

Tomes of Magick: Laws of Ascension

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Adam Simpson:

Hello, Mage fans, and welcome to Mage the Podcast, the podcast that works hard towards Ascension, so you don't have to. I'm your host, Adam, and I'm joined today by Bryce. Have you ever felt like the dice are getting between you and the story? Like your character sheet isn't representing you the way you could if you just had the chance?

Well, today on Tomes of Magic, we look at *Laws of Ascension*. This little volume is the gateway to live action role playing called LARP for short. But before we get into it, Bryce, how are you doing?

Chigg:

I'm doing pretty great this morning, Adam. Thanks for asking. Yesterday was kind of a horrible day for me, but that's in the past and we're moving forward.

Adam Simpson:

I like that direction. Bryce has been a host for some time, but this is the first chance we've had to look at a book together. Before we get started, are there any announcements for our listeners?

Chigg:

Certainly. I would like to announce that over on my other regular podcast, Darker Days Radio, that's darker-days.org, we're beginning a deep dive into the Kult 4th Edition role-playing game.

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We've recorded one episode. It should be out by the time this hits, at least on our YouTube channel, and should be hitting our podcast feed shortly.

We've gone over the basics of the setting and we will be moving on to character creation and then a real quick one one shot adventure, so tune in for that

Adam Simpson:

Yeah, I've heard some good things about Kult. I haven't played it myself, but a lot of praise for that game, so that should be interesting. Well, our book today is *Laws of Ascension*. This came out in 2001 when Revised Edition was young. It clocks in at 271 pages, but is smaller than most Mage books, so it will fit easier in your bag.

It helps mage fans play the game as LARP, live action role playing, instead of the regular tabletop game. No dice, dressing as your character is encouraged. In past episodes of Tomes of Magic, we've discussed how each book fits into the mage universe.

This book is a little different. Rather than boarding the train and finding its proper seat in the order of books, this one hops on a motorcycle and goes its own way. Is that metaphor confusing? Well, I'm a little confused too. In the realm of LARP, I'm like a tourist who just wandered into town.

Rather than assimilating properly, Bryce and I will make a few observations as we try to make sense of it all. Bryce, you've been in one or two LARP games, haven't you?

Chigg:

I have, in fact, been in exactly two LARP games, both at conventions. They were both vampireLARPs. I wasn't entirely sure what was happening either time, but it was a fun time.

It's just not something that I would do on a regular basis, mostly because I don't have 30 or 40 friends that I can wrangle into getting together for it.

Adam Simpson:

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With some experience of LARP, I may lean on you for support today. Being a core rulebook, the walkthrough will be brief. Staying true to the LARP theme, there are no illustrations in this book. The only images we see are photographs of LARP players in costume.

We start off with three pages of fiction. This fiction centers on the three players we see in costume, an Etherite, an Akashic brother, and a Verbena. It is written like an account of a live-action game.

The magic is low key. There is activity, but no combat or chase scenes. We get the impression their LARP game is being held in public places, like a park, a restaurant, on the sidewalk nearby. The three mages have observed signs of unusual supernatural activity in their city, and they want to know what's causing it.

The story continues in brief pieces at the start of each of the seven chapters that follow this introduction. I think the fiction shows a good example of play. Bryce, what did you think of the opening fiction?

Chigg:

Holy exposition story. Oh my gosh. This is welcome Mage Revised. A whole bunch of stuff recently changed. This is the first *Laws of Ascension* book.

So I get that for the characters, they've existed. Presumably, they have backstories. They existed pre-Revised Edition. They were there before the Avatar Storm, all of that fun jazz. Before the masters disappeared from Earth.

But the actual game itself starts, as you said, in Revised. So all of that is prologue. But yeah, they they go over, oh yeah, the dead are rising all over the world. There's zombie apocalypses, you know.

There's a red star in the sky. it's It's a lot of exposition. It's not bad. It's not poorly written or anything. It's just a big old metaplot exposition dump. It was okay.

Right? They did a great job of setting up the world of Mage Revised.

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Adam Simpson:

Chapter one is the introduction. 17 pages tell us about role-playing games and *Mind's Eye Theater*, which is the line of books for live-action role-playing in the World of Darkness.

The roles of players, Storytellers, and narrators are described. Narrators are assistant Storytellers who are very helpful for live-action events. Safety rules and live action guidelines follow. It's fun to spend a day living as your character, but acting out magical rituals beside people who aren't in your game can cause confusion. Sometimes confusion leads to chats with security guards or police officers, so safety rules are reasonable here. In live action role-playing, there are no dice, and some game situations can be slow to resolve. For that reason, we are told optional rules are placed throughout the book. They can add more detailed control and closer approximations to things we see in the tabletop version of Mage, but they should only be added by players who can handle them well and who want that level of detail.

We're told the rules are written with the assumption games will be held in public places. That's why the safety guidelines are rather strict. For example, toy and prop weapons are forbidden. Index cards with gun or a knife written on them are used.

I think holding a live-action game in a public place can inhibit role-playing, especially for new LARP players. Holding a game in a home or in a designated space at a convention should allow for prop weapons and more freedom to get into character.

Next up, we get brief write-ups on the World of Darkness setting, what are mages, traditions, Technocracy, disparates, and Orphans. We finish with glossaries and mage terms and *Mind's Eye Theater* terms.

Bryce, what are your thoughts on the introduction?

Chigg:

I really liked the eight only rules that matter. Just going over them in order. The first is it's only a game. So if Jim's character is a jerk to your character during a scene, when the game is over, Jim was not being a jerk to you. Do not be a jerk back to Jim in character. Hey, that's fine. That's encouraged. That's the point of the game, but out of character, don't be a jerk to each other. No

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touching is, in my experience as a two-time LARPer, a rule that was not really followed because, no one like slapped anybody, but there were definitely people shaking hands and giving each other hugs and stuff in character, which, if it's all consensual, that's fine.

I did enjoy the no stunts rule because odds are you are not actually swashbuckling mage with the ability to bend chance in your favor. Your character might be, but you the player are probably just a schlubby dude. And if you try to jump over a fence or swing from a chandelier, you're more likely to hurt yourself or attract the attention of somebody that you don't want to attract the attention of who may call the cops on you.

Like you said, the no weapons rule. This is a really good one if you're going to be LARPing in a park. But like you said, if you're in someone's house or you've rented a hotel conference room or something for a day and you want to break out, the foam bopper swords or the little cap guns to represent your, I don't know, your Akashic gunslinger character. No one's going to bust down the door and stop you probably. No drugs or drinking. This is probably the rule that was broken more often than no touching because people be people.

Be mindful of others. I think this is the most important rule here. This is the you may be in a public area. Not everybody around you is part of this game. Do not try to rope in the guy who's just trying to get back to his office from lunch into your hermetic order drama garbage. And, don't go into a theater and yell, fire!... elemental.

Adam Simpson:

Well put.

Chigg:

The rules are flexible. Don't be a rules lawyer if the rules get in the way of telling a good, and interesting story. The rules should be changed. You can adjust any rule in this book to best suit the game that you are playing.

This is the golden rule. I'm not sure why this was rule seven instead of rule number one. Possibly because they wanted to emphasize don't touch people, don't bring fake guns out into the park or

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whatever. But, you know. And finally, the eighth rule, have fun. Which sounds unlikely in my games, but you know whatever works for you. Have fun. I suppose.

Also, you mentioned briefly that there is a glossary of terms here. It is a five-page glossary. It has so many definitions.

Adam Simpson:

Well, it is a mage book.

Chigg:

And I get it. You know, we want to know what is the Traditions. What are the Technocracy? There's sections on that before, but man, there's a lot of terms here.

But yeah, it's a very comprehensive introductory chapter. And like you said, it's very short. It's only, I think you said 17 pages. I didn't count the pages. And six of them are glossary.

Adam Simpson:

Got to cover the bases. Well, chapter two is all about the traditions, the nine Traditions that make up the Council of Nine.

Chigg:

Um, no, sir. There are 10 traditions because this is Tevised. So it includes the Hollow Ones as a tradition.

Adam Simpson:

Oh, my mistake.

Chigg:

I'll allow it this one time.

Adam Simpson:

At this point in Mage's development, Technocracy characters are an option, but Tradition mages are still seen as the best hope for a better tomorrow. This book tells us how to make Tradition player characters and Orphans.

Four pages tell us the history of their traditions, some more information about the world of Mage and the current state of the Traditions. Each Tradition gets about four pages with a photo of a player dressed as a member of that tradition.

The standouts for me are Cult of Ecstasy, Dream Speaker, Euthanatos, Verbena, and Virtual Adept. Those players look good in their roles. Each Tradition write-up has advantages and disadvantages applied to characters. Many of these can easily lead to enforcing simple stereotypes, but I'm not going to complain because I get the feeling they may help new people get into their roles.

They also make the character option stand out as more unique. Page 57 tells us the Technocracy hates the Sons of Ether more than the Virtual Adepts. This seems new to me. After reading a stack of tabletop books, I thought the Technocracy hated the Virtual Adepts the most.

We learn the Sons of Ether are known for helping other Tradition mages get across the Gauntlet now that the Avatar Storm is occurring. Was this in Revised Edition? I remember something about them continuing to explore Ether space, but I don't remember them helping other mages to cross the Gauntlet.

Of course, I may have read that wrong. I've done that before. Page 61 takes time to tell us the Verbena really hate the bombs that modern technology have produced. Where did this come from? Don't get me wrong. If the army wanted to store a hydrogen bomb in my backyard, I'd be a little upset too. But of all the products of modern technology, why do the authors want to focus on Verbena hatred of bombs?

While we're looking at the Verbena, the authors very wisely chose to omit references to the Verbena's penchant for sky-clad rituals. Nudity and LARPing do not mix well.

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If I get any emails from listeners objecting to that, I will ignore them. I'm going to stand firm on this one. Bryce, what did you think of chapter two?

Chigg:

I thought it was I thought it was a ah really good um overview of the traditions, including the hollow ones. um The descriptions aren't exactly lifted from the Mage Revised book. Like you said, there are some changes. So if you want to get maybe a different take on the Aetherites, you know, as an interdimensional taxi service or um the Verbena as the...

the Don't nuke the whales group, maybe. I'm not sure what exactly was going on with that either.

Adam Simpson:

I want a bumper sticker of that.

Chigg:

i I did like, like you said, ah the tradition advantages and disadvantages. And those are things like... Every Akashic character gets a free level of brawl and a free level of dough or two levels of meditation.

Because you see, there are two different types of Akashic brother. There's a kind who fight and there's the kind who just sit around and think about it.

I liked that the um hermetic drawback was all hermetics are assholes because now it's, it has, you know, game mechanics to it. So it's a real thing.

ah they Like you said, they did not ah include write-ups of the Technocracy or the Disprits. And the reason for that was because this book was already getting too long and they had to have something for the second book.

You see, this has always been a thing for Mage, whether it is tabletop, whether it is LARP, doesn't matter. There's always too much of fit in the book. There's always an overflow book.

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And I thought, I'm going to go out on a limb here, i'm going say that all of the LARPer look great. Some of them look greater than others, but I think that all of them are going out there, putting on their LARP costumes, and they're getting pictures taken for the official publication.

Good for them.

Um, beyond that, yeah, it was a, it was an okay chapter. Um, nothing really stood out, slapped me in the face as something, you know, super crazy new, but it's not supposed to it's the core book, you know, there, ah Oh, Oh, Oh, every writeup of every tradition includes, um,

the factions, like the sub-factions. So, you know, you have the orders or the, the houses of Hermes rather. ah You have the, the Knights Templar listed as a faction of the Celestial Chorus.

And when this book came out, it was before a lot of the, uh, Tradition books came out for the um later in the alphabet traditions.

So this was the first place that you could see as a as a player some of the factions for like the Sons of Aether or the Verbena. So might not be as neat mosquito today, but at the time, it was pretty nice.

Adam Simpson:

So being a completist had its advantages. Well, chapter three is character creation and traits. Traits are skills, sphere, knowledge, attributes, willpower, et cetera. We get definitions and descriptions of each trait, and that's why the chapter is 52 pages long.

Attribute bidding for challenges seems a little complicated to me. I would probably need two or three LARP sessions before I got it down. Instead of rolling dice against a difficulty, two people play rock, paper, scissors, but multiple rounds and affecting outcomes by bidding traits makes it more complicated.

Backgrounds are traits, so they're covered in this chapter. There are many varieties of the influence background, like academic influence, organized crime influence, et etc. The influence background

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take up a lot of pages. In a LARP game, I would imagine influence being quite useful for gaining an edge without pushing other players around or asking a narrator to adjudicate combat.

The Avatar Essences are covered here. What I found interesting was the Primordial Essence took on dark overtones starting in the second edition rulebook. Here it is presented as being in no way dark or negative, and I'm down with that.

The Occult skill is mixed in with Sphere Magic, whereas in the tabletop game it isn't, although that looks odd to me. I won't object. The skill count needs to be kept low in a LARP game, and I can see how new players would think it's a useful skill for all sorts of magic.

In a chapter this large, I could go on with so many observations, but I think it's better to hand it off to Bryce. What was your take on the chapter on character creation?

Chigg:

I thought it was a really good chapter. um If you're going to be playing any kind of game, any kind of role-playing game, whether it's live action or tabletop, you're probably going to be playing a character.

You probably want rules on how to make that character. This chapter does that. It gives you those rules. um There's nothing super crazy here. It does have a real big list of... um Oh, what are they called? ah natures and demeanors, which, uh, I think is longer than the list in the actual, uh, major revised book.

There's, or, and and yeah, the archetypes, uh, they're just so many of them. You might be able to borrow some here that aren't in the the core book, unless I'm completely misremembering and they are all there, in which case ignore all that, but I don't think they are.

going say something else. had something fun to say. ah

the The trait bidding is a interesting

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twist on the standard rock, paper, scissors. um If you are, if you're playing a character that is incredibly strong and you have, you know,

strong and tireless and tough and vigorous, then you're probably going to be able to, you know, outwrestle character who does not have similar traits.

But if you're only doing rock, paper, scissors to determine this, you have a, you know, one in three chance, I think. I'm not doing the math, it's early. You a one in three chance of of beating them at a rock, paper, scissors match.

So having traits to bid means that you can do multiple rounds of rock, paper, scissors. And that's basically the resolution mechanic for the entire game.

ah The influence, like you said, there are so many influences in the *Mind's Eye Theater* games because one of the overarching games is the influence game.

You know, how can i use mortal society to further my character's goals? So this might be just a ah big carryover from ah Laws of the Night, which is the the vampire LARP book.

But they have a lot of influence games where they, you know, well, I'm I have influence in, you know, city politics, so I can rezone this entire area. And the other guys like, well, i have influence in the the medical field. So I'm I'm in control of all the hospitals downtown or what have you.

And I can block your heard your power play there. So that, I think, is why it has so but so many pages are devoted to the influence background.

Because it's um it's also something you can do between game sessions. You can have your your mortal factions that you're in charge of together. to further your goals while you're not, you know, out in the hotel conference room playing the game.

You can do that over emails, which a lot of, from what I'm told, a lot of, uh, troops did. So,

Adam Simpson:

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Well, that makes sense. Yeah, that that helps me see why there were so many in there. it it seemed like an in interesting possibility, so I just wasn't fully grasping the application. Well, you ready for chapter four?

Chigg:

I think I might be ready for the spheres.

Adam Simpson:

Chapter 4 is 52 pages on the spheres. This is actually the Magic Rules chapter. Several concepts of the game and specific concepts connecting to sphere magic are described here. The rules for doing magic and counter magic are here.

Unlike the tabletop game, players are directed to choose specific rites for the spheres they know. With experience points, they can buy more rites. Using the spheres to perform new dynamic effects is only allowed if the game uses the optional rule that handles that.

This is to keep games moving and reduce the amount of special effects the storytellers and narrators need to sort out in a game. As a long-time mage fan, I wasn't happy about this restriction, but it makes sense in the context of LARP games.

After reading this chapter, magic works quite differently from the tabletop version we're all used to. I guess that's to be expected in LARP games, but it will take some getting used to. The nine spheres are described along with sample effects for each of their five levels. The chapter finishes with information on Paradox, Quiet, and Foci. Remember, they aren't called instruments until Mage 20.

ah Page 130 describes coincidental magic in a way I don't recall from the other mage books. With coincidental effects, the mage thinks of what he wants magic to accomplish for him, but not how. He then lets the magic manifest in the way the universe chooses.

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For example, he wants to use forces to stop an opponent. He wills the effect and then watches to see how it will take form. him A car battery hidden behind cardboard in an alleyway jolts the opponent. The mage thinks to himself, I didn't see that coming.

In LARP games, narrators and storytellers have to be ready to describe how coincidental effects manifest. On page 132, we are told minds and concepts exist on the highest plane of existence. They take a step down to manifest as spirit or ephemera in the umbra.

They take another step down to manifest physically on earth. Although there are similar ideas in other mage books, I don't remember seeing it stated quite this way before. ah Charles Siegel suggested this is probably a magified restatement of popular ideas from Plato.

Every time optional rules are presented in this book, we get an explanation of what they change and why people might want to use them. That was thoughtfully done. What wasn't well thought out was describing the distance affected by sphere magic as paces.

How do I measure 15 paces during a LARP game? If I want to limit things, I choose the shortest person in the room to walk some steps. Does that get an objection from the player casting the rote? Does the short person I keep calling on complain to the main storyteller that I'm wearing her out?

ah LARP games require a lot of problem solving, I would imagine. Well, I've demonstrated I don't understand LARP very well. Bryce, let's hear your take on chapter four.

Chigg:

ah i in the the The first thing I want to call out is that all five levels of every sphere are now officially named. This is the apprentice level. This is the initiate level.

This is the disciple level, the adept level, and finally the master level. we've We'd had this before, you know, five dots, you're a master, but I don't think that it was ever explicitly spelled out before that at two dots, you're an initiate.

for every sphere. I could be wrong. I'm not the one who read all the books. That was you.

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Adam Simpson:

No, I think you're right there.

Chigg:

I'm with you on, i I'm not a big, huge fan of everything requiring rote, but for a LARP, I absolutely understand why.

If you have 30 players and they all have dynamic magic and you have to have somebody running the props table who comes by with whatever the prop is for whatever effect...

Yeah, that's going to be that's going to be insane if you have to come up with something on the fly. Not the players, but just, oh, i'm gonna I'm going to use my forces to have, you know, whatever the...

the the power panel explode. Okay, well, that's that's fine. We have an explosion thing we can stick on there. A little three-by-five card exploded is now on the power panel. But if you're like, okay, i want to combine that with you know these other spheres over here, and now I'm going to make you know all the rats that live in the walls come out and attack. i'm like, well...

We don't really have a whole bunch of, you know, rubber rats we can throw around. So maybe maybe you work on that as a as a rote. You go to you go you know the the toy store or whatever, you buy a whole bunch of rubber rats.

And the next time you can bring those that sack of rubber rats with you and we can have a rubber rat effect.

So I get where they're coming from. um I did like um the coincidence rule of thumb on page 130. I want to give that one an explicit shout out.

um It says that if the average person off the street wouldn't believe it, it is not a coincidence. And this is your, you're giving a justification for why your magic is coincidental.

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If it takes more than a sentence to explain why it is a coincidence, it is not. That one right there is possibly my favorite. And finally, if it takes more than a minute to come up with an explanation that fits into one sentence for why it is a coincidence, it's not a coincidence.

Adam Simpson:

Down to brass tacks.

Chigg:

Yeah. Rules like that are going to cut out so much debate at the, was going say at the table, but at the LARP. No, it took you it took you there it took you ah two and a half minutes to figure out how you could do that coincidentally. No, it's vulgar. I'm sorry.

I do like that it gives little samples for everything and it tells you how to how to deal with paradox accumulation.

and it also includes rules for quiet and hobgoblins, which I was not really expecting to see in the the core book, hobgoblins especially. since those are traditionally NPCs and now they require a a narrator or an assistant storyteller to do whatever to play the role.

um As for your effect, as for your question of how do I determine what 15 paces is, That's a narrator's job. some some Somebody out there is the narrator in charge of magical effects, and whenever they need someone to pay something off, they call Brian over.

And if Brian is a 7'3 basketball player, hey, your range has just got a lot better. But if Brian is a 5'1 guy with little stubby legs and a long torso, bad news for you.

But yeah, that's that's how they do that. That's how they keep that fair. And I feel bad for Brian. hope they bring him something to drink because he has to walk a lot.

Adam Simpson:

Sounds like it.

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Chigg:

But yeah, um it is a an elegant, if not a perfect translation of traditional mage magic that we're all used to from playing the Ascension into LARP effects.

It does lean very, very, very heavily, like entirely on rites, but it tell it it gives a concrete reason for rites to be a thing.

And now if you have a route, you can use that as a bargaining chip in your game. You can tell other characters, hey, I know how to walk on water.

I have this effect that I can do. I can teach you how to walk on rockt water. if you do whatever for me. So it it gives, ah you know, they've they've always talked in the books, in the the traditional tabletop books about how rites are something that you can learn from your tradition, you can learn from another mage, and they're good to have and, you know, they provide a very minor benefit

But why would you want to, you know, go out and learn all these roads? Well, now you have a reason you can, one, they're the only thing you can do in this game, and but two, you can use them as, you know, in-game benefits that you can give to other players.

Adam Simpson:

And that fits well with Revised Edition's setting, where the Masters are gone and the Mages who want to learn new magic, you better make some friends and hope that they're smart and have something they can teach you.

Chigg:

Exactly. So it it fits the setting. It fits, you know, the the general mindset of Mind's Eye Theater and LARP. And it it works surprisingly well.

Adam Simpson:

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Okay. Well, thanks for connecting the dots for me. Yeah, there were there were some things I was fuzzy on after reading that, but it sounds like you know more about it. so I'm glad you're on the show. Well, are you ready to take a look at chapter

Chigg:

man. Somebody's got to be a so-called expert here.

Adam Simpson:

Well, I'm glad somebody is.

So we shall we move into chapter five?

Chigg:

Yeah. Let's head on to rules, systems, and drama.

Adam Simpson:

Chapter five is rules, systems, and drama. The non-magic rules, basically, we start with challenges. This is the system that replaces dice rolling. A person who wants to do something that has a chance of failure plays rock, paper, scissors with another person, even if the other person isn't involved.

The system of bidding traits like skills or attribute qualities can get complicated quickly. You need to keep track of what was bid, whether or not you succeeded on the re-challenge. It's not a simple system, or at least it doesn't look like one to me.

I checked with LARP experts and the old trick of making the gun symbol with your thumb and forefinger and saying gun defeats everything will not only not be accepted, it gets you thrown right out of the game. For me, rock, paper, scissors is asking a bit much. I have terrible reflexes, so I think I would lose every time.

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I remember hearing from a person who runs Jackalope LARP events. He was working on a smartphone app that allowed people to quickly roll dice to resolve things, kind of bringing the tabletop rules into the LARP experience.

Has ah anyone heard if he finished that? I don't know if he finished it up or not. He said he was working on it. On page 213, we hear Mage Society should be thought of as high school with sphere magic.

That is so depressing for me. I hated high school so much I dropped out after two years. Please don't make awakened society resemble my high school. Healing, character death, combat, all are covered here. Several pages are given to weapons and armor.

True faith, derangements, tradition politics. ah Now going into detail for politics makes sense in a LARP book. Social interactions will work better than combat and chase scenes in this kind of game. The chapter finishes with information on the Umbra.

I was surprised the middle umbra wasn't mentioned specifically. The high umbra is mentioned, low umbra is mentioned. Maybe werewolves aren't popular in this town, but umbral scenes can be done in a LARP game, but I think they would be quite difficult. I'm not sure I'd try it in an event that I was running.

The umbra section in this chapter is so long, I have to wonder if the authors expected it to be a regular thing in LARP events. Well, that's chapter five. Bryce, what did you think of this one?

Chigg:

I wasn't a big, huge fan of the derangements, but that's just me. I don't really care for mechanical... drawbacks to, you know, bulimia, for instance. I don't think that's necessary in any game, but I get it's part of the White Wolf baggage that they're carrying in here.

ah Yeah, the um the Rock, Paper, Scissors thing, that can probably be done with a smartphone app. Also, your character sheet, which has all of your traits on it and which ones you have available to bid.

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also could probably be done with a an app on your phone or even just you know ah editable PDF that you can put little check mark next to, I'm i'm severely wounded, I'm almost incapacitated, things like that.

The Umbra, yeah.

I'm not saying it was specifically a bid to get people to also buy Laws of the Wild, the werewolf book that covers ah the middle Umbra, but its absence here is a a noted absence, like you said.

ah especially given that the dream speakers are in this book and it says that they deal extensively with umbral creatures and umbral spirits in the middle umbra.

So yeah, that was a, that was a noted absence. Um, the comparing it to high school with sphere magic, I think is more,

about how catty and petty the, uh, traditions can be towards each other rather than, um, you know, you have to go to gym class now.

ah you know, the Akashic Mass, you're going to be real ticked off if you can't climb up that rope all by yourself this, this hour. Uh,

you said that there was a lot of stuff on the Umbra here. I don't think that it was too terribly much for even the revised edition where in theory, you know, you're mostly supposed to be cut off from the Umbra.

I don't think it's something that's going to come up regularly in a game like on a on every game basis but it is something that given that it's a mage game and it does have this the spirit sphere and you can in fact go there it's something that they needed to include in the core book in case somebody decided that yeah we would like to go visit you know zeus on top of on top of olympus or what have you so it makes sense that they would include it here I think it's something that because all magic is requires routes, you would need to learn the route to visit Olympus.

So that's something that they could keep away from k from players. And if you did happen to come up with or learn this route or devise it on your own, then that would require them to set up a

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special room that is the Umbra or that is Olympus and that has spirits in it and narrators and other storytellers playing those, those special spirits.

So yeah, it's a lot more work than just sitting at the table and rolling your, your R&A and saying, yep, head into the Umbra. It requires a lot more planning and forethought. And it's something that you probably do on special occasions like your birthday.

So yeah. Um, That's all i have to say about that.

Adam Simpson:

Well, chapter six is storytelling. We learn games are supposed to be fun. Is that right? I thought games prepared us for a life of drudgery. Anyways, typical preparations and supplies for games are discussed. It tells us LARP games involve a lot more people and for that reason are different from tabletop games in several ways.

For example, players will often drift off into groups of their own and keep themselves busy instead of always looking to the storyteller. As is typical for storytelling chapters, there are examples of themes and moods. I noticed one of the moods is anger.

A game centered on Eger is probably all sorts of fun to be in. The stages of a LARP game are preparation, opening, climax, denouement, and wrap-up. Because of the larger groups and larger areas involved, the stages are a helpful guideline for games.

There's advice on decorating the game space. The discussion of goal-oriented versus story-oriented players may be helpful. Most players, we're told, are goal-oriented. They want experience points and accomplishments in the game.

The story-oriented aren't worried so much about points or their characters doing something, but they want to see a story or a good dramatic scene play out. The goal-oriented can help your plots move forward. The story-oriented can help the dramatic feel and ambiance. We get descriptions of the different roles storyteller assistants can take. Narrators are general-purpose storytelling assistants.

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The avatar guides handle avatars, seekings, and similar things. The paradox judge handles paradox penalties, flaws, spirits, and possibly realms. The spirit keeper handles the umbra and spirits that cross over from there.

We finish with advice on problems that may arise. Are players bored? accusations of favoritism, etc. One piece of advice is to keep a quizling, as the book refers to it, who pretends to be a player but is really passing secret reports to the storyteller.

It looks like LARP events encourage storytellers to become Machiavellian manipulators who develop henchmen webs of deceit and hidden agendas. I can't think of a better reason to get into LARP gaming. Page 230 mentions Ponca, Nebraska.

I looked it up. Ponca is a real place. Is it a hotbed of LARP gaming? Do we need to send a host there to report? Well, that's chapter six. Bryce, how was the storytelling chapter?

Chigg:

I think this is possibly one of the best storytelling chapters in any book I've ever read. It deals with, like you said, moods and themes, um including anger, like you said, but also including sadness and mystery and passion.

It's not all about being pissed off that the world is garbage. Sometimes you're sad about that.

um It tells you how to pace a game, how to create scale and scope of the game. Is it a local game? Is it a world-spanning game? Is it an interdimensional game? We're going to the Umbra every other week.

um It tells you, if you're running the game, how to accept player input. If a player comes up to you and says, hey, I really enjoyed this part of the game, but that part of the game over there Not really so much for me. I wasn't really into, you know, the high power.

Let's all go to the Umbra part. I want to play a lower power street level kind of game. And if, you know, multiple people tell you that, accept it, take that into you. Don't ignore them because you're going to lose your players if you do that.

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So it's, you know, it's great. there's There's some real great advice on how to run any game here, not just, not just a LARP. let's see, it has goal-oriented versus story-oriented players, like you said. I'm not so sure in LARP that the majority of players are going to be goal-oriented, going for the experience points and trying to, you know, slay the dragons. Unless, you know, the goal is I want to be in charge of things ah because, you know,

That's what LARPer's like to do. They like to be, you know, the mean the main character, in my experience. ah The troubleshooting section of the game covers a lot of problems that can happen at tables, as well as out in the the LARP field.

How to deal with player boredom. How to deal with people who don't want to have fights every other session or every session. ah How to deal with metagaming. How to deal with argumentative players.

um How to deal with storyteller burnout. I think this is a couple of paragraphs that everybody who has ever run any game should read.

How to deal with favoritism or accusations of favoritism.

And ah finally, the very last page of the section, full page, well, two thirds of a full page of crossover hell, how to deal with people who want to have crossover in your definitely not a crossover game.

I think that the the advice in this section is fantastic. And I think that everybody should read this for it, for for chapter six, if nothing else.

Adam Simpson:

Well, finally, we have the chapter on allies and antagonists. The technocracy is covered. Marauders and Nifondi. Then sorcerers. Bygones are covered. I think handling bygones in a LARP game is asking for too much. A discussion on our Discord server brought up the difficulties of players who want to kill a unicorn.

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From a storyteller's point of view, a dead unicorn is a whole lot easier to present in a LARP game than a live one. Hunters are next. These are regular humans who decide to take back the night. I can see these being both interesting and doable in a LARP game.

Vampire the Masquerade LARP events were quite popular for a while, so I would expect requests for vampire characters to join. They are covered right before werereatures, who I may not allow in my LARP games.

Not only are the special effects around shapeshifting going to be a nightmare, but they relish violence, which doesn't always play well in a LARP environment. Wraiths and Changelings close out the chapter. I would only allow them as NPCs and keep a lid on their powers.

So that's chapter seven. Bryce, what was your take? Are you ready to be a LARP storyteller?

Chigg:

I am ready to throw down LARP. If anybody wants to meet in my backyard in the next 15 minutes, we can begin. It'll be a one hour LARP. um I will be playing um a ghost because I will not be joining you.

But yeah, the allies and antagonists section is what it says on the tin. It's, hey, these are our other *Mind's Eye Theater* games. you want it If you want to have a changeling in your book, we got in your game, we got a book for that.

If you want to have hunters in your book, Guess what? We got a book for that. um it's not It's not as you know silly advertisement as that, but it's it's not far from.

um yeah it was fine. um As for how to play how to have ah someone who wants to kill a unicorn, there are unicorn masks. All you got to do is get a narrator to put on a mask and say, all right, Todd's a unicorn now.

Go get him. You want to kill a unicorn? Todd's over there. Go take his horn.

Adam Simpson:

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What if Todd complains he's not getting paid enough for this?

Chigg:

It's a LARP. We're all here for the love of the game.

Adam Simpson:

Okay. Okay. You got me there.

Chigg:

But yeah, it's a it's a very short chapter. It's here because they had to have somewhere to talk about the technocrats and the marauders, I assume.

It's fine. it doesn't It doesn't add anything to the game. It doesn't take anything from the game. It's fine. And then the the book ends with a one-page character sheet that you can print out in whatever form factor this is. I think the book is maybe eight by six but Don't quote me on that.

ah So one page, you can print it out, fold it into fours. It fits in a wallet. It's, you know, pocket-sized character sheet for your character. And then there's the the index, and that's the end of the book.

Adam Simpson:

Well, now we turn to the book as a whole. This is where my lack of LARP experience will show. and me restart that. Now we turn to the book as a whole. This is where my lack of LARP experience will show, but I will offer my comments. Nonetheless, when did being uninformed ever stop me?

The only edition of Mage for LARP is revised edition, although revised wasn't my favorite edition. I have to admit, if I chose an edition of Mage for LARP, it would be revised. That edition discouraged Umbral Trips. It focused on a lower-powered, Earth-centric game, and that's a lot more reasonable for a LARP event.

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Although I haven't been in a LARP game, when Terry visited Austin, it was to attend a Mage LARP being held downtown. After the event, he told me about it. He talked most about conversations he had with other players when they found a quiet spot away from the main action.

That game was an example of Swedish LARP. From what I've gathered, Swedish LARP differs from what's described in *Laws of Ascension* in these ways. Swedish LARP is a single event, so no experience points are given.

Also, the storyteller plans a tighter plot and creates the characters the players will use.

Players may be able to choose their character, but traits, motivations, personality, all that is set by the storyteller. The book is written with the assumption games will be large, with many people and a lot of ground to cover, also in public places. I think private games and games at conventions with assigned rooms are more...

likely going to be the case. I think the fear of confusing bystanders is not going to be much of a problem. In my experience, LARP games are quite rare. I think if this form of gaming is going to catch on, it should be something we can enjoy with groups of four or five people in someone's home.

This form of gaming can't be done online, at least not as laid out in this book, ah so that may limit it also. If someone new to Mage is reading this book, they will have no hope of knowing what the term ascension means. It is used so differently throughout the book, it would confuse anyone.

I envision LARP rules as being simple because of the need to keep things moving when so many people are standing around. I was surprised at the complexity of these rules. ah More record keeping and stacking odds for additional challenges than i would want to keep up with.

The mention of specialized narrators like paradox judges, spirit keepers, etc. makes games sound difficult to run. Is this why we don't hear about so many of them? I think of games like Call of Cthulhu or Vampire the Masquerade, and they seem well suited to LARP.

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The powers are more low key, the special effects are more manageable. ah Werewolf the Apocalypse and Mage are so full of weird powers and umbral trips that it seems intimidating to maintain a long running game.

ah Yet I don't want to be too dismissive, dressing as my character and finding a place in a simulated chantry where I can discuss mage politics and argue about paradigms or the nature of the avatar. That really appeals to me.

In a low-combat, friendly LARP game, I could see myself having a good time. Well, Bryce, what is your view of the book as a whole?

Chigg:

I think it is probably the best possible translation of Mage the Ascension to LARP that we could get. And if I'm wrong, if somebody out there has a better translation, please let us know.

I'd love to hear about it. um Come to us on the Discord. Tell me all about your personal translation. um As for your points of the game not being as popular as Tabletop,

One, you're not wrong. LARP is a subset of a subset of society where you know society as a whole and then tabletop gamers and then LARPerS. Each little Russian nesting doll in that set is smaller than the one before it.

but I'm not sure that it being less popular now means that it was never really popular. I know people who participated in LARPs for literal decades of their lives.

Not always the same LARP and definitely not always the same character, but they definitely played in LARP for 20 plus years. So it's definitely a thing that has a small, but very, very strong fan base. Um, as for making it smaller groups, like four to five people that can play in a home, I agree.

And we've just entered, ah invented tabletop role-playing good for us.

As for not being able to play it online, um my friends who are the the heavier LARPerS than I will ever be, um they do a lot of interaction between events online.

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Like I said earlier, the the influence game is all has been done almost entirely through emails or websites or what have you, mailing lists kind of stuff.

So it's a thing that has an online component, but yeah, if you're just going to play role-playing game online, i wouldn't recommend using the LARP rules for it.

um Mage Revised is my favorite edition of Mage. And it's one that I recommend people pick up and play because I'm not a huge fan of going into the Umbra all the time. And I like it to be more Earth-centered, but that's just me.

So I think that this was a a fun book, a good book, if not a great book. But like I said, definitely, in my experience, the best translation of Mage the Ascension to LARP.

Adam Simpson:

Yeah, I can't disagree with that. And it's encouraging to hear that LARP was more popular. I guess I just didn't live in the right towns, but it's good to hear that the people really gave it a chance and and really got behind it.

Well, thanks everyone for listening. I enjoyed my brief excursion into LARP territory. I'll try to cover the second mage book for *Mind's Eye Theater* in the weeks ahead. Until next time, truth until paradox, baby.

Chigg:

Bye.