

A BLESSING AND A CURSE



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I. THE PHILOSOPHY

Players want cool stuff. Every Game Master has had a player ask for a powerful items to add to their character sheets. While Game Masters love to see their players enjoy the fantasy of playing powerful characters, such great power often undermines the equally important fun of problem solving. But when an item is too weak, it goes forgotten, adding nothing to the player's toolbox for solving problems.

On the other hand, a Game Master will sometimes want to give the players a piece of loot that is a trap. Too often these items lose their potential because players inevitably seek out the true nature of such items through magical means before being foolish enough to try to use them. Even when players too inexperienced to be suspicious of cursed items do use them, these items only provide an inflexible detriment until the means can be found to remove them, often a single spell.

Here I propose a methodology for coming to a more satisfying solution to both desires, the desire of players for powerful magical items and the desire of Game Masters for conflict driving cursed items. This method relies on benefits that must be balanced by the players against

known detriments that will be present until it can be removed.

II. CHARACTERISTICS

To systematically create these powerful but limited items, we use three characteristics that define their behavior: Benefits, Detriments, and Removal Conditions.

A. BENEFITS

The benefits of the item should be purely positive. In general, avoid interpreting unintended negative outcomes from these characteristics.

Cold Immunity-The wearer cannot be harmed by cold, whether magical or natural.

Dark Vision-The wearer can see in the dark as if by a dim light.

Eagle Sight-The wearer can see a great distance, as with the sight of an eagle.

Feather Fall-The wearer falls slowly enough not to take damage from falling.

Fire Immunity-The wearer cannot be harmed by fire, no matter how hot.

Fireball Throwing-Allows the wearer to summon and hurl balls of fire.

Flight-The wearer can fly. Speed and control may vary from item to item.

d20	Benefits	Detriments	Removal Conditions
1	Fire Immunity	Can't Drink	In a flame
2	Perfect Disguise	Always Itchy	Electrical discharge
3	Stone Skin	Slowed	Enclosed in mud for an hour
4	Feather Fall	Can't Breathe	Be unconscious
5	Mirror Image	Disorientation	Must reach into a mirror and remove from reflection
6	Silence	Deaf	Exposed to moonlight
7	Invisibility	Blind	Retrieve a beacon whose light cancels the benefit
8	Dark Vision	Can't Sleep	In total, absolute darkness
9	Shocking Touch	Wounds Don't Heal	Be wounded nearly to death
10	Wall Passing	Can't Interact	A fae creature must remove it
11	Eagle Sight	Animal Intelligence	Remove with teeth
12	Flight	Squawk Uncontrollably	In free fall
13	Time Slowing	Paralyzed Limb	Remove limb
14	Haste	Horrible stench	Bathe in fresh running water
15	Water Breathing	Can't Speak	Four people trying
16	Levitation	Must Crawl on All Fours	Must spend the night under an open sky
17	Short-Range Teleport	Take Damage	Return to location where equipped
18	Fireball Throwing	Evil Attracted to User	Body fully submerged
19	Cold Immunity	Can't Eat	Standing on highest visible point
20	Protection from Evil	User Has an Evil Aura	Defeat bound spirit challengers

Haste-The wearer has increased movement speed.

Invisibility-The wearer cannot be seen by mundane means. More powerful instances may defy even magical means of penetrating invisibility.

Levitation-The wearer can float freely any direction, though slowly.

Mirror Image-The wearer is moves with 1-4 duplicate images that make it difficult to choose the right target.

Perfect Disguise-When wearing the ring the wearer looks like someone else. The exact effect may vary from giving the wearer a random appearance, to giving them the same appearance each time, to giving the wearer the appearance they envision.

Protection from Evil-The wearer is protected from the effects of evil.

Shocking Touch-The wearer is charged with electrical energy and delivers a painful and potentially damaging shock to whoever they touch.

Short-Range Teleport-Allows the wearer to teleport 8 feet at will.

Silence-The wearer makes no sound, perhaps with exceptions for intentional sounds.

Stone Skin-The wearer's skin is hardened, providing some protection against physical attacks.

Time Slowing-The wearer perceives things as happening more slowly, allowing him more time to react and make decisions. The wearer may or may not have increased speed to match the change in time perception.

Wall Passing-The wearer can pass through walls and floors at will.

Water Breathing-The wearer can breathe under water.

B. DETRIMENTS

The detriments of the item should be purely negative. In general, avoid allowing players to interpret unintended positive outcomes.

Always Itchy-The wearer is tormented by constant and acute itching.

Animal Intelligence-The wearer loses most cognitive ability, comprehending the world as an animal, though maintaining goals present at the time of equipping the item as a base instinct.

Blind-The wearer cannot see.

Can't Breathe-The wearer cannot suck in air and must hold their breath until the item is removed.

Can't Drink-Liquids refuse to pass the wearer's lips.

Can't Eat-The wearer gags on any food they try to eat. Food they do get down is vomited up immediately.

Can't Interact-The wearer can't move things in the physical world other than what they were wearing when the item was put on.

Can't Sleep-The wearer is denied the embrace of sleep no matter how exhausted they become.

Can't Speak-The wearer loses the capacity for speech, whether completely silenced or only capable of uttering gibberish.

Deaf-The wearer cannot hear.

Disorientation-The wearer loses all sense of direction and has trouble remembering where they are and what they are doing.

Evil Attracted to User-Evil creatures, perhaps miles away, sense the wearer and are attracted to them to destroy them.

Horrible Stench-The wearer stinks with a putrid aroma that spreads for hundreds of feet, even further if downwind.

Must Crawl on All Fours-The wearer is compelled to crawl on hands and knees, falling when they try to walk upright.

Paralyzed Limb-The wearer cannot use the limb or body part the item is equipped on.

Slowed-The wearer is slowed as if severely encumbered regardless of strength.

Squawk Uncontrollably-The wearer cannot resist the urge to make raucous squawking sounds at all times, even while sleeping.

Take Damage-The wearer is slowly killed by the item, whether by old wounds reopening or life force quietly draining away.

User Has an Evil Aura-The wearer appears evil to anyone with the power to sense intentions and alignment.

Wounds Don't Heal-The wearer's wounds don't close, whether by magical or natural means.

C. REMOVAL CONDITIONS

Removal conditions serve the role of forcing the player to consider the cost of the detriment long after they have finished using the benefit. The detriment will persist until they can remove

the item. Removal should come with effort or limit the application of the item.

A fae creature must remove it-The item must be removed with the help of a fae creature, whether a specific one (Meadra the Fairy), a specific kind (a Dryad), or any member of the fae.

Bathe in fresh running water-The item can only be removed when the wearer has recently bathed in fresh running water, such as a river or stream.

Be unconscious-The item can only be removed from the wearer when they are unconscious.

Be wounded nearly to death-The wearer must be wounded and on the edge of death to remove the item.

Body fully submerged-The wearer must be submerged in water to remove the item.

Defeat bound spirit challengers-When the wearer equips the item, the spirits of those that were sacrificed in its creation emerge in the surrounding area. They seek out and attack the wearer. The item cannot be removed until they are defeated. A variant might be for the spirits to be fleeing.

Electrical discharge-The item must be exposed to an electrical discharge to break its hold on the wearer.

Enclosed in mud for an hour-The item must be encased in mud for an hour before it can be removed.

Exposed to moonlight-The item must be touched by beams of moonlight to be removed. The intensity required may vary.

Four people trying-It takes the efforts of four people to remove the item from the wearer.

In a flame-The item must be bathed in a hot flame to be removed from the wearer.

In free fall-The wearer must be falling near their terminal velocity to remove the item.

In total, absolute darkness-The item cannot be removed when exposed to any light whatsoever.

Must reach into a mirror and remove from reflection-The wearer can reach across the boundary of a reflection and remove the item from their reflection. Their reflection will do the same to remove it from the wearer.

Must spend the night under an open sky-The item can only be removed after the wearer has spent a night out in the open. Tree cover may

or may not render the night ineffective. How long the item can be removed after the night can also vary from right at sunrise to until sunset of that day.

Remove limb-The item cannot be removed until the limb on which it is worn is removed entirely.

Remove with teeth-The item can only be removed from the wearer with their teeth. Some more generous items may allow it to be removed by another person's or animal's teeth, living or dead.

Retrieve a beacon whose light cancels the benefit-When the item is equipped, a beacon of light (possibly colored) appears somewhere, whether a random location or always in the same direction, usually nearby. The light of the beacon cancels all benefits and maybe detriments of the item when it falls on the wearer. The wearer must grab the ethereal beacon to remove the item.

Return to location where equipped-The item cannot be removed until the wearer returns to where they put the item on.

Standing on highest visible point-The item cannot be removed until the wearer has reached the highest point visible when they equipped the item.

III. CONSIDERATIONS

At this point you can certainly figure out how to use this resource to meet your needs. This may mean rolling for combinations on the table, rolling for individual characteristics, or picking and choosing to design an item purposefully. This section points out some things to consider to make more satisfying items and to avoid pitfalls in making items.

A. BALANCE

One dimension to consider is how good, to grossly over simplify, the item is. Think about if you're trying to give the player a useful boon, an interesting tool, or an enticing trap. This intention should dictate the power level of the item as a whole. Boons can have benefits that far outweigh the drawbacks while trap items can have drawbacks out of proportion to the benefit.

B. THEMING

These blessed and cursed items can introduce story and flavor into your game with a little effort in theming. Whether constructing the items by hand or creating them randomly, think about a backstory that explains the combination you come up with and a colorful name to match.

C. INTERACTION

Part of the puzzle of using an item of this kind is navigating the interactions between the benefits, detriments, and removal conditions. Consider what detriments lead to the most interesting limitations to the benefit.

D. NON-CONTRADICTION

When an item's benefit is directly cancelled by the detriment (e.g. **Eagle Sight** and **Blind**), a removal condition is made impossible (e.g. **Can't Interact** and **Be Unconscious**), or a detriment is easily avoided by the benefit (e.g. **Flight** and **Slowed**), the challenge the item is meant to introduce is nullified due to uselessness or simplicity of overcoming the challenge. Keep an eye out for and avoid these situations.

IV. EXAMPLES

Spectral Ring: Grants both **Silence** and **Invisibility** by transporting the wearer to a spectral plane where they **Cannot Interact** with the real world. The spirits of those sacrificed to create the ring attack and **must be defeated before it can be removed**. Perhaps in this spectral plane, the wearer also cannot see or hear people from the real world, just as they cannot be seen or heard by them.

Trespasser's Mask: Grants **Wall Passing**, but the wearer **Can't Breathe**. To be removed, the wearer must **return to where they were when they put the mask on**. The mask is a dark, purple scarf that wraps around the head, covering mouth and nose.

Bloodfire Gauntlet: Grants the wearer **Fireball Throwing**, though each fireball thrown **burns the gauntleted hand**, searing away the flesh and expanding up the arm with continued use. These burns **do not heal**, even through magic, while the gauntlet is worn. The

gauntlet can only be removed while **bathed in a freshwater river or stream**.

Fiedall's Helm: The wearer gains **Stone Skin** and **Time is Slowed** for them, though the experience is extremely **Disorienting**. They also **lose the ability to speak**, feeling as if caught up in a dream. Fiedall famously would charge ahead into battle, having great success, though his comrades would often find him **unconscious** on the field and have to remove his helmet. On his final battlefield, they found only his body, his head and the helm had vanished.

Girdle of Blind Determination: The wearer gains **Haste** at the cost of **Blindness**. The girdle can be removed freely.

Cape of the Imposter: Upon donning the cape, the wearer **takes on the appearance** of any member of the nobility envisioned. The cape cannot be removed or the appearance changed except by the wearer acknowledging his disguised self in a mirror and **reaching across the boundary of reflection to remove the cape** and undo the disguise.



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