

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORLD



Note: This is a generic download, useful in most homebrew fantasy settings. With some minor tweaks it could easily serve for sci-fi settings as well.

History not only helped shape the present, but it often has an impact on the future. The Crusades of the Middle Ages, for example, still affect relations between Western and some Islamic countries today. This is especially true in many fantasy RPGs, where investigating old ruins is par for the course and technology advances as a snail's pace.

The aim of this free resource is to give you, whether you are a budding or experienced world designer, some tools to create a basic historical framework with just a few dice, a deck of cards, and a healthy dose of imagination. Even if you prefer to think up your own histories, this work may give you some extra ideas.

Because of the near-endless range of worlds that exist in gamers' imaginations, this work covers only the "whens" and the basic "whats"—you'll have to use your imagination to unveil the hows, whys, whos, detailed whats, and so on that will turn the entries from a few words into a meaningful, colorful, and exciting history for your individual world. No descriptions of what the individual entries mean has been provided, leaving the GM to interpret events as he desires.

Disclaimer: This work is based on a system found in TSR's *World Builder's Guidebook*. For those after a method of determining near-future campaign events, TSR's original *Oriental Adventures* (not the more recent WotC version) includes a short but excellent system.

ANCIENT EVENTS

Ancient events occurred many centuries or several millennia ago. They take the form of *major* events that are remembered for dozens or hundreds of generations. Given their antiquity, they are recalled not as historical facts, but are rather retold only as myths and legends, hazy memories of bygone days. Exact dates, reasons, names, and sites are often hard, if not impossible, to

pinpoint, and in many instances multiple competing views may exist. Often, such ancient history is tainted by the views of specific cultures. After all, one country's struggle for independence against a cruel, oppressive government is another country's war to crush an upstart rebellion.

Number of Events: Roll 2d6 and draw that many cards from the action deck.

It's up to you whether you shuffle after event card is drawn or replace the cards in the deck and shuffle only after the rolled number of cards has been drawn and the events recorded. The former offers the possibility of multiple events of the same exact type, while the latter is less work.

Gap Between Events: Start your historical timeline at zero, Year 0. This is when the first event occurs and serves purely as a reference point. Once you've worked out the entire framework you can jiggle the dates around. Each ancient event thereafter occurs 1d10 **centuries** later than the previous event. Hence, if you roll a 6 for your second event, it takes place in the year 600. A three for the next result takes us to the year 900, and so on.

DISTANT EVENTS

Distant events occur within the time span of accurate recordings and relate to important events that aren't quite as wide sweeping or epic as those of the ancient period. Facts and figures, while perhaps exaggerated by authors, are still regarded as actual facts. Some long-lived races may actually recall these events as only taking place two or three generations ago, or perhaps even within living memory. This is the start of the modern era, the birth time of many chivalric orders, the foundation of dynasties who rule to the present era, and the stabilization of fledgling faiths into widespread and better organized cults and religions.

Number of Events: Roll 3d6 and draw that many cards from the action deck.

It's up to you whether you shuffle after event card is

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ANCIENT EVENTS TABLE

Check the card's value against the table below. Sometimes the suit or color is used to determine a specific event within a more general entry.

Card	Main Event
2	Cataclysm. <i>Club</i> : magical; <i>Diamond</i> : natural; <i>Heart</i> : manmade; <i>Spade</i> : divine
3 or 4	Empire rises (any red suit) or falls (any black suit)
5 or 6	Migrations
7 or 8	Exploration (any red suit) or colonization (any black suit)
9 or 10	War. <i>Club</i> : conquest; <i>Diamond</i> : racial; <i>Heart</i> : religious; <i>Spade</i> : epic but limited geographically/widespread
Jack	Powerful religion rises (any red suit) or falls (any black suit)
Queen	Discovery, magical (any red suit) or technological (any black suit)
King	Legendary hero
Ace	Golden age
Joker	Draw two more cards. These events occur in the same year.

DISTANT EVENTS TABLE

Check the card's value against the table below. Sometimes the suit or color is used to determine a specific event within a more general entry.

Card	Event
2	Cataclysm. <i>Club</i> : magical; <i>Diamond</i> : natural; <i>Heart</i> : manmade; <i>Spade</i> : divine
3	Religion. <i>Club</i> : new faith founded; <i>Diamond</i> : faith achieves prominence; <i>Heart</i> : evil cult activity; <i>Spade</i> : faith falls into decline
4	Ruler grows stronger (any red suit) or weaker (any black suit)
5	Disaster. <i>Club</i> : famine; <i>Diamond</i> : flood/tidal wave; <i>Heart</i> : earthquake/volcano; <i>Spade</i> : plague
6	Intrigue (any red suit) or scandal (any black suit)
7	Kingdom or empire grows stronger or expands (any red suit) or grow weaker or declines (any black suit)
8	War. <i>Club</i> : border skirmishes/raids; <i>Diamond</i> : monstrous incursion; <i>Heart</i> : rebellion; <i>Spade</i> : revolution
9	War. <i>Club</i> : invasion; <i>Diamond</i> : conquest; <i>Heart</i> : religious/crusade; <i>Spade</i> : succession
10	Exploration (any red suit) or colonization (any black suit)
Jack	Trade booms (any red suit) or declines (any black suit)
Queen	Discovery, magical (any red suit) or technological (any black suit)
King	Legendary hero
Ace	Prosperity (any red suit) or decadence (any black suit)
Joker	Draw two more cards. These events occur in the same year.

RECENT EVENTS TABLE

Check the card's value against the table below. Sometimes the suit or color is used to determine a specific event within a more general entry.

Card	Event
2	War, Civil. <i>Club</i> : succession; <i>Diamond</i> : revolution; <i>Heart</i> : rebellion; <i>Spade</i> : religious
3	Feud (any red suit) or rivalry (any black suit)
4	Ruler grows stronger (any red suit) or weaker (any black suit)
5	Disaster. <i>Club</i> : famine; <i>Diamond</i> : flood/tidal wave; <i>Heart</i> : earthquake/volcano; <i>Spade</i> : plague
6	Intrigue (any red suit) or scandal (any black suit)
7	Trade booms (any red suit) or declines (any black suit)
8	War, Minor. <i>Club</i> : border skirmishes; <i>Diamond</i> : deep raids; <i>Heart</i> : banditry; <i>Spade</i> : crusade
9	War, Major. Ongoing invasion (any red suit) or conquest (any black suit)
10	Exploration (any red suit) or colonization (any black suit)
Jack	Monstrous incursions
Queen	Important dignitary. <i>Club</i> : dies/abdicates/disappears; <i>Diamond</i> : visits neighboring land; <i>Heart</i> : new heir born; <i>Spade</i> : changes faith
King	Diplomatic. <i>Club</i> : armistice; <i>Diamond</i> : change of allegiance; <i>Heart</i> : new alliance formed; <i>Spade</i> : trading pact
Ace	Prosperity (any red suit) or decadence (any black suit)
Joker	Draw two more cards. These events occur in the same year.

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drawn or replace the cards in the deck and shuffle only after the rolled number of cards has been drawn and the events recorded. The former offers the possibility of multiple events of the same exact type, while the latter is less work.

Gap Between Events: Each distant event thereafter occurs 1d10 *decades* later than the previous event. So, if your last ancient event was in the year 1000 and your first distant event roll was a 7, the year would be 1070.

RECENT EVENTS

Recent events always occur within the last century, and more likely happen within the lifetime of the heroes or their parents. Such events are well-documented, if not necessarily widely understood. While some of these events may have ended by the time the adventurers embark on their careers, others are ongoing, providing the backdrop in which the heroes spent their youth, or just beginning to unfold, thus providing adventuring opportunities for their future.

Number of Events: Roll 2d6 and draw that many cards from the action.

It's up to you whether you shuffle after event card is drawn or replace the cards in the deck and shuffle only after the rolled number of cards has been drawn and the events recorded. The former offers the possibility of multiple events of the same exact type, while the latter is less work.

Gap Between Events: Each recent event thereafter occurs 1d10 *years* later than the previous event. If your last later event was in the year 1360 and your first later event roll was a 4, the year would be 1364. The final year in your timeline could serve as the actual starting point or be 1d10 years previous, as you feel fit.

FULL EXAMPLE

Umberto grabs some d6 and rolls them several times. He ends up with 5 ancient events, 9 distant events, and 7 recent events. After drawing cards and rolling to determine the passage of time, Umberto ends up with the basic framework detailed below.

Year	Event
0	Empire rises
600	Colonization
1000	Exploration <i>and</i> religious war
1600	Discovery, magical
1800	Cataclysm, magical
1850	Colonization
1950	Scandal
2050	Disaster, flood/tidal wave
2090	Prosperity
2120	Cataclysm, magical
2180	Decadence
2230	Ruler grows weaker

2270	Monstrous incursions
2350	Religious faith goes into decline
2388	Trade declines
2398	Monstrous incursions
2405	War, major: conquest
2414	Important dignitary dies/abdicates/disappears
2417	War, civil: rebellion
2425	Prosperity
2431	Diplomatic change of allegiance
2433	Present day—campaign begins

PUTTING THINGS TOGETHER

Now all Umberto has to do is expand and detail the entries to turn a scant framework into a full-fledged history.

Since a new empire rose as the first event, Umberto decides to stick with Year 0. The new emperor, he decides, stamped his authority on the world by creating a new calendar, around which all later ones are based.

Reading on, he sees lots of events seem to imply some sort of bond. Umberto decides to explore these correlations a little further to see where his imagination takes him.

During the ancient years, two sets of events stand out as requiring further examination. First, the year 1000 sees exploration *and* a religious war. Did explorers discover a new land populated by heathens and start a religious war to exterminate or convert them soon after the discovery, or are these two disparate events that just happened to occur around the same point in history? He likes the idea of there being an underground faith, surviving through the ages, so he opts for the former idea.

Second, there is a magical discovery followed two centuries later by a magical cataclysm. The obvious conclusion is that the two events are linked, with the discovery leading to the cataclysm. But Umberto thinks it would make a nice change if the discovery was made in an attempt to *avoid* the cataclysm. Naturally it failed, because disaster struck. The wave of colonization 50 years later is determined as being refugees fleeing the site of the disaster to found a new realm. This forms the core of his campaign world, being the heroes' homeland.

Similarly, the recent history is showing possible threads he can weave together. A monstrous incursion followed by a conquest *could* infer the monsters were successful and managed to capture some land. As Umberto is looking to create an "orc" kingdom, this is the historical verification for his ideas. On a similar note, is the death/abdication/disappearance of an important dignitary in 2414 directly linked to the rebellion of 2417, or do these occur in different realms and have no common link? Only Umberto can decide that!

These decisions, along with others, help Umberto to create a vibrant, exciting history with repercussions which flow through time into the present and future of his individual campaign setting.