

Games From Folktales

2016

An experiment in podcasting for the Ars Magica roleplaying game

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In roleplaying games, spellcasters generally make arcane gestures with their hands. In Ars Magica, spells are easier to cast if the character can make sweeping gestures. Spellcasting with subtle gestures is a hindrance, and casting without gestures deeply limits a magician's power. Your character's hands are doing something, and that something affects fundamental universal forces: what's the mechanism for that?

In some games, the gestures are arbitrary, and are used to signal an aesthetic choice about your character. I remember, from very long ago, that in TSR's *Principalities of Clantri*, the vampire lord cast spells with great gestures and evocations of dark powers, even though this had no mechanical effect. Games in which they are arbitrary often suggest magicians use them as a sort of concentration aid. The gesture helps the magus focus and channel power, but any rote movement will do.

In Ars Magica gestures cannot, strictly speaking, be arbitrary, because a character making a Magic Theory roll can observe a spell being cast, determine its effect, and throw up a counterspell. This implies that the observer is gathering information from the gestures. The gestures, therefore, refer to a shared lexicon. They have a meaning beyond the personal eccentricity of each spellcaster.

I've been thinking about this, in fits and starts, for about four years. My wife speaks a simplified version of Auslan (Australian sign language) because some of her family members use it, and because she used to be a carer for multicap adults. I know a handful of signs, mostly involving being able to signal my wife in noisy restaurants.

As an aside, this isn't too far from how medieval sign languages evolved. Monastic sign language evolved because monks used to read out loud when copying books. This made rooms with multiple copyists so loud that a sign language developed to allow communication by a method less disturbing than shouting over the other copyists. It's also why libraries today have carels.

What do your hands say in Mythic Europe?

So, magi can understand each other's signs. Why? We know that they need not be able to understand each other's languages. There are quite a few magi who cast spells using Greek instead of Latin. I'd argue that the signs are not for communication with magi at all.

In Realms of Power : Magic, we learn that each spell is actually completed by an airy spirit from the Magic realm. The ability to cast spells is the ability to create, to cajole omnipresent, spirits. Spirits naturally understand all human languages, which gets them over the Greek/Latin/Gaelic divides in spellcasting. I'd argue that the hand gestures are intended as communication with the airy spirits. Magi watching them can understand the signs because this spiritual language is not an arbitrary concentration aid: it's part of the underlying structure of Mythic Europe's reality. This also explains how magi can botch spells.

In the current rules, magi can fail at casting a spell so spectacularly that they are harmed by the attempt. The most profound form of harm is Twilight, where they slip, for a time, into the Magical Realm. This draws them closer to that realm, so that in time they are pulled into it forever. It has never been clear how "botching" works. If the magus gets to just make up the gestures and words, then it cannot be mispronunciation, or failure of performance, that triggers the botch. Magical items cannot botch, so the process of channelling mystical energy is predictable to the point where it can be mechanised. It must be an internal failure to process the magical energy.

I'd posit that Twilight occurs because the magus has used the wrong hand gestures. Twilight experiences are Nature's way of debugging the magus, so that he stops spewing broken code at airy spirits. Many magi come back from Twilight with enhanced powers, precisely related to the target of their failed spell. To me that sounds like the magus has been altered so that he stops damaging reality.

Can non-magi understand the signs? I'd argue they can, particularly if they were raised in a magical environment. Further, I'd argue that just as some children raised by faeries have skill in negotiating their courts, I'd suggest children raised by airy spirits make better spellcasters because their native language is spellcasting sign. There are some communities where sign was the common language, Martha's Vineyard, for example. It seems possible that in a covenant with people from all over Mythic Europe, an argot of natural signs may devolve out of the signs magi use.

In discussing natural signs, we need to note that American Sign Language, which is the sign most familiar to most Ars Magica players, is a bit unusual. Early in their development, and I hope you'll pardon a vast simplification, modern sign languages received a lot of criticism that they were not true language, but just a type of mime. Speakers of some languages, including Auslan just kept on with "natural" signs. American Sign Language was, instead, redesigned so that the formal word for a thing bore no relationship to that thing. Over time, ASL has tended to come back to more natural signs, by accruing slang. I'm noting this because it matters for language acquisition by Mythic Europeans without the Gift.

If signs are "natural" then mortals will pick them up. It doesn't take a genius to see the sign for "food" and realise the person would like something to eat. Similarly, the sign for "Ball of Abyssal Flame" may be something so obviously threatening that the mortal has an idea that it might be time to dive into a nearby river. If the signs are in some sense rarefied, then that won't happen, particularly because the Spirits may prevent linguistic drift. You might not get slang in magical sign language.

The sign for "father" in ASL is the dominant hand, fingers spread apart, with the thumb then tapped twice at the eyebrow on the dominant hand side. I'm not sure how it gets to mean "father", and that's the point. You don't look at it and go "Oh, obviously." I presume it's because "mother" is the same gesture at mouth level. That judgement, that it looks similar to another sign I know, so I can guess what

it means, might be what a magus is doing with a Magic Theory roll. If that's the case then, no, mortal aren't going to pick it up. "Father" in Auslan is "FF", which makes some sort of sense if you are literate, although it's not as natural as "mother" (which is "woman" twice, and woman is "person who checks her hair", because sign languages are old fashioned like that).

There may be some sign languages which can be understood by all, but not spoken by those uninitiated in certain mystery cults. Here I'm thinking of Walpiri, which is a signed Indigenous Australian language, understood widely but only used by widows. I'll return to that in a later post.

There are a few added areas this theory needs to cover. How is gestureless magic possible? How is performance magic possible? Is there a relationship between the written form of sign language (Americans have several, Australians just use English which is why I used the fingerspell image above) and the process of enchantment, which explains why devices do not botch? Certainly worth considering for later posts.

Final fun note: it turns out that there are two dialect words for "magic" in Australia. My local dialect uses a sign for "magic" which also means "ghost". The nation-wide sign, in comparison, does not mean "ghost", but also means "fashion, fashionable" for which I want to say they mean "glamorous". I'd argue one is better for faerie magic and the other for necromancy. The ASL sign is slightly funny (it's a two hand waggle and finger flick, like a stage magician)

Starting at the appendix

Imagine you are an Ars Magica necromancer. The year is 1220 and you are dissecting a corpse to become more magically powerful. This one has a “sport” which is what you call unexpected extra features like additional teeth or calcified internal twins. This one has an extra...thing...at the end of its digestive system. It doesn’t seem to do anything so you can’t describe it functionally. It looks like an earthworm (and because you speak Latin like most Hermetic magi) you think for it as a vermiform (worm-like) appendix (thing tacked on the end).

Initially, this is exciting because you haven’t seen one of these before. When you see new things while doing dissection, your character learns more about the body faster so you become a more powerful magician. You decide to check the books and see if anyone else has seen these. The first person you check, of course, is Galen. Galen is the great anatomist: he’s been the anatomist that everyone refers to for the last thousand years. Galen is your guy, and he has never seen this appendix. No-one has ever seen this appendix.

Now, this is because, in Ars Magica, what people believed to be true in medieval Europe is, generally speaking, true. In the real world Galen didn’t dissect humans corpses to write his books of anatomy. He dissected monkeys and the ones he dissected don’t have appendixes so, in Mythic Europe, no-one has one, but this guy does.

Now this wouldn’t cause you concern except the next person you vivisect also has an appendix.

And the next.

So time to do some tests. If you create a corpse – and remember created items are more perfect than items that appear from the real world: they are closer to the holotype to use modern scientific parlance – what happens if it has an appendix. What happens if you use Intelligo magic to look inside your own body and and you have an appendix?

What is this organ, where has it come from, what does it mean?

Now, if it’s only a local event – if you write to necromancers elsewhere in Europe and you say “Gang can you all look for this thing and they say “No. Don’t be ridiculous we haven’t seen it” it could be local warping. Local warping occurs when magicians cast magic either in a single powerful event or smaller spells over and over again over a prolonged period near a local population, sufficient for that population to be slightly distorted by the magical energy.

There are some quite extreme versions of warping already in Ars Magica. There is one community of people where the average body temperature is about 20 degrees lower than that for the rest, so they live perfectly comfortably on Alps, but die of heat exhaustion if they descend to lower altitudes. House Tremere is served by a caste

of amber-eyed individuals, who have an inherent sensitivity to magic, are more likely to be homosexual than average, and all of whom can trace their ancestry back to a small group of soldiers whose eyeballs were gouged out by the Bulgars and then replaced in a single ritual hundreds of years ago.

So if you look at your local community and this appendix effect is only found in the very young, you could say this was because of some sort of local cataclysm that occurred recently. You could work back through the population using age to date when occurred, and then you could find the local magician, or rival, or if you yourself were responsible for the appearance of this thing.

But what if its regional? Then it could be a miracle, but lets not work on hat basis: God doesn’t need to create an organ: his miracles can be direct. Water, wine, done. It could be that it is a faerie symbiotie

There are other symbioties described in Ars Magica. The main one that’s been described is from Transylvania, and is a sort of thief weed. You cut open the fleshy part of your left hand near the thumb, insert a spring of weed into it and while the weed remains embedded there it makes any lock that you touch fall open. The weed is, of course, vampiric and, like all faeries in Ars, it exists to gain energy by altering your life story.

If you have seen the thief weed you have seen something similar to what a faerie appendix would look like. You might have some ideas of what the faerie who created it is attempting to do. Perhaps the appendix is there as a forerunner of some great disaster; a famine, a plague or an invasion. You'd need to examine it to work out what it does. This could give you hints on the cataclysm. Is your region going to be on the receiving end, like a plague, or are you going to harm your neighbors. For example if your people can now eat stones, and so no longer have logistical problems with food, it makes invading the surrounding area easier.

But what happens if everyone has an appendix? What happens if you have an appendix?

It certainly wasn't there before, like most corporeal necromancers, you know all of your internal organs. You certainly didn't have this weird squiggly thing where it is now.. What could have caused that?

Well it could have been a cosmological change. If you believe Empedocles, who was an ancient Greek philosopher of great importance to Helleno-Buddhism and House Crimson, time is a circle. It starts at a point of perfect enlightenment and Empedocles himself wrecks everything and plunges the world into time. Everything gradually decays from there with life becoming less and less coherent and ordered, until eventually all that's left are protean shapeshifters who can exist in chaotic, randomly-violent environments. Even these are finally driven to extinction, and all that remains is a swirling void.

After a time the chaotic void begins to cohere again, and life emerges. From that simple life organs emerge, and these organs move independently in the world until, as the amount of order increases, they combine,



becoming more and more ordered until eventually, at the far end of time, they transcend physicality and become spirit.

So does the appendix signal that, somewhere, something happened that made time briefly go backwards?

Now this is very important to your magician because the downward spiral of time is what makes destruction magic easier than creation magic. Your character can disintegrate a wall and not spend great magical energy making sure the wall doesn't reassemble itself, however if you make a wall, you need to spend vis to stop it fading away at sunset - because stones don't fall up. Except in the counter-cyclical alam: the time of increasing order, things work the other way.

If, however briefly, something caused time to go backwards, and if you could, however briefly, cause that to happen again, during that brief time your power of creation would be limited only by the character's physical endurance, and the physical endurance is regular and can be reinforced by creation magic. So: although you wouldn't have the powers of a god - you'd still be limited to your own senses and your own mystical capabilities - you'd nonetheless be able to permanently alter the structure of the world, if you planned what you were doing quite carefully.

So next time you are playing Ars Magica, and there's a skirmish, and one of your grogs guts some poor unfortunate bandit, make sure to look quite carefully at his digestive system.

One of the earliest controversies I can remember from Ars fandom is this: given that magic can't affect your essential nature, can it change your gender? The generally given answer is no, and this is because the way gender is affected by magic in other roleplaying games is so terribly, terribly juvenile. Basically being transformed into a woman is seen as a shaming, disempowering, embarrassing thing and so its treated as a practical joke played on male characters. Being a woman is a curse they need to fight and eventually be cured of. Very early to history of Ars Magica the writers indicated that the Gift was found equally in male and female children and therefore the Order of Hermes embraced equality. Strangely the Founders were and not split 50/50, but you could claim that this was because they were descended from a Roman priesthood, with a patriarchal cultural bias.

So magic can't change your gender because g is essential to your character. This is rather strange though, because magic can do so much else that isn't prevented by the Limit of Essential Nature. It can make you older. It can change you, temporarily, into a wolf. It can cut off your arm. These changes are, apparently, less essential than your gender. It can't make you younger, because mortality is inherent in the human condition, but it can slow the rate at which you age.

If gender is essential, how much resistance to magic does this grant? Your soul's freedom is essential. You can't sin under influence of magic. You can't sell your soul under the influence of magic. Thinks you are forced to do, you cannot be made morally culpable for by magical means. If your gender is protected in the same way, does it protect the expressions of your gender?

I'm not talking about the most overt expressions either. I'm male, so I have androgenic forearm hair. As that is a secondary sexual characteristic, does it have resistance to magical destruction?

The Church had to deal with this issue because intersex people exist. In the modern United States, about 1.7% of babies are born in some sense intersex. The Church, facing similar numbers, ruled that if a person could function more ably in one gender than in the other, that was their gender. The point was to force

people to pick one role and keep to it, rather than switching.

There are all kinds of weird writings at the time indicating that, physiologically, sex was more permeable than it is in our world.

Women were counselled against strident exercise, warming foods and hot baths, because these would affect their fertility and, in extreme cases, cause them to change into men.

Despite these writings, there is no sign that children were prescribed warming as a treatment to change a female heir into a male one: Kings without sons, like Henry the VIIIth for example, never feed their daughters pepper, submerge them in warm baths and force the to go hurdling, in the hope they will become boys.

So, in Ars Magica, sex is often said to be immutable, because other systems handle this so badly, and because permanent changes to the mind of the character are seen as disempowering to the player.

I'd argue that in Ars Magica we have a mechanism which allows us to sidestep these issues: mystery cult initiation. Cult initiation means a character can change deeply ingrained features, but only with effort, so that trivial switching is reduced. If, however, you want your character to undergo a metamorphosis, and spiritually transcend their limiting physical realities, this is possible. This means a transgender character could undergo ritual initiations which allowed a change of sex.

Certain ancient Greeks had this done to them by faeries: Tiresias, a blind seer, was changed into a woman by a goddess, and lived as one for many years. This was seen as the source of his wisdom. Mystery cult initiation allows a character to change gender or race, and know the things only people in those communities know. This allows us to pass tangentially through real world religions that see twin-spirited people as shamanistic: living on the margin of society, protecting it from hostile spiritual forces.

So to conclude, I understand why early Ars Magica fandom thought male characters could not become female through Hermetic magic, but I'd like to suggest that the later, Mystery Cult, mechanic gives the player enough control over the process that it becomes a roleplaying challenge rather than a childish joke or punishment. This provides a loophole, which some troupes may wish to explore in their sagas.

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Intersexuality and essential nature

Monster manuals are taxonomic. That is, they divide monsters by type so that you can get the statistics of the creature based on similar creatures. Medieval bestiaries didn't work this way at all. Medieval bestiaries worked on the idea of significatos, that is, when you are reading about the creature the most important thing is to work out what God wanted you to learn by looking at it. Now, the difference comes about because of our understanding of natural history.

People in the Thirteenth Century believed that the creatures of the world had been created, wither a single act, or through a series of rolling miracles. Some other monsters were later created by sin. Satan himself makes dragons. Inappropriate family relations also seem to have a habit of creating dragons. It is only following Darwin that we get modern books which allow you to decide a creature is a dragon, then classify it into a subtype.

It's this way of looking at creatures which has led to our current problem: which is that you start with the image of the dragon and then create some tiny twist to make a new type, a new species.

THis isn't what medieval people thought about dragons. They decided what the dragon meant, and then built up its physical characteristics from there. Sometimes the dragon is a physical embodiment of a place: the dragon represents a mountain and opposes miners because they are stealing its treasure, or it loves miners because it likes living in the holes they dig. The dragon can be the physical representation of a moral fault which the hero needs to overcome, or the dragon can, like many faeries, act as a guardian of the boundaries of social propriety.

I blame Charles Darwin for this difference because, with the addition of the works of Cuvier, who popularised the idea of extinction, we now have this idea that creatures follow types, and that deviations are unusual, rare or forced by humans in the same way that they are with dogs (although Darwin was not certain all dogs were the same species). Darwin suggested that moving away from the core species you had endless variations, and it's the construction of these variations which leads us to having such uninteresting dragons in our roleplaying games.



Charles Darwin wrecked our dragons

Dragons should represent the obstacles the characters need to overcome.

Let's take another example: in Mythic Europe dragon trees exist on two separate islands: the Hesperides to the far west of Africa, and in Socotra, to the east of Africa. In the real world this is because dragon trees used to exist across Africa, and have been driven to extinction, with the exception of these two, tiny island fortresses.

Now to a Mythic European that makes no sense at all, because extinction is not a thing. Competition between species isn't a thing. Dragon trees appear on those two islands, because dragons are on those islands, and one follows the other.

Similarly dragons themselves appear because God uses them as teaching tools, and this is why we so rarely see dragons doing any of the things you'd expect biological dragons to do. Dragons don't have the plumes of a peacock, or the spines of an echidna, because they don't mate and they are not preyed upon. In the entire Ars Magica line we have seen one dragon egg, and that was in a magazine article.

You never see mating flights of dragons. You never see people train dragons. They are biological creatures, but biological creatures in Mythic Europe do not follow the laws of selection which are obvious to us.

Mythic Europe, then does not follow our modern idea of ecology, which is that it is random life responding to the pressures of its environment. Mythic Europe is a designed stage in which the great play of redemption is acted out by humans under the supervision of an interventionist author. Dragons, as major props in this play, have meaning and significance that is deliberately written into their physical structures. They are incarnate moral lessons.

This leads us back to some very early ideas from Second Edition Ars Magica, that when you were designing a combat, the important element of that design wasn't fairness or verisimilitude, it was the construction of a play experience that you modified while it was being acted out.

So, if an encounter was too simple, you would add new features to the creatures powers to make it more challenging.



If, through random dice rolls, the creature was going to destroy the party, you could reduce the damage or effectiveness of its attacks, to keep the play experience intact.

In modern gaming, this is sometimes considered cheating, however this is what God was thought to be doing in medieval Europe. I'd argue that character is Ars Magica, particularly those with high Lore skills, should be aware that this is how the Universe is structured. This moves us past some of the difficulties that we have with the Magic Realm.

The Magic Realm in Ars Magica is thematically incoherent. You can see the way it was written in Realms of Power: Magic - twelve authors each bringing a good idea. I did magical cats. There's nothing underneath it all, except the idea that magic is the underlying power of the material Universe and that it does not care about humans, which distinguishes it from Faerie. I'd argue that the difference is that faeries respond to human will, whereas Magical creatures are part of the clockwork which was authored by the Creator, and therefore it is alright for Magical spirits to have meaning. They can be, in some sense, living plot elements, because medieval people really did believe the purpose of dragons was to be conquered by saints. The purpose of monsters was to embody, and force you to face your own sins, as part of your path to redemption. This allows us to move closer to the magic realm having a coherent, useful idea behind it.

The creatures the Magic Realm generates are not interested in humans, but the person who created the Magic Realm is.

William Gladstone was a British prime Minister, who did the various sorts of things leaders of Empires do, but for the purposes of gaming his most interesting feature is that he popularised the idea that the classical peoples were colourblind. Now, we know this wasn't true, but he thought their colour-blindness was the only explanation for what he found in their literature. If only one person had said the sea was the colour of wine, you might put it down to a poetic whim, but strange misattributions keep happening in classical texts.

Hector has blue hair, honey is green, the rainbow has three colours. Gladstone thought this meant there was something wrong with the eyes of the people writing.

I'm also drawn to think about the colours in the Egyptian tombs in *The Lands of the Nile*. I wonder, did their deco-inspiring use of bright primaries occur, in our fantasy world, because they literally could not see tones?

Now the question for game designers is not why he was wrong, but how we can take advantage of him being right. Where did the new colours come from, why, and what stories can we tell about it?

In *Ars Magica*, the world has been through various epochs. They aren't listed as discretely as in Middle-Earth, where the ages are numbered, but there are clear points where the cosmology changes. The first is the Titanomachy, which is where the great creative forces of magic are cast down by the pagan gods. The name comes from the overthrown of the titans by the Olympians, but various other myths can be tied in to this. The gods of Ireland overthrow the fir bolgs. Isis steals much of the power of Ra and gives it to her husband or son. The elemental races are pushed aside by the races people can worship.

The next is the Silencing of the Oracles, which is where the pagan gods go into hiding for some reason. Later Christian writers claimed it was because Jesus was coming, but pick your own motivation here.

In the *Ars Magica* setting, the ancestors of the player characters, the Founders of the current magical tradition, also did things which might define an epoch. One lost his powers in a secret ritual to make his new tradition the dominant one. Another moved the axis around which the tides of magic in the world wash. A side effect of this was that ghosts changed colour: the Romans described their ghosts as being black, in medieval Europe they are white. One of these changes may have bled new colours into the world.

Perhaps moving the Axis Magica had another effect though. Maybe it made the world more magical. The game mechanics in *Ars Magica* have a casting bonus of zero in natural environments, with bonuses ranging up to ten points for being near the lair of a magical beast, in a place where magic has been practised, and so on. When a character goes into a place with a higher score, colours are brighter, sounds are clearer and flavours are more pleasant. This effect becomes more intense as the magical nature of the place increases, such that the only magi who regularly go into the Magical Realm, which has a score of ten, train themselves to not be interested in the ephemeral, worldly sensations, to avoid being overwhelmed.

We think that the score of zero, no bonus, as the natural background of the world, but what if, in ancient times, the background score was a negative number? That would make the world less vivid. There would be fewer colours, and they would blend together more, so a rainbow of three shades might be possible. Similarly, the tiny, accidental magics which allow potential apprentices to be detected would occur less often, and so they would be detected less. This explains why the current age of magic goes from a handful of powerful wizards to the many dozens required to wage a continent-wide war within the space of a couple of generations. New magi are easier to find, and easier to train.

In the basic *Ars* setting we tend to think of the changes of the epochs in terms of the dominant realm. Magic was dominant, then Faerie, now Divine, and in the future either infernal or divine depending on how you see the apocalypse as playing out. In older editions, Reason was to be the next dominant realm, and some of us have played with all kinds of odd, new dominants. In one of my settings, the next age is a sort of steam-powered Renaissance.

What if there are smaller subdivisions which don't change the dominant realm, but just change the background number for magic from zero? This makes the Norse guys trying to wake the primordial giants a bit less of a world-destroying problem.

It also gives player characters something to do which doesn't break the world: they could change the underlying ease of magic. So, if the characters fulfil their saga arc, maybe the background number for magic might move up to, say +1. The magic realm is still aura 10, but because it is closer, Twilight incidents, where magi have accidents and slip into a sort of magical coma, are easier to recover from. New colours become obvious: perhaps some that didn't have English names until after the period (orange or pink, for example). Minor magic becomes simpler. Potential apprentices become a little more obvious, magic is slightly simpler to study. The biggest change, of course, is that people become aware that this sort of change is plausible. Future generations of magi work to follow in the characters' footsteps, bootstrapping the world ever closer to the Magic Realm.

It might also explain why so many dragons seem to train cults of magicians. In *Ars Magica* we know of at least three, in the Hesperides, Soqotra, and the Order itself. A more magical environment allows dragons to stray further from their lairs, and use their powers with less fatigue. This line of thinking reminds me of Pope Sylvester II, who was said, in 1000 AD, to have put back to sleep the great dragon which lies beneath the Alps, thereby preventing the end of the World. That's a great story, but I sometimes wonder if what he did, really, was to stop the epoch changing. After all, the Pope has a strong interest in keeping the Divine as the cardinal realm.

Mass Hysteria



Mass hysteria, for the purposes of this article, refers to the manias in which a group of people all begin to exhibit shared physical or psychological symptoms, for which there is no direct cause. The earliest recorded are the dancing manias which swept Mythic Europe. Mass hysteria is poorly understood, but documented cases have several factors which align, with a striking congruence, with the life of companions in Ars Magica settings.

Mass hysteria is far more common in group who live [separated from the rest of society](#). Most covenants are physically separate, because of the dimming effect of magic of large numbers of believers in the Divine. There is also a social distancing in being covenfolk: many have fled feudal society, and live outside the understood confines of the Three Estates.

All incidents of mas hysteria occur in communities under [stress](#). That stress can be economic, but also includes social change and disasters. Covenant life is meant to be a respite from adventuring for magi: but it isn't a respite from danger. There's a reason most magi live in castles. Mythic Europe is a dangerous place and sometimes the thing that wants to kill you really is on the other side of a stone wall a yard thick.

Incidents often occur in people who have little [social standing](#). There's some debate here, as to if the conditions usually appear in people of rank, and then flow into the lower strata of society. That being noted, companions live in a feudal society. The magi are at the top: they are at the bottom.

Outbreaks of mass hysteria occur in populations which [skew female](#). I know how sexist that sounds, but the data is in on that one, I'm afraid. In small covenants that keep to traditional gender roles, when the magi leave with their shield grogs, the remaining population skews female.

Mass hysteria, in slightly later than the game period, was often seen as a form of spiritual possession, caused by faeries or demons. There are also other alternatives. An attack by another covenant could take the form of contagious madness. A very early Ars Magica supplement had a covenant plagued by the dreams of a dragon, about to hatch from its egg, deep below the covenant. The hysteria may be a result of a Twilight experience suffered by a resident magus, who appears unaffected, but acts as a carrier. It may be caused by poisoning, due to the residue of magical experiments getting into the covenant's water supply. It may signify that the covenant's Aura is uneven, and people working in one particular area have been Warped to an unexpected degree. This may be the precursor for eruption of a previously hidden regio.

Sacrificing Horace to Cloacina

I knew a gentleman, who was so good a manager of his time, that he would not even lose that small portion of it, which the calls of nature obliged him to pass in the necessary-house; but gradually went through all the Latin poets, in those moments. He bought, for example, a common edition of Horace, of which he tore off gradually a couple of pages, carried them with him to that necessary place, read them first, and then sent them down as a sacrifice to Cloacina: this was so much time fairly gained; and I recommend you to follow his example. It is better than only doing what you cannot help doing at those moments; and it will make any book, which you shall read in that manner, very present in your mind. Books of science, and of a grave sort, must be read with continuity; but there are very many, and even very useful ones, which may be read with advantage by snatches, and unconnectedly; such are all the good Latin poets, except Virgil in his "Aeneid"

— Lord Chesterfield "Letters To His Son"

So, this seems like a toilet joke, but what if it isn't? In Ars Magica, and in many other roleplaying games, gods exist, and they gain some sort of sustenance from sacrifices. In Ars, gods are faeries and faeries love poetry. What happens if you continually send poetry to a goddess? What happens if you do it day by day, every day? That's worship.

The goddess mentioned was the spirit of the Roman sewer system: perhaps a nymph that was transformed when her stream was enclosed to create it, or perhaps a Spirit of Artifice that sprang into existence as its cornerstone was laid. Her tiny shrine had two statues, and it is not clear what they represented: purity and filth, perhaps. I'd argue being on her good side is one of the ways of getting the, little used, Good Environment modifier, which means your character ages more slowly because of the healthy surroundings.

As a goddess of modest appeal: she's going to pay a character sending her daily poems a lot more attention than, say, Lugh, who has a lot more going on in his life. A character with close ties to her could be a big fish in a small, however foul, pond. Has she a putrid Pope? An impeccable Nurse? What powers might such dedicated servants have? What sacred places might she maintain, in her dual aspect, as keeper of the clean from the unclean? There is clearly the scope for a Mystery Cult here.

We know little of the historical Cloacina, but she seems to have the following features. She is the enemy to plagues, and is a spirit of fecundity, tied somehow to Venus. She has a power over lost treasures. The Queen of the Sable Rivers commands, and is perhaps embodied by, the dark tunnels beneath the major cities, and is kind to those forced to shelter there. She is, in some sense, the most approachable of the Cthonic deities, and the most forebearing. Chesterfield, above, claims that characters gain a study bonus by reading in the chamber of necessity, but not on sciences, and therefore magic Arts, but only on more frivolous things, like Lores.

Cloacina is likely an enemy of Baal-peor, the demon prince who is an open gullet and a ceaseless defecation. Baal-peor flees women, as noted in a short story by Niccolò Machiavelli, so at least some of the Goddess of Filth and Purity's enforcers will be of that gender. As an aside, she's a formidable supporting character in Terry Pratchett's Dodger, which I recommend.

I've just finished recording some Ancient Egyptian folktales for LibriVox, and I'm particularly interested by the story of Naneferkaptah, in which he steals the spellbook of Thoth, who is the god of wizardry. He does this using various spells that allow him to create the sorts of living statues which haunt so many dungeons. He also defeats a vast, regenerating serpent by rubbing sand in its wounds, to create a physical barrier that prevents the pieces reuniting. All lovely stuff, proving that some gaming tropes are older than the Pyramids.

The thing which interests me is that it takes Thoth a couple of days to become aware that his magic book has been stolen. He then goes to Ra, who says "Sure, you can kill him, and his family" which Thoth does by a sort of magical compulsion. The compulsion is carried by a spiritual agent, rather than Thoth himself. This is, as the translator notes, unexpected for people who are used to Jeudo-Christian conceptions of the Divine. Egyptian gods don't know what you are doing, the vast majority of the time. To know things, they need to either perceive them, using the limited perceptive capacities of their bodies, or be told by minions. These are limited in number: there is not an angel by every blade of grass in this conception of the Divine.

Gods can't see you in Mythic Europe



The scene above is famous: it's the Weighing of the Heart from the Book of the Dead. The heart is in the little urn on the left, the Feather of Truth is on the right, and if you fail the test, the crocodile-faced thing in the center right consumes you. The test is necessary because the Gods don't actually know if you are guilty or not. They don't have omniscience. Your sins have changed you, in a spiritual way, and that change is detectable, but not by casual observation.

The text we are looking at above is a spell, and its function is to wreck this test, so that the human always passes on to Paradise, regardless of the state of the heart. The Gods are fooled by this, even Thoth, god of magic, who is standing there on the right with his pen, ready to write down the result. Thoth's strangely limited, for a God of Cleverness. Our way around this in Ars Magica is to have the gods as powerful faeries: they care about the emotions generated by the ritual, not the actual ritual itself, so they don't mind if, superficially, you are conning them. Well, the Eater of the Dead may care: but no-one asks her.

Our leisure furnishes me with the opportunity of learning from you, and you with that of instructing me. Accordingly, I particularly wish to know whether you think there exist such things as phantoms, possessing an appearance peculiar to themselves, and a certain supernatural power, or that mere empty delusions receive a shape from our fears. For my part, I am led to believe in their existence, especially by what I hear happened to Curtius Rufus. While still in humble circumstances and obscure, he was a hanger-on in the suite of the Governor of Africa. While pacing the colonnade one afternoon, there appeared to him a female form of superhuman size and beauty. She informed the terrified man that she was "Africa," and had come to foretell future events; for that he would go to Rome, would fill offices of state there, and would even return to that same province with the highest powers, and die in it. All which things were fulfilled. Moreover, as he touched at Carthage, and was disembarking from his ship, the same form is said to have presented itself to him on the shore. It is certain that, being seized with illness, and auguring the future from the past and misfortune from his previous prosperity, he himself abandoned all hope of life, though none of those about him despaired.

Is not the following story again still more appalling and not less marvelous? I will relate it as it was received by me:

There was at Athens a mansion, spacious and commodious, but of evil repute and dangerous to health. In the dead of night there was a noise as of iron, and, if you listened more closely, a clanking of chains was heard, first of all from a distance, and afterwards hard by. Presently a specter used to appear, an ancient man sinking with emaciation and squalor, with a long beard and bristly hair, wearing shackles on his legs and fetters on his hands, and shaking them. Hence the inmates, by reason of their fears, passed miserable and horrible nights in sleeplessness. This want of sleep was followed by disease, and, their terrors increasing, by death. For in the daytime as well, though the apparition had departed, yet a reminiscence of it flitted before their eyes, and their dread outlived its cause. The mansion was accordingly deserted, and, condemned to solitude, was entirely abandoned to the dreadful ghost. However, it was advertised, on the chance of some one, ignorant of the fearful curse attached to it, being willing to buy or to rent it. Athenodorus, the philosopher, came to Athens and read the advertisement. When he had been informed of the terms, which were so low as to appear suspicious, he made inquiries, and learned the whole of the particulars. Yet none the less on that account, nay, all the more readily, did he rent the house. As evening began to draw on, he ordered a sofa to be set for himself in the front part of the house, and called for his notebooks, writing implements, and a light. The whole of his servants he dismissed to the interior apartments, and for himself applied his soul, eyes, and hand to composition, that his mind might not, from want of occupation, picture to itself the phantoms of which he had heard, or any empty terrors. At the commencement there was the universal silence of night. Soon the shaking of irons and the clanking of chains was heard, yet he never raised his eyes nor slackened his pen, but hardened his soul and deadened his ears by its help. The noise grew and approached: now it seemed to be heard at the door, and next inside the door. He looked round, beheld and recognized the figure he had been told of. It was standing and signaling to him with its finger, as though inviting him. He, in reply, made a sign with his hand that it should wait a moment, and applied himself afresh to his tablets and pen. Upon this the figure kept rattling its chains over his head as he wrote. On looking round again, he saw it making the same signal as before, and without delay took up a light and followed it. It moved with a slow step, as though oppressed by its chains, and, after turning into the courtyard of the house, vanished suddenly and left his company. On being thus left to himself, he marked the spot with some grass and leaves which he plucked. Next day he applied to the magistrates, and urged them to have the spot in question dug up. There were found there some bones attached to and intermingled with fetters; the body to which they had belonged, rotted away by time and the soil, had abandoned them thus naked and corroded to the chains. They were collected and interred at the public expense, and the house was ever afterwards free from the spirit, which had obtained due sepulture.

Letter to Sura

The above story I believe on the strength of those who affirm it. What follows I am myself in a position to affirm to others. I have a freedman, who is not without some knowledge of letters. A younger brother of his was sleeping with him in the same bed. The latter dreamed he saw some one sitting on the couch, who approached a pair of scissors to his head, and even cut the hair from the crown of it. When day dawned he was found to be cropped round the crown, and his locks were discovered lying about. A very short time afterwards a fresh occurrence of the same kind confirmed the truth of the former one. A lad of mine was sleeping, in company with several others, in the pages' apartment. There came through the windows (so he tells the story) two figures in white tunics, who cut his hair as he lay, and departed the way they came. In his case, too, daylight exhibited him shorn, and his locks scattered around. Nothing remarkable followed, except, perhaps, this, that I was not brought under accusation, as I should have been, if Domitian (in whose reign these events happened) had lived longer. For in his desk was found an information against me which had been presented by Carus; from which circumstance it may be conjectured—inasmuch as it is the custom of accused persons to let their hair grow—that the cutting off of my slaves' hair was a sign of the danger which threatened me being averted.

I beg, then, that you will apply your great learning to this subject. The matter is one which deserves long and deep consideration on your part; nor am I, for my part, undeserving of having the fruits of your wisdom imparted to me. You may even argue on both sides (as your way is), provided you argue more forcibly on one side than the other, so as not to dismiss me in suspense and anxiety, when the very cause of my consulting you has been to have my doubts put an end to.

Pliny the Younger

There are three stories in the letter: the phantom of Africa; the early ghost story; the hair cutting people in white tunics. Let's work through them one at a time.

Africa appeared to me, when I first heard the story, to be a genius locus: a spirit of place. She appears as this in Between Sand and Sea. It's entirely unclear what she wants: why she gives these prophecies to a mortal. This makes her seem suspiciously like a faerie seeking emotional reaction, and for her story to be retold. Assuming she's not a faerie, she seems to be limited to the northern expanse of Africa: the fertile bit above the Sahara. The spirits from that part of Africa are engaged in a civil war between sterility and fertility, represented by the Sahara and the Nile, or the colours red and black. Africa would seem to serve the Black, because her area is fertile. She could be wanting the young Roman to go and prepare himself before administering his territories, because the Black, unlike most spirits, has a use for humans. As they spread irrigation, they are agents in the war against the desert.

The second section is a traditional ghost story, complete with clanking chains. The ghost has all of the Ars Magica elements, being geographically limited and having a final purpose which, once fulfilled, allows the creature to rest. The scholar knows this, and so he is able to say to the ghost "No, wait a minute, I'm just going to finish writing this. We both know that you need to communicate with me, so you just wait there." That's interesting, and it's not something a faerie would allow: it would transform into a monstrous shape to force a stronger emotional reaction.

I do note that the ghost seems to cause sickness, wasting, and mental illness in the people it encounters. This seems entirely contrary to the ghost's mission of getting its body buried. I'd suggest this is involuntary, and occurs simply because of the proximity of the ghost. They are perhaps a form of warping.

The third story contains what I'd like to consider as early cases of alien abduction. Glowing figures come in through the window and, upon a sleeping person, perform a medical experiment. Now, the experiment isn't a particularly great one: they are stealing hail, which can be used as an Arcane connection to control the person from a distance or reduce their magical resistance. It still contains all of the usual characteristics of what we would now call a sleep apnea experience. In the Middle Ages these were also called being hag-ridden.

Some people conjecture they have a relationship to the modern experience of people who claim to have been taken from their beds by alien figures. I've always thought of alien abductions as a faerie experience, but you could argue instead that these are the weakest type of spirits who are interacting with humans through dreams. In dream states, humans are less strongly protected by their personalities.

Commentary

The spirits in this story predict the future, but do not seem to do anything to bring the future about. They tell Pliny he won't be charged with a crime. They do this in the useless way, understood only in hindsight, so common in folkloristic oracles.

In the frame narrative, the letter is to Pliny's friend Sura. He is more knowledgeable about metaphysics than Pliny, but has a tendency to argue both sides of any question. Pliny finds this confusing, but in Ars Magica, it's one of the paths to Enigmatic Wisdom. It's the sort of contemplation of contradiction which lies at the heart of some approaches to zen.

So, in this letter we have examples of spirits using humans as soldiers in their wars. We have ghosts using humans to fulfil their final business on Earth, and we have very early versions of the alien abduction story.

Clothing isn't really a matter of choice in much of historical Europe. What you wear isn't so much fashion as a method of telling people how you deserve to be treated. Many games don't deal with this at all: people wear whatever, mechanically, gives their characters the biggest bonuses. Their clothes don't look like a rich medieval person's, because they send no message. In some computer games, to encourage people to not look like their clothes have been shaken onto them by a thriftshop zombie, there are "set" bonuses. Dress like a warrior-priest of the goddess of darkness and night and you sneak better, but only if your gloves match your shoes. She cares about accessories more than what's in your heart.

Dressing like a murderer

In much of historical Europe, sumptuary laws existed, and these made it illegal for the wrong sort of people to wear various things. Fur fringes, weapons, silk garments, certain colours...all of these are not to be worn by those with plebian blood. If your character is a poor farm boy off for adventure, that excludes him. Wear the wrong coloured shirt and you are literally telling a caste of armed men that they should bow down to you when you walk past. This can get you fined, beaten or imprisoned in certain countries.

In Venice, the middle class women loved game-lawyering the sumptuary laws. So, fringes might be banned, but if it was detachable it wasn't a fringe, now was it? A particular colour might be banned, but if you added a little black, then clearly it was an entirely different colour and was fine. Eventually the authorities gave up, and rich people took to wearing the stuff only really rich people could afford. Venice got really colourful and, to more staid communities, terrifyingly deabuched, really quickly.

Sumptuary laws had various rationales. One was that the rich dyes and fabrics came from the east, and so the money for them was being given to the other side of the Crusades. Buying cool stuff from Araby funded mercenaries for the Islamic nobiliy. How true this was is debatable, but it was a reason given at various times. Another was that the poor lacked the moral fibre to have cool kit. It would lead to pride, and covetousness, and the sorts of things that rich people with dedicated spiritual advisors would steer clear of. The final reason, though, is one of the most popular in cities like Venice: in the medieval world, no sensible person believes that everyone is

equal. The point of clothes is to tell people where you stand in the social hierarchy, so that there's no need for violence to force the people below you to act in a suitably deferential way. Given the tendency of the people in the Italian city states to start intergenerational games of "do you like my knife?" politeness was important.

When we look at many of the things medieval people wore, they seem a bit silly to us. Their conspicuous consumption seems a little odd. Even if we accept that their understanding of economics was poor, and so they thought that rich people saving money caused recessions, their belief that rich people should live not at the edge of their income, but at the edge of their credit, appears bizarre. The point, though is this: your status in medieval Europe is being constantly checked, through series of signals. Your expenditure fuels these signals. Do you regularly throw the parties required of a senior courtier? Well, then you obviously have powerful friends. Have you sold off the family silver? Then you can't afford mercenaries or dowries. Status is performed, but not everyone is permitted to perform.

Fashion is part of this: it forces consumption, so it separates the vastly rich from the merely wealthy. Fashion can also be political. Far later, the cavaliers and roundheads, for example, made their In Ars Magica, there's a little social signalling, but it's mostly kept within the society of wizards. If your magus turns up to a tribunal and there are a bunch of guys wearing red and orange, they are likely to start setting things on fire. If there's another group in grey-black, that's House Tremere, which wears a uniform because they are essentially a political party. The house of messengers wears red caps, to say that they have the rights of magicians, even if they lack powers. The magical police force, the hoplites, wear sashes.

Average humans have no idea what any of these signals really mean, with the exception that they know hurting redcaps is bad luck.

In the opposite direction, there were marks to exclude. The obvious one is that Jews were forced to wear various clothes markers. This was theoretically for their protection, and the protection of nearby gentiles. The right to farm the Jews, which is to say, soak them for cash, was owned by various powerful lords, and if you beat up a Jew, you were preventing his farmer



(and that's literally what the practice was called in English) from collecting as much cash, and could expect a lawsuit.

Criminals also had marks to prevent them being mistaken for citizens. Prostitutes in much of Italy needed to wear red capes, shoes, or hats. In Ars Magica, where the messengers of magicians wear red caps, and have their home base in Italy, this has surely led to needing to punch someone in the face.

One house tells humans that wizards wear blue robes with stars on them, conical hats, and carry staves. These wizards need to speak and move their hands to cast magic. This is the House that likes sneaking around civilisation the most. By making sure that people know that wizards look a certain way, and can be depowered with simple preventatives, they make their own lives easier, because they do not wear blue robes most of the time, they use spindles or wands instead of staves, and most of them can cast magic with bound hands or silently. The only strong signal mortals have about magicians in Ars is a deliberately false one, to set up a contact protocol which aids the magicians.

Mythic Europe is

tiny



Travel magic doesn't work very well in Ars Magica, at least in the core rules. As the line has progressed many of the authors, me included, have found ways to sabotage that and allow your party to get whatever they want to go, without participating in on-the-road adventures.

This perhaps expresses a difference in philosophy of game design. Very early Ars Magica might have been influenced by Dungeons and Dragons, where the idea of the wandering monster - a randomly-appearing creature that causes combat for no particular reason - was very popular. In Ars injuries are more difficult to heal than in Dungeons and Dragons. One big combat encounter can have the party laid up for months and therefore, dramatically, during the story random encounters are at best a distraction.

There may be other reasons for trying to keep young magicians in their pen. One of them was that in earlier versions of Ars Magica, magicians were destroying the magical landscape around them. If your magicians were able to move further, it would be difficult to explain why the small, magical things that appeared in your characters area had not already been clear-felled by the magi from a from a powerful covenant.

The current edition gets around this somewhat by having geographical features generate their own magical spirits, which are in some sense persistent. Even if the spirit of a mountain is destroyed, because the mountain is there, eventually a spirit will be generated instead, or the mountain will fall down. Something else will take its place, like a spirit of the plain. Fairies are mobile and have the ability to re-emerge from Arcadia even if destroyed or harvested - well perhaps. It

deliberately doesn't say how they work, so that magicians don't just destroy the fae forest around them increasingly broad concentric circles, making the land mundane.

Another reason why travel magic doesn't work terribly well in Ars Magica is because it's not nearly as necessary as we think. I'm Australian, and there are a surprising number of Australian authors in Ars Magica. A lot of other authors for Ars Magica are from the United States. It is very difficult for us to conceive of precisely how tiny Mythic Europe is.

Before I played a lot of Ars Magica I was fascinated by Pendragon and by Arthuriana. Allow me to consider one case from that: that kingdom of Cornwall. Cornwall is a kingdom that also contains a duchy. The king of Cornwall is one of the core rivals of King Arthur, indeed eventually he sacks Camelot. (Spoilers). It takes people an enormous amount of time to ride from his court to Camelot even though there is an excellent road. Now we might take from this that Cornwall is massive: but it is tiny. It is slightly smaller than Long Island in the United States. For Australians, it is about twice the size of Fraser Island.

Also it's not particularly difficult to get around provided that you're willing to sail. This was the preferred method of transit for many people in Europe, simply because it was far faster. We tend to think of the seas as barriers, particularly if you come from the Australian literary tradition, where the point of sending people to Australia was that the entire place was surrounded by sea which was controlled by the British navy, so we would never get off. There is, I believe, a similar tradition in America that the country is defended by the Atlantic and Pacific. This isn't how medieval Europeans saw the sea, with the exception of the English

Channel which was mythically rough. Indeed in the time of the Roman invasion was thought to be mystically rough: you couldn't land unless the king asked you to come, which the Romans managed by trickery.

So Cornwall is tiny. It doesn't seem tiny to us have because we have a lot of sources, which means that the amount of folkloristic material which we can find for quite large cities in other places (like Hungary) is the same as the amount of folkloristic material we can find for quite small villages in areas whose populations are English speaking, or have been superseded by English-speaking people. This makes Cornwall seems larger simply because we have more material to write about.

Cornwall is the obvious absence in Heirs to Merlin. It is the place where you would park a covenant if you wanted to use the material with the least fiction with currently described covenants. To supplement this, some of us wrote a "vanilla covenant" free web supplement, which encouraged you to investigate Cornwall. In looking at it I found the travelling across Cornwall, without magic, in a single day, is perfectly doable. It has always seemed strange to me that the redcaps best skilled at using travel magic to teleport are the ones based in the Mercer House in London, in what is one of the tiniest of the tribunals.

Personally I like the supposition that the reason that they have teleporting cavalrymen in Stonehenge Tribunal is because it has been separated from the Roman road network, which House Mercere somehow uses to facilitate their work in

the rest of Europe and North Africa. There are Roman roads in Britain (well, there were, most of them have been robbed out). There is a Mercer House in London, at the place one would be wanted if it acted as a mystical connection to the rest of Europe. To claim, however, that the Roman road network in Britain runs all the way to the golden stele in the Agora of Rome seems a stretch, unless there's some sort of invisible bridge or secret tunnel. These are awesome campaign ideas, but let's imagine they don't have them.

Here we strike the solution to one of the tiny, niggling questions in ancestral spell design: why is Seven League Stride only seven leagues? Folkloristically we know seven leagues, or 21 miles, was the distance a man was expected to march during a day. Who would develop a spell that has a teleportation distance of 21 miles. Presumably originally they had shorter spells and stopped at that point. What could they have been attempting to do?

My answer is this. If you look at the strait between France and England, the narrowest point is 20.3 miles. 21 miles seems to me a perfect spell to allow House Mercere's representatives to hop the Channel. Other than it being the product of some sort of dedicated project like this I can't see why it has that limitation: why it isn't just Arcane Connection range so you can teleport anywhere Mythic Europe.

So to summarize for players outside of Europe: one of the reasons that you might feel that your character needs travel magic is because you don't understand precisely how small Mythic Europe actually is.

What is a Sampo?



With notes on mythic Finnish catburglary

**I'm not saying
I'm a catburglar,
but it seems to me that**

**if you are using
an ox and plough
you may be
doing it wrong**

The Kalevala is epic poetry from Finland. Essentially it is about three wizards who have a feud with a witch from Lapland. During the, slightly convoluted, story one of the wizards marries the witch's daughter, and in exchange for that privilege he uses materials, that the which provides, to create something called the Sampo. What the Sampo is, is entirely unclear.

The version which I was reading, which is by Lonnrut, suggests that the Sampo is a magical mill. There are other magical mills in folklore. You've probably heard "Why the sea is salt."? Essentially a magical salt mill was dropped to the bottom and it's been grinding out salt ever since. This Sampo may be similar to that, but instead it creates salt on one side, grain on another, and gold on another.

We know little about the Sampo. It's in a box, it has a multi-colored lid, and that it is small enough to be stored in a copper coated cave near the town of Pajola. We know that it gets stored for long enough for roots to grow around it. One of the wizards, Leminkinen, when he breaks seem to steal it, finds that he can't remove it. He sneaks in again with an ox and plough, and ploughs around the Sampo to destroy all the roots.

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So the magi board their boat and head back to their own kingdom, Kalev. The witch Louhi follows them, but they destroy her ship with magic. She reforms it into a great bird-like body for herself that has warriors for feathers, and sickles for claws. (Which is something that we should really look at for Ars Magic. It's kind of awesome. She essentially creates a mecha for herself out of the boat.)

Leaving that aside, the Sampo gets shattered and some parts of it wash up on Kalev, and they become the futility of the land. Louhi catches some parts of it and she takes those back to Lapland (which user why Lapland is basically a terrible place because she doesn't get very good bits).

So that's the Sampo. It's a magic box that creates wealth and fertility. Or is it?

Some of the people suggest that Lonnrot was wrong when he said that it was a magical mill. They suggest that it was a world tree. So when Leminkinen frees the Sampo from the roots by taking an Ox of Virtue, and the finest plough in Finland, then drawing the plough around to cut the roots off. Maybe he's actually cutting the tree down.

Maybe the plan was always that the Sampo would be broken into pieces, and pieces would be scattered on the kingdom of Kalev. When it happens the senior magician who's there, Vainomoinen, is not sad: it's pretty much exactly what he wanted. This seems strange to the reader, if it is a box that makes gold.

The world tree is an idea that turns up a couple of times in Ars Magica. The Hungarian shamans believed they had a world tree and believed the tree was moved or destroyed when Christianity arrived (which would be the really unfortunate for shamans who were, at that time, up the world tree in the Magic realm because they would be stuck up there).

Criamon creates a world tree, in that he creates the Axis Magica which is much the same thing. It's an elevator to the Magic Realm: a place where you can be connected with the underlying mechanisms which run the universe. Now we find out that one of the exoteric mysteries of House Criamon is that Tree is actually the living embodiment of the Founder, and that the World Tree is temporary, that at some point Criamon's strength will fail. He will fade into Twilight and when he does that the ability to go into Twilight will be removed from other magi. So it's quite important to get everyone out of Dodge before that happens.

So if we take the Kalevala and the work of Criamon together, at least twice, someone in Mythic Europe has been

able to build the world tree, and by building it become the dominant kingdom / power / social group. Is it possible for the characters to build another world tree?

The answer is, apparently, yes. It's already happened several times. Magical people using impossible ingredients and unparalleled skills have managed to create something that permanently alters the tide of magic around the world. When that object shatters it creates points of archetypal fertility in the world around it. If these were trivially easy to make you'd want to make them on a regular basis, so that you could bootstrap the world up into the Magic Realm just by gradually loading it down with the dust of world trees.

How would you go about making the world tree? Here we may strike on one of the reasons why we know so little of it founder Criamon. Perhaps the reason we know so little of his early biography is that he deliberately doesn't want other characters to create a world tree. Other than perhaps his followers, who he can communicate with should it prove necessary at some future time, he doesn't want House Tremere (for example) popping up world tree in Wales somewhere thereby making Britain top nation and producing an early British Empire.

We know Criamon was tortured by his master, to give him spiritual enlightenment. It also drove him, because he believed in reincarnation, to want to break the wheel of time and get everyone out of the world. The stringent, somewhat ascetic, practices undertaken by the Criamon are his gentler way of dealing with his apprentices: giving them the same initiations that he had, without that torture rituals and scarification that he himself suffered. His name seems to have it certain Egyptian feel to it, although that may be deceptive. He claims a certain descent from Empedocles, who was a magician active in the ancient world who eventually committed suicide by jumping into Mount Etna. Or, at least, wished people to

and left his sandal on the slopes of Etna. He's one of the Founders who is still around, in the sense that that his consciousness is intact and in some sense is linked to those of the ghosts in the Cave of Twisting Shadows in that it's an enormous genius locus.

The third magician, the one who makes the Sampo, is called Ilmarinen. He is a blacksmith: the finest in the world. When the sun and the moon are stolen by the which Louhi, he tries to make new ones out of gold and silver. It doesn't quite work out for him because that's not a possible thing, according to the senior wizard, but Ilmarinen seriously believes that it's possible. He seriously thinks that it's within his competence to create a new sun and moon for his people. So if Criamon used the same method as made the Sampo, where did he grab a peerless smith?

Now it seems strange he comes from somewhere around Etna which is one of the forges of Hephaestus. If you were looking for a perfect smith you could conceivably find one there. For example the golden women are still theoretically around somewhere, and know everything he knew because they were his forge wives and assisted him in all his projects. Perhaps it was one of them. Maybe Criamon himself was a smith and we just don't notice because he approached it in some sort of weird spiritual sense. Maybe there was some sort of relationship between Criamon and Verditus that we are aware of.

What materials would we use to construct the Sampo? This is something that we can't be sure of. The folklore that I'm reading seems to indicate that the Sampo is made out of some very mundane items: a drop of milk, a grain of corn (wheat in this case, not maize), a tuft of wool, and a sliver of a distaff. These things represent fertility and vitality. These are, I suggest, perfect items which have been drawn out of the World of Forms, and placed into the mundane world so that they can be replicated. When the Sampo is broken

into pieces this ability to replicate, in the mystic sense, is retained by those pieces. This brings vitality to the land of the Kalevs by creating faerie auras.

How does Criamon get to the Realm of Forms so that he can take a perfect grain of wheat, perfect tuft of wool and so on? The Order does not currently know where the Cave of Bonisagus was. It was mentioned in the rough draft of Sanctuary of Ice that it was hidden from the Order because a secret covenant dedicated to surviving the destruction of the Order was hidden there. All of that was cut out except for one piece of artwork which shows a member of that covenant spying on a tribunal meeting. (Yes I have been reading Second Foundation).

My suggestion is that the Cave of Bonisagus became the Cave of Twisting Shadows. The world tree was placed at the origin point of the Order because the rituals which allowed the Order's formation created the first Level 10 Aura: the first entry to the magic realm allowing access to the items necessary to make the world trade. Bonisagus heads on out to Durenmar, because he knows Criamon is going to do some weird stuff that doesn't suit his new, secular method of magic.

It might be possible for the characters to make a new world tree. Magi falling into Twilight could bring back the required items. The winner of the Verditus Competition of Seven Years might be able to combine them into a new world tree.

What happens if there are multiple world trees simultaneously? Does it create a multipolar world with different styles of magic that are stronger or weaker geographically? Does it create mystical weather patterns, where the two types of energy clash and infuse strangely, creating new types of elementals? Can it create rival types of magic, like the dark and light courts of Faerie fairy or the Infernal and Blessed axis of holy magic?

Would House Criamon prevent the creation of additional world trees or is the eventual creation of a whole forest of world trees part of their plan to assist in the escape from the world? Is it, perhaps, the great plan that next time the world tree will be planted in an inverted form. The trunk is in the Magic Realm and its many leaves and branches emerge into spaces in the mundane world, each of these allowing an avenue out of reality and into the mystical refuge beyond.



Do not eat the werebear

In the Kalevala, the people from the village of the heroes are tormented by the curses of a witch. One is that she sends among them a terrible bear, to harass their herds. He is referred to as Otso, and the people flatter him in the most extraordinary and duplicitous way.



Vainomoinen, the chief wizard, goes to Otso and points out he cannot defeat him, so he asks Otso's mercy. He offers Otso all of the comforts of his town. As they approach, there is much singing and rejoicing. The people, as one, chant songs about how they have missed Otso, and how they have cried waiting for the honour of his coming. The bear is taken within the feasting hall, as a guest who is esteemed as a herald of the gods, and who is a lost cousin come home.



THIS THE ANSWER OF THE TRIBE-FOLK:

"WE SALUTE THEE, MIGHTY OTSO,

HONEY-PAW, WE BID THEE WELCOME,
WELCOME TO OUR COURTS AND CABINS,

WELCOME, LIGHT-FOOT, TO OUR TABLES
DECORATED FOR THY COMING!

WE HAVE WISHED FOR THEE FOR AGES,
WAITING SINCE THE DAYS OF CHILDHOOD,

FOR THE NOTES OF TAPIO'S BUGLE,
FOR THE SINGING OF THE WOOD-NYMPHS,

FOR THE COMING OF DEAR OTSO,

FOR THE FOREST GOLD AND SILVER,
WAITING FOR THE YEAR OF PLENTY,

LONGING FOR IT AS FOR SUMMER,
AS THE SHOE WAITS FOR THE SNOW-FIELDS,

AS THE SLEDGE FOR BEATEN HIGHWAYS,

AS THE MAIDEN FOR HER SUITOR,
AND THE WIFE HER HUSBAND'S COMING;

SAT AT EVENING BY THE WINDOWS,
AT THE GATES HAVE, SAT AT MORNING,

SAT FOR AGES AT THE PORTALS,

NEAR THE GRANARIES IN WINTER, VANISHED,

TILL THE SNOW-FIELDS WARMED AND

TILL THE SAILS UNFURLED IN JOYANCE,

TILL THE EARTH GREW GREEN AND BLOSSOMED,

THINKING ALL THE WHILE AS FOLLOWS:

"WHERE IS OUR BELOVED OTSO,

WHY DELAYS OUR FOREST-TREASURE?

HAS HE GONE TO DISTANT EHSTLAND,

TO THE UPPER GLENS OF SUOMI?"

--

THE KALEVALA - LONROTT TRANSLATION

Then they eat him.

In the process, Vainomoinen strips Otso of his characteristics and powers. In one translation he adds these to his own, gaining Otso's size and strength. It's unclear if he is literally becoming a werebear during this ritual. In the Lonrott translation this process of removal safeguards Otso's characteristics so that he does not lose them, as part of the feasting process.

In the end, the people give thanks to the Creator, and ask that a similar feast be sent to them again. Otso is given an air burial, which closely resembles the story of his birth, previously told by Vainomoinen. This may indicate that the bard is aware of the cyclical nature of faeries, and is preparing Otso for return. If this is the case, the keeping of his sensory organs, which presumably contain vis, is necessary for his rapid regeneration. Damaging them may damage Otso's material form in its next iteration.

A similar story involves the goat the pulls Thor's chariot. Thor eats it each night and it is reborn each day, unharmed, until some fool cracks on of its bones to get the marrow out. Thor's crippled goat cannot be made whole again, although it can be restored to some degree with a false bone made of a sacred type of wood.

Sometimes in Ars Magica it is unclear why Birna, also called Bjornaer, the werebear, left her own tradition of shapeshifters, fleeing into the protection of the Hermetic Order, and creating a rift that remains until the game's present day. Now that we know some people festively eat werebears her motives may be more apparent. Even if you don't accept that Birna was fleeing something like the caludrons and golden dishes of Vainomoinen, the questio nreamins as to if this is what is happening at the Gathering of Twelve Yeats. Is this the year of plenty mentioned in the excerpt? Its possible is that a sacred animal is sent to be butchered by the congregants: their power to transofmr being given to them, or reinforced, by this cyclical process of consumption of a herald from their creator spirit.

On a more material basis: Hermetic magi going into places where this ritual was practiced may wish to find the ritual spaces, because it was traditional for the bones of theb ear to be displayed n a sacred ossuary-space.so as not to be disturbed.Some commentators of the Kalevala scholars claim these sites have been found and that the skulls in particular are displayed. They may contain vis, and if they have a regenerative property, so that a bear containing vis is drawn to the area, then they are a vis source.

Slightly unnatural water



**solvent
adherent
coherent
expands into ice
dissipates heat
heavy
incompressable**

In Ars Magica we have four elemental arts. The one which fits the magic system least well is Aquam, and because it doesn't fit the system particularly well, there have been very few Aquam specialists designed during the game. The story of the Founders didn't explain where Aquam came from: the druid Diedne perhaps, so that's why we don't know much about it.

In the free, vanilla covenant supplement we used Aquam's origin, with the mystery cult of Nodens. I also used this a long time ago in Sanctuary of Ice, when I suggested that the was a protofounder interested in the art of Aquam near Lake Geneva. The protofounders are the magicians who trained with Bonisagus but did not go on to found Houses, generally because they were elderly and died during the lengthy process of the setting up of the Order of Hermes.

Let's look at one facet of the art. The spell guidelines say that slightly unnatural water, or liquids, are easier to create than highly unnatural water. What counts as slightly or highly unnatural? Those of us who have played Aquam magi know you can use this rule to end run the magic item creation process by creating highly unnatural liquids.

"This water, when you drink it, makes you fly." is a highly unnatural liquid, but should it be prevented? Probably. How about "This liquid, itself, flies so if I fill a cauldron with it, an then I can fly by sitting in the cauldron." You get damp, but you can still fly without mastering other Arts which are usually required for travel magic.

Without wanting to stake out the furthest edges of what's possible with the art of Aquam, I'd like to define what a slightly unnatural liquid is. In my own campaigns, a slightly unnatural liquid takes one of the natural properties of water and expands it to an unusual, supernatural degree. Let's just work through these natural properties of water and see what can be done with them.

Water is a solvent. This means that acids are slightly unnatural liquids rather than being highly unnatural, just because they're very effective in combat scenarios. I also allow specific solvents. For example, a heist could be performed by creating a liquid that dissolved silver specifically, flooding the basement of a miser, then evaporating the runoff for the silver dust. In my campaign that would be slightly unnatural. This also allows a character to non-violently disarm opponents. Water which is a specific solvent for iron could be used spray enemies down so that their gear degrades.

Water is incredibly heavy. We tend not to think about it as being heavy because it doesn't hold its shape. If you've ever tried working in a building which has a flat roof, particularly during the cyclone season in north Queensland you'll know that raindrops are essentially pebbles that are slightly friendlier. If you wanted to crush something you could easily do it with a column of water..

When editing this podcast I came back in at this point to mention snow. I've seen snow twice in my life, I believe. I live in northern Australia where snow is a thing that happens to other people. I presume if you come from a snowy area you will have some sympathy with this idea that water is ridiculously heavy and can be really inconvenient.

Water disperses heat. I'd like to think this is why there are so few water magi around. I think House Flambeau hunted them down and immolated them. In my own game Aquam counterspells are really effective against Ignem. A Aquam spell of the same magnitude, plus one added Size, sucks up all the heat of an Ignem spell. Water that has the same effect at a lower volume is slightly unnatural.

Water is coherent and adherent. Slightly unnatural water that was more coherent than normal water doesn't part, which lets you use some of the other properties more destructively. Adherence allows water to stick to things. Turning water into glue is only slightly unnatural. It's the stickiness of water that makes it coat objects. You could drown someone with quite a small amount of water, merely by making it particularly adherent. Similarly, in many parts of Mythic Europe, it's so cold that if you can keep an opponent wet you don't really have to do much more to kill them.

Water has high surface tension compared to other liquids. This means that it's not difficult to make water that you can walk on, for example. Similarly if you make water which is highly coherent and not particularly adherent, you'd have a particularly smooth surface, which you could use for sliding objects or for skating quickly. The surface tension of water creates capillary action. That's where water appears to defy gravity by crawling up the sides of things. Water with a very high surface tension would be able to crawl over barriers.

To move on to the concept of ice: ice is unusual in that it's a solid that is larger than the same weight of the equivalent liquid. Ice floats because it displaces sufficient water: most solids don't do this. A slightly unnatural liquid would be one that created an enormous amount of ice for a small amount of liquid. One of the ways that permeable rock is broken down into tillable soil is via frost. The water in rocks freezes and expands, cracking them slightly. The next frost, more water having filled the crack, it is stretched even wider. Eventually this turns the rock into gravel, then sand. A spell can make this process more rapid, by freezing and melting the water many times each hour. Ice can also be used as a construction material, particularly if you create ice that melts at an unnaturally high temperature. It is particularly good for boat making.

Water doesn't compress very much, which is very important in the creation of hydraulic power transmissions. That is: a great deal of power can be forced through a column of water, if the column of water can be contained. In real-world machines the problem is containing that pressure. In Mythic Europe, magic itself provides the containment mechanism. This means that contained units of water (remembering that it is heavy and coherent) can be used much like rock or metal.

So to revise. Water is a solvent. It is adherent and coherent. This creates capillary action. Water forms ice. Water is great at trapping heat and has a high heat of vaporization. Water is heavy and it does not compress. These features, taken to an extreme, are defining characteristics of slightly unnatural water

Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio

Strange Stories From a Chinese Studio: Volume One was the ten thousandth free audiobook recorded by LibriVox.

One of the reasons I'm fascinated with Chinese folktales is that towards the end of the Ars Magica setting, we started to run out of things that people hadn't seen before and so to cheat we would harvest other peoples' folktales and add them into the European setting. For example there is a Japanese spirit, a sort of faceless person, that I stole for Antagonists. I first became aware of Strange Stories From a Chinese Studio a couple of years ago and I deliberately decided not to read it, because it had too much good material and I was busy working through other research for what became the North African and Egyptian books.

Chinese Studio is a series of short folk tales. The person who's telling them appears to believe that they are the truth, which means that sometimes they end abruptly in the same way that, sometimes, when you read biographies the person is heroic up until a certain point and then the life just seems to taper away. In these stories something amusing or amazing happens and then that's it. Done. The stories have also, in this edition, been bolderised within an inch of their lives. I'm not saying that Giles, who did the translation, was incredibly sex averse, but he was a Victorian gentleman writing for other Victorian gentlemen and he used a vast degree of inventiveness to remove anything vaguely erotic from the stories. Many of the stories deal with people who have fairy or fox wives, because this is a Chinese studio, but let's ignore those that now.

One of the early stories, and one of my favourites, involves a man who goes blind because a film forms over the pupil of each of his eyes. Trapped as he is in darkness, he starts hearing voices and the presumes he is going insane. It becomes clear to him that talking creatures are living inside his eyeballs and they have become disconsolate because they haven't seen the sunlight in a while. They crawl out of his nose and go on an adventure. They then climb back up his nose, and talk to each other about how the man's garden has been neglected since he's gone blind. When he confronts his wife about this, her reaction confirms to him that these are not symptoms of madness. Actual spiritual beings have taken up residence in his head.

After many nights of this one of the creatures becomes sick of all this climbing up noses and decides to create a door, it tries to split open the film in the front of the eye. It fails to do this but it encourages the other creature to try. It manages to break open the film in the front of the eye, allowing the man to see again.

The two creatures in his eyes have a discussion. The one from the blind eye agrees to come and live with the other, leading to another quick trip down one nostril and up the other. From that day the man had two pupils in his right eye, which allowed him to see more clearly than any other man despite being blinded in his left.

It's not clear what the game effects of having these speaking creatures in your eyes are. An awesome knack involving the Awareness ability? If they are faeries, he might gain certain short term skills, or the premonitions Virtue, due to his eyes discussing things which are invisible to him.

It's not clear whether this is meant to be a horror story. Are you meant to think "Wait a minute! I have pupils! Are people in everyone's pupils? Tiny men sitting behind windows?" Giles the translator claims that: yes! This is exactly what you meant to think. He believes all Chinese people believe that there are little human-shaped figures in the back of their eyeballs, a superstition which is caused by seeing your own reflection, reflected off of a mirror into your eyeballs, then back on to the mirror.

Ancient Chinese body horror? Hard to tell.

Another story I particularly like is about an elderly woman who has one son, and this son is taken by tiger. A passing monk rebukes the tiger/ "Just how is this woman to live now that you've eaten her son? This is entirely inappropriate behavior." The tiger adopts the woman and starts leaving dead deer on her porch. Each day another deer. Eventually the woman starts to feel more friendly toward the tiger and she coaxes it to sleep on her veranda. The woman is quite rich by this time, because a deer each day is quite something when you live in medieval China, and no one wants to burgle her house because there's literally a tiger lying across the doorway. Eventually she and the tiger become such great friends that it wanders around carrying things for her, to get her shopping: those sorts of things. Eventually the widow dies, the tiger bursts into her house, and mourns her death.

I quite like this idea that a saint has accidentally put an incredibly dangerous creature into the middle of the town. It does nothing particularly scary, except camp out on the veranda of an old woman. I wonder how this would play in Mythic Europe where poaching deer is illegal. Elderly women who had suspicious seeming cats were sometimes accused of being witches...

...well actually that's after our period/ In 1220 people didn't believe that witches really existed. They believed people who thought they were witches were mentally ill...

but leaving that aside: what can you do if a saint has accidentally handed a woman a tiger, or perhaps in Mythic Europe, a great wolf. You could just wait and after she passes away, then you have a mystical tiger available. You could adopt it as a familiar. You could see if there is something particular to the woman. Perhaps she has the virtue that makes animals particularly friendly. If so she may prove a resource when dealing with similar creatures, particularly given the way that most animals react to magi.

There is a story in which a character asks for his fortune to be told. The magician in the marketplace says "You're going to die very quickly that I can prevent it from happening with one of my charms." The person refuses the assistance of the necromancer, so the necromancer sends spirits to kill the man. The necromancer wants to maintain his reputation. for seeing the future.

Of particular interest to have magi is the story of a tiger spirit which only attacks scholars. It seems to eat at least one every year. The spirit of the scholar most recently killed is forced to serve the tiger until a new scholar dies. In the story the ghost of one of the scholars contacts a friend, and gets him to trick a teacher, whom they both disliked, into coming to the mountain of the tiger.

When I saw this I was reminded of the tradition found in British folk tales of what's called a fag corpse, fag, in this sense, meaning "servant". The idea is that the ghost of the last person buried in the graveyard becomes the servant of the other ghosts while there. Rich people would make very sure that directly after the funeral of their relative was a second funeral, preferably of a peasant. That meant the realtive of the rich people would only have to serve the wishes of the poor people nearby for a matter of moments.

There is also mention of a poisonous plant. Whoever eats this plant dies and becomes a ghost: their final business being that they cannot rest until they have poisoned someone else using the plant. One of the poison victims, a gentleman of strong moral character, chooses not to poison anyone else. He continues his worldly works and supports his mother, until eventually the various immortals notice what he's doing. He is given a role in the celestial bureaucracy, and takes the curse with him when he passes from the world. This reminded me of the oldest of the ghosts at the Cave of Twisting Shadows. In Sanctuary of Ice, there is mention of a woman who poisoned herself, her worldly business being to wait for the return of Criamon.

In another story there is a magic rock, which has many tiny grottoes. Each year, one grotto closes. The person who owns the rock can tell how long they're going to live. There are certain dryads linked not to trees but individual flowers. There are western magicians who are able to stretch and extend their limbs in a way that reminded me of Mr Tickle and Mr Fantastic.

There is mention of the nation of flying heads. In this kingdom people's heads fly off and go down to the marshy lands to eat worms, and it's considered completely normal by the people who live there. There are similar magicians in Hungry they can sever parts of the bodies and send them off travelling, but none of them actually has a flying head.

There is the story of a man who was swept out to sea, and lands on the island of the cannibals. He manages to avoid being eaten by showing them how to cook meat and eventually, to keep him happy, they give him a troglodyte wife. They have two sons and he eventually escapes to the mainland. His children have magic blood and they rise high in the army. His wife is absolutely hideous, so she refuses to go to China until it becomes clear that her sons have become generals and her husband a high official. Regardless of her hideous visage, everyone around her husband is required to treat her as though she were attractive. This does not so far as I can tell actually make her attractive, although that would be an interesting outcome to the folk story.

Strange Stories From a Chinese Studio is an interesting grab bag of material from which you can steal a great deal of campaign material. In this broadcast, I've covered the first volume of the book. I believe it's 5 volumes long.

THE FALL OF BABBULKUND

In one of Lord Dunsany's stories, a merchant caravan pauses in the desert. They ask a man in rags to join them at the fire, and offer him food and drink. He tells them stories of the luxuries of the city to which they travel: ancient Babbulkund. In time they leave him behind, but because of his ceaseless tramping, the man in rags catches up with them, and they have another evening of stories of Babbulkund.

When they meet the ragged man a third time, he is deeply distressed. He confides in them.

'I AM THE SERVANT OF THE LORD THE GOD OF MY PEOPLE, AND I GO TO DO HIS WORK ON BABBULKUND.'

SHE IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CITY IN THE WORLD; THERE HATH BEEN NONE LIKE HER, EVEN THE STARS OF GOD GO ENVIOUS OF HER BEAUTY. SHE IS ALL WHITE, YET WITH STREAKS OF PINK THAT PASS THROUGH HER STREETS AND HOUSES LIKE FLAMES IN THE WHITE MIND OF A SCULPTOR, LIKE DESIRE IN PARADISE. SHE HATH BEEN CARVED OF OLD OUT OF A HOLY HILL, NO SLAVES WROUGHT THE CITY OF MARVEL, BUT ARTISTS TOILING AT THE WORK THEY LOVED. THEY TOOK NO PATTERN FROM THE HOUSES OF MEN, BUT EACH MAN WROUGHT WHAT HIS INNER EYE HAD SEEN AND CARVED IN MARBLE THE VISIONS OF HIS DREAM. ALL OVER THE ROOF OF ONE OF THE PALACE CHAMBERS WINGED LIONS FLIT LIKE BATS, THE SIZE OF EVERY ONE IS THE SIZE OF THE LIONS OF GOD, AND THE WINGS ARE LARGER THAN ANY WING CREATED; THEY ARE ONE ABOVE THE OTHER MORE THAN A MAN CAN NUMBER, THEY ARE ALL CARVEN OUT OF ONE BLOCK OF MARBLE, THE CHAMBER ITSELF IS HOLLOWED FROM IT, AND IT IS BORNE ALOFT UPON THE CARVEN BRANCHES OF A GROVE OF CLUSTERED TREE-FERNS WROUGHT BY THE HAND OF SOME JUNGLE MASON THAT LOVED THE TALL FERN WELL. OVER THE RIVER OF MYTH, WHICH IS ONE WITH THE WATERS OF FABLE, GO BRIDGES, FASHIONED LIKE THE WISTERIA TREE AND LIKE THE DROOPING LABURNUM, AND A HUNDRED OTHERS OF WONDERFUL DEVICES, THE DESIRE OF THE SOULS OF MASONS A LONG WHILE DEAD. OH! VERY BEAUTIFUL IS WHITE BABBULKUND, VERY BEAUTIFUL SHE IS, BUT PROUD; AND THE LORD THE GOD OF MY PEOPLE HATH SEEN HER IN HER PRIDE, AND LOOKING TOWARDS HER HATH SEEN THE PRAYERS OF NEHEMOTH GOING UP TO THE ABOMINATION ANNOLITH AND ALL THE PEOPLE FOLLOWING AFTER VOTH. SHE IS VERY BEAUTIFUL, BABBULKUND; ALAS THAT I MAY NOT BLESS HER. I COULD LIVE ALWAYS ON ONE OF HER INNER TERRACES LOOKING ON THE MYSTERIOUS JUNGLE IN HER MIDST AND THE HEAVENWARD FACES OF THE ORCHIDS THAT, CLAMBERING FROM THE DARKNESS, BEHOLD THE SUN.

I COULD LOVE BABBULKUND WITH A GREAT LOVE, YET AM I THE SERVANT OF THE LORD THE GOD OF MY PEOPLE, AND THE KING HATH SINNED UNTO THE ABOMINATION ANNOLITH, AND THE PEOPLE LUST EXCEEDINGLY FOR VOTH. ALAS FOR THEE, BABBULKUND, ALAS THAT I MAY NOT EVEN NOW TURN BACK, FOR TOMORROW I MUST PROPHESY AGAINST THEE AND CRY OUT AGAINST THEE, BABBULKUND. BUT YE TRAVELLERS THAT HAVE ENTREATED ME HOSPITABLY, RISE AND PASS ON WITH YOUR CAMELS, FOR I CAN TARRY NO LONGER, AND I GO TO DO THE WORK ON BABBULKUND OF THE LORD THE GOD OF MY PEOPLE.

GO NOW AND SEE THE BEAUTY OF BABBULKUND BEFORE I CRY OUT AGAINST HER, AND THEN FLEE SWIFTLY NORTHWARDS.'

The man walks off into the darkness.

The merchants are delayed in their travel and arrive to where Babblukund should be, to find the old man in rags sitting in the empty desert, his tear-stained face obscured by his hands.

The man in rags is, in Ars Magica terms, clearly an angel. He has been sent to re-enact Sodom and Gammorah on Babbulkund. He loves the city, he may even be its guardian angel, and yet must destroy it. He cannot avoid this task because, like all angels following the moracula, he is unable to fall, and thus unable to disobey.

Knowing that the hour of Babbulkund is not yet come, he finds some worthy mortals and says to them "Go and see Babbulkund." as a way of preserving, in story, some of the wonders he is about to destroy. Perhaps he hopes they will take away some small stores of the treasures of the city.

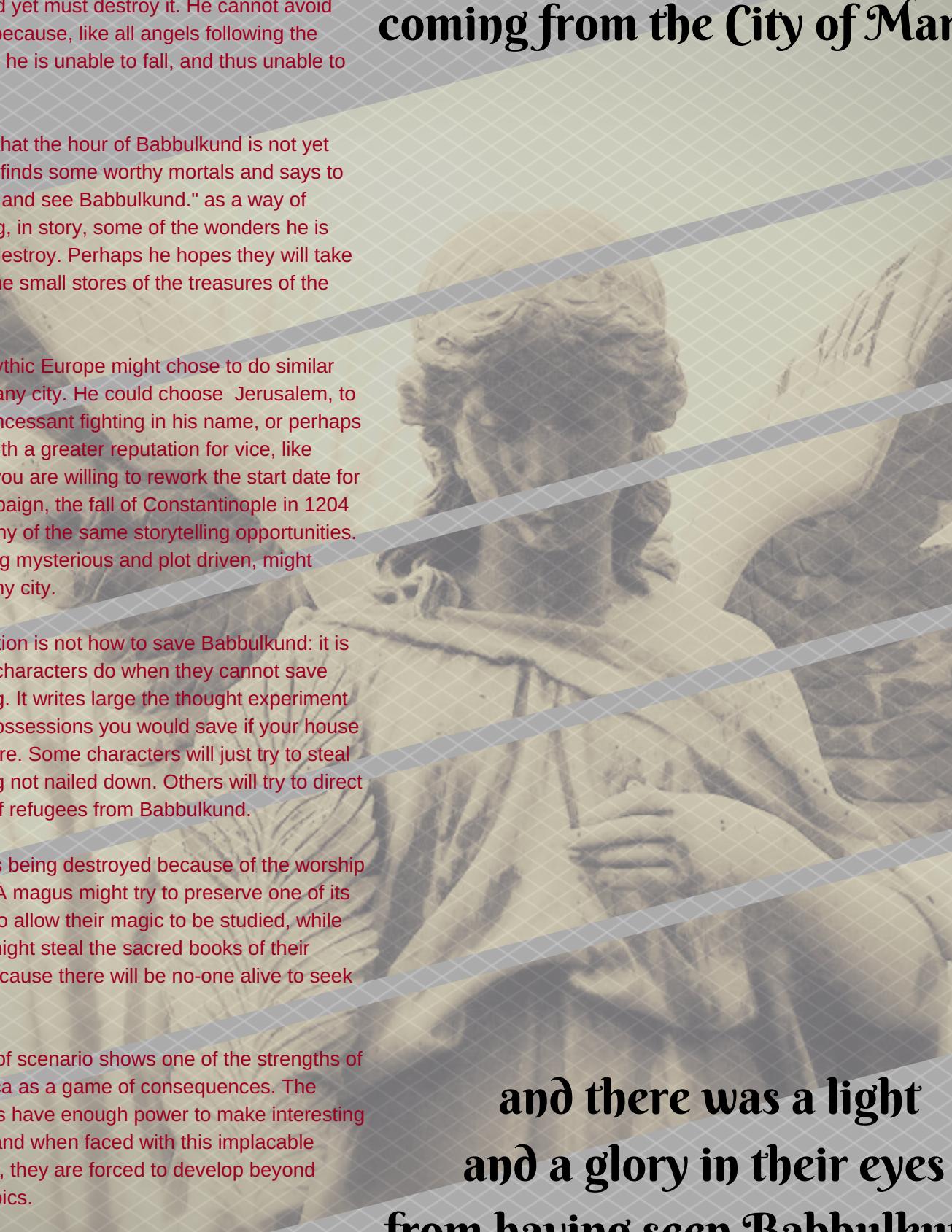
God in Mythic Europe might chose to do similar things to any city. He could choose Jerusalem, to stop the incessant fighting in his name, or perhaps a place with a greater reputation for vice, like Paris. If you are willing to rework the start date for your campaign, the fall of Constantinople in 1204 offers many of the same storytelling opportunities. God, being mysterious and plot driven, might choose any city.

The question is not how to save Babbulkund: it is what the characters do when they cannot save everything. It writes large the thought experiment of what possessions you would save if your house were on fire. Some characters will just try to steal everything not nailed down. Others will try to direct the flow of refugees from Babbulkund.

The city is being destroyed because of the worship of a cult. A magus might try to preserve one of its initiates, to allow their magic to be studied, while another might steal the sacred books of their liturgy, because there will be no-one alive to seek revenge.

This sort of scenario shows one of the strengths of Ars Magica as a game of consequences. The characters have enough power to make interesting choices, and when faced with this implacable constraint, they are forced to develop beyond superheroics.

The foe is not simply a monster that can be killed with magical fire. The foe is indecision: a refusal to develop as a distinct character, with specific personal goals.



**And often travellers
passed us in the desert,
coming from the City of Marvel,**

**and there was a light
and a glory in their eyes
from having seen Babbulkund.**

I was recently listening to a radio interview about the Paralympics, where the interviewee noted that you should expect, at some close date, the prosthetics of the athletes to push their performances beyond those of non-disabled athletes. He noted that there were already concerns about Olympic marksmen having their eyes improved with LASIK, or power athletes having damaged tendons replaced with synthetics. Human augmentation seems underutilised in Ars Magica, given that we have a House dedicated to making magical items.

In Ars Magica there have been several attempts to design prosthetic limbs as magic items. Generally these are arms that are controlled mentally. House Verditus's automata mystery allows the construction of mecha, but on a less extraordinary level, it also allows the construction of full-body therapeutic or access suits.

My preferred method of design is for the prosthetic to be the magus's talisman. This means it shares magic resistance, which protects it from accidental destruction. It automatically has an arcane connection, and its power scales to the magus. The downside of this is that once the magus dies, it's difficult to pass down, the way you might give your apprentice your wand once you no longer use it. There may be a lineage somewhere of wizards inherit and arm, made by a famous archmagus from the War, that they can only use by cutting off their own arm.

I recently, however, thought of a new approach, which best suits House Merinita. A character could have a prosthetic limb which is a faerie creature. For companions it would be a faerie friend, and if it was tricksy in its nature, that could explain a character with something like Alien Hand Syndrome. For magi it could be a matter of mystagogic initiation. The character severs a hand, and then grafts on a replacement, made by a Faerie sponsor, binding it as a Faerie Familiar. This would place it within the character's magic resistance and connect it to the character telepathically.

A sponsor for this cult could be found in the Celtic pantheons. Nuada of the Silver Arm was the king of the Tuatha de Danu when they invaded Ireland. He lost his arm, and therefore his kingship, because monarchs were required to be physically intact. The healer of that set of gods, whose name I can never say, made him a prosthetic arm. When that healer's son dug up Nuada's severed arm and reattached it, the father killed the son in a fit of the sort of jealousy you expect to see only from Verditus magi. This Nuada turns up in cognate forms in Welsh folklore, as Nudd and Lud, who was the creator of London. He's also Nodens, mentioned in an earlier episode of water magic.

In the real world, prosthetics tend to become popular after wars. The American Civil War led to widespread use of replacement limbs, as did the Second World War. Magi might not have been inclined to use prosthetics, but the harvesting of humaniform faeries that occurred during the Schism War may have prevented them from just regrowing lost limbs. Even if sufficient vis was available to regenerate magi, only their most favored servants would be likewise repaired. Lesser servants would have little choice but to use some sort of aid: how many, then, might be tempted by a new hand or leg even if, for example, they needed to sleep with it in a pail of milk by the bed?

In *Against the Dark* we mentioned a Hungarian tribe of wizards who can pull off parts of their bodies and send them on missions: hands, eyes, ears. The odd thing is that the parts aren't just alive and capable of independent action while separated: they retain nervous connection, so a person can hear through a separated ear or see through an eye left in some inconspicuous spot. Even the magus's heart can be pulled out, and used to revive the dead (although this may only work on people killed by faeries, in which case the whole thing is likely a ruse involving changelings). We had these wizards aligned to the magic realm, because Empedocles, the writer who created the Criamon cosmology, believed human organs were once independent creatures, which moved through the world until they combined into vast, symbiotic communities. This need not be the case: faeries, magical spirits of Corpus, or even demonic parts could be grafted to people.

The magi above demonstrate another frightening possibility: there's no need to stop at one. A character might have a parasitic eye, and a parasitic hand, and



goodness knows what else. In extreme cases, a magus might prolong their life by taking an entire faerie body, and attaching it to their severed head (and idea for which I thank Ira Levin). That is, however, a little less disturbing than discovering that a person the characters know is actually a meat substrate for faerie growths. Having struck the term "meat substrate" I am reminded of Supergod, Jerry Craven, and therefore Steve Austin. He has a prosthetic eye, arm, ear and leg.

If, after the war, a lot of companions took faerie limbs, given that the creatures do not require sustenance to survive: could they still be about? They probably aren't, as they contain precious Corpus vis, but if they are, can a character get one just by digging it up, much as Mach did for Nuada? If you dig them up and do not attach them to yourself, can they be used to create monstrous human forms, that can be controlled by Vim magic, like the Colossus of Ylourgne. For those of you who are not Clarke Ashton Smith fans, it's an early horror story in which a team of necromancers use an alchemical process to craft a giant out of corpses, and then terrorize the countryside. They ride around on the colossus in a gondola slung over its neck, as I recall.

It's possible that some of these faeries control their hosts. I mentioned before the idea of alien hand syndrome, but faeries manipulate humans to various degrees. Some will just colour the mind with a single emotion: the person gets braver, or more afraid, or more angry. Some, however, have a deeper level of control, using hallucinations. Players will hate this if used on their characters, but for enemies, it's an interesting idea. Even if player characters it might be welcome if remedial. Could a character be braver if monsters were smaller? Happier if colours are brighter?



I've been really interested in Sacculina parasites, intermittently, for a decade. I sold a version of them, that looks like a Crown of Thorns starfish, to Atlas Games as the Acanaster for their D&D Bestiary. Sacculina parasites grow within crabs. I suppose, Pokemon players, they are the inspiration for parasects. The sacculina is technically a barnacle. It burrows into the crab, and hijacks its mind. It makes the crab act female, grows roots throughout the crab's body and brain, and reprograms the crab to tend the brood of the barnacle as they were immature crabs. I can see a faerie hand being like this: a destructive, contagious parasite, leading to a saga arc.

For a level of body horror: what if when you kill an enemy, bits slide away and he seems to be falling apart. Only later do you discover that your enemy was really just the left eye of the body you were fighting, and it has now found a new host? What if each of the growths finds a new host?

Faerie organs also allow xenotransplants. Want a cat's eyes? Want to have wrist spinnerets? I think either could be gained by mystery cult initiation. Alternatively, some faerie hunter traditions may be able to take pieces from creatures they have defeated, and transplant them either into themselves, or into an alternate form they can assume.

Faeries being so variable, it's possible that many of these explanations can be true simultaneously. You could be a hero with an arm granted by Ares, fighting a warlock made of click-apart organs, that are coating an involuntary host.



I was listening to a lecture on Romanticism by Alain de Botton the other day, and it struck me how significant it was for the design of Mythic European characters. The video is at <https://youtu.be/sPOulyEJnbE> if you'd like to check it out yourself.

De Botton suggests that certain features become connected to the concept of love during the Romantic period, which began in the Eighteenth Century and blossomed in the Nineteenth. Before noting them, I'd just like to highlight how difficult it is to even think of the term "romantic" as being something that's disassociated from love. That difficulty dissociating one set of ideas from the other is what I'm talking about here. What do Ars Magica characters feel, which they describe as love?

"Romantic" when the term emerges, meant "having something to do with tales of chivalry" and so for the rest of this discussion I'd note that romantic love hearkens back to an imagined past in which chivalric love was in full bloom. The Romantics loved the medieval period (as opposed to the classical and industrial periods) and Ars Magica, as a game that is based on the popular imagination of the Middle Ages is covered in their fingerprints. It directly draws from their work, in that the idea that living in the time before antibiotics was more fun is the sort of daft thing they believed, and it also rearranged the folklore we used as source material in building Mythic Europe. That's why the faeries have wings, the Church is post-Augustinian, and there are Winter covenants. It allows you to use romantic medievalist tropes.

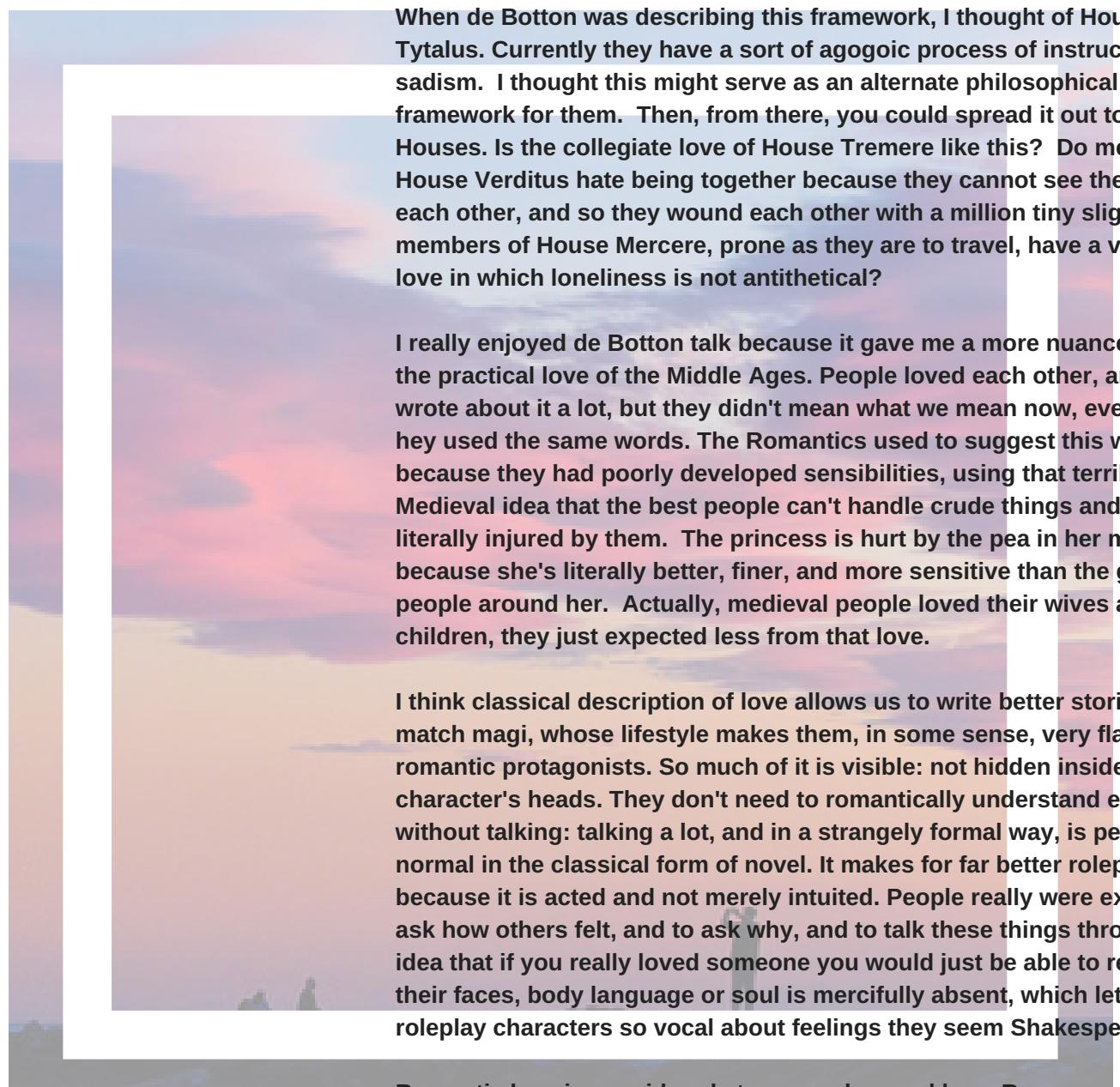
Romantic love is for the rich. No Romantic hero seems to have something so annoying as a job. In Ars Magica we see this influence on our characters, in that it was one of the first games where you hunted monsters and stole their treasure to explicitly say that the treasure was stage dressing, and should be described with adjectives, not numbers. We've marched back from that a little, with the Mythic Pound, but let's be honest: a lot of people really don't care about how much money characters have. That's why our unit of account, the Mythic Pound, is the average annual earnings for a peasant family. That's like running a modern RPG where the unit of currency isn't the American dollar, it's the average American family income (which is about USD52 000).

Romantics love a bit of Nature. Nature's where dramatic stuff happens. As it happens, magi live out there in Nature, because the city dims magic. Beautiful things are magical. Faeries cluster around beauty, and magical auras make things more vivid. Some beautiful things literally drip magical power you can bottle and keep for later.

Romantics spend a lot of time together. Work doesn't get in the way. Practical things don't get in the way of this. Magi can't love people, because they spend so much time closeted in their labs. Loneliness and love are opposites, which makes familiars really an odd idea.

De Botton notes a classic concept of love that has features which sound unusual to modern people. The lover does not complete the beloved. The lover does not love the faults of the beloved. Sexual union is not the

highest expression of love. The lover loves the good parts of the beloved and wishes to nurture and instruct them, to polish their superiorities of character, and to diminish their inadequacies. The lover and beloved take turns as instructor and student. Since this love does not have sex as a necessary capstone, like romantic love, and does not require the lovers to complete each other, it allows the person to be in multiple loving relationships within the one structure. One can love family members, one's spouse, and one's friends, all within a single ideological framework of love, rather than having a series of differentiating frameworks.



When de Botton was describing this framework, I thought of House Tytalus. Currently they have a sort of agogoic process of instructive sadism. I thought this might serve as an alternate philosophical framework for them. Then, from there, you could spread it out to other Houses. Is the collegiate love of House Tremere like this? Do members of House Verditus hate being together because they cannot see the good in each other, and so they wound each other with a million tiny slights? Do members of House Mercere, prone as they are to travel, have a version of love in which loneliness is not antithetical?

I really enjoyed de Botton talk because it gave me a more nuanced view of the practical love of the Middle Ages. People loved each other, and they wrote about it a lot, but they didn't mean what we mean now, even though they used the same words. The Romantics used to suggest this was because they had poorly developed sensibilities, using that terrible Medieval idea that the best people can't handle crude things and are literally injured by them. The princess is hurt by the pea in her mattress because she's literally better, finer, and more sensitive than the gross people around her. Actually, medieval people loved their wives and children, they just expected less from that love.

I think classical description of love allows us to write better stories which match magi, whose lifestyle makes them, in some sense, very flawed as romantic protagonists. So much of it is visible: not hidden inside character's heads. They don't need to romantically understand each other without talking: talking a lot, and in a strangely formal way, is perfectly normal in the classical form of novel. It makes for far better roleplaying because it is acted and not merely intuited. People really were expected to ask how others felt, and to ask why, and to talk these things through. The idea that if you really loved someone you would just be able to read it in their faces, body language or soul is mercifully absent, which lets us roleplay characters so vocal about feelings they seem Shakesperean.

Romantic love is considered stronger when reckless. Romeo and Juliet die within four days of things kicking off. Ohhh, so romantic. Classical novels are a lot more practical than this. That allows for goal setting and story crafting. Money matters. Where people live matters. Doing certain things to make yourself marriageable isn't some sort of terrible, shallow thing: it just proves your spouse isn't a little bit dim, like Lydia Bennett. This is great for gamers, because those goals are earned by in-plot actions. We can design stories around that, much like any other MacGuffin.

Adventure ideas can come from anywhere: this one comes from a podcast I was listening to. A farmer in South Africa mentioned that because his orchards are in the mountains, his apples ripen two weeks earlier than everyone else's, and this gives him a price premium. Seasonal fruit is a brilliant as treasure, because it needs your characters to do things immediately to secure its value.

Back when we were writing the China book, which fell through, one of my favourite plot hooks was the melon bandits. To explain, in the west of China they grew melons. These are dried for export, but they are particularly valuable fresh, at the start of the season, in the capital city. So carts of precious melons come the mountain passes, and bandits try to hijack them.

I love the idea of this. It's treasure that smells wonderful, looks wonderful, and that you can share as a snacks at the table. I love the idea of a team of men, inching though a jagged valley, risking their life for fruit so expensive they don't dare eat it. I love the idea of bands of people hiding in the dark, trying to steal succulent orbs that they fence in the cities to noblemen, through a secret network of black-market greengrocers.

Now of course these don't need to be Chinese musk melons: you could make the same scenario fit pretty much anywhere mythic Europe. It can be difficult for modern readers to grasp how extreme seasonality is in the food supply of medieval Europe, partially because we have refrigeration and partially because we have international transhipped produce. Even simple things use to be seasonal. The BLT sandwich, for example, used to mark the start of the tomato season, because tomatoes used to be seasonal. Now they can be deep frozen and colored whenever people want to take them out of storage. That's why you can have a BLT whenever you like.

In Mythic Europe winter is a season of dietary monotony. It's season you eat things like smoked meat, pickled vegetables, brewed grain, and fermented dairy products. This is not just because you prefer the flavor: it's one way to get food to last through the winter. This is also the idea behind certain types of pie making, and preserves like jam. It lets you spread the season of abundance into the season with this it just the fresh produce. That's why the person who has the first fruits of the season is paid such an enormous amount because this pent up demand is almost a madness, caused by being forced to stay in your house due to inclement weather for months. This is also why Christmas is so riotous in some areas of Europe.

A second plot idea that struck me considering this. When I was very young, I saw a Christmas movie that didn't make sense to me, about a knight with miraculous Christmas cherries. I thought all the fuss that these people were making over a basket of Christmas cherries was a little bit extraordinary, because I have cherries every Christmas. I'm an Australian and cherries (because they're vaguely like holly berries and are plentiful in summer) are extremely popular as a Christmas food.

I now know it was based on Sir Cleges and the Christmas Cherries, a medieval story in which a generous knight drives himself to penury by giving his money away to the various people who need it. He and his wife are praying to God, who sends a miracle by making their tree provide cherries in the middle of winter. Cleges takes the cherries to Uther Pendragon, a friend of his from the good old days who is the king of Britain, in the hope that his friend will forgive whatever has transpired between them, then assist with his finances.

When Cleges arrives at court, people are shocked that he has these cherries. To get past the first guard he has to agree to give one third of whatever he is given for the cherries. Then to get past the kings chamberlain, Cleges again has to give up one third of whatever he's given for the cherries. Of course, when he meets the steward, the same deal is struck. When Cleges finally sees the king, Uther asks "What can I give you for this magnificent gift?" and Cleges answers "Twelve strokes with my staff". When the servants come to collect, Cleges beats them. Uther takes him aside says "You're not allowed to beat up my servants." Cleges explains: Uther replies "I'm not giving you the following for the cherries. Have some lands and gold. Promise not to give it all away because generosity is foolish." Well he doesn't actually say that but that's the implication. Cleges goes back to his castle in Cardiff and lives happily for many years.

First Fruits

Now if your magi heard cherries had suddenly appeared in the middle of winter the obvious question would be "Is this something that God has done, or is this just faeries?" You'd go and have a look, to see whether the cherries contain Creo vis. If they do, you can actually steal them and use some of the cherries to create more natural cherries, so that no-one misses the ones you steal. The old Creo bait and switch.

The other alternative is that your character is the character finds the cherries and wants to deliver them to the king as a gift so that you get a reciprocal gift. You have to find your way through the court politics to allow that, and you need to do quickly because otherwise the cherries will sour. I don't even know if that happens to European cherries. In Australia, because it's warmer, cherries left on their own for too long go mouldy.

Thinking about the story, one thing that I was profoundly struck by is that Europeans don't eat mangoes at Christmas. Australians have a mango season which, in the far north of the state that I live in, acts as a sort of social season. Those of you who are from temperate climates are used to the idea that there are four seasons. Different aboriginal groups in Australia had as many as 20, depending on which resources were available at various times. In north Queensland there are 3 seasons: hot, wet and winter, which takes about a month. Mango season delineates the time around Christmas.

Mango season is also associated with a socially bound psychiatric condition called "going troppo". It leads to Australians acting like drunkards even though they're sober. Speaking as a person who has never gone tropo, I have to say that living in the northern part of my state during this season is about as much fun as being the designated driver, in a night club, for three straight months. But enough of my problems this leads to the third of the plot hooks I thought of.

During mango season in Australia it is traditional that the first case of mangoes be auctioned. Proceeds of this auction go to charity. There is a great deal of social cachet, amongst the people in the areas that produce mangoes, for paying far too much for this case of mangoes. Sometimes this case goes for tens of thousands of dollars. Individual mangoes from these trays then become gifts "Have a thousand dollar mango!" In many cases, the farmer that produces the first tray of mangoes is the same person who purchases the first tray through the auction process.

In Mythic Europe you could have a similar system where an order of monks (for example) arranges a charitable auction of the first fruits of a particular harvest. Local merchant families in a town compete to be the purchasers, to improve the social cachet. This could be particularly important for magicians who use a family of puppets to act as their intermediary nobles.

So just as a quick recap. The seasonality of food in mythic Europe causes its price to fluctuate remarkably. This can lead to land based piracy for things like musk melons, it can lead to kings giving manors for a bowl of cherries and it can spark contests between noble families, for something as simple as a tray of apples.



I've seen at least four of them in the last two days, as I've been walking around the streets catching Pokemon. They all have worms in their beaks. They all seem to be watching me. Being a modern person I know that's because it is spring here, the magpies are having babies, and they need to carry food back to them.

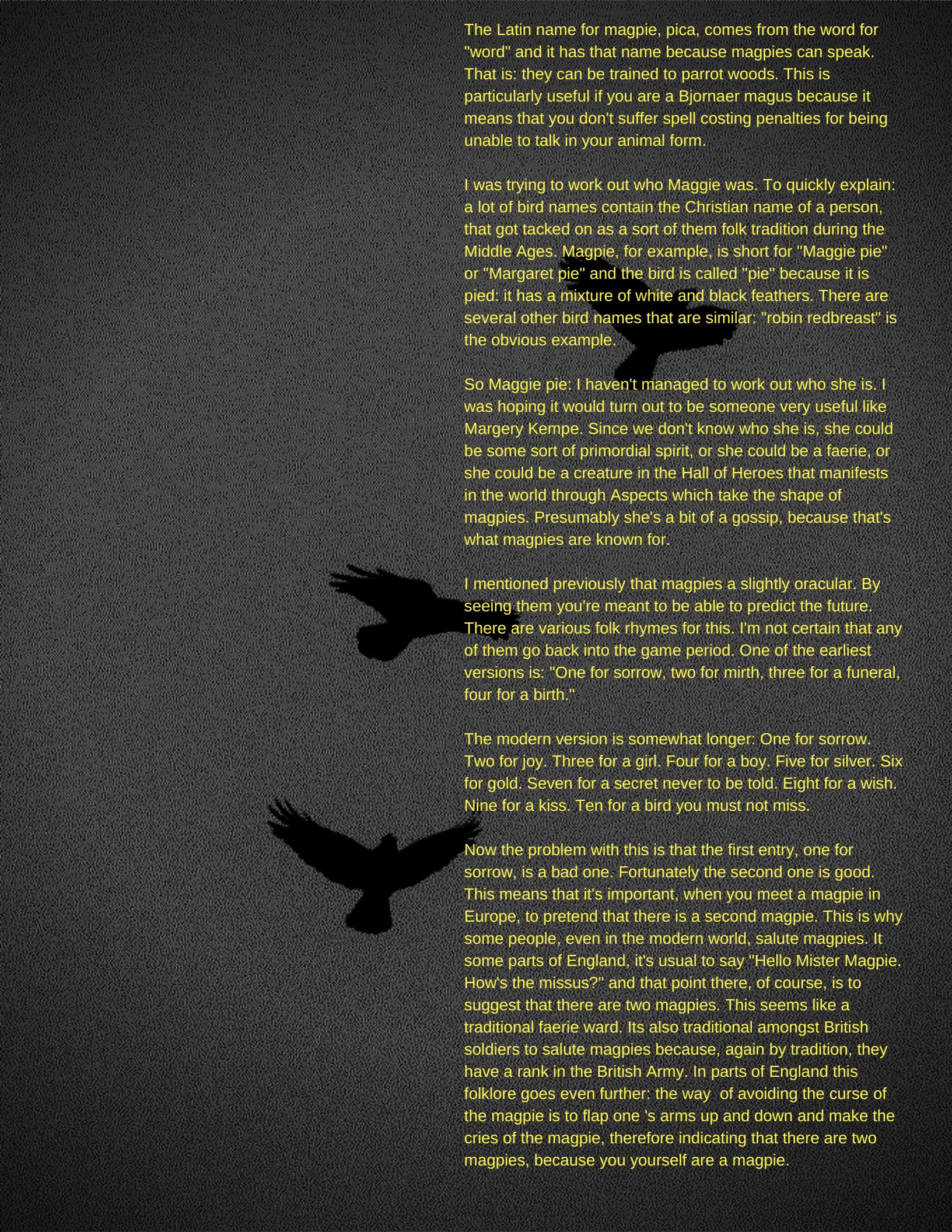
They're watching me because they don't want to give away the location of the nest when they drop off the worm, or possibly because Australian magpies are ridiculously belligerent and they're trying to work out if they can drop off the worm and then turn around and attack my head with a razor sharp beaks. I know this sounds like an Australian tale spinning, drop bears and so forth, but I've been attacked by magpies that have drawn blood from my scalp. I think that's probably true of every Australian schoolboy who had a country up bringing.

To a medieval person repeated magpies would be taken as a sign. Which Realm would it be tied to? God doesn't use magpies much. In some versions of the Noah story a raven had his big chance and didn't take it, so instead the job of being the great symbol of peace went to a dove. Similarly the infernal powers use crows and ravens because, well, they are spooky, but don't seem to use magpies very much. This leaves us with two Realms: Magic and Faerie.

Now it could just be that your character is being followed around by a Bjornaer magus: that is, a magus that can take the form of a magpie, and it's carrying the worm because it wants a snack. In that sense it's somewhat like the police officers in Hollywood films, who sit around with doughnuts. In this case: why is your character being observed? Have you committed a crime? Have the oracular power of some birds indicated that you are likely to commit a crime? Have you been prejudged, and the magpie's just sitting around waiting for you to commit a crime, because it's a hoplite in the service of the quaestiores? Am I pushing this policeman donut metaphor slightly too far?

Indeed I am so let's move on.

Why do magpies keep following me?



The Latin name for magpie, *pica*, comes from the word for "word" and it has that name because magpies can speak. That is: they can be trained to parrot words. This is particularly useful if you are a Bjornaer magus because it means that you don't suffer spell costing penalties for being unable to talk in your animal form.

I was trying to work out who Maggie was. To quickly explain: a lot of bird names contain the Christian name of a person, that got tacked on as a sort of them folk tradition during the Middle Ages. Magpie, for example, is short for "Maggie pie" or "Margaret pie" and the bird is called "pie" because it is pied: it has a mixture of white and black feathers. There are several other bird names that are similar: "robin redbreast" is the obvious example.

So Maggie pie: I haven't managed to work out who she is. I was hoping it would turn out to be someone very useful like Margery Kempe. Since we don't know who she is, she could be some sort of primordial spirit, or she could be a faerie, or she could be a creature in the Hall of Heroes that manifests in the world through Aspects which take the shape of magpies. Presumably she's a bit of a gossip, because that's what magpies are known for.

I mentioned previously that magpies are slightly oracular. By seeing them you're meant to be able to predict the future. There are various folk rhymes for this. I'm not certain that any of them go back into the game period. One of the earliest versions is: "One for sorrow, two for mirth, three for a funeral, four for a birth."

The modern version is somewhat longer: One for sorrow. Two for joy. Three for a girl. Four for a boy. Five for silver. Six for gold. Seven for a secret never to be told. Eight for a wish. Nine for a kiss. Ten for a bird you must not miss.

Now the problem with this is that the first entry, one for sorrow, is a bad one. Fortunately the second one is good. This means that it's important, when you meet a magpie in Europe, to pretend that there is a second magpie. This is why some people, even in the modern world, salute magpies. In some parts of England, it's usual to say "Hello Mister Magpie. How's the missus?" and that point there, of course, is to suggest that there are two magpies. This seems like a traditional faerie ward. It's also traditional amongst British soldiers to salute magpies because, again by tradition, they have a rank in the British Army. In parts of England this folklore goes even further: the way of avoiding the curse of the magpie is to flap one's arms up and down and make the cries of the magpie, therefore indicating that there are two magpies, because you yourself are a magpie.

There's one additional wrinkle for me, which is that I'm Australian. So when I said I'm being followed around by magpies, I'm not talking about the creature that the European and American listener assumes. The creatures which were following me around were probably *Cracticus tibicen terraregnae*. (Butcherbird pipers of the land of the queen). Butcherbirds get the name from the terrible habit of grabbing their prey and impaling it on trees, much as medieval butchers used to hang meat about their stores. Sometimes the birds just impale a whole insect, and sometimes they pull out the organs of the victim and hang them up. This is why one of the serial killers in the recent *Hannibal* series was named the Shrike: it's a similar sort of bird.

Now this is slightly horrible, but there's nothing that folklore can't make worse. This could be a simple source of vis. A shrike keeps grabbing slightly magical creatures and impaling them on a thorn tree that you can then go and shake for vis. More disturbing is, as I've mentioned in some of the previous podcasts, there are human magicians and fairies that can survive with some of their organs separated. It's perfectly possible for you to find a heart impaled on a tree, still perfectly functional, and belonging to someone who would like it back.

I had an idea for an adversarial character who was magpie queen. She's a political character, an faerie adventuress, who controls several men through a power that grants the virtue allowing the removal of their hearts. She places the removed hearts on a special tree, so that, in a sense, their hearts belong to her. The player characters can't simply destroy her, because her death would lead to the end of grant of the virtue, which would mean that her male victims just fall dead. The characters would need to find a way of incapacitating her long enough to place the hearts back in the victims, or they could ignore this more moral of approaches, and simply harvest Corpus vis. That being said, what happens if they put the wrong hearts into people? Does this allow a transfer of passions? Does it allow an elderly character to act like a young man again?

How could characters incapacitate the Magpie Queen (let's call her Margaret because we have that name available). I thought that one way of incapacitating it would be to use another weakness of magpies in folklore. They collect shiny objects. Perhaps you could trap it with mirrors, or maybe (like certain types of vampire) she can be incapacitated by being encircled with dozens of tiny objects (in this case bright shiny ones) that she needs to pick up.

The broader point I'm trying to make in this broadcast has very little to do with magpies. It's that medieval people had a way of looking at the world. The world was a story in which messages were being sent to them by the Divine through a process of revealed significatos. A significato is a meaning behind an element of Creation. If you're looking at the world with a similar mindset you can create stories out of the most trivial of occurrences, like being followed around by magpies.

When you're trying to flesh out the stories it's helpful to have things like "Brewer's Phrase and Fable" or the etymologies of names to assist you, but the key point is that mindset. Life is narrative. You are living a story. The author is sending you clues through trivial occurrences. Now I'm not wanting to delve into matters of real-life faith here. What I'm suggesting is that, as a Storyguide, there is an enormous untapped well of available stories in everyday, trivial occurrences.



Clown punching in Mythic Europe

In the weeks leading up to the recording of this episode a plague of scary clowns has appeared in many Western countries. The obvious question for Ars Magica players is : if the same thing happened in Mythic Europe what would people do. Strangely enough we know the answer to this question because in 1221, slightly after the standard beginning period for the game, Frederick the Second (Holy Roman Emperor, King of Sicily, and wonder of the world) passed a law that said that no man could be harmed for beating up a clown.

I'd like to lightly touch upon the point that, like most urban myths and social phobias, the clown plague could be caused by faeries. I don't want to stress this too much because all of the iterations of that are obvious, and I'd like to focus instead on this legal aspect.

Frederick the Second probably wasn't facing a plague of scary clowns. What he was facing was an imminent crusade, and the belief that heresy would cause that crusade to fail. Looking around his kingdom, he decided to hammer down the rights of people who might be displeasing to God. The first people he went after in the Azzizes of Messina were the Jews. He didn't treat them quite so badly as clowns, because he still needed them. He used them in the imperial service, particularly as money lenders. It was he, later in 1231, that passed the law denying Christians right to practice usury, leaving the lending of to Jews. He might have done this for religious reasons, or he might have done it to annoy the great merchant banks of the other Italian city states. His mistreatment of the Jews aside let's move back to the rest of the text of the Azzizes of Messina.

It will seem familiar to those interested in the Norman invasion of England. Essentially when the Normans invaded England they said "We now own it, and things will be done as we say they will be done. If you have traditional laws, that's fun for you, and we'll keep the ones we find useful, but otherwise everything is up to us." Later this watered down into feudalism.





In much the same way when the Normans invaded Sicily the king of Sicily now owned and ran everything. This degenerated into feudalism but Frederick the Second, when he took over, made certain to confiscate every castle, even from his allies. He made the dispensation of justice something done solely by people that he personally appointed. His instruction through the Azzizes was to his sheriffs (as we would call them in English) that they would never charge anyone for robbing or harming a bufoon or jester.

Now he took this step because the easiest way to get a laugh in 1221 Sicily was to make fun of the pretensions of the clergy. There was apparently a great deal of social-class based humor in Thirteenth Century Sicily, very little of which survives. It might not be too much a stretch to suggest that it was similar in tone to the stories first written down, but orally present in the culture previously, in the Decameron in the next century.

So Frederick is thinking about a crusade and he doesn't want people mocking the Church, because he believes it makes God angry, but also because he believes it's harder to get together the political, financial, and volunteer support necessary for the construction of an army, if it's clear that the people who would benefit from it are hypocrites. Clowns and Jews are mistreated. Prostitutes are also mistreated: well they forced to live outside cities and wear distinctive garb. Sadly this appears to be a red hat which means that the messengers of the Order, at some point, will need to punch someone in the face. Moving on: he does allow gambling but there is a specific punishment for gamblers who take the name of God in vain when they lose.

So he it we can see for Frederick there is a taxonomy of impurity of action. Least troublesome are the prostitutes. Next most troublesome are gamblers who take the Lord's name in vain, then the Jws, then clowns. I've often wondered whether Terry Pratchett was aware of this when he wrote about Lord Vetinari's hatred of mimes. So, strange to say, we know how Mythic Europeans would have responded to the clown plague. They would have passed a law saying that you could rob the clowns and no one will care.

We've had covenants get money from all sorts of strange places. We've had covenants where people hunt whales. We've had others where people mine custard from the ground. Some make magical peppercorns and then transport them far away, so that no one knows that they're the ones who made them, throwing the European spice industry into chaos. We have covenants that sell dye extracted from lichens from rocks from the end of the world. Is it possible that a small covenant could make its living bounty hunting clowns? I think it's possible. I think that this might be a variant of the Crime Hook because although it's not illegal it does involve young men strong-arming people and stealing their cash. It's certainly an interesting way for grogs to make extra money and it's particularly safe in Sicily, because there it is illegal to carry weapons.

With the exception of people who work directly for the Holy Roman Emperor, in his role as King of Sicily, no one's allowed to carry swords or other weapons. Such weapons are kept locked in armories, under the guard of the king until such time as required. This includes all of your characters unless they somehow have a warrant from the Emperor. Some listeners might be thinking this wasn't all that unusual: in medieval European cities there was a requirement to tie down weapons, or hand weapons in at the gate. In Sicily the law went further: most medieval European characters

carry a knife as a work tool or eating implement. These were not allowed in Sicily.

This means that when fights break out in Sicily people tend to use improvised weapons. This includes work tools and farm implements. This also means that if your character is a good brawler, his or her skill is of far greater importance in Sicily than in any of the other kingdoms of Mythic Europe, where people wonder about more aggressively quipped. Similarly people don't wear armor in Sicily. If you want around wearing armour the people who have the right to go around in armour will quickly track you down and insist that you stop doing it, after levying a fine.

This means that if your covenant is rolling clowns cash, the clowns could not be armed, or wearing armor. If you roll a clown for cash and he has a sword with him then he goes from just being someone who you can attack with impunity to someone who it is your civic duty to attack: from someone who the courts will not defend, to someone the courts will actively hunt down.

Environmental Determinism and the Order of Hermes

Environmental determinism is an idea with classical roots, but was most popular during the colonial period. It suggests that the social development of a country is determined in whole, or in large part, by the resources that are available to that society. Listeners familiar with 4X computer games are aware of this style of thinking. If your civilization is on the corner of a map, it's easier to defend your expanding border than if your civilization is on the center of a map, so a more aggressive policy is possible. If your civilization has resources which are highly suited to trading with other civilizations, or to diplomacy, or to manufacturing, you may tailor the way your civilization develops to suit these resources.

This is of course a gross oversimplification and it ignores the way that environmental determinism was used by eugenicists and racists during the colonial period. They suggested that rather than societies being formed by the environmental conditions around them, individuals were themselves permanently marked by their environment, and therefore people who were raised in superior environments were innately superior. This may be a view held by some Hermetic magi, because in an early book by Hippocrates.

These views wouldn't be considered particularly unusual in medieval Europe. Aside from all people being the children of God, people of noble birth were already quite certain that their blood was superior to that of other people. Their senses were finer and they enjoyed them more, for example. The Order of Hermes is one of the few democratic institutions in Mythic Europe and it is also in some senses vaguely meritocratic because it gives greater power to those who have magical talent, and magical talent is earned through personal work and study.

If environmental determinism is, in some sense true, the structure of the Order of Hermes tells us about the underlying magical conditions of the Mythic Europe in which it developed. The standard model of Mythic Europe as described in the current game books is this: all things in Europe are permeated by a mystical field. This field is made up of a substance best thought of, metaphorically, as a fluid. This fluid is called vim. Tides of vim sweep through the world permeating all things, with the possible exception of items so strongly tied to other Realms has to be shielded from magic's effects. The relics of saints, for example.

The tides of vim circle around a single point called the Axis Magica. It is a non-descript cave system in what is modern-day Switzerland. Thinking on this again I should of put it on Mount Blanc but I was using that for something else which didn't eventually make it to the books. In the areas where great magic has been done, or magical beasts have lived, the surface of the universe is in some sense corroded or dimpled, so that more vim can rest there. Magi can use this vim, so areas that have had previous magical use are suitable for settlement by magicians, because they allow easy a study of magic.

Within the great tides of vim are eddies and currents caused by areas which are tied to the other Realms, most notably around cities. According to some magi, the attentive presence of God, which they call the Dominion, forces vim out of the area, in the same way that putting a stone pillar into a pond forces the water out of that space. I suggest that this is not the case, that vim is still in the area, it's just not accessible by magicians. I'd argue (although I don't think this argument has been made in the books yet) that it's because all spellcasting is done through the convincing theurgic spirits. Theurgic spirits cannot abide the presence of the Divine, so casting spells is shouting into empty space: there is nothing that answer the magus and obey his instruction.

So that's the fundamental structure of the world and out of these areas of deep saturation of vim, a substance called vis accrues. Vis takes the flavor of the material shape into which is bound, so if vis binds itself into fruit, it is useful in magic that affects plants. You might make the converse argument: that there are some sites which are better for the collection of certain types of vis, and it's at those points that magicians use rituals to harvest vis.

For example in one of my early campaigns, you could put water into cups carved into a specific rock in Cornwall, on a specific night, and it would become vis. The tides of magic create the potential for the condensation of vis, and magi provide the material object for that condensation to occur into.

It has generally been assumed that the vis which congeals in Mythic Europe is spread evenly across the fifteen Hermetic Arts. In some sagas Techniques (the verb Arts) are rarer than the Forms (the noun Arts). If you accept that environmental determinism, with

all its faults and ethical problems is in some sense a workable model, then the Order of Hermes as it appears in 1220 should, in some way, reflect the resources which are available to its population.

Now in several of the other podcasts I've mentioned that Aquam is an underdeveloped Art in the game. This may be because Aquam does not coalesce, or if it does, it is deep under the ocean, or at the bottom of lakes and streams, where no-one harvests it.

A thought was given to me by an idea mentioned by Tim08 on the Atlas Games forum. He was discussing the earlier episode of the podcast about the qualities of water, and he said one of the qualities of water is that it suppresses radiation, and that he didn't think that that was particularly practical in Ars Magica sagas. In a strange way, however, it is, you could argue that water suppresses the field of vim, either because you're using a metaphor of radiation (which some people do, indeed that's where the name "aura" comes from for the local strength of the field) or you can make the argument that, as the Bible says, the spirit of the Lord moves in the waters. It's the spirit of the Lord moving in the waters that prevents vampires from crossing running water and causes witches to be rejected by water in certain parts of European folklore. Similarly if the spirit of the Lord moves in the water, it is possible that the waters have a very mild Divine aura: they might in some sense have the qualities of a particularly dilute relic. This might prevent vis from congealing in its presence.

Thanks again to Tim08 for this particular thought.

If even small amounts of Aquam were available, the handful of magicians who specialize in Aquam would rapidly accelerate their Arts because there is no competition for that vis, in contrast to, say, the competition for Corpus vis. So looking at the Houses: what can this tell us about the underlying structure of the world? Let's work our way through the vis types.

Animal vis must be relatively common. There is a House of Animal magicians, and there are many beastmaster traditions. Animal is one of those interesting cases where magical spirits can become incarnate in the form. There are even some attempts at farming animal vis by raising the animals which act as condensation points.

Aquam was mentioned earlier: many of the objections to it can also apply to Auram. It's clear that if, for example, Auram vis is mostly deposited by lightning strikes on mountains in the middle of great thunderstorms, there are some people who can catch it. Most noticeably the lightning lineage found in the greater Alps tribunal went from nothing, to having a single Archmagus, to being a relatively politically prominent quite quickly because someone had resources available to them that other people did not know how to use. You could argue that it was the mastery of lightning magic which enabled them to access a great deal of vis which had not previously been available to magicians.

Corpus seems common but I think that's because it is often found in fairies. A question occurs: is Corpus common because it is found in fairies, or is it common because fairies know that magi want it? If magi suddenly said "We're not interested in Corpus vis anymore. We've just want vim now" would magicians be finding that instead? Fairies appear to have the ability to congeal vis:

indeed congealing vis is part of whatever pathway they using to anchor themselves in the mundane world. Do they choose the art that magi want them to choose?

Herbam seems terribly common. In part I suspect that's because have been this is easy to imagine. Also wood is basically the plastic of the Middle Ages, so it's fun to play with it let's characters do a lot of really interesting things without seriously altering the combat balance of the group. It is said in the current rule books that Herbam vis rarer now than it once was, due to the destruction of the great forests. In previous editions vis in general was less common because it was being suppressed by the spread of the Dominion. It is not however clearly in the current edition whether if your character knocks down a vis bearing tree and finds a village, they don't instead start getting other types of vis. That is what should be happening if vis is caused by damage or change in the surface nature of reality because by previous magical accidents, which is the standard model for the creation of vis.

Ignem seems to be rare in the sense that naturally occurring fires are very rare and the few that do occur are very difficult for magi to approach and control. Yet one of the main Houses of the Order is dedicated to fire magic, and many of them carry around large chunks of Ignem vis so that if they die in battle, they can take out...well everything in that vicinity. Ignem clearly appears far more often than, say, Aquam. One suggestion is that ancient mystical practices (Vestalism? Mithraism?) allowed humanity to make fire vis far more common than it would otherwise have been.

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Imaginem vis is useful for magi, particularly the houses interested in mortals and faeries. Fairies seem, conversely, to offer a great deal of it to magicians, however difficult it is to think of natural occurrences in the wild.

Imaginem descending into material form would be things like reflections in mirrors and the sounds of songs: things that transient and difficult for magicians to harvest. Yet none the less they do. Does this mean that they're far more common than other Arts? Does it mean, for example, that Imaginem is merely a reflection of other types of vis: a sort of effluent breathed off?

Mentem is the killer of the idea that all forms appear evenly throughout the world. Mentem occurs where things think, which can cause people to fall back to the idea that the elemental forms are balanced, or that Mentem used to be far more common, but now that people are given a Christian burial it's difficult to take vis from their ghosts.

Terram seems pretty common. In part this is because humans delve into the soil. Modern humans, in various forms of folklore, are strongly tied to the element of earth. According to the ancient Greeks we are the people of iron. According to the ancient Hebrews the first human was made of clay. Something similar appears in Egyptian and Roman cosmology. Also gemstones sexually reproduce deep within the earth, and contain vis. So in a sense they are breedable.

Finally we have vim vis. It just sort of turns up as a necessary, poor relation to the obvious types. It's useful for Aegis of the Hearth, so everyone wants it and it's also good for making magic items, so you can often trade it with someone, but it's not particularly exciting. Sometimes it is found in magical creatures but most instead have vis which is strongly

associated with their most potent magical power.

So let's quickly summarise. The Order has twelve Houses and the Houses have various specialisations. Discounting the specialisations that are verbs, that leaves us with various Houses interested in the ten Forms.

There is almost universal interest in the Corpus Form

Strong interest in Animal, Herbam, Ignem and Terram,

Specialized interest in Imagem and Mentem and Vim

Some, rare interest in Aquam and Auram.

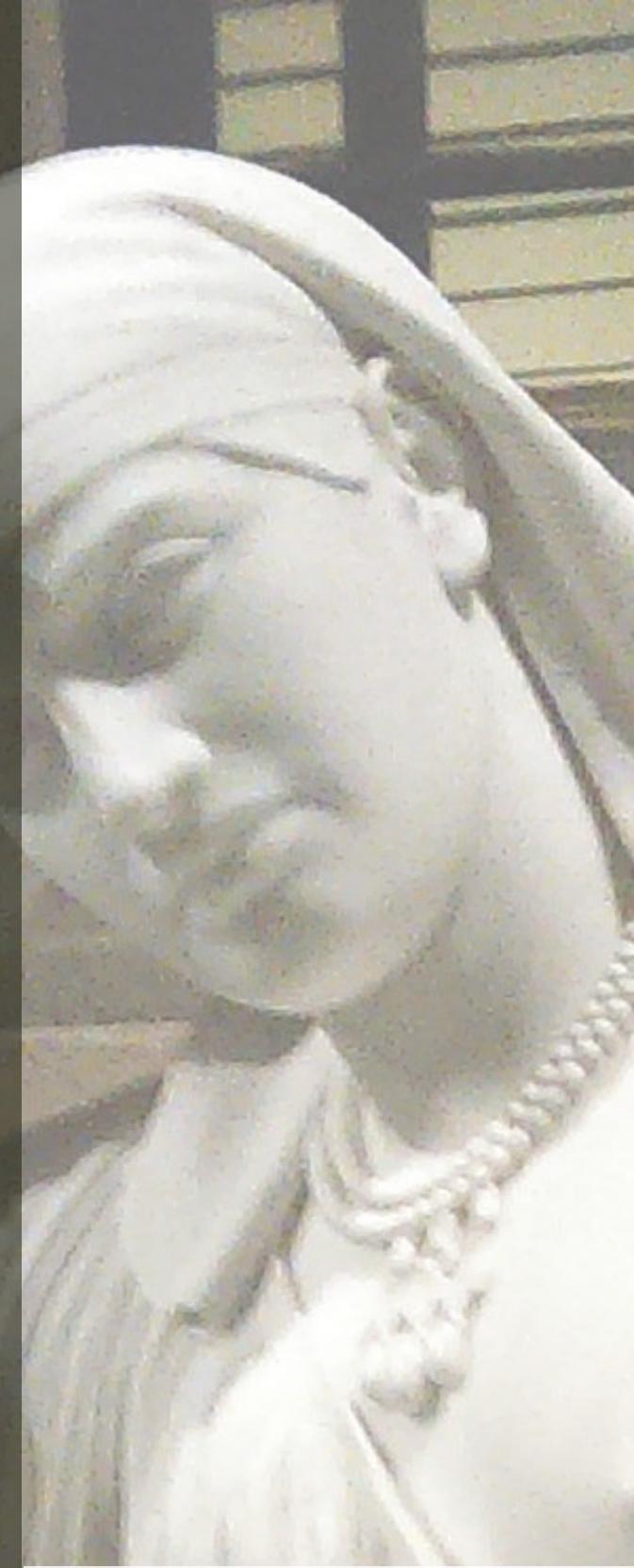
It can be argued that if the resources available to the Order of Hermes determine the shape of the Order of Hermes, then the shape of the Order of Hermes indicates that the resources available have moulded, and are reflected by, this order of interest.

In the dying days of her reign, Cleopatra VII Philopator made preparations to survive the Roman invasion. In our world, these came to nothing: Cleopatra entombed herself alive, and took poison in wine, by smuggling an asp in a basket of figs, or by biting her arm and smearing a fatal unguent over the wound. This was not, however, Cleopatra's main scheme. This wasn't even her initial fallback plan. In Mythic Europe, even a thousand years later, the traces of her actions are seeds for stories.

Cleopatra was a priestess of Isis, a goddess able, so stories say, of bringing people back from the dead. She was given time to prepare the corpse of her lover, Marc Antony, and her own corpse was treated with respect by Octavian, so it's possible that either one or the both of these figures has, or will, re-emerge from the Magic Realms as incarnate spirits. In Lands of the Nile we called these creatures Akhu, and mentioned the chance that they are the youngest creatures of this type, and Antony, uniquely, is culturally Roman, which may assist an Order descended from a Latin priesthood.

Cleopatra was, according to non-Roman sources, a clever sorceress, who commanded the greatest storehouse of treasure in the world. She had the largest library of books, the greatest concentration of engineers, and a stockpile of magic items. How might she have survived, and what might that mean?

The Roman authors, least controversially, have Cleopatra attempt to flee Egypt. She has some of her fleet dragged to the Red Sea, intending to take treasure and soldiers, then carve out a kingdom in India. Her neighbors, the Nabateans, assiduously burned every ship as it arrived. Or so they said. Similarly, after the fall of his mother's kingdom, her son Ceasarion fled the country by heading to Berenice, a Red Sea port, intending to take ship for India. His tutor instead tricked him into returning to Alexandria, and capture by Octavian. Either of these attempts could actually have succeeded. The Nabateans were a mercantile people with no love for Rome: a large enough bribe and they might have allowed some ships through. Octavian had never seen Cleopatra or



Ptolemaic survival



Caesarion. How difficult would it have been to send a substitute to die in place of the sovereigns?

If Cleopatra got away by sea, she could have gone virtually anywhere. Her people had already traveled as far as India as traders. An island kingdom of Helleno-Egyptian sorcerers is possible. She might also have traveled down the Nile, the embodiment of her goddess, and entered Warangia, the mysterious kingdom from which slaves and gold come to the coast.

After the loss of the Red Sea fleet, the Romans were concerned she might head for Spain. It had been a fractious province for some time. She might have continued West, to the Canary Islands, or to Antillia, there to found a kingdom that has avoided Europeans, until now. At least, they have publicly avoided Europeans: they may have had spies throughout Africa, some human, but perhaps some spirits or faeries, like the headless priests of Isis from Philae.

In Cleopatra's story, the two greatest libraries in the world are destroyed. The Great Library of Alexandria burns, and Marc Antony then replenishes it, by giving the contents of the Library of Pergamum to Cleopatra as a gift. These then disappear from history.

Magi have looked for them (of course they have) but they have had an amazing lack of success. As a plot hook, many games have had a Verditus make a submersible and attempt to recover inscriptions on the stones said to have slid into the bay. Perhaps the lack of success is a sign that the best of the items were hidden, then secreted out of the country? Cleopatra commanded her city not to rise against the Romans, so her networks survived the invasion intact. The Alexandrian resistance could have worked for years to save her kingdom's treasures, then impersonate merchants or caravans of slaves, and flee to a new home, distant from the Empire.

As a lover of the Foundation novels and a librarian, the idea that there may be a surviving Great Library sending agents into the world is appealing.

There are a few missing Ptolemies in history, who could be the ancestors of this civilisation's leaders. Cleopatra had four children. Caesarion, son of Julius, likely died at the hands of his adoptive brother, but may have escaped. Cleopatra had fraternal twins with Marc Antony called Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene, then another son, Ptolemy Philadelphus.

The younger Cleopatra was taken to Rome and raised by Octavia, sister of Octavian, until she was married to Juba II. He was also educated in Rome, as a client-king for the Numidians. Their court had a great library, Isis worship and a group of mystical scholars about it. It's one obvious birthplace for a cult of Egyptian-inspired Roman magicians.

After she poisoned herself, Octavian called in the Psylli to try and save Cleopatra. They were a Berber tribe that were immune to snakebite, and could draw the poison out of bites and restore the dead to life. They used serpents in paternity tests: deliberately ensuring their babies were bitten by snakes. There's no known link between the Queen of Numidians, the Psylli, and the Massylli priestess who sent Trianoma to Bonisagus, but there's a hook there to conjure stories with.

The younger boys simply vanish from history. One writer records they were spared by Augustus as a wedding gift to their sister, but that seems oddly sentimental, and vaguely bizarre. Either or both might have vanished away to another civilization, to continue the line of Alexander.

Lands of the Nile has a great deal of information about ancient Egyptian mystical practices and military equipment. The use of a pocket civilization allows these to be used not only by the returning dead, but by a mortal culture. This helps sagas with alternative themeing to stories like the Mongol invasion, the Quest for Prester John, the discovery of the Americas, the addition of a new House to the Order, or the development of a magical homeland.



Very early in the history of Ars Magica, it was established that many of the cursed items which characters might find were produced by a single magician, called Himnis the Mad. Later he is used as the founder of cofraternity of Verditus magi, who for some reason use the limited time of their life to create magic items that harm their users.

Why cursed items exist at all is unclear. In Dungeons and Dragons cursed items are a sort of mini game, in which you ensure that treasure is not poisoned or trapped. In Ars Magica, traps and poisons work far more directly and the philosophy of the game concerning mind control is far different. If you attempted to pull the idea from early Dungeons and Dragons, that cursed items force their owner to use them, even though it reduces the character's favoured ability, then that would be seen as particularly bad story design. Generally if troop has accepted the character, the Storyguide shouldn't go out of their way to wreck that character's main abilities: and yet we have cursed items.

Before the Order of Hermes supplement there was some question as to how large the Order was. It set the size of the Order as about 1000 people. Before that, when the Order might conceivably have been as small as just the characters and their ancestors, a single magician creating cursed items due to mental illness made sense. When the Order became far larger, and your character could have adventures anywhere in Europe, it became troublingly difficult to explain how they kept running into material created by a single person.

The size of the Order has in some sagas, at least, been radically increased to include sufficient members for all of the various cults which characters might wish to join. It's difficult to see how a single magician, or even a lineage of magicians, spend so much time creating cursed items. There is a way around the shortage for groups who think it necessary to have cursed items. I call it Curdled Magic.

I first thought about curdling magic while listening to an episode about Daedulus by the Myths and Legends Podcast. It occured to me that no matter what he made, he was eventually harmed by his creations. If you had his flaw, you can build a labyrinth and you'd then be locked into it. You can build mystical wings, but they'll kill your son. Other

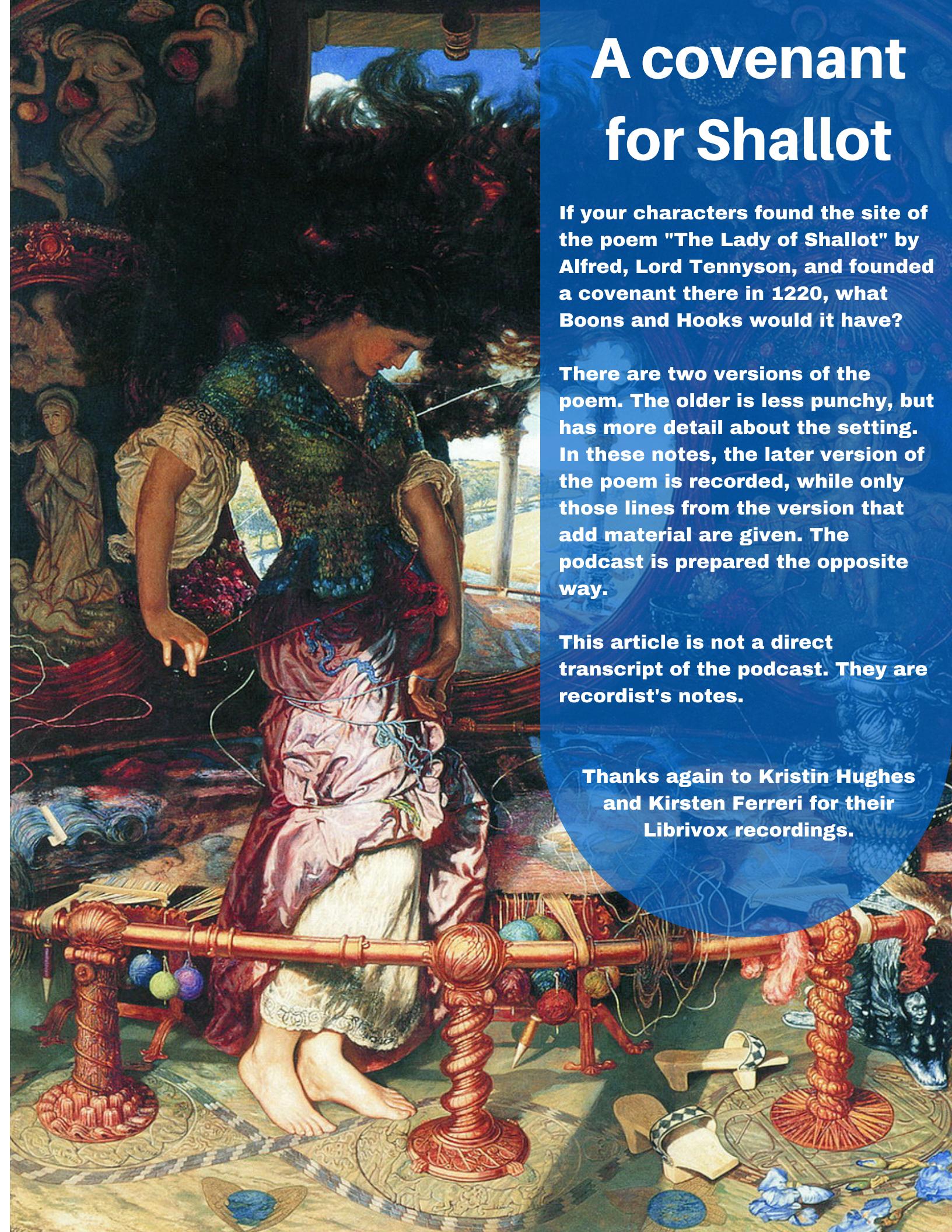
inventions had similar problems. Listening to the story of Daedulus I thought "Aha! This is how Himnis gets his problems. He is clearly a descendant."

Then I thought that the problem with this is that it's not playable. No player would deliberately volunteer to play a magus who spends all of his time creating machines that eventually kill him and destroy his family members. How could this be modified? Can you get the player to volunteer for their characters to spontaneously create cursed items? There are two great points of unexpected failure with magic items.

The first is in the Extraordinary Results for experimentation chart. Those of you using ArM 5, it's on page 199. What I'd suggest is an extra entry into the extraordinary results chart, such that the item becomes cursed: harming the user, although not necessarily the magus making the item. I accept that there is some overlap between the Side Effect result in the Curdling result, however I believe that can be overlooked. Side effects seem different in theme to having an item which is cursed.

I use the term "curdled" to suggest that the magic has gone awry, rather than that it's been deliberately designed to cause harm, like, for example, an item corrupted with infernal powers. There used to be a Flaw in early versions of Ars Magica (and I'm having difficulty recalling its name) that meant that the characters magical ability was linked to their life. When they died, all of the magical items that they had create, and all of the spells which they had cast, suddenly ceased to work. I presume this was removed from later editions because a flaw which is not a flaw. It was an easy point for characters who didn't wish to leave that sort of mystical legacy. You could design a flaw that did something similar, so that at death, the magic items created by character curdled. To be a playable flaw it needs meaningful impact on the plot. It could be known to be heritable, and the character is they have it, so it becomes the Dark Secret Flaw.

The generation of cursed items as a side effect of experimentation, or from a Flaw selected at character creation, adjusts the likelihood of curdling in a particular saga. A troupe can emphasize, or de-emphasize, the availability of cursed items to suit their story style.



A covenant for Shallot

If your characters found the site of the poem "The Lady of Shallot" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and founded a covenant there in 1220, what Boons and Hooks would it have?

There are two versions of the poem. The older is less punchy, but has more detail about the setting. In these notes, the later version of the poem is recorded, while only those lines from the version that add material are given. The podcast is prepared the opposite way.

This article is not a direct transcript of the podcast. They are recordist's notes.

Thanks again to Kristin Hughes and Kirsten Ferreri for their Libriovox recordings.

PART I

On either side the **river** lie
Long fields of **barley** and of **rye**,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the **road** runs by
To many-tower'd **Camelot**;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle **imbowers**
The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow-veil'd,
Slide the **heavy barges** trail'd
By slow horses; and **unhail'd**
The **shallop** flitteth silken-sail'd
Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers "**Tis the fairy**
Lady of Shalott.."

- **River (Hook).**
- **Agricultural wealth, likely in a colder area or poor soils.**
- **Shallot is said to be in Guilford or Ceasaromagus. If in England, Centralised Kingdom Hook may be appropriate.**
- **Used to brew beer, make whiskey, feed livestock (therefor leatherwork, parchment-making.).**
- **Road (Hook, if castle not completely cut off).**
- **Camelot: ruins close?**
- **Flowers as vis sources. Thematic link to love, regard, illusions.**
- **Island is a Fortifications Free Choice.**

- **Castle Hook**
- **Towers likely square or rectangular, as circular towers are novel in the C13th.**
- **Curtain Walls and Mural Towers Boon if the towers form a ring of defended space.**
- **Grey is an odd colour for a castle: most are whitewashed.**
- **A bower is a place where a woman lives confined.**
- **Toll on the canal road? Secondary Income Boon?**
- **The space of flowers takes the place of the utilitarian buildings of the castle?**
- **Is the "space of flowers" outside the castle, so that it is essentially one big building, a dojon, like the White Tower in the Tower of London? If so, it has the Keep, but not the Curtain Walls and Mural Towers Boon. Could Guilford Castle be a model / floorplan?**
- **Covenfolk may have useful skills based on sailing, fishing, carting, brewing and farming. A shallop is a small boat.**

- **Is she a faerie?**
- **Is there a Faerie Aura here?**
- **Has she been replaced by a faerie?**
- **If the faerie sings when people die, it's a banshee, and so either a Death prophecy or Death Visitor.**
- **If she is using the tapestry as an External Vis Source, she might be a covenant inhabitant.**
- **No staff: only reapers hear her.**

- **What is the nature of the curse? Who whispers?**
- **If the PCs continue this, by having other people weave, then that's an Evil Custom Hook.**
- **Is it just Camelot, or is it stopping weaving?**
- **Could you just put a shutter over that window?**

- **The podcast covers the Allegory of the Cave at this point, and notes its role in earlier editions of House Criamon. This suggests that a Criamon clutch might wish to inhabit Shallot.**
- **Red is a rare, expensive colour in period. How do market girls have access to it? Valuable resource? The pages in "crimson" are not wearing red, they are wearing cloth of highest quality., suited to being dyed with the expensive, crimson colour.**

- **The mirror and tapestry are magic items.**
- **The crack may need to be repaired by a skilled Verditus or faerie smith.**
- **"half-sick" is a littoral emotional state, which makes her vulnerable to faerie influences.**

PART II

There she **weaves by night and day**

A **magic web** with colours gay.

She has heard a **whisper** say,

A **curse** is on her if she stay

To look down to Camelot.

She knows not what the curse may be,

And so she weaveth steadily,

And little other care hath she,

The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.

There she sees the highway near

Winding down to Camelot:

There the river eddy whirls,

And there the surly village-churls,

And the **red** cloaks of market girls,

Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,

An abbot on an ambling pad,

Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,

Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,

Goes by to tower'd Camelot;

And sometimes thro' the mirror blue

The knights come riding two and two:

She hath no loyal knight and true,

The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,

For often thro' the silent nights

A funeral, with plumes and lights,

And music, went to Camelot:

Or when the moon was overhead,

Came two young lovers lately wed;

'I am half sick of shadows,' said

The Lady of Shalott.

- Is Lancelot a faerie?
- A bowshot is not very far.
- Why is his armour coppered?
- Why is he so flashy and noisy?
- His shield probably refers to the hero of "The Faerie Queene" by Spencer.
- "Remote" seems a stretch.

PART III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the **brazen** greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On **burnish'd** hooves his war-horse trod;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirrorcrystal mirror,
'Tirra lirra,' by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
'The curse is come upon me!' cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Did I mention not liking Lancelot?

If they get a lot of meteors here, a covenant may wish to seek the Astrological Mysteries.

- The tapestry is not, you'll note, in the boat, although it generally is, as a shroud, when the subject is painted.
- That the Lady knows immediately the nature of the curse, when it strikes her, argues that it is a faerie story element. You don't know how dragon fire works when it breathes on you, just that it is painful: the Magic Realm does not explain itself in this way.
- If she's a faerie, her role has changed at this point.
- Her mirror is really good by medieval standards of manufacture. Glass mirrors with silver backing are not known in period.

- Who has been polishing his horse's feet?
- He's riding his warhorse: that's bad for it.
- The song is a quote from Shakespeare.
- Note she falls for the reflection of the reflection of Lancelot. That seems good for an *Imaginem vis* source.

PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,

Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;

Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse—

Like some bold seer in a trance,

Seeing all his own mischance—

With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.

And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;

The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—

Thro' the noises of the night

She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,

They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,

Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,

Turn'd to tower'd Camelot;
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,

Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,

Silent into Camelot.

Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

Story
dependent
weather.
Faerie
Aura?

Suicide
reference?

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,

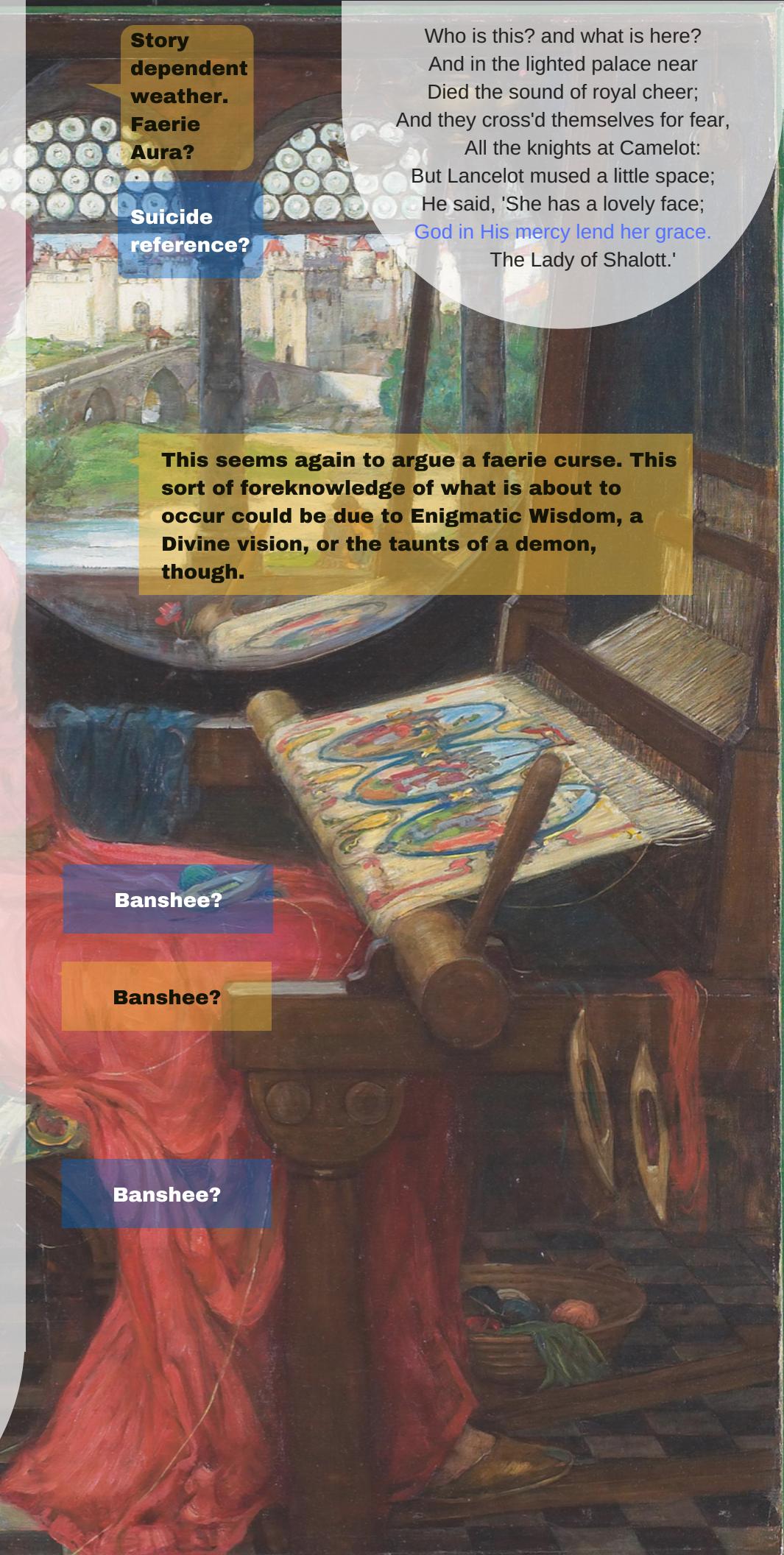
All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, 'She has a lovely face;
God in His mercy lend her grace.
The Lady of Shalott.'

This seems again to argue a faerie curse. This sort of foreknowledge of what is about to occur could be due to Enigmatic Wisdom, a Divine vision, or the taunts of a demon, though.

Banshee?

Banshee?

Banshee?





Extra lines from the 1939 edition

Vis sources. Rego? Herbam? Imagem?

If this is a Briar Rose style of fence and bramble, a supernatural barrier, it explains why the castle is not taken from the lady, despite her lack of guards. Removes the Road Hook, arguably is a physical manifestation of a Regio boundary (Boon).

In addition to its material value, this might act as a key to the Regio boundary.

- Literally a suicide note in earlier versions.
- May carry a curse. May persist into 1220.
- Appears to damage Camelot.

Dying swans might be a Perdo or Imaginem vis source.

The yellowleavèd waterlily,
The greensheathèd daffodilly,
Trembled in the water chilly,
Round about Shalott

...
The little isle is all inrailed
With a rose-fence, and overtrailed
With roses: by the marge unhailed
The shallop flitteth silen-sailed
Skimming down to Camelot:
A pearlgarland winds her head;
She leaneth on a velvet bed,
Fully royally apparelèd,
The Lady of Shalott.

...
A cloudwhite crown of pearl she dight
All raimented in snowy white
That loosely flew, (her zone in sight,
Clasped with one blinding diamond bright,)
Her wide eyes fixed on Camelot
Thought the squally eastwind keenly
Blew, with folded arms serenely
By the water stood the queenly
Lady of Shalott.

...
As when to sailors while they roam,
By creeks and outfalls far from home,
Rising and dropping with the foam,
From dying swans wild warblings come,
Blown shoreward; so to Camelot
Still as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her chanting her deathsong
The Lady of Shalott.

...
They crossed themselves, their stars they blest,
Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire and guest,
There lay a parchment on her breast,
That puzzled more than all the rest,
The wellfed wits at Camelot.
"The web was woven curiously,
The charm is broken utterly,
Draw near and fear not -- this is I,
The Lady of Shalott."

During one of the podcasts I mentioned a demon with the form of an ambulatory phallus. He was written for *Antagonists* and is based on a character from Spencer's *Faerie Queen*. He failed to make the line style and good taste level, so he'd never make it into an Ars book. Sometimes the ideas just aren't winners.

Orgoglio, is a demon so swollen with Pride that his name means "Pride" in Italian. His usual strategy is to take possession of convincing orators and use their pride to lead people into sin. Abaissier has taken these people as his cult leaders, and Orgoglio resents this sudden lack of victims. His physical form is large and powerful, and he vents his frustration by attacking those he might otherwise possess. He may do this in his material form, or by possessing scholars disputing with flagellant leaders.

Order: Vessel of Iniquity

Infernal Might: 15 {Corpus}

Characteristics: Int 0, Per 0, Pre +3, Com 0, Str +2, Sta +4, Dex +0, Qik +0

Size: +2

Virtues and Flaws: Berserk, Tough

Confidence Score: 1 (3)

Personality Traits: Depraved +6, Hateful +6, Angry +4

Reputations: Embodies Pride 1 (Infernal), Vessel of Iniquity 1 (Infernal)

Combat:

Mace : Init +1, Attack +3*, Defense +0, Damage +10**

* +2 when berserk

** +5 if he has time to recover his magical mace.

Soak: +7 or +9 when berserk

Fatigue Levels: OK, 0, -1, -3, -5, Unconscious [Give the penalties for every fatigue level the character has. There may be more to add in.]

Wound Penalties: -1 (1-7), -3 (8-14), -5 (15-21), Incapacitated (22-28), Dead (29+) [

Abilities: Awareness 4 (rivals), Guile 6 (dance), Single Weapon 7 (feet), Theology 6 (heresy).

Powers:

Envisioning, 1 or 5 points, Init 0, Mentem: For 1 point, allows the demon to enter and twist dreams. For 5 points, allows the demon to create a waking hallucination. If used to terrify, the victim can ignore it with a Brave Personality trait roll against an Ease factor of 9 or more. Failure to resist leads to a profound physical reaction, like a seizure.

Form of Wickedness, 2 points, Init 0, Mentem: Allows the demon to manufacture a solid form of pure sin. It forces those around the demon to begin carousing if they lack sufficient Magic Resistance. A Stamina stress roll against an Ease factor of 6 is needed every hour, failure costing a Fatigue level, and a success breaking this Power's hold. The Power also ends when the victim falls unconscious. A botch causes temporary insanity and imposes a Minor Personality Flaw appropriate to the sin. This form may only be maintained for one round, after which the demon must take spiritual or human form.

Form of The Proud Man, 0 points, Init 0, Corpus: After assuming corporeal form, see Form of Wickedness, earlier, the demon can take solid form. See Appearance for details.

Possession, variable points, Init +2, Mentem: The demon stores some of its Might in a temporary pool in a victim, after overcoming Magic Resistance. When this pool is spent, the possession ends. The two pieces of the demon can only communicate if in sight of each other. The demon controls the actions of the host, but must spend Might to have the victim perform tasks they consider abhorrent. This requires the demon to make a roll of stress die + spent Might points against the victim's Personality trait roll.. It also costs 1 might to use a Supernatural ability, or the same number of Might points a possessed supernatural creature spends to use one of its powers. Orgoglio may possess multiple people simultaneously.

Contagious Obsession, 1 point per victim, Init 0, Mentem: When a person is committing a sinful thought or deed, the demon may impose its Obsession Trait if this Power defeats magic resistance. This gives the person a temporary Personality trait of Proud and at the next opportunity he must make a roll, opposed by any suitable Personality trait, to prevent attempting to crush others with his words. If the Obsession fails, the temporary trait is lost. If it succeeds, the trait is acquired permanently. Any human who becomes a victim of this demon's Obsession power becomes a carrier of that Power and can pass it on to anyone he abuses, using the same series of rolls. Every added victim costs the demon 1 Might point, and the Power ceases to be contagious if either she runs out of Might or a day passes without someone being infected. Once the power ceases being contagious, it continues to affect the afflicted as described earlier.

Weakness: Protected group (celibates)

Vis: 3 pawns of Perdo, body

Appearance: The natural appearance of this demon is sin made manifest as a formless dark shape. He can, however, take a solid form. Orgoglio appears as a vaguely humanoid, ten foot tall, ambulatory phallus. He has small arms and legs and, if given time to retrieve it, fights using a mace made from an oak that grew in the centre of the Earth.



Robinsonades

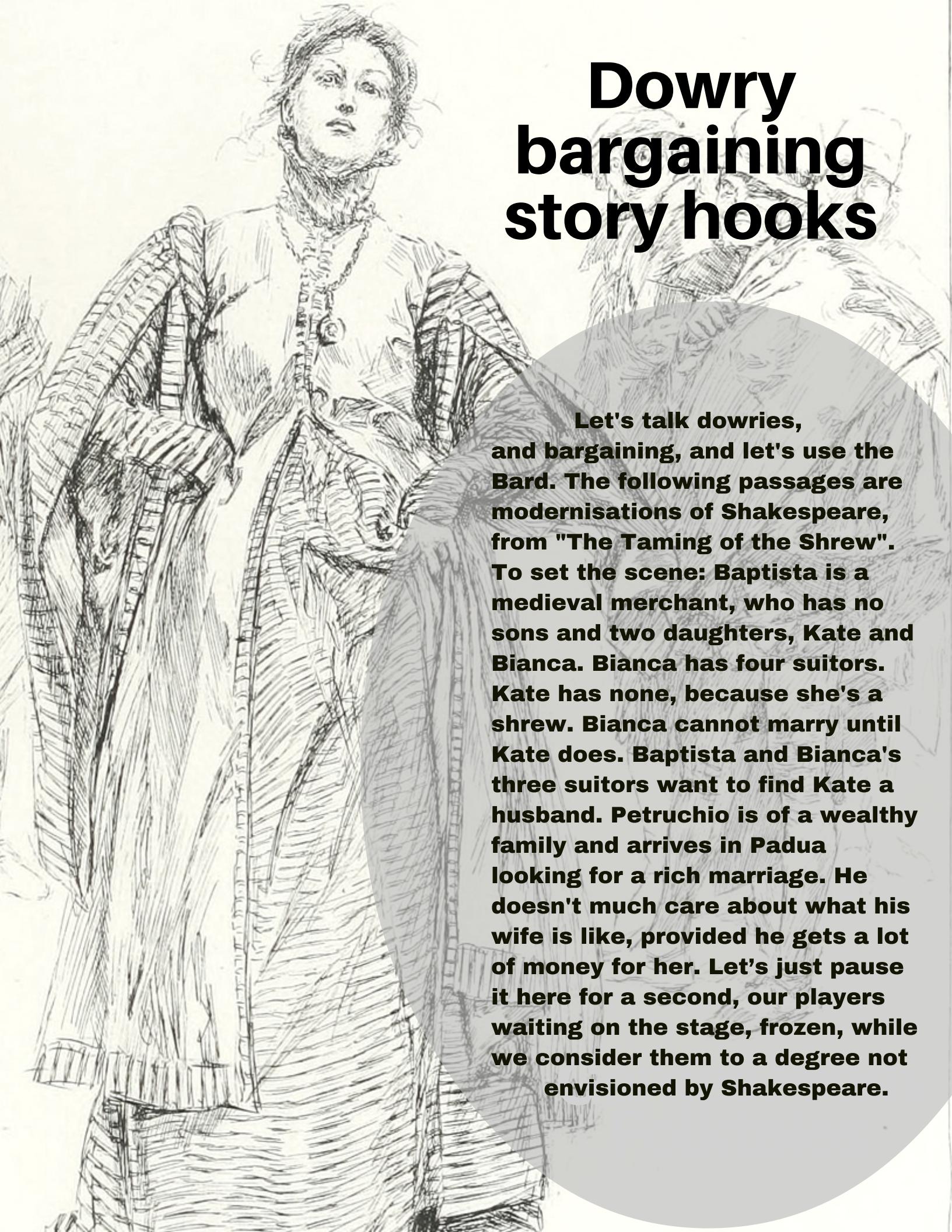
A Robinsonade is a type of story that takes its name from Robinson Crusoe. In the structure of the story a person from a technologically superior area is stranded in an area where they have limited societal support. Robinsonades are interesting as ways of starting Ars Magica sagas, because they force characters to use the spontaneous magic system for something other than combat.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is kind of terrible in terms of its social implications. As a person who works with special needs children I find particularly unpleasant his idea that people who don't have their health are incapable of artistic appreciation or spiritual development, but it does lead us think through some of the basic things characters would need if they suddenly found themselves stranded on an island. What resources can they use their abilities to acquire? How can they then use their skills and magic to meet their requirements for food, water, shelter, communication with the outside world, attempting to leave, and studying their magic Arts? If they do an excellent job of survival the temptation is to place something valuable on the island, so that it becomes the site of the players' covenant. If you think through Shakespeare's "The Tempest" it's a Robinsonade.

Robinsonades make it interesting origin stories for covenants. They, like the covenant design negotiation process, force the characters to prioritise. Players cannot just choose to have one of everything. They need to take their limited resources and expend them, and by expending them, indicate what their characters consider to be the most important priorities.

Imagine a group player characters shipwrecked. They may have the leftover pieces of the ship, the remnants of the cargo, and some of the crew. They need to choose which of these things to rescue/ Is it more important to rescue every last crew member, or to rescue the rations? Is it more important to rescue every last crew member or rescue building materials? From then on I have a series of forced decisions, and they can mitigate the effects of some of those decisions through clever use of spontaneous magic.

In Robinsonades nature is not, generally speaking, bountiful because by having scarce resources characters are forced to act, and that action is the plot of the story. A rich island would transform the characters into lotus eaters who just sit around enjoying themselves, which is fine for a sandbox game. Difficult choices - creative constraints - force players to deepen their characters. Sometimes allowing the players limitless choice freezes character development - freeze in a narrative sense not in an experience gathering sense - because the story just becomes a pastoral where everyone is happy and bucolic. So, consider a Robinsonade for your next saga.



Dowry bargaining story hooks

Let's talk dowries, and bargaining, and let's use the Bard. The following passages are modernisations of Shakespeare, from "The Taming of the Shrew". To set the scene: Baptista is a medieval merchant, who has no sons and two daughters, Kate and Bianca. Bianca has four suitors. Kate has none, because she's a shrew. Bianca cannot marry until Kate does. Baptista and Bianca's three suitors want to find Kate a husband. Petruchio is of a wealthy family and arrives in Padua looking for a rich marriage. He doesn't much care about what his wife is like, provided he gets a lot of money for her. Let's just pause it here for a second, our players waiting on the stage, frozen, while we consider them to a degree not envisioned by Shakespeare.

Baptista has no heir.

Technically, in period this is not correct, there are ways for a merchant family to continue its business in the female line, but even then, the guy has a problem with regard to posterity. Neither daughter is married. So, no grand-children. So, no heir. Oddly, he doesn't seem to have the sorts of hanger-on nephews that people in his situation seemed to attract. He wants to get a daughter married off quickly, and won't marry off the young one before the older one.

The problem is Kate, the elder daughter, who, to use the musical again, hates men. Actually, she hates having to be a wife to them, because its so bloody ghastly, but in her explanation you kind of wonder if she's not laying it on a bit thick, because she talks about the labour of cleaning up after them, and the first thing you ask is "Does she plan to marry a man too poor to have servants?" Obviously she has no intention of it: be damned to love in a cottage, to quote Diana Maturin. She wants her own time, her own space, her own money. And until she marries, its an embarrassment for her younger sister to marry. So, that's the setup: rich guy...daughters...suitors for the youngest.

Petruchio talks to one of Bianca's suitors, and the suitor jests that he might marry Kate. Petruchio hears she's lovely and rich but shrewish, and says "I've braved thunder and canon fire...why not, mate?" The joking guy goes "Are you, like, serious dude?" and Petruchio is all like "Yes, dude. If the bag's full of gold, who cares if it's a bit old?"

and so the suitor introduces him to all of the other suitors, who shout him drinks, and the suitors agree to all be cool with each other, and hang. Rivals in love, but the best of mates. See, that's an adventuring party, right there. Really, it is that teenage boyish, even though one of the suitors is old enough to be Bianca's father.

Now, why, exactly, Kate doesn't just step out of line and join an Italian nunnery is an interesting question. Some Italian nunneries were quite liberal, even by modern standards. Let that go: it seems to be that Baptista genuinely loves his daughters and wants them to be happy. This was less rare than some commentators seem to think.

PETRUCHIO Signior Baptista, my business asketh haste, And every day I cannot come to woo. You knew my father well, and in him me, Left solely heir to all his lands and goods, Which I have better'd rather than decreased: Then tell me, if I get your daughter's love, What dowry shall I have with her to wife?

BAPTISTA After my death the one half of my lands, And in possession twenty thousand crowns.

PETRUCHIO And, for that dowry, I'll assure her of Her widowhood, be it that she survive me, In all my lands and leases whatsoever: Let specialties be therefore drawn between us, That covenants may be kept on either hand.

BAPTISTA Ay, when the special thing is well obtain'd, That is, her love; for that is all in all.

So, the deal is done. Let's look at the deal:

Baptista offers half his stuff once he's dead. Well, he has two daughters. That's no big deal. He has offered not to give all his stuff to Bianca's kids if she has sons and Kate daughters, but that's about it. As the spice for the deal, he offers a whole heap of cash: 20 000 crowns.

How much is 20 000 crowns? A crown's five shillings. A crown is a quarter of a pound. That's 5 000 pounds. Now, in Shakespeare's time that's silver not gold, but still, that's about 500 actual pounds of gold in money right there. So why is he willing to drop that down as his opening offer? "Here – have a roomful of gold."

Well, first he is very rich. Very, very, very rich. He wants Petruchio to know he's very, very rich. He wants –everyone- to know, he's very, very rich.

Baptista, you see, isn't making one deal, he's making two. He's looking at the Bianca deal.

His problem isn't his youngest daughter: she is lovely, and loved by many, and would love many if she could. Kate's dad, who knows that time is not on his side, because, among other things, the younger daughter may go boy crazy and get pregnant before things are formalised legally with a husband, decides to go for Petruchio's offer, because it clears the way for the second deal.

Cole Porter gives Bianca "Any Tom, Harry or Dick!" as her signature tune, and it's clever,

but when in the final lines she repeatedly says she'll take any...well, any not Tom or Harry, you can see he's doing the thing he does where he pushes the sex angle as hard as he thinks he can get away with.

Baptista is, however a bit of a softie: he says that Kate needs to consent. Now, legally this is true, but what he means is that he won't threaten her until she consents. He doesn't do this with Bianca.

PETRUCHIO And therefore, setting all this chat aside, Thus in plain terms: your father hath consented That you shall be my wife; your dowry 'greed on; And, Will you, nill you, I will marry you.

Now, this is just wrong in canon law. Kate must give free consent – practicalities often intrude.

PETRUCHIO Give me thy hand, Kate: I will unto Venice, To buy apparel 'gainst the wedding-day. Provide the feast, father, and bid the guests; I will be sure my Katharina shall be fine.

Note that Baptista provides the wedding feast.

So, let's look at the second deal. Baptista gets the two suitors, Gremio and Tranio (who is pretending to be a nobleman named Lucentio, who was his foster brother) and he auctions Bianca's future on her behalf.

BAPTISTA Content you, gentlemen: I will compound this strife: 'Tis deeds must win the prize; and he of both That can assure my daughter greatest dower Shall have my Bianca's love. Say, Signior Gremio, What can you assure her?

GREMIO First, as you know, my house within the city Is richly furnished with plate and gold; Basins and ewers to lave her dainty hands; My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry; In ivory coffers I have stuff'd my crowns; In cypress chests my arras counterpoints, Costly apparel, tents, and canopies, Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl, Valance of Venice gold in needlework, Pewter and brass and all things that belong To house or housekeeping: then, at my farm I have a hundred milch-kine to the pail, Sixscore fat oxen standing in my stalls, And all things answerable to this portion. Myself am struck in years, I must confess; And if I die to-morrow, this is hers, If whilst I live she will be only mine.

TRANIO That 'only' came well in. Sir, list to me: I am my father's heir and only son: If I may have your daughter to my wife, I'll leave her houses three or four as good, Within rich Pisa walls, as any one Old Signior Gremio has in Padua; Besides two thousand ducats by the year Of fruitful land, all which shall be her jointure. What, have I pinch'd you, Signior Gremio?

GREMIO Two thousand ducats by the year of land! My land amounts not to so much in all: That she shall have; besides an argosy That now is lying in Marseilles' road. What, have I choked you with an argosy?

TRANIO Gremio, 'tis known my father hath no less Than three great argosies; besides two galliases, And twelve tight galleys: these I will assure her, And twice as much, whate'er thou offer'st next.

GREMIO Nay, I have offer'd all, I have no more; And she can have no more than all I have: If you like me, she shall have me and mine.

TRANIO Why, then the maid is mine from all the world, By your firm promise: Gremio is out-vied.

BAPTISTA I must confess your offer is the best; And, let your father make her the assurance, She is your own; else, you must pardon me, if you should die before him, where's her dower?

TRANIO That's but a cavil: he is old, I young.

GREMIO And may not young men die, as well as old?

BAPTISTA Well, gentlemen, I am thus resolved: on Sunday next you know My daughter Katharina is to be married: Now, on the Sunday following, shall Bianca Be bride to you, if you this assurance; If not, Signior Gremio: And so, I take my leave, and thank you both.

GREMIO Adieu, good neighbour. (Exit)

BAPTISTA Now I fear thee not: Sirrah young gamester, your father were a fool To give thee all, and in his waning age Set foot under thy table: tut, a toy! An old Italian fox is not so kind, my boy. Exit

TRANIO A vengeance on your crafty wither'd hide! Yet I have faced it with a card of ten. 'Tis in my head to do my master good: I see no reason but supposed Lucentio Must get a father, call'd 'supposed Vincentio;' And that's a wonder: fathers commonly Do get their children; but in this case of wooing, A child shall get a sire, if I fail not of my cunning. ...

Now, we see here that Baptista is a smooth operator. He has strung up Tranio-as-Lucentio like a goose. Tranio has bid things he, personally, does not have, and because he has gone too far ("My dad has seventeen ships!") Baptista has caught him and said "If you can get your Dad here, and offering all of that, in a

fortnight, then you've got her. Otherwise, she goes to my dear old friend and neighbour here. Yes, she goes to my dear old neighbour who, because he was bidding against you, has just promised my daughter all of his stuff, to the absolute exclusion of the rest of his blood kin. And he's old, and if he dies and she's a widow, then she comes back under my care. Either they have kids and they get his stuff, or I do, and then Kate and her kids get it."

He even -tells- Tranio that he's an idiot. He implies "This is how we roll in Padua: you take my stuff from my cold, dead fingers."

So, Baptista offers no dowry to anyone. He never even promises them the other half of his lands after he dies: he might give it to the Church, or to Kate's kids, or to his mistress or new wife or something. He knows Tranio is a dummy bidder, and uses him to gouge Gremio. Gremio, fortunately, doesn't care - he knows what he wants, and he's willing to go all in to get it, and if he can't have Bianca, then he's going to make sure she gets as much of the other guy's stuff as he can. Bianca does get a dowry of some kind, Petruchio tells her eventual husband's father than she is "well dowered", but that's at Baptista's whim. It's not part of the deal.

Baptista doesn't go for this "and only if she loves you" business, that he pulled with Kate. She's trouble and he needs to sort her out, and he's a bit inclined to the view that she mightn't care which one he chooses. I have to say, I quite like Gremio. I wish he had a happy ending. This play is badly

written, in the sense that minor characters just fade out when the playwright's plot wanders away from them. Eventually, Bianca does what her father worries she might do: she just marries who she likes without asking him. She marries her tutor, who, as happy fortune would have it, is the real version of the guy that Tranio was pretending to be. His name's Lucentio.

LUCENTIO Here's Lucentio, Right son to the right Vincentio; That have by marriage made thy daughter mine, While counterfeit supposes bleared thine eyne.

"She's mine. You were distracted by a decoy."

This is perfectly legal. You don't need a father's consent. That being said, there are social consequences if you follow this route. Baptista, who is very, very rich, gets ready with the smiting:

BAPTISTA But do you hear, sir? have you married my daughter without asking my good will?

Fortunately, Lucentio's dad, who is a nobleman, is here by now, and he just says:

VINCENTIO Fear not, Baptista; we will content you...Which, because he's frighteningly rich, and noble, is what he's meant to say. Compare this to Tranio's bid. Vincentio's bid is all "I know my game. I know you know your game. We have your daughter. We don't want to annoy you so much you disinherit. We have a lot of money and prestige. We can deal. Privately. I have some revenge to deal with, and so do you. Let's go get some revenge on Tranio together, then we'll talk. By the way, my son's noble, so you have to just forgive all

you he's done. That's how it works if you want to step up into the lower upper class. We've offended you, sure, but you'll forgive us as part of the package, and I'll go a tiny bit easier on you than I would usually." He can say this with: "We will content you.", because these guys have big Etiquette and Bargain scores, and they can both do the numbers.

Later, Baptista gives a second dowry to Kate, when she is changed in the final scene. Petruchio also gets a couple of other guys to bet him 200 crowns apiece she'll obey him, and she does. There is one read of the text that indicates that she can see the angles of the thing, and is playing along in his game, but that's a bit forgiving and post-modern. So, Petruchio comes out of this with, in Ars terms, ten thousand and eighty Mythic Pounds. This is atypical, but is a great starting story for a merchant house. He grabs Bianca's suitors, and says...guys, I have a big idea...

And so we come to the end of our lengthy foray into Shakespearean dowries. I admit I was thinking Austen rather than Shakespeare when I first designed that section of City and Guild. She is an excellent source for ideas, because her books are generally about characters of middle class seeking advancement. I hope you can see the sort of story potential I saw there.



Do you know where you are right now?

A better question is: do you know how you know where you are right now?

What's happening is that your body is providing haptic feedback to your brain. That is, you have a sensation of touch from your skin, and your joints are also sending signals to your brain, to tell your brain what configuration they are in. You are within that bundle of sensations.

Except if something's gone wrong which is happening to me today. I woke up this morning with the distinct sensation that I was about two feet behind and one foot above where I physically am. This is due to a pre-existing psychological condition, or because of an inner ear infection.

While I was lying here on my side (not on my back because that gave me the sensation that I was inside mattress which is particularly uncomfortable psychologically) I thought about the tripartite nature of the individual in Ars Magica. In Ars Magica, the person is made out of three parts: the physical body, the soul, and the energy that runs the body under the soul's direction.

Animals don't have souls, but they do have this other energy which is why it's sometimes called the animal spirit. The animal spirit is the part of the self that becomes the ghost when the person dies.

Ruminations on ghosts

So what I'm experiencing at the moment is, from an Ars Magica perspective, a mild out of body experience. That is: I'm experiencing my personhood being separated from my physical body, if only by the couple of feet. This is an unusual sensation. It's quite fun actually. It's been giving me some thoughts about how different things in Ars Magica work.

Spirits have to act through physical objects. All spiritual forces require physical objects: even God. This is why each the Sacraments has a physical object attached to it. You are reconciled with God through the Mass and that involves wine and bread. Actually in the medieval period, it's just bread in many areas, under the doctrine that the blood is within the body. Marriage rings are given and received. Water in baptism. Oil in ultimate unction. A physical object is necessary to carry the spiritual force.

Similarly when an elemental appears, it's not made of magical energy. The body of the elemental is material fire, or earth, or water, or air. Spiritual energy animates it, but it needs a physical sheath to interact with the material world. It doesn't have a soul but it has a mystical spirit, which is taking the place of the animal spirit.

When an elemental emerges in the world it constructs of a body out of nearby elemental matter Demons do the same actually: demons don't bring their bodies with them from Hell. They construct bodies for themselves out of the subtle moisture of the material world. The vis they leave behind - the physical remnant after they are defeated - can't be something they've bought with them. It's something material that they have tainted, or in the case of magical creatures that have purified and bought closer to that Mystical Realm, by inhabiting it. In a sense it's the presence off the spirit that turns things into vis. Faeries do the same thing when they anchor in matter.

At the moment I'm having trouble touching things in a sort of reflexive or automatic way. I bonked myself in the nose while trying to eat breakfast this morning because my sensation of the spoon's location was somewhat above where the spoon actually was. Usually it's fine so long as I'm getting strong feedback by pushing against objects, or when I can see my hands and feet. This is why I could use my phone to record the podcast, but not my computer.

This is giving me some thoughts about when your characters are using magic to control objects at a distance.

Are they getting haptic feedback? I don't think you are, which must make it difficult to use some skills at a distance. If you are picking a lock, can you feel the tumblers move? (I realise in period we don't have tumblers but it's just an example.) When you're picking pockets using a spell that allows you to touch things at a distance, can you feel the coins? I really don't think you can. Perhaps you could through some sort of **Mentem Requisite**. What you're doing is a direct imposition of will on the universe by controlling an airy spirit. Spell casting either controls, or create temporary, spirits. I don't think the temporary spirits mind being temporary.

In **Ars Magica** ghosts have a final business which allows them to rest when complete. What does resting mean? Does the ghost go to Heaven with the soul? I don't think it does. So that would mean that it just goes into the grave to decay with the body. In Chinese folklore that energy can sometimes cause the body to reanimate and become a vampire, or can animate nearby objects. On the Final Day, when the new Earth is made, people believe that the dead reincarnate. They are not pure souls in Heaven. In the medieval interpretation people come back from the dead in physical form, with perfected bodies. Even these bodies need to be controlled by the soul through the mechanism of the animal spirit, so the ghost must persist in the grave. It can't be in Heaven because only the saints are in Heaven before the Judgement.

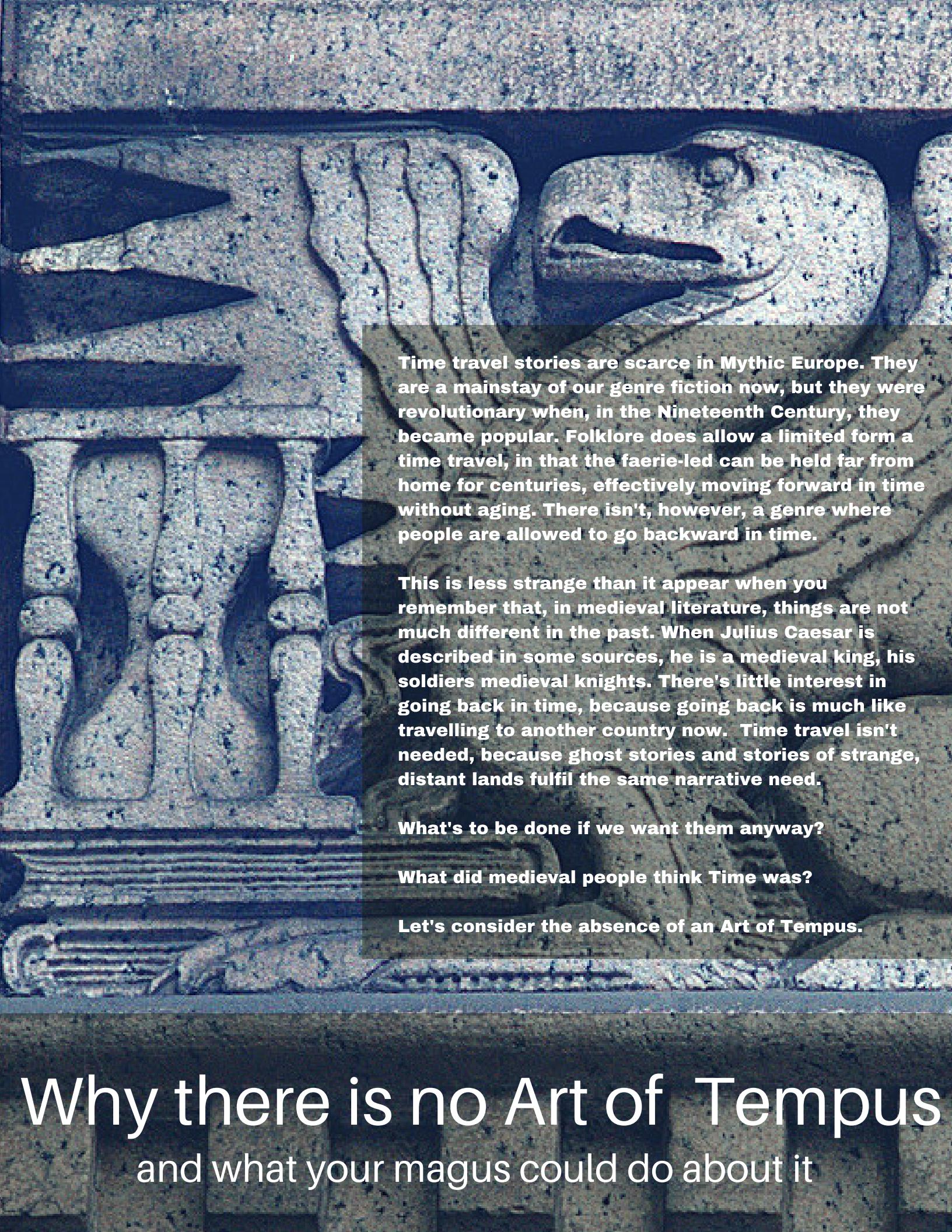
This explains why you can contact the ghosts of those who have not had Church burial. It's still around. This explains one of the odd things in the **Ars Magica** game about the use of **Arcane Connections**. Most types of arcane connection stop working after a time, however if you find the bone of a dead person it doesn't really matter how long they've been dead: you can still call up the ghost. Bones don't stop working in the way that, say, fingernails stop working. Ghosts are in some sense special. Ghosts are an eternal thing which are deliberately waiting until the end of time: They are designed by the Creator not to wear out. Necromancers rejoice! God has done you a solid!

Haptic feedback works differently in spells than using a VR gauntlet. Your character when controlling things to distance probably can't feel the surface texture of those things for example. At the moment I'm technically having an out of body experience, so my judgement maybe slightly askew.

There is a cult of **Criamon** magi who have the ability to extricate themselves from the body, so that the spirit can run around and do things. It requires a physical body when it's actually interacting with the world. This is called the **phantasticum** and is constructed out of ambient nearby matter. It happens to look like the body off the person, because that's how the ghost imagines itself, however there are cases where it doesn't look like that. One of the explanations of lycanthropes is that the ghost incarnates as the person's. totemic animal. At the moment I don't feel like a totemic animal.

So let's summarise. Personhood has three parts in **Ars Magica**: the body, the spirit, and the soul. Personhood of mystical creatures lacks the soul, because the soul is an imprint specific to humans granted by God. Mystical creatures are a physical embodiments of animal spirits, which is analogous to the human spirit. Even ghosts, when they're interacting with the real world, take on a temporary physicality and by taking on a temporary physicality they draw in material substance.

This matter is drawn closer to their **Realm of Power**, which remakes the substance and embeds vis in it. Spells which allow you to control things at a distance are done by puppeteering a mystic spirit. You likely don't have haptic feedback, which prevents you using skills at a distance, even with things like **Rego** magic, although you may be able to work around that.



Time travel stories are scarce in Mythic Europe. They are a mainstay of our genre fiction now, but they were revolutionary when, in the Nineteenth Century, they became popular. Folklore does allow a limited form a time travel, in that the faerie-led can be held far from home for centuries, effectively moving forward in time without aging. There isn't, however, a genre where people are allowed to go backward in time.

This is less strange than it appear when you remember that, in medieval literature, things are not much different in the past. When Julius Caesar is described in some sources, he is a medieval king, his soldiers medieval knights. There's little interest in going back in time, because going back is much like travelling to another country now. Time travel isn't needed, because ghost stories and stories of strange, distant lands fulfil the same narrative need.

What's to be done if we want them anyway?

What did medieval people think Time was?

Let's consider the absence of an Art of Tempus.

Why there is no Art of Tempus

and what your magus could do about it

What is time?

In Aristotle's view, which was followed by Aquinas, time is not a thing. Time is what you see when you count the process of things happening one after another. As such, time is perceived. Before humans were around to watch things there was no time according to Aristotle, because there was no-one who acted as the observer. Things happened, but lacking an enumeration, there was no time.

Aquinas, being a Christian, has an omniscient observer available. Time occurs because God does stuff to begin Creation. The first day is literally the first day in Creation. Time is surrounded by eternity, which is effectively timeless. Again, things still happened prior to people, but it doesn't matter, so there's no time.

Time is, then, the observer noticing motion. This means it's perceived, not abstract. In the Fourteenth Century, some thinkers suggest this is mistaken, that there can be time without motion, or without observers, but that's after the game period.

No noun? No Form. No form? No Art. No Art, no spells.

That's no fun...what can we do?

Declare Aquinas wrong?

One way out of this is to say that time does not work in the way suggested by Aristotle. In the Criamon philosophy, for example, Order descends into Chaos, and this creates an energy differential which can be used by magi to fuel spells. The motions in the field of vim that circles the Earth are literally the clockwork of the universe winding down into utter chaos. This means that manipulating time is Vim.

When you misuse the magical field of energy, reality drops you outside, in Twilight, and even alters you, so that you won't keep breaking the underlying structure of the Universe. Twilight Points are, therefore, the perfect penalty for characters who damage time.

As an example, in one of my earliest online games, we got around the slow signalling rate of email games by having the players simultaneously play three stories. The player had the same magus in each story, and if they did things in the chronologically earlier stories which could not fit in continuity with the later stories, the the later characters just earned Twilight Points.

One way travel

Getting to the future is easy. Faeries have the ability to store people for a prolonged period, so that they move forward in time. Similarly, certain regios have dilated time: a person living in one might age very slowly compared to the outside world. Some spells turn a person into an unaging material object, and they can resume their life if the object remains undamaged until the Duration ends. It's returning to the present which is difficult to explain.

Back from the future

To state the obvious: God gets to cheat. This is now things like prophetic Visions occur. God just shows people a bit of what he can see, in his extratemporal position.

Demons cannot affect the past, because they are unable to plan. As purely reactive creatures they aren't able to decide to travel to the past as part of an elaborate scheme.

Faeries cannot send a character back in time. They can, however, portray flawless imitations of historical times. This means that a character who has gone forward in time by another method might be tricked into thinking they have travelled home.

If Criamon cosmology is correct, and Time is a circle, outside of which is Twilight, then Twilight might be used to traverse time. Some of the earliest mentions of Twilight in Ars Magica state that it is an eternal realm, outside the universe. Further they list reports, by magi who have travelled there, of meetings with the remnants of magi who had not yet fallen into Final Twilight, or even been born. This clearly allows information to be passed backward through time. It makes the Bootstrap Paradox playable.

The Hall of Heroes, where the ascended mortals exist, does not seem to be outside of time in quite the same way as Twilight. The Aspects sent by heroes into the world show no anachronistic knowledge.

So, travel through the Magic Realm allows information to violate strict causality, which is to say, travel in time, but not necessarily through every and any part of the Magic Realm. In much the same way that there is a Deep Faerie where mortals do not go, perhaps there is a Deep Magic, wherein Twilight lies.



If information can be exchanged in this way, might it be easier for characters in spiritual form to travel time? If the characters can see historical events, but not interact, then they can take actionable information, but not create paradoxes. Might it be simpler to send oneself through time as a ghost? Do certain prophetic dreamers do this already?

Travel may be environmentally dependent: in that characters can only leave and re-enter time at sites with a Magical Aura of 10. These places are sometimes destroyed, for example by the encroaching Dominion, or are transitory. As an example, some places have an Aura which rises during the equinoxes, which is why the Aegis is cast on those nights. This means that although a character can go to a place via time travel, they need to remain there only for a certain amount of subjective time.

If you can travel time as a ghost, can you create a solid form once there if you know the secrets of the Nightwalkers, and the construction of a solid, distant body (called a phantasticum)? This might allow time travel much like the "straying" used by Nightwalkers, except it is somewhat safer because if you become lost in the past, you have a lot of time in which to re-orient yourself, as you come the slow way home. Phantastic travel also prevents you bringing objects back with you (save by, for example, burying them in a safe place) which makes time travel, in some ways, more playable. Characters cannot mine the past for physical resources.

The Axis Magica creates a cynosure for spiritual travel. Is there a similar cynosure for chronal travelers? I'd argue that the changes of eon should be obvious. The Silencing of the Oracles, for example, or the spread of the Dominion. Finer levels of control probably require a Lore, much as geographical navigation does.

As a plot idea: the characters may be the ones who construct this beacon, as a Saga goal. This solves the problem of why they have not seen any other time travelers: no-one travels before the creation of the beacon. Afterward, all bets are off, as future people can bootstrap.

What can we change?

That's saga dependent: cosmological arguments can be made for and against people within Time having sufficient agency to change what happens. There are also questions regarding consequences: if you create paradoxes, does the universe care? Does God send an angel to edit you out of the great play of redemption?

Different levels of constraint provide a different feel to the stories, because they provide players with different types of challenge.

Options

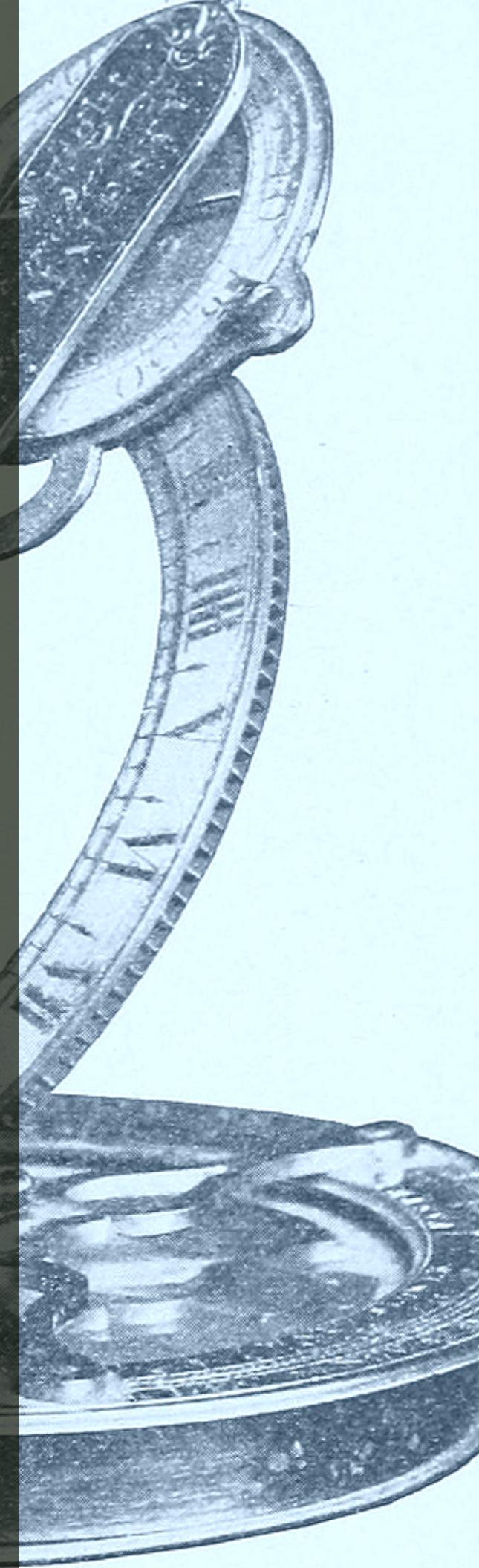
History is set: your presence can't really change anything. All attempts have, in a sense, already failed. Players in these sorts of games need to game the historical record. They need to find loopholes in the known facts. This works well for games where the troupe do not want the characters' "present" to change.

History is infinitely malleable at major points. Player characters can save Arthur, or prevent the fall of Constantinople. This rewrites the world they go home to. This allows epic stories where the players get the broadest scope to rewrite the world.

History is trivially malleable. The most famous story of this type is by Ray Bradbury, where the death of a butterfly in the ancient past affects the traveler's present in dramatic ways. In these sorts of sagas, players need some way to know that the effects of their actions, what small adjustments they can make, and some sort of opposition. Terry Pratchett has an order of monks in his stories who curate these little coincidences.

History is unknown. If your characters go to ancient Egypt before the Flood and do virtually anything, then either the narrative or the effect of their actions is lost to history, so it's not simple to tell if history is malleable. One way is by attempting to make a change notable in the far future, and seeing if all attempts fail due to odd circumstances.

Change both happens, and does not happen. In this case, Time contains discontinuities. These are spackled over with a scab of mystical energy, that forms a Twilight scar on the magus.



Each community in Europe has a slightly different story about who brings gifts to children at Christmas time. Let's not review them when David Sedaris has done such a brilliant job. If you haven't listened to "Six to Eight Black Men" go do that now. Seriously. Pause this. Actually, no. Don't. His work's a lot more interesting than this, so it will make this sound terrible. Listen to this first.

Stories have power in Mythic Europe, because they attract faeries. Powerful stories allow faeries to affect whole communities. Being invited in makes communities even more vulnerable to the fae. Dozens of little kiddies leaving out milk for a jolly old elf is a ridiculously bad idea, unless it has been so tied up in a safe story that it can't do any harm.

The problem is that medieval people are terrible to their kids. Mythic Europe is full of mystical guys who hurt kids on the naughty list. Some steal naughty children. God Himself has some children torn limb from limb by bears for sassing a bald prophet, in the Bible. So: it's important to have a consistent, safe story. This is the story of Black-Faced Hermes.

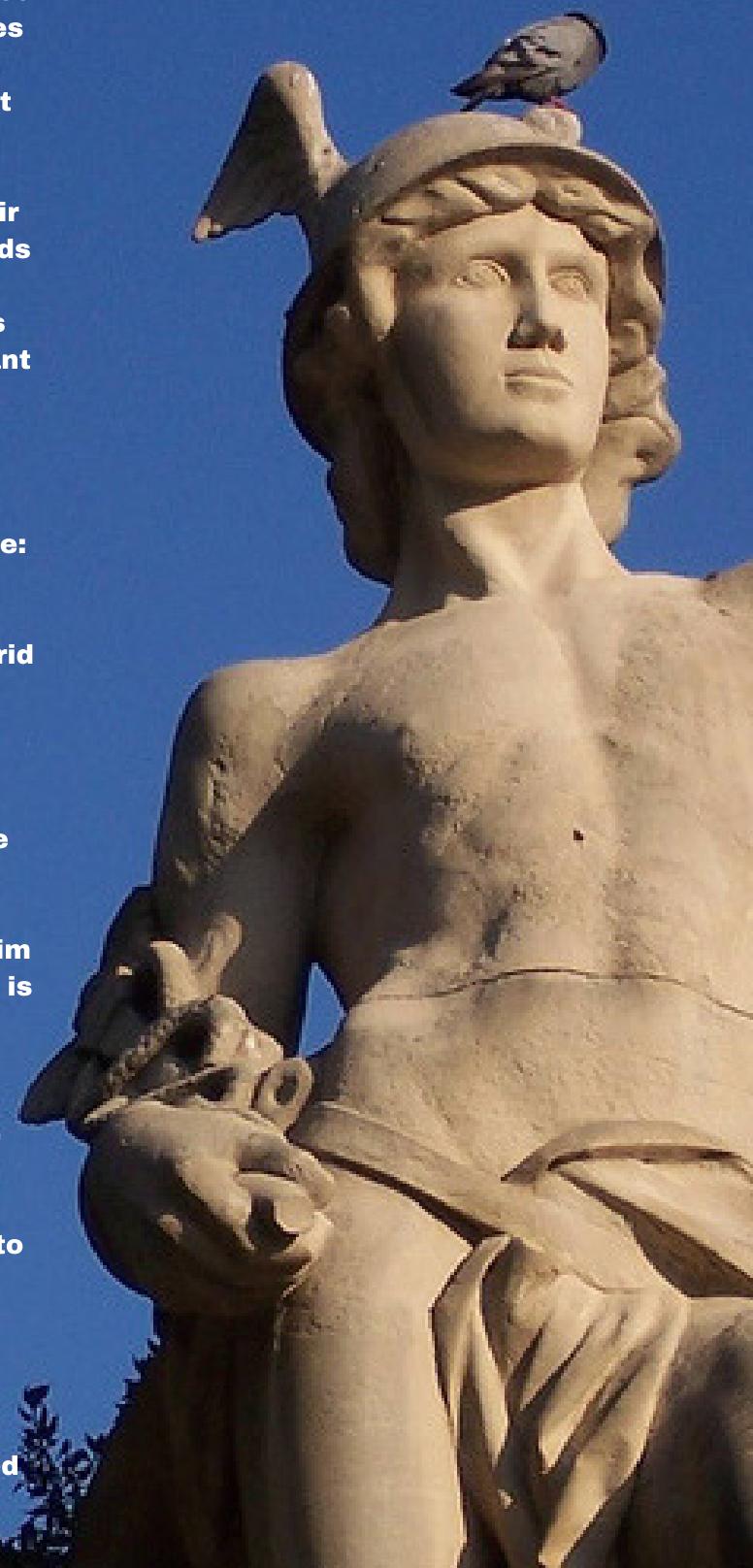
Blackface is, for American gamers, a particularly problematic idea. Black-faced Hermes isn't in blackface: he's the ancient Greek god who steals children, particularly weird, wicked children, often by coming down the chimney and getting covered in soot. To get rid of the problematic term, you might prefer to call him **Hermes Harpyios** which means "Hermes who snatches away".

So, apprentices leave out items for this faerie: because he is the faerie who steals gifted children and leaves them on the doorstep of covenants. He really likes chicken. They are encouraged to place their gifts for him outside the Aegis. As a patron of games and sports, he is best propitiated in spaces where these are played.

Similarly, children receive whatever is left behind for them outside the covenant's mystical defences. As the spirit of sport, games and mystical initiations, the treasure hunts he leaves may become complex little puzzles, which the apprentices need to work together to complete. As the patron of commerce he can leave valuable gifts.

He's also thoroughly and childishly amoral, and is the patron of thieves. Like all faeries, he feeds on raw emotional expression. His gifts can, therefore, be mixed blessings.

Who brings Christmas gifts to the Order?



Daqin: China views the West

Medieval Europeans knew that China existed...well, they knew there was a place out there that silk came from, and they called it "Seres" or "Serica", both meaning "silk". There are records of several groups attempting to make contact between the two empires. It might be said fairly that the Chinese had better information about the Romans than the converse, although their information was still derived through intermediaries. In this post we see what the Chinese thought was in the far west. In a later post, we'll look from the perspective of the west, toward the east. It must be noted that being the state that lies between Constantinople and China is a valuable role, and that those who had it took pains to ensure that ambassadors going from one to the other were prevented for achieving success. A Chinese army reached the Caspian Sea in 97 AD, and one of its officers was sent as an ambassador to Daqin (Rome), but turned back at the shore of the Black Sea, due to stories that he had been told about the length of the journey. Excerpts from his report can be found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gan_Ying The son of the general also wrote a book called "The Records of the Western Regions". The Chinese general who had marched to the Caspian set up a series of fortresses which remained in Chinese hands for some time. The armies of Trajan, in their westernmost march into Parthian, came within a day of these garrisons. There are also stories, which lack archaeological evidence that is broadly accepted, that Romans were taken prisoner by Parthians at the Battle of Caharre, and were shipped east as warrior-slaves to man the Chinese border.

These men are said to have founded a city, called Lijen ("Alexandria"). Note that this is not the same as any of the the cities of the same name founded by Alexander. Alexander did create a city Alexandria Eschate "Alexandria the Furthest", in Ferghana. The descendants of Alexander's army are found all over northern India, in ancient times, and some even seem to have settled as far away as Sri Lanka.

In Homer H Dubs's History of the Former Han Dynasty we find this story: "Between 110 and 100 B.C., there arrived at the Chinese capital an embassy from the King of Parthia. Among the presents to the Chinese Emperor are stated to have been fine jugglers from Li-jien. The jugglers and dancers, male and female, from Alexandria in Egypt were famous and were exported to foreign countries. Since the King of Parthia obviously esteemed highly the Emperor of China, he naturally sent the best jugglers he could secure. When these persons were asked whence they came, they of course replied "from Alexandria," which word the Chinese who disliked polysyllables and initial vowels and could not pronounce certain Greek sounds, shortened into "Li-jien.". When they also learned that this place was different from Parthia, the Chinese naturally used its name for the country of these jugglers. No



Chinese had been to the Roman empire, so they had no reason to distinguish a prominent place in it from the country itself. The Romans moreover had no name for their empire other than *orbis terrarum*, i.e., “the world,” so that these jugglers would have found it difficult to explain the name of the Roman empire! In such a fashion there probably arose the Chinese name *Li-jien* which, for them, denoted the Roman empire in general.” Dubs (1957). Sadly, modern genetic testing does not support Dub's story, but it's good enough for a saga hook.

In 166, a group claiming to be ambassadors from Rome appears in the Chinese court. They came by sea, from the south, which is technically possible because at this time Rome had Egyptian and Red Sea ports which linked to the Indian trade network, which linked to the Chinese one. The goods they offered the Emperor seemed southeast Asian, so there is some question as to their credentials.

The Liangshu notes: “During the 5th year of the Huangwu period of the reign of Sun Quan [= CE 226] a merchant of Da Qin, whose name was Qin Lun came to Jiaozhi [Tongking]; the prefect [taishou] of Jiaozhi, Wu Miao, sent him to Sun Quan [the Wu emperor], who asked him for a report on his native country and its people. Qinlun prepared a statement and replied. At the time Zhuke [nephew to Zhuke Liang, alias Kun Ming] chastised Dan Yang [= Jiang Nan] and they had caught blackish coloured dwarfs. When Qin Lun saw them he said that in Da Qin these men were rarely seen. Sun Quan then sent male and female dwarfs, ten of each, in charge of an officer, Liu Xian of Huiji [a district in Zhejiang], to accompany Qin Lun. Liu Xian died on the road, whereupon Qin Lun returned direct to his native country.” This is sourced from the link in the next paragraph. The author notes that Qin Lun means “Leon of Rome”.

In the Third Century, there was a book in China about the products that can be found in western countries. A translation is here

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/weilue/weilue.html>

There are at least two embassies that claim to be from Rome that arrive in the Imperial court in the Third Century. Rome collapses in the 5th century, and Chinese power wanes after the seventh. This creates a power vacuum, and the Silk Road declines, which in turn cuts communication ties between each side. As the Mongol Empire expands, it stabilises the Silk Road, which permits Chinese people to reach back out, toward Rome, to see what is there. They are remarkably well informed. For example, look at the Da Ming Hunyi Tu map, which is Chinese from the Thirteenth Century, or the Kandigo Map from Fourteenth Century Korea.