# An 'event': the basic building block of play

The Teller System is an event-driven role-playing framework where Players take control of the story, shaping it through dialogue and authentic character interaction. The system emphasises **shared imagination** and **improvisation**, and has been designed with a focus on building cohesive, emotionally resonant stories without the need for traditional game mechanics – though this level of depth does not always need to be present.

In the Teller System **events** form the fundamental basis of play. An event is classified as a self-contained moment where participants collectively explore situations, and character interactions. There are no dice rolls, and generally no predefined outcomes; instead, the experience is shaped by imagination, dialogue, **and a shared commitment to authenticity**.

Each event begins with the establishing of **environment** and **tone** [usually by the Teller] called **event framing, which** provides a shared foundation for the group's imagination. The environment typically delineates the physical and sensory space - what the characters can see, hear, smell, and feel - while tone conveys the emotional and psychological undercurrent that shapes the experience. These elements create a **story logic** which helps **situate the character**, giving Players enough context to respond authentically, provided they understand their characters.

Once environment and tone are in place, events unfold primarily through improvised Player interaction, with the Teller watching carefully, adjudicating narrative consistency and authenticity and, along with the Fate, occasionally nudging things in certain directions where and when appropriate.

Each event, therefore, is a focused moment of shared storytelling, with a clear beginning. The goal of each event [from the perspective of play] is generally not to achieve a specific outcome but to explore the situation as authentically as possible, allowing the story to evolve in a natural organic way, with Players being ultimately in control of the emergent story. This being said, it is the Teller who ultimately **calls time** on the event (see page xx) when it appears to have reached a natural conclusion or its purpose has been fulfilled.

EVENT FRAME

ENVIRONMENT

EVENT

SITUATION OF
CHARACTER

AUTHENTIC
IMPROVISATION
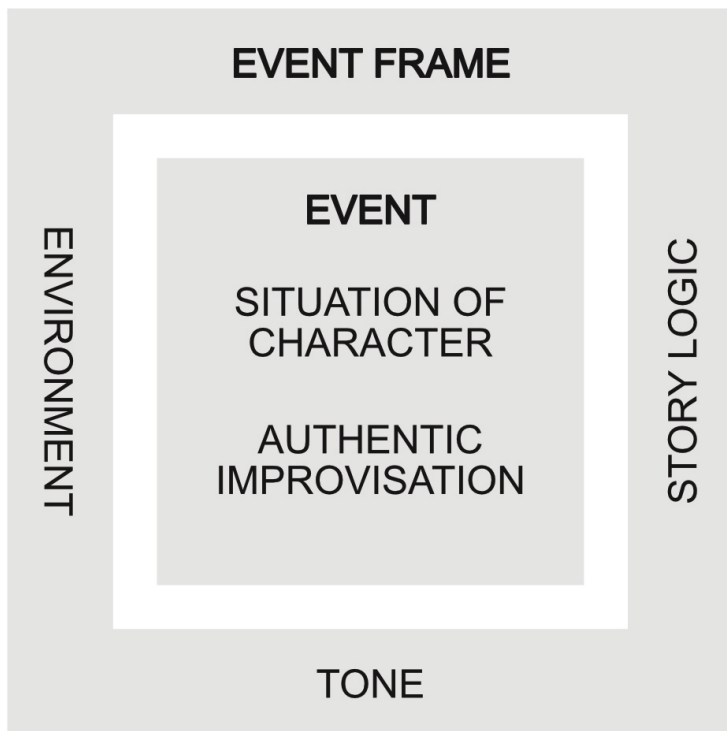
STORY LOGIC

TONE

An **event frame**: a short piece of descriptive text that establishes the environment, tone, and the underlying story logic. This is typically read out/orated by the Teller to the Players (though in certain circumstances may require the use of the Fate and Players if specific character interactions are required within the description).

Event framing: starting play

So as to make things more concrete, let us give two contrasting examples of event frames, both from campaign settings written specifically for the Teller System. The first is from *Alien Overlords: Invasion - The fall of Echo City*, an irreverent, black comedy, slapstick, cartoonish sci-fi.

City Zone: CLOUD-GATE BRIDGE & THE VISTA

The Cloud-Gate Bridge is Echo City's most iconic modern structure: a sweeping suspension bridge of glimmering alloy arcs, designed to emulate the shape of ocean spray frozen in time. Spanning the **Echo Bay** inlet, it offers not only a vital transport link but a tourist experience in its own right.

At the halfway point stands the **Cloud-Gate Vista Platform**— a semi-circular observation deck complete with:

- A small upper-level car park,
- Public toilets of questionable cleanliness, and a tourist boutique & cafe,
- A popular cluster of gourmet food trucks operating under the banner "Cloud Dining." serving everything from artisan tacos to nitrogen-dipped pastries, and Flippy-themed fish sticks ("Dolphin Candy") - particularly well-loved by the under-sevens.
- A small souvenir kiosk selling postcards, Thunderhawk keychains & Thwack-bats, and inflatable Flippys in three sizes.

Activities Of Note:

Bay Dive - The Cloud-Gate bungee experience. Cast yourself (or a family member) into the void.

Suicide Selfie - Walk the plank (with safety chain & anklet) to obtain the ultimate danger-pose selfie.

Location: Cloud Gate Bridge (3:57 pm)
Event Frame: Holiday from Hell

"Through the windshield, the family gets a perfect cinematic view of the dark ocean below—a view that is interrupted only by the motorcyclist still slowly flailing on the hood - blood dripping through his cracked visor as he clings desperately to the windscreen wiper, emitting increasingly wet gurgles.

From the point of view of said motorcyclist all he can see, staring at him from the back seat of the SUV, are the crazed, lifeless eyes of an inflatable dolphin bearing silent vinyl witness to his last few moments of existence - eyes that seem to bore into his soul with judgmental malice and say: "Yes - your whole life was a mistake…"

A seagull alights on the bonnet of the car and, for a brief, horrified moment, no one moves. Then, the screeching of metal against metal, as the barrier slowly buckles and the car begins to dip dangerously forward…

Someone, whispers the obvious: "We need to lose some weight…or we're all going to die."

Everyone stares at the motorcyclist and then at the windscreen wiper control leaver.

Flippy the Inflatable Dolphin lets out a comically prolonged wheeze, deflating like a punctured lung, as his mutant fin is subconsciously squeezed, issuing another asinine sound bite:

"Let's go swimming!"

The wipers swish, the seagull flies off with a caw, and the screams of the motorcyclist, as he plunges to his certain death hundreds of meters below, blends in with the screams of others running doo-lally upon Cloud-Gate Bridge - apparently, it would seem, dodging laser beams, and giant mechanical claws.

From across the bay a sickly green mist billows out from the mothership that hovers low over the skyscraper skyline, a mist that rolls over the city and begins surging towards the bridge like a tidal wave of industrial-strength mouthwash.

All within the car stare dumbfounded in silence, transfixed by the unfolding events…but rudely brought back to the moment as a googly eyed hover helmet bangs suddenly against the rear driver side window, and the child, faced pressed against the glass and holding Flippy, screams involuntarily, startled backwards in fright, squeezing Flippy's fin again in the process.

"Let's get out of here before the sharks come!"

The helmet bounces a second time then, seemingly sensing a hapless victim elsewhere, zooms off.

The parents in the front turn to stare at each other, a certain accusational glare fomenting in one of their sets of eyes: "I told you this holiday was a mistake!"

The second event frame is taken from **The Ruins of Volduron** which could be described as a serious grimdark, horror-inflected fantasy, set in a highly detailed world with a well defined narrative*.

Event Frame: Poisonous Vapours

"The stench of decay has not lifted. If anything, it has thickened, curdled into something new, something worse. What once was water at your feet, has become a sluggish, oily black mire which with each step threatens to unbalance you as it clings to your sinking ankles. You pull up your feet with a slurp and watch as a couple of feet in front of you the muddy gloop seems to expand slightly, before rupturing and falling backwards, burping forth a pale green vapour that curls upwards, swirling and unfurling into the air. You catch a faint whiff of something acrid - a chemical tang that causes your nostrils to sting slightly, followed by a slight itching of the eyes which you try to relieve with the back swipe of a hand. And that's when you notice them...

Clumps, dangling from the uneven, stone ceiling above, clusters of slightly swaying tendril like masses, some dark bloated and swollen as thick as a wrist, others thin like fingers and slightly paler. All ending in a a pulsating mouth filled with what look like tiny hairs.

They are everywhere.

One of them detaches suddenly, a fat, wet mass, dropping into the water with a dull plop.

Your mind recoils at the thought of the water potentially full of these things but then, another realisation settles in: the vapours are pooling. The air is getting worse. If the torches stay lit...that might spell the end for everyone."

Via quick comparison one should ascertain immediately the difference in tone between the two event frames and therefore the implied expectation of character behaviour within each environment. For example one might easily see the facility for the story logic to allow a character to be comedically flying through the air on an exploding gas canister in *Holiday from Hell,* as opposed to slipping into a mindset of paranoia and clawing claustrophobic fear in *Poisonous Vapours*. In other words one should get the sense of the possibility that if Players were presented with either

of these contexts, with a sufficient understanding of their characters, they should be able to begin interacting authentically - both with the environment and with each other.