

A Lion in Scarlet: Vivlio Esoterikos

Introduction: The Theology of Magical Theory

Since the dawn of time on the planet Alvatera (the world where this story takes place), magic has been a driving force and a supernatural tool for people of all species. It is thought to have been first bestowed upon mortals by the Divine Souls, the gods of the planet, as an edge against the horrific monsters created by the eldritch Titans. Theology aside, magic is very real on Alvatera, thanks to the forces at work in that fantastical world.

While not everyone understands the ways of magic on Alvatera, it is no different than any other skill or talent. Some people are born as naturals to the art, and find themselves having an easier time learning the basics than others. Some people study their whole lives to understand magic; whether they become masters of a spell or two beyond low-power ‘cantrips’, or become renowned wizards known and feared by lesser men, varies greatly. Despite the results of magical study and practice not being a guarantee toward amazing power and renown, it is a talent anyone can learn if they set their minds and mettle to it.

The reason for this is because of how the fabric of the planet’s known reality works. In primordial times for Alvatera, the Divine Souls had wrenched away power from the Titans in epic battle. The Titans, whose physical bodies were utterly annihilated and whose spiritual beings were weakened, were forced to surrender the devoured souls of the world before. But without a safe environment for these salvaged souls to exist within, they’d be as good as devoured anyway, being unable to reincarnate into new life, and much less be able to do anything but flow aimlessly within the universe as ghosts.

Thus the Divine Souls breathed new life into the world. They did so through their immense power, focusing and refining the raw chaos of their universe into a form that could be manipulated and altered. It is this refined chaos that Alvaterans have come to refer to as ‘aether’, and it’s through this aether that those with enough power could alter tangible reality through will alone.

However, mortal beings are organisms meant to die and be reborn countless times over. Even if a mortal could wield the aether as an immortal could, their physical being would be instantly destroyed on subatomic levels the moment they tried. For a time the Divine Souls let mortals figure things out without imparting the hidden wisdom to alter reality. And for a time, the races thrived... until the

Titans, banished spiritually to the core of the planet, began to stir. Lacking the power to assume physical avatars, the Titans instead created servants to wreak havoc upon the reborn mortals whose souls they hungered for. These mortal servants of the Titans would come to be known as ‘monsters’, and they would serve as numerous predator species to pose a threat to the now-thriving races of man, fey and beast-folk.

Once monsters began to run amok, the Divine Souls were not willing to let the reborn races fall into destruction once more, especially not from those eldritch beings whom they stole the once-ravaged world from. From newborn children to the elderly living on borrowed time alike, people suddenly began to understand something they never understood before. Like second nature, the souls of ancient peoples chosen by their gods would become the first magicians. And as history extended forth, the bloodlines of magicians would be so interwoven among races of all kinds that almost all people in Alvatera’s modern era have the potential to unlock the door within their very souls to their inner powers.

How Alvaterans Use Magic

Despite an untold number of people having the potential to use magic, it’s uncertain how many people worldwide can actually use it. There are still areas on Alvatera beyond the fringes of civilization, given that the planet is still within its equivalent of Earth’s late-Medieval/early-Renaissance period. On average, Alvatera’s “Beast Wilds” region (where our story takes place) has reported that about 38% of all people within the various settlements know how to use even cantrips, if not full-powered spells. Beyond demographics and theology on the planet, there is a particular science (or pseudo-science?) to how magic is utilized among its wielders. Such methods are detailed in the paragraphs below.

First, a magician must unlock how to work magic. As mentioned in the section prior, magic is very much a skill or talent as any might be for a person. Some people, especially those who are descended from magic-using, divinely blessed, or Titan-cursed bloodlines, just have a natural knack toward the esoteric arts. For many others, however, it is something that has to be developed. Often times, unlocking the doors to magic will involve some sort of spiritual awakening, not unlike a ‘vision quest’ of traditional Native American beliefs. Other times, the doors just burst open like floodgates, usually during the unfolding of traumatic experiences.

Once the door has opened, a magician-to-be can no longer turn back. During the early days of their power, their life might seem surreal. Minor magical effects may come forth with unintended results, and when in contact with other magic-users they might start to suffer unpleasant psychic sensations. The only thing a magician-to-be can do is to try and come to terms with their gift, and they should do so quickly – this sort of ‘arcane puberty’ can last anywhere from weeks to months, but never any longer than a year since their fateful day of awakening.

In modern cultures, a newly-awoken mage is commonly taken under the wing of someone who’s been there – it can be a friend or relative who is magical, or it can be a mentor or teacher with the gift during their schooling years, or even a representative from the “Mages’ College” of civilization’s uniting union, the Republic of the Races. While these magicians can offer advice and support to the newly-awoken mages, they can only do so much. Magic, on the whole, is a personal experience and endeavor, and it will only ‘click’ for a new magician with time, self-acceptance and practice.

With the understanding of their powers, a magic-user can thus go one of two ways with how they use their power. Most magic-users find it easiest to let forth outward ‘spells’, as the mental formulae of a spell is easier to be explained and taught.

However, some magic-users find it second nature to focus their magic with more inward effects – the augmentation of their bodies’ ability to perform physically, with few of these effects extending outward or in obvious fashion. These magic-users are called ‘Adepts’, to differentiate themselves from ‘Sorcerers’ or any other spell-casting title.

The Nitty-Gritty of Working Magic

So now that you understand where Sorcerers and Adepts come from, it’s time to cut to the chase. How exactly *do* Sorcerers and Adepts get their powers to work? Quite simply, it is a matter of willpower.

Unlike non-magic folk, a Sorcerer or Adept can defy the laws of physics to certain extents through sheer desire and determination alone. To quote a line from a certain Disney Channel Original Movie: “Magic is really very simple; all you’ve got to do is want something, and then let yourself have it!”

All magic-users passively accumulate the raw aether that flows throughout the planet. When they cast a spell, they draw in the surrounding astral energies, focus them into a specific effect, and then release the aether back into the world. For a Sorcerer, it comes forth outwardly as a spell; for an Adept, it

typically manifests within their bodies as a so-called ‘aura’. After the spell is finished or the aura dismissed, it dissipates back into the unseen spiritual matter from whence it came.

For Adepts, sometimes they utilize auras that border the line of spells. For instance, average auras for an Adept would be to enhance their physical strength to lift incredible weight, or to be able to run at breakneck speeds while only using the energy and muscle exertion of a jog. What, then, would an Adept call the ability to produce a tearing air vacuum with a limb strike, or to manifest and hurl a ball of plasma created and sustained by heightened bio-electricity? Such abilities are simply referred to as ‘aura powers’, while the body-enhancing effects are just called ‘auras’.

It should be known that any magic-user who has developed beyond their days of arcane puberty will gain a sixth sense related to all magic they are witness to. The moment someone begins to prepare a spell or evoke an aura, that sixth sense will begin to tingle in the minds of all magic-users close enough. Even so, there is little one can do to stop a spell or aura from being utilized once it’s about to manifest – only highly skilled wizards or aura-masters have the power to halt a spell the moment it’s cast.

That being said, not every power can be emitted without ‘charging it up’. Those with enough practice can get their most-familiar effects to be in a moment’s thought; for those who aren’t skilled enough at a certain effect, they must spend more time mentally concentrating to focus the aether into an intended power. Those with a potent enough sixth sense, who has been around all sorts of magical effects long enough, can thus hone in on this charging... and if familiar enough with the intended power, can even realize what that effect will become when it’s used.

And with that knowledge, a magician worth their salt can interrupt a spell by some means. All spells and auras require an intent focus and enough mental clarity to make them real. All sorts of interference can inhibit one’s ability to sustain, or even begin, a spell. The most common killers of a spell-to-be are emotional issues and physical stimuli. A magic-user can only manifest aether into a spell as long as they can concentrate upon it.

Even so, the most talented of magic-users can learn to either use powers that either have a short-lived effect (such as a lightning strike upon an enemy), or one that lasts for a time upon their subject. Most mages attempting the latter will have a tough time learning how to create such magical effects in a

short period of casting time. However, such powers can turn the tide in situations where every second matters, and where their focus may lie outside on sustaining one or more effects all at once.

These long-lasting powers are known as ‘blessings’ or ‘curses’, as the situation warrants. Both work in the same way: if they hit their intended target, the spell is designed to resonate and self-sustain from the subject’s own life force. As aether will only resonate from living beings – mortal or immortal – a magic-user can bless or curse other living beings by use of these spells.

There are three ways to undo a harmful curse, or even to negate a beneficial blessing in those who you don’t want to have one. The first method, exclusive to mages alone, is to evoke a power with the purpose of rending apart the other power at hand. For anyone without magical power, they can turn to quasi-magical means through the use of potions (to be mentioned in the final section of this document) meant to negate magic. Lastly, those afflicted by a curse can try to will away the curse by sheer determination; any sort of physical or emotional trauma can also engage the minds of the cursed enough to boost their willpower and aid in their negation of the curse.

The Costs of Overusing Magic

There are two main matters of magic that aren’t covered in the prior sections, but can be read up on here. These matters are as follows: how much magic one can use at a time, the consequences of overexerting oneself through magic, and the existence of quasi-magical substances.

A mage can only use as much magic as their bodies can handle. As the biblical phrase goes, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”. Remember when I mentioned that someone would be annihilated if they could wield magic on the same level as the Divine Souls? It is for that reason that no mortal can do so... and why magic can be dangerous for one who pushed themselves too hard. Even with divinely-granted fail-safes in play, every spell or aura a mage invokes will cost them physically and mentally.

The more and more drastic of effects a mage tries to use, especially if unpracticed with such effects, the more it will tire them out mentally. And if they begin to suffer mentally enough, one of two things can happen – either the physical body can be harmed, or the mind and soul can be wracked.

First, they could experience the mental agony spilling forth into physical harm; this is most common in Adepts, as their powers are usually to augment their mortal coils. Muscles can tear out of nowhere;

inexplicable lacerations can rip randomly through one's skin and flesh; the nervous system can short out into violent seizure. One of the most grisly and fatal effects can include one's blood literally boiling, or aura-enhanced organs rupturing to gory pulp in catastrophic ultra-violence.

Sorcerers are by no means luckier. Instead of physical harm, they will most likely suffer mental harm. To understand the means of altering known reality, even if spiritual second nature, can open the mind to matters that mortals were never meant to know outside the hereafter. The commonly-accepted theology behind reincarnation is that those about to be reborn must consume so-called 'Waters of Oblivion' to avoid destroying their unborn brains from all the accumulated knowledge of countless past lives.

While not proven by any means, this religious belief is the most commonly-given explanation to the insanity of those who overexert their minds through overusing spells. Another explanation is that the ever-watchful Titans stare back into the minds of those who have weakened their spiritual defenses against their influence by over-casting. Whatever the case, casting too many spells without proper rest takes an unsettling toll on the minds of Sorcerers. Spell effects may be forgotten temporarily; temporary mental illness can set in, even in those who'd never had the symptoms before; permanent brain damage can occur. The worst-case scenario is the person's brain literally being fried by overexertion, killing them swiftly without a means to uphold life-supporting functions within the body.

Potions: Quasi-Magical Substances

As mentioned before, magic is something that can only be brandished by living beings. Because of the nature of aether, being an otherworldly matter of life itself, magic also cannot affect inanimate objects for long. On Alvatera, monsters such as the golem, zombie and other automatons do not exist outside of their own fiction. What's more, items with long-lasting enchantments do not exist either; the closest thing is silver which, for reasons undetermined by arcane sciences and vaguely mentioned in religious beliefs, is anathema to certain monsters that would only get mad when struck with weaponry.

Potions, however, are the exception to this rule. In nature, there exist certain flora and fauna whose living matter possess substances with specific magic properties. These substances are mostly latent in such organisms, but if extracted from picked (or slaughtered) samples and concocted just right, they can create short-lived but potent magical effects themselves!

Most magical effects from these potions are limited in scope. While spells and auras are limited only by the imaginations and practices of the mages performing them, potions can only do certain things. The most common potions on the market take the form of medicines, but arcane poisons and some temporary power-boosting drugs do also exist.

That said, life-saving and malady-treating potions are the only kind most people in civilized lands can ever hope to see... unless they're part of criminal undergrounds, members of the military, or even adventurers who come across the illicit or restricted concoctions on their travels, that is.

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