

Universal Magic (Arcana)

In the **Shatter The World** multiverse, **universal magic**—known locally on Myrah as **arcana** and as the ether (or aether), awen, qi/ki, or gi by legendary magicians such as Merlin and his East Asian counterparts on **Earth**—is the ethereal life energy that permeates all matter and can be wielded to affect the visible world. It is not created or destroyed, only moved, shaped, and recycled. Arcana exists in every dimension and planet, but its concentration, purity, and flow differ wildly from world to world. Life holds Arcana like a metaphysical resouvaure; constantly sensing and emitting waves of sensory-related energy drawn from the God-source (the universal wellspring). This makes Arcana both a reflection of the wielder's inner world and a bridge to the greater cosmos.

Nature and Flow: The Arcana Cycle of the Multiverse

Arcana behaves exactly like water in a planetary water cycle. Inside any single dimension or planet it circulates continuously:

- rising as raw potential from the world's core and living things,
- condensing into usable currents around living beings, imbued items, and ley-lines,
- falling through spells and artifacts,
- then evaporating back into the ambient reservoir.

Between worlds, the cycle extends across **The Void**—the dark, airless interdimensional space that separates all realities. Excess arcana that is not needed locally drifts into The Void; depleted worlds slowly draw it back. This inter-dimensional exchange normally happens at a glacial, passive rate.

Magi-support is the active mechanism that accelerates and directs this cross-world flow. Trained magi act as living conduits (or “pipes”) that can deliberately channel arcana from one reality to another. Most magi only ever support **return** flow—pushing used arcana (or matter converted into energy) back into the universal reservoir so it can drift through The Void to wherever it is needed. This is the “healthy” direction and carries little personal cost.

*[Author's Note: A burial practice for humanoids and magical entities on **Geb** and **Myst** should be to 'push' or 'return' a corporeal being's physical and energetic essence back into arcana; the magical equivalent of cremation. This supports the subtheme of those places being 'one with nature'.]*

Historical Names Across Worlds: The Ether on Earth

On the world of Earth, ancient philosophers (notably Aristotle and the Greek and medieval traditions) described a fifth element they called **aether** or **ether**—the pure, subtle medium that fills the heavens and connects all things. They correctly intuited its role as the cosmic reservoir through which celestial phenomena and hidden forces move, but their searches were looking for a physical substance instead of the living magical energy that actually flows *underneath* or *inside* all things. This ancient Earth lore remains one of the clearest glimpses our world has ever had of the true universal cycle.

A few ancient practitioners on Earth were able to tap into the ether and often used different names.

Celtic bards and prophets (like Merlin) knew it as **awen** — the flowing divine breath that could be drawn through the body for prophecy and shapeshifting. In East Asia, Taoist magicians, Japanese onmyōji, and Korean shamanic adepts called it **qi, ki, or gi**: a universal cycling energy that permeates all matter and moves exactly like a cosmic water cycle. Trained bodies could pull, shape, and return it, though overuse polluted the local flow and damaged the practitioner — eerily mirroring Myrah’s later crisis. These magician-traditions came closest to grasping the true interdimensional nature of the energy long before philosophers gave it the name 'ether'.

Replenishment and Overuse

Like any reservoir, arcana must replenish at least as fast as it is withdrawn. On healthy worlds such as Geb, the natural planetary cycle plus gentle magi-support keeps the system in balance; arcana feels vibrant, almost humming with life. On Myrah, however, centuries of rigid aristocratic control, constant elite spell-casting, and the planetary magical barrier have caused massive net withdrawal. Natural replenishment and passive return from The Void can no longer keep up. The arcana on Myrah has become **polluted, stagnant, and “burned out”**.

Pulling from The Void: The Costly Lifeline

When a world’s arcana deficit grows critical, specially trained **Void-touched magi** (an elite, secret cadre on Myrah) can reverse the normal flow. Using their own bodies as temporary bridges, they slowly draw **extra arcana directly from The Void** and push it into Myrah’s depleted reservoir.

This act is physically agonizing and cumulatively destructive:

- The mage’s body becomes the pipe through which raw interdimensional energy passes; tissues break down, organs strain, and genetic damage accumulates.
- Lifelong practitioners suffer the sterility and defects already noted in the aristocracy.
- A single large “Void-pull” can cause immediate unconsciousness, sensory loss, or death.

Yet without these magi the entire magical infrastructure of Myrah would collapse. Their sacrifice is the hidden reason the aristocracy still functions at all—and one of the deepest secrets Will will eventually uncover.

Conduits, Spells, and Degradation

Anyone with the right (still unknown) birth conditions can become a conduit. Items—natural crystals, man-made staves, or imbued artifacts—provide safer channels. Short phrases (spells) do not create the effect; they simply help the user’s body resonate with the correct energy.

Most casters combine **personal power + imbued item + verbal chant** to improve results and spread the harmful side-effects. Every time arcana passes through a living body or physical object it degrades slightly, leaving behind “residue” that further pollutes the local cycle. This is why lifelong users on Myrah age poorly and why even Geb’s wild magic carries risk if overused.

Known Worlds at a Glance

- **Myrah (The Grey World)** — critically depleted; relies on costly Void-pulls. Arcana feels heavy, polluted, and sluggish.
- **Geb** — abundant and untamed; constant vibrations refresh users but risk overload. Arcana is “gravelly” from eons of circulation.
- **Earth** — sparse and logical; arcana is thin and rarely accessed, yet ancient sages recorded various names and came closest to describing its true nature.
- Other unnamed worlds vary between these extremes.

The ultimate balance of the multiverse depends on magi choosing **support** over **extraction**. Will’s journey will force him to confront what happens when an entire civilization forgets that truth.

Other Earth Facts

Facts for William to discover when he's in the college library waiting for Julia:

historical Earth “magicians” (and their Eastern equivalents) absolutely described the same underlying energy in strikingly similar ways, even though they almost never used the specific Greek/Latin word “aether” (or “ether”). That term was mostly reserved for philosophers and later scientists. The actual practitioners experienced and named it as a flowing, universal, recyclable life-force that moves through people, the world, and the cosmos — exactly like your multiverse's arcana cycle. Here are the real historical parallels (quick, accurate summary so you can drop them in cleanly):

- Merlin / Celtic/Arthurian tradition (Welsh Myrddin and druidic roots): Magic was tied to “Awen” — the divine, flowing poetic/inspirational energy from the Otherworld/cosmos. Bards and seers (Merlin's archetype) channeled it through body, voice, and nature; it was described as a circulating “breath of the gods” that could be drawn in, shaped, and returned. No “aether” word, but the mechanics (flow, personal conduit, risk of madness/exhaustion) match your Void-pull cost perfectly.
- Chinese equivalents (Taoist magicians, alchemists, qigong practitioners): “Qi” (or Chi) — the primordial breath/vapor that permeates everything (people, planets, stars, “outer space”). Ancient texts (from ~5th century BC onward) call it a universal cycling energy that rises, condenses, flows through ley-like meridians, and returns to the cosmos. Magi pulled extra qi from the environment/heavens at personal cost (health drain, sterility in legends of over-practitioners).
- Japanese equivalents (Onmyōji like Abe no Seimei — the classic “Merlin of Japan”): “Ki” (same as qi) within Onmyōdō (yin-yang + five elements magic). They described ki as flowing cosmic force manipulated via body, talismans, and chants; excess use polluted the local flow or burned out the practitioner.
- Korean equivalents: “Gi” — identical qi concept in shamanic and Taoist-influenced magic. Same cycling, body-as-conduit, health-risk lore.

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