

Palladium Books® Presents:

RIFTS Primer

How to Play Rifts® and Create Adventures



By Kevin Siembieda and Carl Gleba



How to Play Rifts®

A Rifts® Primer – Adventure & Guide to solid Role-Playing and Rifts®

By Carl Gleba and Kevin Siembieda

This article may sound like it is for new players and Game Masters, but even experienced gamers are likely to find it interesting and thought provoking. For some of you, playing Rifts® will be an entirely new experience, for others it will be a cheerful reminder about the core elements of role-playing and the elements that make it so much fun.

Those of you unfamiliar with the epic Rifts® RPG setting will find this guide to be an easy and fun window into the Rifts® Megaverse®. If you have played any of Palladium's games, you will recognize the Megaversal rule system. If this is *your first foray* into the exciting and dangerous world of Rifts® or the Palladium game system, then welcome and enjoy.

The Rifts® Primer is meant to give new Rifts® Players and Game Masters a solid footing to start their gaming experience. Whether you are brand new or you have Game Mastered the RPG of any game company, all you need is an understanding of Palladium's rule system and the setting of Rifts®. As a result, this guide is one part *game advice*, one part *adventure building*, and one part *ready to play adventure* – complete with combat and rules explanations built right into the adventure.

The main focus of the guide and Palladium games is on *role-playing* and *storytelling*, and how the rules are applied in the context of this and any adventure. Character creation is covered very well in the Rifts® Ultimate Edition and will not be discussed here. Pre-generated characters are provided so you won't need the Rifts® Ultimate Edition to play this adventure, though it is helpful.

What follows are a slew of *Game Master tips* and *Game Master tools* to help run your own Rifts® games and create your own adventures. There are also some *player tips*, and at the end of the adventure is a section on *crafting your first adventure*.

Once you have mastered the basic rules, you are all set to run your own Rifts® games and have hours of fun creating stories, laughing with friends, and in general, sharing a social experience that can't be duplicated with video games or the Internet. Players who never considered running a game before, may find this information insightful and alluring. So read the *Game Master tips*, check out the adventure, grab your friends and dice, and prepare to have a great time.

Two things to keep in the back of your mind as you read the adventure and tips. I have two rules that are not an outspoken part of Palladium's rules, but which I know the game's creator wholeheartedly agrees with and incorporates himself. I use these regardless of what system I run.

1. Keep it simple.

2. Keep it fun.

I always try to keep these two rules in mind when I create and run my games. So does Kevin Siembieda, the creator of Rifts® and the Palladium game system. New Game Masters should keep their games simple at first, especially while they are learning the rules and art of telling a great story. Have fun with it and keep it

moving, keep it lively, and remember, *the characters are the stars*. Just like a good movie the characters should be the central point of your story.

Game on!

– Carl J. Gleba, 2016

Using this Guide

As Palladium Books makes moves to introduce Rifts® into other mediums and even with other game systems such as Rifts® for Savage Worlds®, we thought it would be a good time to share this adventure and tips for Game Mastering and playing the Rifts® RPG. The tips are rock solid fundamentals of role-playing with an emphasis on character and story – the Palladium style. The adventure that is included is very basic and set somewhere in *Rifts North America*.

I would suggest the Game Master read not just the G.M. tips, but the entire adventure before running it. Unlike your typical adventure book, at various points throughout this adventure are sections on rules and combat. The rules needed at that point in the adventure are explained and, hopefully in the context of the game, they will be clear and understandable. Every rule found in the Rifts® Ultimate Edition is not explained in this guide or the small adventure, only the essential, but they are enough to enable you to play through this adventure and have a good time, WITHOUT the Rifts® rule book. For a complete list of rules, spells, and everything else you'll want to run for an ongoing Rifts® campaign, check out the Rifts® Ultimate Edition and for more setting and inspiration, any of the world or adventure sourcebooks.

Tools of the Game

Dice. You need a selection of dice to play. Most Game Shops sell tubes of polyhedral dice or even check with your local chain bookstore behind the counters. The dice you'll need and how they are noted in this book and other Palladium books are a 20-sided die, or a D20, a twelve-sided die, D12, two ten-sided dice, either different colors or one with the tens denoted on it (e.g. 10, 20, 30, 40 and so on) instead of 1, 2, 3... You will also need an eight-sided die, D8, three to four six-sided dice, D6, and a four-sided die, D4. Below is a list and the notation. If a number is in front of the "D" then that indicates how many of that kind of dice are needed. For example, 4D6 means four six-sided dice.

Twenty-sided die – D20

Twelve-sided die – D12

Ten-sided die – D10

Eight-sided die – D8

Six-sided die – D6

Four-sided die – D4

1D20 means one 20-sided die.

3D6 means three 6-sided dice.

2D10 (also called percentile dice because two will give you a result of 1 to 100) means 2 ten-sided dice.

2D4+2 means roll two 4-sided dice and add two to the result. So your results will range from 3 to 10.

Luck is built into the dice. The roll of the dice determines the outcome of most events from combat to the use of skills. This is where luck and fate come into the game, adding a fun, unpredictable element.

You will need a pencil and notepad or scrap paper. I suggest pencil over pen because sometimes there are stat changes and erasing involved. I, Carl Gleba, prefer graph paper, because it helps me to line up various statistics and to keep them more organized, but that is a personal preference not a requirement. I know others who prefer lined note pads or blank paper. Lastly, to play this **Rifts® Primer Adventure**, you'll need this guide. The characters and NPCs provided can be photocopied for your convenience.

Imagination. The greatest tool you have is you. You and your players, or more precisely, your imagination. Try not to feel self-conscious or timid. Feel free to ask questions and participate. It's okay if you don't know which dice to roll at first. And I think everyone feels worried and a bit self-conscious, at first. Try not to be worry about how people might think about you, your style of play, or how you handle your character. Have fun, speak up, ask questions, and play in character. A good group of players, whether they are experienced or new to role-playing, are not likely to laugh at another player or belittle the choices he or she makes for their character. At least, they should not. Experienced gamers, please cut the new guy(s) a break. You were uncertain and made foolish choices when you first started RPGing, give new players your support, encouragement, and patience.

We have found the best way to try role-playing is to dive right in and not worry about how you look to others. Focus on your character, the game, the action and the adventure, and everything should work out fine. Oh, and if your novice character gets himself killed, shrug it off, roll up a new character and rejoin the fun. Losing characters through naivete, foolishness and heroism may happen more than once. It is part of the game and not anything to feel ashamed of. We have all lost characters in role-playing games. Be the character and have fun. More on character play later.

Getting Started

The Game Master

First, you need to determine who will be the **Game Master**.

The Game Master is combination movie director and master storyteller. As the Game Master (G.M.), you establish the story and set the pace for the adventure. You will know the plot elements, villains and what the full adventure entails – particularly what dangers lay ahead for our band of heroes: the player characters. As the Game Master, you should always try to be fairly familiar with the rules and flexible with your story/adventure, including the ones presented in these pages. I can tell you from experience that no two groups will play this adventure exactly the same way, so flexibility and improvisation are necessary skills that the G.M. should embrace.

One of your jobs as Game Master is to narrate. Describe the scenes using all the senses to give your players a feel for where

they are and what's going on around their characters. Do not just say, "You entered a bar and walk up to the first empty table." That's too simple and you are telling them what to do. Instead, set the stage and ask them what their characters are doing.

For example, say something like, "*Your characters have entered the **Rusty Cup Pub**. Despite being the middle of a sunny, summer day, the bar is dark and dingy. There are no windows and there are a surprising number of patrons present for this time of day. Some sit at the long bar, others sit at tables, and a few play at one of the four pool tables. The smell of fermented alcohol, sweat and smoke from rolled cigarettes and a few cigars permeate the air. There are several human and D-Bee (non-human) patrons at the bar and more at nearby tables. The pair of Headhunters (partial cyborg mercs) who are playing pool stop to look at you.*

"The bartender shouts, 'Welcome gentlemen, you're just in time. I'm opening a bottle of my best swill. Come on over and try some. Your first glass only costs one credit. You can't beat that anywhere.'"

Then ask each player what his character is doing. Inevitably a few will head over for the cheap drink and to chat with this friendly barkeep, another one or two might sit down at a table while casually looking around to size-up the place and the customers inside. From here, all kinds of things might unfold. Use your imagination and your characters.

Setting the scene is very important, and the example above does that nicely. It establishes atmosphere and mood. And most importantly, it helps all the players to visualize what they (and their characters) are seeing. By just saying, "You enter a bar," everyone is going to have their own impression of where they are and what the place looks like. By offering a description like the one above, "it's dark and dingy," "no windows," "there are humans and nonhumans present," "a pool table and a pair of cybernetic mercenaries," sets the stage and a mood. At first glance, this tavern appears to be a place for mercs and nonhumans who value privacy, because there are no windows, etc. And because all the players are imagining the same thing, it gives them a shared experience and avoids confusion later on. This way, everyone will be on the same page. Oh, and by giving "the bar" a name, you create a memorable and specific place. Not just any "bar" or "pub," this is *The Rusty Cup Pub* – and a place that may become a regular locale for getting information, mercenary work, making connections and contacts, or maybe it's just a safe watering hole where adventurers can unwind.

The trick is providing a decent amount of details without getting bogged down in way too much detail. (I, Kevin Siembieda, always start with what is the most obvious to anyone walking in, and wait for the players to ask me questions about the place before providing more info and specific details. If they don't ask, I assume they are not looking around or noticing people or the things that could be important clues about the bar and the people inside. This alone may lead the player characters into trouble.) The players don't need to know the exact size of the place, the exact number of tables and chairs or what the tablecloths look like unless it is important to the setting and mood. There is a big difference, for example, between cheerful green tablecloths with silver flowers, and black tablecloths with skull on them or anti-CS slogans in the borders. But such little details are not important unless it is for mood or story.

Players who want more information will usually ask the G.M. questions to get it, like, "Do I see any shady characters?" Again, this is a broad question and the answer might be, "Yeah, pretty much everyone in the pub." Players will learn to ask more specific

questions, like, “Does everyone here look like a mercenary or soldier?” “Yes, except for the trio in the corner.” “What do they look like?” And the G.M. offers a description. Maybe they are peasants, or mages, or merchants, or ... whatever.

The Game Master (G.M.) also controls all of the NPCs or Non-Player Characters. NPCs are important people that the player characters meet and interact with at places like the *Rusty Cup Pub* and, well, everywhere. That bartender mentioned above, he is a Non-Player Character (NPC). In fact, he is an NPC that the G.M. has immediately made available to the player characters with his cheerful invitation of a stiff drink for only one credit. The barkeep may have information that the characters need and that he will share if one or more characters engage him in conversation, buys him a drink, and so on. It can also lead to confrontation and a momentary side adventure or action. In the context of the story, that could be wherever you, the G.M. wants to take it. Let’s use a story most of you should know: *Star Wars, A New Hope*. The young, farm boy *Luke Skywalker* who is not even a Jedi, walks right into trouble when he and Obi-Wan Kenobi enter the cantina on Mos Eisley. The wise and experienced Obi-Wan knows how to carry himself to avoid trouble. Poor, young Luke looks like the innocent bumpkin that he is, and an ornery thug who has had too much to drink decides to mess with the kid. Conflict and adventure ensues. It also moves the story along.

In the Rifts® bar scenario above, the wrong question to the wrong person could lead to ... well, almost anything. A brawl, a fistfight, a duel, a challenge of skill (fighting, wrestling, knife tossing, a toss of the dice) or drinks for everyone, or a “friend” who volunteers to step forward to help them stay out of trouble (why and what’s his agenda?), or a merc looking for work may offer to be their “native guide,” or a pretty girl, or a thief, or CS spy or a mage may approach them, the possibilities are endless. And all of these NPCs are controlled and played by the G.M. (Game Master).

NPCs (Non-Player Characters) can be very important in creating atmosphere and helping to further the story along. They are meant to provide clues, information and challenges to the player group. If there is a puzzle the player characters cannot figure out, then perhaps the NPC can provide some insight that helps them succeed. An NPC can also provide direction and purpose for the characters. This makes some NPCs important figures in the context of the game. However, something an NPC should not do is provide all the answers nor lead the player characters. An NPC should always be a secondary character in the background, never a primary one in the forefront of the action. And he should never have all the answers or save the day whenever the player group gets into trouble. An NPC should not be coming to the rescue of the players except, perhaps, under the most dire of circumstances, and even then he should need to roll to succeed like any other character. Likewise, an NPC who joins the adventurer group should not be a glory hog. All NPCs should be a *background character* who does NOT steal the spotlight from the player characters.

Again, using *Star Wars* as an example, you may recall *old Obi-Wan* provided a purpose for the group, and that was simply to get them to Alderaan. He helped them find a ship and pilot, but this too helped advance the story and bring other “central heroes” together. Once on the Death Star, Obi-Wan takes on a secondary role, because this is NOT his story, it is the story of *Luke, Han and the other heroes*. Two other notable *Star Wars* characters who function in the role of NPCs are *R2-D2* and *C-3PO*. They helped set up the next part of the adventure, and know and do things that *assist* the central character, but they are sidekicks, secondary characters

who move the story along to the *rescue of the princess*. They also worked as comic relief. Humor and laughter are great for games too. You will notice that none of these characters stole much of the action through the course of the adventure, but did provide critical aid and vital information when needed. This is exactly how NPCs should be used. I call them *support roles*, like *supporting actors* in any movie.

Use NPCs to help drive your story and establish atmosphere. This includes NPC villains and monsters. In fact, villains and monsters are often a major catalyst for adventure. “We must rescue so and so from the wicked X,” or save the town or a beloved NPC, and so on. Villains can also lead to adventure campaigns of revenge, quests for justice, pursuit, preventing atrocities and destruction, etc.

More Game Master Tips and Tricks for Running Rifts® Games

So if you are reading this section, you are either a Game Master ready to run the adventure included in this Primer, or someone curious about the Game Master experience. Or maybe, a G.M. looking to see what we have to say about running RPGs. First off, welcome, one and all. Being a *Game Master* is an awesome experience. Don’t worry if you’re a new G.M., because it is not as hard as you may think it is.

So the **first tip is relax**. Just like anything new, you will get better as time goes on and you become more comfortable running games.

Second, have fun. This isn’t a competition. You are orchestrating a story. Enjoy weaving your adventure and watching it unfold in ways you likely never expected as the players take your plot and make it their own.

Game Masters, it is your job to play all of the non-player characters. Again, don’t worry. This may sound daunting, but is actually a lot of fun, especially if it suits your disposition. It allows you the opportunity to stretch your role-playing skills. Kevin Siembieda (creator of Rifts® and the Palladium game system), me and most Game Masters enjoy playing the many Non-Player Characters and running the adventure. That said, not everyone is suited to be a G.M. You may be such a person. That’s okay. We’ve found that while many people can become a good G.M. with time and practice, only one in eight or ten are naturals who thrive at being a Game Master. But you know what, all those other Game Masters do a fine job too. As long as you and the players are having fun, you are doing fine.

So what’s next? It is your job as G.M. to create a fun story arc filled with adventure, action, suspense and most importantly, a sense of accomplishment. Combining all of these elements is really not that difficult, especially with some of the tips and tricks below. So let’s begin.

Tip Number Three – Preparation. I have always found it easier to run a game *when I am fully prepared*. It makes sense. Most people like to be prepared for any job. Being prepared provides confidence and makes it easier to anticipate problems and overcome them. For role-playing games, which tend to be open-ended and very flexible, this is not always as easy. Or is it?

The first part of preparation is game knowledge. No, you don’t have to have every little rule memorized, that’s why you have a rule book to refer too. I (Carl) have found you do want to become familiar with your game world. Read its history, its setting

and know it well. After all, you are telling the story in this setting so it makes sense to have familiarity with it. That familiarity will also present ideas and opportunities for adventure. Most of the time, if you are a new Game Master and have new players, everyone is on an even playing field when it comes to fully understanding the game world.

Make the setting yours. Own it. RPGs are designed to give you the foundation and groundwork, it is up to you to run with it. That means creating your own corners in that world setting. Towns, villages, ruins, secret places, particular areas of the wilderness, caves, etc. are all yours to create. Just like NPCs they are places to meet, places to go to, places to destroy, and so on. Take ideas from the published setting, be imaginative, have fun and go wild with it. Heck, you might even be one of those Game Masters who decides to create your own entire game world – or your own big area of a larger, existing world setting. That's fine, too. Run with it.

Whether it is the world of **Rifts**® or something you have created, *you need to know your world* and the NPC characters, villains and monsters in it. Especially, the ones the player group is likely to encounter and interact with. To this end, I find it useful to know who the player characters are. Knowing what character everyone is playing and the characters' alignments/moral compass, goals, fears and motivations – let alone special abilities and notable weapons – makes your job as G.M. easier. It allows you to customize your adventures to appeal to and challenge the specific characters and the players. Once you know the background of the characters (and the likes and dislikes of your players), it all gets easier every game you play.

An aside from Kevin Siembieda: Know your NPCs and you can take your story/adventure *anywhere*. I am able to run games in which the player characters seemingly have infinite choices and opportunities. Part of that is from knowing them, but especially knowing my NPCs (Non-Player Characters).

I have my main villains and their henchmen all statted out. I know their alignment, goals and motivations, which means I know exactly how they will react to insults, trouble and opportunities that arise, as well as how they interact with other characters (i.e. the player characters). The arrogant badass, for example, is not going to waste his time with low level characters nor most people whom he sees as beneath him. (Which, by the way, could be the villain's undoing.) However, like a gunslinger, this tough guy welcomes a real challenge and that means taking on and beating other experienced and powerful characters. He likes proving how good he is against others. He also likes to make the big score and enjoys showing off just how dangerous and smart he is. That said, another similar character might pretend to be less savvy and deadly. He or she may like to manipulate and trick people, and let his henchmen do his dirty work. This cretin attacks from the shadows and betrays allies when it is to his advantage. I know if the villain loves magic items (making characters with such magic a potential target) or dislikes magic. I know if he hates Juicers, has something to prove, drinks too much, has a soft spot for the ladies, or likes to kill, or hates to get blood on his hands, or secretly works for the Coalition States. I could go on and on, but I think you get the idea. All of this helps me know how this NPC (Non-Player Character) is going to react to the player characters and any given situation, anywhere. And that means I can introduce them and drop them in anywhere, at any time.

Before I start my game for the night, I like to make a list of the players' real names on a lined legal pad. Next to each name, I write the name of their character, the character's O.C.C. (Occupational

Character Class), and alignment. I often include the character's level and sometimes special weapon notes or other details, like she is desperate for money, or he seeks fame or magic, or is young and inexperienced, or hates so and so (probably an NPC villain), and so on. I do this even with players and characters that I have been running in games for years and know well. It gives me a quick, easy frame of reference I can see at a glance, and it reminds me about *key character elements* I may want to use in the adventure. I also make notes during the game of noteworthy moments, great ideas, outstanding role-playing and key moments, as well as experience point awards. Now back to Carl's excellent RPG Guide.

Knowing the setting for the game, the central antagonists and NPCs, and the player characters, it is time to prepare for the actual **running of the game**. If you are running the adventure included here, make sure you know how many players you have and what characters they are playing.

Whenever making your own adventures you will want that to fashion an adventure that fits and challenges the player group. Plot and make notes for the story arc and encounters the player group will have, and any ideas and alternatives that seem fun and viable. Make all your notes ahead of time and write down important stats like the number of bandits, the average level of these thugs, the bonuses of each bandit, their armor's M.D.C. and what weapon(s) they are using. I jot the notes down in a notebook or laptop, or anything I have easy access too. When I craft my own adventures, I make sure those notes are handy, but we'll discuss more on that later.

So the basics of preparation are:

A) Know the game setting and background.

B) Know the any nuances about the specific places within the setting where the adventure is going to take place, and which you may be creating from your own imagination.

C) Be familiar with any NPCs and have their stats ready. You may be able to get away with short stats for incidental characters. In a movie (and in your game), this is no name *Bandit Number Four* or *Innocent Bystander Number Two*. However, always have the complete stats for the main characters such as the bandit's leader, the evil mastermind, and any other important NPC villains and monsters. The important NPCs are the characters the player group are likely to speak to, interact with, and probably fight, capture and interrogate, or kill or chase off.

D) Have notes for any encounters or important setting areas, clues and details, and, again, have vital statistics written down.

E) Relax and have fun. Let the adventure unfold. Listen to the players and their characters, get ideas from them, and run with the stuff you like. If you listen, your players (often through the words of their characters or conversations between themselves) will give you plenty of ideas you can use to spice up the game or tailor to their fears and needs or desires. Trust us, this is fun.

Tip Number Four – Be Flexible. Nothing in your adventure should be written in stone. We can not stress flexibility enough. Even with the adventure presented here, different groups are likely to react and play it, or portions of it, in very different ways. We may know our friends well, but you can *never* completely see the future or predict how each person will react, or anticipate everything that is likely to unfold in a game. And that, by the way, is one of the fun things about being the Game Master: the surprises your players hand you – some good, some bad, always interesting.

That's why you need to be flexible, improvise and run with any given situation. You may be sitting there and thinking, "What the ...! I can't believe so and so just said or did that!" But as the Game

Master, you need to go with it. *Improvise*. That is where knowing your NPCs and setting comes in handy. Anything the player characters say and do can have consequences. Adventure, drama and comedy often arise from those actions and the resulting consequences those actions bring about. *Have fun with it*. Don't worry about where it may take you. It can be fun going down a road you did not plan to travel. See where it leads, be flexible and have fun. This is a gift, enjoy it.

That said, if the group goes off on a tangent, as fun, silly or strange as it may be, eventually you will want to bring them back around to the story and adventure you had in mind. The question is, how do you steer them towards your adventure?

Well, sometimes you have to just wing it! Yeah, crazy we know. But here's the thing, the players *do not know* that you are winging it. Just go with the flow and do your best. In the worst case scenario, use an NPC or circumstances to get them back on track. They might rescue a person or entire town, and that NPC or townspeople explains their dilemma is the result of *Villain X* (one of the bad guys you want them to clash with). And of course, townspeople know just where he can be found. Or maybe the townspeople don't seem as happy as you might expect for being rescued. Talking with some of them (role-playing these conversations), our heroes learn that as bad as this gang was, the town remains plagued by a monster or more bandits that are even worse. And as fate would have it, that monster or band of villains should be coming to town any time now. Worse, maybe the food or treasure or whatever the villain(s) is coming for, was destroyed in the battle the player characters were just involved in, and it is the hapless townspeople who are now going to pay a terrible price. UNLESS our heroes do something to intercede on their behalf. See how all of this can be used to set up "your" adventure. If the innocent townspeople are going to pay for the player group's actions, that alone should make most of them, especially characters of good alignment, feel like they are responsible for the dire fate that's coming, and that they need to do something about it. Or maybe it is a *Magnificent Seven* situation where the individual or townspeople beg for help and are willing to pay everything they have for that help. Whether that "everything" is a great amount, a powerful weapon or magic item, or tiny pitance (but truly is all they have) is up to the Game Master.

So maybe the location of this conflict is not what you had originally planned. That's okay. Move the ideas and setting elements that fit to this new location and improvise. Maybe this was not how you planned for the heroes to meet this bad guy and his henchmen. Who cares? Go where the story has taken you. It is more dramatic and organic this way. And hopefully, fun for you, the G.M., because it is different and a bit of a challenge.

An aside from Kevin Siembieda: I remember when I first started running role-playing games (**D&D**). I worried and questioned whether I knew the rules well enough or had the skill to be a Game Master. The players would tease me about making things up as I went along. I would deny it, of course, but I found making up the story and throwing out encounters and adventure hooks made up on the spot as I went along was fun and dramatic, not just for the players, but for me as well. I the spontaneity and improvisation.

Another early important realization was that I am the universe. This revelation came from a few other G.M.s that were players in my game. "Remember," they said, "as Game Master, *you are the universal*. You are all powerful." I had never thought of the G.M. like that until they mentioned it and it got me thinking.

Only *you, the Game Masters*, knows what is behind the next door. And you can change it in a heartbeat with a new clever idea

or improving off of something just said by one of the players. Until you it is spoken by you, that canvas upon which your adventure is being created is blank. You and the players create it out of thin air and pure imagination. That means, your players don't know what is behind that door or around the next bend in the road, until YOU reveal it. And only the you, the Game Master, has that knowledge and the power to make it anything *you* want it to be, or that benefits or challenges your player group. *You are the universe*.

Now that power is a great responsibility. You need to use it fairly and wisely to entertain the players *by helping* to weave a great story. I say *helping*, because ultimately this is **their story**. This is the story of heroes and adventurers played by the gamers in your group. *Together*, the Game Master and the players weave an amazing tale of adventure and heroics.

When you are done with your gaming session and that night's adventure – just one of many adventures yet to come – you remember it as if you had just seen a fantastic movie or read a new favorite book. The memories are vivid and wonderful, and best of all, it was YOUR characters who were the featured protagonists in the story. A story you helped create via the words and actions of your characters. For the G.M., the fun is in playing all the villains, monsters and bystanders, and *directing* that amazing story. It is also fun seeing the players react to your story, villains and plot elements, and seeing how they deal with threats and unravel the mysteries you placed before them. *It is all about characters and story*, and fun with friends in the most creative and interactive game medium on Earth – *role-playing*, where you are truly limited only by your imagination. Over time, you will find it easier and easier to let that imagination fly.

Carl here, absolutely true, and that got me thinking. There will also be moments where the players may want to do something an inexperienced, and even an experienced Game Master, is not expecting and may not know how to handle. First, take a moment. Pause the game and get up to get a drink or go to the bathroom (sometimes you need to get away from the voices of your players excitedly talking about their plans or pleas for you to allow X, Y or Z), or sit back for a minute to think about it. Again, a willingness to be flexible combined with imagination will help you *wing it* the best you can. Consider this your permission to *fudge* the action and even make up rules to resolve problems if you need to. You are the Universe, remember. Always try and be fair, but do what you need to do as the G.M. and architect of the adventure.

Another aside from Kevin: However, flexibility and going with the flow of the player characters, is just a general rule of thumb, NOT a requirement or a hard rule. Sometimes your players will get carried away, or one or two will try to exploit the rules and every opportunity for their own characters' best advantage. Sometimes you NEED to just say **no**. Seriously, do NOT allow stuff that is crazy, does not fit the scenario or setting, or is too powerful. My rule of thumb is that it must fist the scenario, fit the character(s), and make logical sense for your setting. And most important, do NOT allow anything that is going to create an imbalance in the game. *It is okay to say no*.

This even applies to things that you, as the G.M., just don't like. That "thing" might be a particular rule, idea, spell, weapon, monster, powerful ability, etc. You need to have fun too, so if it does not work for you, do NOT allow it. Or change it. If it ruins the game for you, or the other players, it is a bad idea. You are the Universe, make it work for you and the game you are running. Yes, the G.M. is supposed to be flexible and try to make sure the players have a fun time, but that does not mean giving in to everything

they suggest or want. You need to cherry pick the best ideas that work for you and the story.

This applies to rules, too. If there is a rule you don't like, it is okay to adjust it, change it completely, toss it out the window or substitute it with a rule you make (and most of the players agree with) or that you borrowed from another game. Don't over think it. Have fun. Mastering it all will happen over time.

Likewise, *if you goof up* and give one or more of the player characters something that is too powerful and it messes up the game or ruins the fun for everyone else – *you are the universe* – change it or take it away and fix the problem. Do so in some logical and appropriate manner that is as fair as possible. If it is a powerful weapon, there are plenty of bad guys (and good guys depending on the circumstance and the characters involved) who will want it and try to take it. A powerful character is likely to be the first guy targeted and ganged up on in combat, which may make owning the weapon more of a liability than it is worth. Maybe an NPC offers a truckload of money for it. Maybe the player who sells it finds out that half (most?) of that money was no good after he sells it. Or maybe it's fine and he acquires a robot vehicle and/or gear that helps the entire group. Maybe the weapon or magic items is stolen from him, or destroyed, or forcibly taken. Maybe the character has to give it up or sacrifice it for some heroic reason, something that saves hundreds or thousands of lives. You are the universe, use your imagination to fix a problem you accidentally allowed or created, but weave that fix into the story whenever you can. Be fair and have fun. That one player may not be happy with the turn of events at first, but you need to do what is best for the group and the story. And in fairness, don't just deprive the character, give him something back in return (a new, less powerful weapon, one that is not unbalancing or a problem, or a different toy, or money, or fame, etc.). Oh, in case you did not notice, many of the solutions above are avenues for new adventures, new antagonists, and new opportunity for the player group.

Tip Number Five – Have Fun! This is something that from time to time can get forgotten. (An aside from Kevin: This is so true. I once had a player tell me I didn't take the game serious enough. She was having fun, but in a moment of silly humor directed at her character, she didn't appreciate that humor, but everyone else thought was hilarious. It was that moment she made the statement, above. Which, by the way, made everyone else laugh even harder, including herself.) The point of the game is to get together with friends, socialize and *have fun*. I know it should go without saying, but sometimes fun gets lost in the mix. You can have a serious, dramatic game and still have fun. Humor is okay, and why not? We have it in our everyday lives, so let the person being a little bit goofy have some fun and blow off steam.

(An aside from Kevin: I often interject humor into my games. Sometimes in the context of the story, and sometimes as a G.M.'s comment or joke. It can be good to lighten things up especially in a heavy situation. The trick is timing and presentation. Unless everyone is being silly, do not force humor and your own bad jokes and puns on everyone else. It kinda gets back to being flexible. If whatever you are doing is fun for everyone, then rock n' roll and keep doing what you are doing. If what you are doing is slowing down the game and taking away the suspense and/or drama desired, try to recognize that and don't do it. Humor is tricky.)

Tip Six – It should never be G.M. vs the Players. I, Carl, found this happened to me a lot when I was younger, and I have seen it a few times in the games of others. Role-playing games

are not designed as competitions. It is not G.M. vs Players or vice versa. Such competitions can lead to hard feelings and take away the fun; sometimes no fun at all. Remember, as the G.M. you do have final say in everything, but you don't need to beat down your players to prove it, nor throw it in their faces. Let the action happen fairly and organically, meaning let it grow and let the *players* take the lead with their characters. Use what they say and do as a foil to improv and as a source for ideas.

I have found that this adversarial condition can crop up when a Game Master was expecting to give the players a real challenge and instead they blow through it like nothing. So all your hard work feels like it was for nothing – except that's not true at all. Sometimes that is just how the dice roll. Or one of the players thought of something that you did not. Or they just played extremely well, or all of the above. It happens to the best of us. If that nasty villain you put a lot of time into creating gets taken down in one melee round because of excellent teamwork or a lucky roll of the die, go with it. I know Kevin and I see such an occurrence as "Fate." It was meant to be. Do not keep him alive just because you want to, or because you are disappointed. It wasn't meant to be. Move on. Remember, role-playing games are not a competition, it is teamwork and storytelling. It is all about the characters and story. And that goes for the players too. Don't mess with the G.M. just because you can, or pimp out your character to the max. Enjoy that easy kill or the game where everything has gone your way, because things are likely to go the other way, maybe even in the next game session.

I think all Game Masters have seen what we thought would be a cake walk for the player characters turn into a life and death struggle because they could not make a saving throw or hit a target to save their lives. Literally. So don't worry if your well thought out plans do not go as you had hoped. Let the characters have their victory. Be happy for them, because this experience is for them as much as it is for you. Let's face it, being a G.M. can be fun, but since you know the whole plot and story, let the surprise victory be the surprise you did not see coming and enjoy the moment with your gleeful players and their boastful characters.

(An aside from Kevin: I completely agree. I love the surprises and I roll with them the best I can to keep the story going in a positive direction. Sometimes, however, the G.M. needs to give the player characters a chance to survive even if it is ugly. In a situation where the players are getting the stuffing knocked out them, it is not a cheat to let them live by allowing them to retreat and run away, or to surrender and be taken prisoner, or a little bit of both. I learned this the hard way.

I was stunned one game night when half of the players were making bad choices and all of them were rolling like garbage. As the events were unfolding, the entire group was doomed. Their utter demise was imminent. A few were already down for the count, some by magic (terrible saving throw rolls) and some whittled down to near death in brutal combat. Though it was not planned (of course, I had not planned to see them all killed!), I was flexible, and gave a third of the characters the chance to *surrender* and be taken as prisoners, and another third a chance to *run away*. Those already taken down and incapacitated by magic had no choice, they would be bound and taken prisoner with those who surrendered. I made it clear these were their only options if they wanted to live, and let them take the one they thought best.

This is where G.M. flexibility came into play again and continued right into the next weekend's game. I had those characters taken prisoner stripped of their weapons, but in the bad guy's ar-

rogance (he was cocky to begin with, and the group fell so easily), he left most of them in their body armor and their weapons stockpiled in sight just outside the prison cell where the characters were jailed. The villain's stronghold was nearby, and though it was not part of my original plan, it now had a dungeon and prison cells, compliments of the Universe and some fast thinking. Those who had escaped were in hiding and healing themselves as they gathered to figure out what to do next. I ended that night's game there, telling the players to think about what they were going to do next. This also gave me a week to figure out my next move and map out the enemy stronghold and dungeon that had not existed until five minutes ago. Remember, I am winging all of this. I was nervous, but thought things out carefully and tried to imagine all possible responses, focusing on the most likely.

As it turned out, I had nothing to worry about. This created a wonderful *prison break scenario* that would become the stuff of legend. While the captives were licking their wounded pride and trying to plot a way out of jail, those who managed to run away and escape were also smarting from their ugly defeat and planning an attack to break their comrades out of prison. If they had the good fortune to extract revenge against the enemy while rescuing their friends, all the better. Of course, as G.M. I would make it so. I could do that, because I knew my players' intentions for their characters, as well as their emotional state of mind.

When play resumed the next weekend, I had two groups with a common goal: prison break and revenge. I went back and forth between both groups of player characters – one trying to break into the prison to rescue their friends, and the other trying to break out of jail to escape and rejoin their friends. By going back and forth with both group, first letting one, and then the other, play out pieces of their strategies, all players were engaged in the story. By pausing the action of one group, soap opera-style at just the right moment to create suspense and hold everyone's attention, I would bounce to the other and have that group do stuff for a while. As one group worked to free themselves, the other group brilliantly made their way into the enemy stronghold. I made sure I did not ruin it for either group by letting one or the other completely play out their plan. That would have been a bummer. Instead, I let both campaigns play out simultaneously. Just as the prisoners looked like they would get free before the other group arrived to rescue them, I had one of the big bad guys unexpectedly arrive with guards to interrogate them (I was winging it again). Knowing this was happening, it made the players in the other group feel tremendous urgency to have their characters find their teammates as fast as possible and unite for the big battle they all knew the adventure was building toward. However, they had to do so stealthily and FIND their way to the dungeon holding cells (which I expedited). The group breaking in were infiltrating, in disguise and had to find their way to the jail cells without knowledge of this unknown facility!

The prisoners acquitted themselves well, too, and put up a great fight. By the time their teammates arrived to free them, the bad guy's second-in-command and his stooges were down for the count, and the player group reunited. The timing, of course, was perfect, because the skirmish in the dungeon had alerted *the main bad guy* and his troops to trouble. He was on his way to crush this rebellion of fools when the team was reunited. The rescuing player characters immediately engaged the main villain and his force in combat while those who had escaped and defeated the other bad guy and his stooges, grabbed the rest of their weapons to join the

battle. This time the dice rolls went the group's way and they triumphed.

I learned three things from that game. **First**, the willingness to be flexible will usually pay off big time. It led to an adventure I would not have thought of on my own, and it was awesome. **Second**, it all felt natural and fluid, as if the hand of Fate was directing the action, not me. I loved the surprises and I loved seeing the story unfold. Sure, as Game Master, I helped it along, but the players and the dice rolls did as much work as I did, and I felt as if I went where the story and the action carried me. I used logical progress and consequences to dictate the bad guys' reactions and the ultimate battle and the heroic outcome. **Third**, I realized defeat, as long as the player characters had a chance to redeem themselves and extract revenge, was very powerful. Victory snatched from the jaws of defeat is exhilarating for the players. Being able to rise up and triumph after defeat and all seems lost, is even sweeter than had they vanquished the enemy in the battle from the previous weekend.

This game became one of the most memorable out of hundreds of games that would follow. Heck, I'm writing about it 30 years later. The players had a blast and so did I. And it would never have happened if I didn't take a chance, been flexible, give the characters a chance to survive and role-play their way out of defeat. I improvised and followed my players' lead. And I was learning it all on the fly, just like you will. Man, did I loosen up my playing style after this, and it would lead to decades of wonderful improvisation and RPG fun.

Tip Seven – Be Fair. This should be a no-brainer, but I've seen it happen where G.M.s are either unfair or lead the players instead of giving them the freedom to go where they desire and thrive. Be fair and consistent with your group. No need to give your best friend the most powerful Rune sword while the other players need to get by with a rusty dagger and an ion pistol. Not being fair can lead to the old Game Master vs the player situation and never delivers a fun experience. Just think about it and treat your players the same way you would want to be treated if you were in their shoes.

An aside from Kevin: If you think it can be tough playing with friends, try playing with your wife or girlfriend like I have. Even with your "significant other" you need to stay impartial and fair in order for everyone to have a great gaming experience. I do it by focusing on what the "characters" are doing. See the characters, not your friends or spouse, and *respond to the characters'* words and deeds. That's what role-playing is all about, staying in character to create a story. That is as important for the G.M. as it is for players. You can love your wife and want to give her the world, and still have her imaginary RPG character pay the price for something foolish her character did. Stay focused on the characters' words and actions and it is easy to respond unbiasedly and deliver the appropriate response to that character. And there must always be appropriate consequences to their actions, based on the NPCs and circumstance that unfolds. The character(s) may be a hero(s) for slaying a tyrant or slaver, but the enemy has family and friends who may not see it that way, and they probably want revenge. Get the idea?

Tip Eight – Keep it Simple. This applies to everyone. Don't get bogged down in the rules. Let the rules guide and help you, not control you. If the target is more or less in range, you don't need to stop the action to figure out the exact distance in case it is a few

feet or even ten feet beyond range, go with the action, roll the dice to see if the attack hits or not, and keep on going.

Likewise, do not get lost in the minutia of the story or setting. Please do not role-play every step of a three hundred mile journey – it is boring – keep the action going and have fun. Jump ahead through the slow parts. (“So your travel is uneventful until at about the half-way point when you encounter ...”)

Newer Game Masters may feel that until they have mastered all the rules and have a few hundred hours of being a G.M. under their belt that they aren’t ready. That’s probably not true. Sure you should get better with practice, but many G.M.s are good from the start and only get better over time. Trust your gut, listen to your players and wing it the best you can.

We suggest keeping it simple. Keep those early adventures simple and linear, in a familiar setting. The more complicated the plot you create, the more work you have to do and the more overwhelmed you may feel. If it is too complicated and you feel overwhelmed, your players are likely to feel the same. Presenting something complicated to the players can be difficult and feel daunting or confusing. Even after years of gaming, we throw in a very simple adventure or two unrelated to the overall plot. This can help to recharge the Game Master’s batteries as well as the players’, and can lead to new ideas or result in a new twist to the adventure.

Likewise, if your story is not working out the way you had hoped and it is dragging, wrap it up and end it. Move on to something else that is more fun. That’s part of being flexible too. And do not beat yourself up for a bad game night; this applies to both players and G.M.s. There is always going to be other adventures where the game and your character shines.

Tip Nine – If you and the players are having fun, you must be doing something right. It’s all good. Don’t over think it and have fun. Seriously, if everyone, from G.M. to players, are having a blast, then whatever you are doing is just fine. Keep it up and keep the fun going. Who cares if you are not playing all the rules exactly the way they were intended, or that you could be doing some things different or better? This is a game and *fun* is what games are all about.

Player Character Tips

By Kevin Siembieda

One could argue that the players have it easier than a Game Master, because the focus of each player is on his own character and the events unfolding in the story. I’d have to say yes and no. Each character is like a role portrayed by an actor, only that actor is you and the character has a leading role. Player characters are the main protagonists in our stories, and since this is an ensemble cast, it means you need to work with the other heroes as a member of a team. The main characters are tasked with figuring out clues, rescuing people in danger, fighting evil, protecting the innocent, and navigating through all the elements of the adventure. These characters are, in effect, *the Avengers* or *Justice League of America* or *the crew of the Enterprise*.

Here are some quick, easy and simple player tips. You will notice advice similar as that given to the Game Master. That is because the fundamentals of role-playing are the same for all RPG characters. The player characters just get the deluxe treatment because they are the stars of the show.

1. Keep it simple and play what you like. Pick an O.C.C. and abilities/skills that you think you will enjoy playing. Then give the

character a bit of background to round the identity out and to give yourself some emotional anchors to play. Your character does not need a large, sweeping or complicated backstory. He or she can be a simple fighter or adventurer trying to survive in this crazy world. He or she can be someone who is trying to earn money to feed his family or protect her town. It could be someone who craves glory and wants to become a famous hero, warrior or mage, or maybe the character is searching for someone or something, or seeks respect, or desires power or wealth, or revenge against a particular type of villain or monster (“I hate dragons”), or the Coalition or Federation of Magic, and so on. Or maybe he’s just a farm boy tired of life on the farm and simply wants to see the world or fight the evil empire. Sound familiar? Keeping it simple works.

Ask a few simple questions, like:

What does the character love or enjoy? Music or magic, or a particular flower?

What does he hate? Could it be something as simple as bullies or slavers? Why? Because he or someone he loved was bullied or once enslaved.

What does he want? What are his goals? We covered some possibilities above.

How does he think he can get achieve his goals?

Where is he going? Even if he never gets there or doesn’t know (just drifting) the character may have a destination in mind.

What does he fear?

These tidbits and the character’s alignment (code of ethics and morality) should help you understand what drives your character and how he might react to any given situation. What might tempt him or lead him astray, what might press his buttons and what makes him take action or stand his ground.

Note: In this regard, many of the G.M. tips involving NPCs and knowing your character, his goals, desires, and fears, apply to player characters as well; heck, even more, because these are ongoing heroic figures.

2. Use the character’s alignment as your guide. This is the character’s moral compass. It’s how he was raised and it’s how he feels about good and evil, what’s right and wrong. Know your alignment and stick to it. Alignments help define who the character is and how he behaves.

3. Play to your strengths and be careful of your weaknesses. Attributes and skills indicate the character’s strengths and weaknesses, play to the strengths and compensate for weaknesses when you can. Teamwork can make up for weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

4. Play in character. You, the player, are almost always going to know what’s going on in the story and elsewhere in the imaginary RPG setting, that *the character* does NOT. Play in character. Your character does not know his hometown is being invaded and his family is being threatened, even though the player might. The character does not know what awaits behind the door until his character opens it, even though the player might.

Playing in character can be difficult, especially when adrenaline and emotions run hot, but it is fun and worthwhile. Just like in real life, the character may want to react in the heat of the moment or the player may want to maneuver his character to where the action is or where treasure has been found. However, if his character does not know anything about it, the player needs to have his character act accordingly.

5. Play like an actor or don’t act at all, it doesn’t matter. Do what feels most comfortable for you. Some players speak in a different voice or accent and take on the role of their character

in very much the same way as a theatrical actor does for movies or live theater. That's cool if you feel comfortable with it, but acting is not a requirement of role-playing. In my experience, most people do not feel comfortable "acting" as their character. They would rather tell the G.M. and their fellow players what their character is doing, often in third person. "Um, okay, Fred climbs into his Glitter Boy armor and suits up. As soon as he is sealed inside his power armor, he aims his Boom Gun at the most dangerous looking attacker and fires."

There is nothing wrong with either approach. In fact, depending on my comfort level and the group I'm playing with, I may speak in different voices or I may describe what one of my non-player characters is saying and doing. Or I might bounce from one style to the other, describing things until the character speaks or there is an important moment when I think the character's words and demeanor are important to convey.

6. Reality check. You are not your character. The role-playing character you create is an imaginary fictional construct that is not real. And though you created him or her, and you may draw on your own experiences to convey the character, it is NOT a reflection of you. In fact, while some people like playing themselves in a game, we tend to discourage anyone from doing that. I, personally, like some distance between me and the characters I play. I'm me all the time. When I game, I want to play someone else. A butt-kicking hero with powers and abilities way beyond my own.

Remembering that your character is not you is important when other player characters or an NPC (Non-Player Character) insults, cheats, or attacks *your character*. It is the fictional character that is being assailed, not you personally. Most people have no problem making this distinction.

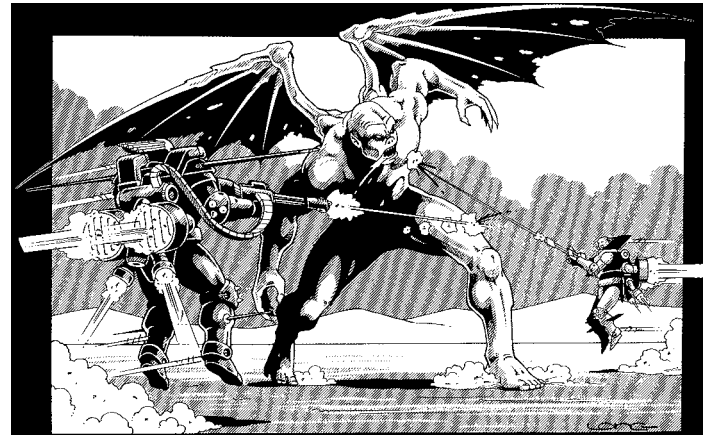
Role-playing is so fun and enveloping that you are likely to find yourself saying things like, "I cast a Lightning spell," "I shoot him in the head," "I leap out of the way," or "I ask the Grackle Tooth what he has seen," when you really mean *your character* does these things. That's okay. It happens all the time, especially when the action is boiling. Just remember you are *playing a character*. That also means not resenting a fellow *player* should his or her character do something that accidentally or even intentionally hurts or kills your character. Leave it on the imaginary playing field. None of this is real. The emotions you are feeling are like those you experience when watching a good movie that makes you cry or cheer for the hero. It's good storytelling and drama that captures your heart and imagination, but it sure is NOT real life.

Likewise, that means your character is likely to do things and behave in ways you never would in real life. I don't drink or use drugs, but I have played RPG characters who drink and were alcoholics or junkies. As G.M., I have played every monster and despicable villain and cutthroat you can imagine. But in real life, I always try to be upstanding, straightforward and do the right thing. I don't get into fights and would like to think I would never kill anyone for any reason, except maybe to save another person's life. I'd like to think I'd be brave and heroic. But many of the characters I often play as Game Master are bad to the bone. Your character had better watch out, because they'll gut you (meaning *your character*) like a fish.

I love it when the player characters hate the mere mention of one of my villain's names. It is a fun part of the game, but it's all make believe aimed at imaginary characters in this imaginary game world. Please, remember that. Don't transfer what happened in a game ("You're an idiot who got my character killed!") to the actual person playing. It was his character or circumstance or a

bad die roll that impacted your fictional character, not your real life *friend*. **Fun.** Remember fun? It's all about having fun creating stories of epic adventure like the *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, *the Avengers*, or whatever might be your idea of fantastic heroes and their exploits.

Speaking of which, not everyone is a dynamic and flamboyant hero. Some players might present their character as the plucky, comic relief or puzzle master. Every player will find his or her style of play and areas of strength within the gaming group. Some gamers will experiment with many different characters, others will create the same archetype every single time regardless of setting. Some crave action and combat; others prefer puzzles and unraveling mysteries, or working out strategies and battle plans; some jump to action while others have their characters avoid the gunfire and battles. Any of it and all of it is okay. Role-playing is personal. If you are having fun and not disrupting the game or everyone else's fun, you are doing fine.



7. Teamwork. Yes, you can play the lone wolf, strong silent type, or the shady guy with the questionable past. Yes, your character can wander off and do things away from the group, but ultimately, the best role-playing experiences for *everyone* involved are the ones played as a group. A team.

Teamwork, or at least working toward the same agenda and goals, is important for fast, fun, fluid play. If everyone is working against the other, or just for himself, the game usually disintegrates into chaos. I have had player characters who were thieves and assassins in the player group, but they all worked toward a common goal and watched each other's back. The thief might steal from his teammates and cheat at cards; the assassin might stay aloof or threaten anyone who pried too deep into his doings, but they always had their teammates' back, avenged wrongs leveled at their "friends" and helped the group achieve *its goals*, not just their own. The thief and assassin would both share information they gathered on their own by hanging out with other criminals and cutthroats, and performed similar acts of benevolence and teamwork. Over time, some of these self-styled rogues turned into true good guys due to the positive influence of their teammates. Others stayed irascible but loveable rogues, or tortured and conflicted figures you still cared about. In one gaming campaign, an NPC demon actually became a champion of light because he adopted the ethics and values of the heroes he associated with. Role-playing fun.

Play in a disruptive manner, jeopardize the group on a regular basis, and there may be serious consequences for your character. The group might leave the troublesome character alone to meet a deadly fate, or turn him over to the authorities. Truly disruptive players may be asked by the G.M. to get it together or leave the group.

One bad apple can spoil everything, so do not be the bad apple. Be a team player.

8. Have fun with your character. Create and play characters you think you will enjoy. Give them the personality, background and quirks that keep the character alive, interesting and fun for you to play. If you get bored with a character, retire it and roll-up a new, maybe a very different one. Character experimentation can be fun and might surprise you.

A Rifts® Adventure

The Rifts® Setting

The Rifts Earth setting takes place several hundred years in the future. A hundred years from now, a terrible apocalypse tears down the very foundations of human civilization. The world is devastated when a small, isolated nuclear exchanged ignites a cataclysmic chain of events that brings storms and natural disasters across the globe. This cataclysm unleashes magic energy in the form of ley lines – lines of magic energy – which begin to ripple across the landscape. Where two ley lines cross, a tear in space and time may occur. They are known as the “Rifts.” In the midst of the Great Cataclysm, scores of supernatural beings, demons, gods and monsters of myth and legend, and creatures from countless alien worlds arrive through *the Rifts* all across the planet. The humanoid are dubbed “D-Bees,” short for “dimensional beings.” They are creatures we might think of simply as aliens, like those from popular science fiction shows like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. Some are peaceful and just as confused about how they got to Rifts Earth as humanity. Others come to conquer and enslave.

After a *Two Hundred Year Dark Age*, the face of the Earth is radically transformed. With the arrival of the continent of **Atlantis** in the Atlantic Ocean, the water level around the world has risen, flooding most coastal cities, and most other major cities are destroyed or swept away by wave after wave of natural disasters. Humanity has huddled together in a small handful of strongholds and camps. Some of these communities are small, primitive hamlets while others have grown into high-tech nations such as the **Coalition States** who have found many of humanity’s lost secrets and technology. Others, like the **Federation of Magic**, have turned to the mystic energy of the ley lines and cast spells or use other types of magic. You see, the mystic arts have also been rediscovered by humanity and D-Bees, making Rifts Earth a place of great contrasts.

From location to location, you can encounter a primitive town with simple log cabins, while over the next hill can be a city encased in Mega-Damage concrete and steel, while in the opposite direction is a town that relies on magic, and elsewhere there are places where magic and technology can be found in equal harmony.

North America is no longer the United States of America. It has been divided by vast stretches of savage wilderness. In the heart of North America, the **Coalition States (CS)** is one of humanity’s largest nations. They are protected by mega-cities encased in concrete and steel. Their army is large and supported by giant robots and powered armored troops. The Coalition States could be humanity’s greatest salvation if not for their human supremacist attitude and extreme measures. They believe Earth belongs to humanity and that D-Bees are invaders to be exterminated.

Furthermore, the practice of magic within the Coalition States is a criminal offense punishable by death. For the CS, magic is seen as a power that corrupts men, turning them evil as they gain more power. While this is not necessarily true, the Coalition States does not understand magic and refuses to accept that magic, like any resource, can be used for good or evil. The CS is a mighty power that has embraced the *Death’s Head* as their motif, and use it to bully and intimidate.

The Coalition States is but one of the major players in North America. Other communities exist, like the **Federation of Magic** east of the CS in a place called the **Magic Zone**. The Federation is a loose-knit community of spell casting mages who have gathered in towns and villages under the control of the evil *Alistair Dunscon*. The practice of magic is not only allowed within the Federation, but any kind of magic from *Techno-Wizardry* and sorcery to the dreaded art of *Necromancy* and *Witchcraft* is allowed. The Federation is not the only magic society in North America, nor is the Coalition the only technological nation, but they are two of the largest nations. Despite the size of the Federation, it is more of a collection of powerful magic users and clans, each with their own power base and holdings. Lord Alistair Dunscon is by far the most powerful and has the largest holdings and influence within the Federation.

There are countless places on North America where one can have a grand adventure. Our little adventure is taking place within the **Magic Zone**. The Coalition is hundreds of miles away and of little concern to our characters. This deep in the Zone, the biggest concerns come from bandits, rogue dragons, and evil practitioners of magic. This is a place adventure can erupt anywhere.

The Adventure Begins

Once it has been determined who will be the Game Master, the rest of the players should select one of the pre-generated characters at the back of this adventure. Try to keep in mind the Game Master and player tips and let’s start the adventure.

The player characters’ travels have brought them to a small town in the Magic Zone known as **King’s Falls**. The town is a large farming community that is popular for its bars and taverns. There are two competing breweries which bring a lot of business to the small town.

The town has a mechanic who can fix most Mega-Damage vehicles and armor, although he cannot fix giant robots or tanks. He also has a generator that can recharge all styles of E-Clips at a cost of 2,000 credits per Clip.

The player characters are meeting in King’s Falls on their two year anniversary. Two years ago, each of them set out to become more than simple farmers or brewers. Thanks to *Sir Cross*, each player character was provided with enough credits to set out and make it on his own, and each vowed to return in two years to report on their success or return to their old life. Sir Cross was the benefactor who made all the contacts once the characters set out. He is a Cyber-Knight, a champion of the people, defender of King’s Falls and a fair and just man. While many people want him to be the mayor, or take charge of the local militia, he always declines positions of power. It is not in his character to want power or authority, and he likes to be able to wander the countryside to help the people of the region when they need him.

Sir Cross has arranged for a small celebration at the **Golden Brew Tavern** to welcome the characters back. Tankards of beer

are available as well as a variety of local food. It's nothing fancy or exotic, but hearty, delicious food nonetheless.

When the characters arrive, they are all greeted warmly by Sir Cross. Just before everyone can dig in and relax, however, a distraught woman is brought in by one of the local farmers. Jessup, the eldest of the family, asks for Sir Cross.

Game Master, read from the script below

or ad-lib your own version.

Farmer Jessup speaks first. "Begging your pardon, Sir Cross, but this here woman says her children have been taken by a monster and I thought you could help."

Sir Cross immediately takes the women to a table, offering her food and drink before sitting down beside her.

"My dear women, you're safe here and among friends. Tell us what has happened. I'm sure my young friends and I can help get your children back."

The woman takes a few sips of water and tries unsuccessfully to keep from crying. "It ... it swooped out of the sky. It was on fire and I thought it was going to raze all of us! Even our town militia could not stop it. The monster grabbed me and my children in its claws. I don't know why. Then it growled and snarled at me before it dropped me to the ground outside of this town, but it took my children..." she begins to cry harder. The farmer and the Cyber-Knight try to console her.

"Sir Cross," says Jessup, she told me several of the town's kids have been taken by this beast. You know it can't be good if it's a demon snaggin' kids!"

Jessup's statement only brings more tears to the distraught women.

"My lady, we will do whatever we can to bring your children back. I just need as much information as possible. What was the creature and where is your town?"

The woman manages to regain some of her composure, allowing her to answer. "Our town Mystic, Lady Cleo, is very wise, and she has been trying to use her powers to scare the beast away. I'm sure she knows what the creature is. Perhaps she can help you? I ... I know nothing of monsters or fighting. Please, sir. Please rescue my children."

The player characters can also ask the woman some questions if they wish. Sir Cross won't object as long as they ask delicately. Here is what the distraught mother, named **Mary Stocks**, knows the following info about her town:

Her town is about a four hour walk through the foothills nearby.

The town is called River Side.

The town has a population of 300 people.

It is a small farming community.

They have a water filtration plant, a pig farm and several small farms that grow vegetables and orchards that grow fruits; mostly apples and cherries.

It's most precious resource, the families and their children.

They trade goods with all the nearby towns.

There is no town militia. The townspeople can muster about ten men wearing piecemeal armor, equipped with a few Mega-Damage weapons. Most people have normal hunting rifles (S.D.C. weapons that can't hurt Mega-Damage creatures).

Lady Cleo is not the town leader, but someone who is becoming very important, especially with her powers of healing. Plus she knows some magic and psionics. Cleo, a Mystic, has unofficially

taken the role of town champion, protector and advisor ever since the Ley Line Wizard Calaphran, died of a heart attack a year ago.

The creature she describes is a large serpent with fire for scales. It has large teeth and breathes fire. It growled and made sounds, perhaps words, that she could not understand.

Mary Stocks has two children, a boy and a girl. The boy is age 8 and named Marcus, the girl is age 7 and named Marla, both taken by the beast. At least ten other children are missing that she knows of. All taken in the last week. Most of the children seem to just vanish, but this latest incident came as a shock and a surprise.

The children started to go missing a week ago. First, it was just the orphans from the orphanage, but two days ago, children from various families started to go missing as well.

Food stores also started to go missing. Mostly fruits and vegetables. It looks like some kind of wild beast broke in and stole most of them.

Lady Cleo has brought in some of her adventuring friends to the town and they are acting as the town militia. Her friends have Mega-Damage weapons and armor.

Note: By the way, Kevin's and my G.M. notes look very much like those above. We list the key points so we don't forget and improv the rest. Keep it simple and fun.

Answering Other Questions: The Game Master can only anticipate so much and inevitably, the players are likely to ask something you didn't plan for. This is the beauty of role-playing. You just have to do your best to ad-lib something. Put yourself in the distraught mother's place. What does she know? She is nothing more than a simple farmer and mother who only cares about seeing her children again. She is not likely to know much more, and it is okay to be unable (or unwilling) to answer all their questions. She may become hysterical at some point, too upset to answer anymore questions, or pass out from the trauma of it all.

Use the NPC Cyber-Knight, Sir Cross, to provide an easy out for you. He will not torment the woman with more questions, saying they will find out more when they get to the village of River Side. "We need to let this poor woman rest, now. She has gone through enough."

At this point, Sir Cross tells the player characters that their planned celebration will have to wait until this matter is dealt with. He would appreciate their help, and all of them should agree to do so out of deference for their mentor and sense of duty. Those of good alignment (Principled and Scrupulous) should feel compelled to help. Those who are more selfish (Unprincipled and Anarchist) may want a reward at which Sir Cross will make a point of saying that these people are poor and don't have much. On the other hand, if "the beast" is a dragon or a demon, it is likely to have a small treasure hoard. That should inspire the rest of the group to tag along and help. Others may simply want to unravel the mystery of River Side and this monster.

Rolling some Dice

This is where the Game Master might want to have the players roll percentile dice. This is another way to interact with the players. When information starts to come out, players can roll under their character's skills to see if they can obtain more information. Be careful not to reveal too much, just enough to give them a better picture. Some skills that would be applicable here include the following:

Lore: Faeries and Creatures of Magic: This skill could possibly reveal what type of monster took the children, based on the

description and other possible details. A successful roll (under the character's percentage) reveals that the beast is mostly likely a *Flame Wing Dragon*, provided Carly is describing it accurately. This skill is relevant because a dragon is a creature of magic. A second successful roll could enable the character to remember more details about this type of dragon, such as its ability to metamorphosis, fly, breathe fire, and cast magic. It is good to have info like this as it makes planning ahead easier especially if the player group knows what they are facing. A failed roll means that the character(s) is unsure what kind of creature she is talking about.

Lore: Demons and Monsters: A dragon is specifically a creature of magic, but to many it is also a monster. While this skill may not exactly pertain to what a dragon is and can do, it can be used to eliminate other possibilities. For example, the description does not fit certain monsters like Brodkil or a Rhino–Buffalo. So call it a process of elimination. The character with this skill who rolls successfully could deduce that it could be some kind of a dragon or Elemental, but not know more beyond this. That is where Lore: Faeries and Creatures of Magic, above, comes into play. Assuming one of the player characters has that skill.

Land Navigation: All characters who have this skill might want to give a roll. A successful roll means that the character(s) have a good idea where the village is and how to get there, as well as a good idea of what the terrain is like. For those that fail, are a bit lost and don't have a good sense of the land, they'll need to follow someone else, like farmer Jessup or Sir Cross.

First Encounter

Unless you, the Game Master, want to have a side adventure, fast forward to our heroes making their way to the town of *River Side*. This encounter happens a few hours after the characters and Sir Cross have left town.

Bandits are common in the area, so being on guard is always a good idea. As it so happens, there are some bandits that are keeping a watch on anyone who approaches River Side. They have set up a simple blind on a hill where they can watch anyone coming down the road or nearby fields. The bandits are cocky because their leader is wielding a suit of powered armor. So while the player characters led by a Cyber-Knight may seem imposing, the bandits are sure they can take just about anyone out, especially if they get the jump on them.

To be fair to the player group, the Game Master may want to give their characters a warning about this potential ambush. After all, you don't want to kill the heroes when the adventure has just begun. The point is to go forward with the story and have fun. So this is where the G.M. may want to let the players make a few skill or Perception rolls. The skills that come immediately to mind are *Detect Ambush*, *Detect Concealment*, *Camouflage* and *Tracking*.

Here is how the skills can be used. Have each player roll once under the appropriate skill. A successful roll yields various details and pieces of information that you, the Game Master, are going to provide. I then let the players make up their minds based on the available data. Do not just come out and say, yep, it is an ambush. By allowing the players to do their own analysis, and perhaps further, careful investigation, they come to their own conclusions. This allows the player group to become fully engrossed in their characters and to enjoy the experience even more.

Remember, skills are rolled using percentile dice, 2D10. One number is the tens position and the other is the ones. So a roll of 5 and a roll of 4 would be 54%. If it is equal to or under the char-

acter's percentage the roll is successful. Any roll above means the skill is unsuccessful; it failed, or had no result.

Here are the skills in action:

Detect Ambush: This is the best skill to use in this circumstance. A successful roll means the player character recognizes likely ambush sites and has a good idea that they are about to be attacked. Moreover, if the character keeps a careful eye on the location or moves in quietly for a closer look, he may see the blind used by the bandits, or see suspicious movement, hear a telltale sound or even see one or two of the villains; any of which gives away their position and reveals the ambush.

Since this is an adventure for presumably new players, the heroes are likely to be low level (first or second), so the Detect Ambush skill percentage is going to be low, so I would provide a bonus to the skill roll. The bonus represents how bad the ambush is and how easy it is to spot. Furthermore, we can assume the bandits are cocky and careless, so our heroes see light glinting off the armor and guns of the bandits. I would give the player group a 10% or 20% bonus. You don't need to tell the players about the bonus. Just let them roll the dice and you will know if they made the roll or failed, then describe the outcome.

On a failed roll the player characters are oblivious to the ambush, including the Cyber-Knight. As far as they are concerned, the way ahead is clear.

On a successful roll (with secret bonus), they see the ambush and can avoid it/go around it, or attack first.

You could also use a **Perception Roll** here to see if one or more of the characters, probably the two in the lead, and maybe the NPC, Sir Cross, notice anything suspicious. I'd give this novice group a 50/50 chance on the roll of a D20, so on a roll of 1-10 they don't notice anything, and on a roll of 11-20 they realize bandits are waiting in ambush. But how many? They can probably only see a few and may decide they can still take these ruffians and attack, rather than avoid them. It is the player characters' call.

Using other skills. While some skills are better and the obvious choice. As the Game Master, you want to give your players every opportunity to use their characters to the fullest. This means using other skills that may not be best suited to the situation, but are still applicable in some way. In this ambush scenario, the player characters who have the following other skills can give it a roll. You can also provide a bonus to the rolls for the same reason above, or a similar 10-20% penalty because the skills are not truly suited for the job; your call.

Detect Concealment: This skill, if successfully rolled would enable a player character to recognize a hunting blind or other deliberate type of camouflage for the purpose of concealment. By spotting the hunting blind, the character can may deduce that it could be a possible ambush site. Or just a hunting blind or something that somebody is trying to hide. While these two observations may not shout "ambush, watch out," they may be cause for further, careful investigation that might reveal the bandits and their intended skullduggery.

Camouflage: This skill is used to cover and hide/conceal vehicles, weapon caches, scout positions, etc., so a successful roll may reveal that several small trees in the area have been cut down and are being used to block or cover a particular position or area. This suggests somebody is trying to hide or cover up something (same as above) and invite further, careful investigation. While this skill does not pinpoint the exact position of whatever is being concealed, it does create suspicion and cause for concern. Proceed with caution with the player characters on guard.

Tracking: While normally used to follow a trail or track down a foe, it can be used to *identify tracks* and *signs of activity* in the area. And in this case, a successful Tracking roll reveals there are plenty of footprints and other signs indicating a small group of at least six people, maybe more, being in the area and leading toward the site of the ambush. Moreover, the successful roll may reveal vehicle tracks, tread marks or the heavy imprint of power armor! Additional signs that someone is in the area could be from a few cigarette butts, or piece of material or a bit of food or a wrapper from food, the smell of machine or gun oil, etc. All of it points to trouble and the likely ambush location! This is a great skill to use in this situation. No penalties either.

Perception Check: Most characters have a Perception Roll bonus. If they don't have a bonus, then it is a straight die roll. Perception is a skill that we all possess. It is how well we notice things that may be out of place and how we perceive our environment. If no one makes their skill check roll, you might offer one or more chances to make a *Perception Roll*, as noted earlier.

Perception is rolled using a D20. Add any Perception Roll bonus the character might have to the D20 roll and that is your result. Determining the target number is up to the Game Master. The Rifts Ultimate Edition has some guidelines on rolling Perception. As a default, go 50/50 with 1-10 a miss and a 11-20 a successful Perception Roll to notice something suspicious.

The Battle Begins

Our first encounter doesn't have to be big or epic. Right now we want to introduce new players to the rule system, particularly the combat system, so this is going to be a relatively simple encounter. The ambush is a chance for the player characters to use their fighting skills, weapons and physical attributes. Despite the results of the ambush, allow the player group the chance to have initiative. On a surprise attack, which gives the ambushers the upper hand, in game rules they have the initiative and attack first. If our characters spot the ambush they now they have the upper hand and can turn the table on the bandits. For our first battle we don't want to demoralize the first time players, so even if they failed in their skill rolls, as Game Master, you can still give them initiative. The bandits simply fail to react fast enough or make a noise or stumble out of their blind, essentially spoiling their ambush. Since both sides are going to be reacting at the same time, despite the clumsy ambush attempt, have the player characters and the bandits roll initiative.

Rifts® Combat Terms

The Melee Round: This is a measurement of time. Each melee is 15 seconds. Most skirmish battles only last 1-6 melee rounds.

Attacks: Each character has a different number of attacks. This is the number of actions that the character can take within that 15 second window. So if the character has four attacks, it means in that 15 second melee round, he can do four actions. These actions are further defined below.

Initiative: To determine who acts first in combat, you roll initiative.

Each player rolls a D20 for initiative for their character and adds any initiative bonuses. The highest roll acts first and then the second highest, and then third, and so on, until everyone has done their first action. Then you start over again, at the top, until everyone has used all of their actions in the melee round. **Note:** Carl plays that any ties between player characters and enemy NPCs

should be re-rolled between those that tied to determine who acts first. Kevin Siembieda allows ties, figuring more than one character could move at the same time, with initiative and target selection automatically going to the characters whose intention it was to attack. In this adventure scenario, that would be the bandits.

The round robin combat sequence: Kevin Siembieda finds it is best to use a round robin approach to combat. This is how Palladium combat is intended to work. Whoever has the highest initiative moves first. He picks his target (could be the opponent closest, or biggest, or most dangerous looking, hated, etc.) and attacks him; roll to strike. The character under attack can now, **a)** choose to stand his ground even if it means getting hit, **b)** parry the attack, if applicable, or **c)** dodge, moving out of the way to avoid damage. A defender can only parry or dodge, not both.

After he stood his ground and took damage, or parried and took no damage (if applicable), it is now the defender's turn to strike back. He is most likely going to attack his opponent, i.e. the guy who just attacked him! But in a game of modern combat with ranged weapons, he could choose to ignore his attacker and use his own strike attack on a different opponent. Most players attack the guy attacking them, and that is usually the smart move. You need to fight the most immediate threat to you, personally, and that's the guy shooting or stabbing at you. The combat sequence is repeated in that the character rolls to strike and his opponent chooses to stand and take (potential) damage (if the attack hits), parry or dodge.

This is where the **round robin approach** comes into play. Rather than having these two guys duke it out until all their respective attacks are gone, the Game Master turns to the character with the next highest initiative, and asks what he or she is doing. In a firefight, the answer is probably, "I fire my energy rifle at NPC opponent X." However, the player may have his character take other action, such as take cover, run to protect a civilian, activate a device, run to his robot or combat vehicle, etc. If an NPC has the initiative, it is the G.M. that announces what his NPC villain is doing or who he is attacking. Let's assume the bandit NPC picks a player character opponent and attacks. The bandit (played by the G.M.) rolls a D20 to strike. The defender chooses to stand and take damage, parry (if applicable) or dodge. The downside to dodging is you forfeit your next attack.

When these two are done, the G.M. turns to the next person in line for their combat move.

The round robin combat sequence works great, because **a)** everyone is engaged in combat, and **b)** when one character has defeated his foe and still has attacks left, he can direct his attacks at another enemy, probably one that a teammate is fighting or having trouble with. Or he may engage a new threat or take other strategic action (plant a bomb, grab the treasure, access an enemy computer, seize control of communications, etc.).

Two or more characters teaming up to battle one enemy is a common strategy in RPGs, especially if that one foe is especially powerful. This means player characters can use tag-team tactics, assist their teammates, and do other things in a very, real life combat simulation. When a buddy runs out of attacks that round, a teammate may be able to step in to battle his opponent and help him out. Of course, that may mean his own opponent has a chance to make good an escape or attack someone else, or pursue him and press the attack while he is distracted.

The next melee round starts when all the characters – players and NPCs – have used up all their attacks. Rolling initiative this next round is NOT necessary, because it is a continuation of the

same fight without pause. The new melee round starts just like the last one, with the character who has the highest initiative roll taking action first, followed by the next, and the next, each repeating the standard combat sequence of the attacker rolling to strike and the defender standing ground and taking damage, or parrying or dodging. Repeat until one side or the other is destroyed, surrenders or runs away.

Offensive Actions

I have found that new players often do not know what to do when they first start to role-play. Well, this is a classic gun battle that you see on TV. This battle assumes that everyone is using their energy rifles only because that is how the ambushers set up their surprise attack. They were intending to gun down anyone who came down the road. So our player characters need to react quickly when caught in the ambush, or they get caught out in the open and under fire. As a Game Master, you are at liberty to set up the terrain as you describe the scene. So there could be places like ravines or trees or boulders to provide some cover.

Here are the **core combat actions** and how they translate into game rules.

Movement: A character can move a number of yards/meters per melee equal to their Spd attribute times 5. So a character with a speed of 10 can move 50 yards/meters per melee round. If they have 5 attacks per melee, they can move 10 yards/meters (30 feet) per attack. Just crunch the numbers for each of your characters to figure out movement. Of course, depending on the type of combat and weapons used, the combatants may stand their ground and do very little movement.

Attack: There are two main types of attacks. **Range attacks** are typically used with modern weapons such as guns. **Melee attacks** involve becoming physical and either attacking with a punch or kick, or using a melee weapon such as a knife or sword. Each character has a set of bonuses that should be consulted when attacking.

For modern weapons you will want to use the appropriate bonuses such as W.P. Energy Pistol, which provides a +1 to strike at level one. This is firing off a quick shot in the general vicinity of the opponent. Some weapons can fire bursts and they are indicated under the weapon. A bonus for burst is one half the normal W.P. bonuses. So since our bonus is only +1 (for a first level character), there is no bonus for burst. The character gets a straight die roll. On the other hand, you can take a careful aimed shot. This is taking an extra few seconds to zero in on a specific individual and it gives you a +2 to strike in addition to the W.P. bonus, so an *aimed shot* on a Pistol will be +3 at level one. *The drawback* is that it takes two of the character's attacks, which could leave the character vulnerable for a few seconds.

Characters can also make *Called Shots*. Say you want to target an enemy's gun. This is a Called Shot and takes even more time to perform. Just like an aimed shot, you gain the +2 to strike, but for three attacks, you can target something very specific such as a gun, a leg, an arm and so on. Otherwise, attacks are assumed to hit center mass which is considered the main body. Deduct all damage from the main body unless a Called Shot is done.

There are additional rules in regards to combat with modern weapons. This is covered extensively in the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**.

Attacker Rolls to Strike: A D20 (twenty-sided die) is rolled to strike. A roll of a 1-4 indicates an automatic miss. Don't bother to

add bonuses. A roll of 5 or higher plus bonuses is a hit unless the defender Parries or Dodges.

A Roll of 8 or higher is needed to hit with modern weapons (guns like pistols, rifles and so on).

A Natural 20 is always a Critical Strike (double damage) and cannot be defended against unless another Natural 20 is rolled by the Defender, in which case the attack is avoided. Bonuses do not matter in the case of a Natural 20. A roll of a Natural 20 on defense/parry/dodge is always successful.

Casting a Spell or Using Psionics: Magic users and psychic characters have additional options such as using one of their spells or psionic attacks. Psionics are easy as they happen at the speed of thought. All Psionics take one melee attack to perform unless otherwise indicated. Spells, on the other hand, use a sliding scale depending on the level of the spell. All magic spells that fall between levels 1-5 take one melee attack to perform. Spells that fall between levels 6-10 take two melee attacks, and all other spells take three attacks to cast.

Casting a spell or using a psionic power is automatic and does not require a die roll. The defender, on the other hand is likely to get a saving throw of some kind. This is equal to a parry or a dodge as the character must *resist the effects* of the spell. To resist the effects of a spell, the defender must roll a 12 or higher on a D20, adding any bonuses they might have to save vs magic. A failed roll means the character is subject to the full effects of the spell.

Characters also get a saving throw vs psionics. Again, a D20 is used with the character adding any saving throw bonuses against psionics. The target numbers are a bit different and depend on if the character has psionics. For this adventure, the target number to save is indicated under each character, but here it is explained.

Characters with psychic abilities are better able to resist psionics attacks. *Master Psionics* only need a 10 or higher to save vs psionics. Major and Minor psychics need a 12 or higher to save, and those who have no psionics need a 15 or higher to save. As always, add save vs psionics bonuses when rolling a D20. If you meet or exceed the saving throw number the character is unaffected.

Non-Combat Actions: Drawing a weapon, changing E-Clips, throwing a grenade and diving for cover, all take one action. For something not covered, the Game Master is going to have to make a call. If it is something complicated and delicate, it could take two or more actions. Quick things typically take one action. Speaking short phrases like, "Look Out!" "Get Down!" "Let's talk." "I think I got him." "I'm not the one you are looking for." I typically give as a free action, but if the group starts discussing a complicated plan that can take several melees to hammer out, it is a different story.

Defensive Actions

While your characters are learning to fight "RPG style," it is good to have a host of defensive options as well. That is the beauty of Palladium's combat system. You don't have to always beat a static number during combat. Defenders get to roll dice for dodges and parries with the high roll winning and ties going to the defender. We will discuss a few defensive options below. Just remember to add your character's bonuses to the D20 roll and high roll wins. It's that easy. Defensive Actions include Parry, Dodge, or Entangle.

Parry: A parry is the ability to block a foe's attack. For example, two people face off with swords. The winner of the initia-

tive swings his sword and it looks like it is going to hit, but the defender raises his sword and blocks the incoming blow. A parry is also considered an automatic action and *does not cost a melee attack*. So you can parry any attack that can be seen. Keep in mind that laser blasts, bullets, rail gun rounds and most ranged attacks cannot be parried.

A *successful parry* means no damage and the attack was blocked. A *failed parry* means the attack was NOT blocked and the defender takes damage. Ties always go to the defender.

Dodge: A dodge is a defensive action that moves you completely out of the path of an attack. This maneuver *takes your next melee attack*, so you will not be able to attack on the next turn because you just moved. This can make for an interesting battle where one foe who has the initiative is continuing to press the attack while you are on the defensive. You can opt to *not dodge* and take the damage, but this is a gamble that may only give you the upper hand for just a single attack or two.

Auto-Dodge: This is the same as a regular dodge, except it does not cost the next melee action. Those with *Auto-dodge* are exceptionally fast and have incredible reaction time, such as a Juicer and Crazy. The Auto-Dodge can be used against all attacks leveled at that character and does not cost the next melee attack. It is an automatic and free action like the parry.

Disarm: This is an attack designed to either knock a weapon like a knife, sword or gun out of the attacker's hand or make him drop it. A successful disarm does no damage but makes the weapon fall to the ground. No damage is inflicted by this attack.

Entangle: This is trying to grab or entangle one's weapon or arm. This can be used as an offensive or defensive maneuver. On a defensive move, you add any entangle bonus to your D20 roll. If successful the attacker's weapon is entangled. Same holds true if used as an attack, but the defender can opt to parry.

Damage and the M.D.C. System

Damage: If the attack is not parried, dodged or entangled roll the appropriate dice and apply damage first to Mega-Damage body armor.

M.D.C. and S.D.C.: Stands for *Mega-Damage Capacity (M.D.C.)* and *Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.)*. This is how much damage an object can take before it is destroyed. Reducing an object to Zero M.D.C. means it is destroyed. One M.D.C. equals 100 S.D.C. Most weapons and armor in *Rifts®* are *Mega-Damage*, meaning they are lethal to just about everyone. Only creatures that are naturally M.D.C. have any chance of surviving a M.D. laser blast or explosion. M.D.C. is the level of protection that tank armor provides while S.D.C. and Hit Points would be our flesh and blood bodies and ordinary building materials. We can only take so much damage, which is why M.D.C. is so much stronger.

Characters clad in M.D.C. armor of any kind, might consider the M.D.C. of their armor as *survival points*. The lower the armor/survival points drop, the greater the danger of being killed. Taking defensive action, dodging and using cover is smart because it prolongs the characters' life. Finding cover, taking evasive action and using teamwork to take down an enemy happens in the real world all the time.

Your *Rifts®* characters all need to have M.D.C. body armor that provides some level of protection. The character's armor *absorbs all damage regardless of how much M.D.C. it has left* – NO additional damage carries over to the character. However, once the M.D.C. is depleted, the character is in a bad situation, because

another M.D. attack will kill him. In addition, the character is now vulnerable to S.D.C. attacks.

Remember Game Masters, it is not you against the players so try not to vaporize their characters on their first adventure. Yes, by the numbers, a character without armor who takes a Mega-Damage blast is dead. No Hit Point/S.D.C. character can survive more than a few points of Mega-Damage. Most are lucky if they can survive one or two M.D. This is where you can take some creative license or provide temporary protection via magic, a force field or diving for cover.

If a character is hit with a Mega-Damage blast and has no armor or is wearing S.D.C. armor, here is what I, *Carl Gleba*, do. Reduce the character's S.D.C. to zero, and bring down Hit Points to only 2D4 points. The character's clothes may be in tatters, he is in pain, and he has suffered a serious injury. It could be a burn, broken bones, severe bodily pain and bruising, or even a severed limb! I try to make the call based on what happened and the weapon used against him. For example, let's say the character was injured by a M.D. explosion, the character gets tossed like a rag doll. His entire body hurts and is covered in contusions, plus he loses 1D4+1 attacks for the next melee round, and Spd is reduced by half for the next 1D4 hours; all in addition to having no S.D.C. left and being reduced to 2D4 Hit Points! Fractured ribs and other broke bones may be a possibility, but try to avoid dishing out broken bones so the character can still move and participate in the game. If the M.D. attack was a plasma blast, half of his clothing is burned away and his hair is singed. If struck by a particle beam blast, most of his clothing is completely vaporized and so is his body hair. A more narrow laser or ion beam blast creates a precision hole in whatever he was wearing but the wound feels and looks as if someone just hit the character with a burning hot iron with the force of a jackhammer, leaving a large red welt around a round burn mark the diameter of a cigar. Whatever the Mega-Damage weapon was, the impact and burning pain inflicting grievous trauma to the character's body, hence the immense amount of damage and penalties. Another M.D. blast will kill him, so he better be dodging and looking for cover and/or some type of M.D.C. protection. **Note:** I love this idea and hereby sanction it as an official rule for those of you who want to use it. This rule should probably apply only to player characters, not NPCs, but I leave that to the G.M. – *Kevin Siembieda*.

Using the option, above, saves the character's life, and the player doesn't need to make a new character on the spot. It also adds a little drama as now a teammate is down or in serious trouble and the other characters need to take actions to protect him or her. **Skill Note:** Do not forget medical skills. Characters with medical skills can try to save their injured comrades or at least stabilize them.

You will also notice that some of the NPCs, namely the dragons in this adventure, are M.D.C. creatures. This means their hides are as tough as tank armor and they can easily survive Mega-Damage. These creatures do not have Hit Points, just M.D.C. Once the M.D.C. is depleted, and if the remaining damage is more than the characters' P.E. attribute number, the creature is slain. If it is brought to zero M.D.C. or just a few points below zero, but not more than their P.E. attribute number, then the dragon is in a coma. Complete rules on combat, S.D.C., M.D.C., Hit Points, and surviving a coma and death can be found in the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**.

Other Combat Options

The Palladium rules system offers a number of other combat options like *Pull Punch*, *Roll with Impact* and *Simultaneous Attack*. They are all discussed in the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**. Don't worry, even with the simplified rule set presented below, you should still have fun and get hours of enjoyment.

Combat Recap

So now that the various combat options have been discussed remember how combat happens.

1. Roll Initiative: Everyone rolls initiative. The only exception is if it is a surprise attack. The attackers in any successful ambush or surprise attack always have the initiative.

2. Establish your order of combat based on the initiative rolls: Everyone gets to use their first action, round robin style, then their second, and so on, in initiative order, round robin style. Keep in mind that defenders can parry or dodge regardless of where they are in the initiative order. If dodging, however, they forfeit their next attack.

3. Combat continues until everyone has used their attacks: Some characters have more attacks than others. Defenders can still parry these attacks after they, themselves run out of attacks without sacrificing any actions. However, each dodge uses up an upcoming attack. Constantly dodging depletes the character's ability to strike back, but at least he is alive and moving.

4. Combat ends when the enemy is defeated, surrenders or has run away.

The Bandits

Here are the **Quick Stats for the motley bandits**. Quick stats are stats stripped down to the most basic and important information.

How many bandits: As noted earlier, one bandit per player character plus the Bandit Corporal, below.

Alignment: All are either Anarchist or Miscreant.

Experience Level: First level. These are all level one bandits and they are still green as can be. They are cocky and bold because they have M.D.C. armor and M.D. weapons, and their second in command has power armor. Each bandit has four attacks per melee, and is +1 to strike with their laser pistols.

Bonuses: +1 to strike, +3 on an aimed shot, but takes two melee actions.

Armor: Roll 1D4x10+5 for each Bandit, as their armor is old, beat-up Huntsman armor. That's 15 to 45 M.D.C. per bad guy's armor. Full M.D.C. is 45, so if they have less M.D.C., this represents how old or used the armor is. The armor also has some penalties and is -10% to prowl and other physical skills.

Hit Points: 1D6+10 for each bandit.

S.D.C.: Roll 3D6+6 for each bandit.

Skills of Note: Prowl 25%, W.P. Energy Pistol.

Bandit Equipment: The bandits are each equipped with an *NG-33 Northern Gun Laser Pistol*. The gun does 1D6 M.D. per shot, has a range of 800 feet (244 m) and has a payload of 20 shots before the clip needs to be changed. Each bandit has a total of two clips, plus each bandit also has a Vibro-Blade that does 1D6 M.D.C.; this is a large hunting knife used for melee combat. Other gear is basic stuff like a canteen, backpack, extra set of clothing and some personal items. They don't have more than 6D6x10 credits between them, and that includes the Corporal.



Bandit Corporal, Quick Stats

The Bandit's apparent leader (really 2nd in Command)

The Bandit Corporal is a *Robot Pilot O.C.C.* with the Power Armor M.O.S. He is equipped with a Flying Titan Power Armor. As this is a suit of flying power armor, the Bandit Corporal has the advantage of flight and range which he will use. This can make him a difficult and dangerous foe to battle.

Corporal Roberts, Bandit Stats:

Alignment: Miscreant (selfish evil).

Armor: The Flying Titan has seen action and taken some damage in the past. As a result, it has 129 M.D.C. (instead of the usual 180 M.D.C.), the head has 50 M.D.C. (normally 70), and the wings have 32 M.D.C. each. The powered armor cannot fly if one of the wings is destroyed. (Reduce the M.D.C. of the wing to zero, and it is destroyed, but requires a Called Shot to strike.)

The Flying Titan has a small selection of weapons available to the Bandit Corporal. First, is a pair of Wing Lasers, each blast does 2D6 M.D. with a range of 4,000 feet (1219 m). The Titan also has 12 mini-missiles (6 on each wing). The Corporal uses these sparingly only because they are his last 12 mini-missiles and they cost big bucks to replace. So while the armor can fire off 1, 2, 3, or 4 missiles (firing a volley of missiles only counts as one melee attack) at a time, he usually fires only one or two at a time to try and conserve ammo.

Hit Points: 20

S.D.C.: 25

Level of Experience: Second level. The Corporal is fairly inexperienced. The only reason he is the second in command is because he brought his own suit of power armor to the bandit

group. He also has more respect among the bandits than your typical brigand.

Bonuses of Note: Using his power armor, the Robot Pilot has five attacks and is +3 to strike with the Titan's Lasers and Mini-missiles, +2 to strike in hand to hand combat, +3 to parry, +2 to dodge on the ground and +5 in the air. He has no bonuses from his Laser Rifle.

Skills of Note: Pilot Robots and Power Armor 76%, Robot Combat Elite: Flying Titan, Sensory Equipment 45%, Weapon Systems 50% and W.P. Energy Rifle.

Equipment of Note: *L-20 Pulse Laser Rifle*; it fires single shots that do 2D6 M.D. each or a burst of three shots that inflicts 6D6 M.D. The rifle uses an E-Clip that has 40 shots (13 bursts) and he has three E-Clips total.

Should it be necessary, the Bandit Corporal has a *Vibro-Sword* that does 2D6 M.D. He only uses this as a last resort in case someone gets too close. He will only stick around if winning. If he loses more than half his M.D.C. on his Flying Titan armor he is likely to retreat, leaving his men to fend for themselves, as he heads off to report to the Bandit/Merc leader, Slasher, who is away from this battle scene.

The Bandit Strategy

The bandits are an advanced scouting party for **Slasher's Mercenaries**. They are supposed to keep tabs on anyone coming into town. The scouts are supposed to try to chase off outsiders, and if they cannot do so, or if anyone looks really powerful (perhaps like our group of adventurers) then they are to stay hidden and two of them report back as quickly as possible. Well, our bandits have other more lofty goals, like lining their pockets with credits and better gear. This makes them greedy and foolish, plus they get bored really quick and that makes them sloppy. So they are playing cards or checkers, drinking and eating their rations, sleeping or paying little attention to those who may be coming their way. That is why their ambush on the player characters is likely to fail. The bandits are slow to notice them and react. Once they realize that the player characters are coming toward them, the cretins attack and initiative is rolled. The bandits are clearly in an attack posture as the Bandit Corporal leaps to the air and demands the player characters surrender. He warns them that he and his "dozen men" (yes, he exaggerates his numbers), will strike them down before they can mount a proper defense, so surrender now, and live. The remaining bandits use what little cover they have and draw their laser pistols. Once they see the player characters, they are likely to shoot first, not bothering to wait for the characters to surrender.

Game Master Notes on the Bandits

Okay, Game Master. You have all the stats on the bandits above, but you may notice that there *are not* a specific number of bandits given. That is because I don't have any idea on how many players you may have. Since you don't want to overwhelm your players on their first battle, I would suggest an even match-up. If there are four characters and one NPC hero, then have five bandits plus the Corporal attack. Use your best judgment and if you have to, cut the number of bandits down to even less than that, especially if this is a first-time player group. If they whip through them too quickly, you can have a few more appear from the underbrush to join the attack.

Here is one last rule to keep in mind as it will save your player characters: During the battle some of the bandits, or even the player characters, take damage and see the M.D.C. of their ar-

mor reduced. Some may have their armor reduced to zero M.D.C. When this happens, the armor is completely destroyed and beyond repair. The last bits of armor soak up the remaining amount of damage. So even if the armor has 4 M.D.C. left and it takes 11 M.D., the armor is destroyed and the character is left without armor, but he is not killed. The next shot, however, could be the killing blow.

Bandits who are quickly seeing what little armor they had being whittled away, are likely to either try to run away if they can, or surrender, throwing their weapons to the ground. Few people fight to the death and these bandits sure won't.

Capturing the Bandits

Any bandit who is cornered and fearful for his life will surrender and now the characters have one or more prisoners. This is another good opportunity for role-playing. Interrogating the prisoners has always been popular in most games because you never know what useful nuggets of information a prisoner might reveal. In this case, any of the green bandits, including the Corporal, are quick to spill their guts. All have some information that the player group will find useful. It is really up to the Game Master to parcel out bits of information. Here is what most of the bandits know and likely to share:

- They are all part of **Slasher's Mercenaries**.
- Slasher is their leader. He is a tough Juicer.
- They have no sorcerers in their group, only fighters.
- Only a few of their members are seasoned warriors, like Slasher.
- The bandits nor Slasher's Mercs have not kidnaped anyone.
- They were just trying to scare the characters into turning over some credits and other valuables.
- They are to report to Slasher about anyone heading into town that might have power armor, magic, or could be very powerful.
- Two of the bandits report to Slasher, in person, every day. They also check in on the radio in the Flying Titan power armor, twice a day.
- They do not go into town unless Slasher tells them to.
- They are waiting for further orders.
- They don't really know the Corporal, he is fairly new to the group. Slasher is their real leader.
- They have orders to shoot a Red dragon on site and inform Slasher, should that come to pass. They haven't seen any dragons

They know little else and none of them know who Lady Cleo is or what her plan may be. See below.

The Town of River Side

As the name suggests, the town is on the south side of a river running from northeast to southwest. There is a barge service for horses and small vehicles. The town also has the following amenities and shops.

Water recycling and distribution building. The river is polluted because it runs through the remains of a major pre-Rifts city. This pollutes the water with some radioactivity, plus there were a variety of chemical storage plants that have been leaking for years. The water recycling plant cleans the water through filtration and it is used by several towns in the area.

Brewery. This is where the beer and ale is made.

Grain and seed mill. This is an old pre-Rifts building that has been used over the years for a variety of things. Right now, it stores large quantities of grain and seed that are for sale or trade.

Pig Farm. This is the largest farm within town. All kinds of pork products are sold as well as fuel made from the pig waste.

Town Hall. The only new building in town and built within the last ten years. This is a large wooden building with two floors. This building serves as the office for the town mayor and his staff.

Operator Shop. Old man Cooper is the town's Operator. He can fix just about anything and has four assistants. If he's not in his shop he is at one of the farms fixing something. His rates are reasonable and he can repair Mega-Damage armor and recharge E-Clips.

River Side Pub. This is the best pub in town. They serve their own brand of beer, mead and moonshine. Drinks typically go for two or three credits. The pub has a dozen rooms for rent on the second floor. Renting a room runs 50 credits a night and includes breakfast.

Surrounding Orchards and Farms. Around the town are a dozen farms that grow everything from fruit to vegetables.

Upon Arriving in Town

There are very few people in sight and those who see the characters either run into their homes, closing the doors and shutters, or run to get Lady Cleo, the town's protector. This makes the place look like a ghost town. Most of the town's people do not trust strangers, even our well intended heroes. People will not be rude, but are clearly frightened. If pressed, they suggest that the group speak to Lady Cleo. There is an air of fear in the town and most people have been avoiding going outside.

Meeting Lady Cleo

Lady Cleo is very charming and speaks with an air of authority. Most of the townspeople trust her completely. She is very disturbed to learn that *Mary Stocks* was also victimized by this horrible beast which she readily confirms is a *Flame Wind Dragon*. Lady Cleo tells the player group that other children have gone missing as well, but alas, the town does not have the resources or manpower to face a powerful beast such as a dragon. She asks the player characters for their assistance in tracking down this monster. While she cannot offer much for a reward, she can offer repairs to their gear and the recharging of E-Clips, and they can keep and divide the dragon's entire treasure among themselves, if they are successful in slaying the dragon and bringing the children back safely. Naturally Sir Cross volunteers and asks the player group to join him.

To further encourage the group to track down the evil dragon, Lady Cleo, who is a Mystic (a psychic and a mage), offers the following: Using her "Mystic" powers she can tell them that the dragon has a *sizeable dragon hoard* and that the characters may claim it as their own as their reward for risking their lives. (More details on the dragon and treasure is are given below). Next, she says her psychic abilities tell her that some of the children are alive, but being mind controlled by the wicked dragon. As a result, they cannot be trusted and will probably lie for the dragon. Don't be fooled, she warns, the dragon is an evil beast that should be slain at first sight. Lady Cleo suggests the player group should do their best to sneak up on the dragon and attack him before he knows they are there. This dragon is very powerful and can teleport on top of the characters in an instant, so they should take no chances.

Finally, Lady Cleo provides the character with the location of the evil dragon that she has gleaned from her premonitions and dreams. The player characters should be able to get there in a few hours on foot or an hour with a vehicle. The terrain makes travel difficult for travel by vehicle. She also suggests that the group stays together and not try to face the dragon separately. This is something that Sir Cross absolutely agrees with.

Should the player group be tired from their trip, Lady Cleo can arrange for free lodgings and food for them. This is compliments of the town since the characters have so graciously agreed to help out.

If asked about bandits, Lady Cleo says she knows nothing about bandits. She does report that a small mercenary squad came through town a few days ago. They turned down her request to slay the dragon, drank and tore up the River Side Pub, before leaving. If they are in the area they have not been heard from in a couple of days.

Fire Fly, the Kidnaping Dragon

Getting to the lair of the evil dragon should not be too difficult. Again, the Game Master can have the players roll their skills such as Land Navigation and Detect Ambush. Since Lady Cleo provided the group with the dragon's location, finding it should not be much trouble.

From a good distance away (perhaps a mile or two), the player characters are able to spot a large dragon lying in a field, sunning itself. Not far from the dragon is a small tent village with six large tents. Near the tents are crates of food and water.

Further observation reveals a very strange site. There are children playing! Not only are they playing in and around the tents, several are actually playing on the back of the dragon. Some children can be seen climbing on the beast and sliding down its neck onto its back or down its sides. Some of the children seem to be tickling the dragon while another is right near its face talking with it. The dragon seems to be talking back and allowing the children to use it as a large jungle gym. All of the children seem to be in good health and well fed. Taking a count of the children (or using the Intelligence skill) reveals that all of the missing children are accounted for, along with several others – perhaps from other towns. Furthermore, the happy children do not seem to be in any kind of trance or obvious mind control. They seem like ordinary kids playing and having fun.

Options on Dealing with the Dragon

Attack? The Cyber-Knight, Sir Cross, will not agree to any attack that puts the children in harm's way. He insists no attack be made while the children are anywhere near the dragon. Instead, he will want to explore other options before settling on violence, and that includes talking to the dragon and the children. But first, he suggest they sneak around to see if there are any hidden dangers as they get closer, and what else might be inside those tents. If the players come up with a plan that keeps the children out of harm's way, Sir Cross may agree, but that seems possible only with stealth and more observation to find out what is going on. In short, the situation is not what anyone expected, and Sir Cross (and our player group?) wants to make sure he and the rest of the heroes have all the correct information before taking any action.

Should the player characters attack, Fire Fly takes a defensive posture to protect the children. He will put himself between the children and the player characters (yet another sign that the dragon

appears to mean them no harm). Furthermore, many of the children start to cry and do not want to leave the dragon's side. They shout to stop attacking, and plead for them not to hurt *their friend*.

Though Fire Fly fights, he does not take deadly action and it should become clear, quickly, that he does not want to hurt anyone. Instead, the dragon puts on a show of force and does his best to *scare away* intruders. This means he breathes fire – not directly at the characters, but over their heads, or in front of them, just enough so they can feel the heat, and yells threats such as, “Leave here now before I destroy you all!” Or, “I just ate the last group of adventurers that came through here, you don't want to be next!” The Game Master may wish to have the players roll Horror Factor for their characters as Fire Fly can appear quite ferocious and menacing, although the children do not seem frightened at all. Since the dragon bursts into flames, the Horror Factor is 14. Anyone who fails the save loses initiative (the last one to attack) and loses one melee attack for the first combat round, but here is the catch: Fire Fly does not attack first, but breathes fire and threatens the characters without hurting anyone. He only gets physical when he is attacked directly or one of the children is threatened. The player characters only see the dragon's true fury when someone hurts one of the children.

Parlay: Fire Fly is surprised at being tracked down, and may initially activate his flaming aura to scare the intruders. However, so long as they do not attack him or the children, the dragon is willing to talk. He scoots any nearby children away to a safe distance even though they do not want to leave his side, and asks them to go into their tents and be good. Fire Fly is prepared to hear what the player characters have to say. While he may be a little naive, he does know right from wrong, and that Cyber-Knights, and those who travel with them, generally do good deeds and tend to work for the greater good.

Naturally, Sir Cross will guide the characters into talking with Fire Fly and trying to resolve the situation without violence.

See *The Scoop*, below, for more information on what has been going on.

The Scoop

Ok, this is for the Game Master's eyes only to read. If you are one of the players, knowing this can spoil the adventure for you. So read at your own risk!

Fire Fly *is* the dragon responsible for kidnapping the children and taking the food stores. He had been living in the town's orphanage for months, disguised as one of the children. He is just a Dragon Hatchling who, for the first couple years of his life, lived among a group of peaceful, loving and kind humans who named him and helped to raise him with good morals. His adopted human family was killed when a disease ravaged their village. Missing contact with people, Fire Fly found the town of River Side and decided to spend some time there. He pretended to be one of the orphans in town, while he fancied himself as the town's secret and unofficial protector. Whenever he saw a threat, he tried to deal with it himself. Being a dragon, there is not much that scares him, but he is still a hatchling and some things are just beyond what he can cope with.

Things went wrong when he discovered that Lady Cleo was a more experienced dragon with some powerful cohorts. From what he could tell, they are slavers who take innocent people prisoner and sell them to the monstrous *Splugorth* in Atlantis. This time, however, disguised as a human, *Lady Cleo* is trying to worm her

way into taking over the town of River Side. When she found out the town had a secret dragon defender, Lady Cleo decided to eliminate the competition in a very clever and sinister manner.

In her own dragon form, she approached the town as if threatening to attack it. Fire Fly was quick to respond and leapt into the air in his dragon form. Lady Cleo feigned defeat and fled, but now she knew what Fire Fly looked like. With that information in mind, she lured Fire Fly away and returned to the town *disguised as him*, demanding tribute in the form of gold, weapons and any valuables. Even with his good intentions of defending the town, he is only four years old and he does not know how to chase the imposter away. He would fight her, but he knows she is much more experienced, powerful and dangerous. Furthermore, Fire Fly knows the people now fear him, thanks to the imposter, and doesn't know how to explain what is going on. Meanwhile, Lady Cleo has ingratiated herself as the town's advisor, claiming she should be able to negotiate with the evil dragon and make him go away. Nobody realizes Lady Cleo and the evil dragon are one in the same. Only Fire Fly and some of the children under his care know the truth. So he mostly stays away trying to watch over the town from a distance and caring for the children he freed from the Slavers. He dares not let them go back home, because Lady Cleo is likely to sell them back into slavery ... or worse.

Back at town, disguised as a human Mystic, Lady Cleo has laid down a foundation of lies and fear about how the “evil dragon” was there to eat their children and destroy the town. But not to be afraid, she would protect them. Provided they made her the leader of the town and showed her the trust she had earned. With her powers of persuasion and charm, she has gotten the townspeople to agree, and now she's in charge. Of course, she blames the disappearance of children and anyone who goes missing on the “evil dragon,” even though she is the one who has been snatching children and selling them to slavers.

The truth is, it has been Fire Fly rescuing the children from a terrible fate, sometimes sneaking into the slavers' camp to whisk the children to safety without a fight, other times fighting and slaying the slavers, before being able to free all of their captives. Before Lady Cleo could do any more harm, Fire Fly started taking children from the outskirts of town to keep them safe. This only caused the townspeople to panic all the more, and Lady Cleo has used that fear to keep them under her thumb.

She had planned to bring in her mercenary force to capture them all, loot their homes, and sell the townspeople to slavers. Then, she discovered *silver!* The precious metal is nearly as valuable as gold in North America due to the war against the vampires in the south and the fact that many demons are vulnerable to the metal. As a result, Lady Cleo plans to have her mercs force the townspeople to do the mining, as her slaves.

The discovery of silver and Cleo's sinister plans are all a well-kept secret, and Fire Fly knows nothing of them. In the meantime, Fire Fly continues to rescue children and orphans (the other kids saved from the slavers) and protect the town from a distance as best as he can.

At first, Fire Fly was a nuisance, but now he is becoming a serious problem. He has eluded her merc assassins, and regularly raids and destroys her hired mercenary company's vehicles, gear and supplies. Things have gotten to the point where he has scared off half of the mercs and is a constant pain in her side. Now, one of the townspeople has gone off and brought a Cyber-Knight and his friends to investigate. Cunning in the extreme, Cleo hopes to

use these “heroes” to her advantage, and trick them into killing the heroic Fire Fly, and eliminate her rival once and for all.

Lady Cleo has only recently learned of where Fire Fly was hiding with the children, and hopes the arrival of the heroes spells his doom. When Fire Fly is dead and the heroes go on their way, Cleo plans to call in her mercenary force to help her subdue the town and force them to mine the silver. The children and people who refuse to cooperate will be sold to nearby Splugorth Slavers. Naturally, before all the mercs could get in place to execute this plan, the player characters arrived! **Note:** Only Lady Cleo, and two of the children who showed her the silver ore they found, know about the existence of the silver vein. She’ll clue the mercs in later.

That’s the situation. With a little diplomacy, communication and luck, the heroes will figure this all out and fight the real villain in this story. If nothing else, talking to Fire Fly and the children should reveal that he is a good, kind dragon and the friend and protector of the children. But in the course of befriending and talking to the kids, the mention of the glittering stone and how Lady Cleo told them not to tell anyone about it, not even their Mommy or Daddy, should come out in good role-playing.

As for Fire Fly, he has been doing his best to pester her and disrupt Lady Cleo’s plans, whatever they are, but his first concern is for the children who he sees as his friends and playmates. After all, Fire Fly is very much a child himself. As he rescued and gathered more and more children, he needed to get them food, warm blankets, tents and other supplies, which is why he has been stealing such supplies from the town, neighboring communities and adventurers. The two dozen or so children he has rescued are safe and sound, and enjoy the large, fiery dragon who they consider to be their best friend and protector. Just like a kid, Fire Fly plays with them, takes them for rides, tells them stories and lets them play all over him. He has promised to return the children who have parents to their homes, but not until he can figure out how to get rid of “the Bad Lady” – Lady Cleo. The children know she is bad, and stay willingly with Fire Fly, because they are afraid if they go home and accuse her of wrongdoing, she will hurt their parents and siblings. Neither Fire Fly nor the children know that Lady Cleo is a dragon herself, but they do know she is not what she seems, that she is the wicked one, and that she is more powerful than she seems.

Fire Fly still acts and thinks like a young child himself. He has not yet developed the sense to simply ask for help, himself. He thinks it is up to him to save everyone, and if that means kidnapping the kids and bringing them back to a safe place, then that’s what he will do. In the meantime, Lady Cleo is going to use his actions to her advantage to keep the townspeople scared and under her control until she can hire more mercs, enslave the people, take over the town and hold control over the secret silver mine.

What happens next depends on the player characters. Once Fire Fly learns that the characters are noble adventurers, he will tell them everything that he knows. He feels responsible for the children, and will only bring them back to town once Lady Cleo leaves and her mercs are sent packing. He will stay and watch the children if the characters will agree to help. All the characters need to do is convince Lady Cleo and her cohorts to leave. The heroes have the upper hand and could return to town and openly confront Lady Cleo, launch a surprise attack, or sneak in and try to kidnap her and deal with her away from town! Or they could be even sneakier. There are all kinds of tricks and traps they could lay for Lady Cleo, and they have Fire Fly (and the kids) as an ally.

Returning to Town

If the group is careful and sneaky, they may get the jump on Lady Cleo. Even then, she is a cunning and wicked dragon, and she will not go down without a fight.

If the heroes are careless, and Lady Cleo learns the group has joined up with Fire Fly and they are coming for her, she and her mercenaries will be waiting for them, armed and ready for a fight.

In this scenario, getting back to town is easy and should be without incident. Just outside of town, the player characters notice several columns of dense black smoke. These signs suggest someone is in trouble. Sure enough, the player group finds several buildings on fire. *Old Man Cooper* and some of his workers are trying to put out the blaze in his Operator’s shop and garage on the outskirts of town. The buildings were set ablaze by some mercenaries he caught trying to steal supplies. Cooper is hurt and barely able to stay on his feet. There are several things that can be done here using skills that the characters possess.

First Aid or Paramedic Skills: Use of these skills can help revive Old Man Cooper. He is suffering from laser burns and smoke inhalation. Simply by pulling him out of the building and getting him fresh air will help him start to recover. If the player characters fail in their medical rolls, magic can be used to heal him. Failing that, Old Man Cooper has an IRMSS (Internal Robot Medical Surgeon System), which when applied (no roll needed), can restore 2D6 Hit Points and help him breathe better.

His concern is saving his home, garage and business. The fire in these building can be brought under control quickly with the help of the player group.

Firefighting: Any characters with this skill can use it to put out the fires. This will take a little while – at least an hour – but our heroes arrive in time to quell the flames before they get too out of hand. Also, it reveals some additional equipment that the characters can use against the bad guys.

After the fire is put out, Old Man Cooper tells the player characters about “the bandits,” but he insists Lady Cleo was there too, and that she transformed into a large, cat-like dragon! She did this. She set the fire as soon as the bandits rolled off with the supplies they came for. Then, something hit him on the head (like the rifle butt from a merc he did not see), and he was left for dead. His workers arrived in time to pull him to safety and begin fighting the fire. Now that the fire is out and the workers have a moment to think, they report having heard some shouting and gunfire in town before the player group arrived. They fear the mercenaries may have moved on to raid the town. The workers know nothing about a cat-like dragon or Lady Cleo being responsible for the fire. Old Man Cooper would like to think he is mistaken, but he is sure Lady Cleo is involved in all of this.

Additional Equipment for the Battle

Through the course of helping Old Man Cooper or put out the fire, the characters come across a large barn behind the Operator’s repair shop. Inside he has a few vehicles and some equipment that the heroes may use with his permission against the mercs and Lady Cleo. Old Man Cooper encourages the characters to borrow whatever they need so long as they can help the townspeople. He initially considers the equipment on loan, but if the player characters rescue the town, he may consider it a reward for their efforts in saving the town and its residents.

- 1 Mountaineer ATV.
- 1 Big Boss ATV.

- 3 Highway-man Motorcycles.
- 1 case of mini-missiles. It contains a mix of 6 Armor Piercing and 6 Plasma mini-missiles. Damage is 1D4x10 M.D. and 1D6x10 M.D. respectively.
- 2 NG-202 Rail Guns, each with two 1,200 round belts (that's 30 bursts per belt). Damage is 1D4 M.D. for a single round or 1D4x10 for a 40 round burst. Range is 4,000 feet (1,219 m).
- Additional suits of armor. There are enough suits of armor that the characters can effectively replace any damaged parts. This will bring their armor up to full M.D.C. if previously damaged.
- A dozen charged E-Clips. This should top off any spent ammo.

Note to the Game Master: You should leave it up to the players to figure out how they divvy up the equipment to their characters. The vehicles are there so the player characters can quickly catch up to the mercs, and have the extra firepower and reloads they are likely to need in the battle ahead. Additionally, the rail guns can be mounted on top of the Mountaineer and Big Boss.

Catching up with the Mercs

Game Masters may want to have anyone with the Tracking skill make a roll. Finding the trail the mercs took will be easy. There are obvious tracks of at least two large, three-wheeled vehicles (Mountaineer ATVs) heading for town. Other tracks seem to indicate a Big Boss ATV and a few motorcycles. On a failed roll, the types of vehicles are unknown, but the path that the bandits/mercs took is still very obvious.

Defeating the Mercenaries

How do the characters defeat the remainder of the mercenary force and Lady Cleo? It certainly won't be easy, but at least the characters won't have to face both the mercs and the dragon together. Lady Cleo has gone ahead, flying in her dragon form, to make arrangements to sell the silver she plans on the townspeople mining. That just leaves the merc leader, his second in command, and the rest of his soldiers; one or two dozen first level Mercenary Fighters. **Note:** Lady Cleo will come back at some point (G.M. discretion), but if her mercenaries are slain, defeated or chased away, she is not likely to put up too much of a fight. However, she will test the mettle of the group. If they and Fire Fly, prove too dangerous, she is likely to abandon the town and the silver mine — for now. She could become a reoccurring villain.

The player characters should once again have the advantage on the bad guys, especially if they use stealth tactics, to pick the mercs off one by one as they round up the townspeople and set up a defensive perimeter.

As a Game Master, you never know what the players are going to try to do. Let them come up with a plan of their own. We encourage Game Masters to work with the players. Let them be the stars of the show. If the plan has any chance of working then go for it. Use Sir Cross as a sounding board to help guide them. "That sounds like an excellent plan," says the Cyber-Knight. "I don't know about that idea. It seems too risky to me."

You cannot always anticipate what people are going to do. Even after running Palladium games for decades, we still get surprised from time to time, and we love it! I always award extra experience points when the players think of something I didn't, especially if it works to help further the story. The key is being flexible and being able to think quickly on your feet. Or if you

need to take a few moments to think over what the players propose, do so. You and they will find it a far more rewarding game when it's the players calling the shots because it allows them that moment of glory when it was their plan that helped saved the day.

Here are four possible ways to do this (that I see), but there are others, and we suggest that the Game Master remain open to any plan the players come up with for their characters. If they are unsure, Sir Cross can suggest a strategy if the characters don't know what to do.

1. Ambush: Once the characters get in range the characters should be able to sneak around and get in close to pick them off a few at a time or to simultaneously attack several positions and catch the bad guys off guard. Or the group may be able to tell that the villains are gathering the townspeople up, pulling them out their beds and herding them like cattle to one particular location, and the heroes are able to set up an ambush/crossfire to either take down the bad guys or leverage them to surrender. However, taking their weapons and letting them go, might see them return for a grudge match. **Note:** The townspeople join the fight to save their town at the first opportunity.

2. Use Fire Fly as a Decoy: The dragon attacks, drawing the bad guy's attention and fire. While the mercs are busy fighting or chasing Fire Fly (they know Lady Cleo wants him dead), the heroes sneak in to a) rescue the townspeople held captive, and b) attack the bad guys from behind.

Another decoy approach could also involve our heroes playing dumb and coming back to town with Fire Fly on a flat truck (one of Old Man's Cooper's trucks), seeming dead. Maybe even covered in animal blood. When the mercs come out to inspect the dead dragon, everyone jumps them, including the very much alive Fire Fly.

3. Nighttime Surprise Attack: Our heroes wait, watch and quietly move into position. They wait to attack until half of the bad guys are asleep and the other half are drowsy and not alert. The player group automatically gets the initiative (no roll necessary) and have first strike. Good luck.

4. Blitzkrieg! Our heroes come in charging, guns blazing. This is all-out war! Meanwhile, it is Fire Fly who either sneaks in to rescue the captive townspeople, who join the fight for their town, or who charges in from the rear. Either way, the heroes have the element of surprise, maybe even terror — nobody expected the dragon to be fighting along side of the heroes (except, maybe, Lady Cleo). Again, our heroes have initiative, the bad guys need to roll a successful Horror Factor save of 16 or higher. A failed roll means each merc also loses one melee attack and G.M.s should roll for morale on a D20. 1-10 means half of the henchmen freak out and run for the hills!

Whether Lady Cleo is still in town or returns during or at the end of this initial battle is up to the G.M. Just make it dramatic.

Lady Cleo is evil and cruel, but she is a survivor and if her mercs are routed and the odds are against her, she may cut her losses, turn tail and leave. HOWEVER, not before she tests the mettle of her enemies in combat. When she is down to half her M.D.C., the evil dragon flees and is likely never to return. But the only way to be certain she never hurts anyone again is to slay her.

The Mercenaries

Game Masters, remember, most of the bad guys are new and inexperienced, first level characters. Those bandits encountered earlier are part of this mercenary group. Only their leader and the

next in command have any experience and real fighting prowess. Everyone else is a first level mercenary with a meager bit of M.D.C. armor and maybe one Mega-Damage weapon. This gives most people on Rifts Earth a major power trip because most people do not have such Mega-Damage weapons and armor. Game Masters can use the same stats for the mercs that were listed under the bandits encountered earlier. Those bandits were really part of Lady Cleo's mercenary band, which also means there are two for every one player character, plus the Corporal, unless they were run off or killed at the beginning of the adventure. If that is the case, there are only eight mercs and their leaders. There are two each in the two Mountaineer ATVs, two mercs in the Big Boss ATV and two mercs on Highwayman motorcycles. The squad leader has a Speedster Hovercycle with a laser and two mini-missile launchers.

Game Masters, feel free to adjust the number of bad guys, but keep in mind that their leader is going to be tough all by himself. So don't add too many mercenaries, just enough to make it a challenge.

The townsfolk are being kept in the brewery and are easy to set free once the merc guarding them is taken down. The people are to be a huge help, but some stay out of the way and those strong enough join the fight to save their town.

It is up to the Game Master and how well this adventure goes as to whether or not Lady Cleo returns and joins the battle. This could be awesome, or too much to handle. If the fight against the mercs goes fast and easy, we say bring her back for the big, climatic show down between her and the player characters, while Fire Fly protects the townspeople.

The Aftermath of the Adventure

The town's people will be eternally grateful. Everyone knew that a life of slavery and misery awaited them, if not for the heroes. Plus many are reunited with their children. The actual orphans are happily given homes with various families, and the player characters are allowed to keep the gear they got from Old Man Cooper. There is little in the way of a reward that can be offered. The town is able to scrape together 20,000 credits to give to the heroes if they want it. Sir Cross declines the generous offer, as these are poor people who need the money more than he. The player characters may follow his lead or take the money, but they should do so as a group, no one individual should get the 20,000 credits. Of course, they can visit any time and enjoy free food, room and board, so the group may have a base of operations as long as they are in the area and whenever they return.

As for the silver: Option One: There is none. Or at least not much. River Side's elders know about the old silver mine, and every once in a while, a few nuggets or a new, small vein is discovered, but the mine is pretty much played out. There is never much silver to be found. The greedy, Lady Cleo did not know this.

Option Two: The townspeople are going to be rich! Keeping the silver mine and the profits for themselves will be difficult, but they now have Fire Fly and the Cyber-Knight to be their protectors. With a little luck, River Side will grow and prosper. As for the player characters, the grateful townspeople offer *the group* a small percentage in the mine, enough to provide each character with 2D4x10,000 credits annually, for as long as the mine holds out. (That could be a couple of years or a couple of decades; G.M. discretion.) A very nice stipend for a day or two's work. It also

gives the characters a vested interest in keeping the town and mine safe, now and in the future.

Old Man Cooper also lets the characters keep the items they took from his shop as a reward, plus he'll fix up anything that was damaged as a final reward. The characters will be forever known as the Defenders of River Side and will even be able to call a dragon hatchling and a noble Cyber-Knight their friends. Should the characters ever need shelter or food in the future, they will always be welcomed and treated like heroes in River Side.

Non-Player Characters (NPCs)



Lady Cleo – Villain

Spectra, Cat's Eye Dragon Hatchling

Lady Cleo is an evil, opportunistic predator who only seeks to profit from others. Like a cat, she turns most of these ventures into a game, and plays until she grows tired of it. Once she becomes bored of it all and loses interest, she walks away, often leaving devastation in her wake.

She is a Cat's Eye Dragon who, like many dragons, believes she is smarter and strong than humans and D-Bees, which means she uses them as she desires. Mostly, she sees them as a means to an end and as playthings. This also means she often underestimates them. Cunning, but lazy, when one of schemes starts to crumble or she faces too much stiff competition, she gives up and moves on to find a new opportunity and people to torment. Cleo is not likely to fight to the death, fleeing (if she can) when her M.D.C. is reduced by half.

Real Name: Spectra.
Alignment: Miscreant evil.
Attributes: I.Q. 19, M.E. 15, M.A. 17, P.S. 23, P.P. 19, P.E. 19, P.B. 20, Spd 25 (85 flying).
Armor/M.D.C.: 497 M.D.C. This is natural armor for a dragon that Bio-Regenerates quickly, so she is a tough adversary.
Hit Points: Not applicable.
Weight: 6 tons.
Height: 30 feet (9.1 m) from the tip of her snout to the end of her tail.
Age: 120
P.P.E.: 90. **I.S.P.:** 79.
Level of Experience: Six.

Skills: Appraise Goods 55%, Astronomy & Navigation 55%, Gemology 40%, Language: Dragonese 98%, Language: American 55%, Literacy: Dragonese 98%, Lore: Magic 65%, Lore: Demons & Monsters 55%, Mathematics: Basic 60%.

Natural Abilities: Fly, nightvision 6,000 feet (1829 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will, resistant to Fire and Cold (M.D. does half damage), Bio-Regenerate 1D10 per melee round, Metamorphosis for 6 hours, Teleport 32% up to 5 miles (8 km) away.

Cat's Eye Gaze (special): She can charm up to 9 people. This power cannot be used during combat.

Fire Breath (special): 3D6 M.D. to a 6 foot (1.8 m) area. Range is 60 feet (18 m) and can be used up to three times per melee.

Other Attacks and Damage: Punch 2D6+2 M.D., Claw Swipe 4D6+2 M.D., Kick 3D6+2 M.D., Tail Slap 3D6+2 M.D., Wing Attack 2D6+2, Bite 2D6, and Crush 2D6 M.D.

Psionics: Clairvoyance (4), Mind Block (4), Object Read (6), See Aura (6), and Telepathy (4).

Magic Spell Knowledge: Armor of Ithan (10), Befuddle (6), Blinding Flash (1), Chameleon (6), Cleanse (6), Death Trance (1; self), Energy Bolt (5), Electric Arc (8), Extinguish Fire (4), Fear (Horror Factor: 16) (5), Fire Ball (10), Globe of Daylight (2), Ley Line Transmission (30), and Thunderclap (4).

Attacks per Melee: Four.

Bonuses: +4 to Perception Rolls, +4 on initiative, +5 to strike, +5 to parry and dodge, +5 to pull punch, +4 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs psionics, mind control and possession, and +1 on all other saving throws.

Weapons and Equipment: Lady Cleo has a fancy wardrobe. Hidden far away in her lair is a small treasure trove from her years of conquests. She has 120,000 credits in various black market weapons and armor and 30,000 universal credits. Whether the player group finds her lair is up to the G.M. Whether they keep it all or leave some for the townspeople is up to the player group.

Mercenary Villains

Slasher

– Juicer and Mercenary Leader

Slasher is a power-hungry warmonger. He loves the power of being a Juicer and the power of commanding others. As far as he is concerned, Lady Cleo is a means to more power and he has no problem following her orders, for now.



Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 12, M.A. 17, P.S. 29, P.P. 20, P.E. 28, P.B. 8, Spd 90.

Armor: 53 M.D.C. from heavy Juicer Assassin Plate Armor, non-environmental.

Hit Points: 78

S.D.C.: 432

Weight: 210 pounds (94.5 kg).

Height: 6 feet, 2 inches (1.85 m).

Age: 26

Level: 4th level Juicer.

Skills: Acrobatics (Sense of Balance 90%, Walk Tightrope 84%, Climb Rope 98%, Back Flip 90%), Boxing, Climbing 81/71%, Detect Ambush 50%, Detect Concealment 45%, Intelligence 49%, Language: Native Tongue 98%, Language: Dragonese 75%, Language: Spanish 75%, Land Navigation 53%, Physical Labor, Pilot: Automobile 68%, Pilot: Hovercycles, Pilot: Sky Cycles & Rocket Bikes 89%, Pilot: Motorcycles & Snowmobiles 82%, Prowl 60%, Radio: Basic 70%, Recognize Weapon Quality 50%, Running, Swimming 75%, Wilderness Survival 50%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Heavy M.D. Weapon, W.P. Sword, Hand to Hand: Expert, and Kick Boxing.

Attacks per Melee: Eight.

Bonuses of Note: +2 to Perception Rolls, +4 to initiative, +5 to strike, +8 to parry and dodge, +5 to auto-dodge, +6 to pull punch, +5 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +4 to disarm, +4 to save vs psionics, +6 to save vs mind control, +15 to save vs toxic gases, poisons and drugs, +7 to save vs magic, +46% to save vs coma/death, kick attack 1D8, Round House Kick 3D6 S.D.C., Leap Kick 3D8, Axe Kick 2D8 S.D.C. Knee Strike 1D8 S.D.C.

Weapons: Like all Juicers, Slasher prefers a *Juicer Assassin's JA-11 energy rifle* and 5 E-Clips (long); 30 shots per E-Clip with 30 shots reserve in a built-in back up canister. The JA-11 has multiple firing options. It has *two laser settings*, one that does 2D6 M.D. the other 4D6 M.D., both with a range of 4,000 feet

(1219 m) and is +1 to strike via its laser targeting. It can also fire an *ion beam* that does 3D6 with a range of 1,600 feet (488 m), or it can fire a 7.62mm round that inflicts 1D6x10 S.D.C. damage and has a range of 2,000 feet (610 m); single shot, requiring each round to be hand-loaded.

He also has a NG-57 Heavy-Duty Ion Blaster that does either 2D4 or 3D6 M.D. per blast (it has two settings), with a range of 500 feet (152 m) and 10 shots per clip with 6 clips total; and a Vibro-Blade that does 1D6 M.D. **Note:** Because Slasher is level 4, he is +2 to strike using all his energy weapons. This is in addition to any bonuses from the weapon as well as the +2 applied to aimed shots.

Equipment of Note: A Bio-comp and bio-data implants, a drug harness and drug supply, optic helmet, portable IRMS kit, camouflage and grey fatigues, boots with knife holster, gloves, backpack, utility belt, sunglasses, and compass.

Note: Slasher has 28,000 universal credits and several black market items with a total worth of 55,000 credits.

Sergeant “Sarge” McCalister

– Pigman/Heavy Weapons Expert

Sarge McCalister is a no-nonsense military man. He loves the smell of plasma in the morning. He is the type to fire first and ask questions later. He is not evil, but he is self-serving and always watches out for Number One, him.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 15, M.A. 20, P.S. 25, P.P. 12, P.E. 24, P.B. 11, Spd 21.

Armor: 60 M.D.C.; Bushman armor.

Hit Points: 40

S.D.C.: 50

Weight: 250 pounds of muscle.

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Age: 30

Level of Experience: 3rd level.

Attacks per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +2 to strike, +6 to parry and dodge, +3 to pull punch, +5 to roll with impact/fall, +2 to disarm, +8 S.D.C. damage, +4 to save vs magic/poison and +14% to save vs coma/death. When firing his E-Pistols the Sarge is +2 to strike and +1 with E-Rifles.

Skills: Language: Native Tongue 98%, Language: Spanish 70%, Climbing 60/50%, Computer Operation 60%, General Athletics, Mathematics: Basic 60%, Military Etiquette 55%, Radio Basic 65%, Running, Sign Language 40%, Recognize Weapon Quality 55%, Weapon Systems 60%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Rifles, W.P. Heavy Military Weapons, W.P. Heavy Energy Weapons, Hand to Hand: Expert, Camouflage 25%, Boxing, Wrestling, Prowl 25%.

Weapons: Sarge carries a Vibro-Knife 1D6 M.D., NG-57 Northern Gun Heavy-Duty Ion Blaster that does either 2D4 or 3D6 M.D. per blast (it has two settings). It has a range of 500 feet (152 m) and 10 shots per clip and has 5 clips total, C-12 Heavy Assault Laser Rifle that does 2D6 M.D. on a single shot or 6D6 M.D. on a burst of 3 shots or setting three which does 6D6 S.D.C. Range is 2,000 feet (610 m) and the C-12 has clip that holds 30 single shots or 10 bursts. Six S.D.C. shots equal one M.D. blast. Has six clips total and the C-12 is +1 on Aimed shots. Finally Sarge has a C-27 Heavy Plasma Cannon. It does

6D6 M.D. per shot, has a range of 1,600 feet (488 m) and a payload of 10 shots in its internal canister. The C-27 is +1 on an Aimed shot.

Equipment of Note: Military fatigues, a suit of CA-1 Dead Boy Body armor 80 M.D.C. -10% to prowl and other physical skills, three flares, two smoke grenades, survival knife, disposable cigarette lighter, air filter and gas mask, and walkie-talkie.

Money: Sarge has 4,000 credits and a few Black Market items worth 20,000 credits.

The Other Mercenaries

Remember those “bandits?” Well, they were really part of Lady Cleo’s shabby mercenary army.

The Corporal – Robot Pilot – 2nd level – See the First Encounter.

All are Level One Mercenary Fighter O.C.C.s: For stats, see the First Encounter for your “average bandit.”

Notable Equipment: See Bandits in the First Encounter with Bandits. Plus they have 2 Mountaineer ATVs, 2 Big Boss ATVs, two motorcycles and one hovercycle, in addition to those vehicles described or listed under a specific character.

The Good Guys

Fire Fly

The Flame Wind Dragon Hatchling, A Friendly NPC

Fire Fly is really a big kid at heart and still loves to run and play with the local children. He has a soft spot for children, especially orphans, and families (he never knew his mom or dad). Fire Fly can, at times, be a bit childish and a prankster, and he used to love to use his shape-changing ability to cause a little mischief here and there, but overall, he is a kind, gentle and caring dragon who genuinely feels concern for the people he knows and cares about.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 17, M.E. 21, M.A. 22, P.S. 19, P.P. 26, P.E. 21, P.B. 18, Spd 21 (100 flying).

Hit Points: Not applicable.

Armor/M.D.C.: 230

Weight: 6 tons.

Height: 30 feet (9.1 m) from the tip of his snout to the end of his tail.

Age: Four years old.

P.P.E.: 103

I.S.P.: 62

Level of Experience: Three.

Skills: Language: Dragonese 98%, Literacy: Dragonese 98%, Mathematics: Basic 60%, Lore: Fairies and Creatures of Magic 57%, Language: American 47%, Land Navigation 50%, Performance 43%, and Sing 48%.

Natural Abilities: Nightvision 100 feet (30.5 m), thermal vision (allowing him to see the heat within an object and gauge the object’s temperature 58%, 300 feet (91.5 m), turn invisible at will, impervious to fire (takes no damage from normal or M.D. fire and plasma), prehensile tail, and can bio-regenerate 1D10 M.D.C. per melee round. Fire Fly can metamorphosis (takes two attacks or half a melee) into any living creature except insects for up three hours per day.

Teleport (special): 29% up to five miles (8 km) away and can teleport once every other melee round. On a failed roll, nothing happens.

Flaming Scales (special): Fire Fly can cause his scales to burst into flames. He takes no damage from this, but does inflict an extra 2D6 M.D. damage from claw and tail attacks. He can maintain the flames for three minutes before needing a ten minute rest.

Fire Breath (special): 4D6 M.D. to a six foot (1.8 m) wide area. He can hit several opponents at once (2-6) simultaneously. Range is 100 feet (30.5 m). Instead of a Fire Breath he can fire small gouts of flames up to 300 feet (91.5 m) away and each does 2D6 M.D. The fire breath can be used as often as desired and both attacks take one melee action each.

Other Combat and Damage: Punch 1D6+2 M.D., Claw Swipe 1D6+10 M.D., Kick 2D6+2 M.D., Tail Slap 2D6+2 M.D., Wing Attack 1D6+2, Bite 2D4, and Crush 1D6 M.D.

Attacks per Melee: Four.

Bonuses: +2 on initiative, +8 to strike, +10 to parry and dodge, +5 to pull punch, +4 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs magic and illusions, and +1 on all other saving throws.

Psionics: Deaden Pain (4), Healing Touch (6), Increased Healing (10), Induce Sleep (4), Stop Bleeding (4), and Suppress Fear (8).

Spell Knowledge: Armor of Ithan (10), Blinding Flash (1), Cloud of Smoke (2), Befuddle (6), Chameleon (6), Extinguish Fire (4), and Invisibility: Simple (6).

Weapons and Equipment: Other than a small selection of kid's clothes, Fire Fly uses no other equipment or weapons and relies on his natural abilities. He does have a small treasure hoard of items he has collected over the years. He has a variety of items, including toys, and an E-Clip that have a total value of 7,000 credits. His prize possession is a blue sapphire gem worth 5,000 credits. His treasure is hidden in a cave that is difficult to find and would require rappelling.

Sir Michael Cross

Noble Cyber-Knight NPC Helper

Michael Cross is a noble knight through and through. He has a good heart and tends to be a bit paternal when it comes to younger people and he always has a word of encouragement or advice to offer.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 22, M.A. 20, P.S. 24, P.P. 18, P.E. 20, P.B. 14, Spd 24.

Armor: 80 M.D.C. Cyber-Armor, plus 95 M.D.C. from Crusader body armor worn over the Cyber-Armor (-15% to Climb, Prowl and Swim).

Hit Points: 58

S.D.C.: 80

Weight: 200 pounds (90 kg).

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Age: 39

P.P.E.: 26

I.S.P.: 61

Level of Experience: 6th level Cyber-Knight.

Skills: Anthropology 70%, Body Building, Climbing 75/65%, Fencing, Gymnastics, Horsemanship: Cyber-Knight 90/70%,

Land Navigation 68%, Literacy: American 85%, Language: American & Dragonese 98%, Language: Spanish 98%, Language: Euro 98%, Lore: Demons & Monsters 50%, Lore: Faeries & Creatures of Magic 50%, Paramedic 75%, Swimming 85%, and Tracking (People) 50%, W.P. Sword, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Boxing, Kick Boxing, Running, Athletics, Wrestling, W.P. Shield, W.P. Axe, and W.P. Heavy M.D. Weapons.

Attacks per Melee: Seven.

Bonuses: +4 to initiative, +4 to strike, +8 to parry and dodge, +5 to pull punch, +7 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +2 to disarm, +2 to entangle, +8 to S.D.C. damage, kick attack, and karate punch. +5 to save vs psionics and needs a 7 or higher to save on psionic attacks, +4 to save vs magic and poison, +3 to Perception Rolls.

Cybernetics: Cyber Armor: Shoulders (2) – 9 M.D.C. each, Back/Shoulder Blades (2) – 9 M.D.C. each, Forearms (2) – 11 M.D.C. each, Thighs/Upper Legs (2) – 16 M.D.C. each, Chest Plate (main body) – 56 M.D.C. Armor Rating 16.

Equipment of Note: A set of dress clothes, a set of dark clothes for covert operations, a gas mask and air filter, tinted goggles, hatchet for cutting wood, a survival knife (1D6 S.D.C. damage), 4 wooden stakes, a handheld silver cross, first-aid kit with extra bandages and antiseptics, suture thread, painkillers, tent, knapsack, backpack, saddlebags, two canteens, emergency rations for two weeks, and a Geiger counter.

Weapons: Sir Cross has a L-20 Pulse Rifle that does 2D6 M.D. per blast or 6D6 M.D. for a burst, and has 40 single shots or 13 burst per E-Clip; range is 1,600 feet (488 m). Cross has four E-Clips total. He also has a NG-57 Heavy-Duty Ion Blaster that does either 2D4 or 3D6 M.D. per blast (it has two settings), range is 500 feet (152 m) and it has 10 shots per E-Clip; 4 clips total for the pistol. Also has a Vibro-Sword 2D6 M.D. damage. He has a spare suit of Urban Warrior Armor with 50 M.D.C. (-5% to Climb, Prowl and Swim).

Money: Has 35,000 in Universal Credits and 8,000 worth of trade goods.

The Player Characters

Below is a selection of pre-generated characters that your players can just pluck out of the book and use. Please feel free to make photocopies and pass them around. Use all, use some or create your own. Game Master who already own the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** can allow their players to make their own characters if desired. Character creation is discussed in the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** starting on page 279. Game Masters should also feel free to include any additional characters below as NPCs to help round out your group. HOWEVER, since the point of the **Rifts® Primer** is to jump right in and start playing, a selection of “pre-made” characters is the easy way to go.

It should be noted for those already familiar with Rifts® that these characters were made rules light, that is they don't have every power, skill and ability of their RUE counterparts. This was done intentionally for ease of using this module as an intro game.

Here is a quick breakdown of the various character statistics. Each character has a name and next to the name is their Occupational Character Class. **The O.C.C.** is what the character is and does. For example, a Police Officer or Fire Fighter would be an O.C.C. in our modern world.

Alignment: This is the character's moral center. Good Characters are Principled and Scrupulous, Selfish characters are Unprincipled and Anarchist, and Evil characters are Aberrant, Miscreant, and Diabolic. A detail explanation on alignments can be found in the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**.

Armor/M.D.C.: In a Mega-Damage environment like Rifts Earth, character's need M.D.C. body armor, power armor, robot vehicle or some kind of magical or psychic protection to survive. Armor is usually listed under *Equipment*. Available magic or psionic protection such as Armor of Ithan or Telekinetic Force Field will be listed under the stat heading of Magic or Psionics. When all M.D.C. armor is gone, damage comes off the character's Hit Points and S.D.C., and few characters can handle more than one or two points of M.D.C. before being atomized by the M.D. blast.

Attacks per Melee: As described earlier, each combat round or "melee" is 15 seconds. The attacks per melee are the number of attacks or actions a character can take in that span of time.

Attributes: These values determine the mental and physical characteristics of the character. The higher the value the more adept the character is with that attribute. The attributes are; Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.), Mental Endurance (M.E.), Mental Affinity (M.A.), Physical Strength (P.S.), Physical Prowess (P.P.), Physical Endurance (P.E.), Physical Beauty (P.B.) and Speed (Spd.).

Armor: The M.D.C. armor/protection available to the character.

Bonuses: Each character will have different bonuses. The bonuses are from combat skills like Hand to Hand or from exceptional attributes. For your ease of play, all bonuses have been tabulated and included with each character. The bonus is added to a dice roll. Unless indicated otherwise, all bonuses are added to a D20 roll. So if there is a bonus of +3 and a character rolls a 10 on a D20, the +3 is added to the 10, making for an adjusted total of 13.

Equipment: This is a list of the items that the character has for their adventure.

Hit Points /S.D.C.: Hit Points and S.D.C. (Structural Damage Capacity) are how much damage a character can take before they die, after losing their M.D.C. armor. Damage is subtracted from Hit Points and S.D.C. when facing an S.D.C. opponent or weapon when outside of Mega-Damage armor. **S.D.C.** can be thought of as bruising, scratches and non-life threatening abrasions. They hurt, but are not significant enough to impair the character. Damage is first subtracted from S.D.C. (unless wearing body armor). **Hit Points** damage occurs after all the S.D.C. is gone; reduced to zero or less. The person is bruised and battered and now the damage they take damage that causes severe injury. Cuts are more severe, bruises may be internal injuries and bones may be broken, while stabbings and bullet wounds may have damaged organs and cause internal bleeding.

At zero Hit Points, a character becomes unconscious and will die unless he receives immediate medical attention. A character can survive a number of negative Hit Points equal to their P.E. attribute. So if they have a P.E. of 12 they can survive up to -12 in Hit Point damage. Any damage beyond this means the character dies from their injuries. Time to pull out that spare character or roll up a new one. The duration of the coma state without being

stabilized is also the character's P.E. attribute number in minutes. So a P.E. of 12 means he has 12 minutes in a coma during which time medical treatment, magic or psionic healing can be applied to save the character!

P.P.E.: Characters who wield magic often have a large amount of P.P.E. which stands for *Potential Psychic Energy*. When spells are cast they each have a P.P.E. cost which is subtracted from this base. P.P.E. is recovered through sleep or meditation at a rate of 5 for each hour of sleep or 10 points an hour for meditation.

I.S.P.: Stands for Inner strength Points. Psychics use I.S.P. to fuel their psychic powers. Whenever a psychic power is used, the I.S.P. cost is subtracted from their I.S.P. total. I.S.P. is recovered at a rate of 10 per hour of sleep or meditation and 5 per hour of activity.

Skills: In the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**, all characters start out with a set of O.C.C. skills. These skills help to define the character. As characters are created, they may select a variety of Related O.C.C. skills and Secondary skills. In the context of this adventure, each character has a selection of skills to best complete this adventure.

Spell Knowledge & Psionic Powers: This is a list of magic or psionic powers that a character might have. A list of magic spells and psionic powers is in a section following the characters.



Marcus Thorn

Ley Line Walker

Marcus is determined to see the world, fight evil and make a name for himself. He dreams of becoming a legendary Ley Line Walker respected by all. He tends to be a bit bold and brash as he is young and focused on learning magic, gathering knowledge about magic and creatures like dragons, and achieving his goals. Despite this, Marcus is a kind soul and a good guy who does what's right and always stands by his friends and teammates. While he won't admit it, using his powers to help others offers its own rewards that he has come to enjoy. If he's not careful, he might find himself being a true hero one day.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 18, M.A. 8, P.S. 12, P.P. 15, P.E. 22, P.B. 11, Spd 21.

Armor: 42 thanks to light armor worn under his robes. The armor imposes a penalty of -5% to Prowl, Climb and Swim. Marcus also uses the Armor of Ithan spell to create additional protection for himself and others as needed.

Hit Points: 28

S.D.C.: 31

Weight: 160 (72 kg).

Height: 5 feet, 9 inches (1.75 m).

Age: 19

P.P.E.: 152

Level of Experience: Third level.

Skills: Climbing 45/35%, Math: Basic 55%, Land Navigation 40%, Language: Native Tongue (American) 98%, Language: Dragonese 70%, Language: Spanish 70%, Wilderness Survival 45%, Pilot: Hover Craft (Ground) 55%, Lore: Demons & Monster 40%, Lore: D-Bee 35%, Lore: Magic 35%, Lore: Faeries & Creatures of Magic 35%, Lore: Psychics & Psionics 35%, Hand to Hand: Basic, Astronomy & Navigation 40%, Xenology 40%, History: Pre-Rifts 37/29%, History: Post Apocalypse 40/35%, First Aid 50%, W.P. Energy Pistol, Prowl 25%, Literacy: Native (American) 40%, and Literacy: Other (Dragonese) 30%.

Attacks per Melee: Four.

Bonuses: +1 to parry and dodge, +2 to pull punch, +3 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +1 to strike with a laser pistol, +3 on an aimed shot (takes two attacks) or aimed called shot (takes three attacks). +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to Save vs Possession/Mind Control, +3 to save vs curses, +4 to save vs magic, and +2 to save vs Psionics.

Magic Spell Knowledge: Armor of Ithan (10 M.D.C. of armor; 10 P.P.E.), Blinding Flash (1), Globe of Daylight (2), Thunderclap (4), Befuddle (6), Chameleon (6), Electric Arc (2D6 M.D. per blast) (8), Energy Field (60 M.D.C. of protection) (10), Fire Bolt (4D6 M.D. or 1D6x10 S.D.C.;7), Fear (Horror Factor: 16; 5), Light Healing (heals 1D6 S.D.C. or 1D4 Hit Points; 6), and Paralysis: Lesser (5). **Note:** The number in parenthesis is the P.P.E. cost to cast that spell.

Equipment of Note: A robe, a set of traveling clothes, a set of nice clothes, knapsack, back pack, 2 small sacks, one large sack, six wooden stakes, a mallet, sunglasses, air filter and gas mask, canteen binoculars, 100 feet (30.5 m) of lightweight cord and grappling hook, pen, pencils, and a notepad.

Weapons: Survival Knife (1D6 S.D.C.), Hand Ax, Wilk's 320 Laser Pistol (does 1D6 M.D. per blast with a range of 1,000 feet/305 m, and each clip has 20 shots). He has 4 E-Clips for it and the Wilk's 320 is +2 on aimed shots, so add this to the aimed bonuses.

Money: Marcus has 6,000 credits and 2,400 in trade goods worth 6,000 credits.

Jack Conner

Juicer

Jack is a man of action. He believes in the Juicer credo of "live fast, fight hard and die young." He seeks justice, helps others, and likes the idea of being a hero. However, he tends to be a bit of a wild man who loves a good brawl or physical contest, and tends



to be rough and tough. Though he professes to be a champion of the people and a freedom fighter, he usually tries to get the best deal he can for his services, and if there is no profit to be made, he loots the bodies of those he defeats in battle. Jack also steals from bad guys, and cheats at cards when he knows he's playing against those whom he has no respect for. That said, although Jack is an irascible rogue who has no respect for bad guys, in the end, he has good intentions and a heart of gold, and usually does the right thing.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 11, M.A. 11, P.S. 27, P.P. 23, P.E. 20, P.B. 12, Spd 83.

Armor: 60 M.D.C., Heavy Juicer Plate Armor, non-environmental.

Hit Points: 60

S.D.C.: 333

Weight: 200 pounds (90 kg).

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Age: 18.

Level of Experience: Fourth level.

Skills: Acrobatics (Sense of Balance 75%, Walk Tightrope 75, Climb Rope 95%, Back Flip 75%), Appraise Goods 30%, Boxing, Climbing 75/65%, Detect Ambush 35%, Detect Concealment 30%, Escape Artist 35%, Field Armorer & Munitions expert 50%, Intelligence 37%, Land Navigation 41%, Language: Native Tongue 92%, Language: Dragonese 60%, Language: Spanish 60%, Pilot: Hovercycles, Pilot: Sky Cycles & Rocket Bikes 80%, Pilot: Motorcycles & Snowmobiles 70%, Prowl 45%, Radio: Basic 55%, Recognize Weapon Quality 35%, Running, Swimming 60%, Wilderness Survival 35%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Heavy M.D. Weapon, W.P. Sword, Hand to Hand: Expert, and Kick Boxing.

Attacks per Melee: Seven!

Bonuses: +2 to Perception Rolls, +4 to initiative, +4 to strike, +6 to parry and dodge, +6 to pull punch, +10 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +2 to disarm, +4 to save vs psionics, +6 to save vs mind control, +11 to save vs toxic gases, poisons and drugs, +3 to save vs magic, +30% to save vs coma/death, kick attack

1D8, Round House Kick 3D6 S.D.C., Leap Kick 3D8, Axe Kick 2D8 S.D.C. Knee Strike 1D8 S.D.C.

Weapons: Jack's weapon of choice is a *Juicer Assassin's JA-11 energy rifle* and he has 6 E-Clips (long), each with a payload of 30 shots per E-Clip with 30 shots reserve in a built-in back up canister. The JA-11 has multiple firing options. It has *two laser settings*, one that does 2D6 M.D. the other 4D6 M.D., both with a range of 4,000 feet (1219 m) and is +1 to strike via its laser targeting. It can also fire an *ion beam* that does 3D6 M.D. with a range of 1,600 feet (488 m), or it can fire a 7.62mm round that inflicts 1D6x10 S.D.C. damage and has a range of 2,000 feet (610 m); single shot, requiring each round to be hand-loaded. **Note:** The JA-11 is +1 to strike due to its laser targeting feature.

Other weapons includes a NG-57 Heavy-Duty Ion Blaster that does either 2D4 or 3D6 M.D. per blast (it has two settings), range: 500 feet (152 m), payload: 10 shots per E-Clip; he has 6 E-Clips for it; and a Vibro-Knife that does 1D6 M.D.

Equipment of Note: He also has a Bio-comp and bio-data implants, a drug harness and drug supply, optic helmet, portable IRMSS kit, camouflage and grey fatigues, boots with knife holster, gloves, backpack, utility belt, sunglasses, and compass.

Money: Jack spends money as fast as he earns it, so it is a wonder that he has 1,800 Universal Credits in his possession.

Sir Jason Richards

Cyber-Knight

Jason is a born hero who lives to help others. He lives by the letter of the Cyber-Knights' Code of Chivalry and believes in justice and equality for all, human and D-Bee alike. He is brave yet merciful in combat and fights like a lion. If he has a serious flaw, it's that he tends to be a lone wolf who sneaks off on his own or rushes into situations that are more than he can chew, especially when a friend or innocent is in danger. Sir Richards is young, brash and over-confident, but that should change with experience.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 24, M.A. 15, P.S. 23, P.P. 21, P.E. 22, P.B. 14, Spd 29

Armor: 50 M.D.C., Urban Warrior Armor worn over his own, natural Cyber-Armor (below); -5% to Prowl and Swim penalty from the UW armor.

Cyber-Knight Cyber Armor (special) – M.D.C. by Location:

Shoulders (2) – 8 each

Back/Shoulder Blades (2) – 8 each

Forearms (2) – 10 each

Thighs/Upper Legs (2) – 15 each

Chest Plate (main body) – 50 M.D.C.

Hit Points: 28

S.D.C.: 72

Weight: 210 pounds (94.5 kg).

Height: 6 feet, 1 inch (1.82 m).

Age: 20

P.P.E.: 26

I.S.P.: 41

Level of Experience: Second level.

Skills: Anthropology 50%, Athletics, Body Building, Boxing, Climbing 50/40%, Fencing, Gymnastics, Horsemanship: Cyber-Knight 70/50%, Land Navigation 52%, Lore: Demon & Monster 50%, Literacy American 65%, Language: American

& Dragonese 96%, Language: Spanish 80%, Language: Euro 80%, Lore: Faeries & Creatures of Magic 35%, Paramedic 55%, Swimming 65%, Running, Tracking (People) 35% W.P. Sword, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, Kick Boxing, Wrestling, W.P. Shield, W.P. Axe, W.P. Heavy M.D. Weapons, and Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks per Melee: Six.

Bonuses: +3 to initiative, +3 to strike, +6 to parry and dodge, +5 to pull punch, +7 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +2 to disarm, +8 to S.D.C. damage, kick attack, and karate punch. +5 to save vs psionics and needs a 7 or higher to save on psionic attacks, +4 to save vs magic and poison, +3 to Perception.

Psionic Powers: Create Psi-Sword (it does 3D6 M.D. and there is no I.S.P. cost), Create Psi-Shield (the Shield has 80 M.D.C. and costs 15 I.S.P.), and Meditation (0).

Equipment of Note: A set of dress clothes, a set of dark clothes for covert operations, a gas mask and air filter, tinted goggles, hatchet for cutting wood, a survival knife (1D6 S.D.C. damage), 4 wooden stakes, a handheld silver cross, first-aid kit with extra bandages and antiseptics, suture thread, painkillers, tent, knapsack, backpack, saddlebags, two canteens, emergency rations for two weeks, and a Geiger counter. He also has a spare suit of Heavy Knight Armor with 95 M.D.C. (not environmental and -15% penalty to Climb, Prowl and Swim when wearing this armor). He keeps it in reserve and wears it when he expects heavy combat.

Weapons: A *NG-P7 Particle Beam Rifle* that does 1D4x10 M.D. per blast, has a range of 1,200 (366 m) and a payload of 8 blasts per E-Clip; he has four E-Clips for it. *NG-57 Heavy-Duty Ion Blaster* that does either 2D4 or 3D6 M.D. per blast (it has two settings), range: 500 feet (152 m), payload: 10 shots per clip, and he has four E-Clips for the pistol. A *Vibro-Sword* 2D6 M.D. damage.

Money: 500 universal credits and 9,600 credits in trade goods. He uses most of his money to help the poor and those in need.

Alexander Otto

Operator

Alex is a businessman who has gotten a taste of adventure and he likes it. While he would like to make a fortune adventuring and helping others, he seems satisfied with the accolades, free drinks, glory and other intangible rewards and perks that come with being recognized as a roaming hero.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 22, M.E. 12, M.A. 15, P.S. 15, P.P. 14, P.E. 14, P.B. 9, Spd 14.

Armor: 55 M.D.C., a suit of Urban Warrior Armor; -5% movement penalty to skills like Climb, Prowl and Swimming while in the armor.

Hit Points: 20

S.D.C.: 17

Weight: 160 pounds (72.5 kg).

Height: 5 feet, 11 inches (1.78 m).

Age: 22.

Level of Experience: Third level.

Skills: Automotive Mechanics 43%, Basic Math 73%, Computer Operation 58%, Computer Hacking 38%, Computer Programming 48%, Computer Repair 48%, Electrical Engineer 63%,

Electricity Generation 68%, Find Contraband 44%, Jury-Rig 53%, Language: Native 98%, Language: Dragonese 78%, Mechanical Engineer 53%, Pilot: Automobile 83%, Pilot: Hovercycles 88%, Pilot: Truck 58%, Pilot: Motorcycle 83%, Pilot: Hover Craft 73%, Radio: Basic 68%, Robot Mechanics 38%, Robot Electronics 48%, Sensory Equipment 58%, Weapons Engineer 48%, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Energy Pistol, and Hand to Hand: Basic.

Special Operator Skills: Jury-Rig Repairs: Temporary repairs can be done in half the normal time and the repairs will last twice as long as normal. Find Contraband Parts: Add +20% to the Find Contraband skills when looking for parts for vehicles, M.D. weapons, M.D.C. materials, power supplies and so on. Recognize Machine Quality 66%, can tell if a machine is new, used or rebuilt. Repair and Soup-Up Machines and Vehicles. Can replace damaged M.D.C. and can maximize the performance of vehicles and most machines.

Attacks per Melee: Four.

Bonuses: +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with punch, fall, or impact and +6 to Perception Rolls.

Equipment of Note: Large wrench and hammer (both good as blunt weapons that do 2D6 S.D.C.), portable tool kit with an electric screwdriver, and additional interchangeable heads, wrenches, etc.; a large tool kit, soldering iron, laser torch, a roll of duct tape, two rolls of electrical tape, pen flashlight, large flashlight, a dozen flares, 200 feet (60 m) of super lightweight rope, two knives, notebook, portable disc recorder, portable language translator, protective goggles, work gloves, 2 pair of thin doctor gloves, backpack, satchel, canteen, set of work clothes, overalls, utility belt, air filter and some personal items.

Weapons: *NG-57 Heavy-Duty Ion Blaster* that does either 2D4 or 3D6 M.D. per blast (it has two settings), range: 500 feet (152 m), payload: 10 shots per clip, and he has three E-Clips for the pistol. He also uses a *Neural Mace* which is a handheld stun weapon. Damage is non-lethal and anyone hit with the mace needs to make a saving throw vs non-lethal poison of 16 or higher. Those who fail to save are -8 to strike, parry and dodge, and their speed and attacks are reduced by half. Those that do save lose only one melee attack and initiative that melee round. The duration of the stun is 2D4 melees and duration is accumulative for multiple hits.

Money: Alex has 2,300 credits, and trade goods worth 9,000 credits.

Daniel Jackson

Wilderness Scout

Daniel has a fiercely independent spirit and a love for the outdoors. He grew up in a family of trappers and hunters, and knows his way around the woods. Daniel is a rough and tumble character who can take care of himself, but is a loyal friend and team player. His lone wolf days behind him, he enjoys the life of an adventurer, traveling, discovering new things and helping others. Under his rough exterior he is a compassionate hero, and under different circumstances, could have been a Cyber-Knight. Daniel is quick thinking, clever and fast on his feet.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 12, M.A. 15, P.S. 21, P.P. 15, P.E. 20, P.B. 13, Spd 27.



Armor: 45 M.D.C., Huntsman Armor; -10% to physical skills like prowl and swimming.

Hit Points: 26

S.D.C.: 55

Weight: 190 pounds (85.5 kg).

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Age: 25

Level of Experience: Third level.

Skills: Athletics, Barter 30%, Carpentry 45%, Cooking 50%, Climbing 60/50%, Detect Ambush 40%, Fishing 55%, Horsemanship: General 60/40%, Identify Plants & Fruits 50%, Hunting, Land Navigation 56%, Language: Native Tongue 94%, Language: Dragonese, Spanish 65%, Pilot: Motorcycle 74%, Outdoorsmanship, Prowl 40%, Physical Labor, Running, Swimming 60%, Radio: Basic 55%, Track Animals 40%, Tracking (people) 35%, Wilderness Survival 55%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Archery, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, and Hand to Hand: Expert.

Wilderness Scout Skills: Trail Blazing (special): The ability to make and mark wilderness trails; 30%.

Cross-Country Pacing (special): The ability used with Land Navigation to estimate time of travel either by himself or with a group. This includes making resources last for the duration of the trip; 40%.

Cartography (special): A skill at making accurate maps; 45%.

Attacks per Melee: 4

Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +1 to parry and dodge, +2 to pull punch, +5 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +6 to damage, +3 to Perception Rolls. +3 to save vs poisons, diseases and magic, and +15% to save vs coma & death.

Equipment of Note: Survival knife (does 1D6+1 S.D.C. damage), hand axe (1D6 S.D.C. damage), set of wilderness clothes, sunglasses, air filter, first aid kit, knapsack, backpack, utility/ammo

belt, 10 feet (3 m) of cord for tying things, 100 feet (30.5 m) of lightweight rope, 6 iron spikes, 6 wood spikes, wooden cross, hammer and a mallet, animal skinning knife, fishing line and hooks, animal snares, two canteens, six flares, infrared binoculars with digital distance readout, a pair of passive nightvision goggles, and telescopic sight on rifle.

Weapons: *Wilk's 320 Laser Pistol:* 1D6 M.D. with a range of 1,000 feet (305 m) and a payload of 20 shots per clip (+2 on aimed shots); he has 3 E-Clips for it. *Wilk's 447 Laser Rifle:* 3D6 M.D. with a range of 2,000 feet (610 m), 20 shots per clip (3 E-Clips, +1 on aimed shots; and a *compound bow* with 24 S.D.C. arrows (2D6 S.D.C. damage), 6 explosive arrows (1D6 M.D. per arrow). Bow range is 700 feet (213 m). Vibro-Knife that does 1D6 M.D.

Money: 865 credits and 7,000 credits worth of trade goods.



Melina the Mystic

Melina is a kind and generous soul who uses her powers to help others. While she is sweet to those in need, she can become as tough and fierce as a mother bear protecting her cubs when her friends or innocent people are in danger.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 18, M.A. 20, P.S. 12, P.P. 12, P.E. 15, P.B. 20, Spd 10.

Armor: 55 M.D.C. a suit of Urban Warrior Armor that imposes a movement penalty of -5% to Climb, Prowl and Swim skills.

Hit Points: 21

S.D.C.: 23

Weight: 110 pounds (49.5 kg).

Height: 5 feet, 8 inches (1.7 m).

Age: 21

P.P.E.: 85

I.S.P.: 58

Level of Experience: Third level.

Skills: Language: Native Tongue 97%, Language: Dragonese, Spanish, & Euro 85%, Dance 45%, Horsemanship: General 50/30%, Land Navigation 46%, Lore: Magic 40%, Lore: Faeries & Creatures of Magic 40%, Lore: Demons & Monsters 40%, Lore: Psychics & Psionics 40%, Philosophy 50%, Play Guitar & Drums 45%, Wilderness Survival 50%, Hand to Hand: Basic, First Aid 60%, Swimming 50%, Literacy: American and Dragonese 45/45%, Prowl 30%, and W.P. Energy Pistol.

Mystic Powers: Sense Supernatural Evil with a range of 300 feet (91.5 m). This ability is automatic and cost no I.S.P./P.P.E.

Psionics Powers: Clairvoyance (4), Exorcism (10), Sixth Sense (2), Suppress Fear (8), Healing Touch (6), Increased Healing (10), See the Invisible (4), Object Read (6), and Telepathy (4). The numbers in parenthesis is the I.S.P. necessary to activate the ability.

Spell Knowledge: Blinding Flash (1), Cloud of Smoke (2), Globe of Daylight (2), Befuddle (6), Chameleon (6), Fear (5), Levitation (5) and Thunderclap (4). The numbers in parenthesis is the P.P.E. necessary to cast the spell.

Attacks per Melee: Four.

Bonuses: +1 to Perception Rolls, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, Major Psionic and only needs a 12 or higher to save vs Psionics. +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs possession, +1 to save vs magic. 60% chance to create trust or to intimidate and 50% to charm or impress.

Equipment of Note: Melina has a set of traveling clothes, knapsack, backpack, 2 small sacks, one large sack, six wooden stakes and mallet, small silver cross, canteen, binoculars, tinted goggles, air filter, gas mask, guitar, small drum, and a hooded cloak.

Weapons: *Wilk's 320 Laser Pistol,* 1D6 M.D. with a range of 1000 feet (305 m) and a payload of 20 shots per clip (+2 on aimed shots) and has 4 clips total.

Money: 4,000 credits and 3,000 credits worth of gems.

Sasha Corlione

Mind Melter

While good at heart, Sasha, like most Mind Melters, revels in her psychic powers. She enjoys power and wants more. For now, she enjoys helping others and likes the idea of becoming a famous hero. She tends to be cocky and arrogant as are most Mind Melters, and relies on her powers rather than other weapons. All of this can get her into trouble. She tends to be a bit of a loudmouth brat at times.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 22, M.A. 12, P.S. 10, P.P. 20, P.E. 15, P.B. 15, Spd 18.

Armor: 45 M.D.C.; Huntsman Armor that inflicts a penalty of -10% to physical skills like Climb, Prowl and Swimming.

Hit Points: 21

S.D.C.: 24

Weight: 115 pounds (51.7 kg).

Height: 5 feet, 8 inches (1.7 m).

Age: 23

I.S.P.: 142

Thomas “Tank” Smith

Mercenary – Pigman/Heavy Weapons Expert

Thomas “Tank” Smith is a soldier of fortune out to make a buck. He has a good heart and doesn’t mind helping people, it’s just that he likes money more and tries not to risk his life for free. He always wants to get something out of the deal, even if it is trade goods, weapons or a percentage of profits. The chance at getting a piece of a dragon’s treasure (or silver mine) appeals to him greatly. Likewise, if there is an opportunity for a free meal, a room, free E-Clip recharging and repairs, he’ll take it, though he’ll be looking for more if he can get it. He is known for saying things like, “Gratitude is nice, but you can’t spend it.”

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 20, M.A. 12, P.S. 23, P.P. 10, P.E. 22, P.B. 15, Spd 28.

Armor: 80 M.D.C. from a suit of CA-1 Dead Boy Body armor he “acquired” on the Black Market. The armor imposes a -10% penalty to Climb, Prowl and Swimming and similar skills.

Hit Points: 28

S.D.C.: 54

Weight: 230 pounds (103.5 kg).

Height: 6 feet, 2 inches (1.87 m).

Age: 25

Level of Experience: Second level.

Skills: Boxing, Camouflage 25%, Climbing 50/40%, Computer Operation 50%, Demolitions 65%, Demolitions Disposal 65%, General Athletics, Language: Native Tongue 95%, Language: Spanish 60%, Mathematics: Basic 50%, Military Etiquette 45%, Prowl 25%, Radio: Basic 55%, Running, Sign Language 30%, Recognize Weapon Quality 45%, Weapon Systems 50%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Rifles, W.P. Heavy Military Weapons, W.P. Heavy Energy Weapons, Wrestling, and Hand to Hand: Basic.

Attacks per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +3 to Parry and Dodge, +2 to pull punch, +5 to roll with impact/fall, +2 to save vs psionics, +8 S.D.C. damage, +4 to save vs magic/poison and +14% to save vs coma/death.

Equipment of Note: Backpack, knapsack, two canteens, two pair of military fatigues, three flares, two smoke grenades, survival knife, disposable cigarette lighter, air filter and gas mask, walkie-talkie and some personal items.

Weapons of Note: Tank’s favorite heavy-hitting weapon is a *C-27 Heavy Plasma Cannon* that inflicts 6D6 M.D. per blast, has a range of 1,600 feet (488 m) and a payload of 10 shots in its internal canister. The C-27 is +1 on an aimed shot. *NG-57 Heavy-Duty Ion Blaster* that does either 2D4 or 3D6 M.D. per blast (it has two settings), range: 500 feet (152 m), payload: 10 shots per clip, and he has three E-Clips for the pistol; a *Vibro-Knife* that does 1D6 M.D.; and *C-12 Heavy Assault Laser Rifle* that does 2D6 M.D. on a single shot or 6D6 M.D. on a burst of 3 shots or setting three which does 6D6 S.D.C. Range is 2,000 feet (610 m) and the C-12 has an E-Clip that holds 30 single shots or 10 bursts. Six 6D6 S.D.C. shots count as one M.D. blast. He has six E-Clips for the C-12. +1 on aimed shots.

Money: Not enough of it. Tank has 740 credits and trade items worth 3,200 credits.



Level of Experience: Third Level.

Skills: General Repair & Maintenance 45%, Land Navigation 46%, Language: Native Tongue 98%, Language: Dragonese and Spanish 80%, Lore: Faeries & Creatures of Magic 35%, Mathematics: Basic 65%, General Athletics, Pick Locks 35%, Pilot: Motorcycle 70%, Pilot: Automobile 70%, Streetwise 35%, Swimming 50%, Prowl 27%, W.P. Energy Pistol, and Hand to Hand: Basic.

Psionics Powers: Bio-Regenerate (self) (6), Mind Block (4), Object Read (6), See Aura (6), Sixth Sense (2), Healing Touch (6), Suppress Fear (8), Nightvision (4), See the Invisible (4), Telekinesis (varies), Telekinetic Leap (8), Telepathy (4), Telekinesis (super) (10+), Telekinetic Force Field (30) and Telekinetic Acceleration Attack (10 or 20). The numbers in parenthesis is the I.S.P. necessary to activate the ability.

Attacks per Melee: Four.

Bonuses: +3 to Perception Rolls, +3 to initiative, +1 to strike, +1 to parry and dodge, +3 to roll with impact/fall, +4 to pull punch, +2 to disarm, +4 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs all kinds of mind control, +3 to save vs magic illusion, and +1 to save vs Horror Factor.

Equipment of Note: Sasha has a couple of sets of traveling clothes, a wardrobe of expensive, fashionable clothing, sleeping bag, backpack, utility/ammo-belt, canteen, sunglasses, air filter, knife, a pocket mirror, food rations for a week, and some personal items.

Weapons: Wilk’s 320 Laser Pistol, 1D6 M.D. with a range of 1000 feet (305 m) and a payload of 20 shots per clip (+2 on aimed shots) and has 4 clips total.

Money: 15,000 Universal Credits and 1,300 credits worth of gems. Money is power, so she tends to be stingy with her earnings.

Adventure Building

Crafting Your First Adventure from Thought to Execution

Rescue the Rogue Scholar – An example in creating an adventure

By Carl Gleba and Kevin Siembieda

Once you get more comfortable with the Megaversal Rules and the world of Rifts, you will want to create your own adventures like the one presented here. In fact, playing the adventure in the Rifts® Primer may give you ideas on how to craft your own, complete with the little twists and turns that make the adventures interesting. And remember, keep it simple.

The reason we always say keep it simple is because we often think big, and why not? The problem is dreaming big can be your own worst enemy. (See the **Rifts® Minion War series** as an example of an overly ambitious writer and Game Master.) Big and epic stories can be awesome fun, but they are also very complex, demanding of you, and time consuming. That makes it a challenge to craft even for experienced Game Masters. There are so many elements, plots and locations in **Rifts®** that it can often be overwhelming. Don't do that to yourself. Start out weaving small, linear stories and build from there. Instead of trying to swim in the ocean, try wading along the shore until you get more familiar with the tides and become a stronger swimmer, or in this case, a stronger storyteller and confident Game Master.

Anything is fair game in designing your adventures. Keep them simple at first, even if they are your typical cliché adventures. Goal driven adventures work best — such as save the Rogue Scholar from the evil Brodkil that kidnapped her or kill the monster terrorizing the region. Simple and straightforward works. And who says something this simple can't expand beyond its original scope?

Simple plots are also the easiest to manage because they are straight forward. If you look hard, you will find the simplest plots in a variety of Palladium World Books and sourcebooks. They are called **Hook, Line and Sinker adventures**. A concept created by game designer Jolly Blackburn as a quick, simple way to outline the foundation for an adventure that a G.M. can grab for ideas and expand upon. Check them out for all kinds of adventure ideas.

Let us take that very basic and simple concept, Rogue Scholar kidnapped by Brodkil, and we now have a very basic plot, **the Hook**. Rescuing the Scholar and perhaps the reason it is important (he holds the plans to destroy the Death Star, or something like that) is **the Line**. Now it is time to flesh it out and give it a twist, that's **the Sinker**.

In order to flesh out the adventure, you need to ask and answer some basic questions, ones you would probably ask if you were a player, except you are the Game Master and you need to ask the questions first, so you have these answers when you need them.

The questions are simple: ask yourself *who, what, where, when* and *why* to everything. We know *who* took the Rogue Scholar, the Brodkil, but *why*? Why not just attack the town? Why did they just take one person? What do they want with him?

Well one way to answer those questions is that the Rogue Scholar has information that the Brodkil need or perhaps info that someone who has hired them wants. That could be your Sinker, the

surprise twist. So they can't kill her (or him, it does not have to be a damsel in distress situation). They took her alive.

To make it more interesting, we can say that the Brodkil are working for a more powerful demon known as a *Neuron Beast* – or any bad guy, like an evil Shifter, the Black Market, the Federation of Magic, etc. It is the Neuron Beast who wants the Rogue Scholar. That is something the player characters will find out near the end of the adventure as they search for the Scholar and gather clues and information along the way. Using the Neuron Beast as the final bad guy is like the old video games where you reach the end of the level to find and fight the big boss. The Neuron Beast serves as the real bad guy and the true danger, pulling the strings behind the scenes until he is discovered by our heroes. And now the plot thickens, because the Beast is not just a threat to the Scholar and the player characters, but others who will be harmed if his diabolical plan is not stopped by our heroes!

So the simple rescue mission takes a plot twist to become something bigger and more challenging. That kind of escalation and twist makes the adventure more memorable and fun. A surprise and challenge that the players should not see coming and for which they must find a triumphant resolve. By the way, if the adventure goes long, this simple adventure could become a two-part adventure.

When, is obviously the time-line of events that were just laid out. She was just kidnapped hours before the characters got here.

Where is the Rogue Scholar being held? Well, the Scout saw the Brodkil head south. Roughly 20 miles (32 km) away are the ruins of a pre-Rifts city. There you go, you have the bare bones outline for an adventure.

So what's next? Well most adventures need NPCs to help give clues and guide the characters toward their goals and the dramatic climax to the adventure. You can add as many NPCs (Non-Player Characters) as you feel are needed. In this case, let's add three NPCs. Why three? One person cannot know and do everything, plus it is good to have a few more people involved in case the characters decide to wander around and don't immediately meet the "planned NPC" with the info they need.

Let us make the first NPC be the person who saw the kidnaping. Let's call him the Rogue Scholar's *apprentice*. We will also need someone to at least point the characters in the right direction so let's add a *Wilderness Scout* (or a farmer or traveling merchant). Characters who are not the hero types might be looking for some kind of reward or bribe for their information or help, or at least recognition for their good deed, so we'll add an NPC who is *the mayor* of the town. You can add more if you feel they are necessary and some circumstances may dictate you to create a new NPC on the spot, like the shop manager when one of the players goes to buy an extra weapon or magic item to help in their quest, or the bartender at the pub the group stops at to discuss their plans. That's the beauty of role-playing and being the Universe, you get to create characters and run with ideas right on the spot. Spinning them from your imagination. Many Game Masters make notes on the NPC they create on the spot so they can use them again later, when the player characters come back to town. Likewise, many G.M.s already have notes and basic stats on any number of characters in the area they believe the heroes might run into. It all depends on the Game Master and his style of gaming.

So now let's fill in some of the NPC details and see where this leads us. Let us call our first NPC, the scholar's apprentice, **Mike**. Mike witnessed his master's kidnaping and just barely escaped himself. The player characters probably meet him when they ar-

rived in town, perhaps at that pub we mentioned, or even on the street as he frantically tries find someone to help rescue his mentor. He didn't see which way the Brodkil went because he fled in a panic, but he can tell the player characters how many Brodkil he saw and speculate (or not) on why they took her. (He might not know.)

Enter our second NPC, **Kevin**, the local Wilderness Scout. He saw the direction the monstrous kidnappers went with their captive. He also saved Mike from the rampaging Brodkil by pulling him into the shadows and hiding him from them. Kevin, the Wilderness Scout, might (at the G.M.'s discretion) offer to join the player group to help the player characters follow the Brodkil's trail and even fight them. Kevin, it turns out, can follow their trail. Time to ask yourself questions, again. Why would Kevin offer to help? Does he hate Brodkil? Did he have a crush on the Rogue Scholar and wants to help? Or is he looking for payment for his "help" or a share of any loot the group comes into for fighting these subdemons (which would be fair if he carries his weight). Or does he have an ulterior motive?

The third NPC could be someone important in town like the town sheriff or mayor. Let's make him **the mayor** who relies on the Rogue Scholar for her wisdom and counsel. He could be offering a reward for her safe return (a motive for the player group to help). We'll call him **Mayor Smith**. As you can see, the NPCs are important to furthering the plot and motivating the players to have their characters take action.

Further exploration of the small hamlet reveals nothing out of the ordinary. They seem honest, good people scared out of their wits by the Brodkil kidnaping (or raid, or whatever the G.M. might want). Everyone has only good things to say about the Scholar the Brodkil dragged away (or do they?), perhaps further motivating characters of a good alignment to rescue the woman.

The player group now has enough information and perhaps a character or two (the Wilderness Scout and possibly the apprentice) to set out to rescue the Rogue Scholar. Great.

Time for more questions to yourself as the G.M. creating this adventure. Where did they take her? How far is it? Is it another town? A known hideout for Brodkil raiders? Hmm, let us make the location the ruins of a city.

Now, let's keep the story moving quickly and cut to our next scene by saying something like, "You and the Wilderness Scout have no problem following the Brodkil's trail as they seem to make no effort to cover their tracks. Typical of these arrogant brutes. You reach the ruins of an ancient, pre-Rifts city and you hear laughter and talking." A quick sneaking around shows that it is the Brodkil.

In the alternative, you have the group travel overland, where they make one or two encounters with other NPCs. Why add encounters? Well, to spice things up and provide a random battle or two to fill in the time between leaving the town and arriving at the pre-Rifts ruins, or to show this is a dangerous region, full of demons or cutthroats. The encounters could be with one or two Brodkil to serve as a demonstration that this group of Brodkil is serious because the group just ran into one of their patrols, or as a foreshadowing of how dangerous and tough these villains are. A couple of encounters along the way can build anticipation and suspense, or hint at something bigger afoot (more foreshadowing and mystery). Some encounters can even be set-ups for future adventures. Always think ahead if you can. It helps keep the story going, and from the players perspective seems like one long, continuous adventure or story with a lot of fun continuity. This also adds to the scope of the world and the tapestry of adventures you are weaving.

For your first adventure, I only use one or two encounters along the way just to mix things up and keep the players' interest. This might even include a few red herrings, false leads. Something like, "You hear some rustling in the brush to your left. There it is again. It sounds like someone sneaking along the off the trail." A player is likely to ask if it sounds like someone following them. The answer, "Maybe. You don't see anyone. The noise has stopped. Oh, oh, there it is again." If they call out or issue a threat, the sound of movement stops. No one answers. When the group moves, so does the sound in the underbrush. Going to investigate, the characters involved on checking out this potential threat encounter a wild animal. This animal could be a wild boar, a mountain lion, a nosey bear or bear cub that is following them out of curiosity or because it smells food or the blood from an injury (the apprentice NPC might have a cut or some scratches). Or ... it could be a rabbit or muskrat that runs off. Even the mountain lion or bear is likely to run off if not attacked or threatened. Why this non-lethal encounter? Two big reasons: one, for laughs. It is always good to add a bit of humor and laughs by scaring the characters with a non-threat, or to keep them on their toes. Two, so that they do not think every time you pause the game for an encounter that it always has something to do with the adventure or the villain. Keep 'em guessing.

Any encounters could be related to the main plot or unrelated. Let's use one of each. Along the way the character come across some kind of monster out hunting for food, perhaps a Black Faerie. This is unrelated to the main adventure, but it stands in the characters' way. What does the group do? They could run or face the Black Faerie. The encounter just keeps the game interesting and adds a little danger and suspense to it. Do the characters risk spending resources to fight the Black Faerie? Do they risk injury? The characters' decision can help you drive the adventure and possibly give you other new ideas. Even if they don't face the Black Faerie now, who is to say it won't reappear later? Perhaps it is stalking the characters and might even attack when they least expect it later. Perhaps it is another henchmen or spy of the Neuron Beast, the true mastermind of the abduction. Or an enemy of the Neuron Beast who may help the group later. As always, ask yourself questions that will make the encounter and character more interesting. Who, What, Where, When and Why?

The second encounter is with some Brodkil. From all descriptions, these guys look like they are members of the gang that took the Rogue Scholar. Ah, but depending on how you, the G.M. wants to play it, they may or may not be. All Brodkil pretty much look the same, so this band could be completely unrelated. Do they know anything about the other group? Are they friends? Could they be rivals willing to share information with the heroes out of spite to hurt their rivals? Do these Brodkil threaten the group and ask for money or trade (like weapons and ammo) to let them pass without a fight? Game Masters, ask yourselves questions and have fun.

If these Brodkil are members of the same gang, and if one could be captured, the group might be able to glean some valuable information from him. So now the characters have to figure out how to capture one of these guys. Again, based on the characters' actions and dice rolls, they will help you determine what happens next. If they capture one of the Brodkil, perhaps it reveals where the Rogue Scholar is being held, or why she was taken. If it even knows why, it probably doesn't know the whole story. It only knows the Neuron Beast hired them to grab the scholar for its own reasons. But now the group knows about this new threat and the tension builds as the plot thickens. This captive might also know the east side of the Brodkil camp is unguarded. (Know why?) And other informa-

tion that could give the player characters an edge and help them formulate the best plan. A plan that might involve combat or a sneak rescue. Of course, getting this Brodkil to talk should involve *role-playing*. The group needs to get him to talk via threats, bluffs, and maybe even actual torture. Then, the G.M. needs to decide if what the monster tells them is true or lies to get them caught in a Brodkil trap. Whether the players avoid any such trap requires more role-playing. Have fun. In this case, what seemed like a random encounter was actually a setup to further the story along. Get the idea?

Once in the ruins, the player group has entered a new chapter to this adventure. The romp through the ruins could be easy or extremely difficult depending on how you want to play it. *Keeping it simple* means a relatively easy romp through the ruins, finding the Brodkil and effecting a rescue or an attack. Again, you could have more encounters if you want, but why? Do not bog down the story and pace with too much details and side encounters. If the group is raring to execute their plan, let them go for it.

This should be the big climax, or the surprise setup for the next adventure. Make it challenging but not impossible for the player group to succeed.

Consider the setting and time of day. It is night. The Brodkil can see in the dark but chances are, all the player characters cannot. So what do they do? Do they press on and possibly draw more attention to themselves or wait till morning? Game Masters, this is where your flexibility comes in. Be prepared for either possibility. By venturing in the dark do the characters draw more attention to themselves or can the dark work to their advantage? While the Brodkil may be able to see better, the darkness does provide additional cover and could make Prowling through the ruins easier.

Think of the jaunt through the ruins as preparations for the climactic ending to the adventure. The characters are getting close and the tension should be mounting as they search for the camp of the Brodkil and, if they know about him, the Neuron Beast.

Once combat or a commotion begins, the Neuron Beast comes out of its lair or hiding place to investigate. It may join the battle or try to reach a peaceful end to the conflict. It is very powerful as a standalone foe. If this foe is too powerful for your characters, scale it down or have the Neuron Beast already moving on with the next phase of its plan. A plan the Rogue Scholar can shed some light on, if she is rescued from the Brodkil. Once it got what it needed from the Scholar, the Neuron Beast might have left her for them to “play with.” This is a setup for the next adventure, as this one wraps with the rescue of the woman and chasing off or slaying the Brodkil raiders. But that is just one possible outcome.

Another could be the Neuron Beast joining the battle with fury in its heart. Maybe the group saves the woman, but has to make a run for it to survive. If the monster did not get the information it needs from her, it and/or its henchmen will come after them. (Fuel for the next adventure.) If the Neuron Beast did get the info, does the group have to kill it now? Can they regroup, heal up and chase it down in a day or two?

To make a fight with the Neuron Beast more even, perhaps it is already wounded. Maybe the Brodkil turned against it for some reason and they flee (with the Rogue Scholar still their captive?), leaving the heroes to only have to fight this creature. We love reoccurring villains, so have the Neuron Beast and/or the Brodkil come back as reoccurring villains.

Or it is a titanic battle, and the heroes fight and destroy every one of the monsters! Whichever way you choose to go, this last battle should be tough and challenging, but not impossible. It can

be easy to overmatch the player characters, especially with dice rolls which can go either way, so gauge it accordingly and adjust as you go along. Ultimately, the player characters should win this battle, even if there is more story to tell or some of the monsters get away to cause trouble later.

Wrap it up. The major foe has been killed or chased off and the players’ characters have rescued the Rogue Scholar and/or uncovered a new danger. Don’t forget treasure! Who knows what weapons, gear, and baubles could be left on the field of battle among the dead. And if the Neuron Beast had a lair or regular outpost here, there could be more treasure. ALWAYS make sure you reward your characters with some well-earned loot and gear (weapons, armor, ammo, explosives, a vehicle, etc.). All things they can use or sell to get Universal Credits. Getting Experience points is fun, but also give them some tangible reward too. It will make a difference for their characters and help with gaming morale. Everyone wants to be a winner, and this makes the players feel like winners.

With the rescue of the Rogue Scholar, the characters have made a new friend and ally. And not just with her, but probably with her apprentice and the mayor back in town, and maybe the Wilderness Scout, too.

As repeatedly noted throughout, finding out *why she was captured* could be part of a larger story arc. Asking the questions again can help to generate even more adventure. Why was the Rogue Scholar captured in the first place? Well, perhaps she knows about a pending demonic invasion and the ruins are going to be a secret base or even a launching point for the invasion. She knows the location of a lost magical artifact of great power, or a pre-Rifts weapon or weapon cache, or a treasure or ... the possibilities from here are endless. The Rogue Scholar could send the characters on all kinds of adventures or this could just be a simple isolated adventure unrelated to any story arc. Maybe her capture was a case of mistaken identity, but even that can lead to a new adventure if the player group believes they should try to find and warn the real target of this capture.

While we suggest keeping it simple, we do like to have our adventures linked or related in order to make the ongoing stories deeper and feel more epic.

Keeping it All Organized

Under “Crafting Your First Adventure,” you can see the thought process behind the adventure. How one idea leads to another and asking the common questions we often ask in everyday life. Now how do you as the Game Master, keep it all organized and rolling? I usually create an outline with notes as I need them. It would go something like this.

Adventure Name/Title: Is a Title essential? No, not really unless you plan on reusing the adventure at some point, but it gives you a reference point. Sometimes you do need to refer back to a previous adventure because a question arises, or there is some piece of information in the current adventure that comes up and somehow it refers to what happened in the past. The title keeps my G.M. notes a little more organized and seeing the title tends to jog my memory a little better.

Background: In the background section of my notes I write out what it is that the characters are tasked with doing or possibly any plot hooks or adventure seeds that come to mind as I am writing it and those that occur during the adventure itself. I like to write notes just for myself. Typically, information that the players don’t

need, at least not at this time, but as the G.M., I do need to keep my facts straight and the players on track.

Introduction: This is the start of the adventure. What kicks it off? This can often be combined with the background details.

NPC Notes: If I don't outright create a fully fleshed out NPC I'll write a small blurb about each NPC. I also like to include their alignment, O.C.C. and relevance to the adventure.

Encounters: To make my life easier, I try to plan some of the encounters. By planning, I can take down notes that I need to run a quick battle, or have a NPC ready just in case.

Conclusion: The conclusion should be your epic finale to the adventure. It can be a massive battle with the main villain or a point of discovery where all the questions are answered in the adventure, and perhaps new questions (and adventure hooks) arise.

Closing Thoughts

So now you have a glimpse into how Kevin Siembieda and I, Carl Gleba, run our games. This style may not be suitable for everyone and if it's not, don't worry, go with whatever works for you. I know Game Masters who run excellent games with little or no prep work, and others who need or want a lot of prep. These guys tend to have much better memories than I or are much more freeform in their games. If you feel that is more your style, go for it. Over the years, my style has changed and evolved. No doubt your style will too. As you develop techniques for running games, they become tools in your G.M. toolbox. Do what works best for you and remember what I said in the beginning. Keep it simple and keep it fun.



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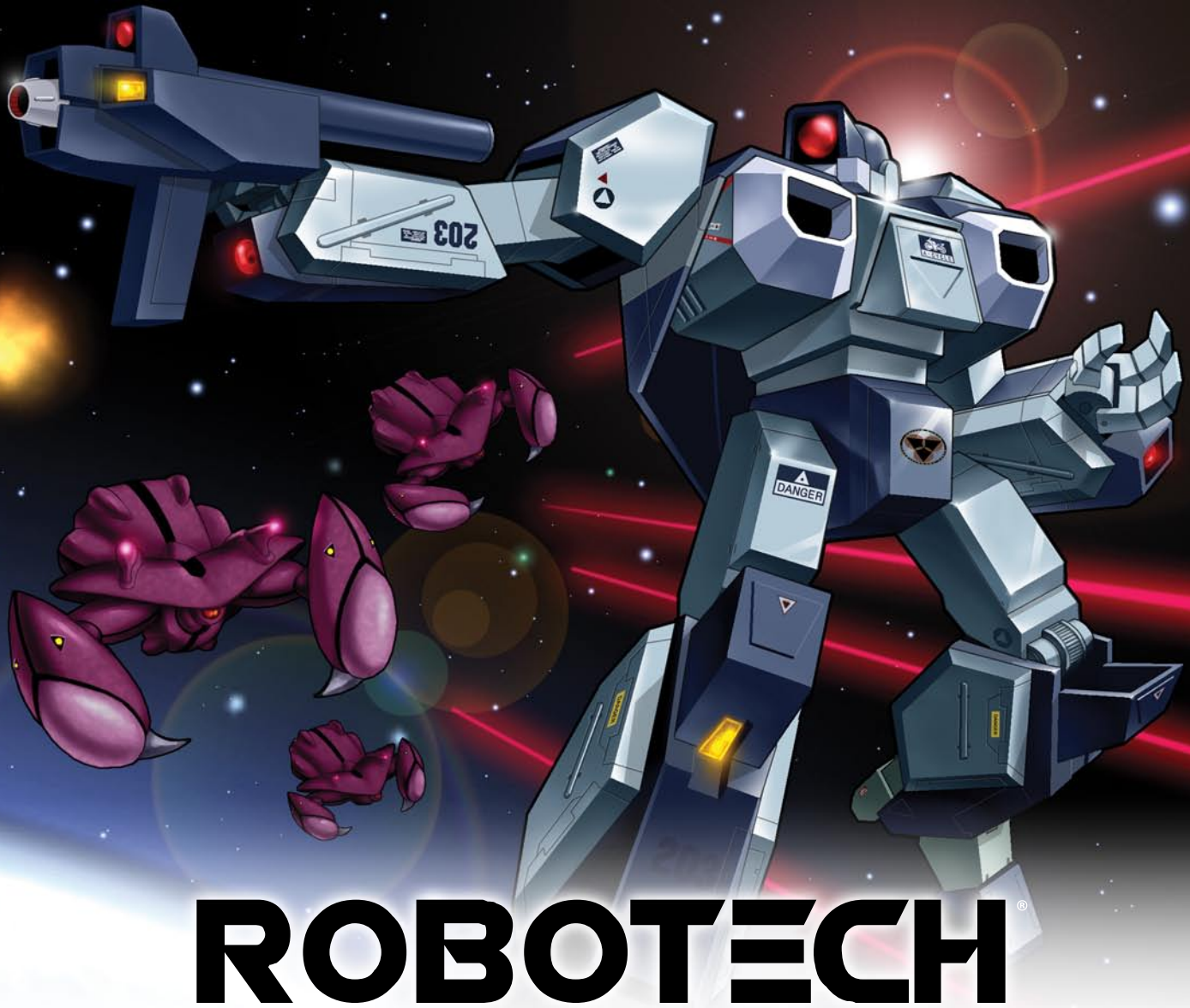
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