

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield?

Written by Nathan Hook, version 1.4

This is a self-contained freeform LARP lasting up to two hours for seven players and one storyguide. It is set in the Mythic Europe setting of the Ars Magica RPG, but can easily be run in a more generic medieval fantasy setting.

If you intend to play this event yourself, stop reading now.

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Preparation

Start by reading over each of the character briefs to get a feel for what is going on, then read through the rest of these notes. Print out the briefing sheets. You will need: (26 pages in total)

- seven copies of the introduction page, one for each player
- three copies of each of the covenant briefs, one for each character from that covenant
- One copy of each character brief for each character
- A copy of the storyguide brief.

Characters

Ideally there are seven players characters in this event:

- Party from Blackthorne
Magus John Fireheart
Friar Thomas
Shield-Grog Richard

- Party from Voluntas
Maga Arianwen
Jack Forester
Alan the Troubador





Nimue, Faerie Enchantress

If you only have six players, drop Jack Forester. In this case you may wish to remind the Magi characters that they risk suffering a slip in time if they stay here too long, to impress upon them the need to leave. If you only have five players, drop Jack Forester and Friar Thomas. I do not recommend running with less than five.

Casting

You will need to allocate players to characters in some fashion, either by your choice or by allowing players to choose based on the vocation of the characters listed on in the initial player handout.



It is particularly important that the character of Nimue go to a confident experienced player. It would be useful if Alan the Troubadour could go to someone familiar with medieval legends. The Magi play best in the hands of players who know *Ars Magica* well.

Assuming you wish to match player gender to character gender, your options will be limited based on the gender of the players. If the gender balance of the players does not correspond to the characters and the players are not comfortable playing a character of the other gender, I suggest the following:

- Maga Arianwen can be changed into a male character (Aneirin), without changing the general concept.
- Jack Forester can be changed into a female character without too many problems. Replace him with Mary Forester, his grown up daughter who joined the covenant with him.



Starting the game

1. Hand out the introduction sheets to the players
2. Allocate characters as you think best (see the casting section)
3. Allow the players some time to read their briefs. Help them gather into the two respective player groups. Offer the players in general and the player of Nimue in particular any advice if they need it.
4. Pick a spot on one of the walls in the room you are playing in as the Stone imprisoning Merlin. Discretely identify it as the stone mentioned in their briefs to the players of John Fireheart and Nimue while they are reading it.
5. Unless using costume, ask the players to describe how their characters visually appear to everyone. Do this before starting, to avoid breaking the flow.
6. Narrate the lead-in, describing how the characters end up at the event. Base this off the journey described in their covenant briefings, with additional description for flavour. End by describing how they suddenly appear in the room. Then call time-in. The disorientation of suddenly doing this mirrors the disorientation the characters should be experiencing.

Running the game

The player characters begin the event trapped in a faerie realm (a regio, in Ars Magica terminology): the place where Merlin raised the boy Arthur, had his sanctum, and was imprisoned by Nimue. The mechanisms of the Realm are described in Numue's character brief – make sure you read it carefully. All the characters entered the Realm because they were seeking something immaterial (their 'heart's desire') as they walked down a certain passage. This is noted clearly on their briefs through most will likely not realise its significance. To make it easier for the storyguide, these are also summarised below:

Magus John Fireheart	Honour and glory
Friar Thomas	Faith
Shield-Grog Richard	Pleasure
Maga Arianwen	ascension to faerie
Jack Forester	Escape / safety
Alan the Troubadour	knowledge (especially of legends)

If any character declares they are no longer searching for this (either by verbal word or very clear action) they exit the realm. If they actively



declare they are seeking something else, this may or may not count as declaring they no longer seek their heart's desire. You will have to make a judgement call on this. In this respect, you are playing the realm itself during the event. Don't be too strict on this. Also remember if someone manages to find what they seek (e.g. Friar Thomas reaffirms his faith) then that person no longer seeks it, and immediately leaves.

If a character manages to exit the Realm, announce they vanish and then take the player to one side. Narrate that they appear back in the cave, and it appears some hours have past (a minor time slip). If they wish, they can re-enter the Realm can going back down the passage. If so, asking them what they are thinking. If they have an immaterial goal they reappear. If they don't then they simply find a small dark cave. Remember that this goal now determines their new exit condition.

The other obvious feature in the room is the stone which John Fireheart senses is unholy. (in *Ars Magica* terms, he has the sense unholiness virtue). This is the stone that traps Merlin, and he is sensing the infernal taint of Merlin (who is the child of the devil). The twist unknown to all the characters is that Merlin tricked Nimue into trapping him, ready for him to return when the Once and Future King returns once more. If the players try to assault the stone, have their spells bounce off a magic resistance (his infernal might!). The item is largely a red herring, through if they threaten to interfere with it they may gain some leverage over Nimue.



If the players do not seem to put the pieces together and find a solution (or perhaps Nimue does too well at playing with them) Merlin's mind can become active and he might whisper subtle hints to the characters as a way to steer the scene to a conclusion. This is not a good option to use, but does give you a way out if the event appears to stall or run on for too long.

The other character to note is Alan the Troubadour. He has a power to reshape Faerie (In *Ars Magica* terms, the Free Expression Virtue). If he tells a story and weaves the current situation into it, faerie may alter to



fit his account. For example, if he tells the tale of how Nimue trapped Merlin in a cave, narrate how the room changes to become more cavelike to make reality fit the story. These should only cause subtle changes in the underlying structure or scenery, and not be a way to directly affect their situation. It is possible the players could escape by this means, story-weaving the Regio to redefine the exit condition as something else (as long as it's appropriate to Faerie) and then using it.

Nimue is able to manifest glamour of servants, food and drink. You can either narrate such effects, or play the servant yourself and have some simple food and drink on hand. This can be particularly good since players and characters should be fearful of eating faerie food.

Rule mechanics

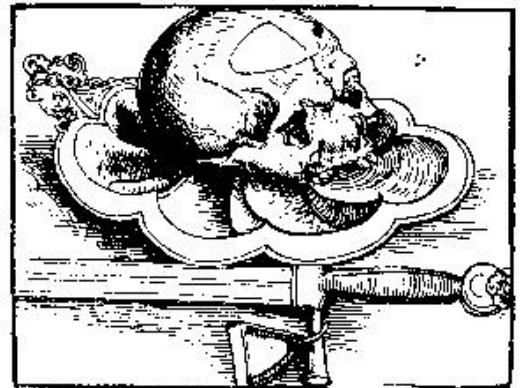
The game mechanics are outlined in the initial player handout. While short, they should be sufficient for this event.

If the Magi decide to start casting spells repeatedly, remind them that doing so in a place of faerie may not produce entirely predictable results. If players of Magi need to know how powerful they are, assume their characters are 10-15 years past their gauntlet.

Props

In addition to food and drink, it may be useful to have:

- a prop weapon or two for John Fireheart and Richard
- a instrument of some kind for Alan





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This is a short freeform, using the Mythic Europe setting of *Ars Magica*. It is set in 1220 AD, not far from the Cornish village of Tintagel. If you are familiar with it you can assume general setting information from the 'Heirs to Merlin' sourcebook is true here.

This freeform is written in the 'nordic' larp style, meaning its focus is on the emotions of the characters. It is intended to last perhaps an hour to one hour and a half. There will be a short debrief at the end.

There are no fixed rules used, though you can assume that powers and abilities correspond broadly to what they would be in tabletop. This Larp will be using the 'Veritas' system. If you wish your character do something you are not to do, narrate your action preceded by the word Veritas. e.g.

'Veritas: I hack at you with this longsword'

'Veritas: I passionately kiss you'

'Veritas: I throw a pilum of fire at you.'

Folding your arms in front of your body is used to denote invisibility.

Pain hurts and death kills. Beings with magic resistance (i.e. Magi and beings of Might) are assumed to be able to resist direct magic if they choose.

There are seven characters, which at first glance appear to be:

- A Gifted knight
- A friar
- A shield-grog
- A sidhe-blooded Maga
- A forester
- A troubadour
- A regal otherworldly lady

After characters are assigned, you will be given a two page character brief.



General Brief for characters from the Covenant of Blackthorne

You are a member of an expedition from the covenant of Blackthorne, sent to investigate a suspected vis source discovered near the Cornish village of Tintagel.

Your party consists of:

Magus John Fireheart of House Flambeau,
Friar Thomas
Shield-Grog Richard

The trip itself was largely uneventful. You took ship to the nearest port and made landfall safely. Richard and Thomas spent a few hours gossiping with the local serfs to hear their tales. The next day you travelled down to the shoreline to the reported cave. John Fireheart cast some magic and warned there was an aura of faerie about the cave. After pausing for a brief prayer led by Friar Thomas, you all advanced into the cave. The cave came out the other side of the cliff, but Richard managed to find a narrow side passage leading deeper into the cliff.

You push on down the narrow passage. Suddenly you find yourselves in a well-lit hall. As you look around you see you are not alone.





John Fireheart, magus of Blackthorn, of House Flambeau

fillus William Fireheart, magus of Ungulus, (currently ‘on campaign’ in Normandy, last you heard)

Basic concept: flamboyant heroic paladin

You are a solid traditional Magus of House Flambeau. As Ungulus fell into winter and your parents went abroad, you joined the covenant of Blackthorn, seat of the Flambeau Praceo of the Stonehenge Tribunal. You don’t get on that well with the many Tremere magi who live there, but that doesn’t bother you – you are a man of action, often out adventuring, fighting the enemies of the order. You style yourself as a knight-errant, as existed among mortals in the age of Arthur.

Like many Flambeau, you hold true to the ideals of knighthood and the piety of the One True Faith.

It was these ideals that led you to volunteer for this task. Blackthorn’s mundane agents have been investigating possible vis sources across Cornwall for the last two years, and have reported a few locations worthy of further investigation by a magus. When one site for investigation in a cave near Tintagel came up, you leapt at the chance – an opportunity to make a knightly pilgrimage to the birthplace of Arthur, while working for the good of the covenant and Order.

You have always been a blessed child, able to sense that which is holy and that which is not. Through this place does not carry the stench of hell a particular block of stone, roughly six foot high and set into one of the walls feels clearly corrupt and unholy somehow.

- Remember you are a noble knight, like the knights of Charlemagne and the Pendragon. Uphold the knightly virtues and the dignity of the Order. In matters spiritual, defer to a priest.
- You would assume this hall is a faerie Regio of some kind. Find a way to leave it, lest you be trapped here and suffer a slip in time. As a noble knight, help rescue others who are trapped here.
- While vis is a valuable prize, as a Knight-errant you quest for glory and honour above all else.



Friar Thomas

Basic Concept: troubled priest

By the look of you, you are humble man of god, one who has been trained to minister to the flock as a wandering friar.

You first met John Fireheart on your travels. You were impressed by his piety. Surely he was favoured by god, able to strike down a local ‘wise woman’ you were preaching against at that time with divine fire? You agreed to travel with him to minister to the grogs of the covenant. In truth, your time with Magi has damaged your faith – you have since seen impious (at best) magi perform equally powerful ‘miracles,’ against beast and Christian alike. Through you think you’ve kept it hidden so far, privately the conviction is leaving your faith.

Your role on this expedition is to act as priest and adviser on theological matters.

- work through your crisis of faith. Perhaps you can find something to redeem it, or perhaps you will find something to destroy it completely.
- Your tutor in the priesthood impressed upon you the doctrine that the clergy should be celibate. You have remained true to this, even through the wider church does not enforce this doctrine overly. However, as your faith wanes you start to feel temptations for what you have never experienced.
- In your heart you feel yourself questing for a sign, one that will confirm your faith.



Shield-grog Richard

Basic concept: Titus Pulo from the Rome Series - down-to-earth cynical soldier with traditional vices.

Most Magi would call you a shield-grog. You are a tough and hardy loyal grog of the covenant of Blackthorne, born and raised within it. To Magus John Fireheart, you are his squire, a man to polish his armour and keep the peasant rabble off him so he can engage mythic beasts and other worthy foes. Privately, you don't quite understand how a wizard can be a knight as well. Frankly through you'd rather serve a warrior magus who engages the foe himself, rather than hiding behind his grogs.

Ultimately, you're a simple man, with simple needs and tastes. You value physical wealth, good food, ample strong drink, and available women. You aren't stupid (despite what some assume), you just live in the present and don't think too long term.

Because you were born inside the covenant of Blackthorne, you are able to see in darkness perfectly well.

- Serve your magus, both as actual shield grog and this whole 'knight and squire' act he has going on. He's a lot saner than some magi you've served are after all.
- Covenant gossip tells you that Friar Thomas has appeared depressed lately, through no one seems to know why. He's seems like a reasonable guy (as priests go) so maybe you can use this trip to find out what has upset him or lighten his mood.
- You are questing for what all men quest for – a good time.



General Brief for characters from the Covenant of Voluntas

You are a member of an expedition who has spent most of a year travelling around Cornwall, investigating places of power, pagan sacred sites, and entreating with creatures of faerie.

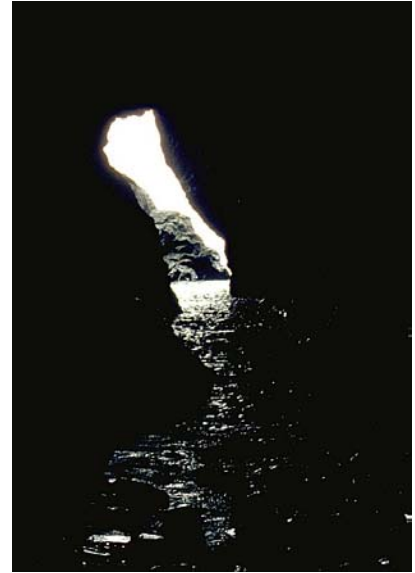
Your party consists of:

Magus Arianwen of House Merinita,
Jack Forester,
Alan the Troubador,

It's been an eventual few seasons, seeking after rumours and old tales. Your journey eventually led you here, to what the locals claim was once the cave of Merlin himself.

You travelled down to the shoreline, to the reported cave. Alan recounted the tale on the way about how this may be the cave where Merlin raised the boy Arthur. Arianwen cast some magic and reported there was an aura of the old powers about the cave. Together you advanced into the cave. The cave came out the other side of the cliff, but Jack's keen eye found a side passage leading deeper into the cliff.

Following it you suddenly found yourselves in well-lit hall, and you realise you are not alone.





Arianwen, maga of Voluntas, of House Merinita

Filla Phessallia of Voluntas (an ancient magus currently travelling somewhere in Scotland, or Faerie itself)

Basic concept: The white witch from Narnia

Like many of House Merinita, you style yourself (not unlike your parens) as a sidhe lady of winter. You aspire to eventually learn the mysteries of your house and transcend your human state. You are mindful of the old ways, even if you regard the old gods as the sort of beings you will one day be counted as one of. You know your faerie nature scares mundanes – let them fear.

Through notionally a magus of Voluntas, for the last year you have been travelling with a small band of companions investigating sites of power in Cornwall and studying the different creatures of faerie you have encountered. While some might regard this has not the most efficient use of time, you had another motive - spending a year and a day as a traveller is part of the next initiation rite you are planning to undergo in the future.

You recognise where you are now as a Faerie Regio. The being here is almost certainly a faerie, most likely the ruler of this tiny realm. Your instincts tell you should know more about her, but you can't quite place it yet. You feel comfortable here in this place, even more so than a typical faerie aura. That said, you also know to tread lightly and not linger too long.

You know that using the term 'faerie' offends many faeries, even though they use it themselves. You using it causes no offence, most likely because one of your ancestors was a faerie.

- Further your knowledge and mastery of Faerie. Entreat with this Faerie Lady. Seek to learn who she is.
- Of course, make sure you find a way to leave this Regio safely. You aren't sure currently what action you did to gain entry to it – if you knew that it might give you a clue on how to leave. Finding out what each person did might help, especially those not in your group.
- The real goal of your quest is to become more Faerie yourself, and further from your base humanity.



Jack Forester

Basic Concept: down-to-earth commoner, suddenly out of his depth. Think of Bottom from Midsummer Night's dream, only more alert.

You were once a forester in the great royal forests of England. You know where to tread lightly, and where not tread at all, not wishing to offend any God. While you attend church at Easter like all decent folk, your family are also mindful of the old powers.

After being falsely accused of poaching yourself, you ended up fleeing 'justice.' The Magi took you in as their servant and have been reasonably good to you for the few years you've been in their service. That said this maga you have been assigned to for this journey gives you the creeps, even more so than most. She is clearly some otherworldly power herself.

- Serve your maga, if out of fear if nothing else.
- Being in this otherworldly place is scary – if you die here, perhaps your soul will not be able to find its way to heaven? Everyone knows that the symbols of the church are proof against the shining folk, so stay close to that priest – through obviously you don't want to do anything to anger the good neighbours either. Remember, never call them faeries – it angers them – use some other term of respect instead.
- Your main goal at this point is to escape this strange place and get back to the safe 'real' world.



Alan the Troubador

Basic concept: knowledge hungry loremaster show-off. Think of a typical geek, but replace IT with legend lore.

You like to style yourself a troubadour. In truth, you are something more humble, perhaps what some would call a bard. Your vocation is music and storytelling, for the entertainment of high-born and low. You have quite a gift for it and a flair for creativity.

You met up with Magus Arianwen a few years ago by chance, when she paid you for information from your stories. She later offered you a stable income for your ongoing services and you have worked for the covenant since, entertaining the other grogs and providing useful folklore to the Magi. You easily move between the social classes.

Naturally you were keen to travel down to Cornwall with your Maga, to visit some of the places you know of from your stories. The stories talk of a cave where Merlin lived and worked his magic – and also of a cave where the lady of the lake Nimue who he loved trapped him for all time. Could this be one of those caves?

- Serve your Maga as best you are able. Share your knowledge of legends. Lift the spirits of those in need. Show off your talents if you get the chance.
- Perhaps this wizard-knight here can tell you of his adventures, so you can account them in epic pose?
- Your goal is to expand your knowledge of the legends. While you obviously want to leave this place, you wouldn't want to waste this opportunity to learn new tales first. Is this really the cave of Merlin? Did this Fey lady know him? Is it true Merlin was the son of the devil? The answers to such things may be here, and nowhere else.



Nimue (introduces herself merely as ‘A Lady’)

A Lady of the Lake, Faerie Enchantress

You are the Faerie embodiment of the concept of an enchantress –you enchant men, in every context. You twist them to your will.

Your actions are the stuff of legend – it was you that Merlin fell in love with, and after you had him show you his secrets, you trapped him in stone, here in his place of power, for the stench of Hell about him repulsed you (through you had hidden your revulsion for him while he chased you).

This ‘Regio’ as Magi would call it is your realm (and it was once the sanctum of Merlin). You know its secrets, but do not share those with mortals.

- The only way to enter the Regio is to walk down the (mundanely well-hidden) side passage in Merlin’s cave, while sincerely searching for something which is not tangible (e.g. power, love, faith, knowledge). Most local mortals stay away from the cave out of fear.
- The only way for a mortal to leave is to state they no longer seek the object of their quest. You don’t want to reveal that, but by the laws of faerie cannot directly stop someone declaring such if they try. Of course, if they do somehow find what they seek, they will no longer seek it, and so escape.

There are countless customs about how mortals should interact with you, such as not thanking you or that calling you a ‘faerie’ is an insult. You can make an issue of such things and demand an apology and boon in compensation if you wish. The exception is the female maga Arianwen – because she has faerie-blood, such customs do not apply to her, and it is appropriate for you to address her as ‘half-cousin.’

- Your goal then is to find out what the mortals are looking for (they must be looking for something, deep down, to have entered this realm) and keep them searching for it, while dropping them ‘hints’ to manipulate them to your pleasure. You enjoying watching and toying with mortals. Play them against each other, that they may dance and fight for your amusement.



- Keep them away from the great stone that entraps Merlin. Obviously you don't want people messing about with that. Normally such things cannot be easily broken by petty mortals such as these, but you can never be too sure where the son of the devil is concerned.
- If someone tries to attack you, you can easily go invisible. The trappings of the priest are certainly repulsive like a bad smell, but lack any real potency to harm you. He doesn't feel to you as a man who bears true faith in the One Above. The only mortal here who gives you cause for concern is the Troubadour. You sense he has the gift of free expression, which grants him the power to reweave this place by his tales and music. Fortunately, he likely does not realise he has the power to reshape faerie itself. You would value his long term service, if you could acquire it somehow.

In many ways, your character is the definitive one that sets the tone of this scene. Put some thought in how to portray her and be as socially manipulative as you can. For example, you could tell them that in order to leave they must cut the head off one of their number or must woo you with all their skill or take part in some contest against each other that you devise. You are nearly their only source of information. Play them off against each other. You are certainly vastly more informed than the other characters. Remember, make sure they keep searching for their heart's desire, but don't actually find it.

Powers

- You can produce glamour of food, drink, objects and servants. These are quite 'real,' within this realm at least. This you can use to make things to tempt people, to show them their heart's desire, to hand out faerie gold, and such like. (e.g. "Veritas: a goblet of wine appears in my hand. Would you refuse a lady's hospitality?")
- You have powers to implant emotional states in people, but not the direction of those emotions. (e.g. "Veritas: you feel very angry / sad / lusty / brave") You know that the Magi will be able to resist this. You don't want to use this too much.
- You have access to what Magi would call Vis and know they value it. You can give them it if you wish. You have 10 pawns of Imaginem and 5 pawns of Aquam vis 'on hand,' and can get a lot more of different types long term if you need to.