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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first anthology of adventures published for the **Ars Magica™** game, and the first product to appear under the label of Atlas Games. While we have obviously designed this product for players of **Ars Magica**, we would hope that players of other RPGs may be intrigued by this collection. In the tradition of **Ars Magica**, our emphasis has been on writing a good story, not legislating rules or catering to their peculiarities. We hope that we have successfully done so, and that these stories will appeal to adherents of every game—and perhaps even intrigue non-gamers.

ABOUT ATLAS GAMES

Atlas Games is a brand new company, a small publisher of role-playing games and related materials. By special arrangement with Lion Rampant Games, we are licensed to produce materials for the **Ars Magica™** game. Atlas Games is envisioned as a small company, one that caters to the sophisticated gamer, the reader willing to delve into the unusual and experimental, as well as to enjoy creative new variations on mainstream design.

This vision is informed by the belief that any art, such as role-playing, grows through risk and experimentation. Large companies, because of the scale on which they operate, are often hesitant to take such risks. As in other arts (and technologies), many of the exciting innovations originate in the small, obscure, “underground” companies. These ideas, and the companies that spawned them, may later—often in “watered-down” form—become accepted as “mainstream.” The creation of role-playing games in the first place attests to this process.

This all means that to renew and grow, the hobby requires a continuous supply of small ventures, business risks that may survive or fail, but which inevitably make their impression on the hobby. While the average gamer may never have read **Ars Magica**, for instance, he may have already felt its repercussions. This is because the best designers, though they may be employed by the larger companies, keep a close eye on the “underground.” They know

that new ideas and approaches will show up there. Consciously or not, each designer is influenced by those ideas to which he or she has been exposed; in this fashion, the best ideas are distilled out and preserved as a legacy for all games.

Atlas Games is pleased to be a small company. Certainly we will not throw away profit, should it come our way; but at the outset our dedication is foremost to innovation, to experimentation, whether exploring new territory or re-charting the familiar. We believe this approach will have a crucial impact on the gaming hobby, whether or not a particular product is widely recognized; and we hope that the core of quality that survives the ravages of time and criticism will redeem whatever inferior contents may have been discarded along the way.

Tales of the Dark Ages is the first step toward our vision. In it, we invite you to taste the cutting edge of role-gaming design. Won't you join us?

WHAT IS ARS MAGICA™? (AND WHAT IF I PLAY SOMETHING ELSE?)

Ars Magica is a fantasy role-playing game published by Lion Rampant Games (P.O. Box 29942, Atlanta, GA 30359). The game focuses on the medieval wizard in an authentic setting, as close to the historical Medieval Europe as possible. It has received critical acclaim from nearly every quarter for its fresh approach to role-gaming, and its innovative magic system.

Tales of the Dark Ages was designed specifically for **Ars Magica**. If you use another game system, do not fret; you can still adapt these adventures for your campaign (—or “saga,” as we would say in **ArM** terms)! Here we'll give you a quick introduction to the basics of **ArM** game mechanics. If you have some idea of what all the numbers and abbreviations mean, it should be easier to draw up analogous details for the game of your choice.

There is only one sort of die, 10-sided, but two sorts of die rolls that are the heart of **Ars Magica** game mechanics. A *simple die* is read as it is, like a "1d10" in other games. When the situation affords extraordinary success or failure, or involves a lot of pressure, the Storyguide (an **ArM** gamemaster) usually requires a *stress die*. A stress die is read normally from 2 through 9. If a "1" is rolled, then the die is rolled again, and the result doubled. (If another "1" is rolled, then a third die is rolled and quadrupled, etc.) If a "0" is rolled, the die must be rolled again. If it is anything other than a "0", the result of the roll is zero. If a second "0" is rolled, however, it is a *botch*—something goes terribly wrong. For instance, in combat a botch may mean the character strikes a companion rather than a foe. The exact nature of the botch is left to the gamemaster.

Die rolls are modified by a *characteristic* (sometimes by more than one) and an *ability* (again, sometimes by more than one). The eight characteristics are Intelligence, Perception, Strength, Stamina, Communication, Presence, Dexterity and Quickness; they have scores from -5 to +5. Abilities are the talents and skills of a character. Hence, one might have a roll such as "stress die + Com + Speak French." The player would roll a stress die, and add to the result his Communication characteristic and his score in Speaking French.

Success or failure is determined by comparing the modified die roll to an *ease factor*; if the roll is equal to or greater than the ease factor, the character has succeeded in his action. Ease factors may be anything; they typically range from "3+" (extremely easy) to "15+" (extremely difficult).

Many gamers should spot ways to translate or adapt this for the games they play. For instance, if one were to adapt this for the *Dungeons & Dragons*® game, one would not add straight D&D® ability scores (since they range from 3 to 18, as opposed to **Ars Magica's** range of -5 to +5) to game rolls. Instead, use the bonuses or penalties that the D&D ability scores confer: -3 for a score of 3; -2 for 4-5; -1 for 6-8; 0 for 9-12; +1 for 13-15; +2 for 16-17; and +3 for 18.

The **Ars Magica** magic system consists of *techniques* and *forms*, two sorts of magic arts that are combined to create magical effects. The five techniques are the action—*Creo* ("I create"), *Intéllego* ("I perceive"), *Muto* ("I transform"), *Perdo* ("I destroy"), and *Rego* ("I control"). The ten forms are the medium or object of that action—*Animál* ("animal"), *Aquam* ("water"), *Auram* ("air"), *Córporem* ("body"), *Herbam* ("plant"), *Ignem* ("fire"), *Imágonem* ("image"), *Mentem* ("mind"), *Terram* ("earth"), and *Vim* ("power," the

substance of magic). For instance "Intéllego Imágonem" would describe a spell for gaining knowledge about an image—detecting an illusion, for instance.

Magi (wizards) have scores in each technique and form that they use. They can can *formulaic* spells from memory, or *spontaneous* spells off the cuff, with their success and efficacy depending on their intelligence and scores in the arts involved.

ARS MAGICA™ ABBREVIATIONS

Following is a list of common abbreviations used in the **Ars Magica** game, and what they stand for.

1st	First Strike Bonus
An	<i>Animál</i> ("Animal")
Aq	<i>Aquam</i> ("Water")
ArM	Ars Magica ™
Atk	Attack Roll Bonus
Au	<i>Auram</i> ("Air")
Cnf	Confidence
Co	<i>Córporem</i> ("Body")
Com	Communication
Cr	<i>Creo</i> ("I create")
Dam	Damage Bonus
Def	Defense Roll Bonus
Dex	Dexterity
Enc	Encumbrance
Fat	Fatigue
He	<i>Herbam</i> ("Plant")
Ig	<i>Ignem</i> ("Fire")
In	<i>Intéllego</i> ("I perceive")
Incap	Incapacitated
Int	Intelligence
Me	<i>Mentem</i> ("Mind")
Mu	<i>Muto</i> ("I transform")
Pe	<i>Perdo</i> ("I destroy")
Per	Perception
Prs	Presence
Qik	Quickness
Re	<i>Rego</i> ("I control")
Stm	Stamina
Str	Strength
Unc	Unconscious

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STATISTICS FORMAT

A few notes may clarify game statistics presented in this anthology.

- Any time that a characteristic, ability, etc., is not listed for a character, but needs to be used in play, presume it to be 0 (zero—that is, average). Hence, if a character is described as having just “Stm +1” under **Characteristics**, the character has a score of “0” in the seven other characteristics.

- Sometimes, after an **Ability**, something follows a slash mark—e.g., “Church Knowledge/Monastic Orders—2.” That something following is a *specialty*. Any time the character is faced with a die roll for the ability that also involves the specialty, the ability is treated as one higher. (In the example: If this character was faced with a question about the Benedictine Rule—which concerns the monastic order of St. Benedict—his ability would be effectively 3.)

- For convenience, in the **Grimoire** of each spellcaster, the caster’s total casting bonus (Int + Tech + Form, plus any other bonus for affinities and so forth) is totalled and presented after the name, technique, form, and level of the spell. This bonus does *not* take into account special considerations such as the aura of an area, or difficult casting conditions (e.g., being unable to make hand gestures or vocalizations).

MYTHIC EUROPE

Mythic Europe™, the recommended setting of **Ars Magica™**, is very much like historical Europe of the Middle Ages—except magic really does work, and things (even the laws of physics!) are as the medievals believed them to be. The setting suggested by the **ArM** rulebook is the *Mistridge Saga*, based on a covenant in the Pyrenees in the late 12th century. Additional contemporary covenants are described in the supplement, *Covenants™*. —But there is no reason why you should not use a different place or time.

If you do, you will want to gather information about it. What is the political situation? What are the economics? What major events have happened there in the last century or so? The upcoming **ATLAS EUROPA™** product line from Atlas Games will answer these questions (and more!) for various interesting times and places—but you should certainly put together sagas of your own devising! In doing so, do take liberties with history. Just as your *Saga* may affect the course of events, so that they differ from the real Europe, you may decide that somewhere along the line in your Mythic Europe, things happened differently. Perhaps in your alternate universe Duke

William of Normandy lost the Battle of Hastings in 1066, leaving England under Anglo-Saxon power. At the same time Norman power could have been greatly weakened, permitting the King of France to consolidate his power earlier than was historically the case...

With the wealth of information that only the real world can give, plus your imagination, you have all the right materials to craft a Mythic Europe to serve and to grow as the setting for your rich saga of exciting stories.

Every adventure provided in *Tales of the Dark Ages* is given a specific setting in mythical Medieval Europe, from the Rhineland to the Pyrenees. The setting chosen by the author is used for detail and atmosphere; in Thomas Kane’s “Tongue of Vipers,” for instance, it is interesting that many of the non-player characters know both French and German; this means that characters from a wide area of Europe could effectively participate in the communication-intensive adventure.

But don’t feel constrained by the setting described. As the adventures note, they often can easily be translated to other places or times, to suit your troupe’s saga. Doing so, along with altering other details to your taste, are part of the creative end of a Storyguide’s job.

UPCOMING PRODUCTS

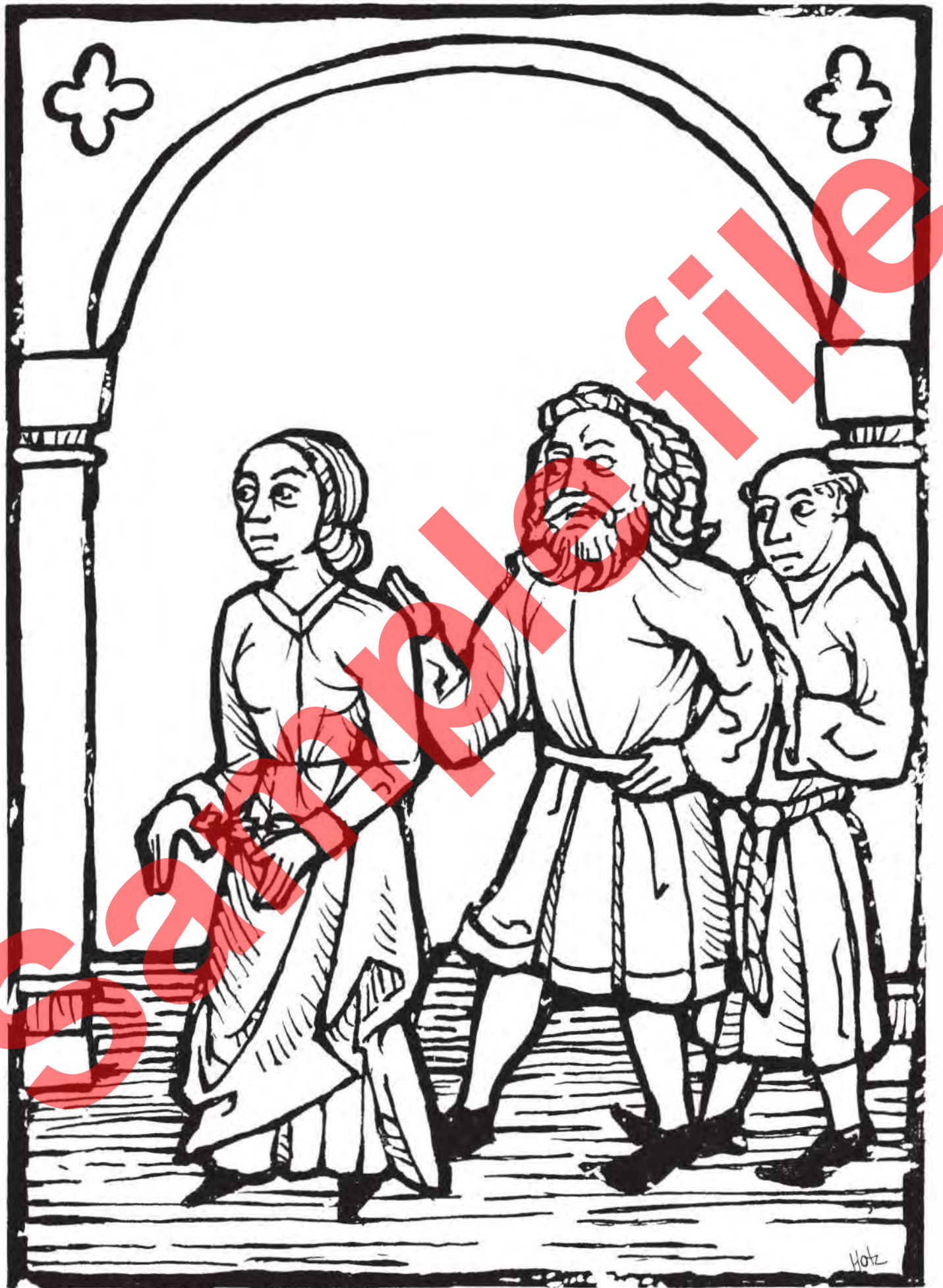
Watch for exciting new products coming up from Atlas Games! In particular, you’ll be interested in seeing our **ATLAS EUROPA™** line of supplements, detailing the setting of Mythic Europe in diverse places and times. For more information on products and availability, write to Atlas Games at the address below.

COMMENTS, CRITICISM, &C.

Your thoughts on *Tales of the Dark Ages*, or any other germane topic, are most welcome! Please write to:

Atlas Games
P.O. Box 406
Northfield, MN 55057

If you have comments for a particular artist or writer, indicate their name, “c/o Atlas Games,” on your envelope, and we’ll gladly forward your letter to him or her.



Tongue of Vipers

by Thomas M. Kane

TIME AND LOCATION

This story takes place during the thirteenth century in the Lorraine region of France, near the Rhine. If your campaign takes place in another place or time, you should have little difficulty adapting it. All beings encountered speak French (or whatever language the PCs use in your campaign, if it is in a different region). Many know German as well.

SUMMARY OF PLOT

For many years, the party's covenant has yearned for access to the Seir Waters, an enchanted spring in the private forests of the Viscount von Orstadt. The viscount, however, is formidable and feels disinclined to humor wizards. When this adventure begins, the Lady Claire, a new favorite at Von Orstadt's court, suddenly entreats the party to pay her viscount a visit. Naturally, the group accepts.

When the adventurers arrive, talk of Lady Claire brings them little favor. The viscount has imprisoned her as a poisoner. Apparently, the viscount discovered remnants of a strange herb dissolving in his wine-cup, which, when fed to a cat, caused immediate cramps and apparent death. After a quick meeting of his Council, he selected Lady Claire as the most likely suspect, and indeed, a search of her chambers revealed more drugs with similar powers.

The party does not know if Lady Claire committed the crime or not. Most of this adventure consists of clues in the castle and grounds, which do seem to incriminate Claire. Viscount von Orstadt has delayed her execution, hoping to uncover any remaining conspirators, and the party could persuade him to grant access to his spring in return for detective work. On the other hand, bumbling adventurers might implicate themselves as Claire's accomplices. As the party probes deeper, they learn that Claire is not the only mysterious person at court.

Claire arrived at the palace amidst a fierce struggle between two other courtiers, Father Gaston and Jacques de Bray, the viscount's private soothsayer. She quickly outshone them both, impressing the viscount with her skills as a seer and her willingness to serve him instead of bickering with his other advisors. Naturally, the two old advisors despised her. She summoned the adventurers as protectors, but before they arrived, Jacques de Bray managed to frame her for the poisoning. She wrote the viscount a letter from prison naming witnesses to her innocence. Father Gaston intercepted it. Meanwhile Jacques had his henchmen beat her into a confession. Now Father Gaston plans to wait for Claire's execution. After that, he will give the Viscount her letter and denounce Jacques as the real culprit. The party must expose the actual villains first—or find themselves enemies of the new powers in the castle.