



The Eleven-Day Empire

[A Tour of the Capital](#)

The "shadow" London of the Eleven-Day Empire is a mishmash of time-zones, with streets, buildings and landmarks taken from periods earlier or later than its eighteenth century foundations, and shouldn't be mistaken for the real London of 1752. The authenticity of the Empire's version is irrelevant: what matters is its symbolic weight.

As London has a certain geographical continuity (which is to say, the street layout has rarely changed over two millennia), it's possible to walk along a lane which switches from Enlightenment to Victorian to Roman and back again within the stretch of a few yards. This guide concentrates on following the route of the Feast of Fools through the streets, providing details of the rites which take place along the way.

The Feast of Fools

This is the annual "beating of the bounds" ritual, in which a masked pageant performs rites at key points around the symbolic boundary of the Eleven-Day Empire. Although the event takes place within the Empire's version of London, it reinforces Faction Paradox's claim to the entire eleven days.

The Feast takes place on Twelfth Night (the 5th of January). Traditionally, this is the last night of the midwinter celebrations in Europe and the day on which the Feasts of Misrule - a variant on the Roman Saturnalia festival in which all social rules are suspended - end. It also numerically suggests the end of the Eleven-Day Empire, and reflects the New Year aspects of the Night. Despite being outside the normal timeline the Eleven-Day Empire still adheres to the Homeworld's concept of linear time, so an annual ceremony can technically take place. Just as Faction Paradox now perceives the War to have been in progress for fifty years, so the turning of each of those years has a Twelfth Night.

The pageant takes the form of twenty-three primary characters or plays, enacted by various senior members of the organisation. These are followed by various supporting cast members, such as La Haut Papesse's two acolytes, and by all the Cousins, Little Brothers and Little Sisters currently stationed in the Empire's London. These crowds provide responses to the rites performed, carry blazing torches and at the end of the pageant usurp the power of the primary characters.

The twenty-three masquerade characters are described in detail under their individual titles. They proceed along the route in a strict order, as marked by their assigned number and as coached by the Remembrancer, one of the Fathers from the Stacks (the Faction's subterranean archives). The Feast begins at dusk, at Westminster, and ends as dawn approaches on the next day: the first day of the new year. The route the pageant takes is, of course, a symbolic rather than literal tour of the Eleven-Day Empire's boundaries.

00. Le Fou

- The Fool, or Wanderer - Westminster Palace

The first of the masqueraders in the annual Feast of Fools is in some ways the most important character. Normally played by the Acting Speaker of the House, the point of this ritual is for his or her authority to be inverted. His (even if the Acting Speaker is female, Le Fou is always male) role throughout is to lead the festivities, both in terms of encouraging the licentiousness and in literally leading the procession around the route. He also trails behind the procession, lagging as a doppelganger known as Le Fou des Ombres.

At the start of the ceremonies he emerges from the Thames on the Members' Terrace of the New Palace of Westminster, clad in greenery which recalls the Holly King, the winter version of the Green Man. He then "dances" through the halls of the building, drumming on the doors of the chambers and calling out the other characters who fall into a straggling line behind him. He's also accompanied by a specially-created butterfly, which flutters in front of him as he leads the procession out of the buildings and into the streets, where the characters are greeted by the mass of Cousins who will run alongside the masqueraders for the rest of the procession.

The first stop on the processional route is Old Scotland Yard.

01. L'Alchemiste

- The Alchemist, or Magician - Old Scotland Yard

The role of L'Alchemiste is taken by the Godfather of the Bio-Research Wing, and is the first character to act out a ritual at a designated spot. His ritual takes place in the courtyard of Old Scotland Yard before the procession makes its way down to the Embankment. This is the Scotland Yard of history and fiction, used from the 1800s to the middle of the twentieth century.

Both the site and the ritual are about investigation and intelligence, about examining fragments of information and building a system of reference around them. Le Fou having begun the journey, L'Alchemiste now takes over to define the Faction's world and the tools the Faction uses to order and, more importantly, reorder it.

When the Godfather playing L'Alchemiste is led to the Yard, he finds a desk-altar already laid out for him. He then ventures alone into the Black Museum within the buildings, re-emerging some minutes later with the four symbols of the four wings (or chapters, or ministries) of the Eleven-Day Empire, each of which is shown to the crowd:

- The spear is raised first, reminding the crowd of the Military Wing. By tradition, the Alchemist calls on Lug to acknowledge this symbol and recognise the Faction's rights. Lug (or Lud) gave his name to one of the gates of the City and was a many-skilled warrior god of Celtic mythology.
- The cauldron is raised next, and is associated with the Bio-Research Wing. Bran is called upon to recognise this. Bran the Blessed is another hero of ancient Celtic mythology, his head said to rest under Tower Hill. Then again, the head of Brutus is also said to be buried there. Maybe they chat.
- The sword, or athame, is raised next. This is associated with the Ritual Wing, although the knife used is a replica of the Grandfather's knife, the genuine relic being stored in the Stacks. The Alchemist calls on the spirits of the city to recognise the power of the blade, turning it through the air in order for them to sense the sharpness of it.
- The stone of destiny is raised last, and is associated with the Doubtless Fourth Wing. The stone was the symbol by which kings and queens of Scotland were crowned, granting them sovereignty over their land. It was brought to Westminster as an act of symbolism (or at least, an act of gloating) after being seized by Edward I, the "Hammer of the Scots". In normal-time several versions of the stone exist, due to it having been stolen at least twice in piques of nationalism by both sides. The actual provenience of the stone used in the Eleven-Day Empire is unclear: it's simultaneously a fake and the real thing.

Once the ritual is complete, the cultist playing L'Alchemiste carries the spear, waiting to hand it to L'Imperatrice at the next stage of the parade.

02. L'Imperatrice

- The Empress - Westminster Bridge

L'Imperatrice rules over the fire ritual held on the steps of Westminster Bridge. This is the spot at which a highly inaccurate statue of Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni, stands: the woman responsible for the most famous and symbolic destruction of London.

The Eleven-Day Empire's version of the warrior queen wears a tunic of many colours, over which is a thick mantle, fastened by a brooch. She has waist-length red hair, and a torc of twisted gold around her neck. She parades next to L'Empereur. Both imperial characters are chosen at the cake ball, which is normally held eleven days before the rite, to give the chosen Mother and Father time to prepare their costumes.

At the cake ball, all the Mothers and Fathers currently within the Parliament eat a slice from a cake: the Mother and Father who find the two English five Franc pieces (with Napoleon's head on one side, and the Tudor rose on the other) are made L'Imperatrice and L'Empereur respectively. Unsurprisingly, the Godmother who prepares the cake ball ensures that the right Mother and Father get the coins. In keeping with the role she plays, L'Imperatrice is nearly always attached to the Military Wing.

When the parade reaches the statue of Boudicca, L'Imperatrice steps forwards and is joined by two female Cousins, dressed as her daughters (vital elements of the Boudicca/ Boadicea legend). She takes the spear from L'Alchimiste and makes a rousing speech, based on the real Iceni's pre-battle speech, beginning: 'From the pride and arrogance of the Homeworld nothing is sacred'. She and her daughters are then handed flaming torches, which they thrust into a beacon fire on the Embankment. The crowd which follows the parade then lights its torches from the beacon and carries them for the rest of the parade, marking out the route with fire.

The procession continues along the Victoria Embankment, towards the back of the Banqueting House.

03. L'Empereur

- The Emperor - Banqueting House, Whitehall

L'Empereur holds court at the Banqueting House on the Thames. This building, as well as holding Court Masques in which the English royal court wore disguises and cavorted with the populace, was the site of a regicide in 1649 (when Charles I was beheaded) and is the place where the "Touching for the King's Evil" ritual took place. This entailed the Divine King curing all manner of illnesses through nothing more than his touch, an early act of faith healing. It's this ritual which the Father disguised as L'Empereur re-enacts.

The Eleven-Day Empire version of the character is dressed in a paper mache replica of full battle armour, complete with bat-skulled head-dress and a dark red cloak over his shoulders. He parades alongside L'Imperatrice. Always played by one of the scientific Fathers, he grants good health by scattering ampoules of the latest biodata enhancements through the crowd. This is purely symbolic, of course: the field troops will already have the latest defences worked into their biodata, but the re-enactment of an act of faith strengthens the defences of the Empire. Then again, it's at least feasible that certain biodata enhancements remain dormant in their hosts until the ritual activates them.

The procession now moves along the Embankment to La Haut Papesse.

04. La Haut Papesse

- The High Priestess, or Female Pope & Cleopatra's Needle (Victoria Embankment)

La Haut Papesse is the first of the spiritual guardians which follow L'Empereur, tasked with ensuring that the loa-spirits are bound with the Empire, and always appears veiled and disguised. So far the mummers have focused on the body, but now they begin the ritual uncovering of hidden wisdoms and the subconscious.

The role of La Haut Papesse tends to fall to Mothers initially recruited in the 1920s, who have an enthusiasm for the neo-Egyptian iconography. She wears a plain white shift, decorated with a large gold collar, and her face is veiled in white. She's accompanied by two of her protege-Cousins, dressed as Egyptian acolytes. In contrast with the preceding characters she and her companions don't play to the crowd along the route but remain silent except during their ritual.

When they arrive at Cleopatra's Needle, the three masqueraders form a tableau facing the river on the jetty in front of the obelisk, standing almost in the Thames as the tide rises (and it's always just lapping the jetty during the ritual, regardless of the actual tide time). Followers with torches stand beside the huge bronze sphinxes while La Haut Papesse declaims various extracts from the Egyptian Book of the Dead. In legend Isis was said to have received words of power from Thoth, and it's these which are recited at this point, calling for Isis to protect the land. As well as the central female deity of Egyptian lore, Isis is also the name given to the Thames higher up its course, so it can be surmised that the Mother acting as La Haut Papesse is calling for the river to be bound to the Empire.

Once this rite is complete, La Haut Papesse falls silent again and the procession moves along the Embankment to enter the Temple region.

Footnote

Cleopatra's Needle

This Egyptian obelisk, erroneously known as Cleopatra's Needle, is so heavily weighted with symbolism that the entire Victoria Embankment has been transposed to the Eleven-Day Empire in order to have the object as an anchoring point.

It originally stood at the entrance to the temple of the sun at Heliopolis, and is said to exert a malevolent presence on the Thames: certainly this is the most popular spot for suicides on the River, and in the Feast of Fools it marks the start of the journey towards the Empire's symbolic death. At this point, shadowy figures are seen rushing to their "deaths" as the flaming torchlit procession approaches.

It may also have been the site of one Cousin's initiation. On a foggy night during the 1940s, a policeman patrolling on Waterloo Bridge was approached by a hysterical young woman who begged him to hurry to Cleopatra's Needle as someone was about to commit suicide. The policeman duly investigated, with the girl in tow, arriving just in time to haul a young woman back from flinging herself into the Thames. When she turned to face him, he realised it was the same woman who had approached him on the bridge and who had suddenly vanished from his side. This may be the Eleven-Day Empire's equivalent of an urban legend, however, as there's no official record of any Cousin being initiated in such a fashion.

05. Le Hierophant

- The Hierophant, or Pope - Temple

This character in the parade is played by the highest-ranking male member of the Ritual Wing (ideally the Godfather, or a notable Father if the head of the wing is currently a Godmother). His mummer takes place in the round nave of the Church of the Templars in the Temple area.

He's dressed as a Cardinal, in a mixture of red and black robes. One arm is generally hidden - or actually missing, in the case of the more fervent Fathers - and the other carries a staff. He's accompanied by a protege-Cousin, dressed in stark red robes, and leads the "congregation" (i.e. the crowds following the parade) in a Misrule service. In the normal timeline this would be a satirical inversion of the rites and masses of the Catholic church, usually with an ass dressed as a bishop and as many rude songs as the congregation could remember. But as Faction Paradox is a culture of dissent anyway, just how can the rules be inverted for satirical effect?

After several trial and errors, a shadow play became the standard ceremony. The players act out an initiation rite, with as much fumbling and overacting as possible. The red-robed Cousin is tied with silk ropes and stands in a brightly lit circle. Le Hierophant brings down the staff between the Cousin and his shadow, separating the two. The silk ropes fall away and the bifurcated Cousin dances about the nave, his shadow mimicking him. They (eventually) lead the congregation out into Pump Court, where Le Hierophant reads out the inscription on the sundial there: "shadows we are, and like shadows depart". At this, both Cousins disappear into the night, generally in the direction of Trafalgar Square.

This ritual is a male counterpoint to La Haut Papesse's charged ritual as well as a foreshadowing of later events. Once the red and black Cousins have departed, the crowd moves through the narrow gates and lanes towards Fleet Street.

06. L'Amoureux

- The Lovers - Fleet Street

The two individuals who perform a rite on Fleet Street are costumed as Sweeney Todd - the demon barber of Fleet Street - and Margery Lovett, his lover and accomplice. They're played by a Father and Mother from the Military and the Ritual Wings respectively. Both are dressed as caricatures of nineteenth century street life, as if they've stepped out of an illustration from a Victorian penny-dreadful. Todd is an archetypal bogeyman, preying on the unsuspecting while they're at their most vulnerable and using cunning to conceal his crimes. Lovett is the European myth of the witch who devours the unwary, making the unpalatable delicious (by all accounts her pies were regarded as the best in London). Everything about the pair suggests a myth, yet Todd and Lovett were obviously real: it's this dual status, mythic yet true, which led to the Eleven-Day Empire incorporating them as L'Amoureux in the procession.

At 186 Fleet Street, the crowd waits outside while all the characters in the parade make their way into the barber shop, sliding down Todd's corpse-chute into the catacombs below. The masqueraders then make their way through the vaults and skeletons under St Dunstan's Church, re-emerging from the pie shop in Bell Yard to be greeted with a cheer by the crowd.

This brief sojourn marks the first rebirth in the cycle of rituals, as the various characters descend into the charnel-house before climbing back into the open air. It takes place after the spoof initiation by Le Hierophant, and signifies the end of the first stage and the freeing of the body from the constraints of society, just as Todd and Lovett went beyond the bounds of their own time. It's also the first rite to contain both male and female primary characters, indicating a form of equality, leading to the next rite: Liberte.

07. Liberte

- Liberty - Fetter Lane

Liberte is actually played by several Fathers, shabbily dressed in justaucorps, breeches and highwayman-style masks to hide their features. They walk up Fetter Lane from Sweeney Todd's shop to the brewery on Holborn. The irony of holding Liberte in a street named after a form of restraint is not lost on the celebrators.

Fetter Lane is on the very edge of the boundary between the Eleven-Day Empire and the City, one of the few literal boundaries of the Empire which the route follows. To go further East is to go outside the bounds of the Empire's jurisdiction. Although the Unkindnesses in the City show little interest in the ceremony, it's not doubted that they'd be amused, at the very least, if it failed. In the normal timeline Fetter Lane was the boundary at which the Great Fire of 1666 stopped, and where the gutters ran with burning liquor during the Gordon Riots of 1780. The Lane also had a disproportionate number of inns and taverns, and the mob following the pageant uses the time here to have a drink or two.

The disguised masqueraders walk up the Lane handing out free pamphlets to the torch-bearing crowds. These freesheets contain manifestos and treatises on diverse subjects, as well as satirical cartoons and libellous comments about Godfathers and Godmothers. These are deliberately lo-tech, badly-printed and mis-spelt, in order to suggest that they're unsanctioned and illegally produced (which is obviously ironic). The disguised Fathers refer to each other by the names of eighteenth century political commentators in order to retain anonymity. Characters normally include:

- "Cousin Thomas the Optimist", based on Thomas Paine, whose 1791 Rights of Man was conceived here. The Father playing this figure normally leads a speech beginning "we have it in our power to begin the world over again", a sentiment loudly cheered by the listening mob.
- "Cousin Mary", based on Mary Wollstonecraft, whose 1792 Rights of Woman demanded that women be treated as equal to men but also argued against slavery and the monarchy.
- "Cousin Thomas the Inky", based on Thomas Evans, a Jacobin (pro-French-Revolutionary) who turned his hand to printing, pornography and running a coffee-house.
- "Cousin James", based on James Tilly Matthews, a greengrocer turned political activist who was eventually locked up in Bethlehem Mental Prison (better known as Bedlam) after accusing a Home Secretary of treason.
- "Cousin John", based on John Wilkes, the "champion of English freedom" (and one-time member of the Hell-Fire Set) who was charged with sedition for publishing his paper The North Briton, and whose release from Ludgate Prison caused a riotous mob to celebrate in the streets. Elected Lord Mayor in 1774, his cross-eyed statue stands in Fetter Lane on the site where "Cousin John" makes a speech ridiculing the current Acting Speaker.

Once the crowd have taken their fill of wine and libel, the pageant moves onto Holborn.

08. Victoire

- Victory, or the Charioteer - Holborn to Tyburn

Victoire takes the form of a Chariot race along Holborn. Four Roman two-horse Chariots are used, one for each of the Wings. Each Wing puts forward a Charioteer, except for the Doubtless Fourth Wing, whose Chariot is unmanned (as the Wing has never been properly identified even within the Faction) and is taken wherever the horses want to go. The race actually begins at Holborn Circus, just to the East of Fetter Lane, and runs as far as Tyburn with the Chariots battling for the lead along a course of torchlit streets only wide enough for two of the vehicles to run side by side.

This route follows a Roman military road, the Wide Here Street, which linked the Roman garrison within the City to the original Watling Street and thus to Thorney Island (Westminster). The two ancient pathways met and still meet at Tyburn, and the crossroads may well have been fixed as an execution site at that time. The route from Holborn to Tyburn has been a road towards death for millennia.

The four Chariots are built by the Little Brothers and Sisters of the various Wings, in secrecy, during the preceding fortnight. Each year the builders try to create the wildest and most improbable display in order to impress the crowd. The vehicles are kept out of sight until the majority of the mob has reached the top of Fetter Lane. The four Chariots are then lined up at Holborn Circus and the three Charioteers are led to them, with a great deal of show to the crowd (the Doubtless Fourth Wing's Chariot is held by the Little Brothers and Sisters involved in its construction). With a signal from Le Fou, the race is started. The Charioteers use any means necessary to try to win while the fourth Chariot weaves amongst them, the horses following the pack. The first to arrive at Tyburn is declared Victoire and returns to Lincoln's Inn Fields to celebrate. The crowd follows the route westward along Holborn.

09. La Force

- Fortitude, or Strength - High Holborn

La Force is played by a young female cultist, drawn from any of the Wings. Dressed as a French Revolutionary, she "fights" and overcomes a lion on a street corner in Holborn after the Victoire chariots pass by.

The young female, often barely adolescent, is dressed as Marie Charpentier: one of the few women to be accorded the status of "Conqueror of the Bastille", and a symbol of strength in an unlikely form. She wears loose clothes with her hair and feet unbound. Her plain white shift is tied across her chest with a tricolor sash and she carries no weapons. Unlike many of the other masqueraders in the pageant, she dresses herself in her costume and is chosen democratically from the masses of Little Sisters instead of through some form of fatalistic rite.

The lion represents the old order, that of the Homeworld, recalling the idea of the lion as a symbol of monarchy and divine right. It's also an automaton, one of Baron von Kempelen's many lifelike creatures (in 1769 the same designer made a humanoid automaton which could ostensibly play chess). It's made of bronze, and inlaid with emeralds for eyes, diamonds for claws. Capable of hundreds of responses and attacks, its movement is deliberately staccato in order to demonstrate its mechanical nature. The lion spends the remainder of its year in the Noah's Ark toyshop at 231 High Holborn, along with an entire menagerie of toys, games and automata. This toyshop, founded by William Hamley in 1760, was noted for leading the fashion in toys in the eighteenth century as well as supplying magical tricks.

The clockwork lion, then, represents a constructed order which is overthrown by the unarmed but powerful revolutionary spirit. To defeat it, La Force must get past its weapons and throw a switch on its belly. Previous members who have played La Force are recognisable by the scars from wounds the lion inflicts. Having overcome the old controlling order, the pageant happily throws itself to the vagaries of Le Fortune.

10. Le Fortune

- Fortune, or Fate - Lincoln's Inn Fields

Le Fortune rests in Lincoln's Inn Fields, just off Holborn. These twelve acres of open fields have been the site of conspiracies, duels and vagrancy throughout their history, and have been used for the bloody executions of both black magicians and Catholics. Fairs were held here in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It's the element of chance, of Fate, which is involved at this spot, echoing the risks taken here. A large fair is set up, with stalls and rings where gaming of all kinds takes place, from duellists fighting to the blood to simple pea-and-cup sleight-of-hand conjurers. Hawkers and showmen loudly encourage the crowd to place bets on the outcomes of the various events.

At the centre of the field a giant wooden wheel is set up, roughly twenty feet in diameter. On the circumference of the wheel, animals from the cryptozoology section of the Eleven-Day Empire's archives either cling or sit in cages. The Wheel is turned, using a series of cogs and spindles which make the whole contraption look like a spinning-wheel, by three Mothers dressed as the three Fates. The Wheel is the only attraction in the Field on which the crowd is not encouraged to bet, instead spinning with a strange quietness which discourages the shouting and jeering heard across the rest of the fairground.

Until the Fates arrive with the main procession the Wheel stands idle, but once set in motion it doesn't stop and the fair continues late into the evening. When the crowds start to reduce, the stall-holders shut up shop and move down to Mayfair for the Le Soleil Fair [see 19] while the main procession carries on in search of L'Hermite du Temps.

11. L'Hermite du Temps

- The Hermit of Time - Seven Dials

L'Hermite du Temps is played by one of the Fathers, wrapped in a robe of absolute black - that rarest of colours - designed through forced-singularity tailoring to consume light in exactly the same fashion as a black hole (without any of the associated gravitational problems, naturally). He carries a dim lamp in front of him, lighting the alleys around the Seven Dials area just south of St. Giles and west of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Unlike all the other primary masquerades of the pageant, L'Hermite du Temps is not a spectacle. Quite the reverse, he attempts to make his way around the area unseen, ducking between the Masonic Hall on Great Queen Street and the Seven Dials pillar via the Queen's Head pub and the Atlantis bookshop. It was in this compact warren of alleyways that both the Freemasons and the Golden Dawn began their meetings, and L'Hermite du Temps is calling on the darker, hidden knowledges in a reverse of L'Alchimiste's public display of investigation.

The Seven Dials area is poorly-lit, with shady figures congregating about the pillar in the centre of the junction. More astute followers of the pageant will notice that the pillar, after which the area is named, only has six sundial faces on it: the seventh is the junction itself, the pillar acting as the arm. The pillar was pulled down in 1773 by a mob in search of treasure which was alleged to be buried beneath it (repeating the idea of hidden riches).

Almost inevitably, the Father playing L'Hermite du Temps is sighted and caught: but when the blackness of the robe is touched it falls to the ground, empty, and the extinguished lantern clatters down beside it.

Having temporarily grasped the mystery of time, the crowd carries on up to St. Giles Circus.

12. Le Pendu

- The Hanged Man - St. Giles Circus

Le Pendu is the first death, the rite of self-abnegation which leads to great spiritual power and echoes the initiation into Faction Paradox. The primary figure is hidden behind a calm, smiling mask as he's raised into a tumbril at Seven Dials. The procession heads towards St. Giles Circus, pausing at the Angel-in-St.-Giles inn as Le Pendu enjoys a last bowl of ale. He or she is a Little Brother or Sister, undertaking this rite as their own initiation. After their last drink, the figure's hands are tied behind their back and they're cheered as the crowd surges towards the Circus. This is the rite which is the most personal - every member of the Faction has undergone a ritual death and rebirth - and the most spectacular, appealing as a wild entertainment, much as executions were considered a fun day out for all the family in eighteenth century London.

St. Giles is the crossroads, the centrepiece of the masquerade, as well as one of the central sites of the Eleven-Day Empire. In the normal timeline St. Giles is where the Northern and Central underground lines cross, and is close to the spot where the missing Eleven Days were given to Faction Paradox by George II: the spot on which the Eleven-Day Empire was born. St. Giles is also an area of outsiders and transience; first a leper colony, then the site of the rookeries (considered the worst slums in London). At this crossroads one of the masqueraders is hanged upside-down on the old gallows, sacrificing the self in order to go beyond base matter and reaffirm the Empire's existence outside of linear time.

Once Le Pendu is swinging, the pageant moves on towards Tyburn.

13. Morte

- Death - Tyburn Road (Oxford Street)

Morte is, unsurprisingly, a cloaked skeleton. He's played by the remnants of Godfather Frei, who was mortally wounded during one of the first (corporeal) skirmishes of the War. Sheer force of will means that despite this handicap, his mind still animates his battle armour. The lining which connected the exoskeleton has withered away so that only the bones themselves remain. What's left inside can occasionally be glimpsed.

Once Le Pendu has been hanged, Morte draws the focus to the crowd to him for the walk along Tyburn Road (renamed Oxford Street in twentieth century London). He symbolically gathers the dead towards him by collecting severed human parts from hiding places along the route in a macabre form of Easter egg hunt. For example, he recovers the severed head of Oliver Cromwell from its hiding place in a chimney and carries it, held by the shaft of the spike which pierces it, until the pageant reaches L'Arbre.

Just as Le Pendu is about making a sacrifice in order to attain a higher level of understanding, so Morte symbolises a change in material status without the end of consciousness. He's calling on the spirits to recognise that the Eleven-Day Empire entails change and decay. It's not about denying Morte, but accepting it as part of the Empire.

14. L'Arbre

- The Tree, or Tower - Marble Arch

This rite takes place at Tyburn Tree itself, an ancient crossroads and execution site, situated at the western end of Tyburn Road/ Oxford Street. At this point another re-enactment of a hanging takes place. Unlike the willing sacrifice of Le Pendu, this figure is unwilling. This is to indicate an overturn of fortune, a downfall.

Tyburn Tree is sited where Nash's Marble Arch was eventually built in the normal timeline, despite Tyburn having been located in Connaught Square just to the north. Since people believe Marble Arch to be the site of the old execution spot, in the Eleven-Day Empire it is, regardless of the truth.

By this point in the Feast most of the crowd are drunk on both beer and the spirit of the night. The higher ranks of the Eleven-Day Empire move onto the wooden stands which look over the gallows, while the Cousins, Little Brothers and Little Sisters stay on the field. Morte climbs onto the scaffold, to the sound a slow drum roll, and throws his bag into the crowd. The drums increase in frequency as the crowd tosses the bag about. With a resounding crash the drums stops, and whoever's holding Cromwell's head at this point is made into the masquerader for the ritual.

He or she is dragged out of the crowd and roughly dressed up as Jack Wild, a notorious thief and thief-taker of the eighteenth century, in a tricorne hat, breeches and a rough cotton blouse. As his hands are tied, the crowd starts pelting him with stones and mud, or with bottles. He's then raised on high, to great cheering from the crowd. He's cut down again, however, before his or her windpipe can be fatally crushed. The point is not to spill blood, but to recreate the sense of someone's world being overthrown: the complete terror of blind fate.

The route now turns south into Mayfair.

15. Les Diables

- The Devils - Balfour Place

Les Diables are played by a Father and a Mother dressed as members of the Process Church of the Final Judgement. As the pageant makes its way through Mayfair from L'Arbre, they and a handful of Little Brothers and Sisters (dressed as their acolytes) start up a chant of 'as it is, so be it' and lead a short "service" in a Georgian house in Balfour Place. All the masqueraders disguised as Processians are dressed in black jeans and turtlenecks, each with a black cape to complete the ensemble. The Father and Mother who lead them are called the Omega, as were the two leaders of the original twentieth century Church.

The Process Church of the Final Judgement was a self-awareness group which became a cult in 1960s London. They believed that Satan and Christ were complimentary characters, and that both should be praised equally (suggestive of the Faction's own doctrines of dissent). There are also parallels in terms of dividing humanity into four "types", mirroring the four Wings of Faction Paradox. Les Diables is another counterpoint masquerade, echoing L'Amoureux, as well as suggesting the pleasures of sex and religione two aspects of life denied by the Homeworld.

The brief service mimics the Sabbath Assemblies of the real Process church, held in the large ground floor room of a building in Balfour Place. On each wall of the room there are symbols representing the four Wings, while a circular altar rests in the centre, the sigil of the Great Houses scrawled on it in blood. The Omega move around this focal symbol, leading chanting and dancing until the group reaches a crescendo and the two leaders copulate on the altar. Generally speaking, it's at this point that the "congregation" rejoins the majority of the pageant outside the house and continues through Mayfair to the L'Etoile.

16. L'Etoile

- The Stars - Devonshire House (Berkerley Square)

L'Etoile takes place in the grounds and reception rooms of Devonshire House. The players are dressed as if attending a large Georgian masquerade party, with complex clothing and elaborate masks. The crowd of following Cousins becomes a mob, cheerfully running riot in Berkerley Square and along Piccadilly, so that the party attendees can hear the constant roar of the crowds over any music.

The rooms and grounds are decorated as constellations. As the primary characters enter, they parade through a series of rooms themed around the eleven Earth zodiacal signs (the Eleven-Day Empire refusing to accept the twelfth house as it includes the Homeworld's sun). Outside in the grounds, lanterns strung along the trees suggest more constellations: a giant stargram of the Empire's influence.

In the centre of the grounds, a small artificial lake has been installed, lit by seven large spheres of fire. As the last stragglers leave the house and enter the grounds, a "Grandmother" - guised as the house's mistress in a revealing and flimsy chemise, with her hair bound by an ostrich feather - steps onto a suitably rustic rock at the edge of the pool. She goes down on one knee, lifts a simple bronze ewer and dips it into the lake, then rises and pours the water out again. Instead of falling to the lake, it rises up, forming a ball and catching the light from the spheres. It then explodes outwards, sending glistening droplets of water onto the assembled masqueraders.

The rite completed, the pageant moves on.

17. La Lune

- The Moon - St. James Street

La Lune is not a masked human member. Instead it takes the form of two bio-engineered dogs - the more excitable might call them "hell-hounds" - who take command in a street in St. James, after the visit to L'Etoile.

Most of the street is made up of the usual stuccoed terraces, but halfway along its length one house is missing and in its place is a waterfall and pool, with a golden disk set in the wall behind it. The two dogs sit back on their haunches and begin to howl, a long, complex, undulating cry. As they do so the moon appears, rising from the water to hang above the pool, reflected in its surface. The moon isn't the Earth's moon, but a large fragment from an asteroid which instead of being caught in the planet's orbit smashed into it, causing a nuclear winter and the destruction of most large-scale life. The fragment was recovered by a Faction Paradox member and spun until it was worn into a smooth enough orb to resemble a small moon. Since the sky above the Empire is always blood-and-fire red, the white light seems harsh and unnatural, and the white stuccoed buildings appear to be made of bleached bone beneath it.

Risen, La Lune spins, obscuring and then partially revealing the gold disk on the wall. As the moon "eclipses" this disk the crowd begins to murmur, talking nonsense or shouting abuse at no-one in particular. This small area of Mayfair becomes, briefly, the land of the mad. This rite is designed to call on the lunar aspects of the spirits to accept the Eleven-Day Empire. As the "moon" begins its return to the well, the masquerade moves back towards Shepard's Market.

18. Le Soleil

- The Sun - Shepard's Market

This takes place in the Shepard's Market area of Mayfair, where the original May Fair was held, and is a rite demanding and celebrating the return of the sun after the lunacy of La Lune.

May Day, and the May Fairs, are traditionally a celebration of spring and fertility as well as non-conformity. The May Fairs, after which the area of London was named, were a combination of drinking, bartering, whoring and rioting. The Fair was eventually outlawed in the 1700s, due to the extreme licentiousness upsetting the upper classes who were moving into the new Georgian estates in the area.

Having watched La Lune set, the crowd moves down to Shepard's Market where the stalls from Lincoln's Inn Fields [see 10] have been set up again. This time the centre ground is taken up by a huge Maypole with an iron cage at the top. Around this, fire-eaters and jugglers perform until the masquerader playing Le Soleil comes forward. This is a young boy, carrying in front of him a large casket. He's naked except for a gold sun-child mask. The fire-eaters help him tie the casket to his back, and - accompanied by a low drum roll - the boy climbs the Maypole, clinging to tiny handholds and footholds. At the top, he threads his legs through the iron cage and pulls the casket off his back. He places it in the bowl of the cage and opens it. Light blazes out: the boy vanishes.

The "sun" is a collapsing star, grabbed out of time at the very millisecond before its death. It's actually held somewhere in the Stacks, within a network of complex gravitational buffers, but the globe is linked to it via the continual strata and blazes as brightly as the sun itself. This is, of course, the only time the inhabitants of the Eleven-Day Empire see a yellow sun in their own realm.

The pageant now moves on to Victoria railway station.

19. L'Ange du Jugement

- The Angel of Judgement - Victoria Railway Station

L'Ange du Jugement is played by one of the few surviving Demon Luminati bound to Faction Paradox. Indeed, some have cruelly suggested that the Luminati were only created in order to be used for this rite.

The rite takes place, rather oddly, in the train shed of Victoria railway station. This seems an odd choice, since other London railway termini are more catherdralesque (Paddington) or Gothic (St Pancras) than the rather functional Victoria. On the other hand, if looking for a large cavernous and echoing hall in the Pimlico area, Victoria is perfect. The area around the station has been called anonymous and depressing, as is the station itself. It also recalls the idea of transience, of a restless mass of people waiting to move on, to travel elsewhere. One rather Catholic chronicler of the Feast of Fools has suggested that as L'Ange du Jugement is a play on the idea of Judgement Day, the choice of a station is meant to suggest purgatory: the place in which lost souls wait to be judged.

The Demon Luminati are an impressive bloodline, humaniform but asexual, with vast crystalline wings and pale, almost translucent bodies. They aren't the Eleven-Day Empire's most successful bio-designed creatures, since they're of limited use in the field, and only a handful were created before the bio-research wing moved on to more practical designs. ("Demon" is a form of title: as they're of no clear gender they can't be classified as Mothers or Fathers, and in their case "Demon" seems more apt than "Sibling", "Parent" or "Kithriarch", the classifications more commonly used for ungendered members of Faction Paradox.) The remaining Luminati are bound to the Ritual Wing. One was known for hanging around with William Blake.

During the Feast of Fools, the chosen Luminati walks the route covered in a plain dark robe, wings

uncomfortably furled. When the procession enters the great train sheds of the station it discards the robe and rises up to hang above the crowd. Having taken on the role of L'Ange du Jugement, it then reads out the latest list of "crimes" of which the Eleven-Day Empire has been accused by the outside universe, ranging from petty manipulations of history to the wholesale subjugation of major cultures. This role call of offences is greeted with cheers by the crowd, especially when the Faction didn't actually commit the crimes being described. L'Ange then passes judgement: guilty, of all this and more.

This is followed by more wild cheering as L'Ange du Jugement descends to the floor, where it takes up the hand of blind Justice and leads her to her rite at the Panopticon.

20. La Justice

- Blind Justice - Millbank

La Justice takes the form of a blinded Mother, who's led by L'Ange du Jugement to the Panopticon, in which she pronounces the sentence for Faction Paradox's crimes.

The Panopticon Prison at Millbank stood close to the spot where the Tate Gallery (or Tate Britain) will at some point be situated, near the point at which the river Tyburn flows into the Thames. It was designed in 1791 by Jeremy Bentham: the concept was of a circular, tiered cellblock with all the cells facing inwards, towards a single inspection tower from which the guards could observe every cell and every inmate. Although the prison built at Millbank was a modified version, the Eleven-Day Empire has created a Panopticon based exactly on Bentham's blueprints.

It's to the central tower that blind Justice walks. L'Ange du Jugement releases her arm as they move through the gates of the Prison. The primary characters in the pageant join her in the tower, looking out of the lower observation points while she heads for the very top. La Justice stands silent, waiting until the noises fall to a low murmur as the mob crowds onto the cellblock walkways. She then raises her arms to reveal the atheme, previously shown to the crowd by L'Alchemiste, and a set of tarnished scales held in her hands.

She passes sentence upon the Empire, based on the Judgement given by L'Ange. This is nearly always something to the effect that the Empire's children are an unnatural corruption, guilty of meddling with and breaking the protocols of history, without respect for any authority other than the Faction's own. And that they're free to do as they please for another year. The mob then surges back out of the Panopticon, heading up Millbank Road towards the Parliament buildings.

21. L'Univers

- The Universe - The New Palace of Westminster

L'Univers is carried on a bier, shouldered by Cousins from each of the Wings, towards the New Palace of Westminster. The Cousins are disguised as an eagle, a minotaur and a lion, while one of the lower caste Demon Lumunati takes up the fourth corner. On the bier rests a large transparent case, edged with silver and gold filigree. Inside the case L'Univers dances, held away from the walls by a spinning and encircling loop of laurel leaves. L'Univers itself is made up of stars and galaxies, forming the figure of a hermaphrodite, both male and female in a single form. This is the combined force called upon by the rites and ritual as the Feast of Fools pageant beats the bounds, the figure growing in clarity and definition as the procession progresses along the route, finally beginning to dance after La Justice has made her speech.

The Cousins carry the ever-swirling L'Univers along Millbank and into the New Palace of Westminster, where they pass through archways and wide corridors until they reach the Star Chamber Court. This inner Court of the New Palace has been combined with the original medieval Palace of Westminster, so that instead of being an open space the original Star Chamber exists within it. This is a simple Tudor room, with

a ceiling painted with stars. It was here that the infamous Star Chamber judgements were passed, and it was once used as an attempted passageway into the heart of the Eleven-Day Empire.

When L'Univers is brought into the chamber, the Cousins set it down in the centre of the room. Once at rest, the figure within the glass slows its dance, and it's revealed to be carrying a blunt knife made up of stars. It uses the hilt to strike against the glass: the filigree mounts fold and collapse, and there's a blast of energy, knocking back most of the crowd and flashing across the dark red sky of London.

When those closest to the chamber can see again, all that remains of L'Univers is the blackened case and twisted metal. The energy carefully bound and held throughout the rite has been dispersed, and the Empire has been bound once more to Faction Paradox. The remainder of the night is spent in celebration of the successful binding as Le Fou des Ombres leads the final rituals.

00. Le Fou des Ombres

- The Fool of Shadows - Trafalgar Square

Normally played by the Acting Speaker of the House, Le Fou des Ombres is actually a specially-engineered doppelganger, lagging behind after his or her first self (Le Fou) who leads the parade. His or her role is to follow the last masquerader, ridiculing the pomp of L'Univers.

When the route has been fully beaten, this last character runs forward, lapping the others and taking the lead. He directs the crowd up Whitehall and into Trafalgar Square. This is the signal that the Eleven-Day Empire has been safely bound and that the night's partying may commence in full. Le Fou des Ombres is made the Acting Lord of Misrule and presides over the riotous celebrations. At the break of dawn the next day - such as it is, in the Empire - Le Fou des Ombres is killed by the mob at the base of the Grandfather's Column, and the Acting Speaker resumes his or her duties in Parliament.

Footnote

Trafalgar Square

This large open space is one of the central sites of the Eleven-Day Empire's London. Indeed, all distances within the Empire are measured from the base of the Grandfather's Column.

The Square is very similar to Nash's Square in the normal timeline. The most noticeable feature is the huge column on which a statue of the Grandfather stands, usurping Nelson. At the base of Grandfather's Column are the four huge bronze lions designed by Landseer, and the wide steps which are used as platforms for speakers. There are also two fountains, and four plinths on the corners of the piazza. These plinths contain statues of fallen Godfathers or Godmothers from each of the Wings - Bio-Research, Ritual and Military - although the fourth is empty, reflecting the Doubtless Fourth Wing's presumed existence. One significant difference between "normal" London and the Empire's London is that here, Landseer's lions are in no way identical: their crested, heavily-stylised heads are more reminiscent of sphinxes than of big cats, the face of each one suggesting a subtly different sub-species. Tradition maintains that before the founder was removed from history, the Grandfather of House Paradox was assisted by four "lieutenants", and perhaps the faces of the lions are intended to suggest the four personalised masks of those original Godfathers and Godmothers.

To the North of the square is the National Gallery, containing shadow-casts of all those works of art considered to be of great iconic value by the Empire, including Fuseli's Nightmare. To the south, Whitehall leads down to the New Palace of Westminster. To the west and east are various buildings from different time periods: the east seems to favour buildings which were present in the twentieth century, despite - or because of? - the fact that they encourage destruction every year by the Feast of Fools mob.

Suggestions for the Linear World Traveller

The route of the Feast of Fools can be traced through modern London, although the compilers of this guide can't be held responsible for any consequences. Below are some notes for interested parties.

The entrance gates to the Temple gardens on the Embankment are often locked (and always are on weekends). Retrace your steps to Temple Place, turn right and try the car-park gate. If that's locked, go up the steps into Essex Street and straight ahead to the Strand, then right into Fleet Street. Or walk the route in office hours on a weekday.

The following pubs along the route have been tested by the compilers of this guide and pass the key recommendation criteria (not too busy, not too expensive)

- Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (Fleet Street): only open on weekdays.
- The Angel of St. Giles (Endell Street).
- Ye Grapes (Shepard's Market): check out the 1920s "porn" on the walls.
- The Chandos (St. Martin's Lane, just off Trafalgar Square).

In this compiler's opinion, Mayfair is the most boring place in the world.