

Apocalyptic Advent of Magic and Superpowers

What Magic Made to the World

In the near future, a cosmic accident brought powerful magic and superpowers to our universe, creating the conditions for radical change, unprecedented opportunity, and huge disaster. It changed the physical laws, making these kinds of supernatural abilities possible, or revealed hidden potential for the same – hard to tell from our perspective. First, the troublesome news. The event weakened the dimensional barriers between our universe and a cluster of hells, inhabited by endless hordes of murderous demons. They knew about and hated humanity, and soon began their indiscriminate attacks.

Moreover, magic was not as perfectly clean and tidy as everyone thought it would be. Natural concentrations of magical power or the remnants of finished spells can become magical diseases. Although magical treatment is simple, if not necessarily incredibly fast, no mundane treatment can cure them. Immediately after the event, such diseases were highly virulent and often lethal. In the long term, their severity substantially toned down; past that point, effects vary depending on the spell or ambient magic that caused them, but are never lethal, and tend towards the embarrassing and the inconvenient.

Magic also has unforeseen effects on wildlife and the environment. Wherever there is life, monsters shall form, more numerous and more powerful as the level of ambient magic rises. Even mundane flora and fauna tend to grow and expand with unnatural speed, more so in the areas that are relatively rich with life to begin with. Various kinds of extinct species reappeared, especially if their disappearance was due to man's action.

Natural resources magically tend to grow back and refill to the levels existing before industrialization or even the Neolithic Revolution if human exploitation ever seriously depleted them. The biosphere became extremely efficient at eliminating waste and pollution. It looked like magic pursued a hard reset of the environment to pre-modern or even prehistoric standards combined with high fantasy conditions, and efficiently strived to keep them in place.

In fact, magic actively attempts to make its users and the world more thematically appropriate. This functions through gradual alterations to the environment and to physical objects. As the level of ambient magic or the number of mages in the area rise, changes tend to become more rapid and extreme. However, these changes never significantly detract from the primary function of an item or area. Magic also tends to twist its users in a way it should not. Abuse of magic has a risk of mental and physical side effects, which only the gradual passage of time can remove. By default, these side effects involve lewd, violent, and thematic features. The first two typically include such effects as increased lust, expanded sexual characteristics, increased aggressiveness, and feral mutations. As it concerns the thematic variant, side effects tend to change a person to match more closely what magic thinks they are.

Besides the changes that magic drives on its own, belief also holds power. As magic spreads, that power can become manifest. Gods may form, living beings may transform into demigods, and ordinary items may become mighty artifacts. The fervent belief of millions, at minimum, is necessary to form such things, and they both strengthen with more belief and weaken as belief dies out. The types of belief that can cause such empowerment may involve religion, myth, folklore, or even popular culture, as long as they are conducive to the existence of supernatural power. Belief in monotheist religion is remarkably ineffective at triggering this phenomenon, as if magic cannot or will not empower a kind of belief that does not admit the very existence of competition. Though mostly defined by the belief that created them, every god has an innate drive to accumulate ever-greater quantities of belief, to destroy any god that would oppose them, and to place demigods and artifacts under their control.

All but the weakest and least dangerous magical threats and hazards turned out to be highly resistant or immune to mundane technology, making humanity critically reliant on magic and superpowers to survive and cope with them. Magic also does not work so well with modern technology. Ambient magic, mages, and the results of magic are fine, but spells and enchantments can cause serious problems.

The initial breakout of magic in the world reaped a devastating death toll, killing the vast majority of humanity. Out of an estimated world population of eight billion, about 85-95% died because of various supernatural hazards and disasters. Only 500 million to one billion people survived, the vast majority of them being inhabitants of industrialized

countries and temperate areas. Such regions fared relatively better, thanks to their greater organization and resources, as well as being spared the worst brunt of certain supernatural threats. On the other hand, developing countries and tropical regions suffered the worst, getting almost depopulated in the hardest hit areas. Over time, however, survivors were able to adapt to their new environment, harness magic and superpowers to fight back the various supernatural threats, reboot a techno-magical civilization with leftover technological and new supernatural resources, and thrive.

What Magic Can Do

The onset of magic was not all about apocalyptic doom and gloom. Magic is powerful, reliable, versatile, relatively easy to use, and can help in various ways. It can perform almost all the typical effects seen in high-powered fantasy fiction without excessive effort, including battle magic, flight, telekinesis, elemental control, healing, shapeshifting, matter and energy creation and manipulation, enhancement of people and items, teleportation, and spatial manipulation.

By default, all mages can manipulate raw magical force with a power and range broadly equivalent to anti-tank weapons or lower. Mages that match this basic power level are commonly known as the Awakened. A rarer, more powerful type of mage (the Exalted) can scale this up to the rough equivalent of weapons of mass destruction. The rarest, most powerful kind of mage (the Ascended) can tap truly godlike levels of power, being able to cast spells that can affect large portions of the world.

There is no theoretical limit to the precision and complexity of one's spells beyond the mage's own intellect, though raw power limits are harder to break. Mages are usually bound to their default power levels, although especially successful ones can sometimes break through to a higher tier. Magic is inherently versatile, and may stretch a bit beyond the normal limits of its potential. As far as anyone can tell, the supply of magic in the universe is inexhaustible. However, there are limits to how much power any mage can channel from personal reserves and environmental sources, without spending time to rest and/or let them replenish.

Magic can be safely directed to heal and repair with imperfect understanding of what and how it heals and repairs. This makes physical healing and repairs easier and mental healing actually possible. As those who would heal the mind naturally must understand it, it is possible to observe the mind directly, initially through a form of empathy. Of course, magical techniques that heal and repair can be easily reversed to harm and destroy. Shapeshifting gets to be fail-safe and temporary by default, but magic can also make such changes permanent. All forms of shapeshifting are relatively easy to perform; it is possible to discover how to gender swap yourself soon after gaining magic. Changing others is harder, especially if they try to resist, and changing items involves a greater degree of complexity. Changing minds is hardest of all.

Magic can be used to project and manipulate several types of energy, including force, heat, cold, light, electricity, and magnetism. It is fairly easy and efficient to cast spells using these energies, as they adjust to match the user's intent. Preventing these energies from harming the caster, and directly shielding yourself or others from these energies and mundane equivalents, is trivial in terms of complexity. Magic also can directly influence the other fundamental forces, including gravity and nuclear forces, as simply as it can other energies. Energy requirements scale normally to match the scope of this influence. Magic knows not and is not subject to conservation laws or the laws of thermodynamics.

It is possible to use magic to transfer the contents of a region of space directly to another location. This does not interact with the space between, and ignores speed of light delay. Magic can also directly manipulate the fabric of space-time, including stretching it and opening portals. Mages have tested this up to interplanetary travel, but it is theoretically possible to use this to travel to interstellar distances, other universes, or even different historical periods. As far as the theory can tell, time travelers that attempt to change the past are going to create alternate timelines.

It is possible to apply magic to something to enhance it directly, with incomplete understanding of how the enhancement takes effect. A mage may use this to make materials stronger, or make complex items better at what they do. It is also feasible and safe to apply magic to living beings in this way, enhancing their skills and attributes beyond normal levels. Magic can make such enhancements temporary or permanent.

It is relatively easy to conjure temporary objects magically. Depending on the conjuror's intent, they may or may not function exactly like normal matter. Conjured food and drink can safely sustain living beings, but may eventually stop them from generating waste. It is also possible to create real, permanent matter magically. At greater complexity and power expense, a mage can create more exotic, magical materials.

Knowledge of scientific facts relevant to the spell or enchantment typically helps considerably with the raw power and finesse of the magic effect. However, this is not strictly necessary since magic tends to follow the user's intent and compensate for imperfect understanding of its workings.

What Mages Are Like

All mages have an inborn ability to sense magic and a certain degree of natural aptitude for magical study and intuition for all things magical. Such talent usually is proportional to their power level. The stronger a mage is, the easier and more quickly they can learn and improve in anything that is related to magic, handle greater degrees of complexity, and come to fully understand the spells and enchantments of others.

Whenever a mage sees a spell being cast or an enchantment in place, they get a chance equivalent to their skill level to perfectly, permanently memorize it. They can subsequently use memorized spells and enchantments at their own skill level or the one of the original casters, whichever is greater.

On the other hand, the greater the power level of a mage, the harder a time they have with mastering fine control. The less mana-intensive and more complex a spell is, the greater the difficulty of successfully casting it is increased. The most powerful mages have to spend a long time, up to several decades, steadily improving and refining their precise control, in order to use magic with as much finesse as their weaker brothers and sisters.

Mages can perceive magic with a sense broadly equivalent to sight, as if it was a colorful mist. Seeing magic in this manner provides significant amounts of useful

information regarding any magic one encounters. Mages also get a vague sense of relative location, density, and nature of magic in their immediate environment. This never interferes with normal vision, and vice versa – a mage can perceive magic even if solid barriers should be blocking their view.

Magic has a strong invigorating effect on the body and mind of its users. Mages are highly resistant or immune to mundane diseases and aging, and completely regenerate from any non-lethal wound. Any negative physical or mental condition they suffer from eventually ends, and they find it easy to keep their skills and attributes at their peak or restore them if they somehow degrade. As long as they use magic regularly, they quickly improve their physical and mental capabilities, up to a peak somewhat beyond human limits. Such a peak typically scales with the power level of the mage, from slightly better than the best humans for the Awakened, to godlike for the Ascended.

The natural lifespan of an Awakened is roughly ten to twelve times the one of a normal human, and application of relatively simple spells and enchantments can double or triple that amount. The Exalted are ageless, and very hard to kill. The life force of an Ascended is directly bound to the magic field of the universe, and therefore they cannot die as long as the tiniest scrap remains, even if in another world entirely. Upon death, they return in some diminished form, such as an infant or wraith. It takes them from 10 to 20 years to regain their full power. Longevity in mages usually comes with lasting youth, although this is somewhat dependent on their self-image, and they remain in their prime for all of their lifespan. An Awakened typically does not show significant signs of age or physical and mental decline until very close to the end of their life.

How One Becomes a Mage

One can typically become an Awakened through various means, including diligent study of magic combined with a sufficient degree of inborn potential, experiencing and showing ability to overcome a traumatic event, performing a heroic feat, or being exposed to massive amounts of magic over time or in a single event. The latter method can fail if exposure is not frequent or intense enough, as the absorbed magic simply seeps away. One can also become a mage by means of a time-consuming ritual only a

god or an Ascended can use. As a rule, the combination of these conditions tends to produce one Awakened in a thousand people, on average.

The only reliable way to become an Exalted is to perform some amazing feat, which may involve magic or be a mundane if extraordinary accomplishment. By this means, a lesser mage can break through their limits and evolve to the Exalted level, or a mundane can directly become an Exalted. Sometimes, a condition that normally creates an Awakened yields an Exalted instead. Theoreticians hypothesize this happens when the subject has an especially high degree of latent potential. Typically, this tends to create one Exalted in a million people, on average.

The circumstances that may create an Ascended are more difficult to analyze due to their extreme rarity (a handful per billion, on average). As far as anyone can tell, the process involves the same factors that produce an Exalted, only magnified by an order of magnitude. As usual, the event may concern a lesser kind of mage evolving to the Ascended level, or a mundane person directly experiencing a breakthrough to godlike power.

The children of a mage often inherit magical power, the greater the chance the higher the power level of the parents. This power typically awakens during puberty, if they have not become a mage by some other means before that point, and is the average of their parents' power, with some flux. The circumstances that create an Exalted or an Ascended trump this limit, and a mundane parent that mates with a mage is irrelevant to determine the power level of their child.

It turned out that inborn potential for magic is not uniformly distributed among people of different ethnicities. It is relatively rare but present with similar frequency among people of European, Asian, or Amerindian ethnicity. It is non-existent among Blacks. Therefore, the latter can develop magical power with much greater difficulty and only by being infused with a sufficiently great amount of magic. They are also unable to tap higher power levels than Awakened or have children who inherit magical abilities.

How Magic Comes to Be

All mages can tap various personal and ambient sources of mana. The soul of every mage is the source of a constant stream of new magic that gradually replenishes their reserves, at a rate proportional to their power level. Each day, an Ascended produces enough magic to fill their reserves entirely, plus ten times that, which spreads out into the world. With a conscious effort, they can harness the excess output and channel it to some specific beneficiary. Moreover, each mage generates a trickle of magic in their mind whenever they think about magic. Every living being that has been exposed to magic generates tiny wisps of new magic itself. In deep forests and other places where life is in abundance, this becomes significant and useful.

The world itself generates magical energy, wherever places of significance have been exposed to magic. The more history, complexity, and significance a place holds the more magic it generates. Gods and the Ascended also are foci through which the mundane can be transformed into new magic. Worship and sacrifices in their name generate magic, scaling in quantity with their honesty and significance. This process is separate from the one that lets the Ascended generate new magic for themselves and radiate it in the environment. Sexual and violent acts also generate significant amounts of new magic, especially if at least one mage is involved. More intense sexual or violent acts involving more people can generate many times as much magic.

Mages can enchant objects to lay down significantly longer-lasting versions of any spell with a duration, or create objects that store extra magic to supplement their own reserves. Such enchantments usually require expensive material components and/or rather more complexity and raw power than casting temporary spells of equivalent effect. If well made, enchantments can last indefinitely, and do not require any additional magic to remain functional. They can absorb and store magical energy, and use it to cast spells.

How Magic is Used

The core of any spell is careful and willful visualization of the desired effect. Strictly speaking, nothing else is necessary to cast magic. Mages however use a variety of techniques and instruments to focus, channel, and boost their castings. Such methods

usually include blood and other fluids; bodywork; dance, gestures, and movement; eye contact; language, music, and voice; martial arts; math and numerology; meditation; mnemonics and mental exercises; ordeals and exertions; sex and sensuality; symbols; social domination; thought forms; True Names; writing and inscriptions; and yoga. Other frequently used tools may be blessings and curses; cards and dice; elements; prayer and invocations (to gods or the Ascended); wands; jewelry; tattoos and brands; weapons; and crystals.

As a rule, the circumstances following the advent of magic, with mages usually being at the forefront of fighting supernatural threats, and the fact that magic is inimical to technology, strongly encouraged the development of magical techniques and instruments that one may use quickly, reliably, and efficiently in the field or during combat. Mages normally train to cast spells with minimal preparation and no reliance on complex rituals, cumbersome gear, or difficult to replace material components, except as it concerns enchanting. Much the same way, they are fully accustomed to combining spell casting with mundane combat abilities, especially martial arts and melee weapon techniques.

Superpowers: An Alternative Path to Power

Just before the event, American and European researchers stumbled upon a document of unknown origin that promised a way to transform suitable candidates into powerful superhumans. After a slow and difficult partial translation, they discovered the document described the synthesis process for a substance that worked as a catalyst for superhuman transformation, a broad description of the process and its results, and a method to identify successful candidates for the transformation. Only a minority of exposed subjects with the right genes had a positive response to the catalyst; the others suffered a painful death.

Researchers were not able to identify the origin of the document that described the superhuman transformation process with any certainty. Circumstantial evidence suggested either an alien civilization or a lost advanced culture. Another theory that later became popular was that advanced descendants of humanity created the document and sent it back in time to help humanity survive the event and ensure their own existence. Broadly speaking, it was a likely case of Atlantis, Precursors, or a Stable Time Loop. Over time, it became evident that the genes for superhuman transformation were relatively rare but present with similar frequency among people of European,

Asian, or Amerindian ethnicity. They were non-existent among Blacks. Circumstantial evidence suggested an artificial origin.

It seemed that in the distant past these genes had been added by an unknown agent (likely but not necessarily related to the creators of the document) to the genome of early modern humans that had emigrated out of Africa and settled Eurasia and the Americas. According to this theory, Mediterranean peoples had later colonized North Africa, assimilating or displacing any African population element. Inhabitants of Sub-Saharan Africa simply missed the chance of getting potential for superhuman empowerment. Subsequent research suggested that in the case of persons of mixed ancestry between ethnic groups with a radically different degree of potential, an individual would typically get the chance to be a potential carrier once the phenotype of the higher-potential group became dominant. The rough gauge was the person being able to pass as a member of that group with relative ease.

This discovery later helped shed light on the genetic factors that were related to magical potential. It turned out that the genes for superhuman transformation and for becoming a mage were likely the same, but could be activated in different ways. Those created alternative paths for personal empowerment. Alternatively, they were separate, but worked in a similar way and were usually inherited together. It was hard to tell the difference at the current level of scientific development. It seemed that a person with the right potential could become a mage or a super, but not both. Or at least there was no known method to activate both kinds of powers in the same person.

The supers acquired a basic power set that was largely the same for all of them, albeit with a few individual variations. It included super-strength; nigh-invulnerability and superhuman stamina; regeneration; immortality; immunity to disease, poison, starvation, suffocation, and environmental conditions; energy/elemental manipulation, typically in the form of heat/fire, electricity, light, and force; flight; super-speed; shape-shifting; telekinesis; superhuman agility and reflexes; and superior combat skills. The supers also had genius intellect, eidetic memory, math savant abilities, enhanced senses, and the uncanny (likely psychic) ability to understand and speak every language used by at least one million persons. Additional powers (apparently natural extensions of their basic abilities) that all supers were able to develop with further training and effort included matter manipulation and transmutation; control of the other elements; healing and biomanipulation; weather control; and teleportation.

In addition to this, each super had a few (usually one to three) personal signature abilities; they might be enhancements or refinements of some default power, or something entirely different. Circumstantial evidence suggested that this varied power set likely was the sum of several secondary powers derived from one or a few subconscious, psionic, and versatile meta-abilities, such as generalist energy manipulation, atomic-level psychokinesis, and/or reality warping.

The supers got enough instinctual proficiency in their abilities to perform basic or moderately complex uses of their powers with little difficulty. However, especially complex or advanced applications would often require some special training to master or a serious amount of trial and error to perform adequately. The supers were usually able to exercise their superhuman abilities up to a village- or even town-sized scale for a sustained time before significantly taxing or tiring themselves. Therefore, they were one-person armies and living engines of mass destruction and construction. Greater levels of effort were often possible, although at the price of increasingly serious exhaustion or even physical damage.

The supers had perfect physiques, full control of their bodily processes, and were very difficult to kill. They were effectively invulnerable to conventional weapons and anything normal humans might throw at them, short of nukes or equivalent damage. In normal circumstances only a sustained barrage of successful attacks by one or more of their peers, sufficiently powerful magic, extreme sources of damage (ground zero of a nuclear explosion, being thrown into the sun), or hypothetical super-science weapons would be able to really threaten or seriously harm them. A sufficient amount of damage by such a source might kill or physically destroy them. However, they were able to recover completely from any non-lethal damage. All available evidence pointed to the fact they were immortal and eternally young.

Thanks to their shape-shifting powers, the supers were able to adjust their bodily features, looks, and gender the same way normal humans might pick their clothing and makeup. Many did so as their fancy dictated, not so rarely even experimenting with features not natural to humans. Others favored a preferred shape. In both cases, the most common invariant features included preference for a humanoid form, extreme conventional attractiveness, and the ethnic traits common in one's homeland. Dedicated shape-shifters usually picked a pansexual orientation; others' preferences might be all over the place. However, exclusive homosexuality appeared to be quite rare and exclusive heterosexuality not so frequent, making bisexuality in various degrees the

prevalent norm. The vast majority of supers preferred taking the opposite-gender form of a sexual partner, although this was by no means a universal rule.

Later evidence showed supers were fertile and in full control of their reproductive abilities. It appeared that their offspring from mating with normal humans most commonly were humans with peak physical and mental abilities; sometimes they inherited a full set of superhuman powers. When two supers mated, they always bred true. The supers were able to imbue other people with similar abilities as themselves, although they often were reluctant to do so since the involved effort would deplete their energies for a good while. The task was substantially less exhausting if multiple supers (optimally a large number) teamed up to power the transformation, and/or the recipient had outstanding potential. Typical cases of the latter included one of their children, someone with exceptional talents to begin with, or a potential responder to the catalyst.

Supers' children who inherited their powers got a survival-oriented and substantially diminished set of abilities at birth, and grew into their full power during adolescence. Much like other humans with better than average or optimally peak-human physical and mental abilities, it seemed non-powered children of supers had a much better chance of being responders to the catalyst. It turned out that inherited potential for magical power and for superpowers worked much the same and usually stacked in children of hybrid heritage. Those children got an equally high chance of becoming a mage (usually of Exalted power level) or a super, but not both.

In normal circumstances, one had to undergo the catalyst activation process or be the child of a super to get superpowers. However, the circumstances of the event and its aftermath were anything but normal. With vast amounts of eldritch energies raging across the world, and the life-force of billions being released, spontaneous activation of superpowers in people with sufficient potential became possible. It turned out the process worked much like the activation of Exalted magical potential and required similar circumstances. These tended to create one 'spontaneous' super in a million people, on average. Synthesis and use of the catalyst helped create more supers.

The Americans and the Europeans discovered the catalyst just before the event and were eventually able to crack the process and develop a sufficient number of super-soldiers to help fight back the various supernatural threats and restore order to the world. They soon shared the secret with their allies in the other developed countries. Much like mages, the supers greatly helped humanity survive the event, fight the various

supernatural threats, rebuild civilization, and let it thrive. Due to the many analogies about how magic, superpowers, and potential for the same worked, researchers theorized that a super equivalent of the Ascended had to exist, but nobody knew how to create one, and individuals of that kind had failed to manifest during the event.