

# **RIFTS: The Erin Tarn Chronicles**

## **Issue 1**

by Jeff Lilly

With inspiration and assistance from Mark Dudley and Pam Bliss

Erin Tarn and the Rifts setting created by Kevin Siembieda

### **Page 1:**

(We open on a grassy field surrounded by forest.)

(Erin Tarn's Diary is represented by a cream-colored text panel. Erin's handwriting is strong and restless.)

**ETD:** People like to talk about the old days.

(Poking its head out of the grass is an odd creature that looks like a mash-up between a dinosaur, a snake and something else. Alien. Long and whippy and quick. We do not yet have a sense of scale; is this some giant prehistoric monster?)

**ETD:** But there's no one alive who remembers before the world changed.

(The creature sniffs at a piece of meat laid out on a leaf. Obvious bait.)

**ETD:** So why does it matter?

(The creature reacts as the trap is sprung- a snare.)

**ETD:** We have the here and the now.

(The creature dangles, hissing, by one foot.)

(A hand lifts the snare.)

**ETD:** Everything else is just a story, right?

### **Page 2:**

(We see Erin, her sister Alix, and their friend Wimik, three heads in the BG, all staring at the little creature, struggling in the FG. Erin wisely gives it a lot of rope. It's obvious now that it's quite small, maybe 8 inches long total.)

**Wimik:** What is it?

**Erin:** Dunno.

**Alix:** I'll bet it's good eatin'!

Shot from further out, showing the area, showing the kids. They all wear clothing that looks a combination of homespun and repurposed... pants, shirts, overshirts, made of rugged materials like denim, patched and re-patched, sewn from pieces of other fabrics, parachute nylon, etc, the other half woven by hand, with extra pockets sewn in, etc. They also have knapsacks and such made in the same way.

**Erin:** You'll eat anything, sis.

(Alix is putting the creature into a homemade cage as Erin and Wimik look on. Erin points into the distance.)

**Alix** (small balloon, background): Ow! It bites!

**Erin** (to Wimik): One more snare to check. Then, how about we see where that road goes?

(Alix is packing the cage into a knapsack.)

**Wimik:** Come on, Erin. We're already way past the boundary!

**Erin:** Who's gonna know?

**Wimik:** We're really gonna get it!

**Erin:** You scared?

### **Page 3:**

(Wimik pulls himself up manfully)

**Wimik:** Not scared of anything.

**Erin** (smirk): Then prove it.

(Alix pops in between them)

**Alix:** Aww, cut the mush, you two.

(They chase a giggling Alix)

(Scene change: Walking along what once was a major roadway, existing now only as a shallow, nearly treeless depression with trees on either side. We might even get the impression that attempts were made to clear it away in recent years, perhaps some stumps of larger trees, etc. But it's been neglected since then, and years of growth clog the way. The kids show their

personalities in their body language- Wimik is cautious and keen for danger, Erin observant, drinking everything in, Alix running a bit apart, swinging a stick.)

**ETD:** But stories inspire us to create new futures. These roads, for example, once linked cities, great cities, much larger than Gen.

**Page 4:**

(They stop. Wimik's nose is twitching.)

**Erin:** What you got?

(Wimik points.)

**Wimik:** Metal. A good amount, over that way.

(They cut away from the road and up a hill.)

**ETD:** Like my teacher says, everything is a circle. If we remember the stories then someday maybe we can make those big cities again...

(they crest the hill)

(eyes wide!)

**ETD:** ...and all the things that went with them.

(Over-the-shoulder. A landslide or other event has caused a big chunk of hillside to slide, revealing the remnants to buildings. This area used to be an interstate highway exit; there might also be the remnants of concrete pillars for an overpass, the bridge long destroyed, the pillars reduced to stumps.)

(they rush down the hill, kids in a candy store)

**Page 5:**

(they walk among the ruins. Alix has found what's still barely recognizable as a gas pump from the strata of debris and is peering down the nozzle. Erin and Wimik in the FG, Wimik turning over something he's found, Erin looking on.)

**Wimik:** Wonder what this place was.

**Erin:** Settlement of some kind. Strange, though.

**Alix:** Is it on the map?

(Shot of Erin. She's unfolding a well-worn service station-type road map, marked with annotations and symbols in many hands)

**Erin:** No. Just think, people once lived here, before the...

**Alix:** Wait, that's Rowland's map! How did you...?

**Erin:** I borrowed it.

**Alix:** He's gonna kill us!

**Erin** (ignoring her): We have a couple hours of sun left. Let's have a look.

(They split up and begin to scavenge, Alix giving her one last evil eye.)

(We see that Erin has wandered far from the others, as they are dots in the background. She's picking something up, examining it, ready to thrust it into a pouch on her belt. Something like a Zippo or other small object.)

### **Page 6:**

(Erin finds a building entrance. She spots something.)

(It's the remains of a small campfire, built under the shelter of a metal sheet, to hide the flames from rain or observation. Also, the entrance looks recently dug out.)

(Erin enters. It's a diner. Counter, stools. Tables and chairs strewn about, the floor buried in dirt. Broken glass and rocks and bits of brick and cinder block strewn about, fallen ceiling panels and fluorescent lights, the ceiling half-collapsed. It's a lonely and desolate place.)

(She spots something on the floor. She kneels and examines it. Footprints, bare and human-looking, in the dust. Alongside them, a drop of blood. Dried, but still obviously recent.)

(Larger panel. Erin looks up, hearing something, but still facing the camera. Behind her, crouched on the countertop, we see a young man, maybe Erin's age. He is beautiful and wild, long hair, but dirty and dressed in the remains of pants, maybe jeans. No shoes. His arms and chest are covered with cuts and scratches.)

### **Page 7:**

(Erin has begun to turn, but the boy has leaped onto her, knocking her flat.)

**Erin:** (cry of pain / surprise)

(Erin and the boy roll on the floor. He's stronger than her, but Erin's grown up tussling and she's no slouch.)

(She's on her stomach, almost helpless, but sinks her teeth into his arm or hand. It's the boy's turn to yowl in pain.)

(Erin flips over on her back, scrabbling for a weapon, the boy still on top.)

(The boy, in this moment of clarity, stops for a moment, seeing Erin for the first time. His eyes light up, understanding that she's not an enemy, and his face is a lot less scary.)

(Erin, missing this, or just not taking a chance, clobbers him on the temple with a rock or piece of brick or other piece of detritus.)

(The boy slumps. Erin is up and running.)

### **Page 8:**

(Erin spots Alix and Wimik up on the ridge, where the overpass used to be. It's gone now, leaving an open space to the old interstate below.)

(Erin calls their names.)

(Alix and Wimik both leap up from their crouches and knock Erin flat.)

**Alix:** Shh!

**Wimik:** Come look. Careful.

(They crawl forward and look over into the gap, Erin still glancing behind.)

(Below we see a mobile Pre-Coalition force... not too large, but some serious equipment, more than enough to seriously ruin several days. Some of the equipment is older, recognizable-patched-up tanks and APCs, but there are a couple of new things, too... hover vehicles and maybe a prototype spider walker as a centerpiece. Ground troops in armor keep watch on the perimeter. They are approaching, maybe still a quarter-mile off.)

### **Page 9:**

**Alix** (awed): Outsiders!

**Erin:** We're the outsiders out here, Alix.

**Alix:** Where did they come from?

**Erin:** Chi-town. See that rune?

(Maybe inset close-up of the side of a vehicle, a stylized rune depicting a fortress city)

**Wimik:** What are *they* doing out *here*?

(Wimik looks up. His eyes, sharper than his human friends', have spotted something.)

**Wimik:** Flyers! Come on!

(The three dash away from the edge, keeping low, ducking behind the hulk of an overturned box truck)

(Zooming overhead are a pair of whatever pre-coalition flying armor would best evoke the Rifts setting.)

### **Page 10:**

**Alix** (plucking at the front of Erin's shirt, which the mystery boy ripped): What did you do?

**Erin:** Never mind! Get to the trees!

(They take off, Erin covering the rear. She steals one more look toward the building where she left the boy. Then she runs into the woods after her friends.)

(Little transition panel, indicating that it is some time later. The sun is going down.)

(The three are walking easily now, through grassy rocky area with small trees.)

**Wimik:** Do you think we got away clean?

**Erin:** Doesn't matter now. We're back inside the Veil. Nice and safe...

(Small panel- a small projectile zips by, startling them, coming closest to hitting Alix.)

### **Page 11:**

(They look to the source, OC. Alix and Erin have slingshots out.)

**Alix:** Hey! Watch it!

(We see Rohrik and his gang, maybe six total, two of them girls. All of them are human, mostly Erin's age or a little older. Rohrik and one of the other boys are old enough to have the beginnings of pathetic, scraggly peach-fuzz beards on their faces. One of the girls is smiling and lowering a slingshot, obviously just having fired on them. This is Teal.)

**Rohrik:** Well, well. If it ain't the school kids.

**Erin:** At least we're smart enough to go to school, Rohrik.

**Rohrik:** That's Rohrik, son of Kindred, to you.

**Erin:** Ooh, big man. Now that your daddy's mayor, how come he doesn't have a job for you? Don't his boots need licking or something?

**Rohrik:** Oh, I do have a job. Finding lawbreakers, like you.

**Wimik:** Piss off, Rohrik.

**Rohrik:** Did you say something, freak?

**Wimik:** I said piss off, monkey boy.

(Teal lets a shot go, right at Wimik.)

**Page 12:**

(Beautifully aimed, right at his head.)

(Just before it gets there, there's a spark of light and the projectile, a clay ball, shatters into dust.)

(Alix fires back.)

(The shot clips Teal on the ear, painfully, drawing blood.)

**Teal:** (Shriek of pain.)

**Rohrik:** Get 'em!

(The others hesitate. Rohrik pulls back his sleeve, makes a fist.)

**Rohrik:** His freak magic don't work against fists.

**Page 13:**

(Erin, Alix, and Wimik are running through the woods, along a now well-traveled path.)

**Erin:** Great shot, Alix!

**Alix:** I was aiming for her nose.

(They barrel along, coming into a clearing. We get the impression of a town in the clearing; buildings built from local lumber and scavenged materials, everything cleverly put together and rather neat.)

**Erin:** Head for school!

(Erin, in the lead, dashes around a corner... and plows headlong into Bell.)

(Bell goes down; she drops a toolbox and a container of nuts and bolts and other mechanical oddments, sending everything flying, Erin landing on top of her.)

**Page 14:**

(Alix and Wimik come skidding to a halt and are wrestled down, the one guy and one girl on Alix, two boys and the other girl on Wimik. Rohrik lets the others do his dirty work, standing a bit apart.)

(The adults in the area come rushing and and try to pull them all apart.)

Mayor Kindred (OC): What is this?

(Mayor Kindred comes stalking in. Unlike almost all of the other men we see in Gen, He has a mustache, rather vainly cared for, and is wearing what looks to be a parody of an early 21<sup>st</sup> century suit.)

(Rohrik and his gang all stand. Erin and her friends remain on the ground. Erin has disentangled herself from Bell and is starting to help her gather things.)

(Erin shoots Mayor Kindred a disdainful look)

**Rohrik:** We caught them, father. Out beyond the Veil again.

**Erin:** We were scouting...

#### **Page 15:**

**Mayor Kindred:** You don't deny it?

**Erin** (hesitates): No. But we brought back some...

**MK:** The law exists for a purpose, Miss Tarn. I know how you like to trade your information and useless trinkets in exchange for leniency, but that doesn't fly under my watch.

(A different shot.)

**MK:** The Veil exists to protect us all. No one leaves its area without permission.

**Rowland** (OC): What happened?

(Rowland appears, behind Erin and Bell. Erin looks up at him. Bell is on hands and knees, gathering nuts and bolts.)

**Bell** (to herself, softly, waveringly): Are you nuts? No, I'm bolts. Heh heh...

(Erin, Alix, and Wimik all jump to their feet, respectful.)

#### **Page 16:**



**MK** (talking to his audience): Master Rowland. I thought that in exchange for regular field work hours from these young and able-bodied citizens, you would... educate them... or perhaps simply keep them out of trouble.

**Teal** (holding her ear, obviously bleeding and dribbling onto her shirt, pointing at Alix): She shot me!

**Erin**: You shot first!

**Rohrik**: Prove it!

**Rowland**: Enough. You can all tell your sides at tomorrow's meeting. Fair?

**MK**: They've already admitted to going Outside. That will cost. Might as well get them started then, eh Rowland? That is, if you can keep your students under any sort of control.

(Rowland stares at MK for a moment.)

**Rowland** (to Alix and Wimik): You two... the stables need shoveling.

(Alix is cheesed, Wimik stoic.)

**Alix**: Awww!

**Rowland**: Erin, finish helping Bell and then report to school.

**Erin**: Yes, Rowland.

### Page 17:

(The crowd begins to disperse.)

(Erin kneels and helps Bell.)

**Erin**: What were you workin' on, Bell?

**Bell**: Huh. Fer... Ferguson's wind... turbine.

(Erin looks up and sees it.)

**Erin** (a bit kid-glovey): Wow. You can fix anything!

**Bell**: Y... yup.

(Erin watches Bell wander off. Bell talks to herself again.)

**Bell** (faintly): Are you a string? N...no. I'm a frayed knot.

(Erin walks around the back of a building, the quickest route to school.)

**Page 18:**

(Erin arrives at school. It's little more than a single-room shack, though it's built well, of sawn lumber. Care definitely went into its making.)

(Inset, perhaps, of Erin opening the door.)

(Erin's hand is grabbed, and she's hauled in. Door slammed behind her.)

(Erin confronts an angry-looking Rowland, who still grips her wrist in a painful hold.)

**Rowland:** What were you trying to pull, girl?

**Erin** (Hurting but trying not to show it): What you taught me to. Being curious.

(Rowland releases her. Perhaps he looks a little stung. He holds out his hand.)

**Rowland:** My map.

**Erin** (sheepish): Here.

**Rowland** (not without humor): Gonna have to hide it better.

(Inset- Erin smiles.)

**Page 19:**

(Rowland moves into the school and lights a large oil lantern.)

**Rowland:** Things have gotten tight since that jackass took over. When I was mayor, I didn't mind folks exploring...

(Inset, Rowland raising an eyebrow meaningfully.)

**Rowland:** ...as long as they didn't put us in danger.

(Erin looks down.)

**Rowland:** Did you *see* something out there girl?

**Erin:** No.

(Rowland pauses. He'll let it slide for now.)

**Rowland** (little smile): You got a lot of work to catch up on. Get to it.

(Time passes. Night falls and the wind blows.)

(Erin sits at a table, writing on a reusable tablet, looking troubled. Rowland sits nearby, poring through old books.)

**Page 20:**

(Zoom on tablet and Erin's writing.)

**ETD:** The others, those like Rohrik, don't understand how we can stare at squiggles on a page for hours. They don't understand that the words talk to you, make pictures inside your head, just like voices do.

(Erin writing)

**ETD:** I'm learning to write the letters. You can make your own stories, or make a perfect copy of anything you hear. It's a great power, greater than any magic or tech, and almost anyone can do it if they try.

(Erin presses hard, busts the stylus tip.)

(She looks troubled and guilty, sets down the stylus)

**Erin:** Rowland?

**Rowland:** No chit-chat, girl. Back to work.

**Erin** (eyes downcast): I *did* see something. Out there, today.

(Rowland pays intense attention)

**Erin:** Outsiders, from Chi-town. Moving along the old... freeway.

**Page 21:**

**Rowland:** Tell me.

(We see the scene again, in Erin's mind, shadowy at the top of the panel, as she recounts the scene.)

**Rowland:** You sure you weren't seen? Or followed?

**Erin:** Positive.

(Erin looks away again.)

**Rowland:** There's something else?

**Erin:** I found... a boy.

**Page 22:**

**Erin:** He attacked me, but he didn't seem... I dunno, I think he was just scared. But I whacked him and he fell.

(Pause. Erin gulps.)

(Erin talks as Rowland steps back, deep in thought.)

**Erin:** I was alone. Alix and Wimik don't even know.

**Rowland** (suddenly): This boy. What did he look like?

(Erin looks past Rowland, startled.)

**Erin:** He... oh!

(We see the window Erin is looking at. The boy, head still bloodied, perhaps clutching a weapon of some sort, is crawling in the window.)

**End of issue 1**