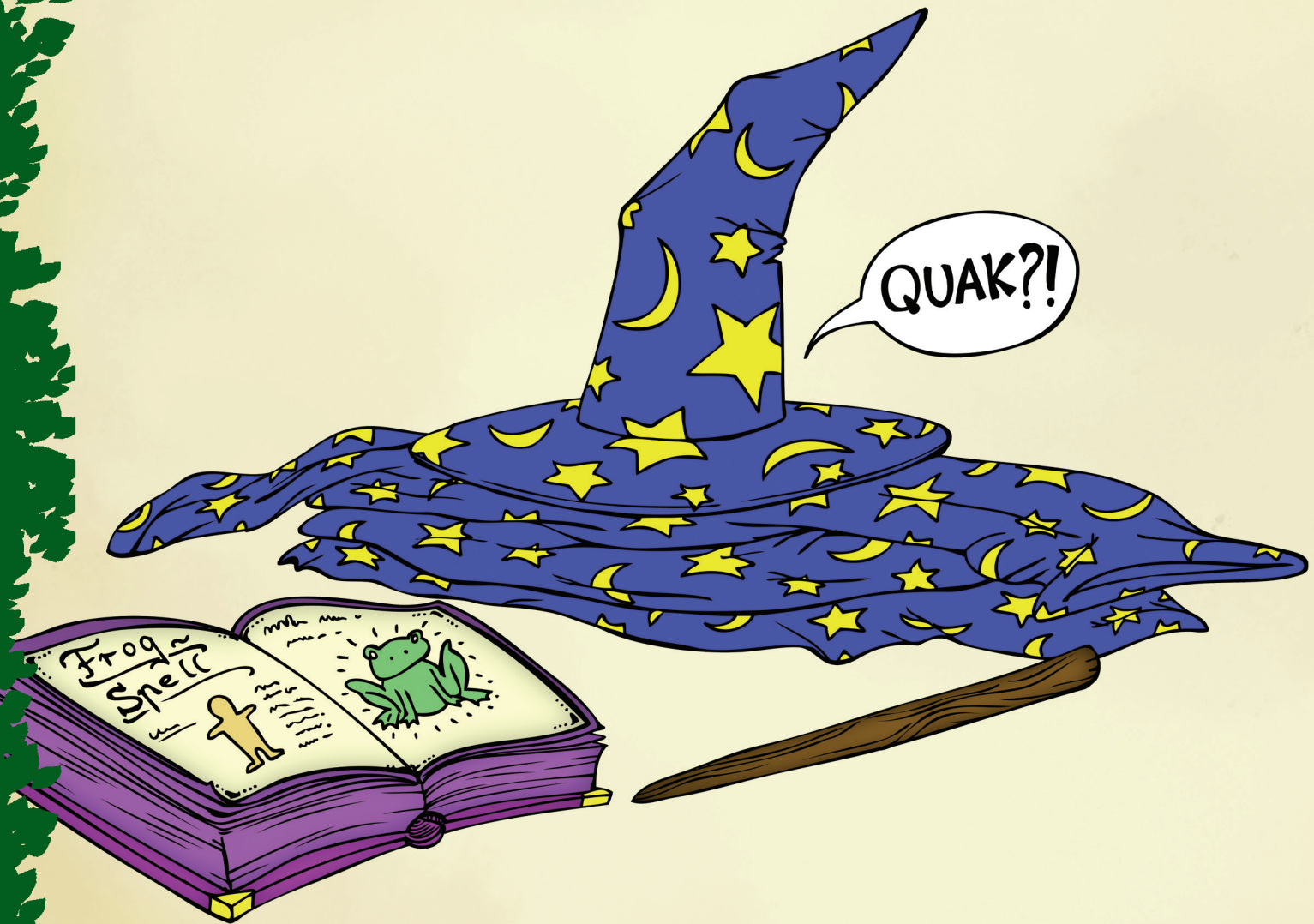


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# Magic Mishap Items



52-IN-52

Owen K.C. Stephens

5e Compatible

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# MAGIC MISHAP ITEMS

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Not every magic item is the pride and joy of the artificer who crafted it.

Of course, some magic items aren't made intentionally to begin with. These are the weapons bathed in the blood of elder dragon's last heartbeat, staves held by mad wizards when they perform the ritual to attempt to achieve godhood, cloaks caught in the explosion when a crashing spaceship hits a medieval school of alchemy, or rings struck by a bolt of pure chaos when the wildmage breaks the lich's soulvault. Often these accidental magic items take well-recognized and familiar forms—*swords of dragonslaying* and *staves of might*—but sometimes weirder items result from such accidental imbuelements.

But even when a magic item is the end product of an exacting and meticulously planned eldritch process, sometimes you don't get what was expected (or desired). You are, after all, dealing with *magic*. There's a word for a process that gives you exactly the same result when you attempt exactly the same procedure, but magic ain't it.

## SO WHAT MAKES A MISHAP?

While a GM doesn't have to use specific rules defining when a mishap magic item happens—sometimes the background of a weird one-off bit of loot isn't something anyone can or should duplicate—but it can be fun to offer players a chance to be involved in the creation of the weird and wondrous. Here are some common causes for items-gone-wrong.

### BAD RECIPE

It's a well-known rule in cooking—if the recipe is wrong, the result will be wrong. If magic times are created by an ordered, recorded, duplicatable process, that recipe is the key to avoiding mishaps. By that same logic if the recipe is bad—be that because the moldering old notes couldn't be perfectly copied out, or because they were written

in code that is incorrectly translated, or that a previous artificer added an intentional mistake they themselves knew to avoid just to serve as a safeguard—anyone trying to follow the mistaken instructions may get a result that's just a bit off true.

### FAILED SAVING THROW

When an item is exposed to the rigors of adventuring, sometimes either it or its wielder fail a saving throw. Sometimes, they **BADLY** fail a saving throw. If an item is too burned, too shocked, or too close to a *ray of defenestration*, sometimes it gets a bit wonky.

This is a perfectly reasonable backstory for any item (*“Well, we were bathed in a chimera's fiery breath, and my cloak of protection just hasn't been the same ever since. So I am willing to part with it for just a bit less than I'd normally charge...”*), but a GM should be cautious when using it on items in player's possession. It's a fair call if the effect in question is a custom creation designed to produce such results (*“The scrambling field of the magebreaker constructs has been known to mangle more than just spells.”*), or if presented as an alternative to an item being destroyed. A GM could even let a player choose to put an item as risk as an alternative to facing death or unconsciousness (*“Although you failed your save against petrification, you got hit right on the hands—if you'd like for your magic gauntlets of brilliance to take the brunt of that attack you can avoid the effect yourself, though you don't know what that'll do to the gauntlets.”*). But you probably don't want to mess with a player's hard-earned and beloved *holy sword* just because they failed a saving throw against ghoul paralysis—that's not fun for a lot of players.

### RUSHED OR INCOMPLETE PROCEDURES

This is largely the same as a bad recipe, except you can offer it as an intentional short cut. If a player doesn't have the wealth, prerequisites, time, or proper conditions to make a magic item,

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a GM can always offer a chance for a player to try to take a short cut, with the warning that it's not 100% likely to succeed. You can allow an item to be crafted at 75% of the normal cost, or in 75% of the normal time, or both, but a difficult skill check is required to do so successfully. And that check is made in secret by the GM. The GM might warn the player that failure could result in a mishap, or could have that be a complication the player discovers only after a *sword of flaming* is first drawn from its sheath.

## SABOTAGE

If there are artificers and alchemists making magic items, there's always the possibility of someone going out of their way to make those effort go awry. Whether that's just intentionally recreating one of the other circumstances we suggest (swapping out ingredients secretly, rewriting a recipe, placing a stone from a zone of chaos magic in the basement of the magic sword factory) or coming up with some new, specific way to throw a monkey wrench in the magicworks (a mishap curse could be placed on an artificer's tools, or an imp released into the workshop to imbue fiendish evil into each item halfway through its creation), there's no reason making magic items wouldn't be at least as subject to sabotage as military planning or construction.

## ZONE OF CHAOS MAGIC

Sometimes there are just places in the world where magic goes horribly wrong. Perhaps it's the ruined wreck of a magewar, the land above a trickster god's tomb, or the one mountain where an interstellar spaceship crashed and it's hyperdrive began playing havoc with the eldritch fabric of spacetime.

Whatever the reason, it's a zone of chaos magic now.

An item taken into such a zone might temporarily become a mishap magic item (the *cloak of elvenkind* is a *cloak of bad advice* that only speaks elven, until you leave the area), allowing GM and players both to enjoy these quirkiest qualities as a temporary addition to a campaign. Or magic items damaged within the zone might pickup a mishap modifier until repaired, or even permanently. And, of course, if anyone is so foolish (or brilliantly madcap) as to intentionally make a magic item with a zone of chaos magic, they're practically asking to get a mishap.

## MISHAP MODIFIERS

Most mishaps are primarily functional magic items, that just have an odd quirk that is clearly not intended (unlike the few complete a cacophonies of chaos presented later in this book). These are items that serve well enough, but slightly inconvenience their owner from time to time, like a mule that won't go unless you sing it a song, or a bootstrap that you have to tie because the buckle is too lose. They can be considered very-minorly-cursed items, functional but with little mishap about them that only comes up from time to time, under just the right circumstances.

As a GM you can select a specific mishap magic to go with an item, or roll 1d20 to assign a mishap modifier at random. In general items with mishap modifiers should be treated as having the same value as non-mishap items, at least in terms of loot in the PCs' hands, though they might require just the right customer (or collector!) to ever sell or trade away if their quirk is known.

## MAJOR MISHAP MAGICS

While most Magic Mishap Items have fairly minor mishap modifiers, sometimes an item is such a major mishap that it's hard to say what happened. These are the things of legend, or at least comedy sketches, but they are also much closer to being real cursed item. Add them to a game mindfully, or as entirely temporary or optional things for players to pick up.

## CONSUMABLE MISHAP ITEMS

One of the best ways to introduce Magic Mishap Items is with a few eccentric consumables. There's always the risk players just won't ever use them, but they also don't take up as much treasure value and important gear space, so players are more free to carry them around "just in case" they might be useful. Two examples of mishap consumables are presented below.

### ARROWS OF HEALING

*Weapon, rare*

*The steel-tipped shaft slams into its target, puncturing deeply... and then begins to glow. A golden aura surrounds the shaft and the arrow works itself back out of the wound it just caused, leaving behind a pink mark in the flesh it just ravaged.*

**TABLE 1: MISHAP MODIFIER TABLE (1D20)**

<b>01. Bigger.</b>	If you have the item on your person for 8 hours or more, you become 10% taller and 30% heavier for 24 hours. Your clothes and armor grow with you, but not quite enough not to give you a slightly lanky, too-big-for-your-britches look. This has no effect on your size, reach, footprint, or any other game statistic.
<b>02. Catseye.</b>	When the item is in your possession, and for 24 hours afterwards, your eyes change radically. A common version of this is for you to have vertically slit cat's eyes, but other versions include your eyes turning red, or entirely flat black, or even having bits of smoke curl up from their pupils. Other than making you fairly distinctive this is basically harmless. Some edgier adventurers even enjoy the effect.
<b>03. Costly.</b>	Somehow, you lose 1d100 cp each day the item is in your possession. It may fall through a hole in your pocket, be taken as fees from a transaction, or just end up left behind when you wake up and dress from a rented room. No matter what precautions you take, even if your money is not with you, some amount of it disappears to the mishap curse each day.
<b>04. Unseen and Unheard.</b>	When the item is on your person when an effect would normally blind you, you are instead deafened for the same duration. When an effect would normally deafen you, you are instead blinded for the same duration. In both cases, your senses are significantly scrambled, allowing you to see sounds, hear colors, and smell changes of temperature.
<b>05. Dimension Flap.</b>	The item occasionally and randomly teleports you a short distance. When you roll a natural 13 on an attack roll or saving throw (the d20 shows a "13"), you are teleported 5 feet in a random direction. You are never teleported into a space with an environment more dangerous than the one you are in—for example you would not be teleported off the edge of a cliff or into a fire (if you weren't already in a fire), but might be teleported within reach of a monster. You can never trigger this ability intentionally.
<b>06. Dragonfriend.</b>	The item loves dragons. That has an upside—you can speak Draconic while the item is on your person, and gain advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks with dragons. But it also has a downside, the item makes it hard to harm dragons—any dragons, and you take a -2 penalty to attack rolls against dragons while the item is on your person.
<b>07. Flutterby.</b>	The item attracts butterflies, even in places you wouldn't expect to find them (though not in environments hostile to butterflies, like underwater). As long as you are on the move this doesn't have any significant effect—the occasional extra butterfly normally goes without notice. But if you stay in one place for an hour or more, the number of butterflies nearby increases significantly. This is mostly only an issue if you are trying to be hidden while camping, and your foe knows that a bush covered in butterflies is a sure sign you are nearby.
<b>08. Footloose.</b>	Your feet become invisible for as long as the item is on your person. This has no effect on any footwear you have, or leaving footprints, and normally has no effect on gameplay. However, it is more difficult for people to perform Wisdom (Medicine) checks on issues that exclusively deal with your feet, imposing a -2 penalty to such checks.

# MAGIC MISHAP ITEMS

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| <b>09. Heavy.</b>                     | The item is just heavier than it should be. It has 50% more weight, to a minimum of weighing 1 lb. This has no effect on its effectiveness, it just makes it somewhat awkward.  |
| <b>10. Heraldic.</b>                  | Having the item on your person for 8 hours or more causes your clothing, armor, and shield to be marked with symbols that indicate your true loyalties, titles, offices, and religion, as appropriate. You can still disguise yourself by putting on a different set of clothing, but any such costume has an 8-hour maximum duration unless you keep changing, or work such symbols into your costume.   |
| <b>11. It's an item that says so.</b> | Literally, it occasionally utters the word "so," generally in common though some have specific other languages and accents. You take disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks. On the other hand, you can make any claim you want, and if someone challenges you on it, you can honestly reply you have an item that says so.<br>You can have similar effect for items that randomly giggle, burp, sneeze, or yell "Hey stinkhead" in orcish.   |
| <b>12. Older.</b>                     | If you have the item on your person for 8 hours or more, you look much older than your true age for 24 hours. This doesn't change what level of maturity you look compared to the standards of your society – an infant looks like an older infant, a child looks like an older child, a mature adult looks like a much older mature adult, and so on. You still recognizably look like yourself, just in good age-increasing makeup.   |
| <b>13. Pale.</b>                      | If you have the item on your person for 8 hours or more, you and all your clothing and equipment becomes extremely pale for 24 hours. Colors fade, highlights become pastel, shine dulls, and so on. The effect is not enough to alter any abilities or die rolls, just to make you notably pale. You still recognizably look like yourself, just in a sun-faded coloration.  |
| <b>14. Saturated.</b>                 | If you have the item on your person for 8 hours or more, you and all your clothing and equipment becomes extremely bright and chromatic. Colors intensify, highlights brighten, shine sparkles, and so on. The effect is not enough to alter any abilities or die rolls, just to make you notably colorful. You still recognizably look like yourself, just in particularly bright colors and contrasts.  |
| <b>15. Shocking.</b>                  | The item draws electricity and lighting toward it. There's a downside to that—you gain disadvantage on saving throws against lighting spells and effects, and attacks that do lightning damage gain advantage against you. However, it also means if a creature adjacent to you is targeted by lightning damage, you may (without taking an action) decide to pull that lightning a bit toward you, giving the creature advantage on any saving throw, or any disadvantage on any associated attack roll. |
| <b>16. Smaller.</b>                   | If you have the item on your person for 8 hours or more, you become 10% shorter and 30% lighter for 24 hours. Your clothes and armor shrink with you, but not quite enough not to give you a slightly loose, wearing-an-older-sibling's-gear look. This has no effect on your size, reach, footprint, or any other game statistic.  |

<p><b>17. Stinky.</b></p>	<p>The item has a foul odor about it, though only when in use. If you pack it away at the bottom of a backpack you're fine, but once it's worn or in hand, creatures using scent to attempt Wisdom (Perception) or (Survival) checks to find or track you gain advantage on the check. On the other hand, while it's easy to track you by scent, creatures doing so must succeed at a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or have their sense of smell blinded by the stench for 1d4 hours.</p>
<p><b>18. Telepathetic.</b></p>	<p>The item randomly causes you to exchange surface thoughts with one creature attacking you, and the exchange causes you to both have too much sympathy for the other to do your best to kill one another. The first time in each combat a creature attacking you rolls a natural 11 (the d20 shows an 11), you and it exchange surface thoughts as if each had affected the other with <i>detect thoughts</i>. You have a deeply-felt sympathy for one another for the remainder of the fight, and each take a disadvantage to attack rolls against the other, and gain advantage on saving throws against effects the other creates.</p>
<p><b>19. Toast au Fromage.</b></p>	<p>While the item is on your person, you have the skill to make the most amazing cheese toast.</p>
<p><b>20. Younger.</b></p>	<p>If you have the item on your person for 8 hours or more, you look much younger than your true age for 24 hours. This doesn't change what level of maturity you look compared to the standards of your society – an infant looks like a younger infant, a child looks like a younger child, a mature adult looks like a much younger mature adult, and so on. You still recognizably look like yourself, just in good age-decreasing makeup.</p>

Some magic items just weren't carefully thought out. *Arrows of healing* fall in this category. When a target is short by such an arrow they receive magic healing... which isn't necessarily a greater amount than the damage done by the arrow. Worse, to ensure the arrows don't discharge their healing magic accidentally while being jostled in transport or sitting in a quiver, their mystic potential isn't activated until they are actually fired from a bow (or crossbow—bolts of healing can use exactly the same rules) and damage a target.

When you shoot a creature with an arrow of healing there's a 50% chance you do damage normally, and a 50% chance you heal it of 1d8 damage.

## POTION OF WONDERS

### *Potion, common*

*The vial of clearly magical fluid trembles slightly, as if so full of potential that it can't lay still. Through the frosted glass, a kaleidoscope of colors and shapes is constantly churned and glowing, and occasionally a faint giggle escapes the stopper.*

There are significant disagreements about where potions of wonder come from. One school of

thought believes they are obviously the result of attempting to blend three or more different kinds of magic elixir in the hopes of creating a draught that can provide multiple benefits while only taking the time to quaff a single fluid. A second theory suggests they are the result of a *wand of wonder* being dropped in a barrel of pickling brine, and the essential chaotic magic being leached out to form its own form of potion. But the most commonly held belief is that some mischievous force (faeries are often suggested, but so are clergy of various trickster gods) made these on purpose, just to mess with people.

It's certainly true that the effect of a *potion of wonders* is more potent than a typical potion, and much more common than a *wand of wonder*. Unfortunately, it's also entirely random. You might receive potent healing... or greatly enhanced senses. Stories of a *potion of wonders* giving a desperate adventurer exactly what they need when they needed it are common, but one presumes the cases where the badly injured adventurer died when the chaotic magic simply aren't talked about as much.

Any saving throw required by the effects of a *potion of wonder* has a DC of 15.

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01-05	Next creature damaged by the imbiber within 1 round affected by <i>slow</i> for 10.	50-53	Imbiber is affected by <i>enlarge/reduce</i> , with a 50% chance of either effect.
06-10	<i>Faerie fire</i> surrounds the next creature damaged by the imbiber within 1 round.	54-58	<i>Darkness</i> , 30 ft-diameter hemisphere, centered in the imbiber.
11-15	Deludes the imbiber for 1 round into believing the potion functioned as indicated by a second die roll (no save).	59-62	Imbiber is healed for 2 hp/level.
16-20	<i>Gust of wind</i> centered on imbiber.	63-65	Imbiber ignores all conditions for 1 round.
21-25	Imbiber learns the surface thoughts of the next creature the imbiber damaged within 1 round (as with <i>detect thoughts</i> ) for 1d4 rounds (no save).	66-69	Imbiber gains a 5-ft fly speed for 24 hours.
26-30	<i>Stinking cloud</i> appears centered on the imbiber, but the imbiber is immune.	70-79	Any time in the next 1d4 rounds, the imbiber can cast a single <i>fireball</i> .
31-33	Heavy rain falls for 1 round in 60 ft radius centered on the imbiber.	80-84	Imbiber becomes invisible, as <i>invisibility</i> .
34-36	Any time in the next 1d4 rounds, the imbiber can summon one creature. It is a rhino (01-25 on d%), elephant (26-50), or rat (51-100).	85-87	Leaves grow from the imbiber. These last 24 hours.
37-46	Any time in the next 1d4 rounds, the imbiber can cast a single <i>lightning bolt</i> .	88-90	5d4 gems, value 1 gp each, fall on the imbiber. Each gem deals 1 point of damage.
47-49	A stream of 600 large butterflies pours forth from the imbiber's mouth and flutters around for 2 rounds, blinding everyone within a 60 ft. cone (Dexterity saving throw negates).	91-95	Shimmering colors dance and play over a 40 ft x 30 ft area entered on the imbiber. Creatures therein are blinded for 1d6 rounds (a successful Constitution saving throw negates).
		96-97	All then imbiber's gear (50% chance) or the imbiber's hair and eyes (50% chance) turn permanently blue, green, or purple (no save).
		98-99	Imbiber is immune for 1d4 hours to the last spell or magic effect to affect them.
		100	Imbiber is immune for 1d4 hours to the next spell or magic effect to affect them.

## MAJOR MISHAP ITEMS

A major mishap item is one that has more than just a mishap modifier, and is a permanent magic item that fulfills the same kind of function and position as a standard magic item. There's a narrow line between being a major mishap item and just being a quirky cursed magic item. In general, a major mishap item must be genuinely useful in some regard, and importantly be more useful than it is hindering. But at the same time, it must clearly work in a way that no one would have attempted to create intentionally.

You can do some major mishap items with just a disconnected between form and function—think of magic pants that give you better vision, or a magic storage container that doesn't hold more than usual but does allow you to teleport. Certainly some

classic magic items from myths and legend fall into this category if considered logically—there's nothing about either a broom or a carpet that makes them a logical choice to grant the power of flight for example. Major mishap items like this are easy to create by taking a standard magic item, and given it an unusual form without changing any other rules.

The other common category of major mishap items is those that do something that initially seems useless, but actually as a beneficial side effect. These take a good deal more careful planning and consideration, but can also be more fun in the long run. Two examples of that kind of major mishap item are presented below.

### CLOAK OF BAD ADVICE

*Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)*

*The impressively tall and ornate collar of the cloak shivers, and then the mouths on its two golden*



*clasps begin making improbable suggestions on ways to scale a cliff using catapults, elephants, and a series of interlocked spiked chains.*

No one is sure exactly what the creator of the first cloak of bad advice was *trying* to create. Little can be gleaned from the cloak's appearance. The cloak itself is a bright crimson cloth, normally fine linen, but less often of silk or satin. It is lined in samite with ornate stitched patterns, and has a stiff, ornate collar that sticks up higher than a typical wearer's head on the back and sides. It is held in place by two heavy golden clasps, each with a pair of full, sculpted lips upon them, and a gold chain that connects the clasps.

The intended design of the cloak was almost certainly an effort to have some kind of advisor or social enchantment placed in a cape or robe... which is already an odd choice. In fact, some artificers call out the cloak as proof that there's a reason no one normally tries to make *boots of eloquence* or *pants of charming* (though that last does occasionally show up as custom requests from performers).

Regardless of the intent, the end result is both much worse than could have possibly been intended, and strangely useful. Because at apparently random moments, which failure is almost certain, the cloak offers up advice.

Spectacularly bad advice.

The cloak activates only when you attempt an ability check or skill check, and the die result is a natural 5 (the d20 shows a "5"). When that happens, the two golden mouth-clasps both begin making suggestions on how to overcome the task you were attempting with the ability or skill check.

And all the suggestions are bad. Not just a little bad, but tremendously, spectacularly bad. Ideas-that-will-get-you-killed-or-kicked-out-of-church bad. And obviously so. If you attempt to follow the advice, you not only automatically fail the check, you suffer the worst possible failure (for example if a check has a more severe penalty for failing by 5 or more, or if a system of critical fumbles is in place, you suffer those worst possible results).

But for all their terrible details, the horrific recommendations of the cloak also spark creative

thoughts in the wearer. As long as you do not follow the cloak's advice, you can change tactics at the last second and possibly succeed where you would have failed. *As a reaction*, you can immediately reroll the ability or skill check that triggered the cloak's ability. You must use the second roll, but if the d20 result on the second roll is a 01-05, add +10 to the final result.

## **SWORD OF FLAMING/SWORD OF FROST** *Weapon, rare (requires attunement)*

*You draw the golden blade from its sheath, and immediately warm flicking flames cover your body! The sword, however, remains mundane.*

These weapons were clearly designed to enwrap the blade of the weapons in elemental energies, and keep those energies from damaging the wielder. By a quirk of artifice, that's not what they do. Instead the wielder is encased in elemental energies, while the blade is untouched by them.

Most sages suspect the elemental magic was written in the Imperial system, and the defensive magic was written in the M'trik system, resulting in a disconnected between how the two imbuements work together.

Regardless of the mishap that created them, these weapons still serve as useful magic items, if not quite in the way their creators originally intended. While the wielder of the weapon is not protected from the fire or frost covering them (though their gear and anything carried is), and their attacks don't transfer the energy (the same magic that prevents the weapon from being covered in elemental energy prevents it from adding to the damage done by an unarmed attack or a secondary weapon), the energy does impact a creature if it attacks the wielder with an unarmed attack or a natural attack such as a claw or bite. (Even the most delicate weapons used to attack the wielder are unaffected—you can use an oil-soaked torch to hit someone holding a sword of flaming with no risk of it getting lit. The magic protecting weapons from the elemental energies is extremely efficient, if seriously misplaced.)

When you are struck by an unarmed attack or natural weapon, the attacker takes 1d6 fire or cold damage (as appropriate to the sword).

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