

THE MANY PARADIGMS OF MAGIC

Traditions and magical paradigms are the basic building blocks of magical practice in the twenty-first century. Established traditions embody elaborate collections of lore, complete with esoteric rituals and potent symbolism that allow a magician to better understand and direct his innate ability to manipulate mana and interact with spirits. Each is a conceptual lens through which a magician focuses his will, and each endeavors to provide a complete cosmological framework of concepts and mystic correspondences to describe the fundamental workings of the magic arts and the spirit world.

THE PRACTICE OF MAGIC

The art of magic is inherently subjective, and amongst the Awakened of the Sixth World many different paradigms of magic co-exist. Nonetheless, since early on, Gifted individuals realized the latent power to be found in traditional mystical philosophies and arcane lore. Renaissance hermeticism, Native American shamanism, Japanese Shinto, Chinese Wuxing, and countless other sources of pre-Awakening mysticism were mined for answers to the emerging phenomena. The predominant modern traditions coalesced around these magical paradigms because, for the most part, they provided ready-made metaphysical beliefs, potent symbolism, rites, and spellcraft.

While a character's magical tradition in *Shadowrun* is very much a personal and cultural choice, the fact is that well-established traditions dominate the corporate and academic magical scenes. By the 2070s, the majority of magicians learn and practice magic based on such "mainstream" traditions, drawing on and adding to the knowledge of others who have walked the same path (or their writings in books and e-libraries). Each such tradition boasts tens of thousands of practitioners, all of whom subscribe to one paradigm developed over the years (or in some cases, centuries). The wide dissemination of these traditions makes it easier for practitioners to find instructors, formal education, formulae, appropriate magic materials, and, of course, like-minded magical groups—and helps the self-perpetuation of their dominance.

Magical development requires years of diligent study stressing the understanding of magic through the specific perspective of one's tradition. This makes the conceptual framework that constitutes the tradition's paradigm self-reinforcing. A mage trained to see hermetic formulae as the symbolic construct needed to mentally weave mana into a spellform will find it impossible to see magic as an animistic force of nature that must be cajoled to act the way the magician wants (as a shaman would). Such radically different approaches mean that a switch between traditions is almost unheard of. A magician would not only have to accept a possibly contradictory worldview, but he'd also have to relearn the basics of his craft from a fundamentally different approach.

Notable (and often inexplicable) exceptions exist, such as those magicians who walk toxic paths or are seduced by insect mentor spirits. Generally, such paradigm shifts are only believed possible as a symptom of an individual's insanity.

The Self-Taught Magician

For most magicians, well-established traditions represent the easiest path to realizing their Gift. These have the advantage of being supported by educational institutions, corporations, and organized magical societies; they are best-served in terms of magical resources; and they generally provide the foundations for magical groups to form around peer networks. Their greatest advantage, however, and possibly their greatest shortcoming, comes from representing a consensual, institutional, and well-documented view of magic, rather than an individual's personal views.

In *Shadowrun*'s dystopian world of unequal opportunities and social injustice, some Awakened characters never get the opportunity to follow formal studies, and some that do reject the dictates of formal education.

Since magic remains very much a personal and subjective experience, rooted in innate Talent, such magicians often find themselves walking self-devised paths of magic (consciously or not). Awakened characters who develop their own traditions—the mental and symbolic constructs necessary to effectively and predictably wield magic—are not uncommon, just exceptional. Without the guidance and support of peers, their path is often harder and development of their Talent more unpredictable. For instance, finding an initiatory group (see p. 68) may be much more difficult.

It is, however, possible to learn from instructors of similar traditions and beliefs—at the gamemaster's discretion, characters can incur anything from a -1 to -4 dice pool modifier on relevant Instruction Tests depending on his perception of similarities between the teacher's and the pupil's traditions.

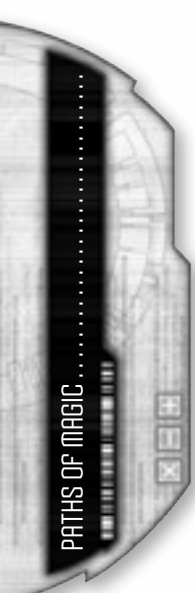
It should be noted that in the sixty years since the Awakening, entire traditions have evolved from individuals mixing and matching elements of other belief systems and their own into not-always-coherent but still-functioning wholes. Though it is looked down upon by more conservative traditions, this is best epitomized by the modern tradition known as Chaos magic.

POSSESSION-BASED TRADITIONS

Some traditions believe in spirits that are invisible and intangible forces which project into the physical world through the power of Possession rather than Materialization. This understanding of the spirit world is part of the tradition's lore and integral to the magics used to summon and bind spirits. As such, all spirits conjured by magicians of a possession-based magical tradition replace the Materialization power in the spirits' statistics with Possession. Otherwise, all normal rules for summoned or bound spirits remain in effect. For more details on Possession, see p. 101.

FAITH, BELIEF, AND MAGIC

Given the way belief is entwined with the practice of magic, it is unsurprising that—even in the materialistic '70s—faith and religion, old and new, have a significant impact on the manner many of the Awakened perceive and practice magic. In the Sixth World, several traditions involve both formal magical systems and religious beliefs, and while





THE SHINTO TRADITION

Concept: Shinto magic originates in the relationship between the practitioner and the *kami*, spirits that invest every aspect of the world. It primarily concerns itself with ensuring that the practitioner acts in harmony with the kami spirits, with magic being a natural extension of this harmony.

Combat: Air

Detection: Water

Health: Plant

Illusion: Beasts

Manipulation: Man

Drain: Willpower + Charisma

Easily the most influential shamanic tradition in Asia, Shinto shares many similarities with Amerindian shamanism, though the two are distinct traditions. Unlike Amerindian traditions, Shinto *kannushi* (typically *miko* if female) do not follow the ideals of a particular totem, but instead try to reach a state of harmony with the collective body of *kami* spirits that inhabit all things. Respect for nature is a key concept of Shinto tradition, as is the idea of remaining physically and spiritually “clean” through careful attention to proper rituals. The kami are honored at hundreds of thousands of shrines that range in size and shape, though most include the iconic *torii* gate. Honoring the kami is necessary, since the *kannushi* typically ask many favors of them, including the use of magic.

Kami spirits come in all varieties, from elemental spirits to the ghosts of ancestors to strange and wonderful animals. They are so numerous that they are commonly referred to as the “Eight Million Kami.” Some are kindly and helpful, while others are mischievous or selfish. Shinto *kannushi* use many ritual tools in their

magic, including *haraigushi*, a wand covered in paper streamers used to purify an area, and *ofuda*, paper prayer strips used for good luck or to deal with malicious spirits.

Shinto is the state religion of the modern Imperial Japan, which makes it the most common tradition found in that nation. It has spread wherever the Japanese Imperial State reaches, and the young Emperor has encouraged the Shinto tradition by making its practitioners an integral part of the rebuilding of Japan. And unlike most other shamanic traditions, Shinto is even found in the ranks of corporations, especially the Japanacorps.

TRADITIONAL OR HEDGE WITCHCRAFT

Concept: *Hedge witches* weave magic the way they always have, through subtle incantations, hexes, poxes, and potions, in accordance with half-forgotten lore of the natural world and ancient women’s mysteries known as the *Old Ways*.

Combat: Earth

Detection: Water

Health: Plant

Illusion: Air

Manipulation: Task

Drain: Willpower + Intuition

Note: Hedge Witchcraft is a Possession tradition.

Traditional hex-casters and wise women, the practitioners of this venerable tradition are known diversely as *weise frauen*, *sorcières*, *streghe*, *brujas*, *bruxas*, or *hedge witches* depending on their country of origin. Witches tend to be secretive about their craft and are often confused with Wiccans. Most hedge witches, however, conform better to fairytale images of hex-casting women than to neo-pagans. Another departure from Wicca is that