

CREDITS

Intro

This is the .pdf version of **Down in Flames**, etc. It is formatted much the same as BTRC's other hypertext documents, though we're constantly evolving the "look" to make it more user-friendly. For instance, the grey headers and text bars are easier on those of you who use ink-jet printers. Text in **red** is normally a hyperlink that provides more info on the item in question. Areas blocked out in color are general information, the same as the regular **CORPS** rules. This document is also bookmarked and thumbnailed if you want to use it that way. Naturally, it also prints perfectly on regular size paper. It's designed to be a lower cost alternative to traditional game supplements, and we hope you find the 72+ pages to follow worth the price of admission.

DOWN IN FLAMES™

©1998, 1999 by Greg Porter

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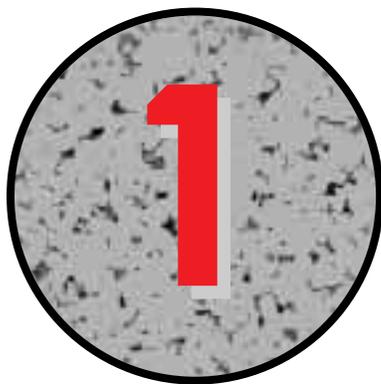
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INTRO- DUCTION

Basics

Down in Flames is a baker's dozen of world-wrecking scenarios just perfect for the coming millennium. There is nothing quite like a global cataclysm to reset your character's priorities. **Down in Flames** is broken down into four sections of three disasters each, with a bonus disaster tacked onto the end. The general categories are Natural Disasters, Manmade Disasters, Outside Influence and the Wrath of God, with maybe a little overlap here and there.

Natural Disasters

Something that doesn't require anything but nature taking its course. And of course, mass extinctions are *quite* natural... It doesn't require alien influence or supernatural forces. It just has to be something rare or unexpected that just happens to occur in the next few years. The hand of man may play a pivotal role in instigating a natural crisis, but it is not absolutely required.

Man-made Disasters

These are catastrophes that we bring upon ourselves. They can be triggers for larger natural disasters, or just the logical and inevitable result of human folly. If your ship is sinking and the only action is to form a committee to decide whose fault it is...well...the ship in this case has no lifeboats and none of us has learned how to swim...

Outside Influence

Someone, somewhere doesn't like us, or maybe likes us just a little *too* much (yum, yum). Outsiders with little concern for any needs but their own decide to move into our territory and impose their way of life on us. A lot like our own colonial eras, with the exception that colonial goals *usually* did not include the complete extinction of the original inhabitants.

Wrath of (a) God

The end of the world, as foretold by many religions. Of course, the original meaning of the prophecies may have been lost or corrupted, or the correct prophecy of the end of the world may have been lost altogether. In any case, supernatural forces of awesome might and/or great number decide that Judgement Day is at hand. God gets tired of holding that rock bigger than he can lift, and drops it on us. It may not be the god you were expecting though...

Designer's notes

The scenarios in **Down in Flames** range from the plausible to the bizarre, and with a little tweaking can be used in most rpg campaigns that are either in dire need of ending, or an abrupt and severe change of focus. Speaking of which, in addition to the global gloom and doom **Down in Flames** will present, there are also some short scenarios and characters to use in them as a one-shot or short standalone campaign. We provide the setting, characters and motivations, but you'll need to fill in the fine detail. These aren't your super-human characters with obscure fantastic backgrounds and esoteric skills. These are average people thrust in way over their heads. Their goal at best is simply to survive, but more likely to find a way to give their nearly inevitable death a higher meaning. It's not that we're *trying* to kill the characters, just that the adventures were *not* designed with their survival in mind...

No worries about character advancement, recovering hit points, or the possibility that your childhood rival who suffered the radiation accident and became your arch-nemesis will uncover your secret identity. It's too late for all that. You just need to worry about living to see the sunrise...provided it's still shining.

What's the fun in dying, you might reasonably ask? Among other things, it frees up your characters to do all the stupid heroic things that you normally wouldn't dare, because your characters aren't going anywhere after the adventure, and they're likely to die before they get to the end, anyway. Also, you get into the heart and soul of what your character (and to some extent, you) believe is *really* worthwhile. And it can be frustrating, too, because your characters will have human frailties and personalities. *You* might think that a one-way trip into the reactor core to save the city is worthwhile, and your character might think so too, but when push comes to shove, will they have the guts to do it? They might, they might not, or they might hesitate just a little too long and make the whole point moot.

You have to play the scenario as your *character* sees the world. *You* may know something really and permanently bad is about to happen, but *your character* might just be thinking that times are tough, but somehow they'll get by. But at some point in each scenario, grim reality will begin to set in, and the character will realize there is little or no chance for a happy ending. That's when things *really* get tough...

Good luck, you'll need it.

How does the world end?

One way or another, all of the scenarios involve the collapse or irreversible change of civilization as we know it. This could be because of a worldwide plague, nuclear war, or having the planet smashed into a billion pieces by collision with a rogue planet. But more usefully, the “end of the world” always includes the end of *your* world. Just because all the scenarios here are set around the year 2000 (or 2001), doesn't mean you can't have them and their side effects happen in some *other* type of campaign...

The first type of catastrophe is the “convenience” catastrophe. Civilization may collapse, but the threat to life is fairly small (at least compared to the other catastrophes). If suddenly, everyone, everywhere found that electrical items did not work, it would be the end of modern civilization, and thus the end of any game campaign that relied on the conveniences provided by electricity. Amazon hunter-gatherers would hardly notice, however, or be much less affected at any rate. Likewise, a magical fantasy campaign could be ended with the sudden decline of magic in the world. Powerful wizards would war over remaining magical resources, structures held together by ancient spells would start to crumble, and so forth.

Even so, all of these do not prevent humankind from continuing to exist. A threat to *civilization* is not necessarily a threat to *existence*. We seemed to manage quite well without microwave ovens, 200 television channels and the Internet for most of human existence, and *most* of us would learn to somehow live without them if we had to. But remember, the higher the average level of technology, the greater the total casualty level. Think of the number of people whose *immediate* survival hinges on the availability of technology like advanced pharmaceuticals, pacemakers, and dialysis machines. Then look at all the people who would be affected by the removal of MRI scanners, blood analyzers, or any other advanced diagnostic tool for the treatment of injury or illness. Advanced technology prolongs life, and makes it possible for people to reach reproductive age and pass adverse genetic traits on to another generation. The more advanced the technology and the longer it is in place, the more people will be affected by its removal.

A number of threats are more serious. They involve the short-term death of a *large* part of the population, resulting in or because of a collapse in infrastructure. A deadly global plague would destroy the food distribution system and result in famine, while a famine could weaken populations enough that they catch a plague. Famine and pestilence go hand in hand. There are few things humans need more or less constantly, but a threat to any of them is an immediate threat to survival. These needs are food, water and air. Some of the catastrophes in **Down in Flames** use these as part or all of the problem. The survivors will have to quickly and radically alter their worldview, or become extinct.

The most serious threat is one to the entire planet, either the habitable parts or the whole thing. Wrath of God, fire and brimstone, floods covering the earth, and so on. These may have as *side effects* any of the lower level catastrophes, but the immediate threat to survival is usually something that an individual has little chance of modifying. You don't know where the asteroid is going to hit, you're stranded on an island that used to be a peninsula and the water is still rising, or aliens have landed and they've decided all that pesky oxygen has just got to go.

At the end of each cataclysm there will be some references to stories or movies (or other games) that contain themes related to that particular catastrophe or scenario. Some might be directly related, while others just include cultural, historical or technological bits that tie into the theme somehow. They are meant to give you more ideas, so if you find yourself morbidly drawn to a particular armageddon, the references may be worth your time to check out.

Scenario rules

You can use these scenarios in just about any game system, but if you are using **CORPS**, ASP's can be used in the only for mitigating damage effects against the character. They may not be used for interpersonal skills, making your own skill rolls or to keep you alive when a global “bad thing” happens. You may use them to make *physical* attribute rolls, especially ones that require a heroic level of effort.

Doing something you know is *likely* to kill you is normally a Difficulty 10 WIL task, and you can't use ASP to make the check. Doing plain old dangerous things is a Difficulty of 6. For a friend, you can subtract 2 from the Difficulty, and for immediate family, the Difficulty is *at least* 2 points less (varies with situation). Doing something that is likely to kill you *and* which you know is *also* probably futile is +2 Difficulty. Any emotional trauma your character may suffer from failing these rolls is up to you, but losing your reason to live should make one of these tasks substantially easier.

Within these guidelines, pre-designed characters will be listed as having certain motivations. These are important facets of the character's personality, and should be played realistically as the situation allows. The characters are not obsessed with these motivations unless described as such.



NATURAL DISASTERS

Water, water, everywhere

The air is hot and oppressively humid. It stinks of sulfur, but you don't notice anymore. Gray clouds with streaks of brown stretch from horizon to horizon, the sun visible only as a brighter area behind the haze. Flashes of lightning are visible in the turbulent clouds, but no rain falls. You wade into the warm shallows to check your traps, making sure the local bandits are nowhere in sight. Most of the traps are empty as usual, but one has a fish, still swimming weakly and gasping in the oxygen-poor water. You scrape the uglier of the blisters and nodules off it, and use them to fertilize the beans and tomato plants you've sheltered from the acid rain. The rest you cook over a small fire. It doesn't fill your stomach, but it does take the edge off your hunger. The sun sets, the earth doesn't move beneath you, and you fall asleep to the sound of dry and distant thunder.

It's been a pretty good day.

Scenario

Earth's ocean levels rise dramatically, over a period of weeks or months. Almost all of the world's largest cities are on ocean coastlines, and much of the world's cultivated land is close to sea level. The immediate death or displacement of *billions* of people, the loss of much of Earth's cropland and crops, as well as industrial production and monetary centers (stock exchanges, central banks, gold reserves) will create global havoc. Provided their governments still survive, most countries will have to resort to martial law to keep any semblance of order. If central authority breaks down, areas will balkanize into haves and have-nots, with famine, plague and small scale wars over scarce resources. The countries least affected by the rise in sea level will find themselves pressured by the military forces of larger but more inundated nations. Who knows how far things might degenerate when both sides see the stakes as survival of themselves as a people or nation?

How does it happen?

Like most of these world-wreckers, it can be looked at alone, or in combination with one of the other disasters, should you be brave enough to try and run a campaign through multiple changes. As a rough figure, 70% of the Earth's surface is covered with water. This is about 360 million square kilometers. To raise this ocean level by 50 meters (pretty catastrophic) would take roughly 25 million cubic kilometers of water. In layman's terms, a lot.

Antarctica has an area of about 14 million square kilometers, and an average elevation of about 1800 meters. If we assume most of this is ice and melt it down to within 100 meters of present sea level, it would generate 24 million cubic kilometers of water. Just about right. For reference, this is about 80% of the Antarctic ice cap, which is in turn about 2% of the world's water supply. Since anything capable of that much melting is going to raise global temperature, we can assume the north polar and Greenland icecaps are going to melt some as well, raising the sea level slightly more. The world will be a hotter place, but as they tell you, "it's not the heat, it's the humidity". A few of the other world-wreckers are capable of this kind of energy input, which is catastrophic in its own right. We'll let you find them and decide on your own.

If raising the water level won't float your boat, try shrinking the Earth. Below the thin crust of our planet is a roiling stew of magma, hot and subject to frequent and as yet largely unpredictable outbursts. Who is to say that as the Earth slowly cools, surface effects have to happen in a gradual, controlled way? If the Earth's heat engine has been puffing slightly slower for the last few million years, it might decide to suddenly contract a little bit, like a magma soufflé gone bad. If the land area of the Earth dropped due to global contraction, and the water volume stayed the same, more land would be covered by water, especially if the contraction were concentrated by having the thicker continents do most of the sinking. Like the previous scenario, this event would also have a lot of global warming involved, as massive volcanic eruptions occurred at the boundaries of Earth's tectonic plates. The relatively small shifts of land mass would be felt as massive earthquakes on a world-wide scale, including places that are not normally known as earthquake zones. There would be shifts in Earth's magnetic field that could cause electronic malfunctions, depletion of the ozone layer, alteration of satellite orbits and general degradation of the technological tools our daily lives depend upon. Chaos would be complete. And on that happy note, we start the first scenario.



