Frederik J. Jensen

MONTSEGUR 1244

BURNING FOR YOUR BELIEFS

Thoughtful Games

MONTSEGUR 1244

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DOWNLOAD

Optional electronic content can be downloaded at: http://thoughtfulgames.com/montsegur1244/download.

User name: Montsegur, password: 16March1244

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Chapter I
Introduction

Montsegur 1244 is a story game inspired by the siege of Montsegur in 1243-1244. The castle was home of the Cathars, a group of people who followed a religion with roots in early Christianity. When the castle surrendered, the survivors were given the choice of renouncing their faith or being burnt at the stake. More than 200 chose death, including more than twenty who converted during the last two weeks of the siege.

We know this because inquisitors wrote down detailed accounts from the survivors. We know the names of many of the Cathars; we know who their families were, and we know their vocations. But we do not know why they acted as they did.

Your task

It is your task – together with the other players – to create a story about who the Cathars were, and why so many chose death rather than to renounce their faith.

You will play the role of one of the besieged Cathars. Through play you will decide the fate of this person. At the end of the game, you must choose one of three fates:

- To repent before the inquisition
- To burn at the stake
- To escape into the night

At least one of you must choose for your character to burn at the stake. At most one of you can choose to have your character escape into the night. Thus, the tragedy is assured.

Unlike most role-playing games, Montsegur 1244 has no game master. All players work together to create a shared story, defined within the context of the game. No dice are used to resolve the events in the story you create. Don't worry if this is unfamiliar to you: The game is designed to make play easy for you.

Overview of the booklet

Chapter II explains the rules and the procedure of play. Read the text aloud the first time you play the game to introduce everyone to the rules.

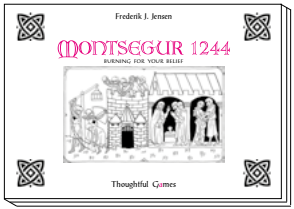
Chapter III contains the framing story of the tragedy. Short narrative texts and brief instructions unfold the big story and focus the drama. You and your players take turns reading this text aloud during play.

Chapters IV and V contain background information and helpful tips on how to play the game.

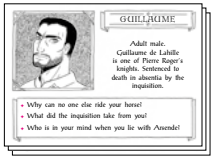
Chapters I to V is all you need to read before playing the game. The following chapters give additional insight to the historical background and advice on how to get the most out of the game, as well as answers to questions that may come up during play.

The last chapter briefly explains the terminology used in the game with page references.

Components of the Game



Rules Booklet



16 Character Cards

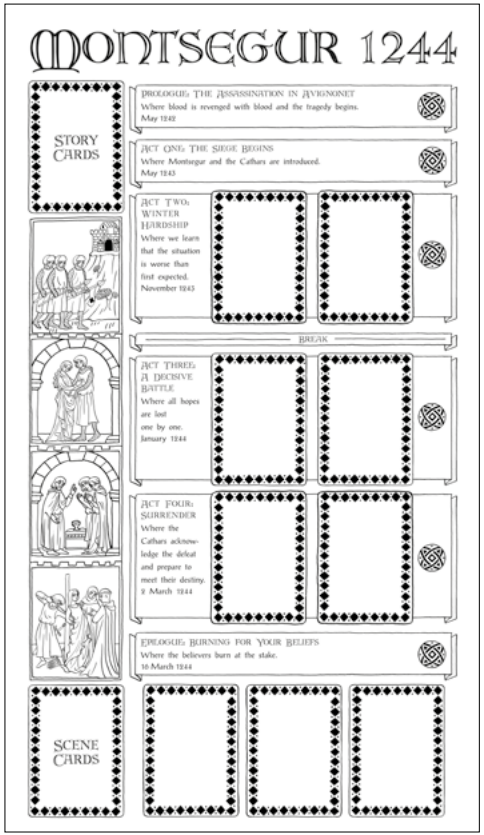
Story Progress Marker

32 Scene Cards

24 Story Cards

Turn Card

Game Board



CHAPTER II
RULES

The purpose of the game is to collectively create a story about the Cathars, who in 1244 were forced to choose between death and betraying their faith. This chapter explains the rules and procedure of play.

The characters

Montsegur 1244 includes 12 characters: Faye, Amiel, Esclarmonde, Garnier, Phillipa, Guillaume, Arsende, Pierre Roger, Corba, Raimond, Cecille, and Bertrand. Some are old, some are young, some are in between; half are boys and men, and half are girls and women. All characters are sympathetic to the Cathar cause though they may not all be highly devoted to the Cathar faith. Each player is assigned two, three or four Cathars, depending on the number of players.

In Act One, each player chooses one of his characters as his main character by setting a scene with this character. It is the story of this character that the player is to create and play. At the end of the game each player must choose one of three possible fates:

- To burn at the stake
- To repent before the inquisition
- To escape into the night

The characters not chosen as main characters are supporting characters.

Each character is described by name, sex, age, role and relations. All additional information is determined by the player who plays the character.

In addition each character has been given three questions. These are used to explore the character. Answer these during play for your main character. For supporting characters it is optional to include them in the story.

Optional characters

Four optional characters are also included: Etienne, India, Arnaud and Joscelin. Adding the optional characters to a game of Montsegur 1244 allow you to explore new stories after you have played the standard game.

Choose one of these options to add optional characters to a game:

- Shuffle one, two or three of them into the set of the original characters and have players pick them normally.
- Let each player who has played Montsegur 1244 before pick one.

If you play with first time players, it is recommended not to add more than one or two new characters.

How to play Montsegur 1244

Before Play

- Place the game board on the table in front of you
- Give the Turn Card to the player with the deepest voice
- Shuffle the scene cards. Draw three and place them on the board positions
- Shuffle the story cards
- Choose characters

In Each Act

- Mark the current act by placing the story progress marker next to the act on the game board
- The player with the turn card reads aloud the text for the act
- Each player sets a scene in turn. The player with the Turn Card goes first.
- The player with the Turn Card passes it to the player on his left
- Have a 15 minutes break after Act Two

In Each Scene

- Choose a scene card and draw a new one
- Set the scene
- Play out the scene
- Optionally: The narration right is taken over by another player
- Draw a story card

The basic rules

These are the four basic rules in Montsegur 1244:

- No player can control more than one character in a scene
- No player can kill a character owned by another player without consent
- Main characters cannot die before the epilogue
- At least one main character must burn at the stake. At most one main character can escape into the night.

The Turn Card

The Turn Card is the card with a cross. During the game it is used to indicate the player who initiated the current act. The player with the deepest voice begins with the cross.

The Cathars did not use the symbol of the cross and despised it. We do not know what symbol they used, if any. Repenting heretics were forced by the inquisition to sew a yellow cross on their clothes such that everybody could see they had been heretics.

Choosing characters

Shuffle the characters. Turn over the first three. Read aloud the text on the character as it is revealed. Each player selects a character in turn, after which a new character is revealed. The player with the Turn Card begins. Continue until all characters have been allocated. Thus each player gets to control two, three or four characters, depending on the number of players.

❁ Choose characters you want to explore. A character is only interesting in relation to other characters, so be sure that other players have characters that you can play up against. Try to ensure that characters that easily appear in the same scene go to different players. The trio of Faye, Amiel and Arsende is a good example.

Background Sheets

The background sheets describe Montsegur and the Cathar religion.

Give the background sheet *Montsegur* to Raimond's player. Give Bertrand's and Cecille's players a set each of the background sheets *The Faith, The Perfects* and *Consolamentum*.

The acts

Montsegur 1244 is a tragedy in four acts, a prologue and an epilogue. In Chapter III you will find a text for each act that tells the over-arching story of the fall of Montsegur. The text also instructs you how to play the act. The acts are:

- Prologue: The Assassination in Avignonet
- Act One: The Siege Begins
- Act Two: Winter Hardships
- Act Three: A Decisive Battle
- Act Four: Surrender
- Epilogue: Burning for your Beliefs

The player with the Turn Card opens each act by reading the text from the story chapter aloud.

The prologue consists of a single scene, The Assassination in Avignonet. It will help you to learn the rules.

In each of the four acts, each player sets a scene in turn which is then played out by all participating players. The player with the Turn Card goes first. In a three player game, set an extra scene in Act Two, Act Three and Act Four. In a six player game, three players set a scene in Act Two and the other three set a scene in Act Three.

The epilogue concludes the story. Each player, in turn, decides the fate of their main character.

At the end of each act, the Turn Card is passed on to the player on the left.

The scenes

A scene is a self-contained part of the story. Each scene is set by a player, who describes where and when the scene takes place, the persons present, and what the purpose of the scene is. Following this the scene is either played out or narrated. When the scene has achieved its purpose, it is ended.

Scene cards

Before setting a scene, the player picks one of the three face up scene cards. The card contains a descriptive phrase that the player should attempt to incorporate in the scene, either in the initial description or sometime later during the scene.

The player retains the card for later use. It can be used to take over narration from another player (as will be explained shortly).

A new scene card is revealed in its place such that there is always three face up scene cards.

Setting a scene

The players take turns in setting scenes. To set at scene, a player does the following:

- Select a scene card and reveal a new scene card
- Describe where and when the scene takes place
- Briefly explain the situation and the purpose of the scene
- Decide on the persons present in the scene initially
- For each person present in the scene, ask a player to play this character
- Direct the players that participate in the scene. What are the goals of their characters?

Each player can only play one character at a time. Main characters can only be played by the player that controls them. Supporting characters can be played by anyone, but try to have the same character played by the same player throughout the game. You can decide to play one of the characters yourself, which you often will.

Playing out a scene

Once the scene is set, it is played out. The players describe what their character does and speaks out what their character says.

Narrated scenes

Not all scenes need to be played out. Entire scenes or parts of a scene can be narrated. For example, a player can describe how a main character walks around between the fallen and wounded, searching for a brother or sister.

Narration right

The player that sets the scene has the right to narrate it. This player decides the outcome of events, can introduce new story elements, and can change the time and location of the scene. The other players are encouraged to suggest ideas – for example, a specific character might enter the scene – but the player with the narration right has the final word. Narration right is only limited by the basic rules.

Examples using the right of narration:

- *"The arrow leaves the bow string and hits its target…"* (decision of outcome)
- *"Suddenly the door opens…"* (introduction of a person in a scene)
- *"Later that same day…"* (change of time)
- *"Meanwhile not far away…"* (change of location)

❁ Use narration to keep the story moving at an appropriate pace. When play stops or slows, quicken the pace by cutting forward in time. When play moves too fast, take a time-out for a panoramic view of the situation.

Ending a scene

The narrating player must end the scene when it has fulfilled its purpose. This is done by saying "Thank you" or "Cut".

❁ It can be a good effect to end a scene early without resolving everything. Leave a door open for the next player.

Change of narration right

Another player can take over the narration right during a scene by using a saved scene card. This player now controls the scene and could, for example, let a new character enter the scene, cut to a simultaneous situation in another place, or add a follow up scene. The player can also just say "Cut!" and end the scene.

❁ Use this to give a scene an unexpected twist.

After a scene card has been used to take over narration, it is removed from the game.

Story cards

When a scene is finished, the player that set the scene draws a story card. Story cards contain story elements that can be introduced in the story. This can be a person (e.g. an inquisitor), an item (e.g. the Grail), or an event (e.g. Witchcraft). Only the player with the narration right can play a story card.

A story card can be played at the beginning of a scene, but can also be introduced into a scene that has already played for some time, e.g. by cross cutting to another location.

When a story card is played, place it on a free space on the game board for the current act. Story cards can only be played in Act Two, Act Three and Act Four and no more than two story cards can be played in each act.

Remember that the focus of the story is the main characters. Use the story cards to challenge or contrast the characters, not to sidetrack the main story. Tie the story together by reincorporating the story cards played early in the game back into the story.

Exempli Gratia

This example shows how the prologue can be played. The player Simon has the Turn Card and has just finished reading the text for the prologue in Chapter III.

Simon: OK, I'm the one to set the scene. I also control Pierre Roger, so I'm going to play him. Who controls Guillaume?

Anna: I do.

Simon: Will you play Guillaume in this scene?

Anna: Yes, gladly. My revenge shall be sweet.

Simon: Excellent. Now, let's see. First I'm to pick a scene card…

Simon takes a look at the three open scene cards and picks "Torches in the night".

Simon: OK. It is late afternoon as the group of armed men approaches Avignonet. They stop in a small grove outside the city and waits. At dusk, a sole rider arrives. It is one of the bailiff's men. Michael, will you play the messenger?

Michael: Yes, with pleasure. What is his message?

Simon: That everything is ready. The inquisitor has arrived and is staying in the fortress.

Michael: OK.

Michael (as the messenger): Greetings. Are you men from Montsegur?

Simon (as Pierre Roger): Yes. Tonight the inquisition will pay with blood for the injustice it has brought to this land.

Michael (as the messenger): My liege has long awaited this night. Guillaume-Arnaud and his retinue have arrived. They are resting in the fortress and suspect nothing.

Simon (as Pierre Roger): Here, take this gold. Let it blind the eyes of the guards and deafen their ears. Send a man to the southern tower with a torch when all is ready.

Simon: The messenger rides away with the gold. A few hours later, the agreed signal is seen: A guard swinging a torch over his head. (Simon has thus incorporated his scene card in the scene description)

Simon (as Pierre Roger): The time has come! Guillaume, bring me the head of the inquisitor!

Anna (as Guillaume): With pleasure! I'm looking forward to let my axe taste his blood.

Anna: Guillaume spurs his horse and gallops down to the city with a group of men.

Simon: Unchallenged the riders reach the fortress where the guards let them in. Quickly they find their way to the room where the hated guests sleep. All is quiet here. The last embers of the fire reveal the sleeping figures. Their heavy breathing is heard. The snoring. A low jingle of metal.

Anna: (Puts a finger across her lips and looks around). Guillaume signals his men to spread out in the room. Then he picks up a torch and walks around among the sleeping. Does he find Guillaume-Arnaud?

Simon: Yes. Up against a wall. You recognize the slight figure. The rough robe, the tonsure, the ring of the inquisition on his finger. He is sleeping. Like a baby.

Michael: Yes! Strike him down!

Anna: Guillaume tightens his grip on the axe. His knuckles turn white. He raises the axe…

Simon: A loud noise echoes the room. In the darkness, someone has topped over a brazier. The snoring stops. Guillaume-Arnoud wakes with a start; looks up slowly, and then suddenly his eyes open wide as he recognizes Guillaume.

Anna: I bring down my axe!

Simon: The axe opens up the skull of the inquisitor, and blood and brains sprays out. The room breaks out in uproar and battle cries. An inferno of blood and gore follows. Soldiers arrive, and in the darkness, it is difficult to know friend from foe. Men are slaughtered on both sides. A group led by Guillaume fights their way out of the fortress.

Bloody and intoxicated by revenge, they arrive at the grove where Pierre Roger is waiting.

Simon (as Pierre Roger): Guillaume, where is my cup?

Anna (as Guillaume): Broken, unfortunately. Cleaved in two.

Simon (as Pierre Roger): Why didn't you bring it back? I would have mended it with a golden band and have drunk from it for the rest of my days!

Michael and Anna: Way to go! Yes! Cool.

Simon: Thanks! And… cut!

Chapter III
Story

Now you're ready to play. The player with the Turn Card reads aloud the text from Chapter Three. First the historic prelude and then the prologue.

Montsegur 1244 is a tragedy in four acts, a prologue and an epilogue. In this chapter you will find a text for each act that tells the over-arching story of the fall of Montsegur. The text also instructs you how to play the act. At the beginning of each act, one player reads aloud the text. The acts are:

- Prologue: The Assassination in Avignonet
- Act One: The Siege Begins
- Act Two: Winter Hardships
- Act Three: A Decisive Battle
- Act Four: Surrender
- Epilogue: Burning for your Beliefs

The prelude describes the events that lead up to the siege.

Prelude
The Albigensian Crusade

In 1199 A.D., Pope Innocent III declares that a good Christian no longer needs go to The Holy Land to go straight to Heaven. Heathens can be found a lot closer to home. In southern France a long and bloody war against the Cathars begins.

The Catholic Church has been in a weak position for a long time. A new religious doctrine has been spreading and threatens the Church. Maybe the bishops have been too busy with their intrigues in Rome. Maybe they have been tax collecting a bit too zealously. The message of a simple life, following the example of Jesus, wins sympathy and listeners. Told directly in people's homes by abstinent, humble men and women.

In 1208, an army of crusaders attack. The main force consists of Normans. The first town, Bezier, refuses to surrender their minority of Cathars to the crusaders. When the town finally falls, there is no mercy. The order is: "Kill them all, the Lord will recognize His own."

More towns fall in the following years. But after a while, acts of war die out. The Count of Toulouse, a defender of the Cathars until now, gives in to the pope and promises to fight the heresy. An uneasy peace spreads.

In 1234, the papal inquisition is formed to help uncover heretics and to prevent vigilantism and lynching. But the efficient and brutal conduct of the inquisition is not to everyone's liking.

Prologue

The Assassination in Avignonet

Where blood is revenged with blood and the tragedy begins.

—— May 1242 ——

A messenger arrived at Montsegur with a letter from Avignonet, a small town nearby. The local bailiff served the French king but was also secretly a faithful believer. In the letter he informed that the hated inquisitor Guillaume-Arnaud was on his way to Avignonet, where he would stay for a few days. The bailiff was willing to let his guards look the other way if somebody would attempt to harm the inquisitor.

- *Play the scene where Pierre Roger leads a group of armed men in an assault on the inquisitor. Does Bernard taste the blood of revenge? Does the inquisitor recognize his assassin? Do all of the Cathars support the idea of the assassination?*
- *The scene is set by the player with the cross.*
- *After playing the prologue, you are ready to choose your main characters. Read the playing tips and continue to play out Act One.*

Act One
The Siege Begins

Where Montsegur and the Cathars are introduced

—— May 1243 ——

The sun was shining from a clear sky when the war came to Montsegur. From the mountain top the enemy could be seen clearly. They were many. 5,000? Perhaps 10,000? Without haste the crusaders gathered around the foot of the mountain.

Montsegur was closed off from the outside. The siege had begun.

- *Raimond's player introduces Montsegur.*

During the summer, spirits are high among the besieged. Life goes on. There is plenty of food and water for drinking and reinforcements easily penetrate enemy lines. A celebration is held with singing and dancing. The perfects teach the faithful about the path to salvation.

- *Each player sets a scene that introduces the character, they choose for their main character.*
- *Remember to draw a scene card before setting a scene and a story card after ending a scene.*

Act Two
Winter Hardship

Where we learn that the situation is worse than first expected

—— November 1243 ——

The crusading army realized that capturing Montsegur was more difficult than first expected. The siege would be prolonged into the winter. Reinforcements and new supplies were needed. Determined to the cause, the enemy prepared to endure the winter in the inhospitable scenery.

This was not a decision that the people in Montsegur was happy about.

- *Bertrand's player introduces the faith.*

Up until January 1244, battles are fought with no decisive outcome. Winter solstice passes. Children are born. The old and the weak get ill and dies.

- *Each player sets a scene that brings complications into the lives of the main characters.*
- *Use the story cards to bring new elements into the story.*
- *Remember that you can use a saved scene card to take over a scene from another play.*
- *Take a 15 minutes break after Act Two.*

Note: In a **three player game**, set an extra scene in Act Two, Act Three and Act Four. In a **six player game**, three players set a scene in Act Two and the other three set a scene in Act Three.

Act Three

A Decisive Battle

Where all hopes are lost one by one

—— January 1244 ——

The continuing bombardment of the east end of the crest had made Pierre Roger withdraw his men to the main fortress. Only a few sentries stayed to hold the watchtower at Roc de la Tour. A sensible decision, given that the east side was well protected by the almost vertical cliff walls.

But it should turn out to be fatal.

A group of soldiers from Gascony volunteered to climb the steep cliff side. An ice-cold night in January with only starlight illuminating the dangerous path, they climbed the rock wall. After several hours of perilous climbing they made it to the top. Without hesitation the surprised guards were killed before they could sound the alarm.

The east tower had fallen.

- *Cecille's player tells about the perfects.*

During the next two months, the crusading army conquers the area on the crest yard by yard. Powerful war machines are set up and the bombardment of Montsegur begins. Death and destruction forces itself on the besieged. They cling on to more and more desperate hopes for rescue. A last, desperate sortie is attempted.

- *Each player set a scene that is played out during this time.*

Act Four
Surrender

Where the Cathars acknowledge the defeat and prepare to meet their destiny.

—— 2 March 1244 ——

It was clear that Montsegur would fall. Pierre Roger took the heavy path down the mountain to negotiate with the enemy. Nobody had any interest in prolonging the siege unnecessarily. The only thing left to do was to agree on the terms of surrender.

Pierre Roger was received with kindness. He returned with easy terms: A 14 day truce during which nobody could leave Montsegur, after which full amnesty was offered for all which renounced their heretic beliefs.

Hostages were exchanged on both sides to guarantee the treaty.

- *Phillipa's player selects a hostage among the supporting characters.*

During the truce, the perfects perform a ceremony. A dozen believers receive consolamentum and thereby choose to follow the perfects into death. Those, who have chosen death, take leave with friends and family and give away their earthly belongings. The vanquished prepare to meet their destiny.

- *Each player sets a scene that is played out during the truce.*
- *Players no longer draw story cards.*

Epilogue

Burning for Your Beliefs

Where the believers burn at the stake

—— 16 March 1244 ——

At first dawn the gates of Montsegur open. The crusader army is gathered and looks at the long line of people, who slowly move down the mountain. Young, old. Children, adults. Men and women.

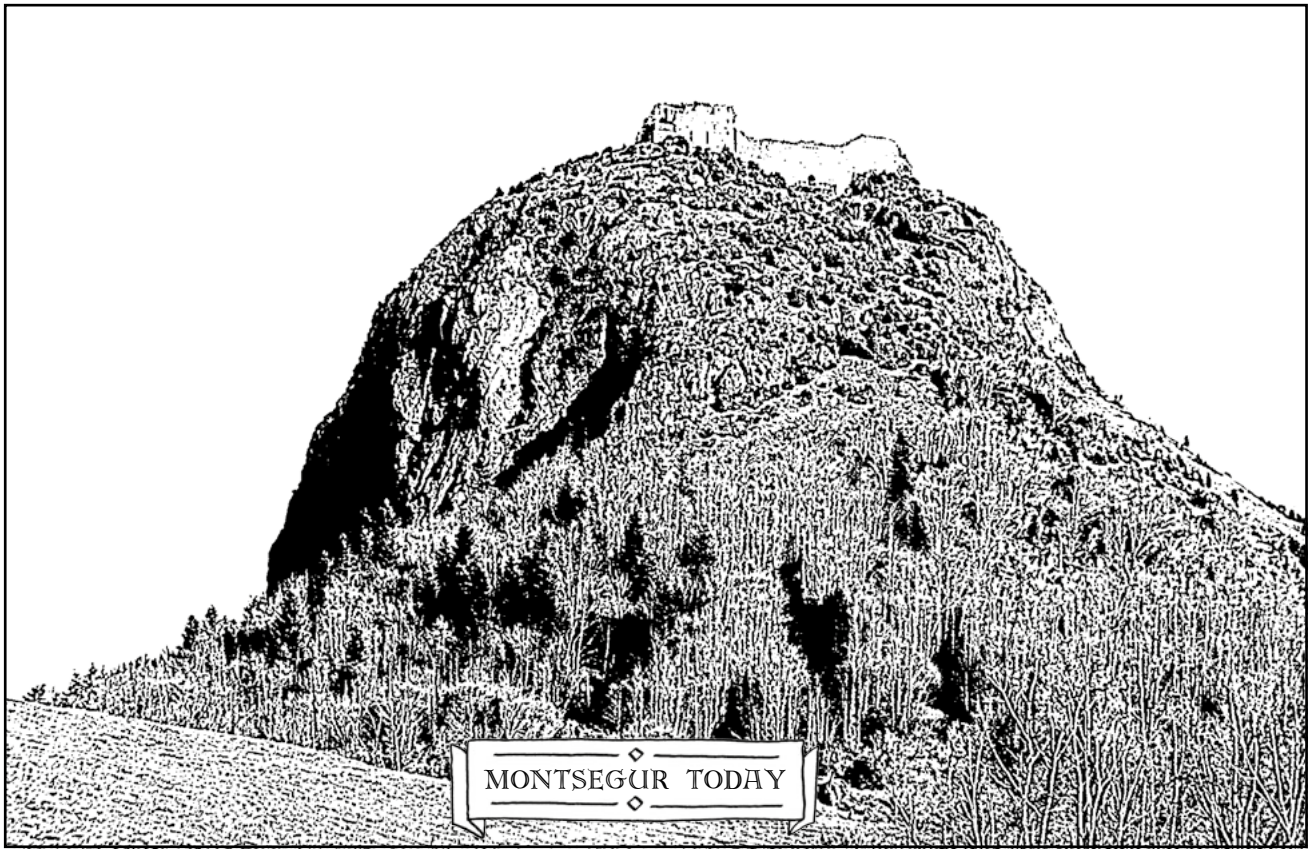
A big fire has been built during the night at the foot of the mountain, ready to be ignited.

Next to the fire, two inquisitors are sitting, ready to write down the accounts of the survivors and take their confessions. Again and again the question sounds: Do you renounce your heretic beliefs and do you wish to receive the forgiveness of the merciful father?

- *Each player in turn tells an epilogue for his or her main character. The epilogue must reveal the fate of the character: To burn at the stake, to repent before the inquisition, or to escape into the night.*
- *At least one main character must burn at the stake. At most one main character can escape into the night.*
- *Players no longer draw scene cards and players cannot play scene cards to take over the epilogue of another player.*

CHAPTER IV

BACKGROUND SHEETS



The background sheets describe Montsegur and the Cathar religion. During play, they are read by the players of Raimond, Bertrand and Cecille.

The information is intended only to inspire fiction, and may not be historically correct, and may not be true in the story you create.

If you prefer, you can let the players read all the background sheets before play or read them all aloud after the Prologue and before Act One. This will introduce the peculiar details of the Cathar faith earlier at the cost of a slower start.

Montsegur

Montsegur is located at a mountaintop in the Pyrenees at 3000 feet. The mountainside drops almost straight down on all sides, least steep at the southwest side. Three parallel defensive walls have been built here. To the east is a crest. Closest to Montsegur in this direction is a quarry, which originally provided building material for the castle. A bit farther away is a small outpost. Even farther, to the northeast at the far side of the wooded crest stands a watchtower.

The two gates to the courtyard can both be watched from the overhanging wooden walkways above and around them. To the east, on heavy, horizontal beams, hangs a wooden platform. On the terraces just north of the fortress lies a cluster of shelters.

Inside the courtyard, several small wooden sheds lean against the solid stone wall. There is a stable as well. Three stairs lead to the wooden fortifications along the top of the walls. To the north-west, the tower where the lord of the castle resides with his family can be seen. The entrance is at the second floor by a wooden stairway. Great vaulted rooms below the castle tower contain big reservoirs of collected rainwater all year around. From the top of the tower, the village at the foot of the mountain can be seen.

- *In Act One, Raimond's player introduces Montsegur.*

The Faith

The Cathars do not call themselves Cathars. Insofar as they refer to themselves as a group, they call themselves the believers (*credentes*).

The faith stems from Christianity. But they believe that the God of the Old Testament, who created the world, is Satan. Earth is Hell. Within every person is a divine soul, trapped in material substance. When people eat, have sex, handle blood and other bodily fluids, they are polluted by the evil of the material world.

Even in marriage, procreation is not desirable. Children are demons. Only when they become conscious enough to choose the right way to live, their souls can be saved. Until then their bodies are just earthly prisons for their souls.

Through an ascetic life of purity, prayer and abstinence people can seek to purify themselves. For most, this is an impossible task. But until it succeeds, the soul is reborn in a new earthly prison, when the body dies. The few, who feel ready for the task, become perfects (*parfaits*).

- *In Act Two, Bertrand's player introduces the Faith*

The Perfects

Not all believers can live up to the strict demands. The few, who feel ready for the task, become perfects (*parfaits*). Perfects renounce material possessions except a cowl and a belt. They dedicate themselves to an ascetic life of purity, prayer, preaching and working to help the community.

You become a perfect by going through the purification ritual consolamentum after a long time of preparation and instruction. The ritual can only be performed by perfects. The effect is hereditary: If the perfect, which performed the ritual for you, breaks his vow, the vow is also broken for you and everyone you have purified.

You can only be purified once, so most people go through the ritual shortly before their death, so as not to risk becoming impure again.

As a perfect, you must follow the example set by Jesus Christ and his disciples. Avoid cursing and swearing. To take an oath would be the same as admitting that you do not always speak the truth. Avoid killing. This includes eating meat, since it could be one of your brothers or sisters reborn in the form of an animal.

Help others find the path. Perhaps they can be reborn as perfects in their next life.

- *In Act Three, Cecille's player tells about the Perfects*

Consolamentum

The ritual of consolamentum is performed in two cases: To ordain perfects and to purify a dying person. In both cases, the ritual is performed the same way.

- The receiver kneels before the perfect. The perfect addresses the receiver by name and explains that the spirit dwells in the perfect and that he is to be adopted as a son of God.
- The receiver renounces the Catholic Church and their cross, their baptism and their magical rituals.
- The duties of a perfect are read. Forgive sinners. Love your enemies. If struck, turn the other cheek. Give your coat to the one who takes your cloak. Do not judge or condemn. The receiver is asked if he will follow this. He answers, "I have this wish and this will. Pray to God that He will give me the strength."
- The receiver confesses his sins and is given absolution.
- The Gospel is placed on the receiver's head. The perfect says, "Holy Father, welcome this servant into your kingdom and let him receive your grace and your holy spirit."
- John 1:1 – 1:17 are read.
- The receiver is girded with a belt of sacred thread.
- The present perfects give the kiss of peace.

- *In Act Four, consolamentum is carried out for those who have chosen to die for their beliefs.*

John 1:1-17, King James Version

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 The same was in the beginning with God.
3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.
5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.
6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.
8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.
10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.
15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.
16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.
17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Chapter V
Playing Tips

Playing your main character

Answer the character's three questions before the game is over. Use them to determine what is important to this person.

Decide on the fate of your main character through play. If you, during play, feel too certain on what fate, you will choose, then consider what could make your character choose another fate. What could make Bertrand denounce his faith? What could make Phillipa choose death in the fire? Try to make the final decision as difficult and painful as possible.

Playing a supporting character

Set focus on the main characters. Put them in difficult situations where they can thrive.

When not playing in a scene

Be an active audience. Pay attention and be prepared to suggest ideas, if play is stalling. Let the other players know when you think they are doing something awesome. Surprise them by taking over narration with a scene card and bring new wood to the fire of the story.

Coming up with an idea for a scene

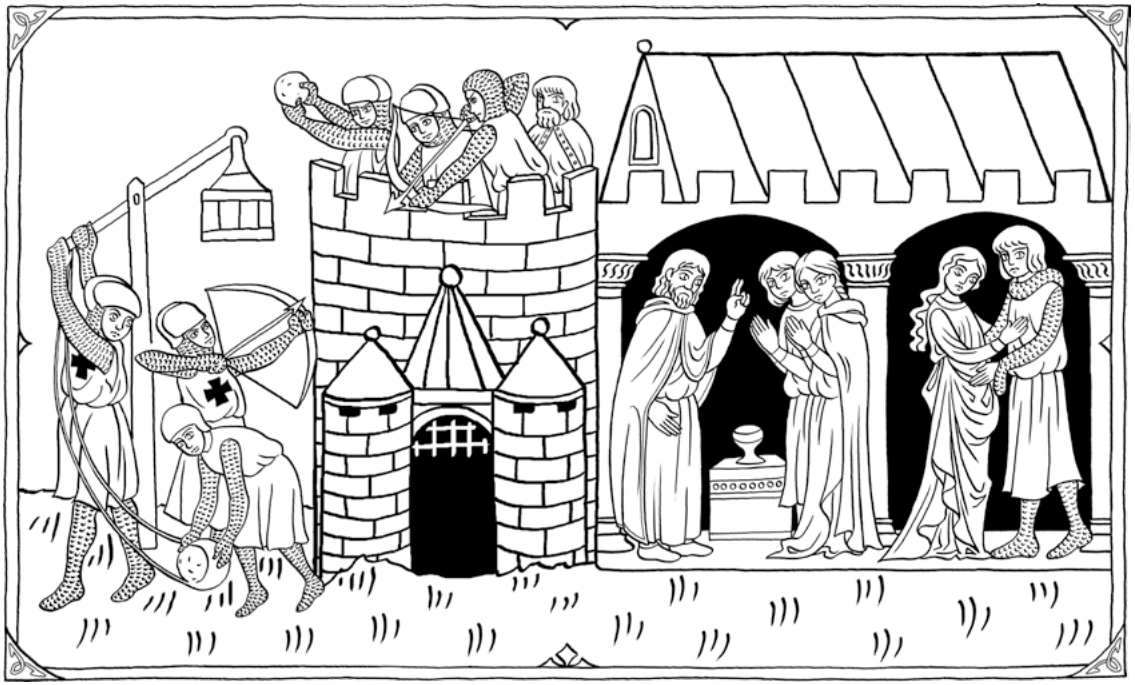
- Put your main character in the spotlight
- Cut to the chase and seek out the dramatic moments
- Get inspiration from a scene card or a story card
- Describe a situation from everyday life. Think of a location or an activity. Establish a routine and break it.
- Glue together the story by reincorporating items, locations, and characters from previous scenes.
- Ask the other players for ideas
- Do the obvious

Setting a scene

- Describe where and when the scene takes place
- Briefly explain the situation and the purpose of the scene
- Decide on the persons present in the scene initially
- For each person present, ask a player to play this character
- Direct the players that participate in the scene

Using the Narration Right

Use narration to control the flow of the game. Increase the pace by jumping forward in time. Decrease the pace by stopping up for detailed descriptions.



CHAPTER VI
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Can you play other Cathars at Montsegur beyond the ones supplied?
A: Yes. Montsegur is home for several hundred people during the siege. But, to keep the cast of characters manageable, it is recommended to limit the named Cathars to the player characters and those appearing on the story cards.

Q: Can you play a character that is owned by another player?
A: Yes. If it turns out to be most convenient, it is OK to let another player play a supporting character. Main characters can only be played by the player that controls the character.

Q: Do I get to keep the scene card even if I didn't use the phrase in the scene?
A: Yes. Use the phrase for inspiration.

Q: Can you use a story card to take over the narration right?
A: No. You can use a scene card to take over the narration right and then play a story card.

Q: Can you play out a flashback in a scene?
A: Yes. It is recommended that scenes are set in chronological order as this makes it easier for everyone to follow the story. However, it can be quite effective to have characters think out loud during scenes, for example their recollections of previous events.

Q: What if Pierre Roger dies before Act Four?
A: Then assume that the terms of surrender are negotiated by e.g. Bernard or Raimond.

CHAPTER VII
HISTORY AND LEGEND

by Ezio Melega

This is an essay about the cultural background of the events unfolding during a game of Montsegur 1244. It is not a history lesson or an anthropology lesson, but a source of ideas and inspiration for your game. If you want to know more about the history of Montsegur and the Cathars, see the bibliography at the end.

Montsegur 1244 is a game about burning for your belief, a game which focuses on the characters and the story you're creating together; it's not a game that aims to faithfully recreate the 13th century.

The historical events are only a backdrop, an opportunity to talk about something you really care about. Historically, Pierre Roger de Mirepoix burnt at the stake on 16 March 1244, having received the consolamentum three days before, but this should not limit you. Your Pierre Roger could be a cynic mercenary who dismisses the Cathar faith without a second thought.

Use the information in this chapter to make your scenes more rich, real and alive, but don't let it restrain you.

The essay is split into two parts: History and Legend. The former is about everyday life, what people did and how they lived, their society and the actual events. The latter tells you about the more uncertain, mythical and legendary occurrences that surround the history of the Cathars.

References to characters and elements found in the game are written in ***bold italics***.

HISTORY

The Cathar Heresy

Cecille, Raimond, Arsende, Esclarmonde; all Montsegur 1244 characters are somehow connected to the so-called Cathar Heresy. Maybe they truly believe, maybe their involvement in the spiritual aspects is only superficial, but for each and every one of them Catharism is the trigger that sets off the events that will lead them to burning at the stake or foreswear their ideals together with hundreds of other people. And yet, today very few know who those mysterious Cathars really were, how they lived and what they believed in so deeply.

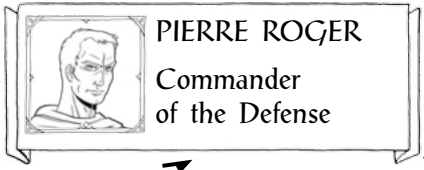
Cathars were pivotal in the events of those troubled centuries that make up the core of the High Middle Ages and they appear often in contemporary chronicles: sometimes depicted as rebelling against the clergy's corruption, other times as violent fanatics, as saints, ascetics, or shaggy farmers unable to understand the subtleties of Catholic theology.

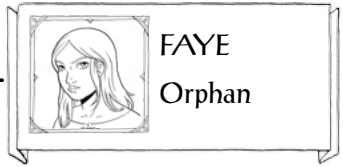
Even their name is an inference. They probably didn't call themselves Cathars but rather Good Men or Good Christians. Several other names are used across all of Europe: Bogomils in the Balkans, Albigensians in the southern Pyrenees where they merged with the Waldesians, Weavers in the countryside due to the profession that many of them – like ***Cecille*** – practiced, and zealous inquisitors like ***Father Durrant*** even dug up the ancient (and false) names of Arians and Manicheans. Dante talks about the Cathar Farinata degli Uberti and calls him Epicurean. This incessant flow of names complicates the historian's job, who sometimes can't precisely discern if a specific name is a local one for Cathars or something completely different.

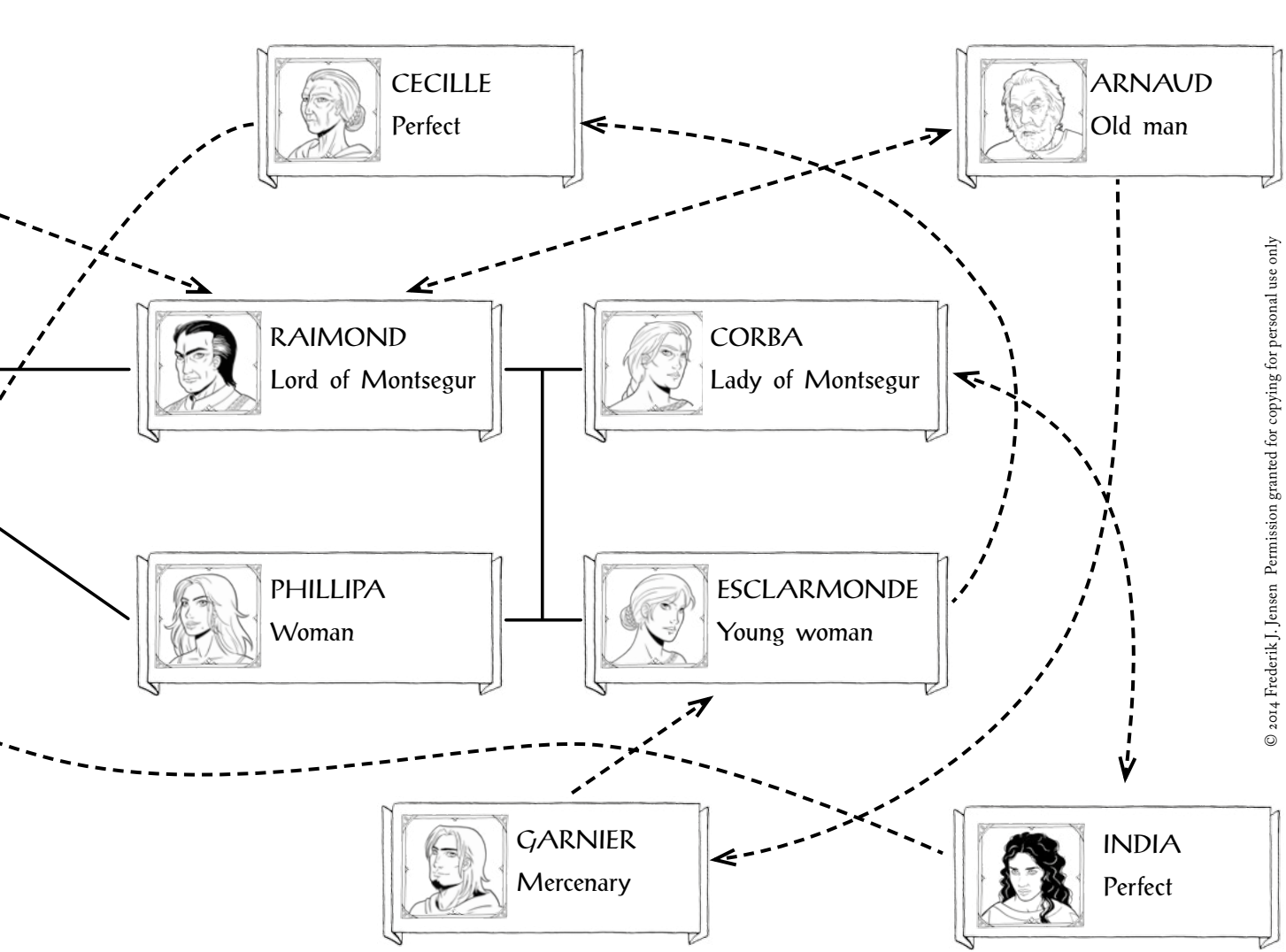
Luckily, more and more original texts resurface which gives us the chance to examine Cathars from a more objective point of view. As an example, we know that the heresy came from the East, maybe from Byzantium or even farther, and that it is linked to ancient gnostic ideas. Cathars believed that Man can rise to meet God and in some instances become part of the divine essence. Satan's rebellion consisted in trapping the souls of one third of all the angels in the world of the flesh that he created, transforming them into Men and estranging them from the divine. Through discipline, Praying (capitalized, since for Cathars there was only one kind of prayer: the one sung by angels, which is the Lord's Prayer still used all around the world) and consolamentum the angelic soul can go back to Heaven, joining and merging again with God. Not simply contemplating the Infinite from Heaven, but being a true angel again, emanation of divine essence and partaking in its transcendent nature.

The Cathar theology was quite complex but despite this, the heresy permeated diffusely at every social level even the most ignorant and poor ones. Perfects were admired due to their renunciations and the simplicity of their evangelization, and Cathars were seen as a valid alternative to the established order. No longer having to be subjected to ecclesiastical authority and its taxes was tempting for farmers, nobles and traders alike, and Cathars didn't swear oaths (what held

MONTSEGUR 1244
RELATIONSHIP MAP







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together the feudal society) nor did they consider past ones effective. A nobleman who was excommunicated or stained by perjury lost the trust of his lords and subjects, but if he managed to become part of the Cathars and of the new order they indirectly promoted, he could still have the social support he needed.

"The Cathar heresy spread like wildfire, and Cathar faithful could be found across all Europe."

The Holy Roman Empire tried to ride this wave in its perpetual fight against the Church, and the same was done by many lesser nobles like the Dukes of Toulouse, powerful French lords and ***Arsende's*** relatives. The Cathar heresy spread like wildfire, and Cathar faithful could be found across all Europe. Their strongholds were those places where they could ally with the local temporal power against the Church: in the lands of the Duke of Toulouse, in Germany, Serbia and very often in the communes of northern Italy.

Cathars had a very strong organization which allowed them to keep in contact with their brothers and sisters all over Europe. The Cathar faithful from which the Perfects rose were considered true Christians and to have the power of Prayer and spiritual baptism – the ***Consolamentum*** – as taught by Christ and opposed to the water baptism practiced by the Catholic Church and taught by John the Baptist (believed to be a demoniac figure, teaching magical rites). Perfects never ate anything that "originated from a sexual act", which means no egg, meat or cheese. Fish was probably forbidden too. Bishops were chosen among Perfects, and like their Catholic counterparts they governed and managed entire bishoprics in France and Italy. They chose two aides among Perfects, called Elder Son and Younger Son; ***Bertrand Marty*** was an Elder Son and then later Bishop of Toulouse.

For many years when Cathars were still tolerated by the Catholic Church, entire monasteries consisted of Perfects; such was the influence of that religion. Through all their history, Cathars had active communities of Perfects, from which they set out in pairs to preach. One of these communities was founded by Lady Forneira, ***Raimond's*** mother, at the foot of Montsegur. There probably was some common ground between these two different faiths, since Bernard de Clairvaux wrote admiring words about them 150 years before Montsegur's siege.

There must have been something that deeply fascinated the medieval people and that we today find hard to comprehend. Among the characters in Montsegur 1244 there is ***Bertrand***, a Perfect who escaped from Béziers. Béziers was not one of the Cathar cities but Cathar and Catholic people lived in harmony there; when the Crusaders came, the Catholic portion of the population refused to surrender the heretics to them, thus choosing war and death. After the fall of Carcassonne, the heretics were chased away (naked, but luckily it was August), but it looks like they were taken in by other cities despite the Crusade. The choice of burning for their belief that so many made at the fall of Montsegur is a mystery. The materialistic rationality of our time and culture (which would have horrified a Perfect) prevents us from truly understanding the feelings that the Cathar preaching roused

in the 13th century man. To do so, perhaps we have to leave behind our cold reason and step into a world where we no longer belong.

Medieval war: siege, raid and theft

Ask a child to tell you about the Middle Ages, and their answer will surely comprise key words like castle, armor, knight, and sword, all terms part of the same facet: war. War has always been the most evocative part of the Middle Ages and we often consider that long millennium as a continuous flow of battles, invasions and sieges. Of course, things were quite different, but violence surely was a key ingredient of the Middle Ages and the same is true for Montsegur 1244.

A war and a siege create the background of the game and almost all male characters are warriors: ***Garnier***, ***Guillaume***, ***Pierre Roger*** and ***Raimond***, all of them are people whose job is war. And a profitable one at that, so much that even people who weren't traditionally associated with violence wanted to take part in it. ***Mathieu de Belcaire*** is a warrior bishop, a priest-soldier, something absurd for today's Christianity, but usual for the Christianity of the Middle Ages. Bishops were primarily landowners so they often took arms and led personal armies and we know about popes who loved weapons more than the miter. Paradoxically, it was their status as people belonging to religious orders or to the clergy and the culture surrounding them that often made them clever and effective strategists. This is especially true for the various military orders such as the Knights Templars and the Hospitallers.

Throughout the Middle Ages war was a job, a way to make money. Battles were fought by professional soldiers and civilians rarely took up arms, since there was no military service (with the one exception of Spain during the Reconquista) and soldiers fought for financial reasons. It was the quickest way to make a profit.

"When an army broke through enemy lines, the first thing it did was plunder the tent of the enemy leader."

Even the noblest of knights didn't turn up his nose at pillaging the battlefield and tried to make the enemy his prisoner and ask for a ransom later, rather than kill him immediately. When an army broke through enemy lines, the first thing it did was plunder the tent of the enemy leader and steal furniture, gold, and weapons. The sortie in ***Act Three*** could be driven by purely economic reasons: stolen weapons and money from ransoms could be enough to allow the besieged party to buy enough supplies to last a few more months.

When we think about medieval warfare we shouldn't think about big pitched battles between two massive armies facing each other. Armies were small, a few thousands of mismatched men, undisciplined and disorganized. It is then unsurprising that pitched battles were rare, and even then the important players were knights like ***Guillaume***, heavy cavalry armed with spear, shield and armor. A single knight so attired could trample dozens of infantrymen and the sight of a galloping knight was shocking enough to have whole groups of foot soldiers flee in terror. One way to understand

the value of heavy cavalry is that lords unwilling to fight paid taxes to their lord in exchange for military services that were high enough to equip whole companies.

Given the importance of economical elements, the most common war practice was pillaging: groups of infantrymen and knights looting enemy territory while the defenders try to force them into a fight on their own terms before both land and resources are completely depleted. The odd siege is more often than not a way to seize the treasures kept inside the fortress.

According to chroniclers, an army on the march looked like the imaginary land of Cockaigne: every instinct was sated and gold flowed abundant. Of course, you had to survive illness, wounds, and attempted murders courtesy of your comrades.

"Why worry about your sins when they will be forgiven?"

Noble knights like ***Guillaume*** had it even better. Their money meant superior equipment, they were often taken hostage instead of being killed and the revenue from pillaging and ransoms was considerable. For them, war was a low-risk bet. A holy war like the Albigensian Crusade was even better: why worry about your sins when they will be forgiven? Many soldiers indulged in the lowest acts of greed, lust and violence, confident that there wouldn't be any spiritual repercussion.

While an army on the march meant many opportunities to those who were part of it, it was a plague on the land it went through (be it friendly or hostile). Supplying meant pillaging. The crusade *contra chataros* was no exception, and while Crusaders besieged Montsegur the surrounding country was full of those bandits and scoundrels put in charge of plundering.

The financial aspect of the war is visible in ***Garnier*** and ***Pierre Roger***. The former is a mercenary, someone who sells his fighting skills to the highest bidder. The great mercenary companies are a long way off, the ones fighting at Montsegur (on both sides) are outcasts, outlaws that gather together in gangs in time of peace and sell their skill and weaponry to armies in time of war in exchange for gold and the right to pillage (almost an obsession for medieval soldiers). The mercenaries brought by ***Corbario*** probably aren't very different: not very organized and even less disciplined.

Pierre Roger has lost his wealth due to the Crusade. Maybe it is now in the hands of the Inquisition but it is equally probable that it was repeated pillaging which ravaged Mirepoix's lands. Since Mirepoix d'Ariege isn't far from Montsegur it is plausible that the Crusaders are using ***Pierre Roger's*** resources against him.

It is interesting how raiding requires a deep knowledge of the area in order to be successful; this is a potential problem for ***Hugues de Arcis***. Raiders need this knowledge so they can move quickly and escape if necessary. Without it, military commanders are forced to use local soldiers and guides and risk them being secretly loyal to the opponent and thus lead the enemy army into a trap. A poor use of locals has led to more than one unsuccessful military campaign.

The second most frequent form of war during the Middle Ages is the siege: a group of soldiers barricaded behind the walls of a castle and another group trying to break through. The former are at an advantage and can hold out for months or even years, depending on how easy it is to smuggle in supplies (and how much money is available to pay for them). True medieval castles are majestic and simple. A perimeter wall, a central tower made of wood and stone. Few comforts, no luxuries, only one purpose: protect those inside it. Sieges were a game of patience and endurance. Sometimes the besieged would try a sortie, aiming not to create holes in enemy lines, but to pillage the enemy camp looking for provisions and hostages. Sometimes the besiegers attacked with trebuchets and battering rams, but most of the time it was all about endurance and resources. Most castles fell due to treason or lucky secret actions. The latter is true for Montsegur, too: a legendary group of Gascons who climbed the walls and conquered the Eastern tower.

Castles were fundamental to establishing and holding dominion in an area. Castles used the characteristics of the land and, if needed, were built very quickly. ***Raimond de Pereille*** got the order to build Montsegur when the Crusade was already under way and he built an impregnable stronghold, taking advantage of the terrain in order to prevent besiegers from completely isolating the fortress, making supplying easier. This is why the fall of the Eastern tower during ***Act Three*** is so bad: the Crusaders can now lay a complete siege, preventing the people of Montsegur from receiving supplies.

Against these massive buildings stood poliorcetic engineering, the knowledge and techniques needed to build siege weapons. Those who mastered it, like ***Brasilhac de la Baccalaira*** in the game, were professional engineers who could precisely estimate tensions, loads and trajectories; they often travelled from one lord to another selling their skill and being handsomely paid for it.

"Maybe the Middle Ages are not so different from today after all."

Once again war intertwines with money and proves to be a very lucrative trade. Maybe the Middle Ages are not so different from today after all.

Daily life in the time of Montsegur

There is more to medieval history than war, even if it is often ignored: how did regular people (farmers, craftsmen, traders and so on) live? Their behavior, the way they lived and related to other people, and the world around them was quite different from today.

To help you better understand: let's prepare a hard-boiled egg. Simple enough, right? Well, you don't have steel pots or a gas cooker. So instead you come up with charcoal and an old copper pot (maybe your grandma's) and we have boiling water. Let's put the egg in and… wait, how do we know how much time has passed without a clock? Try this, and after the fifth runny or overcooked egg you'll begin to understand how different everyday life was at the time also in the small things.

Let's take ***Corba*** as an example. She is the lady of the castle, so you may think that she is a noblewoman who lives on a private income and has lots of free time or maybe she is busy with official matters, yes? Wrong.

You have probably heard someone say that during the Middle Ages there was a subsistence economy. All the resources and workforce were barely enough to produce what was needed to live, with very little or no surplus. ***Corba*** had to do her part, too.

Of course she didn't plough the fields but surely she weaved her own clothes and – together with ***Cecille*** and the other commoners – the clothes of all the inhabitants of Montsegur.

"Privacy which we take for granted was virtually unknown, especially in a location like Montsegur."

In this picture of several women working together we catch a glimpse of another difference between our lifestyle and the medieval one: privacy, which we take for granted, was virtually unknown, especially in a location like Montsegur (a castle whose purpose was defense, not regular life).

Since the stronghold was heavily looted after its fall we only have a few archaeological clues about how Montsegur was at the time, but we can easily imagine the homes of the Cathars thanks to the ruins that can be found on the northern side of the crest. They were small buildings, made of local stone, perched on the hill's side, surrounded by walls and gathered around the central keep.

These houses had a floor area of about 100 square meters (1076 sq. ft.) spread out over three or four floors, built in an oblique way and leaning on the hillside. Very small rooms, dark due to having few windows (glass was a luxury) covered by oiled hides during the winter, which housed people, animals and supplies alike. We can imagine narrow, twisted paths that led to the central keep, with the sides of the houses becoming part of the outer walls and the roofs being used as paths.

Valuable goods like weapons and food were probably held in the keep: water tanks, perishable food and the treasure in the underground level, the cellars on the first floor, the entrance on the second floor (accessible only with a retractable ladder) and a common room where everyone ate, slept and worked. Animals lived together with people. Goats and chickens wandering among the houses were a common sight. Cows, if there were any, were probably taken care of in the keep since they were much more valuable (and convincing them to climb the steep hill had probably been very difficult). Pigs had probably been butchered during the first winter to avoid having to feed them. Mastiff-like dogs of the dangerous and angry kind were everywhere.

Even if there were private areas, privacy was virtually inexistent and people lived packed together. ***Pierre Roger*** and ***Guillaume***, despite their noble rank, probably lived like everyone else; maybe even ***Raimond, Corba*** and their family didn't have a truly private room. In order to optimize the available space there was probably a second common room or a couple of more private areas on the second floor, but that's it.

Now, try to imagine spending the night together with all those people and animals, all together in a small space where, during the day, they live and work. People belching, snoring, having sex and urinating (the medieval man was much cleaner than we tend to think, but there were no toilets and when going outside on a snowy night might mean catching

pneumonia, which will likely lead to death, bearing with the stink is much better). Every crevice closed with oiled cloth to keep out the cold, icy wind of the Pyrenees.

"Most things took place outdoors and sex was no exception."

Promiscuity is a feature of everyday life for both commoners and nobles when in a castle, be it inhabited like Montsegur, or a simpler one consisting only of a keep and a defensive wall. ***Arsende***, being a prostitute, will then practice her profession in the stables (to exploit the warmth of the animals) or a corner of the walls. If she has a house or a room, it will be the same one where she keeps her everyday items and probably a few animals, too. If your Montsegur tends towards being a liberal place she will probably work outside, using a curtain or screen. In the small castle most things took place outdoors and sex was no exception, paid or not.

There were buildings designed with a specific function like the smith's workplace and the kitchen (to minimize the chance of a fire), but there would surely not be a prostitute's boudoir.

Economically, there may have been a few silver coins going around (coined by the Earl of Tolouse or the King of Aragon), but they were probably rare. ***Arsende*** was likely to be paid in kind with food or privileges. The same is true for every other job, from women weaving to the smith. You obtain privileges, protection and food in exchange for your work and skills as agreed beforehand with Raimond. Money was saved for those who lived outside this community such as mercenaries bought with Montsegur's treasure and, maybe, ***Arsende*** herself.

Everyday tools and soldiers' weapons came from this same subsistence logic. Clothes were practical and made from linen, wool and hemp. They were durable and easy to mend. Fabric was produced locally from raw materials. Young women spun supervised by ***Corba*** or ***Phillipa*** while a dedicated room hosted the huge looms, handled by older and more experienced men and women, maybe led by ***Cecille*** who surely took advantage of the long working hours to talk about the Cathar faith. Ten or so spinners were required to provide yarn for a single loom. The weaving area (maybe a hut built against the walls) may have hosted up to five looms. It is also possible that smaller looms were kept in the private, already cluttered houses.

These looms produced the fabric used to sew clothes, pricey and valuable due to the hard and long work required to obtain them. Men wore snug hose, tied to the shirt or doublet with leather laces, over which was often worn a surcoat of a different color. Hats were made with the bottom of sacks. For nobles, shoes were made of leather and cloth, for commoners, shoes were wooden clogs or leather soles sewn to the bottom of the hose. Hair was worn long, reaching the shoulders (this might change for soldiers during wars) and the face shaven. Women's clothes were a bit more complex, especially for nobles, but usually they consisted of a simple, white vest, another one (often colored) worn over it and a sleeveless surcoat. Almost no one had more than a couple of outfits, and even fashionable women like ***Phillipa*** and ***Arsende*** replaced their clothes only once a year. A clever

solution was interchangeable sleeves. ***Phillipa*** could, then, wear her vest all day long even when doing physical work, protecting it with an apron and wearing old sleeves, or working "in her shirtsleeves", letting the sleeves of the inner vest show. At the end of the day, she could wear finer sleeves to welcome home her husband ***Pierre Roger***.

Everyday life was marked by the rising and setting of the sun. The day was split into twelve hours, their length changing according to the season.

The castle probably had bells used to draw attention to the community moments of the day, like lunch or religious services. The women stopped spinning, weaving and sewing and placed long wood planks on supports (the planks were put away against the walls to help retain the heat). ***Corba***, the lady of the castle, supervised the preparations.

"Dogs were everywhere, barking, hungry, and fighting for the leftovers that people threw on the floor."

Lunch was a convivial time. Nobles and other important people ate at a separate table (the high table, literally a step higher than the other diners). Dogs were everywhere, barking, hungry, and fighting for the leftovers that people threw on the floor behind them. ***Esclarmonde***, the unmarried daughter of the lord and lady of the castle, was probably the one that supervised the kitchen and food preparation. Meals were eaten lukewarm because the kitchen was detached from the keep to lessen the risk of fires, served in large wood dishes or flat bread loaves and shared between two people. Cutlery (made of wood) was a luxury, used to bring food from pots to dishes, but not for eating (meals were usually served already cut).

What truly made the meals of ***Raimond*** and the other nobles different from those of ***Garnier*** and the other commoners was the food. The high table had wine every day when available, and meat was common. In addition to this everyone ate farinaceous foods and fish, cooked over hot coals and seasoned with local herbs. Cheese was quite common especially goat and sheep cheese, but bread was the staple food for everyone. Bread was different from what we are used to: rye was often used instead of wheat, so it was darker and more acidic, but very rich and nourishing. It was probably baked into round loaves with a hole in the middle, which allowed for easy transport.

Of course, considering the uncommon situation of Montsegur 1244, the presence of the Cathars probably disrupted this norm since they didn't approve of meat consumption.

Woman: daughter, mother, prostitute

When I played Montsegur 1244 for the first time, the number and roles of female characters struck me: ***Arsende, Corba, Cecille*** and the other women are the core of a complex relationship map. This is unusual enough to stand out. When thinking about the Middle Ages one usually thinks about war, warriors, monks, popes; women's roles are those of mothers, sisters or daughters of someone else, or maybe that of saints pictured on Crusader's banners. The exceptionality of figures like Catherine of Siena or Joan of Arc strengthens the idea that the Middle Ages was a history only of males.

Thinking about the medieval woman calls forth several contradictions: the clergy talks about the woman as the source of all evil, but then elevates Mary as a door to the paradise; the Cathars talk about sins of the flesh and the inherent evil of reproduction, but women can become Perfects and Bishops; nobles consider women a property worth less than land, and then they're glorified in chivalric ideals.

It is then hard to understand what role the medieval woman really had; she seems out of focus, her means limited to choosing to whom to submit herself: God, becoming a nun, dying as a virgin and a holy woman like ***Cecille***, or men, becoming a wife like ***Corba*** and ***Phillipa***. Even a woman extremely powerful like Matilda of Tuscany had to marry several times to consolidate her power. On the other hand, the laws of the time saw marriage as an equal exchange and man and woman had the same duties and rights.

Women like ***Corba*** and ***Phillipa*** are the castle ladies, celebrated by chivalric literature. Even at that time, it was escapist literature and the idea of the noblewoman always smiling, watching over her husband donning armor, is simply that: a fantasy. The truth is much closer to what the duchess of Brunswick wrote about her secluded life comparing it to that of a hermit, confined to the castle and ignored by her husband.

To find out the truth, we have to study the laws of the time. Apart from loophole abuses, women could own land in the same fashion as men did, they fully inherited their majorat and even if they gave their allod to their husband as a dowry it became property of the woman again after the husband died, or at least she had the right to manage it together with her sons. Arranged marriages weren't as bad as we think (an exception were the highest ranking nobles). A father that did not try to achieve the best match for her daughter would have been reproved; we can imagine ***Raimond*** attempting to find the best husband for ***Esclarmonde***. Probably, ***Pierre Roger*** and ***Phillipa*** married when they were adolescents, and they got to know each other growing up together.

"She is the one who manages Montsegur's resources, the real battle that determines if the siege will be won or lost."

In practice, the woman was often the one that handled family money and administration; this was especially true for artisans and traders living in cities. In the absence of her husband the medieval woman takes charge of his duties as well so she must be versed in the complex medieval etiquette, be a gracious host, handle finances and political alliances, manage fields, write and carry out wills and, in some extreme instances, deal with war. ***Corba*** could then be the

true core of the siege: while the men are fighting, she is the one who manages Montsegur's resources, the real battle that determines if the siege will be won or lost.

However, this power is only temporary. A woman can exert power only when acting in the name of her husband or sons. She manages the castle but is subservient to her husband or father. She can own land but if she is young, her male relatives will marry her off to strengthen political and financial alliances.

To find women who enjoy a greater freedom we have to go lower down the social hierarchy, where need increases women's social importance. Without land owned by the family and servants to farm it, women have to work to support themselves and their family and often work emancipates them.

No matter whether they grow up in cities or in the country, girls are taught a job and entire occupations are exclusively for women. Wholesale merchants and retail sellers were often women and the same was true for workers employed in wool processing and other textile arts. There is, however, a gender hierarchy and women were very rarely admitted into guilds and corporations. On the other hand, women were often skilled in more than one job (the opposite was true for most men), so sometimes they choose to not become part of a corporation because these asked their members to completely dedicate themselves to only one set of skills. Women were often the ones that taught the basics to apprentices, thanks to their multidisciplinary knowledge. In England, a woman whose trade was different from that of her husband was considered a distinct legal person, independent from any men, and was accorded great respect. The picture is then one of great resourcefulness, different from the stereotypes that emerge from literary sources of the time.

Even if the lives of women were different from what we usually think, it wasn't an easy one. A woman's salary was sharply less than a man's, and even upper class women were always at risk of destitution. When that happened, women often turned to criminal activities: thievery, fencing, and, of course, prostitution. ***Arsende*** is a good example of this: she is not old, has a family to feed and her rape probably prevents her from finding a good husband; she is impoverished and helpless from a social point of view.

"Young widows were considered fair game and village youngsters organized raids to rape and forcefully marry them."

Even if a medieval woman could have her own political and economic power independently from a man, she had no defense when it came to abuse. In the time and place of Montsegur 1244, young widows were considered fair game and village youngsters organized raids to rape and forcefully marry them. Occasional prostitution was then the only solution for women with no man to protect them, since they could then receive protection from their customers.

This kind of prostitutes, known as "secret women", was ubiquitous: in the country, cities and castles. The latter were becoming closer to the idea of the Renaissance courtesan: an unchaste woman but with a recognized and accepted social role. Sometimes those secret women belonged to lesser noble

families, like ***Arsende*** herself, impoverished by war or by the fall of their lord; since they belonged to a court all their life, they continued to do the same in a different way.

Prostitutes living in cities, working from taverns or brothels, were often blackmailed by men that exploited them and forced them into debt, in a similar way to what happens today. It was even worse for women following armies. There were, however, brothels managed by prostitutes with a somehow democratic regulations that mocked the monastic one and where women had, exceptionally, truly private areas. It was often a bitter choice between a bit of freedom and dignity, not different from what happens today.

Childhood during the Middle Ages

To us, history often looks like an endless flow of facts, events and historical processes involving nations, continents and grand people. This is why it is so difficult to outline a history of childhood. For centuries, children were simply ignored and the interest for every life stage including infancy is quite recent.

In the time period of Montsegur 1244, children began to be a subject of interest for adults. The game gives us ***Faye*** and ***Amiel*** to remind us that children have always been there, even if invisible.

The views about children and childhood are no exempt from the myriad of contradictions typical of the Middle Ages.

On one hand, there is a strong interest towards them, as shown by the legends about Saint Nicholas, Holy Innocents' Day and religious paintings depicting Jesus as a child, playing with toys or being breastfed. On the other hand, there are instances of indifference towards the thousands of vagrant children who took part in the Children's Crusade or the increasing number of baby hatches. Even Church Fathers were in disagreement: some considered children as pure beings, untouched by malice and earthly desires; others pointed out their greediness and selfishness.

The Cathars were no exception. Their doctrine saw the incarnation of a new soul in a body of flesh as evil and they probably practiced abortions but they also gladly welcomed the chance to redeem another soul, freeing it from the realm of matter and flesh.

The lives of ***Faye*** and ***Amiel*** can't be compared to those of modern children. Their childhood was short and adults had little part in it and not only due to the Crusade.

It was common belief that children weren't capable of real thought or reason. Worst case scenario, a child was a burden for the rest of the family; the familiar love and affection in their modern incarnation were starting to spread, together with pediatrics and didactics aimed at children but they were not a given. Infant mortality was very high, up to 60%, and despite the continuous pregnancies it was unlikely for a couple to have more than 3 children.

"It was common belief that children weren't capable of real thought or reason."

When a child reached 7 years of age, it was considered capable of thought and held responsible for their actions. This meant things like being punished as an adult would (burning at the stake included), forming a marriage contract and the beginning of work or instruction. It's quite probable that both Faye and Amiel are at this stage of life, which usually ended around 12 years old for a girl and 14 years old for a boy. Children in this phase were seen as incomplete adults. The focus of family and society was not on abilities typical of their age, but on helping them to overcome this phase and become adults as quickly as possible.

There were very few toys and even less playing.

From 7 years of age onwards, children start studying and working: a knight's training, an artisan apprenticeship, a novice's vows. There's little time to grow up and the world is a harsh one: 14 years old boys will be considered men, ready to take over their father's trade or die in battle, while 12 years old girls will be married to the best match their father found and will probably have their first pregnancies shortly after. While childhood is short, adolescence is non-existent.

Children are frequently not raised by their parents (as it happens to the two child characters in the game), but not always because of the death of their parents. It was common for nobles to send their children to relatives or to their lord's family. This exchange was political, since the adoptive parent would strengthen connections and friendship with the child and their parents, but it also allowed a shared educative experience and the forming of bonds of friendship and trust indispensable to the feudal system, between the children growing up together. Noble children are thus considered a tool to create alliances and many kings and dukes spent their childhood far from home, as guests or hostages of other noble families.

The lower classes don't have this option. Unwanted children and orphans are left at convents and abbeys in the hope that monks and nuns will take them in. These children are known as oblates and many Middle Ages' saints and intellectuals came from their ranks. This practice wasn't barbaric or inhumane, but rather the only way to survive for many families. Impoverished servants and farmers who couldn't support the newborns could simply abandon them in the forest. By making them oblates, they gave the children a chance of surviving. Christian piety required that children "freed from heresy" were taken care of, too. Many became oblates but adopting them was considered doing a good deed and they often had relatives, like ***Arsende***, who welcomed them.

Faye and ***Amiel*** have not ended up in the care of a Cathar nor Catholic religious, but of a relative. ***Amiel*** being raised by a woman, not a man who could take him as an apprentice, is quite strange since there was little care about keeping brothers and sisters together, but probably it is because of the exceptional situation they are in.

Inside Montsegur's walls, shoulder to shoulder with prostitutes and soldiers, forced to grow up quickly and assume responsibility that we might find unjust. It is difficult for us, modern people, to imagine what kind of lives ***Faye*** and ***Amiel*** really lived, but we know that children like them grew up and became the warriors and saints we admire today, and maybe this is the best evidence we have of the strength and courage of the children that faced those troubled times.

LEGEND

The Holy Grail: cup, stone and blood

There has been a resurgence of a uniquely medieval myth, one who shares its roots with the Cathars and Montsegur, at least in the collective imagination: the myth of the Holy Grail.

Volumes have been written about the Grail, ranging from ancient Provencal novels to modern speculative fiction. The results of all these writings and speculations are that the myth has been kept alive for centuries and, at the same time, every historical truth that could be found by digging a bit deeper have been contaminated. It's difficult to tell where the Grail comes from as a concept and what it originally meant.

Nowadays, everyone knows that the Grail is "the cup used during the Last Supper, used to collect Christ's blood". Well, this is a late myth. The first to write about the Grail is the Provencal author Chretien de Troyes; in a 12th century poem he describes it as a simple platter, and it is its content (a Host) that is miraculous. A few years later, Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote about the Grail describing it as a stone. The cup containing Crist's blood comes up again with Robert de Boron, at the beginning of the 13th century. Some think that those legends originated from British mythology, since the poetry collection known as Mabinogion talks about cauldrons which can heal any illness, while others believe the Grail is an exclusively medieval and Christian legend. Some remark how in Persia there are stories about the Cup of Jamshid, which has similar characteristics. The eighties saw an imaginative interpretation that, misinterpreting its etymology, affirmed the Grail was the offspring of Christ and Mary Magdalene; this theory has later been used in a famous best-seller.

What does this have to do with Montsegur 1244? ***The Grail*** appears in one of the story cards, in which you can also read the offspring theory, but even more importantly Montsegur is one of the key locations for those who study this legend.

In the 13th century poem Parzifal, Wolfram von Eschenbach writes about a castle where the Grail is preserved; he call this castle Montsalvat, a name which has the same meaning as Montsegur (secure mountain). Some see a connection between Parzifal and Pereille, ***Raimond's*** house, while Albrecht von Scharfenber, another German poet who lived shortly after von Eschenbach, calls Pereille the First Knight of the Grail.

Those similarities often led to identifying Montsegur as the castle where the Grail was kept, and some say that von Eschenbach did intentionally point out the Grail's location in his books, and in this way suggested the Cathars as its keepers. The followers of esoteric Nazism believed so, and it seems that on 16 March 1944 (the 700th anniversary of Cathars being burned at the stake) Montsegur's sky was crossed by German aircrafts in flying formations resembling weird esoteric symbols.

Wolfram von Eschenbach never describes the Grail as a cup, but as a stone fallen from the sky, a meteorite, a *lapis exillis* (*star stone* in Middle High German) where God imprisoned the angels who chose neutrality during Lucifer's rebellion. It's easy to see how this specific Grail can be related to the Cathars. Why should they, a gnostic sect who believed that the material world is evil, have a cup containing blood as their main relic? On the other hand, a material container for divine spirits punished for their sins is much closer to the Cathar mysticism and its fallen angel trapped in mortal bodies, aspiring to become again one with God.

It is no coincidence that one of the most pure characters, ***Faye***, has a stone as the object of one of her questions.

The legend about Christ's offspring can be related to the Cathars, too, albeit in a less direct way. There was an understanding, if not an outright alliance, between the Cathars and the Knights Templars; the story card about ***Armand de Vichier*** points this out. The modern myth, started by the book "The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail" ("Holy Blood, Holy Grail" in the United States) by Baignet, Leigh and Lincoln, is often connected to those enigmatic warrior monks.

These theories, often quite absurd, are based upon imaginative conjectures and speculations, but we can while playing try to imagine how the Cathars could interact with this knowledge.

A spirit trapped in a body descended from that of Christ could be seen as especially pure or close to gnosis, to definitely leaving the flesh. We instinctively think about the children, ***Faye*** and ***Amiel***, and this could be the reason why their aunt, a prostitute, is accepted into the community. Some say that ***Pierre Roger*** descended from the Merovingian dynasty, the French kings who are said to descend directly from Christ and Mary Magdalene.

Among those confusing dates and myths, there is one historical truth: during the truce, from 2 to 16 March 1244 (***Act Four***), a Cathar group fled from Montsegur bringing something with them. It was probably gold and jewels, but our mind thinks immediately about something much more uncommon and mysterious.

The Holy Grail in its various forms has always been a very powerful symbol, a vessel for something extraordinary and miraculous and those properties transfer to the container. Its myth is the same as that of the Cornucopia (a horn overflowing with Earth's produces) and is associated with Bran's Cauldron (who shares the Grail's magical properties). In each and every form, the Grail symbolizes Man's yearning for the spiritual, the contact point between material and immaterial, the Flesh and the Spirit. The Knight and his Quest are simply an allegory of the efforts made to reach the balance that has always been seen as holy and desirable. It shouldn't come as a surprise then that Cathar gnostics are so often associated with this myth.

The Knights Templar

A phenomenon worthy of belonging in the legends category is that of the monastic military orders. Apart from the historical facts, the events surrounding the Teutonics, the Hospitallers and the Templar Knights have set aflame the contemporary fantasies and the most fantastic legends merged with truths, making it difficult to discern one from the other.

The warrior monks were born historically only after the First Crusade, when the Church felt the need to own an army of its own, one who followed its orders. The loyalty of regular knights lay first of all with their lord, only secondly with the Church and Christian ideals. Creating the military orders remedied this problem: the Teutonics, the Hospitallers, the Templar Knights and other orders (there were about 40 different orders, established well into the 16th century) were above everything else monks, subject to ecclesiastical hierarchies and bound to taking vows and living under strict rules.

The first order of this kind is the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, better known as the Knights Templar, established in 1119 in the Holy Land by a group of French knights and sponsored by a powerful ally: Bernard of Clairvaux. Over the next two centuries these warrior monks rose to the top in terms of power and influence, controlled the destinies of whole kingdoms, and then fell due to internal corruption, the ending of crusades and the envy their power elicited.

The history of the Knights Templars is one of activism. They were often the first that went into battle during the Middle Ages' holy wars and always at the forefront when it came to dealing with heresies, following the will of their founder Bernard of Clairvaux. It is then surprising that they were almost absent from the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars that was fought where they had the most power: France.

If their absence can be explained historically as due to the chaotic nature of this crusade, it is easy to let the imagination run wild and think about possible connections between Knights Templar and Cathars. It is not a coincidence that ***Armand de Vichier***, a Knight Templar, is introduced as an ambassador who wishes to speak with the Cathars' leader about a matter of the utmost importance.

What was the nature of this relationship? We can provide a few hypotheses.

The Templars' symbol was two knights riding the same horse, a symbol of their dual nature as knights and monks. Some scholars see it as something different though. The two men could represent a different dual nature: a soul/body dualism that the Knights Templar could have learnt from the Gnostic Christian currents which were widespread in the Middle East at the time. The same Gnostic ideas that could have given birth to the first Cathars in the same historical period. In fact, the Cathar doctrine had coexisted with the Catholic doctrine for a while; only the ever-present tensions escalated into open conflict at this time, but the idea is fascinating.

Dualism is often present in Templar iconography, so much so that during the trials that condemned them as heretics they were accused of worshipping a head with two faces, a symbol sometimes associated with Gnostics and alluding to

the dual nature of the human being.

Maybe ***Armand de Vichier*** and ***Bertrand***, despite fighting on opposite fronts, felt some kind of kinship or were aware of their shared roots?

The spiritual father of the Knights Templar was Bernard of Clairvaux who lived when the Cathar doctrines began to clash with those of the Catholic Church. Bernard was a fierce opponent of this heresy but not in a violent or uncompromising way. He was part of a faction that tried to reconcile those two different doctrines, trying to bring them back to the fold, studying the dualistic doctrines so much that some claim they influenced him deeply. Some argue that Bernard sent the Templars' founders to Palestine so that they could retrieve secrets that would shed light on the Cathar's views of Christianity. According to this theory and with a bold but fascinating leap of logic, the Templars were then derived from Cathars, born as a tool to verify and confirm their theories. Besides, the iconic Templar locations are often surprisingly close to Cathar ones, especially in France where both currents had their center.

The second link between the Cathars and the Knights Templar is, unsurprisingly, the Holy Grail.

Due to the ever-present idea that the Templars hid a secret, almost every known relic, esoteric doctrine, document or knowledge has been said to be in their possession, and the Grail is the one most often associated with them. Be it a cup, stone or offspring, often the Templars are considered the keepers of this secret. When Wolfram von Eschenbach writes about Grail knights protecting the relic in Montsalvat, celebrating rites and living a holy life, some think about Cathars and the de Pereille lineage, others about Knights Templar and their position as both monks (living an ascetic life) and warriors.

These two conjectures may be the same, since genealogical surveys point to ***Raimond de Pereille*** as a direct descendant of Godfrey de Saint-Omer, one of the founders of the Knights Templar, by way of his mother, Fornera de Pereille.

"Almost every known relic, esoteric doctrine, document or knowledge has been said to be in their possession."

If the Cathars and the Templars ever did guard something together, it is much more likely it was only mundane gold. The Knights Templar were great merchants, owned huge landed properties and established the Western bank system (more or less). The Cathars on the other hand had a strong following among the general populace but had also the support of the wealthy nobles of Occitania and Aquitaine which is the reason why they could move massive amounts of money. The Templars and the Cathars were the most prominent French financial brokers and gold, it is known, attracts more gold.

The mysterious link between the Cathars and the Knights Templars then may be nothing more than mundane, prosaic, material wealth.

Of course, this won't stop anyone from unleashing their fantasy and imagine other and more esoteric connections; Montsegur 1244 could be the adequate background to have fun while testing those ideas.

Magic, miracles and the supernatural

It is not easy for us who are born after the positivism to understand what magic and the supernatural really were during the Middle Ages. Magical and religious thinking pervaded medieval people's way of seeing the world around them and of thinking about it. True heir to ancient beliefs, the medieval man had not lost the belief that special rites or behaviors could influence divine or natural forces.

The Church has always been an enemy of magical practices and maybe we can see the Albigensian Crusade as part of this conflict: Cathars were descendants of the same gnostics that Saint Augustine called mages, right? After all, Medieval magic is nothing more than Man trying to take the place of the ineffable divine plan and to Catholic hierarchs the idea of the Perfects that you can elevate yourself and become part of the divine essence probably didn't seem much different.

It was in the time period in which Montsegur 1244 takes place that the Catholic Church became less permissive towards those forbidden practices after a time of relative tolerance. During the previous centuries the Church tried to assimilate pagan religious ideas and practices found in the lower social strata, creating a composite belief (the so-called "popular religion"). After a while the Church became harsher and tried to eliminate popular beliefs and practices, redirecting believers towards a more orthodox piety.

Since these practices were widespread it was easy to accuse someone of witchcraft and such accusations began to be used as a means to justify persecutions and legal battles (think about the Knights Templar and Joan of Arc). Cathars too were victims of them. ***Father Durrant*** describes in his reports how the heretics in Montsegur practiced magic, conjuring demons using the names of angels and binding them to their will. Furthermore, the consolamentum rite says: "Do you renounce the Catholic Church and their cross, their baptism and their magical rituals?"

The difference between magic and religion wasn't really clear-cut; they were muddled up together thanks to popular religion. Everybody was convinced they were practicing correctly and following God's will, so everyone disagreeing had to be guilty of witchcraft, magic and disobeying the divine order.

Often, the basis for popular religion were superstitions alien to Christian religion: if you want rain, asperse the body of a virgin with river water using henbane branches (a practice that was punished with a 20 days fast, so it was considered mild); if you want protection while in battle, rub your armor with ash leaves and appeal thrice to Saint Sebastian or to the Lord; if you want to know the face of someone who loves you, scatter flour on a smooth board praying to the Virgin Mary three times and their face will appear.

Small rites so ingrained in the popular mentality that they weren't considered magical at all. Everyone living in Montsegur could do them and still consider themselves a good Cathar, while at the same time each of these small rites could be condemned by an inquisitor or a Perfect. ***Garnier*** is surely well acquainted with this kind of devoutness since he grew up in the countryside, and likewise ***Cecille*** and ***Bertrand***, but you can't rule out the nobles. In this world, everyday life and medieval men and women themselves are pervaded by the supernatural and they live poised between magic and religion unable to truly differentiate between them.

The scene card ***Witchcraft*** talks explicitly about a special kind of practice. Demons are conjured with specific rituals and their presence is recognizable thanks to the corruption of the natural order of things they bring. Not small pagan rites but proper witchcraft, as opposed to acceptable religious piety.

This is where conjuring demons lay; since the Devil is the only being powerful enough to fight God and subvert divine order, this is the area of those who willingly go against the natural order. This is especially true when we consider the dualistic philosophy of the Cathars where the Devil had the same amount of power as God while Catholics believed he was subject to God and could do evil only with His permission.

Paradoxically, this was a magic reserved for the upper classes, born from nobles and monks' intellectual reasoning and the rediscovery of classical authors and it was spreading from upper to lower classes thanks to those who wanted to prevent it. Preachers, inquisitors and Cathar perfects, ***Father Ferrier*** as much as ***Bertrand***, all of them warned the population about occult and daemonic practices that could be found in ancient texts, convinced that they were put into practice by witches and wizards hidden among the common people… and, in doing so, spread this knowledge among people who didn't know it existed before. In a way, the fight against witchcraft fueled it instead. During Montsegur 1244 this vicious circle is just getting started, but it might be possible to already see its influence.

Religion, too, is constantly associated with supernatural events. Divine forces manifest themselves through small everyday miracles or big happenings to be remembered and celebrated. The ***Revelation*** that could be brought into the game by a scene card is something that a medieval man would consider usual and acceptable. To him, having the divine manifest itself daily and concretely is something natural. To Cathars, the Prayer (the only one they recognize as valid, the Lord's Prayer) has an out-and-out saving power. Through it you can channel divine mercy, surrender to it and obtain beneficial effects like miraculous healing or fertility for fields.

The existence of enlightened prophets and mystics is widely accepted as a fact and many Perfects affirm to have those powers thanks to their ascetic life and their soul being close to becoming one with God again. Divine power manifests itself constantly in everyday life and every phenomenon is ascribed to supernatural intervention. What is probably most difficult for us to understand is how the medieval world was ruled not by laws of nature but by hope in divine power. The world isn't a machine following comprehensible rules but governed by an external intelligence that guides it as if it was an animal, constantly taking action to modify its behavior and course.

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CHAPTER VIII

PLAYING MONTSEGUR 1244 FOR THE FIRST TIME

by Claudia Cangini and Luca Veluttini

This chapter presents tips for your first game of Montsegur 1244. Our goal is to help you realize the full potential of the game. The advice is based on our experiences playing Montsegur 1244 with people who played the game for the first time. Even if you have several years of experience with traditional role-playing games, you may find something useful for your first *story game*.

What are we going to create?

In Montsegur 1244, you create a dramatic story in which the main characters are ordinary people who face a hopeless situation. Easy so far, right?

The heart of the game is the exploration of the relationships between the various characters. It is by exploring these relations that you decide the fate of your main character at the end of the story.

The game provides all the tools necessary. You might think: "Isn't it boring to play something where everything is provided and I can't add anything of mine?" Wrong. The premises are defined. You will not know how your story will be until you play it.

Choosing main characters

When you choose characters, pick someone who is interesting or challenging for you to explore. Try not to have preconceived ideas before making the choice.

Get some characters that are not related to each other. If you have two characters who are linked by a relationship that probably means that the relation will not be explored in play, given that those two characters are unlikely to be in the same scene.

Recall that the main characters cannot be killed before the Epilogue, even by the player who owns them. Thus, the main characters might consider death as a way out of a difficult situation (for example a heroic defense of the walls), but that choice is not available. In contrast, the supporting characters do not have this limitation. They can be killed or sacrificed to save or corner a main character, but at the cost of a heavy burden on his conscience.

It can be a good idea to talk between the players when you choose your main characters. If you point out relationships and issues that interest all players, it will be easier to create a cast of main characters and develop them in the game.

The three evil questions

What are these three "insignificant" little questions for each character? They are the true engine of the game. The entire play of a character can be based around these. Simply.

Read them carefully, however short they are. These are just a few words and yet foreshadow a whole story. Give it some thought. Then play the storyline of your main character. Any question can be answered, regardless of your game.

"This game works best by using a little more heart than head."

The plot you create in the game will most likely not be worthy of a Nobel Prize. This is fine! In fact, the game will suffer if you use all your creative energy to create a Machiavellian plot that only you can follow. The core of the game is the characters, not the convoluted plots. This game works best by using a little more heart than head.

The scene cards

The scene cards are twofold: They are sources of inspiration for the scene you are going to narrate and they provide a small safety system by allowing the stealing of narration right.

If your instinct tells you to take a specific card, take it. Your instincts – thanks to the atmosphere that is created around the table – will guide you. Do not force the scene card into the scene. A scene card can be a passing narrative or it can be the essence of the scene. You decide what to do with a specific scene card and no one else.

You can play a scene card from your hand to take over the narration of a scene. Why would you do that? You may have an explosive idea that will revive a dull scene. There may be other reasons. However, it is important not to take offense. It is a game. You are adult and mature.

It often happens that we quietly ask permission to take the narration right to those who possess it at the time, although it is certainly not necessary to do so.

Even if you have lost the narration right, you can take it back by playing one of your scene cards. Give the spotlight to the other player and when he has had the opportunity to develop his idea, take back the narrative. The game will provide you with a more than sufficient number of scene cards to allow you to have your say in the game. Grant this right to other players as well.

Don't be too focused on your own ideas for the story. Even if you have a good idea, try not to fall too deeply in love with it. The best results are obtained by being open and receptive to the creative contributions of the other players. Listen to the input from everyone, even if it is far away from your original idea: you will find an unexpected and even more fascinating story.

"By adding details when you set a scene, all players will be more involved."

A further aspect of the scene cards is that they describe elements of the real world. By adding details when you set a scene, all players will be more involved. Try also to give an idea of what the characters feel.

As an example, take the light of the moon reflected on the snowy slopes of the mountains. If you set a scene that takes place on the walkways, you can mention the bitter cold

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that penetrates the clothing of the characters, the clouds of vapor produced by their breath, and the camp fires of the besieging army at the foot of the mountain. Touch, smell, sight, hearing and taste are senses we all have in common and that will make the scene more vivid.

The story cards

The story cards are narrative elements from the outside that can be introduced in your story. If the exploration of the relationships between the characters can benefit from the inclusion of external elements, play a story card.

Some games do not see any story cards played at all. This just means that the development of the relationships between the characters were sufficiently articulated and interesting to be a satisfactory story for the players without the need for introducing other story elements.

"Some games do not see any story cards played at all."

There is no formula for the perfect relation between the number of story cards played and the beauty of the game. If a story card makes for a good story, play it. Otherwise don't.

If you want to introduce a specific element that exists on a story card, you do not have to wait for the story card to do so. If you want your character to betray Montsegur, you do not need to have Sicard Alaman in your hand. You can even introduce the Grail without the story card. Story cards are simply a further option, a cue that is being offered by the game and that is completely at your discretion to decide whether to use or not.

Aggressive scene framing

Framing a scene simply means to decide where and when the next part of the story takes place and who is present. If this was a movie, it would be to call the actors onto the set, explain the initial situation, and then say "action".

For Montsegur 1244 to bring out the best of the players, the scene framing must be extremely aggressive. The scenes must get straight to the point.

"Find dramatic moments and let the consequences and the game flow from these."

The reasons are twofold: Firstly, there is no time. In every act, there is only one round of scenes to play. Your main character may appear on stage only four times before the Epilogue. The situation will escalate awfully fast. Focus on a few important things that you want to tell and skip everything else.

Secondly, the scenes will quickly become very intense. Establish the key conflict right away. Get straight to the point. Find dramatic moments and let the consequences and the game flow from these.

Here are two examples of the scene of the Prologue. The purpose of the scene is to show the reactions of the people of Montsegur to the assassination of the Inquisitor.

- Pierre-Roger goes down the stairs, goes to the stables, saddles a horse, rides out of the stable, etc....

- Pierre-Roger appears in front of Raimond, Lord of Montsegur, with his hands sprinkled with the blood of the inquisitor, shouting: "Why did I do it? Why?"

In the first example, the scene spends precious time telling what Pierre-Roger does in the stables but does not get near the stated purpose. In the second example, the stated purpose is addressed without delay.

Only talk of stables, horses and travel if it is relevant to the purpose of the scene. Don't feel compelled to build a logical set of actions that move Pierre Roger from Montsegur to the room of Guillaume-Arnaud. Think of movies and TV shows: not everything that happens is shown, and yet everything is understood.

A final note: Aggressive framing does not mean to leave out the details. A scene can be filled with details: E.g. the bloody hands, a glimpse of a deep wound under the coat of Pierre Roger, tears of despair, and so on.

Aggressive framing just means getting straight to the point.

The Prologue

The Prologue is the perfect time to start experimenting with aggressive scene framing. Afterwards there will be little time for mistakes. It can be an excellent basis for Act One if you play it with intensity, otherwise it will simply demonstrate what you should do in the game.

Although the scene concerns the assassination of the hated inquisitor, the actual murder needs not be part of the scene. There may be strong differences on the appropriateness of the assassination which can be interesting to play both before and after the murder: On his return, will Pierre Roger seek solace in the arms of his wife, or in those of Arsande? Did the assassination have the support of Raimond or was it an initiative of a few hot-headed men? What will Pierre Roger tell those among his men complaining that they have lost a brother "to defend four beggars"?

These questions are much more interesting for the story than knowing the exact number of stab wounds which killed the inquisitor or the shape of the blood stains on the floor.

Note also that Guillaume-Arnaud can be slaughtered off stage if you do not feel comfortable with playing this out.

The acts

The real game happens during the acts. In each act you will be supported by the reading of the relevant text, which will supply a basic help.

In the following, we analyze what may happen act by act.

"Pay attention to the main characters of the other players"

Act One lays the foundation of your game. It steers the game in a clear direction, simply by examining the starting relationships between the characters (which is why it is so important that the main characters are related to each other and not taken at random). Read the details of your character, look at the relationship map and the scene cards. Sooner or later inspiration will come. Grab the first idea that comes to you. If there is an issue of particular importance to your character, introduce it immediately in the first scene. Show the major issue of your main character to other players now. Be generous with information so the other players

understand the direction you want to go. If your character appears indifferent on the outside but is a world of emotions inside, find a way to tell this to the other players, e.g. with a monologue or a third-person narrative. The more they understand your character, the more the other players can help you develop it, especially by creating opposition.

Similarly, pay attention to the main characters of the other players, and use your characters to help them deal with their issues.

All this is aimed at giving life to a well-defined initial situation. With a solid foundation and a clearly established first development. Anyhow, trouble will soon follow.

In Act Two, your characters will face situations that complicate their lives. How do you make the most of this? Well, you can summon all your inner malice and use it at against a character, undermining any possible quiet and peaceful relationship that she has, causing her to lose all hope. Or better yet, leave her with just one way out that goes against her best intentions.

"The real punch in the stomach is coming next."

In Act Three, the situation has escalated. In the horizon, you can already now see the outline of a conclusion with no happy resolution. If you have not already answered all of the questions on the character, do so in this dramatic moment. Also, start thinking about the fate of your main character.

Use the 15 minutes break to recall what has happened so far and to structure your ideas and thoughts.

Act Four is the most dramatic. By now the fate you have chosen for your character should be clear. In an atmosphere of calm that heralds the inevitable tragic conclusion you have the opportunity to describe the last moments of the characters, what they do, how they try to resolve their situation, answer the last questions, and deal with those difficult situations that the frantic events have prevented them from confronting and resolving until now, the last doubts about their beliefs. Openly declare your destiny or continue to play on the edge of indecision. The real punch in the stomach is coming next.

The Epilogue

The result of all your work emerges at the height of the tragedy when your character faces the inquisitors and respond to their simple question.

Often you see these types of players:

- The player who already knows what his main character will answer and who has openly shown it.
- The player who has not yet revealed anything leaving all the other players in agonizing doubt and is in doubt herself until the very last moment.
- The player who is herself in doubt.

The second type tends to make the decision based on the bonds that has been established with the characters most close to her. The last type can be a bit difficult. Not knowing what to do is never a good thing. But, as with the second type, one can take inspiration from the fate of others.

In any case, retrace the scenes that you have lived during the four acts. Decide on a fate consistent with the scenes played. Remember that the most obvious scene that comes to your mind is probably the best one.

Final tips

There is only one more thing to say: Pay attention to the other players at the table, even if the current scene does not involve you directly. Every single moment can be a source of play for yourself and for others. Play from the ideas of others.

In the course of the game, everything you need to create an intense and exciting story will emerge. The characters, scene cards, story cards, the background sheets and – most importantly – your ideas and passions contain everything you need to play. You do not need to be an expert in history. You do not need to buy and learn heavy rule books or have years of experience with roleplaying to play Montsegur 1244 well. You don't even need a long playing experience with the game: the mechanics are simple and accommodating, and every game is an experience in itself, different from previous ones, and an opportunity to explore new relationships and make new choices.

"Maybe it is also in some way a story about you"

You're playing together. Each of you is responsible for the story that you are creating together and the fun of yourself and your friends at the table. No one else can decide for you: this is your story and yours alone. It's a story about a group of people who lived centuries ago – and maybe it is also in some way a story about you.

Enjoy your game.

Chapter IX
Terminology

- **Act.** An act is a collection of scenes that tells a part of the story. Each act has an overall purpose. See page 9.
- **Albigensian Crusade.** 1208 – 1255. Crusade against the Cathars and the noble men who gave them sanctuary. See page 13.
- **Background sheet.** Sheet with background information about Montsegur and the Cathar religion. See page 9.
- **Cathars.** Religious group spread across southern Europe during the Middle Ages. Perceived as heretics and persecuted by the Catholic Church. See page 19.
- **Character.** A character is a person appearing in the story and played by a player. See page 7.
- **Consolamentum.** The consolamentum ritual purifies the soul and makes a believer a perfect. See page 20.
- **Game Progress Marker.** Game piece that indicates the current act on the game board.
- **Grail.** The holy grail used by Christ at the last supper. A popular myth is that the grail was hidden at Montsegur and carried away shortly before the fortress was surrendered.
- **Inquisition.** The inquisition was an institution in the Catholic Church that uncovered heretics and made them repent or burn at the stake.
- **Main character.** A main character is a central character in the story that is played by the same player throughout the story. Main characters cannot die before the epilogue. See page 8.
- **Montsegur.** Fortress in the Pyrenees that was under siege 1243-1244. Center for the Cathar Church. See page 46.
- **Narration right.** The narration right is the right to control the scene that is played out. It includes the right to introduce new elements, the right to decide outcomes, the right to change time and location, and the right to end the scene. See page 10.
- **Optional character.** The game contains four optional characters. See page 7.
- **Perfect (*Parfait*).** A perfect is an ordained believer, living an exemplary life in prayer and abstinence. See page 19.
- **Scene.** A scene is a concluded part of the story. See page 9.
- **Scene card.** A scene card contains a phrase to be incorporated in a scene description. It is also used to take over the narration right from another player. See page 9.
- **Seneschal.** Bailiff. Represents the interests of the king

locally and is in charge of collecting taxes.

- **Story card.** Story cards describe persons, items, and events that can be introduced into the story. See page 11.
- **Supporting character.** A character that is not a main character. See page 7.
- **Trebuchet.** A powerful war machine similar to a catapult.
- **Turn card.** The turn card indicates the player that has started the current act. See page 8.

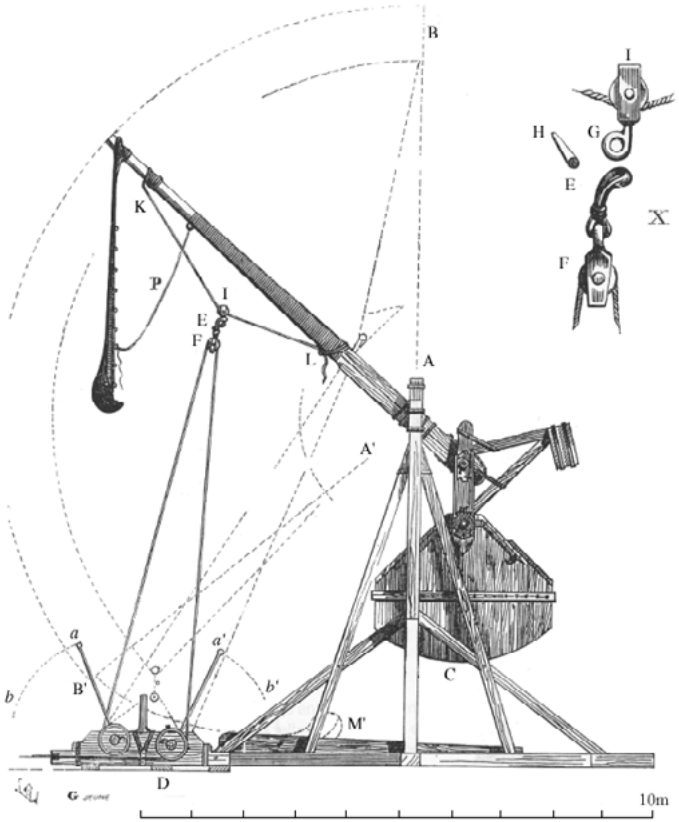

Diagram of a trebuchet from the Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVe siècle (1854–1868).