Mythic Europe

The official setting for Ars Magica is Mythic Europe, a world very like the middle ages of our world, but with magic. For many people, this setting is a large part of the fun of the game. You can 'change history', or at least 'visit' historical places. When you save a country from demons, you've saved France, not some imaginary land. It's also possible to actually visit the place where your saga is set, although that's easier for European players.

However, some players and storyguides can find this a little intimidating. There is no need for this. The most important thing to remember is that it is a *game:* it is supposed to be fun. If historical accuracy is spoiling your fun, you need less of it. Any way you enjoy playing the game counts as playing it 'properly'. The second thing to remember is that this chapter contains all the history you need to play the game in Mythic Europe. There is, of course, a lot more history out there, but none of it is necessary for play.

The reason for the historical setting is that it is fun to pretend that you are involved in history. If that isn't fun for your troupe, you should consider playing in a non-historical setting (see page @@).

Un-Fun History

Medieval European society was not a liberal, tolerant, or pleasant place to live. It was thoroughly misogynist and patriarchal, and democracy was generally regarded as an evil custom that would destroy society. While the period is rightly notorious for its anti-Semitism, it is important to remember that Judaism was the most *tolerated* minority religion in almost all areas covered by Ars Magica. We have not chosen the game’s setting because we think it is a society that is worth emulating, or one in which we would like to live.

If your troupe finds medieval society sufficiently off-putting, you might want to play in a non-historical setting. On the other hand, you might like the general idea, but find particular elements unpalatable. In that case, there is no problem with glossing over or removing those features of medieval society. If you want the Church to silently tolerate surviving pagan cults in rural villages, go for it. That could have relatively little impact, without straining suspension of disbelief too much. If you want to introduce gender equality you will have to do more work, but it might be as simple as declaring that England is currently ruled by Queen Henrietta III, rather than King Henry III.

On the other hand, you might enjoy playing characters who have to face the challenges created by an oppressive culture. It can be a lot of fun to play the resistance, as the popularity of a certain fictional universe including knights with shining swords proves. The Order of Hermes is deliberately designed to be anachronistic and fundamentally tolerant, so that your troupe’s home covenant can be as liberal as you like, if you would have more fun with a safe home base for your characters.

The material published for Ars Magica 5th Edition stays close to the facts about medieval society, but your troupe does not have to. Discuss what you would, collectively, find most fun, and develop that consensus as you play so that everyone enjoys playing in the game world, even if they would certainly not want to live there.

Making it Historical

If you are playing a historical roleplaying game, you want the stories to feel historical. You should not attempt to do this by avoiding errors, because mood is better set by positive, obvious features of the story, rather than by omissions. Thus, you should include historical features and make them an important part of the story.

Some aspects of this are both easy and obvious. There are castles, and knights riding around in armor. However, these features of the environment do not distinguish Mythic Europe from many generic fantasy settings. If you want the game to feel properly medieval, rather than vaguely medieval, you need to do a bit more.

One possibility is to introduce known historical figures. The main problem with this is that most players will only have heard of the most famous medieval figures, generally kings and saints, and it can spoil suspension of disbelief if they show up all the time. On the other hand, if your saga is set in northern Italy a little before the canonical date it is entirely realistic to have St Francis of Assisi wander past every so often. Still, it is unwise to rely on famous medieval people entirely. If your players have more background knowledge on the period, less famous figures might work just as well, and you could make several historical figures into recurring NPCs.

A second possibility is to have the characters turn up at famous historical events. This suffers from some of the same problems as using historical characters, and has an additional potential problem. If you decide that you want the course of history in your saga to match the course of recorded history, you will have to stop the player characters changing anything. This is, in general, a bad way to write stories.

Another approach is to make distinctively medieval things central to a story. This is much easier than it sounds, for two reasons. First, you only need to find out one thing for each story. For example, you might learn that medieval people went on frequent pilgrimages to saints' tombs, and then build a story around a pilgrimage. You don't need to know about the rest of the cult of saints, because those other aspects do not matter to your story. Second, by putting something obviously medieval on center stage, you draw attention to that, and away from the areas where you are making things up as you go along.

You can use any area of medieval culture for this, but you should pick something that you find independently interesting. Once you have found an interesting fact, you have to work it into a story. This does not mean that the thing should turn up, and that you then lecture the players about it. Instead, the course of the story should depend, in some way, on the thing that you have discovered.

Some discoveries are easier to incorporate than others. For example, there was a significant tendency for people to try to steal relics from shrines, so that they could have the holiness for themselves. This is easy to incorporate; the story can just be about a relic thief, and the NPCs simply mention that such thefts are not uncommon. Similarly, features of the laws and systems of justice can easily be worked into a story centered around a court case.

It seems harder to incorporate details of medieval diet into a story, but it is not impossible. For example, the nobility ate meat with nearly every meal, as a sign of status. So, have a nobleman arrange to visit the covenant, and then have an enemy curse the covenant so that their meat stocks all turn rotten, as does any new meat they bring in. If the covenant cannot lift the curse, they will have to feed the nobleman vegetables, and he will be insulted.

For some aspects of social history, the best way to incorporate them is to create an NPC around that fact, and then have the NPC play a central role in at least one story. For example, it was common for widows to take over and continue their husbands' businesses, but many businessmen regarded such women with a degree of hostility. A widow could, therefore, seek the covenant's help.

A final option is to spend some time reading medieval legends and stories, and then to create stories based on them. Many medieval legends are available in inexpensive English translations, and some are extremely easy to convert into stories.

The main body of this chapter, and other Ars Magica products, contain a large number of such aspects of medieval history, along with explicit suggestions for how to turn them into stories. It is entirely possible to create a saga with a very medieval tone without buying any books that are not part of the Ars Magica line.

Some storyguides might worry that their players will not appreciate just how medieval some of the things they incorporate are, but this is unlikely to be a problem. If the players know that you are trying to incorporate genuine medieval history, they are likely to take it on trust that the person they have just met had real medieval counterparts, and thus when the events of the saga differ from the assumptions of generic medieval fantasy they will know that this is because of genuine historical flavor.

In addition, it is not at all uncommon for players of Ars Magica to start reading a bit about the middle ages. If your players do so, they will find that they come across things that have already featured in the saga. This will impress them with your erudition, and with the historical feel that the game has.

The Order of Hermes

The Order of Hermes is completely ahistorical. It has no basis whatsoever in medieval history or myth. (The magical traditions described in supplements such as *Rival Magic* and *Hedge Magic Revised Edition* are, in many cases, much more closely grounded in medieval beliefs.) Its magi are also unbelievably powerful. Why does the rest of Mythic Europe look so similar to the real world?

The real answer is “because we want to play a game about powerful wizards in medieval Europe”. We therefore gloss over inconsistencies. The Code of Hermes is designed to help with suspension of disbelief on this point, and it is reasonable for players to simply assume that it successfully stops magi from interfering and changing the course of history.

Of course, there is nothing to stop you from allowing the player magi in your saga to make major changes, and indeed there is a whole supplement, *Transforming Mythic Europe*, devoted to ways in which they can do exactly that.

Pieces of History

The following sections cover the Mythic European setting, concentrating on the more historical, or historically legendary, aspects. The Realms and Bestiary chapters provide some more ideas on the purely fantastic aspects of the setting. This is not a history text. It is generalized to the point that nothing in this section was exactly true of any part of medieval Europe, and there are some places where the generalizations didn't apply at all. If you want more specific and accurate history for a particular area, there are several Tribunal books available for Ars Magica 5th Edition.

Further, this is not a narrative history of medieval Europe. Such things are easily available in encyclopedias, if you want to read them. However, the sorts of details that are useful for adding historical flavor to a role-playing game are not the sorts of details that are necessarily easy to find.

The information given in this section is most accurate for 1220, the 'official' date for Ars Magica. Using it will give your saga the feel of something happening between about 1000 and 1400, which is likely to be good enough to most troupes.

Medieval Physics

Modern science is not true of Mythic Europe. The world is a sphere, but it is stationary at the center of the universe, and the stars and planets, including the sun, are carried around it on great spheres. The lowest of these, the Lunar Sphere, is also the limit of the power of Hermetic magic. There are differences at a more immediate level, as well. Diseases are caused by imbalances in the four humors, not by infectious micro-organisms. An object in motion tends to come to a halt unless a force makes it continue moving. Worms and flies arise spontaneously from non-living matter. These questions are discussed in detail in *Art & Academe,* which also provides rules for medicine and the feats of experimental philosophers.

Beyond Western Europe

The information in this chapter is focused on Western Europe — the region ruled by Christians who recognised the Pope as the head of the Church on earth. This is a diverse area already, but there is a lot more to Mythic Europe, and supplements have covered it in more detail. *Realms of Power: The Divine* includes more information on Christianity, and also on Islam and Judaism. *Against the Dark* and *The Sundered Eagle* offer information about Eastern Europe, and the Orthodox Church. *The Cradle and the Crescent* covers the Middle East, while *Between Sand & Sea* and *Lands of the Nile* cover North Africa, as far south as Ethiopia.

The Church

The Church is probably the quickest and easiest way to give medieval flavor to your saga. Christianity influenced every aspect of life in medieval Europe in a way that's hard to even imagine today, and does not feature in most fantasy settings. Almost everybody, including most Hermetic magi, is a Christian, and the overwhelming majority of Christians believe that the Church is essential to their religion.

The fact that the medieval Church is, after some changes, still around as the Roman Catholic Church means that you have to be a bit careful about offending people when using it in your sagas. Over its history the Church, both clergy and laity, has had periods when it was more true to Christian ideals, and periods when it was less so, and at all periods members of the Church have run the full gamut from sinners to saints. You will need to decide what sort of atmosphere prevails in your game, although you should keep in mind that, unless you change the game mechanics, the Church is backed by the Divine, which puts limits on how corrupt it can be. In the end, the best way to avoid giving offense is probably to portray rounded characters, rather than stereotypes at either extreme.

Much more information about the Church is available in *The Church.*

Doctrine

There is one God, eternal and unchanging, who created the world from nothing and sustains it from moment to moment. This God is three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Son became a human being as Jesus Christ, an event called the Incarnation, which is considered the most important event in history. Jesus Christ died on the cross, the Crucifixion, and by his death paid the penalty for all the sins committed by human beings. On the third day, he rose from the dead, in the Resurrection, and forty days later he ascended to heaven.

In the beginning, God created two humans, Adam and Eve, and placed them in the Garden of Eden. There, they were tempted by Satan and sinned, and this Original Sin tainted all of their descendants. Where once all of nature had served humankind, now it turned against them. Human beings in Original Sin can do nothing truly good, because their motives are always tainted. Baptism washes away that stain, and fits a person to receive God's grace, which grants the ability to do good.

Good acts are those which accord with God's will, and tend to His glory, while evil acts are those which do not. The seven deadly sins are the basic roots of almost all sins committed by human beings, and the Church warns against them in particular. They are Avarice, Envy, Greed, Lust, Pride, Sloth, and Wrath. On the other side, there are the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Love, and the greatest of these is Love.

All humans have an immortal soul, created at some point before birth. (In 1220, theologians still disagree about when.) After death, the soul is judged by God. Those who die perfect, having done penance for all their sins, pass directly into heaven. Those who die penitent, but not yet perfect, pass to purgatory, where they do penance after death for all those sins remaining. Those who die impenitent are condemned to hell for eternity.

Game Use: Doctrine

The deadly sins and theological virtues make excellent Personality Traits for medieval-themed characters. Beyond that, the issues covered by this section are rarely likely to come into play in sagas, which is probably as it should be.

Magic and Sin

One question that is not decided by the core rules of Ars Magica is whether magic is sinful in itself. It is clear that it can be used for sinful purposes, and lends itself well to all seven deadly sins, but it can also be used for good ends. If magic is inherently sinful, casting a spell is sinful no matter what the purpose.

The choice you make here affects the possible relationships between the magi and the Divine. If magic is inherently sinful, saints and angels will always encourage magi to abandon it. This creates a strong tension, and so works best if interactions with the Church are rare. It does not mean that the Divine is always hostile, as the world is full of sinners, and magic, in itself, is not necessarily a particularly serious sin.

If magic is not inherently sinful, magi could have close, and good, relations with the Church, saints, and angels, with occasional concerns over sins the magi committed using magic. In this case, giving up magic, whether temporarily or permanently, is a suitable penance in itself; giving up a sin can never be a penance, because it is required anyway.

Sacraments

The life of the Church is structured around the seven sacraments. Most of these mark important stages of life, but the most important of the sacraments, the Mass, is devoted solely to man's relationship with God.

Baptism is the first of the sacraments. It involves literally or symbolically immersing someone in water, while announcing that you are baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism washes away the stain of original sin, and is generally essential for salvation. Baptism can be performed by anyone, even a non-Christian, and even someone who gets the process wrong, as long as they intend to be performing a Christian baptism.

In 1220 there is theological uncertainty as to the fate of babies who die unbaptized, so the Church has many procedures in place to ensure that children are baptized as soon as possible after birth. Baptism should be performed by a priest if at all possible, but in an emergency anyone, as noted above, may do it. As a result, Jews are just about the only unbaptized people in Mythic Europe.

Confirmation marks a person's desire to be united with the Church on earth, when he re-affirms the promises made on his behalf at baptism. This is supposed to take place at the age of reason, seven years old, but often does not. Confirmation can only be administered by a bishop or a priest specially designated as his representative, and, ideally, only after examining the candidate to ensure that he understands the Christian faith. These requirements make it hard for most medieval people to get a proper confirmation, so there are a substantial number of people who have never been confirmed. In particular, most Christian magi have not been, unless they or their parens are particularly pious.

Marriage marks the start of a family, and is another sacrament that doesn't need any Church representative. A man and a woman marry by declaring that they are married to each other, as long as they are both old enough (over twelve for a woman, fourteen for a man), neither is already married, and they are not too closely related. Marriage is for life, and cannot be dissolved. The Pope occasionally issues annulments, but these merely recognize that the marriage never actually took place.

Although no ceremony is required for marriage, the Church strongly encourages people to have a public ceremony involving a priest. Apart from anything else, this helps to head off later arguments over whether there really was a marriage. It would be extremely rare for a couple to get married with no ceremony or celebration at all.

Extreme Unction is the final sacrament, given just before death. For this reason, it draws the most ambiguous attitude of any sacrament. While it is generally believed to ease the passage to heaven, many people believe that, if you have received it, you are dead to the world in some sense, and must enter a monastery if you recover (see the Viaticarus Flaw, page @@). Similarly, people are often reluctant to receive it, as that means admitting that they are about to die, and Church doctrine is absolutely clear that it is not necessary for salvation. Extreme Unction can only be administered by a priest.

Ordination is the sacrament that turns a man into a priest, or other member of orders. There are two main classes of orders: minor orders, and major orders. The minor orders are doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, and acolyte. The major, or holy, orders, are sub-deacon, deacon, priest, and bishop. Men in holy orders may not marry, or have a living wife, whereas men in minor orders are much less restricted. All ordained men take the tonsure, which involves shaving the crown of the head, leaving a ring of hair.

Penance is the sacrament that responds to sin. Christians are required to confess all their sins to a priest, who then assigns a penance if he is convinced that the sinner has truly repented. The penance is something of some difficulty, which the penitent sinner performs to show that his repentance is genuine. It does not purchase forgiveness; that was bought by Christ's death. Instead, it allows the penitent to renew his respect for God in a concrete way. Common penances involve saying a certain number of prayers or psalms, giving charity or helping the poor in some other way, or going on a pilgrimage to a shrine, at a distance depending on the severity of the sin.

Priests are not allowed to mention what they hear in confession to anyone, not even their superiors in the Church. The contents of confession are between the priest, the penitent, and God.

In the Mass, God Himself becomes manifest in bread and wine, which is shared with the congregation. In most of Europe, the laity now only receive the bread, but in a few places the custom of receiving both bread and wine persists. The bread becomes the body of Christ, known as the Host, and the wine becomes His Blood, so that the Mass symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of all believers, and the participation of all believers in that sacrifice.

Actually receiving the bread is known as taking communion, and a person must confess and do penance before doing so. (For large penances, a sincere intent to complete it suffices.) As a result, most people only take communion once a year, at Easter, although they attend the service most weeks.

Because the consecrated bread and wine are extremely holy, they must be consumed completely during the service, with great care taken not to spill or drop any.

Hermetic Magic and the Sacraments

Magi can observe the supernatural effects of the Sacraments, and it is common knowledge within the Order that the Sacraments are supernatural Divine powers. For example, a baptismal name cannot be used as a Sympathetic Connection to aid Penetration (unlike a birth name), Mass does indeed change simple bread and wine into something Divine, and bodies that have received Extreme Unction cannot be affected by magic for three days.

Due to this overwhelming evidence of the Divine, most magi believe in the existence of God, and many would describe themselves as Christians. However, even a magus who identifies himself as Christian would almost certainly be considered by the Church to have a heretical view of the world, colored as it will be by the magus’ knowledge of the supernatural.

Game Use: Sacraments

The sacraments are as central a part of modern Catholicism, and many other contemporary varieties of Christianity, as they were of the medieval Church. Thus, a certain degree of care should be taken to avoid offending people. That said, they are a central part of medieval life, and thus make good stories.

A number of covenfolk decide that they want to be confirmed; living at the covenant, they have previously had no opportunity. This means taking them to the bishop, and getting them through the catechism without painting the covenant as a hive of heretics.

A moderately pious magus decides to confess and take communion after several lapsed years. The (knowledgeable) confessor assigns a pilgrimage to a distant shrine, without using magic at all, as a penance.

The covenfolk find out that Hermetic magic, or, indeed, any other magic, is completely incapable of affecting the Host in any way. They form a fraternity devoted to honoring the Host as God's presence on earth. (In 1220, this is unusual, but not heretical. Later, it becomes common and absolutely orthodox.)

Someone born at the covenant becomes deeply pious, but some power seems to be driving him out of churches, and he has ominous warning dreams in which he is overwhelmed by great waves. It turns out that he was never baptized, and the dreams are to encourage him to do so.

The unbaptized pious character dies without working out the problem. After his death, a close friend has visions revealing that he is damned to hell, and why, warning them to ensure that everyone is baptized. This could launch a quest for a way to baptize the character posthumously. (This has happened before. At the earnest request of Pope Gregory the Great, later a saint, God allowed the Roman Emperor Trajan to be saved after death. But God did warn the Pope not to ask such things again.)

Saints

Saints are people who served God faithfully when alive, and have now died and joined the Church Triumphant in heaven. (Living Christians are often called the Church Militant, as they must still fight temptation and the wiles of the devil.) Strictly speaking, angels are not saints, as they are not and never were human, but the archangels Michael and Gabriel are often treated as saints.

The importance of saints for living Christians is that they are willing to intercede with God on behalf of the living, and while they have no power of their own, God is willing to listen to them. The most important saint, by far, is the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, who is believed to have particularly strong influence. After her come the twelve Apostles, Christ's closest followers during His ministry on earth, and particularly St Peter, the first Bishop of Rome and the rock on which the Church was built. St Paul, called the Apostle to the Gentiles, is of almost equal importance. There are many other saints, including the saints of the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Moses, and David, martyrs, who were killed for their faith, and witnesses, who bore witness to God's message in particularly impressive ways.

The Church is, in 1220, moving towards an official list of recognized saints, although the process is not yet complete. Further, the Church recognizes that there are many saints in heaven who are not on the Church's list. The list includes only those saints that the Church is sure about, which means that they lived a clearly holy life, and that miracles have been attributed to their intercession after death.

Saints often take an interest in a particular area of life or institution, reflecting their interests when they were alive, and petitions addressed to the saint tend to be more effective in that area. Similarly, saints are particularly attentive to their relics, physical objects that were closely associated with the saint in life, most often bodies or body parts. The faithful often make long pilgrimages to pray at a shrine containing the relics of a particularly important or appropriate saint.

This, however, moves into tricky territory. Strictly speaking, no-one worships saints, and the requests for intercession addressed to them are to be distinguished from the prayers offered directly to God. In practice, most people are rather fuzzy on the difference, and the Church doesn't mind, as long as the faithful accept that the Church's doctrine, which they don't fully understand, is correct. God does not require all His children to be expert theologians.

Game Use: Saints

Saints are an excellent medium for divine intervention in a saga. First, most medieval stories of divine activity involve a saint as mediator, so this choice keeps medieval flavor. Further, there are many saints, some quite local and obscure, and they all have different personalities. Some are quite abrasive, particularly when dealing with people opposed to God's work. Thus, you can make up a local saint with a personality appropriate to the story you want to tell.

The attitude of saints to the covenant and the magi depends on whether you decide that magic is inherently sinful. It need not be; magic is opposed by both Divine and Infernal auras, after all. If magic is inherently sinful, any saint will want the magi to abandon it. If it is not, saints will merely urge the magi to use their power in the service of God. Either way, there are many specific options for using saints.

A saint takes an interest in the covenant, and starts looking after it. He or she appears in the dreams of covenfolk offering warnings, and occasionally manifests in the covenant to warn against sin or advise on God's will. On the one hand, this is a very useful ally. On the other, the magi will want to avoid a Dominion aura springing up within the covenant.

The covenant comes into conflict, over land or some other resource, with a monastery that has a particularly protective patron saint. They find that their magic is opposed by the power of the Divine, forcing them to find another resolution.

Members of the covenant become particularly devoted to a saint with a shrine some distance away, and pilgrimages become a feature of normal life. Even the magi might choose to venerate this saint.

The covenant discovers an important relic in the course of an adventure. Keeping it at the covenant would guarantee a stream of pilgrims and an eventual Dominion aura, but giving it away would make a firm ally of the recipient — and possibly enemies of the other groups who wanted it.

Structures

The head of the Church on earth is the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who is the Vicar of Christ. (A vicar is someone who performs a role on behalf of someone else.) Over the last century popes have been campaigning to increase the actual authority of their office, and the campaign is working. Nevertheless, lower-ranked churchmen have a great deal of independence. In theory, anyone who disagrees with a lesser bishop's decision can appeal to the pope, but in practice this is so expensive and difficult that only the most serious problems, involving kings and major lords, or powerful monasteries, actually make it there.

There are many other bishops across Europe, all based in a city, or at least somewhere that was as close to a city as the area had when the bishopric was founded. The church where the bishop has his seat is known as the cathedral church, from the Latin term for the literal, physical chair, and the area around is called the diocese. The bishop's responsibilities start with ensuring that the clergy, monks, and nuns are all doing their jobs and living lives appropriate to their station, but also extend, in theory, to the spiritual well-being of every human being in the area. In particular, bishops often find themselves protecting the Jews of a town from angry, and anti-semitic, mobs.

A bishop carries out his duties primarily by means of visitations. In these, he visits a priest or monastery, and carries out investigations to ensure that all is in order. The enthusiasm that bishops bring to these duties varies widely, but very few will overlook persistent reports of major abuses.

Within the diocese, Europe is divided up into parishes. Each parish has a church, the parish church, and a priest, the parish priest, assigned to look after the spiritual well-being of all those within, a position called 'having cure of souls'. Everyone has their own parish, and is supposed to confess only to their parish priest, although exceptions are made for travelers and extreme circumstances. In some parishes, the priest with primary responsibility, called the rector, actually performs the duties. In others, he pays another priest, called the curate, to do the actual work for him.

Game Use: Structures

All covenants are in a parish, even if they want nothing to do with the Church. Thus, the parish priest could come calling at any time, seeking out the lost sheep of his flock.

A covenant with a cozy relationship with the parish priest hears that the bishop is coming on a visitation. Precisely how this plays out depends on the covenant and bishop, but it needs some response.

The covenant wants to get itself recognized as a separate parish, where the magi can choose the parish priest. This is not unreasonable; most covenants are large enough and rich enough to justify this. But neither is it a foregone conclusion, as the characters will have to negotiate a great deal of Church politics.

Canon Law

The Church has its own law, canon law, which is based on the old Roman law but covers all aspects of Church life. It also covers a number of areas that might not seem obviously related to the Church: marriage, inheritance, and commerce, most notably.

All canon law cases must, in theory, be heard by the bishop of the appropriate diocese. In 1220, formal structures to delegate this authority to full-time judges are being established, but the process is far from complete, and many cases are still judged by the bishop in person, or by a representative chosen for that particular case.

Heresy is a growing concern of the church courts. Most heretics are encouraged to accept the teachings of the Church by their parish priests, and the vast majority, being heretical through ignorance rather than conviction, do so. The few who reach court generally recant, returning to the Church, if they are convicted, and this always ends the case. Those who persist in their heresy may, finally, be handed over to the secular authorities for execution, but the Church is reluctant to do this as it all but ensures someone's damnation. However, if the alternative is a serious risk of damnation for more people, misled by the heretic, they feel they have no choice.

Canon law on commerce makes it illegal to lend money at interest, to buy things and sell them at a profit unless you have transported them a long distance, and to buy large stocks of something when it is cheap, to sell when it is expensive. Canon law only covers Christians, so these activities are all legal for Jews, which has made a few Jews extremely wealthy, while inflaming the prejudices of those who owe them money.

Game Use: Canon Law

The magi are accused of heresy, and forced to defend themselves in court.

The magi use magic to get around some of the canon law rules on commerce, making a large amount of money, but stirring up opposition from mundane merchants, who appeal to the bishop.

A friendly bishop is faced with a case of heresy where the heretics appear to have diabolical powers. Knowing his limits, he appoints one of the magi as his judge-delegate, sending along a learned clerk to help out. The magus has strict instructions to save as many heretics as possible.

Resources

The Church, as an institution, has extensive resources. The most basic of these is the tithe; the Church is entitled to one tenth of everything of which God gives the increase; essentially, all agricultural products. This is a substantial amount, and the Church and its agents are quite enthusiastic about gathering it. Failing to pay the tithe is a serious sin, for which heavy penances are routinely assigned.

In addition, the Church owns a good deal of property, from which it draws income just as any other mundane lord. The result of this is that many high-ranking clerics are personally very wealthy, a situation that some people, including some lower-ranking clerics, find incompatible with the Church's mission.

In theory, one third of the tithe is supposed to be used to support the poor. In practice, much less than this is devoted to charity, but the Church is still effectively the only source of support for the most vulnerable members of society.

Game Use: Resources

Magi still have to pay the tithe. God gives the increase on vis sources. Most priests won't care, but what if the local priest does?

A covenant might be located so that the nearest major lord is a bishop or monastery, rather than a mundane noble. Alternatively, the mundane noble the covenant had good relations with might die without an heir, leave his lands to the Church, and give the covenant a new, powerful neighbor to handle.

Monasteries

Monasteries, and the female equivalent, convents, are a vital part of the Mythic European landscape. Ranging in size from tiny establishments with a handful of members to mighty castles with dozens of monks and influence covering thousands of miles, they shape the Church in many ways.

The members of monasteries are referred to as 'regular clergy', because they are bound by a rule (regulus), as opposed to the 'secular clergy', who live in the world (seculum). The details of the monastic rule vary from one tradition to another, but the basics are the same.

All monks and nuns take vows of poverty, chastity, stability, and obedience. The vow of poverty means that they have no personal possessions, that of chastity that they have no sexual relations, that of stability that they remain at one monastery, and that of obedience that they do whatever the head of their house commands.

The monastic day is structured around the seven monastic offices, church services that take place spread throughout the day. In some traditions, notably the Cluniac, these services have become so elaborate that there is little time to do anything else other than eat and sleep. In others, such as the Cistercian, they are still balanced with physical or mental labor of some sort.

Still, the main service that the monasteries provide is their prayers. Monks have given up the world to better serve God, and so their prayers are regarded as particularly effective. Many relics are held at monasteries, encouraging pilgrimages. As an extension of this, most monasteries are required to offer hospitality to travelers, at no charge, although visitors are expected to make a donation in line with their means.

Giving to monasteries is particularly well-regarded in Europe, and so many of them have become rich and powerful. Of particular note in this respect is the abbey of Cluny, in France, which heads the Cluniac Order, a group of monasteries spread over the whole of Europe. Thus, while the monks are, technically, poor, many have access to and control of vast resources.

These resources give the monks time to devote to scholarship and art, and thus monasteries are often centers of high culture. In recent years towns and cities have been starting to take over this role, but many monasteries still have proud traditions of study or craftsmanship.

In the early years of the thirteenth century a new type of regular clergy makes its appearance. These are the mendicant friars, 'begging brothers', who take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and travel the world preaching and serving God. As yet the two major orders, Franciscan and Dominican, are still new, but they are growing in popularity extremely rapidly.

Game Use: Monasteries

While monks make poor player characters, since they are supposed to stay in their monasteries, friars are an excellent choice. They are supposed to wander around, and thus have a perfect excuse for ending up at the covenant.

Monasteries are a good place for traveling magi to stay. Their duty of hospitality means that they will usually not simply turn away even those with the Blatant Gift.

Monastic scholars make good correspondents for magi, and good potential allies.

Miracles

God intervenes in the world, and his interventions take the form of miracles. Miracles are not common events, but neither are they incredibly rare. Almost everyone in Mythic Europe knows someone who has witnessed or benefited from a miracle, and more people have witnessed miracles than have witnessed Hermetic magic.

By far the most common kind of miracle is a healing miracle, including the raising of the dead. The dead are normally raised within a week or so of dying, although God is capable of raising those who have been dead for longer if he so wishes. Injuries, diseases, and inherited afflictions are also cleansed by miracles.

The next most common miracle is a punishment miracle, inflicting some sort of infirmity on a person who has been particularly disrespectful to God or his agents. These punishments are a call to repentance, and thus while they are debilitating, they are very rarely fatal.

Finally, there is a vast range of miscellaneous miracles, ranging from freeing those unjustly imprisoned to saving a talking bird from a hawk, via sending an angel to fight on a pious knight's behalf at a tournament.

Most healing miracles happen at a shrine holding relics, but it isn't a large majority. The guardians of such shrines, often monks, can expect to see dozens of miracles in a typical year, and a pilgrim to such a shrine has a very good chance of witnessing one.

God grants miracles as He wishes, and His purposes are sometimes inscrutable. However, a miracle is more likely to be granted if it is sincerely requested by a pious person, if the cause of the affliction was entirely innocent, and if an appropriate saint adds his prayers to those of the living Christian (or Jew, or Muslim). Still, God is perfectly free, and sometimes grants miracles to help people who seem less than pious.

Game Use: Miracles

Miracles are an excellent way to emphasize the Myth in Mythic Europe, and storyguides should not be afraid to use them that way. They are also, however, the ultimate plot device, as they can do anything, no matter what. Thus, storyguides should use them in moderation, to avoid leaving the players feeling that they have nothing to do.

Also, setting the frequency of miracles is an important part of deciding just how Mythic your Mythic Europe is. The frequency described in the main text is a default level, but you could choose to make miracles very rare, maybe one per year at major shrines, or very common, so that every parish sees a handful of miracles within the parish every year.

A grog killed in battle with a dragon is raised from the dead at the prayers of his wife and five small children. He comes back with a chilling tale of purgatory, and of having seen a recently-deceased magus burning in hell. He starts an immediate campaign to bring the covenant back to righteousness.

A magus confronting some bandits is suddenly deprived of his magical power. Nevertheless, his grogs easily defeat the attackers, and the magus is unharmed. His power returns afterwards; what lesson is God trying to teach him?

A character with a serious problem finds that the magi cannot help, as it is part of her Essential Nature. Instead, she seeks a miracle.

The Nobility

The Church is a truly European organization, with a common structure and common beliefs. The nobility are a group of individual lords, with many common interests and links between them. Although there is a great deal of shared culture among the nobility, there is less than there is among the clergy, so this section is even more prone to over-generalization than the last. More details about the nobility in general can be found in *Lords of Men,* while the Tribunal books provide information about the noble culture of particular regions.

Feudalism

Most of Europe is ruled through the feudal system. This system is tied together by oaths of fealty, in which one person swears to provide a certain sort of service for another in return for being given control of an area of land. The sort of service required is overwhelmingly military; in its simplest form, the person swearing (the vassal) promises to serve his lord in battle for a certain number of days every year. If the area of land (called a fief) is large, the vassal may be required to provide the services of more than one warrior. In that case, it is very common to grant parts of your fief as fiefs to other warriors, on condition that they serve you, so that you can meet your obligations to your lord.

In outline, the system sounds like a simple pyramid, with the king at the top, and lords of progressively smaller fiefs below. However, things are far more complex than that. First, lords at most levels have direct vassals with fiefs of wildly differing sizes. A king might have one direct vassal who controls an area covering several towns and dozens of villages, while another controls half of a single village. Further, vassals can swear fealty to several different lords, as long as they can meet all the obligations. At the extreme, the king of England is answerable to no-one for England itself, but has sworn fealty to the king of France for his possessions in mainland Europe. It is not at all uncommon for a lord to be a direct vassal of a king for some land, but to be a vassal of a vassal for others. It is even possible for two people to be each other's vassals, for different fiefs, but that is rare to the point of being unheard-of.

Within his fief, a lord is responsible for some aspects of law and order. The extent of his responsibility varies depending on the lord and the customs of the country, but in general petty crime is under the jurisdiction of the local lord, and the death penalty can only be imposed by the king or some other extremely powerful nobles.

All the land in the fief is under the control of the lord. Some of it he farms himself (the demesne), the rest he rents out to peasants in return for a share of their crop and some of their labor on his own lands. The nobility are thus very close to the agricultural cycle, although the more land a noble has, the more he is insulated by layers of vassals and staff.

Game Use: Feudalism

Because magi are required by the Code to avoid swearing fealty to any mundane lord, feudalism is more likely to be a part of the background of the saga, rather than an immediate source of story seeds. Still, the complex webs of loyalty it creates are ideal breeding grounds for stories.

Travel

Medieval nobles travel a lot, for a variety of reasons. First, wars seldom take place within a noble's fief, so in order to fulfill his obligation to fight, he must travel. Second, lords often summon their vassals to councils or consultations, so the vassal must travel to wherever his lord is. Sometimes, the summons comes from the king, gathering many nobles in one place for a grand council. Third, lords are Christians like anyone else, and they actually have the resources to go on pilgrimages. As a result, they often do.

Lords with scattered fiefs normally travel between those fiefs over the course of the year. This is because it is easier to transport the noble's household between two places than to transport enough food and drink to satisfy dozens of people for several weeks. As a result, a powerful noble is rarely in one place for very long, and when he does arrive it makes an enormous difference to local society.

Lords also visit their vassals. In part this is to reinforce the bonds of loyalty, and to make sure that the vassal is treating the land well. It also serves as a way to weaken vassals who are becoming threatening, because they are required to support their lord and his entourage, an expensive undertaking.

Finally, nobles simply enjoy visiting one another. Personal visits are the best way to stay in touch with friends and relatives, and the chance to visit new people helps to make life more interesting.

Game Use: Travel

Travel, obviously, allows the storyguide to bring nobles into the saga for a single session, or take them out for a period of time, if so desired.

The local lord, who is on excellent terms with the covenant, is expecting a visit from his lord. He asks the covenant for help in defraying the expenses, and in making sure that the visitor is impressed.

The local lord is powerful, and only visits that fief every couple of years. When he does come, however, the magi have to tread very carefully; he doesn't know the truth about the covenant, and they would prefer to keep it that way.

The local lord, who is somewhat hostile, is called away to a great council, which drags on. His wife, left behind, struggles with a problem facing the fief, and calls on the magi for help. If they succeed, she becomes more friendly, but her husband's attitude does not necessarily change.

Entertainments

The nobility of Mythic Europe have a significant amount of leisure time, particularly when there isn't a war on. As a group of warriors, their favored pastimes tend to be somewhat warlike. The most extreme example of this is the tournament. This is basically an organized battle, where the participants try not to kill each other. The rules do allow the winners to claim the armor and weapons of the losers, so a skilled knight can make a good living on the tournament circuit. Many kings are suspicious of tournaments, and most churchmen believe them to be inherently sinful.

Tournaments, while popular, are difficult and expensive to organize, and occasionally banned by Church and lay authorities. Another extremely popular noble pastime, which does not suffer from these problems, is the hunt. Almost any animal can be hunted, although the deer is probably the most popular quarry, and while the standard hunt involved hunters on horseback, hunting with falcons is also popular, and considered suitable for women as the human hunters do not have to ride about vigorously. Some nobles even hunt magical creatures, although that is recognized to be extremely dangerous.

Large areas of some countries, notably England, are set aside as hunting ranges for the nobility. No-one else is allowed to hunt the animals therein, or to cultivate the land. Peasants in the surrounding areas are generally allowed some activities within these preserves, but they are very limited, to such things as foraging pigs and gathering acorns.

Nobles also enjoy stories of noble activities, and as more of the nobility become literate, manuscripts of romances and legends are increasing in popularity. Even those members of the nobility who cannot read can have the books read to them. Entertainers, including minstrels, acrobats, and trained animals, are also popular. Fights between various animals, such as between two cocks, or between a bear and several dogs, are also popular.

Game Use: Entertainments

While hunting a magical beast, a noble party is badly injured, and stumbles into the covenant, seeking shelter and assistance.

A group of nobles target an intelligent magical beast that is allied with the covenant. The beast asks for help.

A shapeshifter who can turn into a bear is getting into noble households as a 'trained bear'. The bear is extremely impressive, but the shapeshifter has deeper, more devious plans.

Inheritance

Most noble power in Mythic Europe is inherited by the son from the father. This is, however, far from a universal rule, and squabbles over the succession are quite common, particularly when a major lordship (also called an honor) is at stake. In addition, younger sons present a significant problem. If the honor is split between all the sons, the family is weakened. On the other hand, giving the younger sons nothing stores up political trouble, even if the father doesn't care at all about their feelings. Thus, in one sense families would like exactly one son.

That, however, is very risky, because people die unexpectedly. Thus, noble families tend to try for a large number of children, in the hope of getting at least one male heir. Daughters can be married to other nobles, thus building alliances, but younger sons must be found a place in the world. The Church is one obvious destination for them, as is service to a more powerful lord. The most powerful lords, such as kings, often create honors for their younger sons from holdings that have reverted to the king after treason, or when a line fails to produce heirs.

Women only inherit if they have no brothers, and they are expected to marry someone who can be the 'real' lord of the area. Almost the only way for a woman to get real power is for her to be the widow of a lord who had no heirs, as in that case the lands normally stay with her until her death, before reverting to the overlord.

Game Use: Inheritance

A magus was the fifth son of a powerful noble. Now his four older brothers have died, and he is expected to become the new lord. The Order forbids it, but if he doesn't take the role, war threatens.

A lord with no heirs comes to the magi for help in siring a son. This isn't very difficult for magi with the appropriate Arts, but the consequences may be profound.

A lord with no male heirs raised his youngest daughter as a boy, to provide an heir within his family. He died when she was very young, but the family servants kept up the pretense, so that the girl is now the lord of the honor. She is, however, expected to marry a woman. She seeks help from the magi.

Mythic Options

This section covers options for increasing the amount of magic in the nobility. If you want to keep medieval society fairly mundane, you shouldn't use any of them. If, on the other hand, you want magic to be everywhere, you might use all of them.

Medieval legends often tell of faerie nobles, living in a very similar manner to human nobles but with strange features, such as being dressed entirely in green and surviving having their head cut off. In Mythic Europe, such nobles might swear fealty to the king and be part of the normal feudal structure.

While Hermetic magi are prohibited from serving mundane nobles, lesser magicians are not. A noble line where a useful supernatural ability is passed from generation to generation might hold land on condition that they serve the king with that ability, and if the person who inherits the ability is female, she inherits in her own right.

A line of intelligent, magical horses might be the real rulers of a fief. While there is a nominal human lord, who rides the current true ruler, the horses are the power behind the throne. (This could also apply to magical hunting dogs, or magical hawks. Magical pigs should only run a fief if you want a slightly silly location.)

A powerful faerie or magical creature might accept the fealty of human lords, and refuse to swear fealty to any mere human being. This option effectively creates a new kingdom in Europe, and a kingdom where the provisions of the Code are less than perfectly clear. If an area is ruled by a dragon, is it mundane?

A line of wise and successful lords might owe their success to an enchanted item of some sort. The item might be able to support complete incompetents or, more likely, give a competent lord a significant edge in war and politics, so that even a less talented heir can get by. The importance of the item may or may not be public knowledge. The item might be Hermetic, from another magical source, or faerie in origin. Relics and infernal artifacts can play much the same role, but they have slightly different implications.

An evil lord might really have sold his soul to the devil, and thus have lots of infernal powers to help him oppress the peasants.

Towns and Trade

If the generalizations about the nobility had exceptions, generalizations about towns are almost nothing but exceptions. A town is a settlement where a significant proportion of the population (a third and up, say) does not make its living directly from agriculture. On this definition, towns range from villages with a few hundred inhabitants to the great metropolis of Constantinople, with tens of thousands at the very least (well, before it was sacked, at least). Obviously, a town of a few hundred people in Ireland bears little resemblance to Constantinople. More detail about towns and trade is provided in *City & Guild.*

Nevertheless, these points can be used to create towns that feel medieval, even if they don't fit exactly into any actual part of medieval Europe.

Markets and Fairs

Markets are the stage before a town, and often the nucleus around which new towns grow. A market is a formally established place and time for trading locally produced goods. Most gather once per week, although there are exceptions, and draw people from an area about twelve miles across. This allows people to walk to market, do their business, and walk home, all in a single day.

There may be rules about who is allowed to buy and sell what at the market. For example, peasants may be required to sell their grain to merchants resident in the town, and only those merchants are allowed to sell grain to anyone else. There are often fees for setting up stalls at the market, and the lord controlling the market can collect fines at a market court.

The bulk of trade at all markets is agricultural produce, but other goods, including those brought some distance, are also available. Truly exotic goods, however, cannot be found here; the selection is limited to simple tools, clothes, home utensils, and the like. The main customers are peasants, so the offerings are tailored to them.

Because large numbers of people gather at them, markets are also centers for news, entertainment, and people seeking employment, or just wanting to meet new people. Most peasants travel to market many times per year, so they are not as cut off from news of the wider world as modern players might think. It takes time for news to travel, but if it is interesting, travel it does.

Fairs are, essentially, temporary towns. They normally happen once per year, and last for several days. The smallest draw from a large region (that's what makes them more than markets), and the largest, in the Champagne region of France, draw from the whole of Europe. In most ways, a fair is a really big market, but almost anything can be bought there. The customers include the nobility and high churchmen, so luxury goods are sold.

By the early thirteenth century the greatest days of the fairs are over, as towns begin to take over their role, but they still have a great deal of life left in them.

Game Usage: Markets and Fairs

Sending the grogs to market makes an excellent story that need not involve any magi.

Markets can provide substantial income, so a covenant might want to establish one under its control. A market controlled by the magi is also a good way to slowly put magically created goods into circulation, without raising too many suspicions. However, markets bring visitors, who might be over curious, and attract hostility from other local markets, that don't like the competition.

An ambitious covenant might even try to sponsor a fair, but that just makes the potential problems even larger.

Magi needing exotic pieces of laboratory equipment, or materials from distant lands, travel to a fair to find them.

Towns

Most medieval towns cover a fairly small area of land, and many are walled. Within the walls buildings can have as many as four stories, and streets are very narrow. Rubbish is thrown into the streets, including the rubbish from slaughterhouses, and feral animals feed off it. Sewage may also be thrown into the streets, or into the river.

As a result the air in towns is very bad, and often unbalances the humors of those living there. People die significantly younger in towns than they do in the countryside, and most towns only maintain their population through immigration from the land around.

Despite the dangers and unpleasantness of living in a town, people immigrate because there are jobs there. If a peasant family grows too large for its land to support, daughters are often sent to work as domestic servants. Similarly, peasants with no land might head to the towns to work as laborers, or even find a trade.

People visit the town even more often, because the larger towns are becoming, in effect, permanent fairs where the wealthy can buy almost anything they want. In most areas of Mythic Europe there are few adult peasants who haven't visited a town at least once.

In most areas, towns stand a little outside the feudal system. They are often run by councils of the leading merchants, or other wealthy citizens, rather than by a warrior noble, and sometimes they may be entirely independent, and lords of a significant area of the countryside. In these cases, people may flee to the town to escape harsh lords, or to flee justice. Towns are the only places with a crowd large enough to lose yourself in.

Game Use: Towns

Clever use of magic can offset the penalties of the bad air of towns, and small magical auras, or even regiones, might persist, allowing a covenant to be sited there.

Most of the story ideas for markets and fairs also apply to towns.

In some countries, towns have a great deal of discretion to run their own affairs, as long as they pay a certain amount of tax. Thus, a covenant might try to be legally recognized as a town. Many covenants are certainly large enough.

Mythic Options

A faerie town is just as possible as a faerie lord, and would probably be a very popular place for magi to go shopping. It might also be fully integrated into the local economy, and even have some human immigrants.

People with supernatural abilities could set up as traders in a town, as well as in service to a lord. This option needs handling with considerable care, however, as towns with Magic Shops feel very much like generic fantasy.

A town might be alive as a whole, and aligned to any realm. People living there might be real, or merely part of the town. Such a town might even be able to move.

Peasants

Peasants make up 90% of medieval society. While they don't really eat mud, they don't, for the most part, eat very well, and famine is a recurrent feature of society.

Peasants make their living from the land or the sea, whether from arable crops, livestock, or fishing. Their legal rights vary a great deal from region to region, from theoretically the same as a nobleman, to almost no rights at all. In all areas, they are almost powerless, and thus often cannot claim those rights they have.

Most peasant families are very nearly self-sufficient, growing their own food, maintaining their own homes, and mending their own clothes and furniture. However, they are as prone to curiosity as any other human being, and all have been to market, the overwhelming majority to town, and most on a pilgrimage to a local shrine at least. While they are all illiterate and without formal education, they are neither stupid nor completely uninformed, on the whole.

In Mythic Europe, the supernatural is a part of the lives of most peasants. Minor magical creatures and faeries visit villages, or live in the crop fields, or watch over the pigs foraging in the local woods. A magical pool might make a virgin beautiful and irresistible if he or she bathes in it (local stories say it might work twice, but no-one has even been able to try), a tree might grow enchanted apples that taste, and intoxicate, like the finest cider, or the leader of the local wolves might negotiate an agreement with the villagers every year, specifying how many sheep the pack will take. Very few villages are without any touch of the supernatural in the surrounding area, but most such touches have little effect on daily life.

Public Power for Women

Relatively few women hold public power in Mythic Europe. The elaboration of their roles below should not discourage players from selecting exceptional women as their characters. The constraints, and ways to avoid them, listed here are suggested as material for storytelling, not as proscriptions. Troupes should consider carefully how the fun of a historically accurate setting intersects with the fun of playing a character who uses her wits to challenge social conventions. The Paid Rights Virtue (page @@) is a game-mechanical way to acknowledge that an exceptional woman is just that: exceptional.

Players, who are likely most familiar with the English system, should be aware that women have fewer rights in England than in most other parts of Mythic Europe. This is, in part, an effect of the Conquest. The military character of the Norman nobility has not entirely given way to hereditary aristocracy. In areas where landholding is seen as a method of supporting warriors, women have fewer rights, while in those areas where landholding is seen as method of generating money to sustain an army, women have greater rights.

Dressing As A Man

This is the simplest way to ignore social conventions concerning women. There are many folkloric examples of women dressing as men and doing almost anything men do. War or pilgrimage, for example, are easier when pretending to be male. This may become a Dark Secret (page @@), and may also qualify the character for Gender Non-conforming (page @@).

Dressing as a man is not usually a successful strategy for the extended term: marriage and fathering children are difficult, if surmountable, obstacles. A woman who dresses as a man and engages in warfare is, however, likely to die young, as most men do, so this may not be a concern.

Holding Land

Women can gain control of land in six ways: during absence, through inheritance, via political success, through conquest, in a widow's portion, or as a steward.

Absence

Landholding is intimately tied, in most of Mythic Europe, to providing military service. The male head of most families must be available to fight in campaigns, some of which last for months, or in civil wars, which can sputter along for years. Many nobles leave their wives as their deputies. The value of an educated wife to the military preparedness of her husband has overcome many of the objections concerning the education of women.

Women raised for this task always have Leadership and Profession: Steward scores. They also rapidly develop Ability scores that their husbands have due to the peculiarities of their holdings, allowing them to oversee work, or at least select competent overseers. In this role of deputy the woman has the right to spend the income of the husband's territory, and may command his vassals in many matters, including war.

The role that women play in the command of troops varies between the societies of Europe. It is further influenced by the personalities, Reputations and resources of the lady and her vassals. Women rarely lead troops into battle, but there are many references to noble women holding castles against sieges. During a siege the lady may command troops directly, or may direct their command through a skilled lieutenant.

Many noblewomen maintain networks of agents completely separate from the households of their husbands. A wife may take over her husband's network if he dies or is on campaign. This role, as correspondent and diplomat, is expected of the wives of nobility. A woman who does not socialize is considered a poor supporter of her husband's efforts.

Inheritance

Lands inherited by women are a recognized feature of feudal life in most kingdoms. In most areas land goes to sons before daughters, but daughters are given preference over more distant male relations, like uncles and cousins. Some areas grant all of the land to the eldest son, and the daughter receives it intact if there are no sons. In others, when a paternal line extinguishes in this way, the land is divided between all of the remaining sisters, or their husbands. In a few areas, women are permitted to inherit directly, either because the land of a family is divided between all of the siblings not already members of the church, or because the lord is permitted to nominate his heirs and so may choose his daughters.

A woman who rules a fief by inheritance usually retains legal authority in it during her marriage. With the exception of England, where the wife's rights become the husband's, there are many examples of women who married another noble, yet continued to hold court, issue charters, and command vassals. In Castile there is at least one example of an odd midpoint, where the bride continued to rule in her own land, with the exception of her dowry, which was transferred to her husband. At the death of the heiress, her lands may be kept by her eldest son, if the area practices primogeniture. In areas where the lands of the parents are divided, the separate character of the wife's lands make them an obvious domain for one of her sons.

Land that a father has added to his ancestral territories may be made available as dowry. Dowries are used, in much of Europe, as a sort of inheritance before the death of the father.

Political Success

It is rare for anyone, male or female, to be granted land for purely political favors, but it occasionally occurs as a result of stories. A common way for a woman to be granted land is to become the mistress of a powerful nobleman and bear his child. If the woman has suitable abilities, she may be made the child's guardian until he is of age to join his father's household.

Conquest

Some women claim land through invasion, allowing their retinue of knights to settle conquered areas as vassals. This requires loyal retainers and either a friendly monarch or a formidable reputation, as a mercenary captain or disloyal male vassal might try to swear fealty for the land himself. Such women rarely enter combat themselves, but since they are the leaders of their armies, it would be insubordinate to gainsay them if they wished it.

Widow's Portion and Stewardship

In most areas a widow is permitted to retain the use of a portion of her husband's lands for her own use after his death. As a rule of thumb, assume a widow can keep the profit, not income, of a third of her husband's land until she remarries. If the woman was already landed at marriage, and has no adult sons, then she is likely to have complete ownership of her lands returned to her. Widows are extremely common in Mythic Europe.

In some areas, like France, Castile and parts of the Holy Roman Empire, a widow may act as her son's guardian. This allows her to administer land on his behalf until he is an adult. Stewardship of lands may need to be purchased from the dead husband's overlord. In many areas the lord has the right to select the stewards for the heirs of vassals, and he may even arrange the marriage of the widow. By convention, no woman may be given by her lord in marriage a third time.

Nuns

A third avenue for power, and one much enjoyed by the younger daughters of some lords, is the church. The role of nunneries is discussed in greater detail in the supplements *Realms of Power: The Divine* and *The Church.* Nuns are considered wards of the bishop, and brides of Christ. They cannot usually be forced to marry and are not answerable to their fathers or other local lords. Nuns hold a great deal of land in Mythic Europe, and their estates are not divided by inheritance.

Young women may take temporary vows which allow them to retreat into the life of a nun while events unfold in the secular world. It is possible for a sufficiently influential nobleman to force a woman to leave the nunnery and marry, but this is rare. It is common for the female relatives of a man who has lost a war to retreat into the nunneries, so that they are not at the mercy of the victors.

Women As Warriors

In most areas there are folktales about particular women who, at some past time, acted in the role of knight. How characters react to contemporary women who attempt the same course varies by culture and by the status of the particular woman. In the Order of Hermes, the philosophy of Plato, coupled with the scarcity of The Gift, has led to a position of equity. Plato advocated the training of women for all the duties of the state including administration and warfare. Very few women seek military success, but sufficient do for the role to be accepted, to some degree, in most areas. The following examples may guide the generation of background for female nobles who seek military roles.

Dressing As A Man: Margaret of Beverley

Margaret of Beverly was born in the Holy Land: her parents were English pilgrims who commenced their journey while her mother was pregnant. After reaching adulthood and seeing to the education of her younger brother, Margaret decided to revisit Jerusalem. Through terrible luck, she was present when Jerusalem fell to Saladin in 1187.

She pretended to be a man, and took part in the defense of the wall, wearing improvised armor. Margaret was struck by a fragment thrown up by a stone fired from a siege engine, and carried scars for the rest of her life. She was captured, ransomed, and then after a difficult period involving slavery, theft, and rescue by the grace of the Virgin she was able to arrive in Antioch, in time to participate in the siege there.

After peace was concluded she sailed for England with the English army, departing from Acre. Her other travels, to Rome and Santiago, were almost as adventurous as this first trip. Historically, after her journeys she sought out her younger brother, who had become a monk, and he led her to the contemplative life. She joined a nunnery at Laon, in France, and may live there still in 1220.

Eleanor of Aquitaine: Inheritance

Eleanor attended the Second Crusade with her husband, and was attended by a guard of female knights dressed as Amazons and mounted on white horses. Eleanor's right to lead her troops, as overlord of Aquitaine, was incontestable. The queens of several of the other leaders followed her example. Her behavior was considered scandalous, and led to a Papal Bull forbidding women from taking the cross in the Third Crusade.

Sikelgaita of Sicily: Conquest

A princess of the Lombards, then the wife of the Duke of Apulia and Sicily, Sikelgaita is recorded as having participated in her husband's battles, dressed as a knight, and as charging enemies with a spear. In her husband's wars against the Byzantine Empire, she is recorded as rallying some troops that had fled a battle, sending them back into the fray at the Battle of Dyrrachium. The Norman conquests in Byzantium were lost after the war turned against her family.

Petronilla of Leicester: Absence

Petronilla is recorded as having armed herself as a knight and fought in battles during the reign of Henry II, perhaps due to the absence of her husband. A namesake was active during the wars of John against his barons, and purchased the right to select her own husband. This Petronilla used John's desperation for money to haggle the relatively good price of 4000 marks. The latter Petronilla has only been dead eight years.

Matilda of Tuscany: Political Success

Matilda's parents were allies of the Pope, and open rebels against his rival the Emperor. Matilda was trained in warfare from an early age. Her tutor was later the commander of her forces and stated he had trained her in lance, pike, axe and sword. Matilda is widely believed to have ridden into battle from her teenage years.

She was the primary proponent of the Pope's cause during the Investiture Controversy, and through a series of marriages, alliances and wars, she all but destroyed Imperial authority in Northern Italy. Matilda led her armies through a series of wars, crushing Imperial forces so that only a few cities remained under the Emperor's banner. She spent her old age dispatching armies to besiege and capture many of these.

Errors and Anachronisms

Historical errors are inevitable in any historical game. After all, even professional historians make historical errors in their books, which other professional historians then correct. In the game, an anachronism is only a problem if it spoils the illusion that the game takes place in a particular historical period. Thus, introducing guns and wristwatches is bound to be a problem, while getting the cut of men's tunics wrong is only a problem if one of your players is a specialist in medieval costume.

If some of your players do know a lot more about particular aspects of the medieval period than you, you can use them as a resource. Have them explain the details of costume, scholarship, or food, as it becomes relevant to the game. A player who uses his knowledge to break the mood for everyone else is a problem, and you should talk to him about it. If you know more than your players, then they are not likely to be bothered by anything that doesn't bother you.

As you play the game, you might well want to read more about medieval history. This is good, but it can mean that you discover that some aspect of your saga contradicts historical fact. What do you do then? If it isn't a problem for you or your players, you can leave it the way it is. If, on the other hand, the discrepancy does bother you, there are two options. Minor details can simply be changed to be historically accurate. If the King of France has always been Louis in your saga, but you discover that the historical king was Philip, you can simply announce that the king of France is actually called Philip, and always has been.

For things which have played an important role in the saga, that is unlikely to be an option. If the magi have been interacting extensively with the Parliament of England, you can't make it go away when you discover that, historically, it was first called ten years into your saga's future. The best option here, if something bothers you and is too important to change, is to explicitly move your saga to an alternate history. Work out some story as to why Parliament started thirty years earlier, or whatever. Since the player characters have been interacting with the feature extensively it is extremely unlikely that its current state would be historical anyway. It is worth remembering that, historically, there were no magi and no Order of Hermes, so the game is set in an alternate history in the first place.