

PLAYTESTING

Here's what will help us most: **if you have any questions you want answered before you start playing, ask us. If any questions come up during play, ask us.**

From your questions, we'll be able to figure out what isn't working, whether it's fixable, and what we just need to explain better.

If you aren't familiar with Apocalypse World, you'll have some trouble with this text. We're still eager for your questions.

Thanks for giving our game a try! We hope you have a blast with it.

Setup & CHARACTER CREATION

1. Lead the players in creating a holding. Create it together as a group. This is the home of the PCs.
2. Lead the players in creating a people. This is the holding's dominant population, but emphasize that the holding can include other people as well, which you'll create later.
3. Put playbooks, people sheets, and the household & belongings sheet out on the table. Emphasize that anyone who wants their character to be a member of a different people should feel free. They can create the new people before their character, or after, or whenever.
4. Let the players find their way through character creation.
5. While they create characters, create the holding's enemies and other neighbors as people. **We need you to playtest the battle rules**, so create at least one considerable war company.

Begin play

Begin play with "what did you spend the last season doing?" Have each player choose a season move to make. Point out that in addition to the season moves on the characters' playbooks, there's one on the peoples' sheets, and that some characters' rights might include one as well.

Does this give you enough to start play? Write us and let us know.

I hope that it does and you're able to continue play naturally.

Co-MCing

If you feel like it:

1. Create a PC along with the other players.
2. Whichever of the other players finishes creating their character first, pass them one of the stronghold's enemies to create as a people and a war company.
3. Choose a season move yourself. Take your turn! Once play begins, have your character go to another player's character. Ask who'll MC for you. As play continues, share MCing with any of the other players who are interested in taking it up.

I have some advice here, if you want it:

<http://apocalypse-world.com/forums/index.php?topic=2867>

...But don't worry or prepare too much, just give it a shot.

We hope that some of you try this! If you do, let us know how it goes.

The MANTLES

One of the Ungiven Future options is to assume a mantle.

The mantles will be things like "the Anointed Heir," "the Dragon-crowned," maybe "the True Saint." Special, powerful roles that the PCs can add to their characters as they achieve greatness. They'll include rights of their own, outside of the domains, unavailable to normal experience.

Anyhow they don't exist yet. Please play without them.

 The
ARK AGE
FIRST playTEST

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MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Agenda

- *Make the Dark Age vivid.*
- *Make the characters' lives eventful.*
- *Play to find out what happens.*

Always Say

- *What honesty demands.*
- *What the rules demand.*
- *What your prep demands.*
- *What the principles demand.*

Principles

- *Pursue your own sense of magic, mystery, and danger.*
- *Address yourself to the characters.*
- *Choose your move to follow the action.*
- *Make your move, but bring the action into the game.*
- *Give the players' characters their due.*
- *Give the players' characters each others' problems.*
- *Ask provocative questions and build on the answers.*
- *Name everyone, and let everyone be mortal.*
- *Let the players share their vision.*
- *Think offscreen, too.*
- *Sometimes, disclaim decision-making.*
- *Play with the form.*

Your Moves

- *Capture someone.*
 - *Have an NPC act on their aspirations.*
 - *Have an NPC do what their conscience will allow.*
 - *Have the season pass.*
 - *Have something cost, fail, or break.*
 - *Inflict or exchange harm as established.*
 - *Offer an opportunity, with or without a cost.*
 - *Put someone in a tenuous or untenable spot.*
 - *Separate them.*
 - *Show evidence of what's coming.*
 - *Show evidence of what's happening elsewhere.*
 - *Take something away from someone.*
 - *Tell them the possible consequences and ask.*
 - *Turn their move around on them.*
- After every move: "What do you do?"

Use Your Moves...

- *To lay groundwork.*
- *To reveal a commitment to action.*
- *To introduce urgency.*
- *To introduce complications.*
- *To accelerate, escalate.*
- *To draw out the inevitable.*
- *To follow through.*

asic Rules

Moves & Rights

There are four sets of moves: the basic moves, the battle moves, the season moves, and the people moves. These are the backbone of the game in play.

The **basic moves** are actions that individual PCs can take, at will, whenever they have both the opportunity and the ability to take them.

The **battle moves** resolve battles between companies. They call for the war-captains to make decisions about how to conduct the battle, first the attacker, then the defender, and give the consequences.

The **season moves** are long-term activities that occupy the PCs “for the rest of the season.” The MC can call for the end of the current season at any time in play, with or without warning. When they do, every player gets to choose a season move for their character.

The **people moves** are actions that PCs can take with their allies, friends, or vassals, requiring and eliding significant interaction. One of them is a season move, as well.

All of the PCs have recourse to all of the moves.

Rights give individual PCs their own unusual abilities, modifiers to the moves, or other situational benefits. They can have both game-mechanical and purely fictional effects.

Your rights never allow you to ignore or bypass the moves or other game mechanics, unless they say so explicitly and by name. For instance, “you have the right to slay whom you must for the protection of all” doesn’t give you the ability to simply declare someone slain. You must still somehow inflict the requisite harm, and they can still actively resist and prevent you from doing so.

One of the basic moves is for **when you’re denied your right**. Whenever you have the right to do something, but someone or some circumstance prevents you from doing it, make this move.

Rolling

Roll two dice and add your stat. A sum of 6 or less is a miss. A sum of 7 or more is a hit, with 7–9 being a weaker hit and 10+ being a stronger hit.

Harm & Armor

Your weapons and armor give you two ratings, **Harm** and **Armor**.

When you strike someone, you inflict harm equal to the Harm rating of your weapon minus the sum of the Armor ratings of your opponent’s armor. When you’re struck, you suffer harm equal to the Harm rating of your opponent’s weapon minus the sum of the Armor ratings of your own armor.

This is called “harm as established”: the weapon’s Harm, minus the sum of the armor’s Armor.

There are two kinds of armor: armor and helmets. You can wear and carry at most one of each, and their Armor ratings sum.

There are many kinds of weapons. You can carry more than one, if you like, but their Harm ratings don’t sum. Use the Harm rating of the weapon that strikes the blow.

Shields are a special case. They’re active weapons, used not only to ward off blows but to force openings through which you can strike. When you use a shield, you get +1 to your Armor, and also +1 to your weapon’s Harm.

Meeting Death

When you suffer harm, go to the **Meeting Death** section of your playbook. Cross out one line for each 1 Harm you suffer, in order from top to bottom.

The first uncrossed line is the one that, this moment, prevails.

Until you’ve taken 4 Harm and crossed out “I will yet survive this,” you’ll survive.

Medical care or healing magic can heal 1 Harm, restoring one line, and spending the rest of the season in rest and recovery can do the same. When the new season begins, though, the harm you have left becomes permanent, and can never be healed.

When you’ve taken 4 Harm and crossed out “I will yet survive this,” you’re dying. If nothing changes, sometime during the next day, take 1 Harm (ignoring your armor, if any) and cross out “I will see another sun rise.”

Once you’ve taken 5 Harm, cross out “I still draw breath” a few minutes later.

When you cross out “I still draw breath,” your breath stills and you die.

For NPCs:

NPCs have only four lines for meeting death. When they’ve suffered 2 Harm, they abandon the fight and seek only to survive. When they’ve suffered 3 Harm, they are sorely wounded, likely dying. When they’ve suffered 4 Harm, they’re dead.

For War Companies:

War companies have five lines for losses in battle. At the end of the battle, when the war-captain counts the company’s fallen, the harm the company has suffered overall becomes harm suffered by its individual warriors. See the battle moves for full details.

When a war company has suffered 5 Harm and crossed out “we are butchered,” the company is fully defeated. If it’s possible for its warriors to flee, they can, but in rout, not as a company in retreat. Otherwise, it must surrender.

For Monsters:

Monsters have six lines for meeting death and suffer harm as PCs do.

Experience

At the end of every session, the players **mark 2 Experience** for their characters.

The first is the MC’s choice. MC, choose a domain that reflects the character’s actions during the session. Feel free to ask the player about their decisions and motivations.

MC, you can choose to declare the Ungiven Future open, if you feel that the character’s actions during the session will lead to one of those developments. Otherwise, leave that choice to the player.

The second is the other players’ choice, as a group. Players, choose a domain that reflects the character’s actions, and you may, but need not, choose the same domain as the MC. You may also feel free to ask the player questions.

For both, if no domain seems appropriate, choose “a right of your own.” This allows the player to gain one of the rights already on her playbook, no matter which domain, or else to create a new right with the MC.



SETTING

This is not our history's real Dark Age. It's not a year in Earth's real past, nor a place we could pick out on a real map. It is, however, a Dark Age of our Earth.

It's after the fall of Rome (the "Empire of Eagles"), but before the Middle Ages. It's Northern or Western Europe. It doesn't have those kingdoms, those national and cultural borders, they turned out differently in this world, but it does have those landmasses. The Mediterranean is to the south, and across it, Africa. The Eastern Empire, the Byzantine, is to the southeast. Sail down the Volga to the Caspian Sea, or cross the Urals into Asia. Sail west to the Faroes, to Iceland; sail to Greenland, to Labrador, to Newfoundland, and you're in North America.

THE RIGHTS

You can see the setting in the rights.

The rights of the Land Itself and the rights of the Old Ways, these come from a fantasized Northern European paganism. Agricultural, seasonal, concerned with the hunt and the harvest, midwinter and the first of May. Nature-oriented and bloody. Polytheistic, profoundly local, where the goddess of one river is not the same as the goddess of the next, and you do well to learn the names and proper worship of the gods whose places you come to.

It's in the rights of the Land Itself that these pagan traditions survive more openly. These are the rights of farmers, hunters, free landowners.

The rights of the Old Ways are the rights of the pagan queens and kings, whose traditions were threatened, disrupted, sometimes overthrown and driven out, by the Empire of Eagles. They may reassert themselves now, or might be replaced forever by a newer way.

The rights of the New Nobility represent the new systems adopted by the newer crowns. They represent nationalism, feudalism, administration, the rule of law; all the infrastructure that the Empire of Eagles left behind. And Christianity? Are the newer crowns the Christian kings of our own history? It could be, but it might not.

The rights of the Other World contain the old paganism, and also fairy-worship, ancestor-worship, enchantment, the more formal and unified Imperial paganism, and the powerful mysticism of the monotheistic faiths here too. This Dark Age is, after all, non-scientific, and the physical world is not the only world.

The rights of Personal Prowess represent the best that each person might become, ignoring all tradition and indifferent to the past. In their way, the rights of War represent the same, and in their way, the opposite.

And the rights of the Wider World reach outward, both across space and through history. It's in these rights that you'll find explicit reference to the spice trade with Africa and Asia, for instance, and to the law of the Empire of Eagles. There are also less explicit references to old faiths of other lands, brought here by real and imaginary centuries of trade, travel, displacement, migration, and exchange: Judaism, Zoroastrianism, North African paganism, Mithraism, more.

CHARACTERS & PEOPLE

When you create your characters and people for play, this is the context into which you create them. A Dark Age of our real Earth but not our real history, concrete in its systems of rights, not in its precise location in time or geography.

Peoples

It was the policy of the Empire of Eagles to displace people. They stationed their legions and appointed their governors so that governors didn't rule, and soldiers didn't patrol, among their own people. They encouraged free and wide travel and trade, emphasizing citizens' status as *citizens of the Empire* over their local ethnic ties. They also systematically displaced their internal enemies and rivals, to break their bases of power and support within the Empire.

When the Empire fell, some of these people departed with it, but others stayed. Some integrated, and some kept their identities, their beliefs, customs, and history. Thus, here at the edges of the Old Empire and after its fall, there live pockets and remnants of people whose ancestors were born far away, across ocean and continent.

Furthermore, though the Empire fell, trade persists. On the trade routes and sea roads, people still come from the reaches of the world, chasing their fortune or their fate.

CREATING A PEOPLE

Any player, not just the MC, can create a people. Create them freely, at need. In particular, you'll need them when PCs muster warriors.

For playtesting, there are a few versions of the People sheet. **Please let us know whether you use them all, or which you use most.**

Peoples can overlap in groups and subgroups. A given notable NPC can belong to more than one people, with no special consequences.

To create a people, choose what defines them, their numbers, what they look like, what their names and language are, their stats, and what they're known for.

What defines them:

- *They are a single family, by birth and marriage.*
- *They worship the same god or gods, which others around them do not.*
- *They are all who live in a certain place.*
- *They are the subjects of the same crown.*
- *They are descendants of the same ancient king, queen, hero, or demigod.*
- *They are bound by a single common experience.*
- *They speak the same language, which others around them do not.*
- *They were displaced here from their homeland by the Empire of Eagles.*
- *Or as you choose.*

Their numbers:

- *For a clan: 30 souls in 4 households, including 8 warriors.*
- *For an enclave: 20 souls in 4 households, including 5 warriors.*
- *For a warrior order: 16 souls in 16 households, including 16 warriors.*
- *For a fishing or farming village: 50 souls in 6 households, including 8 warriors.*
- *For an outlaw band: 12 souls in 1 household, including 8 warriors.*
- *For a vassalage: 300 souls in 40 households, including 40 warriors.*
- *Or as you choose.*

What they look like:

Barrel-chested, fat, hulking, short, small, spare, stocky, tall, willowy, wiry. Bone-pale, black-brown, bronze-brown, golden-creamy, milk white, olive brown, peach-pink, red-brown, ruddy, tawny brown. Or a diversity. Or as you choose.

What their names and language are:

Algonquian ("Skraeling"), Arabic, Baltic, Basque, Berber, Celtic, English, Finnish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Inuit ("Skraeling"), Latin, Germanic, Greek, Nordic, Persian, Romance, Russian, Slavic, Welsh. Or a diversity. Or as you choose.

All these languages include a written system used to communicate ("runes"). Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and Persian have bodies of literature, including religious, legal, historical, and administrative texts; the others do not.

Their stats:

Assign +2, 0, -1, or +1, +1, 0.

On strength of their Rites, they're known for...

For Rites +2, choose 3. For +1, choose 2. For a 0 or -1, choose 1:

- *Their celebrations.*
- *Their devotion to law.*
- *Their elaborate cosmology.*
- *Their fearlessness in the face of death.*
- *Their insularity.*
- *The might of their god or gods.*
- *Their patience in suffering.*
- *Their sorcery and enchantments.*
- *Their veneration of priests and/or priestesses.*
- *Their vigilance against monsters.*
- *Their vigilance against sorcery.*

On strength of their War, they're known for...

For War +2, choose 3. For +1, choose 2. For a 0 or -1, choose 1:

- *Their archers.*
- *Their brutal raids.*
- *Their cavalry.*
- *Their implacable blood vengeance.*
- *Their individual skill at arms.*
- *Their insatiability in war.*
- *Their loyalty.*
- *Their mercy to their defeated enemies.*
- *Their physical prowess.*
- *Their ruthlessness.*
- *Their strategy and tactics.*

On strength of their Wealth, they're known for...

For Wealth +2, choose 3. For +1, choose 2. For a 0 or -1, choose 1:

- *Their amber, ivory and furs.*
- *Their craft and skill.*
- *Their far-reaching trade routes.*
- *Their garish fashions.*
- *Their generous hospitality.*
- *Their great beauty.*
- *Their marvelous feasts.*
- *Their powerful foreign allies.*
- *Their rich land.*
- *Their spicy, cosmopolitan cuisine.*
- *Their subtle fashions.*
- *Their superb metalwork.*
- *Their towering monuments.*
- *Their wealthy cities.*

NOTABLE NPCs

To create a notable NPC, name them, choose their strength in Single Combat, choose what they aspire to and what their conscience allows them, and list the Armor and Harm of their arms.

In Single Combat:

Choose 1, 2, or 3. This is the number that the MC spends on this NPC's behalf in single combat.

Choose 1 only if this person is not yet grown, or is substantially hindered in some other way. Choose 3 only if this person is a merciless veteran killer, survivor of dozens of campaigns, whose conscience allows both murder and brutality. Choose 2 for almost everyone.

Aspiration & Conscience:

Circle 1–3 in each set. When the MC has this character act, these can guide their choices.

Armor & Harm:

Follow the same system as for PCs' arms and armor.



CREATING CHARACTERS

FROM A PLAYBOOK

To create a character from a playbook, first choose the playbook.

Choose your character's people—you can create them as a people now, or later, and you can create them yourself or ask another player to do it—and your character's name. Describe your character, both according to and contrasting with your people.

Assign your stats. Your playbook tells you which stat to assign +2. For the rest, you have +1, +1, 0, and -1. Assign one of these to each.

Choose 4 rights, of the 8 your playbook lists.

Find the **Household & Belongings** sheet. Follow it to give your character a household and belongings. Note that while not everyone owns arms and armor, practically everyone does carry a short knife and their own drinking cup.

Once you've finished creating your character, take a look at the season moves. You'll start play by choosing one, for what your character was doing in the season before play begins.

FROM A NEW PLAYBOOK

To create a new playbook, first grab or print a blank playbook.

Name the playbook.

Write a three-line verse about it. The purpose of this verse is concrete: to identify, explicitly or implicitly, two or three of the domains of rights, and to place them into contrast:

*Rights of the Land Itself,
But Rights of the Wider World.*

*Rights of War,
And Rights of the New Nobility,
But Rights of the Other World.*

Then just go through the domains of rights you've chosen and copy over 8 rights in total.

If you find that you need a right for your playbook, but it doesn't exist, write it yourself. Check it with the MC or the other players, and write it right into the book.

Now you can create the character from your new playbook, as usual.

FROM SCRATCH

Creating a character from scratch is a lot like creating a new playbook.

Instead of naming the playbook, you can just name the character's own personal place or role.

Still write a three-line verse.

Go through the domains of rights you've chosen and copy over 4 rights; these are your starting rights, the ones you've chosen to begin play.

Now go through and copy 4 more. These are rights of you yourself, the rights you choose to exist in your character's future.

If you find that you need a right that doesn't exist, again, write it yourself.

CREATING A NEW SET OF PLAYBOOKS

The playbooks we're including for playtesting are centered on the stronghold. They all have a place in it, and it provides the basis for play. Your game might outgrow it, or lose it, and range far from it, but still, it's in the stronghold that your game begins.

To play a game not based on a stronghold, you'd need a new set of playbooks.

Choose the ones from this set that fit, if any, and then create the rest.

Say you want to play something more like the movie *The Black Death*, with a band of warriors on a mission. You'd probably be able to use the War-champion and the Outranger as is, and maybe you could adapt the Troll-killer, but you'd really want to add at least a Torturer and a Young Monk. Go ahead and create them.

You might also need to create a new setup sheet, to replace the stronghold sheet. You can use the map sheets if they'll serve.

We hope that some of you try this! Please feel free to share your new playbooks and stuff on the Ecretsay Orumfay.

MONSTERS

A TROLL

“Troll” and “monster” are interchangeable.

Trolls shouldn’t and can’t exist, but do. They are terrible, impossible creatures.

They come from neglected places: the depths of forests and fens, barren cliffheads, forgotten mines, the ruins of the mound-makers, undersea caves.

It is sometimes possible for a human being to call a troll forth, awaken one, create one, engender one upon another, give birth to one, or even become one.

Some have human form, some bestial. All have inhuman, unnatural hunger and hate:

- *This one can eat a village’s harvest for a meal.*
- *This one craves human meat to eat.*
- *This one grinds human bones for its bread.*
- *This one loves the sounds of torture for music.*
- *This one must steal and butcher a child each night or it cannot rest.*
- *This one steals the breath of those who sleep.*
- *This one vomits poison into springs and wells.*
- *And likewise, and likewise.*

All have unnatural abilities and powers:

- *This one’s flesh mends by night, no matter the wounds it suffers.*
- *This one keeps its vital organs hidden in a broken tree.*
- *This one is made of living shadow, intangible except as it chooses.*
- *This one moves lightly on its feet, no matter its great size and bulk.*
- *This one’s skin is as hard as stone.*
- *This one can take on a lovely human seeming, which only its voice betrays.*
- *This one’s teeth and claws effortlessly pierce iron armor.*
- *This one can vomit out fire.*
- *And likewise, and likewise.*

Some have terrible slashing claws, horns, or great rending teeth (4 Harm). Some have more modest claws, horns, or teeth (3 Harm), as a mortal beast. Some grapple their prey with bestial strength (2 Harm), some with unnatural strength (3 Harm). Some carry human weapons. Some have their own unnatural abilities to harm and to kill, like the one who can vomit fire or the one who steals your breath (1 Harm–5 Harm).

Some have skin like the hide of mortal beasts (1 Armor). Some have armored skin like crocodiles (2 Armor). Some have skin as hard as iron (3 Armor) or as stone (4 Armor).

Some are human-sized, some smaller, some larger. Some can change their size at will.

When combatants of different sizes exchange harm, the larger inflicts more harm and receives more armor than usual:

- *1½ to 1: it inflicts +1 Harm and receives +1 Armor.*
- *2 to 1: it inflicts +2 Harm and receives +2 Armor.*
- *3+ to 1: it inflicts +3 Harm and receives +3 Armor.*

When a Monster Approaches Death

It will be a terror to our children and our grandchildren.

It has yet no fear for its life.

It will hide, and heal, and later return.

It is still in its strength.

It is still struggling.

It still survives, somehow.

MAGICS

MAGICAL WEAPONS

An antique breastplate bearing figures of the ancient heroes. 1 Armor. Might protect you from curses and death-words.

An antler-spiked spear. 3 Harm. Might inflict wounds that never heal.

An axe of church-bell bronze. 3 Harm. Might cleave the flesh of magical creatures, if they are enemies to the Bloodless Lord.

A boar-spear of holy ash. 3 Harm. Might pierce the flesh of creatures otherwise immaterial. Its cross-bars might pin in this world creatures who could otherwise flee into another.

A bronze helmet depicting the face of a lion or other fanciful beast. 1 Armor. Might allow you to see others' fears.

A bronze sword, a thousand years old, which has always spilt the blood of the lawless. 3 Harm. Might wound any creature who is enemy to the Upstanding, even when other weapons cannot.

A cap of soft brown rabbit fur. Might allow you to move unseen among your enemies, even when they are alert and watchful.

A cape of unknown hide, lustrous and golden. 1 Armor. Might heal who wears it.

A coat reinforced with massive elk ribs. 1 Armor. Might protect you from giant creatures' crushing blows.

A crocodile-scale shield. 1 Armor. Might protect you from creatures whose claws or teeth pierce iron.

A cursed sword of the Legion of Eagles. 3 Harm. Might spill the blood of someone made immortal by necromancy.

A helmet made from a cave bear's skull, older than conceiving. 1 Armor. Might allow you to speak with creatures who have no earthly voice.

An ivory tablet etched with the figure of a raven. Might let you peer through the nearest raven's eyes, and possibly control it in its flight.

A quiver of 9 torch-arrows, whose heads burst into flame in flight. Might harm creatures who are harmed by fire.

A stone-headed club carved with runes. 3 Harm. Might batter the bones of creatures made of living wood, or of living shadow.

MAGICAL PLACES

An ancient grave-mound of the People Who Came Before. Might trap spirits within, allowing them no egress.

A circle of standing-stones, more ancient than time. Might reveal the secret turnings of unearthly seasons.

A fallen and overgrown tower, home to a bloodthirsty border troll. Might hide the bones of an ancient hero.

A grove and still pool, where the moon descends to bathe. Might heal who sleeps there, or might make them poets.

A new temple to the Bloodless God, sanctified, with its great tolling bell. Might allow no monster nor spirit within.

A natural doorway formed by stones tipped upon one another. Might open into another world.

A pillared shrine erected by priests of the Empire of Eagles, whose statue goddess still stands. Might grant your prayers, if they are proffered correctly.

A place sacred to the Sword-Crowned Queen of Summer, a place of running water in deep woods. Winter might never truly come here.

A place sacred to the Willow-Hag, where the dead make a forest of bones beneath the water. Might bring you into Her presence.

The secret sanctum of a temple to the God of the Holy Law. Might afford a glimpse of the Utmost or of the secrets of Creation.

A wooded crossroads where hungry souls wait. The hungry souls might be made to answer questions in exchange for satiety.

A simple farmstead in the hills, where the desperate can find sanctuary and none other can come. Might give a season's respite and recovery in peace and safety.