

# Riffs and Rituals

## *Introduction*

It's the late 1960s. Counterculture is at its peak, and rock music is at the forefront of it all. You and your bandmates are part of the vibrant psychedelic scene, playing gigs, writing albums, and trying to climb the chaotic ladder of fame. Fame isn't the only thing you're chasing however. Occultism, witchcraft, and the New Age movement are part of your lives, whether you seek forbidden knowledge, to invoke spirits, or to make pacts with otherworldly forces. Will your band become legends of the psychedelic era, or will the dark forces you toy with lead you down paths of madness and ruin?

## *Character Creation*

Each player creates a character that is part of the band. Characters can fill multiple roles such as lead singer, guitarist, manager, songwriter, or producer. Players will divide their dice pool into skills that fit both their role in the band and their interactions with the occult world.

**Dice Pool:** Each player starts with a pool of 10 dice to allocate to their skills, with a maximum of 3 dice per skill. When a skill roll is called for, players roll the number of dice they have in that skill.

### **Skills:**

- **Instruments:** choose one or more instruments to be proficient at, each one with its own dice pool.

Instruments might be common like vocals, guitar, drums, or might be more exotic.

- **Management:** Negotiating contracts, organizing gigs, making money, avoiding bankruptcy.

- **Artistry:** Visual elements of the band, album covers, costumes, performances.

- **Songwriting:** Creating hits, writing lyrics, composing melodies.

- **Production:** Working in the studio, experimenting with audio, making albums.

- **Occult Knowledge:** Rituals, incantations, researching esoteric texts.

- **Occult Practice:** Witchcraft, divination, making pacts, contacting spirits or demons.

- **Charisma:** Convincing people to join your cult, sway fans, or sweet-talk critics.

- **Willpower:** Resisting possession, overcoming hardship, maintaining mental stability.

- **Investigation:** General smarts skill. Noticing things aren't right, tracking down occult leads, finding the truth behind rumors.

## ***The Dice System***

Rolls are made using a pool of D6s based on the number of dice a character has in a skill. The goal is to achieve hits that can be compared to the DC (difficulty) set by the Game Master (GM).

### **Dice Outcomes:**

4 = Low Hit (LH), a weak but successful roll

5 = Medium Hit (MH), a moderate success

6 = High Hit (HH), a good success

Dice outcomes can be combined with two low hits becoming a medium hit, and two medium hits becoming a high hit.

### **DCs (Difficulty Classes):**

The GM sets the difficulty for skill checks. For example:

- Easy Task: "1 Low Hit"
- Moderate Task: "1 Medium Hit"
- Difficult Task: "1 Medium Hit + 1 Low Hit"
- Very Difficult Task: "2 High Hits"

### **Dark Blessing:**

If a player rolls three 6s as part of a skill check, the dice "explode". This counts as three High Hits and they reroll the dice adding any additional hits to their current amount. There is no limit to how many times three 6s can explode. This ability to score 3 High Hits and higher opens up the potential for supernatural feats – outcomes that would be impossible under normal circumstances.

## ***Building a Band***

In addition to individual character skills, the band itself has attributes that impact their success and starting position depending on the story. The GM and the players can decide on values for the band's Popularity, Financial Status (how much money it has or owes), and Creative Energy (new bands have a high amount but this drains as time goes on, especially if releases are poorly received).

These shared stats can be influenced by story events or collective actions the band takes and factor into the band's overall success and survival.

## ***Adventures in the Occult***

This game revolves around the dual themes of the band's climb to fame as well as their ventures into the occult and supernatural. These elements will often intersect and intertwine. For example, solving a mystery might lead to the writing of a hit song, or summoning a demonic entity could unlock boundless creativity but at a terrible cost.

### ***Sanity***

#### **Sanity Pool:**

Each character has a **Sanity Pool**, representing their mental stability as they confront the eerie, strange, and supernatural, as well as any mind altering substances they might partake, and the general stress and novelty of fame and riches.

Each player begins the game with **10 Points** in their **Sanity Pool**. This number can be adjusted based on the tone and starting setting of your campaign or at the player's choice if they wish to play a character who already has struggles in this area.

Whenever a character faces a particularly shocking or terrifying situation, such as a dangerous ritual gone wrong, a cursed object, or a very bad trip, they may be required to make a **Sanity Check**.

#### **Sanity Checks:**

A **Sanity Check** uses a character's **Willpower** or **Occult Knowledge** (or whatever skills are relevant). The player rolls dice from their pool in the relevant skill. The GM sets a DC, with higher DCs for more harrowing or reality-bending encounters.

If the character succeeds, they manage to hold it together and avoid losing sanity. If they fail, they lose a number of **Sanity Points** based on the severity of the situation. For example:

- Minor events (eerie feelings, strange noises, bad trip) might cause them to lose 1 **Sanity Point**
- Moderate events (summoning a weak spirit, encountering a haunted object, a major album flop) might cause them to lose 2 to 3 **Sanity Points**.
- Major events (demonic possession, pacts with powerful forces, witnessing a death curse) might cause them to lose 4 to 5 **Sanity Points**.

### **Effects of Low Sanity:**

As a character's Sanity Pool decreases, they begin to suffer negative effects. These can manifest in different ways:

- **At 5 or fewer points:** The character becomes more prone to paranoia, hallucinations, or anxiety. This can lead to penalties on skill rolls related to concentration or logical thinking (e.g., Songwriting, Management).
- **At 3 or fewer points:** The character might start behaving erratically. The GM could impose disadvantage on social interactions, or the character might develop irrational fears related to the occult. They might refuse to participate in rituals or experience intense nightmares.
- **At 0 Sanity:** The character suffers a mental break. This will likely lead to permanent insanity, full possession by an entity or spirit, or a debilitating phobia or trauma that hinders further occult or band involvement. Except in extreme circumstances, this would render the character no longer playable.

The GM and player should decide together what the exact nature of these negative effects might look like based on narrative context.

### **Restoring Sanity:**

Characters can regain and maintain Sanity in various ways though these should feel like rare moments of respite in an otherwise tense world.

- **Successful Recovery:** After a significant victory such as overcoming a supernatural adversary, producing an amazing album, or excelling at a critical performance, the GM may allow a character to regain 1 to 2 Sanity Points as they feel a sense of accomplishment and stability.
- **Rest and Healing:** Taking time off from both the band's busy schedule and occult dealings can also restore sanity. Often however, this can be detrimental as the world keeps ticking and characters may risk falling into irrelevance, failing to meet contractual obligations, or having a mystery develop in negative ways.
- **New Age Practices:** Practices like meditation, yoga, and working with faith guides and healers might help restore sanity. However, this could also backfire quite badly depending on the exact methods and could expose the character to more mental stress and danger.

## ***Advice for Game Masters (GMs):***

### **Settings DCs:**

Set difficulty levels based on the skill and circumstance. Routine tasks like playing a simple song or performing a basic occult ritual might require a single low hit. Higher DCs should be reserved for complex performances or significant supernatural feats.

### **Encouraging Creativity:**

Allow players to get creative with how they combine their skills. For example, a player with strong Artistry might design an occult-themed album cover that holds hidden magical symbols. Someone with Songwriting could pen a chant that's also a spell. Combining skills can and should be common and might allow for a character to reach a required number of hits via multiple skill dice pools, though this combination might naturally lend itself to a higher DC.

### **Handling Skills Without Stats:**

For tasks that fall outside of specific skill categories—like fixing a car, picking a lock, or general handiwork—rolls are unnecessary. Instead, the GM should rely on the character's backstory to inform the narrative. For instance, if the band's van breaks down and a character has a history of working as a mechanic or grew up around repairs, the GM can allow them to begin fixing the vehicle as part of the story. This doesn't require a roll but should take a reasonable amount of time and resources appropriate to the task at hand.

### **Rewards for Story Arcs and Challenges:**

When the party successfully completes a story arc, overcomes a challenge, or creates a successful album, the GM should reward them with dice to improve their skills. A minor success could reward each character with one die, a moderate success two dice, and a major success three dice. These dice can be spent to increase their existing skills, allowing the players to allocate them as they see fit to develop their characters further.

## Rollable Tables to Aid in Game Setup

Roll (1D12)	Settings	Dilemmas	Mysteries
1	A hazy, incense-filled studio in San Francisco.	Your manager threatens to quit if you keep dabbling in "dangerous stuff."	A strange ritual in the woods leads to sudden success—but with a catch.
2	A small dive bar in Greenwich Village, New York City.	Your latest album flops, and the label wants to drop you unless you produce a hit.	A band member receives a cryptic letter with coordinates to a hidden location.
3	A sprawling, mysterious festival in the Mojave Desert.	Your bandmates are divided on how far to take the occult experimentation.	A séance reveals a disturbing truth about the band's past.
4	An isolated cabin in the Scottish Highlands.	You've made a pact, but now you owe something unexpected to a powerful being.	Ghostly whispers begin to haunt the recording sessions.
5	A strange mansion rented for a recording session in Laurel Canyon.	One band member's paranoia is spiraling out of control—are they cursed?	A fan gives the band a book of spells—its origins are unclear.
6	A New Age retreat center in Big Sur, California.	The police are investigating you for your connections to a recent cult scandal.	The band starts having identical dreams, hinting at a deeper connection.
7	An underground club in London's Soho district.	Strange symbols appear on your instruments, seemingly overnight.	A rival band member is found dead, and you're somehow involved.
8	A haunted castle in the English countryside.	Your most devoted fans are starting to follow a dangerous new guru.	You've been invited to a secret society, but they want something from you.
9	The occult section of a university library, after hours.	You're being blackmailed by a powerful occult figure.	A cursed artifact is in the band's possession, influencing your music.
10	A run-down theater rumored to be cursed.	A rival band accuses you of stealing their music—or their spells.	The symbols on your latest album cover come to life during a live performance.
11	A crowded flat in Paris where surrealist art and ritual intertwine.	Your lead singer is missing after attending a secret occult meeting.	You find an ancient recording hidden in an old vinyl collection.
12	A commune in rural Oregon, complete with its own cult leader.	You're broke, and your next gig could make or break your career.	The venue for your next gig is built over a known occult ritual site.