Magic Items Done Correctly
Making outfitting a character not a nightmare
By Eeveerulz55, platinumCheesecake

Let's be honest. Unless you're a well-seasoned player, or you really enjoy looking through the SRD for hours on end, buying and selling magic items can be an incredibly daunting task that takes up a sizeable amount of time. Rules-as-written, currently if a character wants a magic item that falls under the base price of a given settlement, that character has to specifically seek out that item and hope that such an item exists in said settlement. Any magic item generated with tables is supposed to be one not included in the range below the base limit, but they are not the only items in a city. If I have a small city and I'm generating magic items, only items above 4,000 gp are listed for that city. But what this also means is that anything under that threshold is not even listed for purchase, even though it would he And there are a *ton* of items under 4,000 gp. Naturally, this is a huge problem, and for two major reasons.

Firstly, it means that a given player needs to know exactly what he or she wants from all the options provided. This was significantly less of an issue back when the rules governing magic items and settlements were written, as drastically fewer options were out there for players to acquire. In other words, you simply didn't have the option to choose between *gloves of reconnaissance* or a *quick runner's shirt* to spend with your 3k gold. But now, with the massive library of items Pathfinder has accrued, it stands that it's frankly a bit ridiculous to abide by the same assumptions about what players know about the world. With every sourcebook and player companion comes more and more options to choose from and to be overwhelmed with. There's simply no way to know of every possible item in the game. Which brings me to the second problem.

The other issue with this methodology is that it assumes that actual characters themselves know enough about magic items to be able to make such a decision. The rules state that any item under a settlement's base limit has a 75% chance of being purchasable. So if your world has a Metropolis with the standard base limit of 16,000 gp, this means that every character, including the 7 int barbarian, knows of the existence of every magical item under 16,000 (not even counting literally every minor magic item that's also included as part of a metropolis). Unless of course, you honestly believe that your character spends in-game days at every possible shop in a city, identifying and appraising all of his options (possibly taking 20 on spellcraft checks and with multiple castings of *identify*) before settling on the strongest solution.

Yeah, me neither.

How do we determine what makes a good system?

Unfortunately, no solution to this problem of too much to choose from is going to be perfect. The following variant rules are made with my personal design choices, and mine alone. This guide is specifically catered towards minimizing time spent poring over items. You ultimately are free to choose whatever method you would like; nobody's stopping you from continuing to do things your way. I created this system using my own personal design philosophy, and I'm sure it's not a perfect match for all players. So simply enough, continue reading only if the following considerations interest you.

Personal Considerations when Determining Rules Changes
- The GM should be largely responsible for character item possession, and by extension, average character strength.
- The GM has already pledged to invest time to build a world, and should be the one between sessions to write up tables and stats.
- The GM's prep time is valuable, and any changes should be conscious of this fact.
- Any system that overcomplicates to excess in an attempt to fix a problem is not worth the changes it made.
- All changes must make sense in the context of a fantasy setting. No deus ex machina.
- Be wary of any system that takes away large portions of actual game time.

In addition, I'm of the rather unpopular opinion that players do not need to be statistically the 100% most optimized character possible for their build. In the creation of this system, I have set that opinion aside, and I have judged this system entirely upon the doctrine outlined above. This, however, does not mean that the revised system will be balanced just as before. This system DOES remove options from players. However, as you will see, it will have its own countermeasures to ensure that hopefully not much is lost.

So with all that out of the way, we can finally take a look at what our new Settlement Magic Item system looks like.

Changes to the Old System

We will be altering and adding tables and tweaking some small amount of word choices. For the lazy, here is a link to d20pfsrd's [page on Settlements](#), though I've tried to do a good enough job explaining changes as I make them so you really shouldn't need it.

The primary change I've made is changing the purpose of the base limit. It no longer is used for determining magical item availability the way it had in the past. In a fantasy world, it makes sense that skilled craftsmen of all sorts sell only goods or services that they specialize in. A candlemaker would not offer cobbling services, nor would a cobbler sell candles. Magic Items

should be no different. Instead of having the base limit of a settlement abide over all magic items, period, it makes more sense that the presence of items is dictated upon those who can make them.

Now of course, buying and selling items is just as much a part of any fantasy economy as creating them is. You still have the odd tailor who happens to have an heirloom *+1 light mace* his father gave to him (who would be willing to part with it for some coin), or the general store owner who carries a few *potions of cure light wounds* for convenience. The magic items in a city are reflected in odd locations such as these just as much as they can be by the skilled wizards and clerics who can make them. However, as a result of trimming down for efficiency, such items are regretfully excluded from this system. While it does make sense that there should be items for sale beyond the ones displayed behind a glass case somewhere, such items should be incorporated into a city entirely at the will of the GM. It is for this reason that this system deals exclusively with the largest providers of magic items, them being magic shops themselves.

The New Settlement Stat Block
This system continues to use the bulk of all tables as in the Settlements section of the Other Rules chapter. For copyright's sake, I will not be pasting these tables into this document, as I respect the work paizo has done on this game. Assume everything remains the same as before, except for the following alterations.

Base Limit will still govern the average price of an item that a settlement can carry, as it is still a useful indicator for settlement wealth and trade. Its actual purpose has changed, however. Now, the base limit is the maximum price of an Essential Item you can buy in a city.

Table: Available Magic Items has been completely reworked into the two tables presented below.

Shops Present is a new statistic that determines the number of magic item vendors exist in a city. Naturally, just as any specialist would, a rodmaker would logically have to be the one running a rod shop. It is because of this that magic item shops are separated in accordance to their related item creation feat. Possible shops that can appear in a city are as follows: armor and weapon shops, potion shops, ring shops, rod shops, scroll shops, staff shops, wand shops, wondrous item shops, and specialty shops. Specialty shops comprise all shops that are run using item creation feats not included in the options listed here, such as (but not limited to) Dragoncrafting, Craft Construct, or Inscribe Magical Tattoo. Upon rolling a specialty shop, you as the GM should manually decide what sort of shop best fits with the settlement.

Items per Shop is a new statistic that determines how many items each shop carries, with a slash separating minor, medium, and major items respectively. This value changes every week as items are bought, sold and made, constantly rotating stock.
Table: Shop Types

d%	None	Scroll	Potion	Wand	Wondrous Item	Armor/ Weapon	Ring	Rod	Staff	Specialty
Thorp	1-25	26-65	76-100	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Hamlet	1-10	11-45	46-80	81-95	96-100	--	--	--	--	--
Village	1-5	6-35	36-67	68-76	77-90	91-100	--	--	--	--
Small town	--	1-23	24-47	48-68	69-82	83-94	95-99	--	--	100
Large town	--	1-20	21-41	42-60	61-74	75-86	87-93	94-98	--	99-100
Small city	--	1-19	20-39	40-53	54-63	64-77	78-86	87-93	94-97	98-100
Large city	--	1-17	18-32	33-44	45-57	58-71	72-82	83-91	92-97	97-100
Metropolis	--	1-14	13-26	27-33	34-49	50-65	66-78	79-89	88-95	96-100

Table: Settlement Shops

Community	Shops Present	Items per Shop
Thorp	1d2	1d4
Hamlet	1d4	1d6
Village	1d6	2d4/ 1d4
Small town	2d4	2d6/ 1d4
Large town	2d6	2d6/ 1d6/ 1d4
Small city	3d4	3d4/ 2d4/ 1d6
Large city	3d6	3d4/ 2d6/ 2d4
Metropolis	4d6	4d4/ 3d4/ 2d6

There is one final change I've made that should hopefully keep relative power in check, and shouldn't change too much for those of you who like to optimize characters in particular.

Essential Items is a custom list and something I've come up with that will bridge the gap between power and flavor. It makes sense in a fantasy world for there to be a high demand for especially useful or powerful items, just like in any other world. That is why we will somewhat retain the old rules for Base Limit for a small group of items, often referred to as the "big six."

In every settlement, you have a 75% chance of finding one of the following items, so long as its price is below the settlement's base limit.

Cloak of Resistance
Stat-enhancing Item (*Belt of giant's strength*, *Headband of vast intelligence,* etc)
Multi-Stat-enhancing item (*Headband of mental prowess, Belt of physical perfection*, etc)
Ring of Protection
Amulet of Natural Armor
Static +1/+2/+3/+4/+5 weapons
Static +1/+2/+3/+4/+5 armor

You can include additional items in this list to suit your world, such as *wands of cure light wounds*, or *bags of holding,* but honestly I don't think it's too necessary. With weapons and armor, only items without special abilities (such as *flaming* or *holy*) can be considered Essential. Otherwise what's the point of having a weaponsmith? Lastly, as a friendly reminder, unless your settlements have had their base limit increased, this means that only a Small City can carry +1 weapons, and only a Metropolis can carry +2 weapons, due to the nature of magic item pricing. This seems also pretty reasonable to me.

So to me, this system seems to me to be a pretty fair compromise between realism and power. After all, anyone in a fantasy world seeking to be stronger would naturally gravitate towards these items, so it makes sense to have them readily available. And since the game was balanced to practically account for them anyway, I don't really see this as a nerf to anyone at all.

Generating Items

Okay, now that we've made new tables, let's go over the new procedure for determining magic items step-by-step.

Step 1: Generate a Settlement
Magic item generation should be done at the end of settlement creation, after you have determined its size, base limit, and purchase limit. For every settlement quality that alters a its base limit or purchase limit, proceed as you normally would.

Step 2: Determine Number of Magic Item Shops
Roll the number of dice listed under Shops Present to determine the number of magic item shops exist in this settlement. If the settlement has qualities that alter the base limit or purchase limit, multiply the result of your roll by the associated percentages for each quality to get the final number of shops. Round down as always.

Step 3: Roll for Each Shop
For every shop your settlement has, roll a d% and use Table:Shop Types to create a list of the types of magic item vendors in the settlement corresponding to its size. Feel free to name the shops and write a short description for each. If the result comes up as none, treat it as if you had rolled one fewer shop. This does mean that a settlement can have zero magic item shops.

Step 4: Determine how Much Stock Each Shop can Hold
For every shop, roll for each Minor, Medium, and Major item under the Items per Shop column. This determines the exact number of items of each type the shop holds. Feel free to alter these numbers based on the type of person running a shop. The numbers listed serve only as a baseline for the average shop in a settlement.

Step 5: Roll for each Magic Item
Using a generator or the magic item tables presented in the CRB (or use your own), roll for each magic item in a given shop based on its rarity. If a given item's value exceeds the purchase limit of the settlement, do not reroll. Simply omit that item as if you had rolled one fewer item. This does mean that a shop can have zero magic items of a particular rarity.

Yes, this part does take a bit of work and a lot of pages if you do it by hand. I recommend using the The Treasure by Type function with the [Archives of Nethys Item Generator](#) (though it can be a bit finicky at times) to expedite steps 4 and 5.

This system works well using in-game time as your players express need to visit certain shops. When generating a city, only Step 3 is actually required. A shop's contents only matter once the players walk through the front door. If you have a generator handy during your sessions, it becomes a simple task of preparing the armorsmith's inventory on an as-needed basis. Or if you're like me, you don't mind having a rather large document with a bunch of shops and items already laid out.

An Example Settlement

Let's now make an example settlement, just to show the process. Let's say I want to make a Large Town and I've already decided what qualities it has. It does have one quality that affects its base limit, that being that it is Magically Attuned.

For the number of shops in the settlement, I rolled an 8. Above average. I now increase 8 by the 20% that Magically Attuned provides to get a final number of 9 shops in my Large Town, and a new base and purchase limit of 2,400 and 12,000 gp respectively. Next I roll for each kind of shop. I rolled the following numbers: 73, 7, 33, 8, 17, 41, 81, 10, 59. This gives me 3 scroll shops, 3 potion shops, 1 wondrous item shop, 1 weapon/armor shop, and 1 wand shop. Which is a pretty reasonable distribution if I do say so.

Now I could be done here, or I could take it one step further and roll for each shop just because I like to be prepared. Up to this point, I've only spent about 3 minutes rolling.

Now, i will roll 2d6/ 1d6/ 1d4 a total of 9 times. Online dice rollers can also help with this. In total, I ended up with something looking a bit like this:

Wondrous Item 6 5 4
Scroll$_1$ 3 2 1
Potion$_1$ 9 2 4
Scroll$_2$ 7 5 3
Potion$_2$ 5 2 2
Potion$_3$ 10 5 1
Armor/Weapon 8 6 4
Scroll$_3$ 6 3 1
Wand 11 3 2

Next, I load up the Archives of Nethys generator and plugged in the numbers. I'm able to do multiple shops at a time, as long as they aren't of the same type and it doesn't overload the generator. Again, I could just as easily run this program when my players arrive at a shop, I'm just doing it now as a demonstration.

For potion shop 1, I got the following results
Minor Items
potion of aid (CL 3)
oil of shillelagh (CL 1)
potion of remove fear (CL 1)
potion of blur (CL 3)
potion of barkskin (CL 3)
2 potions of shield of faith (CL 1)
potion of jump (CL 1)
Medium Items
potion/oil of levitate (CL 3)
potion of eagle's splendor (CL 3)
Major Items
potion of fly (CL 5)
potion of bull's strength (CL 3)
2 potions of daylight (CL 5)

None of the items I rolled exceeded 12,000 gp, so I keep them all. Now, I repeat this process for the remaining shops. In total, this whole process took me about 10 minutes for all 9 shops. It used to take you maybe one or two, but I'd say 10 minutes is not a bad trade by any standard when you get out of it what we do.

Other Balance Concerns

The only question you should remaining should be: How does your proposed system affect the game world? Clearly, there are fewer items present in larger cities, as the amount of items covered by the Base Limit system is just too tremendous. But as I will demonstrate, it really shouldn't be too drastic of a change as you might think.

On average, a Large Town used to provide anywhere from 2 to 8 medium items between 2,000-10,000 gp, and 1 to 4 major items between 2,000 and 10,000 gp. This system has on average 7 magic item shops, with a distribution of 7 minor items, 3 medium items, and 2 major items. Which totals to approximately 49 minor items, 21 medium items, and 14 major items per city.

Now before you say that this is clearly more powerful than the original rules, remember that any item above the purchase limit cannot be included. And for a Large Town, this excludes pretty much every major armor, medium ring, major wondrous item, major rod and so on. So by the end of the process, you end up with a distribution of items very similar to what it was before. You have a large (but not all-encompassing) selection of minor items, and a decent selection of medium items, with a few major items to choose from.

There are still more items generated than the regular system would yield with this system. Which is exactly how it should be, since we removed the vagueness of a 75% likely magic item. In addition, you are still able to buy arguably the strongest and most-desirable magic items at the same frequency that you could before. It is because of these reasons that I see little fault in the balance philosophy that went into making this system.

I do understand that this system is a give-and-take, and it's not a perfect solution. Frankly, it couldn't be. To assist you in determining if this system is right for you, I've created a list of the pros and cons of this system. It hopefully shouldn't be *too* biased.

Pros and Cons of this System

+ Realistic: Skilled craftsmen are more likely to be the ones controlling the flow of their given good or service. With the rules Pathfinder has given us, it makes sense that you would find magic items grouped this way.
+ Fleshes out worldbuilding: This is probably my favorite part about this system. With it, you open the door for interesting economic dynamics. If you happen to roll a Small Town with four alchemists, there certainly would be a lot of competition there. Moreover, what makes this town such a good place for brewing potions? Remember, magic item shops are just as much a part of a fantasy world's global culture as anything. Lots of neat opportunities here.
+ Allows for more roleplaying opportunities: Similar to above, you have more opportunities in-character to engage in the world around you. Buying and selling items is no longer a faceless checkbook balancing exercise. Additionally, all the hooks from having individual shops make for a whole slew of new adventure possibilities.
+ Does not take away too much out-of-game time: You do not need to spend hours poring over a database of items to consider every option.
+ Easier decision-making: Without the breadth of the entire rulebook to choose from, and instead only having a premade list of your options, newer players will find this much less stressful

- Takes longer in-game: Depending on what you like about roleplaying games, this can be a good thing or a bad thing. If browsing a shop and bartering with shopkeepers is your type of fun, put this in the blue. If you liked the simplicity and efficiency of just having to roll a single d% to buy an item you already knew you wanted, then put this in red.

- More clunky than the base system: If there's one thing that the paizo system got right, it was the relative ease of use once you learned the rules. This system regrettably had to sacrifice some simplicity to achieve its ultimate goal, though it certainly could be a lot more complex than what I ultimately settled on.
- Limits player choice: Players cannot browse a sourcebook and outfit themselves. The world has to outfit them for them, and to some this might seem irritating and debilitating.
- Less powerful characters: Similar to above, when players do not have all options available, naturally they don't always have access to the theoretically best items at their disposal. Players will be slightly weaker than before (though the Essential Items rule should hopefully mitigate this to a greater extent).
- Cumbersome without automatic generators: Do you want to roll 4d4+3d4+2d6 items 4d6 times by hand? This system definitely takes more time out of the GM preparing his settlements ahead of time.

Concluding Thoughts

In the end, what I have provided is a homebrew solution. You should have a discussion between everyone at the table before implementing this. I hope what I have provided will be beneficial to all of you, and I'd love to hear feedback about it. Please send me a PM if you have anything you'd like to contribute!