

Reality Deviants Book Club: *Dark City*



Adam Simpson:

Hello, Mage fans, and welcome to Mage: The Podcast. Today is another episode of Reality Deviants Book Club. This is the show by people who believe that reality is a good idea - that never occurred to us. If we don't change our minds, we'll look at recommended media and Mage books to see if they're worth your time. I'm your host, Adam, and I'm joined by Pooka. Pooka, are you ready for Hollywood?

Pooka:

You know, I have this life goal. You know how there's the Bacon number that measures the degrees of distance someone has from Kevin Bacon? That's like a takeoff of the six degrees of Kevin Bacon thing.

Adam Simpson:

I remember.

Pooka:

Kevin Bacon has a Bacon number of zero. Anyone who's worked with them has a Bacon number of one, et cetera. And then there's a mathematician named Paul Erdos, who collaborated with hundreds of people on hundreds of papers.

So like Kevin Bacon, he's just this guy who pops up all over academia. So therefore there's also the Erdos number to measure connections with him. Paul Erdos has an Erdos number of zero, anyone who qua co-authored with him has a one, et cetera. From that has come the idea of the Erdos-Bacon number where you add the two together.

And probably some of the highest profile people who are both professional actors and did proper research, not just, you know, academics who had cameos in films or actors with an honorary author credit.

You have Danica McKellar and Natalie Portman, who have Erdos Bacon numbers of six and seven, respectively. I looked it up. So anyway, that's my life goal, is to have an Erdos Bacon number. And that's as ready for Hollywood as I'll ever be.

Adam Simpson:

Well, that's good enough for me. Certainly better than I'm going to accomplish. Well, I have an announcement. Mage fan DrunkDez sobered up long enough to create an online reference for Mage fans called The Paradox Wheel.

So slick, so full of useful game information. I'm confident the listeners will appreciate it as much as I do. I started clicking around because I like the look so much and no-

ticed there's useful information here. Then I noticed how much useful information. Don't miss out, Mage fans. There's a link in the show notes.

If you're looking for thoughtful, intelligent commentary on films recommended by Mage authors... what are you doing here? If you're ready to hear us wander through a movie, you got the right podcast. If you don't mind rants and hot takes, you're going to love us. Mage the Podcast's legal team states, "Opinions expressed on Reality Deviants Book Club really do not express the views of Mage the Podcast. In fact, you probably shouldn't listen to these guys at all."

I want that on a t-shirt. Should I get one for you, Pooka?

Pooka:

Please do.

Adam Simpson:

Two episodes back, we got away with slipping a movie in among the books. I thought, why not do it again? Director Alex Proyas gave us *The Crow* 1994. In 1998, offered another World of Darkness movie. *Dark City* was a grim, atmospheric movie that gives off World of Darkness vibes like a blacklight at an underground rave. The first Matrix movie came to theaters soon after, which caused such a splash many people thought *Dark City* didn't get the attention it deserved. *Dark City* is recommended seven times in Mage Books over three editions of the game. Few things get that many recommendations in Mage books. Tales of Magic Dark Adventure said, "Dark adventure with definite mage overtones. I defy anyone to tell me the hero is anything less than a true will worker suddenly awakened. Extremely gritty setting, very noir in style, a hapless and confused hero, and ominously mysterious opponents with terrifying powers."

Orphan's Survival Guide said, "an Orphan Awakens in a world run by mysterious entities. Too derivative to be truly classic, but damned fine nonetheless."

Story opens with John Murdock awakening suddenly in a bathtub. Fear grips him as he examines an unfamiliar apartment. A woman lies dead. He can't remember who he is or how he got there. A phone call tells him to flee his pursuers. As John takes the advice, he sees three frightening men in the hall. After escaping, he begins trying to unravel the mystery of who he is and who his mysterious pursuers are. He learns he's a murderer and the police are after him. He makes contact with a wife he doesn't remember who trusts him when he says he's innocent. The pale, frightening pursuers appear again and demonstrate supernatural powers. They belong to a secret society that hides underground. As John traces the mystery, police detective Bumstead traces John. As John struggles to elude both the police and the mysterious men, he notices the sun never rises. The city shuts down every night, putting everyone to sleep suddenly.

The roads and subways offer no way of leaving the city. John makes contact with Dr. Schreber, who claims to be his psychologist. Dr. Schreber unlocks the mystery. Schreber serves the strangers, aliens who appear to be pale, bald men who control the city while wearing long black coats that stepped right out of the pages of early World of Darkness books. Each night, they shut everything and everyone down to make changes. These changes help a grand experiment to discover what makes humans tick.

John learns his name, his life, his relationships were all fake memories implanted by the strangers. John shares the stranger's ability to tune, to make things change around him just by willing it. After teaming up with Detective Bumstead and Anna, the wife of his former life, John learns the city is not on Earth, but floating in space.

John is captured by the strangers who don't know Dr. Schreber is secretly helping John. Instead of letting the strangers absorb John into their collective hive mind, Schreber injects a memory serum into John with the secrets of tuning.

John uses the full knowledge of the Stranger's power to free himself and confront the leader of the Strangers. John wins the fierce battle of supernatural wills, breaking the Stranger's power forever. He repairs the city, allows the sun to shine, and goes looking for Anna.

The movie had the dark, edgy aesthetic that Alex Proyas is known for. A 1940s film noir look colors the film. Action and mystery are amply provided. What's more, the movie used its strange science fiction story to ask the question, are we more than the sum of our memories? Are we defined by our past? Before we roll into our questions, Pooka and I saw different versions of the movie. I saw the theatrical cut on DVD. Pooka has the easier to find director's cut that may influence our commentary. Pooka, what was your take on the movie?

Pooka:

Well, to start with, it was absolutely a follow-up film, a spiritual successor to *The Crow* by the guy who made *The Crow*. Lots of the visual language is the same, but with little variations. So instead of raining all the time, as you said, it's night all the time.

And the city, I thought, felt more eroded rather than destroyed like it did in *The Crow*, which is heightened by the kind of anachronistic feel from the Depression era and film noir design. I love that there was an opening scene in an automat because it reminds me of the Hopper painting, which is a metaphor for urban isolation and everything, which i'm guessing might have been intentional.

You get the same mix of bleak, gritty environments. And for viewers, if some of the sets look familiar, it may be because I believe *The Matrix* recycled a few of them, along with a couple scenes like both films start with a phone call and both have rooftop chases and things like that.

But that's contrasted with the occasional splash of something wild or colorful. This noir city also has a jazz lounge where Jennifer Connelly sings and this elaborate incongruous bathhouse where Kiefer Sutherland likes to hang out and some kind of decaying Coney Island amusement park space where the maybe uncle lives.

So that visual intensity keys into the World of Darkness vibe, I think. And I like that there's that contrast. As we learned from *The Crow*, it can't rain all the time. So here things get a little bit more meta because it is actually night all the time, and the protagonist himself points out how weird that is.

Also lots of clock motifs, obviously. Story-wise, it moved at a brisk clip like *The Crow* did. It's only an hour and 40 minutes, which really isn't that long when you consider the size of a lot of the ideas in it. You really have to pay attention to keep up with everything.

So I'm not sure the contrast between the theatrical cut and the director's cut. I know that one of the main things is there's this bit of introductory exposition, which I think it's Kiefer Sutherland doing the voiceover explaining who the strangers are up front.

And it does spoil the mystery a bit, but I was grateful to have that reminder after not seeing this movie for 25 years, because there's a lot of information coming at you in every scene. So trying to both figure out the central mystery of the plot and just like take everything in with an intentional eye, that would take a lot more effort than just casual viewing. It's definitely a film that benefits from a rewatch.

I think I would say it's a mystery first and foremost, because it started out life as a film noir, like the original script that Alex Proyas wrote was about Bumstead the detective, and then slowly the character of Murdoch became more and more central. So those bones kind of show through the story, even though they're layered over with lots of other things.

You have a love story and psychological horror and science fiction, I might even call it more science fantasy, and kind of a hero's journey. So if you go along for the ride, fundamentally, it's about a guy who realizes something is wrong with the world and slowly awakens the power in himself to make other people recognize that.

And that's a story which can go in really inspiring or really creepy directions, or both.

Adam Simpson:

First question, Pooka, what did you like about *Dark City*?

Pooka:

I mean, all the things I'm saying about the story and the aesthetics are things I appreciate. And I'm sorry to keep comparing it to *The Crow*, but it really did tickle the same corners of my cinematic fancy. It's very stylized in its grittiness, and it's not trying to be naturalistic at all because there are undead body-snatching aliens who can warp reality.

Storytellers, take note. There is a lesson to be learned there about how authentic media need or don't need to be. At the same time, there's a lesson to be learned from this movie about how media can play on certain human emotions and experiences like paranoia and how media can reflect things about our world, kind of what you're pointing to, but in this artful way. So things like urban isolation. Those things are present in *Dark City*, but the film is less self-consciously about those elements. So it's not that it's a shallow film. It just doesn't spend much time preoccupied with its own philosophical implications in the way that something like *The Matrix* does. It's just good, clean fun with murder and mass mental manipulation and whatnot.

I already talked about the story's pacing, but the plot is just goofy on wheels. So where did these people come from? How did they get everyone? How did the

strangers, I mean, get everyone onto the space habitat? How long have they been on it and where are they headed?

Maybe the answers to those questions don't matter and would spoil the sort of atomic feel of the environment. It's kind of the self-contained experiment bubble. But this was the 90s after all. And I know I read a lot of junior film novelizations in the 90s. So maybe there's one floating around somewhere with the answers to those questions.

If not, someone should write one. But because of that rapid fire pacing, you don't care so much about the holes in the story or whether it has any gravitas. I also like that as you get farther and farther from the protagonist, John Murdoch, played by Rufus Sewell, wonderfully, the characters get progressively wackier.

Murdoch's life is out of control, but he more or less keeps it together through the film. His purported wife, Jennifer Connelly, and the detective helping him out, William Hurt, are both pretty stable. Kiefer Sutherland plays the psychologist Daniel Schrabner, named after the author of a famous schizophrenia memoir. And he has this very unusual gasping vocal delivery.

That's a choice. And then the aliens just every time they show up chew right through the scenery, one of their key players is Richard Riff Raff O'Brien.

And there's this creepy kid. Why is the creepy kid there? I don't know.

Adam Simpson:

Because he's creepy.

Pooka:

He's so creepy. The whole thing felt a little bit like Dick Tracy done by Ray Bradbury to me.

Adam Simpson:

I had this on DVD before I thought of discussing it on the podcast. I've enjoyed it for years. The action and convoluted sci-fi plot excite me. The plot was revealed bit by bit along with knowledge of the strange city and its masters. The film noir ambiance is a bonus. If you're going for a dark, grim look, turn to the film noir master template. I've been saying for years this is the closest to a mage first edition movie we're ever going to get.

Mage has been called so 90s for the black trench coat look, but I think it has a larger appeal than just that decade. I had been playing mage for five years when *Dark City* hit theaters. After seeing it, I ran to my friends, pointed at the movie poster and said, This! This! It wasn't the first time they couldn't understand me. The movie took risks with big science fiction concepts that don't fit nicely into an hour and 40 minutes. The world changing revelations are more than one or two scenes. There's enough to fill a movie. Besides the voiceover at the start, it expects the audience to keep up. If you don't like fantasy or science fiction, this movie will turn you away. It's made for my kind of people. If you're a Mage fan, see this movie. If you have any love for the cosmic strangeness in the early editions of Mage, the movie will not disappoint you. If you're a Mage 20 fan and ask, what do people see in First Edition? Then watch *Dark City*. Every brilliant effect risks paradox. **Pooka:**, where did *Dark City* fall short?

Pooka:

Well, thinking about that director's cut issue a little more, and if I recall correctly, the opening monologue was a studio mandate that they gave Alex Proyas, and he didn't want to do that. He wanted people to figure it out as they watched.

Adam Simpson:

I heard the same.

Pooka:

But, you know, and I think that's usually how it goes. Same thing happened to David Lynch with *Dune*. But it does occur to me that having that opening monologue makes a few scenes feel a little bit like detours we don't need.

So one example is there's a scene where the Strangers are doing their tuning to reshape reality. And there's this extended bit with a working class couple in a dingy apartment who get their memories altered and they become an upper class pairing living in a fancy house.

And it's just, it kind of takes a lot of time and it's more minutes than I would expect on that kind of thing in the movie because they don't come back, like they're not really relevant to the plot, but it serves as direct evidence of how people are being altered. But that context has already been spelled out with the monologue. So it just felt unnecessary or excessive. There were a few other moments like that.

But mostly it's those big unanswered questions that bug me. So why did the aliens believe that learning about human individuality through whatever means would save them from extinction?

And like did no one apart from that one cop who went insane truly ever question up to this point why it was always night or realize they'd lost time when they woke up after midnight had passed or not recognize that someone they knew yesterday was a different person today?

At the risk of spoiling things a bit. How did Schreber get all those memories into the final training montage vial? Like, where did that come from? It is more, I used the term science fantasy rather than science fiction before because it hand waves a lot of those details away. And my feeling with science fiction is that it enjoys kind of getting into the nitty gritty details more.

I didn't mind it so much. It's just, it required shifting my perspective a little bit to get around those scenes.

Adam Simpson:

I was disappointed by how poorly the Walensky character was used. Walensky was a police investigator who served as an example of people who catch on to what the Strangers are doing. Every night, the Strangers pause the city and its residents. Some people get their lives reset with new surroundings and new memories.

The new memories are delivered through a syringe, right through the forehead. Sometimes the new memories don't take, or the one using the syringe makes a mistake. The result is a person who has some knowledge of what's going on. They either go insane or are labeled such by others. They can't use the tuning ability. Walensky is assigned to find the killer who John Murdoch was supposed to be. In his first scene, police investigator Bumstead visits him. This shows the audience how crazy Walensky is.

In his second scene, Walensky shares some information with John Murdoch in the subway. Walensky then jumps in front of a train to end his life as that is the only way he knows to escape the manipulation. The second scene reveals Walensky is aware of the strangers and confirms John's growing knowledge of the city. It would have been much better to give Walensky one scene with John Murdoch a little earlier in the story. That way you could build a scene where Walensky looks like a frighteningly disturbing person, but as he drops details that John has been noticing, John could see how the crazy man in the subway is the only one who really knows what's going on.

That would have been a powerful scene. World of Darkness games give us Bone Gnawers, Nosferatu, and other grubby skid row dwellers who hold the valuable secrets.

My main complaint with the movie is the rushed ending. John fixing the city at the end was real simple. He has a brief talk with Mr. Hand, the stranger who had the memories of John's programmed life injected into him so he could track John through the

city. Their exchange made its point, but its punch was reduced to less than a slap from a mildly upset Canadian. The complex story and climactic battle left only a couple of minutes to wrap things up. John states he's going to fix the city, the sun shines, and we're done. A three-hour runtime or two movies would have given the story some room to breathe. I mean, at least give it two hours.

Are there any strangers left? What's underground? What comes next for the city's people? Retelling this as a TV show would be amazing. We could really get into that story without shortchanging it.

Pooka, you're never short on ideas, but did this movie give you any more ideas for running or playing mage?

Pooka:

First and foremost, I love the idea of tuning as a word that a mage would use to describe their own approach to will working. I've played an ecstatic character who perceived the world as rhythms to be interpreted and adjusted. So that I think is close enough to that conception for my liking. And it's kind of vague in the movie how it actually works, but it's some kind of a telepathic thing. And we know that, speaking of underground, there are these massive engines that apparently focus the stranger's power there.

So there's a Node buried underground granting massive amounts of quintessence across a wide area, but only to adherents who conceive of their magic in a certain way. Obviously, you can have the strangers themselves show up as antagonists and drawing on that, set the game in an umbral realm or have a Shallowing opening under the city where the internal logic of that space privileges their style of magic.

The characters are as subject to their alterations as the Sleepers caught in their influence until one of them catches on to how these invaders warp reality and learns

how to channel that power too. You definitely also need to include the factory where they're making shoes and pocketbooks and whatnot every night.

The memory vials I thought were cool too. You could have them as gadgets to use the technical term. So one use technological items that do a hefty Mind effect, injecting memories and a new personality into a subject.

And there are lots of moments through the film of uncertain memory, like where Murdoch is trying to sort through the layers of what's true and falls in his own recollection. One scene, there's a book from his supposed childhood where he drew pictures of his hometown of Shell Beach. He finds it and, um. Ironically, I can't remember whether it either has pictures and then the pages mysteriously erase themselves or vice versa. The book is blank and then the pictures mysteriously appear from one scene to the next.

But to add to the paranoia of a chronicle based on this film, have paradox bleed out to cause little twists like that, undercut the character's certainty of what they know and remember or think they remember.

And that kind of thing, it isn't something for every table, so discuss it with your players. Some people don't care for stories that involve memory loss or reality itself gaslighting you, but it's an environmental motif which can emphasize that theme if you wanted to.

And basically every set piece and every secondary character would be excellent for dropping into a Chronicle. More automats, more jazz clubs, more insane detectives putting the pieces together, more chattering, leather-clad corpse alien mages building skyscrapers overnight.

The Strangers, I mean, they make great antagonists because they're these plasmic hive mind invertebrate things inhabiting the dead that erupt across dimensions and a burst of energy when they die. And like the way they end every sentence with "yes".

Adam Simpson:

The mage ideas were plentiful for me at the start when John Murdock awakens suddenly in the apartment, he breaks a goldfish bowl and the goldfish is flopping on the tile floor. The fish out of water metaphor is established.

That's how mages feel when they first awaken. Starting the movie that way was such a nice touch. Put that together with John confronting the strangers on the billboard platform high above the streets and you've got great inspiration for playing out an awakening in your games. On the billboard is the first time John realizes he can use the tuning ability. It's like the wild talent we see in the second edition rulebook.

John Murdock is realizing he's in a strange, frightening world, and when he tries to tell other people about it, he sounds crazy. He latches onto Schreiber like a newly awakened mage will latch onto other mages. "You can see it too? I'm not crazy? Tell me all you can!" I'm tired of being told Sphere effects without instruments is bad role-playing. I think the tuning in this movie makes for scenes that don't sacrifice anything in the way of excitement or engagement.

There are several scenes where the Strangers cooperate to use their tuning for big effects, like creating buildings or empowering their leader to face off with the hero at the end. A group of Nephandi that have an easier time cooperating to use powerful effects against the players could make for an interesting opponent.

Play up their creepy gestures and noises when they work together for atmosphere. I think it would be memorable. Pooka, does *Dark City* offer any insights into the world of Mage?

Pooka:

I mean, kind of along the lines of what you were just saying, insofar as tuning is explained in the film, it is that direct expression of willpower. But I think it might function better as an example of how to do magic and mage from an effects first perspective

rather than the process based. It does feel in the moment kind of just anything goes. They just focus and make things happen. But the principle is the same.

And if you want to get into the paradigm and the practice and the instruments, it's easy enough to layer that on top of the presentation of the film. And for Murdoch, at least, he's mainly doing little things up until the end. He causes scaffolding to collapse, he creates doors. So it feels very much like a street level kind of magic until his power starts growing and he gets his injected training montage.

I would want, personally, in my games, any mage who isn't a marauder to have a proper practice for enacting those changes into the world. The strangers, they get to do the rearrangement of cities in people's lives because there are hundreds of them supported by mechanical devices. So call it the aliens made us what we are paradigm, plus the psionics practice with the instrument intense stare with occasional hand motions.

So I'm always in favor of media that helps me visualize what a particular focus looks like, and I can roll with that. If you look at this film as the story of an awakening, it really drives home how terrifying and disorienting that process can be for a mage, not to mention for the family, friends, and foils around them.

You go from being an ordinary human, in this case, very literally a Sleeper, to someone who is able to see a new level of reality that others can't. Not only do you feel alone in that, but suddenly there are people highly aware of you trying to find you. So you have to keep a low profile, figure things out quickly, learn how to go from perception to manipulation as you develop your power.

I've said before that I'm a fan of Orphan games or at least the ones where the sects of willworkers are a little bit less dominant in mage life. And I think this kind of narrative would play out well in that kind of world.

I'm glad that you said this was referenced in the Orphan's book and Tales of Magic Dark Adventure, because those are like the two perfect books for this. You're lucky to get any scrap of insight into what the avatar is or what Spheres are and how quintessence works and the rest you have to hash out through trial and error.

So that I think is a really good storytelling approach.

Adam Simpson:

In Revised Edition, mages were supposed to bring Sleepers to awakening, but in the early editions, awakening was for a gifted few. Mages were supposed to get that rare gift to advance society, get it out of any ruts it might have fallen into.

Mages were supposed to lead Sleepers to question assumptions and notice the world they live in. We see John Murdock do that in *Dark City*. He asks people to remember leaving the city or when they last saw sunshine. They brush him off, but he insists. When pressed, several people realize their memories aren't quite right. After repeated meetings with John and following his trail, Bumstead and Anna start to question the city they took for granted. That's the effect mages are supposed to have on Sleepers.

Shake up their thinking. Make them connect the dots. When a mage has been there, Sleepers should be looking past common knowledge. Following *The Crowd* suddenly has less appeal. It may sound like a minor thing, but pay attention to those scenes when you watch the movie. How might you open the door for a player to start one of those conversations with an NPC in your game?

One of the strengths of the science fiction genre is being able to use future technology or aliens to present an altered society where fundamental questions can be explored. If people had their memories reset, their identities rewritten, would they be different people? Or is there some kernel of self that you can't take away? The Tech-

nocracy of early editions of Mage would like to see Sleepers as whiteboards that can be erased and rewritten whenever they like.

That early Technocracy was sinister because it claimed to be making the perfect world, but actually they were trying to remake humanity into the perfect residents for the world the Technocracy had planned. The Strangers are a dying alien race that see humans as vibrant and healthy. The Strangers have a hive mind, so they experiment on a city, not individuals. When humans are controlled, reset and exposed to pressures, do they roll with it? Are they nothing more than their programming? Do they ever resist or sidestep anything? If there's a spark of life, a subtle strength, the strangers want to learn from it.

John Murdock is the first human who resists the sleep command every midnight. The first human who can tune. A fluke sets him apart from humanity. The strangers notice and come for him. Nothing is going to keep them away.

That's the early depiction of mages. They awaken and supernatural forces notice them, pursue them. Some want to recruit, some want to eliminate, some want to subvert, tempt, you name it. Whatever results, it's always exciting, always game-able. The whole movie is an example of a teenager's First Edition Mage game. This helps me consider several of the concepts that mage started with in 1993.

Pooka, how about inspiring possible changes in your mage games?

Pooka:

Well, I'm for sure going replace the term Sleepers with whiteboards now. That's perfect. And you say that teenager's first edition Mage game, I will point out not a single katana in sight. So that's the thing.

Adam Simpson:

Oh, you got me there.

Pooka:

Dr. Schreiber has a moment where he's describing the memories as he splices them. He's kind of designing the formula and he's saying, you know, a pinch of teenage rebellion and a death in the family, like kind of as he adds these compounds to the cocktail. And that really stuck with me, and I was trying to figure out why. And I think it's because it reminds me of how, while Mage players might conceive of their magic through focus and Spheres and whatnot, characters, in my opinion, generally shouldn't, with the exception of stuffily formulaic hermetics, maybe. So Schreiber isn't a mage here. He's a psychiatrist turned artist and collaborator, but that's a separate issue. That inspired me to think of how mages see themselves, which impacts in turn how they see each other.

So you can't lean too hard into that idea because then you end up with mage worldviews being incompatible to the point that groups drawn from different traditions spend all their time questioning and denying each other's methods.

But I'd like to try encouraging players to get more into the spirit of think about how does your character perceive a magical effect or a particular moment in that context or a magical place or a particular antagonist?

and to talk about it in character with the others in their group. It fosters scenes where you role play trying to find common ground and potentially other scenes of working to convince people, especially Sleepers, of your perspective. So you know do the Sleepers, if you want the sleepers to not think you're a crazy person trying to wake them up to the reality around them, what's your approach?

What will work for some and not for others based on how you perceive what's happening? There's just as an aside in, I think it's Guide to the Traditions, this great bit of in-character dialogue between, i want to say, a chorister and Euthanatos who meet in a bar and have a frank discussion about the nature of will working through the lens-

es of their different traditions. It's one of the best pieces of diegetic text in the entire game line, in my opinion. And I want my own sessions to have more of that.

So that's kind of an oblique connection. And I'm maybe running a lot with an offhand scene of Kiefer Sutherland looking through a microscope. More immediately though, I have very rarely considered including actual aliens as antagonists in a mage game. *Dark City* may have made me a little bit more interested in that subject.

They're quite unlike most of the canonical aliens we do get in Mage, like the Zigragor. And actually, they're quite a bit like the Keepers, the true fey abductors from *Changeling the Lost*. My biggest hesitation about including them is that it gives the grimmer aspects of the setting, the violence and the decrepitude, the bitterness and the fever dreams, and an easily identifiable and possibly defeat-able root cause.

To me, that undercuts the World of Darkness as an idea a bit. The setting's grimness should come from the tragedy of human choices compounded over time rather than being simply the doing of aliens.

So if you want full-on sci-fi or science fantasy Mage, go for it. Floating space habitat and all. But my preference would be more to have them like slowly infiltrating a city and taking over rather than the experiment from the start.

Adam Simpson:

I noticed several scenes where tuning is used to make a door appear in a wall. I thought of *Correspondence 3* to quickly get to a new place. A lot of us slip into the habit of seeing *Correspondence 3* as teleporting. Disappear from here, appear there. Maybe you step out from behind something, but that's basically it. Instead, a coincidental effect could be making a door appear. People who aren't paying attention, that's most of us, will assume the door was there before and they didn't notice it. In a lot of situations, the mage uses the door and it fades before anyone clearly sees it.

There are a number of these coincidental effects we could put in our games. We don't have to overthink everything and tally up the Spheres needed to form water and the glass holding it just to splash it in an NPC's face for a distraction. The distraction is the thing. The water and the glass are a hasty means to an end.

That's one complaint I have with the book *How Do You Do That?* It makes everyone an extreme bean counter whenever Sphere magic is used. Finally, Pooka, does *Dark City* belong in the Mage recommended viewing list? And if so, what editions?

Pooka:

Well, like I often say with these films, it doesn't not belong. Certainly it gets the world of Darkness aesthetic or an expression of that aesthetic down pat, the gothic mood with Murdoch trying to expose the system as the punk attitude.

Related to Mage, absolutely First Edition, because on the one hand, the grittiness feels very First Edition and early World of Darkness across the board. And on the other, it has literal aliens floating around and warping a space habitat for their abducted humans, which is as peak as the First Edition Storyteller screen and its Tommy gun-toting dinosaur people.

It also has this vibe that came up constantly in the First Edition era short stories that Lee Webb and I read for *Truth Until Paradox*, where it always felt like one mage against the entirety of the Technocracy who always seemed to show up en masse at the worst possible times. So it's not an approach that I'd personally go for by default in my games, but I can see it being at least as fun as that trip I had to Shell Beach that one time.

Adam Simpson:

There's a line in the movie saying, the Strangers' power of tuning can make things happen through will alone. That maps to awakened magic very well. Just like *The Crow*, this movie gives us the early World of Darkness on the screen. I think this should

be on the short list of confirmed World of Darkness movies. That means movies that are a visual example of the setting expressed by early editions of Mage and other World of Darkness games.

Also, this movie, more than any other movie I can think of, shows us First Edition magic. When mages have outgrown their instruments, how might their effects look? This movie can give you inspiration. So yes, this movie belongs on the recommended list. For First Edition, definitely. For later editions, there's still a lot here for Mage fans.

Are the walls closing in on you? Oh, maybe that's just me. At any rate, we've come to the end of another Reality Deviants Book Club. If you think the city where you live is an alien experiment to control your mind, keep it down. Don't tip them off.

Remember, tapping Morse code on the bathroom mirror will get the message through to allies in the Mirror Zone. It works for **Pooka:** and me.

Pooka:

Yeah.

Adam Simpson:

I admit I'm not a movie buff. My collection is quite small. I think we'll stick to books for a while. I'm getting the urge for one more weird fiction dive. **Pooka:** and I will hash it out for next time. Don't forget to spread the word about Reality Deviants Book Club. People love hearing about it. Trust me. This episode is a part of Mage :The Podcast. That is, as long as we can get away with it. If you would like to tell us how far we strayed, send an email to magethepodcast.com@gmail.com. You can subscribe to Mage the Podcast on iTunes, Google Play, TuneIn, and other aggregators. If you like the show and don't worry about what others think, you can leave a review online. Those reviews help other people find the show in their searches. And as the folks downstairs say, there's always room for one more.

You can follow us on social media. We'll put Mastodon and Blue Sky links in the show notes. We're on the web at magethepodcast.com. We're on YouTube. There's a link in the show notes, but just search for Mage the Podcast and you'll find us there.

If you would like to become an executive producer for this podcast, a link in the show notes will help you do that. No one would blame you for Reality Deviants Book Club. Well, thanks everyone for listening. Until next time, truth until paradox, baby.

Pooka:

Sleep!