Player agency

Although it will be necessary to have read further chapters to fully grasp the mechanics and implications of **Player agency** - and how to implement it - it is worthwhile at this point to introduce the concept. Doing so allows us to emphasise a fundamental principle of The Teller System that the previous chapter may have partially obscured.

In The Teller System, unlike traditional RPGs where a Games Master guides the narrative or resolves events through mechanical systems, authority over the emerging story is shifted to the Players themselves (and, to a degree, the Fate). The Players are not just participants within the world - they are responsible for shaping the story as it unfolds.

Just as characters exhibit agency *within* the story environment, Players exercise agency *over* the story environment. This leads us to the distinction between two levels of authenticity: the truth of character, and the truth of contribution.

Two levels of authenticity

Player Agency in The Teller System rests on two interconnected expressions of authenticity:

Authenticity of Character
This is the internal truth of play: how a Player expresses their character's emotional, psychological, and interpersonal truth. It governs speech, reaction, and interaction *within* the emerging story.

Authenticity of Manipulation
This is the external authorship of story: how a Player, as a Player, reshapes or contributes to the environment or story world. It governs how new elements—NPCs, discoveries, flashbacks, setting details—are introduced *into* the story.

While the Teller provides tone and framing, Players can (and should) manipulate the environment authentically, meaning:

- Within the logic of the world

- In service to tone and narrative

- In ways that are satisfying, plausible, and coherent from a storytelling perspective

A character can change the world, but only as that character would. A Player can shape the world as an act of collaborative authorship. Events evolve not because the Teller narrates what happens, but because Players co-create what happens, together. The Teller provides the environment and tone. But the plot—the chain of cause and effect - is forged in real time by the Players.

In the previous chapter the concepts of calling time and event framing by the Teller may have given the impression that it is the Teller who is guiding the emerging story but this should not be the case. Any calling of time and subsequent event framing should be in service, and remain sensitive to, the emerging story that is being generated by the Players. In other words it is the role of the Teller to facilitate Player Agency and reinforce the direction and momentum of the story based on the Players' intent.

No turns, no order - just Story

As briefly mentioned at the beginning of the 'Overview', in The Teller System, there are no turns. There is no initiative order, no waiting to act, no mechanically enforced sequence of play. The story is not passed around like a baton—it flows, emerging organically from the characters, the tone, and the situation at hand.

This does not mean chaos. It means **responsiveness**. Players *must* listen to one another, anticipate, interrupt, pause,

escalate, reflect - all in real time. If you feel your character would speak, act, or shift focus, you do it - provided it remains authentic and within tone.

Rather than a turn order, what governs flow and momentum is emotional rhythm, collaborative respect, and the shared awareness of the moment's dramatic tension.

Similarly as a Player, if you feel the story requires something additional you introduce it.

The Power to Introduce

Players are not restricted to reacting in-character. They may also introduce elements into the world - NPCs, memories, sudden intrusions, clues, hazards, or environmental changes - so long as these additions are:

- Tonally appropriate to the event

- Coherently situated within the story logic

- Plausible and satisfying

This might include:

- Deciding that the hidden map is sewn into the lining of an old overcoat in the attic

- Creating an NPC neighbour who remembers the house's secrets

- Suggesting that the storm outside causes the power to flicker, revealing something hidden in ultraviolet ink

Such contributions are not about character knowledge or intention - they are Player-level decisions that shape the arc of the story and maintain its momentum. Player Agency is about adding the right piece at the right moment - not for

the character, but for the story. How they do this can be found in more detail in sections 5 & 12.

Shared Ownership of Story

Once an event has begun, the Teller does not direct the story. The Players do. Every moment is a negotiation of presence, voice, and intent - at both the character and Player meta-level. The Teller may observe, guide tone, or call time, but they are not the driver of the story.

This does not mean Players should dominate an event. It means they must work together to maintain cohesion. Story emerges when every Player contributes with awareness and authenticity. Agency is not the freedom to do whatever you want - it is the responsibility to collaboratively evolve the fiction in ways that feel earned, grounded, and resonant.

The Weight of Player Choice

Because there are no dice to fall back on, every choice a Player makes carries full weight. A single decision, even if not tied to a character action, can:

- Alter the objective of the group

- Trigger a shift in tone

- Reframe an event mid-way through

- Invite the Fate to act (for example as an NPC)

- Reshape the environment

This is the everyday substance of Teller play.

Responsibility and Restraint

With this agency comes an implicit responsibility:

- To act within tone

- To honour the emotional reality of the scene

- To support the story as a collaborative act

A Player who derails tone for a joke, or overrides other characters' choices, is not exercising agency—they are disrupting flow. True agency in The Teller System is inseparable from **stewardship**.

Player-Led Emergence

At its heart, The Teller System trusts the Players to collectively explore the unpredictable space between character and world. Everything that emerges - every twist, heartbreak, failure, or revelation - belongs to them.

That is agency.