

The Explorer's Tale



A game of audience-driven world building

By the Gamer Assembly

The Explorer's Tale

In this game, a group of facilitators help an audience build a world in 1-2 hours.

There are three facilitators in the game:

- The **Emperor**, who asks questions about the world covering various **Topics**
- The **Explorer**, who asks the audience for suggestions to answer the **Emperor**
- The **Scribe**, who records details about the world in the **Record** as they are spoken

There are two pieces of equipment in the game:

- The **Record**: A visible recording medium. This is used to record the world. This could be as simple as a flip chart or as complicated as a computer connected to a projector.
- **Topics**: A list of world-building topics, divided into three sections.

Preparation and Setting Parameters

The **Scribe** sets up the **Record** so all can see it, and the **Emperor** takes the **Topics** list.

The **Scribe** addresses the audience, asking, "What three things should we absolutely include in this world?" After three items have been added to the **Parameters** area of the **Record**, the **Scribe** asks, "What three things should we absolutely avoid in this world?" The **Scribe** adds those responses to the **Record** as well. The **Explorer** uses the **Parameters** to guide audience responses.

Play

The **Emperor** assumes a position of appropriate authority. The **Explorer** approaches the **Emperor**. If playing with a small group, all players except the **Emperor** and **Scribe** are **Explorers**. The **Emperor** can address the **Explorers** collectively or singly.

The **Emperor** intones, "Welcome home from your travels, Explorer! Tell me about the lands you visited." The **Emperor** chooses a **Topic** from the list and asks the **Explorer** a question about it.

The **Explorer** then turns to the audience and asks for suggestions. The **Explorer** may direct the audience to certain areas within the **Topic**. The **Explorer** doesn't have to ask the audience for an answer as broad as the **Emperor's** question. The **Explorer** may combine suggestions.

The **Scribe** or **Emperor** can challenge a suggestion with, "Surely you jest!" and propose a new idea. The **Explorer** turns to the audience for guidance, and then chooses either to justify the original suggestion with more detail, to accept and explore the proposed idea, or to use a totally different idea. When looking for a different idea, the **Explorer** should first return to the same audience member that made the original suggestion (as with the improv game [New Choice](#)).

The **Emperor's** initial questions should address Foundations before moving on to Inhabitants and Civilizations. The **Emperor** may ignore, create, or revisit **Topics** as needed.

The Record

The **Scribe** begins the **Record** by dividing it into four sections:

1. Parameters
2. Foundations of the World
3. Inhabitants
4. Civilizations

Subdivide these sections as peoples and civilizations are defined. If working with a flip chart, reserve one sheet for each section and add additional pages for each inhabitant and civilization.

Topics

This list contains suggested topics. It is not exhaustive. Feel free to create new topics and explore anything not covered by this list. The **Emperor** can do this easily by simply asking about a new topic during play, but anyone can (and should) suggest topics to the **Emperor**.

Set 1: Foundations

Foundations generate more interest when combined, such as a weapon that is also a landmark.

Different Physics	Magic	Climate	Geography
Landmarks	Flora and Fauna	Races/Species	Scarce Resources
Natural Resources	Technology Level	Modes of Transport	Weapons and Tools

Set 2: Inhabitants

All of these questions should be followed by a corresponding "Why?"

Which species are significant or rare?	How are intelligent species distributed?	Where/how did civilization begin?	What languages are spoken/known?
Which civilizations are largest?	Which civilizations are most advanced?	Which civilization is in the most trouble?	Which civilizations are respected/feared?

Set 3: Civilizations

These topics relate to specific civilizations.

Open/Xenophobic	Allies/Enemies	Death Customs	Birth Customs
Strangest Customs	Festivals	Taboos	Mythic Heroes
Government Structure	Major Religion(s)	Laws/Crime	Warlike/Peaceful
Architecture/Cities	Arts/Entertainment	Fashion	Diet
Plentiful Resources	Scarce Resources	Economy/Trade	National Pride

Postscript: Culture Building

This is an additional game inspired by [Cultural Calibration](#) that further defines a civilization's culture. It is played as a set of scenes, and it will take longer than an hour to play.

Players choose a civilization to explore. Each player gets at least one turn as the **Leader** for a scene. The **Leader** describes the frame for the scene, which can be:

- **Everyday life**, *e.g.*, children playing, a typical work day, a normal meal
- A **life event**, *e.g.*, someone leaving the group, someone dying, the start of a battle
- A **rite**, *e.g.*, a religious ceremony, anointing a leader, a cultural event

Create characters for the scene as needed. Another player (random to start with; afterwards it's the **Leader** of the previous scene) chooses a disruption for the scene:

- A **crime** occurs.
- A **custom** is broken.
- A **taboo** is violated.

The players choose roles and play out the scene. At the end of each scene, each player describes obvious cultural norms and exotic/unexpected cultural norms. Add these details to the **Record**.

We'd love to hear about your experiences playing *The Explorer's Tale* and the worlds you create. Come chat with us about it! Ask us anything!

CREDITS

First print edition, PAX East 2015.

Contributors to *The Explorer's Tale* include: Tresi Arvizo, Brian Fitzpatrick, Brian Liberge, Brent Newhall, Bob Smith, Arthur Vaccarino, and Jim White.

The Explorer's Tale is the bastard child of [Parsley Games](#), [Microscope](#), [Baron Munchausen](#), and [Nordic Larp](#).

Cover Image is *The Campfire* by Alfred Bierstadt, Public Domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Gamer Assembly Logo by [Kaitlynn Peavler](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License](#).

For more information and a free PDF, go to gamerassembly.net and click on *The Explorer's Tale*.

Come chat with us at gamerassembly.net/webchat and join the Gamer Assembly!