

Detail

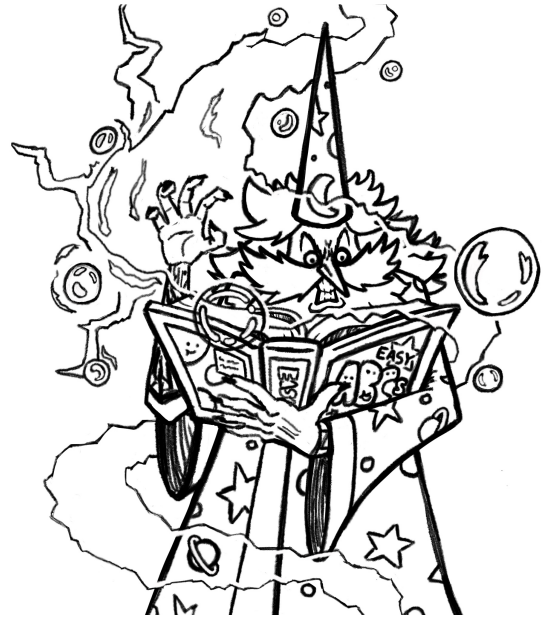
A world building game

By Declan Lowthian

Introduction

Detail is a worldbuilding game designed to facilitate bottom-up setting creation by providing prompts related to small world Details.

This game follows the maxim that “limitation breeds creativity.” It should give you a handful of evocative, unique ideas to define a setting that can stand on its own, or be used for future storytelling.



You will need

- 1–5 players
- A random number generator
- A way to record notes
- Your preferred RPG Safety Tools
- This book

The first step is to decide what you’re here to do. I

designed Detail to build settings for other tabletop games. In this case, you’ll likely know the broad strokes of what your end product will be. If you’re playing Detail as a standalone game, make up a general idea that seems fun or use the table on the following page. Either way, having a one-sentence end goal will guide your choices as you play.

Safety Tools

After you have decided what you’re there to do, it’s important to take a moment to establish the safety tools your group is going to use. My personal favorites are The X-Card by John Stavropoulos (<http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>) and Lines and Veils, but every group has their own needs and preferences. Establish your boundaries, lay out your tools, take care of each other.

Some groups may want to have this conversation first thing, but I find I prefer determining the setting type first, as it lets players zero in on specific tropes or genre conventions they may want to avoid. Once you have your rough sketch and your safety tools, you’re ready to begin play.

Locations

- 1.....Deep space, far beyond the reaches or lifespan of humanity
- 2.....A fantastical kingdom lost to myth and history where the swords have names
- 3.....The high-seas, filled with daring scoundrels and swashbuckling action
- 4.....A bustling city with a weird streak
- 5.....The year 20XX, where cyberpunks resist the crushing boot of the corps
- 6.....Simpler times that perhaps never existed except in our minds
- 7.....An alternate history version of your home town
- 8.....A place of odd scale; an ant hill, a solar system, with residents to match
- 9.....A pivotal place and time in history, filled with things not in the history books
- 10.....Inside a wormhole, a pocket dimension, or a mirror
- 11.....The secret kingdom where faeries dwell
- 12.....The Undercity of wizards, vampires, and shades

How to Play

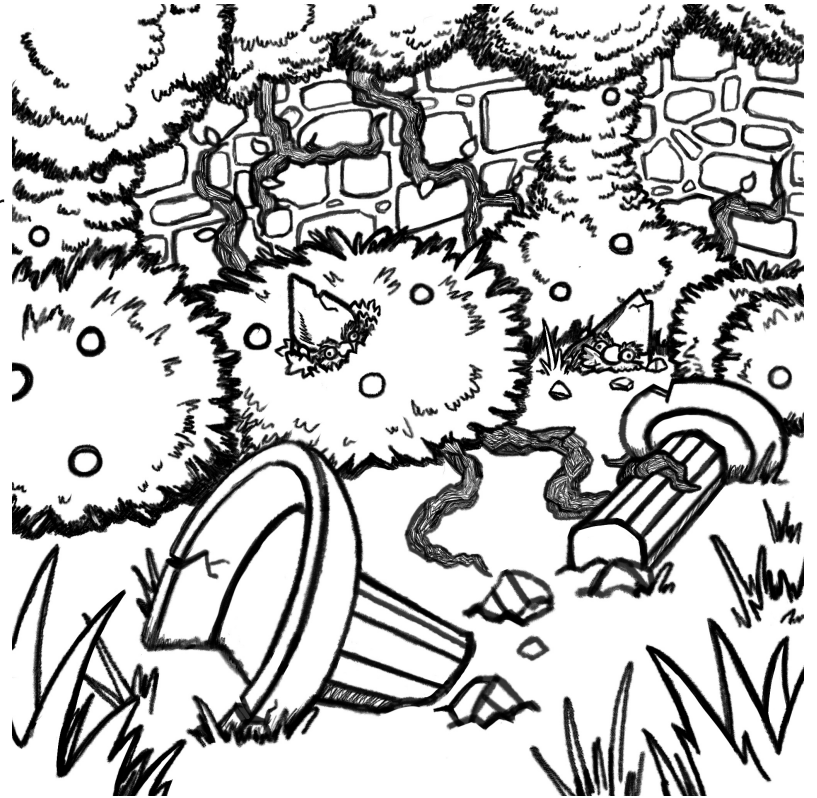
Play proceeds in turns. On your turn, use your random number generator to pick an option from the list of Details. Take a moment to think, then describe the significance of this Detail to your world. Other players can ask clarifying questions, or offer ideas, but the final choice is yours. Once you feel like you've described the Detail enough, frame a short vignette of the Detail in action. This is your chance to translate your ideas into visuals. It can be as simple as a single image, or perhaps a short conversation.

Remember this is not a game about characters or even narrative; you're building a setting. Let characters appear only once. Abandon storylines unfinished. As long as your Detail has been highlighted and its significance is clear, you've done your job. You can always come back to those places and characters in another game if you fall in love.

Feel free to interpret a Detail as loose as necessary for the needs of your table. "Media criticism" could become nobles arguing about the merits of a painting, bloggers plugging their favorite video games, or AI masterminds deciding the best songs, objectively. The Details are meant to inspire. If an idea seems cool run with it.

Eventually, you will find a Detail that shares some creative space with one you already covered. Perhaps your cool idea about snacks encompasses fast food as well. The first time this comes up, it's a good sign your game is reaching its end. Check in as a group, decide if you want to do a few more turns or if you're satisfied with what you have. If you decide to keep going, be pretty loose about allowing for rerolls. You're filling in some last gaps, it's ok to fish for something you're excited about.

Once you've finished, take a moment to review the Details you've defined. Look for connections between Details that may not have been obvious at first. Take note of any questions you might still have. Discuss anything left unsaid by these Details, and decide if these are spaces you want to fill or leave hanging. Once everyone is satisfied, you're done!



The Tables

In the following pages are the Detail tables. Simply use your random number generator to select a Detail.

The Significance Table – An optional addition is to determine a Significance to go along with your Detail. This will give you a little more to go on when describing your Detail, and can push the seemingly innocuous into the spotlight. This is two sided, however. Sometimes it's more satisfying to leave background Details as just that. Use as you see fit.

Details

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.....Vineyards | 8.....Vacations |
| 2.....Field guides | 9.....Musical Instruments |
| 3.....Museums | 10.....Pets |
| 4.....Desserts | 11.....Furniture |
| 5.....Alcohol | 12.....Painting |
| 6.....Snacks | 13.....Sculpture |
| 7.....Cutlery | 14.....Glassware |

15.....House plants
16.....Architecture
17.....School spirit
18.....Houses of worship
19.....Health care
20.....Mirrors
21.....Sports
22.....Board games
23.....Spices
24.....Tea
25.....Word games
26.....Puzzles
27.....Teachers
28.....Restaurants
29.....Toys
30.....Public transit
31.....Day care
32.....Celebrity
33.....Fast food
34.....Waste disposal
35.....Street food
36.....Windows
37.....Staircases
38.....Elevators

39.....Secret codes
40.....Gloves
41.....Scarves
42.....Warm clothing
43.....Swimming pools
44.....Bathing suits
45.....Construction equipment
46.....Roads
47.....Bridges
48.....Rocking chairs
49.....Walking sticks
50.....Hair styles
51.....Beards
52.....Conspiracy theories
53.....Theatre
54.....Higher education



- 55.....Pests
- 56.....Radio djs/hosts
- 57.....Punditry
- 58.....Lobbyists
- 59.....Dancing
- 60.....Comic books
- 61.....Broken things
- 62.....Flags
- 63.....Tourism
- 64.....Bird watching
- 65.....Dietary restrictions
- 66.....Census
- 67.....Hotels
- 68.....Insect repellent
- 69.....Agriculture
- 70.....Paddocks
- 71.....Locks and keys
- 72.....Makeup
- 73.....Tattoos
- 74.....Medicine
- 75.....Bread
- 76.....Fruit salads
- 77.....Dating
- 78.....Gossip
- 79.....Perfume
- 80.....Jewelry
- 81.....Physical education
- 82.....Berries
- 83.....Libraries
- 84.....Lawn games
- 85.....Picnics
- 86.....Pro sports
- 87.....Tea shops
- 88.....Culinary school
- 89.....Pottery
- 90.....Farming
- 91.....Factories
- 92.....Shoes
- 93.....Slang
- 94.....Picky eaters
- 95.....Allergies
- 96.....Shipping
- 97.....Balloons
- 98.....Embroidery
- 99.....Patches
- 100.....Forestry
- 101.....Resource interpretation
- 102.....Gardening

103.....	Burial rites	127.....	Spiritual Leadership
104.....	Card games	128.....	Surveying
105.....	Literacy	129.....	Archives
106.....	Therapy	130.....	Family portraits
107.....	Friendship	131.....	Public land
108.....	Animal husbandry	132.....	Lawns
109.....	Magic	133.....	Novels
110.....	Idioms	134.....	Lawyers
111.....	Puppetry	135.....	News
112.....	Masks	136.....	Wild Animals
113.....	Sanitizers	137.....	Chiropractors
114.....	Concerts	138.....	Second hand items
115.....	Poetry	139.....	Market stalls
116.....	Media Criticism	140.....	Landlords
117.....	Fishing	141.....	Activists
118.....	Astronomy	142.....	Sunsets
119.....	Medals	143.....	Anthems
120.....	Holidays	144.....	Bells
121.....	Ecology	145.....	The passage of the seasons
122.....	Road work	146.....	Clocks
123.....	Mutual Aid	147.....	Grudges
124.....	Charity	148.....	Lists
125.....	Tutoring	149.....	Loveletters
126.....	Escapism	150.....	Collections

Significance

- 1.....How is this Detail important to everyday living?
- 2.....Some people feel very differently about this Detail than others. Why?
- 3.....How is this Detail a symbol of status?
- 4.....How is this Detail quietly ubiquitous?
- 5.....How is this Detail vital to social life?
- 6.....Why is this Detail conspicuously absent?
- 7.....How is this Detail tied to political power?
- 8.....How is this Detail related to fun or recreation?
- 9.....How do people leverage this Detail to get what they want?
- 10.....How is this Detail important to personal identity?
- 11.....How is this Detail hotly contested or fought over?
- 12.....What are the artistic merits of this Detail?
- 13.....How has this Detail changed over time?
- 14.....Who invented this Detail or made it commonplace?
- 15.....How is this Detail essential to the setting's infrastructure?
- 16.....How is this Detail tied to belief or celebration?
- 17.....Who is actively promoting this Detail, and/or who is trying to suppress it?
- 18.....How does this Detail relate to nature?
- 19.....Where is this detail scarce, and/or where is it common?
- 20.....When was this detail introduced or invented?

Acknowledgements

The People – A huge thank you all my friends for helping me playtest this. Thank you to the Dawniverse; Hiraeth, David, and Kylan for help with the Locations, with layout, and for seeing this game through from the start. Thank you to my good good friends Rosie and David for exploring the Significance table and helping me iron it out. And finally, a huge thank you to Jonathan for his fantastic art.

The Games – This game would not exist without the many great worldbuilding RPGs I have played before.

i'm sorry did you say street magic by Caro Asercion (<https://seaexcursion.itch.io/street-magic>)

Dialect by Thorny Games (<https://thornygames.com/pages/dialect>)

Microscope by Ben Robbins (<http://www.lamemage.com/microscope/>)

The Podcasts – I first had the idea for Detail during an episode of Critical Hit by the Major Spoilers Podcast Network (<http://majorspoilers.com/>), and I ascribe this type of detailed worldbuilding to Rodrigo Lopez (@fearsomecritter).

Friends at the Table (<https://friendsatthetable.net/>) has had a huge influence on how I look at roleplaying games and narrative more broadly. Thanks friends!

This game about creating and fabricating worlds was designed on lands that rightfully belong to the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Boonwurrung people, and the Aboriginal people of Tasmania.

