

Foreword by the Translator

I found the first fragment on a trip to England in January of 2005. I was in Oxford and this thing that could only be called a scrap stood out to me amongst all the other scraps of parchment a colleague was showing to me. It was the word “maginer” that caught my eye. It was, in actuality, not a whole word; it was a fragment too, just like the parchment it was scribed on. Immediately to its left was a large space marked in light pen marks where the initial — an imposing, capital I — would go if the intended illuminator had had ever gotten his chance to draw it.

“Imaginer.” A big French verb mixed in amongst archaic English prepositions, adjectives and nouns. To imagine. And that is just what I did. I spent the following four years imagining what this text was trying to tell me.

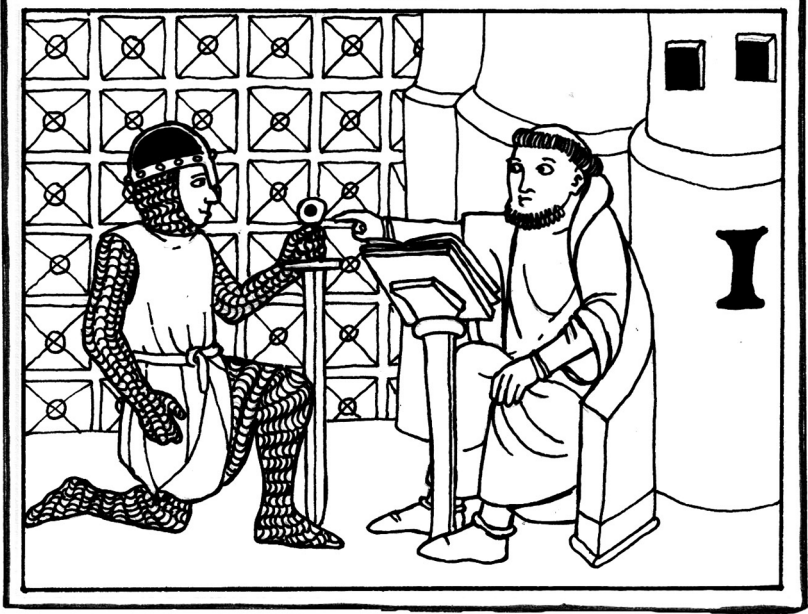
I soon found more fragments. One here, one there...always in some dusty corner of a university or college where they keep things they're unsure how to classify. I made my scans, transcribed the archaic words into my laptop, and was on my way. I was putting together a puzzle, but of course I never knew if all the pieces originally came from the same box. I didn't know what I had, I didn't know where it was all going, but the fragments were starting to tell a story.

Yet they weren't. More to the point, they were telling me the rules for how to tell a story. And not the type of story that an author crafts, but rather the kind that a chronicler experiences. A story not written by one person, but created in the moment by several people in unison. A collaborative, creative exercise. An opportunity to imagine.

The text's actual scribe, it turns out, was not a scribe at all. He was a cellarer, managing the food stores for a priory in England (of which the exact location I was never able to determine) and living sometime in the late 12th century. The cellarer did the writing, but the authorship belongs also to three monks he associated with: Brothers William, James and Adam. Like the creative exercise they describe, what they devised is also a work of collaboration: each member contributing something to the whole (though I must admit that I am somewhat disappointed that James never was able to illuminate its pages as the cellarer had promised).

All-in-all, the result of the endeavor is a game. It is not unlike modern role-playing games in which several players describe the actions of their characters in an imagined world. In fact, where the archaic descriptions or the spaces between fragments have failed to communicate the intentions of the 12th century cellarer and his fellow monks, I must admit that I have borrowed ideas from some of my favorite RPGs to fill the gaps.

I'm not sure that my work can necessarily be called a faithful translation of the original text. Wherever possible I have tried to maintain the spirit of the cellarer's words, but I have perhaps taken the game's first instruction, to imagine, a bit too literally. My efforts were targeted primarily at the game itself, decoding its idiosyncratic terms and mechanisms into something understandable and intuitive. Translation of the text notwithstanding, I think the resulting game is playable and entertaining while still something very close to what four modest monks played in the dim light of a damp cellar so many years ago. And I think they might even be proud to think this game of their invention would be played these vast centuries later. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have, and, as much as I suppose they did.



Imagine, if you will, a sword blade swinging at you. You raise your shield just in time to deflect the lethal blow. Your opponent continues with a barrage of jabs and swipes, forcing you to scramble up the steps that spiral around the stone tower. You only barely twist your body out of reach of the blade's cold steel. Your own sword is contained by the narrow stairwell, your sword-arm constricted against the wall. Finally you see an opening. You swing out with your shield, knocking the attacker's blade to the side, finding the opportunity to raise your own sword into the air and then bring it crashing down.

Picture the fog after a long night of rain. Scattered in the gray are the shadowy shapes of tents and horses. You step ever-so-quietly, careful not to arouse the senses of the few men up and about the pilgrims' camp at this early hour. You slip through the flap of one of the larger tents. You can hear the bishop snoring and time your foot falls with each heavy snort. His pallet is a mound of expensive blankets, and there at the foot of it is the reliquary. It is a strongbox

of gold leaf inlays and dazzling gems. You find it heavy and force yourself not to grunt as you strain to lift it.

Think of fields muddy and worked over. The women and men who labor here are desolate and desperate from being overtaxed by a greedy baron. Most of what little their farms yield goes to feed and pay for soldiers in some far-off war. Everywhere you look is starvation and suffering, but in the middle of it all you see some hope. The baron is vulnerable with his men-at-arms away. The people have a chance to rise up against their lord and overthrow him. They will not do it on their own. They need your words and your courage. Only you can lead them to victory. You shout out to them and their voices raise in unison.

Envision crowded streets thick with the smell of sweat and produce rotting under the noon sun. You leap onto the back of your horse, spurring it forward. You race into a gallop but then must pull the reins to navigate the tight corners of the town's narrow alleyways. The guards are shouting, demanding you stop. Merchants and beggars reach at your horse's bridle and at your legs, but you twist out of their grasp and thunder ahead. One of the guards is on a horse now, giving chase. He is not the rider you are, but the palfrey he is on is fresh and quick, darting with ease around the carts and people littering the market square. He can almost reach out and grab you now. Trying to trap you in the square, some of the townspeople have upturned a cart in front of the passageway ahead. You snap your heels down on the horse's flanks and shout a terse command through your teeth. The horse leaps furiously, coursing in an arc over the wagon.

I must confess to you that, despite our commitment to prayer and hard work in service of our Lord, myself and a few of my fellow brothers here in our humble priory have taken to just these kinds of imaginings. We play these games, you see, in which each participant takes a different role and imagines himself to be somebody else. Not that Brother James pretends to be Brother Adam, but one might pretend to be a brave knight while the other makes believe he is a clever thief. This we started years ago, when we were all novices playing a game written by the late luminaries David, son of Arne, and Gary of Geneva; delving into dungeons, fighting vicious monsters and finding great treasures. Since then we have attempted all types of games in which different heroes and quests are available to us. We are quite fond of one in which we play spiritual enforcers who travel from town to town, solving the peasants' problems and exorcising foul demons.

But since then a few of us have wanted to play something a bit more familiar, a game in which we could play the heroes and interesting figures of our own time. In most of these games, sorcery leaves behind actual evidence of its wrath: fire shooting from a monster's eyes or some wizard floating on a cloud. But as

we have seen it, magic works in the mind's eye, not in front of the physical one. Curses that corrupt a man's heart and spells that only bend the minds of the simple a little. We wanted a game like that. No dragons or centaurs, but where the monsters are the men and women who have lost their way. Something like this may already exist, but we only have access to a limited number of written works in our poor monastery. It was Brother William who suggested that we create our own game rules. We are all educated and clever; why should we not make our own game just like Gary of Geneva or Vincent the Baker?

Since then, William has done most of the work putting together the fiddly bits and the mechanisms of the system of play, all with suggestions and gloriously witty ideas coming from Brothers James and Adam. It has been my humble duty to record each rule and create the manuscript you see before you. I personally find this horribly ironic as I am this priory's cellarer and rarely lift a pen, while William, James and Adam are noteworthy scribes and scholars. But alas, their fingers become so tired and cramped after long days of performing the Lord's work in the scriptorium that they cannot bear to scribble out one simple letter when it comes to our discussions of the game each night. I take notes by candlelight and have now started assembling this manuscript in my own time between meals and prayers. Upon completion, James has promised to illuminate the manuscript with beautiful initials and his marvelous illustrations.

This endeavor, of course, is all very antithetical to our religious and devoted work here at the priory and may be severely frowned upon by our superiors. For this purpose, I made the decision to write in my vernacular tongue, English, as you well know if you are reading this. Charles, our sacrist, who has never played a game in his life nor, dare I say, ever bent his cold lips into a smile, could not understand our purposes and would immediately report our activity to the prior and demand that we be punished. But to our fortune, Charles only reads Latin and French and so my vulgar English acts like a secret code that I hope will not arouse any suspicions. In any case, Charles is mostly deaf and we get away with much more here than God wishes, I presume.

But I digress. You want to know the rules of this game. This game of imagined adventure.

What You Will Need

To play our game, you will first need players. You could play with as little as two and there is not necessarily any upper limit. We have four players here at the priory and we think it is a goodly number. Four is the number of seasons in the year and the number of Holy Gospels in the Bible. Five or seven would probably

work just as well, both being holy numbers, but we cannot recommend having six players.

One of these players, Brother William in our case, assumes the duties of the **Game Master** (who I shall henceforth refer to as the **GM**). William, being very wise, has in all his travels acquired a wealth of knowledge about our world. And the GM's main duty is to portray the world, its vast environments, and all those interesting people you meet in it. In this capacity, William seems a perfect fit. The rest of us all imagine ourselves as individual characters in the world. It is all quite delightful!

You will also need dice. Brother Adam carved many of these for us when we were playing Vincent the Baker's game. Our game uses all of the platonic solids and one that is not so platonic. We use the tetrahedron, or four-sided die (**d4**); the cube, or six-sided die (**d6**); the octahedron, or eight-sided die (**d8**); the decahedron, or ten-sided die and the non-platonic one of the bunch (**d10**); the dodecahedron, or twelve-sided die and my personal favorite (**d12**); and finally the icosahedron, or twenty-sided die (**d20**). Adam made sure we each have our own set, three of each type, because William sometimes tends to become a little angry with us when we touch his dice.

Finally, you will need a piece of parchment, a stylus, and some ink with which to make your character sheet and record information about your character. Brother James has done up a nice template that I will include at the back of this manuscript. You can copy his format for your own sheets. In addition, we have found that a few other trinkets — some small stones or beads, miniature sculptures that represent our characters, a large plastered mat with a grid of lines, and some maps — can help to facilitate the playing of our game.

Step-Die System

Our game system uses what other games, as Brother Adam informs me, refer to as a step-die system. This means that various abilities and forces within the game are rated by the type of polyhedral die you roll to determine their effects. A d4 represents a fairly weak effect: the strength of a small child, the fire of a small candle flame. Each greater iteration of die type is another step forward in the power of the effect. A d6 is one step more powerful than a d4 and a d8 is one step greater yet. A d10 could represent the strength of a renowned athlete or a roaring bonfire. The d12 represents the very pinnacle of human ability and a d20 represents powers beyond even that.



d4



d6



d8



d10



d12



d20

Playing Characters

As I mentioned earlier, those players who are not the GM portray particularly special characters we call **protagonists**. The narrative that is created by our game play is concerned with the decisions and actions of our characters. The GM's characters, in turn, are called **mentors** (those who train and aid our protagonists), **antagonists** (those who challenge and work against our protagonists), **agents** (those loyal servants of protagonists and antagonists), and finally **the simple** (common villagers and faceless crowds).

You can describe your character using many sorts of literary or practical methods, but William has decided on a certain set of descriptors and numbers that define each character in terms of the rules of the game. Specifically, these are **skills**, **tools**, **aspects**, and **backgrounds**. Characters also have **Ardor** points and **Vigor** points.

SKILLS

Skills are the particular abilities that Brother William has specifically designated while crafting this game. I promise to compile a list of them in the following chapter and include a description of each at the end of that chapter. Suffice it to say for now, if you want to make a daring leap, you use a skill called Dash; if you intend to impress a pretty courtier, you may wish to use your Entice skill. Each skill is ranked, using the step-die system, from d4 up to d12. A character with a Boat skill ranked at d4 is a novice at sea and untrained, while a character with a Boat skill of d6 is competent at the task and a d8 would make her an expert. A character with a Boat skill of d10 is a veteran, an old hand if you will, and fears no storm or wave. A skill rank of d12 represents the pinnacle of mastery in that field. No woman or man ever has a skill ranked higher than d12. The d20 is reserved only for God's creatures that have been blessed with some gift beyond men, such as how a horse can always outpace a human or the great lion surpasses our strength.

TOOLS

Tools are the equipment, arms, armor, and even animals that our characters travel with on their adventures. Like skills, each is ranked with a die type ranging from d4 all the way to d20. The tool's rank is a representation of how effective it is in aiding the tasks with which the tool was designed for.



ASPECTS

Aspects¹ are abilities that you devise and describe for yourself. They handle all those things that William's meager list of skill cannot. Aspects may be talents, flaws, beliefs, disfigurements, specializations, or phobias. They may serve to define your character's occupation, social status, or religion. You will write your aspects as phrases; and these can be as simple as *Attractive* or as intricate as *Her fair beauty is the subject of many a song across the land*. The trick in all this is to write something that is both clear and inspiring.

Aspects are also ranked from d4 to d12. We will go over later how an aspect can be **invoked** to provide a bonus or **endured** when they cause a penalty. When **compelled**, aspects influence your character's behavior.

BACKGROUNDS

Backgrounds are inspired by a marvelous idea that Brother James had. James always wants to play romantic characters, like the heroes of those French stories. But none of us, being monks, are ever comfortable hearing the descriptions of physical love that result from these romances. You should see Adam's face scrunch up if anyone mentions kissing when the target is something other than a bishop's ring. Therefore, backgrounds were invented as a solution to this problem.

A background, like an aspect, is a description of some quality of your character, usually something your character is vastly expert at. But it comes with an agreement that the subject of the background need never come up, at least in detail or mechanically, within the narrative of the game. A background is for things that happen briefly, between scenes and in the periphery of the story that deserve only a passing mention. As such, backgrounds need not have ranks.

¹ Translator's Note: I believe the mechanic that William came up with is more literally translated as "Special Gifts and Tests Handed Down to us from the Almighty." But it is a little convoluted with the chant of invocation and, well, a very long stated label for the mechanic that appears frequently throughout the text. When all is said and done, the rules for this subsystem are so similar to the aspects mechanic from the FATE 3.0 role-playing system, as I've read them in the game *Spirit of the Century*, that I've made a slight substitution here. As I've stated before, my primary goal with this translation is to provide a game as playable as the one William, et al., enjoyed over one that's a strict and accurate representation of the original manuscript. At any rate, as the mechanics and rules for FATE 3.0 are made available through the Open Game License, so are the aspect rules here. See the OGL page at the very end of this book for the full disclosure.

They are simply phrases by themselves. James usually writes something like *Romantic lover*.

ARDOR

I believe that the best way to describe Ardor is that energy that grows in us when we encounter adversity; the energy that we spend to set things right in God's eyes. In the game, Ardor is a system of points. You earn these points when your character is hindered some way, usually by an aspect, but sometimes by a tool or some other condition. You spend Ardor points to invoke your aspects in your favor or, in some cases, to gain an extra action.

VIGOR

Vigor is another point system. It represents just how much you are able to participate in any conflict your character gets into. Every protagonist, antagonist and mentor starts with 3 points of Vigor. Agents start with 2 points and the simple start with 1 point. Points of Vigor are lost when your enemies successfully attack you. If you run out of Vigor, you are eliminated from the conflict.

