Dark Fantasy
MAGIC ITEMS

Eric Diaz

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What is this book about?

This book is a collection of dark fantasy magic items. These items are powerful, but dangerous. Not necessarily cursed, but often creepy. The traits described in this book concern to appearance, not mechanics, so they can be combined with existing item if you want – in fact, we encourage you to add detail to every magic item PCs come in contact with. You can also use this book to generate items for stories, comic books, etc.

The focus is on dark fantasy tropes: flawed heroes, terrible villains, corrupting magic, ominous ruins and damned wastelands.

Although this is mostly a system-less book, it is especially suited for medieval dark fantasy games, such as my own (**Dark Fantasy Basic**). It contains a few concepts that are present in "classic" or "traditional" role-playing games: hit points, ability scores, etc. However, these tables are a minority and can be easily "translated" to different systems. Where a system is needed, the most famous and recent one is used. Some specific terms (e.g., "truesight") and mechanics are pulled from the latest version of the game, so that you can find the meaning quickly using the internet.

What is next for Dark Fantasy Basic?

If you want to know the future of the Dark Fantasy series, here is the deal. We already have a players' guide, and the collection of tables for DMs is nearly complete. Soon, we will publish a big, multi-system book about monsters. Once all this is complete, we will check if there is enough interest to publish a complete book… The ultimate Dark Fantasy OSR/Contemporary game! Stay tuned!

Credits

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You can find more of my work in my blog: methodsetmadness.blogspot.com.

Book cover by Rick Troula (www.ricktroula.com).

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The price of magic… items

First, let us quote from Dark Fantasy Magic:

The cost of magic is one of the most important aspect of any magic system, and it is particularly important in dark fantasy games, where magic is often dangerous, corrupting or downright evil. If magic doesn't have a cost, it becomes simply a supernatural skill or superpower. Anyone with a modicum of talent will become a wizard, and magic becomes commonplace and indistinguishable from technology, with magic missiles replacing artillery and portals replacing airplanes.

The price of magic cannot be simple gold, either, or it becomes a commodity (although that might be interesting on its own). It must be something significant – maybe it requires complete devotion, madness, human sacrifice, great risks to the wizard's body or soul, or maybe it poses an existential risk to the world itself.

Magic artifacts may require the binding of a sentient spirit in a piece of metal or wood. Like trapping fireflies to make a lantern… or imprisoning Beethoven in a music box for your own amusement. The demon that lives in your sword is always willing to help you in your fights in exchange for some blood… but for how long?

In short: dark fantasy games, magic has a cost, and that is especially true of magic items. Casting spells may require extensive training and materials, while finding a magic item could be a simple accident. If that is the case, the item might be cursed in one way or another. If the magic item is acquired after a difficult battle or quest, however, the "cost" was already paid in advance (although it can still be cursed…). In this case, you can still add a creepy feel to magic items through appearance and (seemingly) harmless traits.

How to use this book (making magic items special)

The main goal of this book is to make memorable magic items… or make magic items memorable. In most dark fantasy works, magic items (and even mundane ones, provided they are important for some other reason) are rare enough that each one has a distinct appearance and history. In some games, you can find a "+1 sword" in the town's magic shops, while in others even the simplest magic items are hard to come by. This is mostly a matter of taste, but you should consider this when adding detail to your magic items. Common items should have few details, while legendary items should have more.

The first section of the book is a universal table with 100 entries that combines some of the other tables in this book to quickly generate random traits for any item. If you want to add some quick details to your items, especially the simpler ones, this table is all you need.

The second section of the book is a magic item generator. If you need to generate a magic item on the fly, this section will tell you if you get a magic ring that turns you into a bird, an enchanted dagger of poison or special boots. Each entry has suggestions on what the item actually does.

The following sections focus on an items appearance, distinctions and curses. Generally, you can use the first section for all items if you want to, the second for uncommon items, and the third for a few cursed items.

The last page deals with mechanics. It will tell you if a shield has a +1 or +2 bonus to armor class, or if your sword deals 3d6 fire damage, and so on.

Universal traits table

This table is universal – it applies to any item you can imagine. It is, therefore, less specific and more prone to producing bizarre or incomplete results. Adjust as you wish to achieve an answer that works for you, but don't discard strange results without giving it a try. Roll one or more times to quickly generate a few distinctions to the magic item in question. Or roll 1d20 in the column of your choice.

This table includes appearance, weight, sound, quirks, etc. It also has some traits that may indicate purpose, but it assumes you already know what the item actually does (for example, start with a +2 sword and roll twice to get a bloodstained rune sword). If you don't, use the item generation tables, below. Of course, you can go the other way and give additional poison damage for your sword if it has a spider etched in its hilt.

d100	Trait (movement/etc.)	d100	Trait (looks)	d100	Trait (creature)	d100	Trait (details)	d100	Trait (shape/color)
1	Talking	21	Bloodstained	41	Demon	61	Sun	81	Heavy
2	Laughing	22	Prismatic	42	Dragon	62	Stars	82	Light
3	Moaning	23	Shinning	43	Monster	63	Moon	83	Big
4	Floating	24	Bone	44	Fairy	64	Spiral	84	Small
5	Humming	25	Flayed	45	Snake	65	Plant	85	Twisted
6	Oozing	26	Skin	46	Spider	66	Holy symbol	86	Curved
7	Dancing	27	Fur	47	Wolf	67	Runes	87	Thick
8	Flickering	28	Scales	48	Bear	68	Eyes	88	Thin
9	Dripping	29	Crystal	49	Bat	69	Skulls	89	Long
10	Shifting	30	Rusty	50	Bird	70	Teeth	90	Plain
11	Vampire	31	Luminescent	51	Insect	71	Gems	91	Yellow
12	Voluptuous	32	Reflective	52	Elephant	72	Spikes	92	Blue
13	Clockwork	33	Fire	53	Cat	73	Faces	93	Green
14	Disguised	34	Ice	54	Fish	74	Mouth	94	Red
15	Detachable	35	Lightning	55	Frog	75	Tentacle	95	Purple
16	Pulsating	36	Wooden	56	Octopus	76	Chain	96	Golden
17	Unbreakable	37	Scaly	57	Fox	77	Triangle	97	Silver
18	Folding	38	Invisible	58	Ape	78	Hands	98	Obsidian
19	Twin	39	Broken	59	Humanoid	79	Feathers	99	White
20	Aura	40	Wet	60	Child	80	Letters	00	Ultrablack

Item generation tables

To generate a magic item, roll 1d100 and check the corresponding line. Each type of item and each function is described below.

d100	Item	d100	Item	d100	Item
1	Amulet of augmentation	31-32	Helmet of communication	61	Ring of perception
2	Amulet of misdirection	33	Helmet of misdirection	62-63	Ring of protection
3-4	Amulet of protection	34-35	Helmet of perception	64	Ring of reduction
5	Amulet of transformation	36	Helmet of protection	65-66	Ring of spells
6	Armor of augmentation	37	Necklace of protection	66	Ring of transformation
7	Armor of misdirection	38	Necklace of spells	67	Ring of travel
8-10	Armor of protection	39	Potion of destruction	68	Robe of augmentation
11	Armor of transformation	40-41	Potion of augmentation	69	Robe of misdirection
12	Belt of augmentation	42	Potion of communication	70-71	Robe of protection
13	Book of augmentation	43	Potion of influence	72	Robe of transformation
14	Book of spells	44	Potion of misdirection	73	Shield of influence
15	Book of summoning	45	Potion of movement	74	Shield of protection
16	Boots of misdirection	46	Potion of perception	75	Staff of destruction
17-20	Boots of movement	47	Potion of protection	76	Staff of misdirection
21	Bracers of augmentation	48	Potion of reduction	77	Staff of protection
22	Bracers of destruction	49-52	Potion of restoration	78	Staff of spells
23	Cloak of augmentation	53	Potion of transformation	79	Vehicle of destruction
24	Cloak of misdirection	54	Ring of augmentation	80	Vehicle of movement
25	Cloak of protection	55	Ring of communication	81	Wand of spells
26	Cloak of spells	56-57	Ring of destruction	82	Weapon of augmentation
27	Cloak of transformation	58	Ring of influence	83-88	Weapon of destruction
28-29	Container of Creation	59	Ring of misdirection	89	Weapon of influence
30	Helmet of augmentation	60	Ring of movement	91+	Special

Items

Most items in the list are self-explanatory, but some deserve special notes.

Boots. You may decide some magical boots affect only the feet, altering the results accordingly.

Book. Books often require you to be able to read the adequate language to take effect, and require a few days of study. Magical books that cause augmentations can change you for life (if they are legendary). Otherwise, the effect last for a few days only.

Bracers. You may decide some magical bracers affect only the hands, like boots (see above).

Container. A bag (or cup, quiver, jar, sheath etc.) that produces infinite ordinary things (see "creation", below).

Helmet (hat, headband crown). Most magical helmets affect only the head. Augmentation helmets might make your smarter, while misdirection helmets could give you a new or improved sight, but not a new body and improved touch.

Potion. Potions affect whoever drinks them – sometimes with adverse effects. Most potions have a single dose.

Vehicle. This is a small boat, wagon, balloon, exoskeleton, etc.

Weapon. Traditionally, most magical weapons are swords. If you like this trope, make sure about half the magic weapons encountered are swords. Other magic weapons are maces, axes, spears, daggers, and, less frequently, arrows, darts, bullets, etc.

Special. The first time you get this result, roll twice and combine one item with a different function, to generate new combinations (for example, an amulet of destruction). If one of these two rolls is also "special", it means you get a special item, and special function, or both. Come up with something unexpected or roll again. If you roll 00 twice, make the item especially noteworthy and powerful, with multiple functions.

Here are a list of different items. You can also use them in place of bags, helmets, bracers, etc., as appropriate, to add variety. Choose one, or combine your 1d100 roll with 1d4 to find a result.

d100	1	d100	2	d100	3	d100	4
91	Idol	91	Figurine	91	Brooch	91	Gem
92	Hat	92	Crown	92	Headband	92	Mask
93	Gloves	93	Gauntlets	93	Quiver	93	Backpack
94	Sphere	94	Cube	94	Polyhedron	94	Tesseract
95	Slippers	95	Feather	95	Mirror	95	Bottle
96	Candle	96	Horn	96	Eyeglass	96	Cup
97	Plow	97	Pigment	97	Torch	97	Crystal ball
98	Powder	98	Goggles	98	Stone	98	Rod
99	Scroll	99	Flute	99	Lute	99	Drum
00	Body part	00	Quiver	00	Shackles	00	Shovel

Functions

This is what magic items do. Each function has a corresponding table in the next page, unless otherwise noted. You can decide the results self or choose randomly. As always, you can ignore bizarre results or just roll with it.

Important note: the first "you" in each function is directed at the player character, as usual in these texts. However, for most uses in this book, "you" is directed to the reader – presumably, the game master. In short, the player characters (whoever is wielding or wearing the magic items) get the benefits, but it is up to the game master to decide how these items function, on which tables to roll, etc.

Augmentation. You get a bonus to one of your traits. If you roll six or less, you can establish one of your traits is set to a fixed number (e.g., 17), unless it is already greater than that.

Communication. You can communicate in a certain language, with a certain type of creature or though supernatural means (telepathy).

Creation. You can create one type of element, object, etc. Although they are usually endless, they either take a while to create or disappear magically when a new thing is created. The amount created is usually just enough for one person (for example, one piece of silver or one gallon of water per day, or one sword at time).

Destruction. You cause damage to your foes. Roll 1d10 on the table damage to establish the type of damage. For weapons, this is added to the usual damage. Roll 1d12 – a result of 11 or 12 means the additional damage is of the same type as the weapon (slashing, bludgeoning or piercing). Alternatively, the extra damage applies only to certain creatures – roll in the "creatures"" table.

Influence. You can inspire certain emotions. The exact mechanics are up to the GM.

Misdirection. You can disguise yourself, your movement, your actions, etc.

Movement. You can move faster or more efficiently. Use 30 feet of movement as default. If the result is 1 or 2, double the distance you can walk or triple the distance/height of your jumps.

Perception. You have supernatural perception. "Keen" senses give you advantage when using them.

Protection. There are three types of protection. Choose randomly or otherwise.

First, you can become immune to certain hazards or conditions (use the "protection" table). Protection from poisoning protects you from all effects of poison, not just damage.

Second, you can become resistant (i.e., half damage) to certain types of damage (use the "Damage" table). A result of 11 means you get magic resistance instead (advantage in all spell saving throws). A result of 12 means you get resistance to slashing, bludgeoning and piercing damage.

Third, you are protect against certain creatures (use "Creatures" table). All attacks form these creatures against you have disadvantage, and you have advantage in all saving throws against them.

Reduction. You can diminish your foes' capabilities, imposing negative conditions.

Restoration. You can heal lost hit points. The amount of healing is twice the amount of damage another item would cause (see the "mechanics" section). Alternatively, you can cure some condition, disease, etc.

Summoning. You can call or create certain creatures into existence. Some creatures (celestials, fiends, fey) come from other planes or places; others (undead, automatons) are "raised" from corpses, clay, or other forms of inanimate matter; and others are artificial (made of magic, will disappear with no traces). Roll on the "Creatures" table.

Spells. You can cast a certain spells with this item. Many items of this sort require you to be some kind of spell-caster. There are thousands of spells to choose from, these "themes" are only suggestions. Alternatively, choose another effect for inspiration; destruction might mean fireballs, restoration might mean healing magic, etc.

Transformation. You can transform into something else, usually an animal. Alternatively, if the item is small (an amulet, necklace, wand, etc.), it transforms into a loyal animal instead.

Travel. You can travel to other places, planes or – in the rarest cases – through time. Think twice before adding this to your game.

d12	Augmentation	d12	Communication	d12	Creation	d12	Damage	d12	Creatures
1	Charisma	1	Aberration language	1	Food	1	Acid	1	Aberration
2	Constitution	2	All humanoid lang.	2	Water	2	Cold	2	Beast
3	Dexterity	3	All spoken languages	3	Air	3	Fire	3	Celestial
4	Intelligence	4	All written languages	4	Silver	4	Force	4	Construct
5	Strength	5	Celestial language	5	Arrows	5	Lightning	5	Dragon
6	Wisdom	6	Demon language	6	Smoke	6	Necrotic	6	Elemental
7	Attacks	7	Devil language	7	Paint	7	Poison	7	Fey
8	Damage	8	Dragon language	8	A weapon	8	Psychic	8	Fiend
9	Armor Class	9	Fey language	9	Wine	9	Radiant	9	Giant
10	Hit point per HD	10	Telepathy	10	Small beast	10	Thunder	10	Humanoid
11	Saving throws	11	With animals	11	Small tools	11	Special	11	Monstrosity
12	Save DCs	12	With plants	12	Rope	12	Special	12	Undead

d12	Influence	d12	Misdirection	d12	Movement	d12	Perception
1	Fear	1	Move silently	1	Walk	1	Keen hearing
2	Hate	2	Leave no traces	2	Jump	2	Keen sight
3	Paranoia	3	Impersonate someone	3	Levitate	3	Keen smell/taste
4	Friendship	4	Become invisible	4	Fall slowly (or glide)	4	Keen touch
5	Loyalty	5	Create an illusory "twin"	5	Burrow	5	Darkvision
6	Lust	6	Pass as another creature	6	Climb	6	X-ray vision
7	Sadness	7	Leave no memories	7	Fly	7	Blindsight
8	Trust	8	Ignored (in a group of allies)	8	Swim	8	Detect invisibles
9	Mercy	9	Hide in shadows, fog, etc.	9	Ignore bad terrain	9	Detect lies
10	Joy	10	Prestidigitation	10	Pass through walls	10	See auras
11	Kindness	11	Create small illusions	11	Walk on water	11	Vague prophecies
12	Shame	12	Lie very convincingly	12	Teleport	12	Truesight

d12	Protection	d12	Reduction	d12	Restoration	d12	Transformation	d12	Travel
1	Thirst	1	Grappled	1	Poisoning	1	Insect	1	Nearby place
2	Hunger	2	Restrained	2	Diseases	2	Rat	2	Know location
3	Drowning	3	Blinded	3	Blindness	3	Owl	3	A single place
4	Suffocation	4	Prone	4	Deafness	4	Snake	4	Random place
5	Exhaustion	5	Stunned	5	Petrification	5	Wolf	5	Ethereal Realm
6	Fear	6	Charmed	6	Lost limbs	6	Fish	6	Fairy land
7	Charm	7	Paralyzed	7	Aging	7	Tiger	7	Hall of Deities
8	Sleep	8	Petrified	8	Insanity	8	Ape	8	The Abyss
9	Bondage	9	Diseased	9	Exhaustion	9	Bear	9	Mirror world
10	Petrification	10	Frightened	10	Paralysis	10	Hawk	10	A minute ago
11	Disease	11	Poisoned	11	Lycanthropy	11	Boar	11	A day ago
12	Poisoning	12	Insane	12	All curses	12	"Creatures" table	12	100 years ago

d12	Spell	d12	Spell
1	Create a wall, obstacle	7	Control people's minds
2	Create a building of of thin air	8	Stop time for a moment
3	Move things around (telekinesis)	9	Summon invisible spirits to serve you
4	Enlarge or reduce people	10	Magically bind someone to a promise or contract
5	Destroy magic or create anti-magic places	11	Make the floor sticky, slippery, or dangerous etc.
6	Find or identify special things or places	12	Control the weather

Item appearance

The list below is shorter than the universal table, but more detailed. Its result also indicate items that are more impressive than most. The last six lines contain two options each, since these will not necessarily fit any item. In these lines, the first entry is better for clothing and the second for weapons, wands, etc. Some items – such as rings or book covers – can use either. On the other hand, if you want a rubbery sword or a cloak made of bones, go right ahead – the choice is yours.

d20	Appearance
1	Deep and dark like the night sky. You cannot see the stars move, but they do.
2	Looks as if it was made of contained fire, without heat.
3	A sea of desperate faces float around with open mouths, making no sound.
4	Its parts seem to flow slightly within, like water.
5	Luminescent. It glows in the dark but provides no light for you.
6	It contains one or more eyes that occasionally seem to blink.
7	Made to resemble flowers and plants, with a sweet, slightly narcotic smell.
8	Reflective, like a perfect mirror.
9	Ultrablack – darker than your pupils, and makes the light around them a bit weaker.
10	Beautifully prismatic, like a cross between a rainbow and the aurora borealis.
11	Old bloodstains that can never be cleaned.
12	Incredibly fancy. Decorated with precious stones or metals.
13	Resembles (or contains the image of) an animal, demon, monster, child, etc.
14	Has small pulsating protuberances that resemble cists.
15	Made of living, flayed flesh, or human skin. Might bleed if damaged. / Made of bones.
16	Smooth, squishy and wet, resembling octopus' skin. / Semi-transparent, like hardened glass or crystals.
17	Covered in scales of a dragon or great lizard. / Engraved with glowing runes.
18	Decorated with large feathers of extinct birds. / Perfectly polished metal.
19	Rubbery and flexible, but still very resistant. / Radiant, like a beam of light or "laser sword".
20	Covered in the strangely colored fur of an unknown beast. / All bent and twisted.

Item distinctions

The first table in this section applies to all items. The second one applies to armor (plus robes, cloaks, and most other forms of clothing) and the third, to weapons (or any magical item that attacks or hinders enemies). Some magical items will fit into more than one category, while others will have no obvious fit. Choose the one(s) that suits you better.

d6	This item…
1	Is unnaturally cold (or warm) to the touch.
2	Is nearly indestructible.
3	Is easily concealable (or retractable, etc.)
4	Is faithful to its rightful owner.
5	Is capable of (slowly) moving by its own.
6	Can change to a different shape on command.

d8	This armor…
1	Adheres to your body, comfortable like skin.
2	Makes you look scary, like some kind of creature (albeit keeping a mostly humanoid shape).
3	Is full of spikes and will hurt people grappling with you.
4	Has functioning organs (eyes, arms or tentacles) that you can use as your own.
5	Is heavy and makes you move slowly, but grants incredible protection.
6	Has built-in weapons, activated on command (blades, claws, etc.).
7	Is dark and concealing, perfect for hiding.
8	Protects you from one or more ordinary hazards (hunger, cold, suffocation, etc.)

d10	This weapon…
1	Cannot talk, but moans in satisfaction (often obscenely, seldom loudly) when it kills a creature.
2	Leaves bruises that won't heal (at least not ordinarily).
3	Steals magic from its targets,
4	Makes slain foes boil from the inside. Eyes pop out, etc.
5	Collects the souls of your enemies.
6	Heals you when you slay a foe.
7	Cuts through different planes. Useful against intangible foes, but waving it may hit unintended targets.
8	Curls like a snake on command.
9	Returns to its owner if thrown or lost.
10	Has a twin weapon that it loves or hates.

Cursed Items

As you've seen, not all items in a dark fantasy setting will be cursed, but many – specially the most powerful ones – will have *some* cost. You can find some good examples in books like Stormbringer, Lord of the Rings (not only the One Ring but also the palantíri) and the opera The Ring of the Nibelung. For a horror-oriented example, try The Monkey's Paw, the Hellraiser franchise or the H. P. Lovecraft's stories containing the Necronomicon. Remember that cursed items do not have to be entirely negative – on the contrary, what makes them interesting is that they are incredibly useful while also being very dangerous.

d20	This item…
1	Has a mind of its own and subtly tries to convince you to reach its goals.
2	Will drive you insane over time.
3	Will break if used in discordance to certain commandments.
4	Will not enter the sheath (or backpack, etc.) before it participates in a battle.
5	Has to be bathed in the blood of the innocent every 1d100 weeks (the victim is killed).
6	Will look for revenge against you if abandoned.
7	Gives you bad luck until you completely abandon it.
8	Is coveted by everyone who lays eyes on it.
9	Is fearsome and breeds distrust amongst your allies.
10	Makes you the first target in a fight.
11	Melds into your body and becomes hard to remove.
12	Self-destructs if used too often, harming you in the process.
13	Hurts you when you roll a natural 1. It feels good.
14	Identifies you as the villain of a half-forgotten prophecy.
15	Makes loud noises at inappropriate times.
16	Becomes increasingly powerful, until you cannot wield it anymore.
17	Contains a trapped spirit that yearns for freedom and resents its wielders.
18	Wants to return to its creator, and will subtly influence events to do so.
19	Will allow its (deceased) first owner to gradually possess you.
20	Wants to hurt the ones you love.

Mechanics

It is up to you to decide the statistics of each item. However, if you need to come up with something on the fly, you can roll 1d20 and use the table below. These statistics work for both contemporary games and Dark Fantasy Basic. You can roll once in each column if you want more variety (except rarity; you should choose that on your own, maybe by averaging your results).

Bonus. This bonus applies to attack rolls, damage, armor class, etc.

Damage. The damage a "destruction" item causes.

Maximum spell level. If an item replicates a spell, this is the maximum spell level allowed.

Saving throws. If some kind of damage allows a saving throw, augment the damage from d6s to d10s (or d8s if the saving throw only halves damage). The difficulty for all saving throws is suggested in the table below.

Score/checks. If an item allows a saving throw, this is the saving throw difficulty check. If an item changes one ability score to a fixed number, use this number. If a cursed item tries to control you mind, the saving throw also uses this number, etc.

Limitations. Items with powerful effects often have built-in limitations. Some are specific, functioning only in certain circumstances (for example, only against green dragons, not all dragons). Some require a person with certain alignment or class to use, or even certain deeds ("before the sword trusts you, you must slay an evil undead").

Some items can be used only once or a few times a day (with the exception of protection, destruction, and movement). Others can be used once every hundred years (for example, an item that permanently changes your traits), or are destroyed after a single use. Some have expendable "charges" that are replenished at dawn, dusk… or when the item is bathed in human blood, slays a monster, etc.

The details are up to the GM.

Other details. Fill the rest of the details as appropriate for you game. All weapons should require attunement, except the ones that are consumable or very simple (for example, a sword that does nothing except a +1 to +3 bonus to attack and damage).

d100	Rarity	Bonus	Damage	Max spell level	Score/check
01-10	Common	None	1d4	Cantrip	13
11-54	Uncommon	+1	1d6	2	15
55-84	Rare	+2	2d6	5	17
85-99	Very Rare	+3	3d6	8	19
00	Legendary	+4	4d6	9	20+