

Magic Rules!

PART 1: Types of Magic – The Source Be With You

© 2006 by P. June Diehl



Life of Catherine of Siena (Sodoma)
by Giovanni Antonio Bazzi

The illusive art of magic governs, unites and even conquers fantastic fictional worlds with enchanted powers. Fantasy authors must decide the types of magic allowed to work within the created fantasy lands. What choices of magic do fantasy writers have to choose from? And a second important question to ask when writing fantasy: What is the source of your magical system?

Why is it important to understand the type of magic in the fantasy you create? Once you identify the type of magic you wish to use, defining limitations and rules comes easier. Knowing the source of the magical system helps focus on the mundane rules you'll need to understand how to create a believable fantasy world.

The following are examples of magical systems. Some overlap so one fantasy series might include several of these types. This is not meant to be an all-inclusive list of the different types of magic, but a starter to help focus on your magical system.

AURA MAGIC

The aura is the life force of all living things. The energy generated by this life force is used to generate magic. One use of this life force created magic is any fantasy where the source of the magic is from the charkas. The children's classic, *The Children of Green Knowe*, is an example of aura magic, or Jennifer Lynn Barnes, juvenile fiction, *Golden*.

BINDING MAGIC

This mysterious, mystical force binds all that exists in the universe, it works as the thread that connects all things, living and otherwise. The *Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan makes use of this concept.

CHAOS MAGIC

This is a modern form of ritual magic. The source of the magic is some mind alternating technique: music, dance, chanting, drugs, etc. An example might be Alan Dean Foster's *Spellsinger* series.

GOD/GODDESS-GIVEN MAGIC

The source of magic in this system is an advance being, whom mortals see as a god or goddess. Remember: what is so readily given, can equally be taken away (and usually at the worst possible moment in the plot). Harry Turtledove's *The Case of the Toxic Spell Dump* has elements of magic, or power, given to humans by a deity.

GOOD VS. EVIL MAGIC

The source of this type of magic might be the same, but the outcome is juxtaposed, based on the intent of the manipulator. The source of this magic is both outside and internal to humans, or whatever type of character the magical user might be. Robert Goodkind make use of this concept in his *Sword of Truth* series.

HERBAL MAGIC

This is inclusive of any ingredient-based magic, like the fairy dust used in Peter Pan. This type of magic is also found in Sharon Shinn's *Summers at Castle Auburn*, and *Scent Of Magic* by Andre Norton.

MEDITATIVE MAGIC

Either meditation or concentration is used to create magic – the “mind over matter” concept. This can also manifest as an altered state of consciousness. A classic example is Philip K. Dick's fantasy, *The Cosmic Puppets*.

NATURE-BASED MAGIC

Usually, this revolves around the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Elemental magic can be found in the fantasy world of *The Oran Trilogy* by Midori Snyder or Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* series.

POWER ELEMENTS

Magic exists in all things but some objects hold more magic than others. These magic rich objects are considered magical artifacts. An example is the *Winter of the World* series by Michael Scott Rohan.

RITUAL MAGIC

Magic is created through the act of performing a ritual. This may or may not be based on a religion. In her *Deryni* series, Katherine Kurtz makes use of ritual magic.

SCIENCE-BASED MAGIC

The source is based in science, but must have a magical twist. For example: For every action, there is an opposite and equal reaction. Give this law a twist: Every time magic is used by an individual, the good produced as a result, also produces an evil side effect. L. E. Modesitt's *The Magic of Recluce* and *The Towers of the Sunset* exhibit science-based magic.

SCIENCE INDUCED MAGIC

The premise here is that advanced technology is used by advanced beings, but appears to be magic by others. Science fiction author Arthur C Clarke's "Third Law" states "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." *Out of This World*, the first of the *Three Worlds Trilogy* by Lawrence Watt-Evans, is an excellent example of Clarke's Third Law.

SUPERNATURAL MAGIC

The results are the ability to read minds, telekinesis, being able to see across time or space, etc. The source of this magic is the supernatural, that which is beyond what is normally thought of as "natural." In Katherine Kurtz's *Deryni* books, the magic is inborn and presented as psychic in nature. Another example is the psionics in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* series.

SYMBOL MAGIC

In this magical system, symbols are used to represent more than they seem on the surface. When used by a magic weaver, these symbols take on a physical quality. Any fantasy that uses a system like Runes is an example of symbolic magic, such as the *Death Gate Cycle* by Margaret Weiss and Tracy Hickman.

SYMPATHIC MAGIC

Voodoo is an example of sympathetic magic. The focus here is that what is done to an object can be equally transferred to the person who once possessed that object, or by knowing the magical name of an object, as in Ursula K. LeGuin's *Wizards of Earthsea*.

"WE ARE ALL ONE" MAGIC

This is based on the concept that we are aware of our unity with all the universe, we are able to create magic by tapping into that unity. Robert Jordan's magic system in his *Wheel of Time* series is one example of this type of magic.

In some fantasy worlds, magic might be limited to either men or to women. Some examples are the works of Melanie Rawn and Robert Jordan.

These types of magic can be combined to create your magical system. Human myth and legends are full of magic. Beg, borrow, and steal – make the magic your own to suit your fantasy world. Pick and choose the elements that work for your fantasy world. Or, create an altogether new magical type. The limit is your own imagination.

Author Bio: P. June Diehl is the author of **The Magic & the Mundane: A Guide to the Writer's Journey**. June works as a writing coach and teacher. She facilitates workshops on various topics related to the craft of writing and publishing. The author is the Editorial Director and Senior Editor at Virtual Tales (www.virtualtales.com) and Senior SF Editor at ePress-Online (ePress-Online.com) June can be reached at: <http://www.iwriteforyou.org> and pjune@yahoo.com .