

# Holiday Builder

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By James Embry



## **Holiday Builder**



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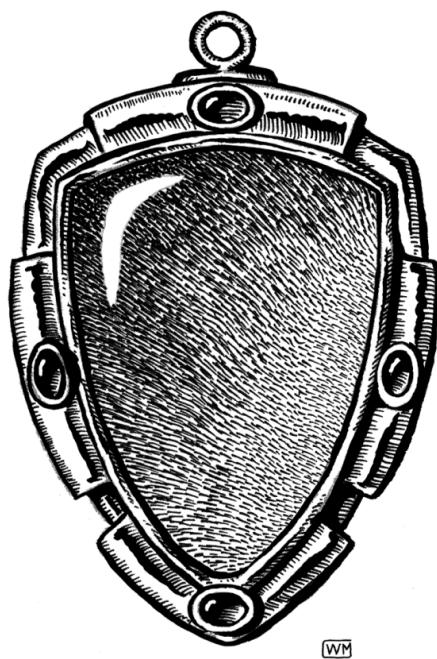
## Holidays

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Holidays are very important parts of just about every human culture. Holidays allow for brief periods of rest and revelry for the common people who may not get to experience these things very often. They also build community and bring people closer together by creating a shared cultural experience. Holidays are a wealth of cultural information and tradition. Yet, many fantasy world, holidays are often ignored or over looked.

In this book it is my intention to give GMs and other world builders a set of tools to create festivities for their worlds that will help their players get a little bit better understanding of the culture of the world their characters inhabit, and maybe give the GMs an opportunity to think about a part of their world's culture that they may have over looked.

This is not an anthropological examination of holidays around the world; this is just meant to be another tool in a GM's creative arsenal.



## Holidays Don't Have to Make Sense

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Holidays, Holy Days, Feast Days, Festivals, and the like are days that are set aside on the calendar to celebrate something.

In modern America (where I am from and most familiar with) we have a combination of religious holidays such as Easter, Christmas, and Good Friday; as well as political/historic holidays such as Thanksgiving, Independence Day, and Veteran's Day. These holidays all include elements of history and culture that are nonsensical or even contradictory to the narrative of the holiday itself. For example: in America we celebrate Easter, which is the religious celebration of the resurrection of the central figure of the Christian faith and symbolizing his triumph over death and sin, by hunting for colored eggs that an anthropomorphic rabbit hides from children. To an outsider that might seem a bit odd at the very least. But this strange egg based celebration of the risen savior is not the only oddity.

If you were to look at Christmas, which is the Christian celebration of the birth of the same savior, we will find that most people who celebrate the holiday are familiar with the Christmas story including the wise men from the east following a star to a stable outside of an inn where they discover a virgin girl giving birth to the son of God. And then celebrate the holiday by erecting a pine tree in their homes, decorating it and then waiting for an immortal Greek bishop who may or may not also be a Germanic forest god to arrive on a sleigh pulled by magical reindeer to leave gifts under the tree.

Holidays are strange is what I am trying to say. Political and historical holidays don't fare much better. For instance, not very long ago a child in an American school would learn to celebrate Columbus Day, which was the day that

Christopher Columbus arrived in America from Spain in his three ships and discovered America and proved that the world wasn't flat. That is a pretty good story and great reason to celebrate a holiday, if you ignore the part where Columbus wasn't even the first European to come to North America, no one really thought the world was flat at this point in time, Columbus believed he was in India the whole time, and that he enslaved and brutalized just about everyone he encountered as soon as he made landfall.

The Thanksgiving Story is a good one though, because it is just a simple story about friendship and family, told to us through the story of how the first Americans made friends with the Indigenous people and shared a meal with them after they taught us how to grow corn with a dead fish. Leaving out the part where the settlement at Plymouth was far from the first European settlement in North America and ignore the entire relationship between Europeans and the Indigenous peoples of North America.

The reason I bring these things up, isn't because I hate holidays, it is to illustrate a point about using them as cultural or historical facts. The few holidays that I have seen celebrated in fiction seem to celebrate events fairly accurately and only include elements that support the premise of the holiday being celebrated, when in real life nothing could be further from the truth.

Holidays often celebrate a number of things all at once and do so in ways that don't even make much sense on the surface. Valentine's Day invokes the name of an Italian saint in order to celebrate love by giving gifts of candy, flowers, and little cards. For someone creating a fictional world it would be hard to create that much absurdity. But, for those willing to do the research, every single element of every single holiday comes from somewhere for some reason. Holidays are fascinating carries of

language, culture, history, and religion. Every single holiday tells a story, but it isn't always the story that it pretends to tell.

## **Creating Random Holidays**

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The tables that follow will help you to create more or less random holidays that should work for most traditional fantasy settings. While the tables will get you started, it is still up to the GM or world builder to fill in the details. For instance, you may roll for a holiday that calls for a masquerade and bonfire to honor a long dead king. It is still ultimately up to the GM to determine which king is being honored as well as the significance of the bonfire and masquerade.

Keep in mind that the results of the table are just a guideline. Individual families and individual people may have their own customs and traditions in addition to the normal components of the holiday. For instance, while not every holiday include feasting, most people will probably eat a special holiday meal of some sort. While some holidays include heavy drinking as one of the central tenants of celebration, there are always those who will welcome an excuse to drink to excess.

## When is the Holiday Held

The very first thing to determine about a holiday is when it is celebrated. This table assumes that the holiday is celebrated at a fixed point on the calendar. There are holidays that are more fluid regarding their dates, normally based on a lunar cycle such as “The first full moon in spring”. Determining holidays like that is simply beyond the scope of this chart, but GMs are encouraged to come up with them on their own.

### 1d12 Date

1	First day of Autumn
2	First day of spring
3	First day of summer
4	First Day of winter
5	Last Day of Autumn
6	Last day of spring
7	Last day of summer
8	Last day of winter
9	Mid-Autumn
10	Mid-Spring
11	Mid-Sumer
12	Mid-Winter

## Significance of Holiday

Not all holidays are of equal importance.

### 1d6 Significance

1	Minor
2	Minor
3	Moderate
4	Moderate
5	Moderate
6	Major

**Minor Holidays:** Minor holidays might be old holidays that are little remembered or of little importance, some may even pass unnoticed. Minor holidays seldom involve relief from labor more often a simple greeting and perhaps a small celebration in the evening is all the significance these holidays are afforded.

**Moderate Holidays:** Most holidays are of moderate importance and will include at the very least a day of rest from most forms of labor.

**Major Holidays:** Major holidays are rarer, occurring only a couple of times per year. These holidays are events that are often planned for days or even weeks in advance.



## Duration of Festivities

The vast majority of holidays are single day events, however there are exceptions.

### 1d12 Duration

1	1 day
2	1 day
3	1 day
4	1 day
5	1 day
6	1 day
7	1 day
8	2 days
9	3 days
10	1 week

## What does the festival celebrate

Holidays often have layers of meaning. For instance, a day honoring the dead might conveniently be held just after the fall harvest, while a day of thanksgiving may mark the beginning of spring. When you roll to determine what the holiday is a celebration of, keep in mind that this is only part of the story.

### 1d10 Celebration

1	An Important Harvest/Planting
2	Astrological Event
3	Historic Event
4	Honor of a king
5	Honor of a Queen
6	Honor of a Religious Figure
7	Honoring the Dead
8	Religious Event
9	Thanksgiving
10	Roll Twice More

**An Important Harvest/Planting:** Harvests of one type of crop or another typically occur throughout the year. In other cases, the holiday

might be held to celebrate the planting of a specific crop.

**Astrological Event:** These holidays celebrate astrological events such as a particular moon sign or the appearance of a particular constellation.

**Historic Event:** These holidays could be celebrations of the founding of a kingdom, the end of a war or battle, or to remember the day of a particular disaster such as a fire or flood.

**Honor of a King:** It is not uncommon for certain kings to be honored for one reason or another. These rulers were likely popular during their day or are remembered for a particular accomplishment.

**Honor of a Queen:** A queen's day is very similar to celebrations to honor kings.

**Honor of a Religious Figure:** Most religions celebrate a cast of saints and martyrs who are remembered by the church for something they did or in honor of their deaths.

**Honoring the Dead:** These holidays tend to be macabre affairs that pay respect to the dead, while at the same time recognizing that the veil between the living and the dead is sometimes less defined than we would like to believe.

**Religious Event:** These holidays mark a particular religious event perhaps the birth or death of an important martyr or the day that a message was delivered to man from the divine itself.

**Thanksgiving:** These days are set aside specifically for the purpose of giving thanks. These days sometimes mark the end of a specific hardship or disaster.

## Components of Celebration

Each holiday is celebrated differently. Some of these components of celebration support the central idea of the holiday while others seem more random. These components might be parts of older holidays that were absorbed by the present one, or they may have been part of another culture's celebration that were brought to the region in question without the original cultural framework for them.

To determine exactly what form the components take, consider all of them together. For instance a holiday that includes song and drinking is likely much different than a holiday that includes song and prayer.

Significance	Components of Celebration
Minor	1
Moderate	2
Major	3

### 1d20 Component

1	Animal Sacrifice
2	Bonfires
3	Drinking
4	Drugs
5	Fasting
6	Feasting/Abstinence
7	Fighting
8	Fireworks
9	Games
10	Gift Giving
11	Hunting
12	Masquerade
13	Pranks
14	Prayer
15	Sex
16	Song/Dance
17	Sports
18	Story Telling
19	Roll Twice More
20	Roll Twice More

**Animal Sacrifice:** A specific animal is ritually killed during this celebration. Roll on the animal table to determine what type of animal is sacrificed.

**Bonfires:** The holiday is celebrated by lighting bonfires.

**Drinking:** One of the central elements of this holiday is heavy drinking.

**Drugs:** This holiday includes the use of some mind altering drug.

**Fasting/Abstinence:** This holiday is celebrated by a fast or abstinence from a particular activity such as drinking or sex. A feast is normally held either just before or just after a period of fasting.

**Feasting:** While just about every holiday includes a large meal of some sort, for this particular holiday, feasting is one of the primary forms of celebration.

**Fighting:** On this holiday, fighting is one of the primary forms of celebration. This could be a day for people to hash out old grudges and gripes against their neighbors or it could be a day where gladiatorial matches are held for entertainment. Perhaps a jousting tournament or some other competition of arms is held on this day.

**Fireworks:** In cultures where they are available fireworks are often included in holiday festivities. If fireworks aren't available, displays of magic might be used to substitute.

**Games:** The games included in the celebration of this holiday might include simple games such as looking for hidden objects or bobbing for apples, or breaking a piñata.

**Gift Giving:** Exchanging gifts is a common form of celebration. The nature of the holiday will determine who is giving gifts to whom and how expensive or elaborate the gifts are.

**Hunting:** The holiday includes a hunt, normally for a specific type of animal such as a stag, fox, or boar.

**Masquerade:** The holiday festivities involve wearing a costume or at least a mask. The nature of the costume and its purpose will depend on the holiday being celebrated.

**Pranks:** The holiday is celebrated by playing pranks on one another. These pranks are often good natured and friendly.

**Prayer:** This holiday includes a specific prayer or other religious observation.

**Sex:** This holiday includes a sexual component. Perhaps it is a celebration of “love” in a more romanticized form or perhaps it is a day when normal sexual taboos are relaxed with regard to choice of partner or type of sex engaged in.

**Song/Dance:** This holiday includes one or more specific songs that are sung in its honor. Or at the very least music and dancing are an important part of this holiday’s traditional celebrations.

**Sports:** The holiday includes an athletic event.

**Story Telling:** There are specific stories and fables that are associated with this holiday and often retold during the course of its celebration.

## Associated Symbols

Each holiday has associated symbols that go along with it. These could be literal symbols or come in the form of specific manner of dress or traditional food that is eaten on that day or even the appearance of a specific holiday character.

Significance	Symbols
Minor	2
Moderate	3
Major	5

1d6	Symbol
1	Animals
2	Character
3	Colors
4	Food
5	Objects/Icons
6	Roll Twice More

## Animal

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**1d20 Animal**

1	Badger
2	Bear
3	Cat
4	Cow
5	Doe
6	Dog
7	Donkey
8	Dove
9	Fish
10	Horse
11	Lamb
12	Owl
13	Pig
14	Rabbit
15	Ram
16	Raven
17	Snake
18	Stag
19	Turtle
20	Wolf

## Color

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**1d8 Color**

1	Black
2	Blue
3	Green
4	Orange
5	Purple
6	Red
7	White
8	Yellow

## Food

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**1d8 Food**

1	Bread
2	Candies
3	Eggs
4	Fruit
5	Meat
6	Pies
7	Soup
8	Vegetable

## Symbol / Icon

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**1d20 Symbol/Icon**

1	Bell
2	Boots
3	Broom
4	Coins
5	Crowns
6	Flower
7	Goblet
8	Hat
9	Hearts
10	Helm
11	Keys
12	Moon
13	Scythe
14	Sea Shell
15	Shield
16	Skull
17	Smoking Pipe
18	Sun
19	Totem
20	Wreath

## Holiday Characters

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Quite a few holidays feature characters that are associated with the holiday. The appearance and personality of these characters differ greatly from culture to culture. In real life there are character such as Father Christmas, Cupid, Baby New Year, Krampus, and many others. If you roll for a holiday character consult the table below to determine its appearance and then roll to determine its personality.

## Holiday Character Attitude/Nature

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**Foolish:** The character is a fool that often finds him or herself in humorous predicaments. A fool normally escapes unscathed, but others may suffer for their stupidity.

**Jolly:** The character is good natured and friendly.

**Protective:** The character is a guardian, normally of a specific type of person such as women or children or clergymen.

**Punitive:** The character is punitive. It punished those guilty of a specific activity.

**Seductive:** The character is sexual in nature and attempts to seduce others. This can be considered good or bad based on context.

**Sinister:** This character wishes to do harm. They should be avoided at all cost. The character can be warded away however.

**Trickster:** This character performs tricks and pranks.

**Vindictive:** This character will punish those that offend it in some way, normally by failing to observe the tenants of the holiday.

### 1d20 Character Appearance

1	Anthropomorphic Animal
2	Attractive and sexualized woman
3	Baby
4	Crone
5	Dragon
6	Dwarf or Gnome
7	Fairy Sprite
8	Fat bearded man
9	Half Human Half Animal
10	Hooded Specter
11	Horned Giant
12	Old Man
13	Orphan Girl
14	Pale and gaunt man
15	Talking Animal
16	Talking Tree
17	Thin bearded man
18	Walking Corpse
19	Warrior Clad in Armor
20	Winged Woman

### Character Attitude

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#### 1d8 Nature

1	Foolish
2	Jolly
5	Protective
4	Punitive
3	Seductive
6	Sinister
7	Trickster
8	Vindictive



## Sample Holidays

### Winter's End

Last day of winter

Significance: Moderate

Duration: 2 Days

Celebrates: Important Harvest/Planting

Celebration: Song, Fighting, Gift Giving

Symbols: Foods (Fruit, Candies) Color (Red)

### Putting it all together.

Winter's End is celebrated on the last day of winter each year. This two day festival marks the end of winter and the very beginning of the spring planting season. The holiday is celebrated by singing songs to welcome the coming spring and giving gifts of small charms, dried fruit, and candy to friends and loved ones. Wrestling matches are held between friends to work out some of the energy and tension that was likely built up after the long months of winter. Both men and women can compete in these matches, which serves to work out another kind of tension as well, although the church looks down on this particular aspect of the celebration. The noble lords have also used this celebration as a day to hold the first tournaments of the year to get their men ready for the summer campaigning season. Red ribbons are often hung throughout the towns and on the doors of shops and homes.



### Saint Quinton's Day

#### Mid-Winter

Significance: Moderate

Duration: 1 Day

Celebrates: Religious Figure

Celebration: Pranks, Animal Sacrifice (Rabbit)

Symbols: Animal (Doe), Food (Vegetable), Character

### Putting it all together.

Saint Quinton's Day is celebrated at mid-winter. The holiday involves a rabbit that is ritually killed by a priest and then sacrificed to the gods in order to give thanks and pray for mercy for the remainder of the winter season.

What probably began as a solemn religious ritual has been somewhat undermined by the persistence of a character called Lady Greene who is often depicted as an attractive and overly sexualized woman who is jolly and willing to share wine and ale with just about everyone. In addition to the celebration of Lady Greene, there is the tradition of playing pranks on one another during this day that has infuriated clergymen for decades, particularly because they tend to be the targets of these pranks.

In addition to Lady Greene, the symbol of a doe deer has been a persistent symbol of this holiday for years, although no one is quite sure why, but the best explanation is that the church placed the holiday (accidentally or intentionally) on a date that had previously been used to celebrate a much older and different midwinter holiday.

It is tradition to eat Savoy cabbage on this day.

I'm Never Sure what to put on the last page.

Thank you very much for checking out my city builder. If you liked it, you should check out my cowboy role playing game Devil's Crossroad or the western setting The Burning Plains. I have also made some dungeon tile sets.

Also, I will be releasing my first fantasy role playing game Raven of the Scythe summer 2017, if you would like to check that out too.

Again, thank you very much for supporting my work. I hope you found it enjoyable and useful.

Happy Gaming.

-James

