

Ars Magica

Lords of Men



by Ferguson, Gronosky,
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Lords of Men

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www.atlas-games.com

Ars Magica players participate in a thriving fan community by subscribing to email discussion lists (like the Berkeley list), compiling archives of game material (such as Project Redcap), maintaining fan-created web sites, and running demos through Atlas Games' Special Ops program. To learn more, visit www.atlas-games.com/ArM5. You can also participate in discussions of *Ars Magica* at the official Atlas Games forums located at forum.atlas-games.com.

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Lords of Men

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Chapter One

Rule by the Sword

Mythic Europe is governed by a warrior caste. To be noble is to expect the call to arms; to gain the esteem of other nobles, a lord must draw forces together and massacre his enemies. Nobles are wealthy, so they may live sumptuously and patronize the Church and the arts, but the thirteenth century is a time of strife. Those who kill, rule.

Realms still need their armies, for virtually all have recently been burned by war, but many nobles feel their state is in decline. Kings and the Church chip away at the status of the warrior caste. Its great mission — the liberation of the Holy Land — seems in disarray. The merchants of the cities are increasingly demanding, as well, and have the money to field armies of mercenaries. The nobility cannot conceive of a world in which it does not rule, but rule is harder to maintain than in earlier days.

And at the edges of society, the nobles know, a mysterious Order of magicians lurks. The wizards are forbidden to meddle, it's said, but rumor states that little stops them. Are the wizards potential allies, or already-active enemies? Is magic a threat, or an op-

portunity? The 13th century is a difficult time to be a nobleman, as challenges, as well as chances for glory, abound.

NOBLE CHARACTERS FOR MANY STYLES OF SAGA

This book provides resources for sagas of varying styles, whether realistic, high fantasy, political, or otherwise in orientation.

It includes material for a realistic mundane world, to allow sharper contrast with the four Realms. Troupes playing this style of saga should consider the new options for massed combat. Characters may now lead armies into battle, or lay siege to the castles of their enemies.

It also supports sagas with a high fantasy tone, aiding the design of stories that contain the elements of medieval ballads. For sagas with characters suited to Arthurian fantasy, the sections on leisure, love, and single combat are particularly appropriate. Mass combat is supported with a narrative resolution variant, which puts a stronger focus on the

actions of the player characters.

Political sagas are also catered to. A skilled diplomat can lead his alliance to war, or prevent bloodshed through a fearsome Reputation and the armed support of powerful friends. The use of Reputation allows diplomatic nobles to judge the goals of their enemies, and threaten them with regional factions of supporters. Earning noble titles is described, with each title's military and economic resources quantified to allow for the rapid design of political and military antagonists.

Sagas in which a nobleman acts as a servant and spokesman for a covenant are also supported. Nobles who reside primarily at covenants may be fleshed out using material on how members of the military class think and act. Land ownership and vassal maintenance are also detailed. A chapter describes the crude and unpleasant life of serfs, and contains many story seeds that can hook player characters from peasant backgrounds into sagas. The relationship between the Order and nobles is also described, with a comprehensive explanation of what most nobles know about the Order.

