



An Agile Worldbuilding Game

Rules Version 0.0.1-alpha

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Special thanks to no one for now

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 This is *Play*

Welcome and thanks for taking the time to read this!

This tabletop game provides an agile framework for you and your friends to create together interesting, cohesive and yet mysterious settings ready to be explored, discovered and conquered by Playing Characters of a Role-Playing Game (RPG).

The main idea behind *Play*  is to let you, Game Master (GM) of a Powered by the Apocalypse<sup>1</sup> (PbtA) RPG, create with your players a world to set your stories in, a world in which everyone has invested time, a world where everything the group would like to see can be featured.

As a byproduct, you'll also have an extensive session 0, in which you can discuss at length the **Genre** and the **Tone** of the setting you're going to play your campaigns in, set the expectations clearly and achieve a level playing field for all lore spouting matters.

The game uses some ideas from Design Thinking and Agile methodologies, which I won't explain in detail not to be disproven by pundits.

In practice you'll use timed ideation sessions, conversation and sticky notes.

To deserve the "game" status, you'll also have to follow some rules during the creation process, indeed you will **Play**.

To set your creativity loose, you'll choose or randomly select adjectives to establish fictional details, I call them **Tags**.

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<sup>1</sup> any other game where the fiction is similarly established by all players will be fine too!

## 1.2 What you need to play

To play this game whether in person or online you'll need:

- a group of friends<sup>2</sup>
- a device capable of reaching the web to use an online random adjective generator

If playing in person you'll also need:

- sticky notes, a bunch of them
- a drawable surface where to put sticky notes on as to connect them with arrows

Otherwise if playing online you'll also need:

- your favourite online sticky note board or digital workspace

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<sup>2</sup> 2-6 players other than you, even though you might use the system solo as a structured way to create settings by yourself

## Chapter 2

# The Setting

In this chapter we'll get a bit more technical with the language, let's start this very moment by defining some keywords<sup>1</sup>, henceforth we'll use:

- The **Truth** is everything related to the world as it really is, absolved from the bonds of sentient beings' cultures. The geography, the way the universe behaves, the life that inhabits it. Anything studied by Natural Sciences and Philosophy.
- The **Interpretation** is everything built or created by sentient beings. Analysis of the **Truth** such as sciences, imitations of it such as arts and technology. Everything related to the history and culture of the people is also part of the **Interpretation**. Anything studied by Human Sciences, Arts and Technology.
- The **World** is **Truth** and **Interpretation** in a certain time period. It is everything that describes the world as if it were real and internally consistent. With or without players observing it and interacting with it.
- The **Genre** and **Tone** are interconnected rough descriptions of the **Setting**, the **Genre** is made of one very coarse category (e.g. Fantasy) and a small number of adjectives to refine it (e.g Epic as in Epic Fantasy), the **Tone** is made of three **Tags**, which are adjectives, that try to convey the overall look and feel of the **Setting**, together they set the expectations to the player, define the tropes to use and act as the tenets to follow during worldbuilding.
- The **Setting** is the **World** plus the **Tone**, the **Genre** and all their interplay, it's what we aim to create.

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<sup>1</sup> these are definitions for the game, they're not my way of analysing worldbuilding academically

## 2.1 Concepts

The creation will start from the top, you'll think of a **Title**, a **Genre** and a **Tone** for your world. **Title** and **Genre** can be edited at any times, so don't fret over them if you can't come up with a good **Title**, or the **Genre** is too general.

The **Tone** will be your first main focus.

## 2.2 Playing the Game

As the GM of the future campaign you're probably going to be the **Facilitator** for the session, but really any player who read this manual can take this role upon themselves. Unlike the GM, a **Facilitator** is like any other player apart from being a bit more expert on the rules and being the tie breaker during voting impasses.

Once you've decided the **Facilitator**, you can start...

1. Choose, as a group, a **Title** and a **Genre** for your world, remember: you can and should go back to them any time.
2. Set a timer to 2 minutes and start a silent hidden brainstorming for **Tags** that would describe your **Setting's Tone**, when time's up, disclose and put them all together so as to be able to look at them. Use an online random adjective generator for inspiration.
3. Set a 1 minute timer to again brainstorm silently, this time using the disclosed adjectives as inspiration, you may again use an online random adjective generator to add some different elements, when time's up disclose and put them all together with the first batch so as to be able to look at them.
4. As a group, cluster and merge **Tags**, define the candidates emerging from the clusters. (e.g. after some discussion Guttural and Luxuriant are merged into Primeval which becomes a candidate; Mysterious, Occult, Sinister are clustered together and Occult is chosen as the representative for the cluster and thus becomes a candidate.)
5. Vote your candidates with 3 votes each. You may divide those votes as you choose among one, two or three candidates. Top 3 **Tags** become your **Tone**. If two or more candidates are tied for a place, the **Facilitator** decides how to break the tie.

**Title:** Behind the Enemy Lies

**Genre:** Spy Postcyberpunk

**Tone:** Wealthy, Disillusioned, Collapsing

## Chapter 3

# The Truth

In this chapter, you'll create the **Truth** as it is in the era<sup>1</sup> we set our **Setting** in.

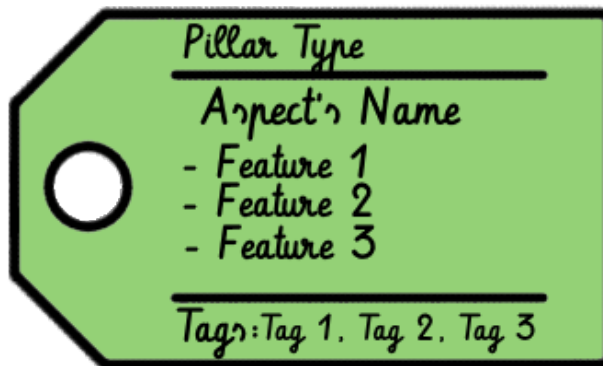
This is the **Truth**, as far as it can be known and as far as you, the players, want it to be knowable at this point.

Cultures, history, art and everything sentient-made will be managed in the following sections so don't think about them for the meantime.

### 3.1 Concepts

The **Truth** is built on:

- **Pillars**, very high abstractions of important parts of the **Setting**.
- **Aspects**, specific implementations of the broad **Pillar**'s concept.
- **Features**, which are brief descriptions of one single facet of an **Aspect**.

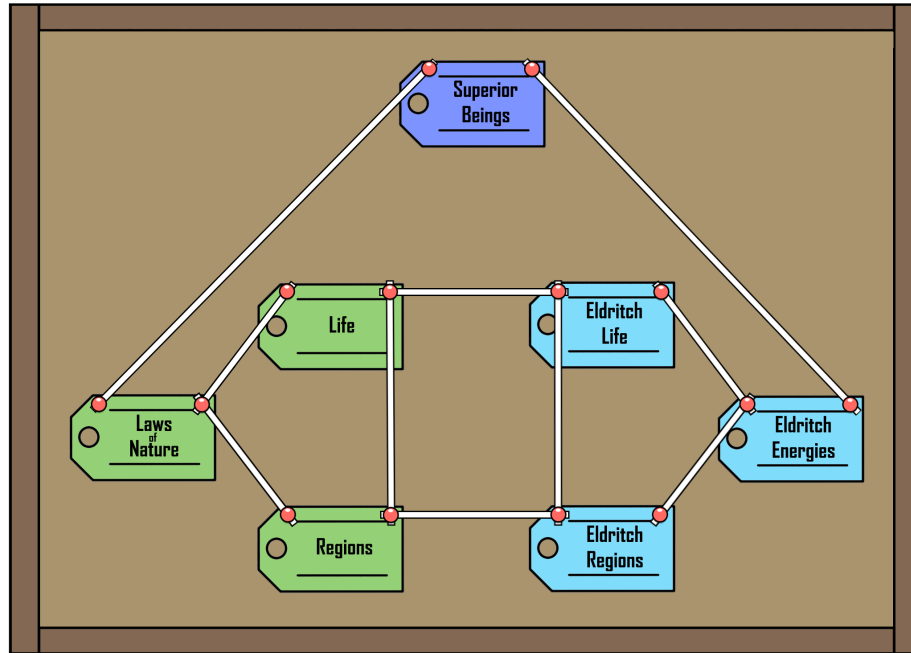


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<sup>1</sup> depending on the chosen setting an era might be centuries, millennia or just a short period in which the status quo doesn't change dramatically

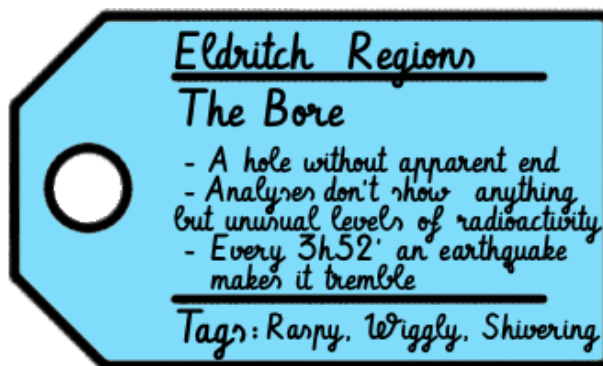


## 3.2 Pillars



As you can see the **Pillars** have different colours and are related among themselves as shown in figure<sup>2</sup>, this influences how making **Aspects** of them will work and how the **Pillars Bearers** will be allowed to create the **Truth**.

All players will be instructed to choose a **Pillar** in which they're interested the most<sup>3</sup>, that player will be considered a **Bearer** of that particular **Pillar**.



<sup>2</sup> every **Pillar** is related to itself.

<sup>3</sup> ideally all players have a focus for themselves, but two or more players can share a **Pillar**

### 3.2.1 Purple Pillars

represent something that can't be described neither as part of the world nor as outside of it.

**Aspects** of **Superior Beings** can be anything spacing from the world itself, its creator, something lost in outer space but capable of influencing it from beyond, to an entity that is out of the grasp of sentient comprehension.

Examples: *Gods of most religions, Ascended Sentient Beings, High Demons, Unfathomable Entities, Artificial Creations of Great Power*

Literary Examples: *Abrahmitic God, Satan, Odin, Elder Scrolls' Vivec, Lovecraftian Old Gods, Pillars of Eternity's Gods*

*Note: Whatever described through these **Aspects** is the factual truth, religion, mythology and philosophy which will be part of following chapters, might be based around that truth, might be human interpretations of it, or might completely disregard it.*

*To sum it up, there can be Gods without a religion and there can be religions without a God.*



### 3.2.2 Cyan Pillars

represent unusual components of the world, seemingly out of place, unnatural, not part of life as usual.

**Aspects** of **Eldritch Energies** can be unnatural forces or tendencies, powers that lie in the world but are not of this world, they are mysterious sources that might be explained and controlled by sentient beings.

Examples: *Magic, Technology, Elemental Forces, Soul, Psionics*

Literary Examples: *D&D's Arcane Magic, D&D's Divine Magic, D&D's Natural Magic, Crones' Witchcraft, Arcanum's Technology, Numenera's Cyphers, D&D's Pure Alignment, Ki, Cakra, Eternal Soul, Star Wars' Force, V:tM's Blood*

**Aspects** of **Eldritch Life** can be unnatural beings, whether a clade, a species or single individuals not worthy to be called **Superior Beings** and not common enough to be considered part of **Life**.

They might be more general concepts related to an Eldritch Energy like Undeath with Necromancy or Artificial Life with Cybernetics.

Examples: *Undead, Dragons, A particular variety of Dragons, A named Dragon, Constructs, Angels, Demons, Fairies, Magic beings in a low magic world*

Literary Examples: *Zombies, Skeletons, Dragons, Red Dragons, Smaug, Androids, Homunculi, Planescape's Trias, Hags, Elves in Harry Potter*

**Aspects** of **Eldritch Regions** can be planes, dimensions, parts of the world where the normal **Laws of Nature** do not apply or work differently, places where an **Eldritch Energy** shapes the landscape.

Examples: *Mystic Continents, Eldritch Catastrophes' Sites, Planes of Existence, Dimensions, Underworlds*

Literary Examples: *Valinor, Nuclear Wasteland in any Postapocalyptic world, Arcanum's Vendigroth, the Elemental Planes, Planescape's Sigil, WoD's Umbra, the Feywild, Persona's Castles, Heavens, Hells*

### 3.2.3 Green Pillars

represent everything related to the nature of the world, what is commonly found in everyday life in a particular place and time, everything in the world that can be studied through observation and experiments.

**Aspects** of **Laws of Nature** can be descriptions of how the universe behave, whether on a physical or chemical point of view, or more philosophical approaches such as pantheistic ideas.

Examples: *Physical and chemical phenomena, seemingly eldritch but common phenomena, phenomena tied to pantheistic or animistic worlds, passing of time*

Literary Examples: *Law of Gravity, Survival of the Fittest, Combustion, Westerosi Changing of Seasons, Neptune's Hexagonal Storm, Reincarnation, Yin-Yang, Suns and Moons*

**Aspects** of **Life** can be natural beings, clades and species, single specimen<sup>4</sup>, sentient races and facets of physiology. As long as something related to life is pretty ordinary for the natural world as described, it is part of **Life**.

Examples: *Animals, Plants, Clades of Living Beings, A Particular Cat, Humans, Magic beings in a magic world, Aliens*

Literary Examples: *Cats, Roses, Mammals, Felids, Nur<sup>5</sup>, Humans, Elves in a Standard Fantasy World, Gungans*

**Aspects** of **Regions** can be any kind of natural space in the setting from galaxies to planets, from continents to small regions. They can also be Biomes present in the world or geographical features.

Examples: *Planets, kinds of Planets, River Deltas, Biomes, Mountain Ranges*

Literary Examples: *Mars, Gaseous Giants, Yaruga's Estuary, Vvardenfell's Mushroom Forest, Ered Lithui*

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<sup>4</sup> refrain from using it for sentient individuals, those will be described later

<sup>5</sup> my cat

## 3.3 Playing the Game

**Pillars** and **Bearers** have special rules to follow during the creation of the **Truth**.

### 3.3.1 Pillars and Bearers

#### Transcendent

Whenever a player defines an **Aspect** of the **Purple Pillar** they may reroll up to three **Tags**.

#### Fiat Lux

**Purple Pillars Bearers** consider **Aspects** linked to a **Purple Aspect** as **Aspects** of their **Pillar** (those **Aspects** count as **Purple** for **Transcendent** and **Aspect** creation)

#### Shrouded in Mystery

**Features** of the **Aspects** of the **Cyan Pillars** relating to origins, inner workings and deepest secrets must be described leaving space for mystery or left unwritten. (e.g. You can't describe the dragons as "Created by Kashath, God of Fire", but you might use "Born of fire")

#### Beacon of Light

**Cyan Pillars Bearers** can describe one **Feature** of an **Aspect** of their **Pillar** without mystery once per turn as if that aspect weren't affected by **Shrouded in Mystery**. (e.g. You can describe the dragons as "Created by Kashath, God of Fire")

#### Universal Constants

**Aspects** of the **Green Pillars** when not explicitly redefined, default to our universe and Earth's standards. (e.g. If not mentioned, the law of gravity will apply to your world with **g** acceleration, mammals exist, chemical reaction work as you expect them and so on)

#### Holistic Cladistics

Once per turn as a **Green Pillars Bearer** *defines* or *refines* an **Aspect** of their **Pillar**, they may *define* a new **Aspect** of the same **Pillar** *linked* to it.

### 3.3.2 Aspecting

In this section we'll see how to co-create the **Truth**, each player will be able to create and alter **Aspects**, with a focus on a **Pillar** of their choice.

Note that you don't need each and every aspect to be part of the world, for a pretty mundane world you might need to define only **Green Aspects** and then have a long conversation on the **Interpretation** part of the creation.

Follow the steps and always keep in mind the Genre and Tone of your world.

1. Each player chooses a **Pillar** to **Bear**.
2. Starting from the **Facilitator**, each player *defines* a new **Aspect** of their **Borne Pillar**, then *defines* two new **Aspects** *linked* to it.
3. Starting from the **Facilitator**, each player chooses one:
  - *Defines* a new **Aspect** of their **Borne Pillar**.
  - *Refines* an existing **Aspect** of their **Borne Pillar**.
  - *Refines* an existing **Aspect** linked to an **Aspect** of their **Borne Pillar**.

Then that player *defines* up to two **Aspects** *linked* to it, for each less than two they defines, they *refines* an existing linked **Aspect** or *links* and *refines* an existing unlinked **Aspect**.

4. If no **Aspect** is isolated from any other and the majority of players feels like the canvas is complete, stop drawing. Otherwise go to step 3.

To *define* an **Aspect**, roll six random adjectives then choose one to three of those, for each less than three you may choose a **Tag** from the **Tone** or from linked **Aspects'** **Tags**, the three adjectives thus chosen are the **Tags** for this **Aspect**. Choose a name<sup>6</sup>, then describe three **Features**.

To *refine* an **Aspect**, add a **Feature** or edit one of the existing ones. Then you may *link* it to or *unlink* it from another existing **Aspect**.

To *link* an **Aspect** to another, create a line joining that **Aspect** to the other if the **Pillars** of the two **Aspects** are related.

When instructed to *define* an **Aspect** *linked* to another, you can only define it if the **Pillars** of the two **Aspects** are related.

<sup>6</sup> the name must be in the language you're playing, in-world languages will be handled in the next sections. (e.g. don't call it Purnam Forest, call it Ribbiting Ranae Rowanwood)

## Chapter 4

# The Interpretation

## Chapter 5

# Adjudicating

### 5.1 Aspecting Corner Cases

When confused about what Pillar would an Aspect fit, forge some question that might help you decide. Here's some example on possibly confusing points.

#### 5.1.1 Is X a strong Eldritch Life OR a weak Superior Being?

- If there's any supreme beings, or vastly superior ones, are they of the same stock as X?  
(e.g. as Zeus is a Superior Being, then Aristaeus should be too)
- Is X revered even without a direct contact with its believers?  
(e.g. a demon being revered only by its warlocks might make them ineligible for being a Superior Being)
- Is X in complete control of many lives?  
(e.g. an all controlling AI might be a Superior Being)

#### 5.1.2 Is X eldritch OR natural?

- Is X something common, so common to be considerable part of everyday life?  
(e.g. The elves in D&D are so common to be regarded as a natural race of the world even when tied to the Feywild)
- Is X more alien to the world than a human? (e.g. Monsters in Undertale while pretty different from human are as Earthling as them, and thus natural)



### **5.1.3 Is X a natural Superior Being, a spiritual Law of Nature OR a natural Eldritch Energy?**

- Is X the spirit or sentience of the world in a Pantheistic world?  
(e.g. Gaia, in a world without other gods, is probably a Superior Being)
- Is X an inherent property of matter apparent to the observer in any way?  
(e.g. The animistic spark present in everything, which causes things to follow the natural cycle and is understood by common people, is probably a Law of Nature)
- Is X an inherent property of matter felt only by the most spiritually inclined?  
(e.g. The animistic spark present in everything, which causes things to follow the natural cycle and is understood only by a minority keen on the occult, is probably an Eldritch Energy)

## Chapter 6

# Examples of Play

### 6.1 The Setting

Baciccia, Cristinn-a and Doardo start the game, Baciccia will be the **Facilitator** for the session.

The players decide they want to create a Dying Earth setting and start with:

**Title:** Ten Torches  
**Genre:** Dying Earth

Starting with these, the players go through the 2 minutes ideation phase and come up with...

Baciccia: ambiguous, ill-fated, selective, venomous

Cristinn-a: energetic, enchanted, bumpy, quaint

Doardo: crooked, erratic

After having disclosed their adjectives, they go through the second, 1 minute, ideation phase and come up with...

Baciccia: vanishing, corrupted, cursed

Cristinn-a: fickle, submerged, acidic

Doardo: pathetic

At this point a group discussion can start on how to merge and cluster the adjectives to arrive to a final roster of candidates.

ambiguous, quaint and fickle are merged into Bizarre  
erratic, vanishing and fickle are clustered into Vanishing  
corrupted, cursed, crooked and venomous are merged into Tainted  
corrupted, cursed and enchanted are clustered into Cursed  
submerged, acidic and venomous are clustered into Acidic  
Ill-fated, Selective and Bumpy are left alone

The voting is held and results come in:

Bizarre: B,C,D,D  
Vanishing: B,C  
Tainted: B  
Acidic: C  
Cursed: D  
Ill-fated:  
Selective:  
Bumpy:

As Baciccia is the **Facilitator**, Tainted wins the Tie and the **Tone's Tags** are thus chosen as Bizarre, Vanishing and Tainted. The newly found **Tone** gives the player the idea to add Cosmic Horror to the **Genre**, also the facetious **Title** is now ready to be changed!  
Now, we have:

**Title:** Horror Vacui

**Genre:** Cosmic Horror Dying Earth

**Tone:** Bizarre, Vanishing, Tainted

The players then proceed to next section of the creation.

## 6.2 The Truth

## Chapter 7

# Acknowledgements

Thanks to Baker and Baker for starting the Apocalypse and the PBtA movement by which I was deeply inspired and influenced.

Thanks to Paul Gestwicki for creating KAPOW whose  $\text{\LaTeX}$  source I've used to create this pdf.