

BLOOD MOON ASCENDANT

PLOT SEEDS FOR THE RED NIGHT

NO SIGHT CONJURES A sensation of foreboding dread more than that of a blood-red moon. It is a staple in many tales of fantasy and horror: the once-pristine silver guardian of the night would on occasion be bathed in an unnatural crimson hue, bringing chaos to a complacent world. When the Blood Moon arcs over the night sky, various unpredictable events come to pass, disrupting the tranquility of the peaceful night.

Most campaign worlds assume that their nights are illuminated by a single moon, and its role as a nocturnal guardian is seen as a welcome complement to the sun. Thus, when the moon fails and instead gleams with the color of blood, it could be understood as a sign of confusion, chaos or divine disfavor. As a roleplaying story tool, the Blood Moon can be used to herald a brief yet tumultuous period when extraordinary terrors emerge and wreak havoc across the night-time world. Consequentially, heroes caught beneath its bloody light have a greater opportunity to prove themselves worthy of the title of “hero” by restoring order and saving the night.



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CAUSES

By itself, the reddening of the moon is not a strange phenomenon; it happens fairly frequently in real life. Twice a year or so, total lunar eclipses result in a moon that refracts a deep crimson color that has long since been associated with blood. Though this phenomenon can be explained casually today, a Blood Moon's appearance was once nevertheless seen as an affront against the established order of the Heavens themselves. Compounded with antiquated concepts of "lunacy" associated with a regular full moon, it was feared as a harbinger of strange and often sinister tidings.

A Game Master must first create a cause for how a Blood Moon comes about, if only to form the foundation of the campaign world's myths for why such a thing happens. Perhaps, like on Earth, it results from the rare alignment of the world casting a shadow over the lunar surface. It could otherwise have a more unusual celestial origin, such as the rare passage of the world through errant clouds of stardust that lightly tinge the night sky with a hint of red. If a world has multiple moons and one of them is naturally red, then slight fluctuations in its orbit may have made this particular moon more dominant to the mother planet than its siblings.

Supernatural explanations could also be used as basis for the Blood Moon's reign. For instance, a benevolent lunar deity might every thirteen years need to manifest a "wrathful" or "agonized" aspect by donning a crimson visage, purging civilization of moral excesses. A great curse might have been cast over the world by powerful magic users in far ancient times, so that a few weeks every century its moon glows red as a grim reminder of the casters' powers. As a twist, the moon itself may be a living world on its own,

inhabited by dragons whose annual mating rituals set fire to its acid sky: an exotic occurrence which in turn can be understood as a "bleeding" by the inhabitants of the parent world across the short void of space.

CONDITIONS

The Blood Moon, apart from other tropes of fantastic doom (such as impending apocalypses or villainous rituals), relies on three specific conditions for its presence to be effective.

It Is Foretold. As is the case in many stories, the Blood Moon doesn't necessarily happen all of a sudden. Its arrival is often heralded days, years or even centuries in advance, either from esoteric calculations by arcane scholars or prophetic warnings by otherworldly beings. Its transformation may be gradual, as skywatchers observe the moon's silver light slowly dim with the passage of time. Because of the Blood Moon's unpredictability, a campaign's focus might be on the player characters preparing for the chaos that is to come, or warning the people of the world to ready themselves for the challenges that the red night may bring.

It Is Cyclic. A world can go through entire human lifetimes without ever seeing a Blood Moon; conversely, it might instead bear witness to the phenomenon once a month or so. Depending on the needs of a campaign, player characters might therefore experience an impending Blood Moon as a singular climactic event; on the other hand, they might be immersed in a periodic chronicle that spans several Blood Moon recurrences, possibly across multiple game years. Regardless of if the characters will ever see another angry Blood Moon or not, it will most likely happen again in some future time.

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It Is Unusual. Be it once a month or once every generation, the emphasis should be that a Blood Moon doesn't happen often enough that the world gets used to it. It is an event so extraordinary that it retains an aura worthy of the mad ramblings of soothsayers. Much like how a total lunar eclipse still generates awe among many of us today, a Blood Moon in a roleplaying chronicle must be uncommon enough that the normal rhythms of life are significantly interrupted by its manifestation.

CONSEQUENCES

A Blood Moon's weird presence demands equally weird ramifications. When constructing the adventure, the GM may allow the Blood Moon to affect only a single realm no larger than a kingdom, or they can go all out and have it affect the entire world or even multiple worlds—again, this depends on the needs of the campaign. Furthermore, they may also need to determine the length of each Blood Moon event: a single fright-filled night may be all that is needed, but elaborate adventures may require a Blood Moon that lasts much longer than just one night. As an extreme possibility, a

Blood Moon might never even cease shining its red light ever again. Regardless of its duration, it should be remembered that when the Blood Moon finally arrives, its effects must warrant the unprecedented heroics of the player characters who find themselves in this urgent situation.

A GM may choose one or more of the possible effects listed below, or can otherwise create their own to suit the story. Alternatively, the effects could instead be determined by one or more dice rolls in order to truly encapsulate the random chaos heralded by a Blood Moon.

EFFECTS OF A BLOOD MOON

d10 Effect

- 1 Statues, dolls and scarecrows—anything with a humanoid shape and face—come alive as construct creatures which attack other living beings on sight.
- 2 The moonlit landscape takes on the sights and smells of raw meat, transforming all lycanthropes into their hybrid forms and sending them into a mad frenzy.
- 3 Powerful undead creatures from the distant past, such as liches or mummy lords, awaken from their dreamless slumber.
- 4 The gates of Heaven have momentarily slammed shut, but the portals to another plane (such as the Hells or another far eldritch realm) have been forced wide open for a horrific Elder Evil to enter the world.
- 5 Fey courts or hags' covens declare a special "Wild Hunt" targeting a specific age group.
- 6 Voracious subterranean monsters begin hunting *en masse* for humanoid prey on the surface.
- 7 The Blood Moon emits a low-frequency hum that only a particular race can hear, giving all its members a long-term madness effect.
- 8 A long-lost clan of angry giants or vengeful dragons returns from exile in an Outer Plane.
- 9 Animals gain the ability to speak, as if affected by an *awaken* spell.
- 10 For something slightly less supernatural, a Blood Moon's gravitational alignment triggers an earthquake that destroys the walls of a prison full of convicted criminals, who then initiate a vengeful and uncontrollable rampage.

INFLUENCE ON THE CLASSES

The Blood Moon's ascendancy need not equate to a steep disadvantage for the player characters. At the GM's discretion, they can be permitted to acquire temporary powers suited to their class that only manifest themselves during the Blood Moon's nights, but only if a specific series of (possibly distasteful) actions, such as a ritual sacrifice at a lost shrine of an evil moon god, has been completed.

BARBARIAN

The Blood Moon magnifies your most instinctive urges, specifically those that tap deep into your primal need to survive in a turbulent world.

During a Blood Moon, your rage lasts twice as long and doesn't end even if you haven't attacked a hostile creature since your last turn.

BARD

Under the fearsome light of the Blood Moon, your virtuosic music unearths buried emotions in the hearts of those it touches.

While exposed to the light of the Blood Moon, you can spend one use of your Bardic Inspiration to cause intense sorrow in a creature within range. The target makes a Charisma saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failure, it enters a fit of uncontrollable weeping, otherwise behaving as if affected by the *hideous laughter* spell.

CLERIC

The horrors unleashed by the red nights seem to avoid those who bear a holy mantle.

All creatures except for humanoids and beasts with a Challenge Rating equal to or less than your cleric level can't approach within 20 feet of you during the Blood Moon.

DRUID

Of all the people of this world, perhaps only you, with your innate link to nature, can accept the Blood Moon as a natural event. You bask casually in its eerie glow with little personal concern.

Once per night during the Blood Moon, you can gain the full benefits of a short rest in just 10 minutes. Additionally, you do not need to consume food or drink as long as the Blood Moon shines. You are instead nourished by its light.

FIGHTER

Metallic weapons that bear the moon's crescent shape (such as scimitars and sickles), as well as other weapons with traditional lunar associations (such as bows), begin oozing a mysterious red pitch when the Blood Moon rises.

During a Blood Moon, when you deal damage with a weapon shaped like the crescent moon, you deal additional acid damage equal to your Strength or Dexterity modifier, whichever is higher.

MONK

You seek spiritual understanding of why the Blood Moon rises, and can attempt to attune to its deep scarlet light.

For as long as you are exposed to the Blood Moon's light, your unarmored movement increases by 10 feet (even at 1st level).

PALADIN

When a bloated Blood Moon hovers over a frightened world, you must now more than ever put your faith in the light of justice to combat the cosmic evil that looms overhead.

During the Blood Moon, you can expend 5 points from your Lay on Hands feature to cast *greater restoration*; this usage bestows one level of exhaustion upon you.

RANGER

The red light of the Blood Moon bathes all lands under it equally.

All of your Natural Explorer features can be used on any terrain wherever the Blood Moon's light shines directly; places where the Blood Moon's illumination cannot reach are unaffected by this effect.

ROGUE

While crimson light blankets the world, shadows grow deeper where the light cannot reach.

You gain the effects of *greater invisibility* while in an area of darkness on the nights of the Blood Moon.

SORCERER

For reasons beyond even your sorcerous understanding, the Blood Moon allows you to eschew the sordid motions and twisting words required to cast a spell—as if the moon itself were lifting the burden of such mortal inconveniences from your shoulders.

You ignore all spells' verbal and somatic components while beneath the light of the Blood Moon.

WARLOCK

The Blood Moon's unearthly energies temporarily twist and bend the occult forces that maintain the pact between you and your patron.

For as long as the Blood Moon shines, you gain a long-term madness effect. However, you also gain the 1st-level feature of another Otherworldly Patron that is not your own; the second Otherworldly Patron feature is chosen when you gain this power and cannot be replaced for the duration of the Blood Moon.

WIZARD

A lesser-known benign aspect of the Blood Moon appeals to wizards such as yourself, who see it as a cold yet reliable repository of magical knowledge.

When exposed to the Blood Moon's light, your spellbook's empty pages fill with crimson runes and diagrams, meaning your spellbook contains all the spells that you could potentially cast at your level; the number of spell slots you possess remains the same. These "hidden spells" take twice as long to prepare as the spells you already have in your spellbook, and they are only visible in your spellbook beneath the light of the Blood Moon. 

