

Primed by Cortex

# MAGE

The Ascension



A guide to Cortex Prime system conversion of the  
game

# Credits

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Gear rules and SFX in the Emporium of the  
Speaking Lands: Miriam Robern

The Arcanist's Toolkit: Riley Routh

Special thanks to: Vecna and the entire Cortex Prime discord for the input, brainstorming, advice and help.

## **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex**

This is a tabletop roleplaying game inspired by rules originally published as CORTEX LITE, that was designed as a “generic” tabletop RPG to be used in any setting.

**Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** is compatible with Cortex Prime roleplaying game system.

**Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** is an adaptation of Mage: The Ascension, a classic World of Darkness game about mages living in the shadows of a world akin to ours.

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# What is Mage?

**Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** is a tabletop roleplaying game of urban fantasy, gothic punk, ambition, freedom, power and shifting realities built on rules inspired by Cortex. The simple yet extremely powerful and encompassing rules will allow you to experience a familiar world of *Mage* with new and exciting rules that are closer to modern narrative games.

In a tabletop roleplaying game such as this one, players each take a role of a character or multiple. **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** characters exist in a world much like ours, but darker, painted in gothic tones and punk sounds. The shadows are darker, the urban decay stronger, and the inequalities highlighted. Mages, vampires, demons, werewolves and countless occult creatures inhabit the shadows. They walk among mortals and pretend to be them, all while navigating their own complex worlds of intrigue, politics, secret wars and mysteries.

# Who Are You?

You play as a mage, a person who can reshape reality through the sheer force of will. In a moment of clarity you Awakened to your potential and the true, mutable nature of reality, and such you are able to change the very reality with your belief and Awakened Will.

And you are not the only one. The world is filled with others just like you, forming spanning conspiracies and secret cultures. Mages walk among mortals and monsters, waging the age-old secret war over reality itself. Mystic mages of Crafts and Traditions combat the march of technology stewarded by the Technocracy and their vision of global progress, as reality is defined by the collective belief of humanity.

But as you can see by the very device you're reading this on, Technocracy is the dominant force in the world, who in their success calcified reality and human belief more and more, forcing every mage into the shadows, lest they be rendered apart by the static, opposing forces of human beliefs for performing the wonders of magick and hypertechology in clear view.

And now you are one of those extraordinary people, so who will you be in this world of mystery and strife?

## How to play Mage

This section is inspired by and remixes some of the player-facing rules from CORTEX LITE and MOONLITE, you can get the games for free at <https://xineink.itch.io/lite> and <https://xineink.itch.io/vle1>

## PCs & ST

As in many tabletop role-playing games, one player takes on the role of the game moderator, called Storyteller, or ST in Mage, rather than playing their own character. The ST frames scenes, portrays supporting characters (called STCs, or Storyteller Characters), controls the opposition (including rolling dice), ends scenes, and maintains a special ongoing pool of dice called the peril pool.

The characters portrayed by everybody else are called player characters, or PCs.

## Rolling Dice

During play, everybody contributes to the story, but at some point you break out dice, introducing just enough randomness so no one knows what will happen until events unfold during play.

## Traits & Dice

Each character has a number of traits, which are things – qualities, abilities, skills, useful items, or magick – that can help them accomplish their goals.

Each trait is rated with one of five die sizes, each represented in this text with a symbol: a 4-sided die or **4**, a six-sided die or **6**, an 8-sided die or **8**, a 10-sided die or **10**, or a 12-sided die or **12**. Each trait in a set is rated with a die size: **4**, **6**, **8**, **10**, or **12**. Generally, larger die sizes make a trait more effective, so **6** is better than **4**.

## Trait Sets

Traits are organized into trait sets.

Examples of trait sets used in **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** are roles (**SCHOLAR**, **SCOUNDREL**, **SCOUT**, **SOLDIER**, and

**SPEAKER**) and assets (items or other factors that provide an advantage, such as **ORNATE REVOLVER** or **PRIVATE LIBRARY**). One example trait set for a character might be the roles **SCHOLAR 10**, **SCOUNDREL 6**, **SCOUT 4**, **SOLDIER 6**, and **SPEAKER 8**.

When you want your character to do something, if there's nothing getting in your way, you just do it. If there is opposition (such as an opponent, difficult circumstances, a harsh environment, or a time limit), you roll the dice for certain traits to figure out if you succeed or fail.

## Your Dice Pool

When you roll, you pick the most relevant trait from each set and roll the die for each of those traits, all together in one pool of dice. (An example dice pool might be **SCHOLAR 10**, **PHYSICS 6**, **FORCES 8**, and **CHAIN LIGHTNING 6** to strike an enemy down with the force of a conjured lightning.)

## Your Total

After rolling, you add two of the die results together for your total. The total is often, but not always, the two highest results.

So if my highest rolls were a 6 on a **6** and a 6 on a **10**, I'd probably decide to add the two together for a total of 12.

## Your Effect Die

After choosing die results for your total, you pick one of the other dice you rolled to be your effect die. This choice doesn't affect whether you succeed or fail. It's somewhat like rolling for damage in the original system is separate from your attack roll.

If I rolled **6** **6** **8** **10** for my dice pool, and used the results I rolled on the **6** and the **10** for my total, I'd use one of the remaining **8** as my effect die.

## Opposition

When you roll, another player (often the Storyteller, ST) builds their own dice pool and rolls it. You compare your roll's total to theirs, and the higher roll succeeds.

If I roll and get a total of 12 and the opposition gets a 8, I win. The player who rolls first sets the bar for how difficult the roll should be, so that player wins ties.

## Success

If you win, the size of your effect die (not the number it rolled) determines how big of an effect your success had. You might say, "My effect die is **8**."

For example, if you roll to hit someone with a weapon, your total determines whether you hit (like comparing an attack roll to armour class in the world's most popular RPG), and your effect die would be how much damage you inflict. Your total tells you whether the story goes your way; your effect die tells you how far it goes.

## An Example of Play

Lydia, a fashionista Hermetic mage with small stature and large personality, is going home late in the evening after shopping for fabric, but a suspicious man is following her. You describe Lydia grabbing a burning spider amulet on her neck, recalling Pattern classifications, and whispering a perceptive spell to read the man's aura.

The ST asks you for a dice roll to see if she succeeds. You roll her traits **SCOUT** **6**, **ALERTNESS** **8**, **SPIDER IN THE WEB** **8**, and **PRIME** **6**, getting 4 and 7 on **8**s, 3 and 2 on **6**s.

You pick 4 and 7 to add together for a total of 11. You use one of the remaining **6**s as your effect die.

The man's total against her is 10, and since 11 is higher, Lydia wins. She gets to keep that **8** effect as her read in the man. Her eyes fall upon the man, the spell pierces a strange film concealing him, and Lydia sees the bright, yet pale reddish-pink aura of a vampire on the hunt, she's in trouble.

# The Shape of Mage

If that explanation all made sense, then you know how to play **Mage: The Ascension**

**Primed by Cortex.** Everything else in the system fits into, bolts onto, or adds a twist to this single mechanic. The rest of this section breaks down more advanced rules that build on those fundamentals.

## Session Zero and Safety Tools

Playing a tabletop RPG can become a bad experience if everyone involved isn't on the same page about the topics and themes they'll be exploring in play. The best way to align those expectations is usually having a formal process, making sure everyone has a chance to be heard and set appropriate boundaries. That process can be a part of a "Session Zero", a conversation before actual play begins that can also provide a chance to make characters together, discuss the game, build anticipation, and decide what kind of content should or shouldn't be a part of the game.

You should also use appropriate safety tools, such as [Lines and Veils](#), the [X-Card](#) by [John Stavropoulos](#) or Script Change by [Beau Jägr Sheldon](#). Script Change is especially recommended, because the framework it provides can improve the experience of playing a tabletop RPG even when content concerns aren't an issue. What's important is choosing the tools that work for you and your group.

## Sessions, Scenes, & Beats

Games are played in sessions. A session is just however long you and your group gather to play at a time, whether in-person or online.

Each session is divided into units of story and action called scenes, just like a play, film, or TV show.

Player actions take place in units of time called beats. A beat is simply how long it takes to complete one action or one piece of a larger action (including both the die roll to do something and the roll opposing it).

## Tests

The most basic kind of die roll is a test. You say you want to do something, and if it requires a roll, but it isn't directly against another significant character (or PC), the ST rolls peril pool against you. (Peril pool will be further explained in the Storyteller chapter.)

## Action Order

Normally, a player can just roll a test or describe their character's actions whenever it makes sense, as part of the game's ongoing conversation. When it's helpful to organize things a bit more, the ST can move things into action order.

- ♂ When the game is in action order, the scene splits into *rounds*. A round is nothing more or less than the amount of time it takes for every participant in a scene to take one beat's worth of action (often called a *turn*).
- ♂ Usually, the ST chooses one player to go first. After a player takes a beat, they choose who goes next. The ST and any STCs active in the scene get to take their own beats as well. Once everyone has taken a beat to do what they want to do, the round ends.
- ♂ Whoever goes last in a round chooses who goes first in the next round, which can be themselves!

## Plot Points

This game uses a special currency called plot points (abbreviated **PP**), which you can spend to affect the story. You'll likely earn and spend plot points all the time. Every player gets at least one **PP** at the start of each session.

The most important uses of plot points include:

- ❖ You can spend a **PP** to instantly create a **6** asset.
- ❖ When you add up die results for your total, you can spend one **PP** to add in the result from one additional die, increasing your total.
- ❖ You can spend a **PP** to make an asset useful to a whole group of people instead of just one.
- ❖ When an asset would go away at the end of a scene or session, you can spend a **PP** to keep it, starting the next scene or session with the asset still in play.

Unless specified otherwise, you can spend plot points at any time, even when it isn't your beat or turn.

Any unspent plot points are lost at the end of a session, so it's best not to hoard them.

The ST doesn't have plot points, but they can influence the story in a similar way by using the dice in their peril pool.

## Hitches

When you roll 1 on a die, you can't count that die towards your total or use it for your effect die.

A die that rolls a 1 is called a hitch. When you roll a hitch, the ST can grant you a plot point to add a die to their peril pool. The more hitches you roll, the larger the die.

If every die in a pool hitches it's called a botch, and it means ST can use the hitches without paying you a plot point.

When the ST rolls a hitch, it's called an opportunity. When the ST rolls an opportunity, you can spend a **PP** to step up an existing asset or step down a complication.

## ST Plot Points

When an ST activates a hitch, or when a PC gains a **PP** from using *Hinder* or a Limit, those plot points come from an infinite pile of plot points no one at the table needs to worry about monitoring or controlling. When players activate a ST opportunity, these **PP** go back to that pile.

However, when the ST wants to spend plot points to help a STC, they instead spend dice from their peril pool.

When you step up a **12** effect die, you gain an extra **6** effect die for that roll.

## Extra Effects

When you want to achieve multiple outcomes from a single roll (including affecting more than one target), you can do so by spending plot points to keep extra effect dice beyond the first.

For each **PP** spent, you can choose one extra die from your roll to become an effect die. You can't choose hitches or dice that are already effect dice or part of your total. If you run out of dice to choose from, you can't keep more effect dice.

Each effect die must do enact a different effect. For example if you are fighting a duo of Technocratic automata in an Umbral realm, you can use two effect dice to assign a **STEPPING SIDEWAYS** complication to each automaton, or to assign both **STEPPING SIDEWAYS** and a **SHORT-CIRCUITING** complication to the same automaton, but you can't use extra effect dice to assign **STEPPING SIDEWAYS** to the same automaton more than once with the same roll.

Also, if you assign effect dice to multiple targets that each have their own dice to roll, each target gets their own opposition roll against you. Only those you beat take the effect.

## Effect Dice

When you succeed on a roll, your effect die usually becomes an asset (a new temporary trait that benefits someone) or a complication (a new temporary trait that makes things harder for someone).

When an asset or complication is created, it gains a name to go with its die rating, such as **BOUND 10**, **CAREFUL PLAN 12**, **CHAIN LIGHTNING SPELL 6**, **HIDDEN 6**, **INVIGORATED 10**, or **RUNNING LOW ON MONEY 8**. The player who creates an asset or complication gets to name and describe it.

Assets and complications aren't added to every roll; like other traits, they only apply when it makes sense in the story for the particular action described. The default assumption is that assets and complications go away when a scene ends.

Most rolls create some kind of complication or asset, but there are a couple other things you can do.

You might simply roll to change your situation, such as by opening a locked door. In this case, your effect die just measures your degree of success: a 4 might be getting the door open just a crack, while a 12 busts it wide open.

You might also roll to step down or end a complication; this is called recovery, and the rules for it are explained later.

## Heroic Success

When you succeed on a roll, if your total beats the opposing roll by 5 or more, you've scored a heroic success. This means that you not only achieve what you set out to do, but surpass your own expectations in doing so. For every 5 by which you beat the opposing roll, your effect die steps up by one size.

## Comparing Effect Dice

Even when you fail a roll against someone, your effect die still matters. If your roll fails, but your effect die is larger than the opposition's effect die, the opposition's effect die steps down.

## There's Always an Effect

Every roll always has a minimum of one 4 effect die. If stepping down dice, removing dice due to hitches, or any other situation would prevent a roll from having an effect die, give that roll one 4 effect die before resolving it.

# Complications

A complication is a temporary trait that makes things harder for you, so you don't roll it yourself. Instead, your opposition can roll it against you, and if someone else has a complication, you can add it to your dice pool when rolling against them.

Here's a sample list of complications that you might inflict (or suffer) during play: **POISONED**, **ELECTROCUTED**, **ON FIRE**, **OUT OF MONEY**, **HEXED TO MISFORTUNE**, **BOUND AND GAGGED**.

## No $\spadesuit 4$ Complications

Unlike other traits that run from  $\spadesuit 4$  to  $\clubsuit 12$ ,  $\spadesuit$  complications do not exist in **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex**. When you take a new complication, if it would be  $\spadesuit 4$  or smaller, it becomes a  $\clubsuit 6$ . When an existing complication would step down to less than  $\clubsuit 6$ , it just goes away.

## Taken Out

If a complication on any character would step up to a die size larger than  $\clubsuit 12$ , the complication stays at  $\clubsuit 12$ , but that character is taken out.

When you are taken out, you are unable to influence the story – one way or another, you've been overwhelmed and can no longer take actions. When someone gets banished into the Umbra, is blown away by a tornado, knocked out by a brigand, or is petrified by magic, they've been taken out. Being taken out usually only lasts until the end of the scene.

## Stepping Up Complications

An important rule of complications is that an existing one can be stepped up by further actions that inflict the same complication. So,

if you already have a **ON FIRE**  $\clubsuit 6$  complication, and someone adds fuel to the blaze or fires a phosphorous round at you, that complication could step up to  $\clubsuit 8$ . Each time another roll worsens your complication, its effect die steps it up. If the effect die is larger than the complication's rating, the complication steps up to that effect die's size.

When naming a complication, it is best to use a name that leaves room for things to get worse – it might get stepped up, after all.

Instead of naming a complication **PARALYSED**, it makes more sense to call it or **GOING STIFF** or **MUSCLE SPASMS**. So if a spell that would turn a character to stone inflicts a complication rather than taking the character out, the complication might just be called **TURNING TO STONE**, as the character's body slowly petrifies, their muscles stiffen, skin goes hard and brittle and their limbs become heavy and slow.

Complications can also be renamed when circumstances change. If a character already trapped in a net is then pushed into quicksand, their complication might go from **TANGLED UP**  $\clubsuit 8$  to **RESTRAINED**  $\clubsuit 10$ , changing the name to include all the problems limiting their ability to move and escape.

## Stress

The most common forms of complications are called stress. These are the kinds of consequences that befall characters all the time. While they work just like complications in all other respects, they have their own rules for when they go away.

## Stress vs. Complications

When something happens that makes things harder for a character, but it isn't covered

by one of the stress types, represent it with a free-form complication instead, such as **TANGLED**, **GRAPPLED**, **BOUND BY SPELL**, **ELECTROSHOCKED**, **BLINDED**, **FADING INTO UMBRA**, **TURNING INTO A LAWN CHAIR**, etc.

## Failure & Stress

When you fail a test, you take **6** stress. The opposition chooses the type of stress. Perhaps a character feels **DEMORALISED** by their lack of success, **DRAINED** by the wasted effort, or **ENTHRALLED** by an interesting problem they can't seem to solve yet.

## Types of Stress

Six kinds of stress are used in **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex**: **DAMAGED** stress, **DEMORALISED** stress, **DRAINED** stress, **ENRAGED** stress, and **ENTHRALLED** stress. Each type of stress represents a different kind of situation, as follows:

**DAMAGED** stress is physical, bodily harm, like getting punched in the eye, cut by a blade, poisoned by an assassin, burned by flame, etc.

**DEMORALISED** stress is fear, insecurity, discouragement, worry, disillusionment, or any other mental state that makes you feel like you might be better off quitting.

**DRAINED** stress is lack of energy, fatigue or burnout for Sleepers, but for mages it is also depletion of their Avatar of Quintessence, the force of creation they can use to bolster their reality-altering magick.

**ENTHRALLED** stress is when you are fascinated, tempted, distracted, charmed, smitten, mind-controlled, or just caught up in your own thoughts.

**ENRAGED** stress is anger, wrath, and aggression.

## Assets

An asset is a temporary trait that grants an advantage. When you create an asset, you choose whether it is for you or for another character. Usually, only the character you choose can use it.

Sometimes, an asset becomes permanent, making it an ongoing advantage that a character uses all the time. Such assets are called signature assets.

## Multiple Assets

A default rule for assets is that, unlike other types of traits, more than one asset can be added to the same dice pool, as long as each asset is being applied to the activity for which the player is rolling.

Assets are possibly the most basic trait in the game, but there are a lot of ways this versatile trait can feature in your fantasy game.

## Creating Assets

You can create an asset with a test. Your effect die becomes the rating of the asset, which you may use for the rest of the scene. Here's some assets that you might create during play: **CONJURED THUNDER**, **COVERED BY TERRAIN**, **SUGGESTIVE APPEARANCE**, **EXPANSIVE RECONNAISSANCE**.

## Shutting Down Assets

Whether it is disarming the garou's knaive, quashing the bloodlust of an angry mob, or unweaving a ward of your opponent, you may want to remove the assets of characters giving you trouble. To do so, you roll against that character, and they get to include the asset in their dice pool opposing you.

On a success, you either:

- ∅ shut down the asset if your effect die is larger than the asset
- ∅ or step down the asset if your effect die is equal or lower

When you step down an asset in this way or make it unavailable, it remains so until the end of the scene. Any player may do this by inflicting a complication larger than the asset's rating. You can do it all in one go, or by starting a low-level complication like **LOOSENERED GRIP** and stepping it up with later rolls. When you step down an asset in this way or make it unavailable, it remains stepped down or shut down until the end of the scene. If the asset would've gone away at the end of the scene, that happens normally.

## Recovery

Complications and stress can be downright crippling. Getting rid of complications or stress is called recovery.

## Downtime

During a scene when characters have a chance to recover – by resting or some other form of self-care and recovery – all stress usually dice step down. However, mages have the *Avatar Reserve* Limit, which means they can only step down their **DRAINED** stress using SFX.

## Expiring Complications

Complications go away at the end of a scene or when they are no longer narratively appropriate.

## Seizing an Opportunity

When the ST rolls an opportunity, you can spend a **PP** to step down a complication or stress.

## Recovery Rolls

Other characters can try to help you recover. (Generally, you can't recover your own stress unless you have an SFX that allows it.)

To do so, the helping character rolls a test against a difficulty of **8 8** plus the complication or stress die that they are trying to help you with.

On a success, they either step down your complication or stress, if their effect die is equal or smaller to its die, or remove the complication or stress entirely, if their effect die is larger.

On most failures, nothing happens. If they fail with one or more hitches, your complication or stress steps up and the ST gives both of you a **PP**.

## Fresh Start

At the start of a new session, all complications and stresses are removed – unless the last session ended in a cliffhanger and the new session picks up right where you left off. (If that's the case, players keep their **PP** as well.)

## SFX & Dice Tricks

Your character gains SFX, special effects that give you added influence over the story. These reflect your character's extraordinary abilities or their powerful role in the narrative. Many SFX require you to spend plot points to activate them. Other SFX allow you to impose a disadvantage on your character in order to earn **PP** or another reward. For example, the *Hinder* SFX lets you earn a **PP** by rolling a smaller die.

Using an SFX is always a choice; you are never compelled to activate your character's SFX, unless that SFX is a Limit. A Limit is an SFX which can be activated by the ST.

Some SFX allow you to add your own complication to your dice pool. A complication included in a roll can't also be included in the opposing dice pool, so using such an SFX also prevents the other side from using that complication against you.

### Doubling Dice

Sometimes, the rules tell you to double a die in your pool. When you double a die, you add another die of the same size to the pool before you roll.

### One Roll

Unless the text of the SFX itself or another rule says otherwise, when you step up, step down, or double a trait using an SFX, you only do so for a single roll.

### Reroll

Some SFX allow a reroll of some or all of the dice in your pool after you first roll them. You can't use SFX to reroll the same die roll more

than once, though other players might use SFX to reroll it.

Usually, SFX of this type specify how many dice are rerolled. If an SFX says to reroll all the dice, or if it doesn't specify, reroll every die rolled as part of that dice pool.

## Stepping Up & Stepping Down

The rules sometimes tell you to step up a die, changing it from a die of one size to one of the next larger size, (such as changing **4** to **6** or **8** to **10**) or to step down a die (the reverse, such as **12** to **10**).

When you step up a **12** in your dice pool, you keep the **12**, but add an extra **6** to your pool as well. When you step down a **4** in your pool, you remove that die entirely.

## Stepping Down Assets

When an SFX allows you step down an asset for some benefit, that asset remains so indefinitely unless the SFX says otherwise. It can still be stepped up by normal means (such as activating an opportunity). If an asset is stepped down below **4**, it is eliminated. Signature assets are restored to their full value at the end of the scene.

## Stepping Down Stress or Complications

When an SFX lets you step down a stress or complication, it remains stepped down indefinitely, as if with a successful recovery roll, unless the SFX says otherwise. (So if an SFX lets you step down someone's **DAMAGED**, for example, you have applied healing to their injury.)

## Using Your Own Complications

Some SFX let you add your own complication or stress to your dice pool for a roll. When you do so, the opposition doesn't get to roll that complication or stress against you – you're already using it to your own advantage, so in that moment it isn't a disadvantage for you.

## The Peril Pool

During play, the ST maintains their own special, ongoing pool of dice that represents the overall ebb and flow of trouble and danger across the entire adventure. This is the peril pool, and when a player rolls a test, the ST usually rolls the peril pool to oppose them. Dice in the peril pool are called peril dice.

At the opening of a new adventure, the ST establishes the peril pool as a matched pair of two dice. It usually starts each session at **6 6**, but it can be **8 8** or higher depending on the stakes of the story.

Whenever a player roll a hitch, if the ST wants to take advantage of it, the ST gives that player a **PP**, then adds **6** to the peril pool. If the player rolled multiple hitches, the ST can step up the new **6** peril die once for each additional hitch beyond the first (**8** for two hitches, **10** for three hitches, or **12** for four).

Also, whenever the rules say the ST would gain a **PP** (such as by activating a Limit for a STC), they gain a **6** peril die instead.

Whenever the ST would add a new die to the peril pool, they can instead choose to step up an existing peril die.

When the ST adds a peril die, they may also describe something that has happened in the scene to make life more complicated for one or more player characters.

The ST can also “spend” peril dice from the peril pool, removing them from the doom pool to activate certain special rules during play (as described in the ST section). For example, the ST can spend peril dice as if they were plot points for STCs, which is the main way peril dice are spent.

## Paradox

During play, every character also maintains their own special challenge pool that represents the force of consensual reality fighting back against the enlightened will of the mage. This is their Paradox pool.

A character grows their Paradox in multiple ways:

- ⦿ Whenever they use vulgar magick, Paradox grows once and the player gains a **PP**.
- ⦿ Whenever a Sleeper witnesses them use vulgar magick, Paradox grows twice and the player gains a **PP**.
- ⦿ Whenever they roll a hitch using magick, the Storyteller may grow Paradox as per peril rules, paying for it as normal.
- ⦿ Special circumstances: Certain special circumstances like encounters with Mad Ones may grow Paradox in unusual ways as well.

Paradox gets to roll against the character (as described in the ST section) if they performed magick and their Paradox isn’t empty. If Paradox succeeds they get to inflict a complication or stress, representing the form Backlash takes, be it Quiet, Burn, a Paradox flaw or spirit.

If a PC accumulates enough Paradox, then the ST may spend from the peril pool to put them in a Paradox realm.

The PC can reduce Paradox by rolling against it, taking an action on their turn to steel themselves before the might of reality hitting them. Success depletes the Paradox dice, and results in a Paradox flaw that has a relatively harmless effect.

# Conditions

Characters may find themselves experiencing all kinds of conditions: getting turned into a lawn chair, using magick to turn invisible, having a pursuer shoot out one of your tires, gaining increased confidence from an inspiring speech, and the like. In **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex**, these kinds of conditions are modelled with assets, complications, and stress.

## Spellcasting Conditions

As a default, hitches on rolls to use magick almost always inflict Paradox on the caster.

Sometimes mages use Quintessence to make their magicks blaze with reality, brilliance, and power, imposing their Will over the world.

**DRAINED** stress describes their Avatar's reserves dwindling.

Hitches might occasionally result in other conditions, as the ST determines. Channelling hitched lightning might shock you as well, for instance, and inflict **DAMAGED**, and a hitched prophecy might fill one with dread, inflicting **DEMORALISED** instead.

Botches can grow Paradox immensely, but they can also be opportunities for mistargeted, uncontrolled magickal effects going terribly awry.

Other complications can interfere with performing magick, depending on the mage's instruments. A mage relying on voice and vocalisations who is **SILENCED** or **GAGGED**, one who uses movement and gestures but has her fingers **BOUND**, or one who writes the code to reality but had **ELECTRONICS TAKEN AWAY** has those complications rolled against her in tests to perform magickal effects. Equivalent complications might afflict mages

with different practices. A player might also **Hinder** a distinction to recognize the limitations of her training – and pick up a sweet **PP** for her trouble.

## Tactical Conditions

A simple test can inflict complications such as **SURROUNDED**, **OUTFLANKED**, or **EXPOSED**, or create assets like **COVERING FIRE**, **IN POSITION**, or **GOT THE DROP ON YOU**. If an asset applies to multiple characters, spend a **PP** to let everybody in the group use it.

A feint can inflict a complication to the tune of **DISTRACTED** or **UNBALANCED**, which can then be leveraged in a later roll to inflict more lasting **DAMAGED**.

Disarming an opponent can also work as a complication. If the item is represented by an asset die, inflicting a complication of a higher die size makes the asset inaccessible until the complication is recovered.

## Morale Conditions

Intimidation both on and off the battlefield is neatly handled by inflicting **DEMORALISED** stress. That stress, in turn, can be rolled into other actions seeking to inflict **DAMAGED** or other conditions. It can even be added to dice pools to scare opponents into quitting the battlefield altogether.

The trade-off is that, in most situations, **DEMORALISED** stress is likely easier to recover than “more serious” conditions like **DAMAGED**, which might require skilled help, specialized tools, or magick. Any character can offer encouragement to any other character as an action intended to recover **DEMORALISED** stress. Characters can even attempt to psych themselves up and recover their own stress.

## Magical Conditions

A whole raft of magical conditions can simply be flashy ways of inflicting basic stress. A fascination charm inflicts **ENTHRALLED**. A Prime effect draining your pattern of energy inflicts **DRAINED**. And of course fireballs inflict **DAMAGED**.

Sometimes you might want something a little more tailored to your circumstances, in which complications come into play. **ON FIRE** is a perennial favourite. **BLINDED**, **Poisoned**, **BOUNDED INTO CONCRETE**, or even **CHILLED** work great, as well. Cursing a man to have a donkey's head, if we want to get all Shakespearean, can also just be expressed as a complication.

Mages may also spend a **PP** to keep an extra effect die. This way you can inflict a standard stress like **DAMAGED** as well as a flashy complication like **ON FIRE**.

Some magical conditions, such as turning someone into a lawn chair, can get tricky. Here the intent is not to complicate their later actions, but to remove the character from the scene entirely. Such a complication may need to be rephrased as an active but unfinished process, like **BECOMING A LAWN CHAIR**.

## Stealth Conditions

Characters sneaking past guards or into rooms without being noticed is usually resolved with a simple test. However if the player intends to leverage that “stealthed” status in later actions, they might spend a **PP** to gain the asset

**STEALTHED** or **IN THE SHADOWS**

Alternately, a character might take action to distract sentries or other opponents. Their intent may be to strike while distracted or shepherd less-stealthy characters past. Such a

distraction can also be handled with a test, this time inflicting **ENTHRALLED** stress, to represent the target’s attention being focused elsewhere, or a temporary complication representing a specific distraction, such as **BURNING POLICE CAR** **8**. Both the surprise attack and other characters’ stealth attempts may then add the complication into their die pool.

Both assets and complications are eliminated whenever they are no longer relevant. When a **STEALTHED** character reveals themselves, the asset goes away. When the sentries are no longer distracted, the complication goes away.

The classic Rogue tactic of striking from the shadows can combine both a **STEALTHED** asset and a distracting complication, which is one of the reasons this tactic is so popular and effective.

## Wealth Conditions

The love of money is the root of all evil, but we live in a society where people must spend to survive. ST can freely offer characters an asset to represent wealth gained an adventure: **FAT WALLET** **6**, **STOLEN CREDIT CARD** **8**, **BRIEFCASE FULL OF CASH** **10**. Alternately, players may search a location and create an asset to represent something valuable they find.

Shopping is as simple as creating an asset with a test. Wealth assets can be added to these rolls, and on a success might be renamed (**SLIMMED DOWN WALLET**), stepped down, or eliminated, depending on circumstance.

Like any other temporary asset, wealth assets only last for one session. A windfall is likely to be used immediately for something relevant to the plot.

If a wealth is stored away or saved up, it doesn’t disappear, but either it’s no longer relevant to

the immediate story and therefore is no longer worth a die, or the character should spend the 5 XP required to gain it as a signature asset, representing more permanent wealth or a useful purchase they intend to carry with them on their adventures.

## How to Be a Great Player

As a **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** player, part of your job is to respond to the challenges the GM lays down as well as interact with fellow player characters. The game works best when you go hard: describe your actions with cinematic energy. Instead of “I strike the zombie with lightning”, you can draw your oaken want inscribed with sacred name of Baraquel, the angel of lightning and speak the Latin incantation of Creo Fulmen to put the dead back to rest, slap the gun out of the vampire’s hand, or any number of other options. There’s no increased risk to your character when you get creative, so let your imagination run wild.

One enthusiastically descriptive player is entertaining, but the good stuff is when the whole table starts riffing off each other’s antics. Keep an eye out for opportunities to interact and open yourself up to others piling on to your fun. Be vocal: say “I need to shake this **DEMORALISED** stress!” or “I’m gonna pin them in place with a complication, so you can finish them off!” The game works better – both tactically and narratively – if everybody is a part of everybody else’s stories.

There’s literally no limit on what any of you can describe except the nature of the story itself, which means the tone and mood of the game is entirely in your hands. This is a collaborative effort; it’s not the sole responsibility of any one

player to decide what is or is not too silly, or too dark, or too outlandish. Talk about the kind of action, drama, and comedy you want to see in the game. If things start drifting in a direction that’s not fun for you, speak up so you can all stay on the same page.

# Characters & Traits