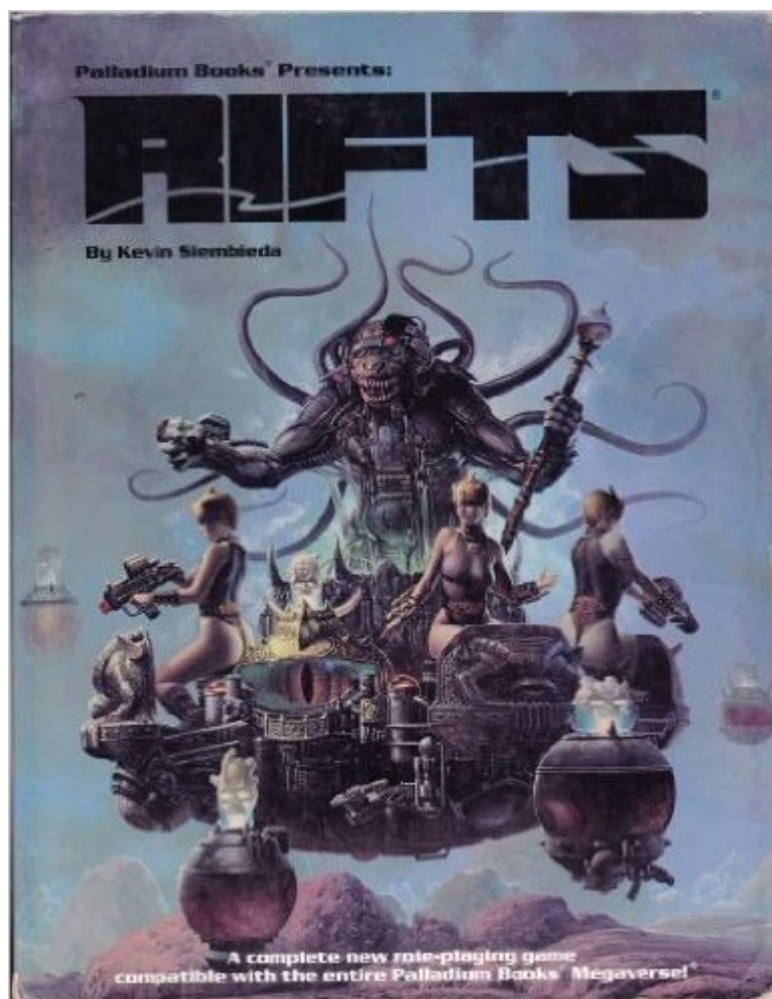


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Rifts: Role-Playing Game



Synopsis

Book by Siembieda, Kevin

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The quick overview: Rifts is a post-apocalyptic future Earth with magic, psionics, and technology intermixed. After enjoying a brief period of peace, unity, and prosperity (both social and technological) in the mid to late 21st century, nuclear war breaks out. The "psychic energy" released by the simultaneous deaths of millions of people causes rips in the fabric of space-time that connect different realities to Earth (the rifts mentioned in the title), as well as allows humans to manipulate magic for the first time in millenia. Fast-forwarded about three hundred years, things have stabilized from their initial chaotic state, mankind has managed to survive on the new Earth, but instead of other humans, their neighbors are dragons, demons, vampires, and all sorts of beasties that have crept in from alternate dimensions. Not to mention that some of the new Earth governments are just as violent and evil as the creatures from the rifts. The book is light on specific details of the changes Earth has undergone. While there is a section of about two dozen pages devoted to describing the "new Earth," the various regions of North America (Northeast, Southwest, etc.) and Mexico get a few paragraphs each, and the rest of the countries of the world are lucky to get more than one or two paragraphs each. The descriptions of North America are enough to get started, but there are precious few maps and very few "what its like for people now" descriptions (for instance, while frontier towns are mentioned, there is very little guidance as to the technology level that can be found outside of the major human cities). Much of the "feel" of the setting has to be derived from the

rules for characters and equipment.

Hard to rate a game like this. On one hand it has one of the most exciting sci-fi/fantasy hybrid post-apocalypse storylines I've ever seen: Thousands of years in the future, following a utopian golden age, atomic war results in a spiritual backlash of energy as millions die. These energies overcharge the ley lines of magic in the world resulting in catastrophic magical storms and natural disasters. Now, hundreds of years later, civilization is just beginning to claw its way from the ruins. The ley lines have opened portals to alien dimensions and Earth has become a nexus for aliens, cyborgs, demons, mutants, AI robots, monsters, and animal-human hybrids. The bad parts however are really awful. First, the system is unusable. It's very close to 2nd edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, but with all the wrong changes. Character creation is cumbersome. Stats are largely useless since skills are calculated separately and the stats themselves, although rolled on 3d6 (like AD&D) can go up way above 20, making d20 rolls meaningless. Skills are percentiles with a beginning average between 15-30%--so expect your players to routinely fail any skill rolls they have to do. Some skills that are always used (appraisal, awareness, social skills...etc.) just aren't there--while skills like cooking, radio scrambler, and advanced mathematics abound. For as interesting as the setting is, it's also woefully ill conceived in a lot of ways. For a world that is supposed to be such a mix of different creatures, the player classes are all human (except dragons--which are ridiculously powerful). Some classes, like the Glitterboy, Crazy, Borg and Juicer are basically just humans who own different equipment!

The RIFTS rulebook is a complete set of role playing rules for \$24.95. While there are literally dozens of optional, supplemental rulebooks available, this main book is more than adequate to allow years of playing by itself. Like most role playing games written in the 1980's, it requires at least one set of polyhedral dice (also known as a "d20 dice set", a set contains dice with four, six, eight, ten, twelve, and twenty sides,) to play. It is preferred that each player has their own set of dice, but it is not required as people can share them. If you wish to give a role playing game as a gift, then the RIFTS main rulebook and a set of dice (if they don't already have a set,) would be a fine choice that would allow them to play almost immediately. RIFTS has been in print continuously since 1983, and has been a perennial steady seller in comic book stores since that time. Strangely, RIFTS has not received the respect it deserves from mainstream bookstores, which tend to only carry Dungeons and Dragons and White Wolf's role playing games. Hopefully this will soon be remedied, as at this time, spring 2004, a motion picture is being filmed set in the world of

RIFTS. RIFTS uses Palladium book's house game mechanics, which are the same as those of their other games, including Heroes Unlimited, Palladium Fantasy, and the now defunct Robo-tech and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles games. The mechanics are similar to, but simpler and easier to use than the current "d20" rules, which they pre-date by about twenty years. The setting of RIFTS is a unique, post-apocalyptic North America, with both technology and the supernatural. At some time in the distant future, man developed bionics, cybernetics, genetic engineering, and other advanced technologies.

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