

Imagine Awakening again.

*Imagine walking in a universe of dust,
feeling it shape to your desire
and retreat from your wrath.*

*Imagine knowing that everyone
and everything you ever cared about
can be changed, forever,
by your actions,
the actions of your peers
and those of your rivals.*

*Imagine the fear,
the crushing responsibility
and the intoxicating, addictive power.*

Would you trust anyone with this?

Would you trust yourself, Heirarch?

- Aaliyah, Bodhissatva

- Full Rules for archmasters, including the Practices of the sixth to ninth Arcana dots.
- Details of the Threshold, the trials that await a mage attempting to become an Archmage.
- Information on the World of Darkness as seen by archmasters; the Ascension War between rival visions for the Fallen World, the alliances Archmages form to promote those visions, the strange realms they explore and the godlike entities they encounter.
- Exploration of the Supernal Realms and the nature of Ascension.
- A minigame portraying Archmages in the Supernal.
- Storyteller advice for chronicles of cosmic scope.



MAGE
THE AWAKENING

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NAMES



Anamika pictured the hospital. She remembered the squeak of shoes on the hallway floors, the ever-present smell of antiseptic and air freshener struggling with the stench of sweat and disease. She hadn't been there for thirty years, but she had a very good memory—even for a Warlock.

She held the memory, made it an Imago. Placed herself and Verrill there in the ER waiting room. She released the Imago—distance and location sliding aside in response to Pandemonium's laws, following the thread in her heart. In the blink of an eye, every place they'd ever been in thirty years was gone. All the distance she'd put between herself and this town was gone, eradicated by a single spell.

"Shit, it's cold."

Verrill drew his coat tighter. The motion was that of the boy three decades past. Armor, not just against the cold.

Anamika looked around the deserted ER. All of the equipment was gone, from heart monitors to telephones. A patch of old graffiti bruised one wall, while a stain like old urine blossomed across the ripped-up seating. Opened cans that once contained food or alcohol crouched in the corners.

And, somewhere close by, the connection.

She realized that Verrill was watching her and raised an eyebrow.

"It's been abandoned since the 80s," he said, breaking the silence. "The film TV shows here every once in a while, clean up the parts that'll be on camera. Is it... Is this the place?"

She closed her eyes to better see, described the spell in High Speech and cast the Unveiling. The lines of sympathy, strung all over the room like frosted spiderwebs, appeared to her mind's eye. A thick tangle danced to and from Verrill. They swirled around her feet like disturbed dust.

And the old line. The oldest line. Upstairs.

"This is the place."

* * *

"...Could you repeat that, Councilor?"

Anamika felt the other Councilors shift uncomfortably. Fortuna would be the first to recover, she thought, as soon as she realized what this meant for her order. Havelok would take it the hardest — she would miss the old man.

The hardest except for the Heirarch.

"Anamika? What did you just say?" Verrill repeated, betrayal and accusation showing through sudden cracks in his official demeanor.

"I am resigning from this Council. Phidias has been an excellent Provost, and he will be a credit to you in my place."

"Are you leaving us, master?" Havelok asked. He used the proper title, not the one she had just given up, and she silently thanked him for it.

She acknowledged the question and turned to Verrill to reply on the record. After a second of looking at him, she found her brother's eyes looking out from the Heirarch's face.

"I have decided to seek the Imperial Mysteries."

* * *

The filming crews had done a good job ensuring the building was easy to move through, clearing the hallways of abandoned furniture, equipment and garbage. Any ghosts that had survived the long years did not make themselves known. The pair only had to pause once for Verrill to warn a spirit of abandonment away.

After a few more minutes Anamika realized with a small pang of guilt that it had been drawn to Verrill.

At the entrance to what had been Maternity, they paused.

"This is where you stop, Gareth."

* * *

On the second night after Council, they fought. Politely. Anamika sitting, Verrill standing a respectful distance away, ready to leave the room if things got too heated.

A magical family drama, laid out as though blocked for the stage.

"But why? Why throw everything we've worked together for—"

"Everything you have worked for."

Verrill — Gareth here, in his home — flinched.

"We have responsibilities," he mumbled, both of them aware that he'd lost the fight already.

"Do you really want me to say it? You hide in your responsibilities, Gareth. We came to this Consilium temporarily, do you remember? But Havelok offered to make you a Herald."

"I am Heirarch."

"And a second-degree adept. You should be a master by now."

He looked ashamed, like a child caught without having done his homework.

"I've been—"

"Too busy? I know the feeling. I can't do this and be your deciding vote."

He reached out for the door handle unconsciously, then, but didn't run.

"If you're serious... If you want to throw your career away for an impossibility, then help me to understand. Why?"

She knew she had his support, then. She made room on the couch, and — hesitating just a fraction of a second — he joined her, taking her hand.

"Because my name isn't Helen."

"I know that—"

"Let me finish. I was five when Mom adopted me. I don't know why she changed my name, but I was too young. Years of being called Helen outweighed a brief life I could barely remember." A flicker of a smile crossed her lips. "Haven't you wondered why I can't take an Apprentice? Pass on my Legacy?"

"I just assumed..." he said, his voice trailing into silence at her reaction.

She shook her head.

"To bond with a student, you have to exchange names. Real, sympathetic names. And I don't know what mine is. You've never noticed because we grew up together. We Awakened together in the fire. You're my brother and I love you, but you don't know who I am. Anamika. One without a name."

His voice, when he found it, was oddly hollow. "And the archmasters know?"

"There's so much about sympathy that we don't understand. Why isn't my name Helen? We leave threads everywhere we go, with every interaction. We can sense, create, destroy and follow those threads, but we don't know what they're made of. We don't know why our first, oldest ones imprint so strongly. I want to know. I need to know, and Mastery is not enough."

"What do you need me to do?" He'd made up his mind.

"Take a leave of absence. Come with me. I need to sort through, well, everything. To find the thread that named me."

* * *

Outside Maternity, they said their goodbyes.

"I'll be right here," Verrill said, "when you're done."

Anamika took a deep breath, turned away from her family and pushed the door open.

Her thread — her oldest sympathetic connection — led to a point three and a half feet above the cracked floor tiles, a few yards into the room. The cot was long gone.

Carefully, Anamika cast the spell she had designed. The point of origin grew in her sight, unwinding like the insides of a golf ball. The Knowing spell granted her understanding of what she was seeing.

She felt the room darken around her, heard her brother calling her name. Her name.

"I understand," she said. And then she was gone.

IMPERIAL MYSTERIES



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IMPERIAL MYSTERIES

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INTRODUCTION

*A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring:
There shallow Draughts intoxicate the Brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.
Fir'd at first Sight with what the Muse imparts,
In fearless Youth we tempt the Heights of Arts,
While from the bounded Level of our Mind,
Short Views we take, nor see the lengths behind,
But more advanc'd, behold with strange Surprise
New, distant Scenes of endless Science rise!*
— Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism"

Immediately after Awakening, anything feels possible. The new mage feels a transcendent empowerment that offers control over the cosmos if he works to understand it. Once the shock subsides, the limits of the Arcana appear: Spells cannot be made to last on living beings. Masters can only apply their most powerful magic in person. The dead must stay dead. The road to the Supernal is forever closed. Querying these limits with his mentors, our apprentice hears of Archmastery for the first time. They tell him that archmasters are power unbound. The Golden Road of the Imperial Practices offers the fulfillment of any wish.

Years pass. The apprentice is now a master and has heard more. Perhaps he's met a cabal who had a mentor who once met one of the Invisible Masters, or read a grimoire penned by one. If he's a mystagogue, he's heard of the "Corpus Author" who founded the modern order. If a théarch, he knows rumors that archmages conceal themselves in the order's Magisterium. If he's exceptionally lucky, he might even have encountered one of the archmages himself.

Legends among the orders agree that the archmasters know more than common mages, and that the price for that knowledge is terrible. The Imperial mages sequester themselves, withdrawing from their orders for fear of breaking rules only they understand. Masters whisper half-understood terms heard from their position of safety. Terms like "Pax Arcanum" and "Ascension War" imply vast, unknowable chess games with ordinary mages as pieces. To know the

game is to be forced to play, forever, and the majority of masters have spent too long building their powers, their influence and their knowledge of the universe to have all that invalidated. Ignorance is bliss. Better to go no further, content with mastery of their Path.

This book is not about them.

This book is about those rare, driven mages who dare to leave the Path of their Watchtower to forge their own Golden Road to the Supernal. The risks are great, but the prize is greater: archmastery of the Imperial Practices, command of the fundamental forces of the Fallen and Supernal worlds and, ultimately, perhaps Ascension itself. A new archmaster finds herself a member of a very exclusive club. The abstract factional conflicts of the World of Darkness become personal rivalries: the number of opposing influences diminishes even as their power increases.

The transition to archmastery is called the *Threshold Seeking*, and is so shattering to one's worldview that it is rightly described as a second Awakening. After years of mastery, the new archmaster discovers that she really knows nothing at all about how the world *really* works. But she intends to find out.

Theme and Mood

Theme: You Can't Go Home Again. Archmasters have undergone their second Awakening. The world has *changed* for them as they look on it with new understanding. The

price of that understanding is becoming significant in the eyes of all those who broke the Threshold before and becoming subject to new shadow laws which supersede any loyalties to friends, family or order they still have. Like Awakening to a Watchtower, the trip is one-way; once a Seeker grasps the lightning of the Imperial Arcana, she can't let go. What has been learned cannot be unlearned, no matter how painful the knowledge becomes.

Mood: The Menace of Cosmic Mystery. A Seeker uses the secret truths behind the Paths to forge a Road borne of his interaction with the mysteries. He knows that the quest for enlightenment and enlightenment itself are one and the same thing; that the way one seeks a truth changes that truth; and that while the Supernal may be the realm of truths, it is by interaction with the Fallen that those truths gain meaning. Archmasters struggle with one another to define the meaning of the mysteries they examine, and the stakes are high. At the very highest level of this Ascension War, archmasters war with Exarchs, gods, and stranger things to change those symbols at the source. The aftershocks of their battles alter the universe and may one day destroy it.

How to Use This Book

Imperial Mysteries makes archmasters fully playable. While the limits of **Mage** can take years of play to explore, eventually a group may want to play a chronicle of truly cosmic scope or, at the endgame of an existing chronicle, have a character go through the Threshold Seeking and forge a Golden Road. The material here could be used to fill in side-stories, the actions of archmasters in Imperium causing the conditions that regular characters then experience.

Aside from the possibilities of player-controlled archmasters, **Imperial Mysteries** is a resource for Storytellers using archmasters as Storyteller characters. In a regular **Mage** game, archmasters become the plot devices and quest-givers, as cabals in search of a miracle first chase rumor and legend to find a Chantry and then have to provide the Quintessence for whatever Imperial Spell they so desperately require. Is the goal worth the quest, or is the quest the goal in itself?

Imperial Primacy

If this were a different World of Darkness book we'd make an effort to preserve the integrity of the setting against world-breaking elements. If archmages edit the cosmos with impunity, doesn't that make crossovers with **Vampire** or **Werewolf** impossible without chucking those games into a subordinate position? Should we tone it down to give those games room to breathe?

We decided to let archmages fulfill **Mage's** promise of world-warping potential. Long ago, the Awakened conquered Heaven, and threw every soul into Sleep. That implies they could do it again. Saying otherwise would be a bit of a drag, right? We designed this book by assuming

that *some* mechanism provides room for other games to fully express themselves while archmages go about their business, but we didn't settle on what it was. Any answer would make definitive statements about the World of Darkness that really belong to you, the Storyteller. It's up to you.

Imperial Mysteries assumes that archmages contend with other entities of comparable rank: Old gods, Death-lords from the Underworld, and entities the archmasters can only guess at. For the most part, these entities protect some aspect of creation they assert ownership over. Every supernatural being in the World of Darkness that possesses a greater supernatural template (including vampires and werewolves) has its advocates in the Ascension War, but these have not been detailed to leave room for future development in other game lines, as well as leaving you free to develop the ultimate powers behind them. These beings may be able to change the Tellurian as archmages do, using potent supernatural powers and maneuvers similar to archmaster Imperium Rites.

Using Other World of Darkness Books

Imperial Mysteries depends on nothing more than the **Mage** core book, but as archmages wander into other realms and weave plots that shake the cosmos, you may find these other supplements helpful. Rather than telling you to "see [other book]" repeatedly in the text, we've just listed the books that play well with **Imperial Mysteries**.

Astral Realms describes realms within the souls of Sleepers, mages and the primordial cosmos. The Aeons and the Temenos' ideological domains are especially relevant to archmages.

Seers of the Throne lists the major Exarchs and notes the role of archmages in the faction. The book also describes the Seers' place in the Ascension War.

Summoners covers entities from the Supernal Realms, Abyss and other planes, including Royal Avatars.

Tome of the Mysteries first described archmages and provides a perspective on how they appear to lesser mages.

Tome of the Watchtowers includes common visions of the Supernal Realms and the mythology of each Path.

World of Darkness: Book of the Dead provides rules and locations in the Underworld, including a domain called the Athenaeum that is of particular interest to archmages.

World of Darkness: Inferno might describe akathartoi from the Lower Depths. Like **Inferno's** demons, the Unclean Ones thrive on temptation and degradation.

Keys to the Supernal Tarot includes a character named Aldous, who might be an Bodhisattva or might be something else entirely.

Contents

Imperial Mysteries is divided into chapters describing archmasters, the worlds they inhabit, the characters they meet and the final Ascension they strive for.

This **Introduction** offers advice on using archmages in a **Mage: The Awakening** chronicle both as Storyteller characters and as protagonists.

Chapter One: Threshold reveals the secrets of archmastery, detailing the requirements for setting off on the Golden Road, the trials of the Threshold and the changed world in which an archmaster finds herself. Full systems for Imperial magic follow, including the Practices found at the sixth to ninth degrees of the Arcana and examples of the spells they make possible.

Chapter Two: The Invisible Road describes the world of the archmasters, from the strange realms they explore to the secret ententes they gather in, from the Pax Arcanum to the Ascension War. When multiple truths conflict, how do you decide what is real?

Chapter Three: The Supernal Ensemble puts faces to the factions in the Ascension War. Rivalries among archmasters are *personal*, and individual Seekers of all the ententes are detailed here. Also included are beings that may serve as allies or antagonists in an archmage chronicle: rules for spirits of high rank, Supernal Gods, Ochema, Aeons and more.

Chapter Four: Ascension details the Final Key of permanently transcending the Fallen World. Ascension isn't only for archmasters, and it isn't a moral state, but what is it?

Appendix: Imperium rounds off the book with a system for playing archmasters in the Supernal Realms. Moves in the Ascension War can reshape the world — more, they can decide the *meaning* of the world.

Storytelling

The advice in this chapter informs the rest of **Imperial Mysteries**, grounding the subjects of later chapters in the use they serve to your chronicle. A lot of concepts will be touched on here to be revisited in full depth later in the book.

Overview of Archmastery

In brief, an *archmaster* (also called a *Seeker*, or an *archmage*) is a high-Gnosis mage who has experienced a second Awakening known as a *Threshold Seeking*, forging her own *Road* to the Supernal instead of relying on the path granted by a Watchtower. The Astral Path experienced by mages meditating into the inner worlds is replaced by the *Golden Road*, an astral world which the archmage uses as a retreat from the Fallen World and a staging ground for exploring the Tellurian. Many archmages expand their Roads by building *Chantry*s, physical pocket-worlds within the Road.

Archmages remain capable of casting spells in the same way as other mages, but may also choose to use their Road instead of the Path to enhance a spell of the common Practices or cast a true Imperial Spell. Using the Road requires the archmaster to incorporate a Mystery they have encountered into their soul, represented in the game by Imperial

magic levying a cost in Arcane Experience. Spells of the 6th to 10th Arcanum dots require a special sacrament called *Quintessence* that provides most if not all of the Arcane Experience needed to cast the spell.

Archmasters may use their Roads to temporarily enter the Supernal Realms. The Supernal overwhelms and absorbs mortal minds exposed to it, so Seekers crossing the Abyss must filter the torrent of platonic forms and symbols through their Gnosis into a *Lustrum*, a set of Supernal symbols experienced as a scene.

By entering the Supernal and changing the truths there using *Imperium Rites*, archmages alter the entire Fallen World toward matching their personal vision for the universe. Mistakes made in Imperium, including staying too long, cause the world to change in unforeseen ways called *Aponoia*. When the Fallen World matches the archmage's vision for it, she may attempt to Ascend to dwell permanently in the Supernal.

The *Ascension War* is the struggle between archmages to promote their rival plans for the Fallen World, but it's a cold war. Acknowledging the risk posed by their powers to the universe, Seekers and other beings capable of manipulating the Supernal are covered by a semi-formal nonaggression pact known as the *Pax Arcanum*. The Pax prohibits the use of Imperial spells to directly attack the interests of any other being covered by it, archmages using their knowledge to rule lesser mages, or any action that threatens the existence of the Fallen World or humanity. Faced by the prohibition against holding leadership roles in the orders combined with the change of perspective that comes with the Threshold Seeking, most archmasters withdraw from the social groups known to normal mages (whom they call *Travelers*) and form bonds among the *ententes*, alliances of Seekers with compatible goals in the Ascension War.

Tier Four

The **Mage Chronicler's Guide** applied the concept of *Tiers* — first introduced in other World of Darkness games — to **Mage**. In brief, the Tier system is a model to assist the Storyteller in focusing attention on the elements of the game that matter for a chronicle, story or chapter by stating the boundaries of the setting to be used. There are three main Tiers, each defined by the extent of the setting and the largest social group that the characters will interact with.

Tier One — Locality/Cabal

The characters are either not members of an order or are members in name only, more concerned with their cabal and any neighboring rivals. They may be the only mages in the setting.

Tier Two — City/Consilium

The characters have loyalties outside of their cabal to orders or Legacies, and have a sense of the functioning mage society in their region.

Tier Three — Global Order

The characters are involved in inter-city and international mage politics, crossing Consilium boundaries, and are aware of the prevailing interests of their order across a large region.

Tier Four — Cosmic/Awakened

An archmaster chronicle goes beyond the three-Tier model to a new level, broadening the scope of the story even further. This manifests in the following ways:

Cosmic Scope

Archmages are not tied to any one region. They travel the entire Tellurian and have interests all over the Fallen and Supernal worlds.

Awakened Without Division

Archmages have allies among all orders, sects and factions. A Bodhisattva is as likely to take an interest in a Seer of the Throne or a Banisher as he is to mentor a Libertine. They associate with whomever they choose in furtherance of their Ascension.

Potent Cast

Storyteller characters in archmage chronicles are Gods, the Ochemata avatar-forms of Exarchs, archmasters, and mighty spirits. Archmages don't bargain with a spirit of pain, they make treaties with Pain itself.

A Universe of Dust

Lesser beings and the Fallen World in general have only a slim hope of inconveniencing an archmage. Because of the ability to retreat into the Golden Road, the potency of protective magic they are able to maintain, and Imperial spells allowing proxies and intermediaries to be used whenever safety is in doubt, archmages are extremely unlikely to die at the hands of their inferiors. Combined with their cosmic viewpoint, this grants a disconnection toward Travelers and Sleepers that varies from professional detachment to outright contempt — or worse, apathy.

Strange Intimacy

While the orders and Ministries are reduced to pawns, gambits, and endless faceless extras, the peers of archmages are brought into focus. With so few Seekers in the universe, the members of that community are aware of one another in a way that mirrors the members of a city's Consilium among Travelers with three differences — no one is in charge, there are no outsiders, and there is no way to leave. Archmages are stuck with one another barring death or Ascension and must settle their differences among themselves.

Storytelling Imperial Magic

Archmasters vastly exceed the capabilities of any other supernatural being presented as player characters in the World

of Darkness. Even compared to one another or the various entities of their rank, they aren't "balanced." Archmages, the Ascended, and spiritual beings of high rank are all capable of rending the world given sufficient justification. Archmages do not possess the inherent weaknesses and game-mechanic blocks that prevent other mages from running wild with their abilities and force them to work together. The only restraints on an archmage beyond her own sense of what is a good idea are Quintessence, the threat of Paradox and the Pax Arcanum. That puts the ultimate decision on whether an Imperial spell can be cast up to the Storyteller.

Imperial magic is described in Chapter Two.

Paradox

Archmages must still be wary of Paradox as all Imperial Spells are vulgar in the material world. Imperial Paradox causes lethal damage and more severe forms of Paradox effects known to lesser mages, with unfortunate archmages vanishing into prison realms formed of their own Paradox-tainted Roads. Backlash, however, still only poses a great risk when the archmage is pressed for time and forced to cast when already injured, or is prevented from absorbing the Paradox. Archmasters of Life can also heal resistant damage, but doing so is itself an Imperial spell and unlikely to be available in an emergency without saving Quintessence ahead of time. Most archmasters therefore reserve their most potent spells for use in the Astral or their own Roads, safe from contamination by the Abyss.

Quintessence

The difficulty of finding Quintessence is deliberately left up to the Storyteller, depending on the needs of the chronicle. Archmage player characters should be able to research and locate the Quintessence for a planned spell within a chapter or two, but archmage Storyteller characters encountered by a Traveler cabal in an otherwise normal chronicle could take much longer to acquire the necessary resources — or, even better, rely on the mages to bring Quintessence to him. Quintessence should be increasingly difficult to acquire as the intended spell rises in Arcanum dots. Casting an eight-dot spell should be as rare in an archmaster chronicle as a six- or seven-dot spell in a chronicle about a cabal of adepts.

Archmages know what the Quintessence of any spell they contemplate casting would be — or at the very least what sort of symbolism would be appropriate so they can start looking. Acquiring Quintessence is an investment of time and resources into a particular Imperial Working. If archmage characters persist they will eventually find the component they need, giving the Storyteller a few chapters to adapt her plans.

The Pax Arcanum

The terms of the Pax are covered in Chapter Three, and the response of the ententes to troublemakers is the primary