

# CRYPT CRAWL

## History of the Celestial Pantheon

by Susan Van Camp

The first god was Chaos, an amorphous being without lasting form, gender or mind. Chaos always has existed and it always will. In Celestial mythology, priests call this god Grandmother Chaos, Grandfather Chaos or both, because all other things were born from Chaos.

By its very nature, Chaos changes all the time. Long ago, it changed into two beings--one male and one female. The beings mated bore twin children, one male and one female. These were Mother Sky and Father Earth, the parents of the entire celestial pantheon.

Mother Sky and Father Earth were full formed adults when they were born. They had children, starting with a series of twins: Zurma and Chalise (the Sun and Moon), Hassar and Umdar (Life and Death), Hijaac and Ard (Trickster and Law Bringer), Trakel and Renzee (Trade and Travel), Vali and Fyzar (Peace and War).

In most cases each set of twins lived in harmony, agreeing between themselves the limits of their power and their roles in the realms they shared. Between Zurma and Chalise, however, harmony was strained. Their conflict started with an argument about who was most favored by Mother Sky. This was more than sibling rivalry; in the Celestial Pantheon, all divine power comes from the sky, so Mother Sky's favor determined who would rule over all other gods. Consequently, many early stories of Zurma and Chalise are about contests between them to outshine each other in their mother's regard.

Eventually, moved by persuasions of Father Earth, Mother Sky favored Zurma, allowing him to shine bright and full all day. Chalise was commanded to only shine at night. When she complained about this injustice, Zurma decided to punish her for her cheek. He summoned a dragon and sent it to attack her. Every night the Chalise fought the dragon, and every night the dragon took a bite out of Chalise. Eventually the disk of the moon was only a sliver, for the dragon had nearly eaten it up. However, Chalise was goddess of changes, and she could not be destroyed by being eaten; instead, every time the dragon took a bite of her, part of Chalise became the dragon. When the dragon came to take the very last bite, Chalise leapt into its mouth; then the moon turned blood red. The dragon roared, struggled, beat its wings and then it turned into Chalise. The moon reappeared, silver and full. From that time on Chalise was able to change into a dragon, and took the form of this creature as her holy symbol. It appears on the Dragon Seal, which shows a dragon silhouetted against a full moon, which hangs over the door of every Temple of Chalise.

Recovered and now strengthened by her victory over the dragon, Chalise embarked on a series of adventures to acquire treasures. Each time she found a treasure she gave it to her mother, who wore it to adorn herself. At night these treasures sparkle; they are the stars. In daylight, Zurma fiercely outshines the stars, jealously hiding Chalise's gifts. He cannot, however, hide the results of his sister's efforts. Charmed by Chalise's generosity, Mother Sky allows her daughter to share her realm with Zurma on certain days of the year. On these days, both the moon and sun share the sky during daylight. From this legend Chalise gained the title 'Treasure Seeker'. Many of her worshippers emulate her quests by

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searching for wealth in ancient ruins.

Since the time that she was granted a place in the day sky, Chalise has shared power with Zurma and the two have quarreled about how much power each should have. This argument has continued from legendary times until today, for worshippers of Chalise and Zurma still quibble about the extent of their gods' power and their own authority.

One of these quarrels led to the creation of people. Offended by her appearance in his realm, Zurma appealed to Father Earth for help. Father Earth had always been more fond of his son than his daughter, a favoritism he has displayed by making the crops grow when Zurma's light shone upon them. He built slaves to labor for Zurma, creatures made of mud, rocks and water. These slaves labored mindlessly for their master; at his command, they began to build tall shining towers for him. When enough towers had been built, the land would be bright all the time; Night would end and Chalise's light would be dimmed forever.

Chalise schemed to undo Zurma's plan. At night, she crept up to sleeping slaves and whispered in their ears. As she whispered, the slaves dreamed; and as they dreamed, they changed, for Chalise is the goddess of change. Upon waking they were different than they had been before: They thought, they questioned, they wandered and they quarreled. They had become people. As such, they were no longer capable of building Zurma's towers, for their questions, quarrels and laziness interfered with the work. Eventually they lost interest altogether and wandered away, leaving the marvelous towers to decay into ruins that adventurers plunder today.

Father Earth never again made such creatures. Any beings that could be easily turned from obedient slaves to complete nuisances were more grief than they were worth. Over time and with much effort, gods managed to put most people to good work: building, farming and worshipping; but they were never again the mindless slaves that Father Sky had given to Zurma, and no amount of divine intervention could undo what Chalise's whispers had begun.

For many ages gods ruled people and people obeyed gods, usually. Towns grew and people thrived. Many new gods were born in this time, divine power growing to match the increasing numbers of people. The quarrels between Zurma and Chalise continued, but over the ages worship of Chalise slowly diminished; Zurma's dominion over crops, which grew when his rays shone upon them, ultimately made him the more useful god. Priests of Chalise were at the point of despair, when a miracle occurred that changed their fate.

On a night of the full moon, when priests had gathered in a holy grove to worship Chalise, she appeared to them in human form. After performing a series of divine acts to prove her identity, including assuming her draconic shape, she explained why she had appeared to them. Evil times were coming to the world and they must prepare to fight. Following her commands, all remaining priests of Chalise gathered up their most loyal followers and immigrated to a large island. There they remained for more than a century, carrying out commands of their holy writ, which had been dictated by Chalise for the five years that she had dwelt among Priests of the Moon Grove. Following a series of strange and complex diagrams laid out by their goddess, the exiles built the first Chalices, magical vessels whose purpose they only vaguely understood. According to their writ, these would be used to summon magical warriors, who would defeat the evil that was to come.

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What evil was this? Chalise's writ was vague, referring to it only as 'the Plague of the Accursed.' While Chalist scholars scratched their heads and tried to understand, people on the mainland were suffering the first evils that Chalise had foreseen. Demons arrived in Zurma's Realm.

Zurma had fathered many children, most with goddesses, a few with mortal women. Among the latter was Effilen, a beautiful, vain and willful queen of a large kingdom. When Effilen bore Zurma's son, she loudly proclaimed his parentage and demanded that the god himself to appear and acknowledge his offspring. The act was a haughty, heretical and not to be borne. Zurma cursed the beautiful queen with boils then crippled her with twisted limbs. Fearful that their queen's impiety would bring Zurma's wrath upon them all, Effilen's subjects turned on her. She was killed and a mob ransacked her palace to find her son, Quegon. They failed. The boy was gone, spirited away by a loyal retainer to save his life.

Quegon was a boy of three when he escaped. He spent his childhood living in dank, isolated ruins, with no company but an embittered old retainer. The man was obsessed with a hunger for revenge against the ones who had deposed his queen. Over time he lost his mind and his desire for revenge grew until he wanted all people to suffer. This hatred he fed to the boy, who grew to be a strong, clever and handsome man with a soul twisted by bottomless rage.

As a youth, Quegon traveled deep into the ruins that were his home. He found many magics that had lain hidden within the ruins, untouched since the age of legend. He studied these magics until he had mastered many terrible, unworldly spells and, using these, he attacked the fabric of Mother Sky's Cloak of Night. This cloak was made of the cloth that she had been wrapped in as a child; Grandmother Chaos had woven in out of her own hair. It was light and fine as spiderweb and stronger than mountain stone. With this cloak Mother Sky covered the world, shielding Father Earth and all of her children from the forces that lay outside her protection; for, when Chaos changed it sometime became terrible, strong and cruel things-- things strong enough to remain, surviving as individual beings after chaos changed again. These were demons, who people call The Accursed, and they were what Quegon let in when he tore the Cloak of Night.

Using evil magics, Quegon enslaved the creatures he had summoned to the world, commanding them to worship him. With their power behind him he was ready to take his revenge. He was now Quegon, God of Invading Evil, and he sent out his demons to slay every man, woman and child in the entire world.

When Quegon's forces attacked many people died, an event that pleased a number of other gods. Umdar, god of Death, was especially pleased, for the ranks of her kingdom swelled and the number of her worshippers grew as people prayed for a quick end when Accursed attacked. She paid Quegon back in kind, allowing him to summon her subjects as skeletons, zombies and other foul undead. Other gods were pleased to see troublesome, annoying people put in their place and delighted in the worship they received when frightened humans turned to them for divine aid. Before long this pleasure faded. Accursed and demons were killing many, many people. If all humans died and only Quegon's demons remained, this cruel, sadistic upstart would have the power to unseat Zurma and rule the gods. It was a chilling thought, enough to make them take up arms against the invader.

They might as well have remained complacent. Quegon's demons were too powerful. The invaders attacked at will; no human force seemed capable of stopping them and no divine force could stay

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Quegon's drive to rule the gods. All seemed lost, until Chalise took a hand.

Chalise had been in hiding for years, her worshippers living in exile, her name nearly forgotten on the mainland. Then, at the very moment that Quegon tore the Cloak of Night, she appeared in a vision to the high priest at her largest island temple. She told him that her prophesy was upon them and that they must begin to carry out the attack, as described in her holy writ. Astonished and overcome by her divine presence (for this vision occurred during a well attended ceremony and many people saw it) the Chalists begin to work.

When Chalise came to save the gods, she was greeted with astonishment and contempt. They could not imagine what a weak, forgotten troublemaker could do to help. Then she proved her worth. Since the first time she had whispered into a slave's ear and made him a man, Chalise had enjoyed a special link with people. She spoke to them in their dreams and she could call to them to do things that gods considered impossible for humans to accomplish. In the face of overwhelming evil, she used this power to create the Spirit Warriors. She whispered to dead people, speaking to those who hungered for righteous revenge against demons who had murdered them. She called them back to life. They returned as sacred warriors, their status marked by strange and wondrous appearance, their power far greater than ordinary men and women. Unlike most men and women, they did not quail and flee when they saw demons. They fought them, and they won.

Spirit Warriors proved so successful that they raised the status of Chalise from forgotten exile to equal of Zurma. Other gods accepted Chalise's return to power when she drove Quegon back into the ruins he had come from. Zurma now gladly shares power with his sister, whose magic protects the entire pantheon. The gods are united against Quegon and people are united against the Accursed. Priests predict victory, so long as unity remains.