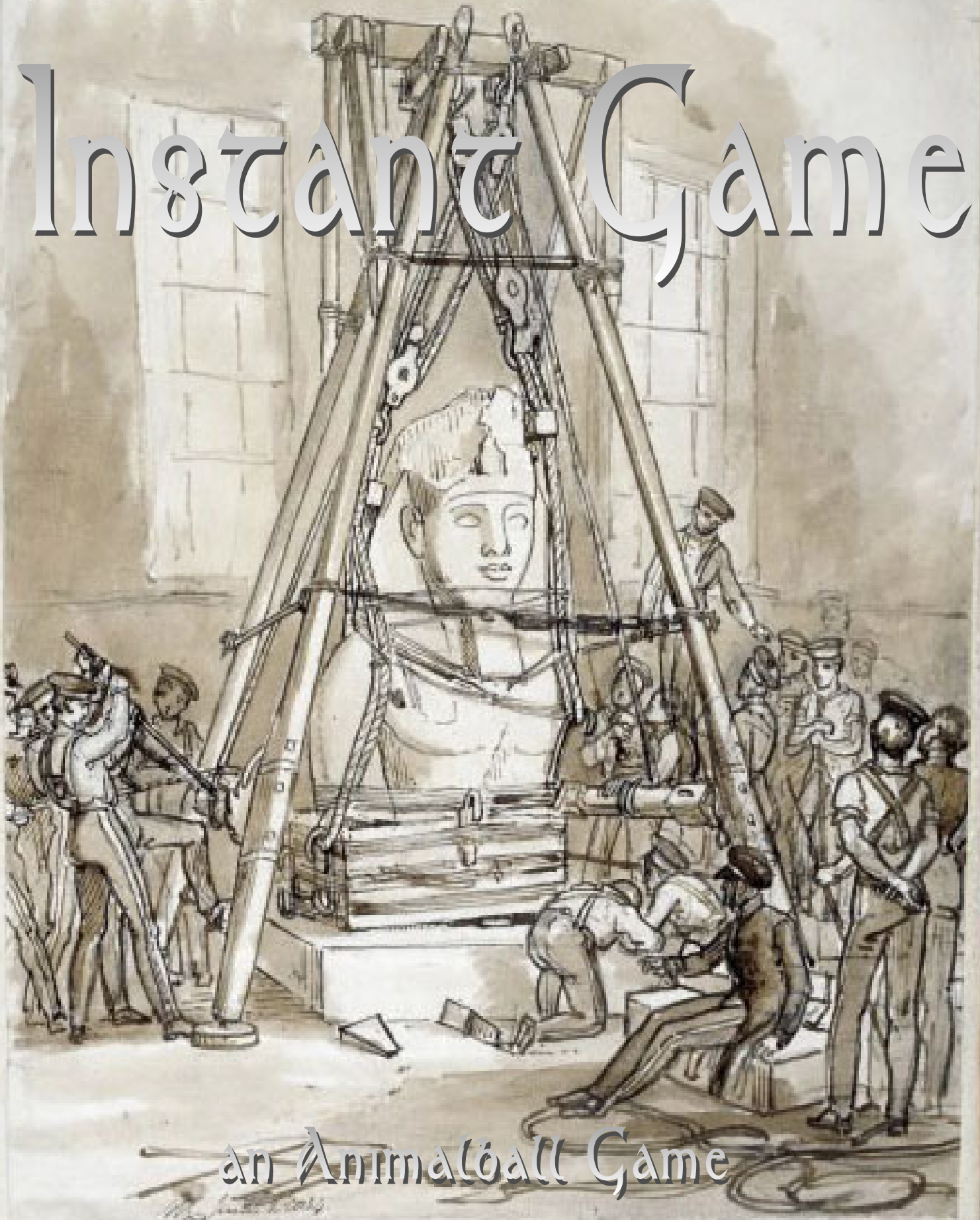


# Instant Game



an Animaloall Game

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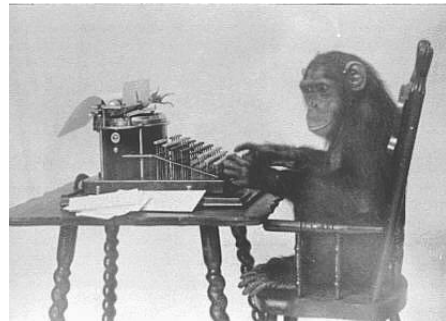
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And special Thanks to Caz Granberg for having the brass ones to run a "Random Zombie Game."



If you like Instant Game (or if you don't), please provide feedback, either at our forums: <http://www.animalball.com/forums> or by email at [instantgame@animalball.com](mailto:instantgame@animalball.com). We're not doing it for the money, but we do appreciate the attention. Thanks.

### ***A note on cultural bias***

Instant Game is intended as a tool with which to build whole worlds and stories on very short notice. As such, it relies heavily on specific genre conventions, cultural archetypes, and a pool of "common knowledge" that we hope gives all of our players a common frame of reference to start from. In order to pack in all the information we want, we often take rather glib shortcuts in our descriptions, trusting that the gentle reader will divine our intent from context, and we certainly don't sacrifice conciseness and expediency for the sake of political correctness.

For example, in the example of the glossary entry for "Ocean going ships," we describe them from a specifically Western and European viewpoint in the context of when double-masted caravels came into use. We fully recognize that other cultures also traversed oceanic distances in more primitive craft. However, to explain such a concept within the confines of a glossary entry would entail far more effort than we, the lazy partners at Animalball, are willing to invest. So just take everything with a grain of salt. And enjoy.

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# Instant Game



## Introduction

**What is Instant Game?** Instant Game is a tool for creating and playing new RPG settings on the spot. With the Instant Game charts and our flexible Instant Game rules set, you can roll up a completely original setting and plot, create and develop characters “on the fly,” and be ready to roleplay in just a matter of minutes. We know that seems incredible on its surface, but it is also a wonderfully real possibility. Instant Game is painless, as well as being some of the most exciting and challenging gaming you’ll find.

**How does it work?** The steps to creating an Instant Game are simple:

- 1) The Gamemaster (GM) rolls on the Instant Charts provided to get Instant Setting rolls and Instant Plot rolls.
- 2) The GM (usually with help from the other players) then puts the Instant Setting elements together to create a coherent world.
- 3) The GM assembles the Instant Plot elements into a workable storyline.
- 4) The GM explains the setting and any needed character guidelines to the players.
- 5) The players create Instant Characters based on our simple character creation rules.
- 6) Then play.

We're not kidding about this. Get your gaming group together with no preparation whatsoever ahead of time. Throw some dice, consult our Instant Tables, and in 30 minutes or so, you can have a complete and novel roleplaying setting ready to roll, with a plot and characters and everything. It's surprisingly a lot simpler than you think.

**But what is an RPG?** For the most part, Instant Game assumes that most of its players will be persons who have at least some roleplaying experience. As such, much of the text assumes that participants already have a working knowledge of basic gaming conventions and terminology. However, this doesn't have to be the case. For those who may be new to the industry... a very brief primer:

On his website, [www.darkshire.com](http://www.darkshire.com), John H. Kim characterizes roleplaying games by the "My Character Wouldn't Do That" test:

In many games you have a character which is really a token without personality. For example, in the boardgame *Clue*<sup>™</sup> your token is a suspect in a murder mystery. In a video game, your token might be a fighter pilot.

In my opinion, the difference between a token and a role-played character is this: Hypothetically, a person watching the game looks over your shoulder and suggests a move, and your reply is "No, my character wouldn't do that." If this happens, or is capable of happening, then at some level you are playing a role-playing game. This simple distinction puts a world of difference between RPGs and other games.

And that's just it: while Instant Game does have rules and guidelines for how to run the game and settle disputes, the heart of it is the players assuming the roles of characters and acting within the game/story as they feel their characters would act. It's like a childhood game of Let's Pretend, but with codified rules so that every altercation doesn't have to end with, BANG—I got you!... *No you didn't!*... Did too! You're dead now!... *Am not! It just grazed me!*... etc.

**How roleplaying works:** In Instant Game, one player assumes the role of gamemaster or GM, while all the rest are players who take on the role of a single character within the game (a "player character" or PC). It's up to the GM to act as guide, narrator, and referee. While everyone at the table helps put the story together, the GM is the final arbiter of what is or isn't a part of a particular world or setting. The GM narrates the setting and describes the actions of all characters not controlled by other players (these "non-player characters are also referred to as NPCs.)

Working together, the GM and players use the Instant Tables on pages 6-10 to create a world in which to set the story. Then the GM uses the tables to further create a basic storyline or plot while the players each create a character for them to play within this world. As gameplay progresses, the GM will describe the setting and what is going on. The players will each describe how their own character acts within the story, and the GM provides the responses of the environment and NPCs. Whenever conflict arises, it may be required to roll dice and follow the action resolution rules on pages 23-25.

**Using the dice:** Instant game uses two types of dice, six-sided (d6) and ten-sided (d10). The six-sided dice are always thrown three at a time (3d6) and then added to get a total result ranging from 3 to 18. Most 3d6 rolls will also include some sort of modifier, such as -5, +1, or +6. Simply apply the modifier to the 3d6 result. This can result in a negative number.

You must have two ten-sided dice, and they must be unique so that it is easy to tell one from the other—usually just using two different colors is sufficient for this. The ten-sided dice are used in pairs to generate results from 1 to 100. The first die represents the tens digit, and the second die the ones. Thus, if you roll a 7 and a 4, the result is "74." A result of double zero equals "100."

# Sample Game: The Rail

No bull, I just took out my randomizer and rolled up a new Instant Game to use with the introduction. These are the rolls exactly as they came out, followed by my development process for those rolls over about 30 minutes of work:

**Setting/Tone: Lost Civilization/Gothic**

**Things: Special Ops, Mass Transit**

**Tech Level: Galactic Empires**

**Place: Orphanage**

*I was good with Gothic Lost Civilization, but then I get SpecOps and Mass Transit? OK, I have no idea how to work those in. And the optional tech level and place don't help at all. I decide it's a mess and I go to reset the randomizer... WAIT! At the last second, before I can push F9, something in the back of my head says, "I think this can work." I've learned to listen to that voice, so I'm patient with it:*

A massive, automated subway-like system that spans the stars and makes regular stops at subway stations on various planets to carry cargo and passengers of all sorts. Now a world that was thought to be abandoned reconnects to the system and...

*...and what? The orphanage. I thought that was a throwaway, but maybe whatever civilization has survived there is brutal or twisted, and someone is trying to save the orphans by putting them on the train out. That's overly dramatic, but I think it's starting to come together.*

Imagine a civilization that spans 10,000 stars. A galactic empire of enormous proportions. And connecting all of these worlds is The Rail. Gargantuan railships travel automated routes throughout the Empire. They punch through hyperspace at trans-light speeds, and at each stop, they drop shuttles to the Rail stations planetside, swap cargo and passengers, and then they're off again to the next stop. In a sprawling and rigid galaxy-spanning bureaucracy, the Imperial Rail Service is one of the most rigid and dogmatic among them.

The planet Olivan has been long considered abandoned. Rail service discontinued 400 years ago, and investigation showed it to be a ghost planet. Utterly empty. Or so we thought. Without warning or explanation, Olivan's Rail station has been reactivated. The Rail has been making regular stops at Olivan to fill requests for refugee outbound travel. However, there is never anyone or anything boarding at the Olivan stops, and somehow the refugee request is always renewed. The most likely explanation is a system glitch, but the Service cannot simply deactivate a station with refugee requests without investigating.

*The plot is already starting to write itself, but I'll make the plot rolls anyway:*

**Opposition: Spies**

**Plot Action: Steal (Religious) Alliance**

**Plot Action: Discover (Alien) Soldier**

Enter our players: They are an elite team of Rail Service Special Investigators. They are now riding the Rail, carrying the first Olivan-inbound request in four centuries. Their status is encrypted, so if there really is anyone planetside at Olivan, they will have no idea anyone is coming.

What they will find is an abandoned Rail station, but with signs that someone has been there. Some investigation will lead them to a frenetic and intense priest who has been traveling to the station every few days to renew the outbound request. She claims she has been working for years to reactivate the station to help take the orphans in her care away from this primitive and battle-torn planet. She has no idea how people came to Olivan, but can relate legends of an angry God smiting Olivan centuries ago, the chosen people who hid underground for 1,000 days and nights being the only survivors. Olivan now is a primitive place of subsistence living ruled by local warlords.

There are two ways to handle this from here. If you want to play it straight, the above plot can be taken at face value. The orphans are in immediate danger. The players can call for backup, but it will take almost a week to get here. In the meantime, the players with their limited (but advanced) equipment must travel into the midst of a primitive war zone to find and free the orphans. Local warlords will try to kill, kidnap, blackmail or otherwise terrorize them in their efforts.

Option two leads the players to believe that this is what they are doing, but the truth is much scarier. Four centuries ago, the planet was discovered by an unknown and sinister alien race. Rather than adapting planets for their own use, these aliens live parasitically by adopting hosts already suited to the world. Human physiology was completely new to them, and the transition period was far longer than usual. The human hosts fell to a primitive state and lost most of their civilization. It has taken the aliens this long to finally fully master their human bodies and minds, and they are tentatively trying to test the Rail so they can meet other humans and find a way off Olivan to see what the rest of humanity is like, and if invasion and domination is viable. Unfortunately for them, not all of their number on Olivan is in agreement, and their primitive human natures have led them to base warfare amongst themselves.

# Instant Game Barebones

The rest of this book gives details and in-depth discussion on how to use and play Instant Game. But the core ideas of IG are relatively simple. So if you are in a hurry to get a game going and are already familiar with the basic concepts of roleplaying games, here's everything you really need to know to get a new Instant Game off the ground.

**What you need:** Pen and paper and some dice. Rolling on the Instant Tables takes a d% (d100 or a couple d10's), and game play requires three six sided dice. You need one person to be designated as the Gamemaster (GM), and then one or more people to be players.

**Instant Setting:** The GM rolls on the Instant Tables to develop a setting. A typical set of rolls would be:  
Setting—1 roll  
Tone—1 roll  
Things—2 rolls

This gives you the general outline of the elements of your world: Pulp dystopia with movie monsters and street gangs, OR Moralistic Neverland/childworld with wilderness and demons, OR Campy military installation with undead and secret societies.

If you need added detail, roll on the Descriptor table to help modify the Things: illusory demons instead of just demons, OR noble undead in place of plain undead.

*Optional setting rolls*—if the rolls aren't specific enough, make rolls on the Places, Population, and/or Tech tables to flesh it out some.

The GM can ask for help from the players in interpreting these rolls or can work alone. In about ten or fifteen minutes, there should be a fairly coherent picture of what the setting looks like.

**Instant Plot:** The GM rolls on the Instant Tables to develop a plot. A typical set of rolls would be:  
Opposition—1 roll, followed by rolls for  
Action + Thing  
Action + Other Thing  
Adding Descriptor rolls to the Things is very helpful, but not required.

The Opposition roll will tell you who's behind it all. The Action/Thing rolls give an idea of what the players have to do or to deal with: guard wedding, OR fight natural disaster, OR kidnap werewolf. These can be goals for the players to accomplish, or actions of the Opposition that the players need to thwart.

**Instant Characters:** At this point, the GM has a fair idea of what's going on. If the players don't know already, the

GM should describe the world for them and give general guidelines regarding the types of characters that are acceptable. Then the players put together characters.

Characters are defined by Traits and Flaws. Traits are positive, helpful things about your character. Traits come in three levels: Basic, Advanced, and Exceptional. A trait can be anything that describes your character, including (but not limited to):

**Skills:** learned talents that may be improved with practice—swordsmanship, chemistry, first aid, surfing, driving, painting, electronics repair.

Basic skills – familiarity and/or minor training.

Advanced skills – considerable training/competency.

Exceptional skills – at the top of one's field.

**Attributes:** innate physical or mental qualities of your character—strength, agility, willpower, presence, beauty, mechanical aptitude, wisdom.

Basic attributes – above average.

Advanced attributes – far above the norm; notable.

Exceptional attributes – near the peak of ability.

**Powers:** gifts or abilities beyond the power of normal humans—psychic abilities, superpowers, magical gifts, cyberware.

Basic powers – latent, unfocused, or otherwise weak powers.

Advanced powers – powers that are moderately consistent, powerful, or controllable.

Exceptional powers – extremely potent powers that are not only strong, but also fairly reliable in the player's hands.

**Possessions:** any item or equipment that a character may own—weapons, communications gear, vehicles, pets, real estate.

Basic possessions – mundane yet useful equipment (standard weapons and gear).

Advanced possessions – more powerful and/or rare items.

Exceptional possessions – extremely specialized, effective, and/or useful items.

**Others:** anything positive that doesn't fit neatly into the above categories—contacts, wealth, group affiliation, reputation.

Exact definition of what constitutes Basic, Advanced, and Exceptional traits will depend heavily on the exact nature of the setting. It will be up to the GM and the players to agree on what's fair for any given game.

Flaws are any aspect a character that might provide a significant limitation or hindrance during the game. Flaws do not come in different levels like traits, but a flaw is any negative aspect of a character that significantly impacts

them during game play. All characters must have at least one flaw.

Characters start with 5 Basic traits, 3 Advanced traits, and 1 Exceptional trait, as well as 1 Flaw.

In addition to the required flaw, a starting character may also take one extra flaw at character creation which earns him 1 additional Basic trait, or two extra flaws in exchange for either 2 Basic traits or 1 Advanced trait.

Depending on the world or the particular character, the GM may decide that more or less than the standard number of traits is appropriate. For example, when playing a mystery in 15th century plague-ravaged London, the GM reduced the traits to 4, 2, and 1 to reflect the impoverished nature of the peasant characters. For super powered time-travel pirates, the GM might increase the number of traits to 6/4/2 to allow a more diverse and flamboyant array of character abilities.

**On-the-fly Development**—In addition to the starting traits, each character also gets 1 Advanced Trait and 2 Basic Traits that may be used only after play has started. These “on-the-fly” traits may be assigned as the player sees fit. However, the player must provide a logical justification for the existence of the trait. Exceptional traits may NOT be added “on-the-fly.”

### Instant Gaming:

**Action Resolution**—Anytime a character wants to accomplish anything in which the outcome is not already a certainty, use the following steps:

- 1) Player declares action
- 2) GM calls out a modifier (based on the individual, their skill, conditions, etc)
- 3) Player rolls 3d6, applying the modifier to the outcome
- 4) GM (with players) interprets results. High is good. Low is bad.

After the player announces their action, the GM calls out a modifier based on everything she knows about the character and the situation. A bonus of +1 or +2 indicates that the character has a fair chance at success. Bonuses of +3 or more indicate relatively high chance of success. Modifiers of 0 to -2 indicate a moderately difficult task, and penalties larger than that mean the chance of success is slim.

Once the dice are rolled, apply the modifier and the result indicates success or failure. 10-11 is the average or “break point” for a 3d6 roll. Anything above that is considered a success. Anything below it is failure. The more extreme the results, the more extreme the success or failure. A roll exactly at 10 or 11 means only partial success. Exact interpretations are left to the GM and players.

**Instant Karma**—During game play, each character has 3 points of instant karma. At any point during the game, a

player may choose to burn instant karma to influence a dice roll. BEFORE the roll is made, the player declares the intent to use karma, and then may add one die to the roll for each point spent. After the roll, only the three best (or worst) dice are kept.



## Barebones Summary

**Instant Setting:** The GM rolls on the Instant Tables to develop a setting. A typical set of rolls would be:

- Setting—1 roll
- Tone—1 roll
- Things—2 rolls

**Instant Story:** The GM rolls on the Instant Tables to develop a plot. A typical set of rolls would be:

- Opposition—1 roll
- Action + Thing
- Action + Other Thing

Adding Descriptor rolls to the Things is very helpful, but not required.

### Instant Characters:

- 5 Basic traits
- 3 Advanced traits
- 1 Exceptional trait
- 1 Flaw

Extra Flaws = 1 extra Advanced or 2 extra Basic traits

### On-the-fly:

- 1 Advanced trait
- 2 Basic traits

### Action Resolution:

- 1) Player declares action
- 2) GM calls out a modifier (based on the individual, their skill, conditions, etc)
- 3) Player rolls 3d6, applying the modifier to the outcome
- 4) GM (with players) interprets results. High is good. Low is bad.

## Instant Tables

### Settings

<b>1</b>	Alien Occupied Earth	<b>51</b>	Lost Civilization
<b>2</b>	All Supers World	<b>52</b>	Lost/Stranded
<b>3</b>	Alternate History	<b>53</b>	Mars
<b>4</b>	Ancient Egypt	<b>54</b>	Mechanized Planet
<b>5</b>	Ape World	<b>55</b>	Medieval
<b>6</b>	Arabian Nights	<b>56</b>	Microworld
<b>7</b>	Archaic/Biblical	<b>57</b>	Military Installation
<b>8</b>	Arkship	<b>58</b>	Modern Day Las Vegas
<b>9</b>	Artificial World	<b>59</b>	Modern-Day Amusement Park
<b>10</b>	Atlantis	<b>60</b>	Modern-Day Milwaukee
<b>11</b>	Barbarian Europe	<b>61</b>	Moon
<b>12</b>	Bizarro World	<b>62</b>	Mystical Orient
<b>13</b>	Boston, 1770s	<b>63</b>	Near Future
<b>14</b>	Camping Out	<b>64</b>	Near Future World Government HQ
<b>15</b>	City Under Siege	<b>65</b>	Neverland/Childworld
<b>16</b>	Classical (Greek/Roman/Peloponnesian)	<b>66</b>	Orwellian Future
<b>17</b>	Cloud City	<b>67</b>	Outpost
<b>18</b>	Cold War	<b>68</b>	Post-Apocalyptic
<b>19</b>	Contemporary	<b>69</b>	Pre-European Americas
<b>20</b>	Correctional System	<b>70</b>	Psychic Near-Future
<b>21</b>	Cyberpunk	<b>71</b>	Realm of the Gods
<b>22</b>	Darkworld	<b>72</b>	Remote Future
<b>23</b>	Dawn of civilization	<b>73</b>	Renaissance
<b>24</b>	Depopulated Earth	<b>74</b>	Resort/Spa
<b>25</b>	Desert Planet	<b>75</b>	School of Magic
<b>26</b>	Dreamworld	<b>76</b>	Sea Adventures
<b>27</b>	Dungeon	<b>77</b>	Skyscraper
<b>28</b>	Dying World	<b>78</b>	Snowed-In Town
<b>29</b>	Dystopia	<b>79</b>	Space Colony
<b>30</b>	Early Space Exploration	<b>80</b>	Steampunk
<b>31</b>	Elizabethan England	<b>81</b>	Stone Age
<b>32</b>	Fallen Civilization	<b>82</b>	Suburban Retail Center
<b>33</b>	Farm	<b>83</b>	Sword & Sorcery
<b>34</b>	Festival	<b>84</b>	Tiny People
<b>35</b>	First Alien Contact	<b>85</b>	Tokyo/Near-Future
<b>36</b>	Forest	<b>86</b>	Traveling Circus
<b>37</b>	French Revolution	<b>87</b>	Tree-top Civilization
<b>38</b>	Frontier	<b>88</b>	Tropical Paradise
<b>39</b>	Frozen Wasteland	<b>89</b>	Underground
<b>40</b>	Future Earth	<b>90</b>	Underwater
<b>41</b>	Galactic Empires	<b>91</b>	Viking explorers
<b>42</b>	Golden Age of Comics	<b>92</b>	Virtual Reality
<b>43</b>	Grimm's Fairy Tales	<b>93</b>	War
<b>44</b>	Historical	<b>94</b>	Wild West
<b>45</b>	Industrial Revolution	<b>95</b>	Wilderness
<b>46</b>	Institution/Institutionalized	<b>96</b>	Wildlife Preserve
<b>47</b>	Isolated Space Probe	<b>97</b>	WWI
<b>48</b>	Jungle World	<b>98</b>	WWII
<b>49</b>	Limbo	<b>99</b>	WWIII
<b>50</b>	London	<b>100</b>	Your Place

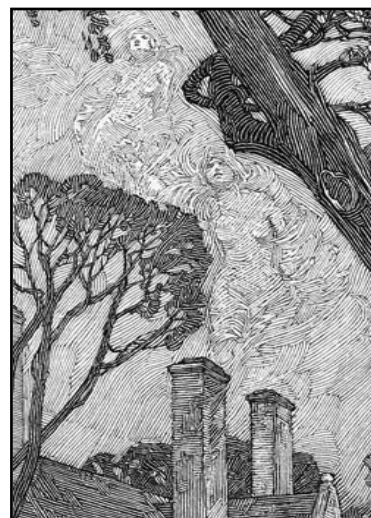
### Tones

<b>1-5</b>	Action/Adventure
<b>6-10</b>	B-movie
<b>11-15</b>	Campy
<b>16-20</b>	Conspiracy
<b>21-25</b>	Despair
<b>26-30</b>	Epic
<b>31-35</b>	Fantasy
<b>36-40</b>	Gothic
<b>41-45</b>	Heroic
<b>46-50</b>	Horror
<b>51-55</b>	Intrigue
<b>56-60</b>	Mystery
<b>61-65</b>	Mythic
<b>66-70</b>	Parable/Moralistic
<b>71-75</b>	Pulp
<b>76-80</b>	Realistic
<b>81-85</b>	Romance
<b>86-90</b>	Suspense
<b>91-95</b>	Swashbuckling
<b>96-100</b>	Tactical

### Population

#### (Optional)

<b>1-10</b>	<20
<b>11-20</b>	100
<b>21-30</b>	600
<b>31-40</b>	3,000
<b>41-50</b>	15,000
<b>51-60</b>	80,000
<b>61-70</b>	400,000
<b>71-80</b>	2,000,000
<b>81-90</b>	10,000,000
<b>91-100</b>	Even more?





## Things

1	Advanced Intelligence	51	Monkeys
2	Afterlife	52	Movie Monsters
3	Alien	53	Music
4	Alliance	54	Mutants/Mutations
5	Alternate History	55	Mysterious Energy
6	Animal	56	Nanotech
7	Anthropomorphic Objects	57	Neutral Ground
8	Artificial Intelligence	58	Neutrality
9	Atomic Monster	59	Ninjas
10	Big Business	60	Occult
11	Blood	61	Organized Crime
12	Bogeyman	62	Pirate
13	Castle	63	Political Intrigue
14	Church	64	Pollution
15	Computers	65	Powers
16	Conspiracy	66	Prophecy
17	Correctional System	67	Psychic Ability
18	Dam	68	Realm of the Gods
19	Demon	69	Robots/Automatons
20	Deity	70	Royal Bloodline
21	Disaster	71	Ruins
22	Disease	72	Sci-Fi
23	Dragons	73	Secret Society
24	Dungeon	74	Serial Killer
25	Elves	75	Ship
26	Empire	76	Space
27	Epic Heroes	77	Special Ops
28	Espionage	78	Spy
29	Exploration	79	Steampunk
30	Fairy	80	Street Gangs
31	Fire	81	Stronghold
32	Frontier	82	Suburb
33	Furry	83	The Supernatural
34	Gang Warfare	84	Supers
35	Garbage	85	Territory
36	Genetic Engineering	86	Time Travel
37	Ghost Town	87	Trade
38	Giant	88	Troubled Youth
39	Heaven & Hell	89	Ultimate Weapon
40	High Magic	90	Undead
41	Hotel	91	Underground Pariahs
42	Immortals	92	Unusual Phenomena
43	Insanity	93	Vampire
44	Invaders/Outsiders	94	Virtual Reality
45	Limbo	95	War
46	Lost Tribe	96	Water
47	Low Magic	97	Werewolf
48	Mass Transit	98	Wild Animals
49	Mecha	99	Wilderness
50	Military	100	World Domination

## Other Things

1	Armory	51	Marketplace
2	Artifact	52	Martial Arts
3	Auditorium	53	Mask
4	Blackmail	54	Mechanic
5	Brains	55	Mercenaries
6	Bugs	56	Mindless Horde
7	Burrow	57	Mob
8	Business Office	58	Murder
9	Cannonfodder	59	Mystery
10	Child	60	Natural Disaster
11	Confinement	61	Newborn
12	Cover Up	62	Nightclub/Rave
13	Crash Site	63	Noble
14	Disguise	64	Note
15	Docks	65	Park
16	Door	66	People
17	Dreams	67	Poison
18	Duel	68	Political Group
19	Elected Official	69	Prayer
20	Election	70	Prisoner
21	Elvis	71	Prostitute
22	Faith	72	Rebels
23	Farm	73	Red Herring
24	Festival	74	Religious Fanatics
25	Fight	75	Research
26	Gambling	76	Restaurant
27	Government Agents	77	Revenge
28	Government Office	78	Road
29	Grave	79	Romance
30	Grudge	80	School
31	Guard	81	Secret
32	Guide	82	Security Forces
33	Heir	83	Sleep
34	Heist	84	Soldier
35	Hired Muscle	85	Sporting Event
36	Honor	86	Store
37	Horseman	87	Student
38	Hostage	88	Survival
39	Hunt	89	Tavern
40	Illness	90	Teacher
41	Intrigue	91	Theatre
42	Invention	92	Town Square
43	Island	93	Traitor
44	Janitor	94	Travel
45	Kingpin	95	Treasure
46	Lair	96	Treaty
47	Launch	97	Untimely Death
48	Law Enforcement	98	Vehicle
49	Lawyer	99	Warehouse
50	Leader	100	Wedding

<b>Actions</b>	
<b>1-2</b>	Alert
<b>3-4</b>	Assassinate
<b>5-6</b>	Blackmail
<b>7-8</b>	Brainwash
<b>9-10</b>	Build
<b>11-12</b>	Celebrate
<b>13-14</b>	Clean
<b>15-16</b>	Clear
<b>17-18</b>	Collect
<b>19-20</b>	Convince
<b>21-22</b>	Cover Up
<b>23-24</b>	Defend
<b>25-26</b>	Deliver
<b>27-28</b>	Destroy
<b>29-30</b>	Discover
<b>31-32</b>	Disguise
<b>33-34</b>	Duel
<b>35-36</b>	Escape
<b>37-38</b>	Explore
<b>39-40</b>	Fight
<b>41-42</b>	Fire
<b>43-44</b>	Guard
<b>45-46</b>	Guide
<b>47-48</b>	Hide
<b>49-50</b>	Humiliate
<b>51-52</b>	Hunt
<b>53-54</b>	Infiltrate
<b>55-56</b>	Intimidate
<b>57-58</b>	Kidnap
<b>59-60</b>	Launch
<b>61-62</b>	Liberate
<b>63-64</b>	Lose
<b>65-66</b>	Mimic
<b>67-68</b>	Murder
<b>69-70</b>	Negotiate
<b>71-72</b>	Poison
<b>73-74</b>	Purchase
<b>75-76</b>	Recover
<b>77-78</b>	Reject
<b>79-80</b>	Rescue
<b>81-82</b>	Research
<b>83-84</b>	Scare
<b>85-86</b>	Seduce
<b>87-88</b>	Spy
<b>89-90</b>	Steal
<b>91-92</b>	Survive
<b>93-94</b>	Teach
<b>95-96</b>	Trade
<b>97-98</b>	Travel
<b>99-100</b>	Win

<b>Opposition</b>	
<b>1-2</b>	Artifact
<b>3-4</b>	Big Business
<b>5-6</b>	Charismatic Leader
<b>7-8</b>	Common Criminal
<b>9-10</b>	Conspiracy
<b>11-12</b>	Crazed Loner
<b>13-14</b>	Demon
<b>15-16</b>	Desperate Citizen
<b>17-18</b>	Deity
<b>19-20</b>	Disease
<b>21-22</b>	Divine Creation
<b>23-24</b>	Doppelganger
<b>25-26</b>	Evil Mastermind
<b>27-28</b>	Family
<b>29-30</b>	Force of Nature
<b>31-32</b>	Government Agents
<b>33-34</b>	Hired Muscle
<b>35-36</b>	Immortals
<b>37-38</b>	Infestation
<b>39-40</b>	Invaders/Outsiders
<b>41-42</b>	Kingpin
<b>43-44</b>	Law Enforcement
<b>45-46</b>	Machines Gone Mad
<b>47-48</b>	Mercenaries
<b>49-50</b>	Military
<b>51-52</b>	Mindless Horde
<b>53-54</b>	Misguided Hero
<b>55-56</b>	Mob
<b>57-58</b>	Movie Monsters
<b>59-60</b>	Mutants
<b>61-62</b>	Mythical Legend
<b>63-64</b>	Organized Crime
<b>65-66</b>	Political Group
<b>67-68</b>	Rebels
<b>69-70</b>	Religious Fanatics
<b>71-72</b>	Security Forces
<b>73-74</b>	Serial Killer
<b>75-76</b>	Societal Pressure/Custom
<b>77-78</b>	Spy
<b>79-80</b>	Street Gang/Gang Member
<b>81-82</b>	The System
<b>83-84</b>	Ticking Time Bomb
<b>85-86</b>	Tragic Villain
<b>87-88</b>	Traitor
<b>89-90</b>	Troubled Youth
<b>91-92</b>	Undead
<b>93-94</b>	Underground Pariahs
<b>95-96</b>	Warlord
<b>97-98</b>	Wild Animals
<b>99-100</b>	Yourself

<b>Tech (Optional)</b>	
<b>1-2</b>	Agriculture
<b>3-4</b>	Alchemy
<b>5-6</b>	Alien Supertech
<b>7-8</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>9-10</b>	Automobiles
<b>11-12</b>	Bronze
<b>13-14</b>	Computers
<b>15-16</b>	Contemporary
<b>17-18</b>	Cybertech
<b>19-20</b>	Domesticated Animals
<b>21-22</b>	Early Space Exploration
<b>23-24</b>	Electricity
<b>25-26</b>	Electronics
<b>27-28</b>	Flight
<b>29-30</b>	Fossil Fuels
<b>31-32</b>	Frankentech
<b>33-34</b>	FTL Travel
<b>35-36</b>	Galactic Empires
<b>37-38</b>	Genetic Engineering
<b>39-40</b>	High Magic
<b>41-42</b>	Hydro-power
<b>43-44</b>	Industrial Revolution
<b>45-46</b>	Information Age
<b>47-48</b>	Iron
<b>49-50</b>	Lighter Than Air Travel
<b>51-52</b>	Lost Technology
<b>53-54</b>	Low Magic
<b>55-56</b>	Macrotech
<b>57-58</b>	Magitech
<b>59-60</b>	Nanotech
<b>61-62</b>	Near Future
<b>63-64</b>	No Tech
<b>65-66</b>	Nuclear Power
<b>67-68</b>	Ocean Going Ships
<b>69-70</b>	Post-Apocalyptic
<b>71-72</b>	Printing Press
<b>73-74</b>	Psychic Abilities
<b>75-76</b>	Renaissance
<b>77-78</b>	Robots/Automatons
<b>79-80</b>	Rube Goldberg
<b>81-82</b>	Scientific Method
<b>83-84</b>	Solar Energy
<b>85-86</b>	Space Colonies
<b>87-88</b>	Steam Power
<b>89-90</b>	Steampunk
<b>91-92</b>	Stone Age
<b>93-94</b>	Teleportation
<b>95-96</b>	Time Travel
<b>97-98</b>	Virtual Reality
<b>99-100</b>	Wheel

## Places

1	Afterlife	51	Lost/Stranded
2	Amusement Park	52	Magic Shop
3	Arcade	53	Mansion
4	Armory	54	Marketplace
5	Auction	55	Maze
6	Auditorium	56	Military Installation
7	Bank	57	Moon
8	Barracks	58	Morgue
9	Bathhouse	59	Mountain
10	Beach	60	Neutral Ground
11	Bordello	61	News Office
12	Bridge	62	Nightclub/Rave
13	Burrow	63	Oasis
14	Business Office	64	Orphanage
15	Camping Out	65	Outpost
16	Carnival	66	Park
17	Castle	67	Parking Lot
18	Cave	68	Port/Transport Hub
19	Charitable Shelter	69	Public Forum
20	Church	70	Refuse Dump
21	Control Room	71	Resort/Spa
22	Correctional System	72	Restaurant
23	Crash Site	73	Restroom
24	Crater	74	River
25	Crossroads	75	Road
26	Dam	76	Rooftop
27	Docks	77	Ruins
28	Dormitory	78	Safehouse
29	Dungeon	79	School
30	Farm	80	Sewer
31	Festival	81	Ship
32	Forest	82	Space
33	Foundry	83	Stadium
34	Frontier	84	Stage
35	Government Office	85	Store
36	Graveyard	86	Stronghold
37	Headquarters	87	Suburb
38	Home	88	Suburban Retail Center
39	Hospital	89	Tavern
40	Hotel	90	Theatre
41	Hovel	91	Tower
42	Institution	92	Town Square
43	Island	93	Underground
44	Junkyard	94	Underwater
45	Lair	95	Vehicle
46	Landmark	96	Volcano
47	Law Enforcement Office	97	Warehouse
48	Library	98	Wilderness
49	Limbo	99	Wildlife Preserve
50	Locked Out	100	Zoo

## Descriptors

1	Abandoned	51	Historical
2	Alien	52	Hi-Tech
3	Anachronistic	53	Illusory
4	Ancient	54	Inappropriate
5	Angry	55	Infested
6	Appealing	56	Informative
7	Artsy	57	Inspiring
8	Awesome	58	Legendary
9	Awkward	59	Magical
10	Balanced	60	Malignant
11	Battle-Scarred	61	Mature
12	Beautiful	62	Medieval
13	Bizarre	63	Mercurial
14	Bright	64	Military
15	Charming	65	Miniature
16	Classy	66	Misdirecting
17	Clean	67	Mobile
18	Clear	68	Newly-Restored
19	Cold	69	Noble
20	Cruel	70	Occult
21	Curious	71	Polluted
22	Dead	72	Precise
23	Deadly	73	Prophetic
24	Deviant	74	Quick
25	Dubious	75	Recognizable
26	Dumb	76	Religious
27	Efficient	77	Reputable
28	Elegant	78	Resilient
29	Enduring	79	Rigid
30	Epic	80	Ritualistic
31	Extravagant	81	Rough
32	Famous	82	Sacrificial
33	Fantasy	83	Savage
34	Fateful	84	Sci-Fi
35	Feared	85	Secret
36	Firm	86	Shiny
37	Flexible	87	Silent
38	Forceful	88	Sloppy
39	Fortunate	89	Spiritual
40	Funky	90	Steady
41	Giant	91	Stiff
42	Gloomy	92	Strong
43	Glorious	93	Subtle
44	Grave	94	Supernatural
45	Guarded	95	Theatrical
46	Guiding	96	Thorough
47	Harmonious	97	Tough
48	Healthy	98	Tricky
49	Hearty	99	Virtuous
50	Hip	100	Wealthy

## People

1	Actor	51	Judge
2	Advisor	52	Kingpin
3	Agent	53	Law Enforcement Officer
4	Anthropomorphic Object	54	Lawyer
5	Aristocrat	55	Leader
6	Artificial Intelligence	56	Local Legend
7	Artisan	57	Magician
8	Athlete	58	Mason
9	Author	59	Mechanic
10	Banker	60	Mercenaries
11	Bar Fly	61	Musician
12	Bounty Hunter	62	Ninjas
13	Bully	63	Noble
14	Cannonfodder	64	Philosopher
15	Caretaker	65	Pirate
16	Carpenter	66	Prisoner
17	Casanova	67	Private Investigator
18	Child	68	Prophet
19	Clergy	69	Prostitute
20	Collector	70	Pundit
21	Common Criminal	71	Rebel
22	Concerned Parent	72	Recluse
23	Conspiracy Theorist	73	Red Shirt
24	Crazed Loner	74	Relative
25	Demon	75	Religious Fanatics
26	Desperate Citizen	76	Repairman
27	Devil's Advocate	77	Robot/Automaton
28	Driver	78	Sailor
29	Eccentric Millionaire	79	Salesman
30	Elder	80	Scribe
31	Elected Official	81	Security Forces
32	Expert	82	Serial Killer
33	Farmer	83	Servant
34	Fixer	84	Shopkeep
35	Gambler	85	Slave
36	Genius	86	Smith
37	Government Agent	87	Soldier
38	Guard	88	Speaker
39	Guide	89	Sportsman
40	Healer	90	Spy
41	Heir	91	Student
42	Hired Muscle	92	Swindler
43	Historian	93	Teacher
44	Horseman	94	Technician
45	Hostage	95	Thief
46	Hunter	96	Thug
47	Idiot Savant	97	Troubled Youth
48	Immortals	98	Undertaker
49	Informant	99	Vagrant
50	Janitor	100	Village Idiot

## Personalities

1	Affectionate	51	Hypochondriac
2	Aloof	52	Ignorant
3	Ambitious	53	Ill
4	Angry	54	Imaginative
5	Apathetic	55	Impatient
6	Argumentative	56	Impulsive
7	Arrogant	57	Independent
8	Artsy	58	Innocent
9	Athletic	59	Insane
10	Attentive	60	Insecure
11	Battle-Scarred	61	Intelligent
12	Beautiful	62	Introverted
13	Belligerent	63	Judgmental
14	Boastful	64	Juvenile
15	Calm	65	Lazy
16	Cautious	66	Logical
17	Charming	67	Mischievous
18	Chaste	68	Nervous
19	Chauvinistic	69	Obnoxious
20	Chivalrous	70	Obsessive-Compulsive
21	Clever	71	Organized
22	Confident	72	Paranoid
23	Cruel	73	Passive-Aggressive
24	Curious	74	Popular
25	Cynical	75	Quixotic
26	Deceitful	76	Reasonable
27	Defensive	77	Relentless
28	Defiant	78	Resourceful
29	Detached	79	Restless
30	Deviant	80	Rich
31	Devil's Advocate	81	Rude
32	Distracted	82	Sadistic
33	Ditzy	83	Sensitive
34	Dumb	84	Serious
35	Eager	85	Shrewd
36	Egomaniacal	86	Shy
37	Evasive	87	Sloppy
38	Extravagant	88	Snobby
39	Famous	89	Spiritual
40	Flexible	90	Spontaneous
41	Generous	91	Stubborn
42	Gloomy	92	Sympathetic
43	Greedy	93	Tongue-Tied
44	Hasty	94	Tough
45	Healthy	95	Ungrateful
46	Hedonistic	96	Virtuous
47	Honest	97	Vulgar
48	Humble	98	Whiny
49	Humorous	99	Wise
50	Hyper	100	Xenophobic

# The Instant Tables

There are 11 different Instant Tables. They can be applied and combined in a variety of ways to provide inspiration for your games. While everything in Instant Game is optional, some of these are more optional than others.

## Settings

The settings provide the core of your world. Some are just whole genres, like *Cyberpunk*, *World War II*, or *Wild West*. Many however are common tropes that are seen often in gaming and fiction—things like *Desert Planet*, *Ape World*, and *Dystopia*.

Even though a setting all by itself may seem terribly cliché, remember that no Instant roll is intended to stand on its own. *Post-Apocalyptic* may immediately suggest *The Road Warrior* or some other similar stereotypical post-nuclear setting. But when you combine it with other rolls, it becomes something original.

## Tones

The tone of the game indicates the general play style. *Orwellian Future* seems to indicate a pretty specific game setting. If you got *Despair* for a tone, you'd probably be on pretty familiar ground. But how different would that game be if it were a *Heroic Orwellian Future*, or *Campy Orwellian Future*, or *Horror Orwellian Future*?

## Population

This is an optional table, and probably the least used of the Instant Tables. After the first set of core rolls, the population level is most often already implied. However, if you need a general idea of how many people will be in the area, give the Population table a roll.

This can mean how many people are in a country. Or it could apply to just a single city or space station or other location. Context will tell you how to apply the roll.

## Things & Other Things

The Thing tables are just that: lists of random things.

## Tech

Tech is optional, only to be used when something needs clarification. The table is a list of technologies or technological levels, and it can be used in two ways. First it can simply identify a particular technology. More often though, the Tech table is used to identify the technology level of a society. For example, a setting of *Forest* may require a little more explanation. A roll on the Tech table will tell you how advanced our forest dwellers are. The technology rolled will usually indicate the pinnacle of that society.

Rolling twice for Tech and then combining the results for a single culture usually produces very interesting results.

## Place

Another optional table. This table provides a list of random locations that can usually be applied to almost any setting. The authors most often use this table to determine where the players start their adventure. Sure we're on a desert planet, but *where* exactly? It's a big place. The Place table tells you they're in a *Morgue* or on a *Mountain* or possibly just *On the Road*.

Where does this road lead? Check the Place table. Where have the knights hidden the sacred scrolls? Place table.



## Descriptors

Any Thing or Place can be modified with a descriptor. These are optional, but extremely handy and informative. We recommend liberal use of descriptors. A fairy is one thing, but a *Battle-Scarred Fairy* and a *Malignant Fairy* both evoke very very different images.

## Opposition

This table is very straightforward. The Opposition is the primary person, group, or force that will be working against the players in this game.

## Actions

A list of possible actions to be taken. These are usually coupled with a Thing (so it's not just *Deliver*, but *Deliver Research* or *Deliver Student*). These Action+Thing combos can be things the protagonists need to do, things the opposition wants to do, or things that have happened requiring the players to take action.

## People

A list of possible people/occupations to be used whenever a random person needs to enter the story.

## Personalities

Like Descriptors. Personalities are coupled with People rolls to provide more information about them.

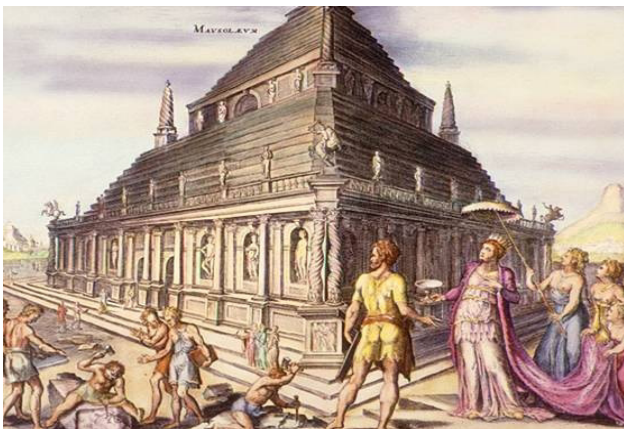
## Using the Instant Tables

The Instant Tables are meant first and foremost as an instrument of inspiration for GMs and players. Items that seem impossible together at first tend to make the most fascinating games. Prepare yourself to utilize common genre elements in very unusual ways and try out several practice rolls as a group to get a feel for how it works.

For any roll, even if you think its meaning and implications are obvious, take a look at its entry in the Instant Glossary (Appendix I). Sometimes seeing someone else's take on an item will inspire you in new ways.

But sometimes, despite your best efforts (and ours), you just aren't inspired. That's okay. If you haven't already, open up some or all of the development to your players. You'll be surprised at the directions they take things. Or if nothing's working, make some extra rolls at random and pick and choose from everything on the table. If worst comes to worst, just pitch it all and start from scratch. We're not proud.

On the other side of that coin, what happens when you have too many ideas, or you're inspired to take the world in a direction not indicated on the tables? Well, then we've done our job well in that case. If you're putting together the world from your first set of rolls and it immediately suggests an amazing plot, then go with it. Don't ruin a brilliant idea with extra dice.



The whole point of Instant Game is that a group of friends can get together for an awesome evening of gaming without any prior preparation at all. Whether or not you use all of our tables or every roll of the dice is irrelevant. The important thing is that everyone comes to the table a blank slate and in 30 minutes or so a playable game world rises from the gathered potential.

There are many ways to let the Instant Tables inspire you—these are just a few.

## The Cold Start

This is the default method of using the Instant Tables as briefly outlined in the Barebones Rules above: Players and GM come together with no prior preparation and roll on the Instant Tables to create a game from scratch.

**Instant Setting:** First, make several rolls on the Instant Tables to generate the outlines of your setting. These starting rolls are: 1 Setting, 1 Tone, and 2 Things. This gives you the core of the setting:

*A heroic adventure in modern-day Milwaukee featuring movie monsters and a church.*

*A B-Movie war setting with artificial intelligence on the frontier.*

*A mythic forest setting involving genetic engineering and space.*

Once again, these are rolls made just now for purposes of writing this section. All three sample cores above are immediately evocative in their own right. Looking at these, one can easily imagine church emissaries battling werewolves in modern-day Milwaukee, or a gritty over-the-top space war battling our own renegade computers at the edge of the solar system. That's your core. And if just three or four rolls is enough to set you on your path, then by all means, put the dice away and get going on fleshing out your game.

But what if you look at your core rolls, and it still seems a little vague? Or maybe you like the core, but you're not quite sure what direction to take it in? Then you make some supplemental rolls. Any Thing roll can be modified by a descriptor. Additionally, there are tables for Place, Population Level and Tech to help you work out exactly where and when things take place.

Looking at the forest setting above, this could go in so many ways. My instinct is a floating city/habitat in space containing a genetically engineered fairy tale forest full of unicorns and satyrs and wood nymphs, but it still feels like it doesn't have quite enough context. So I roll on some of the optional setting tables. First I'll add a descriptor to get *angry genetic engineering*. Unusual, but it gives me a darker feel for this created forest world... one of trolls and witches and other dark creations. Additionally, I try Place and Tech Level, and I get that we start at a dam, and the general tech level of the people here is "Scientific Method"—a people in the Age of Reason who maybe are figuring out that their world is not necessarily natural or logical.

Remember: **Only roll as much as you need.** Don't go mucking up perfectly good inspiration because you thought these rules told you to roll more dice.

The GM is encouraged to have the players help with the development of the Setting section. It has the advantages of often producing more interesting results, and also of creating a greater investment in the setting for everyone involved, making it more likely to be a world that everyone will enjoy. On the downside, collaborative efforts tend to take longer, and some GMs prefer to keep aspects of the game setting secret and mysterious to be revealed during the game.

**Instant Plot:** Once the basic setting has been established, the GM turns to the plot. Again, if the creation of the setting has already suggested a decent storyline, then don't bother rolling anything here. If you already have your inspiration, then save the dice for another time.

However, in most cases, you'll want a few rolls to guide you. First, start with a roll on the Opposition table. This tells you who or what is behind it all. Literally, it is what the players will be facing as they try to resolve the problems posed by the plot.

Next, make two rolls of Action+Thing. These can be Action+Thing or Action+Other Thing. The authors recommend one of each. This will give you short plot phrases like *destroy farm*, *alert heir*, or *murder lost tribe*. These can either be actions that the opposition is trying to accomplish or actions the players will need to accomplish to be successful. Let the context drive your decisions on how to apply these plot phrases.

As always, if you need a little more detail, you can add adjectives from the Descriptor table to get results like *destroy infested farm* or *alert bizarre heir*. Feel free to mix up your actions, descriptors, and things if they make more sense in a different order.

**Extras:** Finally, to flesh out any setting/story, feel free to sprinkle in extra rolls to cover the bald patches. Extra Things or People can be added in to fill out the details.



## The Instant Challenge

With the Instant Challenge, the GM makes all of the "suggested" instant setting and plot rolls, but now, is required to use as many of them as possible in the given order, without rerolling or reordering the rolls. It can be hard at times, but offers some of the most interesting results.

The "Challenge" rolls are as follows:

### Instant Setting

Setting

Tone

Thing + Descriptor

Thing + Descriptor

### Instant Plot

Opposition

Action + Descriptor + Thing

Action + Descriptor + Other Thing

### Extras

Descriptor + Other Thing

Personality + Person

Personality + Person

Then create a world from the Instant Setting rolls and a story from the Instant Plot rolls, and then find a way to fit the extras into the mix. All rolls should be used, no matter how awkward they may seem at first blush. That's how we got Easter Island-head mechas and drunken-monkey style fighting Ben Franklin and the Cherokee zombie shaman on the high plains.

## Not-So-Instant Game

The intent of Instant Game is to create a new game out of thin air with no prior preparation. But sometimes, prior preparation can be a boon. If the GM has time available, there's nothing wrong with making the rolls in advance and allowing more time to research and design the setting and story.

This can be any amount of time. Our playtesting usually involved 30 minutes of setup using either the Cold Start or the Instant Challenge detailed previously. But once, when the GM got cold feet, we decided to have him roll up the setting ahead of time, and he had about 8 hours to mull over the rolls and do some research. This is where we got a time-traveling thief stealing Excalibur from plague-ravaged 14<sup>th</sup> century London.

With hours of lead time, the GM was able to do Internet research on medieval London and the effects of the plague. He found general death rates and dangerous professions, some details on daily life, and even the name of the Lord Mayor for authenticity.

Granted, the original intent of Instant Game was as a time saver, a way to cut out a lot of the prep-work normally associated with RPGs. But if a GM has the time, Instant Game can become just a tool in the process of creating settings and campaigns. An industrious GM doesn't have to be limited to the 30 minute setup. If he wants to spend days ahead of time developing maps and history and a cast of thousands, then certainly more power to him.

## Theme Games

The first iteration of Instant Game was a "Random Zombie Game." It was Halloween, and the GM knew he wanted to run a zombie game. Working from the theory that any setting can be improved by the addition of zombies, we set about creating some tables to randomly generate a setting in which to inject some zombies.

In that same spirit, a group or GM can pick any starting theme. We know we want to play a campy B-movie style, so we start with that and then roll on the tables to fill in the details. Or perhaps one player has always wanted a game with dinosaurs. Or maybe your group wants to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stephen King's *IT* by playing a game of horror that features clowns. In each case, make your Instant Table rolls as normal but with the pre-determined elements already taken as given.

## With Other Games

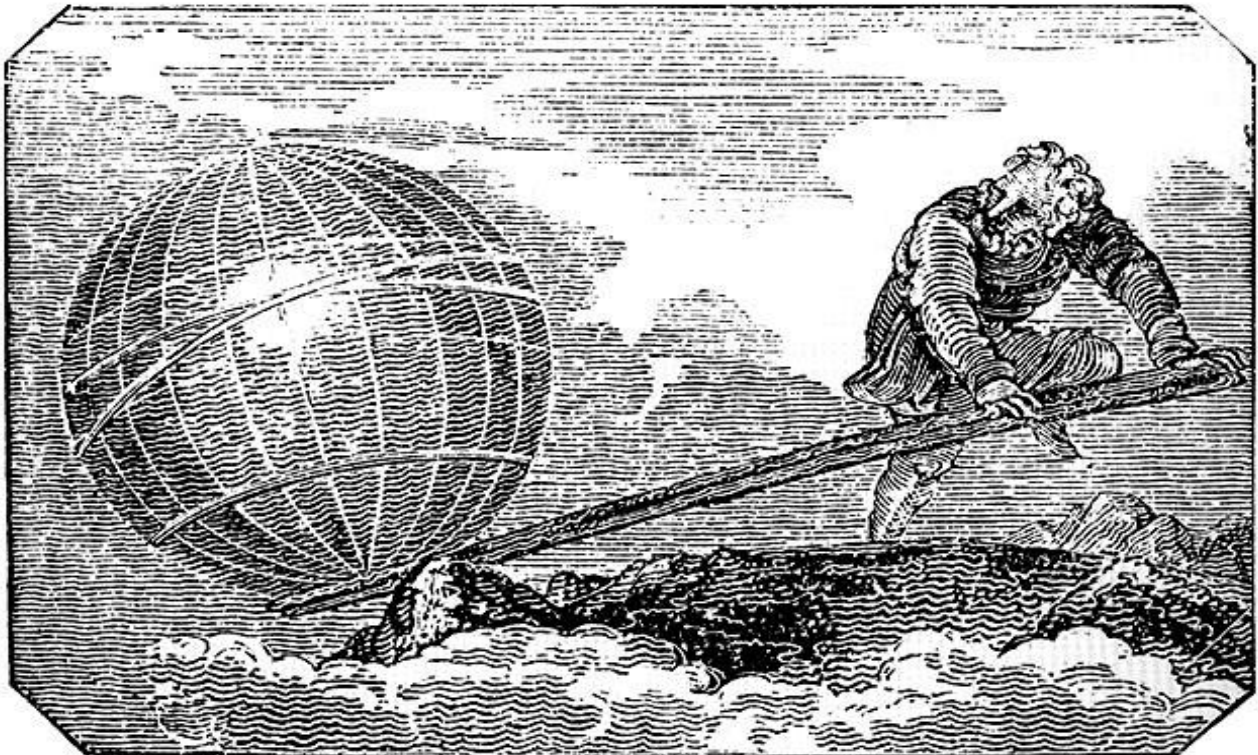
Similar to developing around a theme, the Instant Game tables can be applied to existing games as well. You may

not need the setting stuff, but the Instant Plot can be applied to any game setting.

Imagine that we're playing our favorite fantasy RPG, and we're all out of pre-packaged modules. A few quick rolls on the Instant Plot table gives us "invaders/outsideers trying to assassinate a miniature giant while the players must guard a teacher." Obviously, the invading goblins are trying to eliminate the newly found "Chosen One" who prophesy says will lead the Five Nations to victory. The Chosen One happens to be a child of the barbarian Valley Giants. It's up to the players to escort the wizened high priest of the Sun Temple to Giant Valley. If they can get the priest safely to the giant child before the goblins arrive, he may be able to help the child unlock his true nature and save us all.

But that same set of plot rolls could have worked just as well within a space opera or a game of high-seas adventure or in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. The key is inspiration. Any part of Instant Game that can help you in any of your gaming endeavors makes us happy.

In this way, the Instant Tables can be used any time you get stuck for an idea in any game. Perhaps you're using a published adventure and the players choose to go off the beaten path to look for clues in a remote hamlet. There's nothing in the adventure to cover this, and you need a half dozen or so residents to populate a local tavern. Crank out a few rolls on People and Personalities, and you can have the basics within seconds.





# Instant Gaming

Now that you have a setting and plot, you just need some rules so you can whip up some characters and get right to playing. What follows are the Instant Gaming rules, but there's nothing saying you have to use these rules. The Instant Gaming rules are designed to be very open and loose and flexible to allow for many different settings and abilities. Its character creation is meant to be as quick and simple as the Instant Setting and Instant Plot from the last section.

The heart of Instant Game is the setting and plot tables. It is a tool for inspiration. We applaud efforts to apply our Instant design tools to other systems. There are many good universal game systems out there. The Instant Gaming rules provided below are derived from our own Stories System, and we feel they are especially well suited to the broad range of possibilities allowed by the Instant Tables. But with only a little effort, one could just as well adapt d20, GURPS, Fudge, Risus, or any of dozens of others to run the stories and settings generated by the tables.

## Instant Characters

At this point, the GM has a fair idea of what's going on. If the players don't know already, the GM should describe the world for them and give general guidelines regarding the types of characters that are acceptable. Then the players put together those characters.

Initially all characters are a blank slate. They are considered to be average at everything by default, and any differences are noted as either **traits** or **flaws**. Traits are positive, helpful things about your character. Flaws are any things that may hinder your character.

## Character Creation

The character creation guidelines are actually extremely basic:

**Characters start with 1 Exceptional trait, 3 Advanced traits, and 5 Basic traits, as well as 1 Flaw.**

Refer to the following sections on Traits and Flaws for exact definitions, but this is all there is. After the setting has been established and the GM provides any guidelines for character creation, the players then select the traits and flaws that define their characters.

The 1 Exceptional Trait will typically be the defining aspect of the character—the thing they are best at or most known for. For a barbarian warrior, this might be

Exceptional Strength or Exceptional Swordsmanship. For a starship captain, it could be Exceptional Leadership.

The Advanced and Basic traits help to further define and round out the character. These can be virtually anything, from supporting skills or abilities to equipment, animal companions or important contacts.

Each character must also take one flaw—a quirk or limitation that helps define the character and remind us that no one's perfect. In addition to the required flaw, a starting character may also take one extra flaw at character creation which earns him 1 additional Basic trait, or two extra flaws in exchange for either 2 Basic traits or 1 Advanced trait. At the GM's discretion, the character could potentially take enough flaws for a second Exceptional trait, but the flaws would have to be significant and the extra trait justified within the character concept. Buying an extra Exceptional trait with flaws should be very rare. Instant Characters are meant to be created quickly, and spending that much time on finagling prices kills the Instant spirit.



Depending on the world or the particular character, the GM may decide that more or less than the standard number of traits is appropriate. For example, when playing a mystery in 15th century plague-ravaged London, the GM reduced the traits to 4, 2, and 1 to reflect the impoverished nature of the peasant characters. For super powered time-travel pirates, the GM might increase the number of traits to 6/4/2 to allow a more diverse and flamboyant array of character abilities.

## On-the-fly Development

In addition to the starting traits, each character also gets 1 Advanced Trait and 2 Basic Traits that may be used only

after play has started. These “on-the-fly” traits may be assigned as the player sees fit. However, the player must provide a logical justification for the existence of the trait. Exceptional traits may NOT be added on-the-fly.

Because of the rapid nature of world and character creation in Instant Game, the additional on-the-fly traits are intended to help fill in gaps in the character that wouldn't have been missed if the player had had more time to study the world and/or develop her character.

For example, Goltharra is a civilian advisor to the Martian Imperial Navy. She travels in important and influential circles, and has traits for negotiations, basic combat skills, and her own private shuttle (among other things). After the game has started, the players are summoned to a formal dinner with the European royal family. Goltharra's player realizes that her character naturally would have had some sort of protocol/etiquette skill that would help her here, but she never thought of it during character creation. After a quick conference with the GM, she adds Basic Etiquette to her sheet as an on-the-fly trait.

## Traits

A trait is any aspect of a character which is helpful or positive. If it's something about the character that is likely to provide bonuses to die rolls (see Action Resolution, next section), then it is a trait. Traits come in three levels: Basic, Advanced, and Exceptional. Any specific trait that is not mentioned on the character sheet is considered to be average.

### Ben Muhammed – sample character

from *Firewire* (page 92)

Ben Muhammed is young (only 19) but has always had an affinity for computers and their magic. He is passionate and loyal, and is a valuable crew member of Lady Liberty.

Exc: Netepethy – Ben's specialty is communication. He can detect other active magicians and communicate directly with them over incredible ranges. Most dangerously, he can also read the thoughts and actions of other 'Net-active users.

Adv: Laptop—his prized possession.

Adv: Magical tracking—Ben can locate and track virtually anything through his laptop. Magically active things are even easier to find.

Adv: Recall—Ben has an incredible visual memory. Not photographic, but pretty amazing.

Basic: Sailing

Basic: Physically Fit

Basic: Sailor gear

Basic: Persuasion (usually through the use of bumbling charm and puppy-dog eyes)

Basic: Firearms

Flaw: Impetuous—Ben will nearly always act before thinking. He is guided by his passions.

### Traits & Bonuses

In addition to providing description of your character, traits also provide advantages within game play by adding bonuses to the character's dice rolls. The suggested bonuses listed here under “Traits” are most appropriate when the trait in question is directly applicable to the task at hand. For example, if you are trying to maneuver a shuttle pod out of the ruins of the abandoned space station before it explodes, and you have a trait called Advanced Piloting, then the +4 bonus to your skill roll is completely appropriate.

On the other hand, when the trait isn't directly applicable, but might be helpful anyway, then the bonus will be much less—typically only a +1, but occasionally as high as +2 if the situation warrants it. When you are trying to calm down the frightened griffon who is still chained to the floor in the burning temple, you may not have trait for Calm Griffon or Magical Beast Handling, but you do have Exceptional Empathy. Empathy will certainly help you with the panicking beast, so this might provide you with a +1 or +2.

This is a very subjective process and the possibilities are as wide ranging as the conceivable diversity of traits and stories. The GM is the final arbiter, but players should help with what traits apply best, because no one knows the character better.

**What is “average”?** As with so many things in Instant Game, the exact meaning of this depends on context. “Average” is whatever is typical for the setting. This is highly variable. If the setting is medieval France, then the *average* person will likely have a working knowledge of medieval agriculture and the Christian religion and a fair tolerance for mead, but would have no idea how to drive a car (if the opportunity were to arise). In a game set in the modern day, the *average* person would likely have enough working knowledge to operate a car if needed, but would drop quickly if they had to match the French peasants drink for drink.

So if physique (for example) is not mentioned on the character sheet, then the character is assumed to be of average strength and health for their culture—not outstanding, but not deficient either.

Any area in which a character is above average will be listed as a trait.

**Basic traits** mark the character as being slightly above average and will generally provide a +1 or +2 bonus when they can be applied to a situation or roll.

**Advanced traits** are well above average and typically provide a +3 or +4 bonus.

**Exceptional traits** are the top end of the scale, singular and uniquely effective. Exceptional traits can provide up to a +5 or +6 bonus in situations to which they apply.

Skills Table				
Accounting	Carpenter	Firearms	Literacy	Rituals
Acrobatics	Chemistry	First Aid	Literature	Running
Acting	Climbing	Fishing	Locate Traps	Salesmanship
Aeronautics	Commune with Spirits	Fisticuffs	Lockpicking	Sculpting
Alchemy	Composition	Flattery	Lying	Seamanship
Alien Culture	Computer Build/Repair	Flirting	Magic Lore	Seduction
Anatomy	Computer Programming	Folklore	Marketing	Servant
Animal Calls	Computer Use	Forage	Masonry	Shield
Animal Care	Con	Forensics	Mathematics	Shiphandling
Animal Training	Cooking	Forgery	Mechanic	Shopkeeping
Antidotes	Cosmetology	Fortune Telling	Medicine	Singing
Appraise	Costuming	Gambling	Meditation	Sleight of Hand
Arcane Lore	Courtly Ways	Game Playing	Move Quietly	Smith
Archery	Criminology	Geography	Musical Instruments	Sociology
Armory	Cryptography	Ghost Tracking	Nature Lore	Spell Casting
Astrogation	Culinary Arts	Gunnery	Navigation	Starship Repair
Astrology	Current Events	Heraldry	Negotiation	Stealth
Astronomy	Dance	Herbology	Nursing	Storytelling
Avoid Traps	Demolitions	Herding	Occultism	Streetwise
Balance	Detect Lies	History	Oratory	Surgery
Barter	Diplomacy	Hunting	Painting	Survival
Basket Making	Disguise	Infiltrate	Pantomime	Swimming
Bee-keeping	Doctoring	Innkeeping	Persuade	Tactics
Begging	Dodge	Interrogate	Photography	Tailor
Biology	Drawing	Interviewing	Physics	Tall Tales
Blacksmith	Driving	Intimidate	Pick Locks	Teamster
Bladed Weapons	Drug Knowledge	Juggling	Pickpocketing	Theology
Bluff	Economics	Jumping	Piloting	Throwing
Boating	Electronics	Knots	Poisoning	Tracking
Boost Morale	Engineer	Languages	Pottery	Ventriloquism
Boot-licking	Escape Artist	Law	Prostitution	Veterinarian
Bowyer/Fletcher	Etiquette	Law Enforcement	Psychology	Vintner
Breaking & Entering	Falconry	Leatherworking	Quick-Draw	Weaving
Bribery	Farming	Levitate	Religion	Witty Insults
Bureaucracy	Fast-Talk	Library Skills	Research	Wrestling
Camouflage	Fight	Listening deeply	Riding	Zero-G Maneuvering

A trait can be virtually anything positive that describes your character, including (but not limited to) skills, attributes, powers, and possessions.

Not all traits will provide bonuses to dice rolls. Things like Exceptional Strength will grant bonuses when lifting or throwing or performing other feats of strength. Advanced Astronomy will provide a boost when trying to identify the strange dual star system we're approaching. However, something like the power of Flight, while it doesn't directly influence dice rolls, is still an Advanced or Exceptional trait (based on the nature of the setting), because it grants the character a very useful ability—namely, the ability to fly.

### Skills

Skills are learned talents that may be improved with practice—swordsmanship, chemistry, first aid, surfing, driving, painting, electronics repair, griffon handling, etc.

The full list of potential skills is far too vast to list here, and available skills will vary from setting to setting, but a representative sample is shown in the Skills Table above. The list is clearly not complete, as it makes no mention of Moneylending, Cheerleading, or Kung Fu, but it gives a fair idea of what sorts of things can be available.

**Untrained Skill Use:** If a character doesn't have a skill listed on her character sheet, then she is considered untrained in that area. This doesn't necessarily mean the character is incompetent in the field or unable to perform the skill. It just means the character has no actual training in the area. A person untrained in firearms can still pick up and fire a pistol, just possibly not well. On the other hand, a character untrained in brain surgery is not going to be able to remove the tumor from your frontal lobe, even with an instruction manual and state-of-the-art tools.

**Basic Skills:** This implies a familiarity with the skill at hand and/or some minor training in the area. Alternately, in the absence of formal training, a basic skill level may imply that the character simply has a knack for the task.

The exact level of competence implied by “basic” will depend on the skill area. Sure anyone can pick up a football and throw it, but someone with Basic Football skill will be able to throw farther and hit the mark more often. And to return to the brain surgery example, someone with Basic Brain Surgery may still lose the patient on the table (maybe), but he will at least know the procedure and can at least *attempt* the process.

**Advanced Skills:** This indicates a considerable level of training and/or experience in the skill in question. Characters are considered competent in all advanced skills, and will usually be considered an expert in the area.

**Exceptional Skills:** Anyone with an Exceptional rating in a chosen skill will be near the top of that field.

### Attributes

Attributes are innate physical or mental qualities of your

#### Angeline Black – sample character

*from Her Majesty's Cleaners (page 89)*

Angie comes from a long line of blacksmiths. Her father, Angus, tried to teach her the trade, but the lure of steam and gears kept her from mastering the art.

Exc: A mechanic's mechanic

Adv: Diamond in the rough, Angie cleans up real good

Adv: Manrikigusari - she's a demon with a length of chain in her hands

Adv: Steamwerks, one of the best design & repair shops in the city

Basic: Hidden strength, years of working metal and gears has made Angeline stronger than she appears.

Basic: Blacksmithing

Basic: Mechanic's gear - leather apron & gloves, with many tools of the trade (wrenches, hammers, calipers, goggles, etc.)

Basic: Speaks French fluently

Basic: Contacts, engineers and mechanics

Basic: Steam vehicles and automations - Angie is always working on some wondrous, if tragically flawed, gizmo or construct.

Flaw: Tomboy, her mannish clothes and usual layer of grime, rust, and soot hides the true beauty underneath. Her unladylike manners makes it difficult for her to blend in with high society.

Flaw: Amorous cad, one of the few people to see past her tomboy ways is Lord Chadwick Brighton. He's a love struck fool with more wealth and power than he deserves. Angeline wants nothing to do with Chad. But, no one says no to Lord Brighton.

### Super Traits (Optional Rule)

So what happens when Exceptional just doesn't seem like enough? Enter the Super Trait. Super Traits won't be appropriate for most Instant Games, but for games with superheroes, epic magical artifacts, high-powered magic, giant mecha-armor suits, etc, there's definitely a place for traits that can kick the crap out of exceptional.

Super Traits are things that are more powerful than Exceptional. How many are allowed will depend on the world. In a fantasy tale of epic world-saving knights and wizards, a GM may decide that 5 Basic, 4 Advanced, 2 Exceptional, and 1 Super trait will be enough to create appropriate characters. A world focusing on superheroes though might allow each character 2 or 3 Super traits to reflect the characters' major powers, and 2 or 3 Exceptional traits for their minor ones.

A Super trait can be literal super powers—super strength, mental blasts, flame projection—or can be technology or magic implements mimicking those same abilities.

Additionally, in games with one or more Super traits for each character, the GM may consider allowing one Exceptional trait to be added “On the fly” (see On-the-fly Development, page 16).

character. Sometimes (but not always) attributes can be improved through training and practice, but they are not typically things that need to be learned like skills do.

Like skills, the list of possible attributes is nearly limitless, but a list of common/representative attributes would include: agility, aim, appearance, beauty, constitution, damage capacity, drive, ego, empathy, endurance, health, intuition, magical aptitude, mechanical aptitude, memory, power, presence, psi-strength, psyche, quickness, reasoning, sanity, speed, spirituality, strength, willpower, wisdom, wit.

Note though, that many attributes overlap. Your character may not have anything noted for Agility, but she does have Coordination. It's a judgment call, but most tasks that Agility might apply to would probably get a similar boost from a well-developed Coordination attribute.

Since attributes are usually fairly broad and can apply to many situations, they typically provide smaller bonuses to dice rolls than skills.

**Average Attributes:** If a particular attribute is not noted on a character sheet, then the character is considered to be average or unremarkable in that area. If there's nothing on your sheet about Magical Aptitude, then you are no more capable in using magic than the average person. If your game is set on a Lunar colony in 2138, then “average” magical aptitude is likely “none at all.” On the other hand, in a game of elves and fantasy, the “average” character

**Ick** – sample character

from *14th Century Plague-Ravaged London* (page 95)

A street rat

Traits

Exc: Danger Sense—  
always alert to what is  
going on around him.

Adv: Generate  
Sympathy

Adv: Scrounging up  
food

Adv: Hiding

Basic: Begging

Basic: Running

Basic: Voice-throwing

Basic: Reciting prayers

Basic: Knots

Flaw: Unclean

**Sgt Tonada** – sample character

from *The Rail* (page 4)

Rail Service NCO

Exc: Ranged weaponry (expert  
marksman)

Adv: Endurance (carry huge  
loads for days, sustain  
vigorous activity for hours)

Adv: Hand to Hand combat

Adv: Advanced marine gear

Basic: Field Medic

Basic: Spotter – painting with  
laser, assessing coordinates,  
calling in strikes

Basic: Communication Ops

Basic: Drop Trooper (attacking  
from orbit to planet, vacc suit,  
small spacecraft ops)

Basic: Gardening (ex-farmer)

Flaw: Paranoid/Trigger Happy

might have magical potential that is simply unformed and untapped.

**Basic attributes:** A character with a Basic attribute is noticeably above average, but certainly not outstanding. Someone with a Basic endurance attribute will have a little more staying power than most. A Basic IQ attribute indicates a solid B student (maybe A's if she applies herself).

Basic attributes don't often provide bonuses to dice rolls, but may give a +1 if they are particularly applicable.

**Advanced attributes:** These are attributes that are well above the norm. People possessing them will be noted for these attributes. Examples would include the physical attributes (strength, speed, coordination) of professional athletes, or the reasoning attribute of a professional mathematician.

Advanced attributes typically provide a +1 bonus to tasks they can be applied to.

**Exceptional attributes:** This is a quality that is near the peak of human ability. If Advanced attributes represent pro athletes and mathematicians, then Exceptional would encompass Olympic gold medalists and Nobel prize winners.

Exceptional attributes always provide at least a +1 bonus, and occasionally as high as +2 in they are especially applicable.

**Powers**

Powers represent gifts or abilities beyond the power of normal humans—psychic abilities, superpowers, magical

gifts, cyberware, as well as physiological differences from “normal” humans. What matters here is what the power can actually *do*, and not so much the source of the power. For example, if I have the ability to move objects from a distance without touching them, that could be psychic telekinesis, or it could be wizardly magic, or maybe I'm in touch with the Force, or I have implanted sub-dermal tractor ray generators, or I can command air spirits. The exact nature and origins of the powers will make a huge difference in how they are played within the game, but all have a similar cost in terms of character creation.

In most Instant Games, Powers of any sort are only allowable if the GM has determined that they are part of the chosen setting. Instant Game is designed with a very loose character creation system to allow creation of nearly any character. But just because all things are *possible*, does not mean that all things are *allowed*.

And remember that whether a given power is Basic, Advanced, or Exceptional is extremely dependent on the setting. Armored skin could be an Advanced power in a cyberpunk setting where the implanted armor is rare and expensive. But in a post-apocalyptic world that's heavy in mutations, maybe armored skin is extremely common and only warrants a Basic rating.

Game balance is not a huge factor in Instant Game, but when it becomes a problem, it is generally Powers that throw things out of joint. See the Game Balance & Power Levels section on page 22 for more on this.

**Basic Powers:** These are latent, unfocused, or otherwise weak powers. Basic powers can be as simple as infrared

**Corbin 'Iron' Wright** – sample character

from *Her Majesty's Cleaners* (page 89)

Corbin may not be the largest brawler you've ever met, but he can take a beating and dish one out. He's a dark haired Caucasian with green eyes. His good looks are marred by a nose that's been broken several times, but he's managed to keep all of his teeth. Corbin's a bulldog of a man at 5'10" with 210 pounds of muscle to back it up.

Exc: Tough as nails, "Is that the best you've got?"

Adv: Expert brawler

Adv: Kick boxing

Adv: Bodyguard

Basic: Handsome in a rugged kind of way.

Basic: Bodyguard gear - a nice suit, handcuffs, dark  
spectacles (round wire-rim sunglasses)

Basic: Bounty hunter

Basic: Contacts, city lowlife

Basic: Contacts, street fighters

Flaw: Reputation, Corbin's rough life as a street fighter is past, but the gunslinger curse still follows him. Young punks will call him out looking to beat a legend. More refined gentlemen and ladies are equally repulsed and intrigued by this man of action and danger.

vision or a character who has claws. Possibly the character has a latent psychic ability that only manifests itself as troubled dreams and vague impressions.

Alternately, a Basic power could be more powerful, but it is not in the character's control or it only works under very limited circumstances. For example, a sorceress who can send short telepathic messages over long distances, but only after an hour-long ritual to help focus her energies.

**Advanced Powers:** These then would be powers that are moderately consistent, powerful, or controllable—or at least moreso than the basic powers. An advanced power could be something like bullet resistant natural armor (maybe from a thickened armor-like skin or from implanted cybersteel armor plates beneath the skin).

**Exceptional Powers:** Now we move into the range of extremely potent powers that are not only strong, but also fairly reliable in the player's hands. The power of flight? Telepathy? Superpowers? The sky's really the limit here, assuming that the setting allows for such abilities.

### Possessions

For convenience, Instant Game characters are assumed to have most basic possessions that would be common to a person of their culture and station. Most characters will automatically have clothing and a place to live, and the accoutrements that come with being whoever they happen to be. What this doesn't include is the useful tools of their profession. The general guideline is that anything that might provide a bonus to a roll will require using a trait.

**Basic Possessions:** However, to make it easier, use of a single Basic Possession trait will allow the character to have most of the

### Freya Highwind – sample character

*from Dust to Dust (page 92)*

Freya learned to handle boats on her father's knee. She is the best pilot/captain in town, in spite of her occasional bad luck. After the recent attack, the elders asked her to lead the rescue.

Exc: Boating; "If it's in the water, I can move it."

Adv: Fishing

Adv: Swimming

Adv: Seamanship

Basic: Flirting; "You can't be surrounded by guys and not practice."

Basic: Knots

Basic: Cooking

Basic: Fishing gear – Pole and net

Basic: Tall Tales; "I swear, the fish was this big!"

Flaw: Bad Luck; "I'm good at what I do... Really! Things, well, just go wrong sometimes..."

### Ramonat Oa – sample character

*from The Rail (page 4)*

Rail Service field investigator

Exc: See Inside Souls – not psychic, but he can perceive lies and knows what drives people.

Adv: Linguistics – knows a variety of written and spoken languages

Adv: Sharp Eye

Adv: Bargaining/Negotiation

Basic: Shoot First – attacking quickly if things look like trouble

Basic: Drive Fast

Basic: Not Getting Shot – evasion action, using cover, knowing when to run

Basic: Escape Artist

Basic: Play Harmonica

Flaw: Shy loner, does poorly with opposite sex

### Thota Memnon – sample character

*from Sideworld (page 88)*

Courtly Wizard

Exc: Side Singer – Once designed custom retreats in Sideworld. Can quickly create large and detailed objects/areas/beings within Sideworld.

Adv: Secret Knowledge – long contact with those in power gives her the inside scoop.

Adv: Ghost affinity – Sideworld spirits respond positively to Thota

Adv: Worlds within Worlds – can seal off areas of Sideworld against intrusion

Basic: Court Etiquette

Basic: Seduction

Basic: Disguise makeup and costumes

Basic: Stealth

Basic: Library researcher

Flaw: Unathletic, not very active, low endurance

common tools and weapons of their profession. A bounty hunter will have a couple basic weapons, handcuffs, probably a mount or vehicle depending on the setting, etc. And these will be very ordinary examples of their type. A wizard will have a small magical library, magical spell components, possibly a pet cat, and some base of operations appropriate to the time period—maybe a third floor walk-up or a small tower keep. The assumed or default possessions will never be of outstanding quality, power or utility.

A second (or third) Basic trait can be used for other relatively common but useful possessions that the character might want that maybe aren't standard for their profession or station. So a police officer uses a Basic trait for Basic Possessions and gets a nightstick, handcuffs, a badge, radio, and a pistol (cops make out like bandits on the Basic Possessions). But now he'd like some hunting/camping gear as well. This will require using more traits. It's up to the GM and players to figure out how much camping gear come with the use of a single trait.

**Advanced Possessions:** Essentially, this is for more powerful or more useful items than would come with a Basic trait. The cop or bounty hunter above may want a more powerful gun—a shotgun or hunting rifle. This would require an Advanced trait. A nicer, faster vehicle or mount. A home with greater amenities and security. Whereas the Basic trait might buy simple camping gear (a tent, fishing pole, flashlight, etc.), an Advanced trait would merit a moderately well-stocked RV.

**Exceptional Possessions:** These are extremely specialized, effective, and/or useful items. This is where you get the magic flail of undead-slaying, or the interplanetary sport cruiser, or the rod of lightning. This is another area that is extremely easily abused. GMs and players will have to work together to ensure that characters develop the way the players want but are still in line with

the expectations of the setting and the power level of the other characters. It's up to everyone to ensure that all characters will be able to participate together in the same game.

### Other Traits

Anything positive that doesn't fit neatly into the above categories—contacts, wealth, group affiliation, reputation—can qualify as a trait.

As a general rule, for any unusual trait, compare its utility to that of traits in other categories to help decide if the new trait should be Basic, Advanced, or Exceptional.

### Flaws

Flaws are any aspect a character that might provide a significant limitation or hindrance during the game. Flaws do not come in different levels like traits, but a flaw is any negative aspect of a character that significantly impacts them during game play. All characters must have at least one flaw.

Once again, the key is that a flaw must be some sort of hindrance to the character in accomplishing his goals. How much of a hindrance is for the players and GM to decide. There's a fine line between quirky personality traits that provide humor and/or annoyance, and a true flaw that actually holds the character or her teammates back. For example "Lazy" could just be a quirk that provides roleplaying cues for a player. However, if Lazy is taken as an actual flaw, then it will come into play quite often, and if done right will likely torque off the character's teammates on a regular basis.

Note that qualities that may seem noble can certainly qualify as a flaw if they significantly limit the character's actions. Pacifism may seem noble to some, but it severely limits a character, especially in action oriented games. A knight's code of honor may seem similarly noble, but

#### Jave – sample character

for *Firewire* (page 92)

A privateer under contract to Lord Crowl

Exc: Move non-living items from the Internet to the real world and vice-versa. This is a very lengthy but extremely powerful ability that usually leaves Jave drained.

Adv: 2D sword – nearly invisible, insanely sharp. One of the first items he made real

Adv: Agile

Adv: Talented Liar

Basic: Travel Light – all he needs is his travel pack

Basic: charm software

Basic: Archery

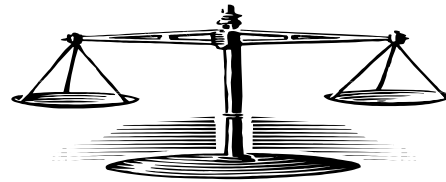
Basic: History Knowledge

Basic: good memory

Flaw: Wanted – his Exceptional Power would make a valuable tool – must keep it secret.

some villains will readily take advantage of the knight's inability to strike an unarmed foe or his drive to save innocent bystanders even if it means letting the bad guys get away.

Some sample flaws include: Absent-minded; Addiction of any sort; Ambitious; Cannot lose an argument; Can't turn away a person in need; Code of Honor; Compulsive behavior; Cowardly; Easily distracted; Enemy; Fanatically loyal (to a patron, country, organization, etc.); Foolishly brave; Greedy; Gullible; Has anger management problems; Incompetence in a specific skill area; Intolerant; Lazy; Massive debt; Mental illness; Obese; Obsessive; Overconfident; Overly generous; Pacifism; Painfully shy; Phobia; Physically weak; Poor; Programmed with Asimov's Laws of Robotics; Prone to battle rage; Racist; Slow learner; Stubborn; Thin skinned; Unlucky; Vain; Wanted by the law; Zealous behavior.



### Game Balance & Power Levels

We move into very fuzzy territory when we start using high-level powers, and it is up to the players and the GM to work out balanced characters that can operate well within the Instant World that's been created. Many things are possible, but they have to be appropriate to the setting. The character who spends his Exceptional trait on getting the *Exceptional Strength* attribute and can bench press 400 pounds may feel a bit cheated sitting next to the character with *Exceptional Power: Telekinesis* who can move two-ton trucks and boulders with merely the force of her will.

Instant Game's character creation is centered around creating quick-and-dirty characters that are well-rounded and playable. Game balance and making sure that all the characters are "equal" is not really a factor, but as noted above, there are some limits on what players will feel is fair, and certainly these rules are loose enough that players can abuse them with only a little effort, if the GM and other players allow them to do so.

Therefore, it is up to the group to have some agreement on what is and is not appropriate for any given world. If the setting is a war-torn near-future world featuring virtual reality, and one of the players uses his Exceptional attribute to be "The One" (like Neo in *The Matrix*), then we would hope that at least one other person at the table would raise an objection. Being "The One" is not out of the realm of possibility, but it is extreme, and everyone involved has to be okay with that. Otherwise, the player in question needs to develop a character more in line with everyone else's conception of the game.

## Action Resolution

As with most roleplaying games, the story can often unfold for long stretches without having to pull out dice or charts. But eventually, the players will want to try or do something where the consequences are uncertain or not immediately obvious.

Anytime a character wants to accomplish anything in which the outcome is not already a certainty, make an Action Roll:

- 1) Player declares action
- 2) GM calls out a modifier (based on the individual, their skill, conditions, etc)
  - 2a) Player may ask for clarification of modifier, or may dispute, or remind GM of other factors (this will mostly be rare, but is included for fairness)
- 3) Player rolls dice (3d6), applying the modifier to the outcome
- 4) GM (with players) interprets results. High is good. Low is bad. The average, or “break point” (10-11) is iffy.



### Declare Action

For the player, this is the most vital step in the Action Roll process. Declaring an action should involve not only a description of what the character will be doing, but also an idea of what he hopes to accomplish.

Some examples of declared actions:

*I hit him with my sword.*

*I try a computer search for any information on the Martian Resistance.*

*I brace myself against the wall and take careful aim with the dart rifle. I'm aiming for the gap of exposed skin between his suit and helmet. I'll fire as soon as I get an opening.*

*I stand back to back with Wart, and fend off the goblins with my spear. I don't care if I hurt them, so long as I can keep them at bay until we edge our way over to the boat.*

*I flash a little cleavage and pout while I talk to him. I'm hoping to keep his focus on me while the other girls slip through the trapdoor.*

*I want to charge the first guard and knock him into his buddy. If that works, I'll use my momentum in the low gravity to vault over them, using their heads and shoulders for leverage if I need to. I want to hit the ground rolling and try to squeeze under that airlock door before it shuts.*

Some of these are better than others. The best ones include both action and intent; and the more detail the better. Extra detail not only makes for a better story, but also improves communication and ensures that the players and GM share a common vision of the story as it unfolds.

Bottom line for players: the more precise you can be about what you are doing and why, the more likely you are to achieve the desired results.

### Assign modifier

Once a player has declared an action, the GM will assign a modifier that represents how difficult the GM thinks it

**Modifiers Table**

+8 (or more)	[so easy you shouldn't bother rolling]
+6 to +7	This should be really easy
+4 to +5	Relatively simple task
+2 to +3	Routine task
-1 to +1	Mildly difficult (around a 50/50 chance of success)
-2 to -3	Hard (expect failure, but you might get lucky)
-4 to -5	Long shot (maybe with luck and a good tailwind...)
-6 to -7	Roll and pray
-8 (or more)	[so hard you shouldn't bother rolling]

will be for the character to succeed.

Based on the player's description of the action, the character's capabilities, and the GM's knowledge of the situation, the GM comes up with a modifier that describes *that particular character's* chances of succeeding at *that particular task*. Table 2 provides rough guidelines for modifiers.

So wait a minute, I hear you saying, what about my Exceptional rating in Robot Repair? What's the point of stats for this if the GM just makes judgment calls on everything? Well, that's the point. Rather than coming up with a system that is either crushingly complex or else just a rough approximation of reality (or both), Instant





Game allows the GM and players together to evaluate the chances and go for it. After all, who knows the characters better? And your Exceptional Robot Repair? Well, that's part of your character's description. It lets the GM know that you are a world-class roboticist, and therefore, under typical circumstances, you're going to get a hefty bonus on any rolls related to robot repair.

Also note that in this sort of system, the player's description of the action is extremely important. If you can be particularly creative, it might increase your modifier. Just standing around hack'n'slash style saying "hit with sword... repeat" doesn't count for much—it makes you predictable and lowers your modifier.

Discussion/Dispute of modifiers: Typically, in a good gaming group that communicates well, this won't happen often, and when it does, it can be quickly and amicably resolved. Normally, once a player declares action, the GM can shout out a number, the player rolls, and the results are decided. It is all intended to move very quickly.

But sometimes, GM's and players don't see eye to eye. GM's make mistakes—maybe they forget something, or there was a misunderstanding about exactly what the character can do. Many times, GM's base their decisions on factors that the players may not be aware of, so while a particular call may seem unusual to the players, there is actually more to it than meets the eye.

In any of these cases, it is perfectly acceptable for a player to question the GM's call or

mention additional factors that the GM may have forgotten. These discussions should be brief and friendly, after which the GM will make a final call on the issue. The GM's call stands and play moves on. If there are still further issues or perceived unfairness, then these should be addressed outside of the normal play session.

## Roll Dice

Instant Game uses 3 standard six-sided dice (abbreviated to 3d6). A roll for action resolution involves rolling all three dice, adding them together and then applying the modifier.

## Interpret Results

The guiding principle behind interpretation can be summed up as: High... good. Low... bad. Very simply, high numbers mean good things happen for the character,

and low numbers mean bad things happen. The higher or lower the actual numbers, the more extreme the results. The Results table (Table 3) provides general guidelines for interpreting the rolls.

The general idea is that a roll of 10-11 is average—right on the cusp between success and failure. Anything higher will equal success. Anything lower indicates failure.

The exact nature of those results is up the GM and players (which is why we call it "interpretation.") Some examples of typical actions and the interpretation of their

**Results Table**

<u>Roll Result</u>	<u>General Result Description</u>
18 (or more)	<b>Critical</b> <i>optional</i> – open to interpretation
16-17	<b>Great Success</b> – ideal; better than you expected
14-15	<b>Success</b>
12-13	<b>Minimal Success</b> – by the skin of your teeth
10-11	<b>Push/Partial Success</b>
8-9	<b>Near Miss</b> – oh so close
6-7	<b>Failure</b>
4-5	<b>Miserable Failure</b> – you make things even worse
3 (or less)	<b>Critical</b> <i>optional</i> – open to interpretation

associated dice rolls would be:

*Kord: I brace myself against the wall and take careful aim with the dart rifle. I'm aiming for the gap of exposed skin between his suit and helmet. I'll fire as soon as I get an opening.*

*GM: (thinking that Kord's a good shot—advanced skill: marksmanship—with plenty of time to brace and aim, but the distance is great and the target small) Plus zero... no modifier.*

*Kord: (rolls dice) 14! Sweet!*

*GM: A perfect hit. Your hands remain steady, and you are able to duck back down quickly before he can even turn to look. Through the gap in the wall, you see him waver and slowly sink to the floor as the drug takes hold of him.*

*Misty: I flash a little cleavage and pout while I talk to him. I'm hoping to keep his focus on me while the other girls slip through the trapdoor.*

*GM: (factoring in Misty's considerable charms, balanced against the guard's fear of messing up on the job) +2.*

*Misty: (rolls a 9) Ack. 11. Only halfway.*

*GM: Yeah, the rent-a-cop is obviously interested in your little display, but he acts like he hears something, "Did you hear that?" he asks.*

*[At this point, if Misty acts fast and rolls well, maybe she can still distract him, but with her Partial Success result, the guard is going to turn around and spot the rest of the team at any moment.]*

*Sarra: I try a computer search for any information on the Martian Resistance.*

*GM: (knowing that the Resistance is actively hiding, and Sarra's computer skill is only about average) -3.*

*Sarra: -3? Seriously? I had experience in communications in the Royal Guard.*

*GM: Trust me. -3.*

*Sarra: (rolls an 8) Oh no... a 5. Does the computer explode?*

*GM: Nope. But you come up empty. There are references and historical data available, but nothing you guys didn't already know.*

*[Secretly though, the GM notes that Sarra's clumsy search triggered an alarm, and now the Resistance knows that Sarra's team is searching for them and will be on high alert.]*

And while the GM has the final word on all results, the stories often turn out better when the players help interpret results as well. Often, the players don't have enough information to explain everything, but it's not unusual for a player to come up with something the GM would never have thought of. This is especially true when bad things happen to players.

For really bad rolls, it is typical for players to throw out possible disastrous results, sometimes just for humor, but

others are quite usable (and usually harsher than anything the GM would have done). Things like, "My gun jammed." or "I trip over my own feet and wind up with a mouthful of dirt." or "Great, I wind up hitting the cement post, and now I can't pull my sword out." Players should be encouraged to take a hand in incorporating the dice rolls into the storyline.

**Critical Results:** At the very top and bottom ends of the chart are critical results. These are very extreme results that are entirely optional, depending on the style of game you are playing. Typically, Miserable Failure and Great Success are more than enough to cover most situations, but at the GM's discretion, even more extreme rolls may result in even more extreme consequences—things, good or bad, that are the stuff of legend. But again, that is up to the GM. For many games, it becomes unrealistic to allow such extremes and breaks the spirit of the game.

As an optional rule, the GM can decide to only allow Critical results when the dice show a natural 3 or 18 before modifiers are applied.



## Action Sequences

Most roleplaying games divide time into rounds or segments or turns, and every character has a certain number of allowable actions in those timeframes. Instant Game is not so regimented. Instead, action sequences in Instant Game are divided into *story elements*. That is, action moves from decision point to decision point, and a story element can be as short as a second or two or as long as many minutes or hours.

For example, if the action in question is a knockdown, drag-out bar brawl, then each story element may be quite short. As each combatant tries new attacks or moves to new locations, the scene shifts, and the combatants constantly make new decisions and new rolls for each maneuver.

On the other hand, if the action is a yacht race, then each story element could last for hours. Once the ships are under sail, the characters roll to determine their performance, and then it could be quite a while before conditions change and someone decides to try a new tack, as it were.

For that matter, even a fast paced piece of action may be summed up in just a couple of rolls, especially if it is not central to the plot or if it would slow down the main story to dwell on it too long. In the bar brawl example, if fighting is not really a central focus of the game in question, then the player and GM could sum up the brawl with a single roll. If the player rolls well, then the group can give a few sentences to sum up the dramatic and action-packed scrap, ending with the player's character coming out on top. A poor roll may indicate that the player's character had lost and is now in the clutches of the evil desperadoes.

In the end, it is up to the GM and players to decide how much time and detail to invest in each scene.

**Order of Actions:** There is no particular "turn order" in Instant Game. Characters take actions as it makes sense for them to do so. If the zombie is lurching wildly towards Kelly, then she has about five seconds to take some sort of action before it gets her. The GM can make the call on exactly how much can be squeezed into those five seconds. And of course, as she acts, then her undead opponent has the opportunity to notice and change tactics as well.

If it ever becomes vital to know exactly whose action comes first, and the answer is not obvious from context, then have the competing characters each roll once (the GM can assign modifiers, if warranted), and the action with the best result would occur first.



## Opposed Actions

This is one of the trickiest portions of Instant Game—how to handle opposed actions. That is, when one character is seeking a specific goal, and another is simultaneously working at cross-purposes, how is that handled?

There are a couple of approaches available. The first, and most common, is simply to let both opposing characters make rolls, and then compare them to interpret the results. If both of them fail, then likely nothing happens. If one fails and the other succeeds, then interpretation is fairly easy. If both succeed, then the one with the higher result probably comes out ahead, although that might be mitigated if the opponent's roll was pretty close. For example:

*GM: The two goons carry hand stunners which they wave threateningly as they try to block you from leaving. (The GM decides that their main objective is to prevent Josh from leaving. They will try physical restraint and will resort to stunners if he resists.)*

*Josh: I want to charge the first guard and knock him into his buddy. If that works, I'll use my momentum in the low gravity to vault over them, using their heads and shoulders for leverage if I need to. I want to hit the ground rolling and try to squeeze under that airlock door before it shuts.*

*GM: (Josh is a decent brawler, and a low-gravity veteran, but he is also unarmed and outnumbered) -2 for you Josh, and the guards will roll at +3.*

*Josh rolls an amazing 16, for a result of 14—Success! But the GM rolls for the guards, achieving a final total of 16—Great Success. Thus, Josh has done a good job, but the guards are even better.*

*GM: Wow. At first it looks like you might get away with it. You easily push down that first goon and go flipping gracefully through the air. You hit the ground rolling, and you are almost to the door, but then the second guard manages to catch his balance and tags you with the stunner. Before you lose consciousness, the last thing you see is the door slamming shut in front of your face.*

Alternately, opposed actions can be handled with a single roll by the player character. In this case, the GM simply factors the quality of the opposition into the player's modifier. This is especially effective and appropriate when the opposition consists of characters minor to the story. When the opposition is a major NPC, or especially when it is another player, then it is recommended that both parties get to roll and then compare results, as detailed above.

## Status, Fatigue, and Injury

The status of characters within a story changes on a regular basis. Characters get tired or wounded. They get drunk or drugged. They get distracted and emotional. As with everything else in Instant Game, these changes in status should be based on the context and the interpretation of dice rolls. If someone has been pushing themselves very hard for a long time, the GM may declare that the character is fatigued, and then that will factor into future actions until the character can rest. Alternately, the GM may allow the player a roll to see how affected he is by the exertion and how well his character deals with it.

## Combat & Injury

In Instant Game, wounds and injuries are simply described in real terms, and it is up to the GM to decide how much they affect performance and/or at what point a person's injuries become debilitating.

As a general guideline, when someone uses a weapon, the results of their action roll will give a good idea of how severe the injury is (see **Table 4: Wounds**). These rough results are then modified up or down depending on the size/power of the weapon and the protections available to the defender.

**Damage Modifiers**—When you hit someone in combat, the amount of damage you do is based on your Action Roll modified up or down by damage modifiers.

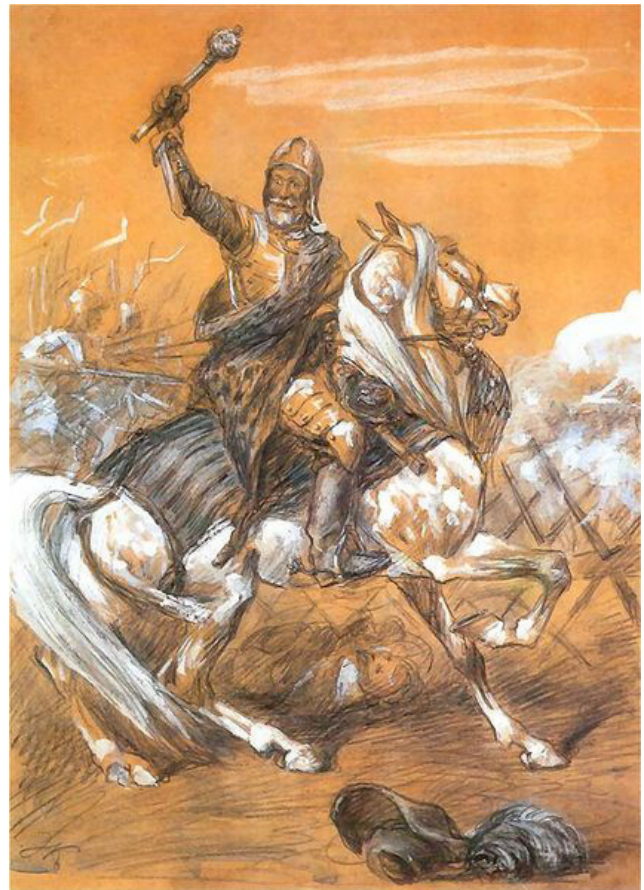
Damage modifiers are any factors that may affect the level of injury that occurs. Most weapons will have a standard damage modifier assigned to them based on their lethality. Some examples are:

- 2 Unarmed attack
- +0 Martial arts or brass knuckles
- +1 Knife or billy club
- +2 Shortsword, large club, hatchet, light bow
- +3 Broadsword, spear, light pistol
- +4 Greatsword, polearms
- +5 Medium firearms
- Etc.

These numbers can range up through +7 or more for military grade weapons though +9 for powerful magics or +15 for a Martian death ray. These are just general guidelines.

The damage modifier for muscle powered weapons can be increased by high strength. Typically this will be +1 or +2 for very strong characters (or conversely a negative damage modifier could be applied for particularly weak attackers).

Similarly, if the defender has some sort of cover or protection or armor, this will result in damage factors that reduce the amount of damage done. The guidelines for defensive damage modifiers are:



- +0 not effective against this type of attack
- +2 has a little effect against this type of attack
- +4 provides moderate protection against this type of attack
- +6 provides great protection for this type of attack
- +8 is nearly impervious to this type of attack

So these values can vary depending on the nature of the attack or other injuring effect. For example, a Kevlar bulletproof vest may provide a damage modifier of -5 versus firearms, but only a -2 modifier against most other

<b>Injury Table</b>		
<b><u>Action Roll + Damage Modifiers</u></b>	<b><u>Level of Injury</u></b>	<b><u>Suggested Game Effects</u></b>
9 or less	<b>No Injury</b>	No game effect
10-11	<b>Negligible:</b> Nick/Scratch/Bruise	-1 to the character's next 1 or 2 actions
12-13	<b>Minor Injury:</b> largely superficial; painful and distracting, but not life threatening	-1 or -2 to most actions
14-15	<b>Moderate Injury:</b> hampers action significantly; will require first aid/medical attention	-3 or -4 to most actions
16-17	<b>Severe Injury:</b> Incapacitating and may become Critical if untreated	-5 to -6 IF action is allowed
18+	<b>Critical Injury:</b> Requires immediate attention; clearly life-threatening if not immediately deadly	No significant action allowed

types of attack. Exact values for each type of protection will have to be worked out between the player and GM.

**Injury Levels**—After all damage modifiers have been applied to the dice roll, look up the resulting value on the Injury table to determine the actual results.

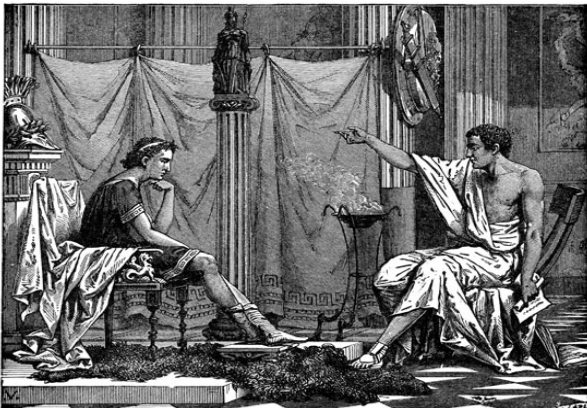
Note that the most severe possible result is a Critical Injury. Depending on the nature of the story and the situation, Critical Injury can certainly be interpreted as instant death, particularly if the roll is exceedingly high. But in most situations, dramatic necessity dictates that most main characters don't die instantly. Sometimes a Critical Injury means the character is effectively out of the game, but can still be saved. Sometimes it means that they *will* die, but they still have enough time for some final words or one last desperate action before they succumb. As always, context will determine how the GM and players interpret a Critical Injury result.

**Applying Wounds**—Each character sheet should have an Injury Track that looks like this:

**Injury Track**

Minor	Moderate	Severe	Critical
□□	□□	□	□

If you receive a Minor injury, check off a box under Minor. If you receive a Major injury, check off a box under Major, etc. If there are no boxes remaining under that category, then move to the right and check the first open box in any higher injury category. For example, if you have already received two Minor Injuries, and you take a third, move up and check off Moderate instead, in which case, you suffer all the ill effects normally associated with a Moderate injury. If there were also no Moderate boxes available, you would have instead moved to Severe. Note that there are no boxes for Negligible injuries, because they are exactly that. They may sting and cause minor distractions, but typically, a character can suffer many nicks and scratches without lasting ill effect.



If a character receives an injury of any level and there are no remaining injury boxes of any level, the character typically dies. However, death doesn't have to be immediate, as noted under Critical Injuries on the Injury table.

**Healing**—Any injuries above Negligible will require time to heal. With rest and proper care, most Minor injuries can be erased after 2 or 3 days. Moderate injuries can be marked down to Minor after a week or so. Severe and Critical injuries will take even longer, as the GM decides. Without proper rest and care, injuries may take even longer to heal, or under adverse conditions, may even get worse. Instant Games are not intended to be extended campaigns over time, but if a particular game does stretch out to weeks or months of game time, the GM and players will have to work together to determine what is appropriate here, rolling dice if needed to determine the course of the healing process.

**Cinematic Combat Option:** For some Instant Games, a very cinematic style of combat and injury is appropriate. In such games, PC's and important NPC's get injured normally, as above, with detailed descriptions and consequences. Typically these important (or named) characters can withstand quite a bit and still struggle on. Lesser characters, on the other hand, do not fare so well. These unnamed characters—minions, goons, plot devices—can usually take just one wound (of any level) and still keep going. If they get hit again, or if they take a severe hit right away, then they are out—either incapacitated or dead, depending on the nature of the game. All of the exact results will vary according to the characters and genre.

## Situational Rolls

When in doubt, roll some dice. Situational rolls aren't necessarily based on the actions or skills of a particular character. Instead, these rolls determine what happens in the story when there are random factors involved and things could go in many directions.

As with any roll in Instant Game, high is good for the players and low is bad. The GM may apply modifiers to situational rolls. Anyone present may make the actual roll.

For example, the team enters a train car, and the GM needs to know if one or more of the terrorists is in the car at the moment. She calls for a situational roll. Anyone on the team can roll, with high results being good and low results being bad. Possible results might be:

- 15+ Not only is the car empty, but the players discover a walkie-talkie that lets them eavesdrop on some of the terrorists' communication (if anyone in the group speaks Polish).
- 12-14 There are no terrorists in this car, and the passengers about are either oblivious to the players or supportive of them.
- 10-11 There's a terrorist or two in here!... but their guard is down. If the players act fast, maybe they can neutralize the situation before an alarm is sounded.
- 7-9 The car contains terrorists who sound an alarm and immediately act against the players.
- 6 or less Oh, they're there all right. And what's more, there's a lot of them. And they've got the drop on the players... big time.

Again, let the context and the dice rolls drive your imagination. Let the players participate in interpreting the results.

## ***Instant Karma***

Instant Karma points are a meta-game tool that allows players to fudge the story in their favor. Each starting character has three Instant Karma points available, and the GM may hand out more as rewards.

Players may use up an Instant Karma point at any point in the game to turn circumstances to their favor. All uses of karma points are subject to GM approval, but usually, there should be no problem with most uses. Examples of things that can be accomplished with Instant Karma points:

- Provide an automatic +/-5 to any roll if the player announces BEFORE the roll is made that karma will be used..
- Alter any roll by +/-2 after the fact.
- Convert any injury to Negligible by announcing that it wasn't as bad as it first seemed (if applied immediately)
- Create a favorable circumstance—for example, "It sure would be nice if there were a fire extinguisher in the stairwell."
- Other uses as determined by player creativity.



# Appendix I: Instant Glossary

**Abandoned** [Descriptor] You can look all you want—there's nobody here. Something that is abandoned was once used, owned or loved, but now is all but forgotten.

**Action/Adventure** [Tone] The action/adventure tone is the same tone used in about 90% of the summer blockbuster movies that are released every year. Normally there are clearly defined good guys and bad guys, and an objective which is not horribly complicated. What the tone does have is a lot of excitement: fights, explosions, players stranded on suspension bridges four hundred feet in the air, car chases, big guns, and tough talk. Using the action/adventure tone, players and adversaries can sometimes accomplish what may seem impossible (racing into a bus sinking into the water to retrieve the nuclear launch codes from the secret service agent's severed wrist), but those amazing and exciting moments are what define the tone.

**Actor** [Person] "All the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players." —William Shakespeare

The actor is anyone playing a role or part. This could be an actor in the traditional sense—an individual paid to perform on entertainment shows or stage—or something far more sinister—an assassin who has killed the princess and now morphed into her visage and assumed her place.

**Advanced Intelligence** [Thing] Where do you find something smarter than mankind? The list is long: our own sentient computers who have finally turned on us; an alien race sent to keep us from spreading; our own descendants traveled back in time; dolphins who have finally broken their centuries of silent observation; transdimensional beings of pure energy; dragons slumbering for centuries at the center of the earth. Unfortunately, compassion for humanity doesn't always go along with brains. With them being smarter than us, it sure would suck if they didn't like us.

**Advisor** [Person] Counsel; consulate; confidante; buttinski. Someone who gives advice to others—either informally (the wise neighbor), formally (the presidential advisor, or the wise man on top of the mountain).

**Affectionate** [Personality] Maybe it's cute, maybe it's creepy, but affectionate people can't keep their hands to themselves, and they sure as heck can't call anyone by their given name. Play it benign, like dear Aunt Edna who can't resist ruffling your hair every time she sees you, or creepy, like that English teacher who couldn't talk to anyone without putting a hand on their shoulder.

**Afterlife** [Place, Thing] The afterlife, if you believe in that sort of thing, is where we all go when we die. Certain religions and mythologies divide it into several different locations, (or hundreds if you've ever played a certain campaign setting by an unnamed corporation) often by the kind of life the person led while they were alive. The most stereotyped of the two are heaven and hell. Heaven, complete with feathery wings and harps, is where the 'good' people go to spend their days singing on cloud tops. The 'bad' people get hell, inferno and about a dozen and a half fiery demons playing in an accordion band.

**Agent** [Person] Generally speaking, an agent is anyone who acts on behalf, and with the authority of, another. More specifically, an agent sometimes refers to a spy or operative for a government agency, normally in intelligence, but could also refer to a business agent who represents clients in financial and professional matters.

**Agriculture** [Tech] Typically the beginning of true civilization. Once a culture figures out how to plant and harvest, they can give up their wandering ways and begin forming permanent settlements and expanding them. The rise of agriculture not only goes with the development of villages and towns, but also with written language, domestication of animals and regular trade. Quite a step for a primitive people.

**Alchemy** [Tech] Stemming from the ultimate search for a material that could transform base metals into gold, alchemy has branched out into a wide host of applications. At its center, alchemy is the study and application of alchemical reagents to other materials. Explosives, caustics, fuels, and poison are just some of the amazing products of alchemy. The technology of alchemy presents a way to introduce more technical concepts, like vehicles and firearms into a largely fantastic setting.



**Alert** [Action] An alarm or notification of some sort. Or the act of initiating such an alarm.

**Alien** [Thing, Descriptor] Creatures not of this world. The human race is in contact with some extraterrestrial intelligence. It could be big-eyed grays abducting us for research or extradimensional intelligent shades of blue who are intrigued by our prime-time programming. Maybe it's just radio contact with a distant race, or humans could be part of a Galactic Alliance of hundreds of alien species.



**Alien Occupied Earth** [Setting] It finally happened: we made first contact, and we were no match for the invaders. The aliens may be tentacled things from outer space, super-beings from an alternate dimension, or goblin-hordes swarming into our world through the newly opened Demon Gate. But no matter who they are, they are now our masters.

The players are typically humans/Earthlings seeking to free themselves from the yolk of oppression. Maybe the aliens are cruel masters who have openly enslaved mankind and ravenously devoured our weak and young. Or maybe they are more insidious and approached us as friends and mentors—only slowly revealing their sinister intentions.

**Alien Supertech** [Tech] The natives have discovered something from beyond this world, and with any luck they'll figure out how to put it to good use. Alien Supertech can be or do just about anything. Maybe it's a doomsday weapon, the remnants of a starship or a device that transports you to another dimension. Whatever it is, it does (or can potentially do) amazing things that mere humans can't even dream of at this point.

There's many ways to apply alien supertech to a setting. It could be a single device or small set of devices that have

fallen into the wrong hands. Thus a single person or group can be using it to dominate or surpass all around them. It could be only bits and pieces of alien tech. It's either old or wrecked or otherwise inoperable, but scientists are slowly teasing out its secrets and are creating (or hope to soon create) wondrous inventions based on this new knowledge. Or it could just flat out be alien technology that humans have purchased or otherwise acquired from alien forces. Like Native Americans with the white man's guns—we may not have the resources or knowledge to create voidships of our own, but we can certainly apply them with devastating effect if you give us a few.

**All Supers World** [Setting] Sometimes being special doesn't mean being different. In the All Supers World, everyone is special—and we don't mean in a "school for gifted youngsters" way, we mean EVERYONE. Your grocery store bagger may be able to telekinetically move objects with his mind, but that's no great shakes in the All Supers World and he is still only qualified to bag groceries. Law normally predominates in an All Supers World, with the most powerful Mega Heroes flaunting their stuff to keep the rest of the riff raff in line. While not required, many times in the All Supers World, everyone is in costume but no one really knows why.

**Alliance** [Thing] One group of people decides to team up with another group of people, to varying degrees of success.

**Aloof** [Personality] Disconnected by choice, acting aloof is often a defense, protecting some hidden hurt or want. This person wants you to know that they are avoiding a connection or emotional reaction from you.

**Alternate History** [Setting, Thing] Quick: pick any major event in the history of mankind. Now imagine that it went completely differently. Now envision what today's world would look like as a result. \*BUZZ\* Time's up... how did you do?



It seems daunting, but the down and dirty way to do this is to choose any major war or political conflict in history and imagine that the other side won:

WWII. 1999: Nazi Europe prepares for the 21st century.

Civil War. 1904: The Confederate States of America ally with Mexico against the Union for the disputed Southwest Territories.

The Cold War. 1989: As the west struggles with the 2nd great depression, the USSR tears down the Berlin wall to celebrate a united Communist Germany.

But with a little more thought, there's an infinite number of possibilities. More recent history is easier, because it means fewer changes to consider, but if a brave GM wants to explore a world-spanning Greek Empire under an Alexander who lived to a ripe old age, then who are we to stop them?

**Ambitious** [Personality] Ambition implies a drive to succeed or improve, often (but not always) at the expense of others.

**Amusement Park** [Place] (See Modern Day Amusement Park.)

**Anachronistic** [Descriptor] Out of place in time. If you're lucky, you're the "way ahead of your time" type. More than likely though, you're the poor unfrozen caveman.

Applied to objects, anachronism is anything anomalous for the time period. Whether it got there through time travel, magic, prophesy or alien intervention is irrelevant. The point is that it doesn't belong here.

**Ancient** [Descriptor] Old. Really old. Typically full of secrets and mystery as well, but that's not required.

**Ancient Egypt** [Setting] This one's a little unfair, because it covers such a huge broad span of time, from the earliest dynasties in 3000 BC, through the more famous Tutankhamen, Nefertiti and assorted Setis, right up to the Greek born Ptolemy and his descendants—many more Ptolemies and the infamous Cleopatra. While the picture is of the great pyramids and sphinxes amidst the barren sandy desert, remember that the lifeblood of the Egyptian Kingdoms was the cities, farms and communities that flourished along the mighty Nile. Pharaonic Egypt was a culture of complex social and political interactions tied to a system of overregulation and bureaucracy that puts



the DMV to shame.

**Angry** [Descriptor, Personality] Just plain old pissed off, and wanting to do something about it. Just try not to take it out on the others.

**Animal** [Thing] The characters come across a liger. Or is it a stray dog? Seriously, just come up with an animal (or animals) that will make the story more interesting.

**Anthropomorphic Objects** [Person, Thing] ...aka: It lives! Take any object and let it walk and talk, and you've got anthropomorphic objects. It can be a magic mirror or enchanted furniture or a demon-possessed car. It might look like an ordinary object that can simply move about on its own, but sometimes, it will come complete with a human-like face and/or limbs to help it communicate and get about. Sometimes, they'll be friendly and act like people, and other times, they'll be sinister and haunt the living with inscrutable motives.

**Apathetic** [Personality] Eh, I honestly don't care one way or another. Look it up yourself.

**Ape World** [Setting] Ape World is just like any other world, except that it's populated by apes that talk, walk, and act exactly like humans in the same setting. If from a world where humans once predominated, the apes really have a deep seated hatred for the humans. They see humans as an uncivilized lot that raped the environment and forced their ape ancestors into confinement or death.

Ape World can exist in any other setting, just replace the predominant race with apes. As an experiment, role again on the settings table and make that an ape world. 1770s Boston is now 1770s Ape World Boston. Orwellian Future is now Ape World Orwellian Future.

**Appealing** [Descriptor] Attractive and desirable. Just plain likeable.

**Arabian Nights** [Setting] If a gamemaster wanted, they could certainly play the traditional/mystical Arabian Nights everyone is familiar with from Ali Baba and Aladdin: flying carpets, chaotic marketplaces, genies, flashy sorcery and monkeys on chains. For more of a challenge, however, this same setting can be played a bit... grittier. For instance, the marketplace isn't chaotic, it's just bustling with goods that have arrived from all over the world. With the crossroads of merchant routes, this setting becomes a rich setting for black marketeers, global intrigue and ancient magicks that well from the belly of the lands themselves.

**Arcade** [Place] The arcade is the place for mindless entertainment. The people who frequent the arcade can be of a

variety of backgrounds: some are people who have worked hard all day and are looking for a fun activity to reward themselves. Some are troubled souls who live at the arcade to distract themselves from their stress. Many are young people who are simply bored and find the arcade a great social setting with their peers. In modern times, the arcade is full of stand alone video games and pinball machines. In the future, the arcade is station after station of cubicles for consumers to jack in and experience games virtually. In more primitive times, the arcade was a strip of different games of varying levels of luck and skill such as the ring toss, frog flipping and chicken races.

**Archaic/Biblical** [Setting] Pick a chapter. Old Testament or new, it doesn't matter. Just try not to pick one with all the begetting going on—even though it sounds exciting in principle, in practical terms it makes for boring game play.

From the context of technology, the biblical setting is pretty primitive. Animal husbandry? Check. Domestic crops? Check. Ironwork? Check. Anything beyond simple machines? Not so fast. The society is mainly agrarian with over ninety percent of the population in subsistence agriculture. Death rates are high and lifespans are low.

What makes an archaic/biblical setting different from a simple Iron Age campaign? Divine intervention. In civilization's more "formative" years, the gods (or God if you choose) would directly interfere with the activities of the mortals. In this setting, however, the gods are not merely immortal humans who act, speak and experience emotions (like the Greek pantheon of gods). Rather, they are unquestioned, omniscient deities that rarely interact with the mortal world, and when they do, it has earth shattering ramifications. If God has to stop being God to send a message to the rest of us, it is either really important (i.e., burning bush type-message) or really devastating (i.e., plague, flood, apocalypse). Either way, everyone pays attention.

**Argumentative** [Personality] I did this one already in another section. No, I really did. Are you calling me a liar? Just go look. Jerk.

**Aristocrat** [Person] You are a man of class. (Probably a man, if you're rolling with the traditional patriarchal power structure. Nothing to say you can't be a society dame, debutante, or damsel, though, or play in a setting with women on top).

Good breeding, powerful connections, the appearance of 'merit' or 'honor'—these are generally marks of the aristocrat. Perhaps you hold that you and your fellow aristocrats are most fit to run government, being wisest and most noble, superior to the tyranny of a man or a mass of rabble.

Aristocrats don't just exist in 17th Century Europe, either. An aristocrat is simply an ingrained part of the power structure, the elite. In present day, aristocrats go to expensive prep schools which prepare them to go to expensive colleges which prepare them for whatever six-figure career they're headed for straight out of college.

**Arkship** [Setting] A massive space-faring habitat intended to bear colonists to a new home. Arkships are large and usually have some sort of self-sustaining habitat that allows it to travel centuries or millennia without refueling or reprovisioning. The inhabitants live and die aboard the arkship, with many generations passing during the long voyage. If the ship is particularly self-sufficient and self-maintaining, the inhabitants will often lose the knowledge of how to maintain it themselves. Sometime, ark residents aren't even aware that they are on a space vessel at all. It is recommended that a roll or two on the Tech table be used to determine the overall tech level of the inhabitants' daily life.

Many twists are possible as well. What if something goes wrong and the players now have to search for the lost wisdom of the ancients to repair their world? What if they finally reach their destination, and it's already inhabited? Or while they were coasting between the stars, humans invented a warp drive and got there ahead of them, leaving the ark and its people an anachronistic relic.

**Armory** [Place, Thing] It's a stockpile of weapons. Probably very dangerous. Hopefully guarded. For whatever time period, the word armory generally implies personal weaponry and combat gear of some sort, but its range and effectiveness will vary greatly.

**Arrogant** [Personality] Not just better than everyone else, but also really smug about it. It's the smug part that gets on people's nerves.

**Artifact** [Opposition, Thing] The heart of the opposition boils down to a single item: maybe a mad computer, a cursed ring of power, an automated security system that works too well. Whatever it is, this item is causing the trouble, attacking people or possessing them or otherwise making them crazy.

**Artificial Intelligence** [Person, Tech, Thing] AI. Machines that think and open pod bay doors. "Intelligent" machines that are so complex that their responses cannot be easily distinguished from human responses. There are two distinct flavors of AI: Simulated AI which in the stories always seems human, but turns out to simply be hyper-advanced programs which ultimately stumble over some obscure situation that only a "real" human can cope with. The other type is the true AI, which really is, for all intents and purposes, equivalent to the human brain, and usually far surpassing it. Some of the most interesting tales are those in which the main characters have no agreement on which type of AI they actually have.

**Artificial World** [Setting] The artificial world may look nothing like the real world. On the other hand, the artificial world may be exactly like the real world in all things except one— it was manufactured. That is the only requirement for an artificial world. It could be a virtual replica of the real world used to simulate disasters or other natural phenomena. On a more modest scale, it could be a self-enclosed structure with limited inputs and stimulation to check the psychological effects on certain subjects. It could be an entire Museum Planet built to replicate the earth as it existed at distinct points in the past (e.g., circa 300 BC). In a more obvious scheme, everything in the artificial world could look exactly like the real world, but be made of shaped foam and durable plastic—with wildlife being animatronic replicas of actual beasts.

**Artisan** [Person] The artisan is a skilled manual worker—a craftsperson in the best sense of the word. Artisans of earlier days were backbone of the economy: carpenters, barrel-makers, blacksmiths, glass blowers. In worlds that have seen the development of an industrialized economy, the artisans are still around, but they are more truly artists and specialists, no longer creating necessities, but rather high quality luxury items.

**Artsy** [Descriptor, Personality] Creative, imaginative and expressive. The artsy person has a flair for dramatic and creative ideas, and insists on displaying it. Couples well with the ‘fartsy’ descriptor.

**Assassinate** [Action] to intentionally kill for a higher purpose—maybe for political gain or power, or maybe just for money.

**Athlete/Athletic** [Person, Personality] Someone who is healthy and in shape. While the athletic person is sometimes muscular, they could also just be well-toned. Most importantly, though, the athletic personality understands the importance of being healthy and works hard to maintain it.



**Atlantis** [Setting] The undiscovered underwater kingdom. Atlantis can be anything you want: modern, eccentric, ruinous, magical or violent. It can be a large underwater empire, or a small, discrete town. The only rule with Atlantis is: it either is an underwater city, or soon will be. There are two ways to play Atlantis: pre and post sinking. In the post sinking variety, make the city however you want as long as it is underwater (which usually means it is largely unknown to surface dwellers). In the pre-sinking variety, Atlantis can be like any other city appropriate to

your game (role again on the settings table for inspiration, if necessary) but is about to fall into the sea for one reason or other—normally due to divine intervention, but alien invasion or magical influences are also appropriate.

**Atomic Monster** [Thing] You know what really sucked about nuclear radiation in the 1950s? It turned normal animals into giant monsters with an affinity for destroying Asian metropolitan areas. Take any normal insect or reptile and make it 250 feet tall. If necessary let it breath fire or give it weird, destructive sonic powers. Make sure that it hates civilization and does everything it can to destroy it. Most importantly, and we can't stress this enough, normal bullets and airplane artillery can't hurt it (but don't be afraid to have the government try).

Typically the atomic monster goes on a rampage of mindless destruction and can only be stopped with an overwhelming and powerful force which is at least as powerful as the nuclear explosion that created it in the first place. Sometimes the atomic monster has grown protective of its hometown and defends it from outside forces. On rare and spectacular occasions, an atomic monster will rampage and coincidentally come across another rampaging atomic monster. Get ready to rumble.

**Attentive** [Personality] These people seem to notice the smallest details, and won't let you forget them.

**Auction** [Place] Depending on the forum, anything can be sold at an auction to this highest bidder. In a traditional auction, items for sale are displayed in advance for inspection and then the potential bidders gather in a room to bid on the products. Online auctions take this same principle to the virtual world, however bidders don't get to inspect the goods in advance. Caveat emptor. Anything can be auctioned: vehicles, puppies, kidneys, planets, crops, antiques and toast which purportedly carries the image of the Virgin Mary.

**Auditorium** [Place, Thing] This is a place of spectacle, where the locals gather for big events. In the ancient world, it could be anything from the rough wooden stages outside the cities for early Greek plays or it could be the grandeur of the Roman Coliseum. Modern day examples range from the elementary school cafeteria/gymnasium for school concerts up to the 100,000 seat domed sports arenas.

**Author** [Person] A person who writes for a living. It could be a modern horror novelist, an Elizabethan playwright or a 26th century vid-scripter, but they all make up stories for a living.

**Automobiles** [Tech] A society with automobiles (powered by an internal combustion engine or the magic/psychic/steampunk equivalent) greatly increases the amount of land it can occupy, cultivate and defend. Automobiles expand the functional travel ability of a society a hundred fold. This results in greater trade

capabilities and the evolution of dependent cities hundreds of miles from each other.

**Awesome** [Descriptor] In the old days, it meant of great number or magnitude. Now it means 'totally tubular,' or 'really, really ridiculously cool'.

**Awkward** [Descriptor] Anyone between the ages of thirteen to seventeen. Or, if outside that range, someone or something appearing out of place, unsure, or clumsy and off-balance.

**Balanced** [Descriptor] Well rounded. On equal footing.

**Bank/Banker** [Place, Person] The bank is the place where they keep the money. Usually it involves a vault, guards and tellers, but it could be much less or more sophisticated, depending on the setting. For some games, maybe this is more of a treasury, or for the very clever, it could be a data bank or a bank of heavy artillery... or even the West Bank.

The banker is the person who controls the money in the bank. Need a loan? Want to open an account? Need to threaten someone to get that vault open? Talk to a banker.

**Bar Fly** [Person] The bar fly is a drunk with a roof over her head. The bar fly is typically a sotting alcoholic, who spends all day, every day planted on a barstool and sucking back free peanuts along with the cheapest alcohol they can get. The bar fly's primary skills seem to be recognizing suspects and staying just level enough to never get tossed out.

**Barbarian Europe** [Setting] While the Greeks and Romans were flourishing and enjoying the marvels of indoor plumbing, they referred to the rest of Europe as barbarians. From around 1500 BC until the fall of the Roman Empire and the spread of Christianity through Europe in the 5th century, barbarians ruled. From the Celtic kingdoms of the British Isles to the Vikings of Scandinavia to the Huns of the Russian steppes, "barbarians" were an extremely dynamic and varied group. Technically, barbarians continued to control many parts of Europe even up until the 11th century.

**Barracks** [Place] A place where soldiers live. Usually this means low ranking soldiers and lots of shared amenities. Spartan in its amenities, the barracks are designed to be practical and utilitarian. With lots of bunks. Lots and lots of bunks.

**Bathhouse** [Place] The bathhouse is... uh... a public facility... that, uh... people use for... for... bathing. It is not unheard of that some of the consumers of the bathhouse may have other interests... than just... uh... bathing.

**Battle-Scarred** [Descriptor, Personality] Conflict touches those who have experienced it first hand. Physically it leaves pits and marks. Mentally it can do far worse. With respect to an object, it describes something that has been

through hell and back, but is probably still usable for its intended purpose, but maybe just barely so.

**Beach** [Place] It's fun in the sun down at the old beachside resort! Who doesn't love the feel of sand gritting between your toes, the fresh salty spray from the waves lapping up on shore, or the coarse cry of the gulls echoing across the wind? Oh wait, I know who doesn't like that: the players investigating the Order of N'goth who have turned day into perpetual night and the waters red with blood. The beach isn't always a cheap and enjoyable form of recreation.



**Beautiful** [Descriptor, Personality] Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Think of the most attractive person you know or have seen and you have the best definition we can think of.

**Belligerent** [Personality] Mean, disrespectful and downright rowdy.

**Big Business** [Opposition, Thing] The evil corporations are behind everything... as usual. Greed is good. It's all about money and power, and the players are caught in the middle of it. Depending on the setting, this could be a merchant's guild, or a modern globe-spanning megacorp. The players however, will only see lackeys and hired guns at first, and finding out who is financing all the trouble can be an adventure in itself.

**Bizarre** [Descriptor] Mind-jarringly odd. Really just too odd to be explained normally.

**Bizzaro World** [Setting] This am confusing. In a bizzaro world, everything is backwards, and things tend to be the opposite of how they are supposed to be. Suddenly you find yourself in a world where Pope Hefner I leads a crusade for the new morality and the WWF belt finally goes to the new heavyweight champion Bill "Ballcrusher" Gates. The words "post office" are synonymous with timely efficiency and reserved level-headed employees, and it seems like Arbor Day shopping seems to start earlier and earlier every year, even beginning to overshadow the grand festivities of Black History Month.

A bizzaro world is best if it comes into conflict with the real world. Either the players find themselves trapped in a bizzaro version of their own home, or else bizzaro versions of themselves are spilling into the "real" world

and causing havoc. The simplest version of a bizzaro world is "Evil Opposite." In Evil Opposite, the characters run into—you guessed it—their own evil opposites, usually easily identified by their sporty van dykes.

**Blackmail** [Action, Thing] If you want your secrets to be kept secret, then you need to pay the price. Blackmailing is more than just trying to extract money from a senator with pictures of him having an illicit sexual encounter with someone other than her husband. Some of the most sinister blackmail plots are complicated, beautiful schemes which involve setting up someone in a situation in which they have no choice but to pay your price—which can be monetary, political, or requiring violent action.

**Blood** [Thing] Every living thing has blood. Its color can vary from red to green to clear, and may not even be recognized for what it is when it's discovered. Often times found in trace amounts at a crime scene, blood can be used to identify an individual who matches the specimen discovered (by blood type, DNA, presence of alien microbes, etc.). For some creatures it is more crucial to discover the blood in copious amounts, preferably still flowing through the veins of a potential victim. For some reason, blood is often the necessary ingredient to open portals to occult planes—like olive oil, the more virginal the specimen, the better.

**B-movie** [Tone] Wouldn't life be simpler if everything was easy to identify as white and black; good vs. evil? Where heroes were normally military officers and women wore uncomfortable-looking bras. Welcome to the world of B-movie productions.

In this play style, everyone plays a well-defined role. There is some unspeakable evil that, if left unchecked will destroy the world: werewolves, vampires, zombies, giant ants, giant dinosaurs, giant spiders, giant blobs, or giant moths (see a trend?). The good guys are out for one thing—to stop the bad guys, and want to do so for no reason better than because it is The Right Thing To Do.

Good guys like to posture heroically and say ominous-sounding things like "If it reaches the plutonium refinery, it may just... destroy... the world!" Bad guys say things like "Rrrrohhrrr!" and then destroy buildings or terrorize damsels in distress. DON'T forget the damsels in distress—they are crucial.

**Boastful** [Personality] This is the best entry in the entire book. Period.

**Bogeyman** [Thing] Did you check under the bed? In the closet? Did you leave the hall light on? The bogeyman is the ultimate childhood fear, and every culture ancient or modern, human or alien has tales of the bogeymen that are told to frighten small children. The names and forms may vary wildly, but they all serve the same purpose: to scare naughty children into doing what their parents tell

them. To include the Bogeyman in a setting could be to actually make one of these mythical creatures real, or at least give the impression that it might be real. But it's also possible to simply introduce the tale of the bogeyman—the myth of the beast—as part of the plot.

**Bordello** [Place] It is a house of ill-repute. A brothel. A cathouse. A den of vice. It doesn't matter what day or age, the world's oldest profession will always find a home.

**Boston, 1770's** [Setting] Welcome to the birth of America. Don't fool yourself, however, into thinking that this is the land of unbounded dreams and ample opportunity. Indoor plumbing? Working sewer system? Think again. Even in New England it was hot and dirty, and people still dumped their waste in the open streets—not ideal conditions for a population that liked to wear powdered wigs.



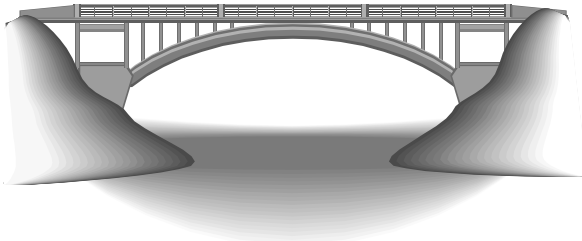
Politics were in the air, and the forefathers of the United States were plotting and scheming their independence from the British who were largely occupying most of the colonies. Most importantly, Johnny Tremain was rebelling against his future as a silversmith and unwittingly became a hero of the American Revolution. Use the high politics and American sabotage of the British as the primary focus of your game, or simply have it as the backdrop to a similarly engaging plot.

**Bounty Hunter** [Person] "Wanted: Dead or Alive". Sweet sounds to the bounty hunter's ear. Good, bad, just misunderstood - the bounty hunter doesn't care. She goes out, finds the person in question, and bring them back. Simple as that. Or is it? We all know about the Honor Is Everything bounty hunters, but that's just a narrative cliché. What about the bumbling bounty hunters? Or the bounty hunters who would rather be running a confidence game, if only they could find one? And the quarry doesn't have to be human, either. Those guys on the American frontier who got paid for every wolf pelt they brought in? Bounty hunters.

**Brains** [Thing] Either kept in a jar or good with ketchup, one can never go wrong with a good dose of crenellated gray matter. Of course, brains could also refer to intelligence or people who possess it.

**Brainwash** [Action] It's not enough to get people to do and say what you want, you've got to make them believe it. Usually involves mental and physical torture of some sort. The desperate and downtrodden make easy marks, but anyone can be broken if you know how. Popular pastime among cults and dictatorial regimes.

**Bridge** [Place] A raised structure that spans a gap, normally over water. What makes a bridge exciting in game play is the element of danger it adds: action or combat taking place hundreds of feet in the air; one slip and someone falls to their doom.



**Bright** [Descriptor] Intelligent, gifted, or gives off light. In theory, someone or something could be all three.

**Bronze** [Tech] The Bronze Age was the first era in which civilizations began utilizing metal to make tools—including weapons and domestic tools for food preparation. With the development of more durable, sharper tools, technology in other fields became more advanced as well. For example, larger more complicated boats and water vessels were created. Shelters were much sturdier.

The Bronze Age is also typically associated with a civilization's first use of rudimentary farming techniques—including plowing of fields for domestic crops, usually basic grains. This also led to more advanced techniques for domesticating animals such as oxen or sheep.

**Bugs** [Thing] Listening devices or insects? How do you choose when they're both so cool? How about genetically

modified insects implanted with listening devices? There's no way that could have dire and/or unforeseen consequences. Is there?

**Build** [Action] In one context, this can refer to the players actually having to build a physical structure: a shelter for innocents in the path of a meteor; a bridge to cross the Salantha River; an unholy weapon to fend off the angelic forces.

In another context, it can call for the players to build a relationship—an alliance, a friendship, trust, or agreement.

**Bully** [Person] You know this type. No seriously, you'd have to have been raised by wolves to have never encountered a bully. You weren't raised by wolves, right? So why are you even looking up "Bully" in the Instant Glossary?

Hey! Don't go read some other entry, punk. I asked you a question, didn't I? I want to know why you are looking up "Bully" in the Instant Glossary if you weren't raised by wolves. And no—I won't drop the question. I'll drop you in a heartbeat if you don't answer me. You want a piece of me? You email me the time and place, tough guy. [bully@animalball.com](mailto:bully@animalball.com) - you don't scare me, buttwipe.

**Burrow** [Place, Thing] When the badgers are the sizes of VW vans, you might think twice before exploring their earthen homes. Burrows are created by digging animals, such as badgers or ants. Often they are simply a long tunnel with a hollowed out space at the end. Sometimes, and ants are an example, they can be sprawling labyrinths with dead ends and cross-tunnels galore.

**Business Office** [Place, Thing] Simply put, a building that houses a business. Normally, a business office refers to a non-service-sector business (no restaurants or barber shops here). Exteriors are often bland and non-descript, and a hierarchy has evolved over the possession of parking spots (or hitching post, depending on your setting). The interiors are similarly drab, with people crowded into "working spaces" which are uncomfortably small. Paper abounds.

**Calm** [Personality] Placid and serene. Just like Bob Ross and his 'happy little trees' from the painting show on PBS.

**Camping Out** [Place, Setting] Maybe it's a military camp of Greek Hoplités waiting to overrun Persia at sunrise, four hunting buddies from the city on a canoe trip through West Virginia, or even a handful of teenage counselors sneaking a few beers after the younger campers have gone to bed. The important part is that the players are sleeping under the stars, cooking their food over an open fire, and occasionally jumping at those things that go bump in the night.

Camping out has the players roughing it in the wilderness, far from whatever it is they would normally call civilization.

**Campy** [Tone] Three words: over the top. The key to a campy campaign is to exaggerate and emphasize the obviously silly or contradictory elements of the setting and story and play everything with your tongue planted firmly in your cheek.

As opposed to a farce or outright comedy, players in a camp game typically don't openly acknowledge the humor of the situation. Instead, they play as if their characters take this ironic setting as deadly serious.

**Cannonfodder** [Person, Thing] Cannonfodder are the grunts—the people on the front lines who are placed in harm's way to protect those behind them. Typically, cannonfodder are unskilled and expendable.

The term comes literally from the battlefield, where the conscripted, unskilled commoners were sent to the front to bear the brunt of enemy fire. In other settings, cannonfodder could be employees positioned to absorb the first round of layoffs in a corporate merger. Or the jungle guides who are always the first one into the bush... and into the crocodile's maw.

In story terms, cannonfodder are most often little more than a name and position. And if you don't even bother to learn their name, then the sting when they die is even easier to ignore.

**Caretaker** [Person] Very literally, someone responsible for the care of something or someone else. It could be people, in a nurturing/healing sort of capacity; animals maybe, or even a piece of property. Nurses are caretakers, as are zookeepers. More exotic examples would be dryads, desperately guarding their small copse of trees, or highly evolved aliens charged with protecting mankind from itself.

**Carnival** [Place] A poor man's circus. Carnivals provide mindless amusement which is affordable for everyone. Attractions include thrill rides which are still mobile enough to be broken down and transported on a regular basis; freak show and oddity exhibits; and games of chance rigged heavily in favor of the house.

**Carpenter** [Person] The carpenter works a special kind of magic, turning wood into items both useful and functional - cups, cabinets, canoes, cottages. And also items that don't begin with the letter "c".

**Casanova** [Person] Typically a lover... not a fighter. A Casanova is a compulsive womanizer or seductress, with the art of romance and love always foremost in their mind. However, unlike the more crass satyr or nymphomaniac, for the Casanova, the romance portion of the equation is just as important (if not more so) than the physical expressions of love.

**Castle** [Place, Thing] Standing above the surrounding countryside, the castle dominates everything around it. Heavy stones and exacting construction strengthen its towering walls. Castles are home to powerful forces, such as emperors, dragons, giants, knightly orders, and merchant princes. Laid under siege, they are the final defense against invaders.

For many hundreds of years, castles were the ultimate weapon. Nearly impregnable, the forces they protected could control the countryside for many miles. Ancient, they stood watch over the people and grew to hold many secrets.

**Cautious** [Personality] A risk-averse individual who tries to account and prepare for any unforeseen dangers or pitfalls.

**Cave** [Place] A natural underground cavern. Normally infested with bugs and vermin. Caves are a great location to introduce creepy opposition, either mundane bats or sonar-emitting cannibal humanoids. They're also notorious locations for people to hide valuable treasures. Bring a flashlight, however, because once you go past the mouth of the cave, there's likely to be no natural source of light.

**Celebrate** [Action] Every culture goes to great lengths to celebrate. In certain indigenous tribes in south Asia, it is an important annual tradition to have surrounding families gather and feast for several days to show the gods that they have created a plush world that does not require constant toil. The Amish often celebrate, albeit in a muted fashion, events such as weddings and births. The Ancient Order of S'goth Ramsei hold a quintacentennial



celebration that involves the entire order feasting on the souls of their enemies' children—it's kind of a metaphor.

These, of course, are grand-scale celebrations. Don't forget that a celebration can be as simple as an end-zone dance after catching the game winning touchdown.

**Charismatic Leader** [Opposition] It's the cult of personality. Or maybe just a cult. It can be in a wilderness bunker or as part of a larger organization or government, but a single charismatic leader, typically with ideas that seem more than slightly crazy to the objective eye, has gathered a close cadre of fanatics, always with the goal of expanding the leader's circle of power and influence.

**Charitable Shelter** [Place] The charitable shelter is the place where the unwanted go to get out of the cold (literally or metaphorically). This can include youth hostels, homeless shelters, halfway houses or rehabilitation facilities. These aren't always the safest place on the block, and the proprietors are universally reviled by the surrounding homes and businesses.

**Charming** [Descriptor, Personality] Alluring, pleasing, delightful. Often associated with physical beauty and mannerisms.

**Chaste** [Personality] Pure, innocent and untainted. The chaste person is untouched by the 'unclean' elements of vulgar society.

**Chauvinistic** [Personality] You hear the word "chauvinist", you automatically think "male chauvinist pig", don't you? It's okay, we do too. Thing is, there's a reason there's a whole phrase involved there - a "chauvinist" isn't necessarily someone who's anti-feminism. A chauvinist is someone with an unshakeable belief in the natural superiority of a particular group, of which the chauvinist is a part. Which group? That's the beauty - it's up to you. Carnivores, magic-users, Pacific Islanders... or maybe carnivorous magic-using Pacific Islanders. Try not to be too hard on all the inferior types you'll most certainly wind up dealing with along the way, though.

**Child** [Person, Thing] A youth of any sort. While they may be precocious or surprisingly mature in some areas, children always have areas (typically social, among others) where they are clearly underdeveloped compared to adults.



**Chivalrous** [Personality] The chivalrous person lives by a code of honor that pervades all their actions. Oftentimes, ideals such as loyalty, truth and honor are more important than self-

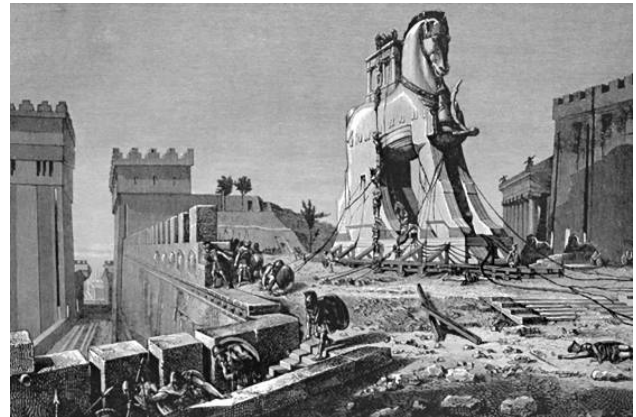
preservation. They constantly strive to reflect their ideals, and failure is unacceptable.

**Church** [Place, Thing] Any place devoted to worship, enlightenment, and/or spiritual betterment, be it Shinto shrines, Islamic mosques, or Catholic convents.

**City Under Siege** [Setting] "Animals flee this burning hell of a city. The hardest stones do not last for long. Only men endure," taken from a letter written by a soldier in the Siege of Stalingrad, one of the fiercest and most horrific sieges fought in human history.

The City Under Siege throws into sharp relief the horrors sentient beings can inflict on one another. Play takes place among the shattered remains of city blocks. Everyone is armed, angry, and trying to survive at any cost. Small arms fire stutters through the night, punctuated by massive explosions from artillery, tanks or home made bombs.

There is no food, nor water, nor safety. Only orders from on high that look a lot like suicide and the urge to kill those who have turned one's home into a ruin.



**Classical (Greek/Roman/Peloponnesian)** [Setting] In the western world (albeit ignorantly so) the Classical era is considered the origination of "cultured" society. City-states and nations developed and the birth of democracy was witnessed in Athens. On the backs of a large population of slaves and indentured servants, an aristocratic culture evolved which focused (among other things) on mathematics, philosophy, science and governance.

Feats of engineering such as extended aqueducts, massive structures and paved roads developed. Religion became quite secular as the population gradually distanced itself from the long-historied tales of their gods and creators. For the privileged, which was an ever growing lot, life became more about recreation and less about the grueling task of daily survival. Of course, all good things come to an end and with the greed and excess of the Roman empire, so did the Classical era.



**Classy** [Descriptor] You have a sense of style. You know the difference between champagne and sparkling wine, you never wear white after labor day and you always hold the door for the ladies. That's class, baby... and it's something you can't buy.

**Clean** [Action, Descriptor] Something's gotten dirty and it's up to you to make it right.

We've got stacks of drug money here and we need to channel it through legitimate sources.

Our entire network has been compromised—it'll take our cyber-programmers days, if not longer, to remove all traces of the virus attack.

Hercules, have you seen where I keep my horses?

**Clear** [Action, Descriptor] Well said. To see through. Concise.

**Clergy** [Person] Any person ordained for religious service. One usually thinks of the priesthood of larger mainstream religions, but any religious personage could fill this role.

The clergy are typically seen as caring and compassionate, purveyors of wisdom, enlightenment and spiritual guidance. But depending on the setting, clergy can also be righteously vengeful, or withdrawn and introspective, or even worldly and sophisticated—doing their faith's service in the context of the larger world.

**Clever** [Personality] Witty. Bright. Ingenious. The clever person usually sees through any gambit and can figure out, or even create, all the angles to any scheme or plot.

**Cloud City** [Setting] The Cloud City has always been heralded in legend and lore as the floating kingdom that escaped the bounds of earth. High above the ground, Cloud City is nestled in the magical clouds that keep it aloft. The weather is always immaculate and the sun beams brightly during the day. But Cloud City is also a marvel of engineering. The clouds don't support mere mortals, so one wrong step and a person will fall miles to their death on the rocks below. If the world is not magical, Cloud City can float on negative-gravity generators which can also move it at impressive speeds around the globe. Given the vulnerable nature of Cloud City, it is normally very well armed and defended.

**Cold** [Descriptor] There are unusual people who are emotionally detached from everyone around them, even their family, spouses and children. These cold personalities are normally quiet, introspective and calm. They detest expressions of feelings such as love, anger, joy or sorrow.

Of low temperature or with a cruel disposition.

**Cold War** [Setting] East vs. West- and we're not talking about rival rap labels here. The Cold War spanned from the end of WWII until the early nineties when the Berlin wall came down. The Cold War is defined by the war of opposing ideologies: capitalist running dogs vs. commie pinkos. While the political philosophies of the two sides were greatly different, their strategies for winning the Cold War were surprisingly similar: military build up; nuclear deterrence; extensive espionage networks; complex alliances and misinformation.

Certainly a Cold War game can take place in the appropriate time period (60s-90s) in any global location (East Germany, Siberia, Nicaragua). But it can also exist in a variety of other settings, from alternate futures (where the commies win and invade mainland US) to Cthulu (the old ones awaken in the time of nuclear standoffs).

**Collect** [Action, Person] Collecting has a couple different flavors. In the first, they have it, and your job is to go collect it. And if you're not the one who has earned it, you normally have to deliver it to them. Collecting can be as mundane collecting a debt from a deadbeat, as complicated as collecting a vow of allegiance from the Council of Dukes or as serious as having to collect the souls of unrepentant rebellion leaders.

Or you could be the other sort of collector—the ones who amass specific items simply for the joy of having them all together in one place. Collectors of this type get strange satisfaction from maintaining collections of odd, but hard to obtain, objects. Often the collectors need to complete a certain collection is obsessive—the collector will offer outrageous sums of money for objects that seem worthless. Collections include: stamps, rare swords, porcelain dolls, trading cards and alien internal organs (normally pickled in jars).

**Common Criminal** [Opposition, Person] Also known as a thug or a punk, the common criminal is a minor ruffian, committing minor crimes to get by. A stereotypical common criminal would be short on wits and morals, but long on muscle and brutality. As such, they are not sophisticated, not good at covering their tracks, and tend to get caught a lot.



The common criminal's transgression of choice can be almost anything: breaking and entering, mugging, vandalism.

**Computers** [Tech, Thing] Whether or not we want to admit it, computers have revolutionized the world. In a tiny box (or phone, or goggles) we have invented a machine that can process information at immeasurably fast speeds. We often discuss the "information age" but it is better thought of as the "computer age" because the revolution of instant access to any information is solely due to the computer. And I'm just talking about the Commodore 64.

While computers can be powerful, the movies have taught us this: if you accidentally spill a beverage on one, it will either turn evil or it will teach you to open your heart to an undiscovered love (normally your attractive neighbor who wouldn't have looked twice at a geeky person like yourself).

**Concerned Parent** [Person] A concerned parent always gets involved, and no one can stop them. Obviously it involves their child, and the situation is grave enough that they are concerned. Otherwise they wouldn't be here, right? Who's going to tell the concerned parent to shut up and go back home? So just acknowledge the fact that you're going to have to deal with them, and be prepared for the unexpected. Concerned parents aren't the most rational nut in the bucket.

**Confident** [Personality] Fortright, assertive and sure in their abilities. Confident people know they are right and extremely decisive. Unfortunately, they often are blind to when they are wrong and refuse to acknowledge mistakes.

**Confinement** [Thing] Sometimes complete isolation is a worse fate than death. People have always had reasons to confine others: punishment for breaking the law; maladjusted psychopath; political purges. Confinement, however, does not necessarily mean being locked away in prison (although it certainly includes that). People can be confined to interdimensional voids that cannot be escaped until the teleportal is reopened. Or trapped in a fire sphere by the Lord Hellion Badranian for tampering with occult relics. Or placed into a coma by a doctor to keep from talking to the police about the murder that was witnessed.

**Conspiracy** [Opposition, Thing, Tone] "I have to take the pills to keep me from sleeping. When I sleep is the only chance they have to read my thoughts."

Okay, that's a little extreme. But the theme of the Conspiracy tone is that the players are questioning everything. The government may have cameras hidden in the corners of every house. The necrotic wizard may be following the players with his invisible hand, waiting for the opportunity to poison their food with his decayed flesh. The aliens have taken on human form and now the humans can't tell who is friend and who is foe. Despite the

setting or genre, a game played in a tone of conspiracy must have two elements: (1) A powerful force which could be anywhere, and the players can't tell where; and (2) it's out to get them.

**Conspiracy Theorist** [Person] The clearest path is always through the mud. The conspiracy theorist knows the truth behind everything, and the more convoluted it is, the better. To the conspiracy theorist, there is a sinister motive behind everything, and there's always a monolithic overarching agency behind it to cover it all up. The really talented conspiricist will always manage to tie them all together, so that everything is linked if you just know how to interpret it.

Typically, the conspiracy theorist is considered a modern invention, and by extension, the ever-increasing complexity of future worlds makes the conspiracy theorist a natural fit. But it is easy to imagine this mentality in virtually any setting—for example, a viking raider who is convinced that a cabal of vampires secretly controls trade routes and introduces plagues to villages that hinder them.

Whether or not there is any validity to these theories is up to the GM.

**Contemporary** [Setting, Tech] Modern day Earth, pretty much as you see it today. Oh sure, there may be all sorts of weirdness bubbling beneath the surface: superpowers, aliens, killer robots, witches, but to an outside observer, the world ain't that much different than the one we know.

I'll wait here while you go look out the window. Sigh. Okay, what did you see? Uh huh. Okay. Great! That's your setting.

In all seriousness, the modern setting could be anywhere on the planet in the past twenty years. Thus, your modern setting could be:

On the streets of Calcutta: A densely packed population with rich and unique aspects of culture. A complex challenge may be having to navigate from one shop to another through the winding roads of the market place.

Jackson, Mississippi: The traditions of the Old South collide with an economy moving into the next millennium. Poverty and power coexist in an odd juxtaposition of two different worlds.

The Underworld of Moscow: When chaos took over after the fall of communism, the underworld was waiting hungrily to fill the void of authority. While connected families still control many aspects of society, the government struggles to display its hollow authority and power.

**Control Room** [Place] The nerve center. In modern and future settings, this is often the central monitoring and computer center. A place where the people in charge can see and control everything. In more primitive settings, the

control center can be the shaman's hut, where the magicks speak and do her bidding. More traditionally, the control room can even be the hidden room in the King's dungeon where the three fates keep watch over the cauldron.

**Convince** [Action] There are powers that rule the world. Powers led by men and women that have all too common wants or dreams. You need only find out what those wants may be and you have the chance to rule for yourself.

**Correctional System** [Place, Setting, Thing] Jail, prison, reform school, the darkest bowels of the deepest dungeon, a forced labor camp, "re-education" facilities, or high school detention. This is where the law has sent you to pay for your transgressions... real or imagined.

**Cover Up** [Action, Thing] I don't know how the hell this happened, but between you and I, no one is ever going to find out about it.

The cover up is the perfect plot twist: it necessarily assumes something unpleasant happened that needs its history rewritten. Typically murders are covered up. But many different situations can call for a cover up: an affair; theft; an accident; a disappearance (or inversely an appearance).

**Crash Site** [Place, Thing] The crash site can refer to any place or thing that results from a large destructive impact. That impact can be caused by two trains crashing into each other, a meteor striking the moon and cracking it into pieces, or an alien spaceship crash landing in the desert.

**Crater** [Place] Generally there are two kinds of craters: old ones and new ones. Most folks are more wary of the new craters, wondering what the hell just crashed and why did it leave such a huge dent in the planet? But the ones to really keep an eye on are the old ones which are normally remote and have had centuries to breed their alien lifeforms and evolve their invasive technology.

**Crazed Loner** [Opposition, Person] A serial killer maybe, or a self-styled vigilante, the crazed loner is an irrational individual with a terrible mission. And even if excessive bloodshed is not an integral part of that mission, the crazed loner has no qualms about making it so if needed. The crazed loner can be a simple madman on a killing spree without rhyme or reason or could imagine themselves an avenger or savior with a mission of vengeance.

**Crossroads** [Place] The intersection of two paths. Taken literally, the crossroads can be a major intersection of two roads, interstellar travelways or transportation tubes. More abstractly, the crossroads can refer to the intersection of the paths of two or more powerful entities, normally leaving a wake in their path.

**Cruel** [Descriptor, Personality] Sadistic, though not necessarily violent. They steal candy from babies.

**Curious** [Descriptor, Personality] Either actual inquisitiveness in a person, or else being strange enough to provoke such curiosity in others.

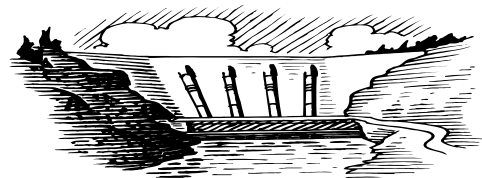
**Cybertech/Cyberpunk** [Setting, Tech] "The sky above the port was the color of television turned to a dead channel..." *Neuromancer*

Mankind has forged an alliance with technology like never before. He has welcomed it into his body, his mind, and some say, his very soul. But can a soul made of silicon and steel still be human? The Cyber Revolution technology level frames that question and many more.

The following tenets are core to this technology level: direct neural interface, cybernetic limbs, automated on demand production, simulated sensation, simulated memories, robots with human or animal levels of agility, artificially intelligent systems and a fully interconnected information environment (usually accessed through simstim or DNI).

**Cynical** [Personality] A pessimist. The cynical personality always sees the glass as half empty, and has a great tact for finding the negative in everything.

**Dam** [Place, Thing] The dam was one of the first marvels of engineering ever undertaken by civilization. When man wanted to efficiently work the land and produce plentiful harvests, he quickly realized that diverting water for that purpose was AWESOME. Thus, the dam was born. Through the years, the dam has grown in size and technology so that they hold back millions of gallons of water and generate power for entire cities. But whether your dam is in medieval Europe or futuristic Colorado, if that sucker bursts you are in for a hell of a headache. Maybe that's why they seem to attract evildoers?



But what if you're playing a stone age campaign which hasn't developed dams or primitive water engineering technology? Never fear! Dire beavers have been making them since the beginning of time. And they get really upset when you mess with them.

**Darkworld** [Setting] You stand perfectly still. Your pupils dilate and your ears strain for any indication of movement. Then one of your hands silently wanders in front of you, slowly at first, just so you can find any type of landmark and orient yourself. But you are effectively

blind. Essentially you are a sitting duck for the sightless grimlock running full speed at you with chef's knife.

Darkworld is exactly that—dark. There is little or no light. If the darkworld is an elaborate underground cavernous structure, the only light is the rare illumination that weakly glows from phosphorescent moss. A darkworld planet is so far from any solar body, that the only light is from star shine and heated through an internal mass, which may be further obscured by atmospheric phenomenon. The inhabitants of darkworlds have adapted to their surroundings, but visitors better bring a torch or a flashlight- or they're a sitting duck.

**Dawn of civilization** [Setting] The dawn of civilization is primitive. The inhabitants are just figuring out how to manipulate their environment to utilize crude tools and forage for edible plant life. Fire, the most important tool, is a precious commodity. Life is normally dangerous and short, and normally focused on reproducing and finding enough food to survive. However, the dawn of civilization could also just be beginning to discover the taps of magical powers to further enhance their survival. Occult forces could be overseeing the entire civilization in a garden-of-Eden puppet show.

**Dead** [Descriptor] Poke it with a stick. I dare you.

**Deadly** [Descriptor] No, seriously, read the instructions first.

**Deceitful** [Personality] Trickiests thiss one. Yesss. Dishonest to poor me. Liar! Liar!

**Defend** [Action] Something or someone of great value must be kept safe. Be on your guard, and know that someone out there wants whatever it might be as much as you do.

**Defensive** [Personality] I am not and I hate that you think I am. I'm just trying to write a good entry here, no need to get in my face. It's not too wordy, is it?

**Defiant** [Personality] Resistant of authority- whether it be a government, a parent or the Rule of Law itself.

**Deity** [Opposition, Thing] The Lord works in mysterious ways. When it comes down to it, all gods work in mysterious (and sometimes arbitrary) ways. The gods often have esoteric goals they wish to achieve which result in obstacles or tribulations for the players. To this end, players can be sent on a quest by one god only to have their journey interrupted by another. Maybe a deity has decided to end civilization on the Civil Realms to expand their underworld domain. This opposition could even manifest in the form of a half-crazed demigod who was spawned from



the god of war and a phoenix.

**Deliver** [Action] Take something to somewhere. While this seems relatively simple, problems arrive when someone else doesn't want the something delivered or when the something to be delivered doesn't want to go to the somewhere that the players are taking it.

**Demon** [Opposition, Thing, Person] Yes, creatures from the fiery pit, usually with horns and pitchforks and a wreath of flames about them. But if you're lucky, they're the kind that are only in your head.



**Depopulated Earth** [Setting] Welcome to the brave new world. For whatever reason, the players begin this session on an Earth with nearly no people. Whether by nuclear destruction, biblical apocalypse, meteor impact or widespread disease; nearly the entire human (or humanoid) population of the planet is gone.

In this setting the players are one of only a handful of people that are alive. Normally the eradication is recent—for example an alien purge of intelligent life. Other times the eradication is long since passed, but the characters have only recently discovered it—as when the players were caught in a temporal bind, and have only now escaped to discover tidal floods have killed everyone. In this setting the players may not know what caused the mass extinction of people, but in another variant may be more aware than they care—as when they emerge from a bomb shelter after a nuclear war.

**Desert Planet** [Setting] There is no water. Here, only the strongest and most cunning have a chance to survive. Desert Worlds are home to mad prophets, ruthless tribes and many creatures turned alien and strange by the endless quest for life-sustaining water. The sun-scorched anvil tempers men, it makes them harder, stronger than they would otherwise be.

Life continues, even in spite of itself. Suffering is part of existence; it sharpens everything into simple decisions. Live or die, fight or run. All else is ephemeral and in the end, useless.

**Despair** [Tone] From the outset, it's clear that all is hopeless. The odds are overwhelming, and more than likely, quite horrifying.

The players are likely tragic heroes. Maybe making one final quest against long odds, or shouldering onward on their dark mission sheerly out of duty or principle or

maybe (sadly) just for lack of another purpose.

While such a game should truly only end in misery and pain and probably considerable player-character death, there is always the remote chance that they will pull it out in the end, against all odds. Probably not... but it's wonderful to let the players have that final glimpse of hope just before the true end.

**Desperate Citizen** [Opposition, Person] This is a difficult villain, both in terms of introducing the desperate citizen to the game and in dealing with her as a player. This is a person at the end of her rope. She has taken everything life has dished out and now feels that she has no other choice... no other salvation... except this desperate long shot that threatens the players or others. An otherwise good person turned to crime to provide for their family, or a desperate mother taking hostages to help save her own child.

**Destroy** [Action] Maim, kill... well you get the idea. Objects are powerful, both in actual energy/magic and in significance. An object of actual power would be the Broach of the Gates, which contains the essence of a demonic jinni who is tortured in the nine hells and projects its ability on the wearer to transport to any place in the material worlds at will. An example of an object of powerful significance would be the shroud of Saint Augustus, which is a normal piece of cloth which has been held as the holiest relic by the New Christianians for 4,000 years.

Got that? Now destroy both and see what effect it has.

**Detached** [Personality] Psychologically apart from the situation at hand. Broken, halting behavior.

**Deviant** [Descriptor, Personality] Deviance, often associated with behavior, describes something that is amoral—or at the very least of questionable moral turpitude. Something deviant is thought of as being perverse and/or depraved.

Not following the norms laid out by society.

**Devil's Advocate** [Person, Personality] In the Catholic tradition, a Devil's Advocate was appointed to argue the case against a candidate for saint-hood. They would look for whatever skeletons were hidden in their closet and display them for all to see. If this wasn't enough to deny the candidates piety and holiness, then the candidate became a saint.

In the vernacular, it means a contrary person, or one who looks for the worst possible scenario, even if they don't think its occurrence is likely.

**Disaster** [Thing] Nothing puts the kibosh on a good adventure like a natural disaster. They are always grand in scale and fantastic in the devastation that they reap. What kind of natural disaster do you need? Pick one: fire,

tornado, tidal wave, hurricane, mudslide, meteor strike, earthquake, floods, or even insect infestation.

A good natural disaster can actually be central to the plot ("Evacuate the village before the dam gives way!") or can simply serve as a random complication in the middle of the mission ("Oh great! What are the chances we'd get softball sized hail?"). Either way, as long as the players think the gods are punishing them, you know you've implemented the disaster appropriately.

**Discover** [Action] Secrets are found everywhere and anywhere, as long as you know where to look. Whether it's the government's secret ego project, a film noir's private eye or Lewis and Clark explore Mars, discovering something new—or perhaps very, very old—is what makes the world go 'round.

**Disease** [Opposition, Thing] Throughout history, diseases have periodically ravaged populations, sometimes to the point of near extinction for some cultures. The plague killed off nearly a quarter of Europe's population, the Native Americans were decimated by European diseases, and rage infected monkeys nearly caused the eradication of all the British.

Typically, as an opposition, diseases are normally quick-spreading and lethal. However, long incubation times before the onset of symptoms can complicate the player's efforts to track the source and path of a disease. Diseases don't always have to be fatal—a zombie disease can convert the infected to zombies; an alien spore could put people into comas while alien embryos feed off the bodies and develop into full warriors; a sentient virus could infect people and take over their physical and cognitive function.

**Disguise** [Action, Thing] Appearances can be deceiving. The players need to disguise their appearance to infiltrate a highly guarded location. Or maybe they have to hunt down a shapeshifter that can look like any of the victims it's killed. Or maybe they need to disguise an elephant with magic to make it look like a cockatoo and smuggle it over the Mexican border.

**Distracted** [Personality] Not able to f...ooh, shiny!

**Ditzy** [Personality] A ditzy person appears vapid and unintelligent to an extreme degree. However, ditzy people are sometimes quite intelligent and use their ditzy facade so their enemies will underestimate them.

**Divine Creation** [Opposition] A divine creation is any creature, force or object created by a god. Most often, gods create champions to do their bidding: Odin may send the soul of his mightiest Nordic warrior to do his bidding; the long-dead Martian god Tonglan may have created an intelligent ash hound to exterminate human invaders on his planet which still carries out its dead master's wishes; Satan might create a cursed scepter that emanates

depravity to all within view of it. A divine creation wields unearthly power because the source of its power is in the very god or gods that created it.

**Docks** [Place, Thing] This is where stuff gets loaded for transport. Typically on ships, but it could be a loading dock anywhere. For some reason the docks are always dark and misty and surrounded by warehouses full of illicit materials.

**Domesticated Animals** [Tech] The first domesticated animals were dogs. Why dogs? Because they're smart and you can use them to help domesticate the other animals. Keeping track of sheep, cattle, goats, chickens, lemmings or other livestock can be difficult, and the assistance of a dog can be invaluable. As a technology level, domesticated animals is still very primitive, but still an effective way to ensure a steady food supply. As an alternative to the traditional agrarian stereotype of animal husbandry, certain societies could simply domesticate vicious hunters to track down and find food for it. Or maybe only large beasts of burden (huge mammoths or yaks) are domesticated to carry entire villages on their backs across an inhospitable landscape.

**Door** [Thing] It's a door (portal, hatchway, gate...). Maybe the players should open it...

**Doppelganger** [Opposition] He looks like you and sounds like you. Even your mother thinks he's you. But he's not. He's a doppelganger that has assumed your visage.

Doppelgangers are villains that carry out their evil work through the guise of another, normally to detract attention from themselves. The source of the ability to transform themselves can be magical (a gypsy's hex), biological (shapeshifter), psychic (she's making everyone think they see you) or technological (best... mask... ever).

**Dormitory** [Place] A very small housing unit for students or soldiers, normally with a shared bathroom and kitchen. One structure can house dozens of separate rooms.

**Dragons** [Thing] Dragons come in many forms, but they are always lizard-like beasts of unusual power. Typically gigantic intelligent flying beasts, they can be scaly with bat wings, multi-colored feathered beasts, or sleek, serpentine Chinese dragons. They are often portrayed as wise, ancient, and aloof atop a massive hoard of gold and trinkets. Terrorizing villages and eating maidens is often part and parcel of the dragon gig. But we all know what dragons are like, so feel free to



have fun with this. If you want cute, fluffy miniature dragons with butterfly wings, that's up to you.

**Dreams** [Thing] We don't only dream when we're asleep. People dream while not paying attention to a boring conversation; while listening to music in their car; while sitting on the subway. It is a state of predominant imagination.

**Dreamworld** [Setting] Buckle your seatbelt and make sure that the giant fish that's driving the bus (and has the voice of Fidel Castro) is ready to roll, because dreamworld is weird. There is no single description that sums up dreamworld because it is constantly in a state of flux. The laws of physics don't apply (or sometimes they do, but only temporarily), objects can randomly appear, disappear, or partially appear as one thing, but upon close inspection actually be revealed to be a different distant object.



There is only one law to dreamworld- everything has relevance. You may think the Cuban fish is just an out of place oddity, but in actuality it is one of the player's visage of his father as an eccentric authority figure, and the bus represents the player's lack of control. No one said this was going to be easy.

**Driver** [Person] Every good heist, sabotage scheme, kidnapping, invasion, or daily commute needs a driver. She won't do your dirty work, but she'll make sure she does her part to get you in and out as fast as possible. Whether she's a hired car, a technology-improved rigger or a jack-of-all-trades that has mastered every vehicle, the driver is crucial for a clean entry and a quick getaway.

**Dubious** [Descriptor] Doubtful; of questionable character; fraught with uncertainty. Or any positive assertion of fact made by a politician or lawyer.

**Duel** [Action, Thing] Dueling is the gentleman's method of settling matters of honor. While normally only two people participate, duels can consist of three or more, or even teams of individuals. There are normally strict rules as to the methods, weapons and timing of a duel—normally to be agreed to by the parties in advance. The duel continues, in accordance with the rules that govern it, until only one participant remains.

**Dumb** [Descriptor, Personality] Not very bright OR unable or unwilling to speak. We've got a lot of words

that can mean the first, so we find the second far more interesting. Take your pick.

**Dungeon** [Place, Setting, Thing] As you are dragged into the dungeon, the dried blood on the stonework screams your fate to you in silent horror. One of two fates awaits you. If you are lucky, you'll be tortured slowly and painfully until Death shows mercy on you. If you are unlucky, you'll be locked in a lightless room for the rest of your existence, only to have maggoty stew shoved through the door once a day to keep you alive. If allowed to live, your sanity will quickly drain from your head as you resort to conversing with dead relatives and slime mold. In either situation, the horror of the dungeons will claim your soul one way or the other.

**Dying World** [Setting] The dying world used to be a world of an advanced civilization. Whether it was premised on magic, technology, or divine intervention, the dying world was the height of civilization. But not anymore. Something happened to topple it all: infertility; apathy; disease; natural disaster; or the afore-mentioned divine intervention. Whatever happened, it destroyed something key in the civilization and it has slowly withered and deteriorated until it is only a pale shadow of its former stature. The technology doesn't function like it should. The spirits no longer respond to the old rituals. And there are hardly any people left. They are a dying breed.

**Dystopia** [Setting] Originally, there was to be a second entry for "Utopia," but the truth is that there is no difference. Every proclaimed utopia has some fatal flaw or dark secret that is either hidden from the populace or that they are all too scared to point out.

The hallmark of any dystopian society is the loud cries from its leaders (and often from its citizenry too) that they have finally achieved the perfect society. But that "perfection" always comes at a price. Have the citizens given up all privacy? Their freedom of speech and thought? Maybe it is only utopia for the middle and upper classes and the whole thing is supported by slave labor and oppressed lower classes. And maybe—just maybe—Soylent Green is people.

**Eager** [Personality] Can we go now? Can we? Can we? How about now? Now? Maybe now? Now? I want to go...NOW! Now?

**Early Space Exploration** [Setting, Tech] This is a civilization that has just figured out how to take the first baby steps off their home planet. Putting things into orbit is the first step, and then after that is getting people into orbit, and finally making the first move beyond the home planet... likely to the moon (if the planet has one). Depending on the world, this is probably a result of real-world style rocketry, but there could be other ways of getting off a planet.

**Eccentric Millionaire** [Person] The eccentric millionaire can either be benevolent or malicious. The eccentric millionaire spends his money in strange, but relatively harmless ways (sponsoring the local Ugly Pageant or making their wiener dog the sole beneficiary of a large, powerful trust). The non-benevolent, eccentric millionaire uses his money for more malicious ends, like touring kids through his chocolate factory knowing that many will succumb to painful demises giving into their childish impulses.

**Efficient** [Descriptor] Not wasteful. When referring to an object, efficiency describes its economic use of a resource (normally fuel or kinetic motion). When referring to a person, it describes someone who is direct, to the point, and quick to finish tasks in the least amount of time possible.

The efficient are able to find the shortest, least taxing route from point A to point B. Point A could be, 'untied shoes' or 'planning world domination.' Point B, on the other hand could be, 'double knotted,' or, 'His supreme high muckaluck.'

**Egomaniacal** [Personality] Someone who absolutely cannot see anything from someone else's viewpoint. In other words, it's all about them. The egomaniacal person either can't, or won't, think of anything other than themselves. This is more than just being selfish. It borders on being obsessive about being the single most important thing in the universe.

**Elder** [Person] Wise in the ways of her people, the Elder is living history and knowledge. She is respected for her age and experience; often acting as part of a leading body. Elders can be anyone who has built up wisdom and influence over the years, like an older councilman, a wizened druid or an ancient alien traveler.

Often consulted for advice or knowledge, the Elder is one of the oldest, most experienced people in the community. Sometimes they are community leaders. Sometimes they are reclusive types who live in the scary house down the block but know spooky town secrets from decades past. Sometimes they are simply crotchety know-it-alls that don't listen to what anyone else has to say, but get upset when someone doesn't listen to every word they say.

**Elected Official** [Person, Thing] Though not necessarily a politician, an elected official has been given a leadership position through the vote of the people. This does not mean they are qualified, or even the people's. Corruption and bribes can always 'sway' decisions, and the official might know more than one nefarious group.

**Election** [Thing] We all took a vote while you were in the bathroom, and it was unanimous: it's your turn to go feed the werewolf.

Elections usually entail some sort of position that multiple people are vying for, but any sort of vote can fall into this situation: beauty pageant, homecoming king, president of the galaxy.

**Electricity** [Tech] The discovery of electricity can come long before a society finds a way to mass produce it and fully utilize it. Electricity as a technology in Instant Game refers to a society that has moved into the mass production phase. Maybe electricity isn't piped directly into every home, but it reaches the major facilities and can be used for a host of purposes. An interesting twist is a society that has put electricity to major use, but its only source is from batteries.

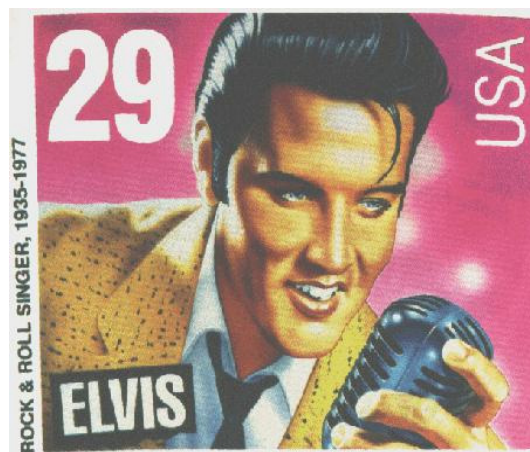
**Electronics** [Tech] Electronics is a technology of gizmos that run off of wires and circuits, and maybe even a vacuum tube or two. Electronics leads to advanced communication and computing devices and even self-regulating devices—like thermostats and elevators that don't require human operators.

**Elegant** [Descriptor] Stunningly beautiful, either in adornments or in simplicity.

**Elizabethan England** [Setting] England circa 1558-1603: the reign of Elizabeth I. Also known as the English Renaissance. During this period such influential historical figures arose such as Shakespeare and Sir Francis Drake. The theater and arts flourished and even the common working stiff could pay a pittance to see a performance at the Globe. For the privileged, high collars, puffy pants and dainty shoes ruled (and we're just talking for the men here- women were in the high-necked dresses and corsets). The Elizabethan period also saw the rise of England as a political and military power: defeating the Spanish armada in 1588 and beginning its forays into colonization at the end of the century.

**Elves** [Thing] Tall and noble Tolkien-esque uber-men... or curly shoe-wearing, tree-dwelling cookie bakers? The choice is in your hands. Reclusive protectors from deep in the forest of Ardeth-Bey or rosy cheeked minions from Santa's Workshop? Do we need to go on? Pick the elves you like and stick them into your story. It can be an entire race with a mission or a solitary puck sent to stir trouble. Just pick an elf and go with it.

**Elvis** [Thing] That's right... the King of Rock and Roll. Greased pompadour, rhinestone studded jumpsuit, the trademark sneer—this is the whole package, baby. I don't know how he got into your game and I don't care. The point is that he's here now, and you can't just ignore that.



For the less stout of heart, if you don't want to have to resurrect the King (or teach him to travel through time or have the aliens return him from cold storage) for your game, this entry can be anything Elvis related. Maybe you've stumbled into a convention of Elvis impersonators. Maybe you must undertake a quest to Graceland. Maybe a thousand years from now, Zen monks have formed a Tai-Chi style meditative practice around Elvis's music and his signature moves.

Personally, I say you go with the man himself.

**Empire** [Thing] There are two types of empires, the traditional and abstract. The traditional empire is what the Ottomans are known for: a imperialistic entity ruling a large number of territories and nations. The abstract version refers to anyone with an extensive enterprise in an industry: Reginald Stathord's media empire or the Deutchbanc's financial empire.

**Enduring** [Descriptor] Long lasting. When describing an object, it often refers to something that avoided destruction despite great devastation (e.g., a family bible that survived a fire that consumed everything else). When describing a person, it refers to someone who has survived great hardships (e.g., disease, personal tragedy, physical pain or disability). Sometimes enduring refers to a situation or set of circumstances (e.g., the dynasty of alien Visigoths endured despite the wild nature of the empire).

**Epic/Epic Heroes** [Descriptor, Thing, Tone] Every step and every act you take creates ripples which effect the tides of the world. The gods watch you breathlessly, each hoping that your choices sway the fates in their turn.

Playing in the Epic tone means one thing: the fate of the world rests in the hands of the players. It is not what you would call light fare. The Epic style is characterized by very serious play, grand actions and consequences, and drama of the utmost importance.

You are the one (or ones as the case may be). Chosen by destiny, a slave to an unknown fate, you can't escape the one role you were born into: to save the world. Epic heroes fight against the destructive forces which are trying to bring about the end of civilization. And if the heroes fail, the world will end because (of course) no one else could fulfill their destiny.

In a fantasy setting, the players could be the champions of gods set to stave off the undead menace. In a modern/occult setting, the players could be the only survivors of the long-dead cult which is capable of sealing



the opening gate to hell. In a futuristic setting, the players could be secret rebels chosen to topple the oppressive and authoritarian mechanical regime which suffocates modern society.

**Escape** [Action] To free oneself from her confines. As simple as getting untied from a bank robbery, to as complicated as returning from the seventh level of hell into a corporeal body without an occupying soul.

**Espionage** [Thing] The art of spying or using spies to covertly obtain information. Can apply as easily to government espionage practices of spying on other nations, as to business espionage practices of trying to obtain confidential business secrets or practices.

**Evasive** [Personality] With respect to physical characteristics, evasive describes something that is elusive or hard to capture or catch up with. With respect to people, however, an elusive personality is one that is defensive, maybe overly so.

**Evil Mastermind** [Opposition] The power of incredible intelligence can be bent into extraordinary power. But when that power is wielded for evil, its destruction can have global implications.

**Expert** [Person] Someone who excels in a particular subject or specialized skill.

**Explore/Exploration** [Action, Thing] The act of systematically searching and documenting something, normally a geographic location.

The world is a strange and wondrous place, with more mysteries than anyone can guess. Lost civilizations lay choked in jungles. Gods' throne-temples dream beneath the sands of ages. Atlantis, Shangri-La and the Golden City of El Dorado wait for those bold enough to claim them. And more, the mass of human knowledge expands only so far - who knows what fantasies could become reality with drive and dedication.

**Extravagant** [Descriptor, Personality] Luxurious to a fault. An item that is extravagant is normally expensive and adorned with expensive objects. An extravagant person is someone who spends freely and generously on (often unnecessary) luxuries.

**Fairy** [Thing] Or "faerie" if you're pretentious. It's the little people. Usually with wings. Often flighty and mischievous. Fairies can be living embodiments of nature, mysterious creatures of myth, or just tiny winged dudes who punch a clock like anyone else.

Fairies are most effective when injected into a setting where most people don't believe in them. Thus the players not only have to deal with whatever mayhem they may cause, but also with the mere fact of their existence.

**Faith** [Thing] Belief in a higher power, often a God or philosophy. In many games, Faith stands at the core of supernatural powers. Faith can also be the larger group of like-minded believers in a particular God or Religion.

**Fallen Civilization** [Setting] There's a certain sadness to Fallen Civilization settings, as the people struggle to get by and occasionally grasp at the signs of former grandeur that are all around them.

The great kingdom of the elves was overrun by goblins, and now the once-great elves live in the ruins of their magnificent tree cities. Their daily lives are occupied simply with avoiding capture at the hands of roaming goblin patrols, but a few heroes seek talismans of now-lost elfin magics that may one day overthrow the oppressors.

Or in space... the classic scenario is a lost colony ship that crash lands, and the survivors must make their way in a primitive world. Or maybe the destruction of Earth has left all of it's colonies stranded, unable to maintain the massive supply ships that once traveled between worlds.

The heart of a fallen civilization is that despite its overall "primitive" nature, there are still odd remnants of past glory and hope that ancient technologies or magics can be recovered or revived.

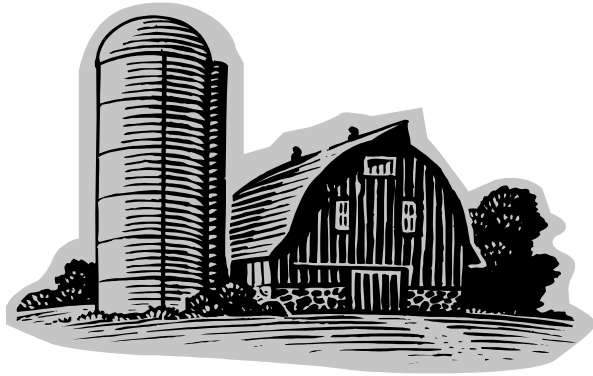
**Family** [Opposition] Blood may be thicker than water, but it can be just as easily spilled. When a group's opposition is Family, that means that the enemy is related to one of them, or their benefactor that sent them on the adventure. While it may be known from the beginning that the opposition is Family (You are hired by President Giggs to find his brother, who has been impersonating him for personal gain, and assassinate him—the problem is that the entire Eastern Seaboard actually thinks the brother is the president), often it is only revealed, if at all, at the climax of the mission (You mean it was my evil twin all along?).

**Famous** [Descriptor, Personality] Everyone knows your name. That's right... just like Norm.

**Fantasy** [Descriptor, Tone] The world is changing. \*long pause for dramatic effect\* I can feel it in the air. \*another, equally long pause for dramatic effect\* I can feel it in the earth—Alright, so Tolkien may have 'started' this genre, but we don't have to sell everything out to him. Do we?

Fantasy is a mixture of slightly abnormal elements that combine to create an extraordinary whole. While often these elements are described as magical, such as wizards or dragons, they do not have to be. The paranormal could just as easily fall into this category. They simply must be unexplained by our current knowledge of the laws of the universe.

**Farm/Farmer** [Person, Place, Setting, Thing] Crops. Livestock. Isolation. A giant barn. Dirt. These are the hallmarks of the farm, where self-sufficient families struggle to survive off of what they can cultivate from the resources around them. It is not an easy existence, but it is the only one available to most people.



The farm is not limited solely to American Gothic-style Ma and Pa NPCs. In the future, the farms are self-contained biospheres run by the megacorps who have monopolized the world's supply of food. In 1920s America, abandoned farms often served as safe houses for "connected" people who needed to keep a low profile. In ancient times, the entire village worked to maintain the communal farm, offering their bounty as sacrifices to keep in favor of the gods which controlled the weather and their fates.

And lest we forget, there are salmon farms and mink farms and conceivably organ farms where comatose headless clones are fed IV nutrients, waiting for the day their organs are needed.

**Fateful** [Descriptor] Something that holds vital importance to future events.

**Feared** [Descriptor] Whether by actual deed or simply by rumor and misunderstanding, people are scared at the mere mention of the name.

**Festival** [Place, Setting, Thing] Turn out the revelers and strike up the drum. Play the horn and dance the night away. The Festival springs into being around feast days, around plenty. People are freed from their regular tasks. Food and drink abound, given with thanks by those who celebrate the day.

Festivals fill the major areas of any community with revelers, decorations and happy confusion. In modern settings, a festival is likely to crop up around a musical act or other entertainment, increasing the size of the original event. Large grounds are often left purposefully empty in order to accommodate them.

**Fight** [Action, Thing] Whether with fists, knives, guns or intercontinental ballistic missile, sometimes you just have to fight. Roll up your sleeves and get ready for a brawl.

**Fire** [Action, Thing] Anything having to do with heat and flame, whether it be campfire, volcano, or 1871 Chicago. The Hindenburg, Smoky the Bear, or the dimension of Elemental Flame.

**Firm** [Descriptor] Solid to the touch. Able to withstand pressure without breaking. A law office.

**First Alien Contact** [Setting] They've landed and, quite naturally, they'd like to be taken to your leader. This can go so many ways that it's hard to even sum them up—you might do well to combine this with another Settings roll.

In the modern world alone, it could be a friendly alien stranded on our planet whose only hope is an 11-year-old with a Speak'n'Spell. It could be hovering mother ships with demands for our surrender. Clandestine alien operatives here to harvest our aluminum to save their planet. A derelict alien ark-ship on a collision course with the earth. So many to choose from.

Now combine this with other time periods or settings, and the possibilities are endless.

**Fixer** [Person] Well connected and in the know, the Fixer's life is all about business. Getting the goods, whether they be merchandise, information or people, to those on the buy, is their life's blood. A Fixer could be a street dealer, a spice merchant, an entertainment lawyer or anything similar. Savvy, smart and ruthless are all good descriptors for one of these people.

**Flexible** [Descriptor, Personality] In a physical sense, this refers to the ability of someone to contort their body. In a personality context, it refers to someone who is willing to compromise in order to keep the peace.

**Flight** [Tech] The impossible dream. Mankind has finally found the ability to literally reach for the sky. This can encompass fantasy technologies such as Leonardo's corkscrew helicopters or Ikarus's follies. Or it can include early gliding and lighter-than-air ventures, but typically flight as a technology indicates powered heavier than air craft... airplanes. In the real world, airplanes also imply a sophisticated level of mechanical engineering, and some type of powered engine and the ability to process fuel for it.

**Force of Nature** [Opposition] A wise man once advised that there were some activities men should not engage in when they were facing into the wind. In Instant Game, a force of nature is normally more formidable than that. When the opposition is Force of Nature, the players find themselves working against some type of natural disaster: forest fire, avalanche, etc. Sometimes the natural disaster is not quite natural, like in the case of softball-sized blood hail.

**Forceful** [Descriptor] Powerful, often to the point of being overwhelming.

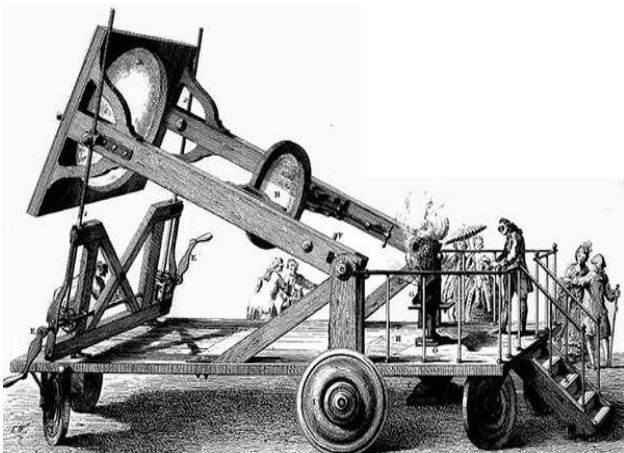
**Forest** [Place, Setting] You may not notice it for all the trees. A forest is typically a thick and extensive wild growth of trees, but depending on the setting, any place with lots of natural vegetation could qualify.

**Fortunate** [Descriptor] Lucky. A fortunate person is one who, despite the odds, succeeds.

**Fossil Fuels** [Tech] The use of coal and oil for fuel. In the real world, the mass consumption of fossil fuels began with the industrial revolution and the mass production of cars and electricity. But there were earlier uses as well—lamps and trains and coal-fired furnaces.

**Foundry** [Place] A place where metal, on a large scale, is poured and shaped. More than just a blacksmith's shop, a foundry normally involves large containers of molten metal being poured into large molds.

**Frankentech** [Tech] Frankentech is a fantasy technology, much like steampunk, that allows seemingly more advanced/modern technology to be introduced into a more gothic post-renaissance setting.



Frankentech is well represented in some of the earlier science-fiction literature, such as Frankenstein, from which it takes its name. Logic and real science aren't always on the closest terms with Frankentech, as it is based on the primitive understanding of science of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is a science of humours and chemicals and delicate clockwork mechanics. Chemistry (closer to alchemy, really), radiation, electricity, and magnetism are powerful forces in Frankentech, and it produces such things as Frankenstein, Mr. Hyde, Nemo's submarine and Well's time machine. Unlike other fantasy technologies (magitech and steampunk), Frankentech is dark and gothic in nature, and the wonders of science are nearly always balanced by its very dangerous and destructive side.

**French Revolution** [Setting] It would be a dramatic oversimplification to say that the uncompassionate excesses of the French monarchs caused the French revolution, but it couldn't have helped. With a working

class empowering itself during an age of enlightenment, France in 1789 was at a crossroads that ended with the overthrow of the monarchy. But the governance void of the French revolution saw such diverse governments as republics and empires. Governance by the people was taken over by would-be emperors. The key phrase is chaos: mobs storm the Bastille looking for arms and instead kill the governor; other mobs storm Versailles and demand self-governance from King Louise; political purges see many lined up and systematically executed by the Guillotine for public display. Simply put: chaos.

**Frontier** [Place, Setting, Thing] The vanguard of human expansion. The players are explorers in a brave new world. Early homo-sapiens pushing northward against the Neanderthals after the ice recedes... pioneers of the American west... Federated starcraft boldly going where no one has gone before. If it's not on our charts, then we want to be the first to be there.

**Frozen Wasteland** [Setting] Grab a blanket because you're going to need it. The frozen wasteland is an unforgiving terrain blanketed with snow, ice, or simply frozen ground. Without thermal protection, any normal living creature could freeze to death in mere minutes. But if the players come prepared, they may survive. Inhabitants can build underground or insulated lairs to survive the extreme temperatures. For forays into the cold wasteland, bundles of clothing must cover every inch of exposed skin. Frostbite is common. Losing one's extremities is unpleasant, but not unusual for someone who gets lost in the blinding whitestorm of the frozen wasteland. For game purposes, this setting can constitute the makeup of the entire world (which would likely mean there are more prevalent accommodating structures and technologies by indigenous peoples), or be an inhospitable environment the population tends to avoid due to the harshness of the surroundings.

**FTL Travel** [Tech] FTL stands for Faster Than Light. A society that can travel faster than light (300,000 kilometers per second or so), has the primary tool for making interstellar travel a commonplace occurrence. FTL travel is the key that unlocks the stars. Without FTL, a space faring society is effectively limited to exploring its own solar system. Trips to other stars would take centuries under even the most ideal conditions. But with FTL propulsion, there can be true galactic nations, with regular commerce and diplomacy... and even war.

The exact mechanism is left to the imagination, but there are two major forms of FTL travel: the first involves simply moving in a conventional manner through space, just really really fast. The second involves taking "shortcuts" by entering hyperspace or limbo or a wormhole, and after traveling some distance in that other-space, returning to normal space near one's destination. Either method can be just as fast or effective as the other, but they have slightly different implications.

FTL travel as a technology implies a fairly advanced society—one that has achieved spaceflight at least, and along with it, considerable knowledge of chemistry, physics, radio communication, etc. Although, an interesting scenario would be a slightly less advanced society that has just barely (or even not quite) achieved space, but somehow stumbled upon the secret of FTL travel to other worlds.

**Funky** [Descriptor] Groovy and countercultural. You can dance to it, but watch out for the munchies afterwards, man.

Alternately: a little overripe and quite possibly smelly.

**Furry** [Thing] Anthropomorphic animals should say it all, but in case that means nothing to you, here's how to play Furry: everyone's an animal. And we don't mean the players are really wild and looking to par-tay. Each character is an intelligent, capable animal.



Even though some people play Furry characters as actual animals (think the "Rats of NIHM" or "Watership Down"), this style of play is pretty difficult for your standard gamer. Instead, most gamers play Furry characters that act, talk, move and behave just like humans. The only difference is that they're some kind of animal: fox, rabbit, bear, squirrel, etc. For some reason there seems to be a fetish with woodland-type critters—like the ones that inexplicably sing to Snow White.

**Future Earth** [Setting] This is the far future and it means you need to rethink exactly what that means for technology and society, but the Far Future Earth assumes everything has advanced through science and technology. Lifespans of humans has likely been greatly extended if not unlimited which raises questions about reproduction and family planning. Local transportation is instantaneous (teleportation or near-light speed travel) as is the transfer of information. Natural resources are likely to have been depleted, and if appropriate, Earth may be a mostly

mechanized planet. Governance is an open question- total democracy, representative government or possibly a totalitarian oppressive regime.

**Galactic Empires** [Setting, Tech] Faster than light travel has allowed civilizations to cross the stars and discover other inhabitable planets. The quest for new resources and land has given rise to colonies and conquests of the most advanced societies. Often, however, different cultures don't always agree on the best way to cohabitate in the universe and this can lead to conflict. The galactic empires setting is the standard space opera with various alien and human factions trading, negotiating and often fighting with each other for dominance in the universe.

**Gambler** [Person, Thing] Odds are you know someone who fits this category. Even money says you probably know several, but aren't aware of it because they are known for their strong poker faces. Are they laying money on the weekend's races? Always in financial dire straights because they lost a "sure thing" during the basketball tournament? Spending weekends alone in Vegas and not talking about the shows or hookers? Bingo—that's the sure sign of a gambler.

**Gang Warfare** [Thing] You've seen this before: Sharks vs. Jets; Crips vs. Bloods; Earthlings vs. Venusians; Templars vs. Jesuits. Gang warfare occurs when two rival gangs (formal or informal groups of hooligans who skirt the law) decide to take their animosity for each other to the streets- often to the detriment of all the innocent bystanders. In the case of Humans versus Venus Dwellers, this means the innocent bystanders include the Moon-men.

**Garbage** [Thing] Just because someone else threw it out doesn't mean it isn't valuable.

**Generous** [Personality] Someone who gives more to others to than themselves, normally in a financial or material manner.

**Genetic Engineering** [Tech, Thing] Uh-oh... someone's been playing God again. And for good or ill, the being before you has been enhanced (or crippled, or wholly created) by modern science.

It can be the heroes themselves who are the engineered beings, or it can be their friends or foes or those ravaging mutants over there. The engineered can be virtually anything, good, bad or indifferent. But the important thing is that it gives the GM and/or players a license to break a few boundaries and go out on a limb.

**Genius** [Person] Someone with unparalleled intelligence. Sometimes recognized for their intellect, geniuses are often shunned by their peers who can't (or won't) understand.

**Ghost Town** [Thing] Empty, but not abandoned, the Ghost Town is a common concept in every era. For reasons unknown (or soon to be discovered) the entire population of a town, village or metropolis has disappeared. Sometimes it is the inevitable circumstance of time, such as in the case of the proto-type old west Ghost Town. Other times it is a cataclysmic event that leads to it, such as when a fast spreading disease devastates a populace. The clues to how it developed are found in the spirits and souls of those who cannot give up the town.

**Giant** [Thing, Descriptor] Very large in height or girth, and usually both. Giant can describe something huge, or as a noun, describes a person of enormous proportion.

**Gloomy** [Descriptor, Personality] Despondent and hopeless. Can refer to either an individual or a situation. More than that though, gloomy brings an ominous air to things, coloring everything around it in dark tones.

**Glorious** [Descriptor] Something of great beauty or splendor. Anything with an air or presence of magnificence.

**Golden Age of Comics** [Setting] The 1940s and 50s were the golden age for comic books and began with the introduction of superheroes. It is marked by its primary colors and its clear demarcation of good and evil. Superheroes were the good guys and did good deeds for the sake of doing good. Evil guys were evil and bent on dominating the world. In the end the good guys always won. World War II and the rise of fascism was a large influence on the golden age and encouraged the bright-line good vs. evil simplicity of the era.

**Gothic** [Tone] Whoever you think you might be, you will be forgotten in a generation, two at the most. No person of common standing has any real meaning in a Gothic toned game. Powers and tradition have incredibly influence - grinding everything beneath them. It is a bleak place, where hopelessness and fear dominate.

Hidden cults, ancient mysteries and shadowy powers should control the game, or be at their center. The players will be hard pressed to find their way among them. Changing anything about the world should be nearly impossible.

**Government Agents** [Opposition, Thing, Person] It's *the man*. And even though everyone fears the intelligence operatives, are you any better off if it's the IRS?

**Government Office** [Place, Thing] It's the place where government does business. This leaves a lot of room for creativity. It can be a mayor's office or the king's treasury or the Martian Imperial Office of Paranormal Investigation. It can be a veritable fortress of secrets and safeguards or a pedestrian plaza where citizens come to find aid and lodge complaints.

**Grave/Graveyard** [Descriptor, Place, Thing] Somber. These severe fellows always seem to know how to knock humorists down a peg or two.



Also, a place where the dead are buried. Elaborate headstones are not necessary, but are often present. Aside from the traditional graveyard, this category also can include mass burial sites, traditional Native American burial mounds and the pet cemetery.

**Greedy** [Personality] Hoarders of wealth, the greedy seek everything and anything they can get their hands on. Then, after they've amassed more than enough, they get some more.

**Grimm's Fairy Tales** [Setting] Once upon a time, there were two brothers who committed to paper gruesome tales of murdered children who refused their parent's orders. They told tales of animals populating the lands of man, normally punishing and terminating the lives of the wicked or unwitting. Magic and fairies abound in this world, and they are often used to enact cruel revenge.

But over time, parents distilled these stories as they passed them on to their children. They idealized them so that in the end no one was hurt, but everyone learned a valuable lesson. Most importantly, despite the trials and tribulations they may have endured, the principle characters always lived happily ever after.

You choose which style you think best.

**Grudge** [Thing] These hurt feelings go way back, and somebody has to pay. A grudge makes a great motivator and/or plot hook for both heroes and villains.

**Guard/Guarded** [Action, Descriptor, Person, Thing] A guard is anyone who watches over or protects something. Sometimes the guard is of great importance, such as when he is protecting the life of the emperor's baby. Other times the guard is a minimum wage earner protecting the mall from skateboarders.

It can also be the act of guarding, or the insular nature of the person who keeps their feelings and motives closely protected from others.

**Guide/Guiding** [Action, Descriptor, Person, Thing] As a person or thing, a guide is anything that leads or guides people to their destination. They can be as rugged as the native swamp guide on a hoverboat, as pristine as the museum tour-guide android with encyclopedic knowledge of the presidential library, or ghostly like the incorporeal animal totem that spiritually guides people in their vision

quest. A guide could also include something as simple as a water-seeking divining rod taken from a willow tree or a modern GPS system. As an action, it refers to anyone or anything actually performing the above-described duties.

**Harmonious** [Descriptor] Two or more things that compliment and/or blend together seamlessly.

**Hasty** [Personality] Someone who is quick to act, often without thinking of the consequences first.

**Headquarters** [Place] The headquarters is an actual building or structure that is being used to as an organization's (or sometimes an individual's) base of operations. It's where all the planning and critical thinking take place. Normally well defended.

**Healer** [Person] The healer is skilled in the arts of... (wait for it)... Healing! But depending on your setting, this can mean very different things. In a primitive setting, a healer can be a shaman or witchdoctor. In a medieval setting, a healer can be a leecher who applies leeches. In a modern setting a healer can be anything from a doctor, midwife, or EMT, to a ritualistic magical adept learned in the skills of mystical healing, or a psychic surgeon.

**Healthy** [Descriptor, Personality] Fit as a fiddle and unlikely to change any time soon.

**Hearty** [Descriptor] Endowed with significant stamina and courage. Hearty's more than just a soup.

**Heaven & Hell** [Thing] Ancient philosophers thought that the Earth was the center point of the universe around which all other heavenly bodies revolved. They were right, but not in the way they thought. In this world, Earth is the battleground in the divine battle between good and evil. The opposing forces can be presented in several forms: angels vs. demons, new gods vs. old gods, unborn vs. dead souls. Sometimes the world's inhabitants are the object of the fighting factions' war—as in a battle for human souls. Sometimes the goal is Earth itself, and the inhabitants are just inconvenient obstacles—people who get in the way of one sides efforts to eradicate the other.

**Hedonistic** [Personality] Silk, cashmere, buttery soft leather, rare delicacies, fine wines... these are what the hedonist is all about. But don't get confused - money isn't required to keep hedonists happy, though it does help. It's all about physical enjoyment - the tastiest food, the comfiest clothing, the

softest bedding. Cozy flannel PJs and a big bowl of Grandma Olma's goulash can be just as desirable as pricier enticements.

**Heir** [Person, Thing] The rightful claimant to something. Whether through ties of blood or a careful selection, the heir takes on whatever his predecessor passes down to him, be it fabulous wealth, a family curse, or a calling to fight crime.

**Heist** [Thing] Robbery? Burglary? These are small crimes for small minds. A true heist is a thing of beauty with covert action and complex timetables. At its best, a good heist goes completely unnoticed until you've made your way safely to Rio.

**Heroic** [Tone] The line between good and evil is clear, and those on the side of good are duty-bound to dispatch evil as quickly as possible. The heroes are larger than life, and their abilities are never in serious doubt. They wade through minions and henchmen with practiced ease until the clever trap or final villain that finally poses a true challenge. And it's not just superheroes, chivalrous goblin-slaying elves and force-sword wielding space knights that fit this mold. It can also be the two-fisted hero police detective, the Arabian sorcerer prince, or the vigilante rebels of an oppressive police state.



When used as a descriptor, heroic implies all of the qualities above—larger than life figures with a clear sense of right and wrong and a strong compulsion to be clearly in the camp of "right."

**Hide** [Action] They're after you. No, they're after what you're carrying. No, they want to capture who you're with. Regardless, they have superior strength, firepower, the works. If they find you, it's all over. Escape capture, or keep your possessions and your comrades free.

**High Magic** [Tech, Thing] This is the obvious kind of magic—the spell-casting, wizardly type of magic. A society with magic may or may not be advanced in other ways, but high magic involves

complex magical methods and research and typically requires a society that can support schools for learning magic. In most worlds that utilize high magic, only a select few have the capability of using it, and even those with raw talent still require extensive training to properly harness their abilities. While most high magic worlds are

not also technologically advanced in other ways, they certainly can be. There's nothing in the rules against rebel starfighter pilots who can also hurl fireballs.

**Hip** [Descriptor] Hip doesn't mean trendy. Hip people are ahead of the trends... quite often, they set the trends. Cool, avant-garde—the hipster is always looking for something more than the opiate that satisfies the masses.

**Hired Muscle** [Opposition, Thing, Person] Hired muscle is anyone paid for physical protection or violence. The category includes mercenaries, bodyguards, bouncers and robotic assassins.

**Historian/Historical** [Descriptor, Person, Setting] The stereotype of the historian renders him or her as one of two things: (1) a frail bookworm with an encyclopedic knowledge acquired after decades committed to passionate study; or (2) a computer program/artificially intelligent robot. But a historian is anyone who makes, finds, researches, or keeps records for posterity.

The historic setting takes place in our own recorded history. Real world events have happened, or are happening, or will be happening. Except now there's the added element of the PCs trying to dip their own hand in the well, and probably muddying the water on top of it. WWII might never happen, or maybe Lennon doesn't get shot.

Historic settings often pride themselves on the details of the time they choose. Don't worry about it too much though; this is Instant Game, where details come fast and cheap. Sometimes a well placed lava lamp is enough.

**Hi-Tech** [Descriptor] Something that uses the cutting edge of available technology. It usually leaves the beholder saying, "Whoa."

**Home** [Place] The place you live; somewhere to call your own; where everybody knows your name.

It's about chest high and a little to the left.

**Honest** [Personality] "If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything." Mark Twain. The honest person doesn't lie. Normally this is because they were raised with a sense of morality and ethics, but often because they are under the influence of truth serum or their programming won't allow them to.

**Honor** [Thing] Can you uphold your principles in the face of adversity? Will you allow your family's name to be sullied? Have you no honor, sir?

**Horror** [Tone] Sheer, unbridled terror. That is the single, overwhelming factor in the atmosphere of the horror tone. No matter how powerful they are, no matter what futuristic or fantasy-styled genre it is set in, the players should always be fearful for their lives.

Although normally characterized by supernatural monsters (vampires, zombies, werewolves, etc.), the horror tone can be used in any genre. Demonic hordes could hunt down characters in a far-future mechanized world just as well as enlightened, renaissance Europe. Similarly, an immortal killer could be on a rampage in a primitive society, or in a fantasy high magic realm.

**Horseman** [Person, Thing] Surprisingly, this person is good with horses. They are knowledgeable of riding, handling, training and breaking horses. A horseman is also normally educated (formally or through experience) in the care and treatment of horses: how to stable, feed, medicate, etcetera.

Alternately, this could also refer to Equan-Ra, lord of the were-horses.



**Hospital** [Place] A place of healing and recuperation. A hospital can operate through technology, personal care or magic. The end result is always to heal the sick and injured.

**Hostage** [Person, Thing] The lives of innocents are being used to gain leverage. Do the players care? Are they the ones that took the hostages? Are they hostages themselves? The magic of hostages is that they create an automatic and unavoidable plot hook: from the get-go, you know someone is in danger, and there's likely a rescue attempt being mounted.

**Hotel** [Place, Thing] A hotel is a public accommodation where, for a price, strangers can have shelter for at least one night. Examples of the different types of hotels include:

-The five rooms attached to the back of the Gryphon's Tavern. There are no windows and the only furniture is two hammocks hung in opposite corners of a six by six

room. But the door has a reinforced bar and a strong lock. Good enough for most wanderers.

-The once luxurious Grand Spanner Hotel and Casino has over 300 rooms, four meeting halls, a presidential suite, two restaurants, an Olympic sized pool, and a ballroom that had to be booked two years in advance for weddings. After the plague killed off 98% of the population, however, it has fallen into disrepair and is now home to morlock squatters who cannibalize any strangers who dare to cross into the grand foyer.

-In a chaotic cyberpunk future, the Corner 4000 is a hotel that takes up an entire city block. Contained inside are 4000 secure sleeping pods which rent for 7 euros per night. The pods are indestructible. But for 1000 euros, you can bribe the owner into giving you the unique combination to someone's "room".

**Hovel** [Place] A hovel is a dirty, dilapidated structure that someone has adopted as their shelter. A hovel is usually intended as a permanent structure, albeit a fragile one. One good brawl, however, and the whole thing will topple like a house of cards.

**Humble** [Personality] The opposite of boastful. Someone who plays down their accomplishments and is reluctant to take credit for good deeds.

**Humiliate** [Action] Besting your opponent is not enough for you. No, you need to make them realize the shame of their loss. Not only do they need to recognize the sheer embarrassment and humiliation at having lost, but you'll make sure to inform their parents, spouses, children and household pets.

And then you'll wait several months—just long enough for them to think nobody remembers the beating you laid on them. Then you'll follow them to the mall, and when they least expect it you'll dump a slushee on their heads from the second floor overhang. And then you'll laugh... Oh how you'll laugh! Because it's really that funny.

**Humorous** [Personality] Hopefully people are laughing with you. That's the good kind of humorous: you think you're funny, and other people agree. The sad versions of humorous are when other people don't find you as funny as you do—or worse, when you don't see why they all keep laughing at you.

**Hunt/Hunter** [Action, Person, Thing] Track something down and obtain it. Think Tommy Lee Jones as a US Marshal in *The Fugitive*, or Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones chasing after lost artifacts. Or, if you like the darker side of things, *The Most Dangerous Game*.

**Hydro-power** [Tech] This is any technology that harnesses the power of water. It can be simple water wheels that use the motion of the local creek to turn heavy

millstones, or it can be massive hydroelectric dams that provide power for whole cities.

**Hyper** [Personality] Someone who is very excitable and/or high-strung. Or every child that ever sat behind me on an airplane between the ages of three and seven.

**Hypochondriac** [Personality] The hypochondriac is obsessively phobic about his health. Often imagining that the most benign symptoms are indications of a fatal disease, the hypochondriac is constantly looking for the affirmation of their illness from others: "My left eye has had an intermittent mucous discharge for the past week. Normally I'd think nothing of it, but combined with the tinnitus I've been experiencing in my left ear, I can only draw the conclusion that it's a tumor." The hypochondriac is resigned to the concept of an early death.

**Idiot Savant** [Person] Incredibly gifted in a single endeavor, such as mathematics, music, philosophy or religion, this person sadly lacks many of the functioning skills they would require to function as an average member of their society. They can be seen as mad prophets, visionaries onto worlds the rest of us can barely imagine, or as simpletons with a single ability that makes them invaluable.

**Ignorant** [Personality] Other than the obvious image of ignorant as someone who is just plain stupid or undereducated, this could also refer more specifically to an individual who is simply oblivious or unaware of a certain situation or life in general.

**Ill/Illness** [Personality, Thing] Someone is sick. Wouldn't it totally suck if it was highly contagious?

**Illusory** [Descriptor] Objects in the rear-view mirror may, or may not, be closer than they appear. Things are not always as they seem. This is the stuff holograms are made of.

**Imaginative** [Personality] Flights of fantasy and lingering daydreams are as important as hard work and rote memorization. Being imaginative can lead to leaps of realization, new inventions, or just hours and hours of wasted time.

**Immortals** [Opposition, Person, Thing] Immortals can be gods, aliens, androids or even just people with the ability to live forever. Sometimes being an immortal simply means the person doesn't age, but can die by other means (violence, disease, etcetera). Some immortals cannot die no matter what—as is the case of the incorporeal Ghost Man, who is intangible and never ages. Finally other immortals, such as certain pantheons of gods, die only to reawaken in the underworld from which they can inevitably escape given enough time and prowess.

**Impatient** [Personality] Anyone who can't wait to get to the end of this description.



**Impulsive** [Personality] "It seemed like a good idea at the time" is the oft-spoken phrase of the impulsive person. These people never stop to think things through when they have some going off half-cocked to do. Half a story is all the impulsive person needs to choose and start a plan of action. Often, this gets them into a lot of trouble. But don't forget - a broken clock is right twice a day.

**Inappropriate** [Descriptor] What separates the inappropriate person from the rude or obnoxious one is often a matter of awareness. Not only does the inappropriate person fail to recognize that perhaps Thanksgiving dinner is not the right time to ask her sister about the results to her STD test, but she will also attempt to insert formality where it doesn't belong. Asked out to the movies, she will answer the door wearing a floor-length gown and opera gloves. Interviewing for a job cleaning kennels for the local veterinarian, he'll wear a three-piece suit and carry a briefcase, being sure to give his interviewer his card before he leaves.

Typically the inappropriate person's intentions are good. They just have no clue how to blend into their world. Which means this isn't limited to modern Earth settings - your futuristic space-faring character will salute people who rank below him, your historic London gas light character will announce she's discovered horse manure on her shoe and proceed to clean it off with whatever's handy... even though she's having tea with the local aristocracy at the time.

**Independent** [Personality] Self-sufficient. Someone who does not rely on others for support, either physically, financially or emotionally.



**Industrial Revolution** [Setting, Tech] The Industrial Revolution occurred approximately between 1750 and 1850 and served as the major technological and societal change of the era. The hallmark of the industrial revolution was the evolution of prevalent economies from intensive, inefficient manual labor to industry dominated by machine manufacturing. The industrial revolution began in England with the development of steam power. Machine tools and all-metal manufacturing led to the development of more large scale, industrial manufacturing. Industrialization gave rise to factories and massive pollution, which in turn gave rise to oppressive working conditions and deleterious health complications.

**Infestation/Infested** [Descriptor, Opposition] Remember when all those gerbil-like creatures took over the star ship and kept multiplying at an exponential rate, almost destroying the ship and crew? That was an awesome infestation.

An infestation is any swarm of creatures, bugs or other living things that essentially destroy or hinder (or annoy) everything in their path. Normally the individual components of the infestation are fragile and easily eliminated in isolation, but when they swarm in the millions or billions it can destroy civilizations. For instance, in post-apocalyptic New Mexico, cockroaches infested the tourist town of Taos and killed every living thing within ten miles—plants, humans, wooden structures, etc. Swarms of locusts can destroy every ounce of valuable crops a society depends on. An infestation of metal-ingesting termites can doom an interstellar space station.

**Infiltrate** [Action] Sneak or bluff your way into a complex, organization or nation. Intrigue, stealth and research all come together to pull off a successful infiltration.

**Informant** [Person] Someone who provides information. In the common conception of the word, an informant is often providing information against another person or organization, and usually surreptitiously.

**Information Age** [Tech] The information age describes the rise of computers as a vehicle for the instantaneous exchange of immeasurable volumes of information. What marked the very beginning of the information age was the invention of the telegraph. For the first time, information could be moved with technology faster than it could be moved physically. At its peak, people could access nearly any bit of public information they needed as long as they knew the proper ways to search for it. With the development of the information age came the development of disinformation technology—intentionally creating false information to deceive people searching for something else.

**Informative** [Descriptor] Someone or something that provides useful/needed information.

**Innocent** [Personality] Uncorrupted by evil, sin or vice. A quality often seen in young children or child-like adults.

**Insane/Insanity** [Thing, Personality] Don't believe everything you see, because if you do, you might just lose your mind. The insane can be demented in any of a variety of ways. Sometimes, there is a method to the madness, but then y'know... sometimes there's not.

**Insecure** [Personality] The insecure person is never confident in their own decisions or circumstances. They constantly second guess themselves and waste

innumerable hours playing "what if", much to the chagrin of their friends and family.

**Inspiring** [Descriptor] Something that gives encouragement or exalting emotion to others. Rouses others to prepare for a daunting or intimidating situation.

**Institution/Institutionalized** [Place, Setting] Whether it's jail or a fat farm, an insane asylum or the walled prison-city of New York, the whole point is that you can't get out.

**Intelligent** [Personality] Smart. Educated. It usually means a person has great mental horsepower. It doesn't mean they know how to use it.

**Intimidate** [Action] To use one's presence, reputation or stature to coerce another into a course of action. Although this is normally thought of as someone using their size to intimidate others, a skinny but powerful computer mogul can be just as intimidating under the right circumstances.

**Intrigue** [Thing, Tone] This can be a game of social and sexual politics in the royal court or financial and legal maneuvering in the corporate boardrooms. No matter where you find yourself, just remember that you can trust no one, because there's always one more plot twist just around the corner.

Sure, everyone's smiling to your face, but if you can't see their hands, it's probably because they're hiding a knife (or an eviction notice, or photos of you in a very compromising position). Everyone has an angle, and they're all looking out for number one.

**Introverted** [Personality] Turned inward. The introverted person is quiet and prefers working alone. Maybe they are socially awkward, but maybe they just don't care for other people.

**Invaders/Outsiders** [Opposition, Thing] Exactly what it sounds like. Someone from somewhere else, be it Huns or aliens or commie mutants, is attempting to invade and take over. Most likely, they come in the form of an invading army, but they could also be finding more insidious ways to infiltrate our ranks.



**Invention** [Thing] Something completely new and, in order to make it relevant to the game, also revolutionary. Sure, your invention could be a GPS golf ball locator, but the story works much better if it's a mind-reading machine, or a cheap renewable energy source, or a semi-automatic chicken generator. Feel free to be inventive.

**Iron** [Tech] Specifically, this is the Iron Age. Depending on the part of the world you are looking at, the historical Iron Age covers an extremely broad period from 1000BC and earlier up until the end of the Roman era in Europe and as late as the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Asia. This is a time of hard work and toil for almost everyone in society. Put simply, this is the time when people discover the techniques to smelt and forge iron implements, which are harder and more durable than their bronze or stone counterparts. Iron plowshares give rise to larger areas of cultivation. Tribes or nations with iron weapons dominate those using bronze or stone - leading to larger kingdoms. Iron tools are hard enough to reliably cut stone. This is the time of Stonehenge, the Celtic Hills and round castles.

Feel free to use any of the technology presented here in your game: Swords, iron-tipped weapons, chain mail, aqueducts, small castles, horse riding, catapults, megaliths (that's Stonehenge).

Also connected to this concept is the mythological Iron Age. According to writers such as Ovid, living in the actual historical Iron Age, the Iron Age marked the rise of nationality, exploration, expansionism, warfare and greed. Ovid apparently didn't think much of his own culture.

**Island** [Place, Thing] Surrounded by water, an island is a small area of land which is typically isolated from the mainland. Islands can be veritable paradises with food falling from the trees, water bubbling from springs and fey-folk bringing you whiskey sours while you lounge on the beach. All islands become prisons, however, when you have no way off of the island to return to civilization.

Yes, we are aware that technically an island can be as big as Madagascar or even Australia, but really... where's the fun in that?

**Isolated Space Probe** [Setting] Floating silent in the depths of space is the isolated space probe. Months if not years from civilization, every object on the space probe is purposeful. There is only enough air, food and water to last until the next resupply stop. Air and waste is recycled and reused as much as possible. If intended for research, labs and tools are compact and normally multipurposed. The problem with the isolated space probe is that when something goes wrong (the air generator fails or the viral rays from a stray comet cause mutations), the only people capable of fixing it are the probe's inhabitants. Other help will not arrive until it is too late.

**Janitor** [Person, Thing] No matter what happens, somebody has to clean it up. Janitors and caretakers have

the lonely work of maintenance after the day is done. They clean, sweep, and repair the buildings in their charge. These solitary types are often a great source of hearsay and other information, as no one sees them, even when they are about their tasks and they are the few in many buildings late into the night.

**Judge** [Person] Someone imbued with authority to rule over the fate of others. Often, a judge is an authority figure vested with responsibility by a government to rule in civil and criminal disputes. However, a judge could simply be a local guy picked by the Shriners to determine the winner of the pie-eating contest.

**Judgmental** [Personality] Someone who is inclined to form moral or personal opinions of others even in the absence of full information.

**Jungle World** [Setting] The strongest shall rule forever—even though the strongest king may fall every day. Trees compete with each other, stretching to reach the sun's energy. They choke out lesser competitors and cloak the ground level in steamy twilight. Ancient temples and cities sleep beneath the banyans, keeping their secrets.

Massive serpents, gibbering apes, lethal cats and mighty elephants thrive in the jungle, ideally suited to the stifling heat. The creatures, along with endless swarms of blood-sucking bugs, are constant threats to the few people who live here. Human existence is a difficult one, plagued by disease, and hunted by fiendish creatures in the night.

The magic of a jungle world though is the layers. As a megascale globe-spanning rainforest, the jungle world has true vertical depth. From the sun-kissed canopy, to the understory among the leaves, all the way down to the pitch black swamp layers among the roots. Each layer comes complete with its own thrills and horrors.

**Junkyard** [Place] Any location that is used to store and resell junk. Abundant items include scrap metal, vehicle parts, broken appliances or self-contained nuclear power drives.

**Juvenile** [Personality] Some people are immature because they just never grew up and insist on acting like they are in junior high school even when they are in their fifties. Other people are immature because they just never grew up—literally only eight or nine years old. Juvenile people are impulsive, emotional and tend to get bored easily after several minutes of the same activity. Often they have a penchant for fart jokes.

**Kidnap** [Action] To seize and detain unlawfully and usually for ransom. In other words, go haul away someone against their will.

**Kingpin** [Opposition, Thing, Person] Whether male or female, the kingpin is the Man. The kingpin is the

pinnacle of an intricate criminal organization who exercises meticulous control over her numerous minions.

**Lair** [Place, Thing] The dwelling of beasts. Many beasts call lairs homes: dragons, a horde of intelligent lemmings, Rosanne Barr. A lair is normally a fairly safe base of operation for a beast or beasts to venture out and pillage the surrounding lands. The only sure way to clear a lair is either to send in some heroes with superior weapons, or just smoke them out. When in doubt... smoke them out.

**Landmark** [Place] Any easily recognizable feature of the landscape. Think of it like this, a landmark is anything you would use in giving directions to make sure the traveler knows where they are: a clock tower; a large river; the deli at the corner of Fourth and Main.

**Launch** [Action, Thing] Once upon a time, there was a face that could launch a thousand ships. Mayors like to snip ribbons with ceremonial keys. Things have to start somewhere, with ceremony or without, and it's the beginnings that most opposition tries to stop.

**Law Enforcement/Law Enforcement Office(r)** [Person, Place, Opposition, Thing] Cheese it! The cops! Right or wrong, the players have run afoul of the law. Maybe it's a misunderstanding, maybe it's crooked cops, maybe they really did it... but it's doubtful that the police are asking questions first.

If that's not your bag, then maybe the players *are* the law. Either way, law enforcement in any form is exactly what it sounds like—those charged with upholding the law.

**Lawyer** [Person, Thing] Scoundrels, each and every one. Some say that the Rule of Law was originally conceived by the world's first lawyer to ensure that he would always have a job. Lawyers are the people that explain and interpret "the rules." In the modern world, they are attorneys or barristers who represent people in and out of court on all types of legal matters. In ancient times the lawyers were scribes who kept record of the codes and laws which were prescribed (sometimes arbitrarily) by the royalty or emperors who ruled. In a future setting, the lawyers are programs encoded to sort through the massive amounts of information that governs the conduct of the living and keeps things "in order." In any genre, however, there is one universal trait that applies to lawyers: no one likes them.

**Lazy** [Personality] The lazy person simply has no motivation to do anything that doesn't seem fun at the moment. While a lazy person normally avoids physical labor, their avoidance may also extend to anything requiring critical thought or getting off the couch.

**Leader** [Person, Thing] This is the person who is supposedly in charge. Sometimes, it is also the person who is actually in charge. But not always. Leaders can be

formal or informal, but the leader is who everyone will look to when they need a decision made.

**Legendary** [Descriptor] Larger than life, and famous for it. Everyone knows the legendary figure. They may or may not believe those tales of legend, but they know them.

**Liberate** [Action] To free someone or something from their confines. Can include a single imprisoned person, a stolen artifact or an entire population of oppressed people.

**Library** [Place] A repository of books or other recorded information. Card catalogs are optional.

**Lighter Than Air Travel** [Tech] Lighter than air travel allows a civilization to use flight through use of lighter than air craft—blimps, balloons and zeppelins, typically. Such technology never took full hold in our own history, because zeppelins were superseded by airplanes, but there is a distinct feel to a world of balloon travel, more akin to airborne ocean liners than what we think of with modern air travel.

**Limbo** [Place, Setting, Thing] This either refers to the cold gray nothingness between hell and purgatory, a metaphorical state of uncertainty or stasis for a project, or the popular Caribbean pastime of walking under an increasingly lower bar. All three will add an interesting twist to your game.

**Local Legend** [Person] There are two types of local legends: one the non-locals know about and ones they don't. The first type is any moderately famous person who hails from a medium-populated town or smaller. They may not be a "legend" anywhere else, but in their home town you'd think they gave birth to the savior. Think about how legendary David Copperfield is in his hometown of Metuchen, New Jersey.

The second type doesn't even have to be from the town, or famous at all. They just accomplished something really amazing that the locals will always remember. This could include the mysterious hero that showed up one day and eradicated the unholy harpy menace, or John Appleton who was the only person to eat an entire seven pound hamburger with all the fixings at the local diner.

**Locked Out** [Place] Wherever you are, you have by now realized that you can't get in. Hopefully, you just locked your keys in your car, and you can resolve this with a coat hanger. More likely though it's a criminal mastermind who has sealed all exits to the bank so that he can rifle through the safe deposit boxes at his leisure. Even if you have him surrounded, he has an escape tunnel ready and a bomb on the roof to distract you.

**Logical** [Personality] The logical will decide on actions based on all of the information present and will choose

their response based upon what they feel is mechanically correct. No gut reaction here.

**London** [Setting] London: a city beset with plague. The Lord Mayor struggles to maintain order as the King has retreated to his country estates and half the population of the city lies dead.

London: home of Shakespeare and the Globe Theatre. Puritan and Libertine sensibilities clash in Elizabethan England.

London: capital city of the world's largest empire. Victorian England is rapidly industrializing, giving rise to a new leisure class.

London: birthplace of the Beatles and punk rock. Despite its lost glory and swelling underclass, London is still a bustling metropolis.

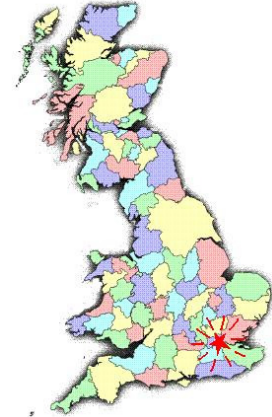
London: home of the free. Last bastion of European democracy under King William V. With the aid of it's Commonwealth nations, Fortress Britain holds against the communist forces that have swept the rest of Europe.

London: underwater jewel. One of only eleven Earth cities to be domed and fortified against the rising oceans of a warming planet.

London: space station. Interplanetary residence of Elizabeth VI and seat of New Britain's government since terrestrial England became uninhabitable in the 28th century.

**Lose** [Action] Your task is not, as is often the case, to win. Your task is to lose, and perhaps make it look like someone else was responsible. Or maybe you're in a sports contest and you have to throw the fight. Maybe you're seeking to lose your pursuers. Possibly, you have something dangerous and you need to see that it gets lost and stays lost. Don't scoff. Sometimes losing is harder than you think.

**Lost Civilization** [Setting] The lost civilization is the culture that time forgot. A lost civilization is always isolated and self-sufficient, which explains why it remained unaffected while the rest of the world continued to evolve along a different path. A typical example from literature would be the isolated island civilization that lives with stone age technology in 21st century earth. But the lost civilization does not necessarily mean more primitive. Without the distraction of technology, a lost civilization may have discovered the well of our innate magical abilities and developed with an entirely different technology. If a gamemaster is going to use the lost



civilization setting, she may want to roll twice on the technology table: once for the predominant culture and once for the lost civilization's technology.



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**Lost Technology [Tech]** The power of the ancients has been rediscovered. This is a technology that existed long ago, but obviously was somehow lost and only recently has been found again. Usually, lost technology is capable of wonders that were thought no longer possible. It could be hyper-advanced Atlantean hovercraft and laser rifles uncovered by steampunk explorers at the turn of the century, or the wonders of ancient Greek culture uncovered by 13th century monks. Maybe the world was originally colonized by travelers from space who went native and forgot their roots. Now centuries later, they stumble across the original spacecraft and base camps of their early ancestors.

If you need help, make two more rolls on the Tech table. Assume that the more primitive of the two results is the overall level of society, and the other is the level of the lost technology.

**Lost Tribe [Thing]** The people who have been separated from the bulk of civilization for generations, and only now have they been re-discovered. Usually, they have some special powers or valuable secret that makes them extra-exploitable to the less savory elements of our world.

The lost tribe can be lost pygmies in the rainforest canopy who hold the secret to immortality, or shipwrecked sailors of centuries past living in communion with intelligent dinosaurs in a bizarre Antarctic oasis of eternal spring, or 23rd century colonists lost in space and only recently returned with the secrets of alien technology.

**Lost/Stranded [Place, Setting]** This is Lord of the Flies and Robinson Crusoe. It can be one person or a small group, but they've gotten into a situation which has cut them off completely from society. It's usually the result of a wreck (boat, plane, spacecraft), that leaves the survivors unable to contact society in any way. Rescue is possible,

but unlikely. Escape, if possible at all, is probably hazardous to the point of madness.

Part one of any lost/stranded setting is simply figuring out how to survive in this new environment. Locating food, water, and shelter can be entire adventures unto themselves. Technology is always limited to whatever the castaways have brought with them or recovered from their own wreck or can construct from native materials. But after the survival drama has played itself out, the lost/stranded setting offers lots of possibilities for other plot twists. Inter-group conflict is a common theme, as the castaways argue over leadership and resources and the best way to get out of here. But also there can be other hazards already present, or outside forces who seek harm to the group (and maybe are even responsible for the accident that brought them here).

While this entry focuses largely on the stereotypical desert island type scene, don't feel limited by that. One could just as easily fall through a hole into a deep underworld full of surprises, or get caught in a science experiment gone wrong and wind up in an alternate world that's either primitive or empty, or even get picked up by a tornado and deposited in some bizarre landscape that requires the players perform some sort of quest to earn their way home.

**Low Magic [Tech, Thing]** Wizards and sorcerers are fine for what they're worth, but they only represent one aspect of the world of magic. Outside the ritualistic schools of magic with their tomes of spells and their volumes of summoning procedures, there is a different kind of "natural" magic: the low magic. Low magic is the innate, rudimentary magic that lies within all of us. But only the most powerful amongst us can conquer it and manipulate it in its rarest form. From the beginning of time, these shamans have been revered by civilizations both primitive and developed. Low magic wielders are often healers who use their skills to aid people. Others channel it for evil, more menacing purposes, such as to make doll-like replicas of your enemies upon which to inflict plagues.



**Machines Gone Mad [Opposition]** It's an old story: Mankind's hubris has finally come back to bite him in the ass, as his own creations threaten to destroy him. From

reanimated corpses to enchanted broomsticks to possessed semi-tractor trailers to artificial intelligences, this story can be reborn in any age and in many forms. The unifying theme is that man has brought this crisis on himself either by overstepping his bounds and playing God or by allowing himself to become lazy with an over-reliance on technology. Or both.

**Macrotech** [Tech] The use of animals—usually genetically modified animals—to perform the functions of various machines. It can be in very obvious ways, as a replacement for vehicles or robots, such as a giant dinosaur-like creature controlled by his telepath-pilot and used to haul people and items around like a truck, or oversized spiders that obey simple commands and fetch and haul household items. Or they could be more subtle items, like psychically sensitive silkworms that crawl across your body and weave new clothes on the spot to match your mood and occasion.

**Magic Shop** [Place] Practicing the magical arts isn't always as easy as it looks. People think it's more like Samantha (just twitch your nose) than like Shakespeare (cauldron, eye of newt, etc.). The reality is that practicing magic usually comes with a price. You can't bend the will of reality without offering something back—normally weird roots or the body parts of crawly things. And when you need a virgin turtle shell or midnight harvested mandrake root, the magic shop is the only place to find it without roughing it and finding it yourself. And believe me, these things don't come cheap. But the magic shop is so much more than just a reagents supply store. For a pretty penny you can also get yourself magical items, weapons or armor! There's something for everyone at the magic shop. All sales are final and returns must be within 10 days and are for shop credit only.

**Magical/Magician** [Descriptor, Person] Anything imbued with a magical aura or magical abilities, or persons who can manipulate such energies. In more mundane worlds, though, the magician is merely a showman, creating convincing illusions and dazzling with mirrors and sleight of hand.

**Magitech** [Tech] This is fairly broad, but magitech is any technology that is powered by magic rather than by more conventional sciences and physics. Flamethrowers? Bonded fire spirits. Airplanes? Carriages motivated through the sky by physical mages. Video cameras? Seeing stones. Firearms? Wands of stone throwing. Any complicated technology can be simulated through the use of magic. However, although they function similarly, the feel is quite different, and magitech devices usually require a magically capable person to either operate them or to empower them. On top of that, magic can be quite draining to the magicians, exacting a serious physical toll in exchange for sharing their talents.

**Malignant** [Descriptor] Something that is life-threatening, dangerous, or virulent.

**Mansion** [Place] A mansion is where the very rich live, and they make sure everyone can appreciate their wealth from their abode. Essentially, it's a really big house which, when originally built, was very expensive. It's characterized by opulent features and expensive furnishings. However, mansions are very expensive to maintain and often fall into disrepair. When this happens, they always seem to either become haunted or occupied by Ms. Haversham. Either way it's creepy.

**Marketplace** [Place, Thing] The true heart of any community beats in its marketplace. Spice markets, shipping houses, stock exchanges, and areas like them bring money, information and a grand variety of people together. Nearly anything in the world can be acquired in one marketplace or another. You need only find the correct one, and then meet the vendor's price. Caveat Emptor always.

**Mars** [Setting] The Red Planet. Some say that it is made entirely of crackers and was originally intended to be enjoyed with slices of moon. Others say that it is infested with ominous Martians plotting to enslave the human race. Another theory is that Mars was the original home planet for humans, who only evacuated to earth after a Martian apocalypse. Finally, the Romans named Mars after the God of War, and some to this day still contend that the influence of the Red Planet leads to violence and death on a grand scale.

Or maybe it's just the fourth planet from the sun, a little smaller than earth, very cold, wispy atmosphere, lots of red rock and dust and... and who knows?

**Martial Arts** [Thing] A style of weaponless combat/self-defense. There are many varieties of martial arts, each with their own particular brand of practice (Karate, Drunken Monkey, Judo, Rex Kwon Do, etc.) Not to be confused with Marital Arts, which tends to be less disciplined and predictable.

**Mask** [Thing] Normally, it's a disguise worn on one's face. However, people can also mask their auras, alien odor or evil disposition.

**Mason** [Person] You are a man of stonework. You could have helped erect Stonehenge, Mesa Verde, or Notre Dame. Where there is construction, there is demand for a mason. Masonry is a common trade among tramps and other men that work only when they have to.

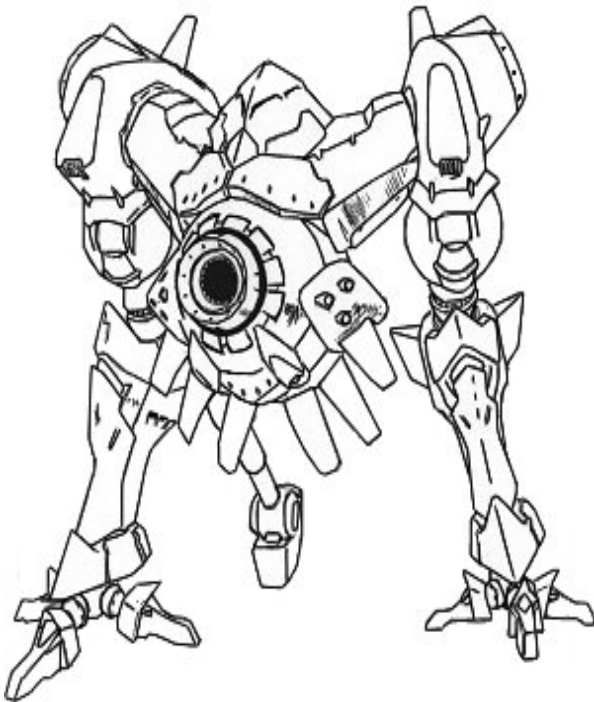
Alternately, this could refer to Freemasonry. In this case, you are privy to secret handshakes and connections and knowledge of the sacred geometry. Not to mention a group of people who wonder just what you're up to. Whether you're up to something is up to you and the GM: the Masons could be as innocuous as the Elks Club if you want. But you know which option is the most fun.

**Mass Transit** [Thing] All densely populated areas have a problem trying to get all the people to all their different locations. Mass Transport includes: subways, trains, roc shuttle, hover buses, or even moving tubes. Obviously, most forms of mass transportation are vulnerable to attack—it is hard to secure a device that moves numerous members of the public simultaneously. However, the "hubs" for mass transit devices are similarly vulnerable: the train station, the airport, the central tube station. Anyone looking to cause major havoc would only have to look at one of these locations.

**Mature** [Descriptor] A polite way of saying "old." But it doesn't have to be that. Mature also refers to the dignity, wisdom, and grace that comes with age. One can be mature without being old.

**Maze** [Place] A labyrinth. Any construct of winding, interconnected pathways. A maze can be a series of underground caves, a dungeon, or a path carved into garden hedges or a corn field.

**Mecha** [Thing] An oversized humanoid(ish) mobile construct with a person or two inside to run it.



The classic mecha is a giant-sized suit of power-armor, like a robotic walking tank, but don't limit yourself to tradition. In a fantasy setting, mechas can be humongous suits of magical plate armor or headless animated statues with dwarven riders. Or in a more alien future world, mechas could be genetically-engineered behemoths with human "pilots" symbiotically attached.

Example: The authors once rolled "mecha" in combination with "sea adventure" and "pre-European Americas," and used it to create primitive Pacific

Islanders defending their villages with mana-powered Easter Island statues. They were cool.



**Mechanic** [Person, Thing] Whenever something breaks and you don't have the first clue how to fix it, you can rest assured that there is someone out there who will take advantage of your ignorance and fix it for an exorbitant price. These are mechanics. They can't be your life coach, your personal trainer or your NA mentor, but they can fix your gas dryer when the idle belt breaks (for the tidy sum of \$120).

Simply put, mechanics fix all things mechanical—cars, microwaves, sewing machines, you name it.

**Mechanized Planet** [Setting] Either in the far future or the distant past, technology became so advanced that nearly all natural specimens of life became extinct. In the modern world, we still rely on natural resources for nearly everything: petroleum for gasoline and oil; wood for construction; animals and plants for sustenance.

In a populated mechanized world, there is none of this. Fuel is created through subatomic particle manipulation. Metals, plastics and other artificial materials are used to create everything from office buildings to clothing to landscapes. Even food is created by artificial means to provide molecular sustenance which, even though dressed up to look like a chicken, is just another flavored item to come from the vat. Even the atmosphere is maintained through precise controls. The only living thing on the planet are the people (humans, aliens or angels) that reside on the planet.

Ultimately, even the people are ultimately optional.

A "rusted" planet, however, is a formerly mechanized planet that is no longer used and fallen into disrepair. Where the world was once covered in metal and synthetics, the natural world has started to reemerge in the chinks and cracks of the system. The automated machines on the rusted planet usually do not work, or if they do, they do not perform as intended. Sustaining life on a rusted planet is difficult if not impossible.

**Medieval** [Setting, Descriptor] Swords, chivalry and fiefdoms. Medieval describes an era generally in Western Europe during the middle ages. The primary form of governance was kingdoms and fiefdoms where the vast majority of people worked for and under the protection of

some level of nobility. Agriculture and animal husbandry were widespread, and technology was only as advanced as simple machines. Medicine was rudimentary and often more dangerous than it was helpful. While life for knights and nobility was generally privileged and comfortable, life for normal people was difficult and laborious.

**Mercenaries** [Opposition, Thing, Person] Some people will do anything for money. Mercenaries take this to the logical extreme and specialize in using deadly force... for a price.

**Mercurial** [Descriptor] Someone or something that is volatile or quick to change their temperament.

**Microworld** [Setting] The microworld boils down to really tiny people in the normal-sized world. Sometimes, it's just "Honey, I've shrunk something!" and we see the trials and the comedy of people trying to survive their own neighborhood when they're only an eighth of an inch tall. If you're lucky, you might find some microworld inhabitants already there once you've got yourself shrunk. Normally microworld inhabitants have created their microworld cities, but on the side of something normal. For example, the million-strong civilization of Freelaire which is fully contained on the tail of a dog. Normal people can then enter the microworld, such as when the party shrinks to microscopic size to enter a friend's bloodstream to battle an intelligent virus.

**Military/Military Installation** [Descriptor, Opposition, Place, Setting, Thing] Somebody has an army, and they're willing to unleash it on you. I wonder what they want... Military can be any organized armed force, or the equipment, personnel and accoutrements associated with armed combat (or armed combat readiness).

The Military Installation is broad enough to include: missile silos, underground bunkers, cavalry stables, a fortified government space station, or an isolated island used to test biological warfare. Unless abandoned (which isn't unusual given the violent nature of these places), the military installation is ruled under the authoritarian auspices of the military- usually a mid-level bureaucratic officer who revels in his or her power. Military installations are normally very spartan and utilitarian, there are no unnecessary supplies or materials, only what is needed for the current operation. One thing that is plentiful at military installations is weaponry... and lots of it. If you aren't a member of the military, getting access to a military installation is tricky. Unless of course you've been judged a "significant military threat", then you can easily gain access, but just to the confines of the military jail cell.

**Mimic** [Action] A copy-cat. One who poses as another, or something that intentionally appears to be something else.

**Mindless Horde** [Opposition, Thing] A mindless horde is any large group of creatures who do not act

independently, but as a single entity. This can range from a raging mob of villagers to a "hive mind" group of insect aliens. Our favorite, of course, is brain-eating zombies. Any game is automatically improved by the addition of zombies.

**Miniature** [Descriptor] Tiny. Small. Piquant.

**Mischievous** [Personality] Someone that is irritating, troublesome or teasing. More maliciously, it can refer to someone who likes to start trouble or cause damage in an indirect way. A pot-stirrer.



**Misdirecting** [Descriptor] It points you the wrong way. It seems helpful now, but you're going to feel foolish later.

**Misguided Hero** [Opposition] The misguided hero thinks she's serving the forces of justice and goodness, but doesn't realize the havoc and mayhem she's creating. Misguided heroes are great villains, because they truly believe they are doing good, but end up doing evil for the noblest of reasons.

**Mob** [Opposition, Thing] They might be carrying torches and pitchforks, or it might be baseball bats and rope. Either way, there's an awful lot of them and they seem rather angry.

**Mobile** [Descriptor] Able to move freely and easily.

**Modern Day Las Vegas** [Setting] Welcome to the plastic world of vanity and greed. Las Vegas is where people go to forget their mundane existences and feel important for a few days (or at least until their credit card gets declined).

Pick your vice: Gamblers have the flashy casinos; Perverts have the hookers who crawl on every corner; Addicts have the drugs that run through the streets like rainwater; and Bluehairs have the off-Broadway run of Cats. Pick your poison, there's something for everyone in Vegas.



And don't believe the hype. No matter what it is... it's not staying in Vegas.

**Modern-Day Amusement Park** [Setting] Come one, come all to the greatest place on Earth (or any planet which values commercial-sponsored, large-scale recreation). An amusement park is exactly as you remember it: large rides, overpriced concessions, games of "skill" with worthless prizes, and musical reviews with questionable dancing.

But an amusement park does not have to be a roller coaster haven. Depending on the game, it can encompass a turn of the century carnival, a high-magic series of enchanted rides, or a futuristic virtual reality with thrilling and dangerous experiences.

**Modern-Day Milwaukee** [Setting] Located in Southeastern Wisconsin on the shore of Lake Michigan, the greater Milwaukee area is home to about 1.5 million people. Originally inhabited by various Native American tribes (including the Fox, Mascouten, Potawatomi, and Winnebago), Milwaukee is thought to have gotten its name from the Indian word *Millioke* which means "the good land", or "gathering place by the water."

Milwaukee is a strong blue-collar town—nearly a fourth of its population is employed in the manufacturing sector. Milwaukee is/was the hometown of such diverse people as Spencer Tracey, Jeffrey Dahmer and Rollergirl from Boogie Nights.

**Monkeys** [Thing] Think our closest evolutionary relative isn't that important? Ponder these factual tidbits:

In the race to get to space, monkeys actually orbited the Earth first and beat the humans by several years.

Monkeys are worshiped around the world in their purest form—wearing a fez and crashing cymbals together.

Monkeys are capable of destroying human civilization at will... by infecting us with contagious rage!

Bottom line: monkeys are cool. And yes, we know the difference between apes and monkeys, but for purposes of Instant Game, feel free to lump them all together. Use this roll to add any sort of non-human primate to your world.

C'mon... haven't you always wanted a monkey?

**Moon** [Place, Setting] On Earth, the moon has long held the fascination of generations. Some refer to it as the

home of gods. Others regard it as an aromatic wheel of cheese orbiting our planet. Some categorize it as a lifeless meteorite without an atmosphere which tidally locked to the Earth (these people are called science nerds). Its influence, however, is crucial to our environment, pulling the tides in and out and keeping the balance with our world.

The moon doesn't necessarily have to refer to the Earth's moon. Any natural satellite that orbits another planet is considered a moon. Some of Jupiter's moons have their own atmospheres and conditions which could have harbored life at one point. Recent data gathered from the myriad of probes NASA has sent to Saturn indicates that its moons evidence extensive tunneling, possibly by mole men intent on dominating the third planet from the sun (or as they refer to it, the "Elemental Plane of Turquoise").

**Morgue** [Place] The way station for dead folks before being sent to their final rest. A modern morgue is stereotypically all surgically sterile and cold, with refrigerated steel cabinets. A nineteenth century morgue could be considerably less antiseptic. In ancient times, it might be the proverbial slab on which the body undergoes various mummification and/or burial rituals. In the future, maybe it's glass-fronted cryogenic chambers where the dead are flash-frozen and Scotch-Guarded™.

**Mountain** [Place] A mountain of paperwork? An overblown situation derived from a molehill? Cute, but no. We're talking about a literal giant pile of rock and earth (or possibly ice or rubble or caramel fudge, depending on the world). The defining factor is its sheer size. A mountain should be overwhelmingly big, regardless of what it's made of or what the players will find there.

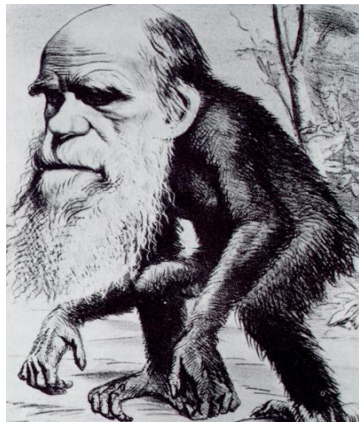
**Movie Monsters** [Opposition, Thing]  
"Even a man who is pure at heart  
And says his prayers by night  
May become a Wolf  
When the wolfsbane blooms  
And the moon is clear and bright."

*"It's alive! It's ALIVE!"*

Monsters have been part of human society forever. Ancient stories of people who could rise from the grave, feast on our flesh and blood or transform into animals became modern when they hit the silver screen.

It's important to note that these are movie monsters. Your average player is probably going to know a few things about how to defeat them. These creatures may be powerful and frightening, but in the end, the monster always loses.

**Murder** [Action, Thing] Someone dies by the hand of another. This can be a murder to investigate, a murder to



thwart, or (if your players don't mind being morally ambiguous) a murder to commit.

**Music/Musician** [Person, Thing] Tunes, melodies, symphonies, rock operas. It can be instrumental or vocal or something entirely other, but the rhythm IS going to get you. In game terms, music can be introduced as the sound itself—maybe from a mysterious source. Or possibly it's about a recording or sheet music or a musical instrument.



The musician, then, is anyone who creates said tunes.

**Mutants/Mutations** [Opposition, Thing] A staple of science fiction and fantasy for decades, mutants come, literally, in all shapes and sizes. The upshot is that something has acted upon a living creature or creatures so that they (or their offspring) are somehow different from the norm—either in appearance or in abilities or both. The "something" can be radiation or magic or chemicals or genetic drift, but the end result is usually beings with amazing powers. Sometimes, these mutants will band together to form a super group that battles injustice and prejudice, but other times, they are just mindless super-strong freaks who live in the sewers and prey upon the surface dwellers. In some settings, especially post-apocalyptic ones, radiation and/or genetic weirdness are so prevalent that nearly everyone is a mutant.



**Mysterious Energy** [Thing] Glowing lights on the evening horizon—what could be causing them? The alien spacecraft has been discovered after 7,000 years in the ice, and the engines still have power—where is it coming from? People around town are becoming suddenly and violently nauseous, and the children report seeing strange visions—what could link these two events?

All you need now is a learned expert to report on a "mysterious energy." It's source is probably unknown, and it's certainly "like nothing I've ever seen before." It's

effects are almost always very unusual and more than a little frightening.

**Mystery** [Thing, Tone] Mystery is not always magnifying glasses, dubious butlers and English accents. It can exist in any genre or time setting. As long as the players are trying to discover the clues that will solve some unknown circumstance (a "mystery" if you will), then you're on the right track.

In a future setting, players could be hired to track and recover renegade clones. In a prehistoric setting, tribesmen could be on a quest to discover what angered the elk spirits which laid a plague on their hunts. If appropriate, the players could be turn of the century sleuths, deducing the identity of a recent murderer- just don't set it on a train.

The key to a good mystery setting in all of these cases is the uncertainty. You can certainly construct a Holmesian mystery of clever criminals and a trail of obscure clues. Or it can be a more straightforward drama of tracking an unknown foe. But it can also be as simple as baffling and unexplained phenomena. The important thing is that the players don't have enough information to know the true story until a good 2/3 or more of the way into the adventure, but they should always feel they are moving consistently towards some kind of explanation or answer.

**Mystical Orient** [Setting] The Mystical Orient setting necessarily implies the generalizations and stereotypes that westerners originally attributed to the Eastern lands when the two worlds began to explore each other. But that doesn't make it any less cool. The Mystical Orient setting involves old magics wielded through wizened sorcerers, dramatic politics between warring factions, flightless dragons who sleep far beneath the ground, gods and ancient champions walking the earth as mortals and epic struggles that balance the fate of the planet in the hands of few important individuals.

Typically the Mystical Orient takes place in mainland China or in Japan several hundred years ago. But that shouldn't stop you from using the same principles in a modern setting or a different geographic location (if you've never seen *Big Trouble in Little China*, you need to put this game on hold while you go watch it).

**Mythic** [Tone] Of legendary reputation and proportions. You cannot simply be told about it. When it comes to the mythic, seeing is believing... and sometimes even that seems to fall short.

**Mythical Legend** [Opposition] A person or creature or event of legend arises to cause mayhem or confusion of one sort or another. It is supposed that the majority of the populace still views this thing as merely legend and will be understandably upset and perplexed to find their mythology coming to life around them. Maybe sleeping gods have awoken to pronounce judgment over the world

they long ago left. Maybe dragons and giants and goblin have stepped out of fairy tale to terrorize the locals. Or perhaps the larger-than-life heroes of legend have somehow been made real: Gilgamesh, Achilles, Paul Bunyan, Batman. Lastly, maybe it's some nearly forgotten prophesied event that finally begins to materialize: Ragnarok, the birth of the Chosen One, a plague of locusts.

**Nanotech** [Tech, Thing] Nanotechnology, literally, is just science on a very small scale. In game terms, it implies a technology that has mastered using microscopic nanomachines (usually self-replicating) for various purposes. In fiction, these purposes have ranged from mind control to rapid large scale construction from base materials to the perfection of maintenance-free human hygiene to facilitating connections between man and machine to replicating the effects of telepathy and other psychic powers. With some imagination, nanotech can be used as a weapon or a tool to justify all sorts of seemingly magical effects.

**Natural Disaster** [Thing] The characters are sidetracked by an Act of God. This can be anything from a torrential rainstorm to a comet strike.

**Near Future** [Setting, Tech] It's just enough like modern Earth to be thoroughly recognizable and familiar, but just enough in the future to justify the addition of whatever little whizmogig the GM wants to throw in. In most near-future settings, the differences from modern Earth are largely cosmetic or just slight advances of current trends, except for one or two major advances or changes that provide a unique twist or further the plot. A near-future world where cheap fusion power has greatly increased the world's standard of living but has also completely upset the political power balance. One where surgically augmented hackers can plug their brains directly into their computers. Or a bleak future where damage to the environment now keeps humankind from ever traveling unprotected out of doors.

**Near Future World Government Headquarters** [Setting] In the very near future, for one reason or another, we will be subjected to a world government. Not the United Nations, but an actual government that controls and determines the laws that affect every human on the planet. Maybe it developed through peaceful means, or maybe the communist proletariat actually succeeded in the cold war and dominated the rest of us. But the world government is housed in a single building where diplomats from around the world gather to lobby for their particular interests. This setting leads itself to either a game of political intrigue if the players are actually involved in the politics of the world government; or a game of great suspense if there is a violent threat unfolding amongst our world leaders.

**Negotiate** [Action] To attempt to form an agreement between multiple parties through talk, compromise,

intimidation or other similar means. This could be in regards to a multitude of things, such as trade deals, hostages, or even what toppings to get on the pizza.

**Nervous** [Personality] Twitchy and uncomfortable. Even if they're not nervous about anything in particular, players can be sidetracked for ages by a guy with shifty eyes and an involuntary tic.

**Neutral Ground** [Place, Thing] While the war has caused the dead to fall faster than they can be counted, there is no blood shed on neutral ground. Neutral ground is the one place where everyone agrees there will be no violence.

Sometimes the respect for neutral ground develops due to supernatural circumstances, as with churches for the undead hunters and their prey. On other occasions, the neutral ground develops out of alliances or treaties, such as the Olympic Park or the summit of demon-lords at their annual conference in Las Vegas. Neutral ground can also develop out of necessity, as in the case of the isolated space-traders outpost where all ships must stop and refuel.

**Neutrality** [Thing] Someone refuses to take a side. This can be very frustrating, but can also lead naturally to neutral ground (see previous entry).

**Neverland/Childworld** [Setting] Like Peter Pan's Neverland, this is a world of child's fantasy. Also like Neverland, this doesn't mean it has to be a happy land of pink bunnies and fluffy clouds. While it embodies a child's most wondrous fantasies, it can also house their fears and anxieties. Like Neverland or Pinocchio's Pleasure Island, it can be an idealized and generalized land of hedonistic fun for any child lucky (or unlucky) enough to stumble into it. Or alternately, it could be a much more specific dreamscape rising from the mind or imagination of a single child. In a darker turn on the theme, the childworld could be the magical realm from which the bogeymen of childhood arise. In this setting, there could still be some bright spots and helpful entities, but on average, the things one would find in such a world would tend to be much more disturbing.



**Newborn** [Thing] An infant child (animal, beast, alien). Infinite in its potential, yet almost impossibly vulnerable.

**Newly-Restored** [Descriptor] Something that had become tattered, worn or shabby that recently has been restored to its previous grandeur. Can apply to an object, building, person, memory, digital recording, etc, etc.

**News Office** [Place] This is where news is compiled, reported, and sometimes created. The news office is a busy place with underpaid employees scurrying around trying to beat unrealistic deadlines. However, when the news office is primarily used for telecasts or broadcasts, the environment is much less chaotic and far more exacting and controlled—at least, in front of the cameras. No expense is spared to make sure that the distinguished, attractive news reader appeals exactly as intended to the chosen demographic.

**Nightclub/Rave** [Place, Thing] Swirling lights, thumping sounds and the overwhelming skin to skin sense of partying flesh surround you. Raves are nightclubs gone rogue - hidden, illicit things where the young and adventurous have more than ample opportunity to meet the predatory and lascivious. Nightclubs are great places for meetings, crimes, and dancing your cares away.



Fore raves, the buildings are usually in more run down areas of the city - raves are quasi-legal as it is. Large structures, like underground garages, warehouses or abandoned factories, are ideal sites for a rave. The scene includes security heavies, dealers, hustlers and rising stars in addition to the decked out throng of young folks. It's loud, bright and smells of sweat and alcohol.

**Ninjas** [Person, Thing] Extensively trained and loyal past the point of death, Ninjas are the secret enforcers of Japanese power. Whether they be empowered by skills, mystical forces, mutation, or cyberotechnology, ninjas are fearsome and unsettling opponents.

**No Tech** [Tech] Have you ever seen that documentary on chimpanzees which show them selecting just the right reed to jam in to a termite bed to fish out a yummy snack? This is about the right level of technology. No mortar and pestle. No stone arrow tips. No metalwork. No agriculture. No fences. No mind-reading devices.

Here's what you get: hunting and gathering. If you really want to press it, you can have sharpened sticks. Want fire? Better go find a tree hit by lightning.

The point is that there is no technology. This doesn't mean that the players don't have knowledge of technology, but for one reason or another (time travel to the far past or future; nuclear apocalypse; extra-dimensional travel) they are in a world of no technology.

**Noble** [Descriptor, Person, Thing] Grand or majestic in appearance or character. When applied to a person, can either mean someone of the royal bloodline, or someone of high moral character (but normally not both).

**Note** [Thing] Someone discovers a note. Reading it reveals a clue. What to do?

**Nuclear Power** [Tech] Society has unlocked some of the secrets of the atom. The two major applications of nuclear power (so far) would be as a weapon or as a source of power. Either way, it implies an advanced knowledge of physics. As a weapon, it typically marks a society's first realization that it is capable of utterly destroying itself, and comes with the ability to level entire cities or nations at a stroke. As a source of power, it is really quite effective and clean... as long as you can ignore those toxic waste products and the occasional meltdown.

**Oasis** [Place] The bright spot amid the wasteland. Sweet sweet respite. Palm trees by a refreshing pool in the middle of the desert. Heated convenience store on a deserted stretch of frigid Canadian freeway. A fully provisioned docking station halfway between Pluto's orbit and Alpha Centauri.

**Obnoxious** [Personality] Annoying to the point of grating on your last nerve. Not just tactless and crude, but almost willfully so.

**Obsessive-Compulsive** [Personality] Pathologically superstitious. Serious control issues. Anal retentive plus five. It's not just the checking and the double-checking and the triple checking... it's the rituals. The seemingly purposeless activities that MUST be performed to bring any action to completion.

**Occult** [Thing, Descriptor] Demons. Magic. Candles and Pentagrams. The occult is not so much defined as a single entity, but rather defined by the cultures that fear it. Whatever the case, the occult typically deals with unexplained phenomenon. Ghost and UFO sightings could both be attributed to the occult, as well as heavy metal that uses lyrics about the devil himself. Modern wiccans often find themselves cast into this group, as does anything related to Cthulu and the elder gods.

**Ocean Going Ships** [Tech] Developed in Europe in the 15th century, the caravel was the first true ocean going ship. It had two or three masts and was typically small and maneuverable, but it afforded Europeans (especially the Spanish and Portuguese) the ability to actually sail across whole oceans without having to hug the coastlines. The opportunities for trade and exploration helped reshape the globe in their day.

**Organized** [Personality] It's not that hard—it's just a matter of having a system and keeping a list. If you remember to always put things in their proper place and check off items as you get that done, you'll always know where you are and what's left.

**Organized Crime** [Opposition, Thing] Somehow, the mob is involved, and they don't like people getting in their way. Organized crime includes mobsters, street gangs, prostitution and smuggling rings, a string of car thieves connected to a single chop shop, roving reiver tribes plying local villages for protection money, and even corrupt political entities that systematically fleece their constituents.



**Orphanage** [Place] It's a hard knock life, but kids gotta go somewhere when their parents aren't around to take care of them. Depending on the setting, it can be a giant place housing hundreds of orphans, or it could be a small modern group home or foster home. Either way, it's full of kids with no parents.

**Orwellian Future** [Setting] Don't look directly into the cameras. Everyone knows they're being watched, but the Authority considers it an act of subterfuge to acknowledge this fact by staring directly into cameras.

The Orwellian Future setting is a near-future world marked by an oppressive regime which is nearly always overly-militaristic. It monitors all its citizens' actions with an unblinking eye that records even the slightest infraction of laws that often seem arbitrary and cruel.

Punishment for any infraction is severe: beatings, mental cleansing, eradication. The Authority's oppression fosters discontent in the few free-thinkers who realize the injustice—but sometimes even your thoughts aren't safe from the Authority.

**Outpost** [Place, Setting] A station in a remote location. A small settlement on the frontier. Whether as part of a defense force, exploration team, or research project, the key defining factor of the outpost is its remoteness from the bulk of civilization. Communication tends to be unreliable, and backup is always at least a few days (or weeks) away. It is differentiated from a colony in that persons stationed at an outpost never expect such placement to be permanent. The outpost serves a purpose for the larger culture and is not intended to be autonomous or self-sufficient.

Some outpost examples: a fort housing French Foreign Legion troops in Angola. A 15 person science station in Antarctica. A watchtower on a far away stretch of the Great Wall of China. An off-shore oil rig, miles out to sea. The Oort Cloud Observation Platform with a sustainable interior habitat and a permanent crew of 400, orbiting 23 light-hours from the sun. The International Marianas Dome, a giant collaborative effort to create a habitable science station on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean. A group of battered Christian Crusaders holding a single lonely fortress outside of Muslim controlled Jerusalem.

**Parable/Moralistic** [Tone] Whether it's Little Red Riding Hood venturing through the Dark Woods, or Lusty campers cavorting at Crystal Lake, the players end up in a tale of right vs. wrong; moral vs. immoral. This tone of game play gives rise as much to the urban legends of modern time as to the world of the Grimm brothers.

This style is presented with bright lines and stark contrasts—there is always an obvious "right" decision compared with the similarly patent "wrong" decision. Innocents that take the solitary walk into the shadowy unknown (be it the shortcut through the woods or the dark alley behind the counselors' quarters) are usually beset by the vicious evils of the world. But if they are virgins they normally survive.

**Paranoid** [Personality] The constant conviction that someone is out to get you. The paranoid see shades of meaning behind every gesture and sinister intent in every coincidence. This is far more than just general negativity and pessimism... it's not just that bad things keep happening, but that *someone* is making them happen. They are malicious, and they are specifically targeting YOU.



Some people are paranoid with good reason. Sometimes, they really *are* out to get you. Much more fun is to give the players reason to think that the paranoia is justified, only to later expose it all as the product of fevered imaginations.

**Park** [Place, Thing] Usually envisioned as a pastoral setting nestled among the streets and shops of the bustling city. This is land set aside for public use, usually for recreation or ornamentation. Sure, there's industrial parks and commercial parks and amusement parks—heck, there's even ballparks. But usually, regardless of location, this is land, no matter how small, full of greenery and intended for public use.

**Parking Lot** [Place] The place where vehicles get together when their drivers are busy elsewhere. Once upon a day, this could have been a stable or dock, but typically, be it packed dirt or gravel or asphalt, it's a place to leave your car while you run inside.

**Passive-Aggressive** [Personality] Do you know why it's hard to identify a passive-aggressive personality? Because you almost never catch them spitting in your coffee.

The passive-aggressive person avoids conflict and will say whatever is necessary to avoid it. But they bottle up their rage and uncork it in covert ways. The passive-aggressive personality can be just as mean and manipulative and vindictive as any other, but everything they do comes coated with a thick veneer of plausible deniability. They tell you it's okay to invite your friends over, but they use that tone of voice that says otherwise.

**People** [Thing] The characters encounter some people. Maybe they should talk to them.

**Philosopher** [Person] A thinker and wisdom seeker. Philosophers are either seeking the answers to life's fundamental questions, or in some cases, they have found an answer that works for them, and they strive to live by the tenets of their own philosophy. In all ages, philosophers tend to be respected teachers, and the very best of them are labeled as trouble.

**Pirate** [Person, Thing] The pirates of legend were swarthy characters who sailed the high seas plundering unwary trading boats and sending the crew to a watery death. But not all pirates are disgusting, peg-legged, eye-patched, parrot-wearing louts. The gentlemen pirate prides himself on his manners and genteel nature (while he politely steals your booty). Female pirates are often more ruthless and blood-thirsty than their male counterparts. Most importantly, pirates are not limited to sea-faring vessels—all these same attributes apply to futuristic pirates and their outlaw spaceships.

**Poison** [Action, Thing] The bane of ancient heroes, star-crossed lovers and bumbling English professors, poison is a constant reminder of mortality and the slim line between

life and death. Poisons are the subtle tool of the assassin, the revolutionary, and the deranged killer. Even the environment can become poisonous, through evil or neglect.

**Political Group** [Opposition, Thing] It's all about power—gaining it and maintaining it. Maybe the ruling party is trying to quash its opposition. Maybe another party is attempting to create scandal and resentment to catapult itself into power. Maybe it's simply a small marginal group looking to stir up trouble and attract attention. Depending on the exact setting, these machinations could consist of open attack and violence in the streets or could be far more subtle and backroom cloak and dagger.

**Political Intrigue** [Thing] Assuming you can tell the good guys from the bad guys, you can't just go beat up your enemies, because you'll wind up dead or in jail. It's time for guile and savvy. You must sway parties to your side without offending or alienating other allies. Political intrigue is very tricky to set up and to play, but is well worth it.

**Pollution/Polluted** [Descriptor, Thing] Dirty. Ill-kept. Trashed. Fouled. Pollution can be anything unwanted that fouls the otherwise pristine condition of something.

**Popular** [Personality] Well-liked by a majority of the people.

**Port/Transport Hub** [Place] Grand Central Station. The docks, a harbor, seaport, naval yard. Bus station, airport, train station, subway station. Skyport, spacehub, docking bays. It's the place for commercial vehicles to come together for shared facilities or passenger convenience or regulatory necessity.

**Post-Apocalyptic** [Setting, Tech] Step 1: Destroy civilization and 90+% of the world's population.

Step 2: Try to survive.

It doesn't matter how the world blew itself up: nuclear war, plague, global flooding, comet impact; all that matters is that it's all gone now, and for the survivors, the problems are always the same:

Someone's got to try to put a semblance of civilization back together while at the same time fighting to the death for scarce resources and fending off vicious brigands and power-mad dictator wannabes. Oh yeah, and there's usually mutants.

**Powers** [Thing] Someone has powers and abilities beyond those of mere mortals. Mutations? Superpowers? Alien technology? Magic? Gifts of the gods? That part's up to you. All I know is that these people can do some truly amazing things.

**Prayer** [Thing] Never underestimate the force of divine intervention—it can be earth shattering. But we all know that deities are busy creatures with very full calendars. So how's a deity to know when they are needed? By the power of prayer.



In a traditional fantasy setting, priests get their divine powers through ritualistic prayer. In nearly any genre, reports abound of miracles occurring after fervent prayers are issued by the devout. The prayers are not always to benevolent gods, either. Chanting the prayers of the dead civilization of Sontralia, will also awaken the Ancient Ones who seek to reap hell on the awakened lands.

**Precise** [Descriptor] Exact. Perfectly accurate.

**Pre-European Americas** [Setting] Nomadic buffalo hunting tribes of the Great Plains. Sturdy, cold-adapted Inuits. Coastal fishing villages. The great empires of Central and South America—Aztec, Maya, Inca. Pacific Islanders. Amazonian rainforest dwellers.

Before the arrival of the white man, the Americas were a rich and diverse place. Common elements will be animistic spiritual beliefs and near stone-age technology—very little in the way of refined metals, no wheel, limited formal agriculture, and few domesticated animals. However, in spite of that, some amazing achievements in architecture and sciences can sometimes be found.

**Printing Press** [Tech] When it comes to technology, there are few things that fundamentally altered the landscape of human activity as drastically as the printing press. (Time magazine named it #1 of the top 100 events

of the last millennium.) Coming during the European Renaissance, the printing press did as much to fuel the Renaissance as anything else. Scientific and cultural ideas could be easily shared. Printing in the vernacular (or common language) became common. Literacy rose as the printed word came more cheaply to the masses.

As an overall technology level, the printing press also coincides well with the rise of firearms and the first true ocean going ships.

**Prisoner** [Person, Thing] Held against her will. Maybe a princess from a tall tower, or a scientist forced to create the ultimate weapon because his family is hostage. A genie in a bottle? A lowly tech-writer shackled in his cubicle? No matter who they are, prisoners tend to be quite grateful if you free them.

**Private Investigator** [Person] This can be anyone who searches out information for a price. Specifically, the modern idea of the private dick arose after the American Civil War with the Pinkerton Agency which specialized in tracking down criminals for large companies. When that function slowly fell more and more to local police forces and the FBI, private eyes became relegated to locating missing persons and digging up blackmail material. From fiction and media, there are all sorts of sleuths and crime solvers, both paid and unpaid, who stumble across (and solve) murders on an almost weekly basis. Nowadays, any group of teenagers with a talking dog think they can go out there and solve mysteries.

**Prophet/Prophecy/Prophetic** [Thing, Descriptor, Person] The oracles have spoken to foretell the future. Or maybe the players find a fortune cookie.

Portentous. Ominous. Some people are able to see visions, read tea leaves, or are just plain intuitive. Regardless, the prophetic have this way of knowing what's about to happen and letting others know about it.

**Prostitute** [Person, Thing] Pure as New York snow, with Bette Davis eyes, streetwalkers have been part of our culture forever. Illicit rendezvous and anonymous satisfaction are what they offer. Often victimized by real criminals, the police and their pimps, prostitutes have few securities on the mean streets late at night.

But not every culture criminalizes prostitution. In some places and times, they have been respected, well educated, and very well paid consorts.

**Psychic Powers/Psychic Near Future** [Setting, Thing, Tech] Telekinesis, telepathy, ESP, pyrokinesis, clairvoyance... Any ability to affect the world with only the power of the mind. Heck, you can even commune with the dead, and we'll still count you as psychic.

When used as a Setting, the default is Psychic Near-Future. That title gives you everything you need to know:

it's just a little bit in the future, and for some reason, there are true psychic powers. Traditionally a psychic near-future setting will be dark and grim, but there's no reason to be bound by that. Psychics are often feared and hunted, but this could just as easily be an Earth in which technology has unlocked the psychic potential in everyone (or at least in those with the cash to pay for it).

**Public Forum** [Place] From the Greek Forum from which this entry gets its name to town hall meetings and modern electronic bulletin boards, the public forum is a place for people of all types to share and discuss ideas and topics relevant to their lives and their community.

**Pulp** [Tone] Two fisted heroes and cliffhanger endings. The pulp world is one of a simpler morality with a clear line between good and evil. Actions and emotions run high, and there's no problem too delicate to be solved by a bone-crunching fist fight. Often associated with the early 20th century, the settings tend toward exotic locales—Egypt, India, darkest Africa—and the villains are most often of the devious and plotting sort.

**Pundit** [Person] When you break it down, really this is just someone who offers an opinion on a topic. Typically, they speak as if they have some measure of expertise or authority on the subject, and hopefully they really do. Political commentators, movie reviewers, and art critics all qualify as pundits in modern society, but whatever the age, anyone offering expert opinion can be your pundit.

**Purchase** [Action] To acquire through barter or payment. This does not mean that you always have to pay cold hard cash, but more often than not, some form of currency will be involved.

**Quick** [Descriptor] Fast; brief.

**Quixotic** [Personality] Eccentric and unusual. Often accompanied by Sancho Panza.

**Realistic** [Tone] Don't get carried away with this one. As a tone, "realistic" refers to how people act and react in the setting, and doesn't have to refer to the setting itself. With some of the other tones, like epic or heroic or swashbuckling, it is expected that characters will perform amazing feats and get away with it—suffer extreme punishment and shoulder on. Not so with realistic. In a realistic setting, people who get shot tend to howl in pain a lot and then slowly bleed to death. We'd like to think we could just grit our teeth and get over it, but that's not realistic. And no matter how cool it would be or how well you roll, there's no way you're going to swing out on that rope and land on top of a moving train. If you don't fall off and get run over, you'll probably break your leg anyway. Find some other way.

You really will shoot your eye out.

**Realm of the Gods** [Setting, Thing] The world of mortals is only a shadowed veil of reality. The true reality is something far more incredible and barely within the bounds of human perception. The Realm of the Gods is where the Powers that Be hold the fates of mortals in their godly hands, but often do not care about the consequences their decisions carry in our world.

The Realm of the Gods, in the literal sense, can be exactly that: a separate tangible location where the gods live (Asgard, Mount Olympus, etc.). However, it can also represent a more abstract world. In a far-future setting, our "reality" is only a matrix on a super mainframe, and the bleak mechanized "real" world is actually where the AI who controls us reside. In a dark, occult setting, the realm of the gods can refer to the unfathomable chaos of the Forgotten Ones who bleed into our world in a seemingly random fashion.

**Reasonable** [Personality] A reasonable person is fair and thoughtful, willing to listen to others and open to change if it is needed.

**Rebels** [Opposition, Thing, Person] Not everyone is happy with the established powers. Rebels are the strong-minded people who are brave enough to band together and fight against the status quo.



**Recluse** [Person] Anyone who has withdrawn from the world and lives largely in seclusion. You don't have to be eccentric for this kind of life, but it certainly helps. In addition to eccentric millionaires, mentally disturbed homeless people and hermits, there are also some religious orders and survivalist fanatics that can technically be considered recluse communities.

**Recognizable** [Descriptor] Familiar. You'd know them, or it, if you saw them on the street.

**Recover** [Action] Something has been lost, stolen or otherwise taken away from it's rightful (and sometimes unrightful) owner and it's your job to get it back. Indiana Jones is a prime example of a recovery operation, hunting down priceless artifacts from times long past for buyers in the present.

Harder to work into a plot is the sense of recovering from some sort of disaster or hardship.

**Red Herring** [Thing] A diversion, a smoke screen, a curveball. Usually leads you down a false path on a fool's errand. Always the precursor to the wild goose chase.



We'd warn the players to avoid the red herring, but it's impossible. The well designed red herring always sucks them in. At least for a while.

**Red Shirt** [Person] The color doesn't really matter, but this guy's not destined to last long. It's his job to find whatever evil, twisted thing is out there and then be destroyed by it in some horrible fashion. It's in the contract.

**Refuse Dump** [Place] Unlike a junkyard, this is a place for true garbage—stuff that no one ever expects anyone else to ever want again. Trips to the refuse dump almost always involve disposing of something that you never want anyone to find again—or else looking for something accidentally discarded or intentionally hidden so that no one could ever find it again. Either way, looking for something in the refuse dump is usually tedious and difficult, and almost always very messy and smelly.

**Reject** [Action] To reject, to shun, to turn away. Star-crossed lovers of the world unite, our lovers have spurned us yet again. Writers fear the publisher's return letter. Made men fear...well...another mortal coil. Rejection is hard, but sometimes it has to happen, and sometimes you might be the one to dish it out.

**Relative** [Person] Someone related to you—or at least related to someone we've met so far. Child? Grampy? Meddlesome Aunt Edna? Could be anyone. The idea is that the relative is related to someone already relevant to the story.

**Relentless** [Personality] Driven. This one just never gives up. And they'll get vicious about it. Seriously, know when to say when.

**Religious** [Descriptor] This could be someone who is seriously spiritual and involved in their faith, or it could be someone who carries only the outward trappings of faith, but have otherwise lost their way, spiritually speaking.

**Religious Fanatics** [Opposition, Person, Thing] Fired by an unquenchable zeal for their God, the Religious Fanatics will stop at nothing. Suicide bombs, torturous inquisitions, mass murders, even complete cultural annihilation are not beyond them. Twisted and debased by hatred, it seems the only sacrament they understand anymore is that of pain, seasoned with blood.

They're not all of a violent bent though. A religious fanatic can just as easily be one who is compelled to preach and protest and proselytize at every opportunity. The dedication and fervor is the important part.

**Remote Future** [Setting] This is a galaxy far far away. Remote future implies human beings, but in a time and place that has forgotten its origins on Earth. Otherwise, it can be as wild as any fantasy setting, with bizarre

alien/fantastical creatures with abilities and technology unfathomable by modern man. Don't be shy about adding in just about anything, as it can all be justified in some way.

**Renaissance** [Setting, Tech] Literally—rediscovery. The European Renaissance was actually several movements of scientific, artistic and cultural advancement from the 1300's to about 1700. While everyday life was still primitive and squalid by modern standards, in their own day, they felt themselves to be the pinnacle of human culture.



The leading minds of the Renaissance finally rediscovered many ancient texts that had been lost during the dark ages, and applied them to the real world using the scientific method. This was the age of Columbus and Magellan. Machiavelli, Shakespeare, DaVinci. Michelangelo.

The Renaissance is a wonderful setting for political and social intrigue, as well as swashbuckling heroics.

**Repairman** [Person] Mr. (or Miss) Fixit. This could be a general handyman, or someone as specialized as a stasis field technician.

**Reputable** [Descriptor] Trusted. On the up and up. Known to be reliable.

**Rescue** [Action] You can't get any more classic than this. Someone or something is in a serious pickle, and they're gonna need saving. It's usually a matter of breaking in

somewhere and bodily removing the poor victim to safety, but if you want to get more metaphysical, there's always the possibility of having to save them from themselves.

**Research** [Action, Thing] We need information, and we need it right away. Search ancient tomes or relational databases for your answers. Talk to folks in the know. Don't be afraid to go digging, you only have so long to get this research done... before the opposition does.

As a thing, research is the compiled end result of the above work. If your research is important in any way, then you can be sure there's a danger of it falling into "the wrong hands."

**Resilient** [Descriptor] Undaunted in the face of great difficulty. Able to press on through pain and suffering and still keep a stiff upper lip.

**Resort/Spa** [Place, Setting] Any culture with any sort of wealthy or leisure class will also have lovely getaway destinations designed for relaxing and rejuvenation. This can be ancient Greek temples built around hot springs or modern spas with mud baths and facial masks and those little cucumber slices on your eyelids.

**Resourceful** [Personality] Creative and capable. At it's extreme, resourcefulness allows a person to MacGyver through any situation, but a resourceful person could also be one with enough money to simply buy their way out of trouble.

**Restaurant** [Place, Thing] This can be any place where one can purchase and eat a prepared meal. In days gone by, the only places to purchase prepared food was at the pub or at ye olde inne, but nowadays, it can be delivery services, hot dog stands, fast food, rotating five-star eateries atop 30 story towers.

**Restless** [Personality] Dissatisfied with the here and now. Ready to move on. Full of wanderlust. The restless spirit is happier with the journey than with the destination.

**Restroom** [Place] Designated toilet facilities. As simple as an outhouse or port-a-john or even just a hole dug in the woods, or as posh as those ladies rooms with couches and mirrored walls and attendants waiting to be tipped.

**Revenge** [Thing] Revenge is the easiest motive to relate to, even though the most illogical to the objective viewer. Someone motivated by revenge seeks to punish or hurt someone, or rarely something (like a government, corporation or network), to correct a perceived past injustice. In other words, they just want to get back at them, at any cost.

**Rich** [Personality] Some are shallow enough to only see material wealth in this word, but those willing to look deeper see texture and nuance and a fullness that makes it that much more rewarding.

**Rigid** [Descriptor] Literally or metaphorically hard and unyielding. Rigidity implies strength and consistency, but also a tendency to break dramatically under enough stress.

**Ritualistic** [Descriptor] The ritualistic often seems extravagant or unnecessary, but ritual also lends emotional depth and meaning. But there is a time and a place for everything, and when the commonplace becomes ritualistic, things start looking creepy.

**River** [Place] Stream, creek, river. It's where the water flows. Some can flow underground, or in rapids and waterfalls, or even just to the sea. If those aren't exciting enough for you, I once heard of a guy with a river of chocolate.

**Road** [Place, Thing] It's the journey not the destination. In other words, even though the players think their campaign starts when they get to the Beholden Palace of Tanaram, the mission really centers on the ambush and pursuit of the Unsleeping Guardians of Tanaram that have been sent to decimate them. On the other hand, a road adventure doesn't have to be epic and fatalistic, it can simply be a series of random encounters (the "how bad can one night get" syndrome).

**Robot/Automaton** [Person, Tech, Thing] Artificial constructs that can do the work of people, usually created as servants. We hear robot and we think immediately of metal men with monotone voices, but in a world of magic, a "robot" could be an animated broom that performs household chores or in the far future it could be advanced androids that are nearly indistinguishable from humans. Thinking outside the box, a completely engineered animal that is programmed on a genetic level to respond to various commands would also fall under this heading of robot.

**Romance** [Thing, Tone] Love is in the air. Perchance the players must reunite separated lovers. Perchance one of the lovers is instead in love with a player?

**Rooftop** [Place] This is a great place to take a story. Rooftops in any setting are a great place to lay out and relax and (usually) watch the stars. But they're even better if you've got a fight going, because they tend to be uneven, with unusual projections and features, and they come with the constant danger of falling to certain injury or death. How cool is that?

**Rough** [Descriptor] Unfinished. Not polished. Crude or primitive.

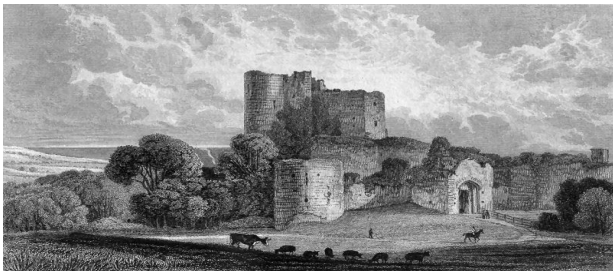
**Royal Bloodline** [Thing] They may not be next in line to the throne, but they're related. Hopefully the line of succession isn't in peril.

**Rube Goldberg** [Tech] A Rube Goldberg device is any item that performs a seemingly simple task in an incredibly complex or roundabout way. In America, this

notion was embodied in the fantastical cartoon inventions of Rube Goldberg. This is a fantasy technology with no real world counterpart, but it could be represented by any overly complicated technology. Perhaps a society in which flaws in a device are not corrected by fixing the device itself, but rather by adding something else to it. Alternately, the characters could find themselves in a society so overwrought with regulation and bureaucracy, that every piece of technology carries sixteen extra attachments required for safety, warnings, regulation and tracking purposes, or simply to protect endangered industries. Or in a more mundane world, maybe the “cutting edge” of technology always revolves around these eccentric inventors and their bizarre, yet oddly effective devices.

**Rude** [Personality] Unpleasant and without manners or tact. Of course, you could have figured that out yourself if you weren't so lazy.

**Ruins** [Place, Thing] The remnants of something that was once grand. There's always enough still standing to be full of danger and little hidey-holes, but not enough to ever make it functional again. And when it comes to ruins, ancient is always more fun.



**Sacrificial** [Descriptor] Intended from the beginning to be lost, destroyed or forsaken.

**Sadistic** [Personality] This is where we cross the border into evil. The sadistic person takes pleasure from the pain of others, and most specifically from causing pain in others.

**Safehouse** [Place] The getaway destination away from prying eyes. When the heat is on, lay low at a safehouse. Sure, it's not much on amenities, but at least they won't find you here. And it doesn't have to be Johnny Law you're fleeing. Safehouses are also great for hiding from the mob or slave hunters or angry ex-husbands.

**Sailor** [Person] This is anyone who makes a living plying the seven seas (or possibly the sea of space). Could be a Norse longboatman or a pirate or a member of the United States Navy or even an apprentice astrologer in the Merchants Guild Seventh Interplanetary Fleet.

**Salesman** [Person] A salesman (or salesperson, if you prefer) is anyone whose occupation is to sell stuff to others. They are not involved in the actual manufacturing

of stuff, only in the selling of it. They don't even have to own the products they sell, they are only middlemen.

No matter what they are really like when they are off the job, a salesman who is “on” (at least a good one) is friendly, charming, exuberant, and at least a little overbearing.

**Savage** [Descriptor] Bestial and primitive. Certainly not meant for “civilized” people.

**Scare** [Action] Frighten. If you can convince everyone that the old amusement park is haunted, then eventually the owners will be forced to sell, and you can claim the land and its hidden treasure. Hopefully, there are no meddling kids around to ruin everything.

**School** [Place, Thing] The funny thing about schools is that even though they can be populated by many different types of people and age ranges, they are still predominated by an atmosphere of conformity and Important Rules. It doesn't matter if you are talking about a grammar school, a prison G.E.D. class, defensive driving courses or demonic assimilation programs: if you don't follow The Rules, you are subject to discipline or expulsion. Another universal characteristic is that the administration of the school is almost always strict and unwilling to be flexible with The Rules. More often than not there are nuns involved.

**School of Magic** [Setting] While it would be appropriate, the School of Magic setting doesn't have to be pre-adolescents dealing with an enemy who can't be named. Instead, maybe a futuristic world has rediscovered the magicks of the old-world and developed an institute to research and rediscover the old ways. Another alternative could have the players infiltrating a secret Nazi campus dedicated to practicing the occult to further the aims of the axis powers. Perhaps the players are undergoing the rites of passage for which their coven has long prepared them. Or for a more familiar setting, you could just have the players be 'tweeners trying to learn magic while struggling with puberty.

**Scientific Method** [Tech] The scientific method of inquiry is the cornerstone of most legitimate modern scientific endeavors. The general process is observation and development of a hypothesis that explains the observed facts. Then predictions are drawn from the hypothesis and these predictions are tested experimentally, thus leading to more accurate hypotheses. This process developed over centuries and was codified as early as the 1300's, but it was not until the end of the European Renaissance in 18th century that it became widely accepted and standardized.

As a technology, the scientific method allows for greater and faster advancement of scientific thought without having to be hampered as much by superstition and muddled logic. Not that those things are eliminated from a

culture, but rather that scientific minds are more aware of them and better able to manage them. Introduction of the scientific method into any "primitive" culture allows them to advance quickly—the Greeks were close, but imagine what they could have accomplished if they had had a rigorous process for actually testing their theories.

**Sci-Fi** [Descriptor, Thing] Science fiction. Science fiction is any aspect of a setting based on projected or speculative advances in technology. Any fictional technology not currently available in the real world is generally considered science fiction.

**Scribe** [Person] Someone who transcribes other people's words for a living. This could literally be the only person of letters in a 13th century village, or a court transcriptionist for a military tribunal.

**Sea Adventures** [Setting] Adventure on the high seas! Pirates! Sea monsters! Privateers! Storms! Vengeful gods? Life on the seas is dangerous but rewarding, and there's no telling what could go wrong on any given day. Just ask Odysseus. Sea adventures are most fun in a world that is still at least partly unexplored and/or a little wild around the edges. The sea adventure setting also typically involves actually traveling from place to place in a ship of some sort, but even that's not required.

Homer's epics, viking explorers, Captain Nemo, Red October, the Kon Tiki, the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria, the Dawn Treader, Captain Hook, the Bounty, the Bermuda Triangle, the search for Atlantis, Sinbad. There's no shortage of excellent examples for this one.



**Secret** [Thing, Descriptor] Supposedly no one else knows about it... but you know how secrets are.

**Secret Society** [Thing] Maybe they're out to control the world, or maybe they're just constructs of bored frat boys, or maybe they're the only outlet of expression and unity for a people under an oppressive regime. Hell, maybe

they're all of the above. We can't know, because it's a secret.

**Security Forces** [Opposition, Thing, Person] Hired badges, rent-a-cops, somebody's private army. Security Forces as primary opposition implies someone behind the scenes paying the bills, but this boss's interest in and involvement with the players only arises because they have crossed paths with security (if even then).

**Seduce** [Action] People always want something. Whether they want, sex, safety, power or just companionship, the want is always there. Use those wants and your own natural talents to bind them to you. Sway their hearts and compel their desires for what you have to offer. But remember, seduction can be a two way street.



**Sensitive** [Personality] The good reading of sensitive involves caring and empathy and understanding. The bad reading delves into words like brittle, emotional and touchy. Consider them both and decide which one makes this character more interesting.

**Serial Killer** [Opposition, Person, Thing] This one's pretty simple: some twisted individual has gone over the edge and is killing people one by one at regular intervals. There may be no obvious pattern or connection to their victims, or they may have very obvious deliberate targets. As an opposition, they may expand their crimes to cover their tracks when the authorities start getting close to them. The important thing to remember though is that the serial killer is usually quite insane, and while they may seem rational and intelligent, their motivations will probably seem quite alien.

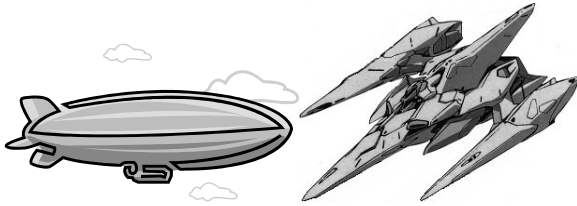
**Serious** [Personality] Grave and without humor. Or better yet, grave and *with* a sense of humor, but you can never tell when they're joking, because the expression never changes.

**Servant** [Person] This largely overlooked functionary fulfills many of the needed roles in a large organization. Alternatively, they are involved in the work that provides luxury to the powerful. Maids, runners, bank tellers, cooks, janitors, butlers, pages, and the like are just some examples of servants. These people are largely invisible to those in power, and lead quietly desperate lives. Often times, they are ideal contacts for those who need to get close to the Powers that Be.

**Sewer** [Place] A drainage system for carrying waste. Usually involves flowing water and is often underground.

**Shiny** [Descriptor] Reflective, often causing joy in the observer when associated with money or jewelry.

**Ship** [Place, Thing] A large vessel for traveling through water, air, or space. Planes don't typically count as ships, but zeppelins do.



**Shopkeep** [Person] A shopkeep is like a salesman (see "Salesman" above) who actually owns the products or services that she sells. Most importantly, a shopkeeper operates from a fixed location (or "shop"), be it a store in the mall, a stall in the marketplace, or a hut/home in the village where she sells baked goods. Shopkeepers have extensive interactions with the local population, and are useful sources of information for visitors or newcomers.

**Shrewd** [Personality] Shrewd implies wise and careful, but in a crafty and devious sort of way. Shrewd is not necessarily dishonest, but it also isn't terribly concerned about ethical.

**Shy** [Personality] Reserved, distrustful, timid. The wallflower. The person who has an idea but is too nervous to speak up with it.

**Silent** [Descriptor] Not just quiet—although it can be that too—but silent can also be secretive and insidious, creeping amongst us without raising alarm... until it's too late.

**Skyscraper** [Setting] A big ol' building. A dozen stories high? Two dozen? Three? Seven? The bigger, the better. When used as a setting, the intent is to keep the entire story within the walls of the building—from the maintenance facilities and parking garage in the 3B sub-basement to the coffee shop and newsstand and clothing stores on street level up through the 50th floor offices, 80th floor condos, the penthouse, and the 50 extra feet of radio tower mounted on the roof. With corridors, closets, balconies, new construction, sealed areas, service tunnels—there's more than enough to fill up any adventure.

Modern skyscrapers only arose in the 20th century with the development of new construction materials and techniques, but you can also use futuristic multi-acre arcologies—giant buildings intended to enclose entire town-sized communities. Delving into alternate pasts, you could also imagine an age in which the Egyptian pyramids were actually occupied and riddled with rooms,

or magically supported towers full of all sorts of fantastical beings.

**Slave** [Person] Someone who is bound in servitude. It can be orphaned children sold to factories or forced to beg in the streets, or captured warriors forced to work in the fields or fight in the arena for entertainment. Even if you call them indentured servants or tenant farmers and explain the impossible conditions under which they can work off their debt, they are still slaves.

**Sleep** [Thing] Blissful oblivion. Everyone needs to sleep and, perchance, to dream.

**Sloppy** [Descriptor, Personality] Messy, disorganized, and unkempt. Careless.

**Smith** [Person] Any person who takes raw metals and turns them into functional or aesthetic items is a smith. The smith can work in precious metals, iron or steel, and can create anything from wagon wheels and axles to swords and other weapons to fine jewelry and serving ware.

**Snobby** [Personality] Arrogant, but more often in a material sense. It doesn't have to be, but it often implies a sense of superiority born of wealth.

**Snowed-In Town** [Setting] Whether it's an ancient Viking village locked in by the winter snows, or an outpost on Charon that gets cut off from the city when the falling frozen methane knocks out roads and radio, the key is isolation. If the roads were open, help could be here in 10 minutes, but until this weather passes, there's nothing we can do. Hopefully the larders are well stocked, but you can't prepare for everything.

No matter what the snowed-in situation though, imagine how it would suck to be stuck in one of those places with a group of criminals. Or zombies.

**Societal Pressure/Custom** [Opposition] With friends like these, who needs enemies? The societal pressure opposition is both complex and simple. On the one hand, it is a complex blend of cultural norms and practices which illogically dictate that certain acts are prohibited or required. The social underpinnings that lead to these practices can be deep rooted in history and culture.

On the other hand, it can be slightly simpler—you are either shunned or hunted for doing something; or shunned or hunted for not doing something. For instance, the post-magical elven civilization ran into famines and widespread starvation because their population lived for centuries. Thus, they instituted the practice that all citizens must be killed at the age of 200 when they are still young adults. Another example is the alien/human hybrid species in the Southeastern United States that adopted the alien practice of disconnecting the cognitive

functions of females when they became fertile, effectively making them comatose breeding stock.

Note that any plotline involving societal pressure as opposition requires more explanation than usual.

**Solar Energy** [Tech] The ability to convert sunlight to usable energy. Sure, plants have been doing it for millions of years; it's about time humans got in on the act. There are primitive versions of this, using sunlight for heating or distilling or other effects, but true solar power allows the user to gather sunlight and use it to produce electricity.

**Soldier** [Person, Thing] A soldier is an individual serving in a militia or organized military force. A soldier can volunteer for the service or be conscripted, and can either be employed for their services or doing it for free out of coercion or obligation. Soldiers sometimes serve under organized governments and others serve their ideals in an underground rebellion. They are normally at least marginally more skilled, if not more, than the average person at combat and use of the prevalent weaponry.

**Space** [Place, Thing] It's one thing when she tells you she needs her space, and maybe that's what this roll refers to, but more likely it is talking about outer space: the void. Beyond the atmosphere of any planet is the vacuum of space. Maybe it's included in your game as an abstract vision or goal, or maybe your characters are actually there. If it's the latter, then hopefully they have suits and ships and space stations and can avoid the messiness of asphyxiation.

**Space Colony** [Setting, Tech] Why is it that the brave new world is always fraught with peril? The colony is usually on a planet or moon in some distant system, but occasionally it's in a wandering space station or ship. Resources are usually scarce and contacts with the homeworld are few and far between.

In addition to potentially lethal native flora and fauna, there is always the threat of space pirates or internal political strife. Most interesting though is the typical mix of high and low technology one finds in a colony. They have access to trans-light-speed spacecraft, tricorder level medical diagnostics, and laser rifles, and yet because of scarce resources, you'll also find them using pack animals for transport over the surface and of course they've had to fall back to hand-woven textiles since the synthesizer broke down four harvests ago.

**Speaker** [Person] Because people dearly love to hear themselves speak, society has had speakers since the development of spoken language. In primitive civilizations, before the advent of written recordation, speakers were the bards and poets responsible for maintaining the oral history and traditions of the community. At the height of ancient philosophical culture, Chinese and Greek orators would lecture to the public as their sole occupation. In a modern setting,

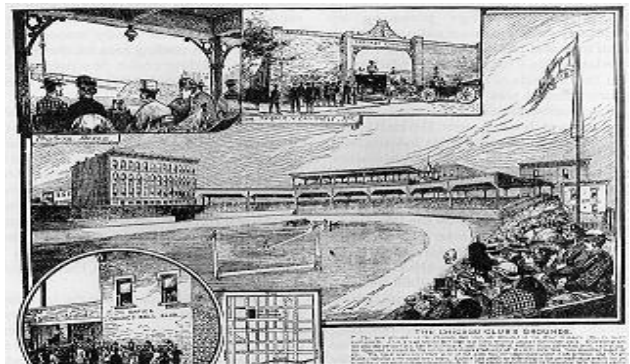
motivational speakers make fortunes demanding huge speaking fees to "motivate" employees of large corporations. In future settings, artificially intelligent programs will debate and lecture with masses of people electronically during virtual lectures.

**Special Ops** [Thing] The Green Berets, the navy seals, the SWAT team. These are the elite of the elite of any fighting or law enforcement force, and their jobs are usually (though not always) covert and secretive. A special ops agent is not something you want to face alone in a dark alley.

**Spiritual** [Descriptor, Personality] "I tell you now that God will provide, you just have to have faith. Like the Good Book says." A Spiritual person truly believes in powers they can not see. They are buoyed up by their spiritualism and seek to share it with those around them.

**Spontaneous** [Personality] Acting on impulse and without planning. Spontaneous people rarely consult their day-planners.

**Sporting Event** [Thing] Any competitive sport in action. Sports have been around for thousands of years and show no signs of going away. No matter where you are or what the stress, people find a way to unwind with a game of ball (or whatever). It can be as formal and structured as Olympic competitions or can be a simple pick-up game between friends.



**Sportsman** [Person] Could be amateur or pro, but sport is the center of his life. Depending on the setting, it could be an Olympic swimmer, a pro bowler, the champion joustler of the realm, or simply the village's fastest foot racer.

**Spy** [Action, Opposition, Person, Thing] Get information through indirect means. The players can't just bustle in and demand answers, but rather take the more covert path of concealed observation to find out what is going on.

**Stadium** [Place] A large arena, usually open, for sporting events or other entertainments. Most have cheap seats and luxury boxes, and when in use will have concessions and merchandise of all sorts.

**Stage** [Place] As opposed to being at the theatre, this is actually being on the stage. Stage means to be in the production of a play or movie or other visual entertainment. It could be the actors of an actual stage play or the production team of a television show.

**Steady** [Descriptor] Consistent. Reliable. Unshaken. Stable.

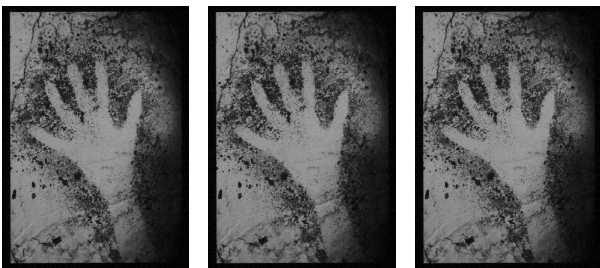
**Steal** [Action] Just walk right through the door. You want it, and someone else has it. You're best off if they don't see you coming, but you can do things the hard way if you prefer.

**Steam Power** [Tech] It would seem to be a very simple concept: boiling water produces steam which is used to power mechanical devices. The ancient Greeks had a toy model of a working steam engine, but apparently it took 2,000 years to find a practical application for it. There were limited industrial uses for steam power through the 1700's, but wasn't until the steamships of the 1800's that steam power really took off, and eventually helped fuel the Industrial Revolution.

**Steampunk** [Setting, Thing, Tech] Similar to steam power, steampunk is actually a fantasy/sci-fi concept of an alternate universe where later inventions and concepts appeared in the Victorian Era, but powered by 19th century technologies. So there might be jet engines or submarines or complex computational devices, but rather than combustion engines and electronics, they'd be composed of steam powered pieces, clockwork mechanics and difference engines. Steampunk often plays off the romance and stiff proper stereotypes of the Victorian Era, while at the same time introducing more irreverent "punk" attitudes on independence and authority.

**Stiff** [Descriptor] Inflexible or uncomfortable in a given situation. Rigid.

**Stone Age** [Setting, Tech] This is the most primitive of actual technology. Civilization has just begun the rudimentary process of realizing that it can manipulate its surroundings to achieve its most important goals: hunting, cooking, and building shelter.



Any sort of mechanical devices are still undiscovered, but the population has figured out how to make tools out of carving and preparing rock, wood and plant materials. Thus, for weapons they have developed: spears with stone heads and "throwers" to project them; stone knives and

axes from sharpening certain stones to a fine edge; and the more advanced cultures have developed bows and arrows. On the domestic front, the stone age civilization has developed stone bowls and grinders, flint for making fire, tools for tanning hides, ability to make cord and the knowledge of how to tie it for various purposes. These cultures may have also developed weaving knowledge and the ability of using certain plants and herbs for medicinal purposes.

**Store** [Place, Thing] An establishment for buying goods.

**Street Gang/Gang Member** [Opposition, Thing] Gang-bangers, ruffians, highwaymen. The opposition consists of a small band of mostly amateur criminals. They may be primitive in their methods, but they typically have a fierce loyalty to one another, and a surprising amount of backup they can call in on short notice.

**Strong** [Descriptor] Physically or mentally powerful. Able to stand up to increased pressure.

**Stronghold** [Place, Thing] Fortified walls and high security. Whether you want in or want out... you're in for a fight.

**Stubborn** [Personality] Thick-headed. Resistant to change.

**Student** [Person, Thing] The student's business is learning. From the pilot in training at the spacefleet academy to the apprentice blacksmith, students are typically young and usually naive and impressionable... and maybe even idealistic.

**Subtle** [Descriptor] Something that you maybe don't notice at first. It's the subliminal text hidden in between the frames of the film, or the odd shape that is reminiscent of... something. That which is subtle doesn't club you over the head—it waits for you to notice.

**Suburb** [Place, Thing] The suburbs: where the middle class go to feel better about themselves. A world of minivans, strip malls, cosmetic dentistry and "No Skateboarding" signs in the parking lot.

Suburbs, however, are not limited to modern settings. A suburb can exist in nearly any time and genre, as long as it consists of a mainly residential area filled with people who most often work, play, and do business in the "big city." In a fantasy setting, this could be an underground lair of dwarves, connected to port town. In a future setting, it could consist of the Midmang-sector, where midlevel bureaucrats make sure they fly the proper flags on the proper holidays so as not to violate their residential covenants.

**Suburban Retail Center** [Place, Setting] It's a mall. Maybe it's one of those all-in-one super mega stores, or maybe even a strip mall, but the heart of this really is the fully enclosed indoor mall. Maybe there's a couple (or

more) big department stores as anchors, but then the inside is filled with every flavor of trendy clothing store, novelty stores, bookstores, luxury stores, the sunglass shack, two expensive jewelry stores right across the hall from each other, the music store, and anything else that strikes your fancy. The only survival necessity the mall typically doesn't have is real food. There's water fountains and soda and candy and the greasy fast food offerings of the food court. Unless your mall is lucky enough to have one of those buffet places. But if you don't care about eating well, you'd never have to leave the mall at all.

Using the mall as a setting can mean playing employees and patrons of the mall and dealing with the petty politics of mall business. Much more fun though is some horrifying traumatic event that forces everyone to lock the doors and try to wait out the disaster inside the mall. Zombie hordes. War. Mutagenic poison fog. Alien invasion. Possibly the mall becomes the command center for American freedom fighters after the Commies invade—how appropriate.

**Superfluous** [Descriptor] Extra or unnecessary. Without reason or purpose.

**Supernatural** [Thing, Descriptor] Any sort of phenomenon that can't be explained with "traditional" science. Ghosts, witches, UFO's, psychic powers... even werewolves and other creatures of the night. As a descriptor it implies some otherworldly quality or a connection to the supernatural.

**Supers** [Thing] Shorthand for "people with super powers." You can be a hero, a villain, or just a person who wants to be left alone, but the truth is you are endowed with amazing abilities beyond those of mere mortals, and trouble will seek you out.



There are seven decades of comics and books and television and movies to mine for ideas here, from 4-color boy scouts from the golden age to angst-y vengeance-bent anti-heroes. The fun comes in dropping supers into a setting where you wouldn't normally expect them—Victorian England, the Old West, an asteroid mining colony.

Spandex costumes optional.

**Survive /Survival** [Action, Thing] Isn't it enough to just get by? You don't need to find lost treasure or defeat the evil hordes; all you have to do is live for one more day. Of course sometimes, the only way you're going to live is by finding the lost treasure... or by defeating the evil hordes.

Sheer terror can arise when survival becomes your singular overarching goal. It doesn't matter exactly what the threat is, all you need to know is that it's going to kill you at any moment if you don't stay vigilant (or take immediate action, or do whatever it is that is required to keep living).

**Suspense** [Tone] Suspense isn't just one style, but is a part of several. Mystery and horror are two of the likely candidates, but any genre and tone can benefit from a little bit of the unknown. Leave the players hanging, don't give them that last juicy bit of gossip until it's too late. Did they split into two groups? Switch to the other before that pivotal die roll that lets their character live or die. Don't tell them that there's something right around the corner. Let them hear it, smell it...maybe even taste it. The big, slathering, jaw toothed beast from *Gluon Seven* that is known to eat men whole. It's there! It's behind that door! Or is it a mouse being chased by a cat?

**Swashbuckling** [Tone] Swing from any handy chandelier with a smile on your face, because when you're swashbuckling, the more dashing and daring your stunt, the more likely you are to succeed. The style and flair of any move you make is far more important than its practicality.

Swashbuckling heroes are handsome and charming, and even when they're bad, the ladies can't help but love them.

**Swindler** [Person] "It's good to be shifty in a new land."  
—Simon Suggs

You are an imposter. Read one of the other descriptions on here (like *Aristocrat*, or *Elected Official*) and pretend to be them. The swindler works by assuming a mask of respectability, gaining the trust (or "confidence") of the mark, often by seeming to place trust in them, or by putting them in a position where a cold rejection would be embarrassing (acting like an acquaintance who they've forgotten, etc.)

You play on the insecurities, isolation, and naïveté of the mark, always keeping him off-balance, never letting him consider the situation objectively. Often you play upon the target's vices to spring the swindle.

**Sword & Sorcery** [Setting] The *Sword & Sorcery* setting is one of grand adventure, where heroes walk like giants among common men. They brawl, feast, drink, love and hate harder than anyone else. Their women are beautiful beyond compare, and many prove to be canny fighters in their own right.



Villains are despicable creatures, working with fell demonic things to seize control of the world. They hide in ancient ruins, or deep within the twisted alleyways of corrupt cities. Monsters are ancient or alien things, and their very existence is often enough to send lesser men into fits of insanity.

Death is a constant companion to the sword & sorcery hero. Success is rewarded by the finest food, the sweetest wine and passionate women. Magic is a vast, undeniable power. It is full of mysteries and horrible fates for those who trust it.

**Sympathetic** [Personality] Aware of another's feelings through mutual (though not simultaneous) experience.

Alternately, someone or something whose plight inspires sympathy from others.

**Tactical** [Tone] "Squad B, take that building! Squad A, flank left! Everybody keep your heads down. The squids just unlimbered two gahumps and AUGH!"

Tactical games focus on battle. It's often more important to know how your players are going to execute an ambush or take an objective than why they were there in the first place. Game focus is on giving and taking damage, positioning troops or vehicles and keeping track of various resources, like ammunition, armor, heat or morale.

Play should incorporate the players into some kind of military unit, whether its a foot platoon, a starfighter wing or a mechajock lance.

**Tavern** [Place, Thing] Pub. Bar. Drinking establishment. This is where you buy drinks and meet total strangers who will go on world-altering quests with you. It's a great generic place to get hired or to go look for information. As a last resort, it always makes a great setting for a fight if you get bored.

In some circles, the tavern is the center of town. Everyone who matters comes down to have a pint and learn what's going on in town. Trade is done over a hand of cards or a checkerboard.

**Teach/Teacher** [Action, Person, Thing] Whether it be the master swordsman dueling students in the training yards, or the kindergarten school teacher helping those little tykes along the way, a good teacher is several things: They are honest, letting a pupil know when they stray off course. They are creative, thinking of more than one way to explain material. They are persevering, keeping at it until the apprentice understands. Part actor, part scientist and always trying something new, the best teachers can get inside most situations and turn them inside out for other people.

The stereotype is teaching to youngsters, but any act of imparting knowledge is teaching.

**Technician** [Person] The expert for whatever complex machinery or process you are working with. Computer technician, x-ray technician, photon matrix technician. If you've got something horribly complex, hopefully there's a technician near by who knows how to operate it—and maybe even repair it in a pinch (if you don't mind waiting three weeks for new parts).

**Teleportation** [Tech] The ability to move instantly from one place to another. As a technology, it implies an extremely high level of development, incorporated into interstellar jump drives to carry ships from star to star, or as transfer portals that shortcut through all the intervening distance. Teleportation doesn't have to be high tech, but it usually is.

**Territory** [Thing] Land, turf, dominion. It's a place that someone has a claim on. And more often than not, the word "territory" seems to open it up for dispute and implies that whoever claims to own it often spends a lot of time defending that claim.

**The System** [Opposition] In this case, there is no real tangible opponent other than faceless bureaucracy. The players' goals and objectives may be terribly noble, and everyone they meet will be terribly sympathetic, but... I'm very sorry but there's nothing we can do for you. The players will face frustration and apathy at every turn and likely will have to become lawbreakers themselves to get around the mindless cogs of the machine:

Hideous aliens are planning to destroy your planet to make way for an interstellar bypass. Your child will die without these lifesaving medicines, but they have been trapped in a Customs warehouse for weeks due to an international legal dispute. You have the evidence to bring down the corporation that's been raping the land for years, but no one will listen anymore and their lawyers block you at every turn.

When you fight the law, quite often, the law wins.

**Theatre/Theatrical** [Descriptor, Place, Thing] A public place where one can watch a story being told. Live plays, motion picture theatres, and holo-sim halls all qualify.

**Thief** [Person] Someone who steals. It would be nice if they could all be the steal-from-the-rich type, but thieves come in all shapes and sizes and most of them steal from the vulnerable and keep for themselves. The word itself may conjure up images of the black-clad crafty cat burglar, but it also includes everyone from muggers to embezzlers to con-men. If you want a real challenge, throw another roll on the Miscellaneous Thing table to find out what it is your thief actually steals.

**Thorough** [Descriptor] Someone who is very detail oriented and careful.

**Thug** [Person] Just a plain old ruffian. Thugs tend to be criminals, but not the smart kind. They rely on brute force, intimidation and direct action rather than any sort of subtlety or strategy. Thugs are most effective with some sort of evil mastermind behind them.

**Ticking Time Bomb** [Opposition] A horrendous disaster is just waiting to happen. Maybe you know exactly when zero hour will come... maybe you don't. Either way, someone needs to stop it before the unthinkable happens. The ticking time bomb may have been intentionally set—terrorist action or desperate protesters or a ship's self-destruct mechanism. Or it could simply be an accident—an automated defense system, or an ancient buried evil that was never meant to be uncovered.

Whether it is a literal bomb or some other destructive event, the defining nature of it is its mindless inevitability. Events have already been set in motion, and it will take extraordinarily heroic measures to alter fate's course.

**Time Travel** [Tech, Thing] "...and that's how I became my own great-grandfather."

Time travel is a great gimmick and a sci-fi staple. Its uses are virtually limitless. For the braver GM's out there, you can time travel close to home and have the players jumping back and forth over themselves, reliving the same events from different angles and changing their own pasts and futures every time they take a time jaunt.

A little easier on the logic-balance though are all sorts of more limited uses of time travel: a single trip to the past to right that which is wrong; visitors from the past or future who must be returned to their own time before time is horribly fractured; time police chasing criminals through time. However it is used, the unifying theme is usually an attempt to "correct" time or to stop cataclysmic events.

**Tiny People** [Setting] No, not little people. We're not talking about the land of Munchkins and Oompaloompas. We're talking TINY people—miniscule. This is the realm of Lilliputians or Smurfs. An extra roll or two can give you an idea of what sort of world the tiny people live in, whether it's medieval faerie folk or tiny aliens invading earth in their mini star cruisers.

There's several angles to play this from, but it works best when there is some sort of interaction or conflict between the large and the small. The players can be tiny people themselves, either working their way through a giant world or suffering the intrusion of big people into their own realm. Or alternately, the players can be normal people who have stumbled Gulliver-like into the world of the tiny.

**Tokyo/Near-Future** [Setting] Take everything you know about Japan and crank it up about three notches. The bustling beehive of a city with a perpetual logjam of traffic on the serpentine ramps and roads that wind among

the buildings. The intensity and work ethic of its citizenry. The high tech gadgetry. The lights and ads and mix of pop culture that puts the Vegas strip to shame.



Tokyo has the stylized glitz and glam of any modern cultural Mecca, coupled with one of the seamiest underbellies out there—all of it growing from a still very old world, conservative cultural base. And it's near-future, so be sure to add in a few nifty whizmogigs to keep everyone on their toes: cyber-implanted PDAs, electrically animated body art, the occasional luxury flying car for the uber-wealthy. No matter what your other rolls, Tokyo has something to offer any style of campaign.

**Tongue-Tied** [Personality] A true Spoonerist, this one seems incapable of expressing herself succinctly. She's always at a loss for words and spends time stammering around everything in her search for the best way to say anything.

**Tough** [Descriptor, Personality] Hardy and resilient and unlikely to take any guff from the likes of you.

**Tower** [Place] Technically, any structure that is significantly taller than it is wide can count as a tower. The classic wizard's keep may come to mind, or even 20th century skyscrapers. But there's also radio towers and control towers and Eiffel towers, lighthouses and monuments. Towers offers strategic positioning due to typically limited access points, a great view, and a very scary place to fall from.

**Town Square** [Place, Thing] The town square is not defined solely by its location (usually at the center of town), but also by its function, which is as a central gathering place for residents where they can demonstrate or celebrate or share ideas or trade goods. The town square is typically an outdoor gathering place, but don't be limited by that. In some towns, the local civic auditorium or courthouse may be the closest you get.

**Trade** [Action, Thing] Maybe simple barter in the local market, but could also apply to prisoner exchanges or a

swap of knowledge or favors. If you can buy it, you can also trade for it.

**Tragic Villain** [Opposition] Even though he's got issues, he's going to make your life hell. Cursed, diseased, enslaved, possibly dying, the Tragic Villain has a score to settle with the heroes.

**Traitor** [Opposition, Thing] The enemy is in your midst. The traitor can be motivated by many things: revenge, hatred, power, corruption. But usually it is simply for monetary gain. In the rare instance, however, the traitor could be a coerced participant—such as when the traitor only sabotages a mission because another villain has kidnapped her husband and will kill him if she doesn't participate.

When the opposition is a traitor, the gamemaster is presented with one of two options: (1) the traitor is a non-player character; or (2) one of the players is the traitor. Obviously, it is easier to make an NPC a traitor, and the secret won't be revealed until the GM chooses to do so. However, the greatest effect comes from when a player has successfully fooled his compatriots and reveals that he has undermined the entire campaign. The risk of the latter is that an inexperienced player will turn a dramatic situation into a cheesy one, or will simply reveal their disloyalty on accident. GMs should use great discretion.

**Travel** [Action, Thing] This should be simple enough, get from one place to another. But who knows what obstacles will be present along the way? There could be fierce storms, high mountains, and angry tribes of monkey demons to be overcome. Journeys are often about the way there, not the destination. In this case, that's doubly true.

**Traveling Circus** [Setting] Perfect for running away and joining. Clowns and jugglers and acrobats. Elephants and lions and bears. Three rings of family fun under the big top. Maybe your circus is coupled with a few of the rides and games associated with the traveling carnival (see Carnival), but the circus is really all about the performances. It's about getting sick on cotton candy, popcorn and overpriced hot dogs while watching scantily clad women swing and twirl on the trapeze.

This envisions a modern 20th century circus, but circuses have been around for centuries, and in one form or another will continue to be so. The only difference is how much the technology can enhance the thrills (inverted motorcycles racing in a steel cage!) and how much people complain about the animal cruelty.

As a setting, players can be circus employees themselves, patrons, or someone sent to investigate or disrupt the circus operations. It's a great locale for drama, because beneath the constant family friendly smiles of their performances, the employees are low-paid struggling working stiffs like any other. And their transient nature can enhance the elements of sleaze and corruption and

abuse if that serves the story. Besides, clowns are just creepy.

**Treasure** [Thing] Everyone likes getting treasure. And sometimes it has something valuable in it. As always, don't get suckered into stereotypes on what does or does not constitute "treasure." Remember, one man's garbage...

**Treaty** [Thing] We have an agreement, and we've gone so far as to seal the deal in writing. Legally bound. So what do you do when one side fails to hold up their end?



**Tree-top Civilization** [Setting] What's not to get about this one? It's a whole community built at the tops of the trees. You'd think the primary requirement for this would be a measure of grace and maybe some prehensile toes to help keep people (especially the kids) from plunging to their death all the time, but it seems that that's not so. This can be a primitive tribe of teddy bears on some far-off moon, or statuesque elves who have placed themselves above the travails of the world, or a high-tech enlightened community that's found a way to live in happy harmony in the rain-forest canopy. The only real commonality seems to be a love and respect for nature.

**Tricky** [Descriptor] Crafty and clever. Willing to deceive others to achieve their goals.

**Tropical Paradise** [Setting] There is no true paradise (see Dystopia), but this refers to a place, typically remote from civilization—often on an island, where there is sun and sea year round, food can be had by simply picking it off the vine, fresh water is in constant supply, and the sea easily yields up an abundant harvest. For human beings, it's a very comfortable life. If it came with an Internet connection, there'd never be reason to leave.

The storylines for a tropical paradise invariably revolve around intrusions into paradise. The players may be outsiders who are shipwrecked in paradise—maybe it's inhabited already, maybe it's devoid of humans and waiting for the city slickers to figure out how to survive. Alternately, the players could be island natives or some type of concerned outsider (researcher, explorer, philanthropist) seeking to protect the paradise from

exploitation by a greedy outside world. The opposition could be 16th century Portuguese sailors landing on a Pacific island or 30th century casinos seeking to place resorts on the water world of New Bimini.

**Troubled Youth** [Opposition, Person, Thing] The pangs of youth: you're all alone; the weight of the world's problems are on your shoulders; and most importantly- no one understands you.

Sometimes the troubled youth are the players. Misunderstood juvenies trying to protect their neighborhood from the alien invasion. Pubescent teens trying to deal with their developing super powers. The Golden Children chosen by an ancient Asian monastery to lead the world into an enlightened age.

Sometimes the troubled youth are the antagonists. Ghost-children with no eyes haunting an abandoned hotel. Undead gang members hunting humans for bloodsport. Frost giant preteens who are terrorizing the local dwarven caverns.

**Ultimate Weapon** [Thing] Exactly what it says: a weapon beyond anything we've previously seen; a weapon whose destructive capacity can barely be imagined. Fortunately for those who fear it, most ultimate weapons never get beyond the planning or construction phase before the plot unfolds around it.

**Undead** [Opposition, Thing] Yeah, we know there's already entries for zombies and vampires, but we just can't get enough of restless dead risen from their eternal slumber.

You can go with the classics: brain-eating zombies, blood-sucking vampires, flesh-eating ghouls. But any returned spirit will do. It can be ghosts or wendigo or returned souls who possess the living to wreak havoc.

**Underground** [Place, Setting] Underground, as in literally "below the surface," or underground as in "hidden from the authorities." Personally, we prefer the former. If you want your underground railroad or whatever, you can have it, but we prefer the subterranean tunnels. This can be anything under the surface—aqueducts or sewers, subway tunnels, fallout shelters, caves, catacombs, sub-basements, storm cellars.

As a setting, this usually implies entire communities that have developed underground, such as morlocks taking up residence in the old sewer system, or sub-cities where either towns and streets have been elevated above the old city or where linked tunnels and sub-basements have slowly expanded to form entire communities below the city. It could even be tunnels deep in the earth where the mole people live, entire magic-fueled civilizations of dark dwarves and elves tunneling deep under the earth and building whole cities in the sunless dark, or a planet where humans have sealed themselves beneath the

radiation and storms and poisons that human carelessness has wrought on the planet's surface. But it can be simpler than all of this too. Potentially, an underground setting can simply be a team exploring abandoned mines or tombs in search of lost treasure and dealing with the traps laid by the previous owners.

**Underground Pariahs** [Opposition, Thing] Deep in the recesses of every civilization's underworld, the outcasts of society survive. In some worlds it's the molemen. In others it's the morlocks. Scariest yet, you could discover the CHUDs (Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dwellers—if you don't know, don't ask).

Sometimes peaceable and sometimes overwhelmingly violent, underground pariahs always share the same general characteristics no matter what the genre or setting: (1) they live underground; (2) they are grotesque in physical appearance, thus incompatible with the superficial surface dwellers; (3) even though banished from civilized society, the underground pariahs have banded together to cobble their own makeshift society; and (4) their minds have been warped by the harsh and unforgiving conditions they have been forced to endure.

**Undertaker** [Person] Someone has to prepare the bodies for their final rest. You can use the stereotypical black-clad, somber and gaunt mortician lurking ghoul-like as he waits for the bodies. Or you can have a more realistic undertaker who is friendly and professional and knows how to comfort the grieving while guiltily pushing them into the fancy coffin.

**Underwater** [Place, Setting] The tone of any underwater setting relies heavily on whether or not the players can breathe underwater. Otherwise, limited air supply is an omnipresent factor in every activity. Whether it's scuba divers exploring ancient wrecks, sailors on a German U-boat, or commuters trapped in the horrific collapse of the Chunnel, everybody's got to breathe.

If air isn't a factor, though, then things lighten up considerably. Mermen emissaries from a sunken Atlantis—genetically engineered colonists in the icy oceans beneath Europa's crust. The possibilities are endless, but always there is an alien otherworldliness to submarine settings.

**Ungrateful** [Personality] What? I'm supposed to thank you for doing your job? Hey, it's not that I'm not appreciative, but after everything I've been through, I think you owe me at least that much.

**Untimely Death** [Thing] Didn't see that coming.

**Unusual Phenomena** [Thing] This can be almost anything, from unexplained low moanings in the garden to apparitions appearing at the watchtower to items strangely being moved around the room when no one's looking. Unexplained phenomena should be exactly that:

weird things that happen and no one can quite figure out why or how. Depending on the setting, there may well be a perfectly logical explanation behind it all... but what if there isn't?

**Vagrant** [Person] A bum, a bag-lady, a homeless wanderer. No steady employment and no permanent address, the vagrant lives off of odd-jobs and the kindness of strangers. When that doesn't suffice, maybe they survive by stealing what they need and victimizing the weaker vagrants.

**Vampire** [Thing] Nosferatu. Vlad the Impaler. Angel. Vampires always add a distinctive and recognizable flavor to a game. Everyone is familiar with the myths and legends surrounding vampires, and they can easily be incorporated into a game. The GM can make them the traditional, evil seducers looking to feed on the blood of innocents. Or maybe it's more appropriate to have reformed, tortured souls seeking to correct the evils they've committed over the centuries of their undead existence. Better yet is the brainless, nearly unintelligent creatures of the night who brutishly tear down victims in an effort to satiate their eternal hunger.

**Vehicle** [Place, Thing] Any object or item used to move someone from one place to another. A vehicle can be anything from a car to a flying carpet to a burrowing robot with room for seven. They can contain extremely advanced technology (such as the car that talks, shoots missiles and teaches you to sing German pop songs), or quite simple (as with a railroad handcar).

**Viking explorers** [Setting] Jorgumundar waits somewhere over the horizon, and the Norns hold the threads of our lives in one hand with sharp shears in the other. It is the wild freedom of wave and wind and the promise of valorous combat and gleaming treasure that makes this life worthwhile.

For centuries, wild Scandinavian pirates held much of Europe in fear. The Vikings raided from their fiords aboard dragon-headed longships. Their ferocity and skill at arms were legendary, often turning the tide of battle in their favor.

This setting is rife with bold warriors, terrible monsters (like sea serpents and Beowulf's Grendel) and magic-wielding giants. A sharp sword and a bold heart are the best defense against such things. In the end, death comes to even the greatest of kings and heroes.

**Village Idiot** [Person] In PC terms, a person with a mental disability who is typically well-known and well-tolerated about town. The village idiot may be mocked and scorned by some (although not

always to his face), but is often viewed with kindness or maybe pity by others. He's not capable of fully supporting himself, but usually lives off of generous family or the charity of others. Village idiot is an antiquated term, but the village idiot figure can be found in any setting.

**Virtual Reality** [Setting, Thing, Tech] Two ways to go with this one: either the whole world is merely a simulacrum of some sort, and the players are unaware of the larger world around them, or else the players are people in the "real world" who spend most of their time living and interacting in some sort of simulated world.

In either case, the stereotypical virtual reality setup with VR helmets and/or datajacks plugged into your brain is probably the most efficient way to handle this, but you can also have worlds created and maintained by magic or by a shared dreamscape or simply that the whole universe is a giant experimental thought construct motivated by extra-dimensional beings.

**Virtuous** [Descriptor, Personality] A goody-goody. Someone or something that possesses the "good" qualities of life.

**Volcano** [Place] Manmade or natural, active or dormant... it's a volcano, and volcano's are great dramatic locations for just about anything. And no matter how long the locals say it's been dormant, you just know that thing's ready to blow as soon as it's most inconvenient for the players.

**Vulgar** [Personality] With an offensive stench and a capacity to belch the alphabet, a vulgar person will demand attention simply by who they are. Boorish and unrefined, they revel the simple things, like triple pepperoni pizzas, cheap beer, and monster truck rallies.

**War** [Setting, Thing] Good god. What's it good for anyway? A war arises whenever one organized faction of people (or demons, or artificially intelligent robots) decide to systematically commit violence against another organized faction of people (or dwarves, or temporal anomalies). A war can be as large as the population of one planet trying to decimate the population of another planet. It can also be as small as the Johnson family trying to burn down the house of the Smith family.

If you wish to be clever, you can interpret this as a price war or a cold war or a war of words, but c'mon... you know it's supposed to be about the mass killing.



Rolling again on this table to decide where the war is taking place is not a bad idea.

**Warehouse** [Place, Thing] A building or location dedicated to the sole purpose of storing stuff. Warehouses are great places for finding illicit merchandise, and if you need a dramatic place for a fight or chase, you can't beat a warehouse—high ceilings with plenty of corners and shadows, lots of stuff to hide behind, not to mention the occasional leaky steam pipe to provide cover for an ambush or big escape.

**Warlord** [Opposition] You face a formidable opponent in the Warlord. Through guile, personal power or skill at arms, he leads a sizable force of capable soldiers—anything from a cadre of dozens to an army of thousands. His reach extends through the land, through military units, political power and fear. His goals are simple, to remain in power and expand that power as opportunity presents itself.

Warlords are tyrants who rule through the force of arms and the discipline of a military structure. They see the world as a battlefield and treat it as such.

**Water** [Thing] H<sub>2</sub>O. The stuff of life. Water keeps a human's juices flowing, and they can go a week or two before collapsing from dehydration. It can also be blessed priests and clerics to create the dreaded H<sub>2</sub>Oly, the bane of vampires and undead everywhere. Put enough of it together in one place, and you've got rain, floods, rivers, lakes, and oceans.

**Wealthy** [Descriptor] Someone whose basement is filled with sacks of money with dollar signs on them.

**Wedding** [Thing] A celebration of marriage, usually accompanied by cake.

**Werewolf** [Thing] The children of the moon rise tonight. By day they are boring, mundane sheep. Just like any other jerk going about their boring, mundane jobs like everyone else. Or maybe they're just in sheep's clothing.

These are the werewolves of the Romanian legends. Twice a month they rise with the full moon and the inhibitions of ordinary man fall away to the wild passion of the beast. Infused with the power of the night, the wolf cannot be felled by normal means. Silver is its only bane.

**Wheel** [Tech] The wheel grants mobility and power. Drawn carts can travel further with heavier loads than individual horses. Windmills and water wheels harness the ever-present energy of the world and put it at Mankind's disposal. What's more, gearing systems (which are nothing more than wheels with crenellations) open a whole host of possibilities. Typical technologies available from the wheel include: animal-drawn vehicles, wind and water powered mills, and clockwork devices, among others.

**Whiny** [Personality] Best served with cheese (perhaps a nice brie), these folks are the ones who complain bitterly about whatever situation they happen to be in. Okay, perhaps bitter is too strong a word, but the whiny ones are just as likely to sit and watch the situation and kibitz as they are to do something about it.

**Wild Animals** [Opposition, Thing] Wild animals of all types can cause trouble: dogs, escaped gorillas, dinosaurs, werewolves and even humans. The worst part is the tetanus shot you have to get after you've dealt with them.

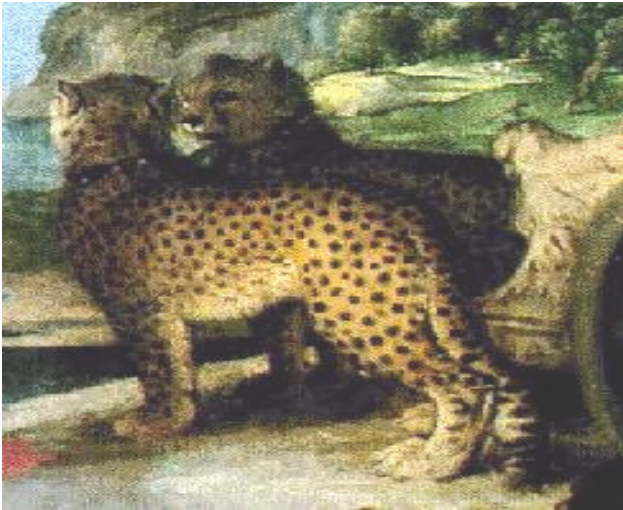


**Wild West** [Setting] Yee-haw! It's no longer the wild frontier, but it's still pretty darn lawless. Sure, you've got the local sheriffs, and if need be, you can call in the cavalry (if you've got a couple weeks to wait for it), but most of the time, justice is what you can make for yourself. There's no shortage of bad guys—robber barons and cattle rustlers and train robbers, and every town's got a church, a general store, a sheriff's office, and a rough-and-tumble saloon where there's gambling-a-plenty, women of questionable morals hanging over the upstairs railing, and guys getting thrown out the front window whenever a fight breaks out.

The wild west is full of frontier homesteads, cowboys on the dusty trail, and Indians being squeezed off their lands by the white devil. Throw in some runaway trains and fantastic chases and you got a great action/adventure tale. Add in mysterious shamans and ghost towns, and it works for horror. Just always remember your ten gallon hat and trusty revolver.

**Wilderness** [Place, Setting, Thing] The year could be 2704, it could be 1400 BC Doesn't really matter, because your characters have stumbled into that part of the map labeled "here there be monsters". They could be following the trail of a bad guy, trying to retrieve a lost child, searching for something they saw crash, or taking direction from a crudely drawn map, an ancient legend or an eccentric wanderer's diary in the quest for some kind of treasure.

**Wildlife Preserve** [Place, Setting] It's a lot like Wilderness (see the previous entry), but it comes with helpful people in uniforms who help keep it tidy and ensure the animals are safe and fed. They also have maps.



The key here is the word “Preserve.” A wildlife preserve is generally established to protect or preserve some natural (or mostly natural) portion of the environment, be it a protected wetland, an African elephant preserve, Jurassic Island, or a whole planet set aside for re-engineered Earth creatures.

**Win** [Action] Succeed at all costs. Whatever the goal is (eradicating the enemy, racing to a critical location, convincing the planetary senate of the oncoming alien menace), the players must achieve it. Failure is not an option.

**Wise** [Personality] Practical and reasoned; down to earth.

**World Domination** [Thing] Someone's always bent on it, right? Usually it's an evil mastermind with a foolproof device/plan that will ensure the complete subjugation of the world's population to her will. Sometimes it's a group of people who have devised a scheme to take over the world, either by secret alliances (Masonites/Illuminati) or overt measures (open warfare or holding the world hostage with stolen nukes). Other times it is otherworldly or extra-dimensional creatures planning to invade and enslave mankind. In all cases, it only takes a small dedicated group to foil their plans.

**WWI** [Setting] Fighter aces dog fighting in their prop planes. Infantry in the trenches fearing the terrible new scourge of mustard gas and other chemical warfare. Not to mention the first appearance of primitive armored tanks on the battlefield and the concept of bombing from the air. This was the first truly global war—the Great War—the War to End All Wars. In its day, it was so cataclysmic that people truly thought that its resolution would bring about the end of warfare. How naive we were.

Taking place from 1914 to 1918 (although the US didn't join until 1917), this was a time of ferocious nationalism. It was also the end of true monarchies in Europe, seeing the fall of the Ottomans, the Romanovs, and the Hapsburgs, followed by the rise of Communism and the Soviet Union.

One can play WWI as soldier on either side of the conflict, or WWI games can tell the stories of the civilians who supported the war from behind the line, or even the innocent bystanders who were affected by the war ravaging their nations.

**WWII** [Setting] 1939 to 1945. WWII started with the rise of Adolf Hitler in the early 1930's, and his continual acquisition of land for his new Third Reich. In black and white terms, it was the Axis Powers versus the Allies. Totalitarian dictatorship versus democracy and freedom. But the truth is that the moral shadings were much more subtle. Hitler and Hirohito are condemned for their concentration camps and genocidal activities, but were Americans too far behind with their treatment of the Japanese and their programs of forced sterilization for the handicapped?

A World War II setting can be used to relive the dramatic tactical battles of the age (if the GM knew enough about the period), or more interestingly, it can be the backdrop for more complex issues of character and drama. There are the individual raids and missions, the work of the codemakers and codebreakers, the spies and scouts who risked their necks behind enemy lines, and the destitute people just trying to get on with their lives in the wake of enemy bombing and constant reports of dead brothers and sons.



One of the most interesting uses of the WWII setting comes from the British movie, *The Bunker* (2001), in which a small group of German soldiers are trapped under heavy American fire in a front-line impenetrable bunker that may or may not be haunted. The Americans are never

actually seen, but the characters slowly break down and conflict with one another due to the pressure and fear.

**WWIII** [Setting] The final conflict. The global war that could end all civilization as we know it. When you watch those movies where the landscape is a shelled out ruin, and everyone dresses like punk rockers while fighting for the last scraps of food and fuel... it's World War III that caused that. Supposedly when the final war breaks out, the temptation to go nuclear will be too strong to resist, and we'll leave 99% of the population dead and more than three quarters of the world forever uninhabitable. Except of course for the mutants.

But WWIII isn't a post-apocalyptic world—it's the build up to it. The nukes may or may not actually drop come the final hour, but that's for the end of the game, if it ever comes at all. The story here is what brings the world to that point—it's the fighting and squabbling that escalates into a global level conflict. It's the hatred and the inequalities that bring people to a nuclear standoff. Your players can be the movers and shakers of this conflict, trying to resolve the squabbles or misunderstandings that threaten to destroy the world, or they could just be plain folks in a world gone mad.

**Xenophobic** [Personality] Having an intense dislike or even hatred of outsiders or foreigners. This applies equally well to aliens or other non-humans.

**Your Place** [Setting] The world of your game is all around you. No seriously, this isn't some kind of new age metaphor. The setting is wherever you are right now as you read this description. If you are playing an in-person game, have everyone look around and explore your house, building, office, game store or wherever you happen to be. This is your setting, set in modern time. If you're playing online or via chat, the GM should use the building she's currently in and generally describe it to the players.

**Yourself** [Opposition] Sometimes the enemy is closer than you think. While you think you see glimpses of your opponent at every corner, it seems she runs out of view every time. Your enemy is leaving subtle clues for you in the most unusual locations—out in the open or through the thinly veiled messages you see in the paper and mass media. You've been beaten down and beleaguered and just when you are on the verge of catching the villain you realize—you were the enemy all along. Or were you?

This opposition is one of the trickiest to play, but one of the most rewarding. It can be incorporated in a myriad of different ways:

-In the future, the players realized that they were going to do accomplish something potentially catastrophic. So they have sent agents back in time through dark magics to obstruct and alter the course of history.

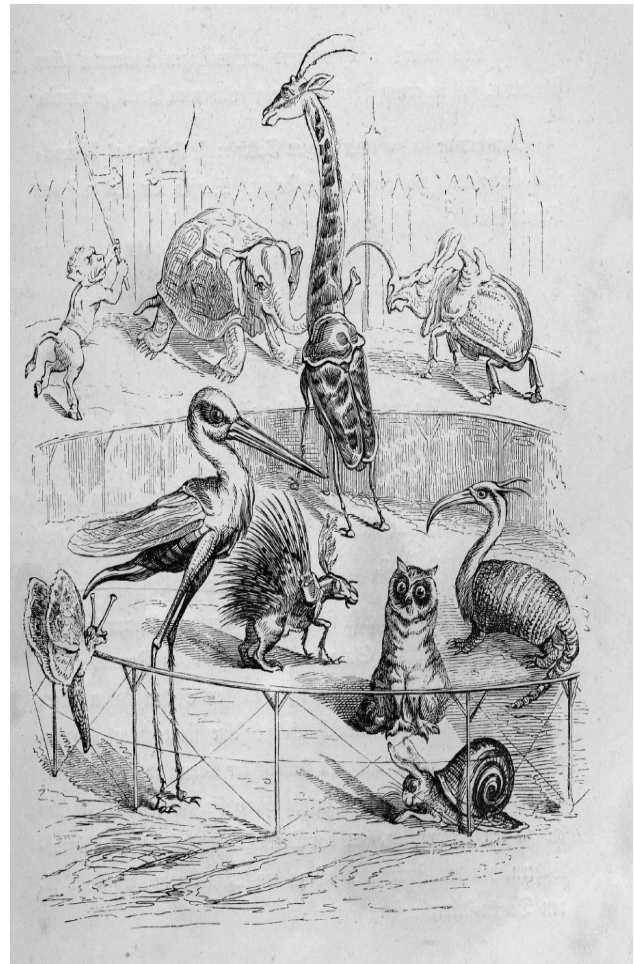
-The players have been subjected to a powerful psychotropic drug which, unknown to them, makes them undertake evil tasks while they sleep.

-The players in a super world have to fight Bizarro versions of themselves from an alternate universe.

-The players are being possessed by vicious spirits which turn them against themselves at crucial times during the game.

-The players find a rift between dimensions, and they swap places with their evil alternate dimension counterparts (easily spotted by their goatees). Players must first survive in this evil dimension, and then find a way back, knowing all the while that their evil counterparts are wreaking havoc on their unsuspecting home dimension.

**Zoo** [Place] Any place where living beasts are gathered and kept for display qualifies as a zoo. This can be anything from the personal menageries of kings and sultans of old up to futuristic preserve planets set aside to house samples of all the people and beasts displaced by the ever expanding galactic empire.





## Appendix II: Sample Settings

What follows are several sample sets of rolls, and the worlds that have been created from them. We repeat this a lot, but again, these examples are all rolls exactly as they came off the charts, and the write-ups that follow are what the authors produced off the top of their heads in just 30-60 minutes. The point is to demonstrate the sort of richness and variety that can arise from Instant Game, even with no prior preparation.

Several of these arose from world-designing exercises on various forums. One person would post a set of rolls to work with, and then anyone wishing to participate would create a game world and plot based on those rolls without first looking to see what anyone else did. The diversity of results that can be derived from a single set of rolls is quite striking.

### **SIDEWORLD**

#### **Instant Setting**

**Setting/Tone:** Steampunk/Intrigue

**Things:** (Dead) Empire, (Informative) Immortals

**Tech/Tech Level:** High Magic & Virtual Reality

It's a steampunkish level setting with prolific magic.

Under the rule of Cardenion the Conqueror, two continents were united in one vast empire. Upon Cardenion's unexpected death at an early age, his many governors and would-be successors set about carving out their own share of the pie. The Cardenion Empire was as wealthy as it was vast, and many of its peoples have become rich and complacent. The Machiavellian states that have resulted now play very dangerous games as noble and wealthy families vie for power. At the same time, the fringes of the old empire are once again falling to the anarch city states of the South and West.

One of the greatest achievements of Cardenion's empire—and the key to its great success and rapid expansion—was the discovery/creation of the Sideworld. It is a place of illusion seemingly parallel to our own. It seems to initially be a blank limbo state, but with proper spells or devices, any mind can be linked to Sideworld where it is free to roam and explore. However, since it is illusion, one's body never actually travels anywhere. Those of power can shape Sideworld to their tastes, creating whatever illusionary environment they desire. The minds that enter experience everything within Sideworld as if it were real. It is used for communication over vast distances, storing and sharing information in the form of illusory Sideworld books and documents, and for entertainment and diversion. Those who can afford it escape into Sideworld fantasy-scapes. Sideworld was originally a secret of Cardenion and his advisors, and it

was with this tool that they conquered the world. Now, in the 12 years since his death, the secret is out, and virtually any magician can begin shaping and using Sideworld.

In the real world, magic is very draining and can only be maintained through a sustained effort of will on the part of a talented/trained magician. Magical items can be created, but are always temporary unless they are periodically re-energized by a mage. In contrast, Sideworld can be shaped into permanent shapes and effects, and talented magicians can even create constructs in Sideworld that will move and react in a lifelike fashion.

In a process whose exact nature is still unknown, some formerly living souls have disassociated from their corporeal forms and become permanent residents of Sideworld. These ghosts appear to be immortal, but are completely trapped within Sideworld. Like the living, some have the ability to manipulate Sideworld. Others do not. Most of these side spirits have come into their situation just in the last 20 years, but a few unfortunate souls stumbled in here long before Cardenion's wizards made their first forays into Sideworld. Most of these "lost souls" of Sideworld have become quite mad over the decades, and a few have shaped their slices of Sideworld into nightmare landscapes.

#### **Instant Plot**

**Opposition:** Family

**Plot Action:** Convince (Glorious) Stronghold

**Plot Action:** Clear (Subtle) Rebels

The players are members of or affiliated with the Borgan family—one of the oldest and most respected on the western continent. Influential under the Arten Republic, the Borgans saw the writing on the wall and were among the first to throw their support behind Cardenion's annexation and eventual subjugation of Arten. They were rewarded with the secrets of Sideworld and magistration of the Arten region. Now with the empire in ruins, the Borgans and their cronies dominate the entire peninsula and virtually every major port on the north shore of the Meddlesome Sea. They definitely have an eye on expansion. The Borgans do not form a nation or empire as such, but they are the power behind the power in every capital and boardroom in the region. They are currently plotting on dozens of fronts to marry, purchase, elect or sue their way into an even larger power base.

*To make a little more sense of things, I reverse the plot rolls to get Convince Rebels and Clear Stronghold.*

A group of rebels have actually taken up arms against the Borgan supervisors at Sconn Province on the far coast. Apparently using the help of a local "lost soul", they have even barricaded Sideworld access to the area, which keeps the family from accessing virtual records and journals of their factories there. The family is torn between sending enforcers of their own to restore order,

calling in the Regional Free Army (which would mean the appearance of submitting to regional authority), or simply recovering what we can and then selling off family assets in the area to wait until the strife dies down.

The players work for Lady Borgan-Guass, whose late husband owned 70% of the manufacturing in Sconn. She is vehemently opposed to the notion of cutting and running, but she is afraid that any failed action will destroy her credibility and influence among the family. Ultimately, it is up to the players, as valuable members of the family, to make the three day journey to Sconn to assess the situation. They travel with a small retinue of guards. It is up to them to clear the family's factories and secure them against access. Then they must recover any Sideworld records and open a clear Sideworld path out of Sconn so that the records may be removed and communication to the town restored. Lady Borgan-Guass's plan is to lock out the rebels and hold what rightfully belongs to the family. If they want a strike, let them have it. The idea is not to engage the rebels physically, but rather to simply hold them off so they will be forced to parley.

Behind the scenes, the rebels are actually funded and motivated by the Lady's brother-in-law who is hoping to spur this popular rebellion and then ride in to save the day "for the family" and become the de facto elected leader of the province, thus recovering what he feels is rightly his, while at the same time, resigning his sister-in-law to the ignominious fate she so richly deserves.

As a result, the players will meet constant resistance and confrontation unless they can root out who is behind all of this and counteract his influence.

## **Belching Black Smoke**

*This was an exercise on our own Animalball forums: [www.animalball.com/forums](http://www.animalball.com/forums). The name arose because two of us used the same imagery of factories belching smoke above the cityscape.*

### **Instant Setting**

**Time/Tech/Culture: Industrial Revolution**

**Tone: Gothic**

**Setting Element: Martial Arts**

**Setting Element: Espionage**

**Location: Outpost**

### **Instant Plot**

**Plot Action: Negotiate**

**Plot Action: Teach**

**Plot Item: Natural Disaster**

**Plot Item: Stronghold**

**Opposition: Security forces**

## **Cronodelphia**

### ***Mike's Black Smoke World***

Setting: The year is 1886, and newly constructed factories belch dark smoke over the blighted port city of Cronodelphia. On it's thoroughfares, the occasional steam-powered lorry crawls between the foot traffic and bristling horses.

It is the industrial barons that rule this city now—the city officials mere lackeys at their beck and call. And in this cutthroat world, industrial espionage, theft and sabotage have been raised to an art form.

The wretched denizens of the city shuffle about their daily grind, unaware that only a few miles away, death is looming over all of them.

[That's Cronodelphia so far. The Martial Arts aspect will be incorporated into the characters—assuming that many of these "industrial spies" are black-ops style ninjas of a sort (1880's style, baby).]

Plot: The players are various employees of Caulfield Iron & Metal. Their primary competitor Grant Steelworks has developed a process for exploiting geothermal energies. The players must enter the private sanctuary of Holden Mercury Grant—owner of Grant Steelworks—under the guise of negotiating a joint venture to block foreign steel from Cronodelphia's ports (and at the same time, a truce to hostilities between the two companies).

Their real purpose is to uncover the location of Grant's new geothermal research stronghold somewhere in the nearby mountains. Once they find this, they will attempt to destroy the station. Unbeknownst to them, shutting down their geothermal dynamos incorrectly will start a chain reaction resulting in an earthquake that could destroy half of Cronodelphia.

## **Her Majesty's Cleaners**

### ***Kyle's Black Smoke World***

Her Majesty's Secret Service has taken a dark turn. The time is 18?? and the world is on the cusp of a new age.

Factories are busily belching out our brave new future.

The dark soot which blankets the skies is seen as the proud mark of progress. Clean, bright, rural areas are considered antiquated and backwards—but the deep, dark, dirty city is where the future lies, and the forces of good and evil know it as well.

The players are Industrial Aged "cleaners" working for Her Majesty's Secret Service. It's unclear if you are actually employed by the Crown, or the business interests that keep the Royal family propped up. All you know is that you are approached, given a situation to clean, and you do it. The lines between good and evil are blurred—or more probably—irrelevant. The Crown wants to keep technology moving ever forward, the Foreign want to

keep it moving forward—in the direction of continental Europe. The Liberation want to destroy the technological advancements and keep the people free from the machinations of technology which enslave them. The players can take advanced "James Bond" skills. Everyone is skilled in some deadly form of martial arts. "Powers" are allowed, as long as they are based in non-electronic forms of technology—steam and mechanical are perfectly acceptable.

The Cleaners are told to travel through the dead of night and surveil a secluded safe house used by the Liberation.

It is believed that the Liberation is developing counter-technology to sabotage and destroy the technology used in many mainstream factories and plants. The safe house is well guarded and heavily manned. The goal is two tiered: (1) infiltrate and by force take several key members of the research/leadership team hostage and negotiate their release in return for the technology being developed; and (2) whether the first plan succeeds or fails, destroy the safe house and technology and cover up the entire incident with a raging forest fire—cleansing all signs that anything ever transpired.

What the players don't know- It is not the Liberation, but the Dutch who have this safe house. They have used it for many months to steal and refine the technology of the Crown.

## Rockefeller Fortress

### *Caz's Black Smoke World*

In a smoke-shrouded world of massive factories, huge armies and little people forced into smaller lives, you and your companions have chosen to strike a blow for life and freedom. The human body is the greatest tool that was ever invented - far stronger than any engine and more flexible than any device. You and yours command incredible powers as Disciples of the Body. Humanity must be free to breathe again, free to choose its own destiny.

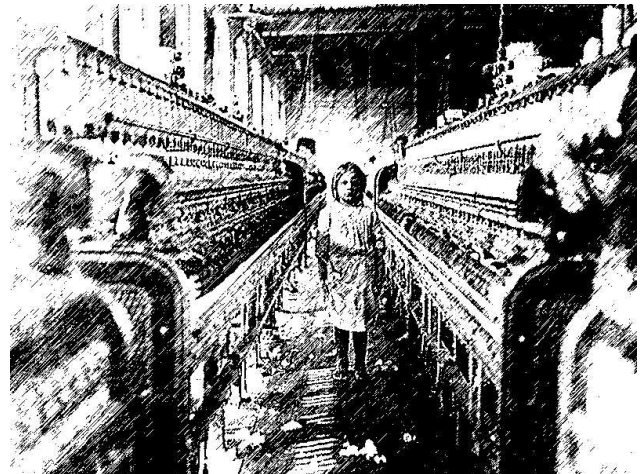
But there are so few of you that open rebellion is beyond your ken. So instead, you have taken to the secret places: back rooms in the halls of power, star courts, and hidden redoubts. There, you use your influence as best you can to change the minds of those in power. Fight when you must, teach those who will learn, kill when there is no other option, but never give up on your fellow human beings.

And the game begins with a group of Disciples in one of their outposts in Baltimore. They must infiltrate the fortress-factory of John D. Rockefeller and put a stop to his evil plans to put the vast majority of citizens into a permanent state of work, living in factories.

## Blood & Iron

### *Threadbare's Black Smoke World*

Alright, The year is 1898, and while the sun never sets on The British Empire, it is certainly late afternoon. Germany is rapidly ascending. Battleships are being churned out by both powers at unheard-of rates. Thomas Edison's discovery of "personal energy," known by the ancients as chi, has given rise to strange and wondrous inventions. Towers of blood and iron darken the streets of the European cities. In the far eastern colonies, Eton-educated mandarins, civil servants, and freelance servants of "queen and country" seek the wisdom of mountaintop monasteries and wandering yogis in quests for personal and national power. For the GM, a quick Internet search for the British expedition to Tibet(1903) and the Boxer Rebellion(1900) will reveal a plethora of extra ideas and details.



Plot: The characters are members of an Imperial expedition to Wulan Mountain, fortified home to a monastic brotherhood. It is rumored to be the location where the secrets to the legendary "Seven-Dragon Chi Strike" are kept. Her Majesty's intelligence service has found evidence of a Russian expedition to this monastery, as well. There have been severe rains this spring, and flooding in the local countryside. Your official purpose is humanitarian, but unofficially, you are to find and negotiate with the leader of the order and/or gain the secrets of the Seven Dragon Strike. The order has not been traditionally open to outsiders, so be aware. Remember: The characters don't all have to be British. They were masters at using local proxies, and people from India, the true powerhouse of the empire, popped up all over the colonial domains.

## Terra Infernal

### *Jeff Hauze's Black Smoke World*

Here we go. I'll give this a shot. I'm stretching the gothic term to go for the monstrous creation side of Gothic literature, the espionage term to go more towards secret societies and early spec-ops style teams, and the martial



arts term to literally mean all arts of war (as the term originally meant and still does really).

The Industrial Revolution brought the Age of Reason, Logic, and Science to humanity, whether humanity wanted it or not. Unfortunately, humanity forgot about the other things that lurked in the dark corners of the human psyche and the forgotten places of Earth's past. In one of many expeditions to build a new factory to spew forth smoke, ash, and new and improved machinery, humanity unleashed something they didn't quite anticipate. The gate to Hell was opened, and though some unknown hero did manage to finally close it, the denizens of Hell streamed out in droves and disappeared through the world to wreak havoc wherever they could.

The characters are the members of a number of secret societies or governmental organizations that have had to band together to track down these daemons and creatures of evil. These agents are highly trained in a variety of arts of war, backed up by the best tools that spiritualism, mysticism, technology, religion, and pure human ingenuity can offer. Whether it be a human killer possessed by some foul fallen angel, a nightstalker looking for warm blood in cold and dark alleyways and city streets, a human cult following a daemon lord who escaped the gates of Hades, or even an agent gone rouge from the horrors he has witnessed; these agents will do whatever it takes to track down the remaining escaped convicts of Hell and return them to where they belong as well stamping out their influence in this world.

In the particular adventure, the characters are sent forth from two different organizations (one a world-wide archaeological/exploration organization with a heavy basis in the Catholic church and ancient pagan mysticism, the other a paranormal investigative branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence of the United States of America) to track down an island that has mysteriously cropped up in

the Pacific. Two US ships have recently disappeared near this island, and the odd ziggurat on the island's surface seems to harken back to a series of hieroglyphs found on the Rosetta Stone. Infiltrate, assess, exterminate if necessary. Find the missing crewmen, and make this island disappear back to wherever it came from.

## ***Fantasy Depopulated Earth***

### Instant Setting

**Setting:** Fantasy/Depopulated Earth

**Setting Thing:** Computers (polluted)

**Setting Thing:** Heaven & Hell (virtuous)

**(Optional Place:** Festival)

**(Optional Tech Level:** Hydro-power)

**(Optional Technology:** Ocean Going Ships)

### Instant Plot

**Opposition:** Evil Mastermind

**(Opposition?) Action:** Kidnap (secret) Wilderness

**(Protagonist?) Action:** Mimic (artsy) Fight

## **Pacifica**

### ***Caz's Fantasy Depopulated Earth***

We had to retreat to the oceans. The machines took the world from us. The computers managed to find a way to take over. It's not like we made it all that hard on them. Microchips and miniaturized servos and nanometer scale engineering bugs were more than they really needed.

The war went on for almost twelve years before the last of the people fled. Some folks in Europe or Russia must have used nukes at some point – screwed the air up real good and now it rains all the time. Didn't help global warming either – so many places are just gone and

drowned. We've got ships now – overbuilt catamarans, gutted liners. There's towns made out of oil rigs and container ships. About the only technology that anybody uses are the sea-dynamos and solar cells. We don't have any computers any more, can't trust them. All the radios are analog.

Like I said, we retreated to the oceans. No body knows how many people survived in the end. Occasionally, we hear rumors about the machines trying to find us with submarines or tanker ships. Thank God that the navies were strong enough to sink all the nuke-powered ships. So it's us with a whole lot of water and ships that are slowly aging away. Some folks think they're going to found a new society. I don't know about that.

### *Fear the Skies*

Nobody knows how, but there's air power again. Sleek, quiet fliers with black and green bull's-eye markings strafed the Brothers' Frontier Tower with nitroglycerin bombs. They took Sandra, Julia and Wanda, along with all the fruit and sweetwater they could steal. We've got to find them. We've got to get them back.

## **Firewire**

### *Mike's Fantasy Depopulated Earth*

Did hellfire begin coursing through our global information network because some malignancy in the system found the key to the gates of heaven and hell? Or was it the angels and demons themselves who found their way in and then used this pulsing living Internet as the newest tool in their eternal war? Do the details even matter?

The collapse and subversion of our whole electronic world would have been far more devastating if we hadn't been so distracted by the falling and rising waters. The skies darkened for 32 days and 32 nights as holy rain fell from cloudless heights. And pushing against heaven's fall was hell's own oceans coursing into our own. Water levels rose frighteningly as hell's seas carried demons and monsters into our world.

Eventually the torrents subsided and the water stopped rising, but the landscape of the Earth was forever altered. The former great continents now divided into massive islands divided by violent seas. Humanity was decimated, but the survivors came out of hiding to try to put society back together. And their greatest tool: the computer. Without power. Without cables. Without satellites to link them. Somehow, the computers still worked. And they still communicated. Those with the talent to work them and connect them, became the new priesthood, wielding true power.

Angels and Demons still cannot physically walk the Earth—they were long ago barred from that—but they

have found that they can manifest themselves through the holy and unholy energies that still suffuse what is left of the Internet's former hive mind. Magicians of all stripes act as their agents (and sometimes pretend to be their masters), sparring with each other wielding laptops full of ancient power. Battling on both physical and virtual fronts.

64 years later...

Grand Lord Crowl has been quiet for some months. After the violent subjugation of New Bermuda and the Gull Points he has withdrawn most of his battleships, and sea-devil sightings near the Free Coast have been almost nil. He's up to something.

It turns out that there are reports of the lost city of Atlantis rising from the sea. It is thought that Atlantis sank after the last time heaven and hell were able to bring their war to humanity. Atlantis sacrificed itself to end the war and send angel and demon alike back to their own realms. Supposedly.

Crowl seeks to capture Atlantis for himself, believing it to possess artifacts and technology that will allow him to rule the whole of the world. The players then are pirate rebels who need to get to Atlantis ahead of Crowl's people. Hopefully, they can foil Crowl's plans, and at the same time, learn the secrets of Atlantis and find the tools and techniques that allowed Atlantis to fight off the forces of evil themselves once upon a time.

## **Dust to Dust**

### *Konsaki's Fantasy Depopulated Earth*

The tales that the story-weavers tell and write down in their giant tombs of knowledge say that a great war or catastrophe almost destroyed the world over three hundred years ago. The few rare tombs we can find from that ancient time say that something called computers might have caused it, though whatever really happened, we now live in a drying dying world. The only thing we can do to survive is live on the coasts of what should be vast oceans of water, from what the tales say, though you can't see the other side and no one has ever returned or arrived from the other side so it might be true.

People are only able to survive in small towns thanks to ancient machines we can use to make the seawater usable, but they break often and we are only barely able to repair them. Ours had been broken for a week and our water reserves were running dangerously low, but the gods showed us favor and we were able to repair it before we ran out. As the cleaned water flowed back into our reservoirs, we yelled joyously as we watched them fill back up to the top.

The night was full of partying in the streets. The sounds of dance and song reverberated from all the small buildings. In hindsight, this was probably the only reason

they were able to sneak up on us, since no one was on the pier.

All around me, the sounds of joy and celebration quickly turned to screams of terror and pain as they attacked. No one really got a good look at them in the chaos but I can remember what I saw like I'm still there. In not but a few moments, there was what seemed like scores of men in or made of metal brandishing swords and rods that shot fire. People panicked and fled the town and on the next day when we returned, we found our houses ransacked but everyone feared for the worst when we found out what they were really after. Our water machine was missing. Without it, we were doomed in a couple of weeks.

Our elders talked throughout the day and night. In the morning they called forth a small group of young people. They guessed that the people who attacked were the rumored pirates who lived on a metal thing in the water. No one knew exactly where it was, but the only chance the town had was to find it and try to take the water machine back. With a small sailboat, supplies and a couple of old weapons; they set off to either save the town or die out at sea.

## Machine & Myth

### *DMDarc's Fantasy Depopulated Earth*

With the creation of faster-than-light space travel, the majority of Earth's population abandoned their dying world in favor of travel to fully terraformed Mars and Venus (partially). As more and more of humankind left Earth, those that remained began to become reconnected to the spiritual forces that had been ignored for so long. You see, the search for answers to everything made less things mysterious - and that is where magic and monsters truly lie. It turns out that those myths, legends, and folk tales of old were all actually true - mankind's insistence that they were nothing but fancy beat them into submission and made them to retreat in hiding. But now, with large cities quickly becoming ghost towns - the magic has begun again.

Life has reverted to a much more "uncivilized" state. There are no operational power plants, oil refineries, or factories controlled by mankind anymore. Even the faster-than-light space travel, the means of escaping Earth, are not under human control. The advent of true artificial intelligence has caused computers to gain true sentience - however, due to bugs in coding, computers no longer serve humans. At best, computers ignore man. Slaves, test subjects, cattle, or worse are more common options.

Mankind has since forgotten most of the technologies it once new. The Ayiyes ("AIs") are considered a tribe of mystical beasts that rule the great abandoned cities - mythical beasts much like the sasquatch, faeries, and other beasts that have been reawakened and dwell on Earth once again. Man tends to live in small communes,

located in rural areas where they can raise farms. Suburbs are seen as buffers before you get into the main cities - ideal places for treasure hunters to start a career as they are less risky to explore than the abandoned cities themselves.

Religion is seen as a stabilizing force, and thus churches become very important centers in every community. Christianity, Islam, Judaism - none of these exist in their true forms. The awakening of Magic forced the most devout practitioners to somewhat adjust their faiths. Religion, as it is practiced now, tends to be unique to each community, and is a combination of traditional Western religion, often influenced by less traditional religions and spiritual beliefs (Native American beliefs, neo-paganism, wicca, shamanism, etc.) Heaven and Hell are not abstract beliefs - they are actual places that only the Arbitrators (unknown to Man: the computers in charge of planetary travel destination) can send Man. Every year a few brave souls trek into the great abandoned cities, and none have been known to return. Whether they make it to their goal is unknown. (Stories of life on Mars, which has been terraformed into a utopian society, are the basis of "Heaven", while Venus, in the process of being terraformed, is seen as "Hell" due to the amount of work and conditions that the original settlers had worked on. With the abandonment of Earth, the resources that Earth had used to help terraform Mars were almost completely depleted - a fact that was not realized until work had already started on Venus.)



Plot: A rural society, the Rens, (founded on the site of an old Renaissance festival - members of the community believe that this was actually the height of man's civilization and know nothing of the abandoned cities except myths) has been infiltrated by a servant of the Ayiyes. This agent was originally sent to investigate the community and report back to his masters about any violent attacks were planned against the Ayiyes, who have become quite paranoid. During the process, he

discovered a surge of power he had never felt before, and found that a ley line was present in the woods. Upon reporting back to his masters, the Ayiyes desired to find a way to harness this power for their own purposes.

Adventurers will be common townsfolk (blacksmith, baker, acolyte of the church, etc.). During the weekly jousting tournament - seen more as entertainment than holding any actual chivalric meaning - the town will be attacked by a contingent of the fey, who believe that the town is responsible for intrusions made on their territory. It will be the duty of the PC's to not only help in the defense of their town, but to investigate why they are being attacked (there should have been no reason for the Fey to break that treaty) as well as stop the Ayiyes agent from completely harnessing the power of the ley line.

## **Prison Planet Earth**

### **Instant Setting**

**Setting:** Future Earth

**Tone:** Nihilistic

**Setting Thing:** Espionage

**Setting Thing:** Mechas

**Location:** Prison

### **Instant Plot**

**Plot Action:** Survive

**Plot Action:** Cover up

**Plot Item:** Hostages

**Plot Item:** Leader

**Opposition:** Rebels

By Common Reckoning, the year is 4235, but no one knows for sure anymore. The charred remains of Earth have long been hostile to life, and the other planets of the League have long since abandoned the Earth—using it only as a dumping ground for unwanted refuse... including people.

The inhabitants of prison planet Earth eke out a meager existence in the sealed warrens beneath old Earth's ruined cities. Death is common, and gangs of humans and mutants make easy prey of the unprotected. The only ray of hope is the occasional ship from the outer planets come to dump off their waste and their miscreants: new fodder for the masses.

But now, something new has come up. Ancient suits of oversized power armor have been discovered, and a lucky few have been repaired and put back into operation. They are leaky and unreliable, but with a mecha-suit, an Earthling can actually roam across the blasted surface of the planet... actually intercept one of the dumpships.

And that's just what has happened (or will happen... depending). The scenario is that a handful of mecha-suited Earthlings head up a small rebellion to attack an

incoming ship and disable it, taking hostages. They will demand safe passage off of the hellhole Earth.

Unfortunately, the rest of the League of Planets think that Earth is merely a dead planet and have no idea that it is being used this way. The powers that be cannot simply let people out, for fear of discovery. They may attempt a covert rescue, but may just as easily cut their losses and leave their crew behind.

The players can be one of three parties in this scenario: the Mecha-powered rebels; the starship crew (who will also have power suits); or new prisoners on the captured ship who just happen to be caught in the middle. No matter who they play, the situation is fairly hopeless, because it is unlikely that *anyone* will be allowed off the planet at this point.

## **Prehistoric Mutants**

### **Instant Setting**

**Setting:** Prehistory

**Tone:** Despair

**Setting Thing:** Mutants

**Setting Thing:** Heaven and Hell

**Location:** Beach

### **Instant Plot**

**Plot Action:** Kidnap

**Plot Action:** Assassinate

**Plot Item:** Mask

**Plot Item:** Alliance

**Opposition:** Military Force

## **The Flight of Angels**

### ***Mike's Prehistoric Mutants World***

A world before time—stone age technology, limited domestication of animals, no formal agriculture.

Once the world was green and vibrant, but now each summer is darker than the last, each winter more bitter. The men of the villages cast their nets, but return home each day with less and less. Another winter is arriving, and stores are very low.

Years ago, before the difficulties began, changeling children were born to the tribes. These cursed offspring could appear in any tribe—in any family. Said to be inhabited by spirits, some of the children had animal traits or seemed attuned to nature or had exceptional physical beauty and abilities. (Such characters can be of any appearance, and they can have abilities beyond normal humans but not quite in the realm of "superheroes." They can be exceptionally fast or smart or strong and have senses beyond human, but no true magic or psionics in the typical sense. But a GM should be flexible.) The changelings are rare—maybe 15 or so total being born each year in all of the known tribes.

These oldest of the changeling children are finally coming of age (at 12 or 13, they are officially adults), and they seem to be of two distinct types—Good and Evil. There are no better words for it than that. Half seem to be dark and twisted and bent on destruction and domination, whereas the others are kindly and protective and turn their energies to helping their families and tribes.

Ten of the Dark Ones have migrated to the inland tribes of the deep woods, and there they have united the disparate barbarian tribes and organized an army. They clearly plan to wage war on all around them. As a start, their bands of thugs make raids on the peaceful coastal villages, stealing away the newborn and infant changelings when they can find them. At the same time, the eldest of the Sun Born (good changelings) have been dying under mysterious circumstances... surely the work of the dark ones.

The remaining Sun Born have agreed to travel from their disparate villages and discuss the matter. Something must be done.

## Clan Baravel

### *Caz's Prehistoric Mutant World*

Long before Mankind taught itself civilization, when groups were no larger than several dozen hunter-gatherer families, there was an age of untold suffering. Ancestral Mankind fell victim to the remnants of Lucifer's assault on Heaven. The celestial radiance of angelic flesh burning in torment outshone the sun for days on end - killing many and blinding far more. The seas shook with the thunder of deific beings locked in combat, sweeping coastal folk into the icy depths. And the land grew foul, tortured and corrupted by heaps of twisted corpses all still charged with divine power. And the world itself wept bitter tears as it was forced to bind Satan and his cohort deep within

Mankind suffered. Blinded, starved, poisoned and drowned by forces far beyond mortality - it changed, becoming more than it once was. Those who survived the radiance but lost their eyes gained new insights into the

world. They could hunt without sight and travel in the deepest darkness. Others grew more hardy, surviving in the harsh wastes that had once been angels' graveyards. And the children born after the tumult had strange and new abilities. All around, the flesh of Mankind was changing into a multitude of different forms.

Humankind rose out of this crucible to stake its claim on the mortal world. Shackled by suffering and deprivation, they came together in larger groups, families gave way to

tribes and extended clans. There was never enough food nor shelter for all who survived. Too many fertile plains had been shattered, too much of the forest had been burned. War became part of Humanity, with clan battling against clan for dominion. And the least of the creatures from the Great War were still free - they sought to use Humankind to further their battles.

Of the many clans, the Baravel, the coastal people strove to establish order and calm for the greater good. Many of them had gained the gift of amphibility, gills and lungs together. They had food and shelter from the great ocean - at many times more than they could use. It is into this clan that you and your companions were born. They look to you, with your unique abilities, to stand for the light of Humankind.

A great and powerful force has grown up out of the Mountains of Torment. Demon-bred and strong beyond compare, the Hunters of Souls dominate many hundreds of miles of territory, and sacrifice lesser men and women upon altars forged from the obdurate bones of fallen angels. This power must be thwarted, before it consumes every last thing that is good or just. Baravel and Thrawsha seek to form a greater alliance, one born out of many pairings of their best sons and daughters.

You of Baravel must travel over great and treacherous distances to meet with your counterparts, and must do so hiding your true nature as Humans, lest the Hunters of





Souls discover you and wrest you back to their dark and terrible lairs. It is up to you to save this world.

(Game Notes: The Characters would enjoy a small handful of useful mutation-type powers that would set them apart from mankind. Most of these would be improvements over natural abilities, with a smattering of psychic talents and the like. Magic would only be available to a slim selection of Humans, those who had either fallen in with the demons or somehow been in contact with the deific hosts. As prehistoric humans, the players would also be very strong and coordinated in comparison to modern people, able to traverse many of the natural hazards without need of gear or supplies. By and large, the technology would be limited to stone, bone, wood and leather, but there are a few relics left over from the Great War. Each of these has a terrible cost, causing mutation and sickness in mortals that keep them (the least powerful of items) to instantaneous insanity or conflagration (average to powerful items).)

## Titan's of Pangea

### *Kyle's Prehistoric Mutants World*

Man was created in the image of God, but what in whose image was he created? Before God created the world in which we live, he had to conquer it. The gods that came before him were complacent and naive. The titans thought they could live in peace in Pangea forever, until the fall of the angels. First God thought he could fashion a better life, and rallied the forces of the angelic titans with rhetoric of hate and division. In the blink of an immortal eye, he armed His army and began systematically carrying out his strategy of deicide. The titans, undisciplined after millennia of complacency, were easy fodder. But God suffered a major setback when his frontline General, Satan, doublecrossed him and gave up major positions and arms to the last bastion of titans. Now, with angels in control of most of Pangea, the only enclave of rebellious titans is behind the well-fortified gates of Eden. But it is only a matter of time before God's forces overwhelm the titans.

Satan has rallied his own elite forces of angels who are also battling against the angels allied with God. It is unclear if he is fighting for the titans, or (more likely) fighting for control of Pangea and to control the heavens and the earth. In a surprise move, Satan was taken captive by God and is currently being marched to his execution at the Sea of Eternity.

The players are the last of the major titans. They control the forces under their domain. Whether it be nature, elemental, emotional or sheer power, these titans wield the power of gods. But with the slaughter of the titans and the new era of angels, the titans have found their powers diminished. Create them similar to super-level powers.

The titans know that their era in the world is over, so they

send the players out on a suicide mission: infiltrate the execution of Satan at the Sea of Eternity, kidnap him and try to bring him back alive—if this can be done, the titans hope to forge an alliance with Satan's elite troops to help defend Eden. Just as importantly, the players need to eliminate the main threat: God—if at all possible, find him and kill him. Even if they succeed in both these objectives, the titans cannot survive long on Pangea—but at least they will have left their mark on the new world.

## Plague-Ravaged 14<sup>th</sup> Century London

Plague-ravaged London was one of our earlier games and one of our favorites. It was created under an earlier version of the Instant Game tables and rules, but the spirit is the same. The GM had several hours lead time, and thus lots of time to do Internet research for this. He also was very loose with the rules, discounting and altering many rolls as inspiration took him.

This game is the reason that *London* is now its own entry on the Setting table.

### Instant Setting

Time/Tech/Culture: Arthurian England (altered to medieval England)

Tone: Despair

Setting Elements: Fantastic monsters & 50's movie monsters (what are the chances of getting both of those? But the GM was inspired in a different direction by the plot, so he abandoned these eventually)

Population: City 50,000 (right perfect for London of the day)

### Instant Plot

Plot Action: Explore (thus the catacombs below)

Plot Item: Ultimate weapon (Excalibur)

Plot Action: Clean (wait for it...)

Plot Item: Honor (restoring—cleaning—the honor of England)

### **The Story**

A madwoman from the future (2350 to be exact) is obsessed with restoring the honor and greatness of England, a fallen and humiliated nation by her day. She is Ethel "Red" Williams—called Red because of her fiery red hair. She believes herself to be a direct descendant (and rightful heir) of the real King Arthur, and further, she has even come to believe that she is Arthur reincarnated. She believes that Excalibur was a true artifact of holy power, and her research has uncovered the resting place of the great sword. She decided that she can travel 1,000 years into the past and recover the sword. Thus, during England's most unstable and vulnerable era, she can use Excalibur's might to become the new English Queen and Savior. And with her advanced knowledge and

technology (and a body full of nanites), she will change the entire course of history and rule for centuries in glory. Ethel is accompanied by four loyal henchmen, and is chased by government "Time Cops" sent to stop her mad scheme.

The players will be citizens of London during the plague who are caught in the crossfire of this madwoman and the futuristic government agents sent back in time to foil her.

### The Setting

The year is 1350—February, winter. The Pestilence has consumed the population of England over the last 15 months, and it is estimated that more than half of London's 70,000 residents are now dead. Nearly two-thirds of the local priesthood is gone, and Pope Clement VI has been forced to grant remission of sin to all who die of the plague without benefit of clergy.



The weather is wet and cold, food is scarce, and bodies still litter the streets where labor is too short to haul them away.

Young King Edward III is at a loss to deal with the chaos that sweeps his nation, but it has provided a temporary respite from the dozen years of war with France (later to be known as the 100 Years War), and the King has abandoned Westminster for his country residence near Wessex.

London's mayor Walter Turke, like so many others, has succumbed to the plague, and it looks to be some time before a replacement will be selected, but city councilman Sir Richard de Kisingbury of the Tailors Guild is the current acting Lord Mayor.

### John – sample character

John is a gardener and handyman for the church. He keeps a pouch tied to his belt, filled with a couple coins and a small golden crucifix on a chain. The last remnant of his daughter, Rose, who died long before.

Exc: Essentially Invisible - His time on the grounds, as well as his old profession, have taught him how to be present without being noticed. It's not that he's not there, it's that people have to actively /want/ to know that he's there. Like the butler who stands right outside

the door until he is called, or the servant who appears before the master realizes he needs him.

Adv: Pickpocketing - The streets of London were ripe with people waiting to have their morning walks marked. It was something to do passing the time before the next highway robbery.

Adv: Staff (Shovel, whatever) Before he was a gardener, John was a vagabond pillaging the trade wagons from London to the outlying towns. At the outbreak of the plague, his daughter caught the dread disease and died. He brought her to St. Paul's and offered her up to the priests there. He offered his own services as a gardener, trying to atone for his sins as best he could.

Adv: Insight - He has a tendency to know what people aren't saying, even if they don't necessarily know it

Basic: Strength - Gardening and Vagabonding, Nature's Workout.

Basic: Gardening equipment – trowel, wheelbarrow, and shovel

Basic: Leather Pouch with a couple coins. Remnants of his old Life.

Basic: Herbalism - While camping under the stars he had to have remedies and first aid for his illegal activities.

Basic: Gardening - He always had a penchant for roses. His daughter, was named Rose

Flaw: Oath of Silence

### Coffin – sample character

Jeffery "Coffin" Sanctimony is a towering figure in the darkened streets of London. He works his grim trade, moving bodies and crafting coffins for those few who can afford them.

Exc: Durability "Coffin" has yet to become ill. He toils ceaselessly for many hours every day.

Adv: Strength - Stronger than many, Coffin regularly carries bodies single-handedly. He is also thickly thewed from many years of carpentry work.

Adv: Carpentry Skills

Adv: "Faith in Aluigi" Aluigi is a saint who died treating the plague in Italy. Coffin may use the power to ease the sick or shield himself from the plague.

Basic: Concentration - Many hours spent in prayer have honed his mind so that he may shut out the confusion of the mortal world.

Basic: Influence among the Healers - Coffin has been working ceaselessly with the healers combating the Plague.

Basic: Carpentry tools: Coffin has several good tools including a hatchet, a saw and a heavy mallet.

Basic: Perception

Basic: Street Smarts - Coffin knows his way around London, and knows what areas are dangerous to travel. He also has some skill in dealing with the less savory elements.

Flaw: Humorless - Coffin no longer has anything resembling a sense of humor. He does not laugh, nor make jokes. Life is work and prayer and little more.