

Bonus Notes on Holidays from Healing Fireball

While researching the holidays Digby O'Flanagan presented in his *Year of Celebrations* logs, some interesting similarities started to come to light about how holidays are viewed by the populous and what types of common themes persist in celebrations throughout all cultures. Never one to pass up a new avenue of research, the task fell to me to examine these more broad aspects of celebrations and holidays as a whole to satisfy our more scholarly readers (read: game masters). I present below my conclusions on similar trends found in holidays and celebrations throughout the land.

~The Healer~
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Using Holidays in Your Game

Holidays and celebrations have been a part of the human experience for as long as man has kept records of these things. They serve a clear purpose - to break up the monotony of average life and to commemorate or honor the accomplishments of our forbearers or society, the changing of seasons or ancient traditions. So how can this cycle of celebration be added to a game world to make it a living, vibrant place? Below are several suggestions as to how holidays can be added to spice up a game.

Holiday as a Point of Interest: The simplest way to use holidays in a game is to sprinkle them in as an exotic eccentricity of a town or race of people. The players can come to a new village and discover that it is the eve or morning of some holiday they have never heard of. This can lead to the players either getting caught up in the celebration or a usually-friendly village becoming unfriendly or even hostile to the party as they run afoul of traditions or break customs in taboo ways. This is a good fit for games with a primary feel of exploration, games set in exotic strange lands or games where the players are diplomats or envoys to foreign cultures.

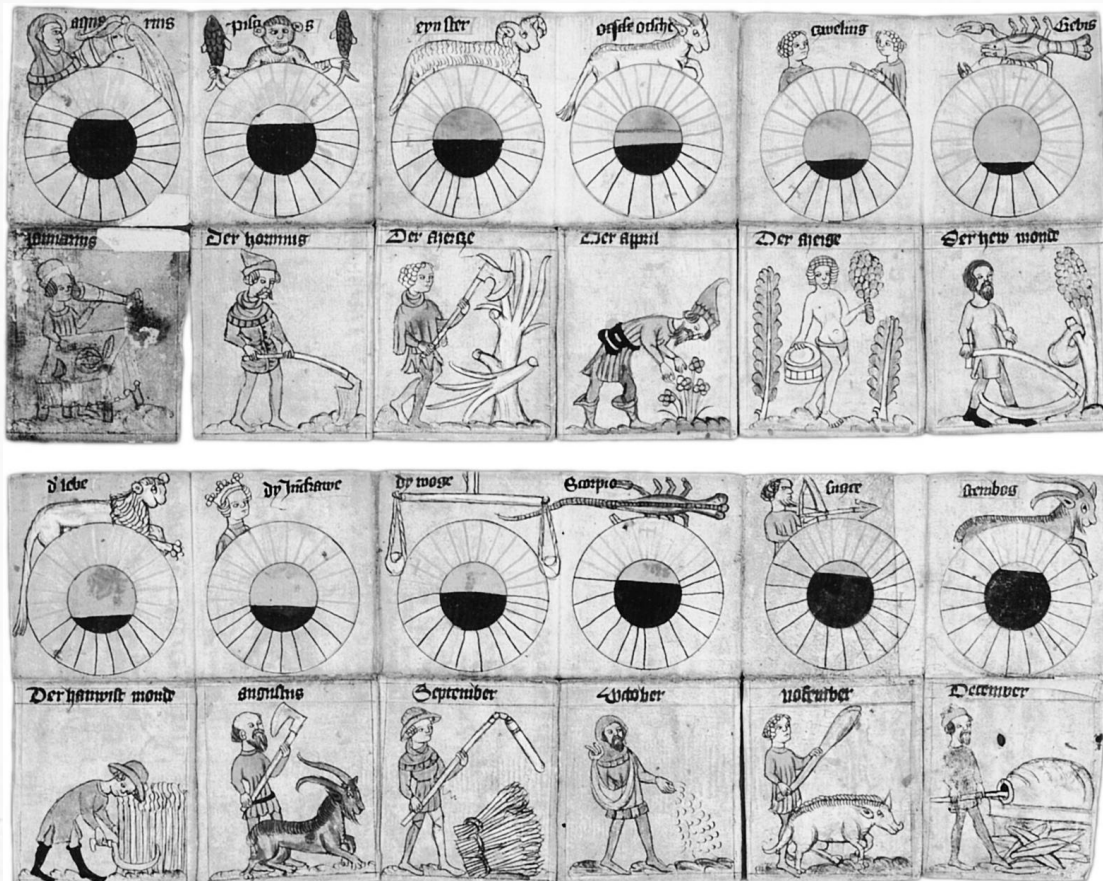
Change of Pace: Another easy way to add holidays to your game is to use them as a break from routine. The party could enter a town and reacclimatizes themselves to life outside the dungeon to find that they have arrived on the eve of a holiday. This approach works best if the characters are familiar with the holiday being celebrated and may choose to take part. To help players, the game master could hand out summaries of the holiday's traditions or a brief history of the celebration. This is a good fit when you want a change of pace between story arcs, when players have a lot of money and need something to spend it on, as a bright spot in a dark campaign to remind the characters what they're fighting for or as a conclusion to a campaign.

Holiday as Backdrop: Holidays also work as colorful backdrops adding a flashy chaotic atmosphere to any town or city. This chaotic atmosphere creates an anonymous cover for clandestine meetings, illegal activities (such as smuggling in illicit goods), or as a possible obstacle hiding the above from the party trying to stop them. Large holidays may also lead to gatherings of specific groups (such as scholars, priests, farmers or skilled labor); this could be a draw for characters seeking contacts of that type. In the above cases the holiday itself is a mere

backdrop functioning as the reason the group has gathered in the town, as a cover or as a hindrance but it is not the main focus of story or reason the party is in town.

Holiday as Plot Hook: A holiday may function as a plot hook driving the adventure itself. For example a sacred item is stolen, a rare offering is needed, or an evil plot centers around the holiday. The party may be hired to find the item, escort the offering or they could stumble across an evil plot. In this case the party may or may not be familiar with the holiday. If they are not familiar with the holiday a good introduction to the plot hook could have the party accidentally ruin the celebration or break up a meeting of the town elders discussing what to do. The holiday itself is not likely to be center stage but instead functions as a deadline that the party before which the party must accomplish their goal. Alternatively, the holiday could be the start of the adventure as it all goes tragically wrong and the party must strive to undo the damage of the holiday. Example plot hooks have been included for each of the holidays presented above.

Holiday as Obligation: Holidays could also be used as an obligation for characters. For religious characters, holidays may be an obligation that they must fulfill as part of their service to their god. However even non-religious characters may have holiday-based obligations and need to return home. This obligation may limit the party's movement as one of them must return home before the year ends. Alternatively, the obligation may spontaneously manifest as a religious character is asked to fill in for a sick priest or the party may be honored with unique positions in the upcoming celebration.



Designing Your Own Unique Holidays

Creating unique holidays for your world can feel like a daunting task as a memorable holiday can leave a lasting impression similar to a well-developed NPC. To simplify the creation of new holidays in your world we suggest using the following four step framework for holiday creation.

Step One: Choose a theme or premise around which the holiday centers. A theme or premise can be as simple as a single sentence (for example, a celebration to honor new mothers) or it can be more complex and specific (such as a celebration to commemorate the victory of the Iron squad when a small force of a dozen militia defended the town from a rampaging horde of orcs). Above I have presented several themes that are common to each month and how they affected the holidays of these months as examples and inspiration.

Step Two: Choose the type of celebration your holiday will be. Common celebrations include fairs, competitions/sporting events, processions/parades, dances/socials, feasts, plays, and religious ceremonies/offerings. Multiple types can also be combined; for example, the procession/dance celebration of "Chaos End" or the complex fair/procession/offering of "The Appeal of The Snow Maiden." The above is by no means an exhaustive list and many combinations are possible but by choosing a celebration type you give structure to the types of events that will occur at your celebration.

Step Three: Choose some key object, event or time that will feature prominently in the celebration. Example objects include things like religious items, items crafted by participants, items of historic value and so on. Events could include the crowning of a harvest queen, the warrior rites or something as esoteric as the day of the first rain of the season. Times could be commemorated dates or the time of day. Suggestion for key items may directly come from your description, be hinted at by your choice of celebration type, or they may just be unique ideas you want to incorporate into your holiday. These items help to flesh out the holiday and give you more things to play within your description.

Step Four: Fill in the details. At this point you should have an outline of your celebration containing a brief description of the theme, a celebration type and a list of several key objects/events/times. Now all you have to do is fill in the blanks. How are these items used at the celebration? When do the events occur and what happens at the specific times? To answer these questions, remember that the theme of the celebration should appear in these answers as should the celebration type. As you create more and more holidays you will find yourself adding more embellishment to the description and truly create memorable, unique celebrations.

The Calendar

It may be useful to create a full calendar to help keep track of the holidays in your world. For the ease of use this book uses a common fantasy conceit - that the world uses a twelve-month cycle that spans four distinct seasons. Alternative names for each month are given in the above month summary and could allow for creating a unique month progression for your world while still conserving the twelve-month format.

Historically, however, since the winter is a time of little work it is also a month-less period of the year. If you wish to incorporate this into your world's month scheme then the New Year's celebrations presented in the winter should be pushed to the spring when the month cycle begins anew. Additionally, winter celebrations should be limited to those that mark specific celestial events such as solstices or midwinter, as a regular pattern of days is not always observed in this month-less time.

A second conceit used for ease of reference in this product is that each season is three months long exactly. This is not strictly true and in settings using more realistic season shifts the holidays that fall at the start and end of the seasons may need to be pushed forward or back to properly line up with the seasons. This does add the effect of making a world feel slightly more real as the seasonal shifts are uncoupled from the month cycle but may lead to more bookkeeping. It is slightly harder to eliminate seasons altogether and still use this product as often the seasonal shift is referenced in the holidays themselves, in the weather or the environment. However, it is possible to create a two-season world using this product by folding the late fall and early spring holidays into winter and the rest into a warm growing month that is a temperate summer or long spring. Additionally, either a shortened calendar or one with more sparse or reiterative celebrations could be created to make an eternal spring world or a harsh frozen tundra land.

Finally, when creating a calendar it is important to remember that not all the celebrations in this book are necessarily common in a single kingdom. If you assume the common calendar conceit from above it is possible to mark all the celebrations on the same calendar while noting the regions where they are celebrated.

About Digby O'Flannagan

Digby is a whip-thin human that stands 6' tall and whose head is crowned with a thick, dark red mane of hair that he keeps trimmed into a tight bowl cut. He is a flamboyant dresser and often wears bright, sometimes clashing, colors and his sleeves and collar are often accented with bells. Digby's musical instrument of choice is the lyre and he is a skilled singer and storyteller as well. His most prized possession is a large journal he keeps in a special lined and waterproofed satchel. He keeps notes in this journal about the many celebrations, stories and legends he attends or hears. The notes in this journal have become the basis for the *Year of Celebrations* line of treatises and he regularly corresponds with "The Healer" about his latest discoveries and human nature as far as it relates to celebrations.

Well, that concludes my notes on the similarities found throughout all celebrations and holidays. From all of us here at Healing Fireball Publications, we hope that you have found this article useful and entertaining. If you enjoyed this summary you may enjoy the more in-depth analysis and histories found in Digby O'Flannagan's travel log, *A Year of Celebrations*. Until next time, keep rolling those dice.

~The Healer~
~Healing Fireball Publications~

Each Issue in the *A Year of Celebrations* line covers a collection of holidays, their traditions, histories and Digby's notes for performers and merchants. Additionally, The Healer's notes section provides suggestions on how to use each holiday in your game and a collection of plot hooks that center around the holiday.

And don't miss the collected full year of logs in *A Year of Celebrations: A Year in the Human Lands*.