

Magical Laws

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Magic is dangerous. Even a low-level caster is capable of destruction and mayhem on par with small explosives. Some possess abilities to kill that leave no trace, no weapon, and no wound. Naturally, like how many countries control the obtainment and use of weapons in both the ancient and modern world, those who live in fantasy worlds would look at the regulation of use of magic as it pertains to the danger it poses to citizens and property.





The Challenge

The biggest hurdle any enterprising city would have in the regulation of destructive magic is the simple fact that there is no real difference between a mage and any other person. If Gandalf, for example, simply removed his hat and set aside his staff he would look no different from any wizened old man walking down the street.

Many of these people are born with these powers because of their heritage, such as tieflings and sorcerers. Others gain their powers because of their race, such as gnomes. Some even gain their powers through mysterious circumstance such as oracles. As a result, this makes it exceedingly difficult to outright ban or regulate magic as plenty of normal people can gain such powers without any formal training or resources.

This requires governments to be creative in order to properly ensure that laws are in place to protect common citizenry without unduly restricting those who are magical by nature rather than training. There are three ways in which a fantasy city could attempt to regulate magic in a manner that can serve and aid the city while protecting its people.

Registration

The first and perhaps least invasive method for magic to be controlled is the use of registries to catalog and track a city's magic using population. Many of these registries would have little more than a name, a place of residence, and a short list of their magical capabilities that would be updated periodically if the person in question moved or if their abilities changed in some manner. Such registries would be available as a public record and would be

maintained either by the local mages guild or a government office tasked for it.

The effect of such registries would allow people to make informed decisions about those they hire, those they allow as tenants, or those they have as neighbors. Such registries would be filled at the gates where a simple low-level spellcaster would use *detect magic* to determine the strength and location of spellcasters entering the city. Those spellcasters would be stopped, asked a few brief questions, and asked to report to a guard post or guildhall for a proper interview. Those who refuse to show or are uncooperative would be considered outlaws and expelled from the city at the first opportunity. Those who lie and are caught would face any relevant charges for lying to a peace officer.

This has a couple of interesting outcomes. It not only opens up the discrimination of mages (as one can easily expect), but also protects the citizenry from charlatans who claim magical power while possessing none. It can also serve as foundation for other laws that can help control magic. Those with a penchant for necromancy or enchantment can simply be barred from the city. Some with particularly destructive magic may be barred from certain industrial quarters where a stray spell can cost hundreds of lives and thousands of gold pieces in damage.

Service

A potential expansion to the idea of the registry is a requirement of service in order to reside in the city. Aasimars may be required to come down into the cities underground to cast a *daylight* spell for workers doing maintenance on the city's sewer. Druids may be required once a season to go to a city's natural park or gardens and cast *plant growth* to save the city

on maintenance. The actual work involved would depend upon the power and ability of the spellcaster.

However, regardless of the work, the result would be clear: the city would benefit from the mage's ability for little more than a day's worth of time, time that the city would likely compensate them for handsomely. This precedent is no different from military conscription or jury duty, where common citizens are required to give some community service in order to help the running of the government and defense of the country.

The purpose of such laws would not only be in gaining service of magic users, but in also ensuring that those magic users are in the public eye. Powerful and potentially destructive magic users may be called upon often by city officials. Such magic users would have less time to get up to mischief and cause great harm, while at the same providing a great benefit to the community. Those who are less powerful or useful would be called upon much more rarely. This in turn becomes an incentive to people who use magic to specialize in whatever way they find most convenient in order to ensure they are only called upon rarely.

Guild Enforcement

Often a city may simply empower a local mage organization to draw up regulations and laws governing the use of magic and employ their own enforcers. The reason for this is simple: magic knows magic best. A city clerk or sheriff may be quite good at ensuring someone pays their taxes or shows up for their community service, but quite bad at determining how powerful a mage is, what they are capable of, and even worse at protecting themselves when that magic is turned on them.

Rather than going through the expense of training and hiring groups of mages to act as advisers, some cities may find it more pragmatic to allow the formation of mage guilds while entrusting and empowering them to regulate and enforce magic throughout the city. Such guilds can become then quite powerful and influential as a result. Self-sustaining with the services they provide—and requiring the trust of the people in order to exist—such a guild can become a very attractive option for any magic user.

With the knowledge and services they provide, the mage's guild not only enforces proper use of magic but also can work to educate and train mages, providing a safe haven for magic users to hone their skills. This can in turn allow them to pressure mages both economically and by force—if necessary—to fall in line with the city's laws.

An expansion upon the guild idea is the role that religions might play in such an ordering. Gods of magic would take a great interest in not only ensuring that magic is used but also that magic is not stamped out of a city because of rogue mages turning the idea sour to mundane people.

Bringing these laws into your game

The ultimate reason for establishing and using this or any fantasy law system for your game is to establish verisimilitude. It is important for players to understand that their characters are special, and that other people know this, as well as appreciating that such powers are not necessarily unique to them and do have a real impact on the world around them. A character might balk at the idea that a dirty guard is asking invasive questions about his

power, but when the guard casually mentions that a mage could slay him—and dozens of others on the spot—with a word and a gesture, it hammers home the idea that the people of a city understand the inherent dangers of magic and its capabilities.

The other reason to use such laws is as important plot points. A mage accused of a murder may use their entry in the registry as a large piece of evidence in the case against them. The PC's may have to discover if the records were altered, if the mage lied, or if the mage was framed and the registry used against them. A sorcerer may be barred from entering a dilapidated quarter for fear that his penchant for fire spells might set an uncontrollable blaze through the city, and this may in turn bring the PC's in to help him do business there. In another potential scenario, the PC's may find themselves constantly harassed by the guild of mages after turning a tidy profit doing business in the city, requiring them to either join or face reprisal in the form of the guild's enforcers. Other businesses may refuse to deal with them as well out of fear of reprisal. Lastly, using the loopholes and imperfections in the laws can allow you to create unique magical methods that can make a city more memorable and interesting.

The important thing to remember with such laws, as they should never serve as an unnecessary restriction on players' creativity and agency. Player characters that run up against the law should not be punished often as long as they are careful and do not flagrantly violate it. Instead, utilize them to color your world and immerse the players in your game.

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