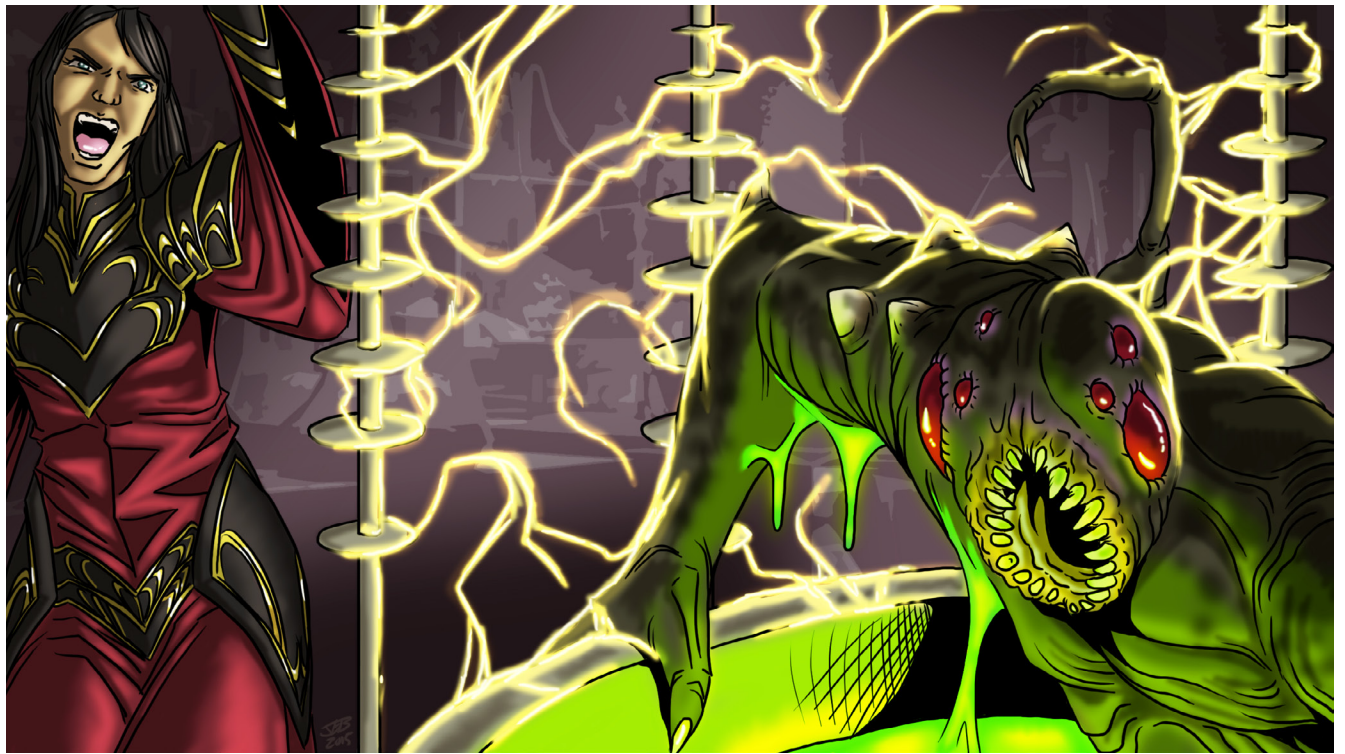


IT'S ALIVE!



FROM ANIMATING A FLESH GOLEM WITH lightning to awakening Cthulhu from his ancient slumber, evil villains need evil rituals. A villain might pursue a ritual for selfish reasons, such as acquiring wealth, power, or immortality. Morally gray villains might conduct blasphemous rites for altruistic reasons, such as

WRITING MARK A. HART
ART JACOB BLACKMON
EDITING JAMES HAECK
LAYOUT ERIC LIFE-PUTNAM

destroying a monster or resurrecting a loved one, believing that the ends justify the means. Whether or not the villain's dark ritual succeeds or fails, the race to stop him can be the focus of a single adventure or an entire campaign.

When GMing, you may need to create a ritual on short notice, or you may want a few ideas to develop your villain's motivation. To help, here are seven random tables for building a ritual, each of which describes an aspect of a ritual. Roll once on each table to construct the ceremony, using common sense to alter contradictory results.

PURPOSE

A ritual bends reality and cheats the will of the gods. To accomplish such miracles, the caster must sacrifice many things, including time, blood, and treasure, or even their own life. For anyone to undertake such epic magic in the first place, the payoff must be worth the effort required. Roll on this table to reveal what benefit the ritual promises to give.

d100 Result

- 01–04 Animate a flesh golem and grant it sentience.
- 04–08 Resurrect a loved one.
- 09–12 Summon an elder god.
- 13–16 Imprison the god of death.
- 17–20 Elevate the ritual leader to godhood.
- 21–24 Inflict a series of plagues on the land.
- 25–28 Eradicate an entire species from the world.
- 29–32 Erase from existence one individual and their accomplishments.
- 33–36 Break open or shutter the gates of hell.
- 36–40 Give immortality to the ritual leader.
- 41–44 Alleviate or transfer a powerful curse or similar affliction.
- 44–48 Banish the sun from the sky or obscure its light.
- 49–52 Gain audience with a celestial or fiendish being.
- 53–56 Restore a living creature's soul.
- 57–60 Raise an army of the undead.
- 61–64 Receive a vision, omen, or portent.

d100 Result

- 65–68 Strip all nobles in the kingdom of their wealth.
- 69–72 Send one or more travelers back through history.
- 73–76 Become the avatar of a god, demon, or other entity.
- 77–80 Liberate the Chained God from his prison.
- 81–84 Retrieve an artifact.
- 85–88 Destroy an artifact or banish it from the world.
- 89–92 Create an artifact or alter an existing one.
- 93–96 Learn the lost spells of the ancients.
- 97–00 Change or eradicate magic in a region.

WHEN THE STARS ARE RIGHT

Most rituals must occur on a specific date or at a precise time. This moment could represent a time when the veil between our world and the next wears thin, or it could involve an alignment of stars and planets. The timing might come once a year, once a century, or once in a millennia. Roll on this table to determine the ritual's ideal timing.

d20 Result

- 1 During the conjunction of the two brightest stars.
- 2 The night of the century's last full moon.
- 3 When the Blood Comet turns the sky red.
- 4 The start of a total solar eclipse.
- 5 Beneath the light of the perigee moon during the spring equinox.
- 6 Upon the birth of the Last King.
- 7 The beginning of the winter solstice.
- 8 In the dying light of a falling star.
- 9 The sixth day of the sixth year of the sixth century.
- 10 Midnight on the Day of the Dead.
- 11 As snowflakes descend on the Vast Desert.
- 12 When the Great River reverses its course.
- 13 A heartbeat before the start of a great battle.
- 14 When the Seven Serpent Kings awake from their slumber.
- 15 Following nine days of unending rain.

d20 Result

- 16 When the tallest tower of the Fallen City becomes visible.
- 17 When the vaults of the Sunken Tomb are opened.
- 18 On the anniversary of the dark overlord's beheading.
- 19 When the reaper's visage darkens the surface of the moon.
- 20 On the thirtieth day without sunlight.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Most rituals must take place in a precise location. The proper site may have been an ancient battlefield, it could be holy ground, or it might be the nexus of elemental ley lines. Roll to uncover where the ritual must occur.

d20 Result

- 1 Within a ruined cathedral.
- 2 Inside a druid's grove.
- 3 At the site of history's bloodiest battle.
- 4 Within a sea leviathan's belly.
- 5 Inside a monastery on the tallest mountain peak.
- 6 On the grounds of an accursed cemetery.
- 7 The dungeons beneath a necromancer's tower.
- 8 On the deck of the most infamous ghost ship.
- 9 At the edge of an active volcano.
- 10 In the shadow of the Slumbering City.
- 11 At the base of the Undying Queen's pyramid.
- 12 In the heart of a sentient swamp.
- 13 Upon the steps of the world's first ziggurat.
- 14 At the feet of the Bleeding God.
- 15 Within the eye of a hurricane.
- 16 Amid the dying embers of a burned library.
- 17 The threshold of an abyssal gateway.
- 18 Atop the world's largest glacier.
- 19 Between the eyes of the Eldest Spider.
- 20 Within the throne room of a storm giant's castle.

CRUCIAL COMPONENTS

Most rituals demand a precise set of reagents, ingredients, and components. These may include rare herbs, exotic metals, one-of-a-kind relics, or even specific individuals, such as the villain's firstborn son. These materials often take years, if not a lifetime, to gather. Roll on the table to identify the ritual's key component.

d20 Result

- 1 Tears of a thrice-slain martyr.
- 2 Hair plucked from the head of an unjustly hanged princess.
- 3 An angel's wing feather willingly given.
- 4 The bones of a fallen knight.
- 5 The egg of a phoenix.
- 6 A pinch of sacred dirt from the First Graveyard.
- 7 Blood of an innocent demon.
- 8 The knife used to slay the fey queen.
- 9 A root cut from Yggdrasill.
- 10 The eyes of a penitent dragon.
- 11 A page torn from the Book of Shadows.
- 12 The person the ritual caster loves most.
- 13 Sea salt from the elemental plane of water.
- 14 An intact fulgurite.
- 15 Splinters from the coffin of a forgotten soldier.
- 16 A statue, carving, or similar effigy retrieved from the ocean's floor.
- 17 A knife carved from the wood of an awakened oak tree.
- 18 Shattered pieces of a wizard's magical staff.
- 19 Flame stolen from the hearth of the gods.
- 20 A lightning rod forged from the spine of an iron golem.

UNEXPECTED RESULTS

By nature, rituals involve unpredictable magic and reality-shattering events. In many cases, a ritual produces side effects that strike without warning, often affecting people and creatures who have nothing to do with the ceremony. Roll on this table to describe what fallout the ritual creates.

d20 Result

- 1 The nearest body of water turns to blood.
- 2 The population of an entire city falls into slumber.
- 3 Dogs and wolves in a 100-mile radius howl for one minute.
- 4 An ancient rune brands every child born that night.
- 5 The earth opens and devours a major temple.
- 6 Black storm clouds encircle the ritual site and the surrounding region for a week.
- 7 Thirty-three lightning bolts strike the same spot in the course of an hour.
- 8 Every person within a day's journey suffers the same nightmare at the same time.
- 9 The eyes of the ritual participants turn silver in color permanently.
- 10 Swarms of insects congregate at the ritual site for one day.
- 11 Blood weeps from the eyes of statues across the world.
- 12 Drought afflicts a nearby kingdom for a season.
- 13 Food and drink in the nearest community become fouled.
- 14 All plants burn to ash in a one-mile radius of the ritual site.
- 15 Every other ritual participant dies horribly within three days.
- 16 Magic ceases to work at the site for a month.
- 17 For the next year, animals balk at the sight of the ritual leader.
- 18 The ritual site becomes suffused with wild magic for one year.
- 19 The ritual tears open a permanent interplanar rift.
- 20 Unexpected warfare breaks out in a neighboring kingdom.

THE PRICE OF FAILURE

Once the villain begins the ritual, he must complete it or risk dire consequences. A ritual unleashes legendary magic into the world; when it fails, this power must go somewhere, often with

catastrophic results. Roll on this table to discover what happens if the ritual falters.

d20 Result

- 1 Each participant ages 2d20 years.
- 2 An earthquake erupts at the ritual site.
- 3 Every person related to the ritual leader vanishes, no matter their location.
- 4 A meteor strikes the ritual site, wounding or killing most of the participants and damaging the area.
- 5 The nearest building or structure collapses.
- 6 A vengeful spirit possesses a random participant, perhaps secretly.
- 7 The ritual leader becomes obsessed with finding a way to perform the ritual again.
- 8 A permanent lightning storm hovers over the ritual site.
- 9 The ritual leader earns the enmity of a god, demon, or other powerful being.
- 10 Each participant suffers bad luck (for example, disadvantage on one roll) once every day for the next 3d6 days.
- 11 The ritual leader loses all ability to cast magic. Only a different ritual can restore it.
- 12 The ritual achieves the opposite of the intended result.
- 13 An infernal power takes possession of the ritual leader's soul.
- 14 A curse strikes a random participant deaf and blind, at least until someone removes the curse.
- 15 The ritual leader suffers amnesia and cannot remember his name or history.
- 16 A powerful church, order of paladins, or other religious organization receives a vision drawing them to the ritual and its leader.
- 17 The ritual succeeds, but make another roll on the Unexpected Results table.
- 18 A horde of ravenous monsters appears at the site.
- 19 Wild magic teleports the ritual leader 2d100 miles in a random direction, leaving scorch marks where he stood.
- 20 The ritual achieves an unexpected result. Reroll on the Purpose table.

FOILING THE RITUAL

Adventurers and other pests love to interrupt a villain's ritual, thereby ruining his labors. Once the ceremony begins, however, it isn't always the easiest thing to stop; even killing the villain may not fully stop events. If the characters interfere in the wrong way, the results can be disastrous. Learning the proper methods might require an adventure or two. Roll on the table below to unearth how to prevent a ritual's completion.

d20 Result

- 1 Extinguish the flames in all five braziers at the same time.
- 2 Force the ritual leader to confront his greatest fear.
- 3 Baptize the ritual leader with oil sanctified by a saint.
- 4 Immolate the ritual leader in divine fire stolen from a temple.
- 5 Sing the lost song of the greatest bard of the last age.
- 6 Combine a portal stone from each of the four elemental planes.
- 7 Strike down the ritual leader with a weapon forged by his best friend.
- 8 Summon the six animal spirits of the land to the ritual site.
- 9 Trick the ritual leader into consuming the Elixir of Peace.
- 10 Destroy the nine mystical runes etched at the site.
- 11 Bring the ritual leader to tears of joy or sorrow.
- 12 Sacrifice an innocent man through the magical portal or gateway.
- 13 Consecrate the ritual site's ground.
- 14 Make a deal with the god of chaos and trickery.
- 15 Steal the ritual leader's voice and lock it in a magical box.
- 16 Recite, in the ancient tongue, all twelve verses of the Ballad of Creation.
- 17 Break the enchanted circle or pentagram with a silvered holy weapon.
- 18 Slay the ritual's participants without shedding their blood.
- 19 Shackle the ritual leader in manacles of cold iron.
- 20 Trick the leader into destroying the idol, statue, or other effigy involved in the ritual.