
Cultural Design.

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External Setting

The primary setting for any culture

Cultures are fundamentally shaped by their external environment

Locale	What is the geography?
	How accessible is this area?
	What natural features mark the borders?
	What are the most striking features of landscape, climate, animals, etc. in this area?

	How will these features affect travel time, communication, etc.?
Climate	What is the climate? What kinds of clothes and shelter are needed? Will the climate only allow survival activities or will there be time for leisure developments such as art, philosophy, etc?
Resources	What are the resources for survival? Noticeable Raw Materials Hidden Raw Materials Noticeable Other Assets Hidden Other Assets Nearby Assets What water resources available, and for what uses (a mill wheel requires flowing water, i.e., river or stream; irrigation needs a large, dependable water source like lake or large river: etc.)? How do most of the citizens make their living — farming, fishing, trade, manufacturing?
Flora	What sorts of food can be grown, hunted, caught? What are the people's main crops? What flora are especially helpful? Like hemp and flax. What are known delicacies. What fruits vegetables can be turned into a liquor and/or drugs or medicines. Are there predatory plants? What are the sources of poisons? How much of the country is farmland? Forest? Desert? Mountains? Plains? What are the primary crops (e.g., potatoes, cotton, tobacco, coffee, rice, peanuts, wheat, sugarcane, etc.)? Are any grown mainly for export? What crops can not be grown here because of the soil, climate, or for other reasons?
Fauna	What animals are especially helpful to your world? What is a creature that preys on other nuisance creatures? What are the domesticated animals? What are the food animals? Whether the food taboos? Which animals are used in medicine. What animals are used for poisons. What wild animals, actual or imaginary, live in this area? Are any of them potentially useful — e.g., for fur, whale oil, hides, magical ingredients, hat feathers? Which animals, actual or imaginary, are commonly domesticated in this area? Which aren't here, but are elsewhere? (Example: water buffalo in India vs. oxen in Europe vs. camels in desert areas.) If there are imaginary animals (dragons, unicorns, etc.), how do they fit into the ecology? What do they eat? How much habitat do they require? Can they live anywhere, or do they prefer or need specific kinds of climate or terrain? Are they intelligent and/or capable of working spells, talking, etc.?
Natural Resource	Which areas are the most fertile farmland? Where are mineral resources located? Which animals, birds, fish, and other wildlife are commonly found in which areas? If there are imaginary animals such as dragons, where do they live?

Which natural resources, if any, have been depleted in which areas over time?

Which resources (e.g., coal, oil, iron ore, gold, diamonds, limestone, etc.) are particularly abundant, and in which areas?

Which are scarce?

Are there places where there are rich deposits that haven't been discovered yet, or where they haven't been fully exploited?

How much conflict has been or might be caused by these imbalances in resources?

How much active, peaceful trade?

What water resources available, and for what uses ?

Other

What kinds of natural phenomenon might influence beliefs?

History

The secondary setting for any culture. All human cultures possess some earlier developments in their culture.

Succession of rulers and/or changes in the form of government

Invasions, movements of peoples, or dramatic mass migrations

Disaster related to plague, fire, disease, famine, pestilence, etc.

Victory in war, establishment or expansion of colonies, major changes in borders, etc.

Take note of dates when a natural event reduced or increase the amount of natural resources (food, water, timber etc.)

Take note of dates when a unnatural event change the resources as well

Keep in mind recovering from war takes about a generation without any major wars.

Track specific dates one power shifted in civilizations (through who, death of a monarch that something) and one of the powershift was smooth.

How far back are there records or tales of historical events?

How widely known are these stories?

Do average people believe old tales, or do they dismiss some that have a basis in fact (e.g., Troy)?

Who are the neighboring countries/peoples and what are they like?

Why did people settle in this country in the first place — strategic location, trade route, water transport, minerals, good farming, etc.?

Have things changed much since, or do they still depend on whatever brought them in the first place?

Who are the rivals or enemies of this country? How close are they physically? How powerful?

Who are the heroes and villains of each country's history (e.g., Washington and Lincoln in the U.S.; Henry V in England, etc.)?

Why are they heroes/villains and what do this say about the country and the people who admire them?

Which peoples/countries/races have been in conflict in the recent past? Why? When and why was the most recent war? Who won?

Which peoples/countries/races fought, allied, traded, or were traditional rivals? Where are there still hard feelings about old events?

Forces

Some outside influences have helped to mold a culture into its condition, so, it has its own set of past values, beliefs, and activities.

Static Forces

Static force provides stability. It allows people to hold to the familiar and put brakes on the forces of change that may be rapid

Established religion

Dynamic Forces

Dynamic force provides change. These are the forces that work toward change.

Interactions with Other Cultures

Interdependence between groups of people brings change.

Conflict between people brings change.

Communication may bring change.

Is population shifting from rural to urban, south to north, mountains to coast, etc.?

Why — invasion, plague, gold rush, etc.?

What effects has this had on the places being left?

The places gaining people?

Magic

These need to be generally answered but they are also culture specific...

What things can magic not do?

What are the limits to magical power?

How do magicians try to get around these limits?

What is the price magicians must pay in order to be magicians — years of study, permanent celibacy, using up bits of their life or memory with each spell, ...

Does anyone ever try to get around the price of magic?

Is there a difference between miracles and magic?

If so, how are they distinguished?

Where does magic power come from: the gods, the “mana” of the world, the personal willpower of the magician?

Is magic an exhaustible resource?

If a magician must feed his spells with his own willpower, life-force, or sanity, what long-term effects will this have on the health and/or stability of the magician?

Do different races/species have different sources for their magic, or does everybody use the same one?

How does a magician tap his/her magic power?

Does becoming a magician require some rite of passage (investing one’s power in an object, being chosen by the gods, constructing or being given a permanent link to the source of power) or does it just happen naturally, as a gradual result of much study or as a part of growing up?

What do you need to do to cast a spell — design an elaborate ritual, recite poetry, mix the right ingredients in a pot?

Are there things like a staff, a wand, a familiar, a crystal ball, that are necessary to have before casting spells?

If so, where and how do new wizards get these things?

Do they make them, buy them from craftsmen, inherit them from their teachers, or order them from Wizardry Supplies, Inc.?

Is there a numerical limit to the number of wizards in the world?

What is it?

Why?

How long does it take to cast a spell?

Can spells be stored for later, instant use?

Does working spells take lots of long ritual, or is magic a “point and shoot” affair?

Can two or more wizards combine their power to cast a stronger spell, or is magic done only by individuals?

What makes one wizard more powerful than another — knowledge of more spells, ability to handle greater levels of power, having a more powerful god as patron, etc.?

Does practicing magic have any detrimental effect on the magician (such as becoming addictive, fomenting insanity, or shortening life-span)?

If so, is there any way to prevent these effects?

Are the effects inevitable to all magicians, or do they affect only those with some sort of predisposition?

Do they progress at the same rate in everyone?

Are they universal in all species, or are some races (dwarves, elves, whoever) immune to these detrimental effects?

How much is known about the laws of nature, physics, and magic?

How much of what is commonly known is wrong (e.g., Aristotle's ideas about human anatomy, which were wrong but accepted for centuries)?

What general varieties of magic are practiced (e.g., herbal potions, ritual magic, alchemical magic, demonology, necromancy, etc.)?

Do any work better than others, or does only one variety actually work?

Are certain kinds of magic practiced solely or chiefly by one sex or the other?

By one race or another?

Is this because of inborn ability, natural preferences, or legislation?

Does a magician's magical ability or power change over time — e.g., growing stronger or weaker during puberty, or with increasing age?

Can a magician "use up" all of his/her magic, thus ceasing to be a magician?

If this happens, what does the ex-magician do — die, retire, take up teaching, go into a second career, start a freelance consulting business?

Can the ability to do magic be lost?

If so, how — overdoing it, "burning out," brain damage due to fever or a blow, etc.?

Can the ability to work magic be taken away?

If so, how and by whom?

How do various religions, if any, view magic?

Do any forbid it?

Why or why not?

Do any require priests/priestesses to be magicians?

Do any forbid magicians from holding some or all religious offices?

How long does it take to learn magic?

Is magic a profession, an art, or just a job?

What is the status accorded to magicians in this society?

Are they the equivalent of shyster lawyers, politicians, and used car salesmen, or are they considered average working stiffs, or are they looked up to and admired?

Are wizards organized?

How?

What hierarchy, if any, do they recognize?

What happens if the person/people at the top get killed?

Who takes over?

How soon?

Can anyone become a wizard, or does one need to be born with some special talent or gift?

Are different races/intelligent species good at different types of magic?

If so, what types are associated with what races/species?

Are there species that use magic more or less unconsciously?

Can you make a living practicing magic, or do you have to have independent means?

If you can make a living, what are you doing — making magic swords, or making it rain for local farmers?

What's a wizard's job market like?

What's a wizard's average income, relative to the rest of society?

Are magicians a force in politics, or are they above it?

Are there national politics that revolve around magic/wizards (i.e., trying to outlaw, protect, or promote certain kinds of magic licensing of magicians,

Do wizards have a lobby?

Do they need one?

Does it require a license to be a wizard?

Who certifies wizards: government, wizard's guild/AMA, local priests?

How do local people view wizards?

Are they good guys, bad guys, Clint Eastwood (call in only to get rid of dragons), regular working stiffs, ivory-tower academics, nuisances who make it rain when you're plowing, dangerous folks to stay away from?

How do you get to be a wizard/magician?

Does it require inborn talent, study and hard work, practice, or all of the above?

Are wizards barred from certain kinds of government jobs or offices?
Do some government jobs require that their holder be a wizard?
If magic requires study, where do you go to learn about it?
How do people fund their training?
Is there an apprenticeship system, or are there wizard schools, or is it one-on-one tutoring/mentoring?
Is an untrained wizard dangerous, or just an ordinary person?
Do wizards have a special language that is used for magic?
If so, where do they learn it?
Is it safe to chat in this language, or is everything said in it automatically a spell?
If so, how can it safely be taught to new students?
Is magic considered a science, or are scientists and wizards enemies or rivals?
Are magic and science compatible?
To what degree does the presence of magic, magical objects, and wizards replace technology ?
Duplicate technology?
Supplement technology?
Can two or more wizards combine their power to cast a stronger spell, or is magic done only by individuals?
What makes a powerful magician?
What do you need to do to cast a spell — design an elaborate ritual, recite poetry, mix the right ingredients in a pot?
Are there things like a staff, a wand, a familiar, a crystal ball, that are necessary to have before casting spells?
If so, where and how do new wizards get these things?
Do they make them, buy them from craftsmen, inherit them from their teachers, or order them from Wizardry Supplies, Inc.?
Where does magic power come from: the gods, the “mana” of the world, the personal willpower of the magician?
Is magic an exhaustible resource?
Are there fashions/fads in magic — are herbal spells “in” this year and ritual spells “out,” or vice versa?
Are certain spells (as opposed to magic generally) illegal?
Why — because of the effect of the spell, or because of the ingredients or procedures needed to cast it, or what?
If so, how would a criminal magician be detected?
Apprehended?
Punished?
Is catching and punishing illegal magicians the responsibility of the magician’s guild, or do the ordinary courts have to handle it?
Are there magical means of transportation (teleport spells, magic carpets, dragon-riding)?
How do they compare in speed, safety and expense to non-magical means?
Are there any drawbacks to magical travel (for example, teleport sickness)?
How commonly are they used, and for what purposes (industrial shipping vs. travel for fun)?
Are there magical means of rapid communication?
How commonly are they used?
For what purposes?
Are magical weapons available?
Can magic be used in warfare?
In what ways?
Are spells fast enough to be useful in hand-to-hand combat, or is magic more of a siege weapon, used only for long, slow things?
How has the presence of magic affected weapons technology?
Can magic make weapons more effective?
Do you have to do anything special to walls, armor, or weapons to make them better able to resist enemy spells?
How has the presence of magic affected weapons technology?
Can an ordinary, non-weapon-type object be enchanted to make it extremely lethal or will this work properly only on things that are already weapons?
Can ordinary objects be enchanted to make them (or their user) supremely good at something (the Frying Pan of Ultimate Gourmet Cooking)?

How common and useful are such enchantments?
Can spells and/or magical items be mass-produced?
Are there magic carpet factories and boutiques selling magic rings?
Can spells and/or magical items be used to increase the efficiency of manufacturing or mass production?
Do businesses keep a wizard on retainer, as modern businesses might keep a lawyer or efficiency expert?
What, exactly, are they paying for?
Are there magical artifacts (rings, swords, etc.)?
If so, who makes them and how?
Are the spells permanent, or do they wear off after a while?
Where is scientific and/or magical research done — universities, private labs, under the auspices of the ruler/government, etc.?
Given the magical/technological level of this society, what is an appropriate ration of farmers or food producers to urban residents?
If farm production is based on magic, how many urban residents are going to starve if the spells supporting farming (weather, land fertility, etc.) fail suddenly?
Are the laws of nature and physics actually different in this world (to accommodate magic), or are they the same as in real life?
How does magic fit in?
How do magical beasts fit in?
In what ways can magic or spells be abused?
How often does this happen?
Is magic legal?
All magic, or only some types?
Do laws vary widely from country to country, or is the attitude generally similar?

Internal Influences

Economic

Sweeping adventure means nothing if you cant buy a bite to eat.

How important is trade to the economy?
How is currency exchange handled, and by whom?
What is the system of coinage, and who mints it?
Resources
Transportation
Scarcity
Production
Distribution
Type of economy
decision-making
technology
division of labor
needs
Trading partners
What does this country import?
Export?

Dynamic Forces

Dynamic force provides change. These are the forces that work toward change.

Interactions with Other Cultures
Interdependence between groups of people brings change.
Conflict between people brings change.

Communication may bring change.

Social

Family life

Customs

Class or Caste

Roles

Decision-making

Education

Leisure activities

Belief

Religion

Myth

Ritual.

Political

Decision-making

Citizenship

Leadership institutions.

Aesthetic

Art

Music

Dance

Literature

Leisure activities

Social Structure

What classes exist?,
How is the hierarchy of classes organized?
Upon what is the stratification of the classes based?
What are the roles of the men, women, children?
What is the family structure?
What social problems exist?
Who cares for and provides education to the children?
is there prejudice, persecution, etc.?
If so, what groups are involved?
How are the children socialized?
Who provides care for the infirmed?
Who cares for the elderly?

Religion

What are the beliefs of the society concerning life and death?
What is considered good and what is considered evil?
Who do they worship?
Where do they worship?
Are there any sacrifices?
What role does religion play in their social lives?

Communication and Education

What languages are spoken?,
How is the language recorded?,
How are messages and information passed along?,
How is history recorded?,
is the society literate or illiterate?,
Who provides education?,
Who receives education?,
What is the "technology" involved in long distance communication?

Power and Authority

What are the rules?
Who made the rules?
How does society get its rules?
What is the source of power?
How is justice dispensed?

How are criminals apprehended?
What punishments are used?
Who are the rulers?
How are the rulers chosen?
How is power passed on to the next leaders?
What groups have the most political power?

Leisure and Recreation

In what sports does people participate?,
What games are played?,
What institutions or organizations provides recreation?
What type of sports are considered spectator sports?
What toys does children use?,
What other types of participatory recreation exist?
What other types of spectator recreation exist?

Artistic Expression

What are the mediums of the graphic arts?
What dances do the people do?
What types of music are there?
What themes are present in art, music, dance?
What is the source of these themes?

Technology

General

Medical

What do people do for pain?
What are do they do about disease?
How do people heal?
Are there hospitals, healers, infirmaries, or medics?

Weapon

Magick

General

Medical

Weapon

Kinship

Family

What is considered a normal family unit?
How extended is an extended family?
How important are family connections and responsibilities?

Ethics, Morals and Mores

What will people swear a binding oath by?
What do people use as curse words?
What is the most desired/most valuable stuff in this society — gold, jewels, drugs, money, furs, reindeer, etc.?
Why is it desired/valued?
Do different races value different things?
Is there a race/culture for whom non-material things (information, time) are the most valuable things?
How did they get that way?
What things are considered normal and acceptable in this society that would not be considered normal or acceptable in yours?
What things are considered shocking in this society that are not considered shocking in yours — e.g., eating left-handed, reading in public?
What would be the reaction of an ordinary person who sees someone doing one of these things — to turn away, call the cops, challenge the offender to a duel,
What are the acceptable limits to honor and/or honesty in this society?
Are “white lies” acceptable socially, or is lying in any form considered beyond the pall?
Is thievery an accepted, if disreputable, occupation, or is it a crime?
Is a binding oath unbreakable no matter what, or can you get out of it if the other party turns out to be evil scum or if you weren’t fully informed?
What is considered the right thing to do if two oaths come into conflict — do you have to decide as best you can, hold to the oath to the most/least powerful person, commit suicide?
What are attitudes toward ownership?
What constitutes “theft” and what can be stolen — gems, gold, someone’s good name or reputation?
Are thieves independent criminals, members of an illegal guild, business people licensed by law, or what?
What are the controversial subjects in this culture?
What things can you start a friendly argument about in any bar?
What things will automatically start an unfriendly argument?
What are the social taboos — what things are “not done,” like wearing a bathing suit to the office?
What things are not talked about?
What would happen if someone did?
How do these taboos vary among the different races?
What are the biggest social faux pas — burping loudly, drawing steel in the presence of a queen/noble, asking a dwarf whether it’s male or female?
What subjects or actions cause embarrassment or discomfort?

Language

How many languages are there?
Which ones are related (e.g., the Romance languages) and why?
Which languages borrow words or phrases from other languages?
Which is likely to be most widely spoken?
Is there a “trade language” that facilitates commerce between countries that don’t speak the same tongue?
Is there a “universal language” spoken by educated or noble persons, as Latin was in the Middle Ages?

Language Tree

Mapping

Dialects

Literacy

Writing Forms

Sounds

Vocabulary and Grammar

Religion, Myths, and History

Religion

Cosmology

Deities

Myths

History

Customs and Traditions

Greeting and Meeting

When meeting someone, how are they greeted — wave, handshake, bow, some other gesture?

How did the greeting gesture originate (example: shaking hands to prove one's weapon hand was empty)?

Is there a special I-am-not-armed gesture for wizards?

Is there a difference between the greeting offered to an equal and that offered to a superior or inferior?

Is there a difference between the greeting offered a man or a woman?

Human/non-human?

Is there a way of changing a greeting gesture to make it insulting?

How are two people who have never met normally introduced to each other?

What is the order of precedence when there are several people of differing sex or social status present, all of whom need to be introduced to each other?

Are there classes of people/beings who are never introduced to other classes of people/beings?

Are "true names" significant, and if so, under what circumstances would someone be given another person/being's true name?

Are there customs involving the way in which someone is named when being introduced
Is there any difference in the way you greet someone you already know, compared to greeting a stranger (or does everybody just always hug or shake hands?)
How does someone acknowledge seeing an acquaintance at a distance (passing on the other side of the street) — by a nod, tipping the hat, wave, smile, or not at all?

Wedding

Bedding

Birthing

What customs surround a birth and the introduction of a new child to the family?
Is the mother sequestered for some period?
Is the child?
Is there a formal presentation of the new child to parents, grandparents, overlord, priest?
Is a feast and celebration declared, or does everyone keep a low profile to keep from attracting demons or bad luck?
Who is normally present for births?
Is it strictly a matter for women, or are men involved, or is the only woman present the expectant mother?

Battle

Burying

What customs surround death and burial?
Is there a special class of people (doctors, priests, funeral directors, untouchables) who deal with dead bodies?
What things must be done and why (burn hair to free spirit, burn body to prevent necromancy, coins on eyes for ferryman, etc.)?
Are the dead feared, revered, or ignored?

Other

Institutions

Rites of Passage

What are the rites of passage in this culture?
Are they formalized rituals, such as being dubbed a knight, or are they informal?
Are they different for men and women?
For nobility and peasants?

Clergy

Rites and Rituals

Religious Norms

Art, Architecture, and Symbolism

Symbolism

Common Motifs

Significant Numbers

Art

Architecture

Politics

Leadership

Stated

Actual

Class Structure

Are there non-human/foreign residents of the culture
Do foreign tend to take up different trades from humans?
Are they legally limited to certain trades?

Judicial Structure

How has the presence of magic and magicians affected law and government?
Are wizards barred from certain kinds of government jobs or offices (judge, jury, police)?
Do some government jobs require that their holder be a wizard?
What are considered normal and legal ways of gathering evidence and determining guilt?
Is torture allowed?
Are arbitrary judgments by the lord or landowner allowed, or is there an independent standard of justice?
What personal weapons are available to anyone who can afford them?
Are some considered “for nobles only” either by custom or by law?
Are there laws forbidding certain classes from being armed at all?
Are there laws requiring certain classes to learn particular weapon skills, as England for some centuries required yeomen to be proficient with the longbow?

Is forensic magic possible?
Commonly used?
Used only for certain types of crimes (and if so, what)?
Are the results of forensic spells admissible in court as evidence?
Is it something any wizard can do, or do you have to specialize?
Are certain spells (as opposed to magic generally) illegal?
Why — because of the effect of the spell, or because of the ingredients or procedures needed to cast it, or what?
If so, how would a criminal magician be detected? Apprehended? Punished?
Is catching and punishing illegal magicians the responsibility of the magician's guild, or do the ordinary courts have to handle it?
Are there separate civil and criminal courts?
Human and non-human courts?
Is there a separate court or procedure for magical crimes?
What is different about each type of court?
Are judges or other court officials required/forbidden to know magic?
Is evidence obtained by magic acceptable in court?
Is evidence obtained by magic considered more reliable or less reliable than physical evidence or eyewitness accounts?
What things are considered truly serious crimes and why?
What are the normal punishments for serious vs. minor crimes?
Are there prisons, or are people punished and released?
Are there degrees of punishment — branding vs. cutting off ears vs. cutting off a hand vs. decapitation — or do they just hang everybody?
Who is responsible for catching criminals?
Who pays the crook-catchers — the ruler, the city government, a consortium of merchants, somebody else?
How are they organized — into independent police precincts, or into overlapping districts, or just according to whoever wants to hire them?
Are they full-time, part-time, or volunteers?
Private or public?
What sort of facilities do they have?
What arms are they allowed to carry?
Are there lawyers or advocates?
Who can afford them?
Who trains/certifies them?
Are people guilty until proven innocent, innocent until proven guilty, or does it depend on the mood the lord is in when they bring the case before him?
Are there judges other than the ruler, lord, or landowner?
If so, how are they chosen, how are they paid, and who pays them?
Are appeals possible, and if so, to whom?
How often are outlying areas likely to see a judge?
Is “mob justice” common or uncommon?
Approved of or disapproved of?
Are there sumptuary laws regulating what different classes/races may wear?
Do judges and lawyers wear special clothes (robes, wigs) to indicate their calling?
Are wizards above or below the law i.e., do they have full rights as citizens, no rights, or can they do as they like without regard to anyone else's rights?
Are highwaymen, muggers, and pirates common or rare? What sorts of crimes is the average citizen likely to run across during his/her lifetime?
Who can make or repeal laws — a group (an elected Senate, an appointed Council, or an hereditary House of Lords), or only the ruler or head of state?
How much can the nobility, middle class tradesmen, etc. influence the laws that are made?
How are alleged criminals treated before and after their convictions?
Do the police/military/city guard make a practice of roughing up suspects, or is this frowned upon?

Making the Laws

Enforcing the Laws

Legal Code

Ownership of Goods

Land

Male and Female Roles

Church and State

Death by Suicide

Death by Anothers Hand

Death in Self Defense

Military

Standing

Command

Routine

Arms

Outfitting

Theory