

# Consensus Important Concepts

## The Consensus

The Consensus is a great unknown for many mages. Some say that it's the collective beliefs about reality from all intelligent life forms, some say it's a semi-conscious manifestation of the universe's principals. (The same principals that mages regularly violate and skirt around.) Whatever the true nature of The Consensus, its existence means that reality isn't just torn asunder by people with fantastic powers, like yourself.

## Mage

A Mage is someone who has the ability to alter reality as we know it. They consider themselves awakened from the sleep of ignorance, and are closer to the pinnacle of human achievement than most anyone else.

## Sleeper

A Sleeper is a regular average person who does not have the ability to rewrite reality with a thought. Magic has no place in their worldview, or even if they believe in it, the fundamental nature of what Mages do is completely alien to their brains. Some refer to them as the eyes and ears of The Consensus.

## Rending Magic

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. To do that requires tearing a rather large hole in reality, and that's when reality fights back. That's Rending magic, and it has consequences. (If the magic can't be passed off as coincidence or happenstance to the casual onlooker, the effect is likely Rending.)

## Lookout

The Consensus, while it seems to be all-powerful, is not quite all-knowing. A Mage can do as much Rending magic as she likes when there is no one around to see it. However, the moment that Rending magic affects someone who doesn't share her exact views on the world, their realities conflict, and there will be consequences. A lookout is any sleeper, or any Mage who has an opposed paradigm. If the effect can't make sense in the worldview of someone observing it or otherwise affected by it (even tangentially), they are a lookout, and the effect is Rending.

Note that this means Mages can be gods in their own little space, doing whatever they want. But no matter what it is they do, it will likely have an effect on a lookout sooner or later, especially if they ever want to see another person again.

## Discord

When you rip holes in reality, it leaves a mark on you. Even when it doesn't immediately hurt you, that can build up, and if you let it build up too far, you're in for one heck of a whoopin' from reality.

## Backlash

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.

## Anchor

When we say that Mages are the pinnacle of humanity, we mean it. But that's not always a good thing, right? There's a line between the top of humanity and something inhuman that is so easy for a Mage to step over. 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 physical objects, or beings, that keep you grounded in the mortal world. But they also hold you back from your fullest potential. 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, these things aren't grounded enough in reality to keep you there. A cat that happens to be your familiar, fine. A spirit familiar you summoned that happens to take the shape of a cat, not so fine.

Mages start with either 3 or 4 Anchors, and after they start losing them, can get more, but only ever back up to 3. You can take a new Anchor instead of an advancement any time that you have 2 or fewer remaining Anchors. Explain why they are now something that keeps you grounded, keeps you human. In addition, think about what you need to do for them, as upkeep. Rent for a home, reading a book to your child before bed, keeping an old watch cleaned and wound.

Anchors fall into three categories, Home, Connection, and Memory. Home Anchors are literally that, an Anchor that is where you live. 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.

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.

Memory 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 lest they slip away.

If you fail to upkeep an Anchor for long enough that it is actively drifting away from you, you will not be able to connect with it until the issue(s) are resolved. At other times, connecting with an Anchor can help refresh you in a variety of small but important ways.

A Mage who has lost all their Anchors is adrift in a sea of magic, no longer quite human, they have become something...else. When you lose your last Anchor, you will get to dictate one scene that is how you react to losing that Anchor, and how it sends you over the edge of humanity. Then you hand your character sheet over to the MC, and start a new character.

As an interesting note, it is easier to bring a Mage back from the dead than it is to restore an Anchorless Mage to humanity.

### **Tethered**

A Mage with more than half of their original starting number of Anchors is Tethered to reality. They are still fairly grounded, and are unlikely to suddenly go for an endless sojourn in the vast seas of infinity. However, their minds are also that much more clouded by physical considerations, and they cannot reach their highest potential.

A Tethered Mage cannot choose any Untethered Advancements, from the third section, and will have a harder time demonstrating true magical superiority.

### **Status Tracks**

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.

A set of status codes is as follows:

- **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

The exact meaning of each Code will depend on what the status track is tied to, especially Code N, the Newsworthy event. Code N is always something with major, usually irreparable, repercussions, at least in the scope of the Status Track.

For most Status Tracks, Code 50 and Code 40 will recover on their own, given time. Once a Code 30 has been reached, the track will slide downwards without concentrated outside intervention.

Status Tracks are usually both prescriptive and descriptive. That is, if the rules say to advance a Status Track by two codes, then do so, and describe what happens. In addition, if something narratively happens that would indicate a code on the Status Track, then advance the Status Track to reflect the new state.

## Harm

Harm in Consensus uses a Status Track.

Every time you take Harm, it will be a certain number. Cross off one Code, in order, for each level of Harm taken, and write down what injury this represents, keeping in mind the severity each Code indicates. So, 2 Harm to an uninjured character, delivered by a blow from a ghost's cutlass, might represent a cut to the arm that hits a big vein and starts to bleed badly ("deep cut" for Code 50 and "blood loss" for Code 40). The same 2 Harm to a character who already has injuries for Codes 50-30 likely indicates a paralyzed arm and severed artery. In addition, when you take Harm, roll the Harm move (it is possible to suffer minor injuries, which do not change your Harm status track, but do trigger the Harm move, represented by taking "0 Harm").

As with other Status Tracks, once Code 30 has been reached, the track will get worse without help. For harm, this represents injuries that will kill you without medical attention. A punctured lung, a cracked skull, the types of things that if you just try to rest and recuperate will end up killing you. You need medical attention, and soon.

Even before reaching Code 30, pushing yourself when you're injured in any way can make things worse. Being strenuous with a cracked rib is just crying out to end up with a punctured lung after all. (GMs take note, and refer to the Adjust a Status Track MC move).

Use these amounts of Harm for rough guidelines.

- **0 Harm** Small cuts
- **1 Harm** A solid punch
- **2 Harm** A knife wound
- **3 Harm** A gunshot
- **4 Harm** A grenade

Code N for Harm indicates that the Mage is about to die. If you take Harm that causes you to reach Code N, including if you don't get medical attention while below Code 40 for too long, you'll be rolling the death move.

## Death

Sometimes things die. That includes Mages. When you die, you will 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.

## Magical Preparations

Humans are fragile creatures, and Mages tend to be a careful lot, so even if they don't think they're explicitly in danger, they'll have prepared something to keep them safe "just in case." This could be a bit of luck magic to make sure they just happen to be out of danger's way, or a burst of superhuman reflexes to move you out of the way. Point is, most Mages can take a bit of harm without any permanent damage. They don't often get hit by oncoming traffic just crossing the road. But

those defenses take some time to prepare, so once they're gone, a Mage is just as vulnerable as any other person.

Above Code 50, a Mage has "Preparations." When they take Harm and they have not already expended their Preparations, all of the Harm is blocked by the Preparations, as long as this can be explained in a harmonious manner. Rending defensive magic is always active. Even with Preparations, you still roll the Harm move as if you had taken 1 Harm.

At certain times, Harm may bypass Preparations, including if there is no conceivable way the Mage could have avoided it (no amount of passive preparations will protect you when you dive into a lake of lava), or for many types of sacrifices.

Preparations can be regained by taking a small amount of time in a safe location, reconnecting with one of your Anchors.

## Paradigm

Just as it is not enough to say that a plane flies "because of physics," a Mage knows better than that they can create wondrous effects "because of magic." A Mage's Paradigm is their personal belief system that explains how magic works. For one Mage, it might be that there is an ancient language, infused with the power to affect the world if spoken aloud. Armed with this belief, the Mage is able to cast spells that rival any fantasy wizard. (What the Consensus has to say about this is another matter entirely.)

Another Mage might argue that they don't do magic at all (and may even debate its existence in the universe). They could, however, have a scientific theory of how the human mind can influence wave function collapse, allowing someone with a complete enough understanding of a technological device to do things that look impossible. This Mage's paradigm is likely much more limited than the more traditional, wizard-like one, but can create effects which are just as fantastic, and may even be easier to disguise among mundane behaviors.

Paradigms are usually identified by an overarching descriptive belief, a set of abilities a Mage carrying said belief is particularly capable of, and effects which are completely outside of that belief system. A Mage dedicated to science above all else likely can't justify faith healing as a part of their conception of reality.

Of course, to be a Mage is to go beyond the limitations of the human mind, and a Mage can always attempt to overcome their preconceived notions and force an attempt to work through sheer force of will. The Mage will be working against their own belief, though, and that is a lot more personal than the pressure the Consensus normally exerts.

If you do magic that is specifically aligned with your paradigm, and are particularly lucky, it may be even more successful than you anticipated. If you do magic that is neither aligned nor opposed, nothing special happens. If you attempt magic that is opposed to your paradigm, it is Rending, and you count as a Lookout to your own magic. (And you are most certainly affected by it.)

If you observe someone else doing magic which is aligned with your own Paradigm, you will be extra capable of aiding them, or standing in their way, due to your own familiarity with it.

## Freedoms and Restrictions

Mages are adaptable beings at heart. One option when you take an advancement is to give another character a "Freedom." This takes the form of an exception to one of their paradigms Opposed methods or effects (when working with the person who gave them the freedom). For example, Laz has a restriction of "Stationary Magic," and Piper gives him the freedom "There is Movement in Melody," which will allow him to accept magic without physical motion, as long as there is a melody, and he is interacting with Piper.

Restrictions come about slightly differently. If you roll a 6- on a magical roll, or perform Rending magic, the MC may decide to give you a new restriction. Where a Freedom is an exception to your Opposed, a Restriction adds to them. A restriction tells you that even though it seems to be in your paradigm to do something, you actually have a deep-seated mental block against it. Restrictions can also be removed when you take an advancement.

### **Place of Power**

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 with residual 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. Be careful allowing 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, and that's easier access to a space in which rituals work. It may be fine to give players that work for it temporary access to a place of power, or even access to a temporary place of power.

### **Consensus Enforcer**

Consensus Enforcers are concrete bits of the forces that cause Backlash. When a Mage has been particularly troublesome to Reality, instead of being marked with a Discordant Sign, a Consensus Enforcer may manifest. These spirits have at least animal-like intelligence and powers to cause trouble for the Mage or Mages whose actions lead to the Backlash. They can usually be handled like other spirits, but grow stronger in the presence of Discord, which can make overcoming them an exercise in care and subtlety.

### **Reality Bubbles**

Sometimes, a Mage who has been bending Reality with their mind will suddenly find Reality bending their mind, or their very being, back. When this is the result of a suitably strong Backlash, the effect can be persistent. There are three kinds of Reality Bubbles. Each acts as its own type of prison for the Mage, which some incredibly lucky Mages may be able to escape on their own, but most will need the help of others, if they are able to escape at all.

The most drastic and obvious type of Reality Bubble is the Discordant Realm. The Mage is ejected from reality, disappearing from wherever they were when

the Backlash struck, into a bubble of weird rules and wild magic. If the Mage is able to survive the dangers the demiplane and bring themselves back in line with the Consensus, they may be able to return to this reality. In addition, the point of departure almost always leaves a mark in the world, which other brave or fool-hardy Mages may be able to use to follow an ejected friend and seek to bring them back. Discordant Realms are Reality's ultimate defense against harm, akin to an oyster's pearl, and if a Mage is not careful, they can remain stuck forever, drifting in the spaces between planes. The fate of many Marauders is to leave reality for a Discordant Realm.

More subtle is a Reality Fracture. This kind of Reality Bubble leaves the Mage physically in the real world, but they see an entirely different reality, superimposed over this one and only mostly lining up. If the Mage is able to pierce the illusion, through force of will, luck, or with the help of allies, they may be able to escape the Fracture and allow Reality, and their mind, to heal. If the Mage buys into the Fracture too strongly, however, it may begin to diverge from reality, eventually leaving and taking them with it (if they don't follow a hallucination into now-hidden traffic or otherwise get themselves killed due to "mistranslations.")

Most subtle of all is a type of Reality Bubble called Discordant Visions. In this case, the Mage largely sees things as they are, but with important differences, recurring hallucinations. Perhaps UFOs hang in the sky, motionless, and ignored by all. The Mage may take it upon themselves to inform everyone of the alien threat, or take the fight to them. This kind of Reality Bubble allows the Mage to most easily see and interact with their friends and allies as they really are, which may be helpful, but if this leads the Mage to believe that they are the only one who can understand the true way things are, and everyone else, even their friends, are trying to undermine them, it can still be extremely difficult to escape from.

A Mage with an exceptionally strong and careful will may be able to overcome a Reality Bubble on their own, but most require outside assistance. Even then, help can be hard to give, because most Mages are used to their own minds being the one trustworthy source of information they have. In addition, if the subjects of a Reality Bubble would inspire the Mage to more Rending magic, they may push themselves even deeper into the Bubble.

A Mage suffering from ongoing hallucinations in a Reality Bubble might see gremlins threatening to make trouble wherever they go. The hallucinations can sometimes be dispelled on an individual level by mental focus and fortitude, but the overall Reality Bubble remains. Escaping from it may require anything from steadfastly ignoring the gremlins and not being goaded into using Rending magic by them for long enough, to finding the (still hallucinated) nest they are coming from and erasing it from their mind.

A Mage who is perceiving an entirely different reality as the result of a Reality Fracture may wander around the world, or may become catatonic, traveling an unreal world in their mind. In either case, the world they are seeing could be anything from a fantastic faerieland, interpreting passers-by as elves, to the world of a noir film, to a school in ancient Greece.

A Mage who has given in to their Reality Bubble and believes it is Reality is called a Marauder, and they are terrifying examples of how Magehood can go

wrong.

## **Discordant Sign**

One of the simplest outcomes of a Backlash, a Discordant Sign is a weird manifestation that occurs as Reality patches itself back up. A Discordant Sign can be just about anything that lasts more than a few moments and hinders the Mage. A Mage might grow tiny devil horns that don't fade for a couple days, or find that they cannot abide the smell of color blue until they have crossed running water three times. More subtly, a Mage's car might simply refuse to start until Reality has become less twisted up around them. Discordant Signs are immensely varied, but all have one thing in common: Trying to fix them with magic only ever makes them worse.

## **Experience**

Whenever the rules tell you to, you mark experience. This comes from a few different sources, including rolling a highlighted stat, resetting secrets with another character, or the end-of-session move. Every time you mark your fifth experience, erase them all and make an advancement.

## **Advancement**

Whenever you mark your fifth experience, you reset down to 0 and make an advancement. Your first 5 advancements must come from the First Tier advancements on your playbook. Additional ones after that may come from the First or Second Tiers. If you are not Tethered, any time you would be able to choose from the First or Second Tiers you may also choose from the Untethered Advancements, the final section. Each advancement option may be chosen only once, except for the "Gain a new Anchor" advancement, which may be taken any time you have fewer than 3 Anchors remaining, and the Add a Freedom advancement, which may be taken any time, and Remove a Restriction when Untethered.

## **Flags**

At the beginning of each session, each player should come up with one flag for each of their characters. These should be things that encourage other characters to interact with yours in an interesting way. An example might be, "My character is very gullible. For this session, their flag is 'tell me a lie that I believe.'" The first time each other character does something that fulfills this flag, they mark experience. You can change a flag when it is fulfilled, or at the beginning of a session after it has been fulfilled at least once, or after it has gone unfulfilled for about three sessions.

## **Playbook Moves**

Each playbook starts with 3 moves. Between 0 and 2 moves will be marked "You have this move by default." Choose from the rest of the moves listed in that playbook until you have three total starting moves.