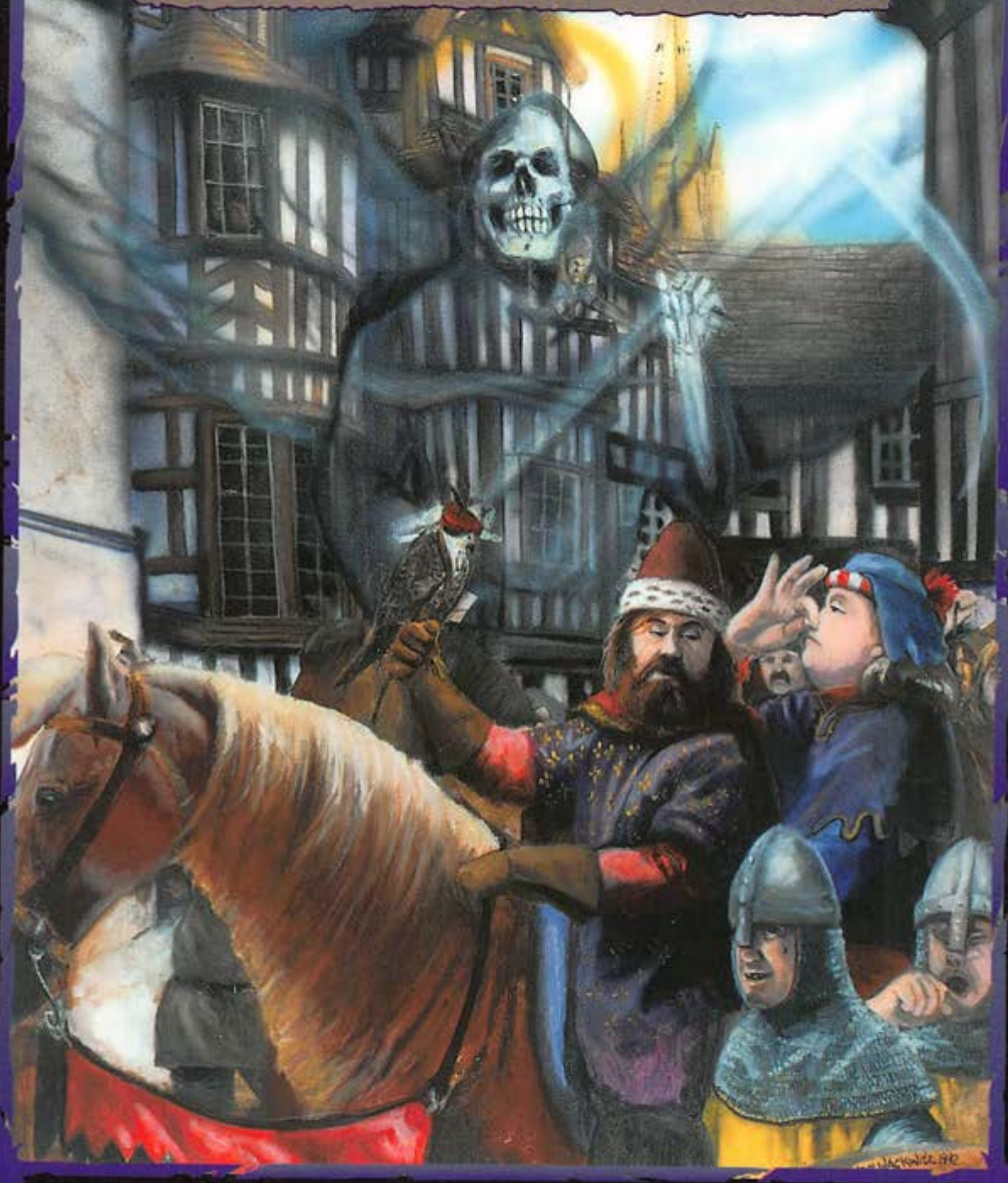


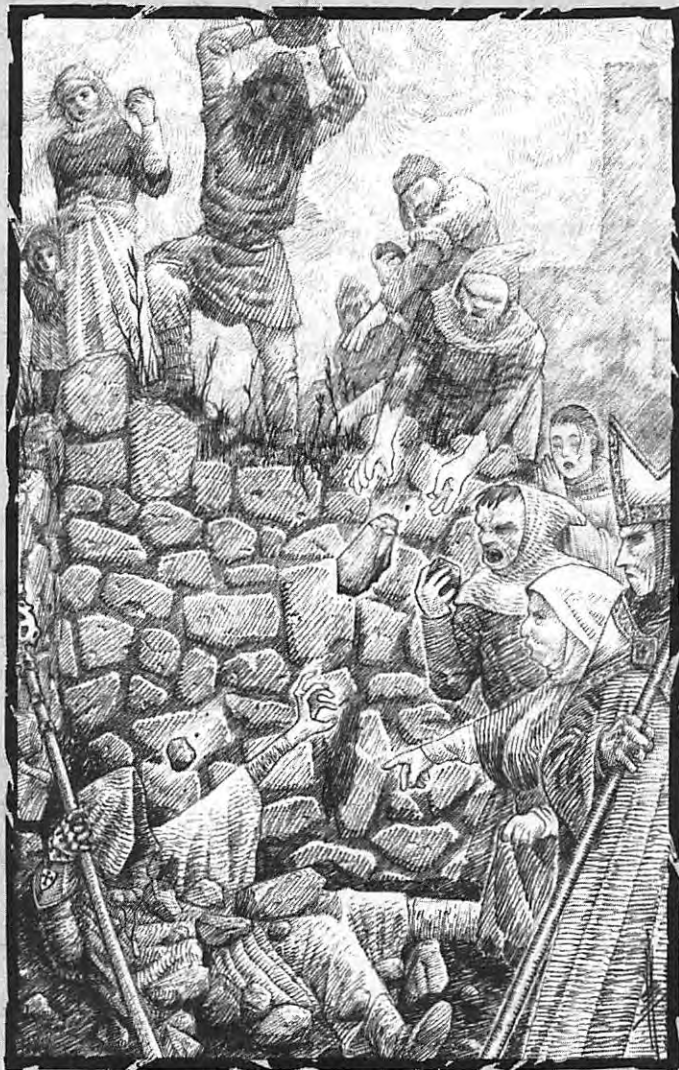
Medieval Handbook



A Guide to the Realms of Medieval Europe
for ARS MAGICA™ 3rd Edition

Medieval Handbook

Aetas Europa



Kevin Hassall

CREDITS

Writing: Kevin Hassall

Development: Ken Cliffe

Editing: David D. Gragert

Layout: Sam Chupp

Art Direction: Richard Thomas

Cover Art: Bryan Wackwitz

Logo: Richard Thomas

Interior Art: Bryan Wackwitz

Back Cover: Michelle Prahler

Ars Magica was created by Jonathan Tweet and Mark Rein•Hagen

SPECIAL THANKS

Bill "I'm like a Shark" Bridges, for staying in constant motion.

Brian "This is Going Down on your Permanent Record" Campbell, for entering the government's White Wolf file by joining full-time.

Andrew "Cardboard Furniture" Greenberg, for making the big apartment move alone, and living out of boxes for days.

Rob "No I Don't Want to Swing the Goob Cat" Hatch, for dodging GENCON.

Ken "Pox Revisited" Cliffe, for having a virus so nice he caught it twice.

Mark "I've Got a Racecar" Rein•Hagen, for getting excited behind the wheel.

Stewart "Doomed" Wieck, for catching the garter without even trying.

A Short Good-bye

This supplement marks the end of an era, the beginning of a new one and the renewal of an old one. Confused? Don't worry. The Medieval Handbook is the last Ars Magica book that White Wolf is publishing. The game line is now in the hands of Wizards of the Coast, under the control of Lisa Stevens, former member of White Wolf and Lion Rampart (if you can remember that far back). Everything old is new again. We're sad to see Ars Magica go, but we know Wizards will do an excellent job, bringing their own style to the game. Farewell.

"History, which is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind."

—Edward Gibbon

***Dedicated to Anne Hassall,
with love and thanks.***

Special thanks to Bill Dawbarn, for permitting the pilage of his book collection. Also to the gullible librarians at Liverpool University (did you actually think a real student could be so industrious?), and Ella Metcalfe for providing "authentic" student back-up.

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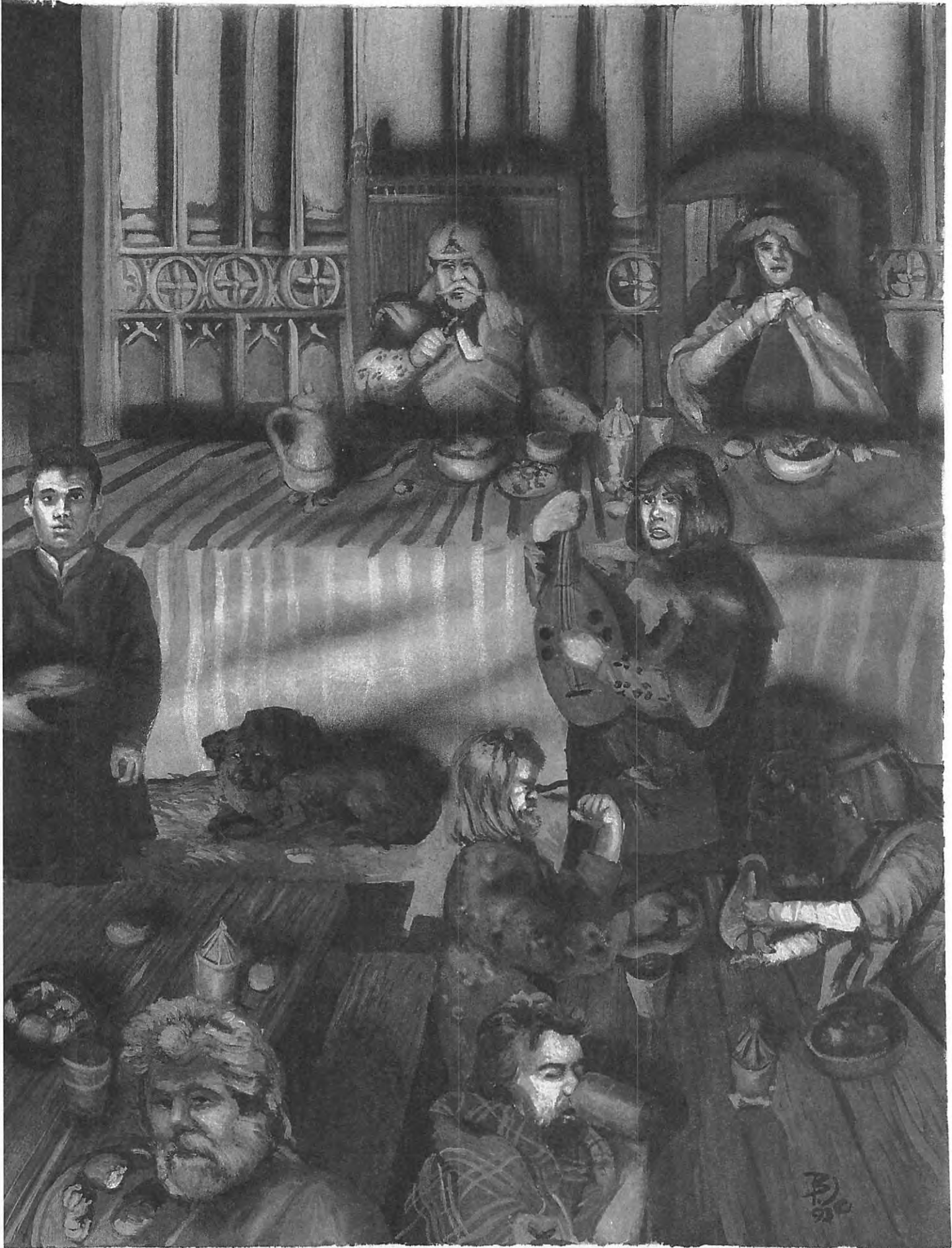
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM WITH HISTORY

Seven hundred years from now, perhaps someone will base a fantasy roleplaying game in the 20th century. If they do, they'll have plenty of source material. They'll be able to scour our videos and records, photographs and movies, our diaries, novels, and countless books on sociology, politics and every other subject from drunk-driving to astronauts. But we don't have such sources from the 13th century.

Thirteenth century people wrote books mainly about religion, or "science," and what little fiction they wrote is blatantly idealistic. They have also left us some biographies (which claim to tell of some great person's life, but are usually disguised political tracts), some books on running a noble's or merchant's household or estate, some traveller's journals, and some very patchy accounts. Unfortunately, all of these are of limited use, since they leave out really basic facts that the authors took for granted. They never explain what normal people did from day to day or hour to hour.

For example, who actually lived in a noble's household? Well, we might estimate how much food was bought by an estate by looking at the accounts and trying to work out what quantities might have been bought at the given price. But we cannot know how much of this was fed to animals (as bread sometimes was), or distributed to the

poor, or given to harvest-workers, or reserved for occasional guests, or even how much went to waste. Furthermore, we don't know how much additional food was grown by the household itself, nor how much more was given as gifts. Unable to even decide how many people lived in a noble's household, we cannot hope to say exactly who they were.

Archaeology provides us with a few clues. From burial sites we might estimate the number of people living in each community, and pathologists can determine their age and suggest life expectancy. (Most villages averaged 50 to 300 people, depending upon geography and date. The average life span was a mere 20 years, including infant mortality, while adults lived to about 40 if they were poor or 60 if they were wealthy.) Equally, the basic plan of houses and villages might be inferred from archaeology (although experts still argue on this), and durable artifacts do turn up in digs.

In certain cases we can look at later traditions and sources, hoping that some techniques might have endured from earlier times. For example, herbs found in 15th century cookbooks may well have been used in the 13th century.

Still, although we cannot know for certain what people did and how they lived, we can at least make an informed guess. We can take all the little pieces of information to create a partial picture, filling in the gaps with our own imagination.