

Sample file

# CITYBOOK<sup>TM</sup> V

## SIDESHOW

*Edited by Paul Jaquays*

19

*fully-described businesses, organizations  
and cultural establishments  
for use with any role-playing system,  
including over 50 completely developed  
non-player personalities to interact with  
your players' characters in City adventures.*

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Published by  
**Flying Buffalo, Inc.**

Produced by  
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# Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction .....                             | 3         |
| GM Guidelines .....                            | 4         |
| Explanation of Maps .....                      | 6         |
| Map Key for All Maps .....                     | 6-7       |
| Sideshow Themes .....                          | 8         |
| <b>Organizations &amp; Individuals .....</b>   | <b>9</b>  |
| The Pack .....                                 | 10        |
| <i>by Thomas Kane</i>                          |           |
| The Old Man of the City .....                  | 14        |
| <i>by J. D. Kirkland-Revels</i>                |           |
| The Sliming Path .....                         | 19        |
| <i>by John Nephew</i>                          |           |
| Terrkot's People .....                         | 23        |
| <i>by Michael A. Stackpole</i>                 |           |
| The Gaggle .....                               | 27        |
| <i>by Elizabeth T. Danforth</i>                |           |
| <b>Personal Services .....</b>                 | <b>31</b> |
| Hilkin's Specialties & Esoterica .....         | 32        |
| <i>by Lawrence Watt-Evans</i>                  |           |
| The Blue Maid .....                            | 37        |
| <i>by Shawn Moore</i>                          |           |
| Riversent .....                                | 42        |
| <i>by B. Dennis Sustare</i>                    |           |
| Enefene .....                                  | 47        |
| <i>by Randall G. Kuipers</i>                   |           |
| Brumar's Workshop .....                        | 52        |
| <i>by Bruce Jaquays</i>                        |           |
| Spittin' Image .....                           | 56        |
| <i>by Mark O'Green</i>                         |           |
| The Face Place .....                           | 60        |
| <i>by Mark O'Green</i>                         |           |
| Smilin' Al Crum's Sideshow Tours .....         | 62        |
| <i>by Mark O'Green</i>                         |           |
| Knight's Cranial Hospitaler .....              | 64        |
| <i>by Panda England and Norma Blair</i>        |           |
| Nadorix's Necropolis .....                     | 69        |
| <i>by John Terra</i>                           |           |
| Komtoi's Cartage & Caravansary .....           | 74        |
| <i>by Bear Peters</i>                          |           |
| <b>Food, Lodging &amp; Entertainment .....</b> | <b>79</b> |
| The Panther Club .....                         | 80        |
| <i>by John Merkel</i>                          |           |
| The Bottomless Keg .....                       | 86        |
| <i>by Kevin Crossman</i>                       |           |
| The Silver Pelt .....                          | 91        |
| <i>by Bill Paley</i>                           |           |

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First Printing: August 1991.



**A Catalyst Product**

— a catalyst to spark your imagination —

**On the cover:** Leona and the slug-like Slorup, leaders of The Sliming Path confront the mysterious Old Man of the City within the shrine of his official residence, Thrupp House.

# Introduction

Once again, it becomes my distinct privilege to welcome you back to the City. Perhaps it may be that *you* never left, but in *CityBook IV: On the Road*, we traveled far from our wondrous metropolis, taking carriages, caravans slug-powered riverboats, delivery dragons and even a long ship from beyond the grave to visit exotic places (even other dimensions). And now, as we return with our senses attuned to the mysterious and the exotic, we find such wondrous places here in our own City.

Come wipe the dust from your boots, take a dipper of cold refreshing water from the fountain, and settle back. For if you have a taste for the unusual, be prepared to find it here.

As with other metropolitan areas, the City has its unique, ethnic quarters where expressions of cultures from around the world are to be found. One of these neighborhoods goes beyond simple human cultures. More than just elves, dwarves and hairfooted halflings (hairfeeted?), this neighborhood is home to creatures not usually found or accepted among humans. In the City, this neighborhood has a name ...

## Sideshow.

It's a terrible name, a human name — an unkind, unloving human name for a part of the City that overflows with unusual, unhuman and undeniably exciting establishments and characters. And yet, to the denizens of Sideshow, the name is a badge worn proudly. For here, amidst persecution and segregation — they thrive.

For the adventurous, Sideshow offers alluring attractions. Where else can one find creatures of myth walking the streets, monsters shopping the markets, sleek-furred half-animal serving the hungry and weary in public houses, and private dining establishments, and gelatinous blue blobs selling snack foods to titillate the palates of nearly every sentient species?

Sideshow literally demands investigation by the heroes of your world. And that world doesn't necessarily need to be one of medieval fantasy. In a blink of an eye, the fantasy denizens of Sideshow become the alien residents of a some future universe. Blink again, and the residents become the exotic human proprietors of some very weird shops in your 20th century campaign — imagine a horror campaign built around Elizabeth Danforth's gargoyles ...

If you have been a frequent visitor to the City, you will find that little has changed here. Peruse the book for those places that most attract your attention.

If you are a newcomer to the world of the City, then let me talk a bit about what you will find here. As with all Catalyst books, everything is described in "generic" terms. That means that no game-specific numbers and statistics are given. CityBooks are written to provide a variety of people, places and things for your games. It is up to you as Game Master (GM) to add the numbers (if you need to) that will fit them into your preferred game system and world. The coding system explained in the section entitled "GM Guidelines" should make this easy, and please, do feel free to modify, edit, expand and otherwise change things to fit your game system. After all we write these things to encourage your creativity, not stifle it.

In the past two CityBooks, we've experimented with creating crosslinks between establishments within the book. In laymen's

terms, it means that you'll find that personalities from one establishment know and interact with personalities from other establishments. Brumar the dwarf of *Brumar's Workshop* orders take-out dwarven cuisine from *The Bottomless Keg* and teaches craftsmanship to the restaurant owner's son, constructs and maintains an internal plumbing and boiler system for *The Panther Club* and sells his mouse-traps-from-hell through the strange shop, *Enefene*. An unpleasant fellow known as The Old Man of the City seems to have something to do with almost everybody, yet almost nobody has anything to do with him.

Despite being linked, the establishments of Sideshow can be used separately. None of them depreciate in play value if pulled free of their linkages.

These places are yours to play with, to change, to warp, reform, deform, defame and kill. You can do anything you desire with them, and we won't cry that you've ruined our little piece of "art." This CityBook is yours, make our ideas and imaginings a part of your world.

As to the CityBook itself, once again we've sourced material from talented authors both inside and out of the gaming industry. This CityBook afficianadoes (those with all the CityBooks) will recognize names like Michael A. Stackpole, Elizabeth T. Danforth, and Bear Peters. We've also secured entries from some talented new names in the industry like Thomas Kane, John Nephew, Mark O'Green and John Terra, whose names appear on game products across the industry. And of course, we are quite excited to present a piece by an award-winning fantasy and science fiction author whose roots are planted in fantasy gaming, Lawrence Watt-Evans.

The multiple-artist format we began in CityBook IV seemed to work, both for us and you the users (read that as: we received no complaints), so we've continued it again this year. Among our talents this year are nominees for and winners of some of the major peer and juried awards in science fiction and fantasy art, including Hugos, Chesley's and Illustrators of the Future.

You know that we like feedback on the City. We want you to tell us what we're missing or doing wrong. We may not agree with you, but we'll listen politely. Don't forget to tell us what we're doing right. We're human (at least it says so on my birth certificate). We need our ego's stroked just like everyone else.

As ever, the epic saga of the City continues. As I write this page in early June, there are three more CityBooks underway. The themes for those books have been selected and writers of past, present and future renown are hard at work to fill the streets and byways of *your* City.

We are always on the lookout for talented writers with innovative and creative ideas for the CityBook line of products. If you think you have the skill and professionalism it takes to be a contributor to CityBook, send a 9" x 12" envelope with enough postage to cover two ounces mailing weight to: CityBook Authors' Guides, c/o Flying Buffalo, Inc., P.O. Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252-1467. Address specific comments or questions to CityBook Editor, care of the same address. A self-addressed, stamped envelope ensures a reply.

Enjoy ...

# GM Guidelines

Since *CityBook IV* is a generic role-playing aid, no game-specific statistics for NPC's or monsters have been given. However, as an aid to the GM who must convert our descriptions into game mechanics, we have provided the following guidelines to help you in adapting *CityBook IV* to your favorite game system. Keep in mind, however, that this is now *your* book; if you wish to change anything, go ahead!

## General Attributes

It isn't necessary to give each non-player character (NPC) in *CityBook IV* complete attributes such as Power, Luck, Wisdom and so forth. However, should you choose to do so, you will note in the character descriptions such phrases as "very strong," "quick," "stupid," "beautiful," etc. By noting these phrases and reflecting them in the NPC's attributes, you should come out with a fairly accurate set of statistics for the person in question.

## Fighting Prowess

At times, playeradventurers will probably get into fights with non-player characters. We have provided a seven-level coding system to describe how well a particular *CityBook IV* NPC can fight. In some cases, the combat ability of an NPC is given in terms of a specific weapon or weapons (e.g., Augustine is Excellent with a thrown knife, and Very Good with a sword, but Poor otherwise). In other cases, the fighting prowess is overall (e.g., Stinya Shortfur of *Riversent* is Poor overall).

There are two ways to randomize for the fighting prowess of an NPC. You can roll 1d6 for the attribute (6 means the character is an Excellent fighter) or you can roll 1d100 and use the percentages given after the ratings to determine the NPC's skill level. Remember, the percentages refer to how well that NPC stacks up in relation to all other fighters in your average world. Therefore, a "poor" fighting prowess would account for about 40% of all fighters met, and an "excellent" prowess would only fit about 4% of the fighters. If you put a "poor" fighter into your campaign, we expect that 60% of the rest of the fighters in your world can soundly thrash him.

These are the codes for fighting prowess:

- Poor.** Unfamiliar with combat arts; can be easily wounded or killed. (01 - 40%)
- Average.** A run-of-the-mill type, but certainly no mistaking him for a hero. (41 - 59%)
- Fair.** Better than average and will acquit himself adequately. (60 - 74%)
- Good.** Can go one-on-one with seasoned veteran fighters. (75 - 84%)
- Very Good.** This person can cause a lot of trouble in

combat. (85 - 95%)

- Excellent.** If blood is spilled, it's not likely to come from this character... (96 - 100%)
- Legendary.** This character's skill with weapons goes beyond mortal limits. Bards will sing tales of his or her fighting prowess for generations to come. (101%+)

## Magic Ability

To determine the expertise with which an NPC uses magic power, *CityBook IV* employs a seven-level system similar to the one for fighting prowess. This is listed in the NPC descriptions as "Magic Ability," and will be followed by a listing of the particular areas the magic-user might be competent in (see "The Eight C's of Magic" below). If an NPC has no Magic Ability listed, then none exists.

The codes for Magic Ability are:

- Poor.** A hedge wizard or apprentice. Might very well turn himself into a frog. (01 - 40%)
- Average.** Competent, but hardly a world-shaker. Only a few spells at his command. (41 - 59%)
- Fair.** Possesses a wider range of spells. Effective, but not powerful. (60 - 74%)
- Good.** Knows numerous spells in many categories, and is versatile in their use. (75 - 84%)
- Very Good.** Knows powerful spells in most of the Eight C's. Formidable. (85 - 95%)
- Excellent.** Not a person to cross. Can easily command almost all the known spells, and might be able to turn the party into anchovy paste with a single gesture. (96 - 100%)
- Legendary.** Skills may exceed mortal limits. Found only in god-like beings or heroes out of Mythology. Spells, who needs mere spells with power like this? (101%+)

Given the diversity of magic systems in fantasy gaming, it is impossible to assign specific spells or powers to any magic-using NPC in *CityBook*. However, spells or powers can be broken down into categories of magic, regardless of what game system you use. Thanks to Mike Stackpole, *CityBook* has the "Eight C's System" to give some idea of what type of magic a particular NPC might wield.

- C1. Combat Magic.** Any spell used primarily in an offensive/defensive manner in combat.
- C2. Curative Magic.** Any spell used to heal wounds, cure diseases, stop poison damage, etc.
- C3. Clairvoyant Magic.** Any spell used to detect things: secret doors, magic, hidden or trapped items, etc.

- ❑ **C4. Conveyance Magic.** Teleportation, levitation, flying, telekinesis spells, etc.
- ❑ **C5. Communication Magic.** Any spell used to communicate: telepathy, translation, hypnosis, magic reading spells, etc.
- ❑ **C6. Construction Magic.** Any spell which uses matter or energy to “build,”: wall spells, protective fields, stone-shaping spells, etc.
- ❑ **C7. Concealment Magic.** Any spell which serves to hide or misdirect: invisibility, illusion, shape-shifting spells, etc.
- ❑ **C8. Conjunction Magic.** Any spell which produces a condition or entity: light spells, weather control, demon-summoning spells, etc.

Keep in mind that a character with Magic Ability need not always be a sorcerer. An NPC could possess certain magic abilities as a result of owning some device or from some form of supernatural intervention. You can also use the Magic Ability Chart randomly by rolling either 1d6 or 1d100 (as was suggested for the fighting prowess chart) to judge the level of a magic-using character, and 1d8 to determine what areas on the “Eight C’s” list the character is competent in.

## Locks

Light-fingered thieves and pilfering rogues are ever-present in the world of fantasy, and run rather thick in this *CityBook*. To help the GM deal with these types, *CityBook* uses a system to code the difficulty of any locks encountered. These codes appear in the text when a reference is made to a chest, door, or similar locked item (e. g., “locked<sup>3</sup>,” which means the lock is “fair”), and usually on the maps themselves in reference to doors.

The codes for locks are as follows:

- ❑ **1. Poor.** An orphan with a hat-pin could open this lock. (01 - 40%)
- ❑ **2. Average.** A little tougher to jimmy this open; just adequate. (41 - 59%)
- ❑ **3. Fair.** Takes some effort to open. (60 - 74%)
- ❑ **4. Good.** Particularly tough. Probably will require special tools to open. (75 - 84%)
- ❑ **5. Very Good.** Will take even a master thief a long time to open. (85 - 95%)
- ❑ **6. Excellent.** Could require magic or a howitzer to open easily—unless you have the key. (96 - 100%).
- ❑ **7. Legendary.** Assume that a god or someone with like powers wanted this thing locked up. Definitely has some kind of magical component or defenses built in. (101% +)

Again, the percentages here refer to what percentage of such locks exist in an average cross-section. Many locks fall into the “poor” category, and there are only a few truly “excellent” locks, and “legendary” locks are found only in legendary situations.

Indeed, most doors are not locked at all.

You could also use the percentages to indicate how many thieves could jimmy the lock. For example, at least 60% of all thieves could jimmy a “poor” lock, while 4% or less could undo an “excellent” lock. The GM will have to determine how well a particular thief character does when confronted with a certain level of lock (i. e., a very poor thief would have lots of trouble with even a “fair” lock). Once again, a GM can randomize on this lock system to learn the nature of any lock.

## Monetary Guidelines

Prices in *CityBook* are usually given in overall terms (i. e., “low,” “reasonable,” and “expensive”). You should use common sense regarding these terms; a reasonable price for a broadsword would be outrageous when applied to a single arrow. Where prices are actually listed, *CityBook* assumes this standard: 10 copper pieces = 1 silver piece; 10 silver pieces = 1 gold piece; a gold piece represents approximately \$1 in U.S. Currency. This currency system obviously must be altered to fit your own economic system.

## Time Frame

*CityBook* uses a standard 24-hour day as its time frame. If your world operates under a different system, alter the times given to fit it.

## Non-Human Races

*Sideshow* is an atypical *CityBook*. Most *CityBooks* deal with human establishments and have human (or near human) proprietors. For the most part, the races to be found in *Sideshow* are not human (and many no where near it). Many of these races are unique to this book and will not be found as stock races in your typical roleplay game system. Simply use game statistics for creatures that best match the ones found here. If a particular race doesn’t work for a GM’s world, he or she should feel free to adapt it to a more human equivalent.

## World History

Several of the establishments in this *CityBook* mention events that took place long ago, far away or some combination thereof. While most of the details are hazy enough to slip them into any campaign as rumors, some of the events might conflict with established campaign history. In this case the GM should change the historical events to something parallel in his own world or slowly let the players “discover” these new facts as needed.