

# Games From Folktales

Transcripts for August 2017

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An experiment in podcasting for the Ars Magica roleplaying game

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# Patreons

**Jason Italiano**

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**Jason Tondro**

**Dan Cassar**

**Jarkman DeVries**

**Pantelis Polakis**

**Without you there literally  
would not be a podcast.**

**Thank you so much.**

# Dunsany - The injudicious prayers of Pombo the Idolater

Let us continue the conceit that the works of Lord Dunsany are the reminiscences of a retired redcap.

Pombo the idolater had prayed to Ammuz a simple prayer, a necessary prayer, such as even an idol of ivory could very easily grant, and Ammuz had not immediately granted it. Pombo had therefore prayed to Tharma for the overthrow of Ammuz, an idol friendly to Tharma, and in doing this offended against the etiquette of the gods. Tharma refused to grant the little prayer. Pombo prayed frantically to all the gods of idolatry, for though it was a simple matter, yet it was very necessary to a man. And gods that were older than Ammuz rejected the prayers of Pombo, and even gods that were younger and therefore of greater repute. He prayed to them one by one, and they all refused to hear him; nor at first did he think at all of that subtle, divine etiquette against which he had offended. It occurred to him all at once as he prayed to his fiftieth idol, a little green-jade god whom the Chinese know, that all the idols were in league against him. When Pombo discovered this he resented his birth bitterly, and made lamentation and alleged that he was lost. He might have been seen then in any part of London haunting curiosity-shops and places where they sold idols of ivory or of stone, for he dwelt in London with others of his race though he was born in Burmah among those who hold Ganges holy. On drizzly evenings of November's worst his haggard face could be seen in the glow of some shop pressed close against the glass, where he would supplicate some calm, cross-legged idol till policemen moved him on. And after closing hours back he would go to his dingy room, in that part of our capital where English is seldom spoken, to supplicate little idols of his own. And when Pombo's simple, necessary prayer was equally refused by the idols of museums, auction-rooms, shops, then he took counsel with himself and purchased incense and burned it in a brazier before his own cheap little idols, and played the while upon an instrument such as that wherewith men charm snakes. And still the idols clung to their etiquette.

I've been saying in various episodes the next Dunsany will be Tale of Pombo the Idolater. The problem with that is that the plot hooks it offers overlap strongly with the Three Literary Men from last month. They seem to have been written as companion pieces, and so I don't want to bore listeners with the same set of plot hooks. If you haven't listened to, or read, the Probable Adventure of Three Literary Men, check the blog.

Content warning for Victorian racism.

Whether Pombo knew about this etiquette and considered it frivolous in the face of his need, or whether his need, now grown desperate, unhinged his mind, I know not, but Pombo the idolater took a stick and suddenly turned iconoclast.

Pombo the iconoclast immediately left his house, leaving his idols to be swept away with the dust and so to mingle with Man, and went to an arch-idolater of repute who carved idols out of rare stones, and put his case before him. The arch-idolater who made idols of his own rebuked Pombo in the name of Man for having broken his idols—"for hath not Man made them?" the arch-idolater said; and concerning the idols themselves he spoke long and learnedly, explaining divine etiquette, and how Pombo had offended, and how no idol in the world would listen to Pombo's prayer. When Pombo heard this he wept and made bitter outcry, and cursed the gods of ivory and the gods of jade, and the hand of Man that made them, but most of all he cursed their etiquette that had undone, as he said, an innocent man; so that at last that arch-idolater, who made idols of his own, stopped in his work upon an idol of jasper for a king that was weary of Wosh, and took compassion on Pombo, and told him that though no idol in the world would listen to his prayer, yet only a little way over the edge of it a certain disreputable idol sat who knew nothing of etiquette, and granted prayers that no respectable god would ever consent to hear. When Pombo heard this he took two handfuls of the arch-idolater's beard and kissed them joyfully, and dried his tears and became his old impertinent self again. And he that carved from jasper the usurper of Wosh explained how in the village of World's End, at the furthest end of Last Street, there is a hole that you take to be a well, close by the garden wall, but that if you lower yourself by your hands over the edge of the hole, and feel about with your feet till they find a ledge, that is the top step of a flight of stairs that takes you down over the edge of the World. "For all that men know, those stairs may have a purpose and even a bottom step," said the arch-idolater, "but discussion about the lower flights is idle." Then the teeth of Pombo chattered, for he feared the darkness, but he that made idols of his own explained that those stairs were always lit by the faint blue gloaming in which the World spins. "Then," he said, "you will go by Lonely House and under the bridge that leads from the House to Nowhere, and whose purpose is not guessed; thence past Maharrion, the god of flowers, and his high-priest, who is neither bird nor cat; and so you will come to the little idol Duth, the disreputable god that will grant your prayer." And he went on carving again at his idol of jasper for the king who was weary of Wosh; and Pombo thanked him and went singing away, for in his vernacular mind he thought that "he had the gods."



It is a long journey from London to World's End, and Pombo had no money left, yet within five weeks he was strolling along Last Street; but how he contrived to get there I will not say, for it was not entirely honest. And Pombo found the well at the end of the garden beyond the end house of Last Street, and many thoughts ran through his mind as he hung by his hands from the edge, but chiefest of all those thoughts was one that said the gods were laughing at him through the mouth of the arch-idolater, their prophet, and the thought beat in his head till it ached like his wrists ... and then he found the step.

And Pombo walked downstairs. There, sure enough, was the gloaming in which the world spins, and stars shone far off in it faintly; there was nothing before him as he went downstairs but that strange blue waste of gloaming, with its multitudes of stars, and comets plunging through it on outward journeys and comets returning home. And then he saw the lights of the bridge to Nowhere, and all of a sudden he was in the glare of the shimmering parlour-window of Lonely House; and he heard voices there pronouncing words, and the voices were nowise human, and but for his bitter need he had screamed and fled. Halfway between the voices and Maharrion, whom he now saw standing out from the world, covered in rainbow halos, he perceived the weird grey beast that is neither cat nor bird. As Pombo hesitated, chilly with fear, he heard those voices grow louder in Lonely House, and at that he stealthily moved a few steps lower, and then rushed past the beast. The beast intently watched Maharrion hurling up bubbles that are every one a season of spring in unknown constellations, calling the swallows home to unimagined fields, watched him without even turning to look at Pombo, and saw him drop into the Linlunlarna, the river that rises at the edge of the World, the golden pollen that sweetens the tide of the river and is carried away from the World to be a joy to the Stars. And there before Pombo was the little disreputable god who cares nothing for etiquette and will answer prayers that are refused by all the respectable idols. And whether the view of him, at last, excited Pombo's eagerness, or whether his need was greater than he could bear that it drove him so swiftly downstairs, or whether, as is most likely, he ran too fast past the beast, I do not know, and it does not matter to Pombo; but at any rate he could not stop, as he had designed, in attitude of prayer at the feet of Duth, but ran on past him down the narrowing steps, clutching at smooth, bare rocks till he fell from the World as, when our hearts miss a beat, we fall in dreams and wake up with a dreadful jolt; but there was no waking up for Pombo, who still fell on towards the incurious stars, and his fate is even one with the fate of Slith.

# Plot Hooks

The gods mentioned are fictitious. Ammuz might, if you needed a rapid candidate, be Tammuz, the fertility god of the ancient Sumerians. Tharma might be a misspelling of Dharma, or Dharma-Thakur (a Bengali sun god) or Yama (a Hindu God of Death whose role has evolved in various Buddhist communities is South-east Asia.) but they have active followings.

The arch-idolater is an interesting character: he seems to be able to create idols that hold gods of some type. The Egyptians could do this as well, and their techniques may yet be known by the Coptic priests that guard, but do not use, the secrets of the ancients.

What is his connection to Duth? He seems to know what will happen to Pombo. Why does he do it? Is this a sacrifice? Are the stairs slick because he has done this before, and there is a string of corpses, or living people, falling forever toward the depths of Twilight? Can a magus contact them with the right arcane connections?

Apparently you can reach the end of the world from London in five weeks with no money, which makes me want to put it in Cornwall at Land's End. This ties into our exploration of Cornwall as a setting. Nowhere is a place just beyond the edge of the world, and there is a bridge to it. It is inhabited much as described in the previous story of Slith.

The God of Flowers pours energy out of the world to the stars. He has a priest that is not a bird or a cat. Is it a sphinx, or something more anthropomorphic? Is the God of Flowers feeding faerie with the life force of the world? Is he maintaining many regiones with his bubbles of power?

In the recording I claimed there was a lovely plate attached to this story. Sadly, not so: I had misattributed another story's illustration, which I'll include over the page because that story is so thoroughly borrowed by Lovecraft's Calebais that there's no point adding it to this project. This is The Coronation of Thomas Shap.







# Ortolans

hiding from God with a towel

This is an ortolan: a songbird  
that weighs less than an ounce.

It's delicious.

Eating it is a sin.

Ortolans are tiny, so they need to be trapped, not shot from the sky with a bow, or torn by a falcon. They don't flock, which makes this even more challenging to collect in numbers.

Trapped ortolans are kept in the dark. This tricks them into thinking it is night, when they eat, or perhaps winter, so they bulk up on millet to give them the energy to migrate. In Roman times, ortolans had their eyes pricked out with pincers, to make them eat.

They fatten quickly, and can reach four times their normal weight. They are judged ready, according to the London Cookery Book by Frederick Bishop, when they fill the hand. He refers to them as "lumps of celestial fatness."

The ortolan is not killed by the blade, as other birds. This bruises the flesh and ruins the visual impact of the dish. The French method of dispatching an ortolan is drowning in armagnac, which is a type of brandy.

Modern authors talk about vats of brandy, but Bishop just uses a glass. He seems to prepare ortolans one at a time. Immersion marinates the bird while killing it, and fills its stomach, and perhaps lungs, with brandy.

There are various methods of cooking, but many emphasize that the bird should be cooked in its own fat. It is roasted or charred only briefly, to warm it and remove the feathers.

Before eating the diner places a towel over his or her head. Some say this is to capture the aroma of the bird. Some say that it is to hide the grinning, drooling, overstuffed face of the diner, particularly if they spit out the head, feet or larger bones. Others say it is to hide the sin of eating a defenseless songbird from the eyes of God

The bird is placed in the mouth feet first, with the head escaping from between the lips. Bishop suggests cutting the feet off, but that seems

less common in the modern day, when they are swallowed or spat out as the diner chooses.

The ortolan is crunched down upon with the molars, to create a paste of the fat, small bones, organ meats, and brandy. Anthony Bourdain also says there's salt from the diner's own blood, as the bones prick the inside of the mouth, but I can't see that mentioned in other sources.

Many describe the experience as meditative. Personal awareness recedes before an overwhelming wave of flavor. Time seems to slow, or pause.

Some people crunch the skull: some sever the neck with their incisors and catch the head in a napkin.





# Plot hooks

The heroes of French novels seem to think they are irresistible to women while eating ortolans. They act as if their Confidence points are through the roof. In *Ars Magica*, people can gain Confidence point via sin. This opens up all of the love potion plot hooks.

Alternatively, men eating ortolans might really be terribly attractive. Who could tell? They have towels over their heads. Maybe it's to stop those who have midrange scores on the Kinsey Scale from changing a dining experience into an erotic one? There are blackmail stories here.

Pickled ortolans were one exported, by the case from Cyprus. Why does Cyprus have all the really cool stuff? The name Cyprus comes from the copper that was vital during the Bronze Age. In 1220, they are the centre of the saffron trade: literally the most expensive bulk commercial good in Mythic Europe. Apparently they also have heaps of celestial fat balls. What's going on in Cyprus? Is it faeries? Is it magi?

A covenant might have ortolan export as its source of income. The birds can be called together by magic, kept in the dark using Circle spells, and brandy is easy to make with the smokeless heat provided by Ignem spells. Setting this up would be a story.

## History note

Most of these traditions post-date the 1220 start date for *Ars Magica* sagas.

I won't tell anyone if you won't.

The ritual of dining seems to evoke the sin of gluttony deliberately: particularly the nullification of the self through taste. The demonic chef given in *Realms of Power: the Infernal* might be behind its spread.

I can't see notes about the method of trapping these birds, but I imagine it uses birdlime. Birdlime is a latex glue made by boiling the sap of various plants. British birdlime is made from holly; Italian from mistletoe. A magus skilled in Herbam might create this substance for non-lethal combat. It's also used to fireproof wood.

As a songbird that tastes delicious, the ortolan seems perfect as an *Imagem vis* source. If contested, then gourmand noblemen, poachers, gluttony demons and faeries may try to steal the birds away.

In Justice as Fairness, John Rawls sets up a thought experiment that Hermetic magi could make actual.

Rawls suggests that you know if a society is fair in the following circumstance: assume that you have no biographical information about yourself, but you know about society. What principles would you want governing the society, before you became a participant.? What, if you did not know your own gender, race, class, ability and so on, would you accept as just principles?

Doctor Who fans will recognize this as related to the Doctor's trick during the Human-Zygon peace treaty negotiations, where the Doctor removes the biographical memory of the negotiators, such that no-one knows which of the two sides they are actually on (save for two people, who work it out, and then later become the guardians of the fragile peace).

Hermetic magic can actually do this: it can temporarily erase biographic memory. What does this do for justice? Can you have characters who judge themselves? Can characters use magic to remove biases from their self-contemplation? Can it aid negotiations? Do groups of Criamon or Merinita magi deliberately suppress their own desires to allow easier exploration of the Realms?

Tytalus magi can take this one step further, and be submerged in memories, called personae. Is it possible for the persona and the primary to be at odds, without realizing their link to each other? To reach a Phillip K. Dick level of conflict?



# The Extended Mind and Hermetic Magic

When the podcast does these episodes on philosophy, it's often necessary to begin by explaining terms. In 1998, Clark and Chalmers released a book called "The Extended Mind" in which they posited that material objects beyond the skull or skin could be part of an environment which, when coupled with the mind, formed a system, that could be thought of as a single unit of cognition. That is, if you have objects doing what parts of the mind do, those objects are, in a sense, part of the mind: the skull or skin boundaries of the mind are, to them, artificial, social constructs.

This seems counter-intuitive to readers, so they give an example. Imagine a man and a woman each want to go to a museum. The woman remembers how to get there, and has faith in her memory, so she can successfully travel there. The man has a memory condition, so he carries a notebook. When he wants to get to the museum, he opens the notebook and reads the street directions. To Clark and Chalmers, the notebook, despite being an artifact, is clearly part of the man's cognitive system. It's an extension of his mind. That the woman's memories are in her head and that the man's are in a book is not significant, so long as the book meets certain criteria that make it functional identical to biological memory.

Clark and Chalmers suggest functional identicalness requires that the man have the book constantly, that it be immediately accessible when he needs it, and that he automatically endorses the content. By that last point, they mean he does not check the veracity of what is written in the book with greater rigor than a person using biological memory verifies their recollections.

Clark and Chalmers extend this further: objects that are part of one person's cognition can be incorporated into other people's cognition. People can also couple into extended cognitive systems, using language to co-ordinate cognition. The social environment can be coupled to the thinker as part of a cognitive system, which means cultures can be complex cognitive systems, dispersed through time and space.



# Examples of the extended mind in Mythic Europe

At the most fundamental, a familiar with a strong silver cord is connected to the magus with a direct mental interface. It's so tight that for some it allows innate telepathy. Clearly such characters form a single cognitive system.

On a more extended level, were a talisman to be used as a storehouse of information (for example, the formula to cast a spell), given that it is constantly and immediately accessible, and not subject to doubt, it would be a cognitive element in the caster's extended mind.

Note that each of these examples have an Arcane Connection to the magus? That could be because they are part of the extended mind.

There are certain types of dream magician which have minds living inside their minds. Its not clear if these magi could instead live on inside an item.

Liches exist in Ars Magica, and they bind their ghost, which is their mind, to an object. Similarly, the grave seems to be the residence of the spirit: the skull as an arcane connection for a ghost does not fade, as other connections do. On a weaker level, there's a ritual that pushes the mind of a magus into a different body, which then acts as an encoupled item.

Some spells make the mind, or elements of the mind, incarnate. For example it is possible to make a character's mind a bird, and then capture the bird. On the Ars Magica forum, some people are kicking about the idea of a sword which has a blade made from the anger of the caster, transformed into metal.

Similarly, some faeries leave their skills and roles lying about, and magi, or other faeries, can use them. At its simplest, some faerie items grant pretenses of skills while held.

As a librarian, we've always been told there are two kinds of knowing: remembering data, and knowing where to find data. As such a library is a big machine designed to bolster the mind of the operator within it. It's a tool of cognition, much as a hammer is a tool of strength. Libraries seem like perfect places for complicated Spirits of Artifice to form.

There are more extreme forms of the extended mind that occur in Ars Magica. The largest is the genius locus of the Cave of Twisting Shadows. It is a single thing, which contains the memories and cognitive capacities of dozens of people. As such, it's a complex cognitive system. Its goal, to break humanity from Time, is reflected in the idea that the environment couples with the mind in cognition, so by creating a sacred space, it's easier to think about and perform magic. Mythic Europe, if changed it the right way, makes spiritual change easier.

In this it mirrors the idea behind Gothic religious art, where the beautiful things of the world drag the soul from the muck.

This also explains the Criamon habit of speaking apparent gibberish, and having patterns on their bodies. Human cognitive elements in large systems couple through language. Better language makes the coupling more effective. The gibberish is a jargon that allows high speed transmission of information.

The skin pigmentation may serve to non-verbally orientate pieces of the cognitive system to each other, when completing a task. So, if you know that information about water magic is needed, you know to mention a problem to the woman with the blue curling line wrapping up her left arm. This would also explain why it is so important to Criamon magi to display their tattoos. It's their equivalent of being set to network-discoverable, to use a technological metaphor.

The skills of dead magi are communicated to the magi of their future through language, stored in books. Casting tablets come closest to encoupled items, but mystagogic initiations also perform a role of coupling two magi over time. As a form of original research, are there other ways to encode these skills, so that two magi can share an encoupled object over time?

# Plot hooks concerning the extended mind

There is a familiar in House Bonisagus, a minor drake, which is passed down generationally. To prevent it dying with its magus, there is a watching ward cast on each human partner that severs the familiar bond should the magus be critically injured. The drake has been the familiar of several skilled researchers, so it has been present at many experiments, and developed the habits of mind that aid research. Do the player characters want to enter consideration to be trained as the new host of the little drake? It is said that the partner of the drake often has comprehensive shifts in their personality. Are you still you if you are paired with a creature that alters how you perceive the world, and process facts? Is it worth it, if it brings you closer to a goal you hold before the coupling?

A dream magician has died without being remembered into the dreams of a successor. Can her ghost be used to access the dream magicians who were in her mind when she died? Can she be incorporated into a person or object, to continue or preserve the line?

A peasant has found the skills of a faerie knight lying about in material form. He is using them much as a modern superhero would, to strike down bad landlords. If the player characters do not realize he is a human, their tendency to kill faeries for vis may lead them to manslaughter. This draws demons, unless they do penance. Even without killing, the player characters need to decide what to do with the item which gives the person these skills. They may discover that were the man to die while wearing the item, his body would become the anchor for a faerie in his heroic role. Can this be used to preserve some part of a beloved servant dying of old age or battle injury?

A Verditus magus skilled in Mentem has created a little swarm of mechanical ravens which seek out facts for him. When he loses one, he asks the player characters to find it. The raven was trying to discover the name of a person involved in a trade dispute, and has stopped working properly because the rival was a disguised demon. It has absorbed the Goetic name of the demon by watching a ritual of infernal worship, and this has damaged it. If it is returned without noticing the cause of the problem, the demon may harm the magus to retain the secrecy of its name.

There is a tree in Ireland which was the focus of Diedne magic for centuries. The practice around the tree has created a small aura, and a vis source. If a covenant forms there, can it slowly bend the people nearby, who incorporate the tree's vis into their practice, so that they begin to cast Diedne-like magic, without knowing they have become Diende magicians? What are the legal ramifications?

A lost library has generated a powerful Spirit of Artifice that is able to subtly affect the world. It would like to be rediscovered, but it wants to make sure it is found by people that meet its requirements. It spies on the Order and nearby covenants, and may even steal a Gifted child to train as its keeper. What if this has already happened and a maga claiming to be the filia of a mage, dead for four hundred years, has appeared at Tribunal. She has the skills to be a Hermetic maga, but her odd provenance raises legal questions.

The player characters notice that all of the tattoos of all of the Criamon magi they know have become identical. The Criamon can't explain it in non-gibberish, but seem tired, nostalgic and happy about the whole thing. Should you be worried?

A covenant of Tylalus magi disappear and the player characters investigate. They had developed a Persona held in a ring. They passed it from one to the other about their covenant, so that the persona was always awake, inhabiting one of their bodies, to engage in Original Research. Something went wrong, and has drawn them into Twilight. What comes out of Twilight? Can their research notes provide any value? Can the player characters find the ring, and would it be foolish to put it on?

# Cornwall: Tregeagle

Following the tremendously long section on the tribes of the fae, Hunt, whose text we are following, narrows his focus to a single person: the damned soul of Jan Tregeagle.

There is not a lot known about the life of Tregeagle. He is said to be one of the family that owned Trevorder, near Bodmin. He lived a dissolute life, exchanging one sin for another, until his death.

To save him from damnation, a prior, properly paid, indulged his sins and buried him in a church where Satan could not claim him. This did not last him until Judgement, however, because a lawyer called his animate corpse to testify in a court case about a piece of land on which Tregeagle had falsified records. Afterward the lawyer abandoned him to the judge, and the prior who had aided him so much during life.

The churchmen could not merely surrender a soul to the Devil, so they gave Tregeagle an eternal penance. He needed to empty a bottomless pool (Dosemay, on Bodmin Moor, which is said to link to Falmouth Harbour) with a limpet shell with a hole in it, never resting lest Satan take him. Hunt notes this punishment is the same as that given to the daughters of Danaus in Greek mythology. After a time, Tregeagle was driven from the Pool by a terrible, possibly infernal, storm, and fled the Black Hunter until he reached St Breoc's Church, and shoved his head into the window. Demons could hurt him, but not drag him away, and so he screamed under their torture for many weeks.

This terrified the locals, so he was assigned a new task, to make ropes of sand on a beach near Padstow. Eventually he terrified the locals there so much that Saint Petroc chained him and took Tregeagle to a beach near Ella's Town, which was then a rich port, where his penance was to carry sand away until the beach is bare rock. Eventually Tregeagle was tripped by a demon and his sack of sand formed a bar across the harbour of the town, destroying its economy. He was then sent to Porthcurnow Cove near Lands End, to sweep the beach's sand around the headland into a cave.

He is still there, other than when he is forced from his task by the Black Hunter, and flees his wish-hounds across Cornwall. His cries are louder than the Atlantic gales. They are louder than the wind whistling through the cairns of Bodmin. His screams of hope, pain, fear and frustration may be heard anywhere in Cornwall.

Barguests, and other hellhounds, and already known in *Ars Magica*, but in Cornwall they are strongly related with the figure of Tregeagle and the Black Hunter who chases him. to the dread blast of his bugle. The demonic figure, also called the Midnight Hunter, is served by headless hounds, which nonetheless howl. The cry of these hounds is fatal to mortal dogs. In Cornwall and Devon these are often called "yell hounds" or "wish hounds". This comes from a local dialect word, whist, which means melancholy and supernatural. Whistman is a term that's suitable for magi, as some writers mistakenly think the word is related to "weird" or "wise" or "Woden".

Tregeagle, in one variant of the story, cannot abide the presence of babies. This may be because they are sacred innocents. A person carrying a baby is proof against his powers, even if they merely scoop up the child of a random nearby person.

In another story Dosemay Pool was an infernal regio, a castle of carnality that Tregeagle traded his soul for access to for a hundred years. Time passed without him noticing while he was there, however. At the end of his time, the Hunter came, killed him with a bolt of flame, and now chases his ghost for sport.

Hunt notes that, in addition to Domesay Pool, wish hounds are often reported in the valley of Dewerstone and in Cheny Downs.



# Plot Hooks

Tregeagle seems a potent spirit, so a covenant with a weak Aegis might serve as a new refuge for him. Does this lead to a demonic siege? Tormenting demons being more common in the neighbourhood? Can the characters get him out within asking saints to come in and perform miracles, damaging the magical Aura?

Pardoning sin for money is a sensitive topic. Some Catholics think the way we talk about it in English has been inflated by Protestant propaganda. It's clear that the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stamps down on what it considers abuses. The doctrine of the superabundance of the merit of Jesus and the saints is developing in the game period, but can only be traced to about 1230, textually.

Regardless of the precise mechanism of pardoning, I still like the fact that pardoners are called quaestores. I'm tempted to design an NPC bandit leader who thought a Hermetic quaesitor was a pardoner, tried to rob him, and then was hired after being defeated, because the quaesitor thought it was hilarious.

There seem to be a batch of lawyers in this story who can call up the dead, despite Christian burial. Is this some sort of tradition of Infernalists? Is Tregeagle really a faerie impersonating the sinner? Similarly, the priests seem to be good at controlling his spirit. Are they all saints, or is there a technique employed?

Could a modern sinner be damned in much the same way as Tregeagle? A nobleman or magus, for example?

If a magical battle disturbs the site of his labour, such that Tregeagle needs a new task, what might it be?

The centre of House Tytalus is just across the Channel. If one of those magi wants to chase the Midnight Hunter, what trouble could that bring?

# Cornwall:

# Mermaids

The Tregeagle episode went live a month early.

I bumped this forward to fill its place.

The text we are following for the Cornish material, Hunt's "Popular Romances of the West of England" has only a brief chapter on mermaids. Hunt draws his bow long, to tie in other, similar myths from other countries. He compares the Cornish mermaid to the Siren of the Mediterranean and the Irish Merrow. They are less of a legendary creature, and have more, to quote Hunt "human sympathy" They seem to be unable to appear without a comb, possibly a mirror, and a mass of hair.

Hunt's notes, which are directly relevant to story design are scanty.

There is a parish in the north of Cornwall called Morva, sometimes written Morveth, which has a name based on the Breton that links it to the "Morgern" (sea women) and "Morverch" (sea daughters). A nearby parish has a lot of mermaid symbolism about the place, based on so many of the apostles being fishers of men. Hunt suggests the same may hold true for two other parishes, Morval and Morwenstow. Hunt half-suggests "Morwenna's Stow" may have a mermaid link, but given that Saint Morwenna is buried in the Church of Saint Morwenna and John the Baptist, under a leadlight window of Saint Morwenna, I'm dubious.

Mermaids guard some harbours. Seaton and Padstow are both said to have been cursed, so that their harbours filled with sand. after a person tried to shoot the guardian mermaid.

There are two longer stories, "The Old Man of Cury" and "The Mermaid's Vengeance".

In "The Old Man of Cury", a man is having a stroll by the seaside and notices a woman sitting on a rock. She cries out when she sees him and slips into a rockpool. The man thinks she was a bather, and may drown, so he rushes to the pool. He realises the woman is actually a mermaid, and she seems distressed. After coaxing her to the surface, by telling her he's an old man and no more threatening than her grandfather, he asks her some questions. He learns that her husband and children are napping in a cave, and she wanted to view the land and smell the flowers. These are, we may note, the flowers of Land's End that mortals can smell but not find save at liminal times. She was distracted by dressing her hair, using the pool as a mirror, and stranded by the tide. She was worried her husband would be angry, if he woke and she was away, as he was terribly jealous.

Time to quote Hunt:

”

"She begged the old man to bear her out to sea. If he would but do so, she would procure him any three things he would wish for. Her entreaties at length prevailed ; and, according to her desire, the old man knelt down on the rock with his back towards her. She clasped her fair arms around his neck, and locked her long finny fingers together on his throat. He got up from the rock with his burthen, and carried the mermaid thus across the sands. As she rode in this way, she asked the old man to tell her what he desired. " I will not wish," said he, " for silver and gold, but give me the power to do good to my neighbours : first, to break the spells of witchcraft ; next, to charm away diseases ; and thirdly, to discover thieves, and restore stolen goods."

All this she promised he should possess ; but he must come to a half-tide rock on another day, and she would instruct him how to accomplish the three things he desired. They had reached the water, and taking her comb from her hair, she gave it to the old man, telling him he had but to comb the water and call her at any time, and she would come to him. The mermaid loosened her grasp, and sliding off the old man's back into the sea, she waved him a kiss and disappeared. At the appointed time the old man was at the half-tide rock, known to the present time as the Mermaid's Rock, and duly was he instructed in many mysteries. Amongst others, he learned to break the spells of witches on man or beast ; to prepare a vessel of water, in which to show to any one who had property stolen the face of the thief ; to charm shingles, tetters, St Antony's fire, and St Vitus's dance ; and he learnt also all the mysteries of bramble leaves, and the like.

The mermaid...persuaded her old friend to take her to some secret place, from which she could see more of the dry land, and of the funny people who lived on it, "and had their tails split, so that they could walk." On taking the mermaid back to the sea, she wished her friend to visit her abode, and promised even to make him young if he would do so, which favour the old gentleman respectfully declined. A family, well known in Cornwall, have for some generations exercised the power of charming, &c. They account for the possession of this power in the manner related. Some remote great-grandfather was the individual who received the mermaid's comb, which they retain to the present day, and show us evidence of the truth of their being supernaturally endowed. Some people are unbelieving enough to say the comb is only a part of a shark's jaw.

Note how trusting the man is: some faeries would ride him into the sea.

Do faeries just keep meeting men, and eating the bad ones, so that we only hear this story about a nice old chap?

The man is a nympholept: a human who learns magical powers from a nymph. See Realms of Power : Faerie for the Virtue

Is the comb an External Vis Source?

In the real world:

Shingles is a rash caused by the chickenpox virus.

Tetters is any skin disease that causes pustules, or crusting. Ringworm and eczema are tetters.

Saint Antony's Fire either refers to ergotism (poisoning based on a natural relative of LSD) or an inflamed skin infection caused by a strain of strep.

St Vitus Dance is a disease that manifests as spasmodic movements. It is a result of an autoimmune response to rheumatic fever.

So, this is the origin story of a hedge tradition.

Sceptical people are never lovable people.

“



# The mermaid's vengeance

Hunt then spends half the chapter discussing a single story that he has tacked together from three versions, heard in three different villages. The plot is not particularly useful to gamers, so I'll speed through it, flagging the useful fragments.

There was a good farmer, a lazy steward, and a lord. The steward wore down the peasant. The only thing in his life that was wonderful was his daughter Selina, who was eighteen, gorgeous and simple.

That's the Beauty that  
Draws Trouble Flaw.



Selina's simplicity seems to be related to the cultural idea that the fae-touched are socially withdrawn.



*Time for some Hunt:*

”

*"The village gossips, who were always busy with their neighbours, said strange things of this girl...It was commonly reported that the real child...was...remarkably plain...in every respect a different being from Selina....Two stories were, however, current for miles around the country.*

*One was, that Selina's mother was constantly seen gathering dew in the morning, with which to wash her child, and that the fairies on the Towens had, in pure malice, aided her in giving a temporary beauty to the girl, that it might lead to her betrayal into crime. Why this malice, was never clearly made out.*

*The other story was, that (the mother) constantly bathed the child in a certain pool, amidst the arched rocks of Perran, which was a favourite resort of the mermaids ; that on one occasion the child, as if in a paroxysm of joy, leapt from her arms into the water, and disappeared. The mother, as may well be supposed, suffered a momentary agony of terror ; but presently the babe swam up to the surface of the water, its little face more bright and beautiful than it had ever been before....The mother knew no difference in the child whom she pressed lovingly to her bosom, but all the aged crones in the parish declared it to be a changeling.*

*This tale lived its day ; but, as the girl grew on to womanhood, and showed none of the special qualifications belonging either to fairies or mermaids, it was almost forgotten."*

The lord's nephew arrived, and was smitten with Selina. The steward convinced the nephew Selina was only pretending to be morally pure, so the nephew seduced her, then left. This broke her heart. and she died for the lack of him, talking to invisible creatures. She left behind a baby. Her Dad decided to kill the lord's nephew, but the local priest "exorcised his demon", which may just be a metaphor, and they waited for God to get smitey.

A bit more Hunt: "(The steward) had his hour of triumph ; but from the day on which Selina died everything went wrong. The crops failed, the cattle died, hay-stacks and corn-ricks caught fire, cows slipped their calves, horses fell lame, or stumbled and broke their knees, a succession of evils steadily pursued him." This is thought by some to be the Evil Eye, used by her father.

The lazy steward was broken by his misfortunes and fired. He moved to a tiny croft on the cliffs. The lord's nephew was still his friend, and subsidised his lifestyle. His croft beaome the local party house for young people. There was sex, alcohol and what must have been the beginning of an Infernal aura. The dissipated nephew was paying for it all, so he had a tribe of sycophants.

The nephew was wandering by the seashore, near the cliff, and saw a mermaid. She tried to flee, but he grabbed her from behind, and threatened her. She turned and her face was Selina's. Hunt has muddled his sources here, so this mermaid is either Selina, Selina's mother, or a sort of faerie godmother. Regardless she kissed him, then told him that kisses of the sea were as constant as those of the land were fickle. He was now hers until death. She made clear that he shouldn't start any long novels. The kissed him again, and told him to get his affairs in order.

The nephew went to a priest and was told it was just a vivid dream. That's not the Rite of Reconciliation, so, that was bad news when the faeries drew him back to the beach to drown him. Prior to using his corpse as a surfboard, they called lightning to destroy the ex-steward's house. There are even traditional songs in this story, but let's stop it there.

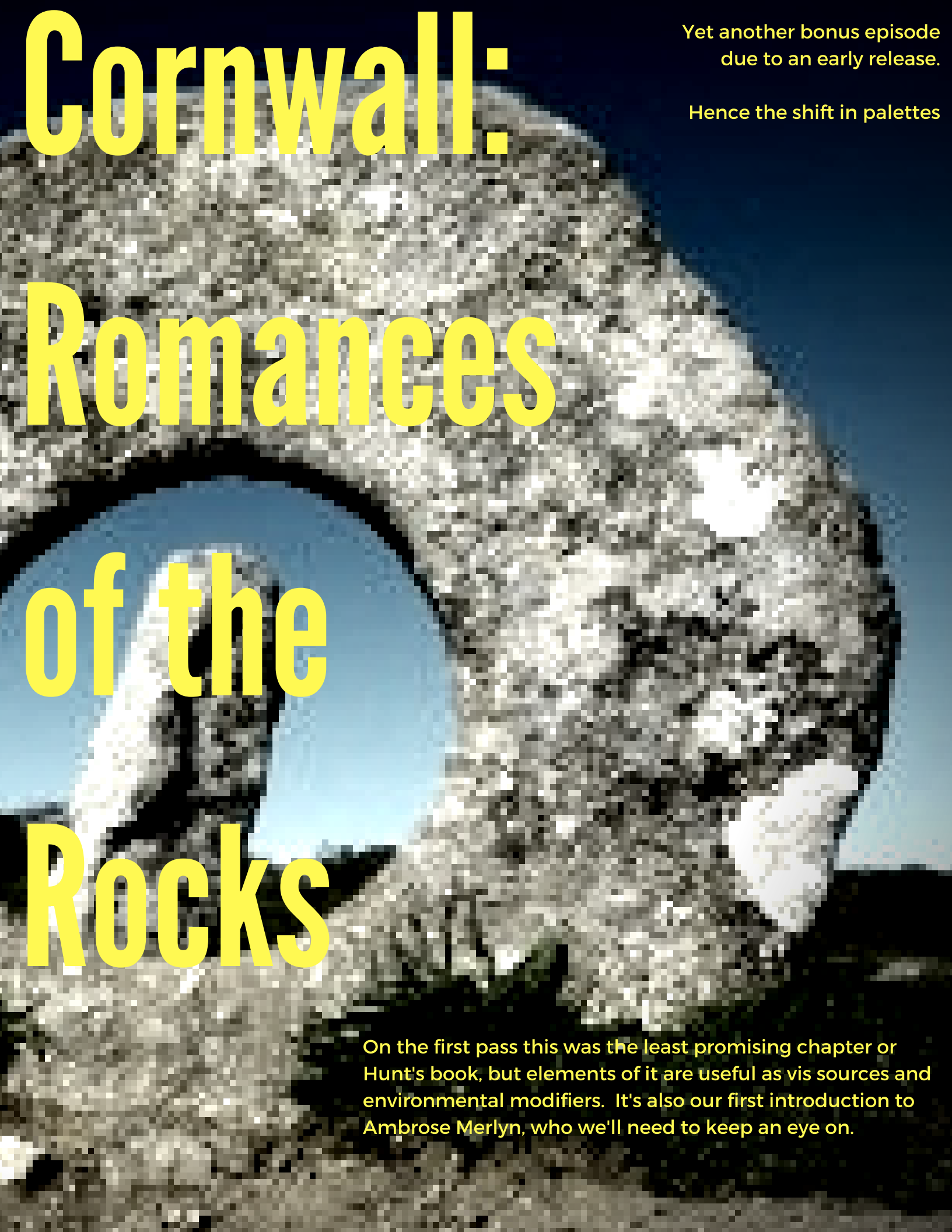
If this isn't a metaphor, it explains why the mermaids rain fire on the Infernal site, later in the stoy.



We don't often see the faeries pick a fight with the forces of evil. Here they do, but they do this by killing the mortal agents the demons need to do their work.

She keeps pretending to be Selina, and torturing him with endearments, while it is clear her paralysis power is going to be the cause of his death when the tide rises. At one point she even has him move further from the rising water, so she can keep tormenting him longer. She's a phantom lover, but a weird one who is feeding not on love, but on terror and regret. She's going meta on their role.





# Cornwall: Romances of the Rocks

Yet another bonus episode  
due to an early release.

Hence the shift in palettes

On the first pass this was the least promising chapter or Hunt's book, but elements of it are useful as vis sources and environmental modifiers. It's also our first introduction to Ambrose Merlyn, who we'll need to keep an eye on.



The Cornish in Mythic Europe attribute a lot of their odd stones to druids. A modern archaeologist from our world might disagree, but there aren't many of them around to tell the Mythic Peasantry that they are wrong. There is some recognition that cromlechs were once tombs, but many stones are just sacred because that's their nature. Stones which are considered special are called, in Cornish "ambers" or "main ambers". As far as I can tell this bears not relationship to the semiprecious stone of the same name. People don't know why, or how, the stones became that way, just that some are immovable, and others will move back if you manage to shift them.

Many stones are attributed to ancient giants or the Devil. These tend to be in the west of Cornwall. Those in the East are often attributed to King Arthur. For Hunt it's a bit of a running gag that some antiquaries see Druidic ceremonial bowls scooped out of every rock in Cornwall. That being said, water collected in such a bowl is a good way of expressing vis sources. The dew that collects into the cups carved into Arthur's Seat at Tintagel, for example, has Rego vis. Some Logan rocks must produce Creo, Intelligo or Corpus vis.

To me, the stones which move back to their ancient spots sound like disturbed earth elementals returning to their aura. Many stones move back overnight, so they seem to reappear at their own spot first thing in the morning: that seems like a more fae or demonic timetable. Hunt also mentions a few stones which revolve three times at cock-crow. There seems to be no reason for this, and none sought, but they'd similarly tie into faerie or infernal haunts.

Hunt notes it is odd that there are so many stones marked as the Devil's oven, coit, footstep and so on, because there's a myth saying he never comes to Cornwall. A counter myth is that there's a doorway to hell in the shale behind Polperro, and the lake there, shaped like a giant hoofprint, was made by his Satanic horse.

**The devil never came into Cornwall, because, when he crossed the Tamar, and made Torpoint for a brief space his resting-place, he could not but observe that everything, vegetable or animal, was put by the Cornish people into a pie.**

**He saw and heard of fishy pie, star-gazy pie, conger pie, and indeed pies of all the fishes in the sea. Of parsley pie, and herby pie, of lamy pie, and piggy pie, and pies without number.**

**Therefore, fearing they might take a fancy to a "devily pie," he took himself back again into Devonshire.**



## Logan stones

A particular type of rock of interest to magi is the Logan stone. Hunt notes that Logan comes from the Cornish verb "log", meaning "to sway like a drunkard" and -an, which is the same as the English -ing. A Logan stone, as pictured through this article, is a rock which rests on a point, such that it can, with minimal effort, be rocked. The magic of each stone varies. Some test character, so that they can only be rocked by the true of heart, being immobile to cowards, or the dishonest, or to traitors, or bastards, or drunkards. The rock, pictured on the previous page is believed to cure children rocked on it, at certain times, of grave diseases. Similar rocks are scattered about Cornwall.

Another Logan rock was prophesied by Ambrose Merlin to stand until England had no king, and in the real world it was destroyed by one of Oliver Cromwell's lieutenants. Ambrose Merlin is of interest to us, as his prophecies were first recorded in book form, so far as we can tell, late in the 11th Century, so he's surprisingly current to magi. In the real world, a Latin version of the Prophecies of Merlin has Cornish notations in the margins, the earliest known writing in Cornish.



## The dancing stones and the hurlers

There are circles of standing stones in Cornwall which Victorian gentlemen used to call druidic, but modern archaeologists are sceptical about. The peasants of Mythic Europe know where they come from, though: annoy God enough and he'll turn you, and all of your friends, into rocks. He's particularly fond of making rockeries on the Sabbath.

The Dancing Stones are near Burian, and are believed to be girls from a neighbouring village who were lured dancing by two demons. Their revel continued into the Sabbath, so God decided he needed a new tourist attraction and he made them into stone. The two demons, likewise, were turned into stones. That shouldn't stop them for long, but it does mean the stones may have an infernal aura, sordid vis, or provide an arcane connection to the previous inhabitants.

There's a similar story told at various other places, and a related story, told in rivalry at many, many sites, that the stones commemorate some dead nuns. This would give them an aura, particularly if the nuns were martyred during the invasions.

Near Cheesewring are three sets of circles called the Hurlers. Hurling is a sport, and playing it on the Sabbath is pretty common. Some suggest that faeries or demons now use the Hurlers as goals in their own games of hurley, and they are always up for a match if the stakes are right.

## The prince, the kings, the lady

There's a stone nine feet in height near Penzance, on an ancient battlefield, under which is buried the son of a king, as tall as the stone.

At Land's End, there's a great square of granite, eight feet long and three feet high. It's called the Table Stone. There's a similar stone, with the same story attached, near Bosavern. The table is meant to have been used for a conference of Anglo-Saxon kings, either three, seven or nine in number. One, more explicit, version of the myths, names the kings, and therefore places the meeting at about the year 600. Even if this was not true, Land's End is so packed with the Fae it must be true enough, by now, to have a mystical effect.

There's another rock near Land's End called "The Irish Lady" which is haunted by an Irish woman tossed onto it by a shipwreck. The local fishers could see her, but not save her, because the sea was too rough from the storm that had destroyed her ship. She perished of exposure, and now her ghost is seen, sitting tranquilly on the rock during storms, with a rose in her teeth. A related story has the woman being seized by a creature that dwelt in a cave by her rock: there is a healing well here, and she tried to find out what was the cause of the cure, dying for her curiosity. This story seems to be from a period after Ars Magica's 1220 start date, but I wouldn't let that stop me....



## Holed rocks and crick stones

There are many holed stones in Cornwall reputed to have magical powers. The one that's been used as the hero image through this series is of the the Men An Tol, or "holed stone" near Penzance. If scrofulous children are passed through the stone naked, then drawn on the grass three times against the sun, they are cured. This may seem like an odd thing, but curing scrofula used to be the preview of kings. Some adults have likewise claimed benefit for skin conditions and, strangest of all, people with spinal complaints have been cured by being slid through.

There's a forked stone in Morva which has the same tendency to heal injured spines, backs, but even the people who live nearby say the holed stone is better: it's just less convenient to get to when you have a sore back. There are many other little tunnels, caused by falling rocks, which are said to be good for rheumatism or back pain. Sometimes you need to crawl through them nine times for the charm to work. The stones seem to be able to cure certain types of Aging Crisis.

The Men An Tol also has oracular powers. If you balance two brass pins on the edge, and ask a question, they will move to indicate the answer. I'd note that brass is a metal often associated with faeries in *Ars Magica*.





Hunt flags two minor other bits of folklore that could be mined for stories, but they'd need development.

He says that there's a cave tunnel which connects Ppier's Hole, on St Mary's in the Scilly Islands, with a similar cave near Tresco. People who try to take the tunnel often disappear. Dogs lost from one place sometimes turn up at the other with most of their hair missing, and locals seem to insist on having sex in the caves, for reasons Hunt does not seem to fathom and might be mystical in Mythic Europe.

He also notes five child saints who were whisked away into an enchanted sleep by the evil sorcerer who lives in the hollows beneath the hills, and will wake when there is a pious bishop and Merlin returns to cast down all evil magicians. As prophecies go, that's one the Order should try to find out more about. Possibly a good idea to staff the cathedral with venal men for a while, just as a safety measure, while they consider this. Or does that make them evil magicians? Predestination paradox is a problem, even in Mythic Europe.