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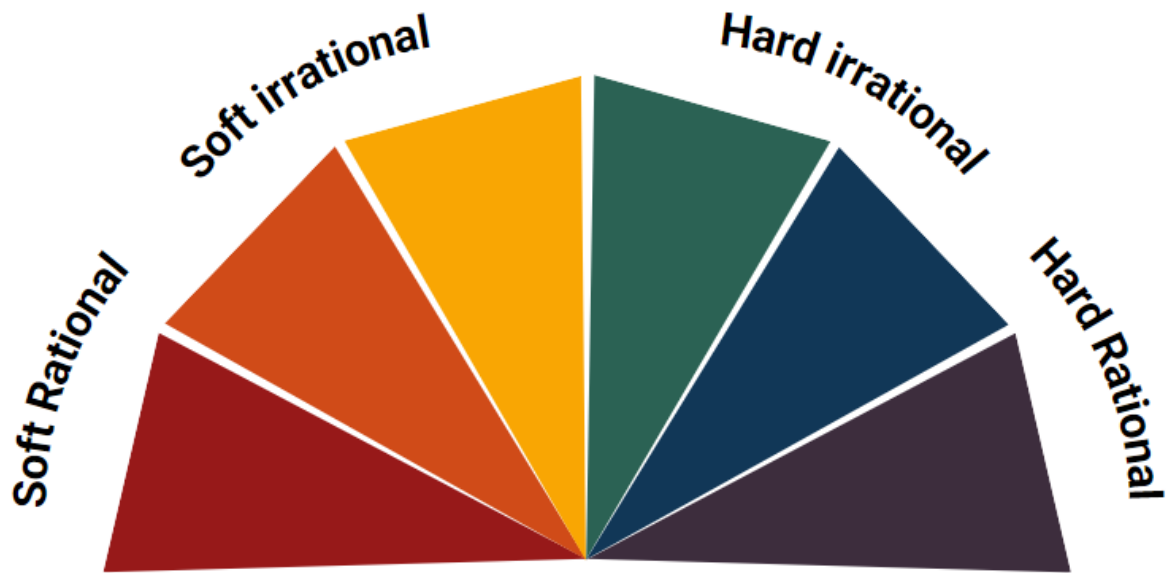
Step 1: Choose your source. Where does magic come from?

Magic Systems are frameworks for how magic works in your world. They can be categorized by their source. All magic systems can fall under one or a combination of the following four:

- **Inherited:** Magic relies on a genetic component for someone to wield it
- **Objects or Substances:** Magic is found within objects like a ring or wand or through substances like metals. These objects and substances can be the direct source of power or can be wielded by someone to use its magic.
- **Environment:** Magic come from a physical location or from the environment itself
- **Faith:** Magic is granted by a higher being or multiple, accessed through rituals, or come from otherworldly energies and forces. Deities and demi-gods can also have powers

Step 2: Choose the depth of your magic system.

The level of detail a magic system has is known as hard and soft magic. Hard and soft magic are really descriptors of how detailed and well known by the reader the magic system in the story is. You can think of it like a spectrum.



Magic System Spectrum

You, as the author, decide where on the spectrum you want your magic system to lie.

- **Hard rational:** More detailed, with explicitly described rules and patterns. Readers learn the logical methodology behind the magic system. Once they know how the system works and what can be done with it, they can apply the logic to how abilities and magic is used and can predict how it could be used.
- **Hard irrational:** More detailed, with explicitly described rules and patterns. Less rules and information are revealed, so while readers understand how most of the magic system works, they can't necessarily apply the logic to how abilities and magic is used or predict how it could be used.
- **Soft rational:** More generic, with fewer rules revealed to the reader, which can be on purpose, but doesn't have to be. Readers learn that parts of the magic system follow a logical methodology. Once they understand these parts, they can

apply the logic to how abilities and magic is used and can predict how it could be used.

- **Soft irrational:** More generic, with fewer rules revealed to the reader, which can be on purpose, but doesn't have to be. Readers understand this magic doesn't follow a logical ability or understand that this logical methodology is unknown to the characters in the story. Therefore, readers can't apply logic to how abilities and magic is used and can't predict how it could be used.

You can also have a hybrid magic system. A hybrid magic system is one that combines both hard and soft magic. It can also combine sources of magic. With a hybrid magic system, you might decide to be detailed and have extreme specificity in one sector of your magic system, while another part is more interpretive for the reader.

Questions to ask yourself before deciding:

- How much do you want your readers to know?
- Do you want magic to create problems or solve them?
- How much wonder or mystery do you want in your story?
- How much time and effort are you willing or able to put into creating the depth of your magic system?

Step 3: Decide how accessible and transferrable your magic system is.

Who can use magic? To answer this, first look to your source. If your source is inherited, then you can say people are born with it, or people must go through a genetic change to be able to use magic. Then take it a step further separating magic users from non-magic users. For instance, in Harry Potter there is a distinction between muggles and wizards/witches. In the Witcher,

normal people become witchers by going through an alchemical process that mutates their genes. Note that by saying who can use magic, you're also deciding who can't or aren't able to.

If you want to get even more detailed, you can categorize your magic which can also further determine who can and can't have/use magic. For example, are there different types of magic within your system, different techniques, different groups, or even different sanctions?

Examples of this would be

- In Avatar there are nations separated by their abilities (Water, Earth, Fire, Air)
- In Eragon Sorcerers utilize the spirits for magic but witches utilize objects and substances
- In the Lord of the Rings there are several types of magic like dark magic and elven magic

Next, you can decide how transferable this magic is. If magic isn't transferable then you're done with this part. But if it is, decide what would lead to their magic being lost or gained. Examples are:

- Being stolen or extracted from them. Think of the Disney Hercules film when Hades made a deal with Hercules and took his powers away for 24 hours.
- Through a place. For instance, magic is usable in one land/world but not another. So you must be in that place to use magic.
- Through an event. It could be by accident like in superhero movies that gave people superpowers through spider bites, acid exposure, and science experiments gone wrong. Or it could be on purpose like through rituals or sacrifices.

Lastly, how accessible is your magic within your world? This will apply if magic can be acquired by collecting ingredients for potions and brews. Or waiting for the right timing such as a significant time of the year or sourced through weather events. Or by using objects or through training. So, think about what magical resources exist, how abundant they are, and how easy it is to access them.

Step 4: Determine to what degree magic is usable.

After determining who can use it, it's time to decide how they use it and to what extent.

If you plan on a character or multiple characters learning the magic, then here is where you'd lay out that process. What would someone need to know to learn your magic, and how would they learn to do it. The easiest method for this is to first determine how someone would wield magic. Then create a step-by-step process they would follow to learn how to wield it. And remember, how detailed you are in this is entirely up to you. Some questions you could ask are:

- Would they go to a school, become an apprentice, or self-teach for instance?
- Would they need to learn potion making, spells, hand gestures, or physical movements?
- How easy is it to learn to wield magic or long would it take?

Next, determine how reliable and usable magic is in your world. Does wielding magic always turn out as expected or is it more unpredictable? As an example, an interesting idea would be to have a spell that is sort of like rolling dice. The spell could have 3 random but related results and every time you cast that spell, you aren't sure which result it will be.

The reliability could also be determined by when magic can and can't be used. Perhaps in your world, magic is taboo, so even if a character really needed to use magic, they wouldn't be allowed to do so in public. Or magic could be place, time, or resource dependent, thus limiting when it can be used.

Step 5: Ground your system and humble it with disadvantages that make your system unique, interesting, and force your characters to struggle and innovate.

Unlimited powers or perfect magical capabilities is boring. And that's the last thing any writer wants. And as we know, all magic comes with a price. So, adding costs and limitations to your magic system will not only make it more unique and interesting, it will also make the story more enjoyable to your readers as they root for your characters to get out of a pickle or innovate their way out of a problem caused by magic.

But what costs and limitations can you add to your magic system?

- **Availability.** This could be in terms of abundance, quantity of an item or items to perform the magic, or perhaps these items are difficult to find. Or difficult to acquire because of who or what guards these magical resources.
- **Skills.** Perhaps someone can't use magic even if they have the gene because they must first learn some physical or mental skill.
- **Who can use it.** Who can or is able to wield magic could be determined by source, talent, exposure, or discovery. For instance, you could determine that very few people know how to use magic because it's an ancient practice that was passed down from generation to generation and was lost along the way or died out. Or because people must find

something in order to use magic. Or the magic gene skips every other generation. Go back to your who and see what limitations you can add.

- **Situational.** This goes back to when magic can be used or can't. This can be time, location, or resource dependent. Or magic can only be wielded with wands. In that instance you could say that every magical person gets one wand but if it breaks or they lose it, then they lose the ability to use magic. And you only get one wand.
- **Risk.** What are the costs of using magic? Perhaps it causes the magic user pain or discomfort in some way, or that pain/discomfort is inflicted on others, or it could negatively affect the world. Or it could be taboo or illegal to use magic. When you think of risk, think of what negative consequences could result in using magic.

Another way to determine limitations and costs is to think in terms of opposites. For every positive element of your magic system, what is the opposite negative element?

Or what could stop/counteract the magic? Can technology or non magic users counteract the magic user

Step 6: What is your magic system called and what terminology is or could be important to know in your story world?

Every magic system has a name. Think of the people who use magic have labels, and the magic itself has its own terminology. You'll also want to determine if you want to distinguish between good and evil magic and what those distinguishers are.

Don't feel bad about using names and terminology that already exist. Afterall, your magic system can show what your interpretation of those terms is.

To come up with your own names, keep your naming conventions similar to what your magic can do and who can use it. For instance, in the marvel comics, magneto can manipulate magnetic fields, storm can manipulate weather such as lightning and tornados, and these magical people are called mutants because they have mutated genes that gave them their abilities.

Here are some examples:

- In *Avataar*, elemental magic is used but it's called Water, Earth, Fire, Air bending. They use martial arts to telekinetically manipulate the elements. Each of these movements has a name.
- In *The Mortal Instruments* series, Shadowhunter's were given their powers by an angel. And they are called Shadowhunter's because they hunt and kill demonic creatures. The author also uses runes as their source of magic which is a common term that already existed before the series was written.
- Star Wars is also a great example even though its more science fiction. They have the Jedi and the Sith. The Force in its simplest terms uses energy and allows the Jedi and the Sith to do things like levitate objects, trick minds, and predict events.

Step 7: Decide what magical effects your system has on your story and your world.

What is the purpose of magic in your story? In other words, what is it used for? Examples of purpose could be

- Political strategy
- War strategy
- To heal

- For power, wealth, or some other gain
- To create or solve problems in the story
- To portray or emphasize a theme in your novel or even characteristics like greed, pride, strength, etc.

Decide what purpose your magic system serves in your world.

It's also important to know how magic influences your story and the world it resides in. Some questions to ponder the effects of magic are:

- Refer to your Lore worksheets and ponder how magic could have affected the creation and history of your world
- Refer to your Natural Environment worksheets and ponder how magic could influence the various aspects of your world's environment
- Refer to your Advancement worksheets and ponder how magic could affect your civilizations.
 - Is magic well known? If so, to what degree? Is it feared or taboo, praised or worshipped, or more normal? If not, is it a secret, undiscovered, an ancient practice lost to time?
 - Do the civilizations interact with magic in some way? Or not at all?
- Now look at everything you've already created within your magic system and ponder how those elements could have an effect on your world