Ardent Offense

Contents

What is role-playing?

If you are new to role-playing games, it is suggested that you read this section. If you're not, you may want to skip to the next section, or skip on to the rules of the system. However, there is some information on "playing" characters below that may be helpful to the smooth running of role-playing games.

Historically, a role-playing game (RPG) is a game of imagination where a referee, the *Game Master* (GM), guides one or more players through an imaginary setting in which the players play the parts of imaginary *characters* (fictitious or otherwise). Such a character in a game is sometimes referred to as a PC for *player character*. A *non-player character* (NPC) is any of the major or minor imaginary characters played by the GM. The *game world*, is merely the background, the setting that the game takes place in. A *party* consists of a group of various PC's and NPC's. An *encounter* is like a scene in a movie. On the other hand, a *campaign* consists of a series of adventures. The purpose of some campaigns may be fairly defined and have an ending of some sorts, whereas the purpose of other campaigns may be very open ended and have no real ending.

When it comes to GM's and players *playing* the parts of characters, there are different ways that this can be done. Based on my own experiences and preferences, my opinion on a smooth way to do this is as follows, though people may prefer to do things differently. A GM describing a NPC's dialog to a player might say "He says you look like you need help and asks you if he can be of service" or "He says you look like you need help, may I be of service?" A player may describe their character's response as "I tell him yeah, how can I get out of this crazy city!" On the other hand, things can get real lively when people talk as their characters, being more animated and doing accents, etc., instead of just describing what the characters are doing in the game world. Yet I (and role-players in general it seems to me), keep things more focused inside the game world instead of outside of it. There can be times where acting out things, doing accents and the like can make for great moments and vivid (often hilarious) gaming experiences; but for role-players who want to concentrate more on what is going on inside the game world, being animated is often more vivid and/or hilarious when instead put into the descriptive actions and mouths of the characters in the gaming world. There can be a nice balance between both styles, but it really depends on what type of gaming experience people are looking for and where people want their attention to be during a game. Outside of role-playing games, I have always been in to doing accents, imitations and stuff to give laughs to others and myself. In role-playing games, I prefer experiences to take place more inside the game world.

Preface

There are many different vehicles for expressing the human imagination. Many great things can be enjoyed through technology and other things can be enjoyed without technology. When it comes to role-playing, some of the preferences outlined below are hampered by technology. One of the problems that computer RPG adaptations have historically faced is their having to impose some linearity when translating from the tabletop pen and paper RPG. One of the strengths of tabletop RPG's is their flexible nature: once someone has created a character, he or she can role-play their character without being hampered by geographical computer boundaries, non-interactive environments, and, in theory, without a rudimentary physics system. In a pen and paper RPG, there are not the kinds of limitations on character actions or on the reactions of other characters that are found in computer RPG's. This is largely because the player who is acting as the GM can alter the fantasy environment to respond to the unpredictable choices of the other players. Problems however, often reside in the physics of the pen and paper RPG system in use, such as where impracticalness resides within the design of the systems core. Pen and paper RPG's are sometimes similar to their computer counterparts, with situations arising that the rules do not address. How a system addresses these and other situations can make for very different types of role-playing experiences.

I have role-played as both a player and (more often) as a GM since 1983 in junior high school, and have used both traditional and freeform role-playing since then. Both forms have ideas that can be enjoyable and are explained further within these pages. Role-playing can be a time consuming hobby, and it can be all the more difficult to find time to do if you use some of the detailed RPG systems out there. When I was younger, I had more time. A few role-playing games I was involved with lasted for years (real life time), often played on a daily basis. Now, much of my time is spent with other interests and responsibilities. Yet, my interest in role-playing continues to thrive. Though I used a couple of particular role-playing games back in the 80's, early on I became interested in finding a role-playing system that would be realistic, highly simulative, yet practical, and oftentimes I just ended up using my own style of freeform role-playing, I did not even know many other people did this sort of thing until somewhat recently! [By the way, I have seen it spelled "freeform" "free form" and "free-form" and I just plain prefer it as "freeform"] Time passed, other things in life occurred. Through all the different role-playing systems I read though, I never was quite content. Recently there has been the time to look at the problem again, and this system is what came together. This system is not necessarily some end-all of role-playing games. It is more of a system and a way of doing things then a big game with a lot of rules and things pre-designed. The system was designed without a great deal of effort to meet certain ideas of my own about role-playing involving more concentration on the game world through effortless play instead of statistical simulation, and perhaps it will be useful and enjoyable for others who are interested in this type of role-playing experience described further below.

Incidentally, for those who may accuse this work (or me) of some radical departure, or evil result, from my philosophical/theological writings, I'd say go read those writings some more. As for this RPG, I would say there is nothing inconsistent here with what I have written elsewhere, though this is really for other role-players like myself. If you don't like it, don't get involved with it. Just like a book, movie, telling a story, participating in group story telling, etc., role-playing is only another form of imaginative creativity, and good role-playing depends on what you spend your time thinking on. If people waste their time on being sick in their imagination then their story sucks. If people have a healthy imagination, role-playing can be just as enjoyable (and as safe) as any other form of imagination. People do have different ethical definitions on what having a "healthy imagination" means. I certainly have mine. But just because some people's definitions (and some people's role-playing systems) might be severely screwed up doesn't mean that role-playing itself is automatically poison.

The *Ardent Offense* game was designed with flexibility in mind. The system's name comes from the setting at the end of the text. Yet, one of the purposes of this game's simple engine is to be a universal enough, stand-alone system that requires no further expansions of supplement rules, new genre rules, etc. Though expansions make gaming companies a lot of money, and though some players may like the sort of system design where detail precedes more detail in a quest to cover all the details, such makes for more of a system of rules that concentrates on simulation in role-playing instead of a system that concentrates on role-playing with the addition of some flexible rules that add to realism created by the GM and the players themselves (some may call this second category, "cinematic"). Both have their advantages and disadvantages. The concept behind this system is one where its core is designed in such a way that people can configure new gaming concepts and rules for themselves. Understandably, such a system may not please everyone. In any system design, gaming detail has to be weighed alongside playability and practicality. The more one tries to pull simulation types of role-playing out of this system, the less playable and practical it will probably become.

In some systems, so much attention to detail results in the lack of realism in other areas that could really enhance role-playing. One example of this is how RPG systems often limit how a character's main character attributes (such as strength, agility, perception, etc.) are allowed to interact with one another or not. Does a persons agility in real life determine by itself (with perhaps some accompanying modifiers), how agile a person is in a particular situation? Are there not circumstances where strength and/or perception can affect ones agility? How about skills, situations of emotion, and other things? Of course there are! Other examples of role-playing system design problems include how many systems limit people to a certain amount of statistics for skills, equipment, and the like; how they often (though not always) don't deal with the fact that armor can take damage; various hit locations; blood loss; that actions in real life between two things sometimes happen simultaneously and not in separate movements of rounds; etc. Does a system need to try to cover all possible human combinations in light of all possible actions and situations? Unless one's goal is simulation (preferably with the aid of computers), such would hardly be practical to maintain all the time in a moving, changing role-playing campaign. Yet, if a game is designed where the GM can decide more for

himself/herself when to account for such various circumstances or not, then the system and the campaign can offer all sorts of entertaining situations and experiences with a level of enjoyable realism. Now, this doesn't mean that every idea behind this system is some new ingenious creation. Some concepts were incorporated from various systems that already were well done, tested and proven. Other concepts were seen as keys to solve problems and weld the whole idea together. Overall, it is hoped that *Ardent Offense* will provide you with a sufficient and enjoyable gaming experience.

Role-playing philosophies

One way of role-playing involves using dice and some sort of an elaborate system of rules and charts to determine the results of certain actions (which is called "traditional" from here on). Another way of role-playing involves not using dice. Some diceless role-playing games have also had elaborate systems behind them. Other forms of diceless role-playing have consisted of not using a system, and instead have involved use of description based resolutions in determining the outcome of certain actions (which is called "freeform" from here on).

Both "traditional" and "freeform" definitions can entail much more than whether or not dice are involved, and people can mix various elements together between the two. However, many people do not seem to realize that when it comes to these two different concepts of role-playing, in some sense they are two different sides of the same coin. In traditional and complex diceless role-playing, things such as character attributes, skills, equipment, and more are created along with detailed systems to manage them so as to enhance the gaming experience. In freeform role-playing, the idea is to enhance the imaginative experience, and no formal system is used to calculate things. Outcomes rest more between the GM's decisions and the quality of the players' role-playing. Traditional role-playing opts for detail involving the necessity of a system of calculation. Freeform role-playing opts for detail involving the necessity of imaginative spontaneity. Whereas both are striving for imaginative detail, they use two different means to get to it.

Both ways of role-playing can be enjoyable even though the fact is that both involve arbitrary concepts. Arbitrary concepts are just placed in different positions. Traditional role-playing has an appearance of detail and accuracy that rests upon a particular RPG's system design. Though arbitrary decision in a sense is avoided, it is really only avoided within a particular traditional RPG system design, designs which often call for the GM to make their own decisions about whether or not dice rolls can or cannot happen at a particular moment. And all traditional systems are designed by their creators to have the dice rolls function according to the particular arbitrary stats of a system, such as how high or low character attribute scores can be, how things relate to the attributes in the rules, and what kind of dice are generally used for the system (d6, d10, etc.) On the other hand, freeform role-playing employs the freedom of being fairly systemless, involving more of a detailed imaginative interactive journey, yet sacrifices the simulation detail and accuracy found riding on the traditional system to do so. The system used in *Ardent Offense* is really a combination of the two forms, leaning towards the

freeform/descriptive direction, and involves some of the benefits of both. However, people are free to run the system differently or use other systems with this one.

Freeform role-playing

Freeform role-playing was already described above as basically being a way of role-playing where the outcomes rest more between the GM's decisions and the quality of the players' role-playing. Freeform works far better where the GM and the players are willing to think and use common sense. Done smoothly it can make for great times, otherwise friendships may end fast! Diceless or systemless games can be very unpleasant if players argue about everything and don't trust the GM. Likewise, GM's must be consistent, just, and fair, simulating realistic outcomes and situations. Freeform role-playing concentrates on realism of player actions and realism of GM decisions. There is a lot that people can consider when it comes to whether or not to use freeform role-playing, and if so, how much of it to use. At times, the use of dice and a role-playing system can help to make certain decisions and are worth considering.

In freeform, all decisions about the outcome of events are made by the GM, who must take into consideration various game factors such as situations and events in the game, and players' actions and the quality of those actions. A GM also bases decisions on the description given by the players of their characters' actions. As such, a GM must use common sense, and a normal, rational sense of balance regarding the players' descriptions and intentions (after all, it is only a game). A GM's decisions are also made by referencing to similar things and situations in real life, and perhaps in some cases, movies, books, etc. In a smooth running game, the GM and the players feed off each other's ideas and they can inspire each other into all sorts of unforeseen directions. Freeform is far different than the concept of continuous storytelling where different people partake in adding various elements to building a story. In freeform, the game takes place in the GM/PC role-playing setting.

A note on setting and the effect on rules

Various configurations can be made for any nation, land, or genre due to the universal nature of the system. The basic concepts of oppression in the setting at the end of the rules can be used in any setting actually, whether it is futuristic, or something medieval like the 1938 movie, *the Adventures of Robin hood*, starring Errol Flynn. The setting is a fairly flexible, contemporary, futuristic grimness called *Ardent Offense*, and it is an example of some of the mixtures that are possible just within one era. *Ardent Offense* can be used as a base for all sorts of world stage shades, from espionage and guerrilla warfare scenarios, to settings that bring to mind aspects from movies such as *Logan's Run* (1976), *Escape From New York* (1981), the 1991 director's cut of the 1982 movie *Blade Runner*, and others. With such flexibility, one could campaign through the horrid rise of a new Nazi or Imperial Japan era, world wide communism, democracy gone overkill (mob rule), extreme anarchy, a new ice age, continental upheaval, seas drying up, an apocalypse, etc. One can decide for themselves more of the specifics of the framework that comprises ones campaigns. Various extremes can be played out, from disease,

starvation, biological and chemical disasters/wars, tyrannical killing machines and mechanized armor, to more brainwashing concepts of government domination such as depicted in the book *1984*, or the 1970 movie *THX 1138*. A society where a computer dominates? Media strictly controlled by civil government, corporations, or just brainwashed civilians? Drug conditioned society? A hidden paradise? Serene settings and campaigns? The complexities of having world peace and keeping it? Mystery? Comedy? Satire? Small scale settings? It depends on where one takes it.

Of course, as in so many things, there are limitations. Some of which have affected the system and made for ease of system playability and design. Limitations often help as a backdrop to magnify other aspects. Real life (and realistic crisis in fantasy) involves no fanciful magic power in our own selves to turn to, and charlatans, gullible fools, maniacs, and more surround us. At least for this author, good fantasy has to have realism to it. A realism that one can believe is possible. Fantasy so realistic that it's believable, so to speak. (Obviously there is a difference between something that has the air of believable possibility to it and a psychopath that actual believes in some fantasy or something, but the point is clear enough.)

Nevertheless, one thing that the modern day, futuristic setting does provide is not only a plausible enough game environment, but also one that can be used as a psychological experience relevant to the future instead of some hack and slash gamer waste of time. Instead of a game involving repetitive, limited foresight in some immature, killing for fun and adventure concept, *Ardent Offense* offers a more mature encounter in tune with actual and plausible terrors of historical, current, and future crazed society. In real life, combat is no cool game and not to be entered into lightly. War sucks and even a single mistake can be fatal for the most experienced soldier. Though some people may choose not to play the system in such a serious manner, this is very much the grim reality of the *Ardent Offense* world. Also, for a long time militaries have used war games as a means of simulating possible events and learning strategic advantages. Though this is by no means always a completely accurate, reliable way to test strategy or come up with defense plans, they can be helpful in the learning process. There is no reason why beneficial psychological experiences and insights must be limited to strategy simulations and why role players, cinematic or otherwise, cannot benefit as well (some would argue that military simulations are often not exempt from certain aspects of role playing games either, but that's another story). The possibilities are as varied as the future of humankind currently is. Personally, I have always enjoyed playing characters in RPG's that were fairly similar to myself, just appearing in different settings and situations.

The basics of the system used in Ardent Offense.

Since people don't know everything in life, perspectives can involve taking into account the facts, possibilities and probabilities in a given situation along with encounters of new facts, possibilities, probabilities, etc. This role-playing system works on similar concepts. One principle is a general notion of a range of percentages in life from 1% through 100%. As such, the system is a simple odds based system and uses two percentile dice (two ten sided dice, 2d10, meaning one 10 sided dice is counted in the tens place and the other is

counted in the ones place, thus making a roll from 1 to 100 possible, 100 being if both dice show 00). The system can be used fairly easily without dice when using a comparative approach to resolving actions, perhaps with a measure of expendable points (ratings, peculiarities, auctions, bids, etc.) that each character has which can be used as a random sort of means to boost the chances of success. Another system principle is the nature of different situations. Some odds in life are fairly stable. A expert climber is probably going to have little difficulty in climbing a simple tree *under normal conditions*, and for gaming purposes is not a situation that needs a success roll. Other situations and circumstances in life may reveal odds that are more or less possible, or probable. It's about a combination of percentage, odds, situations, etc.

Character Attributes

Here is a basic description of character attributes:

Strength (ST): is simply physical power
Agility (AG): is dexterity, balance, and speed
Perception (PR): is alertness, insight, sight, and smell
Determination (DT): is willpower, motivation, and resistance to pain
Intellect (IN): is simply wisdom
Charisma (CH): is social presentment, influence, and humor
Endurance (EN): is overall health, stamina (per-se, see below)

Actions, damage, etc.

Some role-playing systems are so problematic that sometimes simple actions can't be accomplished without multiple attempts no matter what! Because base odds and modifiers are so fixed in many-systems, oftentimes things end up with unrealistic odds and outcomes. Unrealistic weapons damage is only one example. Other systems have tried to go in a different direction, eliminating many odds and modifiers altogether, to merely assign fixed outcomes to different actions. Though doing such can make for perhaps more realistic outcomes in some cases, results start leaning in a repetitive direction and the chances for unusual haphazard outcomes in life that beat the odds are more removed. All sorts of actions suffer lack of practical realism because of these types of problems. Some role-playing games may involve very little if any combat (honestly, in real life the joy is in not getting caught). Yet when it comes to combat, some things that can be taken into consideration include the design of the body; various hit locations; blood loss; shock; determination; armor damage; equipment damage; skill levels; cover; positioning of the body under cover; previous and current wounds; medical aid; equipment weights; area affected by some weapons; rates and ranges of fire for different weapons; running out of ammunition; weapons malfunction; visibility conditions; terrain conditions; sound conditions; advantage and disadvantage in combat circumstances (such as morale); initiative or simultaneous combat actions; unarmed combat; and much more. Due to many such factors, damage ratings for weapons are often highly arbitrary and unrealistic, as so are general character hit points. General hit points can be used when it comes to things like health, disease, etc. Yet attributes, and the percentage of damage

done to a particular location is the thing to look at when it comes to understanding wounds and recovery ratings. A 50% wound to a critical area is going to be as horrible as it is in real life, yet 50% damage to another area might be toughed out. Like in life, characters will avoid fights and as much as possible if they want to last!

To avoid a strictly formed role-playing system which risks bogging people down in more attention to statistics, dice rolls, points, and such instead of role-playing, the following has been designed. Though some GM's may add further character attributes, or subtract some, it is recommended that no score be allowed under 20%. Between 1 and 100, 50 is obviously a strict average, yet there are different degrees of averages in life and such can be reflected to some degree. For a success roll, a person must roll under the proper percent score to accomplish something or find out the results of something, etc. Modifiers and extra circumstances do exist, yet they also range from 1% through 100% *depending on the situation*. Also, there are times when a characters ST may affect their AG or when some other attribute may affect another attribute. Such is up to the GM and creativity. The attribute of morality has not been included here because that is everyone's own responsibility in RPG's. If a player is some kind of psychopath in real life who thinks murder or perversion is good and wants to have fun doing such in fantasy games because "hey its only fantasy" those people are screwed up already and no good GM is going to waste time role-playing with them.

What about action tables? The difficulty in designing parameters is in trying to avoid the same high degrees of arbitrary, fixed designs that exist so often in role-playing systems. Though such is not entirely avoided here either (it is a game after all), we can cut down on some of the unnecessarily fixed parameters. In real life, the base odds (tables per-se) behind a person's actions change under circumstances and are not just thrown some new arbitrary modifiers to account for differing situations. An action that one day under one set of circumstances might have one set of odds and modifiers for success, another day might have a whole new set of odds and modifiers for success. It is up to the GM and the players how exact (and hence, exacting) they want the role-playing session to be. The general idea is to consider the different ranks, percentages, etc., that people, actions and circumstances are determined to be at, consider how they help or hinder each other, then ultimately use that score or scores to make a success roll or rolls under such. This can be done with great detail or little detail. At times, multiple character attributes may be considered in light of each other, such as where two attributes like ST and AG both affect the outcome of an action. In some circumstances, separate success rolls under each attribute may be considered. In other circumstances, the GM may consider both ST and AG percentages and decide to roll under the highest score that is more applicable to the situation, or perhaps under the average between two scores (add the two scores together and divide by 2).

Skills and detriments also work with a rating between 1-100% and are used by the GM to determine how much of a bonus, if any, a character gets when attempting to accomplish something. As in life, sometimes someone can be real skilled at something, yet it is not their learned expertise that pulls them through the situation, but instead is their natural instincts and/or favorable circumstances that save the day, or vice versa. In combat,

chances to hit range from 1-100%, and depend on several factors such as the position of the characters, the agility of the opponents, etc. An overall body chart can be considered which details locations from 1-100 (see below). Or, depending on the position of the characters, the GM may assign percentages to hit a particular location aimed at, and can include percentages to hit other realistically exposed or vulnerable locations. The player must roll under their agility and anything else applicable, and likewise their opponent must roll under whatever attributes and modifiers the situation calls for. If the targets agility score (or difficulty levels for success in the case of actions) is so high that there is no chance of making a successful roll by the player, then obviously, as in life, the attempt for success by the player does not succeed. The percentage of damage done to a particular location is kept track of and reveals the percentage of functioning left (and with what effectiveness).

Practically any weapon can cause critical damage, and such depends on the circumstances. A small caliber bullet through a heart can kill the same as an arrow, sword, etc. So, instead of assigning all sorts of damage numbers to different weapons (to perhaps later feel that some weapons were left out or that some weapons were assigned inaccurate ratings for damage), weapons damage simply ranges from 1-100% according to either how the GM assigns such under a given situation, or by a roll of the dice. This can be pre-figured with or without player advice, or spur of the moment during a game. Armor is handled the same as weapons damage except that armor subtracts 1-100% damage, and depending on the armor and the type of hit it takes, it can decrease in its value of protection as the situation calls for. Some armor is immune to certain attacks; shooting at tank armor with a pellet gun is futile.

Time, movement, etc.

A turn is resolved when one or more characters attempt to perform some action(s). Such involves determining things like how long a turn is in game time, how far characters can move, how many actions can be performed by a character at once, who has the initiative (if anyone does) and so on. Though the GM must figure these things out, players' descriptions play a big part in the GM's doing so. Such things also depend on what action is being undertaken, the relevant ability or skill differences between the characters (or between a single character and the difficulty of an action), and what the circumstances are which are relevant to take into consideration. Characters with highest scores always go first (and so on, in succession) unless the numbers are too close to call / be relevant, in which case actions may be considered to take place simultaneously, or a success roll can be attempted under a number or numbers which the GM and players agree upon. Hence, there can be different levels of initiative, success, failure, etc.

Helpful Tables

Levels: (Possibly used to understand ratings of skills, attributes, difficulty of actions, required levels for success, people, etc.)

00-20   Unskilled level
21-44   Novice level
45-56   Average level
57-75   Above average level
76-84   Professional level
85-94   Master level
95-100 Grand Master level

Location Table:

1-2	Brain	30-53	Chest
3	Left eye	54-55	Heart
4	Right eye	56-78	Abdomen
5	Nose	79-80	Groin
6	Jaw		
7	Throat	81-82	Left hip
		83-84	Thigh
8-9	Left shoulder	85	Knee
10-11	Upper arm	86-87	Calf
12	Elbow	88	Ankle
13-14	Forearm	89-90	Foot
15	Wrist		
16	Hand	91-92	Right hip
17	Finger	93-94	Thigh
18	Thumb	95	Knee
		96-97	Calf
19-20	Right shoulder	98	Ankle
21-22	Upper arm	99-100	Foot
23	Elbow		
24-25	Forearm		
26	Wrist		
27	Hand		
28	Finger		
29	Thumb		

The Ardent Offense setting

The disparity between rich and poor grew greater, civilization surged with technological wonders, and materialism was common. The creation of more and more luxuries to make life easier came at the price of more responsibilities and more doors for the corrupt to take advantage of. In the process of building technological wonders, the groundwork was laid for growing dependency and oppression of rights. Questions on human rights were asked in light of new advancements, but were answered in light of the times. Relativism and apathy infested the earth. New security uses were found for technological advances that had been made for leisure. Methods to ensure ease of commerce and regulations to make commerce secure and profitable were always something that contained risks and challenges. Technological advancements had brought many truly wonderful things with it, yet screwed up humanity was still the same. What was automation for ease of commerce one day, became means to secure power and law enforcement the next.

The nations of the world were increasingly affected by what other nations were doing as advancements made it all the more easy and necessary to become part of the growing world community. Companies consolidated, merged and grew more efficient. Satellites and space stations circled the earth en mass, a few bases were built on the moon, and people walked on mars. Some corporations grew so powerful as to cause great tension between the nations, and in many cases, were not only the source of many conflicts across the earth, but were driving factors behind the continued existence or not of several governments. As those on top grew fatter often at the expense of those on the bottom, civil unrest became more commonplace. Employee strikes increased with intensity, and workmanship declined alarmingly in all sorts of areas. The cost of space projects rose dramatically, leaving space mainly (if not entirely) to the wealthiest governments and corporations. Eyes and hands turned more towards Earth's resources.

Terrorist threats by factions from countries left out in the cold, and by vigilantes from within one's own country, were the new "silent war." Civil wars and rebellions dotted the world. As problems increased, countries often discovered the difficulty in ruling large territories without cutting corners. Nations clamped down harder in the spirit of unity to throw aside "hate" and division, and they embrace together the new future that they had created, often lumping those involved with corruption (including some corporations) together with the average oppressed citizen. On top of all the typical corruption and criminal activity, the somewhat abused Robin Hood mentality of robbing from the unjustly rich to give to the poor (often only an excuse for corrupt behavior), became more and more common among the disgruntled citizen who just wanted to make a living. Implosion increased and those on top cut themselves further off from the rest to protect their interests. Law enforcement groups (some of which actually had their roots in necessary beginnings) became more essential to keeping world peace as turmoil increased. They gained more power and responsibility and became more involved in internal affairs, seeking to keep the peace through sometimes good means, and other times through means that were very dark. Such was increasingly done on their own terms, terms that had corrupted along with everything else.

With world resources abused and in peril, and people ignoring root problems, more corruption took place.   Small businesses took a beating. Small towns and cities began to dry up. People immigrated and migrated into huge Metropolitan cities already overcrowded, the rich and powerful often inhabiting the center with the rest spread out around them. Commercialism was everywhere. Criminals fed on the unfortunate, and on other criminals. The strong beat the weak and the smart beat the strong and destiny beat everyone.

Everything happened so gradually that many people did not take notice. Sure, there was always the crazed zealot, ready to cry alarm at every possible threat to liberty anyway, but very few people opened their eyes. The interlinking of events, the association of different groups with undesirable elements, and more, all contributed to unfounded hatred, misunderstandings, false accusations, etc. "Civilization" drew the noose tighter around its neck. Building on corrupt foundations, humankind entered a new dark age. This is now the age of the techno-gods. Darkness is a matter of perspective, and it looks pretty bright to some!

Governments around the world are disintegrating, face the threat thereof, or have become extremely solid regimes amid seas of chaos. As nations begin to struggle more in coping with internal and external discord, desperate measures that were once considered too barbaric have become more commonplace in the name of "law." As time and the above circumstance progress, so have natural and human made disasters. Nations that did not have them already have developed "Bad Lands," "No Mans Lands" and the like. These are deserted lands long abandoned, wastelands due to catastrophes. Sometimes these places are devoid of human life (sometimes devoid of practically any life for that matter), other times they contain human inhabitants in all the various shades of color that can come about under such circumstances.   In some places, people can travel for weeks without seeing any sign of civilization, in other places different size communities exist by diverse means and standards. Earth's technology is often an extreme patchwork of high and low tech. Alternative sources of power using natural energy concepts are more common among the "better off" poor populations, and are becoming more common everywhere.

What about the details? That is your decision. However, this is a certainty; if there are oppressors, there are the oppressed, and if there are the oppressed, in *Ardent Offense* there is bound to be a quality rebel amidst all the crap.