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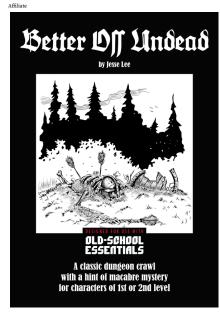
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Holidays & Festivals Issue

It's that time of year again.

The time to celebrate with loved ones and attend festivals and night markets.

In fantasy campaigns it's not unusual at all for settlements everywhere to celebrate special times of the year, season, days, and even heroes and other special personalities.

These are often done by throwing a festival.

The issue is that most GMs handwave these festivals and celebrations with a simple descriptive backdrop.

It's time for festivals to be front and centre within the campaign!

This issue is about exactly that. Helping GMs to create and develop festivals for their campaign worlds, which will make them much more diverse and immersive.

Feel free to photocopy and use the template on page 15 to create memorable and believable festivals for your campaign world.

And, as always, happy gaming!

- Russ from YUMDM https://yumdm.com/ https://twitter.com/yum_dm

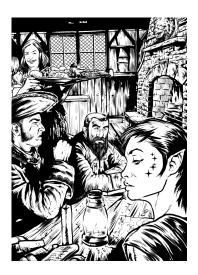
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One Festival At A Time The Need for Festivals



Festivals can be an important cornerstone of worldbuilding in any fantasy campaign, offering more than just colorful celebrations.

They can also provide a window into the campaign world's culture, history, and daily life. And can pull the players further into your world.

Bringing Depth to Your World

In a fantasy campaign world, festivals are powerful tools for worldbuilding.

They reflect the values, traditions, and challenges of the people who celebrate them. A spring planting festival might highlight a rural community's reliance on agriculture, while a winter feast could

underscore the importance of solidarity in harsh times. By incorporating these events, you can:

Illustrate Daily Life: Festivals reveal how people find joy, cope with hardship, and mark the passage of time.

Showcase Diversity: Different regions or cultures might celebrate the same event in unique ways, adding variety and depth to your world.

Anchor the Campaign World in History:

Holidays tied to historical events or legendary figures give your setting a sense of legacy and continuity.

Reinforcing Cultural Identity

Festivals are an excellent way to showcase the cultural identity of your world's inhabitants.

They serve as focal points for shared beliefs and values, allowing players to engage with the world on a personal level. Through festivals, you can:

Highlight Religious Beliefs: Rituals and ceremonies can reflect the influence of deities or spiritual forces in the lives of the people.

Promote Regional Pride: Festivals often celebrate local heroes, industries, or landmarks, reinforcing a community's sense of self.

Express Social Hierarchies: The roles of nobles, clergy, and common folk during

celebrations can reveal power dynamics and societal structures.

For example, a city's Festival of Lanterns might honor a river goddess with offerings and floating lights, blending religious devotion with civic pride.

Meanwhile, the coastal town of Driftport might host a Shipwright's Fair to showcase its naval craftsmanship and attract traders.

Roleplaying Opportunities

Festivals are fertile ground for offering opportunities for roleplay, conflict, and exploration.

These events can also serve as backdrops for intrigue, or act as catalysts for adventures.

Social Encounters: Festivals are bustling with NPCs, from excited children to shady merchants. These interactions can deepen relationships or introduce new plot threads.

Adventure Hooks: A stolen relic, a disrupted ceremony, or a mysterious guest can turn a celebration into the start of an exciting quest.

Character Development: Festivals provide moments for PCs to reflect on their own traditions, bond with each other, or share personal stories.

Dynamic Settings: The environment of a festival—with its crowds, decorations, and events—can challenge players to think creatively as they navigate its unique challenges.

For example, during a midwinter feast, the PCs might discover that a rival faction is using the merriment to smuggle contraband into the city.

Or, in the midst of a harvest festival, a series of omens could point to an ancient curse tied to the land.

Practical Tips for Using Festivals in Your Campaign

Before creating and running a bunch of festivals and holidays, you may want to consider these:

Plan Activities: Think about what people do during the festival. Include games, parades, markets, and rituals that invite interaction.

Add Tension: Consider how the festival might be disrupted, either by external threats or internal conflicts.

Make It Personal: Tie the festival to the characters, whether through their backstories, goals, or moral dilemmas.

Use Sensory Details: Describe the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the celebration to fully immerse your players.

Festivals can be just background color in your campaign world, or they can be so much more, creating intrigue, allowing roleplaying opportunities, adventure hooks, and much more.



Time To Rest How to Create Festivals &

Holidays



As mentioned previously, festivals and holidays can bring depth and authenticity to your campaign world.

Although making them feel natural and integrated into the world requires careful thought, and some planning on the GM's behalf.

Believable celebrations should resonate with the culture, history, and environment of that part of your campaign world.

Start with Purpose

Every celebration begins with a reason.

Think about why the festival exists and what it means to the people who celebrate it. By defining the purpose, you establish the foundation for how the celebration is observed and what it represents to the people.

Below are some common motivations:

Seasonal Events: Harvests, planting seasons, solstices, and other natural cycles often inspire festivals.

Historical Milestones: Key events, such as the founding of a city, the end of a war, or a significant religious revelation, can become the basis for annual holidays.

Religious Observances: Rituals tied to the worship of deities, spirits, or natural forces often become recurrent traditions.

Cultural Values: Festivals can highlight societal priorities, such as honor, community, or craftsmanship.

Reflect Local Culture and Environment

Ground your celebrations in the unique aspects of this part of your world.

Ask yourself how the geography, economy, and cultural identity of the region shape the festivities. Incorporating these elements ensures the festival feels like a natural extension of the world.

Geography: A coastal town might have a festival honoring the sea, while a desert community could celebrate rare rainstorms.

Economy: Trade hubs might host fairs to attract merchants, while agricultural regions celebrate bountiful harvests.

Cultural Nuances: A militaristic society may commemorate battle victories, while a nomadic tribe might celebrate reunions at a central gathering point.

Add Unique Traditions

To make a celebration memorable, give it distinctive practices that set it apart.

These traditions should tie directly to the festival's purpose and the culture's personality. Unique traditions add flavor to the event and create opportunities for player interaction.

Rituals: Ceremonial dances, offerings to deities, or acts of penance.

Games and Contests: Physical competitions, intellectual challenges, or artistic showcases.

Symbolic Acts: Lighting lanterns, releasing birds, or burning effigies.

Food and Drink: Special dishes, rare ingredients, or communal feasts that mark the occasion.

Tie to History and Myth

Believable festivals often have origins steeped in history or legend.

Even if the true story has been lost to time, the remnants of those roots should remain. By tying the festival to the past, you give it depth and context that enriches the setting.

Founding Stories: Was the festival established to honor a hero or to appease a deity?

Evolving Meaning: Over time, a somber holiday might evolve into a lively celebration, or a practical event might take on spiritual significance.

Forgotten Origins: Some traditions may have continued long after their original purpose was forgotten, leading to interesting cultural quirks.

Consider Scale and Tone

Not all celebrations are grand spectacles.

Some might be quiet, local traditions, while others are massive, city-wide events. Think about the scale and tone that fits your festival. The scale affects how the festival interacts with the world and its participants.

Local Gatherings: A village may celebrate with a small feast and storytelling by the elders.

Regional Fairs: Trade festivals might draw crowds from neighboring towns and include bustling markets. **Grand Ceremonies:** A capital city might host parades, tournaments, and elaborate rituals for its most important holiday.

Use Sensory Details

Bring the celebration to life with vivid descriptions that engage the senses.

These details immerse players and help them experience the event as if they were truly there.

Sights: Decorations, costumes, and banners.

Sounds: Music, chanting, laughter, or the clamor of a bustling market.

Smells: The aroma of roasting meats, incense, or fresh flowers.

Tastes: Unique festival foods and beverages.

Textures: The feel of ceremonial garb, handmade crafts, or cobbled streets underfoot.

Provide Roleplaying & Story Opportunities

Festivals aren't just for color; they're perfect settings for roleplaying and downtime (see *Issue 41* of *d12 Monthly*).

By tying the festival to the plot, you make it an integral part of the campaign.

→ Introduce new NPCs or factions.

- → Create social dilemmas or moral choices.
- → Launch adventures through mysterious events or unexpected disruptions.
- → Allow characters to explore personal stories and backstory connections.

Remember, festivals and celebrations are more than just set dressing - they're opportunities to deepen your world and immerse your players.



They Come & They Go Seasonal Festivals

Seasons are a large part of medieval life. Most live their lives tied to the seasons, and their importance in tracking time and growing food gives ample opportunity for festivals to be based on them.

The Foundations of Seasonal Festivals

Seasonal festivals often reflect the practical needs and spiritual beliefs of a community. They are deeply rooted in the environment and the cycles that sustain life.

By connecting festivals to these cycles, you ground them in the daily realities of your world's inhabitants.

Agricultural Milestones: Planting, harvesting, and preserving food are critical moments for agricultural societies and naturally inspire celebrations.

Astronomical Events: Solstices, equinoxes, and celestial alignments mark shifts in seasons and serve as reminders of humanity's place in the cosmos.

Weather and Climate: The arrival of rains, the end of drought, or the first snowfall often inspire rituals and communal gatherings.

Designing Seasonal Traditions

Each season presents unique opportunities for festivities.

Spring: Celebrate renewal and growth with planting festivals, fertility rituals, and ceremonies honoring the thawing earth. Symbolism might include flowers, eggs, and young animals.

Summer: Mark abundance and vitality with vibrant fairs, feasts, and games. Bonfires, sun motifs, and water-based celebrations highlight the season's energy.

Autumn: Focus on gratitude and preparation with harvest festivals, storytelling, and communal feasts. Themes of balance and reflection might feature prominently.

Winter: Emphasize survival and hope during the harshest season. Festivals might center on light, warmth, and kinship, using candles, hearths, and evergreens as symbols.

Cultural Variations

The way a community celebrates a season often reflects its culture and environment.

A desert-dwelling people might hold a Rain Calling Festival during the first storms of the season, offering precious water to their deities.

In a coastal city, midsummer might bring a Festival of the Tides, with boat races and offerings to sea gods.

A mountain village may host a Winter Vigil, lighting fires atop peaks to guide ancestral spirits through the snow.

Myths & Legends A Random Table

Sometimes you need some inspiration to get started with festivals. Listed below are 30 myths you can use for the basis of festivals in your campaign world.

Note: If you don't have a D30, you can roll a D3 as the 'tens' and a D10 as the 'units'.

D30 Activity

Spring Myths

The Verdant Crown: A sacred artifact said to grant eternal spring,

 hidden by a forest spirit to punish mortals for greed. Each Spring Equinox, druids attempt to locate it.

The Blossom Bride: A maiden who transformed into a tree to escape a

2 cruel suitor; her blossoms are said to bless lovers during the Flowering Festival.

The First Seed: A legendary seed, planted by a forgotten god, that brings abundant harvests. Farmers reenact the planting during the Seed Sowing Festival.

The River's Pact: A river goddess's promise to protect her people, renewed annually through offerings of spring flowers.

The Stolen Breeze: A jealous spirit captured the winds of spring; the festival's kites are said to coax them back.

The Egg of Dawn: An egg-shaped stone believed to hold the spirit of a spring deity, hidden atop a mountain.

The Thawing Crown: A crown of ice worn by a winter king, melted by a hero's courage, symbolizing the end of winter.

Summer Myths

The Flame's Keeper: A hero who stole fire from the gods to save their

8 people; bonfires are lit in their honour during the Summer Solstice.

The Golden Horn: A magical horn 9 said to call summer rains, lost in a dragon's hoard.

The Drowning Sun: A tale of a sun god's annual battle with a sea demon, commemorated with oceanfront festivals.

The Azure Huntress: A celestial archer who ensures summer's bounty by slaying sky beasts; archery contests honour her.

The Sapphire Tide: A rare, glowing wave said to cleanse all sins, appearing only during midsummer night.

The Singing Stones: A ring of
stones that hum with magic during
summer's peak, linked to an ancient
elven song.

The Dance of the Fireflies: Fireflies said to be the souls of lost lovers;

their arrival signals the start of the summer revels.

Autumn Myths

The Harvest Lord: A deity who sacrificed themselves to teach mortals agriculture, honoured with feasting and rituals.

The Crimson Pact: A deal between mortals and a forest spirit, renewing the land's fertility in exchange for offerings.

The Wandering Lantern: A cursed soul seeking rest, their lantern's light appearing during the harvest moon.

The Feathered Herald: A giant bird said to bring autumn's winds, whose feathers are rare alchemical ingredients.

The Amber Ring: A mystical
artifact that grants visions of future harvests, hidden in an abandoned temple.

The Veil's Lifting: Spirits of the
departed walk the earth on an
autumn night; offerings are left to
guide them back.

21 The Stone of Balance: A rock said to mark the moment of perfect balance between day and night during the Autumn Equinox.

Winter Myths

The Frost King's Challenge: A

22 mythical figure who freezes unworthy travelers but grants

wealth to those who endure his trials.

The Silver Stag: A rare creature believed to lead hunters to prosperity during the winter solstice.

The Eternal Hearth: A flame said to 24 keep winter's darkness at bay, tended by an order of monks.

The Snow Maiden: A spirit who protects children from winter's dangers, leaving frost patterns on windows as warnings.

The Shattered Star: A celestial
shard that fell to earth, believed to bring warmth and luck when found.

The Frozen Bell: A magical bell 27 trapped in ice, said to ring when winter's rule ends.

The Wolf's Vigil: A legendary pack
of wolves said to guard villages from
winter spirits during the longest
night.

Year-Round Myths

The Twelve Trials: Each month is linked to a mythical hero's trial, inspiring themed contests and rituals.

The Eternal Pilgrimage: A
wandering saint who appears
unpredictably throughout the year,
bringing miracles or challenges
wherever they visit.

All In A Day's Play Unpredictable Festival Events

Events rarely go on without some sort of events going awry. Below is a list of some truly unpredictable events during festivals.

Table: Unpredictable Festival Events

Table: Unpredictable Festival Events	
D20	Event
1	Sudden Storms: Clear skies give way to torrential rain.
2	Uninvited Nobility: A high-ranking noble or dignitary arrives unannounced.
3	Runaway Animals: A horse from the jousting tournament or a goat from the livestock competition breaks loose.
4	Drunken Brawls: A drinking competition or celebratory toast escalates into a full-blown brawl.
5	Prophetic Omens: A festival game reveals an unexpected omen.
6	Mysterious Stranger: A cloaked figure appears, claiming to offer rare goods, forbidden knowledge, or cryptic warnings.
7	Lost Child: A distraught parent searches for their missing child.
8	Plague of Insects: A sudden swarm of locusts, bees, or flies descends on the festivities.

- Rogue Performer: A jester, bard, or magician begins an unscheduled act that captivates the crowd but upstages the planned events.
- 10 **Festival Fire:** A stray spark ignites decorations or tents.
- Artifact Malfunction: A relic or 11 enchanted item used in the ceremonies malfunctions.
- 12 Animal Attack: A wild beast wanders into the festival.
- Forgotten Rivalry: Old feuds resurface during a competition.
- Imposter Revelers: A group of 14 bandits disguises themselves as festival-goers.
- Collapsing Stage: A hastily
 constructed stage or platform
 gives way during a performance.
- 16 **Unexpected Eclipse:** A solar or lunar eclipse occurs.
- Heirloom Theft: A ceremonial
 artifact or crown used in the
 festival is stolen.
- Strange Visitors: Non-humans,
 such as elves, dwarves, or
 creatures from other planes,
 make an appearance.
- 19 **Ghostly Apparition:** A spirit manifests during the festivities.
- Food Poisoning: A batch of festival food causes illness.

Character Building Some NPCs for Your Festival



Listed below you will find a number of NPCs related to a festival, complete with a hook and twist. Use these to spur on events or even a series

of sessions of play.

The Festival Organizer

A harried individual tasked with coordinating the event. They might be an overworked clerk, a stern priest, or a gregarious town elder.

Hook: The organizer's plans go awry when key performers or resources vanish.

Twist: They are secretly sabotaging the festival to push a political or personal agenda.

The Masked Stranger

An enigmatic figure who appears only during the festival, offering cryptic advice, gifts, or challenges.

Hook: The stranger gives the party a riddle or prophecy tied to their future quests.

Twist: The stranger's identity is someone the party knows but doesn't recognize.

The Merchant of Exotic Goods

A trader who appears only during festivals, offering rare items. They could be a traveling peddler, a crafty fey, or a disguised antagonist with ulterior motives.

Hook: One of their wares has a mysterious or cursed property that ties into the festival's theme.

Twist: The merchant is testing the adventurers, offering boons or punishments based on their choices.

The Celebrated Hero

A local figure honored by the festival, such as a warrior, scholar, or mage who performed a great deed.

Hook: The hero asks the adventurers for help defending their legacy.

Twist: The hero's celebrated deeds are a lie, and they're desperate to keep it hidden.

The Festival Bard

A charismatic storyteller, musician, or performer who serves as the festival's voice and spirit. They might regale the crowd with tales and host contests.

Hook: Their tales hint at a forgotten truth about the festival.

Twist: The bard uses their platform to call for rebellion or subtly mock authority figures.

Solo Spotlight Engaging Solo Adventures

Here are some ideas for how solo players can interact with festivals in meaningful and engaging ways.

Personal Stakes in the Festival

Tie the festival directly to the character's goals, backstory, or relationships. This creates an emotional connection and a reason for the character to fully immerse themselves.

- 1. The festival celebrates an ancestor or figure from the character's history.
- 2. A rival or enemy is a key participant in the event.
- The adventurer is tasked with ensuring the festival's success to gain favor with a faction.

Solo Competitions and Challenges

Festivals often feature contests and games that are perfect for a solo adventurer to shine or struggle in. These events test the character's skills and create memorable moments.

- 1. A jousting or combat tournament with escalating difficulty.
- 2. A storytelling or bardic performance to impress an audience.
- 3. A puzzle-filled scavenger hunt requiring cleverness and persistence.

See the article *The Joy of Festivals* in this issue for more information on contests.

Exploration Opportunities

Festivals often open up areas that are normally off-limits, providing new places for the solo adventurer to explore.

- 1. Secret passageways in a temple revealed during a sacred ritual.
- 2. A temporary market offering rare goods or hidden dangers.
- 3. An invitation to a private feast or gathering where plots unfold.

Unique Rewards and

Consequences

Festivals are excellent occasions to provide the solo player with special rewards or story-altering outcomes.

- 1. Winning a rare magical item in a festival contest.
- 2. Gaining the favor of an influential figure or group.
- 3. Earning a curse or blessing tied to the festival's rituals.

Immersive Role-Playing Opportunities

Festivals offer moments for the character to let loose, reflect, or express themselves in ways that might not be possible in the regular flow of the campaign.

- 1. Participating in a ritual dance or ceremony.
- 2. Donning a disguise and mingling anonymously in the crowd.
- 3. Crafting or presenting something personal to share with others.

Creature Feature Monsters Can Celebrate Too



Festival attracts all sorts, even monsters. Below is a list of monster-related events that may take place at festival time.

The Reveling Revenant

A ghost that rises every year during a festival to relive the final joyous celebration of their life. While initially benign, they turn vengeful if the festival does not meet their expectations.

Hook: The adventurers must uncover the revenant's history and ensure the festival goes off without a hitch - or find a way to lay them to rest permanently.

The Firelight Fae

Mischievous fey creatures drawn to festival bonfires, stealing embers to fuel their magical games.

Hook: Their thefts cause fires to burn out prematurely or grow dangerously out of control. The adventurers must negotiate with or outwit the fae to restore balance.

The Effigy Golem

A giant effigy meant to be burned as part of a festival ritual, animated by a malevolent spirit or mischievous prankster's magic.

Hook: When the effigy comes to life and wreaks havoc, the adventurers must stop it, either by dispelling the magic or appeasing the spirit animating it.

The Masked Monster

A shape-shifting monster that uses the anonymity of festival masks to blend in and cause chaos.

Hook: Festival-goers are being targeted by a creature stealing them or their souls. The adventurers must unmask the monster before the festival ends.

The Harvest Wyrm

A serpentine creature that slumbers beneath a village's fields and awakens only during the harvest festival to feast on crops—and sometimes villagers.

Hook: The adventurers must decide whether to drive the creature away, or appease it with a grand offering.

The Lunar Beast

A creature tied to the moon phases, appearing only during a once-a-year festival that coincides with a lunar event.

Hook: Festival-goers believe the beast's appearance is a blessing, but its true intentions are far more sinister. The adventurers must determine whether to defend the creature or expose its danger.

Spellcraft Blessed Items



For religious festivals, priests often give out minor blessed items that will give the recipient some luck or keep them warm on cold festival nights.

Sun Deities

Solar Pendant: A small golden medallion shaped like a sunburst. Once per day, the wearer can activate the pendant to shed bright light in a 10-foot radius for one hour.

Warmth Coin: A copper coin etched with the image of a radiant sun. When held or pressed to the skin, the coin provides comforting warmth, enough to stave off the effects of cold weather for up to eight hours.

Moon Deities

Dreambloom Petal: A single, soft petal from a flower that blooms only under moonlight, stored in a glass locket. Just once, the petal can be crushed to cast *Calm Emotions* on a single creature.

Twilight Coin: A small silver coin with the image of a full moon. The bearer can flip

the coin to invoke a subtle charm once per day gaining a +1 bonus to a Charisma check.

War or Battle Deities

Tunic of the Steadfast: A plain gray tunic with a subtle embroidered motif of crossed swords on the chest. Once per day, the wearer can activate the tunic to gain a +2 bonus on saving throws Vs. being frightened or intimidated.

Shield of the Iron Vigil: A small, round shield charm made of iron. Once per day, the wearer can activate the charm to gain a +1 bonus to AC for one minute.

Knowledge Deities

Pendant of the Seeker's Path: A simple silver pendant with an intricate engraving of a winding road. Once per day, the wearer can focus on the pendant to gain a flash of inspiration, allowing them to reroll a single Intelligence or Wisdom scheck as the knowledge deity imparts a moment of clarity.

Lens of Clarity: A small, polished crystal lens attached to a fine metal frame. Just once, the wearer can activate the lens to peer through it, granting them the ability to clearly read any written text, regardless of language, for one hour.



Adventure Location Moon Market

The Moon Market, as it is known locally, is dedicated to the Moon Goddess and only appears during the Moon Festival.

This event takes place on each Blue Moon (every 2-3 years).

This market is said to be blessed by the Goddess herself, and all the wares contained within are of the highest quality.

Primarily a food market, tools and everyday items - such as bowls, jugs, and other pottery - can be sourced here.

The market is run by **Lunar Shay Moonlight**, a priest of the Moon Goddess, and she is found in the market all night.
She is helped by four underlings.

One Night Only

Once the sun rises, the Moon Market vanishes, only to come again the next Blue Moon.

Anyone within the market at this time will be taken away with the market, not reappearing until the market returns once again.

The market always appears in the grounds of, or near, a temple to the Moon Goddess,

but no-one is certain of where this will be.

Busy Market

The market is always full of customers and can be a haven for pickpockets.

Not Aligned

Anyone entering the market who opposes the Moon Goddess, or is of the opposite alignment of her, feels a compulsion to leave which can only be overcome with a saving throw Vs. Spell. These individuals are not taken with the market when it vanishes.



Class Acts The Pickpocket



Whether lifting trinkets in a crowded bazaar or pilfering secrets in a noble's court, the life of a pickpocketing thief promises excitement, danger, and plenty of loot.

This article explores how to focus a thief on pickpocketing, including tips, tricks, and unique items to enhance a character or an NPC.

Building a Pickpocket Specialist

Below are a few tips to maximize pickpocketing potential.

Know Your Targets

Focus on individuals who appear wealthy but distracted, such as merchants haggling in a marketplace or nobles enjoying a tavern's revelry.

Avoid obvious risks like alert guards or characters wearing armor.

Use Disguises

Blend in with the crowd by dressing the part. A shabby cloak in a bustling market or

a servant's attire in a noble's court can make you less conspicuous.

Work the Crowd

Use busy environments to your advantage. Crowded streets, festivals, or tavern brawls provide excellent cover for a quick grab.

Distract and Divert

Work with allies to create distractions. A bard's performance, an argument, or even a staged accident can draw attention away from your actions.

Building a Pickpocket Specialist

To focus on pickpocketing, tailor your thief's approach and tools to maximize effectiveness:

Dexterity Focus

Prioritize Dexterity as your highest ability score to boost your chances of success in all thief skills, including Pick Pockets. Also, think of not wearing any armour.

Equipment Essentials

Some equipment is essential for a pickpocket.

Disguise Kit: A small box containing wigs, paints, and simple props to alter your appearance quickly.

False Coin Pouch: A decoy pouch to switch with the target's real one, minimizing suspicion.



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Next Month

Next week we start to get weird. This issue will kick-off a three-part arc about weirdness. This issue is all about weird magic. So, hold on to your wands, things are about to get unnatural!



There will be articles on the origins of weird magic, the cost paid for acquiring that power, and weird magic tomes and items, plus much more!

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