

In an agrarian society, a city's concentration of wealth seems more dramatic to a magical medieval person than the vast modern city's wealth seems to modern man. Even small towns are rich when compared to a manor, and once cities are involved in a sacking, a truly vast amount of wealth exchanges hands. The actual process of looting and the distribution of the booty is a complex process heavily dependent upon the length of time available to a king, who is assigned the actual work of looting, the social standing of those involved in the looting from both perspectives, and the method in which a city finds itself being looted. Generally, one-half of all loot is rightfully the king's. If the king does not lead the looting army, the commander receives two-thirds and the king demands a third.

Time is the most important consideration in looting. Only so much can be gained from a quick sack because wealth is hidden by every city dweller the instant it is known that military action is a possibility within their city. Every townsman of wealth has secret hidey-holes for their valuables. These hidden places keep their wealth safe during normal times and are very important in times of uncertainty. Under dire circumstances, even the most unfriendly of neighbors team together, put their wealth in an iron box and drop it into the nearest well. Hearths have removable stones, beds possess hallowed-out legs, and children feast on small gems: all manner of clever ways of concealing wealth face looters.

Assigning looters is an important task of any organized sack. Only trustworthy commanders are sent with groups of soldiers to insure a proper accounting of gain. Each commander of a looting party is responsible for meeting an assessed amount and usually gets to keep a certain percentage of treasure he finds over his requirement. This promotes enthusiasm in the search.

Particularly wealthy townspeople often face a dichotomous situation when their city is sacked. Depending upon the circumstances, they may fare better than others or they may fare worse. Being looted by the army of a second cousin's first uncle is much better than being looted by a mercenary band. Wealthy citizens' social ties may protect them just as much as harm them, and the wealthy take appropriate precautions depending upon the situation. But nothing is worse for the wealthy than a peasant looting. Peasants are remarkably brutal on the wealthy. But such brutality is often just a response to the continual brutality of the nobility upon the peasant.

A sack is also vastly different depending upon the situation of

a city's capture. A city that surrenders with little or no resistance can expect more lenient treatment than one taken after hard siege. Cities often receive warnings about the brutality of their forthcoming capture if they refuse the demand to surrender.

The last reward a soldier can expect, or at least hope, to gain through war is ransom. Ransoming a captured opponent is often the best fiscal reward received by many soldiers for the duration of an entire campaign. One noble's son can yield more than a year of pay to most soldiers. Ransoming, like looting, is a complex business and will vary greatly from one magical medieval society to another. But these variances aside, the typical manner of ransoming follows a set pattern. A knight is recognized by his heraldry and his capture instead of his death is believed more profitable. All attempts are made to capture the knight and once taken, he is stripped of his equipment and word is sent to his family of his capture and the amount of gold expected for his ransom. It can be long weeks, even years for particularly large ransoms, before the bargaining is finished and the ransom paid.

During this time, the captive is usually made to swear to attempt no escape and, depending on his reputation, he is privileged certain rights: he has the right of free movement, usually within a well-guarded area; he eats at his captor's table and is expected to show all good graces as befitting a man of good breeding. If his word is questionable or if he attempts escape, he is usually kept in the dungeon until the ransom is paid.

When ransomable individuals are captured on the battlefield, nobles claim the right to ransom and distribute an immediate gift upon the soldier or soldiers making the capture. Such gifts are only one-tenth the amount a lord expects from the ransom, but to a common soldier or a bachelor knight such gifts can be great indeed. In some situations, groups of young knights form bands and promise equal distribution of any ransoms their members manage. These groups

occasionally lead to the foundation of military orders, but usually just reinforce the existing social structures though competition and display. Kings reserve the rights for all ransoms of royal opponents and often pay ransoms to their vassals to acquire their captured individuals. In the hands of a king, captured opponents are usually forced to pay a greater ransom than would have been assessed if held by the king's vassal. But captives of a king usually fare quite a bit better under captivity. Kings tend to be more scrupulous with their larger reputations than lesser nobles.

