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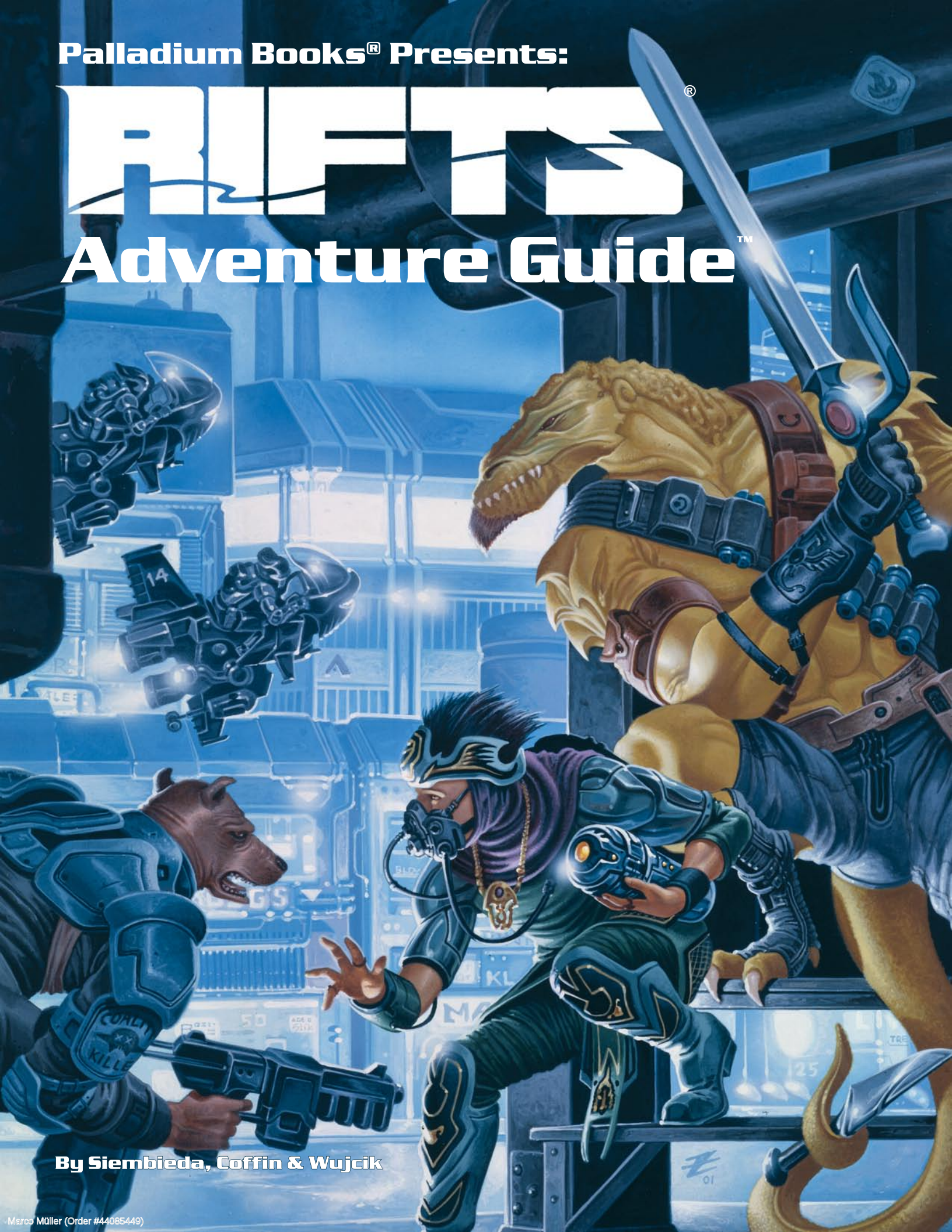
RIFTS®

Adventure Guide™



By Siembieda, Coffin & Wujcik

Marco Müller (Order #44085449)

Warning!

Violence, War, Magic & the Supernatural

The fictional world of Rifts® is violent, deadly and filled with supernatural monsters. Other-dimensional beings often referred to as "demons," torment, stalk and prey on humans. Other alien life forms, monsters, gods and demigods, as well as magic, insanity, and war are all elements in this book.

Some parents may find the violence, magic and supernatural elements of the game inappropriate for young readers/players. We suggest parental discretion.

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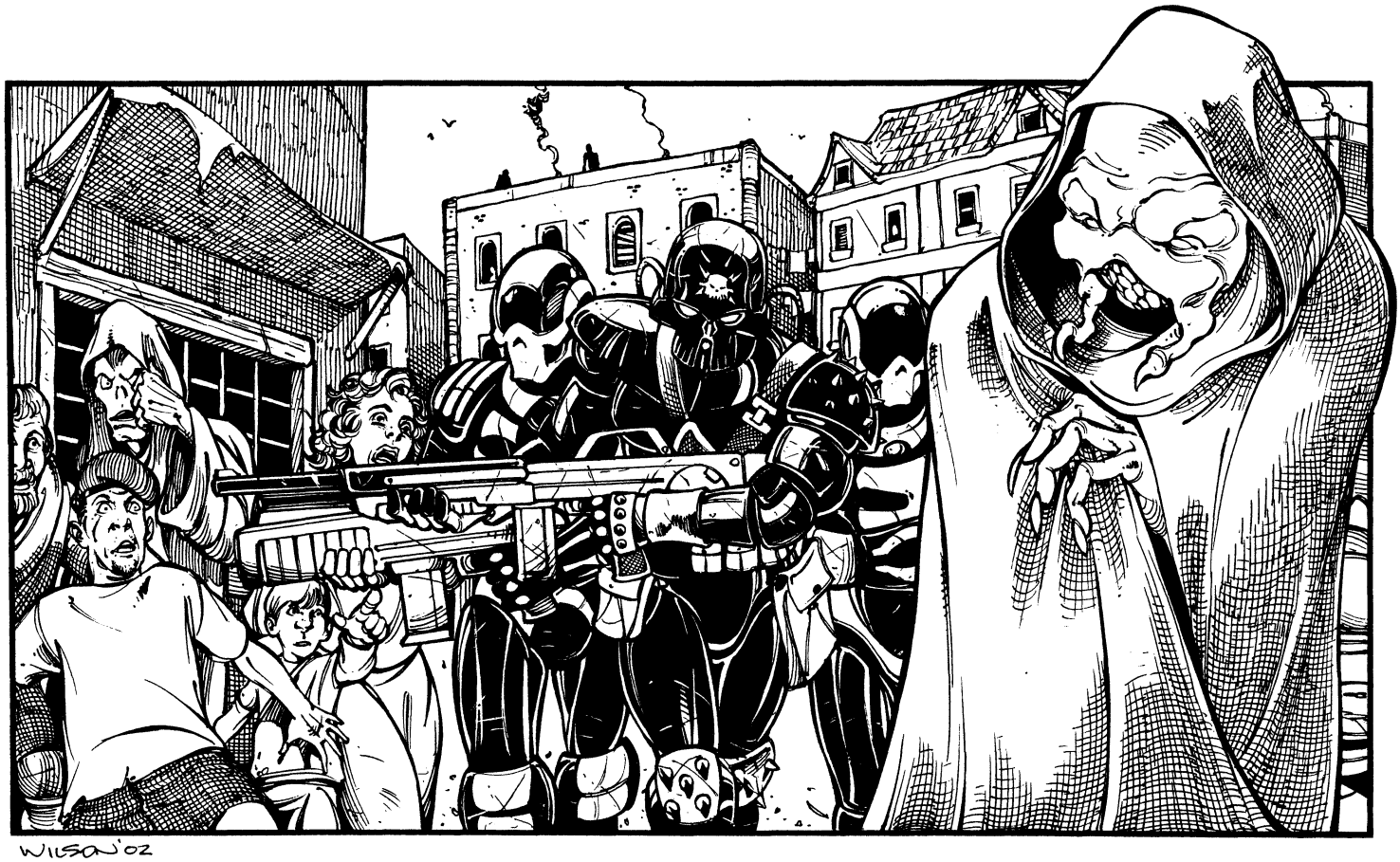

A guide to creating role-playing game adventures for the Rifts® RPG series

Marco Muller (Order: 44085449)

Dedication

To Julius Rosenstein, Erick Wujcik, the Defilers (you know who you are), Bill Coffin, Randi & Roger Cartier, and everybody who has gone adventuring with me.

To Maryann, the greatest adventurer I know, in real life and in gaming.

To my Mom and Dad who taught me to dream.

And to the memory of the Detroit Gaming Center.

– Kevin Siembieda, 2002

Dedication

To Kevin and Maryann Siembieda, who were good enough to green light the **Rifts® G.M.** trio of books, of which this is the third. Folks, nobody is more dedicated to providing good, inexpensive gaming fun to its fans than Kev and Maryann. What can I say? They're the best.

To John Runski, an old buddy of mine with whom I spent countless hours at the gaming table. Back in the day, we played it all, and it was with John that I think I first really started to enjoy being a G.M.

To my wife Alli, for being there in my darkest moments. Every project has them, and she gets me through them all. Thank you, princess.

And to my daughter Fiona, for being a ray of light in those times of darkness. Innocence never shone so brightly. Thank you, sweetpea.

– Bill Coffin, 2002

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Rifts® Game Master Guide™
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Rifts® Coalition Wars® (Tolkeen) #1-6
Revised Rifts® Conversion Book One
Rifts® Phase World®: Anvil Galaxy™
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The Rifter® Sourcebook series and more.

The cover is by John Zeleznik, depicting a band of adventurers prowling through the back alleys of a Chi-Town 'Burb with a precious cargo.

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Rifts®
Adventure Guide

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– Kevin Siembieda, 2002

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The value of this "guide"

This book is for both *players* and *Game Masters*.

If we have done what I hope to accomplish, it will be a valuable "guide to role-playing" useful for *everybody* on numerous levels.

While a lot (but definitely not all) of the information will be utilized most directly and most often by the Game Master, we tried to make this book as *universal* – for G.M.s and players – as possible. To that end, it provides world information, game tips and ideas for anybody. We hope much of it will help to define and crystalize the role-playing experience for everyone involved, and offer suggestions, ideas and thought processes for the role-playing "experience." Not just how to conceive and create adventures, but how to get the most out of the game for all parties involved.

Of course, creation tables, new rules, rule clarifications, background information, things to consider and ideas for adventuring (not to mention how to find those ideas) are also presented in the pages of this book.

Over 200 adventure ideas for playing in Rifts Earth are also presented, as well as world information with a focus on the *post-apocalyptic* Rifts Earth and the *'Burbs*.

It was *Bill Coffin's* idea to do the **Rifts® Adventure Guide**. In his mind, it would be a book specifically designed to help the *Game Master* – filled with random tables, charts and other good stuff. He also thought it would be the perfect companion to go with the **Rifts® Game Master Guide** and **Rifts® Book of Magic**. I agreed and gave him the go ahead.

Bill's heart was in the right place, but I had a different vision for this "Adventure Guide." Erick Wujcik and I had been talking about and discussing the particulars for a *role-playing guide* for ... well ... forever. We just never found the time to do it. Talking to Bill and thinking about all the fan questions we get about running adventures, I knew *now* was the time.

Poor Bill. I ripped into his manuscript like a hungry shark, discarding big chunks of it in a creative frenzy. I took his *Rifts Earth, 109 P.A. Overview* (a good third to half of the original manuscript) to put it into **Rifts® Aftermath** where I felt it worked better, and after a four hour, rapid-fire conversation with Erick, began transforming the "work-in-progress" into what I felt would be a true "guide" to role-playing and adventure.

Erick Wujcik wanted to contribute heavily to this book, but other commitments greatly limited his involvement. Still, he was there providing ideas and suggestions, and has contributed to this book. Bill would have done more too, but I needed him to move forward and work on other projects like **Phase World® Anvil Galaxy™**, **Cosmo Knights™** and the next two **Land of the Damned™** books for Palladium Fantasy.

In the pages that follow is something of a discourse on role-playing, the elements of gaming, and designing RPG adventures. It draws on my 25+ years of role-playing as a Game Master, player and game designer. It includes my own approaches and thought processes as well as things I have seen and learned from Erick Wujcik, Julius Rosenstein, Wayne Breaux Jr., Randy McCall, Rene Vega, Steve Edwards, Bill Coffin, Maryann Siembieda, Alex Marciniszyn, Thom and Ken Bartold, my fabled Defilers (there are too many to name here, but you 26+ guys know who you are), my smaller and later gaming group (Randi, Roger and Ed among them), and every Game Master and player with whom I have ever gamed. I have learned a little something from each and every gaming experience and person I have had the pleasure to game with (yes, Rodney, that includes you), so some piece of all of you guys and gals are alive in this book. And I thank you.

I hope people don't mind that I often present things in this book as how "I" do them. Role-playing is a creative process, and all creative ventures are personal and stylized. There is no one or two ways to do things. Nor is there a right or wrong way to play. Thus, I can only draw on my own experiences and the ways I do things. I have also tried to present some of the ways other Game Masters I know do things because it might better fit your style of play.

By the way, in the final analysis, the role-playing experience all comes down to one thing. Fun. If you and your players are having a good time and everybody wants to play some more next week, the G.M. is doing his or her job. Relax, experiment a little, but keep doing what you are doing and have a blast. Fun with friends. That's what it is really all about.

– Kevin Siembieda, 2002

It's a story

At the heart of role-playing games is the telling of a story. The adventure.

Telling ghost stories around a campfire and the giggly silliness of a sleep-over with friends comes close to the role-playing experience, because both are done in the company of friends and both create a building sense of discovery, camaraderie and excitement.

I also compare role-playing to improvisational theater and the children's games of "dress up" and "let's pretend," but I think the first two examples more accurately capture the *spirit* of role-playing.

What makes role-playing adventures all the more exciting, vivid and fun is that each participant, Game Master (G.M.) and every player, has a direct and important hand in the creation of that story. In role-playing games, that story is the *adventure* – or more likely, a series of adventures involving the same host of characters. In that regard, it reminds me of comic books or a television series where we follow the exploits of a particular group of heroes on their *adventures*: We see how they handle each new challenge, how they grow as individuals, and interact as a team, and we come to know and love them.

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You will hear me talk about stories and storytelling throughout this "guide" book, because whether you realize it or not, that is what role-playing is all about. And if you are not conscious of creating a story while you are playing, that's because the joy of role-playing is *not* the mechanics of story creation or writing. No, it is the pleasure of living in the moment. Of the shared adventure experience unfolding in your mind's eye as the story magically unfolds before you. The fact that an epic story is created from the verbal actions and interactions of YOUR fictional characters is the inevitable outcome of the game. Actions and responses that get the heart pumping, adrenaline flowing and the mind reeling with excitement, anticipation, fear and joy. Every act of heroism or selfishness, courage or cowardice, every bright idea and spoken word contributes to the excitement and the events as they unfold. In fact, in any good game, it is only after the adventure is over and the players recollect the events in their minds, that one realizes a rich, lush story has been born.

I honestly don't know why we humans love stories so much. I mean, look at most of our pastimes. Movies, television, live theater, novels, biographies, comic books, video and computer games, and even most songs tell a *story*. Heck, we often view and talk about sporting events, not to mention our own lives, as a *story* or an episodic tale.

From what I can tell, most experts and pundits seem to think entertainment is all about escapism. We want to *escape* our troubles, boredom and the daily grind, and we do it through stories. Maybe they're right. But you know what? I think there is more to it than that. I think stories, whether they are read, watched, played or lived, stimulate our minds and imagination. They give us ideas and inspiration. They make us laugh, cry or cheer out loud. I think they touch and empower our inner spirit, giving flight to our imaginations, and help us to dream, to wonder and to live.

People sometimes ask me if there is "real magic" in my role-playing games. Of course, they are wondering if there is anything evil, satanic or untoward they need to worry about for their kids' sake. I always say no. Everything in Palladium's games are fictional flights of fancy. I wouldn't know a so-called "real magic spell" if it jumped up and bit me. But as I sit down to write my half of this book, I realize I'm wrong. There *is* magic in these books. In all role-playing games. The magic of the imagination. Because the imagination can ... well, imagine *anything*. And it's a wonderful and good magic that each and every one of us can unleash if we try. But then you already know that, or you wouldn't be reading this book. So on to the heart of the subject.

The Ultimate Adventure

As far as I am concerned, role-playing games are (arguably) the most exciting form of storytelling entertainment that exists today.

It is the ultimate imaginary experience! You and every person involved in the game are not only creating that story but living in the moment of it, experiencing it through your fictional hero. While other forms of storytelling capture some element of that, in role-playing the player is in the moment and you can not flip to page 252 to see what happens later or at the end, because it's not written yet. You and your fellow players are creating the story right now! Your fictional character is making things happen and changing the outcome with everything he or she says or does. Your character and those of your teammates will directly affect the outcome of what happens next. Who lives or dies. Who is rescued or lost. Whether that treasure is used for personal gain or to help others. And on and on.

In a role-playing game your fictional character *is* the master of his own fate. Not only that, but a hero (probably a hero regardless of the setting) who saves lives, rights wrongs, destroys evil and can change the course of mighty nations – maybe even save worlds.

Like I said, epic adventure. A wondrous story. And it's one you, the players and the Game

Master, experience first hand as you weave the imaginary tale with your imaginary characters to new heights of courage, adventure and heroics.

Good stuff. And the best computer and video games don't even come close to the experience. How could they? Electronic games play out a narrow and limited range of options in a predetermined and structured story. As good and fun as these games are (and don't get me wrong, they are fun), they are NOT true role-playing.

In real role-playing games there may be a goal or objective, but the players are stepping into truly unknown territory and can venture into any direction. They may destroy the evil wizard or insane tyrant and save the world, but exactly how they do it and how they get to that point is all in *their* hands.

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Role-playing

By Kevin Siembieda

A common understanding

First thing, relax. It's a game.

A different kind of game than 99% of the ones you have ever played, but a game nonetheless. And a great type of game at that.

The idea is for everybody to help weave an adventure and have fun.

I'm not going to write an explanation of what role-playing is, because I'm pretty sure everyone reading this book already has a pretty good idea. Let's cut to the chase.

The player's job

The player's job is to create a *fictional character* that will serve as their living (in their mind, anyway) playing piece. That's unlike any game right there.

This playing piece is like the character icon in a computer or video game, only it is completely alive, able to think like the player himself, and capable of responding at the speed of thought. How? Because this fictional character's true playing field is no game board or video screen, but your fertile *imagination.*

Role-playing is a game of imagination that comes alive with words. Words that describe the character's intentions, actions, feelings, and hopes. It is the player's job to make his imaginary, "fictional" character come alive and interact with the environment (the Game Master) and the other playing pieces (the other players and the G.M.). This is done through what the player "says." The player's words describe his character's intentions and actions. The clearer and concise the description, the better.

"My Cyber-Knight draws his sword," is a clear, concise statement. We can all instantly picture a Cyber-Knight drawing his sword. If we're part of the playing group, we'd probably know exactly what this character looks like as well as his (or her) alignment and personality. If we were there, in a real game, we'd also know what has caused the Cyber-Knight to draw the sword. Still, a bit more information from the player would make this picture clearer and give the Game Master more to work with. You see, the G.M. feeds off the players and vice versa. The more information a player gives the G.M., the more he or she can give back. For example:

Player of the Cyber-Knight: "A question (to the G.M.). From your description of these thieves, it sounds like they are kinda scared and are probably low level or afraid of Cyber-Knights. Is that correct?"

G.M.: "That's what *appears* to be the case." Emphasizing the word, "appears."

Player of the Cyber-Knight: "Okay, then (speaking for his character), my Cyber-Knight draws his sword and gives them a little smile. He wants to show them he is not afraid. However, he will not attack unless they attack first. Oh, and he'll fight only to subdue these creeps, not to kill them. Ultimately, he'd like to capture one alive for questioning."

As you can see, this still brief description provides a lot more information. We now know the knight draws his sword not in anger but in self-defense. He's confident (perhaps overconfident, assuming, rightly or wrongly, that the cretins who threaten him are low level hoods he can easily handle on his own) and he is calm. We also know his intentions, not to kill, but to defend himself and to capture one for questioning, and chase off the others. This "feeds" the G.M., meaning it gives him information he can expand upon. In this case, if the Game Master wants it to, he or she can give the Cyber-Knight clues, warnings and information through the thieves and even allow one of the hoods to be captured and spill his guts when questioned. *The interrogation* should be another fun bit of role-playing interactions, requiring the Cyber-Knight to ask the right questions and use his head rather than his brawn, further adding depth to the character and suspense to the adventure. This information should motivate the knight and his teammates to respond/do something.

On the other hand, if the Game Master does not want to take advantage of this opening, the interrogated crook simply doesn't know much of anything, which can be played seriously or for humor.

The player may also offer some dialogue. "Rexus the Red (his Cyber-Knight character) says, 'Bring it on if that's what you want." Or, not wanting any trouble, he might try a little intimidation, saying something like: "We want no trouble, but I'm not afraid to get a little more blood on my hands this morning before breakfast." And turning to the farmer he was talking to before being so rudely interrupted, says, "Excuse me sir, while I take 15 seconds to dispose of these brigands."

The words can be anything the player wants. The choice of words, tone of voice, etc., will add more information about the Cyber-Knight's character. It may show he is mean and cruel, or bold and arrogant, and/or he means what he says, or doesn't take his opponents seriously, and so on, adding to both the color of the character and the situation.

And role-playing all adds to the *story*. To play-live through a heroic adventure via your fictional character. In fact, you can see the story building through the interaction as you read these examples. This "encounter" may have nothing to do with the main story or may prove to be a key component, that will be seen as the game session progresses.

If the "encounter" has nothing to do with the player group's purpose/quest/mission, it is a fun aside, subplot or distraction that gave this player a moment to shine and have fun with his Cyber-Knight playing piece.

A note about "encounters": I emphasize *encounter*, because a) that's what we call these interactions with Non-Player Characters (NPCs) played by the G.M., and b) because the use of *encounters* is one of the chief ways the Game Master (G.M.) amuses, directs, and motivates the player characters. Remember,

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role-playing is all about interaction. Like actors in a movie or a play, the players' have *their characters* respond appropriately to the people and situations of the encounter. However, not knowing the script (that's in the mind of the G.M.) the players don't know the full significance of that encounter. They don't know if the stranger on a road is a villain, monster, source of information, or just Joe Average popped in to liven things up or keep them guessing. The players don't know if the barmaid or flower girl is as sweet and innocent as she seems, or whether she is a *spy, a thief, con artist, the person they are looking for, a source of information* or *the catalyst for trouble*. This can only be determined by interaction and role-playing. To "play out" the situation and see what transpires and where it leads.

For players, this should be part of the fun – a chance to flex their role-playing skills and enjoy the art of discovery; i.e. saying and doing things to learn more about and from this encountered character. For the Game Master it is time to use his or her imagination, improvisational talents and a chance to move the adventure/story along the direction he or she wants. Let's briefly take each possibility I noted in the previous paragraph.

Spy: The woman could be an agent of the villain the heroes are looking for, turning the table on them. Or it could be one of the villain's henchmen or informers (there are many scattered throughout the town) on the lookout for "troublemakers" who come sniffing around where they don't belong. Or she could be a spy allied to some completely different and independent organization of good guys or bad guys (the Coalition States, Federation of Magic, rebels, heroes, etc.). Maybe the spy is out to get the same bad guy that the player characters are looking for, and will make a surprise appearance *later* to rescue them or secretly slips them information from time to time, or uses them to get to her target, or later appears to suggest they team up, etc.

Thief: The lovely maiden seems nice enough ... while she's picking their pockets or getting information so she can go to where they are staying and rob them in their sleep (probably accompanied by some burly friends). Or she may try to lure one character away from the group and into an ambush for a mugging by her three siblings (male or female), or steal their map, or an important artifact needed for their mission.

Con-Artist: Yeah, this sweet innocent thing has the information or a map or something the group needs alright. And she'd love to help ... but, well, her mother needs an operation, her kid brother needs medicine, and her dog died yesterday. Can the heroes help her out? Oh, of course the information is worthless, the map is a fake, her mother is well and the head of the assassins' guild, her kid brother is six feet tall and doing time in jail, his "medicine" comes from a whiskey bottle, and she ate her dog last winter.

The person they are looking for: The player characters have assumed the person they are looking for (for whatever reason, including being the villain) is a *man*. Surprise, he is a "she." Or they have no idea what this person looks like and are trying to find him or her (head of the Black Market, a smuggler, a rogue scholar or scientist, rebel fighter, dragon, or any profession or individual who has a reason for keeping a low profile or her/his true identity a secret). Or the individual is in disguise and trying to lay low. Or is a shapechanger by nature or by magic. And so on. Maybe, the *villain* our heroes are looking for has heard about "them" and has sent one of his/her minions – or come herself (in disguise) – to check them out for herself. A fact that is not known until the player group formally meet their quarry later.

Source of information: She may or may not be innocent, but she happens to know something that is useful to the player group and their quest. She may know this because her profession (whether barmaid or flower girl) places her in contact with lots of different people, and she sees and hears things. That information may come out innocently or accidentally in conversation, be willingly offered or the lass may be street savvy and crooked, so she realizes what the characters want and offers to give the information for a *price*. A price that could be money or a favor, and which could be the catalyst for trouble as her "favor" may involve lies and skullduggery that lead to an adventure or encounter in and of itself.

Catalyst for trouble: "Hey, quit talking to my girl!" Yep, it can be something as simple as the jealous boyfriend. Depending on what the player has his *character* say and do, he may defuse the fiery situation and avoid a conflict or make things worse. If things go badly, the hero sudden finds himself being challenged to a duel or a brawl may ensue, and things escalate from there. Or the sweet girl reappears later as a hostage or kidnaped for human sacrifice or trapped atop a burning building, etc. In this case, she is the maiden in distress, but more importantly, because one or more of the player characters met her before (and presumably the G.M. worked his magic to make them like or care about her), she is more than a faceless victim. There is a connection that makes her seem more real, and makes her rescue more dramatic and important. **Player note:** Expect the unexpected. Think about the consequences of your character's words and actions, and accept what happens whether you like it or not. This means you should let the character *think* as well as use his or her special powers or fighting skills. And do so in character, meaning, try to think and respond as your fictional character should, not as you might in real life. Oh, and the most important thing to do, have *FUN!*

G.M. Note: It's your job as Game Master to consider and use the "possibilities" laid out before you. To that end, you need to learn to recognize possibilities and take advantage of them to weave the story, build the adventure and create suspense and intrigue. Also, I'm a big fan of *humorous* interludes and any of these examples could be played for laughs or drama.

Other things *players* should consider

Teamwork

Players should have their characters try to cooperate with each other, stand by their comrades' side and help out one another at least to some degree. After all, they are traveling together as a group. They don't have to be a "fellowship" with a common goal, but it helps. Many groups I have gamed with actually pick a team leader and establish something of a working protocol. This works great for some and not so well for others. As far as I'm concerned, it is a matter of personal choice. I have found natural leaders and idea-people will surface and automatically slip into the "unofficial" role of leader. The players of my old Defilers campaign worked by committee, with six or eight characters of the 26 acting as the de facto leaders or advisory

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board, but even then, these 6-8 would listen to suggestions and ideas from the entire group, formulate a plan of action and then hand out assignments; most of which were volunteer positions. This went something like this: "My character is ready to take point, can see in the dark, prowl and sense danger, I think it is logical for me to scout ahead." The council of leaders would probably agree and establish the position and objective of every player, usually with a common goal. Not that a number of characters didn't have their own, sometimes conflicting (and secret) agenda – "I know we're supposed to capture so and so, but if I find him, he's dead meat." Or the thief would work toward the objective of the group, but would skim 10-30% of whatever treasure he found off the top, before turning it over to the group to be split 26 ways (yes, he would get his "share" in addition to the loot he already stole). It made sense for the thief's occupation, alignment and personality to rob from people he considered friends and allies, yet at the same time, this thief would risk and even sacrifice his life to save one of them. And always (okay, almost always) worked toward the common objective of the overall group.

As you can see from the thief example, if not outright working as a team, the members of the group should at least try to cooperate on a regular basis, come to each other's aid, and work toward the same basic goals. Another great example is my friend *Roger*. Rog has played a number of different types of characters, but one of his favorite "types" and most often played character, is the *sneaky lone wolf*. That means a character, regardless of O.C.C. or R.C.C., who skulks in the shadows, prowls a lot, and who is always listening to those around him, taking notes, and following leads, tailing other characters (mostly NPCs) and sneaking around, usually *alone*, away from the group. Whether a spy, assassin, thief, smuggler, Cobbler, practitioner of magic, warrior, dragon hatchling, or whatever, that's Roger. Playing this kind of character not only means running off from the rest of the group without telling any of the other characters (or maybe one trusted friend) where he is going or what he is doing, but knowing things the rest of the characters in the group may not. This can be dangerous and Roger has gotten his characters in some serious trouble, although he always takes it like a man if his snoop can't weasel his way out of trouble. The point is, despite all the sneaking around, perhaps holding back information or skimming a little extra treasure, Roger's characters almost ALWAYS work to the benefit of the *group* and toward the same common goal. Or as one fellow player put it, "His character may not always work *with* the group, but he is always working *for* the group.

Likewise, Roger's sneaky character will usually come to the aid of a friend or ally in need, particularly if his character likes the one who is in trouble. On the other hand, being an Anarchist or Unprincipled alignment, sometimes Roger's sneaky character can turn his back on or betray a teammate his character *dislikes*, but overall his Sneak is there when the rest of the team needs him, and despite the Sneak's better judgement, he may grudgingly help the teammate he dislikes. That's good role-playing and excellent teamwork, while remaining fiercely independent.

The Nash principle

If you have seen the movie, *A Beautiful Mind*, or already know about John Nash, you will know that he came up with an interesting theory that has been applied to economics, games and a host of other areas. As it applies to players and role-playing, it goes something like this. If each member of a group is out for himself and trying to win the *same* treasure all for himself, or get the same target, all are likely to fail.

However, if each is willing to work toward the same objective – a common goal – (and not even working directly together, mind you) without backstabbing, eliminating or cheating their teammates or competitors, they will *all* achieve some measure of success and reward. And if that goal is not to win or to get that *one specific* target, such as get the same girl or the same magic weapon, but to accomplish a common goal (get a nice girl of their own, acquire some kind of magic weapon, stop the bad guy, prevent a war, get out of this alive, get treasure and glory), they should be able to accomplish that by not beating each other up. For example, the "group" that works toward the same objective and succeeds will have the satisfaction of having accomplished their quest. They will enjoy, as a group *and* individually, the fame and accolades that come with that conquest or achievement. And, if there is treasure, these comrades in arms, whether loose-knit or as close as brothers, are likely to feel compelled, even obligated, to share the reward. Now a few in the group may profit more than others along the way (captures a powerful weapon, acquires a better suit of armor or a magic item, or valuable gem while off on his own, and which he does not feel is "fair" or appropriate to "share," so he keeps it for himself), but everybody got something, and probably in a situation where they would have lost everything or even been killed if they had not worked as a team toward a common goal.

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Players, here are three things to consider in the course of playing through an adventure. **1. Team success.** Although some (if not all) of the player characters may have played a key, even critical role at some junction in the adventure, those characters could NOT have accomplished the mission or survived the adventure on their own. That means he or she owes what success, reward and accomplishment that may come his way, in part, to the other characters involved. The fictional character and *the player* need to recognize and accept this as an *unshakable truth.* **Playing in character**, that unshakable truth *should* help to bond these "individuals" into a team, and create some sense of camaraderie and friendship, even if the members of the group are constantly at odds or bickering (like friends and siblings sometimes do).

2. In real life, being tossed together in life and death combat situations bonds people together like nothing else. That should be remembered when *playing in character*.

3. Nobody likes the obnoxious, selfish jerk, evil slime bag, or the reckless glory hound. While a player may choose to play that type of character, unless there is some *redeeming* quality to the character, it has been my experience that such rogues end up dead, usually through their own foolish actions, but sometimes at the hands of one of their much maligned teammates.

Players, work with the G.M.

Teamwork also means cooperating with the Game Master. Offer ideas and suggestions. Let the G.M. know what you would like to play or encounter. Tell him when you enjoy something he did in the game, or a particular villain, or a fun or surprising idea. The Game Master needs feedback so he or she knows what the players like and want. The Game Master is a person too (really), and also needs to know his or her hard work paid off with a night of fun and that he is doing things right. Everybody needs reassurance and some positive reinforcement. You can not imagine how many Game Masters tell me that they were terrified when they first started to G.M. I believe them, because I was nervous as all get out myself. I cut my teeth on D&D, back in 1979. I thought I had good ideas and cool villains. I knew I could think quick on my feet, and I knew most of the players at least in passing, but I was unsure of myself. What if they hated my adventure? What if they hated me?! I mean, my players all knew the rules and the game world better than I did. They had more experience playing, and I still didn't know how all the stupid charts worked. Despite my doubts, I gave it a whirl and they liked my first adventure (a simple dungeon crawl). The next game went well too. The more I played, the more I experimented and the better I got at it. Considering I would make my living from role-playing only a couple years later, boy, am I glad I took that first step at running.

All parties involved need to remember that role-playing should NEVER be a competition between the players and the Game Master. Role-playing games don't have the traditional winner and loser. While the bad guys played by the G.M. may lose, the Game Master himself does not. He wins when the player group wins – i.e. triumphs over evil, saves the day, achieves fame, glory, and/or monetary and personal reward out of the adventure. In this case, the *common goal* for the Game Master and the players should be playing out the adventure, winning the day and having a ton of fun doing it.

Though it is fair for a player to question a Game Master's rulings or actions, they should also accept that a good and fair G.M. has his or her reasons for everything. That means trying to work with the G.M., accept his rulings, and understand his or her position and logic.

Conversely, it is the Game Master's obligation to be *fair, impartial* and *cooperative* right back. There is nothing wrong with a G.M. stopping the game to explain a situation, clarify a rule, remind a player of a rule, point out the consequence of the action the character is about to take, or present his point of view (or more likely, the point of view of the Non-Player Characters involved). It also means the Game Master should accept it when "he" notices he has made a mistake, or when one of the players points out a mistake, and fix or adjust that mistake. Hey, mistakes happen, even by Game Masters. Trust me, most players will respect and appreciate you for it. (Players, just be gentle about it, okay?)

Of course, there is the occasional loudmouth, disruptive jerk who refuses to play nice or work as a team, and makes the game miserable. This is always a miserable, sometimes painful situation, especially if it is a friend, or the friend of a friend (heaven help you if it is another player's girlfriend or boyfriend). There are a few ways to try to remedy the situation. One is through the events of the gaming adventure, in which the "character" pays for his or her shenanigans. Actually, that should ALWAYS be the case.

Heck, as Game Master I have played plenty of disagreeable, arrogant, haughty, backstabbing and evil characters, but they are usually villains or short-lived Non-Player Characters that the group is supposed to hate, or despite their failings have a heart of gold, or are redeemed (change) due to their association with the player characters (i.e. becomes a better person thanks to their example and influence). Personally, I do NOT dictate how a player handles his character. I try to let them play their characters any way they deem appropriate. That includes lone wolves, backstabbers, selfish, cocky, stupid, risk-takers, and thoughtless jerks, HOWEVER, there WILL always be consequences to the character's words and deeds that will directly impact the character and often the group by association. If the character threatens a merchant over nothing, the authorities will investigate. If he flips off the King, there will be repercussions. If he bad mouths the local religion or a beloved god or hero, there will be logical repercussions. Sometimes these consequences are little but dramatic and annoying. For example, merchants might refuse to serve the character and his teammates or charge 50% more for their goods and services, hotels turn him and the group away, the local authorities threaten and shake the character down, townspeople might spit or curse at him/them or call names and play tricks on them. Larger consequences might have the local tough guys with a bone to pick start a brawl, issue a challenge to a duel, or bear false witness against the character (or group) to frame him for a crime he didn't really commit. Vandalism, robbery and the threat of mob violence/justice could result. The community might tar and feather the character or run him and the group out on a rail. Corrupt and evil authorities (like the CS, tyrants and lunatics) might imprison, torture and/or execute the character and anybody he is associated with!

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Playing out the consequences may help the "character" see the error of his ways. They also give the other players a reason and opportunity to admonish the "character" – "What were you (the character) thinking?" and "Are you trying to get us all killed? You can't do things like that." And/or dish out a little character modification incentive of their own. "Look, we'll help you out of trouble, again, this time, but you have to stop doing things like this. Look what this has cost you (or us)." Or, "The next time you (the character) do that, I (another character) will kick your ..." The player group may also hang a troublemaker or evil player character out to dry. "Help you get out of prison? You've got to be kidding! We told you (the character) not to go there and not to cause trouble. But no, Rexus the Red had to start a fight and then kill that punk in cold blood. In front of twenty witnesses, no less. He was defeated. Helpless. You didn't have to kill him. No. You know what, Rexus? You can rot in jail or hang for all we care." Just deserts for a foolish and abrasive character. And a fair reaction from his outraged teammates. Enough is enough. And time for the player to roll up a new character. With any luck, a few more situations like this and the player will learn to curb the rash and/or disruptive behavior of his character and learn to be a more productive, cooperative and fun player.

Don't think a player can change the way he plays his character? Sure he can, but the Game Master has to be fair and consistent in handing out the consequences, slapping the offending character down every time, dishing out obvious repercussions for playing a character always looking for trouble, shooting off his mouth, or running off on his own. Here's a brief recouningt of a story I have told many times, and which may even bear repeating elsewhere in this book..

During my Defilers campaign, I had a new player join the group. He was a pretty good gamer and an incredibly inventive and imaginative role-player. He was not disruptive or a jerk, but was used to playing with a group of players who encouraged backstabbing and cheating one another, as well as running off on their own. Well, the Defilers tried to warn his arrogant character that the situation they were in called for teamwork and cooperation. The character laughed and proclaimed he would do as he pleased, and he did. Later that night, despite evidence that the situation was deadly and nobody should run off on their own, the player had his character slip away, get into trouble one guy could not handle, and the character was killed. The next week, the player introduced his new character, the brother of the last one. Okay. Same situation, slips away by himself again, takes on more than the character can handle, and that one perishes too. Next week, he introduces the character's cousin, who after a stupid fight with an important Non-Player Character in front of dozens of honest witnesses, has to leave town or else. Next week a new character. Not a relative this time, but the same disposition and attitude. He betrays the group, runs off on his own, gets into trouble, but role-plays magnificently, getting himself out of a situation I, as the G.M., thought was impossible. The character also does something dramatic to win the favor of the group and the character survives. At last, I thought, this guy is on the right track. Next adventure, his thief character slips away from the group to investigate a temple full of gorgeous lady priests. He and the group have gotten enough hints and evidence to know beyond a reasonable doubt that a Medusa operates somewhere within the temple. His character has seen the dozens of life-like statues, but still the thief slips away and goes there anyway. Guess what? The character gets himself turned to stone. The other players who like this character (as does the G.M.) wrack their brains trying to figure out a way that their characters can logically, go back to the temple and rescue their comrade. The problem is, playing in character, the group has absolutely no reason to suspect the temple of any wrongdoing, or that their teammate even went there. His statue is not on display and the priestesses have done nothing wrong or suspicious. Scratch one more character. This guy burned through something like four or five characters, but then he finally got a handle on how he needed to play to survive in this particular campaign setting. Not only that, he turned out to be a truly great player and a joy to game with. His character became a huge asset to the group and he played in that campaign for two years, never missed a game and his character survived the legions of Hell to tell the tale.

This lovely story aside, I won't kid you, sometime you just have a jackass for a player. I think it is the Game Master's unpleasant job to pull this player aside and have a talk with him. Explain that his antics are not funny and are causing a problem. Point out the worst things he is doing, and in as constructive and positive a way as possible, ask him to stop it. If the bozo gets mad and refuses to change, or gets even more obnoxious and disruptive the next time you play (as opposed to somebody who gets mad, but apologizes, or doesn't apologize but makes an obvious effort to play nice), boot his boney butt out of the group. I know this can be hard, but sometimes it just has to be done.

Players should ask questions

If you don't know something or you are confused about something going on in the game, ask. I speak from experience. When I started role-playing I was dumb as a rock. I couldn't remember what my skills did or how magic spells worked. Heck, I couldn't even remember which stupid dice to roll for which weapons. So I felt like an idiot, because I always had to ask questions, but how else could I learn? Five or six games later, my learning curve had improved dramatically. Once I had a pretty good handle on things, I was one of those players who seemed to come up with inventive new ways to use a spell or to use it in a way to "bluff" my character out of trouble. That meant I was inadvertently challenging the Game Master with new ideas. "Hey, can my character do this or that," and "Can I use this particular spell to do whatever, even though it's not in the book?" The G.M. would have to stop and think about it for a minute and make a snap decision in the middle of the game. Sometimes he'd allow it and give me experience points for being inventive, other times he did not, or he would allow it with some conditions, limitations or restrictions. Sometimes I agreed with his ruling, other times I didn't, but I went along with his decision because he was the Game Master and what the G.M. says goes in his fictional universe. Besides, I knew this G.M. *always* tried to be fair and impartial, his adventures were always fun, and he was good guy.

I learned a lot as both a player and a Game Master from *Julius Rosenstein.* I was flattered when he played in my games, and tickled beyond reason when he told me one day he thought I was a better G.M. than he was. Erick Wujcik was my co-conspirator and fellow madman, the Defilers my delight, but

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Julius was my role-playing mentor. Though our playing styles are different, I think he underestimates his G.M. abilities. I would have to rank him as one of the very best Game Masters I have ever had the pleasure to run with. I would bet Julius himself would argue that his adventures, especially in those early days, were pretty basic and linear. And they were. There weren't often any cosmic ideas or world-shattering events, but you know what? They were always exciting from start to finish, challenging, memorable and fun. Though I see Julius often (he works at Palladium and proofread this book and a hundred before it), I'd like to take this opportunity to say, thanks Jules, for your patience, good example, and encouragement. If it wasn't for you, I would never have tried role-playing games in the first place, and there would not be a Palladium Books.

Players should also ask questions when they are not certain about events unfolding in the game, or where their character is positioned, who their adversary is, or why things have erupted into violence or chaos. Most Game Masters I know, have no problem pausing the action and explaining the situation. Knowing exactly who is where and doing what is very important, especially in a combat situation. In my gaming experience, we have drawn up sketches, presented maps, and have even used pencils, bowls of goodies and soda pop cans to lay it all out on the table, positioning extra dice to represent our characters. Just recently, in a fun game run by Wayne Smith, us players got confused as to the layout of a stronghold and the line-up of our characters. Wayne had to stop and explain everything for us again before we got it right. It happens. It is part of the game. Take care of business.

Sometimes, as players, we also want to know more of the *back story* or why something transpired the way it did. Personally, I don't have a problem giving the group a "behind the scenes" or "what you didn't know" explanation at the end of the adventure. Of course, I withhold information that might have an impact on future adventurers, but I'm very generous in revealing details and information. For one thing, I think it makes everybody's gaming experience richer and more memorable. For another, it is fun to recap the key moments of the game and *each* character's moment to shine, combat and non-combat, which allows the players to relive their moment of glory: a great plan, a clever deduction, a lucky roll of the dice, a smart idea, a daring rescue, etc. Plus the recap, with the additional information, creates a sharper picture of the night's escapades and ends the game session with laughs and good feelings.

An important player tip

By the way, as important as interaction is between the player characters, and the human players and the Game Master, players must realize that the G.M.'s mind is always working, always thinking, constantly adjusting the ideas and situation, and tweaking the ebb, flow and events of the story. What that means, especially with a Game Master who is really good at improvisation, that *anything you say, can and WILL be used against you!* Throw out a good idea, and the Game Master may grab it and run with it. Likewise, most good Game Masters pander to the player characters, molding and adjusting the adventure to best fit the mood, hopes, dreams and expectations of the players for their fictional characters. If the G.M. sees them going down some different, but fun and logical avenue he or she had not considered, the Game Master is likely to go with the flow. Or give them exactly what they expect, or change events to give them something completely different. So be careful. And keep your wishes and fears to yourself, or they might come back to haunt your characters (in a fun way, of course). Take my word for it, I do it all the time. And so does Erick Wujcik and Bill Coffin, and Julius Rosenstein and Wayne Breaux and every halfway decent G.M. on the planet.

The Game Master's job

As I have said, it is his or her job to create and run the RPG adventure. To outline and orchestrate the story. Consequently, the Game Master needs to think like a *storyteller* or film producer, director, plot-man and set director all rolled into one.

It is the Game Masters's job to set the stage, outline the story, develop the villains, plot the events to unfold, introduce the action and motivate the player characters. He or she establishes the *outline* of the adventure to come. Paces the action through the introduction of Non-Player Characters (NPCs), events and the dissemination of information, and keeps the players' juices flowing and their characters on track. Oh yeah, and the G.M. needs to know the game reasonably well.

Don't worry. This is all easier than it sounds. And fun too.

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Creating adventures

By Kevin Siembieda

Step One: Getting started

Plotting a course. Before the Game Master steps before his players or sets pen to paper, he or she *needs* to have an idea for an adventure. That means some event, villain and conflict to motivate, challenge and confront the player characters. This is must! Without a conflict, there is no story.

Now while that may sound like common sense, I think every G.M. has tried winging it without the slightest idea, at least once in his life. Or thought to himself, gee, I'm not inspired and don't have any ideas I like, so I'll just let the players do something on their own and see where things go. A Game Master who is experienced and has a knack for improvisation *can* probably wing it, and do fine, although he will be figuring out the basic story elements, events, and villain as he goes along. The improvisor is still seeking ideas and plotting a story, the only difference is he or she is doing it off the cuff and on the fly. The clueless Game Master who just hopes to lets his players loose with no idea for a plot or bad guy or conflict is doomed to drift along in a night of boredom and drudgery for himself and for the players. The Game Master has to be like a *Boy Scout* – always prepared. At least with a plot idea, villain and conflict, even if it is basic and cliche. The rest, one can probably wing.

Getting Started. The reader will notice we spend a lot of time talking about getting started, finding ideas and building upon those ideas to mold an adventure. That's because getting started is the hardest part.

While the players may not believe it, the Game Master probably feels a lot of pressure. He or she wants the players to have fun, and the G.M. wants to put his/her best foot forward.

The adventure has to start somewhere, somehow, and have at least some sense of purpose and direction.

Direction. The players look to the G.M. for direction. It is not enough for the Game Master to just set the stage. He needs to give the players a motive and purpose for their characters. To get the adrenaline pumping and the action going. You know, save the fair maiden in distress, stop the evil monster – better yet, destroy the evil monster and claim its fabulous treasure. Revenge is good too. Actually, there are all kinds of motives, though saving lives, money, power, glory, revenge and self-preservation are probably among the BIG motivators. I have found that even the most good, heroic and altruistic characters are driven by a little extra incentive when money, power, fame or payback are involved. Ironically, it usually does not have to be that much money nor earthshattering power – 20,000-50,000 credits each is usually plenty, or the promise of getting a new powerful weapon (magical or tech), bionic upgrade, a new vehicle or fame will help get the characters' (and their players') juices flowing and their feet moving. Of course, more or the *potential* for more is always better.

(Let me stop for a minute and talk about the power of *potential* and *promise.* The reward does not have to be real, just the promise of it. The rumor or hint that the player characters *might* unearth some legendary secret, *might* acquire an incredible magic weapon, *might* become famous, *might* stop the mighty Coalition, and so on, is somehow more alluring than a guaranteed payment or reward. It is the promise of the unknown and

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the potential for the big score that is exciting and challenging, whether it comes to pass or not. Now back to our regularly scheduled program.)

If the Game Master does not have a story outline/plot in mind, the player characters will mill about and wander around aimlessly, without purpose or agenda. They may engage in buying stuff, drinking and brawling, but not much more. In short, they are lost and the adventure goes nowhere or spins in circles. Likewise, without incentive, just hearing about some bad guy 50 klicks down the road may not be enough to get them going after him. That's where the "rumor" of treasure or implied fame and glory, or the opportunity for revenge, or the knowledge that somebody needs their help comes in. Other things work too. Having a Non-Player Character (NPC) that the player characters know and like, getting kidnaped and held hostage, or some cute, innocent child or hot babe threatened with death (or worse) can also get characters motivated, particularly if the Game Master has made the effort to make the players genuinely like and care about the NPC. Deadlines can also help – "you must accomplish your task by midnight tomorrow or else ..." but we are getting a little ahead of ourselves.

First things first. We need a plot. A story outline. A framework in which the Game Master has a sequence of events in mind and some villains for the player character to tackle.

For that we need inspiration and ideas.

Step Two: Inspiration

Where to look to get started

The most obvious place to look for adventure ideas, of course, are full-fledged, published adventures (of which Palladium offers few), *Hook, Line and Sinker*™ adventure "outlines" (found in a number of our books), encounter tables, and adventure idea tables (examples of the latter two are presented in this book). One can also check out issues of **The Rifter®** for adventures, scenario settings (places), and optional villains, monsters, gizmos and additional ideas. Palladium does not publish many fully fleshed out scenarios, because we think most Game Masters prefer to take the germ of an idea or an adventure outline and develop it in ways that best suit the players and the G.M.'s personal taste, time-line and character history.

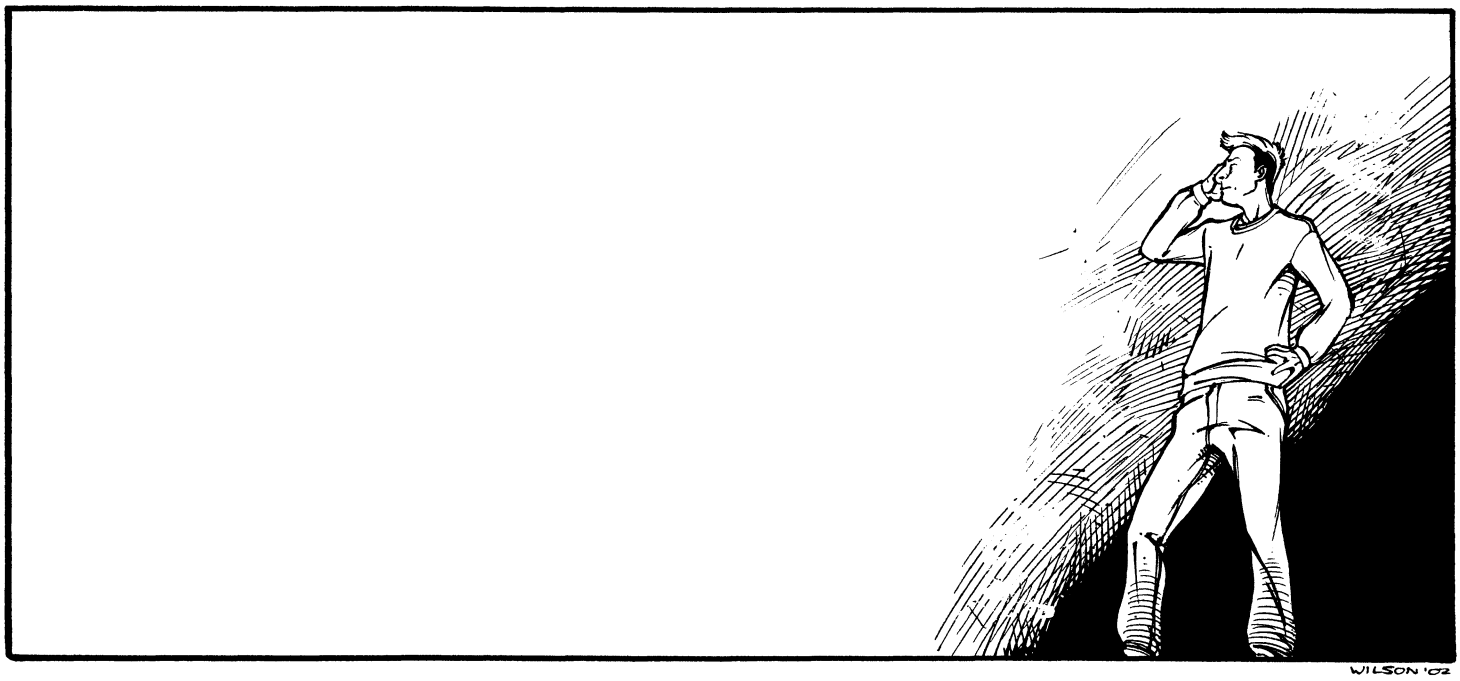
There are less obvious, but equally valuable places to look for ideas. Tons of them are in the printed text of every book whenever *rumors and propaganda* or *background information, history, character descriptions* and *O.C.C., R.C.C.* and *monster descriptions* are presented. These are all packed with ideas.

Remember, clues, hints and ideas for adventure are scattered throughout each and every Palladium role-playing game, world book and sourcebook. All you need to know is where to look, how to recognize them and how to use your imagination to develop them into something more. That's why I'm always talking about "unleashing your imagination."

The trick is to have an open mind and free your imagination. Try to look at *everything* you read, see and hear with a sense of *wonder.* See everything as *potential* for adventure. When you read something and think, "that's a cool idea" or "wow, I would hate to run into that thing," or "that would be cool for a character to have," realize they are the *seeds for adventure!*

A rare artifact, for example, is begging to be sought out. Perhaps by the player characters or the enemy; or both. Maybe one or more other interested third parties also want it. Maybe there is a time limit. Maybe the artifact is needed for some specific purpose to save the day, or can not be allowed to fall into the wrong hands. Not to mention the possibility that it is currently in the hands of some evil or powerful force. An owner is not likely to willingly give it up, not even for a noble cause or a king's ransom. Now what? Steal it? Make a desperate (and hopefully moving) plea? Kill the guy and take it? Manipulate him into giving it up or joining the cause? Find an alternative? Abandon the quest in failure? And these are just some of the possibilities.

See how when you start to consider the many possibilities the ideas just begin to flow? That's the trick. You take a tiny germ of an idea and start asking yourself, what if ... and then all



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the other questions, what, when, where, who, how, why, and it all starts to fall into place.

As you skim and read the rule book or any of the world or sourcebooks, realize that every rumor, every bit of news, every happening, every place, and every character (hero and bad guy, monster and angel) offers an opportunity for adventure. Consider some of these.

An experimental weapon begs to be located, and, a) captured or stolen and used for good, b) captured and used for whatever reason by one of the player characters, c) captured and used for evil purposes, d) battled over and destroyed (intentionally or accidentally), or e) is the beginning of something bigger (the catalyst for war, changes the balance of power, will inadvertently unleash something terrible, etc.), and so on.

A description of a place (military base, city, town, market, factory, forest, desert, cave, catacomb, etc.) is an *invitation* to explore, invade, or visit. A friendly, quiet little town is a good place to lay low – but will one's adversary track the player characters down and bring trouble to the little town? Even if the player group leaves before their enemy shows up, will the townspeople suffer because of them? The CS will murder and destroy a D-Bee or magic community. Bandits and demons will pillage and plunder the town whether the characters are there or not. A powerful being might try to enslave the villagers, and so on. Will the adventurers feel responsible? Will they come back to save the town or rescue a friend? Will they decide it is time to put an end to the fighting and injustice by facing their foes once and for all?

Or does the place offer opportunities for the characters to use their skills and ply their trade as adventurers, thieves, lawmen or guns for hire? Not to mention an opportunity to learn things, uncover a truth or a secret, or to find an answer to a burning question or mystery.

Every D-Bee, monster and villain is a potential *encounter* waiting to happen – taking that creature(s) and using it as the catalyst for an entire adventure or as the primary adversary is the magical stuff of storytelling. The creature(s) has enslaved a village or town, is kidnaping people and using them in terrible magical rituals for some (known or unknown) diabolical purpose, or raiding the countryside, destroying or stealing crops or property, turning the place into a land of evil or dark magic, or is the mastermind behind a criminal or slave operation, and so on. Or maybe the monster is misunderstood, frightened, lost and in need of help from somebody who does not automatically see it only as a monster. Or maybe it is evil, but will cut a deal and leave if it gets what it wants. Or maybe the beast is just marauding vermin devoid of mercy and kindness and must be destroyed. Explore the possibilities.

Every NPC, O.C.C. and R.C.C. is a storehouse of clues, information, trouble, and potential to carry the player characters off into some *new adventure*. Maybe he wants to get back home. Maybe he is hunted as a slave by the Splugorth, or is a runaway slave, or has been persecuted by the CS and longs to get some payback, or helps anybody persecuted by the CS. Maybe the character seeks mystic knowledge, or truth or science or peace, or justice. Maybe he or she is a scoundrel and cad, or hero with a price on his or her head, or a leader in need of heroes, or a fugitive who needs to escape. All offer the stuff of adventure. Likewise, NPCs, O.C.C.s and R.C.C.s are an excellent source for finding and molding a villain, a rival or other antagonist.

See a **quest or opportunity** in every situation. The discovery of gold gives birth to a boomtown and with it, booming crime and lawlessness. A war will need spies and mercenaries. A just cause will need heroes and soldiers to champion it. Injustice and cruelty cries out for heroes to right the wrong, punish the guilty and help the innocent. Tyranny or slavery begs for liberators and freedom. The innocent and weak need protection against the powerful and cruel. Truth always needs somebody to make it heard. Items (and people) of value will always be envied and targeted for theft or destruction. And the list goes on.

Sometimes even a **spell** or **psionic power** can provide ideas for adventure, villains, events and conflict.

Players as well as Game Masters can likewise find hints, clues and ideas they can use to build and develop their character. Most O.C.C. and R.C.C. descriptions offer background information and something of an "origin" upon which a player can draw upon to make his own character more unique, distinct and motivated. As noted above, rumors, history, and ongoing events that offer adventure ideas may also offer *character* ideas, motives, quests and a call to action. For example, the character may have been *created* by some event. This creation may be direct ("They captured me. Experimented on me. Turned me into what I am today.") or indirect ("When I heard about the atrocity – or when I saw what they did – I knew somebody had to stand against them." And that somebody is him).

Indirect things and events usually *inspire* or *move* the character to follow a dream, goal, or quest, creating or instilling a *sense of purpose* or an ideal the character strives to achieve.

Direct involvement are things and events that are *thrust* upon the character whether he wants it or not. An unprovoked attack, being framed for a crime he or she did not commit, being enslaved or imprisoned, being transformed by magic or augmented by technology against one's will, or being plunged into another dimension or swept off to a faraway land. Even to be chosen and declared a hero for his or her deeds by the people or the authorities or the media, whether the character believes he deserves the "hero label" or the notoriety that comes with the fanfare.

Turning this back around to ideas for adventure, the Game Master should see such seemingly inconsequential turns of events as *notoriety* as another avenue for adventure. Perhaps word of the character's or adventurer group's deeds and current location reach an old enemy, the Coalition States or other power who considers them outlaws or who sees such "heroes" as a threat to their power. Perhaps a family member or the friends or partners of the fallen "villains" seek revenge against the ones who hurt or imprisoned (or killed) their loved one. So they come gunning for the "heroes" or put a bounty on their heads, or try to trick, cheat, hurt or discredit the player group in some way. Perhaps some gang of cutthroats or glory seeking punk(s) decides they can make a name for themselves by challenging and defeating the "heroes," or believe if they can kill the "heroes" they can become the new celebrities or power in town. Even simpler, somebody else in need hears how this group helped that town and now pleads that they help them.

See how everything feeds into everything else? Consequences and logical reactions. If one keeps an eye out for ideas the germ of an adventure will sprout, and reactions, interactions and likely consequences will make it grow. It's fun and exciting too. Sometimes an adventure seems to take on a life of its own,

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especially when a Game Master becomes confident and skilled in playing off the things his players say and have their characters do. Wow, take it from me, the interaction, subplots and fast-action can be amazing. I don't know how many times a player gives me an idea from an innocent comment like, "I don't care what's in the graveyard as long as it's not more vampires." Or, "You know what it could be? It might be ..." Often one player turns to the other and says in a hushed, exasperated voice, "Shut up! Don't give the G.M. any ideas." And sometimes I *will* take that idea and run with it, because I liked it or I thought it would be fun, or funny. Other times, now that the one player has gotten the rest of the group thinking in a particular direction, say, that they are about to face vampires (something I imply may be *true* with a mischievous smile or noncommittal comment, neither confirming or denying the possibility; and gamers always assume the worst), I let them think that way, and do a few things to suggest they are correct. Then, I turn the table on them, by introducing the *real* threat or enemy, and it is not vampires as they had all come to suspect. This danger may come as a relief or be something even worse. It may be what I had planned all along or something I changed as the game went along, because I thought it would work better.

Other places that are hiding ideas

As cool as role-playing games are, there is a *world* of places one can find ideas to build an adventure.

Keep an open mind and free your imagination. Try to look at *everything* you read with a sense of wonder. See everything as *potential* for adventure. And when I say look at "everything" you read, I mean everything, including non-gaming material: books, magazines, comic books, on-line, everywhere. If you find yourself thinking, "that's a cool idea" or "wow," realize it may be the seed for adventure!

Ideas can also come from television, movies, school, the zoo, history, myths and legends, different real world places, friendly conversation and input from the players and other Game Masters. Heck, I came up with ideas for the **Xiticix** and their society watching the interaction of hornets flying in and out of a mud nest on the bank of a lake. In fact, I get a lot of ideas from nature, and insects are great for ideas because they look and act very alien to us mammals. I also get a lot of ideas from history, myths, and legends. The news too. Hey, like I said, there are ideas waiting to be plucked from everywhere if you keep an eye and ear open for them.

So if you are stuck for ideas, maybe you should sit down in front of the television and watch the Discovery Channel for a while, or any science, nature, or history channel. Maybe even CNN. Seriously.

Step Three: Building on an idea

As a writer, I'm constantly asked, "where do you get your ideas?"

I'm lucky. I have an overactive imagination, so everything gives me ideas. I read about the Japanese making a bionic cockroach (no kidding) with cameras and such to go into nooks and crannies and relay back data to human operators, and I'm suddenly imagining all sorts of bionic insects and creatures in a Rifts®, science fiction or super-hero setting. An army of bionic spies perhaps? Or tiny bionic assassins. Who made them and why? Better yet, who controls them and why? Does he use his creations to spy upon or undermine an old enemy, or world governments or who? Does he want to conquer the world or secretly control it behind the scenes? Or is this villain's motives entirely for profit – money – rather than power or control. Hey, did you notice I just said *villain.* From a funky, bionic cockroach, I suddenly have a villainous, criminal mastermind! See how the ideas flow and lead into one another?

When I'm writing or working up an adventure, I just let the ideas flow. I let them take me to other new ideas. Then I pick the ones I like most or seem to work best together, and weave them into an adventure.

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You will also notice that after the initial idea, I ask myself questions. Lots and lots of questions.

Who?
What?
Where?
When?
How?
Why?
What's next?
And what if?

Questions are my friends. My tools for crafting an adventure. They help me to take an idea and build everything I need to turn it into an adventure. Logical extrapolation, cause and effect, consequences, likely results, and reactions (by the authorities, by the innocent people affected, by the player heroes, etc.). It all comes together. Before I know it, I have expanded on the initial spark of an idea to construct the framework for my adventure. Now all I have to do is fill in the details. Stat out the villains and NPCs, the reasons for their actions and their plans for the future, figure out a loose time-line and logical sequence of events, work up any clues and subplots, sketch out any maps or floor plans at "key" locations, and I'm ready to game.

The end game. Although I plot out in my mind how I think events should unfold, what actually happens will ultimately be determined by my players and the things their characters say and do. I do not have a firmly fixed outcome that I stick by. Role-playing for the Game Master is like trying to see the future. You get glimpses and may have a good idea of the *likely* outcome, but the players are an X-factor. So are the roll of the dice. The players may have their characters do things that change what you *think* you see for your adventure.

For example, the roll of the dice may go badly (something I see as luck and fate; make it part of the story), or the players just make dumb mistakes, or a heroic gesture goes bad and jeopardizes the mission. Suddenly, instead of defeating the villain, our heroes are getting trashed. As G.M. you have to be prepared for this. What does the villain do? Kill 'em all?! Maybe, but that's not very fun or dramatic or comic book like, and it sure isn't fun for the players. No. This is a heroic role-playing adventure, so the villain does NOT kill them. Instead, he leaves them stunned and defeated. Some may be seriously injured and need medical attention (or magical healing), a few may even be on death's door. The villain laughs, makes a mocking remark, and leaves them laying there, broken and defeated, for they are *beneath* his notice. In the bad guy's arrogance, he believes they have learned their lesson and will never dare attack him again – setting up the famous (and a hoot to play) *rematch.*

Or, as G.M., you give the player characters a chance to escape, also setting up a rematch, not to mention dealing with the consequences of their failure. Their failure could have a whole range of problems. The villain has conquered the city, innocent people are enslaved and terrorized, the villain is more powerful than ever; the local people have lost faith in the heroes, etc.), and the heroes are fugitives hiding in the shadows. Or the villain takes some (or all) of the heroes prisoner, setting up the classic *escape and revenge adventure.* Or before the villain can finish them off, something forces him to flee (the cavalry arrives in the form of the army, police, another band of heroes, a monster, some strange occurrence, a deadline the antagonist must meet, etc.). The player characters live, but there is still the shame or frustration of their defeat, the villain(s) is still at large, and the heroes must ask, what does their arch-foe plan next? Will they be ready for the challenge? See, it is all questions and exploring the possibilities.

One of the things that makes **Rifts®** so much fun but also challenging, is that it is designed to accommodate every conceivable genre and offer unlimited possibilities. Thus, range of adventures and types of stories for **Rifts®** is limited only by one's imagination.

Different strokes for different folks

Different people will approach building an adventure from different angles and with different goals and ideas. Like any creative medium, role-playing is personal. Consequently, the adventures will reflect the likes, dislikes and personality of the players and Game Master. Since it is the Game Master who sets the stage, creates the villain, and outlines the adventure about to unfold, it is the G.M. whose personality, style of play and approach to things that has the greatest influence on the adventure and atmosphere, especially at the onset. **Remember,** the best Game Masters won't try to control or manipulate their players, but let them respond and run with events, letting the story build and change, and go places the G.M. never imagined.

The following are some of the approaches that different Palladium Game Masters use to build an adventure from an idea. Most use the same basic formula of asking questions, starting at the top and working down, using events and establishing conflict, et cetera, et cetera, but we all have our own "jumping off point." That is the element that we start with and from which our framework is built.

Kevin Siembieda: I like to mix it up (most G.M.s' do), so sometimes I start with an event, or a quest, but more often than not, I love to start with a *villain.* My adventures tend to be character driven. I love strong characters – meaning colorful, memorable characters with distinct personalities and insidious schemes. This probably comes from too many years of reading comic books and watching action-adventure TV shows and movies, but mostly comic books. Think about it. Every issue of a comic book follows the lives and adventures of that particular hero or group of heroes. Ultimately, every adventure/story-line/event revolves around a villain. Even if some event or disaster appears to be natural, inevitably we flip to the last page to see the grinning face of Doom – Doctor Doom, that is. Or Lex Luthor, or Magneto, or the Joker, or whoever, because it is the *villain* who is really behind it all, or the *villain* who plans to take advantage of the situation, or who plans to attack our heroes because they are vulnerable right now. Nine out of ten times, it is the appearance of the *villain* each issue, that gets our pulse beating faster and our minds racing as we try to guess his or her diabolical plan for our favorite heroes. And it is that *villain* and the things he does or causes to happen that is the catalyst for a new adventure.

Consequently, for me, creating a cool villain gets my imagination going and the plot coming into focus. By "role-playing the villain" in my mind – that is to say, by putting myself in the villain's shoes – I begin to think about what I might do and want

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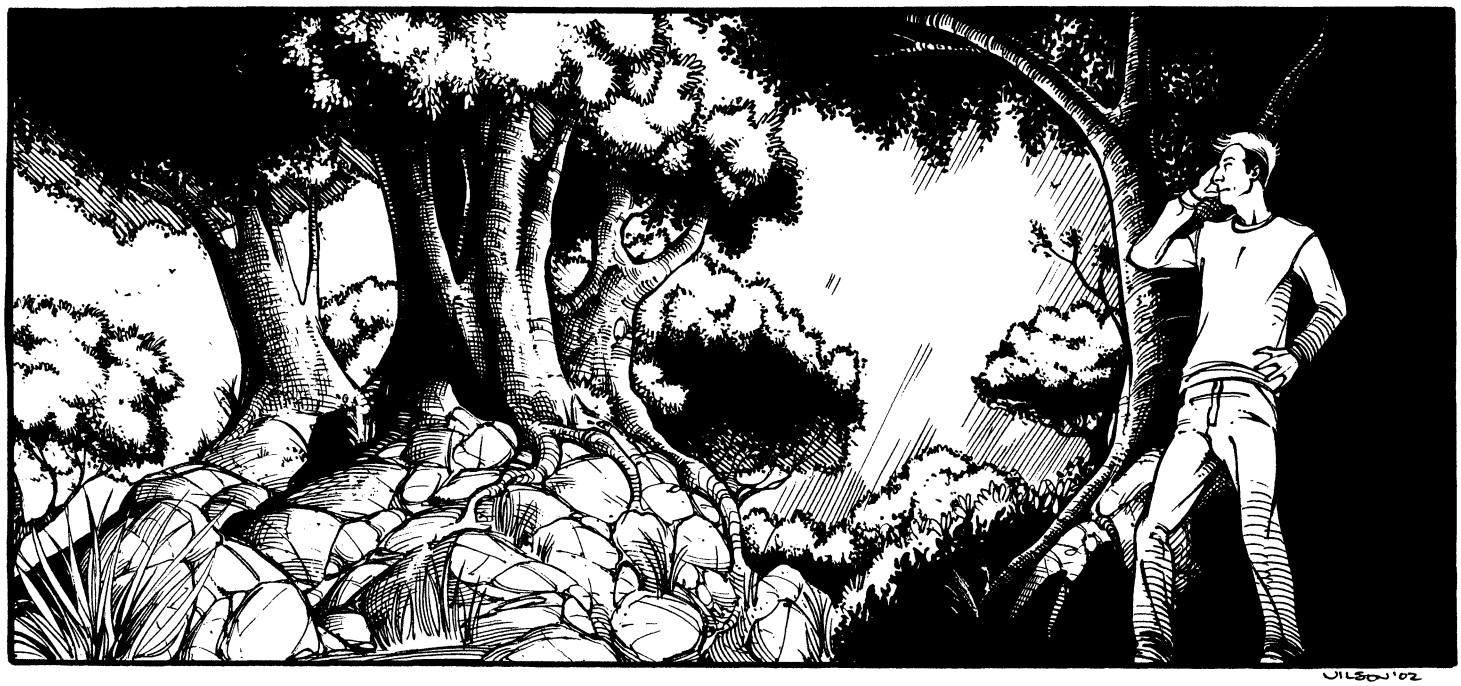

if I was this bad guy. That helps me figure out more about the character.

What is the villain's alignment? Does he have his own twisted moral code or is he a murderous monster, or a maniac, or worse? Is he absolutely evil (Diabolic), self-serving (i.e. motivated by money, power, fame, revenge, etc.; probably making him Miscreant), or does he have his own twisted code of honor and strange sense of fair play and justice (Aberrant).

Why is he evil? Knowing the back-story might provide motive and what he is after or trying to prove.

How bad is he? Is there a spark of goodness buried deep inside? A spark that might be reached and rekindled in some way? By a player character perhaps? Always a nice story sub-plot. Or is he pure evil? A baby eating, abusive monster who enjoys inflicting pain, causing suffering and holding others under his thumb?

Who is this man (or woman, or monster)? Does he have family? Friends?

How did he get this way? More fodder for subplots, motives and story elements.

What does he want? Is he crazy, power hungry, vengeful, greedy, etc.?

Where is his base of operation? Why there?

Who works for him? What kind of henchmen/minions does he have? How many?

Where will he and/or his henchmen strike next? Who will be his/their target?

Why? Money, revenge, to destroy a rival or obstacle – like the player character heroes?

When? Why then? Is there a reason behind the when? Is there a deadline or timetable?

How do the player characters fit into all of this?

These simple questions help me create the villain who is my backdrop and basis for the event about to unfold. He is the "top" to my Top-Down approach.

For me, once my villain is in place and I know what terrible thing or things he plans to do or unleash upon the world, and I can then build my adventure around those ideas, events and schemes. Creating subplots, henchmen, gizmos, monsters, hideouts, locations and elements around that *bad guy* and his sinister *plan* (the event). Then, word from an underworld informant, or spy, or innocent child that something terrible is in the making galvanizes the player characters. Ultimately, whether they are initially aware of it or not, it will become *their mission* to stop *Villain X* from doing *Terrible Event Y*. There may be some additional motivation and reward for the player group (hired by the authorities for big bucks, success will enhance their reputation, the promise of loot, fame, power or glory, a chance to get back at an old adversary, or because they are true heroes who care about people and regularly risk their lives to protect, defend, and save others, or any number of other things), but whatever the reason, they accept the challenge and face the conflict. The rest is all subplot, action, color and details as the players let loose their characters and the actual adventure unfolds.

I also like secret plots, treachery or betrayal (or the opportunity for it), choices, foreshadowing and unexpected turns of events, along with a certain amount of suspense or mystery, so some or all of these elements will make their way into most of my adventures as subplots, detail and drama. My adventures may start quiet and slow or with a boom, but they inevitably build and build until the big climax.

Erick Wujcik takes the *TOP-Down* approach, as do I, starting at the top with a big idea/ main antagonist and works his way down, breaking the big picture into smaller, interrelated pieces. Only Erick takes it to the highest level. He starts with the biggest *concept* he can imagine: good versus evil, or law vs chaos, life vs death, etc. Then he decides who are the *two* "top forces" in this conflict. The true "big guns" on both sides in the big picture. Gods, warring warlords, opposing galactic or world powers, power hungry super-beings, etc. And then he builds his campaign setting around those powers and their machinations, all the while thinking about how the *player characters* fit into the scheme of things. If the forces are gods, he starts asking

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himself questions and finding the answers he likes. What are each god's goals? What do they want or hope to achieve? What is each god's religion? Who are their worshipers, minions and henchmen? What role do they play in the gods' scheme? And on and on. The players typically start at the bottom of this hierarchy and scheme, dealing with henchmen and spies, and working their way (deliberately or by chance) into the heart of the matter and up the ladder.

Erick says he always keeps an eye on the big picture, current events, and like a chess master, one eye six moves ahead in the future. He also wanted me to stress that Game Masters should work out the two opposing powers (in the example above, the two rival gods), their history and their plans for the future as completely as possible. As he does this, he finds motives and revenge and desires that mold them and the situation at hand, as well as other non-player characters and villains who serve (or are used by) these two forces. It shapes their personalities and gives them purpose. Don't write a book on the character and his history, Erick warns, but have a strong idea of the past and present and goals for the future. Knowing this about the opposing forces at the very top, as well as the lesser beings on either side of the conflict, enables the Game Master to use foreshadowing, weave elaborate plots and create a sense of continuity that will make the players feel they are involved in something far reaching, dramatic and truly epic.

Erick also likes to color his adventures with puzzles, secret plots, conspiracy, mysteries and discovery. All made easy because of his Top-Down approach and the rich history and back-story he has in his head. He also loves high-concepts and weird science. But he always starts with the question of who are the *two* big powers – the opposing forces, whether they be outright villains or powerful manipulators behind the scene. This is what inspires Erick and gets the wheels of imagination turning for him. **Note:** See Erick's complete explanation of Top-Down under his write-up entitled, *Thinking Big*, in the **Game Maters' Tools** section.

Rene Vega and **Alex Marciniszyn** are gimmick and gizmo people (Wujcik sometimes too). That is to say, their adventures are often inspired by and revolve around *objects, items* and *technology.* You know, some strange alien device or ancient magic item, or advanced technology, or lost technology, or technology gone awry. This item or items (sometimes a place that holds this lost or alien technology) is the focus of, or chief ingredient in, the adventure and the component that *inspires* them.

Rene often took it to the point that entire societies, religions, etc., might form around this item or technology. And "toys" – gizmos, gimmicks and machines play a big role throughout his adventures. To get a clear idea of what we mean, take a look at numbers 49, 50, 51, 54, 55, 58 and 60 of the *101 Adventure ideas* elsewhere in this book. These were written by *Alex* and reflect his approach using items, gizmos and technology to build an adventure around.

Warning! This can be as fun and as effective as any other approach, provided the players are not bored with too many technical details they don't care about, or given so much junk that they don't know what to do with it or become more powerful than the G.M. can handle. Remember, the players may not always share the G.M.'s interest or knowledge in the same things. Focus too much on science or tech that the players don't know, understand or care about, and they become bored and confused. They may not pick up on clues that seem obvious to you, and the adventure gets mired down. "Yeah, that's cool. Now can we get on with the story? What about our characters? We want to ..." This kind of problem is endemic of *mysteries* and *detective* based adventures too. The players might not be good sleuths. They just don't see the clues, or when they do, they just can't put the pieces together. They see 2+2= 7. They don't get it. It doesn't matter if the Game Master thinks it is obvious or easy. Remember, the players are NOT detectives! It doesn't matter that their fictional characters' may be one. The real life players who have to do the thinking and figuring are not. Realize this and do something about it. No, you don't have to give up running science and tech based games or mystery and detective based games, but you might need to make the clues more obvious and lead the player group a little bit. Cut down on the technical details and boil it all down for the players in terms they can understand and appreciate, and listen to what they want. Give 'em a little more action, other challenges, focus more on the suspense and moody atmosphere, and make sure there is fun interaction. The bottom-line is keep things moving and interesting.

Bill Coffin thinks about cheese, lots and lots of cheese. Seriously though, he uses something he calls the *adventure helix*, a sequence of what Bill called "actions or events" that the player characters have to *respond* to. Bill typically has *two* big actions/events. One at the very onset of the adventure, which sets the stage for the adventure with player characters responding to the consequences of that event. As the players play through the consequence of that action/event, they uncover information and new events unfold that lead them the second "climactic" action. The second event is typically the big battle and/or a satisfying resolution

The first event or action, can be something big or something small. A big action would be a disaster or serious threat (invaders, terrible monster, etc.). But a small action can be just as effective. Bill used the example that some item (keys, experimental weapon, magic item, evidence, etc.) in the player group's possession might get stolen. There is something important about this item or it may seem inconsequential until the other shoe drops and they find out it is of great importance to ... what? As you can see the adventure is forming right now. Using this example, the player characters' "lost or stolen item" has fallen into the wrong hands for a nefarious purpose. They must find out who has it, what he wants it for, and get it back before the villain can use it (against them, against innocent people, to attain something even worse, to summon a terrible force, etc.). Getting the item back and preventing it from helping a bad guy becomes the group's mission, triggered by this little initial action of the item getting stolen. Ultimately, the idea behind the first action is to – as Bill put it – "to get the characters pumped up and jazzed." Motivated to take action and do something. Works for me.

Bill's adventures are also very *player character* oriented. According to him, he really designs a lot of the adventure with the player group and their characters in mind. Creating things those characters hope to achieve, confront, fear, would see as challenge or threat, etc. I think that is true of most good Game Masters who are running an ongoing campaign with the same cast of characters.

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Wayne Breaux's approach is similar to Bill's. Wayne tends to create adventures around a plot/events and/or a villain. He likes elaborate plots and adventures that "seem" to start out simple and straightforward, like a bank robbery. He then builds from there, throwing in twists and surprises to build a more elaborate story. He likes the players to find things out even if it is not imperative to the adventure – i.e. fun facts. For example, the villain responsible for the bank robbery does NOT normally rob banks. It is out of character for him. Investigating this, the players discover the villain did not take any money, but struck at the safe deposit boxes. Further investigation reveals one of the boxes contained ... "X" – secret plans for an experimental super-power, the formula for a magical elixir or the ritual for a rare and dangerous magic ceremony or summoning, or location of something bad, or evidence that will cause mayhem if revealed, and so on. This was the real target and reason/motive for the robbery and now the adventure is off. Like Bill's example, the player characters need to find the bad guy and stop him before he uses it. Or maybe it is just the first phase in accomplishing the villain's goal. If they can figure out what he is up to, where he will strike next (and better yet, why, if the answer is not known yet), they can foil the madman's scheme and avert disaster. If they fail, they have to deal with the consequences.

Wayne says he makes the player characters earn the information, even though no combat may be involved, by interacting with a host of different Non-Player Characters. He also warns G.M.s not to fall in a rut. This section is presenting basic outlines and rudimentary formulas for creating adventures, but you need to stay fresh, try different things and avoid falling into a rut, becoming predictable. Likewise, when players are in a rut, or think they are on to the Game Master's plot, throw a surprise at them. Again, that's where flexibility and imagination are needed. Throw them a curve ball. Use variety to keep things exciting and "unpredictable."

Like me, Wayne makes the world rich and colorful with Non-Player Characters, and often knows the NPCs' alignments, history, motives, goals and aspirations in advance. As a result, we know how they will react to any given situation, which enables us to have them respond and interact with the player characters without much thought. When a player asks if his character can slip the Coalition ISS Officer a bribe to let him escape, we know the NPC is a straight shooter who will be outraged by the offer and respond to it by cursing and beating the character. Or that the NPC lawman *is* corrupt and will accept the bribe. Or will pretend to do so to enable him or other CS agents to follow the character to the rest of his team, and so on. Other times we wing it, modifying the honest ISS Officer to be a corrupt one, because the story has slowed down and this will bring in some new action and new developments.

Wayne wanted me to stress that it is important for the player characters to make a connection with the NPCs. That the drama is more intense and personal if the player characters KNOW the NPC and genuinely like and care about that character. That way, when something happens involving that NPC, there is more *drama* and *impact*.

Julius Rosenstein, a truly great Game Master, likes to build many of his adventures around an *event, quest* or *mission.* So his adventures focus around the characters being given a quest, a mission, hired to do something or facing some impending danger. Sometimes it is also performing a good deed or helping a noble cause. For less noble players, Jules' *quest* may be the acquisition of something valuable or a powerful magic item, weapon or relic. In other cases, the adventure involves stopping said item (or person or secret) from falling into the wrong hands, but ultimately, the inspiration and motive is to *go* someplace and *do* something (to get, stop, protect, rescue, destroy ... whatever). Most of the adventure, the conflict, the villains, and the challenges are built around that quest/mission. Like the *Mission Impossible* movies, Julius' adventure starts with, "your mission, if you choose to accept it, is ..." and he goes on from there.

Julius gave me this example. The Action could be: A missile base has been taken over. That's the impetus. What gets things going. Then he asks himself, who are the villains? What are their resources, special powers, and flunkies? Why capture the base? To what terrible use will they put it? The player characters have to figure all this out too, and then try to stop the bad guys, but it all starts with – "a missile base has been taken over."

A quick note about "power gaming." Some Game Masters build their adventure entirely or almost entirely around action and combat. These combat driven games always resolve problems and conflict with combat, and typically involve a series of butt-kicking encounters ending in a grand finale, mother of all battles. Combat oriented games and those who like playing them often get a bad rap. They are called "Hack n' Slash" gamers, "twitchers," and "power gamers," among other things, all with a certain negative context to the term.

Look, there's nothing wrong with combat oriented games. If that is what you and the players like, no problem. If you are having fun, go for it baby, kick some butt and nuke that den of monsters!

Role-playing games are about *having fun*, remember? There is no right or wrong way to play, just personal preferences and different styles of play.

Personally, I love action-adventures. Though as I stated earlier, I like more story, subplots, humor, atmosphere, surprises and strong character interaction in my adventures. That means I like my players to talk to the farmer and charm the information out of him, rather than crack his head open with the butt of a laser rifle, and threaten to kill his family to get the info or discover he honestly doesn't know anything. But, hey, both tactics work. I just don't enjoy what I consider pointless violence. I like a little intrigue, mystery and foreplay in my adventures. No, not sex, wise guys, intellectual foreplay, a game of wit, strategy and tactics between the heroes and the bad guys. I like the player characters to get an intimate, up-close look at the face of evil that challenges them. I want their skin to crawl and be driven to stop (not necessarily destroy) the arch-villain. And they know exactly why the scum bag must be stopped and the consequences if they fail, creating drama, pathos and suspense. But that's just me and the players I hang with.

The problem I have seen with the so-called "power games" is the stories tend to be more straightforward, linear, and involve a lot less character development than I like. For me, playing in character and character interaction is what "role" playing is all about. I can get shoot 'em up games on the computer. I also seem to hear a lot of Game Masters who engage in power/combat games complaining about losing control and the player char-

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acters becoming too powerful too quickly. Although I think part of that problem comes from the G.M. being too rigid in his thinking and not flexible and imaginative. By the end of my (nearly three year long) campaign, my Defilers were all 9-12th level and were constantly getting beaten into the ground or barely pulling out a win using cunning as well as magic, brawn and raw firepower.

I also found that those who get *too* lost in the combat aspect tend to attack, kill and destroy *everything*, even when the conflict could be avoided with the same successful or better result.

All of the above notwithstanding, I have played in (and even run more than a few) adventures that others would probably consider "hack 'n slash" or "power gaming" and have had a blast doing it. These adventures didn't spiral out of control, and didn't have a bunch of pointless violence and killing, but man oh man, they were non-stop action with a lot of chases, shoot-outs, fighting, explosions and swashbuckling heroics. Let's face it, especially for us guys, sometimes we like to cut loose and just stomp the bad guys (especially since this is all make-believe and nobody really gets hurt). It's fun.

Just remember, no matter what style and approach to gaming and adventuring you like most, *variety* is the spice of life. Mix it up. Try different things and explore ideas, new characters, new settings and different approaches to gaming.

And for you *guys* who want to see more women and girlfriends get involved in role-playing, understand that most women do not enjoy constant, non-stop fighting, especially if it seems pointless or gratuitous. That doesn't mean NO action. Far from it. It means adventures with more meat to them. Adventures with suspense and intrigue, interesting Non-Player Characters and interaction with them, mystery, humor, and maybe (hey, I said maybe) a little romance to go along with the action parts. You know what? You might like it too. Think not? Think again, because ALL the G.M.s I have noted in this section include all these elements and we ALL have women playing in our games and they all have a great time.

Step Four: Outlining the story

To a large degree, we have already covered this when I wrote about expanding on the idea and building the adventure, but we probably should think a little about *formal story structure.*

Now that you have the ideas for the conflict, the villain and the event that motivates the player group to take action, the Game Master needs to structure it into a story with a beginning, middle and an end. You don't have to write a book, just outline the basics and have your cast of Non-Player Characters statted out and ready to go. Know the big picture – the villain's plans, what will happen if this or that occurs, and you are ready to game. Really.

As rudimentary as this may sound, as the Game Master, you MUST have a story, event, and villain in mind. Unless you are good at improvising (whipping up a story, event and villain on the spot), you will *need* to have a plan. Some idea for the adventure.

Story Structure

This is storytelling at its simplest. Don't be afraid of it, and don't spend a million years, sweat and tears plotting out every last detail, because your players will do things you never dreamt of, and go in directions that will play havoc with your idea of how the adventure will unfold. (Getting us back to being flexible and imaginative.)

The beginning: The start and impetus for the adventure: The reason, the villain or danger becomes known and the characters respond to it. In short, we set the stage and establish what the conflict is.

The middle: This is our heroes' response to the conflict and how they work to resolve it. Includes gathering more information, figuring out clues, solving mysteries, conducting reconnaissance, and preparing for battle. Possibly even testing the waters and challenging the foe to size him up, or engage in minor skirmishes that may end in success or failure, but don't add up to much one way or the other. One may lose the battle, but win the war.

The end: The final conflict – the epic battle, winner take all. And hopefully for our heroes, triumph and resolve the conflict.

Of course the above is just the most basic of outlines. In the course of an adventure *campaign*, where the same characters gather to adventure or fight evil on a regular basis, one night of adventure (that game session) CAN end with our heroes in defeat. This can happen because each adventure is telling a bigger story. A continuing story.

So next week, we pick up where we left off. Our heroes running (or left behind) in defeat, and possibly in disgrace and physically beaten. Ah, but what about their spirits? Their spirits are not broken. Thus, the G.M. (the architect of our story) allows the heroes to escape capture (or not) and *regroup*. During this regrouping game session, hours, days or weeks of imaginary time may pass as the heroes heal their wounds, reorganize, figure out what they did wrong, reassess the enemy's strengths and weaknesses (now that they are intimately familiar with them) and begin plotting their rematch. A rematch with a decidedly different outcome. This is likely to involve an entire game session of role-playing, and may involve spying on the enemy, undermining the enemy, setting him up for the fall, finding a new ally, getting new weapons and equipment or a special weapon or magic item to even the odds, and readying themselves for the big battle. During all this there is subtle energy, determination and drama. **The Aftermath of Defeat adventure** is awesome, and one of my personal favorites. Game Masters should try it. Ultimately, it makes for three nights of adventure (maybe more) that tell a story with a beginning, middle and end.

Adventure one turns out to be the "beginning" of the saga in which our heroes learn of the conflict/danger or villain and rush out to face it (perhaps unprepared) and lose.

Adventure two becomes the "middle" where our heroes pull themselves up by their bootstraps and resolve to fight back and win. We then follow their trek back to health and back to the face of the enemy. The odds are against them, but it doesn't matter. They are firmly resolved and ready for the final battle. End of adventure two.

This reminds me of the line, "Nobody tosses me my own guns and tells me to leave. Nobody." I love that line (which I

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may have just paraphrased) from the movie, *The Magnificent Seven.* In this movie the seven gunfighters had won their initial battle against the bad guys, but are betrayed by the very people they are fighting to protect. Thus, the villain and his troops get the drop on the seven in a surprise ambush at their village base camp. Outnumbered, the seven agree to surrender and hand over their weapons rather than be shot cold with no real chance for escape. It is a calculated risk, but it works. The main villain is happy with their surrender and doesn't want the friends of "men such as these" looking for payback, so he is willing to set them free and return their guns – after they have been escorted several miles from the village. The villain states that he is sure the seven realize they are outmatched, and that this village is not worth fighting for. The betrayal, however, came out of fear and misplaced logic, and many of the villagers who supported the seven had no part in the betrayal, but now face brutal retribution. The leader of the seven asks about what will happen to the men who supported the heroes. The villain smiles and says, "What happens to these men will happen whether I kill you first or not." That puts an end to any more questions. The seven are led away, dropped off and expected to go. One by one, six of the seven pick up their guns and make a statement why nobody defeats them like this. Nobody. It is clear from their words and actions they are going back. Only one rides off, but later has a change of heart and rejoins his comrades.

Part Three is the "end story." The final battle. Good vs evil. One will win, one will fall. After all this drama and courage, and if the players play brilliantly, the Game Master should try to nudge things along so that, in the end, even if things go badly, and a second failure seems imminent, our heroes reverse their fortunes and pull out a win. And I do mean nudge. It is a hollow and disappointing victory if the G.M. has to pull their fat out of the fire. And maybe the win, even one all on their own, is not quite a complete victory because the main villain (although thwarted) or a couple of his most dangerous henchmen escaped, and that can only mean trouble later down the road. By the way, it is not a save by the cavalry if the player characters fight all the main bad guys while the cavalry handles the hundreds of flunky warriors, or mops up.

Not to leave you hanging about the movie, *The Magnificent Seven*, the six launch an attack on the bad guys, the seventh rides onto the scene in time to save his friend (the group leader), and the heroes win. Half perish in the battle, but the *group* wins, the evil is stomped out, and the villagers (the real winners in the story) can now live in peace. At least until the not very good sequel. By the way, *The Magnificent Seven* is a good example of "borrowing" and changing ideas to make them your own, because it is inspired from the Japanese film classic, *The Seven Samurai.*

Movies take a four part approach

This is nothing that Hollywood has officially published somewhere, but something Bill Coffin noticed, mentioned to me, and I agree with. Hollywood movies, most TV shows, and comic book adventures construct stories with four acts (four main events or turning points).

Act One: Makes you aware. You get a sense of who the good guys and bad guys are and the coming conflict. In other words, the stage is set and our characters introduced.

Act Two: Makes you care. Gives you the underlying conflict and the reason you should care. Care about the characters and the conflict. Care about the innocent people in danger or the freedoms, ideals and goals threatened by the bad guys. Why you should root for the heroes to stop the conflict and/or defeat the bad guys. And the depth of the enemy and opposition (how powerful, cruel, evil and dangerous they are). In role-playing, this is the clue, discovery and skirmish stage, and when the greatest amount of character interaction is likely to take place.

Act Three: Makes you fear. This is when things start going badly for our heroes and the *villain* seems to be getting the upper hand. Maybe something is going on behind the scenes that the heroes don't know about, or the stage is set for a possible betrayal, or the odds are stacked against them. All those reasons to care for the hero characters come into play as we begin to worry about the good guys, and question and fear that they can not win and/or will be destroyed. In comic books and a number of my adventures, this is where the heroes are defeated and have to regroup and try again or take a different tactic, or struggle on, but *appear* to be losing. Can they pull it off? Gotta wait for Act Four.

Act Four: Makes you cheer (usually). The heroes sucked it up and despite all the odds stacked against them and the perils they had to suffer through, the heroes dig deep and overcame. This is the climactic final battle and ending in triumph. We see this kind of format in all types of action-adventure movies, *The Matrix, Star Wars Four: A New Hope*, *Indiana Jones, Terminator,* and many others use this "happy ending" formula. Even in great films like *Gladiator* and *Braveheart* where the hero DIES, he does not die in vain, and his "triumphant death" puts an end to the villain, saves the day, and/or brings about positive change (rights an injustice, changes attitudes, frees slaves, inspires others to take up his cause and win, etc.).

The "classic" five acts of drama

Bill also reminded me about classic literature and plays, starting with Shakespearian drama, that have five acts. This approach works best for adventures heavy on drama and character interaction as well as long running campaigns (multiple adventures) where a longer, more complex story can be played out. By the way, ANY of these basic, 3, 4, or 5 act approaches can be used as the basic framework for role-playing adventure.

Act One: The good guys are on top, the bad guys are on the bottom. Our story opens with everything fine in Mudville. The heroes are heroes, and everything is as it should be. The heroes are introduced and the setting is established.

Act Two: The good guys are on a downward slide as some event unfolds or as they face some tragedy or conflict. Meanwhile, the villains are sliding up as they are the ones responsible for the trouble/conflict. The good guys and bad guys are crossing each other – meaning that the two are becoming aware of each other for the first time and the battle lines are being drawn. Both sides become intimately aware of each other and of each other's position in the conflict. In fact, it is their crossing, their opposition, that is the *seed* of their conflict.

Act Three: The bad guys are on top and the heroes on the bottom, because the bad guys have the upper hand and are in control.

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Act Four: The process begins over again, only in reverse as the player characters rebound and begin to climb back up as they regroup and formulate new plans to undermine and defeat their enemies. The heroes may even have begun to implement those plans, or found a new ally or weapon to use against their foe. Meanwhile, the villains' position is starting to look shaky. Things are not going as well or as smoothly as they should. The villains may even be aware of the heroes' work to defeat them, and there may be minor skirmishes the villains lose (a prelude of things to come) as things begin to return back to their natural order.

Act Five: Reversal of fortune and heroes triumphant. The bad guys have been prevented from taking what was never theirs to begin with. They are defeated through cunning or combat and peace is restored, and the heroes back on top. As with the four act play (and even the three), the triumph may come at a cost, and there may be a tragic end, but overall, things are good and balance restored.

Step Five: You are power

Game Masters, YOU are power! Not in any real world sense. Nor is it a power you should use to manipulate the players or to get what "you" want in the game. A good RPG session doesn't work like that. Remember, you are striving to create an exciting story with challenges, action and rewards for the players, not to beat or crush the player group. A role-playing game is not a contest between G.M. and players to see who is smarter or more clever, it is a cooperative effort. As I said before, the best Game Masters think of themselves as master entertainers and pander to their players, often customizing events, conflicts, problems and villains to fit, intrigue, challenge and excite the players.

All that aside, you *are* power in the sense that YOU, the Game Master, can change the shape of things to come and the fantasy world you create with your words and imagination. You can adjust, tweak, and modify any element, aspect and Non-Player Character in the game. Remember that.

During my old Detroit Gaming Center days, the players often referred to the Game Master as *The Universe.* "Gosh, you (the G.M.) play everything in the game. You set it all up. You decide if it is a sunny or a rainy day, whether a rainstorm rolls in and washes out the bridge or a flood threatens the village, what villain is on the prowl, and everything. I mean, you know what's behind every bush and door and can throw at us ... well, anything."

And they were right. Mostly. A lot of that is true because it is all part of creating the setting and building the story. As the G.M., you move that story along through the interaction of your Non-Player Characters (NPCs) and the player characters, as well

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as through events, the passage of time, and descriptions to set a particular mood, sense of urgency, or unfolding terror. More importantly, however, as Game Master, you can change things as they progress. Ultimately, YOU control the pacing, the atmosphere and the action. That is important to remember, because YOU, the G.M., can do things as the story goes along, not to cheat or manipulate the players (that's wrong), but to nudge the group in the right direction and make the adventure more fun, mysterious, action-packed, etc., as it goes along. This gets us back to Game Masters using their *imaginations* and *being flexible.*

I've got bad news for you "new" Game Masters: sometimes, no matter how well you plan your adventure, and no matter how good you "imagined" it would be, sometimes it does not go well. In fact, this grand adventure you could hardly wait to spring on your players may *stink!* Or just drag on and go nowhere. It is very much like a comic dying on stage because nobody is laughing at a single one of his jokes. God, the horror! It is painful. You feel like a failure and that your friends are snickering at you. Worse, that they won't want to play anymore and may think less of you as a human being. For the inexperienced Game Master, this is panic time.

First, *relax.* It's just a game. These are your friends. Sure they may rag you about this dull, dismal game. Maybe even for the rest of your life, even after you become a godly Game Master. That's the way some friends are, especially guys. But, it's no big deal. They'll still love you. Honest. You'll still go out and party, and do things together. Besides, you aren't dead in the water yet. This is the moment when you must remember, "you are power." You can change things. Make them better, faster, more dramatic and fun. You are the Game Master. Emphasis on the word "master." The master of the game. The master of the villains. The master of the setting. The master of the action. You just need to be flexible enough and fearless enough to take charge of your sinking ship and change course in midstream.

Like the comic dying on stage, you can stick to your shtick – your plans that are floundering and die a painful death – or you make *changes.* Toss *your* original plans for a night of wonderful adventure out the window. Change the pacing and do something completely different. How? It is so easy, you won't believe it.

Travel, a classic pitfall

Going from point A to point B should be simple, but you know what, they call it a "wilderness" because there just ain't much out there. Playing through the entire trip can be excruciatingly boring and tiresome, just like real life, especially if it takes more than a day or two. Remember when you were a kid, and kept asking, "Are we there yet?" That's the way it is for the players. They want to get to the mystery or the action, especially if the *destination* is where the action is supposed to be. It's like going to *Disneyland*, everything in between getting there is incidental and in the way. You don't care, you wish it were over and you wish you were already at Disneyland! The big payoff, the excitement is seeing Disneyland!

That means unless something truly cool or which takes them off to the *real adventure* occurs during the trip, or has some important consequence for Disneyland, the players quickly get bored. They can only endure weathering a storm, fighting off monsters or bandits and enjoying the scenery for so long.

Here is what I do. I time jump. "Your trip passes by uneventfully and except for a rockslide that causes you to make a slight detour, you arrive without incident and in the eight days you thought it would take."

See, simple. No boredom. No filler crap. Zing, right to Disneyland.

G.M. Rule of Thumb Number One: If it's not fun or important to the story, do NOT bore us with it. Especially not in detail. This is true of writing and any kind of good story-telling, and it is certainly true in presenting a role-playing game adventure.

What's that? It doesn't seem right, or it sounds like a cheap trick. Get real, even great films like **Indiana Jones** use this device. Remember following the little dashes appearing on the map as Indy traveled from one place to another. Hey, the travel part of the story was just not important. It was what happened once he got there that mattered and needed to be told. The only exception (and this applies to your adventures) is when something important happens on the trip. In the first Indiana Jones movie, we follow our hero and heroine on the boat, we have a little character interaction that bonds the two (and endears them to the viewer so the coming act is more scary and dramatic) and because the girl and the ark of the covenant are captured by the Nazi bad guys during the trip. We also see how a quick thinking Doctor Jones escapes capture and gets onto the submarine. That's the important stuff and we see it. We don't see the girl interrogated on the submarine, we don't see the crew eating dinner, playing cards or anything else because its not important to the story. We jump again, to the next scene, the sub landing at a secret dock and Indy getting himself captured. Got it? Good.

The same thing works for the *passage of night* or more precisely, bedtime. You know, where one character stands guard while the others sleep. Now, sometime during "night watch" I *will* introduce an encounter or event that I might spin into an *interesting* side adventure or subplot to spice things up, to provide a clue, or to introduce a threat or hints of a villain or danger yet to come (I adore *foreshadowing* and recommend it highly). And sometimes, just to keep the players guessing and to avoid becoming predictable, I will inject some occurrence or trouble to keep 'em on their toes. On a trip, I might say something like, "The first six days of the trip are pleasant and pass without event, but on the morning of the seventh day ..." and I interject something. "You see ... X," "You find ...," "You encounter ...," "You hear ...," which all leads to an event, clash, observation, person, problem, insight or all of the above. Sometimes it is important and has to do with the overall adventure or campaign (although that may not become apparent later), and sometimes it is just an aside – a minor event that takes place outside the realm of our main story, but is interesting, funny and entertaining nonetheless. I also use "asides" (and humor) to break up the monotony when things begin to drag, or I feel the group needs a distraction or a change of pace, especially if things are getting too grim or serious.

Note: I should warn you, right now, I am NOT a serious gamer. I am serious about gaming and fun, but I'm not a serious games. I know this is true, because "serious gamers" have told me so on more than one occasion. You know the types, no hu-

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mor, intense focus on the adventure, rules lawyering, and serious, often melodramatic playing in character. Everything for these self-proclaimed "serious gamers" is grim, solemn, official and important, with no room for a little clowning around, humor or distraction. To these folks I say, if that's how you like your gaming, great. Enjoy. Like I always say, role-playing is very personal and stylistic – different strokes for different folks – if that's what you like, game on and enjoy. But for me and my players, we like to have some laughs together and get a little silly sometimes. Not through the entire game, of course. A clown who never stops clowning is an annoying distraction who can be seriously disruptive and ruin the fun for everyone. But I think a good mix of emotions, informality and laughter is a good thing. In fact, as the Game Master, I will crack a joke or make a humorous observation or pun even in the middle of a serious or frightening moment in the game. Not all the time, but when I think a nice laugh would lighten things up and remind people that it is only a game or it is just plain funny and I want to share. I also love humor and humorous interaction as an official part of the game too. The blundering Non-Player Character, the goofy drunk, the clumsy thief, the braggart who is really a coward, and other characters for comic relief. It mixes things up, keeps things fresh, and surprisingly, keeps the players alert.

Help! My wonderful plans aren't working

G.M. Rule of Thumb Number Two: Keep the story moving.

Okay, your carefully plotted adventure sucks. Now what? You spice it up, baby. Change it and spice it up. You are power, remember. YOU are the gaming universe. YOU can do anything. So it is time to do it and get this adventure moving. This doesn't have to be more combat. It can be a noise or commotion that should be investigated. A villager staggering into the saloon with a frightening or exciting story (which, of course, has implications on the player group's plans). An unexpected clue that gets the player group wondering, talking and speculating. A chance for the characters to show off in a friendly contest or competition. And so on. Then again, action/conflict is always a winner.

G.M. Rule of Thumb Number Three: Be Flexible & Inventive.

In this case, *flexibility* means throwing YOUR plans and YOUR expectations out the window. You need to do what works best to entertain, motivate and involve the players, not salvage your plans. Something like this should work. You clear your throat and announce:

"Suddenly, without warning, this quiet, boring day in town is interrupted by the sound of gunfire and screaming (or the sound of racing hooves, the swirl of magic, the cry of a monster, etc.)."

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Being brazen opportunists, if not courageous heroes, the various player characters will *take action.* Some may step into the shadows or find a hiding place to wait and see what's going on. A Line Walker may dispatch his familiar, the others may race toward the sound of the commotion.

ALL of them want to *know* what's going on.

They are hooked.

You have their attention and you've gotten the adrenaline flowing.

Now run with the ball Mr. or Ms. Game Master. Let your imagination go and start building an adventure off the cuff. For the moment, it's probably best to forget about what you had planned and let it go for the moment. Like that comic dying on stage, you need to go in a different direction and get the crowd laughing. Once you have won your audience, then you can think about weaving in some of your originally planned material.

So, what is going on?

Could be anything. For this example, I chose it to be a raid by *Splugorth Slavers.* This is a backwater wilderness town with no army, only an inexperienced volunteer militia and a sheriff. The townsfolk are simply outmatched by their attackers, which is why the insidious Slavers chose it. Which means the *player characters* are the people's only chance for salvation. They are the X-factor the Slavers are not expecting. Unless the player characters help, half the town will get scooped up and sold into slavery. And as the G.M., you should make sure the players know this by saying something like:

"Your characters realize the townspeople can't handle this. Whoever is attacking has too much firepower and skill as raiders. Unless your characters do something, it is going to be bad. Really bad."

Punctuate that point with a description of a couple of tragic events and a display of the enemy's power.

"Men, women and children are running around like chickens with their heads cut off. Parents rush screaming into the streets, hoping to snatch up and rescue their children before it is too late. All are panicked. The few who step up to fight back, fall under attack. They need help or will be forced to fall back or be killed or captured themselves."

A bunch, if not all, of the player characters in the group should be in mortal danger and under attack themselves, particularly those who rushed toward the sounds of the raid. But even if they don't, the Splugorth Slavers and their henchmen, including Blind Warrior Women and other Splugorth minions, possibly other slaves and/or local scum bags who serve the Slavers for pay, sweep the streets, kicking down doors looking for victims. To any player characters clustered together or in the thick of things, you report that they see a magical Splugorth Slave Barge turn the corner only a 100 yards away (maybe much closer). The Splugorth Slaver turns, smiles and points at them.

This is it. It is time for the Game Master's famous and perennial question. You look at your players, point and ask each one in turn,

"What is your character doing?"

The action continues from there, using a logical progression of events, actions and reactions. And guess what? You have an adventure going. An exciting one at that.

Best of all, when your players remember this adventure, the boredom and slow start now seems intentional. Part of the story to make the unexpected appearance of the raiders seem more dramatic! You're not a bum or a failure, you're a genius! And if they don't fall for that one, it is human nature to remember the fun and good stuff and forget about the boring. The slow start is forgotten, just like the trip to Disneyland, and only the fun and exciting Disneyland and subsequent exciting things are burned into the memory.

A brief aside. Some players need to be dragged into the action or led by the hand. Do it. I know one gamer in particular who is always avoiding trouble. In real life he is a gentle soul who is just more of a thinker and a dreamer than a fighter. He's not aggressive and tends to play his characters the same way. A guy like this, especially if his character has a self-serving Anarchist alignment, is likely to "take cover and avoid being seen," or "hide until the trouble passes." HOWEVER, if he's a team player or likes a particular fellow character in the group, or an NPC he met in town, the character may be drawn into action if that other character falls under attack, or is about to be captured and needs help. If that doesn't work, then the *hiding character* should be discovered and attacked by the raiders. You can't get any more proactive than having to defend yourself. If the fellow's character is attacked, he has to do something: run, fight, use magic, call for help, something. The point is, the player is now *involved,* because his character is under attack, and you want player involvement and interaction. Something else. Not all players get into fighting. Some like to plan or figure out clues, others like sneaking around and gathering information, etc., that's where customizing the adventure to fit the players comes in. Give these guys or gals something "they" can sink their teeth into and find exciting or challenging. Once in a while, play to the individual character's strength or weakness. It makes the adventure more memorable and challenging for them.)

Where to go from here. That requires more imagination and flexibility from the G.M. He or she must improvise. The events that *could* unfold are many. If the G.M. would like, the Splugorth Slavers and their exploits could turn into an entire night of adventure. How? How about this.

Our heroes pose enough of a threat and resistance that the Splugorth Slavers and their minions turn tail and run. The townspeople cheer and there is a moment of exuberance. The question one must ask is, are they gone for good?

The Slavers may have retreated to regroup and formulate a new plan of attack. Something sneakier this time, and directed to take out their only real obstacle, the *player characters!* That could lead to an exciting night of sneak attacks, tricks and traps for our heroes. Once the heroes are out of the way (dead or captured for resale as slaves or contestants in the Splugorth's gladiatorial arena) the monsters will capture the rest of the town. This is an awesome scenario, full of suspense, tension and excitement, because not only must the players worry about their own characters, but the life and freedom of hundreds, perhaps thousands of people hang in the balance! Don't make this a stand-up fight, have Splugorth minions using treachery, tricks and traps as noted earlier, as well as a siege here and there, perhaps to test the defenses. Also put in some Non-Player Characters and interaction between them and the heroes, so the players care about them. The mother who falls to her knees and kisses the hand of

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the character who rescued her child. The little child or lovely maiden who thanks them and recounts how the Splugorth came once before and took her father or brothers, or friend, and how much she misses them – and how much she fears what fate might have befallen them all if not for the brave adventurers. The kindly town leader who gives the adventurers what little help, weapons and resources he can muster (probably only ammunition, food and healing, because we want to keep this a desperate situation). The town's champion (the sheriff or a Cyber-Knight, mage or retired mercenary) who normally defends the town and who fights at their side despite the fact that he is seriously injured or lost all of his men in the first siege.

This all adds color and provides more situations for adventure. The mother or her child is captured in a later raid, or at least in jeopardy of being captured unless one of the player characters takes action. The little child or lovely maiden charges forth to fight or help someone when everyone else is immobilized with fear or uncertainty. She is captured or killed, giving our heroes more incentive to crush the Splugorth Slave party (and rescue the girl if she was captured). The kindly town leader comes to them with a secret – maybe a secret tunnel/abandoned mine shaft, pre-Rifts subway or sewer system. It leads *behind* their attackers. His idea is the heroes could sneak behind the enemy and jump them! Or the group could use this information to sneak out and leave the town to its fate. It may be a tough decision depending on the alignments of the group. As for the town's champion, maybe during a sneak attack he takes an energy bolt meant for one of the player characters. His dying words, "please, save my town."

And this is just one possible adventure scenario born from the initial Splugorth raid. Here's another. The Splugorth are held off and run away. They leave for good, but they take a dozen or two dozen or six dozen captured townspeople with them! The townsfolk plead for the player characters to rescue them. They might even offer the group *all the money they have* – although it is not likely to be much, probably under 6,000 credits total. Does the group help? If so, we have a nice search and rescue adventure.

Another similar idea is to have several to the entire *player group* captured by the Splugorth. Anyone not captured is almost certain to trail after the raiders (who have moved on to the next town, village or farm where pickings are easy) to help rescue his friends. Meanwhile, those in captivity will be trying to escape themselves, turning this into a night of escape and rescue. In fact, the players should be faced with not just freeing themselves, but freeing as many others as possible, or even getting the upper hand on their captives, to stage a revolt and free everyone! Perhaps destroying or honestly chasing away the Slavers.

Yet another wrinkle in the captive scenario is to have the player characters captured and either turned over or sold to an old enemy or new enemy. Perhaps the very place and villain you, the G.M., *originally* wanted the group to tackle, salvaging part of your well planned but failing adventure. This could be a good place to start next week's adventure. Likewise, this could be an opening for adventures in Atlantis or anywhere in the world, or even an alien planet, courtesy of the Splugorth who carry the group there.

Or after defeating the Splugorth Slavers a *new threat* surfaces, or some new danger is uncovered thanks to interrogation or the boasting of a captured or dying Splugorth minion, or information known to one of the rescued slaves.

Maybe the adventurers find out this slave operation was commissioned by "X" who needs slaves for ... what foul purpose? Again, these can be ways to get the group to go to a particular place to investigate and see what's going on, to free more slaves or to get them back to the original adventure. Or used to open up an entirely new avenue of adventure, *starting next week.*

(That gives the G.M. time to plan and outline the particulars of that adventure. One can only fly by the seat of his pants and improvise so long, especially if it is a new Game Master learning the ropes and feeling his way around.)

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Yep, all good stuff, and it does not begin to consider any of the ideas YOU may have. Which are probably plenty if you stop and think about them for a few minutes.

Oh, and don't hesitate to scrap or shelve that original adventure entirely.

During my days at the Detroit Gaming Center, while running my fabled Defilers Campaign, I had plotted out the underground complex of the Palladium of Desires, a massive, diverse, multi-dimensional lair. I had all sort of plans, and the all the adventures were going great. Personally, I like to let my players go off in whatever direction their little hearts may desire. To allow this, I outline and know the *environment*. I know there is a town 30 miles to the north and I have an idea what that town is like – the general alignment, the common occupation, any undercurrent of evil or criminal activity, etc. I also have a handful of pre-rolled NPCs. You know, things like Breetok the malicious and mighty Ogre warrior who can't ever quite seem to make the big score, a trio of thieves, a band of Juicers, a traveling Line Walker, a miscellaneous dragon or monster common to the region, a typical Coalition patrol, etc., along with notes and some possible plot ideas. These serve as **my secret arsenal**, so when the group spins off in some direction I don't have planned or an area that is not completely fleshed out, I have a bunch of characters, villains, artifacts and ideas I can use if I need them. Being in my early twenties and having more time on my hands than I

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knew what to do with back then, I might even completely map and stat out an entire town or gang, that I could plop in anywhere, or planned to introduce at some point in the saga, regardless. Then again, I like to think I'm a master of improvisation and can whip up an adventure on the spot at a moment's notice, which I did many times.

Of course, when I had big plans for my group and a wonderful adventure planned, I would try to *nudge* or *lure* them into the direction "I" wanted. Not always an easy task, and sometimes impossible. Well, the Defilers were clearly headed for sub-level four, a veritable vampire kingdom! They had encounters with villains from this region and I gave them a zillion reasons to go there. Caught up in my own anticipation and creative excitement, I worked feverishly, day and night to completely – and I mean completely – design, layout, map and stat out the entire sprawling kingdom and every single NPC and villain. I had amazing story-lines and plots I knew the players would love. Unfortunately, my group had other plans. Nothing I said or did could get them to go there. On three different occasions they even stood at the entrance portal, but they would turn away. As fate would have it, they latched on to one of my clever subplots like a hungry pit bull and would not let go. That led them *out* of the vampire scenario and off on a wild and grand adventure I had never even considered. Having spent all of my time on the vampires, I hadn't prepared anything for the subplot story-line. Heck, it was just some dumb, secondary idea I improvised one night because it seemed like a good idea at the time. I had to improvise like crazy for the next three gaming sessions.

There are a few morals to this story. **1.** Let me say it again, because it can't be said often enough, be *flexible* and *imaginative*. Boldly go where no character has gone before, and feel free to make it up as you go along. If I had not been willing to forsake what I thought was my amazing vampire story-line we would never have gone on what turned out to be a truly, and I mean truly, epic adventure. An adventure that turned into a campaign that lasted almost a year. **2.** Sometimes let your players *lead* you for awhile. Follow their leads, build a story and a series of adventures on their needs and expectations for their characters and their desires for adventure. It will take you, the G.M., to places you never imagined, challenge your creativity and flexibility, and create a campaign you'll never forget. **3.** If it is meant to be, it will happen. After a year long roller coaster of a campaign the player characters returned to their base camp in the town near the Palladium of Desires. After a half dozen, one-shot adventurers in and around town, the leader of the player group said to the rest of the players, "Hey, what about those vampires? Let's check out level four and stomp some undead!" Everybody cheered and began to prepare for their investigation and presumed battle with the vampires. I was stunned. Not just because we were finally embarking on my well planned adventure from a year before, but because by then, I had completely forgotten about it! It was a great little mini-campaign that my group did enjoy, just like I thought they would, but as good as it was, the epic campaign my players had forced me to build upon by their characters' determined actions was even better.

You are power, but only to a point

Okay, as G.M. you can change your game in midstream, summon up storms, earthquakes, plagues, call in the cavalry, raise the dead, and the whole-nine-yards, but you aren't god.

You are just some guy or gal with a sharp imagination and a knack for storytelling. As much work as you put into creating and running an adventure, it can not happen without the players. Moreover, the players will reshape, change and take "your" story and make it "theirs." Which is as it should be. That's the beauty of role-playing. The interaction, the co-creation and the shared experience. Revel in it, don't fight it. That means the Game Master needs to let go and let things happen. Do not force the action or manipulate the players to do things "your way." Team effort, shared experience, remember? Let the adventure happen and the story unfold like a rose that starts as a bud and slowly opens to blossom in all its splendor. Nurture and guide the adventure and interaction, but do NOT control it, and never usurp the power and independence of the players. Let the adventure blossom and smell the flowers.

I remember playing in a fantasy game with an inexperienced G.M. The poor guy meant well, but he **1.** is a control freak in real life, **2.** lacked the experience of massaging the situation to play things out, and **3.** had not learned to be flexible or imaginative in a resourceful way. You'll see what I mean in a minute.

The adventure begins. We are given our motive and our mission and sent trekking down some wilderness road to get to the city. Then, the G.M. says, "Your characters reach a fork in the road. They stop and think for a minute, and go left."

We suddenly jolted to attention.

"We go left? Wait a minute. You can't *tell* us we go left. Maybe we want to go RIGHT."

The G.M. looked startled. "No you don't, you want to go left."

"No," chimed one of the players. "We want to go right, don't we guys?"

A resounding "yes" filled the room, and the G.M. frowned.

"No you don't. The town your characters want to get to is left."

"We don't care." said someone.

"Yeah, what's right?"

"It doesn't matter," said the Game Master. "You want to go left."

Well, now things are shaping up into a silly battle of words and wills, with the players getting the better of this poor, manipulative, new Game Master.

"Nope, we go right."

"But there is NOTHING there."

"There has to be something there. Why would the road branch off to the left *and* the right, if there was nothing there?"

"But there isn't."

"Well you said the road was well traveled, didn't you?"

"Um, yes."

"So we want to see what's down *that* well traveled road."

"No."

"Why not?" Apparently that question starts the wheels spinning, a little to late mind you, but they got the G.M. thinking.

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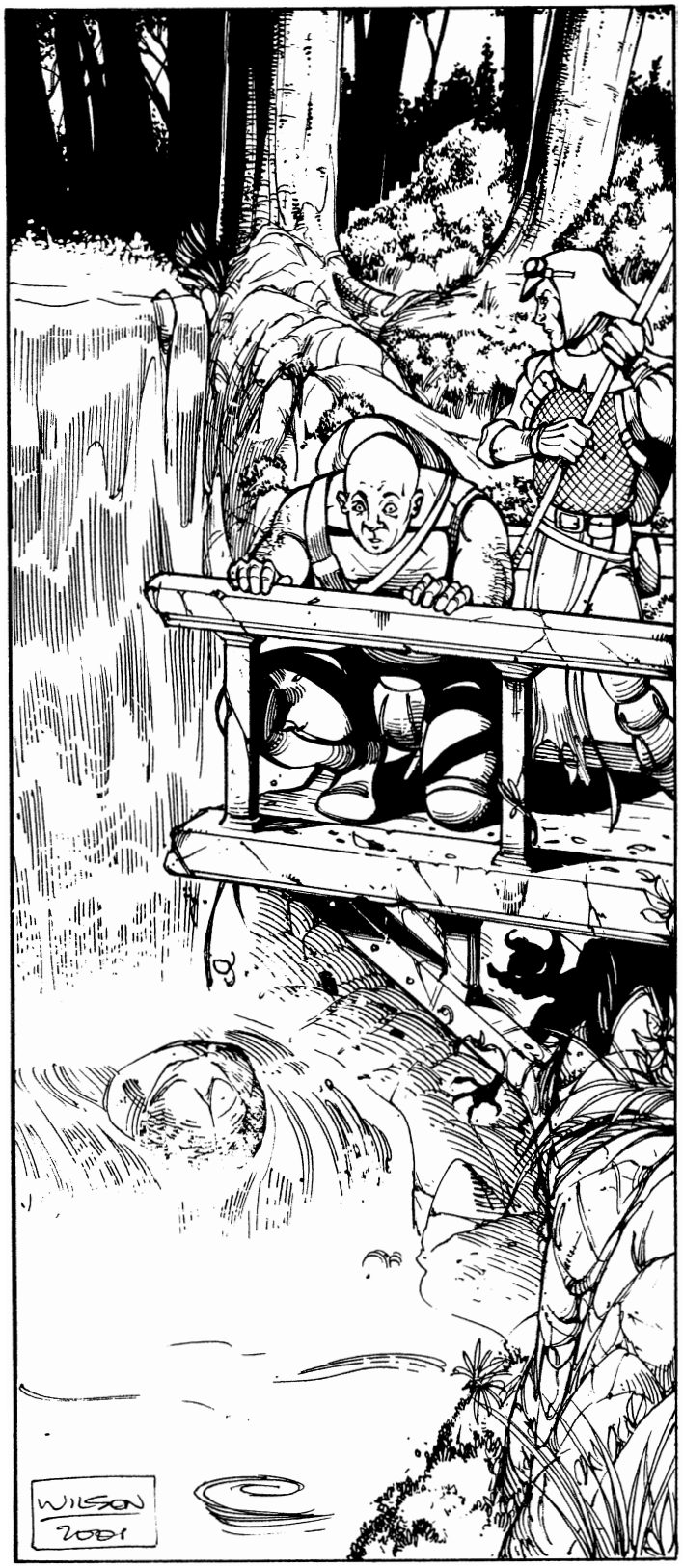

"Um ... because ... bandits are known to ambush travelers on that road, especially at night."

"We'll take our chances."

"A landslide has covered a part of the road."

"We'll go around it."

"There's a river and the bridge was recently washout. You can't cross!"

"My wizard will cast a fly spell on everybody and we'll fly across. Hey, that should help us avoid and elude those bandits if we run across them."

Finally, the G.M. let us go right, but he made the road loop around and connect with the left one, putting us exactly on the path "he" wanted us on. It was kind of inventive, but we all felt cheated and thought he was a goof. Unfortunately, he continued to obviously control our decisions and the outcome of our battles, downplaying things the players thought were important ("yeah, okay") and heaping a ton of time and energy on the things "he" thought were important. Now in this fellow's defense, it was his first attempt at Game Mastering and I heard he got quite good at it. We gave him benefit of the doubt and played a second time, but twice was enough for half of us, and we never played with him as G.M. again.

Now an experienced and inventive G.M. would not have boxed himself into a corner to begin with. Whichever road the group decided to take could have been the correct road to the city. It did not have to be left. We weren't sure if it was left or right, not that he let us role-play that decision or prey on our fears that we took the wrong path. Or he could have let us go (we were only going right because he said we couldn't) and let us run into all kinds of trouble. We know he could think it up, because he came up with ideas to try to dissuade us. His mistake was that he should have let us *role-play* our obstinate choice. That could have gone something like this.

"Okay, a half mile down the RIGHT road the characters see it is covered by a rockslide. You have to go around it if you want to continue. Going around means going into the deep, dark, night woods where you hear a wolf howling not too far off in the distance."

After the characters go around the rockslide, with or without trouble from wolves or anything else, we get to the washed out bridge. After we figure out a way over or around that obstacle we continue on until the G.M. says, "You notice the road is getting narrower and less traveled. Suddenly, you hear the sound of snapping twigs and running footsteps. The sounds are coming from both sides of the road. What are you doing?"

Heck, our characters wouldn't have time to do much of anything but draw a weapon or run away. Lobbing an arrow or two at the characters probably would help us make up our minds that this road is more trouble than it is worth, and probably isn't the way to the city anyway. Ultimately, we find our characters heading back to the other road, probably a little worse for the wear, but it was our choice, we had a little adventure and *WE* decided to go left. Or at least we think we did.

Elements of the Game

Dice, luck and fair play

I love the roll of the dice. For one it curbs me, as G.M., from really believing I am power, because I can let a random die roll determine some outcomes. The very nature of dice rolls involves "luck" and "coincidence." That's why I think games with "luck" rules or "luck powers" are stupid. The roll of the dice is the luck, and there are already all kinds of luck modifiers when bonuses to strike, parry, dodge and save are included.

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I also love that the random roll, especially when the roll is really low or really high, and at a critical moment, creates the illusion of "fate." As G.M., I literally go with the *roll*. Fate, yes sir, fate.

Sometimes I will even *roll* to determine the answer to a question I haven't anticipated, like, "If these barbarians are impressed with feats of strength, if I use my power of telekinesis to make it seem like I can lift that 200 pound (90 kg) side of steer above my head, will they believe it and accept me as a fellow warrior?" As G.M., my first thought is, "Gee, good question and a clever plan, but I don't know." Of course, I don't say that aloud, but I think it. If I'm impressed with the cleverness or if it helps the group out of a jam, I might just *decide* it works and figure out the logical response of the barbarians and the consequences of being accepted as a warrior. However, if I'm ambivalent, or I have bigger things on my mind, I will roll dice to get the answer.

I typically roll a twenty-sided die, sometimes percentile dice, to make a determination. There are no modifiers for these rolls, for success or failure is in the hands of Fate. Low numbers mean *no* or *failure.* High numbers mean *yes* or *success*, almost like a saving throw. I then use the number "range" to help me determine the level of success. For example, rolling under 5 on a D20 or under 15 on percentile dice means not only were the barbarians NOT impressed, but they recognize the trick and are insulted, outraged and indignant about it. This "treachery" only confirms what they already knew, that sorcerers and psychics are lowdown scum who can not be trusted and should NEVER associate with real men.

On the other hand, a high roll, say a roll of 16 or higher on a D20 or 85 or higher on percentile, means outstanding success or an emphatic yes. And a natural twenty, for me, always means perfect success, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Whatever the character was trying to do, he did it and made it look easy doing it. Likewise, the roll of a one is the absolute worst possible outcome and I play on that. In the barbarian example, the roll of a one not only means the barbarians saw through his ruse, but something broke the character's concentration and he dropped the side of beef on top of himself. The barbarians found the incident hilarious, but the character a pathetic charlatan. Ah, but a natural 20 on a D20 means that not only did the barbarians fall for it hook, line and sinker, but they embrace the sorcerer like a brother and *insist* he join them in drink, song and further tests of warrior skills! Okay, I admit, you are seeing the evil G.M. at work with that response. It is an example of my taking a player's idea and having a little fun with it, albeit at his character's expense. In this case, his plan worked a little too well, and the character is stuck in the position of having to continue his facade of being a warrior. Not only that, he will have to drink like a man (a moose is more like it), tell them (made up) tales of his "warrior prowess" and "greatest accomplishments" and probably have to engage in a few other friendly games and tests of warrior strength and skill. I think I would probably play this for laughs in any variety of ways, but in the end the sauced mage would have gotten the information he needed and maybe even hold on to the respect of his "warrior brothers." Or he'll accomplish whatever this ruse was supposed to do, but something goes wrong and his "warrior brothers" turn on him. The character might have to use magic to escape their wrath, or he might simply be looked down upon as a liar and a cheat, not worthy of their spit (thank god).

Just a Game Master tool I have found to be fun, helpful and quite often, surprising.

Fair play

Fair play and trying to be impartial is everything to a Game Master. It's what makes him credible. You have to be fair. You can not play favorites, not even for your girlfriend or wife.

After I got married and I started to run a new campaign with Maryann, my wife, as one of the player characters, I could feel the tension among the other players. I knew they were worried that I would play favorites with my wife. They had seen it happen before, with others, and were afraid my game would follow suit. A couple of the guys even made a few jokes about what might happen.

As fate would have it, the first or second adventure we played together, Maryann's character did something foolish. She used magic to shrink herself to six inches tall, made a spectacle of herself, and stated that she was *ignoring* the bad guy with the crossbow because what were the odds he could actually hit a moving, six inch target scurrying across the floor. Pretty good as it turns out, because to my horror, the bad guy rolled a *Natural Twenty!* Like I said, I use the number rolled to help me gauge how to play the event. So I turn to Maryann and say, "Uh, you know that guy with the crossbow. Well, not only did he hit you, but he rolled a natural twenty. A natural twenty also means double damage, and he rolled eleven, times two, that's 22 and, well, your character only has 12 Hit Points left. That means the crossbow bolt cut your character in half. Uh, sorry. If you had tried to dodge, maybe ..." Maryann took it like a trooper and started rolling up a new character.

You never saw so many relieved players in your life, all grinning like monkeys. They were happy that I had just cleaved my wife's character in half. Not happy because the character was dead, they liked her, but because I had just reestablished my credibility. I was still impartial and fair. They knew that I would not play favorites and that Maryann would not try to influence the Game Master. They could relax now and enjoy the game. They also now knew Maryann wasn't one of those crybaby, please don't kill my character types (which they should have known already, but now they knew for sure). Everything was cool. Hey, I'm still married, aren't I?

Oh, and Maryann learned that taking risks could have deadly consequences, and to have an extra character rolled up and waiting in the wings. It's a pain in the neck to have to spend an hour and a half rolling up a brand new character and missing all the action while doing so. Especially when you could just have one waiting in the wings, pull it and have the new character woven into the game in five or ten minutes.

Hand in hand with fair play and impartiality, is trying to involve ALL the players, if not in the immediate action, in the story. If members of the group get separated, don't let half of them languish with nothing to do while the other half gets all the action, fun and glory. That sucks! Try to involve them even if circumstance or a bad choice has inadvertently cut them out. I do this by whipping up something specifically for the segregated members of the team. Whenever possible, I try to give them

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something important too. Maybe a vital discovery, clue, information or acquisition of a weapon, technology, magic or data that will help them defeat the main villain when they face him. Or they find out that the half of the group is not headed where they think they are going, but into an ambush. Armed with this information, they rush after their friends and allies to catch them before it's too late. And if it is too late and the ambush is sprung, their timely appearance helps to save the day. Now, often something that dramatic is not possible, but as long as those separated get an opportunity to get some of their own action, they are happy. This is where I would weave back and forth at dramatic, cliffhanger moments, from one splinter group to the other. This is extremely effective if you do it right. I let them get in five or ten minutes of play and then just as they open the door and see their new adversary – I switch to the other group. "Okay, you were about to cast your spell as the creature was charging at you. Roll a twenty-sided to see who has initiative. If you win you get your spell off, if not, then the creature will pounce before you can finish it." I then run with this part of the group for awhile, exiting again at some dramatic moment to keep them on the edge of their seats. "Yeah, the monster is down for the count and you can bandage the Operator, but the Juicer who is nearest to the door hears something. A rumbling. Maybe footsteps from a lot of soldiers. No. It sounds more like something slowly rolling. It is getting louder and louder. It may come crashing throw the door at any moment!" I let them brace themselves, and ... I switch back to the other player characters to continue with them for awhile. This teeter-totter gambit works great. Everybody is interested in what's happening in both camps, and while I'm running one group through their paces, the other actually gets some breathing space and time to plan, ready themselves and change their minds. Try it.

Alignments are your guide

From time to time, you may have to remind a player about his character's alignment.

"I'm sorry, Bob, but your Atlantean Tattooed Man is Scrupulous so he would not steal that item and hide it from the group." You might add, "He might be tempted, but he wouldn't do it." This is good, because you just made the temptation the player was battling with, part of the game and a nice little moment of personal triumph when his character *does the right thing.* Then again, I will let the character break from his alignment and do something out of character like kill, steal, or torture. HOWEVER, the consequence is *always* an appropriate drop in the character's alignment, and I will tell the player that in no uncertain terms.

"Bob, your Tattooed Man can kill him, but his alignment will drop from Scrupulous good, to *Miscreant* evil (if he is killing him out of hatred, revenge or anger) or *Diabolic* (if he is doing it just to get even or for the satisfaction) or *Aberrant* (if doing it out of some misplaced sense of justice or fair play; or challenges him to a duel he knows the NPC can never win).

I play **the alignment card** all the time. In the heat of the moment, players forget, even great, experienced players. As Game Master, you are also the *Referee* and *Rules Enforcer.* The G.M. needs to point out errors, inconsistencies, and rules. In this capacity, you might think of yourself as that little *cartoon angel* who appears on the shoulder to counsel the character as his *conscience.*

Do NOT prevent the player from doing it, but do point out that it is out of character, a gross violation of alignment, and the consequence is that his *good* character is about to become *evil.* Plus, there are likely to be other consequences for his foul actions. Consequences for that character, and possibly for the rest of the group. The character may lose the respect of the other player characters, maybe even get kicked out of the group if they are all good guys and learn about his evil deed, plus he will be wanted for murder or war crimes, hunted by the law and the villain's friends and allies, maybe get the entire group wanted as accessories to murder (guilt by association), and so on. I then let the player make his choice for the character. Whatever it is, I roll with it and have the Non-Player Characters, the law, etc., respond as I think is logical and appropriate, with both short term and long term consequences. One long term consequence could be that the character later regrets his action and turns himself in to the authorities or tries to make up for it in other ways. Of course, it should always be much, much harder to return to grace than it is to fall from grace.

A few other things to know about alignments. I designed them into the game to help give the players (and the G.M. in the case of NPCs) guidance, direction and a framework to hang their hats on. The alignment is a character's moral compass. It helps to make him who he is, will affect his choices, motivate and keep him on the straight and narrow. Use alignments in this capacity, that's what they are there for. Beside, this is a "role" playing game. The player assumes a "role" and plays a fictional character. Good role-players strive to maintain that "role"convincingly and stay true to it. Alignment, the moral fiber and orientation of the character, is arguably the single most important aspect of that character, next to his Occupational Character Class which also shapes the character and gives him or her purpose and background.

Pointing out that the suggested course of action defies or breaks the character's alignment and the very real *consequence* of an alignment change (i.e. a drop from good to evil or even Anarchist to evil) *will* give a player reason to pause and reconsider. You might be surprised at how many players do NOT want to play an evil character. Actually, if you think about it, that's not so surprising at all. They are playing in a heroic fantasy game whether the setting is science fiction, horror, fantasy, super-heroes, or whatever, they are playing larger than life *heroes.* After all, I think most of us would like to think that in a

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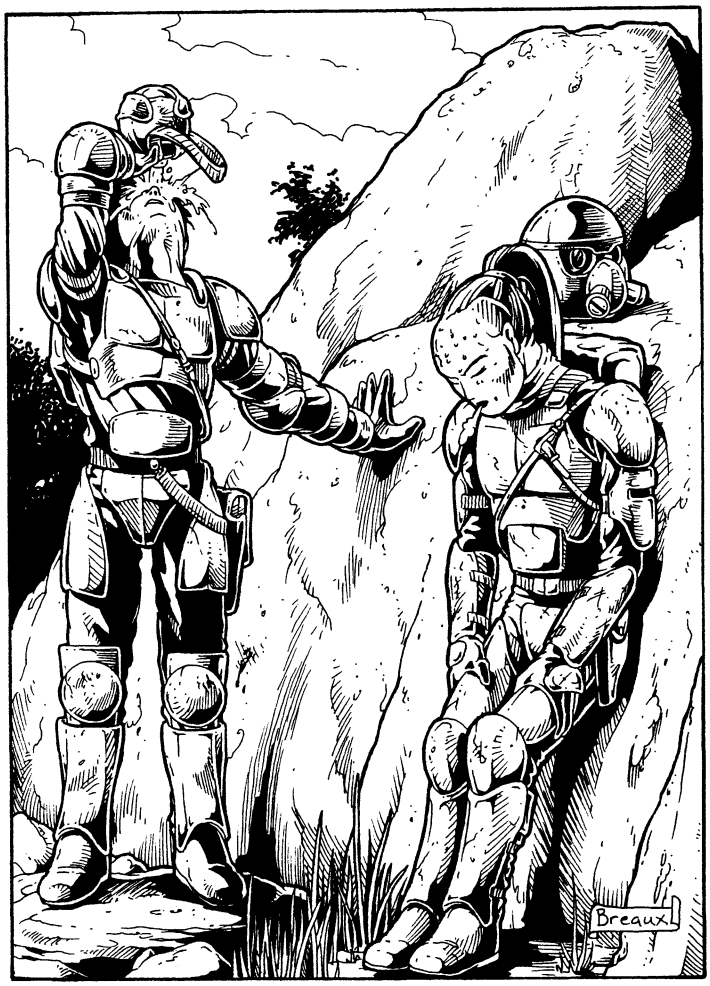
bad situation we would be just, merciful, honorable, courageous and do the right thing, even if it was a difficult or painful choice. We want to be *the hero*, and here we are, in the context of a role-playing game, portraying that *hero*. Here is our chance to be that idealized hero in a fantasy world. All things considered, nine out of ten times, the player will take the high road and be a hero. And you know what, that's a proud and poignant moment in the game, at least for that player. Recognize and praise him for it.



Role-playing can generate heat

Like I said, even the best players can be blinded in the heat of the moment. Take Julius for example. As good a Game Master as he is, Julius is a *phenomenal* role-player. He plays the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the character and stays in character throughout the game. Consequently, he shocked and scared the daylights out of me one game when he physically leaped out of his chair and bellowed at another player character, "I'll kill you for that!"

Adding to my concern was the knowledge that Julius was, at the time, a second degree master in Aikido and I had never, I mean NEVER, see this good-natured person threaten anybody.

As Game Master I had do something to defuse the situation.

I stood up and said something like, "Hey Jules, take it easy. It's only a game."

Poor Julius looked confused and a bit embarrassed. He regained his composure, apologized to the other player, who had not uttered a word (I think he was too busy watching his life pass before his eyes) and said, "Uh, that was ... um, Xarxar, of course, talking to your character." And Julius adds, "If ... if Xarxar ever runs into your character again, he's a dead man."

Pretty good save Jules, but as Game Master I knew we needed a *time out*. I stopped the game's progress and recapped the incident. Explaining how the reactions of both "characters" made perfect sense and fit both characters' alignments. In fairness to Julius I had to take into consideration the shocking turn of events none of us had anticipated.

What had transpired was this. One of the other player characters, a madman, had just become the "valet" to a powerful and evil demon lord. Enter Xarxar who attacks and falls easy prey to the demon lord. Being a vile monster, the demon lord tells the crazy man to prove his loyalty by slaying his old comrade. In fact, the two characters had been very close and had saved each other's lives in the recent past, that's what made his next course of action seem like a callous betrayal ending in the shocking conclusion that so enraged to Julius. Anyway, the crazy man (trying to find a way to *save* his friend) tries to humiliate Xarxar by beating him up a little, knocking him to the floor and riding him like a horsey. Unfortunately, the demon lord, who is indeed amused and is laughing at the wild antics, snarls and says, "As funny and fitting as all this is, it is not enough, kill him." So the wild man says, "Oh, no. I can do better than that. How about this." And with a single blow (rolls a darn Natural 20), chops off Xarxar's right arm with his sword and gives it to the demon to eat as a snack. He also gives the demon Xarxar's most prized possession (at the time). Wow. Talk about surprises and great drama. I think it was the surprise that caught Julius off guard and made him react the way he did. It shocked the hell out of all of us spectators! The climactic moment was all the more unexpected because the crazy character was clowning, laughing and being silly, then suddenly ... wham ... there goes the arm of Julius's most beloved character.

I explained how under the circumstance, considering the other character's alignment and the fact that he had been steadily going insane for the last three adventures, what the "character" did made perfect sense. In a crazy sort of way (great role-playing). I also point out that in the player character's deranged mind (played masterfully from my impartial point of view), he didn't see this as a cruel or heinous act, but as the only way he could see to *save* Julius' character. In fact, his ploy worked. The demon lord stepped over the writhing body of the wizard and left with his new valet in tow (happy that he had saved his friend). Ironically, Julius' character would later undergo a much more violating transformation, turning him into a light, full conversion cyborg, or as Xarxar preferred to call himself, a "cybernaut."

I like to leave 'em laughing, so I made light of the situation and joked about how I saw the other player's life pass before *my* eyes. By the time I was done, everybody had a clear idea of what had happened, everybody was still friends, and Xarxar was rescued and healed up thanks to the efforts of the rest of the group. Of course, he was missing an arm (it was in the belly of the demon lord), and the adventuring continued.

That's about as wild as it gets. Fortunately, that was the first and last time anything like that ever happened to me. There have been a few heated disagreements from time to time, but nothing

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serious. As Game Master, you have to take control of the situation, pause the game when necessary, bring everybody back to earth, and put everything into the proper *game* perspective. Then get back to having silly fun.

Secret information

There will be times when one or two characters know something the rest of the group does not. While said individual is likely to share that data with his teammates, it is not the G.M.'s place to assume that and just spill the beans in front of everybody. When I'm the G.M. I will ask if I can speak in front of everybody (the notion being he's just going to tell it to them all anyway two seconds later) or should we step aside for a minute and talk privately.

This happens a lot when a psionic character is sensing for evil or magic or looking at an aura, performing an object read, or doing a telepathic scan, or getting a private telepathic message (from the bad guy or mystery person). Sometimes the info is short and to the point. A sense evil is positive, yes, you sense magic, aura indicates he is NOT human and IS high level. And so on. These can often be taken care of with note passing and/or cryptic responses. For example, if a player hands the G.M. a note (please write legibly) stating his character is "doing sense evil," the G.M. can look up and say, "yes" or "no." Likewise, a note that says, "Doing see aura. Is he human? High or low level? Sense magic? What else?" The G.M. can respond, "No. High. Yes. Healthy. High level. Yes. Definitely evil." The other players *may* have an idea of what's transpiring and what the answers to the unspoken question mean, but they can't be sure unless their teammate confides in them.

Don't forget, often the player character does NOT want to withhold information from his teammates, but simply can not speak and share what he knows in front of the Non-Player Characters or out in a public place (market, street, tavern, etc.) where someone may overhear them. In fact, as the mischievous Game Masters, I find myself asking the group as they speculate aloud or begin weaving a strategy, "Are you saying that in front of him – or – in public?" They usually say no, but if they did, or if it is obvious they are, despite comments to the contrary, there are *consequences.* The bad guy learns they are on to him. A henchman or stoolpigeon overhears them and reports it to his master. Or the group realizes somebody in the crowd is listening and they have to do something about it before he runs off and tells somebody. And so on.

Sometimes the information acquired by one or two characters is too sensitive or profitable (the player may not want to share it, or it is too elaborate and complex to put in a note). This requires the Game Master to take the player aside to explain what the character sees, hears, and learns. Try to make it short so the rest of the group is not sitting around bored or suspicious for the next 10 minutes. Waiting is never fun, especially when the perception is somebody else is having fun and/or knows a secret they don't.

Likewise, sometimes a character who wanders off will run into trouble or an encounter that needs to be "played" out. Whenever possible, I like to play it out in front of everybody. It's just more entertaining that way. Playing in character, their fictional alter egos do NOT know this is going on and can NOT help their ally in any way, but as the real life players, they can observe, like watching a TV show, and quietly root for their buddy to win or weasel his way out of trouble. A lot of times in a combat situation or a battle of wills or wits, you can see the tension in the spectators and they cheer out loud when their friend triumphs. It's cool, and assuming they reunite later, this episode is recounted to the other characters afterwards anyway. However, sometimes the situation has to be played out in secret. Again, try not to take too long away from the group, and if it is going to take awhile, go back and forth. Play out events with the separated character in another room for a bit, pause at a dramatic moment or a logical pause, and then both of you return to the main group and play out their events for a while, pause at a dramatic or practical moment, and go back to the isolated character and his dilemma. Going back and forward like this keeps everybody happy and feeling appreciated. Besides, you can use the exercise to work off that bowl of chips and four bottles of soda you've consumed.

Options and chances

Give your players options. If the characters have a chance of losing a fight, there should also be an equally good chance they can win it. The characters should NEVER be deliberately led into a no-win situation. The Game Master should make it clear if the odds are stacked against them. If the players "choose" to send their characters into a no-win situation, that's a different story, but even then the G.M. should give them options. The option to change their minds, back out and run away. The option to surrender and/or the chance to escape, or incite a riot or a rebellion, and in the confusion and chaos, sneak behind the villain's back and ... Options and chances. Opportunity and the promise

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of triumph are a necessity. Just like real life, there has to be some glimmer of *hope*, of success, of reward. Otherwise, you crush the human spirit and there is no motive to oppose the evil or face danger if there is no hope. What's the point, unless one is suicidal or crazy? On the other hand, *defeat* with the chance to escape, recover, regroup, and return to challenge the villain again is always a great multi-part drama that is exciting, suspenseful and memorable.

The point is there should always be a back door, a way out, even if it is admitting defeat and running away. A good bluff may be as effective as a threat or a fight. A compassionate appeal may turn an antagonist's heart and get him to step aside, or give up or abandon his evil or vengeful scheme. A powerful speech might win an ally, dissuade an antagonist, or rally the people. But they can only happen if the Game Master makes or allows them to be available as an option.

Options and chances may also challenge the Game Master's flexibility and imagination. Okay, you've set the stage, everybody is pumped, and you (the G.M.) are expecting the big fight. Only one or more or all of the players have hatched a completely different plan. One where they circumvent the clash, or defuse the trouble before it explodes into combat, or they decide to use reason and compassion rather than violence to turn the tide. Hey, that's great, be flexible enough to go with it and explore options you never considered when you imagined the scenario. That, my friends, is the magic of role-playing.

Remember too, as Game Master, you want to nurture and help the characters reach their goals. To help the characters build and grow. This includes letting them acquire *items* that will help them reach their goals in a specific mission or battle. Help them grow as (fictional) people in physical strength, skills and experience. Every obstacle you throw at the player group should *challenge* them, not crush them. It should test their mettle, try their alignment and test their resolve, not belittle, confuse or defeat them. Help them find the way by providing clues and information. Let those clues and information keep them on the right track, and build the dynamic tension of the story.

As I have stated before, most good Game Masters will consider the player characters in their plots and schemes, specifically pandering/playing to each character, taking into consideration their strengths and weaknesses, alignments, skills, powers, goals, fears, emotions, etc. Again, just be careful to *involve* everybody in the gaming experience. Spread your attention around and give every character a chance to run with the ball and be a hero. Make a point to single out the quiet player from time to time, and give him a chance to step forward to shine. Sometimes a player needs you to lead him by the hand a little, especially new players who are unsure of themselves and shy. They need that little extra nudge or first contact to be initiated by the Game Master.

Sometimes the shy player will make that tough on the Game Master. "Your character is tapped on the shoulder," says the G.M. "You look but nobody is there. A voice says, 'Hello, are you a Devil Man D-Bee?' What does your character do?" "I ignore it."says the player. "It keeps talking to you." "I go get the other characters." Hmm, so much for interaction and a moment to shine. But that's okay.

The first thing to remember is, every player is *not* YOU, or the player sitting next to him. Everyone is different, with their own style of play and appreciation of the game. Some are very exuberant and forceful (maybe too much so, and sometimes you will need to curb them a little). Others are thinkers who sit in the background, stepping forward only when they have something to say or do. Others are schemers, or lone wolf sneaks, or only get involved during combat, or are some combination of any of these. Still others are quiet wall flowers who hardly say or do anything. I've had a few of these quiet players in my games over the years (they are usually guys, too). They sit back, guard the camp at night, stay back and guard the door or opening to the military complex or secret lair, avoid interaction with NPCs, hide when trouble comes, ask few questions and don't generally say or do much of anything. No matter how hard I try to draw them into the action the wall flower sidesteps it and/or passes it off to one of the more forceful players. From my point of view (a rather outspoken and forceful individual myself), I can not imagine the wall flower is having a good time, and I feel bad. Like I'm not doing my job as G.M. But he must be enjoying himself, because he's back every week, smiling and prepared to play.

As I have said before, different strokes for different folks. If the player is having fun, don't worry too about him too much. One more thing, one day, outta the blue, that wall flower is going to step up, play like a god, or take the initiative or make some amazing observation or hatch a plan that stuns everybody. No, he's not a late bloomer who is suddenly a more proactive player. The wall flower usually returns to his cozy corner on the wall to become his normal, placid self. It was just something in that moment that made the flower turn into a mighty oak. It also shows you that he was, indeed, riveted to the goings-on of the adventure and enjoying the action all around him.

Consequences and logical progression

There should be consequences, reactions and a logical progression to everything a player character does. The reactions may be both positive and negative

I use the concept of **consequence** constantly in my games. It is what helps the Game Master to be *flexible* and find *options* and *opportunities*. Considering the consequences enables the G.M. to respond quickly, take advantage of a character's actions, and makes the G.M. seem unshakable and quick on his feet – able to respond to just about *anything* and make it seem logical. Perhaps needless to say, this also adds depth and color to the character interactions and the unfolding story. Leaving the players with the feeling that they are part of a big, expansive world.

Everything a character does will provoke an *action* and *reaction* from those around him. Sometimes it will come from his fellow player characters and/or opponent and other NPCs, to the public, the media, the law, and on and on. There will be consequences from public praise or condemnation, to being given a medal or branded as a rogue, rebel, criminal or monster. Even when the overwhelming consequence is positive, there *may* be a negative backlash: An envious NPC who decides the player group or one of the heroes "ain't so tough, or brave, or powerful" and goes on to challenge him later to a duel, or brawl, or does something to hurt the hero or the group out of jealousy and spite. Or some other bad guy sees or hears about their triumph and wonders if (or decides) they are a threat to his operation and must be eliminated.

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Of course, there does not always have to be a negative consequence, but the G.M. should be aware of it/them as an *option* in case he or she wants to use it.

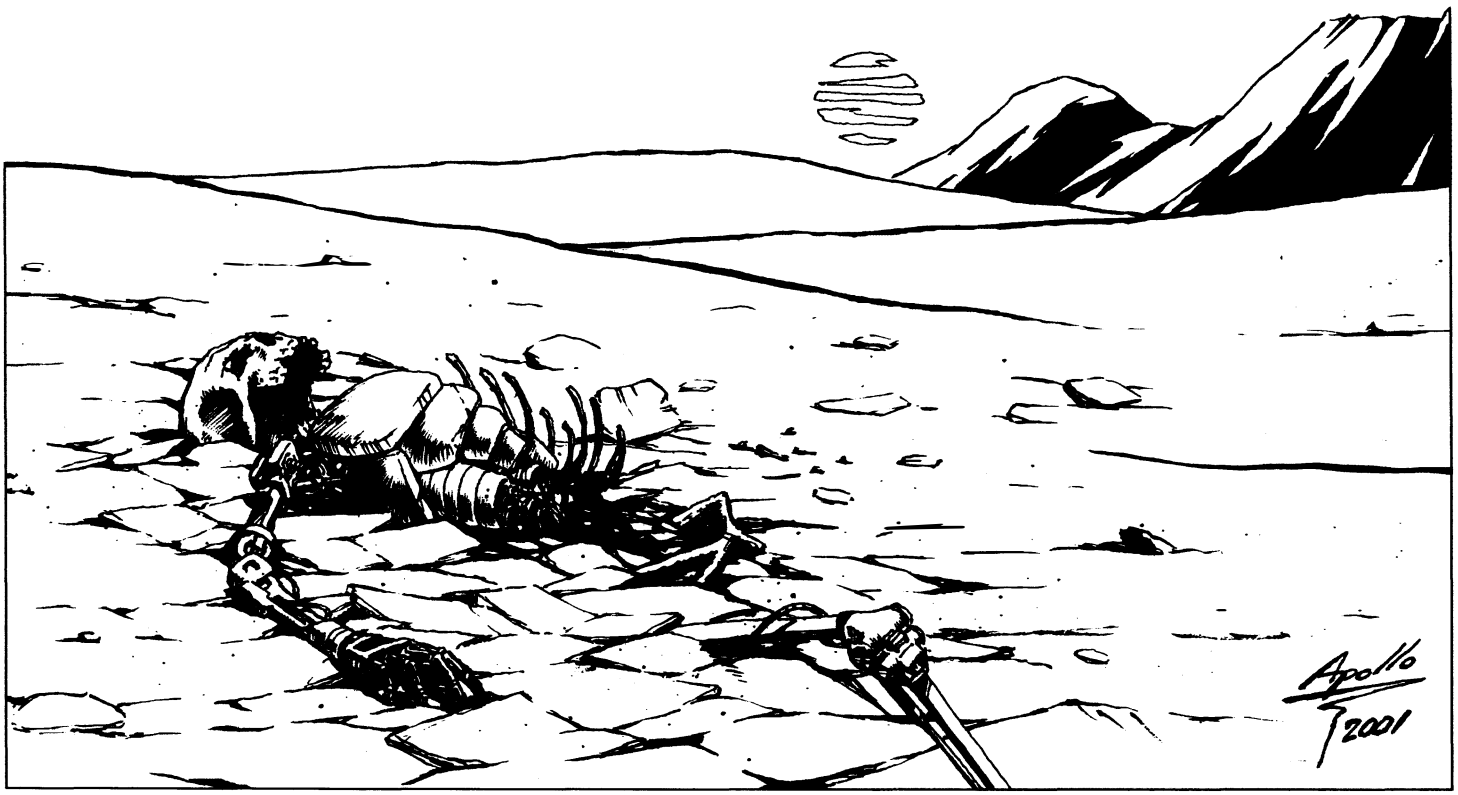
That means it is up to the Game Master to select an appropriate response, reaction or consequence. I consider all the story elements, unresolved subplots, the event/adventure that just unfolded, and the characters themselves (their goals for the future, etc.) and think about the logic progression. I draw from real life experience – things I have lived through, seen on television, read about – and come to some conclusion about what should come next. It's pretty simple because it is the same as thinking about how any Non-Player Character would respond and react to the character or group. Just maybe it is on a larger scale, requiring me to think about how an entire community and key factions within it might respond (the ruler who is envisioning how he might put these heroes to use, the police who appreciate their help or who resent them, the media if any, who else might hear about them – Federation of Magic, Coalition States, oppressed people elsewhere, the Cyber-Knights, Erin Tarn, old enemies, etc.). I try to consider all (or at least several) possibilities and pick the ones that seem the most likely, make the most sense and are exciting or fun in the context of the game (i.e. lead to new adventures).

The easiest way to use consequences (big and small, serious and humorous) is for the Game Master to have a very clear idea in his mind of the fictional world they all are playing in. To know how the authorities, media and people feel about D-Bees, practitioners of magic, super-beings, mercenaries, or other elements indicative of their group in general and our player group in particular. To know who key NPC characters are, their stats and personalities, their likes and prejudices and, as a result, how they will react to the player characters (hostile, critical, supportive, self-serving, etc.). Likewise, if the G.M. knows his *environment,* particularly where most of the action takes place, and the key characters in it, good, bad, and indifferent, he'll have an idea of how they will react and whether or not, for instance, a gang of hoods might use a disaster to cover their own criminal plans, or whether another mage, merc, or lawman might intercede on the behalf of the heroes or the villains.

There are logical consequences to everything. The player group goes to investigate strange happenings or allegations of trouble at some old ruins. Once there, they talk loudly, argue amongst themselves or make noise, kicking in a locked door or moving some rubble. The consequence is simple, the bad guys hiding nearby hear them. The question the G.M. must ask himself is, how do the villains react? If the G.M. "knows" his NPCs and their personalities and plans (in his own mind), he can quickly and easily improvise their reaction. If they are paranoid they may run, hide and spy on the characters or assume they are under attack and leap out, weapons blazing. If they are on the run or can not be discovered, they probably send out a team of their most powerful hit men, spell casters, power armor troops, or killer robots to exterminate the intruders. If they are overconfident, the bad guys might send a low level henchman or two to investigate, or ignore the noise completely! If the bad guys don't want to be discovered or are afraid/not ready for a confrontation they will try to conceal their presence and hide or flee (and conceal any evidence of their presence). But often consequences and logical progression are more basic and simpler than that.

Kill somebody and the law, their friends and partners will come after the character responsible and maybe his accomplices (the other characters in the group). Get caught and you might get killed, tortured and killed, put on trial and hung, imprisoned and placed on trial and found innocent or guilty (and back to prison or an execution). A simple logical progression.

Likewise, if the alleged "murderer" flees, he will be branded a wanted killer and hunted by the authorities and bounty hunters.



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If the other characters shield, hide or help the accused murderer in any way, or destroy evidence, they are accomplices (perhaps after the fact) and criminals in the eyes of the law. They may even be considered part of the killer's "gang."

Steal and someone will come looking for those responsible. Get caught using the item or trying to sell or pawn it, and the character may be arrested or beaten and thrown into jail or out of town.

Lie or brag and some bully, punk or individual who saw it is likely to call you a liar and a brawl may ensue.

Challenge, embarrass, laugh at or mock a bully, braggart, punk or warrior and there is likely to be a fight (or worse).

The local law is more likely to believe a local character than an outsider (unless the lawman knows the NPC is a notorious troublemaker, but not if the law here is corrupt).

Outsiders will always be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion and may be suspected or accused of trouble and crimes.

Magic is feared in many places, flash it around and there will be trouble.

Flash money around or brag about how rich you are and somebody will try to take it. The same is true of rare artifacts, magic items and powerful weapons.

Do something nice, and somebody will return the favor; perhaps buying the character a drink or a meal, or a merchant sells him an item at half off.

Stand up for somebody, and word will spread that the character is a good or nice guy, or stands up for (or against) a particular cause or group.

All of the above are simple, common sense, logical extrapolations, and avenues to conflict, subplots and adventure. It is all really *cause and effect* based on interaction.

Loose ends, use 'em and tie 'em up

Be sure to keep track of all your subplots and non-player characters. Like recurring villains, you can make great use of them over and over again, especially if the player group is operating in one particular area/region. Uncaptured minions, relatives, undiscovered hideouts, unrecovered loot, and undeveloped story threads can all turn up in later adventures.

By the same token, future adventures can begin while the characters are still working out their current one. That's where subplots and foreshadowing (hints of things to come or a growing evil or trouble, or danger, good fortune, a visitor, and so on) come into play. This can be especially useful if the heroes are stuck in their present adventure or if the story you've designed has derailed and you don't know how to fix it. Investigating a rumor that a group from the Federation of Magic are conducting weird experiments, or the disappearance of the Smith child, might have to wait until after the heroes deal with the Coalition spies, but it spices things up and sets the stage for an upcoming conflict. Heck, perhaps the two adventures are linked. Maybe the CS spies are after these evil practitioners of magic, but the group runs the Coalition agents off and now have to deal with the sorcerers on their own. And talk about subplots and continuity, perhaps Coalition troops return in greater force during the next adventure or immediately after, to get the Federation mages, and think the player characters are part of their conspiracy, or the two join forces to stop the wizards.

Hey, and wrap those loose ends up, will ya. Don't leave the players hanging forever about some event, or a particular Non-Player Character. Give them some kind of resolve. Take a look at daytime TV soap operas. They have a hundred different story-lines going at any given moment, and there are characters who come and go, but they plot thread they were involved in is usually tied up, concluded, before they go. And if a plot sucks, do what soap operas do, wrap it up it up prematurely, "and then she said this, and died of a heart attack, the end." Likewise, if an NPC stinks, transfer him to Texas, let the Splugorth get him, or he was eaten by a Xiticix while the player group was off adventuring, or the group deals with him in a humorous and positive way (for them). Yep, them soap operas, ya gotta love 'em. Uh ... or not.

The adventure ends too soon

By Wayne Breaux Jr. & Kevin Siembieda

Okay, the adventure is going along swimmingly, the player group meet the enemy, beat the enemy and are triumphant! All in an hour and a half. Now what? You know the group is expecting more. Even you, the Game Master, thought this was a 3-4 hour adventure.

The premature or easy defeat or death of a villain can also throw a story off track, especially if the G.M.'s whole story revolves around that particular villain or event. Don't panic, stay frosty. You are flexible and imaginative, remember? *You are power!* Don't take the premature loss of a villain personally or let it shut down your imagination. See it is as an opportunity to work in some new plot twist.

Pause the game for a munchies break, go to the bathroom and think. Think about what would happen in a comic book or television show. Villains constantly break out of jail, are mysteriously resurrected, or have robots or clones stand in for them while they are secretly afoot, implementing their real nefarious scheme. Heck, his capture (really his stand-in) might have all been part of the plan all along, to trick the heroes and the authorities. To put them off his scent, so to speak, and buy him time to do ... what? Run with it. Or maybe the villain is really captured or slain. This might cause a shift in the underworld balance of power and cause rival gang lords or powerful warlords, rivals, etc,. to start attacking each other. Suddenly the player group is in the middle of a gang war! Or maybe one of the villain's henchmen (or an old henchman who lost favor and was kicked out of the group) rises up to take over and he (and his flunkies) are worse than the old villain.

How is this for a simple solution: What did you have planned for next week's game? You probably had something in mind. Most Game Masters have some idea for future adventures, now is the time to launch it. If you have nothing in mind, well, it is time to improvise. We talked plenty about where ideas come from and how to build on them. Get to work. Need an idea to get you started? Flip to the *101 Adventures* section of this book (or other books), pick one (maybe at random) and go, go, go.

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Player Knowledge

By Wayne Breaux Jr. & Kevin Siembieda

Player knowledge is the information that a *player* has, including game rules, occupational skills, and life experiences. It is different from the fictional *character's knowledge* that is defined by its skills, powers and creation on paper. Just because your friend Larry Green is a Medical Doctor, it doesn't mean that his character, Joe the Jock, will be able to perform the basics of surgery or even first aid unless Joe the fictional character has the appropriate Medical skills. Likewise, I have had players whose characters are combat machines with plenty of physical and weapon skills, but no investigative skills, who improbably enough want to collect evidence at a crime scene, including things like ballistics and fiber traces. In such a situation, use common sense. Player characters with no investigative skills may know a bit about what to do at a crime scene from watching movies (or playing role-playing games!), but they will not know how to do it, nor will they know how to analyze and evaluate the evidence ("Yep, it's a fingerprint alright. Now what? How do we find out whose it is?"). The best these *untrained* heroes can hope for is to discover the obvious, like shell casings, blood, and obvious footprints, and make some guesses ("It looks like the killer stood in the doorway and shot six times"). However, only skilled characters could reveal the real facts or the hidden truths ("The killer was left handed with a limp and the body has nine bullet wounds from two different weapon calibers"). This where cultivating Non-Player Character contacts on the Police Force, media, etc., would come in handy. Or to have a teammate who does have knowledge in such things. Of course, the teammate will still need the right equipment, facilities and assistance to do the job.

Don't be too rigid with whether or not a skill includes knowledge on this little thing or that, but do keep an eye on the kinds of skills a character has. Someone with most of the weapon skills shouldn't have to roll to recognize a common firearm, just as a medically skilled character will immediately recognize bleeding wounds and obvious disease symptoms. At the same time, the Doctor should have to roll against his W.P. Automatic Pistol to identify a particular European firearm, just as the weapon master would need to roll First Aid to have some idea that a person was terribly ill or diseased.

In a similar vein, it is perfectly alright to offer additional information and "your character would notice" this or that to characters with high I.Q.s or heightened senses. It's also okay to let *players* in on background and behind the scenes information, especially after the adventure. It helps to give them, the players, a clear picture of how and why things happened the way they did. The G.M. might even offer the defeated villain's reasoning or goals, provided such info does not give away any future adventures or plot twists. The G.M. should pass along only judicious information and not adventure secrets the character would have no insight into. The character may indeed be far more intelligent than the player, but that doesn't mean he can see the future, outguess the villain, or know everything. For example, if the player characters have access to a criminal's file and it includes a psychological profile and his rap sheet, then a highly intelligent character (18+) may be able to project his possible moves, motives, or actions. But without anything else to go on, there will be little chance of thinking ahead of the bad guys. Regardless of how intelligent a hero is, he generally won't be able to enter a particular villain's mind set and think like him, unless the two have been antagonists or rivals for quite some time. Likewise, a smart player playing a dumb character (I.Q. 7 or less, especially if 1-4), will have to "play his character" dumber than he, the player, is. Really good players can do this amazingly well.

Ultimately, the *players* will know things their fictional characters don't just by watching and listening to things going on with other player characters. That's okay, but that is also where "role-playing" and "playing in character" comes to the fore.

The *player* will have to role-play as if his character does not know, realize, or care about X, Y and Z. Sometimes the Game Master will have to remind the player of this. For example, the player may know one of his character's teammates has been ambushed by a super-villain, but until his fictional teammate can call for help or somehow indicate that he is in trouble, the other player characters have no reason to help or even be concerned! Now, when an explosion is heard and energy beams come flying from that location, the other players can send their characters to help or investigate

New G.M.s be warned! It is common for players, in the excitement of the moment, to try to do things they can't do and be places they aren't. "What! An explosion! I realize Bob's character, the Horrible Hambone, is in mortal danger and I blast his attacker!" Okay, not a bad plan, however, first the character must fly, drive or run over to the fight scene, which is still some distance away and indoors. Getting to the battle scene will burn up several melee actions if not an entire round or two. And it will probably drive Bob's buddy crazy that his hero is "missing out on the action." Meanwhile, characters that can fly or run at sonic speed, or teleport, can be there in a heartbeat, using up only one or two melee actions. However, if the villain is new/unknown to the fictional heroes, even though the *players* have witnessed their teammate's battle with this brute and they (as players) know what his powers are, their characters must act without this knowledge. Hey, it's called role-playing for a reason.

How many players should be in a typical group?

I'm asked that question all the time. I fear my answer sounds like an easy out, but it is whatever the G.M. feels comfortable with.

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Most gamers I talk to have a group of 3-6 players plus the Game Master; so 4-7 total people in their group. About 10% are smaller and 20% are larger. You really can't play with fewer than three people (the G.M. and two players) and I have found most G.M.s feel most comfortable "running" 4-6 players. That is a good number in which most G.M.s can give a good amount of attention to each player and keep the story/adventure moving along at a good pace.

Personally, I like to run larger groups. For me the "perfect" size is 8-12 players. Anything over twelve starts to get more unwieldily and the G.M. has to really work harder at his storytelling, pacing and theatrics to keep EVERYBODY involved and entertained. Inevitably, some faction of players get less attention and time to shine than others. However, if the adventure was entertaining, they don't mind, provided they had a few moments too, and their chance to shine will come in next week's adventure. But then, I'm used to running a lot of people.

During my *Detroit Gaming Center* days, I used to run a regular Saturday night group of 26 people (The Defilers), with extra folk joining in sometimes bringing that number up to as many as 32 (which is almost impossible to run even for a one-shot night of epic combat and adventure). I don't like to run more than 21 maximum, and much prefer 8-14 for my ideal comfort level. *And it is very important the Game Master feels comfortable.* He or she is the person orchestrating the setting and adventure. The G.M. has to keep the action going and deal with a hundred different aspects of the game, from rules things like keeping track of Experience Points and making sure he and the players are using magic, psionics, equipment and game rules correctly, to the job of refereeing to make sure the gamers are playing "in character" as well as handling the story elements like creating suspense, presenting clues and pacing, to playing the villains and NPCs and weaving it all into a fun adventure. It is a ton of fun, but it is also a lot of work. So players, try to cut your Game Master a little slack and work *with* him or her.

Game Sessions

Each time you play is considered a game or gaming session. A game session can last a couple hours or half the day; however, a typical game *runs* about 3-5 hours. A game session can be a complete story/adventure in itself, like a single adventure comic book story that begins and ends with that session, or a "chapter" in a much larger and continuing story, like a novel, series of novels or TV series.

A game session that has several "chapters" or related adventures that build into an epic adventure is called a *campaign*. A campaign has a continuing story-line that runs like a multi-issues comic book or soap opera style TV show like **ER** or **Star Trek**. These multi-part stories can last for two or three game sessions or run for dozens. Game Designer, Erick Wujcik, has run a **Dungeons & Dragons** "campaign" for over 10 years with the same group of players and characters! Now that's an epic campaign! The original Palladium: Defilers fantasy campaign ran ever Saturday for nearly three years and a typical game session lasted 8-10 hours (but we were young and insane back then).

These epic "campaigns" are usually more complex than a typical "one night" or "two-part" adventure. Both types can be fun, and even a series of "one nighters" are likely to build into a series connected with subplots, interaction and growing relationships between the characters, returning villains, and guest appearances of other heroes.

First time adventuring

First time G.M.s and low level adventures

At the risk of sounding trite or cavalier, start small and keep it simple. And if the players are also beginners or inexperienced, all the more reason to keep it small and simple.

You most definitely do not need a worldbeater villain or end of the world crisis. In fact, I have outlined a number of simple, low key but action-packed and fun adventures. The Splugorth Slavers for one, the stolen item for another, and there are 101 adventure ideas presented elsewhere in this book, plus 'Burb adventures and a bunch of others.

I think one of the best ways to start people in an adventure who have never played before, or only once or twice, is to go with the **quest**. It is very specific and the group knows exactly what they are supposed to accomplish.

Player Checklist

Come prepared.

1. Have your character sheet completely finished and your character fleshed out in your mind. There's nothing more aggravating for the G.M. and other players than to be all pumped up and ready to play, but have to wait while Benny finishes rolling up his character. Personally, I will give the guy 10-15 minutes while chitchatting with my friends and then start the game whether "Benny" is ready or not. His character can be worked into the adventure when he's done with it.

2. Have a *copy* of the character sheet for the Game Master. Something he or she can keep on file for quick, easy reference.

3. Dice. It seems like every game somebody forgets their dice. And don't be one of those players who, a year later, still hasn't bought his own dice. Get off your wallet and get some basic dice.

4. Pencil for erasable notes and temporary changes to the character, such as P.P.E. and Hit Points that will go up and down. A pen or marker for taking notes and writing messages is good too.

5. Paper or note pad for jotting down notes and sketching out maps. Erick Wujcik, Bill Coffin, Wayne Breaux and Julius Rosenstein all stressed that I remind players about the importance of taking notes throughout the game. Not just to memorialize and chronicle the adventure, but to keep pivotal information, clues and data the "characters" may *need* later. "Hey, isn't that the name of the bad guy we were told to avoid?" Or, "were we supposed to go east or west?" "What exactly did that warning say?" If nobody remembers, the group is in trouble.

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Write down the names of NPCs encountered and little notes about them too. It could prove to be invaluable later. "Friendly drunk at the Cyber Café" "Glenda the flower girl," "Mitch the bold D-Bee City Rat." "Man claiming to be Karl, a mercenary, but seemed suspicious. Our group psychic sensed magic, but could not read his aura. This guy is more than he seems to be." And so on.

Likewise, jot down the names of towns, businesses, and a few pertinent details, even those mentioned in conversation by NPCs. "Farmer has seen no sign of undead" (despite the fact that the player group is here to investigate rumors that vampires are operating in the area). "Town of Ravendale, 30 miles to the west." "Little village of D-Bees near ley line by the river. Seemed friendly. Mostly farmers. Zachary the Mystic town elder. Mid- to high-level. Seemed to be good alignment. His assistant was creepy."

Erick Wujcik is such a firm believer of not only note taking, but memorializing the adventure, that he gives out Experience Points in his Dungeons & Dragons and Amber campaigns for players who turn in the adventure written up as a little story. I'm too busy (or is that too lazy) to memorialize my adventures in writing or even as comprehensive notes. Few of my players do either, but Julius and another player do, and there have been many times when I'm glad one of them has the information preserved. Still, I think that should be *optional* and a choice of the individual player.

6. Bring whatever RPG books you think might come in handy. Having the basic rule book and a few key sourcebooks is usually very helpful, but not absolutely essential. If you have them, you can refer to them to check or bone up on the character's skills, special abilities, weapon stats and other information important to the character. Likewise, the player will need the appropriate book to create his character. If he doesn't own one, he'll have to borrow one from the Game Master or one of the other players.

Pre-Game Warm-Up

1. Warn the players in advance, *before* they roll up their characters, if there are any restrictions, exceptions or special considerations. For example, there may be a few O.C.C.s or R.C.C.s that should not be used or considered. In **Rifts®** there might be entire books of them. "This adventure takes place in North America, so no characters from Japan or Russia. Oh, and no vampires as player characters." I always tell my players to "clear" the character with me first. You know, just a quick, "Hey Kev, can I play a Grackle Tooth D-Bee mercenary, or a this or a that?" When I say yes, they can go ahead and roll 'em up. If I say no, the player should have an alternative, "how about a ..." Personally, I allow a lot, and save my veto for the, "Okay, he looks human, but he is really the son of a god, and has 1000 M.D.C., Supernatural P.S. of 50, knows all psionic abilities, and ..." no. The answer is no, get real.

2. I may also allow the character to have special, rare or military, alien or magic weapons, armor or a special item, but ALL items must be reviewed and approved by me, the G.M. This is where getting a copy of the character sheet comes in handy. Same is true of any character modification, special powers, gizmos, etc.

3. At this point you should have your adventure outlined and key Non-Player Characters and villains worked up and ready to go. Don't overwork the ideas and don't worry too much.

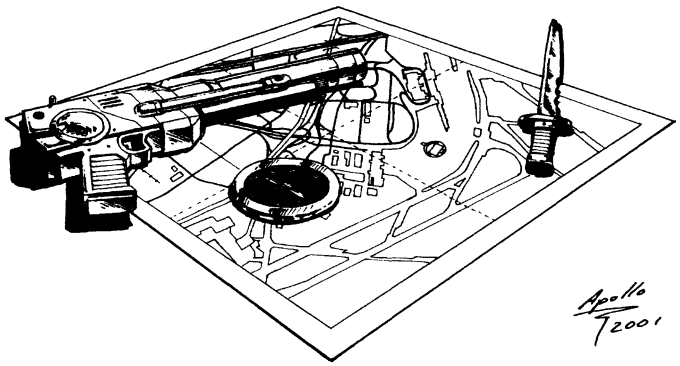
4. I think it is also good to have a strong opening. In my early days I would *write up* a brief opening description that established the setting and any history for that night's adventure, especially when launching into a new campaign, and I would actually *read it* to my players. I figured (and rightly so) that I would be too nervous or focused on other things to simply "tell" it. In fact, for my old Defilers campaign, played every Saturday night for about ten hours (hey, we were crazy college kids, okay), I had this cool little story with the history and legend of the Palladium of Desires. I would read it before every gaming session as a recap to the overall setting. After about four months, I figured they had heard it enough, so I jumped right into the adventure. "Hey! What are you doing?! You forgot to read the opening."

"But you've got to know it by heart at this point," I replied.

"Well, sure we do, but ... we like hearing it."

Apparently they liked the opening legend so much, they were like little kids who have a favorite bedtime story and want to hear it every time they go to bed, even though they could recite it themselves. That's the only group that ever happened with, but it was a cool little opening. Anyway, you get the idea.

5. Game Masters, review your material, make sure every player is bringing some kind of goodie or soda with them, sit back and relax.



Adventure Considerations

1. Let the player characters get hired by somebody (villain, hero, merchant, church, mage, monster, thief, townspeople, whoever) to find something or retrieve something or rescue somebody or destroy some *clear cut* evil monster or villain. You're keeping it simple, remember?

2. Make it easy for them to gather clues and information about their objective and their opponent.

3. Give them time to discuss and formulate a plan.

4. Let them get supplies and equipment.

5. Send 'em out in the right direction (and you might need to give 'em a little push).

6. Make sure it is a mission they *can* accomplish and a villain they can defeat.

7. Make sure there is some kind of tangible reward (treasure, a bonus for a job well done, etc.) in addition to the reward of having survived, triumphed, and getting experience points.

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Game Master checklist

A) Have your "tools" ready. G.M. tools include his dice, his notes, his map(s), writing utensil, paper for taking notes, extra paper for passing a player notes and sketching out positions, the rule book, and any sourcebooks or visual aides he may want or need. Personally, I don't like players using my dice. Game Master dice should be off limits. Yeah, it's a quirky, superstitious kinda thing, but that's the way I see it, and my players respect my wishes. I also have them convinced they'll get bad rolls if they use G.M. dice, or at least my G.M. dice, thanks to some lucky coincidences when some chumps did not heed my warning. Have I mentioned dice, luck and fate?

B) Try to have confidence. The worst part is getting started. Once you get the action rolling things should go pretty smoothly.

C) Have a plan and keep the adventure simple. A nice, linear adventure that is to the point is very good for first timers. Make sure your adventure has a beginning, middle and end.

D) Make sure you have a main villain and his henchmen. Make them all despicably evil so there is no confusion that they are the bad guys and must be stopped. Make sure they are completely statted out; every last detail, from attributes, alignment and powers (if any) to body armor, weapons and the color of their shoes.

E) Consider the abilities and skills of the player characters. Try to involve all the players.

F) Try to keep things interesting and moving. Pace yourself and don't be afraid to pause the game to check a rule or skill, or power or spell to get it right.

G) Let the action take its logical progress.

H) Remember to give the characters *Experience Points.* I like to have a separate sheet of paper with each player's name, followed by the "character" name. I also use this as a quick-glance summary, so I like to put in the O.C.C./R.C.C., alignment, Hit Points/M.D.C. and maybe the P.P.E. and/or I.S.P too. I leave a space or two for experience, handing out Points throughout the game for superb role-playing, smart ideas, a sharp plan, and keen deduction (i.e. the character figured out a key element of the villain's plan, or made an astute observation), as well as when the character used a skill cleverly or performed an act of bravery at a key moment, saved a life, etc. In fact, take as many *notes* as you feel is necessary. Sometimes I take a lot, sometimes I don't. And assign Experience Points *throughout the adventure*, because otherwise you *will* forget those moments when E.P. were deserved, trust me.

I) Remember to try to be flexible and imaginative.

J) Be fair and impartial.

K) Have fun. As Wayne Breaux has noted in one of his books, "If the players *ask you* to G.M., don't sweat it. Chances are, they gave *you* the job because they think you are up to the task and like your style of gaming. If they didn't, they wouldn't ask, now would they? So if they think you can pull it off, take a deep breath, relax, have fun, and get to it."

Before you get started, I recommend getting a *copy* of each *character sheet* from each player. In this day and age of computers, fax machines, and easy access to copies at Kinkos, Staples, Office Max, work, school and dozens of other places, this request should be easy to comply with.

Some Game Masters may want the players to roll the character up right in front of them. For me, personally, that was never a concern of mine, although many "first time" players are likely to need the Game Master's help creating a character.

Once you get them, review the character, the stats and equipment. Decline the inclusion of any O.C.C., R.C.C., magic item, weapon, vehicle or piece of equipment that you find inappropriate, disturbing to play in your game or just plain outrageous. You'd be surprised at what *some* players try to get away with. Be polite, be gentle, but *firm.*

Refer to the player character sheets as your guide to customize adventures around the characters and to know what they can do, so you have a clear idea of their abilities, weapons and desires to better direct them and handle the action. And, I hate to say it, having the character sheet in hand should also keep the players from cheating.

"Um, your character misses with that roll of six, because he is +3 to strike not +7. You must have miscalculated."

Sorry, but in the heat of the moment, some players, especially inexperienced ones, may be tempted to "fudge" numbers. There is no reason to call a player on the carpet for it, or to belittle him or her in front of the other players, but be aware that it sometimes happens, and watching the dice rolls, and having the character sheet in hand helps to curb that impulse.

Likewise, you, the G.M., should *try* to keep track of the damage each character has suffered. "Gee, Bob, by my calculations your character is down to zero M.D.C. (or Hit Points). That means he is unconscious. Without medical help, he'll die in the next hour, so you can't ... um ... have him use his magic to save Jason's character.

The same is true of P.P.E. and I.S.P. although those are usually bigger numbers and more difficult to keep track of. **Note:** It has been my experience that once you have an established group of seasoned players, most will not even think about cheating. For one thing, where's the challenge and fun if you have to cheat at a role-playing game? How pathetic is that? For another, the dice represent "fate" and one should never mess with fate, because somehow or another it will come back to haunt you. It is fate that your hulking 'Borg got taken out of the battle when he missed his dodge roll and got trapped under those falling ceiling beams. But maybe the agonizing minutes it takes for the 'Borg character to free himself means he can charge in like the cavalry and save the day, or is fresh enough and has enough M.D.C. left that he can shield a friend or rescue the group without getting killed in the process. Fate and consequences, my friends. Fate and consequences. A good Game Master learns how to use them as expertly as a Samurai knows his swords.

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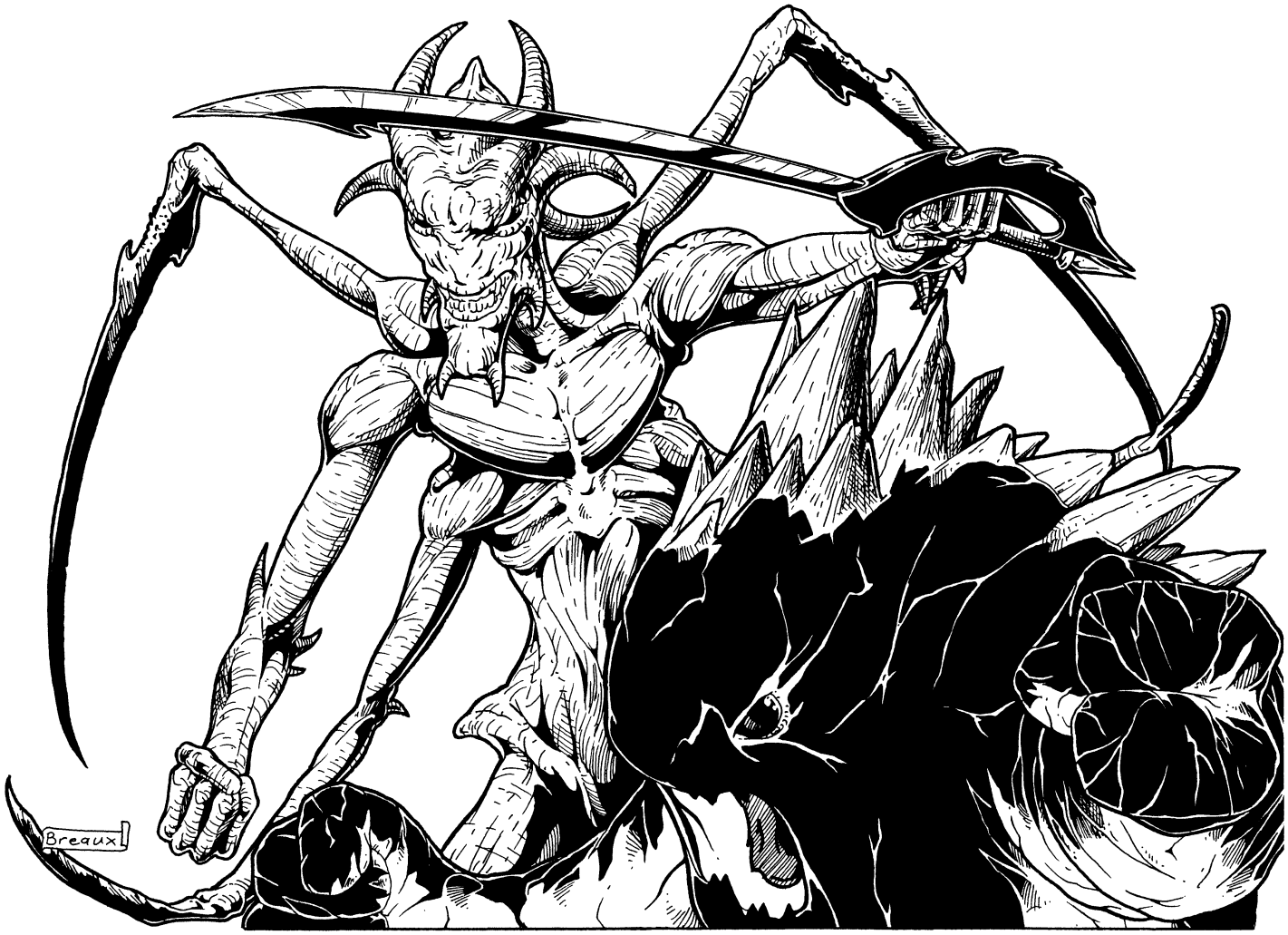

How Siembieda does it

Hope you don't mind, but the following is excerpted from the **Rifts® Game Master Guide**. It just seemed to fit and worth repeating. If you haven't seen this massive, 352 page tome, take a look. It offers some design notes, rules clarifications, and collects, summarizes and indexes key information like stats for all the weapons, body armor, vehicles, power armor, robots, equipment and other good stuff from the *Rifts® RPG, Conversion Book One* (first edition) and the *Rifts® World Books #1-23* and *Sourcebooks 1-4*. Plus it collects maps and offers useful reference indexes, G.M. tips and 100 adventure ideas. Along those lines, the **Rifts® Book of Magic™** collects all Warlock, Ley Line Walker, Necromancy, Ocean Magic, and a ton of other magic spells, magic tattoos, magic weapons, herbs and TW items into one 352 page monstrosity of a magic sourcebook that Game Masters love.

Laying the groundwork for adventure

Personally, I like fast moving, loose, flexible, character driven games where the players can go in whatever direction they want, and with me, as Game Master, gently or subtly drawing them in the direction I want or need for the adventure. That having been said, there have been many a time where the group spins off into areas I never expected and digress from "my" plans for them completely. I like to improvise and go with the flow so that is okay, but I know it flusters some Game Masters. That is how and why I developed my "environmental" approach to creating and building adventures.

How I set up the basics of an adventure. I like to run fast and loose. Focusing on the characters (player and non-player), the villains and big picture. I like to set up my *playing environment* – the history of the area, the town and the key people are all known to me. I know in the town there is the wishy-washy Mayor (and who the real local power is), the corrupt Sheriff, the bartender with connections to he Black Market, the barmaid who dislikes him (and will warn innocent characters or offer info to thwart the bartender's schemes), the Shifter conducting dangerous experiments in the basement of his home, the mysterious vandalism happening lately, etc. I also figure out the *neighboring wilderness* and the various good and bad things about it like the band of crooks, Juicers or Simvan that operate in it raiding travelers and who know things that will help the player group. As well as the Coalition spy team and the town's relationship with the CS and other powers in the region. My playing environment may also include neighboring places, people and monsters.

Then there are the Villains. My reading and loving comic books for something like 42 years has made me good at making *villains*. Real good. In fact, Erick Wujcik says I make some of the most delightful and memorable villains (and other select Non-Player Characters) he has ever seen.

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The bottom line. The idea, for me, is if I know the environment and how the people (NPCs) in that environment live, think, and interact, I know how they will act and react. This enables me to let the player characters go off in other directions and do things I didn't plan for because I know how the Non-Player Characters (NPCs) will respond. That makes everything else easy. The corrupt Sheriff will look the other way if the right bribe comes his way, and he may know about criminal activities, gangs, and Black Market outlets; all things he might reveal for a price, favor, or if gotten drunk. Likewise, if he takes a disliking to any one character in the group, he is likely to cause trouble for that individual, which in turn, is likely to draw the entire group into trouble (jailbreak, getting framed, used as pawns, robbed with the Sheriff doing nothing about it, etc.). When I need a scoundrel or innocent character for something, I know who I can draw on. Likewise with the villains, I can move them around and have the villains make an appearance anywhere, rather than waiting for the player characters to find them. Ultimately, it all adds to and builds on the actions and reactions of the player characters and takes on a life of its own.

By knowing the Non-Player Characters, I respond to anything the players do, want or need. I can also use the NPCs to provide clues, encouragement, and inspiration to motivate the player characters and keep them on track. This includes facts and rumors that might get their blood boiling and ideas clicking.

The plot. I then present the players with one or two "goals." This is *their mission*, their overall purpose and the motivating plot for this night of adventuring. I often start small and simple, even obvious and cliche. But you know what? They are cliche because they work and people love 'em. That simple goal may be as basic as any of the following, among others.

1) The damsel in distress: "Please, please. You have to help rescue my sweet Amanda. The Coalition (or whoever/whatever) has her and god only knows what ... what they might ... oh, please help me."

2) The missing child. "Little seven year old Benny is gone" (wandered off and is lost, kidnaped, last seen talking to a stranger or D-Bee, etc.).

3) The terrible monster. Now, for me, a "monster" can be literally a monster (vampire, Xiticix, demon, etc.) or a vile, monstrous fiend (foul practitioner of magic, dragon, D-Bee, supernatural being, the CS, the Federation of Magic, pretty much any evil or despicable character). **Note:** In #1-3 Heroic characters may accept the challenge out of a sense of duty, morality or compassion. Self-serving characters may need an additional reward to get them involved.

4) Hired protection. The player characters are hired to escort, guard and protect somebody, something or someplace.

5) Money and power. This is the classic hire the player group to get something of immense value or power. Inevitably the pay off for their efforts is BIG in the way of money and/or fame, always with the underlying question of whether or not they should keep this item for themselves if they can get it. The hireling scenario can also lead into drama twists in which the group double-crosses their employer (keep the item for themselves, turn it over to a hero, etc.) or their employer double-crosses them.

6) The great race – or free-for-all. The player group "hears" about some immensely valuable or powerful artifact and either decide to try to get it for themselves or are hired by some rich dude to get it for him (of course they will be paid handsomely for their troubles). The thing is it is all hearsay. Rumor. This item may *not* actually even exist! Still the characters are off with at least two or three *competing* groups (all or most bad guys) after the same thing. This pits our heroes against them and who or what may actually hold or guard the desired item.

7) Coercion. Personally I love coercion. You know, when the characters are tricked, blackmailed or otherwise "forced" to go on some mission. This can be a pardon for past crimes (i.e. do this for me and you get out of jail), or do this thing otherwise these innocent people will suffer or die, or the good ol' Escape from New York: You have "X" days or hours before you die (or something terrible will happen to somebody), and so on.

There are others, but you get the idea.

What next? Adventure. Everything takes off from this one central starting point. This starting point is the launch for things to come. The adventure can move forward from this point in a linear predictable fashion (sometimes those are the most fun) or take a twist or ten.

The twist. This is where the complications, obstacles, surprise turn of events, treachery, and subplots come into play. Such elements can be challenges and obstacles to be overcome or carry the players into completely unexpected directions and lead to entirely different side-adventures or different outcomes than expected. The fair maiden in distress ain't so fair or so innocent. She hasn't been abducted, she's really a Witch or Shifter or demon off on some nefarious plot (perhaps to enslave, hurt or kill the very people worried about her). The search for the lost child could turn into almost anything. Yes, Benny just happened to wander off, but he has since been captured by – god only knows what. Or is being used as some unwitting pawn in some nefarious plot (is really the son of a King or Warlord and the villagers were the ones holding him hostage, and he's just trying to get home to Mommy and Daddy. Or the kid has some other significance. Or he's just a sweet child who wants to go home who comes across these nice men, Slavers, who now have him in a cage and are heading for someplace called Splynn). The employer is worse than the villain who has the item the group has been hired to get. Or there is no valuable relic, it was all a ploy to find so and so in order for the group's employer to extract some terrible revenge. And so on. There's a million ways one can go. Draw upon things you have experienced yourself or hope you never have to. Draw ideas from the news, televison shows, books, comic books, films, other role-playing games, etc.

An RPG campaign is a continuing epic

A regular campaign is typically a series of games/adventures involving the same characters over a period of time. Getting together every Tuesday or Saturday to play with the same characters and players in the same setting, provides fabulous storytelling opportunities which will create a sense of continuity and adventure even if every night is a different adventure. (Personally, I like both one-shot/one-night and continuing two and three part stories, always careful to end with a cliffhanger or an appropriate lull.)

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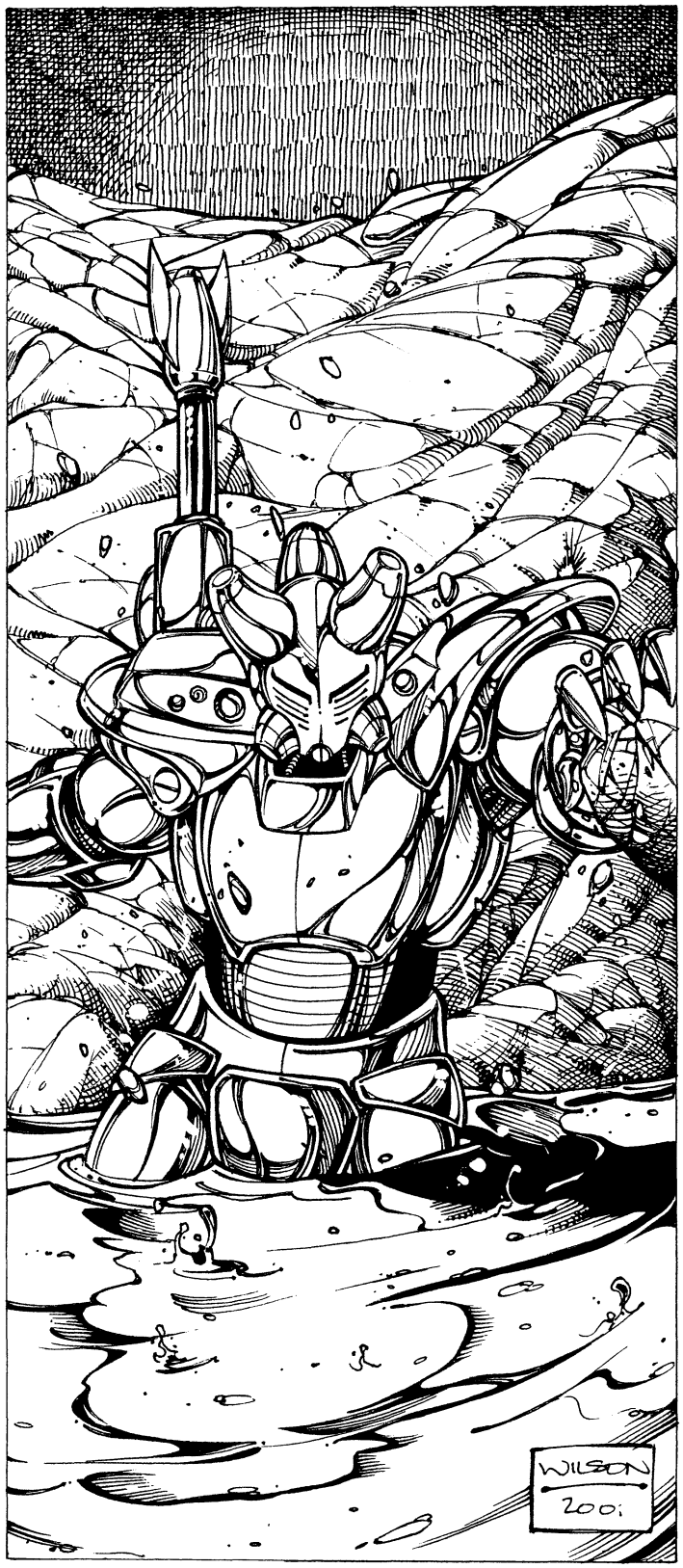

For one thing, a continuing adventure/campaign allows the player characters to suffer defeat, while giving them the chance to return to succeed at a future point.

For another, it offers the opportunity to create returning villains.

Anybody who has ever read comic books knows how important and fun these two adventure elements can be. Use them!!! You won't be sorry.

Defeat. I don't care how smart or powerful a team is, they *cannot* always win. In fact, if they do always win, the story/adventuring gets boring. I'm not saying to set the players up for defeat, but if they are having an off night, making mistakes or the rolls of the dice just go bad for them (I've seen it happen), let them *lose*. Sometimes the real test of heroes is how they handle defeat.

Now, I'm not saying to kill them all. Heck, no. I'm saying whip their butts, but give them an *out*. This can be an opportunity to escape or something as comic book theatrical as the head villain laughing at them and mocking them for being "weak losers" beneath his notice. "You are the best champions these people can find? Ha, ha, ha. Then we have nothing to fear. Begone before I destroy you. You are nothing before the power of Grandal the Destroyer." And the scum bag turns his back and leaves, his minions chuckling and adding more insults as they follow his lead, but also to cover their leader's back and may get in a few last licks on our heroes.

Let me tell you, nobody likes getting their butt handed to them and then laughed at and dismissed as worthless, insignificant losers. It makes 'em mad and spoiling for a rematch. Go for it, next week. Or maybe give the characters a *chance* to find out more about their opposition, uncover some weakness, develop a better attack plan, or to get some powerful weapon that will help them defeat these rats – a side adventure perhaps, that could last for one or more nights of gaming before the rematch.

Besides, it is the stuff of adventure. How many times have the good guys been defeated in comic books or movies only for the heroes to regroup and come back better, stronger, with more resolve than ever. It happened to Indiana Jones. It happened to Luke Skywalker (heck, the Jedi were almost completely destroyed before Luke came around). It has happened to Superman and Spider-Man, and Hercules, and every hero since people began telling adventure stories. And it is awesome.

The returning villain. Likewise, people love to have and hate their favorite villains. In Rifts® that may be the Coalition States or Emperor Prosek personally, or the Federation of Magic, or some specific character from one of the world or sourcebooks, or one of your own dynamic creations. In comics, there is Lex Luthor, the Joker, the Green Goblin, Doctor Doom and a host of others. In film there is Hannibal Lecter, Darth Vader, and many more. Man, your mouth just starts to water and your pulse quicken the minute one of those *recognized* villains steps out of the shadows or claims responsibility for some delightfully terrible or insidious act. In this case, familiarity breeds anticipation and excitement. It creates history and builds suspense and emotion. Use that in your games.

Staying with the scenario presented under Defeat, above, let's say our heroes return for a rematch. This time they are prepared for their adversaries and have a few surprises of their own up their sleeves. Ultimately they win, defeating 98% of the bad guys and saving the day. HOWEVER, the head villain, or one of his secondary, but memorable evil henchmen, escapes. The player group rejoices for winning the big picture, but all the loose ends are not tied up. They may even go looking for the escaped villain (or villains), but fail to find him (or her or them). Maybe the bad guy(s) fell off a cliff but the body was never found. Or maybe he just slipped away during the action and has gone into hiding. The player characters still savor their victory, and maybe even forget all about this villain.

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Then, a month later, six months later, a year, the villain reappears. He may be gunning for the heroes out of revenge or just up to more nefarious schemes and evildoing. However, when the villain(s) and heroes clash again, it is more *personal* this time, because they have history. Both sides are out to defeat the other with increased gusto and resolve. Certainly the villain is out to show them up and get some satisfying revenge now that they are pitted against each other again. The revenge may involve the death of the group leader, a specific character who hurt the villain most in the past, or the entire team. Or it may be to embarrass them and hurt their reputation, or to hurt and infuriate the heroes by harming the innocent. Or simply a game of win or lose, to prove who is better, them or the villain. Whatever the case, it is all good stuff.

To really make for a good and regularly *returning villain*, do not kill the antagonist off this second time either. Let him get turned over to the authorities or escape again, or appear to be killed only to return later somehow (via bionic reconstruction or other life-saving augmentation, magic, a pact with a demon lord, it was really a clone who died, or who knows what else). If captured, the scum bag manages to escape (again), bribes his way out, or an unlikely twist of fate liberates him. At some point, the group and this scoundrel clash again. This can be another out and out battle or quest for revenge, or it can be a couple other fun, classic story ideas.

One of my favorites is pitting the group and the bad guy (and his henchmen) in a situation where they must work together to get out alive or to save the innocent. The villain works with them at least for awhile, but inevitably has his own agenda (escape, get the magic item or money, get revenge, etc.) and when the moment comes, betrays, attacks or abandons the group (or two out of the three, sometimes all three). It makes for great adventuring.

Another is the race. The heroes and the villain are both racing against time and each other to get or do something before the other. In the case of the heroes, their actions and winning the race will ultimately save lives, help people or prevent something terrible from happening (or stopping the villain from getting more powerful). For the villain it is a matter of winner takes all and perhaps revenge.

Another is the, "I have turned over a new leaf." You know, the good old, "I have seen the error of my ways and have given up evil to be a champion of good," or even a preacher, healer, wise man, mayor, protector of the people, etc. The big question is always, "Is this guy for real?" Is he legitimate, or is this one of his scams?" And if it is a scam, what the heck is he up to this time? The answer to those questions we leave to the Game Master.

Tricks of running a large group.

When a player group is small, 2-6 players, they are more likely to bond naturally and tend to work as a team. Even if the characters splinter off in pairs or alone (and you know they do), they are easy to keep track of and even the most independent and chaotic players inevitably work as a team when they really have to. This is why it is more comfortable to run a group of 2-6 players.

Running a large group, however, has similar dynamics on a larger scale. Inevitably, when there are eight or more players, the group fractions into smaller *sub-groups* or teams within the larger group. This is a natural occurrence where *players* with a similar outlook and playing style or whose *characters* share some bond, camaraderie or sense of purpose will naturally gravitate to one another. Ultimately, these splinter groups are handled as a separate team or unit, so even though you have say, ten players, they are functioning together as two or three distinct units, not ten individuals.

The cliffhanger tactic: To keep everybody involved in the action and events transpiring, even those that do not involve them, I use the cliffhanger approach. That is to say I work with one group up until a tense or dramatic moment ("You hear soft footsteps ..." "Like somebody trying to prowl?" asks one of the players. "Could be, maybe yes. And you also hear a faint raspy breathing. The door handle begins to turn ...") – and then I turn to one of the other groups and say, "Okay, what are you guys doing?" This keeps the player unit at the door tense and riveted to their events while watching and enjoying the actions of the other units. It also gives the players some time to think about what they are going to do next. Thus, when I turn my attention back to them, "Okay, you hear the click of the bolt and the door starts to open." The players can jump in and say, "I'm using my spell to turn invisible (or throw up an Armor of Ithan or some such). The Headhunter says, "My gun is drawn and I'm ready for anything." The Juicer says, "Yeah, me too, but if it is something too bad my character will back flip out of the way and then open fire."

Of course, you break at a dramatic pause also, like after the one unit has just defeated their opponents (and before they loot their victims or engage in interrogation, or make a run for it).

Comedy. I like humor in my games. It relieves tension and adds to the fun. Using the setting above, under cliffhanger tactics, I might, if appropriate, have the door open up to reveal a little girl (hence the soft footsteps) with a bad cold (hence the raspy breathing). It's cute. It's funny. And it keeps the players on their toes. Of course, she could be the servant of a powerful dragon, mage or monster that appears on the scene a moment later (right after they let their guard down).

When does the use of a skill count toward experience?

I always go with the "clever" or "critical" use of a skill as the criteria for experience. Reading a computer screen, plugging in a battery or driving the car to the market is not worthy of any experience. Ordinary skill performance in an ordinary setting does not count. The higher the level the character (and therefore the easier it is to do the skill) the less significant it is too.

Hacking into a computer or trying to reprogram it to stop a deadly virus, get vital information or to trick a villain – now that's worth experience points. Likewise, driving a vehicle in such a way as to draw the attention of the bad guys away from innocent children, or to rescue innocent characters or to engage in a stunt driving-filled getaway or chase to capture or follow bad guys – now that's worth counting for experience. But even

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with these examples, we are seeing the use of a skill combined with *ingenuity, daring and heroics*. This is, after all, an "adventure" game, so I always feel the greatest experience points should come from doing something that is smart, cunning, surprising, bold and heroic. If it saves lives (Non-Player Characters or fellow player characters), helps others, or contributes to saving the day, then those actions should count for something and contribute to the character's experience points (not to mention the excitement of the gaming experience).

The greater the risk, the greater the level of (potential) self-sacrifice and the more people saved, the more experience that should be given out. Especially if the rescue was particularly brave and/or brilliant. Likewise, if doing something represented a moral dilemma for the character, but in the end, the character did the "right thing," that too is worthy of a little experience.

Here again it is a matter of *subjective judgement* on the part of the G.M. A rescue in and of itself does not warrant a big experience point reward if it does not truly *challenge* the player characters. If it is easy, the experience is minimal. If it is difficult the experience is greater. If it was death defying or nearly impossible to accomplish (at least without teamwork and cunning) the experience should be considerably more impressive. For example: The player group could rescue 50,000 people trapped in a football stadium and get 50-100 experience points each player character because all they had to do was battle some wimpy guards, the battle took only a few minutes and only two player characters even got a scratched. Big deal. Low E.P.

On the other hand, a battle against a superior force – or even against one, lone villain, but one with great power and who almost kills half the group and/or where one of the player *characters* genuinely puts his or her life on the line – now that is courage, cunning and heroics worthy of 500-1000 experience points to each of those characters who almost died or saved the day. That includes the weak or injured character who came up with the brilliant plan or strategy but did not actually participate in the battle itself. Again, depending on the circumstances, level of opposition and who is being rescued (a pivotal NPC like a king, hero, godling, a lot of people, even one person, etc.) and exactly how events unfold could have an impact on the number of experience points handed out, low or high.

This is easier than it may sound. If you and/or the rest of the players are *impressed* or *surprised* by the character's cleverness, self-sacrifice, heroics and actions (they don't always have to be heroic actions) then that was probably something worthy of an Experience Point reward. If you find yourself, as G.M., thinking, "I never thought of that," or "That *is* exactly right, she's got the right idea," or "Wow," for any reason, **it deserves Experience Points.**

Actually, I use what I call the "Wow Factor" for everything, from designing and running my gaming adventures to the writing of my role-playing games and sourcebooks. If something "wows" me or those around me, it is an important factor worthy of note. The more "wow" and even tingles of "ooh, that's good," and that little smile that curls one's lips as a reaction to something someone said or did, are all signals to me, as Game Master, of a *significant* event or action to be noted, remembered and rewarded. And I make a point to mark down the experience as it hits me. NEVER wait to later and figure you will remember it, because you won't. I sometimes even stop the game for a minute to jot it all down.

On the other hand, a thief picking a lock when nobody is looking, a mage casting an obvious or simple spell without any pressure, a man at arms standing guard, a Juicer leaping from rooftop to rooftop, a scholar buying and reading a book, a City Rat sneaking around or hacking into a computer to be nosy, an Operator cleaning his gun or maintaining the group's vehicle or any character doing anything that is normal, typical, and *expected* under the circumstances – or just a plain stupid thing NOT to do – big deal. **No Experience Points.**

Experience Points are their own reward

Remember, in a game context, one of the tangible accomplishments and rewards the *player* receives is Experience Points for playing his or her fictional alter ego "in character," and cleverly. Yeah, his or her character or the player group as a whole getting money, treasure, powerful weapons or rare artifacts are cool too, and is certainly a "reward" for the characters, but Experience Points are the real achievement for the individual player.

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I have run many a game where the player characters got the snot kicked out of them, lost valuable equipment and got no or little financial reward, but the players were tickled pink because they saved the day (even if it was to save one lone orphan), because they worked as a team, had fun doing it and *won* – stopped the latest "unspeakable evil" and had the Experience Points (and self-satisfaction) to prove their heroic efforts were worth the trouble and pain for their fictional characters. That is the other beautiful aspect of the Experience Point system. You are rewarded for your character's accomplishments and not some dopey points to make him or her more powerful.

Other Rewards

Speaking of "intangible" rewards, don't underestimate the power of a tearful **thank you** from the parents of the child the group just rescued and the good feeling that the players get when the NPC parents offer the group three chickens, a cow and a gold watch – almost EVERYTHING of value these peasants own! And/or the pledge of **undying gratitude** from these parents or the tribe or town, and **little things** like free room and board or healing and other small gestures of kindness and appreciation. Or the **warmth** from a gaggle of children embracing and playing with an ugly/monstrous player character and sincerely calling him their friend (a level of compassion and acceptance "monsters" do not often enjoy, especially from humans and other attractive races).

Notoriety or outright **fame** is another reward. To have the character or the entire player group treated like heroes and celebrities is a nice reward for the players. Another measure of their characters' accomplishments even if it is in a one-horse town.

Of course, fame is a two edged sword that cuts both ways, good and bad. Praise and prestige can turn into disdain and dislike if the characters wear out their welcome by using their celebrity to cheat or take advantage of those who embraced them. This can happen if one or more of the characters in the player group prove to be a lowlife or scoundrel, or if he or the group do not "live up" to the townspeople's *expectations* of them as "heroes." For many people have unrealistic expectations or false impressions of what a hero should be, and become disillusioned and feel tricked or cheated when they come to realize the truth.

Worse, fame brings **notoriety**, and notoriety inevitably brings trouble. My old Defilers campaign brought the characters fame and fortune. The had gigantic statues of them erected by the townspeople. They were all treated with love, affection and respect (even the inhuman ones). They got steep discounts (20-50% off most non-magical items, 10-20% off magic and rarities), were bought meals and drinks and one went on to rule the town (which, thanks to the Defilers, now prospered and its people lived free and independent). That's the good part.

On the other hand, the Defilers were constantly being petitioned to help somebody or another. The more powerful, high level and *famous* they became, the more petitions for help they received – and the more difficult the opposition. They were once whisked away to an alien dimension against their will to save the king and his kingdom. They were attacked by villains looking to make a name for themselves by being able to claim, "I (or we) killed the famous Lord Coake," to prove how powerful they were. The friends, family and associates of enemies the group had defeated or destroyed came looking for revenge ("Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."). Even worse, world leaders and powerful sorcerers, dragons and beings began to approach them (how does one say no to a God of Light?). While good powers would approach them for good deeds, less scrupulous powers tried to manipulate them into doing things they wanted done for self-serving or evil purposes. Of course, that never worked, and the Defilers would figure out what was going on and turn the tables on the scoundrel or villain (with everything ending well). Once, toward the end of their careers (and nearly three years of playing the same characters in the same campaign), the group was attacked by a Genghis Khan character, his most powerful henchmen and half his army. Why? Because the fellow planned to conquer half the region. And when assessing the obstacles he would have to face, he decided that the Defilers would intercede on behalf of those being conquered. Thus, he sought to eliminate them first (his only real opposition), so everything else would be easy!

In the final analysis

"The show must go on." As long as everything doesn't come to a screeching halt, and the players are enjoying themselves, you are doing just fine.

Remember, just like anything else, you will experience ups and downs. When you are hot, you're hot. When you are not, well, try to do a fair to good job at running the adventure. Every game session is *not* going to be epic or magical. Some will be amazing, others just plain good, and some only so, so. As long as the good and epic games outweigh the weak ones, you are doing terrific. Congratulations.

Hey, other times you need to recognize you are having a bad day, can't get going and simply tell your players you can't do it. I've done that a few times. Everybody is over, laughing and ready, but man, I just don't have it. Once I was an hour into the adventure, when I said, sorry, we'll have to do this next week. I didn't make them feel awkward about it. It wasn't their fault. I explained I just couldn't concentrate and focus. Maybe I was too tired or uninspired. So we sat around talking, joking and watching some television.

On another occasion, it was clear the *players* were not in any mood to play. There were just silly as all get out. Jokes and puns were flying nonstop, people were talking about a dozen different things (none of them about the game), and the silliness was contagious. I didn't get angry or try to force them to play, I joined in the fun. After four hours of this, somebody noticed it was midnight and said, "Oh my gosh, it's midnight already? We haven't even started playing." I laughed and said, "That's okay. We were all having too much fun talking. We'll pick up next week." And we continued to talk till two in the morning.

In the final analysis, *fun* with your friends is what gaming is all about. So if your friends keep wanting you to G.M., you must be doing something right. Take it for what it is, cut loose that imagination, game on and have a ball.

This section presents information, methods, tips, devices, tables, charts, rules and reference material that Game Masters should find useful in building adventures and running their games. Enjoy.

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Game Master Tools

The Dungeon Crawl

By Kevin Siembieda

Once upon a time, some genius came up with the idea for role-playing adventures based on a "dungeon crawl." It is simple, to the point, easy to make, easy to play, and lots of fun.

Now, because the concept originated with *Dungeons & Dragons (D&D)* and is over 25 years old, a lot of folks poo-poo the idea of dungeon adventures. That's because they have either outgrown it and have moved on to more sophisticated adventures, or are goofs who don't know what they are talking about. How can I say that? Because the dungeon crawl is beautiful in its simplicity, ideal for beginner Game Masters, especially if running beginner players, and even a poorly designed "dungeon" can be a hoot to play. I have been planning, running and playing games for over 20 years now, and I still use the basic concept and format of a "dungeon" from time to time. I find it ironic that many of the dungeon naysayers love computer and video games that are, in effect, high-tech "electronic dungeons" complete with monsters/antagonists or treasure behind every door.

Here is the basic concept behind the Dungeon Crawl:

The Game Master creates an underground environment. It can be a series of caves, a maze-like labyrinth, a dungeon-like floor plan with one or more "levels" or a network of tunnels and chambers.

The player characters start at the opening to this underground environment and work their way *down* and *through* the dungeon. Traditionally, there seems to be some kind of *cryptic message* or *warning* at the entrance. It can be magical (readable in all languages), scrawled in blood (or paint or chalk) or chiseled into the stone itself, probably by some adventurer who came before them. Sometimes the message is a clue or a riddle concerning something (object or monster) or someone inside. Other times it is gibberish or a McGuffin to throw the characters off track or to lure them to go after something that does not exist. Rumors and legends may also exist about the place and/or the things inside, some true, some exaggerations of the truth, and others complete lies and falsehoods. All are designed to create atmosphere and prime the players for the adventure that awaits them.

What makes the dungeon crawl ideal for beginners is that the adventure *starts at the beginning* – the beginning of the dungeon, and leads down a corridor. The action is confined and directed. How is that for simple?

The first challenge comes with the first door or chamber (some rooms have doors, some don't). In fact, the corridor or winding tunnels are usually filled with doors and chambers, and probably traps and ambushes, and secret compartments.

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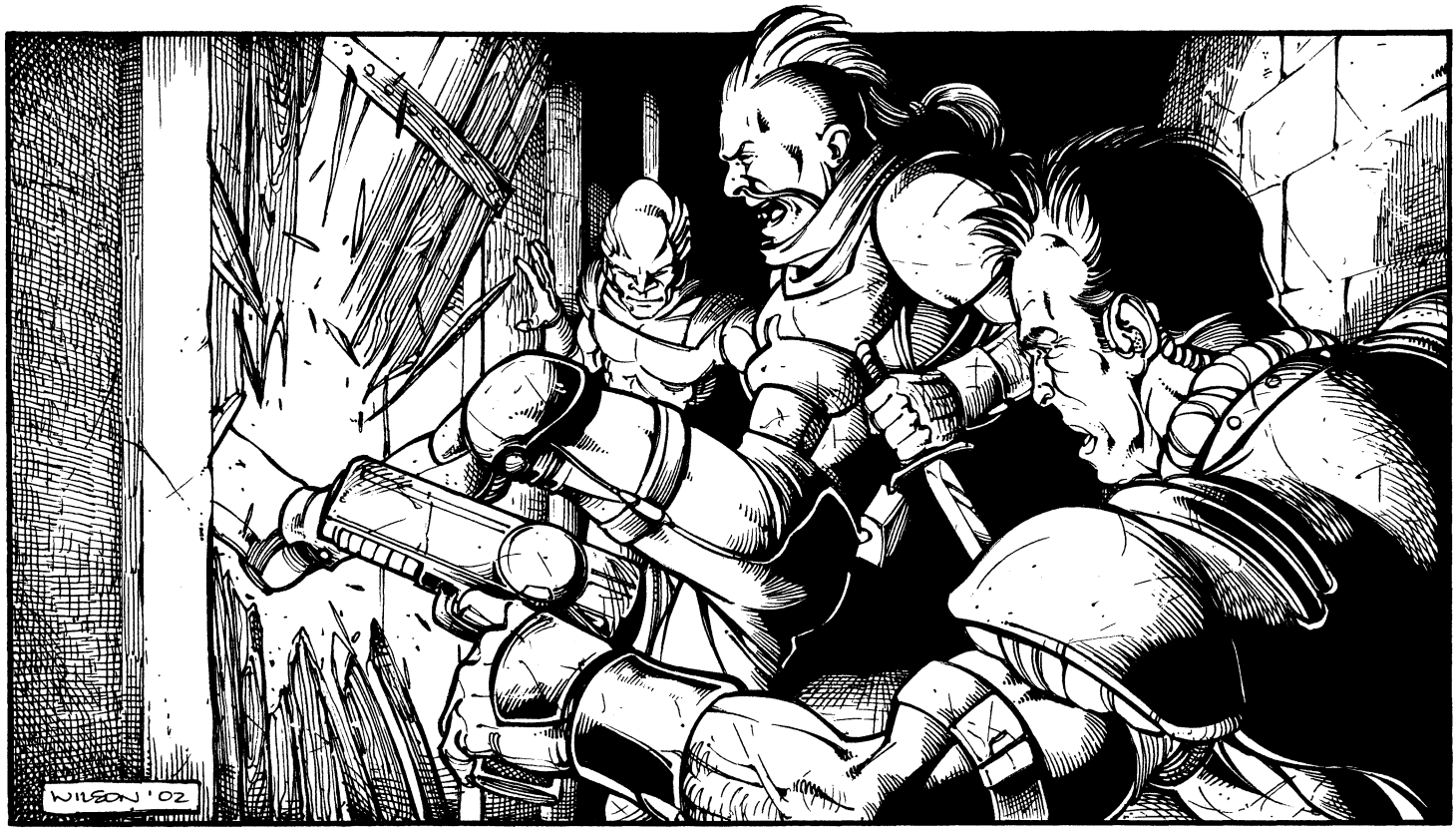

A simple mystery. The beauty of the *closed door* is that it is also the adventurers' first mystery. A dramatic device as simple as the classic – "What is behind the door?"

The answer, open it and find out. It may be empty and filled with dust and cobwebs; any furniture, carpeting, and valuables have rotted away or been looted ages ago. Or have they? Perhaps there is a secret compartment or chamber or some item overlooked. Or maybe the corpse of a more recent inhabitant or visitor (not unlike yourselves; a hint of danger yet to be discovered). On the other hand, it could be unoccupied but filled with new furniture and items, making it the living quarters for somebody who is not home at the moment, but who will not be too thrilled to find intruders snooping around or stealing their things. Or the room may contain a monster or a ghost, or vile inhabitant who attacks the moment the door is opened (and rightly so since strangers, armed to the teeth and probably more than one being *inhuman,* are in the doorway or charging in).

Again, much like today's video games, who or whatever is inside will offer information and clues, is a villain to be defeated, a monster to be destroyed, or a source of treasure (or a combination of them all). Finish killing and loot that room, and one moves on to the next.

The next challenge comes with the next door. Open and repeat. This is done continually, until the biggest and baddest of the bad guys or monsters is found and slain, and its treasure claimed. End of adventure.

Design Note: The earliest dungeons were simplistic, often illogical and usually pretty outrageous. Here's the reason why. Behind most every door was some kind of monster or conflict. Creatures that would never associate with each other or hated each other, or would eat each other, lived in the room just next door or down the corridor. Worse than that, like a simple video game, the inhabitants waited patiently in their own room for somebody to kick its door down and disturb its peace. The beast or bandits apparently did not hear the sound of battle or searching through rubble just next door or three rooms down. Not the magical lightning bolts or the screaming and shouting, or the clash of swords, or the sound of running footsteps – nothing. The monster or the Non-Player Characters just waited until it was *their turn* to do something, triggered by the opening of a door. ALL monsters were mean, nasty, aggressive killing machines! They rarely listened to reason and attacked player characters at sight. That's okay, because your characters were bold, fearless heroes – warriors and wizards – looking for action in a hostile environment. Consequently, it was a safe bet that most everyone encountered in the old-style "Dungeon Crawl" was either a helpless victim looking to be rescued or vicious monster or villain who would attack and fight to the death.

Okay, that approach *is* lame, and, as I said, overly simplified, outrageous and illogical. However, that does not make the dungeon *concept* a bad one.

Using a dungeon the right way

One of the good things about a crawl for inexperienced Game Masters and/or players, is that like the dungeon floor plan the adventure can be as straightforward or as maze-like and filled with twists and turns, and surprises, as the Game Master might want or imagine.

The players are given a simple motive and goal: To "explore" the dungeon or "recover" some item or person inside the dungeon.

The very nature of the dungeon confines the players, limiting their options (and reducing the many possibilities a G.M. might otherwise have to worry about) and provides the group with a

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focused objective in a hostile and unpredictable environment. For you see, a dungeon can be much more than it seems.

Depending on the imagination of the Game Master, a *dungeon setting* can be made into a *logical and plausible* environment. How? Simple, by using all the things we have already talked about: Imagination combined with a logical progression and likely consequences resulting from the actions, reactions, and interactions, not only of the player characters but the Non-Player Characters. Start from the Top-Down and start asking yourself questions, consider relationships between those living in the dungeon and you start to get the picture.

What is this facility? In Rifts it could be all kinds of locations that are completely logical.

1. There are thousands and thousands of entire towns and cities buried under the ash of volcanic eruptions, mudslides, rockslides, sediment deposited by a decade(s) of flooding or swallowed up by earthquakes. Many buried buildings have been dug out as multi-level underground dwellings by human survivors and D-Bees keen to avoid discovery or persecution and who have found the buried buildings to be excellent foundations for underground homes, complexes and lairs. Maybe there are entire underground cities that have been reclaimed?

2. Underground parking garages.

3. The basements and sub-basements of many large office buildings and colleges.

4. Subway tunnel systems.

5. Sewer systems.

6. Old mines. (The city of Detroit, for example, sits atop a veritable labyrinth of salt mine tunnels. Did you know that? Pennsylvania is riddled with old coal mines, etc.)

7. A crash-landed alien spaceship.

8. Survivalist compounds.

9. Everybody's favorite, the secret, underground military complex.

10. Missile silos and military bunkers.

11. Secret laboratories and testing facilities.

12. Military complexes built into the sides of mountains.

13. D-Bee habitats.

14. Natural caves. (Hey, Kentuckians, what about the Mammoth Caves network?)

Don't forget, almost three hundred years have passed since the Coming of the Rifts. Who knows what transpired during the 200 years of the Dark Age that followed the Great Cataclysm? Even much of the last century from 1 to 100 P.A. is shrouded in mystery and uncertainty. Heck, most of North America (and the world) is uncharted, unclaimed wilderness with an unknown past and an uncertain future. Who knows how many alien races, dimensional explorers, demons, and monsters have visited Rifts Earth in the last 300 years and established bases, colonies, homes, and research stations, and what ill-fated invasions have occurred in North America alone? Only to have perished in the face of some disaster or enemy and since forgotten. Who knows what they have left behind, above and below ground?

Building on the idea. Okay, so pick one of the above and start asking questions. Has it been abandoned all these years? If so, what amazing pre-Rifts artifacts or discoveries wait to be uncovered? Who else might have heard about it (before or after our heroes learn of it)? And what are they willing to do to keep it for themselves? Does the CS get involved? Do they try to seize the location? Destroy it, rather than let the truth of the past leak out into the world, or to prevent others from acquiring the technological secrets the CS has already dug out of the past and used for themselves?

Or has the place been ransacked and looted centuries ago? Even so, perhaps it has been the home to numerous people and/or creatures over the decades. Perhaps it is inhabited now, claimed by intelligent or monstrous creatures no one has ever seen before or by some known menace.

Think and explore the possibilities. Even an underground labyrinth that has been stripped of its ancient treasures and secrets (which are probably most) can hold great promise for adventure, danger and treasure.

Unlike the old, silly or ill-conceived dungeons of old, you can make an underground complex with multiple levels, mazes of tunnels (some freshly dug), and filled full of antagonists. You just need to use your imagination. How about this for an idea.

An underground complex is taken over by a group or cult of evil practitioners of magic. Perhaps they are active members of the Federation of Magic, a rival brotherhood claiming to be the "true" Federation or some group completely independent of the Federation. Whatever the case may be, they are a mixed group of mages associating with dark forces (possibly beyond their control). This sets up a wonderful environment for adventure, combat and treasure.

First, consider the big picture. If you were the mastermind of this evil brotherhood of mages (see, I just gravitate to the villain), what is your purpose? Are you (the villain) building a legion to take over a particular town, city or part of the country? Are you and your "associates" conducting magical experiments? Summoning demonic minions? Building an army of henchmen? In league with a demonic overlord or alien intelligence (calling into question who is using whom)? Is this underground *lair* your base of power or just one location in a larger organization? Who, exactly, is this mastermind? What powers and secrets does he wield? Stat him out. Who are his closest partners/alleys? Stat them out. Who are their minions/henchmen?

Then start filling out the underground complex.

First, these brilliant and cunning sorcerers are not going to leave the entrance to their lair out in the open or unprotected, so how is it concealed? Covered by an illusion or simple camouflage? Is the entrance a trap door in the ground behind a rock or inside a cave, or is it concealed in the floor or basement inside what appears to be an ordinary home or farm or hunting lodge, or a falling down shack? Or does one have to step into a magic circle or a circle of stones and evoke some magic to enter? This could the player characters' first obstacle and conflict with any guards (animal, human, demonic, etc.) that are involved.

Second, how did our heroes find this place? (And how to get inside?) That could be an adventure in and of itself. The answer to that question probably explains why they are interested in exploring the place too. If not, it needs to be asked and determined. Curious? The practitioners of magic have something or someone they want? Need to be stopped or destroyed? And so on.

Third, is the entrance protected? If so, by who or what?

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Fourth, once inside, where is that? Is it at the end of a tunnel? If so, where does the tunnel lead? Is it a (small, medium, or large) chamber with a door or two? Where do the doors lead to; a tunnel that goes straight forward, to a set of stairs or a ladder that goes down, what? Or is this antechamber more like a cave, or an air lock, or reception area, or a guard post? And speaking of guards, these mages are not likely to leave this chamber unguarded (or are they that overconfident that they do?). If guarded, by who or what (animal, monster, humanoid guards, magic, etc.)? This could be the player characters' second obstacle.

Fifth, proceeding inside they can find "areas" or entire floors/levels dedicated to different aspects of the compound, such as the following:

- An area dominated/inhabited by one or more Necromancers and their zombie, mummy and skeletal minions. Perhaps the first thing the group finds are skeletal remains laying around in heaping piles, or scattered across the floor, or even more eerie, dressed in armor (with weapon at their sides) and posed like mannequins.

This is the group's first, truly big hurdle, to defeat or bypass the (1D6) Necromancers. In addition to these death mages, are likely to be a few zombies and or mummies, as well as a few henchmen and/or (willing or enslaved) servants. Of course if there is trouble, each Necromancer can animate a dozen of the skeletons. One reason the group may want to try to avoid combat. However, since the Necromancers control this entire level/area of the complex, any sounds of combat short of *explosions*, will NOT be heard by the others on lower levels or different areas. Besides, these guys are always roughhousing with their animated dead playthings.

Other things found in the Necromancer area/floor/level are 1) A large banquet hall or lecture room turned into a work area/laboratory where the mages cobble together strange monstrosities. 2) A kitchen and attached dining room. 3) Living quarters for the Necromancers probably equal to a two bedroom apartment. 4) The chamber (spacious living quarters) of the head Necromancer (most powerful). Each living quarters should have a few valuables, but not much (maybe 2D6x10 credits worth, and many are icky things no normal character should want). 5) A surgical room used for anatomical studies, dissection and torture (probably near or connected to #1). A library, community study, a couple of empty conference rooms, storage closets, bathroom, etc., may be added as the G.M. sees fit. **Note:** Clues, hints and data about what lies below or beyond may be provided here too.

Once this floor is conquered the players can move forward and deeper into the complex.

- The servants' floor. 1) A lot of this floor is made up of empty rooms or chambers not in use. 2)The largest one looks like a makeshift gladiatorial arena (it may come into play later depending on how things go for our heroes). 3) A room full of linens. 4) Laundry room. 5) Large kitchen. This is where most of the meals for the entire complex are prepared. Assuming it is not around mealtime, there will only be 1D4 servants here. They are frightened by intruders and will probably try to make a run for it (out another door, hide in the connecting pantry, etc.). If ONE escapes he or she will sound an alarm that will indicate intruders, and some powerful opponents will show up. Assuming the player group is smart enough and quick enough to stop/corral and contain these first and second level domestic workers, they can prevent a confrontation and get some information about the complex and its powerful inhabitants. The servants should be terrified to say too much, but it should be enough to get the heroes' juices flowing. ("No. No. The master will kill me!" "And who is your master?" "Lord Garnode the Terrible." Take it from there. The more casual and innocent the questions – who is he, what is he, what type of magic does he command, is he home, etc. – the more likely one is to get an answer. The more pointed the question – what are his plans, where is the item we seek, how can we destroy him – the less likely one will get full or truthful answers.) G.M.s can also create atmosphere and apprehension with the environment by describing some of the horrible looking and unidentifiable carcasses of meat (humanoid?) and oddities kept here and in the big walk-in freezers. The food stock should clearly indicate that food is prepared for beings who are NOT human. A hint of opponents to come. Maybe there is even a holding pen with 1D4 live human or D-Bee prisoners, what's left of the "fresh" food. 6) Most other rooms are the sparse rooms for the dozen or two servants and/or slaves who live and work here. All are impoverished and have no valuables of any kind. They are glad to be alive. **Note:** While most probably do not willingly serve their master, there is always a kiss-up or two in every group. Be careful. 7) The quartermaster and her assistant (or two). I think I would make this individual an ornery bully, maybe a Witch or some belligerent non-magical D-Bee race, or creature like a Witchling or Black Faerie. Her quarters are on this level too. It is large and much nicer than the servants', but devoid of any significant treasure (maybe 1D6x1000 credits worth of trinkets or credits hidden away in her room). She or her low level assistant may be on the floor supervising, or taking care of business elsewhere in the complex. She will be trouble at some point, and if present on the floor, she will come to investigate any sounds of trouble or tomfoolery. She knows plenty if she can be made to talk.

- The sorcerers' floor. This is a combination work and living area for the majority of the practitioners of magic who live and work here. Whether more than one or two are present at the time, or even in the complex at all, is up to the G.M. and what he thinks is best to challenge the group. Personally, I would have it so that the group learns about a few other mages who are "away on business." That leaves the door open for a surprise appearance, as well as a potential enemy who may seek retribution upon them for whatever the group does in the secret lair.

There should be all kinds of "signs" and portents of trouble and doom. 1) A few rooms with magic circles inscribed on the floor. 2) A lounge-like library (nothing magic, mostly books on lore, history, herbs, human anatomy, torture, and demons). 3) A couple of posh conference rooms. 4) A small dining room. 5) A room with a small altar that is clearly used for human sacrifices. Perhaps there are manacles on one of the walls or a cage or jail cell, possibly with one or more people in them! (The NPC the heroes are looking for, perhaps? Grab him or her and get out before it's too late. Or has the group decided to put an end to this place? Or have they tipped their hand and suddenly find themselves facing several of the magic weaving inhabitants? Or maybe, the one they seek is not here, if they seek a person at all.) 6) Various living quarters for the majority (5-8) of the practitioners of magic who live here. Most, probably protected or guarded by someone or something. Now the trouble begins. And

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on this floor/level, the sounds of combat or a disturbance *will* attract the attention of at least a few of the mages and/or their henchmen (mortal and monstrous).

- What's left of the complex could be all kinds of stuff. A level inhabited by demons or monsters, one or more floors not completely dug out and restored (and uninhabited except for the runaway slave or prisoner that the bad guys think escaped), ongoing excavations being conducted by demons or Elementals, or the recent discovery of a tunnel network yet to be explored. There could also be a slave pen and/or a monster pen, a true "dungeon" area with jail cells and solitary confinement, a ballroom, a Techno-Wizard or Bio-Wizard laboratory, a dimensional portal to another world, etc.

- Personally, I would make the final floor/level a big chamber with a circle and sacrificial altar or some alien device used for *summoning* or for opening a Rift to another dimension (perhaps to summon forth a legion of demons, D-Bees, aliens, monsters, or to travel in order to find some key component or magic item that will give these sorcerers the power they seek). I'd make Lord Garnode the Terrible some wicked powerhouse, maybe a dragon hatchling or adult, or a powerful Shifter (with a couple demonic henchmen, of course), or I don't know what – but he'd be powerful and displeased with the interference of the player group. Maybe I would have him in the middle of summoning something terrible or communicating with some foul supernatural horror. Maybe the heroes interrupt his summoning ritual or break an enchantment, but this is the big payoff – the final confrontation.

Or is it? Maybe the group is outgunned and have to flee, setting up a rematch. Perhaps they flee deeper into the labyrinth into a portion that the sorcerers do not control. There they find an ally, a weapon or magic item to help them defeat their opponents, or another way out, or ... Maybe Lord Garnode is so tough that he simply mocks them and tells them to leave before he destroys them or challenges them to a contest (remember the arena), winner takes all, or reveals his master plan, already in progress in the outside world, and dares them to stop him. Explore the possibilities!

See how much fun a dungeon-style adventure can be, and what it can lead to? And this is just one idea.

The scenario would be completely different if it were a bandit lair, or a den of monsters, or has become a town itself, or an unexplored military complex with automated defense systems (and a self-destruct if it loses the confrontation, that way the player characters don't get a military complex with enough weapons, armor, vehicles and power to take over the continent or become insanely rich). Or maybe it is a military complex being fought over by two or more rival forces, or they accidentally unleash a plague. Better yet, the abandoned old complex is the only place that should have the antidote for a plague released (by accident or on purpose) someplace else, assuming it can be located inside. The problem is, the complex is inhabited by rival gangs of D-Bees and monsters who have divvied up the place piecemeal. These gangs and individuals will have to be avoided and battled to find the secret cure believed to be hidden inside, and to get back to those in need.

My old Defilers campaign centered around the Palladium of Desires, which was basically a multi-dimensional dungeon. However, the various levels might not even know about each other because they actually existed in a different dimension or realm of existence, with the Palladium serving as a conduit to those worlds. The top three or four floors were more of a traditional type dungeon, with various parts taken over and inhabited by different human and nonhuman factions, just as street gangs might carve up and claim certain neighborhoods and streets of a city for themselves. Powerful individuals came and went as they pleased or engaged in strange experiments or plotted schemes they would try to entice, trick or blackmail the Defilers into. There were also places where none of the inhabitants dared to tread (not that it stopped the Defilers), and there were innocent looking doors that led to dangerous magical devices best left alone, or to other times and places. One door opened up into a forest 30 miles (48 km) in diameter, another led to a time hole, yet another to the cage of a mad god. Sub-Level Four was a Kingdom of the Undead. Level Five the heavily defended doorway to a portal that led to a world of advanced technology (particle beams and such). Level Six led to an Earth-like world locked in war against invading Martians, *War of the Worlds* style. And that was just inside the Palladium of Desires.

At least half the adventures took place outside, many happening in or started at the little town near the Palladium. The group traveled to neighboring kingdoms and faraway lands on missions of mercy or quests for this or that. They were drawn into confrontations because of their growing reputations as crusading heroes and monster slayers, and often had to chase after and stop or destroy some horror they accidentally unleashed, or put an end to a sequence of events they unwittingly set into motion. They traveled the high seas and went to a world of Gargoyles, a dimension of Samurai Trolls, and much, much more.

And it all started with a dungeon.

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Archetypes

By Bill Coffin

Note: The following information, especially the Character Archetypes, is useful to both Game Masters and *players.* For G.M.s to build interesting adventurers and Non-Player Characters. For player as inspiration for their own characters in determining goals, inner demons, purpose and more.

Since the dawn of civilization, we have been entertaining ourselves with stories and make-believe, and over the course of time, certain patterns have emerged that have become hallmarks of the dramatic experience, be it a movie, book, play, or even a role-playing adventure. These patterns take the form of familiar "types" of characters, types of plot-lines, and types of conflicts, that pop up again and again and again. They are *archetypes*, and if you know how to see them for what they are, they can be a mighty addition in your adventure-building toolbox.

The Swiss psychiatrist *Carl Jung* believed that humanity had a collective unconscious that was aware of the repeated experiences of all mankind, resulting in "a kind of readiness to reproduce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas." Jung believed there were **primordial archetypes** (images and concepts so deeply ingrained into the human understanding that we are born with them) and **universal archetypes** (images and concepts found all over the world and throughout history, regardless of barriers in language, society, culture, politics, economics, etc.). As the theory goes, together, these shared images and concepts explain, for example, why the trickster hero of folk tales told by Kalahari bushmen is pretty much the same as the trickster hero of a high-budget Hollywood movie written and shot by people who don't even know where the Kalahari is, much less studied its folklore.

Archetypes endure because no matter what, they resound with us. We are instinctively familiar with them, so the moment we encounter one, we know whether to like it or dislike it, or we know what kind of story or play or game to expect. Archetypes are a powerful but often misunderstood foundation of all storytelling, entertainment and make-believe, and if you get to know them half as well as you know the stats for any given rail gun, you will be a much better G.M. for it. For one thing, you will be able to write better adventures and not work as hard doing it. You will have a better understanding of what makes your players' characters tick. And you will have a greater sense for conflict, drama, and all the other good stuff that drives a story or an adventure along a rich, exciting and satisfying course.

I will deal with only three main types of archetypes: *conflict archetypes, dramatic archetypes,* and *character archetypes.*

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There are tons of other archetypes involving theme, tone, and so on, but for now, these three main ones should be enough to get you started.

The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly

Before we go any further, we should distinguish between *archetypes*, *stereotypes*, and *cliches*. Archetypes are good. Stereotypes are usually bad (oversimplified, overused and broad caricatures). And cliches are just plain ugly (overdone and used to death, making them uninspired and boring). Let's begin by consulting our handy copy of *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*:

archetype (*n*) **1:** the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies; prototype; a perfect example. **2:** An inherited idea or mode of thought in the psychology of C.G. Jung that is derived from the experience of the race and is present in the unconscious of the individual.

stereotype (*n*) **1:** a plate cast from a printing surface. **2:** something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; *esp*: a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment. **3:** something that lacks originality or individuality.

cliche (*n*) **1:** a trite phrase or expression; *also*: the idea expressed by it. **2:** a hackneyed theme or situation. **3:** something that has become overly familiar or commonplace.

– *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*

In other words, archetypes tend to have a mythic or timeless quality to them. They can not be pegged to a certain group of people or culture or time frame. If you can do that, then you are probably not dealing with an archetype.

Stereotypes tend to have a bad connotation and imply something that is *not* timeless or mythic or universal to the human condition and treating it as such. That all women are bad drivers is a stereotype, not an archetype, for example. Racial or cultural stereotypes are especially repugnant and should never be used. They are generally not the hallmark of good storytelling or good adventure-making, but are instead the hallmark of small-mindedness. Now, it is possible to use stereotypes constructively – focusing an adventure around a town's stereotypical views of all D-Bees as liars and thieves is one such option. But be careful when you do so that you don't cross the line between good taste and bad.

Cliches are generally not inherently hurtful or disrespectful the way that stereotypes can be, but they still are not a good thing. Identifying them can be a little tricky, since they actually do have a lot in common with archetypes, and in fact, an archetype can become a cliche!

The trick with avoiding the use of cliches is knowing the fine line that separates them from archetypes and not crossing it by accident. An archetype is a classic, immortal element that resounds in some way with everybody. When that archetype gets used too often (like all the inevitable ripoffs and clones of a great movie), or if it is too obvious, or if it makes the reader/viewer/gamer roll his eyes instead of get interested, then you've obviously crossed the line into *cliche*. There is no hard and fast rule or boundary separating the two. Often, it is a matter of intensity, frequency and pure skill with which archetypes are used that determines how they will be perceived. In the end, your best judge is your gut. If you use any kind of archetype and it feels wrong to you, feels cheesy, feels like more of a ripoff than an homage or an inspiration, then you probably are falling into a cliche and should not use it.

Use your head, use your gut, and use your vast experience with reading books, watching movies and playing games. You will know what is cool and what isn't. Often that alone is what makes archetypes great and what makes cliches stink.

Conflict Archetypes

Conflict. All adventures must have it. Most of the time, adventures are nothing but conflict after conflict, which is fine. We don't role-play to be bored, do we? But if you want to make really great adventures, you must begin with really great conflicts. And to do that, it would not hurt to understand that most scholars recognize there are five basic forms of conflict. Know them and you might just find that adventure idea, or that Top-Down idea Erick Wujcik works from, and certainly you'll have a theme from which to build your adventures. Check it out.

- Man vs. Nature
- Man vs. Man
- Man vs. Society
- Man vs. Himself
- Man vs. Fate

Man vs. Nature

In this conflict, the struggle is against the world at large. Usually, this is a life and death struggle, as the hero tries to prevent the inherent hostility of the natural world from claiming its next victim. This is an interesting conflict, because for it to work well in an adventuring context, it should set the stage for other forms of conflict. A band of adventurers spending an entire gaming session staving off the freezing cold does not usually make for fun play. However, if the stress of surviving the cold makes the characters fight each other (Man vs. Man), makes the characters consider resorting to unacceptable behavior (like cannibalism) to survive (Man vs. Society), or it just makes the characters determined to be the last guy standing (Man vs. Fate), then you've got the potential for a really good adventure on your hands.

A Rifts® example of this conflict might be if the heroes are trapped in the wastes of upper Canada during a really bad winter, or if they have been stranded without food, water or shelter in the depths of the New West or have to face carnivorous packs of dinosaurs. Or if they must eject from their aircraft over the barren steppes of Russia.

A good movie example of the Man vs. Nature conflict is the recent Tom Hanks vehicle, *Cast Away*. However, that is mostly a solo conflict, and not very good for gaming, although it gets

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into the character side of such a conflict wonderfully. A good group example of this conflict might be *Alive*, the story of plane crash survivors in the Andes who must eat their own dead to keep living.

Man vs. Man

This is the classic antagonism between people. The scope and intensity of it can vary considerably. It is probably also the form of conflict with which most role-players are most familiar. After all, many RPG characters are warriors of a sort and even if they are not, they are able to handle themselves in a fight just because role-playing games so often involve violence and battle. **Rifts®** is no exception, as campaigns like the **Siege on Tolkeen™** and sourcebooks like **Coalition War Campaign™** prove. Some folks might feel that open Man vs. Man conflict has been done to death already and that RPGs in general should move past that if they are to evolve into a higher form of entertainment. That's cool, but don't forget that hack-n-slash gaming aside, Man vs. Man has been a major parameter of the human condition ever since man took his first step. It is a major component of the very background of **Rifts®**, just as it is a major component in the present Rifts world. It should not be forgotten. Besides, it is at the root of most dramas and soap operas from Shakespeare to Dawson's Creek or Alias. Comic books thrive on this one archetype alone.

There are so many good examples of the Man vs. Man conflict that you can scarcely look around in a video store and not find a couple. Some of my favorites include *Star Wars* (the Rebellion vs. the Empire), *Heat* (cops vs. robbers) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Li Mu Bai and Liu Shen vs. Jen and Jade Fox) and a zillion others.

Man vs. Society

In this conflict, the hero is up against the rules and mind set of those around him. He is, for whatever reason, an oddball, a pariah, an outcast, a rebel, or even a criminal. Unfortunately, there have been a million cheesy high school drama movies and television shows to water down this particular conflict ("Will Mandi go against her parents and attend the college of *her* choice?" "Will Chad jeopardize getting into the most exclusive clique in school by dating an unpopular girl?"). However, it still is the kind of thing that can really fit into an RPG well, provided you know how to look at it properly, both for single characters and for entire groups of adventurers.

A Rifts® example of this conflict would be somebody secretly practicing magic in Chi-Town (though this is more like Man vs. Man), or a D-Bee character making friends with and fighting alongside creatures of other races that his own kind normally does not approve of. The internal conflict within the Cyber-Knights brotherhood as described in the **Siege on Tolkeen** series is another good example, as the knights are all pressured by the various factions to take part in a conflict they may not want anything to do with.

There are some really great movie examples of this conflict, but they often do not have much of an adventure angle. One of my favorites is *Pleasantville*, which takes an interesting perspective on what being "colored" is all about. Another good example is the science fiction flick, *Gattaca*, or *Braveheart*. And one that may be closer to some G.M.s' heart is *Mystery Men*, in which none of the heroes are taken seriously by anybody, and their lives (and jobs as heroes) are made all the more difficult because of it. They are not just fighting to save their city, they are fighting to get some respect, too.

Man vs. Himself

This conflict is unique in that it is inherently solo. The character involved must deal with a set of conflicting priorities or set of circumstances. It could be that he wants two things that directly contradict each other – like winning the love of a woman whose husband he has sworn to destroy. Or it could be more literal than that, and the character literally is in conflict with his own body or mind, trying to overcome a physical or mental debilitation, or a story of loss and redemption (trying to forsake his evil ways and dark past, to be a hero again), or inner conflict (seeks revenge, but knows it is wrong). In a role-playing context, this sort of conflict is usually faced by an individual character, although his choice and actions may affect the entire group. It is a dramatic way to expand upon and explore the depths of a player character and add drama to the overall adventure. Whatever the adventure is, if the player characters must face and deal with their own inner demons as well as the challenge at hand, it makes for a more compelling, more difficult, and ultimately, more challenging experience. Give it a shot!

A Rifts® example of Man vs. Himself might be a Coalition officer who must depend on the services of a mage if he wants to save his troops. Does he compromise the very ideals he has sworn to uphold to save the men under his command? Or does he sacrifice them (or himself) knowing that they upheld the ideals of the Coalition States and went down pure in heart, thought and deed? Another **Rifts®** example might be any character who has undergone cybernetic surgery and must contend with the strange new feelings and conditions that brings. A third, might be a character who is battling any form of insanity, drug addiction (Juicers), alcoholism or other form of substance abuse.

The ultimate classic is *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. An interesting movie example of Man vs. Himself is *Fight Club*, which I won't get into for fear of spoiling it. Another good movie example would be *Blade*, in which our vampire hero must constantly battle his own bloodlust, and *Conspiracy Theory*, too.

Man vs. Fate

In this conflict, the hero struggles with the inevitable or against overwhelming odds stacked against him. The outcome is usually fairly easy to predict – most times, the hero fights valiantly but in the end is overcome by forces much larger than himself. This works well for cautionary stories or stories that are more about the character than his conflict, and stories in which the character's sacrifice brings about change, freedom or triumph for others. In a role-playing setting, however, fighting the impossible fight works best if there is actually a *chance* the hero might prevail, or that he dies to save or free another or give hope, etc.

A good Rifts® example of Man vs. Fate is the life of any Juicer. These guys all are going to die, and soon. Their challenge is to make the best of what little time they have left so that their decision to undergo Juicer conversion was not without

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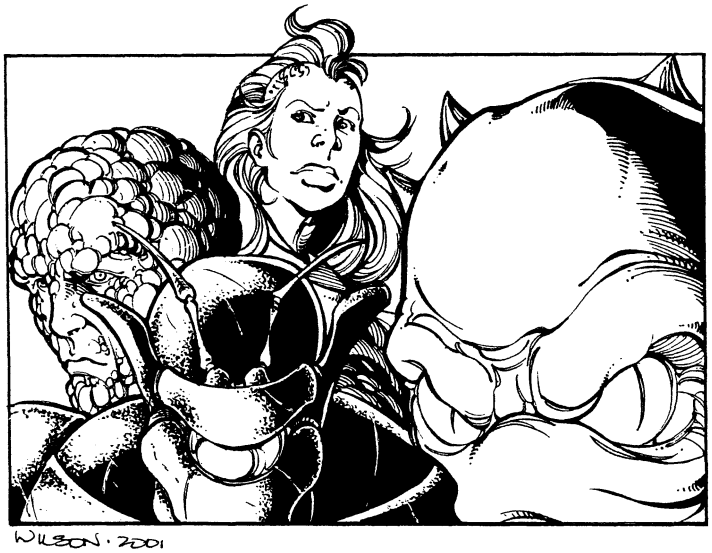
merit. There is nothing more tragic than a Juicer who didn't save lives, get the revenge he was seeking, or at least get a little fame and fortune for signing his own death warrant. Another good example would be any Witch or most Shifters who make some kind of bargain with otherworldly forces. Sooner or later, those forces will come to collect, and the mortal who made the deal knows it. He must live with that knowledge, much like how a guy on death row in prison knows that every day he lives is one step closer to the end.

A movie example of this would be the film *Angel Heart*, a great spooky tale starring Robert DeNiro and Mickey Rourke. It's pretty graphic, though, so if you're under 18, get your folks' permission before watching. I'm not going to spoil the movie for you by explaining exactly why it is a great example of Man vs Fate, so I'll just encourage you to go out and rent it or catch it on video. You'll be glad you did. It is creepy, though. Another is *12 Monkeys*, a weird little time travel movie with Bruce Willis.



Character Archetypes

Character archetypes are perhaps the easiest to spot, in part because they are the easiest to transform into a cliche. We have all seen enough bad movies to know an obvious Mentor when we see one. But because these are, at their root, archetypes, they can always be used again, and in such a way that makes for outstanding characters we come to know and love. Was the Mentor used in a million books, comic books, plays and movies before *Star Wars* came out? Of course. But that did not stop us from loving Obi-Wan Kenobi, the classic mentor. Heck no. You too, dear G.M., can do the same thing with any of the following character archetypes so long as you keep a close eye on how, why and when they are used. Like all archetypes, these are really just universal *starting points*. What makes them work is taking them in new and interesting directions, and not just treading over the same ground that others have done. To a certain extent, you can get away with that when stocking a game with NPCs, especially those who are not intended to last for more than a single game session. But if you take NPC generation as seriously as you take creating a player character, then the character, and the game will be that much more interesting. **Note:** In most cases, the player characters are the "heroes" and these archetypes are Non-Player Characters (NPCs) for use by the Game Master.

This section in no way covers every single character archetype out there. It just covers some of the best known. They are, in no particular order:

- The Mentor
- The Threshold Guardian
- The Herald
- The Shapeshifter
- The Trickster
- The Comrade
- The Sidekick
- The Detestable Villain
- The Sympathetic Villain
- The Casualty
- The Initiate
- The Seer
- The Outsider
- The Commander
- The Rogue
- The Rascal
- The Egghead
- The Adventurer
- The Champion
- The Temptation
- The Spunky Kid
- The Damsel in Distress
- The Sanctuary

The Mentor

These characters serve as teachers or counselors to an individual or group of heroes, especially green adventurers, young warriors, apprentices, and any low level character. They are sometimes role models, sometimes teachers, and sometimes relatives, but often they are figures of legend (perhaps a hero intentionally sought out), or a mysterious and reclusive figure (again someone the hero may seek out or who find each other by happenstance). Mentors impart upon the young hero or group, new or improved skills, knowledge, focus, and insight – all *weapons and tools* they will need to resolve the conflict they are destined to face. Mentors also tend to leave their student at some point, often by getting killed, as a means of increasing the dramatic tension of the story or adventure, and as a way of *forcing* the hero or heroes into maturation.

While there are no hard and fast rules for Mentors, virtually any high-level character can act as a Mentor of a character of lower level than he. A good rule of thumb is that a character's Mentor should be at least five levels higher than he in experience to begin with. As the student character grows in experience, the Mentor does not. Eventually, the student will become as powerful as the Mentor. In a number of stories, it is often at that point when the bad guys kill the Mentor and give the hero something to avenge. Both Obi-Wan Kenobi from *Star Wars* and Morpheus from *The Matrix* are classic Mentors and exam-

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ples of this progression. Other times, the Mentor lives on to inspire and bring hope. In **Rifts®**, Erin Tarn and Lord Coake of the Cyber-Knights are examples of this. But such figures are often distant and rarely accessible to the Average Joe, or even the player characters.

The Threshold Guardian

The Threshold Guardian's job is to provide the hero with a non-lethal early challenge to test their mettle. We see this in comics, movies and games all the time. He is a formidable secondary character who gives the hero a rough time, and then ultimately befriends and usually becomes subservient to the hero. Sometimes Threshold Guardians are monsters or inanimate objects, but they seem to work best as living characters. Multiple Threshold Guardians may pop up in the course of an adventure to gauge how much the hero has progressed. In stories, these characters are a means of proving if the hero can resolve the conflict at hand before actually attempting to do so. If the hero can not best any Threshold Guardian in his way, he clearly is not ready for the final challenge, whatever that may be, or still has more to learn (enter the Mentor character or a Man vs. Man theme as he forces himself to achieve).

Any kind of formidable NPC or monster works well as a Threshold Guardian in **Rifts®**. If they join with a player character, or more often, the player "group," however, they should take a secondary role in any adventures and function as a supporting character and fuel for new adventures (i.e. gets himself and/or the group into trouble). The player characters should, ultimately, have center stage and surpass these "Guardians" in terms of scope, power and heroics.

The character of Little John in the Robin Hood legends is a classic Threshold Guardian.

The Herald

Heralds are often used when the heroes are reluctant or unwilling to get involved in the drama at hand. These characters typically arrive in the beginning of a story and either disappear or become some other archetype that accompanies the hero/group on the quest. Heralds can also be used as the henchman of the villain. His spokesperson. The guy who makes proclamations, issues threats and warnings and oversees retribution. A herald can also be little more than a messenger or the harbinger of some coming event or conflict and then vanish.

In *Star Wars*, R2-D2 is a Herald who later becomes a Faithful Servant.

In **Rifts®**, just about anyone or anything can be a Herald, but it should not be too powerful. Otherwise, it is not *calling* or *luring* the character to action, but bullying him into action with an implied threat of force. Often those who are close to the hero or group and can pull on his/their heartstrings are effectively true Heralds.

The Shapeshifter

The Shapeshifter is a great storytelling device that brings uncertainty and tension into the story or adventure. They are inherently untrustworthy characters or they are from the outset, two different kinds of archetypes, with one hiding within the other. They rarely serve to make the heroes' life any easier, and in the end, most end up either as villains of some kind, traitors, or backstabbing betrayers who the heroes are better off without.

In **Rifts®**, any duplicitous person can fit the role of the Shapeshifter, as can the numerous creatures, monsters and R.C.C.s that can literally change their shape or otherwise deceive the heroes.

In the *Matrix*, Cipher is a good example of the Shapeshifter. He at first appears to be a Comrade, but in reality he is a Sympathetic Villain who surprises us with his open betrayal of the other heroes in the story. G.M.s, feel free to make heavy use of the Shapeshifter or "turncoat." It adds to the drama and keeps the players on their toes, always guessing.

The Trickster

Tricksters are usually either clownish sidekicks or mild troublemakers for the heroes and villains alike. Their actions serve to deflate other characters' egos and to inject a strain of humility and humor into the drama when things get overly serious. They often act as the comic relief for adventures, and their unpredictable behavior can help kick start the action when things slow down (i.e. their antics cause trouble). They tend to affect other characters' lives, but they are, themselves, remarkably static, unchanging. The Trickster never learns from his mistakes and they will get into the same kind of trouble again and again, regardless of what anybody tells them.

Jar Jar Binks, as much as people hate him, is a fine example of the Trickster. He exists only as a comic foil and sometimes the unwitting helper to our heroes. Occasionally, his goofiness serves to get in the heroes' way, too. Annie in *Robotech®* is another. In **Rifts®**, a trickster is most likely to be a Non-Player Character who plagues the player group – a bumbling thief whose schemes and antics never seem to work out right, a cocky and defiant Crazy, a well intentioned but hot tempered D-Bee or overly naive dragon hatchling, but *any* O.C.C. or R.C.C. could work, because it is the character's personality and penchant for trouble (a trouble magnet, in fact) that makes this character a Trickster archetype. Kevin uses Faerie Folk and Goblin thieves for this all the time. Crazies make especially good Tricksters because they're just plain nuts and because if anybody is likely to challenge the status quo and remind everybody of their foibles, it is a Crazy.

The Comrade

This is the faithful and competent peer of the heroes who helps them and even joins their ranks for a while to face whatever challenge, monster or villain awaits ahead. Comrades are often as powerful, if not a little more so, as the player characters, at least at the beginning. However, they tend to remain fixed in their abilities (don't change much) and play a secondary role in the adventure, typically offering insight, information, encouragement and the occasional helping hand. These Comrade characters are not slaves or servants and make their own choices. A Game Master tool, this proven heroic warrior NPC may step forward at a time of indecision or crossroads to announce his decision to press forward or stop the bad guy, giving the player characters a nudge to do the right thing or to buck up and press forward with him.

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In role-playing games, Comrades are an excellent way for the G.M. to include an NPC in the party. (**A note from Siembieda:** The best reasons for doing this are to help focus the characters in the right direction and to help bring about *interaction* with other NPCs and stimulate action. For example, if the group is hesitant about approaching a stranger or band of warriors, the Comrade might offer, "They look okay to me. Let's ask them if they know anything (or have food to share, etc.). Or if the group doesn't trust a captive they have in custody, the Comrade might say, "even if he's lying, what other choice do we have?" to get the group moving again or thinking about their plan. That's the beauty of having a Comrade NPC as part of the player group. Again, the Comrade should take a back seat to the player characters, but he's there to stir the pot. Personally, I always have an NPC in the player group.)

The dwarf Gimli and the Elf Legolas from *The Lord of the Rings* are both classic Comrades. They are able warriors who serve to work alongside Bilbo Baggins, though they take no orders from him and ultimately end up separating from him.

The Sidekick

Like the Comrade, the Sidekick lives to help the hero or player group. Only the Sidekick is almost always *subservient* to the group or hero. He may disobey an order or get himself into trouble, but the Sidekick is eternally loyal, and always there to (at least try to) help his friend; and individual characters or the player group in general. They also tend to be less competent than the Comrade, sometimes much less. This means they serve as adventure fodder, with a habit of, or a gift for, getting in trouble. This works to create action and adventure because now the group must rescue or bail out the Sidekick. But ultimately, the Sidekick's friendship and devotion are unquestioned, and in the end, the character usually pulls through for the hero, saving him or the group at least once. Meanwhile, the individual hero or group (adopted by the Sidekick) is something of a protector and Mentor or older brother, or authority figure to the Sidekick.

Master Samwise from *The Lord of the Rings* is a fine Sidekick example. So are Merry and Pippin, also from *LOTR*, but to a somewhat lesser extent.

In role-playing, virtually any character class or R.C.C. can be a sidekick. The only catch is they should never be within four levels of experience of the hero or the player group in general (1-3rd level is ideal) and advance in experience much more slowly (presumably from their many blunders and seeming inability to learn from them). The sidekick is often eternally inquisitive, optimistic and loyal, all of which get him and his comrades into trouble. "You can't call Rexus the Red a coward. He's a great hero you dumb ox!" And the trouble begins.

The Detestable Villain

This character is evil incarnate. There is not one redeeming aspect to him. He exists only as a foil for the heroes, to thwart good, destroy beauty and goodness, and to make sure that the bad guys prevail in all things. They often are supremely confident and powerful, especially in the beginning of an adventure, but their confidence fades and their power declines (loses henchmen and/or control over those they dominate, etc.) as the heroes defy, challenge and engage in skirmishes against them (or their minions). The Detestable Villain will either fight to the death, or sacrifice his minions or innocent people while he makes good his escape. The Detestable Villain is also frequently outwardly horrific in appearance, but may be very charming and good looking (which may throw their opponents off).

Temporal Raiders, the Splugorth, demon lords, and other such monsters are fine examples of Detestable Villains in **Rifts®**.

Sauron of *The Lord of the Rings*, Emperor Palpatine from the *Star Wars* saga, and Agent Smith of *The Matrix* are all great Detestable Villains. We cheer every time we see them stumble.

The Sympathetic Villain

These bad guys, for whatever reason, are not absolutely evil. Maybe we can somewhat agree with their motives or understand what made them this way. Maybe they are inherently likeable despite their villainy. Maybe they are still good deep down and can be redeemed. Whatever their nature, the Sympathetic Villain is a more complex and often more satisfying villain than their Detestable counterpart, because there is a greater range of depth and possible interaction between them and the player characters.

Virtually the entire Coalition leadership is comprised of Detestable *and* Sympathetic Villains. Sure, they are like the Nazis, but look at how many fight to save lives, and even the worst are dedicated to destroying monsters even more foul than they. Many Coalition characters are the best Sympathetic Villains **Rifts®** has to offer. Only remember, they are villains. They brand innocent, peace-loving D-Bees and practitioners of magic as monsters and slaughter them in droves.

In the movies, Darth Vader is a classic Sympathetic Villain who comes to save Luke and renounce evil by the end of *Return of the Jedi.*

The Casualty

In any good adventure, somebody has got to die. Either to illustrate just how rotten and despicable a Detestable Villain is, or to drive home the horror, the immediacy, or the seriousness of the situation. That victim is the Casualty NPC. These are the characters whose meaning and importance in the adventure is revealed in death. A good number of them die before the story or adventure even begins when the player characters happen upon the scene of recent combat or a town that has been attacked by raiders. They are merely part of other characters' backdrop. The faceless victims that serve as part of the event/action or villain to motivate the characters. Others will exist for the first part of the adventure, but their demise will prove to be a turning point for the adventure and the player characters.

The death of a Heroic Casualty, somebody on equal or greater heroic footing than the protagonist, saddens the heroes and may demand justice or revenge. Roy Fokker of the *Robotech®* saga is a good example.

The death of a Sympathetic Casualty, somebody on equal or lesser heroic footing than the player group, lets them know that the villain is powerful (maybe more powerful than they), good guys can and will die, and that they might be next. Ben Dixon, also in *Robotech*, is a good example. Again, while the villain

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may have killed the Sympathetic Casualty to frighten or break their spirits, it often strengthens their resolve and motivates them to take action.

The death of a Pathetic Casualty, somebody with no real heroic potential, but is often innocent and likeable, usually drives the heroes to avenge him or to take heroic action. Uncle Ben from *Spider-Man* comics, and dogs in general are good Pathetic Casualties. Nobody likes to see the dog get it, do they? Least of all the heroes, who usually go on a tear against whoever popped a cap into Rover.

The Initiate

These are young heroes who are initially unskilled and must undergo some kind of training, strengthening or transformation before meeting their final challenge. Their adventure is all about becoming a hero, not necessarily acting like one from the onset. In role-playing games, any first-level character is effectively an Initiate, the unproven would-be hero, because they are so unproven and lack experience. One of their goals is to prove themselves worthy of their chosen occupation, if not being recognized as a hero by the common man.

In *The Matrix*, Neo is an Initiate. He begins the adventure knowing nothing, and by the end, he is running up walls, busting kung fu moves, dodging bullets, and giving Agent Smith a really, really bad day. Likewise, Luke Skywalker of *Star Wars* is a classic Initiate. He begins as a whiny farm boy and ends up as the destroyer of the Death Star and ultimately, a Jedi Knight.

The Seer

This character sees what others do not see, knows what others do not know, and is therefore placed in the role of hero because of it. The level of the character's knowledge can be practical (R2-D2's Death Star Plans in *Star Wars*), metaphysical (Paul Muad'dib's visions in *Dune*) or a mix of both.

Any conspiracy story involves this kind of character, who usually is the hero. A more adventure-related example might be Morpheus from *The Matrix*. He knows what the world is really like, which puts him in a position to recruit likely soldiers in his war against the Axis and their Agents. The Oracle, also from *The Matrix*, is a good, if obvious, example. Her job is to tell the heroes what they do not know about themselves so when the time comes for them to make a leap of faith, they will be more willing to do so. On the flip side, *Forrest Gump* puts this device on its head, creating a lovable hero who is dim-witted but sees things better because of it. Forrest's simplicity is his staff and his shield against a world that is going crazy and way too complicated for its own good.

The Outsider

These are usually good characters who are haunted by some inner darkness they care not to reveal. Maybe they seem like villains at first, but that is merely the darkness of whatever shadow hangs over them. They tend to be tortured and secretive, loners through and through. During the course of the adventure, their challenge is not to merely survive – many of them are competent adventurers – but to become part of a group again and to open up to other people. This makes for great, mysterious NPC allies or angst ridden player characters.

Wolverine of the *X-Men* is one of the most popular Outsider characters ever. Agent Mulder from the *X-Files* is another good example. So is pretty much every gunfighter role Clint Eastwood has ever played, but especially that of the Preacher in *Pale Rider*.

Outsiders in **Rifts** are a matter of attitude and history rather than ability. Psychics, magic users, warriors, cyborgs, Vagabonds, Cyber-Knights, Juicers, and dragons can all be Outsiders. It is what happened to them long ago that makes them what they are, not whatever skills they have picked up in the meantime.

The Commander

This character is a highly competent individual who is the natural leader of any given situation, regardless of whether he was really meant for the job. The bottom line is the Commander has what it takes to get the job done, and he will lead every other character along the way. Sometimes Commanders are interesting background figures, who could have handled the crisis at hand if other concerns did not prevent them from doing so. James Earl Jones' Admiral Greer character from the early Tom Clancy movies is a good example — he is too high-ranking and too informed to adventure.

Marvel Comics' Captain America is a Commander, but so is Ripley from the *Alien* saga, even though she clearly does not want the job. Neither does Sarah Connor of the *Terminator* movies. But she perseveres anyway, through incredible adversity.

Commanders/leaders are not the sort of thing to roll up for player characters. Players will themselves develop and grow their characters and may earn a place as a Commander/leader by how they play. Commander NPCs, though, are common adversaries, masterminds and leaders of antagonistic groups working against the player group.

The Rogue

The Rogue is the good guy with a bad streak or dark nature he is constantly trying to suppress. Ultimately, however, he is reliable, trustworthy and loyal to the group. These are the rebels without a cause, the guys who are getting busted by their superiors because they don't always follow or play by the rules. The guy who doesn't like being told what to do by anybody, but is still basically a good guy (Unprincipled alignment). This archetype easily works for player characters and NPCs.

Han Solo is the consummate rogue. So is Dirty Harry. They are good guys who are touched by a propensity for going over the line and breaking the rules. But ultimately, they fight against evil, battle for justice and try to help the innocent.

The Rascal

This character is the irreverent, fun-lover of the bunch, who shows a healthy disregard for rules, regulations and formality. He is the life of the party wherever he goes, and he is often a source of comic relief. Unlike the Trickster, he does not exist to bring anybody down or to get in the heroes' way. He is merely somebody who is always likeable, no matter what is going on with the other characters or the rest of the unfolding drama.

Ruby Rhod of *The Fifth Element* is a hilarious and outrageous Rascal, as is Axel Foley in any of the *Beverly Hills Cop* movies.

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In role-playing, anybody can be a Rascal; it has more to do with temperament than skills or one's occupation. Rascals are rarely heavy hitters in combat, though. They are not helpless, but their job is to lighten things up and provide unconventional ways of solving problems, not facing trouble directly and succeeding. This means City Rats, Operators, Rogue Scholars, Vagabonds, Saddle Tramps, Gamblers, Saloon Bums, Thieves, and Smugglers, among others, are more likely inclined to fit the role of a Rascal. A large number of Rascals are either cowards, or simply prefer to run away or talk their way out of trouble rather than fight.

The Egghead

Logical, rational, introverted and inflexible, the Egghead is the brainy guy (sometimes the recluse or weakling) of the group. They are likely to command great knowledge and skills, but not fighting skills or great physical ability. However, the Egghead contributes to the group in heart, loyalty, figuring out clues, making plans, and good intentions. They often work behind the scenes and don't get the glory. Still, when the chips are down, the Egghead is ready to try to think the group out of trouble. The adventuring Egghead may become a little more battle-hardened, but their initial meekness and unreadiness for the rigors of adventure are their hallmark characteristics.

In **Rifts®**, Rogue Scholars, Rogue Scientists and Body Fixers are obvious choices for the Egghead archetype, possibly the Operator too.

The character of Edie from *The Mummy* and *The Mummy Returns* is a good example of the Egghead, but by the second movie, she is far more capable at adventuring than most Eggheads might be. Jeff Goldblum from *Independence Day* is a more traditional Egghead in that he retains his geeky charm until the closing credits, the same is true of his characters in *Vibes* and *Jurassic Park*. In those two films we get to see the heroic side to the Egghead.

The Adventurer

This character is action-oriented, though not a hardened soldier or gunfighter like the Champion, but he is inquisitive, daring, and can handle himself in a fight. He is often ready to take the initiative, even if he is not necessarily the leader of the group, and likes a challenge. These characters are physical, daring, animated, and tend to have a knack for the spectacular. They also tend to look before they leap, which can get them into trouble. Ultimately, these characters benefit from a Mentor or Commander of some sort to keep them on the straight and narrow.

Indiana Jones of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is a classic Adventurer, as is Lara Croft from the *Tomb Raider* series.

In **Rifts®**, any explorer or action-oriented character makes a good Adventurer, especially men at arms and scholar/adventurers. Practitioners of Magic might also be Adventurers, but their studiousness runs counter to what the Adventurer is all about.

The Champion

This character embodies that unflinching readiness to do battle and to die if necessary. These characters are always combat-oriented, often to the detriment of their ability to contribute in other ways. In shallow stories and combat adventures, these guys are the star of the show. In more deep escapades, there is a definite place for the Champion, but the character does not get center stage all of the time. This is the dedicated warrior or war hound. The career soldier.

Any really combat-oriented O.C.C. or R.C.C. makes a good Champion in **Rifts®**. Headhunters, Grunts, 'Borgs, Mercenaries, RPA Pilots, and Glitter Boy Pilots all come to mind. Their job, and let's be honest here, is to kick ass and chew bubblegum, and chances are they're all out of bubblegum.

A favorite movie example of the Champion is Private Vasquez from *Aliens*. From the moment she shouts "Let's rock!" and cuts into the Aliens with that smart gun of hers, you just know she's got the goods. And when she plants her boot on an Alien's head and pops a few .45 caps into its skull point blank, there can be no doubt: Vasquez is a great Champion. Given the scope and tone of that movie, it's why she is such a likeable character.

The Temptation

This character is the promise of forbidden fruit or debilitating distraction to the hero. In its classic form, temptation is in the form of a female Seductress, but sometimes it is a male Svengali. Very often, sexual favors are involved, couched in such a way that imparts no love or emotion at all, just a cheap debasement that will rob the hero of some of his purity or goodness. There are other Temptation characters, too. Criminal figures can be Temptations by offering the heroes a cheap and dangerous means of defeating their foe. Likewise, Temptations can become villains of a sort when and if they decide to go after the hero.

In **Rifts**, Temptations can take almost any form. That is what is so great about them. You never see them coming. Of course, they can be a trashy vamp, but they can just as likely be an innocent old friend who has a sinister secret agenda. The Zenith Moon Warpers are natural seducers, and shapechangers may use their abilities to trick and tempt others.

Sharon Stone's character in *Total Recall* is a good example of the Temptation, even though Arnold Schwarzenegger's character never really has a chance to resist her initially.

The Spunky Kid

Eager, perky and unflappable, the Spunky Kid is that junior member of the cast who does not really belong in harm's way but always gets himself there anyhow. He is marked by an earnest desire to help the heroes despite his questionable abilities to do so. Often, despite the odds, the Spunky Kid comes through, winning an unlikely victory and earning the right to tag along with the heroes on later adventures.

The character of Jimmy Olson from the *Superman* comics and movies is a good example of the Spunky Kid, even though he is a little old to be one. His over-eagerness to get a good scoop tends to get him into situations where he needs Superman

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to save him. Sandra Bullock's character in *Speed* is also something of a Spunky Kid in that she is clearly not cut out for the job of driving a runaway bus through downtown LA, but with a great show of moxie, manages to persevere. A more traditional Spunky Kid is Anakin Skywalker in *The Phantom Menace*, especially during the climactic dogfight in space.

There is no Spunky Kid O.C.C. in **Rifts®**, but that is no reason why a player could not make one. Simply roll up a Vagabond Peasant Farmer or street urchin Thief or City Rat and give him low physical stats and a desire for adventure. Voila! Instant Spunky Kid. Creating a Spunky Kid O.C.C. is probably not a good idea, however, for campaigns that will span years, since the Spunky Kid will most likely grow up and take on an O.C.C. of his own.

The Damsel in Distress

You know the type: young, single, beautiful, in trouble, and (allegedly) helpless. The Damsel in Distress has been a part of heroic adventure since the beginning, and it remains as viable an archetype as it ever has been. Damsels in Distress are almost exclusively female because most folks are simply not comfortable with a man playing the role of Damsel unless it is supposed to be a joke. But kindly old folk and children are easy and suitable substitutions.

Speaking of jokes, an especially clever take on the Damsel in Distress comes from the character of Princess Fiona in the animated movie *Shrek*. Another good movie example is Fay Wray in the original King Kong and virtually any teenage girl in any anime ever made. If she is pretty and faints at the first sign of danger, she's a Damsel in Distress. Recent storytelling trends favor tough, resourceful female characters, so Damsels are increasingly uncommon, except for use as parodies, as in *Shrek*.

In **Rifts®**, Damsels are best used as powerless NPCs who must be rescued or saved by the player characters. They can stay with the group, of course, but their inherent lack of skills and abilities will probably make them much more of a liability than an asset. That is, unless the Damsel begins to change into some other character as a result of her rescue, such as an Adventurer or a Champion. Or she was more than she appeared (or pretended to be) in the first place.

The Sanctuary

These are the characters who exist to give other characters comfort and to be their shelter during times of trouble. They work best as parental figures or perhaps even as a Mentor whose student graduated long ago but has come back after a terrible defeat or a time of trouble. Sanctuaries are endlessly generous and will never turn away the heroes of the story. They also usually have no means of solving the heroes' problems for them, they merely provide a place where the heroes can summon the strength, seek the wisdom or learn the skills they will need to prevail.

In **Rifts®**, healers of all kinds make good Sanctuaries, as do certain Mystics and psychics. Basically, anybody who is likely to take in the heroes no questions asked and who has the ability to make their lives more comfortable for awhile is a likely Sanctuary. Sanctuaries can be ordinary folk, like that kindly old barkeep who always gives the heroes a room and hot food when they need it, or major characters like Erin Tarn.

In *Return of the Jedi*, both Yoda and Kenobi shift from being Mentors to being Sanctuaries, as Luke comes to them for some final advice before confronting Vader. At this point, they really have nothing more to teach Luke, and what they tell him is something he already knows but needed a safe place to be when he finally faced up to it.

Dramatic Archetypes

By Bill Coffin

Some folks might have a hard time discerning *conflict* from *drama*. After all, don't they mean the same thing? No, not really. Put simply, *conflict* is when you have two or more opposing forces. *Drama* is when that conflict gets really interesting or complicated. For example, a Coalition sniper sees a D-Bee outlaw and lines him up in his sights. Here, you have conflict (Man vs Man). It is simple, straightforward, and it works. But it's also a little shallow. But what if all of a sudden a little human girl starts dancing around the feet of the D-Bee? If the Coalition trooper takes the shot, he might hit the girl. Or the D-Bee may fall on her, and certainly she will be traumatized by the sight. What to do? Now the simple conflict has been given additional depth to which there is no longer only one way of resolving the conflict. Drama.

The more varied the possible outcomes, the greater the *drama*, and the better the adventure. What if the D-Bee killed the sniper's best friend? But what if the girl reminds the sniper of his own daughter? But what if the sniper will earn a huge bounty for killing the D-Bee? What if the D-Bee might or might not be wired with a micro-nuclear bomb that will go off if his heart stops beating? What if the sniper will be executed if he does not carry out his mission? You could continue complicating this endlessly just between the two characters, the sniper and the D-Bee. You could complicate things exponentially with each additional character you bring into the situation. This is where serious drama lives and breathes, in the nexus of a *complicated conflict* to which there is no perfect solution, and any way out entails *giving something up* or *making some kind of mistake*. This is the good stuff, people. It is the heart and soul of outstanding role-playing, and if you can engender it in your games, it will elevate your role-playing experience to a whole new level.

So, what about plot? Good question. Plot is the course of actions through which a conflict or a drama is resolved. Like conflict, it is also an essential element to forming drama. You can have a plot without drama (Joe goes to the store and buys some cheese.), but you can not have a drama without a plot through which to resolve it (Joe goes to the store to buy some cheese because the guy who is holding his family hostage is hungry, and he promised to kill Joe's family if he tries to get any help while out on the errand). Ultimately, *plot* works for the same boss that conflict works for: *drama*.

A lot of Game Masters seem to believe that in writing an adventure, plot is everything. It is not. In fact, plot may be one of the most highly over-rated elements of adventures. A lot of

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G.M.s try like hell to write out a great plot only to have it self-destruct when their players do not go along with it.

Here is a simple trick that will make writing adventures a lot easier, and will make your adventures a lot more *fun* to run and to be part of. Ready? Don't write an elaborate plot. Use a really basic plot: rescue the child, stop the villains, find the magic artifact before it falls into the hands of evildoers, defend the town. Keep it simple. Focus on the *characters, the conflict(s)* and the *drama* of the situations. Sometimes, you can run entire adventures merely by giving the characters the loosest of goals to pursue, but make things interesting and exciting with a lot of *drama*, and responding to how the players go about trying to achieve their characters' goals in the heat of this drama. How do they respond to the situation? How do they add to the drama? How does the situation expand/develop, and how do the player characters find a way to resolve the conflict, and an end to the drama? Do not overwork, or worry over, the plot beyond the basics. The plot will, in many cases, take care of itself. It is essential, of course, but it is most certainly not essential that you develop it on your own before the game even starts. As noted earlier, paying attention to the player characters, taking cues from them, and being flexible and imaginative should carry you from there. Meanwhile, especially good players with cool characters are more than likely to contribute to the storyline/plot.

So, no, plot is not everything. Drama means a lot. If you are not striving to provide good drama in your adventures, then your adventures will be shallow and flat. That might work for a while, but eventually your players will yearn for something more, and the pressure will be on *you* to provide it. If you don't know drama, your job will only be that much tougher. But have no fear! Below we will describe twenty of the most classic *dramatic archetypes* there are. These are more than just plots. They are immortal dramatic structures that always involve multiple components of character and conflict. They are:

- The Quest
- The Adventure
- The Pursuit
- The Rescue
- The Escape
- Revenge
- A Riddle
- The Rivalry
- The Underdog
- The Temptation
- The Metamorphosis
- The Transformation
- Maturation
- Love
- Forbidden Love
- The Discovery
- Wretched Existence
- Ascension
- Descension

The Quest

Possibly the best known of the dramatic archetypes, the Quest requires our heroes to complete a task of epic proportions. It is important to note that the task is considered epic by the heroes, even if it might not be epic to others. In Stephen King's novella *The Body* (later made into the film *Stand By Me*), the juvenile protagonists go on a quest to see a dead body. For them,

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it is an epic undertaking. For Superman it would not. But then again, these are different contexts we're talking about, and that is the essence of the Quest. To those who undertake it, the Quest is epic. It does not matter how epic the task at hand might be to others.

Having said that, though, most Quests involve tasks that really would be epic to anybody. *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the most famous quests in modern literature, and it involves destroying a magic ring of ultimate evil. Anybody in middle Earth would have a hard time doing what Frodo Baggins must accomplish. That he is a meek little Hobbit makes his Quest all the more impressive.

Quests often involve making a long journey, having multiple different adventures along the way, the vanquishing of a great menace, and the self-discovery of the heroes. They are often forced upon the heroes, or are so compelling to the heroes that they can not pass up the opportunity to undertake the Quest. This is not the case all of the time, but often enough to bear noting.

Two examples of a **Rifts®** Quest could be, if the heroes travel across North America to deliver to Lazlo the means for destroying the Xiticix, only to discover they must use this secret weapon themselves; putting in motion a grand plan to get to Chi-Town, assemble the means for defeating a Coalition Army, and carrying out the mission. Or traveling across the Rifts world in search of an ancient mystery, lost treasure, or to seek the counsel of an incredibly powerful magic being.

The Adventure

The Adventure is ... well ... an *adventure.* It is some kind of escapade in which the heroes put themselves at risk, struggle against adversity and/or a villain, and seek some kind of reward or gratification for their efforts. Adventures differ from Quests mostly in their scope. Adventures are over and done with fairly quickly, which is why heroes on a Quest will often have numerous side adventures over the course of their Quest. Adventures also do not usually displace the heroes too far or too long from their normal routine.

Any of the Indiana Jones movies are great examples of Adventures. They are super-dramatic and epic in scope and intensity, but they are, more or less, just another day at the office for our pal Indy. We are meant to believe that he has had a million other exploits like this before, and so we do not expect too much change nor permanent restructuring of his character over the course of any of his Adventures.

Any one-shot game of **Rifts** is a fine example of an Adventure, too. When a game lasts only for one night, or is too short to be considered a campaign of its own, it is an Adventure. Of course, role-playing heroes can always die in Adventures whereas the main characters for movies and stories usually do not, because if they did, the franchise would come to an end. (Where would *James Bond* be if he died in *Dr. No*? See what I mean?) This is what we like to call "script immunity," because no scriptwriter is going to kill off certain characters if it will jeopardize their own job unless they own the show and have no compunctions killing off certain characters. However, role-playing characters do not enjoy script immunity, and as a result, they may die in the course of an Adventure. That is the whole point of an Adventure – to risk it all and come out the better for it.

The Pursuit

In this, the heroes must go after an elusive person or thing. The motivations for this can be legion. Maybe they are trying to obtain something that will make them rich, or will cure them or another from an illness. Maybe they are after somebody to extract revenge on them. Maybe they are hunting a menace. Maybe we never even know the reason why. After all, the point of the Pursuit is really the *pursuit* itself. While ending the Pursuit at some point is an easy way to get a satisfying conclusion, the Pursuit need not end for this drama to resolve itself.

The recent Robert DeNiro movie, *Ronin,* is an excellent Pursuit, involving a team of modern mercenaries all chasing a mysterious silver briefcase that the audience never learns the contents of. By the end of the movie, we learn that maybe the Pursuit of the case was not the real point of the story after all. Another good Pursuit is the movie *Jaws*, although it does not feel like it until about the halfway point, once our heroes go to sea in search of a killer shark. For the latter half of the movie, we watch one of the best Pursuits in any film.

A good Pursuit in **Rifts®** might be trying to catch a thief who stole from the group, trying to run down a criminal with a big bounty on his head, trying to keep Tolkeenite warriors from escaping Tolkeen, trying to keep Coalition soldiers from escaping an ambush and making it back to safe territory, and so on.

The Rescue

In this case, somebody important to the heroes has been captured and must be freed. The captive can be a friend or stranger or even an enemy, but for some reason, the heroes have a good enough reason to want to see him safe. Those reasons can include monetary payment ("I'm not interested in your revolution, sweetheart. I'm in this for the money!"), love interest, coming to a friend's aid, to resolve a debt of honor, to deprive the captors/enemies the benefit of their prisoner, and so on.

The above-quoted *Star Wars* is a terrific Rescue. The heroes not only must get Princess Leia free from her Imperial captors, but they must go to the very seat of Imperial might – the Death Star – to do it! The more recent *Proof of Life* with Meg Ryan and Russell Crowe is another interesting Rescue. For most of the film, Crowe tries to perform his rescue through clever negotiations, but in the end, he must resort to force in a battle scene not to be missed.

Rifts® Rescues might include getting a D-Bee out of a Coalition stockade, getting an enslaved buddy away from a Splugorth slave barge, pulling comrades away from savage demons who are preparing to eat them, saving an innocent scheduled for human sacrifice, freeing a town from the clutches of a madman or monster, and so on.

The Escape

In the Pursuit, the heroes may be as powerful as those they are pursuing, in the Escape, the opposite is definitely true. An Escape is marked by heroes who are *not* as powerful as the forces opposing them, and if they are to triumph they must flee. Running may not seem particularly heroic, but it really can be. Remember, the heroes are not necessarily cowards, and they may fight their pursuer at every turn. It is just that initially, they lack the means for standing up to their enemy, and during the

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course of their flight, their challenge is two-fold: Stay one step ahead of the pursuer, and find a way to defeat the pursuer. In successful Escapes, defeat does not have to mean *destroy*. For whatever reason, if the heroes make it so their chase must be called off, for example, they have won.

There are a ton of outstanding Escape movies, *The Terminator* immediately comes to mind, *Halloween* (all of 'em) and other films in that genre also fit the bill. The *Empire Strikes Back*, *The Road Warrior*, and *The Fugitive* are other outstanding Escapes. In *Empire*, the once victorious Rebellion is now overwhelmed by the Evil Empire and must run for its life. The Escape ends when our heroes escape the Empire's clutches well enough to remove them from the immediate threat of recapture. Of course, they lose Han in the process... In *The Road Warrior*, our heroes are embattled inhabitants of a besieged oil production facility. They make a break for it and make good their getaway thanks to the nameless stranger (Mel Gibson) who helps them out. In the *Fugitive*, Dr. Kimball (Harrison Ford) is framed for murder and must avoid capture by the authorities and at the same time, get the guy who framed him. This is neat because it is both an Escape and a Pursuit.

In **Rifts®**, any of the above examples could apply. Others might include running away from the Coalition, or raiding the Dimensional Market of Splynn and trying to keep out of Splugorth custody. Or in the Phase World setting, welshing on a debt to the Naruni and then trying to make sure Repo-Bots don't catch up to them.

Revenge

In this archetype, the heroes have endured some kind of injury, wrong, injustice, or other misdeed that calls for retribution. Initially, the heroes are unable to exact their vengeance, and the adventure is all about the trials they must undergo so they might be able to achieve justice.

Return of the Jedi is a great Revenge story because it deals both with paying back Jabba the Hutt for nabbing Han Solo (though in that regard it is also a Rescue adventure), and it also addresses the final defeat of the Empire, which does so much to harm the Rebellion previously in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *A New Hope*. *The Crow*, starring the late Brandon Lee, is another good Revenge adventure featuring a man who has endured an injustice so great that it actually gives him the power to rise from the grave and administer lethal doses of payback to his tormentors.

Revenge can be a little tricky in a role-playing game because the heroes do not always have a wrong perpetrated against them worth avenging, but they may be fighting for or hired by others that have been wronged (Tolkeen, an innocent town pillaged and raped by a marauding band of Pecos Bandits, etc.). Another Revenge-type adventure could be tracking down or going to face an arch-villain or villainous gang that the group has battled before only to have the villain(s) escape. Now the bad guys are back to cause more pain, suffering and trouble – and this time, the heroes vow, these scum bags will not escape (although they might). In the scenario of the returning villains, the events of one adventure turn out to have greater significance than originally imagined, and create a wonderful sense of epic scale and continuity.

A Riddle

This archetype poses some kind of puzzle, problem or riddle in front of the heroes, who must pool all of their strength and resources to solve it. Sometimes, the Riddle can be downplayed into a mere "MacGuffin" – a term Alfred Hitchcock invented to mean anything that the heroes spend all of their time and energy addressing, but in and of itself is ultimately unimportant to the larger context of the story or adventure. The movie *Ronin* is a good example. Ultimately, we don't really need to know what is in that case everybody keeps fighting about, because that conflict has become more of a personal contest between the heroes and the villains. However, Riddles can also be of a larger sort, as in *The Andromeda Strain* or *Outbreak*, in which the nature and cure for a super-lethal disease must be discerned before the whole of humanity comes down with more than just your average case of the flu.

A really good movie example of this is my all-time favorite crime flick, *The Usual Suspects*, a story that revolves around a central riddle that nobody seems to have the answer to: "Who is Keyser Soze?" Even though the characters in the movie might not always be asking themselves this question, the audience sure is.

In **Rifts®**, an example of a Riddle adventure might be if the heroes obtain some kind of magical or ancient, pre-Rifts information or code that can supposedly unlock great power or riches, or prevent some tragedy if they can only decipher it.

The Rivalry

This dramatic archetype is marked by a seemingly intractable conflict between two more or less *evenly matched* forces. Sometimes the antagonist is more powerful than the protagonist, but not so much so that the contest is a blow-out. There is constant tension right to the end over who will prevail, and it usually is resolved only after a very drawn out confrontation. There may be multiple confrontations throughout the course of the adventure, all of which generally come to a stalemate as both sides look for some way to outsmart, outrun or outfight the other. In the end, most Rivalry adventures end with only one man standing.

Terminator 2: Judgement Day is a really good Rivalry adventure. Unlike the previous *Terminator*, which was an Escape adventure (Sarah Connor had to keep running from the Terminator), *T2* pits the really tough Arnold Terminator against an even tougher T-1000 prototype. By the time the adventure comes to a close, these two combatants will have really put each other through the ringer.

Another fine Rivalry movie is *Heat*, in which Robert DeNiro and Al Pacino play an intense game of cat and mouse in modern-day L.A. DeNiro is a master thief, Pacino is an obsessive detective. Sooner or later one of them is going to fall, and until the final 30 seconds of the adventure, you have no clue which one it will be. A couple other films that come to mind are *Payback, Con Air* and *Face Off*.

In **Rifts®**, Rivalries are perhaps best laid out with a recurring villain who plagues the group as a whole. Establishing Rivalries between a powerful single NPC or an equally matched villain group and the player group as a whole. If you can not set up a

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Rivalry that involves the whole group (and this goes for any other dramatic archetype, by the way), then you should probably not use it.

The Underdog

This archetype presents a hero who is totally unable to resolve the conflict before him when the adventure begins, but he does have the promise of growing stronger, so by the adventure's end, he will have grown in power enough to meet his opponents and challenges and vanquish them. The adventure is as much the hero's journey from underdog to triumphant champion as it is about that final moment of victory when the Underdog has finally shed his questionable status away.

There are a lot of Underdog movies out there, but not too many of them are gritty and adventure-oriented because adventure heroes tend to be fairly strong to begin with. Two good examples, though, of adventure Underdog flicks are *Mystery Men* and *The 13th Warrior*. *Mystery Men* starts with a band of loser hero wannabes who somehow find themselves in the unique position of saving the city. They go from outcasts to heroes, defeating evil and getting some respect. *The 13th Warrior*, starring Antonio Banderas, is a stirring retelling of the tale of Beowulf. In it, Banderas is a great Underdog – a court poet who must make the unlikely transformation into a true medieval warrior and hero. And not to beat a dead horse, the original *Star Wars* trilogy, not to mention *Rocky*.

In **Rifts®**, there are entire O.C.C.s, such as the Vagabond or Rogue Scholar, who at first blush do not appear very powerful or very heroic. But, as we all know, they often can prove to be very heroic and capable of doing things that more powerful characters neither have the foresight, courage or dumb luck to do. But more than this, any low-level character is a bit of an Underdog, for they are striking out into a powerful and hostile world intent on making a name for themselves. Given how many heroes die quick deaths on Rifts Earth, those still willing to make the effort despite the odds definitely deserve the Underdog label. Meanwhile, even a powerful, experienced group can find itself in the role of Underdog, for there is *always* someone or something smarter, stronger, meaner or more ruthless than our heroes.

The Temptation

In this, the scope of the adventure is not necessarily achieving something, but simply not falling prey to a certain desire or temptation that is off limits. In movies, we often see this in the form of stories about recovering drug addicts or opportunists who know not to give in to the allure of a big score. However, as *Lord of the Rings* shows us, Frodo's struggle with the Ring (especially in the later parts of the story) make that epic as much a Temptation drama as anything else.

In role-playing games, Temptation can work in variety of ways. One can be a player character battling with the temptation to extract murderous revenge when he knows he should not, or standing and fighting when he (or most of the group) wants to cut their losses and run. Another could be the desire to attain the mantle of power (presumably over others) or great wealth or fame at the expense of others. Betrayal often plays a role in Temptation and an individual player character or the group as a whole could be the betrayer or on the receiving end of betrayal when somebody gives into Temptation. This dramatic archetype can also work as a part of a character's background history. (**Note from Siembieda:** Bill expressed to me the worry that *singling one player character out* and targeting him or her with a Temptation will freeze the other characters out of the action, or could be seen as unfair to the rest of the players. And that these are bad things. I can understand the concern, but I must strongly disagree. The actions of individual characters are constantly affecting the rest of the group throughout the course of *every* adventure. I have found that tempting *one* player character, especially if it will have a dramatic outcome on their mission or on the rest of the group, has a *riveting* effect on the rest of the players, provided they are allowed to watch as spectators, or better yet, actively engage in trying to sway the character in one direction or the other with impassioned pleas. It is the classic battle of wills or desire vs what's right. Which will win out? Good or evil, love or hate, vengeance or justice, compassion or cruelty? And believe me when I tell you that it creates incredible suspense, tension and *drama* that is absolutely awesome to play through. Some of the most memorable moments in several of my campaigns have come when one player character can change the course of history or the fate of a multitude or tip the balance and victory to good or evil. I recommend it highly. Don't do it frequently, because then it becomes trite, but it is definitely applicable to epic campaigns and the occasional adventure. Life is full of choices, and heroes are going to have to face their own demons from time to time and choose between right and wrong, good and evil for themselves. And sometimes, Temptation makes that a difficult choice indeed.)

Metamorphosis

This archetype concerns the hero's discovering or developing of his true self. This is a natural change, one that the hero was always going to undergo, but the conflict at hand has made the entire process highly dramatic and the outcome uncertain. Metamorphosis typically denotes the person involved getting better, stronger, wiser, more understanding/compassionate, aware or more sophisticated. When the character emerges a changed and refined individual, it is a time of celebration. If he emerges and the protagonists are waiting for him, striking him down before the Metamorphosis can ever be realized or appreciated, the entire adventure will take on an exceedingly grim tone. That is probably why most Metamorphosis adventures give their hero a certain degree of script immunity. Nobody wants to see the metamorph die before he becomes what he is truly supposed to be.

Neo in *The Matrix* is a classic example, and Luke in the first *Star Wars* trilogy (not just Luke, but Han and Leia too). For some reason, the Metamorphosis archetype is also really, really popular in a lot of anime. I mean, a *lot* of anime.

(**Note from Siembieda:** In role-playing this can be a coming of age story for an individual character or the entire group, as the player characters must face some situation that has a profound impact on them [or most of them], making them wiser, kinder, stronger, a better or closer-knit team, etc. In a lot of ways, each and every adventure in a Palladium role-playing

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game is just *one chapter* in a story of metamorphosis, because the characters as a group and as individuals grow and learn with every adventure. This is represented in the Experience Points format with skills and powers that increase by level. That is why I intentionally made the Palladium game system level based, and keep it that way despite protests from some who complain about level systems as being archaic. I don't think they are archaic at all. No, I think they are elegant. A perfect simulation of the Metamorphosis in a game that is all about simulation and playing the heroic "role." The character starts as a low level nobody with a dream. A dream to be a hero or great adventurer – a "somebody." A weakling who grows in strength, skill and experience [both by way of Experience *Points* and the intangible experience of each new adventure] and realizes that dream with each new plateau of raw power, newfound knowledge, wisdom and notoriety. When a low level punk backs off from a 7th level player character, it's because of the Metamorphosis. Most rewarding of all is if the character actually started at first or second level in the game and worked his way up, because then the player and his fictional character have really *earned* their heroic and/or powerful stature, one level at a time. Metamorphosis.)

Transformation

Similar to the Metamorphosis in that the hero undergoes a drastic change, the Transformation is usually a sudden or jarring change, often unwanted, and rarely for the better. The adventure is about the troubles this change brings upon the hero, and his struggle to not let this change destroy him. Either version of *The Fly* uses this archetype superbly, although the second version, starring Jeff Goldblum, does a better job of it as we see a likeable, brilliant, geek scientist transformed into a hideous mutant who grows more and more hideous with every passing day. In the end, will he be able to resist becoming a monster? Will the woman he loves be destroyed in the process? For a great look at Transformation, this film is hard to beat. It is dark and graphic, though, so be prepared. And eat dinner well beforehand. Trust me on this one.

Less disturbingly, the Jack Nicholson movie *Wolf* also deals deftly with Transformation, as a meek editor is bitten by a werewolf and begins becoming one himself. Much of this movie deals more with the often-neglected psychological and character changes of a Transformation. In **Rifts®**, with mutagens, cybernetics, and shapeshifting creatures abounding, the chances to run a Transformation adventure are legion. Heck, you could even run an entire campaign out of the Transformation archetype, and the heroes all must cope with having been turned into something else, or at the very least, having undergone some serious change to who and what they were.

Maturation

This might be thought of as a "coming of age" archetype, one which is particularly successful when aimed at young kids. In terms of adventure applications, we do not see Maturation very often. In part, this is probably because it is a difficult archetype to carry off if the story or adventure is not willing to stretch out over a period of years. One does not just mature overnight, after all. But when the hero has finally Matured, he has developed into his true phase in which he can now resolve whatever conflicts are before him. This archetype works well with Revenge, and in adventure-type uses, we see the two paired up quite a bit.

A really good example of this is Frank Herbert's sci-fi classic *Dune*, in which a young and untested Paul Atreides must not only escape the destruction of his family, but he must learn how to grow up into the man he must be if he is to meet his destiny.

Maturation may be difficult to implement in any RPG, although as Kevin noted under Metamorphosis, maturation is really one of the underpinnings of many role-playing games, especially certain ones that use a Level Based system for experience/growth. The biggest problem with using this archetype is time. To really make it work well, it requires the passage of a substantial amount of time, something which many games do not have and which even fewer G.M.s are willing to afford. (**Note from Siembieda:** Bill's right about the time angle. More Game Masters need to stop and factor in the fantasy "game time" as days, weeks and even months may pass in the context of the fictional setting. In my old Defilers campaign, fifty years passed, although the player characters themselves only actually experienced the passage of about 15 years during my two and a half year campaign. There were a lot of time anomalies in that game.)

Love

Although this is a classic dramatic archetype, it seems to get very little play in many RPGs. At least that's the impression I get. I suspect that is because, 1) it is not exactly in sync with most typical RPG adventures, and 2) frankly, a lot of role-players are not interested in developing love dramas in their game. Fair enough. But it should be said that this is a major archetype for a reason. Love is more than just a romantic or filial relationship. It is the positive force that brings people together, regardless of the circumstances. It can even be a powerful force in an adventure even though there is no real interaction between the people who are in love. Tom Hanks' *Cast Away* is a good example; during most of the adventure, Tom Hanks' character is separated from the one he loves, and it is that love which gives him the strength to persevere. We see very little show of love in the adventure, but it is there all the time, and provides the adventure with its backbone.

In a more straightforward vein, the recent movie *Pearl Harbor* focuses not just on the attack, but on the love triangle between our heroes. Their complex relationship is the real focus of the story; the incredible attack at Pearl Harbor and the counterattack over Tokyo ultimately are a vast and spectacular backdrop to the adventure's real point – love in wartime.

And let us not forget there is more than one type of *love*. There is love for one's friends and family, love of king or country, love of freedom or an ideal (or lust for an object, person or power). The movie *Gladiator* had a strong underlying theme of Love. The Gladiator's romantic Love for his wife and smoldering love for his old flame, as well as love for his son, love for his Emperor/friend, and his love for Rome and all that it *should* stand for. The movie *Braveheart* is another story of romantic love and love for an ideal: freedom.

Characters "in love" is a tricky thing to handle properly in a game context, and may turn out to be a disaster for the characters involved. While some might suggest this is true of most

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real-world relationships (heh, heh), the truth is that role-playing a romantic relationship is a very hard thing to do and rarely in sync with the adventure at hand. If you want your adventure to involve the Love archetype, it might be easier using it as a part of the backdrop, much as it was in *Cast Away*. That way, you can have whatever action you like, but in the end, it will be Love that prevails.

Forbidden Love

Because it almost always involves inherent conflict, Forbidden Love and desire is a lot easier to incorporate into an adventure context than True Love or Romantic Love. In this case, there is a clear romantic or filial interest between the heroes or the heroes and some side characters, but for some reason, the very presence of this love engenders some kind of conflict or hardship on the heroes. The most classic example of this is Shakespeare's "Romeo & Juliet," which involves, among other things, two warring families who routinely have brawls and duels with each other! What's could be more adventuresome than that? (**Note:** In Baz Luhrman's remake, *Romeo + Juliet*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, the story is set in the modern day, the warring families are rival crime families, and you've got gunfights instead of sword fights. Cool.)

Another outstanding example of this, both in literature (*Le Morte D'Arthur*) and film (*Excalibur*), is the doomed romance between Lancelot and Guinevere. Here we have the best of King Arthur's knights and the Queen herself who have fallen into a true, heartfelt love for each other. But to act upon this love breaks the sacred duties of both participants — Lancelot must not betray his lord, friend and king, and Guinevere must not betray her husband. But neither can help themselves – they are in love, after all – and the result is civil war among Arthur's Knights, the capture of Arthur's Kingdom by Mordred, and the subsequent destruction of Arthur's golden reign.

For use in a **Rifts®** game, either of the above examples should give you lots of room to work with. In a Romeo & Juliet context, any relationship between, say, Coalition and non-Coalition personnel could make for an interesting situation. Likewise, if the heroes are part of any kind of feudal kingdom, the possibility for the Lancelot & Guinevere situation is there, too.

The Discovery

In this archetype, the hero comes across something new that alters the entire way he interacts with his world, and he must handle the various stresses and conflicts this brings into his life. A good example is the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, a quirky film about a Kalahari Bushman who knows neither greed nor technology. When an African bush pilot chucks an empty Coca-Cola bottle out the window, it lands in the Bushman village, and suddenly these people have something to fight over. To rid himself of this plague, our hero undertakes a quest to throw the bottle away, and in the course of his adventure, he must interact for the first time with people from the outside world. It is a funny and engaging adventure that is a whimsical way of looking at the Discovery motif.

In a **Rifts®** context, the Discovery could be finding a rune item that is evil and must be discarded or disposed of properly. Or, it could be some tidbit of pre-Rifts information that must be handled properly. Imagine if the heroes found the recipe for some kind of super-powerful biological agent. They might want to get this information to Tolkeen before the Coalition overruns the kingdom, for example.

Wretched Existence

This archetype focuses on how the hero must live under some kind of appalling condition. Generally speaking, the adventure is not so much how the hero got there, or whether he will get out of it (he often does not), but what he makes of his situation. A favorite example of this for me, is *The Crow*, which is also a great Revenge piece. But in the Wretched Existence department, it is about a man who has been summoned from beyond the grave, and must always contend with the loss of his fiancee, and his own damned condition, trapped between life and death, between turmoil and rest. Any good vampire adventure inevitably deals with this too, such as Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*.

For **Rifts®**, a Wretched Existence is more likely to be part of a character's particular design, such as a 'Borg who does not like being a cyborg, a Juicer facing his own mortality (and the option to live, but as a weakling) or some D-Bee or Lone Star experiment mutated into something nasty, or some character condemned to slavery, and so on. While characters can always choose to start up with such a condition so they have an extra role-playing challenge, applying a Wretched Existence to them over the course of a campaign is also an option, too.

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Ascension

This archetype deals with the hero's rise from obscurity to power, and the toll it takes on him as he goes. In one way, these adventures are all about an endless string of successes, but to maintain tension, those successes come at some cost to the hero that makes one wonder if the Ascension was at all worth it.

In the classic mob film *The Godfather*, we watch Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) rise from an innocent kid to the new head of the most powerful crime family in New York. Over the course of the film, we watch Michael's emergence as a brilliant crime leader, but we also watch his innocence drain away. By the film's end, sure he reigns supreme, but he is a shadow of the man he used to be emotionally and spiritually.

In Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*, we watch William Wallace rise from an unknown farmer to a national hero leading a rebellion against the King of England. For the entire film, we watch Wallace's legend grow, even despite a disastrous betrayal and military defeat two thirds through the movie. By the end of the flick, Wallace has so inspired his nation that he has set into motion the events that will ultimately lead to its independence. (Sure, it might not be historically accurate, but it's a good story. G.M.s, never let the truth get in the way of a good story.) However, Wallace's achievements come at the cost of his own life. And he does not die prettily, either.

A **Rifts®** campaign can be about Ascension if the G.M. wishes to put the characters on a track where their rise in wealth, power and experience are in such a way that it gives them power over some part of the game world. Characters who simply become great warriors or adventurers do not necessarily embody Ascension. Those who rise in power and as a result, have a major impact on their environment do.

Descension

This is the opposite of Ascension, and it deals with the hero's fall from his summit. Sometimes the fall is slow and steady and inevitable. Sometimes the fall is sudden and traumatic. Either way, the hero ends up losing most of what he has, and the real conflict of the story is not how he tries to prevent these inevitable losses, but how he deals with that loss and adapts to his new life. In many cases, this fall is meant as a wake-up call to the hero, who really does not need all of the things he has lost. In fact, in many adventures, the hero has drifted away from his true purpose because of an excess of wealth, power, security, etc., and his subsequent loss of all that makes him truly heroic once more.

My favorite example of this is not a movie, but a comic book story. Legendary writer Frank Miller penned a story arc in the *Daredevil* comic called "Born Again," and it deals with how Daredevil's arch-enemy, the Kingpin, learns of Daredevil's secret identity. He then uses that information to destroy Daredevil's life. But in the end, it only makes Daredevil stronger and ultimately the entire plot hurts the Kingpin more than Daredevil. It really makes for great reading. You can buy it all in trade paperback format from your local comic retailer.

In a **Rifts®** context, this archetype can be used to "adjust" characters who have won insane amounts of treasure and power, and so the G.M. takes some to all of it away in order to bring the heroes back to a more manageable state. While this may look good from the G.M.'s point of view, losing everything they have fought so long and hard for simply stinks from the player's perspective, unless the G.M. has been careful to make it part of an interesting story using this archetype, and the player gets something (probably intangible, like greater respect, justice, wisdom, etc.) in return – i.e. finds himself or a higher purpose.

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Wujcik Words

The following pages are tips, rules, advice and tables by master game designer (and my long-time friend) Erick Wujcik. The first two are expanded articles Erick did for **The Rifter®** and are gold that bear reprinting here. The Rifts Worlds material is completely new.

The Art of the Name Giver

By Erick Wujcik

It isn't just a part of the job, as Game Master, it's what we do.

Coming up with names. Rich, meaningful, resonant names. Interesting, quirky, memorable names. Cool, funny names that the players remember. Names that strike fear. Names that inspire awe.

Bucky, James the Timid, Isaac Gump, and Urenfogger are all names that don't have much of a charge. They work perfectly for getting the player characters to underestimate the competition. Which shows that names can also be wonderfully misleading, a mask, or another truth-behind-the-truth.

Names for characters. Names for animals, creatures, monsters and bugs, from pet puppies to pet pterodactyls. Names for places, including buildings, towns and cities, geographical oddities, mountains and valleys and deserts and plains, streams and rivers and lakes and oceans, worlds and moons and comets and suns, clusters and galaxies, not to mention all the myriad alternate universes in the Palladium Megaverse.

Names for items, artifacts, foodstuffs, tools, weapons, whole new sciences and technologies. Philosophies, religions, magical systems.

There is really no limit to the number of names that a Game Master needs to invent.

The art of naming is complex.

On the one hand, the more research the better. Coming up with names involves book work, a keen observational eye, and a lot of doodling around with a pencil (better yet, a word processor) trying out different combinations of letters and syllables.

On the other hand, a really good Game Master can whip out names with lightning speed.

Want a model? Check out the movie "The Usual Suspects." For those of you who haven't seen it, I won't spoil things. Suffice to say, they used one of my favorite tricks for smoothly coming up with a lot of names.

That's one great trick. Here are a whole bunch of others ...

Green-Grass Golem-Gash

Try saying it. "Green-Grass Golem-Gash." Do it fast, do it in strange voices, do it with an accent. Sure, you'll trip a few times, but it's not that hard to master a smooth rendition.

Green-Grass Golem-Gash is one of my all-time favorite names. I have no idea where it came from. It was just one of those things that popped into my head when I was trying to fill in a list of magical swords.

Since I had a "Circle of Twelve Mages," and a "Circle of Twelve Artifacts," in the early (the first!) Dragonwright Campaign, I thought there ought to be at least twelve interesting magical swords.

I had already come up with a handful of good names. *Deathkiss*, for example, was planted in the Tombs of Gersidi, a very early adventure in the campaign. *Blackbright*, a sword that could only be wielded by one who was undead, was another early entry. I sat down and started listing a bunch more. *Ironfrost, Victrionix, Righteous Wraith, Bloodseed,* and... hmmm... what comes after that?

Green-Grass Golem-Gash.

It sounded funny. It sounded good. It sounded right.

I had no idea of what it would be, what it would do, what purpose it might serve in the campaign. I just liked saying it.

Green-Grass Golem-Gash.

It worked beautifully. It was one of those unforgettable names, and it helped me create a personality for the sword that was unique. After all, if I liked saying "Green-Grass Golem-Gash," it made sense that the sword itself also liked the sound of its own name, and that every time the sword spoke (which was a lot!), it liked to refer to itself, Bob Dole-style, in the third person.

How do I know it was a successful name?

The only way to judge is by judging the reactions of the player characters. Do they like the sound of it? Do they refer to it by name? Does the use of the name create a reaction? Green-Grass Golem-Gash was a success by any measure.

By the way, filling out the rest of the list of swords are *Mercyblade, Krugenfelder, Dragon-Hewer, Tammarande* and *Opal's Eye* (no, the group still hasn't found all these mystical blades). All interesting names. Some names that have become legendary. None as good as Green-Gash Golem-Gash.

Names as Foreshadowing

One of the big advantages of coming up with a list of names, early in a campaign, is to build in a lot of anticipation. No, you don't need to know what each item does, or even have a clue as to what the item is (for years the group debated the nature of such items as the "Ard of Bright" and the "Illonath Barecth"), just come up with the names. When the group found an old ruined temple, complete with the names (and a few tantalizing fragments describing the items), they were really excited to fi-

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nally have a complete list of all the names of the "Circle of Twelve Artifacts." It was a big deal. Finding each new item from the list, a task that took over ten years, was always exciting, because the *anticipation* and *challenge* was so great.

My Big Mistake

If there is one thing I did wrong, back in the early days of creating my various role-playing campaigns, it was taking names from other sources.

Back when I was young and stupid, too often I took the easy way. I stole names from wherever I found 'em. From books, television, movies, whatever.

That turned out bad in the short run, and in the long run.

Right away, almost instantly, many of the names I used were recognized by the players (who would have suspected that so many upstanding young students would know all the names from an obscure television soap opera?). Whenever the names were recognized I had to put up with either (1) ridicule or (2) criticism.

It was worse later on. First were problems with getting things published (game manufacturers are a tad skittish about printing something bearing a name trademarked by, say, Disney, or Lucasfilm). Too many changes were needed, and I was always afraid that I'd slip up and miss one.

Even more important was the impact on the player characters. Names that I invented, that were my creations, had more of a long-term impact on the campaign. Players took them *seriously*. Original names had a chance of becoming legendary, at least among my circle of gamers (and really, when it comes down to it, does the opinion of anyone else really matter?).

I can't emphasize it strongly enough.

Game Masters should *create* their *own names*.

Don't think you are good enough? Work at it. As with any aspect of role-playing and Game Mastering, the more you do it, the more likely it is that you will get better, that you will find yourself with a valuable new skill.

And *players*, the same thing applies to your characters as well.

Tools of the Namer

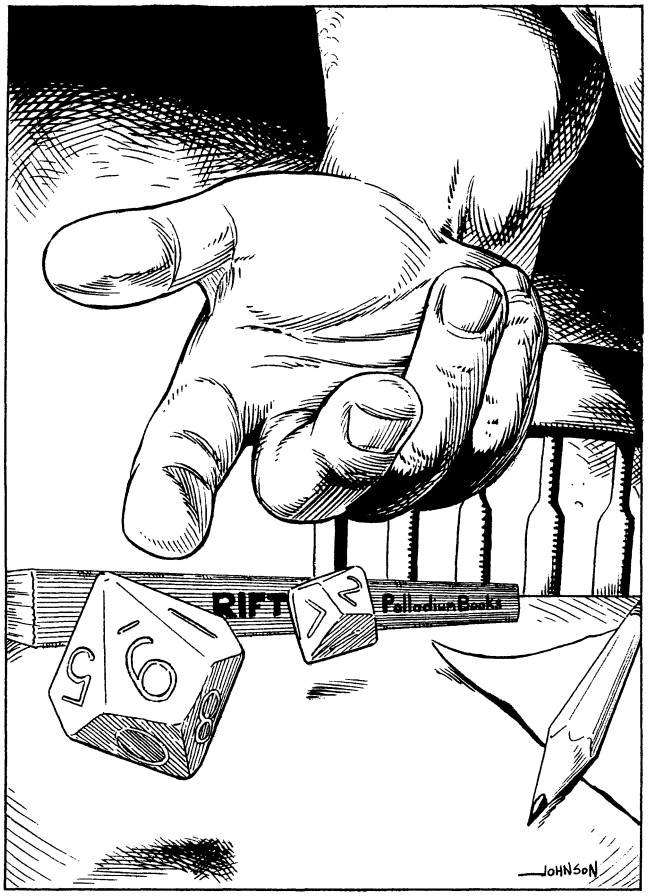
Dice

Using dice to come up with names has the advantage of being fast. However, just as a batch of monkeys banging on keyboards are unlikely to generate great literature, using dice to come up with names is unlikely to produce any really epic name. Worse, it may come up with a name that is awkward to say or nearly unpronounceable. Back in the old days, when I was in a hurry I used the following technique.

First, roll a six-sided.

If the result is low (one, two or three), then roll a twelve-sided for the exact letter from the *start* of the alphabet. In other words, 1 = A, 2 = B, 3 = C, 4 = D, etc.

If the six-sided roll is high (four, five or six), then roll the twelve-sided and start in the middle of the alphabet, where 1 = M, 2 = N, 3 = O, 4 = P, and so on.



Not a perfect system, since it leaves out W, X, Y, Z, but I found that I tended to make too may names starting with X or Z anyway.

Since you need more vowels than consonants, alternate rolling a six-sided where 1 = A, 2 = E, 3 = I, 4 = O, 5 = U, and 6 = Y.

The good thing about rolling up names like this is that it is fast. Whenever the group would meet a new non-player character, or hear about a monster, or come into a town, I could come up with plenty of odd-sounding names.

The not-so-good thing about this system is that most of the names were *garbage*.

Oh, they were okay for an hour or two. It's just that almost none of them stuck. None of the names turned into the names that the players would use when telling their war stories.

That's not to say that I don't use the dice anymore. Far from it. I'm always grabbing for the dice when I'm stuck for a name. Now, however, I only roll one letter, just as a starting place. Then I roll it around in my mind, seeing what kind of possibilities my imagination can generate.

Making Lists

Just about everywhere you go, if you keep your eyes open, you can notice and jot down interesting names. After one of my trips to London, England, I sat down at the computer and came up with the following list, taken from all the little slips of paper that ended up in my jacket pocket:

Ragnachar, Chararic, Rignomer, Hengist, Octha, Celidon, Dogobert, Chlotar, Nantechildis, Wolfegundis, Berchildis, Neustria, Sigebert, Penda, Mercia, Haethgelth, and Cadwallon.

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Next time you find yourself in a waiting room, try looking at the magazines and catalogs that **don't** interest you. In a crowded restaurant listen to the voices of the crowd and see what nonsense you hear if you don't just listen to one conversation. When watching a sporting event note the names of the players on the back of their jerseys; hockey seems to have an especially good roster of exotic names thanks to so many Canadians and Eastern European players.

Reference Books

While dice have their place, the main tool of a good name giver is a good library. Of course, make use of your local public or school library, but it's also a good idea to start putting together your own set of good reference books.

No, I'm not talking about spending money. A lot of my best volumes on naming were freebies or purchased at "Bargain Book" outlet stores.

One of the nice things about the books that come in handy for name reference is that they are mostly worthless. For libraries, bookstores and most book-owning people, it is important to have the latest, most accurate, most up-to-date version of a dictionary, encyclopedia, or any other reference book.

As someone looking for good names, new is NOT necessarily better. In fact, some of the very best books are *old*. Obsolete, even.

For example, just last week, as I was preparing for the writing of this article, I stopped by a local used bookstore. There, sitting on the "free" shelves (ask, most *used bookstores* have a batch of old or damaged books that they are eager to give away), was an old "Winston Simplified Dictionary," inscribed with "Kermit Jacobs - Nov 18, 1920." Heavily defaced (by Kermit, or by later generations of Jacobs, I don't know), filled with graffiti, and otherwise pretty damaged (I don't know how, but somebody drilled a small hole all the way from the front cover to page 49, centering on the word "bathe"), this is still a handy book for me or any Game Master.

Oddly enough, the older the better. Why spend the big bucks on a brand new dictionary when it will be out of date in a year or two (in case you haven't noticed, our language is changing all the time; what with the internet, et al, even the rate of change is accelerating)? **Old dictionaries** are better, partly because they are cheap (somewhere in your area is a scuzzy used bookstore, where there are piles of big old dictionaries, selling for something less than ten cents a pound). When it comes to dictionaries, I recommend getting one of the really big suckers, filled with all kinds of obscure words.

Speaking of obscure words, sometimes "real" words work very well as names. An example from the Dragonwright Campaign is "Heresiarch," defined as a messiah who preaches heresy. One of the players happily accepted the title of "Heresiarch" and used it for quite some time before he happened to find it in a dictionary.

Another category of free, or really *cheap* books, are old foreign language books. Scan through a French-English dictionary, or a textbook on Chinese, and you'll come up with plenty of odd sounding words. (Along those lines are old "travel" books, typically outdated by 5-20 years. They seldom cost more than two or three bucks and are full of great sounding names. Depending on what part of the world, one can find the names of Native Americans, the Old West, Celtic, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Swahili, etc. Plus, you have maps and ideas for adventures in different parts of the world. Just my two-cents. – Siembieda.)

One of my favorite tricks is using a **foreign dictionary**, and looking up a word that might be some kind of clue. For example, I see "betray" is "trahir," and "betrayal" is "trahison" in French. I wonder how many players might figure out that there is something wrong with "Trahir Trahison," the new swordsman, wizard or mercenary they've hired?

Another good source for names is, no big surprise, **name books**. Again, check around the used bookstores. You'll find a surprising number of books on names. Among the cheapest, and also the most useful, are "baby naming books" (also ask your older relatives), which contain the names and meanings of hundreds of first names.

I paid real money for a copy of **The Writer's Digest Character Naming Sourcebook** by Sherrilyn Kenyon, Writer's Digest Books, 1994. It's pretty handy, especially if you need a name associated with a particular language, since it contains thirty-five different name lists, each divided in female and male sections. I haven't used them yet, but I never know when I'll need a list of "Arthurian Legend Names," or names based on Native American or Teutonic languages.

One of my favorite sources for names is a book entitled **A Dictionary of Angels** by Gustav Davidson (The Free Press, 1967), where I can find great names like Arariel (listed as "curer of stupidity"), Goap (a fallen angel with a dominion in Hell), Jesodoth ("10th in the hierarchy of the elohim"), and Zaroteij ("an angel of the Seal"). Of course, great names are also scattered through any religious volume, and the old ones are often sold for cheap at church sales and bazaars.

The final stop on our list of good reference books is a volume that you already have. It's called a **telephone book**. Especially when it comes to creating contemporary names, there is really no better resource. Don't just take the names as they are. Either mix them up, matching different first and last names, or use the names as inspiration to create your own strange variations.

Rolling the Books

Combining dice with books is another cool way to come up with names quickly. Take a quick peek at the total number of pages in a book. My 1945 *Japanese-English Dictionary of Sea Terms* by Lt-Cdr. C. Ozaki (another free book!) has 731 pages of dictionary. To generate a name I start by rolling an eight-sided, for the hundreds, and then a set of percentile dice. So a roll of 4 on the D8, and a roll of 51 on the percentile takes me to page 351 (round down on the D8, so you don't miss the first ninety-nine pages). Once there I notice that "Koganfu" means "inshore wind." Depending on what I need at the time I could use "Koganfu," shorten it to "Kogan," or just use the name "Inshore," which also sounds pretty good.

Computer Software

A good Thesaurus is an excellent reference book, but I much prefer the electronic version. I'd be surprised if you had to add a thesaurus on to your computer system, because most good word processors have one built-in (in these days, where Microsoft is

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just about ubiquitous, you won't have a lot of problems checking out MS Word). Once you get past the initial learning curve, finding neat names on a computer thesaurus is wicked fast.

For example, let's say the characters meet a character who is wearing a very fancy outfit. I start by looking up the word "fancy," which gives me a long list that includes the word "ornate." That's a possibility, but then I click on "ornate" and get "rococo." Nice sound, rococo. Jimmy Rococo? Andreas Rococo Vaughn? Rococo Zimphere? The possibilities are endless...

You might also want to check out some of the more advanced features of your spell checker. Using mine (I'm still using WordPerfect on this machine, which dates from the age of MS-DOS), I can use the asterix character ("*") to do "wild card" searches. For example, if I need a word that ends with "ithian" (because I like the sound of the name "Corinthian" in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* comics), I enter "*ithian," and get "nabothian" which sounds excellent (oddly enough, I can't find it in my big dictionary, so I guess I'll have to make a trip to the library)...

When you use the asterix, remember there are three ways to do it. As a prefix (*ithian, as above), as a suffix (Br*), or as an infix (B*ian).

Building Original Names

As good as it is to consult reference books, the best names are often those that you invent from scratch. Of course spending a lot of time with dictionaries, breaking down words according to their component parts, and fiddling with the pieces, that's all a necessary part of the process...

Suffixes, Prefixes, and Infixes

Back in the late 1940's, my Aunt Camille received a scholarship to study art in New York City. Just as Camille was about to leave on the train, her mother, my grandmother, had some kind of bad feeling.

"I'm coming with you," said my grandmother, and hopped on the train as it pulled out of Detroit. Camille argued, pointing out that the school would take care of everything. Besides, what help could her mother be? Gram who spoke fluent Armenian, but broken English, was on her way to New York, a city where she had no friends and no family.

Sure enough, when they got to New York, it turned out that Gram was right. Camille had no place to stay, and very little money.

So Gram, my wise grandmother, picked up a copy of the New York City telephone directory. Then she started calling Armenians all over Manhattan. And pretty soon she had set up Camille with all the necessary living arrangements, in a community where she would be looked after and protected.

How?

Simple enough. Most Armenians have a common **suffix**. That is, most (not quite all, but most), have a last name that ends in "ian." Evarian, Dekarnikian, Gerarian, Kervorkian, Serafian, and Misralian. Go through any telephone book and, if you avoid the listings for names like "O'Brian," you'll find plenty of Armenians.

A lot of nationalities have common *suffixes*, or endings. "Chavez," "Mendez" and "Vasquez" are clearly Hispanic. "Atagnostopoulos," "Kaloyropoulos" and "Panapolos" are obviously Greek.

A trio of the suffixes I've used in the Dragonwright campaign are "-al," "-ahz" and "-nar." This helps to identify names like "Ba-al," "Aprek-nar," "Muj-ahz" and "Unba-al" as belonging to a particular class of gods and demons, or with the characters who worship those demons and Deevils.

Prefixes that you might find in the telephone book include "van" and "van der" for Dutch names, "von" for German, and "O'" for Irish.

I've come up with a bunch of family names, associated with a particular fantasy ruling class, all with the prefix "d'." So "d'Althin," "d'Fingal," and "d'Voren" are all clearly marked.

Just as prefixes are standard chunks attached to the beginnings of names, and suffixes are the pieces stuck on the ends, so *infixes* are bits that go in the middle of a name. This isn't common in English, but lots of other languages, such as the Philippine language, Tagalog, have all kinds of interesting infixes. For example, adding "le" into the middle of the word "valea" (meaning "stupid"), turns it into valelea ("stupidity") in the Niutao dialect of Tuvaluan in Polynesia.

Take a couple of Niutao infixes, like "fu," "ka," and "pu," add them to some standard English, and you easily generate some cool sounding names.

David can be Dafuvid or Dakavid or Dapuvid. Maryann becomes Mafuryann or Makaryann or Mapuryann. If you stick the infix between Mary and it's suffix Ann, then you'd get Mary'Fuann, Mary'Ka'ann or Mary'Puann.

Also consider the following names; BillyJoe Magee and BetsyJoe Magee, CindyLou and MaryLou and DonnyLou Krammer, EdnaLouise and SaraLouise Smith, not to mention JoeBob and JimBob Kovlowski. "Joe," "Lou," "Louise," and "Bob" are all infixes in these examples.

While coming up with an infix is a bit more difficult, it can also have a certain rhythm when used with a whole batch of related character names.

Stream of Consciousness

So, now that you know about prefixes, suffixes and infixes, here is a detailed example of how they can be used.

My players have grown wary of a group of particularly nasty elves, who combine magic into a form of technology. Among these elves, who aren't exactly enemies, but who can be quite dangerous, they've met characters named Chromatic, Necrophon, and Styolite.

Back when I first came up with the elves, I tried to make all the names sound vaguely technological. They do, to my ear. When I want to come up with another one of their group, when I need another name, I usually just try to take some contemporary technological term, and warp it.

So, "Prosak" could be "Prosakton" or "Sakrapon" or "Orsopak."

How?

I start with "Prosak."

Then add components of the names of the elves we've already met. Chromatic, Necrophon and Styolite. The suffixes would be "tic," "phon" and "ite." (I'll leave it as an exercise to the reader to work out the prefixes and infixes.)

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Adding extra sounds on the end, I could get Prosakton, Prosakic, Prosakite. Prosakton, of these three possibilities, just sounds better.

In this case, putting extra sounds at the start just doesn't seem right.

Break it into "Pro" and "Sak." One prefix, one suffix.

First, just switch 'em around.

Sakpro?

Not enough of a name, I think.

Sakpronic? Maybe.

Sakprotic? No way.

Sakpropon? Okay, at least it sounds like a name. It's just that "propon" is sort of hard to say. Too easy to twist up the tongue. "Sakropon" is better. "Sakrapon" is better yet, since it seems to lend itself to an interesting pronunciation; "Sa-KRA-pon."

So how did I end up with "Orsopak?"

More switching around. "Pro" backwards is "Orp," but "Orp" sounds dumb. "Or" isn't too bad... If it started with "Or," then what?

Orpak? Naw. Too short.

Orpropak? Hmmm...

Orcropak? Ormapak? Oryopak?

I just kept messing around, putting in different sounds.

Until I came up with Orsopak.

It sounds good to my ear. I can say it out loud. It seems to fit in with the others, Chromatic and Orsopak, Orsopak and Necrophon, Styolite and Orsopak.

In other words, I just keep messing around until I come up with something that sounds right.

Magic Names

Playing around with suffixes, foreign dictionaries and software tools are all okay, but the real art of naming is finding a name that fits.

It isn't science, or technique. There is no real trick to this.

Finding just the right name is more a matter of instinct. It's an art. Like all art, it's impossible to completely explain. The best I can do is come up with examples. Here are some of the best names I've invented.

Vagrant and Reaper

In a conventional sense, Vagrant and Reaper aren't even "names." They are words that you might find in a dictionary. However, as names they have worked brilliantly.

Both are from my original *Amber Diceless Role-Playing* campaign. In the case of "Reaper," I was looking for the name that would describe the father of several of the player characters. He wasn't going to be a nice guy (you probably figured that out, just by the name). More, he was going to be downright nuts. And I very much wanted the players to fear him. I'm happy to say that I succeeded. Even now, years after one of the player characters cut off his head, the name "Reaper" still inspires fear and dread in the players.

As for "Vagrant," I was looking for a name for one of the important figures in the Courts of Chaos (a kingdom of powerful demons and shape-shifters). As an assistant to the royal family, I came up with a title, "High Lord of Protocol." He would be big and powerful, with incredibly political clout. Someone who could intimidate with words alone. Someone who would always know exactly the right etiquette and proprieties in every situation. I pictured a huge demonic figure, covered in glittering green and black scales, wearing ... nothing but a tuxedo vest and a black g-string. I have no idea where the name "Vagrant" came from. It seems so counter-intuitive. Yet the juxtaposition of the name "Vagrant" with the campaign's most "proper" figure worked out perfectly.

Doc Feral

When it comes to a character name, this is another of my perfect assignations. For those of you who don't recognize him, Doctor Victor Feral was the main villain created in the original Palladium game, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Other Strangeness* (made way back in 1985). Here was a character who believed in putting humans first, and in subjugating mutant animals (i.e., the player characters). He was a delightful combination; a character who was totally upstanding in his dealings with humanity, and completely venal otherwise. Short, sassy, and full of spit, Feral is still a great name.

Haldeman and Napalm

Ask the players in the Dragonwright Campaign about really powerful mages, and you'll likely hear these two names.

Napalm was one of my very first, the holder of the entryway to "Napalm's Dungeon." There is no substance known as "Napalm" in the campaign, but the name is clearly evocative. I don't know if the players ever saw Napalm cast a fireball, but you know they've got to be thinking that he must have something pretty hot up his sleeve.

As you may recall, there was a prominent figure in Nixon's Whitewater Scandal named Haldeman. Of course, that Haldeman didn't have exclusive rights to the name, since there are plenty of other Haldemans, famous and otherwise (Joe Haldeman, the author of "The Forever War," is a fine science fiction writer). Still, choosing to name the evil sorcerer in my fantasy campaign "Haldeman," has worked out very, very well. While the name has a modern ring, it works just fine in a Palladium setting.

Left-Side-Wound and Two-Trees

Early in the Dragonwright Campaign, nearly two decades ago, the characters first met up with *Kankoran* and *Emerin* (see **Rifts® Conversion Book One**). The ritual of being adopted into the tribe had two parts. First, each player character was paired with a young Kankoran and sent out for a ritual combat with an Emerin. The survivors were given tribal Kankoran names. However, the names were to be based on what happened during the ritual combat. The result was that many of the player characters have memorable names to this day. The names weren't really mine, I didn't invent them, but I can take credit for introducing the tradition. Speaking from experience, when a player character has a tribal name based on the wounds they received in a desperate battle, it is a very good name...

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Names with Roots

A couple of years ago, I ended up running a role-playing session with a huge group, along with two other Game Masters. While I had designed the scenario, I wanted to keep it open-ended, and to give the other two Game Masters enough freedom to move with the flow of events, as well as to invent new non-player characters (NPCs) as needed. Still, I wanted it to look organized, from the point of view of the players. Most of the NPCs would be demons, but demons from two very different realms. Rather than hand out a list of names, I came up with a pair of simple rules. One batch of demons were all to have names based on automotive parts, and the other on words for astronomical objects. No, not just "carburetor" or "Venus," but switched around a bit. It worked fine, and it was clear to the player characters that "Anarator" and "Exafold" belonged to one group of demons, while "Evenus" and "Ijupar" were clearly from another. It turned out to be an easy, very quick, way of inventing names. Even within the two categories, it was easy to segregate the demons according to their names, so big tough guys might have names based on "engine block;" *Gineblock, Lockingine and Ongkin,* while a smaller, smarter one's name could be based on "accelerator;" *Torcellator.* It worked and it was a technique that was invisible to the players.

Rolling 'em off the tongue

A few years ago, when visiting China, I had the opportunity to help teach an English class. Although the students had been taking English for many years, their pronunciation of English words and phrases was often pretty bad. After all, most of their teachers had been Chinese as well, each with their own accent problems. After an hour or so of listening to them read and recite, I started experimenting with different things to see if I could get them to sound better.

The trick that worked best was getting them to speak phrases really quickly. When they spoke at their own speed, each word would come out awkwardly. However, when I got them to repeat a phrase fast, and then faster, and again, they had no choice but to slur it all together. Which is exactly what native speakers of English do all the time; we slur our words together. Oddly enough, it worked really well. By the end of two hours they were speaking a few sentences that sounded natural to an American ear.

When it comes to using new names and words, the same thing applies. If you possibly can, practice before using 'em in front of the role-playing group.

For example, one of the latest characters introduced into my Dragonwright campaign I named Jakadaka. Yes, Jaka-Daka, as if it rhymed with itself. It probably would have been a disaster if I hadn't practiced in advance. Instead, every time I spoke Jakadaka's name I got a laugh, and within a couple of sessions, everyone in the group was pronouncing it correctly.

A note from Siembieda: Along those lines, I have a couple of pet peeves, observations and suggestions.

1. I hate weird names that I have to work at to say, let alone remember. Hate 'em, hate 'em, hate 'em. The name should be easy to say, easy to pronounce and easy to remember. You will note that 99% of Erick's names, even when very exotic and alien, "sound" good and roll off the tongue. They are easy to read and easy to say, and often even have a sing-song quality to them. A cool name for a monster, demon, alien or magic item is *NOT* one that is spelled weird and is unpronounceable. In fact, *Xiticix* is a great example of a lousy name. Probably less than 20% of the Rifts players can pronounce the darn word. I should have known better, but Kevin Long created the root idea behind the insectoids, defined their appearance with artwork, and he came up with the name. I only know it is pronounced Z-eye-tick-icks, because Long told me. Others have called them Zitty-sick, Zitty-is-ex, and dozens of others. My Dad, working in the Palladium warehouse, calls them "City Chicks" and editor Jim Osten gave up entirely and just started calling them "bug men." Cool character, lousy name.

2. I hate it when two or more characters have the same or similar names. Do NOT create a gaggle of character like James, Jimmy, Jim, Jeremy, Jeffery, Jason. It makes things difficult to keep straight. You want the individual characters to stand out and be memorable, not blur together in a homogenous lump. Yes, it happens in real life, but the people typically are given different nicknames to distinguish them. At one time there were four Kevins associated with Palladium Books, Kevin Siembieda, Kevin Long, Kevin Kirsten, and Kevin Fales (five if you included Kevin Eastman, co-creator of the Ninja Turtles). I was typically "Kev," "Boss," or "Siembieda." Kevin Long was "Kevin" or mostly "Long" and "Longo." Kevin Kirsten was just "Kirsten" and Kevin Fales was "Fales." For humor, Long, Steve Sheiring and Maryann, created a trio of brother characters named *Clem, Flem* and *Zeek.* Because their characters acted similarly and two had similar names, all three were constantly being confused for one another. It was a clever and funny idea, but caused some confusion in the actual game play.

3. Shorten long and/or difficult to say names into something short. Zanderfarlynntine could be Zan or Zander or Lynn or Lee, or even Zee. Besides, it is human nature (at least of modern humans) to shorten names to be as compact as possible. Kevin is not exactly a long name, but a lot of folks call me "Kev." Brian Bartold is not long either and certainly rolls off the tongue, so why is the kid called "BJ"? Heck, Thomas is Tommy, Tom, and even "T." We like 'em short and punchy. Remember that and use it in your games. A couple of my most popular and memorable NPC characters were *Sid* (a powerful demon trapped in the body of a Bug Bear), and *Fearless* (a clumsy, bumpkin mercenary drug abuser who insisted he was a "Palladin" because he had bought a certificate saying so, not that he could read it).

Now it's your turn ...

I could go on.

Agranin, a major demon, Alstay the Bonestealer, a witch of supernatural proportions, Apnik, a minor demon-sprite, Ayeron the spider god... all the way to Zelerum, a suit of demon armor. All the good names found me, whispered in my ear, and demanded to be used.

All of my role-playing life I've been known as a guy good with names (for example, that little name, "Rifts," that was a good one that I suggested to Kev). I like names, I like naming things, and I even like thinking about how to name things.

It didn't happen overnight. It didn't come naturally. Like just about everyone else, when I first started coming up with names

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it seemed impossible. As if the people who invented good names were some kind of tricksters.

It turns out that it wasn't magic. For me, for you, for anyone who wants the knack of naming, all it takes is work and practice. And a little imagination.

Thinking Big

Top-Down

By Erick Wujcik

On the subject of names and naming, I told you about some of my early errors, about how I made the mistake of "borrowing" names instead of inventing 'em. I mentioned that the names I'd ripped off from books, movies, television, etc., came back to bite me long after they were introduced into my role-playing campaigns.

If you read that and thought, "no problem here, my campaigns never really last," this is for you.

The trick to making a game that *lasts* is thinking big. It's all about stretching your imagination so you can create a role-playing campaign that will last and last.

Bopping back to something else I mentioned back in naming, you may recall that I described the "Circle of Twelve Mages," and the "Circle of Twelve Artifacts," as stuff from the first Dragonwright Campaign.

That campaign is now over twenty years old. The same story, the same universe. Heck, we've even got some of the same player characters. What is even more amazing is that the Dragonwright Campaign was started by a pretty dumb Game Master. As I look back on what kind of Game Master I was twenty years ago, that guy looks pretty clueless. He (the old me) had never run a role-playing campaign of any kind, wasn't all that good a Game Master, and made a heck of a lot of mistakes.

Yet in one all-too-crucial way, I was a friggin' genius.

Because I thought big.

Thinking big was a lucky accident, the coincidence of starting in on role-playing and Game Mastering right in the middle of some pretty exciting computer science classes. Back in those days (circa 1978), the latest thing in systems engineering was something called "Top-Down Design." As applied to computer programming, the idea was to conceptualize the problem, whatever it was, in the most general way possible, and then to break it down into manageable pieces, one level of implementation at a time. That way, in theory, you could start with a really tough job (like designing a computer operating system), break it down into *pieces* (usually something like input, processing and output), and then break each of those pieces down into even *smaller pieces.*

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For a visual image of Top-Down, try to picture an organizational chart. You know, the kind with the little boxes and lines, with the "President" at the top level, then the various "Vice Presidents" at the second level, with progressively more little boxes as you go down through the "tree." And at the bottom of the chart would be the "Workers," the people who actually performed useful functions.

In computer programming you can use pretty much the same chart, the same visuals. However, instead of the boxes containing the titles of people, each box would describe some function of the computer program.

As I said, at the time I was pretty involved in this whole new way of doing things, because of my computer programming classes.

So it wasn't much of a leap for me to apply exactly the same technique when it came to building my first big role-playing campaign, the monster that came to be known as "Dragonwright."

Before the Big Ideas Hit

By the time I got around to designing the Dragonwright campaign, I had already built three "dungeons."

The first one, "Kiddie-Dungeon," (which was, by the way, Kevin Siembieda's very first encounter with role-playing), wasn't much more than a collection of rooms stocked with monsters and treasures. Fun, in a limited way, but with nothing to keep the player characters interested for more than a couple of hours of killing and figuring out puzzles.

By the time I got to my third dungeon, "Napalm's," my designs were considerably more complex. There were dozens of levels, thousands of rooms, and whole categories of monsters. Better yet, the dungeon actually made sense (well, not really, but as much sense as you'll find in most fantasy novels). Different areas of Napalm's were controlled by the worshipers of competing gods, each charged with protecting various shrines, treasure rooms and artifacts.

Also, Napalm's was enormous. Using the most detailed graph paper I could find, and a selection of colored pencils to represent all sorts of detail, I wrote up hundreds and hundreds of detailed descriptions. Plus mazes, traps and countless interesting magical items.

It was around that time that I figured out one big problem.

Napalm's was really *too big*.

Oh, it was fun. For about half a year people would send their player characters tromping into Napalm's, happily mapping and exploring, fighting and running, and grabbing all sorts of interesting loot (those happy few who survived—this was back in my days as a "killer" Game Master).

However, it started to become obvious, to me at least, that a lot of the important stuff in Napalm's was never going to be discovered. It took hours and hours for the players to fight their way in, follow up on a few obscure clues, and then fight their way out.

Also, after a solid six months of work, as the designer, I was nowhere near finishing Napalm's. Worse, it seemed like the more I built, the less chance there was of any of the player characters actually finding the cool stuff I was inventing.

In other words, Napalm's wasn't all that much fun.

It was around this time that I had my epiphany.

Why, I thought to myself, spend all this time designing dungeon levels, forcing the players to wander around for hours, when I could just put the interesting stuff right in front of them?

My favorite authors didn't waste pages and pages describing the boring parts. No, they'd just say something like "after two weeks of searching," or "he crawled for hours," and then jump right into the good stuff. Why couldn't I do the same thing?

Instead of forcing the players to march through hallway after hallway, seeking the one real treasure room among the dozens of fakes, I could just skip ahead. Better yet, instead of drawing all those dozens of rooms, I could just concentrate on the fun part, just on designing the rooms that actually contained interesting stuff.

Whew! What a relief!

Right away I started moving stuff around in Napalm's. Cool stuff from deep inside was moved right into the path of the oncoming player characters.

Suddenly the role-playing got a lot more interesting, and a lot more fun. Plus, it was easier for me, as Game Master.

Thinking Big for the First Time

Napalm's, as I've described it, and in many other ways, was a beautiful learning experience. By trial and error I'd managed to figure out a lot of what made role-playing interesting, and also what could make it deadly dull.

I had learned that people liked *following a chain of events*, that they were more involved in the experience of the role-playing if they *felt like* every detail might be *part of a bigger picture*. In my own particular version of a fantasy world, that meant understanding the politics behind different gods and the religions that worship them (you thought it was a coincidence that I wrote the Gods section of the fantasy *Dragons & Gods* sourcebook?).

However, trying to work out all the details in a campaign, in advance, was looking to be a pretty futile exercise.

After all, what was the point of designing a really cool room if no one was likely to find it? Wouldn't it be better to just design the stuff that was right in front of the player characters?

That was it. That was the trick.

I needed to think big, but I also needed to avoid wasting time on details that weren't important.

Which brought me back to the scheduling part of the philosophy of Top-Down.

You see, it's the job of a systems analyst to break apart a big problem, to separate it into *manageable chunks*, and then to assign the different parts of the problem to different computer programmers. Big projects usually require time scheduling as well, so that different parts are tackled at different times in the development schedule.

That way of looking at things can be translated into role-playing terms.

Think of the player character group as a set of *problem solvers*. Whatever the point of the overall role-playing campaign, it's up to the *player characters* to meet the challenge, and to solve the problem.

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Obviously, the player characters aren't going to be able to solve everything at once, no more than a computer programmer can write an entire operating system in one sitting, or a team of automotive engineers can design a new car in a single day. They need to tackle the problem one step at a time.

In the case of the Dragonwright Campaign, in order to succeed, the player characters had to collect all the scattered objects that made up the "Circle of Twelve Artifacts."

Now, since I was thinking BIG, back when I first created the Dragonwright Campaign, I already knew the purpose of the Circle of Twelve Artifacts (sorry, I can't include that information here, since my players haven't figured it out yet). Back then I didn't even know what the artifacts looked like, what their names might be, or much of anything else.

I just knew that there would have to be a Circle of Twelve Artifacts, that there would be twelve of 'em (duh!), and that they had all been scattered, hidden, and locked away, thousands of years before the player characters came on the scene.

Since each of the twelve artifacts was of major importance, I figured I'd have to work up, basically, twelve different "quests." Yes, I had to work up the first one, in detail, pretty carefully, but the others could definitely wait.

So, as the campaign progressed, I gradually *filled in* more and more of the particulars. About a year after we started, the group found a structure where all of the twelve artifacts were named and pictured. In that year I had the chance to figure out all twelve names and even have a pretty good idea of what each item could do. Eventually, over the years, all of the twelve were discovered, and all fell into the hands of the player characters.

This was interesting for the player characters (imagine knowing about a mystic item for ten years, knowing its name, its appearance, and something about what it can do, and then, finally, finally, having the opportunity to get your hands on that very item!).

Even more important, for me as a Game Master, the Top-Down approach gave me a *framework*, a blueprint upon which I could build a campaign. A campaign that would prove to last for decades.

Thinking Big with Maps

Let's take worlds as an example.

Say you've decided to run a campaign where, for starters anyway, the player characters are going to be dealing with a *little town.*

You know the kind of place. In **Rifts®** it would be a place with a few buildings, a couple of dozen scruffy inhabitants, maybe built on the ruins of an old intersection, where there used to be gas stations, strip malls, and maybe an old motel.

No big deal, just a place where the characters can rest up, have a couple of harmless encounters, maybe set up a bar fight.

Probably, if you are like most Game Masters, you know the town isn't all that important. Certainly not worth putting in a whole lot of work.

After all, knowing the way **Rifts®** player characters move around, they'll be there only a short time, squash the place flat, and then they'll be off somewhere else, never to return.

Why waste time and effort on such a nowhere place?

Exactly because the player characters are going to be moving around. Because whatever happens in this little town is really only a set-up for the next big encounter.

One approach would be to start mapping with the town at the center of the map. You could figure out that the Coalition is this way, and the Federation of Magic is over yonder, and there's a nasty dimensional Rift that's going to appear on the ley line off to the south, and so on...

Then, as the group moves around, you can just fill in the necessary details, always adding to your map in little ways.

Which is actually a good approach.

It's just easier, and more effective, to start out with a big map in the first place.

Start with a world map (don't worry, it's mostly going to be blank). Now sketch in, in rough fashion, the big areas you know you're going to want to include in your campaign. The Coalition State of Chi-Town, Atlantis, etc.

Now focus on the general area where you want to put your little town. Figure out what's in the general area. Add in some interesting details like rivers or mountains. As you get closer to the target area, to the exact location for the town, get more and more specific.

See the difference?

Yes, you can still extend your map, still *fill it in* as the player characters wander around. The difference is, starting with the big picture – a framework – with the big idea, is that you've got a map that is more manageable. It's clear, right from the start, how everything fits together.

In the long run, starting with a global map, with a world map, even if you have very little of it figured out, makes for a better campaign, because it provides perspective and focus.

Thinking Cosmic Big

So far, so good. If you've paid attention up to this point, you probably realize that designing a world is, in a lot of ways, easier than designing one village at a time, one encounter at a time. Thinking big, at least when it comes to worlds, makes things easier for the Game Master to imagine and fill in.

Likewise, it makes sense to try to think big in *time* as well as space. That by building an interesting past, you also leave yourself open for some room to design a complex and interesting campaign.

Now prepare to really let loose.

The idea is to give your imagination full rein, full scope. To kick on your brain's afterburners, and really think big.

Bigger than worlds, bigger than solar systems, bigger than galaxies. Universe big. Cosmic big.

Cosmology big.

According to my big dictionary, cosmology is the branch of science that deals with the philosophy of the origin and structure of the universe, which includes such minutia as the nature of time and space, the existence of god (or gods), and even stuff like causality (which came first, the chicken or the egg?).

For me, this is the real payoff of role-playing, and the real kick I get out of Game Mastering. In just about any other creative endeavor, there are limits, boundaries (and budgetary constraints). Not so in our little hobby. We can do anything in our imaginary worlds.

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You have the power to decide, in your own pocket universe, exactly how creation happened. Who are the gods? Which Alien Intelligences are mapping and controlling the ley lines and the Rifts? What cosmic forces are at war with each other? You get to decide all the big questions.

Better yet, your universe can consist of many universes. Alternate dimensions (Rifts®!), different time-lines, and realities based on whatever rules you wish to impose or create.

The bigger you think, the better.

The Biggest Thinking

It can be a lonely job, being the god of your role-playing campaign. Seeing everything from an Olympian view, looking down on the ant-like movements of your player characters. It can be particularly frustrating when the players don't appreciate your efforts. When they grumble and complain and obviously have no clue as to the Herculean tasks that you've performed as their Game Master.

When the players don't appreciate your efforts, it's only natural to get a little resentful. After all, wouldn't it be great if you could just get rid of these spoiled little brats, these loud-mouth troublemakers, and bring in some *real* role-players?

Well, no. It wouldn't.

Chances are, your players are your friends, and sometimes even members of your own family. If you aren't creating a good enough campaign, if they are not having fun, then *you* obviously haven't thought big enough.

You need to think big enough to *include the players in your plans.*

I don't mean you should consult with them as to how the game is going, or get their approval on the next set of villains or traps. No, I mean you should try to put together the kind of adventure *they* would *enjoy.* Everything the Game Master does should be put together with your *players in mind*, and with *their characters* in mind.

Your first clue, and the clue that's always staring you in the face, is the characters that the players put together. If Ron is running a Juicer then it's up to the Game Master to make sure there's enough action and challenge to keep the character occupied. It's up to the Game Master to figure out when Ron's character is going to need to replenish his drug supply, as well as where Ron's character is going to find the drug supply. When the rest of the campaign is being designed, Ron's Game Master should always be thinking about what's going to be fun and interesting and involving. Around the time that Ron's character needs to make the life decision, whether to commit to dying a Juicer, or attempting Juicer Detox, it's up to the Game Master to set it up so another Juicer collapses, with just enough of a dying breath to pass along a few words to Ron's character (will it be "Kid, don't make the same mistake I did" or... "Hoo Hah, Kid, I'm so glad I made the choice to die fast! You take what's left of my rig and go have some more fun..."?).

Each and every one of your players deserves a piece of the action, deserves to have their characters taken *into account* in the campaign. Role-playing isn't like a book or a movie, where there's one star. No. Role-playing games are about *everybody* getting their own personal storyline, their own friends, their own personal enemies, so that every game session, every player goes away feeling like *they* were part of the story, part of the action, and an important part of the group.

One of my good friends, Rob Justice, who started playing in my Dragonwright group as a teenager, has taken this kind of Top-Down thinking even farther. He starts by interviewing the players before the game even starts. With questions like "What would you like to see in the game?" and "What do you think would be fun to play?" and "What would suck?" he figures out how to make a great role-playing experience right from the beginning. As Rob says, "as a Game Master you've got to embrace your role as an entertainer."

Siembieda sidebar: I agree one hundred percent. In fact, I also ask my players "What would like to see in the game?" and "What do you think would be fun to play?" Not every adventure, but when I'm first starting to work up a campaign and at junctions where the continuing adventures can go in new or different directions. I also ask what are the plans of the group as a team and of individual characters. This way I can use and build upon the elements I think will make compelling drama, subplots, challenges, choices and encounters. From my point of view, the player characters, each and every one of them, are the *heroes* in our epic campaign. Each is a star in an ensemble cast, and I try to treat them that way. Giving each "star" his or her moment to shine.

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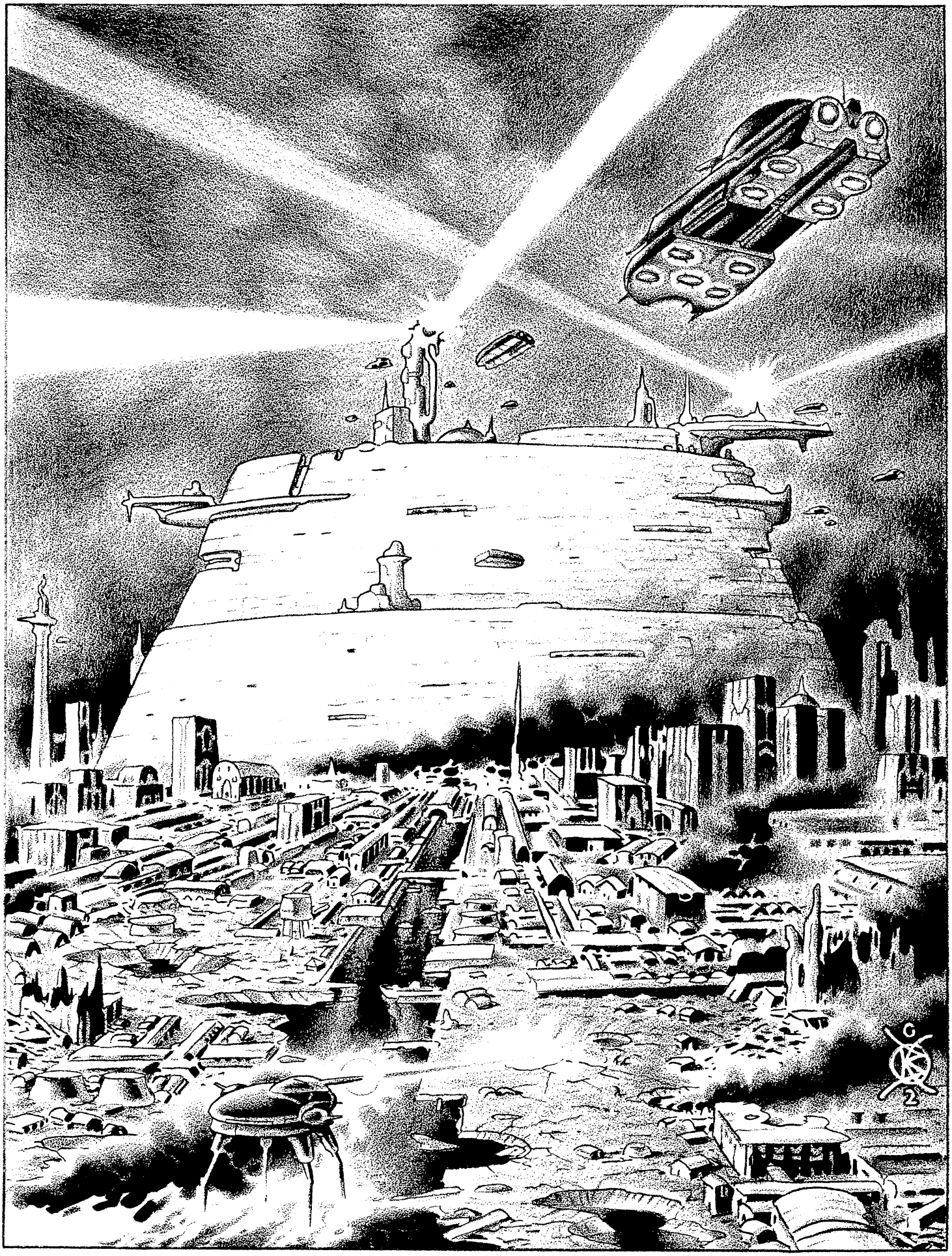

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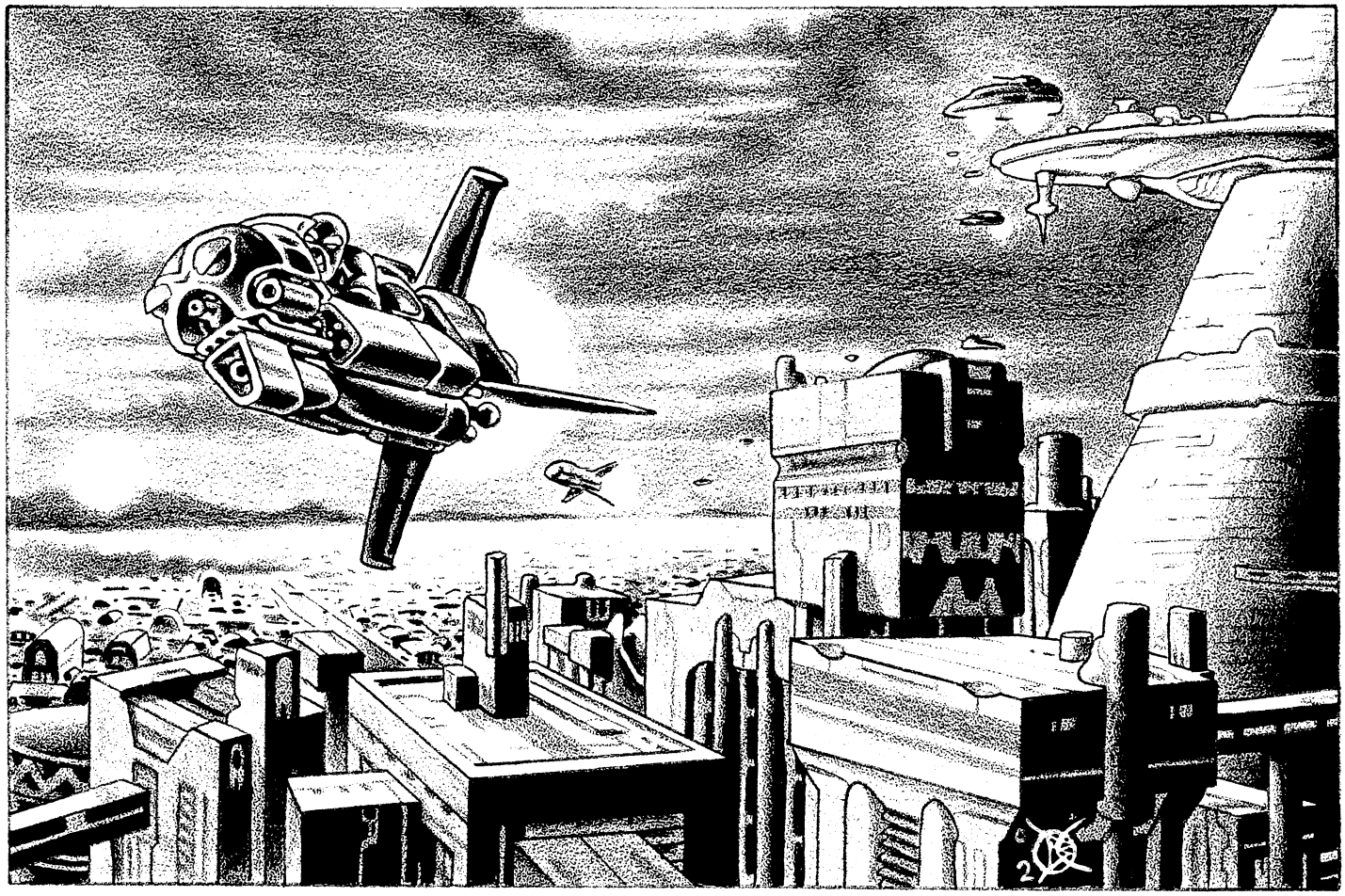

The CS 'Burbs

By Kevin Siembieda

We hear about the 'Burbs, especially the Chi-Town 'Burbs, but we seldom see much information on them. That all changes right now!

The 'Burbs are a different kind of *urban sprawl*. They are found around the fortified cities of the Coalition States – the one around the fortified City of Chi-Town being the largest and most famous of them all.

The fortified cities of the CS represent a safe haven for humans. A refuge and something of an "urban paradise," for within its walls, *human beings* can live without fear of attack from monsters, demons, alien invaders or marauding bandits, sorcerers or madmen. Each citizen is given a job and finds his or her place in CS society. Here they live a life of comparative high-tech luxury. All apartments and businesses have hot and cold running water, reliable electrical power, heating and cooling systems, secure telephone network, city-wide internet access, modern conveniences, and even leisure time activities and resources like television, film theaters, concert halls, live theater, museums, diners, sporting events, arenas and all the things one imagines an advanced megalopolis would have.

Most importantly, the government (albeit subtly controlling and tyrannical) is stable and works to provide for and protect its citizenry like few others in the world. Law and order are enforced to provide a safe and secure place to live, work and raise a family. As basic as all this may sound to us readers, such amenities, stable government, and sense of safety are a truly rare commodities in the North America of *Rifts Earth.*

The Burbs

If the fortified cities of the Coalition States are "paradise" then **The 'Burbs** must be "purgatory" – a holding area where one waits years, sometimes generations, before getting into the paradise contained within. Beyond the 'Burbs, away from the fortified cities, is the "hell" that is the uncharted, perilous and frightening *wilderness.* Ah, but the wilderness is covered under the Post-Apocalyptic Earth in another part of this book, the 'Burbs are what we want to explore here.

"'Burbs" is the slang term for the shanty towns that spring-up around cities and strong-holds within the Coalition States, particularly around the great, fortified super-cities. Like the *suburbs* of old, they are sprawling communities surrounding a large city. However, they are a far cry from the manicured residential communities that once surrounded the cities of pre-Rifts Earth.

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The 'Burbs started out as campsites scattered around the outskirts of the fortified city of Chi-Town. The resting place of the hopeful. These camps were originally supposed to be a temporary holding zone for human refugees who wanted to apply for citizenship in the Coalition States, and/or petition for work or residence in one of the great walled cities. However, peasants, farmers, woodsmen and wilderness folk throughout North America came in droves. Unable and unwilling to accommodate everybody, the local CS officials were forced to push the multitudes away, beyond the city limits, where they pitched tents and waited.

As time passed, some turned their vehicles into a home, or built a little fence around their pitched tent. Others put together a shack or simple cabin out of wood, clay, stone and salvaged sheet metal and scape. Vegetable gardens were grown to help feed those who waited. Traveling merchants stopped to hawk their wares, and some established semi-permanent trading posts. The Coalition government ignored these "temporary camps" even as many of them grew into squatter homesteads and shanty towns. Before the CS knew it, the great city of Chi-Town was surrounded by tens of thousands of people unwilling to leave, and patiently waiting to be recognized and accepted into the city.

In the early days, the Coalition Military would forcibly remove the squatters, sometimes escorting them hundreds of miles away, but many would return after a few weeks, joined by other hopeful newcomers, to rebuild.

No matter how many times the people would be routed and the shanty towns leveled, they kept coming back. To complicate matters, at least a third really were eligible candidates for citizenship or work permits, placed on waiting lists and forced to languish with the less fortunate. Moreover, they were fellow humans, consequently, lethal force was not an acceptable option. (The CS tries to avoid killing their own kind, and while most of the "Burbies" are crude, uneducated, and unskilled, they are *human*.) Finally, the CS government gave up and allowed the shanty towns to flourish, "like weeds outside the garden," as General Cabot once commented.

Over the years, thousands of hopeful Burbies waiting in the slums have turned into hundreds of thousands, even millions. While much of the 'Burbs remain a cobbled together hodgepodge of people and shanty towns, many of the older parts are effectively towns and cities in their own right. These communities have their own quasi-democratic system of government, with leaders and representatives, merchant associations, and guidelines for commerce, laws and conduct. Most are based on or inspired by the government and society of the more formal and "civilized" Coalition cities, largely because the squatters hope they will earn a place in the fortified cities *if* they can prove themselves to be "cultured," "civilized" and "worthy" of living as a favored city person.

The 'Burbs are different things to different people, and vary dramatically from sector to sector even in the same region. In most cases, the 'Burbs encircle the entire fortified city. Around *Chi-Town* and *Iron Heart* they are effectively an array of small, independent cities and towns that flow seamlessly from one into another. The only elements differentiating these *unofficial* towns and neighborhoods from one another are each community's level of poverty, technology, lawlessness, and civility. They all *start* as shanty towns and tent cities. Temporary holding zones where people originally gathered to petition for citizenship in the fortress city and *wait* for acceptance into it. Since the fortified cities are, indeed, regarded as "paradise," tens of thousands (and in the case of Chi-Town, millions), throng to the 'Burbs. All hoping to be accepted as an elite city dweller. There *are* other CS cities, towns, outposts, colonies and farm communities in the Coalition States, and many are quite nice and safe, but the fabled *fortress cities* are seen as the best of the best. So it is, people continue to come and wait. Even those who have been *declined* admittance often remain, hoping that they can somehow change the authorities' mind or to help a family member or friend succeed where the "reject" has failed. Others choose to make their life in the 'Burbs because they see it as better than living out in the wilderness or even rural locations within the CS. Some never leave.

The average wait for *highly desirable* candidates for acceptance into a fortress city is longer than ever, 5-10 years. For the less desirable, unskilled, and uncouth masses, that wait is said to be 15-30, but few have any real chance of acceptance at all. Afraid to leave for fear that they would be forgotten, the multitude of hopeful people pitch camp and *wait*. Since the wait may be years, they usually gather in family clans, build some sort of hut or house or live out of tents or vehicles and wait. And wait and wait. Thus, the 'Burbs were born.

The structure of the 'Burbs

In a way, Chi-Town and the 'Burbs can be thought of as the rings of a tree. At the *core* is a fortified city, like Chi-Town. The first several small rings of growth around the core are the oldest suburbs of the city. The first camps and shanty towns that have grown up around the fortress city into thriving communities in their own right. Around the center and the inner core that is the Old Town, are the larger New Town 'Burbs followed by the equally large and newest Shanty Town 'Burbs. Chi-Town has some of the oldest and largest 'Burbs of all the allied States – Free Quebec and Iron Heart are next in line. This is because most refugees are attracted to the largest, most prosperous and famous communities.

Old Town District of the 'Burbs

Statistical Breakdown:

96.5% Human population.

2.5% Psi-Stalkers (human mutants).

1% D-Bees and others (unwanted supernatural beings and creatures of magic).

91% Are dedicated human supremacists.

87% Have nothing to do with D-Bees whatsoever, and shun them completely.

1-4% accept magic in any form; all others (96-99%) fear and reject it. None practice it openly.

5% Are literate in American.

4% Possess psychic abilities; 99% of those are IC registered psychics with Psi-Net.

10% Of the buildings are tents, huts, shacks and vehicles turned into dwellings.

70% Are 1-10 story buildings (average is four story); half are M.D.C. structures. The rest are small homes.

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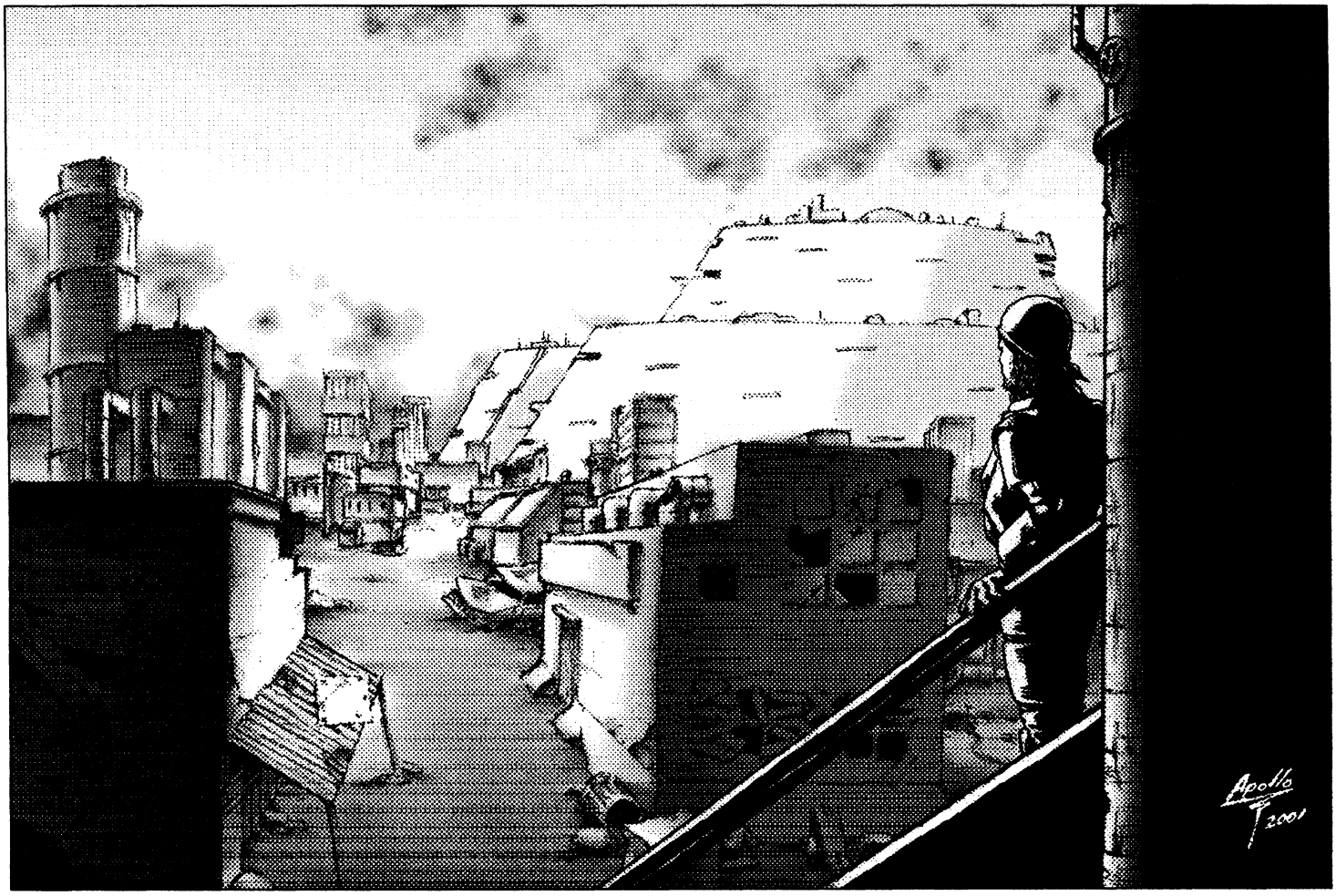

75% Of the Old Town 'Burb is permanent and mostly unchanging. Streets and businesses are well established and don't change or move much.

Crime is low.

Poverty is low, only about 20% are truly poor. The rest live well and may be considered middle class, while 10% are downright well-to-do and 5% (mostly criminal kingpins and merchants) are worth millions of credits.

Has a solid and strong local governing body and militia/police, but may also have a few street or criminal gangs as well as powerful and influential businesses and individuals.

CS authorities have the most trust and respect for the Old Town 'Burbs and regularly go to its local governing body to resolve any problems before resorting to violence. Soldiers sweep the Old Town 'Burbs only once or twice a week, although there may be an increase if trouble is afoot or if the 'Burb's leaders call the CS in to resolve a problem; namely incidents involving spies, terrorists with a vendettas against the CS, rebel dissidents, practitioners of magic, and those speaking out against Emperor Prosek and/or spreading history and propaganda contrary to the Coalition's views. It may also be visited by the police from the fortress city, but only if it's suspected that the culprits of a crime or trouble are hiding in an Old Town, or the police are looking for the help of Old Town authorities to track down a suspect or criminal operation in one of the other 'Burbs.

Old Town Burbs are the small center around the core that is the fortified city. These are the oldest, most established and permanent of the 'Burbs. Some are very old and established communities that have existed for 50-80 years. In fact, they are so clean and well kept that if one did not know better, they could be mistaken for genuine Coalition towns or small cities. The inhabitants are also fanatically loyal, obedient and, some would say, the most desperate, of the 'Burb communities. Most of the people living here are willing to do almost anything to see members of their community become residents of the fortress city. These denizens of the 'Burbs tend to be psychotic about obeying CS laws, making them the most law abiding, orderly, and zealous human supremacists living anywhere in the 'Burbs. Old Town settlements are also the safest places in the 'Burbs. At least two thirds of its structures, from businesses to residences, are permanent structures, one to four stories tall. Two thirds of the commercial buildings are Mega-Damage structures, so are a third of the homes. Likewise, half the streets are paved, the rest are covered with gravel, and only the back alleys are dirt (and half of them are covered with gravel). There is very little that changes in the Old Town 'Burbs. Businesses come and go but most of the buildings and streets stay the same. Only in the event of a destructive fire, battle, or large urban renewal project is there a major change to the look and shape of an Old Town 'Burb. By comparison, the buildings and streets in the New Town and Shanty Town 'Burbs are constantly changing.

The Old Town sections are "managed" by a formal, but *unofficial* seat of government, including a self-regulated judiciary and police force who follow the laws of the Coalition States to the letter. Moreover, many factories and businesses in Old Town 'Burbs manufacture goods and perform services for the fortress

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city, and these denizens of the 'Burbs regularly enjoy day and weekend passes into the city itself!

The inhabitants of the elder 'Burbs usually consider themselves to be steadfast loyalists to the Coalition States and Emperor Prosek, and whether true or not, they choose to believe they are among the *most favored* by the CS, thus making their citizens the elite upper-crust in the 'Burbs, and therefore the most likely to become city residents; or so they have convinced themselves.

New Town 'Burbs

Statistical Breakdown & Notes:

80-84% human population.

5-8% Psi-Stalkers (mutant humans).

6-10% D-Bees; most of whom are illegal slaves, indentured servants or renegades on the run and living the low life. Independent D-Bees are typically adventurers, rogue scholars and scientists, bounty hunters, mercenaries, vagabonds and traders. The CS considers all D-Bees to be untrustworthy miscreants, but corrupt soldiers and police often ignore D-Bees kept as slaves and servants unless they act suspiciously or cause trouble. D-Bees who cause trouble or commit a crime – even a minor offense – are savagely brutalized and often killed on the spot; no arrest nor trial is necessary. D-Bees have no rights. Consequently, D-Bees who are only accused of a crime or wanted for questioning run for their lives and hide from the authorities. Independent or Free D-Bees are generally considered to be spies, assassins, the worst kinds of criminals or dangerous rebels out to undermine and destroy the Coalition States. As such they are automatically wanted for "questioning and extermination!" Lazy CS soldiers and police will give up the chase for D-Bee suspects who prove to be too elusive, difficult or dangerous to pursue, while corrupt ones will accept "bribes and payoffs" to look the other way and let D-Bees go or arrange an escape.

1-2% Others; unwanted supernatural beings and creatures of magic.

50-60% Are dedicated human supremacists.

40% Have nothing to do with D-Bees whatsoever and shun them completely.

4-10% Practice magic!

40% Fear but accept magic as a strange but useful ability; they look the other way to its practice, especially if the magic is used to their benefit.

50% Fear and shun magic, and will turn those who practice it or shelter magic users over to the authorities.

2-6% Are literate in American.

6-12% Possess some measure of psychic abilities.

50% Of all buildings and homes are tents, shacks, huts and vehicles turned into dwellings or trading posts.

25% Are 2-5 story buildings; half are businesses and half are M.D.C. structures which can be considered semi-permanent structures. Only a few of the most traveled streets (namely the business area) are permanent. Otherwise the configuration of the streets, buildings and houses changes regularly; every few (2D4) weeks.

25% Are 1-2 story homes; one third are M.D.C. structures.

Crime is high. Poverty is the norm. Only 20-30% live well, 3-6% high on the hog.

There *is* an apparent governing body and neighborhood militia/police but depending on the 'Burb and changing times, it may be a vocal and showy figurehead, corrupt or criminal authority and alternately, a true and honest governing body. Most New Town 'Burbs also have *at least* a half a dozen street and criminal gangs as well as some influential merchants and powerful individuals.

CS soldiers patrol the streets of the New Town 'Burb 1D4+4 times a day. It may also be patrolled or visited by the police from the fortress city, but only if it's suspected that the culprits of a crime or trouble are hiding or based in the 'Burb.

The newer, but established 'Burbs are known as **New Town 'Burbs**. The newer 'Burbs are larger, more sprawling than the Old Towns and are seldom more than 7-10 years old, falling prey to destruction and CS purges only to be rebuilt as someplace new. New Towns are unstructured, disorganized and only partially civilized. They are noisy towns with gravel and mud streets, poor sanitation and a haphazard layout. The only semi-permanent buildings are the 2-5 story buildings of its business district, filled with trading posts, saloons, boarding houses, and places of ill-repute. The business area is surrounded by small homes, shacks, broken-down vehicles turned into housing, tents and campsites. Only twenty percent are Mega-Damage structures. Most of these New Towns are considered to be established communities and resemble and function as towns or small cities in and of themselves.

The atmosphere is similar to the boomtowns of the pre-Rifts American Wild West, where there are shootouts in the streets, the community never seems to sleep, and there is always something going on (whether you want it to or not). These are the communities where organized crime and the Black Market abound, and where one can find just about whatever illegal substance, pleasure or information he may be looking for. Of course, the Coalition Military patrols these places regularly and frequently set up "sting" operations to capture criminals and spies. Bounty hunters, mercenaries, slavers, scholars, mutants, psychics, practitioners of magic, Juicers, Crazies, 'Borgs, City Rats, adventurers, D-Bees and demons also call the Burbs home, or use them as a rest stop to resupply and have a little fun, or to get lost in a sea of faces, human and inhuman.

Shanty Town 'Burbs

Statistical Breakdown & Notes:

60-75% human population.

15-20% D-Bees; most of which (70%) are independent and free adventurers, mercenaries, vagabonds, rogue scholars and scientists, and other O.C.C.s and R.C.C.s. 30% are slaves and indentured servants. The general situation with D-Bees and how the CS responds to them is basically the same as described under *New Town 'Burbs*.

10-15% Psi-Stalkers (mutant humans).

2-5% Others; supernatural beings and creatures of magic.

35% Are dedicated human supremacists.

30% Have nothing to do with D-Bees whatsoever and shun them completely.

1-4% Are literate in American.

10-15% Accept and practice magic!

40-50% Fear but accept magic as a strange but useful ability; they look the other way to its practice, especially if magic is used to their benefit.

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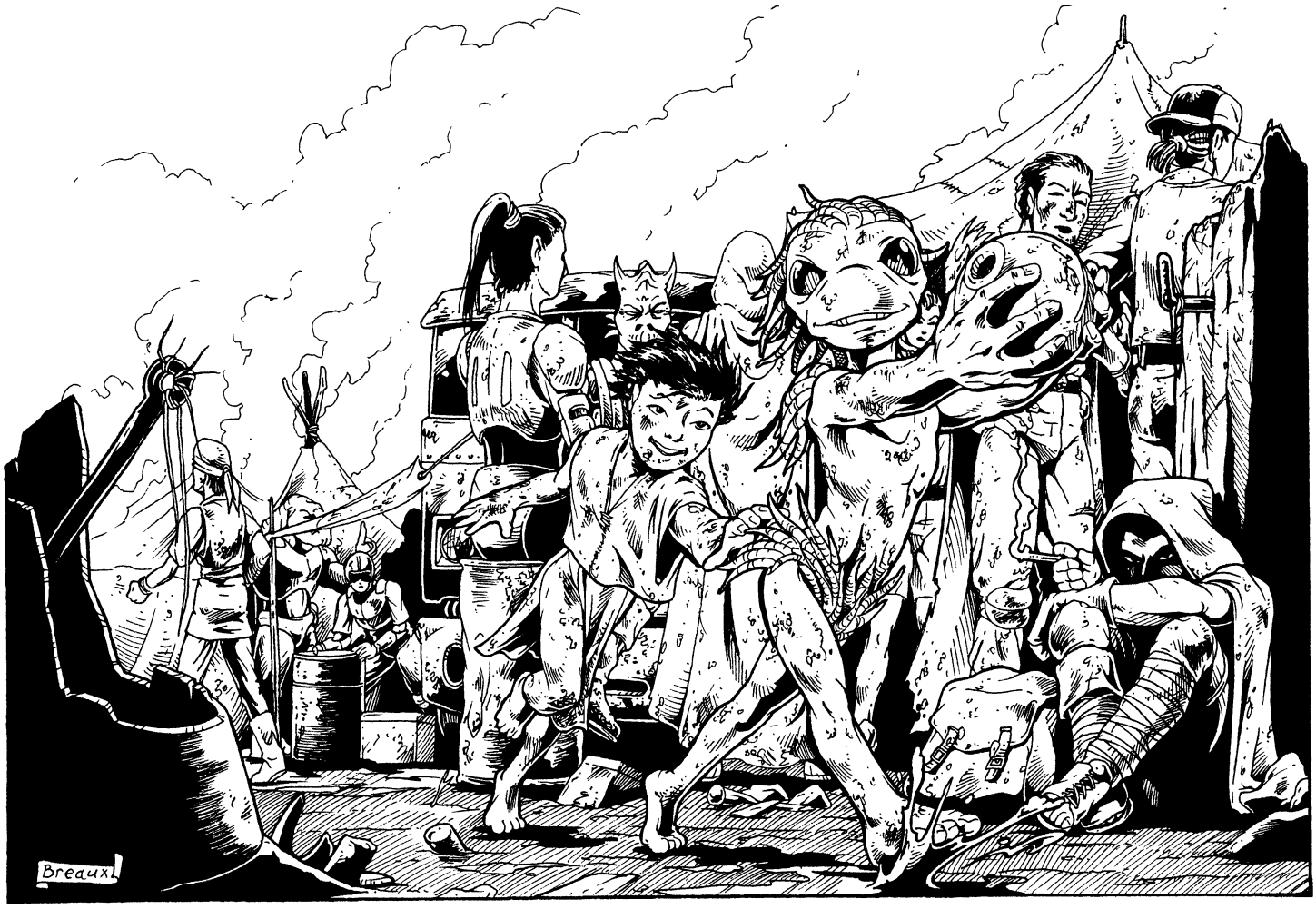

30% Fear and shun magic, and will turn in those who practice it or shelter magic users.

10-20% Don't know what to think about magic.

8-15% Possess some sort of psychic abilities.

95% Tents, huts, shacks and vehicles turned into dwellings.

5% Are one and two story buildings; half are M.D.C. structures. *None* can be considered permanent. The configuration of the mud and dirt streets, buildings and houses moves and changes regularly (every 4D6 days), with people, businesses and places appearing, moving or disappearing completely, replaced by somebody new.

Crime is rampant. Poverty, lawlessness and uncertainty reign.

There is no governing body or authority other than rival gangs, powerful individuals and CS military patrols who wander the Shanty Town 'Burb 2D4+8 times a day. It may also be patrolled or visited by the police from the fortress city, but only if the 'Burb is suspected of harboring culprits responsible for crimes or troubles in the city.

Shanty Town 'Burbs are investigated and tossed by the CS authorities, military and police, every few days, and they are likely to knock apart 2D4x10% of it every month or two. Whenever the CS troops want to make an example of someone, D-Bees or practitioners of magic and those known or suspected of associating with either group are targeted (and usually killed in the streets).

The farther one gets from the inner core of the fortress city and the Old Town 'Burbs, the more wild, lawless and deplorable conditions get. The Shanty Town 'Burbs are the largest of the three types of 'Burbs and almost always dilapidated garbage heaps where the poor and newcomers gather. They are infamous for their wildness, lawlessness, and deplorable conditions. The majority are divided up into sections ruled by gangs, criminal organizations or powerful individuals (Juicers, 'Borgs, psychics, practitioners of magic, merchants, etc., good and evil). Some are even controlled by monsters lurking in the shadows where they pull the strings of their human puppets. Since there are no formal laws or official ruling body, anarchy prevails and the level of violence, crime, corruption and mayhem can change dramatically from one Shanty Town neighborhood to the next – often without warning. Most Shanty Town 'Burbs are considered sprawling, lawless dens of iniquity where visitors can purchase all kinds of contraband and lose themselves in the masses. Thus, they are havens for fugitives, runaway slaves, bandits, practitioners of magic, D-Bees, monsters, spies, and adventurers, as well as terrorists and enemies of the Coalition States.

The smallest Shanty Towns are little more than a gathering of strangers and nomads. Most of these "little villages" are composed of tents and ramshackle buildings made from scraps and the gutted husks of vehicles. These can have as few as 20-100 people and are the most likely to be temporary dwelling places that fall victim to roaming gangs, thugs, bandits, monsters, disease, or the Coalition Military. These places never have large, permanent structures nor attract merchants, although a smuggler, traveling show, Cyber-Doc or con man may temporarily set up shop.

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However, most Shanty Town 'Burbs are sprawling affairs that rather resemble a tent city, refugee camp or the packed parking lots of a massive pre-Rifts sports stadium for the Super Bowl – with vehicles, tents, campsites and people everywhere going on for miles.

Lexicon of Slang in the Suburbs

Black Mark: As in, "has a black mark," meaning he is marked by the Black Market and wanted for capture and questioning or marked for death!

Black Shop: A business owned or run by the Black Market and probably offers contraband and illegal services or knows who does.

'Burb: A town or city of *squatters* outside a large Coalition city, typically a fortress city like Chi-Town, who hope to petition the State for residence in the fortress city.

Burbie: Somebody who takes up residence in a 'Burb. Also see "Reject."

City Rat: A general term for youths and gangs of youths who are technophiles (love technology and cybernetics) and who know the city better than most. Many are computer hackers, information dealers, runners and small-time crooks.

Cyber-Snatchers: Roving gangs of murderers who target people with bionics and rob them of their cybernetics, usually killing their victims in the process.

D-Bee: Short for "Dimensional Being," typically referring to any humanoid or bipedal alien from another world.

Dead Boy: Typically refers to soldiers in the Coalition Military, so named for their black and skeleton motif body armor, and their habit of shooting suspects and troublemakers "dead."

Dead Head: A Coalition soldier or police officer willing to take bribes (money, favors, goods, etc.) to look the other way – i.e. a "dead head" who sees nothing. The more serious the offense the more costly the bribe.

Dog Boy: The Coalition's famous canine troops – part dog, part human.

Downsider: A term that refers to residents of the big city who live on one of the lower levels.

From Beyond the Rift: Typically refers to someone who came through a dimensional portal/Rift from another world or dimension. May be a "D-Bee" or a supernatural being or creature of magic.

Grunger: A resident of the big city, but one who is a lowlife involved in a gang or with crime, City Rats or the 'Burbs or Burbies.

I.C.: Identification Coding for psychics. All psychics living in the Coalition States, including those in the 'Burbs, are supposed to participate in the Psychic Registration Program (PRP) in which they get an Identification Code (bar code) and I.D. implant.

Lawman: A police officer or sheriff that is NOT affiliated with the Coalition States, i.e. a sheriff from a kingdom outside the CS.

Mage: A generic term for any practitioner of magic, but usually refers to some sort of *spell caster*. Thus, a Necromancer or Shifter would be referred to as such, while a Ley Line Walker, Warlock, Mystic, and other spell casters (often including Techno-Wizards) are a "mage."

NTSET a.k.a. Nut Set: An elite division of "psychic police" and "monster hunters" within the ISS. Sometimes referred to as "psychic police."

ISS: The ISS – Internal Security Specialists – is the corps. of lawmen, police, inspectors/detectives, monster hunters and psychic police officers who maintain law and order in the big cities and fortress cities of the Coalition States. They sometimes come into the 'Burbs in pursuit of a perpetrator or to investigate the occasional high-profile crime in the 'Burbs (typically when it involves someone from the city). **Note:** See **Coalition War Campaign** for complete details on this CS organization, along with NTSET and military personnel.

ISS 'Specter: An Internal Security Specialist *Inspector*, basically a detective or FBI agent.

LL or Low Leveler: Another term for residents of the fortified city, but one who lives on the lowest levels. An elite status that many Burbies would love to achieve (at least from their point of view).

Reject: Someone who has applied for citizenship in a fortified city and has been rejected. The rejection of a city application is usually permanent and irrevocable, but many Rejects stay to live in the 'Burbs, and many still cling to their dream of life in the big city if only they could find some way to prove themselves worthy. The term "Reject" is sometimes used for ALL inhabitants of the 'Burbs, especially by ISS and Coalition Military troops.

Stoolie or Stool Pigeon: An individual who makes a living or regularly earns favors from the CS or other organization by providing them information about people, places and goings-on in the 'Burbs. A City Rat who is a Stool Pigeon is known as a "Roof Rat" or "Rat Fink."

Work in the 'Burbs

The denizens of the 'Burbs survive by using either using their brawn or their wits, wheeling and dealing. Everything and everybody has a value and a price if one knows where to look or how to pitch themselves. Those with skills or natural abilities have it easier and manage to eke out a modest to good living, the rest do the best they can. A full 50% live in abject poverty, a third only slightly above poverty, while the remaining 17% do quite well.

Some find work as adventurers or mercenaries, but most manage by scavenging what they can and getting piecework as laborers for the CS. The vast majority of work comes from the factories, loading docks, farms and other unskilled positions at the fortress city and neighboring CS cities, towns and farmlands. The nature of most work available is the kind of backbreaking labor and disgusting jobs that the city folk would rather not do themselves, so they hire out "Burbies." In this regard the inhabitants of the 'Burbs are reminiscent of the migrant workers of pre-Rifts 20th Century Earth.

Less honest work also abounds, including earning a living as a stool-pigeon/informer/snitch, lookout, private eye, bodyguard, runner (delivery person), thug, petty crook, thief, forger, smuggler, con artist, assassin, spy, smuggler, and information broker (mainly acquiring and selling information of interest to the CS

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concerning subversives, crime and enemy agents operating against the CS).

There are numerous power bases operating in the 'Burbs, the Coalition Government/Military and local CS city authorities/police being only two of them.

The Black Market has a strong presence in the community, quietly running money changing and money laundering operations, body-chop-shops, weapon dealerships, smuggling rings (CS weapons, magic items, ancient artifacts, books and similar *contraband* outlawed by the CS), drug cartels, secret libraries (outlawed by the CS), gambling, prostitution, and racketeering, as well as some legitimate businesses including vehicle garages and repair shops, among others. The Black Market has its tentacles in every major operation in the 'Burbs, criminal and legitimate, but its presence is subtle, below the surface, making waves only when the prize or the potential loss or threat are great enough. Consequently, the Black Market cares only about the "big picture" and big operations, ignoring small-time crooks, pawnshop operators, visiting merchant traders, independent thieves, mercenaries, City Rats and assassins, as well as the tin-plated "lords of the streets."

The Lords of the Streets – Street Gangs and Crime Gangs. Street and crime gangs usually dominate or lay claim to a particular neighborhood as their "turf" or kingdom. This "turf" can be two or three square blocks to several city blocks, but is usually under one mile (1.6 km). While both types of gangs tolerate and accept independent City Rats, lone operators and the Black Market (although they resent it), they do NOT tolerate *each other*. This means a neighborhood dominated by a gang will belong to either a "street gang" or a "crime gang," not both. As a result, gang wars and skirmishes over "turf," "respect" or "what's owed," are a weekly occurrence somewhere in the 'Burbs. A skirmish may break out because one gang sees a rival gang as disrespecting or challenging them, stealing their clients, stealing from them, disregarding their boundary (i.e. coming into another gang's turf), and similar slights and grievances. These kinds of feuds, vendettas, retaliations and saber rattling are frequent and violent, but seldom deadly. *Gang wars,* on the other hand, occur when one gang (or a new gang) decides to *take over* all or part of another gang's turf, and always leave bodies laying in the streets.

Anybody living, working, operating or even visiting a gang's little urban kingdom will have to deal with them as the de facto "local power." Even if the gang's turf is part of a larger, recognized township with an official mayor, lord or ruling council, individuals must still make good with the "gang" or pay the consequences. Visitors can expect to be asked to show the gang respect (perhaps even a public display of respect or support), and may be "shaken down" for tribute/bribe/payoff, or be forced to cooperate (share information, do the gang a favor, provide a service for cheap, etc.). The consequence for defying these thugs is to earn an enemy who never forgets a face or a slight, and who *will* seek retribution. Violent retribution such as breaking kneecaps, smashing fingers, brutal beatings, and robbery of everything one owns, public humiliation, being framed for the street gang's crimes and murder. While one can often delay the inevitable by avoiding that street gang's domain, if ever caught by a gang member or if ever caught back in that gang's domain, the offending party can expect the worst.

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Street Gangs tend to be smaller, less organized and more driven by emotion than crime gangs. Its members are predominantly young toughs who believe they can grab respect and power through muscle, cunning and violence. Most are involved in criminal activity such as selling drugs, armed robbery, mugging and running numbers, but do not have much in the way of a true criminal organization. For most street gangs, these wild punks commit crimes of "opportunity," meaning they are quick to respond to opportunities like snatching a parked hover car with a window left down, robbing a store of its latest shipment of goods, robbing a drunk or jumping a pair of adventurers, shaking down/extorting money out of visitors, etc., but don't have a criminal organization that plots or maintains an ongoing criminal enterprise. The advantages street gangs have is they are incredibly mobile, have a fiercely territorial claim to a neighborhood, and their intimate knowledge of the streets, and foolish fearlessness. **Crime Gangs** on the other hand treat crime as a *business.* While they may seize an opportunity, they generally do so only if it is a big score. Crime gangs are much more organized and methodical. A typical gang will operate 1D4+1 of the following: drug den, gambling hall, house of prostitution, smuggling ring, body-chop-shop, organized band of thieves, forgers, killers, or thugs, as well as engage in local racketeering. Most crime gangs have "connections" with the Black Market and may deal with them regularly. Some may even run neighborhood Black Market operations, splitting the take 60/40 (with the gang getting the short end). Despite their organization and career attitude, most crime gangs are comparatively small-time crooks.

Independents. An independent can be an individual or small group (2-8) of any O.C.C. or combination of O.C.C.s who are not allied to the CS or any established faction within the 'Burbs. While an independent may deal with or take a temporary job from any number of gangs, business people, City Rats, foreign governments, D-Bees, the Black Market and even the CS, they are NOT official agents of or loyal to any organization or government. They are independent operators who work for *themselves* and deal with whomever offers them the best opportunity for the moment. The most obvious independents are *adventurers, bounty hunters, vagabonds/drifters* and *mercenaries*, but any "freelancer" whether a man at arms, practitioner of magic, scholar or adventurer can fit the bill. As a rule, independents are ignored by the CS, Black Market, gangs and other power brokers in the 'Burbs unless they happen to cross interests or represent a problem or a threat. When this happens, an independent must watch his back and may want to leave the 'Burbs until things cool down. Otherwise, he (or they) may disappear permanently, have an accident or be killed or imprisoned (the latter mainly applies to the CS). **Note:** Independents (particularly City Rats and out-of-towners) are often *used* as pawns, flunky-hirelings and cannon fodder by those in power at the 'Burbs, including wealthy individuals, business people, rebels and cultists.

City Rats. Arguably the most "hooked in" independent operators in the 'Burbs are the City Rats – computer whiz kids, hackers, snoops, thieves and information brokers. Information in the 'Burbs can be a valuable commodity and City Rats specialize in finding, selling, trading and sharing it.

The general City Rat O.C.C. is found in the **Rifts® RPG**, but depending on the "Rat's" choice of skills and anarchist/criminal pursuit, he will earn him or herself a more distinctive "tag" (name) on the streets of the 'Burbs. Each of the following slang names represents the City Rat's orientation and specialty on the street.

"Hack Rats" are City Rats who specialize in computer operation, programming and hacking. They also usually know communications skills and may run a pirate television or radio station (limited to only 1D6 mile/1.6 to 9.6 km range), or rumor mill. Many Hack Rats also have some skill in picking locks and breaking and entry (prowl, climb, etc.).

"Maze Rats" or *"Runners"* are often City Rats and young Rats in training who know the streets, alleys, roof tops and hiding places like the back of their hand. They know the quickest and safest (as well as the longest and most perilous) routes throughout the 'Burbs. Their intimate knowledge of the streets (typically specializing in 1D4+2 different 'Burb communities) means they know "everybody" in the 'hood, and are willing to make "deliveries" from one person to another. These "deliveries" may include anything from drugs and contraband (book, magic, etc.) to money, information and simple letters. There is no postal delivery system in the 'Burbs, so Maze Rats fill the void as messengers and mail delivery people for hire, and cheap too, as little as a credit or two or a bit of food or soft drink if a simple delivery, 10-60 credits for something that is contraband or in a dangerous part of town. **Note:** All Maze Rats always have the following skills counted among the skills selected: Running, Climbing, Surveillance Systems/Tailing (with an extra +5% bonus on top of the +10% all City Rats get) and Streetwise (with an extra +10% bonus that is ONLY applicable to the 1D4+2 specific 'Burb communities the Maze Rat is intimately familiar with).

"Pack Rats" don't just collect and horde bits of seemingly minor or worthless information and items, but also gather and work in a close-knit group or "pack." Such packs are always at least *half* City Rats but may include mages, thieves, spies, D-Bees or just about anybody who is committed to the group. Most are close friends who work as a team for their own common agenda, often just to find stuff out, spray paint walls ("tagging"), petty theft and causing mischief and having fun at the expense of others. Working as a team makes them highly effective. Average size of a "pack" is 1D4+4.

"Gutter Rats" is the slang designation for the most violent and criminal oriented City Rats in the 'Burbs. These are Rats whose skills focus predominantly on breaking and entry, stealing, spying, mugging, and fighting – will have Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin and two W.P.s, typically W.P. Knife or Blunt and W.P. Energy Pistol. They are generally the meanest and most ruthless of the City Rats.

"Roof Rats or *Rat Finks"* are City Rats who work alone or in pairs known to lurk around spying on people and selling that information to local gangs and/or the Coalition States. These "snitches" are considered the lowest of the low, and are generally hated by everybody, including other City Rats, including Gutter Rats, who think Roof Rats give them all a bad name. As pariahs, they keep to themselves and have no loyalty to anybody (typically Anarchist, Miscreant or Diabolic alignment).

Cults. Worshipers of demons, dark alien gods and other strange groups frequently get a foothold in the 'Burbs. Most of them try to capitalize on the plight of the impoverished Burbies,

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luring them into the cult with promises of success, wealth or revenge. A few death cults, witches' covens and actual demons and the occasional vampire are regularly uncovered in the 'Burbs. So far, all have been isolated, small-time operations preying upon the dreams of the innocent and the greed or cruelty of the wicked.

There are also *political groups* and subversive movements that effectively function as cults or small guerilla cells. Political cultists typically target a particular group of people, government, practice or philosophy for acts of protest, rebellion and, more often than not, malicious acts of vandalism, extortion, violence, murder and terrorism. The 'Burbs are, of course, the perfect base of operation for rebels and terrorists with a bone to pick against the Coalition States, its Emperor, government and policies. Some are outspoken radicals who speak out against the CS, others work quietly, while still others are militant rebels or terrorists out to topple the government or destroy the States. These types of hate groups and anti-Coalition cults are numerous in the 'Burbs and the most actively chased down by the authorities.

Tolkeen Retribution Squads are the latest militant groups to invade the 'Burbs. Most seek revenge against the CS for crushing the Kingdom of Tolkeen. These are among the most driven and violent of the political groups. Their goal: To strike at the Coalition States' heart of government, namely the fortress city of Chi-Town, and make her people tremble. As a result, there are many factions who hope to penetrate CS security, make it inside the fortress and assassinate Emperor Prosek, his family, and key members of the government and military. In the meanwhile, they are stirring up trouble in the 'Burbs, attacking CS patrols and causing problems in the Old Town 'Burbs.

Not all "cults" are dedicated to evil, religion or politics. Some are simple gatherings of D-Bees who share a common origin, faith or lifestyle. Other "cults" are gatherings of people branded as *outlaws* by the CS but who are little more than educators and philosophers with opposing views or ideas. They include practitioners of magic, unregistered psychics, historians, Rogue Scholars and Rogue Scientists who are forced to go "underground" because their beliefs, powers or very occupations make them "dangerous undesirables." The act of teaching the "average man" how to read and write is a serious crime in CS territory. Educating or harboring a D-Bee is a crime punishable by death, and teaching anyone (true) history that conflicts with *official CS propaganda,* as well as speaking against the Coalition States or its Emperor, are all rebellious acts of derision punishable by hard labor or death. That is why Erin Tarn is a wanted criminal in the CS. In fact, just about anything that flies in the face of the Coalition Government is branded as dissension and squashed, or at least they try to squash it. The writings of Erin Tarn, for example, though illegal contraband, are easy to find and acquire most anywhere in the 'Burbs other than the Old Towns. True, most 'Burb inhabitants can not read, but there are enough who can read to them, and many like just to own a copy because Erin Tarn is a symbol of truth and courage – an ordinary person just like them who has risen to defy an Empire. Ironically, New Town and Shanty Town 'Burbs are infested with Rogue Scholars and Rogue Scientists breaking the law by teaching history and mathematics, and reading to anybody who will listen. The practice of magic is another area of study that must be done in secret and often results in the creation of small groups and brotherhoods the Coalition labels as dangerous "cults."

Religious cults make money through the donations from its members. They may also sell religious items, and provide special favors or services such as healing, guidance counseling, marriage rites and other ceremonies. Nonreligious groups, like scholars/teachers, often accept donations from those they educate or help, but may also charge a small fee and/or food or room and board in exchange for their services. Rogue Scholars and Scientists are typically advocates of *learning*, and travel the broken lands trying to teach humans and D-Bees about the planet they live on, its past and the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic. Practitioners of magic typically offer discreet magical services such as healing, curing disease, chasing away evil entities, building and other things where a magic spell or special ability can make a difference. On the other hand, they may also to act as magical thugs or mercenaries agreeing to use their magic to rob, steal, extract revenge, punish or destroy. Like most everyone else, a mage charges for his services based on what needs to be done, the personal risk involved, and the difficulty of the task.

Cults sometime hire adventurers, mercenaries and individuals for protection and special assignments (building, spying, theft, acquisitions, escort, assassination, etc.).

The Coalition Military and local city police (ISS and NTSET) are constantly on the lookout for subversive cults, individuals and terrorists. Stomping out cults of any kind whenever they catches wind of them, treating all of them with near equal disdain and brutality.

Some notable businesses common in the 'Burbs

Armorer (Black Market & Independent): A number of shops and outfits in each type of 'Burbs offer repairs, patching and upgrades (increase M.D.C. by 20%) to Mega-Damage armor. They also sell and make "homespun," non-environmental M.D.C. armor out of scraps and unconventional materials (typically have 35-50 M.D.C. and sell for 10,000 to 25,000 credits). The best and most reputable Armorers are found in the Old Town 'Burbs. Most can also make minor repairs to weapons and machines.

Body-Chop-Shop (Black Market): Buys, sells and installs new and "used" cybernetics and can perform partial reconstruction and full 'Borg conversions, as well as repairs, cleaning, maintenance and upgrades, usually with no questions asked. Many are associated with Cyber-Snatchers, murderous gangs who trawl the New Town and Shanty Town 'Burbs for easy targets to attack, subdue and chop off their bionic parts or remove cybernetic implants. These killers don't care about hurting their victims, so they are brutal about it, often maiming or killing their victims.

Body Fixer: A Doctor of Medicine and surgeon. There are some clinics and doctors who service the people of the 'Burbs, but the richest and most successful Body Fixers are *underworld* figures who cater to a criminal clientele who have a need for secrecy and the credits to pay through the nose for escaping the notice of the authorities. Most New Town 'Burbs will have at least one secret hospital-safe house (costs 5000 credits a day,

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double or triple if the patient is "hot") and a dozen Body Fixers and Psychic Healers who are willing to do their work discreetly, without questions. The best and most careful of these medical doctors are in high demand, trusted and wealthy.

Bootlegger: Makes, buys and sells all kinds of homemade whisky, vodka, beers and wines. May also sell "brand" mass market brands that are probably stolen.

City Rats: See the description of the various types in the previous block about the 'Burbs.

Drug Dealer: Traffics in illegal substances of all kinds, including drugs, medicine (always in high demand and short supply in the 'Burbs), poisons, and herbs (including those for magical use). May be independent, a member of a criminal gang, or a Black Market operation. Roughly one quarter sell the drugs and paraphernalia needed by Juicers (the helmet, collar and injection harness, etc., as well as specific replacement drugs required for Juicers).

Drug Den (Black Market): A drug den is a place where the user can not only buy from a variety of available drugs, but where he can also zone out and "crash" after getting high. The most established and long running drug dens are house or hotel-like setups in which there are dimly lit, incense filled rooms with cots, couches and/or pillows on the floor where one can crash with as few as a dozen fellow drug users or as many as 2D4x10. The best will offer private rooms for the cost of 40-60 credits per day. Security is fair but lax, unless a private room is rented. A drug den can also operate out of a tent, private house or the back of a van or truck. Such places are typically found in Shanty and New Town 'Burbs.

Fight Club: A roaming troupe of fighters, often comprised of Juicers, Crazies, Quick Flex Aliens, and other fast and strong D-Bees who engage in fighting matches with ordinary folks and visiting adventurers. Challengers who win their fight are given half the purse from the gate (i.e. paying attendees) which is usually 400-800 credits, but the real money to be made is in the side betting. These bouts take place every day someplace in the New Town and Shanty Town 'Burbs; never in Old Town. They are never to the death, though accidents do happen and all participants fight at their own risk.

Fortune-Teller: Always popular, fortune-tellers are especially so in a place like the 'Burbs where living conditions are terrible but hope runs high. Half are frauds, half are the genuine article (psychics with Clairvoyance and other suitable abilities or spell casters with Second Sight and Oracle). Prices are always higher from the genuine article and will cost hundreds if not thousands of credits, while charlatans and amateur tarot card readers cost 30-100 credits or the equivalent in trade. Some charlatans also offer elixirs, herbs and charms that promise to bring the user a clear head, calm and insight for an extra 100-300 credits. Found all over Shanty Town 'Burbs, to only a slightly lesser degree in New Town 'Burbs and only the oldest and (allegedly) most reliable (and most expensive) in the Old Towns.

Gambling Hall (Black Market): All types of 'Burbs, even Old Towns, have at least one gambling establishment with slot machines, wheels of chance, and games of cards, dice, skill, numbers and even races and/or fights between small animals.

Gladiatorial Arena: Even though the CS frowns upon gladiatorial games, half the *New Towns* have a "sports" arena where all types of sports are played, including Juicer sports, boxing, wrestling (including Juicer and Crazy competitions) and other competitions that come as close to gladiatorial style games as possible. Meanwhile, illegal gladiatorial fights, some to the death and some involving psychic and/or magic wielding opponents, are held in the Shanty Town 'Burbs. So are dog fights and other brutal competitions. One of the Old Town 'Burbs has a race track for horses and another, a race track for hovecycles, race cars and other vehicles.

Healer (Psionic or Magic): The psychic or magical equivalent of the Body Fixer. Sometimes one needs something more akin to a miracle than a surgeon to survive, or doesn't have weeks to recuperate and needs instant healing, or does not want the scars. That's when they seek a psychic healer or practitioner of magic who can heal. Then again, some folks just prefer psionic or magical healing, or find them more reliable and trustworthy; certainly there aren't medical "complications and malpractice" to worry about. That's why these services charge steep prices and are organized by the Black Market. **Note:** There are "independent Healers" who charge considerably less or who will trade a healing for some other service, but the Black Market frowns on it and tries to prevent it, forcing such individuals to be extremely discreet and conduct any healing favors or trades very, very quietly behind closed doors. Those who try to operate an ongoing business of healing without working through the Black Market and giving them a sizeable cut, will pay the consequences, probably requiring a healer themselves, if not a morgue, when the Marketeers are done with them.

Only registered psychics with the PRP can get a license to practice psychic medicine in the 'Burbs, but must follow legal guidelines and can NOT accept clients on the Coalition's list of Enemies of the State, including known rebels, wanted fugitives, Rogue Scholars and Scientists, practitioners of magic, D-Bees and any nonhuman. Such licenses are typically only given to registered psychics based in an Old Town 'Burb. Most others operate illegally and do so very discreetly.

Juice Shack (Black Market): Full service facility for Juicers, including a Body Fixer on staff who specializes in Juicer augmentation. All Juicer drugs and equipment are available as well as "getting Juiced" (slang for the procedure that turns somebody into a Juicer), and Juicer Detox. Prices are reasonable, except for the last two. However, being tied to the Black Market, the Juice Shack can usually find a would-be Juicer a "sponsor" who will pay for the procedure, provided the newly created Juicer gives him 2-3 years of loyal service under his employ (often a branch of the Black Market is the sponsor, but they also have connections with rebel organizations, mercenary companies, cults and others in need of a Juicer enforcer or agent). Detox is strictly cash and carry. Juicer augmentation is illegal in the Coalition States outside of limited application in the CS Military. If a Juice Shack is discovered it will be closed down (unless the CS officer/soldier making the discovery can be bought off or terminated before he can blow the whistle). Moreover, these are expensive operations to run, so Juice Shacks are incredibly secretive and discreet, sometimes moving to different locations on a regular schedule, and are uncommon. If one is to be found, it will be in a New Town 'Burb or out of the back of a truck in a Shanty Town 'Burb.

Medical Doctor: Underworld Medical Doctor. See Body Fixer and Healer.

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Mercenaries: Mercenaries, adventurers, sorcerers and guns for hire are found everywhere in the 'Burbs; most of them looking for work. Whether they are as good as they say they are is another question entirely. The 'Burbs are full of young toughs and adventurers looking for action.

Mercenary Agent: An individual who represents one or more mercenary companies or adventurer groups for hire. He can also help connect independent mercs and adventurers with clients looking for individuals with their talents. The agent's cut, 10-15% of the group's take for the assignment.

Operator Den: These are garages controlled by independent Operators who build, repair and soup up vehicles and other types of machinery. Work is usually fast, good quality and reasonably priced.

Orphanage: With all the hardships and skullduggery of the 'Burbs, not to mention life as an adventurer or mercenary, an alarming number of children are orphaned. Consequently, at least one or two of the Old Town and New Town 'Burbs will have an orphanage – humans only. CS authorities sometimes take infants and toddlers from these orphanages and give them to parents inside the fortress city. Rumor has it, they really take these children for genetic augmentation and mutation experiments. The authorities deny it, but many fear it may be true.

A handful of unofficial and unsanctioned D-Bee orphan groups are found in the Shanty Town 'Burbs. These are not really an orphanage with a safe place to live, but a group of adults who try to care for the kids the best they can. D-Bee orphans who don't find a benevolent group to take care of them are likely to fall prey to heartless villains who sell them to slavers, or worse, to monsters or demons who buy them as food.

Pawnshops: There are pawnshops galore, especially in the Shanty Town and New Town 'Burbs. Not to mention merchants, street vendors and visiting traders who will buy, sell, trade and act as a pawnbroker, though they are less reliable and sometimes only in town for a few days or weeks, or go out of business, get robbed or get killed in a few days or weeks.

The typical pawn is 20% of the estimated resale value, which is usually 20% below market price to begin with (that translates into about 10% of the listed, book price). Terms of the pawn are the broker will *hold* the item for 14 to 30 days (depending on the broker). Only Old Town has well established pawnbrokers who will pay out 30% and hold the item for 60 days. During the *holding period,* the person pawning the item can buy it back for the money he was paid by the pawnbroker. After that period of time, the item belongs to the pawnbroker who can place it for sale at whatever price he wants, to anybody. It is only the rare, hard to get, magical or hotly desired contraband item that commands top dollar and can get a person 50-60% of its list value (of course the pawnbroker will sell it for two or three times that amount, and such items have a nasty habit of getting "stolen" before the holding period ends, sorry). Most pawnbrokers' terms include no liability for items that may be lost or stolen, but the most established and, dare we use the term *reputable*, will pay the victim of this loss an additional 20% of its list value in credits or 40% in trade.

Prostitution (Black Market & Independent): It's the oldest profession in the world. Sadly, the desperate women of the newer 'Burbs resort to this work. Those who are independent are typically pitiful and sickly. Black Market ladies of the night are generally healthier, prettier and cost a lot more.

Resident Mage: A practitioner of magic who keeps a low profile, works out of his house or tent, or truck, and who has established a reputation for being reliable and helpful. Most also have a reputation for having no ill will for the Coalition States.

Saloon/Tavern/Bar: Taverns and places to buy alcohol and socialize are found throughout the 'Burbs. Those in Old Town 'Burbs are usually more like English Pubs, Gentlemen's Clubs and neighborhood bars and close around two or three in the morning. Those found in Shanty Town and New Town 'Burbs are usually loud, rowdy, smoke-filled saloons where drunkenness and brawling are commonplace, and the establishment stays open around the clock or closes down for 2-5 hours in the morning between seven and noon. A few of the nicer places in the New Town 'Burbs have private rooms and lounges for gambling and meetings.

Traveling Shows, Freak Shows and Carnivals: These shows are outlawed from coming within 20 miles of a Coalition City or the 'Burbs, not that it stops them. Actually, the large shows and circuses obey that law because they are too big to conceal their presence, and defying it means an all out attack by Coalition SAMAS and other air and ground troops. However, the smaller shows, especially medicine shows, all frequent the 'Burbs and outlying towns on both sides of the CS border. See **Rifts® World Book One: Vampire Kingdoms** for information on a few specific traveling shows. Rules for creating traveling shows are found elsewhere in *this* book.

Vanguard Estates: Rumors persist that the descendants of a secret society of sorcerers who once served the Coalition States before the use of magic was completely banned in 12 P.A. still exist. According to legends and rumors, they continue to work behind the scenes, manipulating people and events in ways that will help and protect the Coalition States like a mystical illuminatti. They are said to have branches throughout the 'Burbs of North America with their main base of operations located in one or more of the Old Town 'Burbs around Chi-Town. These magical secret protectors of the CS are said to infiltrate, undermine and destroy other practitioners of magic, terrorists and dissidents out to hurt the CS. Many who live in the 'Burbs insist they are real.

Weapons Dealer (Black Market): This is one of "the" places to purchase weapons, armor and adventuring equipment. While pawnshops and independent traders will have a small selection of weapons and combat gear, Black Market Weapons Dealers will have an incredible array of product. A typical selection of products include Northern Gun, Manistique Imperium, Wilk's, and a smattering of Triax and Black Market "knock-offs."

'Burbs – Phantom Cities

The Coalition Government, never to miss an opportunity, has made the 'Burbs a weird *nonentity*. Unlike other cities, towns and communities found throughout the Coalition States, the 'Burbs are NOT recognized as a legal entity. Instead they are considered an illegal community of squatters without any claim to the land they inhabit or any of the normal rights enjoyed by the average CS citizens all around them. Desperate and/or

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blinded by the dream of paradise that life as a big city dweller promises, most people in the 'Burbs (90%) accept this legal limbo as a consequence of the path they have chosen. After all, most of these people have risked everything, including their lives, just to get here in the first place.

What this means is those who choose to live in the 'Burbs have no rights. None. Those born in the rural and wilderness areas of the Coalition States are born with the rights of CS citizenship, but they also give up those rights if they move to the 'Burbs, becoming a nebulous *nonentity* for the promise of a better life in the fortress city. Normally, any *human* born within lands claimed by the CS are presumed to be citizens and expected to accept the Emperor as their leader and the Coalition Government as the law of the land. Those who do not are considered traitorous rabble, barbarians, or rebellious malcontents and dealt with accordingly. The people living in the 'Burbs are neither citizens or malcontents, for they desire to live in the CS but in a fortified city. To get that special, elite living environment, they accept the nonexistent limbo that is the 'Burbs, where they have no value or rights in the eyes of the Coalition Government until they are accepted as a citizen of the fortress city or leave the 'Burbs to find citizenship in one of the other (non-walled) CS cities, towns or rural communities.

The fact that the 'Burbs are unrecognized as a legal township, city or community of any kind, gives the CS government and military absolute power over those living there. Consequently, the Coalition Military and local city authorities (from the fortress city) can do pretty much anything they want to the "squatters" and "rejects" in the 'Burbs. Furthermore, it is the fortress city that owns the land on which the 'Burbs are located.

All this means the local and national CS governments can harass, interrogate, arrest, beat, and even murder people and bulldoze entire city blocks if they so choose, because the people of the 'Burbs have forsaken their rights as recognized citizens. Crazy? Yeah, like a fox. The Coalition government uses the unique situation of the 'Burbs to their advantage in countless ways.

For one, it enables them to attract, keep tabs on and infiltrate scores of criminal, mercenary and opposition groups using the 'Burbs as their base of operations, as well as those groups who come to visit or trade at the 'Burbs (adventurer groups included).

For another, the Coalition's secret agents and visible CS police and army troops operating in the 'Burbs are able to identify practitioners of magic, unregistered psychics, smugglers, rebels, criminals, adventurers and other "undesirables." To help them in their task of identifying and gathering intelligence on these undesirables, they utilize a network of gung-ho informants living in the 'Burbs, all hoping to win the authorities favor to get themselves or family members "fast-tracked" into the fortress city.

Third, the Coalition Military attracts thousands of new recruits with the *implied promise* that anyone who serves in the military will *earn* themselves and their immediate family special consideration for citizenship in the city, as well as get them moved to the top of the waiting list. Of course, no such promise is ever put in writing. It is implied and understood with a wink and a nod. This practice gets them thousands of volunteers joining the Coalition Army annually. These Burbie dupes played a big role in the siege against Tolkeen and the war on Free Quebec where they served as front-line troops in both campaigns.

Fourth, the 'Burbs provide the CS with a cheap labor force living in such deplorable third-world conditions that they are willing to take almost any job at cut-rates to feed themselves or support their families.

Fifth, the 'Burbs provide a constant source of *volunteers* for all kinds of dangerous tasks, from agreeing to test new medicines, vaccines and experimental treatments to wilderness reconnaissance and spy missions.

It is also rumored that the Coalition States, particularly the City of Chi-Town, conducts secret experiments on sectors of the 'Burb population. Everything from testing the response to new propaganda to testing psychological warfare/manipulation, experimental military weapons, and even testing biological agents (plagues).

The Coalition Way is the best way

Since the vast majority of those living in the 'Burbs dream of one day being chosen to live in the great fortified city of Chi-Town or one of the other fortified Cities in the States, most believe and try to uphold many, if not all, of the same views as the Coalition Government. To win favor and acceptance, many of the squatter communities zealously practice and preach what they see as the *Coalition way*. This means most are human supremacists who are suspicious and fearful of non-humans, if not outright hateful of them. Many outspokenly chastise and rebuke nonhumans, and threaten, mistreat and attack D-Bees and inhuman monsters such as the Lynn-Srial, dragons, and others whether such beings pose a threat to them or not. They also feed on CS propaganda, accepting it as gospel and doing whatever the Emperor or CS authorities might ask of them. This is all es-

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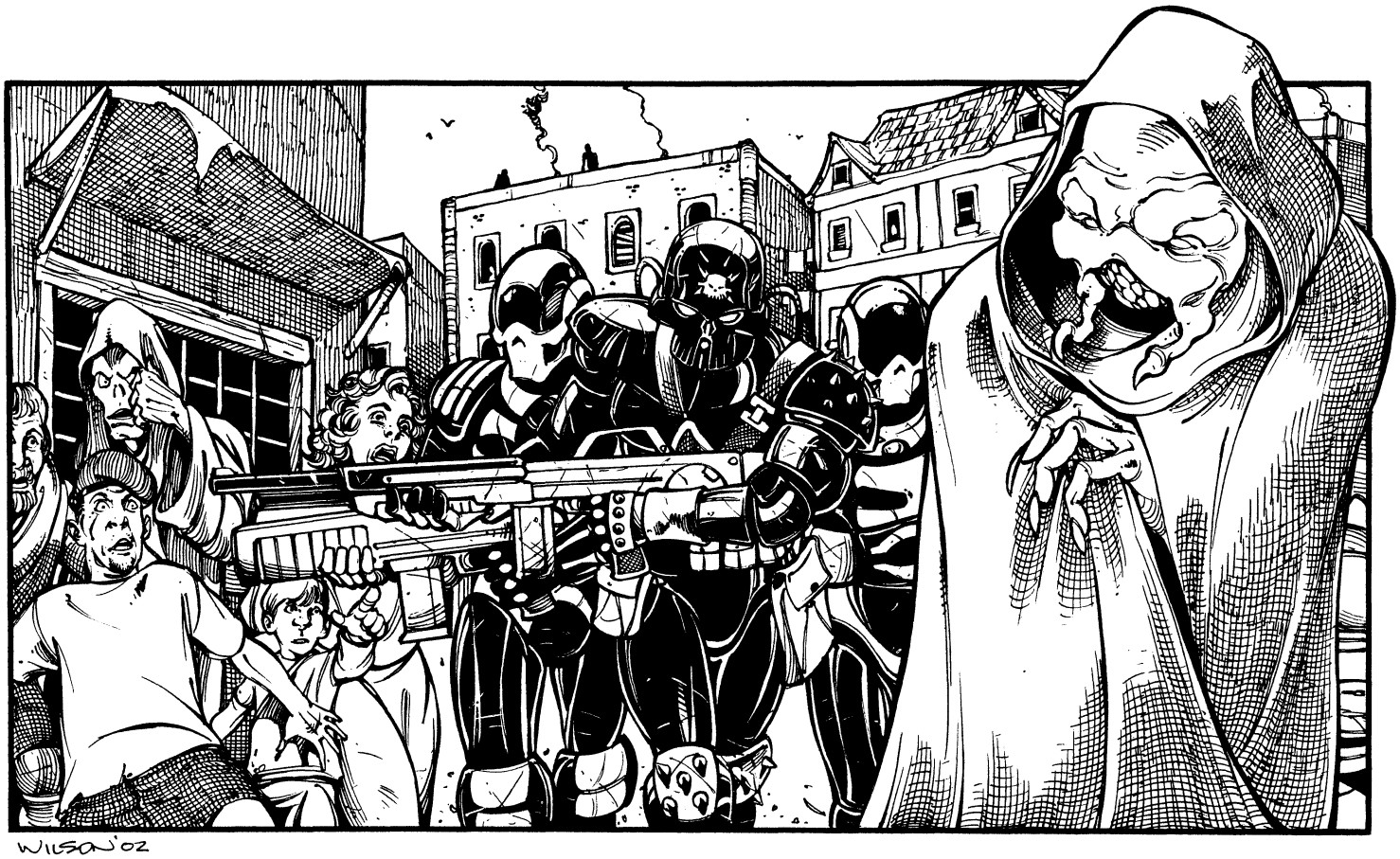
pecially true in the *oldest* and (arguably) most "civilized" and established *Old Town 'Burbs*. Consequently, the 'Burbs present the CS with thousands of spies, informers and henchmen willing to rat-out their neighbors and visitors to make a name for themselves and hopefully earn the Coalition's favor to get bumped up higher on the waiting list. The CS exploits this "hope" mercilessly.



Lawlessness in the 'Burbs

For the most part, the Coalition military and city ISS and NTSET law enforcement don't really care if the inhabitants of the 'Burbs kill each other, die from disease, enslave and mistreat D-Bees, struggle against supernatural predators or destroy themselves in any way, provided their internal conflicts and troubles do not *directly affect*, frighten or threaten the human citizens of the nearby city(s) or the security of the Coalition States. A Coalition Grunt will step over the dead body of a D-Bee without so much as a, "what happened here?" The body of a monster or demon *may* elicit an investigation to make sure there aren't *more* lurking around or building an army of worshipers or minions that might threaten the citizens of the neighboring CS communities. The body of a human is more likely to raise an eyebrow, provided the deceased is not a known vagabond, gang member or criminal. The murder of a respected citizen from the city who foolishly visited a 'Burb, even if he was a scoundrel involved in criminal or morally reprehensible activities, will always warrant a thorough investigation and may be reason for a "shakedown" or a "culling."

The flagrant and constant brutality, cruelty and injustice at the hands of Coalition officers is a direct result of the zero tolerance policies. However, the majority of CS troops and law enforcers do conduct themselves with some degree of morality and compassion. They don't, as a rule, go around pushing, beating, harassing, raping and killing just any Burbie or Reject who gets in their way. In fact, many would-be citizens cooperate with CS authorities and often turn to them when they have serious problems. Some soldiers and ISS operatives who are regularly assigned to a particular 'Burb may even come to enjoy status as *friends and protectors* of the neighborhood. The Coalition troops are most savage and relentless when hunting down wanted criminals, murderers, D-Bees, practitioners of magic and enemies of the CS. Assassins, freedom fighters and monsters from the Kingdom of Tolkeen are the newest enemies of the Coalition States to make their way into the 'Burbs to cause trouble, unrest and killing.

The CS government *demands* that the 'Burbs maintain some measure of self-enforced laws to keep order. When they do not, and the lawlessness and/or violence becomes too great to ignore, these communities are placed under *martial law* and shaken down or purged. In some cases, they are evacuated and bulldozed! Martial law or destruction of a 'Burb can also occur

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when subversive rogues, spies, terrorists, practitioners of magic, or supernatural forces are suspected of controlling it or are being supported by the inhabitants. Again, this only becomes a concern to the CS authorities when it threatens the safety of the city and CS citizens, or becomes too blatant to be ignored.

Consequently, the unspoken law of the 'Burbs is, be subtle, careful, don't cause the human city any reason to worry, don't make too much noise, don't threaten CS authorities, and don't make a fuss, because where the CS is concerned, "what they don't see doesn't bother them."

Many street gangs, cultists and organizations consider their operatives/minions to be out of line when they do something that brings the CS down on their heads. In many instances, those responsible for causing a CS investigation, martial law, or worse, a purge or retaliatory strike, are treated like pariahs, and are often driven from the community. Word of their folly travels like wildfire through the other 'Burbs so they may not be welcome anywhere in New Town or Old Town, leaving them the Shanty Town 'Burbs or the option of leaving the immediate area. If the retribution of the CS is too terrible and costs hundreds of lives or the loss of businesses and important revenues, those held responsible often pay for their carelessness with their lives.

Law and order in the individual 'Burbs, therefore, varies dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood. Whomever dominates and/or governs that particular unofficial township makes and enforces the local law. Most adopt some, if not all, of the laws of the Coalition States. Clinging to their dreams of a better life inside a fortress city they hope by adopting and using CS laws, they will somehow prove themselves worthy of acceptance into the privileged and elite citizenry of a great CS city. However, many inhabitants of the 'Burbs, especially in the Shanty Town 'Burbs, and to a lesser degree, the New Towns, bend and ignore the law. This is when individuals and groups within the community intercede and talk with the offending party and get them in line before it is too late. Social pressure from one's neighbors is enough for many, threats and boycotts of businesses (and even individuals) work for others, but some can not be made to tow the line. These individuals and groups are likely to be paid a visit from one of the local powers-that-be in that 'Burb. This may be an authority figure, elder or powerful individual or band of heroes, practitioners of magic, merchants, men at arms, etc. Ironically, areas dominated by a street or crime gang are likely to have one or more gang members "talk" or, more likely, "enforce" the peace or the law (sometimes imposing a "permanent" end to troublemakers, spies and loudmouths). A few New Town 'Burbs (and most Old Towns) may even have an acting law enforcement/police agency, lawman, or a champion to enforce the law, keep the peace and defend that 'Burb.

CS Zero Tolerance

Although the Coalition government has accepted the existence of the 'Burbs, they are not thrilled by their presence and have established some harsh policies concerning them. These policies are designed to keep the 'Burbs weak, submissive and non-threatening. They also give the CS the right to intercede, invade, and attack the 'Burbs to protect their own interests without formally declaring war or having good cause – the slightest suspicion can incite the Coalition to take extreme action and measures. The inhabitants of the 'Burbs must accept these conditions as realities or face the wrath of the Coalition Army.

1. The inhabitants of the 'Burbs are *not* citizens of the allied States. Their problems are not the concern of the Coalition States. Consequently, they enjoy none of the rights, privileges or protection of the CS. They are entirely on their own. Whatever hardships befall them is not the concern of the CS. This hard policy has allowed deplorable living conditions, poor sanitation, disease, malnutrition, crime and violence to claim the lives of thousands of people every year without the CS lifting a finger.

2. The 'Burbs are unauthorized and unrecognized communities that have invaded the Coalition States. Its people have no rights, no claim to land, and exist in a political no-man's zone. The inhabitants are undesirable, Rejects or squatters who are *non-entities* in the eyes of the Coalition. The CS does not acknowledge any government, ruling body, organization or leader that may rise from the 'Burbs. Any declaration of independence or sovereignty is an act of war!

3. Violence and insurrection against the Coalition States, its people, property and holdings will not be tolerated. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

4. The harboring of nonhumans, enemies of the allied States and/or criminals wanted is an act against the CS and will be considered an act of war. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

5. The establishment of a militia or military is not allowed (gangs and small groups of mercenaries or champions don't count). To do otherwise is an act against the CS and will be considered an act of war. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

6. The practice of magic is forbidden. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

7. The study, practice, teaching, and distribution of forbidden knowledge of magic is illegal and will not be tolerated. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

8. Use of unauthorized and illegal technology, including bionic reconstruction, M.O.M. conversion (creating Crazies), Juicer augmentation, genetic alteration (mutation and superpowers), Cyber-snatching and similar will NOT be tolerated. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

9. The worship of supernatural monsters, demons, intelligences and the inhuman in general, is illegal and will not be tolerated. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

10. The harboring of nonhumans, including D-Bees used as cheap labor or slaves is illegal and will not be tolerated. The CS *will* respond accordingly. All D-Bees should be reported to the CS for capture and extermination.

11. Affiliation with or support of Coalition Enemies, including Tolkeen, the Federation of Magic, Naruni Enterprises, the Pecos Empire and others is considered an act against the allied States and cause for war. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

12. Rights and authority of the Coalition States supersede all others!

13. Coalition States authorities, in its sole discretion, shall use the military, ISS and any other force or measures to protect its people, property and holdings; keep the peace, and enforce some measure of law and order upon the 'Burb communities as it sees fit. The CS has the right of search and seizure, and complete jurisdiction over the 'Burbs regarding matters of investigation, crime, defense and national security. The CS *will* respond accordingly.

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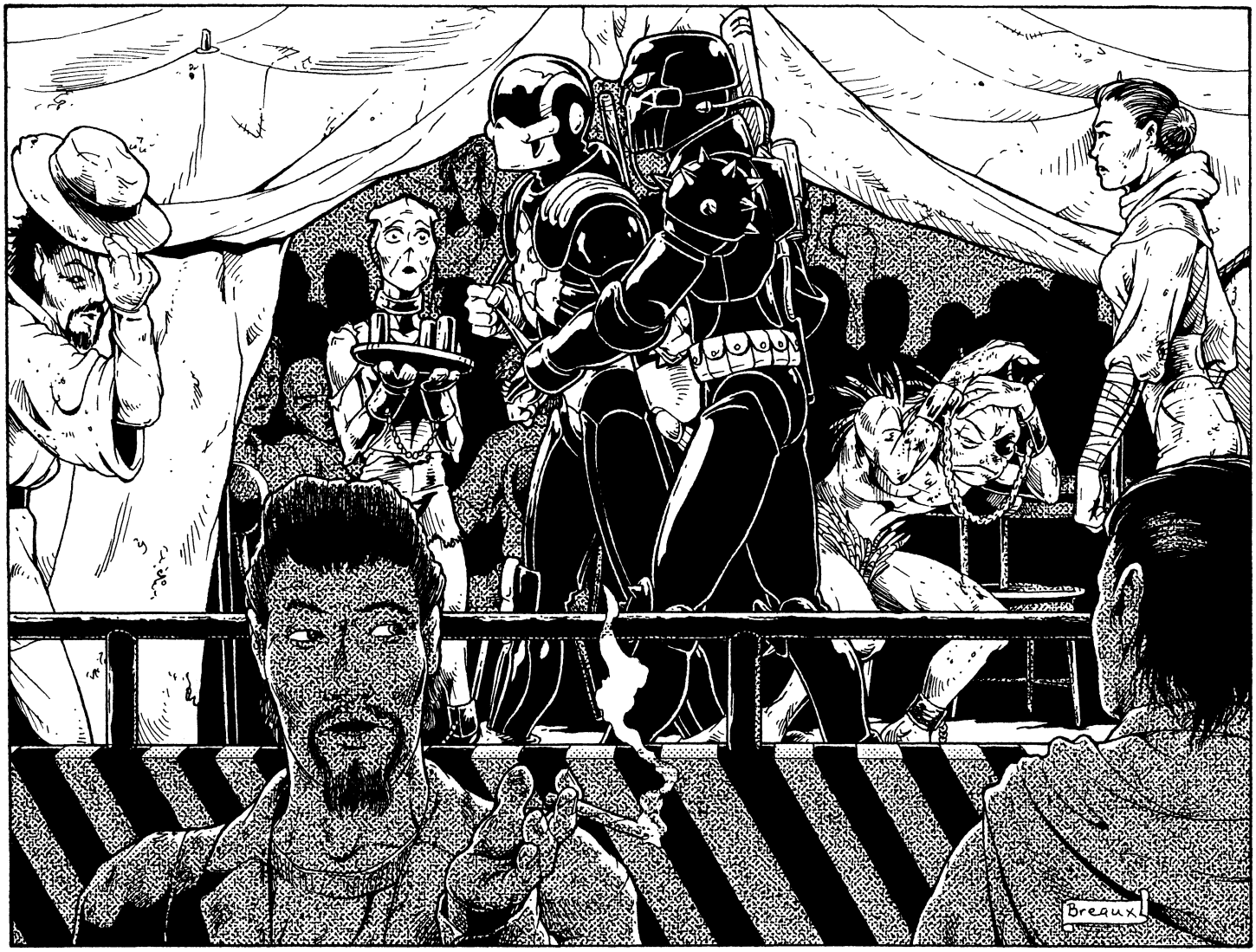

Coalition Intervention

The Coalition Military or government can tear a 'Burb down and/or harass its inhabitants whenever they want to. Remember, the inhabitants of the 'Burbs are not CS citizens and their communities are not recognized as any sort of political entity, so they have absolutely no rights! Thus, the CS Army can enter a 'Burb, burst into a home or business, trash the place, threaten any of its people, and beat, rape and even kill inhabitants with impunity. Any resistance on the part of the "Burbies" or attacks leveled against the CS authorities can only instigate serious trouble. Riots, destruction of a neighborhood or wholesale slaughter are the least of the probable aftermaths of a confrontation with the CS Military or ISS.

The worst is **martial law**. Both the Coalition Military and the ISS can impose and enforce its own rule and domination over a 'Burb that is considered to be openly hostile or harboring dangerous refugees, supernatural monsters or practitioners of magic. Martial law brings a strong police presence and strict, often brutally enforced laws, restrictions, curfews and regulations. The people living in a 'Burb under martial law are subjected to constant harassment, search and seizure, and interrogation. The CS authorities have absolute freedom to conduct themselves any way they see fit, and can use any degree of violence to keep the peace and/or eradicate the trouble. A Coalition grunt can beat or kill a man, woman or child with little fear of reprimand from his superior, unless such incident was extremely unwarranted and causes a commotion. As usual with all things regarding the 'Burbs, the quieter incidents are kept, the less likely there is going to be involvement by CS superiors. High visibility and outrageous atrocities cannot be ignored and the soldier may find himself court-martialed or have an accident while on duty in the 'Burbs.

Even when the 'Burbs are *not* under martial law, both the Coalition Military and ISS maintain a presence via frequent patrols, investigations and shakedowns. **Shakedowns** are surprise raids to "flush some of the rats into the open and see what we get." Such raids are typically directed at rogue scholars and scientists, practitioners of magic, nonhumans and organized crime, particularly brazen Black Market operations. **Purges** are full military invasions that can devastate entire neighborhoods, see the slaughter of dozens, the imprisonment and/or routing of hundreds and, occasionally, the obliteration of some or all of that 'Burb. **Cullings** are similar shakedowns and purges, but with the express purpose of cutting out and removing – culling them from the rest of "the herd" within the 'Burbs – a specific faction of people; i.e. practitioners of magic, psychics, a particular gang, monsters or D-Bees. In the case of the latter two, the culling may start with one specific type/creature in mind, but generally degenerates to include everybody who falls into that

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category. Anybody who opposes the action or gets in the way is rolled over, and probably killed.

The Coalition's Six Big Problems with the 'Burbs

Note: The Military and ISS both have jurisdiction in the 'Burbs and share the responsibility of maintaining some measure of order. This include SAMAS and Sky Cycle fly-bys, regular street patrols and shakedowns. The primary focus of the ISS and the CS Military presence in the Burbs is the protection of CS citizens from the denizens of these foul refuges of the desperate and unwanted.

1. Bureaucratic Red Tape. The CS government has difficulty screening and processing acceptable applicants into the great cities. There is currently a *three year* minimum waiting period even for desirable applicants; much longer for most. Only the most desirable and those with connections or vast wealth to properly grease the wheels of bureaucracy can acquire citizenship and residence in *less than a year.*

2. Refugees & Rejects. There are thousands of human refugees who have been *rejected* as "undesirable," but they refuse to leave!

Undesirables, commonly known as "Rejects," include people who have a criminal record, are known to associate with D-Bees or practitioners of magic (or have in the past), are too old, sickly, lack social skills and/or have no work skills suitable for life in the high-tech cities. The latter two categories are typically peasant farmers, unskilled laborers and vagabonds from across the wilderness with the dream of a better life in the fabled wall-cities.

Many of those rejected for citizenship have no place else to go, and/or see life, even in the 'Burbs, as better and safer than other alternatives left to them (which gives one a good idea of just how terrible and frightening life can be outside the Coalition States). Consequently, they stay and struggle to eke out an existence in the 'Burbs. Many live straight and narrow lives with the hope of being reconsidered for citizenship, even though this secondary list currently has a waiting period of 11 years! Others join the CS military to prove their loyalty and to get on the *short Reconsideration List* (only a six year waiting period). Sadly, while they try to prove their worth in the Army, their families are left to make a life in the squalid and dangerous 'Burbs, where any accusations of wrongdoing can lead to a longer waiting period and even exclusion of that family member from reconsideration. This leads to the next big problem with the 'Burbs, crime.

3. Crime. Human applicants forced to wait years for their chance to be considered for CS citizenship and/or city residency often find themselves stuck in the Burbs with little resources at their disposal and surrounded by rough and roguish people (human and inhuman). The unskilled, penniless, and often socially retarded "Rejects" are in an even more desperate state. For both of these groups, turning to *crime* is one way to make ends meet – for some it is the only way. Consequently, crime runs rampant in the 'Burbs, particularly robbery, mugging, smuggling, drug dealing, the sale of contraband, prostitution, gambling, blood sports, carjackings, vandalism, assault and battery, Cyber-snatching, rape and murder.

Street gangs also represent serious danger. Gangs are active in establishing and protecting their "turf" as well as engaging in criminal activity. Some gangs rule half of the Burb. Visiting mercenaries, Juicers, Crazies, Headhunters, D-Bee gangs, bandits, practitioners of magic, young toughs, hoodlums and supernatural predators also offer their share of trouble.

4. The Black Market is run by an efficient cartel of organized crime bosses and their gangs. It represents the biggest and most powerful criminal organization operating on the continent. It has a strong presence in many sections of the 'Burbs and typically has its hand in 40-60% of all illegal activities in the community, particularly the operation of body-chop-shops, prostitution rings, gambling, blood sports arenas, smuggling, and the sale of weapons, drugs and other illegal contraband.

5. The dissemination of dangerous ideas. The unorganized mass of refugees and hopefuls living in the 'Burbs attracts all kinds of opportunists and parasites. In addition to con men and crooks, it also attracts *Rogue Scholars, Rogue Scientists, Bounty Hunters, Mercenaries, practitioners of magic, D-Bees* and people of all kinds with dangerous ideas and views of life. Although not criminals in the usual sense of the word, the education of the masses is forbidden by the CS, so the scholars and teachers who dare to defy such edicts are branded as criminals, brutalized by the police and often executed on the spot! *Erin Tarn* is effectively the patron saint and hero of most scholars and free thinkers. She has also earned the position of Enemy Number One on the Coalition's most wanted list!

6. D-Bees and Demons. The anarchy, lawlessness and opportunities of the 'Burbs also attract the inhuman. D-Bees desperate for work and better lives for their families have become the illegal, second-class citizens in a shadowy underground. Many will work for a third of what humans will work for, and will take the most degrading and dangerous jobs. Others are involved in crime or prey upon the humans who persecute and take advantage of them. Still others are vagabonds, drifters, drunks and bums.

Then there are the supernatural predators. The 'Burbs are wonderful hunting grounds. Without a formal army or police presence to combat them, hunting is easy and prey plentiful. Like the other denizens of the 'Burbs, these fiends have learned that keeping a low profile means they are less likely to be hunted. Preying on D-Bees for example, rarely warrants investigation. Literally hundreds of D-Bees could be disappearing from the streets and back allies of the 'Burbs and the CS authorities couldn't care less. However, extend the hunting grounds beyond the 'Burbs, into the city or surrounding CS territories, and attack a CS citizen, and the authorities will come down upon the villain(s) like the wrath of god. Preying upon innocent humans, particularly women and children, or notable members of the 'Burbs, will also get the Coalition Military or ISS involved in tracking down and eliminating the threat. Likewise, a perceived "infestation" of demons and supernatural beings will bring the CS authorities to investigate and exterminate the demonic vermin. From time to time, the Coalition Military and/or ISS will engage in purges to flush out and exterminate D-Bees and monsters. Humans believed to willingly worship, serve, or protect supernatural or alien beings are typically slaughtered right along with their inhuman masters as traitors to humankind.

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Note: See **Rifts® World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** for complete information about the Coalition Military, ISS police force, Psi-Net, weapons, vehicles, equipment and common types of D-Bees (including the N'mbyr Gorilla Man, Quick-Flex Alien, Tirrvol Sword Fist, Trimafore, Kremin Cyborg and Vanguard Brawler.) **Rifts® New West** and **Rifts® Canada** also present a variety of D-Bees common to North America.

'Burb Adventures

By Kevin Siembieda

1. An ornery CS Patrol is going through town rousting and harassing anybody who looks at them the wrong way. D-Bees and Rogue Scholars, Rogue Scientists and mouthy adventurers get it the worst. The soldiers actually avoid conflict with 'Borgs, Juicers, Crazies, Cyber-Knights and other especially tough characters, ignoring them even if they make a remark. However, any mage, dragon or shape changer is attacked, pursued, and if possible, slain. These bullies claim to be investgating "trouble" and looking for "suspicious characters," but truth be told, they are just in a foul mood and feel like flexing their muscles by harassing people before moving on to the next victims of their indiscriminate ire.

2. Standard CS Patrol. Stay out of their way, don't look suspicious and don't say or do anything to antagonize them and they will pass by without incident. These soldiers are on their standard run, bored, and couldn't care less about the 'Burbs. They just want to finish their run and get back to base. They even ignore D-Bees and practitioners of magic unless there is trouble.

3. CS Raid. Anywhere from a squad (10) to a platoon (40) of Coalition troops appear from around the corner, laying siege to a particular building and a particular group of characters. Their targets may be criminals, rebels, D-Bees, practitioners of magic, scholars, etc. – but not the player group. Anybody on the crowded street who does not move out of their way gets bowled over, shoved out of the way, run over or shot! Startled, stunned and frightened ordinary people, women and children are all in their path and may need rescuing. However, any character who draws a weapon or obviously uses magic will become a *target*. These shock troops do not take any chances and anybody who may be a threat is "neutralized."

Likewise, anybody who tries to protect or help those under attack are presumed to be part of the "gang" and attacked, and arrested for interrogation or killed. Anybody who criticizes or complains about or to the CS troops is beaten to shut them up, or arrested and interrogated "with the rest of the scum."

Note that the skirmish may have additional repercussions. Fallen combatants are vulnerable for robbery, a dropped weapon or item is available to be snatched up unnoticed if one acts quickly, and one of the targets who slips away from the conflict can be followed. Additionally, the fight may damage, collapse or cause a fire in one or more of the neighboring buildings. Collateral damage the soldiers don't care about.

Any character that helps a Coalition soldier will be noticed, thanked and given a slap on the back, probably nothing more. However, the G.M. may chose to have the soldier feel beholden to the character, compelling the trooper to help the character in some *small* way (a bit of information, a warning, a bit of advice, lets him go, buys him a meal, etc.).

The CS raiding party may be simple, armor clad grunts and Dog Boys with one more powerful soldier among them (in power armor, a CS Cyborg, Juicer or psychic) or mixed group of grunts, Dog Boys and heavy forces (includes power armor, SAMAS, Sky Cycles, 2-4 small robots or one or two large robots like the UAR-1, etc., even one or two tanks) depending on the situation and who they are after.

4. Tolkeen Suicide Squads in the 'Burbs. Since the beginning of the Tolkeen War, the 'Burbs around Chi-Town have become even more dangerous than ever, with frequent terrorist attacks by pro-Tolkeen groups, followed by harsh crackdowns by Coalition forces. Now that Tolkeen has fallen, these Tolkeen supporters have shifted their focus, from terror tactics to doing as much damage as possible to the Coalition military and infrastructure. This has brought several dozen *teams* of Tolkeen spies and suicide squads into the 'Burbs (perhaps as many as ten, 4-10 man squads). These "Retribution Teams," as they call themselves, engage in the following types of attacks and missions.

Ambush/Crossfire. Ambushes are typically surprise attacks targeting CS 'Burb patrols, both Coalition Soldiers and City Law Enforcement Officers (NTSET, ISS, Dog Boys, etc.), as well as off-duty military personnel, off-duty police and city dwellers come to visit friends and relatives in the 'Burbs (or to shop for contraband, drugs or other illegal goods and services). Seldom fight to the death and flee as soon as they lose the advantage.

Crashing Booby-traps. These are typically trip-wire traps that cause a part of a building to collapse (does 1D6x10 M.D.), stairs to cave-in (1D6x10 foot/3-18.3 m drop that does 1D4 M.D. per 20 feet/6 m), a half ton metal beam or chunk of jagged metal comes swinging down (does 3D6 M.D.), or a ton of debris to come crashing down (does 4D6x10 M.D., plus 4D6 Hit Point damage to those *inside* body and power armor, and the victims are 01-90% likely to be pinned under the debris and must be dug out; takes 2D4x10 minutes). Again, CS soldiers and police are the primary targets. Typically one or more Tolkeen Retribution Team members may lure the Coalition soldiers/police into the trap, but they usually disappear a few moments before the trap is sprung.

Death Squads. Gunmen similar to the ambush scenario only these fanatics fight to the death.

Suicide Gunman. Fanatics who realize they can never defeat the Coalition States. It is a realization they can not live with, and they have ordained to kill themselves, taking as many of the enemy with them as possible. Most work alone, in pairs or in small groups of 4-6 members.

These are the murderous madmen who appear in a mall, square, store, a border point of the fortress city with a gun and start blasting away, killing and injuring as many as possible before being gunned down himself. Will always kill himself to prevent being captured. Most are only first to third level.

Suicide Bomber. Typically a lone assailant (sometimes two) with M.D. explosives strapped to himself, or driving a motorcycle, hovercycle, car or truck bomb and detonating it while still inside. Damage for vehicular bombs is typically 5D6x10 M.D. with a blast radius of 1D6x10+40 feet (15.2 to 30.5 m); 2D6x10

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for M.D. explosives strapped to an individual with a 30 foot (9 m) blast radius.

The primary target of suicide bombers are Coalition troops, CS Army vehicles, guard posts, fortress city checkpoints and entrances, and places where they can do the most damage. The Old Town 'Burbs are frequently targeted because they are seen as the next best thing to actual city dwellers and the lap dogs of the Coalition Government.

Deep Cover, Suicide Squads (large team). Only a few large Suicide Squads are known to exist, each with 10-20 members and maybe another dozen sympathizers and supporters, but they are the most organized, well funded, cunning and dedicated to taking out large groups of the enemy (ideally scores of them if not hundreds). These professional guerilla fighters and terrorists are not afraid to die, and expect to die someday for their cause. However, they "live" to hurt the enemy as often and for as long as possible, engaging in multiple acts of arson, sabotage, assassination, and big, mass murder bombings and raids. In fact, it is such groups who often enlist, instruct and supply the other types of suicide squads and Retribution Teams.

Their primary targets are Coalition troops, CS Army vehicles, guard posts, fortress city checkpoints and entrances, but they see all CS citizens, including those who inhabit the 'Burbs, as the enemy with a death mark on their head, and regularly go on shooting, bombing and arson sprees throughout the 'Burbs: Old Town, New Town, and Shanty Town alike. Currently, arson is way up, and a full *half* of all fires that occur in the 'Burbs are attributed to these deep cover Suicide Squads. **Note:** These groups are also constantly trying to get inside the Fortress City where they hope to kill top government officials and military officers, maybe even Joseph Prosek II or the Emperor. May have ties to criminals and criminal groups.

5. CS troops on a tear looking for Tolkeen Terrorists. A dozen squads (10 troops each) are smashing through the 'Burbs searching for Tolkeen Retribution squads. They are questioning anybody they think looks suspicious or nervous; which involves beatings, threats and blackmail. Any "suspect" or "suspicious looking character" who runs or refuses to cooperate is chased down and either beaten within an inch of his life or gunned down on the spot (75% of the time it is the latter). Likewise, 75% of any known criminals and fugitives encountered are terminated whether they have any involvement with terrorists or not; the rest are taken captive, interrogated and sentenced for their crime (often a fate worse than death).

Each CS Squad has one Military Specialist or ISS Officer, one 1D4+2 level Major Psychic (four squads have 1D4+2 level Mind Melters), two Dog Boys, four Grunts, and two CS Juicers or CS Cyborg Soldiers, or a pair of SAMAS.

6. Secret Coalition Undercover Agent disguised as an adventurer is looking to cozy up with some adventurers, mages or mercenaries to find out if they are in league with Tolkeen Retribution Teams, the Federation of Magic, or involved in some other plot against the CS. This agent will be (roll percentile dice) 01-25% CS Special Forces, 26-50% CS Commando, 51-75% ISS Intel Specter, or 76-00% CS Psi-Battalion (1D4+4 level Mind Melter or Psi-Slayer or Psi-Ghost).

He is not out to destroy or undermine the group (for now), but to find out if they are working against the Coalition States. If not, he or she will note everything about the group and their "mission," I.D. them all as completely as possible and file a full report when it is advisable, but otherwise does nothing against them. In fact, if the infiltrator is allowed to join the group, the agent will prove to be a reasonably good and reliable teammate, and especially, um, vigorous in conflicts against nonhumans, dragons, demons and practitioners of magic.

If the group is engaged in subversive activities against the Coalition States, the agent will set them up for capture or termination by a larger Coalition military force.

7. Secret Coalition Undercover Agent disguised as an adventurer trying to sniff-out practitioners of magic, shape changers and D-Bees for extermination whether they are working against the CS or not. Whenever they are found, the agent will call in reinforcements to waylay the group and destroy the offending party(s) and capture their human associates for interrogation and punishment for affiliating with the enemy (typically 5-15 years of imprisonment and/or hard labor). This agent will be (roll percentile dice): 01-25% CS Special Forces, 26-50% CS Commando, 51-75% ISS Intel Specter, or 76-00% CS Psi-Battalion (1D4+4 level Mind Melter or Psi-Slayer or Psi-Ghost).

8. Bounty Hunter on the prowl. The 'Burbs are prime hunting grounds for Bounty Hunters, as well as a place to spend money, resupply, catch up on the latest news and gossip, learn about the latest CS bounties, and get a little rest and relaxation. Fugitives, especially those wanted by the CS, must be constantly on alert for Bounty Hunters.

9. Bag Man. A trusted criminal henchman whose job it is to "hold and transport" valuables and money/credits for his boss. Typically carries the "take" from some illegal operation (gambling/numbers racket, prostitution, etc.) from the place of business to his boss's home or business office. Knocking over a Bag Man spells trouble as the crime boss he serves will most definitely seek out the perpetrators and extract a terrible vengeance. The lucky ones get off with only getting their legs broken or their hand crushed, and all their valuables taken. May serve a criminal gang or Black Market.

10. Pick Pocket. The Shanty Town 'Burbs are crawlin' with 'em. Did the character (or playing group) just lose money/credits/valuables, or was it something crucial or secret? If so, they may want to try to get it back before it is too late.

11. Grab Man. A two-bit punk (male or female) who lives on the street and makes his money grabbing purses, bags, sacks, backpacks, briefcases, suitcases, saddlebags, and such and running off with them. Typically a 1-3rd level Bandit/Thief, Grunt or Vagabond with a good P.S. and Speed (sometimes a City Rat Runner or Gutter Rat). May or may not have any Rogue/Thief skills, because brute strength and fast legs is all this type of criminal really needs. Often a solitary crook or operates as a pair or small band of 3-5. May be completely independent or a member of a street gang.

12. Thieves who specialize in mugging people and rolling drunks. A small band of 1D4+2 low level hoods (1-4th level), attacking drunks and people they think they can take.

13. Cyber-Snatchers. The many Body-Chop-Shops in the 'Burbs have the common practice of not asking questions as to where one *acquired* "used" cybernetics and bionics, even if they are still dripping with blood. This encourages the gruesome theft of bionics by Cyber-Snatchers who literally chop, cut and rip bi-

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onics and cybernetic implants out of the bodies of their (sometimes still living) victims. These ghoulish thieves abound in the Shanty Town and New Town'Burbs. They are typically armed with energy pistols, Neural Maces, Vibro-Blades, and M.D.C. chainsaws! Some represent brutal street gangs, others are independent groups of (4-6) miscreants always on the prowl. Even most crime gangs and the CS are nauseated by these murderers. Cyber-Snatchers sometimes associate with or work for Necromancers.

14. Rogue Dog Boy (or other CS mutant). A mutant mutt that has "gone feral" and quit the CS to live its own life. May be a member of a street gang, crime gang, or mercenary group, or be a true lone wolf, or be looking for a group of adventurers to join. Most retain a high regard for human life. All are wanted for termination by the Coalition Army.

15. The tail. One of the player characters notices he (or the group) is being followed by one or more individuals (perhaps a scout with 1D4 others trailing at a discreet distance behind).

The questions are, who and why?

The possibilities are considerable. Could be a Coalition soldier or patrol, CS Special Forces team, Psi-Net, NTSET, ISS, a CS informant or spy who has found the character (and/or the entire group) to be suspicious and is observing them. Similarly, such a CS agent(s) may have recognized the group or someone in the group as a wanted fugitive, or suspects them to be Tolkeen Freedom Fighters or agents for some other enemy power (Lazlo, the Federation of Magic, Atlantis, etc.). Likewise, groups that are famous as heroes or liberators, or notorious for something (like having fought on the side of Tolkeen during the war), as well as groups that include a number of practitioners of magic, dragons, and/or D-Bees, are likely to be considered dangerous and worth observing for a while. Characters who act strange or suspicious or do something to garner public attention may also be observed by the CS (or Black Market or other interested parties). Those deemed to be a threat to the Coalition States or the city may be watched continuously, questioned, asked to leave, detained or attacked and killed.

Other possibilities include a bounty hunter, lawman pursuing a criminal or escaped prisoner, monster looking for a tasty morsel, a spy, bandit(s), street gang, old enemy, kin to an old enemy looking for revenge, an old friend/acquaintance (who may be a fugitive himself), a drug dealer or shady merchant looking to make a sale or acquisition, a City Rat gathering or looking to sell information, a curious kid, a shy fan of the "heroes," a D-Bee looking for a friendly face (i.e. his own kind), a character in need of a hero or hired gun, somebody who needs something the group has, or any number of stool-pigeons and informants who keep their eyes peeled for anything that might earn them a credit or a favor.

G.M.s, this could be the start to any number of possible adventures.

16. Vigilante hero. This guy or small group (2-5) is a self-appointed protector and do-gooder of this particular 'Burb. He/they intercede to protect the innocent and good people of the community. This might include helping, hiding and rescuing the player characters if they are good guys or involved in helping one or more people in the "hero's town." Conversely, this vigilante will challenge and oppose anybody he/they believe to be a crook, villain or outsiders bringing trouble to his burg.

The vigilante hero(s) may be any O.C.C. or R.C.C. and may be "superhuman" or quite ordinary (but resourceful, clever and courageous). Such a hero will have a secret base of operation, local friends and contacts, a few informants, and connections with trusted City Rats. The character(s) is also likely to have clashed with the CS and may be a wanted fugitive himself. Most are larger-than-life heroes to the locals, but relatively unknown outside that particular 'Burb.

17. The City Rat's package. A City Rat approaches the player group asking for assistance. He is out of breath, covered with perspiration and nervous. He asks the group if they would be so kind to as to deliver a computer disc for him to a specific individual. He is willing to give them a debit card with 300 Universal Credits on it, and tells them that the person they deliver it to will give them another 300 credits if they tell him the disc is from "The Black Max." He insists it should be handed directly to said individual and nobody else.

If the group agrees he hands it over, putting his trust in them, and scurries off. If they refuse he apologizes for bothering them, pats one player character on the shoulder and trips and stumbles into another one of them, before running off into the shadows. A few moments later the player group will see or hear about how the City Rat they just spoke to met with a sudden "accident" at the hands of a Coalition Patrol or gang of mercenaries (or terrorists). He's dead and those responsible have already slipped into the shadows. Don't worry about the disc though, even if the group refused his request, the City Rat slipped it into the pocket, backpack or bag of one of the player characters.

What's on the disc? Take it away G.M.s, the only things for certain are that whoever wants that disc are willing to kill to get it, and they are certain to backtrack the City Rat's trail and learn that he momentarily spoke to the player characters.

18. A fight breaks out in the middle of the street between a pair or group of heavyweights (Juicers, 'Borgs, power armored warriors, dragons, mages, powerful psychics, monsters, etc.). Anybody who tries to break it up or accidentally gets pulled in will have to deal with *both* sides of the combatants, as neither appreciates the interference. If the fight is too violent, loud and destructive it will attract the attention of the local authorities, if not Coalition troops. Player characters wanted by the CS or known to be criminals or fugitives should get out of sight before they are seen.

19. A plague is sweeping through the 'Burb. 10% of the population has died and 1D6x10% are sick. Rumors: One blames the Coalition Military for the contagion, claiming they are testing biological warfare on them or that the CS is trying to cull the population of their particular 'Burb (or perhaps the 'Burbs in general). This rumor circulates every time a new illness breaks outs.

Another rumor blames the Federation of Magic. Another Tolkeen rebels who hope the plague will spread into the fortress city (Chi-Town?). And yet another blames a particular race of "filthy" D-Bees.

Truth be told, the 'Burbs, especially the Shanty Towns and New Towns, have *always* been squalid, dirty places suffering from improper and inadequate sanitation, malnutrition overcrowding and shabby housing. All of which makes a recipe for disaster. When one 'Burb falls to a virus, it often becomes epidemic and easily carries to the other 'Burbs. The average epi-

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demics will infect 1D6x10% of the sprawling 'Burb network. The most virulent infect 70-90% and kill tens of thousands. The disease in and of itself is not usually lethal, but it is the rampant malnutrition, appalling living conditions, and inadequate care, medicine and doctors that combine to kill most of those who perish from the illness.

20. Fire! House fires and arson fires are common outside of the Old Town 'Burbs. Considering the fact that most of the lesser 'Burbs are shabby, S.D.C. structures built close together and without much, if any, sewer or water delivery system, a fire can be devastating, raging out of control and burning down 3D6 city blocks before it is contained.

Right now only one of the following is ablaze (roll percentile dice). Putting it out right away will save the rest of the 'Burb. **Note:** Whether anybody is inside any of the burning structures is left to the G.M.

01-20% Burning out of control trash bin.

21-40% A burning tent.

41-60% A burning car, truck or van turned into a domicile.

61-80% A burning shack or small house; already a blazing inferno threatening to spread to its nearest neighbor any minute.

81-00% Half of a business building, garage or large house is engulfed in flame and rapidly spreading. Once the entire place goes up, the fire will leap to 1D4+2 of the buildings nearest it.

21. Grave Ghouls (or worse). The CS offers to cremate the dead at no charge to the people of the 'Burbs. This offer is made out of concern for pestilence and practicality rather than any sense of generosity. Many take the CS up on it, but others would rather have a traditional burial or don't trust the CS. As a result, the local burial ground of a 'Burb is known to have recently been invaded by Ghouls who dig up the dead and feed upon them. The local leader is willing to pay a group of adventurers, wizards or warriors to exterminate the horrid lesser demons. However, more is afoot than the presence of ghouls. Exactly what I leave to the G.M., but it could be one or two vampires just arrived to the area, a Necromancer (not ghouls) digging up the deceased for his legion of skeletons or building monstrous constructs, etc, or it could be that various Worms of Taut have infested the graveyard or something entirely different.

22. Beggar-thief. Beggars and panhandlers are found throughout the 'Burbs, especially the most impoverished ones. Most are sad cases or annoying, not dangerous. But some (30%) are first or second level thieves skilled in picking pockets, palming and concealment. They will try to snatch a purse, pouch or small item they can pawn, sell or trade away for food or other need. Characters not careful to guard themselves from such thievery will lose one or more possessions (exactly what depends on the character, circumstance and the G.M.). The most desperate (and unskilled) may simply lunge forward to grab the most obvious valuable, easiest item to snatch, or any kind of bag, sack or backpack and run off with it. The victim and his buddies can give pursuit, but the beggar-thief knows the streets much better than any visitor or even 'Burb resident who has been away for more than a month.

23. The Vanguard! A practitioner of magic, probably a Ley Line Walker, Mystic or Conjurer, takes a liking to the group and tries tagging along with them. He or she is knowledgeable about the 'Burbs and the CS. If the NPC is pushed away by the player characters, he will make another appearance at some moment of need that ingratiates him to the player group. Ultimately, this individual hopes to join the group or become a trusted "contact" and helper. The mage is really a member of the secret pro-Coalition sorcerers known as the Vanguard. His angle, to learn all he can of the group, determine whether or not they represent trouble for the Coalition States, and if so, tip off the Coalition Military to their scheme and location so that their plot is foiled, and, with any luck, they are captured or destroyed. In the alternative, the Vanguard secret agent will try to undermine the group repeatedly, again with the hope that it will lead to their undoing. The Vanguard always pretends to be two levels lower than he or she really is (typically 1D4+2 level). If caught setting the group up, the mage will never admit to being a member of the Vanguard, and if faced with psionic probes or torture, will kill himself rather than reveal any secrets about the Vanguard or their operations.

24. Snake oil Salesman. A fast-talking, crooked salesman with an angle for everything. Knows all the latest rumors and happenings in his 'Burb, right down to the time of CS patrols and the goings-on of the local street and crime gangs. He's glad to share what he knows, provided one spends enough on his worthless products.

25. CS purge! Somebody stirred up the CS and the army has been sent in to tear down that specific 'Burb. Standard procedure is to flatten 75-90% of all standing structures, gun down all opposition without mercy, exterminate any D-Bees, monsters and practitioners of magic encountered, as well as target and capture or terminate any "known enemies" flushed out into the open, and chase off all the rest. Standard troops dispatched for a purge operation are two wings of (20) Sky Cycles, a wing of (10) SAMAS (old style or Smiling Jacks), a squad of (nine) UAR-1 Enforcers led by an IAR-2 Abolisher or IAR-3 Skull Smasher, 2-4 Spider-Skull Walkers or tanks, a platoon of (40) Dog Boys, and a company of (160) grunts. These are more than enough to run roughshod over any 'Burb, including the typical Old Town. However, additional tanks, robots and troops are on standby in case of mass insurrection, magic or heavy resistance.

Note: Most residents of the 'Burbs know not to get involved when a neighboring 'Burb falls under purge or the purge will be extended to include them and any other that protests or joins the fight. Speaking of fights, typically, resistence is negligible from the people being purged. The overwhelming majority grab what they can and run for the hills or neighboring 'Burb. This makes living in or outside of one's vehicle very popular, especially in the Shanty Towns. Consequently, the invading CS troops usually make a big show of power, giving the inhabitants a reasonable number of minutes to get out before they are blasted or bulldozed under. As a result, fewer than two hundred people usually die in the purge and less than a thousand are injured. However, if the 'Burb or a key resident (gang, criminal operation, rebel camp, etc.) harbored in that 'Burb perturbs the CS to the point that it is marked for *annihilation*, EVERY last building and vehicle will be atomized and casualties will range from 50-80%! Thankfully annihilation purges are rare, occurring once every 3-5 years. However, there have been years where 3-6 such annihilations took place.

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26. Bounty Hunter or Assassin. A professional man-hunter (or small, powerful group of Bounty Hunters) has been hired to capture or kill one or two members of the group, or perhaps liquidate them all! To add mystery and confusion to the adventure, make it so the group has no idea who might be responsible. Presumably there are at least a half a dozen people the group has crossed that might want them dead. Make them find out who it is. Maybe they can make a deal or restitution that will save their hides and get the Bounty Hunter(s) off their trail. Or maybe knowing who is out to get them doesn't help and they still have to deal with this particular group of assassins. And even if they defeat or destroy this team, will others follow?

27. Find the fugitive. In this case the group is after a fugitive (individual or group) as the hired man-hunters or chasing after a bounty reward.

28. Rescue the City Dweller. Some stupid city folk has gotten his or herself kidnapped and is being held for randsom. The local 'Burb authorities are offering a 5,000 or 10,000 credit reward for the individual's "safe" return (The CS never pays ransoms). Might appeal to the player charcters.

29. Gang War. The group finds the 'Burb they are visiting to be locked in a gang war. The group could join one side or the other to help it win, except both are crooked and cruel, with neither being better or worse than the other. In the alternative, the heroes could try playing a game in which they play one gang against the other with the intention of undermining and destroying both. If they succeed, they will be in a position to step in as the new gang lords if they wanted to. Of course if they are discovered too soon, it is they who might be destroyed by one gang or the other.

30. Monsters on the loose. The CS caught wind of a Traveling Freak Show or Traveling Zoo in one of the Shanty Town or New Town 'Burbs and made a hit. Unfortunately, a dozen or more monsters escaped and have scattered into the 'Burbs. The fortified city has dispatched NTSET Psi-Hounds and agents on the job, but only because they don't want to see any city folk get hurt. These creatures will find the 'Burbs have many hiding places and its dense population provides plenty of prey to hunt. Heroes are needed to track these creatures down, and not just to protect the innocent Burbies, but before the CS thinks of using this as an excuse to purge or cull one or more 'Burbs.

31. Demons on the loose. Nobody knows where they are coming from but demons and supernatural monsters are appearing in unusual numbers. The source has to be found and plugged. The usual suspects include a handful of Shifters and a crazy mage known to dabble in summonings and opening dimensional portals, but they may or may not be the ones responsible. Could there be a random Rift someplace in or near the 'Burbs? Is this an accident or deliberate sabotage? Could the Federation of Magic be involved?

32. Federation of Magic. The Federation always has spies, both practitioners of magic and non-magical agents, prowling the 'Burbs and looking for trouble and opportunity. They are also always working up schemes to punish, embarass and hurt the Coalition States and the hated Prosek family. They are especially active in the Chi-Town 'Burbs and the ruins of Old Chicago (where there are a number of ley lines). These plots often involve hirelings, dupes and pawns. The player characters might just fit the bill.

Apocalyptic Earth

Everybody talks about the ruins of ancient, pre-Rifts cities and lost treasure, weapons and artifacts, but hardly any cities are left standing, so what gives?

The ruins of pre-Rifts cities that *are* still standing are most often found in the eastern half of the continent (US and Canada; in the south for Mexico). However, most are ramshackled

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dumps, with bare metal girders showing and the rest of the structure falling apart. Skeletons of a bygone and mostly forgotten era.

You have to remember, as of 109 P.A. (or even 101 P.A.), *The Coming of the Rifts* and the *Great Cataclysm* had occurred some 300 years ago. A good half of all cities, towns and communities in North America were pulverized in the first few weeks of the Great Cataclysm. While these details are not known to most (95%) of the people living in modern day Rifts Earth, the eruption of the ley lines caused natural upheaval on a biblical level. For those who lived through it, the planet seemed to be tearing itself apart. Earthquakes raged across every fault line. Little shakers and aftershocks measured eight on the Richter Scale and full strength quakes were off the chart. Two thirds of the world's volcanoes erupted over a three day period, including the long quiet super-volcano under most of the Yellowstone National Park. When it blew, the world had not witnessed anything like it in over 650,000 years! Simultaneously, tremors and volcanoes rocked the continent (and the world). Volcanic activity hammered Mexico and northwestern Canada. Coastal cities, worldwide, were crushed and washed away by tidal waves a mile (1.6 km) tall and traveling over 100 miles (160 km) inland! Rivers overflowed too, coastlines were reshaped, miles of land permanently swallowed by the oceans. As if this were not enough, hurricanes swept in across the Gulf of Mexico pounding that country as well as Texas and the southern Gulf States. Florida and most of Georgia were wiped from the face of the Earth, as was the Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia region of Canada in the north. Tornado Alley, from Texas to Michigan, felt the fury of 193 tornados in a single day – and the twisters continued to appear unabated for two months.

The devastation could not have been worse if 10,000 nuclear warheads were dropped on the continent.

Within 72 hours, half the country was in ruins. Other parts of the world fared just as poorly, some, far worse.

The communities that miraculously survived had to withstand hysteria, riots, plagues and invasion from hordes of alien beings and monsters that defied explanation or logic.

Somehow the survivors of human civilization knew the lines of blue energy radiating from the very earth were responsible, but it was beyond their comprehension. Magic and demons were flights of fancy, not real. Dimensional portals opening in the sky was the stuff of science fiction. Even if the technological elite and scientific brains could wrap themselves around these cataclysmic events, it still would have done them little good. The planet Earth was being purged, reshaped and reborn. There was nothing anyone could have done.

Human civilization collapsed. It is amazing that human beings managed to survive at all. The age that followed an unspecified amount of time known as the Great Cataclysm (some say a few months, others a year to ten years) is known to the descendants of the survivors as the **Dark Age**. With civilization gone and history lost, mankind fell to barbarism in less than a decade. Except for rare pockets of pre-Rifts artifacts that survived, all of human history, its splendid past, its grand creations, were quickly forgotten. A hundred years later, and only half-way through the Dark Age, all of human history that had come before was forgotten. Everything.

What cities and remnants of the past that remained were buried, destroyed or torn apart by the early survivors and used as materials to make new shelters, weapons, clothes, etc. Many old cities and towns were torn apart completely, every bit of wire, every brick, every piece of scrap metal, every article of clothing or device taken and used to build a new community in its place. Extra parts and materials were traded away or sold. Within three generations, the English language (known today only as "American") was lost as written form, but survived as a spoken tongue.

What history of the Dark Ages survived into, what Karl Prosek calls, the New Age of Humanity, is mostly myths, legends and folklore passed on from generation to generation. Most of it is vague or deals with the last fifty years, the earliest years lost. Nobody knows what brought about "The Coming of the Rifts." Not even the illustrious Erin Tarn knows for sure. Likewise, virtually nothing is know about the Great Cataclysm itself.

The pre-Rifts mythos

Most myths tell of a trio of great empires:

"The American Empire, the Canadian Empire and the Mexican Empire. Three vast kingdoms that lived in peace and harmony, together. It is said that other Empires existed across the seas in faraway places, but nothing is known of them.

"The three Empires prospered and achieved an unparalleled Golden Age of peace and wisdom. It is said that humankind was alone in the world in those days. There were no Dimensional-Beings (D-Bees), dragons, or demons. Even the gods did not tread the earth for humans were but godlings themselves able to change their appearance and make copies of themselves and living animals with *Genex Gineer-rings*. They could fly through the air, speak to one another through the air using something called the *Inner-Nexus*. Sickness and sorrow was unknown and mankind looked toward conquering both the stars and his own being."

Most myths speculate about what happened next, but some come right out and state:

"The gods looked upon humans and said to themselves, 'These mortal creatures seek to walk among us as gods themselves. This can not be.' In jealously and fear, the gods decided that humankind had to be struck down. And so it was that man was laid low. His mile high cities toppled and crushed, or washed into the sea. But the gods were not done with the upstarts yet. To teach humans humility and keep them in their place, the angry gods made the Earth into a world unlike anything humans had known before. Raising up ribbons of mystical light from the very ground, reshaping the world with magic. A magic to destroy and forever hold down human *tek-knowledge-ee*.

"To make certain human cunning would not, one day, elevate them to challenge the gods, humans would never again know the peace of isolation. And so it was, the gods called forth the *Rifts*, and from them rushed a multitude of creatures. The dragon, the Simvan, the Fury Beetle, all of demonkind, and all manner of monsters, wicked spirits, and some beings neither monster nor human – Dimensional-Beings brought to Earth to overshadow humans and keep them low."

That's what most people in Rifts North America know about the Time Before the Rifts, how the Great Cataclysm happened,

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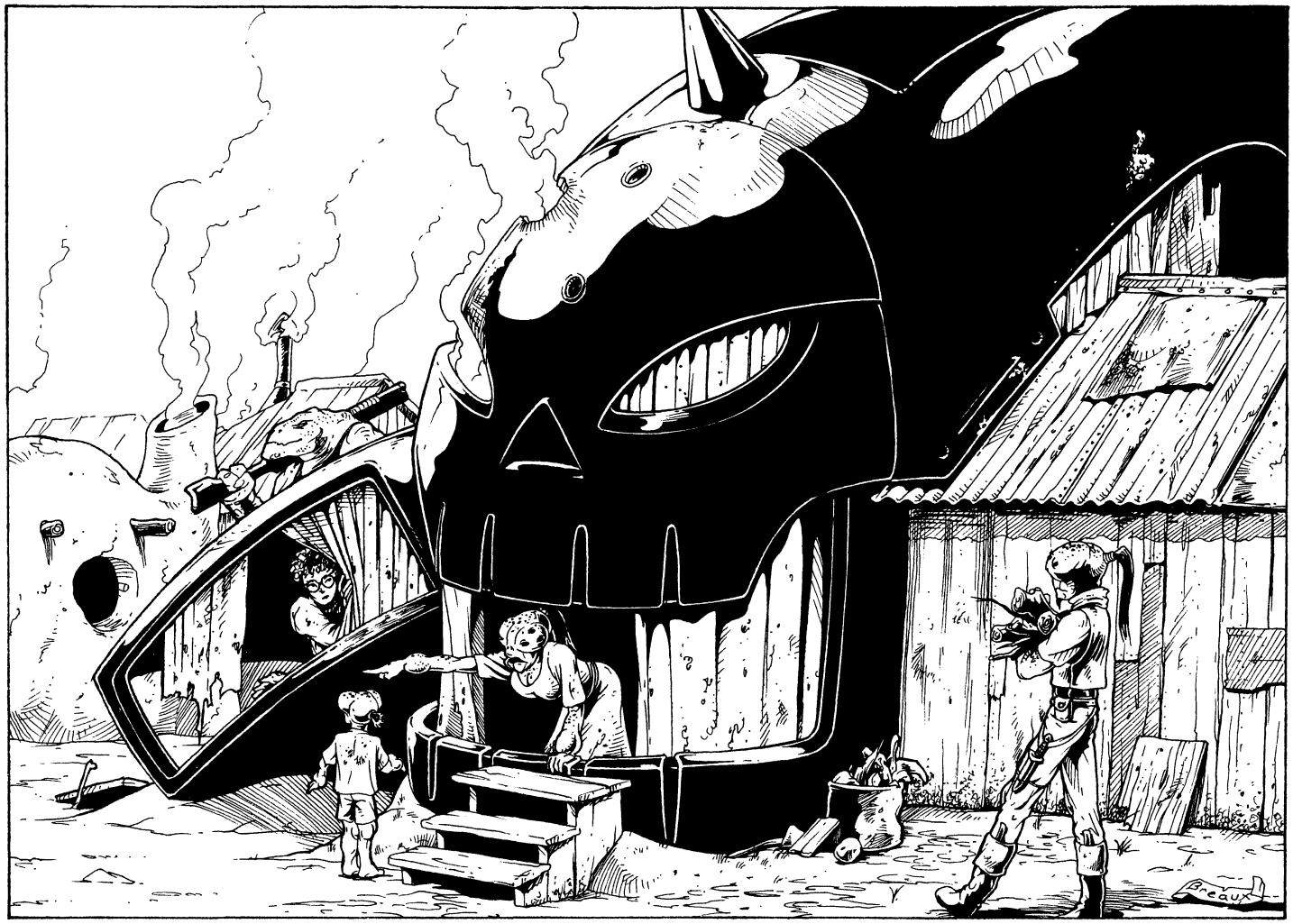
and why the world is the way it is. This story was born sometime during the Dark Age and has survived some 250+ years. Many believe it still. Not as legend, but as fact.



The Post Apocalyptic Age

The so-called Dark Age was proclaimed to be "at an end" in North America with the rise of the **Coalition States** in 33 P.A. The city-state of Chi-Town, one of the few true centers of humanity for some 70 years before the formation of the CS, had been using something it called the *Post-Apocalyptic Calendar* (P.A.). When the Coalition States were officially formed, they adopted the Post-Apocalyptic Calender and retroactively proclaimed the Dark Age had ended some 33 years earlier, when the P.A. calendar first began to enjoy widespread acceptance and use, and when humans supposedly began to "rise from the ashes of the past and see the light of the future where there was only darkness."

HOWEVER, for many people living in Rifts North America (and elsewhere in the world) little has changed over the last 300 years. Some have never heard of the Post-Apocalyptic Calendar, and have only heard tell of the Middle Kingdom calling itself "Chi-Town" or "The Coalition States." These are the lost generation of the human survivors whose descendants survived the Great Cataclysm and the travails of the Dark Age. Others are D-Bees who have come to Earth through the Rifts, and know nothing about Earth other than the here and now.

The vast majority of people are simple folk trying to carve out an existence in a harsh environment filled with marauders, monsters and unearthly magic. Most (96%) have a "trade" but can not read or write, have no knowledge of their ancestry or anything about human history other than the myths and legends passed down throughout the Dark Ages. Most live off the land as independent homesteaders, farmers, trapper-woodsmen, hunters, mercenaries, adventurers, and nomads. What communities do form are rarely planned, but come about through circumstance and just plain luck. Such was the case with the Pecos Empire, Kingsdale, Whykin, even the Kingdom of Tolkeen, and Chi-Town.

Things just happen to fall into place, the communities prosper, prosperity attracts outsiders and brings about growth; at least to the lucky ones, collapse to the unfortunate ones. The next thing anybody knows, a town, probably with an outlying community of homesteads and farms, has come into being. Sometimes that one town helps to support a cluster of towns and, provided they don't all go at each other's throats, can develop into a city-state or tiny kingdom.

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However, many wilderness communities are barely more than a trading post or one-horse town. Most have populations under a thousand. There are thousands of such places scattered across the North American continent. Blink as you pass by and you missed them. Many are miles, often a hundred miles, away from their nearest neighbor, let alone the next community.

Barbarians

A good number of wilderness people still live as **barbarians.** The most civilized conduct themselves similarly to traditional Native American tribes, the least civilized are savage warriors maintaining a ruthless existence just a notch above the caveman. Even tribes that have established crude permanent settlements made of logs, wood and salvaged scraps, live by hunting, trapping, fishing and raiding other people. Psi-Stalkers and Native Americans are frequently the only people barbarian clans and settlements regard as equals. All others are viewed with suspicion, envy or contempt, and treated as dangerous rivals, invaders and targets for plunder. Even those the barbarians consider "brothers" (i.e. other barbarian tribes, Psi-Stalkers and Indians) may be harassed, attacked and raided, though they are not usually slain as indiscriminately as all others. Meanwhile, barbarians consider Brodkil, Simvan and Xiticix to be a plague upon the land, and hunt and slay them relentlessly.

Though less than one percent of the barbarians can read, and only 5% wield magic (20% of all barbarian mages are Indian-like Fetish Shamans, 20% are Mystics, 12% are Conjurers, 5% Ley Line Walkers, 40% Warlocks and 3% other), they have a keen appreciation for magic and technology, especially those items that have an application in combat. Consequently, while clad in furs and buckskin, they also wear homespun (non-environmental) body armor, 1D4x10% of any barbarian group will wear light to heavy environmental body armor (captured from a fallen opponent in combat), typically adorned with teeth, horns, antlers, claws and fur, giving them a rather frightening, monstrous appearance. (Even in armor, barbarians like to wear fur cloaks and capes too.) At least 1D4x10+45% of all adult males (age 17 and up) will have some kind of M.D. energy rifle and one other M.D. weapon, typically a Shaman created "fetish" weapon, Vibro-Blade or M.D. pistol. Most will also carry 1-3 S.D.C. weapons. All barbarian women will usually have access to S.D.C. knives, clubs and spears, about a quarter will have a spare M.D. weapon.

An estimated 60% of all **raiders** are *barbarians.* Raiders are roving gangs of warriors who make their living (and support their clans and tribes) by stealing livestock, grain, and other foods and valuables from farms, homesteads, towns and even small cities as well as military camps, platoons in the field and traveler/adventurers. Most raiding bands are 12-40 strong, sometimes larger, rarely smaller unless the group is an advance scouting party, lookouts or splinter group. After a raid, it is standard operating procedure for the barbarian horde to divide into 4-6 smaller groups. This means anybody chasing after them must stop to decide which of the groups to pursue (allowing the others to get away), or follow them by dividing into smaller numbers themselves. Pursuers who divide into smaller groups make themselves much more manageable for the individual splinter group to evade or attack them. Raiders strike a community using surprise and hit and run tactics. They strike fast and without warning at two or more locations, one always a diversion. Such raids are usually fast, brutal and destructive. Raiders take no chances so they shoot to kill when they meet with opposition. Furthermore, they have learned that the more confusion they create, the less likely any town defender will get an easy shot at them. Consequently, Raiders strike with much howling, gunfire and destruction. They set 1D6 locations on fire and engage in mass vandalism, knocking out lights and power, and knocking down fences, freeing livestock (half of which is rustled, the rest serve as a distraction). As a result, granaries, crops, churches, schools, hotels and homes are prime targets for being set on fire, because most people will choose to battle the fires and save their livestock, food reserves, church, children or homes *rather than pursue* their attackers, enabling the raiders to get away clean. The one thing most "barbarian raiders" do not engage in is slavery. Barbarians cherish personal freedom and will not sell another being into slavery. They don't hesitate to rob, rape, batter, maim or kill, but slavery is unacceptable.

Setting down roots

Some barbarian bands are composed entirely of a single race – human or one specific type of D-Bee – while many others are mixed groups of D-Bees, or humans and D-Bees. The same is true of many little towns who may be open to a select handful of races or all people.

While a town roots itself to one place and may have a strong leader, permanent structure, homes and buildings, many are as lawless and cutthroat as any barbarian clan or gang of raiders or bandits. Furthermore, just because one puts down roots and tries to make a go of it, does not guarantee survival. Not by a long shot. *The failure rate* of most wilderness communities, barbaric and civilized, in the first two years of their existence is a catastrophic 88%! Thus, it is not uncommon for an adventurer to find a town has cropped up out of nowhere, only to have vanished six to twenty-four months later. And not just abandoned. Frequently, the people will tear down and carry away with them everything they can. Just as frequently, fire, flood, storm, raiders, bandits, slavers, a rival, adventurers, a private war, or rampaging dumb animals will raze the community to the ground. A year after a town's demise, one could be standing where its main street had once been and never know a town had existed there at all.

Barbarians and wilderness people are the average folks of Rifts North America. We don't talk about them much because their lives are pretty grim and not particularly exotic. They are not the stuff of high adventure, so instead we tend to focus on the big cities, kingdoms and Coalition States. However, such bastions of *civilization* are, however, the true rarity. Full blown cities and large towns, let alone city-states and fledgling kingdoms, are few and far between.

The humans and D-Bees of the wilderness typically live in small, rural communities of farmers, trapper-woodsmen, hunters, fishermen, prospectors, and cattle ranchers. Few towns ever exceed more than a thousand people, and most view outsiders with suspicion and criticism. Just as many arrogant "civilized" or "city folk" tend to regard wilderness folk as uneducated, unrefined and primitive "hayseeds," (and barbarians and Wild Psi-Stalkers as savages), many country folks see so-called "civilized" people as lazy, conniving, loudmouth fools who don't

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know Jack about the "real world" (i.e. life in the wilderness). They also see many "civilized/city folk" as opportunists who would sell their own mother if it put enough credits in their pockets. Of course, not everyone shares these stereotypical views, but even open and honest wilderness people regard city people (adventurers in particular) as well meaning louts who rely too much on technology or magic, who come tromping into the woods like they own the place, when that kind of attitude is likely to get a body killed.

Most wilderness people appreciate honesty, hard work, courtesy and kindness – not charity or condescension, but from the heart kindness the way one might lend a hand to help a friend or neighbor. Outsiders who exhibit these traits will be treated in kind. While many wilderness people are good, honest, hard working folk trying to scratch out a living in a hostile environment, the stereotype of the meek, simple, salt of the earth type is a misconception held by most city folk. While that description can apply to some, many wilderness people are a resourceful, rowdy, rough and tumble lot who brook no nonsense and can handle themselves in a fight. Many won't take guff from anybody, and will teach cocky or rude visitors a lesson they will never forget. Likewise, while they may not be able to read or write, or even know what a computer is, they know about life and are probably a master of some trade whether it be farming or trapping, or carpentry or whatever. Point is, every one has their strengths and weaknesses, areas of knowledge and misconceptions. Meanwhile, the worst of the lot would just as soon kill and rob an outsider as look at him.

The Dark Age lingers

As noted, nothing has changed for most wilderness folk. Even if they have heard of the Post-Apocalyptic calendar, most could care less about it. They measure time by the changing seasons, and rarely set foot more than 40 miles (64 km) from home; barbarians, tribal people and trapper-woodsmen being the exceptions, they may travel hundreds of miles from their settlement in search of prey and other resources. This means they hold onto many of the beliefs, fears, superstitions and prejudices that have prevailed for the last 200 or 300 years. Even established wilderness towns and fledgling city-states hold on to these long running beliefs.

The following are some of the most notable and widely accepted beliefs of wilderness people in North America. Unless stated otherwise, these views are held by humans and D-Bees. Remember, most D-Bees have not come to Rifts Earth by choice. Most were plucked from their native worlds, often without warning, and plunged through a dimensional Rift. These victims of dimensional magic know nothing about Earth except what they are told. Consequently, they only know about the prevailing myth.

1. The Nameless Gods. Half of all wilderness people believe the Dark Age myths about gods smiting down humankind completely. Another third believe parts of it and wonder about the rest, unsure whether it is true or not.

2. At least 65-75% of all wilderness people believe there really were gods who destroyed human civilization and that these gods caused The Coming of the Rifts and brought the D-Bees, dragons and supernatural beings into the world.

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3. Anti-Technology. At least 50-60% believe the *gods* brought magic into the world to "... destroy and forever hold down human *tek-knowledge-ee*." Consequently, they fear "technology" is dangerous and should be forsaken lest people bring upon themselves the wrath of the Nameless Gods for a second time. As a result, those wilderness people and communities who believe this way, avoid technology, hate it being brought into their communities by outsiders, and may not allow technology in their land, driving away those who wield it, and sometimes stealing and destroying it. Not surprisingly, products of technology, including energy weapons, tech body armor, vehicles and machinery are forbidden in these communities, causing the people to live in a primitive state of low technology like the early pre-Rifts American settlers or the Amish of the more modern age.

4. Among the humans and D-Bees who believe technology to be "dangerous and evil," about half believe *magic* is an acceptable alternative to technology and embrace the mystic arts. Scores of such communities are scattered throughout North America, particularly in the Magic Zone.

Even many of those who embrace magic often fear or loathe technology. They see those who use tech as stubborn fools whose blind devotion to old ways, rebuilding and clinging to the technology of the fallen Empires are a threat to all life on Earth. Some even regard Techno-Wizardry as a dangerous practice best to be used in moderation. Consequently, cyborgs, Headhunters, power armor, robots, Juicers, Crazies, and even Operators, City Rats and Rogue Scientists are seen as the *living embodiment* of "evil technology" that will bring about a second Great Cataclysm and global destruction if they are left to develop old and new technology unopposed. Many of the people and mages in the Federation of Magic ascribe to this belief to this day, and (unknown to the CS and most scholars) it was this fear that served to fuel the original conflicts between the Federation and the Coalition over one hundred years ago. The *Bloody Campaign* of 12 P.A. and subsequent conflicts have only worked to intensify the animosity, resentment and legacy of hatred between both factions. However, Lord Dunscon and many who fight to topple Chi-Town and the rest of the Coalition States, do so out of burning hatred and a lust for revenge and power rather than any belief in ancient myths or fear of the Nameless Gods.

5. About 15% of those who fear technology and the wrath of the Nameless Gods reject both *magic and technology*, and choose to live without benefit of either. However, they are the minority.

6. Anti-Magic. A good 30-40% of all wilderness people fear and distrust magic. They point out that it was "magic" that was used to destroy the old world of *tek-knowledge-ee,* and it is "magic" that is responsible for the ley lines and dimensional portals that bring demons, monsters and D-Bees into our world. The most frightened and strident believers that "magic is bad" will have nothing to do with it. They don't like it being brought into their communities by outsiders, nor its being secretly practiced behind closed doors. They are so adamantly opposed to it that many refuse to trade or even talk to those they *suspect* of having any involvement with magic. Some attack and chase away practitioners and creatures of magic, and kill any magic users who threaten or oppose them (and often just coming to town is considered a threat). Humans, and even some D-Bees, who hold this view have flocked to the Coalition States over the last 75 years, provided they don't also fear technology.

7. Demons and other supernatural beings are seen as monsters sent by the Nameless Gods to punish and torment humankind. To keep humans locked in such chaos and misery that they might never again challenge the gods. Consequently, supernatural beings are natural enemies to be destroyed. Any mortal, human or D-Bee who allies himself to such diabolical creatures is a traitor and a fool, which is why Shifters are so looked down upon. Witches even more so.

8. D-Bees are the enemy. One might think the hardships of wilderness life would bond people regardless of their race and appearance, and sometimes it does. More often than not, however, racial prejudice and fear of the unknown divides the many people of Rifts Earth. Human supremacists point to the passage from the old myth that says,

*To make certain human cunning would not, one day, elevate them to challenge the gods, humans would never again know the peace of isolation. And so it was, the gods called forth the Rifts, and from them rushed a multitude of creatures. The dragon, the Simvan, the Fury Beetle, all of demonkind, and all manner of monsters, wicked spirits, and some beings neither monster nor human – **Dimensional-Beings** brought to Earth to overshadow humans and keep them low.*

As a result, all of these creatures are seen as invaders and monsters brought into the world by the Nameless Gods to "overshadow and keep them (humans) low." Thus, by their very nature they are the enemies of humankind. Dragons, demons and similar monstrous creatures are clearly a danger, but the Dimensional Beings – D-Bees – are said to be the most dangerous because of their great numbers, and because they live like humans in the human world. They compete for the same food, the same resources and the same lands, making D-Bees the true menace. A devouring blight, pushing out the native people (humans) and turning the planet into an alien world. As a result, many humans see D-Bees and even human mutants like the Psi-Stalkers as a pestilence that must be eliminated.

As one might expect, this anti-Dimensional Being sentiment has worked to make some D-Bees, especially aggressive ones like the Vanguard Brawlers, respond in kind, inviting them to cling to their "own kind" (same D-Bee race or all D-Bees in general) and become competing rivals and, sometimes, bitter enemies of humankind. The *Simvan Monster Riders* are a good example of a D-Bee race that has adapted well to Rifts Earth and keep to their own race, see all others as competition or enemies to be driven away or destroyed. Other D-Bees exist in such small numbers or are so scattered across the globe, that there are not enough of them to build their own tribal nation. Still others see the folly of segregation and strive to live in diverse groups of people, including humans.

Emperor Prosek and the propaganda machine of the Coalition States have used the lingering old myths to play upon the fears, superstitions and doubts humans have about D-Bees to forge their nation. Capitalizing on those emotions to win the hearts and minds of millions and manipulating them to bring them power. So relentless and convincing has been the Coalition campaign, that even human supremacists outside the CS believe and spout their lies.

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This means virtually every community will have its own outlook and policies on D-Bees. Some accept them all, others do not. Some accept certain types of D-Bees but exclude, hate, or hunt others. There are even D-Bee races who fear and dislike other D-Bee races based on myth, hearsay and CS lies. Some, like the Simvan, deserve their reputations, but others do not, and even the Simvan, displaced from their native home world, have a right to co-exist on Rifts Earth.

Diverse communities of *humans* and *D-Bees* are found throughout the continent, but seem to live together most harmoniously in the *New West*. In the East and Midwest, D-Bees also live free and in mixed communities where they are treated as the equal to humans. Lazlo and New Lazlo are two of the most notable of such cities, however, there are many places where D-Bees live as second-class citizens or slaves. Some of the most callous and fanatical human supremacists actually go into the woods "hunting" D-Bees, killing them for fun, sport, and bounties or capturing them to use as slaves or to sell to Slavers, including slave towns (often mining or industrial operations where cheap laborers are in high demand, as well as Splugorth Slavers. (Splugorth Slavers are especially active in the eastern United States, Canada and Gulf of Mexico. With the recent fall of Tolkeen, they are found in the Midwest as well. A turn of events that troubles the CS, Federation of Magic and Lazlo.)

Rumors, lies and misconceptions abound about numerous different D-Bees, dragons, and Atlantis. Actually, about the CS, Lazlo and a lot of people and places. Since a great deal of the information comes to wilderness settlements via word of mouth, information and "facts" are regularly distorted, and like most rumors, only the really bad and untrue stuff seems to stick.

9. Psi-Stalkers are an interesting case because many uneducated people, especially D-Bees, incorrectly believe them to be fellow *Dimensional-Beings* when Psi-Stalkers are actually mutant humans. It's an honest mistake since most Psi-Stalkers don't strictly think of themselves as "human." At least not in the same way as most "civilized" humans in the Coalition States define human. Psi-Stalkers have *adapted* to the magic rich environment that is Rifts Earth, mutating into psychic vampires who prey on supernatural beings and monsters. Among civilized humans, Psi-Stalkers are generally regarded as second-class citizens and a little scary. Even when "domesticated" into serving in the CS military or life in the big city, most people think of Psi-Stalkers as being primitive savages. Their pale skin and bald heads help to give Psi-Stalkers a rather less than human appearance too, but they are human. How Psi-Stalkers got this way is anybody's guess. Presumably it happened during the Dark Age, and while one would not think humans could evolve so dramatically over a few hundred years, magic energies or some outside force may have had a profound impact on the rapid mutation. City folk tend to find Psi-Stalkers unsettling and bit scary, but in the wilderness, Psi-Stalkers are known as monster hunters, demon slayers and "the good woodland hunters." This being the case, one can see why they are the natural enemies of the Simvan Monster Riders. Psi-Stalkers are usually welcomed at most wilderness communities, but the mutants typically prefer a life of hunting and adventure in the wilderness. They are frequently hired as wilderness scouts, trackers, guards and monster slayers, all jobs they relish and do well.

Note: The prevailing ignorance, superstition and lack of historical identity, not just for humans but D-Bees too, is why Erin Tarn and other scholars work so hard at uncovering the truth about the past. Educating ALL people and making the truth known about Earth's history is Erin Tarn's personal mission. A quest, really, that borders on obsession and which has made her one of the most famed and respected people in North America. She believes in the sanctity of knowledge and that only by understanding the past can humans and D-Bees understand their place in existence and the world around them. That is why Erin is not satisfied with just dispelling the myths and talking about history, but teaching people to read and write so they can see for themselves, question and reach new heights of knowledge, expression and wisdom. She also hopes that humans and D-Bees might recognize neither is responsible for the other's plight, and that through fate or happenstance they have been thrown together for some greater purpose. Thus, they need to learn to live with each other as a family united.

Ancient Ruins from the Golden Age

Most ancient ruins of pre-Rifts Earth are shattered and buried below the earth. Those that still stand are most often found in the eastern and midwestern United States and the eastern half of Canada. However, anything still standing that was not stripped for parts and scrape are usually inhabited by bandits or monsters. Some places like old Detroit, Windsor, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Raleigh and others have been infested

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with monsters for centuries. Most other ruins in the east have either crumbled away from three centuries of decay and the elements, or have been picked at and torn down for parts and building materials since the Dark Age. In other cases, the old ruins have served as the foundation and framework for new cities built on top of them. A few of the standing ruins have been taken over by primitive people and barbarians, who use them as the framework for shanty towns or a pitiful village whose people live among the rubble.

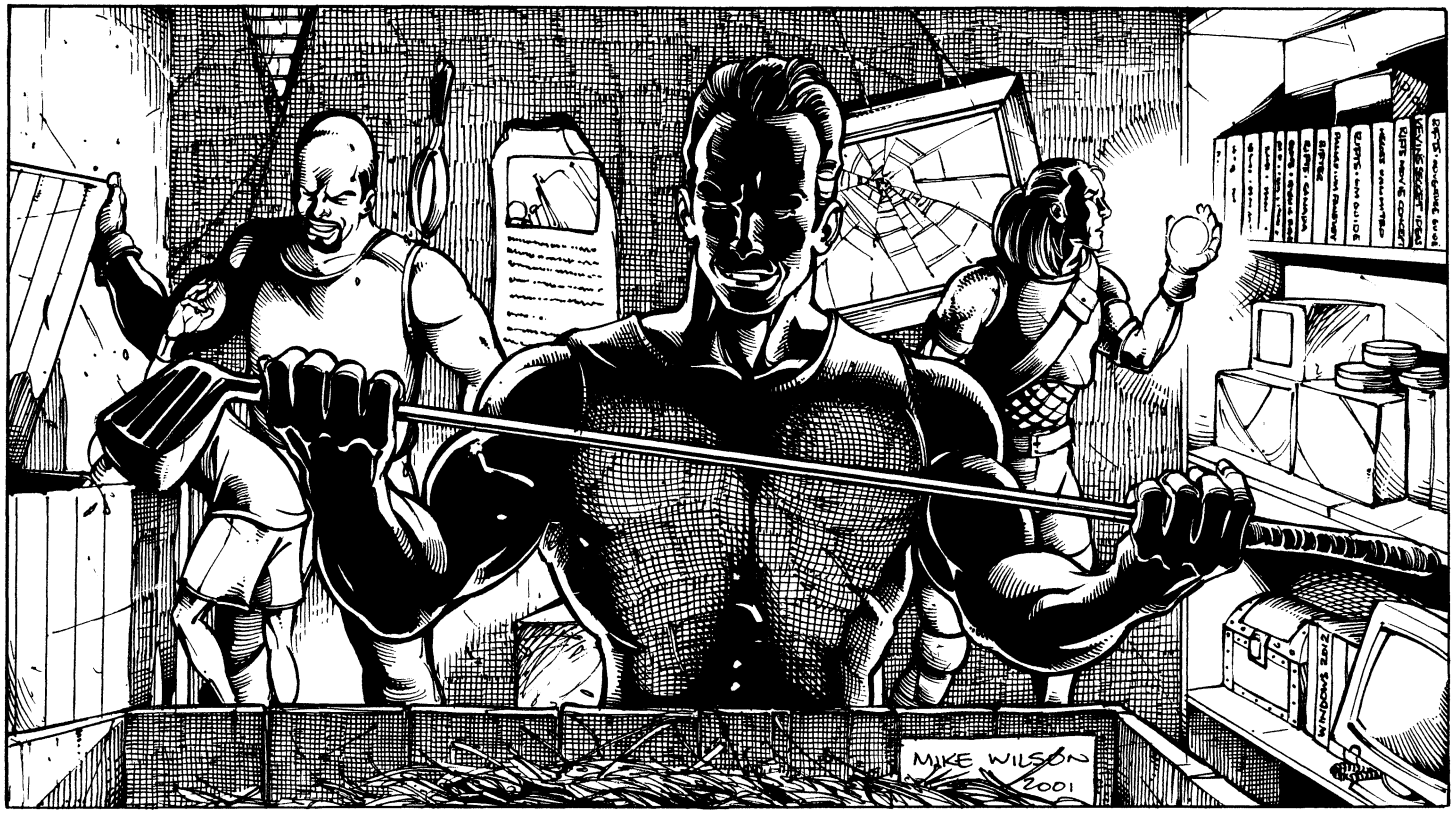
Some ruins remain unclaimed by any one group or community – stripped and looted, but their bed of debris, steel girder skeleton and occasional walls still stand. These skeletal ruins provide travelers, fugitives, bandits, raiders, thieves, bushwhackers and evildoers, not only a place to camp for the night or to use as a lair or base of operations, but also a place where they can set traps, ambushes and cross-fires. Of course, monsters and wild animals may also use a ruin as their den or lair, and those who can dig or tunnel often find a network of subterranean tunnels and chambers thanks to sewer systems, subways, basements and pockets under collapsed buildings that are only partially filled with rubble and now make a perfect cave.

Haunting Entities, poltergeists and more dangerous entities, spirits and supernatural beings are also drawn to standing and subterranean ruins by the lingering psychic impressions of the multitude who have died there. While most pre-Rifts ruins have a ghost or two (Haunting Entities and poltergeists), a few places are known as *haunted ruins* (or lands) filled with ghosts, malevolent entities (Tectonic, Syphons and Possessing Entities), and other dark spirits and demonic beings, including Necromancers, witches and demons.

As for artifacts, they too have been looted long ago or have perished in the heat, cold and wet of the changing seasons; or destroyed in the successive waves of destruction brought about by the Coming of the Rifts and subsequent Dark Age. Those ruins that survived were either kept up by generations of survivors, or were preserved, by chance, in some way until found decades later. Artifacts preserved by chance remain to be found to this day and for generations to follow, but they are usually buried under tons of rock and rubble, or locked away in some forgotten underground chamber in places where one would never think of digging. Again because of the weather and humid environment of the East, many items found are weathered or damaged by rust, water, decay, mold, mildew or similar. Books and other paper products are the most vulnerable to moisture, decay and the passage of time.

The real finds are out west.

The lands west of the great Mississippi River suffered some of the greatest destruction of the Great Cataclysm. Many cities were toppled by earthquakes, floods, tornados, and storms and subsequently covered by lava, mud slides and tons of hot ash. In fact, most everywhere between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi River was covered by 30-80 feet (9.1 to 24.4 m) of volcanic ash in the first years after the Coming of the Rifts. Everything west of the mountains by 20-40 feet (6.1 to 12.2 m) of ash, followed by the accumulated dust, dirt and vegetation of the next 300+ years. What all this means is that in many cases, entire cities and towns in the west (their tallest buildings toppled or jutting out from the ground like the tip of an iceberg locked in stone or earth) remain preserved. Buried under tons of packed earth and stone (lava). Consequently, the best expeditions for finding pre-Rifts cities, artifacts and technology are in the Midwest, Southwest and Western United States. Unfortunately, these regions are also among the most dangerous and harsh wildernesses on the continent. Known as the **New West**, it is filled with strange creatures, snakes, dinosaurs, demons, monsters, mutants, ghosts, D-Bees, savage tribes of Simvan and Wild



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Psi-Stalkers, and American Indians, as well as being a land that shifts from wide open plains to rugged canyons and mountains, and is afflicted by harsh weather, shifting lands, dimensional anomalies and all kinds of danger.

From time to time, word that some prospector or explorer has "struck" the ruins of an ancient city spreads across the countryside as far east as Chi-Town and Iron Heart. Like the gold rushes of the Old West, such discoveries often bring people who share the dream of finding something that will make them rich. It also brings out spies from the Coalition States, Federation of Magic, and other kingdoms and groups looking to profit from the discovery or steal or sabotage anything that might threaten the balance of power.

Creating Towns & Cities

Strength in Numbers. In a world as dangerous as Rifts Earth, it pays for people to gather in numbers. By that same token, there comes a time in many adventurers' lives when they have wandered far enough and want to pool their experience, money and resources and build something grand out of it. This is the heart of organization and city building, and we see it all over Rifts Earth as humanity (and its alien friends and competitors) tries to bring civilization back from the brink of extinction.

Setting up an organization or functioning community is not an easy thing. It requires dedication to the job and perseverance, let alone other resources such as massive amounts of money, time, infrastructure and leadership to hold it together. To reflect this, cities and organizations have a certain number of **creation points** the G.M. may spend to build them. These are to help keep the organization balanced and to give each place and organization strengths and weaknesses. It also gives the place "character." Remember, large and powerful communities and organizations are social juggernauts that will have a major impact on the setting of your campaign. The bigger and more advanced, the more likely it is to be noticed and attract outsiders, competition, civil unrest and enemies. If in North America, then consider what the Coalition might think about it, or the Federation of Magic, or a rival city-state or kingdom. It will also become a target for crime, raiders, and mercenaries. Likewise, if you create a large, powerful city, imagine what its impact would be in whatever part of the world it is located. Who are its neighbors? Will they get along? What are the city's ambitions? Its defenses? Its industry (can it sustain itself)? Ultimately, *you* are the architect of your own campaign and the cities, organizations and places in it. Just remember *consequences and logical progression.* The bigger and more powerful, the more notorious and likely it is to attract attention, rivals and enemies.

Permanent Communities: Cities, Towns & Settlements

Based on material by Ben Cassin Lucas & Kevin Siembieda; Modifications, additions and new material by Coffin & Siembieda

As Rifts Earth struggles to rebuild, the landscape remains a largely wild and unexplored one. A planet once utterly dominated by mankind has become a new form of hostile wilderness that houses endless danger and mystery. Against this wilderness, the forces of mankind (and certain D-Bees, too) struggle to make a place for themselves by clearing out the wild land and placing homes, farms, businesses and industries there. They clean out the ruins of the past and lay the foundations of the future. And while these villages, towns and cities are still relatively few and far between, they signal the growing possibility that Rifts Earth might one day become a truly civilized place once more.

Orientation & Disposition

The general orientation and disposition or outlook of a community is reflective of the pervasive attitude of the residents and current leaders/governing powers. While most people ascribe to these sentiments, there will always be some who do not. **Note:** There is no point cost in the selection of one of these categories. The overall alignment of a community (alignments are located elsewhere) will also help to define and fine tune the general attitudes, behavior and the people's response to outsiders and trouble. Pick one or roll 2D4-1 for random determination.

1. Survival Instinct & Isolationists. All survival instinct communities are focused on (sometimes obsessed with) the importance of "continuation" and survival. They realize that in order to see the next day, hard work and cooperation within their community is required. Most are usually "closed" communities, meaning they have only a passing interest in the affairs of places outside their town and no interest in the affairs outside the general region they inhabit. This means they generally view outsiders as potential trouble and do little to encourage them to revisit or join them. Destruction is what has put them in their predicament, and more destruction is not going to get them far. This is a time for rebuilding and they just want to be left alone to go about their business.

2. Tight Bonds and/or Strong Family Ties. As the term "community" implies, the people of this town or settlement are unified, close-knit and likely to be based around one or more family clans. The appearance of strangers often means more mouths to feed, more wounds to dress, and more machines to repair, and are all unwelcome unless the strangers can somehow benefit the community. This isn't quite as harsh as it may sound, because current news, juicy stories or gossip, and simple things like candy, processed food, booze, silks and other fabrics, magical healing, and/or a willingness to help the community (from

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digging ditches and hard labor to defending it against monsters, raiders or other dangers) are all welcomed and *valuable.* In fact, visitors who endear themselves to such a tight-knit community are likely to make friends for life!

3. Hostile and Aggressive. This is usually a rough and tumble wilderness settlement, or a very orderly and law abiding town who refuses to put up with anybody's nonsense. Fiercely independent and unified, its citizens are willing to fight at the slightest hint of danger, blackmail or trouble. Virtually every household and business, if not every adult, has a weapon (often concealed) that is quickly available to him. These people are not killers, brutes or savages, they just don't tolerate trouble from outsiders. Lawbreakers, abusive and pushy roughnecks, and desperadoes on the run are dealt with swiftly. Justice is usually fair, but swift and harsh at such communities. Mercy and trust are not given easily nor freely.

4. Easy Going and Passive. Tend to take everything in their stride and look for the path of least resistance. This means they tend to deal with anybody and bow (and scrape?) to those stronger and more frightening than they. This also means they tend to have no strong loyalties and will sell out others to save their own necks.

5. Open and friendly! These people have a very positive and open outlook on life, whether it be born from faith, prosperity or idealism. Most members of the community welcome new ideas and spontaneity, and encourage self-expression. They are also most apt to accept D-Bees and strangers until they prove themselves untrustworthy. Justice is usually fair and even-handed, and tempered with compassion, however, its execution can be slow and ponderous.

6. Open but Cautious. These people welcome trade and travelers and are fairly amicable, but a bit cool, wary and cautious of strangers. They are a pragmatic group with practical sensibilities and attitudes. They can be fun and peaceful but respond to trouble quickly and aggressively.

7. Rigid and Orderly. The people in this community have a time and place for everything, and everything runs like a well oiled machine, at least it's supposed to. They abhor anarchy and disorderly conduct, so most residents obey the letter of the local law. Such communities tend to be self-righteous, rigid and closed-minded. Outsiders are seen as potentially disruptive and corrupting forces best kept at a distance. Troublemakers and rabble-rousers (which can include idealists and people with contrary views) are treated harshly, and justice is often strict, unforgiving and with little room for compassion.

Type & Size of Community

Pick one or make a random roll using 2D4-1. The type and size indicates the amount of points available to the community. Note, however, that a community does not need to spend all the available points, although once the town is built, any extra points are abandoned and gone forever. Furthermore, a town can go over its point allotment by as much as 10%, provided the G.M. feels it is appropriate and okay with him. **Note:** The "points" presented here, are the amount the city designer can *spend* to build the community. All other points listed from A onward are the *cost* for specific features, resources and elements of the place.

1. Family Commune or Homestead. Such a place is even smaller than a Shanty Town, and usually destined to fail. Either a single extended family has decided to make it on its own, or a collection of homesteaders, survivalists, barbarians, woodsmen or the disenfranchised (D-Bees, refugees, etc.) have taken it upon themselves to break away from a larger group to build their *own* community and make a fresh start. These are common throughout North America (the US, Canada and Mexico), especially in unsettled wildernesses like the New West, Eastern Seaboard, and most of western Canada. Sometimes communities

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like these flourish and prosper. Some even become actual towns, but half simply fade away without a trace due to lack of defenses, large numbers and resources. Such a settlement is typically very small, rarely larger than 2D6x10 members.

Points for Building: Few, 90. Spend wisely.

2. Small Shanty Town. These are the small, struggling communities that try to be a town but lack the resources to survive and grow. Many vanish after a few years (even a few months), are rarely on any map, come and go without warning, and seldom missed if they are destroyed. There are thousands of ramshackle communities like this scattered across the country, but they are most numerous among the ruins in the east, the Midwest, the coasts, along riverways, Mexico and areas where the weather is warm and the land is good for farming or raising livestock. They are perhaps the friendliest of all settlement types, mainly because they rarely have the power to adequately defend themselves, or threaten or dominate others, and therefore seek peace with any newcomer. They have enough problems to deal with without making trouble. Generally, there are 3D6x10 people living in a Shanty Town.

Points for Building: 115, but weapons and vehicles can go no higher than level 4.

3. Wilderness Gang, Barbarian Settlement & Clan Collectives. The gangs are ofteny nomadic raiders, but when they get big enough, they start to form outposts or trading posts. Like marching armies, they start off as temporary base camps, functioning similarly to mobile units of mercenaries or bandits. However, some slowly build up to become permanent outposts and settlements that are effectively villages or towns, but they are never hospitable. They are always built with blood, and are violent and aggressive places where only the violent and the aggressive survive. Fights, squalor, booze, busted cars, chaos and general mistrust and hostility greet outsiders who visit a place like this. To those who live inside a Gang/Clan Collective, life is a day to day struggle, and one must hunt, kill, rob and cheat to get what one needs. Gangs vary dramatically in numbers – anything from a few dozen to three hundred may fill a community such as this. Some gang compounds grow to the size of small armies or towns and include wives, families and relatives; the entire population can range from 400-1600 individuals. Large or small, most are typically lawless, chaotic places, and dangerous in the extreme. There are even rumors about gangs of cannibals, but many agree (or hope) that such rumors are a myth.

Points for Building: Varies widely, usually anywhere between 90 and 180; roll 3D4x10+60. Administration, Medicine and Trade Features are all capped at level 3.

4. Advanced Village or Small Town. When a shanty town or family commune finds a resource like fertile crop lands, oil well, ley line, or a raw material/resource (like water, minerals to mine, pre-Rifts ruins to plumb) or industry (fur trade, light manufacturing, mining, lumber, food processing, cattle ranching, Techno-Wizard magic, etc.) to trade with other communities, mercenaries, travelers or adventurers, it begins to expand and becomes a full-blown town. Professional people and traders are attracted, as are people looking for a place to raise a family, start a business or strike it rich. The greater the size of the industry, visitors and the population, the larger the buildings and the more businesses there are. Such a town will have livestock, riding animals, at least a few modern vehicles, and businesses such as a farmers' market, doctor, veterinarian, mechanics shop, tanner, butcher, tailor, etc., that cater to the locals, as well as a few that cater to trade with outsiders (general store, dance hall, a saloon and a boarding house or two). It is also likely to have a small cache of high-tech and/or magical weapons and a volunteer militia and/or sheriff to defend the community. A typical up-and-coming village or small town will have 3D6x10+60 inhabitants in its ranks, but some have over 500 people (1D6x100+60).

Points for Building: 185, but sufficient points must be spent on adequate Water and Food Features.

5. Typical Wilderness Town. While it is unfair to say the majority of wilderness towns and settlements will be like this, it is fair to say that everyone strives to reach this happy middle ground. The people are a balance of general workers/laborers and skilled professionals. The housing is reasonable, equipment may be shabby or limited but functional to well maintained. Supplies and resources are adequate, if not plentiful, and there is enough infrastructure, leadership, laws, communal unity and weapons to keep the place strong and going. Everyone, even outlaws, wants to live here, but as the saying goes, "You have to be harsh to be kind," and communities like these seldom accept newcomers unless they are able to contribute to the community as a productive, law abiding citizen. It will also have an area or "district" that caters to trade with neighboring homesteaders, farmers, outsiders and adventurers, including a general store, gun shop (sells weapons and armor), pawnshop, furrier, tailor, bakery and various other shops and services (may include call girls), garage, dance hall, gambling hall, a couple saloons and a boarding house or two, maybe even a hotel (maybe).

The average populations of these towns range between the 400-1,600 mark (4D4x100), although sometimes they will be as large as 2,000 to 8,000, rarely larger.

Points for Building: 280

6. Militaristic Encampment. Life on Rifts Earth is a constant struggle. Except for the big cities and places like the Coalition States and Free Quebec, the world is mostly a hostile, unclaimed or hotly disputed land of wilderness and violence. Many parts are still living in the Dark Ages, and alien cultures clash with humankind and one another. Monsters, demons, powerful wielders of magic and madmen are everywhere. Consequently, many have learned to be ruthless, resourceful and live by the gun. Thus, many communities are little more than armed camps or small armies. Likewise, rather than resort to barbarism, they have adopted military structure and discipline as the way to survive.

A Militaristic Encampment is a community usually established under military structure, rules and conduct, with the general attitude of "Mess with us and get stomped." They operate very similar to a mercenary company, except they are not for hire and establish permanent, town-like armed camps. This is an organized group or hard-boiled survivalists and fighters who intend to outlive the cockroaches. They take comfort in their fortified walls, watchtowers, well trained militia and armory of weapons, armor and vehicles. The people are typically very loyal to their community and each other (close knit) and keep a fighting spirit. Yet below the guns and bluster, they are men and women just looking for a way to survive and raise a family. They simply see the military approach, discipline, unity and

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combat readiness as the best way to go. The size of a militaristic settlement can be as small as a company (160 people) to the size of a brigade or even a division (2000 to 6000), but most fall into the 400-1600 range.

Points for Building: 320, with a lot of it spent on security, weapons and vehicles.

7. Major Town or City. These places are rare, and are usually talked about by name. They tend to crop up near resources (fresh water, natural gas, petroleum field, arable land/farms, cattle grazing land, operational power plant and/or factory/manufacturing, and so on), or where traffic and trade is high. A town this size has thousands of people, and enough professional personnel, business people, traders, and leadership that they can afford to have a standing army, supplemental militia and/or police force, and white collar jobs that would be otherwise impractical most anywhere else in the wilderness. They have enough fuel to power their vehicles and enough water to maybe even have plumbing (though this is rare). Some may even have old generators, rebuilt hydroelectric plants, geothermal power plants or other means of generating electricity and power. Such a place usually holds about 3000-12,000 people, but can have as many as 20,000-60,000! They may be considered a city and a major threat to other communities. Worse, they won't escape the notice of regional powers, especially if within a few hundred miles of their cities.

Points for Building: 420 is typical, with as many as 500 for the largest (if the G.M. allows it).

A. Weapons and Armor

Every community should be armed if it expects to survive. However, advanced, Mega-Damage weaponry necessary to fight supernatural menaces, alien monsters and well armed (and armored) bandits, raiders and slavers may be difficult to obtain, and most communities covet anything they can find.

1. None. The community is weaponless when in comes to Mega-Damage items. The best they can muster is a collection of clubs, makeshift spears, pitchforks, shovels, a few bows and arrows (used for hunting or sport) and maybe a few S.D.C. firearms and hunting rifles (maybe one person in ten has one). One or two individuals may possess an S.D.C. automatic rifle, 1D4 hand grenades or even a light M.D. weapon acquired through scavenging or trade. Ammunition is also limited to a hundred rounds or so for those who have S.D.C. weapons. No one in the settlement has the ability or aptitude to construct even basic Mega-Damage weapons. Such a community is very vulnerable. Cost: None.

2. Limited. A blacksmith or other skilled individual can construct bows and arrowheads and metal S.D.C. weapons and tools like knives, swords, maces, pitchforks, axes, etc. They can't make firearms, but have a respectable selection of S.D.C. melee weapons, rifles and shotguns. They are also likely to have scavenged or traded for 2D4 Mega-Damage guns and those who have guns will have 1D6x100 rounds of ammunition and 1D4+1 E-Clips for each, but that's it. Only a handful of militiamen or defenders will have light, probably make-shift, M.D.C. body armor. Cost: 5 points.

3. Good. In addition to basic melee weapons like knives, swords, and bows, the community also has its fair share of S.D.C. firearms (mostly hunting rifles and shotguns; 1D6x10%) and 10% have Mega-Damage Weapons, including Vibro-Blades, handguns and rifles. Bullets are plentiful and possibly even made in town and private owners of Mega-Damage weapons have 1D4+1 E-Clips, while the militia and lawmen each have 1D4+3 E-Clips. Probably has to go outside to get additional E-Clips or to get spent ones recharged. There may even be a couple M.D. plasma rifles and/or grenade launchers, but nothing heavy like a cannon, rail gun, or power armor are part of the community's defenses. All militiamen and law officers have light to medium M.D.C. body armor; most are even environmental types. Likewise, 1D4% of the regular citizens may have light, homespun M.D.C. armor. Cost: 10 points.

4. Well Armed. 2D4x10% of the people in the community have S.D.C. firearms, mostly rifles, shotguns, automatic weapons and even a couple (heavy S.D.C.) grenade launching rifles or bazookas. Bullets are plentiful and probably even made in town. Furthermore, every law officer and militia member (or army as the case may be) has two S.D.C. weapons, an M.D. Vibro-Blade and one medium Mega-Damage weapon, mostly energy rifles. There are even likely to be 2D6 heavy M.D. weapons like a plasma rifle, grenade launcher, rocket launcher, and rail gun. Such heavy weapons may be part of a defensive tower, bunker or combat vehicle. Each energy weapon will have 1D6+8 extra E-Clips with a recharging facility in town (probably the sheriff's office), and additional or replacement E-Clips available through expensive trade with outsiders. All town defenders will have light to medium, environmental M.D.C. body armor; and 1D4+2% of the citizens have light environmental or homespun M.D.C. armor. The town also has one or two suits of (relatively) common, low-end power armor available to its defenders. They may or may not have the ability to repair, modify and mount weapons; few can actually make M.D. weapons, although some have gunsmiths capable of making, repairing and modifying S.D.C. and sometimes, M.D. weapons. Cost: 20 points.

5. Advanced. Fundamentally the same as #4, except that not only do all town defenders have light to medium energy weapons (mostly rifles) with at least 12-20 E-Clips for each, 6% have heavy weapons (particle beam rifles, rail guns, etc.). Meanwhile, even 10% of the townspeople will have light M.D. weapons, typically a Vibro-Blade or energy pistol; half have an M.D. energy rifle. All town defenders will have medium to heavy environmental M.D.C. body armor, and 6-10% of its citizens will have light to medium M.D.C. body armor; half environmental. The town is likely to have one or more gunsmiths capable of making, repairing, modifying and mounting S.D.C. weapons and ammunition, and is even able to clean and repair M.D. weapons, as well as recharging facilities (two or three). Cannot make M.D.C. weapons but has good access to them through the Black Market, trade with outsiders and possible direct contact with a manufacturer like Wilk's or Northern Gun. Has 2D4 suits of power armor at its disposal and one combat vehicle or Northern Gun giant robot. Cost: 30 points.

6. Superior. The community has a full arsenal of S.D.C. and M.D. weapons. All town defenders have light to medium energy weapons including a Vibro-Blade, a sidearm and a rifle, with at least 20 E-Clips for each. Ten percent also have 1D6 M.D. hand grenades and another 10% have heavy weapons. Furthermore, the town has enough Mega-Damage weaponry to issue an M.D. sidearm to every tenth person and most households have 1D4

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S.D.C. guns, from revolvers or pistols to shotguns, hunting rifles or even an automatic assault rifle and submachine-guns. Conventional S.D.C. ammunition is plentiful and made in town. And there is even one small facility for recharging E-Clips rapidly. A dozen suits of power armor are available to defenders and 1D4+1 giant robots or heavy M.D. combat vehicles are part of the town defenses (probably Northern Gun or Bandito Arms products), as well as weapons like plasma rifles, grenade launchers, rocket launchers, and/or rail guns mounted in a defensive tower or bunker. Weapon construction, repair and modification are also usually available at such towns. Fifty percent of the town defenders will have light to medium environmental M.D.C. body armor, 20% have homespun armor. Cost: 45 points.

B. Medicine

Basic medicines, painkillers, bandages, basic medical knowledge, midwives and other medicinal fundamentals that we modern people take for granted can spell the difference between life and death for the majority of those living on Rifts Earth. The flu can cripple and kill, so can chicken pox, mumps and measles, and malaria carrying mosquitoes are an enormous threat in the marshlands. Infection of a wound can lead to amputation, which, in turn, can lead to death (few wilderness folk could afford a cybernetic replacement if they saved for their entire lives). Coma survival is rare without medical equipment (or psychic or magic healer), and a simple laceration can cripple a person for weeks. Roll 2D4 for random determination (roll of 2, pick either 1 or 2).

1. None. The community has no medical ability – no surgeon, no painkillers other than aspirin acquired through trade, not even a basic antiseptic or midwife. This place is in serious danger and survives by pure luck. Cost: None.

2. The Basics. There is the equivalent of one midwife (with the Holistic Medicine skill at +5%) and a paramedic, but no doctor. A few first-aid kits and basic medical supplies (clean bandages, gauze, towels, antibiotics, some common painkillers, etc.), equipment and knowledge. However, serious illness, injury, or surgery is way beyond their ability. Cost: 4 points.

3. Good. There are 1D4+1 midwives (with the Holistic Medicine skill at +10%) and the equivalent of one or two *Holistic Doctors* (+20% and at least 5th level) or *Body Fixers* (Medical Doctors/M.D.s capable of setting bones, performing surgery, etc.) and a nurse/paramedic (+10%) who assists the doctor. The doctor's office is like the old-time country doctor who probably works out of his home and makes house calls. These healers are all clean, competent and knowledgeable. Cost: 10 points.

4. Very Good. A half dozen midwives (with the Holistic Medicine skill at +10%) plus a small clinic with a dozen sick rooms, two surgery rooms and a good selection of medical equipment (EKG, respirator, heart defibrillator, old but effective X-ray machine, small basic laboratory, etc. – roughly equal to an EMS vehicle or field doctor's camp). Of course, big and expensive equipment like a dialysis machine, Cat scan, fully equipped laboratory, etc., are not part of this facility. There are two or three *Body Fixers* (Medical Doctors or Holistic Doctors at least 5th level and +20% to Holistic Medicine skill), or *Psychic Healers*, plus the equivalent of 1D4+2 nurses/paramedics (+5% skill bonus). There may even be an ambulance. Cost: 15 points.

5. Excellent. A tiny hospital with two dozen private sick rooms, two wards, four surgery rooms and an excellent selection of medical equipment (EKG, respirator, heart defibrillator, old but effective X-ray machine, small basic laboratory, etc. – roughly equal to an EMS vehicle or field doctor's camp) and even 1D4+1 ambulances. Big and expensive equipment like a dialysis machine, Cat scan, fully equipped laboratory, etc., are not part of this facility, but they are capable of performing major surgery, installation and repair of bionics short of full conversions and have a well trained and caring staff. There is one chief Doctor who is 1D6+7th level, one Cyber-Doc (1D4+6th level) and 1D6+2 *Body Fixers* or *Holistic Doctors* (at least 6th level and +15% to Holistic Medicine skill), and/or *Psychic Healers*, plus the equivalent of 1D6+6 *nurses/paramedics* (+10% skill bonus). Not to mention a dozen midwives (with the Holistic Medicine skill at +5%). Cost: 25 points.

6. Superior. A small hospital with ALL the basics, 2D4x10 private rooms, plus six wards (each can accommodate 20 patients comfortably, twice that in an emergency), and a fleet of 1D4+3 ambulances. There is one Medical Doctor who is Chief of Staff (1D4+9th level), 1D4 *Cyber-Docs* (1D4+4th level) and 1D4+4 *Body Fixers* (1D4+5th level), and the equivalent of 2D6+10 *nurses/paramedics* (+15% skill bonus). Not to mention one or two dozen midwives (with the Holistic Medicine skill at +15%) and 1D6 small clinics or private practitioners who are either *Body Fixers* or *Holistic Doctors* (at least 5th level and +10% to Holistic Medicine skill) or *Psychic Healers*; or a combination of all three. Cost: 30 points.

7. Unheard Of. A fully functioning hospital that can accommodate as many as 800 patients at a time and has all the modern equipment and facilities one could imagine. Beyond surgery and full treatment of disease, the community has a staff of doctors, nurses, paramedics, and a Cybernetics clinic with a dozen *Cyber-Doctors*! Midwives, Psychic Healers, and Doctors of Holistic Medicine are much less popular when such a technological wonder is present, but there are likely to be a handful of them along with a dozen *Body Fixers* in private practice. A town with a facility such as this is likely to be a local or regional *medical center*, attracting plenty of visitors/customers from outside the town, including neighboring towns, farms, homesteads and travelers. The town may even have limited Juicer and Crazy technology. Cost: 45 points.

8. Extraordinary Means. Has a dozen psychic healers or practitioners of magic (or half and half; 1D4+5th level) who specialize in healing and medicine, as well as 1D4 Holistic Doctors or Herbologists (1D4+4th level), two nurses and a half dozen midwives. This town relies on "extraordinary measures" (psionics and magic) for its needs rather than conventional medicine (which is basic at best). May be on or near a ley line. Cost: 35 points.

C. Agriculture and Natural Resources

Closely linked to water, but a separate category, this relates to the raw production of goods the community can perform. Good land, good teamwork, old salvaged technology, and other factors can contribute to abundant resources in growing food (crops, orchards and raising livestock).

1. None. The land has lost its topsoil, and there are no resources to exploit. Farming or raising grazing animals is impos-

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sible. This community must rely on some other means to support itself and heavy trade with other communities and travelers. The poor land usually keeps such settlements tiny and poor (unless there is some other resource). Cost: None.

2. Fair. Growing crops is difficult and yield is usually minimal, but it is enough to survive. Timber and other resources are either scarce or of poor quality. The community must either supplement by hunting, fishing and trading (and they don't have much to offer) or make large cutbacks to its way of life. Cost: 4 points.

3. Sufficient. The land is capable of reasonably good crop growing and harvests, and/or the raising of livestock at levels sufficient to support the current community. There is also likely to be a fair supply of timber or stone for building, or other basic resources. However, the town can not easily expand, and drought, blight or raids resulting in serious damage and loss could be disastrous. Cost: 10 points.

4. Good. The people are comfortable and have enough to grow, store for a rainy day, and to trade. Their resources are typically basic things like a combination of good arable land for farming, grazing land for cattle or other livestock and/or fishing, hunting and trapping. Good to excellent availability of lumber and/or rocks suitable for quarrying and building, and so on. Water is typically adequate to excellent and businesses are attracted because of the "good land" and the strong or growing community. Cost: 15 points.

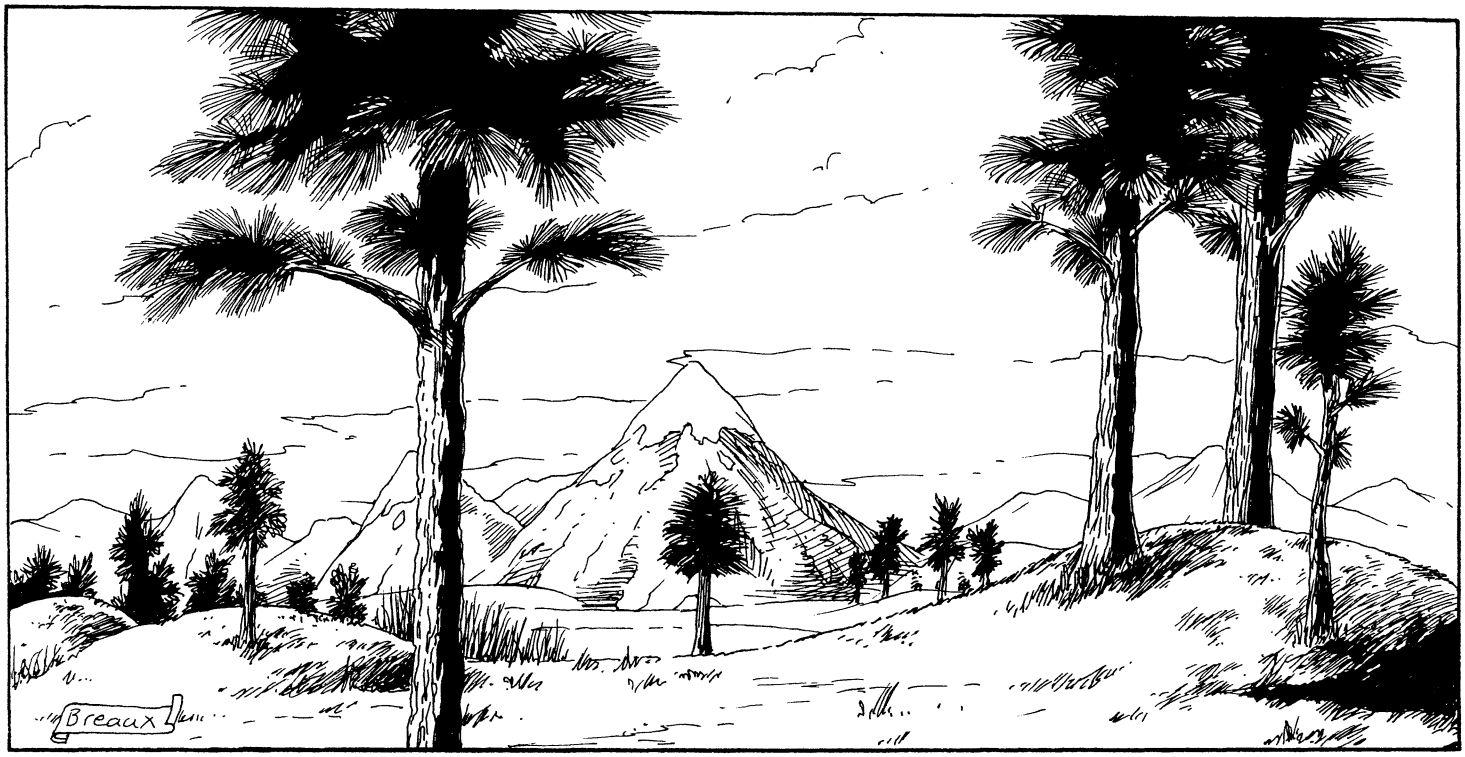
5. Enviable. The people here are fat and sassy. They have an excellent local resource that gives them good crops, high yield, strong livestock and/or other resources that they can either trade or use to make luxury items. Plenty of surplus too. Resources other than those for agriculture or raising livestock may include fishing, hunting, trapping, natural gas, oil, mining for any variety of ores, (more) water, hydroelectric power (must have an excellent or excessive water supply), or rebuilt pre-Rifts manufacturing facility, power plant, lost technology, etc., that gives the community a coveted, tradable commodity or rare service they can provide. **Note:** This is the minimum level required for a community to try drilling for oil or any of the things noted in the previous sentence. Cost: 20 points.

6. Abundant. The community is blessed with outstanding resources (typically several), is completely autonomous and self-sufficient, and their local resources are not only enough to make them happy, but they have more than they know what to do with. Resources are either used with abandon and/or traded freely. May have several types of industry and limited pre-Rifts capabilities in certain areas and the resources noted in #5. May be considered a "boomtown." Cost: 30 points.

D. Real Estate/Land

Location is very important for trade, security and growth. A badly placed township established in a flood plain, for example, may disappear into a swamp, be devastated by floods, or mud slides, etc. Likewise, one must be aware of changes brought about by seasons, weather, close proximity to a dangerous ley line, one's neighbors, regional conflicts, areas given to drought or blight, and high risk fire areas, volcanic or seismic activity, and so on. A well-placed settlement shouldn't need constant foundation work or a vigilant watch to guard against natural disasters, fires, monsters and hostile forces.

1. Shocking. It's surprising this settlement hasn't slid into oblivion and manages to keep going at all. Such a place is located in a highly volatile or otherwise unstable or dangerous location – near a ley line nexus, a storm-riddled coast, tornado alley, desert, and/or regularly plagued by disease, extreme weather and seasons, banditry, monsters, and so forth. Or, the location itself could have a problem such as residual radioactive fallout, the presence of dangerous biological agents, hidden land mines, and so on. Life is hard, disasters are common; the people really should think about moving. Cost: None.



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2. Bad. The settlement is situated in or near a high flood area, crocodile infested swamp, desert, big ley line, dangerous gang, monsters, war zone, or similar hazard. Cost: 1 point.

3. Fine. No complaints, beyond the normal difficulties of living anywhere on Rifts Earth. Could be better, though. Cost: 5 points.

4. Prime Location. The region is stable, the weather normal, and the area reasonably safe. Life is relatively comfortable, and the community easily defendable. Cost: 15 points.

5. Location, Location, Location. The settlement is located in an idyllic, beautiful location in a stable region with good weather. May even be invisible from the air, magically protected from the ley lines, underground, underwater, or in some other exotic location that makes it safe, attractive and/or exclusive to its inhabitants. Cost: 40 points.

E. Vehicles & Fuel

Vehicles are an important part of life, especially when communities exist so far apart from each other. Sometimes vehicles are required to plow fields, carry timber from a forest or take water from a dam. Trade also requires vehicles if it is to be made efficient. The availability of motorized vehicles and fuel is an example of a valuable resource.

1. None. They don't even have a skateboard. Foot power is their mode of transportation. Cost: None.

2. Live Animals. Heard of that "one-horse town"? Well, you've found it. A horse or two, maybe a camel or a mule (and/or a couple sail and rowboats if near a body of water), and that's all. No machine driven vehicles as of yet. No fuel other than some heating and lamp oil. Cost: 2 points.

3. Very Basic. A few good, strong riding and working animals (horses, mules, oxen, etc., and/or exotic animals), plus a few beat up utility vehicles, and a few spare parts; maybe a few bicycles or motorcycles too. If near water, the community will have a handful of sail and rowboats and a few canoes. Fuel is difficult to come by and expensive. The town rarely has more than one month's supply on hand, and may occasionally run out for 1D4 months at a time. Cost: 6 points.

4. Average. The community has a fair number of utilitarian motor vehicles in reasonably good condition (a couple might even be M.D.C. vehicles), a sufficient number of work and riding animals (but none to spare), some bicycles, and some spare engine parts for the vehicles. In addition, it will have one beat up M.D.C. cargo hauling truck or four-wheel drive vehicle like the Big Boss or Mountaineer. In fact, 10% are M.D.C. vehicles. Fuel is difficult to come by and expensive. Usually has a 1D4 month supply on hand; rarely runs out completely. If near water, the community will have several small rowboats, a few motorboats, a few small sailboats, a couple of large sailboats/fishing boats, and a few motor powered cargo barges. Cost: 12 points.

5. Good. The community has a fleet of vehicles, including bicycles, several dozen motorcycles, a few heavy construction vehicles (tractors, bulldozers, backhoe, etc.), a variety of small to medium-sized trucks, a selection of modified or souped-up vehicles, and a number of automobiles, hover vehicles, fast-moving hover cycles, and 1D4x10% are even M.D.C. vehicles (no military vehicles)! They also have the tools, parts and general knowledge to maintain them. Horses and exotic animals are also still used for riding and work, especially on farms and ranches, with enough to sell to outsiders. Fuel can be hard to come by, with prices varying from reasonable to high, but the town is usually careful to keep a 1D4+2 month supply on hand. Cost: 15 points.

6. Excellent. The community has a truly enviable fleet of vehicles, including bicycles, motorcycles, several tractors and heavy construction machines (dump trucks, bulldozers, steam shovels, cranes, etc.), small to medium-sized trucks, a dozen 18 wheelers, a variety of conventional automobiles, jeeps, and land rovers, two dozen fast-moving hover vehicles, and half are M.D.C. vehicles (average M.D.C. of the main body is 4D4x10)! In fact, one in ten citizens has his own S.D.C. motorcycle, jeep, pickup truck or trusty ol' automobile. Riding and work animals are typically restricted to use on farms, ranches and for pleasure riding. The town also has several garages and vehicle repair shops with skilled mechanics, maybe even a used car dealer. Plus the community has in service 1D4+1 light to medium, M.D.C. military vehicles as part of its defense. Alternatively, they may own 1D4+1 aircraft, probably helicopters and light airplanes (if on water, it will have 1D4 patrol boats and a submersible). Fuel can be hard to come by, with prices varying from reasonable to exorbitant, but the town is usually careful to keep a 2D4+4 month supply on hand, and some have their own fuel supply/oil fields. Cost: 25 points.

7. Superior. The community will have everything noted in #6 and then some. Fifty to sixty-five percent of the vehicles are M.D.C., the town defenders all have light, M.D.C. military vehicles (from armored hover bikes and jeeps to small half-tracks and APCs), and may even have one or two dozen power armor suits and/or 1D4 robots! Not to mention a small airfield and a dozen or so aircraft. One in five citizens has his own S.D.C. motorcycle, jeep, pickup truck or automobile; one in twenty their own M.D.C. vehicle. Riding and work animals are restricted to use on farms, ranches and for pleasure riding, with many raised specifically for selling to outsiders and neighbors.

Coastal communities will have a third as many ground vehicles but a fleet of small to large sailing and motorized boats, plus a small fleet of military patrol boats and/or 1D4 submersibles, plus the aforementioned power armor units suitable for land and sea operations. The town also has several garages and vehicle repair shops with skilled mechanics, as well as one or two car dealers (new and used). A tiny percentage of these superior vehicle places actually build and rebuild vehicles by hand. An even smaller percentage may have miraculously rebuilt a vehicle manufacturing plant to make and sell select types of vehicles. Cost: 35 points.

F. Administration & Social Structure

Communities need to pull together to survive. Without order, they crumble and fragment. Efficiency is gauged by the quality of leadership and law enforcement.

1. None. Total chaos and anarchy. There is no one, strong leader or group and there are often rival groups squabbling for control of some small portion of the community. People do as they please, and nobody has any real authority over anybody else. What laws may exist are more like suggestions and optimistic philosophy. People panic and things unravel very quickly in times of strife. Cost: None.

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2. Slight. The laws were agreed upon verbally, and are used to remind people what they should be doing, but they serve more as guidelines and strong suggestions than anything else. Only the most grievous crimes are punished and the most important laws and practices are enforced. Leadership is weak, direction divided, and social structure loose. Cost: 5 points.

3. Fearless Leader. A strong, charismatic leader who the people respect, listen to and follow – some are even revered. The danger of this leadership is that the structure, justice, law and power is held by one man. This means the community is usually a reflection of his moral character, hopes and dreams. After all, it is the charismatic leader who is unifying the people and giving them purpose and direction. If they lose that leader, the community is likely to lose direction, splinter and flounder (become like #2), unless some new individual or group successfully takes his place. A wise leader will try to establish a support network and a means of finding or electing a new leader. Generally speaking, such a place is reasonably well organized under a well-liked (or much-feared) leader. The town will usually have a fair to well structured society and set of laws and rules, but usually as the one leader sees fit. Cost: 10 points.

4. Good/Sound Structure. Typically a democratic structure of some kind with an elected leader-mayor, governor, etc. – and a secondary town council and public officers to help support and run things, including judge, sheriff, etc. Depending on the leadership, things run fairly to very well. Cost: 10 points.

5. Strong Structure. Typically a democratic structure with a governing body that shares the duties of running the affairs of the town. Social order, law, justice and sense of unity are clear and strong. Citizens understand their place in the community and most work together like the parts of a well-oiled machine. The leading body may be any form of government, but "most" communities in North America are some type of the following: *01-33% autocracy* (one absolute power, ruler, despot, tyrant, king), *34-70% democracy* or *republic*, and *71-00% hierarchy* (a ruling body with levels of descending rank, power, and authority such as king, prince, duke, lord, peasant). Cost: 15 points.

6. Utopian. Very rare. Historically, utopian societies have never worked on a large scale, but can have limited success on a small scale (under 10,000 people; smaller is better), especially when a community is reasonably prosperous, and has a strong sense of identity, equality and camaraderie. They are almost always democratic, with a group, committee or congress holding the seat of power rather than any one individual (no mayor, etc.). A utopian society can be super-rigid and organized or super-open and loose (with individuals taking great pride and personal responsibility in the maintenance of their community). However, in either case, most citizens share the same fundamental beliefs, views, values, and aspirations. In many cases, these societies fall apart, because the community becomes an engine that works like clockwork – everything perfectly in its place – so when something is seriously knocked out of kilter or their worldview shattered, pandemonium may result, and adaptation may be impossible, causing the community to splinter and disperse. Cost: 20 points.

G. Alignment

This is the general, predominant alignment of people in the community (about 80% of the population). There will always be exceptions to the rule and a range of alignments.

1. Diabolic. Cost: None.
2. Miscreant. Cost: None.
3. Aberrant. Cost: 4 points.
4. Anarchist. Cost: 2 points.
5. Unprincipled. Cost: 4 points.
6. Mixed: Unprincipled & Scrupulous. Cost: 6 points.
7. Mixed: Anarchist & Unprincipled. Cost: 4 points.
8. Mixed: Anarchist & Miscreant. Cost: 2 points.
9. Mixed: Aberrant & Miscreant. Cost: 3 points.
10. Scrupulous. Cost: 6 points.
11. Principled. Cost: 8 points.
12. Mixed: Principled and Scrupulous. Cost: 8 points.

H. Magic

Magic is extremely useful in countering magic and combating monsters and the supernatural, but is also helpful in all sorts of other ways: security, defense, communications, healing, weather control, growing crops, controlling animals, building, and other practical applications (may vary with the type of magic). This category is required if the community is to be magically aware, even the slightest bit (many are not). The more understanding there is, the less superstition and fear there will be, and the more accepting of magic and their willingness to use magic.

1. None. No one in the settlement can cast spells or knows anything about magic or ley lines (other than that they are strange, scary places that attract monsters). Fears magic and may reject it entirely as evil and/or alien and dangerous, like the Coalition States do. Probably has little or no understanding about the supernatural either. These people are likely to regard practitioners of magic as mysterious, frightening, dangerous and probably inhuman or the servants of demons and dark gods. Cost: None.

2. Vague Understanding. Magic is accepted as being real and ley lines are known to be places of magic, spirits and supernatural monsters. One or two of the more educated people in town know a few basic truths about magic as well as a thing or two about the supernatural (like vampires are burnt by the sun, demons can be killed with powerful enough weapons). Still, true spell casters and magical beings are viewed with a certain amount of mystery, awe and fear, best to be avoided. Cost: 3 points.

3. Good Knowledge. Most everybody in town knows magic is real and that it is a "resource" that can be used for good or evil, to destroy or build. Most don't fear it, but respect it as a formidable and dangerous power. Likewise, they understand that the world has become a place with magic and deadly supernatural beings. They know enough to take precautions and stay out of danger from the average supernatural menace, but the average person is still ill-equipped in truly dealing with magic or the supernatural. Will have 1D4+1 Shamans, Mystics, Ley Line Walkers or Techno-Wizards who are respected members of the community. Any resident Rogue Scholar is also likely to be well versed in magic, ley line and demon and monster *lore*. Such a town may also have a few major or master psychics living among them (any Psychic R.C.C.s; see *Psyscape*™ and the *Rifts® RPG* for most, possibly including a rogue Dog Boy or

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two), and probably part of their defense against the supernatural and magic. Cost: 10 points.

4. Vast Knowledge. The people of this community have a strong understanding of magic and the supernatural, and encourage and embrace the study and practice of magic. It is likely to have 1D6+2 spell casting residents (low to mid-level, 2-6th level, probably Line Walkers and/or Mystics), 1D4+2 Techno-Wizards (or Shaman and/or Warlocks if an agricultural or nature oriented community), a small library or guild of magic, supernatural study (either physical books and records, or mentally, in the form of wise men, scholars, and sorcerers, or otherwise knowledgeable people). In addition, there is likely to be one Master sorcerer (1D4+5th level Line Walker, Mystic, dragon or any magic O.C.C.), as well as a few (2D4) low level beginners (1st & 2nd level) among the town's residents and defenders, particularly to fight against supernatural dangers. Such a community is usually very accepting of psychics, and friendly creatures of magic, and welcome, regularly use and build Techno-Wizard devices. They also desire other magic items, weapons, resources and knowledge. May be located at or near a ley line or ley line nexus. This type of community is very common in and around the Magic Zone (Ohio Valley region in the USA), southeastern Canada (particularly the Ontario Province) and parts of Mexico (mainly those not dominated by vampires). Cost: 15 points.

5. High Magic. Magic is a common and everyday part of the settlement's existence and way of life. Techno-Wizardry is a staple of life and the community may even use magic in place of conventional machines and industry. Scholars, Shamans, and a wide variety of practitioners of magic (including a few of the less reputable arts, like Necromancy, Shifting, Conjuring, and Temporal Magic), as well as psychics, are highly respected and valuable members of the community. In fact, the town may draw on ley lines and/or use magic to build and protect itself. There will be at least a dozen high level spell casters (1D4+6th level Line Walkers, Mystics, Warlocks, etc.), a few dozen or so mid-level spell casters (3-6th level) and another 1D4 dozen low level beginners (1st & 2nd level). Psychics, Demon Slayers, Native Americans, friendly creatures of magic (dragons, etc.), D-Bees, Rogue Scholars and Scientists and other open-minded outcasts are all likely to be accepted at such a community. Likely to be located on or near a ley line or nexus and are most common in the Magic Zone and other places where magic and magic energy are abundant (Yucatan, England, France, Japan, China, etc.). Cost: 30 points.

6. High, Dark Magic. Fundamentally the same as #5, except this community focuses on the dark arts and areas of magic not commonly recognized or accepted by most good and peace-loving communities. This includes Shifters, Necromancers, The Corrupt, Mystic Knights, Witches, Temporal Raiders, Temporal Wizards and Warriors, Russian Bone and Nature Magic, Magi Automatons (Federation), Stone Magic (Atlantis), Tattoo Magic (Atlantis), demon worship and possibly even Bio-Wizardry (Atlantis). Cost: 30 points.

I. Racial Tolerance

Racial tolerance can enrich and help a community, especially in the wilderness, but infighting and prejudice are commonplace.

1. Zero Tolerance. One race, no others! Everybody in town is *human* or one specific *nonhuman race* and no or little acceptance of any others. There is a definite prejudice and hostility against all other races. The only use they have for "others" is as slaves, and some communities won't tolerate their presence even then. This is especially true of human supremacists, the monsters of the Calgary Rift and demonkind (who see all that are not demons as slaves, playthings and cattle). Cost: None.

2. Disapproving & Suspicious. One race is elite and in control. While non-members of that particular race are tolerated, they are hated and discriminated against, possibly enslaved. The word of the elite, dominant race always has more clout, even from strangers, than the word of those they look down upon. Likewise, "others" are regarded as dirty, smelly, untrustworthy, thieving, dangerous, lazy, and dumb low lifes, yet cunning and treacherous. The only use they have for "others" is as slaves and the lowliest, misused and abused workers (given the worst and hardest jobs). Cost: 1 point.

3. Reasonably Tolerant. One dominant race (represents 60-80% of the population), but fairly accepting of other races, human and nonhuman, who are attractive or similar to them, but less tolerant and accepting of alien and monstrous beings. Although they are not likely to find slavery acceptable, most alien and monstrous people are treated like second-class citizens. Cost: 5 points.

4. Tolerant. The people of the settlement have one dominant race (represents 40-50% of the population) but the rest are of mixed heritage and include numerous different races from the human to the monstrous and alien. They are accepting of most other races, even monstrous D-Bees, aliens and many creatures of magic, and accept them as equals. This leads to diversity and a more advanced and open community. They would never consider enslaving any being and try to treat all intelligent life forms, other than demons, as equals. Cost : 7 points.

5. Extremely High Tolerance. Similar to #4 above in their tolerance and acceptance of all people, but this community is so diverse, with so many different races (at least 1D4+6 in roughly the same proportion), that there is not one particular race of people who can be said to dominate the community. In addition, there are many strange, exotic, monstrous, magical and alien creatures, and even some friendly monster races and supernatural beings. True "demons," including vampires, will always be feared; as they should be, but even one such as these might be accepted if it proved to be a loyal and productive member of the community. Cost: 12 points.

J. Trade

This represents the willingness and ability to trade with other communities, nations, outsiders and adventurers. This will raise the wealth, resources and diversity of equipment the community has available to it, some of which may be quite exclusive.

1. None. Although the occasional item, service or bit of information may be sold or traded to a passing traveler or neighbor, there is no type of formal or organized trade operation. This community either can barely support themselves, or are self-sufficient isolationists who want nothing to do with outsiders. Cost: None.

2. Internal. Trade of goods and services goes on only within the community. Money and trade goods actually have meaning

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to the people within the settlement, but they seldom trade with the outside world. This community is usually self-sufficient, but afraid of the outside world and keeps contact to a minimum. Moreover, it probably has little of value that outsiders might want, or is geographically isolated in a remote or inhospitable or inaccessible place. On the other hand, the people may be isolationists who want nothing to do with outsiders. Cost: 2 points.

3. Limited. The community does have one or more trade goods or services they are happy to trade with others, especially nearby settlements, but nothing of great significance or tremendous value. Just enough basic things to keep avenues to resources they don't have themselves and communications open to the outside world. Cost: 5 points.

4. Established Trade. This settlement encourages trade and has well established trade operations, a trading post or business district and even have formal trade routes with its neighbors. They trade with other communities and welcome travelers and outsiders, and may send agents, buyers and sellers hundreds of miles (kilometers) away to engage in trade and to get items it needs and desires. At least 33% of their revenues and resources come from trade. Cost: 10 points.

5. City Tech, but basic trade. A prosperous modern city, with all (or most) basic modern amenities, but it does not focus on trade with the outside world other than select communities. It would prefer adventurers, travelers, mercenaries and outsiders to go someplace else. Not much of a shopping and entertainment district, and has only a few basic hotels. No bionic, Crazy or Juicer augmentation facilities. Basically a nice, quiet, modern town or city, without much for a visitor to do. Troublemakers are escorted out of town by the law or local champion. Cost: 15 points.

6. Trading Post or Barter Town. A community known as a trading post and which makes 75% (sometimes more) of their living from buying, selling and trading goods and services. Most Trading Posts will sell or trade anything that isn't nailed down, and will sell to most anybody unless they share a prejudice against that "type." Such places often attract a rowdy and dangerous clientele, including adventurers, mercenaries, practitioners of magic, drifters, hunters, trappers, D-Bees, raiders, smugglers, bandits and all sorts of criminals and roughnecks. They rarely have any sort of formal alliance and like to keep themselves relatively "neutral" and independent when it comes to politics, war and money. In addition, most will have information and rumors about the region, and offer a surprising array of goods and services from girls, gambling and booze to garages, mechanics/repairs, weapon dealers, medical services, accommodations and entertainment. Prices in Universal Credits are usually 20%-200% higher than book price for most items, including vehicles, M.D.C. armor, M.D. weaponry, E-Clips and ammunition, and 50%-300% for rare, exotic and magic items. Meanwhile, the exchange rate for "trading goods for goods" is roughly about 50% of its book value. Cost: 20 points.

7. Trade Center. These are usually prosperous big towns and cities that advertise and cater to travelers, visitors, adventurers, mercenaries and traders from the outside world. It offers every type of goods and services one would expect from a major city. Most even have internal systems of local communications, and offer S.D.C. and M.D.C. vehicles, environmental armor, weapons, electronics, high technology, medical services, a shopping district, restaurants, all kinds of entertainment and first class accommodations. They have most (if not all) modern amenities and may even offer cybernetic Body-Chop-Shops, partial and full bionic conversion, and Crazy and Juicer technology. Cost: 30 points.

8. Boomtown. A town that has found old, pre-Rifts technology and/or 2D4 rebuilt manufacturing plants/factories, or has a ton o' magic, or struck a rich mineral deposit (oil, natural gas, gold, iron, etc.). Similar to #6, only a rowdy and wild (often lawless), sprawling town or city that has sprung up practically overnight (within the last 4D6 months). It attracts people from every walk of life, but abounds with opportunists: merchants, carpetbaggers, fortunetellers, gamblers and gambling halls, saloons and saloon bums, drifters, saddle tramps, mercenaries, bandits, bounty hunters, adventurers, practitioners of magic, 'Borgs, D-Bees and fortune hunters of every race, creed and orientation. The Boomtown offers all or most of the things listed in #6 as well as appealing to every vice and service one can imagine. It is even likely (01-80% chance) to have 1D4 'Burb-like Shanty Towns and 1D4 smaller, quieter towns or settlements popping up around it (only 2D6 months old). However, odds are that this town will go bust as soon as it uses up whatever resource it has tapped or expands faster than it can handle, turning into a ghost town. When it goes, so will half of the surrounding communities. Likely to go bust in 2D4 years. Cost: 40 points.

K. Threats

This feature is often linked to location, although not necessarily in the way one may think. A great location may be coveted by envious neighbors, powerful invaders or even a powerful individual who would like to rule it. Likewise, it may be regularly targeted by barbarians, raiders, bandits, slavers and monsters. On the other hand, geography, poor planning or fate may play a hand in the overall level of danger and threats. Such threats can include human predators like gangs, bandits, pirates, cannibals, nomadic tribes (Indians, barbarians, Simvan, Psi-Stalkers, etc.) and evil sorcerers to roving monsters, demons, and evil spirits. Close proximity to a ley line or ley line nexus (a dimensional portal that frequently opens randomly) can be a serious problem with Ley Line Storms, dimensional anomalies, portals and invaders from other worlds, visiting practitioners and creatures of magic and supernatural beings attracted to the magical energies. In addition, whatever major powers (the Coalition, the Federation of Magic, Vampire Kingdoms, Lazlo, Tolkeen, Whykin, etc.) are in the region also represent potential danger and conflict.

1. Constant. The community is located in a volatile and hostile environment. They are constantly in a state of chaos and unrest, and forever being threatened, abused and ravaged by all kinds of threats, be it from monsters, demons, bandits, raiders, roving gangs, storms, tornados, floods, earthquakes, wild animals, or other settlements. Cost: None.

2. Dangerous. Yes, dangerous, but survivable and even tolerable, for while there are frequent threats and potential dangers, there are also moments of peace-time to regroup and recover. Danger tends to overshadow the lives of these wilderness folk, but they deal with it. They don't have a choice. Cost: 3 points.

3. Moderately Dangerous or Low Threats. Serious threats are rare, just the occasional rampaging monster, raiders, bandits, wild animal and bad storm. Cost: 10 points.

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4. Relatively Safe. Trouble and bad weather are rarely severe and through luck, more than any other means, the community is rarely assaulted by forces of nature, raiders, magic or the supernatural. The inhabitants are at ease and feel quite safe. Cost: 20 points.

5. Safe Haven. Foul weather and trouble are a rarity and the community has never known a serious assault by the forces of nature, raiders, magic or the supernatural. The inhabitants live in blissful peace, unaware of what the rest of the world is like. **Note:** There is no place on Rifts Earth that is completely safe or a true paradise, but this place comes close, at least for now. Cost: 30 points.

L. Skill Levels & Professionalism

Highly skilled people are prized. They become key personalities within a wilderness community, as their skills make life easier, and are often a valuable resource. They can also teach others and help the community to grow. In all cases, the community is assumed to have enough of these individuals (between one and five) to meet its demands. You may purchase more than once from this category.

1. Body Fixer/Doctor/Healer (extra if already has good medicine). Cost: 10 points.

2. Builder/Carpenter/Fortifications. Cost: 10 points.

3. Communications Specialist/Officer: Cost: 5 points.

4. Computer Hacker/City Rat or Rogue Scientist. Cost: 5 points.

5. Cyber-Doc. Cost: 8 points.

6. Cyborg: Miner. Cost: 6 points.

7. Cyborg: Soldier. Cost: 8 points.

8. Cowboy/Rancher. Cost: 6 points.

9. Defense: Glitter Boy & Pilot. Cost: 12 points.

10. Defense: Gunslinger or Bounty Hunter. Cost: 8 points.

11. Defense: Grunt/Soldier. Cost: 5 points.

12. Defense: Headhunter. Cost: 8 points.

13. Defense: Juicer. Cost: 10 points.

14. Defense: Military Specialist/Commando. Cost: 8 points.

15. Defense: Robot Pilot & Robot. Cost: 15 points.

16. Defense: RPA Pilot & Power Armor. Cost: 10 points.

17. Farmer/Vagabond O.C.C. Cost: 4 points.

18. Electronics/Operator or Rogue Scientist. Cost: 10 points.

19. Healer: Shaman. Cost: 10 points.

20. Healer: Psychic. Cost: 10 points.

21. Law & Defense: Cyber-Knight. Cost: 15 points.

22. Law & Defense: Gunfighter. Cost: 7 points.

23. Law & Defense: Sheriff. Cost: 8 points.

24. Law & Defense: Sheriff & Deputy. Cost: 12 points.

25. Ley Line Walker. Cost: 10 points.

26. Mechanic/Operator. Cost: 10 points.

27. Merchant/Vagabond O.C.C. Cost: 5 points.

28. Mystic. Cost: 8 points.

29. Preacher. Cost: 5 points.

30. Psychic: Fortune Teller/Clairvoyant/Sensitive. Cost: 8 points.

31. Psychic: Mind Melter or other Master. Cost: 12 points.

32. Pilot: Driver. Cost: 4 points.

33. Pilot: Boats/Sailor. Cost: 5 points.

34. Rogue Scholar or Scientist. Cost: 6 points.

35. Smuggler or Forger. Cost: 10 points.

36. Spy (professional). Cost: 8 points.

37. Techno-Wizard. Cost: 12 points.

38. Thief/Bandit/Pirate. Cost: 5 points.

39. Thief (professional)/Safecracker. Cost: 6 points.

40. Trader/Merchant/Vagabond O.C.C. Cost: 5 points.

41. Teacher/Rogue Scholar. Cost: 5 points.

42. Vampire (or demon) Hunter. Cost: 10 points.

43. Warlock. Cost: 8 points

44. Wilderness Scout/Ranger/Psi-Stalker. Cost: 5 points.

45. Woodsman/Trapper. Cost: 5 points.

M. The Community Overall (buy only one):

1. Poor. Predominantly unskilled, illiterate laborers; little if any formal education, 5-10% are literate. Technology level is low. Cost: None.

2. Average. Hard workers, uneducated and only a few skilled professionals. Approximately 10-30% of the people have training in a particular trade; 1D6% are literate. Technology level is moderate. Cost: 5 points.

3. Skilled. Half are laborers, most others have some degree of a specialized trade (carpenter, builder, trapper, tailor, etc.) in a profession, and 10-15% are skilled professionals (doctors, scholars, etc.). 4D6% are literate. Technology level is typically middling. Cost: 10 points.

4. Educated. Half are laborers, a third have some degree of specialized training and skill, and the rest are skilled professionals (doctors, scholars, etc.) in some respectable trade. 1D4x10+14% are literate! Technology level is typically middling. Cost: 20 points.

5. Highly Skilled & Educated. Most people have had some measure of higher education or a respectable trade. Literacy is high at 1D4x10+50%, and there are many scholars, teachers, scientists and skilled professionals. Technology level is usually good to high. Cost: 30 points.

N. Shelter

The actual number and condition of the buildings within the settlement.

1. None. People camp out under the stars. Dangerous and exposed. Cost: None.

2. Poor. Tents, shabby huts, and makeshift buildings clustered together. Cost: 2 points.

3. Good. Simple but solid buildings that are reasonably sturdy. Typically made of wood and/or mud bricks, with the occasional stone, concrete or composite structure. 1D4 buildings will be made of M.D.C. material with 4D4x10 M.D.C. Cost: 7 points.

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4. Solid. Comparatively modern buildings made from a mix of materials. At least 10% will be made of M.D.C. materials (1D4x100 M.D.C.) and may be a restored pre-Rifts structure. There may also be utility buildings, fences and/or defensive walls, and perhaps some underground M.D.C. shelters/bunkers as well. Cost: 12 points.

5. Excellent. Modern buildings made from a mix of materials. At least 1D4x10% will be made of M.D.C. materials (1D4x100 M.D.C.) and may be a restored pre-Rifts structure. There are also utility buildings, fences, and defensive walls, and perhaps some underground M.D.C. shelters/bunkers as well. Cost: 18 points.

6. Fortified. Many buildings have an A.R. of 15 and have a minimum of 3D6x1,000 S.D.C. (equal to 3D6 M.D.C.), and 1D6x10+15% are M.D.C. structures with 1D6x100 M.D.C. There are at least 1D4 large M.D.C. community buildings and 2D4 bunkers (3D6x100 M.D.C. per each building/bunker). Plus there is an outer wall (1D6x10 M.D.C. per 20 square feet/1.9 m) protecting at least 2D4x10% of the community, 1D4+2 lookout towers or fortified positions, and the rest of the area is protected by light M.D.C. fences, dirt mounds/berms and similar light fortifications (4D6 M.D.C. points per 20 square feet/1.9 m). Cost: 35 points.

O. Security & Fighting Force

Security at most communities, even large ones, is light or completely ignored. On the other hand, everybody knows each other in small communities, so strangers and trouble are immediately recognized. Some communities, especially military and paranoid ones, have well defined defenses, checkpoints, and security systems in place. This category refers to the settlement's militia. Note: The exact types of vehicles, weapons, equipment and other resources will depend on the amount of points spent in other categories.

1. None. There is no formal security and residents pull together and fight the best they can when they need to, but this can lead to disorderly rabble in a crisis. Settlements of this kind must rely on wandering champions to defend them against tyranny, injustice and outright destruction. Sometimes bands of good-hearted adventurers will "adopt" such settlements while they are in the area. Cost: None.

2. Volunteer Militia. The town has a group of volunteer defenders to take up arms in times of trouble. Furthermore, 1D6x10% of the citizens will join the fight to protect their town, and most will fight to defend their homes and loved ones. A typical militia is rarely larger than 10-20% of the population. The people have probably appointed one person to be a security officer or constable. Cost: 7 points.

3. Sheriff & Militia. Similar to #2, except the town has an officially appointed lawman who is a skilled and seasoned warrior (1D4+4 level man at arms) who commands 2D6+1 deputies or a small police force (also various men at arms, ranging in level from 1-6). Cost: 12 points.

4. Standing Army. In addition to a Sheriff and probably a volunteer militia similar to #2 and #3, the town has a small standing army that can range from the size of a platoon (40 troops) to a full company (100-160 troops). The 1D4+3 leaders in the group will be 1D4+4 level, while the general troops will range widely from level 1-4; 3rd level being average. Cost: 20 points.

5. Mixed Fighting Force. A fixed defensive force will include a militia, small to medium police force and a standing army the size of a company (160 troops), sometimes larger. In addition to fighting troops like those in #4, the unit is likely to include a handful of Military Specialists or Commandos, a few 'Borgs, Headhunters, Juicers or other augmented or specialized warriors (Gunslingers, Cyber-Knight, Crazy, Special Ops, Spirit Warrior, etc.), 1-6 psychics, 1-6 practitioners of magic, and a squad or two (10-20) of power armor troops. While the entire community may rise up and fight to defend their homes, these are the chosen warriors. In addition to civil defense, squads from these forces may engage in dangerous military missions in the field, including Reconnaissance, Rescue, Search and Destroy, Espionage and Sabotage. Such a large military force is fairly uncommon except at prosperous, large towns and the occasional city. Cost: 25 points.

6. Small Mechanized Army. Fundamentally the same as #5 complete with the troops noted in that description, plus another company (160 troops) with a platoon of (40) Headhunters or full conversion cyborgs, a platoon of (40) ground power armor (mixed), a platoon of (40) flying power armor, and a platoon of (40) mixed heavy combat vehicles (APCs, tanks, and giant robots)! This community is loaded for bear. Cost: 35 points; 70 for double the six.

P. Power/Energy

Power is required to run lights, machines, medical facilities and many other advanced machines common to daily life. Power may be generated from many different sources – fire, steam, methane gas, solar cells, a hydroelectric generator, rare geothermic power plant (pre-Rifts), fossil fuel generators, batteries that require a recharging generator, E-Clips, etc.

1. None. The settlement is without any power other than the use of fire and perhaps steam. Back to nature! Cost: None.

2. Low. Crude gas, coal, wood and/or petroleum powered generators, and furnaces provide about several hours of lighting at night and the energy to run light to medium machines. Fire and steam power may also be used. Having sufficient fuel is always a problem. They may also be used to power other machines. Cost: 6 points.

3. Good, Solar & Fuel Burning Power. Solar energy panels and the use of fuel powered generators and machines are the

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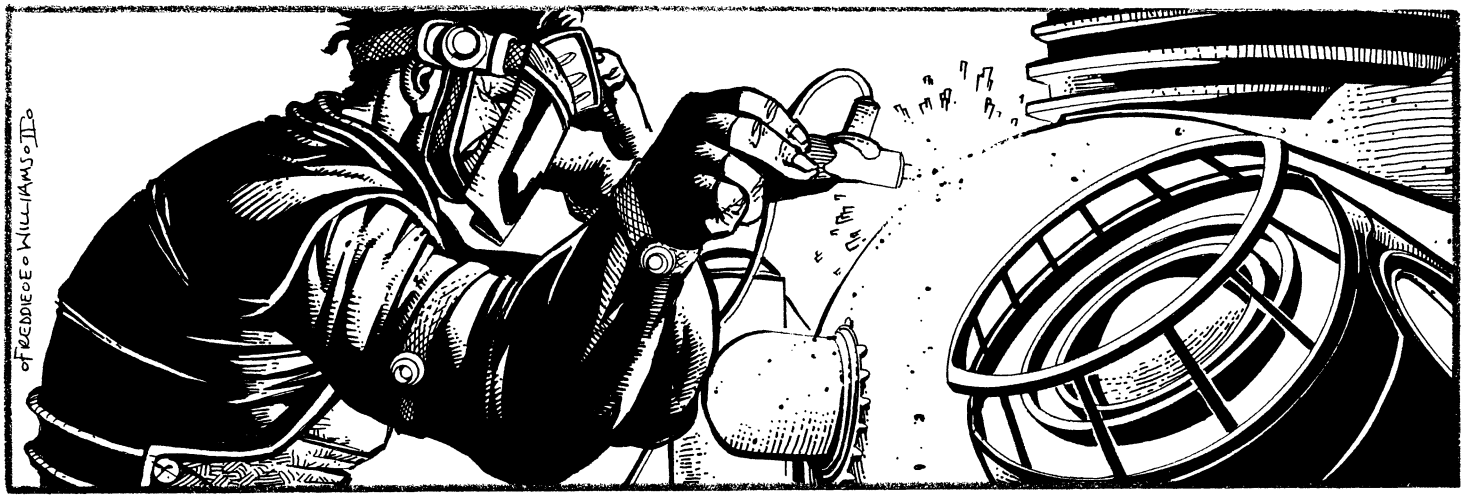

main source of power. They can also be used to charge batteries. The town's batteries are enough to provide about 8 hours per day of artificial lighting. Cost: 12 points.

4. Good, Hydroelectric Power. Generators driven by the flow of water are used as the primary means of generating power. May use back-up fuel powered generators and/or windmills, as well as fire and steam. Cost: 20 points.

5. Good, Mixed. Any combination of windmills, solar, methane-run generators (fueled by the waste of livestock), batteries, and other fuel powered generators and machines. May also have a few high-tech nuclear batteries and power packs (the latter are either pre-Rifts artifacts or big city creations). Cost: 25 points.

6. Excellent, Mixed. A little bit of everything: Solar systems, windmills, fire and fuel burning systems, perhaps even hydroelectric and/or high-tech nuclear power packs and generators. Has at least one small to medium power plant. Cost: 35

7. Excellent, High-Tech and High-Powered System. The town actually has access to a running nuclear power plant, major hydro-electric plant or rare geothermic plant. Energy is abundant with plenty to spare. Cost: 50 points.

8. Ley line or other form of magic energy. This town relies on energy derived by magic, typically drawn from a ley line. Cost: 40 points, but the community must be heavy into magic.

Q. Special Features

These are some of the notable special facilities or advantages that can make a big difference in the lives of wilderness people. More than one of the following can be purchased, and the same Special Feature (with cumulative effect) can be selected as often as three times, but each selection costs points.

1. A simple garage with basic repair equipment and rudimentary facilities. Cost: 6 points.

2. A large, advanced garage with full facilities to effect repairs, weld, make major modifications and build, tear down and rebuild large vehicles and heavy equipment. Cost: 10 points.

3. A large aircraft hangar, with space for a few small aircraft, or one or two big ones. Cost: 6 points.

4. Electronics Lab, with computers, diagnostic equipment, and basic tools and facilities for repair, modification and testing. Cost: 10 points.

5. Library, which may contain many valuable, pre-Rifts books, magazines, microfilm, video discs, and similar historical and scholarly material. Cost: 15 points; 25 if 30-50% are pre-Rifts artifacts.

6. Science Lab, with basic testing and research equipment, chemical analysis, etc. Cost: 15 points.

7. Communications Suite, possibly including long-range radio transmitter/receiver (500 miles/800 km), scrambler, multiple channels, plus short-range radar equipment (25 miles/40 km). Cost: 10 points.

8. Country Maps, either detailed, pre-Rifts maps, or up-to-date maps, the latter probably drawn by hand. Cost: 3 points.

9. Hydroponics, allowing food to be grown in the worst of conditions. Cost: 5 points.

10. Cellars, to be used as storm (or monster) shelters and hiding places as well as simple storage or refrigeration. Cost: 4 points.

11. Processing Plant or Manufacturing Plant (varies by resources). Cost: 10 points.

12. Landing Strip, in decent condition, kept relatively clear. Cost: 14 points.

13. Good roads, attractive to travelers and bandits alike. Cost: 4 points.

14. Harbor with 1D4+2 docks and piers. Cost: 12 points and is limited by geographic locale.

15. Robotics Workshop, with advanced repair and testing equipment. Cost: 15 points.

16. Aeronautics Workshop, with basic repair and testing equipment. Cost: 12 points.

17. Limited Computer Equipment. Cost: 12 points.

18. SCUBA gear and Underwater Workshop/Repair Facilities. Cost: 5 points.

19. Old M.D.C. materials salvageable for body armor and building materials (3D4x10 M.D.C. per every 10 foot square/3 m of material). Cost: 10 points.

20. 1D4 large pre-Rifts M.D.C. bunkers with 1D4x1000 M.D.C. Cost: 10 points.

21. Old M.D.C. ruins that can be fixed up as homes, community buildings and/or bunkers (each has 3D6x1000 M.D.C.); 3D6 total buildings (exact size – could be skyscrapers or a two story home or business – is left to the G.M.). Cost: 10 points.

22. Pre-Rifts underground complex or catacombs.

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Typically an underground garage, a series of basements (easily connected with tunnels), subway tunnel or similar underground structure. The walls are sturdy M.D.C. structures and are ideal for use as secret hiding places, underground bunkers, storage and even living quarters or prison cells. Cost: 15 points.

23. Pre-Rifts weapon cache (old weapons of any or all kinds; G.M.'s discretion), 4D6 total, plus 2D4x10 E-clips. Cost: 15 points.

24. Pre-Rifts cache of 3D6 salvageable light to medium M.D.C. ground vehicles (100-300 M.D.C. each). Cost: 15 points.

25. Alliance with local D-Bees, creatures of magic, supernatural beings, or if the G.M. allows it, a loose alliance or deal of some sort with the nearest major city. Cost: 20 points.

Organizations

Organizations are not communities, although they may have operations in, and ties to, one or more communities. An organization may also be headquartered in a city, town or 'Burb and have satellite operations in different communities. Most criminal and secret organizations operate outside of the local law and regional governments, and have their own hierarchy, leaders, rules of conduct, ethics and operating parameters. In short, they are a power unto themselves, although most are "shadow" organizations existing in the subculture and underworld of the city at large.

Syndicates & Secret Organizations

Based on material by Richard Thomassen

Additional material and modification by Siembieda & Coffin

A *syndicate* is a group of people who have come together for some express purpose. Oftentimes it can be to run a business operation, other times syndicates are *criminal* or *secret organizations.* Some are small, localized and poorly organized thugs or cults, others are as powerful, organized and as far-reaching as any kingdom or nation. For Game Masters and even adventurers who want to build some permanent base of power, but do not necessarily want to become mercs, traveling performers, or want to build an entire community, creating a syndicate, cult, secret brotherhood or underground network this is the way to go (typical of rebels, freedom fighters, and terrorists, but in Rifts® may include anti-slave underground railroads and underground networks for Rogue Scholars/Historians, Rogue Scientists, City Rats, and practitioners of magic). **Note:** For the most part, a player-controlled syndicates should not be very large or powerful; ranging from Clan to Small Guild (1-3).

Type & Size of Syndicate

Pick one or make a random roll using 1D6. The type and size indicates the amount of points available to the community. Note, however, that a syndicate does not need to spend all the available points, although once it is established, any extra points are abandoned and gone forever. Furthermore, a syndicate can go over its point allotment by as much as 10%, provided the G.M. feels it is appropriate and okay with him.

The number of people in a syndicate refers only to the official, elite, loyal members dedicated to the organization. A syndicate may also hire and use informers, laborers, skilled professions from "the outside" (adventurers, bounty hunters, mercenaries, mages, psychics, artists, builders, etc.), as well as sympathizers and supporters who are not official members (i.e. operatives or agents) but are loyal to the syndicate (for whatever reason) and volunteer to help it. However, they do not know anything about the organization's inner workings or who its leaders may be.

Note: The "points" presented here, are the amount the designer can *spend* to build the organization. All other points listed from "A" onward are the *cost* for specific features, resources and elements of the place.

1. Gathering, Clan or Cult. A collection of 6-24 people. They probably have very few resources, not even a syndicate house, instead meeting at a regular place and time.

Points for Building: 60.

2. House or Brotherhood. A larger collection of 30-80 people. The group probably has a permanent home, which functions as its base of operations and where the syndicate's business is transacted, as well as doubling as a residence for one or more members.

Points for Building: 120.

3. Syndicate or Guild. A full syndicate of 1D6x100 members. The group will be recognized as an authority on their occupation/business/area of knowledge or power. Business will be done out of a building converted or built for the purpose of serving as the headquarters. The group will also be able to assert some political power locally.

Points for Building: 200.

4. Large Syndicate or Guild. A large syndicate has 1D4x1000 members and is a powerful force within a city or a number of communities in a particular region. Syndicate premises are likely to be large, and its members well respected (or feared). Within their area of influence, their voice is listened to.

Points for Building: 300.

5. Regional to National Syndicate. These large syndicates are widespread networks with at least 2000+ members, probably numbering into the thousands and even tens of thousands within a particular geographic region (like the Midwest or Eastern Seaboard), sometimes an entire country or nation. Satellite branches, houses, agents, sympathizers and supporters of the syndicate are found in all larger or important cities and towns within that region or country. The Black Market and Federation of Magic are good examples of this. Such an organization is a powerful force with friends and influence in high places, including the law, certain businesses and other small clans, houses, and guilds, and quite possibly, the regional government.

Points for Building: 450.

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6. International Syndicate. Any recognized international group (numbering 4000 people or more) that has its tentacles, networks and clans on two or more continents. This is a power to behold. Their laws and doctrines cross boundaries. If they have a demand, it will be met, or kingdoms could fall. **Note:** No such organization is known on Rifts Earth. The Black Market active on each continent is a separate Regional/National organization.

Points for Building: 750.

Sponsorship

Syndicates can be sponsored by bigger organizations. While this provides extra resources to the syndicate, it also means that someone else is holding the reins of power. Choose only one sponsor per syndicate.

1. None. Provides nothing. The organization is autonomous.

2. Secret. An unknown benefactor helps pay the syndicate's way. Points for Building: An extra 10 points for Dress and another 10 to any category.

3. Cult. An outlawed cult or unrecognized church secretly steers the syndicate. Points for Building: An additional 10 points for Criminal Activity, and 10 for any category.

4. Underground. An illegal organization provides funds to run the syndicate in exchange for favors, such as transportation of goods, hiding of fugitives (no questions asked), laundering of money, fencing goods, and information. Points for Building: An extra 15 points to spend on Criminal Activity, and 10 applied to any category.

5. Merchants. The syndicate works for the interests of a large merchant syndicate or business power. Points for Building: An additional 10 points to Communications, 20 to Equipment and 10 for any category.

6. Government. A government (possibly foreign) controls the syndicate. Points for Building: An extra 20 to Dress, Supplies, Equipment and Money.

A. Dress

Most syndicates will provide a uniform and/or emblem or secret seal of some type for identification and other utilitarian purposes. Purchasing a level of dress determines the quality of the standard syndicate clothing and armor for combat troops such as guards and enforcers. Purchase only one level of dress.

1. None. The syndicate provides nothing. Cost: None.

2. Simple. Provides a cheap hooded robe or cloak that constantly requires patching. At least they're a uniform color (pick one). Guards and other combat troops will be provided with only light, non-environmental M.D.C. armor, which is expected to be repaired and maintained by the wearer. Cost: 5 points.

3. Good. The syndicate provides decent clothes that may range from hooded robes or cloaks, to military style fatigues or uniforms, to good quality business attire, all with a snappy logo, insignia or emblem. Travel clothes and disguises may be available upon request. Enforcers and combat troops are provided with light to medium M.D.C. armor (half are environmental, half are not). Their most experienced, powerful and best agents get light to medium environmental M.D.C. armor. The syndicate also has a repair and maintenance service at the owner's expense. Cost: 10 points.

4. Excellent. Garments appropriate for that organization, similar to #3, above, but of high quality. Travel clothes and disguises may be available upon request. Enforcers and combat troops are provided with medium to heavy M.D.C. armor (75% are environmental, 25% are not). Any operative can get light M.D.C. armor (probably environmental) on an as needed basis or as a reward for outstanding service. The most experienced, powerful and best agents get whatever they need short of military power armor. The syndicate also has a repair and maintenance service for a minimal charge to the owner. Has a snappy logo, insignia or emblem that is evident on all outerwear and armor. Cost: 20 points.

5. Opulent. Garments appropriate for that organization, similar to #3 & #4, above, but of highest quality and expense. Travel clothes and disguises are be available upon request, as are cyber-disguises. Enforcers and combat troops are provided with heavy, environmental M.D.C. armor (medium or light if they request it). All operatives get a suit of light, environmental M.D.C. armor, medium or heavy for outstanding service or reward. The most experienced, powerful and best agents get whatever they need, possibly even a common suit of power armor or magic clothes or protection. The syndicate also has a repair and maintenance service free to all its agents, and will replace damaged and lost armor for its best agents without thinking twice. Has a snappy logo, insignia or emblem that is evident on all outerwear and armor. Cost: 30 points.

6. Unlimited. Same as #5, above, except this syndicate provides the best of the best. 10% of the top agents have Naruni force fields or armor, 50% have top Triax armor, and the rest have the best of Northern Gun and Black Market armor. Elite enforcers, combat troops and agents may have enhanced, enchanted or powered armor. Meanwhile, uniforms and business attire are outrageously expensive, beautifully designed, and very impressive. And in addition to a classy logo, emblem or insignia, all members have an expensive gold ring with gemstones on it. Forgeries and special demands of almost any type are supplied. Cost: 50 points.

B. Equipment

This describes the general equipment and supplies provided free of charge by the owners/principals behind the syndicate to its agents/members. Replacement of any lost or damaged equipment is usually automatic. **Special Note:** Unlike other categories, it is possible to pay points to purchase more than one of the following equipment features. For example, by spending 20 points, a company could provide both Electronic (#3) and Medical (#4) equipment as described below. Weapons are a separate category.

1. None. The characters are responsible for buying and replacing their own equipment. Cost: None.

2. Basic Gear. Each character has commonly available gear, a survival knife, language translator, backpack, duffle bag, utility belt and up to 5,000 credits worth of basic equipment (flashlight, cigarette lighter, silver cross, carrying case, special clothes for undercover, etc.) like those from an O.C.C. is available at the start of an operation. Damaged or lost items may not be easily replaced, especially expensive things like cybernetic implants or heavy weapons. Cost: 2 points.

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3. Electronic Supplies and Good Gear. One cybernetic implant (if desired) and good quality gear is provided. Available equipment includes a language translator, basic sensors, surveillance and communications gear, and as needed computers, software, recorders, video, cameras, basic cybernetic implants and miscellaneous equipment; up to 15,000 credits worth of items per agent. This will always include communications gear. Cost: 10 points.

4. Medical Equipment. First-aid and paramedic type equipment and pharmaceuticals are available. Includes antibiotics, painkillers, anesthetic, protein healing salve, sodium pentothal (truth serum), dosimeter, E.K.G. and E.E.G. machines, portable lab, bio-scan, oxygen, all commonly available robot medical kits (RKM, IRMSS, Compu-drug dispenser, etc.) and other basic medical gear. Cost: 10 points.

5. Medical Clinic. The syndicate is equipped with full medical facilities equal to a small medical clinic. A full-time doctor (M.D. or Holistic) and one psychic healer are on staff and assisted by four nurses and two paramedics. In addition, the syndicate has an emergency medical budget of 1D4+2 million credits for cybernetics and hospitalization. There is also a small veterinary facility for any combat, riding or work animals. Replacement of lost or damaged equipment is automatic, but the total amount of medical equipment can never exceed 10 million credits. Cost: 20 points.

6. Magic Technologies. Most common to Brotherhoods, Houses, Guilds and organizations involving practitioners of magic, but may also be deployed by organizations whose focus is not magic, but who like to have magic items in their arsenal. This syndicate typically offers Techno-Wizard equivalents of weapons, armor and common devices. May include other types of magic weapons, charms and enchanted items, healing magic/herbs, and possibly even Bio-Wizard items and symbiotes for augmentation. All high ranking officers and elite troops will have a rune weapon or other powerful magic items. Cost: 40 points.

7. High-Tech Augmentation (Bionics, Juicers, Crazies). This syndicate's emphasis is on high-tech augmentation and its members are expected to comply. 15% will be full conversion 'Borgs or Headhunters, 25% partial reconstruction cyborgs, 12% City Rats with 4-6 implants (conventional and/or Black Market), 10% power armor troops, 12% Juicers, 10% Crazies, 6% Wired Gunslingers, and 10% other high-tech creations, including genetic mutants, superhumans and alien or foreign technology. Cost: 40 points.

8. Unlimited High-Tech Augmentation. The syndicate is a high-tech operation equipped with high quality advanced electronics, computers, communication systems, sensors, optics, cybernetics, and bionics. 30% will be full conversion 'Borgs or Headhunters, 10% partial reconstruction cyborgs, 5% City Rats with 5-10 implants (conventional and/or Black Market), 20% power armor troops, 15% Juicers, 10% Crazies, 5% Wired Gunslingers, and 5% other high-tech creations, including genetic mutants, superhumans and alien or foreign technology. Cost: 50 points.

C. Vehicles

Transportation provided by the organization to its members on an as needed basis. Indicates what the organization has (i.e. its "fleet" of vehicles). Numbers #3, 4, 5, and 6 can be purchased separately and combined to create a superior fleet of diverse vehicles.

1. None. Can you run? Fly? Swim? We hope so, because you're not going to get any kind of ride from the company. Cost: None.

2. Basic Transportation. The syndicate has just enough vehicles to accommodate its needs. A third are horse-drawn wagons, a third are M.D.C. trucks and utility vehicles, and the remaining third are old hover cars and hovercycles. No big transports or fancy vehicles, and are not expected to see combat. Cost: 5 points.

3. Ground Vehicle Fleet. The syndicate maintains a fleet of conventional M.D.C. ground vehicles including cars, trucks, trailers, motorcycles, and a dozen limousines, as well as a fleet of hover cars, hover trucks, and hovercycles (boats too if they need 'em). A quarter are equipped for light combat, otherwise they are non-combat vehicles. They are fairly new and well-maintained. If this is a magic based syndicate, one third will be Techno-Wizard vehicles. In addition, individual leaders and elite agents will be assigned their own personal hover car or hovercycle (the top leaders, limo). Cost: 10 points.

4. Air Fleet. The organization maintains a fleet of M.D.C. aircraft. 20% are commercial twin engine airplanes, 20% are commercial prop jets, 20% are commercial helicopters, 10% combat vehicles such as the Sky King and combat helicopters, 15% are rocket bikes and 15% jet packs. If this is a magic based syndicate, one third to half will be Techno-Wizard or other magic vehicles. Cost: 20 points.

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5. Combat Cars. The syndicate maintains a fleet of M.D.C. ground vehicles including cars, trucks, trailers, and motorcycles equipped for combat. They also have a combat fleet of hovercycles, rocket bikes, command cars, patrol cars, APCs, and even a dozen hover tanks and a dozen giant robots or Bandito Arms Tarantula ATVs. Any boats will be patrol boat types and combat sleds. If this is a magic based syndicate, one third will be Techno-Wizard vehicles. 50% are light combat vehicles, 30% medium and 20% are heavy combat vehicles. Cost: 25 points.

6. Specialty Fleet. Oddball and exotic, foreign or alien items and possibly experimental vehicles. Includes robot horses, Bandito Arms Sidewinder power armor, Juicer Icarus Flight System, Juicer Tarantula Jump Bike, stolen CS vehicles like the Sky Cycle, and Kittani and other alien or foreign ground, air or water vehicles (mostly non-military issue). Cost: 35 points.

7. Unlimited Vehicles. Any existing commercial vehicles of all kinds are available as well as good access to military, including tanks, robots, aircraft, jet packs, and Techno-Wizard vehicles. 20% are military vehicles, 10% giant robots, 20% power armor, and 50% are commercial vehicles. If this is a magic based syndicate, one third to half will be Techno-Wizard or other magic vehicles. Cost: 60 points. Rare.

D. Weapons

This is the standard gear the organization provides to its members. Buy only one.

1. None. The characters are responsible for buying and replacing their own equipment. Cost: None.

2. Basic S.D.C. Weapons. S.D.C. pistol or revolver, S.D.C. rifle and knife. Other S.D.C. melee weapons, club, sword, axe, blackjack, bow and arrow, etc., are available upon request. Plenty of ammunition. No magic, no M.D. items. Cost: 2 points.

3. Basic M.D. Weapons. An M.D. Vibro-Blade, handgun, a light rifle and 1D4+2 E-Clips. The syndicate will exchange spent E-Clips for charged clips, but the member has to pay for any lost or damaged weapons or E-Clips (standard cost). S.D.C. guns and melee weapons are also available upon request. No magic items. Cost: 5 points.

4. Well Equipped. Gets an M.D. Vibro-Blade or Neural Mace, and any type of M.D. handgun and rifle with 1D4+4 E-Clips for each. The syndicate will exchange spent E-Clips for charged clips, but the member has to pay for any lost or damaged weapons or E-Clips (half the standard cost). S.D.C. guns, melee weapons and the most common TW equivalents to the weapons listed, hand grenades and rifle grenades are also available upon request. No other magic items, rail guns or heavy weapons. Plenty of ammo. Cost: 10 points.

5. Extensive Advanced Weapons. Fundamentally the same as #4, except that just about any human-made weapon is available: Vibro-Blades, M.D. and specialty arrows, handguns, rifles, rocket launchers, rail guns, flame throwers, explosives (including fusion blocks) and even portable manned weapon systems (i.e. heavy rail gun, small cannon, mini-missile launchers, etc.). The syndicate will exchange spent E-Clips for charged clips, and lost or damaged weapons and E-Clips are replaced free of charge (unless the syndicate thinks their member is "selling" them on the side). S.D.C. weapons and common TW equivalents to the weapons listed are also accessible, but not TW melee weapons and other types of magic weapons. Cost: 20 points.

6. Superior Tech & Magic Weapons. Same as #5, plus Triax weapons, and magic weapons and devices (Techno-Wizard and other types) are readily available to elite members, those sent on special assignment, and as rewards for outstanding service. The group also has a smattering of Naruni weapons (5%) and 5-10% of other alien and foreign weapons (Kittani, Splugorth, Russian, etc.). Cost: 45 points.

E. Power Armor & Bots

What is available to the members and elite operatives of the syndicate. Buy only one.

1. None. Members of the syndicate are expected to provide for themselves. Cost: None.

2. Basic Power Armor. Light exoskeletons and augmented power armor like the Triax T-11 Enhanced EBA and power armor like the T-21 and T-C20 Terrain Hopper, or FT-005 Flying Titan, Kittani Manling, Kittani K-Universal Light Power Armor, and NG-X9 Samson. Not robots. Cost: 15 points.

3. Extensive Power Armor. Can get any type of commercially sold regional power armor including Glitter Boys and those produced by Northern Gun, Manistique, Bandito Arms, Titan Industries, and the Black Market, plus 5% are Triax or some other foreign manufacturer. As many as 10% can be Techno-Wizard creations (33-50% if this is a magic based syndicate). No robots and no CS, Free Quebec or other nations' military power armor. Cost: 25 points.

4. Power Armor & Basic Robots. Same as #3 above, plus common robots, giant robots and robot vehicles available from those same manufacturers. As many as 10% can be Techno-Wizard creations (33-50% if this is a magic based syndicate). No 'bots from the CS, Free Quebec or other nations' military. Cost: 40 points.

5. Extensive Robots, but no Power Armor. Any type of commercially sold, regional giant robots and robot vehicles including the Behemoth Explorer, Bandito Arms' Tarantula ATV, and giant robots and A.I.s produced by Northern Gun, Manistique, Bandito Arms, Titan Industries, and the Black Market, plus 15% are Triax, 1% Naruni, and 3% are from some other foreign manufacturer. As many as 12% can be Techno-Wizard creations (33-50% if this is a magic based syndicate). No 'bots from the CS, Free Quebec or other nations' military. Cost: 40 points.

6. Maximum Firepower. #3 and #5 combined! Cost: 75 points.

F. Communications

This is a measure of how good the communications network and devices are in the syndicate.

1. None. Characters must buy their own and/or relay messages by word of mouth, hand delivered letters, messenger, etc. Cost: None.

2. Basic Service. The group has one long-range, wide-band radio (500 mile/800 km range), language translator, 1D4+1 computers, and a dozen walkie-talkies/communicators (3 to 5 mile/4.8 to 8 km range) in each vehicle and environmental suit

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of armor. No scramblers or bug detectors available. Cost: 2 points.

3. Secured Service. Two long-range radios, all personnel have a walkie-talkie or other short-range type radio/communicator, all long-range radios have scramblers. Plus, the organization has many language translators, two mini-radar systems, 2D6 computers, 1D6 PC-3000 pocket computers, and a portable video camera and player. Cost: 10 points.

4. Full Range System. Short-range radios, communicators and language translators are abundant, plus the syndicate "network" is reasonably well "connected" with long-range radios and radio and microwave transmitters and receivers for radio and computer transmissions. All personnel have short-range walkie-talkie/communicators available to them as well as those in vehicles and environmental armor. All long-range and main radios have scrambler capabilities and one of the long-range radios has a laser booster system that doubles its range (1,000 miles/1,600 km). All senior officials have a full size computer as well as the PC-3000 and a language translator, other officials have only the PC-3000. Members have reasonable access to a variety of commercial audio and video disk recorders and players, surveillance systems, basic scanners and radar equipment. A public announcement system is wired throughout the headquarters/camp/compound, and a full sound and video recording studio trailer monitors and controls the music and announcements piped through the PA system. Two full-time communications specialists, two electrical engineers and 5-10 assistants are on staff. All equipment is good to excellent quality and well maintained. Cost: 15 points.

5. Deluxe Communications Network. Identical to number four, except that all the equipment is of the highest quality, the communication staff is twice as big, and available equipment is doubled. Cost: 30 points.

6. Superior Communications. Not only does the syndicate have everything provided in #5, but it has a communications command center (quadruple the number of communication staff), film studio, private (pirate) televison and independent radio station both capable of breaking into local networks and transmitting coded and uncoded messages and video or radio up to one thousand miles (1600 km). All principals have full-size and pocket-size computers and language translators. Cost: 50 points.

G. Security

While security can not be simply purchased, this acquisition determines how well the syndicate has been drilled in keeping its secrets, covering its trail and locking its doors. Purchase only one of the following.

1. None. The syndicate house, compound or headquarters is not guarded, and is easy to infiltrate. Very few doors are locked or watched. Those that are locked are simple to pick or bypass. Nobody really pays attention to others. Cost: None.

2. Lax. There are a few guards who watch the main entrances, and the most important rooms will be locked. It's still easy to get in through side entrances, and few people would notice discreet strangers. Cost: 5 points.

3. Tight. Passwords and codes are used by members. Professional security guards the syndicate headquarters and main operations. There is a watch, 24 hours a day, on all main and important entrances. Side entrances are locked and they are checked by patrols, as are the halls, every four hours. New members and clients are checked for their credentials, skill and background. Complex locks (-10% to pick) and alarms protect important places and items within the syndicate. The most important syndicate items are locked in a safe and protected with minor magical defenses, such as a ward sequence or protection circle. Cost: 10 points.

4. Secure. Security guards are posted at every main entrance and guards patrol the corridors every four hours. Video cameras also monitor the main halls, main doors, side doors and exterior perimeter. A Diabolist or other man of magic provides full-time magical protection with alarms, traps, protection against supernatural spying, and the scanning of visitors, customers and suspect syndicate members. Cost: 20 points.

5. Iron Clad. The syndicate grounds, main building and surrounding areas are patrolled regularly; corridors every two hours. Video cameras, infrared and ultraviolet sensors, motion detectors, and heat sensors are in place at strategic locations and set off silent alarms when disturbed. Throughout the syndicate, hidden compartments, secret doors, magic alarms, and protection circles are at work to keep the syndicate's secrets safe. Every entrance is guarded constantly. Secondary doors are locked and monitored via security cameras and sensors. All doors are M.D.C. and constantly locked. Many require retinal scans and a password to open. Visitors are scanned by men of magic or psychics and scrutinized constantly, possibly escorted. A few magic items have been provided to aid the security forces against mundane foes and the supernatural. The syndicate operations are all like this, and key operatives have an I.D. implant under their skin. A *Security Force Response Team* that includes a Mind Melter, Nega-Psychic, Psi-Ghost, one mage (typically a Line Walker or Mystic), one Gunslinger or Commando, one Headhunter or Psi-Stalker, one full conversion 'Borg or power armor, one Military Specialist, and five burly grunts respond to trouble. There are three such teams on duty around the clock. Cost: 30 points.

6. Paranoid! All of #5 and then some. Snipers on the roof, a 'Borg and a pair of Juicers, or Crazies, or Psi-Slayers added to the Security Force Response Team, and monitors, cameras and sensors everywhere. May also use Elementals, entities and invisible guardians/watchdogs. Codes and passwords are changed every 48 hours, and everybody has to pass a retinal or DNA scan. No one is trusted comp. If magic based, key areas and leaders of the syndicate are protected by powerful and permanent magicks or supernatural guardians. Cost: 45 points.

7. Impregnable! Impregnable protection has all the elements of Paranoid security (#5 & #6), with the added advantage of concealed identities even within the syndicate (i.e. nobody knows who the top leaders are), I.D. codes and passwords that change every 24 hours, state of the art detection and identification systems, reinforced outer doors that are more like air locks than a door, and a special squad of assassins/enforcers and another special squad of elite spies (Professional Spy O.C.C., Psi-Ghosts and other top agents skilled in espionage). Cost: 60 points.

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H. Headquarters

To do business, most syndicates will work out of a large Syndicate House, possibly fortified. This will give the impression that the syndicate is doing well, but also that they are able to defend themselves. With the following acquisitions, a syndicate will be acquiring buildings and land. Multiple selections may be made. For example, a House and an Estate may be acquired for a total of 85 points. If the syndicate covers more than one large city, each city will have approximately the same amount of land.

1. None. The syndicate has no recognized holdings or base of operations of any type. Members meet in the open or at specially designated, public locations (parks, alleys, bar, restaurant, parking garage, cave, etc.). The location probably changes regularly; there is no one regular meeting place. Cost: None.

2. Designated Meeting Place. While it doesn't own the land, there is a particular location or place that is known as a favorite "hangout" and meeting place where the syndicate regularly congregates; a *favorite* bar, restaurant, nightclub, pool hall, church, even a street corner or a particular spot in the forest. Cost: 2 points.

3. Hovel or Ruin. The syndicate has an old hunting lodge, hut or dilapidated house from which they conduct business, or a spot in an old, pre-Rifts ruin. It is a secluded place that the average person avoids for obvious reasons. Cost: 5 points.

4. Vehicle. The syndicate has no permanent housing or special meeting place or hangout, but gather in one or more vehicles and meet on the street or the outskirts of town. Cost: 5 points.

5. House. The syndicate has a town house. Within this house there are a couple of small offices, and additional space for storage, work rooms, or accommodations. Cost: 10 points.

6. Fortified House. The syndicate has fortified its town house, thickening doors, adding shutters to windows and barring all possible entrances. Arrow slits and murder holes are available on request. Cost: 15 points.

7. Fortified Mansion or Manor House. A large estate house with a large dinning hall, sitting room, library, game room, ballroom, a half dozen meeting rooms, and a dozen guest rooms with private bathroom, as well as the usual fare for a manor house. It has been strongly fortified and sits on 4D4 acres of land that is fenced in and patrolled by dogs; the gatehouse by 1D4+2 armed guards. Cost: 20 points.

8. Bunker. The syndicate has its own military-style HQ. This can be an extremely heavily fortified house, or a surface or underground military fortification. Walls, doors, and roof are all thick M.D.C. structures (1D4x100 M.D.C. per 15 feet/4.6 m) Cost: 25 points.

9. Stronghold. The syndicate's keep or tower has been fortified further, adding a wet or dry moat, drawbridge and a gatehouse over the main entrance. Cost: 35 points.

10. Fortress. The syndicate has acquired a fully armed and stocked fortress from which to do business. The castle-like dwelling can either be "open," allowing the surrounding people the advantages of the fortification, or closed and inhospitable, a reminder of the syndicate's power; sits on 1D4x10 acres of land. Cost: 50 points.

11. Sprawling Estate. A Manor House, Stronghold or Fortress surrounded by a sprawling estate, complete with a tall stone or iron fence around the house if not the entire estate, a gatehouse that is more like a bunker (has 1D6x1000 M.D.C. and a dozen guards), stables, garage, a servants' house, 1D4 guest houses, gardens, tennis or basketball court (or both), swimming pool, and expansive grounds (3D4x10 acres of land; part of which is probably unkept woods). Cost: 75 points. May also have a secret, underground bunker under the house or at a hidden location on the grounds for an extra 20 points.

I. Intelligence

Most syndicates rely on information, research and secrets. Some even traffic in them, making the acquisition, buying and selling of information their business (or big part of it). Whether these are stolen military plans, the activities of rebel groups and outcasts (D-Bees, practitioners of magic, mercenaries, adventurers, monsters, etc.), the competition's trade routes, or the personal habits of government officials and the goings-on at court, acquiring intelligence resources gives the syndicate a chance to find out things they shouldn't know. Multiple selections may be purchased. Note that these individuals are NOT likely to be *members* of the organization, but outsiders, freelancers and hirelings working for or selling or trading to, the syndicate.

1. None. The syndicate has no eyes or ears, other than its members. Cost: None.

2. Gossips. The syndicate relies on stories, rumors and gossip told on the grapevine. Cost: 2 points.

3. Stoolies & Informants. Busybodies, Saloon Bums, Vagabonds, two-bit hoods, street punks, City Rats, junkies, angry spouses, jilted lovers and others who decide to "share" information out of spite or for their own advantage, to sympathizers and supporters always glad to help the syndicate, to those who routinely keep their eyes and ears open and "sell" information to support themselves or their *habit* (gambling, drugs, booze, women, etc.). Cost: 6 points.

4. Military Scouts. The syndicate has a number of scouts able to enter an area and return with information valuable for military planning, such as troop movements, natural resources and ambush points. They can produce maps and report documents if given sufficient time. Cost: 5 points.

5. Wilderness Scouts. May include Trapper-Woodsmen, Native Americans, Psi-Stalkers, Simvan, professional Wilderness

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Scouts, adventurers and others who live, work or wander the wilderness. These agents provide information about people, places and events transpiring around the organization's operations and possibly rivals and enemies operating nearby. Cost: 5 points.

6. Underworld Contact. The syndicate has several contacts within criminal organizations that are able to find out "the word on the street," and will approach the syndicate to sell information of interest. Cost: 10 points.

7. Spies. The syndicate has several masters of espionage, infiltration and disguise, able to enter the communities, homes, businesses and organizations of those the syndicate wishes to watch. The speed of their reporting depends on the syndicate's Communications network and the security around those they spy upon. Spies can be syndicate members or hired agents. Cost: 10 points.

8. Psychics and Sorcerers. The syndicate employs a number of practitioners of magic and psychics that specialize in gathering information. This may be done through scrying spells and abilities such as Astral Projection, Invisibility, Clairvoyance, Telepathy, consulting spirits, and a host of others or the use of enchanted items and natural talents. Cost: 20 points.

9. Supernatural. The syndicate has either a deal with, or the friendship or control over, supernatural beings that are able to gather information, and possibly divine the future. Cost: 20 points.

10. Intelligence Network. The syndicate has established an information gathering network. The network will not provide specific information, but will constantly report on the state of the world around them. The information is normally collated by a specialist, and a report given to the syndicate leaders. For example, the report may list troop movements, the state of harvests, syndicate conflicts, changes of government and noted births and deaths. Cost: 30 points.

11. Spy Network. A spy network has the resources of an information network, but is also able to send professional specialists into an area to find specific information. Normally, the spies are controlled and the information is collated by a central spy master, who has a position of complete trust within the syndicate. Only the spy master knows all the details of the spies, their movements and missions. Cost: 40 points.

J. Monthly Budget

A monthly budget determines how much "spare cash" the syndicate generates that they can use in emergencies and to cover extra costs. Select *one* budget. Game Masters should be careful to avoid abuse by player-controlled syndicates, or creating syndicates with enough economic power to topple kingdoms.

1. None. The members of the organization must pay out of their own pockets. Cost: None.

2. Penny Pinchers. 200 credits per month. The syndicate can barely afford to repair any damaged equipment. Cost: 5 points.

3. Reasonable. 3,000 credits per month. Cost: 10 points.

4. Deep Pockets. 15,000 credits per month. Cost: 20 points.

5. Big Spenders. 40,000 credits per month. Cost: 30 points.

6. Rolling in Dough. 100,000 credits per month. Cost: 50 points.

7. King's Ransom. 250,000 credits per month. The syndicate has massive reserves of money to fall back on. If throwing money at it can solve a problem, the problem will be solved. Cost: 60 points.

8. Unlimited. The syndicate can get its hands on whatever monetary resources they require. Money will probably be virtually irrelevant to them – they are in business for power, not profit. Cost: 100 points.

K. General Alignment

The alignment of a syndicate will affect how it is perceived, how its members act and who will trade with them. Acquire one alignment.

1. Diabolic. Completely untrustworthy and ruthless. They will destroy their competition and anyone who gets in their way. Cost: None.

2. Aberrant. The syndicate can be trusted to keep its word, deals and oaths, but its motives can not. Cost: 2 points.

3. Miscreant. The syndicate is regarded as cutthroat. It can not be trusted if they stand to make huge profits by breaking a deal, lying or cheating. Cost: 2 points.

4. Anarchist. The syndicate is a gamble to work with. Sometimes their dealings are disastrous, other times they produce amazing results. Cost: 4 points.

5. Unprincipled. If the syndicate hasn't had any bad dealings with you previously, they are trustworthy. However, once crossed, they hold a grudge that could spell disaster if not resolved. Cost: 6 points.

6. Scrupulous. The syndicate is regarded as an honest, trustworthy, humanitarian operation that works toward a good cause even if it is against the law, government, ruler, or other regional power. Generally well liked and supported by like-minded people. Its enemies are those who have an opposing view or see it as a rival or obstruction. Cost: 8 points.

7. Principled. Not only is the syndicate completely honest, they are an aid to their community, maybe even trying to make the world a better place. Like Scrupulous, however, a secret or underground operation may be at odds against the powers that be and will have its share of enemies who would like to see it crippled or destroyed. Cost: 10 points.

L. Criminal Activity

A syndicate is often a secret or private organization that operates outside the law. Many are criminal or subversive. Many crime syndicates are responsible for some or all of the criminal activity within an area, be they as crude a bunch as a simple crew of bandits, or a sophisticated Thieves' Guild or other organized crime ring. These underworld figures can be used to generate income, smuggle, spy, crush the opposition or enforce the syndicate's will. Multiple selections can be made.

1. None. The syndicate appears to operate on the straight and narrow. Cost: None.

2. Adventurer Group. The syndicate has an adventurer group under its wings, that is sent on jobs that the regular syndicate members and enforcers can not deal with. This group can be no more in number than the founders of the syndicate, nor can they be more than half the level of experience of the found-

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ing member with the lowest level of experience. Thus, if the lowest-level founder is an 8th level Techno-Wizard, then the syndicate's adventuring group's members may be no higher than fourth level. Cost: 20 points.

3. Assassin. The syndicate's enemies have a habit of disappearing, having fatal accidents, or being found in the wrong part of town with a knife in the back. One specialist (1D4+4 level; Commando, Special Forces, Juicer or other Military Specialist like character). Nasty. Cost: 10 points.

4. Computer Hacker. Often a 1D4+5 level City Rat, Rogue Scientist or Psi-Tech. Cost: 8 points.

5. Con Men. Scams and confidence games are a great moneymaker. Typically, 1D4+3 level with high M.A. or the ability to charm or cloud minds. Cost: 5 points.

6. Cyborg Enforcer. A powerful, full conversion cyborg with a mean streak a mile long. Typically 1D4+2 levels of experience (double E.P. level for double the cost). Cost: 8 points.

7. Drug Master. The syndicate has a professional man of science (or old lore) in their employment specializing in the brewing of highly addictive narcotics. These are then used as "gifts" for their customers, and to generate income in the underworld. Cost: 15 points.

8. Explosives Specialist or Safecracker. 'Nuff said. Cost: 10 points.

9. Expert Forger. Typically a 1D4+5 level Scholar/Artist, Scientist, Thief or Military Specialist skilled in Forgery, Art, Photography, Basic Math, and Computer Operation (must be literate) turned to crime. Cost: 8 points.

10. Hired Gun. A man at arms who is a specialist with guns or sniping. Typically a Gunslinger, Wired-Slinger, Gunfighter, Juicer, Headhunter, Bounty Hunter, Psi-Slayer, or Military Specialist or other O.C.C. skilled in the use of weapons. Cost: 8 points.

11. Poisoner. The syndicate has a professional poisoner in their employment. Enemies of the syndicate are either very careful, or drop dead. Cost: 10 points.

12. Professional Thief. The syndicate has a number of burglars, and highly skilled thieves able to acquire what the organization needs, as well as plant evidence, etc. Cost: 6 points per each thief.

13. Prostitutes. The syndicate has a number of attractive prostitutes who not only generate money, but can be used to gather information, and corrupt, control and frame clients. Cost: 5 points.

14. Psychic or Wizard Enforcer. The syndicate has acquired the services of a practitioner of magic or psychic (1D4+4 level) who enjoys interrogating, brutalizing and terrorizing the syndicate's enemies, and those who stand in their way. Mind Bleeders love this work. Cost: 12 points.

15. Psychic Spy. 1D4+5 level Psi-Ghost, Psi-Tech or Mind Melter. Cost: 10 points.

16. Shapechanger! The ultimate spy, infiltrator and assassin. Can be any shapechanging race including dragons, or a mage who specializes in magical disguise and metamorphosis. Cost: 15 points.

17. Smuggler Team. The syndicate employs 1D4+2 smugglers to acquire, trade and sell contraband, even if it is on their own doorstep. Cost: 15 points.

18. Soldiers of Fortune. The syndicate has attracted a small number of professional warriors to its ranks (1D4+3 level). They are responsible for enforcing the syndicate's wishes on the streets. Cost: 8 points.

19. Surveillance Expert. Master at following and observing others with the skills of tracking, tailing/surveillance, prowling, climbing, streetwise, and possibly other Espionage and/or Rogue skills. Typically 1D4+5 level. Cost: 10 points.

20. Techno-Wizard. Good for gizmos and gadgets as well as repairs, defenses, hacking and special assignments. Cost: 10 points.

21. Thug Enforcers. The syndicate has a gang of thugs (1D4+4), leg-breakers and murderers (any man at arms O.C.C.; 1D4+2 level) who enforce the syndicate's will on the streets, keeping the people in line. They are not accustomed to stiff resistance, preferring to outnumber and bully their victims. Cost: 10 points.

M. Reputation

A syndicate can not do well if it is not a "known" name, especially in certain circles, on the street and among its competitors and rivals. Make one purchase.

1. Outlawed. The syndicate is known, but for the wrong reasons and is wanted by the authorities and/or rival syndicates are out to undermine, cripple or destroy it. Cost: None.

2. Inferior. The syndicate is known to be inferior to its competition. At least they're cheap. Cost: 1 point.

3. Suspicious. The syndicate is known to be a shadowy organization. Little is known about it and it is not trusted. Cost: 3 points.

4. Unknown. The syndicate is just "one of the crowd" and has yet to make a name for itself (or wants it that way). Cost: 5 points.

5. Known. The syndicate is recognized as a competent and perhaps dangerous organization, even among its competition. Cost: 10 points.

6. Excellent. The syndicate is regarded highly as one of quality workmanship, skill and professionalism. Cost: 20 points.

7. Famous. The syndicate is well known as highly efficient, organized and professional. Good or bad, its reputation is such that even the ordinary person has heard of it. While its rep is useful for attracting new clients and intimidating rivals and enemies, it also attracts competition and enemies (including the law and local powers). Cost: 30 points.

N. Monthly Salary

Some syndicates (such as Wizard Guilds) charge for their membership. Others employ their members, paying a wage. Make one purchase. Don't forget that a syndicate may offer other perks like supplying its operatives with weapons, equipment, medical care, etc. Besides, one frequently joins one of these organizations for the prestige or power it provides, not for the money.

1. Charges Fees. The syndicate charges 10% of a member's annual income. Cost: None.

2. No Salary. The syndicate doesn't charge for membership, but doesn't pay its members for their work. Expenses come out of the pockets of the members. Cost: 2 points.

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3. Freelance Income. The syndicate arranges work for its members, and takes a percentage, typically 20-40%. Cost: 5 points.

4. Pittance. The syndicate pays approximately 50 credits per week to help subsidize expenses. Cost: 10 points.

5. Good. The syndicate pays a guaranteed 2D4x100 credits a week, plus bonuses and rewards for exceptional work or other services to the syndicate. Cost: 20 points.

6. Excellent. The syndicate pays 2D4x100+650 credits per week, plus bonuses, hazardous duty pay, and even a pension, in addition to other perks and rewards. Cost: 30 points.

7. Outrageous. The syndicate pays 4D4x100+1200 credits per week. Cost: 40 points.

O. Special

Here are a number of miscellaneous options that may be taken. Make as many purchases as are desired and affordable.

1. Sub-Syndicates. The syndicate may spend points to create a secondary organization under itself. For every two points spent, the new syndicate will receive three. Rather than following the "Syndicate Size" table to determine points based on membership, use the table to determine the membership from the syndicate points spent. For example, a shadowy merchant syndicate spends 80 points setting up a smuggling sub-syndicate. This gives the new syndicate 120 points – this makes the new syndicate a House-sized syndicate, with 30 members. Cost: 10 points.

2. Leased Land. The syndicate can lease, rather than own its land (see "Stronghold"), reducing its point cost in that category by one half. Cost: Special: This comes at a cost, reduce the syndicate's monthly budget and salary by one third.

3. Rumored Existence. The syndicate is a famous name, but only in rumor or legend. They do not operate openly, and go to great lengths to protect their identity. Cost: 10 points, and requires a minimum of *Tight Security*.

4. Friendship: Merchants. The syndicate has a friendship and several contracts with a large merchant syndicate, giving it a guaranteed market for its products or services. Cost: 10 points.

5. Friendship: Men of Magic/Psychics. The syndicate has friendly relations with a group of magic practitioners or psychics. Cost: 15 points.

6. Friendship: Government. The syndicate has friendly relations with the power and law of the land. They share information and do each other little favors, as well as associate regularly. Cost: 20 points.

7. Friendship: Local People. The organization has won the hearts and minds of (1D6x10+20% of) the people, who sympathize and support them in little ways, like warning members and operatives of trouble, the authorities and rivals, looking the other way, forgetting what they have seen, hiding or helping operatives, and providing the latest gossip, rumors and word on the street as quick as they can. Cost: 20 points.

8. Government Backing. The syndicate has friends in truly high places who often arrange to have the law look the other way, lose evidence, let criminal operatives out on a low bail, give light sentences at trials, and share information for certain favors. Cost: 30 points.

9. Monopoly. The syndicate has a monopoly on its particular trade or area of expertise within a specific area or region. For example, a normal Syndicate will monopolize a town, a Large Syndicate a city, and a National Syndicate a nation or several city-states or kingdoms in a given region. Cost: 20% of their basic *starting Building Point allocation.*

P. Disadvantages for Building Points

Can take as many of these as is desirable.

1. Divine Enemy. A god or other powerful supernatural being with many followers has vowed to destroy the syndicate. Cost: None; gives the syndicate an additional 50 points.

2. Enemy Syndicate. The syndicate is faced by a powerful syndicate bent on its destruction, in addition to its normal competitors. Cost: None; gives the syndicate an additional 15 points.

3. Enemy Nation. A number of city-states, kingdoms or an entire nation has declared war on the syndicate! This is in addition to its normal competitors, but gives the syndicate far bigger things to worry about. Cost: None; gives the syndicate an additional 35 points.

4. Major Competition. The syndicate's main competitor has the backing of the Black Market, local government or some other powerful Guild or Syndicate. Cost: None; gives the syndicate an additional 15 points.

5. Mole/Spy. The syndicate has been infiltrated by 1D4 spies who are providing information about the syndicate's operations, plans, leaders, defenses, and inner workings to one of the following (may actually be a member of one of them). The moles and their master do not want to destroy the syndicate, just keep tabs on it and possibly undermine some of its operations for its own advantage Pick one or roll percentile.

01-20% A rival syndicate. Provides: 10 Building Points.

21-28% An outside enemy (possibly unknown). Provides: 15 Building Points.

29-46% Local authorities/The Law. Provides: 5 Building Points.

47-63% Local/Regional Government. Provides: 10 Building Points.

64-81% The Black Market. Provides: 10 Building Points.

82-00% The Coalition States. Provides: 15 Building Points.

6. Vengeful enemy. Not a rival syndicate but a family, business, adventurer group, mercs, D-Bee group, or any individual or group who might have some reason to hate the syndicate and want to hurt or destroy them. Likely to target key operations and important agents and leaders. Cost: None; gives the syndicate an additional 10 points.

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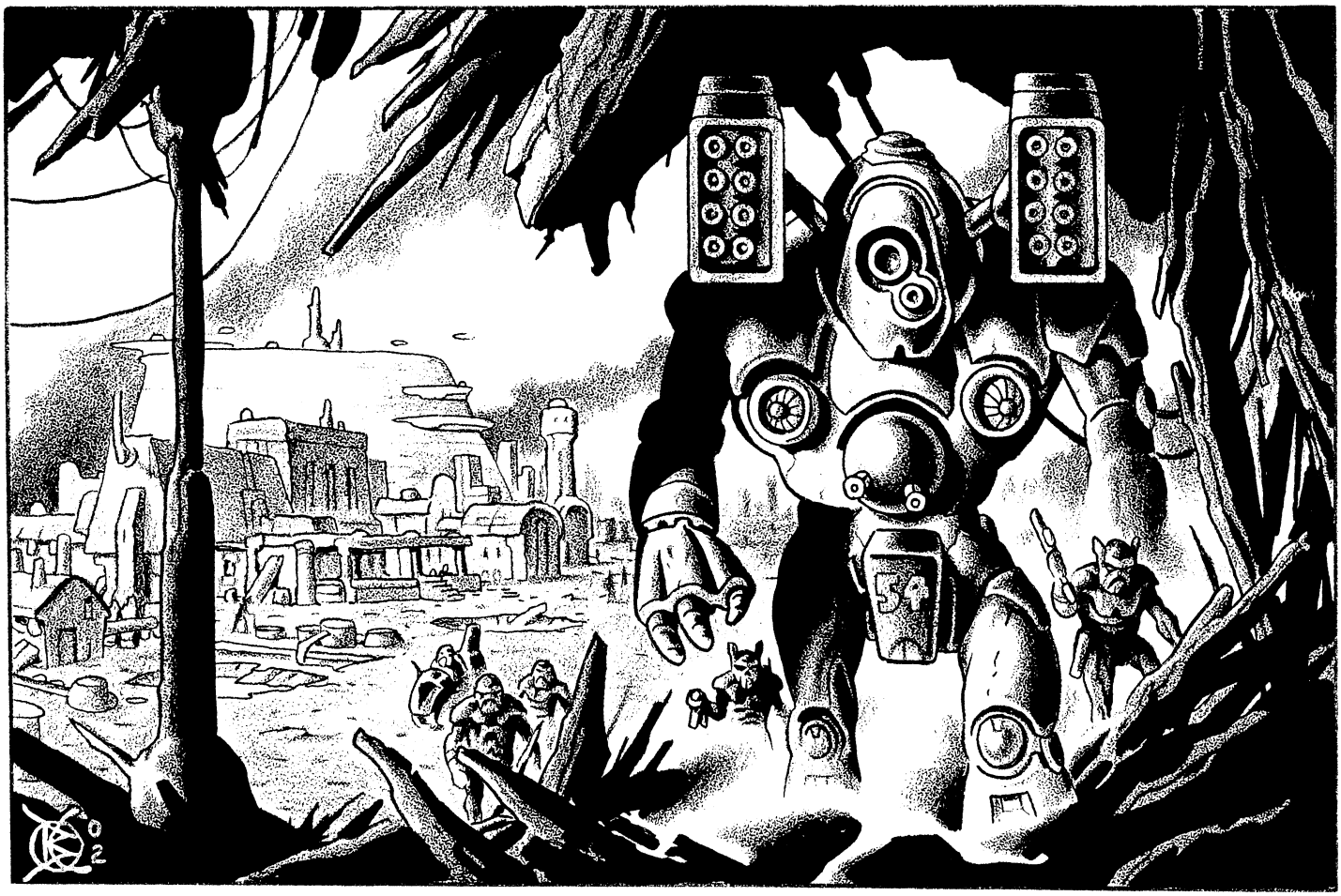

Mercenary Companies

Based on material by Kevin Siembieda and C. J. Carella that originally appeared in *Rifts® Mercenaries*

The term Free Company was used during the Late Medieval period in Europe to describe bands of independent soldiers who fought for any nation as long as they were paid on time. On Rifts Earth, the term has become popular once again. Any independent (or at least seemingly independent) group that sells its services for money can be called a Free Company.

Free Companies vary greatly in size, power and influence. Some are about the size of a typical player character adventurer group (4-8 characters), while others are large armies that can fight in several different conflicts at the same time. Their strength, influence/reach, equipment and organization are highly variable. Such factors will affect the role a Free Company will play in a campaign. There is also the question of who actually controls the mere outfit. Many seemingly independent organizations are the agents or dupes of other more powerful forces in the Rifts world, such as the Coalition States, the Splugorth, etc.

The following rules are guidelines on how to create any mercenary company. The Game Master (G.M.) may create them for use for himself or, if the players are to be key members or founders, they can also participate. For the most part, a player-controlled company should not be very large or powerful; i.e., it should be selected from the company types 1-4. For Non-Player Character (NPC) agencies, the G.M. can pick and choose as he sees fit, or roll randomly.

Size and Orientation

This will determine how much raw power will be available to the Free Company. The Game Master can roll 1D6 to select the type of Company, or may decide which size will work best for the adventure/campaign. Remember that these are simply guidelines and the G.M. may modify them in any reasonable way he sees fit.

The points listed under each category are the total available points for all company features. The G.M. may assign an extra 10-100 points to a company to reflect any special financing or equipment. For example: A small company with a lot of expensive firepower could have an extra 50 points to spend on weapons and vehicles.

Even with 540 points (the typical maximum), selecting company features can be difficult. If no points are spent on a particular feature (A through N), then the company automatically has the lowest rating of level 1 (None!), in that particular feature. This means some mercenary companies may have incredible strengths and resources in some categories (areas of specialty) and no or limited resources in others. Likewise, some companies may be more well balanced in many categories with no great strength or weakness in any category.

1. Small-Time Company or Squad. This is the smallest mercenary band available, and the most appropriate for player

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characters. This small band consists of six to twelve people, including both front line and support personnel (which usually means that the medic and mechanic will also double as fighters when the time comes, and they both better do well!). These companies run on a shoestring budget, and will have few resources (for the most part what each member brings along with him) and even less political influence.

Points for Building: 60 points are available, plus an additional 10 points for vehicles and 10 points for weapons. Note: The additional 10 points must be applied only to those specific features. Additional points can be spent from the general point pool. Organization designers can spend the general points (in this case, 60) wherever they desire.

2. Minor Company. A slightly larger band with 20-40 members, including support personnel who can also double as front line troops. Sometimes, these companies work for one or two employers on a regular basis or have a sponsor who provides the funds necessary for the maintenance of the company. On the other hand, this could be a small-time outfit that acquired resources through a stroke of luck, a big job, and/or combat situations. These groups can be formidable if properly equipped, but are still no match for any major government.

Points for Building: 95 points are available, plus add an additional 10 points for equipment and 10 points for vehicles.

3. Free Company. This is a good-sized group, equivalent to an army company or small brigade. About 100-400 members total; 60% of these are likely to be support personnel, not expected to fight except in an emergency. Usually well-armed and equipped, this group is able to destroy a town or threaten a small city. The leaders of the group are often experienced men-at-arms, but can also include supernatural creatures, powerful magicians, cyborgs and/or psychics.

Points for Building: 145 points are available, plus 10 points for vehicles, 10 points for outfits, and 10 points for weapons.

4. Large Company. This mercenary organization is a small army in its own right. It has about 400-1,000 members; about 60% will be support personnel, not expected to fight. This is the largest size commonly found on Rifts Earth. It's very difficult to support a bigger group in this underpopulated, impoverished and dangerous world. Furthermore, armies that get any larger often become targets of fearful governments, including the paranoid Coalition States. A company this size can take on the garrison of most typical cities and win. Even though they may be outnumbered, their weaponry and training will usually more than make up for the difference.

Hiring such an outfit may make the difference between winning or losing a war. These groups will have some political power, especially if they have settled in one area. If the company has a home base, 30% of the personnel will always stay behind to provide security and maintenance. The company will probably control or be a major player in the politics of the region where they have established their headquarters. Most mercenary "armies" are made up of a temporary alliance between two or more large companies, or one large company and several smaller ones.

Points for Building: 200 points are available, plus 10 points for vehicles and 20 points for budget.

5. Mercenary Army. An army in its own right, with at least 2,000 effective (line soldiers) and 3,000 support personnel. Total size of the army can range from 5,000 to 10,000, with 60% of the troops engaged in support activities. This force will have heavy weapons and some air support. There will be at least one platoon (40 members) of "specialty" agents: magicians, psychics and super-powered operatives (up to 5% of the total size of the army can be composed of these "special" operatives).

Typically, only the largest national governments can match these forces; keep in mind that a highly trained and well-equipped mercenary army will be able to defeat any typical army twice its size and a militia or inexperienced army three or four times its size. Mercenary armies this size are a rarity on Rifts Earth, especially in North America and Atlantis. However, several trans-dimensional armies that operate throughout the Megaverse might make an appearance on Earth. Frequently, a company this size sells its services to many different clients at once, fighting several small wars in different places. In that case, the total number of effective forces is broken into 2-50 sub-units, each usually equal to a #3 or #4 size company. An army of this size can play an important part in the political field. Its raw power cannot be ignored by any government because such an army could conquer almost any typical kingdom or small nation.

Points for Building: 300 points are available, plus 20 for budget or weapons and 20 for outfits.

6. Large Mercenary Army. This Free Company can take on any kingdom and nation on Rifts Earth, with the possible exception of the Coalition States, The NGR and Atlantis. It consists of a multi-divisional army (at least 20,000+ effective, 40,000+ support personnel) and can have as many as one million total members! This army will have several hundred super-powered and magically or psionically adept agents. It will also have enormous resources and equipment, most of which will be technologically equal or superior to the CS or Triax. It will have land, air, and possibly sea support.

A Free Company of this size is probably able to dictate terms to most governments. No *mercenary* group of this size is known on Earth. Only a trans-dimensional mercenary outfit from another dimension may be of this size and become involved on Earth. However, very few nations could afford to hire an army this size. Consequently, one is more likely to encounter a visiting branch from this dimension traveling mercenary force (typically troops ranging in size from #1 to #4).

Points for Building: 500 points are available, plus 20 for vehicles and 20 for budget.

Sponsorship

Exactly who is controlling the mercenary company, providing them with leadership, goals and their real source of funds? Select one. There is no cost for this necessary feature.

1. Independent. The company is owned and operated by the mercenaries themselves. The owners could be the leader or leaders (officers), or maybe every single merc is a shareholder. The objective of the company is to make money, and the owners are responsible for upkeep and payment of non-owners. All the money left after expenses is divided among the owners/shareholders. They answer to no one and go where they please.

Points for Building: Add 10 points wherever desired.

2. Secret. Most of the members have no idea who is really behind the organization, or what hidden motives there might be

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in their assignments. The group is given clients and may be told not to sell their services to certain potential clients. The features and equipment of the company are paid for by the mysterious benefactor.

Points for Building: An extra 10 points in Equipment, 10 points in Outfits, and 10 points wherever desired. **Note:** Keep in mind that the members don't know who they are working for or toward what purpose. The characters may find themselves given assignments they do not want, or told to do things that may compromise their morals (especially if the sponsoring agency is corrupt or evil). G.M.s should take advantage of this as a continuing story subplot.

3. Small-Time Bandits. The mercs are actually a band of brigands who will engage in criminal acts whenever they cannot find gainful employment, or when crime is more profitable than military service. Their mercenary reputation is used as a cover for illicit activities from smuggling to looting battlefields to outright banditry.

Points for Building: An extra 10 points to Criminal Activity and 10 points wherever desired.

4. Organized Crime. The company is a big-time crime outfit engaged in everything listed in number three but on a larger and more covert scale. This mercenary company may only pretend to sell its services to an employer and tend to betray those who hire them whenever it is convenient. Their goals have little to do with warfare, but with the acquisition of power and wealth for their organization. The Thugees of India and the Ninja of Japan are examples of two ancient sects of criminal specialists and assassins for hire, but who represented a powerful organization in their own right.

Points for Building: Add an extra 20 points to Intelligence Resources, 20 points to Criminal Activity, and 10 points wherever desired.

5. Government. The company is secretly sponsored by an official government, usually one of the smaller kingdoms, and is covered by the government's legal framework. This was a common practice in Earth's history. When a government could not make war directly on another, it often equipped private armies who would then take offensive action. In the sea, they were known as privateers. Frequently, the merc company is used as a covert form of aid to an ally at war (rather than send official troops to the aid of the ally and risking that nation getting involved in a war it doesn't want). The government secretly hires (or arranges the hiring of the army) and supplies the merc company, which is then sent to aid their ally. In other cases, the mercenary company may be a source of revenue for the government, maybe even the most important moneymaker for the kingdom! Instead of exporting normal goods or services, the nation is offering its warriors as hirelings to other, non-threatening, kingdoms. This is likely to be troops of professional soldiers who are predominately good and anarchist in nature and who live by a military code of ethics; they are not necessarily evil or heartless destroyers (but they can be). Points for Building: An extra 20 points in Outfits, 20 points in Equipment, and 20 points wherever desired.

6. Government Front. Sponsored, controlled and secretly owned by a powerful government or power bloc! Likely candidates include the Coalition States, the NGR, Splugorth, Gargoyle Empire, Sovietski, etc. 75% of management will be agents of the government (military officers or major minions), 20% of the support personnel are government agents, and 50 to 75% of the line soldiers are members of the government. This company will try to appear autonomous and try to hire itself out to enemies of the sponsoring government. Their sole intention is to spy, sabotage, conquer or destroy the enemy who has unwittingly hired them. Small companies and squads will most likely engage in spying and sabotage. Larger numbers of troops will be sent far away from their area of origin to engage in covert actions or even open war against any enemy forces.

Points for Building: Add 20 points to Outfits, 20 points to Equipment, 20 points to Weapons, 10 points to Budget, and 10 points wherever desired.

A. Outfits

Uniforms and body armor that the Free Company distributes among members. Uniforms may not be mandatory among all but the largest armies.

1. None. The characters are responsible for their own clothing and armor. Officers have to make or buy their own insignias or badges of office, if any. No replacements of any kind are available. Company Cost: None.

2. Utility Outfits. The company has a standard uniform for all personnel. This is typically an inexpensive one-piece coverall, jump suit or shirt, pants and jacket. The shirt and jacket may have a simple emblem or insignia denoting membership in this particular group. Members must provide their own body armor but can paint it in the same colors and use the official insignia (if there is one). The company has plenty of replacements, in standard sizes, and also provides free laundry service. Company Cost: 5 points.

3. Open Wardrobe. In addition to a basic uniform, a complete range of clothing, uniforms and costumes are available. Standard uniforms are made up of light M.D.C. padded armor (30 to 40 M.D.C.); officers may have the heavier composite and/or plate types. Other individual members can purchase heavier armor at their own expense. Company Cost: 10 points.

4. Specialty Clothing. Standard uniforms are provided as well as medium Mega-Damage body armor (usually 40-55 M.D.C.), with heavy armor (60-80 M.D.C.) available for elite assault units and officers. Special gear, such as SCUBA/diving suits and equipment, radiation suits, and contamination suits, are also available. Availability, replacement suits and repairs are reasonably good. Company Cost: 20 points.

5. Gimmick Clothing. A full range of uniforms and body armor, plus concealed body armor (such as Triax "Plain Clothes" armor), specialty suits and helmets with advanced electronics, communications, homing devices, optics and surveillance gadgets are available. Light exoskeleton battle armor/power armor may be provided to high ranking officers and special operatives. Availability, replacement suits and repairs are reasonably good. Company Cost: 30 points.

6. Unlimited Clothing. High quality uniforms with flashy insignias/emblems and Mega-Damage armor of all kinds are available (rare and exotic items are the only exceptions). Standard armor is equivalent to Dead Boy heavy armor (80 M.D.C.). Common types of light power armor and/or magic armor and clothing are available to high ranking officers and elite troops.

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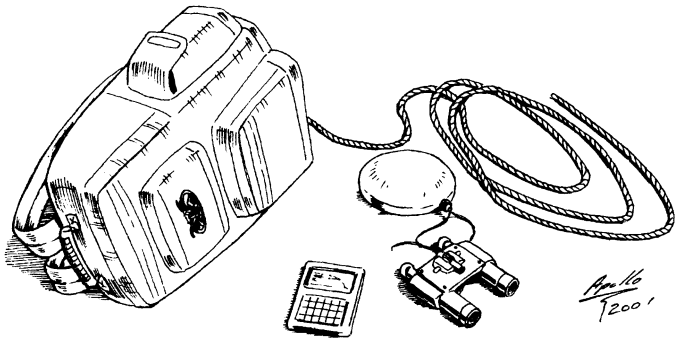
Specialty outfits and forgeries (used for infiltration) can be requested and provided within 1D4+1 days. Excellent availability, replacement suits and repairs for common items, good availability for the expensive and uncommon items. Company Cost: 50 points.



B. Equipment

This describes the general equipment and supplies provided free of charge by the owners/commanders of the mercenary company. Replacement of any lost or damaged equipment is usually automatic. Special Note: Unlike other categories, it is possible to pay points to purchase more than one of the following equipment features. For example, by spending 15 points, a company would provide both electronic (#3) and medical (#4) equipment as described below.

1. None. The characters are responsible for buying and replacing their own equipment. Company Cost: None.

2. Cheap Gear. Each character has a commonly available energy rifle, sidearm (energy or not), three clips for each weapon, a survival knife and up to 5,000 credits' worth of equipment available at the start of an operation. Damaged or lost items may not be easily replaced, especially expensive things like cybernetic implants or heavy weapons. Company Cost: 2 points.

3. Electronic Supplies and Good Gear. One cybernetic implant (if desired) and good quality gear is provided. Available equipment includes sensors, communications, computers, translators, recorders, video, camera, surveillance, basic cybernetic implants and miscellaneous equipment; up to 25,000 credits' worth of items per mercenary soldier. This will always include communications gear, a vital element of military operations. Company Cost: 5 points.

4. Medical Equipment. First-aid and paramedic type equipment and pharmaceuticals are available. Includes antibiotics, painkillers, anesthetic, protein healing salve, sodium pentothal (truth serum), dosimeter, E.K.G. and E.E.G. machines, portable lab, bio-scan, oxygen, all commonly available robot medical kits (RKM, IRMSS, Compu-drug dispenser, etc.) and two basic life support units. Plus a budget of 750,000 for emergencies requiring hospitalization and cybernetic organs or prosthetics. Company Cost: 10 points.

5. Medical Clinic. The company is equipped with full medical facilities equal to a small medical clinic. A full-time doctor (M.D. or Holistic) and one psychic healer are on staff and assisted by four nurses and two paramedics. In addition, the company has an emergency medical budget of 1D4+2 million credits for cybernetics and hospitalization. There is also a small veterinary facility for any combat, riding or work animals. Replacement of lost or damaged equipment is automatic, but the total amount of medical equipment can never exceed 10 million credits. Company Cost: 20 points.

6. Magic Technologies. This company's emphasis is on magic, particularly magic weapons, armor, vehicles, healing, augmentation/enhancements (Bio-Wizardry and magic herbs/potions). 30% of these warriors will have 1D4+1 minor Techno-Wizard/magic weapons/wands/potions/items or Bio-Wizard weapons/parasites/microbes or one major item. All high ranking officers and elite troops will have a rune weapon or Bio-Wizard device or other very powerful magic items. 5% will be Techno-Wizards, 5% will be Ley Line Walkers, and 5% will be others (Temporal Wizards, Stone Wizards, Shamans, dragons, D-Bees, etc.). Company Cost: 40 points.

7. High-Tech Augmentation (Bionics, Juicers, Crazies). This company's emphasis is on high-tech augmentation. 30% will be either full conversion 'Borgs or Juicers, 20% will be Headhunters or partial reconstruction 'Borgs and 10% will be Crazies, Juicers, Wired Gunslingers and other high-tech creations (including mutants, D-Bees/aliens or foreign technology). Company Cost: 40 points.

8. Unlimited Equipment. The company is a high-tech operation equipped with high quality electronics, computers, communication systems, sensors, optics, cybernetics, bionics and all equipment needed for the operation and logistics of the company. High ranking officers and special elite troops can have a personal vehicle of choice and 1D4+2 cybernetic implants (conventional and black market); 10% are partial reconstruction 'Borgs, Juicers, Crazies or robots. In addition, there is a superb mobile mini-hospital that can accommodate as many as 40 patients, has six life support systems, three surgery rooms and one cybernetic surgery unit (cybernetics can be repaired and replaced safely). Two Body Fixers/Medical Doctors, one psychic healer, two Cyber-Docs, eight paramedics and twelve nurses comprise the medical staff. Plus one million credits' worth of common cybernetic items in stock and an emergency medical fund of 20 million credits. Company Cost: 50 points.

C. Vehicles

Transportation provided by the company to the characters. Also includes information on the company's fleet of vehicles.

1. None. Can you run? Fly? Swim? We hope so, because you're not going to get any kind of ride from the company. Company Cost: None.

2. Basic Transportation. The company has just enough vehicles to accommodate its needs. A third are horse-drawn wagons, a third are trucks and motor-home trailers, and the remaining third are old hover trucks and used military jeeps and other heavy-duty vehicles. Transports are usually unarmed and unarmored (i.e., they are low M.D.C. or S.D.C. structures) and are not expected to see combat – not if they plan to survive! The company will cover ground slowly, due to the poor quality of their transports. Company Cost: 3 points.

3. Fleet Vehicles. The company maintains a fleet of trucks, trailers, motor-homes, and light Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs; 4D4x10 M.D.C. main body). They are fairly new and well-maintained. Half the hover and all-terrain vehicles have

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one light laser or machine-gun weapon (1D6 or 2D4 M.D. per blast; 2000 feet/610 m range). The other half are not outfitted for combat and serve only as a means of transportation. In addition, individual characters of officer rank will be assigned their own personal hover car, hovercycle, jeep or land rover (all with one or two weapon mounts). An expense account of 500,000 credits is set up for special travel needs (such as hiring additional transportation, fuel and repairs). Company Cost: 10 points.

4. Combat Cars. As above, but ALL vehicles are outfitted for combat! 70% have Mega-Damage armor and light to medium weaponry (machine-gun, beam weapons, mini-missiles). 10% are heavy combat vehicles such as tanks and heavily armored vehicles, and 10% are aerial combat vehicles such as the Sky King, helicopters and jet packs. If the merc outfit uses magic, up to 20% can be Techno-Wizard or other type of combat vehicle. Company Cost: 20 points.

5. Specialty Vehicles. This fleet contains a number of specially designed vehicles, and most vehicles are military or paramilitary. This includes 2D4 heavy robots or tanks, 3D6 medium or light robots or tanks, and two dozen suits of powered armor with flight capabilities. 20% of all other more conventional vehicles are outfitted with additional armor (+30% of the normal armor), special sensory (radar), electrical (computer), surveillance (camera and bugs), and security systems (locks and alarms) worth about 100,000 credits each. 70% are outfitted with short-range radios (6 mile range/9.6 km). Also, a variety of conventional vehicles and luxury vehicles (for officers) are available. Air support exists in the form of 4D4 air vehicles (typically Sky Kings or similar; half that number if combat jets are available). All vehicles are of top quality, heavy-duty construction and constantly maintained (ten million credits budget). A team of mechanics is employed full-time and includes: one Techno-Wizard (if the company has no bias against magic), 2D4 Operators (with robotics and weapon system skills), 12 mechanics, and 12 assistant mechanics. Company Cost: 30 points.

6. Unlimited Vehicles. Any existing vehicle is available, including tanks, robots, aircraft, jet packs, and Techno-Wizard vehicles. This includes 3D4+4 heavy robots or tanks, 3D6+6 medium or light robots or tanks, and four dozen suits of powered armor with flight capabilities. 50% of all conventional vehicles are outfitted with additional armor (+50% more than normal armor; robots not included), special sensory, electrical, surveillance, security and weapons systems, or may be modified to Techno-Wizard systems. Up to 500,000 credits may be spent on an important vehicle. Common, insignificant vehicles such as motorcycles, jeeps, land rovers, and small A.T.V. trucks and cars are automatically replaced. All vehicles are outfitted with short-range radios (6 mile range/9.6 km) and about 25% with long-range radios. The full-time staff of mechanics is double that of number five. Company Cost: 50 points.

D. Weapons, Power Armor & Bots

The actual weaponry issued to both line soldiers and specialty troopers. They include powered armor suits, robots and combat vehicles (cumulative with the Vehicles entry, above).

1. None. Members of the company are expected to provide their own weapons and equipment, and fend for themselves when it comes to repairs. Company Cost: None.

2. Basic Equipment. Members provide most of their weapons, but simple repairs, spare parts and reloads/bullets/rail gun ammo and recharging of E-Clips are provided by the company. A simple and inexpensive assault weapon is provided as standard issue (something equivalent to an NG-L5 laser rifle). Company Cost: 5 points.

3. Basic Weaponry. All members are issued one common type of energy rifle and an energy pistol or Vibro-Blade (only 10% are heavy weapons like particle beams and plasma ejectors). 10% of the group will be issued some type of common/inexpensive powered armor. One combat robot will be available for every 20 line soldiers. Company Cost: 10 points.

4. Advanced Weaponry. As above, but all members are also issued grenades, and l-in-5 have a heavy weapon (particle beam rifle, plasma weapon, rail gun, missile or grenade launcher, etc.). 20% of the group will be issued power armor suits (30% if light and/or very cheap suits are used), plus one combat robot or tank for every 10 line soldiers. Weapons are all of good quality (unless quantity is stressed over quality) and damaged or lost items are immediately repaired or replaced (20 million credit budget). Company Cost: 20 points.

5. Extensive Weaponry. High-quality energy weapons are issued to all personnel, including 1D4 grenades, energy rifle, and energy sidearm (pistol or other). 40% have heavy weapons including missile launchers, rail guns, particle beam and plasma weapons, etc. 30% of the group will be issued powered armor suits (50% if very cheap suits are used). At least a company of 3D6+6 assault robot vehicles or tanks will be on service with full crews, or one fighting vehicle for every 5 line soldiers,

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whichever is greater. Techno-Wizard and alien/D-Bee equipment may also be available. All weapons are of the highest quality and damaged or lost items are immediately replaced or repaired. E-Clips are recharged as quickly as possible and ammunition is readily available (35 million credit budget). Company Cost: 40 points.

6. Maximum Firepower. The unit is as well-armed, soldier by soldier, as any outfit on the planet. Weapons of all kinds, including explosives, heavy and special weapons are available. There is even limited availability of magic and Techno-Wizard items (roughly enough for 10 to 20% of the troops). 60% of the soldiers are issued a suit of good quality power armor and heavy weapons, plus there is a robot vehicle or two tanks for every 5 line soldiers. Ammunition is plentiful. Weapons and equipment are of the best quality and damaged or lost items are immediately repaired or replaced (50 million credit budget). Company Cost: 60 points.

E. Communications

This is a measure of how good the communications network and devices are in the agency.

1. None. Characters must buy their own and/or relay messages by word of mouth. Company Cost: None.

2. Basic Service. The company has one long-range, wide-band radio (500 mile/800 km range), one portable language translator and a walkie-talkie (3 mile/4.8 km range) in each vehicle. No scramblers or bug detectors available. Company Cost: 2 points.

3. Secured Service. Two long-range radios, all personnel have a walkie-talkie or other short-range type radio, all with scramblers, six language translators, two mini-radar systems, one PC-3000 pocket computer, and a portable video camera and player. Company Cost: 10 points.

4. Full Range System. Every tent and major vehicle is equipped with a short-range (6 mile/9.6 km) radio and language translator, plus there are four long-range radios on line, and all personnel have a short-range walkie-talkie available to them. All radios have scrambler capabilities and one of the long-range radios has a laser booster system that doubles its range (1,000 miles/1,600 km). All senior officials have a full-size computer as well as the PC-3000 and a language translator, other officials have only the PC-3000. Soldiers have reasonable access to a variety of commercial audio and video disk recorders and players. A public announcement system is wired throughout the camp, and a full sound and video recording studio trailer monitors and controls the music and announcements piped through the PA system. Two full-time communications specialists, two electrical engineers and five assistants are on staff. All equipment is good quality and well maintained. Company Cost: 15 points.

5. Deluxe Communications Network. Identical to number four, except that all the equipment is of the highest quality, the communication staff is twice as big, and equipment is more plentiful and readily available. Company Cost: 25 points.

6. Superior Communications. Not only does the company have everything provided in number five, but it has a communications command center (triple the number of communication staff) able to coordinate the actions of the whole company at once. All officers have full-size and pocket-size computers and language translators. Company Cost: 40 points.

F. Internal Security

This is the level of internal infiltration that the company is vulnerable to. Note that this is the only thing that prevents spies and intruders from already having been placed in the organization. Enemy agents, moles, "turned" employees and supernatural interlopers can only be prevented with high levels of internal security. **Note:** This is the security provided to the company while it is out "in the field" while on a campaign.

1. None. No security, anyone can walk in or out and company members are not screened or given background checks. No supernatural safeguards other than the characters' own awareness or powers. Company Cost: None.

2. Lax. A pair of security guards at all main entrances check visitors in and out. A patrol goes around the camp's perimeter. Only the officers' quarters and important vehicles and facilities have locks or alarms. 25% chance of a company member being an infiltrator working for himself or for another organization. No mystic safeguards other than the player characters' own awareness and powers. Company Cost: 2 points.

3. Tight. Alert security guards, electronic alarms, and roving patrols secure the company site from intruders. A watch is organized and operates 24 hours a day. In potential combat situations, the whole camp is in a state of readiness (soldiers sleep with their weapons at hand, at least 25% of all company members are "on duty" at all times, etc.). A rigid check of possible employees reduces the chance of enemy infiltrators to 15%.

Supernatural safeguards include security teams familiar with common supernatural and magic occurrences and how to handle them (items such as silver crosses, garlic and holy water are available). The security detail will have at least some Psi-Stalkers/Dog Boys, or other magic and psionic sensitive soldiers, including at least one psychic or spell caster. Company Cost: 10 points.

4. Iron-Clad. Every entrance and exit is under constant video monitoring and guarded by a security team. Besides the precautions outlined in #3, picket lines and outside guard posts provide a security blanket as far out as several miles around the camp site, including air reconnaissance. Other security measures include high-quality locks and alarms in all vehicles and facilities, hidden compartments/safes, floodlights, emergency generators, motion detectors, heat sensors, mini-radar, and camera surveillance of areas of importance. Magic wards of alarm or incapacitating magic are strategically placed with an eye toward stopping supernatural infiltration. Magic/supernatural security is otherwise as above. Company Cost: 20 points.

5. Paranoid. Top security and then some; all the measures taken in number four plus. Suspicious characters may be strip-searched or denied entrance, and no one can so much as enter a bathroom without surveillance. Multiple layers of defense are set up to detect enemy forces at least 10 miles (16 km) away from the main camp site. Several psychics and sensitives are employed as part of the security force. The average level of the security force is 1D4+3. At least 25% of the company forces will be under arms all the time, including robot and combat vehicles. Supernatural safeguards include a dozen protection circles, amulets and scrolls (including Negate Mechanics, Negate Magic, Dispel Magic Barrier, Turn Dead, Exorcism, Constrain Being, Desiccate the Supernatural, Ensorcel, Remove Curse, Globe of Silence, Globe of Daylight, Locate, Negate Poison, Pu-

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rification, and Apparition; 1D4 of each). The commanding officers' rooms are protected by a Sanctum spell and several Mystic Alarms. Superior Protection Circles, wards and similar safeguards are scattered throughout the compound. Company Cost: 40 points.

6. Impregnable. A vast amount of time and resources have gone into this security system; similar to number five, only with the absolute best locks, alarms, equipment, supernatural safeguards and experienced personnel (add one experience level to each NPC member of the security force and double the number of psychics and mages). The security force has developed a system of secret verbal signals and hand signs and countersigns to warn each other of danger and trouble. A reaction force is always on alert to counter any intrusion. Surveillance cameras, motion detectors, heat sensors and other measures protect the facilities and quarters. The perimeter fence includes a microwave fence and full radar and ground sensor system. There is only a 2% chance of an infiltrator being found anywhere in the company. Company Cost: 60 points.

G. Permanent Bases

The mercenary company that has a permanent secure base for the company will select numbers 2-6. Many companies have no permanent base and are nomadic or semi-nomadic groups, traveling around the continent looking for work.

1. None. The group has no permanent home or fortification to retreat/go home to or hide out at. They travel around and stay in temporary camps (**Note:** the security in these temporary camps can be as high as the company wishes it to be; see "F" above). Company Cost: None.

2. Partial Headquarters. The company has a semi-permanent base of operation located on land that they own/claim or have purchased or leased from a nearby community. This facility can be as little as some office space and a few apartments, or several acres of land where vehicles are kept and tents are pitched. The only permanent structures are likely to be a few storage shacks and a run-down looking barracks building. Personnel can stay at this simple facility to recover from wounds, illness, to await their next assignment, or just to relax and rest. Likewise, the characters can engage in training, teaching, recruiting, etc. The entire compound can only hold a maximum of 20% of the total troops at any one time; most of the company is on the road and away from the partial HQ. Company Cost: 2 points.

3. Headquarters. The Company owns a large tract of land, usually close to a friendly town or city, where the whole organization can establish camp. There are a few permanent facilities built in the area, such as a saloon, a few sturdy barracks, some storage buildings and a field hospital (none are likely to be Mega-Damage structures; if they are, they'll have light M.D.C.). The land is primarily a safe place to park one's vehicle and pitch a tent when the company is not involved in a campaign. The government of the nearest civilized area (farm, village, town, city, etc.) is usually friendly and sells supplies and equipment to the troops. Company Cost: 10 points.

4. Fortified Headquarters. A permanent headquarters with several permanent buildings, including barracks (enough for half the troops), shooting range, garage (for vehicle and bot repair), meeting hall with smaller conference room(s), several storage buildings, commissary and arsenal (at least half are light to medium M.D.C. structures). The place is surrounded by a wall or fence, and has a security equivalent to Internal Security #4, above (this applies only to the headquarters, and not to the company when it is on the road). The location can house 80% to 100% of its troops and has enough supplies to last a twelve-month siege. Company Cost: 20 points.

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5. Company Town. The company owns a whole town! This is usually true only of the larger mercenary companies. The town's facilities are mostly dedicated to serving and entertaining the mercenary company (70% of all town trade is related directly to meeting the company's needs; the remaining revenues may be made up in smuggling, slave trade, weapons manufacturing, tourism and other businesses). The town is heavily fortified. In many cases, all or part of the town is fortified and may be enclosed by protective walls and have several clock, bell or obvious watchtowers (as well as radar dishes and communication towers on the roofs of buildings). It also has a permanent home guard equal in size to 40% of the total company force; this guard is not expected to join the mercs on most campaigns and may be made up of former mercenaries who want a (relatively) peaceful billet. Security for the whole town is roughly equivalent to Internal Security #3, with level #4 at most mercenary-operated areas and #5 at vital military points. About two years' worth of food, weapons and supplies for the entire population are stockpiled in several secure spots/caches around the town. Company Cost: 40 points.

6. Company City. Same as #5 except that the company is large enough to support a whole city (often, several associated mercenary companies combine their resources to fund such a city). Mercenary related businesses are an important part of the city's economy; roughly 50% of all trade is directly related to the mercenary trade. Security is also typically equal to #5. The city could survive several years of siege, and is designed to be defensible against a much larger force. Company Cost: 60 points.

H. Intelligence Resources

These are the types of intelligence-gathering methods and systems available to the mercenary company. This includes scouts, spy networks, and informants. Intelligence is very important for all military operations. Special Note: It is possible to pay points to purchase more than one of the following intelligence resources.

1. None. The company has no designated scouts or spies, and relies on the talents of individual members. Company Cost: None.

2. Scout Detachment. The company has formed a scout group to gather information about enemy positions. They are typically Wilderness Scouts, Rangers, Trapper-Woodsmen, Native Americans, Cyber-Knights, Psi-Stalkers or Simvan, Dog Boys, Psi-Druids or Headhunters with wilderness and tracking skills (espionage skills can be very helpful, but are not a requirement). Company Cost: 5 points.

3. Special Military Operatives. The company has a team of trained spies. Applicable O.C.C.s include the CS and Triax military specialist, elite robot or power armor pilots, 'Borgs, Juicers, Crazies, Commandos, Special Forces, Bounty Hunters, Spies and similarly appropriate O.C.C.s. These special operatives are not only used to gather information, but to infiltrate, spy on, sabotage, confuse and engage the enemy in covert operations. Company Cost: 10 points.

4. Psionic and Magic Operatives. Magicians and psychics are used as scouts, spies and saboteurs. Likely candidates for this position can include the Line Walker, Mystic, Temporal Wizard, Warlock, Mystic Knight, and other practitioners of magic, psychics (particularly Mind Melters, Mind Bleeders, Psi-Slayers, Psi-Druids), Lynn-Srial, dragons, Faerie Folk, and creatures of magic. Company Cost: 20 points.

5. D-Bee Specialists. Similar to #4, except these characters are from another dimension. They must have a background in tracking, wilderness scouting and/or espionage or have unique, superhuman or supernatural powers and may have alien weapons and technology. Such beings may include Psi-Stalkers, mutant animals, Simvan Monster-Riders, Tattooed Men, Mechanoids, vampires, shape-changers, teleporters, and other beings with strange abilities. (See descriptions in **Rifts® Conversion Book One**, and various other World Books, particularly **Rifts® New West, Rifts® Canada, Coalition War Campaign™, Psyscape™, Federation of Magic™** and both **Atlantis** world books). Company Cost: 20 points.

6. Infiltration Network. In addition to having 2D4 squads of scouts, 1D4 squads of special military operatives and 1D4 magic and/or psionic operatives, the company has an entire network of secret agents, infiltrators, and moles! There is a 12% chance that the mercs have 1D4 agents in two or more of the Coalition States (excluding Lone Star), Tolkeen, Lazlo and 1D4 other major forces/communities on the continent. There is also a 17% chance of having spies among 1D4+1 rival mercenary/bandit outfits or enemy organizations. There will be 1D4 "safe houses" or hideouts in each of the infiltrated communities. Furthermore, the mercs know about (20% chance of having dealings with) smugglers, weapon dealers, body-chop-shops, the Black Market and underground organizations operating within each of the infiltrated communities. **Note:** At the G.M.'s option, there is a 5% chance that a specific low ranking employee of a rival or criminal organization is working with/for the player characters. Company Cost: 50 points.

I. Special Budget

This category reveals the money available for any kind of special projects, not for regular operating costs. For example, if a covert team needed cash to buy weapons in an area beyond the company's normal supply line or needed special weapons or transportation, bribes, etc., this section determines just how much cash the company can afford to spend.

1. None. No money available for any special projects. Characters are on their own. Company Cost: None.

2. Nickels and Dimes. Up to 10,000 or even 20,000 credits are available for any one operation. But it had better be a success! Company Cost: 5 points.

3. Small Potatoes. The company can dig up as much as 100,000 credits. Company Cost: 15 points.

4. Large Loans. The company has up to one million credits to kick into any important missions. Company Cost: 25 points.

5. Big Bucks. Up to 100 million credits can be made available. Company Cost: 45 points.

6. Mega Bucks. The company has up to 1.5 billion credits available! Company Cost: 60 points.

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J. General Alignment of Personnel

The majority (80%) of the company's personnel falls into this category. Player characters and specific NPCs may be the exception.

1. Evil. Miscreant and Diabolic. Company Cost: None.

2. Evil. Miscreant and Aberrant. Company Cost: None.

3. Anarchist. Company Cost: 2 points.

4. Anarchist and Unprincipled. Company Cost: 4 points.

5. Unprincipled and Scrupulous. Company Cost: 7 points.

6. Scrupulous and Principled. Company Cost: 10 points.

K. Criminal Activity

Mercenaries often have a reputation for engaging in banditry and other criminal acts as well as (or even instead of) military activities. Many companies will engage in the looting of enemy camps, strongholds and allied civilian communities/sympathizers. The following are some of the special personnel skilled in the criminal arts and who supplement the company's income with illegal services like assassination, blackmail, and coercion. **Note:** Several of the criminal activities can be purchased and the same activity can be purchased as often as four (4) times.

1. Con Man (1). An expert fast-talker who fools people into financing wild schemes, granting bad loans, or otherwise parting with their hard-earned money. May also be used to sell substandard weaponry or equipment (useful for moving bad stock the company has somehow acquired). Company Cost: 5 points.

2. Prostitutes (3). Ladies of the night who sell sexual favors. They usually serve the company members (which reduces the dangers for soldiers in enemy territory), but may also sell their services to outsiders if the company commander allows it. Prostitutes are also used in blackmail schemes, information gathering and spying. All three have a P.B. attribute of 10+2D8, but M.A. is only 6+1D6. Company Cost: 5 points.

3. Cyber-Doc (1). A Cyber-Doc and one assistant/nurse illegally practice the science of cybernetic and bionic augmentation. Company Cost: 10 points.

4. Gang of Robbers. Traveling some distance away from the company, a gang of 2D4+2 thieves and thugs rob isolated houses and communities, or mug people in the alleys and dark shadows. There is a 50% chance that this activity is not officially sanctioned, but is a racket organized by low-level officers, unknown to their superiors. The thieves try not to seriously injure or kill anybody, but beatings are commonplace. The gang members try not to use the same equipment or uniforms as the company and often wear civilian clothes or other disguises, and carry captured or stolen weapons. Company Cost: 10 points.

5. Smugglers and Sellers of Contraband. A traveling mercenary company is an ideal front for smuggling. How many customs inspectors will dare to mess with a small army? Traveling with the company are 1D6+2 specialists in smuggling with 1D4+3 levels of experience. They buy, sell, and transport scarce, illegal, or dangerous goods; most notably poisons, drugs, pre-Rifts artifacts, magic, weapons, cybernetics, bionics and fugitives. They will also protect, hide and deliver secret packages, contraband and information for outside clients (including other crooks, the Black Market, or a government like the Coalition). Most smugglers will have good contacts with the Black Market and can be useful when the company needs to find some illegal or scarce commodity. Company Cost: 15 points.

6. Expert Assassin (1). An evil, 1D4+4 level, warrior who specializes in murder; can be any Men of Arms O.C.C., including 'Borgs, Crazies, Juicers, Psi-Stalkers, Wilderness Scouts, Gunslingers, Bounty Hunters, and others. Company Cost: 12 points.

7. Psychic Enforcer (1). A psychically powered individual whose job is to enforce the wishes of the commander and the needs of the company. Assignments include torture, interrogation, frightening and hurting people, ferreting out spies, detecting supernatural menaces, working as an elite bodyguard, protection and murder. A 1D4+2 level Mind Melter, Mind Bleeder, Psi-Slayer or any of the psychic O.C.C.s that appear in **Psyscape™** and elsewhere. Company Cost: 15 points.

8. Special Forces. In this instance, a pair of super-warriors used for special missions such as assault/raids, sabotage, and murder. This group is treated as a special unattached unit under the direct control of the company command. Typically a pair of 1D4+3 level Commandoes with power armor, Special Forces soldier with power armor, Crazies, Juicers, 'Borgs, or a dragon (or other supernatural powerhouse) and a psychic or practitioner of magic. Company Cost: 20 points.

9. Safecracker/Locksmith (2). A demolitions expert and mechanical engineer who uses his talents to "crack" safes, open security doors, break out of jail, avoid/bypass or disarm security systems and similar feats. See the Safecracker O.C.C. in **Rifts Mercenaries.** Company Cost: 15 points.

10. Forger (1). A 1D4+6 level brigand with a knack for art and forgery. He will use his skills to create false passports, citizen's papers, identity cards, credit cards, invoices, and other documents. This rogue is also familiar with photography and video/film equipment and recording. See the Forger O.C.C. Company Cost: 15 points.

L. Reputation/Credentials

Just what is the reputation of the company? The credentials determine how much respect or fear the characters can command, how much the company can charge for their jobs, etc.

1. Hunted. The company is rumored to be trouble and/or composed of criminals, cutthroats or fugitives (for any reason, real or trumped up). All members of this mercenary band are viewed with great suspicion by everybody who encounters them. The authorities of several towns and cities are hunting them because they supposedly reneged on a contract, owe money for damages they caused or because they are known scoundrels wanted by the law, the Coalition States or some other kingdom! There is a 01-40% chance that a hunting party (CS, military, merc, or adventurer), bounty hunter(s), or a messenger spreading the word that they are wanted criminals, will show up whenever the company/characters stay in a town for more than a week. Most potential employers will see the company as a liability and may not hire them or pay 1D6x10% less than normal. Only unscrupulous or desperate employers will pay more for the company's services. Many employers won't hesitate to betray the mercs if it benefits them in any way. Most people will shrug off such betrayal with words like "They had it coming," all because of their unsavory reputation. Company Cost: None.

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2. Scoundrels. The company is viewed with suspicion. They have a reputation for being overly violent and untrustworthy. They may also have a history of being as damaging to their employers as the enemy they were hired to fight. Nobody is actively pursuing the company, but there is a good chance that employers will shortchange or betray the mercs if they think they can get away with it. Company Cost: 1 point.

3. Unknown. No one has ever heard of the company (usually because it has just been formed). Would-be employers try to be fair and give the company the benefit of the doubt and reasonable pay. However, employers are likely to believe the worst about the company if the information comes from a reputable source. Contracts will be easy to come by, but the pay will not be as high as for better-known armies. Company Cost: 5 points.

4. Known. The company has developed a reputation as a reasonably effective unit that gets the job done and keeps its side of the bargain, unless justified to do otherwise. Many employers will be reluctant to betray this company, because doing so will damage their own reputations, may evoke the mercenaries' wrath, and other mercenary companies may decide not to work for them. The company will be paid above-average rates for their services (about 20% more than unknown or trouble mercs). Company Cost: 10 points.

5. Excellent Reputation. The company has a reputation for being reliable, efficient, and lethal. This reputation is likely to mean that the company has rarely lost an engagement, are excellent fighters, rarely fail at their assigned tasks, and may be known for some heroic, impressive or daring feat(s). The company has a reputation for always fulfilling their contracts and can be trusted by their employers. By the same token, any employer that betrays the company knows that he will be branded as a treacherous fiend, causing most other reputable mercenaries to avoid him like the plague. Furthermore, this mercenary group may decide to teach him a lesson and/or extract justice (and payment) by any means they deem necessary. The company with an excellent reputation commands much more for their services and gets it (50% to 60% more than the average soldier of fortune, but they are worth it!). Company Cost: 25 points.

6. Famous! The company is known as "one of the best" in the business and have a reputation for being extremely successful, organized, resourceful, dangerous, heroic and/or deadly. They are also recognized as highly trustworthy and reliable. Lesser mercenaries, freelance troubleshooters and adventurers may hesitate to take up a contract that puts them at odds against this outfit. In fact, 25% will refuse such a contract or flee from combat when they are actually pitted against them (50% chance of fleeing if the "famous" warriors start off strong and/or are beating the tar out of the opposing forces). The rates for a famous mercenary company are among the highest on the market and the leaders rarely engage in haggling or price reduction. If these mercs are as good as their reputation, the employer is acquiring the best there is and winning is almost assured. Double the typical level of pay. **Note:** If the famous company suffers two or more terrible defeats in combat their reputation will drop to "Excellent" or "Known." If they lose and show acts of betrayal, cowardice, incompetence or repeatedly appear to be weak or buffoons, their reputation will change to "Scoundrels" or the "Hunted!" It will take a great deal to recapture their reputation once it is lost. Company Cost: 50 points.

M. Salary

The amount of money received weekly by the mercenaries will vary depending on the size, reputation and quality of the company. Note that operating as a freelance army or strike force means that even the best mercenary forces may have to endure periods of little or no pay; especially between jobs. The "average week's pay" listed below reflects the average pay of a typical mercenary trooper when work is plentiful and payment is on time.

1. None. The company members share the pay/profits and the expenses equally. Each merc gets a fair share of the profits from whatever is left after meeting expenses. Depending on the outfit, leader and circumstances, pay and booty may be shared equally by all members, with officers and specialists taking only a slightly higher cut (10% to 20%), or it may be based on performance, seniority or whatever the leader decrees. Average Week's Pay: 3D6x10 credits for line soldiers and 1D4x100 for officers and special operatives, plus a portion of the profits whenever there are any. Weapons, equipment and other goods may be offered in place of cash payment. Company Cost: None.

2. Freelance. Same as None, described above, but a little more structure and some operating cash. The management of the company tries to supply food, ammunition, and basic supplies on a regular basis. They also provide limited access/use of the company's basic resources (whenever available), such as use of vehicles, special equipment, medicine, repairs, and similar. Company members have no binding contract and can be fired or can quit with a moment's notice. Average Week's Pay: 1D4x100 credits for line soldiers, 1D6x100 for officers and specialists. Company Cost: 2 points.

3. Pittance. The company employs the characters on a full-time basis with regular set wages rather than sharing in the profit. The company also consistently provides food, basic supplies, ammunition, recharging of weapons, and uniforms free of charge. It also offers reasonable access to other facilities and benefits at no charge, such as vehicle repair and maintenance, doctors and medical treatment, hideouts, base camps, access to vehicles, the use of special equipment, explosives, and similar (such use must be authorized by the company commander). Soldiers usually sign up for a one to four year stretch with an option to re-enlist when the contract expires. Average Week's Pay: 300 credits for line soldiers, 500 to 600 for officers and 500 to 800 for special operatives. Bonuses may be given when the company hits a big payoff. Company Cost: 5 points.

4. Good Salary. In addition to the basic items listed under "pittance salary," the quality of the food, supplies, services and facilities are better, plus the warriors receive a good salary. All personnel sign a two to four year contract. In case of death or dismemberment, the family or beneficiaries are paid a compensation equal to three months' (13 weeks) salary. Average Week's Pay: 400 credits for line soldiers, 500 to 550 for non-commissioned officers, 600 to 700 for medium-grade officers (Lieutenant, Captain), and 800 to 1500 credits for higher-grade officers and special operatives. Bonuses of 1D4x1000 credits are paid to officers every quarter during which the company is under contract. Combat troops can receive a hazardous duty bonus of 1D4x100 a month depending on the circumstances, and bonuses or special equipment, weapons, and armor may be given when the company has windfall profits. Company Cost: 10 points.

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5. Excellent Salary. In addition to all the standard supplies and needs of a mobile army and access to the company's good facilities, the mercenaries receive an excellent salary. Soldiers sign on for a three to six year period. Average Week's Pay: 500 credits for line soldiers, 600 to 700 for noncommissioned officers, 700 to 900 for medium-grade officers, and 2000 to 5000 for high ranking officers and special operatives. Hazardous duty bonuses of 1D6x100 are paid to the troops every month (double for officers and specialists), plus all soldiers receive a 1D4x1000 credit bonus on successful completion of a contract (2D6x1000 for officers and specialists). A pension for soldiers killed or incapacitated on duty may also be available to the soldier or his beneficiaries; this is equal to 30% of his standard pay for 3D4 years. Company Cost: 20 points.

6. Outrageous Salary! All the usual accommodations, supplies, facilities and perks plus spectacular pay! Average Week's Pay: 700 credits for line soldiers, 900 to 1200 for noncommissioned officers, 1,200 to 2,000 for medium-grade officers, and 4,000 to 8000 for superior officers and special operatives. Hazardous duty bonuses of 1000 credits are paid to the troops every month (double for officers and specialists), plus all soldiers receive a 2D6x1000 credit bonus on successful completion of a contract (1D4x10,000 for officers and special operatives). A pension for soldiers killed or incapacitated on duty is paid to the soldier or his beneficiaries; this is equal to 50% of his standard pay for 10 years, plus a one time, lump sum payment of 1D4x10,000 credits (double for officers). Company Cost: 40 points.

Other Information of Note

Each mercenary company should have a name; traditionally, the name includes the team leader's last name. Most will also have a logo/insignia, and banners. It's a good idea to come up with an owner/commander, the commanding officers, and a few other key characters. Remember that interesting mercenaries, officers, medics, special operatives (like smugglers and spies) and other personnel can make the company and adventuring much more interesting. Mercenary companies, like all groups of people, will have a network of personal relationships, from respect and love to envy and hatred. The more colorful the detail, the greater the atmosphere.

A modern military "squad" is 10 soldiers. A squad can be sent on reconnaissance, seek and destroy missions, sabotage, escort, guard duty or "Special Operations." A mercenary squad (6 to 10 soldiers of fortune) can operate as a reconnaissance, etc., squad for a larger outfit, or as an independent, small mercenary force. On Rifts Earth, even a handful of warriors can wield a great diversity and amount (sometimes staggering) of power.

A "platoon" has 40 troops typically divided into four squads of 10 soldiers each.

A "company" has 160 troops divided into four platoons (40 soldiers) with four squads per platoon.

A "battalion" has 640 troops, one H.Q. and four or more companies.

A "brigade" has 1,920 troops, one H.Q. and three or more battalions.

A "division" has 5,760 troops, one H.Q. and three or more brigades.

A "corps" has 11,520 troops, one H.Q. And two or more divisions.

Traveling Shows

Based on original material by Kevin Siembieda and Steve Sheiring

Do not underestimate the popularity and impact (and danger) traveling shows in North America have on the wilderness communities. They represent entertainment, business (will often sell and trade goods and services) and communication (carrying news, gossip and rumors with them from town to town), and sometimes healing (real and quackery). Consequently, they are considered a high form of entertainment and value welcomed with open arms by most wilderness folk.

In the wild regions of Rifts Earth, entertainment is really hard to come by. Most people live incredibly hard and painful lives, barely surviving from day to day. What's more, most wilderness people, particularly D-Bees, live out in the boondocks away from the big cities and kingdoms. Consequently, they have few if any modern facilities or luxuries. Many live as if thrust back into a barely industrial age in which modern conveniences like movies, computer games, holograms and other diversions, even books, are as alien as any creature from a Rift. But people are people, and the harder their lives, the more they crave some sort of release from the daily grind. Into this niche falls the most common form of wilderness entertainment around: *Traveling shows, freak shows* and *circuses.*

These wandering productions, both large and small, travel from place to place, setting up for a day or so, sometimes a week if the pickings are good, and then hitting the road once more. In many towns and villages, a visit from *any* traveling entertainment is big news, and the entire settlement will turn out to catch the show. Most shows charge a small fee (how else would they support themselves?), but are content to accept trade for goods like food, booze, shelter, fuel, and supplies and services (repair work, healing, etc.).

Traveling shows have the opportunity to use their unique abilities, skills, magic, or appearance to make money above and beyond mere showmanship. Many are scam-artists who bilk the public of their hard earned money with games of chance (tilted greatly in the show's favor) or with sad stories of woe, get rich quick schemes, fake maps to whatever the rube desires, or by selling fake Indian charms, alien doodads and secret elixirs guaranteed to cure what ills ya (really some sort of herbal concoction mixed with 10-50% alcohol). Others in the show pick pockets, sell drugs, offer peep shows (may sell their body, too), rob homes (while most everybody is at the show), steal chicken eggs, fruit and pies, and other types of theft and crime. Traveling shows are also wonderful resources for spying and gathering information, and there is always somebody interested in buying or trading for information, as well as smuggling, making deliveries (for a fee) and contact with a large variety of people. As they travel from town to town, the performers can make maps of the region and the towns they stay at, accurately noting places and people of importance. They can inconspicuously

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study the people, their philosophies, laws, defenses, security, leaders and businesses, take note of the community's wealth or poverty, its racial mixture, the people's loyalties, their leanings toward magic, social activities and targets to rob or raid. Such raids may not be by the people in the show, but by a gang of bandits or raiders to whom they sell information for a 10% to 20% cut of the take.

Traveling shows operated by evil opportunists and brigands can lead to many fun and strange encounters, as well as clashes with unique enemies. The freak show, circus or medicine carnival can be much more than a bunch of no-name bandits and con artists, they may include real monsters, mutants, cutthroats and even spies from a syndicate, rival town, the Coalition States, Federation of Magic or anywhere. Traveling shows can go a long way to adding color, suspense and action to an adventure, or be the source of adventure in and of itself.

On the down side, to really make a sideshow work, a fair amount of thought and character development is required on the part of the Game Master. However, it can pay off big if done right, and if used as *continuing characters/villains.* Remember, these scoundrels travel all over the country. Moreover, if they are not thieves and con artists themselves, they often sell their knowledge and services as spies to bandits, crime lords, raiders, slavers, mercenaries, evil groups, other kingdoms and even the Coalition States. (**Note:** Ironically, the CS has banned Traveling Shows from coming within 20 miles/32 km of a Coalition city, the 'Burbs, or permanent military base, but they can visit outlying CS communities, rural areas and Coalition military camps

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outside of the States.)

Of course, not all shows are operated by evil villains, but even the most honest and friendliest traveling show can be a great source of information, news, rumors and trouble. For even good guys are likely to be renegades, rogues and outcasts who have no trouble smuggling goods and people in and out of places, or hiding fugitives, mages and D-Bees from the Coalition or evil monsters. They sympathize with "fellow" outcasts and often skirt the law and traffic in contraband (magic, books, etc.). Many can also provide medical treatment and/or sell food and supplies, including weapons, magic items, TW items and oddities depending on the individual show. If nothing else, these nomadic entertainers provide amusing fodder for encounters.

Size and Orientation

Traveling shows come in all sizes and variety. There are six basic types of shows presented here along with the total available points one can spend to design or "build" show features. The smaller the show the less points, diversity and features possible. Game Masters with specific needs, ideas and requirements may bend these rules, because they are meant to serve as a *guideline,* not carved in stone laws for all shows. There are always exceptions. Also, while the emphasis is in the design of *unscrupulous criminal and evil shows*, the same features can be used to create honest and good traveling shows; just skip the criminal sponsors and criminal activity, and select an Anarchist or *good* alignment.

Each basic type of show will list the initial number of points one can spend on the "features." The sponsoring force behind the show will also add points that can be spent on features, though some of these may have to be spent on a specific feature. Specific, individual characters in the show may add to the overall power and dangerousness of the performers.

1. Sideshow. This is a very small operation, usually consisting of about 6-14 people, including the show's owner, performers, and operatives. The typical sideshow offers a combination of entertainment (minstrels, tumblers, acrobats, jugglers, magic), fortune-telling (a must whether the fortuneteller is really psychic or a charlatan), and an array of oddities. The oddities are mostly inanimate objects, including supposedly alien devices, pre-Rifts artifacts (real, fake, or both), stuffed animals, strange or monstrous skulls and skeletons, and usually one or two "live" freaks (the main attraction and half the time a fake). The sideshow usually runs on a shoestring and will have very few resources and even less political power (virtually none; considered to be second-rate and charlatans by most educated people and those in power). Often return to the same towns and places where they have done well in the past.

Points for Building: 110 points, plus an additional 10 points for Vehicles and 30 points for Acts.

2. Freak Show. Most freak shows are about twice the size of a sideshow and often have 12 to 32 personnel, but are frequently just as poorly budgeted. The show's owner, performers, workers, and the freaks, are usually willing members of the show. The emphasis of a freak show is the bizarre, horrific and frightening. Other than the show's barker (announcer/host) and the possible inclusion of a juggler, tumbler, fortuneteller, minstrel or magician, there are no performers; *the freaks* are the show.

There will be at least six to ten living freaks, many of whom may be fakes, but at least two or three will be genuine and truly impressive; one, if not both, will be a show stopper. But even with the real freaks (often D-Bees, aliens, mutants, shapechangers or demons), many are not as disgusting or dangerous in real life as they may appear to be in the show. A great deal of hype and theatrics are involved in the best of the traveling shows.

Points for Building: 150 points, plus add an additional 20 points for Freaks (Acts) and 10 points for Equipment features.

3. Medicine Show. The infamous medicine show can be as small as three or four people in a single wagon, to a traveling show of some size (10 to 40 people) with entertainers and sideshow freaks, but the emphasis is always SELLING product. Medicine shows are almost always a vehicle for flimflam men and charlatans. The typical show will offer a number of potions, tonics, salves, herbs, alcohol and charms to cure whatever ails you. Often the selection of brews is staggering and can number over a hundred! The sad thing is that most of the potions and tonics are useless fakes, sugared or spiced water or fruit juices spiked with alcohol or narcotics. Only the herbs are mostly authentic and even then it's best if one knows exactly what he's buying rather than trust the salesperson.

Generally, S.D.C. poisons, herbs for holistic medicine, garlic, wolf bay, wolfbane, mushrooms, spices, salt, candy, honey, vinegar, fruit juices, beer, wine and moonshine are available in abundance. Magic potions, amulets, talismans, scrolls, Techno-Wizard items and similar items (usually kept behind the closed doors of a special wagon for that special customer) should be viewed with the greatest suspicion!

Entertainment is likely to include stage magic focusing on sleight of hand (palming, escaping from handcuffs, etc.) and a *minstrel/singer* or *tumbler* (great distractions while another member or two of the show slips through the crowd picking the richest pockets). *A fortuneteller* (psychic or not) and *healer or doctor* (may only know first aid) are also typical members of a medicine show. The rest of the show's members are salespeople, workers, pickpockets, guards and assistants. May return to the same towns and places where they have done well, but will avoid places where they ran into trouble with the law or were accused of trickery, fraud or other illicit activity. This type of show will stop to pander to any group, large and small – soldiers, mercenaries, bandits, adventurers, travelers, prospectors, farmers, even impoverished refugees, and especially merchant caravans – if they think they can make a sale.

Points for Building: 140 points, plus 10 points for Internal Security and 20 points for Criminal Activity.

4. Traveling Troubadours. Unlike the previous three traveling shows, troubadours, or minstrel shows, are all entertainment. Generally, the troupe will put on a half dozen to a dozen short performances, each about a half hour to 45 minutes long, throughout the day, ending in a big nighttime show, two or three hours long. The big show can be a drama or comedy play, stand-up comedy, a pre-Rifts movie (always fascinating), or music, or music and dance. The pre-Rifts movie and music and dance (especially if the townsfolk can dance along) are the two most popular attractions and will pack them in every time. The shorter daytime shows can include musicians, singing, sing-alongs, short comedy plays, silly skits, storytelling, puppet

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shows, juggling, tumblers, acrobats, magic tricks, and sleight of hand. Frequently return to places where they made good money and/or were applauded for their show. This type of show will also stop to entertain platoon or large-sized camps of soldiers, mercenaries, bandits, adventurers, travelers, merchant caravans and anybody they think will contribute food, money and other gratuities when the hat is passed.

Points for Building: 160 points are available, plus 10 points for Equipment and 20 points for Outfits.

5. Small Circus or Carnival. The small circus/carnival generally focuses on showmanship and entertainment of all kinds. Consequently, it is likely to have a sideshow, troubadours and even a medicine or freak show and games of chance as part of its entertainment package throughout the day. The main show, however, is at night and lasts two or three hours, preceded by several smaller shows during the day and evening hours.

Most circuses will have everything one might expect: acrobats, tumblers, jugglers, clowns, magicians, fortunetellers, animal tamers, animal rides, games of chance, oddities, and souvenir and concession stands. They may or may not have a freak show or may or may not show pre-Rifts movies. The typical small circus will employ 200 to 500 people.

Carnivals are similar to circuses except that there is less emphasis on performances (no long show) and more emphasis on rides, sideshows, freak shows, games, and experiences. The typical traveling carnival will support 100 to 400 workers and performers and offer at least a dozen different rides, a house of illusion, two or three showgirl performances, one magic show, two or more sideshows, and a couple dozen games of chance, as well as concession stands, fortunetellers, etc.

Some of the larger and/or **wild carnivals** offer gambling and arena style gladiatorial matches to win a cash prize. The fights often allow challengers from the audience to fight one of several champions, for a price, of course. Rides and experiences can include traditional carnival rides like the Ferris wheel and less traditional rides like zooming along on a Sky Cycle or Tree Trimmer, riding giant robots or tame monsters and exotic animals (like a Pegasus or Fury Beetle), the house of illusions (using *real* illusionary magic cast upon the crowd by a mage specializing in illusion magic, as well as mirrors and holograms), and so on. Entertainment is limited to freak shows, sideshows, museums, fortunetellers, psychics, healers, magicians, showgirls, wandering clowns, jugglers, minstrels, and games of skill and chance (frequently rigged against the player). Carnivals also sell a larger array of trinkets and junk items.

Points for Building: 240 points are available, plus 50 on Acts and 10 on Reputation.

6. Large Circus. The circus is still the favorite of all of the traveling shows, consequently, there are a number of large traveling circuses throughout the world. Circuses are especially popular among frontier and rural communities that don't have common access to technology or television. A large circus can employ 800 to 1600 people and will offer a huge venue of diverse acts and entertainment.

Points for Building: 300 points are available, plus 90 on Acts and 20 for Reputation. **Note:** The points listed are the total available points for all of the different show features. Even with 350+ points, selecting features can be difficult. Remember that if no points are spent on a particular feature, say Security, then the traveling show automatically has the worst level in that feature.

Sponsorship

Exactly who is controlling the traveling show, providing them with their leadership, goals, and their real source of funds? Select one. There is no cost for this necessary feature.

1. Independent Operative. The show is owned and operated by an entrepreneur or group of owners who like the business and run the show. Sometimes funded by a larger private business. His goals are to make money as he and his employees see fit. The owner(s) is responsible for the upkeep of the show, the selection of its attractions, payment to the employees and performers, food, supplies and virtually everything else. He (they) answer to no one and go where they please.

Points for Building: Gets an extra 20 points to Acts and 20 points wherever desired.

2. Secret. The performers and staff have no idea who is really behind the organization or what hidden motives there might be in their assignments to stay alert and gather information. For the moment, they are their own bosses, given a free hand at what they want to do, provided they stay within the framework of the organization. The features and equipment of the show are paid for by this mysterious benefactor.

Points for Building: An extra 10 points for additional Acts, 10 points to Defense, and 30 points wherever desired, but remember, they don't know who they are working for or toward what purpose. The characters may find themselves sent on assignments they do not want, or told to do things that may compromise their morals (if the sponsoring agency is corrupt). G.M.s should take advantage of this as a continuing story subplot.

3. Small-Time Bandits. The traveling show is run by a gang of brigands who use the show as a means to steal, smuggle, gather damaging or reconnaissance information for resale and extortion, spying, assassination, selling illegal or fake merchandise, etc.

Points for Building: An extra 30 points for Criminal Activity and 10 points wherever desired.

4. Organized Crime. The show is a big-time crime outfit engaged in everything listed in number three but on a larger and more covert scale.

Points for Building: An extra 10 points to Internal Security, 10 points to Defense, 50 points to Criminal Activity.

5. Government. This kind of show is secretly sponsored by an official government, usually one of the smaller kingdoms, and is covered by the government's legal framework. The group's emphasis can range from crime-busting to smuggling, from scientific research to espionage. This could include internal security, ferreting out moles/spies from other governments, criminals, monsters, and terrorists, covertly investigating and eliminating supernatural dangers without frightening the public, as well as smuggling, reconnaissance and field investigations. **Note:** Not necessarily an evil force, may be good or anarchist in nature.

Points for Building: Add 10 points to Internal Security and 50 points wherever desired.

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6. Government (or Syndicate) Front. Sponsored, controlled and secretly owned by a major government (e.g., the Coalition States, Tolkeen, Pecos Empire, New Eldorado, NGR, etc.)! 75% of the management personnel are soldiers (military specialists and technical officers), 20% of the employees and performers are soldiers and the military defense force is entirely government personnel. The CS would use such a show as a front for a traveling espionage network used to spy on non-Coalition towns, suspected anti-CS supporters, rebels, mercenary companies, practitioners of magic, and free thinkers, as well as other intelligence. This type of "front" operation could also be used for terrorism, sabotage, blackmail, assassination and general trouble (robbery, vandalism, etc.). The traveling organization is free to set its own policies and to wage war against enemies of its sponsor state as it sees fit. This can include something as extreme as burning a town to the ground and slaughtering hundreds, if it can be done without implicating the traveling show/espionage network, to selling it out to its enemies or slavers. Either way, the characters represent a special team of operatives who utilize robots, cyborgs, and high technology, and/or magic and psychic powers. The organization should be predominately evil.

Points for Building: Add 10 points to Internal Security, 20 points to Defense, 10 points to Equipment and another 40 points to wherever desired.

A. Outfits

The quality and flamboyance of the clothing worn by performers and workers. Replacement of any show outfit is automatic.

1. None. The characters are responsible for their own clothing. Costumes tend to be plain and simple. No replacements of any kind are available. Show Cost: None.

2. Utility Outfits. The show has standard uniforms for all its employees and colorful costumes for its performers. Quality is good and designs are nice, but nothing spectacular. Show Cost: 5 points.

3. Open Wardrobe. A complete range of clothes, uniforms, and costumes of superior quality. Bright colors, spectacular designs, rhinestones, sequins, feathers, capes, hats, and masks are available to all employees and performers. Quality is excellent; replacements and new designs are regularly available. Show Cost: 10 points.

4. Specialty Clothing. The absolute best in uniforms and costumes. A similar array as described in #3 are available, only more dynamic, imaginative and colorful. Includes stage armor, fluorescent colors, glow in the dark fabric, wigs, masks, hats, and props, as well as standard uniforms, clothing and special gear. Even civilian clothing is fairly classy, equivalent to what's available in expensive clothing stores. Show Cost: 20 points.

5. Gimmick Clothing. A full range of quality clothes and costumes equal to number three (add 10 points to be equal to number four), but also includes an array of colorful wigs, fright wigs, masks, complete makeup kits, disguises, and grease paint. Plus "gimmick" costumes like clothes with hidden pockets, body armor, concealed items (flowers, coins, tools, weapons, etc.), wings that are functioning gliders, jet packs, concealed optical systems built into helmets/ hats/goggles, etc. The quality is high, very fashionable and believable. Show Cost: 30 points.

6. Unlimited Clothing. All the quality costumes, uniforms, specialty outfits, and gimmick clothing one could ever want. All quality levels are available and the world's top designers are on call to specially make appropriate outfits for any need. Replacements and new designs are frequently available. Show Cost: 50 points.

B. Equipment

This describes the general equipment and supplies provided free of charge by the management of the traveling show. Replacement of any lost or damaged equipment is usually automatic and at the expense of the management. **Special Note:** Unlike most other categories, it is possible to spend points to purchase more than one of the following equipment features. For example, by spending 15 Points, a show would provide both electronic (#3) and medical (#4) equipment as described below.

1. None. The characters are responsible for buying and replacing their own equipment. Show Cost: None.

2. Cheap Gear. Each performer has the basic equipment, props, and materials for his craft and up to 5000 credits of additional equipment available to him. Damage or lost items may not be easily replaced, especially expensive things like cybernetic implants, weapons and vehicles. Show Cost: 2 points.

3. Electronic Supplies and Good Gear. Good quality gear is provided, along with up to 25,000 credits' worth of common sensory, recording, video, camera, communication, computer, surveillance, and miscellaneous equipment (like language translators, electro-adhesive pads, etc.) is available for each major

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performer and 10,000 credits' worth for secondary performers. This selection is limited to electronic items only. Show Cost: 5 points.

4. Medical Equipment. First-aid and paramedic type equipment and pharmaceuticals are available. Includes antibiotics, painkillers, anesthetic, protein healing salve, sodium pentothal (truth serum), dosimeter, E.K.G. and E.E.G. machines, portable lab, bio-scan, oxygen, all commonly available robot medical kits (RMK, IRMSS, Compu-drug dispenser, etc.) and two basic life support units. Plus a budget of 750,000 for emergencies requiring hospitalization and cybernetic organs or prosthetics. Show Cost: 10 points.

5. Medical Clinic. The traveling show is equipped with full medical facilities equal to a small medical clinic. A full-time doctor (M.D. or Holistic) and one psychic healer are on staff and assisted by four nurses and two paramedics. In addition, the show has an emergency medical budget of 1D4+2 million credits for cybernetics and hospitalization. There is also a small veterinary facility for any circus animals. Replacement of lost or damaged equipment is automatic, but the total amount of medical equipment can never exceed 10 million credits. Show Cost: 20 points.

6. Unlimited Equipment. The traveling show is a high-tech operation equipped with high quality equipment, electronics, computers, communication systems, props, and all materials and equipment needed for the acts and to operate the show. In addition, there is a superb mobile mini-hospital that can accommodate as many as 40 patients, has six life support systems, three surgery rooms and one cybernetic surgery unit (cybernetics can be repaired and replaced safely). 1D4+1 Body Fixers/Medical Doctors, one psychic healer, one Cyber-Doc, six paramedics and twelve nurses comprise the medical staff. Plus one million credits worth of common cybernetic items in stock and an emergency medical fund of 20 million credits. There is also a comparable veterinary clinic for any circus animals. Show Cost: 50 points.

C. Vehicles

Transportation provided by the management of the show to the characters. Also includes information on the show's fleet of vehicles.

1. None. Can you run? Fly? Swim? We sure hope so, because you're not going to get any kind of ride from the traveling show. The owner has two horse-drawn wagons: his personal wagon and living quarters and the supply wagon. Both are so filled with equipment that there is no space for others. Characters must provide their own transportation and tents. Show Cost: None.

2. Basic Transportation. The traveling show has just enough vehicles to accommodate their needs. A third are horse-drawn wagons, a third are trucks and motor-home trailers, and the remaining third are old hover trucks and trailers. Living quarters are cramped and must be maintained by the people living in them. Performers may purchase their own vehicles but maintenance is their cost and responsibility. Show Cost: 3 points.

3. Company Fleet of Vehicles. The management of the show maintains a fleet of trucks, trailers, motor-homes, and wagons; all are fairly new and well maintained hover vehicles. 1D4+2 construction vehicles such as cranes and bulldozers, and two giant NG-V10 robot labor vehicles complete the standard fleet. In addition, the performers may be assigned their own personal hover car, hovercycle, or minivan. Living accommodations are in pleasant, spacious, personal trailers for top performers and their families and reasonably spacious accommodations shared by two to six laborers or minor performers. Special traveling arrangements and expenses for commercial airline flights are available upon authorization, with about 500,000 credits in the expense account. Show Cost: 10 points.

4. Deluxe Fleet of Vehicles. The fleet of vehicles includes new and constantly maintained hover trucks, trailers, motor-homes, wagons, construction vehicles (8), four NG-V10 robot labor vehicles, six Mountaineer ATVs, and a small fleet of personal luxury vehicles for the show's star performers (their choice). An expense account for vehicle maintenance, fuel, and rentals, including chartered aircraft and boats, is also maintained at a level of four million credits. All vehicles are high quality, with special vehicles being the top in luxury and performance. Living accommodations for the stars are spacious and luxurious, equipped with video and music disc stereo systems, and rich furnishings, and attractive in design. Personal trailers for minor performers and workers are also spacious and attractive though shared by families or two to six individuals. Show Cost: 20 points.

5. Specialty Vehicles. This fleet contains a number of specially designed vehicles, especially large trucks, trailers, animal trailers, vans, motor-homes and construction vehicles (12). Includes six NG-10V robot labor vehicles, a dozen NG-W10 Heavy Labor 'bots, six NG-W9 light labor 'bots, and two dozen T-21 Hopper power armor suits (see *Rifts® Sourcebook* for Labor 'bots and Hopper power armor or the *Rifts® Game Master Guide*)! 20% of the vehicles are outfitted with additional armor (+20% the normal armor), and special sensory (radar), electrical (computer), surveillance (camera and bugs), and security systems (locks and alarms) worth about 100,000 credits. 70% are outfitted with short-range radios (6 mile range/9.6 km). Also, a variety of conventional vehicles and luxury vehicles (for star performers) and helicopters are available on a limited basis. All vehicles are of top quality, heavy-duty construction, and constantly maintained (ten million credits budget). A team of mechanics is employed full time and includes one Techno-Wizard, four Operators (with robotics and weapon system skills), 12 mechanics, and 12 assistant mechanics. Living accommodations are luxurious (identical to #4). Show Cost: 30 points.

6. Unlimited Vehicles. Any existing vehicle is available, including rare and expensive pre-Rifts models (used in the show), jet packs, aircraft, and all the specialty vehicles and robots listed in number five. 50% of the vehicles are outfitted with additional armor (+40% more than normal armor), and special sensory, electrical, surveillance, security, and weapon systems (if allowed by the military/defense feature), or may be modified to Techno-Wizard systems; up to 500,000 credits may be spent on a vehicle of importance. All are outfitted with short-range radios (6 mile range/9.6 km). Living quarters are the most luxurious. The full-time staff of mechanics is double that of number five. Show Cost: 50 points.

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D. Communications

This measures how good the show's communications network and devices are.

1. None. Characters must buy their own and/or relay messages by word of mouth. Show Cost: None.

2. Basic Service. The traveling show has one long-range, wide-band radio (500 mile/800 km range), one portable language translator and a walkie-talkie (3 mile/4.8 km range) in each vehicle. No scramblers or bug detectors available. Show Cost: 2 points.

3. Secured Service. Two long-range radios, all personnel have a walkie-talkie or other short-range type radio, all with scramblers, six language translators, two mini-radar systems, one PC-3000 pocket computer, and a portable video camera and player. Show Cost: 5 points.

4. Full Range System. Every tent and major vehicle is equipped with a short-range (6 mile/9.6 km range) radio and language translator, plus there are four long-range radios on line, and all personnel have a short-range walkie-talkie available to them. All radios have scrambler capabilities and one of the long-range radios has a laser booster system that doubles its range (1000 miles/1600 km). All key administrators have a full computer as well as the PC-3000 and a language translator, lesser administrative personnel have only the PC-3000. Employees have reasonable access to a variety of commercial audio and video disc recorders and players. A public announcement system is wired throughout the show and a full sound and video recording studio trailer monitors and controls the music and announcements piped through the PA system. It is also used to mix and prepare music, sound effects and videos for the show. Two full-time communication specialists, two electrical engineers and five assistants are on staff. All equipment is good quality and well maintained. Show Cost: 15 points.

5. Deluxe Communication Network. Identical to number four except that all the equipment is of the highest quality, the communications staff is twice as big, equipment is more plentiful and readily available, there are two recording studios, and a small video theater tent or vehicle. Show Cost: 25 points.

6. Theater and Superior Communications. Not only does this show have everything provided in number five, but it also has two large screen video theaters, and a massive full screen theater with a complete pre-Rifts film projection system with the best surround-sound system. This package also provides computerized lighting, emergency generators, and a laser light show system. The two audio, video and film studios have state of the art editing, production and duplicating facilities. Plus a communications command center monitors, regulates and controls the PA system, lighting, surveillance/security cameras, sensor systems, and communications. All administrators have full-size and pocket-size computers and language translators. Two dozen or more sets of video cameras, lenses, filters, and other portable recording equipment are available to personnel for business and personal use. Show Cost: 50 points.

E. Internal Security

This is the level of internal infiltration that the show is vulnerable to. Note that this is the only thing that prevents spies and intruders from already having been placed in the organization. Enemy agents, moles, "turned" employees and supernatural interlopers can only be prevented with high levels of internal security.

1. None. No security, anyone can walk in or out, and employees are not screened or given background checks. No supernatural safeguards other than the characters' own awareness and powers. Show Cost: None.

2. Lax. A pair of security guards or muscular thugs stand at the main entrance and another pair keep an eye out for thieves and troublemakers (1D4 level experience Headhunter, Wilderness Scout or strong Vagabond). No special identification cards or codes are necessary, everybody knows who is an employee and who is not. Only the owner's property and the most important vehicles and attractions have locks and alarms. 25% chance that one out of every ten employees has a criminal or Coalition background, or is an infiltrator secretly working for himself (skimming off the top) or for another organization. No mystic safeguards other than the player characters' own awareness and powers. Show Cost: 2 points.

3. Tight. Alert security guards and circus personnel keep one eye on the grounds and the other eye open for intruders and troublemakers. Everybody works as a team. One out of every 20 employees is a warrior type whose job is security, plus two security guards protect the main trailer (office/money) or attraction, another two watch the entrance, and two psi-stalkers wander the grounds, especially alert for supernatural and psychic troublemakers (1D4+2 level Headhunter, scout, ex-soldier, and two Psi-Stalkers). All show vehicles and living quarters have good, solid locks, and electronic alarms. Larger shows have the performer and living areas guarded by another 2D6 man security force (same as above) and may require employees to wear electronic picture I.D. cards and have surveillance cameras to monitor the most important areas. A rigid check of prospective employees reduces the chance of Coalition and active criminal infiltrators to 15% (a criminal past is okay). The traveling show family is fairly close knit and protective of each other and the show. Supernatural safeguards include a security staff familiar with common supernatural and magic occurrences and how to handle them (items such as silver crosses, garlic, and holy water are available). In addition to the Psi-Stalkers, psychic sensitives and other psionic or magic O.C.C.s as trained members of the show will assist in the event that there is trouble (at least one mage, 1D4 psychics/fortunetellers, and 1D4 with Minor or Major psi-powers). These individuals can sense for evil and magic and observe a person's aura, etc. Show Cost: 10 points.

4. Iron-Clad. Every entrance, exit, attraction and area of importance is under constant video monitoring and guarded by one or two members of the security force. The security force represents a quarter of the overall staff (they also assist in tearing the show down, putting it up, and other chores). 10% of the force are at least partial reconstruction 'Borgs or Headhunters, 10% Juicers or Crazies, 25% Psi-Stalkers or Dog Boys, 20% Headhunters or ex-military, and the rest have some level of combat or street experience (City Rats, scouts, tough Vagabonds), plus one or two psychic and magic O.C.C. security personnel. All are 1D4+2 level, the head of security will be 1D4+4 level.

Common M.D. and S.D.C. weapons, body armor, optical enhancements, and sensors are provided by the management with good availability. 30% will have power armor or robot vehicles

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available (no Coalition, Naruni or heavy Triax items like the Ulti-Max). Other security measures include high quality locks and alarms on all show vehicles and attractions, hidden compartments/safes, floodlights, emergency generators, motion detectors, heat sensors, mini-radar, and camera surveillance of areas of importance, including the personnel's living area. Magic wards of alarm or incapacitating magic are strategically placed in areas off limits to the public. Patrons attending the show are asked to check weapons at the door and a metal detector is used to scan those entering (15% chance of slipping by or around the scanner). Robots are not permitted on the show grounds. Supernatural safeguards include the previously mentioned mage and psychic characters on the force, as well as psychic and magic performers, and the occasional protection circle, amulet, or talisman. The security staff is familiar with common supernatural and magic occurrences and how to handle them (items such as silver crosses, garlic, and holy water are available). The members of the show are a tight-knit family that watches out for each other and the show. A rigid check of prospective employees reduces the chance of Coalition and active criminal infiltrators to 10% (a criminal past is okay). Show Cost: 20 points.

5. Paranoid. Top security and then some; all the measures taken in number four plus. Suspicious characters may be strip-searched or denied entrance, and no one can so much as enter a bathroom without surveillance. Multiple checkpoints and constant personnel checking prevent intruders from entering the restricted areas of the show. Several psychic sensitives and mages are employed as part of the security force. The average level of the security force is 1D4+3. In addition to the human security force, eight NG-W9 light labor 'bots with illegal military/defense programs and two Triax Dyna-Bots patrol the area, plus one Triax Ulti-Max or Glitter Boy is deployed at all times (see Rifts Sourcebook for new robots). Supernatural safeguards include a dozen protection circles, amulets and scrolls (including Negate Magic, Dispel Magic Barrier, Turn Dead, Exorcism, Constrain Being, Remove Curse, Globe of Silence, Globe of Daylight, Locate, Negate Poison, Purification, and Apparition; 1D4 of each). The owner and chief of security's rooms are protected by a Sanctum spell and several mystic alarms. Superior protection circles, wards, and similar safeguards are scattered throughout the compound. The members of the show are an extremely tight-knit family that watches out for each other and the show. The chance of Coalition and active criminal infiltrators is a mere 5% (a criminal past is okay). Show Cost: 40 points.

6. Impregnable! A vast amount of time and resources have gone into this security system; similar to number five, only with the absolute best locks, alarms, equipment and experienced personnel (add one experience level to each member of the security force and double the number of psychics and mages). The security force has developed a system of secret verbal signals and hand signs and countersigns to warn each other of danger and trouble. Reaction to trouble is swift and discreet. Surveillance cameras, motion detectors, heat sensors, and other measures protect the attractions and property of the show. The personnel's living area is protected by a microwave fence (in addition to the other safeguards) and a full radar and ground sensor system is also used. The members of the show are fanatically protective of their people and property. There is only a 2% chance of an infiltrator being found anywhere in the organization. Show Cost: 60 points.

F. Defenses/Military Power

The amount of military force that the show commands. This is the number of defenders and special defensive weapons, robots and equipment available to security and personnel in the event of attack.

1. None. The characters must provide their own weapons and equipment and fend for themselves or rely on the internal security force, if any. Show Cost: None.

2. Basic Defenses. A small number of basic arms have been distributed to the members of the show. These will include basic, inexpensive body armor like the Urban Warrior and Plastic-Man, and weapons like the NG-57 ion blaster, NG-33 laser pistol, NG-L5 laser rifle, and L-20 pulse rifle. Anti-vampire weaponry includes wooden crucifixes, garlic, wooden stakes and mallets, spears, and the occasional (about one in eight) crossbow with wood bolts. The management also provides six Highway-Man motorcycles with machine-gun mounts, four ATV hovercycles with laser mounts, two suits of power armor (no Glitter Boy or Ulti-Max) and two giant robot combat vehicles of the more common and basic variety (like Titan or NG-V7 Hunter). Show Cost: 5 points.

3. Weapons & Armor. A more deadly selection of arms and armor has been distributed to the members of the show. Any type of body armor is available, with the majority being the heavier armors such as Gladiator, Crusader, Bushman, Explorer, or armor of choice. 10% of the personnel have NG-Samson, Flying Titan, or TX-Hopper power armor. 40% of the vehicles have been fitted with weaponry, including rail guns, and additional vehicle armor. In addition, the organization has a special rescue team of ex-military and combat personnel who comprise a 12 man force. All are 3rd to 6th level (1D4+2) and at least two will have psychic powers and two will know magic. All have the best weapons and equipment, four wear power armor of choice (excluding Glitter Boy and Ulti-Max), and two pilot giant robot combat vehicles (any). Show Cost: 10 points.

4. Militia. The traveling show has a 32 man force of warriors; all are 2nd to 5th level (1D4+1) and have the best weapons, body armor and equipment. Six wear power armor (any excluding Glitter Boy and Ulti-Max), six are 'Borgs, six pilot giant robots (any, excluding GB or UM), and eight are psychics and/or mages (at least one is a Mind Melter, Burster or Zapper, two are Ley Line Walkers). The remaining are experienced fighters, including Gunslingers, Gunfighters, Headhunters, Juicers, Crazies, Scouts, ex-Coalition soldiers, Psi-Stalkers, mutant animals, and D-Bees; all have their own vehicle (hovercycle, jet pack, car, etc.). All show personnel have the same type of equipment listed in number three, as well as performers who may know magic or possess psychic or other powers. 50% of the vehicles are fitted with weapons and sensory systems like radar. Weapons and equipment are of good quality and damaged or lost items are immediately repaired or replaced (20 million credit budget). Show Cost: 20 points.

5. Private Army. A small unit of 40 combat veterans comprise this elite force; all are 5th to 8th level (1D4+4). One is a Glitter Boy or Ulti-Max (or giant bot of choice), six pilot giant robots, 12 pilot power armor of choice (excluding Glitter Boy or Ulti-Max), and six are psychics and/or mages (at least one is a Mind Melter, Burster or Zapper, and two are Ley Line Walkers, Warlocks or Mystics or Tattooed Men). The remaining are ex-

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perienced fighters, and all are equipped with the best armor and most powerful weapons, including rail guns, particle beams, plasma, mini-missiles, etc. In addition to the human troops, there are 12 NG-W10s with Black Market military programs, armed with pulse rifles (4 with light rail guns), as part of the defense force. Anti-vampire weapons, explosives, jet packs, and body armor of all varieties are also available. Half are constantly on duty and all are ready to mobilize in a moment's notice! As usual, weapons and armor have been issued to all personnel and 60% of the vehicles have an extra 1D4x100 M.D.C. armor and weapons added to them. Weapons and equipment are of the best quality and damaged or lost items are immediately repaired or replaced (35 million credit budget). Show Cost: 40 points.

6. Strike Force. Identical to number five plus the following additions to personnel and equipment. Seven Triax Dyna-Bots, four more psychics or Psi-Stalkers or mutant animals, two full conversion 'Borgs or two men of magic, two healers, another Glitter Boy or Ulti-Max (or bot of choice), and twelve additional fighters; 60 troops in all (plus the show's personnel). Add one experience level to all characters in the strike force. As usual, weapons and armor have been issued to all personnel and 60% of the vehicles have an extra 1D4x100 M.D.C. armor and weapons added to them. Ammunition is plentiful. Weapons and equipment are of the best quality and damaged or lost items are immediately repaired or replaced (50 million credit budget). Show Cost: 60 points.

G. Types of Acts

There are no limits to the number of acts or combinations of acts that one can purchase from this feature. The same act can be selected as often as three times (although the same basic routine, each is different from the other). The more spectacular shows are the most costly but also the biggest moneymakers.

1. Average Clowns. Six clowns, all are first and second level Vagabonds who have a knack for comedy. All paint their faces and wear funny, colorful costumes. A typical clown can make funny voices and faces, tell jokes, and perform short, silly stories with a lot of sight gags and slapstick. Show Cost: 2 points.

2. Expert Clowns. Six clowns, all are excellent comedians and experienced clowns (1D4+2 levels, any O.C.C., retired, turned to clowning). These men and women can usually sing, dance, play a musical instrument, do back flips, cartwheels, tumble, and balance (Gymnastics skill), as well as the usual funny clown antics. Show Cost: 5 points.

3. Jugglers. Four jugglers, all first or second level Vagabonds with high physical prowess and a knack for juggling and comedy. Can usually dance and tell funny stories; nothing more. Show Cost: 1 point.

4. Expert Jugglers. Four jugglers, all are experienced performers (1D4+1 levels, any O.C.C. turned to performer). These fellows can dance, juggle and throw knives (W.P. Targeting), and perform sleight of hand (Concealment, Palming, and Pick Pockets) and may be tumblers as well (Gymnastics). Show Cost: 5 points.

5. Expert Tumblers. Four people skilled in tumbling, falling, rolling, pulling punches, back flips, cartwheels, balance and other feats of physical prowess on the ground (all Gymnastics and General Athletics abilities). Show Cost: 5 points.

6. Average Minstrels. Four handsome or lovely characters (P.B. 12+) who can sing, dance and play at least two different musical instruments each. Speak at least two languages. Typically second or third level Vagabonds. Reasonably good quality. Show Cost: 2 points.

7. Expert Minstrels. Four handsome or lovely performers (P.B. 14+) who sing, dance, can play at least four different musical instruments, tell stories (several Lore skills and possibly Anthropology and/or Archaeology), and speak at least four different languages (50% are literate in one). Show Cost: 5 points.

8. Expert Sideshow Barker (1). This is the charismatic individual who stands outside the tent or wagon and shouts out descriptions about the wonders of the show or exhibit that awaits within, and also serves as the announcer during the show(s). They are consummate salespeople and often con-artists. Barkers speak loudly, quickly, clearly, and have a knack for exciting people by their words. Typical attributes required: I.Q.: 9+1D6, M.A.: 18+2D6, M.E.: 10+2D6, high P.B. is a nice asset but not a requirement. Typical skills: Radio: Basic, T.V./Video, First Aid (is always there for the public), Prowl, Anthropology, Archaeology, all Lore, Basic Math, and speaks at least three languages and literate in two. Frequently a 1D4+1 level Rogue Scholar or Rogue Scientist O.C.C. turned "carny-man" (may still practice O.C.C. skills/profession, but it's as a barker that the person makes his money). Show Cost: 8 points per each Barker.

9. Fortuneteller (1, non-psychic). This your classic reader of tarot cards, tea leaves, crystals, palms, lumps on the head, and crystal balls. They tend to create a lot of atmosphere and suspense but all of their predictions and intuition is showmanship;

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none is real. Usually a low level Vagabond or City Rat turned carny. An M.A. or P.B. of 18 or higher is typical. A typical reading costs 10 to 60 credits depending on the skill of the reader and the complexity of the reading. Show Cost: 5 points per each fortuneteller.

10. Psychic or Mystic Fortuneteller (1). These are the real McCoy. True psychics or sorcerers with the ability to see into the future and/or sense emotions and thoughts. These guys can pull in the big bucks, 2D4x100 credits per individual reading, always amazingly accurate. Psychic sensitive or Mystics whose psi-abilities include Clairvoyance, Object Read, Empathy, Telepathy, Total Recall and See Aura are the very best!! They can see the future and use empathy and telepathy to read the patron himself, interpreting emotions and thoughts to tell the person what they want to know. Object Read is great for locating people or telling whether a lost person is alive or dead. Many magic spells can produce similar results. Only 1D4 level. Show Cost: 8 points.

11. Expert Stage Magician (1). The stage magician knows no real magic but is a master of sleight of hand. They are frequently City Rats, Vagabonds and Thieves who have turned their unconventional skills toward entertainment. However, they may be encouraged to continue their thieving by the managements of the less scrupulous traveling shows, picking pockets and fleecing the public. Skills include Concealment, Palming, Pick Pockets, Pick Locks, Prowl, Streetwise, and Escape Artist (special, no skill bonus). Other skills common to the trade are Hand to Hand: Basic, Expert or Assassin, Climbing, Running, General Athletics, Computer Operation, Computer Hacking, Basic Math and additional languages. Generally, the magician will have an M.A. or P.B. of 20 or higher. 1D4+4 levels of experience. Show Cost: 6 points.

12. Pickpocket and Shill (1). This is an unofficial member of the traveling show who pretends to be a spectator. The petty crook will pick pockets, break into vehicles, and perform other acts of theft. As shill, the person helps work the crowd by being amazed by performances and claims or statements of fact (loud oohing, ahhing, excited exclamations, fear, fainting, applause, etc.), to provide supposedly independent verification of facts ("I've been a trapper in these hills for years an' I kin say thet thing is real. An' I ain't never seen nothing like it."), volunteering to drink potions and tonics with immediate and wonderful effect, and so on. Generally, the shill will have an M.A. and M.E. of 18 or higher. Skills should include Concealment, Palming, Pick Pockets, Pick Locks, Streetwise, and Hand to Hand: Basic, among other rogue and/or espionage skills like Intelligence and Disguise. Typically, a low level City Rat, Thief or Vagabond turned carny. Show Cost: 6 points.

13. Expert Acrobats. A group or family (80% likelihood of being a family) of 6-8 individuals of varying ages, two are attractive females. These performers have learned the art of acrobatics from an early age on as a profession. The two oldest members will be 30+3D6 years old and have 6+1D6 levels of experience, the youngest will be 6+2D6 years old and have 1D4 levels of experience, and the other four will be 18+1D6 years old and have 4+1D4 levels of experience as acrobats. Skills include Dance, Acrobatics, Gymnastics, General Athletics, Body Building, Climbing, Running, and Hand to Hand: Expert. Show Cost: 15 points.

14. Expert Animal Tamer. One star animal tamer (1D6+5 levels of experience), two secondary tamers (1D6+2 levels of experience) and six assistants, two of which are Psi-Stalkers or Simvan Monster Riders (1D4+1 level each). Show Cost for Performers: 15 points.

Show Cost per Animal Act: Each specific animal act must be purchased separately. Select as many acts as desired.

12 trained dogs of all kinds; dance and do tricks: One point.

24 snakes for a snake act: One point.

Four bears; dance and do tricks: Three points.

Six horses; dance, leap, do tricks: Four points.

Six elephants; dance and do tricks: Five points.

Four African lions; leap through flaming hoops, do tricks: Five points.

Two tigers; same tricks as lions: Five points.

Two leopards; same tricks as lions: Five points.

Small dinosaur; tame, does tricks, can be ridden: Five points.

Larger herbivore dinosaur; same tricks as small: 10 points.

Common monster; tame, does tricks, can be ridden: Five points.

Exotic monster (like gryphon, pegasus, Rhino-Buffalo, etc): 20 points, not tamed; 30 points tamed.

15. Real Magic Act (1). An experienced spell caster such as a Line Walker, Mystic, or Warlock (1D4+3 level); sometimes a Conjurer, Tattooed Man, Stone Wizard or Shifter and his assistant (1). Performs an exciting, but safe, magic show using real magic. Illusionary magic is ideal along with spells like Concealment, Levitate, Fool's Gold, Trance, Escape, Fly, Superhuman Strength, Invisibility, Ignite Flames, Fuel Flames, Circle of Flame, Extinguish Fire, and other "showy" types of magic that could be used in an act. Healing and curative magic is always a plus, especially in a Medicine Show. Show Cost: 12 points.

16. Healer (1, psychic or magic). This is a service oriented performer (level 1D4+3) who will provide conventional doctoring along with magic or psychic healing. The more complex the ailment the more costly the service. This can be a very lucrative feature, especially in areas where medical treatment is costly, poor or not available at all. Show Cost: 12 points.

17. Showgirls! Eight voluptuous women, P.P. and P.B. attributes 12+2D6, usually 1D4+ 1 level City Rats or Vagabonds, but can be any scholar and adventurer or psychic O.C.C.s. Skills of note: Dance, Sing, Cook, Pick Pockets, Streetwise, Body Building, speaks at least two languages. Show Cost: 10 points.

18. Live Freaks (2). Two strange, alien, D-Bee, frightening looking mutant, or disfigured intelligent life forms (not necessarily humanoid). Or 6 fake freaks (makeup and an act; look very convincing). Show Cost: 12 points.

19. Sideshow Attractions. 12 inanimate oddities. Can include alleged magic items, pre-Rifts artifacts, the skulls or skeletons of aliens or monsters, inanimate mummies, strange plants, and similar. Show Cost: 10 points, 20 points if 1D4+1 are really weird.

20. Pre-Rifts Movie! The showing of pre-Rifts movies is always an incredible draw. People are fascinated about life before the Time of the Rifts. They will pay 10 to 40 credits to watch the absolute worst love stories, dramas, comedies, and horror movies and sit glued to their seats, just to see what the world

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was like. Color movies about city life are among the most popular. High quality, blockbuster action/adventure movies, historical, and science fiction movies are the most popular and can command 50 to 100 credits a person! Some movies can get even more. Show Cost: 15 for projector/theater system (FREE if Communications #6 has been selected). Plus the cost of the film. Lousy film of any kind: 5 points (3 if black and white). Good film drama, gangster, adventure: 10 points. Great film drama, gangster, adventure, or fair sci-fi: 15 points. Great Science Fiction: 30 points.

21. Rides. Show Cost: Pony ride, six animals: 1 point. Horse ride, six animals: 2 points. Elephant ride, four animals: 4 points. Other unusual animals, like camels, llamas, buffalo, ostrich, etc. (four animals): 5 points. Exotic Animals (two animals): 10 points. Carnival rides like those typically found in modern traveling carnivals (Ferris wheel, spinning rides of all kinds, etc.). **Note:** Big rides like roller coasters require too much construction, materials, time and labor for a traveling show: 3 points each.

22. Games of Chance. These are all types of simple games of skill and chance, like throwing knives or darts, tossing a hoop over a target, target shooting, and similar arcade games. Show Cost: 1 point per each game.

23. Gladiatorial Arena. Patrons may challenge the show's champions. Credits or prizes may or may not be offered as a reward to the participants. Taking bets is usually allowed. The typical arena is a large tent with a roped off area indicating the combat zone. Fights are usually limited to fisticuffs and ancient style weapons (swords, maces, etc.). Fights are rarely to the death. Setup comes with one 9th level warrior, typically a Crazy, Juicer, Simvan, Grackle Tooth, Mastadonoid, or other fearsome-looking and powerful D-Bee trained in Hand to Hand: Expert or better. P.S., P.P., and P.E. attributes are a minimum of 22, one or two are often much higher. Three secondary gladiators level 1D4+2, possessing one extraordinary physical attribute, P.E., P.P., P.S. or speed, are the other fighter's arena management. The animal tamer may allow one of his bears or other animals to fight as well. Show Cost: 15 points.

H. General Alignment

The majority (80%) of the show's workers and performers are of the same alignment, setting a general moral tone for the entire company.

1. **Miscreant and Diabolic.** Show Cost: None.
2. **Miscreant and Aberrant.** Show Cost: None.
3. **Anarchist.** Show Cost: 2 points.
4. **Anarchist and Unprincipled.** Show Cost: 4 points.
5. **Unprincipled and Scrupulous.** Show Cost: 6 points.
6. **Scrupulous and Principled.** Show Cost: 8 points.

I. Criminal Activity

In addition to petty crime, con jobs, theft and brutality, the traveling show has some very developed areas of criminal expertise. The following are special personnel skilled in the criminal arts, offering illegal services like assassination, blackmail, and coercion (beat people up, break legs). Like the "acts" and some other features, several of the criminal activities can be purchased, and the same activity can be purchased as often as four (4) times.

1. Medicine Man (1). Same as "Barker" (see Acts #8), except is a con-man who pitches/sells fake, stolen, dangerous, illegal or worthless medicines and goods; also knows Palming. Show Cost: 5 points.

2. Prostitutes (3). Ladies of the night who sell sexual favors. Also used in blackmail schemes, gathering information and spying. P.B. attribute is 10+2D8, but M.A. is only 6+1D6. Show Cost: 5 points.

3. Expert Forger (1). Typically a 1D4+4 level Rogue Scholar, Rogue Scientist or Military Specialist turned to crime, but may be a professional Forger. Skills should include Forgery, Art, Photography, Basic Math, Computer Operation and literacy in at least three languages. Show Cost: 10 points.

4. Expert Moles/Worms (3). Two warriors trained in espionage (Military Specialist, Commando, Special Forces, Crazy or Wilderness Scout/Ranger) and a City Rat; all are 1D4+2 levels. Skills of note include: Disguise, Intelligence, Tracking, Radio: Basic, Surveillance Systems and Tailing, Basic Electronics, Computer Operation, Streetwise, and Literacy in American and/or Spanish. Ideal for map-making, targeting wealthy or poorly secured houses, reconnaissance, and blackmail. Show Cost: 10 points (30 points if each is 1D6+4 level).

5. Cyber-Doc (1). A Cyber-Doc and one assistant nurse illegally practice the science of cybernetic and bionic augmentation. Show Cost: 10 points.

6. Pickpocket Team. A pair of 1D4+4 level pickpockets. Typically City Rats, Vagabonds or thieves. Special bonuses in addition to all others: +15% to Pick Pockets, +10% Palming and +5% Prowl. Show Cost: 8 points.

7. Gang of Robbers. While the show is going on, a gang of 2D4+2 thieves and thugs rob the empty houses and mug people in the alleys and dark shadows. Usually 1D4 level City Rats, Vagabonds, Headhunters, Thieves, Bandits, Highwaymen, or Smugglers. They try not to seriously injure or kill anybody, but beatings of victims are commonplace. No member of the gang is officially affiliated with the show, but the observant individual will notice these shady characters hanging around the circus and they do have a secret hideout in the show's living area. Show Cost: 10 points.

8. Smugglers and Sellers of Contraband. 1D6+2 specialists in smuggling, 1D4+3 levels of experience. Skills of note include Concealment, Palming, Prowl, Basic Math, Literacy, Forgery, Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment, and Escape Artist. Buy, sell and transport scarce, illegal, or dangerous goods, most notably poisons, drugs, pre-Rifts artifacts, magic, weapons, cybernetics and bionics. Will also carry and deliver secret packages, contraband and information for outside clients; individuals, other crooks, the black market, and the Coalition. Show Cost: 15 points.

9. Expert Assassin (1). An evil, 1D4+4 level, warrior who specializes in murder; can be any Men of Arms O.C.C., but 'Borgs, Crazies, Juicers, Psi-Slayers, Psi-Stalkers, Bounty Hunters, Commandoes, Special Forces and others trained in stealth and martial combat are the best. Skills should include Tracking, Sniper, Land Navigation, Prowl, Hand to Hand: Assassin or Martial Arts, as well as physical and W.P. skills. Show Cost: 15 points.

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10. Psychic Enforcer (1). A psychically powered individual whose job is to enforce the wishes of his boss and the organization. Assignments include torture, frightening and hurting people, elite bodyguard, protection and murder. Typically 1D4+2 level Mind Melter, Mind Bleeder, Burster, Zapper, or other Master Psionic, see **Psyscape™** for a large selection. Show Cost: 15 points.

11. Special Forces. A pair of super-warriors: Crazies, Juicers, 'Borgs, Commandoes, Special Forces, Military Specialists, Gunslingers, Gunfighters, combat oriented psychics and similar, or a superhuman D-Bee or supernatural powerhouse, used for special missions such as jailbreaks, assaults, raids, and murder. Typically 1D4+3 level. Show Cost: 20 points.

12. Spies. 1D4+1 Espionage agents or professional Spies who specialize in gathering intelligence and sabotage. May include Psi-Ghosts, Psi-Techs, and certain D-Bees with an aptitude for stealth and prowling. Show Cost: 15 points.

J. Reputation/Credentials.

Just what is the reputation of the show? The credentials determine just how much respect characters can command.

1. Hunted. The group is rumored to be criminals, con-artists, or troublemakers, and viewed with great suspicion by everybody who encounters them. The authorities in several towns are hunting them because they owe money in fines or damages, or because they are wanted for questioning about any number of crimes. May even be known and wanted criminals. There is a 01-40% chance that one of these hunting parties, lawmen or bounty hunters will find them whenever the show stays in or near a community for more than three days (roll for each day after three). Such a show will find help and cooperation from authorities anywhere to be slow and half-hearted. Despite this rep, the show still draws a crowd. Show Cost: None.

2. Scoundrels. The show and its personnel are viewed with suspicion. The public assumes them to be a group of criminals, outlaws, flimflam men, quacks, freaks or fanatics. Feared and not trusted, it still draws a crowd, though not as well or as large as other shows. Cooperation from authorities, particularly police and militia, will be slow and reluctant. Show Cost: 1 point.

3. Unknown. No one has even heard of the show. They get no special cooperation and receive no overt attention from the town or the authorities. Draws good crowds. Communities will try to be fair and give the visitors reasonable doubt, but will tend to side with fellow citizens and other authorities if called into question. Tend to believe the worst about the show if something negative is said about it from a reputable source. **Note:** Increase the typical level of pay by 10%. Show Cost: 5 points.

4. Known. The show is known to have been around for years as a source of good entertainment or product. There are no rumors about the show having ever been involved in criminal or negative activities (regardless of whether the show is operated by scoundrels or not). Tends to draw bigger and more excited crowds. Police and local authorities will help in matters that are in their jurisdiction. **Note:** Increase the typical level of pay by 25%. Show Cost: 10 points.

5. Excellent Reputation. The traveling show has a reputation for providing high quality entertainment and goods. Even if there are rumors of trouble or crimes, nobody holds it against the show (after all, drunks and hooligans follow such popular shows to prey on the attendees and the innocent show takes the blame), or the show is so spectacular that people are willing to take the risk. The management is known as "good guys" who deserve all the help they can get. Draws excellent, large crowds. Police will overlook minor infractions such as brawls and drunkenness, and will gladly dismiss minor criminal charges like petty larceny, if the show's management *makes restitution* to the injured party, pays a big fine (double the usual) and promises to keep out of further trouble. Authorities will help and cooperate to their fullest in any investigations and operations; tend to give the show the benefit of the doubt. **Note:** Increase the typical level of pay by 50%. Show Cost: 25 points.

6. Famous! Either a *sparkling* or *villainous* reputation. The show is known to be sensational!! The performers are bigger-than-life stars displaying incomparable skill, death-defying courage and the best entertainment around! Any authority and citizen would jump at the chance to have the show visit their community, even if it means risking trouble that may come with the show. The show always receives favorable press, gets lots of free advertising, is swamped with adoring fan letters and requests, and draws huge crowds.

Shows with truly sterling reputations (are not evil or criminal) receive the same cooperation and adulation as visiting dignitaries; perhaps more. The show is always given benefit of the doubt and the authorities will always side with the show unless there is concrete evidence to the contrary.

Those with notorious reputations (may even be known or suspected crime rings) are still accepted with open arms because they are known as spectacular entertainment. These performers have the same star status and are adored by thousands. The only difference is that a cloud of controversy and trouble seems to follow this show wherever it goes. Authorities will do their utmost to prevent trouble and may increase police patrols or call in the militia just in case there is trouble. Authorities may suspect otherwise, but will always give the show the benefit of the doubt, unless there is *concrete evidence* to the contrary. Brawls, drunkenness, larceny, and petty thievery are completely ignored. Even major crimes may be ignored (especially if the show is leaving soon) out of fear of retribution by the show's dark forces.

Note: Whether good or evil, double the typical level of pay. Show Cost: 50 points.

K. Salary

The amount of money received weekly by the employees will vary depending on the size of the show and the show's reputation.

1. None. The performers pass the hat and hope for the generosity of the spectators. Criminal groups make their real money fleecing the crowds. The take is generally small and varies dramatically from crowd to crowd. A place to live, food and costumes may be provided on loan from the management or may be the responsibility of the performer. Typical Week's Pay: 3D6x10 credits for workers and 5D6x10 credits for performers. Show Cost: None.

2. Freelance. The performers and workers are paid a small commission based on the profit of each show. No profit means no additional pay but they receive living quarters, food and the

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use of the show's other resources (costumes, vehicles, etc.). Performers and workers have no binding contract and can be fired or can quit with a moment's notice. Typical Week's Pay: 4D6x10 credits for laborers, thugs, and lesser performers. 1D6x100 credits for expert performers and criminal specialists (always get paid more than the average Joe). Show Cost: 2 points.

3. Pittance. The show employs the characters on a full-time basis, but is strapped for money. The show provides living quarters, food, supplies, costumes, and access to other facilities and benefits at no charge. Performers are likely to be signed to one to four year contracts. Typical Week's Pay: 180 credits for laborers, thugs and lesser performers. 275 credits for minor performers and 400 credits per week to star performers and expert criminal specialists. Show Cost: 5 points.

4. Good Salary. In addition to room and board and access to the show's facilities, the employees receive a good salary. All performers and important laborers sign a two to four year contract. Typical Week's Pay: 250 credits for laborers and minor performers, 350 credits for the average performer and 650 credits for star performers and expert criminal specialists. Bonuses of 1D6x1000 credits are paid to star performers every quarter and 1D4x100 to the others in the show. Show Cost: 10 points.

5. Excellent Salary. In addition to room and board and access to the show's facilities, the employees receive an excellent salary. All performers and important laborers sign a three to six year contract. Performers and key people may get additional perks in the way of special accommodations, a private vehicle, special billing, etc. Typical Week's Pay: 350 credits for laborers and minor performers, 600 credits for the average performer and 2000 credits for star performers and expert criminal specialists. Bonuses of 2D6x1000 credits are paid to star performers every quarter and 2D4x100 to others in the show. Show Cost: 20 points.

6. Outrageous Salary. All the usual accommodations and perks plus spectacular pay!! Typical Week's Pay: 600 credits for laborers and minor performers, 1200 credits for the average performer and 5000 credits for star performers (and expert criminal specialists). Bonuses of 1D6x10,000 are paid to star performers (and expert criminals) every quarter and 1D4x1000 to all others in the show, making them all very loyal. Show Cost: 40 points.

Other Information

Each traveling show should have a name, logo/insignia, and banners. Game Masters, it is a good idea to come up with stats for the owner/manager, an executive officer, at least a couple of the star performers, and a few other key characters (particularly criminals). Remember that interesting guards, performers and scoundrels can make a traveling show much more interesting. The more colorful the details the greater the atmosphere. You might think of it as a traveling town.

Player-Created Organizations

Most of the time, the Game Master is the one who handles the creation of whatever social orders the player characters might come into contact with. But what if the player characters are the ones who want to build an *organization* or *traveling show* of some sort? No problem! Provided the G.M. approves it, all the rules for the construction and design of organizations hold true for player characters who wish to start one of their own.

The primary limit on the size of an organization is going to be its founding members' experience: For every thousand experience points the founding members have, the syndicate will have one *Building Point*. From there the founding members can spend their points as they see fit. If you, as G.M., think that's too much then make it one Building Point for every 2,000 or 3,000 experience points. Simple. Meanwhile, truly huge, regional, national and international type organizations are probably not likely to be available to player characters.

The G.M. must also factor in *the time* it will take for the characters to build their organization, as well as how much money it will require. The characters must pay their organization's start-up costs at the *beginning* of the building period. The characters also may not hold onto some of their points to spend later. They must spend what they have during the initial design of their organization. Leftover points are lost. Later on, the characters may build onto their organization either by bringing in new partners to run it or by gaining additional experience themselves (and therefore, additional points to play with). However, subsequent additions or modifications to an organization cost *double* the usual number of points (and therefore, twice the money and time, too). Bringing in new partners, it should be noted, is an easy way to gain more points, but these are *partners*, not mere lackeys brought in to contribute their experience. These people should have equal say in the ownership and running of the organization. The bottom line: rolling up a bunch of new characters nobody will ever play just to beef up an organization is forbidden. So is recruiting a bunch of NPCs just to harvest their points.

The time required to build an organization gives Game Masters an excellent opportunity to run adventures involving the organization/syndicate-building while it's in flux. Adventures that take place while player characters are building their organization could range from squashing rival syndicates who want to stop the building, to recruiting key personnel, to getting land rights and permission to build a fortress from the local lord, to getting the equipment and materials they need, and on and on. In the end, this kind of commitment of the characters' time and other resources should give the players a sense of accomplishment once the syndicate is finally built.

Power. When an organization is set up, it requires founding members to control *everything*. These are the syndicate masters or town leaders. The more powerful the organization becomes, the more members it must advance to the rank of leader (second in command and administrators), but it means letting go of some of their own control of and power over the organization. It also

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opens the door to mismanagement, theft, betrayal, and crimes and abuses not known to the founders by these lieutenants, as well as a possible coup/usurping of the organization by these top underlings.

To determine the required level total of an organization's controllers, multiply the number of *Building Points* (before sponsorship and other modifiers) by one thousand. This is the total amount of experience points the organization's leaders must have between them to be capable leaders and maintain (reasonable) control. For example: An organization with 200 points requires 200,000 experience in total between its leaders/founders. That equates to one twelfth level Ley Line Walker, two tenth level Line Walkers, or four seventh level Line Walkers.

If they do not have the required experience, reduce the organization size and the creation points available. For example, if the above mentioned new syndicate heads have only 160,000 experience points between them, then they will only get 160 creation points.

Money. A new syndicate or town will cost a lot of money to get started. Every *Building Point* available to the organization requires one million credits as an initial investment (only 2% of that to start a Traveling Show). If the cash is not available, reduce the number of creation points available. For example, the above 160 point syndicate requires a whopping 160 million credits in start-up capital. If the founders have only 100 million credits between them, they must either scale back their organization to only 100 points, or they must scratch together another 60 million credits to cover costs, or a combination of the two.

Just finding the funding for an organization can be an adventure unto itself, especially if the founders decide to steal the funds or if they take out a loan with some shady characters to make ends meet.

Time. Finally, just like any new business, to build an organization or town or a large, glitzy traveling show takes a lot of time. Just to get the organization onto its feet will take a number of days equal to the creation point total. A 300 point organization will take almost one year just to get set up. Even at this point, the organization will be much weaker and underpowered than an established organization. Exactly *how* this weakness manifests itself is for the G.M. to have fun with.

It will take a further two days per organization point to reach full strength. While this may seem like an excessive amount of time, it is required to account for building the buildings, recruiting manpower, making political connections, and so on. For example, after the 300 days spent setting up a 300 point organization, a further 600 days (nearly another two years) are required for the syndicate to gain its full potential strength.

During set-up time, the founders must be at or near their organization at all times to oversee things. One can not, in essence, "place an order" for an organization and then continue roaming around on adventures while somebody else builds it. Creating an organization requires the founders stay in the same location for a long time, perhaps forever. But with the sacrifice of mobility, comes many other rewards – rewards that only a functioning organization can give. Besides, most adventurers who create an organization do so because they are tired of being baseless adventurers. They want to build something bigger than themselves and to have a permanent power base somewhere. Thus, staying put is not such a hassle for many organization builders.

G.M.s, feel free to use this building time as a separate campaign. While the founders must stay close to their fledgling organization, that does not mean they can't have a ton of adventures getting their organization off the ground. Dealing with rival organizations, preventing sabotage, maintaining a perimeter around the building site, dealing with last-second emergencies, and other crises are all excellent adventure fodder. Remember, building an organization does not mean trouble and adventure can't find you anymore. Remember *The Empire Strikes Back*? Lando Calrissian is a great example of an adventurer who settled down only to find trouble knocking at his door anyway.

Losing It All! Of course, poor Lando is also an example of what can happen when an adventurer *loses* his organization. (We're going to overlook the fact that Lando actually won his organization in a game of chance; players generally shouldn't be able to make such winnings, unless the G.M. is prepared to handle the sudden rush of power and influence it will bring to the characters.) Just because the heroes spent a lot of time, effort and money building an organization or town does not mean that organization is immortal. It can be destroyed, dissolved, taken over, bought out for pennies on the dollar, go bankrupt, or meet any number of other premature fates. Now, the G.M. should be fair about this. Don't just take away the heroes' organization with a single stroke, without giving them a chance to defend it. That's just not cool. Besides, there are a million adventure possibilities alone on the theme of *preserving and defending* the organization or town from external and internal threats. But, in the event that the heroes' organization *is* destroyed or must be abandoned, then the characters can always try to build a new one. They must first wait a full year. Then, they can simply begin the whole process all over again. Of course, they will have to scratch together the start-up money once more, and they must go through the lengthy building process, but they can always rebuild.

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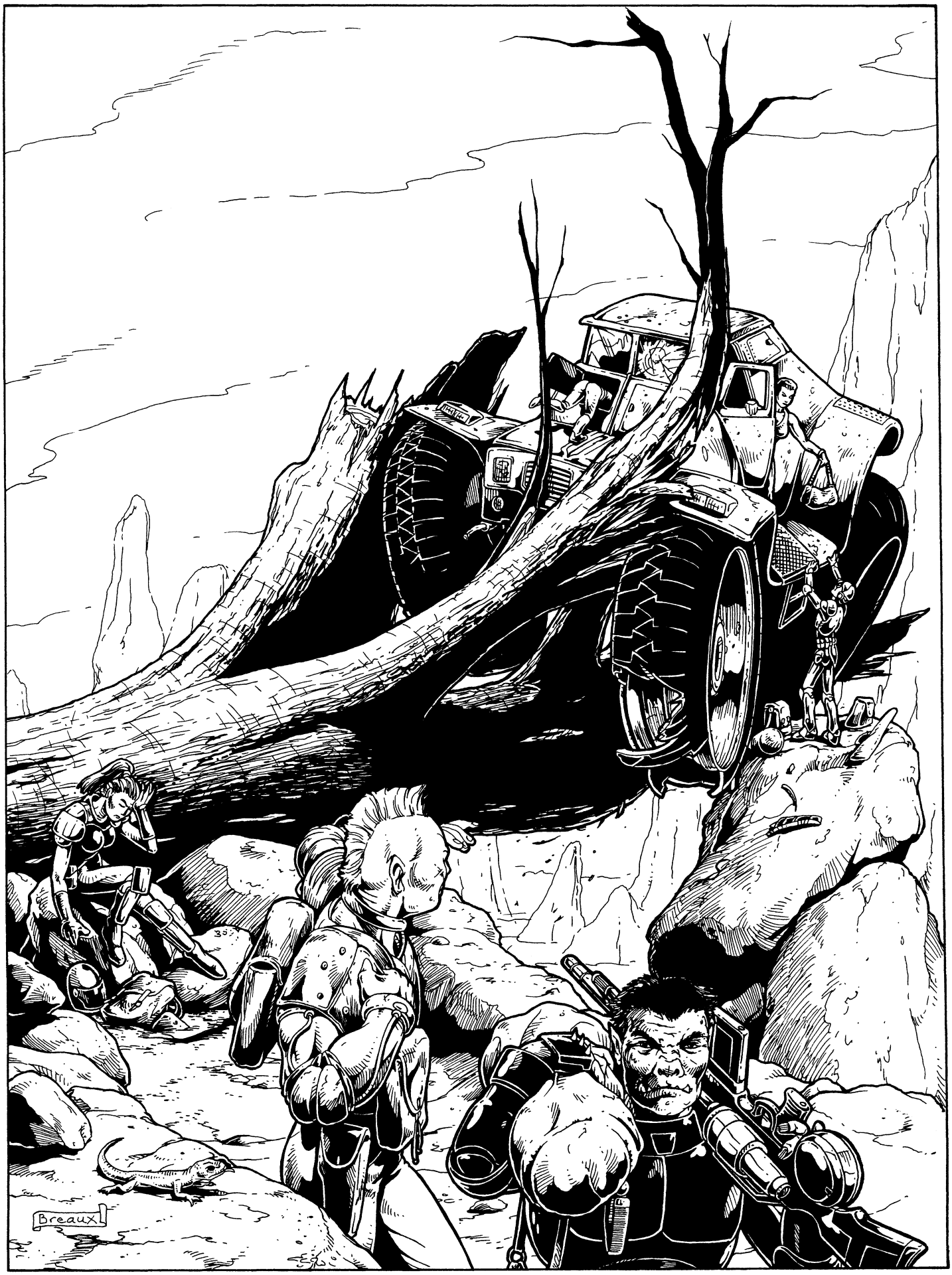

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Trails of Adventure

101 Adventure Ideas

Kurt Freiberger, Bryan Garner, Alex Marciniszyn, Julius Rosenstein, Steve Sheiring, Wayne Smith, Bill Coffin and Kevin Siembieda have whipped up a slew of adventure ideas to get your imaginations going. Ninety-nine percent of these adventures take place in *North America*, the focus of many a Game Master's campaigns. However, as you will see, many can be easily modified for just about anyplace in the world. Just use a little imagination.

1. Oceans: Dolphins, whales, and killer whales have been deserting the oceans (along the ocean coast of any continent) and beaching themselves in great numbers. The closest thing to an explanation the creatures will give is a warning to avoid *The Abyss*. Since only small creatures are believed to inhabit that area, what could be lurking there that is so frightening as to drive so many whales and dolphins crazy enough to beach themselves? Note that 80% can be calmed down and helped back into the water where they will nervously retreat back into the depths. The other 20% perish.

2. Xiticix bounty hunting. Come one, come all! Now that the war at Tolkeen is over, thousands of Coalition settlers are swarming to the Tolkeen area, to stake their claims in this newly acquired territory. However, besides tiny Tolkeen resistance cells and freedom fighters, they are encountering an even greater obstacle – the Xiticix. The population of the giant insects has been steadily growing over the years of the war, and they are making their push to the south, right into the fallen Kingdom of Tolkeen, as well as northern Wisconsin. The problem is so bad in the north that the Coalition States is paying bounties for Xiticix carcasses, and even hiring mercenaries to go on "bug hunts." In some areas, the situation is so desperate that the CS is hiring practically *anyone*, turning a blind eye to teams composed primarily of spell casters, mutants and D-Bees, provided a human serves as the liaison between the group and the CS Office of Bounties. These "Bug Hunters" on the CS payroll even include mercenaries, mages and freedom fighters who just fought against the Coalition in the siege on Tolkeen. Talk about strange bedfellows. However, there have been clashes between Tolkeen expatriates and Coalition troops operating in the region, with both sides extracting a little payback when the opportunity presents itself.

3. Bounty Hunters aplenty. With the cataclysmic end to the Siege on Tolkeen and the situation with the Xiticix (see #2 above), bounty hunting has never been more lucrative. In addition to the Xiticix (with small bounties of 50-200 credits a head; 500,000 for a Queen's), there are bounties on a thousand people from Tolkeen that the CS still wants "brought to justice," dead or alive. Not to mention other criminals, fugitives and enemies of the Coalition States with bounties on their heads (most in the 20,000-100,000 credits range).

The typical bounty for low end Tolkeenites is 10,000 to 40,000 credits, mid-range 75,000 to 250,000 credits (including the leaders of the ongoing resistence), and the *Most Wanted* are worth 500,000 to two million credits (the Circle of Twelve, Tolkeen's Generals and top Warlords, and a few famous practitioners of magic and Dragon Kings fall into this elite category). However, sometimes the CS will shell out 100-1000 credits for ordinary Tolkeen resistence fighters, suspected spies, and monstrous minions (Brodkil, Gargoyles, Witchlings, etc.) brought in "alive." However, this is a hit and miss proposition, and often depends on the mood of the Coalition Officer or Agent for the Office of Bounties to whom the individual is turned over.

The CS representative must have the *authority* to accept bounties in order to payout on a bounty. This means that sometimes the bounty hunter must be escorted by a CS squad, along with his prisoner, to the proper authorities. This may offer an opportunity for the prisoner to escape (sorry, no bounty even if he escapes because of a CS blunder) or for the group to fall under attack from the prisoner's allies, freedom fighters or even other bounty hunters who want to claim the bounty for themselves and are willing to jump a CS squad of soldiers to get it. **Note:** The areas where the most bounty hunting is going on are Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Coalition States of Missouri, Lone Star and Chi-Town (namely in the Chi-Town 'Burbs) for Tolkeen fugitives and other humanoids; Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, and southwestern Ontario for Xiticix bounties.

4. Amateur Bounty Hunters. With the bounties offered for Xiticix heads (see #3) and so many Tolkeen fugitives (see #13), there are a lot of "amateurs" out hunting, hoping to make some easy money or a big score. Of course, the work of man-hunting is far from easy, and even gunning for Xiticix is fraught with peril. Consequently, these amateur bounty hunters regularly get themselves killed or into trouble. Many get lost, starve to death, or fall victim to their prey. Others accidentally get in the way of or interfere with the capture of a "mark" by professional bounty hunters. They are also the ones most likely to resort to bushwhacking and jumping other hunters to steal supplies, ammunition and even a captive to claim the bounty reward for themselves. These would-be man-hunters often travel in packs like scurvy wolves, 1D6+5 members strong.

5. Mercenaries for hire – cheap. With the end of the Coalition-Tolkeen War, there are a large number of mercenaries out of work. Added to their numbers are a good number of freedom fighters, psychics and practitioners of magic who learned how to fight during the war, and now hope to parlay that knowledge and experience into a way of making money as mercenaries. Desperate and hungry, many are willing to work for just about anybody for a quarter or third of what they normally get. This means any tin plated tyrant, wealthy businessman, gang leader, crime lord or mercenary outfit can hire these mercenaries to do

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just about anything. **Note:** Bands of mercs who can not find gainful employment (of which there are many), may engage in cattle rustling, robbing, raiding and intimidation tactics (i.e. the threat they will attack) to get food and basic supplies.

6. Spying on the Federation of Magic for the CS. With the Coalition forces in a weakened state after the war, and its army still concentrated in the west, the CS is concerned that the Federation of Magic might take the opportunity to strike. They are paying good money for any "independent operators" who can provide intelligence on the Federation, the more detailed, the better.

7. Throughout the Tolkeen war zone, an incredible number of mass graves have been dug up, the bodies missing. All evidence would seem to point to Necromancers, animating the dead and making off with them. Clearly, something big is going on. The question is, what?

8. The blight. Late in the war, it is rumored that a group of Tolkeen operatives infiltrated the farming region of the Coalition State of Chi-Town/Missouri on a mission to interfere with Coalition food production. Another rumor blames a cult of dark sorcerers in the Federation of Magic. Whoever is responsible, it appears their destructive magic is a success, as severe crop damage is evident throughout the State. However, whatever methods they used, apparently some magical disease or curse, the effects are spreading into the surrounding wilderness. In Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas, there are signs of dying crops as well as sickly fruitbearing trees and other plants. All indications are that this magical blight will continue spreading out in all directions, with no end in sight, unless somebody figures out how to stop it!

9. According to the latest gossip in Lazlo, there have been some suspicious characters in town. In the aftermath of the war, there are thousands of refugees and other new faces in Lazlo, but the rumor is Coalition and Free Quebec operatives have been among them, scouting around the city, mapping it, and assessing its strengths and weaknesses. Is the Coalition preparing to make a move on Lazlo, with Free Quebec support, or are the two simply gathering intelligence for their own peace of mind? Either way, spies are afoot in the City of Light.

10. Splugorth Slavers. Refugees and even mercenaries and monsters fleeing the fall of Tolkeen make easy pickings for slavers. Not just any slavers, but Splugorth Slavers. In fact, they are looking specifically for warriors, practitioners of magic, psychics, monsters (Daemonix included), Lyn-Srial, Cyber-Knights, and Coalition soldiers for the gladiatorial arenas on Atlantis! Adventurers beware.

11. Splugorth colonies? Word from the east is that Splugorth activity is increasing on the Atlantic coast. Some second- and third-hand reports from traveling trappers and traders even insist that large groups of landing craft have come ashore, delivering a Splugorth army. Have the Splugorth decided it's the right time to attack North America? Or is there something else going on? Many interested parties, from the Coalition and Free Quebec to the Federation of Magic and Lazlo, would pay handsomely for any credible answers to this question.

12. A new Warlord in Lone Star. *Warlord Carlos Arroyo* and his *Night Raiders* are a quickly rising star in the southwest. Within a short six months, he is rumored to have gathered an army of over 4,000 with hundreds more flocking to him since the fall of Tolkeen. Ironically, he is a threat to both the disorga-

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nized *Pecos Empire* and the *Coalition Lone Star* military outposts and civilian colonies. To the Empire because Warlord Arroyo does not acknowledge the Pecos Bandits or their claims of sovereignty over Texas. King Macklin feels especially threatened and is said to be massing his own troops and working at trying to convince a tribe or two of Psi-Stalkers to join his ranks. Meanwhile, Warlord Arroyo is a threat to the CS because this new bandit upstart is incredibly daring, a clever tactician, and well organized, and it is suspected that Arroyo or some monsters under his command have somehow managed to gain entry into the heart of the Lone Star Genetics complex on at least four occasions, despite is nearly impervious security systems and heavy presence of CS troops. No damage has been done to this infamous genetics compound, yet, but what Warlord Arroyo may be looking for or have planned for it remains a mystery.

Another thing that worries the CS is that reports confirm half of Warlord Arroyo's men are *monsters;* Brodkil, Gargoyles, Simvan, N'mbyr Gorilla Men, Vanguard Brawlers, Keepers of the Desert, Oborus-Slitherers, rogue mutant animals created by the Lone Star Complex, and even a few vampires among them. He is said to court Necromancers and Shifters for his elite magic corps, along with a few Daemonix and Thornhead Demons.

Warlord Arroyo is famous for his successful night raids and general elusiveness. His main base of operation is along the Rio Grande and is said to have base camps and hideouts on both sides of the Mexican border. This has led some to speculate that Warlord Arroyo is a *Master Vampire* and that one hundred of his most trusted men are Secondary Vampires under his complete domination. A recent rumor has it that a Saddle Tramp stopping at El Paso in search for Reid's Rangers got so drunk one night that he revealed he had been riding with Warlord Arroyo for the last two months. He deserted when he discovered the man was a vampire and at least 300 of his troops were, too. According to this drifter, he accidentally learned that after several attempts to carve himself a power niche in the Vampire Kingdoms, Arroyo has decided to claim part of Texas as his domain, spreading vampirism into the north. The Saddle Tramp was found later, dead in an alley across from the boarding house where he was staying. The man was torn apart by wild dogs. Coincidence?

13. Rare goods from Atlantis. Some strangers have recently arrived in town with a supply of Bio-Wizardry *organisms* for sale. They claim to have successfully raided the city of Splynn, made a "clean getaway," and brought these items back for sale. If so, however, why are they willing to sell them so cheaply, and seem to be in such a hurry to cash out and move on? Are they so nervous because they are selling Splugorthian Bio-Wizard things, or is there something else? Like being pursued by Splugorth minions.

14. A visit from Phase World®. A Kreeghor spaceship comes through a space Rift and crashlands on Rifts Earth. Will the Kreeghor be able to fix their ship and leave? Or will they remain? If they stay, will they be friends or foes? If they leave, will they leave forever or return with reinforcements?

15. A large adult Fire Dragon has recently arrived in the area and is intently searching for something or someone. It will accost people to ask them a number of seemingly unrelated questions, and, in some cases, use magic to make them forget the questions and their answers. Who or what is the dragon looking for? As each day goes by without results, the dragon seems to be more agitated. What will it do if it fails in its search? Better yet, what will happen if it finds the object of its search?

16. The spy and the secret. The *Golden Age Weaponsmiths (GAW)* have formed a secret alliance with remnants of *Ironheart Armaments*. A *spy* from the Coalition has discovered this alliance and is desperately trying to get this information back to Chi-Town. If he does, GAW and the remains of the Ironheart Armaments will be sought out and destroyed by the Coalition Army. He has joined with a Search & Destroy team sent to retrieve him (the exact makeup of the Coalition force is up to the G.M.). GAW has managed to destroy their transport vehicle, but the unit and the CS spy have escaped. Golden Age Weaponsmiths will do anything to stop this information from reaching the CS, including hiring adventurers, mercenaries or bounty hunters to track them down and destroy them.

17. What goes around, comes around. One night, the player characters are saved from a potentially deadly encounter by, of all things, a Secondary Vampire named Jose.

Jose is that one in a million vampire who somehow manages to retain a small vestige of his former humanity. Though no one really trusts a vampire, he did save their lives and asked nothing from them in return. So some, if not all the player characters in the group find themselves in the awkward position of being indebted to a seemingly "heroic vampire." The player group learns very soon afterward that Jose is being hunted by a group of Reid's Rangers. Do they repay their debt to Jose (even though he is a vampire)?

18. The town invaders. The player characters come across a young man named Benji Brooks from a small town nearby called Kreteville.

Benji is a ragged mess in desperate shape. He looks half starved and has no weapons. When he encounters the group he begs them for help, and tells them a wild tale about how three strange D-Bees appeared after a Ley Line Storm and just took over the town. He tells them about the abuse he and his fellow citizens have endured at the hands of the malevolent trio and his fears for the future of the town under their yoke. His description is of one really large monstrous and hulking thing (Kreeghor soldier) and two human-sized beings with great physical powers (Invincible Guardsmen; exactly how powerful, what powers the Guardsmen have, and what they want is up to the G.M.). See **Rifts® Dimension Book Two: Phase World®** or substitute for some other alien invader, demons, dragons or monster; ideally ones uncommon to this part of the world.

19. Future present. The player characters notice at various times that they are being observed by three men covered from head to toe in skintight black clothes. As time goes by, the three mysterious men in black are found out to supposedly be from about a hundred years in Rifts Earth's future. They claim to have come back to this era and this place to witness an event soon to unfold that can change the face of Rifts Earth. The three in black could be on the level or could just be crackpots that have advanced technology. They refer to each other as *Prime, Alpha,* and *Uno*. They have exhibited either great power or advanced technology in the form of force fields, teleportation, and the ability to see things most people can not.

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If this mega-event really occurs, are the player characters integral to it in some way, or are they just in the right time at the right place? Perhaps more importantly, can they stop or change the events unfolding and change the future? Will these three men in black *allow* them to do so, or are they really here to make sure it happens the way they want it to?

20. The watering hole. Coming to a small town in the wilderness, this could be a favorite watering hole for the player characters or a village they have never seen before. Of course something is odd and the group picks up on it right away. Soon they encounter a mage who introduces himself and the "new Mayor" of the town, and all who come into his humble place in the world must pay a *town tax* of one thousand credits per person or spend three days in the town jail. Paying the tax will allow them to enter the town without any problem (although during their stay, they will see that the people fear their "new mayor," as well as witness numerous acts of cruelty and coldheartedness at his hands).

21. Sanctuaryville. If the player group refuses the Mayor will insist they pay up or work their debt off at a month of hard labor in the coal mine or fields tending crops. If there is any hostile action on the part of the player group, the next thing they ALL know is they are awakening from unconsciousness some sixty seconds later. The mage laughs and commits against some town person, animal or henchman an unspeakable act right before their eyes. If they attack, again the next thing they know is they are waking up from unconsciousness again. This time with their belongings removed and in the hands of the Mayor's henchmen who had been hanging back in the shadows. The wizard knows the Spell of Legend, Sanctuary, and how to make it last for months at a time, a little trick he picked up in another dimension. Every time they make a violent gesture against the mage, they are rendered unconscious. How do they dispose of an enemy they can not touch? How can they help this town? There must be a limited range to the magic's influence, but can they figure out what it is and lure the mage outside of it? What other spells does he possess? Just how powerful is the Mayor of Sanctuaryville? (The answer to that last question is left to the G.M., but probably not as powerful as the group might think. This cretin knows a few impressive spells and uses them to his best advantage, but beyond that, he's no powerhouse. But then, does this cunning manipulator really need to be?)

22. The score. At some point, our heroes are approached by a pair of scurvy looking characters who look down on their luck except for their huge grins and exciting scheme. They can approach the group in a town, the 'Burbs or the wilderness. They are lightly armed and are completely harmless. They explain that they heard about some recent exploit of the group (or witnessed it first hand), so they know they are "the men for the job." The two claim to be mercenaries who have learned the location of a Naruni cache of weapons hidden nearby. They are not fools and know they can not tackle the job themselves, that's why they have come to the player group. Based on what they know or have seen of the player characters, the two mercs believe they can trust "valiant heroes" such as they. All these two want is first choice of equipment and an equal share. Such a find is worth a fortune, and what the two are proposing is a fair deal. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that the Naruni were run out of North America back in 105 P.A., so anything the aliens left behind is fair game. Everything the two tell the player group is truthful (confirmed by magic or psionics if it is available to recognize the truth). The two are anxious and suggest they move quickly if they are interested in making a fortune and equipping themselves with a ton of state of the art, Naruni gear. The group would be crazy to say no.

Oh, there are a few other wrinkles to this caper.

1) There is one little detail the two mercs left out. Though they are the ones who learned the location of the Naruni cache, it was while they were members of a mercenary group. A group made up of a dozen, low- to mid-level (2-6th level) roughnecks of mostly Anarchist and evil alignments (these two are Anarchist and Unprincipled). Anyway, these two left the group when they realized their teammates were going to cut them out of any of the real money to be made here. The two have a day or two head start on their old comrades, so they suggest the player group moves quickly. Otherwise, the two will head out on their own.

2) The hidden Naruni bunker will have at least a couple of automated defenses, maybe even a robot (Naruni, or a couple Skelebots or Dyna-bot modified and souped up by the Naruni to be even more formidable than usual).

3) One of the other sleaze bags in the mercenary group has sold the information to a Coalition outpost (or Black Market or a group of Pecos Bandits, or other band of cutthroats) who is planning to send a squad out to investigate, even as our heroes get moving themselves. The CS squad will not want Naruni weapons and equipment to fall into the hands of mercenaries, adventurers, mages or D-Bees. If they miss the group at the site of the secret weapon bunker, they will track and hunt them down.

4) The Naruni did *not* leave that much equipment behind. The G.M. should limit equipment to items he or she feels comfortable allowing into the game, and to only one item (or two if minor or the G.M. feels comfortable with more) per character, including the two mercenary NPCs. Anything left over is only worth 1D4x10,000 credits to be divided equally between all parties, NPCs included (i.e. should translate to about 6,000-8,000 credits each). Still, it's a good haul. If they can keep it.

23. Wanted by the Black Market. The player group encounters and gets into a brawl or disagreement with a street level punk named *Dylan Slapp.* They manage to dispatch Dylan with ease. The problem is Dylan is a street pusher for a local group from the Black Market. This particular Black Market organization operates in about seven towns and cities in North America and are of enormous influence with the crime outfits in all their territories. They do not let anyone hassle their members for any reason. So now the player characters are at odds with a particularly large group of thugs and cutthroats with loads of financial backing. A large reward is placed on the heroes' heads, double if brought in *alive* so they can be punished.

24. Rescue from evil mercenaries. The player characters stumble across an exhausted group of four practitioners of magic (each is anarchist and third or fourth level). The fifth member of their crew is a sixth level Mind Melter who has his teammates Mind Blocked, his aura altered, and who will use psionic persuasion to illicit help from the player group. They explain that they got in over their heads when they tried to tackle a band of evil mercenaries who had taken over a town a couple hundred miles (320+ km) from the group's current location. The

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sorcerers recount how they *tried* to liberate the town from these tyrannical men-at-arms, but were overwhelmed by the mercenaries' numerical superiority and keen military tactics. Forced to give up their good intentions and retreat, the mages have been in constant pursuit by the mercenaries, and have lost three of their teammates. Accordingly, the mages beg the player characters for help. If only the group could hold off the mercenaries for a couple hours, giving them enough time to recoup some precious P.P.E. to make good their escape. They offer the player group their last few thousand credits and the Mind Melter can perform psionic healing to any who needs it, otherwise they are spent and will surely perish if they are forced to fight. If the player characters agree, they do indeed earn the 4D4x1000 credits the sorcerers have among them as well as their eternal gratitude.

The sorcerers soon flee, leaving the player characters to slow down and perhaps even stop the mercenary scum after them. Sure enough, 4D6 minutes after the sorcerers leave, a band of a dozen or two mercs appear, some in power armor. The player characters can try to reason with these agitated warriors or ambush them. The mercenaries give a good accounting of themselves, and it soon becomes clear they are highly skilled, experienced (levels 5-9) and well equipped. It is not an easy fight. Only after the skirmish has gone on for a while will any character with a military or history background notice the insignias on the mercenaries' armor. The well known mark of the legendary and heroic *Larsen's Brigade!* The mercenaries are willing to call a truce and talk, where it is revealed, to the player characters' dismay, that it was the sorcerers who had taken over the town and the mercs of Larsen's Brigade who had been hired by some of the townspeople to liberate them. Unfortunately, by now the adventurer group has bough the practitioners of magic time to meditate and get back enough P.P.E. to cover their trail and use magic to improve their escape plan. Needless to say, the player characters have just earned themselves the animosity of the most powerful mercenary band on the continent. Fortunately, the fighters of Larsen's Brigade are (relatively) understanding and merciful, so they will not rob, hurt or kill the adventurer group. If the player characters offer to make amends by joining Larsen's men in tracking down the renegade sorcerers, the mercenaries will rudely refuse their help, saying they have "helped enough." The mercs also warn they will kill anybody they find following them or who gets in their way. However, nothing is stopping the player group from trying to track down the scoundrels on their own. If they choose to do so, things could get tricky as these sorcerers will hook up with an old buddy (a sixth level, spell casting Ice Dragon) and are making a beeline for the Magic Zone where they will find other friends and sympathizers. Furthermore, if they bungle the capture of these villains or accidentally help them to escape Larsen's Brigade again, the mercenaries will not be so understanding.

25. Manna from the heavens ... While traveling in the wilderness, the adventurer group is startled by, a large fire ball passing overhead, shortly followed by a loud sonic boom. The fire ball is an aircraft that crashes not too far from the player characters.

An investigation of the crash site reveals a large and relatively intact spacecraft. The craft has two survivors who are in bad shape. If they manage to talk to or save the survivors they might learn that they are from a place called *Freedom Station* in orbit around the Earth. Their ship lost main power in a skirmish in space with a ship from rival *Laika Station.* Their special cargo is two USA-G14: Mark IV Glitter Boy suits of power armor, intact and ready to go. What a find! Free Quebec would pay a king's ransom just for these advanced, space capable Glitter Boys and their particle beam cannon. Here's the problem: a reconnaissance unit from the Coalition States is in the area and also saw the spaceship crash, as did other adventurers in the

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area. All are converging on the area to see what it was. Can the player characters manage to hold onto their prize long enough to cash in on it? Of course, the characters can keep the space G.B.s for themselves or plot a course to Free Quebec to make their sale (a long and arduous journey). **Note:** See the **Mutants in Orbit** sourcebook for complete details on these advanced Glitter Boys and for details about the space colonies and killer satellites around Rifts Earth.

26. Making new friends. In Canada, the *Calgary Highlanders* have been recruiting and rebuilding their numbers (see **Rifts® Canada**, page 97). The players are resting and resupplying in a small wilderness town in Canada or the northwestern United States when a gang of the Highlanders decide to come in and throw their weight around. If and/or when the player characters get into it with them, they probably don't realize they are making an enemy of a huge gang of thugs that operate over three provinces and a couple of territories in Canada. The real kicker is that this gang of scum bags is composed, in large part, of demons, monsters, and evil D-Bees who thrive on violence and chaos. These brutes never forget a face and will welcome any opportunity to get revenge on anybody who showed them up or got in their way.

27. Invitation to a quest. The player group meet and befriend a Cyber-Knight named *Sir Thornton.* He is in search of a rogue band of demons and, believe it or not, fallen Cyber-Knights. This band has been hiding in the wilderness for the most part, but has also been raiding local farms and villages. The band consists of four Brodkil, two Gurgoyles, and five Fallen Cyber-Knights. They are a murderous lot with foul intentions. Although Sir Thornton does not know what they have in mind, he knows it will be bad unless somebody stops them. They are a pretty powerful and malevolent bunch who enjoy inflicting pain on those who can not defend themselves. They also a have big hate for the Coalition States. Sir Thornton asks the player group to join him in his crusade to stop these villains before others suffer at their hands. Do the heroes have the courage to join his fight?

28. Carnage. The player characters investigate the sounds of battle in the distance, ideally near a body of water. When they arrive on the battlefield the fighting is over and they find a scene of carnage. There are twenty-some Coalition Dead Boys laying on the ground, twisted and broken. The fallen soldiers are dressed in battered Coalition Navy armor (CA4-MK2, page 41, **Rifts® Sourcebook Four: Coalition Navy™**). Their weapons are still laying all over the battle site. With a search of the area, they find a *CH-12N Sea Wasp helicopter.* It has a dead pilot and co-pilot laying on the ground near the aircraft, their bodies broken and mangled. The helicopter is in fine shape and the fuel gauge says it has three quarters of a tank of gas. Three things can come of this: One, the player group can become engaged in a conflict with reinforcements from the Coalition Navy who think they killed their fellow seamen (especially if caught looting the bodies); two, they can jump into the chopper and fly off with it (assuming someone in the group can fly it), although they may be pursued and shot down by the approaching Navy reinforcements; or three, they could encounter whoever or whatever took out all these soldiers. Something big and terrible. Possibilities to entertain include an adult or ancient dragon, a Dragon King (and/or his Shadow Dragons), a Devil Unicorn (see **New West™**, page 140), a tyrannosaurus rex (see **New West™**, page 166), a Murex Metztla or Volute Metztla or Kreewarr Carapace (a massive and monstrous Splugorth minion; see **Rifts® World Book Two: Atlantis**, pages 54 or 56 or 61 respectively), giant automaton from the City of Dweomer in the Federation of Magic, Necrophim & Soul Snake (see **Psyscape™**, page 104), or an any number of monsters, demons or gods at the G.M.'s discretion.

29. I am the sun god. The player characters come upon a field being worked by a handful of farmers. When the farmers see the group, some turn away to ignore them, busying themselves with work. Others try to wave them away. One runs toward them gesturing furiously for them to turn away and saying in a quiet, desperate voice, "run, run away." If the group quickly backs off and hides, they will avoid capture. Otherwise, the poor soul trying to warn them is consumed in a ball of Mega-Damage fire.

A voice that sounds like crackling fire booms, "I am the sun god. Bow down before me or be consumed."

Floating in the air above them is a Lipoca, Sun Demon – a foul creature with the power of a demigod. (See **Psyscape™**, page 109). He is accompanied by four henchmen who willingly serve the monster as its loyal guardians. They, in return, enjoy power over those their master enslaves. This particular Lipoca, named C'uultec, has laid claim to the small farming village and everything within 100 miles (160 km) around it. Any who enter its domain are expected to bow down before it and accept C'uultec as their master or be destroyed. The player group is the latest acquisition of its growing kingdom. This is a powerful nightmare of a monster with a growing number of henchmen who believe C'uultec is building a kingdom. Those who can not be recruited as willing servants (the sun god using its psionic powers to see if they are truthful) are stripped of their weapons,

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armor and possessions, and forced to become a serf under the creature's rule. Other travelers and heroes have already fallen to C'uultec and may join a group of bold newcomers in an escape or action to destroy the beast.

30. Secrets. The players encounter an odd pair of mutants (most likely in or around Minnesota, the State of Lone Star or in the southwest). How they encounter them is up to the G.M., but they could meet up with them by accident in the wilderness or in a small town bar. The pair consist of an intelligent feline humanoid (*Coalition Battle Cat*) and a large humanoid chimpanzee (*Coalition Monkey Boy or in this case, Monkey Girl*). The feline is a big woman resembling a puma. She is armed to the teeth and clad in armor, with only her head, feet, and hands exposed. She looks fierce and tense. The monkey creature has a C-12 laser pistol and a hand-held personal computer. She looks very nervous. Interaction with the pair will reveal them to be rogues from Lone Star with very valuable top secret information on the Monkey Girl's computer. Information Dr. Bradford will spare no expense or amount of manpower to reacquire or destroy. The information could be anything from proof of the illegal experiments being conducted by Dr. Bradford to a secret plan to replace the Emperor with one of his clones, or anything in between. Bradford is a powerful man and keeper of many secrets, both his own and those of the Coalition States. The good Doctor, however, will not notify the CS of this "breach" (there have been too many lately), and will, instead, dispatch teams of his mutant creations to track down these traitors, recover the stolen data, and kill the two (and anybody who tries to help them). See **Rifts® World Book 13: Lone Star** for details about Doctor Bradford, his mutants, and the Lone Star Complex.

31. The coming storm. There have been an unprecedented number of *Ley Line Storms* in the area. The player characters investigating (or stumbling upon) the phenomenon find that all the towns and villages in the area have been devastated by the rash of sudden storms and the unpredictable things they rain down. Many may not recover and could not survive yet another Ley Line Storm any time soon. There is a *nexus* in an old ghost town that seems to be the focal point of the storms. The locals refuse to go to the ghost town out of fear and superstition, but the adventurers should have no such reservations.

In the town there is a group of mages and a couple of mutants that are doing Rifting experiments. This group is so engrossed in their dimensional experiments that they are oblivious to the trouble they are causing. If asked to stop, they refuse outright, because they are so dedicated to their work that nothing else matters. They are not evil, but are obsessed with understanding dimensional Rifts and will not stop because of "a few unfortunate side effects." The group consists of two high level Ley Line Walkers, two high level Shifters, one mid-level Temporal Wizard, and four mutant *Capybaras* from South America, also mid-level. All are Anarchist alignments. Their goal is to unlock the secrets of the Rifts and dimensional travel. They can not concern themselves with "collateral damage." As far as they are concerned, the people should move. And not only are their experiments a danger to the many small wilderness communities clustered around these connected ley lines, but who knows what horrors they might unleash. And if the CS or some other anti-magic group should learn about these sorcerers' experiments ... there will be hell to pay for everybody in a fifty mile radius.

32. Secret Admirer. For some time now the group has noticed that it is being followed and spied upon. One day their tail approaches them (or they may have confronted him), and he invites them to join his leader's group. It seems the leader of some independent power (King Macklin or Emperor Sabre Lasar of the Pecos Empire, Lord Dunscon of the Federation of Magic, Warlord Scard or other leader of the Tolkeen Resistence, Colonel Larsen of Larsen's Brigade, Plato of Lazlo, the Justice Rangers or Reid's Ranger, perhaps even the CS – or anybody the Game Master would like – witnessed the group in action, liked what he saw, and wants them on his team. Pay is very good to excellent, with fringe benefits in the way of available resources, prestige and opportunity. Whether the player characters like the organization making the offer is a whole different story. If they decline, there is no ill will, but the leader of the group will take notice if they ever cross him.

A related possibility is that a rival learns that this leader plans on recruiting the characters and takes action to recruit them first, discredit them or destroy them!

33. Slave Camp. The group stumbles across a chain gang working in the fields, in a mine, building, shipping, or performing some hard labor. When they are noticed the workers just stop and stare. Some turn away. A few look nervous, but most look exhausted and could care less. A few moments later, the slaves' taskmaster comes out, accompanied by 1D4+1 low level (1-3) guards. He laughs and makes light of the situation, but looks nervous. He offers the player group food and water, and explains that there is nothing here to trouble themselves over. If any of the player characters express concerns about slavery and/or freeing the men, the taskmaster will argue that they are better off this way, quite happy, and that the group should stay out of the affairs of others. If they press the matter, he will try to buy them off, offering 5,000 credits each if they leave this very minute and forget what they saw.

Freeing the slaves will meet with minimal resistance. The slave master is a coward, and his goons are ineffective against any opponents with more skill than a slave laborer. However, they work for a powerful (seventh level or greater), evil practitioner of magic who will not take the player group's interference lightly.

34. Family in despair. The adventurer group comes across a small farm or homestead in poor condition. The family living here (human or D-Bee) is struggling to survive. The father and his eldest sons are suffering from some illness. They should completely recover if they can get enough to eat. Meanwhile, their mother and six younger siblings (four girls, two boys, ages 3-11) are weak from caring for their family and trying to maintain the farm. They beg any passers-by, especially warrior types, to please help them. They are in desperate need of food, enough to last them a couple of weeks. The three year old daughter is adorable and will ask, "cain't you hep us at all. A nice deer is all we need. Please misser. Cain't you hep?" The 11 year old girl and 9 year old boy can show where one might find good huntin' down by the meadow (deer, rabbit, raccoons, and even the occasional bear). They could use some help fixin' the fence and choppin' some wood too. Will the player characters help? The family has nothing of value to pay them with, not even livestock or chickens – raiders took them two weeks ago.

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35. The happy hoe-down. The player characters arrive at a small town or village of about 200 people. All are in a festive spirit and about to celebrate their good fortune: a record sale of crops or other resource that will keep them fed, fat and sassy with a pile of money and goods that will last them well into next year. They welcome visitors with open arms, and are so giddy that they tell the *player group* all about their good fortune, the three new tractors and the truck they bought, and all the money they made. Even where the money is kept (in the cellar of the church, not the bank, and in gold and gems, not credits). Makes a tempting target for unsavory characters. Does that include the player group? If not, then the players should be savvy and alert enough to realize that these trusting, happy people have left themselves wide open to bandits or raiders. Our heroes may want to hang back in town, keep an eye on the church, and listen for any signs of trouble.

In fact, one such band of desperadoes have taken notice of recent events and plan to steal the truck, rob some of the homes and knock over the *bank* while everybody is singing and dancing in the square all night. The bandits heard about the gold and gems, but don't know the money is at the church, at least not yet. Does anyone else know?

If the player characters save the townspeople from getting robbed, they will earn the community's eternal gratitude and will have a place to hide or visit and rest with absolute safety for the rest of their lives (or as long as this overly trusting and careless community survives).

36. Wild predator. A solitary hunter or a mated pair of some sort of animal predator has become a man-eater. It now stalks the road or trail and/or local communities in search of human prey. Make it something nasty like a Grigleaper, Gwylack, Leatherwing, Ostrosaurus, Oborus-Slitherer, Panthera-Tereon, Rhino-Buffalo, Silonar or other dinosaur, Tree Spider, (all described in **Rifts® New West™**) or Devil Sloth, Spiny Ravager (both found in **Coalition War Campaign™**), or Blood Hawk, Dark Behemoth, Dark Hound, Land Ray (all found in **Psyscape™**), or other monster.

37. Toll Bridge. A bridge or ferry across a river or lake or ravine or mountain pass. It is owned and run by a Demon-Dragonmage, Necromancer (and his undead legion), dragon or a gang of Potgal Dragon Slayers (Vampire Kingdoms or South America One), Psi-Goblins (Psyscape), Brodkil, giants or other malicious creatures. Whatever it is, the creature(s) charges exorbitant prices and may rob those who pass if it (they) believes its target can be overpowered.

38. Danger, Plague. As the party travels down a dusty dirty road, they come across a lone D-Bee driving a sign into the ground at the side of the road. The sign reads "Danger, plague. Stay away." The D-Bee tells of a horrible sickness that is sweeping his village. Since he was out hunting when the plague started, he hasn't been infected; at least not yet. His only hope to save his village is to get to the nearest doctor, miles away. To get there he must travel through the "Weeping Woods," a forest of Weeping Willows long held to be inhabited by monsters and creatures that howl, wail and harass travelers who dare to make their way through it. Will the player characters help him make his life saving trek? Will they protect this character and help him make the passage through the haunted forest?

39. Hostages. The player group is traveling in the wilderness (the Midwest or New West territories are ideal) when they come across a Coalition Squad at a makeshift camp. They notice that several Native American Indians are being held hostage. A couple look to be in pretty bad shape. Just then, two CS Grunts carry out another hostage from a tent and throw her together with the others. A uniformed officer bursts out of the tent after them, walks over to the group of Indians' and starts gesticulating wildly and yelling, pointing at a folded piece of paper in his hand and then off to the southwest. He then stops, takes a deep breath and barks out some orders. The two Grunts grab the most battered hostage and tie him to the remains of an old gnarled tree. The officer slowly pulls his sidearm, aims, and kills the Indian with one shot. He again points to the paper in his hand and then at his watch. He turns and notices the player characters for the first time. He walks slowly back into the tent ... eyeballing the group all the way. If the group should decide to help the Indians, they will definitely be recognized. What is it the officer wants? It must be important if these captives are willing to die to preserve the secret.

40. A cry in the night. While sitting in a local tavern a man comes in and stands up to the bar close to one or two of the player characters, so they hear him say:

"Thomas, give me a double of the strongest thing you've got!"

"Barlow, what's got you so worked up?" asks the bartender.

"I just had to take another one of those crates up to that house. It's not right I tell'ya! I swear I could hear noises coming from inside that crate. God only knows what was inside o' it. An' I'll tell you another thing, this time I think I saw something watching me! I could swear I was followed, all the way up, until I passed through the gate. It's all evil I tell'ya, all of it."

"Now, now Barlow, we've been through all this before. The cargo in the crate probably just shifted when you hit a bump and just because you don't understand what Mr. Nightsinger is working on, doesn't mean it's evil. As for being followed, you know that was probably Mr. Nightsinger's boy Rory closing the gate behind you."

Barlow slams his hand down on the bar causing a hush to fall over the bar, and shouts, "Dangit Thomas, I know what I seen and it wasn't Rory! I'm going to find out what's going on up there. Then you'll see I was right!"

The man known as Barlow storms out of the tavern and conversations begin again. Not twenty seconds later a loud screech is heard followed by a blood curdling scream that is cut off quickly. There in the street lays Barlow, his throat ripped out. Tracks not quite human, not quite animal, lead away from his body. Thomas the Bartender stares in utter shock and horror, looks up toward the Nightsinger house, and mutters, "Maybe, you were right Barlow. Maybe we have invited evil to come live in our town."

Time to investigate?

41. The balance of power. You have just taken down a local crime lord who was strong-arming a town for protection. His boss just found out about it and is sending a large group of Greot Hunters to ask the group why they are interfering in business that does not concern them. They should arrive any time now (within 24 hours) and they'll take the town apart piece by piece to find those responsible for this insurrection. Does the

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group stand up to them or cut and run? If they run, some townsfolk *will* pay the price for their handiwork (somebody has to pay and be made an example). What's next?

42. Subterranean pre-Rifts ruins. The player group stumbles across the buried ruins of a pre-Rifts city or town. The vast majority of the place is completely buried and it would take a team of professional archeologists decades to completely unearth. However, a small part of the ancient community functions as a network of underground tunnels, caves and chambers. The entrance from the surface is concealed by rocks and an overhanging chunk of concrete. Dropping down into the hole (large enough for most cyborgs and even a Grackle Tooth), the adventurers drop about 14 feet (4.3 m) to the floor below. Rusted steel girders stand exposed to the elements, but still hold strong. What were once plaster walls have mostly crumbled away, likewise all wiring and fixtures have either rotted away or been stripped as salvage centuries ago. In some areas, new (relatively speaking) walls made of stone and clay have been built by *somebody*, sectioning the great chamber into several antechambers (it is up to the G.M. to decide how many and what incidentals might be there). It is clear that somebody – a tribe of Indians or Psi-Stalkers, a gang of bandits or mercenaries, or nomads – uses this place as a camp, hunting lodge or hideout from time to time. It may even be used by a number of different groups. As evidence of this there are mats of straw, a slab of concrete mounted on two large stones for a table, and even a room with two long wooden tables, benches and an old-fashioned, wood burning stove with an exhaust pipe running up to the surface to prevent suffocating those inside.

At some point in this overall rectangular structure is a opening where a door use to be, and a crumbling steel and concrete staircase. It still seems strong enough to support a reasonable amount of weight, but portions are weak and may collapse if strained. The stairs lead to several other floors of what was once a five-story office building. The top two floors are sheared off, the adventurers actually entered the third floor, so there is the second and first floors, as well as the basement below. The basement has most of its cinder block rooms intact and a tunnel that leads to what was once a parking structure. The parking garage is half buried, but half remains accessible. It once serviced this building and other office buildings on the block (they have all been destroyed and/or completely buried, filled with dirt and rubble). Whatever pipes, wiring, plastic, scrap metal, including the furnace, furniture, building materials and other salvageable items there may have *once* been, are all gone, looted hundreds of years ago during the Dark Ages. But more recent inhabitants may have hidden new treasures, loot, weapons, food, etc., tucked away in this place. In fact, one, two or more creatures may live here. **G.M. Note:** Here's your setting, now make this a fun little dungeon crawl. It's your job to fill in the details. Perhaps a band of Native Americans and a rival clan of Psi-Stalkers or Simvan use the first floor as a base camp whenever they are hunting in or passing through the area. That means hunting and war parties of both tribes visit the place, occasionally at the same time and clashing. Other times half the tribe (perhaps hundreds of people) make a safe haven of the subterranean lair for 1D4 weeks at a time. Even the bravest warriors seldom go down to the deeper levels because it is said to be haunted. Indeed, 1D6 *Haunting Entities* and a half dozen *Poltergeists* wander the first and/or second floors, harassing visitors. They never leave those two floors, however, and are more of a frightful nuisance than a deathly danger. But other "things" also live in the levels below. What? A trio of *Black Faeries* or *Witchlings,* perhaps. They don't bother the Indians or Psi-Stalkers, but they will investigate and plague other visitors who disturb their underground sanctuary (they hate noise and intrusion); typically picking off interlopers one or two at a time. Perhaps a wicked *Devil Unicorn* or *Oborus-Slitherer* (see **New West™**) or a similar aggressive and dangerous monster lives in some part of the building. A crazy old hermit (practitioner of magic, psychic or Cyber-Knight) inhabits one of the basement chambers. He or she is powerful or cunning enough to fend off the monsters who share the building, or the hermit is harmless, keeps to himself and is ignored by the other creatures (maybe chased or harassed sometimes for sport when they are bored). On occasion, one of these monsters brings captives down here; playthings to torment until they are finally killed and eaten. Meanwhile, living in the collapsed, dirt filled part of the Parking structure is a Blow Worm or two (a demonic Worm of Taut; see **Rifts® Conversion Book One**), as well as dozens of Tomb Worms and maybe a couple other Worms of Taut. Or a Giant Canyon Worm, or maybe the parking garage is home to a mated pair of *Panthera-Tereon*, or mother *bear* and her cubs, or a pack of *predatory animals* who have dug another way in and out, and use the place as their den when not out hunting in the wilderness. And so on. Then there are new dangers: Perhaps a band of cutthroats, Coalition soldiers, bounty hunters, evil sorcerers, a dragon, demons, wild animal, etc., that has found the opening (perhaps by following the player group), blocking the only *known* way out.

Use this basic concept as a template for all sorts of adventure settings to explore, infiltrate or invade. Instead of the ruin as depicted above, it could be a secret Coalition, Federation of Magic, terrorist, bandit, etc., base of operations with equipment, troops and a bunker in the basement. Or the home camp of a small army of humans, D-Bees or demons. Or the home to a tribe or mixed group of D-Bees. Or a secret military training camp (well equipped or Spartan conditions). Or contains a portal to another world, or a nest of monsters, or ... well, you get the idea. – KS.

43. The grinning idol. Along the edge of a ley line (where one can draw upon the line's energy) a discovery is made. A recent flood, landslide, or firefight reveals an opening into a pre-Rifts drain pipe. It is large enough for a human to stand erect, although tall folks (taller than eight feet/2.4 m) will have to walk stooped over. The pipe is damp and filled with mud. One end is collapsed with dirt, rock and plant roots, the other end is fairly open and runs down 300 feet (91.5 m) before branching off. At the "L" shaped branch, the tunnel runs another 1D6x1000 feet (305 to 1828 m) before coming to a dead end. However, at the junction is an iron rung ladder that goes up a tube to a metal hatch. The hatch is rusted and resists opening, but gives way after several tries or to a P.S. of 30+ or Supernatural strength. It opens up to reveal a massive stone and brick chamber easily the size of a gymnasium (maybe 50% larger). Its stone ceiling towers 50 feet (15.2 m) high, with massive pipes and tubes snaking along the floor and ceiling. Big machines dotted with all kinds of levers, switches and gauges cover one entire wall. Any character with an understanding of machines or pre-Rifts architecture will figure out that they are in the central control chamber of an ancient water treatment plant or dam or

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similar water or sewage plant. The place is damp and musty. Cobwebs are everywhere, and the dust is thick. It is clear that nobody has been here for a few centuries. One might think not since the Great Cataclysm until the *stone idol* is noticed.

The idol is as tall as a man. A grinning, stout fellow, with large round eyes, crowned in a wide headdress and standing on a pedestal decorated with crudely carved skulls. The wall behind it is covered in dark brown paint that looks as if buckets of paint were splashed on it rather than applied with a brush or roller. Closer inspection (or chemical analysis of scrapings) reveals that it is not paint, but dried blood! And lots of it, although not a drop on the terra cotta colored idol. As if this scene were not macabre enough, the skeleton of a 30 foot (9.1 m) giant, one hand clutching the base of the statue, lays stretched across the floor, ignored even by the malevolent idol.

Brushing the dust away from the floor reveals a large circle like those used in certain magic rituals, painted in blood and white paint. All around the circle are inscriptions written in American; some painted, some in faded chalk, others scratched into the concrete floor itself. They all say things like: "Through this portal we call upon the master." "Queltal Marnoc, lord of death, we embrace thee." "Bring forth the plague and end our suffering." "Send forth your blood demons and wash our planet in glorious red." "Queltal Marnoc the destroyer, we welcome you." "We live to serve," "May our blood give you life" and "We die so you may live, and mankind cease."

A Rogue Scholar specializing in history or a practitioner of magic (especially if 6th level or greater experience) will recognize the name as belonging to an obscure death god believed to have been worshiped during the first decades of the Dark Age that followed the Great Cataclysm. For most historians, Queltal Marnoc the Destroyer – sometimes known as the "Hand of Armageddon" – is a shadowy figure from a time of chaos and darkness that remains an enigma probably forever lost to historians. Many scholars are not even sure this Death God and his bloodthirsty cultists ever really existed. The few tales of The Destroyer that have survived to this day paint Queltal Marnoc as a mythic boogeyman who reigned during of the worst days of the Dark Ages, leading rampages of bloodletting and mass destruction. According to myth, during the days of chaos that followed the Coming of the Rifts, Queltal Marnoc appeared, promising those who worshiped and served him a quick death and eternal peace if they helped bring about the extermination of human life. To that end, his cultists would go forth, en masse, rioting and killing everyone in their path. It mattered not that they died in the process, because death in chaos and the name of Queltal Marnoc meant glory and eternal peace. Supposedly, they could even call forth their Death God to lead them. When Queltal Marnoc appeared, it was as a thirty foot (9.1 m) giant, with blood red skin, eyes as black as the pits of Hell, able to summon forth a giant sword of magical energy (basically a Psi-Sword of immense destructive power) and fire bolts of black energy from his eyes and fingertips. Although a giant, Queltal Marnoc was said to be represented as a squat grinning humanoid with a large headdress just like the one our heroes have discovered. Queltal Marnoc's idea of a joke, it would seem.

For the last two centuries, many scholars, mages and historians suspected this god to be nothing more than a symbolic representation of the madness and destruction of the era. The discovery of this apparent cult *temple* would suggest otherwise, making it of great historical significance. Sketches and photographs should be made if the site can not be preserved.

All of this raises some interesting questions. Could this chamber be the place where the cultists would call forth Queltal Marnoc? If so, could the skeleton be his? The Death God's physical link to our world? Filling it with muscle and flesh whenever he returns? Can the magic circle and a human sacrifice (or several) summon this foul god? Do any of his followers exist today? Presumably not. None have been known to exist for at least 200 years. Then again, there is always some lunatic or power-mad person ready to take up a diabolical cause. Could this discovery rekindle the Cult of Armageddon and bring about the return of Queltal Marnoc? Did any other supernatural beings serve this god? Should the idol and skeleton be destroyed, and the circle painted over or scratched out?

Wait! Was that a flash of blue energy in the eyes of the idol and/or the skulls along its base? Was that a noise in the back of the chamber, among the pipes? Is someone else ... something else ... in here with the group?

44. Worms. Hungry worms. A young man or woman races toward the members of the player group. "Oh, thank god. Thank god! You have to help us. Please. Come with me. You can stop them. I know you can. We ... I mean ... there's just so many of them. But you have body armor ... guns. You can kill 'em. Come on, quick!"

The town is not far (probably within easy eyeshot) and is only a short jaunt down the trail the way the group was headed

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in the first place. When they arrive, they see the good townsfolk swatting, hitting, stomping and sweeping away eight inch long, worm-like things. These worms are all over the place, dropping from rooftops, climbing up people's legs, and even curling up and springing up to four feet (1.2 m) high. Once they land on their victim they start biting, inflicting one point of damage per bite. Thankfully, they only have one bite per melee round (plus two melee actions to leap, crawl or dodge), and only have 1D4 Hit Points, so they are very easy to kill. But there must be a thousand of the darn things, maybe more.

Heroes in M.D. body armor thinking they are safe from the critters are in for a rude awakening. The worms secrete an acid that burns through inorganic M.D. materials (no damage to flesh). This acid does 1D6 M.D. to the armor (and vehicles, tires, etc.) every time a worm secretes it (counts as one melee action) and burns a worm-shaped hole into it within two melee rounds. Once the armor has been breached, the worm crawls inside and starts biting! Despite this nasty surprise, our heroes, with the help of the townspeople, should be able to find and exterminate 90% of the worms within a few hours.

The adventure could end here, or the G.M. can build on it, asking questions like: Where did these things come from? Is there a nest that needs to be tracked down and destroyed? Is there something like a queen? Could somebody (an evil Shifter, Witch, demon, monster, alien, etc.) have deliberately sent them to attack this town? If so, why? Who is it and how can they stop him/her/it? Is this the start of something much bigger? Run with it.

45. Stone cold killer. In town or on the road, the player characters run into a *gunslinger*. He's an ornery cuss looking for a fight. He's one of those rare breed who likes killin' and is fast enough and mean enough to challenge other fighters and win. He will use the slightest thing as an excuse to challenge one or two of the player characters to a showdown. If they refuse he says he'll kill 'em where they stand. And he will. That should be made clear. This guy is not invincible, but he is good. Real good. And a fast draw. In a quick-draw showdown, which is what he wants, odds are he is going to win. The group should realize this, and may want to cheat and use magic or psionics, or even jump this mad dog killer to subdue him long enough to tie him up and make their getaway. As one might guess, this gunslinger will fight to the death and will see getting jumped as low down and a reason to kill 'em all. If the gunslinger is subdued, he never forgets a face and the group can count on trouble if they ever cross paths again. (Um, G.M.s, they should definitely cross paths again at some point. If not in that night's adventure, a few adventurers later.)

46. Do you want to rule the world? Ley Line Walker *Nistar Hule* does and he's found a way to do it. He has been in contact with an Alien Intelligence through a ley line nexus point and the Intelligence has given him the power to locate and command the mysterious and powerful beings known as "The Corrupt" (see **Federation of Magic™**, page 86), and he is starting to build his army right now. The player group learns of this from one of Nistar Hule's lackeys who has decided nothing good can come of this. He prays they can stop this evil madman before he gets too powerful. Currently, Nistar only has three Corrupt and three servants (2nd level Vagabonds) under his thrall, but that may soon change. The evil Alien Intelligence has give Nistar a ritual to summon 2D6x10 of the Corrupt to him. The ritual can be repeated every night of a full moon, provided Nistar has three teenage, virgin girls to sacrifice. There will be a full moon in three days, and there is a town, tribe or village nearby. **Note:** A nice bit of foreshadowing is to have the player characters hear prior to this that a girl or two is missing from a local village. It's a nice touch, plus it turns the adventure into a rescue mission with a deadline, as well as a destroy the evil maniac and his monstrous minions adventure. The fellow ratting his old master out *may* help the adventurers find Nistar, but remember that he too is an evil guy (probably Aberrant or Miscreant) and not completely trustworthy. He could turn on the group, or cheat, rob or turn them in for a bounty later.

47. Do you Seer what I Seer? The characters make a couple of wrong turns and get lost (this can be in a town, city, 'Burbs or wilderness). The next thing they know, they are standing in front of a small group of *Grey Seers'* (see **Federation of Magic™**, page 88). They just happen to be looking for a group of stalwart adventurers' to accompany one of their brothers on a journey. A journey to where is not known, but the Seer will *find out* along the way. According to the Seers, it is fate that has brought the player characters to them, and their destiny to accept the task. G.M.s, take it from here, and make it good.

48. There's gold in them thar hills! You've heard stories and rumors of a mine that had a large deposit of gold still in it. It's even been told that it's just lying there waiting to be picked up, but that while people have found it by accident (coming back to civilization with pockets full of gold), no one has ever been able to find their way back to it a second time. And thousands have tried. Well, you have the technology (perhaps Techno-Wizard technology thanks to a friendly and trusting NPC prospector the group has met), you have perseverance, and you even got the permission of the local Indian tribe to try and find it. The only thing you missed was the laughter behind your backs as you were leaving. You see they didn't tell you about the Devil Unicorns and Giant Canyon Worms that infest the area. Nor did they tell you about the Dragon that lives there and his deal with the Indians (he has the fun of combating the adventures and they get all the equipment that's left over). Oh, and did they mention that the region is known to Native Americans as "The Shifting Lands"? You know, as in, it randomly shifts from one other dimensional landscape to another, once every day? No? Didn't think so.

49. Gold! (May be tied to #48 or not). The player group stumbles on to a field littered with rectangular chunks of gold. Closer examination, especially by someone with the Gemology, Prospecting or Identify Gems and Precious Minerals skill, will reveal that it is indeed solid gold. In fact, all of the irregularly shaped, eight pound (3.6 kg) chunks look almost identical. The Black Market will pay handsomely for this find. You're all rich!

Secret Number One: You're not in Kansas anymore, Toto. You're in some alien dimension.

Secret Number Two: After the group takes all they can carry, they walk away with new dreams about their future. However, the gold metamorphs into golden snakes. These unique robotic aliens bite each member of the group and temporarily take mental control of them (infuse with nano-machines that dull the mind and direct them; need a 18 or higher to save; and no it is NOT technology the group can acquire). The snakes are benevo-

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lent but desperate. They lead the group into their underground lair where they release them from their control and explain they need the group for a special project (something that will save the lives of their people or free them from slavery). In return for their help, they will be glad to give the group the mineral they seem to want (gold, kids, gold; 100,000 credits worth) and lead them to a dimensional portal that *should* take them home. They point out their appearance in this time of need is a sign of good fortune for them all.

50. Discovery of Bubble Ball Trees. While traveling through a wooded area, the group comes across a man standing next to a strange tree. He is plainly dressed and his aura reads as good. After greetings are exchanged, he tells how he was lost, injured and starving. He risked eating one of the apple-sized, transparent globes from the strange tree and was instantly healed and nourished.

There are only four Bubble Ball Trees, with twenty-four Bubble Balls each. One Ball can heal 6D6 Hit Points and retains its healing properties for up to eight days after it was picked. After that time, it turns into nourishing food with no healing ability, but lasts thirty days. Each Ball contains a light blue seed the size of a small bead. The seed takes eight years to germinate and grow into a Bubble Ball Tree and another four years before it bears fruit, but it can grow almost anywhere it is warm or has warm seasons, including the desert. This rare other-dimensional tree is not even known to most practitioners of magic and scholars. Also, could these four be the first of several dozen that will bloom over the next 1D4 years? It would be a great place to start a homestead or town.

51. Shatter Sword and Amulet. An ordinary looking sword is found stuck in the ground. Hanging from the hilt is a necklace with a metal, teardrop-shaped amulet attached. The amulet is dark green, has a screw-on cap, and is the size of a robin's egg. Neither register as magic.

The sword and amulet came to earth from another dimension. Anyone touching the sword will activate a stored psychic message that reveals the weapon can completely shatter items that have 1-10 M.D.C. with a single strike, and does 2D6 M.D. to objects with greater M.D.C., but also cracks the material, weakening it so that each subsequent strike does 4D6 M.D. and creates more cracking.

Anyone touching the *amulet* will release a stored psychic message that tells how the amulet contains two doses of a light oil containing nano-machines that can repair only inorganic material such as armor or M.D. concrete (restores 60 M.D., not reusable once expended).

Both the sword and amulet want to go in a particular direction although they will not say why until they reach a specific location. The reason is to find a lost explorer from their dimension. She has failed to report or return home on schedule and the worst is feared. Rather than risk another life, these two objects were sent to try to locate the explorer. When they reach the location (the last place she was known to be, or supposed to be), the items reveal this information and ask the group to help them find her and give them to her so she can return home. If she is found to have died, the two objects disappear 24 hours later. If she is injured the amulet will heal her with a secret dose of nano-machines that can restore the body of that alien race (not humans or most D-Bees). If she is imprisoned (by an evil being, because she is Principled), the items will ask that the group help them rescue her. No cooperation by the group will cause the items to vanish after six months.

52. Super-powered mutant human. A frightened man is encountered who runs away after spotting the group. After a while, the man reappears and asks if he can tag along with the group for a while. Initially nervous, he finally tells the player group that he has "The Power."

The man has recently gained the ability to cover any object with sand, dirt or debris. It starts with a mental command that creates a swirling mini-tornado, six feet (1.8 m) tall, which piles layer upon layer of self-sticking debris on anything, eventually burying it and making it immobile. If desired, a mental command causes the debris to lose its sticking power and it falls off. The same thing happens after 2D4+6 minutes whether he wants it to or not (victims trapped inside can also try to struggle or blast free, but it requires a P.S. of 30+ and will take at least 1D4 minutes). Range is 300 feet (91.5 m). Damage: None; only traps and holds the target. The debris cannot be made to pummel the victim. He can also use it to camouflage or conceal himself, or to cover himself with a sort of junk, M.D.C. body armor if the materials are available (80 M.D.C.; not environmental) for twice the normal duration. He can only work his power three times per hour and is confused and frightened by it.

He fails to mention that his superstitious village thinks he is cursed, possessed by demons, or an alien spy (or all of the above). They ran him out of town and threatened to report him to the Coalition. Well, they did, and the CS has dispatched a squad to investigate. They don't need any alien spies or demons

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that can possess people snooping around their territory. A traveling show or slaver might be interested in "buying him," so unscrupulous bandits or mercenaries might be looking for "the freak" too.

53. Herd of wild Fury Beetles. Our heroes come across a herd of a 30 adult Fury Beetles and a dozen young. The Fury Beetles will ignore the group if they leave them alone, but the young are worth 2,000-6,000 each if captured and sold to a wild animal merchant to be domesticated as a riding animal. Not to mention that the meat of young and adult Fury Beetles is delicious and nets a good price, and the armor is also valuable (typically the meat and armor of an adult is worth 4,000 credits each).

Complications: 1. An attack will cause the herd to flee headlong for a farm or town about 10 miles (16 km) away. The stampede will cause tremendous damage and probably hurt and kill innocent people unless the giant beetles can be turned in a different direction.

2. A Simvan hunting party was closing in on the herd when the player group appeared. If the group spooked the Fury Beetles or killed or captured a few, the Simvan will feel cheated from "their" kill and may attack the adventurers or cause trouble.

3. Fury Beetles are common to these parts so the kill only nets half the normal amount (2,000 credits for the meat, 2,000 for the armor).

54. Android City. Away from the Coalition States, rumors of a city of androids located in a nearby valley reach the player group. Some say they are hostile, others that they are friendly but keep to themselves. Some claim they are visitors from another world trapped on ours. Others that they are advanced scouts for an invasion force. Some rumors tell how the androids have helped people in need and that they fix machines faster than a top-ranked Operator. Others that these androids don't like people much, using flesh and blood people as slaves – one even said they eat people (although why an android would need to eat is not clear). And these are just a few of the rumors. It is clear that everyone is afraid to find out the truth. What about the player characters?

Secret: The androids do exist, but they have not yet built a city. One hundred friendly, humanoid androids have built a small village of one story buildings. Their creator, a humanoid dimensional traveler, has died, without giving them their final instructions. They seek purpose. Will the player group help them find it? Will it be for good or evil? What fate awaits these socially innocent beings?

55. Military Vehicle. A firefight is heard in the distance while traveling through a remote hilly area. By the time the

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group arrives, only one man is left alive. Upon seeing them, the wounded survivor runs away. Then they see a partially unearthed vehicle of some kind.

The vehicle is an armored trailer of the former U.S. Army. The airtight back door is open and it contains assault rifles, additional ammo, hand grenades, flak jackets and other military equipment, including a few computers. All in perfect condition! Now, can they keep it? Who else might be coming to investigate the sounds of combat? Did the sole survivor run to get reinforcements? Are reinforcements coming already? Is there something else, some secret, inside the vehicle waiting to be discovered? Could there be an old American military base buried under their feet?

56. Ghosts? While exploring one of the unpopulated regions of North America, the group establishes camp for the night. They are visited by luminous, ghost-like beings. Strangely, each member of the group sees the ghosts as members of his own species. The ghosts tell them to respect their land, but make no threats, and disappear. Somehow, everyone in the group falls back to sleep.

Upon waking the next morning, everyone believes it was a strange dream, don't talk about it much and continue on. Then they come upon a clearing with never before scene purple cactus-like plants. If the group does not damage or destroy the plants and if the group is primarily good aligned, the ghostly aliens will emerge from their "plant homes" and befriend them, telling them things about the immediate area and talking about the sanctity of the circle of life, the harmony of nature and conservation. If mostly evil or they try to damage the purple cactus, the aliens will attack them with psychic powers. They possess all Sensitive and Physical psionic powers plus the Super-Psionic powers of Electrokinesis, Hydrokinesis, Mind Bolt, Mind Bond, Mind Wipe, Psychic Omni-Sight and Telekinesis.

57. Freaks! The player characters are first tipped off to something amiss when they get free passes to a traveling freak show. The show is harmless for those who come to see it, but it contains a number of truly ugly and horrifying mutants. Freaks the likes of which the group has never seen (unless they've had a close encounter with the Lone Star Complex or Gene-Splicers, in which case they recognize the hand of Doctor Bradford in this). The passes are handed out for free, because the show's owner is trying to drum up business (this is only his third stop since getting started) and because he hopes to sell a number of elixirs to cure what ails you. The owner is a Miscreant, sixth level Vagabond turned entrepreneur. Although street savvy, if one gets him excited and liquored up enough, he will reveal how and where he got his menagerie of freaks. The freaks can also provide this information (at least the ones that aren't drooling vegetables), except they are caged and kept away from spectators after the show. During the show several plead with the audience to "help" them. That they are being held prisoners and have, in fact, been turned into monsters against their will. Of course one of the Vanguard Brawler handlers hits them with a stick or shocks the poor creature with a cattle prod to silence it. Most people in the audience assume it is all part of the act. Experienced adventurers, however, will recognize the reality of their captivity while characters with empathy, telepathy and similar abilities will sense the painful truth about the freaks. If contact is made, the freaks beg that they be set free. Some plead for death. All who can communicate will reveal who is responsible and ask that he be brought justice and stopped.

The back-story (which is where the adventure is): The creator of these monstrosities is a man named Mark Willis. He learned his genetics engineering in the CS and worked for several years under Doctor Desmond Bradford at the nefarious Lone Star Complex. However, Doctor Willis' experiments broke with Coalition protocols and even repulsed Doctor Bradford. For one thing, rather than design creatures from a genetic soup and grow them, Doctor Willis worked to mutate existing beings. To take a perfectly healthy, adult human or D-Bee and cause genetic mutation to appear and change the original body. The results were as unpredictable and disfiguring as they were repugnant. The CS forbids any genetic augmentation on humans, so when it discovered Doctor Willis was illegally continuing his experiments, they went to arrest him. As fate would have it, the evil doctor was tipped off and managed to escape. He now continues his inhumane experiments in the outside world. Evil to the core of his being (Diabolic), rather than destroy his monstrous failures or try to restore them (he couldn't even if he tried), he sells them to slavers and traveling shows.

Putting an end to this madness would be a blessing, but it's not that simple. In addition to the player characters who may now be looking to put an end to Doctor Willis, is the Coalition Army who has never stopped looking for this monster. But that's not all, a team from Atlantis is en route to recruit the doctor. It seems the Splugorth are intrigued by his experiments and want to learn more so they might improve on the techniques and continue to transform ordinary humans into living monstrosities and oddities for resale in the slave trade. That team includes one Sunaj Assassin, a Splugorth High Lord, a Splugorth Conservator and two or three Overlords. In addition, the doctor has connections with a number of Black Market Body Chop-Shops where he sells his services as a physician and surgeon (and recruits new victims). If he finds out any of these groups are looking for him, he will go underground using his Black Market connections and cunning.

58. Garbage Dump. A nearby ley line nexus shimmers briefly and what looks like a truckload of garbage spills out. Closer examination and some digging through the trash, reveals empty pyramidal containers, sections of sheet metal, and metal rods among lots of blue and green leaves, chopped up purple branches and what looks like eggshells and some kind of goop. It doesn't smell too bad (yet) either. The sheet metal *is* M.D.C. (1D4x10+21 points each) and there is enough to cover a large car or pickup truck, or to build a nice hut. The metal rods are S.D.C. (50 points each), as are the pyramidal containers (some kind of soft plastic with 5 S.D.C. each). Can you believe the nerve of some aliens?

59. Frog Man. The group spots an oversized frog along the shore of a small lake. From the back, it appears to be four feet (1.2 m) long! When it turns toward them, it has the bald head of a man, with bulging eyes. "Hi!" it says. "You're new around here. But you're welcome to take a swim. I know my friends would like to meet you." And it hops into the water.

The frog man has a child-like intelligence and is very trusting. He lives in a mud brick community of dome-shaped buildings with grass growing on them. His friends have found some interesting things at the bottom of the lake that are stored in one

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of the domed houses. Where his people came from is unknown to them. Presumably they were unwillingly Rifted to Earth and have made the best of things. The community is small, and while all are not as trusting as the first fellow (who takes an instant liking to the player group), these are peace-loving D-Bees who want no trouble and like to meet other people.

60. The Coffin. A local farmer comes to the group, asking a favor. He found a coffin on his land and he needs a few strong bodies to move it. He offers a hot meal and basic provisions to anyone who volunteers.

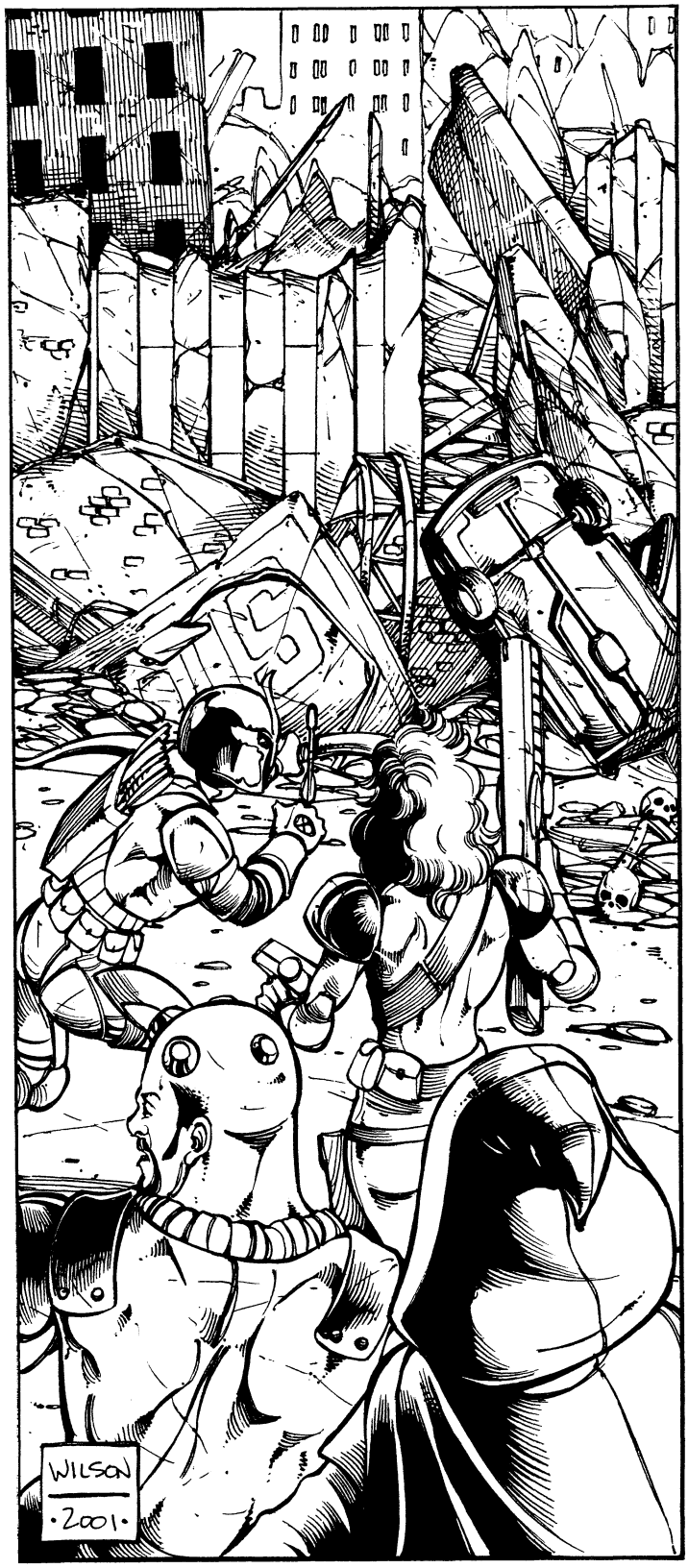
Upon arriving on the scene, the dark green, human-sized coffin is still attached to a camouflage parachute. The illiterate farmer was unable to read the following: Experimental Organism, Type C-3972, NGR, Sub. 8h11k, Stasis Chamber. Press RA on control panel to revive.

61. Standing ruins of a pre-Rifts city. This scenario setting is placed in North America, but can apply to just about anywhere in the world. The adventurers come across the ruins of a standing city. Most of the buildings are little more than skeletal frames, their contents and even the wiring, brick, concrete and metal stripped long ago. Still, girders, partial shells and debris remain. There are usually several locations suitable for ambush and crossfire so watch out.

These old ruins are sometimes adopted as a site for an outpost, hideout or used as a hunting lodge or campsite by trappers, vagabonds, Wilderness Scouts, adventurers, raiders, bandits and nomadic tribes. The CS sometimes sets traps or places Skelebots on hunter-killer missions in city ruins; occasionally spies posing as wanderers or mercenaries too. Of course, some are considered sacred ground said to be haunted, some are lairs for monsters or bandits, and some are death traps with crumbling structures and gangs of murderous savages or clans of monsters. Others are claimed by Psi-Stalkers or D-Bees who turn them into temporary or permanent villages or shanty towns. Such villages or shanty towns usually have a dominant group or individual who runs most of the place, a rival (gang or individual), a shaman, healer, still (cheap moonshine for sale), some livestock, a small farm (often on the edge of the ruins/shanty town) and a trading post. Those that experience a lot of foot traffic from visitors may also have a boarding house or campsite, a gambling hall, saloon, stable, blacksmith and a garage. What law and order *may* exist comes from the hand of he who is strongest (physically, technologically, psionically, or magically); most are lawless frontier towns. Which of these places this one might be is up to the G.M.

62. Barbarian village. Typically a simple, crude fort made of logs, with wood, mud and grass brick homes, or animal hide huts or teepees. The inhabitants are uneducated hunters, trappers, and woodsmen who live off the land and see strangers as a threat. Few, if any, possess M.D. guns, although there is likely to be a fair number of M.D. melee weapons and magic weapons/items made by its shaman or acquired through trade with Psi-Stalkers, Simvan and Indians. Other weapons and items are taken from defeated intruders, Coalition Troops (barbarians love Vibro-Blades), Xiticix and bandits. Most barbarians, even children, are aggressive and suspicious, rude and crude. They lack the formal laws, discipline and spiritualism of the Native Americans or even the Psi-Stalkers, though most barbarians do trade with Indians, Psi-Stalkers, Trappers and woodsmen. If a barbarian sees something he wants, he takes it. In these communities, might makes right. **Note:** Typically has the equivalent of a Native American Fetish Shaman, Tribal Warrior and a War Chief or Warlord (the warrior leader/king of the tribe).

The typical village has 80-200 people and is a semi-permanent structure. Semi-permanent in the sense that few last more than 3-6 years before getting demolished by raiders, slavers, monsters or natural disaster. The survivors are forced to



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move on and establish a new village someplace else or rebuild the old one. Barbarian villages are usually overcrowded for their size, squalid and basic. Laundry flaps in the wind, animal hides are tanned out in the open, the slaughterhouse dumps its scraps over the wall, and sickness and disease are the common enemy of these crude, savage people. Although they will consider trading with strangers, they may just as well rob or mug them and take what they want, sometimes killing or enslaving their victims. Barbarians respect physical power and warrior prowess above all else, and are more likely to find a trade partner, friend or ally in a fellow warrior than any other O.C.C. Barbarians see advanced technology, including guns, body armor and vehicles as a coward's way to fight, and magic as frightening, demonic and unnatural. Techno-Wizards represent the worst of both worlds.

63. The animals are frightened. So frightened that deer and elk have been trying to get *into* animal pens with the cattle, and wolves, cats, squirrels and raccoons have been trying to get inside houses! What could be driving the animals to seek shelter among people?

In the woods the birds are silent, and any animals' scurrying by run and leap as if terrified. That has made hunting and trapping miserable and even the fish aren't biting. Furthermore, woodsmen (and adventurers) sleeping outdoors in these woods feel uncomfortable and edgy during the day and dread at night. Most can not sleep even if they wanted, and report feeling as if a predator is watching ... stalking them from the shadows.

What's the cause? Time for the player characters to find out and the G.M. to start thinking. Here's one idea: Could be that a newly arrived alien intelligence has appear near a ley line (or not). It is living in a cave (or subterranean ruin, but one the locals know exists), and its evil is so intense and pervasive that it fills the air and corrupts the land. The creature is not fully acclimated to this world and is weak (only has 15,000 M.D.C., needs 24 hours to regenerate 1D4x100 M.D., has only seven attacks and spells are cast at a strength equal to a 6th level mage) but when it is, it will be almost unstoppable (60,000 M.D.C., 14 attacks per melee, regenerates 1D4x100 M.D. per minute, and the magic spells of captivity, enslavement, control, torture, and Necromancy it knows are cast at 20th level potency). Already the mammals who have not fled the forest and live closest to the horrid thing are mutating into demonic, mutant versions of themselves (replace S.D.C. with M.D.C. and they are all predators, even squirrels and bunnies; bears and canines are the most deadly). Right now, only one or two percent of the *mammals* are monsters (the mutating magic does not affect humans, birds or cold-blooded creatures like snakes, lizards and frogs). In another month that will become 5%, in two months 10%, in three month 20%, in four months 40%, and so on. Even livestock and domesticated animals will start to change after six months. The creature affects a 50 mile (80 km) diameter of the woods now, but that too may change as the monster grows in power. After that, who knows what else might happen, and who cares what the Alien Intelligence wants. It is evil and must be destroyed. Psychics and Dog Boys can sense exactly where it is.

64. The animals are being slaughtered. Herd and grazing animals in the wild, cattle and all other animals on farms are being slaughtered in a swath of mayhem that cuts a trail from northern Canada down into what was once the United States. While the occasional animal is found partially eaten, most are simply killed and left laying there. Herds of elk and entire farms have been wiped out; an estimated 97 people too – anybody caught in their path. The question is, who or what is responsible? Reports vary, but most say the killers are a pack of shadowy or furry demons or a massive pack of savage wolves, or both. So far, most authorities and heroes who have gone to investigate the matter either disappear (presumed dead) or barely escape with their lives – telling the same story about a pack of wolves and demonic wolves and bestial man-things at least two or three hundred strong.

If the pack keeps to its current course, the player group is right in the path of ... whatever it is ... but the pack should not arrive for another three days. This gives our "heroes" plenty of time to get out of the area. However, they are aware that scores of helpless homesteads, a dozen tiny farms and hunting lodges, a village of 400 (probably where the characters are when they hear about this) and a small tribe of Psi-Stalkers are smack-dab in the path of destruction. Any character of good alignment will be hard pressed to desert them, and the people will not desert their homes and neighbors.

A strange little fellow with an odd accent and Indian features approaches them. He identifies himself as Turtuk, an Inuit shaman. According to the fur clad, soft spoken and polite fellow, he was visited by the *Great Turtle* (a powerful spirit/god of his people) who explained to him that a foolish Shifter had unleashed an ancient, malevolent nature spirit that is effectively the essence of the predator, but without conscience or compassion. For unlike real predatory animals who usually kill only for food, this spirit kills for the simple joy of killing. It has inhabited the body of a Windigo Demon and has gathered around it a pack of wild animals and monsters whom it leads on a killing spree the likes of which has not been seen since the Dark Ages (the last time this killing-spirit walked the Earth). Turtuk is here to kill the body of the Windigo the evil spirit has inhabited, send the evil spirit back to is unearthly dimension, and stop the carnage, but he could use some help from them. The Shaman will especially appeal to characters of good alignment, who should be hard pressed to turn him down without having to change their alignment to Anarchist.

There is some good news. While the demon pack has some 200 wolves, a dozen Loup Garou and a half dozen Windigo, they group need only slay the *pack leader*: the Windigo possessed by the evil spirit. Once he is slain, Turtuk can send the evil spirit away and the rest of the pack will immediately scatter without further incident (most heading back up north). Of course, the six other Windigo will try to protect their leader, and the killing-spirit directly commands eight wolves as if they were extensions of himself (telepathic union). The Loup Garou are just along for the fun and will not sacrifice their lives to protect the pack leader. Unfortunately, while the Windigo are tough lesser demons to begin with, the one possessed by the killing-spirit might be considered a "super-Windigo." He is bigger, faster and stronger than the average Windigo, as follows: 20 feet (6 m) tall, has 320 M.D.C., bio-regenerates 4D6 M.D.C. per melee round, has nine attacks per melee, is +7 on initiative, +11 to strike, +8 to parry and dodge, impervious to Horror Factor, +3 on all saving throws, has a Supernatural P.S. of 50 and his bite does 5D6 M.D. and claw strikes 1D6x10 M.D. (6D6 on closed fist punches and kicks)! Good luck.

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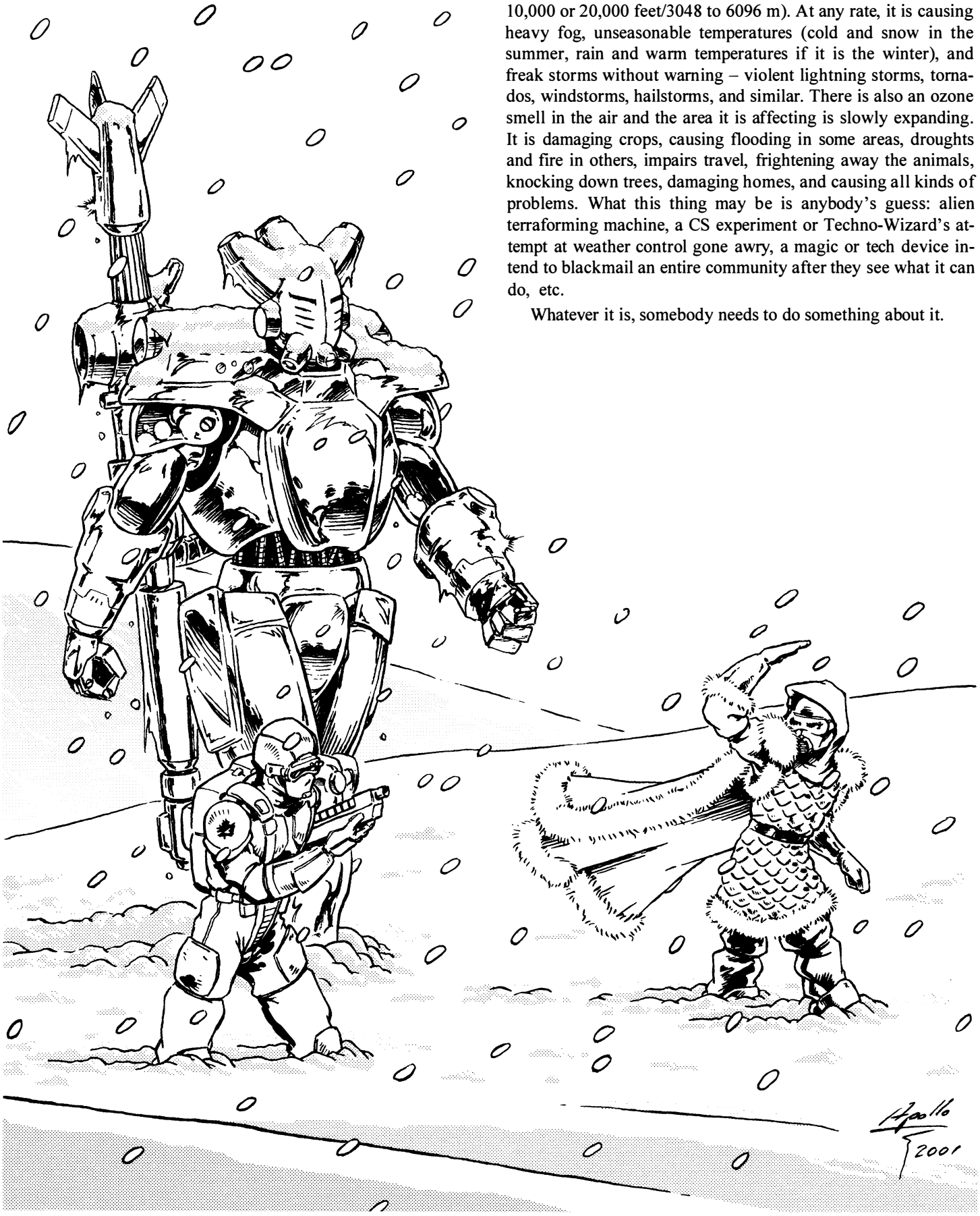
65. Alien weather machine. Out of nowhere (perhaps near a ley line nexus) this ... this machine appeared in the sky and trouble began. It vaguely resembles a satellite floating in mid-air (can be low to the ground, say 1000 feet/305 m, or higher up, 10,000 or 20,000 feet/3048 to 6096 m). At any rate, it is causing heavy fog, unseasonable temperatures (cold and snow in the summer, rain and warm temperatures if it is the winter), and freak storms without warning – violent lightning storms, tornados, windstorms, hailstorms, and similar. There is also an ozone smell in the air and the area it is affecting is slowly expanding. It is damaging crops, causing flooding in some areas, droughts and fire in others, impairs travel, frightening away the animals, knocking down trees, damaging homes, and causing all kinds of problems. What this thing may be is anybody's guess: alien terraforming machine, a CS experiment or Techno-Wizard's attempt at weather control gone awry, a magic or tech device intend to blackmail an entire community after they see what it can do, etc.

Whatever it is, somebody needs to do something about it.



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66. More trouble at Lone Star. The Lone Star Complex has been experiencing underground tremors for about six months. The tremors are becoming more frequent and increasing in strength. So far, no structural damage has occurred, but there is cause for concern. Lone Star officials believe these tremors to be of an unnatural origin from western Texas or New Mexico. The player group is "unofficially" hired to investigate.

67. The legend of the City of Wonder. For decades, rumors have persisted that a City of Wonder is located somewhere in Utah. It is reportedly made of gold and precious gems. The waters within the city are rumored to have incredible healing properties and the people to be gentle and kind. Some say that the city is so wondrous that those who find it never want to leave. Another rumor says those who live there live free of sickness for a thousand years and find enlightenment and peace. Many believe it is real, the educated believe it is a myth.

A wandering merchant sells our heroes (or an appreciative villager gives the player group) a map to a city of peace built into the side of a mountain in Utah. Could this be the City of Wonder?

68. Make me a map. Much of North America is uncharted wilderness. Old pre-Rifts maps don't work because the Great Cataclysm changed much of the landscape. The player group is hired by a local kingdom/government or society of scholars to explore a particular region. As part of their job, they are to keep a journal noting key landmarks and physical features, ruins, strange vegetation, wildlife, any humanoid communities, and notable danger, as well as make as accurate of a map as possible.

69. Strange and unusual weather has been affecting the states of Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Missouri and Arkansas for the past couple of months. Intense heat, rain, wind or sleet will be followed by a week of calm and then more intense weather. Many of these weather patterns appear to originate from central Oklahoma. The storms wreak havoc with magic, psionics and electronic equipment. It might bear investigating. Could it have any connection with the weather machine? (See #65).

70. Chaos in Kansas. The Coalition Army is looking to hire adventurers to investigate eastern Kansas and find the cause of problems there. Their plans to absorb this region are temporarily on hold. The entire eastern section of the state has transformed into a dark, foreboding, chaotic territory full of alien vegetation and strange creatures. Hordes of demons are killing Coalition forces. Stories abound that the Comanche or at least one Comanche tribe have struck a deal with dark forces in order to prevent the Coalition from expanding.

71. The Great Indian Burial Grounds. According to rumor or a conversation one of the player characters overheard from a couple of drunken adventurers, there is a place called the Great Burial Grounds of Nebraska where great treasure and danger exist. Supposedly, this is the final resting place of all great Indian chieftains and warriors. The Great Burial Ground actually exists in another dimension, but once every one hundred years it appears on Rifts Earth and remains here for only 1D6 years. During this time, the many tribes of Native Americans make a pilgrimage to the location, bringing the remains or a few special items (headdress, peace pipe, enchanted war club, etc.) of their great chiefs and greatest shamans to be interred at the mystical burial ground; for it is considered the greatest of honors. The Great Burial Grounds can appear anywhere in North America, its location made known only to Spirit & Fetish Shamans. This time Nebraska is the location.

The player group may want to go just to see and experience this interesting phenomenon, partake in sacred ceremonies with Indian allies, to meet with various Indian groups or to help defend the mystical burial ground from looters and graverobbers. Miscreants and thieves may want to go in order to dig up the various mounds and steal items of magic and value for resale to mercenaries, warriors and collectors, or to blackmail Indian tribes who will desperately want the stolen items back.

72. A gruesome discovery. Over the course of the next several days, the player group finds and/or hears about the bodies of a dozen people murdered and a single body part or organ taken from each. In each case, there is no obvious sign of a struggle (suggesting the victims knew or were not afraid of their assailant, or never saw the attack coming) and all possessions are still with the body. In addition, local residents in the region report seeing eerie lights in the night sky and an unknown type of D-Bee skulking around in the woods. Could these incidents be related? Who is responsible for the gruesome murders and theft of body parts, and for what dark purpose? The locals are terrified and stay off the country roads at night.

73. When sickness strikes. The people of Colorado (or anywhere) have been suffering from boils, sores, rashes and minor aches and pains. The affliction was sudden and just seems odd, defies known medical explanation and resists conventional treatment. Are they the subject of some biological experimentation or a powerful magical curse? Maybe somebody should look into this. Maybe there are clues as to who or what is responsible (villain, magic or natural causes).

74. The child. The player group comes across what appears to be a mute four or five year old child (male or female) all alone. The child immediately takes to the group. None of the local people know who it is. Any attempt to get rid of the child will invoke its ire and result in hysterical crying and clinging, a temper tantrum, and the entire group being cursed (negative luck; -4 on all combat rolls and saving throws) until they get it back. Keeping the child will result in an increase in bonuses (+2 on initiative, parry, dodge and saving throws), as well as general good luck and fortune from time to time. Like any child he or she will be incredibly fun and delightful to have around one moment and wandering off, getting into danger or trouble, and whining or throwing a tantrum the next. The only way to get rid of the kid with the Luck Curse is if he becomes bored and wanders away or attaches himself to another group. Intentionally trying to give up or abandon the child results in the curse. Trying to kill or hurt the child will cause the attacker to get knocked off his feet as if by a Telekinetic Push and the assailant takes 1D6 points of Hit Point damage (one M.D. if a Mega-Damage creature) even if inside M.D.C. armor. Of course, good and even Aberrant evil characters would never try to harm a child. **Note:** Child is beautiful (P.B. 25), strong (P.S. 10), healthy (50 M.D.C. and if hurt regenerates 10 points every two hours), radiates with magic (has 150 P.P.E.), seems resistant to heat and cold (half damage), impervious to disease, impossible to mind read or possess, his aura is brilliant, healthy and unlike anything the psychic has seen before, and eats as much as a

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burly man four times a day. Exactly what it is (an infant demi-god or godling, dragon hatchling in disguise, an unusual essence fragment of a god, or alien infant, are all possibilities) and who it may belong to are mysteries yet to be uncovered.

75. CS shakedown? The group encounters a Coalition patrol. They will let you pass provided the characters hand over any obvious magic items or at least 1500 credits. Do you comply? Are these real CS troops or thieves posing as Coalition soldiers? The group has heard that there is a band of thieves posing as CS troops. Could this be that gang? On the other hand, the characters have also heard of Coalition troops shaking down adventurers and travelers, especially D-Bess and practitioners of magic. Refusing real Coalition troops can only lead to more trouble and possible arrest, interrogation, and loss of every possession. Attacking real CS soldiers will result in a messy fight and win or lose, make the group wanted criminals by the Coalition States.

76. A simple plan. You thought you were pretty smart working for that Shifter. All he wanted your group to do was to cross over through a Rift that he would open. Jump into a room, kill anything that was there, but of course there shouldn't be anything there. Retrieve the artifact from the pedestal and jump back through the dimensional portal. Simple. No problem, right?

Well, the four Gurgoyles in the room thought it was a problem, and during the fight a stray shot went through the Rift and tagged the Shifter. Which, of course, made him lose his concentration (you hope he's not ... dead) and let the Rift close. Now you and your buddies are stuck in a room with four dead Gurgoyles, no way home, an artifact that does who knows what, and to top it off, you look out the window and notice the *Bavarian Alps!* It's going to be one heck of a trip back to the Magic Zone!

77. Nuke 'em till they glow. The player characters encounter a figure dressed in old, pre-Rifts US Army fatigues sitting against a tree. The character is near death, refuses any medical treatment and shoves a scroll into the nearest character's arms. With what appears to be his last dying breath, he says, "stop them," then the figure fades away like a ghost. The scroll is written in American (English) and presents information about a pre-Rifts military installation that is still active. It seems to be a prototype for a completely automated military base run by machines and robots that service and reproduce themselves. The last sentence sends a cold chill down your back, as the author seems to indicate that its nuclear arsenal is still intact and could fire at any time. The only thing that is needed to launch them is one last set of commands. The command for the self-destruction sequence is documented on the scroll. Below this information is a spell, in American, that will teleport the group directly to the location. And a second spell that will teleport them back. These teleports are good only for these two specific locations.

Is the group heroic enough to follow this eerie and dramatic lead? Or would someone, say, like the Coalition, pay a handsome reward for turning over the document to them?

Further complications. When the heroes arrive, they find the military complex just as the scroll described, only it has been taken over by a tribe of over 300 Brodkil and some other D-Bee henchmen. If the group is clever and stealthy, they can probably avoid guards on patrol and groups of Brodkil. One group of these creatures, some D-Bees among them, are currently trying to figure out the final launch code for the nuclear missiles. It will only be a matter of time (days or weeks) before the creatures figure it out and are able to use it.

Our heroes have only a few options, the best one is to get to a computer access panel away from the main computer center where a dozen bad guys are (unless the G.M. requires the players to lure these villains away because only this control center can be used for their purpose) and punch in the self-destruct code. The entire facility will be completely atomized. Since the place is deep underground and located in a remote part of the country, danger from radiation will be kept to a minimum.

78. Buried pre-Rifts ruins: The Kansas labyrinth. A rumor is only now starting to reach people that an ancient pre-Rifts city has been uncovered in Kansas. Excavators think it might be Dodge City. Whatever it is, although the buildings are buried, many remain intact and miraculously, entire floors, basements, crevices and rain erosion have effectively created a network of underground tunnels, caves, and massive chambers unlike any known to have been uncovered before. Word is, that once inside one of the underground buildings (said to be in unusually good condition) one can smash out a window or chop through an exterior wall and tunnel in any direction to find the next buried building. How big this city may be is unknown, but it seems big. Not only is it a great historical find, in and of itself, but a large number of well preserved pre-Rifts artifacts have been uncovered.

This has started the latest "gold rush" type exodus, as treasure hunters, rogue scholars, scientists, grave robbers, thieves, mercenaries, carpetbaggers, merchants and opportunists flood to the site. Never to miss a beat, Coalition spies, archeologists, historians and military specialists from Chi-Town and the new State of Eldorado (Arkansas) are also secretly hidden among the newcomers. Meanwhile, refugees from the Tolkeen-Coalition War are also flooding into the region, not only with dreams of striking it rich, but perhaps to make a new home near or even *inside* the underground city. A honeycomb of subterranean caverns, tunnels and old buildings locked in the very earth might make for a nice haven, safe from surface raiders and Coalition aggression – or so the logic goes.

79. The search for the legendary NORAD. Post-Rifts scholars know that some sort of catastrophe of epic proportions happened in a place once known as the *Yellowstone National Park*. Whatever that disaster was, it reshaped that part of the country, creating new valleys, hills and mountain ranges, as well as altering the Rocky Mountains themselves. Scholars know it probably had something to do with volcanic eruptions and extreme seismic activity, but they don't know exactly what. (For those readers who want to know, see the **Rifts® Chaos Earth™ RPG**. This RPG series chronicles the Great Cataclysm born from the Coming of the Rifts, and the collapse of human civilization that leads to the Dark Ages. Check it out.) Some speculate that this catastrophe also destroyed or buried the American Empire's military compound known as NORAD.

Since ancient books and documents talking about NORAD were first discovered in the post-apocalyptic world of Rifts Earth, countless expeditions of independent explorers, mercenaries, adventurers, scientists, scholars, Black Marketeers, and nations like Lazlo, the Coalition States and others have searched for it, but nobody has ever found it.

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By chance the player group catches word that a new expedition out of Canada is being formed. The team of experts is looking for stout, strong bodies to protect them and help dig and search for NORAD. Not that anybody outside the recovery team believes they will find it. After so many thousands of fruitless expeditions, few believe it will ever be found, and many peasants and local people doubt NORAD ever really existed. Naysayers and disbelievers aside, the search for the legendary NORAD continues, just as people before the Coming of the Rifts sought to locate the lost Dutchman's Gold Mine, the lost city of Eldorado and the continent of Atlantis. **G.M. Note:** This expedition should fare no better than any before it, but it should make a fun and exciting adventure nonetheless, involving the dangerous wilderness trek through the badlands of the *New West*, hostile Simvan, Indians, Cyber-Knights, Coalition spies, bushwhackers, monsters, vampires and NORAD seekers driven mad by the experience. In fact, the half dozen rival search teams in the area now (there always are) are willing to do anything, even kill, to prevent others from finding "their" NORAD before them. Not to mention other possible discoveries unrelated to NORAD and any number of adventures.

80. An abandoned missile silo. Actually, there are hundreds and hundreds of abandoned silos across the western United States, especially the southwest (a few in the midwest, east and Canada too). And they are huge, easily accommodating 100-200 inhabitants. The tops of most missile silos are buried under 30-100 feet (91 to 30.5 m) of dirt from the ages, but some are closer to the surface and discovered by adventurers, prospectors and wanderers. There are no nuclear missiles, explosives or military equipment in abandoned silos, but they make great bunker-like hideouts, campsites, and homesteads.

This one is frequently used by Simvan and bandits in the area, sometimes Wilderness Scouts and other travelers. If the exterior hatch is left open, bats, snakes and more dangerous creatures might inhabit it also, including predators, monsters and demons.

81. An inhabited, decommissioned missile silo (probably located in the Southwestern USA). As noted above, there are lots of abandoned US military missile silos. The trick is digging one up. When one is found, they are often turned into a homestead or the heart of a farm or small town. Here are some of the likely possible inhabitants. Note that Indians never inhabit missile silos or any pre-Rifts military structures.

01-10% 1D4 giant Canyon Worms that got in through an open surface hatch or found an underground breach into the otherwise empty silo.

11-20% A band of 1D4x10 mutant Keepers of the Desert.

21-30% A clan of 2D4x10 Cactus People, with a nice little farm on the surface.

31-40% A clan of 2D6x10 Fennodi (and maybe 2D6 people of other races living with them) or other type of D-Bee race. They have a nice little farm or ranch on the surface around or near their missile silo home.

41-50% A band of 2D6+6 desperados/bandits or nomads.

51-65% A mixed group of human and D-Bee Cowboys with a cattle ranch on the surface or farmers with crops and some livestock on the surface. The silo is used as the main bunkhouse and storage bay.

66-75% Vampires! The Undead love these nice, dark, dry missile silos buried safely in the earth. Could be any combination or number of vampires inside. A common find is 2D4 Secondary vampires, a half a dozen of their mind slaves and a few to several prisoners (people to be drained of their blood, but until then they are playthings for the vampires to be tormented, tortured and worse). Whether a Master Vampire is among them is up to the G.M. Or there could be a nest of Wild Vampires; anywhere from three or four to a dozen or two, maybe more.

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76-80% A brotherhood of practitioners of magic (any one type, like Necromancers, Line Walkers, Mystics, etc.) or a mixed cadre of mages (several different types of mages, perhaps living with their families or in some kind of commune). Their exact numbers, level, alignments and purpose we leave to the G.M.

81-85% One or two Oborus-Slitherers or Phantasms or other rare and vicious being.

86-90% 4D6+10 Grigleapers. These monsters gained entrance by killing the humanoid inhabitants and turning it into a cozy nest. An abandoned silo might also be home to 1D6x100 rattlesnakes.

91-95% One Hatchling or Adult dragon or similar magical creature.

96-00% A hermit Cyber-Knight or practitioner of magic or supernatural being who wants to be left alone. Or a secluded Techno-Wizard workshop or other cadre of practitioners of magic conducting dangerous or secret (or both) magic experiments.

82. An active missile silo. Active in the sense that it still contains a missile; 40% nuclear. These rare finds (remember, most silos are buried nowadays) are usually scavenged for the explosive warhead, parts and other bits of machinery, scrap metal and such (rarely any other military weapons or equipment are present). These items can then be sold to Bandito Arms or some other branch of the Black Market, the Pecos Empire or other independent kingdom, even a large mercenary group or the Coalition States. A working warhead can get 30,000-60,000 credits, a nuclear warhead twice that, the other stuff maybe 15,000 credits total. Being out in the middle of nowhere, however, bandits, nomads, and other adventuring groups may try to lay claim to the silo and its payload, or try to steal or seize it.

83. Bank of America. An old bank vault is discovered. It may be unearthed by a battle in which an M.D. explosion blasted a hole in the ground, or a village or town may have dug it up by accident during construction, or discovered by a prospector, or explorer or whatever.

It has managed to stay airtight all these years. While most of the vault and all of its safe-deposit boxes were emptied some 300 or so years ago, there are approximately one thousand pieces of *paper money* in various denominations, mostly singles, fives, tens, twenties and fifty dollar bills. There are also 100 dollar coins, 200 quarters, 400 dimes, and 600 nickels. As money goes, they have no monetary value in the world of Rifts Earth, nor any value as ore. However, as "collector items," each bill is worth four credits and each coin is worth two credits! The trick is getting them to a place like Lazlo, Whykin, Kingsdale, the Colorado Baronies, El Paso, Arkansas or big city 'Burbs where one can find interested parties to buy them.

84. The machine. A landslide has uncovered a strange device still half buried under tons of rock in the side of a tall hill. Exactly what it is or does, and whether it is still even operational, remains yet to be uncovered. Some believe it is a previously unknown pre-Rifts war machine or robot. News of the discovery has spread across the countryside attracting a variety of curious onlookers, spectators and profiteers looking to somehow capitalize on the discovery. A small band of mercenaries (or bandits) have already struck a deal to protect the item and excavation site for 10% of whatever profit comes out of the discovery. Word of the discovery has also reached the Coalition States who have taken an "interest" in the recovery operation. The CS will want to acquire any valuable pre-Rifts technology (especially military hardware) for themselves. A dozen spies are already among the gathering horde of spectators and workers, while a Death's Head Transport carrying a platoon of SAMAS, a squad of Super-SAMAS and a squad of Terror Troopers, as well as conventional soldiers impatiently wait in the wings a safe 60 miles (96 km) away. What lengths the CS will go to recover the item and when they might act, is yet to be seen, and will depend on what it is, but their involvement won't be good.

85. This ley line is private property, intruders will be persecuted. Since ley lines are natural lines of mystic energy that can be used by any practitioner of magic, creatures of magic and supernatural beings, they are often claimed by one faction or another. Ownership of a line frequently changes hands when someone, some group or some monster who is more powerful seizes control. Likewise, after that individual, group, monster or god is through with it (days, months, years or decades later), he/they/it may abandon the line, leaving it up for grabs by anybody who can grab it and keep it. While one might argue that it is only logical to share a ley line since their energy reserves seem to be nearly infinite, there are strategic advantages to being the sole controller of its energy, especially at a nexus point. And let us not forget simple greed and power-mongers who want it all and refuse to share, even if sharing has no negative impact on the owner/controller of the line.

Most individuals, groups or communities who lay an exclusive claim on a ley line will have warning signs stating such. Those who sneak in and syphon some of the ley line energy for themselves to heal, communicate, cast spells, etc., must be prepared to pay the consequences. Of course the "owners/claimant/controller" of a ley line, or a length of line or a nexus junction can not usually monitor the entire line 24 hours, seven days a week, so others can usually sneak in and gain access to it if they are careful. However, if caught like a kid stealing a farmer's corn, the owner will take action against them. Depending on the alignment and temperament of the owner/claimant, interlopers may be destroyed (sometimes horribly or slowly), chased down and forced to pay a service fee or be imprisoned, captured and robbed (stripped of everything of value), or be tortured and released, or just scared spitless and/or simply chased away.

86. Ley line wars. When a powerful individual (human or not, often not) or group claims a ley line or nexus exclusively for themselves, they must be able to hold onto it when their claim is challenged. That's exactly the situation the player characters have walked into. Like the "range wars" of the Old West, two rival factions are fighting over ownership and control of a particular ley line. The two factions can be practitioners of magic vs other practitioners of magic, or humans vs a dragon or monster or group of demons, or whatever the G.M. wants. Both sides are recruiting hired guns to do away with the other. Of course, both sides paint the other as the bad guy; which one may honestly be, or both may be equally greedy, violent and ruthless as the other. Both engaging in scare tactics, sabotage, theft, destruction of property, kidnaping, blackmail, raids, open combat, murder, and every dirty trick and type of skullduggery imaginable. If the adventure group is interested there are opportunities.

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87. Ley line community. Similar to #85 and #86, ley lines also attract entire communities of practitioners of magic of every type, mixed communities of mages and non-magical people, cults, brotherhoods, dragons and other creatures of magic and supernatural beings, as well as ordinary folk who believe they will be safer living with or near magic wielding beings. This is one such sprawling township or city, surrounded by independent farms, homesteads, hunting lodges and trading posts. If the community is friendly or at least open to visits by travelers and adventurers, it is likely to offer boarding houses, saloons, a general store, trading post, furrier, garage, magic shop, bookstore and/or library, and probably a medical clinic and possibly other amenities and things to do that one might expect in a town or small city. These communities are usually very orderly and civil places to visit, compared to most towns or barbarian villages. As for the law, there is likely to be a sheriff or powerful champion (individual or a group) as the "official" defender, but also a volunteer militia and numerous powerful wielders of magic from Line Walkers, Warlocks, Mystics and Necromancers to dragons, supernatural beings and other inhuman masters of magic, who may step in to protect "their" community or put a stop to a nuisance. The general alignment, disposition, and goal of the people living in this mystic community, as well as other specifics, we leave for the G.M. to work out.

88. The Necromancers' ley line. This particular length of ley line is controlled by a group of Necromancers up to no good. They are hatching some kind of scheme rumored to involve a Shifter, a dragon hatchling, raising an army of undead and a summoning (and pact?) with a demonic force from another dimension. Rumor also has it that this scheme has some link to Lord Dunscon and the Federation of Magic and Chi-Town. An attack on the 'Burbs, Chi-Town or a military installation perhaps. Apparently to hedge their bets, they are recruiting mercenaries for additional protection and patrols along their ley line (a pivotal component in linking with the demonic force on another world). This may be an opportunity for the player group (especially if heroes) to infiltrate and see what is going on. Maybe even foil their plans. If that isn't incentive enough, Lazlo, Kingsdale and a few other concerned kingdoms are hiring spies to infiltrate the Necromancers.

89. Cromwell the disgraced. Located at the edge of a ley line nexus is the castle keep-like tower of Cromwell the Black, a Ley Line Walker of some repute. Rumor has it that he was thrown out of the Federation of Magic after trying to usurp the throne from Lord Dunscon. After a bloody coup attempt, all of Cromwell's troops and allies were captured and slain (some say in a bloodbath of arcane rituals that made Lord Dunscon more powerful than ever). Only Cromwell the Black was allowed to live, according to Lord Dunscon, so that he could live out the rest of his life in disgrace as a fool and a weakling. Perhaps needless to say, Cromwell the Black lives for revenge, and is always looking for bold adventurers to do jobs for him that secretly undermine and hurt Lord Dunscon and his Federation of Magic. He has a little scheme going right now. Anybody interested? Maybe his scheme involves foiling the plot noted in #88.

90. A random Rift. Our heroes step into a clearing to find themselves standing at a ley line nexus where a Rift has opened up just moments before. Whether it was created by someone or is a random occurrence is unknown. Peeking into it may show them exactly where it leads, but that is also dangerous because if there is a hiccup, the Rift energy might snag them and pull them in whether they want to go or not. Or they can take a deliberate leap and see where it takes them. **G.M. Note:** This is a great opportunity to carry the player group off to a different part of the world or to another dimension entirely (Wormwood, Phase World, the Skraypers' environment or any Palladium game world, or a place from your own imagination).

91. The cult. One of many tiny communities along this particular ley line is the Cult of the Empty Hand, a band of 13 weirdos suspected to be witches dedicated to some demon lord from another plane of existence. Recently, the cult has become increasingly agitated and aggressive, its members seen rushing here and there or skulking about. Their odd behavior and the recent rash of robberies, cattle mutilations and the disappearance of young Angela McCaffrey all have the locals wondering if the cult is up to something dangerous. Are they?

92. A madman with a plan. The player group is attracted by an unusual light display in the night sky a little before midnight. Upon reaching the source, they see a mage of some kind weaving magic at a ley line. He sees them (even if they are trying to be stealthy or hiding) and beckons them to join him. He has a wild look in his eyes and suggests the impossible. "Come, come. Join me in my quest. I can tell you are good people. Heroes. Champions of justice. And I have need of such stalwart heroes if my mission is to succeed. You see, I'm about to go back into time and stop the Great Cataclysm. Oh, I see the doubt in your eyes, but it is true. I know the way and I can ... I will stop the

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Great Cataclysm. There will be no holocaust. The Coming of the Rifts shall not come to pass and the Golden Age of Man will continue. This ... dark nightmare of a world will never be. No Dark Age. No Coalition. No Atlantis. No ... constant war. No ... endless sorrow and death. Just peace and prosperity. Together we can do it. Please join me. But you must decide now, for our window of opportunity is short."

And with that, a dimensional portal glimmers to life and spreads open to display a modern marvel of a high-tech city beyond the void.

"That's a place called San Diego, California in the year 2098, December 18th." The mage smiles and waves. "You must act quickly, I can not keep the portal open for more than a few minutes. Come." And with that the sorcerer steps into the Rift and vanishes. The portal silently beckoning with untold opportunity. The player characters must decide quickly. In another minute and a half the portal will shudder and 15 seconds later, close. Do they take the plunge? Is the man who just vanished a lunatic, a prophet, or a man about to reshape the future ... their present? **Note:** See the **Rifts® Chaos Earth™ RPG** for adventures in Rifts Earth's past, during the Great Cataclysm.

93. Dragon fire! A pair of dueling male rivals are locked in a battle to the death. The player group can watch from a safe distance, run away, or try to mediate and stop the conflict (an unlikely proposition). However, if their presence becomes known, one of the dragons will offer them "a great reward" if they join him in smiting down his opponent. Before any character can respond, the other dragon bellows and screeches, "So, you have finally summoned your mortal lackeys to join the battle, have you? Well it will do you no good." A heartbeat later, the rival dragon's own henchmen appear, charging down from the heavens or from the shadows to engage our adventurers. Neither the dragon or his minions will stop to listen to any protests or claims they do not work for the other dragon. They are drawn into this sorrowful affair against their will. Their opponents battle to the death and show no mercy. That's what happens if one is not careful around dueling dragons.

94. A homesteader's surprise. A farmer approaches the player group as they pass by his place. He offers them a piece of his wife's delicious apple pie and a tall glass of milk if they would stop over for awhile and take a look at something he dug up in his corn field. It was tangled in the roots of an old stump he finally got around to tearing out of the ground. At first he thought it was just a piece of pre-Rifts junk or a time capsule, but now he ain't sure what it is. Actually, if the fellas in the player group want it, they can have it. And that piece of pie too. They don't get much company in these parts and welcome the diversion. The farmer, his family and farm hands are glad to listen to stories and trade rumors.

Oh, that odd item he dug up. It's a black box with a few doohickeys and a blinking light. It's about the size of dresser drawer and was in a metallic tube. Writing on the tube said something like: Emergency Survival Capsule A-1CWAI-2078X409 A.R.C.H.I.E.-One Prototype. Like he said, they can have it and the case if they want it.

This ARCHIE-Three predecessor is not the inventive thinking machine that the ARCHIE-Three is, and has its share of bugs and quirks, but it is still functioning. How, after all these years isolated and without a power supply seem impossible. It does radiate with magic (the farmer probably didn't think to mention the tip of his cornfield runs along a ley line. Could it be this ARCHIE-One Prototype has been imbued with some alien or magical energy – or possessed by some alien mind, entity or force. If so, is it friendly, evil or insane?

95. Grandville ain't so grand. In fact, it is ruled by a tyrannical monster (dragon, demon, powerful practitioner of magic, Mind Melter, etc.) who berates and abuses his subjects. This is his little kingdom and here he is god. Any loudmouthed visitor will learn that the hard way.

96. The Chop-Chop gang. This encounter could take place in a town, the 'Burbs or the wilderness. The player group is minding its own business when a partial conversion 'Borg staggers and falls at their feet. He is missing a bionic arm, a bionic leg (hacked off just above the knee) and one of his bionic eyes is hanging out of its socket. He begs the group to help him, when a gang of seven Cyber-Snatchers lunge onto the scene. They stop, eyeball the group, and demand their "property back." Two of the punks are wielding M.D.C. chainsaws, another a Neural Mace and a Vibro-Blade, the rest various M.D. handguns. The leader has a Triax pump pistol in hand, a Vibro-Saber hanging at his hip and a Coalition C-14 Fire Breather assault rifle slung over his shoulder. Ironically, he has a bionic right hand (with laser finger and finger jack), and a few basic implants.

The 'Borg cringes and shouts that they are the ones who did this to him, and again makes his plea for help. The gang leader says he wants no trouble and flashes a sheriff's badge pinned to his rifle strap. "That's right, I'm the law in these parts, an' these here are mah deputies. Now gimme mah suspect and be on yer way."

97. Shifter in trouble. A woman accompanied by three demonic creatures rushes from out of the woods or around the corner and into the arms of our heroes. "Adventurers," she exclaims. "I will pay you 50,000 credits to protect me from these brutes." and she points to the mob hot on her heels. The mob insists the Shifter is responsible for a series of gruesome murders, and the disappearance of a child. Allegations she flatly denies. She is indeed a Shifter, Aberrant evil in alignment, consorts with demons and monsters, and a condescending bitch. However, she appears to be telling the truth. So problem number one for the player group is stopping this angry mob from lynching an innocent woman and her three, um, demonic servants. Problem number two, if she's innocent who's responsible and where are they? Maybe the adventurers need to find the culprit to prove the lady Shifter's innocence and to prevent future attempts to kill her in the name of justice. And if she's not responsible, does that mean the real villain has the missing child or is the kid lost in the woods or in the hands of some other fiend?

98. The Mind Melter king. A powerful Mind Melter greets the player group and welcomes them to his kingdom. The sprawling town is a strange place with people and areas who seem idyllically happy and sweet, and others like something out of a nightmare. Stranger still, the streets and buildings seem to change every time one passes by them. Sometimes the change is little, almost imperceptible, other times dramatic, like the flower girl who is gentle and kind the first meeting and a screaming shrew the next, perhaps even a witch or someone completely different. There also seems to be something lurking in the shad-

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ows, as if following the group, yet when one goes to investigate, there is nothing there. After spending some time in the town, the King always lurking in the background, the Mind Melter approaches the group and drags them to a "safe place." There he explains in whispers, while glancing from side to side, that he believes a terrible evil has taken over his town. He hopes they will help him find out what it is and destroy it. This should lead to several chases, ambushes and combat with strange shadowy demons, some of whom wield magic and others who possess psionic powers.

In the end, as the landscape of the kingdom changes again and again, the players should uncover that the kingdom and the demons are a figment of the Mind Melter King's imagination. The town once existed, and it was invaded by ravaging demons. In the Mind Melter's arrogance, he had no law or militia in place and the kingdom's defenses were inadequate. Thus, while he tried his best, his kingdom was overrun. Half of his subjects were slaughtered. A quarter stolen and carried away, and the rest run off. Their homes were destroyed and their tiny kingdom set ablaze. Unable to live with the horror, and more importantly, what he sees as his failure, the powerful (15th level) Mind Melter created a fantasy version of his kingdom. So powerful is he, and so deep is his sorrow and regret, that he unwittingly creates elaborate illusions in the minds of visitors. The monsters in his shattered mind are shadowy reflections of his own guilt. There is no help for this poor man, but once the adventurers' realize this, he has no power over them and they see the ruins of the real kingdom. They can leave at any time.

99. The player group arrives just in time to learn that a famous group of lawmen or warriors like the Tundra Rangers, Justice Rangers, Cyber-Knights, Reid's Rangers, etc., have ridden off to face some terrible danger (demonic invasion, barbarian horde, monster uprising, etc.). The warriors only have a day or so head start, so the player group can easily catch up with them if they want to. However, before the group moves on, the little community is attacked by the very danger the Rangers (or whoever) have ridden off to face! It seems the lawmen were deliberately drawn away so the villains could attack unopposed. Is it fate that the player group happened to be in town to thwart them?

100. A visit from Atlanteans. Over the last few days, the player group has seen a Sunaj assassin (a scout) who vanishes before the group can approach her, several ransacked homesteads and the smoldering remains of a small town. Then they happen upon a camp of cheerful Splugorth Slavers. This appears to be a small-sized operation with two Slavers and their eerie barges, five Kittani in Manling armor, four Blind Warrior Women and a Sunaj assassin. They greet the adventurers with cheer, invite them to join them (as they size up the group) and ask them if they have seen any Tattooed Men or an Adorak Flying Mountain (one of the Splugorth's D-Bee slave races). The visitors from Atlantis claim to be one of four Atlantis "search" teams looking for some dangerous escaped slaves (a few Tattooed men and the Adorak mentioned earlier). However, locked in their slave pens a bit away from the camp are what appear to be three or four dozen local human and D-Bee peasants; perhaps some of the townsfolk from that burnt out village.

101. The Shemarrian Uprising. The player characters are adventuring in the northeast, when they come across a battlefield littered with the remains of Free Quebec troops; at least a hundred of them, including a platoon of (40) Glitter Boys. This must have been some fight to take out these veterans. That's when six Shemarrian Warrior Women appear riding Monst-Rex and brandishing Shemarrian Rail Guns. They declare this region and a thousand mile (1600 km) length of the eastern seaboard, with the old state of Maryland at the center, as the Shemarrian Nation. They then advise the group to leave or suffer the same fate as "these invaders."

ARCHIE-Three and Hagan Lanovich still lurk in the shadows pulling the strings of their creations like puppet masters. Most people (99%) still believe the Shemarrians and Monst-Rex to be real, "flesh and blood" creatures rather than robotic creations. To enhance that illusion, ARCHIE or Hagan have made improvements so that the women and their mounts have softer, warm, convincingly human skin that actually bleeds, and the robots seem to breathe too. Something is definitely afoot, however, as Shemarrians and Monst-Rex are scattered across the region in unprecedented numbers, especially along the coastline and western borders of the land they claim. Once a few hundred, there are now easily a few thousand of each! Despite their threat to the player group, the Shemarrians and Monst-Rex are scattered over a huge land area. If the group is quiet and discreet, they can avoid detection and slip in and out and wander around without further incident. Even if found deep inside the interior, the robot women and hulking Monst-Rex (with and without a Shemarrian rider) assume them to be native nomads in the region and may question them, but leave them alone. The only exceptions are groups causing trouble or fighting in the area, or who attack them first (or discover the secret of what's really going on); they are hunted and targeted for termination.

Has ARCHIE-Three finally decided to become a conqueror? Is Maryland and the surrounding territory just the beginning of his conquests? Is anyone in the northeastern USA and Canada safe? Could ARCHIE be at war with Free Quebec? Or is there something else going on? Could ARCHIE (and/or Hagan) actually be protecting the region and its inhabitants? A little snooping around shows that the locals seem to think the Shemarrians are at war against some outside force. Is it the Mechanoids again? Invasion by Atlantis? Some new threat? Or is it a clever ploy by the thinking computer who has dreams to launch his own secret conquest? Good adventuring.

A few other quick adventure ideas for places outside North America

1. South America: The voodoo priests of Bahia have received a dire warning from the loas. It is a message about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The Horsemen were stopped in Africa when they appeared to be on a crusade to destroy the world. It took a Gathering of Champions, Erin Tarn and "the" Victor Lazlo among them, the last time to stop these supremely powerful demons (maybe the player character played a role in that victory or not). If the rumors are true, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have returned to Rifts Earth (sooner than should be possible), this time to South America, for another attempt at

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Armageddon! It is up to the G.M. to decide whether one or all four of the dreaded Horsemen have, indeed, reappeared in South America, or whether they are some foul imposters trading on their name. If it is the latter case, these four beings (mages, monsters, aliens, dragons, demons or any combination of such creatures) are malevolent creatures up to no good, enslaving and destroying. It is quite possible that the four creatures are foul gods or demon lords once known to the ancient Mayan, Toltec or other lost civilization, mistaken for the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The player group may already be adventuring in South America or the Four Horsemen (false or otherwise) may have minions come to where the characters are to get or do something that makes their presence known and draws our heroes (knowingly or incidentally) into the conflict.

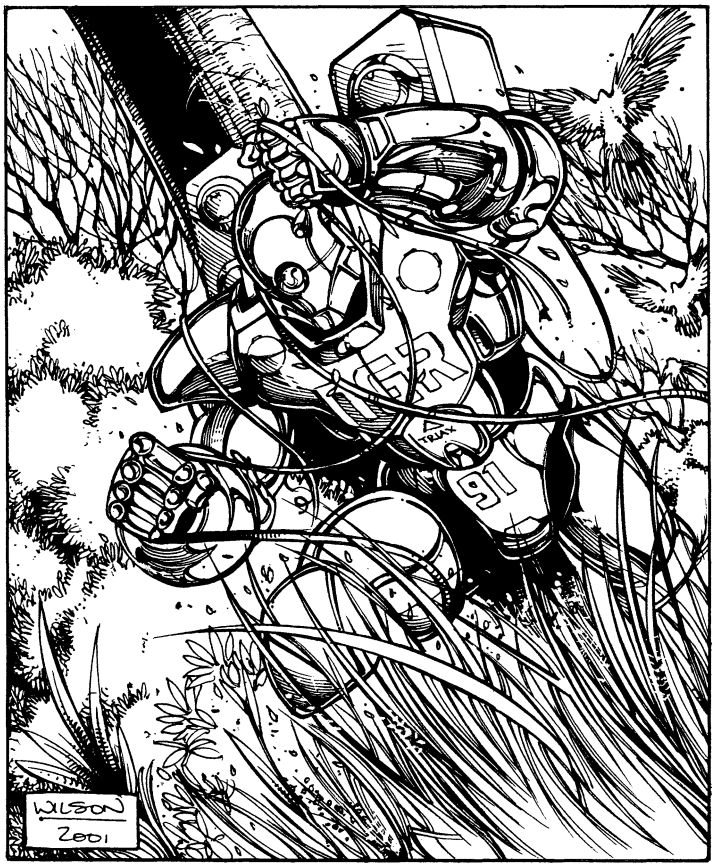
2. South America. The enemy's power. Thanks to their high technology and powerful Magicks, the Southern Federation has managed to hold off the *Larhold barbarians* so successfully that the barbarians seemed to have given up their raiding. However, just recently, the Larholders have resumed their raids and seem to become more resistant to the Southerners' magic with each attack. If this continues, then the barbarians may someday overrun the Federation. What is causing this and can it be countered before it is too late for the Southerners?

3. South America: Peru. There are a lot of Pucara Red Giants in the Andes Mountains and they have generally been content to stay in the mountains and leave the lowlands alone. However, the recent number of sightings of, and raids by, these giants has increased dramatically. What is causing them to leave their mountain homes and what are their intentions? Are they preparing for some big battle with dragons? Is something driving them from their mountain homes? Have they gone insane or become possessed by some evil force? Can somebody stop their violence?

4. South America: On Maga Island, the Tree Council is agitated and sending out a call for help. Several *Trees of Wisdom* have received psychic flashes of an ecological disaster about to occur. The specific nature of the disaster is still unknown (the flashes only showed hints of what may happen) and the Trees need adventurers willing to investigate these leads.

5. France: The marriage. Two of the major feudal kingdoms in France are about to get together with a royal marriage. If this marriage goes through, it will not only allow these kingdoms to become one, but several nearby smaller states may join this alliance. Since such an alliance will put a damper on much of the anarchy they thrive on, the *Blood Druids* want to stop this wedding (and subsequent alliance) at all costs. This includes kidnaping and/or assassinating either the bride or groom (or both), probably in a way to implicate some other enemy (Britain, perhaps) to bring about more chaos and bloodshed. **Note:** With a little tweaking, this basic scenario could involve two kingdoms and a cult anywhere.

6. The New German Republic has received reports that a vast underground military-industrial complex (run by humans) exists in what was pre-Rifts Switzerland. Further reports indicate that this complex might be amenable to allying itself to the NGR. Unfortunately, the complex is in (and under) *Gargoyle Empire* territory. Who will find the complex first – the Germans or the Gargoyles? And how will the Swiss react? Or is it a false lead? If this underground complex really exists, wouldn't they



have heard of it before now? Could this be a Gargoyle trap, or is it something else entirely?

7. Mutants in Orbit/Europe. The New German Republic has been testing a new piece of technology – a giant rail cannon, positioned to launch its payload into "outer space." The orbital community that secretly exists on the moon and in satellites around the Earth have determined that it won't be long before the NGR begins to target their network of defense satellites, in an effort to clear their way into orbit. To prevent this, *Freedom Station* has begun looking for volunteers to embark on a daring mission: To descend to Earth, infiltrate the NGR, and destroy the cannon. The catch is, whoever survives the mission will never be able to return to their home in space, and must never divulge the existence of the space colonies. **Note:** See the **Mutants in Orbit™** sourcebook for more about the space colonies, killer satellites and mutants.

8. Russia. The number of gypsies within Warlord Sokolov's Sphere of Influence has increased dramatically. Why have many gypsies from other Spheres made this long journey (sometimes hundreds of miles) and what are they searching for? And why has Sokolov, who is normally paranoid and violent, been ordering his troops to give the gypsies a wide berth?

9. Japan: The return of the Emperor. Someone has emerged in the **New Empire** claiming to be the reincarnation of the first emperor, *Jimmu Tenno.* He already has a sizeable following and, if his support keeps growing, may supplant the current Emperor. Unfortunately, he hates technology and has no use for the *Republic of Japan,* the New Empire's greatest ally. The activities of this Emperor Tenno, reborn, threaten to tear Japan apart and set it back a thousand years. Somebody needs to find out the real story behind the reincarnated Jimmu Tenno and what he plans for Japan before the islands slip back into civil

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war and return to feudal times. One rumor suggests he is in league with the Oni, who want a divided Japan caught in chaos.

10. Japan (or China): Demon Wars. A child-stealing Oni, has stolen the first son of a powerful warlord. The creature issued a demand that the warlord lead his army into battle against a hated rival, kill the man and conquer his kingdom, or die trying. If he does not, the Oni will slay and eat his child, then come down from the mountains to steal the warlord' next son, and then his daughters, until the warrior does as he is bidden. The warlord has nine days left to marshal his troops before the demon slays his child. The warlord has no love for his rival and is sure they will clash some day, but not like this. Not for this reason. He has sent scouts and Demon Slayers into the mountains to find the foul little creature, kill it, and return his son, but so far, none have been successful. In fact, half have been found dead. Their bodies mangled and burnt. The rest appear to have vanished. **Note:** What nobody knows is that the child-stealing Oni (and a half dozen others) serve a wicked Shikome Kido-Mi dragon who has it out for both warlords for slights it has suffered at their hands. (Both warlords have opposed the great beast in other matters most foul. The dragon can be any level suitable for the player group, but no less than 6th level). See **World Book 8: Rifts® Japan** for details on Oni and Japanese dragons.

Rolling for Rifts!

By Erick Wujcik with Kevin Siembieda

Dimensional portals, that is

On Rifts Earth, the state of each dimensional Rift is a lot more important than the latest weather forecast. Below are tables for figuring out the type, duration and condition of each dimensional Rift or portal, as well as what worlds are likely to be linked by the Rift.

The odds of a dimensional portal opening up and tearing a "rift" in space and time to another world or dimension have to do with a vast number of influences, chance and the cosmic balance. Magic and ley lines can be manipulated and used to open a Rift. Other times the Rift opens at a ley line nexus or ley line triangle unbidden, a random occurrence, a hiccup in the cosmic energies that connect the Megaverse. A flux of nature on a cosmic scale that tears a hole in the fabric of reality. Thinking big, Rifts Earth has become a Megaversal Nexus point. A place in the universe where magic energy seethes with power on a scale that is seldom seen, causing its many ley lines and nexus points to warp space and time and connect other worlds, or times, and other realities to its own.

While magic can partially tame a ley line and try to control a nexus, there are still times when the energies surge with power and Rifts happen whether they are wanted or not. Times when those who have some mastery of magic *may* bridge realities more easily and open their own Rift.

A typical Rift whether random or deliberate usually remains open for *minutes*, but there are times, places and circumstances where a Rift may remain open for hours. A few, like the Calgary and St. Louis Rifts, are open constantly.

Odds of Dimensional Rifts Occurring

Vernal Equinox

On Ley Line: Every hour of daylight there is a 01-20% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration.

At Nexus Point: Every hour of daylight there is a 01-30% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration

At Super Nexus Point: Every hour of daylight there is a 01-50% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Periodic Rift Table* for type and duration.

Autumnal Equinox

On Ley Line: Every hour of the night there is a 01-20% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration.

At Nexus Point: Every hour of the night there is a 01-30% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration.

At Super Nexus Point: Every hour of the night there is a 01-50% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Periodic Rift Table* for type and duration.

Summer and Winter Solstice

On Ley Line: Every hour for twenty-four hours there is a 01-30% chance that a Rift will appear, plus exactly at sunset there is an increased 01-50% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration.

At Nexus Point: Every hour for twenty-four hours there is a 01-50% chance that a Rift will appear, plus exactly at sunset there is an increased 01-85% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration. If a Rift is in existence at exactly sunset, then roll on the *Periodic Rift Table* instead of the *Random Rift Table*.

At Super Nexus Point: Every hour for twenty-four hours there is a 01-70% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on *Periodic Rift Table* for type and duration.

Lunar Eclipse

On Ley Line: During the 90 minute period of the lunar eclipse there is a 01-15% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration.

At Nexus Point: During the 90 minute period of the lunar eclipse there is a 01-77% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the Random Rift Table for type and duration.

At Super Nexus Point: During the 90 minute period of the lunar eclipse there is a 01-95% chance that a Rift will appear. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration. If a Rift is in existence halfway through the lunar eclipse, when the moon is completely dark, then roll on the *Periodic Rift Table* instead of the Random Rift Table.

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Partial Solar Eclipse

Anywhere: During any partial solar eclipse there is a 01-21% chance that a gigantic Rift will appear in the sky, at an altitude of from 1,000 to 18,000 meters (roll 3D6 times 1,000). This is roughly equal to 3,000 to 50,000 feet. **Note:** If the Sky Rift appears, it will sap the P.P.E. of all the nearby ley lines and nexus points, preventing other Rifts from appearing. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration.

On Ley Line: Assuming there is no Sky Rift, there is a 01-25% chance that a Rift will appear on the ley line. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration.

At Nexus Point: Assuming there is no Sky Rift, there is a 01-50% chance that a Rift will appear at the nexus point. Roll on the *Random Rift Table* for type and duration.

At Super Nexus Point: No need to roll, since a Rift will *definitely appear* from the very outset of the eclipse. Roll on the *Constant Rift Table* for the conditions of the Rift during the *few minutes* of the eclipse. At the end of the eclipse, as soon as no part of the moon covers the sun, roll on the *Periodic Rift Table* for type and duration of a second Rift that appears at that moment.

Rift Duration & Conditions

There are three kinds of Rifts. In a few special places in the world there are Rifts that are permanent, *constant* and cannot be removed. Next are Rifts that appear often enough to be *periodic*; while they aren't predictable, you can count on them appearing over and over again. Finally, there's the most common type of Rift, the *transient Rift* that appears for a few minutes, likely never to return. Transient Rifts are completely random. A magically conjured Rift might be considered a fourth type and is usually at a specific place and time desired by the spell casters, but in a way is transient because it is created at the whim of the mage and is sometimes random.

Rift Duration: In the case of constant Rifts, the description indicates how long it will be before the Rift changes to another state. For temporary transient Rifts, the description indicates how long the Rift has before *disappearing*, or what the chances are that it will dissolve.

World Links: Describes the current connection that the Rift has with another world.

Dimensional Link Stability: Some Rifts hang on to their world connections for as long as they survive, while other Rifts fluctuate, constantly losing their connections, and then making links with other worlds altogether.

Rift Metamorphosis: This applies only to Constant Rifts and indicates the likelihood that the Rift, while constant/ever present, changes the type of Rift that it is, requiring a new roll on the Constant Rift table.

Constant Rift Table

While this table is suitable for the few permanent Rifts found on Earth, it will also work with this kind of "steady" Rift found on other worlds. In North America, the only *known* permanent Rifts are the Calgary Rift and Saint Louis Rift (right at the arch). The latter is sealed off and controlled by the Coalition State of Chi-Town. The Calgary Rift is currently under the control of a growing kingdom of monsters. Another permanent Rift is suspected to exist in the ruins of Old Detroit, but has never been confirmed. Those knowledgeable in such matters believe that Old Detroit and Old Windsor are plagued by frequently reoccurring Periodic Rifts. Other permanent dimensional Rifts are found on Atlantis but these are controlled by the Splugorth and their Stone Master minions and contained inside their fabled giant stone pyramids. One is known to exist in Africa and another one or two are suspected to exist in China, and still others might be found elsewhere, though probably no more than a dozen or two.

01-05% Becalmed Rift. The dimensional portal seems to shrink in on itself, pulsing softly with its own power. Unlike most other states, a Becalmed Rift (also known as a Dwarf Rift) is actually a source of power, leaking P.P.E. at a rate of 1D6 points every five minutes rather than being a true doorway to another world. That having been said, while one may not open or enter this Rift, they can sometimes communicate (usually via magic or telepathy and/or empathy) with powerful creatures of magic or supernatural beings (namely demon lords, gods, and Alien Intelligences). It is from such Becalmed or Dwarf Rifts that diabolic creatures may reach out to mortals and make foul Witchery Pacts and begin to establish ties and agents (worshipers, witches, etc.) in our world.

Rift Metamorphosis: None. World Links: None. Powerful supernatural beings anywhere in the Megaverse can use it is as a conduit for communication (and bestowing power through it via a Witchery pact), nothing more. Think of it as an open telephone line available for use by anybody who happens to run across it. Typically one powerful supernatural being monopolizes the open line for a while (minutes to hours to days) to make contact with mortals and either starts a conflict or begins establishing a link in that world. This is why a cult might need to meet at a particular place, at a particular time, in order to "commune" with their evil or alien god. They have to come to the Becalmed Rift. And the specific time is arranged by their "god" so that the supernatural being can make certain it can gain access to the open line at that time. As a rule, once the evil force has accomplished its small goal of getting worshipers, creating a witch or setting the wheels in motion for turmoil or disaster (thanks to its mortal minion or pawns), it happily lets go of the open circuit, leaving it available for some other supernatural power to use. Range: The distance the supernatural being can reach out from beyond the Becalmed Rift to touch someone is usually only 1D4 miles (1.6 to 6.4 km), double during equinox and solstices, quadruple during eclipses of any kind.

06-20% Shrinking Rift. The Rift seems to be collapsing in on itself, taking part of the world around it with it as it slowly retreats, shrinking at a crawl, a few feet a day. The sense that it is taking away part of the world is not an illusion, since parts of the world are being sent through the Rift into alien worlds. Likewise, it is around a Shrinking Rift that one will find 2D6 Fade Towns and other dimensional aberrations, and along any connecting ley lines, Ley Line Storms occur two or three times more often than is normal.

Rift Metamorphosis: 01-25% chance of changing every 72 hours. World Links: There will be one primary world link, through which most of the landscape is being channeled, and

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anyone that gets pulled into the Rift will be sent. Only those with magic ability will have the power to return. Dimensional Link Stability: There is only a 01-08% chance per 12 hours that the link will change to another world.

21-45% Pulsing Rift. This is the condition most common to permanent Rifts, where the dimensional portal seems to exhibit something like a heartbeat, slowly "pulsing" in and out every ten minutes or so. This is also the most stable situation, and Pulsing Rifts have often maintained themselves for days, weeks and even years or centuries.

Rift Metamorphosis: Rare; only a 1% chance of changing each sunrise. World Links: There will be one primary world link. Dimensional Link Stability: At each sunrise and sunset there is a 01-22% chance that the link will switch to a different world.

46-60% Swelling Rift. The Rift seems to be expanding, gradually eating the surrounding landscape, and moving outward at the pace of a steady walk every day, retracting at sunset. Those who don't move out of the way will be drawn in, and sent elsewhere!

Metamorphosis: Rare; 01-03% chance. World Links: There will be one primary world link, and the Rift will be bringing landscape from that world into the area of the swelling, replacing the native landscape. There is only a 01-15% chance of another link. Dimensional Link Stability: There is only a 01-15% chance per 12 hours that the link will change to another world.

Note: Things from another world exit the Swelling Rift infrequently. Only a 01-25% chance whenever ley line energies flare (equinox, solstice, etc.). Elsewhere: Being sent "elsewhere" can be any of the following: 01-25% 3D6x10 miles (48 to 288 km) away in any random direction. 26-50% to the other side of the continent in any direction. 51-75% To another continent on Rifts Earth. 76-00% to the dimension/alien world the Rift is currently connected to. The G.M. is invited to add possibilities to this table.

61-85% Stable Cycling Rift. Making a noise like low, continuous thunder, the Rift seems to be chewing up the landscape and spewing it somewhere else, into other worlds.

Rift Metamorphosis: None. World Links: 2D6 worlds will be connected to the Rift which it cycles through randomly, changing to a different one every 4D6 hours after the last time. Whichever dimensional portal is open at the time is the one that beings can enter or exit. Dimensional Link Stability: Every 4D6 hours after the last change.

86-93% Violent Rift. Rippling, shaking and contorting like a wild animal, the Rift moves randomly around the landscape, appearing at random locations on the ley line within a two mile (3.2 km) radius of its last location every 2D6 hours. It alternately pulls stuff in and ejects stuff out (those within 1000 feet/305 m). Those wishing to enter the Rift must wait for one of the periods in which it is drawing things in. Those who enter the violent Rift will often catch glimpses of one nightmare world after another, including random views of the place where they started, and it may be several minutes before they are finally released into their destination.

Rift Metamorphosis: 1% chance of changing every month. World Links: Links to at least 3D6 worlds, often twice that, with no one link dominating any other. Dimensional Link Stability:

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Once the violent Rift starts up the links will tend to stay the same.

94-96% Morphing Rift. This bizarre dimensional portal is constantly changing from one type of Rift to another, and back again.

Rift Metamorphosis: Morphing is a constant regardless of what type of Rift it momentarily becomes. That means if a Morphing Rift becomes a Becalmed Rift for a short while, it will explode back to something else (one of these other types) at any given time. World Links: Endless, changing with each new metamorphosis. Dimensional Link Stability: Every link imaginable is possible at some point or another.

97-100% Raging Rift. The dimensional portal will seem to be blazing, exploding with energy, and swelling across the landscape in a blossom of energy and towering 4D4x10 feet (12.2-48.8 m) into the air, and a mile (1.6 km) or more into the sky during surges of power (equinox, solstices, etc.), becoming a two way portal to whatever world it is currently linked to (i.e. people from Rifts Earth can go there, and beings from there can come to Rifts Earth by stepping into the portal). Beings on both sides of the divide can see a glimpse of what awaits them on the other side of the portal.

Rift Metamorphosis: None. It rages on and on. World Links: Endless! Constantly changing to dozens of different worlds, although there will be 1D4x10 that it cycles through most regularly. Dimensional Link Stability: Every link imaginable is possible at some point or another, with the Rift acting like a mad channel surfer, shifting worlds every 4D6 minutes. Note: This is the type of Rift locked away in St. Louis by the Coalition States.

Periodic Rift Table

While not as powerful or as persistent as the permanent kind, periodic Rifts tend to stick around longer than their random counterparts and appear at the same location at regular intervals when ley line energies surge. Periodic Rifts are much more common than "permanent" or "constant" Rifts, and can appear wherever a ley line, nexus or stone pyramid is located; typically the latter two.

01-15% Diminishing Rift. The Rift starts to lose power and force as soon as it appears. Immediately roll on Random Rift Table.

16-30% Weak Rift. This is a dream state for practitioners of magic, since the Rift is vulnerable and easy to manipulate. With just 100 P.P.E., it's possible to open the Rift as a gateway to the world of the mage's choosing, and keep it there for just 20 P.P.E. per minute. This gateway can be the size of a man, giant or big enough to shift an army. Duration: There is a 01-05% chance that the Rift will dissolve every 10 minutes. The maximum life of this Rift is one hour. World Links: As it is created, the Rift will have a link to one world. Those who seize control of it can change that link easily. Dimensional Link Stability: There is only a 01-04% chance per half hour that the link will change to another world.

31-60% Throbbing Rift. Every minute the whole Rift will seem to 'throb' with a massive influx of energy, and then relax again. Each of these beats will signify that all the world links have changed, and that the dimensional portal is now linking an entirely different set of worlds. Duration: 3D6 minutes, but every minute there is a 01-10% chance that the Rift will start to destroy itself and suddenly vanish 30 seconds later in a silent burst of light and sparks. World Links: 2D6 different worlds. Dimensional Link Stability: Every minute or two the portal changes to a different world.

61-70% Time Rift. Rather than open a portal to just a different world, this Rift in space and time leads to a different period of time. Duration: 2D6 minutes. World Links: 1D6 different worlds in addition to Rifts Earth, which means one could be sent back into the past or to the future of Earth or some alien world (may be a parallel Earth or some alien place during the dinosaur age, caveman era, medieval era, modern times or the future). Dimensional Link Stability: Every 1D4 minutes the portal changes to a different world and/or a different time.

71-80% Ley Line Trapped Rift. For some unknown reason, the dimensional portal of this Rift does not open to other worlds, but to other ley line *nexus points* around the world. This means the Rift can be made to open to any place on Rifts Earth where there is a ley line nexus. To get the portal to open at the desired location, the user of the Rift must think of the place (01-50% likelihood of success, +25% if he has actually been there before). A moment later it appears displayed in the Rift opening and one simply steps through it. Duration: 2D6 minutes or until it is used as a portal. The act of using it as a portal seems to short-circuit the Rift, causing it to disappear within 1D6x10 seconds after the first person steps through it. World Links: Only locales at ley line nexus points on Rifts Earth. Dimensional Link Stability. Not applicable.

81-90% Blind Rift. This is typically a medium-sized dimensional portal about 50-100 feet (15.2 to 30.5 m) tall. Most dimensional portals enable the user/viewer to peer through the rippling wall of energy to see what is on the other side. However, the magical energies of the "Blind Rift" are such that one can NOT see where it opens to and those using it must do so blindly, for it could lead to almost anywhere on Earth or worlds beyond. Duration: 3D6 minutes before it vanishes. World Links: In addition to the primary world link there is a 01-33% chance of another 2D6 links. Dimensional Link Stability: Every three minutes, the Rift has a 01-40% chance of shifting to a different world.

91-94% Cascading Rift. Like an infection that rages out of control, this dimensional gateway extends itself along the strongest available ley line, and then stretches and grows along that ley line until its time runs out. The Rift portal moves along the ley line like a devouring whirlwind at a Spd. of 15, consuming everything in its path (sending them to some alien world or different part of Rifts Earth or even a different period of time). Duration: Every five minutes there is a 01-33% chance the Rift will run out of steam and self-destruct. If it manages to survive for an hour, it will last another 1D4 hours before vanishing. World Links: 1D6. Dimensional Link Stability: There is a 01-15% chance that all the links will change to different worlds; roll every five minutes.

95-98% Alien Controlled Rift. Some otherworldly force has control of the Rift and forces it into becoming a huge gateway. Rippling, shaking and wobbling, the dimensional portal functions as a *one-way portal* with things able to come out of it only from the alien side to enter into our world. Duration: Since it will cost the controller of the Rift at least 100 P.P.E. every min-

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ute, it depends on the resources and desires of whoever is using it; typically 3-12 minutes. World Links: Just a link to the world of whoever has the Rift under their control. Dimensional Link Stability: Under control and unchanging. To switch worlds, whoever is in control of the portal must close it and create a new one.

99-100% Supernatural Rift. A very rare phenomenon, where a periodic Rift is only linked to *supernatural realms*, like those of the various gods, spirit realms, demonic hells, Elemental Planes, the domain of Alien Intelligences and similar dimensions where only supernatural beings exist. Duration: 2D6 minutes before it vanishes. World Links: There is a primary link and a 01-45% chance of 1D4 links to other supernatural realms. Dimensional Link Stability: There is a 01-25% chance that the portal will change to a different supernatural realm every four minutes.

Random Rift Table

Caused by natural phenomena, or brought about through mystical means (spells, ritual sacrifice, etc.), these are the most ephemeral of Rifts, rarely lasting more than a few minutes.

01-18% Dying Rift. Sickly from the very first, the Rift seems insubstantial and very weak. It starts to fade as soon as it's created, pulling back on itself and retreating. Very difficult to use as a gateway since it is so weak, and because it fades out so quickly. Duration: 2D4x10 seconds. World Links: One that will stay the same until the Rift dies.

19-30% Shrunken Rift. Unlike the usual towering wall, this dimensional portal will appear only slightly taller than most humans, and will be confined to a fairly small area. While it persists, it will be stable, with at least one strong inter-world connection. Duration: 1D4 minutes. World Links: One link to another world. Dimensional Link Stability: Every minute there is a 01-20% chance that the link will shift to another world.

31-50% Pulsating Rift. The most stable of the random Rifts, it pulses with energy every few seconds (much like a human heartbeat). Duration: 2D4+1 minutes. World Links: In addition to the primary world link there is a 01-33% chance of another 1D6 links. Dimensional Link Stability: Each minute, each link has a 01-14% chance of shifting to a different world.

51-60% Swelling Rift. As soon as it comes into existence this dimensional portal seems to start swelling, growing and expanding. However, it gets no stronger as it expands outwards, and instead just gets more and more faded and weak. Eventually, as if it just spread itself too thin, it will pop like a soap bubble. Anything, or anyone lying in its path, before it dissolves, will be sucked up into another world. Duration: 1D4 minutes of expansion. World Links: There will be just one primary world link. Dimensional Link Stability: There is only a 01-8% chance that the link will change every minute.

61-70% Misting Rift. The dimensional portal opens to reveal nothing but white mist and clouds. You guessed it, the Rift opens to the Astral Plane. Any characters who send their *Astral Self* into the realm of mist and clouds can flawlessly find their way back through the portal as long as it is open. If it should close before they return, the characters must follow their mystical umbilical cord as usual. One can also enter the Astral Plane with their physical body by walking through the portal. However, once the Rift closes, those in physical form can not find their way back to the physical plane unless they can find or create another Rift to home. Moreover, even if the character can Astral Project, it does him no good, because the silver cord leads back to the physical body which is inside the Astral Plane. Likewise, those whose physical body is inside the Astral Plane can NOT see into the physical world, for they are now an inhabitant of the Astral realm. Duration: 4D4 minutes. World Links: There will be just one primary world link. Dimensional Link Stability: Stable, it does not switch to other dimensions.

71-80% Consuming Rift. The most turbulent Rift, with energy churning around inside, making a high-pitched shrieking noise that gets continuously higher and louder until it extinguishes itself. Duration: 01-33% chance of blowing apart every 30 seconds. Once the Rift goes away, it will be at least two days (48 hours) before any P.P.E. can be harvested from the area. World Links: There are a huge number of links to many different worlds (at least 2D6x10), and virtually anything or any creature is likely to emerge. However, each creature that emerges has a 75% chance of being sucked right back in. Dimensional Link Stability: None of the links get switched off, or switched to another world. However, every minute that the Rift survives means that another 2D6 worlds will also be linked to it.

81-90% Transparent Rift. Unlike some manifestation, this Rift is calm and clear enough that observers can easily see through it into another world. It's also known that the denizens of the other world, if they are in the right place, can look through from the other side into our world. Beings from either side of the portal can step through the portal at any time. Duration: 1D6+1 minutes. World Links: A link to just one world. Dimensional Link Stability: Every minute there is a 01-25% chance that the Rift will shift to a different world.

91-100% Exploding Rift. The moment the Rift appears it will be obvious that 'she's gonna' blow!' The massive energy of the Rift seems to be completely out of control, snaking and writhing in all directions, with chunks of landscape, objects and creatures being exchanged with their counterparts in other worlds continuously. It will be obvious that it can not last (Ley Line Walkers and Shifters will be able to judge how many seconds it will be around), but while it exists it will explosively expand outward, at a Spd. of 30, overtaking and swallowing anyone in the way. Duration: 4D6 seconds. World Links: 1D4 worlds will be linked. Dimensional Link Stability: No changes in the few seconds of this Rift's existence.

Random World Generation Story-Driven Worlds Table (Optional)

There are a lot of ways to roll up the random worlds that appear on the other side of a Rift. This particular table is designed to help the Game Master to focus on the most important thing of all: keeping the story exciting and fun.

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01-07% World of Portents. A world of ghosts and spirits, where nothing lives among the ruins and crumbling remnants of an ancient civilization. However, one of the player characters will receive a message of warning, perhaps through a psychic contact, perhaps by finding a cryptic inscription, that will warn the group of an impending ambush, trap or disaster.

08-15% World of the Lone Refugee. In a world filled with growing things and unintelligent animals, the group will discover a being that is clearly stranded. It could be anything from a lost pet, to a lost explorer, but the refugee will bond to a friendly player character and become a friend and companion from that time on.

16-30% Plot-Resolution World. Something in the world can be used to solve the group's most pressing problem. It could be the weapon they need, an herbal antidote, or an electronic device, but there should be clear signs that they've come to the right place.

31-50% Player Character Heaven. For one of the player characters in the group, the new world is their idea of heaven (or close to it). Everything from the air, to the food, to the inhabitants, to the lifestyle, is absolutely perfect.

51-70% Henchmen World. The world is inhabited by beings who would make perfect followers, and who would be incredibly effective against the player characters' most difficult foes. Better yet, the player characters will show up just when the society of these people is in terrible trouble from something that only the player group can fight or fix.

71-90% Back Door to the Enemy. The Rift opens to some unprotected part of the home world of one of the player characters' most difficult class of enemies (probably D-Bees or demons).

91-100% Gateway to New Worlds. The world is connected to a larger network of worlds or star systems, so that the player character group will be able to explore an even larger part of the campaign. Ideally this world should be made available through some kind of transportation device (a magical amulet, a dimensional teleporter, a spaceship, etc.), so the players can get back and forth easily.

Making Your Own Tables

Right about here, it would have been a good place to put in a table of all the various worlds mentioned in each and every Rifts book and/or RPG put out by Palladium. Yep, that would have been the easy way.

The problem is, most people don't have all the Rifts books (if you do, well, bless you, and thanks!). The other problem is that even then our "complete" list wouldn't include some of the other worlds that you might find cool to include.

So here's how you put together your own percentile based table.

First, come up with a list of worlds that you want to include. An easy way to start is to make a pile of all the Palladium books you've already got and which ones you would like to include (you may not want to create a world link to everywhere just because you own the book). For example, here's what I had sitting around when I was writing up this chapter:

Rifts® RPG (Duh! Yeah! I guess I need that one to run the game...)
Rifts® World Book 18: Mystic Russia™
Rifts® Dimension Book 4: Skraypers™
After the Bomb® RPG (mutant animals).

Converting this short list into a percentile table is pretty easy. Just count the number of items in the list, divide the number 100 by that number, and then have the result be the gaps in the list. In this case there are only four books listed. Divide 100 by 4, and the result is 25. The simple trick is to add the "gap" number as the last number in each entry, and adding it in for the next entry. So start with the entry 01-25, and the next entry would the last number plus one (25+1) to the last number plus the gap number (25 + 25 = 50), giving us 26-50. So the quickie table would look like this:

01-25 Rifts Earth
26-50 Mystic Russia
51-75 Skraypers
76-00 After the Bomb® Earth

Got it? Good!

Now let's try a little more complicated example. Scraypers is based on the Charizolon planetary system. Taking a look through the book, I came up with a list of the following (habitable) planets and moons:

Vuulok
Yol (moon of Forschell)
Razuul (moon of Forschell)
Avulor
Talavera
Dilm
Seeron

That's seven in the list, and 100 divided by 7 would be roughly 14, giving us the following percentile table:

01-14 Vuulok
15-28 Yol (moon of Forschell)
29-42 Razuul (moon of Forschell)
43-56 Avulor
57-70 Talavera
71-84 Dilm
85-98 Seeron

Obviously, that's not quite right, since we stopped with 98, instead of 00. That's where the Game Master gets to use a little ingenuity. Since Seeron is probably the most interesting world to visit, here's an easy modification:

01-14 Vuulok
15-28 Yol (moon of Forschell)
29-42 Razuul (moon of Forschell)
43-56 Avulor
57-70 Talavera
71-84 Dilm
85-00 Seeron

An easy way to combine the tables is as follows, where the Game Master would roll twice, once for the source book, and a second time for a particular world:

01-25 Rifts®

Home world of the Xiticix.

26-50 Mystic Russia™

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Russian Demon World (source world of the various demons and spirits that now plague Mystic Russia).

51-75 Skraypers™

01-14 Vuulok

15-28 Yol (moon of Forschell)

29-42 Razuul (moon of Forschell)

43-56 Avulor

57-70 Talavera

71-84 Dilm

85-00 Seeron

76-00 After the Bomb®

Alternate Dimension of Mutant Animals

Of course this is a very, very simple example, with only a very few possibilities. Most Rifts® Game Masters will be able to come up with something a lot more interesting at the drop of a hat. Even this small list could be doubled or tripled just with some of the other possibilities from this short list of four books. (What if there were a separate world for the Russian Spirits, or the Gypsies? What about all the other worlds mentioned in *Skraypers*? What about a couple of dozen worlds based on *After the Bomb*, each with a different mutant animal in charge? Etc...)

Note. Please, if you've got a cool idea for what a world ought to be on the other end of a Rift, please don't think you've got to roll on your table. It's your campaign, so put in whatever you think would be cool, or fun, or whatever, and don't let a random table run your life. Especially not a table that you made in the first place.

Now, let's try a more complex set of tables. Assume that the players find themselves in the Russian Demon World (the source world for all the demons of Mystic Russia). Here's a list of all the beings of that world:

Lesser Russian Demons

The Unclean
Demon Claw
Hell Horse
Il'ya Demons
Kaluga Hag
Kladovik Guardian Demon
Nalet
Serpent Hound
Stone Demon
Water Demon
Wood Demon

Greater Russian Demons

Khitaka Abductors
Koshchei the Deathless Ones
Midnight Demon (Polunochnitsa)
Morozko Frost Demons
Nightfeeder
Whirlwind
Wolf-Serpent

Woodland Spirits

Domovoi
Polevoi
Leshii
Vodianoi
Rusalka
Firebird
Spirit Wolf
Werewolves
Vampires

Doing up a percentile table for the Lesser Demons is straightforward. There are eleven types, and 100 divided by 11 gives us roughly 9, and the following table:

Lesser Russian Demons

01-09 The Unclean
10-18 Demon Claw
19-27 Hell Horse
28-36 Il'ya Demons
37-45 Kaluga Hag
46-54 Kladovik Guardian Demon
55-63 Nalet
64-72 Serpent Hound
73-81 Stone Demon
82-90 Water Demon
91-99 Wood Demon

Obviously the other two tables could be put together the same way. However, what if you wanted a table that included all the various creatures? That's a total of 27 possibilities. 100 divided by 27 is 3.7, but that turns out to be something of a problem. It starts okay, with:

Lesser Russian Demons

01-03 The Unclean
04-06 Demon Claw
07-09 Hell Horse
10-12 Il'ya Demons
13-15 Kaluga Hag
16-18 Kladovik Guardian Demon

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19-21 Nalet
22-24 Serpent Hound
25-27 Stone Demon
28-30 Water Demon
31-33 Wood Demon

Greater Russian Demons
34-36 Khitaka Abductors
37-39 Koshchei the Deathless Ones
40-42 Midnight Demon (Polunochnitsa)
43-45 Morozko Frost Demons
46-48 Nightfeeder
49-51 Whirlwind
52-54 Wolf-Serpent

Woodland Spirits
55-57 Domovoi
58-60 Polevoi
61-63 Leshii
64-66 Vodianoi
67-69 Rusalka
70-72 Firebird
73-75 Spirit Wolf
76-78 Werewolves
79-81 Vampires

Oops! What's going to happen if you roll an 82 or higher? Obviously, you could just ignore results over 81, and still use the table, but that's not a very tidy solution. A little math shows that this wasn't completely unexpected. The result from our first calculation was 100 divided by 27, which equals 3.7. But when you take that extra .7 and multiply it by all the entries, 27, you end up with an extra 18.90.

However, knowing that we've got an extra 19 is easy to deal with if you just play around with the table. For example, if you assume that Lesser Demons and Woodland Spirits are more common than Greater Demons, all you've got to do is add in a few extra numbers. Add 11 Lesser Demons to the 9 Woodland Spirits, and you get 20, leave out one (Vampires), and that means you can use a four for those more common creatures, and a three for the Greater Demons and Vampire. Here is the resulting table:

Lesser Russian Demons
01-04 The Unclean
05-08 Demon Claw
09-12 Hell Horse
13-16 Il'ya Demons
17-20 Kaluga Hag
21-24 Kladovik Guardian Demon
25-28 Nalet
29-32 Serpent Hound
33-36 Stone Demon
37-40 Water Demon
41-44 Wood Demon

Greater Russian Demons
45-47 Khitaka Abductors
48-50 Koshchei the Deathless Ones
51-53 Midnight Demon (Polunochnitsa)
54-56 Morozko Frost Demons
57-59 Nightfeeder
60-62 Whirlwind
63-65 Wolf-Serpent

Woodland Spirits
66-69 Domovoi
70-73 Polevoi
74-77 Leshii
78-81 Vodianoi
82-85 Rusalka
86-89 Firebird
90-93 Spirit Wolf
94-97 Werewolves
98-00 Vampires

See? The Lesser Demons and almost all the Woodland Spirits are each *weighted* with a four, while the Greater Demons and the Vampire each take up three possibilities on percentile.

Is that the end of the table? It's done if you like, but it really depends on the Game Master. Other demons, or other natural creatures, or even different kinds of humans, could easily be added to the list. The chances of encountering certain types could be reduced, and other types increased, all depending on how the Game Master sees the world, or even just the proportion of creatures in a particular forest.

Like many things in role-playing games, percentile tables are *tools*. And every Game Master should learn to make and customize these tools.

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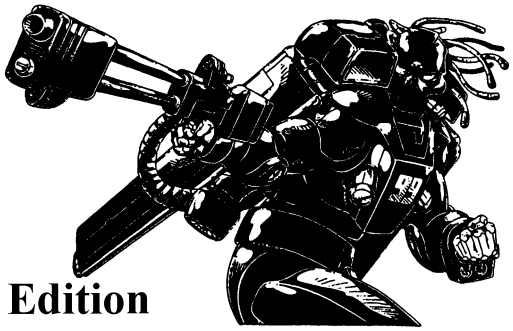

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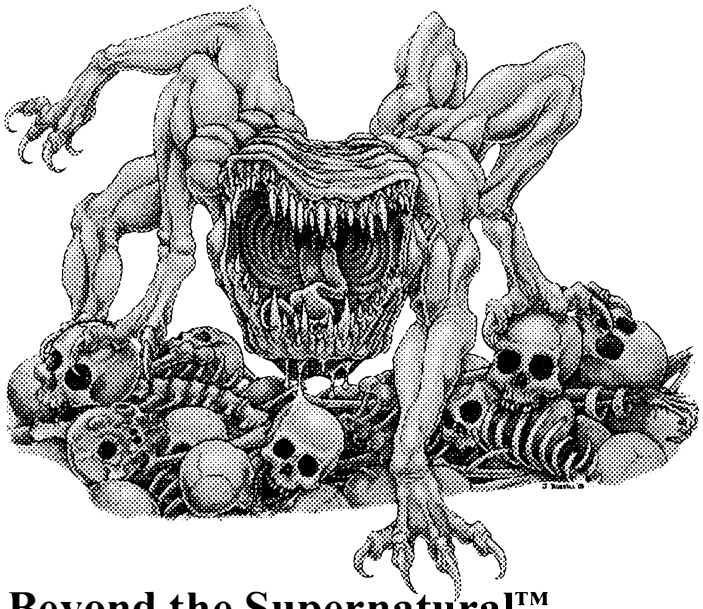

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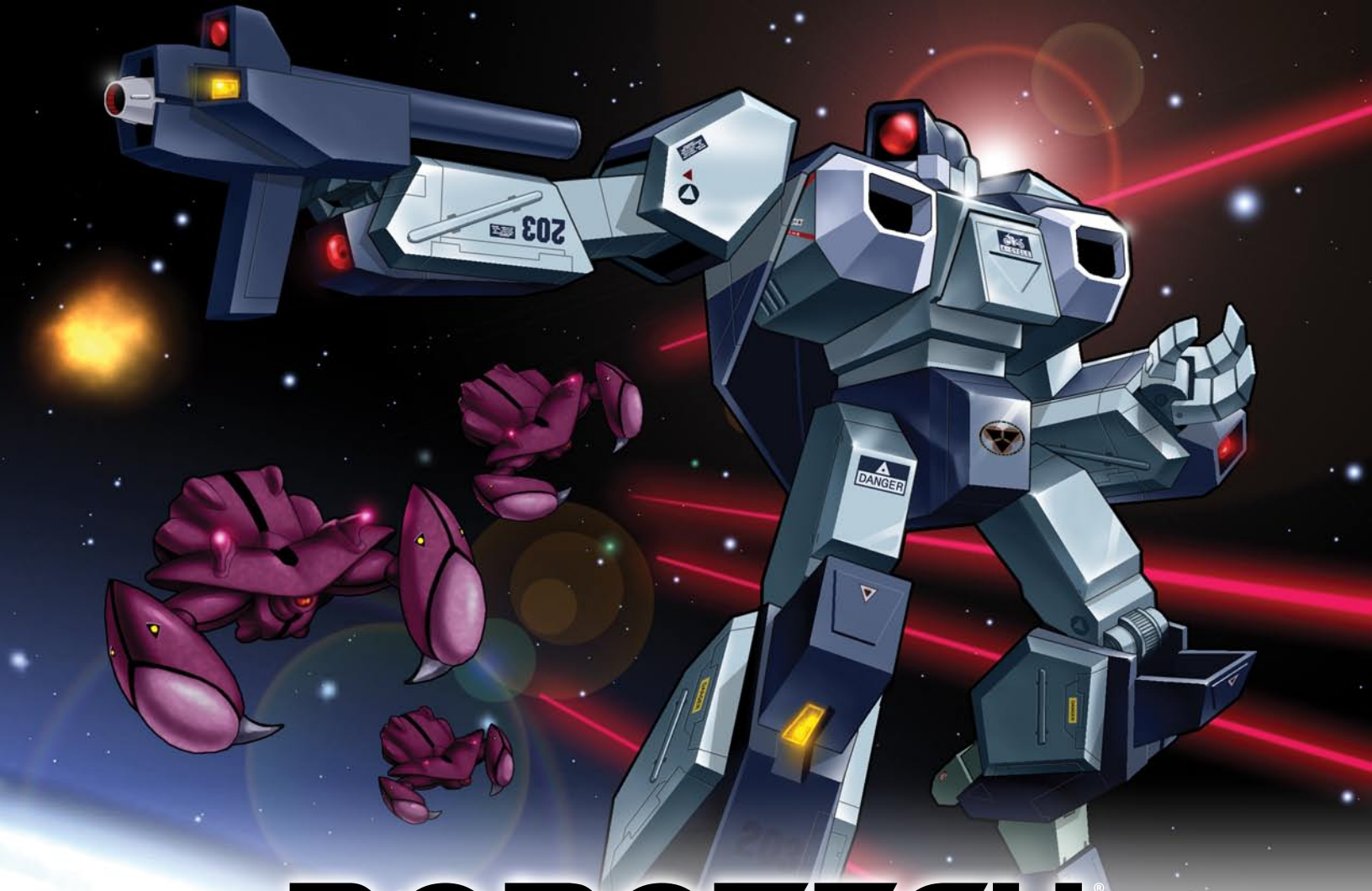

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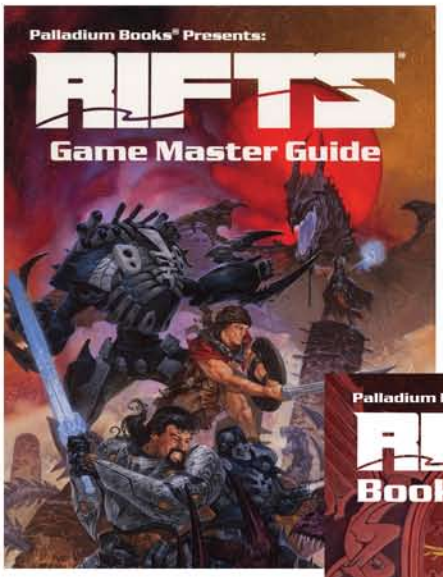

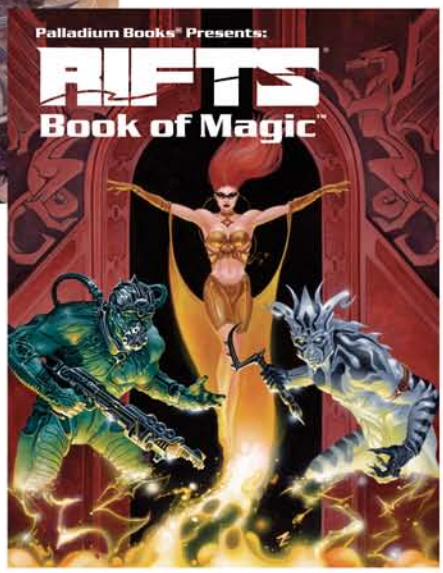

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