Prelude

The Albigensian Crusade

In 1199 A.D., Pope Innocent III declares that a good Christian no longer needs go to The Holy Land to go straight to Heaven. Heathens can be found a lot closer to home. In southern France a long and bloody war against the Cathars begins.

The Catholic Church has been in a weak position for a long time. A new religious doctrine has been spreading and threatens the Church. Maybe the bishops have been too busy with their intrigues in Rome. Maybe they have been tax collecting a bit too zealously. The message of a simple life, following the example of Jesus, wins sympathy and listeners. Told directly in people's homes by abstinent, humble men and women.

In 1208, an army of crusaders attack. The main force consists of Normans. The first town, Bezier, refuses to surrender their minority of Cathars to the crusaders. When the town finally falls, there is no mercy. The order is: "Kill them all, the Lord will recognize His own."

More towns fall in the following years. But after a while, acts of war die out. The Count of Toulouse, a defender of the Cathars until now, gives in to the pope and promises to fight the heresy. An uneasy peace spreads.

In 1234, the papal inquisition is formed to help uncover heretics and to prevent vigilantism and lynching. But the efficient and brutal conduct of the inquisition is not to everyone's liking.

Montsegur

Montsegur is located at a mountaintop in the Pyrenees at 3000 feet. The mountainside drops almost straight down on all sides, least steep at the southwest side. Three parallel defensive walls have been built here. To the east is a crest. Closest to Montsegur in this direction is a quarry, which originally provided building material for the castle. A bit farther away is a small outpost. Even farther, to the northeast at the far side of the wooded crest stands a watchtower.

The two gates to the courtyard can both be watched from the overhanging wooden walkways above and around them. To the east, on heavy, horizontal beams, hangs a wooden platform. On the terraces just north of the fortress lies a cluster of shelters.

Inside the courtyard, several small wooden sheds lean against the solid stone wall. There is a stable as well. Three stairs lead to the wooden fortifications along the top of the walls. To the north-west, the tower where the lord of the castle resides with his family can be seen. The entrance is at the second floor by a wooden stairway. Great vaulted rooms below the castle tower contain big reservoirs of collected rainwater all year around. From the top of the tower, the village at the foot of the mountain can be seen.

- *In Act One, Raimond's player introduces Montsegur.*

The Faith

The Cathars do not call themselves Cathars. Insofar as they refer to themselves as a group, they call themselves the believers (*credentes*).

The faith stems from Christianity. But they believe that the God of the Old Testament, who created the world, is Satan. Earth is Hell. Within every person is a divine soul, trapped in material substance. When people eat, have sex, handle blood and other bodily fluids, they are polluted by the evil of the material world.

Even in marriage, procreation is not desirable. Children are demons. Only when they become conscious enough to choose the right way to live, their souls can be saved. Until then their bodies are just earthly prisons for their souls.

Through an ascetic life of purity, prayer and abstinence people can seek to purify themselves. For most, this is an impossible task. But until it succeeds, the soul is reborn in a new earthly prison, when the body dies. The few, who feel ready for the task, become perfects (*parfaits*).

- *In Act Two, Bertrand's player introduces the Faith*

The Perfects

Not all believers can live up to the strict demands. The few, who feel ready for the task, become perfects (*parfaits*). Perfects renounce material possessions except a cowl and a belt. They dedicate themselves to an ascetic life of purity, prayer, preaching and working to help the community.

You become a perfect by going through the purification ritual consolamentum after a long time of preparation and instruction. The ritual can only be performed by perfects. The effect is hereditary: If the perfect, which performed the ritual for you, breaks his vow, the vow is also broken for you and everyone you have purified.

You can only be purified once, so most people go through the ritual shortly before their death, so as not to risk becoming impure again.

As a perfect, you must follow the example set by Jesus Christ and his disciples. Avoid cursing and swearing. To take an oath would be the same as admitting that you do not always speak the truth. Avoid killing. This includes eating meat, since it could be one of your brothers or sisters reborn in the form of an animal.

Help others find the path. Perhaps they can be reborn as perfects in their next life.

- *In Act Three, Cecille's player tells about the Perfects*

Consolamentum

The ritual of consolamentum is performed in two cases: To ordain perfects and to purify a dying person. In both cases, the ritual is performed the same way.

- The receiver kneels before the perfect. The perfect addresses the receiver by name and explains that the spirit dwells in the perfect and that he is to be adopted as a son of God.
- The receiver renounces the Catholic Church and their cross, their baptism and their magical rituals.
- The duties of a perfect are read. Forgive sinners. Love your enemies. If struck, turn the other cheek. Give your coat to the one who takes your cloak. Do not judge or condemn. The receiver is asked if he will follow this. He answers, "I have this wish and this will. Pray to God that He will give me the strength."
- The receiver confesses his sins and is given absolution.
- The Gospel is placed on the receiver's head. The perfect says, "Holy Father, welcome this servant into your kingdom and let him receive your grace and your holy spirit."
- John 1:1 – 1:17 are read.
- The receiver is girded with a belt of sacred thread.
- The present perfects give the kiss of peace.

- *In Act Four, consolamentum is carried out for those who have chosen to die for their beliefs.*

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John 1:1-17, King James Version

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 The same was in the beginning with God.
3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.
5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.
6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.
8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.
10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.
15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.
16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.
17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.