

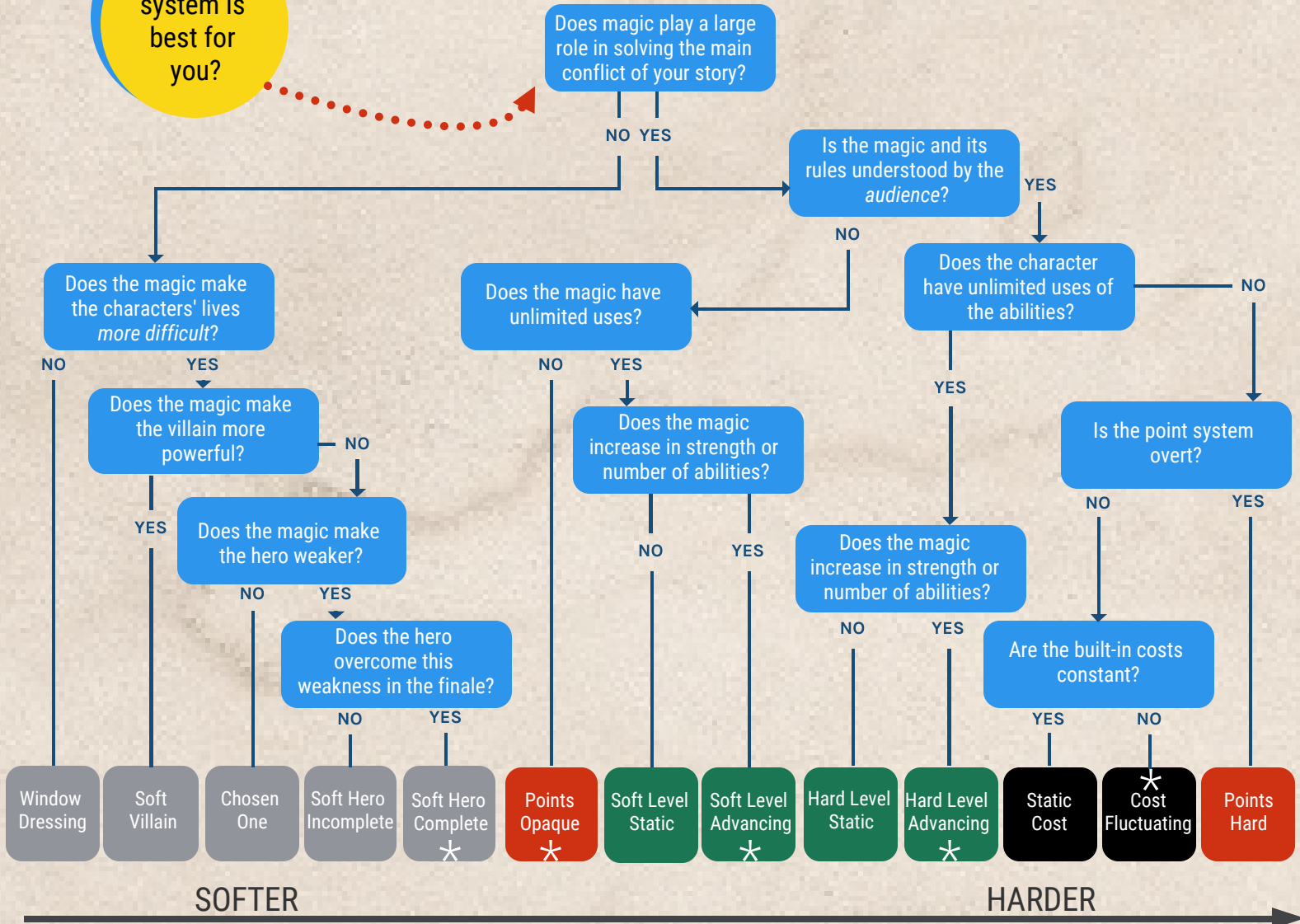
A.A.L.C. Magic Systems

(Appearance, Abilities, Limits, Cost)

Based on Sanderson's laws of magic and the Four Cs of Worldbuilding, there is a progression to how audiences interact with magic systems. The more the audience understands the system, the more the magic can solve the major conflicts of the plot. These break down into four types with 13 subtypes, each one building on the ones before:

Soft Systems: Appearance	Point Systems: Abilities	Level Systems: Limits	Cost Systems: Cost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What the magic looks like * Makes the world feel more exotic * Can cause problems for characters but cannot solve them * Usually tied to a character arc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What the magic does * Points calculated based on magical effect, range, number of people affected, and duration * Characters have a finite amount of fuel (mana) to use abilities * More powerful abilities require more fuel * The fuel does not have to be overt for the audience to understand * If points not overt, cannot solve conflicts unless a cost system is added 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Unlimited uses of magical abilities * Abilities stratified in codified levels defined by their limits * The more the levels' abilities and limits are known by the audience, the more they can be used to solve conflicts * Focused on clever uses of abilities against stronger foes * Cost system can be added to enhance dramatic moments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Costs must be greater than or equal to abilities to make them dramatically satisfying * Costs can include time, exhaustion, materials, sanity, morality, etc. * Adds dilemma to magic by forcing characters to make choices * The greater the character's sacrifice, the more audience satisfaction at conflict resolution

Which system is best for you?



Those marked with the asterisk (*) can use the Cost Fluctuating system.

A.A.L.C. Magic Systems (cont.)

Each system builds on the previous ones, so that Cost Systems use all four, while Point Systems only care about Abilities and Appearance. Multiple systems can exist within the same story, and systems can harden over the course of the story. The Force, for instance, has been a Soft, Point, Level, and Cost System depending on who wrote it at the time.

Window Dressing

- * Magic for secondary characters
- * Can instigate conflict but cannot solve it
- * Ex: Gandalf, Obi-Wan

Soft Villain

- * No explanation or upper limits needed
- * Makes villains more powerful to make heroes greater underdogs
- * Ex: The Emperor, Voldemort

Chosen One

- * Unknown power keeps hero safe throughout story
- * Can be considered plot armor unless earned through character arc
- * Ex: Harry Potter

Soft Hero Incomplete

- * Curse or positive ability the character cannot control
- * Hero still learning limits of ability at story's end
- * Powers and arc continued in next adventure

Soft Hero Complete

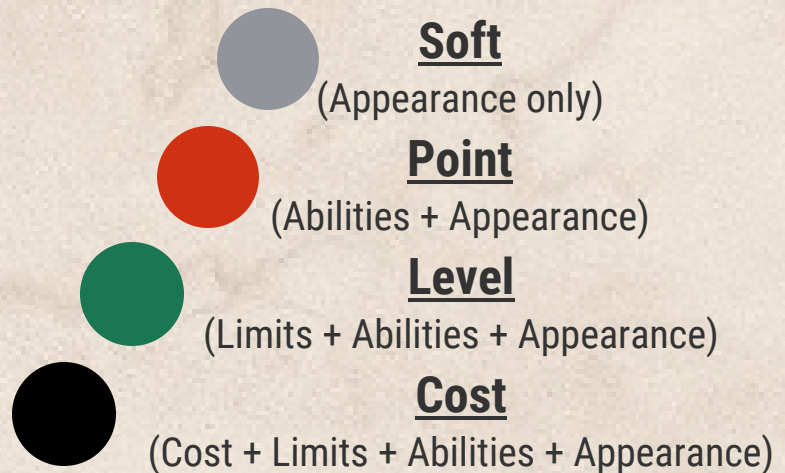
- * Hero embraces ability to complete arc and solve main conflict
- * Magic must become harder in subsequent adventures
- * Ex: Luke at end of first Star Wars film

Points Opaque

- * Non-explicit reservoir of energy fuels powers
- * Cannot solve main problems without cost option because characters finding hidden energy reserve feels like deus ex machina
- * Raistlin, Willow

Points Hard

- * Both abilities and points system must be explicit like in video games
- * Becomes about resource management
- * Easy to understand but takes sense of wonder out of magic



Soft Level Static

- * Unchanging power without upper limits
- * Cannot solve conflicts because feels repetitive
- * Power must be used cleverly
- * Ex: Wolverine's healing factor

Soft Level Advancing

- * Increased powers or new powers with unknown limits
- * Cannot solve conflicts unless tied to a character arc like Soft Hero Complete, at which point "unlocks" new abilities

Hard Level Static

- * Unchanging abilities with clear-cut limits
- * Can solve conflicts so long as setup is properly seeded, usually resulting in sacrifice
- * Ex: Dolby, Genie

Hard Level Advancing

- * Well-established abilities with limits
- * Can solve conflicts based upon clever uses of abilities, usually against stronger foes
- Ex. Airbender, Harry Potter

Static Cost

- * Well-established cost remains consistent for each use of ability
- * Can solve conflicts since based on personal sacrifice

Cost Fluctuating

- * Costs change based upon dramatic need
- * Costs must be **greater than or equal to** ability
- * Possible costs include lost time, money, sanity, health, memory, life, morality, etc.

