

Powers and Perils - The Laws of Magic

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Powers and Perils

The Laws of Magic

Creating Magic Items in P&P

Having realistic and consistent guidelines for the creation of magic items is very important to the feel of the campaign. The spells and powers in Powers & Perils are taken largely from the vast body of historical and fantasy literature. As such, they conform to several principles or laws that magic was thought to function within. These laws can be used to help create consistent and interesting magic items for any campaign. They are especially important as guidelines for characters who wish to create their own magic items.

Magic devices should be hard to come by and much sought after, and a mage should be able to make devices for himself. Deciding how it is possible to make a thing, or what rare components should go into it, is often difficult-These magical laws offer a good source of ideas.

The Law of Association

If two things have components in common, they may act in common. If the liver is the source of a Lion's courage, then if you eat the liver of a lion you slay, you will gain its courage also. You may also control something through elements common to another thing you control. Feathers will help you control the actions of birds (as opposed to the Law of Similarity, below, where feathers may be used to cause flight).

The Law of Similarity

Effects have appearances similar to their causes. This is the law that covers so-called "Sympathetic Magic." When ensorcelling a flying carpet, part of the spell casting can include attaching bird feathers to it, chirping over it, or moving it through the air while chanting in the Tongue of Wind. The similarity does not have to be visual. Sound, smell, texture, and taste can work as well. The general rule is "like produces like."

The Law of Contagion

This says that objects once in contact continues to interact after separation. The Black Curse, the Seeking Death, Spirit Death, Simulcrum, Tracking, Vengeful Horror, and Curse spells from P&P all use this principle. The influence of one object over another in this manner decreases during separation, depending upon how long they were in contact before separation and how long they have been separated. This is why great mages guard their hair and toenail clippings, lest some enemy should find them. There is a link between cause and effect (i.e. between a wound and the weapon or warrior that caused it; just like the Damage Reversal spells from P&P).

The Laws of Contagion and Similarity are often found together. Scales from Ralf the firesnake can be used to aid a Fascination spell on Ralf (by Contagion) or against any firesnake (by Similarity).

The Law of Rarity

Rarity is directly related to power. Rare items are innately special and usually make better sources or focuses for magic. A spell that always works when Diamonds are a material component will rarely work (or be much less powerful) when sand pebbles are used instead. Ingredients work best if they are expensive (gold, silver, platinum, gemstones), rare (four-leaf clover), or hard to obtain (the left testicle of a living dragon). Obtaining the raw material for your magic wand by going out on midnight of the first full moon of fall to cut a branch of hazel from a tree that has been hit by lightning with the single strike of a virgin axe would put any wizard to a lot of trouble. It would also be likely to increase the power of the wand. The conditions that cause this rarity should as often as possible be related to the powers intended for the item through the first three laws. If it is a belt for shapechanging to a cat, it should be collected from a cat killed and skinned under the first full moon. If it is a wand for lightning spells, it should be cut from a tree struck by lightning, or during a natural thunderstorm.

The Law of Personification

In a magical fantasy environment, any phenomenon may be alive and possessing a personality. The more powerful or larger it is, the more likely that it will have an active one. The Tongues spell allows the caster to communicate with these forces or things. This law is the source for the elementals, dryads, water sprites and so on. To a large extent, Tonahs are the focus for the intelligence and personality of the race they represent, although this is not the only connection. This law is fairly easy to understand intuitively. How many people have kicked a stool they have tripped over, as if the stool could feel the punishment? Primitive animism has its roots in this concept.

The Law of Words of Power

This law says that there are words that hold power in themselves. This power resides as much in the sounds themselves as in the meaning of the word- The True Name of a demon can be used to summon it or gain power against it. To have control of a familiar, it is necessary to know and use its true name. These words can be very dangerous to the uninitiated, as they can be used by total novices unintentionally, and without control over the results. Note that using the proper supernatural tongue involves the law of association as well.

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Other Laws

Many other, less important laws do exist, but these are the crucial ones to creating a consistent system for the logic behind how magic items are created. Any Laws of magic can be used, so long as they are internally consistent. The logic behind the P&P system supports the premise that magic is rare and powerful, that wizards are scarce but often very powerful, and that it is possible and even desirable for a wizard to create most of the magic items he needs himself, rather than combing treasure hoards for cast-offs.

Creating Magic Items

The materials must be worked or forged from their most basic form by the wizard who will be creating the item. This is because all previous owners or users will have left their imprint on the item (Law of Contagion). A sword bought at market, no matter how fine, cannot be enchanted or ensorcelled. The materials should be very fine, very expensive, and usually rare (Law of Rarity). They should also have as much in common as possible with the magic to be cast on them (Law of Association). If you make a ring for summoning a Demon or entrapping a Jinn, enscribing the name of the beast on the device is necessary (Law of Words of Power). If the item being Created is to be dedicated to the destruction of certain beasts, you must use appropriate parts from those beasts in its creation (Law of Similarity) and perhaps engrave the item with the names of supernatural forces hostile to the creature (Law of Words of Power). If it is a sword to kill a particular dragon or lich, using something once used or possessed by the individual is important (Law of Contagion).

Ideally, the method for creation of a magic item, especially a powerful one, should use as many of the laws as possible. As an example, here is a detailed analysis of the creation of the screaming sword.

Readers are urged to consult the beginning of "The Devices of Oom" for a complete description of the Screaming Sword of Invisible Fire.

Materials: all the materials are as valuable as possible.

Procedure: purify workspace for balance magic. This will increase the success chance of any balance spells cast in the area by 10%, and is a good step to start with. Purification dampens the influence of previous events on the actions about to be taken, reducing the effect of the Law of Contagion.

Enhance Zehani Wolf Blood: this serves several purposes. Enhanced normal wolf blood causes permanent uncontrollable battle fury when drunk. This is because the enhancement exaggerates and concentrates the fury of the wolf into the blood (Law of Association). By enhancing Zehani Wolf (balance aligned) blood, the desired result (concentration of the fury of the wolf against the enemies of balance) is obtained. Since the Zehani Wolf hates Law and Chaos, this attribute also can be transmitted to the blood by the Law of Association.

Forge Sword: the sword is made of silver. Silver is much more valuable than iron or steel (Law of Rarity).

Quench Sword in Enhanced Zehani Wolf Blood: the final act of making the sword is its quenching, where it is heated, up one last time then plunged into a cool liquid to temper the metal. By quenching the sword in the blood, it gains its limited battle fury through the Law of Contagion. This requires an ensorcelment spell to prepare the blade to receive the characteristics of the blood. The blood is destroyed in the process, so it is important not to err at this point.

Cast Astral Fire on Sword: the normal way such a spell will function is that it may be used a certain number of times per day and require no mana from the user to generate the spell. In this case, the desired result was a continuing spell that functioned perpetually while the sword was held. The 'mana for this could not be stored in the sword, so it had to come from some outside source. Since the spell lasts six phases normally at a cost of 14 mana points, using the holder as a source for the mana for the generation of the spell (from his casting ability or energy level) was a perfectly acceptable alternative.

Cast Opposition on Sword: simple ensorcelment. This spell fits in very well with the logic behind the sword, giving the user another way to attack supernatural Chaos and Law beings, if they survive the Astral Fire.

Cast Chaos and Law Immunities on the Sword: these are also simple ensorcelments, to protect the user against the powers of the supernatural beings that this sword is designed to destroy.

A Note on Game Balance

The judge should never allow the creation of an item that does not have reasonable weaknesses, or that has too many spells in it. It might be theoretically possible to create a suit of armor that was enchanted for AV, intelligent, had Teleport, Flight, Insubstantiability, Interworld Travel, Regeneration, Chaos, Law Balance, Elder and Sidh immunity to magic, Might, Dark Sight, and a bloody partridge in a pear tree, but no gamemaster should permit it.

The Screaming Sword, although a powerful weapon, would not unbalance a campaign. It has a consistent idea running through all its powers (a weapon against law and chaos supernatural influences), it has several disadvantages (Energy drain, battle fury against Law or Chaos, and the fact that the user will get no help from friends; he who walks in a sea of Astral Fire walks alone). It also has several holes: it gives the user no protection against missile fire, Elder, Sidh, or Balance spells. It is, however, a very interesting item, bound to create strange situations and heroic actions. Since it is so dangerous to the user, Oom himself never intended to use it when he made it. He made it because, by doing so, he could further the cause of Balance (and make a little money in the bargain).

A Suggested Reading List

The following books have interesting systems or details on magical rules and rituals. Although they do not always agree, they can add insight to your magic items. Books noted with an asterix have useful diagrams and illustrations.

- *Bezoir, Jeany; *Magicks and Ceremoynes*, Lancer Books, New York, 1972.
- Bias, Clifford; *Ritual Book of Magic*, Samuel Weiser, Inc., York Beach, ME, 1981.
- *Blum, Ralph; *The Book of Runes*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1982.
- P.E.I. Bonewits, *Real Magic*, Coward, McCann Geoghegan, New York, 1971.
- Various authors, *Authentic Thaumaturgy*, The Chaosium, Albany, CA, 1978.
- Crowley, Aleister, *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings*, Samuel Weiser, Inc., New York, 1973.
- Frazer, Sir James; *The Golden Bough*, Macmillan, Inc., New York, 1950.
- *King, Francis and Skinner, Stephen; *Techniques of High Magic*, Warner Books, Inc., New York, 1976,
- Love, Jeff; *The Quantum Gods*, Compton Russell Ltd., Great Britain, 1976.
- *Regardie, Israel; *How to make and Use Talismans*, Samuel Weiser, New York, 1972.
- Regardie, Israel; *A Garden of Pomegranates*, Llewellyn Publications, ST. Paul, MN, 1970.
- *Wang, Robert; *The Secret Temple*, Samuel Weiser, Inc., New York, 1980.

Various "schools" of magic have their own systems of associations used for making spells. For instance, in the Golden Dawn system, a love spell could include symbols of the planet Venus, the tarot card "The Empress", the hebrew letter *daleth*, copper, and seven-pointed

stars. One can find tables of these associations in some books on the occult. They are sometimes called "tables of correspondences." *A Garden of Pomegranates* by I. Regardie and *777* by Aleister Crowley have examples of these tables.

In addition, the following books from fantasy literature have detailed and interesting magic systems, although this is only a small selection.

- Chalker, Jack; *Lilith: A Snake In The Grass*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1981.
- de Camp, L. Sprague and Pratt, Fletcher; *The Compleat Enchanter*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1975.
- Garrett, Randall; *Murder and Magic, Lord Darcy Investigates and Too Many Magicians*, Ace Books, New York, 1966.
- Hardy, Lyndon; *Master of the Five Magics*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1980.
- Hardy, Lyndon; *Secret of the Sixth Magic*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1984.

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