

# First Sabbat

*Authors:* Kate Hill and Charlotte Dragga

*Players:* 4-6 players (Facilitator can also play)

*Time:* 1 hour of game play, 2 hours total play time.

*Technology used:* Discord Server. Get a [copy of the server here](#) for your own play! Two Discord bots: a tarot and dice bot. We recommend these two: [Asterie](#) (for Tarot) and [Dice Golem](#)

## **Introduction:**

It's 1998. Small town life can be stifling, especially when you're a teenager and don't really fit in. But you've found a community on an online IRC channel, one where people talk about and teach about your faith, Paganism. Well, you're pretty sure it's your faith. You only really started teaching yourself a few months ago. Now, you and a group of others you have found who are in similar circumstances are meeting up, secretly, for your first in-person ritual for the night of Samhain. That's right, Samhain, the night when the veils between life and death, between this world and the spirits, is especially thin. Can you, using your favorite websites, text chat with your friends to create the ritual, plan it, and make airtight plans for secrecy, all in the hour before your mom needs to use the phone?

**Content warnings:** religious prejudice, discussion of queer topics including homophobia/transphobia, highschool power dynamics.

## **A bit about the subject matter:**

This game focuses on paganism in America, specifically early pagan practitioners who are in small towns, isolated and different from the rest of their communities. Paganism itself is incredibly varied and indeed, is distinguished from many other faith practices by its deeply individualist and syncretic nature, and so this game could never capture the multitude of experiences or traditions under this umbrella. Due to when this game is set and the authors' own experiences and research, the main traditions that shape this larp are that of Wicca, Celtic, Goddess Worship and generalized "Witchcraft".

## **Tone:**

This game has characters who might come into conflict over what they want out of life, paganism, and their relationships, and people can be angry or sometimes controlling over one another. However, the general tone is that of misfits growing and learning together, of community, with an underlying sense of sweetness and naivety to it all. It deals with real issues, especially those of societal exclusion, what it's like to be a different religion than those around you, and rebelling against norms. But it's grounded in reality--this is not a game for satanic sacrifice or fantasy-style magic. Some pagan traditions can also fall prey to nationalism, fascism, and white supremacy. These topics are not welcome in this game.

## **Setting up Discord:**

Invite players to the Discord server. The copy of the server will have channels for safety, lines, character-options, questions and character-introduction under the OOC channels and then the IC channel labeled smalltownpaganchat. IC Chat is a text channel only, while intro and debrief can be done using audio and/or video. No audio or video channels exist for in character play.

Before play, the facilitator should copy the following text from this document into the Discord server:

- Safety rules from the safety section.
- Character options and relationship questions for the character options channel.
- Questions (under gameplay) for the questions channel.
- The URLs at the end of the document for smalltownpaganschat. These should be pinned.

### **Safety:**

- The door is always open. Players can leave whenever they want, no questions asked.
- Okay check-in. The purpose of this can be found here: <https://nordiclarp.org/wiki/Check-in>
  - In this game, Okay check-in is done via a direct message. When wanting to check in with a player, write “OOC: Okay?” Players can then respond with the ::thumbs up:: emoji (I am doing good!), the ::thumbs down:: emoji (I am not doing well) or the :/ emoji (I don’t know?). Play continues with a thumbs up. For the other emojis, continue the conversation with the player. Generally asking “what kind of support do you need right now?” is a good way to go.
- Hold Up: which basically means, slow down, people need to stop typing for a while and let others catch up and speak. Anyone can call this. It’s important to recognize that there are different typing speeds and that everyone should be contributing.

### **Setting Lines:**

With the tone and content warnings in mind, have players write their lines--materials that they do not want ever to enter play, directly or indirectly--in the lines channel. If players want their lines to remain anonymous from most of the players, they can Direct Message the facilitator, who can enter them.

### **Creating characters:**

First, each player should choose a name and their pronouns. Then, each should answer the following four questions. Each player should choose a different answer for all questions except for questions three and five. When a player decides on an answer, the facilitator should write that player’s name after that option in the character-options channel.

#### **1. What is your Family Background:**

1. Dad is a factory worker and stepmom works at a convenience store. You grew up in a blue color home with a few other siblings.
2. Professor’s kid who is raising you as a single parent.
3. Father is the local megachurch pastor, mother teaches Sunday school. You were homeschooled.
4. Your dad is an engineer and your mom is a stay at home mom. You have nine siblings.
5. Your parents are both artists and you have spent time living out of an RV traveling the Renaissance fair circuit.
6. One of your parents is on disability after serving in the military and you have served as caretaker of them and your younger sibling. Your other parent works multiple jobs and is rarely home.
7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **2. What drew you to Paganism as a faith:**

1. You have an overactive imagination and the idea that it might be real is truly captivating.
2. You found a book about it randomly at the library book sale and have been keeping it all from your conservative religious parents.

3. You're the rebellious one who wants to pull away from mainstream society as much as possible. This is an important part of your journey.
4. You're a queer young adult who finds acceptance of themselves in the parts of neopaganism that are more accepting of sexual and gender expression.
5. You have discovered that your own religious tradition has some magical aspects that you're exploring. You're scared that others in your faith won't understand.
6. You had a deeply spiritual experience in nature as a small child and have been seeking a way to explain it ever since.
7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **3. What form of Paganism are you exploring:**

1. Wicca or what you know of it. The triple Goddess and her counterpart, a focus on Celtic holidays and the lunar cycle. Working spells for good (white magic).
2. Pantheism. God(s) are in everything. It's pretty nebulous, you're still figuring it out.
3. Your faith's own religious tradition (Jewish Magic/Kabbalah, Christian and Pagan Syncretism, choose another!).
4. Goddess Worship--a worship of the inherent power of the feminine.
5. Thelema/more formal Occult studies. Detailed rituals, lots of reading, a focus on numerology.
6. A reconstructionist Paganism focusing on one tradition such as Norse, Greek, or Egyptian.
7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **4. What do you want out of the ritual?**

1. To be able to feel something spiritual, something bigger than you. An ecstatic experience.
2. To call on the gods or spirits and have them do something clearly supernatural.
3. To express yourself, all of you, including your inner emotions, in a place that feels safe.
4. To have others praise your work and recognize you for the magical savant that you clearly are.
5. To have an excuse to finally talk to your crush and impress them.
6. To cause some trouble, get into some danger, go big or go home.
7. To find your patron deity or spiritual mentor to guide you on your path.
8. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **5. Why do you feel different from the other kids at your high school?**

1. You moved from another bigger town and you're a stranger in this tight knit community.
2. You had a bad experience in your own religious organization and no longer go to it. It's a rift.
3. You're queer and not sure if anyone will accept you for this.
4. You have different political beliefs and are outspoken about them.
5. You have this feeling of darkness in me that I feel is bad or wrong. It isolates you from others.
6. You're better than these losers and none of them realize it.
7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Set Relationships:**

Once characters are created, establish relationships using the following questions.

1. Find the person one below you on the Discord member list. Why are you jealous of this person? What do they have that you don't?
2. Find the person two below on the Discord member list: You feel like they get you as a kindred spirit. What did you bond over?

## **Gameplay:**

Gameplay takes place completely via chat or sometimes images. There is a main chat channel, smalltownpaganschat, but you should feel free to hold separate chats via direct message on Discord. This allows you to have side conversations while the main chat is occurring. The facilitator should pay attention to make sure that everyone is getting a chance to weigh in via chat, and take a role in asking for a player's opinion if they have been quiet. Feel free to DM someone to cool their jets and let others talk as well!

Your main goal is that you all together are holding your first ritual for Samhain. You need to determine a few important details and you only have an hour before life, parents, and the vagaries of dial-up internet steal you away. But you all also have motives of your own, and those whose ideas you like more and those whose ideas you know are wrong.

## **You need to decide:**

1. Where are you all meeting?
2. What time of day is ideal for the ritual?
3. What is the goal of the ritual? What spells shall be cast?
4. What form should the ritual take? What are its components, both verbal and material?
5. What part does each person play?
6. How do we make sure no one knows what we are doing? Especially our families?

Of course, you're all a bit new at this. But the internet is super helpful! At the top of the chat your group has pinned some of your favorite websites. As you work together to answer these questions, use these to come up with ideas and build concepts. As players, these are here for you to not need to know much about \*any\* of this! You're also free to just make things up--pagans make up their own rituals and spells ALL the time. Do not worry too much about making it perfect or canon. None of your characters really know what they're doing anyway.

## **What happens when there is a disagreement?**

When there is a disagreement, a character can call for a Tarot reading to resolve it. At this point, all players other than the one calling for the reading roll a die using the Dice Golem bot (/roll 1d6); the character whose player has the highest result will be the reader. The player calling for Tarot will then draw a card using the Helios (command: ?tarot random), and the reader will then interpret the results in a way that resolves the disagreement. This is an in-character procedure--you all agreed to this mechanism previously.

You might not get all the way through and that is okay. Hopefully you get all the way through, or at least figure out a place! No matter what, in an hour game ends. Good luck!

## **Debrief:**

After the game, have everyone come back into the lobby space to chat in person. Ask players to change their names from their character's name back to their own. Debrief should be short but ask the following questions.

1. What actually happened in that ritual? How well did it go?
2. What is something that another player (or players) did that made your experience better?

**Appendix:**

List of URLs for research. Pin these to the smalltownpagachat! They are all actual sites from 1998, captured thanks to the wayback machine and the Internet Archive

<https://web.archive.org/web/19980112123149/http://www.tarot.com/rider-waite/>

<https://web.archive.org/web/19981206120634/http://wicca.com/celtic/cc002.htm>

<https://web.archive.org/web/19991127141238/http://twpt.com/home.htm>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20000302053026/http://www.spiralgoddess.com/>

<https://web.archive.org/web/19990429005638/http://www.circlesanctuary.org/page2.html>

<https://web.archive.org/web/19981212034135/http://www.witchcraft.org/>