

About Alternity

Basic orientation:

The game begins in 1991 for our characters, 9 years after Voldemort took over the wizarding world. It is currently 1996. (From our perspective, the game began in 2008.) We use the current year calendar for all dates, full moons, and other such things, for simplicity. You'll often see comments in our fan community referring to the game Y1, Y2, etc. We fully expect to complete all 7 years: we are currently halfway through Y5.

Our years run the course of the school year, from September 1 to August 31 - so not quite in sync with the books (where the book ends with everyone going home in June.)

We started out the game on LiveJournal, but moved to Dreamwidth (a fork and further development of the LiveJournal code) beginning in our Y2. Our fan community is still on LiveJournal.

I like to describe what we're doing as looking at shades of gray where much of Rowling's world is black and white, playing in the worldbuilding, and generally looking at situations from a wide variety of perspectives. We've also, as player-authors, been committed to having fewer massive illogical plot holes, and to showing a wide range of interactions. (One of the things many of us like about Alternity that's missing in canon are a range of female friendships - and honestly, a range of friendships in general.)

Finding your way around:

The current game website is at <http://www.blotts.org/alternity/> but we're in the process of moving everything to its own site, at <http://hpalternity.com>. This has general background, and there's also a summary of the Harry Potter bits if you aren't familiar with the canon we're altering. You can find a more recent summary of the game (up to December of Y4, just before the Yule Ball) at <http://lapin-agile.dreamwidth.org/119277.html>

There are two ways to read the game. To catch up, we suggest reading through the summaries posted each week to our fan community, found at <http://alt-fen.livejournal.com>. If you want to start reading the game from the beginning, I suggest loading each post, beginning with our first summary (<http://alt-fen.livejournal.com/2008/09/08/>) and following the links, then moving forward post by post from there. The summaries are intentionally vague and cover only the initial post, not the comments, and the best of the game happens in comments.

Besides the summaries, alt-fen also has other discussions, comments, questions, and occasionally other amusements and easter eggs. Because of the delay between summaries and what's going on in game, you may want to skip over the discussion posts until you've read the relevant week of the game materials (or else live with spoilers...)

If you want to get up to speed in a general way, there are also summary posts by term (though we are way behind on those: the last one is spring Y3) - they're linked from the blotts.org site.

For reading current material, you can use <http://alt-player.dreamwidth.org/read>. This aggregates all the character posts in one place. I use a couple of extensions to make it easier to see new comments - you can find a good discussion of them at <http://dw-nifty.dreamwidth.org/12806.html>

Notes on the mechanics of the game:

We talk about player characters (PCs) and non-player characters (NPCs), a standard gaming term. Player characters have journals, but they may be major characters or minor ones.

Some of our major characters don't exist at all in the original canon - Hydra LeStrange, for example - and some of our favourites get only a passing mention in canon. Part of the strength of the project is getting to see events through a wide range of different viewpoints, rather than just Harry's.

As the summary says, in our Y1, the Lord Protector gave everyone magical journals. They are very quirky magical objects, but they work roughly like various journalling sites, including LiveJournal and Dreamwidth: you can see other people's public posts, other people can see yours.

Everyone with a journal can read public posts. Any public posts. However, what shows up in your journal, unless you specify something, is what the incredibly complicated sort-sentient journal magic thinks you want to read. So there are hundreds of posts going on every day that we never see, and those who get written to may write back, just in places we don't see.

You can cross out text - just like you can in a physical journal - and you'll see that used from time to time. Our assumption on this is that it works like it does in pen and ink: sometimes you can guess at what's struck out, sometimes you can't.

Private messages: In the summer of Y2, the Lord Protector introduced a Private Message function: these can only be sent to two people. People can see that you've sent a private message and who it's to (the subject line), but they can't see any other content. It is possible to combine either lock described below and a private message. If one of the people a PM is sent to is a muggleborn, the other has to be their owner. (Oh - there are people at the Ministry who can review private messages, but some people have more to worry about here than others.)

Order Only: At the very beginning of the journals, Bill Weasley created a private communication method for the Order of the Phoenix to use. Only the people keyed to it can see it, and posts must have Order Only at the beginning for them to be hidden from prying eyes.

ISS lock: The I Solemnly Swear lock gets developed later. Again, only the people keyed to it can see it, it has a built in age limit (17), and you need an additive to your ink to write in it. Posts must use the special ink, and have I Solemnly Swear I Am Up To No Good in the subject.

A few other notes:

The first few months are rough the way new gaming stuff is. I tend to think it really picks up around January of Y1, and we've been constantly improving since. The really deep worldbuildy character depth stuff picks up heavily in Y4 for a variety of reasons. We also promise that our student characters are less painful to read (in terms of spelling) fairly quickly.

We use both tags and icons as metadata. Icons are used to indicate mood, emotion, etc. Because of journal limitations, some of the icons you see reading now are not the ones used originally - in particular, Terry Boot's icon for a number of years did not show his face.

Tags are used to help readers follow an individual character plot backwards, but they are not visible to the characters. (Lucius, for example, has a tag for his mistress, which he would never do in character.)

We are about to mirror our fan community to Dreamwidth - that's literally in progress as I wrap up notes for this presentation. You'll be able to find info about accessing it on LJ as soon as it's set up.

I - and I suspect anyone else actively reading - would be glad to make explainy noises at you if anything else is confusing. Email, post on alt-fen, whatever works for you. I can be reached at jen@modernhypatia.info .