



Magical Items For The Mundane

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It seems like every gaming system which involves magic also includes various items which posses magical energy but may be used by anybody. Except Shadowrun. (Unless they've come up with something new since I've purchased my last book which was back in the ice age.) I speak of magical potions, weapons, jewelry, etc. which, although once created by magical means, now operate independent of their makers. For the most part I believe the lack of items of this kind is a good thing. Nobody wants to see every samurai trotting around the barrens with a Sword of Satan's Grandson, slicing through panzer engines like they were margarine. But the occasional healing potion would be nice. The following rules regarding these types of magical items were created with the understanding that the items would be very, very rare. I have not, as of yet, created rules dealing with the actual construction of magical items. For now assume they are beyond the ability of almost all magic users to create.

Power

The power of an item is its most important rating. It determines two things. A: How well the item will work, and B: whether it will work at all (or "activate"). Both relate strongly to the essence of the individual attempting to use the item. Staying consistent with most rules regarding magic, a magical item works best with someone who possesses a high essence. An individual with a lower rating is less in touch with the latent energy of nature and may also be less likely to have faith in its power. An individual with a higher essence retains more of his or her connection with the "non manufactured" world and, whether he knows it or not, is better able to connect spiritually to the item in use. It also comes down to a magician being as likely to sip a healing potion as a samurai is to guzzle it.

An item's effectiveness when used by an individual is calculated using the following simple method. Make an unresisted roll pitting the essence of the user against a target number of 10 - the power of the item. Even somebody with no essence still gets one die. In addition to its power an item also has a base effect. One success means it worked, each additional success multiplies the effect by one. An example:

Joe Samurai has an essence rating of 5 and is shot up pretty bad. He possesses a magical elixir with a power rating of 6 and with little else to do but die, decides to drink it down. He rolls his essence (5 dice) against a target of 4 (10-6) and scores two successes. The base effect of the elixir is the healing of two boxes. Since Joe rolled two successes a total of four boxes are healed.

I realize these rules make an item of this type pretty tame but it is probably best that way and keeps magical crossbows out of the hands of every hard wired merc, sam, etc. Another important thing to remember is that the rule of ones still applies for these rolls. A healing potion in the hands of an extreme cyber burn out may have an interesting, and very unhealing, outcome.

In addition to the item's power, various other ratings may be needed, depending on the individual type of object. For example, weapons may need a duration to see how long they stay 'hot'. The following item list shows a few of the options. All powers may vary.

Healing Elixir

Duration: Instant

Each success heals two boxes of physical damage. (A mental version is also available, it's called a stim-patch.)

Magical Sword

Duration: One Fight

Each success raises the damage's power by 1.

Talisman For Safety In Travel

Duration: One Day

Each success adjusts the target number any action which may directly harm the wearer 1 in the wearer's favor. (I.E. the target number for shooting at the wearer is raised by one while the target of a crash test would be lowered by one.) It would not lower the target number of an individual who was simply driving in the snow because he or she is not in immediate danger.

Rejection

When an individual fails the essence roll required to activate a magical item it is said to be "rejecting" him. For whatever reason the item does not want to work. With one shot items like potions, tough luck, it's gone and it ain't coming back. (And even if it did I wouldn't want to drink it.) Other items, on the other hand, are still around but will eventually get to the point that they will never work for the person trying to use them. A player may only fail his activation roll a number of times equal to his essence rating. Even people with no essence still get to try once. If the player fails in this way the item will NEVER work for him or her. It retains its original rating, however, and may be used by somebody else. All the player has to do is activate the item once in order for it to begin accepting him. It will, however, receive a minus one to its rating for every attempt that was made. This lowering of rating only applies to the individual trying to use the item. The rating returns to normal if the item ends up in somebody else's hands.

Acceptance

When an individual succeeds in the essence roll required to activate an item he grows closer to it and, in turn, the item grows closer to its user and begins to resist use by anyone else. When an individual succeeds in using an item a number of times equal to 10 - his essence rating the "personal" rating of the item raises by one and the rating for everyone else is lowered by one. If the rating had been damaged by repetitive failures during the initial attempt at activation this will cancel one of these out. The rating of an item may only be increased by the essence rating of its user. If this raises the power above 10 the user gets one additional success (not automatic success) per point of over spill. The rating for someone else's use continues to fall regardless of its user's essence. Even if the item's rating had been lowered by failed usage attempts the rating still is reduced starting from its original number. Once this rating reaches zero it can NEVER be used by anyone but its owner. If, however, the item is successfully activated by somebody else before this rating reaches zero all the rating adjustments are removed and the item returns to its original state. It is a good idea to keep these things in a safe place.

Assencing

To the naked eye a magical item does not normally appear as anything incredibly special. Although they will occasionally activate themselves (see PERSONALITY) it usually requires an assencing to figure out exactly what it is. Fortunately, this is pretty easy. The more powerful an item is, the easier it is to assence. Since the magical energies within the item is self contained and possesses no links to astral space it is no easier to examine it from within astral space than it is from the outside world. From astral space it simply

appears "more real" than the rest of the mundane objects lying around it. In the real world the magician will "feel" its power, and purpose, and nature. A talisman for safety will feel "comforting". A magical weapon will be feel "powerful". From this the magic user is able to deduce the ratings for its power, duration, effect, etc. Now, with the knowledge of what he has, a player may go about attempting to activate the item. Although mechanically this follows the rules stated above, roleplaying wise it depends much on the item's personality.

Personality

The personality of a magical item is probably its niftiest aspect. Although potions tend to be pretty consistent in their attitudes ("drink me!") other items possess a wide variety of quirks and idiosyncrasies, probably reflecting the personality of the person who created it. Some magical weapons, for example, will not activate unless the situation is desperate or if it is being used for some kind of noble purpose. It would probably never activate simply to cut up a pizza or some other idiot action. Most players would eventually figure this out when it refuses to activate during a bar brawl but shutters with power while hacking up an abusing boyfriend. When a weapon refuses to activate in this way, do not count it as an actual rejection. You can give the player a subtle hint that his six successes don't mean shit to a weapon which has been guided into the head of a nun. He'll eventually catch on.

Personalities tend to come in two basic brands, Good and Evil, although many straddle the line. Good items will normally activate when they are being used to right a wrong or protect its user. Evil items seem to help the user a bit of them time, and be out to get him the rest. An evil sword, for example, may slice through its target and then continue to swing into one of its user's friends. Although good items don't get too extreme with their actions, evil ones can get down right nasty. The ultimate evil item is a cursed item.

Cursed Items

Cursed items are very similar to Insect Totems in the way they conduct themselves. Although at first they appear to assist the user, it is only part of their grand scheme to eventually control him and bring about his destruction. The gentlest of the cursed items simply don't want you to be without them. A cursed Talisman for Safety In Travel, for example, will keep the user safe while he or she is wearing it but the instant it is removed all kinds of unsafe things begin to occur.

Other cursed items, however, don't let you off that easily. Their actions involve reaching to goal of eventually driving the user insane or into the grave. Magical weapons will convince their user to kill for no reason, the old safety talisman will turn it's wearer into a paranoid, suicidal wreck.

Unlike good items, with most evil and all cursed items as the power for the user increases, so does the item's hold on that user. Good items, although it would probably make them "sad", do not stop its user from simply throwing it away. Once an individual uses a cursed item for the first time it immediately begins to control him or her. In order to break the item's hold the user must succeed in an opposed test pitting the user's willpower against the item's rating for that user. They can only make this test once every time the personal rating of the item increases (see ACCEPTANCE). Another way to break the item's hold is to take it away for the user, which can prove to be quite hazardous depending on the mood of the item and the user you took it away from. The other way out is for the user is to die. If any of the above occur successfully all ratings of the item return to normal and it awaits its next victim.

Destruction

The physical destruction of a magical item is extremely difficult. Although a good item which has lost a faithful user will usually crumble into dust all by itself, most other types are hard to get rid of. Steel items won't melt, leather items won't burn, elixirs won't want to come out of their flasks, etc. Also if an attempt at their destruction seems immanent many have a strange way of getting "lost" on the way to execution. The traditional methods of disposal seem to revolve around some kind of burial, either in the ground or at sea. Following such an action, however, the individual who did the disposing is usually plagued by a long series of life threatening occurrences. So far the most reliable way of getting a magical item out of your hair is to return it to its place of origin. This, in itself, can be a treacherous experience.