



ADVENTURE ESSENTIALS: HOLIDAYS

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INTRODUCTION: CREATING HOLIDAYS FOR YOUR GAMES

This eBook helps you plan, prepare, and GM better adventures. While you can use the information to craft interesting holidays, my goal is to help you use holidays as the backbone for campaigns, adventures, and encounters. Holidays can be much more than a minor quirk of your game world. With strategic design, you can transform holidays into a vital GMing tool to create immersion, realism, and most importantly, more fun in your game sessions.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Holidays are an under-designed aspect in games, but they hold wonderful storytelling and gaming potential. Often, we cook up default holidays based on real life, books, and movies. Holidays also tend to be afterthoughts—events we tack onto a gameworld or plot after everything else is done. It doesn't have to be this way. You can get more value from your preparation time and efforts by using holidays as the foundation for:

ADVENTURE DESIGN

A single holiday can spawn numerous hooks and stories that make perfect RPG plots for players to explore. Properly designed, a holiday will have deep ramifications, plot threads, and factions you can use as the backbone for adventure construction. If you need an adventure idea or a side plot for your group, holidays are a great solution.

ENCOUNTER DESIGN

Holidays should be more than a name and a date on your game world calendar. As you will see, fleshing out your holiday can spawn encounters, encounter seeds, and encounter hooks. Ultimately, this book is about bringing holidays to the game table to make them real and interactive for your players through inspired encounters.

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HOLIDAY DESIGN

Take a moment between sessions to consider upcoming holidays in your game. If you have any planned, use the ideas within this book to breath new life into them, to make them fun and interesting for players. If you don't have holidays scheduled on your game calendar, then use the information herein to help you design some.

CHAPTER 1: HOW TO DESIGN COMPELLING HOLIDAYS

The first chapter gives step-by-step instructions for building a holiday. It helps you pick the right level of detail creation, so that you don't waste time over-planning, or don't get caught under-planning.

CHAPTER 2: HOLIDAY DESIGN ELEMENTS

This chapter is your holiday design toolset. It goes into detail about how and what to design for each of the steps outlined in chapter 1. Numerous examples are provided.

CHAPTER 3: GM & CAMPAIGN ADVICE

Chapter 3 provides tips and tools to help you design holidays and use the advice from the first two chapters.

CHAPTER I: HOW TO DESIGN COMPELLING HOLIDAYS



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DESIGN FOR ADVENTURE

At first glance, holidays might seem like a good way to flesh out a game world and add interesting trivia to a campaign milieu. However, holidays are a perfect GM tool when used for adventure. They provide plot hooks, encounters, and interesting encounter locations. Associated NPCs, events, and history can feed existing plot arcs, spin off new ones, or tie several together.

A key holiday design step is to adopt the right attitude. Holidays are opportunities for adventure; they don't have to be window dressing. They are campaign and plot design tools with conflicts and rewards, just like dungeons and encounters. What makes holidays special is their unique blend of timeline, events, and location that you can tweak according to your campaign's needs. They present new and interesting situations and environments in which to adventure and tell stories.

- o **Timeline.** Deadlines create drama. You decide when holidays occur, including one-time holidays such as coronations and funerals. Once set and the PCs are notified, the campaign has a deadline that cannot be changed, which adds drama if you can weave in situations that will be difficult to achieve by the holiday date.
- o **Events.** You can design holidays with one important event that the PCs get mixed up in, or with several events PCs can pick and choose from, much like a fork in a dungeon corridor. Additional dramatic tension is created if two or more events happen at the same time.
- o **Locations.** Holiday events require locations. Because holidays can range from simple to complex, sublime to weird, all types of locations fit without breaking immersion or consistency. For example, your low magic campaign does not normally have gates to other worlds or plane travel, yet you have a craving to do something unusual. The solution: you craft the Sun Holiday, during which a portal opens at a special, secret place at high noon providing a gateway to the Plane of Fire. The holiday makes this a temporary effect during an unusual time, and maintains campaign balance and immersion.

ALTERNATE CAMPAIGN DIMENSION

Holidays have another awesome power: to temporarily interrupt your campaign and plots. During this interruption, you can inject all sorts of adventures without ruining the flow of play or the vectors of your plot arcs. Holidays create a window the PCs can enter and muck about in, sort of like an alternate campaign dimension. When the holiday ends, everything returns to normal, aside from any consequences based on events that occurred during the holiday.

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When the alternate campaign dimension opens, you can insert jousts, bard competitions, bizarre creature migrations, solar eclipses, temporary villains, prophecies, battles, magic oubliettes, unique roleplaying opportunities, and more.

Holidays are forgiving GM tools that let you bend the laws of your world and the campaign for a short time, if desired, and this creates huge opportunities for adventure!

For example, The Race For Manna is celebrated every three years by the villages of Emlet. The year prior, each village holds competitions on the same date to see which team will champion their village in the upcoming race. Teams then have one year to train and practice. In your current campaign, this holiday could be an opportunity for adventure:

- o Ask the PCs to be competitors for competing teams in a village
- o Ask the PCs to help train or coach a team
- o Ask the PCs to be judges who choose which team will represent the village in the race
- o Ask the PCs to represent a poor village in the race at the last moment
- o The race crosses the PCs' path, and they are:
 - o Requested to help
 - o Caught in the middle of a battle between teams
 - o Required to sabotage a team
- o The time of the race coincides with a period of frequent storms and monster appearances. The PCs get tangled up in one or more of these

HOW TO DESIGN FOR ADVENTURE

Designing with adventure in mind is quick and easy. Adopt an attitude for adventure so you can spot opportunities as you design. While crafting, look for ways to build in the following basic adventuring elements:

- o **Conflict.** Two or more sides compete for a scarce resource such as gold, the attention of the Emperor, the right to participate in the holiday, or control over a special location. For any given holiday element, create two or more factions who compete over it. Note: the level of competition can range from friendly rivalry to deadly combat to devastating betrayal, giving you more options to keep adventures fresh and interesting.
- o **Mystery.** For any given holiday element being designed, try to add an element of mystery, a secret, or an unpredictable outcome. This not

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only creates drama, but opportunities for discovery quests, investigation encounters, and villainous plots.

For example, funny little Groundhog Day has mystery: will winter end soon, or will there be six more weeks of it? Imagine in your world that, instead of a groundhog it's a dragon, and the result is real. First, you'd want to give the gods a smack upside the head for creating such a fragile triggering mechanism to base climate on. Second, this looks like the perfect opportunity for a villainous plot: the evil Black Lord raises and trains a special group of dragonslayer NPC quintuplets who, on their 19th birthday, are sent to destroy the dragon a week before the holiday so the whole world is thrust into a nightmare realm of never-ending winter.

- o **Location.** As you design your holiday, ask “where?” as often as you can. Holidays often involve history, ceremonies, and events—which require locations. These locations have unusual and cool circumstances and opportunities for interesting encounters.

For example, the PCs are hunting for a serial killer and are asked to bodyguard the mayor during Arrow's Folly, which is a celebration of the city's founding. The mayor must give a speech on the green outside the mage's guildhall. A platform and chairs has been set-up, along with a buffet, entertainers, and several tents. During the ceremony, the PCs spot the serial killer in the audience. The integrity of the ceremony is at stake, but so are the lives of future victims. If a battle breaks out, instead of fighting in a 10'x10' dungeon room, there's a 10' high platform, a crowd, chairs, tents, tables full of food, and other interesting location elements. Sweet.

- o **NPCs.** A great way to ground your holiday to game table action and relevance is through NPCs. Add notable figures, past and present, who are integral to, involved with, or affected by the holiday. These people can serve as hooks, sources of conflict and mystery, and the basis of encounters and events.

You can craft specific NPCs or NPC roles. For example, a holiday might require a high priest, a sacrificial victim, and a huntsman who selects and returns with the sacrifice. You can craft specific NPCs to fill these roles, if required, or you can move on using just the notion of the roles to fuel other details and designs.

- o **Reward.** Motivating PCs is half the battle between adventure design, session preparation, and railroading. When PCs act out of self-interest,

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they feel in control, even if you planted the reward. To this end, know what motivates your players and their characters, and sprinkle these elements throughout your holiday.

For example, one of the PCs seeks to build a castle. During the Festival of Trolls, large bounties are paid on trolls killed in the nearby badlands, plus the King personally and publicly thanks those who killed more than two trolls. This is a perfect opportunity for the PC to earn gold toward his future goal, plus meet and hopefully befriend the King who could grant him land in the future.

DESIGN BASED ON ROLE

You only have so much time. There are many things to prepare before next game session. That's why holidays are such a valuable GMing tool. If you design them for adventure, you'll get a lot of mileage from crafting just one campaign element. However, there are other reasons why you might design holidays. Avoid wasting time from over-designing, or getting yourself in trouble at the game table by under-designing.

Below are the primary purposes for designing a holiday in terms of campaign role. Choose what role best suits your holiday purpose and consider the element design advice given. See chapter 2 for element descriptions and their design.

INCIDENTAL INTERACTION

Some holidays will exist as mere placeholders, with a slight chance the PCs will bump up against them in a non-meaningful, non-critical way. For example:

- o Holidays that PCs have almost zero chance of interacting with or knowing about.
- o Holidays for places outside the adventuring region.
- o Holiday ideas and seeds you note for now, without spending design time on.

You don't want to spend more than a minute documenting an Incidental Interaction holiday. Your time is better invested elsewhere. However, you should document the bare essentials so you don't forget your cool idea on the outside chance the PCs brush up against it in a trivial manner.

For holidays with anticipated Incidental Interaction, note the following:

- o **Holiday name**
- o **Brief summary:** One or two sentences of what the holiday is about.
- o **Mood:** Whether the holiday has a positive or negative vibe.
- o **Timeline:** Note when the holiday occurs. Note if that date becomes known