Personal Review: Mage: The Ascension (Revised Edition)
Not quite sure why this revision of Mage: The Ascension scored such a low rating, this is possibly the best revision of the game available. The game is a complicated one, but if handled with creativity and drive one can easily master playing one of the greatest role playing games ever made.

Originally modeled after Ars Magica the role playing game, Mage is a tale about wizards fighting in the modern world. While it bears only some Tradition names in common with Ars Magica it holds its own as a solid and unique role playing game. These mages are not the pointy hat, robbed fellows you find in Dungeons & Dragons; the mages in Mage are average people with a unique ability to manipulate reality. The revised edition also brings to light an abstract thing called Paradox - reality's way of snapping back and harming the Mage for creating something out of the ordinary.
The revised edition of this game is truly remarkable and explains in detail how such things as Paradox and magic Spheres work (the mages magic powers so to speak). Many have accused the role playing game of being too convoluted but the intelligent role player will - perhaps with some effort at first - be able to understand how Paradox works and describe it either in text or words depending on what type of RP game he or she is playing in (the same applies to Spheres).

Paradox for all intents and purposes isn't a straight forward thing, instead if the mage creates something out of the ordinary or botches on a magic role he suffers the number of paradox points mentioned in the box - this is, of course, all subject to change as the GM of a game is the final authority in what is considered breaking the rules. Paradox is then explained. It isn't merely a force which hurts the mage; it is a plausible, almost coincidental occurrence which can render the mage in quite a bit of pain or... in some cases, dead. One major struggle then in mage is trying to make your magic seem like mere coincidence so as not to upset the forces of reality.

The magic Spheres covered in this book are excellent - in no other revision has the magic in Mage been given so much creativity - unlike any other role playing game you now have the chance to make up your own spells and enchantments. Perhaps alone worth the price of the book, the Spheres section goes over each and every magic Sphere in the game and gives you detailed descriptions of what each and every level does.

Fireballs from fire and earth shaking spells from earth? Not a chance, in this game you actually get to make your own spells - mixing Forces and Prime for instance to summon something out of the blue (the Prime Sphere, a flame for example) and propel it (a decent mastery in the Forces Sphere), which can essentially make a fireball (if you want to risk getting the effects of Paradox).

It goes without saying that this role playing game was not made for small table top groups, instead it is better played on a World of Darkness game online in which other players play humans, vampires, and werewolves among other things - a world in which seeming normal is very important. More importantly magic can be explained in lengthily prose as too can be explained the effects of Paradox whereas in a tabletop game this might be difficult.

I've read a number of complaints in reviews on how little Nephandi, Marauders and the Technocracy are covered. This is more than intentional and the reason for it should be a little more than obvious: with source books on the way, it goes without saying that White Wolf should leave quite a bit of information out. I'm /not/ a fan of this either, but Dungeons & Dragons releases books where you have to buy every single source book in order to keep up with the game, I figure White Wolf is ahead of the game by putting out a playable system every time they release a core book but
require individuals to buy additional sourcebooks. (Many of the sourcebooks in D&D are also quite useless - as many D&D fans know but also know they serve as essential references with information intentionally left out of the campaign books. White Wolf's sourcebooks typically cover everything in good detail.)

As a GM in a number of White Wolf systems I'd have to suggest readers to disregard comments telling them not to pick up the revised edition of Mage as a starting point. Many of the essential game components, such as Paradox, Magic Spheres, botch rules, and other die rules are covered poorly in previous editions - while I mean no disrespect to reviewers who feel otherwise, revised is essential to play in mostly any Mage game (especially online).

Lastly one of the major complaints about this game system is that it describes the Technocracy as winning the Ascension War. If you have a problem with it, like most GMs you should create your own source material to give to players telling them of any plot/epic level changes you made. Again, everything in this game can be changed and quite easily (the effects of Paradox are not the result of the Technocracy mind you, they are instead the result of a mindset which humankind has developed... disbelieving magic, believing more in technology, a mindset which makes this game realistic).

A /substantial amount of creativity is needed on the part of the player./ It is warned at the beginning of the book that this core book should be used as a guideline only - skip that in Vampire: The Masquerade if you'd like, but in Mage it is essential for proper game play.

Describing things in depth creatively comes before any and all die rules when playing mage (if you dislike this idea than perhaps the game system isn't right for you, if you like it though, give the game a try). That being said this game cannot be played properly after simply reading over the book, it takes a long time of practice with writing descriptively or speaking descriptively should you venture to play it at a tabletop. The rewards of playing this game system are amazing though as you will be able to play something creative and unique with magical powers in a realistic world.

The only downside with the game is that it is difficult to consistently think of creative ways to play your Mage (something which is essential). While I'm sure this game will provide the you - the reader - with months of entertainment, it is possible for the enthusiasm to die down after a few years (whereas D&D games can be adapted and revised by GMs for years of Friday night game sessions... so it might be more trouble than its worth).

Superb game all in all! In my opinion this is certainly one of the best and most creative games White Wolf has to offer!