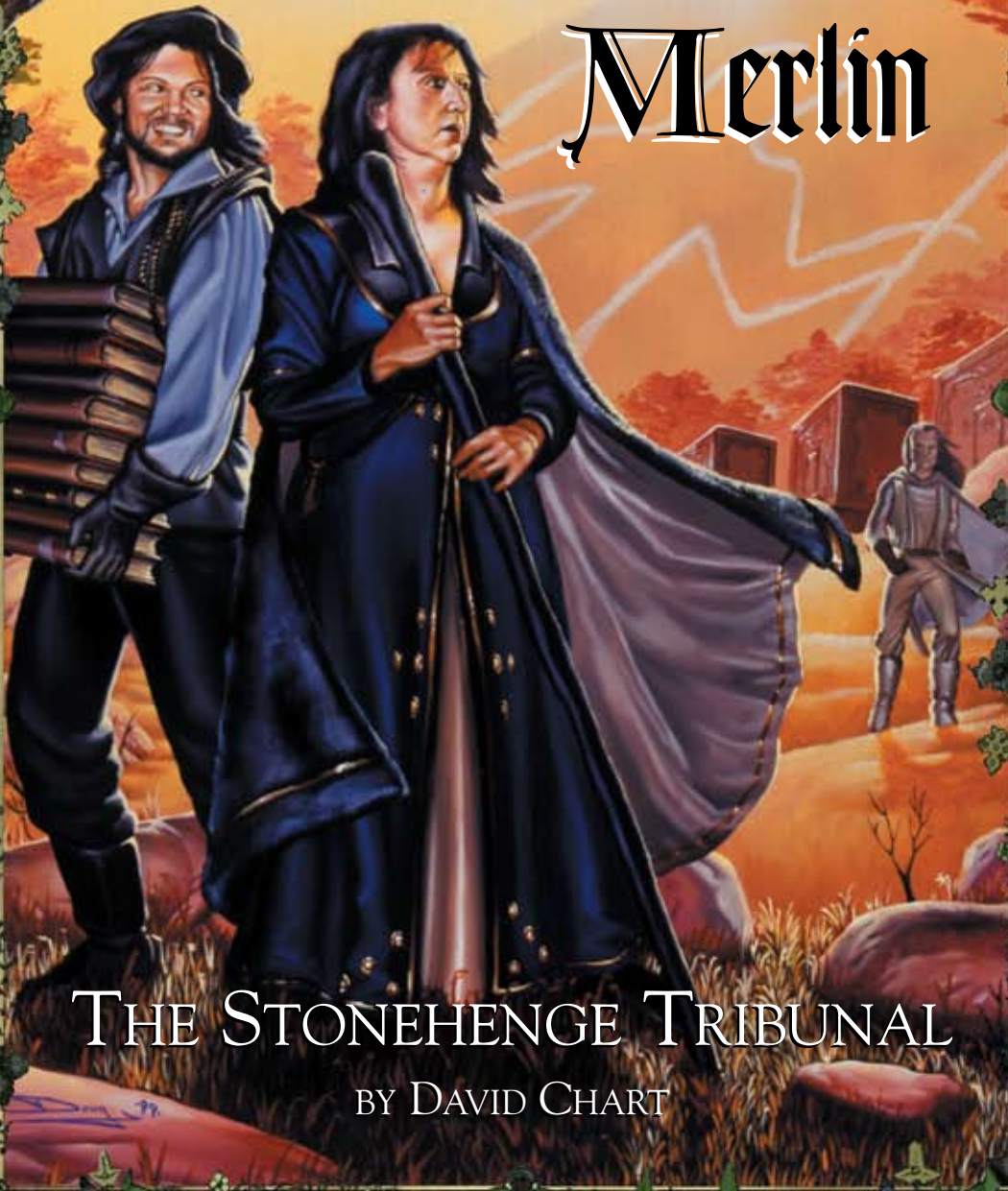


Arx Magica

# Heirs to Merlin



THE STONEHENGE TRIBUNAL

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

England: a generation ago, at the heart of the most powerful realm in Western Europe, now recovering from the ravages of civil war while ruled by a child. Stonehenge: a tribunal emerging from decades of stagnation to take its place in the councils of the Order. The next few decades will decide whether this island will dominate Europe, both mundane and Hermetic, or slip into marginal irrelevance. This sourcebook provides players and storyguides alike with all the information necessary to play a saga set in the Stonehenge Tribunal.

## How to Use this Book

This book has been designed to be read both by players and by storyguides. It does not contain details of secret dealings, or pages of statistics for creatures and characters. In fact, it contains no statistics at all. Instead, it portrays the scenery against which stories will happen, and describes the hooks on which plots can hang. Furthermore, it has been designed to provide information for play, rather than to be read like a novel.

Storyguides should not expect to be presented with a developed ready-to-play saga. This book provides all the historical information that the storyguide needs, and fills in the background to any saga. Of course, it does not contain everything there is to learn about England and Wales in 1220, and the bibliography and guide to further reading will help if you want to learn more. However, it does provide easily enough history for playing **Ars Magica**.

Indeed, it probably provides more than any single game will need. It is vital to remember that this is a game: it is supposed to be fun, not a history lesson. Do not worry about minor anachronisms, such as styles of dress or forms of religious devotion. An anachronism is only a problem if it spoils the players' sense that their characters are in

### A Description of England

Britain, the best of islands, is located in the Western Ocean, between France and Ireland. It is eight hundred miles long and two hundred wide, and provides plenty of everything that human beings need. Every kind of mineral is found in abundance, and it has broad fields and hillsides covered with rich soil, which produce every kind of crop in their seasons. There are open woodlands filled with every kind of game, and the forest glades provide pasture for cattle and many-colored flowers from which bees take honey. Its windswept mountains rise over meadows green with grass, beautiful places where clear springs flow into shining streams which lull those lying on their banks into calm sleep.

What is more, it is filled by lakes and rivers, and these in their turn are full of fish. In the south it is separated from France only by a narrow strait, and there are three noble rivers, the Thames, Severn, and Humber, which it stretches out as if they were arms to receive the goods of all lands.

— *The introduction to Geoffrey of Monmouth's  
History of the Kings of Britain*

medieval England, and you can generally assume that, if something is not a problem for you, it won't be for them.

If you are not to worry about anachronisms, how do you create the necessary sense that the game takes place nearly eight hundred years ago? If you have found a way that works for you, then stick with it. Otherwise, here are some suggestions.

First, make your positive descriptions as true to the time as you can manage. The following pages provide outline information on the appearance of clothes, buildings, and the countryside: use it when describing travel. Remind the players that roads are unpaved, that men have skirts, and that a single coin is a day's wages for a laborer and can be bent between your fingers. Don't worry about describing everything — just pick a couple of things at a time, to point up the differences from modern society.

Second, base stories on features of medieval society. Pick one, such as tithes, or noble hunts, or lawsuits, and build a story that relies on its details. If the players have read this book (which is recommended), they will realize what is going on, but otherwise you may have to explain to them — their

characters would know, after all. Do not try to introduce everything in a single story; you will only overwhelm the players, and probably lose track yourself. Instead, bring things in one at a time, and have them recur later as background incidents. After the covenant fights a writ of novel disseisin the players will know what it means when a visiting merchant complains that such a writ has been presented against him. A number of story ideas are scattered through the text to help you do this.

Third, have the players create characters with backgrounds drawn from medieval culture. Encourage them to read the relevant parts of this book, and to work one or two elements in as important parts of their history. The book is split into thematic chapters to make this as easy as possible — a character who wishes to portray a peasant need only read the chapter on peasants, for example.

Finally, don't worry about it. Everyone wants to think that they are playing in the middle ages, so they won't be trying to pick holes in your descriptions. A covenant maneuvering for a borough charter while trying to convince the local priest not to claim tithes on its vis sources and fighting a writ of



## Where Are the Stats?

On a quick flick through this book, you won't see any game statistics. This is because there aren't any. This book is as much for players as for storyguides, and players should not know the non-player characters' statistics.

There were several reasons for doing it this way. First, players will find the information in this book just as useful as the storyguide will. Much of the background information would be known by anyone from the tribunal, and all of it could be known by a curious and persistent character. Information about medieval English and Welsh society will help in character creation, and in playing a character who behaves in medieval ways.

Second, there isn't space to provide statistics for every important character in the tribunal, and no way for me to predict which characters will be important in your saga. Further, the statistics for characters like Henry III are largely irrelevant. Most player characters

could kill him easily: he's a twelve year old mundane. He's also the king, and that's what matters. The reverse is true of important magi. Whatever Goliard's statistics, she could wipe the floor with new magi. By the time they have studied enough to challenge her, she will either be even more powerful, or dead.

Third, providing statistics would set the power level of your saga. **Ars Magica** can be played with very different levels of power, and a magus who would be powerful in one type of saga might be very weak in another.

Finally, this book does not aim to provide a "plug and play" saga setting. Instead, it aims to provide players and storyguides with the background they need to play somewhere that is distinctively the Stonehenge Tribunal, not "generic Mythic Europe" or "generic Fantasyland." Game statistics would not help achieve that goal, rather hindering it by preventing players from reading the book.