

A few thoughts about Role-Playing in a Post Apocalyptic World.

By their nature an RPG set in this environment is a dark and dangerous place. The mutations, to plants, animals, and people make it dangerous enough, without factoring in the single greatest threat; mankind.

The bad guys don't wear black hats. The nice farmers that you spent the night with, may have the remains of the last poor, hapless, and unarmed visitor hanging in the smoke-house. Even the good guys will on occasion do things that, in our civilized, comfortable, clean, and relatively polite society, seem barbaric.

This is the biggest change our heroes have to learn to live with. Compared to the average citizen of the new world, even a MARS team sniper is a boy scout. These people have grown up in, lived in, and will die in a harsh and deadly world.

If the ravagers, mutants, animals, or your neighbor don't kill you, the very water, or air might tomorrow. This is a world where the weak are victims. Death is a release, and the good die too young.

Strength of arms, determination, hard work, and willingness to do what's necessary, determines the winners (survivors) from the losers (dead). This is a world of warlords, wizards, slavers, and honest folk. Good may triumph, but only if they are willing to get dirty. Think Thundarr with guns.

Some things to remember...

1. THE WORLD HAS CHANGED... It isn't the world we grew up in, or the one we want our children to grow up in. The veneer of society and civilization is JUST beginning to be put back into place. There are still areas out there where a person will be raped, killed and worse just because they look tasty. The water glows, rain still brings down fallout, rivers have changed their course. The winds howl, and there is no release from suffering, save death.
2. Applying your own values to a situation is fine, but there isn't an easy way out sometimes. Bruce Morrow could have, with his time travel capability stopped the whole war BEFORE it started. With the resources at his disposal, he could easily have proved (even to a government as jaded as ours) that he knew what would happen and when. It is obvious to anyone who has studied the dynamics of this situation, that the war and all the accompanying misery was part of a larger picture. That the struggle would, at some time in the future, be worth the cost. The deaths of billions to secure a future, as a paradise or hell, was in at least his opinion, a sacrifice that was needed to be made. You can't make an omelet...
3. Project Directors and players need to understand the reality of this situation. If you want a very good example of how moral, good, and generous mankind is, just watch the news after a tornado, hurricane, or earthquake. Watch all those scumbags that loot stores and homes. Look at the tv and you'll see a ten year old girl, in the most powerful nation on earth, guarding her home, with her dad's shotgun, to prevent looting.
4. The project and its personnel are the next, best hope of mankind. Review your game playing style. Don't put too many, constraints on your players or your bad guys. I'm not saying that the bad guys can't or won't be honorable, just that they **all** aren't that way. A person who will kill you for your shoes, skin you, grind your dead body into sausage, sell it to starving people, and use your equipment to do the same to others, **DESERVES NO MERCY**.
5. The characters are in this for the long haul. The opinions of the populace, in the grand scheme of things is rather, inconsequential. AFTER, the bad guys are killed, driven off etc, then you can help rebuild. You can't do anyone ANY good if you've stood against the wall.

Sacrificing yourself for your team, the good guys, helpless people, etc, is always a good way to die. Sacrificing yourself for some set of higher ideals; just gets you dead.

This is not to say that there are not pockets of civility and humanity out there. There are. They just are very few and far between. After the war, mankind had to adjust. The thousands of objects, chemical assistance, artifacts, and services that we take for granted ARE GONE. No more Big Macs, Budweisers, Cheetoos, Insulin, Microwave ovens, telephones, or the Internet. Not gradually either, literally within days. Our society is thrown back 200 years at least. In some places, even farther.

The survivors have to make hard decisions everyday. Do we expend resources on the terminally ill? DO we expend power, a very limited resource, in keeping Insulin cool? Do we expend medicine on those people, dying of radiation sickness? Triage becomes a way of life. In fact, do we even expend food on those persons, medically or due to age who can't contribute to the overall good? Do we shoot looters? What is the penalty for stealing food? As you can see, this is just a small selection of the questions these people deal with everyday. After 150 years, this has become an ingrained thought process. It has become part of the culture. New laws sprang up over-night.

A special note to Project Game Masters.

You have, by starting to run this game opened yourself up for a new perspective. Consider your own situation before running this. Are you married, do you have children? Where do you live? Are you near a ground zero? If so, try to imagine them 5 minutes after the war starts. Dead by either heat or concussion. Or if they survived, blind, burned, screaming, and dying. How do you proceed? On a personal note: Do I have the strength both physical and mental to kill them quickly and painlessly, to spare them the death that awaits? If not near a ground zero, how do I proceed, how will I provide for them? What will I have to become, to ensure their survival?

You have opened yourself up for a bunch of new, and in many cases, terrifying nightmares. The best way to face a fear, is to control it. By learning the dynamics of this game, you control the circumstances of it. The fear doesn't go away, but it does become manageable.

This game will also allow you to look at the dark and savage side of human nature. In a world where grandma's carry Uzi's, all things are possible. Your players are the pawns in your game. They have the potential to become kings, or knaves as you and they choose.

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