

CONSENSUS

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Chapter 1

In The Beginning

1.1 Consensus

Narrator

Hello Reader.

There are certain rules, that everyone seems to know, about how the world works. Electricity moves in circuits. There's no way to show someone else an exact image of what you see inside your head. You can believe with all your heart that you can fly, but when you step off the cliff, that won't be enough to stop you from plummeting to the ground. This is the Consensus, the universe's general agreement about how reality works.

A few people, though, seem to know differently. They might know that an antenna uses an open circuit to make invisible waves which can be translated into sound. Or that the right

1. In The Beginning

Narrator

drumbeat can let them focus a point behind their eyes into a picture—an exact image—for another to see. Or that there is a secret, forgotten word from the dawn of history that, when spoken as a command, allows you to ignore gravity. They understand a truth that defies the Consensus.

They are known as Mages, as Awakened. They may exist within the Consensus, play by its rules when they must, but always they harbor the knowledge that there is more. That knowledge carries power; the power to shape the very truths of reality. Who can wield such power? What ripples radiate outward from its source?

Would you like to find out?

1.2 Reading This Book

Narrator

Most of this book will be addressed to you, the player, in one of two roles. The first role is the Master of Ceremonies, or MC, who facilitates conversation and play. This is the player whose job it is to make the moves that keep the conversation flowing, in some games this role would be called the GM. The second role is the player of a Mage in the game, who embodies a particular character. They choose and portray this character's thoughts and actions, contributing to the story primarily from that character's perspective. No matter

Narrator

which role you plan to take, feel free to read anything and everything you see herein. This isn't the kind of game that keeps secrets from one role or the other. That said, the reason we break it out like this, is so that you don't have to read more than you want to.

Different people will have different entry points into understanding this game. After you finish chapter 1, here are some places you might skip to:

If you're the kind of person that wants to learn about the flavor of the game, you can continue on to chapter 2, Magic. If you're the kind of person who really needs a character to latch onto before you understand the game, take a look at the Playbooks in Appendix A. If you understand a game best through the actions that it encourages you to take, it's worth taking a look at The Moves chapter. If you want to get an idea of how the game plays out, you can skip to the First Session chapter, but be sure to read on, because it doesn't go into depth about a few important things. If you do take any of these options besides moving right on to chapter 2, there will likely be a lot of terms you don't understand, but that's okay, you can look them up in the glossary, or you can just keep reading the rest of the book where they will be defined.

If you see a section that looks like this, we are talking to you in your role

MC

1. In The Beginning

as the MC.

MC

Player

If you see a section that looks like this, we are talking to you in your role as a player of one of the game's Mages.

1.3 Setting Up to Play

First off, you'll need around 3-6 people, and not just any people, you'll need the type of people that are into this sort of thing. People who enjoy pretending, imagining, and playing together, and people that can trust one another, people who feel safe with each other. You're the MC, and the rest of the players will play Mages. (Unless you don't want that much responsibility, in which case, see if you can pawn this role off onto one of them.) More people than that and it will be hard to keep everyone involved and keep track of everything that's going on.

You'll need to have printed one copy of each of the Playbooks, several copies of the Basic and Extended moves, the MC sheet, and the character summary sheet. You'll also need a few more pieces of blank paper, and writing utensils to go around. You won't need dice for yourself, this isn't that kind of game,

MC

1.3. Setting Up to Play

but might want to have a few pairs of six-sided dice for the other players.

MC

First off you'll need a group to play with, and someone to take on the role of the MC. If there isn't someone to take on that role, maybe you can consider doing it. We'll guide you the whole way, we promise.

Player

You'll need a pencil and a pair of normal, six-sided dice (d6s, if you prefer). Check with the MC if you don't have them. Other than that, bring just your creativity and willingness to collaborate. Don't have any firm ideas set in stone, but also don't be afraid to bring to the table what you would like seeing. Games of Consensus often start to bring up images and symbols that feel real within the game. If you want to bring materials to show or make them, such as colored pencils or origami paper, it can go a long way.

To get started, you'll need a place reasonably free of distractions and interruptions, where everyone can get into character and start to imagine together. You'll want comfortable seating and a table of some kind to spread out all the papers and roll dice on, and so everyone can see each other. Some people

MC

1. In The Beginning

like to add to the ambiance, with music, candles, incense, grimoires, ravens' skulls, or Tesla coils; be creative and take ownership of your space! Consensus tends to run about 6-12 sessions, so try to find somewhere you'll be able to return to several times.

Try to have materials to help you quickly make little pieces of the world to hand to your players, such as scribbling out a "business card" or sketching a rough map. If you can, also facilitate creative expression for everyone, with things like colored pencils and parchment or origami paper.

You'll have read through this book at least once, but when you're sitting down to your first session, go to the First Session chapter and begin to follow its rules.

MC

1.4 Roleplaying as a Conversation

This is a roleplaying game, and your role is to describe the world, most people in it (including some Mages not played by other players), and how they respond to the action of the characters played by the other players. You will get input from the other players on how the world looks and works as guided by your rules. You aren't trying

MC

to compete with, outwit, or win against the other players, but you will provide obstacles and difficulties for the characters. The objective of the game is to tell a story about wondrous things, and to have philosophical conversations about the nature of reality, and about the nature of humanity.

Overall, Consensus works by having all the players, including you, describe a setting together. It might be a city, much like one many of you know, but likely with a darker, more sinister slant. It might be a quiet town with secrets hidden just under the surface. Whatever it is, everyone should understand what it's basically like, enough that any of you could easily describe a starting point for a new scene, and feel comfortable making up small details. Each other player also describes a Mage they'll be playing, in much greater detail, from the clothes they wear to their beliefs about the universe. You'll help them do it by asking questions to help flesh them out. They'll help you flesh the world out. You'll ask probing questions to help them help you.

Then, you'll start framing scenes, describing something that encourages action from a few Mages, and ask a player, "What do you do?" At this point, a conversation has begun. They'll respond, and you'll build on what they said, and

1. In The Beginning

draw in others at the table. The rules of the game add depth to the conversation, bringing up pointed questions or adding new complications to the story that's developing. Your rules, and input from the other players, will guide you as you facilitate the conversation.

MC

Player

This is a roleplaying game, and you will take on the role of a character in the story. You'll describe, with the others, what happens. One player, the MC, tends to describe the world, most people in it, and how they respond to the actions of the characters played by you and the other players, getting input from you on how the world looks and works as appropriate. None of the players are competing with each other, though characters may be at odds. The objective of the game is to tell a story about wondrous things, and to have philosophical conversations about the nature of reality, and about the nature of humanity.

Overall, Consensus works by having all the players describe a setting together. It might be a city, much like one many of you know, but likely with a darker, more sinister slant. It might be a quiet town with secrets hidden just under the surface. Whatever it is, you should understand what it's basically like, enough that you could easily de-

scribe a starting point for a new scene, and feel comfortable making up small details. You also describe a Mage, in much greater detail, from the clothes they wear to their beliefs about the universe. Don't worry, the game helps you do it. The MC asks questions to help flesh out both the world and your character.

Then, the MC will start framing scenes, describing something that encourages action from a few Mages, and asks someone, "What do you do?" At this point, a conversation has begun. When you're asked, you'll answer with your character's action or reaction. The MC responds, building on what you said, and drawing in others at the table. The rules of the game add depth to the conversation, bringing up pointed questions or adding new complications to the story that's developing. The rules, and details about your character, can help prompt you where you should go next, but in the end, you're the one who decides what your character thinks and does.

1. In The Beginning

1.5 Moves and Dice

The basic building block of a conversation in a classroom might be question and answer. In *Consensus*, the basic building blocks of our conversations are the *Moves*. Any time the other players look to you to see what happens next, or ask you a question about the world, you respond with one of your moves. When the players describe what their characters do, it will often trigger one of the common moves or one of the *Playbook* moves. If not, you respond with one of your moves. The structure of the players' moves is as follows:

The Trigger: This part will be bolded on the moves sheet or *playbook*. It takes the form of “**When you [do something]**” and may be very specific or may be more broad. In either case, when a player says that their character does something that fits one of these moves, you should call for them to roll it. If a player does not wish to roll that move, they should change their narration of what their character does so that it does not trigger the move. Likewise, a player should never just say “I want to roll [move].” If they do, have them describe their character doing something that triggers that move. If they are describing something close to one of the triggers, you can help them

MC

by suggesting how they could trigger the move. Players can not roll a move without their character taking the action that triggers it, and can not have their character take an action that triggers a move without also rolling it. When in doubt, ask "OK, how do you assert your Paradigm," or whatever.

The Roll: Most moves (but not all of them) will have a roll associated with them. It will take the form of "Roll +[Something]," usually one of a character's stats. A roll in Consensus is always two dice added together, plus whatever the move says. Regular dice with six sides and numbers or pips on them. Nothing fancy or weird. (If you want fancy or weird dice, take a look at our Hacking section for some options).

The Outcome: In Consensus, a result of 10 or higher (notated "10+") is a full success, and the character should succeed at what they were attempting to do. A roll of 7-9 is a mixed success. The character should still succeed, but at some cost. The move will give you guidance. They may have to make a hard choice, or they may not succeed as well as they would have on a 10+. A roll of a six or less (notated 6-) is a failure, and means that you have to make a Hard Move. (This is a move that changes the fiction irrevocably and can't be prevented, such as breaking a piece of gear, having someone show up

1. In The Beginning

to notice their horrific act at just the wrong time, or even dealing damage). This doesn't necessarily mean that the character has failed at what they were setting out to accomplish, though. They could succeed and find out exactly why succeeding was the worst possible thing for them to do. Most moves will tell you exactly what happens on a 10+ or a 7-9, and some will even tell you what happens on a 6-.

MC

The basic building block of a conversation in a classroom might be question and answer. In **Consensus**, the basic building blocks of our conversations are the **Moves**. Any time you look to the **MC** to see what happens next, the **MC** will respond with one of their moves. When you describe what your character does, it will often trigger one of the Basic moves or one of the Playbook moves. The structure of a move is as follows: (**MC** moves follow a different format)

Player

The Trigger: This part will be bolded on the moves sheet or playbook. It takes the form of "**When you [do something]**" and may be very specific or may be more broad. In either case, when you say your character does something that fits one of these moves, the **MC** will call for you to roll it. If you do not wish to roll that move, you should

change the narration of what your character does so that it does not trigger the move. Likewise, you should never just say “I want to roll [move],” instead you must describe your character doing something that triggers that move. You can not roll the move without your character taking the action the triggers it, and you can not have your character take an action that triggers a move without also rolling it. If you are describing an action that you think should trigger a move and the MC isn’t calling for it, you can remind them. This is especially relevant for your Playbook moves, which they might not know by heart.

The Roll: Most moves (but not all of them) will have a roll associated with them. It will take the form of “Roll +[Something]” usually one of your character’s stats. A roll in Consensus is always two dice added together, plus whatever the move says. Regular dice with six sides and numbers or pips on them. Nothing fancy or weird.

Occasionally, a roll will say “roll +nothing”, that is, the usual two dice with no intrinsic benefits, or “roll just...”, which means roll whatever you are told to without adding any external modifiers such as “+1 forward”. If they are combined, “roll just +nothing”, you are rolling two dice and taking their total, with no way to change it!

1. In The Beginning

Player

The Outcome: In Consensus, a result of 10 or higher (notated "10+") is a full success. Your character succeeds at what they were attempting to do. A roll of 7-9 is a mixed success. Your character still succeeds, but at some cost. They may have to make a hard choice, or they may not succeed as well as they would have on a 10+. The move will give guidance. A roll of a six or less (notated 6-) is a failure, and means that the MC gets to make a Hard Move. (This is a move that changes the fiction irrevocably and can't be prevented, such as breaking a piece of gear, having someone show up to notice your horrific act at just the wrong time, or even dealing damage). This doesn't necessarily mean that the character has failed at what they were setting out to accomplish though, they could succeed and find out exactly why succeeding was the worst possible thing for them to do. Most moves will tell you exactly what happens on a 10+ or a 7-9, and some will even tell you what happens on a 6-.

Some moves may tell you to take "+1 forward" or "-1 forward", which means to apply +1 or -1 to your next roll. Moves also may tell you +1 or -1 "ongoing", which means the modifier applies to all rolls until you're told otherwise, or the session ends.

Your moves have a slightly different structure. They are directives, such as “Set Up a Future Problem,” “Give Them an Answer They Won’t Like,” or “Imprison Someone.” When you use one, you’ll use it as inspiration for what happens in the fiction of the game. For example, the player of an alchemist asks if their character has any eye of newt. This is a form of looking to you to see what happens, and so you make a soft move. You might pick “Set Up a Future Problem,” and say “Yes, but only enough for what you want to do now, or the ritual you want to do later, but not both. What do you do?” This sets up their future problem of not having enough eye of newt for their ritual.

When your rules tell you to make a Hard Move, you need to pick one that will allow you to change the fiction irrevocably. When you describe it, don’t give the characters a chance to prevent it.

MC

1.6 Stats

Player

The Stats in Consensus describe things about your character, what they’re good at, and what patterns they might reach for first in order to solve a problem. Stats can be in the range of -1 to +3,

1. In The Beginning

Player

and are added to your dice rolls for relevant moves. The specific stats used in Consensus are:

Static: as in unmovable, steady, set in your ways, and conservative.

Dynamic: as in creative, free-flowing, adaptable, easily moved, and inventive.

Entropic: as in direct, active, unstoppable, forward, and destructive.

Within: referring to the internal self, controlled reactions, ability to introspect, and know yourself.

Without: referring to the external world, connections, empathy and understanding.

The other players will keep track of their characters stats. It might be helpful for you to know what they are so that you know what moves the characters are likely to succeed or fail on, but other than that you don't need to interact with the stats much at all.

MC

1.7 The Life of a Mage

Narrator

No matter what role you're taking on, this is some basic information you'll want to be thinking about.

Mages in Consensus are people who have a deep belief about how the world works and

1.7. The Life of a Mage

Narrator

how they can fit into it. This belief is strong enough to allow them to do what the game recognizes as magic, though they may deny that, because if the world really works by allowing people to speak words of power to command the elements, then speaking those words of power isn't magic any more than using a computer is. Mages change the world just by existing, whether they like it or not, and these changes form the basis for many of the stories in Consensus.

Paradigm

Narrator

A Mage's particular beliefs are summed up in their Paradigm. This describes what it is they believe that is different enough from the usual world that when acted on, the Mage produces magic. It suggests what they are generally capable of, what they are particularly good at, and what they think is impossible, whether for just themselves or for anybody. Understanding the depths of their own Paradigm is an important part of the journey for any Mage, and understanding the Paradigms of other Mages around them is key to successfully working together (as well as to not have a disastrous clash of worldviews).

1. In The Beginning

Player

This may sound like a lot to figure out when you don't even know the first thing about your character. You'll have help figuring out your character's paradigm as you make your character during the first session. There are also game rules associated with it, and you can see the Magic Chapter (page 29) for more about those and about paradigms in general.

Unlike the stats, you need to understand the character's paradigms deeply. You'll ask probing questions to help the players understand them, and you'll need to keep a sharp eye on Mages trying to do things that their paradigm forbids. Neither you nor the other players need to have exhaustively explored and understood a Mage's paradigm to start out; a large part of playing the game is doing that exploration and learning exactly what a Mage's paradigm means for them.

See the Magic Chapter (page 29) for more on Paradigms.

MC

Hardship Breeds Revelation

Narrator

Beliefs can be made stronger by being challenged, just like people. Very few people who lead an easy, charmed, unchallenged life develop the beliefs that are strong enough to transform them into a Mage. But, once they do Awaken, coming to understand their abilities, their story is just getting started. Difficulties remain, whether things they couldn't shake from their past or new problems brought on by magic. The life of a Mage is never an easy one.

To get at this, Playbooks ask three questions: Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized; why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed; and why are you hunted. These can be far-fetched and fantastic, but also can be tied very tightly to real-world issues. Be respectful and careful, but do delve into these if you want. The Safety Rules (page 95) in the First Session chapter can help make sure no-one crosses a boundary they don't want to.

Everyone has trauma from times that they have gone up against reality and lost, in one aspect or another. Mages' histories often mean that this trauma is both acute, and something they have grown around. It is quite possibly what helped lead to the moment of Awakening that now enables their wondrous abilities, but it never truly goes away. Mages will feel driven to keep pushing against reality, and it will keep pushing back. They will often

1. In The Beginning

Narrator

be hurt in the process, whether it is from Backlash or losing a Consensus Shift race. Before they were Awakened, reality might strike back in the form of physical laws, authority figures, or mob mentality. After, the Mage's ability to handle many of these problems will have increased exponentially, but so will the danger: raw forces of reality can tear a Mage asunder, knots of disbelief can be summoned to hound the Mage, and their sense of reality might become temporarily broken so they cannot tell what actually happened. Trauma is never a simple path, and Mages can gain new Restrictions and other complications when it flares back up.

Anchors and Inspirations

Narrator

Mages, just like anyone, are tied to people and things around them. Some of the most significant ties are to Anchors, the answers to the question "Why did you stay?". These nonmagical people, places, and things hold a Mage back from their full potential, but also keep them from becoming lost. They require upkeep, since people have needs, apartments need rent, and traditions must be followed. If not seen to often enough, they will stop anchoring the Mage, leaving them that much closer to true power, and to disconnecting entirely from the world. It is also possible to lose an Anchor in one searing moment, when

1.8. Gear and Accoutrements

Narrator

it becomes clear they didn't matter to you like you thought they did (or they die, are broken, or lost).

Inspirations are the people, and occasionally magical beings, who further enlighten a Mage and help them see what might be possible. They act as counterbalances to the restraint from Anchors. An Inspiration doesn't tend to actively inspire for long, but they are easy to reconnect with, which can be very rewarding.

You'll be framing a lot of scenes around these two types of characters, which means you'll be spending a lot of time portraying these characters. Make sure to ask probing and pointed questions so that you and the player who's Mage they're connected to are on the same page about who they are and what kind of relationship they have.

See the Anchors and Inspirations chapter (page 182) for more.

MC

1.8 Gear and Accoutrements

Player

Your Mage is hopefully capable enough when armed only with their mind, but they will have a variety of supplements to draw on. They may have a few

1. In The Beginning

Player

pieces of noteworthy gear, access to a special magical place, or a band of other **Mages** to work with. Some **Mages** even have a group of students who seek to learn their wisdom. You'll learn more about which of these things your mage has access to during the first session, and you can read more about them in the **Gear and Accoutrements** chapter (page 202)

MC

A **Mage** is certainly capable enough when armed only with their mind, and beyond that your fellow players' **Mages** will have a variety of other tricks, tools, and resources. Make sure to make note of prominent gear, locations, and especially people that are in their rules during the first session. You can see more in the **Gear and Accoutrements** chapter (page 202).

1.9 Status Tracks

Narrator

Consensus measures progress over time for a number of elements of the game, from health to a sinister plot. This is usually done with a **Status Track**, which is based on the **Code** system used in some medical transports. **Status Tracks** start with no **Codes** marked off,

Narrator

then have Code 50 marked off, Code 40, and so on, down to Code 10 and then Code N, the “newsworthy event.” What this means will depend on what the Status Track is tied to, but Code N is always irrevocable, representing a fundamental change. When a Status Track’s Code 30 is marked off, it starts to “slip”, advancing towards Code N much more quickly. Problems that aren’t addressed early on can become much more difficult to head off.

For more on Status Tracks, see the Status Tracks chapter (page 132).

1.10 Why to Play

Narrator

Maybe you want to feel what it would be like to be able to seize spirits by their names and command them. Maybe you like talking about whether souls exist and what it would mean if they did, and want to try out being someone who knows they do, can act on them, but still stays up late talking about what it means. Maybe you hear power corrupts, but want to play out struggling between that and using power to do good. Maybe Mages sound like the kind of people you want to associate with, and think like, and this seems like a good way to try it out.

Maybe you’ve felt like you realized something true about the world, and you’ve been waiting for something that says it’s real, for a long

1. In The Beginning

Narrator

time.

Chapter 2

Magic

Player

Ask three Mages what magic is, and you'll get at least six answers, and one might be that there's no such thing as magic, this is just how the world works. Your Mage will have their own way of looking at magic, called their Paradigm. It defines how they do magic, but also how they look at the world. Your Playbook will help you build a Paradigm, so don't feel like you have to figure it all out while reading this. All this is against the backdrop that is the Consensus, which is sort of like the Paradigm of the dominant society around you. Because you are a Mage, your Paradigm conflicts with the Consensus in some ways. Magic is the things you can do because they fit in your Paradigm, but are not in the Consensus.

2. Magic

Player

Magic that you can hide so it doesn't look impossible within the Consensus is called Harmonious, and is fairly safe. Other magic, that cannot be explained or easily rationalized, is called Rending, and is one of the most dangerous actions a Mage can take. A major concern for Mages is finding ways to solve their problems that remain Harmonious.

Magic, and doing magic, is probably why you and your players picked up this game. Despite that, this game is focused on the people themselves, their interactions, and their paradigms. Magic is a clear and straightforward expression of the Paradigm that likely informs much of how a Mage conducts their life. During this game, one of your jobs will be exploring and helping the players conceive of and define their Mage's paradigms. This exploration starts as they make their characters, but continues during play, and in fact makes up a large part of it. You'll also provide the other magic in the world. You will also be playing the part of the Consensus, helping to decide what magic is subtle enough to be Harmonious, and what is just so obvious that it smashes through the veil of reality and is Rending.

MC

2.1 Paradigm

You need light to see. You need air to breathe. Things fall when you drop them. Electricity only flows in a complete circuit. There are radioactive metals. The sun is a star, and the moon reflects its light.

All of these are very likely part of your model of how the world works. You can use this model to plan future actions, and to understand what must have happened when you're learning about something. Your Paradigm for the world involves known physical laws, social norms, likely causes and effects, and so on. It even includes things in which you don't understand the underlying causes, but you do know outcomes. You don't have to understand the full complexity of the global financial system to know that you'll be in trouble if you don't make rent.

Your Mage's Paradigm is similar. It covers how the world works, on some fundamental and some specific levels. The difference is that this Paradigm includes things which most humans would consider to be impossible. It might be that there is an ancient language, infused with the power to affect the world if spoken aloud. It might be that a divine power has chosen them to work the power's will in the world,

and as long as they are acting in line with the plan, they can perform miracles. It even might be a branch of physics that is hitherto unexplored by conventional science, allowing access to other dimensions and enabling wonderous devices. Your Mage does live in something akin to the real world, so their Paradigm will still include major parts of the Consensus, essentially the Paradigm they had before they Awakened, as a backdrop.

The key to your Mage is that their Paradigm is not just a belief system: it really works. No matter how strongly a person who is not a Mage believes that they can teleport, it isn't going to work. However, a Mage can act according to their Paradigm, and what they expect will usually happen. So, if they believe that a ritual circle inscribed in the ground using an ancient language that describes a location will allow travel to that location if it is entered with a clear mind under a full moon, then that will work for them (most of the time, if they're careful).

Paradigms are very personal. Even when they are mostly shared, there are likely to be some details that differ. It's an effect of being able to shape your own reality. This does mean that two Mage's magics may not work for each other at all. In extreme cases, their

beliefs may actively clash (see Opposed (page ??).)

When choosing a Paradigm for your character, look at the listed ones in the Playbook. The choices will cover a variety of possible belief systems tailored to that Playbook, and in fact each individual Paradigm choice is likely to encompass multiple possibilities. You will need to choose something that makes sense to you, the player, because you will need to justify your Mage's actions in terms of this Paradigm. This also likely means there will be some interpretation, as there are multiple ways to use the traits written out for each Paradigm to describe a view of the world.

It is difficult to summarize all of a person's beliefs in a small section. In Consensus, key aspects that are relevant to magic are called out.

A Paradigm is a way of looking at the world, a structure that helps make sense of things. Mages are defined in large part by having a Paradigm that does not line up perfectly with the local dominant beliefs about how the world works, and being able to act according to their own beliefs successfully.

Of course, a character will have had an entire life to build up beliefs and explore them, while the player might

2. Magic

have just made them a few minutes ago. One of your main jobs will be to help construct and expand the players' Mages' Paradigms. They may need help making choices on their character sheets, and you will ask probing questions to help flesh out what the choices actually mean. If a character believes in a divine power, what does it mean that there is evil in the world? Do they receive magical abilities specifically to fight it, or are they just using the divine ways which were there anyway? If a character knows a magical language they can use to construct spells, where did the language come from? Why does it, in particular, have power?

Playbooks call out a few major features of Paradigms for their characters. You can also use these as inspiration for other Mages who show up in the world.

MC

2.2 Paradigm Traits

Player

Each Playbook has multiple Paradigms to choose from, and each Paradigm has choices to make within it. The written components, called traits of the Paradigm, follow.

Title

Player

The title of a Paradigm is just a label, but usually indicates something about the flavor or approach that it entails. “True Names Give Command” suggests the power of “true” names (though whether that means the first given name, a secret name known only to the arcane, or something else entirely, is up to you), while “Reality has an API” suggests a technological approach, perhaps with a magical programming language or the crafting of devices which can change the world’s properties.

Aligned

Player

Aligned traits are parts of the Paradigm that the Mage is particularly good at. This may have to do with their beliefs (a Mage who believes in a current of life energy flowing through the Universe is likely to be good at healing), or just be a particular focus within what’s possible (a Mage who believes that Reality can be programmed might have happened to have specialized in deletion, out of a variety of possibilities.) Use the listed choices in Aligned for a sense of what the Paradigm can likely do.

2. Magic

Player

Your character's **Aligned** aspect makes it easier to help related actions, and magic which is **Aligned** to your character's **Paradigm** has a chance of being particularly, remarkably successful.

Opposed

Player

Opposed aspects are things which your Mage believes are impossible, as firmly as you probably believe that you can't live without **Oxygen**. These will never apply to anything which a non-Mage could do, but definitely can cover things which other Mages may do. They even may apply to things your own Mage might appear to be capable of. Having them listed under **Opposed** means that there is a detail to the Mage's **Paradigm** that completely precludes them. For example, if a Mage has "emotional manipulation" as an **Opposed** aspect, then that means that they do not think it fits into their worldview. If the worldview looks very broad and flexible, like "**Ancient Languages Hold Secret Power**," then there is a reason it is **Opposed**. Perhaps the language came from before humans were evolved enough to manipulate emotions, rather than just feel and express them like animals. Perhaps it was too dangerous and was sealed away by an ancient

Mage. Or perhaps it is unknown to the **Mage**, they just have a deep sense that it is impossible as continuing to live without breathing would be if they had no magic.

Note that **Opposed** aspects reflect strong enough beliefs that they even apply to other **Mages**. It's not just that your character can't work obscuring magic, for example, it's that no-one can. For these purposes, a character who is **Opposed** to magic being done is a **Look-out**, exactly like someone who has never **Awakened** at all. This means that a character with a really restrictive view of the world, like that the only magic that exists has to be done through a computer terminal (which they might not even consider magic) may be tricky to be around. **Mages** by their nature have to be skilled at concealing their craft, however, and nothing is insurmountable. **Harmonious** magic will slip by just fine, but if you're going to do **Rending** magic in front of another **Mage**, you'll want to make sure they aren't **Opposed** to any aspect of what you're doing.

In addition, some **Mages** have **Paradigms** in which the universe of what is possible is broader than what they can ever expect of themselves. For example, a **Mage** who believes that some people are attuned to certain classical elements and can manipulate them might believe that

2. Magic

Player

they specifically are attuned to **Water**. Someone manipulating **Fire** doesn't represent an impossibility, but this one **Mage** expects to be incapable of it. These **Mages'** **Opposed** will btend to be first-person expressions, such as "My magic must cause a transformation" or "I can't do the same thing twice." No **Mage** will have both **Opposed** described this way, but for the ones who do, they are a little easier to work around, as they will only be **Opposed** to magic along these lines that they themselves participate in.

Pay attention when choosing **Opposed** magic to the **Paradigms** of others at the table. While there is nothing wrong with playing **Mages** who believe that each other's magic is impossible, it does make for a very different game than if they all more-or-less agree. That being said, since all **Paradigms** are different, no-one will ever fully agree on everything.

A **Mage** may be able to break past their **Opposed**, and do magic that is **Opposed** to their own paradigm, but it will always be **Rending** if they do.

Freedoms

Player

Freedoms are one of the perks that come with working with other Mages over time. Another Mage may choose, when they take an Advancement (see chapter XX, Improvement), to grant your Mage a Freedom. This is a short phrase or sentence that describes how something which appears to fall under one of your Opposed Aspects is actually just fine. The Freedom only comes into play when you are working with the character who gave it to you. If Piper, who has an Opposed aspect of “Silent magic”, is given the Freedom “There is sound among the spirits” by Marcus, then when Piper and Marcus do magic together, Piper can do magic that appears to be silent in the physical world, as long as it somehow involves “sound” in connection with spirits.

Freedoms can be very useful, especially because Mages tend to become less able to directly help one another as they become more powerful (because Help or Hinder uses the number of Anchors to modify the roll). Freedoms let them stop hiding some of their magic from each other, and reward collaboration.

2. Magic

Restrictions

Player

Restrictions are holes discovered in a Mage's view of what is possible. Many Mages start with them, as the Consensus includes many examples of things which are technically possible for someone, but not for just anyone. New ones often come about as a result of significant failure: Not only are you unable to do that this time, you're unable to do it at all. They can cover new discoveries in the fiction about the exact shape of the Paradigm, and they can cover new beliefs gained by the Mage ("I guess I actually can't breathe underwater.") Like Freedoms, they are short phrases or sentences, but they add on to Opposed aspects, rather than providing a way to bypass them. A character with the Opposed aspect "magic that prevents movement" might gain the Restriction "Movement for spirits includes multiple dimensions," and now anything that would trap a spirit on one plane is as unreachable as if it were Opposed. When something says it applies if a Mage is Opposed, this includes if they have a Restriction that applies.

Some Restrictions start with "I." For example, "I can't enchant living things," or "I can only work with water, out of the four elements." Because these are about individual capabilities, they usually will not lead to the Mage with the

Player

Restriction being a Lookout (“I can’t work with elemental fire, but that doesn’t mean you can’t.”)

Unlike the Opposed aspects, Restrictions can be overcome. There is an Advancement a Mage can take to remove a Restriction that they started with or have gained, representing an expansion of understanding or self-confidence by the Mage.

2.3 Performing Magic

Narrator

There is no “do magic” roll, or even move, in Consensus. It is too intrinsic to a Mage’s nature, in the same way that there is no move for traveling somewhere. Just as “I travel somewhere” raises innumerable questions that need to be answered, some of which may lead to rolls, while others just can be accepted at face value, like “Are you walking? Biking? Flying?” and “Are you going somewhere particular? What do you want to do?” and “How will you deal with the cold and the snow?”, you need to know more specifics before you know what any given act of magic means.

There is a sense of “power” or “strength” within Consensus. By default, most Mages have around the same strength: what matters

2. Magic

Narrator

is how well they can apply their Paradigm, what support and preparations they have, and whether they can exploit the situation to their advantage. That exact power level is not precisely defined and may vary from game to game. Expect to come to a common understanding as you play, and that common understanding may shift over time. After ten sessions, a spell that was very difficult and taxing may have become trivial, and that's OK.

2.4 Harmonious Magic

Player

Most magic that Mages do is barely distinguishable from coincidence or extreme luck. There's a reason for this. That kind of magic is easy, and safe. Instead of creating money out of thin air, a Mage prefers to find the exact location buried treasure is hidden, right in their backyard. Maybe it was there before they did their magic, and their magic just allowed them to find it. Or maybe their magic put it there just minutes before it was dug up. Either way, the casual onlooker (and therefore the Consensus) can't tell the difference. This is called Harmonious magic. This kind of magic acts in harmony with reality, circumvents the rules of the universe, and nobody's the wiser. There's

a reason you don't see Mages throwing balls of fire down the streets of Chicago. Nobody's Paradigm is going to be violated by a Mage happening to have exactly the small item that they need in their pocket.

Commonplace magic

As a result of Harmonious magic being an option, there are likely to be many small things that your Mage frequently does and even can take for granted. There's no special move or roll for "doing magic", and so doing it doesn't invite danger any more than walking down the street does. Of course, since Mage's lives are not boring, often a chance to walk down a street may involve some other tension, and possibly trigger another move, but it's not the act of walking itself, and nor should harmonious magic feel this way.

This also means you can assume your Mage has a variety of small magics active all the time, in much the same way as they likely have certain common equipment on them at all times. Occasionally it may come up at a pivotal moment, but most of the time it's just part of your narration.

2. Magic

Player

One specific type of common magic is warding. Basic protective charms, subtle precognition, and other such effects are called Preparations, and are explained later. They summarize the ways that each Mage prepares themselves each day before going out to face the world, that always remain Harmonious, but are part of what make Mages look just a little luckier and safer than other people. Preparations usually come up when the Mage needs to use a quick burst of prepared magic to fix something, or to protect them from harm.

2.5 Rending Magic

Player

But what if your character thinks they Really Need to throw a fireball down the streets of Chicago? Well first, they're almost certainly wrong, Rending Magic causes many more problems than it fixes in 99 out of 100 cases. But if they're dead set on doing it, they're performing Rending Magic. To do that requires tearing a rather large hole in reality, and that's when reality fights back. If an effect for any reason can't be passed off as coincidence or happenstance to the casual onlooker, the effect is very likely Rending. Notably, when you do rending magic, it just works, and you roll the

Player

move if it affects a lookout. This can be very powerful, but the costs are very high.

Lookouts

Player

Sometimes you can tear holes in reality and get away with it because no one is around to act as eyes and ears for the Consensus. Rending Magic only triggers the Rending Magic move when it affects a lookout. A lookout is any non-mage human, and any Mage who's paradigm is Opposed to that rending effect. However, "affects" should be taken as broadly as possible here. If a lookout sees the magic being done, if they are targeted by it, or if a ripple effect causes them to sneeze from the wind generated by your summoned Wind Golem, those are all being affected. If you summon a bar of gold in the privacy of your own warded lab, that's fine, until the moment you hand that bar of gold to a non-mage as payment, at which point you roll the Rending magic move. You can animate a golem in your basement, and as long as no one sees it or hears a distinctive sound that no human could make, you're all set. But when the housekeeper opens the locked basement door and sees an animated humanoid form made out of

2. Magic

Player

clay, no matter where your mage is, they roll the rending magic move.

One wrinkle to the name “Lookouts” is that, although they bring the weight of the Consensus down on a Mage, they do not actually remember what they saw. They will rationalize it away, assume they missed something, or outright fabricate an explanation that doesn’t break with their own expectations about how reality works. This means a Mage cannot choose to accept some Discord and prove to someone that magic works by doing something Rending. It also can be inconvenient for Mages who are trying to work together with disparate Paradigms. Learning to accept “and then my friend, who I trust, did something impossible I can’t quite wrap my mind around,” is an important skill for a Mage, and can be the first step to widening their own Paradigm.

2.6 Discord

Player

Discord is a buildup of some sort, reality leaving its mark on mages who dare to tear holes in it left and right. The more the discord builds up, the more the Consensus is going to kick you in the butt when it finally comes time to pay the piper. Track your discord on

Player

your playbook, and it's best not to let it build up too much.

2.7 Backlash

Player

This is the universe's way of fixing itself after a hole is torn in it by Rending magic. It is also the punishment for Mages who break the rules too egregiously. Sometimes a backlash is minor, the equivalent of a slap on the wrist. Sometimes you're banished from reality itself. Depends on how much you've been messing with reality, and how much it feels like messing back.

When you trigger the Backlash move, this is one of the few times that rolling lower is better, and you roll adding your current discord. Roll high enough and you cause a localized break in reality. More often though, what will manifest is either some physical sign of your Discord, making your life difficult, or a being of some sort, sent by the Consensus to Enforce its will on you.

Physical signs of discord should affect the character negatively for the rest of the session. Things like milk spoiling around you, electronics refusing to work in your presence, or extreme sensitivity to light and aversion to the sun.

2. Magic

Player

Enforcers for the Consensus can take many different shapes, they will likely take on a form that makes sense within the Mage's paradigm. They may or may not be able to be seen by other mages, depending on the circumstances. One thing is constant between all physical signs of discord and Enforcers though. Using magic to try and get rid of them or mitigate their consequences will only make matters worse.

2.8 Reality Breaks

Player

Sometimes, when the Consensus is particularly pushed against, a Mage needs to learn a lesson, reality breaks around them. This can take a number of different forms, pervasive hallucinations that only the mage can see, an entire fantasy world overlaying the real world, making the mage think they've been transported elsewhere while in reality they wreak havoc on their world, or a pocket dimension, actually transporting them elsewhere for a time out from reality.

You may have read the section on Rending Magic and wondered how the world survives with that much power in someone's hand. Why hasn't a Mage blotted out the sun, or cracked the

tectonic plates of the Earth? Well, when they try, Reality tends to Break around them. They may very well go on living in a pocket dimension where they did blot out the sun. Or a fantasy world with a tectonic rift across the city may overlay the actual world for them.

These take a few different forms, but regardless of form, they are the Consensus' way of protecting itself. This is why, even though Rending Magic can theoretically do anything, you don't hear about mages blotting out the sun (for more than a short eclipse). If a mage is lucky enough to get out of one, they are usually humbled and have learned to be more in tune with the Consensus, or at least have learned to be more careful with the magic they do.

From the outside, Reality Breaks are the kind of things that most people don't see, or won't see. Pervasive hallucinations are things that only the affected Mage can see, and many people are practiced at ignoring someone they think is seeing things. An overlayed fantasy world is similar, in that it only exists for the affected Mage (and perhaps other Mages that know how to look for it). Pocket dimensions, from the outside, may just look like the person disappearing, and any onlookers having their memory of the past few seconds wiped. For a practiced eye, a Mage may be able

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Player

to find the pinprick hole in reality that caused the Break, and follow it through to attempt a rescue.

When you fall into a Reality break, you choose a trait of your paradigm (whether the title, the Aligned, or an Opposed) to be explored by the break, and the MC describes it as they would other new scenes. You also work with the MC to write a move that, when triggered, brings your mage back closer to reality.

In general, you should shape the reality break to the player's chosen part of their Mage's paradigm (either by making it more prominent, or inverting it), and to the rending magic that caused the break in the first place.

Work with the player to write a move that, when triggered, brings the mage back closer to reality. This should be a relatively easy trigger for the mage's player to push for, because they'll need to do it 6 times in order to escape the reality break (once for each section of a full status track.) You will also make a status track, representing the strength of the reality break.

You will frame three scenes for the mage. At the beginning of each of these scenes, the strength of reality break track will advance once. During each

MC

scene, you may advance the strength of reality break track as a soft move in response to the mage going along with the scene or failing to learn their lesson. This means that by the end of the third scene, either the mage will have advanced their escape track to code N and broken out of the reality break, or the strength of reality break track will reach code N in which case... the mage is trapped in that reality permanently. They are no longer a playable character, though you may bring them back as a threat later, these mages are unbound by the laws of the Consensus and can be very dangerous for everyone.

Be especially cognizant of established safety rules like Lines and Veils when defining reality breaks. They are meant to challenge the character, and your instincts may take you to places that challenge the player as well. This is fine, so long as no-one at the table has ruled against whatever element you seek to include.

MC

2.9 Rituals

Player

A ritual is any larger magical working undertaken by one or more characters. Rituals increase the power that can be

2. Magic

Player

brought to bear, and allow more specific expectations and results to be set out ahead of time. A ritual is often the right option when time allows.

A ritual has two phases: planning and performing.

Planning a Ritual

Player

In order to perform a ritual, you must know what you are doing, first. Planning requires “some time and relative safety.” It allows you to specify the effect you are trying for, in much more detail than you would if you were simply doing magic on the fly. The MC will assign some requirements to perform the ritual.

Some rituals are made up to solve a particular problem, within a specific situation. These rituals draw on the Paradigms of Mages involved, as well as any resources they have available, and are “rituals” because of the complexity involved in them, above and beyond a simple spell. Other rituals are ceremonies in the more traditional sense, passed down from generation to generation, or rediscovered in old lore. These rituals likely have much less planning to do, because most of the planning was accomplished long ago. It will still be necessary to fit them to the particular

circumstances, however.

Once you have planned the ritual, you need to write it down. This ensures that important details aren't lost.

Performing a Ritual

Performing a ritual has more requirements than planning one. To start with, it must be at a place of power that is appropriate for the ritual. Time and relative safety are requirements like for planning. In addition, there will be a sense of how many Mages are needed, and they all must be present. It would likely help if they were involved in the planning phase as well, but this is not a requirement.

As the ritual begins, each Mage's player must explain how their Mage contributes within their Paradigm. Simply being present is usually not good enough, and a Mage can only contribute if they believe their contribution is possible. A mystic Mage might have a hard time explaining how they can add to a ritual which takes the form of an all-night hackathon. Because everyone is doing magic, almost certainly in view of each other, this is a time when Opposed Aspects can really get in the way.

2. Magic

Player

A ritual does not technically have to be planned. If a group of Mages simply gather together at a place of power and start working (or even just start acting in concert), something is bound to happen. However, with a plan to follow, they can specify the outcome much more precisely.

The Mage who is leading the ritual rolls the move. The other Mages are necessary, and can only Help or Hinder (see page XX) if they are doing something above and beyond their prescribed roles. The outcomes can be rather dangerous, so a ritual should never be undertaken lightly.

Place of Power

Narrator

Places of power are locations with a high concentration of magic, for one reason or another. These tend to be naturally occurring, like ley-line nodes, which are jealously guarded secrets, or else constructed with a copious amount of time and energy from many Mages. Places of magic like this are paramount when putting together rituals of great power, so they are coveted by groups of Mages wishing to work large magics, or singular Mages who need to draw on great amounts of power.

Some playbooks have access to a place of power through optional moves. Other places of power may show up during play. Usually, don't allow the players to permanently gain access to a place of power if there isn't a playbook move specifically granting it to them. There should be a real benefit for taking that move, in the form of easier access to a space in which rituals work. Instead, if no-one at the table has the move, make the players work for temporary access to a place of power, or even access to a temporary place of power. Remember your Principles such as Make Everyone Vulnerable; Sometimes, Give Them Exactly What They're Asking For; and Don't Be Afraid to be Obvious. What would it mean for there to be a place of power that the Mages can find right now? Who else knows about it now, and what are they up to? Who will find out about it if the Mages use it, and what will they do with it tomorrow?

Similarly, be careful of restricting access to or taking away places of power gained through Playbook moves, at least permanently. You can certainly take them away temporarily though through MC moves like "take away their stuff", which can be good motivation and drama, but most of the time, unless a character was explicitly and intentionally risking their place of power, it should be much easier to requaire, reconsecrate, and oth-

MC

2. Magic

erwise return to.

MC

Player

Your Playbook may have an option to take a Place of Power as one of your move choices. This gives you a large benefit, since you'll always have a place to conduct a ritual, but will also be a place you have to protect and it means your Mage will be somewhat stationary. If you don't take that move, or if your playbook doesn't give access to one, that doesn't mean you'll never be able to do a ritual, but it does mean that you'll have to find a Place of Power, perhaps asking a local hermit in the woods to borrow theirs, or sneaking into a cabal's inner sanctum and doing the ritual before they get back.

Chapter 3

The Master of Ceremonies

Player

As you might have guessed, this section is addressed to the Master of Ceremonies, or MC. That being said, there's no reason you can't read it! This isn't the kind of game that has secrets which must be kept away from the other players, and it might be interesting to find out what perspective the MC will have, and help see what expectations are in the game by default. However, if you don't want to read it, this chapter is perfectly safe to skip. Pick up in The First Session (page ??).

The Master of Ceremonies, or MC, facilitates conversation and play. Your job is to make the moves that keep the conversation flowing, in some games this

MC

3. The Master of Ceremonies

role would be called the **GM**. Because you're still going to be surprised by the story and play along with the other players, we still consider you a player, just with a special title on top. It's hard to always have something interesting to say under any circumstances, so the rules that you must follow help make sure there is always something entertaining. The following chapter will help you figure out what to say when the whole table looks at you to see what happens next. The next sections will provide the rules and structure for you to follow. These aren't suggestions, these are your set of rules as the **MC** player, and following them is necessary to keep the game working smoothly.

MC

3.1 Agenda

The **Agenda** is your most abstract, highest order, set of rules. These are your objectives during the game. If you succeed at all of these agendas during a given session, you will find that the story naturally follows.

Provide the characters with strife both within and without.

Mages do not lead boring lives. When they talk with friends and allies, they have deep, weighty conversations that reshape views of reality, or prepare to reshape actual reality. Give them scenes where their beliefs are challenged or they have an

opportunity to teach. When they venture out to thwart the plans of insidious forces, the balance can swing on their wits and on the weight of their convictions. Give them scenes where the danger is real and immediate. When they seek a moment's respite, they forge connections that can guide them like starlight, if they haven't already turned away. Give them scenes where they can show that they care.

Play to find out what happens.

This means that you don't have a story planned out that you're running the players through. It means that even though you might have some inklings of what's going to happen next, quite often you'll find out you're wrong, because the players come up with an idea that just fits, or a move forces your hand. It may seem odd at first if you're used to a more preparation-heavy style of running a game, but trust us, the fun you have finding out what happens next right along with the players is worth it.

Ask what it means to be human.

Consensus is a game about people who are everything humans can be, want to be, strive to be. But it's also about how these people still can fail, whether by not being true enough to themselves or by going too far. As you ask leading questions, make moves, and write Forces, focus on making yourself and the other players think about the nature of humanity, theirselves' and others'. In this game, a scene about a character drowning their sorrows in a bar can be just as important, if not moreso, as a knock-down drag-out fight. Sorrows make us human, while any beast can do battle.

Make the Consensus come to life.

Your job is to play the world and the other

3. The Master of Ceremonies

people in it as if they were real. No person exists just to give the characters some information and then be ignored, think about what would happen if the characters met someone and demanded something from them, and then needed their help later. In this way, you make the world feel real, like a living, breathing world, one that is exciting to explore.

3.2 Always Say

When the other players look to you to see what happens, you have to say something. Make sure the things you say follow these rules.

What the principles demand

Your principles, below, address how you speak to the table, and what you say. Don't contradict any of your principles when you address the table.

What the rules demand

This is both your rules detailed here, and the rest of the rules of play, such as the basic moves, and the playbook moves. Sometimes these will tell you what to say depending on the outcome of a roll.

What your prep demands

When we said above that you can't make any kind of preparation, we were stretching the truth a little. The game will tell you to make Forces after the first session, and you should always look to these when you don't know what to say, they will tell you what to say.

What honesty demands

Your job isn't to lie to the players, or trick them, or make them guess what you're thinking. Some

games are about that, this one isn't. So when a player asks a question, answer it honestly, and be generous with the truth. If the player's character enters a room, you should describe it, set the scene, and don't leave out important details waiting for them to ask the right question.

3.3 The Principles

Riddle the world with hidden magic, unexpected connections, and unrecognized potential

Save up those images that speak to you from your favorite media about magic. Don't just describe a bookstore, talk about the dust laying thick on a stack of books in the back, talk about a ghostly light shining through the motes of dust like a sunbeam normally would. Make the world feel like there's magic in it, but also that it's hidden, buried, or unseen.

Create Ephemera

During the game things will come up that need a visual, tactile, or written aid. Draw maps of the cities, write the Mages letters from their mentors on aging parchment, write down the steps of a ritual to be included in a grimoire many years down the road. Play music or ambient sound if it fits the mood. Sketch characters, make props, bring the magic to our world just a little bit. Sometimes, when you would demand an evocative answer, offer materials to them instead. "Can you draw the park's layout, if you have an idea?" or "Give us a sense of your lab, and use that paper if you feel like it."

Use Character Names

When you're speaking to the players, make sure

3. The Master of Ceremonies

to speak at the character they're playing, use their Mage's name when you ask them leading questions, or when you ask them what they do next. Speak in first person as the characters you play, engage the Mages in conversation.

Stay in the Narrative

You have a lot of Agendas, Principles, and Moves, and they're great. They're wonderful. They're your rules. But just like a baseball game would be boring if the pitcher stood still and yelled "fastball," while the batter also stood still and yelled "single," instead of actually playing the game, you also shouldn't just say what move you're making when the players look to you, you should weave that move into the narrative, tell them what it looks like, what their characters can sense about it, tell them what actually happens in the fictional world.

Make Everyone Vulnerable

This principle has a few layers of meaning. First, remember that none of the characters that you make up to interact with the mages, no matter how much you like them, is invincible. Characters can get hurt, captured, or worse, and you shouldn't be afraid to let that happen to even your favorite character, if that's what happens in the fiction. Second, remember that everyone has weaknesses, and irrational like or dislike of certain things. Even if they put on a tough face, let your characters be vulnerable. Third, following that, let your characters show emotion, let them connect with the Mages and share those moments of vulnerability.

Give Everyone Names and Desires

All of your characters should have names, lives, and motivations. There's no faceless bartender, no shopkeep who only exists to buy and sell from.

Everyone in your world should feel real, and three dimensional. When you make characters for the Mages to interact with, give them a goal, whatever they're striving towards. This may be the same as their Forces goal (see the Forces chapter) but most likely it's smaller and more personal. Whenever you don't know how that character would act or react, refer back to their goal.

Demand Evocative Answers, then Follow Through

Sometimes you're going to be asking leading, provocative, and personal questions about the Mages. You can even do so with questions that assert a truth in the question itself, like asking a Mage who they screwed over in the past. This is part of how you build the world collaboratively with the other players. Don't let them off the hook with simple, safe answers, press for more, get them into the details. And once you've got that, make sure to (as they say in improv) "yes, and" their answer and build on it in fun and interesting ways.

Sometimes, Give Them Exactly What They're Asking For

Often times, because Mages lives aren't boring, there's challenges and hurdles in the way of getting what they want. But if every little step of the way has a hurdle, suddenly no one can move. Sometimes you should give characters exactly what they're asking for, because otherwise their lives become predictable (and therefore boring). Other times, you should also give them exactly what they ask for, and have them realize why it's a monkey's paw just a little too late.

Root for the Mages

You and the other players are on the same team,

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so it only makes sense to root for the Mages. That doesn't mean you want their lives to be easy (boring), but you also want to see them overcome their struggles, talk about things that matter to them, and do cool things. Conversely, it's okay for the Mages to fail, and if it happens you should let it happen and not try to save them, because you're rooting for them, not trying to play for them. Cheer them on when they do something great, and wince and cover your eyes when they make mistakes, just like you might for your favorite characters on a tv show.

Think About the Bigger Picture

Sometimes something will happen in a scene that has a far-reaching effect, outside of just the limited scene that's currently on screen. Think about how big things can affect your Forces, even the ones who aren't present at the moment. Also, sometimes a Mage will roll a 6-, or the table will look to you to see what happens, and none of your moves make sense to have happen right then in that scene. Make a move off-screen, describe what's happening to the players, and what, if anything, their characters notice about it.

Take Some Decisions Out Of Your Own Hands

Sometimes you just don't have an answer, or you don't want to be responsible for the outcome of something. You're allowed to pass the buck occasionally, by doing one of a few things. You can turn the question back on one of the players. "I don't know Vince, do you have a secret stash of highly dangerous alchemical components in your apartment?" You can look to the outcome of a move, if one applies. You can look to the relevant character's goal, or you can look to the relevant

Force's status track. Those might already have the decision made for you.

Don't Be Afraid to be Obvious

It can be so easy to get wrapped up in trying to think of something cool and unique, and sometimes that's fun, but this game works very well if you sometimes just do or say the obvious thing. Tropes are tropes for a reason, and actions have logical consequences, so when a Mage is trying to **Outwit**, **Outpace**, or **Outfox** a pursuer by climbing up a tall building, and they roll a 6-, you can go ahead and have the obvious thing happen. They fall flat on their back and hurt themselves (**Deal Damage**).

Being obvious can let the players feel good that they predicted something. It's boring if that happens too often, but getting it right from time to time can be rewarding and satisfying. Plus, if everyone knows what is obviously coming up and seems into it, then you already know that if you make it happen, the players will like it.

Additionally, since everyone is different, sometimes what is obvious to you isn't at all obvious to the other players. In our experience, you can just keep saying what's obvious, and the players will keep thinking the story is full of creative twists and turns.

3.4 Your Moves

Your moves behave differently from other moves in the game. While most moves trigger when a character not controlled by you takes an action in the fiction, your moves are a set of options to choose from when the others at the table look to

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you. The move gives you the general framework of what happens, and then it's up to you to describe the actual events in the narrative. Everyone at the table looking at you will usually happen when nothing else is happening, when one of their moves prompts a response or interpretation from you, or when they are asking a question about the world. You will privately pick a move, come up with how it works in, and then make it real.

Your moves are short phrases like "Make them Conjure or Buy" or "Imprison someone." Other than in-game concepts like Discord, they don't carry special meaning. "Raise the Stakes" really does literally mean do that. Moves must always follow from the fiction, and likely will not look the same twice. In one scene, you might choose to Raise the Stakes by having a tense conversation about which bedroom a guest will stay in suddenly become about whether to remain roommates at all. In another, Raising the Stakes might be knives coming out at a fistfight. Whatever happens, describe it in the context of the fiction, not the game rules. It shouldn't actually matter to the other players that you are using Invent a Predicament for Someone. What matters is that a Lookout saunters into the alley for a smoke break just as they're about to step through their dimensional door.

When you make a move, it can be broadly categorized as "hard" or "soft". Hard moves have consequences that are immediate and irrevocable. They should inspire further action, but will not simply be undone or blocked. A secret coming out, an item breaking, an injury. Soft moves advance the action, in particular by setting up hard moves that will come to pass if the Mages don't intercede. Someone coming home but not yet seeing a Mage in

a compromising position could be a soft move, and if the Mage doesn't work to hide or explain things, then soon the secret will come out, as a hard move. Most moves can be hard or soft, depending on the circumstances, but some are easier to use one way or the other. We have arranged them from generally softer to generally harder, but that's just for convenience, and for when you're looking for inspiration.

When you need to choose a move, choose one that can follow logically from the game's fiction. It might not be the only one, but it should be plausible. Remember it's OK to be obvious, so if something from a moment ago could demand a response, then find a move that fits it and say that. However, also remember your Principle to Think about the Bigger Picture. Things you have set up in the past can suddenly make an appearance and still be following from the fiction.

Most of the time, you'll be making soft moves. These let the action keep advancing, but keep giving the other players the ability to respond to things. Remember that soft moves should suggest hard moves that could occur if nothing happens. It can even be as direct as "With a crack, the branch breaks. You're right underneath it! What will you do?" and if they say "I keep standing there", then go ahead and use a hard move to deal damage.

You are empowered to make a hard move when they hand you a perfect opportunity on a silver platter. This can be because the character explicitly ignores a soft move that was already in play. It can also be because a character tries something that will clearly go poorly for them, and you respond with the soft move that is Tell them the possible consequences and ask, and they follow through with

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it anyway. If something that you have been setting up, through one or more soft moves, comes to pass, that's a time to make a hard move. This won't be a surprise because of the principle to be generous with the truth, but can represent the Mages running out of time, or the dramatic irony of the Mages not noticing something that the players are aware of. In addition, if someone rolls a 6-, you make a hard move. It may be mostly dictated by a "on a 6-" clause in the player's move if present, but most of the time you're on your own, and have to follow the fiction to come up with an outcome.

One very flexible soft move is Set up a Future Problem, which can stretch to anything from the extreme short term, like "The car swerves and is coming right at you!" to a more far-off "As you shake the Dean's hand, you see a camera flash. This will definitely be in the papers tomorrow..."

Another flexible move is Declare Something Bad has Happened Elsewhere. "Something bad" is quite broad, and the thing about Mages is that today's "elsewhere" is often tomorrow's "here."

After you make a move, always turn it back to the other players. Ask them, "what do you do?"

Softer Moves

Tell them the possible consequences and ask

This is a handy move to use for when a Mage gets stuck with a hard choice. It's also good for times when they ask if it's possible for their character to do something. Also for times when they say something like "I jump out of the airplane." Tell them the possible consequences of getting what they want, and ask "do you do it?" For example:

"So Piper, you're trying to prove that you're someone these spirits should listen to. You can do it, but you're going to have to bring your people in line and snap at one of them. They're going to feel hurt. What do you do?"

Offer an opportunity, with or without a cost

Another very handy move, especially when the table stalls a little bit. You can use this for anything from telling the Mages about a great sale on herbs, to letting them eavesdrop on someone important. For example:

"Yes, you can get closer and hear exactly what they're saying, but if you want to stay hidden you're going to have to step directly on a pile of rare books. What do you do?"

Set Up a Future Problem

One of your most versatile moves, this is one of your best ways to set up a future hard move. In particular this should give the Mages information which, if they don't act on, will result in a hard move. This could be far in the future, for example:

"You get the ritual off in time, and as the final energy flashes out from your circle, you realize that some of it got siphoned off into a battery on the other side of town. Someone must be trying to power some really big magic. What do you do?"

This can also be very near in the future, even just a moment in the future. For example:

"They activate a runic circle drawn on the ground in front of them, and you see an electrical wire break off the telephone pole, it's headed straight for Piper. What do you do?"

Give Them an Answer They Won't Like

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Sometimes Mages are trying to gather information, or ask a question about the world. This move is where you can let them succeed on gathering that information, or let them notice the thing about the world they're asking about, but when they do they find out it's not what they were hoping for. For example:

"Your research on the ancient faeries is actually quite fruitful, you learn that they were much more powerful, well respected, and given a wide berth if possible. They don't share the modern faeries weakness to iron, music, or fire. And worst of all, you learn that they feed off mortal magic. What do you do?"

Pit their Desires Against Each Other

This can mean either pitting one Mage's desire against another's, or it can mean making a single Mage's desires conflict in that moment. For example:

"The ice princess is willing to give you what you need to rescue your friend, a scepter made of pure unmelting ice, but if she does so, she warns that she won't be able to hold off the ghosts that have been threatening you any more. What do you do?"

Demand Upkeep from an Anchor

Anchors are real people, or places, or things that need attention paid to them. That's how they ground the Mage. So a window being broken in your apartment, or a call from your mother asking you to stop by for a family party since she hasn't seen you in forever. These are particularly useful to set up later scenes focusing on that Anchor, because the Mage either needs to go upkeep that relationship, or risk losing their tether to reality.

"You finish reading that tome and the possibilities

are running through your head, there's so much you can do now that you never could before. But before you get a chance to test any of it, your phone rings. It's your aunt calling to remind you that you promised to mow the lawn yesterday, and it's going to rain tomorrow, so you really need to get over there and do it. What do you do?"

Slip a Status

Status tracks are divided into two sections, which amount to basically "Stable" or "Slipping." If a status track has hit code 30 or below, it's slipping, and will keep getting worse faster and faster. Mechanically, this happens quickly because it is a soft move. This move describes it getting worse. For example:

"Yeah, you run and catch up with them, but that cracked rib from earlier just isn't putting up well with the exertion, and suddenly you feel a stabbing pain in your right side, and it's harder to breathe. Slip your health status track down to Code 20, punctured lung. What do you do?"

Make them Conjure or Buy

Sometimes a player will ask you if their Mage has a certain item, and you're not sure. One thing to do is to tell them that they don't, but they know where they can buy it. Or since they're Mages, if they can figure out a way to conjure it, they're welcome to have it.

"You don't have any Black Cohosh for that healing potion on hand, it's endangered in fact. But you think Ashley at the local herb shop might have some tucked away in the locked display case. You remember it being pretty expensive though. What do you do?"

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Show them the Downsides of their Paradigm

This is a way to make the Mages think about their magic. Put them in a situation where their Paradigm, their way of seeing the world, is more hindrance than it is a help, as opposed to normal, where it is likely a source of freedom and agency. Consider in particular that most Paradigms have some form of “build-up” that happens from doing the same kind of thing over and over. The generic term for this is Resonance, but for a given Mage it could be lingering manifestations, an electric charge, or simply specific vibes. Maybe doing all that fire magic becomes a problem when traveling in a forest.

“So you’ve been preparing for this meeting for a while now, and to make sure you’re suitably prepared, were going to connect with your Source. So you do a line of coke, and you know how it lets you see the true nature of things? You realize you’re starting to see everyone’s personal demons. There are so many, it’s getting hard to see, or focus. Some of them make it hard to keep it together. What do you do?”

Invent a Predicament for Someone

Players will put their Mages in all sorts of predicaments anyway, but sometimes it’s good to throw an unexpected one at them, and put the Mage (not necessarily the player) on the spot.

“Remember how we talked about what would happen if your sister showed up? Just as you complete the spirit binding and the gears begin to turn on their own, you hear a pounding at the door and a familiar voice. ‘River! I know you’re home!’ What do you do?”

Raise the Stakes

This means raising the tension, putting more on the line, or otherwise upping the amount of investment the Mages have in the outcome of a given situation. For example:

“Your ritual goes off wonderfully, and you’re just about to close down the circle when a sinister presence steps through the gate in the fence. They look at you and say in a deep, rumbling voice ‘You’ve stopped us from possessing any of you, true, but now we’re going to possess the entire city, and there aren’t enough of you to stop that.’ What do you do?”

Introduce a Lookout

Oftentimes, Mages try to set up circumstances so that they can make free use of their magic, without anyone “spying” on them for the Consensus. They’ll meet up with other Mages in secret basements, summon spirits deep in the woods, or they set up a distraction for everyone else in the area. So it can provide some complications when a Lookout shows up out of nowhere. If they’re about to do Rending magic, they’ll either have to stop, or trigger the move. And if they’re about to do “questionably” harmonious magic, a lookout being there will likely make them have to Sell a Lie to keep it from being Rending.

“The two of you have just finished lining the doorway in chalk runes, but before you can activate the portal, a patron comes in from the other side. ‘Excuse me, is this the reference section?’ What do you do?”

Threaten an Anchor

Much like the Demand Upkeep from an Anchor move, this one is a little bit more immediate. Capture their cousin, or slap a foreclosure sign on

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their house. Remember, they have to go deal with it, or will lose it.

"You get home, eager to tune up your motorcycle and maybe go for a spin...and instead find a ticket with the number of a tow truck company! What do you do?"

Soft or Hard Moves

Hit them with the static realities of their world

Mages often wish they lived in a full fantasy world, but sadly they do not. The Consensus holds sway, and is strong. Use this move when they come face-to-face with the limitations that even Mages find.

"The building is oppressive, and you can feel the weight of disbelief. Try as you might, you can't find the kind of convenient, shadowed corner you need to hide a transformation. Fluorescent light bathes every inch. What do you do?"

Isolate Them

Mages are most powerful when they are together, even if their personalities may clash. Use this when you want to separate one or two from others they expected to be with.

"You suddenly notice that while you were talking, the sun has set, and now you're not sure where the rest of the cabal is. You hear sirens in the distance. What do you do?"

Use one of your Force Moves

Forces have moves of their own, dictated by the Stressor the Force relates to. You should have the moves written on your Forces sheets, and can use one of them just like any other MC move.

Consider a game with a Force of rationality-focused Mages who seek to stamp out mystery, wonder, and creativity. They exhibit the Stressor Control, and have the move "Blackmail them".

"When you check your mail, you find an envelope with no return address or postmark. Inside is a picture of your house, and a letter that just says: 'We know you're behind the blackouts. Don't even think about showing your face tomorrow.' What do you do?"

Declare Something Bad has Happened Elsewhere

You have a Principle to Think about the Bigger Picture, and this is a direct expression of that. "Elsewhere" should be somewhat relevant, whether somewhere that you know the Mages will be back to, or whatever happened there is now coming here.

"With a start you realize... if all of you are here, who's watching Amandal? You hear a deep mocking laugh from the other side of the building."

"You hear the sound of sirens off in the distance. They could be headed this way, or it could be a coincidence, but do you want to take that risk?"

Make their Move Backfire

Many moves have clear ways they can go wrong. Attacks misfire, plans play into an enemy's hands, intimate moments sour. You can show the worst possible outcome for a move, or can show someone else do it better.

"You cast around looking for Any Port in this raging Storm of magical energy, and you realize there's only one spot. The eye of the storm, which is occupied by the beast itself."

"You begin to speak with the full authority of the Winter Court, to tell these upstarts their place,

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when the Winter Princess herself steps out from behind a tree and says 'Actually...'"

Harder Moves

Change the Battlefield

Use this when you want to throw the Mages' control of a situation into question. This can be like Raise the Stakes, but encompasses things that are more out of left field as well. Changing the "battlefield" (even if it's actually just a parlour filled with relatives) can mean new Forces arrive, an environmental effect, or revealing a dramatic complication.

*"So you Step Sideways, planning to phase out and phase back in, but while you're on the Other Side you see this vast space with creepy floating creatures, and they're fighting to get in. It looks like this battle is taking place on more planes than you knew."

"Everyone's fighting, you feel like you have a good handle on things - and then the ghost pirate ship appears, with Gordon dangling in a cage off the bow. They're rowdy and their cannons are armed."

Take away things they expect to have

Most of the time, you can assume the Mages have what they need for what they want to do. A cell phone, a bottle of water, batteries. This extends to more rare items, once a Mage has acquired it and makes a point of keeping it around. When you use this move, suddenly all those assumptions go out the window. It can be direct and in the moment, like having a business card snatched away, or it could be retrospective and only now realized,

like a wand not being where it was last put down.

*“So you shoot the harpoon gun, but you aren’t braced and the gun flies out of your hands, backwards! Your target falls, but another guy sees that you’re unarmed and jumps at you.”

“Something has gone mysteriously missing? How about the gas for your boat. Not that you’d notice right away, of course.”

Imprison Someone

Mages’ lives involve the fundamental freedom to do what they believe, and so imprisonment is a particularly stark action. It doesn’t have to be to a Mage in particular, but if it involves anyone they care about, it can dramatically shape their reactions. In a world full of police, gangsters, manipulative relatives, and magical binding circles, “imprisonment” can take many forms.

*“As you look around the ballroom, you notice what are clearly ensorcelled humans serving drinks, and wait, that’s the man you saved from drowning! As dead-eyed as the rest of them.”

“Allison opens the door to get into the taxi, and the driver looks you in the eye, and as you recognize him, says ‘My Lady sends her regards,’ and drives off before you can react”

Adjust a Status Track

Sometimes a mage’s actions (or inactions) should have a clear and obvious impact on a status track, but that status track isn’t yet slipping; or maybe increasing its status isn’t what makes sense. Adjust it as you see fit: advance an Anchor upkeep track, de-escalate a Force track, or even reduce the severity of a mage’s health status.

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“As you finish your impassioned speech and look out over the crowd, you realize it’s falling flat; they aren’t buying it. And then they start jeering, and you see your credibility slipping away. Set your Consensus Shift status track back to 40.”

“It’s been a busy time for you all, hasn’t it? Police called because of the fraternity twice, position as a social hub has been falling because the coolest kids are going everywhere but to you for their parties, and now that Piper’s staying there things are getting tense. You get a letter from the administration, the fraternity is officially on probation.” While you mark off another code on the Internal Forces Status Track.

“Sure, your magic centers around the Breath of Life. As you speak soothing words, he breathes easier. Lazarus, heal 1 Harm.”

Add a Restriction to a Mage’s Paradigm

A mage’s paradigm is inherent and intuitive, and sometimes it might take some exploration to understand the full extent of it. Sometimes that exploration re-categorizes certain things from ‘we might be able to finagle a way to do that’ to ‘that’s flat-out impossible and I can’t believe we ever thought otherwise.’ When a mage attempts an edge-case use of magic and it doesn’t go in their favor, that’s a good time to add a restriction to their paradigm to reflect that update to their magical approach.

“So his fist is coming for your head, and as your self-protective instincts take over, you try to yank at his life-thread to throw him off balance. But you can’t get a grip on it, and he keeps coming. It occurs to you as your head rings from the impact that there never has been room in your paradigm

for selfish acts. Add a restriction to your paradigm: self-defense is considered selfish."

"So you reach out for ghosts under the sea - and get nothing at all. Maybe this is why ghost pirates always have a ship. Add this restriction: The Sea's Vastness Outdoes Mortal Magic."

"You try to speak across boundaries to him, but it's like his mind is a mirrored sphere. You can't reach him, and add the restriction, 'The close-minded hears only themselves.'"

Assign Discord

Discord is what happens when reality bends around a Mage like a spring. It hasn't given yet, but something is probably going to happen. Rending magic that affects a Lookout always produces some, but sometimes other sources of Discord will follow from the fiction.

"You're used to having that little harmonious spell that keeps your garden pest-free going, but just as Jack, your new neighbor, comes over, and their eyes glance over the perfectly-formed leaves, you feel a sudden lurch. Take 1 Discord. 'I'm looking forwards so much to getting to know you,' says Jack, eyes gleaming unpleasantly. What do you do?"

*"You're not working at all within the local expectations. Your camera flashlight can work to illuminate Glamour, but take 2 Discord."

"The ritual is being resisted by something with a deep hold over this place. You all take 1 Discord, and at this rate it's going to get worse."

Deal Damage

The life of a mage is dangerous, and danger often involves pain. When they fall, when they're struck,

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when they deign to tinker with untested equipment while not wearing PPE, deal damage and have them roll to Suffer Harm.

Remember that if they have not yet expended their Preparations, now is the time, as long as there's any Harmonious way to explain how they can escape unscathed. Also remember that Preparations make Mages a lot tougher than they would otherwise be, so don't be afraid to use this move.

"Even as you tug haphazardly at the tangle of wires, you realize the moment when 'down to the wire' becomes 'too late,' and you aren't going to defuse the bomb in time. You scramble backwards as it ticks down to zero, and are thrown back with the force of the explosion. Take four harm."

*"So there's this big boom from out on the water, and huge droplets spill down on you - and hand-sized swordfish. One gets you right in the shoulder. Take 2 Harm."

"It's trident against trident, and you stab him good, but he got you, too, with a glancing blow. 1 Harm."*

Make them Backlash

Magic in a Consensus that denies its existence carries its own inherent risk. That risk most often manifests in the form of backlash. Use this move when a spell goes sideways, a spirit gets away from them, or a Mage reaches too far.

"It's the first time you've tried using magic to change your own appearance, and you're wrestling with your own mind as it clings to your established self-image. It takes all your willpower to silence that internal dissent, but you're on the verge of succeeding-until you catch a glimpse of your distorted reflection on the window. The unfinished spell

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shatters and turns against you. Roll backlash.”

“As you and George lock eyes, you feel all that Discord bouncing around inside you trying to get out, and suddenly - it does.”

3.5 Running a Session

A session of Consensus is a self-contained advance of the story. It will build on what came before and set up new directions for the future, but it has a beginning, middle, and end, and should always change the game world in ways not easily undone.

Starting a Session

Your MC sheet has a list of steps to guide you through the beginning of the session.

Gather The MC sheet, PC summary sheet, Forces, Flags, and Portents

These cover all the essential information you need to make sure the table has available.

Distribute and resolve “love letters”

Some MCs like to prepare for a session by writing short, personalized notes to some or all of the players’ characters, ironically called “love letters.” These are particularly useful for updating what has happened if there was a time skip, or if there are specific aspects of a character’s state of mind you want to explore. A love letter may include a custom move, such as a choice of options or even a roll, and may have lasting consequences for

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the session. The results shouldn't move straight into the action, because there is still more session start to perform, but distribute them early so the players can start reading them, thinking about their implications, and setting up what elements will come up in their first scenes.

Look over and read out Flags, note which ones can be changed

Flags are one of the main methods that allow Mages to mark experience, so everyone should be reminded of them and be able to reference them. In addition, Flags which have been hit at least once are available to be changed if the player wishes, so remind them of that.

Mark one Code off every Portent Status Track

Portents have a fairly short lifespan, so that they will be brought up again before they fade out of memory. If you mark off Code N of the Portent, it should come up fairly early in the session.

Mark one Code off every Anchor Status Track

Anchors require maintenance. The Status Tracks advancing represent this.

Note all slipping Status Tracks

Status Tracks which are slipping are very relevant during this session. They should feel like whatever they are connected to is beginning to spiral out of control, or fall out of reach, or come to an

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inexorable conclusion. Advancing a slipping Status Track is a soft move, so you can do it almost any time it makes sense, and going over them at the start of the session will help you think of it. Write the slipping Status Tracks on your MC sheet.

Review any effects that last session were decided to be extended into this one

Some game effects last “for the rest of the session”, but might come up near the end of one. This lets you extend things that seem worth it, like a bonus or penalty that hasn’t come into play yet.

Perform moves triggered at start of session

Remind the players to perform moves on their sheets which are triggered at the start of the session. Much like love letters, these won’t start the action exactly, even on a 6-, but they do prepare things.

Frame a scene and make a soft move

Now, you have seen all of the pieces you have to work with. Fairly abstractly, there are the Mages with their hopes and desires, and the Forces relevant to their world. More urgently, there are Portents, Anchors, and other Status Tracks that are demanding attention, and you may have already been told to make moves. Now, frame a scene according to the rules below, and open the action with a soft move, to require a response, and you’re off.

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Scene Framing and Spotlight

Consensus is played out in scenes. Each one should go as long as it needs to but no longer. This usually means about 15-30 minutes, but you will find what rhythms work for your table.

A scene involves one or more of the Mages. One of your jobs is to manage the “spotlight”, making sure that everyone gets some time with scenes focused on them and doesn’t go too long away from the action. Some sessions may have most or all of the Mages together in the same scenes, but often the Mages will want to go their own separate ways. Look out for opportunities to show them together in twos or threes, but don’t neglect individual scenes when they fit. When you are deciding on a new scene, think about who hasn’t been central recently, and see if you can frame one around them.

All scenes should fall into at least one of three categories: “Anchor scenes”, “Inspiration scenes”, and “Force scenes”. The categories serve different purposes, for the Mages’ goals and the advancement of the story. If you know which Mages are going to be in a new scene, their last known positions or their goals may dictate or inspire what category the scene should be. Or, you may know what category of scene comes next, and then figure out what would be going on and so what Mages would be involved. If you only know what’s going on, not who is involved or which category it should be, think about the category first, and then set the scene with mages who inspire that kind of scene. We find the game feels best when you keep a balance between the types of scenes, roughly 1/3 of each in a given session. Of course some sessions will

3.5. Running a Session

involve a lot more paradigm discussion than anything else, and that's okay, but when you're guiding the scenes, keep the 1/3 rule in the back of your mind.

Anchor Scenes

One of the central tensions of a Mage's life is feeling like they have one foot in each of two worlds. Sometimes they're probably late to work because a spell took longer than expected. Sometimes they miss the midnight full moon ritual time because their parent is sick in the hospital. Sometimes their Aunt June wants them to go to a craft fair on Sunday because they haven't had quality time in forever, but there's a spirit killing people on the loose, and Sunday is the only time the rest of your Cabal can get together to stop it.

Anchor scenes are about what keeps our Mages human, and tethered to the human world. An example might be a scene spending time with their Connection Anchor (Aunt June) doing something that they both enjoy (going to a craft fair). Another might be a scene of scrounging and doing odd jobs in order to afford rent on their Shelter Anchor. These can take many forms, but in general they are the most grounded scenes in Consensus. During an Anchor scene is also when a Mage can refresh their preparations, so long as the Anchor that the scene is based on isn't slipping. Often an anchor scene will be about upkeeping the anchor or relationship with the anchor, and thus will clear that anchor's status track.

If the Anchor is slipping, then there will be something key going on that, if not addressed, will cause the Mage to lose the Anchor. This might have

3. The Master of Ceremonies

been understood before the scene, if events have made it clear, or it might need to be determined as the scene begins. Whatever it is, this makes the scene more urgent, even if the Mage is trying to stay cool. In this case, focus on the real importance of the Mage's choices, and how they still can keep the Anchor, if they're willing to work at it. If the Mage is successful at reconnecting with their Anchor, clear the Status Track. They have a reprieve, for now. If they aren't... refer to slipping status tracks and the move **Lose an Anchor**.

Inspiration Scenes

Many Mages have big, sweeping ideas about the world, the Universe, and their place in it. Mages who don't still tend to find themselves brushing up against questions about these things, whether they like it or not. Inspiration scenes focus in on this aspect of their lives, seeing what happens when Mages get talking.

They are called Inspiration scenes because a Mages' Inspirations, or potential Inspirations, are very common sources of these events. Two Mages having a long discussion about not only their Paradigms but what the differences mean to how they accomplish things in the world and how they feel about the people around them will probably become Inspirations for each other. This also covers more esoteric scenes like a Mage deciding to really get to know the spirit that lives in their wand.

Inspiration scenes can be tricky because they're a less-common type of scene to see in a roleplaying game. However, players often really do enjoy them. Look out for when it seems like a Mage could have a good time teaching, learning, or just talking, and

3.5. Running a Session

give them Inspiration scenes to play it out.

Force Scenes

A Force scene is a goal-seeking scene. Either a force is working towards their goals, and the Mages either help or hinder, or the Mages have a goal, which various Forces will help or hinder.

As the scene starts, if the Mages involved already have a clear goal, your moves present interesting choices and challenges. If they do not and are being more reactive to a Force, then start with a soft move that gives the Mages something to react to, and therefore a goal.

Continue until it's clear what the outcome is going to be. If there's a conflict and it becomes clear the Mages have the upper hand, go ahead and wrap up and move to the next scene. If no clarity is coming, that tells you that instead of a resolution, further scenes will be needed to see more sides of these events. Wrap it up so that it doesn't drag on, and start later scenes reacting to the ongoing status.

Ending a Session

At some point, it will be the right time to end the session. Maybe the players will have time constraints, or a significant climax was reached in the story and everyone will need some time to process, or maybe everyone is just getting antsy. This is often around 3 hours, but really does vary hugely by table. When it is time, after the scene wraps up, announce it is the end of the session, and read out the move:

3. The Master of Ceremonies

At the end of session: note any effects that lasted “until end of session,” but should continue into the next. Then, ask yourselves these questions as a group. For every one you answer “yes” to, everyone marks experience.

- Did you show the lengths you were willing to go to in order to maintain an Anchor?
- Did you uncover a secret?
- Did you learn something that puts your paradigms in perspective, or caused you to question them?
- Did you expose the depths of your humanity, to yourself or to someone else?
- Did you witness loss, selfishness, or pain born of magic?

Effects that last “until end of session” but might continue into the next include things like the physical representation of Discord in the Backlash move. If it happened in the last scene, for example, its full weight probably won’t have been felt, so it would definitely be worth extending into the next session. However, don’t feel obligated, if something already seems played out, or is otherwise no longer interesting.

3.6 Your Sheets

These sheets help you organize your thoughts and are more tools for keeping the game running.

The MC

This sheet should be front-and-center. It reminds you of your agenda and principles, and lists all of your moves, arranged from hard moves to soft moves to help prompt you when it's time to make one. It also has a place to list all the currently-slipping Status Tracks, so that they are never far from your mind (and never far from the Slip a Status Track move).

PC Summaries

This sheet collapses the essential details of the Mages down to the size of cards. Especially early in the campaign, it can help you refer to the Mages by their names, and means you don't constantly have to ask "What are your Opposed Aspects again? And what's your mother's name?". You don't need to obsessively track every single detail of the characters here, but keep the broad strokes.

Forces

Forces are your main organizational tool for notable elements in the world, and the sheets collect all the relevant information about them. Keeping them close at hand will help you make Force moves, or realize what Force to bring in when you think about the bigger picture. Do keep them updated, as their Status Tracks change, as cast members come and go, and as you associate custom moves and other details with them.

It's OK to write some speculation on Force sheets, but remember not to actually plan anything. As such, it should be fine for a player to see one,

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since you shouldn't have any deep dark secrets you are scheming to unveil at the worst possible moment.

3.7 Sundries

Some things to remember.

When you're trying to figure out what to say, and picking a Move, remember that the game's rules will influence what you're going to say. For example, when a mage rolls the Suffer Harm move, on a 7-9, the MC chooses an option. So you choose one of those options, and since the Principles say to Stay in the Narrative, you describe what happens to the Mage based on which option you choose.

Your Forces will also inform what you say. Not only from their Force moves, but for example, when a ritual draws unwanted attention, you should look at your forces to see which ones might count as "unwanted attention" for that particular ritual.

Like we mentioned above, sometimes you'll want to turn questions back on the person who asked them, or turn them over to the group at large. "That's a good question, who are the Frat House's biggest rivals?"

Sometimes you'll want to let your narration wander a little bit. Imagine looking idly at the scene, like you've paused a movie, and notice some detail, something not at all relevant or material to the scene, and describe it. For example, "here's no heater in this basement, but there is an intricate symbol etched into the wall. It looks faded now, but you can just catch a sense of heat, and looking deeper into it the lines curve in on themselves like licking tongues of flame..."

Zoom in and out of scenes sometimes. Sometimes you'll want to plan out a ritual in exacting detail, and describe everyone's every motion as they contribute to it, but then partway through the ritual, say "And the rest of it goes off without a hitch." Same goes for between sessions. Sometimes you'll want to pick up moments after the last session finished, other times you can make it days or weeks later. Use your judgement, and do what's fun for you and the rest of the table.

Sometimes you'll want to zoom in on a move too, Outmaneuvering someone might mean parkour over a wall and crossing 10 feet of distance. It might also mean staying ahead of their search teams for the next week. You can use moves to find out what happens in very zoomed in scenes, and very zoomed out ones as well.

Take breaks when you feel like it. The game taking place in scenes gives you a lot of stopping points, and though sometimes you'll want to continue straight on to the next one, sometimes it will feel better to take a little while to stretch, refill drinks, and so on. Pay attention to when the energy at the table is flagging and it might be worth everyone clearing their heads. You'll be surprised with a little physical motion can do for your energy. Conversely, a short break at a cliffhanger can help make things more intense. I usually find that about three breaks during a three to four hour session feels right, two short and one long.

Chapter 4

The First Session

4.1 Before the First Session

Player

If you're interested in playing Consensus, you likely have some ideas that you'd like to see in a story about Mages. This is great! Keep those in mind. But, don't come with a character concept you're married to. Let the details be worked out at the first session, when you're hearing from all the other players. Likewise, if you don't have many ideas, you can check out our own inspirations in the Ludography (page ??), but don't stress about it. You'll be able to get ideas and bounce things off your fellow players, and the game will guide you through the rest.

4. The First Session

Player

Oh, and get a couple of dice to bring to the first session. The ones with six sides and pips. Or numbers if you prefer.

Make sure you have all the materials needed for play. A printout of each of the playbooks, a few copies of the basic moves sheet, an MC sheet, a copy of the Forces sheet, as well as the Internal Forces and Consensus Forces sheet. Read through the playbooks and basic moves if you haven't already, they form the core of the game. Maybe bring a few pairs of dice in case any players forgot them.

Read through this whole book. You don't have to memorize it, but at least skim the parts about the different character playbooks, and read the rest with as much attention as you can spare. You'll want to familiarize yourself with the process of creating Forces, but do not begin to create them. Not even one.

You can also start to come up with some ideas for fantastic imagery to use, settings, themes, descriptions and the like, but don't commit yourself to any plot, storyline, or even make any characters before the game. You'll see why as you start to play, this is a collaborative effort, and the game is so much more fun when you can take those ideas

MC

and run with them.

MC

4.2 Character Creation

Initial Expectations and Safety Rules

Narrator

This is a game centered around humans with magical abilities, called Mages. It is set in modern, or at least semi-modern, times, in a world that looks more or less like our own, at least to ordinary people. It is meant to explore questions of humanity. It will not glorify violence, having power over your fellow humans, or exclusionary rhetoric. We get enough of that in the default reality, and Mages are drawn from marginalized communities as a general rule, not from those who already have the most power.

Roleplaying involves vulnerability, and any game set in familiar times and dealing with philosophical questions can easily bring up topics that may make some people uncomfortable or even unwelcome. We very much want to support the use of the game to explore personal issues, but never at the expense of the players' wellbeing. Thus, before even looking at the characters, here are some rules to follow throughout the game to help everyone push themselves exactly as far as they want to go, but no farther.

4. The First Session

Discuss and Align Themes

The best thing you can do is talk about themes as a table. Find out what themes you all are interested in playing for. It doesn't have to be exhaustive, but this is the time to find out whether you're aiming for a game with a lot of romance and scheming, or a lot of hard looks at inequality, or peering into horrors beyond comprehension. Don't hold things in reserve here. Learning what everyone expects so you can spring a surprise genre shift on them not only damages trust, it won't work very well in a world where Mages really can shape reality. Be forthcoming with the truth. This won't have to limit you. If you want to see Mages have to deal as they uncover one terrifying secret after another, tell the table that. If that excites them as much as it does you, it can be a great basis. Don't forget that you shouldn't be coming up with those secrets yet, though.

Pay particular attention to anything that players say they don't want to see. Don't push them on it, either, just be sure that you'll be steering away from those topics. Note that these won't necessarily be as simple as particular topics. "I don't want the game to be about faeries" is fine, but so is "I don't want to play a character who is abandoned by others."

4. The First Session

Player

Talk about themes as a table. Find out what themes the other players are interested in playing for. Bring up whether you're aiming for a game with a lot of romance and scheming, or a lot of hard looks at inequality, or peering into horrors beyond comprehension. If you want to uncover secrets, talk about that!

Explicit Safety Mechanics

Narrator

Because of the vulnerability inherent in roleplaying, and roleplaying potentially difficult themes, it is important that you use some form of explicit safety mechanic at your table. There are many available, and we have included a sample of them here, ones that we've found work well for Consensus. If you have a favorite safety mechanic, we highly encourage you to bring it with you to this game.

As the person expected to maintain and update the state of the world, paying attention to all the players' characters and adding new elements whenever the rest of the table looks at you to see what happens next, you do have some extra responsibility here. You should watch out for if someone is treading in a direction that has been forbidden for

MC

this game, and try to steer away from it. Call it out explicitly if it seems like it's happening anyway. Often, a simple reminder is all that's needed, if a player forgot. Do not be afraid to use the safety mechanics for your game if need be, however.

Be extra sensitive to your fellow players' safety needs. Interpret anything they have said is off-limits broadly, and be scrupulous about following and respecting any safety mechanics invoked by other players. If you are thinking about adding something to the game that was not explicitly disallowed but still could be an unpleasant surprise, ask about it ahead of time (as a starting point, anything that would either bump the rating of the game up to an 'R', or anything that would add a new content descriptor to an 'R' rating, is worthy of checking).

MC

Player

This is a game where you have more leeway and ability to add elements to the world than in some others. This means it is important for you to think about the safety mechanics, especially anything that has been forbidden, in terms of what you add as well as what other people say your character interacts with.

4. The First Session

The X Card

Narrator

Credit for this mechanic goes to John Stavropoulos

Give every player an index card with a large, clear 'X' on it. Explain that at any time, any player may raise or clearly tap their X card. If this happens, we immediately edit out whatever was X-carded. No explanation of why is necessary, or should be requested. If there is an issue, anyone can call for a break to discuss it privately.

This ensures that everyone at the table remains in control of what they will be exposed to, without having to figure out and list hard lines ahead of time.

Narrator

Dial It Up/Dial it Down

[This is a mechanic for recalibrating in the middle of a scene, to help stop them from going too far, and help stop them from not going far enough.]

Magic

Narrator

Consensus is fairly flexible in the type of magic it showcases, but there are some starting points to know so you're all on the same page. Small, subtle magic is easily accessible to most Mages. Magic does not inherently carry a cost, we don't track a mana pool that determines what spells we can cast, and so effects which are likely only noticed by the Mage in question may be produced at almost any time. Larger effects, more in line with advanced but still modern technology, are achievable with effort and help, or with practice. Technically, there is no true limit to what a determined Mage can achieve, but their achievement may be tempered by a great many caveats. Reality has ways of reigning in obvious magic, such that this is not a game where you can expect to see Mages casually flying through the air, being pointed up at by curious bystanders. But, a Mage's life will be full of magic, both their own and other people's, and it will be enough to help them with their problems, cause some other problems, but never truly make them all go away.

Introduce Playbooks

Make the playbooks available, laying them all on the table or handing some out to each player to be passed around.

MC

In addition, read these short intros, unless everyone already seems to know what they want.

The Cabalist has a group of mages with a similar paradigm to their own, that they may or may not be the leader of. If you want to be part of a group, or have other mages to work with regularly, play a cabalist. **Warning:** A lot of your power is in your cabal, and that means lots of drama trying to wrangle them.

The Hedge Mage is flexible in their magic, they have a lot of options, and feel the most like a classic wizard. **Warning:** The Hedge Mage is eclectic and doesn't have a specific focus or niche, and it can be hard to know exactly what to be doing at any given moment.

The Inspired can have both very personal connections and large reaching moments where they bring magic to sleepers. They are extremely powerful when interacting with their Source. **Warning:** Their Source is a constant source of tension, and magically they can be stymied without it. If you're not willing to have your magic rendered useless or impossible on a somewhat regular basis, you probably don't want to play an Inspired.

The Mentor is a teacher for a group of non-magical students. If you want to be explicitly in charge of a group

of sleepers, you want to play a mentor. **Warning:** This playbook is quite reactive until you get to **Advanced** moves. You may be bored if you don't make your way there eventually.

The **Pious** has a vision for how things should be, and goals, and are ready to see them through. A **Pious** is often a very driven character. **Warning:** It's easy to try eschew connections and try to go it alone as a **Pious**, but no **Mage** survives without connections to the world around them. Make sure to keep connected to at least your **Anchors**.

The **Primordial** cuts right through the trappings that are common in magic to deal with fundamental forces and energies. They have the capability for tremendous savagery. **Warning:** The **Primordial** has a lot of pressure to solve all their problems with magic, but doing this will eventually catch up with you, hard.

The **Tech Adept** uses magic and technology fluently, whether that means making inventions that are only possible because their hands did it or enchanting common technology for their own ends. **Warning:** The **Tech Adept's** belief in how magic fits into technology limits them. If you want to be able to do magic without technology around, don't play a **Tech Adept**.

The **Voiced** exemplifies everything about the power of the human voice, from convincing to leading to spreading wisdom. Some of their abilities are subtle, but that does not mean they are not incredibly powerful. **Warning:** The **Voiced** is one of the most social playbooks. They can't do much without someone to listen to them.

The **Wayfarer** is a traveler, wanderer, even loner, and their magic reflects this unbounded nature. The nature of each **Wayfarer's** travel is unique, and presents them with unique options and opportunities. **Warning:** The **Wayfarer** is at their most powerful when they are constantly on the move. Don't play a **Wayfarer** if you want to settle down.

For players who are unsure of what playbook they want to choose, find out what they are looking for to better understand a character, and use that to direct their attention.

If they want to know what options they'll have, the **Moves** are a good place to get a sense of what the character might do and what situations they might excel in.

If they want to know what kind of magic they'll be doing, the **Paradigms** are best.

If they want to know what kinds of relationships they'll have with others, have them look to the **Anchors**, in

addition to the Cabalist and Mentor in particular. The Inspired and Voiced might also catch their attention.

If they know what kind of character they want to play in the abstract, but don't know which playbook can represent it, then Paradigm and Moves are likely to help. They also may find themselves pushing against the options more than other players. Be flexible.

If they want to be sure they play a character who is going to be helpful to the group, and care about choosing one with good stats, do your best to let them down gently: this is not the kind of game where those are primary worries. Mages are competent people, and the group will often not be focused on the same goals anyway. Encourage them to choose a Playbook they find interesting, because of who it suggests being, not just what it can do.

Once people have their playbooks, they can start going through and selecting options and filling in blanks. The MC, as likely the one who has read this book the most, can help answer questions as they get started.

MC

Player

Playbooks are the collections of stats and specific rules that make up Mages. Each Playbook defines a dramatically

different type of Mage, with different attitudes, talents, biases, and ways of doing magic. At the same time, each Playbook is just an archetype, covering a wide range of possible Mages. It is possible for two Mages created using the same Playbook to be very different people. Nevertheless, each active, player-controlled Mage in a game of Consensus should have their own unique Playbook. There is too much room for overlap and stepping on each other's toes, otherwise (in the frustrating way, not the fun, conversation-provoking way).

Physically, Playbooks are double-sided tri-folded sheets of paper. There will be a front indicating the playbook name, and when you open it, a left column with a bunch of choices, starting with "Name." Other columns contain Stats and Advancements, Playbook Moves, Paradigms, and other information. Each Playbook will be similar, though some sections move around where needed.

The first thing you need to do after discussing safety mechanics and basic assumptions about the world is picking out a Playbook. Because each Mage will have a unique Playbook, you can take it and write your choices and other character details directly on it. In this way, your Playbook becomes your character sheet, in addition to your Mage's archetype.

There are a lot of Playbooks, and choosing among them might be overwhelming. Plus, what you want to play could depend on the other people at the table. Maybe you come assuming you'll play a potion-brewing witch straight out of the Scottish play, but when you hear someone else discussing their Mentor with an anarchist streak, you decide you'd rather play a Voiced who learned from the Mentor and now spreads word of their ideas. To help you decide, the MC will make all the Playbooks available, and read out short descriptions of each of them. Listens, then grab one and look over it. If it seems uninteresting, or whenever you are done with it, toss it back into the pile and pick out another. If you're having trouble drawing meaning out of a Playbook, ask the MC what parts you should look at. They can help direct you, depending on what will help you decide (some players think about what a Playbook will let them do, others think about what relationships their Playbook means they'll have, and still others just care about approaches to magic. All are fine!)

This isn't a solitary activity; talk to the other players and see what they're thinking! Bounce ideas around. If you and someone else both want the same Playbook, you both should try to come up with a notably different idea you'd like based on a different Playbook, and

4. The First Session

Player

then see if the new idea pulls either or both of you to those other Playbooks instead. If you are truly stuck, you could come up with something random but fair like rolling one of the dice you have available.

Once you have selected a Playbook, you can start filling in the blanks, Name on down. If you don't understand anything or aren't sure, feel free to ask the table, or skip it to come back later. The single column will direct you to make all the choices you need to on your own for a starting character, all the rest you have to do is start thinking about your Mage as a full person, and answering any questions the MC has! They might latch on to certain details such as who some of your Anchors are and ask you to come up with answers.

Stats

Narrator

The stats are:

- **Static:** as in unmovable, steady, set in your ways, and conservative.
- **Dynamic:** as in creative, free-flowing, adaptable, easily moved, and inventive.
- **Entropic:** as in direct, active, unstoppable, forward, and destructive.
- **Within:** referring to the internal self,

Narrator

controlled reactions, ability to introspect, and know yourself.

- **Without:** referring to the external world, connections, empathy and understanding.

Stats can never be higher than +3, and most will range from -1 to +2.

Setting Expectations

Player

While you're all making your characters, you'll be defining parameters of the world your game is set in. If someone says they are a Cabalist and their Cabal is a "book club" in a fraternity, then great! They have just indicated this game will include a fraternity, which means a college they're connected to, and so on. This, plus the work you did at the beginning around aligning themes, will help make sure everyone is on the same page. However, Consensus does have a few baked-in assumptions. You don't have to memorize these, but the MC should go through them while you're still working on your character.

- Your characters don't have to be friends, but at the time the game starts they should all know each other, and should be basically allies and not enemies, even if they

have their disagreements. Characters can become enemies during play, but should start out on at least civil terms. These mages are notably and noticeably different from the unawakened masses, so they will have undoubtedly noticed each other.

- Your characters are unique in the world of Consensus. There might be other mages who take approaches from many schools, but you're the only Hedge Mage. There might be (probably are) other mages who work together and share similar outlooks and paradigms, but you're the only Cabalist.
- All of the characters have Preparations, which represent the basic protections you take against harm, magical or mundane. This means you don't have to take a lot of game time for your characters to take safety precautions before going out. Briefly describe what they look like, and if they change at any point. You can regain Preparations by spending a few minutes in relative safety connecting with an Anchor.
- Rending Magic is powerful, it Just Works, and is extremely dangerous. You can describe a rending effect, and it happens, but should it even tangentially affect a Lookout, be

prepared for reality to hit you back hard. It's easy to think this will be the solution, but it rarely solves more problems than it creates. Rending Magic, by its very definition, cannot coexist with Consensual Reality. Before long, one of them will have to give, and that one is almost always the Rending Magic.

- Notice your Savings and other gear, think about how your character came into that gear, and what it means to them.
- You all have Anchors, which are non-magical parts of your lives. They serve the dual roles of keeping you connected to your humanity, and holding you back from what you could perhaps become. Anchors come up day-to-day by helping you recharge, and also when they are threatened. Losing an Anchor almost always hurts.
- The MC isn't out to get you, and isn't your adversary. If they were, they could just introduce angry spirits that rip out your characters souls so they die. The end. That's no fun for anyone. Similarly, they aren't there to make you guess what they're thinking, or feel smart by presenting puzzles that prove the players can't read their mind. The MC and the players are both there

4. The First Session

Player

to find out what's going to happen to the Mages.

As the players create their characters, notice as they progress through things and ask specific questions about choices that interest you, such as how they got to know certain Anchors, what the first time using magic with their Paradigm was like, and so on. However, between asking these questions, and before the characters are complete enough to answer any, go over the expectations listed above. The game rules assume they will be true and some things won't work as well if they aren't included.

MC

Introductions

Once everyone has the basics of their characters decided, go around the table and have everyone introduce their characters. Start with name and pronouns, and move on to more specific details.

MC

Paradigm

Player

Sharing a character's Paradigm gives the starting point of who they are as a Mage. It says something about how they look at the world and what kind of magic to expect from them, but also what they can't work with. Characters are likely to have to work around each others' Opposed Aspects a lot, so it's important to have been exposed to what they are.

Looks

Player

Talk about what the character looks like, using the traits on the character sheet as guides. Since Mages usually have more than just the five senses, Aura is a noteworthy part of any Mage's description.

Preparations

Player

This is one element that can be skipped if the themes of the game suggest it won't be relevant any time soon. But, describing the Preparations gives a specific example of how the Mage's Paradigm functions, as well as

4. The First Session

Player

what they are likely to look like if they do end up in danger.

As everyone introduces their characters, people will likely start to suggest ideas about how they could be connected, or involved with pieces of the world that are brought up. That's great! Try not to get too bogged down with it, but these connections help build the world the characters will inhabit.

The Three Questions

Player

The MC will want to know the answers to each of the three questions on your playbook, “Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized?” “Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed?”, and “Why are you hunted?” This might require a little bit of negotiation to make sure everyone is on the same page about what these questions mean and what the answers mean.

Ask a few probing or leading questions about these, in order to understand them and start to connect them to the world, but don't go too far here, leave things unexplored and open to changing, because the first scenes of the game will fill out exactly how these connect the characters

MC

to the world.

MC

Anchors

Player

The **MC** will ask questions about your Anchors. They'll ask you as if you are the authority on them, because you are! It's possible that the short descriptions given in your Playbook will have made ideas leap to mind, and if so you should give those answers. Don't hold back here; it's much easier to get the reward of actually seeing ideas you like in play by bringing them up this early on. At the same time, it's just fine to say "I don't know" if you don't have ideas! If it's something necessary to understand the starting point for the world, the **MC** may suggest things until you find one you like, but if not, it can be left unknown to surface in play. This can be particularly interesting because it will help it slot into just the right spot in the story.

As the characters become ready, ask them about their Anchors. This is key to understanding what motivates the characters and to revealing the world around them. Find out what the Anchors are, and note this on your summary sheet.

MC

4. The First Session

The most important things to know are how they keep the character anchored, that is, connected to the mundane and physical world, and what common ways for that connection to degrade are. For some cases, this might be easy. A Shelter Anchor that is the Mage's house keeps them connected by being a home, and it can degrade by the rent coming due, housework building up, pipes bursting, and so on. Other Anchors may be more difficult. Whether clear or not, ask a few detailed questions about each Anchor, to make the player make up some answers. Ask where it came from, what a relative thinks of the Anchor, why this is the only one left, and so on. Don't get too deep, since there will be time for that later, but seek to have a clear starting point.

MC

Flags

Your character needs a Flag, which is a way that you think it would be interesting for other characters to interact with them. If your character "hits" another character's flag, then your character marks experience. This is to give you a little incentive to have that interaction. It means you have a way to tell the rest of the table "please do this with my character." For the first ses-

Player

Player

sions, everyone is still getting to know each other's characters, so it's likely and OK for them to be simple, and may even be based on things that you expect to become quite common. For the first session, play to your strengths and set expectations, rather than trying to subvert expectations that the table hasn't seen established yet. For example, if Lazarus' player wants to establish that he's trusting to a fault, he might say to the table "Lazarus is pretty gullible, so my first flag is 'Tell me a lie that I believe'. It shouldn't be hard to make him believe."

Make a table on a piece of paper or something everyone can see, and record the flags as the players tell you theirs, so everyone can see what flags are available to them and which ones they've already hit. These Flags will help the players tell each other what kinds of early interactions they are expecting and hoping for, as well as a chance to start gaining experience right away. Because the Mages are new to the game, it's likely they will be simple, and may even be based on things that the players expect to become quite common. Help anyone who is having trouble to come up with a fairly basic flag. A good standby would be something that causes them to trigger one of their Playbook

MC

4. The First Session

Moves.

MC

4.3 First Scenes

Player

Once your characters have been created and introduced, the MC will set a scene and before long should ask someone, “what do you do?” Sooner or later, maybe after a scene or two, that question will be directed to you. From this point onward, roleplay away! Think about how your character would respond, maybe inventing or discovering parts of their personality or the world you didn’t know about. The first few scenes will help set up the rest of the game, possibly dipping into the past a little and exploring the three Humanity questions. Forces allayed for and against your characters will be established, Anchors and Inspirations will be met, and you’ll start to see how your Mage acts in the world.

Once characters have been created, it’s time to play through the first scenes in the game. In Consensus, the first scenes you play through are related to the three questions that every character answers during character creation. Through this you’ll establish some shared history between characters, some current ties, and

MC

you'll foreshadow future problems and complications. Depending on how much time you have available, you should aim for between 3 and 6 scenes for this part, which explore the answers to those three questions for multiple characters. Make sure each character is a part of at least one scene, preferably 2 or more that explore answers to different questions. Also make sure each question is the focus of at least one of the scenes.

These are the first scenes you will be playing, so if you see the chance to have a move trigger, make sure you take it! These can be a great introduction to the mechanics as well as to our characters and the world.

MC

Pulling in Multiple Characters

When the players go around introducing their characters, make a note of any answers to the 3 questions (or leading questions you pose about those questions) that seem to synchronize with each other. You'll use this to set those characters up in the same scene and start it off in a way that lets you learn more about the characters and the world they are interacting with. If you have 4 players and are aiming for 4 scenes, you could make each scene have two characters in it, or you could pull all 4 characters

MC

4. The First Session

into the scene about the first question, and give each character an individual scene that addresses one of the others. During each scene you should look for places where the actions they describe would trigger a move, and have them roll it.

MC

Framing a Scene

During the first session, your method of choosing scenes is a bit more structured and formulaic than it will be in future sessions. First, choose one of the 3 questions that you're going to explore. These often make the most sense if they go in order, so any scenes about the first question before scenes about the second and so on, but that isn't always the case. Next, pick any number of Mages who have answers to that question that could synergize. Put them into a situation that starts to explore their answers, and then start asking leading questions to probe deeper and deeper into their answers. Find out who trivialized their humanity, or how it lead them to a fundamentally different paradigm about the world, or what they most fear about being hunted. Find out anything you can while playing out the scene, and help the characters establish their ties and connections to each other while doing it. Also look for places

MC

where characters that are connected to one Mage might also be connected to another, and how both Mages might want different and competing things from that non-player character.

If you've chosen the first question, it's likely you'll want to frame it as a flashback. Feel free to describe special effects and camera shots, fog clouding people's memories and cheesy flashback chimes. Frame a scene that explores the characters' humanity being trivialized.

If you've chosen the second question, you will likely want to frame it in the recent past or in the present. Again, make good use of visual storytelling tropes like camera angles to establish the scene or tone. Frame a scene that questions the characters' humanity, from an external source or even an internal one.

If you've chosen the third question, you should set it in the present, and you should make it immediate. Make soft moves that characters need to react to while also asking leading questions to make them fill in details about the world. Frame a scene that shows them being hunted or pursued, or evidence that they soon will be or recently have been.

MC

Turning the Three Questions into Scenes

The first question asks the player to think about why their Mage's humanity was trivialized. This should be something before they awakened to their potential as a mage, and should provide a great place to mine for scenes that take place in the characters' mundane pasts. If you can, tie in a character's anchors here, especially any important people or memories from their younger days.

The second question asks the player to think about why their Mage's humanity might still be in question. Awakening hasn't solved all of their problems, and this is a fertile ground to look for scenes that include the character's current friends, ties, relations, and troubles. If you can, tie in any relevant anchors (like Shelter), gear, what they do during an average day, and their paradigm/magic.

The third question asks the player to think about why they might be hunted. This could take on a positive or a negative connotation, so try to get a sense of that before you frame the scene or even decide which characters are going to be in it. Generally it might be easier to group characters who feel positively about being hunted with like, and same for negative, but look for places where that isn't true, and see if you can frame a scene around

that. Make sure to ask a lot of leading questions in scenes that focus on this question, players will likely give answers that lead directly to your most interesting Forces.

MC

Ask Leading Questions

In addition to playing to find out what happens, during these scenes you should ask questions that get at things which interest you and seem like they might be useful to build on. Leading questions help ensure that the player will have an answer, and doesn't just feel overwhelmed with the need to make up more details about their character than they know. Don't just ask "What was school like?" Instead ask, "What was the name of your biggest bully in High School? What did they do to you?" Build on the answers, so if the player answers "Kevin James, he took my lunch money", maybe ask why Kevin singled you out over the rest of your classmates.. You're seeking answers that will not only help you characterize the Mages, but also demonstrate answers to the Mages' three questions, and help you understand their Stressors. You even may be able to ask questions that start to develop parts of the world that may be used as Forces. Asking an Inspired who sells "Chemically

MC

Assisted Experiences” the question “Who are your most reliable customers?” might suggest a group that could easily become a Force.

You can sometimes use leading questions to push the world in a particular direction. If you ask the Hedge Mage, “What did you offer to the Star Cult in order to ensure your herb chest is always full?” you’re establishing that there’s a Star Cult, and giving the option for the Hedge Mage to be making dubious deals. If you add “that you didn’t want to?” to the end, it becomes even more pointed.

You can go deeper here than earlier in character creation, as long as the answers keep giving the table interesting stuff to work with.

MC

Identifying the Stressor

During the first session, after a scene or while a scene wraps up, take a look at the list of stressors, and think about which one was primary in the scene that played out. If it isn’t obvious, and it often will be, you can ask a couple more leading questions to really solidify one of the stressors. Each scene should have one stressor assigned to it after the fact, and you will use this to fill

MC

4.4. Ending a Session

out the world before the second session.

MC

Number of Scenes

Depending on how much time you have, the number of scenes are variable. However, we recommend between 3 and 6 because each scene turns into a Force in the world. Having less than 3 will result in a flat world and likely players will look at the Forces as challenges to overcome. Having more than 6 becomes very hard to keep track of and keep up with from session to session. There are already so many scenes that players will want to fit into the game, extra Forces will tend to fall by the wayside.

MC

4.4 Ending a Session

At the end of the session, the MC will make sure that any lingering Portents are recorded for next time. Speak up if you think anything is missing! The End of Session move will trigger, and ask some questions of everybody there. You may find it helpful to jot down a few notes about what was going on and what would interest you to pick up with your character next time (or you could

Player

4. The First Session

Player

just wing it. It's not like your plans are likely to go off unaltered anyway.) Finally, it is often good form to mention anything you particularly enjoyed from another player during this time.

MC

At the end of a session, before wrapping up and putting everything away, there's a few things that you should do with the table. First, you should note down a little bit about where you ended, whether on a cliffhanger or with some resolution, and make sure to write down any lingering Portents that have come up during play. Then, you should proceed through the end of session move, following its instructions. Feel free to draw attention to anything you particularly enjoyed from another player as the session wraps up!

4.5 After the First Session

Player

You don't have any jobs between sessions! It can be fun to think about what your character might do, but don't feel obligated to. Just don't lose your character sheet. Give it to the MC if you're afraid you might lose it.

Give it a little bit of time, don't start this right after the first session. Let some ideas percolate through your dreams and subconscious. Give it at least a day or two.

Now, take a look at that list of Stressors you got from the scenes in the first session, and pull out the notes you took about the details that you and the other players established about the world. Go over them carefully and follow the steps listed in the chapter on Forces to create the world that the characters inhabit. See where the things you've already established can fit in, and use other parts to inspire you.

When thinking of Forces, because you need to have interesting things to say, choose what resonates with you. Pick things that put you in the mindset of: deep connections, magical ethics, everyday miracles, and things that lurk in shadows. Pick things that you would love to read, or binge-watch. Things that make your mind overflow with vivid imagery, things that make you yearn to explore and change the world.

MC

4.6 The Second Session and Beyond

Player

At subsequent sessions, you have less work to do at the beginning. The MC will lead you through checking on things that carried over from last session and might need to be updated, such as Flags and “ongoing” modifiers.

From time to time, the MC might have a “letter” for you about your character. This might tell you something about what happened to them since the last session ended, and could give you a choice or a roll to make.

Starting a Session

Gather your MC sheet, PC summary sheet, Forces, Flags, and Portents. Read out Flags for all the players’ characters, and note which ones can be changed. Mark one Code off every Portent, and mention them as you do so.

(If you have them, read out and resolve “love letters.” [maybe we actually explain them right here?].)

Have every player mark one Code off every Anchor. If things come to mind, note what these Codes mean, but if not, you will determine that when a character goes to reconnect with the

MC

Anchor. An Anchor beginning to Slip probably deserves a bit of prose, though.

Take stock of all the slipping Status Tracks, since they can easily advance this session. Review any effects from that last session that were extended onto this one, like “-1 forward” or a Move being unavailable.

Have players with Moves triggered at the start of the session perform them. Remember the ones that roll 6- for the first scene.

Frame a scene and make a soft move.

MC

Framing Scenes

Frame scenes so that everyone knows where they are starting and can use that as a jumping-off point to contribute. A scene should start when the action gets interesting, not before, so skip the preparation that can be taken for granted (if the preparation might be interesting, then make it into its own scene, don't tack it onto the front of another.) Sometimes it will be clear how exactly to start a scene, but whenever it isn't, try one of these techniques.

- Put two people in the middle of an interesting situation and ask them why they're there. Make a soft

MC

move (so one that demands a response or else it will turn into a hard move.) This can be scary, but let your players surprise you!

- Pose a question to yourself of the form “**What** happens when...?” that involves one or more characters and will alter the story when it is answered. Start the scene as close to when the answer would be revealed as possible.
- Pick a plan a character has been working on, and play to find out how the next step is prepared or executed, or goes wrong.
- Pick a Force that just had a Status Track advance, or advance a Stack Track and then pick that Force. Make the outcome affect one or more of the Mages, and show them first encountering it.
- Ask how a character connects with an Anchor or Inspiration.
- Look at a slipping status track, especially a character’s anchor or their health, mark off a code, and frame a scene around it slipping even further.
- Have an NPC ask one character for help in a way that will put them at odds with another character.
- Ask a leading question of a character that seems like it could have an

interesting answer to play out (“Who surprised you when they showed up to worship at your church this morning?”). Only follow up if it seems likely to go somewhere. If not, ask another question or try another one of these starting points.

When framing a scene, define what is needed to get started; think about time, place, and who is around. Let other details be filled in naturally. Keep an eye on when the scene has fulfilled its purpose, so it doesn’t begin to drag on. When the major tension of a scene has resolved, whether that tension was there at the outset or arose within the scene, wrap it up and move on to the next one. Stories often leave you on a cliffhanger, and it can be fun to do that here. Sometimes the end of the scene is left up to the audience to fill in with their imagination, they know the outcome, but what exactly transpired doesn’t need to happen “on screen”. Followups can either be briefly mentioned, or made into new scenes of their own.

MC

Chapter 5

Status Tracks

Narrator

Many things in Consensus have a sort of progression. Even if individual events aren't precisely connected, one layers on top of another, getting more and more intense until reaching a breaking point.

To represent this, Consensus uses Status Codes similar to those used in medical transport, ranging from Code 50 down to Code N. They're described here first, and other Status Tracks are shaped by these standards.

5.1 Harm and Healing

Narrator

Every playbook has a section labeled “Health,” which is the primary status track each Mage’s player will keep track of. These are directly based off the medical transport codes listed below:

- **Code 50** Basic transport (not serious)
- **Code 40** Serious case (IV started)
- **Code 30** Trauma case
- **Code 20** Acute Trauma case
- **Code 10** Critical Trauma case
- **Code N** Newsworthy event

No matter how injured you are, if you physically push yourself while injured, the injuries may get worse. Being strenuous with a cracked rib is just asking to end up with a punctured lung after all. This is especially true when a status track has hit (crossed off) Code 30 or below. We call this state “slipping.” When a status track is slipping, the MC may advance that track as a soft move, in response to the normal course of play, where otherwise advancing a status track that is not slipping is usually a hard move. For the health track this represents injuries that will kill without medical attention. A punctured lung, a cracked skull, the type of things if you just try to rest and recuperate will end up killing you. Note how this means

Narrator

the more someone is injured, the faster they slip towards Code N.

Code N, as noted above is a Newsworthy Event, which means something large enough to make headlines (at least for the newspaper of a character's life) has happened, and is almost always irrevocable. In the case of the health status track, this often means death. If a player's character takes harm that would put them at Code N for their health track, the player rolls the Death Move.

Player

Each time you mark off a Code of health, you should write an idea of what the injury is that came from the harm on the line next to that code. For code 50, this could be as simple as a sprained wrist. For code 30 we might see an injury like blood loss or a gunshot wound. Code 10 is often reached from a number of compounding or untreated injuries, and therefore might not look on its own like the character is at death's door, but with the other listed injuries, it should be clear that they can not easily continue.

Harm follows from the fiction. You can use the following levels of harm to reference when dealing damage:

- 0 Harm Small cuts

MC

5. Status Tracks

- **1 Harm A** solid punch
- **2 Harm A** knife wound, or energy drain
- **3 Harm A** gunshot
- **4 Harm A** grenade, or soul rending

Since one of the primary purposes of Harm is triggering the harm move, harm that wouldn't necessarily leave any lasting effects on its own can be represented by **0 Harm**. The move is rolled as usual, and consequences may occur. An injury that causes **0** harm does not spend Preparations.

MC

Healing

Healing, whether mundane or magical can help you recover from harm. In some cases this will cause the **MC** to tell you to erase codes off of your status tracks.

Player

Mundane healing revolves around medical treatment, up to and including hospitalization. If your character is in serious need of medical attention, sometimes the best thing to do is call an ambulance. Of course hospitals come with some risks, from snooping nurses wondering where your injuries came from to the ever present threat of enormous medical

bills if your game takes place in the United States. It also takes time. Healing up to code 40 or so in a hospital can be relatively quick, sometimes all they need to do is surgery or set a broken bone. Codes 40 and 50 are usually slower to heal, and require physical rest. There are even some things that mundane healing can not fix. These can include injuries beyond modern medicine, or even injuries beyond modern scientific understanding. A hospital will not be much help if your Code 30 injury is "My Aura is being siphoned off by a Demon."

Magical healing on the other hand, has its own host of problems. Sometimes in the moment it may seem necessary in order to save someone, but magical healing almost always comes at a cost. Generally speaking, actual healing is likely only possible when you have an excess of time or magical energy, in which case you might want to look at the Ritual moves. In crisis situations, you may find the MC offers you an opportunity, but with a heavy cost.

Healing is simply an application of your "Adjust a Status Track" move. This means you can do it at any time that it follows from the fiction. However, it is usually a good idea to make it meaning-

ful. Harm comes from dramatic events, and healing can ratchet the tension up or down, depending on how you use it. You should usually let the Mages heal if they are trying to, but in a way that keeps things interesting, according to your Principles. If they want to spend a lot of time on mundane healing, think about what might happen while the Mage isn't out and about. If they use time or magical energy to perform serious healing, then use the Ritual move to make sure their paradigms are aligned and see what challenges they might have to overcome to pull it off.

If they are trying to heal quickly, with magic, likely to save someone, it is a good idea to make it come at a cost. A very common cost might be letting them shift harm around, rather than actually healing it (meaning two uses of Adjust a Status Track, one up and one down). Almost any time a Mage wants to perform magical healing, they will be triggering a move (either a basic move or perhaps a playbook move.) You should pay attention to how the player describes their Mage attempting to heal someone, and call for the appropriate move. Keep an eye on **Sell a Lie**; **Enact Sudden, Violent, or Unexpected Change on the Physical World**; describe a magical effect within your Paradigm but beyond your normal abilities; and Do

Rending Magic in particular, as well as any potentially relevant playbook moves.

MC

5.2 Anchor Status Tracks

Player

Each of your Anchors has a Status Track to keep track of your relationship with that Anchor. At the beginning of each session, each one of these status tracks is advanced by 1 code, and they may be advanced more during play. Just like with Health, an Anchor's Status Track that hits Code 30 starts to slip. At this point, things have gotten bad enough that you know that you have to deal with it soon, or you will lose them. If it hits Code N, you lose that Anchor. It might not cease to exist in the world, but it no longer Anchors your Mage. The relationship has fundamentally changed or permanently deteriorated. This could be as dramatic as a divorce or a house fire, or as subtle as you no longer feeling the same way when you visit the garden that used to be yours.

You can tell the MC you would like to have your Mage spend some time tending to their relationship with an Anchor, or the MC might offer you a chance to. If you do, it will take a full scene, and you may have to solve problems that have come up, but at the end the

5. Status Tracks

Player

MC will tell you to clear the **Anchor's** status track.

In addition, if you share a **Moment of Humanity** with an **Anchor**, clear their status track.

Each **Mage's Anchors** has its own **Status Track**. They deplete of their own accord, with all having one **Code** marked off at the beginning of each session. You or the player can come up with what it means, either right then or when you are setting a scene based around an **Anchor**.

If a player tells you they'd like to have their **Mage** spend time tending to an **Anchor**, try to make that be the next scene you show them in, if at all possible. These are the **Anchor Scenes** described above. Don't be afraid to question the player on how the **Mage** deals with however the relationship has deteriorated: where did the money come from to pay the utilities bill? What excuse will you give your parent for missing their show? How do you demonstrate to yourself that you are re-dedicating your meditation practice? Sometimes these can be answered with simple roleplaying, where you and the player get deeper into character and talk through things, and sometimes you might find more lines of tension in the world to pull on in the future.

MC

An Anchor Scene should be solely focused on the Anchor for it to count enough to clear the Status Track. Mages don't get to double-dip, that's what causes Anchor Status Tracks to fall in the first place.

Exchanging a Moment of Humanity clears a Status Track because this can, by definition, only happen with other people. A person can forgive a lot when they are reminded of someone's humanity (the rent is less lenient).

MC

5.3 Portents

Narrator

From time to time, things will happen in game that feel like they deserve to be followed up on, but aren't tied to any obvious way to track them. Maybe a friend felt snubbed about something, maybe a character made a deal and it's unclear when the debt will be called in, maybe a character or player had an idea that was too juicy to just forget about. They can be large or small. It can even just be that something feels like it Matters, like the time I saw a character reach into their sister's mind and wipe away a memory. We knew a line had been crossed, and this should come back in the story.

5. Status Tracks

When this happens, write down on a sheet of paper everyone can see, a short description of the thing, and a Status Track with just codes 20, 10, and N. At the start of every session, or whenever it feels appropriate (they're always slipping), mark off another Code. When you hit Code N, bring the Portent into play somehow, and cross it off the list.

MC

5.4 Reality Breaks

Narrator

Sometimes, Reality fights back. When a mage backlashes, if they are unlucky, they may find themselves in a reality break, a way the Consensus protects itself. Reality Breaks have two Status Tracks, which race each other.

Player

One Status Track describes how close the Mage is to escaping. You keep track of it. It is advanced by a particular move defined by you and the MC when the Mage first enters the Reality Break. The move's trigger indicates the Mage learning their lesson, or at least going along with what is needed from them to exist in consensual reality. It is always of the form:

"When [trigger], advance the Reality

Break Escape status track.”

The race that the two Status Tracks create will put some fairly serious pressure on your Mage, if they’re aware of it, or at least on you. If the Mage is completely unwilling to change their ways, they could succumb in just a few scenes. However, since the trigger for the escape Status Track should be easy for you to hit, your Mage should be able to free themselves if they are willing to learn the lesson offered.

If your Reality Break Escape status track reaches Code N, your Mage has escaped. They might be disoriented, and they might be upset or just relieved, but whatever it is, they’re back in the normal, shared world with everyone else.

The MC will be keeping track of the Reality Break Strength Status Track, and keeping you aware of where it stands. If it reaches Code N, your Mage ceases to be a playable character. Depending on the details of the exact type of Reality Break, they may or may not still be a presence in the world at all. Either way, it is time for you to start a new character, if you don’t already have another to play (see XX). It should be quite obvious that this is happening for some time, so you should have lots of chances, whether acting as your Mage or invoking safety rules, if this outcome would upset you.

One Status Track describes how close the Mage is to escaping. The player keeps track of it. Work with them to define a move trigger that indicates the Mage learning their lesson, or at least going along with what is needed from them to exist in consensual reality. It should be relatively easy for the Mage's player to push for.

The second Status Track describes how close the Reality Break is to permanently claiming the Mage, and you keep track of it. This Status Track is advanced at the start of every scene in the Reality Break, and it is only a soft move to advance it in response to the mage going along with the scene, struggling against it when they shouldn't, or failing to learn their lesson.

The race that the two Status Tracks create should put some fairly serious pressure on the Mage, if they're aware of it, or at least the Mage's player. If the Mage is completely unwilling to change their ways, the Status Track showing them slipping into the Reality Break should fill in at most three scenes. However, since the trigger for the escape Status Track should be easy to hit, the Mage should be able to free themselves if they are willing to learn the lesson offered.

If the escape Status Track reaches Code N, the Mage returns to their normal

reality in an appropriate way. For Reality Breaks that were all in the Mage's head, they stop experiencing the hallucinations or visions, which might be jarring, but is fairly simple. For a pocket dimension, its expulsion of the Mage might be more dramatic. It shouldn't be Rending, but the Mage might suddenly turn up near where they disappeared, potentially disoriented or otherwise in bad shape. The pocket dimension normally ceases to exist at this moment.

If the strength of the Reality Break reaches Code N, then the Mage is trapped in that reality permanently. They are no longer a playable character. If the Mage was in a pocket dimension, then it likely disconnects from reality entirely and floats away. For other Reality Breaks, the Mage might leave reality of their own accord, or may keep seeing the world in their own unique way, now too far out of touch with reality to affect it normally. The MC may bring them back as a threat later, and as these mages are unbound by the laws of the Consensus they can be very dangerous for everyone.

When a reality break is created, follow the steps of the move:

- Decide its form, pervasive hallucinations, a fantasy world overlaying the real one, or a pocket dimension

you fall into

- Pervasive hallucinations could be something like a white whale showing up in random places that you feel compelled to chase.
 - A fantasy world overlaying the real one could be something like everyone else in the world being dead and appearing as ghosts (but they don't know they're dead)
 - A pocket dimension can be almost anything you can think of including literally the character's personal Hell.
- Choose a trait of your paradigm to be explored by the break
 - The traits to choose from are the name of the paradigm, the Aligned, the Capability, or either of the Opposed.
 - Decide what the reality break looks like
 - Note that sometimes you may change either of the first two answers while you are doing this, to better fit your vision
 - Consider the type of rending magic (or other circumstance) that lead to the Backlash

- Consider the paradigm trait. If it is aligned or the name, consider making the reality break a world where that does not exist or is not possible. If it is opposed, consider making that the way the world works in the reality break, or heavily emphasize that, or have the reality break push the mage to do that a lot.
- Expand a bit on what this world you are creating, and what it means for the character stuck in it. If the fantasy overlay is that nothing has names, think about how there will be no street signs and the character is fundamentally lost, and how they will not be able to talk about many specific things with proper nouns.
- Write a move to advance it's status track
 - If you are exploring an Opposed or Capability, it can be good to have this move be something that reasserts the Mages paradigm (so acts against the Opposed) but doesn't push back against the world too hard.
 - If you are exploring an Aligned, consider having this status track advance when the mage accomplishes something without the use

5. Status Tracks

- of magic, or without resorting to what they are good at.
- This move specifically should be something entirely under the player's control, because they will need to push their character to do it in order to win the status track race and keep their character.

MC

5.5 Forces

Player

Forces are an MC tool you don't need to worry about unless you want to.

Each Force has a Status Track, representing how close it is to making an irrevocable change on the game world. These Status Tracks have descriptions added at Code 40, Code 20, and Code N. They are descriptive and prescriptive labels, so that when the Code is marked off, the description should be made true, but if it happens in the fiction and the Code is not yet marked off, then you should do so.

These Status Tracks can be advanced by MC moves, and this can often start a new scene as the effects of the advancing Status Track start to be seen. When a Force's Status Track is slipping,

MC

this indicates it will now take active work to prevent their Code N result from coming to pass.

Force Status Tracks can also be reset, if they are given a major setback. This may also involve changing the descriptions, as the Force may have had to restructure or change plans.

MC

5.6 Consensus Shift

Player

With certain advanced moves, a Mage can attempt to shift the Consensus and change a fundamental truth about what the general populace believes to be possible. These status tracks are detailed in the **Advanced Moves** (page 230) section of the Improvement chapter, and they race against the Consensus Forces status track, which is controlled by one of the other major Forces in the world. Whichever one hits Code N first can set the tone for the shift in reality that is to come.

Consensus Shift Status Tracks, and the racing Consensus Force status tracks, work exactly like all the others mentioned: They get advanced when moves dictate it, including if you choose to use **Adjust a Status Track** or, once they're slipping,

MC

5. Status Tracks

Slip a Status Track.

MC

Chapter 6

The Moves

The move descriptions and explanations are directed to the other players, since they're the ones who will be rolling them. However, you should still be sure you know and understand them! They're the basic ways that Mages interact with the world, and so you will be calling for them as they are triggered, and interpreting the outcomes as needed. Many of these say things the MC will do, which are also your jobs.

MC

6.1 The Basic Moves

Player

When you assert your Paradigm over another Mage's, roll +Static (-1 if Tethered). On a 10+, hold 3, or on a 7-9, hold 1. You can spend your hold 1 for 1 to: - Have them mark experience (if an NPC, they comply with a reasonable request) - Give them a +1 or -1 on their next roll (if an NPC, enhance or counter their next use of magic) - Cause their current Discord to backlash. - Offer yourself as an Inspiration to their character (they do not need to accept) On a miss, they hold 1 against you, on the same terms.

This move is one that serves multiple purposes. Sometimes a mage is explicitly trying to convince another mage about how the world works, animatedly or even violently. They are asserting that their paradigm is correct. However, this move comes up even more during deep philosophical conversations between mages, where they compare views on the world, morality, and magic. The hold from this move can flow freely, and you can use it to help, hinder, bribe, or threaten another mage.

When you impress a *lusus naturae* with

a feat of magic in order to sway them, they will expect something in return. Roll +Without (-1 if Tethered). On a 10+, they will do what you want if you promise to do it. On a 7-9 they may choose to instead: - Give you something else they think you want or need - Make themselves scarce - Require you to fulfill the promise before they help.

There might be other beings in the world besides simple humans (some of whom are Mages). Ghosts, demons, perhaps even more esoteric creatures like vampires and faeries, and the artifacts of creation like golems and artificial intelligences. Some Mages lump them all into a category of *lusus naturae*. They exist hidden in forgotten corners of the Consensus, not able to step outside it like Mages, but denied by the common Lookout. They have at least a dim understanding of a Mage's raw power, and a display of it is the quickest and easiest way to convince them of something. They can be inscrutable, however, and have their own agendas. They also may find Mages to be inscrutable, and sometimes will try to help in their own way, or simply get out of the Mage's

path, rather than face potential wrath.

When you use a sleeper for your own ends, you must first present something they want. Roll +Without. On a 10+, they will do what you want to the best of their abilities, but on a 7-9, they'll need proof that they'll get what they want, or they'll need it before they do anything for you.

Whether your mage views the masses as pawns to be used, individuals to be saved, or somewhere in between, sometimes they will really need a sleeper to do something that the sleeper would rather not do. That's where this move comes in. Take note that "something they want" can be implicit or explicit, and it doesn't need to be physical or material. If you roll a 10+, awesome, you can choose whether to keep your word and give them what they want. On a 7-9, they're going to make sure you keep your word, before you help.

When you help or hinder another PC, roll +Anchors. On a 10+ they get a +1 or -2 to their roll, your choice. On a 7-9 they still get the bonus or penalty,

but you open yourself to cost, danger, or retribution. If they are doing magic that is **Aligned** to your **Paradigm**, you may instead have them treat the result as one category higher or lower.

Often when the **MC** calls for a roll on a specific move, it won't be just one of the players' mages who are involved. But it can get messy to try to figure out different moves to trigger for all of them, so if they are directly helping or hindering the process, this move should be called for. Players may want to consider how their mage would help, if they want to help out on a roll, and this should always be triggered and rolled before the move that it is modifying. It can feel good to help out, but doing so means getting involved, which always comes with its own risks.

When you **sell a lie** (to a person or to the **Consensus**), explain why they might believe it and roll **+Dynamic**. On a **10+**, you've done it, with no-one the wiser. On a **7-9** you only mostly get away with it; the **MC** will offer you a hard bargain, worse outcome, or tough choice.

This is one of the most complex moves in the game, and also one of the most versatile. Any time you're trying to slip something by a person in conversation, or otherwise trick them, this is the move to go to. Any time you try to slip a subtle, harmonious magical effect past the filters of reality, this is the move to go to. Pretty much any magic that doesn't fit into one of the other moves probably can fit into this one.

When you outfox, outpace, or outmaneuver to avoid a danger, name your gambit and roll +Dynamic. On a 10+, you pull it off, just as described. On a 7-9 choose 1: - you overextend yourself in the process - you come away with something missing - someone else is drawn in.

This move is particularly useful for when you're trying to do something quickly, or craftily. The MC might call for this move when you're trying to outpace a rogue mage in a foot-race, or when you're trying to avoid automagical countermeasures on that machine you just jacked yourself into. This move will

save your bacon a hundred times over before you're done with it.

When you keep your head down to avoid attention, roll +Within. On a 10+, you avoid notice, suspicion, or detection. On a 7-9, someone on the alert notices you. Choose one: - Offer them something to ignore you - Back off without arousing further suspicion - Choose when and where you are noticed.

Mages don't always try to take up space and make noise. Sometimes, they actually want to escape notice. This can take many forms, from cloaking one's aura, to an actual invisibility spell, to simply wearing dark clothes at night. Even if you are spotted, you usually have a few options before the whole game is given away.

When you do Rending magic and it affects a Lookout, gain 2 Discord, Backlash, and roll just +nothing (the Consensus doesn't care how smart or sexy you are). On a 10+ choose up to 3, on a 7-9 choose exactly 2. - You only gain 1 Discord - You don't Backlash - You don't cause collateral damage - You don't add a Restriction to your Paradigm. On a miss, choose one, but not "You don't Backlash."

Here's the thing about magic that rends holes in reality. It just works, but never without a price. It's noteworthy here that "affecting" a Lookout means even in the broadest sense. Did you painstakingly craft a homunculus that helps out in your workshop? That might be just fine, until a Lookout sees it. Did you make money appear out of thin air? Fine, until you spend it. Once a lookout is affected, the Consensus catches up with you quick. If you're very lucky, you can escape some of the consequences, but never all of them, and never forever.

When you do magic that is **Aligned to your Paradigm** and roll a 12+, take narrative control briefly to describe how it works above and beyond your expectations, and how that goes well for you.

Aligned magic represents a Mage's real specialty, the kind of thing that just comes naturally to them. It might not even be their primary focus, but when they do something along those lines, everything tends to go better. This move makes that real. Rolling a 12+ while doing

Aligned magic is like the stars aligning, just a little bit. Don't go overboard with the results - a healing spell isn't going to suddenly raise the dead instead. But it's the pleasure of a painting that comes out so well it's bought by a collector on the spot, or a protection spell that will last for eight days instead of just the one, or a website that reveals you have a lot more supporters than you realized.

When you enact sudden, violent, or unexpected change on the physical world, roll +Entropic. On a 10+, choose 3. On a 7-9, choose 2: - You accomplish what you set out to do - You aren't injured in the process - You don't cause any collateral damage - You impress or dismay the target or an onlooker, and take +1 forward interacting with them.

Mages do not just exist in an abstract world of the mind. Sometimes, they have to act, to really change something, and fast. With enough preparation and control, most side effects can be mitigated. Without much preparation or control, this move happens instead. It is risky, potentially far-reaching, and often not the best choice.

This move does apply in particular to straight up, physical violence. Most Mages know better than to resort to violence, and know the outcome is never as certain as you would like, and the side effects are always worse. If they find it is unavoidable, or worse, let themselves be caught unprepared and be pushed to it, the consequences escalate rapidly. A smart Mage will find a way to change the situation quickly, before their or someone else's luck runs out.

When you **Backlash**, you pushed reality too far and it pushed back. Any effects besides Harm will be difficult if not impossible to fix with magic, particularly the type of magic that caused it. Roll just +Discord, then reset Discord to 0. On a 10+, reality breaks around you a little bit. Make a Status Track for this break, and the MC will make one to track if you become convinced it is real. Decide its form: pervasive hallucinations, a fantasy world overlaying the real one, or a pocket dimension you fall into. Choose a trait of your Paradigm (the name, Aligned, a Capability, or an Opposed) to be explored by the break, and write a move to advance its Status Track. On a 7-9, choose 2: - You take 3 Harm - You don't reset your Discord to 0 - A physical

Player

representation of your Discord manifests; the Consensus makes life noticeably inconvenient for you for the remainder of the session - The Consensus manifests a being, an Enforcer of its will, to hunt you down, attack you, or otherwise warn you to change your behavior On a miss, you shake it off with minimal lasting effects.

This move is complex, it carries a lot of weight, and it can heavily shape the experience of play at your table. See the Backlash section (page ??) of the Magic Chapter for details about what this means.

6.2 The Extended Moves

Player

When you fail a roll on a magical action and decide to put willpower behind changing it, the MC may ask you some questions. Answer them honestly. Re-roll the roll with +1 and choose 2: - Sever your connection to an Anchor - Take -1 ongoing until you actually fail a magical roll - You Backlash.

Sometimes the MC calls for a roll, snake eyes show up on the dice, and you feel a sense

of dread about where the story is going for your Mage. Or other times you just think it would be more fun to try again. This move is a way to re-roll any magic that you do, at a very large cost. It is rarely worth it, and the MCs questions will likely revolve around why it is so important to your Mage that they succeed, that they are willing to take such risks and put their will behind changing the outcome of fate.

When you fail a roll with no magical influence, and decide to use magic to fix it, treat the result plus your stat as a 7, and choose 2: - Take 2 harm, or 2 Discord - The magic is Rending - Lose a Playbook move until the end of session. - Expend your preparations (This counts as two choices)

Mages don't always use magic. No really, they don't, if they did they'd be on a short path to no longer being of this world. (Take that how you will.) But sometimes, even when they are doing things the normal, mundane way, they use their little bits of magic to get an edge or fix a mistake. If they've prepared for it, great, that's

why they have charms they say every morning before they leave the house, or wear their lucky enchanted handkerchief. If they're not prepared, it can be costly, but even then sometimes they feel like it is necessary. Either way, make sure to describe either the magic you'd prepared ahead of time for a situation just like this, or the magic that you do spur of the moment and why it causes some of the potential downsides.

When you suffer harm (even 0 harm), roll just +Harm suffered. On a 10+, the MC can choose 1: - You're out of action: unconscious, trapped, incoherent, or panicked. - Take the full Harm of the attack, before it was reduced by preparations. If you already took the full Harm of the attack, take +1 Harm. - You are shaken. Take -1 ongoing until you can spend time connecting with an Anchor. On a 7-9, the MC can choose 1: - You lose your footing - You lose your grip on whatever you're holding - You let something or someone you're attending to fall into danger, or drop the ball on an obligation (especially important if it affects an Anchor) - You are delayed, to deal with the effects of your injury - Something you weren't prepared for happens On a 6-, you take the Harm, but things don't get worse.

This move won't always or even often come up in a session, but sometimes people get hurt, even mages. It can be small, like getting the wind knocked out of them (an example of 0 harm) but it can still affect what they are trying to do in the moment.

When you have some time and relative safety and you plan a ritual of magical power, describe the effect you are trying for. The MC may say more information or clarity is needed before the plan can be finalized. Once those needs are met, the MC will say which of these are needed to perform the ritual (it may be more than one): - Extra time - A certain object - Help from an outside source Then, write down the plan and hold 1.

"Ritual" here is a general term for more advanced and complicated magic than is usually done on the fly. They often involve multiple participants, prescribed steps, and are capable of more than a single individual's unplanned efforts. A ritual might include all the classic trappings, like hooded robes, dribbly candles, magic circles, and chanting, but it might also be a rock concert with a particular sequence of songs, or an all-night coding

session, or even a strike. If there is a lot of time, and the Mages already have everything they could need, a plan might be followed immediately by the performance of the ritual, but quite often, they will be separate events.

When you have time, relatively safety, a place of power, and enough Mages, and you begin a ritual, have each Mage involved describe how they will contribute to the ritual within their Paradigm. If you have met requirements set out by Plan a Ritual, you can spend a hold from it, and tell the MC the effect that will occur on a success, within the scope of the planed effect. Otherwise, the MC decides based on each Mage's contributions. Take into consideration each participant's Opposed, and the probability of Rending magic. Then, roll +Within. On a 10+, the ritual works as expected. On a 7-9 the MC will choose at least one. - The ritual takes longer than expected - You draw unwanted attention - The ritual causes Discord - Everyone involved Backlashes - The ritual has greater than intended effects.

Performing a ritual is a complicated undertaking. Even if you have a theoretical plan, when it gets down to the details, especially if there are multiple

Mages, everyone will need to figure out where they will be, what they will be doing, and why it matters. A ritual with crossed purposes, or worse, a Mage who discovers midway through that they do not believe a type of magic being employed is possible, can be a huge disaster, just as how a successful ritual can create a huge effect.

Plans can be somewhat flexible, and in the end, a ritual following a plan has its outcome chosen when it is performed, not back when it was thought up.

If a plan was made, but the requirements were too high, and then a ritual to accomplish the same thing is attempted anyway, this is just like improvising a ritual, and the outcome really is defined only by what each constituent Mage is doing. Hopefully they have talked it through well enough to have the same goals and a way of getting there.

When you lose an **Anchor**, roll +Anchors left. On a **10+**, it may take some time, but you'll get through this. On a **7-9**, choose 1: - Another **Anchor** gets put in danger - You do something you will regret. The **MC** tells you what.

Note: This means it does not cause another Anchor to get put in danger - You Backlash On a miss: Lose another Anchor. The MC will tell you which one and how.

Losing an Anchor can hurt. Any time a connection is broken, even under amicable terms, it can be a detaching feeling, leaving you adrift. For a Mage, capable of walking into other worlds entirely, or reaching levels of enlightenment in this one nearly incomprehensible to onlookers, it can be particularly dangerous. Even if the Mage is happy to see the Anchor go, it will be destabilizing. If they're not careful, the Mage might start to spiral.

At the end of session: note any effects that lasted "until end of session," but should continue into the next. Then, ask yourselves these questions as a group. For every one you answer "yes" to, everyone marks experience. - Did you show the lengths you were willing to go to in order to protect an Anchor?
- Did you uncover a secret?
- Did you learn something that puts your paradigms in perspective, or caused you to question them?

- Did you expose the depths of your humanity, to yourself or to someone else?
- Did you witness loss, selfishness, or pain born of magic?

This move wraps up the session, and rewards you for delving into certain parts of the game. After finishing it, pack up your character sheets. Go ahead and keep thinking about what might come next, and some of you might have Advancements to pick, but the game is done, for now.

When your **Harm** reaches **Code N**, roll +**Within**. On a **10+** you stabilize, and will need medical care, but you should live. On a **7-9**, some serious magic is going to be needed to help you survive, plus the medical care. On a **6-**, you're about to bite the dust. Make peace with your **Paradigm**. If you have two or less **Anchors**, you have the option of removing an **Anchor** in order to stabilize. Describe how you spiritually cut yourself off from the **Anchor**, infusing yourself with magic in order to heal, but taking a huge step away from reality in doing so.

Everything dies eventually. That includes **Mages**. When you die,

you get one final scene to impart wisdom on your friends, or just unleash an unholy blast of Rending magic at the one who killed you. Death is not always the end, especially for Mages. But it is the end for now.

When one of your Anchors is put in danger, mark experience and either go and handle it, or lose them as an Anchor.

The thing about having Anchors that you care deeply about is that sometimes you have to show that you care about them, to yourself as much as anybody else. "In danger" means of no longer being your Anchor, not necessarily a true threat to their being. And sometimes, you realize that actually, you don't care enough to deal with this, and that isn't a realization you can go back on.

When you describe a magical effect within your Paradigm but beyond your normal abilities, the MC may tell you a resource you could consume to achieve the effect.

Even Mages have their limits. Archimedes supposedly said, "Give

Player

me the place to stand, and I shall move the earth,” but he would need that place, and a long enough lever. When a Mage thinks about what they could do if only they had the power, or the tools, they can usually come up with something. It might not be easily achievable and they might not want to give it up, but the possibility is there.

6.3 Magic and Moves

Player

There’s no one move in this game that you roll to just “Do Magic.” Instead, magic infuses the very essence of the game. Almost any move you can roll could be triggered by you doing magic. Remember, you don’t tell the MC “I want to roll the Assert Your Paradigm move,” you describe what your character does, and the MC will let you know if it triggers a move.

Playbook moves can be thought of in many ways as spells your character is familiar enough with to do consistently, sometimes called “rote magic.” If you describe doing magic, even magic that is close to but does not trigger a playbook move, it may just trigger

Player

a basic move instead, and have much more unpredictable results.

In cases where you aren't sure what move is triggered by a mage attempting to do slightly risky harmonious magic, it could be that they just don't roll a move, and you just make a soft move in response. Or, in most cases a mage doing magic that doesn't cause Backlash could be described as them selling a lie to the Consensus as a whole.

MC

Narrator

Let's look at some examples of moves, and how they can be both mundane and magical.

Tobias is cornered, and really needs a distraction to get out of there. Because they work with electricity as a major part of their magic, their eye catches on a telephone pole and a transformer right nearby. Tobias' player tells the MC that Tobias is going to redirect the flow of power briefly to overload the transformer and cause a very distracting pyrotechnic display. The MC responds that this seems like the very definition of enacting a sudden or unexpected change on the physical world. Tobias' player agrees, and so rolls the move.

Dove, on the other hand, is also cornered, but doesn't want to use magic to get out of the situation, because they've been too recently

6. The Moves

Narrator

reminded by the Consensus that magic doesn't fix everything. So Dove's player describes Dove throwing a rock at a dilapidated wall nearby, to bring it down on their pursuers and distract them long enough for Dove to get away. This is also enacting sudden (violent) and unexpected change on the world, even though there was no magic involved.

6.4 Changing Flags

Player

You'll set up your initial flags during the first session. Flags are special sorts of moves, made by you and the other players, that encourage certain types of interaction with your mages. You can think of a flag as a move in the format of **"When you interact in a certain way with my mage, mark experience."** Once your flag has been hit (ie the move above has been triggered), it may or may not still be interesting for you. Additionally, once your mage has hit someone's flag, you can not do so again until they change it. Every time your flag is hit, and at the beginning of a session if your flag had previously been hit, you may change the flag to better reflect how you want the other players' mages to interact with your mage.

6.5 Improvement

Among the many improvement options available to your playbook, you may see options such as **Gain** another [playbook] move, **Gain** a move from another playbook, or **Gain** an advanced [playbook] move. Moves from your playbook are listed along with the moves you picked from when creating that character. Choose an additional one, and you now have access to it. **When** you gain a move from another playbook, try to choose one that someone else isn't playing, or at least talk with the player using that playbook. The playbook moves are part of what make characters feel unique, and you don't want to diminish that. **When** you gain an advanced playbook move, choose from the ones listed in this book for your playbook. These moves will radically alter the game and story, your whole table should be prepared for what that means.

Chapter 7

Stacking Moves

Player

This chapter is addressed to the MC, since it's their job to call out when moves trigger, to make scenes flow, and generally keep the game running. However, if you're having trouble understanding what moves are like in play, this is a particularly good chapter for you to read anyway.

Sometimes, maybe even often, and especially when you're zoomed in on a scene, a single move isn't enough to resolve an interaction. 7-9 results can be followed up on, or leave things dangling. Moves can trigger other moves, they can overlap, they can nest within each other, you could end up with a chain of moves that's 5 or 6 deep fairly easily. That's

MC

okay, just remember that if a move is triggered, it must be rolled, and the fictional results happen, and in order to roll a move, the trigger condition must first be met in the fiction.

Here we provide an extended example to help you understand better.

Zuri the Primordial is going to talk to some librarians she suspects might be involved with the Winter Court. She finds Lila and Hector at a cafe, having lunch.

"Do they have any telltale signs of the Winter Court around them?" asks her player.

"Yeah, there's a little bit of a chilled Resonance, but maybe just on their clothes," I say, giving them an answer they won't like. And then I remember to be generous with the truth, and say "Yeah, definitely just on their clothes. Which means it's a surface-level enchantment."

"OK, I just learned my worst fears are confirmed, faster than I expected, but I did kind of see it coming. So....I use Hunter to track my prey's magical trail!"

"Cool, what prey, and what do you do to track them?"

"The Winter Court! Uh, oh right, I probably can't pick up their trail without causing a scene, can I?"

"Not really, you are in public."

"Fine, then I ...call my friend Esin (A player character, an Inspired). They should know what to do! And I sit down, and start trying to find out where they could have gotten enchanted. They might not know, but I'll ask what they've been doing recently and listen for anything out of the ordinary or out of place."

I'm still being generous with the truth, so I'm not going to make Zuri fight to find out. But, while I know it happened while they were at work, I haven't figured out which Fae got to them. So, I turn it back on Zuri's player, saying,

"They mostly talk about interesting or funny patrons at the library. One stands out to you, sounding like a Fae she knows of, from the Winter Court. Who is it?"

Zuri's player instantly reacts. "Oh, it must have been Hob. He seems like he would like the two of them."

Oh, Hob, that's good, I didn't realize he'd made such an impression on them. I draw lines from him to the two librarians on the Winter Court Force sheet. This conversation can easily have taken the time it would need for Esin to arrive, so I say,

"So you realize they're describing Hob, tall, thin, but not lanky, and they bring him up as someone really interesting,

but then sort of trail off trying to describe him. Definitely sounds like an enchantment. Before you're able to try and probe for more, Esin arrives, and comes to sit down with you."

Eisen's player looks thoughtful. "When I get there, is my Source there?" I look down at my PC summary sheet and see that Eisen's source is new music, so I **Offer opportunity, with or without a cost**, saying "Well, it's a library, so there's no music playing there unless you bring it. Did you come with your headphones on, and a few new songs loaded up?" Eisen's player answers in the affirmative, telling me that they're listening to one of the songs as they walk in, so their **Source** move is triggered, and they hold 3.

Eisen's player continues, "I want to offer my headphones to Hector, and I say, 'You've gotta hear this, it's blowing my mind man.'"

I think about whether the player might need to roll **Use a Sleeper**, but ultimately decide that it's pretty normal and Hector would just take them. So I describe Hector putting on a headphone, and kind of nodding their head along to the beat, then taking the other to hear better. "It seems like you've **Opened Their Mind** to your Source, Eisen," I say, and Eisen rolls +Dynamic. 8, so they are drawn

to Eisen's Source. "Wow, this is great. Who's it by?" asks Hector, reaching for your phone." Eisen lets them have it, and I say, "They look at the screen for a moment, then close their eyes, really getting into the music. Absent-mindedly, they go to put the phone into their pocket." I'm **Setting up a Future Problem**, which will turn into **Take Away Something They Expect to Have** if it isn't handled. "What do you do, Zuri?"

Zuri's player smirks. "You know, Eisen, magic requires sacrifice..." As Eisen sputters, I notice that this, too, triggered a move, and say "It sounds like you're **Asserting your Paradigm over another Mage.**" Zuri and Eisen's players both go wide-eyed, but agree. Zuri's player rolls +Static, and gets a 7, so holds 1. Eisen's player says, "I don't think I'm convinced. I hold out my hand and ask for my phone back." I look over the moves, and this is an attempt to get a sleeper to do what they want, so it would trigger the **Use a Sleeper** move. "In order to **Use a Sleeper**, you'll need to have something they want. What are you offering, Eisen?" "Hmm. OK, I say, 'Hey, Hector, I need that back now, but I'll send you the playlist later, OK?' Is this where I roll?"

Zuri's player jumps in. "Actually, I think I'm going to spend my Hold to

give a -1 to that roll, because I did just say that magic requires sacrifice.” “It’s true, you did,” I say. “Alright, roll +Without minus one.” “That Zuri, so convincing,” remarks Eisen’s player, as they start to roll. “10! No, wait, minus one, it’s a 9. Curse your silver tongue.”

“Alright, so Hector will need proof that they’ll get what they want, or will need it before they do anything for you, so I think Hector shakes his head. ‘Nah, you don’t understand. I really need this right now. I’m just gonna AirDrop it over to my phone...” Eisen’s player just kind of shrugs, so I say, “You realize that if Hector does that, this playlist won’t be ‘new’ anymore. It will stop feeding your inspiration. You were sure you were going to get another day or two out of this at least.” I’m telling the possible consequences and asking. Eisen lets out a long-suffering sigh. “OK, sure. Hang on, while my Source is still kind of present, at least for Hector, can I spend one of my Hold to bring the positive tag into play? It’s +invigorating, so maybe it breaks Hector out of their enchantment?” I nod, and now Eisen’s player gets to narrate what this means for the moment. They say, “So as the music swells, it starts to give Hector a rush of energy, and then clarity. Finally, the music hits and holds a single note, that resonates like a tuning fork and

then shatters the enchantment." "Great!" I continue. "Hector shakes his head to clear it and looks around. 'Zuri? When did you get here? I think someone dangerous has been lurking around!'"

MC

Chapter 8

Anchors and Inspirations

8.1 Anchors

Player

When we say that Mages are the pinnacle of humanity, we mean it. But that's not always a good thing, right? The thing about being at an edge of humanity is that it's easy for a Mage to step over the line, and that means no longer being human. Your Anchors are the things that keep you on this side of the line. A loved one who knows nothing about magic, an estate bound up in the history of your family, the stray cat you took in off the street, or the picture of your brother who died the day you Awakened. Anchors are beings, or physical objects, that keep you grounded in the mortal world. But they also hold you back from your fullest potential.

8. Anchors and Inspirations

Player

Do you want to shed the shackles of your Anchors in order to transcend, or remain among them, being a little bit better, but know you will never reach your full potential?

Anchors cannot be magical in nature. Other Mages, spirits you've summoned, enchanted items, these things aren't grounded enough in reality to keep you there. Your pet cat who brings you comfort, fine. Your cat familiar, not so fine.

Anchors are some of the most powerful story elements you have available. They are people or things that your players have specifically told you their characters care about, and losing them is always a dramatic moment. Indeed, simply threatening an Anchor is enough to force a Mage to make a choice, whether to react or not, which they always learn from.

MC

Player

Starting Anchors

Your character starts with Anchors, which say things about who they have been so far. Each playbook suggests different Anchors in the starting categories. As you choose them, think about how they keep you grounded, and human. Also

think about what you need to do to keep them in your life, be it paying rent on an apartment, or taking care of a loved one. Note that you can choose to forego any of these Anchors, but you may be starting yourself at a disadvantage.

Starting Anchors fall under three categories: Shelter Anchors, Connection Anchors, and Emotional Anchors.

Shelter

A Shelter Anchor is literally that, an Anchor that gives you shelter. It can be very powerful and grounding to have a home for an Anchor, but also means that you have not enchanted your home as much as some Mages might. If you find yourself using magic for maintenance, you quickly might find that, while still a home, it is no longer an Anchor. For some Mages, having a home to come back to which is calm and relaxing can keep them grounded. For others, the home they come back to and fight can be a different, but just as real, type of grounding. There's something about yelling about who will do the dishes that can get your head right down out of the clouds.

Connection

Connection Anchors are notable for their agency, as they are people or animals.

Keep in mind that these Anchors can protect themselves from danger sometimes, but also have the choice to turn their backs on you. If they do so, it's up to you at that point if they remain an Anchor...but if they do, they won't make it easy on you.

Emotional

Emotional Anchors are the objects, signs, and places that connect to memories of the past and ideas of the future. They can be grounding, but need to be kept in your mind, and likely regularly interacted to or kept on hand, lest they slip away.

Filling in Blanks

Some starting Anchors are not completely filled in to start, they will have a blank space left to fill in. Choose something evocative to write there, if you pick that starting anchor, and be ready to explore what it means. Keep in mind the category of Anchor it is in, and don't fill in the blank in a way that makes that Anchor not fill that need.

Anchor Upkeep

Anchors require upkeep to remain. Every Anchor has a Status Track representing its condition. At the start of each session, mark off one Code from every Anchor's Status Track. You can suggest what this means to the MC. Frequently,

it will not be the first Code marked for that Anchor, and so simply represents an exacerbation. In addition, as with all Status Tracks, if something happens which seems to suggest worsening of an Anchor's condition or connection to you, mark off a Code.

Upkeep for an Anchor involves doing whatever is needed to restore things to normal. Homes frequently cost Savings to upkeep in a literal sense (rent, bills, maintenance, and so on). Connection Anchors usually need to spend time with you, likely receiving your attention. Emotional Anchors need to be kept from fading in your mind, often through routine or rote, and also may need physical maintenance. In general, performing upkeep for an Anchor takes a good amount of time, or savings, or has an opportunity cost, and clears the entire Status Track, restoring the connection. Notably, performing this upkeep should be something that grounds you in reality. If you are attempting to upkeep your Shelter Anchor by performing magic on it to tidy everything, you aren't up-keeping the Anchor, you might in fact be slipping it. See the Transformation section later in this chapter for more examples.

Note that an Anchor's Status Track

can be slipping, like any other.

Connecting with an Anchor

When you've been shaken by the threat or reality of bodily harm, connecting with an Anchor is an important step for helping you get your feet under you again. This is just a little while, maybe a couple of minutes, of really reminding yourself of your Anchor's presence in your life, or interacting with one. Some effects of combat will wear off during this time, and you can recharge your Preparations.

However, if an Anchor's Upkeep Status Track is slipping (has hit code 30 or below), then there is no calm to be had. It is actively drifting away from you, and you will not be able to connect with it until the issue(s) are resolved.

Losing Anchors

Losing an Anchor is a moment of transformation for your character. It can happen in many ways, but all of them mean that the Mage is a little less grounded. They're a little closer to leaving behind what it means to be human, and a little more powerful.

Losing an Anchor makes people react unpredictably. When you lose an Anchor, a move triggers, giving you a sense of what happens. If you're lucky, it is

Player

not truly destabilizing, even if it was a shock. If you are less lucky, you might lash out, one way or another. Or, you might find that some of your magic was based on the knowledge that you had that Anchor to fall back on, and it Backlashes on you, which may have further compounding effects. Or, you might find that your Anchors were more connected than you might have realized, and now another one is threatened, or lost outright as well. How lucky you are depends in part on how many Anchors you have, so you can quickly enter into a spiral. If your magical exploits mean you haven't been spending enough time with your spouse and they finally take the kids and leave, you might realize that the house really isn't yours, once the divorce takes place it will belong to them so even in the meantime it doesn't feel grounding, and now you have lost two Anchors in as many minutes.

A former Anchor likely still exists in the world, and may even continue to interact with the Mage. Don't forget about them just because they aren't marked anymore. In fact, you should probably note them on an appropriate Force, or keep them in the Internal Forces if none stand out, as an element that can still be brought into play.

MC

8. Anchors and Inspirations

Upkeep

If an Anchor's Status Track hits Code N, you have lost them. Depending on the nature of the needed upkeep, this could mean many different things about their place in the world. You might get evicted from your home, or find that the house has become literally unlivable. A Connection Anchor most likely feels neglected by you and decides to go their own way. An Emotional Anchor might stop reminding you of what it once did, or it might finally break, and you feel your connection to that part of your life break as well.

Player

Threats to Anchors

A Mage's life is full of danger, and this can extend to those around them. During play, you are likely to discover from time to time that an Anchor is put in real danger. When this happens, you have a choice to make. You can either drop what you're doing and go try to handle it. Or, you can accept that the Anchor doesn't actually mean more to you than what you are doing. Of course, realizing that means that they aren't Anchoring you anymore. Whatever you choose, you learn something from the experience.

What exactly constitutes danger de-

depends on the **Anchor**. A branch falling on your house probably demands upkeep (marking a **Code** off the **Status Track**), but likely isn't an imminent danger. A foreclosure notice from the bank, however, requires the immediate choice. It might even depend on your relationship to the **Anchor**. If your connection anchor tells you "show up to the bar tonight or we're not friends anymore," to one person that might be just how they talk to their buddy (mark a **Code** off the **Status Track** if you stand them up), whereas to someone else that relationship is in real danger from that kind of ultimatum, and they need to make an immediate choice.

Narrative Loss

Sometimes, it is clear that you have lost an **Anchor**. If a **Connection Anchor** dies, they clearly are no longer an **Anchor**. You also might acknowledge that for other reasons, and **Anchor** no longer fulfills that role. This is exactly like losing an **Anchor** in any other way.

Transformation One way to lose an **Anchor** is for it to become magical. **Anchors**, after all, cannot be magic at their hearts. It is **OK** to put some magic on them, though this may be risky, and likely requires upkeep later to help re-

store a sort of balance. But, if they reach the point where they are magical, then they cease to be an Anchor. Sometimes this can happen intentionally, like if you decide to turn your house into a fully-enchanted wizard's tower, or you link your mind to your dog's because you want a familiar. Other times it might be an unintended side effect, like if you save your sister by throwing her into a magical pool, and discover when she emerges that it not only healed her wounds, it transformed her into an oracle.

Gaining Anchors

Your starting Anchors are not the only ones you can ever have. It is possible to gain new ones during play. These behave exactly like other Anchors, though they are likely better characterized when it happens. You can even re-gain previously lost Anchors, if you can justify it. It may be helpful to consider new Anchors as one of Shelter/Connection/Emotional, but it is not required. Add them to your sheet, and put a Status Track next to them.

Through a Move

A few moves allow an Anchor to be gained. Work with the MC, and originator

of the move if not you, to determine who or what the new Anchor is, and how you come to realize what they mean to you.

If you exchange a moment of humanity with a Mentor, you may immediately gain an Anchor. They are highly grounded as it is, and this rubs off on you. You cannot gain more Anchors than you started with in this way, however. There is only so much you can be connected to.

The Pious' Advanced Move Humanist lets a Pious show you the value of humanity, and that can affect you strongly enough to immediately gain an Anchor, even going above your starting number. The Pious sees something special in the world.

The Mentor's Advanced Move Nekkhamma allows them to gain one last Anchor, "my love for humanity", when they would otherwise cease to be Anchored at all. This represents a certain type of enlightenment, one that encourages them to stick around to spread their wisdom.

Through an Advancement

All playbooks also have the option to gain an anchor as one of their Tier 1 unlimited advancements. This will list a maximum number of Anchors you can have after taking this advancement

8. Anchors and Inspirations

Player

however, and it is always one less than the number of Anchors your playbook can start with. This is a good way to regain some ground if you are close to the edge, but can't bring you back to as fully grounded as you started out.

Non Player Character Mages

MC

In this world, Mages have Anchors. You should be sure to think about this and what it means for your NPC mages. Losing even a single Anchor will likely hit an NPC extremely hard, much like how NPCs often only take 1 or 2 harm before going down for the count.

8.2 Inspirations

Player

The counterpart to Anchors, Inspirations are what bring a Mage their power, or tempt them to cross the line to being something other than human. Other Mages often inspire, and particularly significant spirits, animals, or even magical objects might as well. Where Anchors keep you tied to the physical reality, Inspirations help you find ways to rise above your mundane existence. They

help you strive to reach your true potential, but in that striving, is it possible you will go too far? Inspirations are always inherently magical, whether they be other awakened Mages, spirits, or magical objects, in order for them to help you transcend the constraints of your magical capabilities, they must themselves be part of the magical world. (Of course, sometimes you meet someone who would absolutely be an inspiration if only they knew like you did, that magic was real. Maybe you start searching for a way to really open their eyes, thinking about how perfect everything will be then.)

Gaining Inspirations

While there are many people, spirits, animals or even items that could serve to inspire you, only some of them are actively on your mind at a given time. When you interact with someone or something that inspires your magic in certain special ways, they become an active Inspiration for you, lifting you to new heights.

Having a Moment of Humanity

The first way of gaining (or re-gaining) an inspiration is to have a Moment of Humanity with another mage. When this happens, along with rolling your move,

you may add them as an Inspiration. Write their name down on your playbook along with maybe a note about how they inspire you to greater magical feats, like “reminds me to think of individuals, not just groups” or “shows me new forms of magic every time we meet.”

Doing Magic Through Them

The second way of gaining (or re-gaining) an inspiration is to actively work your magic through, or in deep collaboration with, them or it. This is more commonly a way to gain an inspiration that isn't another person, be it a spirit, a familiar, a magical focus, or similar. When you do magic through one of these things, or even through another mage, you may add them as an inspiration. Write them down on your playbook along with maybe a note about how they inspire you to greater magical heights, like “contains the secrets of blood magic” or “tells me what's wrong in my code.”

Maintaining Inspirations

Inspiration is sometimes said to be fleeting. In order to maintain your connection with your inspirations, simply do the same thing you might do to gain one in the first place. If you do so once per

session per inspiration, they'll continue to inspire you.

Losing Inspirations (and why it's not a big deal)

Losing an inspiration, more likely just falling out of touch and not having them at the forefront of your thoughts, isn't a big deal. There's no penalty, and you can always go back and rekindle that spark of inspiration. If at the end of a session you have not had a moment of humanity with or done magic through one or more of your inspirations, just erase them from your sheet and keep on keeping on.

Non-Human Inspirations

Most Inspirations are other humans, especially the other Mages played at the table. But, they're not the only possible source. Magic itself can be inspiring, and it takes many forms. Inspirations really can be any magical thing that make sense at your table, but a few are worth calling out explicitly.

Familiar spirits are a classic part of magical lore. Wizards construct homoculi to help them around the laboratory. Witches bond with magical cats. In these cases, the magical being itself usually

elevates the Mage, possibly even speaking directly to them on issues of magic. Whether a familiar is a spirit taking an understandable form or is a formerly mundane animal which has been transformed into something more is academic.

Some Mages believe that they have a personal spirit who helps guide them on their journey towards enlightenment. This spirit may appear in dreams and visions, and likely offers tantalizing, incomplete clues about magic. On lucky occasions, the Mage might get a chance to actually talk directly to the spirit, and may get a sense of a favorite manifestation, such as a mythological figure, force of nature, or even a past life. These spirits are often called Avatars, or Genius, and they can be a powerful source of inspiration if interacted with regularly.

Some magical items are simply tools, but others go beyond that. Important relics a Mage has found, or artifacts they created themselves, can continue to inspire. Doing magic from an ancient spellbook just feels different from piecing the components together out of pop witchcraft, and sometimes a wand chooses a wizard.

8.3 Tethered and Untethered

Being Tethered

Being Tethered is a state that all mages find themselves in at the start of a game of Consensus. It simply means that you have at least as many Anchors as you have Inspirations, and it is a safe place to be. Safe, but potentially unfulfilling, you can't reach your true potential while tethered, you can't work your will on reality when you let yourself be tethered to reality.

Becoming Untethered

Once you have more Inspirations than Anchors, you become Untethered, a mage truly starting to grasp just how far their power can reach. More paths will open up to you while you are Untethered, but beware, you stand on a precipice, even more than you did before.

When you lose inspirations, or gain anchors so that you are no longer Untethered, you go back to being Tethered, but you keep any advancements you may have gained while Untethered.

Untethered Advancements

The top tier of advancements are only available while your PC is Untethered. These advancements are often more powerful than others you have access to, so you will need to decide if the power is worth the risk. Note that when you gain an advancement, you must take it immediately, so if you are coming up on your 6th advancement and really want to access your Untethered Advancements immediately, it is time to start gaining Inspirations, or shedding Anchors.

Advanced Moves

Notably, the only way to access your playbook's Advanced Moves is by being Untethered, at least for a time.

Basic Move Effects

Certain moves care if your character is tethered, or how many Anchors or Inspirations your character has. Asserting your Paradigm and impressing non-Mage magical beings are both slightly harder if you are Tethered. On the other hand, when you roll to help or hinder another PC, you roll +Anchors, even if you are helping or hindering a magical effect.

Losing a Character

If you ever find yourself with inspirations totaling more than twice the number of anchors you have remaining, that's the moment you've taken a look to see where the line is, the one that mages can't step over and maintain their humanity, and you notice that it's a few steps behind you. This character will be wrapping up, one way or another.

When you lose an anchor or gain an inspiration that would put you over this threshold, you lose the character. They become something other than human. Depending on what the circumstances were, a character might descend into a magic-fueled rage for the rest of eternity, or they might throw off the shackles of their earthly form and ascend to a higher consciousness, just for a couple examples. Work with the MC to determine what happens to the character, and then if you don't have any other characters to play, grab a playbook and make a new one. The MC will almost certainly bring your "lost" character back in some way through the story, so everyone can interact with... whatever they have become.

Chapter 9

Gear and Accoutrements

9.1 Gear

Player

Gear covers notable possessions. This is the modern world, so there are lots of trivial or common items that don't get mentioned often: You probably have a pair of shoes, could carry a pen, may have a flashlight and so on. You may be likely to have a cellphone, depending on where and when your story is set, and the characters' socioeconomic status. These aren't called out anywhere on your character sheet. That doesn't mean they don't exist, of course. You might use them as part of a move, and some MC moves might mean that it turns out your wallet fell out of your pocket and you only notice at the worst possible moment. Determine together, as a table, what is

normal to expect people to have (a game about working in an Antarctic base is going to have different assumptions from one about being deep in the city). You also might want to have it be noteworthy that your character lacks one or more expected modern-day items. But, in general, don't stress about exactly how many socks your character has.

However, some things are interesting by their nature, and most everyone has items that are relevant to them, and show something about their preparation, or sentimentality. This is listed under Gear on your character sheet, and you select it from lists during character creation.

Starting gear is listed in categories, from within which you choose. Think about why your character happens to have that, what it means, and how they might have used it already. Mention it to the other players, too, since it might spark ideas for them.

Note that starting gear also doesn't cover some other possessions, like where you live, or items that are Anchors. Homes are particularly important (see the Anchors chapter), and having one to live in usually means it is an Anchor, unless something unusual has happened. For other Anchors, though, if they represent something that would generally need to be called out in Gear, like a gun or

a motorcycle, then they need to also be listed under Gear or else they are sentimental, but not functional. Starting Anchors and starting Gear should usually have an option that allows them to line up in this way. Nothing stops you from choosing one but not the other, of course. Maybe the motorcycle is just a motorcycle, nothing special, and maybe the pistol that keeps you Anchored to the memory of your father had its barrel welded shut when you were a child, as a form of protest.

When you make or acquire a new item of significance, either through normal play or through a move such as Universal Programmer, make sure to write it on your playbook under the Gear section. Sometimes this could be as simple as telling the MC you'd like to buy something.

Savings

Money is hard to deal with. In some games, it makes sense to simply keep track of gold coins as they come and go. The modern world is more complicated. In small groups, systems of favors and mutual interdependence often overshadow money. In addition, the existence of secondhand shops, eBay, and bargain hunting mean that you can often find something within your price range, as

long as you aren't too picky.

To represent this, money in Consensus is handled abstractly. Prices are given as a number of Savings that have to be spent. Importantly, this number of Savings is supposed to be roughly the same for different characters, but the details and quality of the good or service will depend on the character's in-fiction wealth. For example, "a nice meal for two" is listed as one Saving. The difference is, if those two work minimum wage jobs, it might be a meal at their favorite chain that includes dessert. If they are a movie star and an internationally-featured artist, it's probably a custom creation by a personal chef.

Your character has a certain number of Savings, beginning with the amount listed under their Starting Gear. Subtract from this when told to, usually spending or Anchor upkeep. The MC may also you to increase your Mage's Savings, such as when getting paid for a job, or selling something valuable. A steady job can be difficult for a Mage to keep up, however, it does somewhat guarantee a supply of Savings, which can be worth it.

Of course, your Mage can shape Reality to their whims and can decide that money is a problem for other people, and seek to circumvent it with magic. If

Player

you aren't changing a bartender's mind to add it to their tab just this one more time, you might have the \$20 you need blow in on a dust devil, or win a small lottery, or go digging for buried treasure in your backyard and, incredibly, find a chest of pirate gold. This does have all the usual rending dangers of repeated coincidence, of course. It is much more harmonious to change things up, than to keep diggings holes in your yard until the Consensus sits up and takes notice.

When pricing something new, look to this table to get a general sense.

1 Saving

A nice meal for two. A suit. A thoughtful gift. An interstate train ticket. A good psychic reading.

2 Savings

An ostentatious meal for two. A domestic plane ticket. A handgun. A computer. A night's stay at a hotel. A rare book. Walk-in medical treatment.

3 Savings

A short hospital stay. A college course. A short vacation. A custom-crafted sword, made by a skilled Craftsper-son.

4 Savings

MC

A car, a motorcycle, a boat

Something that is significantly less than the 1-Savings category probably shouldn't cost the character anything at all. However, do remember that buying a lot of something can add up.

When a character is buying something that doesn't line up with what would be normal for them (such as if a nurse buys a suit to blend in with a movie star), adjust Savings as appropriate.

Sometimes, you might say that a course of action requires some Savings to be spent. This frequently makes sense as part of upkeep for Anchors, particularly the Shelter Anchor. In addition, remember that some things cannot be bought for any amount of money, and will have to be procured through other means (consider the move, "Make them Conjure or Buy").

Feel free to tell characters to increase their Savings if they've done something to deserve it, such as completing a job for someone or finding a valuable item and then selling it. Press hard on Mages who do attempt to keep a steady job, however. Pay attention to the impact of staying out all night to fight the living dead on someone who needs to open the shop in the morning. If they turn to magic instead of the mundane world to see to their monetary needs, then

don't forget to Hit them with the Static Realities of their World if they try to use harmonious magic to pass off the same lucky coincidence, too many times.

MC

9.2 Accoutrements

Some playbooks have extra sections that include how they relate to the world. Only fill in these sections if you select or start with the Move that is attached to them. For example, a Pious only fills out their Place of Power once they select the Sanctuary move, whereas a Cabalist starts with the move Gossamer Threads, and fills out the Cabal section of their playbook when making the character.

Player

Places of Power

Places of power are magically significant sites, and for a PC to have access to one is a Big Deal. It means that unlike Mages who have to depend on rare confluences of energy or the generosity of others in order to take part in Rituals, you can usually expect to have a place to go that is awash with energy. The details of this will be determined by the move, because it is never truly simple: maybe you don't exactly own the place as such, you just know about the magic

there and take care of it. Or maybe you do own it, but the land is half an hour by car on dirt roads from anywhere, has no running water, and something of a wolf problem. Still, a standard plan to use when you need to create a much larger effect than you can accomplish unaided is incredibly valuable.

Facade

This is the appearance that the place takes on, or the structure built over and around it. These are both thematic and practical, and the facade you choose will help inform many of the other choices while making the Place of Power. This is also when you will work with the MC to determine the location of your Place of Power.

Strengths

These represent the upsides to the particular place you have chosen. Whichever one you choose, make sure to talk a little bit about what that means to you, so the MC doesn't accidentally circumvent it. (They may of course purposely circumvent it when their moves allow them to.)

Weaknesses

These represent the downsides to your place of power. Again, talk a little bit about which ones you choose and what they mean to you, and what they mean for the place of power. If a place of power is inaccessible, why, what makes it hard to get to? If it's tainted, by what? How does that affect the magic that's cast there? You don't have to decide everything right away, but the MC will likely make probing questions at the weaknesses, to help everyone understand the potential risks of that Place of Power.

Ritual Bonus

This choice is a bonus to the Ritual move when it is performed at this place of power. This really helps solidify the uniqueness of your place of power, which can be especially important if multiple playbooks are in play with a Place of Power move. This limits the potential costs, needs, or downsides of doing a ritual here.

Other Accoutrements**The Cabalist's Cabal**

The Cabalist has a group of like-minded mages that they work with regularly.

Though they are represented as a group on your playbook, work with the **MC** to make them each individuals. The **MC** will likely ask probing questions about them as they appear in the story, and should tie their stories to other player characters as well. Your cabal as a whole has strengths and a vulnerability. These help add depth to the group, and also tell the **MC** what kinds of stories and situations you want to play out with your cabal, and what kinds you want to avoid.

Example Cabal The Chi Beta Chi Book Club Secret Society -

The book club has alumni that graduated previously and other chapters on other campuses with their own cabals. +support

The book club has studied magic and has passed down techniques from Senior to Freshman. Drop weak magic.

The frat likes to throw parties and the book club doesn't really know the meaning of subtle. Vulnerable: Target

The Mentor's Students

The **Mentor** has a group of mundane students that they're teaching. Each session they progress towards their want or their surplus or both. When they reach

a tipping point, the MC will have them either help out in a way related to the surplus, or cause problems by pursuing their want or wants. The students are also individuals, who can be connected to other player characters. While they often act together as a group, they also act as individuals with their own personalities.

Example Students Shady Grove Middle School Go Club -

The go club is full of bright students who all want to play first table at any upcoming match, and to do whatever they can to prove themselves. (replace want: departure with want: competition)

The go club is full of middle schoolers who are penned up in classrooms for far too much of the day, but they absolutely love playing and learning the game. (replace surplus: time with surplus: energy)

The students are quick studies, always trying out new things and adapting strategies on the fly. (+1 learning)

The Inspired's Source

The Inspired's source is a reliable Inspiration for them, when they can get it. It has a form that describes it, one positive tag, and two negative tags. Re-

ally flesh out what the Source is though, the tags should just describe it. The positive tag can be brought into play while interacting with your Source, and the MC can use the negative tags to affect you (or your ability to access your source.)

Example Sources Muse - A person, +sense, +quick, +chaotic

Peak Experiences - An action, +alert, +rare, +forbidden

Adrenaline - An action, +invigorating, +dangerous, +addicting

A patron eldritch horror - An abstract concept, +sense, +dangerous, +chaotic

Intense Emotional Music - An abstract concept, +safe, +quick, +rare

A very special boulder I keep in my basement - An object, +safe, +immobile, +rare

An ornately carved statue with sharp edges - An object, +social, +dangerous, +rare

Terror - An emotion, +social, +forbidden, +dangerous

Tags

Tags are narrative flags applied to some accoutrements. They are one or two words written with a + in front to

make them stand out. When you are told to select tags, you are adding customization and making the accoutrement concrete. They can define strengths and weaknesses, and other relevant properties. Tags often come with a small description to help flesh out the meaning. The player and the MC should both note the tags, to make it easy to bring them up often. Two different characters may both have a place of power, but if one has the Strength tag +private, and the other has the Strength tag +famous, then the interactions at each should be totally different. The first is unlikely to have rituals be interrupted by passers-by, while the second might cause more helpful chance meetings.

Like most things in Consensus, tags are prescriptive and descriptive. If the +private place of power becomes famous, its Strength should probably change. Likewise, if an advancement allows a new tag to be added, describe what has changed to make this true.

Chapter 10

Improvement

Player

Characters grow and change through the course of a story. Mages are no different. They learn new types of magic, get stronger, and sometimes change who they are entirely. Experience is the primary method of tracking how this happens over the course of a campaign, but it is not the only thing that changes. Growth can come in quick, noteworthy jumps, or evolve slowly over time, only to be noticed after a while. Thus, these changes can be made at any time that they make sense during a session.

10.1 Gaining Experience

Experience is a measure of how your character grows and learns over time. In Consensus, “marking experience” refers to filling in a bubble on your character sheet. When you fill in the fifth bubble, erase them all and pick an Advancement.

Several things cause you to mark experience. Generally, like the rest of Consensus, do it when a move tells you to. The ways you can mark experience are common information at the table, and can act as encouragement: If you let the Hedge Mage talk to your character about their Paradigm, you just might mark experience! Everybody wins! Similarly, you can use hold from moves like Assert Your Paradigm. This would allow you to encourage others to do what you want them to, by offering experience.

Here are most common ways to mark experience, which reflect how Consensus is encouraging you to play the game.

Flags

Every character in play should have a Flag. When you hit a Flag for a character that you haven’t hit before, mark experience. This will give them the opportunity to change it, and you can’t

mark experience for hitting that same Flag again. Even a minor change is enough to allow you to mark experience again, however. Flags are a way to tell the other players how you would like to see your character interacted with, and offer them a little experience in return if they do it.

Asserting Your Paradigm

If someone Asserts their Paradigm over you, and rolls a success, one of the things they can spend their Hold to do is cause you to mark experience. The player is perfectly within their rights to use this as a bribe: "If you go along with my character's way of looking at things, I'll let you mark experience." In-game, this represents your character seeing something in their assertion, and maybe learning from it.

An Anchor is put in Danger

When one of your Anchors is put in danger, mark experience right away. No matter what, it's a cause of growth. Whether the danger leads you to find out how far you're willing to go to protect what's important to you, or makes you realize you didn't care that much after all, or even just reminds you of the

precious and fleeting nature of things, it adds to your experience.

At End of Session

At the end of every session, a move triggers to resolve dangling threads, but also asks the table a set of questions. If anyone answers yes to a question, everyone marks experience (for any characters they played during the session). It is reasonable to discuss whether an event that occurred means a question is answered yes, but even if the answer was only relevant for some characters, it counts for everyone. For example, if Leslie uncovered the secret of the *Untouched Words* while Cory and Ash spent the whole session arguing over herb gardens, all three still mark experience. This is one of the ways to gain the most experience, and also helps you check the tone of your game after each session. If you find that for multiple sessions in a row, you don't answer yes to any of these, this game may not be working as well for you as it could. You may want to talk about the tone of game you want to play in, and change the end of session move to better fit that.

Playbook Moves

Various playbook moves involve marking experience, or allowing others to mark experience. It's a good idea to note these to the table, so they can understand what your motivations are, and know what you are offering them.

10.2 Choosing Advancements

When you reach 5 experience, erase all bubbles and choose an advancement from a tier that you have access to. Each playbook has their own set of advancements, you must choose an advancement from the playbook you are playing. Advancements, unless otherwise noted, can only be chosen once. Fill in the bubble on your playbook to note that the advancement has been taken. It is worth noting that some advancements have a * next to them, which represents that it can be taken any number of times. You don't need to try and fill that in. Advancements are both prescriptive and descriptive, like most things in this game. You may choose to take an advancement to move your character in a certain direction, or to acknowledge mechanically a direction they are already moving in. In either case, try to think about what works best for the fiction, what makes the most sense for your character, and

what would be the most fun. Attempting to min-max your character advancements can be disappointing in this game.

Tier 1 Advancements

Tier 1 Advancements are accessible to all characters without restriction, these are your playbook's base level advancements. Some of the advancements listed below are Untethered advancements in certain playbooks, and can only be accessed when the criteria for choosing Untethered Advancements are met.

Gain +1 in a Stat

This advancement adds +1 to one of your stats, up to a maximum listed on your playbook. If your stat is already at this maximum, taking the improvement will confer no benefit on your character.

Pick a new option for a playbook specific accoutrement

This advancement will specify a new option for one of your playbook specific accoutrements. This might improve your place of power, or a group of NPCs that your character has influence over. You can choose a negative modifier unless otherwise specified.

Gain a new move from your playbook

This advancement lets you pick another move from your current playbook, one of the ones you don't already have access to. Fill out any relevant parts of your playbook, make any relevant choices at this time. Think about how your character might have gained mastery of this ability, gaining the move gives them reliable results when they try to do it, as opposed to the wide-open world of trying to do something similar without a move. Think about what it means for your character to have gained this move. Is it something they've been practicing (on or off screen)? Is it something they tried once and quickly found a knack for? Is it something they don't even realize they can do, and the first time the move triggers will be a surprise to them?

Gain a move from another playbook

This advancement lets you pick a new move from a different playbook than your own. This is as close to "multi-classing" as it is possible to get in Consensus. Try to pick a move from a playbook that isn't already in play, or if you do have your eye on a move that is in a playbook some other player is playing for one of their characters, talk to them first. Playbook moves are

one of the big ways that characters in Consensus are unique, so try not to pick a move that another character already has.

Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm

Restrictions may be added to your character's paradigm by the MC during play. These are limitations on what you can do within your limitations, similar to the Opposed choices you made at character creation. Choosing this advancement is the only way to remove them. This advancement, like most advancements, can only be chosen once, so choose carefully when you decide to use it. Think about how your character overcomes this restriction. It doesn't need to be big and momentous for them, but it very well might be.

(Special) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm

This special advancement, noted by an asterisk on your playbook, can be taken any number of times. You choose a Freedom to give to another Mage's Paradigm, basically a loophole or exemption to one of their Opposed Aspects. They write this freedom on their character sheet, along with who gave it to them.

Freedoms only work while the receiving character is working together with the character who gave it to them. These represent real opportunities for teamwork, character growth, and synergy. As characters work more together, consider giving Freedoms to make note of how they have learned from each other. Especially pay attention if moves like **We're Not So Different**, **Assert Your Paradigm**, **If You Ask Me**, **Clarity of Purpose**, or **Strong Avatar** have been recently triggered.

(Special) Gain an Anchor

This special advancement, noted by an asterisk on your playbook, can be taken any number of times. You may gain a new anchor, in a category that you don't currently have one in. You can never get back to your starting number of Anchors with this advancement however. Think about how your character has gained this anchor, sometimes it will be obvious from play, such as buying a house or gaining a new important (mundane) friend. Sometimes it will be less obvious, and you will need to come up with a little more information about the Anchor and your relationship to it for the MC.

Tier 2 Advancements

Tier 2 Advancements are unlocked only after you have taken five Tier 1 Advancements. These represent large changes to the character, and do not make sense for a brand new character to take.

Retire to safety

If you choose this, your character stops being playable. They have decided to opt for a simpler, safer life, at least for the time being. Describe where they settle, or how they head off into the sunset. Perhaps they finally do build that wizard's tower in a nearby plane, or maybe they're still your next-door neighbor, but who's no longer going out looking for where things are wrong and fixing them. Doing this binds the MC to not kill your character, toss them into a Discordant Realm, or otherwise greatly mess with them. They might show up, as a non-player character, on occasion, since they still exist in the world, but they shouldn't be going around, having adventures anymore, and trouble won't seek them out as it will actively played Mages.

If you are still playing in the campaign when you choose this, and don't have any other characters, make a new character to join in.

Switch playbooks

This represents a more profound change to the way your character approaches the world than simply gaining a new move. Maybe your Wayfarer has found a reason to stop wandering, in a group of mages they now call family, and so changes to a Cabalist. Maybe the Hedge Mage has a brush with death that changes their outlook on life and they become a Pious. Maybe the Primordial gets convinced that the old ways are dying and they join the winning side as a Tech Adept.

In any case, the character's core self doesn't change, so by default they keep their name, looks, Anchors, stats, and any moves that seem particularly iconic. That being said, this is a great time to shake anything up if it seems like it might make sense. Perhaps the character switches one of their anchors, and explains how that happens in the world, or changes the general look of their eyes or aura.

If you take this advancement, you'll negotiate with the table about what aspects of the old playbook transfer over to the new one. Generally we advise that you should be able to keep one move from your old playbook that was particularly iconic to the way you played them. We advise that you pick a Paradigm from

the new playbook, but perhaps keep elements of your old paradigm if they make a lot of sense to stick around after such a big change. For Gear, the easiest thing to do is either keep your old playbook gear, or take the gear from the new playbook, but the table can talk about it if some things make sense to transfer over, and you also want some of the gear the new playbook offers.

Start a second character

You can also start an entirely new character, to play alongside your old one. They are wholly independent beings, who just happen to have the same player, like how all non-player characters are played by the same MC. Do this the same way a new character would be added to the campaign. Select a playbook that's not currently in play, make all of the choices that you would at the start of a campaign, at the table where you can get input from others. Write a Flag, and figure out where they fit into the world that's been described.

If you have two, or even three characters, it can be hard to fit everybody in. So, when you are told to do something for all characters at the start of the session, select at least one, who you want to see in play. If you're sure you will want to see multiple, that's fine. Later,

if another of your characters is going to be in a scene, cover their start of session actions right then: Updating their Flag, mark a code of each of their Anchors' Status Tracks and determine what they mean, take stock of their slipping Status Tracks, and roll start of session moves. At the end of the session, only characters you played mark experience in response to the questions.

Note that not playing a character doesn't stop, for example, Portents related to them from advancing, so do make sure that they get their moments in the spotlight as appropriate.

Untethered Advancements

Some very powerful advancements are only available to Mages who have left behind a certain amount of attachment to the mundane world, or are sufficiently inspired in the magical world. Untethered Advancements may only be accessed by characters that have unlocked Tier 2 advancements, and only if they are Untethered at the time of reaching their fifth experience. If a character becomes Tethered again, they retain any advancements gained while Untethered. Advanced Moves for each playbook are under this tier, and are some of the most powerful moves available.

Becoming Untethered: Inspirations and Anchors

A character becomes **Untethered** when they have more **Inspirations** than they do **Anchors**. This can happen by gaining a new inspiration or by losing an **Anchor**. (Sometimes both may happen at once, but this is likely a rare occurrence.) They remain **Untethered** while this remains true. However, if a character at any point has at least twice as many **Inspirations** as they do **Anchors**, that character becomes **Lost** and is no longer a playable character (**Losing a Character** (page 200)). This is the careful balancing act **Mages** must do in order to access their most powerful advancements.

(Special) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm

This is the same advancement as the one-time advancement from **Tier 1**, but as it is notated with an asterisk, can be taken any number of times while **Untethered**.

Advanced Moves

Advanced moves for each of the playbooks can be found below. These moves often change the nature of the game or the world significantly, and with one ex-

ception, each playbook can only take one **Advanced Move**. This is likely the culmination of your character's goals, abilities, or research, so consider very carefully what move fits them best.

Consensus Shifting

If you have an **Advanced Move** that lets you attempt to shift the **Consensus**, you start a **Consensus Shift Status Track**. If this status track reaches **Code N**, you have successfully shifted the consensus. This track is racing against the **Consensus Force Status Track** though, as you are likely not the only one who is trying to sway the subconscious of the universe. If the **Consensus Force Status Track** reaches **Code N**, the **MC** will choose to either shift the consensus in favor of one of the **Forces**, in which case you will reset your **Consensus Shift** track to **Code 50**, or they will choose to shift the consensus to block your shift. (This represents a faction refuting the possibility of your shift before you establish it in the **Consensus**.) If the **MC** shifts the **Consensus** to block your shift, or if you successfully reach **Code N**, you may start a new **Consensus Shift Status Track** next time your **Consensus Shifting** move triggers.

Cabalist Advanced Moves

Strength of the Circle Once per session, when you would gain any amount of discord, your cabal intercepts the discord and spreads it among the members, effectively diluting it enough to dissipate it.

Cult Your cabal follows you fanatically. Add the following option to **Gossamer Threads**, and always choose +1 option when you roll that move, even on a miss.

- They go above and beyond the call of duty.

Group research When your cabal helps you **Research**, on a 12+, hold 2. Use this hold 1 for 1 to introduce a previously unknown fact or weakness about the topic of your research at any time.

Hedge Mage Advanced Moves

Familiar You may take a magical being or object as an anchor. You may only ever have one magical anchor at a time. Your magical anchor may also be an Inspiration.

Universal Understanding Remove an Opposed Aspect from your Paradigm

True Summoning Call Through Shadow can now work on magical objects and beings, as well as specific objects and beings.

Push the Consensus When you take this move, you may note a small but arcane shift you are attempting to make in the Consensus. **Start a Consensus Shift Status Track.** When you have successfully performed Harmonious magic that stretches the limits of coincidence (in a way related to your consensus shift) in front of a would-be Lookout, roll +Anchors. On a hit, advance the Consensus Shift status track. On a 7-9, choose 1:

- Oops, that was actually Rending magic!
- Oops, you slipped it by the Consensus too well, don't advance the Consensus Shift track.
- Oops, the Consensus noticed, but so did... something else. The MC will advance the Consensus Force and up to one other related Force.

On a 6-, that was certainly rending magic! The MC makes a hard move

Inspired Advanced Moves

With a Little Help From My Friends
When you roll a 10+ on the Backlash

move, bring someone with you. They see and experience what you do, but retain their understanding and awareness of reality

Mind Wide Open Add this to **Open Their Mind**: On a 12+, they **Awaken**.

Hidden in Plain Sight At the beginning of the session, roll +**Within**. On a 10+ hold 3, on a 7-9 hold 2, on a miss hold 1. Spend a hold to negate one of the negative tags of your Source for a scene. (This could simply mean the negative tags aren't interfering for whatever reason, or it could be because of something you did, magical or mundane. Narrate as appropriate.)

Terror and Wonder When you take this move, you may note one moderate shift (on par with a major technological breakthrough), or two tiny shifts you are attempting to make in the Consensus. Start a Consensus Shift Status Track (Only one, even if you chose two tiny shifts) When you do rending magic (that directly relates to your intended Consensus Shift) in front of a large group of Lookouts, take 3 discord and roll +**Dynamic** and advance your Consensus Shift Status Track. On a 10+, advance your Consensus Shift

Status Track again. On a 7-9, choose 1:

- You are not immediately sucked into a Reality Break
- The MC does not advance the Consensus Force
- Advance your Consensus Shift Status Track again

On a 6-, you are sucked into a Reality Break, and your Reality Break Strength status track starts having hit Code 30.

Mentor Advanced Moves

Nekkhamma Once per session, when you lose an anchor, treat the roll as a 10+, no matter what it is. Mark an additional XP. When you lose your last anchor, you immediately gain one final anchor of "My Love for Humanity", continue playing as normal.

Diamond Body Any time you take Harm, reduce it by 1 (to a minimum of 0)

Mass Awakening All of your students are awakened, change playbooks to Cabalists.

Pious Advanced Moves

Awakener When you perform rending magic in front of a non-magical witness, you may add another option to the list: They awaken. You may only choose this option if you don't chose "You don't cause collateral damage."

Humanist When you show someone the value of humanity, they may immediately gain an anchor. They may go above their starting number of Anchors for this.

Secret Keeper When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity in addition to any other effects, you immediately learn one secret about that character. Ask their player for a deep secret about the character. When you do, choose one from each line: * The secret gets out, The secret is magically sealed, The secret is forgotten by everyone but me

* Hold 3 as per Assert Your Paradigm, Hold 3 as per Vows, Hold 3 spent 1 for 1 to have them suffer 0 harm

* Transfer all of their Discord to you, Transfer all of their Harm to you, Nothing

Primordial Advanced Moves

One With Everything Remove an Opposed Aspect from your Paradigm

Iron Will Once per session when you Put Willpower Behind Changing It, you may choose none of the options.

Fountain of Power When you are at a place of power, you may do magic within your Paradigm but beyond your normal abilities (without expending a magical resource). In addition, you are aware of the magic stores within the place of power.

Tech Adept Advanced Moves

Publish Or Perish When you take this move, you may note a small but substantial shift you are attempting to make in the Consensus. Start a Consensus Shift status track. At the beginning of the session, roll +Without. On a 10+, advance your Consensus Shift track. On a 7-9, advance your Consensus Shift track, but choose 1:

- The MC advances the Consensus Force
- Add a negative “quirk” to your consensus shift. (ex. the Panacea

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Player

you are working into the Consensus sometimes just up and kills the person dosed with it, instead of curing them.)

On a miss, the MC will advance the Consensus Force and make a move.

Reality 2.0 Remove an Opposed Aspect from your Paradigm

Perfected Blueprints Add the following to Universal Programmer: On a 12+ you can make additional copies of it without rolling, as long as you have the time and materials.

Detailed Analysis When you roll Things Speak, always ask 1 additional question. In addition, add these questions to the list of possible questions:

- What is the hidden power of this object?
- What is this object's greatest use in the current situation?
- Why was this object meant for me?

Voiced Advanced Moves

Renown You are powerful, connected, or otherwise a Big Deal. You yourself count

as a significant or powerful group for the purposes of **Power Vested in Me**.

Storyteller When you tell a group of non-magical people a compelling story about a seemingly magical feat that someone else has performed, start a **Consensus Shift Status Track** about that magical feat. If a status track already exists for that **Consensus Shift**, roll **+Without** and the **MC** advances the **Consensus Force**. On a hit, they are interested and want to hear more. On a **10+**, they also don't doubt or contradict you, and word doesn't get back to an interested party, the **MC** does not advance the **Consensus Force**. On a **12+**, additionally, advance the relevant **Consensus Shift Status Track**.

Heart of the Storm Choose one large-reaching effect that you specialize in. (Examples include: **Conjuring storms**, **Creating Golems**, **Miraculous Healing**). For this effect, only roll the **Do Rending Magic** move if you are directly witnessed casting this by a **Lookout**, rather than if it affects a **Lookout**.

Wayfarer Advanced Moves

Demiplane You gain a place of power that isn't entirely of this world. It is

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Player

afforded more protection and power than a standard place of power.

First pick current facade:

- Deserted island
- Mountain temple
- Small dimly lit shop
- A plain white infinite expanse

Pick up to 1-2 strengths:

- Awakened spirit
- Warded
- Instantly accessible
- Bountiful

Pick at least one danger:

- Labyrinthine
- Mesmerizing
- Transformative
- Draining

A ritual here will never:

- Take extra time
- Require help from an outside source

It will also never:

- Draw unwanted attention
- Cause Backlash
- Cause Discord

Find the Path When you seek the path to a place that you can imagine, the MC will tell you how to get there.

Exile Add this option to **Assert** your Paradigm and **Impress a lusus naturae**: On a 12+, you may instead choose to exile your target from one of: - their home - this land - this world. Name a condition that will allow them to return. This cannot target another player's character without the player's consent.

10.3 Custom Moves

Sometimes, it will become clear that something your character does is iconic or frequent enough that it's worth codifying. The table can figure out a move, structured just like a playbook move, that reflects this action and the standard outcomes. This usually shouldn't define something new about the way the world works, so much as simplify executing it. Now it's not "I'm going to cast that summoning spell I worked out," then looking to the MC to see what

happens, and they make a soft move reflecting the outcome, but rather, you cast the summoning spell, triggering the move “when you cast your researched summoning spell,” and follow from there. Most of the time, when you write one of these, it should consume an **Advancement**, coming after you have marked five experience.

See the **Hacking** section for more details on creating moves, but in general, a move has a trigger, describing an in-game action, and an outcome. The outcome might be a simple statement, a mechanic such as providing **Hold**, or an instruction to make a roll and read further for success and failure. Codifying 7-9 and 6- results has a particular kind of power, by making them into known quantities.

Don’t use this to copy other playbooks’ moves, especially moves that are already possessed by other characters at the table.

10.4 Fictional Positioning

Finally, characters advance within the context of the story. A character gets some money and buys a new car, and now has a reliable means of getting around. A character meets a long-lost cousin and now has a new connection

to their family. A character finally builds the library they've always meant to. Often, due to the descriptive nature of the rules, it is possible to fit these things into the mechanics. New acquaintances can become Anchors or Inspirations, a library might be a place of power, but just because it doesn't fit doesn't mean it doesn't matter. There are also changes that aren't precisely mechanics but interact with them: If you quested out and gained a vial of sacred water from the lake inhabited by the last mermaid, perhaps you now have a resource that could be consumed to do magic within your Paradigm but beyond your abilities.

Chapter 11

Forces

Player

This is another section addressed entirely to the MC. Like elsewhere, it's perfectly acceptable for you to read this, but also wholly unnecessary.

Forces are one of the main organizational structures used in MCing Consensus. They give you a way to keep track of what powers are in the world, and how far along they are in their goals. You make Forces between sessions, collating what you know about the story and where you imagine it may go.

A Force can be many things: It might be an ambitious organization, some *lulus naturae* from Elsewhere, or even a collection of cursed items, each with their

MC

own motivation. The point is to gather them together for your own records, and know what happens when they act. That's where the name Force comes from: they are things which will act, and make changes in the world.

Note that Forces can be allies or enemies, or neither. They may have their own agendas, but at times, some Mages may realize that they do not want to impede a Force, and indeed wish to help it along. In addition, what is a positive Force to one Mage might be a negative Force to another. Forces are complex. No Force should simply exist to be defeated.

Finally, Forces should not have perfectly aligned goals. If they do, then it is really once Force being described. They do not have to be active enemies of each other, but even very positive Forces in the world can find themselves pushing in different directions.

11.1 Parts of a Force

Forces are tracked on the Force Sheets, so that you can easily reference them while playing. They should put the information you need front and center so you can quickly make decisions, reference established facts, and record important changes.

Forces have a name and a brief description, so that you can keep reminding yourself of what they are. A Force that hasn't been seen in a little while might have slipped your mind, especially if it's a long time between games, so err on the side of being descriptive. "Ghost Pirates!" is a lot better than "What Comes from the Mists", even if it's more trite.

Stressor

Each Force is based on a Stressor, which itself comes from key aspects of one or more characters. A Stressor is a feeling or outlook which is taken too far, such as Fear, Control, or Guilt. The Stressor gives a little bit of an overarching theme for the Force, and Stressors have Force Moves associated with them, which you choose from when creating the Force.

The available Stressors are:

- Control
- Fear
- Guilt
- Anger
- Distrust
- Extremism
- Isolation

- Envy
- Obsession

Type

Each force falls into a broad category of types. Each type has a subtype, which gives an impulse, which describes its Code N outcome. This will necessarily be a broad statement, so while it guides you to what that Force's Code N outcome will be, it won't tell you directly what to write on the sheet, just give you guidance.

The available types are:

- Tradition
- Outsider
- Asparant
- Place of Power
- Artifact

Force Moves

Every Force has up to three moves associated with it, chosen from a list given by its Stressor. These moves are available to you at all times, and can be used just like any other MC move. Like most MC moves, they can be hard or soft, depending on how exactly you use

them. Sometimes, the Force is already active in the scene, and so their move is a natural step. If a Mage is dealing with a mysterious star who grants them powers, and the Force representing the star has the move “Dredge up the Past”, then when they roll a 6- or look to you for what happens next, it makes perfect sense to reveal that an old family friend has come looking for you with ill intentions. At other times, you might use a Force move to introduce the Force to the scene. This is particularly useful when you really don’t know what is going to happen next: pick a move from a Force not currently in play, and let that direct what they are doing and so what the characters need to react to.

Cast

Here is where you can list NPCs who are connected with this Force. This does not have to mean that they are a part of the organization it represents, or even allied with it, just that they are most associated. So for a Force that is the Winter Court, the Faerie Queen surely belongs in its Cast. But so too might the Special Detective from the Big City who’s investigating the mysterious disappearances, the ones that the mages know are caused by the Winter Court.

Note characters down here aggressively. It is very useful to have an established cast to draw on, already with names and maybe a word or two of description, when you need to help make a Force feel alive and active.

Force Status Tracks

Part of Forces being an active part of the fiction is that if they are left unchecked, they will result in some material change to the world around them. In the simplest case, the Force represents a group or individual and the change is something they are actively working towards. However, it can also be a kind of natural outcome of each part of the Force acting, without being concerted effort.

The Force's Status Track keeps track of the progress. There is space for description at Code 40, Code 20, and Code N. At each space, write something clear and recognizable that occurs. When you mark off the Code before it, make clear how the next step is approaching. When you mark off a code with a description, make clear what has happened and how the mages know about it. Like other Status Tracks, the Force's is both prescriptive and descriptive. As a result, if you notice that the event listed on the Status Track has occurred, mark the corresponding Code or Codes

off. This may advance the Status Track to be Slipping, just like any other. If a major setback occurs, you may even erase codes from the Force to represent the work being undone or plans foiled.

If you advance a Force's Status Track as part of a move, be sure to make the effect clear and visible. They are not meant to sneak up on the other players.

Code N Outcome

When a Force reaches Code N, it means a material, irrevocable chance has occurred in the fiction. The Force has achieved their current goal, or has otherwise manifested in a dramatic and meaningful way. This should not be world-ending, but it might be world-upending.

The Code N outcome starts based on the impulse of the Type. These are broad categories, that can help give a sense of direction to the entire Force.

If Code N is reached, take some time to figure out how the world has changed, and be sure to feature those elements in following scenes. In addition, update the Force. Some Cast members may have changed, some Moves may change, and the Status Track and Code N Outcome should get a whole new set. After all, the Force has gotten one of their desires, and so why would they stop

now? In some cases the Force might have come to its natural conclusion when Code N is reached, and you find there's nothing more to be done with it. See the section below on removing a Force.

11.2 The Three Questions

During character creation, each player will answer 3 questions about their character, roughly corresponding to past, present, and future. These 3 questions will be the basis on which you build your Forces, so make sure you take some time with each player to explore these questions during the first session.

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized?

People who live perfect lives never quite find the need to reach out beyond the realm of everyday life to improve their existence, or merely to survive. Mages typically awaken due to a combination of factors, but one of the major factors is having their humanity denied or trivialized. This could be in the form of bullying, isolation, violence, or many other things. Many Mages have a particular moment they can point to that made everything so clear and awakened their new Paradigm. Seldom are these

moments caused by pleasant interaction. The answer to this question will tell you about the Mage's past circumstances.

Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed?

Despite how it may seem, expanding your consciousness to include the ability to alter reality at your whim doesn't solve all of your problems. From juggling the balance between your mundane job, bills, and relationships with the wonder of the magical world, to much of the same bigotry and discrimination that mundane people experience, there are things that magic just can't completely solve for you. That doesn't mean that you won't try.

Why are you hunted?

There's an old adage that everyone is either running to something or running from something. That may not hold true for everyone, but there are reasons that each and every Mage might be hunted. From the relatively obvious and sinister, that someone who can do magic challenges the existing power structure of the world, to the more benign that you have talents that people might want to learn about or exploit, to the weird like

intentionally needling dangerous people because you find it fun to be hunted.

11.3 Stressors

During the first session, as you explore the three questions, you will find a main stressor that motivates the scene, write them down. After the first session is over, you will use these stressors to create the Forces for the game, and bring them to life. Make sure to have a conversation with players during or before the first session to make sure they can express any stressors or themes they do not want to explore for any reason. Here are the stressors that might come up.

Control

Is someone trying to manipulate, gain power over, or otherwise control someone else?

Fear

Is someone afraid of a threat, real or imagined, or is someone acting out of fear?

Guilt

Is someone primarily motivated by an internal guilt, either for something they did or something they are or were?

Anger

Is someone angry, either the hot rage that threatens to boil over, or the cold anger that motivates them to seek vengeance?

Distrust

Is someone mistrustful of others, maybe strangers or even friends? This can be justified or imagined, distrust breeds distrust.

Extremism

Has someone taken a nominally acceptable opinion and gone so far with it that they are causing harm to others?

Isolation

Is someone or is a group isolating themselves or being forcibly isolated?

Envy

Is someone feeling a deep desire for something that someone else has, like an object, relationship, or knowledge?

Obsession

Is someone preoccupied or engrossed with a person, object, action or etc to the degree that it is intrusive?

11.4 Types

Sometimes you'll know right away what a Force is going to be, either because of an answer that a player gave to your leading question, or because something comes about synchronously. Other times you'll only have a stressor to start with, so Types will help you narrow down the Force and really understand what it is. Here's a list of the types.

Organization

A group with some amount of power, tradition, and goals.

Outsider

An entity or group of entities that aren't part of the normal mundane/human world, or are otherwise outside of the norms of the setting. Usually, this means they are *lusus naturae*.

Aspirant

A person or small group with great ambition and the will to see it through.

Place of Power

A magical or significant place that can pull at the threads of reality.

Artifact

A magical or powerful item that may warp reality around it.

11.5 As Above So Below, As Within So Without

The three questions become stressors. Stressors will then become Forces. The internal and personal struggles of the mages are reflected in the world around them, and the threats, challenges, allies, and opportunities they might find.

After the first session, sit down with your list of stressors. Think about any groups, individuals or powers that came up during the first session, and make sure to include any interesting ones in your Forces.

11.6 How to Make a Force out of A Stressor

Step one:

Sit down with your list of stressors from the first session. Pick one of them. Then, pick a force type that compliments it.

Step two:

Write down anything you already know about this Force. For example, you might know some of its cast because they were named in the first session. You might know the name of the Force if that came up. The only things you absolutely should not fill in during this step are the Moves and the Countdown Steps. These will come during later steps.

Step three:

Choose a Type for this Force, and then choose one of the subtypes from the list below.

Organization

- **Dogmatic** (impulse: enforce some truth on the local area)
- **Expansionist** (Impulse: grow and gain members)
- **Acquisitive** (impulse: gain resources or knowledge)
- **Vigilant** (impulse: stand together and defend each other)

Outsider

- **Wild** (impulse: to return something to its natural state)
- **Tricky** (impulse: to beguile, lure in, and toy with victims)
- **Corrupting** (impulse: to invert a being's desires)
- **Ephemeral** (impulse: to become more real)
- **Destructive** (impulse: to consume, raze, and damage)

Aspirant

- **Power** (impulse: to steal power from those who have it)
- **Secrets** (impulse: to learn a dangerous secret)
- **Taboo** (impulse: to do something no one would do)

- **Revenge** (impulse: to exact revenge on someone who has wronged them)
- **Entropy** (impulse: to return things to lower states of energy)

Place of Power

- **Cursed**(impulse: to draw in new victims)
- **Wild** (impulse: to grow)
- **Dedicated** (impulse: to reduce control)
- **Convergent** (impulse: to be used)
- **Hidden** (impulse: to be found)

Artifact

- **Powerful** (impulse: to overwhelm the user)
- **Destructive** (impulse: to cause collateral damage)
- **Knowledgable** (impulse: to reveal something better left hidden)
- **Cursed** (impulse: to spread the curse)
- **Broken** (impulse: to be repaired)

Step four:

Choose up to three Force moves from the stressor that this Force is based on. The Force Moves are listed below.

Control:

- Seize something dear to them • Black-mail them • Introduce a new enemy agent
- Spring an elaborate trap • Manipulate an Ally • Demonstrate Power • Appear More Reasonable • Lookout for (even) non-Rending magic • Enforce Dominant Paradigm

Fear:

- Show an Ally to be Untrustworthy
- Reveal a new enemy cell or sect
- Track down a Mark • Resist Magical Effects • Torture Someone • Uncover and Exploit a Weakness • Avoid Consequences

Guilt:

- Deprive them of Resources • Cover Up an Atrocity • Take Advantage of a Weak Link • Press an Advantage • Cause Collateral Damage

Anger:

- Destroy something irreplaceable • Provoke an Overreaction • Damage Infrastructure • Drain Energy • Lash out Chaotically • Enact a Cold-Blooded Plan

Distrust:

- Manipulate Public Opinion • Hide in Plain Sight • Circulate False Information
- Turn Friend on Friend • Flaunt their Secure Positioning • Introduce Self-Doubt

Extremism:

- Convert an Ally • Enforce Emotional barriers • Respond Disproportionally

Isolation:

- Rationalize Evil for the Greater Good
- Miscalculate Emotional Response • Be Unshakable in Convictions • Brainwash Agents • Break a supply line • Cause a boundary to be crossed

Envy:

- Enchant Someone • Conceal Weakness • Simulate Expertise • Use Their Tricks Against Them • Bring Them to Your Level • Sabotage Their Strengths

Obsession:

- Seduce someone • Stalk • Lock something or someone away

Insecurity:

- Overcompensate • Goad Someone into Overreacting • Grind to a Halt
- Undermine Someone

Step five:

If you have not named the Force, do so now. Likewise fill in any cast that are likely to come up right away. Write a brief description of the Force, and how it interacts with the world (ie the player's characters and the other Forces)

Step six:

Look at the impulse from the type this Force is based on, and write down a Code N outcome for the Force. These are broad categories, so narrow it down

and make it specific to the Force you've built. This represents what happens when the Force progresses its goals or is left unchecked, and the effect it will have on the world. Since this is Code N on a status track, make sure it is a Newsworthy Event. It doesn't have to be front page above the fold, but it should at least warrant a story in the local media.

Step seven:

Write in the Code 40 and Code 20 Outcomes on the Force sheet. The Code 20 effect should be a measurable step towards the Code N Outcome, and something that would be noticed by the world (and likely the players' characters). The Code 40 effect should either be a measurable step towards the Code N Outcome, or a measurable step towards the Code 20 Outcome. This should also be something noticed by the world, and will likely be the characters first hints at the Force's Outcome.

Step eight:

If you have used up each Stressor from your initial list, you're done! Otherwise, return to step 1

11.7 Special Forces

There are two other types of Forces for the MC to keep track of, and they represent other crucial parts of the world.

They also have fewer parts to them than the other Forces and should be easier to keep track of. The Internal Forces contains any relationships that don't belong in other forces, like many Anchors, members of a Cabal, or Students. This isn't to say that those characters might not find a home with another Force though, which could lead to interesting choices for any mages that they're close to. The Consensus Force represents force being exerted on the local Consensus, and is almost always in control of one of the other Forces.

The Internal Forces

The Internal Forces sheet has space for cast and a status track with no labels. This track advances just like any others, when interacting with (or perhaps not interacting with) important people in a player character's internal life. When this Force's status track reaches Code N, the newsworthy event doesn't need to make local news, but it should be a Big Deal to at least one of the player characters. Which one will depend entirely on the fiction at the time.

The Consensus Force

The Consensus Force sheet has space for the Force(s) currently in control, a

status track, and a space for listing the Consensus Shift that the Force in control will make if the status track reaches Code N. This can be a small change such as believing that snow in late Spring is entirely seasonal. It could also be a larger change, such as believing that long pointy ears are entirely normal for humans.

11.8 Revealing, Retiring, and Adapting Forces

Consensus' rules give you an initial set of Forces that should be tied into the players' characters in interesting ways. However, games shift and adapt over time. Sometimes a Force will simply seem to be less interesting than expected, and come up less and less. That's just fine. You can let it fade from view, maybe to bring back up if it seems relevant later, or let it disappear entirely.

Forces can also sometimes become resolved. Maybe their Code N Outcome was reached and there really is no direct followup. If a Force concerns an anti-magic storm coming into being over the city, then at Code N it has hit, left an anti-magic shell, and the storm itself abates. Or, maybe the players' characters struck such a major blow against a Force that they fully withdraw for a

while. Keep them in mind in case it makes sense to come back, especially if members of the Cast are still around and alive, but it's perfectly reasonable to stop choosing them as elements of scenes and sources of moves.

You may wish to add Forces as the game progresses. This can be because something new is recognized in the world. Maybe the players keep referencing an abandoned house that they think is haunted. Sure, if the game isn't too busy, write it up as a Force. Choose a Stressor to base it off of that you think could use more exploring. It also can happen if you resolve one or more Forces and are starting to find that the game is getting a bit thin. In that case, you can develop a new Force to bring into play based on characters' Stressors that aren't getting to be seen much, and on world details that are already established. This is a great place to have a rival sect of Mages roll into town, or have a hitherto-unnoticed secret society reveal itself, or have a character wander in not knowing what they have unleashed. For any of these, build the Force similarly to how you did the initial ones, but now you will have much more familiarity with the characters and the fiction to fit them in. Don't forget to make their goals at cross purposes with other Forces, where applicable.

Finally, it is reasonable to change de-

tails of a Force from time to time. Changing truly core elements like the name or Stressor probably represent retiring the Force and bringing in a new one at the same time, but other aspects can change with play. In particular, the Status Track's labeled Codes may alter as you learn more about the Force, the fiction, and the characters. Perhaps your initial idea seems less interesting once you see what kind of game is actually being played. Or, perhaps the players' characters themselves actually have a big enough impact on the Force to change their goals. A Force seeking to restrict knowledge of magic used for time travel which is made aware that there are a nearby sect of time travellers casually visiting the distant past on a regular basis might completely shift their goals to containing and neutralizing the threat to the timeline, and so update their Status Track accordingly. Conversely, a Force may take such a blow that they have to completely change tactics, which also can mean a major rewrite.

The Cast of a Force can constantly be in flux, as new characters who are members are established, and as old ones may leave the area, change allegiances, or even be rendered permanently ineffectual.

Moves usually shouldn't change, since they are core to the Force. You might

11. Forces

add more from the appropriate Stressor's list, if you have less than three written down and discover a new one that makes sense. The moves also might change during a major event, such as the Force hitting Code N. In the reconfiguring that happens as a new goal is selected, old capabilities may be abandoned or made irrelevant, and they may seek or discover new methods.

MC

Chapter 12

Hacking

This final chapter will contain information on making the game your own, from writing new moves (and how that can be a part of **Advancement**, if you feel like it), to new **Paradigms**, to new **Playbooks**, to bigger changes like the dice/stats system (d10s!) or running in alternate worlds. Also how and if to play if someone can't make it/drop in drop out ability of this game

Narrator

TBD

Chapter 13

The Characters (Appendix A)

13.1 The Cabalist

In a world where mages are solitary islands of power, shaping reality in loneliness, you have a group of people who understand you.

Name: Lou, Mr. Norrell, Agatha, Lady Corrington, Phan, Lisa, Gordon, Alice, Joan, Rainbow, Norrie, Ms. Siltane

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because of my beliefs, because I was sick, because of my obsession

Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed? Because of my obsessions, because I can't keep my mouth shut, because of my friends

Why are you hunted? For my beliefs, because I antagonize, for my family ties

Looks:

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- bright eyes, shifty eyes, blue eyes, wary eyes, knowing eyes, quick eyes
- blustery face, youthful face, calm face, hidden face, mysterious face
- rigid body, slight body, tattooed body, plain body, angled body, musty body
- formal clothes, billowy clothes, modest clothes, roomy clothes
- self-important aura, tight aura, foggy aura, woven aura, silver aura, austere aura

Paradigms

True Names Give Command

Aligned: (choose one) Command, Binding, Summonings

Opposed: (choose one) Inanimate mundane objects, Creation, Silent Magic

Targets who have not been given a True Name, I must know my targets' names

Ancient Languages Hold Secret Power

Aligned: (choose one) Cantrips, Enchantment, Written Magic

Opposed: (choose one) Reactive Magic, Emotional Manipulation, Magic with concepts newer than my language Magic without words (spoken, written, or thought), I must speak my magic aloud

Moves

The Cabalist gets the Gossamer Threads move, and 2 other moves of your choice.

Gossamer Threads: (You have this move by default) When you try to **Sway the Cabal** to your chosen course of action, roll +**Without**. On a **10+**, they do what you want, on a **7-9**, you have to give them something they want.

Sanctum: Your Cabal has a Place of Power at which they meet and which they are charged with protecting.

Research: When you spend time researching a piece of the world, roll +**Static**. On a **10+** you may tell the MC something you learned, and how it might be immediately useful. On a **7-9**, the MC will tell you something you learned, it's up to you to make it useful.

Speak Beyond the Veil: When you attempt to contact the spirit of one who has passed on, roll +**Entropic**. On a **10+** choose **2**, on a **7-9** choose **1**:
- The spirit is the one you meant to contact - The spirit can stay for longer than a single utterance or action - The spirit is of the disposition you expect

We're Not So Different: When you explain your paradigm to another mage in order to aid them in doing magic that is **Opposed** to their paradigm, roll +**Within**. On a hit, the magic is not **Opposed**, this time. On a **10+**, you both mark experience.

You also have this move:

When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity, roll +**Without**. On a **10+** you may each immediately give a freedom to each other. On a **7-9**, each hold **1**. They may spend their hold **1**

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

for 1 to attempt to Sway Your Cabal (as per your move Gossamer Threads). You may spend your hold 1 for 1 to attempt to Sway them as if they were part of your cabal. On a 6-, they hold 2, you hold 0.

Stats

Arrange +2, +1, +0, +0, -1

Anchors

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. My **Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) My creaky old house with my painted family portrait; My first floor flat in the city

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. My **Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) Eilian, my oldest stepchild; My black cat, Shadow

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. My **Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) My estranged brother's dream journal; My father's service pistol; My little brother's baby blanket

Starting Gear

- 1 Savings
- Choose a method of communicating with your cabal: A fresh batch of pre-programmed burner phones, with important numbers on speed dial; A stone that glows and heats up when you're being summoned; A heavy crystal ball.

- Choose a source of information: An ancient spellbook, passed down through the cabal; A library of broad strokes esoterica; Accounts on the leading magical webforums, such as they are.
- Choose a tool you hope to never have to use: A well-maintained firearm; A well-stocked first aid kit; Nonperishable food to last one person two months; The personal number of the best defense lawyer in town.

Your Cabal

By default there are about 5 in the Cabal, you don't control them and they don't control you. You're pretty close in your outlooks on the world, but not everything lines up completely. This is a small cabal, with weak magic.

Pick up to two of these:

- You actually are in charge, or at least you founded it. Strength: +loyal
- There's more than just a couple of you, maybe 10 or more. Medium cabal.
- You're part of a larger system, you're just one node in the leylines. Strength: +support
- Your cabal is strong of will. Drop weak magic
- Your cabal is very close. Strength: +family

And pick one of these:

- Your cabal doesn't keep a super low profile. Vulnerable: Target
- Your cabal owes something to someone, money, allegiance, an artifact, or the like. Vulnerable: Obligation

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

- Your cabal is anonymous and guarded about their identities. Vulnerable: Infiltration

Place of Power

You have this if you take the Sanctum move.

First, pick a facade:

- Library
- Fraternity/Sorority House
- Shop Basement
- Old Manor House
- Civic Building

Then pick up to **1 Strength**: +respected, +private, +large, +guarded.

Pick at least **1 Weakness**: +inaccessible, +obvious, +public, +tainted, +exposed, +business hours, +cramped.

A Ritual performed here will never (choose **1**):

- Need more information
- Draw unwanted attention
- Take longer than expected

Advancements

- Get **+1 Without** (Max Without +3)
- Get **+1 Within** (Max Within +2)
- Get **+1 Dynamic** (Max Dynamic +3)
- Get **+1 Static** (Max Static +3)
- Pick a new option for your Place of Power
- Pick a new option for your Cabal
- Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- (*) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm
- (*) Gain an Anchor (2 Anchors max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- Pick a new option for your Place of Power
- Get a new Cabalist Move
- Get a new Cabalist Move
- Get a playbook move from another book
- Get an Advanced Cabalist Move
- Remove a weakness from your Place of Power

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

13.2 The Hedge Mage

"Once Upon a Time, Humans could move mountains with their will. Now, it is upon us to carry on the ancient traditions, and master as many types of magic as we can."

Name: Merle, Freya, Orenna, Benjamin, Liro, Norfeld, Wood, Sherand, Lilith, Melinda, Corin, Wilhelm, Byecross

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because of my attitude, because I was neurodivergent, because I couldn't keep up

Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed? Because of my detachment, because I don't want to fit in, because I screwed up

Why are you hunted? For fun, for my Talents, because I disturb people

Looks:

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- distracted eyes, glittering eyes, faraway eyes, inscrutable eyes, determined eyes
- wizened face, deadpan face, vivacious face, brisk face, chipper face, sharp face
- spindly body, angular body, aggressive body, thickset body, dexterous body
- rustic clothes, embellished clothes, coarse clothes, domestic clothes
- sprightly aura, stalwart aura, agile aura, musical aura, flashy aura, unrefined aura

Paradigms

A Thousand Arcane Secrets

Aligned: (choose one) Cantrips, Ritual Magic

Opposed: (choose one) Large-reaching effects, immediate effects, I can't do the same thing twice

(choose one) Planning magic, magic from rote

Double, Double, Toil and Trouble

Aligned: All possible magic

Opposed: Magic that doesn't require preparation

Magic that doesn't require physical components

Moves

The Hedge Mage gets the **Exactly When I Mean To** move, and 2 other moves of your choice.

Exactly When I Mean To: (You have this move by default) At the beginning of the session, roll +Entropic. On a 10+, hold 2. On a 7-9, hold 1. At any time, either you or the MC can spend your hold to have you arrive in a scene, with the proper tools and knowledge, with or without any clear explanation why. Take +1 forward when you do so. On a miss, the MC holds 1, and can spend it to have you arrive, but somehow pinned, caught or trapped.

Call Through Shadow: When you call a mundane or common object to yourself, roll +Dynamic. On a hit, you have successfully summoned it to you. On a 10+ you're in the clear. On a 7-9 choose 1:

- It comes out of an intense nearby situation

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

- It comes with strings attached
- It can be traced back to you.

Scrying Bowl: When you have an object related to a person and use it to gaze upon their current situation, roll +Without. On a 10+ all 3, on a 7-9 choose 1:

- They don't know they're being watched
- You can identify where they are
- You can discern what they are doing.

If You Ask Me: When you offer an alternative perspective on someone's Paradigm, roll +Without. On a hit, they gain experience. On a 10+, give them a new Aligned related to what you told them until the end of session.

Magical Experimentation: When you collaborate with other Mages to push your magic past its current boundaries in a controlled setting, roll +Dynamic. On a 10+ all 3, on a 7-9 choose 1:

- It works pretty much as intended
- It doesn't cause a scene, draw extra attention, or harm you
- It was controlled enough that you can repeat it.

This One Is Mine: When you call out another magical being, so long as your companions don't interfere, others will give you enough space to finish it, come what may.

You also have this move:

When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity, they gain one hold, which they can spend to cause you to appear as if by Exactly When I Mean To.

Stats

Arrange +2, +1, +0, +0, -1

Anchors

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. **My Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) The **Ancestral Family Home**; **My** cottage with a small garden out back; **My** penthouse apartment that I barely afford

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. **My Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) **Lazarus**, the man I saved from drowning; **My** well-meaning mother; **Chance**, my favorite nibbling

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. **My Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) **My** grandfather's old chipped pipe; **My** compass that doesn't point north; **A** leaf from the forests I knew from -----

Starting Gear

- **1 Savings**
- **Choose a symbol of hospitality:** **A** set of fine china; **A** spare bedroom; **A** large cast-iron oven; The latest in home entertainment systems; **A** well stocked bar.
- **Choose a tool:** **A** tablesaw and misc. woodworking equipment; **A** glassblowing oven; **A** well-used set of gardening implements; **An** emergency shotgun, loaded with rock-salt.

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Advancements

- Gain +1 Without (max Without +2)
- Gain +1 Within (max Within +2)
- Gain +1 Entropy (max Entropy +2)
- Pick a new Hedge Mage move
- Pick a playbook move from another playbook
- Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- (*) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm
- (*) Gain an Anchor (2 Anchors max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- Pick a new Hedge Mage move
- Pick a new Hedge Mage move
- Pick a playbook move from another playbook
- Pick a playbook move from another playbook
- Gain +1 Dynamic (max Dynamic +3)
- Get an Advanced Hedge Mage Move

13.3 The Inspired

Many people wonder where inspiration comes from. That question is boring to you, you know the answer. The right question is, how much can you do with that inspiration?

Name: Esin, Tobias, Tafari, Sameal, Mab, Fiona, Kai, Kendall, Flower, Ida

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because they thought I was broken, because I was uneducated, because of my looks

Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed? Because of my obsessions, because I'm too different, because who I am hasn't changed

Why are you hunted? Because I'm misunderstood, because I break the Rules, for my insight

Looks:

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- Burning eyes, dull eyes, hungry eyes, bloodshot eyes
- Slack face, haggard face, shining face, stubborn face, yearning face
- Wiry body, full body, misshapen body
- Flowing clothes, fancy clothes, rags, hip clothes, active clothes
- Expansive aura, sucking aura, insinuating aura, kaleidoscope aura, tantalizing aura

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Paradigms

I Bend the Rules through my Source

Aligned: (choose one) Mental magic, Time-affecting magic

Opposed: (choose one) Magic that reenforces the status quo, magic that doesn't protect my Source, time-affecting magic

(choose one) Magic without my Source, I must share my Source to do magic

My Source Lets me See the True Nature of Things

Aligned: (choose one) Divinations, Transmutations

Opposed: (choose one) Obscuring magic, changing things that are Static, My magic must cause a transformation

(choose one) Magic without my Source, Magic without understanding

Moves

The Inspired gets the **Source** move, and 2 other moves of your choice.

Source: (You have this move by default) You've identified the source of your inspiration. **When your Source first becomes present in a scene, hold 3.** At any time that your source is present for the rest of the scene, spend your Hold 1-for-1 to:

- Draw attention to your Source
- Give someone (including yourself) +1 to a roll they just made if it would change the result, describing how your Source helps them do it

13.3. The Inspired

- Bring your positive tag into play, narrating what it means for the moment

Whether it is present in a scene or not, your Source always counts as an active Inspiration for you.

Just When I Think You're Gone: When you pass up an opportunity to interact with your Source, or remove it from a scene, roll +Within. On a hit, hold 1. On a 10+ you may spend your hold 1-for-1 to have your source appear in the scene with no explanation needed. On a 7-9 you may spend your hold for the same, but your Source is threatened, captured, or in peril.

Open Their Mind: When you introduce an individual to your Source to open their mind, roll +Entropic. On a 10+, they are not a Lookout the next time they would be for your magic. On a 7-9, they are drawn to your Source (if a PC, they mark experience next time they interact with your Source). On a 6-, in addition to whatever else the MC says, choose one:

- They find they have a strong aversion to your Source
- They wish to take your Source away from you.

Opiate for the Masses: When you bring your Source to a mob, roll +Without. On a 10+, hold 3. On a 7-9, hold 1. Spend your hold 1-for-1 to:

- Discover a truth that they know
- Obtain something of value or use
- Get them to believe a truth
- Learn their potential
- Placate them and return them to their mundane lives.

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Visions of Fate: When you dive into the chaos surging around you to see visions of what could come to be, roll +Entropic. On a 10+, pick one person who keeps their standing, and one who doesn't. On a 7-9, pick one or the other. Don't name a PC; name NPCs only. The MC will make your prediction come true, if it's even remotely possible. On a miss, take -1 ongoing until the chaos subsides.

You also have this move:

When you and another character **exchange a moment of humanity**, roll +Entropic. On a hit you count as having Opened Their Mind, as if you'd rolled a 10+. On a 7-9 they hold 1, and can spend that hold to have your Source show up in a scene, or deny it from you for a scene. On a 6-, if they are aware of the magical world, they gain a Restriction against magic with your Source.

Stats

Arrange +2, +1, +0, +0, -1

Anchors

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. **My Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) 617 Arbor St. Rear; The couches and guest rooms of my friends (I always pay, in cash or chores); The "Beach House" that I live in, even in the off season

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. **My Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) Neon and Crystal, some kids I hang out with on the weekend; Leslie, who cares about me

but just doesn't understand; _____, my greatest confidante

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. **My Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) My last gift from _____ before they left; The diamond necklace from _____; The well-worn T-shirt I always sleep in

Starting Gear

- 3 Savings
- Choose something to fall back on: A hidden cache of valuables worth about 2 savings; A safehouse that's really more of a safe-shack; Airline miles enough for a one-way ticket to just about anywhere; Two good fake IDs; A holdout pistol with a single shot.

Your Source

First pick your Source's form: a person, an object, a substance, an abstract concept, an action, an emotion

Next choose one of these: - Your source can be concealed, protected, or otherwise removed from a dangerous situation (+safe) - Your source gives you heightened senses (+alert) - Your source lets you understand magic as its caster understands it (+sense) - Your source makes you feel more alive, it gives you a rush (+invigorating) - Your source helps you get people to go along with what you want (+social)

And choose two of these: - Your source is dangerous, socially unacceptable, or otherwise something you must hide or face consequences. (+forbidden) - Your source is rare or hard to find. (+rare) -

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Your source is immobile, unportable, or otherwise impossible to bring with you (+immobile) - You crave more and more of the source, you suffer without it (+addictive) - Your source is short-lived, and its magical enhancements last but a moment (+quick) - Your source often harms you, physically or otherwise (+dangerous) - Your source makes your magic more unpredictable, you can't always control it or its effects (+chaotic)

Advancements

- Gain +1 Without (max Without +2)
- Gain +1 Within (max Within +2)
- Gain +1 Entropic (max Entropic +2)
- Pick a new Inspired move
- Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- (*) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm
- (*) Gain an Anchor (2 Anchors max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- Pick a new Inspired move
- Pick a playbook move from another playbook
- Gain +1 Without (max Without +3)
- Gain +1 Within (max Within +3)
- Get an Advanced Inspired Move

13.4 The Mentor

The secrets of the Universe are yours, but you don't guard them jealously. You share the wisdom with the precious few who will listen, taking on pupils who will one day surpass you.

Name: Johan, Master Lu, Mina, Zoe, Indra, Roy, Puteri, Madame Leena, Marshki, Luce, Goswami, Sena

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because I was poor, because I was neurodivergent, because of my transgressions

Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed? Because I see things as they really are, because I make my own path, because people started noticing me

Why are you hunted? Because I'm famous, for my forbidden knowledge, so my students are not

Looks:

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- shining eyes, sunken eyes, alert eyes, glowing eyes
- weathered face, gaunt face, wrinkled face, caring face, creased face
- wiry body, ripped body, lanky body
- street clothes, flowing clothes, concealing clothes
- menacing aura, peaceful aura, green aura, golden aura, fading aura, grounded aura, rippling aura

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Paradigms

Your Focus Determines Your Reality

Aligned: (choose one) Calming Magic, Projecting Power, Perfect Positioning

Opposed: (choose one) Breaking cycles, My magic must remain internal

(choose one) Technomagic, Magic while distracted

I am the Platonic Ideal of Myself

Aligned: (choose one) Static Magic, Convergence, Reflexive Magic

Opposed: (choose one) Fragmenting magic, creation, my magic cannot hide me

(choose one) Cynical magic, magic without conviction

Moves

The Mentor gets the Pupils move, and 2 other moves of your choice.

Pupils: (You have this move by default) You have a number of students who follow your paradigmatic teachings. At the beginning of the session, roll +learning to determine how their studies are progressing. On a 10+ they have a surplus. On a 7-9, both a surplus and a want. On a 6-, they will do everything in their power to satisfy all their wants.

Meditation: When you meditate on the best course of action for considerable time, roll +Dynamic. On a 10+ hold 3, on a 7-9 hold 1. You may spend this hold 1-for-1 at any time to ask the MC a question from this list, the MC will answer truthfully. You take +1 forward when acting on this information.

- **What's** my escape route?
- **What** are the unknowable risks?
- **Where** can the Consensus be bent in my favor?
- **Who** is favorable towards my plan?

Academe: You have a Place of Power where you train your students. While you are within your Place of Power, take +1 forward to any Static rolls you make.

Matter over Mind: You may roll +Static instead of +Without when impressing a *lusus naturae* in order to sway them.

What you Need, not what you Want: When another character comes to you for advice and you tell them honestly what you think the best course of action is, they take +1 ongoing while following your advice, and you mark experience.

You also have this move:

When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity, they may immediately gain an Anchor (They still may not have more anchors than their playbook started with this way).

Stats

Arrange +2, +1, +0, +0, -1

Anchors

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. **My Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) The apartment I share with a few roommates; My small but immaculate house downtown; A single room at the back of my place of work

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. **My Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) My best friend Ayah; Devon, my oldest rival; Zorrah, my forbidden love

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. **My Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) A portrait of my own long-dead mentor; The gold necklace given to me by _____; A coal to remind me of _____

Starting Gear

No major possessions to speak of, but 3 Savings tucked away for a rainy day.

Your Students

By default you have about 10 students, they are moderately studious sleepers and they respect you, though they're not fully loyal. They have their own lives apart from you, family and friends in the area. (learning +1. surplus: time. want: departure.)

Pick up to two of these:

- Your students are competitive (replace want: departure with want: competition)
- Your students are driven (replace surplus: time with surplus: dedication)
- Your students are enthusiastic (replace surplus: time with surplus: energy)
- Your students are lazy (replace want: departure with want: sloth)

And one of these:

- Your school is famous (add surplus: growth and want: infamy)
- Your school is large (default students 20)
- Your students are quick learners (+1 learning)
- You have a protege; your most advanced student is Awakened
- Your students are rowdy (add want: violence and surplus: intimidation)

Place of Power

You have this if you take the **Academe** move.

First, pick a facade:

- Dojo
- Dance Studio
- Abandoned warehouse
- Stunt filming location
- Lecture hall

Then pick up to 1 **Strength**: +hidden, +famous, +easily defended, +inconspicuous, +free

Pick at least 1 **Weakness**: +cramped, +dangerous, +temporary, +infamous, +weak

A Ritual performed here will never (choose 1):

- Need help from an outside source
- Take longer than expected
- Have greater than intended effect

Advancements

- Gain +1 **Entropic** (Maximum Entropic +3)
- Gain +1 **Within** (Maximum Within +3)
- Gain +1 **Static** (Maximum Static +2)

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

- Gain +1 Dynamic (Maximum Dynamic +2)
- Get a new Mentor move
- Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- (*) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm
- (*) Gain an Anchor (3 Anchors max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- Get a new Mentor move
- Choose a new option for your Students
- Choose a new option for your Students
- Choose a new option for your Place of Power
- Get a playbook move from another book
- Get a playbook move from another book
- Get an Advanced Mentor Move

13.5 The Pious

You know the true meaning of sacrifice. It isn't something dramatic or grandiose, sometimes it just means going without sleep so you can stake out the fields that cows keep disappearing from. There's Something larger than just you, and choosing that over your own needs, that's sacrifice.

Name: Joan, Ether, Miranda, Brother Wilhelm, Francis, Emira, Marja, Ingrid, Bernard, Rishi, Sister Eliza

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because of my beliefs, because of my family ties, because I couldn't keep up

Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed? Because I keep screwing up, because I can't keep my mouth shut, because of my anger

Why are you hunted? Because I break the Rules, for my beliefs, for the Truth

Looks:

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- caring eyes, quiet eyes, intense eyes, small eyes, inspired eyes, hard eyes
- youthful face, lined face, sharp face, round face, marred face, open face
- hard body, sallow body, frail body, large body
- orderly clothes, homespun clothes, conservative clothes, starched clothes
- peaceful aura, driven aura, flowing aura, tight-fitting aura, hidden aura

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Paradigms

All is One and the One is All

Aligned: (choose one) Pattern magic, cooperative magic

Opposed: (choose one) Selfish magic, magic that divides, my magic must be wholly of the physical world

(choose one) Magic without Faith, magic that doesn't involve people

I am the New Prophet

Aligned: (choose one) Visions of the Future, Forging a Destiny

Opposed: (choose one) Things at rest, Negating other magic

(choose one) Changing the Future you Know, Hiding the Truth

Moves

The Pious gets the **Vows** move, and 2 other moves of your choice.

Vows: (You have this move by default) When you **Eschew Mortal Comfort** in favor of aiding someone else, roll +Static. On a 10+ hold 3, on a 7-9 hold 1. Spend your hold 1-for-1 to declare someone involved in a situation owes you a small favor for past help.

Listen to the Celestial Chorus: When you tune in to the voices of the universe, sometimes they will have something helpful to say. Roll +Static. On a hit you may ask questions from the below list, the

MC will answer truthfully. On a **10+** ask 3, on a **7-9** ask 1.

- **Who** here has the most potential?
- **Who** can I trust?
- **What** am I not seeing?
- **Who** is telling the truth?

Sanctuary: You have access to a Place of Power, a safe haven against things that would harm servants of your Path.

Clarity of Purpose: When you talk someone through a **Restriction** on their **Paradigm**, they remove that **Restriction**.

Exorcism: When you **banish** an inhabiting spirit roll +**Dynamic**. On a **10+** choose 1, on a **7-9** choose 2:

- You expose yourself to possession
- The spirit is ill-disposed towards you
- The inhabited subject is harmed.

Holy Avenger: You have a weapon, enchanted and attuned to your beliefs. When you use it to bring death, justify why this is necessary, and roll +**Entropic**. On a hit, you may incapacitate or kill any one opponent on the battlefield. On a **7-9**, they have a chance to react first, but can't stop you. On a **6-**, they were prepared. Sucks to be you.

You also have this move:

When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity, roll +nothing. On a **10+**, either you or they lose one **Discord**, their choice. On a **7-9**, they choose whether to transfer one **Discord** from you to them or from them to you.

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Stats

Arrange +2, +1, +0, +0, -1

Anchors

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. **My Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) The alley behind the best Chilean restaurant in the city; **My** cramped apartment downtown; **My** cared-for house with a welcome mat out front

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. **My Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) Kell, my heart's delight; **My** widowed sister-in-law

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. **My Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) **My** wooden rose, a gift from my first love; **My** dog-eared holy text

Starting Gear

- **1 Savings**
- Choose a way of strengthening bonds: **A** altar, complete with spiritual accoutrements; **A** branch from the Oath Tree; **A** table at the best restaurant in this half of the city; **A** hand-woven prayer mat.
- Choose a ritual supply that you have a small stock of: **Holy Water**; Incense from a far-away place; Rare herbs; Preserved animal bones; Graveyard dirt; Specially prepared ink and paper
- Choose a creature comfort: **A** hotel of the month club membership; **A** bottle of 18 year Macallan; **A** luxurious bathrobe and slippers; **A** set of high-end noise-cancelling headphone

Place of Power

You have this if you take the Sanctuary move.

First, pick a facade:

- Place of Worship
- Forested Grove
- Basement Laboratory
- Old Log Cabin
- Wishing Well
- Ancestral Mausoleum
- Natural Spring

Then pick up to 1 Strength: +warded, +accorded ground, +famous, +private, +unique, +awakened spirit

Pick at least 1 Weakness: +inaccessible, +obvious, +public, +tainted +exposed, +business hours, +cramped

A Ritual performed here will never (choose 1):

- Need a certain object
- Cause everyone involved to Backlash
- Need extra time

Advancements

- Gain +1 Without (Maximum Without +3)
- Gain +1 Within (Maximum Within +2)
- Gain +1 Static (Maximum Static +2)
- Gain +1 Dynamic (Maximum Dynamic +2)
- Get a new Pious move
- Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- (*) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm
- (*) Gain an Anchor (2 Anchors max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
Get a new Pious move
- Get a new Pious move
- Choose a new option for your Place of Power
- Choose a new option for your Place of Power
- Get a playbook move from another book
- Get a playbook move from another book
- Get an Advanced Pious Move

13.6 The Primordial

You don't need fancy rituals, long drawn-out methods, or anything like that when you're working with the raw forces that shaped the Universe. That's what magic is really about.

Name: Markus, Zakiel, Cassandra, The Hooded One, Crystal, Zuri, Malaki, Jeyde, Andrzej, Kolden, Sheth

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because of my anger, because the world isn't accessible, because of my fear **Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed?** Because I'm too different, because I can't stay still, because I'm afraid

Why are you hunted? Because I hurt people, for my wealth, because I want to be

Looks:

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- burning eyes, dead eyes, piercing eyes, hungry eyes, hopeful eyes, white eyes
- scarred face, drawn face, sallow face, eager face, tired face, weathered face
- imposing body, sinewy body, impish body, emaciated body, thickset body
- concealing clothes, goth clothes, simple clothes, worn clothes, grubby clothes
- fiery aura, dark aura, shifting aura, grey aura, brilliant aura, mossy aura

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Paradigms

Blood is the Strongest Sympathy

Aligned: (choose one) Healing, Curses, Sympathy

Opposed: (choose one) Restoration, Mind-affecting magic

(choose one) Magic that doesn't require sacrifice, magic that doesn't require sympathy

The World's Energy is Wrapped in Crude Matter

Aligned: (choose one) Transformations and Transmutations, Energy Manipulation

Opposed: (choose one) Destruction, Creation
(choose one) Subtle magic, finesse magic

I See, Hear, and Command the Spirits

Aligned: (choose one) Elemental magic, Summoning

Opposed: (choose one) Man-made things, Transmutation

(choose one) Magic that disrespects the spirit world, my magic must incorporate spirits

Moves

The Primordial gets the **Strong Avatar** and **What Doesn't Kill You** moves, and 1 other move of your choice.

Strong Avatar: (You have this move by default) When you assert your Paradigm's truth to another Mage, roll +Static. On a hit, replace one of their Opposed with one of your own for the rest of the scene. On a 10+, both mark experience.

13.6. The Primordial

What Doesn't Kill You: (You have this move by default) The first time during a session your Health hits Code 30, mark experience.

Harvest: When you Rip the Power from a Being, describe what power and roll +Entropic. On a 10+ choose 3, on a 7-9 choose 1.

- It dies then and there.
- You are empowered, take +1 ongoing until you fail a roll.
- The power is not tainted.
- You don't draw excessive attention.

Hunter: When you track your Prey's magical trail roll +Without. On a 10+ you find them, and they're close. On a 7-9, choose 1:

- You're in for a trek, but at least the trail is strong
- They're close by, but the trail went cold

Serendipity: Once per session, when you Use Magic to Fix it, you may choose none of the options.

You also have this move:

When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity, you each hold 1. You can each spend that hold at any time to Help or Hinder each other, no matter the barriers or distance between you.

Stats

Arrange +2, +1, +0, +0, -1

Anchors

Only pick Anchors from two of the categories below.

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. **My Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) **A** small tent down under the East Side Bridge; **My** small house, where my pets live; **An** apartment roughly the size of a closet

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. **My Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) **Agnes**, my faltering grandmother; **Red**, my oddball neighbor

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. **My Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) _____ from my childhood home; The engraved knife I found in _____; The yellowed love letters my parents exchanged

Starting Gear

2 Savings

- Choose a prize that you won: **An** always-sharp knife; **A** large rainstick that sometimes works; **A** gold-plated hip-flask; **A** once-used guitar; **An** embellished leather jacket; **A** bleached animal skull.
- Choose an impracticality: **A** large ornate mirror; **Two** sets black-tie attire; **A** high-powered telescope; **A** timeshare in the Hamptons; **A** 96" plasma TV; **A** marble bust of your head.

Advancements

- Gain +1 **Without** (Maximum **Without** +1)
- Gain +1 **Within** (Maximum **Within** +2)
- Gain +1 **Static** (Maximum **Static** +3)
- Gain +1 **Dynamic** (Maximum **Dynamic** +2)
- Get a new Primordial move

13.6. The Primordial

- Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- (*) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm
- (*) Gain an Anchor (2 Anchors max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- Get a new Primordial move
- Get a second use of Serendipity
- Get a playbook move from another book
- Get a playbook move from another book
- Get an Advanced Primordial move

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

13.7 The Tech Adept

Most people think magic and technology are incompatible, but you know better. You prefer to think of them as peanut butter and chocolate. And you're the sweet sweet mix.

Name: Jeremy, Kix, Sonya, B3ll, Doran, Starter, TK, Foto, Liza, The Law, Dodge, Ophelia, Tarvek, Fr0st, Amanda

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because of my obsession, because of my transgressions, because I was uneducated

Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed? Because I'm holding back, because I don't care, because I don't know how to fit in

Why are you hunted? For my talents, because I get framed, because I antagonize

Looks:

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- cocky eyes, darting eyes, vacant eyes, lively eyes, emotionless eyes
- driven face, stony face, fervent face, steady face, broad face, impassive face
- jumpy body, gangling body, striking body, burly body, awkward body
- tailored clothes, lusterless clothes, futuristic clothes, dingy clothes, protective clothes
- kinetic aura, obscure aura, crackling aura, luminous aura, twisting aura, drab aura

Paradigms

Reality has an API

Aligned: (choose one) Changing a single variable, magic done from a terminal

Opposed: (choose one) Living things, magic that affects only part of an object, I can only change a single variable at a time

(choose one) Unplanned magic, magic not done from a terminal, my magic must be expressed as if/then conditions

My Own Theory of Everything

Aligned: (choose one) The physical world, repeated magic
Opposed: (choose one) Magic not of the physical world, magic that violates the Law of Entropy, my magic may not involve living things

(choose this one) Magic without technological accoutrements

Moves

The Tech Adept gets the **Universal Programmer** move, and 2 other moves of your choice.

Universal Programmer: (You have this move by default) When you make a new piece of equipment, roll +Dynamic. On a hit you make it. On a 10+, it works and keeps working. On a 7-9, it will only last for the scene. In either case, choose a quirk:

- The device works much more slowly than expected

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

- The device requires more of a resource than expected
- The device has a side effect when used

Read the Web of Fate: When you enter the virtual world to Read the Web of Fate, roll +Without. On a hit, you can determine the degrees of separation between two objects or people. On a 10+, you can also get a general idea of the path between them.

Ghost in the Machine: When you enter the Virtual World physically, you may bring other willing Mages along, and exit at any terminal you can find.

Things Speak: When you examine an interesting technological or magical object, roll +Without. On a 10+, you may ask up to 3 of the following questions, on a 7-9, ask 1.

- What strong emotions have been most recently associated with this?
- What's wrong with this, and how might I fix it?
- How frequently has this been handled?
- Where did this come from?
- How might this be dangerous?
- Who designed this?

Percussive Maintenance: When you impose your will on a machine, roll +Entropic. It works better. On a 10+, tell the MC how. On a 7-9, the MC will tell you how. On a 6-, the MC will tell you how, and why this is terrible for you.

You also have this move:

When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity, they speak to you as if they were an interesting technological or magical object (whether or not you have the move). Treat it as rolling a

10+ and ask up to 3 questions from the list. If you ask more than 1 question, you speak back to them in the same way, and they may ask up to 3 questions of the same list.

Stats

Arrange +2, +1, +0, +0, -1

Anchors

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. **My Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) A squat without running water; My nicely decorated apartment, walking distance from public transit; A room-share start-up pilot program

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. **My Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) My only uncle, Avi; Zeke, from my virtual community

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. **My Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) The tree-house I built with _____; My first hand-held console; My mint copy of _____; My High School Diploma, which I almost had to forge

Starting Gear

- 2 Savings
- Choose a signature toolset: My souped-up computer; a set of scripts and daemons that I can reach from anywhere with an internet connection; All the meters, connectors, and components I could need.

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

- Choose something you've made: A full home automation system; An Internet watchdog to keep you informed; A weapon using Consensus-defying energies.

Advancements

- Gain +1 Without (Max Without +2)
- Gain +1 Within (Max Within +2)
- Gain +1 Entropic (Max Entropic +2)
- Gain a new Tech-Adept move
- Gain a new Tech-Adept move
- Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- (*) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm
- (*) Gain an Anchor (2 Anchors max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- Gain +1 Static (Max Static +2)
- Gain a new Tech-Adept move
- Pick a playbook move from another playbook
- Get an Advanced Tech-Adept Move
- Get an Advanced Tech-Adept Move

13.8 The Voiced

I am the voice of the past that will always be
I am the voice of your hunger and pain
I am the voice of the future
I am the voice, I will remain

Name: Arin, Malak, Liron, Shir, Piper, Lark, Jaron, Calliope, Diona, Zamira, Kousan, Prudence, Orpheus, Sophie

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because I spoke differently, because they thought I was broken, because of my looks

Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed? Because I don't want to fit in, because I can't stay still, because of my friends **Why are you hunted?** For my talents, because I'm famous, because I appear broken

Looks:

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- glimmering eyes, vibrant eyes, piercing eyes, innocent eyes
- open face, laughing face, pained face, serene face, fake face
- young body, burly body, tantalizing body, inconspicuous body, flashy body
- crisp clothes, respectable clothes, stylish clothes, custom clothes, ill-fitting clothes
- forbidden aura, enticing aura, waifish aura, vivid aura, purple aura

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Paradigms

I am a Voice in the Chorus

Aligned: (choose one) Words spoken which become Truth, divine insight

Opposed: (choose one) Harmful magic, dissonant magic

(choose one) silent magic, magic done alone

Spirit Whisperer

Aligned: (choose one) The breath of life, soothing magic, transcending barriers

Opposed: (choose one) Loud magic, wards, entropic magic

(choose one) Magic without spirits, silent magic, my magic must be expressed as a request, my magic depends on a willing spirit

Music is the language of the Universe

Aligned: (choose one) Regular rhythms, variations on a theme, harmonious magic, cosmic vibrations

Opposed: (choose one) Chaotic magic, countermagic, singular effects

(choose one) Soundless magic, emotionless magic, my magic must be a song

Moves

The Voiced gets the **Charming Voice** move, and 2 other moves of your choice.

Charming Voice: (You have this move by default) When you **Sell a Lie** using your voice to do so, you may roll **+Without** instead of **+Dynamic**

Voice in the Wind: When you speak across boundaries that would otherwise make communication impossible, you are heard.

Power Vested in Me: When you speak as the voice of a significant or powerful group, and with their full weight and authority, roll **+Static**. On a **10+** those you are speaking to will take you at your word, on a **7-9**, they will need some proof or assurances first.

Arresting Voice: When you use your voice to deliver a message that is both powerful and captivating, roll **+Without**. On a **10+**, your audience is frozen, unable to do anything other than to continue listening until you finish. On a **7-9**, they are likewise frozen, but you must not take any action other than to continue delivering your message, or the spell will be broken.

The Voice of Experience: When you have been here before, give advice on a course of action and roll **+Dynamic**, **-1** if Tethered. On a **7-9**, take **+1** forward when following the plan. On a **10+**, additionally everyone who follows the plan marks experience.

You also have this move:

When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity, you may tell them a secret about yourself. If you do, they will respond with a secret about themselves.

Stats

Arrange **+2**, **+1**, **+0**, **+0**, **-1**

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

Anchors

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. **My Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) **A** studio in the nice part of town that I sweet-talked my way into; **My** spotless but lived-in condo; **A** nice house in the bad part of town

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. **My Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) _____ who is always there for me; **Allison**, who taught me how to live; _____, who finishes my duets

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. **My Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) **The** long-dead bouquet of flowers I was given for _____; **The** headphones that _____ got for me; **The** _____ my mother brought back from a business trip.

Starting Gear

- **1** Savings
- **An** old police scanner to stay informed.
- **Choose** a method of expression: **A** well-cared for musical instrument; **A** high end camera; **A** reliable sewing machine; **A** potter's wheel and kiln; **A** small leased art studio; **A** waterproof notebook; **A** pirate radio station with a range of a mile or two.
- **Choose** a way of protecting your voice: **A** large supply of herbal teas and tinctures; **A** small switchblade; **A** tube of pepper spray; **A** bullhorn.

Advancements

- **Get +1 Static (Max Static +2)**

- Get +1 Dynamic (Max Dynamic +2)
- Get +1 Within (Max Within +2)
- Get +1 Entropic (Max Entropic +2)
- Get a new Voiced move
- Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- (*) Give a Freedom to another Mage's Paradigm
- (*) Gain an Anchor (2 Anchors max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a Restriction from your Paradigm
- Get +1 Without (Max Without +3)
- Get +1 Static (Max Static +3)
- Get a new Voiced move
- Get a move from another playbook
- Get an Advanced Voiced move

13. The Characters (Appendix A)

13.9 The Wayfarer

There are many who travel the world in this day and age, and many fewer who travel where you do. The journey of a thousand miles begins with you.

Name: Roland, Isobel, Amelia, Karma, Daniel, Celina, Jamie, Gabriel, Christopher, Morgan, Laurie, David, Cara, Trina, Corwin

Why were you overlooked, downtrodden, or trivialized? Because I couldn't keep up, because of my attitude, because the world isn't accessible **Why are you ignored, oppressed, or dismissed?** Because I don't care, because people started noticing me, Because I see things as they really are

Why are you hunted? Because I run, because I break the Rules, for what I know

Looks:

- (choose at least one) ambiguous presentation, androgynous presentation, butch presentation, concealed presentation, femme presentation, fluid presentation, transgressing presentation
- spirited eyes, tender eyes, distant eyes, daring eyes, wandering eyes, secretive eyes
- stolid face, eager face, weathered face, angular face, weary face, covered face
- vibrant body, waifish body, hardened body, fluid body, mousy body, weird body
- tattered clothes, soiled clothes, crisp clothes, foreign clothes, comfortable clothes, tough clothes
- tireless aura, vital aura, capricious aura, eccentric aura, boisterous aura, nondescript aura

Paradigms

All people are connected, all people affect one another

Aligned: (choose one) Sympathy magic, travel magic

Opposed: (choose one) Creation, permanent effects, my magic can only affect living things

(choose one) Binding magic, magic that prevents movement

I have one foot in the spirit world

Aligned: (choose one) Travel between worlds, opening things, spirit magic

Opposed: (choose one) Static magic, abstract magic
(choose one) My magic must not be wholly of the physical or spirit world, stationary magic, my magic requires a reflection

Moves

The Wayfarer gets the **Step Sideways** move, and 2 other moves of your choice.

Step Sideways: (You have this move by default) When you seek a path to step sideways and travel to someplace new, roll +Entropic. On a 10+ choose 4, on a 7-9 choose 2.

- You get where you meant to go, no funny business.
- You arrive promptly.
- You arrive unharmed.
- You remember the path, so you can travel it again.
- You can safely and easily return.

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Chance Meetings: When you meet an important stranger (your choice) in your travels, roll +Dynamic. On a 10+ choose one, on a 7-9 the MC will choose one.

- They tell you something useful and true.
- They give you something that is potentially useful.
- They have something of great value to you.
- You have something of great value to them, and you know it.

Sixth Sense: When you travel along a path before it happens, roll +Within, and see a vision of possible futures. On a 10+, tell the MC what you sense, they may add to it. On a 7-9, the MC will tell you what you sense, and two possible interpretations.

Parkour: When you Outfox in an urban jungle, on a 12+ you additionally hold 3. You can spend your hold one for one to:

- Take +1 forward on an additional Outfox roll
- Take +1 forward to keeping your head down
- Treat your skills as something a sleeper wants for Use a Sleeper

Any Port in a Storm: When you find yourself in an unwelcoming situation, roll +Dynamic. On a 10+, tell the MC what you recognize as familiar and how that helps you. On a 7-9, the MC will tell you.

The Soul of an Explorer: When you seek out or find an entirely new experience, roll +Dynamic. On a hit, you learn something, mark experience. On a 10+, you find something that makes it easier, safer, or more enjoyable, the MC will tell you what.

You also have this move:

When you and another character exchange a moment of humanity, roll +Within. On a 10+, once, you can step sideways to this person as if they were a place you've never been before. On a 7-9, you see each other in a new light, you each pick one from the Chance Meetings list for the other. On a 6-, take -1 ongoing until you prove they haven't chained you down or anything.

Stats

Arrange +2, +1, +0, +0, -1

Anchors

Humans need shelter, a place to live, and a home to come back to. My **Shelter Anchor** is: (pick one) My well-maintained but tempermental conversion van; My house that always seems to need repair; A well-used tent and backpacking gear

Humans need connection, people they care about, or that care about them. My **Connection Anchor** is: (pick one) Iris, who will be my legacy; My family; Devin, my childhood chaplin

Humans need emotion, memories that tie to the past and dreams of the future. My **Emotional Anchor** is: (pick one) My well-polished Harley; My tattered, empty diary; My collection of smoothed stones

Starting Gear

- No Savings
- Choose a means of getting around: My well-cared-for motorcycle; A walking staff and good

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pair of boots; The latest in a long series of cars, not yet on its last legs.

- Choose a way of protecting yourself: A pet dog, your loyal traveling companion; Enough hidden knives to arm a small gang; A pistol with a hidden holster
- Choose a curiosity: A map to somewhere you'll need to go again; A spirit totem that isn't sure it accepts you as its owner; The latest in amateur radio technology

Advancements

- Pick a new **Wayfarer Move**
- Gain +1 **Static** (Max **Static** +1)
- Gain +1 **Without** (max **Without** +3)
- Gain +1 **Within** (max **Within** +3)
- Gain +1 **Entropic** (max **Entropic** +2)
- Remove a **Restriction** from your **Paradigm**
- (*) Give a **Freedom** to another **Mage's Paradigm**
- (*) Gain an **Anchor** (2 **Anchors** max)

(Choose only after 5 from the first section)

- Retire to safety
- Switch playbooks
- Start a second character

(Choose only after 5 from the first section and if not Tethered)

- (*) Remove a **Restriction** from your **Paradigm**
- Pick a new **Wayfarer move**
- When using **Step Sideways**, always choose +1 option, even on a miss
- Pick a **playbook move** from another **playbook**
- Pick a **playbook move** from another **playbook**

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- Gain +1 Dynamic (max Dynamic +3)
- Get an Advanced Wayfarer Move