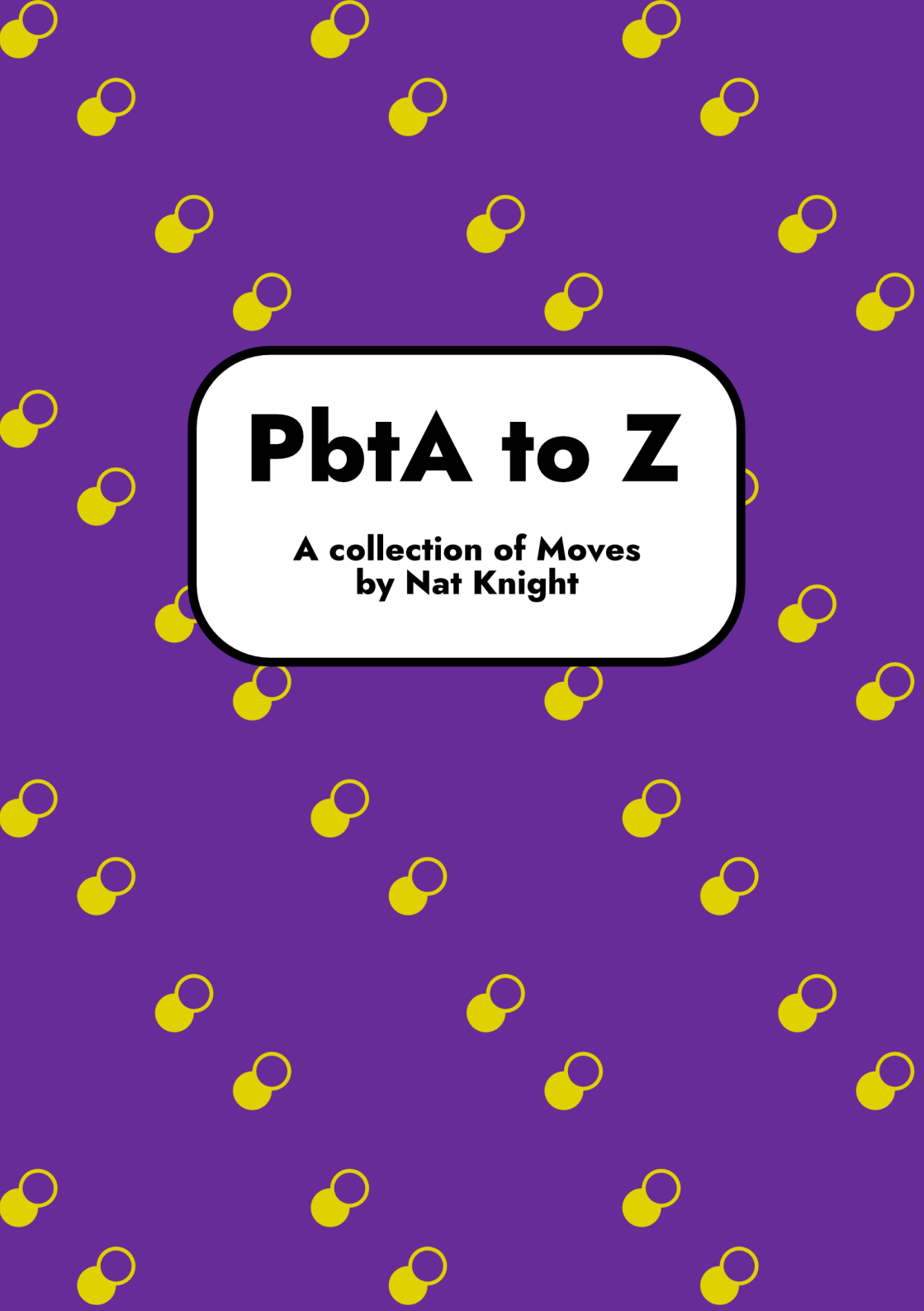


The background is a solid purple color. It is decorated with a repeating pattern of yellow circles. Each circle is split vertically: the left half is a solid yellow circle, and the right half is an empty yellow outline. These circles are scattered across the entire page.

PbtA to Z

**A collection of Moves
by Nat Knight**

PbtA to Z: A Move Anthology

By Nat Knight

This is a collection of Powered by the Apocalypse moves: rules or procedures that could fit into the tabletop roleplaying game *Apocalypse World* or one of its myriad descendants.

Each move is inspired by things that were meaningful to me: books I stayed up all night to finish, games that found me at exactly the right time, movies that touched me for one reason or another, etc. There's one entry for each letter of the alphabet.

It was written for the *Making Moves* jam, which was run by Plus One Exp, Aaron King, and Keegan for all of 2026.

The tone varies from somewhat serious mechanical procedures and poetic condensations to inside jokes and silly bundles of memes. It's more an exercise in writing and adaptation than something you'd actually use in play, but if you want to use one in your game I think that's great.

There's an appendix at the end that explains some common PbtA terminology.

The idea of a PbtA move anthology came from Aaron King's anthologies *Reading the Apocalypse* and *Game Genie Apocalypse*. Everything I learned about writing moves comes from Vincent Baker's blog. I also take pretty direct inspiration from *Pasión de las Pasiones* by Brandon Leon-Gambetta and *Oddworld* by Max Lander.

"One entry per letter" comes, of course, from the many, many such books I've read with my kids.

Air Superiority

Inspired by the video game *Alpha Centauri*.

When your faction discovers how to sidestep the 100-million year production process of fossil fuels, roll +Research.

On any hit, you develop DOCTRINE: AIR POWER and can hereafter build and deploy needlejet units.

On a strong hit you benefit from a period of air superiority over your adversaries. Your needlejets take +1 in combat during the first vendetta where you deploy them against an enemy faction.

On a miss, your research is fruitless. Make a different discovery before attempting this one again.

Collegial Cryptography

Inspired by codebreaking at Bletchley Park.

When you attempt to crack intercepted communications protected by a novel cryptographic system, roll -the number of tumblers it employs.

On a miss, your efforts are frustrated.

On a hit, you do not recover anything, but gain some insight. Take +1 to all future attempts to break *this* cryptographic system.

How did you gain insight?

- gruelling systematic analysis
- sheer inspiration
- materials recovered from the adversary
- sloppiness from enemy operators

On a strong hit you crack the system. With effort, you can now decrypt intercepted messages.

Polaris Lost

Inspired by the video game *Control*.

THIS MOVE MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

Once you realize that the comforting, alien, geometric presence that has been with you since you were eleven is not a source but a catalyst, take +1 ongoing when acting against hostile extradimensional intruders.

Its Power Seems Inescapable

Inspired by *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. Le Guin.

When your survival, wellbeing, or life's work depends on a profiteer or a hierarchy—no matter how subtle—choose one:

- Find a position in the hierarchy or a way to transact.
- Accept the risks and operate by force, guile, or beggary.
- Stay true to your ideals and do without.

Through the Postern

Inspired by the play *Equivocation* by Bill Cain.

When James demands thee play a history
Of treason fresh and men set to be hanged
Instead of ancient deeds, thy usual fare,
And thou uncover rank conspiracy
To speak of which a traitor would make thee
To know thy fate roll with these questions three:

- Hast thou forgotten that which thou canst lose?
- Hast thou a need his coin could satisfy?
- Know thee the sum of what the King has done?

On ten or more thy play's intent's too plain;
Into the dungeon, then on gallows dance.

On six or less thy courage comes up short;
Thy spirit and thy quill stir never more.

But on a seven, eight, or nine, Oh then!
Thy play will tell the measure of this man
And in the telling bind his hands so that
To raise them against thee were as to show
The blood of all the murdered souls they bear.

Time Dilation

Inspired by *The Forever War* by Joe Haldeman.

When you embark on a mission that will involve enough space travel to incur time dilation effects, roll 1d6.

On a 5 or 6, when you encounter your adversaries their equipment is centuries out of date. They cannot meaningfully oppose you.

On a 3 or 4, you find your adversaries are about evenly matched. Proceed with caution.

On a 1 or 2 you are faced with capabilities you cannot even understand, let alone oppose. Prepare for the worst even if you retreat immediately.

Wait a minute...

Inspired by *The Good Place*.

THIS MOVE MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

Your Dissonance starts at 0.

When you interrogate the utopian afterlife, roll
+Dissonance.

On a hit, set your Dissonance to 0 and choose one.

- The Powers That Be take no notice of your investigation and the next activity proceeds smoothly.
- You may ask the Architect one question; they must reply in good faith.
- You may ask an NPC a question; they will reply however the fiction demands.

On a 12+ you deduce the truth.

On a miss, prepare for the worst but gain +1 Dissonance.

Oorah!

Inspired by *Halo: Combat Evolved*.

When you engage enemy forces with a squad of fragile allies, roll.

On a hit, the MC will describe how they provide flanking, a distraction, or are otherwise helpful. Take +1 to a roll during the engagement.

On a strong hit they also all survive the engagement.

On a miss the MC chooses one:

- They take heavy losses. If they've already taken heavy losses they're wiped out instead.
- They get in the way or endanger you; take -1 to a roll during the engagement.

After an engagement where an ally is killed you may take a piece of equipment they were carrying or salvage supplies from your fallen comrade to restore two uses on an existing piece of equipment.

Weigh a Piece

Inspired by the board game *Isle of Skye*.

When you judge what something is worth to your adversaries, roll +Sharp.

On a hit, choose one. On a strong hit choose two.

- You may ask the MC what an adversary values most in an exchange; they must answer truthfully.
- You conceal what's valuable to you from your adversaries.
- You find a second good option in case your preferred trade doesn't pan out.
- You find a bargain; pay one less barter in your next trade.

On a miss you've misjudged your position or revealed too much. Pay two more in your next exchange.

Statement of Dissent

Inspired by the video game *Jet Set Radio Future*.

When you release the soul of the street that has collected in your heart, roll +Hot.

On a hit you create art that expresses your culture and infuriates your rivals and would-be oppressors.

On a strong hit, choose one:

- You provoke a reaction from a rival; the DJ will tell you who.
- Your art disables or destroys any instruments of oppression that it's applied to.

On a miss, your heart is empty. You can't make this move again until you spend time refilling it.

Separation of Powers

Inspired by the RPG *Kingdom* by Ben Robbins.

When your community is at a crossroads you may choose one:

- You direct the community's activity with legitimate authority.
- You understand your community and its situation and can make accurate predictions about it.
- You're in touch with the community as a whole and know what its members think and want.

Grace Under Pressure

Inspired by *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* by Becky Chambers.

When you use empathy and knowledge of culture, history, or law to navigate a charged situation, roll +Sharp.

On a hit, choose two. On a strong hit choose as many as you want.

- You can deescalate potential violence.
- Any losses you incur will be made whole.
- You can override a local law or custom with a galactic one, or vice versa.
- You and everyone you're trying to help avoid lasting consequences.

Love in Idleness

Inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

When you on sleeping eyelids lay the juice
of western flowers where th' bolt of Cupid fell,
before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
the target will begin to madly dote
upon the next live creature that it sees.

More of a Tinkerer, Really

Inspired by *Nimisha's Ship* by Anne McCaffrey.

When you take something apart and put it together again, or examine a design in minute detail, roll +Sharp.

On a hit, choose one. On a strong hit choose three.

You figure out how to:

- make it more performant
- make it more efficient
- make it safer
- make it easier to use
- make it a little cheaper
- use a less expensive component or material to make a version that's much cheaper and nearly as good

Stave Off Oblivion

Inspired by *Outer Wilds*.

THIS MOVE MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

When you have been paired with one of the Ash Twin project's masks, as long as the project's warp core is installed your memories will be sent 22 minutes into the past when the star that the project is orbiting goes nova, creating the subjective impression of a continuous time loop.

A Different Fate

Inspired by the film *Penda's Fen*.

THIS MOVE MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

When you believe in King and Country with the fervour and naïveté of youth but bravado, piety, and your cadet's uniform just don't fit, roll +Gender.

On a miss you are haunted by a hidden power. Choose one:

- a cryptic sign of unknown origin
- the man and the woman, suburban avatars of conformity
- an androgynous angel, mute and unspeakably beautiful
- the wise ancient king who slumbers beneath the fen

On a 7-9 you connect with someone who helps you figure yourself out. A peer, parent, or other person of your choosing. Take a cumulative +1 when you make this move.

On a 12+ you have outgrown this move. Make peace with yourself and begin groping towards the person you want to be. A hidden power will come for you before you are ready.

Arm-ament

Inspired by the video game *Quadrilateral Cowboy*.

THIS MOVE MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

When you install a concealed cybernetic machine gun in your forearm, hold 720 Embedded Ammo.

You may spend 720 Embedded Ammo to deploy your weapon and enter battle trance.

While in battle trance your body will use all available resources to neutralize threats and protect allies with superhuman speed and skill, but you'll be loud, cause massive property damage, and you won't remember any of it.

Remember, We Do It for the Genre Friend

Inspired by the *Ranged Touch* podcast network.

School: Illusion

Components: V

Casting time: Standard Action

Target: all creatures who can hear and understand you

Duration: 600 turns

Transmit a critical analysis of a work of genre fiction, game studies, or Stephen King directly into the minds of all creatures who can hear and understand you.

Affected creatures hold 1. They may spend hold to automatically succeed when finding their way amidst stacks so straight and tall with tomes lined end to end, remembering that the social is predicated on its exclusions, or doing it for Steve.

Begin a Tale

Inspired by *The Snail and the Whale*.

When you slither all over your rock
And gaze at the sea and the ships in the dock,
When as you gaze you sniff and sigh,
“The sea is deep and the world is wide”
and long to sail as a tiny snail,
Roll + Silvery Trail.

On a hit, the other snails in the flock chastise you for
being excitable.

On a strong hit a humpback whale, immensely long,
holds his tail out of the starlit sea and says to you, snail,
“come sail with me”

On a miss, you are eaten by a seagull. Roll a new snail.

Not a Gift Given, but a Choice Made

Inspired by *The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula K. Le Guin.

A wizard from beyond the sea has trespassed the sacred underground labyrinth where none but you may tread and illuminated the lightless vault which even you may not look upon, and you have trapped him in the dark.

When you peer through a spyhole and whisper to him:

Ask one; he will answer truthfully:

- Why is the wizard here?
- What will he do if he escapes?
- Are the Old Ones dead, or false, or weak?
- What is the wizard's home like?

Answer one, to the wizard or alone:

- How do the daily temple rites feel different now that you've seen into the darkness?
- How do you enjoy the privilege of your position as the chosen of the powers beneath?
- What's the most difficult expectation the temple has of you?
- What fleeting thing do you remember from before the temple took you from your family?

Left alone in the labyrinth, the wizard will die of thirst in three days' time.

Caught by the Spiral

Inspired by *Uzumaki* by Junji Ito.

THIS MOVE MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

When you encounter the indelible spiral that haunts your village, roll +Turns.

On a miss, describe how the spiral intrigues, compels, or unsettles you. Gain one Turn.

On a hit, gain one Turn and answer one:

- How do you know the spiral is consuming someone close to you?
- What strange phenomenon does the spiral induce in the village's plants, animals, or weather?
- How does the spiral make you feel? Afraid? Intrigued? Exhausted? How do these feelings manifest?

On a strong hit, your Turns become O and choose one:

- The spiral takes someone from you; describe how, and how you know.
- The spiral twists something you love, rendering it grotesque or macabre; what?
- The spiral leaves a permanent mark on your village; what changes? The more outrageous the better.

You're Completely Free

Inspired by *V for Vendetta*.

When you think about resisting the fascist government that has ruled your country since before you were old enough to know what that meant, roll with the questions:

- Have they destroyed something beautiful that you loved? Say what it is.
- Would you rather be taken out behind the chemical sheds and be shot than cooperate with them?

On any hit, change seems possible. Hold one. You may spend your hold to ignore the effects of intimidation, propaganda, or despair.

On a weak hit you're caught in the periphery of an act of resistance (your own or someone else's) which draws unwanted attention.

On a miss, inertia or fear overcome your outrage. What brutal everyday indignity do you try to ignore for now?

Superman

Inspired by *Watchmen* by Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, and John Higgins.

When you interact with a being with power beyond comprehension, roll 2d6, take the lower result, and choose that many:

- They inadvertently endanger you with their power.
- They're overwhelmed by the mundane world.
- They casually do something miraculous.
- They refuse to do something that's obviously important to you.
- They find it impossible to relate to, understand, or explain themselves to you.
- They attract unwanted attention.

War of Attrition

Inspired by *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*.

When you shoot down a UFO, roll -the number of UFOs you've shot down in the last ten days.

On a strong hit your best troops are available to clear the crash site. This is an opportunity to capture valuable material or live aliens.

On a hit some of your troops will be green or under-equipped. Don't try to be a hero or this could get costly.

On a miss you're going in with a bunch of rookies. Hopefully this isn't a bloodbath.

Practice

Inspired by doing yoga.

When you practice yoga for your mental and/or physical health, roll with the questions:

- Are you following an instructor or a recording to set the pace and focus your attention?
- Have you been consistent with your practice?

On a hit, you finish feeling calm, warm, and present in your body. Hold 1. Spend your hold to take +1 when resisting the effects of chronic pain.

On a strong hit take +1 next time you practice.

On a miss you're too distracted or rushed to practice effectively, choose one:

- You start to lose the habit. Take -1 next time you practice.
- Your pain doesn't improve. Take -1 ongoing until you make this move again.
- You overdo it. Take -1 ongoing to resist the effects of chronic pain until you roll a strong hit on this move.

Making Deals

Inspired by the board game *Zoo Vadis*.

At the beginning of each session, hold 2.

You may offer to spend a hold to let another character use your stats, questions, moves, etc. in place of their own.

Say how you lend them your abilities and what it will cost them. They may counter-offer or decline if the cost is too great and you may decline if you feel it's not worth your while.

Lose your hold only if you come to an agreement.

Appendix: Terminology and Conventions

When a move presumes a facilitator, they're called the MC; substitute Game Master, Keeper, Maven, Warden, etc.

When a move tells you to “roll,” you'll be rolling some dice with the most common result being a hit, with misses or strong hits being less common. Different games might have different rules, but the usual roll is 2d6 (added together) with 2-6 being a miss, 7-9 being a hit, and 10+ being a strong hit.

Sometimes you'll add a modifier to your roll. “Roll +Hot” means “roll 2d6 and add your Hot stat.”

This book usually uses “hit” and “strong hit” in case you want to use them in a system that doesn't use the usual ranges, though some moves have explicit target numbers. When it refers to stats it usually uses the ones from *Apocalypse World*; substitute different stats as needed.

Sometimes you'll “roll with questions” and be presented with a list of questions. Roll 2d6 and add one for each question you answered in the affirmative.

Sometimes a move will tell you to gain a resource to be spent later during play. Often, if the resource is abstract, it's simply called “hold”. For example, “hold 1” means you gain one opportunity to use the “spend hold to...” part of the move.

Generally, hold gained from one move can't be used by another move.

Set in Vollkorn

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