate communication between the various groups. Many returned to their native lands and built Adytums — places of gathering for those of the Chorus to stay, worship and work in the faith.

"Those priests of Amenhotep IV who were disgruntled and offended were not going to sit idly by and let things go unsettled. They worked on the populace of Thebes and inflamed opinion to the point they were able to piece together a jyhad against the new city of Akhenaten. It is now believed that the priest chief in his opposition, D'halen Ra', was in league with the Nephandi. Scarcely one century after the completion of Akhenaten, it was burned to the ground along with the Grand Adytum of the Celestial Chorus. Although this was the first instance of such interference from the Nephandi in the Second Age, it was certainly not the last. The Nephandi strove to interfere with the building of the Grand Adytum in the Horizon Realm, and though they failed in this task, they continue to preach chaos, destruction and hate in order to countervail the Chorus' message of love, tolerance and faith in the One.

"The continued perseverance of the Chorus and Council resulted in the spread of the faith around the world. Solomon rose in 965 BCE to become King of Israel, and he commissioned the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. This temple survived two incarnations and finally was destroyed in 70 CE. While Solomon certainly espoused some unusual ideas, such as the codes of spirit-dealing used by the Order of Hermes, he was also a man of faith and a powerful proponent for our cause. His choice to embrace wisdom instead of power or wealth is another step for us to emulate.

"Until the birth of Christ, Romans filled the Grand Council. During this time, Rome reigned supreme in the secular world and the Grand Council felt that the Congregation's future lay with it. Over this time, the Roman influence was so great that the Council was renamed the Curia, and the High Councilor was called the Pontifex Maximus. What had been a role of parliamentary advisor soon assumed almost absolute authority.

"The centuries following Christ's birth brought on a radical change in the composition of the Congregation and Curia. From the Holy Land came the Messianic Voices, a Christian group that was initially little more than a cult. Also, the Sons of Mithras rose in prominence since Christianity and Mithraism were rivals for the hearts and minds of the Chorus in the second century of the Common Era.

"These theological battles raged until Constantine the Great embraced Christianity and allowed freedom of worship for Christians. The die was cast from that point. By 324 CE, the Pontiff and the majority of the Curia were Christians."

The Third Age

Days of learning had clogged Jeremiah's mind. He'd been given so many facts — some with explanations; others with encouragement to use the Adytum's library. The questions soon came fast and furious. Then came the visit by Simon Pain.

"William, will he be ready for more practical teaching soon?" Pain had asked. That question still rooted uncomfortably in Jeremiah's mind. He recalled the answer that his mentor had given: "He is barely through the Second Age now, Simon. I will not rush him. He needs the time to adjust and gain his bearings. Only as soon as we have given him the knowledge of the Third and Fourth Ages will I believe him ready for some exploration. I realize he is strong, and I will get him to you soon enough, but he needs a firm grounding. He needs to understand not only where we came from, but why, and how we arrived where we are today. Give me two more weeks, and then we can send him gallivanting around the globe as is your wont."

Pain had digested this assessment carefully. "Very well, William," he'd said. "I have no intention of taking him away from you completely. I'll send him to Texas where a certain rabbi awaits him for a little broadening. He'll then be returned to you for more extensive training."

William had smiled at Pain's comments, but he added a cryptic statement of his own, saying only, "Yes, I think that would be most illuminating for our young Jeremiah. See you in two weeks, Simon."

Jeremiah still remembered the look that Pain had given him. It was relentless, appraising, as if Pain were looking for some weakness... but then, a surprising kindness rose in his voice. "Be ready, Jeremiah. You

will likely have headaches when I come for you. Be well, William."

Only a few more weeks of sheltered study, and then back into the fray — Jeremiah had a lot to learn. He only hoped now that Pain's appraisal of him had been correct. As he settled into a comfortable seat for the afternoon's discourse, he pondered also whether he'd make it, whether he'd even get out of the abbey.

Brother William looked at Jeremiah and waggled his eyebrows. "Are you ready for this challenge, Jeremiah?"

Mithraism and Christianity

Mithraic cults flourished in Rome. The Roman sensibilities embraced the warlike deity eagerly. The way the Roman social structure worked meant that one had to be landed to hold a vote, and owning land was the surest way to secure an income. As a result, many young leaders would build armies and go forth to conquer new territories. In this fashion, Rome fostered its own expansion and created a class of experienced military leaders who were backed up by loyal armies. No wonder that a warrior-god like Mithras should deserve their respect!

So how did Christianity get its hooks in?

Several factors, really. The system that led to Roman expansion also meant that many Roman politicians had an interest in backing up their ambitions with military power. Many a retired general became a senator or other public official and threatened to take over the Empire with an army of loyal veterans. Naturally, this looming threat did little for internal stability, and it led to a downturn in the popularity of the military. The idea of a more caring deity who preached peaceful solutions had some appeal.

Also, Christianity had many amazingly charismatic supporters. The conversion of a Roman emperor could completely change Roman religious policy for generations, and that's exactly what happened. The opportunistic early Christian church would co-opt local religious holidays and transform them into Christian ones, or even Romanize the names of important figures. ("Jesus" is actually a Romanized name.) Christian theologians often argued prominent philosophers to a standstill.

What worked against the Mithraic cults most subversively, though, was the fact that they were masculine-dominated. Not only were women barred from the priesthood, but they couldn't even participate in many worship rites. As a result, the soldiering husbands in many households worshipped Mithras, while their wives took up Christianity.

After a brief moment of thought, Jeremiah simply replied, "I pray so."

With a chuckle and look at Abbot Kelly, William continued.

"Christianity took ascendance in the Third Age of our Chorus. There are many reasons for this, but it seems that while Christianity was a minority faith, it was the most strongly voiced. The insistent ones… Given that Roman politicos lived and died by their skills with speech, the eloquence and persistence of the Christian church won it many supporters. With this in mind, then, it is not surprising that the Roman Catholic Church exerted a great amount of influence on our Chorus."

Brother William leaned back in his cushion and folded his hands over his stomach, ruminating momentarily. He raised one finger to emphasize his point, adding, "I am going to qualify this with a simple bit of fact. Under no circumstances do any of us view the ascendancy of any one Sleeper church as proof that such faith is the one 'true' church. They are all facets of the One. It is a wise piece of doctrine to allow individual Choristers the familiar structure and strictures of their original faith as a framework of reference of how to seek a higher state or divine communion. After Constantine made his declaration at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Christianity blossomed far faster than most other religions. You may well ask, why not the Muslim faith? Or that of Buddha? Why monotheistic worship at all? These questions are those of your faith, and they provide an excellent backdrop for learning more of the wonders of the One. But, I digress from history. You will have to formulate your own approach to other religions.

"The Third Age cemented and codified Christianity. Various heresies were disposed by means academic or by the swords of the Crusaders. The Messianic Voices became a majority in the Congregation, and other faiths were either pushed aside by the rising tide of Christianity or marginalized by its newfound political strength. The Sons of Mithras and other pagan groups fought valiantly, but they were either forced onto the sidelines or sadly removed from the Choir Celestial. Militant forces popped up and caused much strife in both the mundane and magical spheres of influence. It is from this witch's brew of discord and strife that the Cabal of Pure Thought came forth. This group of Choristers stressed the importance of a single, unified Church, and it quickly rose in prominence. These changes in the Chorus were reflected by the changes in the prominence of certain Sleeper churches.

"Charlemagne brought hope for a unified Christian Europe. Although Charlemagne did not succeed in his vision, the Chorus rejoiced as the vision of a Sacred City was believed to be coming to fruition. Soon the stress of this rapid and unprecedented religious expan-

sion caused fragmentation and quarrels in the Celestial Chorus itself. Western Singers argued to gain theological supremacy for Rome, while the Eastern Singers argued for equal status. This resulted in a major schism, and Rome and Constantinople were soon at odds. The Singers of the Cabal of Pure Thought saw this schism as a major threat to unity, so they demanded the Byzantines be co-opted by force. In a moment of wisdom, the Pontifex and the Curia ignored these demands and forged ahead in the belief that the Sacred City was at hand. Some degree of variance was to be allowed.

"In the 800s, a militant offspring of our group emigrated from Rome to Aachen, the capital of Charlemagne's empire. These priest-knights excelled in both arts of war and magic. They became known as the Palatine Knights or simply Paladins. They swore holy vows to defend humanity against the forces of darkness. This creed has become a model for those that followed down the centuries, or simply a source of inspiration for those holy warriors that aspire to something greater."

"The Crusades were a high point in the Middle Ages for Christianity, especially for Roman Catholicism. Members of the Church gained supremacy in matters ecclesiastical, they gathered political power via the sway of the Roman Church, and they held the power supreme through the Crusades. The vast majority of the rulers in Europe owed their secular gains to the Roman Church. This formula for success lasted well beyond the Third Age of our Chorus into the Fourth Age. Simony was practiced for centuries. This policy within the various faiths caused constant friction within the Congregation of the Chorus. The predominance of Christians in the Curia, including the office of Pontifex Maximus, started to cause even deeper divisions within the main body of the Congregation. The Eastern faiths started to rebel and this division of purpose hurt the cause, although the Chorus remained viable. The dream of a Sacred City was dead and doomed, but the Chorus did not realize it.

"The Jewish Singers found their lands a prize, while the Muslim Singers were more and more marginalized in these ecclesiastical battles. It soon became a conflict between the Christian Singers and everybody else. The Albigensian Crusade proved to be a victory for the Cabal of Pure Thought at first, and then a defeat. The repercussions of the Crusade led to the official ousting of the Cabal from the Congregation, even though some members of the Congregation harbored sympathy for them. This came back a century later to haunt them, when the Cabal reemerged in 1325 as part of the Order of Reason. The Convention of the Ivory Tower sounded the horn, and the walls of the Sacred City came tumbling down.

The Palatine Creed

We, of the Sacred Congregation of the Chorus Celestial assembled in the Sanctuary at Aix-la-Chappelle, do pledge on this day, the 11th of November in the 800th year of our Lord, to become true Protectors of Mankind.

We take now these Holy Vows, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, that no creature of Infernal influence or vice kind shall pose a threat to humanity:

From Vampires, discarnate spirits and other evil dead shall we safeguard Mankind;

From shapeshifters, changelings and other inhuman species shall we defend Humanity;

From demons, succubi, incubi and any other dark spirits shall we protect the Innocent;

From sorcerers, thaumaturgists, warlocks and others who conspire with dark forces shall we shield the Powerless;

From the Dark Singers and all who would desecrate or pervert the Lord's good Creation shall we preserve the Earth.

Let our War Song be heard and our battle cry be trumpeted across the world, for a powerful army unto the Lord shall we be.

In the name of God, Amen.

"While being deeply divisive, the Third Age was one of the busiest and most productive times for the Chorus. Churches produced huge volumes of sermons, songs and art. Prophets wrote key visions for us, and the church's firm ensconcing in secular affairs gave us an influence that extends even to the modern day. Many of the era's writings discussed the divisions in the Chorus, and many solutions were proffered. Unfortunately, many were discarded as 'untenable' by the Christian majority in the Congregation. In the visions of Lucien, we see eye-witness accounts of the Inquisition and the deep damage done by the folly of allowing secular rulers to dictate to the ecclesiastical.

"In these writings he clearly speaks of 'hard hearted shepherds,' likely referring to the mortals who ran the Inquisition or the Cabal of Pure Thought."

William and Jeremiah paused for supper. The visions of Lucien particularly shook Jeremiah. He pushed around his salad without eating much before finally working up the courage to ask, "Brother William, have you ever had a vision?"

Harrumphing and daubing his mouth with his napkin, Brother William left the few remaining bones from

his fish behind after a critical glance and then pushed his plate away. "No, I can't say that I have. But that's not to say that they're not real. You see, son, a lot of people say that in this day and age, God just doesn't talk to people any more. And that's just not true.

"I could give you some quaint little bit about God talking through His works, like nature and human kindness. That's not what I'm talking about, though. God — er, the One — still speaks to the few that need to hear what he has to say. Maybe, if you need to hear it, he'll speak to you. Maybe not."

William thought for a moment. "I suspect, though, that having God talk to you is more burden than benefit. I think I am happier as a humble monk than as a messenger. After all, consider some of the messages He's delivered in the past and what's happened to the messengers."

William paused and said to Jeremiah, "Do you know the story of how Brother Simon Pain came to join us?"

After some thought, Jeremiah answered cautiously, "No, I can't say I do."

William nodded. "It is kept quiet to some degree, since it is a disquieting story. Yet I find it inspiring in its own odd way. I shall tell you of it soon."

The Fourth Age

"The Fourth Age builds on the tumult of the Third Age," continued William. "After the Convention of the Ivory Tower in 1325 and the beginning of the slow crumbling of the Sacred City, it took courageous leadership to keep the core of our faith together. Great Singers like Valoran, Constantine and Sister Genevieve have kept that core together through the pernicious attacks of the Order of Reason and later the Technocratic Union. The Congregation was divided from within and being attacked from without. Externally, it warred with Hermetic mages and the witches of the Verbena. Internally, the Messianic Voices still suffered from division over Christian theology, while non-Christian Singers were all but absent from the Congregation. The Inquisition's fires burned hotter and hotter, taking Christian and heretic alike, almost indiscriminately. Hermetics and Verbena blamed the Congregation, even while some of the Congregation's own went into the flames. Misery was everywhere. By the mid-1400's, the Congregation was in desperate need of motivation and a reunification.

"Then came Valoran. Citing a vision of the Archangel Gabriel, he reunited the factions within the Messianic Voices, made peace with the Hermetics and Verbena and reconciled with the non-Christian voices that had been forced out by the ever-pervasive

The Blood Soaked Days (XIIth Vision of Lucien)

The vision of the Lord came upon me, and upon a mount there grazed many sheep. Some grazed near the cliff, close to the edge from which they would fall to their doom, while others grazed far from the dangerous precipice. Some ate grass, filling their bellies with the food of life, while others ate rocks and thorns, till they bled and bleated. There were many shepherds for these sheep, and they watched over them. Standing guard with crooks and watch fires, they were to guide the sheep away from the cliff and the rocks and the thorns. But some shepherds only saw the word of their duty, and not the intent, and they hardened their hearts. They punished the sheep that did wrong, though the sheep are but animals. While some shepherds would gently pull back from the precipice those sheep that were too close to the edge, others smote their sheep with their crooks, splitting their skulls. And while some shepherds healed and nurtured the sheep that ate the rocks and thorns, these other shepherds split their bellies and let them bleed. "For such is the price of disobedience," they said. And then came the time when these shepherds would beat and kill those sheep that they suspected of approaching the edge, or eating rocks and thorns. And finally, these shepherds came to burn and smite those of the flock whom they suspected did desire to approach the cliff or to eat the rocks and thorns. "For such is the price of disobedience," they said. And finally these same shepherds looked to the other shepherds, and questioned whether they harbored sympathy for the disobedient sheep, and were lax in their duties.

And these hard-hearted shepherds took their crooks and watch fires and turned on the other shepherds. "For such is the price of disobedience," they said. And the owner of the flock came to the mount, and saw that he had no sheep, and that the mount was covered with the blood of sheep and shepherd alike. And he wept for the wounded and slain, and his lamentations seemed endless. The owner turned to the hard-hearted shepherds, cursing them and all of their progeny. "I asked you to care for my sheep," he cried out, "but you have destroyed them, and your fellow shepherds! And in so doing, you have destroyed yourself. For such is the price of disobedience."

The Lord said unto me: "O man, you and your Singers are the shepherds, and the time of blood is coming, when some in your midst will punish the flock instead of guiding them."

Lucien was considered one of the stronger prophetic voices in the Chorus. If it were not for him, the revolt of the 14th century would have come as a surprise to all. One of the members of the Congregation who followed the prophecies of Lucien was Valoran. Valoran was to become Pontifex Maximus and reunite the Chorus Celestial as a Tradition of the Council of Nine in 1461.

The Promethean Uprising (XXVIth Vision of Lucien)

The One came unto me. There was a man bound to a rock in an endless sea too tightly to do anything save to writhe in torment. He was here as a punishment for daring to steal the fire from Heaven. Three eagles flew above him, circled him, each taking turns striking him. It came to pass that these eagles turned to speak to each other while aloft. The first eagle spoke, saying, "We are here to follow the dictates of the King of the Skies, He who placed us here, for He is good and just, and this man attempted to steal that which belongs to our King." And when he was through he again dove to strike the chained man.

The second eagle spoke, saying, "We are here to understand the secrets of flying and the mysteries of nature. We question why the lightning strikes as it does, and we desire to control it. I know not of your King." Contemplating this, he ignored the chained man.

The third eagle spoke, saying, "We are here to experience the joy of flight, to thrill at the beating of our hearts, to draw power from the blood of the chained man. I know not of your King." Contemplating this, she ignored the chained man.

The first eagle spoke again, saying, "You are both wrong." To the second eagle he said, "You desire only power, secrets and knowledge, but not wisdom." To the third eagle he said, "You seek the dark thrills of the physical life and not the lessons they offer." The first eagle ignored the chained man that he might argue with the others, until it finally came to pass that all three eagles fought each other in the sky. They tore at each other until they could barely fly, and they went to the chained man's rock for a rest. When they alighted they saw that the chained man was free, for they had forgotten to watch him. Weakened as they were they could do nothing, so he chained them to the rock and he reigned as king.

The One said unto me: "O man, you and the many Singers are the eagles, and a time of tears is coming when you shall no longer fly and shall instead be imprisoned by those you should have contained."

The visions and prophecies of Lucien indeed came to pass, and Valoran led the Chorus in the dark times with wisdom, courage and determination. Yet it would take many centuries to repair the damage wrought by the ignorance, pettiness and smallness perpetrated in the name of the One.

forces of the conservative Christian Singers. In 1461, the Congregation was able to present a unified face to the Council of Nine under the name of the Celestial Chorus.

"This did not end all division within the new Chorus. As the Protestant Reformation grew and more groups split away from the Roman Catholic Church, new stresses developed. If it was not for the external threat of the strengthened Order of Reason and the Nephandi, it is doubtful that even as charismatic a leader as Valoran could have held our disparate brethren together. Thus, in adversity came new strength. As the Order of Reason grew, visions of a dark future were visited upon many seers and visionaries. The main threat was the rejection of religion in daily life. Fortunately, these things helped to bring together the Chorus even more. In 1545 and continuing into 1563, came the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent. The sins of the Inquisitions started to come to roost. The most pernicious of Inquisitions (the Spanish) was brought to a close by the pope, and, while such ecclesiastical events could not be disavowed, a gentler Church came out of the fire and brimstone. A prohibition on Inquisitions with secular supervision was included quietly in the documents of the Council, and the Roman Church tried to begin to emerge from the ashes of disaster."

"Following the Catholic counter-reformation, we stabilized a great deal. By this time, the Chorus had very definitely become something other than the original religions that had initially fostered us. Our doctrines of acceptance and of the One placed us firmly in the camps of heresy to those of more conventional faiths. This became a time of slow decline for the Chorus.

"You see, by this time, the Order of Reason had firmly established its foothold. We originally had a strong influence on humanity. We'd helped in the spread of faith and many views of religion, but it devolved into too much fighting, too much bloodshed and dogmatism. We watched for 100 years as our control eroded. The Order of Reason brought in its wonderful cosmic machine, its mathematics and sciences, trying to logic our God right out of existence.

"We'd spent so long fighting the other mystics like the Verbena and the Order of Hermes, and even ourselves, that we missed out on the threat coming from behind. We completely missed the people who believed in something that was not a variation on our belief or a relation to it, but in something opposite."

Brother William paused to sip at his tea. "Woo. Parching my throat again." Jeremiah smiled and waited for him to continue.

"Anyhow. The situation stabilized, but the damage had been done. We started a slow decline. It seemed that each century, fewer and fewer people came to the cloth. They didn't believe any more, or they didn't want to.

"By the time we reach our century—"

Jeremiah interrupted a bit pensively. "What happened in between there? That's, what, five centuries?"

"Well," Brother William said, shifting in his seat, "not too much, really. Sure, we had some good religious thinkers, but no big revivals, no tremendous Crusades, no great creations of potent Adytums. Like I said, it was slow decline. We weren't going to give up ground quickly or easily. People just started deserting the churches. Faith became as hollow as those empty buildings.

The Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon

From within and without the Celestial Chorus has come almost a universal obsession with the Knights Templar. Hugh de Payen founded the Poor Soldiers of Christ in 1119 CE, but like many stories of knights, his begins in blood and tragedy. The Saracens had killed 300 religious pilgrims and kidnapped another 60, which prompted nine knights to swear holy vows to protect pilgrims in their travels to the Holy Land. The orders enjoined these knights to live lives of poverty, chastity and obedience, and made them regular canons of the Church, although their work was not confined to any single cathedral. King Baldwin of Jerusalem supported their efforts initially, and he granted them a wing of his personal quarters on the north side of the Temple of Solomon. They named themselves from this location, becoming the Military Order of the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon. They operated from this location for nine years, with little record of their activities. Records of their activities as an Order begin in earnest in 1128 with the Council of Troyes.

In this Council, St. Bernard of Clairvaux drew up a code of behavior and definition of the Order for the Knights Templar. This *Rule* started with 72 articles and grew to over 600. The *Rule* covered every aspect of the Templars' life, from what to eat to how to dress to what weapons to use. By 1130, the Knights' numbers had grown to over 300. Papal bulls followed, which allowed the Templars to build their own chapels not under diocesan control, to bury their own dead, and to keep the spoils of war taken from the enemy. In their close to 200-year "official" history, they gained the wealth of nations, were the envy of the poor folk whose young

were ripe to be recruited into the Order, gained great prestige and became the bankers of the world.

Then in 1307, King Philip the Fair of France ordered the arrest and incarceration of all Templars in France on the charge of heresy. This order was odd in itself since the Papal Inquisition usually handled such cases, but the pope gave dispensation to allow it. It is widely speculated that King Philip trumped up these charges in his envy for the enormous wealth of the Temple and that his real purpose for doing so was to gain said enormous wealth. Over a seven-year period, knights were arrested, tortured, tried and convicted of heresy. Some were burned at the stake, but most recanted their "heresy" and joined other Orders as their penance. It is considered odd that these knights (almost to a man) admitted to sodomy, heresy, devil-worship and defiling the name and image of Jesus Christ.

Before his death, Jacques de Molay, Grand Master of the Temple, decided that he would make a sacrifice to protect the Order. The records remain muddy regarding the manner in which de Molay was kept apprised of developments, but the Templars were already master conspirators by this time. Doubtless, a combination of magical spying and Byzantine politicking made them one of the first successful espionage teams in addition to their other skills. Plans were set into motion, and the remaining Templars started to amass a significant portion of their fortune for a secret departure from public life. When all seemed in order, Grand Master de Molay confessed to the crimes specified in the spurious charges laid out by King Philip. While Philip was setting the execution date, expeditions left from certain buildings in Paris, London and Jerusalem. By the evening before the day on which de Molay was scheduled to be burned at the stake, the majority of the vast wealth plus 250 Knights of the Temple had disappeared without a trace, never to be seen by Sleepers' eyes again.

On a dreary Paris day in 1314, Jacques de Molay was set to be executed by being burned at the stake. He went to the pyre quietly until he was granted his right of final statement. When he spoke, he recanted his confession, saying that the only treason he committed was against the Temple, by admitting a fraudulent guilt. He further called upon Philip the Fair and the pope to meet him at the throne of God inside the year. He was executed at the stake, but he steadfastly refused to cry out in his pain and distress. His final words came to pass, for both the pope and King Philip the Fair died inside the year. Within that time period, the pope dissolved the Order. It never emerged into the public eye again.

Under their new Grand Master, Henri du Marquet, the Knights Templar had contacts with both the Celestial Chorus and the Order of Reason. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Templars were sympathetic to the Cabal of Pure Thought. When the survivors gathered in Montsalvat, the Cabal proposed that the Templars continue to protect Christendom in secret. Battered and beaten, they agreed, although doing so resulted in the Order being a mere strong-arm for the Cabal. Over the centuries, the Templars continued in their mission, although the doctrine of *One Faith, One Church, One World* had to be abandoned because of the Reformation. Finally, the Temple was betrayed by the Order of Reason in 1837. It was revealed that the Order of Reason planned to completely abandon religion although the Templars were to remain beholden to them. With this final indignity, the Templars refused and made plans to resist. Once again, the Temple was to be decimated and reformed by an eleventh-hour appointee to Grand Master.

Under Christopher the Just, the Templars revised the *Rule* and took on new responsibilities.

The Edicts of the Just

- Establish a new Christendom;
- Defend innocents from the horror of the supernatural;
- Defeat the Order of Reason-betrayers and promulgators of irreligion;
- Preserve the Order itself, with secrecy as a paramount directive.

For the next 150 years, the Templars survived as a spread conspiratorial cell organization. A combination of high secrecy, phenomenal battle skills and handed-down wealth, influence and magical treasures made them very successful in spite of their woefully small numbers and narrow goals. By the 1990s, some of the Templar recruits had become liberal enough to consider the possibility of working with those who might accept religions other than Christendom. They do so not to promote any other faith, of course, but to strike an alliance with the greater goal of strengthening the Order and the soldiers of God. By 2000, the Templars had split hotly in debate over this issue. Many remained convinced that only adherence to their ancient code and correct and final justice dealt to heretics could be accepted, but they were loath to raise swords against their brethren in violation of preservation of the Order. Several dozen Templars finally came full circle and reunited with the Celestial Chorus, to bring their swords to the fore once more.

"Which brings us to today. We have far-flung contacts across the world and many, many different religions in our organization. We all search out ways to commune with the One, and to put each other in touch with that calling. A noble organization, yes?

"Sadly, we haven't stopped the fighting. It'll kill us, one of these days, if we let it. You see, Jeremiah, that's our big failing. Each one of us is so convinced that he's got some little handle on the truth that we can never quite agree. And if we can't agree among ourselves, how can we possibly hope to bring unity to everyone else?"

Jeremiah pursed his lips, troubled. "I'd think that the Chorus would be able to work these problems out. I mean, come on! People are literally getting killed over this!"

William sighed, "Yes, just like they did 500 years ago. Jeremiah, you'll find that the more pressing the problem, the harder it becomes to solve. I'm just an old monk. I can see that you want to do some good, but think. There are a dozen more Choristers out there, just like you, full of spark and vigor, all with great ideas for how to make things better, but those ideas are all *different* from yours."

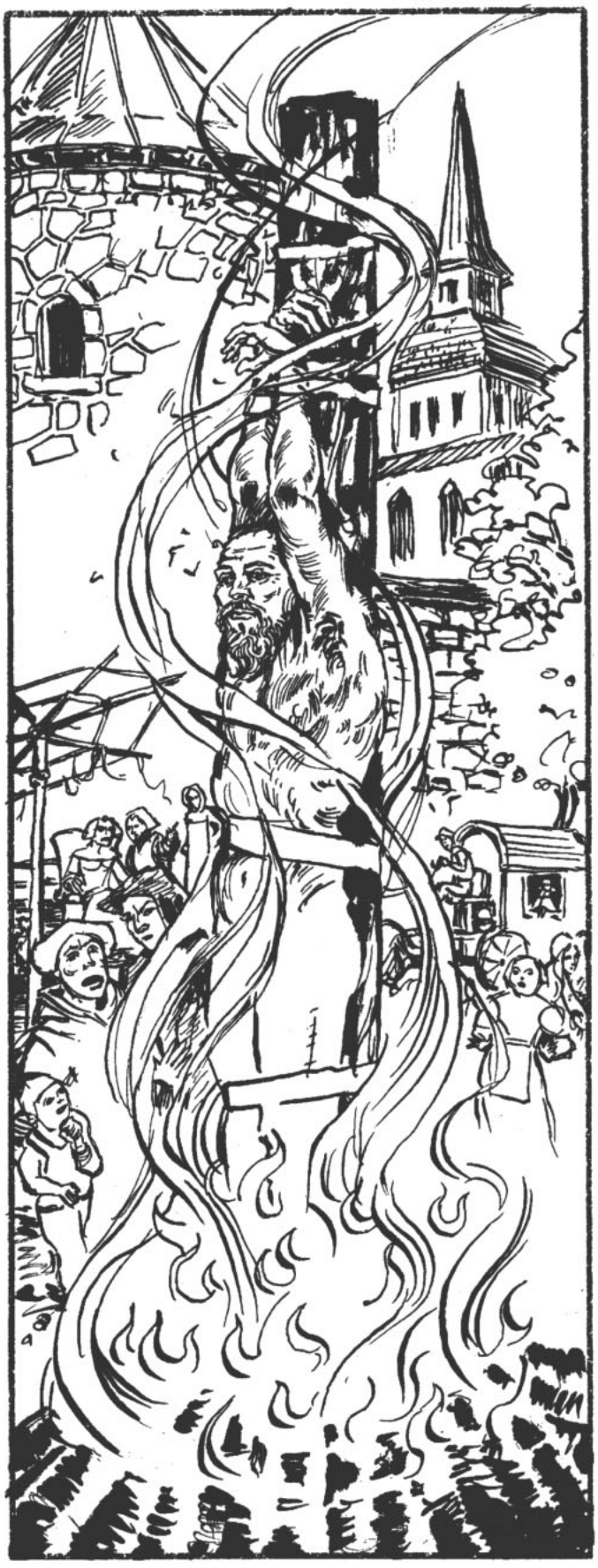
"Oh. I see what you mean," Jeremiah opined, gnawing on his lip.

"Yes. And now you see why we're so desperate. We want to show people a better way, but we can't agree on one. We need more help, but fewer and fewer people come every year. Now we have communications all around the world, with people who can talk to us about anything, with religions that nobody in Europe had even heard of during the Middle Ages, but it also gives us so much more to argue about. We've argued ourselves to a standstill."

"So how do we fix it?" Jeremiah asked.

William held up his finger and grinned. "Exactly the question to ask. We do it the way we fix anything: one piece at a time. We're out there every day doing things to make this world a little better for people. We give people hope, my boy, a chance to see the world for the beautiful creation that it is. Well, we have to do the same thing with our own ranks. We need to remind them that they're all in it for the same thing, something beautiful and eternal. And that happens one person at a time. Who knows? Maybe you'll be the one to do it. If you even touch the life of one other member of the Chorus, you might start the ball rolling.

"Simon Pain, he travels the world looking for great truths. Sometimes he finds them. In order to make use of them, though, you have to get people to



The Chorus's Vision for Humanity

Celestial Choristers tout a communion between humanity and divinity — but what exactly does that entail?

While the divine is, perforce, a creation of spirit, and emanations of the One are reflected with Prime, any human can embrace faith. The Chorus hopes to teach people to put aside fear and ego, because the rewards of a knowing and compassionate relationship with the cosmos outstrip the dry impersonality of a purely logical cosmos. Just as humans are more than machines of logic, so too do the Choristers see all of Creation as something greater than a set of cosmic cogs; to the Chorus, the One really *does* care what happens to humanity. While perhaps distant and inscrutable, the One insures that the human with faith lives in a universe that reflects the positive character of the faithful.

Of course, a spiritual life must stem from a proper physical housing. While Choristers aren't necessarily fanatical in their pursuit of exercise, diet or mores, most have at least a few strictures that they obey. To some, the strictures help to provide a sense of sacrifice that helps the individual to rise above material concerns. To others, these are willing sacrifices made to please the One and open the way to communion. The body is a temple, after all, and so most Choristers recognize the value of simple, clean, healthy lifestyles. Specifics vary from faith to faith, but it's the sense of sacrifice or discipline — the individual's decision to perform a specific act out of faith — that's important.

Ideally, the Chorus hopes to show everyone that their world is more than the science espoused by the Technocracy. By quelling doubts and bringing compassion and caring, the Chorus acts as messengers for divinity, showing by example how humans can rise above their animal natures to seek a more sublime existence. The Chorus, in some ways, is about service: Not simply service to the One, but also service to all humanity, because humanity must have help if it's to achieve communion with the One. When everyone puts aside their fear, hate and greed, then the path will be open for Ascension.

accept them. He's not so good at that, you may have noticed." William's eyes twinkled.

"Uh, yeah. Say, is this where—" Jeremiah started.

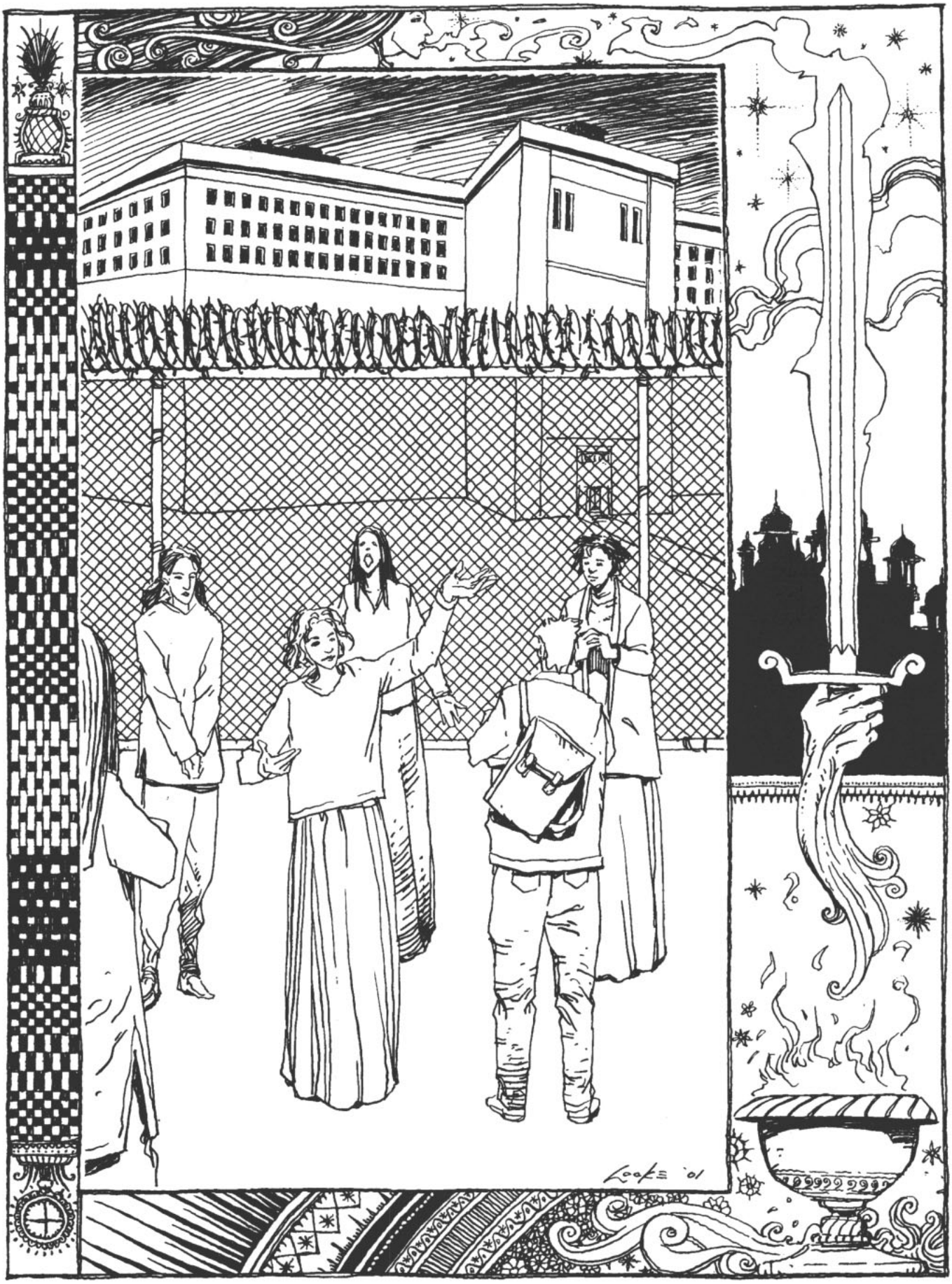
"—I tell you about how he came to us? No, that you'll find out a little later." William put his hands on his knees and stood up creakily. "Now, it's time for you to mull things over. We'll have time for some more questions tomorrow. And then, you pack."

The Chorus Around the World

Given the Chorus' church-based predilections, strength in the Americas and Europe isn't surprising. Of course, the Chorus isn't solely limited to these locales. While many prominent Choristers count the Americas as their home, Europe still has a very strongly religious population, especially in Spain. Further afield, though, matters become a bit more sketchy.

Choristers in the Far East are pretty rare — perhaps half are missionary Choristers, and the other half are indigenous people. Awakened individuals of a religious bent tend to gravitate to the culturally identifiable Euthanatos or Akashic Brotherhood in Asia. This doesn't mean that the Chorus is without representatives, but it is a little lower on the totem pole than other Traditions in those homelands. While the Chorus once made messianic expansion a priority, increasingly modern sensibilities have convinced most Choristers to simply let matters well enough alone, rather than fighting with other Traditions for potential members.

Africa has an odd dichotomy as far as the Chorus is concerned. On the one hand, missionary groups do still work for and with the Chorus, and conversions that trace back to the colonial era still gather followers. However, the Chorus has strong competition from the shamanic and tribal heritage of the area. Choristers from Africa tend to be one of two types: Either straight-laced and hyper-conservative, or syncretists who happily blend Judeo-Christian faith with spirituality, shamanism and ritual. The occasional compromise shows up, but most tend to fall into one of these stereotypes.



Chapter Two: Holy Tasks, Sacred Paths

God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illuminated by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.

—Dag Hammarskjold

Nona: Pain

If there had been someone there to hear her, she would have screamed. Instead, she whimpered.

The drugs no longer stopped the pain. Every piece of skin, every hair, every small tendon and muscle hurt. She no longer even had the will to push against the shackles that held down her feet or the handcuffs that pinned her hands to her side. When she closed her eyes because the vertigo made her want to vomit, she saw only the face.

She tried to keep her eyes open, but her vision was fading. The white fluorescent light had washed the face out only hours before. Now she couldn't see the light at all. She was lost in the darkness, with only a face, a shadowed, twisted floating face in front of her. She knew then what the blackest part of her mind had suspected for a very long time: There was a hell, and it was waiting on her.

And behind the face — the dark shadowed, leering face — she saw a dot of light. It was barely the size of a gnat, but it was definitely, distinctly there. And part of her mind, the part that thought this fate had always been coming, said to her, "The light is only a gesture... a small one.... It is too little, it is too late."

But in the farthest reaches of her conscious thought, she could hear a voice singing, "The smallest crack will break the dam, and all the water will run free."

And the pain became so great that she could no longer think to form words, so she moaned and hoped that whatever heard her would understand it as a prayer.

Jeremiah: Entering the Circle

"For the living we sing. We sing of the One who led our people out of slavery in Egypt. 'Remember what God did for me when I was a slave in Egypt?' For you sisters, we sing the songs of Miriam who celebrated liberation, hoping one day you will walk free."

A leader Jeremiah couldn't see intoned the prayer to the group of women standing near the gate. After the cool reason and cooler climes of Brother William's quiet home, the unforgiving heat of a Texas afternoon seemed especially cruel. Jeremiah's cab sped off behind him, but he kept a respectful distance from the cluster of women who were gathered by the tall, barbed-wire-topped fences that surrounded the vast complex. He hoped that when their service was over, someone would recognize him.

"For the dying, we sing," the leader began again. "We sing a song for our mothers, each of them prisoners in their time. Abraham let Sarah be taken by the Pharaoh for his harem. Rachel and Leah were kept prisoners at their father's side while Jacob slaved 14 years at their father's land. Tamar and Rahab were whores, and Miriam was born a slave. Ruth was a foreigner and an alien — a woman born outside mercy and the law."

"Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah receive your souls and guide you into light," several women said together.

"You must be Jeremiah," a woman's voice whispered behind him.

He nodded and turned. The woman was tall with large eyes. Her face looked serious, although she seemed to be younger than even he was.

"Brother Jeremiah," she said, "I'm Squire Martha of the Remnant Knights of St. George." She named her alliance as if it were a matter of great importance, but she seemed to both relish and loathe the title of squire. "My Knight is Sibyl Jones of the Last Watch Cabal in New Orleans."

"Amen!" In the distance the gathered women responded to a prayer he could not understand. They stood in silence, then a few began to sing. Squire Martha sighed and stood by to watch the proceedings.

"I suppose I should welcome you to hell," she added. "Worst place in the world for a mentor's exchange. There's nothing to do, nothing to think about doing and more heat every day. I wanted my mentor to send me somewhere exciting, no luck." She paused. Eventually the women stopped. They did not linger or talk. When they finished their silent prayers, they wandered away. "So you want to meet the Rebbe? I'll introduce you."

All but one woman had gone, and she turned to them as they approached. She had a way of carrying herself that made her seem taller than she was, and she seemed to emit a steady, sad warmth. She wore a gray tee shirt, worn jeans and old roper boots. Her hair was cropped short, dark and graying on the sides, and she was pulling a long rainbow-colored stole from her shoulders slowly.

"Jeremiah," Martha said, "This is Rabbi Deborah Levin." She took a step back as if she'd escorted him to a formal introduction at court.

This, he suddenly realized, was Deborah Levin, the "Rebbe," the Teacher that William Rathman had sent him to look for because she was one of the few remaining Chorus Masters on Earth.

She reached out and took both of his shoulders, looked into his eyes a moment and, with her soft, quiet and distinctively Texan voice said, "Welcome, Jeremiah. May the One come with you."

Jeremiah Learns

In the car on the way home, Martha stretched out in the back seat, looking like she was dozing. Jeremiah sat in front with the Deb — she had forbidden him to ever call her Rabbi Levin.

Jeremiah watched the compound walls disappear in the distance. "What was that place?" he asked her finally.

"It's a prison — The Texas Federal Women's Medical Center. Martha says the whole of Fort Worth, Texas is a hell. If so, that place is hell's fuckin' heart."

"Maximum security?"

The rabbi snorted. "They convict a woman on minor charges — drug possessions mostly — and if she's too ill for a normal minimum security place, the Board of Prisons sends her here to the hospital. The prisoners, the judges, the families... they don't have a choice. Family doctors aren't allowed to see them. Some report going six months with everything from cancer to gangrene to meningitis and never seeing a medic, never receiving any treatment. The staff confiscates medicines, ignores doctor's recommendations, shackles minimum security prisoners to beds, performs surgery on the wrong body parts, restricts a family's access to the dying. You know a woman can get raped one day, turn to drugs, get busted and end

Prayer

To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know there is more....

—Joy Harjo

At its heart, the members of the Chorus are people of prayer. For the Chorister, prayer is an expression of a firm belief in another reality above and beyond what the everyday world offers.

The common prayers associated with Chorus magic include *petition* (in which one asks — sometimes even pleads with — the One to grant requests) and *command* (in which the Chorister does not so much presume to command the Divine as to draw on the Divine in order to command creation).

All to often, however, these two prayers are the extent that the Chorus character prays. If the Chorus teaches us one thing, it's that The One isn't simply a divine "it" hovering over the world or a well that they are free to tap and exploit. The One is a "You."

Not all Choristers believe that the Divine is a specific person, but nearly all believe that the Divine can be touched through human love and experience. They address Her/ Him as they address one whom they love and have come to know. For the Chorus, prayer is not a rote casting formula that Hermetic neonates might call a "spell." It is a conversation with the Divine and an important element of every aspect of life. The Chorus believes that prayer must be constant if it is to truly nourish and transform the soul.

Prayer is the point at which the Chorus' paradigm intersects so many others. Even the most sophisticated paradigms cannot eradicate belief in divine intervention completely, even those who regard it only as simple luck, random chance or odd coincidence. Using prayer as a focus, a Chorister may work in tandem with almost any other mage, regardless of the Tradition or paradigm of the Effect's leader. The only exception is for an Effect or ritual that diametrically opposes her Resonance or most cherished beliefs. Therefore, a Chorister with some understanding of Life may pray that the One guides the hand of an Etherite doctor performing surgery or even that the One may show a Progenitor researcher how to cure a terrible disease.

up spending more time here than her rapist spent in a state penitentiary?"

Jeremiah didn't say anything for several minutes.

"I'm the Jewish chaplain, but I'm too noisy. They keep threatening to fire me."

"Sounds awful," he finally ventured.

"It is. I don't like it one bit, but you should try being one of the women who doesn't get to leave at the end of the day. First lesson, Jeremiah: The One never asks, the One only calls. This place is like a nasty piece of string, all twisted and knotted up on itself, and somehow I've gotten knotted up in it. It needs to be unraveled. I can cut myself loose and go, but if I do that, the knot still stays behind.

"Second: When the One calls you, your options never include walking away. Never simply assume the One's too lofty above all of us normal people and abandon reality-that-is for a life way in the middle of the air. There are some people called to do that, but there are some who just do it because it's too hard to keep caring and keep fighting. Status quo's the biggest demon ever lived, and if we want to see the hundred other possibilities come to life, then we never walk away from challenging reality. And this is the third thing. Before you have change — what the other Traditions call 'magic' — you have to have hope. You have to know that the One so far surpasses everything else that eventually, in spite of all the evidence, what's right is what will become."

Moving Forward

Rachel showed him to his room, let out another sigh and started to tell him more about her life with the knights in New Orleans as he unpacked. She probed him for details about his life with Brother William at the same time. "I hoped when she sent me to study with another mentor I would get to go work with the Varghese survivors in India or the Michaelites in Brazil, but instead she sent me here...."

The sound of someone coming up the stairs hushed Martha, and an older woman with frizzy blond hair, broader hips and broader shoulders, appeared in the hall. Martha stopped and introduced Jeremiah to "Sister" Susannah who greeted him with a wide grin and a short laugh.

"Newest exchange, eh?" she said. "Welcome, get comfortable. I'm from the Fool's Feast Cabal in Providence. My mentor is a member of the Silver Moon Clan, which I'm sure you've never heard of." Susannah was a beautiful woman, and Jeremiah caught himself grinning, at a complete loss for words. Susannah

laughed at him. "Well then, unpack your tongue and we'll talk more later. I've got to help Deb with dinner. You, too, oh squirrelly one. Get moving!" She winked laughed and headed downstairs. Martha shrugged, grimaced and followed. Jeremiah watched after them a few minutes, finished unpacking and went down the stairs as well.

Night Falls

Sundown had come late in the southern summer, and Jeremiah was tired from his trip and the heat by the time the Sabbath arrived. He assisted Deb with preparations as best he could.

"Hardly seems a day of rest if you have to run around so much to get ready for it," she had laughed to him. She lit the candles as the sun started to set. When it was gone, the Sabbath started. Jeremiah barely had time to catch the name of Deb's oldest student, Muriel, who looked East Indian but had a vaguely European accent.

"Blessed are you Lord our God, ruler of the universe who has sanctified our lives through wisdom, commanding us to kindle the Sabbath lights."

Deborah paused and covered her eyes three times. The other students mimicked her motions. She paused, said something in Hebrew, then spoke in English.

"The light of the sun is gone. The Sabbath has come. We are a people set apart, this is a time set apart. We close our eyes to the cold and harsh light of the reality we are told is there. We open them to the gentle flame of the One to see the hundred worlds we know to be possible. We are told that work and success are the gods that run our lives. We are told to not stop, not rest, not reflect, only run. We close our eyes, ourselves, to those demands. We open our eyes to the One in whom our work finds its success. May the One give us rest, the One give us peace, the One refresh us. May the Holy One bring us to unending bliss."

"May the One be blessed forever," they answered. Martha spoke half a beat off from the others.

Deb spoke the words of the service in Hebrew and repeated them in English. She stopped every now and again to offer commentary and explanation. When she came to the part of the service where the parents of a traditional family would have blessed their non-adult children, she leaned over and whispered some words to each of her students, resting a hand on their heads as she did so. Martha was third, and as Deb whispered to her, he could swear the younger woman rolled her eyes. Then Deb turned to Jeremiah, placing her hands over his head. For a moment she said nothing, then nodded and whispered in his ear.

The Silver Moon Clan

Night is our ministry and silence our diocese.
—Thomas Merton

From time immemorial, songwriters, singers, bards and minstrels have found their places among the people of faith. Many of these wandering holy singers heeded Valoran's summons to the first Council and found a home among the members of the Chorus. They were alternately chastised for their disorganization, sensuality and unpredictability and loved for their simple lives and beautiful worship songs, although more conservative members disdained them as being far too much like the hedonists in the Cult of Ecstasy.

Many attempts to organize these mendicant musicians, performers and storytellers have come and gone over the years. Before the Reformation, many wandering Christian musician-mystics joined to form the Society of St. Brendan, and similar groups came and went in India and Russia. The remnant members of these varied groups joined together in 1968 to form the Silver Moon Clan, a loosely organized network of individuals and cabals. They claim to have chosen the name because, like the moon, their outward forms change, but they always hoped to bring light into dark times and dark places.

Although almost all Silver Moons are wanderers, many have at least a base of operations or Chantry that they consider home — although they may not see it for months at a time. Their charter, the document that unifies them, states their mission as follows: "Keeping watch, with the One, on those who work, wander, watch or pray at night; going where we are called; taking only what we can carry; singing comfort to those in sorrow, mourning with those in grief, laughing with those who rejoice."

Due to the seemingly random nature of their wanderings, many Silver Moons, especially those who first study magic within the faction, have deep insights into the Sphere of Entropy. Like many Chorus factions, they have come to accept the assistance of sorcerers and psychics, and many of their non-Awakened companions study the Paths of Alchemy (Herbalism), Conveyance, Divination, Fortune, Shadowcasting or Weather Control. Others practice the phenomena of Precognition, Psychoportation, Psychic Invisibility and Telepathy.

"May the One make you, Jeremiah, like the fire of a candle. May the One make you, Jeremiah, not like the sons of Joseph, but like your namesake, like the sons of the prophets. May you be a light by which people may see truthfully.

"Ya see, kiddos o' mine," she said after a pause. "The first thing you have to learn is hope. In the face of all the little factoids, you have to still know that the One, and not the status quo, is the source of being and the creator of life. In order to do that, the first thing you have to unlearn is idolatry. At the heart of our way, our 'magic,' is monotheism, the complete rejection of idols. I'm not talking about the little rejections of elephant-headed figurines or the simple negation of iconography. We can debate the virtue of images and symbols until the sun ceases to shine, and we waste an entire Sabbath. I want to talk more about those later this week while Jeremiah is here with us. An idol isn't simply a graven image.

"You ask for a second, what about those Hindus and Sikhs and Mithraites, then? How come they're part of the Chorus? Well, because the idols I'm talking about aren't just stone statues, and the monotheism I mean isn't just saying that if you have many gods you're wrong.

"At the start, the creation, the One established orders of Powers — angels and spirits who were to serve humanity and all of the created world. But when humanity went astray, it dragged these Powers along with it. The One was too complex, so they turned the world on its head and found these simple servants and dressed them up as gods. Idols, then, are angels — ideas, messages — who have lost their place and lost their way.

"The idols of choice have changed throughout history — and herstory, too. But this is theology time, and good theology is about now — the time our magic is called to take place. There are four big ones that have been with us the longest and against whom we often fight the hardest. As I see it, these are the big idols that the status quo is all set to jizz themselves over.

"The first is *Money*. Rabbi Yeshua and his contemporaries referred to this one by the name Mammon. Though one of newest, he has become the most popular: He is universal, grants great abundance, and his service is the gateway to incredible power. If we take his name in vain — claiming the power of money when we don't have it, or promising money will do things that don't happen — the authorities punish us. His economy of grace, though, is limited and arbitrary.

"The next to oldest are the twins: *Vanity* and *Gluttony*, though they're the most complicated. Beauty, eros, pleasure, ecstasy, all are like food.

Human life without them is harsh and lacks meaning or joy. But when they're pursued exclusively, they're vicious and decadent masters, willing to sacrifice anything, including health, relationships and dreams, for their next rush.

"Their sister is *Utility*, whose judges are damn harsh bastards. Her messenger is the clock, and her scale is success. Don't cross her. She weighs lives in the balance, and when she finds them wanting, she trims away mercilessly. She is blind like Justice. Unlike Justice, she has no truck with mercy. She is the newest of the lesser gods, coming of age only a century ago, but she was quick to grasp power.

"*Size* is the most ancient of them all. Freud discovered him or rediscovered him, but Freud didn't know the half of it. Size is the final arbiter of the power that the others may grant, for they reward their truest followers with the largest treasures, the greatest efficiencies, the most expansive egos, the longest reigns.

"The point of all this isn't to get us to have the idols fall down and be destroyed, for 'nothing was created that was not good' as my own teacher used to say. We do not seek to abase ourselves or reject material joys just to remain pure and unsullied by the world. We do not forget the grandeur of great architecture or the delight of a rich dessert.

"What we reject, my dears, is that any of these things must be the great determiners of our lives, the lords of our decisions. Like Israel's children, we are in Egypt, but the Pharaohs go by the names of success and self-interest. We do not want gods who see us only as playthings and servants. We want to know ourselves as members of the household of the One, the same One who seeks not slaves, but beloved children and cherished friends.

"All right, as you might guess, I didn't just pull those five aforementioned idols out of my nether regions. In the One, we know their power to be ultimately flaccid and false. Money is merely a symbol. Destroy the system that empowers it, and you have destroyed its power. Utility presumes too much, for she drives us to work for ends that do not fulfill us. Vanity finds out he's time's slave. Even if he doesn't wither and age, he soon discovers that the fickle desires he sought to ensnare us with have changed. What power does Size have when the greatest of explosions is caused merely by dividing the smallest of atoms? Even time falls victim to his own inability to measure out the moments of life that seem most profound and most significant. The shortcomings of these misguided angels are well known. Even those ensnared by the status quo will admit, under pressure, their gods' futility. But their power is everywhere, knit deeply into our lives.

"The question, kiddos o' mine, is how do we escape them? How do we see beyond them to the One who is our life and source and hope?

"I believe we answer these idols with holy practices, holy focuses, of which I think, the first is prayer. These practices are the first movements in a dance that draws more deeply into the Way of The One. Though there are numerous practices — many overlapping with those of other Traditions — there are some that are the most basic and are almost universal. All of the practices we follow have two elements: an inward element and an outward element.

"These two elements are important. We do not seek Ascension for ourselves alone, but for the whole of Creation. We must not forget anyone if we can help it. The One, in Her wisdom, created nothing out of spite. Everything in the world is loved. As the Jews say, 'Our blood is no redder than theirs.'

"However, working for the life of Creation does us little good if we have forgotten the life of our own souls. We cannot believe that all of Creation is precious and loved unless we know ourselves to be precious and loved. We cannot make sacrifices of ourselves unless we know ourselves to be truly valuable children of the One. Thus does our magic work.

"But we will talk more on these things tomorrow. The Sabbath is a day of rest, so let's get to resting."

Nightmares

Martha tossed and turned through the night, unable to rest or completely wake up, caught in a nightmare that wouldn't let her go.

She'd gone through a similar thing the night the first Varghese master died, his blood falling to the ground a hundred times over in her dreams. Nightmare upon nightmare wracked the knights' sanctuaries, until the Varghese were almost decimated in the end, and the rest of the Knights of St. George with them.

But this sensation was something different. It was as if part of her, some terrible desperate forgotten part of her, was crying out without comfort.

In her mind, in the dream's darkness, she heard a very quiet voice that sounded almost like that of her grandmother, but quieter. It sang, "The smallest crack will break the dam, and all the water will run free."

NONA: THE DEVIL UNDER THE BED

For more than six hours, the dark shape sat over her, its smirk never floating more than a few inches from her face. The nurses came, increased the painkillers, checked the security of the cuffs, made sure she wasn't faking and left.

You're alone, aren't you...dear? Who's here for you now? I guess there's no one but me. Where are all your lovers? Gone? Family? Did they forget you? Who'll mourn you when you go? Who will honor your memory?

Do not worry, child. Even for you, for a whore like you, there is a final burning intimacy, a consuming bliss, a last perfect union. Soon you will not turn away from me ever again. I and the Maker are one.

A cold spectral finger touched the edge of a bedsore on her lower left thigh. Her body writhed as the caress hit an exposed and aggravated nerve.

Come, Nona, be One in our bliss.

The voice began to laugh, although the face never moved.

Her heart stopped for the first time, but they brought her back in only a moment and left her again.

And when she came to, she felt legs and arms... invisible but more physical now, more real... tighten around her. The face bent to give her a soft, delicate kiss.

Now, now, no fair, my dear, dying before your time. Suffering makes the soul's consummation perfect.

The Dark Singers and Devil-Hunters

The counterpoint to the Celestial Choristers are the so-called Dark Singers, those who hum the discordant vibration that tears apart Creation. While the term "Dark Singer" applies equally to all Nephandi, many Choristers reserve the epithet specifically for those who turn against the Chorus to enter the Cauls. While Choristers believe in redemption for most, the Dark Singers are beyond help, for they have seen the grace of the One and rejected it.

What could prompt someone to turn from the face of God?

When all is said and done, Choristers are still human. (As human as any mage is, anyway.) They're vulnerable to temptation and doubt. They do, fortunately, have a stronger moral center than many members of other Traditions, since the Chorus teaches morality hand-in-hand with magic and academia. Nevertheless, some Nephandi are very good at what they do, and the devil can tempt even the most virtuous.

Some Choristers of the guardian orders (p. 42) take on the moniker of Devil-Hunter. Instead of fighting the Tradition's other enemies, these Choristers hunt down infernal entities, wicked spirits and Nephandi. It's a rough job, but it's an exhilarating one (and a fun one for an action-oriented character). The Chorister must balance violent impulses with the need to exact justice. Even the angels kill at the One's command, though...

Jeremiah: A Day's Work

Jeremiah rolled over in the large bed and saw that the sky was turning gray. For a moment he forgot where he was.

"You dozed."

It was Susannah. He was in her room, clothed and asleep on her bed. She sat up in a chair opposite him and laughed quietly.

"Scandalous, you, staying up all night in a young lady's room. Martha will be terribly distressed, but she doesn't know what to make of me anyway." She pulled her mane of hair into a bun behind her head and laughed again. She laughed often, he had found.

"Well get up," she said, fluffing the pillows and covers where he had flattened them. "Shalom Shabbat. It's still Sabbath you know. Synagogue soon. Now, come here," she looked at him meaningfully, pointing to a vase in the corner where she sat. "There's something I want to show you. Some work must be done, even on the Sabbath."

He stood up, groggily, and wandered over to where she sat, taking his seat at her feet for lack of anywhere else.

"Tired puppy," she grinned at him, patting his ear and scratching his head. "Look at this." She withdrew a cut rose from the vase and brushed the tip playfully down his face. It was fresh and soft, and it felt like velvet.

"Beautiful, no? I do not know why it was cut. It seems like something like this should go on and on... forever. But it never is to be, not in this possibility." She kissed the rose's tip, set it on the bed table, and poured the vase's water into a bowl, holding it under his nose for a second. It looked clear, although he noticed the slight smell of chlorine.

"Tap water," she said, "not the purest, but neither are any of us, even the ones who pretend. But even moldy bread can be blessed. Like us, imperfect does when it needs to do.

"I was given this rose months ago in New York. My cabal went there before my mentor sent me to come study here. We slept part of the time in the streets and part of the time at a hostel and part of the time at the Y. And we sang. It's what we do, you might say.

"One night, after we finished singing, a man came up to offer me money. Now, normally, we take money when it's offered: We could live on song, I suppose, but it wouldn't work forever. But we had enough that night, and I knew that he was offering us money because it was the only thing he knew how to give. So I looked at him, looked him straight in the eye and told him no. I told him to give me something that had a bit of him in it; something that could symbolize him as long as it lasted.

"And so he went down the street, stopped in a market, bought a rose and brought it to me. And this is it. Every morning that the rose lasts, I pray for him, and I give it new water, which is God's gift to cut roses. It's lasted this long and who knows how much longer."

"For in the beginning," she said, half to the water and half to Jeremiah, "the Spirit of the One hovered over the waters and from that came life, but do you know what Spirit means? It means breath." And at that

she blew on the surface of the bowl and unclasped a medal from around her neck. She touched it to the surface of the water, and Jeremiah took a good look at it. He did not recognize the saint on the medal's face.

"Holy Mary, bless this water with your love. Blessed St. Sarah, who watches over wanderers, make this water a nourishment for all who wander, for all who are cut off from homes and lives and loves, for all who are aliens in strange lands. Let this water be their taste of the One who is their home. May those that touch it know Lady Joy, sister of Wisdom, and may every good act they do be blessed, every bad act forgiven." And with that she poured the water back into the vase, kissed the rose and dipped its tip into the water.

Then she smiled, laughed again, and removed the wet stem, using it to sprinkle Jeremiah.

"And bless Jeremiah," she laughed. "Refresh him and let him wake up, he is too groggy!" She giggled, seeming younger than he knew her to be.

"Now off with you, improper man. Be gone! I'm a good Catholic girl and this is a respectable Jewish house. It won't do to have Squire Martha see you coming out a proper young lady's rooms at sunrise." She gathered a robe and a towel, replaced the rose in the vase and scampered giggling down the hall to the bathroom.

Jeremiah returned to his room and lay on his bed. All was not right with the world, he knew that. But, as he drifted into a morning nap, he thought, for just a second, he had glimpsed the possibility that the One was indeed in Heaven.

First Song

When they returned from synagogue, everyone was quiet. Deb had asked Martha what was wrong, but the younger woman seemed reticent to talk. Muriel asked her to spar, but she passed on that as well. The others wandered up the stairs. Martha stood at the dining room table, staring off into space.

Sitting across from her in the den, Jeremiah heard her whisper out a song.

"My brothers went off to a war
And my mothers, clutching their swords, to battle.
And did they go off to glory and fame?
What evil thing did they slay?
They went to fight the darkness and died.
They gave up their spirits in fire.
Cry out in grief, the brave ones are gone.
The One, like a mother, weeps over the bodies of children."

She paused.

"That's a song for the Varghese, isn't it?" His voice faltered, the question surprising him. He knew he had heard it before, but he didn't know where.

She turned, surprised, and forced a weak smile. "'The Psalm of Our Grief'... for all who went. As they died, they cried out in our dreams to warn us away. But it was too late. By the time the last one had passed, it was too late for the last of us to even make a face of bravery. Their dying visions haunted us for months."

"I didn't know that any outside India had time even to go..."

"We saw it coming," she said. "And we went to meet it. It peeled through our warriors one by one. Cut off from our greatest, we were not prepared. My grandmother died on the very first day."

Jeremiah sputtered involuntarily.

"My mother was her only child, and she died when I was very young. My grandmother raised me. She was a great knight and one of the first to leave to join the Varghese there." She stopped and sighed.

"It's why I don't want to be here, you see. Deb is kind, but I cannot stand it. To think of all the things that sleep under our feet, waiting for our missteps, waiting to reduce the world to cinders. I want to save just one small thing, Jeremiah. Is it pride to want that? Because I don't want it to be pride. I just remember the way my grandmother made me feel — safe — and I just want to be that, just once, for somebody else before it all comes to an end."

He stood there, not knowing what he could possibly say. Suddenly she ran to him, grabbed his shoulders and hugged him very tightly, then let go and darted up the stairs, nearly knocking over Muriel and Deb as she ran. Deb nodded and Muriel followed her.

Sacraments and Symbols

A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace.

—The Book of Common Prayer, 1979

Many in the Chorus believe that the One has never favored what was great. The Prophet Elijah was listening for God, but he didn't hear God in the whirlwind or in the fire or in anything else large or powerful. The Technocracy may worship Size, but the One is compassionate to all things and is found in all things, the Choristers say, even those that are small. "The infinite and the finite kiss each other," is a simple maxim that Chorus mentors teach their newest pupils.

Choristers believe that a sacrament is the One manifest in some finite moment or way. Some are simple images that remind people of the story of their faith: the crucifix, the star of David, the crescent moon, the lotus. Others are driven more by the specific moments at which they are used: matzo, the Eucharist, the chalice, anointing oil, the laying on of hands. All function by manifesting the Divine through specific physical elements, usually grounded in key moments in the history of faith. Sometimes, though, sacramental moments seem to come with little rhyme or reason.

The symbols and sacraments of Chorus rituals tend to work in one of two ways. The first is a metaphor. When Choristers wish to purify themselves, they think of the act as washing, and so Christians, Jews and others participate in ritual washings or baptisms. Healing sects see the mystical union of all life connected with the human capacity to touch, and so they practice the laying on of hands for rites of healing or blessing. The sweet, heady, overwhelming smell of incense is the symbol of the sweet, heady, overwhelming presence of the One. When they grieve or they want to communicate the feeling of abandonment or fear, Jewish Choristers rip their clothes, showing the One the extent to which they feel their own lives are ripped open. Metaphorical sacraments rely on the connection between a spiritual act and a different but comparable physical act. Such sacraments actualize the connection between the Divine and the physical world.

The second way in which a sacrament works is through synecdoche, taking a part for its whole. This method is especially important when a Chorister wants to bind herself to a particular person or particular event. When Christians want to commune with Christ, they eat the bread and drink the wine as he did at his last supper with his disciples. When Jews want to bring themselves closer to the God of liberation and deliverance, they eat matzoh, which is a part of the story of Passover. Synecdoche also works as the basis of holy symbols. Jews are the remnant of David's kingdom, so many wear David's star and regard it as sacred. Buddhists associate many aspects of the Divine with the lotus, so they regard it as a sacred sign. In each case, a simple part of the story or tradition has come to represent the whole.

Focal Practices

While prayer, sacrament and symbol are the most widely used Chorus foci, they aren't exclusive. Many practices are not universal, but they are still used by one or more groups. Some of these foci include:

Bibliomancy: Primarily seen as a form of Divination. Bibliomancy is the practice of opening a sacred text at random and applying the words found to one's situation, this seeks the One's guidance through a combination of Holy Writ and random chance.

Blessing and Consecration: The pronouncement of blessings, often accompanied by a kind of touch, is a way of affirming the presence of The One in each other, of giving thanks for others' abilities and presence and of enabling the other to engage in the One's work. Before engaging in a minor undertaking, a Chorister may seek the blessings of colleagues, mentors or even students and friends in an attempt to draw on the Divine energy that is inherent in such affirmations. Alternatively, Choristers may grant blessings, seeking to channel Divine energy into altering the world through the work and experience of another.

Cursing: Pronouncing a curse is a grave situation, especially among Choristers in persecuted religious and ethnic communities, but it is an important instrument of Divine justice. Divine justice must be called on those who endanger others, harm the innocent and take advantage of the helpless with no sign of mercy or compassion. Curses are designed to stop evil actions and to call cursed people to repent.

Discussion: The Chorus is not a collection of soloists, it is a choir. The communities from which this choir emerges often have rich traditions of group discernment. Quaker Meetings, Rastafarian Reasonings, Rabbinical Circles and Monastic Chapters all emphasize the importance of a community working in concert to find and comprehend truth. Among Choristers who know the ways of magical discernment, such truths may be found even in the simple words of those community members who are not fully enlightened or Awakened — or even in the words of outsiders. Listening is as important as speaking at such gatherings. Who knows where the One's spirit may next be heard?

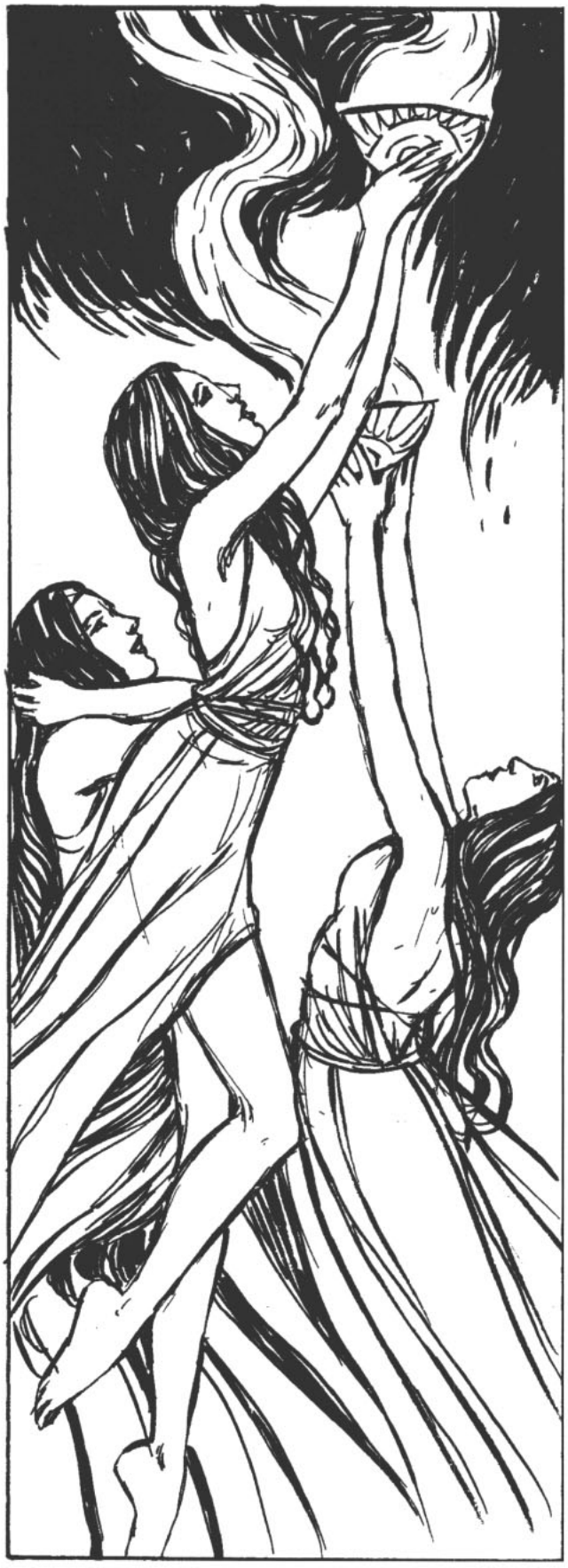
Dream Interpretation: Reawakened through the work of psychiatrist C. G. Jung, many Choristers have taken renewed interest in dreams. Many early prophets and sages were known for their ability to discern the future — as well as the best, most holy course of action — through the interpretation of dreams. They did so by discerning the meaning of the dream symbols and applying them to the future.

Fasting and Self-Denial: Many Choristers believe that modern (as well as premodern and postmodern) life's problems can be traced to the significance that people assign to money, possessions and appearances. To break down the power of those idols, Choristers engage in little acts of internal rebellion that they call self-denial. Self-denial is a recentering of oneself on what he finds to be most important, reminding him that everything he is comes from the One who gave him birth and is nourishing him every minute. The most common form of self-denial is fasting, although Choristers may also choose to deny themselves sleep, sex or any number of other pleasurable activities as a sign of devotion. In addition, a Chorister may simply believe that the One called her to give up a good thing in order to save money, time or energy for other works, or to understand fully the sufferings of the poor.

Intoxication: In the end, although the crimes and cruelties of humanity are a source of sorrow and grief, the life of divinity is a source of joy. To remind themselves, many Choristers engage in activities that draw them into states of elation and ecstasy. Sufi Muslims, Hasidic Jews and Pentecostal Christians rely on dancing and music to induce altered states of consciousness. Some Rastafarians ritually smoke or consume marijuana, which they call ganja or "wisdomweed." The Talmud commands Jews to become so drunk on the feast of Purim that they cannot tell, "Blessed be Mordechai," from, "Cursed be Haman." More than one Adytum, it is said, has been saved from attack during such celebrations. Could it be that a celebration's sheer primal and divine joy can manifest enough force to shield it temporarily from enemies who seek to interrupt it?

Lot Casting: When at a loss for determining which course of action would be best, some Choristers abandon themselves to the divine guidance of random chance and cast lots (small pieces of paper drawn at random from a bowl) to determine between two courses of action.

Music and Song: Music and song are often the shape of other foci rather than a separate focusing practice. A prayer or adoration may take the shape of a wordless instrumental solo. A petition for divine aid may be sung out as a mournful plea. Music in various



forms may alternate with silence and spoken words throughout a Chorus ritual. The music may take a number of forms. Hymns and chants are the most popular, although other types are not unknown. Rastafarians rely on reggae and ska. Indigenous peoples rely on folk music. The California-based Chantry of St. John the Musician relies on the jazz masses and ragtime hymns of composers like their patron, "Saint" John Coltrane.

Possession: Just as those who seek to serve demons often allow themselves to be taken over by their infernal masters, so those who seek the Divine find themselves surrendering their will and their bodies to the spiritual servants of the One. Often preceded by rituals of either intoxication or self-denial, the Choristers then invite the Divine spirit or its servants to enter them. Such possessions might result in prophecies or the granting of new (and temporary) powers. Often times, the Chorister simply provides her body as a vessel for an angelic being who needs to come and work on Earth. Alternatively, Choristers may summon the spiritual forces of holiness into the bodies of willing consors.

Sacrifice: To sacrifice means, literally, to share with the Divine, and sacrifices may be made as offerings of praise or thanks as well as for rites of purification or petition. Most contemporary sacrifices are those of herbs, vegetables, incense or food. Offering living animal or humans as sacrifices is rare indeed among modern Choristers in the West, but it is not entirely unheard of. Most human "sacrifices" are martyrs who give themselves freely to save others, simultaneously converting their life into the primal energy of the One.

Science and Technology: Although they are identified primarily with the Alexandrian Society and other Techgnosi factions, many young Choristers do come to a new and deeper appreciation of the One through the study of reason, science and technology. Those who do are able to focus Divine energy in subtle but powerful ways through medicines, computers and other implements and practices of modern life. Some even develop rites and prayers for blessing nurses, exorcising computers and guiding machinists. After all, all things emanate from the One.

Sex: Although it involves neither the Tantric exercises of the Akashics or the self-forgetting bliss of the Cult, Choristers' sex magic is focused on

bringing two people (or possibly more, in rare modern cases) together and channeling the energy generated. No matter what individual or corporate mores guide their sex lives (and despite rumors, there's a good bit of diversity in the Chorus on sexual matters), the actual sex magic of Choristers draws its power from the rich bonds of commitment between the participants. The participants see the act as a metaphor for the mutual love and desire that binds the Chorister to the Divine. Sex between two loving and committed partners is often the source of a Chorister's ability to heal or build places of safety. "Magical" sex often fills a Chorister with the energy he needs to perform great works of wonder and compassion.

Silence and Seclusion: Just as the One may be known in the multitudinous voices of celebratory cheers, earnest discussion, jubilant music or ritual stories, many Choristers find the One in a very real way in the absence of words, and sometimes even in the absence of noise. To grow silent outside is to eventually quiet the voices of the external distractions that creep slowly into our thoughts. When these voices are stilled, the Chorister may hear the voice of the One in new and surprising ways.

Touch: Relying on human contact to mediate and symbolize the ever-present compassion and justice of the Divine, Choristers often use simple touch to focus healing, blessing, communicating or transforming magic.

Visualization: Although it is associated primarily with the New Age movement, visualization often guides a Chorister to imagine reality in radically different ways. Such visions often become ecstatic experiences that provide Choristers with the energy needed to prophecy or work miracles. Many mentors teach active visualization as a way to stretch the mind and imagination in preparation for sensory magic.

Vows: To cement the break with the status quo and various distractions of modern life, Choristers may take vows of poverty, obedience, stability, conversion or celibacy as a sign of their undying commitment to the One. Alternatively, they may take vows as part of particular magical feats that they wish to perform, although many mentors warn their pupils never to let a vow be a form of bargaining with the Divine.

"Muriel will know what to say," Deb reassured him. "They are two women warriors cut from the same cloth. One's just a bit older. She told you about her grandmother?"

He nodded. Deb sighed.

"Her name was Dame Alicia DuMont, and she was one of the bravest women I'd ever met. Not the wisest, really, but what she lacked in a good head she made up for with a fine heart. She was a woman of no small power and, when the native Choristers crumbled, the brunt of terror fell on her. If you had any idea what she faced then, you might wonder she lasted even a day. Her cabal fell behind her. In the end, only four Varghese Disciples survived and only because their remaining knights sent them away by force to a safe place in Old Delhi. In Europe and the Americas, too, very few of the Knights stayed behind. Only those that did survived. I was one who brought most of their bodies back. Martha doesn't know that, I think. I don't know what she would say.

"That is why Sibyl sent her here. New Orleans is less and less safe for her cabal these days. The Knights were small to begin with. Now they are little more than disparate disciples and desperate Initiates... Just like the rest of the Chorus's old warriors.

"It was half of my work last year, fetching bodies, attending funerals, helping cabals develop convincing cover stories for police and families. I thought it'd never stop, but it has, for a bit." She paused for a very long time.

"I need some ice cream," she announced at last. "Want some?" Jeremiah declined. Deb walked slowly to the kitchen. He suddenly thought she seemed much older now than he'd seen her before. He went upstairs to look for Susannah.

Nona: Suffocation

In the darkness, she felt herself dangling forever at the edge of a precipice.

Her heart would stop. She would fall. The machines would whir and scream and draw her back to the edge. Four times it happened, but she no longer cared. She only wanted away from the thing that was strangling her, making her sick of her own breath. Playing with her like a cat toying with a mouse.

And then she fell a fifth time, and the low, coy laugh stopped. In the background, she heard the machines and medics screaming. She felt them

pumping her veins with chemicals to fry her back into existence, but she was beyond their reach now. She saw a dark-robed figure crouch at the edge of the precipice, heard its breath suck in, saw it lick its lips and pounce.

The pain of her body stopped. She kept falling. She knew she was dead, and she screamed as the torture of her soul began. She was falling... then she was trapped... then she was caught in thick skins from which she could not tear her way out. She was pelted on every side by a vicious swirling wind and what felt like hard boiling rain.

The dark-robed form caught her, pinned her down and started to laugh.

Preparing the Way

It might seem obvious to some, but it should be spelled out just the same. Some foci obviously cannot be performed on the spot. However, Choristers who are going into times of conflict, combat or struggle often use fasting and similar acts to prepare themselves for the trials ahead. It is the Storyteller's discretion whether such preparatory, "hanging" foci will serve for a set number of Effects or a set number of scenes or whether they work to focus on a certain type (or types) of Effects. Players and Storytellers should work this arrangement out in advance with an eye toward paradigm, character development, narrative integrity and game balance.

Jereittiah: Passing

The Sabbath was well over by the time they were hungry enough again for a light dinner. Deb took a phone call upstairs and never came down, though, so they started without her.

"The phone call will be about her work in the prison," Muriel explained to them over a dinner of simple cornbread, beans, greens and rice. "She often fasts for the prisoners, especially the dying. She hopes to take on their suffering so that their pain will not carry over too much into the next life and their souls might pass on free of anger."

"When a woman is dying there, her family cannot come to comfort her," she went on. "And they can't sit with the body because the prison leaves her in chains for a day in case she's faking death in an attempt to escape. But Deb, as chaplain, is permitted to sit with the bodies of the Jewish women and say the psalms and prayers for the dead. Among the Jews of the Chorus, Deb is the ranking member of Chevra Kedisha."

"The Chevra Kedisha?" Jeremiah asked.

"The society of those who care for the souls of the dead," Susannah said quietly.

"This one was Jewish but she didn't have a family," Deb's voice interrupted, coming down the stairs. "Her name was Nona. She died alone, and because she hadn't been a practicing Jew, they're not going to let me sit with her. Tonight, though, we'll watch with her spirit from here until her soul is ready to move on."

Susannah sighed, put down her fork and went to begin covering the mirrors.

Gates

The four of them finished and gathered with Deb in her study. There she lit olive-oil lamps and placed them around the darkened room. She set a large white cloth in the middle of her desk, opened a book and began to chant in Hebrew. Susannah set out little bowls of water and lit incense. Deborah dipped her hand in the water, touching it to the white cloth.

"Come Nona," she said, speaking the dead woman's name. "Though you died there, come and rest the night here. There, you will find only forgetfulness and hate. Come where you will hear love." She began to chant again in Hebrew.

Susannah joined the chanting, and the smoke from the incense grew thicker, hovering over the white cloth. Muriel and Jeremiah stood and stared as the smoke formed itself into patterns, seemingly random at first, but Jeremiah could swear that he saw something like a face slowly taking shape in the swirling smoke and dim light.

Then Jeremiah heard what he swore was a voice, although it was very dim and at once quite loud, cutting through the plaintive chanting like a stone through a window.

"No," Deb whispered.

The face opened its mouth as if to scream and then the shape was gone. A trick of the shadows. One lamp sputtered and went out. Deb's voice faded.

"Nona?" she whispered. There was no answer. Muriel lit the lamp again. "Hear me, Nona. We cannot sit with you there, so we sit with you here. Come and

hear us pray for you." There was only silence. The smoke from the incense simply dissipated into the dark of the room. Deborah nodded, and Susannah returned to chanting. She motioned for Muriel and Jeremiah to follow her out of the room.

"Son of a bitch!" Deb whispered. "Albertus has her." She sighed and calmed. "She won't get free unless we slap him back into place."

The four stared at her a moment.

"We'll keep watch with her, then?" Muriel asked.

"Yes, here. Muriel first. I'll wake the rest of you when it's time."

"But she isn't here, what can we do?" Martha protested.

Deb looked at her sternly. "We keep calling her here until he lets go." And with that Deb, who looked very tired, simply sat and stared at the empty space. Muriel nodded and began to whisper prayers. Martha swallowed turned and went to her room. For a minute, Susannah only clutched Jeremiah's hand. Then she led him to his own room.

"Can I stay here?" she asked in a whisper.

"Who is Albertus?" he asked almost at the same time.

She blinked, touched her face, and sat down on the bed, finally letting his hand go. "Someone Deb knew a long time ago. She says he had a fair mind and good insights. Some said he went mad, others say he Fell. Deb thinks both. Some time ago, a Chorus council banished him. He calls himself the high priest of the dead." She sighed. Jeremiah realized that she hadn't laughed for several hours.

"Deb hoped the Storm would cut him off from the world for good."

He touched her hand. "Please stay here," he said.

"Here," she said, taking a small medal out of her pocket and placing it around his neck. "May Mary, Michael and St. Martha — who was a dragon-slayer long before St. George — guard your dreams." She closed her eyes, lay down and sighed. He crawled in next to her and was soon asleep. He dreamed that a slowly growing spot of light was singing a song, but he couldn't hear it yet. Then he heard Martha say, "And the darkness has not comprehended it."

The Chorus' Many Singers

Every voice in a choir has its own distinctive character, as the Singers well know, but the Chorus' members see their missions through different lenses based upon their strengths. Some are healers, diplomats or academics; others are soldiers, investigators and demon-hunters. Where factions are concerned, the Chorus recognizes a great many small groups, some of which are composed of no more than a half-dozen people, at this point. As with all points of orthodoxy, a Chorister's internal political affiliation can determine how available tutelage is to him and how much influence he has. A theologically liberal member of one of the guardian orders, for instance, may find her ideals clashing with those of her more conservative sect-mates, while a scholastic who also indulges in martial skills, sports or worldly affairs may find the other members of his faction arcane or difficult to approach. This state of affairs divides the Chorus among many axes, and a group can find itself split on matters of doctrinal purity as well as expedience or preferred implementation. One month, the knightly orders may work together in fighting an outside threat, but the next month could see various knights siding with believers who have different religious interpretations even to the point of creating internal schisms.

In some rare cases, a Chorister may ally with several factions. Moving between factions isn't unheard-of, either. Different factions have different grades of "official standing." One cannot become a knight in a guardian order without sponsorship and a vigil, but conversely a technologically progressive Singer may find himself siding with the Alexandrians on many issues without having any sort of "membership." These factions range from full-blown conspiratorial sub-societies to nothing more than convenient labels with which to group Choristers who have certain common goals.

The Guardian Orders

Perhaps the most famous of the Chorus factions, the guardian orders have an inheritance that is at once noble and frightening. While they have saved countless lives and made great sacrifices to protect the innocent, their mistakes and misjudgments have served to support the worst crimes of the Crusades and Inquisition, not to mention the countless burnings of heretics and witches. Even those orders that are not involved in the events have often been stuck carrying the blame by association. Still, their guidance and protection are in demand more and more frequently now. Although they have neither the magical force of the Hermetic Flambeau or the raw martial prowess of the Akashic Brotherhood, their zeal and their capacity to work collaboratively and selflessly to accomplish their goals makes them formidable foes. In the absence of the Masters, it is to the already strong and cohesive orders that many in the Chorus turn for leadership and defense.

The Brothers of St. Christopher: In November of 1996, a young Greek psychic named Bartholomew Pappadakis awoke from a dream in which he said he had been visited by an angel with the head of a dog and body of a giant. This angel went by the name Christopher, the bearer of Christ. The angel foretold a time of great trial that would bring people together from across the globe and alter the world forever — although Christopher would not say whether the change would be for better or worse. The angel instructed young Bartholomew to found a community of brothers in the name of St. Christopher, the dog-headed giant who ferried the Christ child across a river on his back. By 1999, the small community of brothers had become affiliated with the Chorus, although less than half of their members are capable of Awakened magic. The brotherhood's charge is to protect the innocent at all costs, which has often set them at odds with established churches. They interpret their charge in the broadest, most liberal possible sense, often escorting women into reproductive clinics, marching for gay rights, dispensing justice for unpunished hate crimes and working to undermine racist groups. Their membership is exclusively Christian and male, although they often work, travel and form cabals with women and members of other faiths. Those members who Awaken often emphasize the sphere of Mind. The brotherhood is informal in organization: A man is a brother if he follows the rule and is sponsored by another member. Hierarchy is almost non-existent, although the group honors the wider hierarchy of the Chorus.

It is rumored that Bartholomew himself has not been seen in public for over a year. Some say that he is sleeping, and that he will pronounce a great prophecy when he finally wakes. Others say that he has given his body to be a gateway through the Avatar Storm into a secret realm where a sacred treasure is being stored for a coming time of trial. If the rank and file members of the brotherhood know where he is, they are not letting on. Although the brothers are scattered throughout the world, their primary strength lies in Central and Eastern Europe. Brothers who Awaken under a Christopherite's tutelage often focus their studies on the Sphere of Mind. Psychics and sorcerers in the Brotherhood often rely on phenomena such as Biocontrol, Clairvoyance, Precognition, Psychometry and Telepathy and Paths such as Divination and Fortune.

The Knights of St. George and the Dragon: Once the largest guardian order in the Chorus, the Knights saw themselves as the greatest protector humanity had from the monsters who prowled the knight to prey upon innocent victims. Their chief enemies were vampires, although they had come into contact at times with demons and even werewolves. At night, they were fierce warriors, but they were known as artists, statesmen and poets in the day. Although the order was founded in Syria in the 11th century, the Knights spread throughout the world. By the 1400s, there were branches of the order as far apart as the Roman Catholics of Ireland and the Syrian Orthodox Christians in India. In the 19th century, they became the first of the old guardian orders to admit men and women equally. At the turn of the 20th century, the order became the first of the old Christian factions to begin admitting non-Christian members.

The days of the Reckoning should have been the Knights' time to shine, but their members remaining on Earth were unprepared for the fury of the vampire-demon that arose from underneath Bangladesh in July 1999. Although the Varghese (the St. George Knights of India) foresaw its coming, they did not know what to prepare for. Disparate members of the Knights gathered to meet the ancient evil from all over the globe, but they were cut down. Within two days, the great knighthood, the largest of the guardian orders, was reduced to a mere shadow of itself.

Today, fewer than 30 known and fully knighted members remain, and several of them are not even users of Sphere magic. The survivors are torn between continuing their work or withdrawing to train their newest members. Those members with some gift for prophecy, though, hint that either decision may be moot. The surviving Knights often concentrate on the study of Forces. Those few psychics and sorcerers allowed to join the order use Paths such as Conjuration, Fortune and Hellfire as well as phenomena such as Psychokinesis and Pyrokinesis. More often, the Order relies on sorcerous consors who study Alchemy and Enchantment to provide them with the weapons and armor that they need.

The Order of St. Michael: Ten years ago, the membership of this faction was so small and localized that it appeared almost insignificant. In the wake of the Reckoning, however, this group's growth has been phenomenal thanks to its focus on local action and its almost vigilante approach. Founded in the 1950s among the early liberation theologians of Central America, their commission was to make the world safe for all people and to deal justice and mercy to those to whom justice and mercy had been denied.

Their members take few Apprentices. They prefer instead to welcome Choristers who seek to become more engaged in protecting their own communities. They target primarily large corporations, organized crime and corrupt politicians. Those who train within this faction often focus their study on the Sphere or Forces. Several psychics work within the order, and they are often reported to use phenomena such as Psychokinesis and Pyrokinesis. Some sorcerers in the order are reported to use the Paths of Fortune and Shadowcasting.

The Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon: While the separatists Templars outside the Chorus distrust Chorus Templars for their tie to the heathen religions and Traditions, other Choristers distrust their Templar brethren for their ancient ties to the Cabal of Pure Thought and the old Order of Reason. Most Templars who affiliate with the Chorus are distrustful and reticent about working with any but a few, specially chosen groups or individuals in the wider Tradition. Most are members of all-Templar cabals still based in Templar-dominated Chantries.

The ice is breaking, slowly, however. A handful of Templars have joined inter-faction cabals, some even with non-Christian Choristers. A rare few have even agreed to work with members of other Traditions. Members of the faction almost always have Forces as their specialty Sphere. Very few psychics or sorcerers are known to work with the Templars, although rumors persist of Fenian shapechangers fighting alongside them. (For more on the Fenian, see **Sorcerer Revised Edition**.)

The Sisters of Gabrielle: The oldest of the guardian orders, and the only one that admits women exclusively, the Sisters may be second only to the Knights of St. George on the list of those factions most weakened by the Reckoning. Founded as a secretive and sometimes reclusive company of explorers, demon slayers and Umbral watchers in the first millennium of the Common Era by a mysterious mage named Gabrielle, the Sisters' numbers were decimated by the Avatar Storm. Many of their greatest were killed or cut off from Earth permanently.

For the Earth-bound sisters, Sendings and Stormwardens are rare, and they almost never bring good news. Rumors abound that the dark forces that have long sought to take the Sisters' remaining horizon realms and Umbral Chantries have found some new sense of leadership and organization. Those on this side of the Gauntlet do not know if they should strengthen their fortifications here or risk the destructive winds of the Avatar Storm to join those on the front lines. Many Sisters simply carry on with their daily task of fighting spiritual evil wherever they may find it, hoping some sign or answer may appear soon. However, the Sisters have found a new impetus for collaboration with other Chorus factions and with the rest of the Traditions, where they were often only nominally associated with the rest of the Chorus before. Those mages who first Awaken within this faction often focus their studies on the Sphere of Spirit. Psychics who work with this faction often use the phenomena of Astral Projection, Biocontrol, Ectoplasmic Generation, Psychokinesis and Pyrokinesis. Sorceresses use the Paths of Conjuration, Hellfire, Shadowcasting and Summoning, Binding and Warding.

The Chevra Kedisha: Taking their name from the people in each synagogue who volunteer to prepare the bodies of the dead for burial, the members of the Chevra Kedisha work to guide troubled souls in the time after death. The order was founded in the Middle Ages when Jewish singers faced numerous persecutions that left many souls bitter and frightened when death came. These Choristers seek out lost souls and troubled spirits, helping them to resolve those things that bind them to Earth and progress into the life beyond.

Many souls resist such "assistance" — clinging desperately to those things that they loved in life — but others are glad for a voice and a pair of hands. Some even hope to use these Choristers to their own ends in the skinlands. The Chevra Kedisha, however, is far from naïve. These Choristers weigh costly actions carefully and communally, often undertaking their own investigations and divinations before trusting the word of wandering spirits. They are firmly committed to doing what they believe is right, however, and once convinced a soul's needs, they will stop at nothing to see that their charges are cared for. In the 20th century, the Holocaust, almost destroyed the society, killing many of its wisest members and working the rest to their deaths. However, their students survive to this day, tending the wounded and trying to shepherd every dying soul that they can into light.

Long before the rest of the Chorus began to recruit users of linear magic, the Chevra Kedisha found many such sorcerers and psychics to provide useful services and wise counsel. Today, other factions and Traditions might call over half the groups' membership "un-Awakened," but the Chevra Kedisha does not care what the others think. They know only the comfort that these fellow travelers bring to the souls of dead.

All Chevra Kedisha are Jews, although some "righteous gentiles" work with them. The Missionaries of Saint Judas (believing that Judas the betrayer continued his apostolate among the dead after his suicide), and the Fellowship of Orpheus performed similar work among the Christian and pagan communities, although they have few if any known members today. Many members of the Chevra Kedisha and similar societies focus their studies on the Sphere of Spirit. Affiliated sorcerers and psychics often study the Paths of Divination, Oneiromancy, Summoning, Binding and Warding, and the phenomena of Astral Projection, Channeling, Precognition and Psychometry.

The Theological Orders

In contrast to the guardian orders are those groups who focus more on introspection, theology, philosophy or religious orthodoxy. These theological orders attract those Singers who work more in the realms of pure thought — or, at least, those who aren't so rigid and warlike as the various guardians.

Monists: The Monist faction emphasizes the heart of the Chorus' message: All faiths, all people, all creations are one. Monists in the Chorus tend to be very tolerant Protestants, Jews or Catholics — members of other religions often find themselves too marginalized by orders like the Templars or Septarians to offer much to the Monist agenda. Monists aren't really formally recognized as a faction, but many experienced Choristers express at least some degree of Monist belief — aside from those with a serious bone to pick or a major theological hang-up.

To the Monists, the One can take any form, and only human limitations cause differences of opinion. Since people are limited by nature, of *course* they have different ideas about what's right and how the world works! In response, the Monists preach tolerance throughout and beyond the Chorus. Monists are among the most likely to work with members of other Traditions, so most other Tradition mages form their opinions of the Chorus based on the Monist diplomats. This isn't a bad thing — Monists often have to be very level-headed to keep the more exotic branches of the Chorus from fighting.

Monists include some Sleepers and linear magicians, but the majority is composed of Awakened Singers. This probably stems from the fact that the experience of Awakening is profound enough to shake up a lot of old notions of who's right and who's wrong, so a disproportionate number of Awakened mages (compared to the number of Sleepers) decide to back the faction.

Septarians: Septarians represent the "old guard." These Choristers are highly traditional, and they value a strict code handed down from a very specific branch of Christianity — be it Southern Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist or what have you. Naturally, the Septarians can hardly get along with one another, much less with the rest of the Chorus. Other Choristers rightly consider them arrogant, opinionated and sometimes even violently reactionary. All of these views tend to prove themselves correct. And, of course, the Septarians can't even agree on canon among themselves.

So why put up with such nonsense? For starters, the Monists argue very persuasively that every concept of the One must be considered, and if some want to live by a stern and demanding code, that's their choice. Also note that Septarians aren't necessarily all Bible-thumping fanatics. A Septarian typically has a very stern view of right and wrong, but he is not a wasted person because of it. This same fervor makes Septarians some of the best intellectual strategists and thinkers of the Chorus, since they engage in a lot of debate and challenge just about every idea that comes their way. The Chorus' Monists also often direct Septarian outrage against the Chorus' foes. The real problems crop up when a Septarian winds up in the same room with a more liberal member of the Chorus and nothing else keeps them from butting heads.

Septarians also have great strength among the Sleeper allies of the Chorus. The more dogmatic theologians and theurgists cling to narrow religious and magical views, so they naturally support one or another Septarian belief. Septarian theurgists are often strong in Healing, Heaven's Fire and Summoning, Binding and Warding. A significant number exhibit True Faith as well.

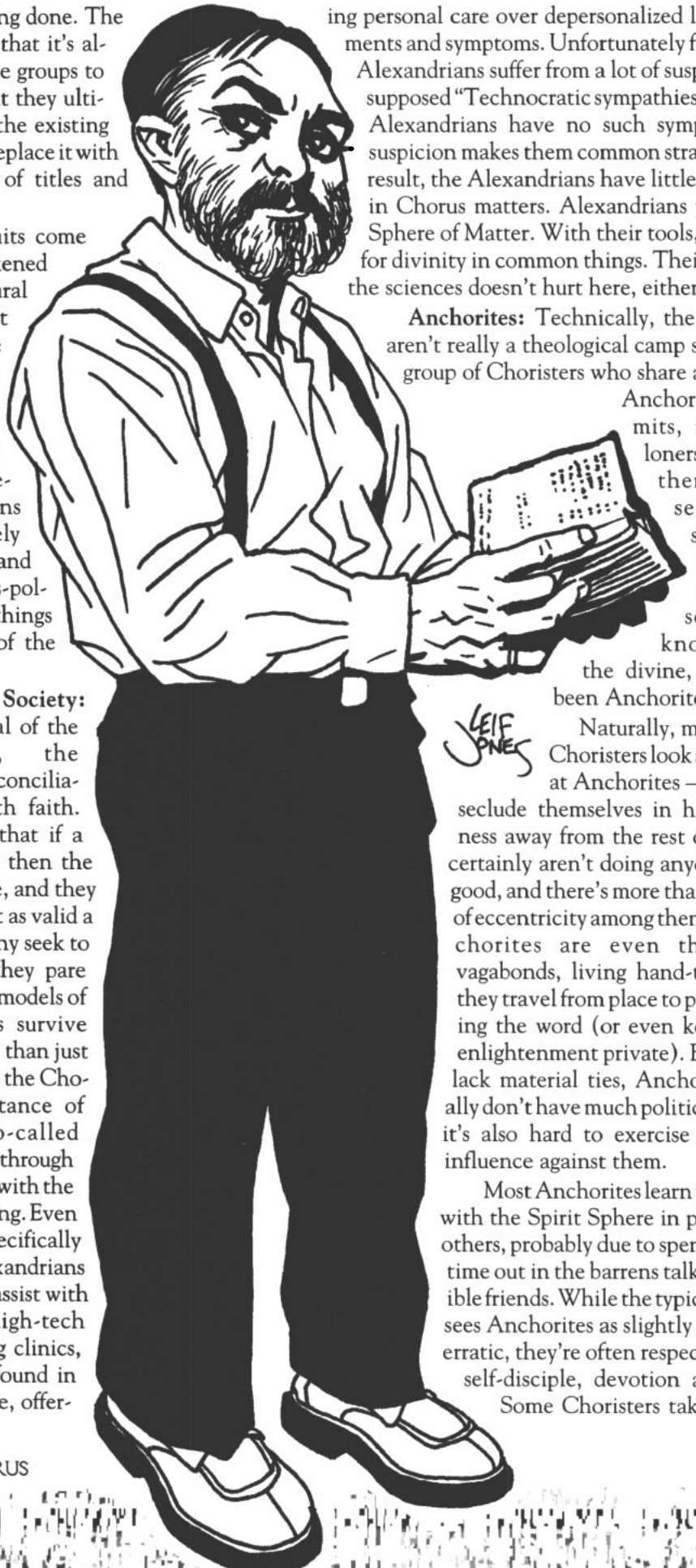
Latitudinarians: While the Monists believe that everyone is entitled to a personal vision of the One, the Latitudinarians feel that the Chorus' very structure is overly stifling and that it prevents just that sort of expression. Latitudinarians often include members of the various non-Westernized religions. Essentially, the Latitudinarians believe that the very structure of the Chorus propagates too many old, bad traditions. The Curia, the structure of Adytums, even the specialized ranking terminology all smack of Christian dogma. How does someone who's not a Christian fit in? Latitudinarians vilify the additional learning curve and the invisible discrimination that this structure engenders.

Typically, Latitudinarians work messianically within the Chorus in seeking to convert others to their way of thinking. The faction splits its time between reasoned debate and willful subversion. In a Latitudinarian Adytum, the old rules and ranks may not apply. Whoever's the local head determines policy and structure. For their part, other groups, such as the Alexandrians and the various guardian orders, argue that Latitudinarian rebellion is counterproductive. It's better to change slowly over the generations as new blood comes in, say such groups, than to totally throw out the structure and simultaneously make it impossible

for anyone to get anything done. The Latitudinarians counter that it's already impossible for some groups to get things done, and that they ultimately hope to abolish the existing Tradition structure and replace it with a more generic system of titles and positions.

Latitudinarian recruits come equally from the Awakened and the Sleepers. Cultural and theocratic bias, not magical ability, is the great motivator for this faction. Each Latitudinarian tends to study the magic that his culture and religion cultivates. Therefore, the Latitudinarians have a disproportionately wide range of practices, and it's often possible to cross-pollinate and learn new things from another member of the faction.

The Alexandrian Society: Perhaps the most radical of the theological orders, the Alexandrians seeks a reconciliation of technology with faith. These Choristers note that if a thing has been created, then the One has given it purpose, and they believe that reason is just as valid a tool as faith. Indeed, many seek to balance the two, and they pare away outdated or flawed models of theology. Alexandrians survive better in the modern age than just about any other group in the Chorus. With their acceptance of technology and so-called Techgnosticism (wisdom through science), they mesh well with the trappings of everyday living. Even their miracles have a specifically technological bent. Alexandrians might use computers to assist with devotions or set up high-tech churches and counseling clinics, and they can often be found in the forefront of medicine, offering personal care over depersonalized lists of treatments and symptoms. Unfortunately for them, the Alexandrians suffer from a lot of suspicion about supposed "Technocratic sympathies." While the Alexandrians have no such sympathies, the suspicion makes them common straw men. As a result, the Alexandrians have little internal say in Chorus matters. Alexandrians practice the Sphere of Matter. With their tools, they search for divinity in common things. Their training in the sciences doesn't hurt here, either.



Anchorites: Technically, the Anchorites aren't really a theological camp so much as a group of Choristers who share a way of life. Anchorites are hermits, monks and loners. As long as there've been seekers who stride out into the wilderness in search of knowledge of the divine, there have been Anchorites.

Naturally, many modern Choristers look a bit askance at Anchorites — those who seclude themselves in harsh wilderness away from the rest of the world certainly aren't doing anyone else any good, and there's more than a fair share of eccentricity among them. Some Anchorites are even thieves and vagabonds, living hand-to-mouth as they travel from place to place, spreading the word (or even keeping their enlightenment private). Because they lack material ties, Anchorites generally don't have much political clout, but it's also hard to exercise any sort of influence against them.

Most Anchorites learn to commune with the Spirit Sphere in preference to others, probably due to spending a lot of time out in the barrens talking to invisible friends. While the typical Chorister sees Anchorites as slightly off-base and erratic, they're often respected for their self-disciple, devotion and insight. Some Choristers take up a brief

stint as Anchorites ("40 days and 40 nights of privation") in hopes of inducing prophetic visions or Epiphanies. A "true" Anchorite, though, takes up the mantle and the staff and sets out for a life of hardship. It's thought that the rejection of human society is a rejection of the temptations of man, and so the Anchorites can live apart untainted by the vices of society.

Children of Albi: The declining Children of Albi follow in the footsteps of the Albigensians. In brief, the Albigensian heresy followed the gnostic view of the universe: All that is pure is spirit, and so all that is material is base and wicked. Thus, the human body, the physical world and all of their accoutrements are merely imperfect tools by which corruption entices the spirit.

The Albigensians lost much of their number during the Albigensian Crusade — the gnostic view never entertained much popularity with the church hierarchy, probably because it rejected any sort of worldly or mortal authority in favor of spiritual insight. For this same reason, the few remaining Albigensians look askance at Chorus leadership, claiming that anyone too tied to the material world is perforce shackled to the corrupt materia that is the antithesis of divinity. Ultimately, the Children of Albi reject any sort of mortal authority and instead follow divine strictures as handed down scripturally, in hopes of purging their bodily taint and eventually raising their consciousness to a level of pure spirit. To the Albigensians, this is Ascension — the transcendence of the material world in favor of an unfettered existence.

While the Albigensians are nominally accepted in the Chorus, they're something of a loose cannon faction. Their rejection of physical authority means that they're liable to follow the advice of spirits, visiting projections and self-proclaimed Exemplars at the drop of a hat, in hopes of moving in harmony with the spirit world — doubt of the spiritual is, after all, simply a lack of faith brought on by the imperfections of physical existence. In this age, the Albigensians don't really fit into magely society very well; they have few supporters and most of their energy is bent toward introspection that does little to improve the world at large.

Nashimites: Cousins to the Children of Albi, the Nashimites believe that the spirit world is the true battlefield of virtue, but that it reflects the minds, emotions and bodies of all humanity. Since every individual is a piece of creation, the sum of these individuals makes up the whole of creation — and, thus, every single person has an influence, however small, on the final outcome of the Tellurian. As the material world becomes more degraded and banal, so too does the spiritual world decay. Mages who study spirit magic recognize the truth of this, at least in some degree, since the Umbra typically reflects the emotions and states where it borders the world.

Unlike the Children of Albi, the Nashimites take a very active stance in worldly affairs. It's hoped that by purifying the physical world and bringing hope and faith back to the people, the spiritual world will also come to reflect this improved state. Nashimites devote their time equally to their own spiritual development — so that they can discern right from wrong — and to improvement of the material world based upon these personal observations. While the Nashimites remain a rather small group, and one that's still considered a little odd, they do have strong support from the Chorus because of their constant efforts to improve the world.

Infinite Diversity: Other Religions

While the greatest number of Choristers come from Christian churches and the various branches of Judaism, these Choristers do not represent the full range or breadth of the Tradition. Since the first Grand Council, the Celestial Chorus has welcomed numerous other groups. The justice and compassion of the One are not confined by geography, after all.

Gnostics: The Gnostic sects arose in and around numerous religious group during the Roman era, but they are most often associated with Christianity. Most Gnostic sects reject the material world as illusion, the creation of a lesser divine being who is often described as evil. Some practice strict asceticism and attempt to escape the confines of the mortal body, while others are decadent libertines who believe that since the body in unimportant, indulgence is inconsequential. The Gnostics reject dogma and institutions in favor of reclusive mystical experiences. However, some Choristers fear that their rejection of the material world leaves them insensitive to the sufferings and injustices others face. The oldest Gnostic sects associated with the Chorus are the Children of Albi and the Nashimites, both described previously.

Hare Krishnas: Although these worshippers of the Hindu god Krishna are relatively new to the West, their order was founded in India shortly after the first Grand Council came together. The Hare Krishnas rejected the Hindu caste system, polytheism and pantheism, and they taught that Krishna was the manifestation of the one true God. They believe that adoration and prayer are the chief purposes of the life, and they take their name from their most well-known prayer: "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare." They are strict vegetarians, and they are dedicated to non-violence. Their numbers are growing in the Chorus, which concerns more traditional Hindus, many of whom see the Hare Krishnas as a breakaway sect. Although they tend to form their own separate communities, most Chorus Chantries routinely receive heralds and pilgrims who follow Krishna, and Western Choristers often call on them to serve as outside mediators in minor disputes. They focus their studies on the Sphere of Prime.

Hindus: One of the earliest non-Judeo-Christian groups to approach Valoran, the Brahmin priests, all members of the most elite caste of Indian society, represent one of the Earth's largest religions and the Chorus's oldest continuing faith tradition. The priests are among the most conservative members of the Tradition, and they are often strict advocates of a return to the old ways. Many of them also propose strict separation from the other Traditions, especially their estranged neighbors of the Akashic Brotherhood, the Cult of Ecstasy and the hated Euthanatos — not to mention the "infiltrating Technomancers" who call themselves the Virtual Adepts and the Sons of Ether. In contrast, Hindu followers of the Yogis, who reject the caste system and lead lives of great austerity, are among the Tradition's most peaceful and open-minded members. Most Hindus in the Chorus are deeply devoted to the study of the Sphere of Prime.

Jains: Practicing a peaceful and strictly ascetic life, the Jains follow the Jinas, ancient spiritual teachers, the last of whom lived around the time of the Buddha. Their chief allegiance is to the principle of Ahimsa, non-violence and reverence for all life. They go to great lengths to prevent themselves from harming other living beings, and they follow a strict diet of foods that can be gathered without killing (such as fruits, legumes, dairy products, etc.). Although they are still located predominately in India, many of their Awakened Svetambar (white-robed) monks and nuns, as well as many of their other followers, have made their way to the Western lands to try and persuade all Tradition members to pursue their way of non-violence. Devoted to the study and purification of the human soul, the Svetambar often have great insights into the Sphere of Mind.

Mithraites: Almost forgotten outside the Chorus, the Sons of Mithras continue to honor the ancient god Mithras, the bringer of light, as a primary embodiment of the One. While most Choristers have primarily known the Mithraites as warriors and scholars, many also serve as healers, heralds, diplomats and leaders. They place great stress on honor and protecting the weak, and they are often consulted when dealing with the Nephandi. Some Mithraites are so proud that they claim that no Son or Daughter of Mithras has ever become *barabbi*, but the faith's elders offer no comment. Imagining the One as primarily a bringer of light, safety and protection, the Sons of Mithras, as well as independent Mithraites, often study Forces.

Rastafarians: As the newest of the faith groups whose Awakened have found homes in the Chorus, the Rastafarians are often viewed with suspicion. Some of their early leaders advocated the superiority of the black race and advocated racial segregation at the same time that many progressive Choristers were beginning

to make headway in teaching racial equality and trying to end segregation. They believe that the One, whom they call Jah, was most recently manifest in the late Ethiopian Emperor Halie Selise, although the emperor himself was a strict Christian. Many are also associated with Ethiopian and Coptic Orthodox Churches. Their deep and newfound connection to their history, as well as their ongoing hope for the future, have led some of them to explore the Sphere of Time.

Sikhs: Although they make up one of Northern India's largest religious groups, Sikhs rarely become Choristers. Some of their religious leaders prohibit the working of miracles or the giving of blessings or curses. Rumors persist, however, of Awakened Sikhs who continue their connection to the near-forgotten Ahl-i-Batin, although no Sikh Singer has ever confirmed these rumors. Some Awakened Sikhs in the West do seek out relationships with Chorus Chantries, although ongoing tensions with the Hindus have kept them from playing a serious role in Eastern Chorus politics. Most Sikh Singers focus on the Sphere of Prime.

Sufis: Although they were identified with the Ahl-i-Batin traditionally, more and more Awakened Sufis — especially those who find themselves in Western or Westernized lands — have been joining Chorus Chantries of late. When they come, they exchange their ancient insights for shelter and information. Rumors persist that these Sufi Choristers are the guardians of secret intellectual and material Batini treasures and that the remaining Batini are using these Muslim Singers to communicate with (or manipulate) the other Traditions. Even though a rare few still preserve the knowledge of Mount Qaf and their insights into the Sphere of Correspondence, most Sufi Singers are students of the Sphere of Prime.

Other Factions

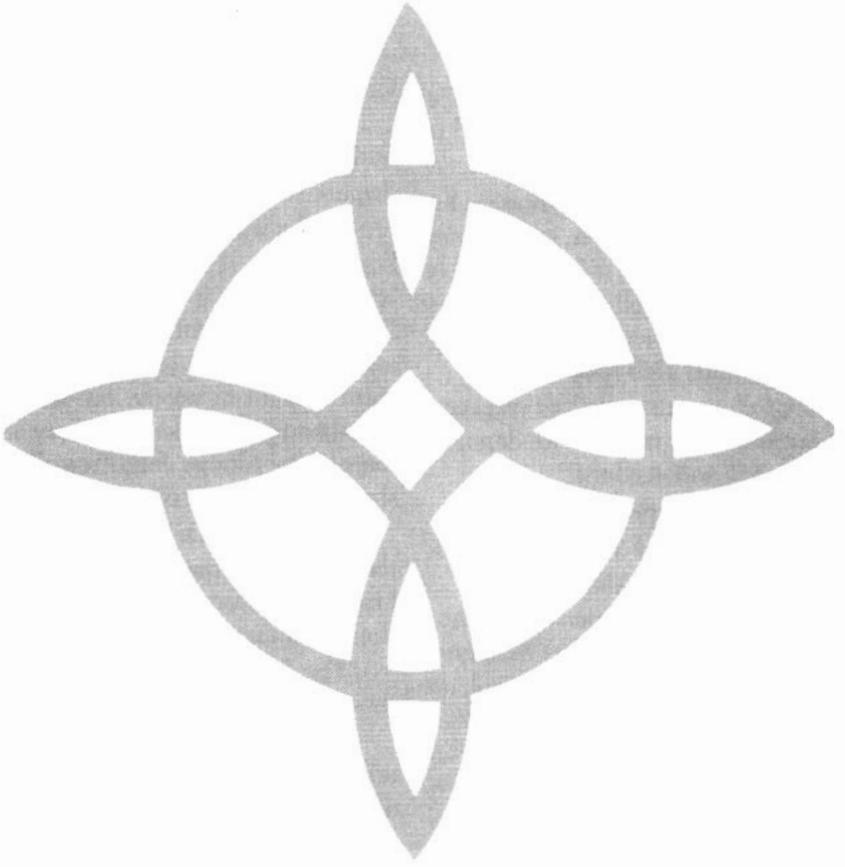
Throughout its history, numerous sects and groups have joined the Chorus, while others have arisen from within its ranks. Some are exclusive assemblies that train and recruit their own members. Others are loose fellowships of like-minded individuals, many who were trained by — and may even still hold membership in — other factions. Several groups are detailed in **Mage: The Ascension**. Numerous others exist or have existed, though, including these two.

Bat Binah: Because women were not permitted to study more Torah than was necessary to the performance of their duties, women were also not commonly permitted to study Kaballah. From the earliest times, however, those women who longed to comprehend the Divine more fully disregarded this prohibition and studied the Kaballah in secret. Many even left their families and communities to pursue this hidden knowledge. They discovered that the Torah was not only the laws that governed reality, but reality itself, and that by understanding the mystical language of the universe and secret meanings of numbers and names, they would be able to come even closer to the Divine and perform acts of great power. In addition to studying the Torah, the Zohar and other important Jewish Kabalistic texts, the Bat Binah (i.e., the daughters of understanding) also study the arrangement of the natural universe. They do so through means as rigid as scientific research, or through something so simple as simple meditation on the process of baking challah bread.

All mages trained in this faction begin with the study of Prime, but they almost always eventually learn something of

the Spheres of Matter and Life. Sorcerers who join this sisterhood often show great affinity for the Paths of Conjuration, Conveyance, Healing and Summoning, Binding and Warding. Few psychics are known to operate within this faction. Some Choristers think that Bat Binah may have some relationship to an ancient, hidden group called the Lions of Zion, but nobody would know what to make of this if it were true.

Song of the Ancients: Founded in the early 1980s to serve as a gathering place for Choristers who were from or studying tribal and other ancient religious beliefs, the Song of the Ancients is a loosely organized network of students and practitioners who are members of the Chorus. They come together once a year or so to exchange stories, information, research and insights. They include members of monotheistic tribal groups in Africa, members of Afro-Caribbean faiths and followers of ancient Celtic pagan-Christian synthesis beliefs. Those who are looking more deeply into the ancient faiths of Minos, Egypt and Persia are part of this group as well. Many of these mystics maintain close ties to members of the Dreamspeakers and the Verbena. Although most such Choristers study the Sphere of Prime, a few mentors train their students to first study the Sphere of Life. A very few others begin with the study of Spirit. Sorcerers affiliated with the Song of the Ancients often study the Paths of Healing and Summoning, Binding and Warding. Psychics in this faction manifest a wide variety of phenomena, although most eventually master Astral Projection.



Vigil

They watched throughout that night and into the next day. Then they all took time to rest and prepare. Sunday evening, they gathered again in Deb's study. The were joined by two members of Deb's cabal. They were a tall, thin blond man named Daniel Jennings (who was trained by the Sons of Mithras) and Samantha Prince (a smart-looking woman with café-au-lait skin and hair in dreadlocks). A man called Father Torres, a Templar, drove in from the small, rural Saint Anna Adytum to work with them as well.

Jeremiah watched as the others gathered in Deb's living room. They brought the white sheet to represent the body of Nona, which was now buried in a pauper's grave. Deb bent, dipping her hands in the water and blotting them on the sheet.

"This is how we love you, Nona," she said. "For though your body is kept from us, still we wish to wash you, to enfold you and show you kindness, even though you cannot return it." She dried her hands and stood.

Muriel moved to stand at one end of the cloth, she drew a short knife and held it before her over the cloth. Father Torres did likewise. Dennis followed.

"This is how we love you, Nona," said Muriel. "We have no body to guard, yet we long to stand around it and guard you as the angels want to defend your rest."

In the smoke of the incense, Jeremiah thought he saw a face hover and flicker. A second later, it was gone. Susannah sang a song in a language he did not know. It sounded like a lullaby. A hush fell when she was finished, then a murmur arose of voices praying in their own rites and own ways. Finally Deb spoke.

"We, Albertus, seek to bury our sister, but you keep her from us. If you keep our sister from us, we demand to know why. Show yourself and account!"

For a moment, nothing happened.

Then the lights flickered, and in the shadows, something grew darker and began to take shape.

Do you, Rebbe? Bless you, but I've seen your sisterhood, you know. You take more sisters than the One allots. You never knew this one 'til she came under your care. I, on the other hand, have been watching this one for some time. Drug user, whore, disowned, forgotten. Mene, Mene Tekel Parsin! She has been weighed in the balance. She has been found wanting. Her empire has been handed to the Medes and the Persians, and it will fall this night. Her being shall be consumed to return its tainted substance to those the One finds stronger, more righteous, more deserving.

Opposite the shadow, the figure of a middle-aged woman was forming.

There is no one here to mourn her, no one to say the prayers for her.... Even she knows it. Is there anyone to mourn her passing? She's a Jew is she not? But is there anyone to sit shiva for her? To say the prayers for the dead as her son or daughter would?

Father Torres spat, raising the knife in his hand. The ghostly woman's face sobbed in pain.

Strike me padre, strike the Mad Albertus who dares judge the bitch for what she is. But know this, my mark is on her spirit. She is bound to me, she has no one to care for her, to remember her. No one will claim a fucking whore.

"Sarah was sold by Abraham as a harem girl to the Pharaoh. Tamar and Rahab sold their bodies to survive. Rachel and Leah were sold by their father to Jacob," a quiet voice said from the back of the room. "Our mothers in faith were prostitutes and concubines and slaves, but they were chosen by the One and loved." Jeremiah realized that the speaker was Martha.

"I am motherless. I am grandmotherless. I claim Nona as my mother."

But you did not know her! Albertus laughed.

"I did not know my mother. I did not know all the spiritual mothers to whom I owe my faith. But in the One, they were my parents and my siblings."

There was quiet and then Deb spoke. "My student wishes Nona bound to her, her soul to hers. Can anyone dispute her claim?"

There was a sound of air sucking in, of a shadow beginning to shriek, then Muriel's knife flashed. She spun and thrust it into the shadows, holding it there as if pinning something to an unseen wall. The others followed suit, and Jeremiah could swear he heard the spirit scream in agony, but the sound was less like a scream and more like a memory of some terrible nightmare, now almost forgotten. The deep place in the shadows did not move, but it began to fade.

"Albertus," Deb spoke. "Little bastard, wherever the hell you are really hiding... Do not come here again. Leave the prisoners alone. I am their chaplain, I care for them, I command it. Go."

The dark space dissolved, but for a second Jeremiah thought he heard the sound of a man whimpering.

In the smoke of the incense, the face of the woman relaxed and began to fade. Deb touched Martha's shoulder, and Martha reached to grab the two ends of the front of her shirt, and pulled, making a single, clean, complete rip. Then Deb led her in the prayers for the dead.

Mourning

It was a long week, and the traditions of mourning dictated that Martha not leave the house. Each of the

others in turn came to sit with her, but Jeremiah was with her the most. Deb told them everything she could about Nona. The others sat, paid their respects quietly or held her hand as she prayed the *kaddish*, the prayer of mourning. At the end of the week, they all brought her out of the house and took her on the symbolic walk that ended the time of mourning.

When they returned, the others left to run errands and Martha sat alone with Jeremiah in the kitchen. She held her hand out to him and he took it. They were quiet for a very long time.

"I don't feel the same," she said.

"How do you mean?"

"It's like there's something else bound to me. Some other history, some other person now living in there." She pointed to her chest.

"There is, I guess. You can see it in your aura. There's something else there, weaving itself around you, like your own mother and grandmother are there."

"I think I always thought it was just words before — adopting her, I mean."

"I guess honest words can be very powerful."

She simply nodded and, again, there was silence.

"Do you still think your mentor was wrong to send you here?" He finally asked. She shook her head. He stood to leave the room, she squeezed his hand and let it go.

"You've done something good, I think," he said as he left. She smiled at him and turned her face away. He slipped upstairs.

Celebration

"You're a sharp man, Jeremiah, I knew it when I looked at you. So you've probably noticed that we talked about four different idols, but only three practices to counter them with. I want to tell you now about celebration." Deb had taken the time to let Jeremiah go about his breakfast solemnly enough. Now, it seemed, it was time for one more lesson.

"The counter to the idol of Utility is celebration. Utility puts a worth, an absolute and finite statement of value on everything. Time, people, places, objects, all are known by what they produce. We preserve trees not because they are old and alive and beautiful, but because they give us oxygen. The One says, rather, that all of Creation has intrinsic value. That everything is cherished and nothing is despised. In its essence, we believe, the universe is a dance. The One is the choreographer, the lead. The priests of Utility have a harsh and unforgiving magic. Celebration makes no sense, to Utility only the now and immediate matters. There's

little place for dancing, for songs, for stories in the world of Utility. Celebration, it says, is about the distant past and the far away future. We celebrate our cherished victories, and we celebrate those things that we know are promised. We know the stories only second-hand. We do not know when the promises will be fulfilled. Utility, therefore, cannot comprehend us, and thus, ultimately, we exist outside of it.

"Jeremiah, some say the 'magic' of our faith is dying, that we must forget the far-gone past and take our eyes off the promised horizons. I say that the very magic of celebration is what brings those stories and promises — the long forgotten victories, the yet unseen deliverance — into now. We celebrate them not as things far away because we aren't slaves who are bound to clocks and calendars. We celebrate them as now, and those celebrations make them so, even if just for a little while.

"Now, kiddos, Jeremiah's got a long drive tomorrow. They need him back up North. No, you didn't know it yet, son, but that's why I'm tellin' you now. We're all getting up to see him off. So sleep tight." With that, she carried her plate into the kitchen and went upstairs to bed.

The Music of the Spheres

The Celestial Chorus's magic is not a homogenized, lock-step understanding of the world. Rather, the Chorus embraces a wide variety of visions, theologies and understandings that are just similar enough for their adherents to work together. Although the specifics vary, Choristers generally agree on how the Spheres work in their metaphysics.

Correspondence: The Presence of God

"How high is heaven? How large is the One? How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Where is the property line of the One's dominion?" Such questions may seem like absurd speculation, but they are often used to educate students to the Chorus's perspective on space, distance and physical dimension. All space is under the One's rule, but the One contains all things.

"Every preposition a theologian can imagine defines the One's relationship to space," said one late Master, "in, above, through, beyond, within..." As students Awaken to these realities, they begin to be able to step outside the demands of consensual spatiality and open themselves to the One who connects everything. Gnostics and some thinkers who study Asiatic philosophies go so far as to regard all perceptions of space as illusions.

Entropy: The Ends of Existence

Some would call it luck or fate, but to the Chorus, the end or consummation of all things is a matter of divine destiny and providence. The Chorus focuses less on Entropy as the "death" Sphere and more on Entropy as the Sphere of divine fortune and blessing. Some Choristers believe that all of reality follows a master script that the One foresaw and constructed long ago. However, one seeress of the Silver Moon Clan is said to have asked the One's angel what her cabal should do, only to have the angel respond "surprise me." Therefore, she inferred that destiny and fortune are not prescribed scripts, but improvisational theaters wherein the One works with created beings to bless the world. Choristers often call upon revelations or divine emanations to read the process of Entropy. Creation of Entropy — that is, tearing things down — stems mostly from rare curses. Such uses of magic are frowned upon, and in truth the Chorus' structures do not often accommodate such methodologies very well.

Forces: The Motion of Creation

If the material world is the world that the One made, then the forces — gravity, light, heat, friction — are the "angels" that make its constituent parts able to interact with each other. All forces and energies flow from and are subject to the One, and each offers unique capabilities for creation, sustenance and destruction. For this reason, many of the older factions as well as several of the guardian orders study the Sphere of Forces as the basis for their understanding of the universal energies that they study in the Sphere of Prime. Choristers call upon Forces by using candles, lights and especially fire. Some Singers also create resonating chants that alter existing forces. Songs exist to create or snuff light, to invoke silence and to ward against harm. More spectacular displays, such as calling down lightning, fall under the purview of divine intervention, so they rely more upon prayer or ritual than upon simpler foci.

Life and Matter: The Order of Beings

Probably no other Spheres generate such fundamental disagreements between Choristers as these

two. Some believe that the One loves and cares for all material existence and all living beings, longing for them to reach a blissful perfection. Others regard all material existence as an illusion, albeit one that the Awakened mind can alter easily. Such disagreements do not seem to prevent Choristers from working together to create powerful conjunctional Effects when they choose to do so, but many Choristers have divergent means of tapping Life and Matter energies.

To some Choristers, base Life and Matter can be altered through the laying on of hands, the application of holy scriptures and phylacteries, or the use of potent scriptural words. To others, Life and Matter are illusions to be overcome. They are mind-states that must be transcended before they can be altered. Those Singers use meditation and very simple harmonizing to focus on a state so ephemeral that Life and Matter are nothing more than base, easily manipulated Patterns of gossamer, to be spun at the will of the Divine hand.

Mind: The Source of Understanding

Before anything was, endless possibility came from the mind of the One in the form of all created reality. Mind is the seat of emotion, imagination and rational capacity, and everything was born from a single mind before time or space began. Choristers who are aware of this fact slowly become able to break down the barriers that separate the minds of two or more beings, reaching back to their common creation in the mind of God. Some are even able to become temporarily the unfettered disembodied intelligence that many imagine the One to be. Others have learned to create new intelligence within themselves. The Sphere of Mind emulates many of the creative impulses of Divinity, for with it, the Chorister can know emotion and thought and even create new beings with awareness of self.

However, it is for this very reason that some consider the Sphere of Mind a dangerous implement. Those Choristers who focus on the Mind use erudite

meditations garnered from philosophy, concentrate on important passages or on releasing the mind of the self to flow in harmony with the mind of the One. Some even perform rites to re-enact the creative impulse (such as by molding clay in the form of a subject to know that subject's mind, or healing someone's mind by kissing the individual and giving the breath of life and understanding).

Prime: The Point of Origin

From the One come all things, and so the worshippers of the One, dedicate themselves to understanding the universal Quintessence that is the root and substance of all things. Like the One, it pervades all of reality, and knowledge of it informs the study of every other Sphere. Even among those factions that emphasize other Spheres, almost every Chorus Disciple has some understanding of Prime.

As the most central Sphere of the Chorus, Prime occupies a special place in Singer understanding. The Chorus uses a wide variety of foci to touch Prime energy, of which singing is the most common. By creating a harmony, the Choristers can bring several people all in tune with one loving, centered whole and put them in touch with Creation. Different songs, tempos and sounds associate with different sorts of Prime Resonance, which partly explains why many Adytums have their own special hymns.

Touch is also an important focus of Prime. By sharing love, compassion or strength, Choristers share the energy of Divinity that suffuses them. For broader applications, the sprinkling of holy substances (be it water, smoke, wafer crumbs or some other sacramental item) allows the spreading of grace across an area. A Chorister channels power from Nodes and sacred sites by performing rituals of reverence there (such as by building an altar, making a sacrifice or acknowledging in some way that the place is sacred).

Spirit: The Joy of Diversity

Much like the Sphere of Mind, the key to the Sphere of Spirit lies in the common origin that all things have in the One. This common origin gives those mages who see their kinship with all of reality — even those things that are hidden — an incredible degree of understanding and power over the creatures of the spirit worlds. Some Choristers see the spirits as a sort of angelic hierarchy, and indeed angels (and demons!) do seem to populate some reaches of the Umbra. To speak with these beings, Choristers rely on everything from simple prayers for intercession (often with an appropriate saint to back up the request) to elaborate systems of gematria and angelic language. A few scholars of the Chorus proclaim that the Hermetic language of Enochian is really nothing more than a debased form of the angelic script that some Choristers study.

Time: The Shadow of Eternity

The Technocratic Union measures time in minutes, hours and seconds, disdaining relative concepts such as soon, moment or infinity. The Chorus, however, believes such relative expressions exactly capture the true nature of Time as the dimension in which all of creation interacts and experiences each other. Chorister seers and prophets understand that time is relative to the One, so they are able to gain glimpses of what Creation has seen before and what it may see in the future. Others are even able to change the flow of time by externalizing their internal clocks, possibly even stopping or delaying certain actions that occur in time. Some few have even been able to step briefly out of the flow of time into the One's own timeless reality and come back at a different point.

While other Spheres often rely on special rites or rituals, Time Effects most often occur spontaneously. Prophets of the Chorus can sometimes slip into meditative trances or induce visions, but such states seem to come naturally when the Singer is under great stress. Manipulation of Time itself tends to be very subjective. A Chorister in vigil for a knightly order might experience a night's fast and prayer as "eternity in an eyeblink." The Templars in particular seem to have esoteric theories of Time — perhaps held over from their early days with the Order of Reason — which allow them to coordinate attacks and move with inhuman speed in melee combat.

Many Challenges, Many Songs

For those who strive toward union with the Divine will, miraculous abilities are not the goal, but the side-effect of their love for the One. Still, such abilities come part and parcel with the work that the One has given them, and the wise student learns to put these abilities to use with justice and compassion.

Abundance, or "Loaves and Fishes" (•• Matter, •• Prime)

In times of hardship, the suffering often look at their supplies and wonder how much longer their stocks of lights, candles, food or water will hold out. However, Choristers are aware that the One, author of compassion and hospitality, does not wish for anything to go hungry. The rites for this Effect usually involve a blessing or prayer of thanks, and they may also require sharing parts of the abundance with those in need. In no case does any person see new materials spontaneously generate. Rather, the canteen simply never runs out of water, and no matter how many loaves of bread one makes, the level of flour in the canister doesn't seem to go down. Using Forces, variations on this rote have allowed simple energy sources to last far beyond their normal duration. Batteries don't run down, for instance, and flames consume their fuel very slowly while still burning just as bright.

System: By using Matter and Prime together, the Chorister allows simple material forms (not complex or mechanical forms without a very high number of successes) to replicate slowly and replace what is used. One success should replicate one standard unit of the item replicated (a pint of water, a cup of coffee, a half pound of grain, an arm's length of string), based on what would be believable in a given circumstance. Continued use of this rote will provoke a Domino Effect unless the caster spaces it out over believable intervals. Any attempt to use this rote while performing actions that would normally deplete the source (emptying a thermos of coffee) would make the effect vulgar.

MET: Initiate (Basic) *Matter*, Initiate (Basic) *Prime*. You cause a simple, non-living object to garner twice its usual quantity. Doing so applies paradigmatically only to staples of survival, like a trivial light source or a basket of bread. You can't suddenly double the money in your pocket, nor can you cause a pile of gold to be twice as big as it was before. The object just doesn't seem to run out as fast while you're using it. It doesn't actually gain any physical size or mass. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success adds one multiplier to the amount that the object can be used (one grade, triple amount; two grades, quadruple amount).

Find the Lost (• or •• Correspondence and •• Entropy, or • or •• Correspondence and •• Mind)

The twists and turns of fate and prophecy often lead Choristers into situations in which they know that a troubled or disturbed person is present, but they do not know who it is. Some Choristers use this rote to locate those with specific destinies or callings. Others might use it to locate the owners of a valuable lost item or the author of a suicide note. By using this rote — which usually requires some form of simple divination rite — the caster is able to locate the troubled person before desperate actions are taken.

System: Correspondence searches the area while Mind or Entropy locate the specific individual in question. Players may divide successes between range and duration if they are waiting for the particular person to appear in a given space. Locating individuals who are not in line of sight requires the use of Correspondence 2. Individuals who are trying to avoid notice or detection may resist with Willpower at the Storyteller's discretion. The Entropy version may also be used to find lost items.

MET: Apprentice or Initiate (Basic) *Correspondence*, with either Initiate (Basic) *Entropy* or Initiate (Basic) *Mind*. You perform a simple divination, and you gain a sense of the location of a subject. With Apprentice *Correspondence*, this Effect works only on things that would be within your line of sight. You find the subject if it's hidden, spot it in a crowd or otherwise pick it out from normal (but not supernatural) concealment or distraction. With Initiate *Correspondence*, you can search at the normal ranges for that Sphere. The *Mind* version finds specific people you know, while the *Entropy* version finds anything that has been lost. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to find one extra item or person at the same time.

Hope's Birth (•• Mind, optional •• Prime)

For the embattled guardian orders, many are the times when neither the mage nor anyone around her can find any sense of hope in the ongoing war with evil. At such times, many of the leaders must call on the One to lift their spirits and sustain them. When one uses this rote, hope comes where there was only

fear and discouragement. The caster may engage in some inspirational speech, lead the group in prayer or share some type of sacramental rite with those who have gathered. The result is the same. Spirits lift, hope increases, and energy rises. Some Choristers have used a similar rote, **Primal Dread**, to instill terror in otherwise fearless and confident enemies.

System: When a character performs this rote, he converts sheer primal energy into a new human emotion. Range and duration are determined as per **Mage: The Ascension**. If the mage is merely intensifying or transferring an emotion that is already present, Prime is not required. Each targeted character in the range of the spell regains one dot of temporary Willpower for the duration. (The mage may choose not to target a character who would otherwise be in range.) Additional successes beyond those used for range and duration may either increase the difficulty of Intimidation rolls, or it may be used to reduce damage modifiers by one health level per success. **Primal Dread** has the opposite effect, reducing the foe's temporary Willpower and enhancing attempts at Intimidation or increasing damage modifiers.

MET: Initiate (Basic) *Mind*, optional Initiate (Basic) *Prime*. You bolster emotion or (with *Prime*) transform primal energy into new hope or fear. A single target suffers no wound penalties for the next minute/ conflict unless he reaches Incapacitated. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to affect one additional target or to extend the duration by one grade.

Lighting the Path (•• Correspondence or •• Entropy)

Wanderers, mendicants and pilgrims often find themselves venturing into new territory, unsure of where to go to find what they seek. Others simply wander in any given direction, hoping that the One will take them to a destination they cannot yet know. But the Chorister never forgets that the One watches over his steps, revealing the path a little bit at a time. Choristers who get lost while on a pilgrimage, mission or quest often ask the One, the saints and the angels to guide them. Those who seek with more vague goals pray that the One will lead them to where they may do some act of kindness, justice or compassion.

System: Choristers who seek a specific item, person or place use the Correspondence version of this rote. The greater the number of successes is (and the closer the object is), the greater the detail the character will gain about the road, the challenges and the traveling conditions involved. The Entropy version helps with more vague requests, such as, "Where should I go next?" Players may use successes to affect the range of the Entropy version ("What's the most important act of kindness I can do in this immediate area?") or the duration ("What's the most important just act I can do in the next hour?"). Successes on the Correspondence version affect the degree of detail that the character learns.

MET: Initiate (Basic) *Correspondence* or Initiate (Basic) *Entropy*. You simply wander and let your feet take you where the One needs you. In response, you gain a special insight to the trials ahead. If your ritual succeeds, you gain one retest to be used in the next scene, *if* you go to a location specified by a Storyteller. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Penance for the *Siccari* (•••• Prime, ••• Correspondence, optional •••• Time)

The legendary White Monks are said to take the castigation of Paradox for their brethren, the Red Monks, so that the latter order may bring justice and righteousness without fear. The ability to do so is lost to the Chorus at this time, but if the White and Red Monks are real, they would almost certainly use a rote built something like this.

The Prime component allows the White Monk to redirect the Paradox energies involved. This capability is normally outside the Tradition framework, and it is probably beyond the grasp of anyone but a Chorister, given the way that the rote is built. The Correspondence component establishes a link to the Red Monk in question so as to be able to redirect his Paradox energies. With the optional Time component, the rote can be cast ahead of time so that a Red Monk doesn't have to send any sort of message back to tell the White Monks to cast this ritual on his behalf. It will simply activate when the Red Monk gains Paradox.

Each success scored on this rote will allow the transfer of one point of Paradox from the Red Monk to the White Monk.

MET: Adept (Intermediate) *Prime*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Correspondence*; optional Adept (Intermediate) *Time*. You cast this rite on someone else and take one Trait of his Paradox on yourself. You may take a Trait immediately (if the subject has one) or later in the same turn. With *Time*, you can cast the spell in advance then choose to take Paradox from the subject when the subject gains it. The base duration is one minute/ scene. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of

success allows you to take an additional Paradox Trait from the subject, or to extend the duration by one grade, or to link to one additional subject.

Time's Tongue (••• Mind, •• Time)

The Earth and the realms that surround it have a long history, and many languages, tongues and dialects have come and vanished over the years. Often, though, Choristers and their Tradition allies are forced to deal with manuscripts in languages that they have long since forgotten. But the One never forgets. By communing with the One and the One's servants in the past, the Chorister may understand printed or spoken fragments of a dead language or idiom for a time.

System: The Storyteller determines how effectively the character may translate or comprehend the text based on the number of successes minus those used for duration. While a single success would be enough to allow the reader to understand Latin or Classical Greek, the Storyteller may increase the difficulty or the number of successes required for those looking for especially obscure languages. Note that translation is rarely perfect or complete. The Chorister may gain a sense of the meaning, but he probably won't be able to just pick up a book and read it like a native would. Subtexts and cultural angles may be lost on the reader, since they may refer to totally unfamiliar events or idioms. Imagine the Chorister who reads the phrase "break a leg" without any knowledge of Western theater traditions, for instance.

MET: Disciple (Intermediate) *Mind*, Initiate (Basic) *Time*. You commune with the One to gain understanding of a specific piece of writing. You must have a Narrator present in order to use this Effect. The Narrator offers you a basic idea of the gist of the writing or language in question. This impression may or may not be very accurate, since you don't always glean subtext or exact phrasing. You can't, for instance, rely on this to tell you exactly how to pronounce a strange magical formula, but it might tell you what the formula does. Comprehension of the subject matter relies on your Abilities — if you use this rote to read an electronics manual written in Punjabi, the electrical engineering material still means nothing to you without *Science* and *Technology*. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to translate an additional page or section of writing with the same casting.

Tools of the Just

While tools of holy and blessed items abound in the legends and myths of world religions, their nature often seems radically different from those constructed by other Traditions. Blessed weapons, holy water and sacred foods are what one immediately thinks of when meeting Chorus crafters and enchanters. The Chorus' close ties to Sleeper society and their frequent alliances with non-mages have led them to produce a wide variety of Artifacts, Talismans, Amulets and Charms. While many simply store basic rotes, others are unique.

Holy Water

Variable-Cost Charm

Water is a powerful symbol for many religious traditions. It cleanses, renews and sustains life. It refreshes the soul, and it carries the pilgrim to distant lands. Along with air, shelter and food, it is a basic requirement for sustaining life. The Chorus consecrates water to use in initiations, wash items before blessing them or create barriers between things holy and unholy. The water itself may also be consecrated specially to imbue a person or place cleansed with it or drinking it with the Merit: *True Faith* for one scene. Each dot of True Faith so imbued causes the special draught of Holy Water to cost one Background point. Additional points may be used to give the one using the Holy Water the Merits: *Iron Will*, *Lucky* or *Code of Honor*. Deliberately evil creatures (demons, Wyrm-tainted Garou, elder vampires, Spectres) will take one die of aggravated damage per point-cost if the water is used on them directly.

Characters who act in ways contrary to their stated belief system (or who oppose the beliefs of the one who consecrated the water) or who use Holy Water as an "instant power fix" may find that the water no longer strengthens them. The water exists to nourish faith, not substitute for it. However, harsh and judgmental Choristers may be surprised to see that the One does indeed grant the benefits of Holy Water to those they thought previously had been beyond grace. Alternatively, the Storyteller may rule that those who frequently use Holy Water may eventually find their personalities changing. For instance, they become more prone to self-sacrifice, kindness and justice.

Justice Blades

3-6 point Charm

When consecrated, the Justice Blades are told the specifics of an unpunished crime and entrusted to a Chorister who is determined to seek out the criminal. Any attempt to use the Justice Blade to attack anyone who did not participate in the crime will increase the difficulty by two and decrease damage by five (although it may still be used to parry). When attacking the one responsible for the crime, the modifiers are reversed. In addition, the holder of the blade will receive the Merits: *Code of Honor* and *Iron Will* for the duration of the scene when he is attacking or challenging the one responsible. The effect ends when the one responsible is killed, subdued. The same is true if the person surrenders with no immediate intent to deceive or escapes. If the target escapes, the blade must be re-consecrated. The end of the effect does not destroy the weapon, so several legendary blades have been consecrated repeatedly to bring down various criminals. It is important to note that the blade works on the one who actually committed the crime (or the one who is most responsible for the crime), not necessarily who the wielder believes committed the crime.

A rare few of these blades are charged with one-to-three points of Quintessence used to make the damage aggravated, thus increasing the point cost. Until recently, the making of these blades was closely watched and regulated, but the chaos of recent times and the lack of authority have made them frighteningly more common.

Penance Bonds

Variable-Cost Fetish

It needs little proof or explanation: Religious people sometimes do terrible things, either through misguided belief or selfish motivation, or some odd combination of both. This often leaves some of holiest people with years of painful memories and regrets so that they do not believe they cannot go peacefully into whatever comes after death. On their deathbeds, Chorus members often call wise and powerful Masters of Spirit to hear their confessions. Sometimes, they two Choristers agree to forge the Chorister's spirit, at the moment of his death, into some item that will be given to those whom the Chorister has neglected or wronged.

Alternatively, such items may be given to a Chorister's students, friends or consors so that they may pay the debt for their friend or mentor's misdeeds. Rumors circulate of penitent souls being bound into urns, jewelry, weapons, shields, trees, flowers and even into the words of certain prayers or songs. The Storyteller should work closely with a player in determining what the nature, powers, restrictions and costs of such items might be. Those who were especially powerful may place the wielder of the item under some vow or Geas in return for the right to wield the fetish.

Normally only mages or powerful psychics and sorcerers may be bound in this manner, although rumors persist of a long-lost silver bowl forged from the soul of a penitent vampire that transforms ordinary water into elixirs of healing.

Soul Mates

Variable-Cost Relic

Most people move through life content with the love and companionship that they find in friends, family, lovers and mentors. Others, however, seem to carry within them a deep void that they believe can be filled only by one particular other person. For those who have been given Soul Mates, this is especially true. When a Chorister discovers a child of great destiny, either unborn or just after birth, he may present the child to certain wise Chorus Masters who beseech the One to grant the child a Soul Mate to give the new-born mage comfort, guidance, counsel and even protection. At that time, a new child is conceived elsewhere — maybe in the same family or town, or perhaps far across the globe — who is destined to be the first child's Soul Mate. Each Soul Mate is unique, although no Soul Mate is ever an Awakened mage. Some, however, manifest psychic abilities or True Faith, and a rare few have studied sorcery.

Exactly what relationship the mage and her Soul Mate will have is dependent on when they meet, their sexual orientation, blood relationships and other commitments (such as vows of celibacy or current marriages). Whatever the relationship is, however, all those characters with Soul Mates receive the *True Love* Merit. All true Soul Mates are also either living Relics and/or Periapts, imbued with special abilities by those who first called them, although these powers may be used only in the company of the mage to whom the Soul Mate is bound. Many have also been phylacteries, storing the mage's Avatar until she is ready to Awaken. Because of the way Soul Mates are called, all are a few months to a year younger than the mage they are bound to. The Soul Mate's companionship always

serves as a unique focus for at least one of the mage's Spheres (although most mages find that having a unique focus with an independent will is a mixed blessing).

To figure the point cost of a Soul Mate, begin with a four-point base cost for the *True Love* Merit and add the cost of the type of Wonder that the Soul Mate manifests (Relic, Artifact, Periapt, etc.). If the Soul Mate is highly competent or has some Numina, add points as per the *Allies* Background. Add the cost of any other Merits that the Soul Mate may share with the mage. (One young mage recently discovered that his Soul Mate wife was capable of guiding him through the Avatar Storm unharmed, as per the Merit: *Stormwarden*). Subtract seven points from the cost if the Soul Mate is a phylactery, but add three for *Manifest Avatar* if the Soul Mate may channel Avatar messages directly. If the Soul Mate may also serve as a Familiar, reducing Paradox in return for Quintessence, add points for that Background. Finally, subtract one point for every Physical or Mental Trait that the Soul Mate has at 1 and subtract half the point value of every Physical or Mental Flaw the Soul Mate has. (The Storyteller may also allow the point cost to be reduced for certain Supernatural Flaws.) Anyone with the Soul Mate should also take the *Destiny* Background, which serves to protect both the mage and her Soul Mate.

Although the Soul Mate's destiny is bound to the mage, she is still a person of free will. Any time she is in the presence of the mage, whether the mage wants her to or not, she may use any of her imbued powers to do anything but attack the mage directly (nor may the mage directly attack her). The Soul Mate should be run by the Storyteller or by a separate player, rather than by the player of the mage. While the Soul Mate bond is unique, powerful and often beautiful, it is never free of challenges and struggles.

Merits and Costs of Faith

The very essence and power of the Celestial Chorus often lies in its commonness. The Singers are often quite common people with common problems and common beliefs, but they are profoundly touched by a reality that none of them can understand adequately or name. Therefore, most Chorister characters have the same Merits and Flaws as other mages. However, some are unique to the Chorus.

Ecumenist (5 pt. Social Merit)

Though possibly never having worked with mages outside the Tradition, your mage has developed some unique insights into the distinct factions and sects that make up the Chorus. Perhaps his mentor encouraged him to pursue studies with another teacher as well, or he simply developed a new interest or sense of calling and went off on his own. The character with this Merit may purchase both factions' specialty Spheres at the bonus multiplier, effectively having two primary Spheres. This benefit has its downside, however, as both factions may require certain obligations of him.

MET: Choose two factions to study under. You gain the specialty Spheres of both for purposes of learning time and Experience Trait expenditures (although you don't start with any extra free Sphere levels).

Techgnosi (2 or 6 pt. Social Merit)

The One is not limited by the changes of history or the challenges of humanity's ever-expanding knowledge. Your character has learned to find the One in the contemporary world of technology, even gaining new and sometimes profound insights about the mystical side of scientific knowledge and the rational dimensions of religious faith. After all, the One is no respecter of human boundaries. The most organized group of Techgnostics is the Alexandrian Society, noted on p. 46.

The two-point version of this Merit allows your character to use technological foci that are more commonly associated with the Virtual Adepts or the Sons of Ether as long as there is some mystical or religiously oriented content associated with them. (Your character might use a religious website for a Mind Effect, for example.) The six-point version also allows the user to have both Prime (or her faction's primary Sphere) and either Matter or Correspondence as her primary Spheres.

MET: For two Traits, you may use a focus from the Virtual Adept or Son of Ether lists as a normal focus for your magic. You can't take it as a specialty focus for any of your Spheres, but you do gain a broader application of Abilities and techniques for your magic. For six Traits, you gain either *Matter* or *Correspondence* (your choice) as a bonus specialty Sphere in addition to your normal one.

Note: Some players will want to take both the six-point version of Techgnosi *and* the Ecumenist Merit, to have *three* specialty Spheres. This is pretty darn cheesy, but it's on your head as a Storyteller if you allow it. You have been warned.

Discordant (1 or 3 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

For some reason, your mage doesn't fit into the harmony of the Chorus. This Flaw isn't an actual problem with singing — although she probably isn't any good at that, either — but rather, it's a problem in finding a way to become part of the whole. Any time your Singer wishes to perform magic by acting in concert with another mage, you suffer a penalty.

For the one-point version of this Flaw, you just suffer a one-point difficulty increase on your rolls for acting in concert.

For the three-point version of this Flaw, you not only have the difficulty problem with acting in concert, but you must spend a temporary Willpower point to do so!

MET: You have problems meshing your magic with other mages' efforts. You just can't seem to hit the right combination. For one Trait, you suffer a penalty Trait on resolution of tests to work magic in concert. For three Traits, you suffer this penalty Trait, and you must spend a Willpower Trait to perform magic in concert.

Dogmatic (2 pt. Social Flaw)

Your mage believes in the principles of his religion so strongly that he just can't stomach other faiths. Not only is your character inclined to treat believers of other religions in a condescending manner, but he can get downright nasty when his precepts are challenged.

You suffer a two-point difficulty penalty on all social interactions with people of different faiths (for instance, if your character is Episcopalian and he's dealing with a Methodist). Your character's condescension or mistrust always seems to come out argumentatively.

MET: Whenever you deal with someone who violates the precepts of your religious orientation, or who just disagrees with your religious viewpoint, you suffer a one-Trait penalty on bid and resolution of all Social Challenges.

True Faith

It defies understanding and magic. It works outside the confines of will or Awakening. Its practitioners can be just, compassionate, ruthless or determined. It is a surrender to the universe in a fashion so deep that the individual becomes a channel for some greater entity. It is faith.

True Faith is described in some degree on p. 298 of **Mage: The Ascension**. However, you have a variety of options for how you implement True Faith in your game, and with the Celestial Chorus, considering True Faith carefully is *especially* important.

The crux of a great divide for the Celestial Chorus lies in the nature of True Faith versus magic. A Chorister performs miracles through the power of will, using tools that consecrate or create a bond with divinity. The Faithful perform miracles by becoming channels of some greater power. The lines do blur. A devout Chorister sees her will as simply an extension of the One. The major difference is that True Faith relies on the intervention of some outside agency, even if the faith itself springs from within. A Chorister could, conversely, be ultimately faithless and yet still work magic. Such a mage would be a sad creature indeed, since she would be hobbled by her belief that she can't do magic until she regains her faith.

In game terms, both True Faith and magic allow for some phenomenal miracles, but True Faith is the less structured of the two systems. How, then, do you justify having both in play? What do you do if you have a character with both? Can a Chorister serve a greater power through True Faith and yet also have personal power?

The default assumption for the World of Darkness is that Faith and magic exist side-by-side. A rare few mages might have True Faith and even see themselves as agents of a greater power. Many mages in the Chorus believe that they're an organization in service to humanity and that the Chorus was designed to bring humanity in touch with the Divine. The Faithful instead spread the power of the Divine as servants.

The other ways you can use True Faith in your game include, but aren't limited to the following:

True Faith and magic co-exist: The usual World of Darkness style. True Faith is a channeling of some greater power through profound personal surrender. Magic is a channeling of personal power through personal will.

True Faith and magic co-exist, but not in the same person: You could argue that a Chorister cannot have True Faith because she imposes her will on Creation, while the Faithful instead are nothing more than agents of Creation who subsume their will in the Divine. In this model, no Chorister has True Faith. They have Awakened to *personal* power, and their service to the One is always a matter of using their own devices. The Faithful, in the end, are vessels who are directed where they must be.

True Faith *is* Awakened magic: The Faithful are just Orphans! That is, if you decide to use this option. Doing so solves some neat little loopholes with metaphysics and makes the game a little more internally contiguous. On the other hand, this option also eliminates a wonderful little stumper — the real world doesn't always make perfect sense, and neither does the game world. In this model, the Faithful just have some sort of proto-Awakened magic that allows them to perform limited feats. A faith healer, for instance, is really an Orphan with Life magic.

There is no True Faith: God is dead, and so are His servants in this variant, so nobody has True Faith. Perhaps humans can't know the Divine, and the Chorus is doomed. Perhaps Awakened magic is the only route to real human cosmic power. Perhaps the One does exist, but only in a distant form that does not interact with humanity.

Choristers aren't mages at all: This option is pretty far-flung, but you can rule that Choristers aren't really mages. Instead, they are legions of the Faithful, with theurgists (sorcerers of holy magic) backing them up. In this variant, you still have to deal with the metaphysical nit-picking of Faith and magic in the same setting, but suddenly you make the Chorus take a very different direction in mage society. Can you train someone to have True Faith, even though you can't train an Awakening? What are the limits of True Faith, and how does it compare to magic? What happens if anyone ever figures out that the Septarians are right and that the Traditions really *are* just heathen wizards?

The Limits of Faith

The powers of True Faith aren't the sort of thing that come when called. They are works that stem from a person's connection to the One; as such, they happen when the One dictates that they're necessary. Therefore, among other things, you don't just say, "I'm gonna use my True Faith to heal him now." The One (represented by the Storyteller) decides when the conduit of faith opens.

As a "power," think of True Faith like a transistor. The individual is just a channel for miracles. It's up to the One to decide when to turn that switch on or off, and how much current to put through, but only certain conductors are good enough to carry that kind of power!

Since True Faith represents the powers granted by the One, the manifestations are theoretically limitless. For the sake of your game and your sanity, of course, you'll want to actually impose a limit and establish a few guidelines. Try the following on for size:

Scale: True Faith starts with a rating of one dot, at a cost of seven freebie points. It increases only due to profound events and insights of Faith. A character with a Faith rating of 5 is literally a saint on Earth. A character with a Faith rating of 10 might as well be whisked off to Heaven since he has no place on such a flawed, material world as this.

Code of Conduct: The Faithful must be pure and constant in their devotion. Someone with True Faith is the sort of person that you can talk to for five minutes and immediately tell his unusual level of dedication. The Faithful must follow the moral tenets of his chosen religion. You can't have Faith in something that has no moral code, because that thing lacks a framework of greater authority. Therefore, you can't have faith in chaos or carrots. While one of the Faithful might be a sort of holy avenger, most of them are kind, just, peaceful — the sort of people who become victims in the World of Darkness. Rarely, someone manages to reconcile Faith with violence or even torture (see **The Inquisition** sourcebook), but such a person comes along once in a generation, if that often.

Works of Faith: While "it is only through grace that we are saved," Faith is strengthened by exercise. Temporary Faith points are restored as the individual performs acts of charity, meditation, compassion and other forms of nobility.

The Powers of Faith

True Faith's powers should vary based on the form of religion in which the character believes. In many cases, you can pick a couple of rotes and allow them. Give the Faithful access to any rotes that would have total Sphere dots required equal to or less than the character's Faith rating. Therefore, one of the Faithful with three dots of True Faith could perform healing, as a general guide.

Remember, exercises of Faith often follow the established sorts of miracles for the individual's religion. A Christian might walk on water, turn water to wine or heal the sick. A Buddhist might float in the air, meditate without food for a year or become invisible. A Mithraite might breathe fire or make his skin as impermeable as iron.

Since it's no fun to spend points for a power only to be told that only the Storyteller can decide when you get to use it, the Faithful should be allowed to exercise their powers of Faith simply by spending one temporary Faith trait. All Faithful characters have the first three of the following capabilities. The other possibilities can be adapted as you desire for your other religious preferences. Most of these powers would be considered reflexive.

Countermagic: True Faith allows countermagic dice equal to its rating, as described in **Mage: The Ascension.**

Convictions: A character can use a True Faith point in place of a temporary Willpower point.

Warding: You can ward off the infernal with your Faith. Pit your True Faith rating against a difficulty of 8. If you win, you force vampires and demons to stay back from you. With enough successes, you can even force them to flee. (Vampires who share your True Faith might be unaffected — but what kind of game are you playing?!?)

Acceptance: You recognize the fundamental oneness of Faith. As a result, you can ignore any one other application of True Faith. For instance, you might cut right through someone's Holy Shielding or ignore an application of Penance.

Faith Healing: Touch an individual and roll True Faith. Each success heals one bashing or lethal health level of damage. Two successes heals one aggravated health level. Every two successes also lowers the toxicity of a disease or poison by one. (You'd need a Faith rating of 8 or more to raise the dead.)

Transmutation: You can turn water to wine, or poison to water. No roll required; this affects an entire container. Depending on your religion, doing so might simply make you immune to the effects of poison when you consume the liquid, or it might make for a wonderful boost at weddings.

Mental Resistance: Add your Faith dice to your Willpower when resisting any mental assault or invasion. Alternatively, you might just become immune to supernatural coercion at certain levels of Faith.

Holy Shielding: Add your Faith to your soak rating for the turn. You can stand in a furnace unharmed, block spears with your skin, survive the jaws of lions or be otherwise protected.

Visions: You gain a vision or prophecy that relates to some future event. Perhaps you prophesize the End Times, or maybe you just foresee a good life for someone.

Intercession: You intercede with the Powers That Be on behalf of someone, to lift a curse or stay death. You can allow someone to linger miraculously even when he is dying. The person is stabilized temporarily, and his pain flees. (Duration is up to the convenience of the story.) Or you can use your countermagic to perform Unweaving (**Mage** p. 155) against a deleterious Effect on someone else.

Penance: You pit your True Faith against a subject's Willpower in a contested roll, with a stern lecture. If you succeed, your target is overcome with remorse. While you can't necessarily force someone to convert, you can give someone serious second thoughts and an attack of conscience. Against truly evil individuals and monsters, this capability may cause thoughts of suicide and recklessness.

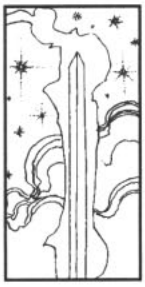
Locke '01

Chapter Three: Scattered Souls

"You're right," he said, "You're right. And the second riddle: How far is it from earth to heaven?"

"Oh," she told him, "I think about the width of an eye. Because you see the eye looks down and sees earth, and the eye looks up and sees heaven."

—Alice Kane, "The Clever Wife," in *The Dreamer Awakes*.



Diversity is the Celestial Chorus' strength, but it might as well be a weakness that hobbles the Tradition with internecine strife. New Singers have to find a place in a community that's often torn by raucous arguments. Oftentimes, it takes faith in the One to find anything in common with their comrades at all. Reconciliation is an important part of any Chorus-based chronicle. The Chorus must reconcile with the Traditions they've wronged in the past, with the clergy who see them as too lax, too strict or simply crazed. Choristers must also reconcile with each other, when sectarian divisions threaten to tear the One's faithful children into so many squabbling cliques.

But all is not lost! New Singers have the chance to break through centuries-old divisions and bring new insights to the choir. Like their Sleeper counterparts, Choristers can learn and change. New revelations about the One could grant the Tradition a newfound strength. Theology, philosophy and social work can bind the Tradition together with more sincerity and coherence than ever before. The decline of colonialism and the rise of interfaith dialogue opens a way for Choristers to look upon their beliefs and works with a broader vision. The challenge lies in convincing the die-hard traditionalists to look beyond the comfortable, limited conceptual worlds they've constructed for themselves and appreciate the larger community of faith — the Chorus of *all* voices — that could be the Singers' salvation.

How much change is too much? The shock of the Reckoning has left some Singers wondering if the bold steps they took in the past were worthwhile, or whether they should return to the ancient, insular customs of

their respective religions. Some, like the Septarians, want to see the old ways reevaluated before they capitulate to the modern world. Culture is an important key to freeing the Consensus. If it's compromised too much, won't it just contribute to the death of faith and magic?

The Celestial Chorus is full of potential without direction. Visions and divination can only determine policy for so long. Someone is going to have to step up to guide it with human hands and take the risks that men and women must, so far from the One's guidance.

Penitents and Priests: Noted Singers

Most Singers agree that humility is an important quality. Even the more politically inclined members of the Chorus try to avoid the appearance of hogging the spotlight. On the other hand, nothing's wrong with accepting someone else's praises, as long as you don't let it go to your head with an unseemly display of pride!

Therefore, Singers tend to be known for their accomplishments before they reap the rewards of title and leadership. The Celestial Chorus also keeps extensive records of its history, so that scholars, saints and theologians are never forgotten. A Singer can usually track down the biography and writings of a noted figure without too much trouble. Modern Singers who stir the pot are remembered by opponents who work to refute their efforts from the pen and pulpit and by disciples who emulate and follow him.

The following people are well known to most of the Chorus. They can expect anything from adoration to grudging tolerance from a choir, as their reputations precede them.

Simon Pain

Background: The strangest people get religion.

Simon Pain is an unusual ambassador. As of 2001, he's only been a Singer for three years. Before that, he was Operative Pain, a Watcher for the New World Order. (He doesn't really consider the coincidence of naming much of a joke.) His past is something of a mystery. While he's open about his time with "the Service," he refuses to discuss his life before Awakening. It is known that he was a Catholic priest before he joined the Technocracy. He admits as much and his familiarity with the sacraments confirms it. Brother Simon also admits that he suffered a crisis of faith after his Awakening, and that that crisis led him to the Technocracy, but he refuses to be more specific. The Watcher Methodology capitalized on his background. His clerical training taught him to interpret the motivations of Reality Deviants. Although he was no stranger to mystical philosophy, he saw it as a tool. Operative Pain knew his enemy.

Pain was attached to Diversified Operations Amalgam #3 (DOA 3), a mixed group of Technocrats who worked on "odd jobs" — things other amalgams were too specialized or too busy to deal with. Pain's specialty was religion-based phenomena. Weeping statues of the Virgin, stigmata, sightings of angels and Deviants who claimed that "God told them to" were all under his purview. In most of these cases, the "deviance" amounted to a con artist trying to make a buck or misguided idealists trying to trick their community into believing in God. In a few cases, he found Tradition mages, whom he despised for putting a human shield (their flock) between themselves and the amalgam's work.

When DOA 3 was caught in a crossfire between a Celestial choir and a Nephandic cult, Simon found himself unable to help his comrades with any of his technological or psychological tricks. The only resources available were the contents of the battered church they fought in. As the Singers were cut down and the Nephandi began to call forth some allied monstrosity from the Outer Dark, he seized a Bible and prayed.

He never meant to perform a miracle, at least not in the sense of working magic, but the One answered. Holy fire warded off the beast, and the rest of his amalgam dealt with the infernalists.

In the aftermath, his amalgam decided to list him as killed in action, since they knew that his transgression against Reason wouldn't be received well. At the same time, Simon Pain knew that his faith had been touched, and that he needed to make sense of what was essentially a second Awakening. After he parted ways with DOA 3, he used his training to track down another choir. Evidence acquired at the church led him to a mentor. The old Singer's eyes widened when the Technocrat prostrated himself before him, but mercy and a little careful Mind magic convinced him that Simon Pain would be a worthy student.

Since then, Pain has been a curious figure of note within the Tradition. Although his past used to incline others to treat him with disdain and distrust, he's since grown into a strange kind of authority. He's rediscovering God, and he is willing to ask all the wrong questions to the wrong people to find his spiritual path. In doing so, he's cut across the Chorus' sectarian boundaries and become an expert on the Tradition's broader role (with a little help from his old skills) at a time when more and more Singers are isolating themselves from the whole.

His research into the Chorus' pre-Christian roots in Africa and Greece (see **Dead Magic**) has given the Tradition's factions more of a reason to talk to each other. Whether this research will help unite the Chorus or touch off another wave of bickering has yet to be seen.

Image: Pain dresses in crisp suits, but he keeps the Chorus' sun-symbol (instead of the crucifix) on a ring or a chain around his neck. He wears either all-black or all-white. He sees any other kind of dress as "messy." He's a wiry man in his mid-fifties with very pale blue eyes who wears his blond hair chin-length. To him this hairstyle symbolizes a break from the establishment that he once served. Ironically, the fact that he places that kind of importance on it is more a sign of his conservatism, since most people have gotten over hair length as a judge of "normalcy." Occasionally, he'll grow a goatee shot through with gray, but he always shaves it before any important meeting. In more relaxed circumstances, he'll dress blandly, if neatly. He'd like to appear the quintessential Singer, but it's hard for him to outgrow trained anonymity.

Roleplaying Hints: You learn best by teaching, but your natural self-confidence leads others to believe that you're giving instruction when you're actually trying to teach yourself via the Socratic Method. This method had propelled you into a position of authority in the Chorus, since your teachings seem to bear fruit. You can feel the One's song, but you often wonder if it's a dull din compared to what other Singers experience. You relish the titles and vestments of the Celestial Chorus, because it feels as if you're returning to the faith you'd forgotten for so long. What caused you to abandon it in the first place is a closely held secret (and is ultimately for the Storyteller to decide). You prefer to look to the future, not the past, for answers.

You use Christian and Gnostic texts and liturgical instruments in your magic, but you prefer to call upon the One with research. Forgotten scriptures fascinate you, and handling them isn't much different from poring over sealed files and surveillance dossiers just like you used to do in the old days.

Faction: None

Essence: Questing

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Pedagogue

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4 (Fast-talker), Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4 (Quick)

Abilities: Academics 5 (Religious Mysticism), Alertness 4 (Details), Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Cosmology 3, Dodge 3, Drive 3, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 4 (No Tools), Leadership 4 (Friendly), Linguistics 3, Occult 4 (Demonology), Subterfuge 3, Streetwise 2, Stealth 3

Backgrounds: Arcane 3, Avatar 2, Contacts 3

Arete: 5

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Forces 3, Mind 2, Prime 3, Spirit 2

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 8

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Dynamic) Curious, (Static) Devout

Aiko Kawaguchi

Background: A Monist, Aiko Kawaguchi began her religious life as a member of Omoto-kyo, a syncretic religious movement in Japan (see **Dragons of the East**, p. 37). A survivor of the Second World War, her life eerily mirrored that of Omoto-kyo's founder, Deguchi Nao. Like Nao, she grew up in abject poverty and suffered through the death of her children. Like Nao, the experience of losing them to an unexploded bomb while they were searching the ruins of Tokyo for things to sell drove her insane. It also Awakened her Avatar.

Guided by the voices of her son and daughter, she came to study the teachings of Nao's successor, Deguchi Onisaburo. She became his disciple for the last few years of his life, and she went on to promote Omoto-kyo after he died in 1948.

Onisaburo preached a doctrine that espoused one world religion and universal disarmament, which were attractive opinions for a woman who had lived in the shadow of war and devastation. Of course, he also

preached that he was the messiah, the true Emperor of Japan and the natural leader of this universal church, but any doubts that this claim stirred were muted by the beauty of his message. She kept her own miracle-working capabilities a secret because she didn't want to undermine Onisaburo's message and attract followers, but she used healing prayers from time to time to help the poor. She gave special attention to children.

Despite the efforts of Kawaguchi and others, Omoto-kyo attracted only a few new adherents in the postwar era. Nonetheless, she did come to the attention of Michael Kawamori, a US Army Chaplain, interpreter and Singer. Kawamori detected a special intensity in the woman as he listened to her lectures on Omoto-kyo and, he followed her on her anonymous missions of mercy. Eventually, he inducted her into the Celestial Chorus and arranged to give her the means to travel and meet other followers of the One.

While the Ascension War intensified during the '60s, Kawaguchi argued for an immediate end to hostilities. At the time, this sentiment generated resentment in her fellow Singers, but eventually, a few of them started to appreciate her arguments. The Reckoning finally made people stand up and listen to the impassioned Adept. The tumultuous events of the time seemed like a vindication of everything she had said.

Recently, she's turned her manic energies away from the external matters, and she has set to work to unify the Chorus itself. More than a few choirs have felt put upon by her demands, but that feeling has been balanced by the lengths she'll go to help her fellow Choristers. Some Singers wonder if the amount of self-sacrifice she's willing to go through to unite the Tradition is a sign of some sort of messiah complex.

The fact of the matter is that her madness has never entirely ebbed. She's spent 64 years wishing that she could join her children, but they have forbidden her (through the guise of her Avatar) to commit suicide. Instead, she tries to destroy herself for the good of the Chorus, in the hope that the One will let her die in His service.

Image: Aiko Kawaguchi is a spry 90-year-old with wild white hair and emaciated features. She wears light blue dresses and an assortment of prayer necklaces from many cultures. She speaks Japanese, English, Sanskrit and Latin in a scratchy, high-pitched tone, alternating between long meditative pauses and rapid-fire statements that don't leave a single pause for interjection.

When she doesn't think anyone is looking, she whispers to her children.

Roleplaying Hints: If the Chorus doesn't unite under one ethos, it's doomed. Make sure that you emphasize this

to each and every Singer you talk to. You're not too proud to beg, cry and harangue your obstinate colleagues. You're not all talk either. You're perfectly willing to risk everything for those you're trying to sway. The fact that someone your age is willing to leap into the breach fills your comrades with guilt, and you can use that fact to your advantage when you argue for unity. You focus your magic through meditation, chanting, prayer and purification rituals such as vigorous clapping and washing.

You listen to your ghostly children, who are messengers from Tenchi-Kane no Kami, the Great God of the Universe. They give you the spiritual guidance that you so desperately needed when you were younger, but at a terrible price. Each divine command fills you with sorrow as the voices of your little ones remind you how much you'd like to go to Heaven. With any luck, one heroic sacrifice will both unify the Chorus and purify your soul enough to join your family in the afterlife.

Faction: Monist

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Director

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics (Comparative Theology) 4, Awareness 5 (Emanations of Children), Cosmology 4 (Shinto Realms), Enigmas 3, Etiquette 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 4 (Pleading), Linguistics 3, Medicine 3, Meditation 4 (Chanting), Occult 2, Streetwise 1

Backgrounds: Avatar 4, Destiny 4, Dream 3

Arete: 5
Spheres: Correspondence 4, Life 4, Mind 3, Prime 4, Spirit 3, Time 2
Willpower: 8
Quintessence: 8
Paradox: 2
Resonance: (Dynamic) Unifying, (Entropic) Selfless

Jude Bankole Kuti

Background: Jude Bankole Kuti was originally a young Anglican priest from Kaduna state, Nigeria. He was always something of a scholar, and he continued to study even as he served his parish. His efforts were rewarded. In 1985, he received a scholarship to study theology at All Saints College, Oxford.

Reverend Kuti was originally a moderate who advocated a mix of local traditions and Christian teachings. He felt that local beliefs mirrored the message of the Gospels, and that the Church was best suited to transmit moral truth because of its organization and resources instead of any special claim to the truth.

Oxford changed that. His quick, rational mind suited him to the study of Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine and St. Anselm. His surface knowledge of these thinkers grew into expertise while his initial admiration for them bloomed into near-worship. Christian scholars like these neatly justified many of the things that he had always found arbitrary about Christian doctrine.

Kuti returned to Nigeria with a stronger commitment to the tenets of his faith and less tolerance for anything that deviated from them. His fervor and his articulate speech won him popularity and drew many nominal Christians back to the Church. He Awakened while witnessing an ordination. In a flash if insight, he saw the power of Apostolic Succession that flowed through the hands of the bishops. Afterward, he met the odd miracle-worker who used Islamic or Yoruba beliefs to channel that power. These encounters only reminded him of the fact that the Devil, too, has his servants.

He returned to Oxford in 1996 to lecture on Christian ethics and human rights. Singers in the audience recognized his Awakened nature and inducted him into the Chorus. His initial elation at meeting other Christian mages turned to disappointment, when he was forced to deal with the ecumenism that (in his words) infested the Tradition. He did make contact with Muslim Singers from his own land, though, and his opinions might have softened if it hadn't been for the events that unfolded in his home parish.

In 2000, Kaduna Christians protested when the state government began to consider the selective implementation of the Sharia legal code on behalf of its Muslim majority. Despite assurances that the code would not affect them, the Christian protests flared into violence. Kuti's own parish was at the forefront, largely because of the extreme views he'd inculcated in his parishioners.

Kuti saw this event as a sign that his attempts to cooperate with non-Christian Singers were foolish, and that realization inspired him to spread this message to other Christians within the Tradition. Nowadays, The Reverend Jude Bankole Kuti divides his time between teaching his parishioners to defend themselves from "heathens" and touring Europe and America to debate with Chorus ecumenicists. Because of his brilliant (if somewhat inflexible) arguments, many Septarians and Templars have come to see him as a kind of advisor — someone who will teach them to be as rational as they are opinionated.

Image: Kuti's a thin 39-year-old who dresses in modern clerical garb. He usually wears pale blue shirts with his Roman collar. His vision has just started to fail, so he wears a pair of horn-rimmed glasses that complement his narrow, worry-lined eyes. His deep voice carries Nigerian and British tones. When he does speak, he does so in composed statements that never descend into irrational claims. Despite (or perhaps because of) his intelligent tone, he belts forth every word with a special passion that seems to echo in the listener's mind longer after Kuti's finished speaking.

Roleplaying Hints: You're an uncompromising man who doesn't let words go to waste. Try to engage others on an intellectual and emotional level. You'd hate to be accused of sloppy thinking. (This sentiment extends to your Songs as well.) Debate and writing serve as a focus for your magic, along with Christian trappings such as the Bible, consecrated bread, wine and water and priestly vestments.

You *are* rigidly dogmatic, but your dogma is that of thinkers, rather than impulsive revivalists. While you're convinced that writings such as Genesis are allegories and that the laws of Leviticus aren't meant to be applied blindly to those who follow Jesus' covenant, you do accept core Christian doctrines (such as Christ's divinity and Mary's virginity) out of an appreciation for the saints and thinkers who have made these beliefs make sense. Similarly, you're convinced of the Church's supremacy, and you feel that ecumenical ideas stray from the rational path of the Church fathers and lead straight to folly and perdition.

Faction: Septarian
Essence: Questing
Nature: Pedagogue
Demeanor: Autocrat

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4 (Memorable), Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 5 (Logical), Wits 3
Abilities: Academics (Christian Theology/Philosophy)5, Awareness 2, Drive 2, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Law 3, Leadership 4 (Resolute), Linguistics 2, Occult 3, Performance 4 (Sermons)
Backgrounds: Avatar 3, Influence 3, Library 3
Arete: 4
Spheres: Correspondence 3, Mind 4, Prime 3, Time 2
Willpower: 7
Quintessence: 7
Paradox: 0
Resonance: (Static) Resolute

All-Chorus Chronicles

The Celestial Chorus may be a house divided, but the irony is that those divisions spring ultimately from an earnest desire for unity. Individual Choristers quarrel over the details, but all of them believe in the primacy of the One. The key to salvation is to understand the Almighty. Hindu and Christian, Monist and Septarian Singers alike all disagree on exactly *what* the One's nature is, but they would all agree that the question itself is the most important question ever asked. Outsiders may see these differences as arbitrary and unimportant, but the Chorus knows better. The keys to Reality are hidden in these very debates.

When a chronicle's characters are all Singers, this issue can unite them without reducing the choir to a bland, pious caricature. Individual Choristers don't have to agree on the One's gender or the position on nonbelievers. The important thing is that God is something worth arguing about, defending and sharing with the world.

In this kind of scenario, it's easy for one character to take the moral high ground by being "more tolerant than thou." Doing so is a bit of a cop out, because such a character is really appealing to the players' sensibilities rather than the characters'. While you may not care about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin — and you may not even believe in God — it's a sure bet that your character has a passionate connection to these questions.

This doesn't mean that you can't play a tolerant Singer, however. Just remember that your character struggled to have the opinions that she does. Many Singers are rigidly dogmatic, but just as many would be considered heretics by their native faiths. In either case, the character has had to struggle, be it with a world that ignores the revealed truths of the One or the religious hierarchy that rejected her views. Tolerance *and* intolerance are brave choices when they're made within the structure of a religious paradigm that finds itself at odds with the outside world.

What the Chorus Cares About

By and large, the Celestial Chorus cares about Sleepers to a degree rarely matched by the other Traditions. The whole premise of the Tradition is that reverence for the One extends beyond social and geographical boundaries. While a Dreamspeaker might devote all of his energies to preserving the beliefs of his people, his Singer counterpart would act to make sure that those same customs ultimately served a divine truth that applies to everyone, everywhere.

If that Singer believes that God manifests a single truth in many cultural styles, he could spread his beliefs without being too disruptive. Monist and Latitudinarian Choristers do just that. Christians rewrite the Lord's Prayer to refer to the local face of the Creator, and ecumenicists argue that the experiences of mystics are one and the same, regardless of what culture the mystics come from.

At the opposite pole, sectarian Singers such as the Templars consider this diversity to be a horrible mistake (and not because they're pigheaded bigots). After all, if so many faiths contradict each other, how can they *all* be true? This attitude can turn into the kind of intolerant zeal that the Traditions once despised the Chorus for, but it can just as easily express itself in study and debate. All the same, a conservative Singer acts to

ensure that the One's will isn't bastardized or confused with the desires of worldly or infernal beings. Indeed, conservatives are often the most vigilant in rooting out corruption. Their keen (if arbitrary) sense of right and wrong makes them brave enough to attack a moral problem directly, and their earnestness inspires them to go to any length to do so. While Templars and their ilk are irritating opposites in a debate, nobody would accuse them of cowardice. When the time comes to unsheathe the sword of faith, they do so without hesitation. Their subsequent martyrdom at the hands of the Chorus' enemies completes the cycle, bringing new inspiration to the extremists that remain.

In **Mage** games, this humanitarianism provides instant motivations for a group of Singers and their allies. A choir is an active, dynamic defender of the One, which brings wisdom and compassion to the Sleepers. This fact can express itself in a number of ways. Charity, political activism, scholarship and demon-hunting all have a place in the divine mission.

Theology

Who is God anyway? This question always weighs on a Singer's mind, even if it takes the form of a lifelong struggle to defend a single set of tenets. Faith is more than blind belief. Sleepers struggle with their devotion in the face on contradictions, institutional demands and tragedy. How much harder is it for an Awakened Singer, who sees the powers of unbelieving mages and knows about the dark, sinful underbelly of the supernatural world? Is the One even listening? Why does She allow injustice to exist? Why does He allow the world to stray from perfect faith and spit on His name?

Theology is the study of these questions. Singers search for answers to these questions with the same zeal as other mages who scour the world for ancient tomes and secret rites. The fact of the matter is that theological study serves much the same purpose as any mystical quest for knowledge. Learning about the One is the key to more power and enlightenment.

Theology provides more than an opportunity for the members of a choir to bicker. A rare religious text that sheds a new light on the underpinnings of a Singer's beliefs can be the focus of a quest, a schism, or even a mystery. Umberto Eco's novel (and the film) *The Name of the Rose* is a vivid example of this story line in action. Theological truth can be a matter of life and death. After all, if your beliefs are worth dying for, aren't they worth killing for?

Morals and Politics

Hand in hand with the study of theology comes the struggle to implement Chorus beliefs in the real world.

Long, Dark Nights of the Soul

Mage players are probably familiar with this stereotype: The Singer, supremely confident in his faith, lays down the law and tells you what God wants. As usual, the truth is a little more complicated.

While some Singers out there go through life with nary a doubt about their beliefs, these folks are the exceptions rather than the rule. Such mages are either mystics who are expressing themselves on a level so complex that their assertions can take on a dozen different meanings (all of which are suitable for a particular circumstance), or their rigid faith has shut the door to Ascension.

The fractious nature of the Celestial Chorus springs from a degree of self-doubt as well as temporal ambition. Sometimes, the One seems too distant to comprehend. Spiritual development arises from doubt as well as dogma, and Singers tread a delicate path in between. Paradox, failed Seekings, the misery of the World of Darkness and a host of other things can trigger a profound sense of emptiness inside a Singer.

Belief in the One is the core principle of the Chorus' paradigm, but so many mutually exclusive variations on that principle exist that a Singer needs to argue, act and look within to give himself a certain measure of confidence. Perfect faith and perfect trust are things to be earned.

Moments of doubt can be moments of high drama. In the worst cases, they can interfere with a Singer's ability to use magic, but you needn't go to such extreme lengths to make the experience an important one. A Chorus mage can react by withdrawing from the world, giving in to temptation or devoting herself to a self-destructive goal.

How does a Singer recover? There are a number of answers to this question, but one common theme involves a radical shift of perspective on the part of the mage. She might need to learn that divine magic isn't the be all and end all of holiness, or she might learn to accept the things that she used to think were profane. In extreme circumstances, this revelation might express itself as a Seeking. For characters with the *Circumspect Avatar* Merit (**Mage: The Ascension**, p. 294), Seekings can take the form of solutions to worldly crises. A Storyteller can easily play a riff on a character's doubt and surprise a player with a tangible result.

How do religious teachings affect the lives of Sleepers? How much influence should the Chorus have over society? These questions seem abstract at first, but when they begin to touch the everyday lives of Singers and Sleepers, they take on real importance. Some Choristers believe that only men can really serve the One, and Catholic Singers advocate celibacy as often as their Sleeper counterparts. How should the Chorus act on the manifold, contradictory desires of its constituents? Sexual orientation, the ethics of warfare, the relationship between church and state, and the tension between freedom and responsibility are all issues that the Chorus wrestles with.

Singers should have a coherent set of beliefs regarding these pressing issues. One undercurrent of a Chorus-centered chronicle is the struggle between the Singers' different moral standards. The irony is that the Singers, who examine moral issues more deeply than any other Tradition, are themselves the most divided over them. Then again, this split comes about because the Celestial Chorus cares deeply enough to argue over them!

Because Singers have such a passion for justice — such a desire to do the right thing — moral issues can be used to enhance the drama of your stories more effectively than they might when you use protagonists from other Traditions. A Singer might be called upon to defend someone whose lifestyle he finds repugnant, or he might have to deal with someone that his religion considers ritually unclean. This lies at the root of the Chorus' issues with Traditions such as the Cult of Ecstasy or the Verbena. Ancient quarrels between the Chorus and these groups can be traced back to differing moral perspectives.

Battling the Infernal

For all its divisiveness, the Chorus has always stood together regarding one doctrine: Infernal creatures and their willing servants should be expunged from the Tellurian. Demon-hunters aren't as common as they were during their High Mythic Age, but then again, neither are the gross manifestations of infernal power that they used to fight against. If anything, the Consensus has made infernal forces even more devious, since they have to conceal themselves in a world that has mostly forgotten about making deals with the Devil.

The stereotypical demon-hunter wields an antique sword in one hand and a Bible (or other holy book) in the other, but few modern Singers play the paladin's role these days. Instead, the Chorus tries to counter infernal influence where it matters most — in the lives of Sleepers. Even the Templars prefer to play influence games and gather intelligence before they unleash Relics, swords and Flames of Purification. The fact of the matter is that both Nephandi and the human cultists who emulate them are skilled enough in misdirection and concealment that a hasty approach can easily end up hurting the wrong people. Add to this situation the fact that factions, choirs and individual Singers all have wildly differing opinions about what constitutes an infernal presence, and a hotheaded crusade may well end up serving personal prejudices instead of freeing the suffering and "smiting the bad guys."

Most of the time, only minor demons and petty cultists take the direct approach. They're more concerned with immediate gratification because they have less to lose and little to gain from far-reaching plots. As seen in the previous chapter, the Chorus uses rites that care for the victim and condemn the creature tormenting it. Unfortunately, this kind of infernal harassment is somewhat random and all too common. A single choir could spend all of its time doing nothing but fighting this kind of "lesser evil." This isn't to say that these attacks aren't important, however. On the contrary, to ignore them in favor of bigger fish would be a callous act in of itself.

Nephandi and their masters operate with a greater level of restraint because they need more suffering to thrive and they have more to gain from ambitious plans. If an imp materializes, it's just fodder for the next cabal it runs into, but if Kshatla of the Seven Poisons can crack the Gauntlet, that's a whole other magnitude of trouble — and reward for the Nephandus who masterminds such a scheme.

For example, although Kshatla can be brought to Earth through child sacrifice, the Nephandus that serves it won't necessarily run out and start kidnapping boys and girls. Doing so attracts the attention of Sleeper authorities and other interested parties, and it doesn't provide the Fallen mage with any protection. Instead, he might take control of a company that manufactures drugs to treat postpartum medical problems. Afterward, he can magically "spike" medications to cause psychotic episodes and memory loss in the women who use them. The sacrifices are the product of these episodes.

If a choir discovers him, they can't just run into his office building, guns blazing. For one thing, the Sleepers working there could be hurt or killed, and they would make the use of vulgar magic a risky proposition. Furthermore, Sleeper authorities and Technocrats would both see their actions as a terrorist attack. The company might be manufacturing a critical drug required by AIDS or cancer patients as well. The smart Nephandus allows these activities to go on unhindered, so that an attack that disrupts his business also spreads suffering to innocents.

In this kind of situation, Choristers may be forced to infiltrate the corporation over a period of weeks, find evidence to present to the FDA that the drug is

The Big Issues

Racism. Sexism. Homophobia. Social inequality. These issues are difficult to talk about, but they are also the issues that cause religious schisms. People talk about "God's will" in order to justify their positions, and they couch their arguments in religious language. In our world, these are issues that monotheistic religions tackle daily, and if you trust your players, you may want to include these issues in your chronicle.

First of all, you should gauge your players' receptiveness. Some of your players may have been at the receiving end of religious discrimination. Others don't want to confront this much reality at the table, or they don't want to risk trivializing their beliefs by discussing them in the context of the game. You can deal with the last concern by emphasizing the separation between player and character. In any event, you shouldn't test your players' comfort levels without their permission.

The Celestial Chorus struggles with these issues as much as any Sleeper institution, if not more. The Chorus' diversity intensifies debates that could normally be resolved with an appeal to religious unity. At the same time, issues of discrimination are often less a matter of intention than tradition. An Exarch might not be aware that he's favoring his male disciples. He's just using his teacher's criteria for excellence, and thereby perpetuating the glass ceiling. However, the Chorus' diversity also means that these practices can be identified with a fresh pair of eyes, argued about and sometimes rooted out.

Racism has never been a particularly severe problem for the Chorus. Singers come from all over the world, and missionary activity has produced a crop of Singers every bit as devout as those native to the Chorus' traditional power centers. Furthermore, the Chorus accepts the One in many guises. Skin color is irrelevant in the face of divine wisdom. Individual Singers have been incredibly insensitive to foreign cultures in the course of their missionary work, but this chauvinism has usually been religious or cultural rather than racial. In the modern era, Singers who espouse racist views in the service of the One are either censured or suspected of infernal leanings. Regardless of the cause, most Singers recognize racism as a form of evil. Be it infernal or mundane, racism is a symptom of the world's spiritual corruption.

Sexism is still a contentious issue for the Chorus. Many conservative members use theological excuses to justify sexual inequality. Conservative Choristers sometimes claim that women aren't meant to serve the One, or that they can't perform the same rites as men. Others demand that women fulfil "traditional" household duties while taking on the mantle of an Awakened Singer, which hobbles their chances for advancement. Sexist attitudes aren't limited to men either. Some women also argue for strictures such as mandatory motherhood, celibacy or segregation by gender.

Discrimination against homosexuals is an issue that some members of the Chorus would very much like to sweep under the rug. The Chorus mirrors Sleeper society almost perfectly in this regard, following all the prejudices and recreating all of the debates of the religions from which they draw members. Homosexual Singers are usually either cautious or defiant in their relations with other members of the Tradition. Moderates are often too cowed by conservative elements in the Celestial Chorus to speak out. When the issue does come up, it is usually framed in formal debate, where fiery arguments and quotes from Leviticus are the order of the day. While not all of the cultures in which Singers thrive are homophobic, Judeo-Christian hegemony sometimes creates an undercurrent of intolerance in the most prestigious Adytums. Queer Singers who aspire to lead the Chorus have to choose whether to stay in the closet or speak out about an aspect of themselves that has nothing to do with their competence.

Social inequality has become a more pertinent issue as the Celestial Chorus has spread its influence to the richest and poorest people on the planet. Latin American and African Singers wonder about the morality of a world where one wealthy man can consume as much as an entire third world city over the course of a year. Because the Chorus has members on both sides of the fence, economic differences stand out all the more sharply, leading many to develop specific theological positions to deal with the problem. Some Singers have followed the example of some Latin American Catholics, who preach that Christ's message called for social change as much as it did for compassion. Others simply say, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's," and feel that economic issues are the business of politicians, not priests.

Despite the fact that they come from the most ideologically fractured Tradition, Choristers pursue these issues with a fervor that their allies find at once admirable and unnerving. No Singer would go out into the world without at least thinking about where she stands. Ask yourself what *your* Chorister feels about these issues, and how intensely he feels it. Does the character accept homosexuality but find the issue uncomfortable? Does the character have a tolerant attitude toward other cultures leavened with nationalist pride?

destructive, or even buy in to the company as shareholders. As vile as it may seem, a Singer may find himself sitting with a Dark One at the long table of a boardroom in a war of words instead of prayers.

Nonetheless, the time comes eventually to put subtlety aside and prepare for war. When Singers are fully prepared, they have no compunctions about unleashing God's thunder on evil's willing servants. A story line that pits your Singers against the infernal can be as subtle and morally subjective as any other, but it can ultimately end with a climax that's both cathartic and offers a temporary respite from the muddy moral waters of the World of Darkness.

The Song of Hope

The Celestial Chorus' mission is about more than fighting evil, making moral pronouncements or communing with the One. Most Singers agree that these imperatives are inextricably linked with the needs of the Sleepers. The Chorus supports charities, homeless shelters and activist groups, and individual Choristers try to do some good in their day-to-day lives. More conservative Singers tie these activities to missionary work. You don't receive their help unless you're willing to listen to some preaching and do some praying. Others simply do what they can and hope to lead others to the One by setting a good example.

This work can reap a number of benefits, from improved relations with the other Traditions (and even the Technocracy) to contacts throughout all walks of life. A Singer who's spent a year working in a soup kitchen may find herself privy to the details of street life, and she could acquire a few contacts and even allies there, while her more presentable choirmate could hobnob with the elite at a fund-raising ball for the place.

A choir can inherit a charity, support an existing one or even build one from the ground up. This last option can be especially challenging, since the charac-

Cinematic Evil vs. Real Evil

Evil exists.

—Romani proverb

Evil isn't a word we use much these days without snickering. It smacks of self-righteous judgment, and it serves as a caricature of complex moral realities. It's all shades of gray, right? Not necessarily.

Relative morality can only excuse so much. For all the talk people indulge in, any sane person knows that some things are simply wrong, and wrong in every way. Survivors of genocide and abuse can testify to the reality of evil in the world. It isn't a comfortable thing to think about, but evil isn't an effective dramatic element unless it comes across in a palpable, realistic sense. Just as you probably wouldn't run chronicles or characters without tying them to the real world, you shouldn't portray evil as an abstract menace in horns and a stylish black cloak.

For one thing, Nephandi don't control or inspire every instance of wrongdoing and avarice. A Technocrat, Traditionalist, Sleeper or even another Singer can follow the Dark Song without ever bending knee to an evil overlord. Many do turn to the service of demons, Malfeans or Outer Things, but this tragedy often occurs after a Dark One has followed the Path of Descent on his own. Such a mage might turn to infernal service to reap greater rewards for what he's already doing or to acquire extra protection in the face of opposition. While these pacts always give the Dark Singer more than what he bargained for (in the negative, soul-destroying sense), they are almost never the reason he turned to evil in the first place. In other words, the Devil *didn't* make him do it.

"Shades of gray" can be a catchphrase for tolerance, but it can also serve as an excuse for dark deeds. Evil is usually couched in comforting phrases such as, "The ends justify the means," or, "I was only following orders." Sadism and selfishness rarely seem wrong to the perpetrator. Popular media has reduced evil to an easily identifiable team of "bad guys" who do their dirty work offstage; a quick fade to the heroes from the ruins of the destroyed planet or the clutches of the monster and *boom!* Instant motivation.

Real evil, on the other hand, hurts real people, and that hurt should be confronted; it adds weight and meaning to a story, and it's more responsible to the themes involved. It's easy to yawn at a plan to blow up the Chantry, but it's harder to ignore the victims of a Nephandic ritual abuser. The former scenario just prods self-interest, while the latter raises moral hackles. Again, you should respect your players' limits, but there are ways to work around that. TV shows such as *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order* provide examples of how to present mature themes in a safe but respectful manner. If you feel comfortable taking it up a level, do so, but don't do it to pander to cheap voyeurism, and don't trivialize those tragedies that do occur in the real world.

ters have to deal with mundane officials, Technocratic surveillance and the fallout of those who have something to gain from misery working to undermine their efforts. In the World of Darkness, nonprofit organizations can suffer from corruption as easily as any other institution. No matter how pure a choir's intentions are, they may be stepping into a morass of politics, shady deals and administrative headaches.

Choir: Interfaith Outreach

Interfaith Outreach is a small choir that operates out of downtown Vancouver. In addition to the five Singers who form the choir proper, roughly two dozen Sleepers are involved with the group. Of these activists, five know of their friends' mystical gifts.

Interfaith Outreach isn't a secret organization. It holds public meetings, organizes protests and distributes literature calling for religious tolerance. On the other hand, its Awakened members keep a very low profile, and spectacular magic is frowned upon. This feeling is slowly starting to change as members of the choir become more and more restless.

The fact of the matter is that the cabal is failing in its secret mission, which is to become a refuge for Singers who want to put the business of the Ascension War behind them. However, restlessness is beginning to assert itself, and Interfaith Outreach is starting to take a more active stance that prepares for war rather than working for peace.

History

Interfaith Outreach used to have a more hawkish name. As the Nine Fires, the group members acted as front-line troops in the Ascension War.

The choir proper began in 1972, when Singers from several multi-Tradition cabals turned their back on their comrades to focus on objectives more befitting the Celestial Chorus. The previous three years had been a boon for the other Traditions, but the upsurge of alternative beliefs cased many to abandon establishment religions — the very faiths that the Chorus traditionally relied on for support. The Summer of Love (and the less publicized wave of revolutionary violence that accompanied it) sparked a new wave of aggression from the Technocracy. The remnants of good will that survived the Second World War collapsed in favor of renewed efforts to crack down on "deviants," be they magical or otherwise.

This situation is what inspired these Singers to meet in an old church on a rainy San Francisco day. Their concerns were threefold. First, the Chorus and its attendant religions needed more support. North American Singers were running out of the money and influence that they needed to win the people over to faith in the One.

Second, everyone recognized that the Technocracy would attack the weak links in the Traditions' armor, and at the time, the North American Chorus felt weak indeed. The Nine Fires would act as wandering sentinels and ensure that any attack upon an Adytum would be more trouble than it was worth.

Finally, the group acknowledged the problem of the Nephandi. The Dark Ones seemed to have a free reign in this era of moral disintegration. From proud and trendy Satanists to gurus-of-the-week, infernal temptation could manifest in a thousand new forms. Even worse, the new offensive by the Technocracy rendered null and void the agreements that kept the Union and the Council united against the Adversary.

Under the leadership of Aline Levesque, the promise to address these three concerns was wedded to an agreement to stifle religious differences. All were to agree on the primacy of monotheism, but that was enough. Ironically, the spirit of the times that caused them so much trouble was largely responsible for the success of mutual tolerance. They felt the need to come under one common banner to ward off the chaos outside.

After taking a name to symbolize the Spheres as emanations of the One's purifying flame, the seven mages of the choir toured troubled Adytums, helping when they could. Predictably, the Singers of the Nine Fires were conservative in their views, which led to some friction occasionally with hosts who'd adapted to the changes of the previous decade by adopting a more liberal outlook. While the choir initially felt nothing but disdain for the Jesus Freaks and pantheists who represented the new generation of Choristers, they gradually learned to accommodate diversity.

The fact that the Nine Fires suffered a high mortality rate was even more pressing. By placing themselves in the line of fire deliberately whenever a Chorus possession was threatened, they earned as many casualties as accolades. The high turnover in membership pressured the group to accept any Singer who accepted the risk involved. By 1985, Levesque was one of the only original members of the choir left alive.

Aware of the realities of the Nine Fires' mission, most of the new members were cut from a less idealistic, more pragmatic cloth. As the Ascension War turned against the Traditions, Govinder Singh advocated a more subtle approach. Levesque resisted him until January of 1998. That year, an investigation into a ritual abuse cult ended disastrously when the cabal tipped its hand by magically punishing a clique of sorcerers who they thought had been directing the disgusting enterprise. Unfortunately, it alerted the cult's true leader, Herr Flax.

Disguised as an introspective priest, the vengeful Nephandus took one of the choir's Singers to the Cauls before he was driven away. The survivors took a rest stop in Vancouver and swore to take to the field again after healing their spiritual wounds. They never left.

The Reckoning was the final nail in the coffin. The collapse of the old Council left the group without a clear direction, and Levesque suffered a deep bout of Quiet. Singh took control and retooled the Nine Fires into Interfaith Outreach. Besides caring for Levesque, he turned the choir's efforts toward restoring faith and tolerance. Sleeper support soon followed. When Aline Levesque returned to her senses, her choir was nothing like the cadre of spiritual warriors she'd left behind. Despite her avowed support for Interfaith Outreach, she's begun to push subtly for a return to the old days.

Mission

Interfaith Outreach promotes ecumenism and antiracism. Under Govinder Singh, the group sponsors conferences on these subjects and distributes street-level propaganda supporting religious tolerance and spirituality. Most visitors to downtown Vancouver have seen one of their posters or taken one of their pamphlets.

Awakened Singers are in the minority. Most members know the group's mages only as members of the organization's Coordinating Committee. While Singers do lead Interfaith Outreach, Singh emphasizes that the choir's mission is to help their community find justice and faith in the One in whatever way they see fit.

In addition, the choir uses its contacts in the community to deal with problems that require their Awakened talents. For the most part, doing so consists of spiritual cleansing, blessings and other subtle magics, but as veterans of the Ascension War the choir is willing to use extreme means to defend the people if the situation warrants it. Since Aline Levesque has recovered from Quiet, she's advocated a more proactive approach. This approach has borne fruit as the choir's managed to acquire a Node that it detected while "on patrol," but Singh cautions the choir not to take this success as a reason to act rashly.

Organization and Politics

Interfaith Outreach works in the same way as many other nonprofit organizations. General meetings are held four times a year, and anyone can attend and say their piece at this time. The meetings determine the

public direction that the group will take and what issues it will tackle in the next quarter.

The Coordinating Committee, which consists of the group's Singers and two of the five custos, implements these directives. The Committee also handles all of the group's magical business. Govinder Singh is the Chair of the Committee. Although he isn't a leader in any formal sense, he's usually looked to for guidance. Among the Singers, his requests are usually obeyed. Aline Levesque is the second most influential. The return of the Nine Fires' old leader has made the issue of leadership a little less clear, and even Singh accedes to her authority without argument on the rare (yet increasingly frequent) occasions that she chooses to exercise it.

Behind Levesque's back, things grow even more confused, because Sigh often modifies policies out of Levesque's earshot. Bold initiatives are changed into more cautious undertakings.

Interfaith Outreach's custos keep an eye out for anything that might require the Committee's magical intervention as well as other supernatural dangers. They also take care of legal and financial business as well as any activity that might expose the Singers to too much Technocratic scrutiny. None of them were associated with the Nine Fires, and they are a little puzzled by recent changes in the Committee's politics.

The group used to rely on rented spaces such as community centers, but the discovery of a Node in the Commercial Drive slums resulted in some hasty fund-raising and the purchase of the building containing it. The group slowly converts this old warehouse into a new business center.

Choir Members

While Govinder Singh and Aline Levesque are Interfaith Outreach's most prominent members, the other Singers do hold influence over the group's Sleepers. While they have their differences, they can and do cooperate to protect the choir and the Sleepers around them.

Alan Milewski is a Catholic priest and Adept from New York City who joined the Nine Fires in 1985. He's Aline Levesque's former Apprentice, and he remains loyal to her. Lately, this loyalty has expressed itself in the form of uncharacteristic dogmatism. He feels that promoting the faith that both of them share will somehow better her position, but it's begun to alienate his choirmates.

Lana Bleecher is an Initiate and a straightedge punk. This clean-living 23-year-old expresses her Gnostic Song through music that other Singers find harsh and occasionally offensive. She's particularly strident about

anti-racism, and she wishes that Interfaith Outreach would sanction militant protests on the issue. As a Vancouver native, she's unfamiliar with the choir's history.

Jay Hassan is an Ismaili Muslim who's been with the choir for six years. Unfortunately, this tenure included the Nine Fires' darkest days, and he still has nightmares about Herr Flax. What's worse, he has prophetic dreams (courtesy of the Time Sphere), and he often has trouble telling his night terrors apart from prescient visions. To quell his fears, he opposes most of Interfaith Outreach's initiatives, and he is something of a dead weight at meetings. Govinder Singh has tried to counsel him, but Singh has failed to cure his pessimism thus far.

Aline Levesque

Having recovered only recently from Quiet, Aline Levesque has yet to step up and reclaim the leadership of the choir. Nevertheless, she's begun to influence the direction of the group seriously, and it's beginning to return to the methods of the old Nine Fires as a result.

Background: Aline Levesque was Awakened by nothing less than the Holy Spirit. As a teenager, she used the Catholic rosary to work her way through vicious migraines and hallucinations. During these moments of fevered prayer, visions would form amidst the pain and disorientation. Finally, at the age of 18, a vision of the Savior in white enveloped her, and she knew that she'd been blessed and sanctified. She claims that angels guided her to her first mentor. Under expert tutelage, she became an able Singer.

She spent four years in a multi-Tradition cabal, but by 1970, she tired of the wave of self-indulgence that had seemingly swept every Tradition in the aftermath of the '60s. Scholars became radicals, and hedonism became more and more acceptable. She left the cabal a year later and traveled across North America, distributing a manifesto that would evolve into the Nine Fires' basis of unity. She organized the first meeting in San Francisco, and she assumed the mantle of leadership.

She used her visions to guide and teach the group. The fact that she felt that she was on a divinely ordained mission strengthened her resolve, and she trained herself in the arts of spiritual and physical warfare. While she wasn't the best teacher, she did have some remarkable insights about angels and demons and their place in the Tellurian. As her devotion to the mission became more and more intense, she began to loosen the requirements for new inductees, reasoning that anyone who appeared blessed by the One and wanted to join was fated to take up the struggle. While this practice liberalized the choir, it also opened them to infiltration.

After leading a direct attack on an infernal cult, Levesque was looking for replacements for John Finlay, a Singer who'd been killed in the raid. What she got was the soft-spoken Harold Felix — Herr Flax in disguise. The Nephandus played the part of a shy, unworldly priest, and he allowed Levesque to "toughen him up." He wove her often brutal lessons into his own magic, weakening the choir's empathy, until he managed to persuade the Gnostic Singer Janine Willow to participate in the secret torture of an alleged Technocracy informant. Flax used this act to take her into the Cauls, and he made it very clear that he'd twisted Levesque's own fanaticism against her. A year later, her attempts to locate Flax and Willow backfired, and the angels filled her mind with a new kind of fire: Quiet. She spent the next two years in a fugue in which she thought that the world was an illusion overlaying Hell itself. On occasion, the skin over the inferno tore asunder and demons dragged her down for punishment.

She recovered when Govinder Singh brought her to church, as he did every day when he cared for her. The madness wore off, and she realized that the Nine Fires had lost its way.

Now, she wants to return to crusading, but she doesn't want to repeat her mistakes. She's hoping to heal the choir's "cowardice" and mount an attack on Flax that will settle affairs once and for all.

Image: At 55, Aline Levesque is in excellent shape. While she's a touch thin, her ruddy skin and long brown hair glow with vitality. She has the disconcerting habit of staring through people, and doing so for far too long for comfort. She wears comfortable, rugged denim clothes, and she usually has a knife and a revolver hidden somewhere on her person along with a rosary, bulletproof Bible

Using Interfaith Outreach

Interfaith Outreach isn't a wandering choir anymore; characters will have to go to Vancouver to meet them. All the same, they do have many resources to offer Singers and other Traditionalists who care to pay a visit.

The most notable resource is the choir's Node. Recently discovered, the Node is a potent one (level three as per to *Node* Background in **Mage: The Ascension**, pp. 122-123) that hums with the Dynamic Resonance of Insight. The Node did not have a guardian (although several spirits visited regularly) until recently, when Aline Levesque bid a minor emanation of the Archangel Gabriel to watch over it. Despite its impressive pedigree, the spirit is only of moderate power (equivalent to a Jaggling), and it typically appears as a winged pillar of fire. Singh is willing to share the Node with friendly mages who pass through, although Levesque has asked Singh not to volunteer such assistance.

In addition, the choir enjoys widespread community support and is willing to use it to help those whom they feel are worthy. Cabals who have high moral standards and a measure of tolerance can ask for and receive food, shelter and street-level intelligence about the area.

Interfaith Outreach would like other cabals to use its model or at least work to improve the lives of Sleepers without imposing their beliefs. This desire often puts them at odds with more conservative choirs — Reverend Jude Bankole Kuti has written several letters to the choir arguing against its ecumenism — and truth be told, its members do tend to practice the more rigorous disciplines of their faiths alone so as not to provoke offense. Their ideals are laudable, but they choose to pursue such devotions privately much of the time rather than hash out their differences in the open. Sublimated conflict is slowly tearing the choir apart, and the intervention of outsiders may well trigger a final resolution. Whether that conflict will destroy or revitalize the choir will depend greatly on what visitors do.

Finally, the choir's legacy as the Nine Fires both empowers and haunts it. As veterans of the Ascension War, four out of the five members of the choir can provide useful training and insight into the more violent applications of the Spheres and guerilla tactics. Levesque is happy to teach what she knows, and even Singh will help someone whose cause is just. On the other hand, the group still suffers from the aftershock of Herr Flax's attack. Requests for help against the Nephandi are liable to open old wounds.

By choice or by accident, visiting mages could well determine the choir's future. Will the choir return to the battlefield or stay with the community? The results might ultimately change the Celestial Chorus as a whole, as Interfaith Outreach's vision of tolerance is emulated or cast into the flames of the Nine Fires.

and a copy of the *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. These last three objects serve as foci. The knife also has a cruciform handle that she occasionally uses in exorcisms.

Roleplaying Hints: You're passionate and fearless. If you can escape Hell (Quiet? How patronizing!) then you can rebuild the Nine Fires. This time, you're going to get it right. You won't tolerate laxness, but you won't descend into cruelty, either. You're going to take the best parts of what the choir's become and use it to strengthen what it must be once again. To do so, you have to be gentle but convincing. Singh seems to have steered the group into a direction based on his own needs and fears, and he might have to go, but the rest can be made to see. Some of them are waiting to finish what they started when they joined the Nine Fires, and you're going to help them.

Your magic manifests itself as spontaneous visions, singing in tongues, or ritualized prayers designed to attract the attention of an angel or rebuke a demon. Your Avatar appears in two forms: There's an angel — always driving you forward — and the Savior — waiting at the end of the quest with your eternal reward.

Faction: Monist
Essence: Questing
Nature: Perfectionist
Demeanor: Judge
Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3
Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Cosmology 5 (Astral), Dodge 3, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 3, Linguistics 2, Meditation 4 (Christian), Melee 3, Occult 4 (Angels/Demons), Performance (Singing) 2
Backgrounds: Avatar 5, Contacts 2, Library 2
Arete: 4
Spheres: Forces 3, Mind 2, Prime 3, Spirit 4
Willpower: 8
Quintessence: 5
Paradox: 1
Resonance: (Dynamic) Driven, (Entropic) Hellish

Govinder Singh

As Interfaith Outreach's current leader, Govinder Singh has largely abandoned the ideals of the old choir. He enjoys his current work because it falls closer to his own ideals than the struggles of the old Nine Fires, but he does feel a certain sense of restlessness and fear. He's a trained warrior, but the events of the last decade have left him spiritually scarred. He isn't sure whether he argues his position out of cowardice or sincere belief.

Background: Govinder Singh Awakened shortly after being baptized into the Khalsa Panth, the Sikh fraternity that distinguishes itself through unshorn hair, the turban and the wearing of the kirpan (sword or dagger). The teenage Singh came to realize the nature of the One after intense meditation.

Singh lived in a rural community in Punjab, India until the age of 18, when he immigrated to Vancouver, Canada to live with his uncle and meet a young woman who his family hoped he would eventually marry. Unfortunately, his magic got the best of him. The tales of brave warrior gurus set his heart aflame, and he spent every spare moment looking to right wrongs. He fell in with the Nine Fires when he followed his mystical senses right into the middle of a fight between the choir and a squad of Men in Black. His skills helped turn the tide, and he was accepted into the Nine Fires. In their travels he met another Awakened Sikh, who convinced him that he was on the right path.

Unfortunately, Govinder Singh forgot about his family. His distraught uncle assumed that he'd run off with crooks. Singh's letters home were no help. He was always guarded about what he was doing or where the money that he sent came from, which fueled his family's suspicions.

In the meantime, he became a skilled warrior and mystic. A potent combination of Khalsa martial training and the Chorus' Songs made him an invaluable asset to the Nine Fires. Aline Levesque eventually made it clear that he was second in command, and he wore the responsibility with quiet pride.

When the Nephandus Herr Flax crippled the group, Singh organized the retreat to Vancouver. An awkward encounter with his family ended well when he revealed his Awakened nature to them. They offered the choir the support of the community and helped him tend to Aline Levesque when she fell into Quiet.

His return also inspired him to take a more critical look at the purpose God intended for him. Sikhism values equality and tolerance, things that he'd had little opportunity to fight for as a part of the Nine Fires. He took the opportunity afforded by the choir's misfortune and began to direct them toward healing themselves through community service.

Levesque's return to sanity shook Singh's conviction that he's doing the right thing. To a certain extent, his decisions have been informed by fear — he doesn't want his companions to suffer — but, at the same time, he honestly feels that Interfaith Outreach represents the direction that the choir, if not the Chorus as a whole, must pursue to survive the new millennium.

Image: Govinder Singh is a muscular, 30-year-old man of Indian descent. Like all members of the Khalsa Panth, he doesn't cut his hair. He keeps his beard and moustache neatly combed, and he keeps his hair under a saffron-colored turban. As his faith demands, he also wears the kara (a round steel bracelet) and the kirpan (a ceremonial dagger). Under his beard, his face is quite thin, and he has a tendency to smile when people are watching him. Singh usually dresses in simple earth tones.

Roleplaying Hints: You want to do the right thing, but you're wary of your own motives. Are you a coward? Is this direction really the best for the choir to follow now that the Ascension War has collapsed? Aline Levesque is your friend, your mentor and your comrade-at-arms, but you're proud of what you've done to help people in your community. You're also acutely aware that you should get married one of these days. Your faith finds virtue in living a normal life, not gallivanting around on magical quests, and you want to be good to your family, since they've been so understanding and you've been so irresponsible.

Your Songs come from your lifestyle. The precepts of the Khalsa fill you with strength and dignity, and they keep your purpose aligned with God's. You merely

need to have the signs and think upon their virtues to invoke enlightened power.

Faction: Latitudinarian

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Architect

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Cosmology 3, Dodge 4, Firearms 2, Law 2, Leadership 3, Linguistics 2, Meditation 4 (Sikh), Melee 4 (Blades), Occult 3, Stealth 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Avatar 3, Contacts 2, Library 2

Arete: 3

Spheres: Forces 3, Prime 3, Time 3, Correspondence 1

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 3

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Idealistic

Legends of the Chorus

The Celestial Chorus has a rich history, drawn in part from the world's holy books. Stories drawn from scripture are another source of conflict within the Chorus. Which stories should be taken literally, and which should be considered allegory? Some conservatives believe that rejecting traditional creation myths and histories can only strengthen the Technocracy's grip on the Consensus, while others preach that the symbols contained in stories such as Genesis are far more important than their literal veracity.

While many of the Chorus' tales come from scripture, they aren't the only source of myths and legends. Oral traditions around the world have preserved legends of the One's Singers, from nomadic cultures that venerate their storytellers to the morality plays and saint's days of the medieval peasantry. Parables teach, and myths point the way to secrets best uncovered by the worthy.

The following legends are well known to most Choristers. No Singer has yet discovered the truth behind any of them. Perhaps the future will reveal their meaning, or perhaps they are myth, shaped by belief as much as anything else.

The Merovingians

Some Singers speak of the Merovingians — the line of kings preceding Charlemagne. Merovingian rulers were said to have had a divine spark within them. Most Sleeper historians dismiss this assertion as hyperbole, a holdover from pagan times when kings ruled with the approval of savage gods. However, a small group of conspiracy theorists, occultists and Singers claim that the Merovingians had a holy secret: They were bound by blood to the One Himself.

In fact, the blasphemous legend asserts that either Jesus or his brother James fathered children, and that Joseph of Arimathea spirited them away to Western Europe for safekeeping. They say that the Holy Grail was not a cup containing the blood of Christ, but symbolized His bloodline. As the descendants of this hallowed line, the Merovingians defended Christianity because they wished their birthright to prosper, and they influenced the development of the Church secretly. After laying the groundwork for the Holy Roman Empire, it is said that

The Divine Conspiracy

The truth of the Merovingian legend is something that the Storyteller should figure out for herself. In a conspiratorial, Chorus-centered chronicle it might all be true, but in a mainstream **Mage** story, historical forces, and not a secret society, engineered the rise of the Church and the Templars. Mages elaborated on these movements and influenced them in turn (or in the case of the Templars, almost entirely subverted them), but they rarely exerted the kind of broad control that the Merovingian legend implies. For those players with access to **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, the legend may be a distorted recollection of the Ksirafai's influence (although getting to the bottom of it shouldn't be easy by any stretch of the imagination, since even the Technocracy's forgotten about them).

All the same, mages claiming to be Merovingians *were* members of the Chorus, and they *did* vanish after their "cousins," the Templars, were brought into the fold. Were they impostors who fled before the deception was revealed? Were they self-deluded and corrected by the Reckoning? Were they killed by the Templars or dealt with some other rival?

Or did they retreat into another plot still, to chase a goal undreamed of by any but themselves?

they founded a secret society — the Brotherhood of Zion — and created the Templars to secure Christendom and retake the Holy Land. One of their number was Baldwin, Crusader-King of Jerusalem. As a descendant of Jesus, he held the territory by right of blood.

It's further alleged that the Merovingians built churches and Templar fortresses along ley lines and according to the principles of sacred geometry — the very same tools that empowered the Craftmasons of later times. Could it be that the Brotherhood of Zion helped create the Technocracy? The connection between the Celestial Chorus, the Templars and the Technocracy has always been a tenuous but persistent rumor. Perhaps these secret kings were the cause.

Until recently, certain Choristers claimed to be descendants of the Merovingians, and they claimed to Sing by right of their blood and the symbols of ancient kingship: long hair, the chalice and the crown. With the arrival of the Templars, these mages vanished mysteriously. They had always held themselves apart from the rest of the Chorus, and few were sorry to see them depart. (Their vain claims didn't endear them to Christian Singers.) Still, a few Singers now wonder if these preposterous tales had a grain of truth in them after all.

The Kingdom of Prester John

Throughout the Middle Ages, mundane and Singer clergy alike were impressed with the tales of Prester John. Legends painted him as the Christian Emperor of Asia and a mage whose demesne included the Garden of Eden itself. Prester John's empire was supposedly as large as all of Europe, and he held sway over a court of men and fantastic creatures who spoke as men, all of whom were devout Christians. Prester John was the bishop and priest of his realm. His word was law, and his law was always just.

So popular, so convincing, were the stories that mountebanks could often make a dime by posing as Prester John's ambassadors and demanding gold as tribute. During the Crusades, ambassadors were sent east with pleas for aid against the Muslims. None were answered.

In the 13th century, the Church sent two priests as emissaries in an attempt to secure an alliance with the mysterious king. The Celestial Chorus also sent two of their own to secretly follow these pious Sleepers and discover the truth for themselves. What followed was a strange bifurcation of events. To this day, no Singer can judge the truth of it.

Despite their faith and endurance, the Sleeping priests never found Prester John's realm. Instead, they stumbled upon the court of Temujin (Genghis) Khan. At first they thought that the Golden Horde's ruler was Prester John himself, since the Mongols practiced a strange form of Christianity and Temujin himself had been baptized. They soon discovered that such wasn't the case. Temujin was a shaman, first and foremost, but he promoted religious diversity and even practiced the outer forms of each religion in his far-flung dominion. The priests attempted to do their duty as emissaries nonetheless, but they were housed with the rest of Temujin's religious advisors, away from the Khan himself. Left to bicker with their eastern counterparts, they were particularly humiliated when the Buddhists trounced them in a debate.

The Singers experienced something entirely different. Despite the fact that they had been selected for their skepticism and level-headedness, they began to see wondrous things such as trees that spoke to them while the Sleepers plodded obliviously onward and lions who roared in greeting to them wearing crowns of thorns.

The Hidden Kingdom

Prester John's kingdom might still exist in a contemporary **Mage** game. The most obvious location would be in the Astral Umbra. The legendary priest-king could preside over a court of Bygones, virtuous souls and angelic Umbrood in a realm close to the Astral Heavens. If John was a mage, he might also have set up a secret Horizon Realm adjacent to the Shade Realm of Spirit, Time or Prime.

Of course, Prester John would also make a fine infernal Tempter. His holiness could be nothing but a sham, designed to dazzle Singers so that his machinations can pass unnoticed or take on the guise of righteous work. In this case, it can serve as an object lesson that reminds the characters that they can't rely on some omnipotent father-figure to do their thinking for them.

Even if Prester John still reigns somewhere in the Astral Umbra, knowing as much still doesn't solve the mystery surrounding him. Astral reality is susceptible to belief, and Europeans believed for hundreds of years that Prester John's kingdom lay just to the east. Therefore, such a realm might be nothing but a copy, woven from the dreams of the Middle Ages.

As Crusaders and merchants ventured further east, the purported location of the kingdom had to be revised, until it was said to lay near to, or perhaps inside fated Cathay. There *were* Christians in China at the time. Nestorian Christianity was popular among Chinese merchants for a time, and part of the confusion between Temujin and Prester John came from the fact that the Khan embraced that faith (as well as virtually every other practiced in his domain). Some Singers think that the basis for the legend lies somewhere in Asia, and they scour China and Mongolia in search of the truth.

After a harsh thunderstorm, the Singers lost track of their Sleeping quarry, and the steppes around them changed into a lush jungle. They were approached by a headless man in fine silks, whose face lay across his chest. This strange creature bid them to attend "Emperor John's" court, and led them to a huge, golden-domed palace, reminiscent of the Hagia Sophia but a dozen times larger.

After several days of receiving almost Heavenly hospitality and seeing the joy that charged every step of Prester John's subjects, they were given an audience with the Emperor himself. They approached a radiant throne guarded by talking lions.

The Singers reported that they were consumed by a divine bliss that made it impossible to recall Prester John's features clearly or to remember exactly what he said to them. They could only remember two things. First, they remembered that he offered them each a golden fruit, which he said had come from the Tree of Knowledge. Sensing a trial, the Singers refused. Second, they remembered that when he dismissed them, he said, "One day, I will sing with your Chorus."

They awoke a few days ride from Constantinople, far west of their last known locale. After returning to their Adytum, they told their elders, who confirmed that the Singers believed that they had spoken the truth. Their words were recorded faithfully and handed down to the present day.

The Celestial Chorus is divided on the nature of these Singers' experiences. Did they meet an enlightened ruler, or did they escape the Adversary's deception? Some imagine that they passed into a strange Umbral Realm, while others submit that it was a real kingdom that had become too virtuous for the Consensus to support. Most see the last as an unsatisfying answer, for if it's true, what hope does the Chorus have to bring righteousness to Earth?

The Celestial Temple of the Sun

This Adytum was once thought to be the Ancestral Chantry of the Celestial Chorus. The Tradition's greatest Exarchs often spoke of the place, and the White Monks that passed on the ultimate secrets of the One from its cloistered seclusion. When the Tradition became better known, many were surprised that most Choristers had never seen the place, and they scarcely knew more about it than the ambassadors who questioned them. Instead, they were directed to the Great Adytum, the residence of the Pontifex Maximus.

Now that the Great Adytum has been lost to the Reckoning, the question of the Celestial Temple of the Sun grows all the more pertinent. If it could be found, it might provide the physical and spiritual resources the Chorus needs to survive this difficult period; Monists

also hope that the Temple will unify all Singers under one vision, allowing them to stride forth and secure a greater voice in the Council of Nine.

What especially intrigues today's Singers is the reputed location of the Temple. Instead of being isolated by the Horizon, the Adytum is purported to lie under Vatican City. Supposedly it is a great underground monastery that is only accessible via Correspondence Songs, and only then if the Singer knows the correct signs. Choristers scour the Eternal City looking for divine and mundane clues to the Celestial Temple's whereabouts, but without success. The strong Faith around the Vatican makes magical perceptions unreliable, and the White Monks don't appear to have left any sign of their presence in the upper world.

The White Monks are as much a legend as the Adytum itself. To become one is said to require perfect virtue and the wisdom to decipher the ancient signs of the One: the rose, the sun's disk and the cross. Those who fail may never repeat the test. Those who succeed are taken to the Celestial Temple of the Sun, and they wear the white robe for the rest of their days.

The Temple reputedly holds the most ancient lore of the Chorus. White Monks study the ancient cult of the Aten, sing hymns composed by Mithras himself and guard the secret theurgy of Pope Honorius. They transmit these secrets to the Chorus' wisest Exarchs in dreams or transport them bodily to the Temple to show them a truth about the One that has been long forgotten to the world above.

Even rarer are tales of the Red Monks, or *Siccari*. These Singers have passed the Temple's tests, but have refused the white robe, choosing instead to share their wisdom with the world. Simpler legends say that the Red Monks are the Celestial Temple of the Sun's enforcers, and they weed out evildoers in the Chorus. The White Monks use their command of Prime and Correspondence to take the Paradox accrued by these dread deeds upon themselves, so that the *Siccari* can act without fear of retribution.

The True Temple

If it were discovered, the Celestial Temple of the Sun would change the face of the Celestial Chorus, if not the Traditions themselves. If the Temple was ever contacted and the White Monks were convinced to intervene in worldly affairs, the Chorus would become the mightiest Tradition of all, armed with ancient lore and Masters (and greater mages) capable of using it to its greatest effect.

This all assumes that the Temple exists.

It is true that the tales of the Temple have appeared in many different places, to Singers who never even realized that they had the same stories until they began to share them. This suggests that the Temple, the White Monks and the Red Monks all exist in some form or another.

On the other hand, these legends tend to frame Seekings and tales of Ascension. These are times full of unpredictable magic, profound visions and fateful dreams — not all of which are reliable. The Celestial Temple of the Sun may simply be a sign that lies submerged in the Chorus' collective unconscious. It's also entirely possible that lesser Singers, Umbrood and even Dark Ones have masqueraded as the Temple's secret monks to serve their own purposes.

Clever players will note the similarities between the White and Red Monks and the description of Ascension and the Oracle Seeking in **Masters of the Art**. Sometimes, a symbol is powerful enough.

Some Exarchs deride this interpretation. They submit that the Red Monks are wiser than their cloistered counterparts and that the title *Siccari* (which means "dagger-bearer" or "bandit") marks them as martyrs instead of thugs. The Red Monks suffer beneath knives rather than wield them, and they are scorned as criminals and blasphemers by the profane world.

Who knows the truth? A handful of Masters dream, and the search continues still.

Raising a Voice to Heaven

No few of the Chorus are sinners, but all aspire to be saints. So much depends on the one judging the deed. With so many creeds, there are perspectives enough to judge any Singer to be both. Sin and virtue are ephemeral things, and the pious should tread carefully.

It's into this uncertain world that a new Chorister comes, filled with conviction, piety and even doubt. A Singer knows that reverence for the One is the only constant among them. Who the One is, Her gender, His desires and His name are all debatable.

Yet the very schisms that hobble the Tradition's collective ability grant individuals the freedom to believe what they wish. As long as they accept the One and wield magic as a sword of Faith instead of Will, a Singer's eccentricities are likely to be tolerated. Although her seniors may deride her blasphemous beliefs, they accept that even blasphemers are counted among the Chorus, and they will work to find a choir more suited to her tastes.

The following templates illustrate the kind of diversity to be found within the Celestial Chorus. Magic comes from the One, but it's made richer by the varied voices of the Many.

Doubting Pastor

Quote: *The One may work through me, but that doesn't mean He shows His hand.*

Prelude: Nobody could call your life anything but "normal," really. Sure, you had your foibles and your quirks. Everyone does. You played some hockey in your high school and college years, you went to seminary school, you had a wacky aunt and a younger brother who became an engineer — nothing special, right? Except that one night, after you were talking to God, someone talked back.

A Seraphim? Metatron? A demon in disguise? Insanity? You weren't sure. While faith had blossomed in you early, it shrank as you aged. By the time you heard the voice, you had really come to doubt the existence of any sort of divinity. The usual questions battered at your psyche: Why would a loving, caring creator leave His world in such disarray? Why did humans have to be so sinful and base when they could be so much more? Why bother at all if the universe was preordained? To you, theological thinkers had never sorted out these issues successfully. That's why you were totally unprepared for your Awakening.

As you broke down over the course of several months, your parish drifted away. People realized at first that your faith seemed shaken, and later that you had some sort of uncertain, crazed mania, as if you could barely keep yourself from laughing or screaming at the voice. Still it urged you: *I'm here*, it told you. *We are as One. Let your will be the will of the Divine.* Fortunately for you, an experienced Chorister happened into your church just before you were about to lose your position. He recognized your doubts and your fears, and he explained everything to you as best he could.

Now you recognize the power of miracles, and you work in concert with your inner voice. Still, the same questions haunt you. This Awakening places you only barely closer to knowing the mind of God. Why can't He reveal his plan? You think that perhaps humans are so fallible that they have forgotten how to accept His grace. But sometimes, you fear that maybe His plan is too terrible for humans to witness.

Concept: Take your small-town preacher with a kindly heart and not a whole lot of stock in what he's supposed to believe. Leaven with a mysterious inner voice that pushes him toward the mind of God and a very human fear of the divine. With your training, you are a good counselor, an able spiritualist and philosopher and a skillful mage. You must discover your own place in the world, though, which is something no magic can do for you.

Roleplaying Tips: Offer compassion, rational advice and a bit of humor. You keep abreast of sports and politics, partly because it helps you to relate to your flock and partly because you actually like these things. In your mind, there's nothing wrong with recognizing the good things that humans can do and that the One provides. Still, when push comes to shove, you aren't really sure where you're going or what you're doing. You long for some certainty that isn't there. Even though you've had an experience that would reaffirm faith for anyone, it's not enough for you, and you wonder sometimes if that longing indicates some flaw in yourself.

Magic: Very traditional Chorister tools shape your magic: prayer, liturgy, holy water, incense, ritual with trappings. To work your magic best, you need to be in church, with your vestments and books. Often you work real miracles for only one person at any given time (no sense drawing too much attention or Paradox). Often you must rely on all the trappings of high ritual to perform your magic, although you can call upon your Prime energies in a bind with a few phrases of power and a commanding stance. Your awareness of space flows from watching incense and crafting hand-sigils of significance in the air, while your Life healing often functions in conjunction with holy water and a good dose of channeling.

Celestial Chorus

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Pedagogue
ESSENCE: Questing
DEITIEANOR: Caregiver

FACTION: Monist
CONCEPT: Doubting Pastor
CABAL:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma (Inspiring)	●●●●○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●●○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Crafts	●●○○○	Academics	●●●○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Computer	●○○○○
Awareness	●○○○○	Etiquette	●●○○○	Cosmology	●○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Enigmas	●●●○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Meditation	●○○○○	Investigation	●○○○○
Expression	●●●○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	●○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	●●○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Occult	●●○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	●○○○○	Science	○○○○○

SPHERES

Correspondence	●○○○○	Life	●●○○○	Prime	●●○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	○○○○○
Forces	○○○○○	Mind	●●○○○	Time	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Backgrounds	
Allies	●●○○○
Contacts	●●○○○
Resources	●●●○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

Arete: ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower: ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Resonance
Dynamic ○○○○○
Entropic ○○○○○
Static (Questioning) ●○○○○

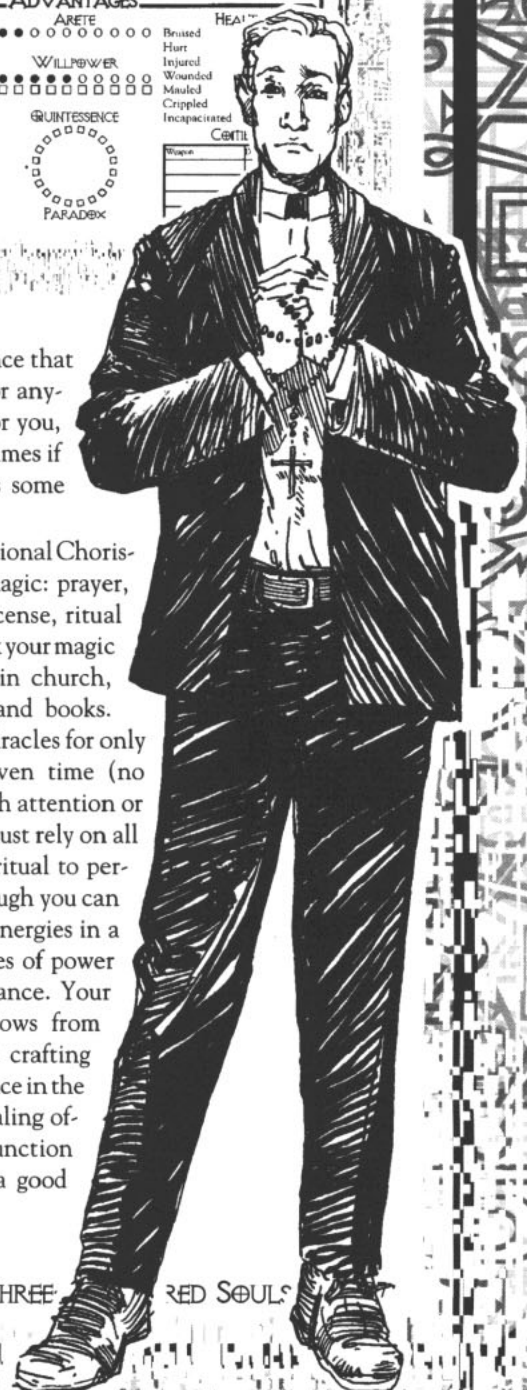
Quintessence

Experience

Paradox

Health
Bruised
Hurt
Injured
Wounded
Mauled
Crippled
Incapacitated

Combat
Weapon



Celestial Chorus™

Name:

Character: Doubting Pastor

Chronicle:

Faction: Monist

Essence: Questing

Cabal:

Nature: Pedagogue

Deitfeanor: Caregiver

Arete ●●○○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○

Quintessence/Paradox □□□□□□□□□□

Resonance

Dynamic

Entropic

Static Questioning x1

Physical

Quick

Tenacious

Tough

Social

Charismatic x3 Magnetic

Elegant Persuasive

Expressive

Mental

Attentive Knowledgeable

Insightful Reflective

Intuitive

Abilities

Academics: Theology

Alertness Etiquette

Enigmas Expression x2

Merits & Flaws

Backgrounds

Allies x2

Contacts x2

Influence: Church x1

Resources x3

Spheres

Apprentice of Correspondence

Initiate of Life

Initiate of Mind

Initiate of Prime

Rotes

Celestial Chorus™

Name:

Character: Philanthropist

Chronicle:

Faction:

Essence: Pattern

Cabal:

Nature: Architect

Deitfeanor: Martyr

Arete ●●○○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○

Quintessence/Paradox □□□□□□□□□□

Resonance

Dynamic

Entropic

Static Supportive x1

Physical

Graceful Delicate

Steady

Vigorous

Social

Dignified Friendly

Elegant Genial

Expressive Witty

Mental

Attentive Insightful

Clever x2 Rational

Dedicated x2

Abilities

Academics: Theology x2

Expression x2

Subterfuge x2

Merits & Flaws

Backgrounds

Allies x1

Contacts x3

Resources x5

Spheres

Disciple of Mind

Disciple of Prime

Rotes

Philanthropist

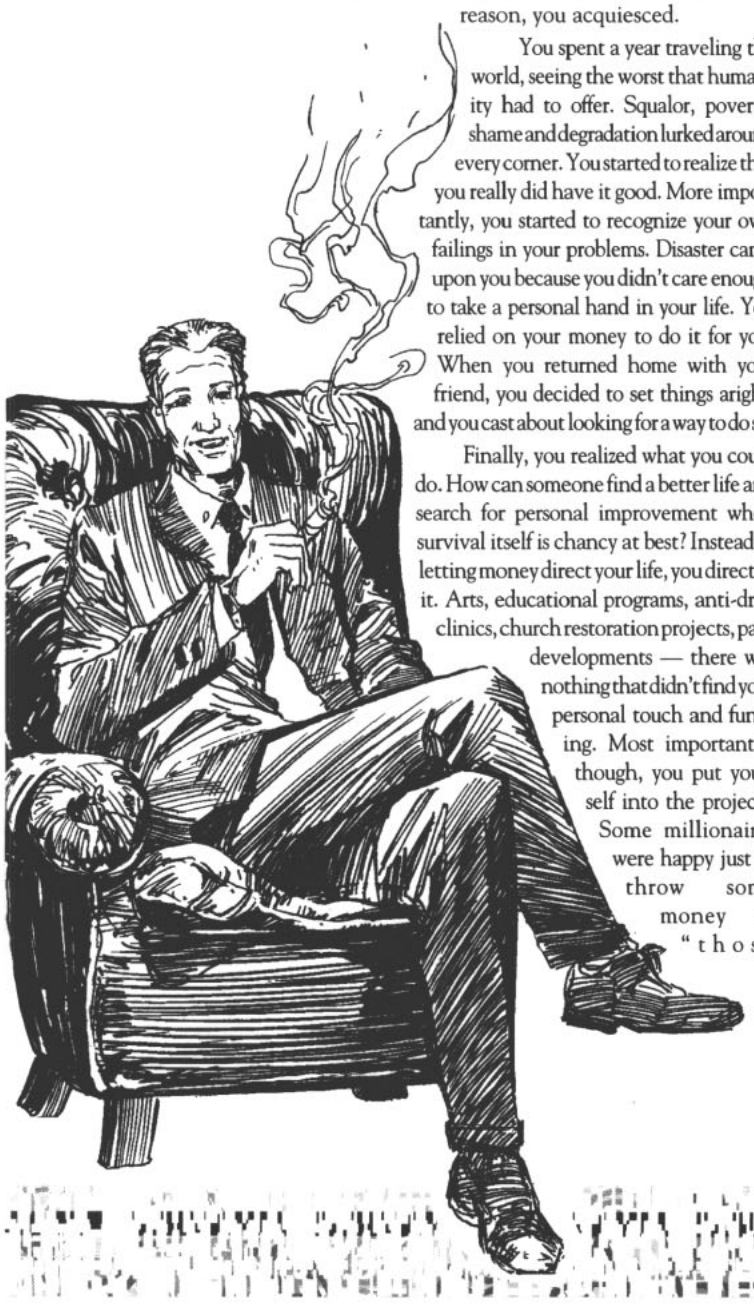
Quote: *As the Creator is merciful, so too it falls on his creations to be merciful.*

Prelude: You've always had money. It came with the family, the natural talent, the breeding and schooling. Money bought your education, your degree, your easy job and your way into high society. It bought friends, influence and prestige. It even helped you bury the evidence of your occasional, youthful peccadilloes.

Money can't buy happiness, sadly.

Disaster followed your 20s and 30s. Two dead wives. A collapsed economy that couldn't support your business. An amoral child who fell into the drug culture and died from an overdose. You can buy off the headlines, but how can you buy off the problems?

You'd often sneered at people who turned to religion. You considered it a crutch, a weakness and failing. Then one day an old high school buddy turned up in a Roman collar. At first, you figured he was going to hit you up for a donation. Instead, he asked after you — all about your life, your problems, how he could help. Bitterly, you spouted that everything was fine — after all, you could be worse off. You could be poor and starving in India. Your friend just nodded and asked you if you wanted to see the truth of that statement. For some reason, you acquiesced.



You spent a year traveling the world, seeing the worst that humanity had to offer. Squalor, poverty, shame and degradation lurked around every corner. You started to realize that you really did have it good. More importantly, you started to recognize your own failings in your problems. Disaster came upon you because you didn't care enough to take a personal hand in your life. You relied on your money to do it for you. When you returned home with your friend, you decided to set things aright, and you cast about looking for a way to do so.

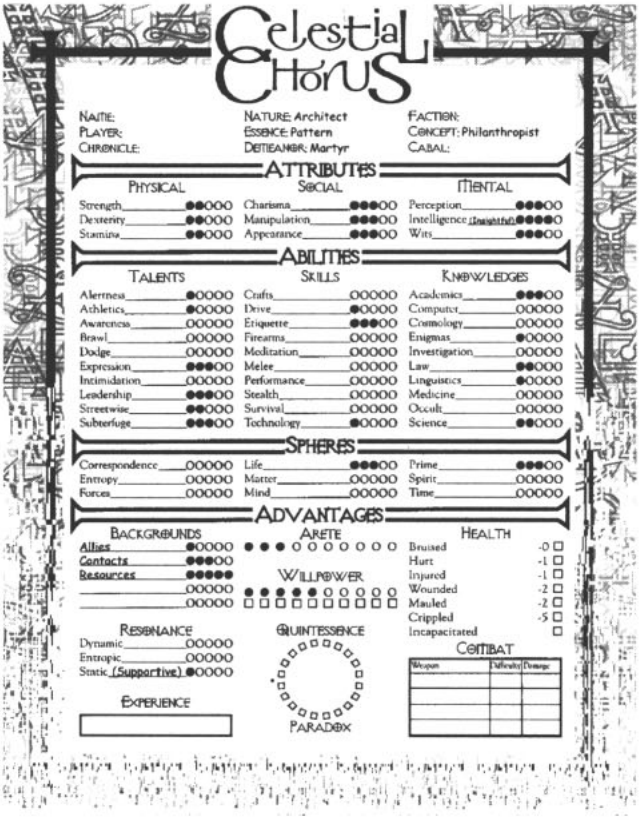
Finally, you realized what you could do. How can someone find a better life and search for personal improvement when survival itself is chancy at best? Instead of letting money direct your life, you directed it. Arts, educational programs, anti-drug clinics, church restoration projects, park developments — there was nothing that didn't find your personal touch and funding. Most importantly, though, you put yourself into the projects. Some millionaires were happy just to throw some money at "those other people's" problems and pat themselves on the back. You dove in, became part of the project and part of the solution. You saw how you could change other peoples' lives, make them better, and you finally realized how to improve your own. Once you took the good fight into your hands, you recognized that there really was a connection between all people, be they wealthy or poor, classless or stratified, hopeless or hope-giving. Your friend just nodded at the truths you'd learned and started your education on how to shape your efforts to the best.

Concept: Very simply, you have a heap of money, and you're not afraid to use it. However, you also have a deep and abiding faith in humanity's power of self-improvement. Unlike other Choristers you don't follow a specific religious doctrine. You simply touch the One when you recognize that people are pretty much all very similar and that you can change circumstances for the better. Personal action is as important as money, of course. As a result, you work on personal relationships with each cause that you foster, be it environmentalism, political activism, religious revival or whatever.

Roleplaying Tips: Smile a lot, dress snappily and always offer to help. You've become quite good at listening to people and their problems. When someone's hurting, you saunter up with a bit of disarming wit, maybe an apology and an insightful aside at something that might help. Often your suggestion seems implausible and it provokes a bitter reply, until you show that you really do have the ability to get it done. Then you dive in with gusto. You have self-confidence and esteem in spades, because you know that not only do you have a good life, but you have the rare opportunity to make life better for everyone else, too.

Magic: Where other Choristers rely on prayer or signing, you have a penchant for social interaction, community and a little coincidental greasing of the wheels. Your name and money can perform some astounding tricks to influence people with Mind magic. Your Prime power comes from channeling the positive feelings and communal good will created through your efforts.

Equipment: Tailored business suit, PCS with speed-dial to several social organizations, wad of cash, stack of credit cards, another wad of cash, Lexus LS 430



Relic-Hunter

Quote: *The chopped Biblical manuscripts were from around the sixth century AD, but this is much older. Where'd you find it?*

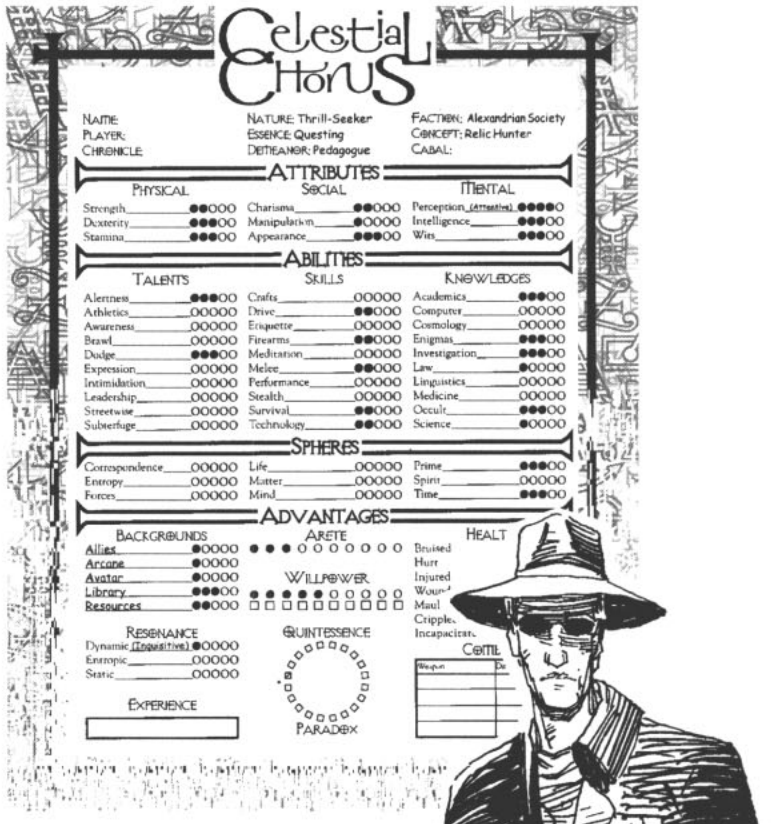
Prelude: Perhaps it was the dig in Persia, or maybe the scrape with a local cult that didn't like people finding out about their restored temples in Thailand. Somewhere along the road, your study of archeology turned from class work into a passion.

Looking back, you'd have to say it all started when you were only sixteen. While on the outskirts of town hiking with some friends, you spotted a group of men excavating an aged and decrepit mission that the local governments had boarded up rather than restore. Watching cautiously at a window, you saw them haul aside a large statue and a stone centerpiece, then open a cache underneath it and withdraw a relic of some sort. It was a golden and bejeweled medallion, a real religious artifact from the days when the Church made such things! While you never found out who they were or what happened to the medallion, your hunger to see such wonders of earlier ages had been whetted. Without really thinking about why, you later set upon a career in archeology.

Classes and university professors drilled into your head that archeology was all about putting together minute facts to draw conclusions about ancient civilizations. They told you that the days of "heroic exploration" of the darkened corners of the globe had passed a century ago. You studied hard and graduated to field work, where you truly excelled. You gambled correctly on the resting place of a set of lesser Ayurvedic manuscripts in Mongolia, you thwarted a corrupt New York museum curator who'd arrange for artifacts to be "stolen" and sold on the black market, and you even found time to teach some graduate classes.

No pillars of fire, voices from above, spirit-visions or quests from on high for you. As you pieced together tiny bits of puzzles from dusty mausoleums and shattered remnants of pottery, you recognized the interconnectedness of it all. Human accomplishment and the search for the divine persists throughout all ages, transcends the fragile shells in which it's crafted and gives reason for every worthwhile endeavor you've ever gotten involved with. That's enough for you.

Concept: As an archeologist and adventurer, you find yourself in lots of scrapes around the globe, always on the hunt for the next big piece of history. Ancient civilizations and debates that formed the basis of modern religion fascinate you. Because of your travel experience, you have a good handle on keeping yourself prepared for dealings with different cultures, hostile elements and unfriendly governments.


Celestial Chorus

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Thrill-Seeker
Essence: Questing
Deitheanor: Pedagogue
Faction: Alexandrian Society
Concept: Relic Hunter
Cabal:

Attributes
Physical: Strength ●●○○○, Dexterity ●●●○○, Stamina ●●●○○
Social: Charisma ●●○○○, Manipulation ●○○○○, Appearance ●●●○○
Mental: Perception (Attentive) ●●●●○, Intelligence ●●●○○, Wits ●●●○○

Abilities
Talents: Alertness ●●●○○, Athletics ○○○○○, Awareness ○○○○○, Brawl ○○○○○, Dodge ●●●○○, Expression ○○○○○, Intimidation ○○○○○, Leadership ○○○○○, Streetwise ○○○○○, Subterfuge ○○○○○
Skills: Crafts ○○○○○, Drive ●●○○○, Etiquette ○○○○○, Firearms ●●○○○, Meditation ○○○○○, Melee ●●○○○, Performance ○○○○○, Stealth ○○○○○, Survival ●●○○○, Technology ●●○○○
Knowledges: Academics ●●●○○, Computer ○○○○○, Cosmology ○○○○○, Enigmas ●●●○○, Investigation ●●●○○, Law ●○○○○, Linguistics ○○○○○, Medicine ○○○○○, Occult ●●●○○, Science ●○○○○

Spheres
Correspondence ○○○○○, Entropy ○○○○○, Forces ○○○○○, Life ○○○○○, Matter ○○○○○, Mind ○○○○○, Prime ●●●○○, Spirit ○○○○○, Time ●●●○○

Advantages
Backgrounds: Allies ●○○○○, Arcane ●○○○○, Avatar ●○○○○, Library ●●●○○, Resources ●●○○○
Arete ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Willpower ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Resonance: Dynamic (Inquisitive) ●○○○○, Entropic ○○○○○, Static ○○○○○
Quintessence
Paradox
Experience
Health: Bruised, Hurt, Injured, Wounded, Maul, Crippled, Incapacitated
Combat: Weapon, Dv

Roleplaying Tips: Alternate between wit and insight. In the classroom, you have an enthusiasm that makes you stammer a bit, because you have so many ideas to get across. In the field, you really shine at taking charge, making intuitive leaps and coming out on top in spite of the odds.

Magic: Careful consideration of the various relics that you carry helps you focus your insight into possibilities of the past and future, and allows you to use Time magic to set the pace of events. You channel Prime rarely, and most often in a vulgar fashion, through the use of reliquaries or holy objects that you've found and liberated.

Equipment: Masterful set of archeological excavation tools, rugged multicultural wardrobe, visa and passport, small collection of valueless stone artifacts

Celestial Chorus™

Name:
Character: Relic-Hunter
Chronicle:
Faction: Alexandrian Society
Essence: Questing
Cabal:
Nature: Thrill-Seeker
Deitheanor: Pedagogue

Arete ●●○○○○○○○○
Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○
Quintessence/Paradox □□□□□□□□□□□□

Resonance
Dynaffic Inquisitive x1
Entropic
Static

Physical
Nimble
Quick
Resilient
Social
Charismatic
Magnetic x2
Mental
Alert
Attentive x3
Cunning
Abilities
Academics: Theology x2, Enigmas
Alertness
Dodge
Occult
Merits & Flaws

Backgrounds
Allies x1
Arcane x1
Avatar x1
Library x3
Resources x2
Spheres
Disciple of Prime
Disciple of Time
Rotes

Celestial Chorus™

Name:
Character: Inquisitor
Chronicle:
Faction: Templar
Essence: Pattern
Cabal:
Nature: Judge
Deitheanor: Bravo

Arete ●●○○○○○○○○
Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○
Quintessence/Paradox □□□□□□□□□□□□

Resonance
Dynaffic
Entropic
Static Defender x1

Physical
Brawny
Fericious
Quick x2
Social
Commanding
Dignified
Fearsome
Mental
Alert x2
Attentive
Disciplined x2
Abilities
Academics: Theology
Firearms
Intimidation
Merits & Flaws

Backgrounds
Allies x3
Destiny x3
Resources x2
Spheres
Initiate of Forces
Initiate of Life
Apprentice of Prime
Apprentice of Spirit
Rotes

Tireless x3
Violent
Vigilant
Melee x2, Swords

Inquisitor Ordo Templar

Quote: *I have been judged, and so I judge.*

Prelude: A special destiny always awaited you. From evening readings of the Bible — and many, many other religious texts, such as the Urantia Book and the Divrei Torah, for comparison — at your father's knee, you learned an early appreciation for the many hidden meanings of Scripture. As an only child, you gained the lavish attention of both parents, who impressed upon you a stern sense of justice and discipline. While your grasp of theology and esoterica alienated you from your peers, you excelled in sports and were possessed of tremendous physical acumen. Still, you had no desire to push yourself competitively. You simply wished to pursue the life that God had provided for you, for His glory.

When you were 12, your grandfather came for a visit. This dour old man walked with a cane and a limp, yet he still maintained a noble carriage and a keen mind. He impressed you at once. He had no time for nonsense or child's play. His first question of your father was, "Has he been prepared for his duties?" When your father answered in the affirmative, you felt no pride or confusion. You already knew that you had a path laid out for you.

Your grandfather continued your schooling in subjects that you'd thought only legendry. Merovignian kings, Epiphanies, the Holy Sepulchre, the Shroud — all of these things, he asserted, were true. With your father and with another man he completed your training in matters martial. By day, you were a withdrawn student of the public schools. In the evenings, you were a warrior for Christ.

On your 21st birthday, your grandfather and his associates ordained you as a Knight Templar. During your fasting, you prayed that you might fulfill your role, and you saw a vision of a sword, with "Deus" on one side and "Equitas" on the other. When you emerged from your vigil, you donned your coat, took your family's sword and stepped into the role for which you'd been born. You had become the one who metes out God's justice, who roots out corruption and infamy, who brings orthodoxy among the faithful.

Celestial Chorus

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Judge
Essence: Pattern
Deitieandor: Bravo
Faction: Templar
Concept: Inquisitor
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●●○○
Stamina (Tireless)	●●●●○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●○○○○	Crafts	●●○○○	Academics	●●○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	●●○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Cosmology	●○○○○
Brawl	●●●○○	Firearms	●●●○○	Enigmas	●○○○○
Dodge	●●○○○	Meditation	○○○○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee (Swords)	●●●●○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Medicine	●○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Survival	●●○○○	Occult	●●○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	●●○○○	Prime	●○○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	●○○○○
Forces	●●○○○	Mind	○○○○○	Time	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Arete	Health	
Allies	●●○○○	● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bruised	-0 ☐
Destiny	●●●○○		Hurt	-1 ☐
Resources	●●○○○	Willpower	Injured	-1 ☐
	○○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○	Wounded	-2 ☐
	○○○○○	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Mauled	-2 ☐
			Crippled	-5 ☐
Resonance		Quintessence	Incapacitated	☐
Dynamic	○○○○○		Combat	
Entropic	○○○○○		Weapon / Difficulty / Damage	
Static (Defender)	●○○○○			
Experience		Paradox		

role, and you saw a vision of a sword, with "Deus" on one side and "Equitas" on the other. When you emerged from your vigil, you donned your coat, took your family's sword and stepped into the role for which you'd been born. You had become the one who metes out God's justice, who roots out corruption and infamy, who brings orthodoxy among the faithful.

Concept: Part investigator, part warrior, you fulfill the role that most Choristers expect of the Templars: You are a soldier of God. However, you police the ranks for signs of backsliding and corruption, and internal-affairs sorts are never popular. The job is thankless and merciless. Fortunately you, were weaned on conspiracy, so you have no trouble walking the labyrinthine halls of choir politics.

Roleplaying Tips: Stern. Uncompromising. You may or may not have a sense of humor — it's hard to tell. You're so convinced of your place and your duties that you don't even have a second thought about how you live your life. Hobbies? Hobbies are for those who have free time. Unlike some other warriors of the Chorus, you don't see yourself as an angel or a savior. You simply do the job for which you were ordained.

Magic: When you strike without judgment, but as an arm of God, your blows carry the weight of His wrath with Forces. As a soldier on His battlefield, you can heal from nearly any wound (no matter how mortal) as long as you pray and keep your faith (with Life). Through careful introspection and the words of the Bible, you can discern the tainted and the impure and hunt creatures of wickedness (with Spirit).

Equipment: Battle-ready heirloom broadsword, ballistic vest, HK USP45 pistol, copy of the King James Bible with annotations in an illegible shorthand

White Witch

Quote: *Pagan gods? Pfeh! Hexes are what the Lord allows, or what His ugly opposite gives you. Mind your delusions, lest you be unable to tell 'em apart!*

Prelude: Your mother first told you about magic. The two of you went for a walk one day, beside the stream that ran behind the ramshackle house you lived in. When she first told you about God, it bored you. Didn't you go to church every Sunday to learn this stuff? Then she got to talking about hexes, saints' days and mummer plays — all the tricks the Lord left for folk to use in hard times. The devil knew the same tricks, and many more besides — like how to blight a crop or make a house sick — but those kind of charms always took folks to a bad end.

You read your Bible of course, and you asked your mother if hexing was a sin, since it said not to suffer a witch to live. She replied that they were talking about poisoners, and those who brought misfortune onto the Israelites with the devil's tricks; but what God gave to poor folk was like what he gave to the Israelites: manna in the desert, warm fire and clouds to guide their way. Surely Moses wasn't sinning! Understanding opened up in you like a warm fire, and you listened to your mother's teachings, enraptured.

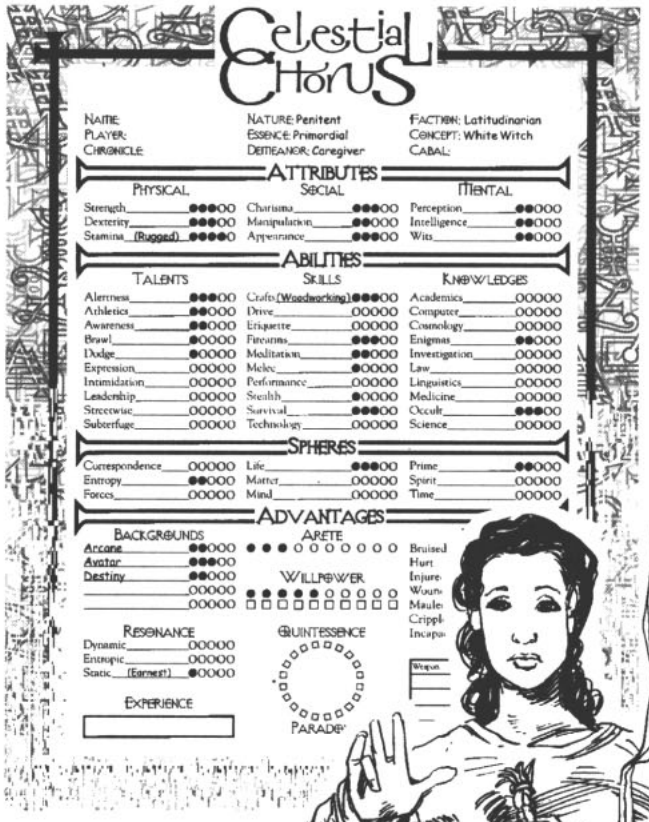
Since you were home-schooled (there was no point sending you miles from the back country to sit in a classroom), you could spend your afternoons learning hexes, the herbs that the saints had blessed for you and the special days when little miracles could be wrought in the woods. When your parents went to town for supplies or helped a cottager with his boat, you practiced on your own, and you learned that your little miracles could do far more than your mother ever taught.

You tried to show them it came from God — you really did! — but they just saw the devil's work and tossed your clothes after you when they kicked you out of the house.

You traveled. Charms and hexes gave you what you needed to survive. You always made sure to go to church, to keep yourself from backsliding and to prove your parents wrong. In a city far from home, you met God-fearing folk who could perform miracles. They called you a "Singer" because of your faith, but they treated you with suspicion when you showed them how you did a hex and made a herbal brew. Still, they didn't seem to dislike you any more than they did each other, and you loved the fact that they cared about God first (and that they didn't let you backslide).

Concept: You're a witch, but you aren't a neo-pagan, paleo-pagan or anything else that might lead you to join the Verbena. Even though your methods might look the same on the outside, you know that the Lord guides you, rather than nature or some idolatrous pretender. You've done too much traveling to be naïve, but your walk and drawl mark you as someone from the back-country.

Roleplaying Tips: Take care to explain where your power comes from. You've had too many misunderstandings to be unclear about it. Mention important pieces of wilderness lore as if you're just shooting the breeze about common knowledge. Keep the Sabbath, and take your time. You don't rush your Songs because the Lord never meant for you to act before you think.


Celestial Chorus

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Penitent
Essence: Primordial
Demeanor: Caregiver
Faction: Latitudinarian
Concept: White Witch
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina (Rugged)	●●●●○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●○○	Crafts (Woodworking)	●●●○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	●●○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	●●○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Cosmology	○○○○○
Brawl	●○○○○	Firearms	●●●○○	Enigmas	●●○○○
Dodge	●●○○○	Meditation	●●○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	●○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Survival	●●●○○	Occult	●●●○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	●●●○○	Prime	●●○○○
Entropy	●●○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	○○○○○
Forces	○○○○○	Mind	○○○○○	Time	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	
Arcane	●●○○○
Avatar	●●●○○
Destiny	●●○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

Arete ●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○

Resonance

Dynamic	○○○○○
Entropic	○○○○○
Static (Farmer)	●○○○○

Quintessence

Experience

Parade

Bruised
Hurt
Injured
Wounded
Mauled
Crippled
Incapacitated

Weapon

Magic: Herbs, saints' medallions, certain trees, chalk designs and strangely shaped stones all suit your rural style. You always carry a Bible to ward off evil, and you make the sign of the cross when you suspect that something evil's hiding from you. Your herb lore and common sense direct your skill in Life. Entropy lets you ask the Lord for a little luck, and Prime lets you see His will at work and bask in its power.

Equipment: .22 rifle and ammunition, a utility knife, sturdy flannels and denims, a crucifix, a bible, a backpack with a bedroll, dried herbs and vials full of the tinctures you made from them.

Celestial Chorus™

Name: _____

Character: White Witch

Chronicle: _____

Faction: Latitudinarian

Essence: Primordial

Cabal: _____

Nature: Penitent

Deitfeanor: Caregiver

Arete ●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○

Quintessence/Paradox □□□□□□□□□□

Resonance

Dynaitic _____

Entropic _____

Static Earnest x1

Physical

Dextrous Resilient x3

Ferocious Stalwart

Lithe _____

Social

Alluring Elegant

Beguiling Genial

Charismatic Naïve

Mental

Intuitive Ignorant

Reflective _____

Shrewd _____

Abilities

Alertness Firearms

Crafts Occult

Expression Survival

Merits & Flaws

_____

_____

_____

_____

Backgrounds

Allies x1 _____

Arcane x2 _____

Avatar x3 _____

Destiny x2 _____

_____

Spheres

Initiate of Entropy

Disciple of Life

Initiate of Prime

_____

_____

_____

Rotes

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Celestial Chorus™

Name: _____

Character: Angel Incarnate

Chronicle: _____

Faction: _____

Essence: Questing

Cabal: _____

Nature: Perfectionist

Deitfeanor: Judge

Arete ●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○

Quintessence/Paradox □□□□□□□□□□

Resonance

Dynaitic _____

Entropic Angry x1

Static _____

Physical

Brawny Rugged

Ferocious _____

Quick x2 _____

Social

Charismatic x2 _____

Fearsome _____

Tactless _____

Mental

Alert Shrewd x2

Cunning Vigilant x2

Discerning Violent

Abilities

Alertness Expression

Awareness Meditation

Drive Melee

Merits & Flaws

_____

_____

_____

_____

Backgrounds

Allies x3 _____

Destiny x3 _____

Resources x2 _____

_____

Spheres

Disciple of Forces

Initiate of Mind

Initiate of Prime

_____

_____

_____

Rotes

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Angel Incarnate

Quote: *God sent me.*

Prelude: Simple faith was good enough for you. You went to church and said your prayers, morning, noon and night, and that was comfort enough. Your family was moderately religious, but they rarely talked to you about it. They rarely talked to you about anything at all, for that matter.

Without your family's support or any friends to speak of, you found solace in the Church. The simple beauty of its rituals and its quiet pageantry enthralled you. You wanted to be a priest, but you hated school enough as it is. Seminary college, with its useless pontificating about the smallest aspects of the faith, struck you as a self-indulgent waste of time. You didn't want to waste time studying when you could be praying.

Then your mother was murdered. It was pointless — a robbery gone wrong. The family left you to arrange the funeral because you knew the church so well. When they arrived on the day of the service, peering about the place they so rarely visited, you felt an unaccountable resentment well up within you. Watching you mother lying in state only made you angrier, as if she'd cavalierly left when you needed her. After the funeral, guilt came crashing down on you, and you cursed yourself for your shameful feelings.

You spent the nest week praying with savage energy, trying to rip the hatred from you. The next Sunday's sermon was about anger. (Perhaps the priest had noticed your troubled state?) He talked about Jesus driving out the moneychangers, about God's righteous wrath, and lastly, about angels, who could fight sin — who could *hate* sin — without being unworthy to serve the Lord.

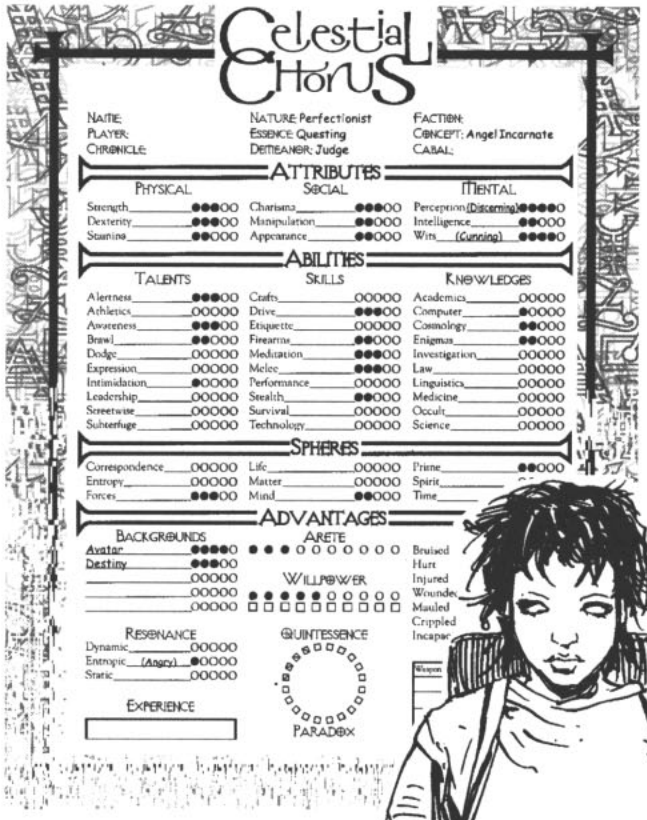
You spent the day contemplating the sermon. When the church caretaker asked you politely to leave, you wandered the streets without a particular destination in mind. But *something* was guiding your steps. You kept walking through the bad part of town where your mother had been gunned down. You wrote it off to random chance, but when you tried to leave you felt intense pain, like a hawk digging its talons into your scalp.

To avoid the pain, you stumbled down an alley, and you saw them: three teenagers huddled around a makeshift pipe, all with dilated pupils. In an instant, they were surrounded by dark halos, and you knew that they'd killed her.

There was a flaming sword in your hand, and you knew the true reason for your anger. You dispatched two of them; the third pissed himself and fell to his knees, and you knew that he'd truly repented. In you mind's eye, you saw the angel within you. On your back, you felt the fluttering of wings.

You had to flee of course. The police were after you for murder! Fortunately, you also attracted enough attention for the Celestial Chorus to find you. They also have angels inside them, although they call them different names and clutter up their good work with useless talk. Still, your angel implies much and says little. Perhaps your fellow Choristers can help you understand its message?

Concept: God has joined you with one of His radiant servants. You're not sure why, but you know that you aren't meant to take it sitting down. It's frustrating. Shouldn't the Lord have told you what your purpose is? The angel plies you with hints and cryptic messages, and you try to fill in the gap with research. You hate relying on study instead of faith, but it's the hand you've been dealt.


Celestial Chorus

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Perfectionist
Essence: Questing
Demeanor: Judge
Faction:
Concept: Angel Incarnate
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception (Discerning)	●●●●○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits (Cunning)	●●●●○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	●●●○○	Computer	●○○○○
Awareness	●●●○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Cosmology	●●○○○
Brawl	●●○○○	Firearms	●●○○○	Enigmas	●●○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Meditation	●●●○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	●●●○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	●○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	●●○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	
Forces	●●●○○	Mind	●●○○○	Time	

Advantages

Backgrounds: Avatar ●●●●○; Destiny ●●●○○

Arete ●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Resonance: Dynamic ○○○○○; Entropic (Angry) ●○○○○; Static ○○○○○

Quintessence

Experience

Paradox

Bruised
Hurt
Injured
Wounded
Mauled
Crippled
Incapac

Weapon

Roleplaying Tips: You're a punisher of sins and a judge of men. How could it ever be otherwise? Never take God's mission or the power of the Holy Spirit trivially. You might be unkempt and malnourished, but why should you glorify your ashen shell when your mission beckons? You're a reluctant student, but you understand that you need to learn more to understand your angel's cryptic messages.

Magic: Forces and Prime are the Wrath of God. You need only point out the sins of your target before using them. Mind allows you to hone in on the human mind and sense flaws that deserve staunch correction. As part of the Chorus, you've started to experiment with real angelology. You occasionally make use of the Four Humors and the Sephiroth in your workings, but you've yet to feel truly comfortable with them.

Equipment: Ratty clothes, a knife, Colt .45 and a backpack containing the King James Bible and a number of books on angelology

Reformed Addict

Quote: *Faith is the Immaculate Fix.*

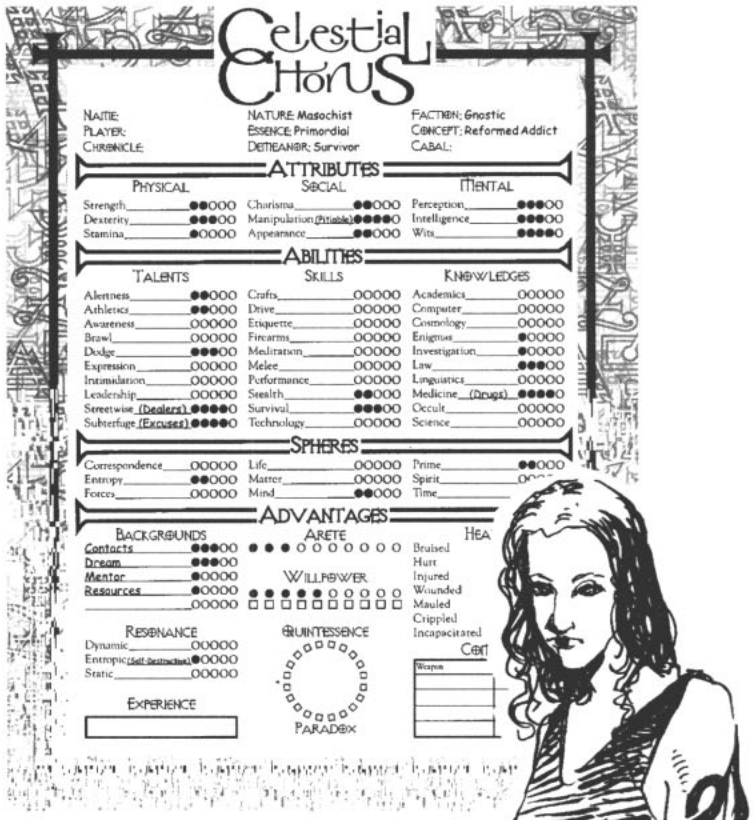
Prelude: Always the life of the party, you took to booze like it was second nature. Given your father's alcoholism and your mother's neurosis, it probably was. Smoking and drinking with the crowd gave way to lines of coke in the backrooms of the theater club and speedballing with the art dropouts. Perhaps if you'd analyzed, it you might have found that you had some need to abuse yourself, a lust for addiction so that you weren't in control of your own life or some other psychobabble. Who knows? You bottomed out and wound up on the streets crazed and incoherent.

Recovering from a tainted batch of GHB took a month in the care of the modest clinic of a local shelter. You never made it to the hospital. They were sick of wasting money on junkies who'd never pay the bills anyway. DTs, vomiting, immune system shock and the slow process of your body rejecting parts of its own poisoned organs wrung you out hideously. You would've jumped right back into the life as soon as you hit the street, just to die peaceably, but for the shelter volunteer who took care of you. She told you about the strength that comes with faith, about releasing yourself to a greater will, one that could speak in you and give your own will the strength of true conviction. In your delirium, you saw her as your savior, perhaps as the nurturer that your parents weren't.

As soon as you could stand up, you asked to help around the shelter. "Give me something to do, anything, so that I can't be tempted to go back," you said. You studied and worked with diligence. Life was difficult but your mind kept playing over and over what the woman said. As you worked with her, you plied her with questions and ideas as a sort of cathartic dialogue. Slowly, she revealed to you the real secrets, the ones that come from the pain of your soul and the healing that makes it stronger.

Now you've kicked the habits, you help others to get off the streets and the drugs, and you know that you have the strength of the One, because you're part of the Chorus. You won't go back. You can't go back. You're finally in control of your life. You're a worthwhile person. You can do better, be better, make things better. Keep telling yourself that because the old life is a short road from where you are now, and it ends in your grave.

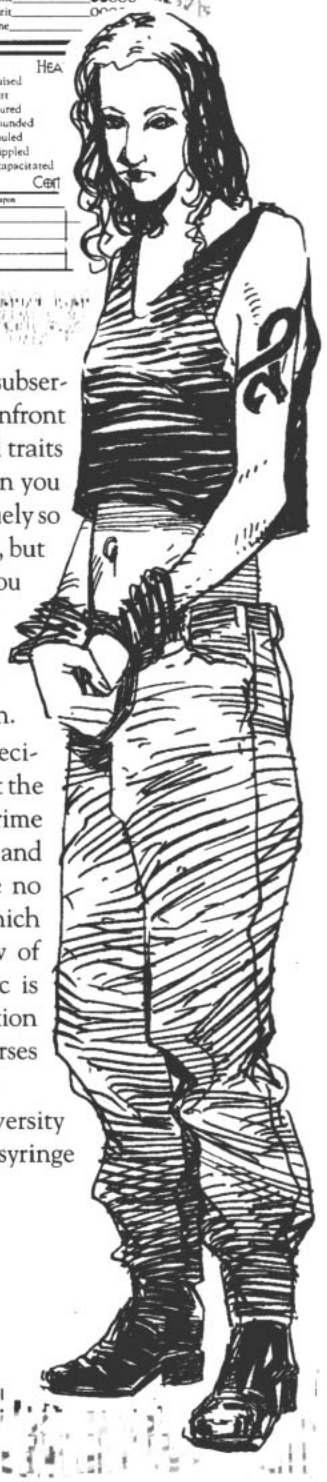
Concept: Is it all lies, or are you really better? Will you ever be better? Some days, you are strong with the One. Other days, you're weak and you need to punish yourself for it. Sometimes you even feel like the tracks on your arms are your own stigmata. It's a terrible battle between your faith and your failings. You have faith in the One, but does the One have faith in you?



Roleplaying Tips: Mostly, you're subservient and passive. You mumble, don't confront people and exhibit the various survival traits that you picked up on the street. When you want something, you approach it obliquely so that it doesn't seem like begging at first, but it always comes out that way. Often, you look to others for support or affirmation. You desperately fear your own weaknesses, and it shows in your occasional fits of jagged hysteria or depression.

Magic: With small mantras and recitations, you focus your Mind to shut out the cravings or the terrible memories. Prime comes to you in the form of meditation and deprivation. Having dried out, you're no stranger to asceticism and self-denial, which opens you to feeling the greater flow of Creation. Your most dangerous magic is your Entropy, because it's an externalization of your own self-loathing through curses and bouts of screaming, searing anger.

Equipment: Worn-out Rice University sweater, janitorial supplies, needle and syringe (as a reminder)



Celestial Chorus™

Name:

Character: Rebellious Singer

Chronicle:

Faction:

Essence: Dynamic

Cabal:

Nature: Rebel

Deitfeanor: Deviant

Arete ●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○

Quintessence/Paradox □□□□□□□□□□

Resonance

Dynamic Screaming x1

Entropic

Static

Physical

Brawny ●●○○○

Dextrous ●●●○○

Feriocious ●●●○○

Social

Charismatic ●●○○○

Commanding ●●●○○

Fearsome ●●●○○

Mental

Creative x2 ●●●●○

Insightful ●●●○○

Shrewd ●●●○○

Abilities

Alertness ●●○○○

Brawl ●●●○○

Expression x2 ●●●●○

Merits & Flaws

Nimble x2 ●●●●○

Resilient ●●●○○

Tireless ●●●○○

Obnoxious ●●●○○

Backgrounds

Allies x3 ●●●○○

Contacts x1 ●○○○○

Library x2 ●●○○○

Resources x2 ●●○○○

Spheres

Initiate of Matter ●○○○○

Initiate of Mind ●○○○○

Initiate of Prime ●○○○○

Rotes

Celestial Chorus™

Name:

Character: Reformed Addict

Chronicle:

Faction: Gnostic

Essence: Primordial

Cabal:

Nature: Masochist

Deitfeanor: Survivor

Arete ●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○

Quintessence/Paradox □□□□□□□□□□

Resonance

Dynamic

Entropic Self-Destructive x1

Static

Physical

Dextrous ●●●○○

Wiry ●●●○○

Quick ●●●○○

Social

Empathetic ●●○○○

Friendly ●●○○○

Ingratiating x3 ●●●○○

Mental

Attentive ●●●○○

Clever x2 ●●●●○

Cunning x2 ●●●●○

Abilities

Expression ●●○○○

Law ●●○○○

Medicine ●●○○○

Merits & Flaws

Backgrounds

Allies x1 ●○○○○

Contacts x3 ●●●○○

Dream x3 ●●●○○

Mentor x1 ●○○○○

Resources x1 ●○○○○

Spheres

Initiate of Entropy ●○○○○

Initiate of Mind ●○○○○

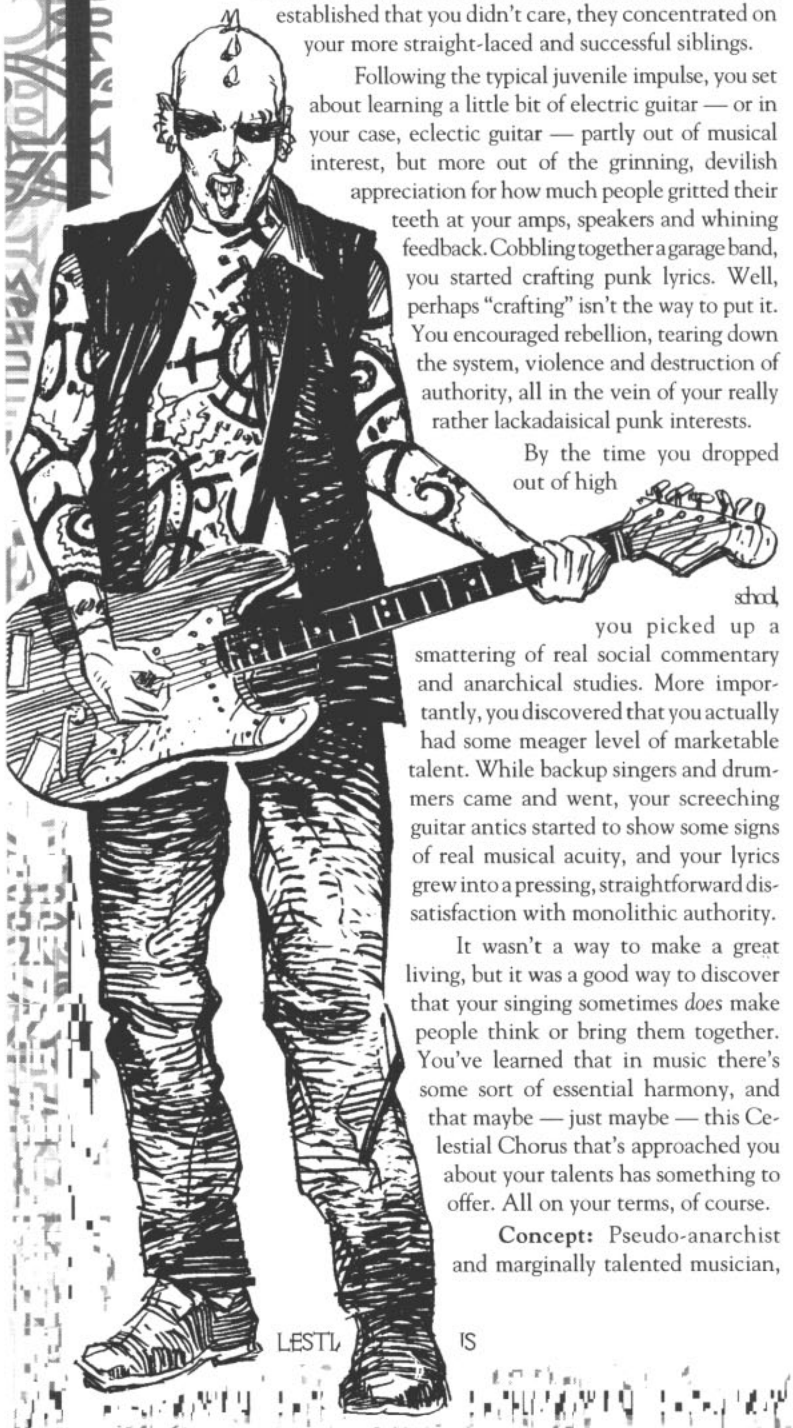
Initiate of Prime ●○○○○

Rotes

Rebellious Singer

Quote: *I not gonna tell people what they wanna hear/ I'm just gonna say it the way I figure/ You better be ready to face your fear/ 'cause it's time to fight for somethin' bigger!*

Prelude: As a kid, you were a wretch. Constantly fighting, talking back, making smart remarks and basically acting as the bane of parental authority, you established a long streak of rebellion. This streak grew from childish disobedience (like sneaking into the kids' communion for Easter and swapping the grape juice with real wine) to youthful anarchism (such as your underground school newspaper that touted "All the News that's Fit for the School Board to Censor"). Exasperated by your antics, your parents threw up their hands and just left you to your spiked, dyed hair, screeching music and abysmal grades. Sure, you got the occasional shouting match or disappointed stare from one of your parents, but after you established that you didn't care, they concentrated on your more straight-laced and successful siblings.



Following the typical juvenile impulse, you set about learning a little bit of electric guitar — or in your case, eclectic guitar — partly out of musical interest, but more out of the grinning, devilish appreciation for how much people gritted their teeth at your amps, speakers and whining feedback. Cobbling together a garage band, you started crafting punk lyrics. Well, perhaps "crafting" isn't the way to put it. You encouraged rebellion, tearing down the system, violence and destruction of authority, all in the vein of your really rather lackadaisical punk interests.

By the time you dropped out of high school, you picked up a smattering of real social commentary and anarchical studies. More importantly, you discovered that you actually had some meager level of marketable talent. While backup singers and drummers came and went, your screeching guitar antics started to show some signs of real musical acuity, and your lyrics grew into a pressing, straightforward dissatisfaction with monolithic authority.

It wasn't a way to make a great living, but it was a good way to discover that your singing sometimes *does* make people think or bring them together. You've learned that in music there's some sort of essential harmony, and that maybe — just maybe — this Celestial Chorus that's approached you about your talents has something to offer. All on your terms, of course.

Concept: Pseudo-anarchist and marginally talented musician,

Celestial Chorus

Name: | Nature: Rebel | Faction:
Player: | Essence: Dynamic | Concept: Rebelious Singer
Chronicle: | Deitheanbr: Deviant | Cabal:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity (Nimble)	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●●●○	Intelligence	●●●○○
Stamina	●●●○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●○○	Crafts	●●○○○	Academics	●○○○○
Athletics	●○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	●●○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Cosmology	○○○○○
Brawl	●●●○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Enigmas	●○○○○
Dodge	●●○○○	Meditation	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	●○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○	Performance	●○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	●●○○○	Survival	●○○○○	Occult	●●○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	●●●○○	Science	●○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	●●○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	●●○○○	Spirit	○○○○○
Forces	○○○○○	Mind	●●○○○	Time	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Arete		Health	
Allies	●●●○○	● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○		Bruised	-0 ☐
Contacts	●○○○○			Hurt	-1 ☐
Library	●●○○○	Willpower		Injured	-1 ☐
Resources	●●○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○		Wounded	-2 ☐
	○○○○○	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐		Mauled	-2 ☐
				Crippled	-5 ☐
				Incapacitated	☐

Resonance: Dynamic (Screaming) ●○○○○; Entropic ○○○○○; Static ○○○○○

Quintessence

Experience

Paradox

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage

you have some real skill in there somewhere, but you're so busy busting peoples' expectations of you that you've never developed it formally. You have a raw, anti-traditionalistic edge even as you spread a message that in some ways mirrors the rest of the modern Chorus. You encourage people to fight against stifling authority and conformity, choose their own destiny and throw down the oppressors who tell them that the world is nothing more than businesses and governments and numbers. Unfortunately you're just above crappy on the guitar, and your vocals are untrained. Nothing a little magic can't cure, now that the Chorus has decided to take you in (with much bitter divisiveness, you've happily discovered).

Roleplaying Tips: Rant, slouch and alternate between frenetic action and slothfulness. In truth, you're pretty bright and fairly easy-going, but it wouldn't do to fail to live up to the image that the world has of you, right? Challenge all blanket statements of authority, no matter how absurd your position is. Write down simple, rhyming lyrics that try to convey a direct and heartfelt passion (sometimes successfully, sometimes not). And don't forget to Fight the Power!

Magic: Like many Choristers, you use music as a focus, but it's not any kind of music that *they* are used to! Your words, chants and lyrics can inspire people to frenzy, to introspection or to confusion with Mind magic. (You're not so good at pacification or obedience.) Your musical instruments are specially tuned up with your own crazed theories on musical tensors and resonance, and you have a keen eye for how to break handcuffs, bricks, windows and other pieces of random junk that allow you to vent your rebelliousness, all with your Matter magic. Prime comes to you in rare moments of solo lucidity as you just let your music flow of its own accord and form eerie, scratching crescendos.

Equipment: Epiphone Korina Flying V electric guitar, metal spikes attached to studs implanted in your scalp, copy of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* with sticky notes of potential lyrical material

EPILOGUE: SOMETHING PRECIOUS

He was sharing the motel room with Susannah that night. It was winter, and they were driving back to Brother William's chantry. The heater made the room almost too warm, but they held each other tightly, naked under the blankets.

"What is the value of this moment?" she asked him, seriously.

"Sorry?"

"What is the value of this moment?"

He wanted to answer "infinite," but he was afraid it would sound contrived. "Why?" He said finally.

"Because I have to go back to Providence tomorrow." Somehow he'd known it was coming.

"I see," was all he could say.

She turned to him, and he could see that she'd been crying. He blinked, and she kissed him again, wrapping her arms around his waist.

"I can't forget something Deb said…" he answered at last. "'The status quo will try to fit everything you do into itself: to its dictionaries, its calendars, its clocks, its monetary exchange. It will try to govern your time, your relationships." He paused. "Paradox comes when the status quo cannot control what you are, what you do. But you're a monotheist…'"

"'And status quo isn't God, never was.'" She finished it for him and they went to sleep.

When he awoke, there was a fresh-cut rose on his pillow, which he kept for a very, very long time because it was symbol of a gift from the One.

References

Obviously, the first thing you'll probably pick up (aside from this book!) when starting in on the Celestial Chorus is a copy of your character's favorite religious text. It can be a Bible, a copy of the Book of Mormon, the Rig Veda or any number of scriptures. It's beyond our ability to recommend a specific canon or version thereof. We can't say that the King James version of the Bible is "the definitive one," just to make an example. What we *can* recommend is that you not only decide to look into religious scripture, but into a few academic analyses thereof.

The Bible Code, Michael Drosnin — A look at the possible hidden meanings of scripture. While not necessarily true, it's an interesting angle to explore, and it has similar implications for the Koran. Of course, this study stems from the gematria of Kaballah, which uses numerology to derive secret meaning from the words of scripture.

Divine Discourse, Nicholas Wolterstorff — A psychological analysis of the phenomenon of God speaking to humans, and what His word might mean or aim to do.

The Human Mystery, John C. Eccles — Covers natural theology, running across a multitude of sciences in the pursuit of faith. A good text for players of the Alexandrian Society or Gnostics.

The Chronicles of Narnia and *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis — What's that? These aren't academic, they're fiction? Well, they're fun reads, and C. S. Lewis manages to combine Christian allegory with strong writing. The former is a fantasy story with some parallels to Christianity, while the latter is a humorous discourse on the state of affairs in the infernal hierarchy. Another Lewis work of nonfiction, *Mere Christianity* describes the basic thought process that converted Lewis to the religion, even though he was previously Atheist.

Paradise Lost, John Milton — A no-brainer. Where else do you get to follow the Fall of Lucifer and then trek through all of Hell?

Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, H. Richard Niebuhr — Analysis of the clash between monotheism, polytheism and multiple cultures. Academic but informative.

And of course, a few good films.

Black Robe — The Jesuit missionaries try to spread their faith with missionary programs, and they meet with hardship and adversity to test any man's faith.

The Exorcist — Before you dismiss this as a campy '70s thriller, watch it. Not only are the main characters pretty compelling, they're also thorough and believable. The situation could easily apply to a Celestial Chorus game.

From Dusk 'til Dawn — Okay, it's Tarantino. It's all splatter-action and canned humor. Still, the father/ pastor figure who wrestles with his faith, compromises with criminals and eventually comes out as a "mean [Mmm-mmm] servant of God!" is a great one. And you know that you secretly want to blow up **Vampire** characters.

The Ten Commandments — Honestly, Charlton Heston should just have one "Why, God, why?!?" clip that's used in all of his movies. A stellar performance from the days when studios made classics, covering the flight of Moses from Egypt.

Celestial Chorus™

Name: | Nature: | Faction:
Player: | Essence: | Concept:
Chronicle: | Demeanor: | Cabal:

Attributes

Physical
Strength ●OOOO
Dexterity ●OOOO
Stamina ●OOOO

Social
Charisma ●OOOO
Manipulation ●OOOO
Appearance ●OOOO

Mental
Perception ●OOOO
Intelligence ●OOOO
Wits ●OOOO

Abilities

Talents
Alertness OOOOO
Athletics OOOOO
Awareness OOOOO
Brawl OOOOO
Dodge OOOOO
Expression OOOOO
Intimidation OOOOO
Leadership OOOOO
Streetwise OOOOO
Subterfuge OOOOO

Skills
Crafts OOOOO
Drive OOOOO
Etiquette OOOOO
Firearms OOOOO
Meditation OOOOO
Melee OOOOO
Performance OOOOO
Stealth OOOOO
Survival OOOOO
Technology OOOOO

Knowledges
Academics OOOOO
Computer OOOOO
Cosmology OOOOO
Enigmas OOOOO
Investigation OOOOO
Law OOOOO
Linguistics OOOOO
Medicine OOOOO
Occult OOOOO
Science OOOOO

Spheres

Correspondence OOOOO
Entropy OOOOO
Forces OOOOO
Life OOOOO
Matter OOOOO
Mind OOOOO
Prime ●OOOO
Spirit OOOOO
Time OOOOO

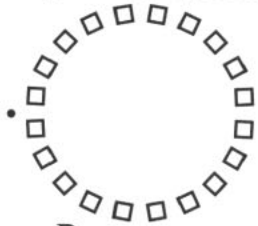
Advantages

Backgrounds
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

Other Traits
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

Arete
● O O O O O O O O O O

Willpower
● ● ● ● ● O O O O O
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence


Paradox

Health
Bruised -0 □
Hurt -1 □
Injured -1 □
Wounded -2 □
Mauled -2 □
Crippled -5 □
Incapacitated □

Resonance
Dynamic OOOOO
Entropic OOOOO
Static OOOOO

Experience

Celestial Chorus™

Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Magic

Preferred Effects	Rotes

Combat

Maneuver	Roll	Difficulty	Damage/Effect

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

Armor: _____

Celestial Chorus™

Expanded Background

Allies

Library

Contacts

Mentor

Destiny

Node

Influence

Resources

Possessions

Gear (Carried)

Equipment (Owned)

Foci

Wonders

Familiar

Past Incarnations

Celestial Chorus™

History

Awakening

Goals/Destiny

Seekings: _____ Quiets: _____

Description

Age: _____

Apparent Age: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Age of Awakening: _____

Hair: _____

Eyes: _____

Race: _____

Nationality: _____

Height: _____

Weight: _____

Sex: _____

Appearance/Nature of Avatar: _____

Visuals

Cabal Chart

Character Sketch