Abandon all hope, ye who uses fantasy clichés.

I do it. You do it. We all do it. What do we do? We use clichés. Before I begin, I just want to make this clear, there's nothing inherently wrong with clichés. I always point out that clichés are clichés for a reason, it's because they work, and they have proven that … countless upon countless times in fact. But this is one of those 'your strength is also your weakness' type of things, which just happens to be a cliché as well … damn …

Indeed, clichés work, but that's also the problem. Seeing the same thing causes us to get jaded to it and takes the excitement out of it. Something we learned in film class is that formulas are great for the general population, that's because it's safe and generally, people like what's familiar. But, for a good deal of others, this gets irritating as well.

But don't immediately go and write off clichés. 'But Tierra didn't you just said,' yes, I know. But again, clichés have proven that they work. And come on, we all have those guilty clichés. Mine? A **well told** love triangle or killing off the parent(s).

Here are some fantasy clichés that are far too common, to me anyway. Some of them I still use, some of them I hate with a burning passion. But don't let that dissuade you because we all have guilty pleasures. Just … be cautious …

1. **One or more parents are dead or missing.** Disney does this the best, I don't think there's one movie of theirs where both parents are actually alive and well. Well, there's Hercules, Mulan, Moana, and Tangled but in the grand scheme of things, Disney is notorious for offing the parents or the mother at least. In fantasy, this is a recurring plot as well. I'm going to say that this is overused but I use it like there's no tomorrow. Most of my projects have some kind of absent parent figure, but that's also because I just like offing people. This cliché is one of the ones that I can work with, I can see the reason for it. It paves the way for a lot of problems down the road and sometimes even helps define why characters act a certain way or why the plot goes a specific way (RIP Master Audouin). Parents are such an important part of a character's

story that whatever you do with them, alive or dead, it will influence that character, that's just how characters work.

2. **Orcs are ugly.** But why. I blame Tolkien for this, I seriously do. But at the same time, no one said that we had to continue this. World of Warcraft and Neverwinter does a decent job at warping this perception but it's still a heavy cliché that orcs are ugly brutes who enjoy nothing but slamming you across the face with a two-handed weapon. I'm all for this race of heavily built, combat worthy species, but damn, can we stop making them ugly as hell and with underlining racist tones? Stop it!

3. **The object that controls everything**. Another thing that Tolkien started, no doubt. Or I'm giving him way too much credit because I just don't like looking farther down the fantasy timeline. Also, disclaimer, I adore Tolkien's writing so don't get me wrong, LOTR is life. But I will point a lot of fingers at the Father of Fantasy, you carry that title, you carry the burden. Anyway, this cliché follows the ideology that there's some sort of object, be it an accessory, box, jewel, etc. that can be used to destroy everything. The villain wants it because, of course, destroy kill destroy. And the heroes want to destroy it because, of course, heroes gotta hero.

4. **Elves are immortal, beautiful, wise, etc.** Blah blah blah. This cliché right here is annoying beyond all comprehension. Immortal, I'll wave that one off because I can work with it (not if they're the only immortal race/species or there's not a good reason why that is). But the others, no. I want to see the two-hundred-year-old immature elves and the elves that aren't drop dead gorgeous. Give me a world where elves are treated like crap and everyone sees them at the bottom of the food chain.

   Left Brain Cell: "I'm sorry do you mean Dragon Age?"
   Right Brain Cell: "Yes, but Dragon Age still caters largely to the elven race in terms of lore so that earns its own annoying spot. Feed me my dwarven and Avvar lore damnit. You don't create an entire species in dwarven lore that bleed lyrium and then shift focus to a walking egg and expect me not to complain."

5. **Dwarves are dwarvish.** You know what I mean by that. They're stubborn, stocky creatures who have an affinity for rocks and crafting things *hehe, fine Dwarven Crafts*. I'm actually curious about where the concept of dwarves always being an underground species come from, probably Tolkien. Probably should research that … naw … And do I need to talk about the constant beards? If you're going to tell me that this is a hairy race then I expect all of them to be

hairy, not just the males. I love dwarves (short people unite), but dwarves are always the same to me. Yes, I know that's just the species but I'm talking about clichés so I can complain all I want.

6. **Prophecies.** Need I say more? This is such a cliché plot device that I think everyone is tired of reading it. It definitely belongs in the top five fantasy clichés … I say as I stare at it being number six, this is random by the way. But I have spoken to friends who will literally put a book down, no matter what, if they're hit with a random prophecy. That book could've been written by their mother and it's still gonna be a no. It's not that prophecies are unrealistic, but they're always so annoyingly spontaneous and coincidental, enough to earn that eye roll. I'm not against all prophecies, just the random ones that say, "that one guy no one knows, yea, he alone can save the world." The fuck? Why? Why would you put all of that pressure on some random guy that is probably working some low-end medieval job in the piss poor town of Piss Poor?!

7. **All Hail King Peasant.** The cliché where a peasant or some lowly citizen finds out that they're actually the long-lost child of royalty. And, for some reason, with no skill set to rule, they become King or Queen, and everyone is happy about it. Nah. Congrats about finding out about your bloodline Fred but you can stay in the stables. I don't care if the common man likes you. I really don't.

8. **Hero rescues the damsel.** Need I say more? I don't think I do. Just no.

   Left Brain Cell: "Okay but what about heroine rescues the guy?"
   Me: "Uhp … you have intrigued me."

9. **That one guy that can do everything.** Definitely the hero or the villain, and definitely an over-powered mess. The instructor, master, whatever you wanna call em, says that it takes years to master techniques and disciplines but guess what, that doesn't mean anything to our hero. Jimmy learns it in a week because they're a hero and they have no time for your petty conceptions of time, training, and discipline.

10. **Death in general, but not death.** Explanation time, death itself is not the cliché. It's how they die. The notorious fake death, I'm looking at you Supernatural. Where the character doesn't really die and we know it, they know it, but the writer thinks we don't know it. Next thing we know, oh look they're alive, who would've guessed? Angst is my dear baby, but that's not angst. That's annoying.

Or the 'I'm going to tell you this important thing right before I die' cliché. The cliché where for some reason, you kept this important piece of information to yourself, saving it for when you died. And even more ironic, you have the time now to tell the main character it all right before you pass on. Like why isn't this just considered an asshole move? The 'last thing I said to them' death, where the main character says something extremely rude and profound, and never gets to say sorry because the character dies. Suck it up! And lastly, the 'I never told them I loved them' death. Well, that's just shitty timing my friend.

11. **Hero has special abilities.** Of course, this cliché isn't going anywhere. And why should it? But that doesn't make it any less of a cliché and doesn't mean I won't talk shit about it. The hero is never just normal, they either have some dormant abilities or powers, have powers that have yet to mature, or acquire them somehow. Because let's be honest, who wants to read or watch the normal guy go through a fantasy story with no kind of special abilities or skills besides common sense. *raises hands* I mean, I'm just curious …

Left Brain Cell: "But if that's true then why didn't you do that in Superstition? You had the perfect opportunity and you did the cliche."

Me: "It's fun to pick on yourself. To look at your stuff and point out the flaws and inconsistencies and then stay up all night considering them and how much better or worse something could be due to it … So much fun."

12. **Old wise wizard or old and wise.** Gandalf, I love you, but you're a cliché. Or maybe you started the cliché. Though they might not always be a wizard, they are always old and wise beyond their time. Though they're still old so I don't really get that phrase. And most of them talk in riddles that take the hero the entire story to figure out, and at the last most important moment do they figure out what they meant. Like I know it's because the story needs to story, but putting it under a realistic lens, that is just horrible timing. You could have saved so many more lives if the old geezer just told you what you needed to know, fuck heroing.

13. **What the heck does that say?** For my last two clichés, they might sound more like a rant. I'm all about fantasy names, but if you're going to name your fantasy country Dowglsheapre, then you NEED to put a pronunciation guide somewhere. I hate when I'm reading fantasy stories and the first paragraph I read is this:

> The wagons traveled down the road into the town of Dowglsheapre, a quaint little town whose history has long been forgotten. The citizens of the town could hardly

remember, but that could be because Urumeaq's were naturally forgetful creatures. They walked around with their Bozroine sticks and hollered in a language that sounds similar to Yahugush but not quite.

Gosh, does that feel like some twisted Dr. Seuss book. As a reader, we will do one of four things: 1. skip over the word, 2. come up with five hundred different ways of saying it each time we see it, 3. give it a nickname and call it a day, or 4. quit. And there's there's the fifth, those who actually go to the back of the book, look up how to say it and succeed if there's a pronunciation guide. Kudos to you … that ain't me (stares at number 3). It sucks, even more, when all the words are all residing in one paragraph. As the writer you want your reader focused on your writing and lore wise, to feel like they're part of the world. You don't want them spending ten minutes on the pronunciation of one word that might not even be important. I need a break, my eyes need a break, and my mouth is just spitting out gibberish now. There's nothing wrong with coming up with your own words but test it out with others first, or something.

14. **So. Many. Apostrophes.** Av'alon. D'uerker. Bridge'tower. S't'o'p. I't. Unless you have a reason to put it there, which in world building you should have a reason because that would fall under language. Then don't go crazy with the apostrophes. It gets highly annoying and yes, it is a cliché.

So, how do you avoid the unavoidable? Well, you make it your own. For example, let's use a well-known cliché, hero saves the damsel because the prophecy said he would. Well, what if we turn that good ol' prophecy into a spur of the moment one? Made up on the spot by some drunken old man? Or if the prophecy was created as a mere bedtime story that went too far? Passed on through generations and somehow becomes bigger than it is. They end up getting the wrong guy because it's a fake prophecy for a somewhat real situation. And what if the damsel isn't really a damsel, they're a pet or some inanimate object. Someone's intel was definitely off? The hero, secretly the villain. And boom, you just turned one horrible cliché into something more original.

Am I saying you should avoid clichés if possible? No. Readers will generally point it out but won't be 100% turned off because of it, unless you stack so many on top of one another that it just becomes too much.