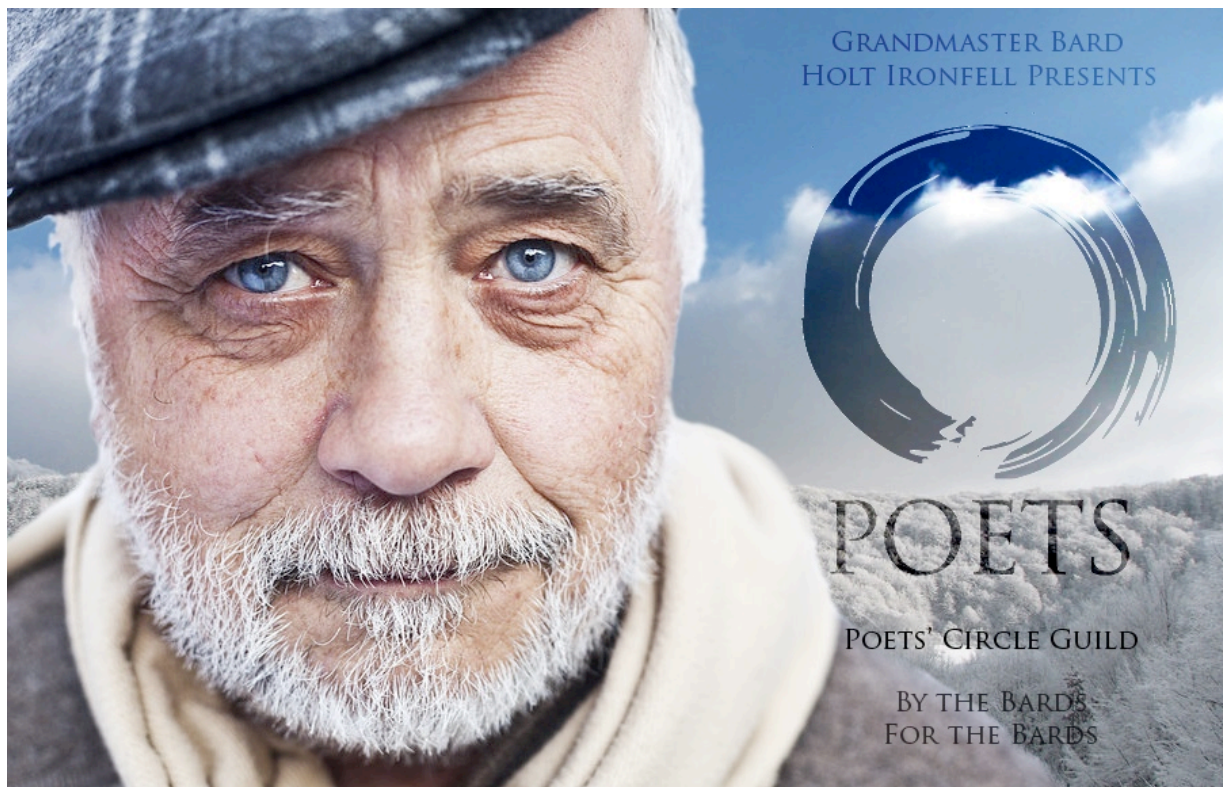


The Bards of
POETS' CIRCLE

A “Shroud of the Avatar” Role Playing Guild



“There is a song of legends hidden within you. Wax Poetica, my friends.”

Introduction

Where I come from, every Bard worth his salt had heard of the Bards of Poets' Circle, and those who sought fame, fortune & adventure inevitably join or associate with the prolific and creative organization. Now, New Britannia's greatest storytellers, musicians, architects, artisans and artists shall exercise their mastery from within what promises to be the greatest guild of Bards there ever was: Poets' Circle.

But it takes more than Bards to run a powerful Guild. There is much to be gained from having a host of Bards at your back! That's why you'll find Patrons, consisting of wealthy merchants, productive crafters, and noble Lords and Ladies, who support the careers of their favored Bards, Ambassadors playing the political landscape, and Explorers keen on collecting the world's lore.

You'll also find a society dominated by the Bardic Houses of the Master Bards, governed by the Council of Masters, and overseen by the mysterious and legendary Grandmaster Bard, Holt Ironfell. The infamous Jesters, ranging from the hilarious to the psychotic, thrive on madness and chaos; spies and thieves find ideological shelter within the neutral community. Archivists and Lore-keepers gather the secrets of the world, guarding them for the exclusive use of trusted Poets' Circle members.

So! Ambitious Initiates have Apprenticeships to seek, Bards have adventures to embark upon, and stories to create. Masters have political strings to pull and Patrons, gold to make.

A Note on Shroud of the Avatar Guilds

In a Selectively Multiplayer Game, your friends list, and your guild, are very important. They will shape how you experience the game. For the first time in the history of MMOs, groups with certain inclinations can enjoy the game in their own way, and in our case, that means Role Playing.

The Poets' Circle Guild also seeks to unite storytellers, musicians and other creative minds so that we may create a rich role play environment, as well as network with one another outside the game to accomplish creative endeavors, such as musical collaborations, fan fiction, user generated content, or youtube videos!

So be sure that you choose your Guild wisely, and we hope you'll choose us in Poets' Circle!

The History of Poets' Circle, Old & New

As written by Holt Ironfell, Grandmaster Bard of Poets' Circle

“Dedicated to the Memory of So Many Great Bards, Persecuted by a Wicked State.”

Though many bards came before me, I have lived longer than any, and seen many a great and wicked thing. Jobi Mockery and I stole a fairly unique elixir of Everlasting Life from a corrupt gypsy sorcerer, and it worked. From a historical perspective such an acquisition is a blessing, but from an emotional one, it is most assuredly a curse.

I witnessed the destruction of my city-state and the old Poets' Circle, and for many years wandered the wastelands with my troupe 'The Sands of Irony', belonging nowhere.

A few King's Ages later, I had engineered the recreation of Poets' Circle in the heart of the rebuilt city-state, whose name I omit, as I am under no obligation to carry forward memory of the evil place it inevitably became.

With money, manipulation & the occasional murder, my network of Bards forced the State into funding the Circle once again, as in days of old. It seemed as if we were about to enter a renaissance, a golden age! Ah, how naive I was, even as a Master among Bards.

In the beginning we represented a diverse ideological pool, a true oasis in the desert that was that harsh world. But the Servants of the city-state's Sorcerer-King had other plans, and slowly eroded our freedoms and our imaginations. This was the specific task of the interior ministry, the white robed Sisterhood, who possessed, unbeknownst to most, freakish mental abilities. They were mindbenders.

One by one my peers and colleagues became more brainwashed or afraid of being so. Paranoia started to be the main occupation of a worldly bard, but if we did not cooperate with the Sisterhood, we would end up with our brains scrambled, or simply 'disappear'.

So it was that after a couple generations of bards, the foundational ideals of Poets' Circle had been utterly subverted, and control of the Circle usurped. The Masters of the Bardic Houses were replaced by puppets. Original thought dwindled, and only state sanctioned speech was ever heard. Bards spied on and betrayed one another, vying for crumbs of favor from the monsters in power. Poets' Circle became a place of propaganda and mind control, a mere outlet through which the Sisterhood controlled perception.

I have witnessed the destruction of Poets' Circle, both old and new. I both hate and fear the wickedness that caused these transformations.

We struck back the only way we could think of, before we fled from that world, through the moongate. From our hidden Speakeasy (the true Sanctuary of all bards, in that time and place) we orchestrated the assassination of the High Precentor of the Sisterhood, thus dismantling a network of tyranny. At least, that is what we liked to think.

The truth is we left that world, for this one. Left our harsh desert world for the abundance of New Britannia. What will happen to the many bards who succumbed to their fear of power and authority, who used their storytelling gifts to serve an unjust State based on profound manipulation? To concoct lies about one another to 'get ahead' in the eyes of beings that barely considered them higher than animals? I have left them behind, to begin anew... with you, my friends.

The State, in truth, stole Poets' Circle from me and mine, but in the end, we stole it back. For Poets' Circle is an idea, and the enemy of ideas shall never triumph. Though I came through the moongate to New Britannia with the barest of essentials, I carried the history of Poets' Circle in my memory... And its future in my imagination.

May this new world show me kinder years, for I am over two centuries now, and careworn. My dying days shall be spent nurturing a third Poets' Circle into life. May Virtue never again be persecuted, as it was.

Signed,

Holt Ironfell, Grandmaster Bard of Poets' Circle

"Wax Poetica, my friends."

The Future of Poets' Circle

Gather around, stay a while and listen, whether you be young Apprentices or seasoned Bards, for a true Master does not merely tell stories of glories past, but ever sets course for new adventure -- and a Grandmaster like myself has grand designs for the future.

Most know Bards for their love of the arts, of history, of music and tales. But Poets' Circle is a sanctuary for many other types of creative deviants. Is there not artistry to everything, in its own milieu and to its own masters? Merchants may know the secret art of gold making, crafters may understand hidden subtleties lost upon the general crowd and never tell a Lord or Lady that politics and governance does not require wisdom and artistry to if one wishes to succeed!

But there is more, isn't there? There is the con artist, the clever spy, the cunning assassin; and occasionally the legendary thief -- I am no villain, but I have participated in each of such activities in my time and can honestly say that life is not fully lived as a Bard unless you've gotten your hands dirty.

Although in essence 'good' and virtuous, the Circle by no means agrees with every law or strategy of control imposed by nearby city-states and their rulers, preferring a more tolerant and 'strategic' view of both politics and the actions of its membership.

Previous iterations of the Circle had seen pockets of rebels, secret societies, thieves groups, assassins and spies. There is even a sort of bardic cant, a private language used when discretion is necessary. On the whole one might suspect this would give Bards a 'bad name', but as they are generally in control of the words, stories and reputations of friend and foe alike, a lot of questionable activity is simply swept under the rug and not spoken of much.

Advanced Bards always have an awareness of the unspoken, the censored, the taboo: Poets' Circle is traditionally a refuge for thought that is dangerous to voice in public. Yet, although a voice mustn't be silenced completely, any decent Bard learns the time and place where speaking is prudent. They learn to choose their battles, and that sometimes one must bite one's tongue -- for some, the rewards of clever politicking outweigh the ego of one's personal opinion. Yet others build their fame by their cleverness and attitude, their words fly in defiance of the powerful precisely because they speak where others would not.

So many Guilds, Orders, Groups and Whatnot thrive on some specific and imposed creed, supreme leader, or authoritarian drive. Rather than grow into what their membership makes of them, those Guilds rather unimaginatively become second-rate, filled with the type of petty drama that plagues bit players. They fail to rise to the full potential, as must all epic theater productions.

The Bards of Poets' Circle have a bigger part for you to play.

That is because of our heavy emphasis on "**Role Playing**" and the separation between RP and OOC or "**Out Of Character**" interactions (section 1). Another to do with the intrigue, plots and sense of place generated by the organization of our "**Bardic Houses**" (section 2) and the interplay of the various "**Hierarchies**" (section 3) allow various sub-Guilds to operate within the larger community. If that weren't enough, there is a healthy tradition of "**Rivalry**" (section 4) which promotes constructive conflict and collaboration, even amongst disagreeing factions.

Finally, Poets' Circle is different from other Guilds because there is no authoritarian or supreme leader: important issues are voted upon by the Council of Masters. With

dedication and application, any Bard and even a Patron or two can influence the very nature of the Circle, and guide it forward.

Section 1a: Role Playing (RP)

A lot of people are new to Role Playing, even if they have been playing RPGs or “Role Playing Games” for decades. The essence of true Role Play (RP) is that you create a compelling character with a persona that thinks and behaves differently than you do.

RPGs have had a lot of focus on the class, level, stats, and gear of your character, and fighting monsters or figuring out puzzles. Poets’ Circle seeks to concentrate on the RP part of the game, not as a substitute for the other aspects, but to infuse them with drama and enjoyment for everyone involved.

Therefore, most interaction while in the game will be based on three simple questions:

- 1) “What would my character think?”**
- 2) “What would my character say?”**
- 3) “What would my character do?”**

Because your choices matter in Shroud of the Avatar, it becomes an ideal game for RP. Your choices shape your character. So too do they shape Poets’ Circle, a Guild structured and led in such a way to compliment the decisions, adventures and resulting stories of your character.

The quality of role play can really improve too, given that selective multiplayer will group you with a list of friends, and guild members, who may share your enjoyment of it. This is one of our aims with the Guild, and we are certain that the game will shine because of it.

Section 1b: Our of Character (OOC)

Whilst the majority of In Game actions are encouraged to be In Character (IC) there are times when communication demands that something be Out of Character (OOC). An optimal RP environment always keeps OOC distractions at a minimum. Announcing AFK, sharing playtimes or linking URLs are typical uses of speaking in ‘OOC’.

To make the separation sink in, we encourage people to speak to one another over mediums such as Google+, Skype, IRC, Ventrillo, etc. That way it can be more clear that while playing Shroud of the Avatar, the characters you deal with are NOT in fact players, put people who live in New Britannia as if it were the primary reality.

This is no small task, and there is much to be taught to one another about ‘strong’ Role Play. But just as one might take acting classes in real life, or write a novel or short story,

there are techniques that can be learned. They shall be covered in a second resource dedicated to their discussion.

Your Grandmaster is a highly experienced Role Player, and the Guild will hold seminars on Role Playing in its 'Bards' College', so there is always a chance to learn and have fun. Roleplaying, much like acting and storytelling, is done for the enjoyment of others, and in that, we enjoy it ourselves. I have seen some amazing 'bad guys' played, as well as tragic heroes. The goal is to create a playing field full of intrigue and mystery, suspense and excitement. Are you ready to play that kind of game?

Section 2: Bardic Houses

Poets' Circle is unique in that it is composed of Houses, which have authority over their individual membership, and whose Master Bards vote on issues as part of the Council of Masters. A House is a Faction, or 'sub-guild' within the larger scheme, and the Circle acts as a safe haven for many different ideals.

Each House is founded upon a unique philosophy. It has a creed, a musical theme or anthem, and an emblem or crest. The creation of a new House is the exclusive privilege of those who have attained the rank of Master Bard. Though more than one Master may be in a House, only one may sit at its head. The Master of the House sits on the Council of Masters, the deciding body of the Circle. Issues of import are brought up at Council meetings and are then discussed. The solutions are then given either an 'open' or 'secret' vote, depending on controversy.

Bardic Houses participate in Rivalry, see section 4.

Current Houses: Ironfell, Isolte*, Space* (names subject to change)

Section 3: Hierarchies

To fully understand the inner workings of Poets' Circle through the confusion of its eccentric diversity, one must examine its hierarchy, which is fundamental to our particular bardic tradition.

Poets' Circle is far from a military organization and its power stems from its grassroots initiative, rather than authority from the top. Though respect, personal responsibility and cooperation is expected, many Bards favor the chaotic good outlook, and relish in a bit of mayhem from time to time.

Therefor, although the ranks of the Guild are important, everyone has a chance to catch the spotlight and share in their ~15 minutes of fame. An apprentice may be a talented prodigy with all eyes on their progress, while a Master may have a more hidden utility and be coaching in the background. We play to our strengths.

The Ranks

Grandmaster

Master

Bard -- also Jester or Patron

Apprentice -- also Family or Friend

Initiate

Also, certain members may earn 'custom' ranks, to honor their particular contributions. For instance, expect to see things such as Artisan, Architect or Ambassador. Those ranks may be the equivalent of another rank, or somewhat more or less powerful. Such subtle nuances are always changing and never set in stone.

Grandmaster Bard

The Grandmaster (the position that I, Holt Ironfell, currently hold) serves to organize, to introduce, to mediate and advise; a face for the Circle, an ambassador to the other large organizations of New Britannia. The position holds as virtue: wisdom, reservation of judgement, patience and ideological neutrality. Mind you, a wily old Bard like myself always has his own plans for the betterment of the Guild, but my veto is a rarely used thing.

The Grandmaster's role is to make sure the right people get connected, that collaborators and co-conspirators are introduced and can start and finish their artistic projects, that Initiates and Apprentices are taught the skills that make them better at being future Bards, and that the general society of Bards in New Britannia is enriched. For while preference and privilege is given first to members of Poets' Circle, all those who breathe life into the fabric of the world are invited to join us in our cultural vision.

The Grandmaster tries to set an example, and tries to behave as a teacher, mentor and producer rather than authoritarian leader. He is concerned with the nurturing of talented Bards into Masters, and with the Guild's sum production of works (musical, theatrical, storytelling, etc.). He is also in charge of the business side of the Guild, the management and maintenance of resources and acquisition of gold.

Master Bard

The Bard that excels beyond expectation, exhibiting a full mastery of song and story, cunning and wisdom in politics, and who advances the wealth and power of the Circle,

may become a Master Bard. The prime virtue of all Masters is the display of wisdom, a nebulous but important art form.

Poets' Circle may be agreeable on accepting unaffiliated bards, but it does not recognize the title of Master Bard, save when earned through its own traditions.

A Master Bard (in essence an 'officer', in Guild terms) may remain in the House within which they were an Apprentice and Bard, or they create a new House of their own. This House acts as a sub guild or 'Faction' and has full authority over its membership -- excepting veto powers of the Grandmaster.

A House has a philosophy and creed, so a Master cannot form a House without having this philosophy challenged by the current council of Masters and the Grandmaster. It insures that Houses are founded upon rock-solid ideals, and ensures the final result: that many unique ideologies and opportunities are represented. A Master Bard must also compose a musical theme or anthem for their House, before it is founded.

Bard

When an Apprentice is ready to become a Bard in a House, he or she must Audition before the Master of that House, and the Grandmaster. For some Apprentices, this will be their first formal interaction with the Grandmaster. Masters will want to coach their Apprentices for this moment, as a good Apprentice earns the House reputation and favor on the Council.

Auditions are very formal and follow a traditional ritual. The Master reports on the progress of the Apprentice, presenting him or her in a fully in-character fashion. Then the Apprentice presents his best piece and suffers a Critique from the Grandmaster. These are not typically meant to be a positive experience; the tradition is symbolic of actions speaking louder than words, ie. the Apprentice is promoted and awarded a monetary stipend to fund their further endeavors, while embracing, with humility, that there is still much to learn.

Most importantly, the Grandmaster now 'hears' the newly promoted Bard, though they are still expected to deal primarily with their Masters. Going over the Master's head is almost always frowned upon, unless there is some form of OOC abuse going on.

The Bard rank is where most careers stay, for a long time -- it is an earned title, and to be a Poets' Circle Bard is regarded as having been tested and recognized by those with the earned authority to do so. Anyone can 'call' themselves a 'Bard', but only a Poets' Circle Bard is an esteemed graduate.

Some Bards leave to become Ambassadors to other Guilds, or to serve the courts of Lords or Kings, while remaining in contact with the Circle. This all to say that no further striving is necessary in the rank system, as a Bard is a Bard is a Bard.

Apprentice

An Initiate becomes an Apprentice when they join a House. They understudy a Bard (or if lucky, a Master) and join that Bard's House. The Grandmaster meddles very little in the operations of Houses, and rarely 'hears' an Apprentice formally, so Initiates are warned to choose wisely, as they will be at the mercy of the House they align with.

The ultimate objective of an Apprentice is to be prepared for their Audition with the Grandmaster, which happens only once the Master of their House is convinced with their ability. There will be more structured details on the tasks one must complete, at every rank, in future iterations of this document.

Initiate

The lowest rank, a recruit. Initiates are adopted purely on a trial basis, and allowed to ask questions and observe so as to find a House to align with, and a Bard to Understudy. It is so-called because the Circle expects *initiative* from its members. Initiates are not 'carried' and must stand on their own two feet while finding their niche.

No one can be creative for you, and you are expected to find creative ways of contributing to Poets' Circle.

Other Ranks:

There are other ranks in Poets' Circle, as well as custom ranks for those whose unique talents merit them. Here are two important ones.

Patron

Patrons are the financial backbone of Poets' Circle. They are the merchants or crafters and artisans who consider their profession an art form. They are the political players, the Lords and Ladies, who see value in having a full host of bards at their disposal,

whether because of their love of the arts, the information and secrets they can learn, or the powerful propaganda machine it allows them access to.

Patrons are expected to be worth their weight in gold, pure and simple.

Jester

The Jesters are the clowns, comedians, fools and psychotic madmen of the Circle. The Apprentices who have specialized in light hearted entertainment, satire and mockery find themselves with an appropriate rank. Here too are Jobi Mockery's ilk, the insane, the true killers. The world will come to both laugh and/or tremble in the wake of Jesters, whose role it is to always keep us on our toes with their cleverness and guile.

Section 4: Rivalry

Role Playing provides a great opportunity to avoid the 'Real Life' drama that plagues other guilds. It allows us to be 'someone else', and channel our instincts from drama into its true creative function: intrigue, conflict, suspense and mystery.

Rivalry is the central aspect of Poets' Circle, it is the glue that holds the chaotic elements and creative differences together. Characters in the Circle are expected to plot and scheme, expected to compete for attention, for resources and for political favor from those more influential. To work their way up to the spotlight. For some through the Virtue of their reputation, and for others through ruthless political manipulation and bribery. Each have their own choices to make, their own reputation to manage, image and identity to maintain. Each have glory and fortune and fame to attain.

The Houses may chose to cooperate, or compete. The Bards within Houses may try to outshine one another.

What is discouraged is taking things personally. They are not, as your character is an Avatar, not you: they are their own separate entity within the game, with their own goals, motives, feelings, weaknesses and strengths. Out of Character behavior is discouraged, and skillful Role Playing will be rewarded and favored when the Council of Masters make decisions.

Rivalry is an artform. Subtlety and thinking is required. During Guild events, one must carefully balance reputation with the desire to get ahead. Appear too extreme, and

others may unite against you. In this way, one shall learn the wisdom held in such high regard by Masters and Grandmaster alike.

In this way, Poets' Circle is itself a game: a Game of Houses, a dance, a grand orchestration....

Good luck, and Wax Poetica, my friends.

~Holt Ironfell, Grandmaster Bard of Poets' Circle~

Below is writ

the Mission

&

Bardic Benefits

Statement of Mission

It is the sacred duty of Poets' Circle to nurture, protect & promote those who lend their art to the Guild & to Lord British.

Written hence are the stated mission objectives of the Guild, its Bards, Patrons, Ambassadors and Spies, and the uniting ambitions of all recognized Master Bards of Poets' Circle.

- To gather the storytellers, composers and artists into a loose, but powerful association of talent and creativity.
- To create music for the game, for Lord British, and for one another.
- Not only to tell stories, but embark upon player-driven adventures and plots.
- To write, cast and perform in-game Theater productions.
- To witness the rise of a player-run City or 'Enclave' of the Arts, complete with Guild Hall.
- To institute a college for Apprentice Bards to learn music, refine their storytelling or just learn a thing or two along the way.
- To spare no expense in the promoting the work of our loyal Bards and generous Patrons.
- Whether virtuous role players, rogue-like PvPers, or savvy merchants our Bards and Patrons shall be remembered as the Enemies of Boredom, Champions of Player-Driven Plots & Immersive RP.
- To be a powerful Guild who can back their players in an extremely diverse set of in-game objectives.
- To be known for quality role playing experiences for our members and those who interact with the Guild from outside. Selective Multiplayer to the Max.

Bardic Benefits

A ROLE PLAYING GAME IS NOTHING WITHOUT BARDS!

There's a reason it's called 'playing' music, and we want to show how turning music into an adventure creates unimagined results. By playing a storyteller & musician, something truly magical takes hold.

ANSWERING LORD BRITISH'S CALL FOR MUSIC

Shroud of the Avatar is founded on the backs of a vibrant Community. It is from this very Community that the game world's music shall come from. We bards of Poets Circle' are the vanguard.

MASSIVELY MUSICAL ONLINE RPG

When talented individuals are given a chance to come together and play, the sound takes on a life of its own. Believe in the music within us all, & together let us discover the true meaning of Harmony.

POETS' CIRCLE PROVIDES FREE PUBLICITY

As a Bard of Poets Circle, you shall receive assistance in promoting & mastering thy work with music, poetry, storytelling and drama. Our Patrons and Master Bards help fill out player-driven plots with actors, & fund artistic productions.

SHARE IN THE WEALTH OF A BARDIC GUILD

Profit from gaming & music is a dream come true. Our Guild is a place for master bards to mentor budding bards and even offer them help with monetizing their own individual works, or collaborations within Poets' Circle or in real life. Note that your work is your own intellectual property. We're merely here to help!

RAISE A TOAST TO FRIENDS AND PATRONS, ALL!

Poets' Circle isn't only for bards. Friends, family, patrons and publicists are welcome, and all serve an important role in the day to day functions of a Guild. Come one, come all! Create a legacy amongst true friends!