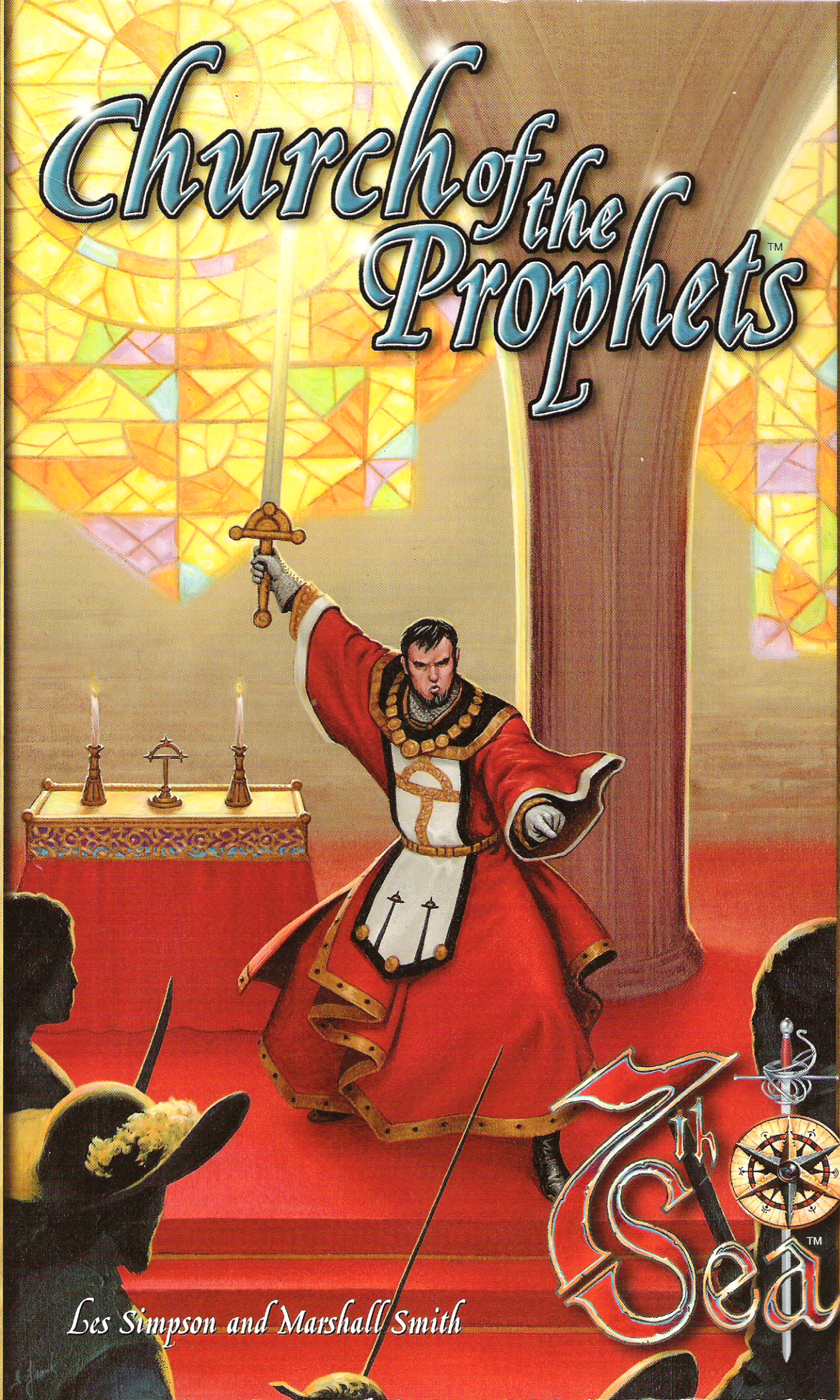


Church of the Prophets™



Les Simpson and Marshall Smith

7th Sea™

Church of the Prophets



"The light of Theus guide my hand."

— Battle cry of the Poor Knights of the Prophet

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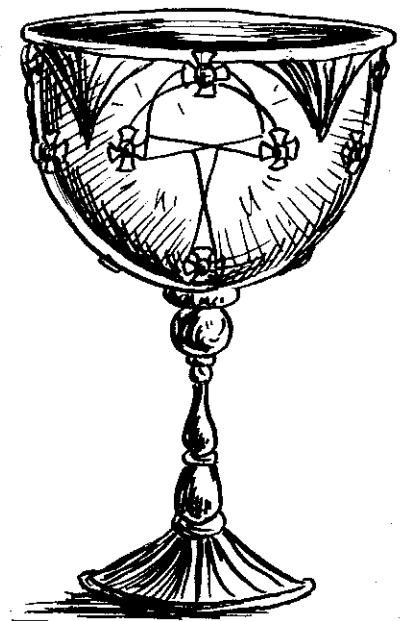
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Disclaimer

While Théah's religious institutions bear a resemblance to certain actual forms of faith, they are considered fictitious and should not be construed as comments on any actual religion or religious institution.

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Low Mass

The bandit leader was beginning to lose his patience; his mood matched the storm outside. "Where is it?!" he roared, flecks of white spittle striking Father Kappelhoff's contorted face. The other raiders knew the tone too well and hastened their destructive swath through the small Vaticine church. They ripped down ornaments and knocked over statues and candles, herding the few parishioners against the north wall to be stripped of their valuables.

Watching the defilement of his beloved parish, the priest's expression shifted to pure contempt. "The Holy Crozier of Saint Konstantinus will never be held by hands as wicked as yours! It is a relic of the Church's earliest days, an emblem of Theus' message to His people!"

The bandit snorted and pushed him to the wooden floor. "It's also an emblem of me and me boys gettin' paid. Our employer wants the crozier and she's gonna get it. Understand?" His thick Inish brogue almost rendered the Eisen words incomprehensible.

"What I understand," the priest said evenly, "is that this raid is futile. You'll never find what you are looking for."

"It's a shame ye see it that way, Father." The bandit leader unsheathed a wicked knife from his belt. "Now I'll hafta cut the information out o' ye."

Before either man could move, a fierce crack and scream rose from across the room. "He hit me!" cried a pained bandit. "I think he broke my nose!" Another punch echoed through the chamber, quickly followed by two more. The bandit staggered and fell over a pew, his broken nose matching his swelling eyes and busted bottom lip. The attacker popped his knuckles and shook his head. "Maybe that will make a believer out of you."

Stunned, the other bandits stopped their ransacking and stared at the man who had so easily bested their comrade. His dark, unkempt hair was tied back with a faded red ribbon and his

whiskered face was clearly Castillian — but these features almost went unnoticed. All that mattered were his intense, smoldering blue eyes.

"Hey!" called the leader from the front altar, completely forgetting Father Kappelhoff. "Just who in Legion's name do you think you are?"

The man stepped around the unconscious bandit and into the aisle. "My name is Luis Rafael Dominguez de San Angelo."

The other bandits began to close in around him, and their leader's deep laugh resonated with cruelty. "Ah, the swordsman with the long name. I've heard of ye, and I'll warn ye just once to mind yer own business. No one here can afford yer blade."

Luis arched his brow. "Perhaps I'm feeling charitable today."

Thunder rolled across the heavens and the bandit leader clutched the hilt of his knife. "You try my patience."

"And you try mine," Luis answered coolly. "Just like your crony did when he attempted to search under my coat." With a shrug, the garment slid from his taut shoulders, revealing a basket-hilt rapier in a worn leather scabbard. "You may know who I am, but I have no idea who you are. Eisen has too many half-wits roaming around for me to keep track of them all."

The bandit leader bristled. "Who we are ain't important, Castillian. All that matters is that we get what we came for."

Without warning, the two front doors of the sanctuary flew open in a swirling gust of wind and rain. Out of the storm stepped a tall figure in a hooded cloak. His features were obscured in shadows, and he seemed to embody the force and power of the tempest. As he strode into the room, he addressed Luis in a rich, steady voice. "I can tell you who they are, Sadiq. They are dangerous men who have dared meddle in sacred affairs."

Father Kappelhoff rose on his knees and watched in awe as the stranger pushed back his hood, revealing a dusky, lean countenance that could only have come from the Empire of the Crescent Moon. Almost as surprising was when the swordsman called the exotic man by name.

"Welcome to low mass, Feyyed. I'm sure it's similar enough to your Orthodoxy practices that you can keep up."

The Crescent did not smile at his friend's joke, his face remaining as stoic as ever.

"I apologize for my delay, Luis. I see you found the church without my assistance."

The bandit leader snarled, pointing his knife at the two men. A vein emerged on his forehead and began to throb. "Dinnae think of gettin' in the way. We're here for the relic. If everyone behaves, then everyone gets out alive."

Feyyed leveled his gaze at the man. "Saint Konstantinus' Crozier is not for sale."

The bandit bared his teeth and snapped, "That's why we're takin' it!" He looked down at Father Kappelhoff. "Tell me where it is."

"Never," said the priest, inching away.

"A crozier?" Luis inquired to no one in particular. "Someone hired these clowns to steal a stick?"

"A staff," Feyyed corrected, "once belonging to Saint Konstantinus, one of the Prophet's Nine Witnesses. It bestows wisdom and clarity of thought to any who hold it, but that is not why the woman who hired them wanted it."

Out of the corner of his eye, Luis watched as two bandits moved closer toward their position. "Really?" he asked. "What did she have in mind?"

Three more bandits edged further forward, and Feyyed calculated their every step. The others were staying close to the trembling laity, and that

could pose a problem. "She confessed she had intended to use it and three other stolen relics in an unholy ritual to summon Legion's Prophet and usher in the end of the world."

"I see," Luis said nonchalantly, his muscles tensing for action. "And you talked her out of it?"

"In a manner of speaking," Feyyed replied. With a practiced motion, he unsheathed his scimitar and twirled it around in his callused hands.

Father Kappelhoff scrambled to his feet. "Did you hear that?" he asked his tormentor. "Your patron is dead. She can't possibly pay you for the crozier."

The bandit leader sneered. "Then I'll find a new buyer. Killin' little old ladies don't impress me Crescenter, an' I eat swordsmen like ye fer breakfast." He gave a shrill whistle and waved his knife in the air. "'Okay, boys. I've heard enough. Kill them all!'"

The parishioners screamed in panic and Feyyed and Luis flew into action. While the Crescent engaged the three bandits on his side, the Castillian leapt onto the edge of a pew and then grabbed onto a wooden chandelier, swinging



over his two assailants and landing in front of the terrified congregation.

"Tranquilo!" he urged them in his native tongue. Almost instantly he corrected himself in his newly learned Eisen. "Be calm. I'll protect you."

The two bandits that had missed Luis eagerly joined the fray around Feyyed, and the five ruffians circled him like a hungry dog pack. When the first one lunged, Feyyed brought his heavy blade into the man's middle. With a twist of his sinewy arms, he swung the brute into three others, sending them sprawling backwards. The remaining bandit took a desperate swipe at Feyyed's neck and was rewarded with his fragile weapon breaking in half against the thick scimitar. The Crescent grabbed him by his shirt and delivered a powerful head butt, but before he could catch his breath, the three he had scattered regrouped and launched a savage counterattack.

Across the room, Luis ducked and parried through a siege of lethal strikes. His moves were masterful, but the confining space and throng of fearful noncombatants at his back did not allow him to dispatch the bandits as quickly as he had hoped.

Sparks flew from his dexterous blade as he deflected a thrust meant for a cowering old woman's chest. He slid the rapier's tip down his opponent's sword, found the hilt and then, with a nimble flick, the weapon was airborne. Luis caught it in his free hand and slashed loose a tapestry from the wall. It fell forward and covered his stunned adversaries. But the swordsman knew the trick would not slow them for long. "Run for the doors," he called over his shoulder. "Now!"

The panicking flock did not have to be told twice, and the bandit leader watched them flee with a look of venomous loathing. His cold eyes turned to Father Kappelhoff. "Be happy, holy man," he said smugly, his knife ready to strike. "You're going to die defendin' yer beliefs."

The knife hissed through the air toward Father Kappelhoff's face but stopped short of reaching its target. The priest had caught the bandit leader's wrist and was holding tightly. "My belief can stop greater threats than yours," he breathed.

The brigand kicked forward, knocking Father Kappelhoff's legs out from under him and sending him to the ground once more. The bandit raised his weapon high, preparing to plunge it into the priest's heart. But before he could act, he noticed a set of hinges and small handle on the floor.

"What is that?" he growled. "A secret vault?" Father Kappelhoff was silent and the bandit leader's face split into a hideous grin. "That's where yer keeping me crozier!" The knife darted under the priest's chin, its fine point drawing a single drop of blood. "Open it!"

Away from the altar, Feyyed found his three remaining opponents to be more prudent than the first two he had finished.

They coordinated their attacks, forcing the larger man into a defensive routine to keep their hungry blades from tasting his flesh. He watched their moves, studying their strikes with detached patience, and saw a fatal flaw to their pattern. They were overcompensating for his height.

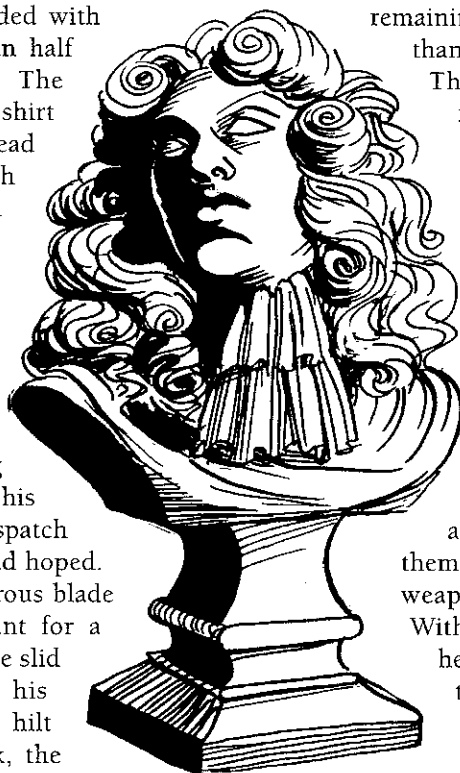
On their next push, Feyyed took the three by surprise, ducking and rolling under their combined swipes. He came up astoundingly quickly and struck them all with a single sweep of his weapon, felling them like wheat. Without bothering to wipe his blade, he moved up the aisle to the front of the church.

Off to his right, Luis was finishing with his own problems.

Once the innocent parishioners were out of harm's way, he had torn into the threatening bandits with an almost inhuman speed. Four were already strewn over the small area, and the remaining two were clearly at Luis' mercy.

"You need to consider a new occupation," the swordsman advised, cutting off a bewildered man's buttons. His rapier neatly snagged a hoop earring and tore it from its owner. "One of these days, you could be seriously injured." In two strokes both men lost their swords and, in two more, their pants were around their ankles.

Luis managed a smile. "Get out of here." Tripping and stumbling, the bandits wisely followed his order.



"Stay back!" yelled the leader. "I'm takin' the crozier an' leavin'"

Feyyed moved purposefully forward, but Luis' hand held him. "He'll kill the priest," he said softly. "The only exit is behind us."

Luis considered for a moment, then lowered his sword. "You win, Inishman. Take it and go."

The hinges on the floor squeaked with age as Father Kappelhoff pulled open the hatch. His face flushed with exertion, he reached down into the darkness and began to rummage about.

"It better be down there," the bandit said through his teeth, "or ye can start giving yerself Last Rites." His hard expression became a look of smug satisfaction as the priest emerged with a long, thin staff crooked at its end. "It's beautiful," the bandit said, the sound of a purse full of guilders rattling in his ears. "Now give it to me!"

"As you wish," Father Kappelhoff said heavily. Gripping the staff as he had been taught, he jabbed it first into the bandit's stomach and then into his face, the knife clattering harmlessly away. Rising up, he spun it over his head and brought it down forcefully between the man's shoulders, crashing him to the floor unconscious. Satisfied, the priest steadied himself and let out a deep breath.

The church was still, with only the steady rhythm of the rain marking the passage of uneasy moments. At last Luis cleared his throat and spoke. "That was... unexpected."

Father Kappelhoff smiled. "Why is that? You didn't expect a priest to be able to defend himself?"

"Not with a sacred relic," Feyyed said sternly. "What if you had broken it?"

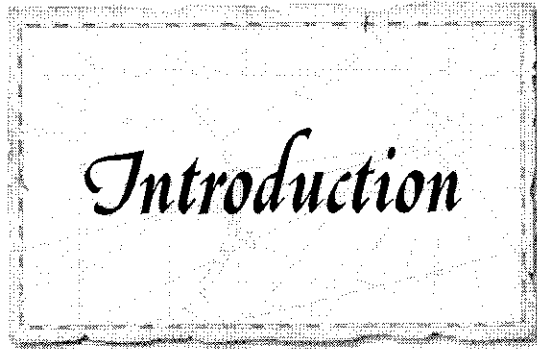
The priest gave a small laugh. "Then I would have carved a new one. There is nothing sacred about this staff. I simply store it down there with my extra vestments."

Luis rubbed the back of his neck, surveying the damage around them. "So, where is the real crozier? These brigands certainly wanted it badly enough."

"They never would have found it," Father Kappelhoff said. He reached behind the altar and produced an unpretentious green jar. "Its ashes are in here. At least we hope they are its ashes. It was destroyed when Objectionist zealots burned our first church down during the war."

Feyyed did not look amused. "You are not certain whether the ashes you have are authentic?"

"No," said the priest, "but it doesn't really matter, does it?" He reached up and placed a grateful hand on both men's shoulders. "That's the nature of faith."



From their earliest days, the people of Théah had faith in higher powers, in gods and spirits responsible for the world's creation and subsequent maintenance. These ethereal forces provided suitable answers to life's questions when no others could be found. The names and natures of these beings were as varied as the people who worshipped them and, though they often came into conflict, no single belief system ever threatened to overpower any of the others.

Then a single man appeared in the chambers of the world's mightiest government. He was unremarkable to behold, but had a gentle smile and clear eyes. He claimed to be a Prophet of Theus, the one true god who created the world and the heavens. The Prophet was charged with bringing Theus' message to His people, encouraging humanity to understand its Creator by studying all of His creation. He also charged that sorcery was an abomination, a claim that would see him burned at the stake.

The Prophet may have perished, but his words flourished. Thousands followed the message he had delivered and a new religion grew up around it. Through the centuries the religion grew, changed, and even fragmented into different sects, but it continued to serve the same role. People still had questions they could find no easy answers for, questions that could only be answered by faith.

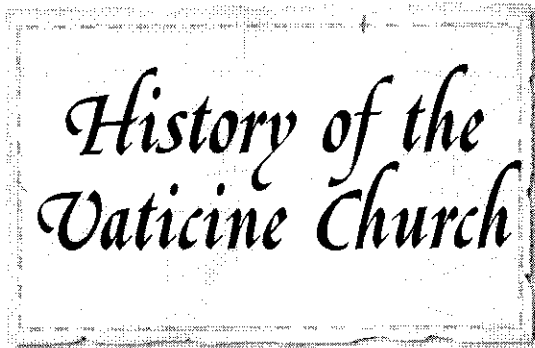
This book is about the power of faith and the organizations created to draw upon its strength. It includes information on the four main branches of the Prophets' followers: Vaticine, Objectionism, Ussuran Orthodoxy, and the fledgling Church of Avalon, as well as new ways to portray devout Heroes in the world of *7th Sea*. Every group presented in these pages is faithful to its own creed, every devout practitioner a champion of a great and noble cause. Their faith can lead them to remarkable triumphs and tragedies.

It can make them heroes.



Chapter One

The Word



The history of the Church of the Prophets has been covered throughout various sourcebooks for *7th Sea*, primarily the *Players' Guide*, pages 84–91, the *GMs' Guide*, pages 121–125, and the *Castille* sourcebook, pages 61–66. Much of this information is covered below, in part or whole. However, the history here unifies and develops the descriptions presented elsewhere, to show the full story that underpins the fate of every nation on Théah.

The First Prophet

The chronicle of the Church begins quite naturally with AV 1. Certainly, no Vaticine elements existed before the First Prophet appeared. The events before that time influenced the Church's development, but cannot truly be called part of its history. The only possible exception occurred fifty years before the Prophet began preaching on the street corners of Numa. Senators, hungry for power, made a Bargain with mysterious beings, marking the birth of sorcery. Many believe that this event spurred Theus, who

had previously been content merely watching the world, to take an active role in its future. The threads of fate were altered, and His messenger was born.

No one knows where the First Prophet actually came from. The few surviving records indicated that he spoke many languages fluently, and without accent. The original nine Witnesses who accompanied him came from all over mainland Théah. There was a pair of twin brothers, Jaime and Joaquin, who were fishermen from the coast of Acraga. Also from Acraga was Maria, whose profession would currently be referred to as a Jenny. Tomas and Kirstin came from the barbarian Eisen tribes. Kirstin's husband, Pierre, hailed from the area that would one day become Montaigne, and apparently served the Prophet's right hand man. From the area around Numa came Simon and Phillippa, citizens of the Empire's most prosperous province. Finally, there was the woman Sophia from the border of the Empire of the Crescent Moon. Her background remains shrouded in mystery, but she followed the Prophet with unquestionable devotion.

Many apocryphal tales surround the travels of the First Prophet and his Witnesses. Tomas' conversion came very slowly, leading to the name Doubting Tomas. Maria's stories remain very popular with the Vaticine faithful. She was supposedly in love with the Prophet, but could not bear to express that love to such an unearthly man. Many tales speak of the Prophet protecting her from people who condemned her for her past. Numerous towns have legends surrounding the revelations of the Prophet or his Witnesses there, and several claim to be the birthplace of various Witnesses.

After five years of wandering and gathering followers, the Prophet knew that the time had

come to confront his enemies. He brought his Witnesses together on the hill of Monte Joyas, the "Mountain of Jewels" in La Sierra Hierro. "I am leaving you," he said. "I am leaving so that all of you may be saved. I cannot protect you, and Theus cannot protect you, but you can be spared." Stunned by his words, the Witnesses asked him to explain, but he only said, "You cannot understand yet, but I ask for you to leave this place without me. Go apart from one another and wait. In one year's time, you may spread my word once again."

The Witnesses were confused and frightened, but they did as he commanded. For a time, Pierre refused to abandon the Prophet until the Prophet looked at him sadly, and said, "Pierre, you are my rock and my foundation. I am trusting you to build on what we begin here, and bring all the people into the glory of Theus. If you come with me, all will be lost." Finally bowing to his leader's wishes, Pierre gathered his scriptures and left the hill to travel across the world. One year passed, and then the words of the Prophet began to ring out again all across the Empire.

While his Witnesses were traveling their own way, the Prophet knew where his destiny lay. He journeyed to Numa, the heart of civilization and center of sorcerous power. He at first appeared to be a simple street preacher, one of many who flocked to the capital. But his words rang true, and his faith was strong. Crowds gathered to hear him speak, and kept his words in their hearts. But the Prophet had no intention of moving slowly. Theus' agent came to him in the form of a Senate page named Vesta, who heard his words and wished to help him. She led him through a secret passage into the Senate's chambers. It was there that the world changed.

The sudden appearance of man dressed in common robes shocked the Senators. The debates immediately halted. Guards were summoned, but none would move against the Prophet. He appeared so calm and self-assured that assaulting him seemed... wrong somehow. Then, he spoke into the silence. He told the assemblage of Theus, of the beauty and mystery of nature. He told them how to be kind and generous. He told them of the Seven Deadly Sins, and showed them the corruption in their midst. But, most importantly of all, he told them that the sorcery they all wielded was wrong, and would someday destroy the world.

The Senators were not used to being lectured, and certainly disliked being told that they were wrong. Their amazement at the Prophet's audacity

so gave way to anger. Senator Castillus was the first to speak. "Who are you, that understands such things?" he cried.

"I am no one," the Prophet replied, "yet I bear the burden for all."

Castillus raged against the Prophet's message. "If your god is as powerful as you say," he shouted, "ask him to show us!"

The Prophet fell silent, and looked sadly at the Senator. The rest of the Senate, sensing the growing tension, fell silent as well. The Prophet looked at each man in turn, resolution in his eyes. He ended with Castillus, but rather than meet his gaze, he walked forward and touched the senator's hand.

Castillus was seized with violent fits. His colleagues yelled in terror and accusation as he collapsed onto the Senate floor, writhing and shuddering. The Senators shrank back in fright, refusing to approach their afflicted companion. Only one man came to his aid, a young man by the name of Tobias. He knelt by Castillus and attempted to comfort him. As he touched his colleague's hand, spasms ended as suddenly as they had begun.

When the excitement was over, the Senators forgot their fright and returned to their anger. "That is Tobias the Meek," one cried. "What has he done to Castillus?"

"He has done nothing that you should not have done yourselves," the Prophet answered. "He has demonstrated courage, an understanding that he and a person in peril are part of the same organism, and due the same respect."

"But you caused this!" the Senator returned. "You made Castillus ill."

"No. I have given him a gift — the chance to see what awaits him should he continue his sinful ways. I have shown him the most awful thing that can happen to a mortal man."

"You... monster!" Castillus shrieked, and lunged forward. He and the other Senators attacked the Prophet with all the sorcerous might they could muster. The Prophet stood calmly in the middle of the Senate floor, their magic washing over him like water. When the men had expended themselves, he simply turned and exited the building.

The Senate quickly recovered from the uproar, and called for the young man's arrest. However, the Prophet turned himself in before they could issue the warrant. The Senators then held a trial, without the presence of the Prophet. He was found guilty of numerous crimes — attacking a

Senator, attempted treason, and several other trumped-up charges — and sentenced to immediate death.

However, the Prophet's words had touched at least one of their number. Tobias the Meek came to him in his cell to tell him of his fate. He apologized for not being able to save the Prophet, and asked if there was anything he could do. The Prophet said that he needed one more Witness. Tobias swore to carry his message, and the Prophet then told Tobias everything. The nature of Theus, and his mercy. The threat of sorcery. The three Prophets to come, and their messages to the world. Tobias swore that he would spread the Prophet's words far and wide, so that they would live forever.

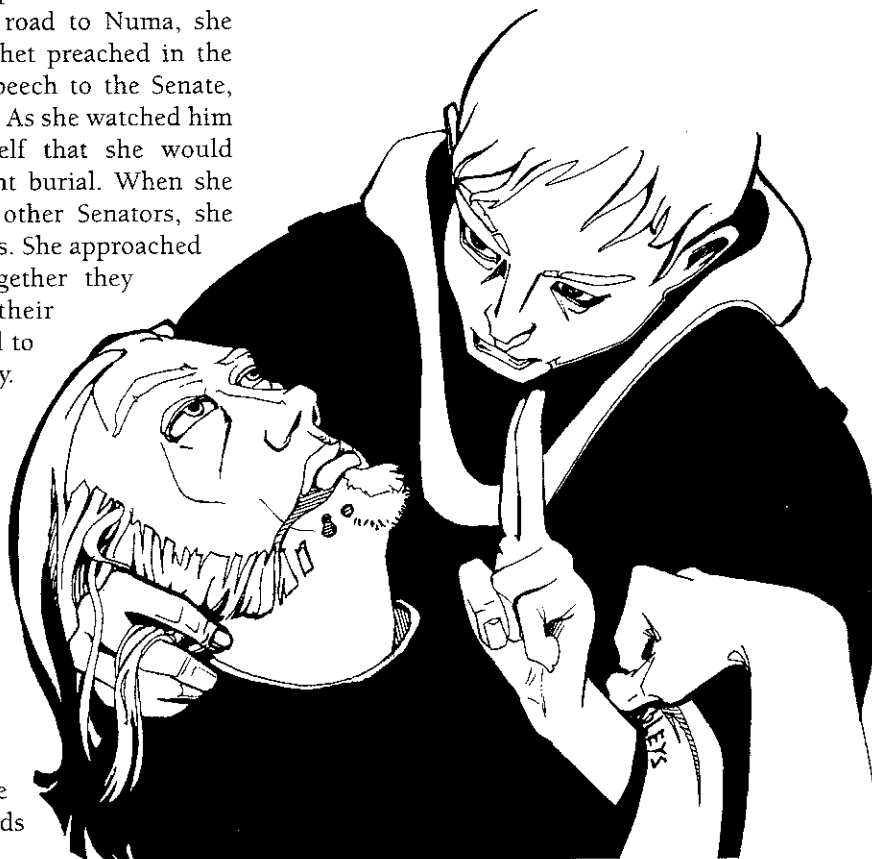
The next morning, the Prophet was taken out into the city square and burned at the stake. Tobias stood with the other Senators who had come to watch his death. After the flames died down, Tobias renounced his position as Senator, and changed his name to Mattheus. He became the Prophet's Tenth Witness, and abandoned his position in the Senate to seek out the other nine. He didn't have to travel far.

When the Witnesses had scattered, Maria knew what the Prophet intended. Her faith urged her to obey him, but her love pushed her to follow his path. Taking a different road to Numa, she watched silently as the Prophet preached in the streets. She learned of his speech to the Senate, and his impending execution. As she watched him burn, Maria promised herself that she would recover the body for a decent burial. When she saw Tobias' defiance of the other Senators, she knew him for another Witness. She approached him in the square, and together they reclaimed the ashes of their mentor. The Prophet was laid to rest in a crypt outside the city. (The great Cathedral of Santa Maria was built around the Tomb of the Prophet in the early twelfth century, and it remains an important holy site to the Vaticine faithful.)

With the Prophet's ashes consecrated, Mattheus and Maria traveled across Théah, collecting both Witnesses and worshippers as they went. The death of the Prophet had given his words

weight and passion. Small groups of worshippers appeared all across Théah. They elected priests among themselves, and those priests corresponded with the Witnesses and other priests for advice. Thus the Church of the Prophets truly began. Mattheus compiled the texts of the other Witnesses, along with the revelations the Prophet had entrusted to him, into the First Vigil. Pierre was regarded as head of the Church, and later generations would refer to him as the First Hierophant. Each of the other Witnesses performed deeds, in accordance with their gifts, which help solidify the new religion.

The message of Theus first took hold in the outlying regions of the Empire. By the time the Senate learned that the Prophet's dangerous words still lived, Theus already had a significant following. Determined to stop this new religion, the Senators ordered all manner of persecutions. Chapels were burned. The faithful were tortured and executed. Many of the saints from this period were revered as martyrs, and the stories of their continuing faith under pain and torture have inspired many. Even members of the Ten Witnesses were eventually arrested and killed, though it took some time to do so. These activities only served to prove how evil the



sorcerers were, and strengthen the faith of the common people.

After a few generations, the faith had grown too strong to be rooted out (after all, a noble can't very well kill all the peasants, or who will do the work?). In addition, the First Vigil had begun to circulate among the lesser nobility. They found in it a message of hope and love, but more importantly, they found a weapon against the sorcerous families who controlled the Senate. Many nobles converted as a statement of opposition against their so-called superiors. In AV 203, Emperor Danatius himself declared that he had converted to the new faith — a move which shifted the balance of power. The Church was now secure against attack from the Senate, and began to flower as never before.

The Second Prophet

By the end of the third century, the Church developed tremendously. It controlled so much money and so many people that bishops and monsignors held as much power as kings. The faith also served as a political playing piece in the constant struggle between rulers. All of this turned the Church away from its goals of charity and knowledge. Power and wealth were now the chief concerns of many who joined the priesthood. Thus in AV 305, Theus sent His second messenger to set the Church back on the proper path.

The Second Prophet came from a small city deep in the Empire of the Crescent Moon. His name was Malak; he was tall and slender, just as the First Prophet had been, and he had brilliant blue eyes, which was almost unique for a Crescent. Nine Witnesses followed him, gathered from all the tribes of the Empire. He arrived just as the First Prophet had predicted.

Where the First Prophet had preached a message of love and acceptance, the Second Prophet claimed that the Church had abandoned that message. "You are all deceived," were his words. "This Church you follow has been corrupted by the very sins it claims to absolve. By remaining under its tutelage, you deny your duty to the Creator. In all the small things, you have been betrayed, for you have become too wise to be led astray by the large."

The message of the Second Prophet was much less popular than the first. The Church did not like hearing that it followed the word of the First

Prophet incorrectly. The people, though aware of the Church's corruption, distrusted the rest of Malak's message. He advocated a very precise set of rites and rituals, which he claimed were the only means to true salvation. The rules proved inflexible. For example, duels and wars were manifestations of Wrath, so people should never fight, even in self-defense. He prescribed a very precise series of fasts to combat Gluttony. He spoke out strongly against Lust and Avarice, trying to close down houses of ill repute wherever he found them. He even went so far as to declare drinking a sin. The common people loved Theus, but they weren't sure that the Creator really wanted them to give up all these earthly pleasures.

The most controversial aspect of the Prophet's message, however, was the call for separation. He claimed that the Church had been corrupted — and could not help but be corrupted — by imperfect men. Only by removing oneself from the temptations of the world could one attain enlightenment. The Prophet called for all his followers to come with him back to the Crescent Empire. For many Théans, this meant not only abandoning home and family, but also traveling into an area known for barbarism and horrific treatment of trespassers.

By this time, the Emperor Alexius had heard of the Prophet. He was concerned about the upheaval that such a man would bring with him. The fact that this Prophet wanted to take a number of Imperial subjects across the border into the Empire of the Crescent Moon troubled him deeply. However, he did not want to make the mistake of attacking a true messenger of Theus. So he ordered his guards to bring the Prophet to him so that he might hear the message first-hand.

Several days later, his soldiers returned. There was no sign they had seen battle, yet they also did not have the Prophet. They told the Emperor that they had found Malak, surrounded him, and moved in before he could react. However, his Witnesses formed an impenetrable circle around him. They used no weapons, but seemed impossible to move or harm. Sorcery had no effect on them, and the guards' weapons never seemed to strike home. They fought for six hours, and eventually became exhausted from their efforts. Their targets remained unharmed. Seeing no way to fulfill his orders, the commander decided to return and report.

Alexius was gravely disturbed. He decided that the best way to handle the situation was to send

an entire army and overwhelm the Prophet with sheer numbers. This time, however, the Witnesses parted to allow them forward. Malak stood there, silent and without fear. He allowed himself to be taken into custody and imprisoned. He was interrogated for an entire year while his Witnesses attempted to speak to the Emperor on his behalf. During that entire time, the Prophet never changed his perfectly calm exterior, and never spoke.

The morning of Primus 1, AV 306 dawned calm and clear over the Prophet's prison. As the sun rose, one of the guards saw something descending from the clouds. The sight stunned him into unconsciousness. When questioned later, he could only describe a blanket of bright white light, descending from on high. What happened next was a mystery. The prison had been reduced to a pile of smoking rubble, and the Prophet seemed to have simply walked away.

Malak was next seen at Monte Joyas, over three hundred miles away. He had gathered there with his Witnesses and forty thousand faithful followers. Imprisonment had apparently been good for the Prophet's message, and more people were listening now than ever had before. Unfortunately, the Prophet had added a dramatic sense of urgency to his message. What had been a simple call for separation now became a clear plan of exodus to the Empire of the Crescent Moon. The Prophet's words swayed his faithful, and all forty thousand eagerly followed him toward the desert.

Emperor Alexius was very concerned with these developments. The miraculous escape of Malak lent weight to his claims of divinity, and it seemed very probably that Theus's second Prophet had indeed arrived. However, the Emperor could not very well allow 40,000 subjects to leave his realm and be delivered "into the hands of barbarians." He sent three armies after the travelers, with orders to prevent the crowd from crossing into the Empire.

When the armies arrived at the border town of Rahajeel, they found only the remains of Malak and his followers. Apparently the entire group had been cut down by Crescent raiders while they stood at High Mass. The attack had come very suddenly. The bodies still lay in rows, having apparently offered no resistance to the murderers. The Prophet himself had died in front of the altar, his final sermon scattered on the ground around him. Vultures and jackals had just emerged from

the desert to feed as the armies of the Emperor approached.

Within the hour, a storm blew up, and the Emperor's men retreated to their camps. Five hours later, the winds died down. The battle site was gone. The bodies, their possessions, the carrion-eaters, every trace that forty thousand people had ever existed was wiped from the face of the earth. The Creator had simply gathered them all into his care, never to be seen again.

When he heard what had happened, Alexius was outraged. What may have been one of the holiest men to walk the face of Théah now lay dead, and the Emperor could never have his doubts resolved. Even worse, forty thousand subjects of his empire had been slain by his ancient enemy under the Crescent Moon. His orders returned to the three armies still waiting on the border: avenge the prophet's death. As the word spread of what had happened, the citizens of the Emperor supported his decision, and flocked to his call. The First Crusades had begun.

Despite his grisly demise, the words of the Second Prophet did not die. Some have claimed that one of the soldiers picked up the Prophet's last sermon before the storm came in. Supposed excerpts from this work have surfaced in a number of scholarly texts, but the Church has never irrefutably accepted any document as the Prophet's final words. According to legend, the sermon was a continuation of the First Prophet's discussion with Witness Mattheus. Some of the excerpts have included specific prophecies regarding the last two Prophets.

The Tenth Witness and the Second Vigil

Of all the faithful who came to Monte Joyas that fateful day, a few were unable to follow the Prophet into the desert. The Witness Marco was one of those. He had been a sailor, but had lost his legs to a siren attack years earlier and retired to a small inn in a little town on the coast of Vodacce. One day, the Prophet came into the village to speak to its inhabitants. Hoping to have his injuries healed through some miracle of faith, Marco went to see his speech. Malak noticed the crippled sailor, and beckoned him forward from the crowd.

But the Prophet did not restore his legs. Instead, he knelt and looked deep into Marco's eyes. "The Creator has given each and every one of us very special gift," he said. "That gift is not legs, or eyes, or breath. Your gift is your mind. The secrets of the Puzzle are within every man's

grasp. All you need do is believe in His word, and see the truth in His Creation. Our bodies are just clay. While you live, have hope." The Prophet then asked Marco to meet him at Monte Joyas, ready to hear the answer to the Puzzle.

Marco, who had never emotionally recovered from his injury, was suddenly filled with a new joy and purpose. He sold everything he had, and set off for La Sierro Hierro. He soon met a young priest who wanted to travel with him. The priest taught Marco to read and write, and instructed him in all the mysteries of Theus' message. It took the pair almost two years, but they eventually made it to Monte Joyas.

When the Prophet saw Marco waiting amongst his followers, he smiled. "You cannot come with us on our journey. Theus has chosen you for something else. Teach His Church how they have strayed. Keep my message alive. Remain behind to tell others what you have seen." Marco took the writings of the other Witnesses, as well recording the final message of the Prophet, and wrote the Second Vigil, preventing the loss of the Word of the Prophets to the sands of time.

The Corantine Council

The launch of the First Crusade would be one of Emperor Alexius' final acts. He died in AV 312, and was succeeded by his son, Corantine. Corantine was always a faithful Vaticine, but in listening to the interrogation of Malak, he had become a convert to the teachings of the Second Prophet as well. He declared that the Vaticine faith was now the official religion of the Empire.

Though Corantine's edict was a major triumph for the Church, it contained one significant flaw. The Church had still not incorporated the Second Prophet's new message. Indeed, many of the Church leaders questioned whether or not Malak was, indeed, a Prophet. The faith of the people, whipped into a frenzy by both Malak and the Crusade, was splitting into dozens of cults and factions. The different factions spent more time attracting converts and accusing each other of heresy than carrying out the will of the Creator.

Corantine saw it as his duty to resolve these differences before they tore his Empire apart. He laid down an ultimatum: the different factions had one year to resolve their differences and establish a universal creed. If they could not, he would settle the question for them. A massive conference was held in Numa, lasting five months. The attendees included representatives from nearly every Prophet cult in the Empire. Every nuance of the faith, from the nature of the universe to the color of the priests' robes, was discussed at length. Finally, with only three weeks left in the year, they presented the Corantine Creed to the Emperor. The Reformed Vaticine Church had been established, and would not change significantly for seven hundred years.

The Corantine Conference had a great deal of impact on the history of the Church. In addition to the creed, it created the first Catechism, defining the truths to which the Church adhered. Many later councils would modify and refine the questions and answers, but the concept had been born. By establishing a base line of "true" Vaticine beliefs, it became much easier to define what constituted heresy. Indeed, the fourth and fifth centuries would see a remarkable attempt on the



part of the Hierophant to identify and root out heresies. Despite their best efforts, heresies continued underground. The majority of Théans became devout Vaticanines, at least publicly.

A second Corantine Conference convened twenty years later. Questions had been raised, and the Reformed Vaticanine Church needed to evaluate its progress. The conference served primarily to take the now-unified faith, and give it an organization that would support every worshipper everywhere. It created the four levels of Hieros, Archdiocese, Diocese, and Parish, and revived the concept of elected officials, abandoned since the days of the Republic. To honor the Ten Witnesses who followed each Prophet, it was decided that the structure would be built around groups of ten. The Empire was divided into ten parts, roughly along political lines. Each Archdiocese was then divided into ten Dioceses, and so on. The remarkable blending of feudal tiers and democratic succession created a system that was diverse enough to deal with issues on all levels, and dynamic enough to adapt to the radical changes the next thirteen centuries would bring.

The Dark Ages

In 376 AV Emperor Corantine died. The Empire was divided between his three sons, none of whom had his ability or ambition. Within fifty years, Théah had devolved into dozens of warring kingdoms. The Church, now unified, became an agency for recognizing the legitimacy of the new rulers. Hierophants slowly became king-makers, culminating in 609 AV when the Church recognized Carleman as High Emperor of Théah — thus legitimizing his rule.

The Vaticanine feared this new political power at the same time that they used it. The Second Prophet had come because the Church had grown corrupt, and more concerned with the temporal than the spiritual. Were they now slipping to their former corruption? Debates raged in many areas as to whether the Church of the Prophets should bear the responsibility of controlling the political destiny of Théah. On the one hand, the Church was stable and universal. On the other, political concerns often distracted Church officials from their proper duties. Then again, the Church had the most learned people within their ranks, and the most complete history of each family and each conflict. And yet, the Church had never been

authorized by anyone to act as an overseer for the nobility. Very few people could honestly approach the issue objectively and dispassionately.

The Fifth Corantine Conference took place in 874 AV to address these issues. Its participants determined that the Church could indeed function as an arbiter in political disputes. However, to do so it must forever remain a neutral party. They laid down several rules to ensure this legacy. If nobles wish to become priests, they would have to give up both titles and power. Priests were banned from personally owning land or businesses. These and similar provisions would remove most of the personal interest a priest might have in any dispute, allowing a more detached role. Churches and their officers were also declared neutral ground in any dispute, eventually leading to the tradition of sanctuary.

By the end of the first millennium, the Church was wealthy and powerful, but thanks to the Fifth Convention, it managed to maintain its integrity. Scholarship flourished, the poor and needy received aid, and wars were kept to a minimum. Many historians describe the Church as complacent and content. The faithful met their duties, but the fire of conviction had dimmed. That fire was soon to be fanned to heights never before seen.

The Third Prophet

In 1000 AV, a young man appeared in northern Castille, performing miracles and claiming to be the Third Prophet. None knew his name, or his family, though he was clearly of Castillian descent. One thing was perfectly clear, though. He burned with a frightening faith, and ignited the same passion in those he touched. His message was frightening, as well. He preached that the Church had once again lost its way. The nations, too, had strayed from His word. Sin and heresy were flourishing unchecked, the world was again ruled by those with sorcery, and none would stand against those in power.

The Hierophant at the time, Honorius, was skeptical of this Prophet. The coming of the millennium had brought out numerous false holy men and rabble-raising doomsayers. This Prophet seemed no different from them. Moreover, his words did not match those of the first two. He also had no Witnesses. The fact that his message — indeed his mere presence — was

very threatening to the established order added to the apprehension.

When the Prophet heard of the Hierophant's doubts, he sent a message to Numa and asked the pontiff to meet him at Monte Joyas. When the Hierophant arrived, the Prophet asked him to join him on a pilgrimage into the mountains. The two men left the Hierophant's entourage behind, and traveled deep into La Sierre de Hierro. The Prophet led them directly to a hidden cave, which contained an wondrous jet of flame. The fire spiraled up from a crack in the floor, and disappeared into a chimney above.

The Prophet indicated that they needed to seek Theus' guidance to ease the Hierophant's doubts. The two men knelt before the flame. They stayed there for three days, praying and meditating. On the dawn of the third day, the Prophet reached out his hand and placed it within the fire. The flame suddenly turned pure white, and became so hot that the rocks near it began to crack. The Prophet and his clothes, however, were untouched.

"The Flames of Theus burn bright," he said, "but cannot harm those who obey His word."

The Hierophant had studied the prophecies of the First Vigil, and even the supposed prophecies of the Second Prophets' lost sermon. He knew the signs of the Third Prophet, and had been watching him carefully. Now, the words came back to him. The First Prophet had described the Third Prophet as bearing "a sword of flame," and the Second Prophet had been even more explicit. "He shall lead the faithful into the wilderness as I have," said the Second Vigil. "But he shall neither leave them there, nor leave even one lamb of his flock behind. He shall draw forth a sword from the earth, and bring it back to lead the Church." Clearly, the Hierophant was the faithful led into the wilderness, and this was the sword of flame pulled from the earth. All his doubts were dispelled in that moment.

When the word went out that the Third Prophet had truly come, there was much rejoicing. Pilgrims flocked to hear him speak, and followed him in great roving camps. He named Ten Witnesses from among his earliest followers. He spoke to each of the Cardinals in turn, and each was convinced of his divinity and the rightness of his message.

That message would create devastating conflicts. He declared that the faithful had fallen from grace by allowing sin (in the form of sorcery) and heresy (in the form of the Crescent Empire) into its ranks. He asked that all of his

followers reject such things from their own lives, and save their neighbors by removing such influences from theirs. Castille was, at that time, very heavily influenced by the Crescent Empire, and indeed many Crescents lived within its borders. Castille was also the home camp of the Third Prophet. It was not hard to see the firestorm brewing.

Open conflict erupted in the spring of 1002. A Crescent mob in Malaca grew incensed over the treatment of a prisoner, who later turned out to be innocent. They stormed the palace, raging at the gates. Bishop Felipe de Gallegos came to the gate in an effort to make peace with the crowd. The angry protesters would not listen. They hurled rotten fruit at him. The fruit was soon replaced by rocks and bricks, but despite the danger, the Bishop would not retreat. The guards could do little to shield him, though two were severely injured in the attempt. The Bishop was struck in the head by a shard of stone, and died later that night from complications.

When the rest of Castille heard this news, they were outraged. When the Prophet heard, he declared war. Holding up the actions of the mob as proof of his message, he declared that any man who allied himself with the Empire of the Crescent Moon was a heretic and an enemy of the Church. He then called on all faithful Castellians to rise up and cast out their heathen neighbors. Blood ran in the streets. The Second Crusade had begun.

The war would rage in Castille for eight long years. The Prophet led his people bravely, but the majority of the nobility (and thus the ruling sorcerers), sided with the Crescents (to whom they owed their position). Faith can only carry a man so far when his body is weak from fatigue and hunger. Though they fought bravely, the Prophet's followers could not overcome their opponents. In 1008, the Prophet turned to his ally, Honorius. The Vodacce — devoutly Vaticine — had already struck against the Crescent Empire. When Honorius heard the Prophet's request, he used his considerable influence with the Merchant Princes to send the Vodacce navies to help. Vaticine troops from Eisen took this as a sign to move south into the Gallegos peninsula, striking at the strongholds of the Crescents. It would take two more bloody years, but the infidels would be driven into the sea. The Merchant Princes would continue the Crusade on and off for another three centuries, until the death of the Poor Knights in 1308.

The Prophet rejoiced in his victory, and blessed his people for what they had accomplished. However, the heresy of the Crescents was not the only threat to the souls of the pious. The sin of sorcery still flowed in Castille's veins, despite the heavy losses suffered by the nobility. As the armies celebrated at Malaca, the last stronghold of the Crescent supporters, the Prophet sent out a call to all sorcerers who were faithful to the Church. If they would join the Prophet at El Fuego Sagrado, he would use the power of Theus to purge the taint from their souls. They would enter Elaethorum in a state of perfect grace, and would be honored as saints ever after. Many nobles heeded the Prophet's call and were cleansed of their sorcerous blood. Some did not, and fled into the mountainous refuge of La Sierra de Hierro. The Prophet declared them heretics, and they have been hunted ever since.

To celebrate the victory of the true faith over the infidels, the new High King Ramon Sandoval ordered the construction of a city to honor the Prophet and his Church. The King offered up a portion of his own estate along the Rio De Dios for the project. As with any village in Théah, the first building must be a church. For Vaticine City itself, that church would be a cathedral to outshine any other in the world. The construction would not be completed for one hundred and fifty years, as war-torn Castille struggled to divide limited resources between their home and their faith. But even today, the Great Cathedral of the Prophets is one of the largest and most splendid constructions in the world.

The Hieros Wars

After the Second Crusades ended, the Prophet concentrated on purifying the Church. He founded the Inquisition, a holy order dedicated to seeking out and eliminating heresy in all its forms. Their first target was the shepherds of Theus' flock, the priests themselves. The Inquisition looked into the history, habits, and teachings of every ordained member of the Church. Priests, Monsignors, and even Bishops were found guilty and removed from their station. Most were defrocked, and some were even executed. Entire orders were found to be heretical and subsequently eliminated.

Just as the Third Prophet had replaced the old Crescent nobility with new Vaticine dons, he replaced the defrocked priests with Castillian men

and women who had proven their loyalty under fire. All across Théah, parishes and Dioceses saw a rapidly increasing influence from priests who looked first to Vaticine City and the Prophet, and second to Numa and the Hierophant. The Vodacce Cardinals sensed the coming threat to their power, and began opposing Castillian appointees and their agendas. The Hierophant, however, remained fiercely loyal to the Prophet, which strongly curtailed his supporters' ability. In the winter of 1012, the tension between the old and the new would boil over in a way no one could predict.

It began innocently enough, over some obscure matter of which Diocese a certain monastery belonged to. However, one of the Dioceses heavily supported Numa, and the other heavily supported Castille. Political pressures brought the issue to the attention of the Cardinals, who were split amongst themselves. The Hierophant looked at the history of the monastery, and decided that it belonged with the diocese that supported Numa. The Third Prophet took this decision as a direct challenge to his own authority. He exercised that authority by removing the Hierophant and replacing him with a more amenable (i.e., Castillian) one. He compounded this radical decision by declaring that the seat of the Church would move from Numa to Vaticine City, permanently.

The Vodacce Cardinals were not about to take this lying down.

For the second time in a decade, blood was spilt in a religious conflict. Castille, still recovering from the Crusade, was no match for the Vodacce forces. But Emperor Friedrich II of Eisen, who did not like the old Hierophant, sided with the Prophet. The war lasted for four years, though surprisingly few battles were fought. Castille held strong against the Vodacce attack, and turned their foes back in the first year. Meanwhile, Eisen forces pushed south and, heading on an arrow's path for Numa, took the city in the late summer of 1018. By the next spring, the Merchant Princes knew their cause was hopeless. They convinced the Cardinals to yield.

The new Castillian Hierophant, Innocent, was an excellent politician who quickly recognized how close the Church had come to fragmenting. He allowed the Vodacce to keep their two Archdioceses, although both Cardinals faced trial for heresy. He thanked Eisen by pledging to keep the Church out of its internal politics. The



The Death of a Prophet

Following the decisive victory over the Vodacce, the Prophet began focusing on his legacy. He held a number of Conferences to debate the nature of faith and the role of the Church. Under his leadership, a new zeal came to every corner of the Church. The Inquisitors would root out heresy. The Gnostics would seek out knowledge. The Victorians would bring in converts. The Church was growing in a way not seen since the time of Emperor Corantine.

One of the Third Prophet's great projects was to revolutionize science and philosophy. For generations, the great thinkers had looked within themselves for the answer to Theus' Riddle. The Third Prophet reminded them that every part of creation is a piece of the puzzle. Alchemy and superstitions gave way to rational explanations, experimentation, and

categorization. At first, only the Church scholars followed the Prophet's new methods. But since the Church controlled most of the universities, the shift across all of Théah was inevitable.

The strongest legacies of this time are the Third and Fourth Vigils. The Third Vigil was written by the Witness Lucio, one of the Prophet's earliest and most fervent followers. Surprisingly enough, Lucio never took a formal place in the Church. He simply declared that, while a priest must serve Theus, his duty was to serve the Prophet. He studiously observed everything he saw, and the Church keeps the seventy-five volumes of his diaries in a glass case in Vaticine City. Scholars frequently quote from them, and they are still considered the authoritative history of the Hieros Wars.

The Third Prophet himself penned the Fourth Vigil. The first two Prophets had entrusted their most important prophecies to a single speech, hours before their death. The Third Prophet knew that his prophecies were too important to risk losing them. He worked on the Vigil for seven years, and finished them on the evening of the fourteenth day of Primus, 1030 AV. The next morning, his chamberlain found him dead.

Hierophant also established his absolute rule over the Inquisition, which has continued to the modern day. Despite the Prophet's good intentions, Innocent felt that the Inquisitors often threw the baby out with the bathwater. He ordered them to focus on more tangible evils, such as sorcery, rather than the increasingly nebulous category of heresy. The nobility of Vodacce were left extremely vulnerable, a fitting revenge for questioning the might of the Prophet.

The Hieros Wars had a dramatic effect on the history of Théah. Castille became the center of learning and piety, setting standards for Théah that stood well above anything seen before. Vodacce was wounded in her heart. The people felt that Theus had turned His back on them. Even today, most of the upper echelons of the Vodacce Archdioceses plot constantly for a way to return the heart of the Church to what they see as its rightful place. Eisen, in its place, earned a reprieve from outside influences that allowed it remarkably independent growth up to the sixteenth century.

The world mourned for two years. Priests refused to wear anything but solid black. Flowers were left at altars and church doorsteps all over Théah. Many people traveled hundreds of miles to pay their respects at his tomb. The *Vaticine Journey*, by Gerard Recauche, tells the story of ten such Montaigne pilgrims, and the fables they spun on their trip.

The Climb from the Dark Ages to the Renaissance

The next century was remarkably peaceful, almost as though the whole world had expelled its anger in a cathartic orgy of war. Except for Henri du Montaigne, who invaded Avalon in 1066, most nobles seemed content with their lands. Restless young sons went off to the Crusades, to reclaim the Second Prophet's homeland inch by inch. Squabbles still took place, of course, but they were generally settled diplomatically or economically rather than with war. It seemed as though the Prophet's sword of fire had brought peace to the land.

Not everything was idyllic. The Vodacce Cardinals continued to try and win back their influence. Since Vaticine City was still under construction, most of the bureaucracy remained in Numa under the Cardinals' control. In 1088, they solidified their continuing importance by placing the libraries of Alexia in Numa. While publicly a "gift to the Hierophant," the libraries attracted historians from across Théah. Now, even the new universities of Castille had to ask Vodacce for help.

The Second Crusade was going well, if slowly. Hot-headed young knights that would otherwise be picking fights with their neighbors were gaining glory against the infidel foe. They came home to a hero's welcome, satisfied with their lot. Those who did not return were honored by the Church as martyrs, in some cases even saints. As the faithful pushed the front farther and farther into Crescent territory, it became necessary to establish nobles there to administrate the new lands. In order to prevent nations from fighting over their conquests, the Church created an order of holy knights. Thus were the Poor Knights of the Prophet created under Hughes Allais du Crioux.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a time of tremendous growth for the Church. Thanks to the Montaigne invasion, Avalon had fallen under the Vaticine wing. The bleak landscape and remote locations proved ideal for

monasteries. Monasteries were also growing rapidly in Eisen. Many new orders sprung up during this time — so many, in fact, that in 1243, the Church was forced to ban new orders. The ban lasted until 1375.

Universities were also advancing, though slowly. Changes in approach had forced Church scholars to re-evaluate basic concepts, which set back the progress of science (though it built the firm foundation on which the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century was based). Peaceful times encouraged communication between nations, and Church scholars worked to gather various pieces of information that were found scattered across the continent.

The end of the thirteenth century found a Church that had once again grown complacent. Hierophants often served as puppets for greedy kings, and strong leaders struggled to make any meaningful difference. Vodacce's increasing control over Church bureaucracy allowed them to influence the Hierophants' decisions. Once again, the leaders of the Church were likely to be of Vodacce blood, though few even dared suggest that the seat move back to Numa. The Vodacce princes decided to use their influence to make a more direct grab for power.

Around the turn of the fourteenth century, rumors arose regarding the Order of the Poor Knights. A number of crusaders returned home with tales of the Knights turning into Crescent sympathizers. The rumors quickly grew worse, and the Vodacce princes fanned the flames. The whispers caught the ears of the Hieros Council, who ordered an investigation. Conveniently enough, the twelve priests charged with gathering evidence all hailed from various noble families of Vodacce, though they had supposedly given up secular ties.

The Order of the Poor Knights was found guilty of heresy, polluted by their extended contact with the Crescent Empire. They were all hunted down and executed, though stories persisted of a few knights escaping the purge. The Hierophant, who owed numerous favors to the Bernoulli family, closed the borders except to Prince Bernoulli and his followers, who were allowed to continue trade. The Church ruled that the infidel faith practiced in the Empire was dangerous to even the most devout Vaticine. Contact must be kept to a minimum, and those who maintained contact must be watched closely. That policy has continued to the modern day.

The fourteenth century had more than its share of dangers, which the Church addressed admirably. With the end of the Second Crusade, the Crescent threat was finally contained. In 1347 and 1386, the White Plague resurfaced, but only for a very short time in both cases. The Church dedicated scholars to researching the Plague, though it was difficult with so few subjects and such unusual patterns of spread.

The end of the fourteenth century saw the specter of Legion worship raise its ugly head in Vodacce. The long-reviled Lorenzo family, whose bloodline continued in the guise of the Biancos, seemed to have struck a Bargain with Legion. Stories circulated of terrifying acts and bloody rituals conducted at their estates. The Biancos even went so far as to openly scoff at the power of the Church. Eventually, however, retribution would come.

In 1398, the Princes holding back the Inquisition suddenly changed their minds. The Vestini family received the task of eliminating the Biancos and destroying their heretical minions. Hundreds of Inquisitors and contingents of Church guard flocked to Vodacce to participate in the witch hunt. The predators, however, did not truly appreciate the power of their prey.

The Bianco family defended itself with terrible powers, bringing Fate sorcery and other magics to bear against the attackers. Only one young Vodacce knight seemed able to withstand the onslaught. St. Andare del Casigula Rosa led his contingent to victory time and again. He possessed a passion for the destruction of the Biancos that seemed unrivaled. Furthermore, he seemed immune to their sorcery. With Andare as a spearhead, the Vestini were able to capture many cities within the Bianco-controlled area of Mantua.

The end of the century saw the end of the Bianco, as the last remnants of the line were finally trapped in their central manse. The Inquisition held a trial in absentia, and found them all guilty of the blackest sins. They were sentenced to be burned at the stake, and Theus seemed to agree with the judgement. Before the officials could arrest them, the manse erupted in a blazing inferno. It was surrounded by guards, and not a single person was seen to leave. The Church declared itself satisfied, and the power of Legion once again disappeared.

This great victory was soon followed by a great defeat, however. Ever since the Second Crusades ended, the order known as the Knights of the

Black Cross had struggled to find a new purpose. They had been fierce combatants in the Crescent lands, but there were few enemies worthy of their attention in mainland Théah. They had also become ludicrously wealthy from their time in the desert. Emperor Arvid I of Eisen coveted their wealth, and turned to Hierophant Logan III to help get it. The Church could not match the power of Eisen, and bowed to his will. The Knights of the Black Cross were accused of the same heresies as the Poor Knights before them. With the Hierophant's permission, the Emperor destroyed the order at Tannen in 1411 and seized their lands. The army of the Church has never been as powerful again.

The Rise of Objectionism

On a cold, foggy October morning in 1517, a monk nailed a list of questions to his Bishop's door. The act was simple, but the questions were not. They challenged high-level Church policy, the habits of Church officials, and the dedication of the Church to the message of the Prophets. Ninety-five points were raised, and would see their author, Mathias Lieber, brought in front of the Hieros Council.

The trial went poorly, both for Lieber and the Church. Lieber had a keen mind, and no small amount of truth on his side. The Cardinals, led by the Avalon Thomas Chandler, had precedent, power, and a firm grasp of the canon involved. The argument raged all day. It ended with Lieber renouncing the Church, and the Church in turn condemning him for heresy. The young monk was imprisoned in Vaticine City to await the cleansing flames.

But his execution never came.

Someone spirited Lieber away in the night, apparently at the order of the Eisen Emperor. Two days later, the record of his trial also disappeared. It mysteriously reappeared three weeks later, having been copied and translated word for word. Pamphlets containing excerpts particularly damning to the Church began circulating. Lieber began preaching in Eisen, traveling from town to town to spread his message. The Eisen had been separated from mainstream Vaticine politics for some time, both by policy and by differing values. Many of the priests who heard Lieber were already disposed towards his point of view. The arguments he espoused found fertile ground to grow and spread.

At first, most of the Church simply saw the founding of a new monastic order, probably a heretical one. After all, movements such as Lieber's had come and gone before. But Lieber had a charm and fire that earlier leaders lacked. He also had one important difference in policy: Lieber believed that one did not need priests to worship Theus.

The Vaticine Church had taught for centuries that priests gained their power through a direct line of succession from the Prophets themselves. Only through this divine right, received during ordination, could worshippers reach Theus and receive His blessing. Lieber, however, believed that Theus loves all his children, and listens to each one. This was not only heretical, but also threatened to undermine the entire structure and purpose of the Church.

It was also extremely popular with the common man. Several priests declared their allegiance to the movement, hoping to force significant reform in the Church. But the Cardinals universally opposed the Objectionist agenda, and excommunicated many of its supporters. The Inquisition was loosed on them, but the Emperor's grace kept followers safe within the borders of Eisen.

The crisis reached a head in 1525. The Hieros Council met with one item on the agenda: what to do about the "Lieberites." The movement had now become too popular and too widespread to be dismissed as a heresy. That label, and the subsequent attention of the Inquisition, had chilled much previous opposition, but in this case, their efforts just seemed to reinforce Lieber's arguments. The Cardinals discussed many ways to handle the situation, and even heard from many Objectionists to see if they could strike a compromise. All efforts proved fruitless, however. The Cardinals concluded that Objectionist beliefs were fundamentally heretical, and could not be tolerated within the Vaticine Church. Any who professed to be Objectionist were excommunicated, and barred the sacraments.

Unfortunately for the Vaticine Church, many priests and monks already subscribed to Objectionist philosophy. They declared that the Church had no right to deny them Theus' blessing. No man, no matter how pious or educated, could pass judgement on another man's beliefs. They split from the Vaticine faith, resigning from their official posts. However, they continued to hold services in their old chapels, and many of their worshippers stayed with them.

They also regularly exchanged letters, and rapidly developed an internal structure to organize their new religion. These were not isolated cultists the Church, but men and women that knew what they were doing.

For years, the Church refused to recognize the validity of the Objectionist Church. They continued to treat them as heretics, not as rivals. It would not be until 1587 that any official Vaticine record would refer to the Lieberites as a church unto themselves. In that year, the declaration of Emperor Weiss III granted freedom from religious persecution in Eisen. Overt tensions cooled, and the Inquisition was forced to stop hunting Objectionists. But the schism still ran deep, and the discord would eventually erupt in war.

A detailed look at Objectionism can be found on pages 45-56.

The Church of Avalon

In 1614, the Church saw the rise of a fierce ally as King Richard IV ascended to the throne of Avalon. Richard was an outspoken opponent of Objectionism, which had become quite popular in the Highland Marches and elsewhere. Many believed that his faith in the Church and the Hierophant was unshakable.

They were wrong.

In 1622, Richard asked the Hierophant for special dispensation to divorce his wife. He was desperate for a male heir, and his wife seemed incapable of producing one. A minor point of law, one whose lapse would hurt no one, seemed a small thing next to the security and future of Avalon. The Hierophant did not see it as a minor point, however, and refused the king's request.

Richard, however, did not accept the Hierophant's decision. He was outraged that, after all he had done for the Church, he would be denied this request. He passed the Act of Supremacy, declaring that the Church in Avalon, now the Church of Avalon, would no longer look to the Hierophant for spiritual and religious guidance. Instead, Avalon would look to the king.

Needless to say, the new Church's first act was to grant Richard's divorce.

The Church was shocked at the declaration. Still trying to deal with the schism with the Objectionists, they saw this as a sign that the Church was falling apart. Unfortunately, the Hierophant had little real control over the Avalon

Archdiocese, and was unable to appeal to their loyalty. The Church could do nothing but wait, and pray that the next king (or queen as it turned out), would repeal the Act of Supremacy. The Hieros Council therefore voted not to excommunicate the nation, but rather work to encourage it to stay as Vaticine as possible in hopes it would one day return. To date, those hopes have not come to fruition.

For a more detailed history of these events, see the Church of Avalon section, pages 56–61.

The War of the Cross

In 1636, Emperor Weiss III died and Reifenstahl, a devout and outspoken Vaticine, ascended the throne. He instituted many oppressive policies against the Objectionists. Even before he came to power, the Objectionists saw what his reign would bring them. The south of Eisen, where Objectionism was strongest, soon rose up in rebellion.

The Vaticine Church, who had been watching the situation closely, moved in immediately. The Church Guard worked closely with the Eisen forces, donating money, supplies, and the best engineers they could muster to the cause. With so much on their side, it should have been a quick and decisive victory, possibly even crushing the Objectionist Church and returning all of Théah to the control of the Hierophant. Theus, apparently, had something different in mind.

The forces of the north were led by a largely incompetent general named Dehmer. Not only did he have poor strategic skills, but he seemed incapable of integrating the Church's contributions into his own efforts. The Church Guard remained separate from the main force, and was rarely called upon for battle. He disdained the engines brought in from Vodacce and Castille in favor of Eisen artillery, even when his own began to run low. Only the Church's money was freely used.

The southern forces on the other hand had a remarkable general, Stefano Wulf, who was already highly respected before the war began. His strategy and logistics were innovative and flawless. He consistently defeated much larger forces. His efforts kept the Objectionists in the war, and turned what should have been an easy Vaticine victory into bloody, decades-long stalemate.

Wulf was finally slain after thirty years of fighting. Without their leader, the southern army lost direction. The larger Vaticine armies began taking the victories that they expected. By then, however, Eisen had become a wasteland full of bandits, starving peasants and worse horrors. The armies had been fighting back and forth for so long that the land was no longer capable of supporting its populace.

Finally, in 1666, Reifenstahl decided that he needed help from the Church. Breaking six centuries of autonomy, he wrote to Vaticine City and asked for assistance. His queries did him no good. Armies from Castille and Montaigne arrived, not as defenders, but as invaders bent on conquest. They served not the Church, but their own national interests, and easily swept aside the exhausted Eisen armies. Reifenstahl was forced to sue for peace. The nation fell to pieces, the invaders claimed over a sixth of the nation as their own, and the Emperor himself committed suicide less than a year later. Though appalled at the conditions the war had brought, many members of the Church thought it fitting reward for the nation which had created Objectionism.

Montaigne and the Hierophant

In 1664, some two years before the end of the war, the Church was faced with yet another crisis. King Léon XIV announced that he practiced sorcery, and that Montaigne would become a haven for sorcerers. The Church reacted with horror and outrage. Protecting Objectionists was one thing, but sorcery had been outlawed by the Church since the days of the First Prophet. But with Eisen in chaos, the Church had no wish to alienate a nation as powerful as Montaigne. They issued a statement of disapproval, but did not act directly against Léon.

Cardinal Ésteban Verdugo, however, was not willing to accept such circumstances. As the head of the Inquisition at the time, he knew full well what evil sorcerers like Léon were capable of. Should the King's actions go unpunished, it would doom countless souls to Legion's abyss. With the War of the Cross occupying the Church's time, he could not act immediately, but two years later, he saw his opportunity. He and his men quickly raised an army — consisting mostly of devout Castillians — and marched on Charouse.

Before the King of Montaigne knew what was happening, the Cardinal's army was camped on his doorstep, with only the Palace Guard to stop them. Even the vaunted Musketeers were in the countryside, and could not come to the King's aid. It was only a matter of time before the Church once again controlled Montaigne.

But, as history shows, a little luck and a great deal of inspiration turned the tide. Corporal Montegue, trapped between the Church's army and the locked palace gates, used revolutionary tactics to stop the assault. He killed all the officers he could find, sending the leaderless Castillian troops scattering. Verdugo's great thrust was turned aside, and by the time he could regroup and send new officers, the Montaigne army was prepared for them.

When the Hierophant heard what had happened, he was deeply distressed. He desperately wanted to redeem the nation, but Léon reacted to the Church's efforts with apparent pleasure, not despair. He had thwarted Verdugo's attempts to apprehend him and now openly flaunted the Vaticine's authority. Worse, the nobles beneath him openly supported his efforts, and it appeared as if the entire nation might be lost. The Hierophant decided to journey to Charouse personally, in an effort to repair the rapidly disintegrating relations between Montaigne and the Church.

His mission was doomed. He took ill suddenly while in Charouse, and died. Leon's doctors declared that he had become infected by the White Plague, and ordered the body burned to prevent the spread of the contagion.

Not content with merely embarrassing the Church, King Léon declared himself *l'Empereur*. He cast out every vestige of the Church that he could, though the peasants clung to their faith (providing a vital foothold into the country), all trappings of Vaticine power were cast aside.

During this time Cardinal d'Argeneau and the bishops under him all disappeared. No one knew exactly what happened, but the Vaticine sensed Léon's hand behind it. No bishops meant no new Cardinal. No Cardinal meant no vote on the new Hierophant could be held. No Hierophant meant that the Archdiocese of Montaigne

could not be reassigned to another kingdom. Leon had neatly tied the hands of the Church in its own canon. Until the bishops of Montaigne could be found or the Cardinal declared legally dead, the entire power structure of the Church was rendered impotent.

The Rise of the Inquisition

The Order of the Prophet's Inquisitors, referred to as the Inquisition, was a powerful tool of Hierophants for centuries. They rooted out heresy, sorcery, Crescents, and other enemies of the Church. Their methods were somewhat extreme, but the mercy of the Hierophant always tempered their actions. Until now.

Even before the death of the Hierophant, Cardinal Verdugo worked to increase the Inquisition's effectiveness and reach. In 1661, he had Jeremy Cook excommunicated for advocating Empiricism in *The Rational Chemist*. His agents succeeded in assassinating Cook the next year. By



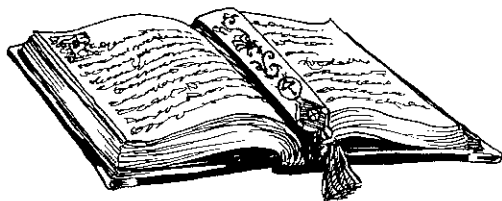
1664, Cardinal Verdugo was arguing to declare all scientific research outside the halls of the Church heretical. The Hierophant refused him many times, but without that influence in the way, Verdugo used his own power to make it so.

With no one to deny him, his agents have unleashed their full fury on an unsuspecting world. Dozens of known sorcerers in Montaigne and Vodacce were put to the stake. Hundreds of scholars were arrested, though many escaped before they could be killed. Terror spread through the populace.

Verdugo's status as head of the Inquisition was an open secret, and knowledgeable Théans saw his schemes behind these acts of terror. As such, his name has become more feared than Reis or Léon. In every village in the Vaticine world, and some outside of it, people whisper in the night about the activities of the Inquisitors. After all, the red robes and faceless masks could turn up anywhere, at any time, and drag away those suspected of speaking against the Church. Indeed, young mothers have even taken to threatening misbehaving children with the specter of Verdugo's men. "If you don't eat your porridge, the Inquisition will come and take you away."

The Inquisition is hardly unopposed, however. Although canon and tradition are on their side, many Cardinals and Bishops reject the new definitions of heresy and the extremism of the Inquisition. Little can be done, however, when the loudest opponents risk being charged with heresy themselves and burned at the stake.

There is also growing opposition from outside the Vaticine Church. Both the Objectionists and the Church of Avalon have refused to continue the tradition of the Inquisition, and fight to keep it out of their territories. Numerous secret societies in Théah constantly work to stop agents and free victims of the Inquisitors. However, for every noble hero, there is also a greedy villain willing to accuse a rival of heresy or to turn informant in order to gain favors from Verdugo and his followers. In between, there are the masses of common folk, who are too frightened or ignorant to stand up for themselves.



The Vaticine Church Today

Tension runs rampant through the ranks of the contemporary Church. For an institution infamous for a lack of adaptability and innovation, it has gone through remarkable changes in the last century. The Objectionist split is still causing ripples, the Church of Avalon thrives under Queen Elaine, and the upheavals of the War of the Cross have yet to heal. Many priests and worshippers have lost faith in the Church as an institution, though they still have fervent faith in Theus. But two major schisms, a religious war, and the reign of terror in the Church's name have tarnished its reputation as an absolute authority and safe haven.

The Church faces several critical tests in the next few years. The situation in Montaigne grows worse by the day, and desperately needs resolution. Whether that involves the capitulation of *l'Empereur* or a revolt of the peasantry doesn't much matter. On a related note, the invasion of Castille must end. If the Montaigne were to capture Vaticine City, it could force the Church back to Numa or worse, destroy it entirely.

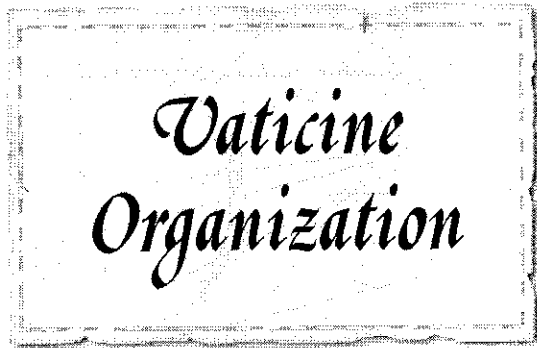
The rift between the Vaticine Church, the Objectionists, and the Church of Avalon needs to be repaired. While it is unlikely that these groups will ever again form a monolithic organization, they can still work together to help solve the world's problems. In order to do so, however, they must first rein in the Inquisition. If Verdugo takes the Hierophant's seat, peace between these rival faiths will never come.

The Inquisition must be stymied for another reason as well. The denunciation of scholarly research could set Théah back decades in scientific progress. It is also contradictory to a number of the fundamental tenets of the Church, and could be the focal point for yet another schism.

Of course, Verdugo's reasons for restricting research have validity, at least in some circles. The dangers of Synchron technology give many Church scholars pause, and the notion of advanced scientific research in the hands of a man like Léon gives the hardest bishops pause. Even Verdugo's zeal pales in comparison to the chilling notion that he may be right. If the Vaticine cannot fix these problems, if the Church cannot fulfill its duties, then the coming of the Fourth Prophet

may be at hand. Armageddon is a frightening possibility, and the faithful wonder if it is growing closer each day.

But Theus abides, and there is still good in the world. The Church of the Prophets must ensure that reason and virtue triumph over terror and despair. No one ever said that Theus was fair, only that He loved His creations and gave them the means to better themselves. It is up to the Church to see that potential fulfilled.



The structure of the Vaticine Church is broken down into five layers. At the bottom stands the individual church, or congregation. In honor of the Ten Witnesses, the Church then groups upward in units of ten. Approximately ten churches make up a parish. Ten Parishes make up a Diocese. Ten Dioceses make up an Archdiocese. Finally, the ten Archdioceses make up the Hieros.

Church

Individual churches often make up the heart of the villages they occupy. They are responsible for weekly, and in some cases daily, worship services. The officials at this level directly minister their congregations, helping to celebrate joys and ease sorrows. They also educate the youth of their congregation, which typically consists of little more than the catechism, but in some cases can involve literature, history, and mathematics. The sanctuary of the church is generally the largest hall in any town, and is designed to comfortably seat everyone. As such, it will often be used for town meetings and secular gatherings in addition to its religious uses.

There are several officials that can be seen on this level. Typically, each church houses one priest, properly ordained and a full voting member of the parish. The priest will occasionally

have assistants, such as acolytes and altar boys, who are referred to as lay-people (the term lay indicates anyone who is not ordained). If the church stands near a university or monastery, the priest may have a deacon — a young person studying for the priesthood, but who has not yet been ordained. In many ways, this is equivalent to a journeyman craftsman working with a master to finish his or her training.

In larger churches, and especially in cathedrals, several priests work together to cover all the duties. They take turns conducting services, hearing confessions, and handling the administrative work. The most senior priest will often be referred to as a High Priest, to denote his importance.

On the other end of the scale are the very small churches. In some areas, such as southern Eisen and the Vendel islands, there are widely scattered people still faithful to the Vaticine Church. They can come together enough to warrant a small church, but cannot afford to support a priest. In some of these cases, a priest travels between many villages, spending generally one week in each location. In other cases, the village has enough affluence to support a vicar (a semi-retired priest). She does not perform many priestly duties outside of Mass, nor does she vote in parishional issues.

Oddly enough, it is on this bottommost level that the Vaticine Church is most involved in politics. In most towns, the priest or vicar will not only command a great deal of respect, but will be the most educated person in the area. His rhetorical skills also allow him to control most debates. In general, however, the Church prefers its priests to stay out of political affairs, only using their influence on behalf of the congregation.

Parish

Theoretically ten churches are supposed to make up a Parish, but the massive reorganization of the past century has made that a tad impractical. Some parishes have as few as three churches, while others have as many as twenty. Parishes are run by Monsignors, who are elected from among the priests in the parish. In certain, rare cases, a particularly well-suited (and well-connected) priest can become the Monsignor of a parish to which she does not belong, but this is uncommon in contemporary Théah.



The parish maintains a small staff for its administrative duties, usually made up of priests who do not feel called to minister to a congregation, and wish to serve Theus in other ways. Their duties involve managing the churches of the parish, providing liturgical supplies, and overseeing the priests. Additionally, the parishes are responsible for managing any Church-owned lands within their borders. It is not unusual for a noble to leave land to the Church in their will, or for a noble son to donate his inheritance when he becomes a priest. Over the years, these gifts have added up to a tidy sum; at its height the Church owned as much land as any king. Much of this land supports the Vaticine as an institution, but some of it effectively becomes the private homes of Church officials.

Monasteries and universities rank on the same level as parishes in the Church hierarchy. They contain a similar number of ordained personnel, and their place in their respective communities is roughly equivalent. Monasteries are generally separate from the politics of the Church, since the monks have specifically chosen to retreat from the world. However, monasteries also serve as the major landowners of the Church, and may include acres of vineyards, farms, and orchards which the brothers and sisters tend. With such an important role in the resources of their diocese, Abbots and Abbesses often cannot help but become entangled in larger issues.

Universities, on the other hand, often willingly involve themselves in politics. Not only do many

of the scholars enjoy debating as a hobby, but they are also frequently located very close to the political centers of their respective areas. Their influence is bolstered by the fact that many of the priests in their diocese attended the local university, and still have quite a bit of respect for their old professors. However, the universities own little property (relatively speaking), and their “ivory tower” reputation makes them appear very impractical. While their opinions are valued, the priests generally turn to those who do “real” work to make the decisions.

Dioceses

Like parishes, modern dioceses often consist of a little less than ten parishes. However, since the dioceses cover much larger areas, their boundaries often remain fixed. Their “borders” generally run along existing political boundaries, such as county lines, and will always stay within a single nation or kingdom.

Dioceses are responsible for running the parishes, monasteries, and universities below them. They are also responsible for ancillary personnel, such as the Church Guard, messengers, and lay servants. The diocesan level sees most of the financial management in the Church, and requires a large administrative staff to function properly. As with parishes, much of this staff consists of priests, generally those with political ambitions. It is not uncommon for a

diocese to elect a new bishop from among the ranks of the aides, rather than the Monsignors. After all, they know best how the diocese functions.

The head of each diocese is the Bishop. As with all Church officials, Bishops are elected by the Monsignors below them. Society often treats them as equal to nobility, regardless of their birth. When a Duke, Eisenfürst, or Prince assembles his council, he usually includes the local bishop or bishops. They are not supposed to take an active role in politics, since the canon of the Church specifies that they can act as mediators and authorities of knowledge only. Of course, bishops can significantly affect the outcome of a debate by choosing what knowledge to share, and when. Though they hold little secular power, bishops can be quite influential if they choose.

Archdiocese

There are always precisely ten Archdioceses in the world. Generally, the Hieros Council tries very hard to keep each Archdiocese at ten dioceses, but that is often difficult. Each Archdiocese is led by a Cardinal, who serve as the equivalent of kings, and have shaped the history of Théah on many occasions.

The responsibilities at this level are very broad. In addition to managing the dioceses below them, the Archdioceses must manage foreign missions, which can be exceedingly taxing. Their primary duty, however, is to determine and enforce the canon and dogma of the Vaticine Church. To do this, the Cardinals meet on a fairly regular basis (generally twice a year) as the Hieros Council. There, they debate points of law, questions of theology, and modifications to the structure of the Church. When the Hieros Council speaks, very few are willing to defy them.

Hieros

The top-most level of the Church is the Hieros. This is simply the Church as a whole. There is actually very little done at this level. The only officials are the Hierophant himself and his or her direct staff. The Hierophant has certain powers specifically spelled out in the law, but mostly acts as the head of the Hieros Council.

Orders

Many divisions can be found within the Church as a whole, and not simply along geographical lines. Over the years of Church history, differences of opinion have arisen as to how Theus should best be worshipped. While some have been radical enough to be labeled heresy, most were recognized as legitimate interpretations of the Word of the Prophets. Various orders have come together, created by like-minded priests to pursue these interpretations. Some are so informal as to only be marked by a symbol worn by members. Others have their own initiation ceremonies and internal structure. Below are some of the largest and most influential orders within the Church today.

The Gnostic Order

This order stresses the gathering and teaching of knowledge. They dedicate themselves to understanding the Creator's puzzle, and believe that humanity is close to the solution. Their creed also stresses that it is important to bring all people to enlightenment. Thus, they spend their time teaching any who will listen.

The Gnostic Order consists mostly of scholars and university professors, though a large number of members are wandering monks, gathering and dispersing knowledge wherever Theus may take them. Due to the close connection to the Vaticine's universities (as well as most non-Vaticine schools) the Gnostics have developed a fairly sophisticated internal structure, which allows members to share information and resources effectively. The Headmasters of the various universities, who are almost entirely Gnostic, annually meet in a Forum to discuss matters that are of concern to the scholarly community, but not necessarily to the Church as a whole. This Forum also acts as the primary outlet for concerns to the Gnostic order, and the Headmasters act as de facto officers.

There are very few obligations put upon members of the Gnostic Order. The most important is that they not hoard what they learn, but share it freely with all other members of the order. One can often recognize a member of the Gnostic Order by the hood attached to their stole. They will also have the symbol of the order, an open scroll with a Prophet's Cross on it, somewhere in their regalia.

While the Inquisition has yet to directly attack the Gnostic Order, Cardinal Verdugo and several of his Knights did attend last year's Forum. The atmosphere there was very subdued. The Forum has not been held this year, supposedly due to the Montaigne-Castille war.

Members of the Gnostic Order can take the University Advantage for two fewer points (making it 2 points, or free for Castellians). However, they must take a 2 point Obligation Background, reflecting their commitment to share what they have learned with other members of the Order. They gain no points from taking this Background.

The Benefactine Order

One of the oldest and most revered orders of the Church, the Benefactine Order is dedicated to spreading the mercy of Theus. The Order rarely includes parish priests, focusing primarily on monasteries and wandering monks. Many Church-sponsored and ordained doctors also claim membership in this group. Their agenda is very simple and non-threatening. They will help anyone in need, anywhere, at any time.

The structure of the Benefactine Order is fairly rigid, centering around a number of monasteries dedicated to its beliefs. The abbots of these monasteries have a pecking order among themselves; the highest abbot is referred to as the Custos Salutis, who represents the interests and needs of the order to the Hierophant. This typically consists of such things as requests for aid in war-torn or disease-ridden areas, intercession with a troublesome lord, or provision for a Benefactine monastery. With no Hierophant currently in place; the Custos Salutis reports to the Hieros Council.

In addition to promoting charity, the Benefactine order was the first to establish a common code for monks and nuns to live by. Before this time, seclusion from the material world was done at one's own discretion, and a monk was expected to find his own way into Theus' grace. The founder of the order, known today only as St. Benefactus, devised a set of rules of conduct, designed to bring the monks who followed him to enlightenment. This code is still used in one form or another by most monasteries today.

The symbol of the Order of St. Benefactus is a dark window with a white candle in it. The Order has always prided itself on serving as a haven for the needy, and Benefactine monasteries frequently give sanctuary and shelter to travelers.

Members of this order gain the Cloistered Advantage for free, but they must purchase a 2-point Vow Background, reflecting their commitment to helping those in need. They cannot regain the points spent on this Background.

The Order of St. Victor

The Victorian Order began in AV 1134 as a more peaceful and long-term alternative to the Inquisition. Heresy was once again uppermost on the minds of the Church leaders. A young Monsignor by the name of Victor came out of Eisen, where he had been fighting a large sect of heretics. Rather than arresting and executing the cultists, he talked to them. He was a gifted orator and tenacious debater. Within five years, he had broken the power structure of the sect and converted the majority of them back to the true Vaticine faith.

News of his work spread rapidly through the Church. He left his position as Monsignor to travel, battling heresy with truth, and encouraging other priests to do the same. He also asked the Cardinals to create a new order of priests dedicated to preaching the Word of the Prophets, and carrying it to those who had not yet heard it. With his talent for argument, and his popularity in the Church, he soon convinced them to agree.

Victor founded his first monastery near Gottkirchen in Eisen. He modeled it largely along Benefactine lines, with one primary difference. He strongly encouraged speech and argument among his monks. He emphasized that a learned man had a constant advantage over an unlearned opponent in debate, much like a trained swordsman has an advantage over a peasant. Logic, history, and theology were his focuses, but he never saw any learning as useless. For his early monks, he would only take those who had already attended university, but the order has eventually come to accept others, and train them themselves.

The Order today includes the finest preachers of the Church, as well as most of Vaticine missionaries, who feel that their time is best spent bringing new members into the Church. The old monastery at Gottkirchen is still the center of the order, and constantly works to win the Objectivists in Eisen back to the Vaticine faith.

Members of this order gain the Missionary Skill for free, but may not purchase the Fencing Skill under any circumstances.

The Order of St. Francesca of Gallili

In 1287, an old nun died in a small village in Vodacce. As word spread, the entire Church mourned her passing. Fifty-four years later, she was canonized as St. Francesca. In 1375, the Hieros Council, under a deluge of petitions, agreed to lift the century-old ban on new religious orders. Thus was the Franciscan Order born.

Although many stories circulate about St. Francesca's life and deeds, very few facts are actually known about her. She was Vodacce, and approximately seventy-five when she died. Church records show that she was elected Mother Superior of her nunnery in 1253. She stepped down from that post twelve years later to travel. It is mostly these later years that inspired so many.

Francesca was known throughout Vodacce for her charity and good works. She would help the poor and destitute whenever she came across them. She never claimed any possessions other than her robe, sandals, and walking stick. Anything else that she received went right back to the needy. She also had some basic medical knowledge, and would frequently tend the sick and diseased. Some claim that she began the tradition of professional nurses, but if so, it took almost three centuries to catch on after her death.

Her followers loved her dearly, and the nuns at her convent sought to emulate her in every conceivable way. They often left their cloistered halls after a few years to spread their good works even farther. The inheritors of this tradition would eventually form the core of the Order.

Like the Benefactine order, this order focuses on good works. There are some important differences, however. The Benefactines tend to work on a large scale, trying to ease famines and rebuild cities after disaster. The Franciscans tend to work on a small scale, focusing on individual people and families. For this reason, the Benefactines must be highly organized, while the Franciscans have almost no leadership.

The most striking difference is the Franciscans' dedication to their vow of poverty. Members of this order never keep more possessions than they absolutely need. In turn, any church and most people will give them food and shelter for as long as they need it. Anything above their basic needs that they receive, they immediately give to the needy. Some noble families have disappeared entirely when the prime inheritor of the estate joined this order, donating all the lands and possessions they owned to the Church.

Today, the order is the second strongest monastic order, behind the Benefactines. However, they do not follow the Benefactine code, and run their retreats very differently. Rather than being remote and self-sufficient, they are often found in the middle of large cities, acting as a combination hospital/shelter/soup kitchen. They can be easily identified by their light blue robes and stoles. In addition to being exceptionally charitable, they are known for their extraordinary pacifism.

Members of this order receive both the Doctor Skill and the Servant Skill for free. However, they start play with no money, and must take the Vow of Poverty Background for which they never gain any points.

The Church Guard

The Swords of Solomon

Early in its history, the Church realized the need for an elite fighting force to defend the faith. While it often employed independent mercenaries and bodyguards, the first true order of Church Guards did not arise until the arrival of Solomon Antone.

In 523 AV, Solomon Antone was in the service of Johann von der Velde, an ambitious warlord from the lands that would someday become Eisen. He held a position as a military commander when von der Velde led an invasion into the snowy realms of Matushka. The assault was a horrible disaster and Antone was one of the few survivors. While the carnage might have caused some to lose their faith, Antone emerged more devout than ever. Burning with the need for righteous vengeance, he fled towards what he thought was Vodacce, searching for Vaticine compatriots to continue the fight. Instead, the terrain shifted and he wandered deep into Cathay.

Antone surfaced in Vodacce over 30 years later but did not look a day past 25. He demanded an audience with the Hierophant, but was denied time and again. At last, the pontiff sent a beleaguered cardinal to talk to the curious foreigner. Antone spoke in the words of a visionary poet, proclaiming the rise of a great warrior in the west named Carleman and a second great conflict with the Crescent Empire. He stressed the importance of guarding Church officials in the coming times of trouble. "While

the Prophets may be divine," he stressed, "do not expect the dead to save the living."

The Cardinal took the words as blasphemy and threatened to have Antone burned at the stake. Antone easily escaped his would-be captors and began to wander once more. In Montaigne he amassed and trained a small group of followers before finally encountering the man he had envisioned: Carleman.

Carleman had already advanced his forces across western Théah but was unable to hold on to conquered territories for long. For reasons clear only to himself, Antone agreed to use his own retinue to teach Carleman's ruffians in a more specialized way of warfare. His military tactics were guerrilla in nature, using several smaller armies to siege a city or take land. The fighting style he lent to the soldiers also incorporated a three-man squad which could easily be applied to larger units. Antone also instructed the army in the fabrication of specialized weapons, oval shields, and a blade which, when forged properly, had a dark, snake-like image running down the center. The armies formed nicely and fell upon Théah like a great lion.

In 607 AV, the Church was growing strong politically and began to court Carleman. Antone watched as Vaticine emissaries slowly turned the conqueror's ear, searching for protection from the would-be ruler by becoming his ally. When Carleman decided to send his wisest advisor to Numa for formal negotiation, he found the decision an easy one to make.

Antone appeared on the steps of the Church as he had so many years before, followed by six of his most loyal soldiers. When he went inside, the others scattered into the shadows. Clad in dark plaid and a charcoal grey cloak, Antone also sported a silver ring around his left forefinger. His modest attire paled in comparison to the luxuries all around him, clearly meant as a display of authority to impress and intimidate Carleman's envoy.

The Cardinals' words carried the same force as their material possessions but Antone was equally unimpressed. As they pontificated around him, he sat quietly, waiting to make his own point. It came when his soldiers sprung from the shadows, easily overpowering the few guards present. He blades were quickly at the Cardinals' throats, and Antone had their undivided attention.

Another man might have made a coup, but Antone was not interested in destroying the Church. Instead, he claimed a fervent desire to

save the Vaticine from enemies both without and within. He explained that he had developed his new fighting style to serve those who serve Theus. As the Cardinals were charged with protecting souls, so was he charged with protecting the Cardinals' lives. He negotiated an agreement which saw Carleman crowned High Imperator the following month, but also provided for a new, highly trained order of guards to defend Church officials. The order swore to protect the clergy as long as they held true to the words of the Prophets. They called their fighting technique the Swords of Solomon, out of respect for their leader.

Antone faded from history when Carleman died and his kingdom separated among his three children. Members in the Guard still incorporate the snake sword from old and, at times, include the oval shield when escorting Church officials. Popular myth holds that guard members take an oath to give their lives in their service to the Church, but also to take the life of any charge who abuses his authority. As a result, many Cardinals sometimes fear their guards as angels at their shoulders. For their part, the guards have ever been noble. If one has ever faltered, history makes no words of it.

Rules for creating Church Guards can be found in Chapter Three.

The Inquisition

A Short History of the Order

Shortly after the Second Crusades, and in the midst of the Hieros Wars, the Third Prophet decided that the Church needed an arm to seek out its foes, wherever they might hide. It wasn't enough simply to have faith in Theus. One must *act* on that faith. The challenges ahead required bolder steps than excommunication and public derision of heretics. The Sword of Flame thus passed from the Prophet to the newest order of the Vaticine Church: the Order of the Prophet's Inquisitors.

For centuries the Inquisition existed as little more than a Vaticine police force. When heresy or sorcery came to light, Inquisitors were dispatched to try the accused and mete out punishment. The orders of the Third Prophet gave them the right to administer any punishment they saw fit, up to and including execution. It was during the conflict with the Bianco family in Vodacce, that torture first became officially sanctioned as a method of

extracting information and confessions. While the Hierophant originally intended it as a special dispensation for desperate times, it has remained in place to the current day.

By the dawn of the seventeenth century, the Church had become a very conservative institution. While still on the forefront of scientific thought, their philosophies and mores remained rooted in the past. This state was more pronounced in the Inquisition than anywhere else. While they were frequently referred to as reactionary fanatics, their powers were too broad for anyone but the Hierophant to risk criticizing them publicly.

The Scientific Revolution of the early 1600's not only shook up the intelligentsia of Théah, it shook up the Inquisition as well. Fundamental truths were questioned on every side, and the Order could never handle excessive questioning. They based their precepts on ancient and irrefutable sources. If such sources could be questioned, then so must the dogmas which they engendered. If the reliability of scientific scholars could be doubted, then the reliability of historical references might likewise be doubted. This slippery slope could lead one to question to validity of the Prophets themselves, an unthinkable prospect to the Inquisition.

Unfortunately, even the Grand High Inquisitor still answered to the Hierophant. The previous four Hierophants all strongly supported the scholarly pursuits, and strictly constrained the Inquisition. The Order was frustrated and concerned, but could not defy Hieratic decrees.

In 1642, a young priest named Ésteban Verdugo was ordained in Castille. He had already earned notice for his remarkable zeal, and his first few years as a priest were marked by constant clashes with his superiors and his congregation. He soon came to the attention of the Grand High Inquisitor, who recognized his potential. A brief discussion with the Hierophant was all it took to remove Verdugo from his position in a village church and make him a full time Inquisitor.

Three years later saw the young man rising rapidly, having already become High Inquisitor and Bishop. During this time, Verdugo began to exercise tactics that have made him known as the most thorough Inquisitor in history. He combined a careful study of the canon with a policy of asking for forgiveness rather than permission. The Inquisitors under his command accomplished much more than the Hierophant technically allowed, or even knew about. Seven years later, when the Grand High Inquisitor died, the Hierophant decided that Verdugo should take his



place. One of his first acts was to declare the new principles of Empiricism heretical.

Verdugo's control over the Inquisition gave him tremendous power. He has ruthlessly used his resources in his constant hunt for heretics and sorcerers. He pushed for greater Church involvement in the War of the Cross, and used his influence to launch an invasion of Montaigne. Now that the Hierophant has died, the only remaining check on Verdugo's power has been removed. The Inquisition is more thorough, more fervent, and more brutal than ever before. But the Grand High Inquisitor isn't satisfied yet. The Fourth Prophet is coming, and Verdugo plans to have all of Théah ready to greet him properly.

The Inquisition and Heresy

While the Inquisition exists for the sole purpose of eliminating heresy, it is not always clear what constitutes heretical thought. For centuries heresy was defined as a philosophy which fell under at least one of three descriptions. First, it must promote, use, or justify the use of sorcery. Second, it must promote the violation of any of the Nine Commandments. Third, it must undermine the ability of the Vaticine Church to properly minister to its flock.

While it is technically up to the Hieros Council to declare heresy, for almost two hundred years now the Grand High Inquisitor has acted to investigate claims of heresy and pronounce judgement upon the accused. It has been over seventy years since the Council has even questioned such a judgment, and over one hundred years since a judgement was overruled.

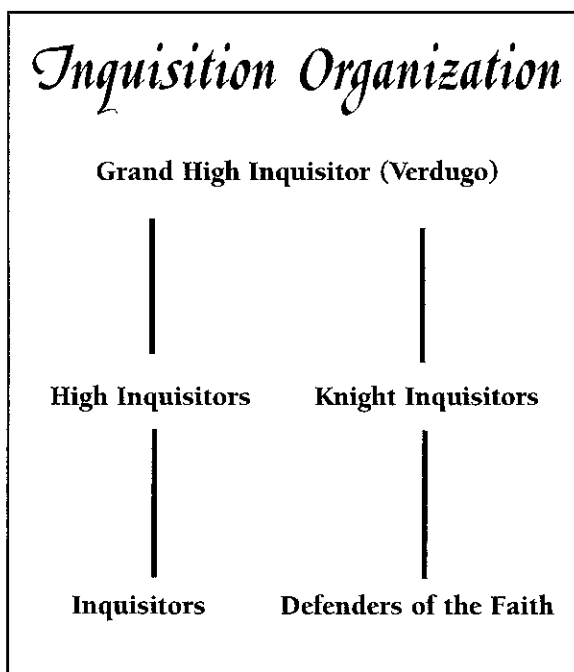
Under the rule of Cardinal Verdugo, heresy has become more broadly defined than at any time in memory. Sorcery is, of course, heretical. Objectionism is heretical. Anything derived from the Crescent Empire is heretical. Study of the Syrneth has been declared heretical, since the Syrneth have been linked with Legion and the Bargainers (at least in Verdugo's mind). Empiricism — and by extension all modern scientific exploration — has been declared heretical. This last charge is very controversial, but Verdugo has argued his case effectively. The Third Prophet taught humanity how to think and how science should be properly advanced. To question that is to question the Prophet himself, a violation of Vaticine law. Empiricism suggests that the teachings of the Third Prophet may be in error — that the scientific learning he espoused may be insufficient to reveal Theus' mystery. The Fourth

Prophet is coming. If the population of Théah has been led astray by these scientific fallacies, all of humanity will fall before the forces of Legion. So it is written in the Fourth Vigil. Verdugo believes that it is too late to return the scholarly community to the proper paths of thought. The only solution is to stop new discoveries altogether, by fire and sword if necessary.

Organization

The Order of the Prophet's Inquisitors has a very simple organization. At the top stands the Grand High Inquisitor, who is typically a Cardinal. Below him are a number of High Inquisitors, who enforce his edicts. While the number was originally ten, it has since expanded to many more. Today, only Verdugo truly knows how many High Inquisitors there are, but they number somewhere between one hundred and one hundred and fifty. Each High Inquisitor has a group of Inquisitors who answer to him or her. There are generally ten to thirty Inquisitors below each High Inquisitor.

During the War of the Cross and the invasion of Montaigne, Verdugo gained great respect for his military procedures. This was no accident. When he first ascended to his position, he took aside several of his High Inquisitors who had served in the military and made a new division within the Order: the Knight Inquisitors. Currently, there is no rank difference between regular Inquisitors and their more military comrades. Knight Inquisitors hold the same position as High



Inquisitors, and their followers, the Defenders of the Faith, are equal to regular Inquisitors. The primary difference comes in technique.

The High Inquisitors will generally amass irrefutable evidence against a target, then turn a crowd of locals against him or her. They also tend to exercise patience and diligence, often carefully plotting and gathering information until they can swoop in and destroy an entire sect at once rather than member by member.

The Knight Inquisitors, on the other hand, have developed a very different reputation. They are willing to arrest and execute people on less evidence, and do not care one whit about the rest of the locals. Fearsome fighters to a man, they have little to fear from even a mob of ordinary peasants. With their well-trained Defenders of the Faith around them, they are easily a match for most town militia. Of course, pitched battle is rarely their preferred tactic. Attacking in the night, ambushing a target on the road, or challenging heretics to single combat in Theus' name is more their style. For these dreaded soldiers of faith, fear is the drug by which they control the masses.

Methods

Stories circulate around countless campfires and mugs of ale about the excesses of the Inquisitors — fantastic tales of torture, terror, and murder most foul. Few of these tales have any basis in fact, and even the truthful ones tend to be exaggerated. Inquisitors are not sadistic, homicidal maniacs. They do not revel in inflicting pain and many go out of their way to avoid excessive suffering. They are priests, with a sacred duty to protect the Church and her congregation from elements that would corrupt them. However, they burn with a fire of absolute faith, and will not hesitate to do their duty if it means saving souls. Absolutely nothing can stand between an Inquisitor and a heretic; not blade, not honor, not even their own immortal soul. In light of such fanaticism, even ordinary actions take on the color of nightmares.

The single greatest weapon of the Inquisition is secrecy. An Inquisitor must keep a very low profile, both in order to get close to suspected heretics and to protect themselves from revenge for their actions. To achieve this, the Inquisitor will don completely concealing robes and a hooded mask when passing judgement on a heretic. Inquisitors and Defenders of the Faith wear red robes and mask with a gold Prophet's

Cross on the face. High Inquisitors wear black robes with a red Cross, and Knight Inquisitors wear black armor with a red Cross. On those rare occasions when Verdugo himself appears "in disguise," he wears a set of white robes, and a white mask with a red Prophet's Cross on the face.

When Inquisitors are "post crucem" (their term for being masked, meaning "behind the cross"), they go by assumed names. They generally choose the name of a prominent figure from the Book of the Prophets, or a favorite saint. An agent's superiors always know their alias, preventing an Inquisitor from taking part in random or personally motivated violence without any accountability. Verdugo's alias while post crucem is Tobias, a fact known by many secret societies battling the Inquisition's influence.

While many Inquisitors must operate in secrecy, they must also maintain contact with their superior. Each agent is assigned a territory, and is responsible for every action committed within that territory in the Inquisition's name. If someone is arrested or executed for heresy, the agent must report the charge to her superior and provide evidence of the accused's guilt. If an action occurs which the agent was not a part of, she must do everything within her power to determine the responsible party. If another Inquisition agent was responsible, contact can usually be made and the situation resolved fairly quickly. If it was an imposter, however, the agent must apprehend the party and carry out the mandatory death sentence (impersonating an Inquisitor is one of the gravest sins on the Order's list).

Members of the Order must also maintain secrecy when communicating. To this end, they have developed their own code, often consisting of nothing more than a string of numbers. The numbers appear in groups of three, and each trio of numbers refers to a book, chapter, and verse from the Book of Prophets. The verses each have particular meaning to Inquisitors, and can parse the message's meaning through them. This code is not remarkably secure. Anyone who has access to a Book of the Prophets can eventually deduce the gist of the message. (If a character does not have access to a Book, a successful Theology Lore check against a TN of 15 will identify a verse from memory. A separate check should be made for each verse. It is up to the GM how much of the message can be understood based on the number of successful checks.)

The most significant means of secret communication for the Inquisition comes from the Lodestone of St. Vitus. When two needles are simultaneously touched to the Lodestone, they become linked. No matter how far apart the needles become, when one of them turns, the other will turn as it does. Verdugo's predecessor set up a hidden room in Vaticine City filled with needles suspended over a circular arrangement of the alphabet. Young Inquisitors will spend hours watching the needles and writing down incoming messages for Verdugo and his High Inquisitors. This arrangement allows for virtually instantaneous and private communication between agents all across Théah. It should be noted, however, that the system is not perfect. A storm either over Vaticine City or at the agent's location can prevent the needles from working. Severe storms have occasionally permanently disrupted a pair of needles, rendering the agent incapable of reporting until they can return to Castille.

Despite their horrific reputation, Inquisitors do not rely on torture as their primary tool. They do recognize that many of their methods are morally questionable at best, but see their actions as the lesser evil when compared to the sins they battle against. But however justified a necessary evil may be, it still should only be used when no other choice presents itself. Most Inquisitors attempt benign styles of observation and interrogation before turning to hot coals and thumb screws. Even when those fail, agents of the Order will often turn to larceny, bribery, and intimidation before outright torture.

The Inquisition and the Nations of Théah

Avalon

The Inquisition is weaker on the isles of Avalon than perhaps anywhere else. There is no significant Vaticine presence to support them. Even devout Avalons have trouble sympathizing with their cause. Queen Elaine has denounced them outright, and agents must be constantly on the watch for her Black Knight. To make matters worse, the Syrneath-loving Explorer's Society and the Invisible College both have several major strongholds on Avalon.

Aside from the political difficulties, the Sidhe make life even more difficult for the Order. They seem to be able to almost smell the Vaticine faith on them, and do their level best (which is quite a lot) to keep Inquisitors off "their" land. The nobles, entranced by Elaine and thrilled with the

gifts of Glamour, will only very rarely give aid to the cause.

The Church and her soldiers have established one toehold, however. The O'Tooles have recently invited a number of Vaticine officials to their city, including a pair of low-ranking Inquisitors. The O'Tooles wish to get rid of the O'Bannon, and see the Inquisition as powerful allies. While the Order resists being used as a political tool, the opportunity to make inroads into the nation may be worth the cost.

Castille

Castille is the only nation in which the Inquisition does not have to hide its face. They can burn heretics in the town square at midday for all to see. In fact, in many areas of Castille the Inquisition operates as *de facto* rulers, acting as the *alcalde* and issuing laws as they see fit. While admittedly oppressive and frightening, these priest-sheriffs are also very effective. The training that enables them to identify and capture heretics is also useful in uncovering con men and apprehending bandits. Inquisition-held towns are very orderly and quiet, unnatural for the passionate Castillians.

Only two factions prevent their reign from expanding even further. The first is El Vago and his followers, who frequently rescue prisoners and thwart the Inquisitors' plans. The second is the university system. Even though scientific exploration has been outlawed, the scholastic tradition has too much hold on the Church to be eliminated so easily. The universities currently serve as much-needed havens from the Inquisition. But they are not completely safe; more than a few scholars who thought themselves out of the grasp of fiery justice have found themselves snatched up in the middle of the night and burned at the stake for their folly.

Eisen

Eisen is as much a mixed bag for the Inquisition as it is for anyone else. The Eisenfürsten are far too busy trying to hold on to what they have to notice roving bands of vigilantes. On the other hand, few Eisen tolerate religious fanaticism, which they believe brought the nation to its current state. Inquisitors in Eisen have many opportunities there, but they rarely survive being caught. Most of their activity takes place in the northern half of the country, where the Vaticine Church still has influence.

Oddly enough, the Inquisition rarely focuses on Objectionists in Eisen. For one thing, there are simply too many of them. But more importantly,

the desperate situation of so many people has brought charlatan preachers from all corners of the world, bearing false hope in return for the last shreds of their tattered lives. Inquisitors stay very busy breaking up these opportunistic cults, as well as fighting a tendency among rural villages to abandon the teachings of Theus altogether in favor of older and darker religions.

Recently, several Knight Inquisitors operating out of Eisen have been found murdered, their bodies cut to pieces. Because of Eisen's disorganized state, any number of factions may be responsible, but rumors persist that the Inquisitors were slain by vengeful ghosts of the Black Crosses...

Montaigne

The lands of *l'Empereur* provide the richest hunting for the Inquisitors. Sorcerers walk the land openly. Scholars fleeing Castille can often be found here before they reach the relative safety of Avalon or Vendel. The excommunication of most of the nobility has made almost anyone the Church wants to target technically outside of Theus' grace.

Montaigne's peasants aid the Inquisition cause considerably. The common people are still fiercely Vaticine, and fear for their souls. They are easily convinced that aiding an Inquisitor can offset their ruler's excesses. Many villages in Montaigne provide sanctuary to the Order for no other reason than to keep an ordained priest in their community. The fact that the Inquisitors usually target the hated nobility only makes the choice all the easier. However, a few agents have found themselves thrown out into the cold after attacking one of the Musketeers so beloved by the people.

The Inquisition would like nothing better than to get their hands on *l'Empereur* himself, but Léon keeps security tight around him at all times. Countless assassination attempts have been made, but none have yet to pierce his protective veil. There is one Knight-Inquisitor, though, who is poised to deliver the man responsible for the current state of the nation into the tender care of the Church. All he needs now is the proper time to act, without drawing the attention of Remy du Montaigne.

Ussura

The Inquisition seems to simply ignore Ussura completely. A handful of Inquisitors under the command of High Inquisitor Konraad Wulfson of Eisen are attempting to infiltrate Odyesse (which is in Montaigne hands). Their objective is mostly

to apprehend fugitives. So far, they have been unsuccessful. Every native they have revealed themselves to, no matter how sympathetic they seemed, has turned on them immediately upon learning their secret. The almost total lack of Vaticine presence in Ussura means that support and reinforcements are weeks away at best. Even small losses can threaten the success of the entire operation.

On the other hand, Ussura holds little of interest to the Order. Matushka does not tolerate sorcery within her lands (except for Pyeryem of course). Ussuran Orthodoxy branched off from the Vaticine faith so long ago, it cannot legitimately be considered a heresy (besides which, eliminating it would amount to genocide, an undertaking even the Inquisition is not too sanguine about). While a few scholars seek refuge among the frozen wastes, their small numbers cannot justify the resources it would take to find them. When coupled with the wretched climate and relatively low population, these reasons make Ussura a most uninviting target.

Vendel/Vestenmannavnjar

The Inquisition has a small and very secretive stronghold in Kirk. The islands are split evenly between Objectionists and pagans, which hampers their efforts considerably, but the cosmopolitan nature of Kirk (combined with the easily bribed officials) make for a place in which any group can remain secret. The need for secrecy is more pronounced here than anywhere else. Even Bors MacAllister cannot compare to the threat of the combined scrutiny of the Vendel Guilds. There has not yet been a single public execution in Kirk, although heretics and scholars do mysteriously disappear from time to time.

Most Inquisition agents in Vendel concentrate their energies on spying. The shipping and finance center of the world is an excellent location to track people, resources, and contraband. More than a few heretics in other lands have been arrested based on evidence gathered by agents in Vendel.

The Inquisition has absolutely no hold among the Vestenmannavnjar. The Order does not want to work with pagans, especially pagans that are still too strong to be overcome. The Vestenmannavnjar, on the other hand, have trouble even understanding the nature of the Inquisition. Also, they always react badly, and violently, to yet another group trying to tell them to abandon their beliefs and history.

Vodacce

Even as fanatically Vaticine as Vodacce is, they are still not partial to the Inquisition. The Merchant Princes and other nobility greatly enjoy their freedoms and have spent centuries manipulating the Vaticine in order to keep them. Indeed, even the practice of keeping courtesans could conceivably deserve the Inquisition's attention, and no noble wants to be stripped of his Fate Witch wife and daughters.

The Inquisition does have an open presence in Numa, but it is mostly a ruse. The real agents in Vodacce work very deeply under cover. They must move carefully, because Vodacce never forgives mistakes. Of course, many nobles are perceptive enough to spot them anyway. Many times throughout history, the Inquisition has been used as an effective tool for disposing of a rival. This goes against the Inquisition's beliefs, and taints the purity of their mission. Consequently, they always act with extreme caution when planning operations here. It is not unusual for an agent to spend a year or more gathering evidence and setting up a plan against a single Vodacce target.



Vestments

Red is the color of Vaticine vestments, and all ranks of the clergy wear it. Priests typically wear red robes when out of the sanctuary. When performing their duties, they will wear robes of white with embroidered red stoles. In a pinch, usually only while travelling, the stole is sufficient to indicate that the priest is now in a formal role, acting as the conduit of the grace of Theus.

Ironically, the farther one advances up the ranks, the simpler the robes become. This is supposedly to indicate the increasing closeness to Theus, but over the centuries, various Church

officials have found ways to appear more splendidous. The robes of a bishop, for example, are simpler than the priests', but have the added elements of the miter and crosier. The miter is a large hat shaped vaguely like a pointed arch. The crosier is a hooked staff, commonly referred to as a shepherd's staff. The bishops' importance often means that their regalia are richly ornamented. Miters of purest red linen and gold-plated crosiers are fairly common.

Cardinals are marked by plain red robes subtly adorned by black embroidery. Their vestments remain unchanged both in and out of the sanctuary. Additionally, each Cardinal has a special medallion bearing a device indicating the nature and location of the Archdiocese. The Cardinal generally only wears the medallion during services and other formal events, as it is quite heavy.

The Hierophant wears robes of deep blue; the only Vaticine official who does not wear red. Some of these robes have supposedly been passed down from the time of the Second Prophet. The Cathedral in Numa contains a set of robes from (according to legend) every Hierophant who has ever served. The "blues," as they are referred to, are barred not only to any other priest, but any person anywhere. Only a few select monasteries produce the special dyes necessary to make these robes. A number of Montaigne nobles have recently taken to wearing tokens of Hieratic blue, as a sign of contempt for the power of the Vaticine Church.

Bishops, Cardinals, and the Hierophant all receive special rings when they assume their new station. These rings belong to the person, not the office, though many have been passed down for generations. A standard show of respect when meeting one of these Church officers is to kneel and kiss their ring of office.

Monks, scholars, and other non-parishional priests wear woolen robes of brown or black, usually tied with a simple rope. This simplicity can be striking when a University officer addresses a council of Bishops in all their splendor. It is a matter of opinion as to which side makes the stronger statement.

Sacraments

The sacraments of the Vaticine Church are the holy rites designed to connect the worshipper more fully with Theus. They typically mark major

life changes, such as birth or adulthood. Only a member of the Vaticine Church in good standing may receive sacraments. In order to be considered a member, one must have been baptized in the Vaticine Faith (though this is obviously waived for baptism itself). To remain in good standing, the canon reads, "the membre must be knowne by his prieste." This typically means that the member must attend church regularly, but it has occasionally been interpreted as one who tithes regularly. In the case of travelers, participation is on one's honor to follow the canon.

The Objectionist and Avalon Churches have less stringent requirements. An Objectionist priest will give sacrament to a Vaticine member, whereas the reverse is not true. Some elements of Objectionism have even gone so far as to make the requirements simply "true in their faith to the Creator." This laxity is not widespread, however.

Baptism

The first sacrament any Vaticine experiences is Baptism. This ritual formally ties the soul to the body, while promising the child to Theus at the end of his or her life. Barring excommunication or unrepented sins, the soul will go to Elaethorum at death. At baptism, the child also formally receives a name, and possibly a set of godparents as well. Godparents are friends or distant relatives who swear to look after the child should the family die.

It is widely believed that a child who dies before being baptized never truly lived. The soul returns to Theus, unused, and the child is buried, without a name. The Church permits such graves on consecrated ground, but they are very rarely marked. It is a tragedy, but not an uncommon one in 17th century Théah.

Confirmation

This is the basic adulthood ceremony for most Vaticines. The child, usually in their pre-teen or early teen years, learns the Catechism; at the Confirmation ceremony, he or she is tested in an oral exam for their knowledge of the faith. If they pass, they become full members of the Vaticine Church (meaning, mostly, that they have a say in various matters). If they fail, they receive a one-year grace period, and then take the test again. Theoretically, a child may take the test any number of times. In practice, however, few have taken it more than three times.

Confirmations may only be performed by a priest of the Monsignor level or higher. It is considered good fortune to have a Bishop or

Cardinal perform the ceremony. Because of this, most confirmations are not only tests of faith, but the first time the child has left his or her village. In truth, many Théans only ever travel for Confirmations, either their own or that of a relative.

Confirmation occurs at a delicate age for young adults. Puberty, and the quickly following thought of marriage, is in full swing. Many children are entering into apprenticeships and in fact, a number of children who pass their Confirmation are left with a master following the ceremony. In addition, children may not use their family name (if they have one) until they have gone through Confirmation.

Communion

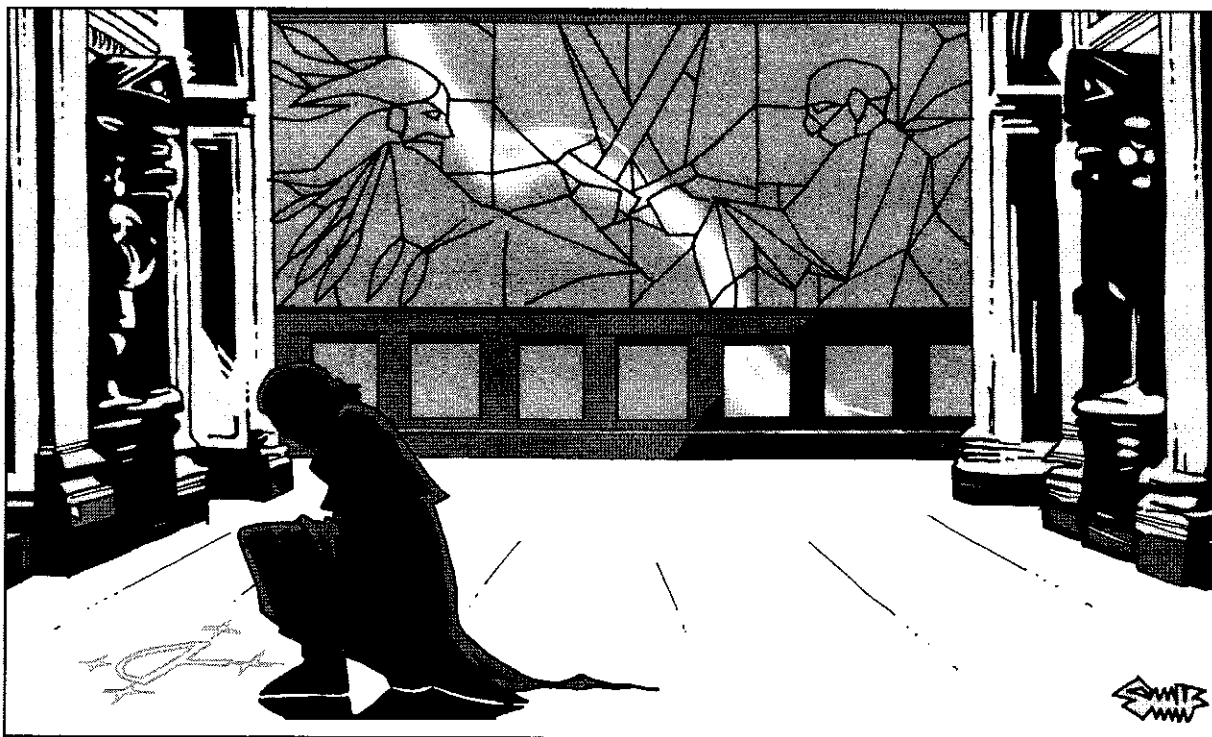
Communion, also called Eucharist, is the act of sharing bread and wine. When the Second Prophet led his flock into the Crescent Empire, all they had was one hundred loaves of bread and one hundred jugs of wine. Somehow, this fed thousands of people for many days. Communion celebrates the memory of that miracle, and the Second Prophet who created it.

Communion differs from most other sacraments in that it is received on an ongoing basis (typically once a week). It serves as a part of every Mass. Priests will deliver it to the sick, needy, or imprisoned outside a church, one of the few sacraments that doesn't take place "within sight of Theus." The purification, blessing, and bestowal of the bread and wine follow a very precise series of rituals. Whereas few people can actually speak or understand Théan, most adults can parrot the rituals of Communion. They may not know what it means, they may not even be able to determine where words end, but they can say (or chant) the entire fifteen-minute ritual without pausing.

Marriage

As has been noted elsewhere, marriage in Théah is not an affair of love, but of business. Still, it is a great cause of celebration. The joining of a man and woman, and hence of families, involves a large number of people, and usually makes all of them happy.

Hundreds of rituals and superstitions surround weddings. However, the actual Vaticine rite is relatively simple and straightforward. The congregations receives a blessing, the priest asks if any have just cause for the marriage to be halted (historically, this was to prevent cousins from,



perhaps unwittingly, marrying), the couple exchanges vows of engagement, the priest pronounces the marriage, and, finally, introduces the new pair to the congregation. Different areas and different social strata perform the ceremony with different details, but the basic meaning remains unchanged.

While the wedding is a joyous affair, marriage itself is very serious and sacred. Divorce, for all intents and purposes, does not exist (not even in Avalon). Adultery is a serious crime against Theus (though, in Vodacce, they have conveniently redefined adultery to exclude dalliances with courtesans). Marriage means "til death do you part," in every way. Of course, there are many instances of couples breaking up for one reason or another. In most of these cases, however, either one partner ends up excommunicated or society pointedly ignores the separation (treating the couple as if they were still together).

Ordination

Ordination is the ceremony by which a layperson becomes a priest. It creates a special bond between the priest and Theus, and must almost always be performed by a Bishop. None have been able to detect this bond, and few can describe it, but almost every priest has said that they feel very different after the ceremony.

The Vaticine Church has very stringent rules on who might become a priest. A priest may be

male or female, married or unmarried, and of any nationality. He or she must be a member of the Church, and must go through training (many priests attend a University) in preparation for serving Theus. The priest must be of sound moral fiber, though such a definition can be nebulous at times. Finally, the priest must pass a test at ordination. This is no formality. Many have failed their first test. If you fail, you receive a three-year period to study and try again. If you fail a second time, however, you are forever barred the priesthood.

The Church can revoke ordination, in a manner similar to excommunication. This is referred to as *defrocking*. It is a very serious punishment, and only reserved for those who have flagrantly abused their position.

Confession

Every good Vaticine goes to Confession at least once a week. This is a chance to unburden your soul of all the little sins that have built up in your life. You speak to a priest in utmost confidence, and the priest assigns you a penance fitting your sin. If you show your repentance and obedience to the will of the Creator by performing this penance, then He forgives your sin. It is as simple as that.

Oddly enough, this is the only sacrament that has been removed from common use in the Objectionist churches. Objectionists believe that a

worshipper does not need a priest to communicate with Theus, and that priests do not have the authority to grant Theus' forgiveness. Objectionist priests still speak confidentially with their flock and counsel them on how to make amends for their sins. But the ritual practice of Confession has been set aside in many areas.

Confession is not a simple eraser of sin. Church doctrine states that you must truly repent in order for it to work. That means regretting what you did and vowing to avoid repeating the action. Many people see it as a free ride. Do whatever you like, say a few Nomine Thei's on feast day, and die in a state of grace. This is wrong. If you perform a penance, and then go and commit the same sin again, the previous penance served no purpose. You did not learn your lesson. And Theus will know.

Funeral

This is the last sacrament anyone will ever receive. When a member of the Church dies, he or she receives the sacrament of the Funeral so that the soul may go properly to Elaethorum. Additionally, the body is buried on consecrated ground, so that agents of Legion will not violate it.

Not everyone has access to Funeral rites. As with all sacraments, you must be in good standing in the Church (although no few wastrels and rebels have found consecrated plots due to expansive gifts from their families). Excommunicated souls are forbidden funerals and may not be buried in consecrated ground. Those who died without grace (which notably includes suicides) are likewise forbidden the sanctuary of the cemetery. Also, those with sorcery but without the protection of a noble house are banned.

The service itself, as one would expect, is a very solemn and sober affair, but a few cultures, notably the Ussurans and those of the Highland Marches, celebrate the life that has passed through wakes. A boisterous party is held to celebrate the life that has passed. The Church frowns on these wakes, which is probably why they flourish in areas where the Vaticine has little influence. Vaticine dogma states that the funeral is a time of grief for the life lost, and a time of support for those left behind. The soul has departed for a better place, and does not need mortal revelry to raise its spirits.

Tithes

Although the early priests asked only for generosity, it soon became apparent that a growing number of people needed a more structured idea of how much to give to further the Church. Soon after Emperor Corantine declared the Vaticine faith the official religion of the Empire, he worked with the Church to give it a more formal structure. Part of that structure was the tithe.

Every faithful Vaticine is expected to donate the tenth part of his or her bounty to the Church. This means that a peasant with barely more than the clothes on his back might only give a single loaf of bread, but that loaf is as important as a velvet robe given by a merchant or an entire cathedral donated by a noble. The Church does not see the tithe as a tax, however. Not even the Inquisitors would come to your door simply for failing to give your due. Of course, giving an incomplete tithe may be an indication of incomplete faith, but it is not a crime by itself.

In an age of fifty to seventy percent tax rates, most Théans find a ten percent to the Church a easy burden to bear. And unlike taxes, most families consider the tithe something they gain benefit from throughout their lives. Because they dropped a few coins in the offering box, their children can learn to read and write, they have a place to go if disaster strikes, and the local priest can always be counted on to provide counsel. None of that includes the spiritual benefits, or the comforting feeling that comes from knowing you are in Theus' good graces.

Cathedrals and Architecture

When the Church is the source of scientific exploration, some of the most fantastic technical innovations go to the benefit of the Vaticine's structures. The fabulous cathedrals of Théah — the corbelled vault, flying buttress, pointed arch, and dome — are all well-established elements of Théan architecture. The relatively new innovation of cement has been used to create fantastic decorations, usually strengthened with rods of wood or iron. Unfortunately, most architects believe that churches, with their need for large central spaces, have reached their limit, at least



A Pilgrim Hymn

Who would true valor see 'gainst all disaster,
Come forth, and constant be; follow the
Master.

There's no discouragement,
Shall make you once relent,
Your first avowed intent,
To be a pilgrim.

Who so beset you round with dismal stories
Do but themselves confound; your strength
the more is.

No lion can you fright,
You'll with a giant fight,
But you will have the right,
To be a pilgrim.

Hobgoblin nor foul fiend can daunt your
spirit;

You know you at the end shall life inherit.

Then fancies fly away!
Fear not what others say,
But labor night and day,
To be a pilgrim.

until someone can find a way to make steel beams stronger.

Churches are almost all built along cruciform lines, using the Cross of the Prophets as the model. The long shaft forms the seating for the congregation, with the sanctuary in the rounded section at the end. The altar stands in the center of the half-circle, often creating marvelous acoustics. The choir and attendant priests sit around the edge of the "round," where their voices can carry throughout the structure. The confession booths typically stand at the ends of the crosspiece, except in large churches which use the extensions as additional entrances. The church will generally appear to have a squared end from the outside, with the sacristy and priest's chambers in the corners.

Statuary, murals, and carved friezes are very typical decorations. Stained glass exists, but is very expensive and therefore reserved for large or ostentatious churches. Since the majority of Théans are only barely literate (even with public education) pictures in the windows and great murals on the walls tell the stories of the Prophets. Many churches often use carved wood

as decoration. The Cathedral of La Pasiega, for example, is known for its huge carved panels, which can be disassembled and replaced as the seasons change.

Saints

As in any organization, some Vaticine faithful stand out more than others do. Particularly pious members of the Church, or those active in their faith are recognized as saints. The Vaticine has fairly strict rules for determining who might be *canonized*, or declared a saint. First, he or she must be recognized as a member of the Church in good standing. This eliminates most heretics from consideration, no matter how noble their agenda. Second, the saint must be dead twenty-five years before the Cardinals can vote on the subject. This puts an appropriate distance from the candidate's life, as well as to give all those who want to present evidence regarding the saint ample opportunity to come forward. Third, the saint must be responsible for at least three verifiable miracles. Given the remarkable acts possible with sorcery, the Church closely scrutinizes reputed miracles, making it one of the most difficult conditions to fulfill. Most saints were not looking to get canonized, so did not necessarily seek opportunities to perform miracles. As a consequence, many of the saint's devotees will either fabricate miracles or embroider actual events to appear miraculous. They do not consider this deception, but rather to ensure the proper veneration of a man or woman they believe to be holy. It does make the investigating priest's job difficult, though.

Once a saint is canonized, he or she holds a very special place in the hierarchy of the Church. They supposedly serve as intercessors between the faithful and the hosts of Theus. While mere mortals do not fathom the nature of the Creator, saints have come close enough to enlightenment to effectively communicate prayers in such a way that Theus will know how to answer them. As such, many people will pray to patron saints of various spheres of influence, believing that these saints have special expertise or can address certain problems, and are therefore more likely to hear a plea than Theus who has to pay attention to all of Creation.

Different saints are memorialized in different ways. Many have symbols or crests associated with them. Some have holy sites dedicated to their

memory, possibly including shrines, churches, monasteries, blessed springs, statues, or spectacular natural phenomena. Most saints have a day set aside by the Church specifically to honor them. This generally has little effect on society in general, though there are some notable exceptions. For example, no ship will set sail on Sextus 16 — the Feast of St. Elmo, one of the patron saints of sailors. Very little work gets done on Primus 21, the feast day of St. Giovanni Bosco (the patron saint of apprentices). In recognition of him, all apprentices receive a holiday (which, conveniently enough, means that most masters are “forced” to take a holiday as well).

Objectionists reject saints for much the same reason that they reject the Vaticine notion of priests and the Hierophant. Their doctrine teaches that Theus listens to everyone, and thus has no need of an intercessor. However, the Objectionists still recognize that the saints were particularly pious. A few sects have retained the Vaticine Calendar of Feasts, which specifies celebratory days for each saint.

Relics

Relics are special tokens of religious significance, such as the bones of saints, water from holy sites, pieces of important objects, or depictions of famous events. They are frequently mounted or housed in special containers, using rare woods, gilding, jewels, and other gaudy decoration. Relics hold tremendous importance to those who own them; they often represent a family’s most prized possession, handed down for generations.

During the Age of Chivalry, the collection of religious relics became not only an expression of piety, but big business as well. The status of a church, parish, or even diocese was measured by the quality of the relics they maintained. Nobles would collect them in the same way they now collect Synchron artifacts. Indeed, scoundrels and adventurers, similar to contemporary diggers would collect and sell relics for purchase by pious nobles.

Unfortunately, this kind of demand rapidly used up the supply of true relics. Very few people actually kept ashes from the First Prophet’s pyre. On the other hand, very few people can verify that any given pile of ashes did not come from the First Prophet’s pyre. Thus, countless frauds and forgeries began appearing, most indistinguishable

from the genuine article. In 1423, the Vaticine Church attempt to catalog and verify as many of these items as possible. This quickly proved an exercise in futility. Despite verifying that the entire corpse of the Third Prophet was still intact in his tomb, the Vaticine found 107 fingers of the Prophet in the possession of various persons in Castille alone. To question them would be to draw the ire of some very powerful families, and the Church ultimately decided to abandon its efforts rather than risk the political fallout. The survey never extended beyond the borders of Castille.

While the fad of collecting relics eventually faded among the nobility, they continue serve an important purpose in the Church. While many false relics have been exposed, some are impossible to verify. Also, some families fervently resist having their heirlooms discredited. Thus, there are still a remarkable number of scraps of the Second Prophet’s robes spread across Théah. Regardless of their actual history, these are still regarded as sacrosanct.

Perhaps the most pervasive reason for the collection of relics has nothing to do with piety, and everything to do with power. Many items have been ascribed miraculous capabilities over the years. Healing is most common, with good luck running a close second. A number of the Church’s leading scientific lights have accredited inspiration or insight to certain relics. Unfortunately, these claims are even more difficult to document and verify than the accuracy of their identity. Consequently, they are also more difficult to disprove. Ultimately, it comes down to faith. If the relics inspire piety and belief in the Church’s doctrines, then their authenticity really doesn’t matter.

Pilgrimages

Holy sites abound throughout Théah. Nearly seventeen hundred years of recorded history have made a number of locations famous. Faithful Vaticine consider a trip to one of these sites not only a show of piety, but a spiritual journey in and of itself. Records of pilgrimages are as often works of philosophy and spiritual exploration as travelogues. While the tradition of pilgrimages dropped off dramatically after the Objectionist movement began (though there is no apparent connection between the events), a large number

of people still undertake a holy trek as part of penance or to seek special divine favor.

The most famous sites, naturally, revolve around the Prophets. The city of Numa has numerous places associated with the First Prophet, from the ruins of the Senate floor where he first spoke to the square where he was burned alive. Though there was much argument during the time of the Crusades, the Church has determined where the Second Prophet died, and the area remains a popular, but dangerous, destination. Due to the restrictions on travel to the Crescent Empire, the location of the Second Prophet's birth has been forbidden to all pilgrims. Castille contains numerous memorials to the Third Prophet, but most pilgrims focus only on the Chamber of El Fuego Sagrado, where he first revealed himself to the Prophet.

In addition to the Prophets, saints have generated a number of holy sites. Various "healing springs" (often naturally heated mineral water) are associated with saints and their miracles. Statues of saints are often said to cry or bleed. Sleeping, praying, or fasting near one of these statues or at a similar site may give one of the faithful a connection to Theus.

Many nations also have sacred places, which hold deep spiritual significance to the natives. In Avalon, pilgrims travel to the lake where Athrwys threw in the Graal. Eisen pilgrims explore Gregorskorn, and the Vestenmannavnjar have more holy sites than can be easily counted. Perhaps, one day, patriotic Castillians will journey to El Morro.

Sins

Sin in the Vaticine faith is a betrayal of the trust Theus put in His children. The Prophets taught that Theus created mankind in His image, and wants us to achieve His own state of perfection. However, humans still have base urges and selfish desires that hold them back. The Church has attempted to catalogue these failings in hope of eradicating them among its followers. Below is a list of the Nine Commandments, which form the core of Church Law, and the Seven Deadly Sins, which the Vaticine consider their greatest enemies.

The First Commandment is: "There is only one true god, and His name is Theus. Thou shalt not bow thy head to another." While this may seem an

obvious rule of faith, it has led to a great deal of philosophical debate and numerous accusations of heresy. More than a few monastic orders have been excommunicated for violating this commandment, though many admittedly did so before the Third Vigil was even written. In addition, the Inquisition has accused numerous heretics of violating the second half of the commandment. Indeed, a number of recent tracts against the Invisible College have condemned them based on this commandment. "Empiricism," as written in *A Treatise on Faith Without Question*, "has become the sole aim of these scientists. They have replaced trust in Theus with trust in logic. This is heresy of the highest order, and must be stopped before it can spread further."

The Second Commandment is: "Thou shalt honor the Four Prophets of Theus." This commandment has caused very little controversy, since not much is required of it. There was a famous case, however, in the late fourteenth century when a group, now referred to as the Abscriptors, attempted to refute the sanctity of the Four Vigils. They argued that the Vigils were written by men, transcribed by men, and often translated by men. How, then, could the Church consider them the true message of Theus? Unfortunately for them, they came mostly from Vodacce, and the local Vaticine authorities swiftly identified and apprehended every member. The trial established that the Vigils are considered the true words of the Prophets; to question the text is to break the Second Commandment. All the Abscriptors were found guilty of heresy, but only a few actually burned for their sin. The rest claimed to have seen the error of their ways, donated their entire fortunes as penance, and were left more or less alone.

The Third Commandment is: "Honor thy father and thy mother." While this commandment has never been the touchstone of heresy, it is one of the most quoted in confessionals. Many young people chafe under the requirements of their parents, and sometimes this sentence is all that prevents outright rebellion.

The Fourth Commandment is: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Most of Théah defines adultery as engaging in sexual relations in violation of your marriage vows. If you are not married, you cannot commit adultery. Only "cheating" on your spouse denotes such a sin. Vodacce used the obvious loophole to refine it further. Since adultery is defined as "violation of your marriage vows," Vodacce wedding ceremonies are worded very

carefully. The husband simply promises to never love another woman. Courtesans, as paid entertainment, cannot be objects of love, and retaining their services is no more a betrayal of marriage than paying another woman to cook for you. It is a service performed by willing women when the wife cannot or will not do so herself — no more. Of course, the rest of the world sees this as hollow justification for decadence, but what do the Vodacce care for the rest of the world?

The Fifth Commandment is: "Thou shalt not speak falsely." The Creator is truth. To speak falsehood is to tarnish and deny that truth. This is a grave sin, for it not only takes the liar farther from Theus' blessing, but drags down the one he or she lied to as well. Unfortunately, humanity seems an inherently deceptive creature, and many a priest has had to assign penance for this sin.

The Sixth Commandment is: "Thou shalt not covet." This commandment forms the basis of several Deadly Sins. However, it is often the most difficult for people to follow. It is the only Commandment that you can break through involuntary action. To lie, steal, or cheat, you must make a conscious choice to do so. But coveting often comes to mind unbidden, and is difficult to stop once it begins. The Church often urges its followers to fight against envy in their daily lives, and to wage constant battle against the subconscious desires which rise in their minds.

The Seventh Commandment is: "Thou shalt not commit murder." The Third Prophet worded this Commandment very carefully, and devoted several verses in his book to explaining its ramifications. Waging war against heathens is not murder. Executing properly condemned heretics is not murder. These things are the proper work of agents of Theus. To snuff out the life of an unsuspecting person, however, is murder. It robs them of the greatest gift of all, life. Killing another person represents one of the gravest potential sins, and should never be considered unless you are certain you have justice on your side.

The Eighth Commandment is: "Thou shalt not steal." Throughout history, this Commandment has caused little controversy. Most Théans know what it means to steal, and every society, Vaticine or not, already frowns upon. This does not lessen the importance of the Church's law, however. Theft is wrong and harmful, even if the person robbed can afford to lose the money or goods. The Third Prophet recognized this, and ensured that this Commandment became part of the rules of life set down by the Church.

The Ninth Commandment is: "Thou shalt not suffer a sorcerer to live." All the Prophets have adamantly condemned the dangers and evils of sorcery. Its very existence is an affront to Theus, and a danger to the world. In order to stave off Legion, humanity must first purge those who benefit from Bargaining with him. Unfortunately, the Church has rarely had the power to move openly against sorcery. The nobles hold too much power. But times of trouble take their toll. Only two of the original Bargainers' arts are still openly practiced, and the next few years may see at least one of those vanish forever.

The Four Vigils and the Book of Common Prayer

The Witnesses of each of the Prophets wrote down the Four Vigils, describing not only their acts and lives, but also their messages. Around 1250 AV, the monk Juan Bautista Rael copied a version of the Four Vigils in which he broke each one down into chapters and verses. This made it significantly easier for priests to memorize sections of the long prose work. It also enabled common Théans to digest the lessons of the Prophets in small quotes. Proverbs were seen not only in scholarly papers, but also appeared in everyday speech.

The First Vigil is actually little more than a series of sermons. The First Prophet had a surprisingly uneventful life outside of challenging the Senate. He did, however, have a remarkable number of lessons to pass on, which he conveyed in very direct, clear language. To modern Théans, they are inarguable truths of the human condition. A reading by a skilled lector can still move a congregation, and most of the Théan proverbs come from the First Vigil.

The Second Prophet was not as gifted an orator, but was a remarkable storyteller. The Second Vigil consists largely of parables and fables, often using animals to illustrate its points. These stories are frequently repeated not only in church services, but also around campfires and at bedtimes the world over. The bards of Avalon have translated the stories into Cymric and adapted them to their own style. Even Ussurans, who reject the Second Prophet as a messenger of Theus, tell stories from the Second Vigil to their children. Marco, the Witness who recorded the Vigil, had been a devout follower of the Second

Prophet, but did not follow the Prophet into the Crescent Empire. This is fortunate since the vast majority of people who heard the Prophet speak died in that great exodus. Marco prevented the Prophet's words from being lost as well.

The Third Vigil is an agenda for the Church. In between stories of the miracles of the Third Prophet, it lays out the foundations for the Vaticine canon, lists the Nine Commandments, and expands upon the nature of sin in specific laws. The Third Prophet called for scientific inquiry and philosophical debate to improve the minds and lives of the faithful. He also called for the purging of the faithful, driving out the influences of Crescents, heretics, and sorcery. While a rather dry read compared to the other Vigils, the language is very precise and explicit. When scholars argue a point of law, they will often turn to the Third Vigil as the ultimate authority.

The Fourth Vigil is unique for a number of reasons. First, it is the only Vigil actually written by a Prophet (the Third). Second, rather than being a guide to life and creation, it is a prophecy of doom and destruction. However, it does deliver its own moral messages. The Fourth Vigil details the days before the end of the world, when the Creator will call forth those faithful to Him to battle the hosts of Legion. It contains very specific passages detailing the manner of person who will be included in the Multitudes of Elaethorum, as well as a number of disturbing passages implying that if sin and heresy go unchecked, Legion will triumph on the Last Day. It is this message, more than any other, which drives Verdugo and his Inquisitors. Clearly, the Church must be more than a passive example of how to live, but actively attempt to save the souls of others. Whether they want to be saved or not.

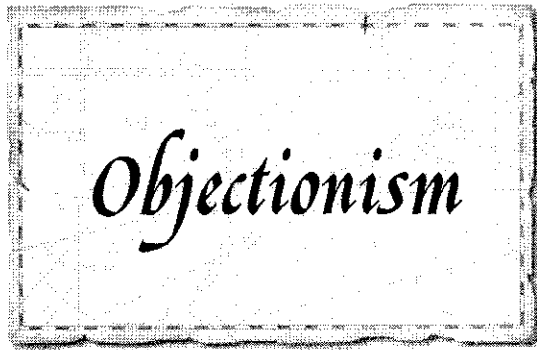
The language of the Fourth Vigil is extremely vague and symbolic. Six times in recorded history

prominent Church scholars have declared that the end times were at hand, based on interpreting the symbolism to match current events. The seventh time seems near at hand; a number of theologians have pointed at specific passages that seem to mirror the present situation in Théah. "And the Lady [the Church] shall lose her head, and a sorcerer shall keep it from her. And the Fourth Prophet shall arise to return it to her." This certainly echoes the rumors surrounding *l'Empereur* and his plot to prevent the election of a new Hierophant, as does another passage, "The sun shall be cast from the eye of Theus." "The lowliest of voices will come to be heard in the greatest of halls, and his voice shall echo through the ages to sunder the drachen." Almost every Church scholar now believes that this passage refers to Mathias Lieber, the Objectionist movement, and the subsequent destruction of Eisen. However, scholars remain unclear whether this is actually a sign of the coming end, or simply a critical event in the history of the Church.

The most telling passage, and the one that kept the Crusades going long after simple religious fervor died out, describes the warlord who will herald the coming of the hosts of Legion. "And a king of beasts shall arise from the Crescent. His face will be as the blackest of nights. He shall have seven eyes and thirteen fists. A sword older than man shall serve his cause. His banner will cast a shadow of red over all the land. His followers shall be the very

Hounds of Hell, baying his name as they come. And he shall strike down the descendants of Numa with a sorcery more foul than any yet known. The wolf shall bow to his power and run at his side. When his power is joined to the moon, then shall the Day of Reckoning dawn." No few Inquisitors and Crusaders were willing to kill every Crescent in the Empire to prevent this monster from arising.





Objectionism stands as the strongest challenge to Vaticine authority, as well as the fiercest rival for the souls of the faithful — quite an accomplishment for a movement less than two centuries old. Though Objectionist doctrine matches the Vaticine's in many ways, it is their differences which continue to define them, and which ensure that relations between them remain strained at best.

History

Prelude To A Storm

Almost any discussion of the Objectionist Movement begins with Mathias Lieber. Lieber certainly wasn't the first (or last) person to question the Vaticine Church, but his actions have certainly had the furthest reaching consequences.

To truly understand the Objectionist Movement, however, requires a look further back into history. The first true signs of trouble within the Church began over one hundred years before Lieber was even born. After a period of increasing complacency and growing corruption, the Church came under scrutiny from within, and many clerics called for a moral revival. They were growing weary of clerical abuses; of priests, monks, bishops, and even Hierophants behaving far more worldly than spiritual. Many Church leaders so concerned themselves with luxury and base emotions that they appeared to have lost sight of the ultimate goal: understanding the Creator through His Creation, and a few brave souls mustered the courage to speak out against the injustices around them. Some of these went beyond condemning individuals within the Church and questioned Church doctrine as well.

Once such early critic was Arleigh Hess, a nun and respected professor from Eisen. Much like Lieber a century later, she believed that all

members of the Vaticine Faith comprise a "priesthood of believers" and considered professional priests nonessential in following the words of the Prophets. She also believed the State to be supreme to the Church, and that the two should not meddle in one another's affairs. Not surprisingly, these radical ideas made her quite unpopular and, in 1391, she came before a Vaticine council. Her trial began in the morning and she was burned at the stake the same night.

Hess was ahead of her time in acting against the Church, but the institution's swift action against her only hastened its decline. Despite the work of a few dedicated reformists, the Church proved to be its own worst enemy. A series of remarkably impious Hierophants caused many devout believers to question their faith and the role the Church should play in their lives. These Hierophants were notorious for their moral corruption, living lives of excess and indulgence that rival the extremes of *l'Empereur du Montaigne*. Among their lesser offenses were selling Church offices and assigning their friends and children (often illegitimate) to key clerical positions.

Perhaps the most questioned practice at the time, however, was the selling of indulgences. Traditionally, the Church grants an indulgence once a sinner has confessed his wrongdoing; it is a penance to receive forgiveness and prove that the sinner truly regrets his immoral deeds. Normally, the indulgence required a pious act of. However, in the early 1400s, the doctrine of indulgences had become so corrupt that sinners could simply pay money to absolve their wrongdoings. During this time, sorcery began to secretly flourish with nobles who kept the Church on their payroll, quietly buying forgiveness for their use of magical arts.

Seizing any opportunity to fatten Church coffers, Hierophant Terricus VI took indulgences a step further. He claimed he could free the souls of the dead from the punishments they received. For the right price, bereaved friends and family members could purchase an indulgence to hasten a deceased loved one's ascent into the afterlife.

By the beginning of the 16th century, tensions had reached an all-time high, and a letter of protest would help bring down the Church's centuries of dominance in Théah.

Mathias Lieber

The man who would write this famous letter, Mathias Lieber, came from humble origins. Born

in Eisen in 1489, his father worked as a shipwright and his mother a laundress. Neither had much free time to spend with the boy. However, they were both devout believers in the Vaticine faith and young Lieber received a strict religious upbringing. To his parents' delight, he proved a brilliant student of scripture and theology. On his nineteenth birthday, when he took the vows and became an ordained priest, his parents agreed that Theus had truly blessed their family. Less than a decade later, they would decide otherwise.

Lieber's strong mind, dedicated study habit, and personal charisma quickly found him in the southern portion of Heilgrund, the Church's national headquarters in Eisen. While others in his order attempted to find proof of Theus's works within the natural world, Lieber spent his days analyzing the Vaticine Book of Common Prayer and the Book of Prophets, gaining new insight from early generations of the holy texts. On the occasions where he would discover discrepancies or inconsistencies in the works, the pious monk would always find a way to reconcile the problem, supporting his belief in the infallibility of the holy words. When he was twenty-four, he published a paper, *On The Wholeness Of Scripture*, which suggested that Theus could not only be found in the world He created, but within the subtleties of the words mankind used to express His will and truths. It was a radical idea, but one the Church quickly embraced.

Among those who took interest in the paper was Eisen's Emperor, Franz II. Fluent in every language in Théah, Franz was captivated by Lieber's focus on the importance of words, and invited the monk to visit the royal palace. Lieber could not refuse such an honor and, in short order, the two men became close friends.

During one of their frequent visits, Franz requested that Lieber teach his two children, Adette and Franz III, about the holy scripture. The Emperor wanted to make sure they would pass their confirmation, and Lieber happily agreed.

Adette proved a difficult student, always questioning Lieber's lessons with a resounding "Why?" Fortunately, the monk had years of studying on his side and could easily address most of the girl's concerns. Some, however, proved more troublesome than others, and Lieber found himself combing through tracts, letters, and documents for suitable answers. As was the case when he had encountered discrepancies and

inconsistencies in scripture translations, Lieber could always think out reasonable solutions — at least reasonable enough to satisfy Adette. But the questions born out of a child's innocence led Lieber to form questions of his own, and these seemed to have no answer whatsoever.

Over the next four years, Lieber observed the actions of the Church toward its followers. He watched them with the same precision and dedication that his fellow Vaticine scholars had given their studies of the natural world. The Church's determination to accumulate as much wealth and political power as possible caused him great concern, and the sale of indulgences troubled him greatly. Also, from his studies of early holy transcripts, Lieber knew the Church owned dozens of books that contained crucial information about one of the greatest mysteries on Terra: sorcery. Instead of helping its followers understand and deal with the strange phenomenon, the Church encouraged ignorance and fear — but was also quick to deliver forgiveness if the sorcerer could afford it. In many ways, the Church appeared in direct conflict with the very scriptures it held sacred, and Lieber's spirit was torn between his devotion to the institution and his faith in the words that inspired it. In the end, his belief in the holy words triumphed.

What happened next has been documented in numerous texts and histories. As an objection to all of the abuses he had studied, Lieber developed a list of ninety-five questions concerning Vaticine practices and doctrines. Then, on the first of Octavus, 1517, he nailed the list to his superior's door in southern Heilgrund. Lieber intended his inquiries on sorcery, the selling of indulgences, and the Church's seeming obsession with wealth and political power to incite scholarly debate. But he had not counted on the dramatic public response his questions fostered. In a matter of days, the list was translated from Théan into Eisen, published, and circulated throughout the country.

As interested as the Eisen citizens were in Lieber's words, the Church was even more so. A representative of the Hierophant summoned Lieber to his offices and demanded that he confess and repent for doubting Church tenets. Perturbed, Lieber reached into his purse and produced a handful of coins, asking if the modest amount was enough to buy the Hierophant's forgiveness. He left the representative in stunned silence, his belief in the Church's fallacies stronger than ever

before. Disgruntled, he spent the next few months delivering his interpretations of the Book of the Prophets to any who would listen.

During the middle of one such session, a breathless messenger arrived, brandishing a thick sheet of parchment. It was an official condemnation of Lieber's teachings, personally penned by Hierophant Leto VIII. Lieber had been waiting for such an event and publicly burned the decree, stating that the only Theus Himself could judge his work. Lieber declared that he had no fear of the Hierophant or any institution created by man, but the strength of his convictions would soon be tested.

Lieber was summoned to Vaticine City in Castille, the focus of the annual Diet. The Hierophant himself presided over the Diet, but Lieber came under the vehement interrogation of Cardinal Thomas Chandler, who had spearheaded the efforts against him. The two men argued for three tense days, each becoming more resolute in his own ideology. Lieber did not flinch as his opponent used the words "heresy" and "blasphemy" to label his beliefs. Instead, he loudly accused the Church of corruption, depravity, and even conspiracy to keep its faithful ignorant of the Prophets' true message. At last, the Hierophant had heard enough. He placed Lieber under arrest and promptly excommunicated him. There would be no trial. The monk had

demonstrated his heresy for the last time and his execution would take place the following night.

Luckily for Lieber, his friend the Emperor had not forgotten him. Franz had secretly dispatched a small group of his elite knights to follow Lieber into Castille and protect him from harm. When they received word of Lieber's impending fate, the knights made a dramatic assault into the heart of Vaticine City, freeing Lieber from prison. Lieber's party traveled through dark forests by night and hid in barns or caves during the day. At long last, they returned to the relative safety of Eisen, and the Emperor secreted Lieber away within a small castle in the Undying Swamp.

Lieber put his time in isolation to good use. In just a little over two months he translated the entirety of the Book of the Prophets from Théan into common Eisen. He also fleshed out the tenants of his personal theology and recorded it all in a six-hundred page journal later named *Lieber's Book*. Franz found both works an audience by taking advantage of a relatively new invention: the printing press. These two works were the first widely published books in Théah's history.

The Hierophant soon learned of Franz's role in Lieber's escape and demanded that the former monk be returned to Church custody. The Emperor snubbed the order, and the Hierophant attempted to coerce the King of Castille into a war with Eisen to retrieve Lieber by military force.



After consulting with his generals, the King refused to enter a conflict with the most powerful army in the known world. Ultimately, the Hierophant was forced to back down, and Lieber felt safe to appear in public again.

The Hierophant's vendetta ultimately worked to Lieber's advantage. The Church had threatened Eisen over a single man it had deemed dangerous, thereby substantiating many of the grievances Lieber raised. Lieber's beliefs now found ready acceptance across Eisen; those who adhered to them became known as Objectionists.

Lieber's new theologies and doctrines reached across the economic classes, finding proponents equally among the nobility and peasantry. Members of the growing middle class, in particular, grew enamored of the movement, some simply from the fact that Lieber did not believe in paying tithes. In addition, many of Lieber's most adamant supporters were erstwhile monks, nuns, and friars, as well as priests and other clergy members. They, too, had become disenchanted with the Church and felt they could better serve Theus and His people through the new perspective offered by Objectionism.

Lieber's defiance did take a great toll on his personal life. His parents disowned him and many of his oldest friends felt he was either a criminal or the puppet of Legion. Even his closest friend, the Emperor, slowly grew distant. Franz believed that the Church should be reformed and was troubled that, instead of helping mend the "true" faith, he had aided in the birth of a new one. He never converted to Objectionist beliefs, but neither did he persecute its adherents.

Lieber spent the rest of his life working to make sure that his split from the Church was not in vain. He lived by the words he preached, limiting his official duties to religious services, marriages, and officiating funerals. He made it a point to find time for a private life, however, and married a former nun. Despite the domesticity, he continued to write and hone his beliefs, encouraging others to translate his works into other languages so that they might be read across Théah. Lieber died a satisfied man, knowing he had effected a profound spiritual change in the world.

The Movement Abroad

National boundaries never troubled the Objectionists. As Lieber's works traveled over Eisen's borders, Lieber's followers found converts across Théah. New leaders readily took up the



On the Question of Sorcery

There is a small but increasingly vocal contingent of the Objectionist Church that has begun to challenge the traditional condemnation of sorcery. Their line of reasoning is as follows:

"We believe that Theus created the universe and everything in it. If Theus created everything, then that includes sorcery, whatever power fuels it, and the ability to wield it. Theus, an omnipotent deity, would not create something inherently evil and would not condemn a part of His creation or prohibit its particular study as opposed to others."

These advocates have come to the conclusion that sorcery represents just another force of creation, one that has yet to be fully understood. It is merely a tool, neither good nor evil in design. Those who control the mysterious power ultimately determine whether it further serves the goals of Theus or Legion.

Sorcery proponents (who count most of their number from Montaigne and Vendel) face an uphill battle. The words of the First Prophet clearly condemn the practice of sorcery, so opponents can easily dismiss their argument. However, several interested nobles are funding research and expeditions to uncover early drafts of the First Prophet's words. They hope to find evidence of some conspiracy to hide the truth — or at least a simple mistranslation that has led to the dim view of magic through the centuries. Conclusive evidence has yet to be uncovered, but the nobles have vast resources to continue their search.

Objectionist torch, though some merely used it as inspiration to start their own religions, as was the case with the Church of Avalon (*see page 56*).

Among the more remarkable Objectionist leaders of the time was Toulouse le Blanc of Montaigne. le Blanc held and exhorted many of Lieber's ideas concerning absolution by faith and the ultimate statute of the Book of Prophets over Vaticine dogma, but he also preached beliefs that were entirely his own. In the course of his studies, he felt he had uncovered irrefutable proof that humankind had no free will and that Theus had already selected those whom He would save from

the fires of the Abyss. Those born with the curse of sorcery were clearly damned, but it was just as easy to spot those chosen by Theus for redemption. These were the souls who instinctively led good lives and followed the words in the holy scriptures. Not surprisingly, the nobility took a dim view of le Blanc, and forced him out of Montaigne into exile in the Norvik islands. The Vestenmannavnjar had even less patience with le Blanc's ministrations than the Montaigne, and the enthusiastic chaplain met a gruesome end four months after his arrival. Despite the brevity of his career, a small sect of Objectionists still adhere to le Blanc's beliefs and have assumed the name "Blancests" in his memory.

Dozens of other sects have appeared and disappeared over the past century, some more noteworthy than others. The Glamour Isles in particular seem to have more than their fair share of offshoots, with each island having its own personalized denomination of prominence. One austere sect, known as Theites, fanatically observe the First Prophet's warnings against sorcery. They mercilessly condemn any hint of sorcery as well as any trappings associated with it. Over the years the definition of "sorcery" has grown to include wealth, colorful clothing, and dancing. The Theites lead a life of humble diligence meant to give them a deeper connection to Theus' creation, and perhaps it has. The magic of Glamour Mages rarely works in their presence, and the sheer strength of their faith has been known to cause intense discomfort to the Sidhe. The Theites see a very different version of the Triple Kingdoms than the rest of Théah, and their observations make them fiercely devoted to their beliefs. The majority of the island's people dislike their presence and they are frequently persecuted. Many within their small number have considered pooling their resources and settling somewhere across the sea to the west.

The Highland Marches hold many secrets, more than most people could ever guess. The Knights of the Rose and Cross have kept a veiled presence here for some time, and their proximity may have influenced the beliefs of an Objectionist sect known as the Apocryphasts. When the Third Prophet appeared in Castille, spreading his message of intolerance towards religions and beliefs different than his own, he also condemned dozens of books and religious texts the Church had previously considered canonical. The majority of these works were burned, but a few

survived through the ages. The Apocryphasts recovered some few of these books, and have integrated them into their belief system; and their research has led them to a disquieting conclusion: the Third Prophet was a charlatan. In four separate works, the Third Prophet is described as "One who shall reconcile the diversity of Theus' creation, unifying the distant faiths as a shepherd collects his flock." It takes a tremendous stretch of the imagination to believe that this was the goal of the Third Prophet revered by the Vaticines. Most scholars doubt the authenticity of the Apocryphasts' beloved texts, but that has not blunted their conviction that the world now awaits the arrival of the true Third Prophet, not the Fourth.

Finally, in Inismore, there is a group of scholars who regularly congregate in selected locations, study the Book of Prophets together, and then return to their normal lives for the rest of the week. While most Objectionists maintain similar habits, these are the only ones who conduct their ministries in absolute silence. Known as the Quiet Ones, they gather to read in private contemplation, never uttering a sound to one another, focusing solely on the power and wisdom of the Prophets' words. Then, one by one, they return from whence they came and dedicate the coming week to living whatever enlightenment they have received. The Quiet Ones have no recognized leader, and it is anyone's guess who founded their movement or when. Intrigued, the O'Bannon has attended their service on two separate occasions and each time left with only a headache to show for his efforts. Because they are so inobtrusive, the Quiet Ones are given free reign to do as they please. Still, most citizens prefer to stay away from them.

There is one additional Objectionist sect worth mentioning, a group that practices their unique beliefs high in the mountain range of La Sierra de Hierro in Castille. Under the spiritual guidance of the charismatic Jorge Vasquez de Grijalva, the *Seguidores Del Fuego* (Followers Of The Fire) have reconciled Lieber's teachings with a once-proud symbol of their Castillian heritage: the sorcery *El Fuego Adentro*. While Grijalva and his followers lack sorcerous ability of their own, they believe that fire, from simple sparks to lightning bolts to the Chamber of El Fuego Sagrado, is the ultimate representation of Theus. The majority of their religious rites incorporate fire in some form, including marriage and baptism — sometimes leading to disastrous results. The *Seguidores Del*



Celebration in Song

Mathias Lieber loved to raise his voice and sing of Theus' wisdom and glory. In his lifetime, he translated hundreds of Vaticine hymns into Low Eisen for his congregations to enjoy, and wrote several dozen new ones himself. An important part of Lieber's services occurred when everyone in attendance would stand and sing together, unifying not only in faith but harmony.

In the years since, the practice has become a tradition, and most Orthodox churches have a choir to lead everyone in song. The message and melodies of the hymns remain very popular, and people regularly practice and sing them outside of religious settings.

Fuego believe the Fourth Prophet will be able to transform himself into a being of pure flame and purify the world, and they fervently pray for his coming.

Objectionism Today

Despite the occasional off-shoots, the Objectionist Movement has remained largely unified, much more so than its early critics had predicted. Not surprisingly, its strongest support comes from the land of its origin, Eisen. The teachings of Mathias Lieber survived the War of the Cross, and may be a stable part of Eisen's national identity for centuries to come.

The young nation of Vendel has accepted the Objectionist faith as well, referring to those who practice it as "Liberans." During the War of the Cross, Vendel encouraged Objectionist refugees to settle in their developing country and, since then, the expatriates' have made numerous contributions to Vendel life. To acknowledge the role the Liberans have played in their nation's progress, the city of Kirk is currently constructing the largest Objectionist church in the world and naming it after the movement's founder.

The Highland Marches have also embraced the Objectionist Movement. The proud Highlanders had grown weary of the Vaticine Church centuries before the Objectionist movement began and were eager to accept the theology proposed by Lieber.

The other nations of Théah have yet to develop anything resembling these followings. Castille and Vodacce, the strongholds of Vaticine doctrine, have few Objectionists, if any. The nobility of Montaigne see little need for religion at all, but the peasants still cling to centuries of Vaticine tradition. The Vestenmannavnjar continue to put their faith in Grumfather and the Living Runes while Ussura and Avalon have their own recognized religions. Inismore and Avalon both tolerate Vaticines and Objectionists, though neither group feels entirely comfortable.

One new nation, however, has proven extraordinarily receptive to the Objectionists, a new country that gives its citizens the freedom to pursue Theus in whatever capacity they desire. *La Bucca*, known for its pirates and cutthroats, has seen Objectionist missionaries find willing listeners amongst its citizens, and it is one of the few places the hand of the Inquisition does not reach. Missionaries have sailed on several ships out of *la Bucca*, settling wherever Theus guides them.

One such place lies far to the southwest of Castille, near the equator in an area known as the Dead Tropics. The recently discovered island of Kanuba has a belief system that has remained unchanged for untold centuries. That has not stopped the Objectionists from trying to convert the natives. The islanders have been mostly amused by the Objectionists' attempts, but their amusement may soon come to an end. The Vaticine Church has learned of the valuable natural resources to be found on Kanuba and are preparing to send their own missionaries there to "save the savages from Legion's clutches." The Objectionists may find themselves allying with the pagan natives in order to keep their rivals from gaining a foothold there.

No matter what the future holds, the turbulent beginnings of the Objectionist Movement have given its current believers hope that they, too, can overcome obstacles in their spiritual path. Mathias Lieber is revered as a great spiritual leader. Out of the respect due to such an important figure, most of his teachings have remained unchanged. Lieber would still feel comfortable in an Objectionist religious service, but he would likely be surprised at how large his congregation has grown.

Beliefs

Because it began as an offshoot of an established religion, the beliefs professed by Objectionists remain quite similar to those of the Vaticine faith. The primary difference lies in the value of personal responsibility and the intervention of the Church as an arbiter between Theus and man.

Like the Vaticines, the Objectionists hold that Theus, the one true God, crafted the universe as an enigma for humanity to understand and that discovery tempered with faith is the only method to reach the ultimate solution. With each new piece of knowledge uncovered, mankind draws closer to understanding its creator.

The Objectionists have also adopted (at least in spirit) the six Articles of Faith that make up the Vaticine's credo. The actual interpretations differ a bit, especially concerning Article Two. For more information on the Vaticine interpretations of these articles, page 85 of the *Players' Handbook*.

Article One: One True God

As previously stated, Objectionists hold that Theus is the one true Creator and made all of the universe and everything in it. For the practitioner of the Objectionist faith, no other gods or powers exist before Theus. However, a small movement within the Church is beginning to question whether or not sorcery constitutes an action against Theus as the Vaticines maintain. Even though the First Prophet condemned the use of sorcery, a few scholars have begun to speculate that the condemnation was intended against how sorcery was used. For more information on the sorcery issue, see sidebar on page 48.

Article Two: One True Faith

Despite the growing external divisions in contemporary religion, the Objectionists believe that there is, in reality, only one Church comprised of all the believers who adhere the words of the Prophets. But the Objectionists also believe that only the Book Of The Prophets can determine doctrine and that they alone have returned to the pure teachings the Prophets intended, discarding hundreds of years of needless dogma.

Article Three: The First Prophet

The Objectionists recognize the legitimacy and importance of the First Prophet, following his



Vestments of the Objectionist Church

Like the Vaticine Church, leaders within the Objectionist Church wear vestments as part of their religious services. These distinctive garments are normally made from cotton cloth and are traditionally white or black in color, though a new trend varies the colors to reflect changes in the year. These colors range from shades of blue to green, purple, and even orange and red, corresponding to specific seasons of the church year or festival days. There are two designs for vestments, one specifically for Holy Communion and one for all other occasions.

During Holy Communion, the presiding Chaplain wears an alb (a long white linen robe with tapered sleeves), cincture (a belt or sash), stole (a long scarf, usually of embroidered silk or linen, worn over the left shoulder by Deacons and over both shoulders by Chaplains and Apostles), and chasuble (a long sleeveless vestment worn over the alb).

The second design is less formal, consisting of a black cassock (an ankle-length garment with a close-fitting waist and sleeves) and white surplice (a loose-fitting, white ecclesiastical gown with wide sleeves worn over the cassock). Chaplains do not regularly wear a stole during these services, but it has become more common in recent years. Although not officially considered vestments, some Apostles don copes (a long cloak) and occasionally carry crosiers (a staff adorned with a Prophets' Cross) when presiding over a church service as a sign of their office.

The exact cut and design of vestments differ from region to region, and they are not normally worn except when performing specific clerical duties. In day to day life, church leaders wear clothes appropriate to their location and lifestyle, though many wear a Prophets' Cross pendant or necklace as a sign of their faith.

example and teachings. They particularly cherish his words of tolerance and acceptance of one's fellow man, including those tainted by sorcery. The Objectionists believe that no soul is beyond Theus' love or salvation, a belief which has often



Mediators

Because they believe in conversion through example and not through force, Objectionists are often quite skilled in the arts of diplomacy and negotiation. These talents are frequently valuable outside of church settings, and the Objectionists are becoming known as impartial mediators from one end of Théah to the other. Some use the opportunity to bring opposing parties together in prayer or a better understanding of Theus' word, but most act without making religious overtures, letting the strength of their judgment and morals act as a window into their faith.

inspired them into acts of great charity. A founding principle of the Objectionists faith is to promote conversion through good examples, not through force.

Article Four: The Second Prophet

The Second Prophet is also revered, and his actions to thwart sorcery have given those who oppose it a strong argument. Sorcery's proponents, however, are quick to point out that the Prophet only had conflicts with those who opposed his mission. Also, because the Prophet came from the Empire of the Crescent Moon, many Objectionists feel that new bonds need to be established with the Crescent people in order to build a stronger spiritual brotherhood.

Article Five: The Third Prophet

The Third Prophet is shown proper respect, though his more violent aspects tend to be either downplayed or overlooked. Lieber found the Prophet's aggressiveness to be counter to the words of the first two Prophets, and determined that his actions be taken as literal interpretations of metaphorical truths. The Third Prophet lived in a tumultuous era and the Objectionists believe his examples should be admired, not duplicated.

Article Six: The Fourth Prophet

The Objectionists are seemingly divided over the Fourth Prophet. While all agree that the final Prophet will be a harbinger of the end of the world through a final battle with (and victory over) Legion, the question remains on how much

emphasis should be placed on that future date. Lieber felt that worrying over the inevitable was a distraction from the more pressing issues faced by the faithful every day, but many of his followers feel that preparing for the final conflict is the most important spiritual task they can undertake. As a result, the significance of the Fourth Prophet varies from church to church and congregation to congregation.

A Priesthood Of Believers

The most significant difference between the Objectionists and the Vaticines is the role played by the Church in the daily lives of its faithful. Like Arleigh Hess before him (*see page 45*), Lieber believed that all people who worship Theus and follow the teachings of the Prophets comprise a "priesthood of believers" and that clerical figures are not necessary for humanity to reach out and commune with the divine.

As the Book Of The Prophets states, "Only Theus can grant absolution from sins or give a troubled soul guidance." To Objectionists, this clearly indicates that mankind does not need an arbitrator to deal with its Creator. They hold that every human is intelligent enough to develop a personal relationship with Theus, and therefore capable of interpreting His will without aid from the Church.

Instead, the Objectionists believe that the Church exists to deliver the words of the Prophets to the masses, who can then interpret and use those words for their own spiritual growth. This is accomplished not only through the sermons delivered by Chaplains, but also in the translation and continuous publication of the Book Of The Prophets so that it may be read again and again for inspiration.

The Objectionist Church performs selected ceremonies and administers the sacraments, a still-important function prescribed by the Prophets themselves. Objectionists hold that a sacrament is an act ordained by Theus, connected to him through worldly elements. The Objectionists actually observe far fewer sacraments than those ordained by the Vaticines. In fact, only two have any real importance.

Sacraments

The Objectionists consider baptism and communion to be the only true sacraments, and officially refer to them as Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Holy Baptism takes place on a child's seventh birthday and marks his or her official entry into the faith. Unlike the Vaticines, Objectionist children do not need to pass an exam before having this sacrament administered. They need only make a statement of belief in Theus and the words of his chosen Prophets. The foundation for this sacrament comes from the scriptures describing how the Second Prophet "spiritually cleansed" his followers in a river before leading them on his last, fateful pilgrimage.

Holy Communion is sometimes known as "The Prophet's Supper" and finds its origins with the First Prophet. Before he journeyed into the city of Numa, he had a final evening meal with his retinue and told them that, even if something should happen to him, they should continue to meet and dine together in the years to come to celebrate the good news he had delivered unto them. Once a month, every Objectionist church has a communal meal for all its members and often extends an invitation to everyone else in the community to participate and help give thanks.

Ceremonies

Though less numerous than in the Vaticine tradition, ceremonies still play a part within the Objectionist Church. The three most important of these are ceremonies for ordainment, marriage, and funerals.

Ordainment ceremonies confer the official title of Chaplain upon a successful candidate. Because the Objectionists strongly concern themselves with understanding scripture, a candidate must first pass an oral exam. Lieber initially opposed this idea, saying that it granted too much authority to the Church. However, after encountering congregations led by illiterate people with no grasp of the Book Of The Prophets, he changed his mind. Exams are now given at Church-sponsored schools and universities, and the ordainment ceremony resembles a scholarly graduation exercise.

The marriage ceremony is a joyous occasion that celebrates the union of two people in a social contract with each other and Theus. Priding themselves on their forward thinking, the Objectionists have embraced the controversial idea of romantic love and encourages marriages of love in addition to the normal marriages for property. The couple commonly write their own vows while the Chaplain officiates and leads a prayer for long life and marital bliss.

Funeral ceremonies are somber events, at which the life of the deceased can be reflected upon with seriousness and respect. A Chaplain oversees the event, reading comforting passages of scripture that speak of the promised wonders of the afterlife. Objectionist funerals tend to focus more on the status of the bereaved than the deceased, since the departed soul now resides with Theus. The Highland Marches still adhere to the tradition of the wake, eschewing standard Objectionist gloom for a more boisterous observance of the deceased's passing.

Saints, Angels, and Miracles

Objectionists still recognize and venerate saints, especially those numbered among the early apostles. Saints are regarded as heroes and role-models, men and women who performed great feats in their lives (and regularly sacrificed their lives) to help others better understand Theus and His creation. Unlike the Vaticines, Objectionists do not believe the saints can intercede for people from the afterlife and, in the Church's history, no new saints have been canonized. It is doubtful that any will be any time soon, but no decree has been made that denies the Church authority to take such action.

Because they are mentioned in scripture, the Objectionists believe in the existence of angels. The Church believes them to be benevolent beings of pure spiritual energy that act as intermediaries between Theus and mankind. Judging by the tales found in scripture, angels mostly act as Theus' divine messengers, delivering words of hope and inspiration in times of trouble. There has been no scientific evidence of the existence of these celestial creatures, and most chaplains hold that faith must overrule proof in this case. When humanity discovers the true nature of Theus, so too will they learn the true nature of his angels.

The subject of miracles is a tricky one for Objectionists. After all, many sorceries yield fantastic results, and even members of the secretive Knights of the Rose and Cross accomplish miraculous actions. The Book Of The Prophets has many examples of miracles being performed, especially by the Prophets themselves, so Objectionism stipulates their existence. However, the Church does not claim the ability to bestow miracles itself. Miracles are considered spontaneous in origin and cannot be invoked. They are the deliberate workings of Theus and thus as rare as they are wonderful.

Science

In the quest to understand Theus' creation, the Objectionists continue to support and contribute to the scientific arts. Because of the Vaticine Church's restrictions on scientific learning and exploration, there will soon be more active scientists of the Objectionist faith than Vaticine.

The Objectionists point to Vaticine scientific persecution as evidence that the faith has made no effort to reform and is, in fact, further away from the Prophets' words than ever before. Objectionist churches often shield fugitive scientists and give them funding. After all, the Objectionists know all too well how it feels to be labeled a heretic.

Tomes

The Objectionists have done away with the Vaticine Book of Common Prayer, believing that only the Book Of The Prophets is necessary in determining Theus' will.

Lieber held that the sacred writings are truly the word of Theus through his Prophets, and therefore cannot mislead or deceive those who study them (as the Vaticine Church often claims). Time and again he avowed that only the words of the Prophets themselves were infallible, and that the Church, its priests, and even the Hierophant can and do make mistakes. Only the truths within the Book Of The Prophets can be counted upon for eternity, and those truths remain the same for every member of the faith to discover and interpret on his or her own.

There is another book Objectionists turn to for inspiration, but it has never been considered sacred or divine. Lieber himself originally penned it and it now bears the simple title of *Lieber's Book*. What started as a personal journal grew into a theological manifesto six hundred pages in length, detailing Lieber's personal views on Theus, the riddle of creation, organized religion, and other facets of the Objectionist Movement. Brimming with eloquent prose, it has been hailed as the work of a master by most of Théah, and the work of Legion by the Vaticine Church. The Hierophant declared ownership of a copy heretical shortly after its initial printing, but it has since become one of the most widely owned and read books in Théah.

Gender

Like the Vaticine, the Objectionists place no gender restrictions upon their clergy, believing that all of humanity is equal in the eyes of Theus. Many of the Prophets' apostles were female and a

few scholars speculate that the Fourth Prophet will likely be a woman.

Structure

When Lieber began writing his ninety-five questions, he knew that he was attacking the upper echelons of the Vaticine Church, not the average priest. The higher one rose in authority with the Church, the more chances arose for corruption. Lieber considered this an enormous problem and, when he began organizing his own faith, he took dramatic steps to resolve it.

One such step was not to have a specific center for the Church. As a result, the Objectionists are much more decentralized than the Vaticines. Where the Vaticines have a central location of authority (Vaticine City), the Objectionists have none. Instead, their Apostles (see below) convene every six months in a new, mutually agreed location. In the early days, this served more as a survival tactic than anything else. Without a base of operations, there was no direct target for the Vaticines to attack. In practice, it has proven useful to ensure that no one geographic area can dominate any of the others, enforcing the conviction that all members, regardless of their economic standing or geographic whereabouts, are equal in their faith.

Lieber believed that the actual organization within his Church should differ from the Vaticine as well. Keeping true to the message he preached, there are no Dioceses, no bishops or archbishops, and no Hierophant. The highest position obtainable for the Objectionists is called "Apostle," named in honor of the men and women who served the Prophets during their time in the world. Numbering a total of twenty-five, the Apostles serve roughly the same function as the college of Cardinals for the Vaticine, interpreting difficult pieces of scripture or deciding what policies the Church as a whole should adhere to. The Apostles' decrees are not mandatory, and many individual churches ignore them entirely. Unlike with the Vaticines, this is not heresy; the Objectionists consider it a divine right.

The Apostles are chosen through elections within the Church, held by the Deacons (see below). In theory, each of the twenty-five seats comes open once every four years (one year for each Prophet) but, in practice, most Apostles serve for life as no one else usually wants their jobs. If no candidate opposes the Apostle

currently in the seat, he is automatically renewed for another four years. Also, once every four years, the Apostles vote amongst themselves to elect a member to preside over all of their meetings. This position, commonly referred to as the "High Apostle," changes frequently. If the other Apostles do not approve of the work being done, they may remove a High Apostle by a simple vote of no-confidence. This has only happened twice in Church history (the first when an unusually aggressive High Apostle suggested collecting donations to pay mercenaries to attack Vaticine City, the second when a High Apostle wanted to do away with the Apostle position altogether). The High Apostle involves mostly public relations duties and occasional secretarial work. All Apostles are considered equal in the eyes of the Church, and the High Apostle's words and opinions carry no more weight than those of anyone else.

Since the Objectivist Movement has spread across Théah, almost every region is represented among the Apostles' numbers (with the exceptions of Ussura, Castille, and Vodacce.) Some areas, notably Eisen and Vendel, have more Apostles than others. However, even in these locations, they have radically reduced powers and responsibilities when compared to their Vaticine counterparts.

The number of Apostles per country currently breaks down into the following tally, with the newly elected High Apostle residing in Vendel.

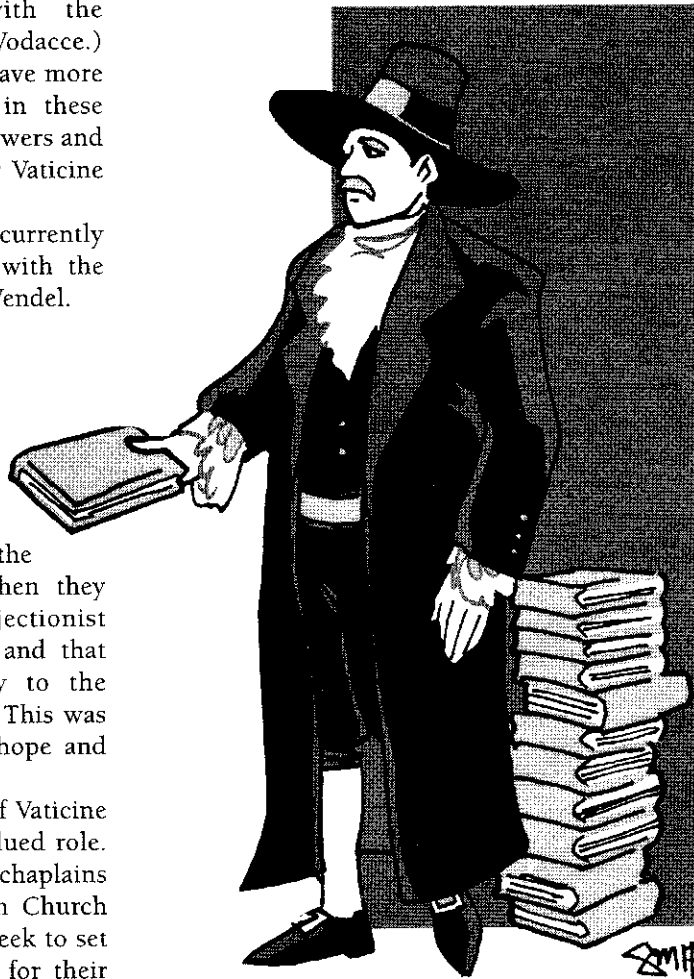
- Avalon - two
- Eisen - twelve
- Highland Marches - four
- Montaigne - one
- Vendel - six

Outsiders accustomed to the ways of the Vaticine Church are often puzzled when they learn that the majority of the Objectivist hegemony stems from the local level and that individual chaplains remain the key to the dissemination of the Objectivist faith. This was always Lieber's intention and greatest hope and has proven remarkably effective.

The chaplains act as the equivalent of Vaticine priests but play a noticeably more subdued role. As befits the Objectivist belief system, chaplains do not act as directly mediate between Church members and the divine. Instead, they seek to set an example with their own noble acts for their congregation to follow.

Chaplains typically hold only one religious service a week, usually on Soldi mornings. Unlike the Vaticine Mass, this service is always conducted in the native dialect and includes not only a selected reading from the Book of the Prophets but anecdotes of how a particular passage is relevant to the congregation. A few chaplains have become notorious for obsessive preaching about the arrival of the Fourth Prophet and the horrible punishments awaiting in the afterlife for those who ignore Theus' word, but the majority focus on the more mundane concerns of daily living to inspire their listeners.

Many chaplains follow other vocations as well, usually working in the fields of education or medicine. No matter what other position in life they fill, they (theoretically) work hard to act as good citizens and ideal Church members, hoping to inspire the people around them rather than forcibly convert them. Chaplains commonly volunteer for committees and review boards in



their communities, always aware that their actions (both good and ill) reflect directly upon the Church.

The Deacons reside between the Chaplains and the Apostles. They act as senior Chaplains whose job is to coordinate the actions of several churches. The average number is twenty, but the actual total may be greater or significantly smaller depending on the Deacon's location. A typical Deacon presides over his own church like a regular Chaplain, but he must also remain abreast of current events and be prepared to elect Apostles every four years. The majority of Apostles come from the ranks of Deacons simply because they have more practical experience than the typical Chaplain. This is not always the case, however, and several gifted and enthusiastic Chaplains have been elected Apostles without ever serving as Deacons.

Despite their limited powers and adherence to simplicity, Objectionist officials are as susceptible to corruption as their Vaticine counterparts. Every preacher holds a certain amount of power over their flock, and some unscrupulous chaplains have taken advantage of their position. However, thanks to Lieber's far-sighted policies, such corruption rarely causes as much damage as it might elsewhere.

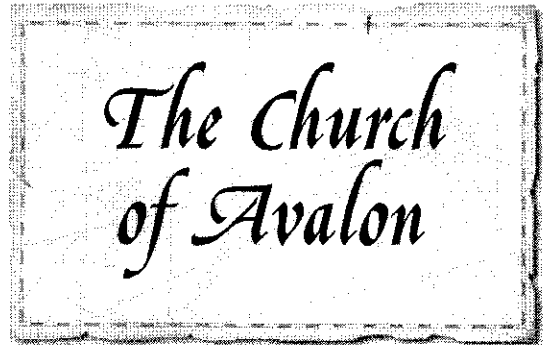
Churches

Most Objectionist churches are simple one-room buildings made of wood or other building materials common to the area. They adhere to plain designs, though a few are adorned with steeples or bell towers to designate their ecclesiastic purpose.

Typically, the interior of the church is as plain as the exterior. Rows of benches stand on either side of the aisle leading towards the chancel, where the altar is located. The Chaplain delivers services here, flanked by benches for the choir. The area also holds the sacristy, a small area where the vestments and hymnals are stored.

A particular type of structure has been developed by Objectionist missionaries among the Vestenmannavnjar. These are commonly called "stave churches," named for their unique construction technique which incorporates vertical posts resting on a foundation as the main support structure. Elaborate serpent heads and Prophets' Crosses decorate their exteriors, but there is little difference in the internal structure from the typical Objectionist church. Certain Vendel congregations have begun emulating this

design, as a way of keeping in touch with their roots.



The Church of Avalon represents a unique development: the creation of a new religious body through political, rather than theological reasons. Its creation has been sketched out in the *Avalon* book and earlier in this chapter. The true story, however, runs much deeper. Even before King Richard IV passed the Act of Supremacy, the Vaticine Diocese of Avalon had been the willful and stubborn child of Mother Church. To understand why, we must look far back into the history of the nation, and the Vaticine Church.

History

Joseph of Aremacady

In 305 Av, the Second Prophet appeared and began preaching separation from the corrupt secular world. While most of his faithful followed the Prophet into the Crescent wastes, one, Joseph of Aremacady (many scholars believe this was originally Giuseppe of Arene Candide, but there is little evidence one way or the other), decided that his calling lay in the farthest north, not the farthest south. He and a small band of converts undertook a long and difficult journey from present-day Vodacce to the isles of Avalon. Although the Emperor discouraged those who preached the words of the Second Prophet, Joseph found that on this island he was free to preach openly. He had also found a land seemingly free of the taint of sorcery. Unfortunately, the people of the land were not Vaticine. In fact, the majority of them did not even know who the First Prophet was, let alone the Second. Their religious figures were mysterious druids. Their gods were either

beings similar to the ancient Imperial gods, or simply powerful Sidhe.

Joseph did not immediately set out to convert the locals. He simply wanted a place to build a monastery and spend his days contemplating the divine. The message that he preached to his own followers, however, caught the ears of a number of Avalons. The druids were puzzled by the messages of the Prophets. On the one hand, Theus supported the learning of secrets, and understood that the world was a riddle to be solved. On the other, these priests would tell their secrets of divinity to any who asked, and were arrogant enough to think that one day they could solve the riddle of existence. The openness practiced by Joseph and his monks, such a contrast to the mysterious midnight rituals of the druids, was a new experience for many Avalons. Without abandoning their ties to the Sidhe, many commoners began to incorporate the teachings of Theus into their lives.

By the time Arthwrys was fighting his brothers for supremacy of the island, every town and most large villages had chapels to Theus. The Sidhe did not seem to mind these chapels, but also avoided them. The priests were truly Avalon as well, and honored the Sidhe as they had learned in their youth. Druids had waned in influence, becoming less religious, but wiser and more mysterious in the estimation of the populace. The Church, however, was not Vaticine. When Corantine had held his convention, no one had thought to invite the Avalon people. Their beliefs and rituals had grown out of a different tradition, and did not pay homage to the Hierophant. Though it espoused belief in Theus and His Prophets, it had little else in common with the religion practiced on the mainland.

Henri of Montaigne changed that when he changed the rest of Avalon history.

Vaticine Avalon

When the Montaigne conquered Avalon in 1028, they brought with them the faith of their fathers. The priests that followed the new nobles were not kind to the native clergy. They quickly deposed the existing holy men and set themselves up in the ruling positions, with the blessing of the Hierophant. However, not enough priests were interested in moving to the wild northern islands, so many local priests retained their churches. Though the new regime outlawed many long-standing traditions, the Avalon people remained stubborn.

The priests in charge of the local congregations were responsible for selecting promising young men and women to attend seminary. Through these and similar channels, the old beliefs and systems stayed alive despite official oppression. Eventually, of course, the original Montaigne invaders slowly integrated with the dominant culture. In only a few decades, the Archdiocese of Avalon regained much of its old flavor while still paying lip service to the Hierophant.

For the centuries under Montaigne rule, Avalon became a powerful and populous Diocese. However, they never quite integrated into the rest of the Church. Local priests would refuse to denounce the Sidhe, even though it appeared that that had vanished forever. The Bishops and Cardinal were treated as backwater politicians, and rarely did much to influence the Hieros as a whole. They became known as stubborn reactionaries who had to have every Hieratic decree shoved down their throats. It was not a reputation they much minded.

A few significant events took place during this period of history. Harold Guisard, who served as Archbishop in the mid 12th century, traded on his family's noble name and connection with Queen Eleanor to effectively buy his position. However, that was not enough for the ambitious nobleman. He promptly turned on his benefactress, working with King Charles to have her declared a traitor. He spent the entirety of Charles' reign as little more than a puppet of the King. When Charles was deposed, Guisard was exposed as a tyrant. A unanimous vote of the bishops stripped Guisard of his office, and defrocked him. The King then arrested him on charges of treason, and he was hanged from the same gallows that had seen Eleanor's death. For more information, see pages 15-16 of the *Avalon* book.

In 1457, Thomas Cranmer became Bishop of Camlann. He had become abbot of his monastery only two years earlier, but his piety was evident to everyone. Unfortunately, his piety also served as his downfall. As the war between the Camlanns and the Lovaines began, the Duke of Camlann asked Cranmer to preach against his rival, the Duke of Lovaine. Cranmer decided that Lovaine was a pious and good man, however, and refused to speak against him.

The Duke of Camlann was outraged that "his" Bishop would refuse him over something so simple. He raged and screamed at Cranmer's "treasonous" behavior, promising great rewards to anyone who brought him the bishop's head. Two

of his men-at-arms promptly went to the Cathedral of Bedegrane. Cranmer was praying before the altar. The soldiers waited for him to finish, then killed him as he left the sanctuary. They returned to the Duke with Cranmer's head in a bag, expecting to be richly rewarded,

By then, however, their lord had calmed down and was horrified at what they had done. Despite their differences, the Duke considered Cranmer a great man and a friend. He ordered the soldiers arrested, but could not bring himself to order their deaths, since he himself was responsible for the turn of events. In an attempt to expiate his sins, he honored Cranmer throughout the land. He built a new cathedral in Bedegrane, dedicated to Cranmer, and had the bishop buried under the altar. He also financed a campaign to have Cranmer canonized, and his efforts ultimately bore fruit. To this day, the tomb of St. Thomas Cranmer of Bedegrane is a site for pilgrims looking to find the solution to a difficult decision.

The Act of Supremacy

When Richard IV assumed the throne in 1614, he hoped to bring the Archdiocese of Avalon more in line with the heart of the Vaticine Church. He radically increased the communication between Kirkenwood, where Cardinal Guilbert resided, and Vaticine City. The Cardinal, however, was not particularly pleased by Richard's activities. He had grown quite used to the idea of Avalon running itself with minimal outside influence, and argued with the King quite often about allowing the Hierophant to influence matters in his kingdom. Perhaps it was he who planted the seed for the King's radical act of secession.

King Richard IV desperately needed an heir. As a student of Avalon's kings, he had seen what happened whenever a strong king died: either a weak heir would invite political mischief or a question of succession would tear the nation apart. He wanted to raise a brilliant and noble son, one who could keep Avalon strong after his death. Unfortunately, he had yet to sire such a son, and was watching his best years slowly slip away. Obviously, he needed a new wife. He wrote to the Hierophant, seeking special dispensation in the name of Avalon's future. The Hierophant, however, denied his request. King Richard, outraged, passed the Act of Supremacy, declaring himself the Hierophant of the Church of Avalon. His first act was, naturally, to grant himself special dispensation for the divorce.

This act of defiance and separation shocked many and frightened the majority of the populace. Certain that they were going to be excommunicated for such audacity, they turned to their priests for guidance. The priests, however, had already turned to their Cardinal. This position could not have been better for Guilbert, who could now shape the Church of Avalon. He publicly supported the King's Act, and wrote many letters to his bishops explaining the theological justifications for his position. As a further demonstration of his support, he set aside the title of Cardinal, taking the title of Archbishop instead.

The Church of Avalon was born in defiance and desperation, but it quickly solidified into a strong institution. Richard had honestly expected that Avalon would return to the Hierophant in time. However, events and Cardinal Guilbert worked against him. The Hierophant decried the one time "defender of the faith," and excommunicated the king. Richard still had difficulty siring a son, and couldn't return to the Vaticine faith until he had a proper heir.

Most importantly, however, Cardinal Guilbert worked hard to unify the new Church of Avalon, making changes that would never have been allowed by Vaticine City. He started adopting elements of Objectionism into the 'new faith.' He commissioned translations of the Book of the Prophets into Avalon, so that the common people could read and understand it. He worked to clean up the Vaticine canon, eliminating a number of outdated laws and edicts which were inappropriate for Avalon. He also began streamlining the bureaucracy of the Church, simplifying the relationships and obligations between its various elements.

Margaret and Elaine

When Richard died, his daughter "Iron Queen" Margaret took the throne. At first, she looked like she would undo the Act of Supremacy when she first took power. However, she never did. She did affirm that Avalon was still faithful to the ideals of the Vaticine Church, but did find it necessary to give up the power fate had handed her. As the head of the Church of Avalon, she could use not only Church resources, but also her own armies to ferret out Objectionists and heretics. She also attempted to use the Church as a lever against the Highland Marches and Inismore. Unfortunately for her, neither kingdom took religion as seriously as she did. They



The Prophet's Prayer

The Ussuran Orthodoxy has dozens of prayers that are memorized by the faithful. Of these, the Prophet's Prayer is the most commonly recited. It is incredibly short, consisting of seven simple words:

"Oh Prophet, share your wisdom with me."

The faithful recite the prayer during times of trouble, repeating them over and over as rapidly as possible. In essence, the words act as a form of meditation, clearing the faithful's mind to permit more focused thinking.

Over the centuries, the Prophet's Prayer has become so ingrained in the Ussuran culture that natives commonly utter them out of exasperation.

alternated between paying her lip service and defying her outright. However, the Church of Avalon saw opportunities within the strife of the Queen's rule. A number of old Vaticine sanctuaries were re-opened during this time under the auspices of Guilbert (who ended his life, and hence, his term, under Margaret's rule). The Church had gained footholds which it would not soon relinquish.

Margaret's reign was a difficult time for the fledgling Church, but she did grant them a number of powers that they have since used to strengthen their position. Priests could now act as royal judges in rural areas. Indeed, for a brief time priests answered only to the Queen, but a series of acts in Parliament curtailed that license. Church lands were considered royal property, and hence exempt from taxation by local nobles. However, the bishops also had to work very hard to thwart Margaret's attempts to instigate her own Inquisition. The priests also frequently fought against their new status as agents of the Queen, seeing it as a distraction from their duties to Theus. Fortunately, the Church continued to move forward as a single institution, and resisted fragmenting over politics and beliefs.

The return of Elaine and the Graal, however, truly seemed to solidify the Church. The new Archbishop of Kirkenwood, Peter des Roches, had ascended to his title after Guilbert. Margaret's death in 1654 had sparked an internal war for succession, which appalled des Roches to no end.

Any hope of ending it quickly and peacefully seemed to lie with Elaine. So when she took the throne, des Roches was one of the first men to drink from the Graal, pledging his allegiance to her cause. As has been the case in the past, the priests and bishops fell right in behind their Archbishop.

The past two years have seen a flowering of tolerance in the Church. Avalon priests have honored the Sidhe by officially accepting Glamour has as "a part of Theus' puzzle" rather than sorcery. They have made overtures to the Objectionists in the Highland Marches to see if they can unify the two faiths. Archbishop des Roches has issued a writ specifically condemning the acts of Verdugo and his Inquisition. The universities of Avalon, still sponsored by the Church, have welcomed many scholars fleeing persecution elsewhere.

The Modern Church of Avalon

Theologically, the Church of Avalon falls somewhere between the Vaticine Church and the Objectionists. Much of their liturgy continues to follow Castillian tenets, though it's less theatrical. They continue to use both the Four Vigils and the Book of Common Prayer. However, they have relaxed a number of Church laws that they felt were inappropriate. They have translated the Book of the Prophets into Avalon, and most services are held in that language. Elaine has also commissioned a translation of the Word into Cymric, but that has not yet been completed.

The hierarchy of the Church has been simplified, in a way similar to the Objectionists. Each individual church has a priest. Parishes no longer exist. Each county has become a diocese, with its own bishop. The whole of the Highland Marches comprises a single diocese, since most churches there are Objectionist. Inismore, as yet, does not even rate a diocese (see below for more information on the religious state of Inismore). The eight bishops answer to the Archbishop of Kirkenwood, who is elected from their ranks. The Archbishop answers only to the Queen in matters of religion, and Elaine, in her usual political style, has given the Archbishop free rein in most matters.

The priests have begun to support Elaine directly through her Knights. In the Age of



The Prophet's Cross

At first glance, it may appear that the Ussuran Orthodoxy incorporates the same symbol into its theological practices as the other major religions of Théah: The Prophets' Cross. In truth, the item is both the same and completely different. In Ussura, it takes the singular possession, becoming the Prophet's Cross.

Hallowed Convention maintains that the Prophet designed the cross as a teaching aid for his followers. As such, the Orthodoxy made certain to incorporate it into their own religious practices.

Over time, the image has come to symbolize the Prophet himself. The base of cross represents his time on Terra, and the left and right branches portray the physical and spiritual aspects of his message. The arch connecting the left and right branches is emblematic of Theus, from whom the message originated.

Any outsider who wishes to remain in good standing with members of the Church should never confuse the symbol with its Vaticine and Objectionist counterparts. It is a touchy subject.

Chivalry, knights were known for their piety. Archbishop des Roches wants to make sure that this current revival holds to these standards. He initially offered to have a priest bless each of the Knights' missions. It has now become more than tradition and several of the Knights will refuse to set off until they have seen a priest. Des Roches has also personally spoken to Lawrence Lugh several times about his problems, but Lugh decided that the laws of the Prophets were too confusing to truly guide him.

Faithful followers of the Church of Avalon simply consider themselves "Vaticine without all the bother." Centuries of additions to liturgy, canon, and observances have created a very complex system for a Vaticine to follow. Avalon has stripped the Church back down to its essentials. Mass is referred to simply as Communion, and only takes place on feast days, rather than every day. The saints' days are barely acknowledged. Church law now mostly consists

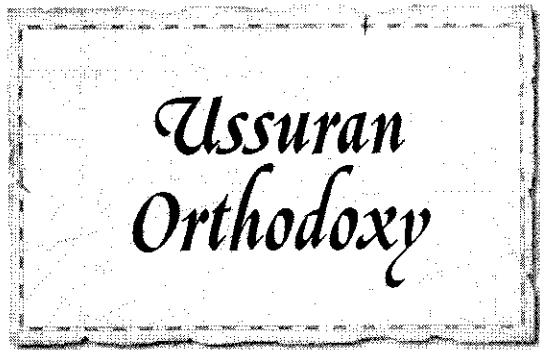
of simply the Third Vigil and a set of rules for the internal bureaucracy of the Church. The sacrament of confession has been set aside in many areas. The Church has become a much more comfortable place for the pragmatic people of its congregation.

The Highland Marches and Inismore

The Highland Marches continue to be primarily Objectionist. A few priests of Avalon, however, hold services on the island. These are frequently more Vaticine in temperament than their counterparts in Avalon proper, as their congregations are often specifically attempting to get away from Objectionism. Their most important message, however, is one of national pride. The priests support both MacDuff and Elaine, and work to strongly encourage cooperation and friendship between the two nations. The Bishop of the Marches has had many meetings with prominent leaders of the Objectionist faith, including the MacDuff himself, in an attempt to bring the Objectionists into the Church of Avalon. After seeing what divisiveness did to Eisen, the Bishop wants to see what fellowship can bring to the Triple Kingdoms.

Inismore is a divided land, from a religious point of view. Most of the populace honestly couldn't care less how they worship Theus. They simply revere him. At least, most of them do. Many of the more remote villages in Inismore continue to worship the old gods, particularly since the return of the O'Bannon. The cities tend toward Objectionism, rejecting the Church of Avalon because of the name more than anything else. The O'Tooles, however, have brought the Vaticine faith back to the island. After all, any group who is against Glamour, the Sidhe, and Queen Elaine (if only in her position as head of the Church of Avalon) is a friend of the O'Tooles. Several churches have recently been re-dedicated to the Vaticine faith, and rumors swirl of Inquisitors spotted on the streets of Lochcuan.





Ussuran Orthodoxy has recently been covered in that nation's sourcebook. What follows is a more complete look at the first religious institution to break from the Vaticine church.

History

After the death of the First Prophet, the mighty Numan Empire continued to thrive. It spread its trade relations into the frozen realm of Ussura to the north, and its traders brought their new religion, the beginnings of the Vaticine Church, with them. The Ussuran people proved quite receptive to the teachings of the Prophet, and even the land itself seemed to welcome those who came in his name.

In a short matter of time, the Ussurans began to spread regionalized tales the Prophet's deeds, but one story in particular captured their imaginations. Local legend held that the Prophet had visited Ussura before his journey into the Numan capital. In the deepest forest he found a dark cave protected by Matushka's animal guardians. He defeated each one in turn and made his way deep underground into Matushka's bower, confronting her at last. Though the nature of their conversation has been lost over time, it was supposedly the Prophet's visit which caused Matushka to awaken and cast her magical blessing over the people.

When the leaders of the Church learned of this story, they took great measures to ensure it was not considered canonical. After all, the Prophet had spoken against sorcery and any other gods or powers. If Matushka was not a god, she was certainly a power, and the Church leaders could not believe that the Prophet would have any dealings with a force outside of Theus. They regarded the Ussuran tale as nothing more than folklore and sent a decree to the churches in Ussura to officially say so. The Ussurans ignored

the decree and it soon became clear that a separation of faith between the two factions was inevitable.

The actual catalyst came with the arrival of a dark man from the burning sands of the Crescent Empire. While the Church leaders in Numa hailed him as the Second Prophet, the Ussurans refused to acknowledge him as such. They believed that when the First Prophet spoke of "those to come," it was not to be taken as the literal arrival of more Prophets. Instead, they felt the phrase described the spread of the Prophet's message from one generation of believers to the next. The man claiming to be the Second Prophet was clearly a charlatan and, when his teachings and beliefs began to merge with the First Prophet's, the Ussuran churches united and rejected the Vaticine Credo of 325. They would continue with their own true faith while the rest of the world fell into Legion's clutches.

The united Ussuran churches began to refer to themselves as Orthodox, literally meaning "right worship" or "right teaching." The Ussuran bishops elected a Patriarch among themselves to fill the void left by the corrupt Hierophant in Numa. His name was Illarion Belafustus Pscov, but he changed that to Innocent the First as an expression of the rebirth taking place for his beloved faith. The Vaticines were not pleased with this turn of events and formed an army to either bring the Ussuran dissidents back into the Church or destroy them. As would become a familiar story in the centuries to come, the land's unforgiving weather and terrain made short work of the soldiers, leaving the Ussurans to develop their theology in peace.

The first decree of the Patriarch was to compile all of the writings of the Prophet's Nine Witnesses into a single, unedited volume. This book became known as the Orthodox Canon of the Prophet, and has never been changed or updated in any fashion since its initial assembly. The Patriarch then set up the Orthodox hierarchy which, too, has remained unchallenged and unaltered since its creation.

Other new traditions began to form within the Orthodox Church as well, including more stories of the Prophet's travels into Ussura, the tale of Tobias the Meek's betrayal of the Prophet (a radical departure from the Vaticine point of view), and the legend of Legion's Prophet (known as the Fourth Prophet within the Vaticine Church). As it learned about them, the Vaticine Church condemned each of these wild deviations as a new



apostasy. However, it took no physical action against the crimes, lest Ussura's aberrant weather consume even more faithful soldiers. Instead, the Orthodox and Vaticine leaders sent angry letters back and forth for centuries, each charging the other with heresy. Not surprisingly, both side disregarded their opponents' accusations.

Believing in the Prophet's declaration that all of creation was Theus' riddle to humanity, the Orthodoxy used its resources to build lavish churches, cathedrals, and monasteries that catered to its followers' spiritual and educational needs. Unlike other parts of Théah, the Ussurans already possessed an innate connection with the natural world around them, so their educational focus quickly shifted from scientific research to recording and chronicling historical events. Monks translated famous and influential works of literature from across Théah, expanding their world-view after centuries of geographic isolation.

Like the rest of Ussura, the Orthodox Church has a timeless quality. It has remained in true to the tenets of its original formation and, contrary to the troubles and transformations within the Vaticine faith, no one has seen the need to reform or change it. It has proven a unifying force among the diverse cultures that make Ussura their home, bringing people of vastly different origins together under one belief system.

The Orthodoxy's centuries of prosperity are taken as distinct proof that Matushka sanctions the institution in her lands, and that endorsement alone has converted as many skeptics over the years as the actual words of the Prophet. Today, the majority of Ussura's

citizens devoutly follow the Orthodox ways. As the current Patriarch, Iurii The Benevolent has declared, "To be Ussuran is to be Orthodox."

Beliefs

The basis of faith for the Orthodox Church stems from two sources: the Orthodox Canon of the True Prophet, and the unwritten accounts of the Prophet's words and deeds (along with the traditions that have sprung up around them). As the Orthodox clergy has always been eager to point out, the accounts of the Nine Witnesses were Hallowed Convention until their own followers at last documented them.

Just because something is not written does not make it any less true.

Matushka, Sorcery, and the Old Ways

As Matushka's presence can be felt upon the fringes of daily life in Ussura, so can it be felt upon the fringes of the Orthodoxy. The Prophet's message of revering the creation of Theus takes on new meaning in the frozen wastes. When one seeks to understand the design of the natural world, that means understanding the force that is Matushka. To respect Matushka is to respect the natural world, which is what the Prophet commanded.

Hallowed Convention holds that Matushka converted during the discussion with the Prophet deep in her cave. The proof of her conversion was her bestowment of the gift of Pyeryem upon the Ussuran people, sharing a secret of Theus' creation that no other group in Théah has yet to learn (or likely ever will). Because of this notion, Orthodoxy does not consider Pyeryem a form of sorcery. Clerics have long maintained that it is no more sorcerous for a practitioner of Pyeryem to dramatically change form than for the land to dramatically change seasons. Both are wonders of nature.

However, this leniency does not extend to magics of other regions. The Prophet spoke plainly against the evil of sorcery and was eventually murdered by its vicious practitioners. Under no circumstances would the Orthodoxy condone powers as vile as Porté or Sorte (though they reserve judgment on Glamour and Lærdom). These and the other dark arts are considered anathema.

Besides Pyeryem, many of the old ways in Ussura have filtered through Hallowed

Convention into new, more acceptable forms. Ancient gods and nature spirits have changed through the ages into saints and angels, and now hold revered positions in the Orthodox order.

Prayer and Fasting

The Orthodoxy teaches that mankind may communicate directly with Theus, but the process is not meant to be an easy one.

Prayer is the first step in reaching toward the divine. The Orthodox Canon of the Prophet reveals that Theus is omnipotent, seeing and knowing all of the thoughts and actions taken by mankind. Therefore, it is impossible in prayer to inform Theus of something He did not already know (e.g. my daughter is sick and needs to be healed). Instead, prayer is meant to show humility and subservience to Theus' infinite wisdom, to open the heart and mind so that He might present the solution or resolution sought.

The Orthodox faithful can also fast to open communications with Theus. They consider this practice a physical extension of prayer, a biological representation of the believer's temperance and dedication. Together, these spiritual and physical components guarantee the blessing, enlightenment, and benediction the troubled soul has been longing for.

Sacraments

While many special rites and ceremonies exist within the Orthodox Church, only seven are recognized as sacraments. These sacraments find their origin in both the Orthodox Canon of the Prophet and Hallowed Convention. In no particular order the sacraments are baptism, chrismation, anointing of the sick, eucharist, holy orders (taking priestly vows), marriage, and confession.

Baptism marks one's entry into the Orthodox faith. Every child must be baptized within forty days of his or her birth and during the rite, is completely submerged. Any converts to the Orthodoxy must be baptized as well.

Chrismation is the act of applying chrim (consecrated oil) to the faithful in the sign of the Prophet's Cross and is a part of the baptism service and other holy events.

When a person is sick and all other medical options have been exhausted, a priest will anoint them with sacred oils in order to give the soul the strength needed to depart the mortal realm or cause the body to recover.

The eucharist ceremony recalls the Prophet's final hours spent with his followers and the words and duties he charged them with.

Holy orders come only after a candidate has been spiritually cleansed through months of intense prayer and fasting. Like other faiths, an aspiring priest never enters into holy vows lightly, and to break them is to break a personal contract with Theus.

Similarly, marriage vows hold weighty implications among the Orthodox. Marriage is a symbol of the unity of Theus' creation, and can rarely be revoked once they have been taken. No one who divorces his or her spouse may ever enter the clergy in any official capacity.

Lastly, the sacrament of confession exists to absolve the faithful of their sins. Confession within the Orthodoxy differs from the Vaticine practice in that, before actually confessing, the penitent must fast for three days, subsisting only on bread and water. The priest administering confession does not require as many specifics as in the Vaticine Church and, once the believer has been absolved, he or she makes a display of faith by kissing the Prophet's Cross and the Orthodox Canon of the Prophet.

Tobias the Betrayer

Both the Vaticines and the Orthodoxy agree that a man named Tobias paid a visit to the Prophet in his cell as he awaited his execution. The Vaticine maintains that the Prophet told him

of three additional servants of Theus that would follow in his wake, three more Prophets with their own messages and duties to perform for the good of mankind. The Orthodoxy believes this to be a lie.

Though called "Tobias the Meek" by the Vaticines, he is known as "Tobias the Betrayer" to the Orthodox faith. In fact, they consider Tobias an agent of the sorcerous Senators, charged with distorting the Prophet's true message. It was he who ensured that the Prophet would burn for his words. Because the church rejects the lies of Tobias, the Ussuran Orthodox Church knows itself to be the only bastion of the Prophet's truth, and the only hope the world has against Legion's Prophet.

Legion's Prophet

In the Orthodox tradition, there are no True Prophets beyond the First. The additional prophets revered by other faiths are false, and none more so than the one believed yet to come.

The Orthodoxy refers to the Fourth Prophet of the Vaticine Church as Legion's Prophet, the harbinger of the end of the world and the ultimate destruction of mankind. When he comes to power, he will unleash all of Legion's dark forces against humanity. The Prophet's armies will particularly attack those who have known and praised the truth of Theus' only True Prophet. The Vaticine Church will become the tool of Legion, and will spread terror and suffering. After hearing



tales of the crimes perpetuated by the Inquisition, most believe the day of the final conflict is imminent.

Orthodox scholars continually comb through ancient texts, searching for clues and signs of when and where Legion's Prophet may appear. Many brave souls within the Orthodoxy have dedicated their lives to preventing any of these prophecies from coming to pass.

Structure

The structure of the Orthodox clergy is almost as complex and baffling to those who belong to it as it is to outsiders. Centuries of differing interpretations of Hallowed Convention and tradition has created an intricate and sometimes contradictory configuration where no clear chain of command exists.

Despite the perplexing orders and ranks involved, two distinct camps have emerged within the Orthodoxy that clerics may belong to: the black clergy or the white clergy (each so named because of the color of the frocks worn by its members). Most of the titles and positions involved with both groups match their Vaticine counterparts.

The white clergy consist of priests, deacons (who assist the priest with various rites) and lesser church positions. Convention maintains that priests and deacons must be married, but can only marry once. If the spouse dies, the survivor customarily enters a nunnery or monastery. The highest position a priest may hold is called *protoerej*, charged with overseeing the clergy of an extended area.

Those wishing to advance into the Church's upper echelons must belong to the black clergy. The least influential position within this category is that of monk or nun. Monks and nuns live by the rigid standards set by Saint Ascanius, considered the spiritual father of Orthodox monasticism. Above the monks and nuns stand the priors and abbots, culminating with bishop. Only after reaching the rank of bishop may ecclesiastics be enthroned as archbishops and eventually pontiffs (the Orthodox equivalent of cardinals). Above the pontiffs stands the Patriarch, the spiritual leader of the Orthodoxy.

The Church divides the great expanse of Ussura into forty separate dioceses, each managed by a consistory of clerical figures and one layman who is elected into a secretarial position.

Churches

The churches of the Orthodoxy borrow heavily from Vaticine architectural advances, but maintain a unique style. The most distinguishing feature is the use of onion-shaped domes upon church roofs. Most church buildings have a large dome in the center, surrounded by four smaller domes in each of the corners.

The inside of the church is traditionally filled with tapestries and statues of saints, the Prophet, and even Matushka. The altar is lavishly decorated. Surrounding the area are sepulchers and dozens of incense burning braziers. Few Orthodoxy churches contain pews or benches, since the congregation alternatively stands and kneels during various parts of the Mass or prayer.

Vestments

The vestments of the Orthodoxy are beautiful and richly decorated, often superior in quality and appearance to those of the Vaticine Church. Common materials for vestments are silk, brocade, and velvet, though many styles incorporate wool and fur for colder climes.

All priest's vestments consist of the following and must be worn during all religious services:

- Under Chasuble — a long, sleeveless, and round mantle
- Epimanika — cuffs
- Zones — belts
- Epitrachelion — stole
- Cudgel — a small, one-handed staff
- Skufia — a small, pointed hat
- Phelonion — a sleeveless garment, short in front with an elongated back and an opening for the head. The Phelonion is one of the most ancient vestments of the Church, symbolizing the seamless coat worn by the Prophet.

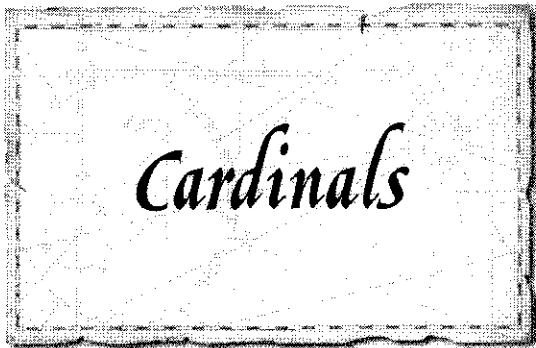
In addition to the above material, a bishop must wear a saxos (akin to the Vaticine and Objectionist alb), omophorion (a circular band worn about the neck, chest, and shoulders), and miter (a type of turban ornamented with brocade fabric, icons at the four corners, and a Prophet's cross on the top).

When adorned in these vestments, the clergy customarily recite relevant short verses from the Orthodox Canon of the Prophet and kiss the embroidered Prophet's Crosses.



Chapter Two

The Faithful



Cardinal Tomás Balcones

Cardinal Balcones is a man who practices what he preaches. He sees himself less as a spiritual leader than as a teacher, someone to help the masses understand the meaning behind Theus' creation. Of course he knows he is no closer to a definitive answer than anyone else, but that does not dissuade him from living as the Prophets instructed or setting a positive example for others to follow.

Born into a family of minor Castillian nobles, Balcones loved to explore his father's rancho, keeping a detailed journal of sketches and notes on the different aspects of nature he observed. He especially loved to study birds, watching them soar high into the heavens. To his young mind they were angels in disguise, singing praise to Theus and watching over all the lands and creatures He created. These amateur efforts in ornithology earned him a chance to study at la Universidad de San Cristobal, a chance he could not afford to pass up.

He was admitted at the age of fourteen, one of the youngest students in the university's esteemed history. A few of his professors deemed his questions and theories more whimsical than scientific, but others were inspired by his fresh interpretations of old notions. He clearly had a knack for balancing reason and empirical evidence with an equal amount of faith, and the priesthood was an obvious occupation in which he could nurture his gift. He was ordained by the age of seventeen and began leading his own parish only a year later.

Balcones brought his love of learning to his parishioners, helping start a library in his church's annex and personally tutoring the children of those families who could not afford a formal education. He often performed Mass outside of the church, in secluded areas that allowed his eager congregation to experience their Creator's glory rather than simply hear of it. His busy schedule did not permit him to enjoy a personal life, but the young man never noticed. The Bishop was impressed with his tireless work and eventually moved him to the cathedral back in San Cristobal.

To the surprise of no one, Balcones rapidly rose through the stations at the cathedral, becoming a favorite among the congregation. The attendance of the masses he conducted often exceeded those led by the Bishop, a fact his superior took note of. Instead of being envious, however, the elder man actually came to Balcones for advice, which the humble priest delivered with his usual combination of modesty and enthusiasm.

While in San Cristobal, Balcones continued his personal outreach to the community. He spent time with the sick and the poor, always providing words of inspiration with a kind smile. He also began a tradition of visiting prisoners, hoping to reach their troubled souls and set them on a



Cardinal Tomás Balcones

higher path. His efforts won many new converts to the Church and Balcones even more recognition. The Hierophant personally nominated him for a Cardinal's position, and his election was unopposed.

After moving to Vaticine City, Balcones altered his extracurricular activities to include a professorship at the famed *la Academia de Ciencia del Profeta y Salvador*. His efforts shielded these hallowed halls of learning from the wrath of the Inquisition, earning him the wrath of his fellow Cardinal, *Ésteban Verdugo*. For the first time in his life, Balcones had made an enemy, and the two have been adversaries since.

Balcones knows he has a powerful foe in the Inquisition but will not allow himself to be intimidated. Instead, he has turned to scripture, studying how each of the Prophets dealt with their own seemingly insurmountable problems. To be on the safe side, however, he has employed a personal bodyguard to watch his back.

The stress of dealing with the changing politics within the Church has aged Balcones, and he is much more nervous now than in years past. He still finds the time to reach out to the people and be a positive example. He is loved by thousands, a fact that has kept him safe from harm so far.

Cardinal Sergio Bilardo

Bilardo is the oldest of the Vaticine Cardinals and fondly remembers the predecessors of every other Cardinal currently serving with him. He remembers the election of the previous Hierophant and how he personally had another candidate in mind for the position. He remembers the beginnings of the unfortunate conflict in Eisen, of how the upstart Objectionists had forced the Church's hand. He remembers the past very well — it's the present he has a hard time focusing on.

Bilardo's first memories are of Saint Torchia's Home For Children, a Church-funded orphanage in Numa. His surname comes from *Agusto Bilardo*, a valiant *Vodacce* crusader who perished deep within the *Crescent Empire* while defending a holy relic. He was not an athletic or scholarly child, but the boy did have one redeeming quality. When he sang, Bilardo had the voice of an angel, and Father Yannone, the director of the orphanage, made sure the talent did not go to waste.

Believing that idle moments allowed Legion to put his plans into motion, Father Yannone kept young Bilardo continually occupied. When he wasn't rehearsing new hymnals, he served as an alter boy, laundered vestments, swept belfries, and dusted libraries. At first it seemed as if the boy would simply be happy as a Church laborer for the rest of his life. However, as he grew older, he began to learn the meanings of the lyrics he had memorized and was moved by their messages. By the time he entered adolescence (and had his voice drop an octave), Bilardo felt that *Theus* wished him to enter the priesthood. Father Yannone was pleased and made all the proper arrangements.

Bilardo received his ordainment in the autumn before the War of the Cross ignited. Idealistic to a fault, he requested a post in Eisen to "win back *Theus*' lost children." But what began as a mission of hope rapidly spiraled downward into an assignment of horrors. In less than a year, Bilardo went from delivering messages of reconciliation and unity to delivering last rites. Although the fighting, death, and carnage grew more horrible by the week, the priest somehow found the strength to hang on to both his faith and sanity. Those around him admired his resolve, which proved to be a great source of comfort and strength. If anyone ever questioned the ideals being fought for, they could look to Bilardo for a clear reminder.

In time, Bilardo came to realize that the hostilities were at a stalemate and that continued fighting would only lead to more death. He made a personal appeal to the Emperor and several Objectivist leaders to find some grounds for mediation, but no one wished to hear his words of peace. Discouraged, he returned to his native Vodacce after an absence of almost fifteen years.

Bilardo took an assignment at the cathedral at Sant'Andrea in Lucani, but visions of the war in Eisen still haunted him. Remembering how Father Yannone had told him to always stay busy, he became an avid reader in his spare time and soon grew enamored with the written word. Never interested in erudite pursuits before, he now found comfort in learning of Théah's past and discovered many trends and patterns that echoed current woes. He documented his findings and even joined expeditions into the Speturan ruins to the north in search of evidence to prove various theories. His efforts were well received and led to his appointment as a Bishop, Archbishop, and then eventually Cardinal.

In his career as a Cardinal, Bilardo's distaste for warfare and intimate knowledge of history proved useful time and again. Bilardo could always be counted on for an effective and pertinent anecdote for the situation, and his wisdom only increased as he grew older. That is until recently.



Cardinal Sergio Bilardo

As if the Church did not have enough problems with its leadership, Cardinal Bilardo's mind has begun to fail him. He is lost in the past, often confusing those around him with friends and acquaintances from years gone by. He does not realize that the Hierophant is dead or even that the War of the Cross has ended. The other Cardinals have been forced to work around Bilardo's malady and, to their credit, have done remarkably well. When treated gingerly, he can still yield portentous insights, but rumblings have begun about the search for a possible replacement.

Cardinal Christina

There are few ways for a woman to gain respect in Théah on her own. The Church is the best way, assuming the woman in question has faith to go with her ambition. Christina had an abundance of both, along with a strong talent for business and administration. As a young female priest of a non-noble family, she began her career at a small church at the foot of La Sierra del Hierro. The congregation had languished for years, with the members seemingly unwilling to give any more to the church than duty called for. Christina was expected to fade into obscurity.

Within two years, the Bishop of the Diocese received a letter from Christina's Monsignor. The little church that did nothing had apparently become a powerhouse of charity. The chapel itself had been completely repaired, and the parishioners had started work on an addition. Members traveled up into the hills, establishing connections with the lumberers and hunters there. Those who could started coming into the village on a semi-regular basis for services. Those who could not soon found Madre Christina on their doorstep, with all the necessities for a Mass in her hands.

Word of this remarkable little woman quickly spread. When she attended Parish and Diocesan meetings, people listened to her. Her non-stop energy and flair for organization began working on a larger scale. She was quickly replaced in her home church, and began working as an officer of the Bishop. When he retired, he asked the Monsignors to name her as his successor. They agreed.

The career that rose from certain obscurity truly took off from that point. Already a familiar face in Vaticine City, Christina now had influence to back up her ideas. She worked tirelessly to gain



Cardinal Christina

every advantage for her Diocese she could. A common joke among her household was that she saved much money by working through meals, but lost it again burning oil all night long. Her efforts had not gone unnoticed.

Eleven years after she became Bishop, Christina's Cardinal took ill. Without missing a step, she took over his workload, managing the Archdiocese effortlessly. When the Cardinal died a year later, it seemed only natural to keep her on in the interim before a new Cardinal was elected. They needn't have bothered. Her amazing record, combined with key promises to her fellow Bishops, secured her the seat as Cardinal. She has successfully held that post for thirteen years now. Not only does she ably manage her Church affairs, but her position on *El Concilio del Razon* has given her a chance to shine. While she rarely advises King Sandoval, she is certainly one of his most capable administrators.

Cardinal Christina is a small, lean woman, with an aura of intense energy. She never seems to relax, and everything she does seems aimed at furthering her goals. She goes through assistants like they were water; few people can withstand her schedule or frequently abrupt manner. She rarely performs Church services personally, handing off the privilege as favors to those who enjoy such things. However, none can doubt her piety and religious fervor, and her charity is famed

throughout Castille. She is also known as an advocate of the universities. While she supports the Inquisition in general, she strongly objects to Verdugo's new definitions of heresy. Christina and the High Inquisitor, once allies, have split over this issue.

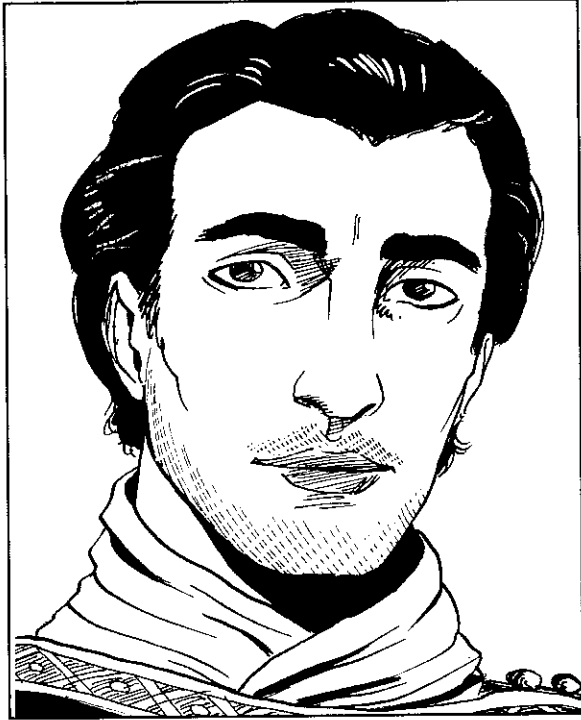
Cardinal Michel Durand del Falisci

Cardinal Michel's tale is fairly typical for one of such power. Born the second son of a Merchant Prince, he had little inclination for secular power. Michel was ill-suited for soldiering and quickly tired of merchanting as well; the best option for a second son has always been the Church. So Michel, a graduate of Dionna University, took his orders shortly after his nineteenth birthday. His elder brother was killed soon thereafter, but Michel had already lost interest in the Princedom. He happily handed the family reins over to his younger brother Donello and continued his service to Theus.

With Donello as a brother, and Scarovese as an ancestor, Michel did extremely well for himself. His schemes succeeded more often than not, and the famous Falisci charm won him quite a few friends. The fact that he could invite anyone he chose to his brother's famous parties didn't hurt. He became Bishop at age twenty-four (skipping the rank of Monsignor entirely), and Cardinal at age twenty-six, two years ago.

The circumstances behind Michel's rise to Cardinal are a little unusual, and perhaps explain his current interest in Montaigne affairs. The previous Cardinal objected strongly to the excommunication of an entire nation. When the act was passed despite his opposition, he resigned from his position in protest. Donello exercised his considerable influence over the other Bishops to elect Michel. His predecessor left a letter in his office for Michel, asking him to use his office to bring Montaigne back into the fold. Michel has sworn to do everything he can to see that this comes to pass.

That task, however, seems to be a bit more than the young Falisci can handle. His passionate letters have been ignored by *l'Empereur*. All attempts at compromise, including such extreme measures as absolving the sin of sorcery for the Montaigne family in perpetuity, have been rejected. Unfortunately, with the ultimate trump



Cardinal Michel Durand del Falisci

card of excommunication already played, Michel has little to threaten *l'Empereur* with. Considering the wealth of Montaigne, he has little to offer them. He is attempting to play the Great Game in unfamiliar territory and without any cards in his hand. It may require a miraculous event for his efforts succeed. Fortunately, his is now the business of miracles.

In the course of attempting to reclaim Montaigne's souls, Michel has frequently come into contact with Cardinal Erika Durkheim. The two have become close allies, though not friends. They exchange letters constantly, trying to come up with a plan. Cardinal Durkheim has recently passed some potentially damaging information on *l'Empereur* to Michel, in the hope that his political friends can make use of it. Only time will tell.

Outside of his passion for Montaigne, Michel maintains few other interests. Since becoming Cardinal, he rarely attends his brother's parties, though the two remain very close. He has also ceased his once-frequent hunting trips. The one concern outside the Church that still draws his attention is the need for a wife. His choices are somewhat narrow. He wishes to marry a Vodacce noblewoman, as his birth calls for. However, no Church official would consider marrying a woman tainted with the sin of sorcery. This leaves him looking for a *Senzavista*, or 'Sightless' woman. Most of these, though, are destined to be

Vedova and have had their will broken early. This leaves a precious few, whose families often go to great lengths to catch the eligible young Cardinal's eye. So far, none have been able to keep it long.

Cardinal Carouso della Spada Lucani

Cardinal Carouso is a passionate and charismatic man, but not particularly adept at politics and intrigue, at least by Vodacce standards. Fortunately for him, he is also honest with himself. While still young he looked at his prospects within the Great Game, and quickly decided that if he were very lucky and very clever, he could rise as high as "trusted advisor." More likely, he would end up spitted in a duel before he was thirty, probably over some cause he had nothing to do with. However, there was an easier road open to a young third son. Upon graduation from school, Carouso declared his intention to enter the priesthood. His brothers and father rejoiced at the news; they did not want to share their inheritance with him and Carouso's decision left them with one fewer rival.

The young priest rose steadily in the ranks, becoming Monsignor in five years and Bishop three years after that. The politics of the Church were far more forgiving and straightforward than those of the nobility, and Carouso found his charisma and intellect won him the friends he needed to advance into higher ranks. However, that intellect would soon bring him trouble.

Carouso had suffered from strange nightmares since he was a small boy. He would see disturbing men in hoods and masks committing foul acts that he couldn't quite make out. He had spoken to his own confessors about these dreams, but to little avail. After his investiture as Bishop, though, the tone of the nightmares changed. The men were still frightening, but now they spoke to him. Carouso could never quite recall what they said, only that it made an exceptional amount of sense to him at the time. It was during this period that he first began to publish his philosophical writings. He also began making fairly radical suggestions for change in Church meetings. He had held such ideas all his life, but only now seemed capable of expressing them properly.

The new outspoken behavior of the Bishop won him little favor with his superiors, but attracted a number of younger priests. He



Cardinal Carouso della Spada Lucani

suddenly seemed to be on the forefront of a new philosophical revolution within the Church. He advocated a loosening of the restrictions on Crescent trade. He revived discussion around some of Mathias Lieber's less-radical ideas. He also pushed for the Church to take a more active political role in areas such as Montaigne (and would later be the primary proponent of *l'Empereur's* excommunication). These radical ideas stalled his political career, and he remained a Bishop for thirty-four years, under three different Cardinals. Finally, in 1662, pressure from forward-thinking priests and nobles, coupled with a lack of strong candidates, gave Carouso the seat of Cardinal.

In the six years since, his ideas have grown, if anything, more radical. Instead of suggesting new ways of looking at established dogma or small changes in the Church's political role, Carouso began proposing changes to fundamental Church principles. He has even gone so far as to question the validity of the Vigils, asking whether documents of such antiquity can really still be used as an absolute reference on modern life. His ideas have, so far, stayed on this side of heresy. But Carouso and Verdugo have had several heated conversations, and many people whisper that he should watch out for the Knight-Inquisitors. Carouso merely scoffs at such rumors, confident that his position puts him above such danger.

Currently, the Cardinal is a very active and vibrant man, even at the advanced age of sixty-eight. He still has a remarkably full head of silver hair, and piercing black eyes. He makes his home in Guarre de Puertofino, where he can easily make the trip to Vaticine City. He fights diligently against Verdugo for two reasons. First, he honestly feels that Verdugo's extremism is wrong, and will hurt many innocent people. Second, he knows that Verdugo wants to use his new fame to claim the Hierophant's seat. Carouso intends to use his position as the High Inquisitor's fiercest opponent to make the same claim.

Family matters greatly to the Cardinal, and he has done as much as he can with his position to help the Lucani. He married young, and has two sons and three daughters. To his disappointment, none of them chose to join the priesthood, but they all have good positions within the Lucani family holdings. His wife, Donna, died four years ago. His spirit seems as strong as ever, though his focus on his work has turned to obsession without her there to balance him.

In recent years, Carouso's nightmares have taken a much more frightening turn. He has begun to remember one phrase, which recurs in his dreams frequently. The dark figures turn to him, hands full of blood, and say, "This, son, this is your legacy." He does not know what this means, and is terrified of the implications. He has told no one else of this strange new development.

Cardinal Beppo Mueso

For better and mostly worse, Cardinal Mueso is a product of the world around him. No other Cardinal personifies so many of the faults Mathias Lieber attacked. Mueso continues the secret sale of indulgences to sorcerers, regularly meddles in local politics, and is not the least bit concerned with providing a good example for parishioners to follow. To call him worldly is akin to calling Captain Reis ill-tempered.

The interesting thing about Mueso is that his questionable nature stems not from an evil streak or a desire to undermine the Church's spirituality. Everything vile in him radiates from one sin: sloth.

The only child of struggling merchants in the city of Amozare on Bernoulli Island, Mueso entered the priesthood because he felt it would be an easier life than the one his parents were living. His above average-intelligence meant that he could devote less time to his studies than most of his peers, and the



Cardinal Beppo Mueso

young man secretly filled his free time with jennys, gambling, and alcohol. His wild ways did not cease with his ordainment, and he quickly learned people could be very generous if he promised them spiritual rewards. When a young Fate Witch offered half of a year's profits from her family's vineyard in exchange for forgiving her indiscretions, Mueso knew he had chosen the right profession.

While other priests pursued scholarly or philanthropic means of moving up in the Vaticine hierarchy, Mueso took inspiration from the works of Scarovese and the Great Game. He decided it would be easier to simply blackmail his way into whatever position he desired. Gifted with a fine laugh and winning smile, he was able to maneuver close to his superiors and gain private information, later using it against them when necessary. He also formed a network of spies to acquire secrets about those less than forthcoming about their personal matters. He was a Cardinal by his thirty-fifth birthday.

Unlike many men who achieve power by ignoble means, once he had obtained the title of Cardinal, Mueso had no desire to expand his influence. His slothful nature found contentment in his little section of Vodacce, which met all of his needs and desires in abundance. To worry about the rest of the world would simply be a waste of energy.

At least that's what he originally thought.

Five years ago, Mueso received a letter from the Vendel League, inviting him to pay their nation a visit. The message indicated the League was interested in improving relations with the Church in both trade and diplomatic arenas. Another Cardinal would likely have refused, not wishing to tread on grounds walked by so many Objectionists — but not Mueso. He eagerly packed his bags and journeyed abroad, anxious to experience the delights of a city he had been hearing of for some time: Västeras.

To the Cardinal's delight, Västeras proved even more wild and provocative than he dared dream. His every whim was catered to, and the term "overindulgence" took on new meaning. That is exactly what the League was counting on.

In his moments of weakness, Mueso divulged many of the secrets it had taken him years to collect, secrets about the Church and (of particular interest to the League) about the Vodacce merchant princes. They rewarded him well for his confessions and returned him home content in his revelry.

To Mueso's amusement, the League began regular correspondence with him and he responded in kind. For every bit of knowledge he passed along, they provided him with a generous donation to be used as he saw fit. Of course, he felt the majority of these gifts should remain in his possession, but he did pass along a few odds and ends as evidence of his work in converting the heretics in the League and across their nation. No one in the Church was fooled, but they did not wish to risk exposing Mueso for fear of what it might do to the Church as a whole.

So Mueso continues his schemes, making overtures to the Merchant Princes and selling their information to the Vendel League. The Church worries that he will be found out soon and of the inevitable consequences involved when a trade war becomes an open conflict.

Mueso keeps his white hair and beard short and well groomed. His breath always has the faint smell of alcohol and his eyes always search for new pleasures to experience. He has retained a variety of women to assist him in his duties, but they always seem to quit after a few months. Ironically, despite his decadent lifestyle, he remains an ardent supporter of the Inquisition — provided they keep their noses out of his business, of course.

Vaticine Agents

Knight Inquisitor Bishop Corantin d'Crus

A few generations ago, there was a small branch of the Rois et Reines family that had three daughters, but only one son. While initially pleased at this arrangement (it gave them an heir and three potentially powerful marriage alliances), they soon became greatly distressed. When their son came of age, he declared that he did not wish to inherit, but to join the Church instead. A horrible row ensued, which ended with the son disinherited and his name stripped from him. In response, he took the name d'Crus to represent his allegiance to his faith. Corantin, the grandson of the original d'Crus, is the current patriarch of this rising Vaticine family in Montaigne.

Even as a young man, Corantin knew that his path lay with the Church. He had spent his childhood attending fine schools in Montaigne, Vodacce, and Castille. It was during his university days that the young priest learned of the Inquisition movement. He was instantly captivated by their message and mission. He had always despised his own sorcerous heritage, weak as it had become. When it came time for him to take on a position in the Church, he convinced his parents to help him land a position as an Inquisitor.

He ruthlessly hunted down rogue Porté mages, accumulating more successes than any other agent in Montaigne. When Verdugo ordered the attack on King Leon, Corantin was a natural choice to help lead the Church forces. Already quite familiar with the court system, he managed to paralyze much of the political structure of the nation with a few key victories. With communications and supply routes in disarray, the capture of Charouse looked to be no more

than a matter of time. But one small unit led by Montegue robbed Corantin of his greatest victory.

Today, he continues to operate in Montaigne as one of the Knight Inquisitors in charge of operations in the nation. He is also one of the few Bishops still in Montaigne, though the title is purely ceremonial and he does not hold any diocese. His mission has not changed significantly. He is still trying to bring down l'Empereur and his Porté-wielding lackeys by any means necessary. He hates Leon with a passion, not only for his promotion of sorcery but also because Martine d'Crus, Corantin's younger sister, is one of the missing Bishops of Montaigne. If Martine ever died and Corantin learned of it, Leon might prefer to go straight to the Abyss rather than face the furious Inquisitor.

Bishop d'Crus is a strong, vital man in his late forties. His black hair has begun to develop streaks of gray, and his face is lined from years of care. His left arm is disfigured by an old burn scar, from an incident involving a Porté mage who did not take kindly to his impending execution. He is surprisingly blunt for a Montaigne noble, though a Ussuran or Vestenmannavnjar might not find him so. While he is married, with two fine sons who are probably going to follow in his footsteps, his only true passion is doing the work of the Prophets. He will very willingly use torture,



Knight Inquisitor Corantin d'Crus

blackmail, theft, and murder in his pursuit of his goals. The only deviation in his dogma is an opposition to Verdugo's persecution of scholars. Corantin feels that the Third Prophet commanded humanity to seek out all the knowledge they could, and would not want them to stop just before their greatest trial. Even so, his reputation as a butcher causes scholars and the Invisible College to give him as wide a berth as possible.

Yves Drossin

Yves Drossin has seen the light. After a lifetime of criminal activity, he has put his faith in Theus. He is now devoutly Vaticine, a true defender of the faith, and serves as a personal bodyguard to Cardinal Tomás Balcones, the man he credits for turning his life around.

Drossin comes from a long line of Montaigne troublemakers. His grandfather Acel often stirred peasants' passions against the nobility (he was hanged), and his father, Louvel, was a successful smuggler and privateer (he was killed by a mutinous crew). Lacking the intellect of his forebears, Yves instead developed his brawn and physical abilities, earning his keep as hired muscle.

Legitimate work proved too tedious for Drossin's tastes, so he focused his talents into more nefarious occupations. His favorite undertaking was acting as an enforcer and bodyguard for Vicq Rousselot, a shifty noble who dealt in the illegal traffic of Syrneath artifacts from the western isles. In his service to Rousselot, Drossin broke limbs, burned homes, ransomed hostages, and personally sank a rival's luxury yacht. He was always well compensated for his deeds, but had no restraint with his spending. As a result, he occasionally lived a life of destitution, punctuated by brief periods of obscene decadence.

Though a good employer, Rousselot was a bit careless. He ran afoul of Vodacce's Caligari family one time too often and faced the terrible consequences when a team of mercenaries broke into his mansion and brutally murdered him. Drossin was out celebrating the completion of a recent job when the crime occurred, but vowed to kill all those responsible. Over the next year, the trail of bodies led him back to their boss, Martinus Caligari.

Martinus, a distant cousin of the Prince, was impressed with Drossin's determination. He explained the circumstances surrounding Rousselot's death, of how the noble had broke



Yves Drossin

numerous provisions and stipulations he had previously agreed to with the Caligari family. He appealed to Drossin's twisted sense of honor and loyalty and, when that appeared to fail, he appealed to his coin purse. The change in tactics worked, and the impressionable Drossin soon found himself in Vodacce, working for the Caligari family against their many enemies.

During his new employment Drossin went from merely brutish to truly vicious and cruel. He hardened his heart against anyone the Caligaris turned him against, and soon found it was as easy to take a man's life as it was to take his money. He came to work alongside some of the worst criminals in Théah, including a memorable and bloody voyage on the *Crimson Roger*. In his spare time he turned to alcohol, which did little to improve his temper.

When his homeland invaded neighboring Castille, Drossin was beyond caring. However, the Caligari family had reestablished their link with Rousselot's successor, leading to a profitable flow of valuables from conquered Castillian lands into Vodacce for sale to the highest bidder. Drossin was a natural choice to work in this dangerous smuggling trade and reveled in the brutality of war.

Unfortunately, while the Caligaris had planned on encountering occasional trouble with the Castillian army, they were not prepared for the swift action of Los Vagos. Once the vigilante group

uncovered the smuggling ring, they dedicated themselves to crushing it. Drossin was but one victim of their justice, apprehended in a drunken stupor at a brothel in Altamira. With a strong sense of irony, his Vagos captors delivered him to their other enemy, the Castillian Inquisition.

As tough and resilient as Drossin was, he was no match for the Inquisitors. Their torturers quickly broke his will, and he divulged everything he knew about the operation and his employers. Verdugo's men left him to rot in a dungeon until the Church had further need of him. Months went by and he was eventually forgotten.

Then, on the evening of La Noche Divinos, he received a visit from Cardinal Balcones. The Cardinal customarily visited prisoners during the holiday and decided to spend some time with Drossin. Emotionally ragged, he shared his life's story and, in return, listened attentively to the Cardinal's gentle words. To his surprise, the man did not judge him or even condemn his terrible actions. Instead, he offered the Montaigne two truly alien commodities: forgiveness and peace. With tearful eyes, he eagerly took both and was accepted into the Vaticine faith.

Drossin's spiritual hunger moved the Cardinal, who continued to visit his cell. Over time they became friends, and Balcones eventually secured the man's freedom. Knowing that Drossin was not socially trained to deal with the legitimate world, the Cardinal offered him a job as his personal bodyguard, a position he was honored to accept.

Drossin is now enamored with polite society and enjoys dressing in their clothes and copying their mannerisms, which can be a bit comical at times considering his size and bulk. He speaks both Castillian and Vodacce with a slow, broken accent and often flies into a torrent of Montaigne when frustrated. Deeply spiritual, he is dedicated to defending the Vaticine faith and especially Cardinal Balcones. He stays quiet when on duty, preferring not to draw attention to himself. His fearsome physical prowess has survived, however, and he would gladly destroy anyone who threatened the man responsible for his salvation.

Richard Kailean

Richard Kailean is the Vaticine Church's foremost scholar on the White Plague. He is obsessed with finding a cure to that terrible disease and has vowed to do so no matter the cost to himself or the institution he represents.

A Highlander by birth, Kailean grew up in one of the few predominately Vaticine neighborhoods in Kirkwall. The scrawny but studious child would regularly travel the muddy streets to the city's library, braving the taunts and attacks of Objectionist children both to and from his destination. His parents recognized his potential. Though they only simple cobblers, they worked hard and saved money to send their son off to la Universidad de San Angelo in Castille. They knew their son would prosper there, and were not disappointed in his performance.

Kailean arrived at the university with a rudimentary knowledge of the Castillian language, an outdated book of useful phrases, a fresh quill, a bottle of ink, and an eager mind. He put all of them to good use and, by the end of his first semester, was considered a student of great expectations. He chose medicine as his education specialty and never once doubted his choice. By his third year, he was actually instructing his fellow students, aiding the university scholars in their research, and writing two books. He graduated early and le Grand Université in Montaigne granted him a full scholarship to expand his studies. Kailean leapt at the chance.

As before, his instructors were amazed at his ideas and dedication to his work. Kailean discovered that smoking the right combination of leaves imported from the Crescent Empire and the distant Midnight Archipelago acted as a stimulant, and he would often spend days engrossed in his studies, never once considering the idea of sleep.

Not being a Vaticine-supported school, le Grand Université offered different theories than those in Castille. In fact, many ran in direct opposition to what he had learned at la Universidad de San Angelo. Kailean's instructors explained that they were not concerned about making their opinions and research fit nicely into Church doctrine, and therefore saw the facts as they were. Ever the devout Vaticine, this troubled Kailean to some extent, but his love for the scientific arts overruled his feelings of discomfort. He continued his work but made sure to go to confession and receive forgiveness whenever he felt it necessary.

Kailean spent five years in Montaigne studying one disease after another. His research on scurvy yielded positive proof that an unidentifiable quality in citrus fruit helped prevent the malady; it was also at this time that he began his first inquiries into the White Plague phenomenon. His initial speculations soon reached Dionna

University in Vodacce. The masters there found that Kailean's ideas closely matched to what they were working on and invited the young scholar to join them in their research. In no time, Kailean was the lead researcher on the project.

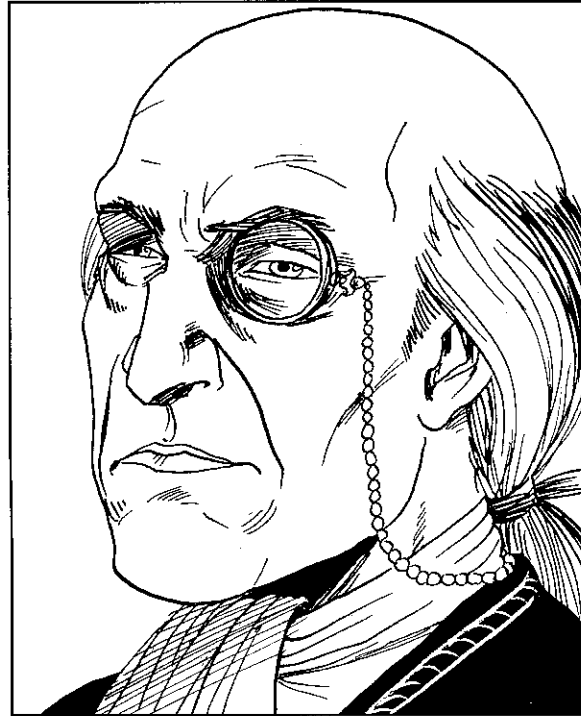
Though partly funded by Vaticine donations, Dionna was influenced by its other patron, the Villanova family, and everyday practices in its famous halls would have been outlawed anywhere else. Kailean was shocked at some of the experiments he witnessed and eventually took part in, such as injecting the "white sweat" common during the first stage of the Plague's manifestation into condemned prisoners. As a colleague told him, "Dramatic results regularly require dramatic actions." The words struck Kailean like a divine truth and he has since lived his life by them.

The one thing he felt hampered his research was that he only had isolated cases to study. There had not been a true outbreak of the White Plague in generations, and Kailean knew that he could make no true progress until he could study the disease "in the field." After almost ten years of working in Dionna laboratories, he felt he needed a change to continue being of use to the scientific community.

He had heard stories of how the Knights of the Rose and Cross had made medical advancements within their own organization and wrote a letter to Duke Douard Allais du Crieux, the Knights' most generous patron in Montaigne. The letter was a simple request to share knowledge with the Knights and, because of Kailean's excellent reputation, the Duke granted his unusual request. Unfortunately, Kailean did not discover anything worth reporting. After all, he was interested in medicinal techniques, not secret handshakes or hidden agendas.

While while he was studying with the Knights, the White Plague again spread across Théah. The outbreak was short, lasting only a few months, and moved so fast that its origin could not be determined. To Kailean's frustration, he could not launch a committed study before it moved from one random location to the next. A small consolation was that the ample number of victims provided plenty of cadavers to dissect.

One such dissection yielded an original finding. Secretly using a newly invented device, the microscope, Kailean compared fresh samples of the White Plague to other diseases he had studied and determined that the disease was not some kind of cellular organism as he had previously postulated. He checked his findings against dozens of other victims and reached a



Richard Kailean

disturbing conclusion: the Plague was not biological in origin and was, in fact, unlike anything he had ever encountered before. This discovery was both terrifying and thrilling. He knew in his heart that Theus had presented this riddle for him alone to solve.

He alerted the Church of his findings and acquired a team of trusted scientists to join him in his crusade. One of these men was Don Petrigai, a secret member of the Invisible College who took a personal interest in Kailean's findings. When comparing them with his own work, he found something that legitimized Kailean's claims even further. The Plague spread through the victims' blood like some sorcerous poison. Even more disturbing was that some external force seemed to control the outbreaks, as if someone had the power to orchestrate the disease and kill thousands of Théans at will.

Kailean immediately wanted to notify the Church of the danger, but Petrigai would not hear of it. In desperation, he revealed his ties to the Invisible College and explained that a public declaration at such an early stage could bring down the wrath of whoever controlled the Plague. Kailean reluctantly agreed. Though he worked for the Church, many of his childhood heroes were now members of the Invisible College, and he respected their judgment. Though not wishing to join the persecuted organization, he struck a solid

alliance with them and has accepted the fact that the heretical scientists may lead him to finding the answers he has sought for so long.

Kailean has siphoned an increasing amount of Church resources into his research. He has also used his position as one of the few recognized Church scholars left to gather donations from pious nobles, acting the part of brash impresario when needed. The Church has given an approving nod at his work, believing that such a devout man will find truths it can stand behind. The Inquisition leaves him alone because the White Plague frightens even them, and they wouldn't dare destroy the man most capable of finding a cure. Kailean prays every night that his connections to the Invisible College will remain undiscovered. Nonetheless, he has learned to suppress his fears and focus on the work at hand, constantly reminding himself that dramatic results regularly require dramatic actions.

Giuseppe Marco

Father Marco always suffered from wanderlust. When he joined the priesthood, he wanted nothing more than to travel to the farthest corners of the world, spreading the word of the Prophets. Unfortunately, he also suffered from severe seasickness, and could only travel overland. Most of "civilized" Théah had few potential converts, leaving only the far ends of the continent open to him. He petitioned to be allowed into the Crescent lands, but was turned down. So the young priest turned his eyes eastwards towards Ussura.

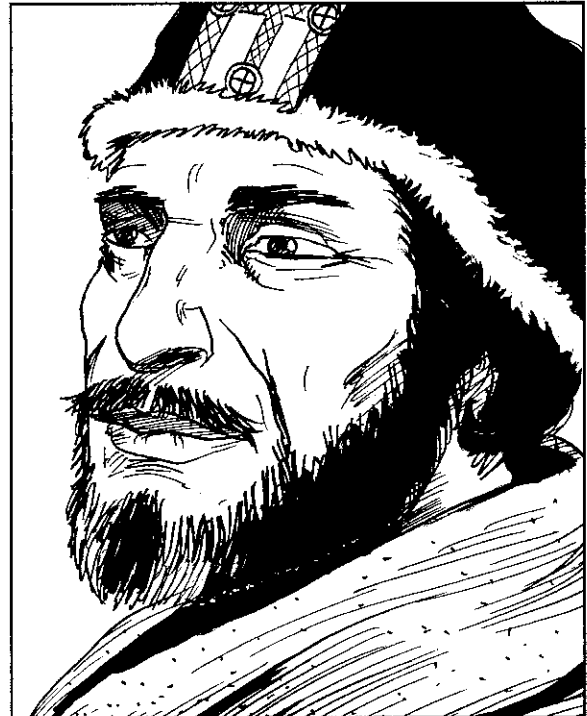
He spent his first years in Pavtlow, learning the culture and language. He also studied Ussuran Orthodoxy in depth, looking for arguments he could use to sway people to the Vaticine faith. While many foreign émigrés in Pavtlow were happy to see a Vaticine priest, he found very few converts among the native Ussurans. He decided to strike out and see if he could have more luck in the wilds.

His first attempt was a miserable failure. Barely three days from Pavtlow, he ran into a torrential rainstorm. His food became waterlogged, his cart was hopelessly stuck in the mud, and his horse ran away. Four days later, he decided that he would have to head back to Pavtlow to resupply. As soon as he turned around, the storm broke. When he told his story to people in Pavtlow, they laughed at him. "Don't you know that Matushka doesn't like outsiders, particularly ones who want to stir up

her people? You're just lucky you weren't armed and don't have sorcery, or that would have probably been a snowstorm on your head."

Father Marco recognized his mistake, then went to the shrine to Matushka in the center of the city, and prayed there. He asked Matushka for permission to speak to her people. He also asked Theus for aid, to help him spread his message. He stayed there for hours, waiting for some kind of sign. He fell asleep in the shrine, and a dream came to him. Two figures, one bathed in light and one shrouded by swirling snow, appeared to be arguing. Finally, the icy figure turned to Giuseppe, and spoke. "I will permit you to speak to my children," she said. "However, I demand that you respect me as they do. You must not eat the meat of any animal while you are in my domain. I promise that if you violate this oath, you will not live to reach the borders of my land. Do you agree?" Father Marco nodded in his dream, and woke instantly. In his hand was a knot of hair, possibly from a horse. The deal had been struck.

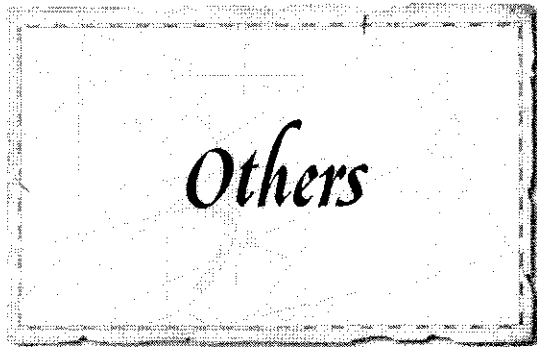
Father Marco went back to gather his supplies again. He no longer had money for a new horse and cart, but didn't let that bother him. He struck out on the road again. When he reached the spot where he had been stopped before, he found his cart still there. He also found his horse, complacently grazing alongside the road. Giving thanks to both Theus and Matushka, the priest hitched up his cart,



Giuseppe Marco

pulled it from the now dried mud, and began his journey anew. It has yet to end.

Father Giuseppe Marco is now a middle-aged man who has seen most of Ussura during his travels. Long hours on the road have weathered his face and toughened his body. Years of debating have sharpened his wits to a razor's edge. His faith has also strengthened under the years of hardship. He has converted a number of people to the Vaticine faith, and now has a regular route around the villages of his "parish." He continues to honor his oath to Matushka. The first thing he does when entering a village, and the last thing he does before leaving, is to leave an offering at Matushka's shrine. For the last thirty years, Ussura's protector has returned his good faith.



Apostle Reinn Bergen

Reinn Bergen is young and idealistic, just like the nation of his birth and the religion he embraces. He sees the world changing at an almost dizzying pace and can feel the pressure to help guide it in the best possible direction. It is a daunting task, but one in which the sedulous young man seems destined to play a major role.

Bergen grew up in Kirk, the ever-growing capital of Vendel, and the city made a lasting impression on him. He was a small child when groups of Objectivist refugees from Eisen immigrated into the country, and he listened in awe to their strange accents and even stranger stories. They spoke mostly about the horrors of war and the joys of their religion. The tales mingled and seized the boy's imagination. Like many other Vendel, his parents found the Objectivist doctrine more in keeping with their new status than the old myths of Grumfather and the Living Runes, and his family was soon

brought into the faith. The day of his baptism remains Bergen's favorite childhood memory.

He soon found he could apply his contemplation of the Book of the Prophets to his scholastic work and used his new knowledge to excel in all of his studies. His teachers found him quite remarkable, especially concerning his talent in dealing with other children. His words often carried a wisdom beyond his years and he found himself mediating between feuding classmates. Everyone knew he would be a member of the clergy when he grew up and he did not disappoint them.

By his mid-twenties, Bergen was married and the leader of a small church between Kirk and Eskilstuna. Because his congregation was mostly Vendel, he focused his sermons on the First Prophet's message of love and forgiveness, presenting it as a means of resolving the tensions between themselves and their Vestenmannavnjar cousins. A few detractors wanted nothing less than the eradication of the Vesten, but a surprising proportion of Bergen's congregation embraced the idea. Word spread of Bergen's uplifting messages, and the little church's membership eventually tripled. At the urging of his wife, Bergen wrote a small treaty on improving relations with Vestenmannavnjar, and its publishing was a success not only at home but abroad as well.

Objectivists in Eisen circulated the book amongst themselves, finding parallels between their own troubles with the Vaticine Church. Objectivists in the Highland Marches could see similarities in their dealings with the Church of Avalon. Everywhere, Bergen's work was praised for interpreting the Prophet's wisdom in clear and concise terms. When the Objectivist Deacons held their elections for new Apostles, Bergen was voted in by a unanimous count.

He moved his family to Kirk to be closer to the large population he now represented. His diplomatic nature found him taking a larger role in city politics than he had first anticipated, and he even had a chance to share his opinions with the Vendel League on more than one occasion. Val Mokk admired the young man's drive and clarity of vision, and Boli Kollsson immediately saw someone with whom he could share his unconventional opinions on sorcery.

Kollsson and a party of like-minded Porté mages had been lobbying the Apostles for months to re-examine the First Prophet's condemnation of sorcery, going so far as to donate incredible sums

of money to fund the construction of Lieber's Cathedral in Kirk. A few Apostles were impressed with the idea of how many converts they could steal from the Vaticine Church if they determined that the First Prophet was not speaking against the use of sorcery but rather its misuse. Most, however, were adamant against the idea.

At last, Bergen agreed to study the case more closely and report his findings at a special meeting. The other Apostles appreciated his initiative and elected him as High Apostle for his efforts. That was six months ago.

Since then, Bergen has spent almost every waking moment poring over different interpretations of the Book of the Prophets, from the work of Mathias Lieber to copies brought back from Ussuran Orthodox churches. To his frustration, his findings to date have been inconclusive. He knows whatever outcome he arrives at will likely affect Objectionist policy for decades (if not centuries) to come, and that a hasty decision without the proper amount of documented proof could bring disastrous consequences.

Instead of being nervous, however, Bergen remains enthusiastic. He believes that Theus will ultimately guide him in the right direction, no matter how long it takes.



Apostle Reinn Bergen

Jurii The Benevolent

As Matushka is seen by some as a mother to the Ussuran people, many have come to view the current Orthodox Patriarch, Jurii The Benevolent, as a father figure. He has served as Patriarch for two generations, and his flowing white beard cannot hide a face so full of energy that it seems he will last at least two generations more.

But before he was Jurii The Benevolent, before he was Jurii the monk, he was Jurii Zheltonos the farmer. A devout believer in the Orthodox Church, he was content to work his small section of land and live a simple and honest existence. Then, one day as he toiled in his fields, he was struck with a horrible vision. The freshly tilled ground began to bleed and the sun disappeared behind thick clouds of smoke as if the entire world were on fire. A voice boomed down from the heavens, telling him that the land he loved would face a spiritual test and that Jurii needed to see it through the coming troubles. The young man fell to the bloody ground, his destiny clear in his weary mind. With a clap of thunder, the disturbing images disappeared and everything returned as it had been before. In two weeks, Jurii had sold all of his land and possessions and joined the Orthodox clergy.

Because he was not married, Jurii could see that his only course was to enter the monastic life. As a monk, he learned how to read and write not only in his native tongue, but Teodoran, Théan, Vodacce, and both High and Low Eisen. He also proved to have a sharp mind for mathematics, but his true obsession was in studying prophecies and legends for signs of the impending troubles the vision had alluded to. Months of prayer and fasting at last revealed the truth. Legion's Prophet would attempt to rise at some point in his lifetime, and he had to make his people ready.

Jurii's religious passion saw him installed as an abbot before he was thirty and a bishop before thirty-five. In the interim he calculated world events, alert to any signs that his vision was coming to pass. After becoming a bishop, his perspective slightly changed. Instead of looking beyond Ussura's borders, he looked within and, for the first time, noticed the cold political maneuverings in his own country. He felt called to his people in a new way and began to actively participate in their lives. He took time to talk with the parishioners, appreciate nature, and listen to the children.



Iurii The Benevolent

Perhaps because he never had a family of his own, Iurii's bond with the younger members of the Orthodoxy was the strongest of all. He could see that their elders often ignored their innocence and wonder, so he took special pains to listen to their concerns and even crafted toys and other gifts in his spare time. When words of his kind dealings began to spread, he received the name Iurii The Benevolent, and has considered it a title of honor ever since.

When Iurii rose to the position of Patriarch, he divided his energies between caring for his people and continuing the search for signs of Legion's Prophet. His fear of the times of trouble ahead were echoed in the masses delivered by priests all over and helped strengthen Ussura's distrust of the outside world. At his word, groups of zealous young men and women were sent out again and again to destroy any indication of the evil one's coming, and every day that safely passes is proof they have succeeded in their task.

It has been that way for almost forty years now, and the more frightened and xenophobic the people become, the more they look to Iurii as their spiritual leader. He has become one of the most beloved figures in Ussura's history and could be considered quite dangerous if he did not have his people's best interests at heart.

Feyyed al-Mutarjim El Mumtaz

Feyyed's mother died during childbirth, leaving him to be raised by his father Hazim, a master of the Crescent form of swordfighting known as Daphan. Not knowing much about proper child care, Hazim raised his son in the only fashion he knew, bringing him up as an apprentice swordsman. Father and son were constantly on the move, serving under various sultans and generals, training them in the ways of the sword. The life was hard and lonely for young Feyyed, his only friends being his training gear and the books his father acquired for him along the way. He practiced his martial routines religiously every day, and the skill he developed would serve him well for the rest of his life.

When Feyyed was fourteen, his father fell defending their employer from religious fanatics, thwarting a coup by sacrificing his own life. The sultan, Aban Akram Abdul-Bari, was so grateful that he financed Feyyed's education. His primary instructor, Abbas, was clearly impressed with the serious youth and a close bond developed. Feyyed often referred to him as "Ámm," or "Uncle."

Feyyed had a keen mind for learning and proved a natural linguist. By the time he turned fifteen, he had mastered written Théan. Fluency in Vodacce required just nine months more and, by his seventeenth year, he spoke every language in Théah without an accent. The sultan quickly recognized what an incredible asset Feyyed would be to his trading caravans and appointed him as a diplomat and translator. The young man agreed to his new status, but only if Abbas could join him in his travels. The sultan was happy to fulfill the request and the teacher and student settled into a nomadic lifestyle.

In his travels, Feyyed was exposed to many different places and events, but the one thing he had a hard time comprehending was the secrecy in which the barbarian countries to the north and west carried out trade with his people. At last he came to understand that the Vaticine Church had put restrictions on such actions and that, in the minds of the foreign traders, to disobey the Church was to disobey the Creator. In his studies, Feyyed had learned much about the Church, of how it revered more than just one prophet and that its fanatical followers had felt it was Theus' will to slaughter the Crescent people as part of a

holy crusade. Even from a distance, Feyyed developed a strong dislike for the so-called Church of the Prophets. Coming on top of his encounter with the zealots who killed his father, he held religion in very low regard.

The pleasant life of a trade negotiator would not last past Feyyed's twenty-fifth year. With a ship loaded with spices and silks, he sailed for the city of Sousdal in the Ussuran province of Somojez. Before he could reach the harbor, however, the ship was besieged by Muhtadi Sha'ban, a notorious pirate captain in the service of Kheired-Din. Muhtadi's brigands had little trouble in boarding the trade vessel but the crew put up a vicious fight. Muhtadi swung over to turn the tide of battle and his heavy sword eagerly cleaved its way through the trader crew. He chastised each dying man for bringing goods to the infidels, people who did not recognize the Second Prophet. When his blade struck down the helpless Abbas, his taunts finally came to an end.

Feyyed sliced Muhtadi into three separate pieces, then turned his wrath against the pirate crew. He tore through them like a hungry desert wolf and would likely have finished them to a man if a pistol shot hadn't struck him in the back. He fell to the deck, exhausted and dying, slowly watching his world fade into darkness.

A week later, he awoke to the tender ministrations of a pretty Ussuran named Sasha... and an Orthodox priest named Ulrich. The people of Sousdal were deeply indebted to Feyyed for dispatching Muhtadi, and took care of him. When he fully recovered, they offered him a position at the shipyards, training the guards against Crescent fighting styles. At Sasha's urging, he accepted.

Sasha was a mystery to Feyyed. In all of his travels, never had he met a woman with such fire. She captured his waking thoughts and danced in his dreams. Their friendship quickly turned into passion, and that passion became devoted love. There one obstacle prevented their union in marriage: Feyyed did not belong to the Orthodox Church. His love of Sasha proved stronger than his years of mistrusting religion, however, and he approached Ulrich on converting to Orthodoxy.

As he had always done, Feyyed excelled in his studies. In almost no time he was quoting scripture with the same ease as Ulrich, but the priest could see that Feyyed did not feel the spiritual truth behind them. No matter what Ulrich tried, he could not reach the Crescent's soul. As it turned out, only another tragedy could do that.

One terrible night, four Crescent pirate ships stormed into the Sousdal harbor. They flew the colors of Kheired-Din and his Corsairs, seeking revenge for the death of Muhtadi. The fighting was fierce but Feyyed's training and the stout hearts of the defenders eventually forced the pirates to retreat. Sousdal's citizens defended their homes and families with their lives, and Sasha was one of many who did not live to see the morning.

Feyyed's grief threatened to destroy him. Ever stoic on the outside, he was tortured internally. His father had fallen to those who used religion as a weapon, as had Abbas. Now his beloved Sasha was gone, a victim of the same fanaticism. Enraged, he stormed into the towering cathedral in the city's main square, demanding answers from Theus. At the height of his anger and frustration, a calm slowly began to take hold of him. The scriptures he had memorized began to repeat themselves and he soon understood the true message they held. For the first time in his life, he got down on his knees and prayed for Theus' guidance. After a moment of silence, a voice seemed to speak to his spirit, telling him to take up his sword and use all of his heartache and passion to combat the growing evil in the world. Feyyed made a sacred oath and, for the first time since his childhood, he found peace.

Since then, Feyyed has roamed wherever Theus has called him, always arriving in the



Feyyed al-Mutarjim El Mumtaz

middle of a crisis to help those in need. By the time his work is done, he has often proven nothing less than a dark angel. Unlike those he comes into conflict with, Feyyed is not a fanatic or zealot. His relationship with Theus is a private one, and that is how he intends to keep it.

Lord Peter des Roches, Archbishop of Kirkenwood

Young Peter des Roches had just been elected Monsignor when King Richard passed his Act of Supremacy. He was very pleased with the separation from the Hierophant, because he felt that mainland Théah already had far too much influence over Avalon. He was an ardent supporter of Cardinal Guilbert, and worked hard to bring his parish around to the new way of thinking. When the Bishop above him resigned to move to Montaigne and rejoin the Vaticine Church, Cardinal Guilbert rewarded Peter by supporting him fill the vacant slot. Under his new leadership, the whole diocese was soon excited about the new Church of Avalon.

As the Church began to establish its own identity, des Roches was right in the middle of it. He attended so many conferences that he began maintaining a permanent residence in Kirkenwood. Although he remained on Guilbert's side after the Cardinal became Archbishop, he was hardly a patsy or flunky. He spoke his own mind, and other members of the Church quickly recognized him as a leader of the pro-reform faction.

During Iron Margaret's reign, Archbishop Guilbert finally succumbed to old age. By this time, Peter had gained a great deal of support in the Bishops' Council. He managed to carry the vote after much debate, and became the second Archbishop of Kirkenwood. Under Margaret, however, this was not a particularly enviable position. She had steadily increased her control over the Church of Avalon, working to firmly establish it as an arm of royal power. Archbishop Peter had different ideas. He felt that the Church must remain separate from the secular government, even while it answered to the Queen. To blur the lines was to invite corruption into the Church. He borrowed heavily from the Second Vigil, quoting the story of the Prophet throwing the moneylenders out of the temple. The point was not lost on Margaret, but it did not stop her either.

Finally, in 1654, Queen Margaret died. The country was thrown into chaos, and the

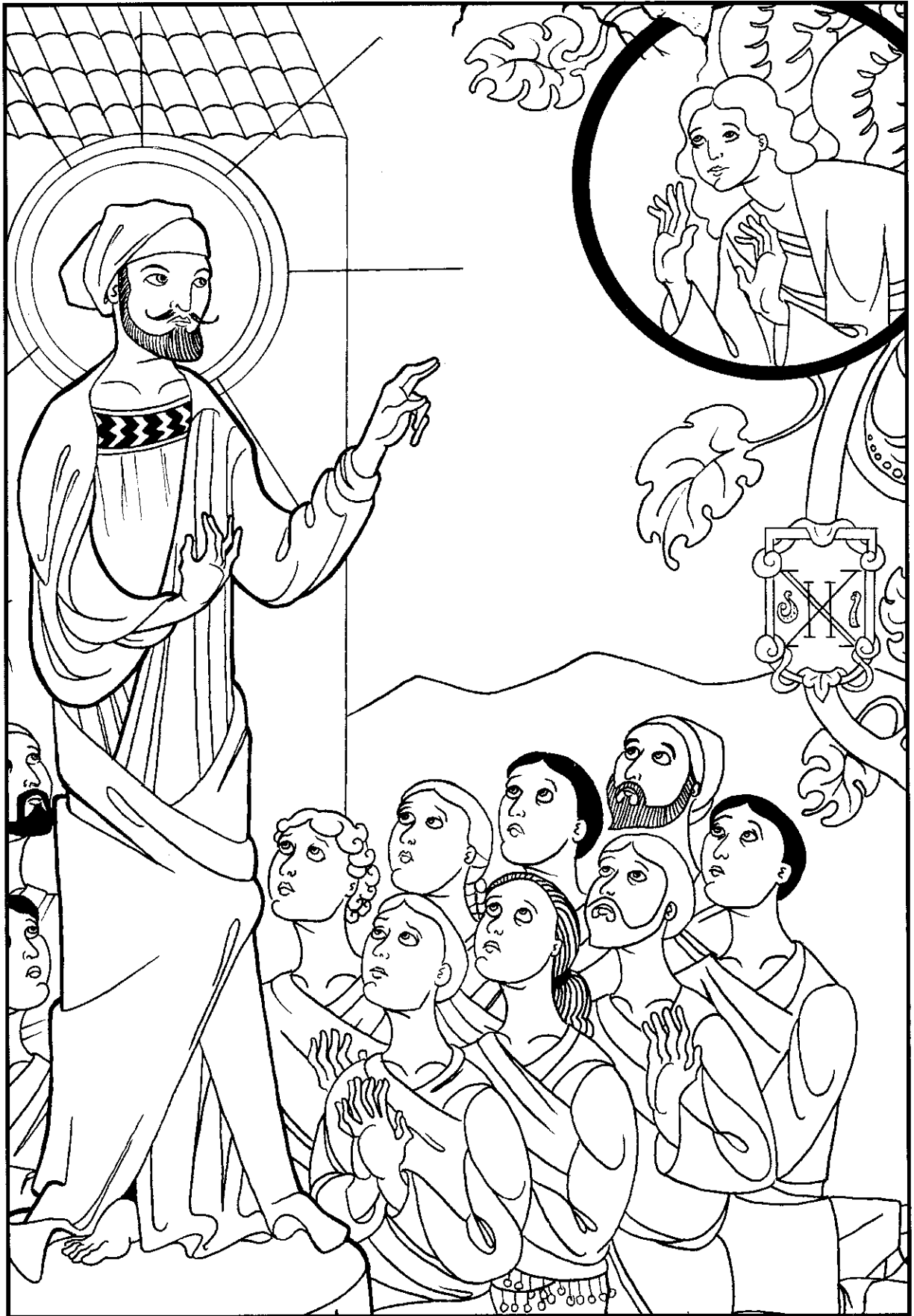
Archbishop saw it as his duty to maintain order. He attempted to use the powers the Queen had bestowed on the priests to mediate disputes, mete justice, and aid those he could. However, the noble ideals of the Church were no match for the blind ambition of the Dukes of Avalon. The Archbishop wrote in a letter to a friend that he felt like the mother of ten or twelve active boys, trying to keep them all under control and run a household besides. But no mother ever had to watch her rowdy children maim and kill one another.

When Elaine appeared with the Graal, Peter seized on her as the best solution to the civil war. As she mounted her campaign to claim the throne, the Archbishop threw the support of the Church behind her. This calmed the fears of those wary of any gift from the Sidhe. When Elaine became queen, the Archbishop was among the first men to drink from the Graal. He never regretted his choice, and his personal loyalty to Elaine has never wavered.

Archbishop Peter is now in his early seventies. His mind is still clear and strong, but his body is rapidly failing. Thin white hair clings to the edges of his bald head, and palsy has robbed him of the ability to write. He says he doesn't expect to see another spring, and has already set his affairs in order, naming Bishop William of Breg as his choice to succeed him.

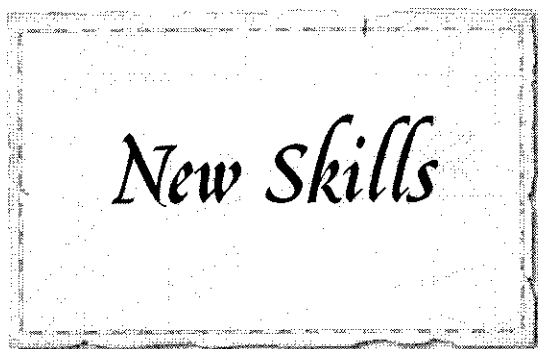


Lord Peter des Roches



Chapter Three

The Sacraments



Priest (Expanded)

The Priest Skill in the *Castille* book, reproduced below, describes the Knacks that standard priests, acting in a local church or as an agent of a parish or diocese, would have. The new Missionary and Monk Skills represent alternative training paths that the ordained might take. Because no one is trained in multiple paths, Heroes may not choose more than one of these (Priest, Missionary, Monk) Skills. At the GM's discretion, a previously created Hero with the Priest Skill may "switch" to the Missionary or Monk Skill: dividing the appropriate Knack ranks equally among the "new" Knacks. Care should be taken to keep the new Skill as close as possible to the old (Theology, for example, should remain the same), and that Advanced Knacks do not gain any Ranks originally assigned to Basic Knacks.



Priest

Basic Knacks

Oratory: Sweet words of praise flow as easily from your lips as whispered words of poison. Oratory allows you to convince your listeners more easily of the truth of any argument.

Philosophy: Beyond facts there are ideas, and those ideas can change the world. Theoretical debates are a hobby of yours, and with this Knack you might well win them.

Writing: Your quill flies across the page with the gift of prose, setting down words that can entertain the reader, outrage the nobility, or call the people to arms. Your words can turn beggars into kings or topple the most entrenched tyrants. This Knack encompasses poetry, plays, and other written works.

Advanced Knacks

Diplomacy: The art of diplomacy is the art of peace; words have prevented more wars than guns ever caused. Your soothing reassurances can calm all but the most enraged duelist, and keep your blood where it belongs — in your veins.

Mooch: With a combination of entertaining conversation, hollow promises, and sheer audacity, you can convince others to provide for your needs. Care must be taken not to do this in one place too long, however, as even the most flattering guest must eventually wear out his welcome.

Theology: Divine will is a difficult subject — everyone feels that he's right. You, however, have studied all the faiths dispassionately, looking for correlations and unseen connections, regardless of your own beliefs. You know who they all pray to, how they worship, and how their daily lives have changed because of it.

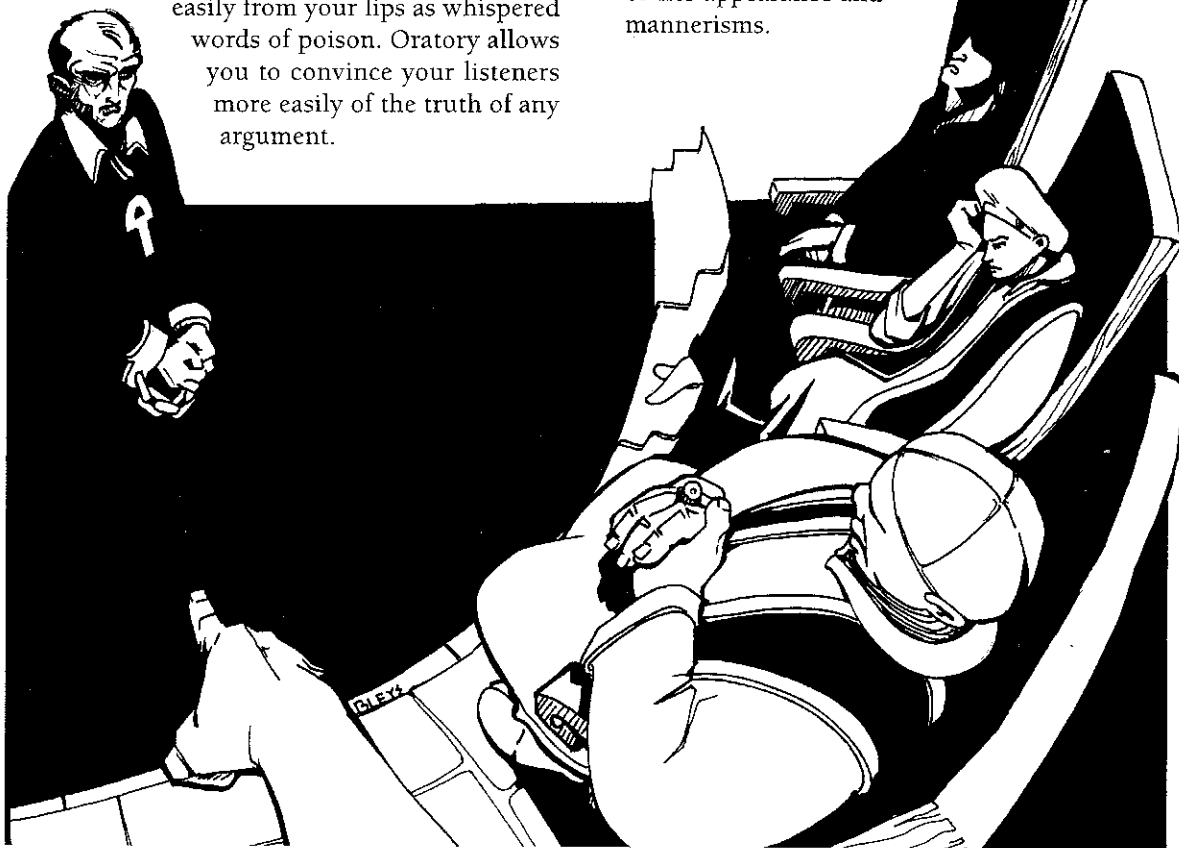
Missionary

A missionary is specifically a priest charged with taking the teachings of the Prophets into areas where it has not yet penetrated. There are remarkably few areas left in Théah where this is true. Many missionaries have traveled into the Empire of the Crescent Moon under special dispensation from their Church. In recent years, a number of eager young priests have set out for the mysterious islands to the west, hoping to bring the glory of Theus to a whole new people. A few brave souls make their home in the frozen north, arguing with the Vestenmannavnjar. And, once or twice a century, a newly ordained missionary feels called to the lands of Cathay. None have ever returned from that journey.

Missionaries may come from any faith, though most are either Vaticine or Objectionist. Particularly bold Heroes may serve as missionaries from so-called “fringe” religions, such as the Avalon druids or Vestenmannavnjar’s worship of Grumfather. Such brave souls clearly have their work cut out for them.

Basic Knacks

Oratory: Sweet words of praise flow as easily from your lips as whispered words of poison. Oratory allows you to convince your listeners more easily of the truth of any argument.



Survival: Foraging for nuts and berries isn’t exciting, but it’s often necessary during the winter or in unfamiliar territory. With the Survival Knack, you can always find enough food to survive on, although it may include such delicacies as mice, grubs, and termites. Rules for this Knack are located in the *GMs’ Guide*.

Philosophy: Beyond facts, there are ideas, and those ideas can change the world. Theoretical debates are a hobby of yours, and with this Knack you might well win them.

Advanced Knacks

Diplomacy: The art of diplomacy is the art of peace; words have prevented more wars than guns ever caused. Your soothing reassurances can calm all but the most enraged duelist, and keep your blood where it belongs – in your veins.

Theology: While philosophers debate the nature of the world, theologians debate the nature of the divine. You have studied the writings of the Prophets and of the great minds who came before you. While no one has solved the Great Puzzle which Theus has placed before the world, you at least know what most of the pieces look like.

Cold Read: This is the art of deducing things about a person from his or her appearance and mannerisms.

Handedness might be determined from a callous on a knuckle, while a nervous twitch could reveal much to an observant eye. With this Knack, you can always enter a conversation with at least a little information about the other person. More often than not, this Knack will be used in Contested Rolls against the Resolve of another, or against one of her other Knacks.

Monk

Monks and nuns are ordained members of the Church who have chosen seclusion as a way of connecting with Theus. Due to their sacrifices, many people in Théah see them as particularly holy and wise. In addition to their own pursuit of knowledge, they assist with the upkeep of their retreat, giving them intimate knowledge of a great many mundane tasks. The cloistered also function as scribes for the Church, creating new copies of the Book of the Prophets and other writings by hand.

Basic Knacks

Philosophy: Beyond facts, there are ideas, and those ideas can change the world. Theoretical debates are a hobby of yours, and with this Knack you might well win them.

Writing: Your quill flies across the page with the gift of prose, setting down words that can entertain the reader, outrage the nobility, or call the people to arms. Your words can turn beggars into kings or topple the most entrenched tyrants. This Knack encompasses poetry, plays, and other written works.

Calligraphy: You can write in a very formal, decorative hand, and illuminate the pages of a book. This Knack is only useful for those languages that you can read and write, or those which share a common alphabet with those you do (See the Language section on page 163 of the *Players' Guide* for details).

Menial Tasks: This Knack allows you to perform all the common labors that any servant must perform in service to his lord (e.g. cleaning and taking care of his estate, doing laundry, answering doors). Failure with this Knack will likely result in unemployment, or worse.

Advanced Knacks

Theology: While philosophers debate the nature of the world, theologians debate the nature of the divine. You have studied the writings of the

Prophets and of the great minds who came before you. While no one has solved the Great Puzzle that Theus has placed before the world, you at least know what most of the pieces look like.

Seneschal: You have shown acumen with organization and an attention to detail. You are, or have had experience as, an abbot's administrator, someone who collects the tithes, oversees the other monks, and generally handles all the minor details he feels are too minute to bother with.

Compounds: You know how to treat plant matter, and mix different kinds of flora to produce beneficial mixtures: healing balms, poultices, sleep aids, and the like. Note that such mixtures are not the magical potions detailed in the *Sophia's Daughters* book, but non-magical compounds that any hermit or midwife can feasibly prepare.



Cloistered (4 Points)

This character went to a monastery or nunnery at an early age. She grew up in a very sheltered, but self-sufficient environment. She took holy orders, including a vow to abstain from one of the Seven Deadly Sins. The most typical vows are poverty, chastity, and humility. Most monasteries reserved such things as vows of silence or fasting for short periods of penance or meditation. This character receives the Monk skill for free. In any social situation in which the character is being tempted or coerced to break a vow, she receives 2 Free Raises to the appropriate check. The character does not receive a salary apart from basic daily needs, but does begin play with 30 guilders. This Advantage may not be combined with the Ordained advantage.

Guardian Angel (4 Points)

Whether you believe in its existence or not, an invisible celestial power seems to watch over you, protecting you from danger and harm. By spending a Drama Die, you may force an opponent to re-roll a successful attack against you. You may also spend a Drama Die to re-roll a failed Active Defense against a trap or other environmental hazard.

Man of the Cloth (2 Points)

You are known throughout the land for your piety and wisdom. This character gains 5 Reputation points. This advantage may only be taken by a character with either the Ordained or Cloistered advantage.

Membership: Church Guard (2 Points)

The Church Guard are trained from a young age for a variety of duties. Essentially, they act as the Church's personal protection, protecting its members and holdings. They may be watching a door one day, accompanying a bishop to court the next, and joining a unit in a skirmish a week after that. However, their duties have a few common traits. First and foremost, they must uphold the dignity of the Church. They must always be well presented, and usually remain silent and still when on duty. All members of the Church Guard learn to use the halberd (the Church is not known for rapid changes, and has not yet adapted its standards to the end of the Age of Chivalry). In situations in which their halberd cannot be used effectively, the Guard are also well trained in the art of restraining their opponent through grappling.

A Church Guard still wears the blue and black colors of the soldiers Antone first trained so many years ago, but now incorporated into a light robe that is less cumbersome than a priest's but still resembles a priestly vestment. A Church Guard walks beside his charge with a grace that does not

disturb the ground. He learns to be nimble and, though quite skilled at hand to hand combat, he becomes a deadly blur when armed with his blade.

Membership Requirements

- Wits and Resolve of at least 2.
- Membership in either the Rossini Halberd School or the Swords of Solomon School (see below).
- The Wrestling Skill.
- Rank 3+ in either the Attack (Fencing) and Parry (Fencing) Knacks or the Attack (Polearm) and Parry (Polearm) Knacks.
- At least two points spent on the Vow Background, representing an oath to defend the Vaticine Church.

Duties

Church Guards are expected to defend the Vaticine from its enemies and obey their superiors in all things. They are also expected to obey all Church edicts as if they were law (i.e., no sinful activities). The Church (usually a bishop or high-ranking monsignor) assigns them to specific duties: guarding locations, protecting specific priests, and so on. These duties are invariably public in nature: few Church Guards operate "undercover."

Benefits

All Church Guards have their room, board, and equipment paid for by the Church. In addition, they are considered representatives of Vaticine authority and may claim sanctuary in any Church building in the world. This effectively renders them immune from secular prosecution (be warned, however: the Church has its own justice and certain nations like Montaigne may simply ignore the Vaticine's authority). They have access to any and all Vaticine resources, including restricted areas. Finally, they may request assistance from other Church Guards in times of trouble.

Miracle Worker (Varies)

(Note: This advantage previously appeared in the *Castille* sourcebook. Due to its nature, we are reprinting it here for your convenience.) There are those who believe that Theus works through

them. However, Theus works in subtle ways, and the benefactors of a miracle are never able to prove any intervention. This Advantage costs 5 HP per Miracle die. You may buy up to three Miracle dice. See below for the effects.

Miracle Dice

A Hero with the Miracle Worker Advantage gives his Miracle Dice to the GM at the start of each Story. The GM controls when, and if, these dice are activated. Each die activated causes a miracle to occur. These miracles can be anything the GM desires, remembering that Theus leaves no physical evidence of intervention after a miracle. Several example miracles are described below. Finally, a Hero receives 2 XP for each unspent Miracle die at the end of each Story.

Healing Wind: The Hero feels a gentle wind blow through his body, and suddenly his wounds don't bother him as much anymore. Two of the Hero's Dramatic Wounds are healed. They look just as bad as ever, but the bleeding slows to a stop and the Hero is no longer impeded by them.

Righteous Fury: Just as the Hero is about to fail miserably, he feels a flush of heat that gives him a

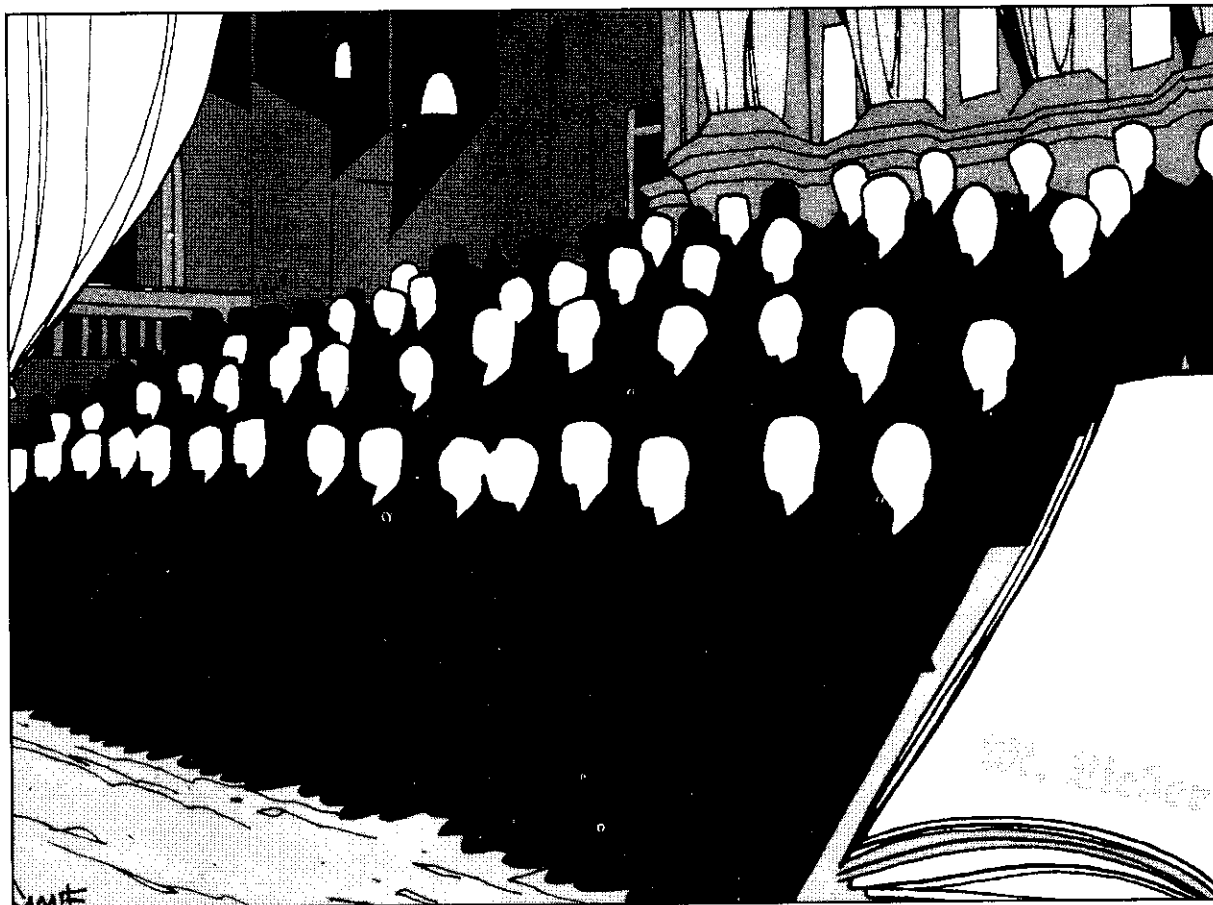
push that may help him succeed. After the Hero has failed an important roll, this Miracle die turns into three Drama dice that are added to the roll.

Shield of the Faithful: When looking death in the eye, a chill wind blows past the Hero and those around him. Then, a miraculous event occurs that may allow him to cheat death for a little while longer. When a Villain attacks the Hero, this Miracle die causes the Villain to automatically miss. In addition, the Villain's remaining Action dice for the Round are discarded.

Strength of Theus: When the Hero thinks he's exhausted his last reserves of strength, energy fills him and the power of his belief keeps him going. After the Hero has spent the last of his Drama dice, this Miracle die turns into two Drama dice.

Patron Saint (3 Points)

This character has taken a particular liking to one of the Vaticine saints. Through pilgrimage, prayer, and/or donations, he or she feels a special connection to the saint, and seems to gain an extra measure of ability from that connection.



Choose one of the saints below, or the GM may create one for you. You gain the ability listed next to the saint's name, but only so long as you continue to honor the saint through pilgrimages and donations in the saint's memory. If you lose the favor of a saint that gives a discount on Hero Points, you must repay those points in equivalent XP (i.e. 9 XP) as soon as possible. (See the Patron Saint chart on the following page.)



Personal Relic (3 Points)

This character, either through inheritance or personal quest, has obtained a holy relic. Feel free to describe the relic in whatever terms you wish. This character can invoke the power of the Relic to add one unkept die to any roll. The Relic can only be invoked once per Scene, or twice per Scene if the character also has the Faith Advantage. If the character ever loses the Relic, he is at -1 Resolve until the Relic is recovered or replaced.

Crisis of Faith

Something has happened, something so traumatic that you now question the existence of Theus or any higher power. It's not that you do not want to believe, it's just that you currently cannot. You are now searching for meaning, for proof that



Patron Saints

Saint	Sphere of Influence	Benefit
St. Corvus	Thieves	A Free Raise on all Criminal Knacks
St. Demetrius	Archaeologists	Gain Keen Senses for free
St. Elmo	Sailors	A Free Raise on all Sailor Knacks
St. George	Avalon	A Free Raise in Avalon social situations
St. Gregor	Monster-Hunters	A Free Raise on any Fear Check
St. Hippocras	Doctors	A Free Raise on all Doctor Knacks
St. Hubert	Hunters	A Free Raise on all Hunter Knacks
St. Jerome	Libraries, Scholars	Two Free Raises to the Research Knack
St. Joaquin, Jaime	Castille	A Free Raise in Castillian social situations
St. Kristin	Eisen	A Free Raise in Eisen social situations
St. Kristoff	Travelers	Good weather for any overland trip
St. Maria	Lovers	Receive 13 HP for Star-Crossed Hubris
St. Maurice	Armies	A Free Raise on all Commander Knacks
St. Niklaus	Animals	A Free Raise when dealing with animals
St. Phillippa	Vodacce	A Free Raise in Vodacce social situations
St. Pierre	Montaigne	A Free Raise in Montaigne social situations
St. Simon	Desperation	Purchase Propitious Virtue for 7 HP
St. Sonia	Artists	A Free Raise on all Artist Knacks
St. Usurrus	Ussura	A Free Raise in Ussuran social situations

Other saints may be created and added to this list, pending approval from the GM.

your previous faith was not in vain. The number of HP spent on this Background indicates how difficult it will be for you to again regain your faith.

Heirloom Relic

Your family was once touched by the divine and received a relic as a sort of spiritual souvenir. The relic can be almost anything, from a saint's finger to the ashes of the First Prophet. Now it is in your custody. You may look at the item as a blessing or a curse, for the number of HP spent on this Background indicates how famous the relic is and the lengths others will go to be close to or even possess it. Any special properties are left to the GM's discretion, or may be added by purchasing the "Personal Relic" Advantage, above.



Heretical Relation

Someone in your family belongs to a faith you consider heretical. This could be something as simple as having an Objectivist cousin if you are Vaticine or something as dramatic as being related to a notorious Legion worshipper. This relative can be living or dead, but the more points spent on this Background indicate how well known the individual's actions are/were and how strongly they affect you. This Background is particularly common in Vendel/Vestenmannavnjar.

Inquisition Informant

You have turned someone you know over to the forces of the Inquisition. Perhaps you did it because you truly felt the person a heretic, or perhaps only to save your own skin. Whether or not the action troubles you, it will certainly affect how other perceive you. The number of points spent on this Background indicates either the closeness of the person betrayed (a friend or family member) or the number of people you have handed over (neighbors and acquaintances).

New Swordsman Schools

The following three schools represent the more martial side of religious institutions. Two are practiced by the vaticine's Church Guards, and one is the purveyance of an order of Avalon monks. They are generally only available to members of their respective orders, though the GM may make an exception if circumstances warrant.

Monastic Order Of Avalon Fighting School

(The Friars/Rogues Of The Cross)

Country of Origin: Montaigne (Avalon)

Description: The Friars are a tricky bunch who seem to epitomize their adopted nation's penchant for fisticuffs. The order had been around long before the Church of Avalon but has since been brought into its fold.

The Friars originated in Montaigne. They were a group of thirty monks who protected the poor and defenseless with a flair that would often lead ruffians back to the door of their monastery seeking revenge. A Friar would usually humiliate his opponent to attract as much of a crowd as possible, allowing taunts and jeers from the enthusiastic audience to help overpower the foe. The best Friars would include an impromptu sermon in their fighting, preaching on how no evil act goes unpunished.

The Friars were driven from Montaigne when seven of their members were locked inside their monastery as the building burned to the ground. A local family of minor nobles, du Rosemonde, had been insulted by the Friars on several occasions and the order still holds them responsible for the crime.

Without the evidence necessary to make such an accusation stick, the Friars migrated to

Inismore, where they set up permanent residence, constructing a new but more humble monastery. Some traveled throughout the Enchanted Isles and carried out good works, quelling riots and thwarting criminals, all the while portraying an outward appearance of men of the cloth. Most of these men were thought to be carrying on the work of Robin Goodfellow, lending something positive to the Friars' image.

When word of their deeds spread, their new monastery tripled in size with eager acolytes wanting to join the "Rogues Of The Cross." The Friars soon found their emotional and political ties stronger with the people of the Triple Kingdoms than with the distant Hierophant and, when Queen Elaine formed the Church of Avalon, they became proud defenders of the new faith.

Friars often fight with what is at hand but can use a sword or club handily. They often wear a boiled leather fighting girdle under their robes, which allows them to perform a move dubbed "The Strands of Theus." This is accomplished when a Friar allows an opponent to get within his guard. The Friar goes on the offensive as well, using his fighting skills to disarm or incapacitate his opponent. (However, while this technique works exceptionally well for fist fights, the girdles provide little protection from a sharp sword.) A Friar rarely kills, preferring to let the bruises and broken bones serve as the sinner's punishment.

Unlike other Swordsman Schools, the Friars do not receive a free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, they receive a free Rank in one of their Swordsman Knacks. Students must take the Ordained Advantage in order to purchase this school

Basic Curriculum: Dirty Fighting, Pugilism

Swordsman Knacks: Attack (Improvised Weapon), Beat (Improvised Weapon), Corps-a-corps, Disarm (Improvised Weapon) Exploit Weakness (Friar)

New Swordsman Knacks

Feint, Corps-a-corps, Disarm and Attack are all learned and performed with an improvised weapon such as a bucket chair or a club.

Apprentice: At this rank, the Friar gains a Free Raise on all of his Pugilism rolls, becoming more adept at swinging his fists. During a fight in which the Friar has struck his target at least three times (to the same or multiple opponents), the Friar may spend a Drama Die to add one point to his Reputation total. There must be at least two

witnesses besides the Heroes and their opponents for this additional Reputation to take effect.

Journeyman: The Friar learns to fight with whatever is at hand, learning not to break the object. This allows the Friar to treat the improvised weapon as a regular weapon, keeping any 10s rolled for damage without fear of breaking it.

Master: The Friar has extensive knowledge in what improvisations work best against particular weapons. As a result, all attacks he or she makes an improvised weapon receive a Free Raise. Also, the Friar learns the "Strands of Theus" technique which employs a fighting girdle. The Friar lures his opponent into striking at an armored spot covered by the Friar's robe. This is much like Corps-a-corps, except that the Friar draws the attacker in from far away and allows the weapon an open target.

The Friar declares he will perform the strands, the opponent strikes and, if the Friar beats his opponent's Attack Roll with his Active Defense roll, then the Friar's TN to hit on the next attack is 10. If he does not attack before the end of the round, or he changes opponents, the TN to hit returns to normal. This technique cannot be used without the Friar's fighting girdle.

The Rossini Halberdier School

This school was developed by a devout Church Guard as an alternative to the Solomon school. It relies on the halberd, a polearm which went out of style sometime ago. The Church Guards still carry them during formal ceremonies, and have learned how to use the archaic weapons effectively.

While a trained halberdier can be a terror, well-trained opponents know how to get inside the reach of the polearm. Also, the Church Guard learn to handle adversaries with a minimum of harm. While this is excellent for avoiding injury to overzealous faithful, it can severely hamper the Guardsman in a fight with a serious opponent familiar with this weakness.

Country of Origin: Vodacce (Castille)

Curriculum: Polearm, Wrestling

Swordsman Knacks: Beat (Polearm), Disarm (Polearm), Bind (Polearm), Exploit Weakness (Rossini)

Unlike other Swordsman Schools, members of the Rossini school do not receive a free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, they receive a free Rank in one of their Swordsman Knacks.

Apprentice: Apprentices learn primarily to protect their charges. As such, they are able to use their Parry Knack or any of their Swordsman Knacks against anyone attacking a nearby (within 10 feet) person without penalty.

Journeyman: In a continuing effort to increase the protection of their wards, Journeyman Guards learn to anticipate attacks before they happen. Once per Round, the Guard may use an Interrupt Action to parry an incoming attack by spending only one Action Die, instead of the regular two.

Master: Masters have learned to move their halberd with remarkable speed, blocking incoming blows with ease. If the Church Guard is using Parry (Polearm) as their Passive Defense, increase their TN to be hit by an additional 10.

The Swords of Solomon School

Country of Origin: Vodacce (Currently Castille)

Description: The Church Guard was officially created by Solomon Antone in 609 AV when Carleman was crowned High Imperator by the Vaticine Church (see page 15). The fighting style of the Guards came from Antone's time spent in Cathay. The Guards often incorporate a shield to protect their charge while fighting with their distinctive swords (see below). Few Swordsmen learn to fight against a shield or how to fight together. The Swords of Solomon learned to fight in tight groups of three and are dispatched in this manner most often.

Basic Curriculum: Fencing, Shield

Swordsman Knacks: Bind (Shield), Disarm (Fencing), Attack (Shield) (damage for the church guards' shield is 1k1), Exploit Weakness (Swords of Solomon)

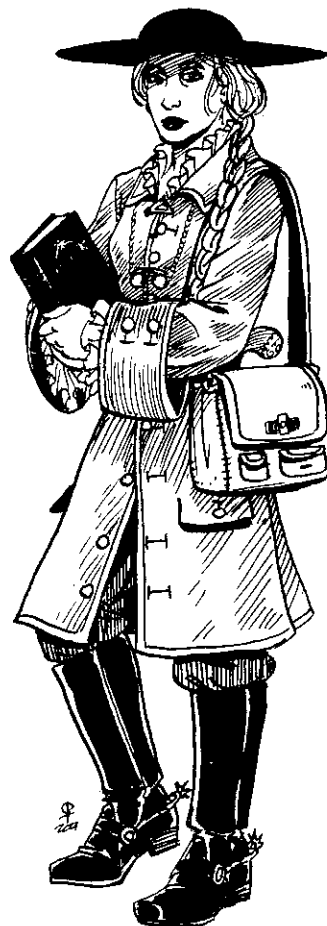
Unlike other Swordsman Schools, members of the Swords of Solomon school do not receive a free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, they receive a free Rank in one of their Swordsman Knacks.

Apprentice: The first thing a Guard must learn is to escort or protect a charge. He is taught to

fight while having a defenseless person at his side or even as a prisoner, using his shield to hide his charge and keep him or her from danger. If the Guard uses a shield, he may add 3 to his Passive Defense since he must keep an eye on more than one target at a time. In addition, the apprentice receives no off-hand penalty when using a shield.

Journeyman: At this level the Guard learns how to effectively fight alongside his brethren. When surrounded, the Guards form up back to back and hunch low, covering as much of themselves with their shields as possible. Often times they will protect someone while fighting in such a manner, placing their charge at their center. When a group of three or more Church Guards are fighting together, they focus on the targets in front of them, leaving their brothers to watch their sides. Each Guard receives an extra action during combat (usually used to move the person they are guarding). This extra action always falls on phase 5.

Master: The Guard now learns the deepest secrets of Solomon's serpent swords (see below). He or she may add 5 to any rolls made with it. This includes Attack Rolls, Damage Rolls, Parry Active Defense, and any Swordsman Knacks.



New Equipment

The Serpent Swords of Solomon

The unique sword of the Church Guard is forged in a fashion originating in Cathay but improved upon by Solomon Antone's insights. When the metal is folded over and over again, a dark serpentine shape forms in the center of the blade. Crafted from the finest Castillian steel, the swords are as impressive as they are deadly. Today, the sword resembles a baskethilt claymore with an open grip, but the blade still remains the same as in years past.

The blade is considered a 2k2 sword. 10 is added to the TN of any attempt to break it.

Inquisitors

Inquisitors are intended as NPC Villains and may not normally be created as Heroes. A player wishing for a challenge may wish to portray an Inquisitor as a Hero, but such a character is not recommended. For information on organization and methodology, please see pages 30-36.

Defenders of the Faith

Threat Rating: 1-4
Usual Weapons: Rapiers (Medium) and Muskets (Firearms)
TN to be hit: 5+ (5 x Threat Rating)
Skills: Sprinting +1, Disguise +2
Special Abilities: Defenders of the Faith can operate in Brute Squads of up to 8 members, instead of the usual 6.

Description: The Defenders of the Faith comprise the bulk of the Knight Inquisitor's forces, and are often used as muscle or spies. The sight of a dozen masked thugs dressed in red Inquisition robes is enough to send even the bravest man scrambling. Defenders of the Faith are Brutes, but they can be any Threat Rating the GM desires.

High Inquisitors and Knight Inquisitors

These are generally full-fledged Villains, with average Traits of 3. They are all well-seasoned professionals, who know exactly what they're doing. High Inquisitors generally focus more on proving heresy, with prominent Knacks in Law, Occult, and Theology. They also frequently possess very adept spying Knacks, with high ratings in all the Spy Knacks and most of the Courtier Knacks. Knight Inquisitors generally focus more on capturing and executing heretics — judging rather than prosecuting. They will have high ratings in at least one Martial Skill, and often high ratings in Hunter Knacks such as Tracking and Ambush. All Inquisitors, regardless of their station, believe fanatically in what they are doing. Common Arcana would include Mised, Stubborn, Fanatical, and Focused. Of course, Arrogant, Cruel, Paranoid, Charismatic, and Ruthless also fit very well.

New Advantage: Membership (Inquisition) (2 Points, NPCs only)

This Advantage represents a position of authority within the Inquisition — usually High Inquisitor or Knight Inquisitor. As such, they may demand support from any Church officials they encounter (though doing so may reveal their status as Inquisitors), as well as commanding any normal Inquisitors, Defenders of the Faith, or other

servants. They have access to any and all Vaticine resources, including restricted areas. They also receive a stipend equivalent to 100 guilders per month, for use in procuring equipment, bribing informants, and the like. They may receive more funding in special circumstances. In return, they must answer to their superiors in the Order and explain their activities to Verdugo's satisfaction.

New Advantage: Righteous Wrath (5 Points, High Inquisitor/Knight Inquisitor NPCs only)

This Advantage works much like the Miracle Worker Advantage, but with slightly different capabilities. As such, Inquisition may not also take the Miracle Worker Advantage. Each Inquisitor with this Advantage receives two Miracle Dice at the beginning of each Story (this number can be adjusted by the GM, but doing so does constitute a significant change in power level). The Villain can activate a Miracle Die to perform one of the special abilities detailed below. With the exception of Vanishing Act, none of these abilities can be successfully used against a Hero with the Faith Advantage.

It is up to the GM to determine if these powers exist in his or her campaign, and where their origins lie if they do. They could be the result of the Inquisitor's fanatic beliefs, they could spring from the divine will of Theus, or they could even be the result of a terrible Bargain the Inquisitor made, similar to the one which produced sorcery. Every Inquisitor is different and not all of them have such abilities. Alternately, they could not exist at all, leaving the Inquisitors to operate as other mortals. Their exact nature is up to you.

Silver Tongue

The Inquisitor has a strangely persuasive voice. He can whip villagers into a frenzy, or stall them just long enough to make his escape. The Inquisitor gains two Kept die (+2k2) on any one social roll. They often use this ability to recruit new members of the Inquisition or to plant the seed of doubt in a Hero.

Gaze into the Abyss

This ability represents the almost supernatural dread that many Théans feel towards the Inquisitors. The Inquisitor has a terrifying, piercing gaze. By activating this ability, he can look into another character's eyes and make a contested Resolve check, to which he gains two Free Raises. If he wins the contest, the losing character treats him as if he had a Fear Rating of

1 for every 5 he won the contest by. Thus, if he wins the contest by 15, he has a Fear Rating of 3 with respect to the character who met his gaze. The character must know that the Villain is an Inquisitor for this ability to work. The Fear Rating lasts until the end of the Story, or until the character defeats the Inquisitor in a fight, whichever comes first.

Fanatic Strength

The Inquisitor can summon up tremendous strength with which to smite the enemies of the Church. By activating this ability, the Inquisitor gains 3 Ranks of Brawn for the duration of 1 Action. This ability could be used to break down a door, shatter manacles, bend bars, or just attack a Hero.

Piercing the Veil

The Inquisitor may activate this ability to automatically penetrate any deception being attempted against her. They cannot necessarily discern the truth, but they can perceive a lie as such. The deception in question must be specifically aimed at the Inquisitor (she couldn't discover the existence of your secret twin sister for example), and the ability only works against one deception. If a Hero in disguise tells the High Inquisitor that the escaped prisoners went that way, the High Inquisitor could tell either that the Hero is in disguise or that he is lying about the prisoners, but not both.

Untapped Reserves

After the Villain has spent the last of his Drama Dice, he can spend a Miracle Die to convert it into two more Drama Dice. These Drama Dice must be used by the end of the Scene, or they are lost.

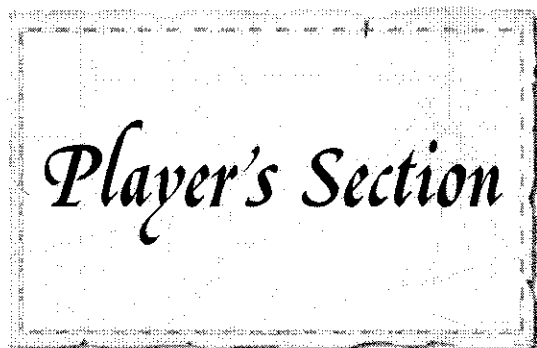
Vanishing Act

The Inquisitor can fade into the shadows in an instant to evade pursuit. When none of the Heroes are looking at her, the Inquisitor can vanish without a trace so long as she isn't being physically restrained and has an unguarded avenue of escape nearby. The precise circumstances are up to the GM, and common sense should prevail. No one should ever actually see the Inquisitor vanish; she simply uses her surroundings to maximum advantage. Often, an Inquisitor intending to use this ability will set up a pre-arranged distraction (such as an explosion or a fire) to give herself the instant she needs to escape. This ability can still be used even if one of the Heroes has the Faith Advantage.



Chapter Four

The Light



“Why should I play a priest?”

In a swashbuckling world, where pirates attack sorcery-wielding archaeologists and Musketeers rescue damsels with secret agendas, why would anyone want to play someone as boring and stuffy as a priest?

For the simple reason that priests are neither boring, nor necessarily stuffy. There are many examples in the classic literature of great men of the cloth, ranging from the priest who sheltered Zorro to Friar Tuck to Aramis himself. Priests have many tools at hand to shine in roleplaying situations, and can easily become as exciting as any sword-wielding swashbuckler.

The most important thing to remember about priests is that they are passionate. Whether they direct that passion at saving souls, helping the unfortunate, or gaining a true understanding of Creation, it touches every aspect of their lives. And passion is the lifeblood of adventure. With a little back-story and imagination, even the most

reclusive hermit can be spurred to heights of glory in Theus' name. That glory may come in saving the world from the evils of sorcery or Legion. It may come from defeating more worldly foes of the Church. The priest could help the needy, heal the sick, or save the lost. And scholarly pursuits can often draw priests away from their books and into a wider world.

It is also important to realize that priests in Théah have a very different role than the one we are used to in modern times. Théans do not embrace the separation of church and state. In fact, in Castille the Church is the state. While the Vaticine Church has worked hard to distance itself from political entanglements, in the long run that is not really possible. With the massive upheaval underway across the continent, priests are just as involved as anyone else is, if not more so. Eisen is littered with both Vaticine and Objectionist chaplains who have seen their entire congregations wiped out by war, and now wander the world looking for new purpose and new answers. Many ministers of Montaigne have been run out of their churches, and must now work from afar to help the peasants who looked to them for comfort. Priests in both Vodacce and Castille could just as easily be agents of the nobility as of the bishops.

Playing a priest in *7th Sea* is in many ways easier than playing a priest from Renaissance Europe. Vaticine clergy may be of either gender, may fall in love, and can get married if they wish. A member of the Church is accompanied by an unparalleled support network. A nobleman may be able to call upon friends, but he must trade favors for their help and his influence only extends over a limited area. The Vaticine Church, on the other hand, covers a huge swath of territory, and will freely give any reasonable aid to

its clergy. A member of a secret society may have friends everywhere, but he must jump through a number of hoops just to find those friends, let alone establish mutual trust. All a priest has to do is ask where the local chapel is, and walk up to the front door.

The priest has access to the libraries and records of the Vaticine Church. Not only are these the largest publicly known libraries, but their restricted sections also hold secrets that few outside the Church can learn. Only clergymen may enter these areas, and even then they must have special permission. The records of the Church are really the only government documentation that exists. If a Vodacce Fate Witch on the run needs to establish a new identity, at some point she will need a priest to create the proper records.

The public views priests as set apart. They are more knowledgeable, more honest, more sympathetic, and more impressive. This gives the clergy advantages in most social situations. A distressed nobleman might confess to a priest his desperate passion for the Comtesse. A merchant could give a discount on his goods, counting that as part of his tithe to the Church. A guard would be unlikely to question a priest entering a prison

with all the preparations for a private Mass with one of the prisoners. The game mechanics reflect this with the free raise given to any character with the Ordained advantage.

Finally, do not underestimate the importance of the scholarly background. While other characters can duplicate a priest's scholarship, it is built into the very fabric of Vaticine life. Every Ordained priest has the Scholar knack, and the Priest skill duplicates a number of those knacks. Without any rounding out of the character, she can already rival many members of the Invisible College. And while the Leegstra swordsman might not respect the priest for her knowledge, when her familiarity with the law gets the swordsman out of jail after a bar brawl, he will appreciate her.

The priest is also an excellent archetype from a game mechanics standpoint. The sorcerer must spend twenty or forty points at the beginning of Hero creation, and the swordsman must spend twenty-five. The priest, on the other hand, spends four points for the Ordained advantage and two for the Priest skill. All the rest is free for customization.

The most frequently heard complaint about playing ordained characters is that it restricts role-playing possibilities. This couldn't be farther



from the truth. While priests do comprise a very strong stereotype, even playing within that type can be tremendous fun. A bombastic preacher denouncing the sins of carousing can create great tension within the party, with little chance of it boiling over into bad feelings or real conflict. The naïve and bookish acolyte can get the party into all kinds of scrapes with manipulative con men and spies. As these Heroes fit people's expectations, you will also find more NPCs who are willing to ally themselves with you.

However, the best opportunities come from playing against type. The old priest who can't keep his hands off the sacramental wine is the classic eccentric. Even more fun is the ex-thief or ex-sailor who swore to Theus that she would become a priest if He would just get her out of this scrape. Now she has truly devoted her life to the Church, but can still swear, fight, and carouse with the best of them.

In short, you should play a priest because it is fun and effective. You will serve as an invaluable resource, and find numerous opportunities for excitement and fun. When the noble swordsman stands over the Villain's prostrate body, he will know that he never could have done it without the guidance and support of Theus' messenger.

The Nature of Faith

"When you come to the edge of the Abyss, and all the light is gone, Faith fills you with the knowledge that when you step over the edge, either there will be solid ground beneath your feet, or you will learn to fly."

— Book of the Prophets, First Vigil

There are few concepts as tricky to explain as faith. It is not as simple as belief that the Creator exists. Even Nicklaus Trâgue believes that, and he claims to be an atheist. However, it is not as all-encompassing as the belief that the Creator will never allow harm to come to you. Clearly, faith did not prevent harm from coming to the Prophets, and good people suffer and die every day. Where, then, does the answer lie?

Church scholars have described faith as perfect knowledge. You know, with absolute certainty and with no need of proof, that Theus exists, that He has a plan, and that that plan has humanity's best interests at heart. The plan may involve suffering for you or those you love. That is the price of free

will. Mankind must learn to come to Theus on its own two feet, and that requires a lot of stumbling. But Theus has given us everything we need to succeed, and will always help us regain our feet when we fall.

Faith can also exist in a less perfect form. Even in modern Théah, with the great scientific minds at humanity's disposal, logic and human thought can only take them so far. The universe holds truths that we do not yet have the tools to comprehend. But these truths are real. Faith helps bridge the gap between what we have learned, and what we know. It is more than intuition, and is certainly not guesswork. It is simply the fundamental, instinctive recognition of one of the great truths of the universe.

There is very little that is practical about faith. It will not clothe you or feed you. You cannot spend it, and you cannot make things with it. But a person cannot live without it. When you lose your faith, or if you never have any to begin with, all of life becomes an empty routine. You have no idea what any of your actions mean, in the "big picture." Importance becomes a relative issue, mostly relative to you.

Faith in a higher being is a bit like becoming lost in an opera. You follow the characters' lives and feel their emotions with amazing intensity. You feel like part of the story, part of a different world. But you are not actually in another world. A space exists between you and the characters, an indescribable separation between their reality and yours.

When you get this feeling of near-rapture, you want to share it. You tell all of your friends about the opera, expecting them to join you in your love of it. You begin developing a social circle made up of fans of the opera, and discuss it endlessly with them. Your new friends now make a habit of going to see the opera regularly.

Of course, not all of your friends see the opera the same way. Different themes, different characters, and different scenes appeal to each of you. The opera does not change, and none of you appreciate the opera any more or less than the other, but you end up with different opinions of how best to appreciate it. More remarkable still, you will find friends who like other operas altogether. You both understand what it means to love an opera, but you disagree on which opera to love.

To drag this analogy one step further, speaking to a person without faith is like discussing an opera with a deaf man. You can describe the story,

and the sets, and even to a degree the music. But the deaf man will never really know what you are talking about until he hears the opera himself. Faith holds an essence there that cannot be described, only experienced.

What does faith mean to the Hero? Mostly, it means that the Hero knows that, somehow, justice will triumph over evil. It may not happen in every situation, and the victory may not even be clear. But, in the end, the one who holds true to his faith will prevail over one who does not. Often this belief is the only thing that keeps Heroes moving forward. The wrongly imprisoned person knows that she will one day be liberated. When a commander sees his loyal men cut down like wheat, his faith tells him that the loss serves a higher purpose. It is not always kind, but it is always for the best.

The one thing that faith cannot do is assure that nothing bad will ever happen. In order for there to be good, there must be evil. Similarly, in order for there to be rewards, there must be tests. Pain, loss, and death are a part of life. The test is not whether one can avoid these things, but whether one can deal with them. In the trials of our lives, faith becomes the subject of the test. It is the tool with which we pass the test. And, in the end, it is the reward we receive.

Faith is the hidden steel that supports your convictions. It provides an explanation for how the universe works. It brings a transcendent fulfillment to your Hero's life. It sustains him through the tribulations of his existence. The nature of faith is the nature of human experience.

Sword and Cross: Warriors of the Faith

It has been said that more wars have been waged over religion than any other factor, and that notion holds just as much truth in the world of 7th Sea as our own. By its very nature, religion inspires feelings of confidence and devotion, but these emotions contain an element of extremism. There is a thin line between merely believing something and the willingness to fight and die for it. Once that line has been crossed, the faithful often becomes the fanatic.

Andres Fiore pulled his horse's reins hard, bringing him to a sudden stop. Below, in a corner of the narrow ravine, stood a fearsome pit, an open wound that led deep underground. A cursed place

that had claimed dozens of innocent souls. The stench of evil caused the horse to shiver. Andres brought the Prophets' Cross from around his neck to his lips, calm and fearless in the face of his task. Theus had brought him here for a reason, and he was but an instrument of the divine.

The term "fanatic" is regularly thought of in a pejorative fashion, but never by the person who moved to such intensity. For him, the excessive enthusiasm stems from the conviction that he follows some truth or purpose greater than himself. It is a spiritual compulsion, an irresistible impulse that becomes the driving force in his existence. To deny it is to deny himself, and its presence becomes reason enough to take action in the world.

Andres' torch flickered its orange light, futile in its attempt to bring warmth or clear away the inky shadows on the cave's walls. The Explorers had left unmistakable signs to insure they could find their way out, but it was never to be. They had been missing for over four weeks, and Andres knew the ancient creature they were hunting had instead found them. He could almost feel their panic and fright, lingering like ghosts in this place. They were unprepared and afraid, weaknesses Andres did not share.

While some Villains may portray the darker side of fanaticism, it also contains noble aspects for Heroes to embody. A fanatical hero can be considered a warrior of his faith, fighting for a cause greater than himself. He never questions what he is doing. He epitomizes dedication and certitude and can act as an inspiration to those around him. 7th Sea has two groups that exemplify this type of fanaticism: Ussura's Tyomny and the enigmatic die Kreuzritter.

The dim passage became almost too tight to squeeze through, its ceiling and walls closing together like a massive fist. Andres grimly noted the backpacks and Explorers' gear littering the slime-covered ground, cast away for the doomed trek further beneath the world of man. He briefly examined the discarded supplies and found nothing he needed. The sword and pistol at his side and the fire in his heart were more than adequate to face the terror ahead, to brave the forces of Legion as he had done many times before.

Warriors of the faith are usually made rather than born. They are questing heroes in the truest sense, searching for something that they cannot always define. The catalyst which sparks a quest varied as much as those who answer its call, but the most common initiative is personal tragedy.

The hero hits a personal and emotional low, effectively ending his old life. He is reborn when he finds a purpose to pursue that rises above than himself or his problems, which can manifest in sundry ways. Meeting with like-minded individuals, experiencing fearful visions, and even deep self-examination can provide the impetus for the Hero's unwavering belief in the righteousness of his cause. How he pursues his calling determines his level of fanaticism and defines his heroic nature.

Andres squinted his keen eyes, peering into the muck of a once-pure spring that now bubbled ebony waters. A lifeless face stared back at him from under the surface, contorted in a last, silent howl of horror. He had seen the ghastly expression before, worn on the corpses of family and friends the night his village was destroyed, the night his simple life ended in gnashing teeth and shredding claws. He remembered how his own fright washed away in a golden surge of Theus' power, how the angels sang as he picked up his father's sword, how the beast from the forest screeched as the purified blade pierced its twisted heart. The power had never left Andres, guiding him from one end of Théah to the other, combating evil in all its forms along the way.

So what is an appropriately heroic form of fanaticism? Every gaming group must find its own answer to this question, but a few guidelines can provide a good start. First of all, the fanatic Hero must be able to work with the other players' Heroes. The easiest way to insure this is for the other heroes have qualities the driven character needs (or at least finds useful) in his quest. Also, the actual quest should be of a heroic nature. A character bent on destroying the Vaticine Church and all of its adherents could be considered villainous, but one who feels called to thwart the evils of the Inquisition and return the Holy Church to a state of grace has the makings of a true hero. Solving the mysteries of the Synchroneth, foiling evil sorcerers, and combating the supernatural denizens of Legion are all good

choices. A Heroic fanatic should have a purpose that can never be interpreted in less than righteous terms. He is a champion for a greater good, capable of inspiring the weak and bringing hope to the hopeless.

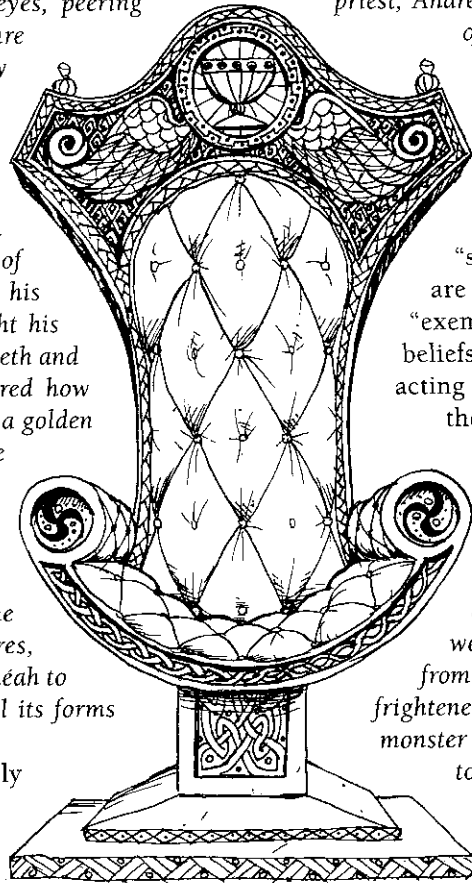
The body in the spring was only the first that he would find. The monster had murdered the Explorers one by one and its increasingly grisly methods revealed a supernatural cruelty. It had tormented its prey, running them ragged and exhausting them without food or clean water. Though he was no priest, Andres lingered briefly with each victim,

offering a silent prayer that their spirits would find eternal peace in the embrace of their Creator.

Many terms can be used to define the fanatic nature of a warrior of the faith. "Driven," "intense," "focused," "inspired," "staunch," and even "passionate" are all relevant, but so too is "exemplary." A hero with such strong beliefs would never dishonor them by acting inappropriately or undermining the grand nature of his quest. He travels a road others cannot, and therefore holds himself to higher standards.

Andres bowed his head and forced himself through another cramped passage. The jagged walls were splattered with fresh blood and, from a distance, he could make out the frightened sobs of a woman in distress. The monster had saved the last Explorer for its torturous delight, and Andres vowed upon his Cross to save her from becoming the next victim. As the final words left his thin mouth, the torch's flame burned from orange to blue to a holy white.

A warrior of the faith is at his best faced with insurmountable odds. He is a man of action, unfaltering and unwavering. He may not live through his quest, but he will confront his destiny face to face and go down fighting. In death he will further the goodness of his cause and his life will serve as an inspiration to others. This last, ultimate sacrifice is the culmination of the fanatic's quest, his ascendancy from a life with purpose to a completed, purposeful life. He embraces it as a noble end, and never flinches when it finally arrives.



The monster dead at his feet, Andres looked down at his wounds. The creature had raked him across the chest, a lethal slash that would claim his life in a matter of minutes. Pressing his cloak in an effort to staunch the bleeding, he turned to the pale Explorer, his calm face showing no sign of the pain that coursed through him.

"You are free," he said to the young woman, his deep voice echoing in the confines of the chamber. He took the Cross from around his neck and placed it in her shaking hands. "Go live a full and productive life." She nodded, gratitude shining from her face, then turned and fled towards the exit.

The torch's flame flickered as if from a sudden breeze, burning from white to blue to orange. Andres closed his eyes and smiled, allowing himself to finally rest.



New Ideas for the Faith Advantage

Undeniably, Faith acts as one of the most important advantages for any member of the Church. While the *Game Masters' Guide* gave some excellent suggestions for handling the Faith Advantage, we felt that some more options were warranted. Below are five more ways in which Theus can touch the lives of your more pious characters:

- With Faith in the divine and in one's self, a person can gain greater insight into those around them. In game terms, a character with the Faith advantage can sense Arcana, particularly in Villains. When the character interacts with the Villain, give that person extra information specifically tailored to give away the Villain's Arcana. You should not come right out and tell the player what the Arcana is. This isn't sorcery,

after all; it is simply an enhanced appreciation of the puzzle of Theus, and each person's place in it. Alternatively, you could use this same mechanic to allow the Hero to sense the impurities in those whose blood carries the taint of sorcery.

- Common people can sense Faith, and are often much more willing to trust and help the pious. Whenever the character interacts with side characters (i.e. NPCs who are not important to either the adventure or the campaign), reduce all appropriate TN's by 10. This would apply to such skills as Haggling or Gossip, but would not apply to skills with minimal personal interaction, such as Research, nor to skills in which the NPC has no awareness, such as Cold Read. Under no circumstances should this bonus apply to combat. Even the most holy saints won't cause a peasant to stand there and take a blow.

- Faith can also be used as a Background. Any time the character has his faith tested in a story, reward him with an XP bonus. Two experience points is the recommended bonus. Whereas three points is more fair for the cost, it is often very difficult to give that much to a character surreptitiously. Remember that the players are not supposed to know what benefit they gain from Faith. If it becomes clear that it operates as a three-point Background with little or no negative stigma, Faith will suddenly become a very popular Advantage.

- It is widely believed that those with Faith see their prayers answered more often than those without. Whenever the character offers a prayer asking for something specific and selfless, you as the GM should see that it comes to pass. However, this is not the ability to perform miracles. If a character prays for a sick woman to get well, rays of light should not stream down from heaven, curing her instantly. Instead, a traveling doctor should happen into the village. Even if he is clearly a quack, his potion should have the desired effect on the woman. Skeptical characters will point to the doctor's skill or blind luck. But the Hero knows that Theus took a hand in the proceedings.

If you choose to play Faith this way, it is extremely important to keep it secret. Use coincidence and luck to arrange for the prayer to be granted. If players become suspicious, deny a few prayers. After all, not every request can be granted within Theus' plan. Make sure that you only fulfill reasonable and selfless requests. Again, if your players discover this rule, even the best of them will be sorely tempted to abuse it.

• Faith can sustain you against the slings and arrows of your enemies. Whenever an opponent attempts to influence you with the Repartee system, your appropriate Trait is considered one rank higher. This does not apply to your attempts to influence another; it is a poor idea to attempt to intimidate Captain Reis with your piety.

Who (Or What) Is Theus?

Hints and clues on the true nature/identity of Theus are scattered throughout *7th Sea*. Unlike other facets of the setting, however, there is no definitive or single explanation for who or what Theus is. The very existence of Theus is a matter of faith, not fact, and Game Masters are encouraged to define this deity however they see fit (or to not define Him at all). That said, there are a few theories a GM might wish to consider. These theories are far from exhaustive, and combining one or more can lead to interesting possibilities. You may also choose to let the mystery be, and never develop the actual origins of Théah's Supreme Being. Whatever the case, however, the players and their Heroes should never be completely sure as to the answer. The less they know about Theus, the more options you have in dealing with their Heroes' faith.

Theus Created Man In His Own Image

This is the message espoused by the First Prophet. Theus created the universe and everything in it. Mankind is the pinnacle of His creation and has inherited many of His attributes. In an effort to help His people understand Him, He gave them the ability to interpret the world. He is a benevolent deity who cares and aids humanity like a father.

Man Created Theus In His Own Image

Theus did not create Terra or its human occupants. Instead, Theus was created by the belief of humans, the ultimate manifestation of their force of will (the same force that fuels shamanic magic). Man created Theus in his own image, and now Theus represents the best hope of stopping the threat posed by the Syrnych and various other supernatural forces.

Theus Created Everything... And Then Abandoned It

Theus intended the universe and everything in it to be completely self-sufficient, like a machine gifted with perpetual motion. His work complete, He left the universe to fend for itself and now shows no interest in its workings.

Theus Created Everything... And Keeps Tinkering With It

Like a scientist or inventor, Theus continues to work with and improve upon His creation. The Syrnych did not work out, so He created humans to study and manipulate in a grand, cosmic experiment. He often interferes in mortal affairs just to study the results.

Theus Is A Syrnych

Theus is not an individual but one of the races of the Syrnych. This would, most likely, be the Thalusiai, who were obsessed with ruling Théah with a race of slave beings at their command. The humans eventually revolted and, with the help of the Sidhe, banished their masters beyond the Barrier. Alternately the Syrnych might very well have created humanity as part of Theus' plan — serving as unwitting instruments of His will even as they plotted to rule His creation.



Theus Is A Razhdost

Like Matushka, Theus belonged to the powerful race known as the Razhdost. When the Bargain occurred and the Barrier weakened, Theus gained a window back into the world. He developed a fondness for the humans and sent His Prophet to help guide them on the spiritual path to resisting the powers released as a result of the Bargain. Matushka recognizes His handiwork and did indeed speak to His Prophet, which is why she allows Orthodoxy to exist within her borders.

Theus Is Grumfather

The Vestenmannavnjar have been right all along. The being everyone refers to as Theus is actually Grumfather, the Grey Wanderer, who created the world from the body of a giant named Värld. The Vesten are the last of his people to stay true to the Good Ways and, if they vanish, everything will be destroyed in a fierce battle called Ragnarok.

There Is No Theus

Theus is not real. He never was real. All of the Prophets represent the collective subconscious of humanity. Mankind will soon understand that the concept of Theus was merely a crutch needed to evolve to a point where the true nature of faith can be studied and understood.

A Developed Theory: Ayallah

This theory serves as an example of how to develop the "true" nature of Theus for your particular campaign. It is based on the story of Matushka, as told on pages 109-110 of the *Ussura* book.

Long, long ago there lived a race called the Razhdost, incredibly powerful beings who created all the other life on Théah. As their creations flourished, the Razhdost began to disappear. This earliest of races knew fear, and tried to stop themselves from dying out. They failed, time and again. Some of their attempts became the other Synchronic races – the Thalusiai, the Domae, the Setines, and others we can only dream of. Yet still they were dying.

The final conclusion was inevitable. The Razhdost would have to leave their beloved home, and let their children flourish or perish on their own. They began to prepare a great spell to open a gate into the Beyond. The Thalusiai, however, refused to let the Razhdost go until they had learned all their secrets. They sabotaged the spell, expecting the failure to convince the Razhdost to stay and pass their knowledge on.

But the failure was much more spectacular than the Thalusiai could have predicted. When the portal opened, the unstable energies ripped across the face of the world, shattering the continent and parting the oceans. Strange magics and alien beings poured into the world. Thousands of Razhdost died in the cataclysm. Unable to direct themselves into the Beyond, the remaining Razhdost prepared a final spell to seal the portal and save the world.



In order to seal the portal, a few Razhdost had to go through, risking the energies and chaos on the other side. Fifty of their number immediately leapt through the portal. Five came out the other side. They began to cast the spell that would seal the portal from this side, as their brethren sealed it from the other. They did not know, however, that the other Synchron races had turned on the remaining Razhdost in fear. Not understanding what was going on, and believing that the Razhdost's new spell meant to eradicate them altogether, the Thalusiai attacked. Hundreds of Razhdost died, but the last few used their own blood to seal the portal. Only one, Matushka, survived on Théah.

In the Beyond, three of the five remaining Razhdost died to seal the portal from their side. Only two, Seraphia and Ayallah, succeeded in moving to the Beyond. They wept and grieved for their lost race, and their shattered world. After a time (it is difficult to say how long in that strange realm) Seraphia decided to move on. She found a new, unblemished realm, and created a home for herself there.

Ayallah, however, could not forget what had been lost. He knew that alone, He would never have the power to open the portal again. But He could open a small pool that would allow Him to view Théah. He was stunned by what He saw. The Sidhe, which He had never seen before, were fighting the Synchron. More surprisingly, they were winning. In a blink of an eye (from where He stood) they forced the prodigal children of the Razhdost behind a great Barrier, locking them away from Théah. In their place, a fragile new race emerged. Humanity rose from the ashes, and began building the world anew.

When Ayallah first looked upon the humans, he fell instantly in love. These tiny, weak creatures embodied everything the Razhdost had been striving for. Without the cold and grasping Synchron races in their way, they had the potential to rise to undreamed heights of nobility. Ayallah watched these people carefully, exercising what power he could to modify their history and encourage them on the right path.

After many years, as humans reckon them, Ayallah saw a dreadful thing. A few humans had made contact with the Synchron beyond the Barrier. In return for fleeting scraps of power, they had agreed to help free the Bargainers from their otherworldly prison. He knew what that would mean, and what He must do. He must find a way to act more forcefully in Théah to combat this "sorcery."

For forty days and forty nights He labored. An equal number of years passed in the world below. Finally, He discovered a difficult and dangerous solution. The old portal could be opened a tiny fraction to allow a piece of Himself through to be born into one of the humans. He could only do this three times, however. A fourth attempt would once again unbalance the universe and let the uncontrolled energies of the Beyond into the world. He resolved to make the attempt. Thus was the First Prophet born.

Three hundred years later, Ayallah saw the need to reinforce his teachings. The Second Prophet was born.

Another seven hundred years would pass before His Church once again strayed from the path. A Third Prophet was sent into the world.

Now, Ayallah bides his time. He once again must be content to work what little magic he can from the Beyond, favoring those of His priests and followers who show exemplary service. He is pleased to see the number of humans working to prevent the destruction of the Barrier. He is even more pleased to see how humans have come to value goodness and nobility over wealth and position. Certainly the material lures have led many astray, but at least they and their fellows know that they are making the wrong choice.

Unfortunately, recent years have seen an increase in the use of sorcery again. Philosophers argue if it can really be all that bad. It is clearly time to send another Prophet to reinforce his teachings, particularly since the Third Prophet never delivered his message. But Ayallah knows that this time, His interference will destroy the world more surely than the Synchron could. So he waits, hoping that humanity will realize their folly and keep the Barrier strong. But if it comes to a choice between seeing His children (as He thinks of the humans) destroyed, or seeing them enslaved to the powers that killed his brethren, His choice is clear.

He will destroy them all.

Running A Church-based Campaign

How Do I Make The Clergy Exciting And Fun?

Let's be honest. When you think of tales of action, adventure, and swashbuckling, they rarely involve religious organizations in more than a

supporting role. Sure D'Artagnan and his friends ran afoul of Cardinal Richelieu and Robin Hood counted Friar Tuck among his Merry Men, but none of the main characters, the true heroes, belonged to the Church in any official capacity. In the world of *7th Sea*, that's a missed opportunity. Théah's various denominations are a perfect starting point for any campaign.

Much like a soldier in a nation's army, being a clergyman isn't just a job, it's a way of life. Whether a person serves as a priest, monk, or choir member, he belongs to an expansive organization with its own set of rules and protocols. This organization may consist of countless individuals, but they all work towards the same purpose: furthering a spiritual cause. This uniting aspiration can keep a group of Heroes together even if they despise one another. Whatever personal problems they may suffer, they will endure them for the Greater Good. They are agents of their faith and will do whatever it takes to persevere.

So what kind of adventures can a GM expect to run in a Church-based campaign? The true answer is, "Any kind the GM wants," but a few guidelines may help. There are two extremes a GM can utilize time and again, one external and the other internal. Combining elements from both in a single adventure will provide a very rewarding experience.

An external adventure can be thought of as missionary work, where the characters serve their faith in some outward capacity, whether it be through political maneuvers, combat, or actual charitable ministrations meant to convert others to their belief. These adventures are similar to spy novels in that the player characters take an assignment from a superior or group of superiors and have a set of parameters in which they must operate. Some examples of this type of adventure include:

- Uncovering the true death of the Hierophant
- Finding and destroying a group of relic smugglers
- Protecting a certain area from a supernatural menace
- Establishing a church in a hostile territory
- Aiding in negotiations between two rival factions

An internal adventure concerns the heroes with the workings within their church. These adventures tend to be more political in nature, dealing in subtle maneuvers rather than out-and-out action. This is a guideline, however, and not

an inflexible rule. After all, discovering that a bishop has been replaced by a servant of Legion will likely result in a combat situation. Some examples of this type of adventure include:

- Thwarting a dangerous rival from advancing in the ranks.
- Protecting crucial scientific research from the Inquisition.
- Re-interpreting ancient texts to permit the use of sorcery.
- Foiling an assassination against a fellow clergyman.
- Dealing with a rogue sect which now threatens the status quo.

Keep in mind that numerous secret societies have elements within the various Churches. The Heroes may belong to one or more of these sects without violating their vows, and their connections can serve as an easy fulcrum for internal Church adventures.

Of course, Heroes do not have to be clergymen to run a Church-based campaign. With political power and resources to spare, organized religion can act as the ultimate benefactor or antagonist, showing up with a personal interest in whatever affairs the Heroes are involved. Since such affairs usually involve larger-than-life exploits, their activities would likely prove of great curiosity, whether they want them to or not.

The key to running a successful church-based campaign is to remember that organized religion is no different from any of the other factions making up Théah's political landscape. Yes, they claim to have the power of the one true deity on their side, but they are operated by the whims of man. Everything noble and everything base about humanity can be incorporated into a church-centric campaign.

Just remember that, no matter how ludicrous their actions may be, every church believes they have the best interests of their parishioners at heart. If the GM keeps the same attitude toward his players, his work is half done.

Pagan Religions

Not everyone in Théah worships Theus. Many villages have little contact with civilization, and still honor the old ways. Many ambitious men and women have rejected a Church which has brought them little in favor of another master who promises much. And many, many fools are drawn

in by something "different" or "rebellious." Below are a few of the more prominent alternatives to the various forms of the Prophets' faith.

Legion Worshipers

Most Théans look upon Legion with fear and hate. Some, however, see the evil being as a source of power. These few come together in secret to implore Legion to grant them some measure of that power. They look for strength, long life, riches, or even a Bargain for sorcery. In return, they perform evils in Legion's name. This can range from petty bickering to prevent the village council from accomplishing anything all the way up to human sacrifice and cannibalism.

The Hosts (as followers of Legion are generally referred to) are not really a single force. As such, they cannot compare to any of the typical secret societies for resources or impact. Rather, they consist of small cells, individual practitioners, and family traditions. These groups communicate with one another, and in fact many actively despise other Hosts. As such, there is also very little in the way of consistent ritual or belief among them. Depending on the area, their ritual could be a deliberate mockery of the Vaticine Church (saying the Mass backwards, for instance), or derived from ancient pagan practices. In Vodacce, there are more than a few self-styled black magicians who claim to use arts stolen from the Crescent Empire.

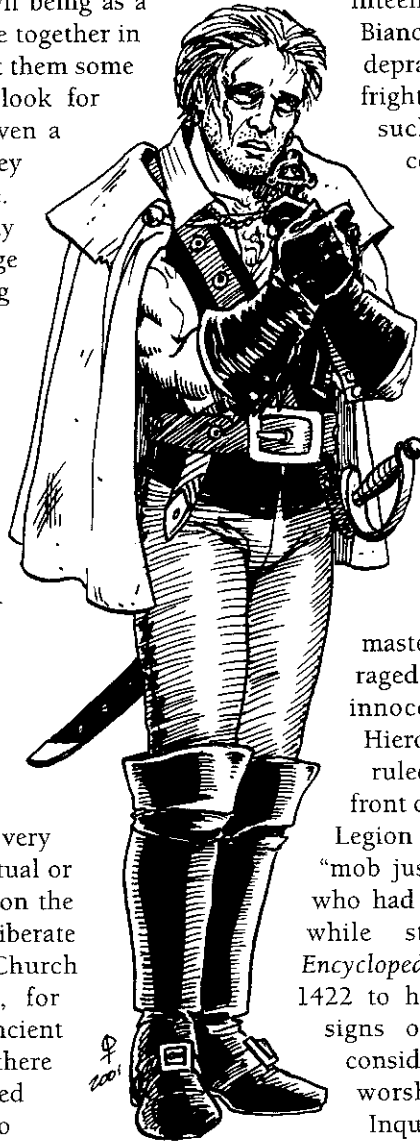
Surprisingly enough, very few sorcerers number among the Hosts. The common belief is that they no longer need to curry favor with Legion, as they already possess very real supernatural powers. However, it may have more to do with the fact that few nobles take part in Legion worship. The largest draw seems to be among merchants and others of the middle class — those with enough leisure to pursue occult interests, and enough ambition to do anything for a little more advantage over their rivals. People

who already have all the power they need are less likely to sell their souls.

While it is very unlikely to find an actual member of the Hosts, many a poor soul has been tortured and killed on suspicion of belonging to them. This was particularly rampant in the fifteenth century, soon after the fall of the Bianco family in Vodacce. The Biancos' depraved acts and widespread influence frightened many in other kingdoms. If such beasts could hide in Vodacce, could they be hiding here? And many Biancos were merchants. Could they have spread their foulness along with their trade goods? Many people began to warily eye others who seemed odd. Those who did not appear sufficiently pious had their faith questioned.

Those who were too pious were thought to be putting on an act. Loners and misfits were obvious targets, but the fiercest battles raged between rival merchants who accused each other of serving the Bianco family and their dark masters. Hunts for Legion worshippers raged across the continent, and many innocent people were killed before Hierophant Lucia I put a stop to it. She ruled that it required a proper trial in front of three priests to convict someone of Legion worship, which brought a halt to "mob justice." Cardinal Leonardo Vincenza, who had been active in fighting the Biancos while still a Monsignor, wrote *The Encyclopedia of Demonology and Witchcraft* in 1422 to help judging priests understand the signs of the guilty. This work is still considered the primary reference on Legion worship, and is carried by many an Inquisitor.

Despite the lack of organization among the Hosts as a whole, there is one group that comes close to claiming the title of "Secret Society." La Caldera, also known as The Cauldron, is an extremely well-organized and regimented group of Legion-worshippers which operates almost exclusively in Castille. It began in the time of the Third Prophet. A small group of Crescent people escaped the purges ordered by the Prophet. As they saw families and friends killed or exiled, they swore revenge against their oppressors. It was decided among the founders of La Caldera



that the best way to destroy the Church was from within. They masqueraded as pious converts to the Vatican faith and became ordained as priests. Unfortunately for them, their numbers were too few to do much damage without tipping their hand. But they bided their time and executed what petty plots they could.

Some few years after the founding, a man came to the head of La Caldera with a strange story. He claimed to be the last surviving member of a group called Agiotage (see the *Sophia's Daughters* sourcebook for more details). He told them of the vast power that they could receive from the Syrneth, creatures similar to the Bargainers. Though the Cauldron priests were not familiar with Syrneth, they certainly knew about the Bargain. The man claimed that an organization of women was trying to kill him, and he needed desperately to hide and find a way to pass on his secrets. La Caldera accepted his deal.

Unfortunately for them, the man mysteriously died three years later, having passed on only a few small pieces of information. But it was enough to turn rebels into worshippers of Legion.

The sect really had very little clue how to worship Legion. Their informant had given them information on how to serve the Bargainers, but not actually how to contact them. They would need knowledge from existing cults if they wished to reach their goals. In order to discover and communicate with these worshippers, they infiltrated the ranks of the Inquisition. Their numbers slowly grew, and with them came increased power and knowledge.

After a few centuries of slowly increasing in power, La Caldera developed two powerful unwitting enemies. Die Kreuzritter, working under the orders of the Hierophant, began seeking out and quietly eliminating corrupt priests. The Knights, except for one small cell that has recently caught rumors of "The Cauldron," have yet to realize that there is a conspiracy linking the priests, a conspiracy that began to break down as key members were removed.

La Caldera was also inhibited by the same simple monk that shook the Church to its foundations. Without realizing quite what he was seeing, Mathias Lieber cried out against exactly the excesses that La Caldera had been quietly encouraging in the Church. Oddly enough, this was precisely the sort of schism that the Cauldron founders had been hoping to effect in the Church. However, the members who heard Lieber had lost some of the fire of revenge, and instead saw their power and comfort threatened. What could have been fanned into a firestorm that finally destroyed the hated Church, instead was fought to a point where the core of the Church in Castille and Vodacce survived. Ironically enough, in response to the Objectivist accusations, a number of the most corrupt priests (including the most powerful members of La Caldera) were defrocked and exiled. The Legion worshippers saw defeat snatched from the jaws of victory.

La Caldera still exists and operates today, but is fairly small and almost completely restricted to Castille. They have retained a small presence within the Inquisition, and are at least partially responsible for electing the zealot Verdugo to his current position (though he is not a member, and would destroy them without blinking if he suspected their existence). Most of the cruelest excesses of the Inquisitors are actually at the orders of the very people they were



created to destroy. They have now entirely forgotten their original mission and concern themselves only with amassing power and spreading suffering in the name of Legion.

Syrneth Worshippers

Recent years have seen a real crisis of faith among the nobility of Montaigne. They have been excommunicated, and their Empereur has told them they no longer need Theus. Many of them, however, still desperately need to believe in something greater than themselves. They have found their answer in the Syrneth, a phenomenon which began even before the Empereur's break with the Church. Tales and artifacts ascribe them seemingly divine powers and intelligence. Their return to importance on Théah just as Theus seems to be abandoning them is considered the sign of a new faith.

In addition to finding information on the Syrneth, many of the archaeologists and historians employed by the nobles have also turned up information on the Imperial religion from before the time of the First Prophet — cataloging rites, beliefs, and icons from the earliest days. A small group of nobles in Paix started assembling similarities between the Imperial gods and the Syrneth. They concluded that the Imperials worshipped the Syrneth, who had started human civilization before passing on. Obviously, then, it was the First Prophet who had turned humanity from the truth, rather than revealing it. Their efforts gave birth to a cult dedicated to recovering the mysteries of the Syrneth.

The ideals and beliefs of this cult are quite bizarre by Théan standards. They promote the strength of the individual over Theus or king. Sorcery is not evil, but a gift from the old gods to help humanity achieve their potential. The entire Vaticine faith is a conspiracy to keep the people and the kingdoms under the control of the Hierophant and his Knights. The Syrneth were, indeed, multiple races. Each of them attained enlightenment as a race and moved on into the next world. They can still be contacted there by those sufficiently close to enlightenment.

The Syrneth cult builds its rituals and structures around what ancient Imperial "mystery cults." It ranks consist of a series of Circles, each representing greater enlightenment in the ways of the Syrneth. The five nobles who founded the cult are the only ones in the Seventh Circle. The Sixth Circle holds about twenty members, and the remaining circles total between ten and one

hundred (the definition of whether or not one belongs to the First Circle is extremely vague, and no one has a good count of them). A member moves from one Circle to the next higher one when a unanimous vote from the higher Circle agrees to let them in. They go through excessively theatrical initiation rites, which are held in absolute secrecy. They are then considered full members of the next Circle.

All the rites and ceremonies of the Syrneth cult are held in absolute secrecy. This is for two reasons. First, their research indicates that the mystery cults operated in total secrecy so as to limit the number of "enlightened ones." Second, they know that their views could attract unwelcome attention from the Inquisition and l'Empereur. In truth, both the Church and the Musketeers know about their activities, but they have dismissed the cult as a harmless fad which will collapse soon.

There is a deeper secret, however, which would frighten any that knew of it. Two nobles of the Seventh Circle actually are Syrneth themselves, Thalusions who slipped through a hole in the Barrier (see *Die Kreuzritter* for a description). In order to build a power base sympathetic to their cause, they chose to play on the dissatisfied Montaigne gentry. They are attempting to carefully balance the unusual political demands involved in running a secret group of fanatics with the promotion of their agenda. They encourage the use of sorcery, particularly Porté, to further weaken the Barrier. In fact, a number of their rituals involve opening pockets and gates, repeatedly weakening the Barrier in certain places. Finally, they wish to discredit die Kreuzritter, and tell any worshipper who makes it to the Fourth Circle about the Knights, painting them as evil secret police who would silence any opposition to the Hierophant. They also spread rumors in the First Circle, pointing to certain factors, such as the high mortality rate at Kippe Academy, as evidence of a conspiracy of evil. Their numbers have not grown sufficiently (the "fad" label has more truth than they admit), but they have high hopes that their agenda will continue to spread as long as the Empereur remains in power.

Schattenmann Worshippers

In the Schwarzen Walden, a mysterious being has walked since the beginning of legend. He is known today as the Schattenmann, and feared by almost everyone who lives near the wood.

Almost everyone.

Long, long ago in Eisen's history, the barbarian tribes worshipped terrifying deities. Gods of war and storms clashed with goddesses of death and magic. As the teachings of Theus spread, most of these old gods disappeared and were forgotten. But one, the fearsome god of the night, would not leave his stronghold in the Schwarzen Walden.

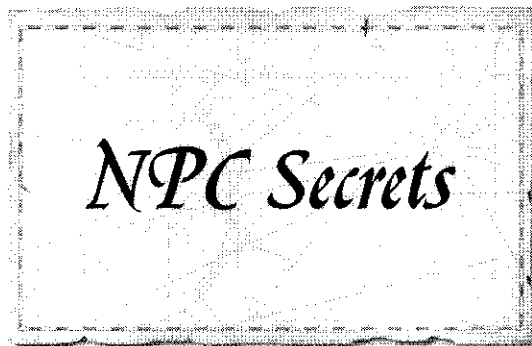
Today, villages on the edges of the dark forest still perform annual rituals to appease the Schattenmann. It is said that so long as they perform these rituals properly, the Schattenmann will stay within the forest and leave the villages alone. So far, it seems to work. The only victims of the terrible specter are found within the wood, never in civilized areas.

Some few people still remember where these annual events came from, though. The ancient barbarian rites have secretly passed down from parent to child for generations. These rites could not only prevent the ire of the gods, but actually coax favors from them. Even today, certain woodcutters and hunters in the forest still worship their Prince of Darkness, the Schattenmann.

The worship services are usually conducted at dusk and dawn, when the realms of man and god touch. They are frequently violent and bloody. Worshippers sacrifice animals, and use their blood to paint mystic symbols on the ground and trees. Particularly potent requests demand human sacrifices, tied to a Blackwood tree and covered in sap. When the Schattenmann finds the sacrifice, he inevitably kills the unfortunate person.


Theologically, the cult of the Schattenmann is very simplistic. Worship is used to alternately calm the god's wrath and call that same wrath down on enemies. No one can say for certain whether or not the Schattenmann is any way impressed by his following. However, cultists are the only woodcutters who can regularly venture into the forest after dark, and they are often reported to be able to command kobolds and other lesser monsters. This may be simple superstition and exaggeration, but it may not as well.

Only the shadows know.




The following section contains game statistics and hidden secrets for the NPCs in Chapter Two. Because of the sensitive nature of the information, we have included them here where the players won't inadvertently stumble across them.





Cardinal Tomás Balcones: Hero
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 2
 Wits: 5
 Resolve: 5
 Panache: 5
 Reputation: 95
 Background: Nemesis, Vow
 Arcana: Inspirational



Cardinal Sergio Bilardo: Hero
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 1
 Wits: 2
 Resolve: 2
 Panache: 1
 Reputation: 98
 Background: Vow
 Arcana: None

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Faith, Miracle Worker, Noble, Ordained, University

Artist: Drawing 5

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Gossip 3, Oratory 5, Politics 4, Sincerity 4

Merchant: Calligrapher 5, Scribe 5

Priest: Diplomacy 5, Mooch 4, Philosophy 5, Theology 5, Writing 5

Scholar: Astronomy 4, History 4, Law 3, Mathematics 3, Natural Philosophy 5, Occult 3, Research 5

Rider: Ride 4

Cardinal Balcones is scared. He does not know the extent of the Inquisition's true goals or even its full power, but he knows that Cardinal Verdugo is nothing but trouble for his beloved Church and homeland. He despises the recent edicts against science and secretly gives aid to the Invisible College whenever possible. He prays daily for a miracle or at least some sign of how he can help lessen this dangerous threat.

As if the Inquisition were not enough to occupy his waking thoughts, the Cardinal has an additional problem. He has developed a secret crush on Alicia Zaneta de Lazaro, the famous Castillian matadora. He had never embraced the idea of romantic love until he saw her in the ring, the perfect specimen of grace and courage. He cannot get her lithe form out of his mind and cannot decide if Legion is using her to make him forget his problems with the Inquisition or if she serves as a reminder from Theus that beauty exists everywhere.



Advantages: Castille (R/W), Eisen (R/W), High Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan, Vodacce (R/W), Faith, Ordained

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Gossip 5, Politics 5, Sincerity 3

Priest: Diplomacy 5, Mooch, 1, Oratory 5, Philosophy 5, Theology 5, Writing 5

Scholar: History 5, Law 4, Mathematics 2, Occult 3, Research 5

There is a reason that Cardinal Bilardo's mental health is in such decline. Just before his mind began to slip, he was on the verge of making a startling announcement.


In his dedication to understanding history, he uncovered evidence that the order of holy knights known as die Kreuzritter had not been destroyed. Over time, he made contact with one of its members and learned more about the nature of the world than he had bargained for. His young contact transferred four bags full of old letters and documents to him, many which originated from the cathedral in Numa. Particularly troubling were some etchings made by an unknown priest from the early fourteenth century, etchings of a plaque once reported deep within the catacombs beneath the church.

When pieced together, the etchings depicted a detailed sketch of a male and female human, complete with accurate anatomical details. Beside the drawings was a 4-foot by 8-foot block of unusual text that Bilardo believes is Syrneath origin. The tiny picture of a mechanical humanoid at the bottom of the plaque struck the Cardinal as either a self-portrait or a signature, and the plaque's original purpose struck him like a cold knife. It was a blueprint, the plans of how to build a human. The shock was so great that it immediately began to wear on his mind.

Bilardo decided the plaque indicated one of two things: the Syrneath were the true creators of humanity or that they had disappeared by becoming humans themselves. Either scenario

challenged his faith to the breaking point, but he finally determined that if all of creation was a riddle, this was simply another part of it. Unfortunately, the more Bilardo worked on solving it, the more it weakened his intellect. Then, one fateful morning, he awoke with no knowledge of the current day or his research.

All of Bilardo's journals, notes, the etchings themselves are stored within a trunk in his private chambers. When he passes into the next life, their inevitable discovery may have profound ramifications.



Cardinal Christina: Villain
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 2
 Wits: 5
 Resolve: 5
 Panache: 2
 Reputation: -37
 Background: Obligation
 Arcana: None


Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Castillian Education, Connections (many), Indomitable Will, Keen Senses, Ordained, Membership (NOM), Small, University, Miracle Worker
Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 5, Fashion 1, Lip Reading 2, Oratory 5, Politics 5, Scheming 5, Seduction 3, Sincerity 4
Merchant: Accounting 4, Appraising 2, Hagglng 4, Steward 3
Priest: Diplomacy 4, Mooch 4, Oratory 5, Philosophy 3, Theology 4, Writing 5
Scholar: History 3, Law 5, Mathematics 4, Occult 1, Philosophy 3, Research 4, Theology 4
Rider: Ride 3

Cardinal Christina's rise to power was not solely due to her own ability. While serving as a priest in eastern Castille, she often interacted with the people in the mountains. This meant that she inevitably came to the attention of los Nublados... and one of Alvara Arciniega's lieutenants among their number. He recognized her fire and ambition as something that NOM could likely make use of. After reporting his find, he began using the resources of NOM to get Christina out of the rural area to which she had been consigned and onto a larger stage. NOM was responsible for the Monsignor's original letter, and for her post as assistant to the Bishop. Every time Christina's

career took a new step forward, she would receive a mysterious unsigned letter describing how she had been aided.

Christina cannot truly be called an agent of NOM; more like a friend who owes them a number of favors. She has repaid many of those favors in typically obscure NOM style, through seemingly innocent and unconnected events. She has also tried to keep the Inquisition out of her Archdiocese, with limited success. Arciniega expected her to protect his castle from Verdugo's men, which is why the Inquisitors took him by surprise. However, Verdugo had outmaneuvered Christina and had his soldiers in place before she could deny him the right. This has caused significant bad blood between the Cardinals.

Christina is completely unaware that Arciniega is a NOM master, though she does know of his place in the Invisible College. She believes that her mysterious benefactors also sponsor the secretive scholars, and she is happy to repay her favors in a manner that is also in line with her own feelings. She fears that one day, she may be asked for a favor that is morally questionable, and is unsure what she will do.



Cardinal Michel Durand del Falisci: Hero
 Brawn: 3
 Finesse: 4
 Wits: 3
 Resolve: 2
 Panache: 4
 Reputation: 34
 Background: Vow
 Arcana: Fortuitous

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Appearance (Stunning) Connections (Donello Falisci, among many others), Faith, Foul Weather Jack, Left-Handed, Membership (Swordsman's Guild), Ordained, Noble, Scarovese, University
Courtier: Dancing 3, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Gaming 2, Gossip 3, Mooch 3, Oratory 4, Politics 4, Scheming 4, Seduction 1, Sincerity 2
Merchant: Accounting 2, Hagglng 3, Vintner 3
Priest: Diplomacy 4, Mooch 3, Oratory 4, Philosophy 2, Theology 2, Writing 3
Scholar: History 1, Law 3, Mathematics 1, Philosophy 2, Research 2, Theology 2

Ambrogia (Apprentice): Feint (Fencing) 3, Pommel Strike 2, Riposte 3, Exploit Weakness (Ambrogia) 2

Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Side-step 2, Sprinting 2, Swimming 3, Throwing 1

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 2, Attack (Improvised Weapon) 3, Kick 2, Parry (Improvised Weapon) 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 2, Parry (Fencing) 4

Hunting: Ambush 3, Skinning 3, Stealth 4, Survival 2, Tracking 3, Trail Signs 2, Traps 4

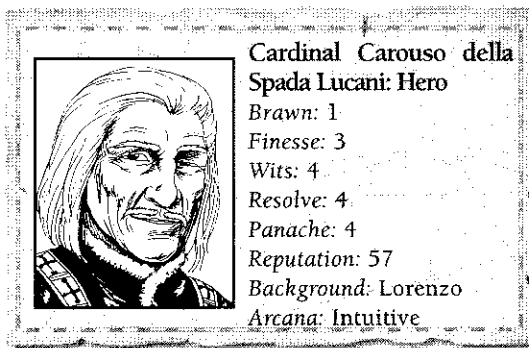
The Cardinal's Scarovese Advantage allows his reputation to drop to -50 before becoming a Villain.

Cardinal Michel has a few deep secrets. The first is simply that he is terrified. While he certainly planned on becoming Cardinal, he expected it to come in his forties at the earliest. He feels unready for the pressures of the position and firmly believes that his next crisis will hold certain disaster. Despite evidence to the contrary, he believes that his success up to now come from a combination of luck and the influence of his family name.

The larger secret in his life is his true agenda in Montaigne. From his point of view, there is only one sure way to bring the nation back under the Church. Cardinal d'Argenau must either be found or proven dead. Similarly, his Bishops must also be found and convened, most likely to elect a new Cardinal. Michel has greased every wheel he can find. His brother, Donello, has agreed to help him, and stepped up his visits to Montaigne (leading to his unfortunate meeting with Lady Jamais Sices du Sices) in a effort to locate the lost clergymen. The complex political machine under *l'Empereur* has tested Michel's political ability to the limit, but so far he has not stumbled.

There has been a recent breakthrough in Michel's information network. A small manor of *l'Empereur's*, one which he has supposedly never visited, has recently closed. All of the staff were dismissed, but supplies continue to arrive at the manor. Lights have also appeared in the manor at night. The Cardinal believes that this manor is the prison of at least one of the missing Bishops.

The information network has brought one more secret. Cardinal Michel has learned that Imperatrice Morella du Montaigne has foreseen something terrible. He has sent secret messages to the Imperatrice, offering her sanctuary in his Archdiocese should she find a way to get there.




Advantages: Castille (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Ussuran, Vodacce (R/W), Connections (many), Faith, Noble, Ordained, University, Patron Saint (St. Phillipa)
Courtier: Dancing 4, Diplomacy 5, Etiquette 4, Fashion 4, Gaming 3, Gossip 4, Mooch 3, Oratory 5, Politics 5, Scheming 5, Sincerity 3
Priest: Diplomacy 5, Mooch 3, Oratory 5, Philosophy 5, Theology 5, Writing 5
Scholar: History 3, Law 4, Mathematics 1, Occult 1, Philosophy 5, Research 3, Theology 5
Crossbow: Attack (Crossbow) 3, Fletcher 1
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 3, Parry (Fencing) 3
Rider: Animal Training 2, Ride 4

Carouso has numerous skeletons in his closet, as anyone who engages in Vodacce politics must. However, none of them are enough to significantly damage his reputation. He does have one secret, however, that could not only ruin his career, but hand him over to the Inquisition without a prayer of survival. And he doesn't even know it exists.

Carouso has Lorenzo blood from both sides of his family. However, neither his parents nor his grandparents knew about it. The last of his ancestors to use the Lorenzo name died in 1432. A strange twist of fate brought two remnants of the Lorenzo blood together in his parents. Even more damning is the fact that his mother actually descends from "right-thinking" Biancos who had rejected their name and heritage even before their family fell.

The strange nightmares that have plagued the Cardinal are actually an effect of the unknown blood in his veins trying to break through. They bind his heritage to ceremonies worshipping Legion which his ancestors took part in. If he had been identified at an early age, he could have been shaped into a powerful force for evil. Fortunately, he chose the path of the Church and the world was spared that. Mostly.

Something about Carouso's investiture as Bishop, and later as Cardinal, strengthened the ghosts within him. They now actively attempt to corrupt him, and push him away from the Church. His radical and near-heretical ideas come from deep within his subconscious, where his mind remembers what his dreams whispered to him. However, to Carouso, the ideas seem very much his own, and his intellect and training have allowed him to build arguments to justify them. Whether or not the defiant priest will become an unwitting pawn of evil or continue to thwart his dark heritage, remains to be seen.



Cardinal Beppo Mueso:
Villain
 Brawn: 3
 Finesse: 4
 Wits: 5
 Resolve: 3
 Panache: 4
 Reputation: -65
 Background: None
 Arcana: Lecherous

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Faith, Ordained
Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 5, Oratory 3, Politics 5, Scheming 5, Seduction 5, Sincerity 4
Criminal: Cheating 5, Gambling 5, Quack 2, Pickpocket 3, Scrounging 4, Shadowing 3, Stealth 3
Merchant: Calligraphy 3, Scribe 3
Priest: Diplomacy 5, Mooch 5, Philosophy 3, Theology 3, Writing 5
Scholar: History 4, Law 4, Mathematics 3, Occult 2, Research 4
Spy: Bribery 5, Conceal 2, Cryptography 5, Forgery 5, Interrogation 5, Lip Reading 5
Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 4
Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 3

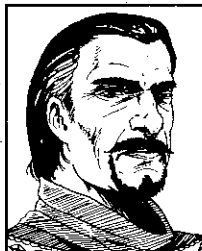
Cardinal Mueso's schemes are more complex than initially presented. The Merchant Princes are no fools and are intimately aware of the information he passes along to the Vendel League. It was their idea to make him a tempting target for their enemies and they prompted him with the exact knowledge to better serve their own plans. This makes Mueso a double-agent, a role he is quite comfortable with.

However, there is still one more factor in the equation. Mueso is in cahoots with Cardinal

Verdugo. Verdugo strongly disapproves of Mueso's worldly pursuits and threatened him with a visit from a Knight Inquisitor if he did not prove himself useful. So Mueso began to strengthen his ties with the Merchant Princes which, in turn, led to his dalliances with the Vendel League — all of which he shares with the High Inquisitor. Verdugo may not approve of the corrupt Cardinal's methods, but he appreciates the results he has yielded. Theus works in mysterious ways.

But Mueso has plans of his own, and they have nothing to do with Theus. He is very selective about the information he collects and passes along, always keeping the juiciest tidbits for himself. He is slowly beginning to play both Vendel and Vodacce against each other and will ultimately support whichever side will benefit him the most. If he can somehow destroy Verdugo and his pesky fanatics in the process, so much the better.

Mueso isn't really slothful. He's just very, very patient.



Knight Inquisitor
Corantin d'Crus: Villain
 Brawn: 4
 Finesse: 4
 Wits: 4
 Resolve: 5
 Panache: 3
 Reputation: -43
 Background: None
 Arcana: Misled

Advantages: Avalon, Castillian (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Ussuran, Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Connections (many), Faith, Indomitable Will, Keen Senses, Linguist, Membership (Inquisition) (Rilasciare), Noble, Ordained, Personal Relic (the mask of St. Averro, the first High Inquisitor), Righteous Wrath, University

Courtier: Dancing 1, Diplomacy 3, Etiquette 3, Fashion 1, Gossip 3, Oratory 3, Politics 3, Scheming 4, Sincerity 4

Priest: Diplomacy 3, Oratory 3, Philosophy 3, Theology 3, Writing 2

Scholar: History 2, Law 4, Mathematics 3, Philosophy 3, Research 2, Theology 3

Spy: Cryptography 2, Interrogation 5, Shadowing 3, Sincerity 4, Stealth 4



Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Long Distance Running 2, Sprinting 2, Throwing 3

Commander: Ambush 4, Cartography 2, Diplomacy 3, Incitation 4, Leadership 5, Logistics 3, Strategy 3, Tactics 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 4

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 4, Reload 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 5, Throw (Knife) 2

Polearm: Attack (Polearm) 3, Parry (Polearm) 3

Riding: Ride 4

Valroux (Journeyman): Double-Parry

(Fencing/Knife) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Tagging

(Fencing) 4, Exploit Weakness (Valroux) 5

Bishop Corantin d'Crus has a large number of secrets. The first is that he himself is tainted with sorcerous blood. He is a half-blooded *Porté* mage, though he has never trained in its use. However, he can sense blooded items and recently-closed portals with uncanny ability.

The most important secret he holds is his secret membership in the *Rilasciare*. During his campaign of terror against the nobles of Montaigne, spies of the secret society migrated to his command. After several years of observation and carefully probing questions, the society offered an invitation to work together, since they had the same enemies. After hearing the


Rilasciare's true agenda, Corantin readily agreed. The Knight Inquisitor and the various sects of the *Rilasciare* have been working together for two years now to try and simultaneously overthrow the decadent nobles of Montaigne and eliminate *Porté* sorcery from the face of *Théah*.

Corantin's methods are certainly not nice, or noble. He frequently allows peasants to be punished for harboring his men, using their resentment as a further lever against the nobility. He would also willingly kill, maim, and torture a hundred innocent souls to prevent one sorcerer from escaping his grasp.

The Bishop is also aware of the unrest brewing in Montaigne. How could he not be, when he has fanned the flames of discontent for years? He actively encourages the peasants to rise up against their masters, promising a return of the *Vaticine* Church when Leon is ripped from his gilded throne. At the same time, he provides secret arms caches to peasants, and has even been known to show up in his Inquisitor's robes and demand that a noble turn a peasant prisoner over to him, only to release that peasant to return to his family. Many peasants see Corantin as a champion of their cause, and overlook the brutality with which he pursues his own agenda.

D'Crus is a fascinating man. The ideals he fights for stand in dramatic opposition to his actions. He is one of the few Knight Inquisitors who might actually aid the Heroes. Make no mistake, though: this man is a Villain. He has no scruples, no restraint, and no softness to his being.

Fear his wrath. The Montaigne already do.



Yves Drossin: Hero
 Brawn: 5
 Finesse: 3
 Wits: 2
 Resolve: 2
 Panache: 2
 Reputation: 6
 Background: Obligation
 Arcana: Trusting

Advantages: Castille, Montaigne (R/W), Vodacce, Faith, Large, Membership (Rilasciare), Toughness
Courtier: Dancing 1, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 1, Fashion 1

Criminal: Ambush 3, Cheating 3, Gambling 3, Lockpicking 3, Pickpocket 3, Shadowing 3, Stealth 3

Scholar: History 1, Law 1, Mathematics 1, Occult 1, Philosophy 1, Research 1, Theology 4

Streetwise: Socializing 2, Street Navigation 4, Underworld Lore 4

Athlete: Break Fall 4, Climbing 5, Footwork 5, Leaping 5, Long Distance Running 4, Rolling 4, Side-step 4, Sprinting 4, Swimming 2, Swinging 3, Throwing 4

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3


Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 5, Kick 5, Throat Strike 5

Wrestling: Bear Hug 5, Break 5, Escape 5, Grapple 5, Head Butt 5

Yves Drossin is very trusting to those who show him kindness, almost like a giant child. It is a trait that those with less than noble intentions have always taken advantage of.

Drossin managed to stay alive in the Inquisition's dungeon because his grandfather, Acel, was one of the most beloved members of the Rilasciare of his generation. His reputation was good enough that both his son and grandson were considered *de facto* members of the secret society, whether they wanted to be or not.

By destroying the records and documents of his incarceration, the Free Thinkers hoped that Drossin might prove useful at some point in the future. Apparently, they feel that the time has come. The Rilasciare (some of them, anyway) see the Inquisition as a powerful threat to their ideals, and Drossin is in a unique situation to strike a blow against it. His position as Cardinal Balcones' bodyguard allows him to get close to Cardinal Verdugo, close enough for an assassination attempt. The Rilasciare are grooming him to take such an action and, because he knows his trusted friend Balcones dislikes Verdugo, he feels the idea has merit. Once he has proof of Verdugo's evil, he will certainly make the attempt.



Richard Kailean: Scoundrel
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 2
 Wits: 5
 Resolve: 5
 Panache: 1
 Reputation: 55
 Background: None
 Arcana: None


Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Age and Wisdom (1), Faith, University
Doctor: Diagnosis 5, Examiner 5, First Aid 5, Quack 3, Surgery 5

Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 4, Mathematics 4, Natural Philosophy 5, Occult 3, Philosophy 3, Research 5, Theology 5

Spy: Conceal 3, Cryptography 3, Shadowing 2, Sincerity 5, Stealth 3

When Don Petrigai announced his startling revelations about the White Plague, Kailean was crushed. He had spent so many years studying the blasted disease that was almost unthinkable that someone else could make such strides in so short a time. He has hated the man ever since and recently devised a plan for revenge.


Once Kailean has found the answers he is looking for, he will personally turn Petrigai over to the Inquisition. He will be a hero to the people of Théah for developing a cure to the White Plague and a hero to the Church for apprehending a known heretic. Until that time, he tolerates Petrigai's presence and allows him to assist in doing Theus' work.



Giuseppe Marco: Hero
 Brawn: 3
 Finesse: 2
 Wits: 4
 Resolve: 4
 Panache: 2
 Reputation: 14
 Background: Moment of Awe
 Arcana: Friendly

Advantage: Crescent (R/W), Ussuran (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Accent (Teramo), Faith, Indomitable Will, Ordained, Toughness
Missionary: Diplomacy 2, Mooch 2, Oratory 3, Philosophy 4, Survival 4, Theology 4
Artist: Drawing 3
Hunter: Skinning 2, Survival 4, Trail Signs 2
Scholar: History 2, Mathematics 1, Philosophy 4, Research 1, Occult 2, Theology 4
Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Long Distance Running 2, Sprinting 2, Throwing 1
Heavy Weapon: Attack (Heavy Weapon) 1, Parry (Heavy Weapon) 1
Pugilism: Attack (Pugilism) 3, Footwork 3, Jab 1
Rider: Ride 3

Father Marco has no secrets of note. He is simply a remarkable man of faith who is living out his dream to travel endlessly.




Apostle Reinn Bergen: Hero
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 3
 Wits: 4
 Resolve: 5
 Panache: 4
 Reputation: 93
 Background: Vow
 Arcana: Focused

Advantages: Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Appearance (Above Average), Faith, Miracle Worker, Ordained
Artist: Singing 4
Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 5, Fashion 3
Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 4, Law 4, Mathematics 3, Natural Philosophy 4, Occult 4
Priest: Diplomacy 5, Mooch 2, Oratory 5, Philosophy 5, Theology 5, Writing 5

Apostle Bergen does not have any personal secrets, and he certainly does not know Boli Kollsson's darker motives for wanting to legitimize sorcery. The Lærdom mage is obsessed with gaining power for its own sake and, if he feels that if can convince the Objectionists to embrace his belief, hundreds of sorcerers across Théah will be indebted to him. (See *Vendel/Vesten*, pages 117–118, for further details.)

Bergen is not about to rush to a hasty decision. Even if his findings ultimately favor Kollsson's claims, he is not sure that embracing the power of sorcery will solve anything. Representatives from die Kreuzritter and the Rilasciare monitor his actions closely, as do other forces from just beyond the shadows.




Iurii The Benevolent: Hero
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 2
 Wits: 4
 Resolve: 5
 Panache: 2
 Reputation: 92
 Background: Hunting
 Arcana: Exemplary

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Teodoran (R/W), Théan (R/W), Ussura (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Faith, Ordained
Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Politics 4, Scheming 3
Priest: Diplomacy 5, Mooch 3, Oratory 5, Philosophy 5, Theology 5, Writing 5
Scholar: History 5, Law 2, Mathematics 2, Occult 4, Research 5
Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 2

In his relentless search to ferret out any trace of the Fourth Prophet, Iurii has yet to notice the biggest threat the Orthodoxy currently faces: Ilya "Grozny" Sladivgorod Nikolovich. The Gaius' growing madness has already manifested in a plan to murder the Patriarch and replace him with his personal confessor, Pontiff Grigori Malenkov. Of course, if the Gaius' plot is uncovered, Iurii and

thousands of others will condemn him as a servant of Legion, if not Legion's Prophet himself. That's a fairly big "if," however, and Ilyia has yet to catch the slightest inkling of Ilya's plot.



Feyyed al-Mutarjim El Mumtaz: Hero
Brawn: 4
Finesse: 3
Wits: 5
Resolve: 6
Panache: 4
Reputation: 23
Background: Vow
Arcana: Loyal


Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Castille (R/W), Cathay (R/W), Crescent (R/W), High Eisen (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Teodoran (R/W), Ussura (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Vodacce, Faith, Indomitable Will, Large, Linguist
Archæology: Occult 3, Research 3, Traps Lore 3
Artist: Calligraphy 3, Musician (Shibaba) 2
Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Leaping 5, Long Distance Running 5, Rolling 4, Sidestep 5, Sprinting 4
Commander: Ambush 3, Cartography 2, Incitation 3, Leadership 5, Strategy 2, Tactics 3
Courtier: Etiquette 3, Oratory 3
Daphan (Master): Beat 5, Lunge 5, Pommel Strike 5, Exploit Weakness (Daphan) 5
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry 5
Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry 3, Throw 3
Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 3, Math 3, Philosophy 3, Research 3, Theology 4
Wrestling: Bear Hug 3, Break 5, Escape 5, Grapple 5, Head Butt 5

Feyyed's Daphan School gives him the following abilities: he may attack one Phase earlier than the Action Phase shown on the die; when an opponent makes a successful Active Defense using Parry, he may spend a Drama Die to attempt to break his opponent's weapon (rolling Brawn against the TN of the weapon in question; see the Eisenfaust rules in the *Players' Guide*); and he may raise and spend a Drama Die to keep an extra die of damage.

Feyyed has no secrets. He is incredibly honest in all of his dealings and will always act in an honorable and straightforward fashion. He adheres to a strong personal code of conduct that

he refuses to violate, and is especially adamant in defending women and children.

As a deadly avenger of Theus, Feyyed is very hard to get close to. In his career of righting wrongs, he has met only one man who he has found worthy of true friendship: Luis Rafael Dominguez de San Angelo. The two have found themselves on the same side of several conflicts and, if anyone knows what lurks under the Crescent's grim exterior, it is this other enigmatic hero.



Lord Peter des Roches, Archbishop of Kirkenwood
Brawn: 1
Finesse: 0
Wits: 6
Resolve: 4
Panache: 4
Reputation: 47
Background: True Identity
Arcana: Inspirational

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Connections (many), Faith, Legendary Trait (Wits), Noble, Ordained, University
Priest: Diplomacy 4, Mooch 2, Oratory 5, Philosophy 4, Theology 4, Writing 5
Courtier: Dancing 3, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Gossip 3, Mooch 2, Oratory 5, Politics 5, Scheming 4, Sincerity 4
Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 4, Law 4, Mathematics 3, Philosophy 4, Research 3, Theology 4
Rider: Ride 4

Peter's low Finesse and lack of Martial skills are a result of his advanced age and palsy. In his prime, he was a trained swordsman and quite an accomplished tennis player.

Peter des Roches has few secrets that he cares about anymore. His family, however, is a hive of deception. The des Roches come from old Montaigne stock, tracing their history back to the time of Montanus himself. Unfortunately, they held lands in the north of Montaigne, which were given to Avalon by Eleanor and represented some of the last territory reclaimed by Montaigne from David III. During that time, the des Roches became trusted retainers of the several Avalon kings... and betrayed that trust on a regular basis.

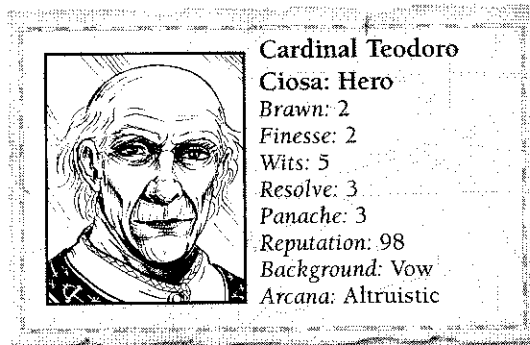
The kings of Montaigne had struck deals with several successive des Roches generations, convincing them to act as spies in the Avalon court. Eventually, it became family tradition to sell information back to Charouse from Luthon. The family prospered in this manner, and when Montaigne reclaimed their land in the 15th century, the family was actually concerned at how to maintain their lifestyle without the extra income. A large branch of the family decided to abandon their home and emigrate to Avalon, claiming continuing loyalty to the throne. They received a small parcel of land along the southern coast, and continued to be welcome in the courts. They also continued to sell information across the channel to Montaigne.

When Peter was growing up, his family indoctrinated him into this tradition. He rejected it, however, considering himself a true son of Avalon. He couldn't very well go to war with his own family, though, so chose the neutral option of joining the Church, salving his conscience and setting his career.

The secret of the des Roches remains intact as far as the majority of people know. Bors MacAllister, however, found out about the family trade, and confronted Peter over it. Peter convinced Bors of his change of heart, pointing to the Graal as evidence of his true intentions. To further ease MacAllister's suspicions, Peter also helped trap his nephew, then the head of the des Roches house. MacAllister could not convict the man of treason — Peter would not allow that — but he had enough clout to remove the family from a state of influence and prevent them from speaking to the Queen. The family remains on the Black Knight's list, but the Archbishop has been cleared, at least as far as Avalon is concerned. His relatives, however, might take things a bit more personally...

Previously Published NPCs

Chapter Two lists six Vaticine Cardinals. The remaining three have been covered in other books (the tenth Cardinal, Maurice d'Argeneau, has been missing for some time). Because they are so important to Church dealings, we are reprinting their statistics, along with a brief summary of their backgrounds and personalities.

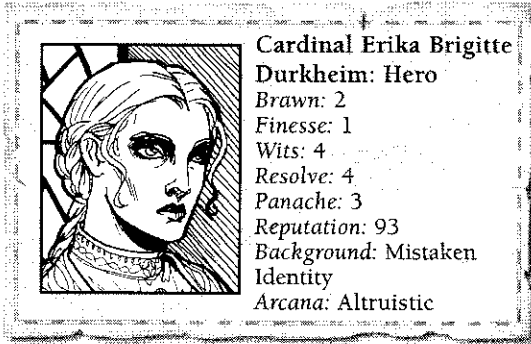


Advantages: Castille (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Faith, Noble, Ordained, University
Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Gossip 4, Oratory 5, Politics 4, Sincerity 4
Merchant: Calligrapher 5, Ceramics 3, Scribe 4
Priest: Diplomacy 4, Mooch 2, Oratory 5, Philosophy 5, Theology 5, Writing 5
Scholar: History 3, Law 4, Mathematics 3, Occult 3, Philosophy 5, Research 4
Servant: Accounting 3, Drive Carriage 3, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Menial Tasks 4, Seneschal 4, Unobtrusive 3
Streetwise: Shopping 3, Socializing 5, Street Navigation 4
Pugilism: Attack (Pugilism) 4, Footwork 3, Jab 3, Uppercut 3
Rider: Ride 4

Teodoro is one of the most beloved Cardinals in the Vaticine. His spirituality and generosity have become legendary (he once gave his noble family's land to the peasant farmers who dwelled there), and he effectively controls nearly half of the Church's assets in Vodacce. A reformer at heart, he has put forward several ideas for getting the Church back on track with a full complement of Cardinals and a Hierophant. He advocates a controversial plan to add a Cardinal to Castille, replacing the missing Montaigne Cardinal and effectively shutting Montaigne out of Church politics.

Ciosa considers the Inquisition a child run amuck, and has aided the Invisible College in an effort to slow the Inquisitors' rate of devastation. Politically, Ciosa is untouchable. He has no scandals in his past. He is beloved of the people, and if he were to die mysteriously the populations of entire cities could be easily inspired to riot. He numbers Prince Gespucci Bernoulli among his friends, and can count on him for unflagging support.

More on Ciosa can be found on pages 73–74 and 115 of the *Vodacce* sourcebook.



Advantages: Castille, Eisen (R/W), High Eisen (R/W), Montaigne, Théan (R/W), Appearance (Stunning), Connections (die Kreuzritter), Faith, Noble

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Oratory 5, Politics 3, Sincerity 4

Performer: Acting 4, Cold Read 3, Dancing 2, Oratory 5, Singing 3

Porté (Apprentice): Attunement 3, Blood 3, Bring 3, Pocket 3

Scholar: History 3, Mathematics 3, Occult 3, Philosophy 5, Research 4, Theology 5

Servant: Accounting 2, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Menial Tasks 3, Unobtrusive 4

Streetwise: Shopping 4, Socializing 4, Street Navigation 3

Cardinal Durkheim occupies the Eisen seat on the Council of Cardinals in the Vaticine Church. Thanks to a childhood disease, she is lame in her right leg, which forces her to walk with a cane. She recently arrived in Montaigne to help Cardinal d'Argeneau deal with the aftereffects of the Hierophant's death. Once things had settled down, she was preparing to leave for home when the unthinkable happened — Cardinal d'Argeneau disappeared, and the Empereur turned up the next day wearing the man's ring of office. She has since remained in Montaigne, working to repair some of the damage *l'Empereur* has caused. The Cardinal hopes she can finish her work and return to Eisen, where she is also desperately needed, before things get too much worse.

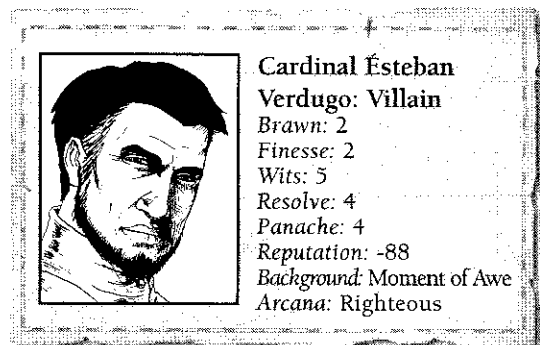
The Cardinal has some dark secrets in her closet. First of all, she's a half-blooded Montaigne, and received rudimentary training in Porté before turning her back on the sorcerous art. Secondly, she has made a bargain with a dark creature in violation of all her clerical vows. She gained the ability to summon mirror ghosts and ask them three questions a day, and it gained her "reflection." It turns out that the creature meant that literally, since she no longer appears in

mirrors. Worse, the creature can appear as her mirror image, a trick which has been helpful at least once.

Four years ago, the Inquisition targeted her for investigation, and subjected her to a three-day interrogation before clearing her of all charges. She later grudgingly received a public apology from them — angering a Cardinal is unwise, even for the Inquisition. In truth, when the Inquisition inspected her for sorcery, she sent the imp in her place, and it was able to fool them.

It might be asked why such a devout woman would deal with such a creature. The answer is simple: she was asked to do so by her commander at the time — Gunther Schmidl, the leader of die Kreuzritter — as well as the late Hierophant. They needed a spy, and with the knowledge she would gain from the ghosts, she would be ideal. She still retains many connections with die Kreuzritter.

More on Durkheim can be found on pages 50, 58, and 108–109 of the *Montaigne* sourcebook, and page 64 of the *die Kreuzritter* sourcebook.



Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Faith, Indomitable Will, Ordained, University

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Oratory 5, Politics 4, Scheming 5, Seduction 4, Sincerity 5

Merchant: Calligraphy 5, Scribe 4

Priest: Diplomacy 4, Mooch 4, Oratory 5, Philosophy 4, Theology 5, Writing 5

Scholar: History 5, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Occult 2, Philosophy 4, Research 4, Theology 5

Servant: Accounting 3, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Gossip 4, Menial Tasks 4, Seneschal 4, Unobtrusive 5

Spy: Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Cryptography 4, Forgery 4, Interrogation 5, Lip Reading 3, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 2

Verdugo has had visions since he was a small boy. He believes that they come from Theus, and has used them to guide him through the Vatican ranks to the position he currently holds. He combines an unwavering fanaticism with a swift intellect that served him well both as a priest and a member of the Inquisition. Since taking command of that Order, he has shaped it into the dominant power in the Church, fighting to prepare as many souls as possible for the End.

Some whisper that his actions hide aspiring political ambitions — that he desires nothing less than the Castillian throne. Verdugo does intend to rule Castille, but not for the reasons anyone imagines. Temporal power to him is simply a means to an end. He's interested in saving souls, ensuring that as many people as possible reach Theus' arms safely. He truly believes in the

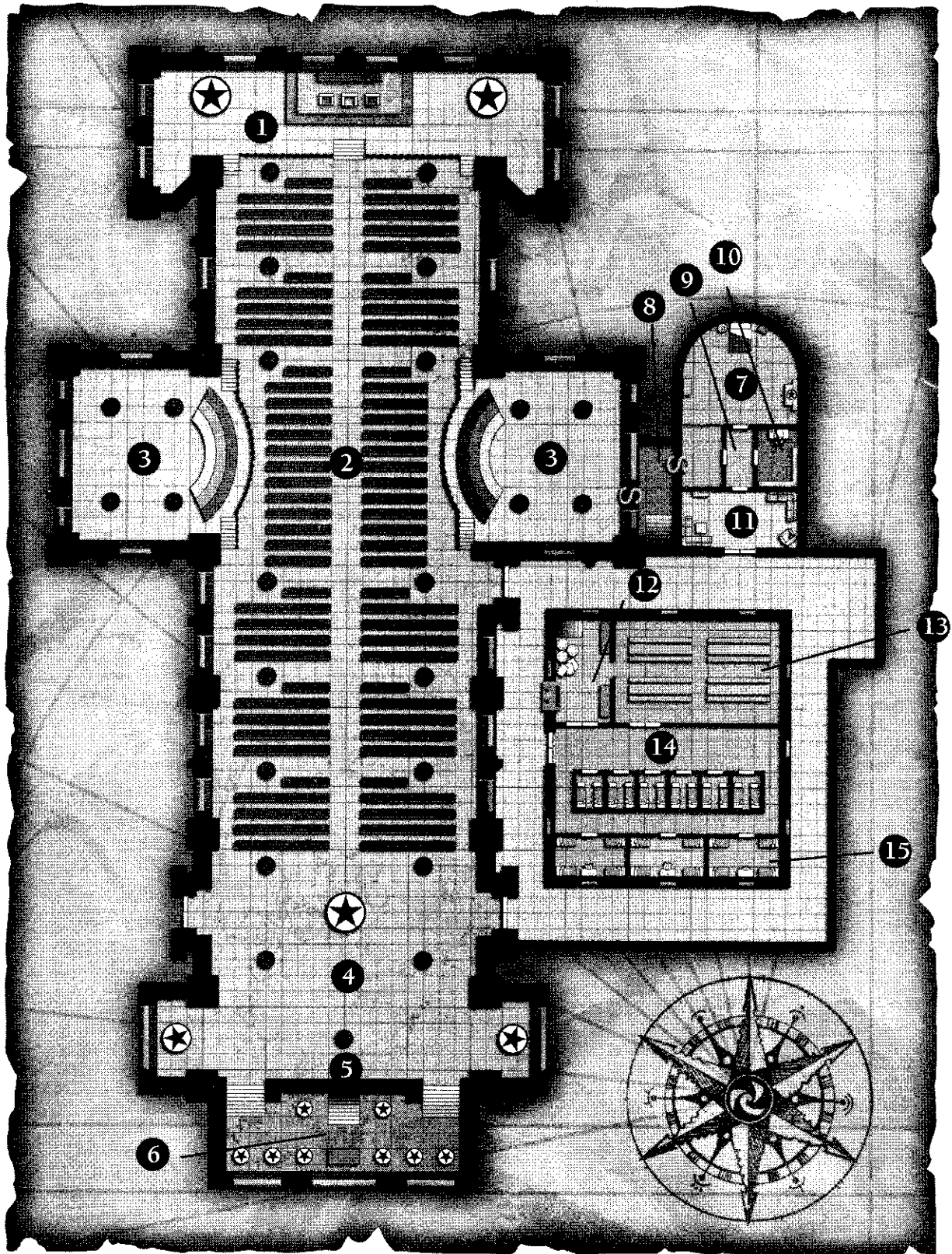
justness of his actions, and the more power he has, the more easily he can continue his good work. He had Prince Javier removed because the heir apparent demonstrated some dangerous ideals. He had hoped to do the same with Sandoval, but El Vago has repeatedly thwarted his efforts.

Verdugo's advice emphasizes the good of the whole over individual suffering. He speaks with quiet smugness, and uses logical arguments to justify horrifying acts of brutality. Verdugo conducts himself with absolute confidence, and truly believes that he has saved more people from Legion's flames than anyone else in history.

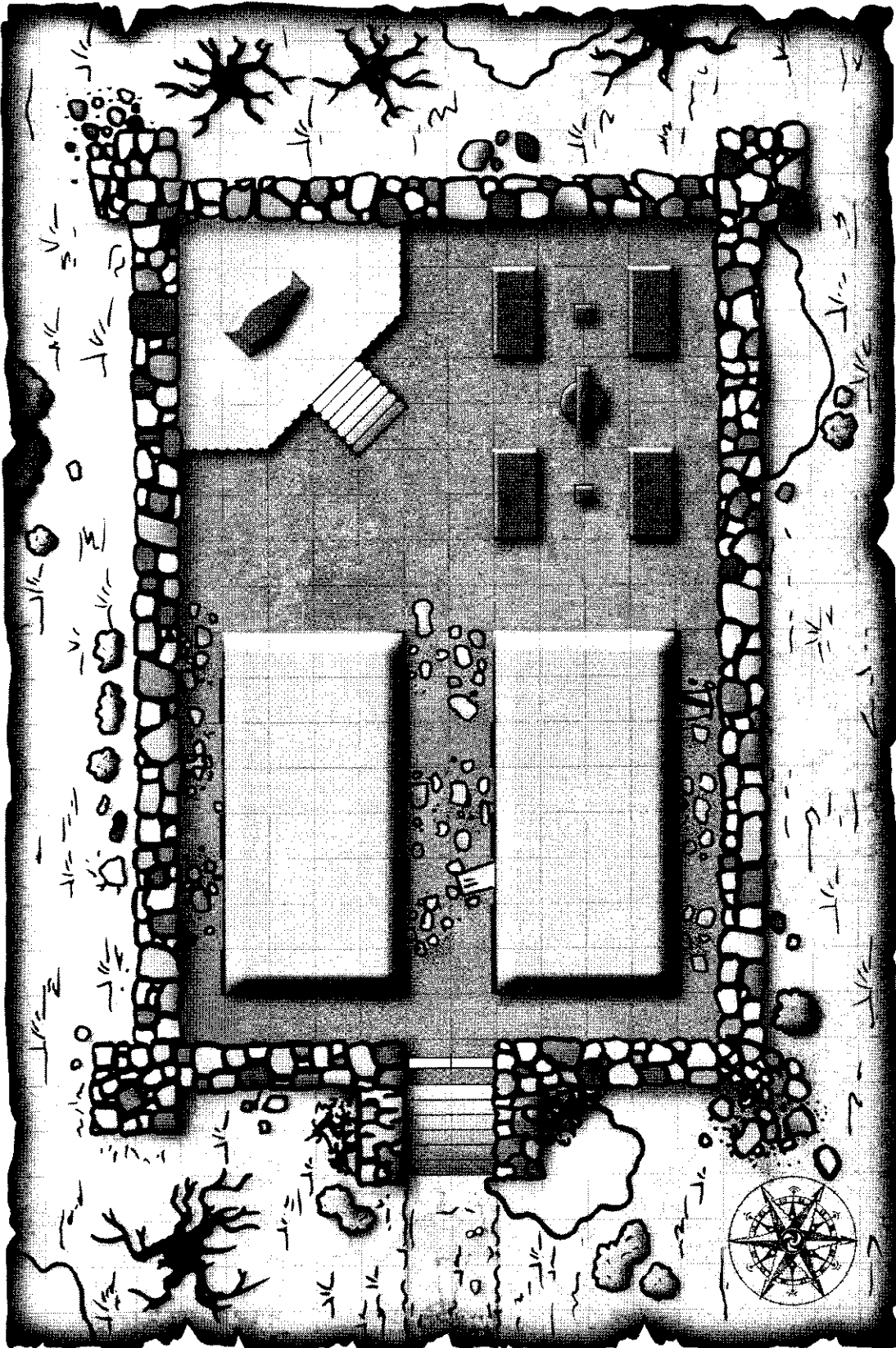
More on Verdugo can be found on pages 46–47 of the *Game Masters' Guide*, pages 76–77 and 112 of the *Castille* sourcebook, and page 112 of the *Los Vagos* sourcebook.



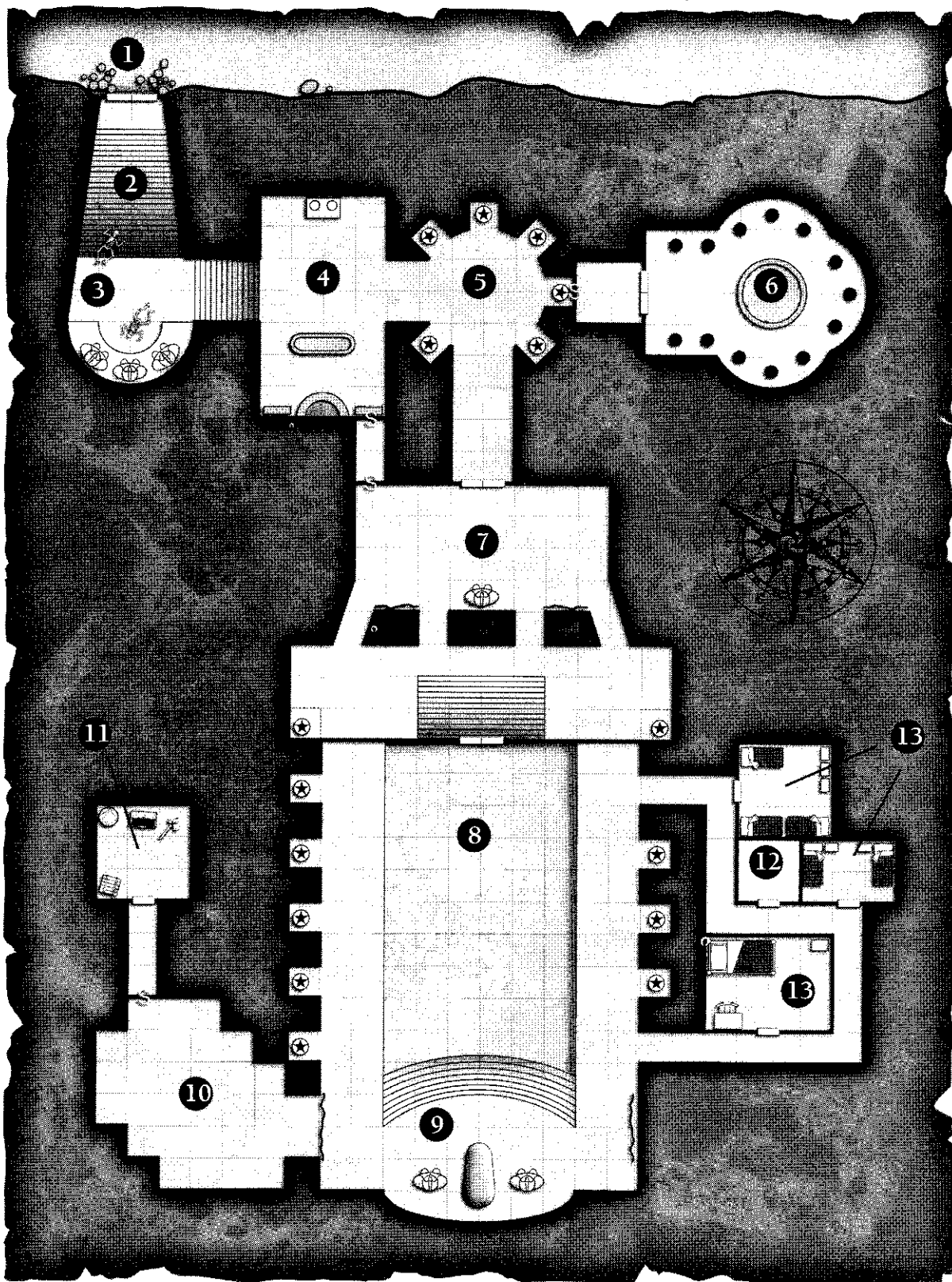
The Great Cathedral of the Prophets



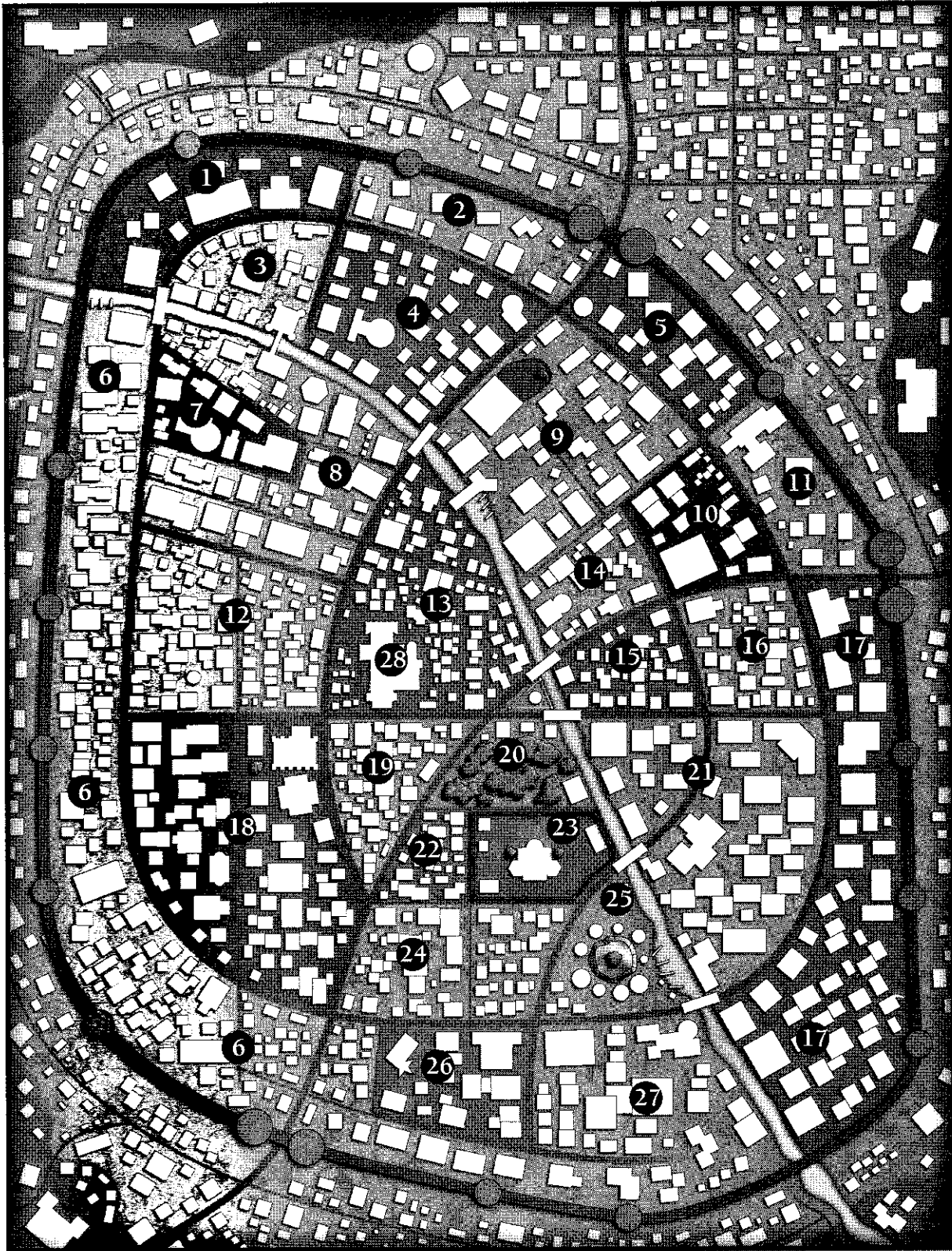
Tomb



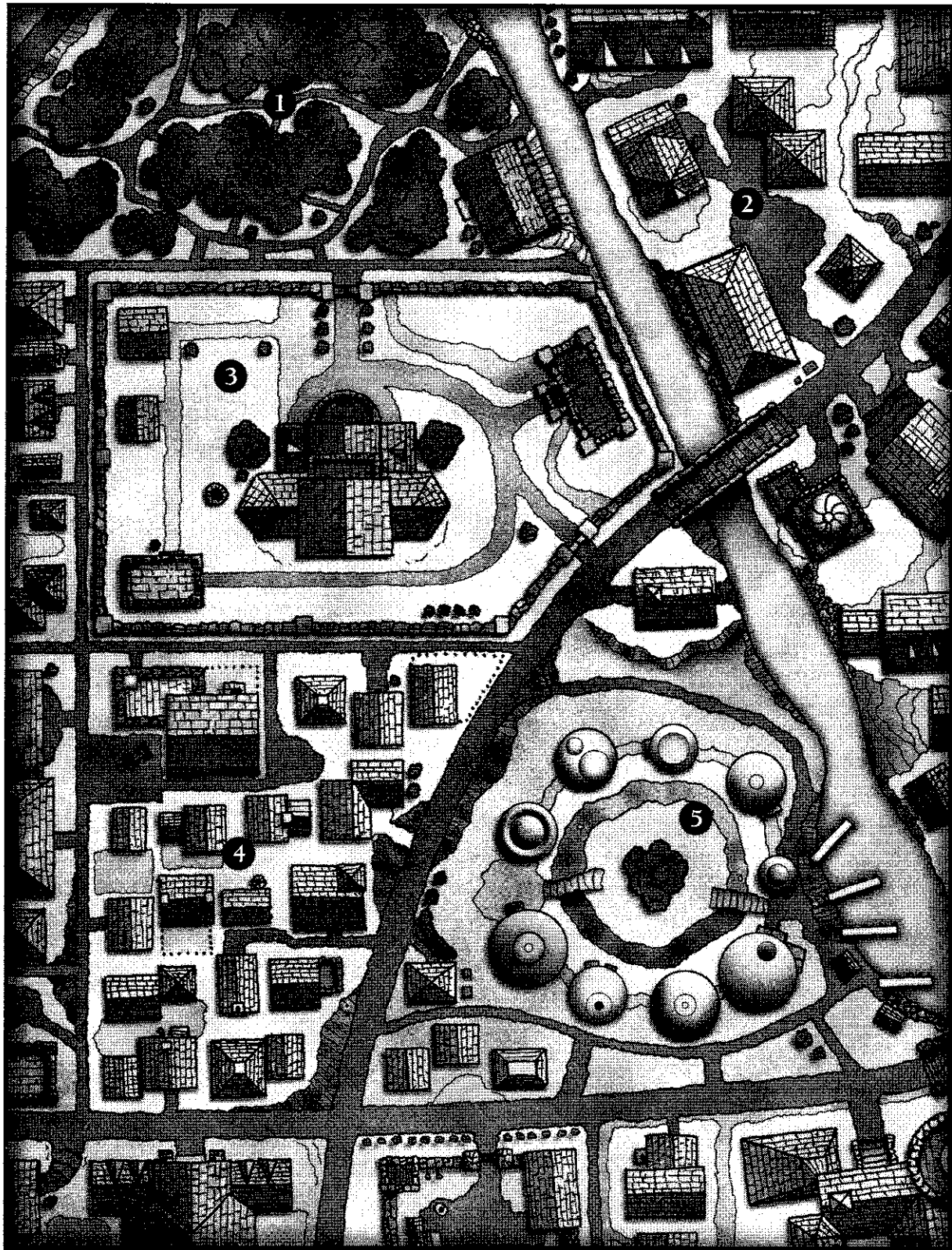
Underground Monastery



Vaticine City



Central Vaticine City



Map Keys

The Great Cathedral of the Prophets (page 122)

Built in the heart of Vaticine City, the Great Cathedral represents one of the largest and most beautiful Vaticine structures in the entire world. It took over a century to complete, and is an enduring symbol of the Vaticine faith. Exquisite marble statues, stained-glass windows, and rich tapestries adorn its stone walls. The cathedral bells, calling the faithful to mass, are heard from miles away, and even visiting Objectionists are moved to tears by the heavenly toll. It houses over a thousand worshippers, and maintains a staff of one hundred clergymen, keeping things running at all times. An Archbishop usually holds mass here, though Cardinals and Hierophants have been known to lead the proceedings on occasion.

1. Baptistery
2. Abbey
3. Choir/Retrochoir
4. Nave
5. Sanctuary
6. High Altar/Pulpit/Sedilia/Statues
7. Bishop's/Cardinal's Room
8. Pentise/Secret Hallway
9. Hall
10. Study
11. Kitchen
12. Aumbry/Sacristy
13. Chapter House
14. Cells
15. Rooms

Tomb (page 123)

This location is designed to be generic, representing any crypts or vaults scattered throughout Théah. Any number of people could be buried here, or the tomb may serve an entirely different purpose than the one for which it was built. A group of homeless Eisen peasants may have moved in, it may serve as a hiding place for a Vodacce bandit's hoard, or it might even contain some forgotten piece of knowledge, wedged in between the ancient stones. Its purpose and function are up to you.

Monastery (page 124)

Like the Tomb on page 123, this map can be used to represent a variety of locations. It was built into the side of a mountain, and may have

housed ancient gods of the Numan age, Sophists, Cultists, or any number of Vaticine orders.

1. Stone Doors
2. Stairs
3. Statue Room
4. Altar Chamber/Font
5. Statue Chamber
6. Meditation Chamber
7. Entrance Hall
8. Abbey
9. Altar
10. Storage Chamber
11. Secret Chamber
12. Aumbry/Sacristy
13. Almonry

Vaticine City (page 125)

Built in the eleventh century on the banks of El Rio de Dios, Vaticine City currently serves as both the seat of Vaticine power and the capital of Castille. The walls surrounding the central city were incorporated from Crescent design, and the Crescents' architectural influence can be seen throughout the city. This map mostly marks city districts, rather than individual buildings. More information can be found on page 37 of the *Castille* sourcebook.

1. Warehouses. This district stores cargo brought in by river traffic. Smuggling is rare, though a few corrupt merchants regularly skim profits from incoming shipments.
2. Northern Quarter — Residences. This district contains homes belonging the Castillian merchant class.
3. Waterfront. This district contains a variety of shops, inns, and taverns, catering to river traffic. Due to the Vaticine presence in the city, rowdy behavior is kept to a minimum.
4. Mercantile District. This area contains mills, textile facilities and the like. Cloth for the Hierophants robes are prepared here, along with the rare dyes used to color them.
5. Textiles. This area is similar to the Mercantile district, above, though its facilities are somewhat coarser.
6. Western Quarter. The district along the wall contains an eclectic mixture of dwellings, along with barracks housing members of the Castillian military.
7. La Ciencia University. The most famous university in the world, La Academia de Ciencia del Profeta y Salvador has continued its proud history of learning despite the nearby presence of the Inquisition. More on the university can be found on page 68 of the *Castille* sourcebook.

8. Warehouses. See entry 1, above. The buildings here are used almost exclusively by either the Church or the university.
9. Mercantile District. The businesses here benefit immeasurably from the fine docking facilities located along the river.
10. Warehouses. See entry 1, above. The buildings here are in relative disrepair, and smuggling is fairly common.
11. Merchant Quarter. Shops, stores, and craftsmen's stalls dominate this quarter, most catering to government bureaucrats or members of the clergy.
12. Slums. The city's poor crowd into this area, driven by desperate circumstances and the recent war with Montaigne. The Church maintains a high presence here, but even their ministrations can only do so much.
13. Church District. See entry 18, below.
14. Merchant Quarter. See entry 11, above.
15. Central Quarter — Residences. The city's working class peasants make their homes here; the houses are poor, but mostly clean.
16. Servant's Quarter. See entry 19, below.
17. Eastern Quarter — Residences. Since the war with Montaigne, many displaced Castillian Dons came to Vaticine City. They congregated in this district, crowding into a series of estates intended for visiting clergymen. The Vaticine tolerates their presence, but their numbers have steadily grown, and fights among rival Dons are not uncommon.
18. Church District. This area houses the vast array of Vaticine bureaucracy, from the ancient libraries to the headquarters of the Church Guard. An army of clergymen hold sway over every aspect of Vaticine policy here, and it is said that even the Cardinals occasionally need help in finding their way around.
19. Servants' Quarter. The vast number of clerks, gardeners, cooks, and other servants attending the Vaticine elite make their residence here. Many of them are ordained clergymen, though some are simply devout Castillians selected for their extraordinary skills.
20. Gardens. See entry 1, "Central Vaticine City," below.
21. Cardinals' Residences. See entry 2, "Central Vaticine City," below.
22. Guest Houses. This district services foreign diplomats, visiting Dons, and other long-term guests of the Church.
23. Hierophant's Estate. See entry 3, "Central Vaticine City," below.
24. Servants' Quarter. See entry 19, above.
25. Palace of Wolves. See entry 5, "Central Vaticine

City," below.

26. Inns and Taverns. These luxurious buildings — subsidized by the Church — house short-term Vaticine visitors (i.e., those staying only a few days).
27. Southern Quarter — Residences. This area contains large estates belonging to the Castillian nobility — mostly minor members of the Aldana family.
28. The Great Cathedral of the Prophets. See page 122 and the description above.

Central Vaticine City (Page 126)

This area represents the heart of the city, and houses most of the important buildings.

1. Gardens. Originally a hunting ground for the King of Castille, the Church has declared these gardens open to all residents "as a testament to the beauty of nature." Picnickers and tourists can be found strolling along the paths, and the grassy fields become quite crowded every siesta. The Church Guard maintains a strong presence in the area.
2. Cardinals' Residences. The ten Cardinals traditionally maintain homes here, though only the Castillians live in the city full-time. Each estate maintains a large number of servants, as well as a staff of clergymen to assist the Cardinals in their needs.
3. Hierophant's Estate. This impressive estate has served as the residence of the Hierophant and the headquarters of El Concilio de Razon since the days of the Third Prophet. With the Hierophant dead, the Cardinals have converted the entire estate for their use, and now use it solely as an instrument of the Church.
4. Servants' Quarter. See entry 19, "Vaticine City," above.
5. The Palace of Wolves. This Crescent-designed artifice serves as the hub of Castillian politics. The twisting, labyrinthine palace was supposed to house Good King Sandoval until he came of age (and could return to San Cristobal), but has since transformed into the *de facto* capital of the nation. All pertinent government decisions are made here, as well as deadly politicking among Castillians and foreigners alike. More on the Palace of Wolves can be found on page 37 of the *Castille* sourcebook.



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