

HOW'S THE WEATHER?

USING WEATHER AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN RPGS



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KEEPING WEATHER REAL IN TTRPGs

It happens to every game master... out of nowhere, a player asks one of those few questions for which the game master never seems to have an answer: What's the weather like? This often comes when the player plans to cast a spell that interacts with the weather, but if a game master knows the answer to that question, they can benefit even more than just being able to answer it. Weather can add flavor to any adventure, has a mechanical impact on the game, such as affecting visibility, and can create complications for actions like chases and overland travel.

When the question of weather arises, most game masters will give the first answer that comes to mind, most often "clear" if it hasn't been previously described. And if the players don't mind this kind of off-the-cuff response, that's fine. For some players, though, knowing the weather helps with immersion, and if the weather seems to change in realistic ways, it goes a step further. But not every game master is a trained meteorologist, so most settle for assuming that weather works like it does where they live, which is also a perfectly acceptable response.

And while there are no meteorologists here either, the system presented here was created with meteorological advice. This system helps to guide game masters with insight into how one day's weather affects the next, as well as how other aspects, such as climate, season, and even local relative humidity, can affect the weather. Of course, not every game master has all of those details about their game world, but even incorporating one or two of these ideas into the determination of weather will help make it feel more realistic for their players.

TYPES OF WEATHER

Before looking at a system for choosing and evolving weather, the game master must first understand the different types of weather available to them. For this system, the weather is broken down into ten basic conditions.

PRECIPITATION

Precipitation comes in five forms:

- **Light Precipitation:** gentle rain or snow flurries
- **Moderate Precipitation:** a typical rainy day or light snow
- **Heavy Precipitation:** torrential downpours or heavy snow
- **Storms:** such as thunderstorms or mild blizzards
- **Dangerous Storms:** hurricanes, tornados, or blizzards

Rules for the high precipitation and strong winds that result from such weather can be found in the *Game Master's Core Rulebook*.

WEATHER WITHOUT PRECIPITATION

Weather without precipitation comes in four forms:

- **Overcast:** the sun is hidden, and the gray skies threaten rain or snow.
- **Partly Cloudy:** clouds are in the sky in various degrees but with some clear blue.
- **Clear:** there isn't a cloud in the sky.
- **Intense:** the sun is so bright that the temperature is higher than expected for a clear day.

WEIRD WEATHER

And finally, the tenth category type of weather is just "weird weather" that doesn't exist in the real world but would occur in a world of fantasy or science fiction.

Natural disasters such as tsunamis and wildfires are not weather and are not included as part of this system, though a game master could easily incorporate such events when considering dangerous storms and intense heat.

One thing that should be considered when determining weather is how one day's weather affects the next. Overcast skies can give way to clear skies or heavy rain, and clear skies rarely lead directly into storms — though it's by no means impossible — and heavy rain often breaks the clouds and leads to clear skies, while light rain often seems to go on for days. On the Weather table below, this influence is represented by a modifier given to adjust the weather on the following day if the game master intends to determine the weather randomly. Alternatively, these modifiers can provide the game master with inspiration for how the weather evolves if they choose to select the weather less randomly.



CLIMATE

But the day's weather isn't the only thing affecting the next day. The most significant driver of weather is the climate of a region. No system can include every possible climate and sub-climate, but the one presented here incorporates the most common overarching climates with considerations for the proximity of large bodies of water.

The colder climate types are identified as **arctic** (Antarctica), **subarctic** (most of Greenland and northern Canada), and **cool temperate** (southern Canada and New England in the United States).

The hotter climates are identified as **tropical** (northern reaches of South America and central Africa), **subtropical** (much of Mexico and southeast Asia), and **warm temperate** (the southern United States and the Middle East).

The final common climate is **continental**, which encompasses the zones that border cool and warm temperate regions. This system additionally incorporates **coastal regions** bordering oceans and seas and oceanic areas for when characters are sailing across the seas.

And finally, regions identified as **wastelands** are parts of other climates devastated by unnatural disasters such as magical apocalypses and nuclear holocausts, where the climate has been dramatically altered from that around it.

The Climate table provides modifiers for use when randomly determining the weather. These modifiers are generally only used when deciding the initial weather for an area. However, they can also be used when the seasons change, characters move from one climate to another, or the game master forgets to track weather for a while and needs a fresh start. For game masters that prefer a less random determination of weather, the modifiers can inspire determining initial weather based on the types of weather that appear more likely in those climates.

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

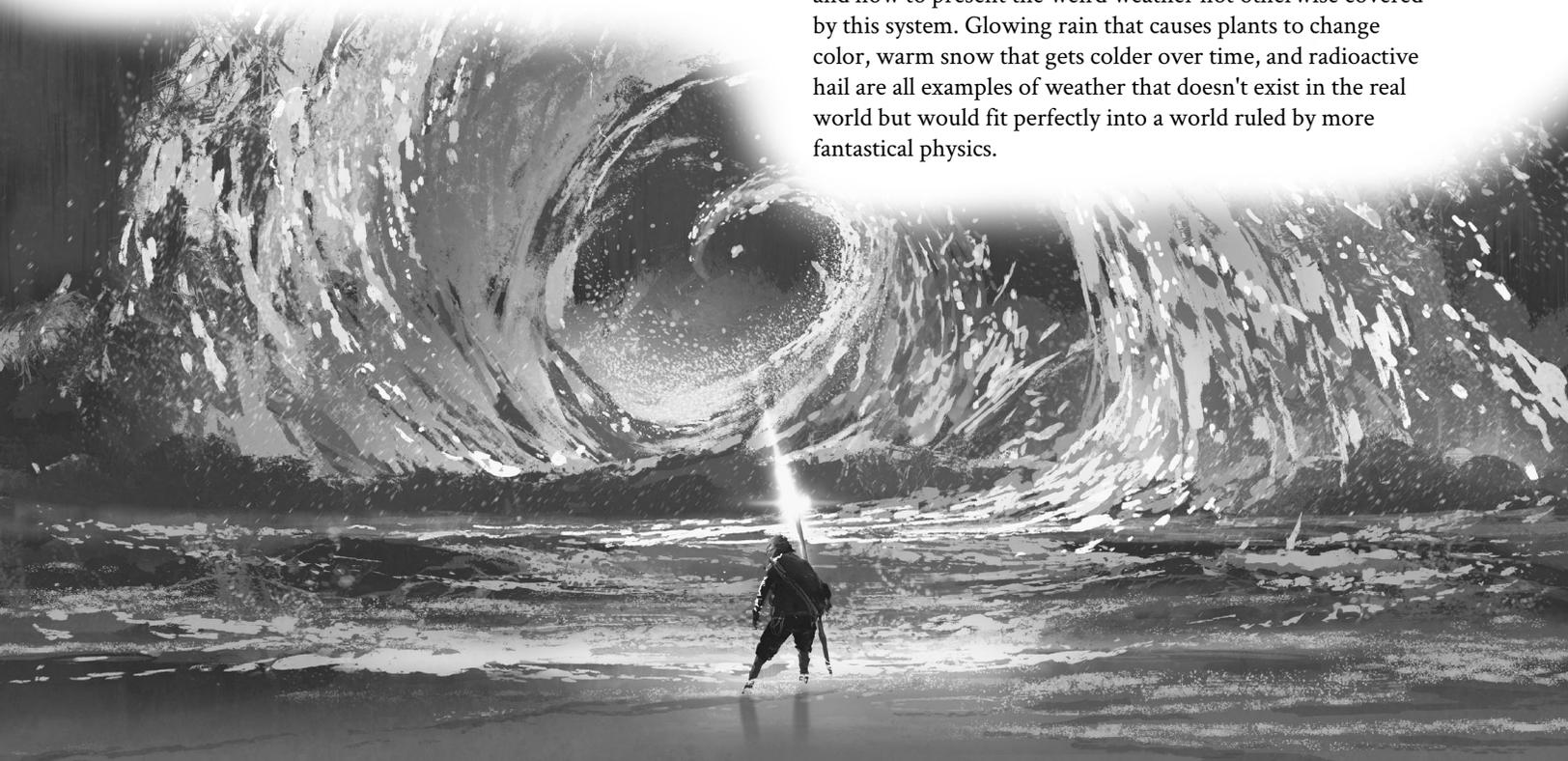
Two other primary factors influence the weather, the seasons and the humidity relative to the locality. The first of these is easy to understand since most game masters live in parts of the world that experience a change of seasons. Winter, spring, summer, and autumn all bring with them weather phenomena that are more common than in other parts of the year. Spring tends to bring precipitation, and summer tends to be drier.

Local relative humidity may be a bit more obscure, but it is easier to understand concerning what most game masters consider types of terrain. Swamps and rainforests tend to have high relative humidities, while deserts and glacial areas tend to be on the lower side. Other forms of terrain vary significantly in relative humidity, but more extreme climates tend to be more arid or wet, while more moderate climates have more moderate humidity levels.

Like climate, the Season and Local Relative Humidity tables provide modifiers for determining the weather. The local relative humidity modifiers are generally used when determining the initial weather, while the modifiers for the season can affect the changes in the weather from day to day. As was said with climate, both of these modifiers can be used when seasons change, characters move between regions, or game masters want a fresh start or want to mix things up. After all, even realistic weather can be unpredictable from time to time. And, of course, game masters that prefer to keep things less random can use the modifiers for inspiration to make their weather evolve naturally.

THE WEIRD STUFF

Finally, to make a fantasy or science fiction world seem genuinely fantastic, the game master should consider when and how to present the weird weather not otherwise covered by this system. Glowing rain that causes plants to change color, warm snow that gets colder over time, and radioactive hail are all examples of weather that doesn't exist in the real world but would fit perfectly into a world ruled by more fantastical physics.



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The system for determining the weather is a simple mechanic of choosing the initial weather and then tracking the weather are very simple. When determining the initial weather, add the modifiers for Climate, Season, and Humidity, add them together, and use them to modify a d20 roll on the Weather table. Then for each day that the game master wishes to track, make a new d20 roll modified by the modifier on the Weather table added to the modifier for the Season.

It's that simple. When the seasons change, or whenever the game master needs a fresh start, the initial weather should be rolled again, and the continuation of weather from day to day is tracked accordingly. The game masters should remember that weather doesn't always change at midnight, so knowing the weather for the next day and the previous day can allow them to present a natural, realistic transition from one weather situation to another as each day progresses.

d20	Weather	Modifier
< -3	Dangerous Storm*	+3
-3 - 0	Storm*	+2
1 - 2	Heavy Precipitation*	+2
3 - 4	Moderate Precipitation*	+1
5 - 8	Light Precipitation*	+1
9 - 12	Overcast	-1
13 - 17	Partly Cloudy	-1
18 - 22	Clear	0
> 22	Intense Heat	+1

**The type of precipitation depends on the temperature.*

Weather can be unpredictable, and in some climates and terrains, it might be similarly common to have intense heat or dangerous storms. However, to make the progression of weather more realistic when modeling changes in weather over time, it's necessary to have storms and intense heat on opposite ends of the table. So what does a game master do if they want to make a heatwave end with a storm? The answer is simple: ignore the table and do it. The table is here as a guide, but even the best meteorologist recognizes that sometimes Mother Nature does what Mother Nature wants. No system can perfectly replicate it all the time.

Precipitation can be rain, snow, or just intense humidity. The *Game Master's Core Rulebook* has rules on things like high winds and visibility in precipitation that will help a game master apply mechanical effects to such conditions. Cloudy and clear conditions rarely affect the game mechanically, but extreme heat and cold can. These conditions are also covered in the Core Rules.

Keep in mind, though, that extreme weather is relative. Temperatures over 100 degrees are intense in a Cool Temperate climate, but it's just part of life in an arid subtropical region. A result of "intense heat" should be intense for the region, and in some places, intense heat shouldn't be that big of a hindrance... and in areas like the arctic, it can reduce the threat of extreme cold for a short time.

Climate	Modifier
Arctic	+1
Subarctic	0
Cool Temperate	0
Continental	-1
Warm Temperate	0
Subtropical	-2
Tropical	-3
Coastal	-1
Oceanic	-2
Wasteland	-3

The climates represented in the above table are mostly those that make up the real world. Wasteland is often associated with a post-apocalyptic landscape, but it can also include things like salt flats or a broken, cracked landscape that was once a lake before arid temperatures dried it.

Keep in mind that climate is *not* the same as terrain. In any climate, things like deserts and swamps are created by relative humidity, and mountains are just as common in arctic terrain as in the tropics or continental climates. While rainforests are most often associated with the tropics, there are examples of rainforests even in cool temperate climates on Earth. Even so, the game master may want to adjust the climate based on certain elements, such as the altitude among mountain peaks, which can make a warm temperate climate seem subarctic.

Season	Modifier
Winter	-1
Spring	-2
Summer	+/-2
Autumn	0

The seasons influence the weather, with winter and spring having the most precipitation and autumn and summer being less damp. And while summer storms can be violent, they're usually short and less common but highly memorable. Hurricane season tends toward early-to-mid spring and very late summer. Peak blizzard season is winter and, in some climates, early spring. But a game master shouldn't let the season table prevent a weather condition from happening if they want it to happen.

And in some parts of the world, the seasons affect the weather differently. This table was created with the northern hemisphere in mind in the middling latitudes where summer would produce a more positive modifier. The closer to the equator a person gets, the more like that summer's heat may bring nasty storms, so in those cases, summer should provide a negative modifier rather than a positive. Because of this, the summer modifier is plus or minus, and the decision to use plus or minus is entirely up to the game master. As a recommendation, however, the direction of the modifier is most likely to be the same as the positive or negative modifier for local relative humidity.

Local Relative Humidity	Modifier
Arid (Desert)	+2
Low	+1
Moderate	0
High	-1
Wet (Wetlands)	-2

There are places on Earth where the relative humidity shifts, but for the most part, relative humidity is usually consistent in a region. And while it may be common to associate deserts and wetlands with warm regions, they're also common in cooler temperatures. Many glaciers are considered arid because the air is so cold and dry that it never snows, even though people in the area are walking around on the ice.

Weather is unpredictable, so no mechanical system can be made to model it perfectly. And while this system was created so game masters can more realistically model and track weather, the game master should also throw in some random and surprising weather now and then.

Tracking weather requires a little work on the game master's part, and while it's certainly not essential to track weather to this degree of detail, it can help with player immersion and make the game world feel truly alive. And the next time the druid asks, "What's the weather like," you'll be ready.



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