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World of darkness mage the awakening

(see also Mage The Awakening Sourcebook) Mage: The Awakening is a role-playing game developed by White Wolf and based in their World of Darkness setting. The characters portrayed in this game are individuals able to bend or break the commonly-accepted rules of reality to perform subtle or outlandish acts of magic. These characters are broadly referred to as "mages". Mage: The Awakening is loosely based on a prior White Wolf product, Mage: The Ascension, which had similar game mechanics, though the terminology differs. While the games both focus on magic, the setting and themes of Mage: The Ascension have been completely replaced. Mage: The Awakening won the 2006 ENnie Award for Best Writing. Background and setting
As with the other games in the "new" World of Darkness (nWoD), the history presented in the game provides for some ambiguity. However, the "origin story" of magic and mages is less ambiguous (or at least more widely accepted) than that of the nWoD vampires or werewolves. In the mythic past, a mysterious island existed with a single towering mountain, encircled by dragons which lived upon its summit. The mountain on the island called to humanity through dreams and visions. During this period, humanity was barbaric and tribal, and more importantly, its survival was under constant threat by stronger creatures. Over time, the dragons left and the mountain continued to call. Some humans answered the call and sought out the island. The humans who moved there discovered the first secrets of magic, and through magic they created the mighty city-state now known as Atlantis, though its true name has been lost to time. Over time, the mages who remembered the struggles for survival had passed on, and those living on the island took it for granted. The mages became filled with hubris, and created a Celestial Ladder to reach the heavens and attain greater mastery over the world. Once the ladder was finished and mages began to climb it, those at the top began fighting over how best to lead the world. Over the course of the battle, the ladder shattered. This separated the Earth into the Fallen World and the Supernal Realm, with the chasm of the Abyss in between. The Fallen World is the world where humanity now exists in, and mages have come to understand that it is a lie. The Supernal realm is the realm of magic, where the mages who climbed the ladder now reside. The Abyss that separates the two worlds prevents most of humanity from awakening to magic, and hampers the power of mages trapped in the Fallen World. There is also a region known as the Lower Depths, even further fallen from the Supernal Realm than the Fallen World is, but little is known about it. Mages believe that the Supernal Realm is the truth of reality and the origin of magic. It is ruled by the Exarchs, powerful mages who had successfully climbed the ladder and established themselves as rulers of it. The Exarchs wish to snuff out the memory of Atlantis and knowledge of magic so they will remain the supreme masters of reality. They are more god-like forces than human beings now, however this means that they must influence the Fallen World through servants. Resistance against the Exarchs is possible because of the Oracles, a small number (probably five) of Atlantean mages who also climbed the ladder. They each created (or maybe are) one of the Watchtowers, which are both locations in the Supernatural Realm but can cut through the Abyss. They serve as paths towards magic, allowing Sleepers (humans unaware of magic) to awaken to it. Each mage visits a Watchtower during their Awakening, and their magical abilities are forever affected by that journey. Fragments of the organizations, artifacts and writings of Atlantis survive to the present day, and mages hope to use this knowledge to further their various causes, by gaining a stronger connection to the Supernal Realm. Characters
Mages "awaken" to the ways of magic. The setting states that it is unclear whether this is mostly accidental or as a result of a person's nature or understanding. The process of awakening can be slow or fast, but there are two major ways in which the event may manifest: the Mystery Play and the Astral Journey. In both sorts of "awakenings", the mage-to-be goes on a journey that culminates with them arriving at or in their respective Tower and inscribing their name upon it. The Mystery Play is a waking dream, where the magical symbolism of their awakening is overlaid on top of the "real" world. Other people, places and real world events mesh together until the Mage arrives at a skyscraper, a phone booth, a grove or some other place that represents their Tower and somehow write their name in both the physical and astral setting, such as a hotel ledger or a statue's plaque. Astral Journeys, which occur when the potential mage dreams, are common to those who deny or resist the "awakening". Astral Journeys feature strange settings, objects and people, in a full sensory experience. Path A
Path is a Mage's personal connection to a Watchtower through one of the Supernal Realms. It is through this connection that the mage is able to draw down mana and work magic in the Fallen World. Each of the five Supernal Realms has a single Watchtower, so there are five paths to which a mage may awaken; the paths have a title, but also a series of descriptive names which invoke the mystical nature of the path's connection to its parent realm. The Paths are: Acanthus Affinity: Fate & Time Enchanters on the Path of Thistle work with luck, intuition and destiny. Connected to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn in the Realm of Arcadia, Kingdom of Enchantment and Abode of the Fae. Mastigos Affinity: Mind & Space Warlocks on the Path of Scourging work with perception and inner demons. Connected to the Watchtower of the Iron Gauntlet in the Realm of Pandemonium, Kingdom of Nightmares and Abode of Demons. Moros Affinity: Death & Matter Necromancers on the Path of Doom work with death, mortality and material things. Connected to the Watchtower of the Lead Coin in the Realm of Stygia, Kingdom of Crypts and Abode of Shades. Ochrimos Affinity: Prime & Forces Theurgists on the Path of the Mighty work with the divine energies infusing the world. Connected to the Watchtower of the Golden Key in the Realm of the Aether, Kingdom of the Celestial Spheres and Abode of Angels Thyrsus Affinity: Life & Spirit Shaman on the Path of Ecstasy work with all aspects of the natural world. Connected to the Watchtower of the Stone Book in the Realm of the Primal Wild, Kingdom of Totems and Abode of Beasts. Orders
After awakening, a mage typically joins one of the five Orders, although some choose to remain free of political connections, or remain outside of mage society due to ignorance, and are called apostates. The Orders have competing agendas and opposing beliefs, leading to a lack of cooperation and trust, however this does not lead to open warfare between the Orders. When enemies of the Orders, such as the Seers of the Throne, appear, the Orders put aside their differences, as their squabbles are petty compared to the battle between the Oracles and the Exarchs. The Five Orders are united in their opposition to the Exarchs. Four of the Orders claim a heritage going back to Atlantis. The Adamantine Arrow Ungala Draconis, the Talon of the Dragon. These piritual warriors and masters of conflict, who claim a heritage going back to Atlantis' defenders. Currently, the Order of the Arrow could perhaps be described as something akin to a knightly sect, though bushido and other warrior codes find a place in The Arrow. These mages conduct intensive physical and mental training, honing the minds and bodies of order members into deadly weapons which magical society may then wield against its enemies (such as vampires, werewolves, Seers of the Throne, and so on). The Free Council
Modernists who wish to create new forms of magic, a union of mages who have discovered ways of using magic that do not adhere to the Atlantean methods. According to Council members, mankind is subconsciously aware of metaphysical truths, and thus all of human society carries the potential for mystical wisdom. The "Libertines", as they are also called, possess a strong belief in democratic process and anti-authoritarianism. Guardians of the Veil
Visus Draconis, Eyes of the Dragon. Spies and conspirators who claim their descent from the intelligence officers and enforcers of Atlantis' laws. Many obscure their activities and identities even from other mages, and act as a check on humanity's dangerous curiosity for "that which man was not meant to know". To this end they falsify and obfuscate information through an elaborate honeycomb of lies and misdirections known as "the Labyrinth". The Mysterium
Alae Draconis, the Wings of the Dragon. Dedicated to pursuit of magical lore and the acquisition, cataloguing, and study of mystical and occult knowledge and artifacts. They continue the ancient heritage of the scholarly and intellectual of Atlantean society. Their internal structure often resembles the academic structures of the part of the world in which they reside. The Mysterium gathers, catalogues and maintains items of all types of magical and historical significance. These are stored in museum-libraries known as "Athenaea", which vary in size from private collections to massive storehouses that must be physically hidden by magical means. The Silver Ladder
Vox Draconis, Voice of the Dragon. Dedicated to ruling and reshaping the world, the viziers and senators of Atlantis remain in force. Politicians and authoritarians, the Silver Ladder believes in creating a perfect hierarchy (with themselves at the top, of course) which will seize control of reality, subjugating it to the will of mankind. Many would say (justifiably) that the Ladder is only interested in power, but this dream is not without its altruistic appeal. As a member of the Ladder might point out, control over reality could bring an end to human suffering in all its forms. Legacies
Legacies are an optional third grouping, literally portrayed as refinements of one's soul that are passed on from master to student. These grant additional innate benefits called Attainments, and may also grant affinity towards a third Arcana. Furthermore, because they are based on shaping one's own soul rather than drawing down Supernal rules, Attainments do not risk Paradox. Legacies can be created or learned based on Path and/or Order. Left Handed Legacies work the same as regular Legacies, but suffer social stigma because of their beliefs or practices. Left Handed Legacies might practice infernalism, corrupted forms of necromancy or other unwholesome arts. On the other hand, they may simply espouse political views that are unpopular amongst local mages. They are largely meant as antagonists rather than player characters. Many who practice these have a low Wisdom score, representing a progressive moral decline that comes from practising them. Magic
Magic is simply the ability of a mage (or "willworker") to impose their will onto reality. Mages are able to do this because of their sympathetic connection to the Watchtowers in the Supernal Realm, because their names are inscribed upon it, and because they realize the Fallen World is a lie. A mage's power, or level of awakening and understanding of the depths of the Supernal, is called Gnosis. Arcana represent the understanding a mage has over particular facets of reality, and govern their ability to affect those aspects. Subtle arcana are those spells that do not outwardly appear magical, and therefore do not automatically risk backfiring (called Paradox.) Vulgar spells are unmistakably magical, and risk backfiring. All spells have a greater risk of Paradox when they are cast in the presence of non-mages. Arcana
The 10 Arcana represent the different forms of power a mage can exert over the surrounding environment. Each Arcanum governs a specific and clearly defined sphere of influence, and they are neatly divided into Gross and Subtle Arcana, representing power over material and metaphysical concepts, respectively. The 10 Arcana are as follows: Death (subtle), wielding power over darkness, decay, ectoplasm, enervation, ghosts, and soul stealing. Fate (subtle), wielding power over blessings, curses, destiny, fortune, oaths, and probability. Forces (gross), wielding power over electricity, elemental fire, gravity, heat, kinetic energy, light, physics, radiation, sound, and weather. Life (gross), wielding power over disease, evolution, healing, metamorphosis, and vigour. Matter (gross), wielding power over alchemy, elemental air, elemental earth, elemental water, shaping, and transmutation. Mind (subtle), wielding power over communication, hallucinations, mental projection, mind control, and telepathy. Prime (subtle), wielding power over Hallows, illusions, magical imbuement, Mana, resonance, and tass. Space (gross), wielding power over conjuration, scrying, sympathy, teleportation, and wards. Spirit (subtle), wielding power over exorcism, the Shadow Realm, soul retrieval, spirits, and the Gauntlet. Time (gross), wielding power over divination, prophecy, and temporal acceleration/deceleration. Ghosts and Spirits
This system makes a strong distinction between ghosts and spirits. Ghosts are summoned, communicated with and manipulated via Death magic. Spirits are summoned, communicated with and manipulated via Spirit magic. The two may interact, but have little relationship otherwise, and spirits are not the souls of deceased humans, but rather the native inhabitants of the realms beyond the Gauntlet. Antagonists
Seers of the Throne: The Seers are Awakened who have sworn service to the Exarchs. They claim to follow the will of the Exarchs, and seek to remove magic from the world and strengthen the Lie. Seers believe that an Exarch is a man-made-god, and serve them in the hopes that once they succeed in destroying those that oppose them they will be rewarded by their distant masters. They also believe that, given their power, the Exarchs will inevitably triumph and reality will ultimately come into accordance with their desires. The inevitability of the Exarchs' victory is a major part of the Seers philosophy: the success of the Exarchs' agenda will permanently "fix" reality, and once that happens, the only viable path to enlightenment will be to accept the sovereignty of the Exarchs' hierarchy. They are not traditionally evil in the sense of fantasy or horror antagonists, but their philosophy is so at odds with that of mainstream society (in this case the mystical Atlantean Orders) that conflict is nearly inevitable. The Banishers: Banishers are warped Mages who dedicate themselves to destroying other Mages. Generally speaking, their Awakening was traumatic, undesired, and misunderstood, and they do not accept their mystical powers. They exist outside of normal mage society, and are often obsessed with hunting and killing other mages, usually driven by a desire for repentance or a belief that doing so will cause their life to be returned to normal. The Mad: Mad are Mages whose Awakening caused them to lose their minds, rendering them insane mystics who use their magic for their own mad ends. In game terms, they have a Wisdom (Morality) score of zero. The Acamoth: They reside beyond the threshold of existence, in the Abyssal gulf between the Supernal Realm and the Fallen World. Because of their nature, they are incapable of contacting or having any power in either the Supernal or Fallen World, and as such they require agents to grant them potency. Few knowingly or willingly serve them, and rather service their agendas by proxy, but those who do understand and submit are amongst the most feared and despised of beings. The Scaelesti: Mortal mages who serve/worship the Abyss are known as "Scaelestus", or simply "The Wicked". They serve the "Divine Purity" of the Abyss and seek the end of all things. They are hunted as heretics and abominations by all other Mages and are arguably the closest entity in the game to being "pure evil". Goetic Demons: Goetia is a practice that mages use that summons the vices of their minds into a physical form, in the belief that it will make them possible to subdue, or even destroy. Quite often, however, a Goetic mage will summon an "inner demon" that is too powerful for him to defeat, and it will escape, or even take control of the overconfident mage. Needless to say, these creatures are hunted down at all costs. Tremere: Liches who consume the souls of others in exchange for immortality and power. They were created when a group of Vampires(already called the Tremere) attempted to remove the curse of Vampirism by diablerizing (consuming the soul of) Awakened mages as part of magical rituals. The Vampires were destroyed and the mortal mages had their souls irrevokably altered; requiring that they themselves steal other souls in turn in order to stay alive. Trapped in a state between life and death, these spiritual vampires must consume the souls of others to survive, and pass on a terrible dark "gift" to those they consider to be truly worthy of the secrets of eternal "life". Witch Hunters: Mortals who seek out and destroy mages for ideological reasons. Books

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