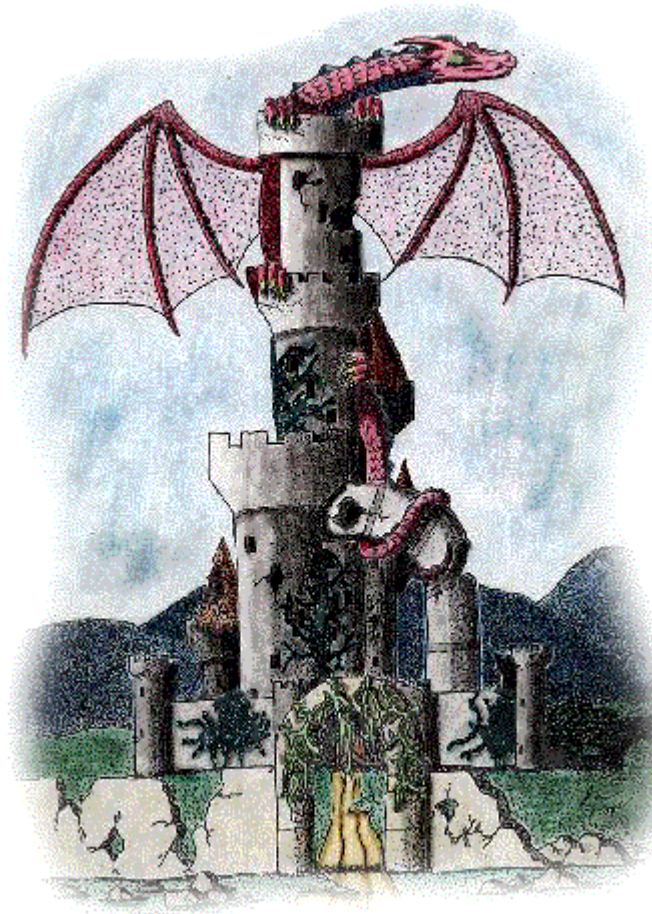# Uncle Figgy's Guide to Good Fantasy, or...
Watch Where You're Pointing that Sword!

v 1.1

Introduction

Fantasy is probably one of the hardest genres to write about. There's Pure Fantasy, High Fantasy, Low Fantasy, Epic Fantasy, Dark Fantasy, Science Fantasy, Contemporary Fantasy, Quest Fantasy, Sword & Sorcery. And attempts to define any of those categories are lame at best. Sure, some are pretty easy: Contemporary Fantasy, for instance, is Fantasy that happens in the "here and now." But just what is Science Fantasy? Is it Fantasy where magic is used like technology or is it Science Fiction where the "science" is more like magic -- having no real basis in science fact? And what about Dark Fantasy? Fantasy where life is cheap, the world is dirty and gritty, and the heroes die horrible, painful deaths fighting demons against which there is little hope? What about the Horror genre? It has very little "real" science in it. Couldn't it be called a "Dark, Contemporary Fantasy?"

There is, however, one thread that runs continuously through all these genres: Magic. Some unexplained phenomenon that drives (or at least is an indispensable element of) the story. But, as far as Fantasy (Fantasy writing, at least) goes, magic is one of the most overlooked aspects of the genre. Go to any good-sized bookstore and you'll find a lot of books on historical weapons and armor. Books on castles and costumes and diet and anything else you want to know about the Medieval or Renaissancian periods. But you'll find next to nothing about how magic would have affected those things. As a writer, and as a GameMaster, it's your job to figure out how magic would affect the siege of a castle. It's your job to figure out how magic would affect public health and safety.

That's where "Uncle Figgy's Guide to Good Fantasy" comes in. First and foremost, this Guide will focus exclusively on what your Uncle Figgy calls "Pure" Fantasy: A medieval/renaissance world where magic works. Secondly, because there are so many reference books out there for authors of Fantasy, I'm not going to cover such mundane things as the details of a typical peasant hut or the social significance of the village inn. The main aim of this guide is a common-sense discussion of magic and how it would affect the typical peasant hut. This guide is to help you do your job of figuring out how magic would affect the siege of a castle. To help you do your job of figuring out how magic would affect public health and safety.

One important thing to keep in mind when reading this guide is that it's not totally comprehensive -- it really couldn't be, simply because of all the ingredients that go into Fantasy. So while I go into as much as I can, some of your favorite items might have gotten left out and I really couldn't go into as much depth as I might have wanted on some of the things I did include. I mean, I easily could have written an entire "Uncle Figgy's Guide to World Mythology" or "Uncle Figgy's Guide to the Afterlife" (and I guess I still could if enough people ask for it). But, I did try to cover as much as I can about those things I felt haven't already been covered to death by other writers. I think I did a pretty good job that more than makes up for the lack that I felt was out there, so read on, brave adventurer. Your fantastic world awaits!

Chapter 1

Fantastic Style

Traditional Fantasy has a swashbuckling style: light, quick and cinematic. Realism takes a back seat to the drama of the story. PCs take heroic risks and come out relatively unscathed (*stupid* risks are another matter entirely). Heroes stand toe-to-toe with a dozen lesser foes and sneer confidently at the odds. "Uncle Figgy's Guide to Good Fantasy" talks a lot about the realistic effects magic might have on a medieval/pre-Renaissance world, the realism of the Fantasy "dungeon", and even the realism of the typical Fantasy economy. Any bit of this may be ignored in favor of the style of Fantasy that you (and your players) enjoy.

Your Uncle Figgy enjoys the cinematic style of play, but with heavy doses of realism. Ordinarily, mixing these two things is like trying to mix oil and water. The key is to add those realistic elements that are humorous, dramatic and non-fatal, while throwing out those realistic elements that are depressing, mundane, deadly and would slow down the game. The section on "Illness and Disease" (Chapter 9) is a good example: Having a character suffer through the agony and debilitation of tetanus might be realistic, but is hardly fun for the player in question; and while it may be dramatic, it's terribly depressing. But having that same character suffer through a cold is not only realistic, it also can be funny and dramatic.

By adding those little realistic touches that have no real effect on the game, you can safely take away all of the "depressing" bits while still maintaining an illusion of realism in your world.

Levels of Magic

Magic is what makes Fantasy fantasy. But just how much magic do you have in your world? Two fantasy worlds, totally similar in every respect, can have an extremely different feel if their levels of magic are at opposite ends of the scale. How much magic you have in your world can affect everything from its creatures and ecosystem to its rulership and economics. Most importantly to gameplay, however, it can even affect the types of characters (both player and non-player) that are available to choose from.

In a world where magic is very common and most people can cast spells, for instance, wizards will be cheap to hire and nobody will respect them too much. They're just another working schmuck trying to make a living. But in a world where magic is almost unknown, wizards will be something special, maybe even revered as gods.

To help out with this tough job, your Uncle Figgy has created the following scale. Like anything else in gaming (or in reality, for that matter), these categories are just individual spots in a spectrum that usually blends smoothly from one spot to the next.

Some worlds might fit totally into one category with no overlap, while another might fit somewhere between the categories. Some worlds might fit into several of the categories (reflecting a world where there are different magical levels in different locations).

Low Magic, Low Power

Magic is very rare and the magic that *does* exist is very low powered. One or two talented individuals from each country might have the ability to stop bleeding, cure fever or make their gardens grow a little bit better. Wizard characters will be very rare and, while their powers might be something special, they're not going to be big movers and shakers. Most people might not believe that such people exist or the belief might be that the wizard's power is either a fraud or somehow explained away as something other than magic. The wizards are going to be nothing more than the boy down the street who has a sixth-sense or the king's daughter who can tell the truth from a lie. Most of them will have some other profession that is supplemented by their abilities. Magical artifacts and weapons, unless left behind from a time when magic was more prevalent or powerful, are going to be very few and far between and are mostly going to consist of simple charms that have a very small effect. Things like crosses that scare away the undead (which will also most likely be very rare) or the dagger that's been in the family for generations that can't be broken and never rusts. One might also find charms that, in game terms, give a bonus of about +1 to avoid some type of disease/sickness.

Low Magic, Medium Power

Magic is very rare and the magic that *does* exist is moderately powered. One or two talented individuals from each country might become great heroes or healers (or villains) because their abilities set them apart. Wizard characters will be very rare, but those few individuals are likely to have an effect on the world even if only in myths and stories. Low-powered attack and defense magic are possible in this kind of a world. Wizards become slightly more than human to be revered and praised or (in a superstitious area) feared and destroyed. None of them will be major movers and shakers in the grand scheme of things, but many will have the rulers or religious organizations of an area seeking them out. Legends of the historical Ninja and Shao-Lin priest are closest to this type of world -- normal individuals with enough power to make them mysterious and special. Magical artifacts and weapons are going to be few and far between, but now the sword that gives a +1 to hit and damage or the sword that glows in the presence of a specific type of enemy will probably become available.

Low Magic, High Power

Magic is very rare and the magic that *does* exist is highly powerful. One or two talented individuals from each country will be known throughout the length and breadth of the land (and probably in other lands as well). Wizard characters will be rare, but those few individuals are going to be major movers and shakers of the world at large. Kingdoms will vie for their favor and do their best to hire them for wars. They will probably be feared, but no one would dare approach them because of their power. The whole range of magic is available to these people and many will have long-reaching plans

and goals intertwined with the future of society, if not being the outright rulers of their respective lands. Wizards in such a game make far better NPC patrons and villains than they do PCs. Depending on what version of the King Arthur legend you read, Merlin could be considered to be one of these types of wizard. Magical artifacts and weapons are going to be few and far between, but greater strengths are available, mostly created by the wizards for the express purpose of giving them to their most trusted servants, soldiers and lackeys. Potent magical weapons or items of great healing power are possible at this level and their rarity makes them great quest objects.

Medium Magic, Low Power

Magic is common enough that one or two wizards will come out of every duchy (or possibly every city). The power of these people will not be of any great importance, but they will be common enough that people won't scoff at their existence. The average view of the populace would most likely be that it would be great to have one of those people living among you, but you can get by without. They're still not going to be movers and shakers of the world, and most of them will have some other job that they supplement with their ability. The average adventuring group *might* have one in the party, but it's not necessary as the non-magical feel for the most part that they can do without. Magical artifacts and weapons become more common, but still not very useful.

Medium Magic, Medium Power

Magic is common enough that one or two wizards will come out of every duchy (or possibly every city). These people will be set apart from the common man because of their abilities and they will be sought out for their usefulness. Any city would be proud to have at least one of these individuals living among them and cities that don't have them will lament their loss. Many of them will be renowned for their specialties. War begins to take on a new aspect because many kingdoms will have at least a few of these people working for them and their powers are significant enough to turn the tide of a battle. The average adventuring group *might* have one in the party, and he'll be a very useful addition. Magical artifacts and weapons are more common, but still scarce -- famous (or infamous) is the warrior who carries a magical blade or wears magical armor, and history might remember the name of his weapon before they remember him -- and still of limited usefulness. At this level of magic, the average non magical "adventurer" begins to slightly lose his usefulness.

Medium Magic, High Power

Magic is common enough that one or two wizards will come out of every duchy (or possibly every city). These people will be powerful and many might begin to war with each other, much to the detriment of the surrounding countryside. Kingdoms will rush to befriend these people for the usefulness of their magic. The face of war becomes different as opposing wizards fight to destroy the enemy forces or protect their own. It wouldn't be uncommon to see an army led by a wizard-king, protecting his soldiers beneath a magical dome while an opposing wizard-king rains stones of fire and brimstone down upon them. It is doubtful that the average adventuring party would see one of these individuals as

they are too lofty for such goals. Exceptions would be those very rare wizards who long for the thrill of adventuring more than they long for the thrill of warfare. Magical artifacts and weapons are still fairly uncommon, but highly powerful and highly desirable. Unlike Low Magic, High Power, many might be found in the hands of those other than a wizard's personal retinue as the (relative) abundance of mages and powerful magic makes "magic for-hire" situations more feasible. At this level of magic, the average non-magical character has little usefulness except in mass-combat situations, and a non-magical "adventurer" would have to be very powerful to stand toe-to-toe with a wizard.

High magic, Low Power

Magic is so common that everyone knows a wizard. Their powers are low, but walk into any town with a headache and someone will point you to a person who can fix the problem with magic. These people will most likely have other jobs that they can supplement with their abilities. The world doesn't change much, except life tends to be a little bit easier and cleaner thanks to a myriad of small, helpful magics. Wars are similar, a little bit longer and a little bit cleaner with just a little bit less loss of life. Most adventuring parties will have one or two of these wizards who help the group in more ways than just their special powers, often because they are also warriors or thieves or what-have-you. Magical artifacts and weapons are common enough that everybody might have one or two, but they're not all that useful -- life wouldn't change without them, it would just be a little bit tougher and dirtier. No one would cry over their loss.

High Magic, Medium Power

Magic is so common that everyone knows a wizard. Every city is proud of their wizards, who often act as protectors/healers. Wizards have become a common commodity and their power has made magic a competitive market. Magical shops offering items of varying usefulness become possible because wizards have to make a living somehow. Wars become radically different with every kingdom having one or two (maybe more for a big kingdom) platoons of dedicated wizards. Unless there's some form of honor system where wizards only fight wizards, the average foot soldier becomes pretty much useless except in those rare battles that do not involve magic. Adventuring parties will have a couple of wizards, either as companions or hirelings, and they won't want to do without them. Magical artifacts and items are common enough to support magical trade and possibly even the beginnings of magical technology in the homes of the rich and powerful (enchanted water closets, magical refrigerators, magical air-conditioning, etc.). Anyone who can afford it can own something magical. Non-magical adventurers lose most of their usefulness unless they are very powerful. In fact, at this magic level, a powerful non-magical hero or villain will be more renowned/famous than a wizard hero or villain.

High Magic, High Power

Magic is so common that everyone knows a wizard. Every city has a few powerful wizards who probably run everything behind the scenes. More powerful wizards would most likely rule over those of lesser power or those with no magic. War is practically

unrecognizable compared to the historical wars of our world. Enchanted creatures, elementals, constructs and undead fight most of the battles, while many wizards will blast enemy lands from far away -- blighting them with plagues, fires, lightning, etc. All the while, the beleaguered land's wizards use their magic to fight against the enemy's magic. Magical shops are features in every major city, with potions, scrolls and items and weapons of every type for sale to anyone with the money to buy. Adventuring parties rely mostly on their wizards, who strengthen the non-magical characters with temporary or permanent enhancements. It becomes unfeasible for a non magical party to ever try anything without some form of magical aid, whether it be actual help from a wizard or an armory full of magical weapons and armor. Magical weapons and artifacts are everywhere, as people can't imagine life without some form of magical help. Non-magical characters are useless except as cannon fodder unless they have some form of magical aid.

Very High Magic, Low Power

Magic is so common that *everyone* is a wizard. Everybody in the world has some form of low-powered magic. Very minor abilities are everywhere and no one who can do magic is special in any way. In fact, the only people who are special are those with no magic whatsoever. Magic items are relatively non-existent since nobody really needs them. Wars are a little bit longer and a little bit cleaner, but still pretty normal. The only time anyone will actively seek out any specific wizard is if she is at the head of her field.

Very High Magic, Medium Power

Magic is so common that *everyone* is a wizard. Everybody in the world is loaded with attack magic, defense magic, healing magic and any other kind of magic you can think of. Weapons practically vanish because nobody needs them. Wars are fought entirely with spells because, let's face it, there aren't any non-wizards. Battle becomes a matter of who has the best defense and who has the best offense, and the person with the best of both is generally the winner. Magic items and magical technology run rampant -- all as things that can perform those magical functions that you aren't capable of doing (or don't want to do) yourself.

Very High Magic, High Power

Magic is so common that *everyone* is a wizard. Everybody in the world can work magic. Powerful magic. *Very* powerful magic. This world is practically a futuristic society. Think and it happens. You can have what you want, when you want. Cities are virtual magical paradises loaded with magical technology. Wars are fought (if they're fought at all) exclusively by magical beings such as constructs, undead, elementals and the like. Picture a fantasy world where everyone has magical weapons and armor; lives in a house with magical hot and cold running water, magical television, heating, cooling and plumbing; goes to work at a magical factory and drives around in a magical vehicle. Imagine magical starfaring and probably even magical battlemechs. Of course, in a world like this, most of the creatures are probably going to be magical as well, so magical weapons and armor will definitely be a necessity.

Those are Uncle Figgy's twelve levels of magic. Again, I have to say that not all worlds are going to fit exactly into any one of those levels, and some may encompass several levels on the same planet, the same continent or maybe even the same kingdom.

Let's take and build an example world. We'll call it Figland for lack of a better name *grin*. Figland has four continents. The Northeastern continent has Medium Magic, Medium Power throughout most of it, while some backwater areas might be Medium Magic, Low Power and the main cities will be Medium Power. The Southwestern continent, which is fairly unsettled, is Low Magic, Low Power except for the few settled territories that are Low Magic, High Power. The Northwestern and Southeastern continents are Medium Magic, High Power all around.

In the case of Figland, the magic levels are really denoting actual distribution of wizards -- not the kind of magic the land itself is capable of. But we can change that at any time to drastically alter the feel of the world. For instance, maybe the Southwestern continent can't sustain any magical level higher than Low Magic, Low Power anywhere except on its coasts. What this means in the game world is that most non-magical individuals will strive to migrate to the interior of the Southwestern continent where they will have the power they lack in the face of the wizards of other continents.

And, of course, magical level might not have anything to do with the actual *working* of magic. A land might have Very High Magic, High Power in regards to the environment, flora and fauna, but the people of that area might only be able to work that magic at a Low Magic, Low Power level -- which makes warriors much more valuable than if the people were able to manipulate that Very High Magic at a High Power level.

Also, you could even state that the wizards of your world start out as, say, High Magic, Low Power, but only a very few make it to great power levels. And those few would be at a Low Magic, High Power spot while the rest of your world was High Magic, Low Power. This is probably the default of many Fantasy gaming systems: Many start out as wizards at the low levels of power (High Magic, Low Power) but many are unable to advance to the medium levels of power (Medium Magic, Medium Power) and only a very few are able to become masters of magic (Low Magic, High Power) -- TSR's AD&D system features this type of magical setting.

As the creator of your world, you have the final say in how the magic level rates, but that decision should be one of the first you make in regards to your Fantasy world as it will definitely have an effect on how your world looks and feels -- as well as how effective other types of characters might be.

Types of Magic

Another factor in the magic of your world, at least as far as manipulation of magic is concerned, is how that manipulation manifests. Do characters cast "spells" or is magic

more religious, requiring great rituals and many casters? Does everyone have one inherent magical ability and can never learn anything else or do sorcerers simply think about the effect they want, draw the power and make it happen? Your decision here is usually made for you by the game system you've chosen. Most rely on actual "spells". Do a little dance, wave your hands, speak a couple of arcane words and boom, you have magic. This is an easy form of magic that makes wizards fairly powerful. Still others rely on a free-form "you tell me what you want and I'll see if it's possible" kind of thing -- the "think and make it happen" style. Below, I've listed some of the ways of manipulating magic that are the more common in Fantasy gaming and novels. And don't forget that, just like Uncle Figgy's twelve magical levels, a world can consist of all, some or only one of these (and you might have one that I haven't even listed).

Ritualistic Magic

This is magic most like what would be considered "Earth" or "religious" magic. Magic spells are cast through a gestalt effort made by several mages after much ceremony and preparation. Individual combat spells are non-existent, but greater spells that might call lightning to strike an enemy army are possible. Wizards will be highly protected from interruption and attack so that they have the necessary time to work their magic. In a Low Magic world, finding the required number of wizards to cast a spell might be very difficult and could even lead to an epic quest. Also, many Ritualistic mages would probably need to hire bodyguards, warriors, soldiers, etc.

Sympathetic Magic

"Like affects like" is the working phrase of sympathetic magic. All spells that affect anything need something that is somehow similar to that being affected. Want to mend a broken bone? You need the bone of an animal that you have to break, therefore drawing the break from the bone being repaired to the bone being broken. Want to summon a giant weasel? You'll need a regular-sized weasel to do it. Dolls that resemble people are used to hurt those people. Breaking a drinking glass is needed to break the glass in a window. This also tends to preclude individual combat spells because of the time and materials (often called "material components" in gaming) needed. Wizards become more mobile than their Ritualistic counterparts, but still won't venture very far from a stronghold stocked with all the things they need. This would probably be the most common type of magic in a Low Power type of world.

Contagious Magic

Closely akin to Sympathetic Magic (*very* closely akin) is Contagious Magic. The concept behind Contagious Magic is that any part of a whole will continue to affect the whole no matter how far away. (It is interesting to note that the modern Quantum Inseparability Principle, part of Bell's Theorem [J. S. Bell], says almost exactly the same thing: that any two particles, once in contact with each other, continue to influence each other no matter how far apart they may move). Contagious magicians would need some part of a subject to work magic on that subject. Hair or nail-clippings from a human. A chip of stone from a castle. A twig from a tree. From a gaming viewpoint, Contagious

wizards are virtually identical to Sympathetic wizards -- both need extra time to do their work and both need components. Of course, in a world where Contagious Magic is common (or the *only* magic), thieves would be the most popular characters around with every wizard hiring them to get things like nail-clippings, hair from hairbrushes or maybe even blood from a wizard's next victim.

Alchemy

Early chemistry mixed with the supernatural. Alchemy doesn't create magical "effects", per se, but instead creates "portable" magic in the form of potions, balms, unguents, powders, etc. A combination of Ritualistic, Contagious and Sympathetic magic, alchemy requires time, ritual, components, and lots of space. Need a potion that enables a man to fly? You probably need a few feathers from a pegasus, the blood of a bird and a few hundred crushed houseflies (like affects like, remember?). Brew it all together with the ritual that is necessary to imbue it with magical properties (so it's not just some disgusting "Cream of Housefly Soup with Blood and Feathers") and, presto: Potion of Flight. As with the previous three types of wizards, alchemists are not "battle" mages. They need time and components, but they also tend to need lots of space for their equipment. Alchemists, however, would need to hire people to get those components for them, as well as needing bodyguards, soldiers, etc.

Spellcasting

Typical gaming magic. Magic is manipulated through various "spells": usually incantations and gestures mixed with a little bit of Sympathetic or Contagious Magic (called verbal, somatic and material components, respectively), although any of these things can be optional in some systems. In some worlds, each incantation works independently of any others. You learn it like you would memorize, say, a poem, and then you learn another. In other worlds, you must know one spell before you can learn its next-higher counterpart. It is at this type of magic that wizards become useful in one-on-one battles. They aren't limited (too much) by time or components, and can happily join in with other adventurers.

Intuitive Magic

Magic exists all around us, all you have to do is reach out, grab it and manipulate it. "Think, draw power, and make it happen." These mages alter the world through sheer force of will. Wizards are limited only by their players' imaginations (and any system or GM rulings, of course). They can go anywhere without having to worry about having tons of time or a wagonload of material components. There are no spells to learn. These wizards are very useful, but also very difficult for the GM, who has the job of adjudicating all those player imaginings that just won't work. Any GM settling on this type of magic would be wise to assign a "Magic Manipulation" type of skill and then apply bonuses and penalties to it based upon what the player wants her character to do. This is probably the most common type of magic in a world with a High Magic level.

Inborn Magic

All wizards have one magical ability that they are born with. In a High Power setting, a person might be able to manipulate, say, fire in all of its aspects. In a Low Power setting, that individual might only be able to start a fire using readily available, readily flammable objects.

Whatever the case, each wizard is generally limited to only one magical ability. This means that some wizards -- depending on their magical specialty -- might be in high demand while others are considered useless by the public. The former will make a great living just using their inborn ability, the latter will have to learn a trade just to make ends meet. In such a world, there will never be any "spellbooks". No magical libraries. And most likely little to no magical items at all.

These, then, are Uncle Figgy's seven types of magic. As with the twelve levels of magic, don't forget that any world can mix and match and blend any and all of the above. Also, as I've shown, the types of magic will also have an effect on the character types (and their usefulness) in your Fantasy world.

Just as a quick sidebar, most historical "magic" in our world was of the Ritualistic type, with a heavy emphasis on religion and spirituality, mixed with Sympathetic and Contagious. Even historical alchemy was a very ritualistic undertaking with spiritual/religious underpinnings.

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Chapter 2

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Character Types

Because of the limitations of some gaming systems (and in keeping with the magic-oriented goal of this Uncle Figgy's Guide), this section is going to focus on the most common character types found in Fantasy gaming, and how they would be affected by a magical world. I am going to leave out wizards because I discuss them in the Levels of Magic and Types of Magic sections. I also will not deal with Priests/Clerics, because I discuss them in the section on Religion and Magic (Chapter 3).

Thief

The ability of thieves to function in a magical world is largely dependent on the level, types and classes of magic available. For instance, in a world where magic lets one see images of the past or where magic lets one "track" a person by their aura, thieving becomes very risky, indeed. Who, after all, will steal when the chances of getting caught are very high? Consequently, in such a world, pawn-shops/fences would also be very rare -- not having any market to support them.

In a Low Magic, High Power world, however, the wizards themselves will probably be the greatest employers of thieves; hiring them to steal magical items or formulae from their rivals. The thieves themselves will most likely be magically augmented so as to sense and avoid magical traps as well as evade magical detection once the job is done -- making thieving a very high "magic-tech" adventure where the thief himself is much like James Bond.

Contagious Magic wizards, in particular, would have great use for thieves. *Someone* is needed to get ahold of all those locks of hair, articles of intimate clothing and discarded nail clippings necessary to work Contagious Magic. Alchemists, too, would hire thieves to steal necessary components as well as the formula required to work those components.

All in all, thieving in a magical world is more dangerous than thieving in a non-magical world. Good thieves in a magical world will probably have to have some form of magical augmentation just to continue their career. If, however, tracking-type spells are unknown/expensive, only the most powerful would have the ability to find who had stolen from them. The poor, unfortunately, would just have to suffer their loss. This leads to a world where powerful, magically-enhanced thieves steal from the rich and powerful, and the not-so-powerful thieves have to content themselves with only a little bit of gold stolen from the local tavernkeeper.

Thief sub-class: Assassin

Assassins take on new roles in a Fantasy world depending on the levels and types of magic available. In a world with Low Magic, High Power, the only way to destroy an enemy wizard might be through stealth. Alchemists will only need the services of a hired

killer to destroy a rival alchemist. Sympathetic mages won't have much need for them, and Contagious mages need to rely on thieves more than actual assassins. Ritualistic mages, however, might call on them frequently -- especially in a world where wizards are rare and the death of one might mean the end of a Ritualistic circle.

If magical resurrection is very common, assassination becomes less heinous a crime and more of a way of sending a message. This threat carries even more weight if there is a way of killing someone that makes their death permanent. Sort of a "I care enough to have you killed so you'd better stop what you're doing or next time you *won't* be resurrected!"

For the most part, the assassin is subject to the same limitations as the thief; especially in a world where someone can talk to the dead to learn the identity of their killer! A good assassin in a non-magical world would need to make sure that whomever saw her face wouldn't live to tell anyone about it. A good assassin in a non-magical world would need to make sure that even the people she killed never saw her face at all!

Thief sub-class: Spy

In a world where stealing might be too dangerous, selling knowledge will probably be a safer bet. Most thieves, therefore, would become spies. This would most likely be the most common profession for the thiefly type in a world where all magic is of the Ritualistic or Sympathetic types. Wizards hiring spies to learn the location, capabilities and/or rituals of their opponents in the case of Ritualistic magic. Or hiring spies to learn the exact dimensions/plans/blueprints of a ship or castle so that an accurate model may be built by Sympathetic Magicians. Again, these individuals will most likely be (at least in all but the magically poorest worlds) heavily enhanced by enchanted devices.

Bard

In an enchanted world of all but the most magical, the bard becomes a valuable addition to the upper echelon of society. With her stories and tales and songs of heroic deeds and great magics, the bard is a spy who is not a spy. In a Low Magic, Medium or High Power world, the bard's stories and tales will hold priceless clues as to the powers and abilities of rival wizards or the forgotten location of rare and potent magical items (or even that someone has found the forgotten location of that rare and potent magical item). In Medium/High Magic, Medium/High Power worlds, the bard becomes a favorite of the nobility as her stories and songs might hold valuable information about the magical capabilities of opposing countries. Only at the highest levels of magic does the bard lose her effectiveness and favor as anything more than simply an entertainer. This changes, of course, if a bard's songs and stories have inherent magical power of their own (making them spellcasters with rather long casting times for their spells). If this *is* the case, bards will most likely be looked at by the populace with the same scrutiny given other wizards. If bardic magic is known generally to be only beneficial, they might be considered the only *acceptable* form of sorcerer while all other magic users are pariah. An interesting world could be made where *all* the magic is bardic magic.

Warrior/Soldier

Perhaps of all the standard Fantasy "classes", the warrior is the one most affected by the existence of magic. In any Low Power world, the warrior is as effective as he would be in a world without magic. In Medium or High Power worlds, the warrior becomes next to useless without some form of magical augmentation. Also, the *type* of magic available to the average sorcerer is of great importance to the effectiveness of the warrior. In a world of Ritualistic,Alchemical, Contagious or Sympathetic magic, for instance, the warrior is relatively unhindered no matter the power level of magic.

Warriors in a world where there is only Ritualistic magic will be hired by wizards as guards to protect the rituals from interruption. In a world of Alchemical magic, warriors will be hired to go and get those dragon's teeth required by this elixir or those phoenix feathers needed for that unguent. Alchemists will also need guards. Sympathetic and Contagious mages have little need for warriors and more need for spies and thieves.

In the worlds of Spellcasting or Intuitive Magic, however, warriors begin to suffer. Below are some of the thoughts your Uncle Figgy has had on how warriors are affected by magic:

Low Magic, Low Power: Warriors are a necessary part of life. Spells are not powerful enough to hamper their effectiveness. The average warrior is more than a match for the average sorcerer.

Low Magic, Medium Power: The Warrior is still a necessary part of life. While spells become powerful enough to be a considerable threat, wizards are so uncommon that the average warrior will never encounter one. The average warrior will have a tough time beating the average wizard.

Low Magic, High Power: The Warrior is still needed in society, maybe more so. With more powerful summoning magics available to the few wizards that there are, warriors are needed to fight all manner of magical creatures, constructs and undead. Those warriors, however, should not hope to have any chance at all (without some form of magical aid) against the wizard doing all that summoning.

Medium Magic, Low Power: Warriors are a necessary part of life. Spells are not powerful enough to hamper their effectiveness. The average warrior is more than a match for the average sorcerer.

Medium Magic, Medium Power: The warrior is still a necessary part of life, and more of them are needed as many will not survive their encounters with the more common wizards. Many warriors will still never encounter a sorcerer, but those that do will often encounter more than one during a siege or open warfare. Most will die unless magically protected.

Medium Magic, High Power: The warrior becomes much less a necessary part of life. Those that do exist may never encounter a wizard. Warriors who do encounter a wizard

directly stand no chance without some form of magical enhancement. In most battles, if one group of wizards summons something to fight, the opposing group will probably summon something else to fight the results of the first summoning.

High Magic, Low Power: Warriors are a necessary part of life. Spells are not powerful enough to considerably hamper their effectiveness. The average warrior is more than a match for the average sorcerer.

High Magic, Medium Power: The warrior class becomes almost totally ineffective. Wizards are everywhere and their powerful magic make warriors as a large group obsolete. Of course, with this rise in wizards also comes a rise in magical items, weaponry and armor -- giving way to the standard Fantasy treatment of the warrior: uncommon, powerful and armed with at least a magical sword. The average warrior would stand no chance at all in such a world, while the typical PC warrior's magical items would more than help balance the scale. Warfare becomes mostly a case of platoons of wizards blasting platoons of wizards with a few potshots at whatever magically-challenged soldiers who happen to be caught helplessly in the middle.

High Magic, High Power: The warrior class as a whole becomes totally obsolete. Wars are fought mostly by wizards and their constructs, undead and summonings. The glut of expensive-but-powerful magical items, weapons and armor makes the uncommon Fantasy-style warrior into an actual class unto itself -- smaller than the standard class of warrior, yet able to stand toe-to-toe with even the most powerful wizards if they have the right equipment.

Very-High Magic, Any Power: Warriors again regain almost all of their effectiveness because they are spellcasters as well!

Warrior sub-class: Ranger

The ranger is generally viewed as a "woodsy" warrior. Not as big or brawny, but much more knowledgeable of the natural world. They shun cities and thrive in the wilderness. In some cases, they might have magical abilities themselves.

The usefulness of non-magical rangers in a magical world depends upon the types of magic available. Alchemists and Spellcasters who need components will often need rangers to find rare and exotic (and most likely very dangerous) animals. Outside of those, however, the non magical ranger is nothing more than a specialized warrior.

Warrior sub-class: Paladin

Paladins are featured quite prominently in some gaming systems as warriors with some form of religious magic. If they have no magic, Paladins are, like the Ranger, a specialized Warrior (usually an honorable knight of king or church) and subject to the same basic limitations in the face of magic as the standard warrior. The only problem is that, in a highly magical economy, the non-magical Paladin is of less use than the warrior as he often will not let himself be hired to retrieve spell components or make a raid on an

enemy wizard (unless, of course, charged by king or church to do just these things).

Paladins with religious magic are usually warriors with many vows related to whatever religion gives them their power. Their magic is often a watered-down version of that given to priests of the same religion. See the Religion and Magic section.

These, then, are the typical character classes of the average Fantasy game (save Wizard and Priest, each of which are discussed elsewhere) and how they would be affected by the existence of magic. Of course, in a game system without "classes" -- where a player can create any character combination she wants -- these archetypes become much more versatile and useful; especially if magic is available to them as well! A thief with an invisibility spell or some form of magic that lets him elude magical detection is much more efficacious than a non-magical thief. A warrior with a magical sword and magical armor (or the ability to cast actual spells) stands a much better chance of going man-to-man with a sorcerer than a warrior with no magic whatsoever. Magic, no matter the level, stands equal to technology. If a character has access to magic, no matter her class, she becomes much more powerful than a similar character with no magic.

Magic and Game Balance

As can be seen by the "warrior" entry of the Character Types section, certain characters would realistically be greatly affected for either good or bad given the existence, power and rarity (or lack thereof) of magic. The creators of most Fantasy games preserve the standard effectiveness of the warrior class (to name the most obvious) by instituting seemingly arbitrary "game balance" rules that make the warrior stronger than the average wizard. Perhaps she can take more damage before dying than a wizard of the same strength. Maybe she can hit harder. Maybe her pure "physical-ness" makes her more resistant to magic. Or, the game designers might limit the wizards; making them weaker than the average warrior. Perhaps he is more easily injured than a warrior of the same strength. Maybe his physical attacks are weaker or he is limited in the number of spells he can use. Maybe he is limited in the type of armor he can wear or weapons he can wield. For the most part, while these decisions preserve game balance, they can become seriously unrealistic and rather senseless if not fully thought out.

The examples I give in the "warrior" entry explain one way that magic might realistically affect warriors as a class without any limitations placed on the wizards or enhancements placed on the warriors. But there is nothing wrong, however, with having a world where, say, a warrior's pure physical "aura" makes him strongly resistant to magic. In such a world, you can have powerful warriors shrugging off fireballs that would level a castle and then charging, sword raised, at the offending mage.

Whatever you decide is best for your game world, make sure you have an

explanation ready for your players, and make sure you have thought it (and all of its logical conclusions) out as far as you can. Your players *will* want to know *why* their wizard can't wield a sword or wear armor. They'll want to know *why* a warrior is more resistant to magic than a thief. Sure, you might get a group of players who just say, "okay, whatever you say", but how often does that happen?

Uncle Figgy is reminded of the following exchange while talking to one game designer many years ago:

UF: Why can't wizards wield swords?
Designer: Because the intense training involved in magical study precludes any training in weaponry.
UF: But wizards can wield staves. The staff is a more difficult weapon to wield properly than the average sword. Plus it's much heavier than, say, a rapier.
Designer: The wizards can't use the staff to any great effectiveness.
UF: Okay, I guess I can buy that argument. But why can't they wear armor?
Designer: Because the intense training involved in magical study prohibits...
UF: Don't say it. It doesn't take any training to wear armor. It might take some training to get into and out of it quickly, but anyone can wear it. Armor's main limitation is weight.
Designer: [Long moment of silence] Actually, the metal in the armor interferes with the magical energies. If a wizard wore armor, he wouldn't be able to cast spells.
UF [Choosing not to point out the obvious question about leather armors]: Okay, if metal interferes with magical energies, how is it there are magical swords or magical plate-mail? What about all those spells that require metal components?
Designer [Now quite ticked at Uncle Figgy]: All of these decisions were made for the purposes of game balance. They weren't made to be realistic.

Now, in this case, I would have been willing to accept the game designer's explanations *if they had made sense.* They didn't. When writing a story, everything you write, whether it is unrealistic or not, at least has to make sense. Your readers are going to catch it if it doesn't; it hampers the "willing suspension of disbelief" that you need to maintain to capture your audience. The same is true of roleplaying. Whatever decision you make has to make sense. If it doesn't, you lose your players. They want to know *why* this is like this or that is like that. If you don't give them something that makes sense and helps them suspend their disbelief, they get caught on that one little sticking point. Most of them will not get past it. In Fantasy, this is probably the biggest sticking point. Uncle Figgy can't stress this enough: if you make a decision for the purposes of game balance, make sure your reasoning makes sense, and don't forget to think it all through. If you say that metal is resistant to magic, you have no complaint coming when everyone who has to face a wizard is decked out head to toe in iron plating.

Religious beliefs are a powerful force. Many bloody wars have been fought (and are being fought) over nothing more than the question of faith. Fantasy worlds are little

Chapter 3

Religion and Magic

Religious beliefs are a powerful force. Many bloody wars have been fought (and are being fought) over nothing more than the question of faith. Fantasy worlds are little different, except that in most Fantasy worlds, the gods actually take an active hand in shaping events. If you have gods, how many are there? Do they give magic to their followers? Do they need their worshippers to exist? If so, what happens if all of their worshippers are destroyed? Do they have specific spheres of influence or do they overlap? Is it possible for someone who knows Priest Magic to also know "Thaumaturgical" (a generic term for non-divine power) Magic?

In some game systems, these questions are already answered for you. Gods exist and priests cast spells. In these systems, Priest Magic and Thaumaturgical Magic are quite separate. Wizards can't heal and Priests can't throw fireballs. Not many people think about the whys and wherefores of this fact, but it's a good one to think about. After all, if Priests and Wizards could cast the same spells, why would anyone worship the god who allegedly gives the priest her powers? What would the organized church's official stance be toward the wizard who had the same powers as the priesthood? Is he a holy man outside of the organized church, chosen by the god for some specific purpose? Or is he a charlatan, a pretender to the priesthood who has tapped into some nefarious power? By separating Priest Magic from Thaumaturgical Magic, you don't have to worry about these questions. Unfortunately, though, you still have other things to worry about:

No Gods

There are no divine beings to shape the world. All religions are based on nothing more than belief and faith. Without gods supplying the power, Priest Magic is either Thaumaturgical Magic disguised with the ceremonial trappings of the church or is Ritualistic Magic created by the combined power of the believers, focused by the priest. Paladins are nothing more than holy warriors.

One God

There is only one true god and all others are false. At first glance a relatively easy solution, but with its own difficulties. If the god grants power to certain worshippers (priests and/or paladins) where does other magic fit in the grand scheme of things? How does the church convince worshippers of the power of the one true god if the worshippers of a false god can also create miracles through Thaumaturgical Magic? If the one true god shows his power through frequent divine intervention, why would anyone else worship the false gods or choose to be atheist in the face of the true god?

Dualistic Gods

There are two gods at opposing ends -- their wars keep the world in constant motion.

Together, they create the dichotomy of existence: Light and dark. Good and Evil. Positive and Negative. Priestly Magic is based on which of the two gods is giving the power. This is good enough for a simple, black-and-white world with good priests and evil priests; paladins and anti-paladins, but is very limited and not very deep. Sometimes, a neutral god might be added whose job is to make sure that neither of the other gods ever gets too much power lest the world be torn asunder.

Great Pantheon

The world has many gods who love and live and battle for the attention of mortals. Gods of such a world usually have distinct spheres of influence that limits Priest Magic to that represented by their chosen god. Priests of a goddess of fire and light, for instance, are going to have much more destructive spells than the Priests of the god of flowers and healing. Unlike the world of Dualistic Gods, good and evil become subjective concepts. The gods of one city are good to the people of that city as long as they're appeased, but evil to the enemy city on which they rain plague and sickness.

Bucket O' Gods

This world has gods for everything. There's a god of rosebuds, a god of mice, a god of window washers and a god of the spring rain (who isn't much different than the god of the summer rain or the god of the fall rain or even the god of the winter rain). Some take an active hand in running things, others are aloof. Priest magic in such a world is a case of asking the right god for the right effect. Want your flowers to grow? Don't ask the god of mold. Need a blessing on this ship, you might want to stay away from the patron god of sea-serpents. This can lead to an entertaining campaign where every god has a name and the PCs, when using Priest Magic, have to ask the right god for the right benefit. After all, the god of fire has a different idea of a "blessing" than the god of luck...

Most games rely on either the Dualistic Gods scenario, the Great Pantheon scenario or a combination of the two (a world in which there is a pantheon of gods aligned with good, evil or neutrality). One of my own campaign worlds is of the No Gods variety (it actually has two gods but neither of them need power from, nor grant power to, their worshippers and neither takes an active hand in the world). There are three distinct organized churches of this world. Two recognize the existing gods but are under no delusions as to the god's participation in the world -- they pray to them in the hope that they can "talk" the gods into someday supporting their respective causes. The higher ranks of the third church knows that their god does not exist, but will not let the populace in on the secret. This church's Priest Magic is nothing more than Thaumaturgical Magic wrapped in ritual and ceremony and hidden in the trappings of the church. All wizards of this church's country *must* join the church as priests or be destroyed as heretics.

In a second of my campaign worlds, I use the Great Pantheon approach with a twist -- the gods don't battle each other. They are all part of the forces that govern existence. Where the God of Death and Ruin might seem at first glance to be opposed to the God of Life and Growth, they are, in actuality, teammates working toward the greater goal. Each

god knows when to stop his work and let one of his colleagues take over. The priests of each deity get their power directly from the deity, but only powers related to the god's domain, and only powers that further the natural order. The populace itself doesn't really worship any of the gods in particular, but thank them every day for their hard work in maintaining the good working order of the universe.

All in all, our own world is rich in myth and legend that give rise to every form of religion imaginable. Most Fantasy worlds are based loosely on a combination of Greco-Roman and Norse Mythology with (sometimes, but not always) a little bit of Celtic. Uncle Figgy suggests reading all you can about the various mythologies out there before deciding on any one (or combination) for your world.

Priest Magic

In our world, Priest Magic runs more of the Ritualistic type with a little bit of Sympathetic or Contagious thrown in. In such cases, Priests suffer the same limitations as wizards of the Ritualistic type. In most Fantasy gaming, however, Priest Magic is of the Spellcasting variety: a quick prayer to whatever god, a bold gesture and the miracle occurs.

The main concern with Priest Magic is that, since it comes from the god, the god might require that anything done with that magic further the goals of the god. A god of healing, for instance, might be willing to heal practically anybody. But that same god of healing might choose not to heal warriors as warriors exist solely to *hurt* people! The priest prays to god, goes through the required ritual, and nothing happens. Also, should the priest act in ways that the god finds unacceptable, the god might withdraw his power from the priest, rendering him incapable of magic. This could be permanent or only until the priest properly atones for his sins.

Area and Power of Divine Influence

If your world has gods, you have to define how powerful the gods are and how far-reaching their abilities. In a world of One God, you can simply say that the god is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present. Of course, should this be the case, why does the god need priests to spread his teachings or act on his behalf? If evidence of the god is everywhere, people will worship the god without needing priests to interpret the god's whims. And why would anyone dare stand against such a god? Such a world would likely degenerate into a place where everyone believes in the one true god, no one goes against the god's wishes, and everyone lives as wards under the god's care. That's great for fanatics, but not very exciting for a roleplaying game. This, of course, assumes that the god takes a meddling hand in the affairs of mortals. If the god is aloof, then priests *will* be needed to reach him and spread his teachings and do his bidding. If the god is *very* aloof, then priests are no longer a necessity as nothing they do will really matter -- although

they might still exist in the hope that someday they'll reach the god (see the example above of my campaign worlds).

The standard for Fantasy gaming is that (even if there is only one god) the gods are limited in scope, power and range -- which is why they need priests and why they need to grant power to those priests to act on the god's behalf. If the god of one area can't act directly in another area, she'll send a priest to do her bidding. The priest will be needed as a special "conduit" to the god, interpreting the god's wishes and (in the case of gods who need worshippers to survive) sending the power of the people's belief to the god.

A world where there are many omnipotent gods who are also omniscient and omnipresent makes for a world where mortals stand little chance except as pawns for the games of the gods. What's the use in trying to attack of your own free will that enemy kingdom if that kingdom's god can blast you out of existence before you even reach the walls of the castle? And if your god is telling you to try, you can bet that he wants that castle for a reason and he's going to be doing his best to keep the other god from harming you. Mortals then end up caught in the middle of the lives of the gods. Probably why most typical Fantasy sticks with the idea that the gods are *not* omnipotent, omniscient or omnipresent.

Divine Intervention

Another important question when considering religion in your world is how active a hand the gods take in manipulating that world. In most Fantasy, the gods take a slightly-active role: They act through their priests and paladins, sometimes send lesser servitor beings (angels, demons, etc.) to accomplish some task or deliver some message to those who aren't priests or paladins, and *very* occasionally make a personal appearance. The idea behind most of this behavior is that the ways of the gods are beyond mortal ken and they have little time to deal with the mortal world. Thus, they delegate that responsibility to the church and its officers and members. The more active a hand the gods take in the world, the less priests or paladins are needed.

The less powerful a god is, the more he can be active in the world without unduly changing it. In a Bucket O' Gods setting, for instance, the gods might walk the face of the earth as they do their respective jobs. It's probably even possible that the average mortal might run into them as they work. A farmer getting up before dawn on a cold autumn morning might meet and have a nice chat with the God of the Fall Frosts, and after offering the god a nice cup of hot cocoa, might be able to get some information about the coming winter. "Well, my child, I'm not sure what the God of Winter Snows is planning for this year, but I did hear him say something about getting a very late start."

For the purposes of the rest of this Guide, your Uncle Figgy is going to stick with the traditional Fantasy stance on gods: Slightly active, not omnipotent in any way, and working through their priests and paladins to take care of things for them. Also, for the

rest of this Guide, whenever it is mentioned how magic might affect something, I am referring to both Priest and Wizard magic.

Chapter 4

Religion and Politics

Churches often wield great political power, and many monarchies require that the public believe that the rulers rule by a mandate from the heavens. Very often, public policy and law is based on some form of religious dogma and very little more. In a world with active, visible gods, churches can be expected to wield even more power over world politics. Like everything else involving gods, this is almost entirely dependent on the role the gods take in day-to-day affairs. A church with an active, accessible god will have more influence over rulers and their vassals than churches with aloof gods. After all, if the threat of divine retribution hangs over the success or failure of the kingdom, kings aren't too much to blame for passing laws that favor the active gods over those that don't take much action in the mortal world. If the God of Healing requires cleanliness before he gives his gifts, for instance, the rulers of a land are likely to pass laws that prohibit the emptying of chamber pots into the streets. Also, in a world with active gods, the fact that rulers rule by divine will might be more than just a simple belief -- the gods might actually *want* those rulers in place. On the one hand, this is good for the ruler because anyone who wants to depose him will have to face some serious consequences. On the other hand, the ruler had better be fairly certain he's acting in the god's best interests unless he's looking to be removed (in what would probably be a very messy, violent way as an "example").

Where there is other magic separate from religious magic, this attitude might be relaxed. Why bother appeasing the God of Rain if your wizards can just cast spells that keep your crops watered? This often leads to organized churches, eager for political power, who seek to destroy secular sorcery or at least defame it in the eyes of the nobility and the public. If successful, witch hunts are the likeliest result -- a world where only church magic is "good" magic and all non-church magic is "evil" magic. This idea could come straight from the gods, or it could be created by the church officials seeking to bolster their political power. Imagine the surprise of the latter if the gods actually approve of secular magic!

The Afterlife

Another big concern in regards to Fantasy religion is the final destination of departed souls. Is there an eternal paradise awaiting the good and righteous and eternal torment awaiting the evil and wicked, or is there one dim place where departed souls spend eternity in shadowy mockery of their former lives? Are all souls recycled, to be reborn again and again until the end of time, or is there a way off the wheel of rebirth for the enlightened? Or maybe there are separate afterlives depending on your occupation in the mortal realm -- farmers tend eternal fields, warriors fight eternal battles and wizards study eternal secrets. Perhaps the souls of the deceased become servitors of the gods they

followed in life, or, just maybe there is no afterlife at all and people simply cease to be.

Possibly the main reason to concern yourself with your world's afterlife is because of all the myriad undead the populate the traditional Fantasy world. When zombies, skeletons, mummies, ghosts, vampires and all the countless other undead abound, interesting questions are raised about the nature of the soul and the afterlife. And, don't forget, that while many religions of your world might have widely different beliefs of the afterlife, not all of them have to be true! The priest who believes and preaches that the righteous go to a good and just reward upon their death might be very shocked upon his own death to find that there are no rewards for the righteous or punishments for the wicked; just a hazy, shadowy existence that spans for eternity and from which there is no escape.

Before you ever introduce any form of undead into your Fantasy campaign, you should know where those undead come from. Are ghosts those who choose not to make the final journey into the afterlife or are they the souls of those who cannot make the final journey because of some important, unfinished task, or can there be both? Is there a "land of the dead" where all secrets are known to those who've passed on? If so, are the dead able to relate this information directly to the living or must they speak through riddles? Are zombies nothing more than re-animated bodies given enough of a spark of life to work the brain and nerves and muscles, or is part of the deceased's soul brought back from its final rest to once again inhabit the flesh? These are all questions that must be answered. After all, ghosts who flee the afterlife have totally different motives and personalities than those who want to enter but are unable. If zombies are just reanimated bodies, their creation isn't necessarily evil (even if a bit disgusting), but if the soul is dragged from its final reward as determined by the gods, someone is bound to get a little bit upset.

Most Fantasy (gaming especially) is a mish-mash of afterlife beliefs: Punishment for the damned, rewards for the holy; the truly good become lesser angels and the truly evil become lesser demons while those of a phenomenally heroic stature might be elevated to the very heights of godhood. Ghosts are either evil people who refuse to accept their death, good people who refuse to accept their death until some task is finished, and indifferent people who are simply not allowed to rest because of some taboo attached to their death. The creation of zombies/skeletons is generally considered an evil act because it somehow disturbs the final rest of the deceased soul.

In the first of my campaign worlds (the one with the two gods who pretty much ignore the world) the churches believe in an afterlife where the good are rewarded and the wicked are punished. The truth of the matter is that there *is* no afterlife -- departed souls return to the primal chaos that is always at work behind the universe and from which new souls and spirits are created. Ghosts are those whose sheer strength of will enables them to carry on after the passing of the body. Zombies and other lesser undead are merely corpses (or portions thereof) reanimated by a spark of spiritual energy. Mummies and liches and such are undead whose soul returns soon after death to reanimate the body. The dead can be resurrected only for a very short time after their death, during which the body retains enough residual spiritual energy to "rebuild" the

soul up until the moment of its passing. Some powerful magics are able to "store" the soul for very long periods of time, or even to duplicate it from the impressions it leaves behind. In this campaign world, there are no servitor beings and no final reward or punishment.

Chapter 5

The Physics of Magic

 Putting aside Divine Magic -- the manipulation of reality through the will of the gods who, presumably, created it -- how does magic work in your world? What are its strengths and what are its limitations? One Web site I looked at quoted an author of Fantasy who believes that magic *must* have some form of limitation. If it's possible for a wizard to do *anything,* he says, then they are gods and you don't have a story. To him, Uncle Figgy responds: Bull Snot!! Apparently this author was absent the day they taught logical conclusions (and the day they taught about all those stories of gods versus gods in the good old mythology classes). Really though, let's think about this. If *all* wizards can do *anything* (and are, in his logic, gods) then *all* wizards are pretty evenly matched, aren't they?

 Of course, this means that you're going top end up with a "Battle of the Gods" kind of world where wizards habitually and constantly alter the very fabric of reality itself just to get what they want. It would take quick-witted and very imaginative players to know what to alter to affect what; and it would take a quick-witted and very imaginative GM to adjudicate the results on other wizards or the rest of the game world. There might not be that many players or GMs who are up to such a task. I'm reminded of the following exchange that took place after a player was told by the GM that his character had just been possessed by a highly powerful demon that the player would now roleplay. "Anything you want to do," the GM said, "you just say so."

Player: Well, okay, can I make all of their (the rest of the party) torches go out?
GM: Yeah. Just say that's what you're doing. You can do anything you want.
Player: What if I want to make the walls bleed?
GM: Just tell me you're making the walls bleed. I told you, you can do *anything*.
Player: Okay. Can I make...?
GM: Dude! Don't you get it!? You can do *anything!!* Just say so!
Player: [Pauses and thinks for a moment] What if I want to...?
GM: Forget it. The demon has left your body in search of a better host.

 In light of that particular travesty, I'm willing to concede a little to the qualms of the aforementioned author. Simply for ease of play and GM adjudication, it might be easier if magic *is* limited in some way. While many might opt for what appear to be arbitrary, game-balance rulings to accomplish these limitations, I've always thought that the only true game balance comes from having your world balanced. If your world works in a reasonable, logical way, your game will automatically fall into balance with it. Accomplishing the former accomplishes the latter.

 Now don't get your underpants in a wad when I say the words "logical" or "reasonable". I already know that magic isn't supposed to follow rules of logic or reason, that's why it's *magic!* But you, as the ultimate creator of your world, need to set rules for

how that magic works, and then you have to follow those rules. Even if you say that the only rule for magic in your world is that it's totally random and illogical and unreasonable, you've set a rule for that magic and you have to stick with it. You've set a path for it and you'll have to trace that path to its logical and reasonable conclusions. (In this case, you've pretty much eliminated the concept of the traditional spellcaster. The mages in your world summon up the magical force -- or channel it or create it or whatever -- and hope that whatever happens when they let it go is something close to what they wanted it to do. Magic items are pretty much all going to be one of a kind as no wizard will be able to duplicate whatever it was that created the magical item in the first place! In such a world, wizards might actually be hunted down and destroyed in an effort to preserve the order of the world.)

For the most part, the magic types that I have listed are fairly self limiting: Alchemists require lots of time, space and material components; Ritualistic mages require lots of time, space and ceremony; Sympathetic mages require something that represents the target of their magic; Contagious wizards need some sample of their targets; and those with Inborn magic are generally limited to only one ability. That leaves Spellcasters and Intuitive wizards as the most threatening to game (and world) balance.

Most games limit Spellcasters by requiring the use of verbal, somatic and material components. Spells require the wizard to speak a few esoteric words, perform some arcane gestures and do a little dance, and somehow utilize items of a sympathetic or contagious nature. Thusly, a wizard who is gagged or silenced can't speak the words -- no spell. A wizard who is shackled can't perform the dance -- no spell. And a wizard who is bound can't make the gestures -- again, no spell. Pretty strong limitations in and of themselves even if you forget about the requirement for material components.

Now, your Uncle Figgy has never been a fan of material components. Aside from the fact that their use in traditional Fantasy spellcasting either reeks too much of Alchemy or is very arbitrary, the concept breaks down quickly if you consider everything a mage might need to carry with him if he wants to go adventuring with his mates. I'm sorry, but when I think of a mighty adventuring party, I *don't* think of the brave warrior, holy cleric, mysterious thief, and the wizard with his caravan of bearers and wagons hauling boxes of dried flies, iron filings, golden statues, ball bearings, rose petals and a couple bottles of dragon's blood -- all so he can be ready to throw whatever spell he might find he needs during the course of the adventure! Add to that the fact that spell components are easily lost, damaged or stolen (which any intelligent creature will try to arrange if he knows he has to face the wizard) and you've more than limited the mage -- you've crippled him!

Unfortunately, many game designers use the idea of spell components to kill two (and sometimes three) birds with one stone: Since many spell components are rare and/or difficult to obtain (Dead Bird number 1: No component = no possibly unbalancing spell *[then why'd the designers put it in the game in the first place!?]*) they will be very expensive (Dead Bird number 2: Bleed off excess PC wealth) or the PCs will have to go and get it themselves (Dead Bird number 3: Instant adventure!).

Also, the rule of material components has a great impact on the number and types

(and hence, value) of the magical items available in your world. After all, if the creation of a flaming sword requires a weapon of exquisite manufacture, constructed by a master-craftsman, that was quenched in the blood of a dragon and sheathed in the feathered skin of a phoenix -- well, don't expect to see too many of them. That's fine if that's the feel you want for your world, but if you envision your PCs armed with enchanted items of every description, you might want to rethink the material component rules.

Another way to limit both Spellcasters and Intuitive mages is with skill requirements. Simply put, working magic takes a lot of brain-power and practice -- if you aren't skilled enough at using magic, you don't get the results you wanted (or you don't get any results at all!). This means that with enough practice and experience, any wizard will be able to cast any spell. But a lot of wizards might never get that far. Many may decide that it's too much hard work to learn those more powerful spells. Still others might not survive to that point, having been killed early in their wizardly careers when they tried to cast a spell they weren't quite ready to cast.

A third way to limit Spellcasters and Intuitive mages is with a "spell point" system. In such a system, wizards have a certain amount of spell points available to them. They must spend some of these points to cast a spell (the actual amount of spells usually depends on the power of the spell itself; stronger spells have a higher cost, weaker spells have a lower cost). When the caster runs out of spell points she can't cast any more spells until her spell points recharge. There are also many different ways to explain the spell points -- perhaps mages store magical energy like a battery, or maybe casting spells drains their physical (or mental) strength. Recharging those spell points might require sunlight, meditation or just good old sleep.

It's important to know that some game systems might even combine some of these methods. For instance, AD&D combines the components and skill methods while GURPS combines the skill and spell points methods.

Another thing you might want to consider are the actual "physics" of the magic in your world -- a decision that is totally separate from how the magic works from a game standpoint. Does the magic in your world follow an orderly pattern; always acting and reacting in the same manner, or is it chaotic and random with spell effects that are difficult to duplicate? Is it a "balanced" form of magic in that, if a wizard makes something appear, it actually disappears from somewhere else? Or is the wizard actually creating that thing out of thin air? Is magic the will of the magician altering reality itself, or is magic a force that is locked inside every thing under the sky awaiting a wizard to unlock its potential? This particular decision won't have much great effect on the actual gaming aspects of your world, but it will give added depth to the world itself. Wizards might never know (or care if they do know) that, when they cast a Sphere of Water spell, a couple gallons of water are drained from a well somewhere on the other side of the world, or that the Start Fire spell they're casting really isn't creating any heat but is just causing the flammable object to release the flame that is already stored inside it. Also, most Fantasy assumes that magic is a renewable resource -- there's always more no matter how much is used. Interesting worlds can be created by not making this assumption. Perhaps each spell a wizard casts makes the world slightly less magical. For

each fireball, a pixie dies somewhere. For each magically summoned storm, a unicorn ceases to be.

In my own campaign world, magic is a field of energy that surrounds and fills everything. By channeling and focusing this field, wizards can cause changes elsewhere in the field. To limit the number of wizards, I decided that the ability to manipulate the magic field is a recessive genetic trait. To limit the power of the wizards, I decided that it is difficult to focus and channel the magical field (the Skill method of limitation), requiring wizards at a lower level of skill to perform a minor ritual (speak a word or two and make a gesture or two) to aid in the focusing of the energies involved in a given spell. As the wizard becomes more skilled with the spell in question, the focusing aids become less and less necessary and are soon dispensed with altogether. Channeling and focusing the magical field is also very tiring (Spell Point limitation system), although skilled wizards are able to take more of the strain (a certain spell will cost less points when cast by a more advanced wizard than by a beginning or intermediate wizard). Magic is very orderly -- the same spell, unless acted on by outside forces, always acts in the same manner -- and is balanced in nature -- water created by a wizard is taken from elsewhere in the world, water that is destroyed is sent to somewhere else in the world. Most wizards of my campaign world are not aware of the theories behind magic use, although there are universities that know of the whys and wherefores of the magical field's existence and workings.

Chapter 6

Magic and Law

Generally, it is to be assumed that if magic is, for the most part, beneficial to society as a whole, it will be freely and openly accepted. This doesn't necessarily have to be so. If the rulers of society don't want the people to benefit from magic, wizards might well be outlawed no matter how good their works. In such a system, there will be more than just a little bit of spin-doctoring by those in charge -- anti-magic propaganda will run rampant: it's evil, it's unnatural, wizards are actually demons, etc.

If magic is widely regarded as legal and acceptable, wizards will likely be regarded as a man carrying a crossbow. There's nothing inherently illegal about it, but if he uses it to commit a crime, he'll be legally liable. The same would go for magic. If a wizard uses his magic to harm someone, he's just as much a criminal as a person who stabs someone with a dagger. Unless, of course, the wizard in question is so powerful as to be outside the law -- either a part of the power structure (a world where all wizards are part of the police force) or so powerful that none but the hardiest of heroes hope to stand against them.

Certain magics might be heavily regulated. In a world with minted coins, for instance, spells that create gold become quite dangerous to the economy and would likely be viewed as counterfeiting unless used by authorized personnel (wizards working in the kingdom's mints, for instance). Some magics might be totally illegal. For instance, those in a highly secular world might be forbidden to cast any magics that tamper with the final departure of the soul. And, in worlds where totalitarian governments rule, even the most beneficial knowledge or healing magics might be banned from use by everyone but the government's agents.

As far as you need to define it, the average laws of your world will cover magic. Harming someone by magic is still harming them. Stealing by magic is still stealing. And murder by magic is still murder. Other magics available might need to be judged on an as-needed basis, based on society's attitude toward the magic in question. In a world where personal freedom is valued, any kind of possession or mind-control magic will likely be frowned upon or banned outright. In a world where water is a precious commodity, magics that destroy water could likely end up in a death sentence. In some societies, there might even exist a book of law that outlines the legality of every possible use of every possible magic. And if a wizard comes up with a magic that isn't on that list, she can expect more than a little bit of intense scrutiny.

An interesting campaign could be that all magic is illegal (perhaps due to some severe magical catastrophe in the distant past). PCs are wizards who must build their power (for whatever reason) while staying hidden from the authorities and suspicious peasants, or they are sympathizers who believe that magic could be far more beneficial and useful if only the authorities and the public could be convinced of its safety. Of course, this becomes a difficult proposition if there are evil wizards waiting to flaunt their

power over the masses at every opportunity. The PCs, then, have the difficult task of defeating the evil wizards while trying to convince the populace and its rulers that it is the person, and not the power, that defines if magic is good or evil.

Magical Surprise

In a world where magic is uncommon, wizards are much more powerful because of their "surprise" factor. In a world where magic is common, however, wizards lose that benefit -- people just won't be that impressed by magic if their village boasts a wizard of its own. And in a world where magic is an everyday occurrence, wizards become run-of-the-mill. What this means is that citizens of a magical society cannot be taken unawares by magic. It will be at the back of everyone's mind all the time. Precautions will be taken against magical attack. Any strange occurrence will be viewed as though it was of magical origin. (This, of course, can be a good thing to the skilled non-magical thief or assassin -- it might be difficult for the authorities of a highly-magical society to grasp that the person who killed the local constable wasn't a wizard under invisibility armed with magic that causes instant death, but was rather a very-skilled assassin armed with nothing more than an untraceable contact poison). Magical defenses will be common, as will wizards employed as guards and detectives. Many jails and dungeons will be somehow proof against magic, so as to hold any magic user captive.

As an adjunct to this, it is important to note that a populace will always seek to protect itself from the more common threats. This includes magical threats. If certain attack spells are more frequently employed by sorcerers, it is highly likely that most towns will have some protection from those spells. Thus, the wizard with the lesser known, less commonly used spells (which are usually the least "instantly" powerful) becomes more powerful in some situations than the wizard armed with the "spell of the day". For instance, if fireballs are the most common attack spell, expect most towns to have many areas that are magically fireproofed. If it is lightning bolts that are most commonly employed, civilized areas might be loaded with magical "lightning rods" that collect and harmlessly dissipate the charge from such attacks.

This goes for the spells that PCs use as well as those utilized by NPCs. If all of the bad guys in your campaign habitually animate zombies to serve in their unholy armies of the night, it is only a logical step that the people of your world will start protecting their dead from such animation as a way of protecting themselves! Possibly, cremation would become common, which could lead to serious problems for the PC who has died before his time and is cremated by superstitious peasants before his friends can pay for a resurrection. If all of your PCs constantly use the same types of magic when dealing with the bad guys, expect word to get around (either from those who've managed to escape the PCs' wrath or simply from good, old magical divination) and expect your bad guys to start being prepared for those magics. Such tactics are also a good way to explain why (in most systems/campaign worlds) there are just *so* many different magics out there. When people get wise to one, you move to another or you suffer.

Magic and Health

Medieval cities stink. I mean they really reek. Literally. The average peasant hut was a single room structure. All the living was done in that one room. Cooking, eating, sleeping, sex, childbearing. Everything except going to the bathroom, which was usually done outside, not far from the hut. In the cold of winter, the livestock was brought into that one room at night to keep both human and animal warm and alive. Refuse was fed to pigs and goats (there wasn't anything that we know as "trash") or whatever else would eat it. Life was dirty and nasty. Lice and fleas were common on most people and all but the most-cared-for animals (usually horses). Rats and other scavengers ran free through the streets simply because of all the food available to them. In a larger city, a house might have more than one room, but waste disposal (including human wastes) was still a matter of chucking it all out the window. It's no wonder that diseases thrived -- both common and sexually transmitted. Injuries often led to infection, gangrene and amputation, and even childbirth commonly led to death.

Magic can change all that if it is common enough. Open sewers and latrines become a thing of the past if magical tunneling is cheap and easy. Contaminated water need never be drunk if it can be easily purified or created. Another big carrier of disease can be eliminated if there exists a magical way to exterminate rats, fleas, ticks and other scavengers/parasites. Or, they can be gotten rid of by getting rid of their food source: no garbage means no rats and no flies. Clean bodies (and livestock) means no fleas and no ticks. Cleanliness and sanitation go a long way to preventing most diseases/plagues. Even low-powered magic can deliver easy access to all these things, making disease lose much of its bite even if there are no powerful healing magics. If powerful healing magic also exists, those who do catch some terrible illness need only see their nearest healer for a magical cure.

Very powerful healing magics, however, could allow for an immortal aristocracy/theocracy -- as long as rejuvenating or resurrection magics exist and are reserved for the rich and powerful or the most holy. If anti-aging or resurrection magic aren't available in your world, you have no problems, but if they *do* exist, GMs would be wise to come up with a reason why such abuses can't happen in their world. (In my own world, the lower-powered healing magics are cheap and easy. Resurrections, however, are extremely difficult because of the workings of my world's afterlife, q.v. Even those who *are* resurrected are limited in the number of times they can be resurrected simply because of the "generational loss" of rebuilding a copy of the soul from a copy of the soul, etc. And only *extremely* powerful and rare magics can actually prevent or reverse aging.)

Also, if magical healing is available in your world, what about non magical healing? Are there surgeons and physicians and herbalists working in those areas where magical healers can't or won't work? If so, how do they all get along with one another? One possibility might be that you go see the doctor first, and he refers you to a magical

"specialist" only if he can't fix the problem. Another is that magical healing might be limited to followers of specific religious sects (in a world where divine healing is the only magical healing) -- mundane healers in such a world might be actively hunted by the church!

Magic and Food

Probably the main thing that limits the size of any city is the amount of food that can be supplied by the surrounding countryside. Primitive farming techniques (and primitive genetic stock) are what ensure that harvests are not great enough to support cities of very large size. Modern farming methods (and hybrid plants bred for hardiness, disease and pest resistance, and high yield) are what lead to the large harvests that are enough to support our modern cities. Also, safe transportation of foods after harvest ensure that more food reaches our modern cities intact. Lacking such things, medieval cities are small out of necessity.

With magic, all that changes. Magical breeding programs, whereby two or three generations of plants can be raised and bred in but one growing season, can lead to very hardy, high-yield crops. Magics that "bless" plants, making them grow stronger and making them resist disease and pests and drought, help ensure a large harvest. Magic can be used to make soil richer in essential nutrients and remove stones that would hamper good root growth. With strong enough magic, the trees themselves might be made to pull themselves out of the ground and replant themselves at the edge of a field to act as a wind and frost break. Plant magic might be used to make plants grow quickly to maturity, say, three or four times in only one growing season -- thereby tripling or quadrupling the land's yield (although such activity would very quickly drain the nutrients from the soil, but see above). Or, simple plant strengthening magic might make one acre yield as much as two. Powerful enough magic might even enable wizards to actually create food and water from nothing! (All of this assumes, of course, that the powers-that-be *want* the populace to be well-fed. If they don't, such magics might be totally forbidden!)

All this food then has to make it to the cities. In such an economy, there might be constant caravans of normal wagons heading constantly to and from the cities in much the same way as the pony express carried mail: a fresh driver and a fresh team of horses available at stopping points along the way in an effort to keep the food travelling non-stop to its destination. Add magic, and the transport of this produce becomes even easier. Fleets of flying carpets or magical barges might do brisk trade in getting the food to the cities quicker than any wagon. Magically refrigerated wagons or ships need not worry about the length of the trip. Nor do those foods that have been magically preserved. A wagon or ship whose interior is enchanted by "stasis" magic becomes the ultimate in food transport.

Thus, Fantasy cities can become much larger than their medieval counterparts, but that's not the only impact such things will have on the world.

The first, and probably the least obvious, is nutrition. Fresher foods mean more nutrients. The more variety in diet a populace has, the healthier they tend to be. And if food is easily acquired and well preserved before it's acquired, the risk of fatal food poisoning dwindles rapidly. Also, the more well-nourished an organism is, the more resistant to disease (probably the biggest killer in a medieval society) it is.

The second area where magical food production will have a large impact is the art of siege, which will be discussed in Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Magic and the Arms Race

I was in a discussion once about the enchantment costs as listed in a certain game system (which shall remain nameless). It seems that, in this game system, it was easier/cheaper to enchant a suit of armor to be almost impenetrable than it was to enchant a sword that could penetrate it. Game terms, it took more to make a sword +1 than it did to make a suit of plate mail +1. Most of the people were polarized on the issue: it was either that the system was right and realistic and should be left the way it is, or it was that the system was wrong and needed to be totally changed. Fact is, neither side seemed to understand that #1) It's your world, change what you don't like to make it what you *do* like, and #2) How would such a thing likely affect, and be affected by, the world itself?

Historically, arms and armor were involved in a neck-and-neck race: one would take the lead for a little while, and then some advance in the other would push it ahead. For example, when all weapons are slashing knives that cut, someone invents chainmail that can't be cut through. The response is a thin, strong blade (or projectile) that can slip through the links in the chainmail. So someone invents something stronger, say, plate mail (now, historically, armor and weapon invention wasn't quite so linear, but "necessity is the mother of invention" or so they say. When there is a need for better armor, there will be better armor, and when there is a need for better weapons, there will be better weapons). Plate mail is heavy and expensive, and pretty much immune to the weapon of the average soldier. So, enter mancatchers and billhooks and, yes, even whips -- all to yank the plate mail-clad knight from his horse. Then enter knives like the estoc -- a very strong, dagger-type knife with a diamond cross section that pretty much existed for the sole purpose of punching through the armor of a downed knight.

Basically, the average world will have an "average" weapon and an "average" armor. The standard weapon will be able to easily penetrate sub-standard armor, will stand probably a 50/50 chance of penetrating the standard armor, and will have very little chance of penetrating the above-standard armor. When the above-standard armor becomes more commonplace (either through supply/demand or lower manufacturing costs), demand will dictate that an above-standard weapon be created. All other weapons and armors then drop a notch on the scale. What was once standard becomes the sub-standard, what was once above-standard becomes standard, and someone will likely invent something that is, once again, above-standard.

Traditionally, above-standard weapons and armor are available only to the elite -- usually because of high manufacturing costs (this also applies to the costs of magical enchantment). Standard weapons and armor are available to the soldiery, and sub-standard weapons and armor are available to the general public.

So what makes weapons and armor drop a notch on the scale? In one word: Power. If the most-holy knights of Figland all have plate mail +1, the king of rival Figgyosk is going to make darn sure that his wizards are working overtime on armor-piercing swords

+2. *And,* just to go one up on the king of Figland, the king of Figgyosk is going to be doing his best to make sure *his* knights have plate mail +2.

In my own world, as enchanted armors became more and more common, the wizards discovered ways to make magical weapons that ignored some of that armor. Even if you don't decide to use a magical solution, however, there are still ways around too much armor vs. too little weaponry.

First of all, armor-piercing arrowheads (the bodkin, for instance) have been around for some time. In a world where everyone is walking around in plate mail +2, it is highly likely that such an item would have been invented and would be the projectile of choice. A GM of any system would be well within her rights to dictate that such an arrowhead would attack as though the target armor were two classes worse (thus making that plate mail +2 effectively just plain old plate mail). Add a simple +1 enchantment to that arrowhead, and, well, you get the picture.

Secondly, who says you even have to penetrate the armor? Heavy maces, morningstars and mauls do quite nicely in putting large, immovable dents in that thick shell. Imagine trying to breathe (and fight!!) with a bent piece of steel compressing your lungs (whether you took damage from the blow or not!). Also, other weapons were invented that didn't rely on any kind of damaging power to take out those turtles on horseback. Whips, mancatchers and bill hooks all do nicely for incapacitating the armored juggernaut.

Now, all of these things may fluctuate depending on the relative poverty level you might happen to be in. The standard armor and weapons in a poor farming community, for instance, might be hard leather, large knife or cudgel, and the shortbow. In the royal city, however, the standard armor and weapons might be chainmail, shortsword/broadsword, and crossbow. And among the king's elite, the standard might be plate mail, great sword and crossbow.

So what was Uncle Figgy's solution to the whole issue about enchantment costs? Well, as I've tried to show, people are an inventive bunch. When any one thing begins to dominate the market, something better will come along. If enchanted armors become commonplace because of inexpensive enchantment costs, you can bet that the rulers of your world will have their wizards working triple-time to come up with a cheap way to enchant weapons that can beat that armor. And if they don't come up with it by the next summer solstice, off with their heads! Hey, who won't find a way under that kind of incentive?

Magic and Siege

Most GMs are quite able to imagine the effects magic might have in open warfare: fireballs and lightning bolts, tossed by wizards on both sides of a conflict,

scouring across the ranks. Morale improving spells bolstering the bravery of the soldiery. Fear spells trying to break down that morale. Slain warriors raised as zombies to continue fighting even after they've died. Wounded warriors rapidly healed so they can quickly rejoin the fight.

Sieges, on the other hand, are often neglected in Fantasy. Traditionally, sieges are a race between starvation and disease inside the city and starvation and disease outside the city. Using catapults, attackers would often lob the rotting carcasses of pigs, cows and even fallen warriors over the walls of the city to aid in the spread of disease among the defenders. Sometimes, the defenders would lob them right back. Such tactics become useless in the face of magic. If the defending city possesses good, magical sanitation, it might never fall to disease. And if magic enables small plots of land to produce acres worth of food, it might never fall to starvation.

In such a case, other methods would be found. Magically summoned or created creatures could be used with no fear of loss of life by either side. The attackers might well use powerful magics to create earthquakes that would topple walls or to create tunnels to go under the city. And everything that would be used in open warfare would also be used in the siege. More subtle magics might also be employed -- powerful fear magic aimed at the entire city might well demoralize the defenders enough to hand themselves over to the enemy. In such a case, the heroic PCs might be employed by the city to sneak behind enemy lines and destroy the wizards responsible...

Magic and Gunpowder

Most Fantasy worlds assume a setting that is *just* pre-Renaissance -- advanced enough to have large sailing vessels, decent mining and metallurgy, and steel swords; but not advanced enough to have gunpowder. That's fine, but rest assured that at some point in your world's career, at least one player is going to try to "accidentally" create gunpowder: "Uh, yeah. I'm just going to throw some random ingredients together in this mortar. What's this one? Hmm. Sulfur. Yeah. And a little bit of this saltpeter. Ooops! Darn! I just knocked some powdered charcoal in there. Oh well, I guess I'll just grind it all together. Darn! When I got up, I bumped the table and knocked a lit candle into it. What happens?"

If the GM is very generous, then PRESTO!, the PC has just invented flash powder (many players don't realize that it has to be pelleted into grains before it actually has the properties commonly known as "gunpowder"). If the GM is realistic, she might require the player to make some intelligence rolls at some pretty hefty penalties before the PC can even comprehend the very *concept* of mixing those ingredients together. More rolls (at appropriate penalties) to mix them in the proper ratios and then come up with the concept that the whole mess needs to be pelleted. But even after all those rolls, the PC might get lucky and end up inventing gunpowder.

Many Fantasy worldbuilders loathe the idea of gunpowder and magic together -- they avoid the issue at all costs. But there's no real reason to do so. First off, if magic is common, nobody would even *want* to invent gunpowder; the need wouldn't exist. And if gunpowder *had* been invented, who would want to work their butt off, risking life and limb, only to create a small amount of a substance that accomplishes the same thing a wizard could accomplish just by wiggling his fingers and saying a few words?

Secondly, gunpowder isn't the panacea that some players might think it is. Just because you have gunpowder doesn't necessarily mean you have guns. The manufacture of a tube strong enough to withstand the explosive forces necessary to propel a projectile with any great force is no easy task, and the average weaponsmith probably won't be up for the job. And, contrary to what many might think, dynamite *isn't* gunpowder wrapped in a paper tube. Also, remember that gunpowder that gets wet will have to be re-pelleted before it can be of any use. And in a world where wizards can hurl spheres of water or create rainstorms or very heavy fog, keeping gunpowder dry becomes a difficult prospect indeed. In the same light, gunpowder can be touched off by any spark. Carrying that musket for it's limited one-shot-per-battle potential might not be such an attractive idea when compared to the risk of it (and it's powder in your backpack) being set off by the first lightning-bolt or fireball you're hit by (Uncle Figgy remembers a game where a wizard cast a fireproofing spell on his gunpowder to keep it from being touched off by just such an occurrence. It took him a couple of minutes of wondering why his musket wouldn't work before the other players reminded him that gunpowder is useless if fire can't ignite it). And keeping it all in a magically fireproof, sparkproof, waterproof case until you're ready to use it makes it next to useless except in siege situations or ship-to-ship battle. Even then, one insanely patriotic wizard with "Dispel Magic" and "Fireball" could seriously damage the enemy's army before it even reaches your castle walls.

All in all, in a world where magic is as common as it is in traditional gaming Fantasy, gunpowder loses much of the reliability that it historically possessed in our own world. In a world with less magic or lower-powered magic, gunpowder will have a higher potential and greater reliability.

Magic and Technology

A famous Science Fiction author once wrote that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. The opposite of this is also true, any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology. This, of course, is limited by the feel that the Fantasy worldbuilder wants for his or her world. In most Fantasy worlds, science and technology are relatively non-existent in the face of magic. Wizards take the place of research scientists and magical healers take the place of physicians and surgeons. Usually because people are kept too busy simply keeping alive to ponder the workings of the universe. But in a world where magic is less common or low-powered (or Low Magic areas in an otherwise High Magic world), technology has a chance to grow. It goes right back to that necessity-being-the-mother-of-invention thing: If magic makes life easier, safer and cleaner, people won't have a need for technology.

If you decide that technology *does* exist, you have to ask yourself how the magic-using society gets along with the technological society. Those few Fantasy worlds that deal with such things assume that wizards (and priests) work to actively stomp out technology, thereby ensuring their own job security as the only ones who can make life easier, safer and cleaner. This does not always have to be the case. Wizards could, for instance, view technology as another form of magic -- they may even trade knowledge with the scientists of their world. And if wizards work together with scientists, interesting things can happen: Is that iron creature attacking the party a magically-animated iron golem? Or is it a technological robot, with gears and flywheels and mainsprings, that is kept powered by magic and imbued with a necromantically summoned spirit?

In my campaign world, most wizards do not think about technology and the populace sees no need to develop it. Advanced technology *does* exist, however, as a bizarre blend of magic and science. A magic-tech item might be a wood-burning furnace that boils water to turn a generator that creates magical energy. Or, it might be as simple as a permanent "ice" spell cast on an item that has an adjustable "wind" spell blowing across it for a magical air-conditioner.

Magic and Wildlife

Another big issue in Fantasy worldbuilding is how magic affects the flora and fauna of your world. Are there creatures and/or plants that can use magic? If so, how? Are they limited in magic's use in the same way that your wizards are? It seems unlikely that animals or plants would be able to use magic of the Alchemical, Sympathetic, Contagious or Spellcasting types, but there are some who would argue even in our world that animals can perform rituals, and in a magical world, who's to say that some of those rituals can't be Ritualistic magic? Most commonly, however, animal and plant magic is of the Inborn (natural) type. Still, interesting results could come about if animals are capable

of using Intuitive magic to fill their needs -- to lure prey, heal young, hide from prey, etc. And what about divine animal magic? Certainly the God of Mice might grant little boons to his charges in helping them avoid the cat or the mad farmer's wife. Unless you have decided that plants think and feel (in which case they're just animals with a different physiology), it is highly unlikely that they will be able to use Intuitive magic, although divine magic might still be a possibility. Intelligent animals could be quite capable of utilizing all the types of magic, but animals *that* intelligent should be viewed by the GM/Worldbuilder as another race, not just as animals.

The biggest question to ask about your magical animals and plants is do they just *use* magic or is magic a vital part of their existence? If they just use magic, then taking them out of the magical environment makes them just ordinary animals and plants with no special abilities. But what happens if magic is part of their very existence? What happens to them if you take them to a magically-dead area? Do they slowly weaken and die or do they simply cease to exist, their whole being depending totally upon the presence of magic? Whatever decision you make, remember that it should probably apply to any intelligent races you have created. If you have decided that dragons are totally magical beings, then they should be affected in the same way as a non-intelligent magical creature that has been removed from its environment. If they just lose their magical abilities, you have to decide if a dragon's intelligence is a result of magic (in which case it becomes a big, ordinary lizard) or is totally separate from the existence of magic (in which case it becomes a smart, big, ordinary lizard -- unless you've decided that it's ability to flight and breathe fire don't rely on magic, either. Then it pretty much stays exactly the same. This was what I did for one of my campaign worlds: dragons are totally biological, not magical, creatures -- taking them out of their magical environment just removes their ability to cast spells).

Another big question that needs to be answered is what happens to the animal's (or plant's) magic after it dies? If a plant shoots magical laser beams out of its blossoms, can those blossoms be cut off and used by the PCs or NPCs? If an animal has an organ that generates magical fear, can that organ be used? It's generally assumed that such things still carry a little bit of their magic after the creature in question has been disposed of -- they become spell components for Alchemists or Spellcasters suffering under the Material Component limitation. But do they carry enough magic for even one use after the creature's death? If they do, expect your PCs to cut off those useful flowers or organs and haul them around with them. If you don't want that, assume that the creature's death drains all but the most residual magic out of the parts in question.

On a non-magical note: Animals in our world tend to fear humans. They don't attack unless their territories are threatened, their young are threatened, or they are wounded, crazed, cornered, or very, very hungry. In a Fantasy world, however, common animals might not yet have learned to fear humans. Or they might be just so big and powerful (perhaps through inborn magic) that humans just aren't a threat. The problem there is that such powerful predators need powerful prey or the average, ordinary animal in the ecosystem gets wiped out fairly quickly. As usual, balance is the key. A ratio of 20 prey for each predator (of approximately the same size) is about right for an area with fairly active predators (in our world, this is a more "mammalian" ratio, reptilian predators

require much less prey for the same time-period in the same area). In my own world, some of the most common animals have great magical abilities that protect them from those predators that would happily take on an entire platoon of magic-wielding warriors. Of course, rabbit-hunting is a much more difficult sport in my world...

Chapter 9

The Dungeon

Perhaps the hoariest cliche in Fantasy is the dungeon. At worst, a dungeon is nothing more than a collection of traps, monsters and treasure placed seemingly without reason in a complex of rooms and corridors that have been placed with little to no purpose. They're great for a night of friendly hack-and-slash, but hardly realistic or sustainable through an extended campaign.

Humans tend not to build large complexes, either above or below the ground, without some purpose. When they do, all the rooms and corridors will be placed with a thought toward that purpose. And, once they build it, they'll be very reluctant to abandon it. Still, accidents and plague *do* happen, and it's possible that the fantastic castle of Lord Gunther the Mighty could be lost to the ages, or the fabled city of El'Adrill be buried beneath the sands of the desert. Add to that mines that have been mined out, large cave complexes, and humanity's fondness for very large and very grand burial places, not to mention any demihumans who enjoy large underground living spaces, and you have lots of room for the existence of the locale itself.

The problem come not in whether the ruins/dungeons can actually exist or not, but in the inhabitants themselves. Smaller creatures that might take over an abandoned area are easily driven/frightened off by the first group of adventurers to come along. Larger creatures might lair in a place, but will prey upon the smaller. Intelligent creatures will band together to drive off such a predator, while the unintelligent will simply begin to avoid the area -- making the predator have to move elsewhere if it wants to remain fed. The likeliest inhabitants for a "natural" dungeon are organized groups of intelligent creatures. Bands of orcs, goblins, etc. Of course, if you're running these creatures as actual NPCs and not mindless "monsters" (see my "Guide to Good GameMastering", particularly the section on NPCs and "Monsteritis"), the dungeon-crawl becomes much more interesting. Such an adventure turns the PCs less into heroes and more into criminals (in the orcs' eyes, anyway) who have broken into the creatures' homes to loot, pillage and plunder.

One exception to this would be crypts and tombs; catacombs of the dead ruled over by an undead king and all of his undead minions. Since the undead have no real ecology, there is no need to worry about predator-prey relationships. Another exception would be the dungeon created by some great power and stocked with various creatures by that power for some nefarious purpose. Since the great power controls all the creatures, it can easily keep them from preying upon each other or fighting amongst each other. Such a scenario might be created by a powerful evil wizard who is training a powerful army. Also, one can envision an ancient ruin still guarded by the manufactured automatons of long-dead wizards; the society has long since vanished from the world, but its tireless guardians still patrol the city streets, waiting for new orders that will never come...

Nonhumans

Much Fantasy features the existence of nonhuman races. Elves, dwarves, halflings, orcs and goblins abound. These are familiar archetypes. Most people are familiar with at least a couple of these. The problem comes in when the worldbuilder has one idea of what, say, dwarves should be, and the players have another. One of the biggest problems with these traditional races is just that. They are traditional. And that means that they can easily be stereotyped (by either players or even Gms) and they have also begun to get mundane. Stale. New races have the advantage of being different, possibly bringing a breath of fresh, magical air to a new Fantasy world. But totally new races have other problems. Probably the biggest is that they *are* new. Your players might not want to play them at all (if that option is available to them) because they aren't certain what the race should really be like. Plus, you'll have to tell the players constantly what their characters would know about the new races. ("Okay, Bob, your character knows that all Koobiens love to eat sweets...") If you're going to use totally new races, be sure you have outlined them (and their likes and dislikes) as thoroughly as possible before you enter them into your world. Help your players to know as much about the new race as they can (if you plan on letting the race be played as PCs) or as much as their characters might have learned about the race before they began their adventuring career (if you don't plan on letting the race be played as PCs).

Should you create totally new races, you have to decide which will be allowed as PCs and which will not. Races that are much more powerful than the average Player Character will not fit in well with an adventuring party, the same goes for races that have psychologies/thought processes that are radically different from the average PC. For the most part, your Uncle Figgy is pretty much opposed to creating Fantasy races that are not made available to the players, except in the most extraordinary of circumstances -- if the race is not available because it is too powerful, why hasn't that race taken over? If the race is too alien, it becomes difficult for the GM to even run it properly. I would say that exceptions are due for a campaign where the too-powerful race has taken over and all the PCs are fighting to overthrow them, or where the too-alien race is overrunning the world for whatever alien reason and the PCs are one of the many lines of defense.

When coming up with new races, decide where they stand in relationship to every other race. Most Fantasy worlds assume that humans are the dominant species on the planet -- elves are too slow-maturing a race to be as prolific as humans, orcs are too primitive to be much of a concern, and dwarves hide themselves away rather than take an active part in worldly affairs. This leaves the humans who are prolific, advanced (at least more than the orcs) and who are more than happy to take an active part in worldly affairs (preferably to run them entirely). This is an easy assumption. We know humanity and what it does. We know what their societies are like. We know their likes and dislikes. We know their wants and needs. We have seen them, and they are us.

Of course, some explanation should be given for why humans are on top of everything. In most Fantasy, humans are the upstarts; the newcomers. The "elder" races are content to sit back and watch what they do. None of this has to be the case. In my

own world, for instance, there are eight races -- any one of which is available to be used as a PC. Humans *are* at the top of the heap, but mostly because *they* are the elder race (there are actually two more races of the same "age" as humans, but one is reclusive and the other values freedom and fun above anything else. Three of the other races have evolved from the humans, one of the others evolved naturally on their own, and the last race was accidentally created by a group of wizards that is unaware of what they've done (my world's equivalent of toxic waste). Because of the differing social needs of the other two elder races, and the relative "youth" of all the other races, humanity is the dominant race in my world.

All of these assumptions of humanity's dominance can easily be turned around. Elves, with their long lifespan and magical talents might get tired of the way humans are managing (or mismanaging) things. Such a world might feature dominant elves acting as parental guardians of humans, maybe even treating them as children! Even those few enlightened humans might only be awarded the social status of an intelligent Elven teen...

Economy

"After defeating the kobold chieftain, you open the chest. Inside is 300 copper pieces, 200 silver pieces, 100 gold pieces and 10 platinum pieces."

Ahhh, treasure. The reason for adventuring in the first place. Grab the loot, kill more monsters and grab even more loot. Never once giving any thought to just *who* is minting all this cash in the first place.

What!?

Exactly. Traditional Fantasy is filled with treasure of every description, but the most common is the generic gold piece, silver piece or copper piece. But just what *are* these "pieces" and where do they come from. Most people assume that the word "piece" means "coin". But saying 500 gold pieces sounds somehow more Fantasy than saying 500 gold coins (and don't ever say 500 dollars!). But coins have to be minted by someone. Who is minting the coins in your world? And what are they really worth?

In our society, coins (and bills) are nothing more than an adult game of pretend -- acceptable roleplaying, if you will. The metals that our coins are minted from aren't particularly valuable, and neither is the paper for our bills. We pretend that they are, though. We all agree that a dollar bill or pound note have some intrinsic worth. It is through this mutual agreement that our economy works. Most Fantasy doesn't have that sort of agreement. The coins of Fantasy really *do* have some intrinsic worth. Gold coins really *are* worth their weight in gold.

Most rulers mint coins as a way of immortalizing themselves. It's hard to forget who your king is if his face is on every coin you handle. And with Fantasy coins, the value of

the metal makes giving up coin for an item a simple matter of trade -- you're trading pieces of rare metal for whatever item you're purchasing. It's simple and it works. Unless you take those coins to another realm where gold may or may not be worth as much as it is in your own.

So what weighs more, a pound of gold or a pound of gold?

A gold system is a weight-based and supply-based economic system: it is the weight and rarity of a piece of gold that determines it's value (this is a very simplistic view for gaming -- actual value of gold in our world is also based on purity, an issue that is relatively complex for roleplaying purposes; beware of bogging your game down if you choose to use it). A kingdom with little gold, for instance, might mint coins in a ratio of, say, 200 coins per pound, while a kingdom with a lot of gold might mint coins in a ratio of 20 to a pound. What this means is that one gold coin from Kingdom A is worth only 1/10th of one gold coin from Kingdom B. (I want to stress again that this is a very simplistic view -- economics and value of gold can be influenced by thousands of factors, but keeping track of all that is probably way too much work for the average Fantasy game. The simplest way to look at it all is just to assume that coins from a poor country will have a lesser value than coins from a rich country.)

So, if Brick Lockjaw wants to buy a sword that is worth 40 gold pieces in kingdom B, and he's from kingdom A, he's going to have to shell out 400 gold coins. Why? Because what that sword is really worth is 2 pounds of gold, not any set number of gold coins. No matter how many coins equal a pound, a pound is still a pound and that sword will still be worth 2 pounds of gold. Other things might affect the value of that sword (e.g., supply and demand, quality, fame of its maker) but it's value will be the same in actual weight of gold no matter how many coins might be in that weight.

Now, realistically, if a group of PCs dropped into town with a few hundred thousand gold pieces (which, presumably were collected by the monsters from many different countries -- rich indeed would be the country that had minted so much gold coinage it didn't even notice when a few thousand of those coins went missing), the local economy would bottom out. That much gold making that sudden appearance would devalue all the gold in the area. That was another reason behind minting coins, an attempt to keep a steady handle on the amount of wealth in the economy.

A big problem in most Fantasy gaming is how to bleed off excess PC wealth. Uncle Figgy doesn't think that is what the problem is at all, however. The big problem is what PCs are doing with that much wealth in the first place! How did they get it and where did it come from? Gemstones and objects d'art would be much more likely treasures in a medieval milieu -- there just aren't all *that* many coins around. If the PCs got the treasure from slaying monsters, just what were the monsters doing with it in the first place? Is there some sort of "monster market" where monsters can go to do trade? Can they walk into town and buy things just like PCs? Are there evil "dungeon-supply" salesmen who travel drawbridge-to-drawbridge selling things no self-respecting cavewife could do without? If not, then why do these monsters collect treasure? It obviously has no value to them. And if the monsters realistically wouldn't be collecting all this coinage, then the

PCs wouldn't realistically be acquiring so much of it that taking it away from them becomes that much of a necessity.

Another thing to consider is what the PCs would do with all that treasure if they *did* get ahold of it. Unless your world has reliable banking institutions, they're going to have to bury it and hope that no tunneling monster with a penchant for collecting coins (see above) stumbles across it. And if they immediately start flooding the local market with it, someone important is going to take notice. In almost any setting, wealth means power, and, to most nobles, any power other than their own was viewed as a serious threat unless it was a *very* strong power, indeed. Any PC coming back from a day's adventure with a few thousand gold that he couldn't hide might well be met by the tax-man and a squadron of armed and armored soldiers. "Why thank you for finding this lost coinage of King Greldon the Greedy. I'm certain you realize how much it would help the kingdom in these most troubled times. Why a donation of, say, ninety-five percent would earn the appreciation of the king himself, thank you very much."

Now, old coins were small simply because of the rarity (and difficulty in mining, that's why they were so rare) of these precious metals. Even so, gold is a heavy metal, and one could easily assume that 100 coins weigh at least a pound (some game systems make this distinction for you, others do not). Kind of a tough proposition carrying about twenty pounds of coins (only 2,000 gold pieces!!) on your back as well as around (at least) twenty pounds of armor and twenty pounds of all your other adventuring gear while you try to fight and run and do all that other adventuring stuff.

And, again, the question that begs asking is just where did all that treasure come from in the first place? It can't all be from some ancient lost civilization, can it? And it certainly can't all be stolen -- many people would likely do trade by barter, not cash. The average person might be found to have one gold piece on them at most, and then only if they were going into the city for some reason or another. Depending on the economy, the average person might never see a gold piece, and three gold pieces might be someone's entire life savings.

In a realm with a more stable economy, however, that much treasure becomes a possibility, but monsters still won't have reason to value it (and therefore keep it) unless they either have an economy of their own or they are allowed to take part in the common economy. But, in that stable of an economy, these "gold pieces" begin to take on more of an arbitrary, set value with one gold coin having about the same worth no matter where you might take it in the realm. There might even be set currency conversion ratios between realms. In such a system, much flavor can be added to a game by giving names to the coins. One gold tower might be worth ten silver bunkers in one country, but only worth six silver dukes in another country, worth thirteen silver squares in another country, and worth only two sharfas in yet another country. In some realms, it might have no worth at all!

This last is how I have set up the economy in my campaign world. All of the countries have coinage that is based on the copper-silver-gold setting of traditional Fantasy (copper worth the least, silver moderately valuable and gold the most valuable),

but the coin sizes are different from country to country (depending on the wealth of the country) and therefore some are not worth as much in one country as they are in another. All of the countries have different names for their coins, and some countries don't use any coinage at all, doing trade by barter only. Thus while one gold coin is fairly valuable in its country of origin, it is worth much less if carried to a second country (a richer country) and worth much more if carried to another, poorer country. And if carried to yet another country, that same coin might not be worth anything at all! There are no "monsters" intelligent enough to collect coins that are not accepted members of the world economy, so PCs cannot go around slaughtering them for their treasure or they'll likely be hunted down as murderers. So, in this world, for PCs to make money, they either have to hire out their services or sell those objects, gems and weapons they might find on their adventures.

As with everything else, "world balance" is the key. As long as there is a logical origin for the treasure in your world, you shouldn't have to worry about taking excess wealth from your PCs -- they simply won't be finding it! It is when you don't have any logic or reason to the economy of your world that you end up with such problems as too much or too little wealth in any one area.

Illness and Disease

Fantasy is full of sickness and disease. Heroes must rush to find the cure for the king's stricken daughter. Adventurers routinely stumble into towns wiped out (or in the process of being wiped out) by the plague. Mummies and other magical creatures are able to instill magical decay in those they touch. Illnesses and diseases abound.

Your Uncle Figgy defines illness as any debilitating sickness that keeps a character out of action and may or may not kill him. While this might be a good convention for Fantasy novels (the character lies unconscious, delirious and in a high fever while his comrades rush for the cure), it doesn't work all that well in a Fantasy game. No player wants to be told that her character is out of the action for what could possibly be the rest of the game because she has contracted tetanus from that last sword fight.

Disease, on the other hand, is defined as a severe sickness that may eventually kill the character, but will only have a minor weakening effect (say a -1 to -3 to a couple of stats) throughout the duration of the sickness, up to and including the actual day it kills the character! Unlike an illness (which may also be deadly), this allows the character to continue to take an active part in the adventure and even in struggling nobly until the end trying to find a cure. And, unless the player agrees to let the character die at the end of the disease's term, a cure should always exist. It may not be easily available (a whole adventure spanning many gaming sessions might be required to find it) but it should exist. As a general rule, the quicker the disease can kill the character, the easier the cure should be to get ahold of.

In keeping with cinematic style, illnesses should never be visited on PCs (NPCs are another matter -- a good adventure might be to find a cure for the illness of the bedridden king), but diseases can be. For the most part, assume that an area suffering under the plague will be treated as if all of the NPCs have an illness, while the PCs are only affected as if by a disease. The exception to this are those *very* mild illnesses that annoy us in our own world. A touch of realism and humor can be added by having the mighty warrior catch the flu or the noble knight be prone to sea sickness. And don't forget to call for rolls to avoid catching a cold after the wizard douses the battlefield with his "Frosty Raining Hail" spell. Such minor illnesses can also add drama to the game: The sneaking thief will have a hard time sneaking if he has to roll to avoid sneezing at an inopportune moment. (If he fails and sneezes, nothing immediately deadly should happen -- perhaps the guards have been alerted and now the thief must find a good hiding place...)