

# WELCOME TO THE FILK CIRCLE

by Lee Gold

If you've never attended a filksing before, you're twice welcome. Don't think that you have to pretend to be a bump on a log just because you don't know the titles of any filksongs. When your turn comes round, feel free to ask for a song about your favorite SF book or TV show or movie. Or to ask for a song about spaceflight or fantasy or computers or fantasy gaming or fan history or cats or anything else you can think of. Filkers love to be challenged.

Or if you'd like to sing a favorite song that seems to you likely to interest other SF fans, then go ahead and do that. Or if you've written a song that goes to a well-known tune and you don't trust your own singing voice, you can probably find someone willing to sing your lyrics for you.

If you don't understand a reference in a filksong, ask politely once it's over and someone will be glad to explain it to you.

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## *BARDIC CIRCLE*

Round and round goes around the Bardic Circle. When it's your turn, you have three choices:

- PICK a song—and ask if someone else in the Circle can sing it
- PERFORM a song yourself
- PASS to the next person

It's a good idea to decide which you're going to do when the Circle starts getting to two or three people ahead of you.

If you're still looking through your filkbooks for a song when the turn gets to you, you can POSTPONE your turn till you find the song—and let the next person go ahead.

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## *POKER CHIP BARDIC*

If you've never attended a Poker Chip Bardic before (and that's likely), here's how it works.

When you come in, you'll be handed three poker chips: Red, White & Blue. We'll sing a Red round, then a White round, and then a Blue round. Then we'll pick up the chips and maybe start over.

As usual for a Bardic, you get to Perform or to Pick a song or singer once in each round. Unlike the usual Bardic, the turn doesn't pass clockwise or anti-clockwise around the circle. Instead, when a song is over, anyone who still has a chip the right color for that round can toss it in. That person can then perform a song OR ask a certain person to perform a song OR ask if anyone present is willing to perform a song (specifying the song somehow—or asking for any song that applies to a general subject). This lets a song flow naturally from the previous song, letting a set of songs develop in the Bardic Circle just as it can in a Chaos Circle, while still preserving the basic egalitarianism of the Bardic.

If you have a follower song you'd like to sing but you don't have a chip left, announce that you've got a follower—and see if anyone tosses in a chip to hear it. If not, then abide by the group consensus.

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## ***CHAOS CIRCLE***

In a Chaos Circle, there's no set order of who's going to sing next or any attempt to make sure that each filker sings the same number of times. Non-singers might suggest a song or topic, but the Chaos Circle is really for singers and those who want to listen to them.

That doesn't mean that all songs have to be filksongs. Folksongs are welcome. So are all other songs that seem to fit in. If you're not sure that a particular sort of song will be welcome, feel free to ask.

If you've never sung in a Chaos Circle before, sit quietly for a few songs and see how it works. You'll notice that once a singer is finished, there'll be a few moments of silence. Then one of the other singers will strum a guitar or say, "I've got a follower for that" or do something else to indicate a readiness to sing. If more than one singer is interested, then the next singer may be the one with the fastest reflexes—OR the matter may be decided by whoever's in charge of the Circle.

All the people in the Chaos Circle room may seem to be old friends. That doesn't mean they won't be interested in hearing you sing. Wait till someone does a song that seems like a good lead-in to one of your best songs, and then go for it. By the end of the convention, you may find you've got a whole lot of new friends. If you don't feel self-confident enough for the Chaos Circle, you should check out the Bardic Circle. And then think about coming back to the Chaos Circle after 2 AM when there are fewer people in the room and when a new face (and voice) will stand out more.

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Here are a few other, usually unwritten Filksong Circle Rules (adapted from Melinda Hunter's Rules).

Rule #0 Everyone who wants to participate gets a turn. Eventually.

Rule #1 No apologies before performing!

Rule #2A If you're in a Bardic Filksong Circle, when it gets around to your turn, you can: Play a tune, sing a song, tell a story, Request that someone else play, sing or tell a story Pick a subject and see if anyone's written a song about it Postpone your turn till later, or Buy a vowel for \$50 (in which case we all get pizza which we'll eat during one of the longer songs).

Rule #2B If you're in a Chaos Filksong Circle, wait 3D6 microseconds after the last performer is done and then loudly strum your guitar or other instrument and start to play and/or sing. If you sing a capella, STAND UP and start to sing. (You can sit down once the room is obviously listening to you.)

Rule #3 PLEASE, take conversation into the hall if someone is performing.

Rule #4 No apologies before, after or (especially) during performing, or for not performing!! If you don't want to perform, say "Pass."

Rule #5 If you do NOT want accompaniment, say so. Otherwise we will join in at the darnedest times and in the darnedest keys.

Rule #6 Bawdy songs are traditionally sung after midnight.

Rule #7 Traditional folksongs are welcome. So are pop songs that seem to have something to do with science fiction, fantasy, and high tech. Or cats, roleplaying, or Neopaganism.

Rule #8 If someone asks people to turn off their recorders, please do so. Otherwise, feel free to record whatever you like.

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