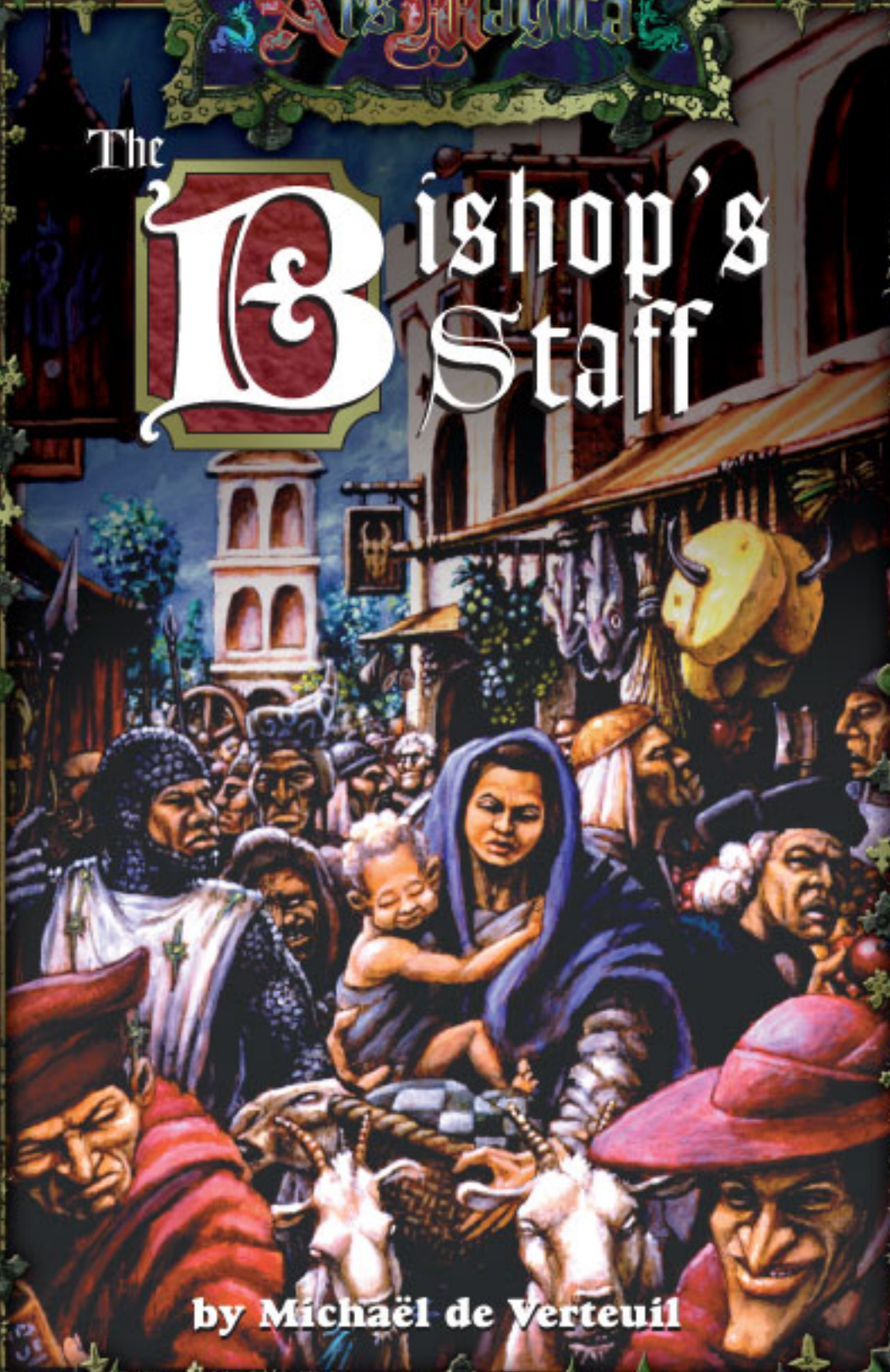


Ars Magica

The

Bishop's Staff

by Michaël de Verteuil



The Bishop's Staff

Table of Contents

Part 1: The Story

How to Use this Adventure	4
Synopsis	6
Prologue	7
Scene 1: Come Now, Let Us	
Argue it Out	7
Scene 2: If Disaster Falls on a City	10
Scene 3: The House of Feasting	13
Scene 4: Fire Shall Burn Them Up	17
Scene 5: In Whirlwind and Storm	19
Scene 6: Out of the Belly of Sheol	24
Scene 7: The Grapes of Wrath	25
Epilogue	27

Part 2: Dramatis Personae

Anan bin Daoud	28
Ambrosius	34
Barabas	37
Eo	39
Ibrahim, Yossouf and Benjamin	42
Pantos	43
Rebecca	43
Anan's Wives	43
Mad Anna	44
Jonas	44
Guy	45
Toni "the Grip"	45
Father Deodat	47

Index of Inserts

Article 4 of the Code of Hermes	27
The Crypt	21
The Covenant	11
The Dove	15
Intersections	6
Invisibility and Second Sight	13
The Karaites	7
Karaite Magic	30
The Letter (Player Handout)	5
Nemesis	40
What He Shuts No Man Shall Open	3

Index of New Spells and Powers

<i>The Baker's Clay</i> (MuTe 15)	36
<i>The Call to Contemplation</i> (MuMe 40)	36
<i>Cough of the Bleeding Lung</i> (PeCo 45)	40
<i>Eyes of the Hawk</i> (MuCo 10)	41
<i>Gift of the Second Wind</i> (MuCo[Cr] 20)	41
<i>Gift of the Sure Hand</i> (MuCo[Re] 20)	41
<i>The Invisible Archer's Friend</i> (ReAn[Te, He, Aq] 25)	40
<i>Kiss of the Agape</i> (MuMe 55)	36
<i>Sense the Vis of the Beast</i> (InVi 20)	38
<i>Wings of the Soaring Angel</i> (MuCo 40)	40
<i>Vibration of the Unsuspected Vis</i> (InVi 1)	22

The Bishop's Staff

C R E D I T S

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Michaël de Verteuil is a frequent playtester for **Ars Magica** and is one of the authors of the sourcebook *Ordo Nobilis*. He is also an active contributor to **Ars Magica** fanzines, most notably *Ars Mag* and *Hermes' Portal*. In "real life" Michaël (forget the diaeresis at your peril!) is currently working for the Canadian International Development Agency as an analyst. As an amateur medievalist he is also involved in scenario writing and as a verifier of historical realism (facts checker) for a forthcoming French language children's drama series for TV based on the 13th century House of Savoy.

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“No bloodshed!” Anan had insisted unreasonably. Berthold could still hear the Karaite’s loud and nasally accented whine. And when had that been? It seemed like hours ago. Berthold punches another rioter in the forehead with a mailed fist. The man stops, goes cross-eyed, and keels over as Berthold ran to tackle another rioter just as he is throwing a burning brand over the compound wall.

This is getting cumbersome, not to mention tiresome. Houses all over the quarter are in flames, and drunk rioters are running in all directions hollering and shouting at the top of their lungs, competing with the roar of the burning thatch next door. Berthold wonders

how his companions are doing, as he watches warily a cluster of young toughs of dubious sobriety. They are obviously trying to nerve each other up to charge him *en masse*.

Berthold backs up and pulls out his sword. The incipient charge stalls and dissolves as its lead elements recoil at the glint of steel in the torch light. The noisome cluster backs off and slowly edges past the knight under cover of fake bravado taunts and insults, all the while keeping well out of sword range, of course.

Let them attack another house, Berthold mutters to himself as he sheathes his weapon, only to be beaten about the head and shoulders from behind by an angry broom wielding crone who has somehow appeared out of nowhere, and who seems to be taking great exception to him in the unfathomable local dialect. He ignores her. He may have sold his soul to those damned wizards, but there was no way he was going to lower himself to fighting old women. At least they provided decent armor. He hardly felt anything.

By St. Catherine’s garters, if it had not been for that accursed chamber pot incident, he would still be riding the tournament circuit and making a decent living as a lordless knight should. Instead, he now finds himself owing more silver than he is likely to see in a lifetime, and has been reduced to earning his bread incognito as a hired sword for a mongrel clutch of bickering, over-educated spell mongers. And now they have him standing street guard duty for a household of damned usurers — the indignity of it all!

A loud rhythmic thumping catches his attention. Pushing “Granny” aside, Berthold looks around the corner at the front of the compound. That drunken tavern crew is back again,

trying to force the gate in with a heavy table.

There are too many of them now.

Unsure what to do, Berthold just stands there fingering his sword pommel. The gate doors seem to be resisting unnaturally well.

“Unnaturally” indeed, he smiles. Even sorcery has its uses.

The assailants seem undeterred

at first by their lack of success. Possibly, because of the darkness, they seem unaware of how little progress they are making. Suddenly one of them points at Berthold. The improvised ram falls to the ground and the pack hightails it down the darkened street. At least he is beginning to earn some respect from this rabble. Turning around, however, he is quickly deflated. He spots a party of mounted knights making its way down the narrow street in full armor. Berthold is not sure whether this is good or bad, but hopes the magi will let him in in any case. This is getting to be far more than he is willing to handle by himself.



What He Shuts
No Man Shall Open
Isaiah 22:22