

THE MAKING OF SAVAGE WORLDS

By Shane Lacy Hensley and Tens of Thousands of Savage
(From the original web articles)





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This article was originally written as the game was being developed. It was then updated and annotated in 2004, about a

year after the game debuted in March of 2003. The “Updates” you see are from this 2004 version. A condensed and edited article written for the Shark Bytes Fanzine appeared sometime in 2006 as well.

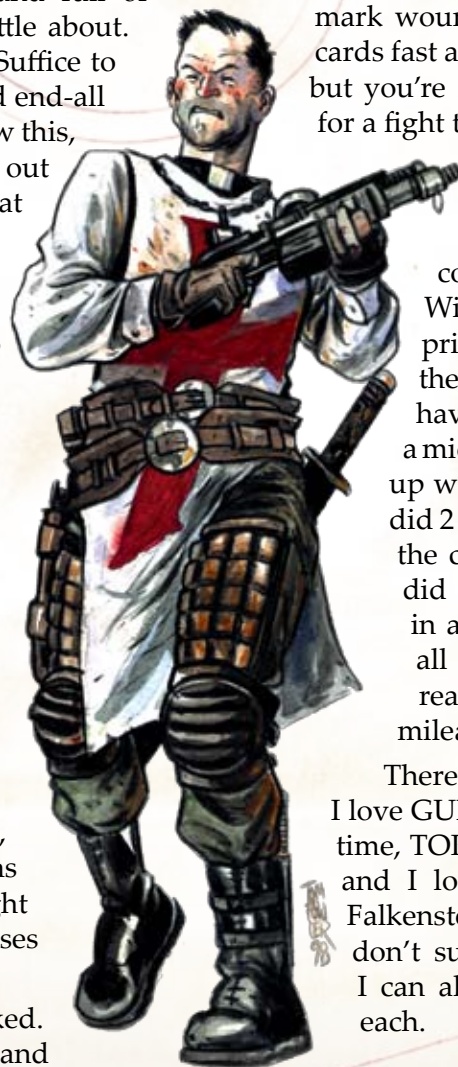
Notes beginning with “2009 Update” were new to this edition, which was written in February of 2009.

The original *Deadlands* was built from the beginning to simulate “The Outlaw Josey Wales” type action. A few rounds of gunfire takes big chunks out of people and ends up with someone in Boot Hill. But a big fight with 20 Black Hats, 5 player characters, and a couple of NPCs we talked into soaking up bullets for us can take a while. If you know what you’re doing you mark wounds with chips, count down the cards fast and don’t let people take too long, but you’re still looking at about two hours for a fight the size described above.

The article is, of course, self-serving and full of personal anecdotes that many will care little about. But people have asked for it so here it is. Suffice to say that *Savage Worlds* isn’t the be-all and end-all of roleplaying games. Rest assured we know this, and that there are flaws we continue to iron out to this day. But at its core, it succeeded in what it set out to do—create a crunchy game that runs reasonably fast and requires very little work on behalf of the Game Master. Of that I am proud—and humbled that so many people have given it a try.

It’s a problem faced by every RPG out there—how to handle big fights—unsurprisingly common in our adventure genre. Wizards of the Coast’s D20 system in principle is fairly easy, but because the power curve is so wonky, you have to throw a horde of bad guys at a mid-level party, and just try keeping up with all the minions’ hit points (“I did 2 points to the skeleton figure with the chipped paint on his sword!”; “I did 8 points to the penny!”) Throw in a few allies and try to remember all their special abilities and it gets really slow. For me anyway—your mileage may vary.

There are lots of great games out there. I love GURPs, Hero, and my favorite of all time, TORG. I think D20 is nifty for D&D, and I love oddball systems like Castle Falkenstein or Blue Planet. Even if they don’t suit my particular gaming tastes, I can always find a few cool things in each.



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—Shane Hensley
February, 2009

PART I: BLACK HATS AND TALL ORDERS

It all started with a mess of Black Hats. We were playing the adventure “Ground Zero” from the *Radiation Screen for Hell on Earth*.™ One of my best friends and fellow author John Hopley was the Marshal (Game Master), and he’s known for big, bloody fight scenes. It was a blast. Villains (and characters!) were dying left and right and it was one of those big climactic losses you talk about for months afterwards.

Yup. We lost. We actually got our tails kicked. *Deadlands* combat is “chunky” and bloody and

But what I really wanted was a game system that did something new. All those games, *Deadlands* included, are strong for what they're supposed to do, but suffer a little if you want something a little faster and most of all EASIER. Today's audience seems to feel the same way. We're spoiled by TCGs and pre-painted minis and Cheapass Games. Awesome products we can get into and play in minutes. But the few RPGs, mostly home-grown rules, that tried the same thing were really too simple and just didn't have any real depth.

I wondered if there was a way to get the same great action and feeling we did from our big *Hell on Earth* battle, but in half the time.



THE GREAT RAIL WARS PROVIDES INSPIRATION

So sometime around 1999, the PEG staff was sitting around thinking about this and got to talking about how well the *Great Rail Wars* (GRW) was doing.

A quick note for those of you who aren't in the biz. GRW won

the Origins Award for Best Miniatures Game of '99, we got rave reviews from everywhere, and even we felt it was a very elegant game and the most fun we'd ever had playing minis (and we've played LOTS of minis games). We also thought it had a good amount of detail for a miniatures game. You could make a custom character complete with RPG Edges and Hindrances and game out a fight with *hundreds* of figures and even vehicles in just a few hours.

But we had no advertising to speak of, and fighting with stores for blister space is highly competitive. To make matters worse, our management at the time had other priorities and didn't push through the expansions and new minis. This isn't a blame game—just a period where I was mostly writing and editing while others ran the company and their plans were different than mine.

Of course the idea occurred to us to modify the GRW rules a bit and use them as an RPG system. Except that we couldn't do it. We couldn't turn around and tell all our loyal fans who had bought scores of books to suddenly change their *Deadlands* game over to the *Great Rail Wars* system. I think I might even have advocated this once, but the other management, who was right in this aspect, immediately said no.

So we forgot about it and moved on to other things.

PART II: TAKING OUT THE 88S

The next phase on the road to *Savage Worlds* started while our gang was watching John Hopler's favorite team, the Giants, get their butts handed to them by the upstart Ravens in Superbowl XXXV. I told John I was thinking of running a World War II game with a little horror thrown in, and I even had a name for it: "Weird Wars." Hopler's a big WWII nut, and in between a flurry of Raven touchdowns, came up with some nifty ideas for the game. We got excited enough that I decided Hop should write it and I'd publish it. Hey, I do own a game company after all!

But about that time, another very interesting thing was happening in the gaming industry. Wizards of the Coast (WOTC) introduced the D20 System as an Open Gaming License. Friends of mine who had already done several D20 products were experiencing double and triple their normal sales. We were also getting good vibes from distributors about bringing new fans into *Deadlands* with our upcoming *Deadlands D20*.

2009 Update:

Curiously, we sold tons of *Deadlands D20* but it had an overall negative effect on our business. In hindsight, what happened was two-fold. First off, we didn't really embrace D20 and make it our own. We added some cool stuff in the Epitaphs that followed, but by then it was too late.



More importantly, our core "Classic" fans believed we had stopped producing original *Deadlands* and converted entirely (which wasn't true—we were "dual statting" at that point). Other companies with smarter leaders than myself, such as Kevin Siembieda with Palladium, Steve Jackson with GURPs, and Stephen Wieck with *Vampire*, all stayed the course with their game systems and rode out the D20 wave and subsequent crash much better than I did.

So it seemed only natural that *Weird Wars* should be a D20 product. We immediately started playtesting and had a blast, but there were glitches. Attack bonuses in D20 games with guns are a little weird since no one in WW2 wears armor, and hit points can be very off-

putting when you hit someone with a .50 cal and they shrug it off. To make a long story short, we came up with about 50 different ways of doing damage, including WOTC's *Star Wars*® "wounds/vitality" system. Then we started hearing lots of people complain about some of the other games that had done this, and that they weren't compatible with all the cool monsters and other D20 material WOTC and others were making (and I've heard that if they had it to do over, *Star Wars* would have used the regular D20 system as it isn't 100% compatible with everything else.)

2009 Update: Since I wrote this, the new *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition* and *Star Wars* are out. The sweeping changes made in these books indicate the designers wanted something different as well.



So we altered our philosophy to "Add, don't change," and came up with some cool new feats to handle those commandoes and snipers who live by the "one shot, one kill" motto.

That worked fine, and *Weird Wars* debuted to great sales at GenCon of 2001.

But then Jason Nichols ran a Russian Front game. I was a Commissar, and had been assigned a platoon of 20 men (four of which were PCs). After the lieutenant died, I wound up in tactical control of the group as well. Then we came up on a German 88 mm anti-aircraft gun dug into a ruined building in Stalingrad. I pinned the Germans' fire with one squad then assaulted on the flank with three others. My assault squads had a mix of weapons, but most were submachine guns and auto-fire didn't quite have the punch it should have.

Fifty-some combatants, with artillery, explosives, machine guns, and a little bit of weirdness can take quite a bit of time. So Jason did what he should have done—gamed out the little fight where the PCs were and made up the rest. When the battle was over, he decided we lost as many men as we took out. That's certainly fair, and even generous by historical standards, but I felt a bit robbed. I knew if we had gamed it out using the regular system, my platoon would have done much better. But there was just no way to handle a fight that size easily.

2009 Update: I have a Masters in military history and served in the Virginia National Guard, but I'm not particularly interested in getting every military detail just right. What I am interested in is rewarding good tactics and sound planning (though chance will always play a factor as well).

OF ELVES, DWARVES, AND D20

There used to be a long section here about why we decided not to do D20 any more, but suffice it to say it just wasn't for us. We think companies like Green Ronin, AEG, and Fantasy Flight fill this niche just fine, and we love their stuff too. But we like a different feel, so let's just leave it at that.

PART III: MIDWESTERN ODYSSEY

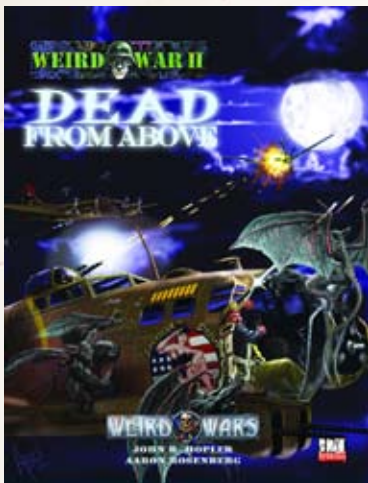
February of 2002, I got invited to a great weekend -long wargame at The Last Square game store in Madison, Wisconsin. Two groups of great friends I'd met through Pinnacle lived along the way, so I decided to make a long trip of it, spend the night with them, and do a little gaming.

Though no one else knew it, I needed a little time on the road to think about what to do next with the company as well.

The first night was spent with Mark Metzner and his crew in Louisville, KY. We hung out, played a little X-box, and then got to gaming. Mark had downloaded a demo version of a new World War II RPG (that's now out) and we got to playing. In my humble opinion, it was a bit off. Any game that takes place during World War II should be reasonably fast and easy, but it wasn't to us. The die mechanics were weird, there were lots of wound stats to keep track of, and a fight with five Nazis took us an hour. I didn't say anything to my host of course, but after a while the group said they didn't want to play any more, so I suggested an alternative.

2009 Update: I've since admitted the game was *Godlike*. I also know now that not only were these playtest rules we were using, but we also got lots of things wrong. The authors of *Godlike* are great guys and terrific designers. My apologies to Dennis, Greg, and John for the mistake. It's an important part of the article and the evolution of my thoughts, so I've left it in.

These guys were all *Great Rail Wars* players, so I told them to make up World War II GRW characters real quick. That was around 11PM at night. Their characters were done in a few minutes. Then I ran the adventure



that would eventually be written for *Dead From Above* for *Weird War II*. We had several major fights with Nazis, a climactic aerial battle, and a spooky fight with a flying gargoyle. The guys had a blast, and it went faster than anyone would have believed. We finished at 2AM. From making characters to completion in three hours. And it wasn't *just*

fast—it was easy to run.

My next stop was the Bloomington/Normal, IL, area for a game of GRW and then *Deadlands* with my good friends Dave Ross and Aaron Isaac. I also got to meet and get to know the extremely talented Dr. Rob Lusk.

2009 Update: These are three of the best guys you'll ever meet, on and off the gaming table. Dave and Aaron supported me on many occasions when I thought things were hopeless, and Rob Lusk's constant enthusiasm for *Deadlands*—and now his own *Sticks & Stones*—is positively infectious. If you ever get a chance to go to the convention they run, FlatCon, I *highly* recommend you do so.

During the day, we had about eight people playing *Great Rail Wars* with probably a thousand points a piece. Eight strangers, hundreds of figures, vehicles, boats, monsters, and the game lasted about three hours. Phenomenal. It had been a while since I'd played GRW, and I'd forgotten how much I missed it.

That night we went to Dr. Rob's house for an awesome game of *Deadlands*. It was great fun, but we had a gang of about 11 player characters, so combat was a little slow. Not bad, but certainly nothing like I'd experienced the night before.

After the game, Dave, Rob and I sat up and talked for hours about this new idea. About a system that was fast and easy. Would anyone care? Was there a market for it? They certainly cared. Like me, these guys are all older (mid 30s and up) with kids and busy jobs. They want a game they can hop into and play without hours and hours of preparation, and with fast, smooth combat that doesn't necessarily sacrifice tons of detail. I was once taken to task for a poor choice of words about our fans being more "mature" gamers, but this is what I meant. Gamers our age have a difficult time playing due to time constraints and family commitments and we need a game that fits our new evolving lifestyle.

I told them all that and what I'd done the night before and they were as enthusiastic as I was beginning to get.

Update: This talk was what finally made me decide to create *Savage Worlds*. Thanks, guys. You have no idea how awesome this trip was.

IS FASTER REALLY BETTER?

If I were you and I was reading this far, I'd think "Boy. This Shane guy just wants fast combats. That's all this game is about." Yes, I do want faster combat than anything I've played yet. But I also want the depth of character creation that games like *Deadlands* and D20 allow. I think feats are great, for example, and I love our own Edges and Hindrances. But I don't want to have to rely on a computer program to make my character for me. Nor do I want to have to hand-hold a new player through every step of the process.

2009 Update: Our "speed," I later realized, comes not from having vastly simplified die rolls, but from the lesser amount of bookkeeping involved.

The single greatest reason gamers don't try new games is having to learn a new system. So a new game has to be understandable in about one page of instructions. Is this even possible?

Yes. Note that I very definitely did not say what came of all this is "The Perfect Game." There will never be such a thing because different people like things different ways—believe me—I've read thousands of submissions over the years and have seen as many different approaches. But what *Savage Worlds* does is exactly what I, as a player and a Game Master, want—make my work easier so I can just play.



Jess, Ernie, Aaron, Eliot, Shane, and Rob playing *Deadlands* at Rob's house.

As a Game Master:

1) I want a game where it's easy to make up monsters, NPCs, magic items, weapons, etc. on the fly. If I have to look up lots of charts and tables, add up points (as a GM, not a player), and so on, it's too complicated.

2) I want a game where "mooks" are either up, down, or off the table. I don't want to keep track of wounds for lesser NPCs—only important bad guys, villains, dragons, and so on.

3) I want a game that easily handles vehicles. The vehicle rules in many games require a PHD to decipher.

4) I want a game a non-gamer friend of mine can look at and understand at a glance. The basic rules for *Savage Worlds* can be described in one sentence ("Look up the die type by your skill and roll it").

5) I want a game that has a "spine" capable of gaming any genre, but allows me to insert special rules to tailor specific genres. Horror needs detailed fright tables, for instance, and a pulp heroes game needs to be less gritty and deadly than World War II.

7) I want to roll *one* attack die for my bad guys to see if they hit, and I don't want to do any math to it. If three orcs gang up on a hero, I want to roll 3 dice, look for hits, and be done.

2009 Update: Writing the D20 statistics for the three *Deadlands* lines, *Weird Wars*, and a book we did called *Hostile Claims* really took a toll on me as a designer. The D20 rules have a very detailed structure depending on the class or type of creature you're creating. Undead, for instance, don't have Constitution, while sentient plants have a lot more skill points than you really want to spend sometimes. High-level foes get extremely complicated. A 20th level multi-classed NPC for *Lost Colony* once took John Hopley a good three hours to design.

It's important to fans of the game to get this right, which means you not only have to follow the rules precisely, but you have to check and double-check them for errors as well. I get this and appreciate that style of gaming, but it's just not our style, and was extremely tedious for us. So after pushing through our D20 books, it was absolutely mandatory to us that creating baddies for *Savage Worlds* should be as fast and easy as possible.

As a player:

1) I want a game that provides real depth for characters. I want to see my character grow, gain new special abilities, and increase my skills and attributes.

2) I want a game that handles large battles fast. If my sergeant in World War II persuades the villagers to fight beside him, I want them on the table-top and fighting, not glossed over or forgotten.

3) I want my NPC allies to have names and at least a "personality" trait for each. If my Lt. in Vietnam needs to send someone to scout a hill, I want to know who's "Gung Ho," "Reliable," "Shifty," "Lazy," and so on.

4) I want a little control over the dice—like Fate Chips or bennies. I like games where characters can be killed in one shot, but I also like having a chance to avoid that one lucky goblin arrow that hits me square in the eye through no fault of my own. It's the "chance" part that's important though—there's no suspense in my opinion if the players know their heroes can't die.

5) "Open ended die rolls." If I get lucky and roll that high number, I want to keep rolling and feel like I just conquered the world.

Does *Savage Worlds* do all that? Obviously we believe so. You'll have to decide for yourself.



Randy Mosiondz, now Lead Designer of *Champions Online* at Cryptic Studios, and one of the first "Savages" to help playtest the original rules. This is him running a game at GenCon and (hopefully!) proving all those points I made above. This is the best part of the job—Randy became one of my best friends, and has a fantastic setting we hope to publish one day.



A scene from our miniatures game, *Modern Ops*, complete with all manner of weapons and even helicopters and armored vehicles—all using the same system as our RPG..

PART IV: THE RULES

So here I was in search of a faster, simpler game. I wanted something that was fast, furious, and fun. I even decided that's what the new game's "tag line" would be: Fast! Furious! Fun!

Now let me ruin the ending. This all ends with a modified *Great Rail Wars* system. But you should know that I wasn't close-minded about writing a completely new game. I played around with several different ideas. One of which was something called *Blood Moon*.

2009 Update: Long time fans have seen *Blood Moon* mentioned before. Will we ever do it? I hope so. It's very different. Part of it was definitely inspired by *Solomon Kane* though, which is an itch we've already scratched with our own *Savage World of Solomon Kane*. There's more to the setting than that though and I hope to one day return to it.

The game system was very simple and elegant. It was basically a 2d6 plus adds kind of system, with my traditional love of Aces (that's exploding dice for some of you, or rerolls on a roll of 6 for the rest). The problem with a game like this happens the first time you have a really large battle. Rolling a handful of dice all at once is easy—rolling and adding two dice per character, one at a time, is much slower.

Picture this. It's Weird War One. A machine gun cuts loose with a burst of fire. The GM either has to roll 2d6 several times (plus any Aces), or there has to be a kludge of some sort (every 5 points over the TN causes another bullet to hit or some such).

Now think about a mass *Warhammer* type battle. I wanted something that could handle huge formations of troops as well as small roleplaying-type battles. If you've got a block of skaven fighting righteous Imperial halberdiers, you can't very well be rolling 2d6 for every figure in the two units.

Nope. It had to be one die per attack. That turns your machine gun attack into one roll of 3 dice. The block of skaven with a 10-rat front rolls 10 dice.

Okay, so you roll one die. That's nice, but it's also nice if (aside from a few common modifiers) the die roll is the result—you don't have to add any skill or attribute levels to it. What you see is what you get.

Those of you who have played the *Great Rail Wars* know that's what it already does.

So I came full-circle. The game system would basically be *Great Rail Wars*.

THE RULES

Here's the basics of how *Savage Worlds* works. Characters are rated in their attributes and skills from a d4 to a d12 (supernatural creatures can go above a d12 to d12+1, d12+2, etc.) An average person has a d6 in his five attributes and whatever skills he possesses.

The basic Target Number (TN) for success is a 4. Roll that or higher and you succeed. Every four points over that is another success (we call it a "raise").

Damage is based on your Strength for melee weapons (Strength+3 for a long sword), or a fixed number for ranged weapons (2d6 for most pistols).

2009 Update: Starting with *Deadlands: Reloaded*, which is the *Savage Worlds* version, melee damage is now the Strength die plus another die. The larger the weapon, the larger the die. Daggers are d4, short swords d6, and so on.

When a target is hit, he rolls his Toughness plus any armor. If damage is 1-3 points more than the Toughness roll, he's Shaken (like Eatin' Dirt in GRW). If damage is 4+, the victim is wounded. Mooks are taken off the table, heroes and archvillains suffer wounds, and eventually get into some fun, gory criticals. That's the basic game.

Update: We made this a static number as well. Damage is compared to your Toughness. Equal or exceed Toughness and he's Shaken. Get a raise (or two Shaken results) and he's wounded.



WILD CARDS

The only problem here was that there's no "curve" to the die roll. That's not a big deal for "mooks," but a little frustrating to a hero. So we played around with a couple of ideas. The first was that out of combat, a "hero" type could roll two of his dice and take the best. That seemed a little confusing.

The second idea was better and stuck. We called "heroes" (which also includes villains) "Wild Cards." These are player characters and arch-villains who take wounds instead of just getting taken off the table when they're wounded. They also get a "Wild Die" (a d6) along with each skill or attribute roll, and take the best.

Here's an example from the *Legend of the Five Rings* game Zeke Sparkes ran. My character, Iuchi Tang, had Spellcasting at d12. When he cast a spell, I roll a d12 and a d6 and take the best of the two. Trust me—that d6 can really save your bacon sometimes.

ADDING CHARACTER

We worked in our curve, and we already knew combat was fast and easy, but characters needed much more depth to feel like real roleplaying characters and not just combat stats for minis.

Fortunately, this part was easy. All our games have Edges and Hindrances, and long ago, when we had first talked about an RPG based off GRW, we had talked about adding a "shtick" to each archetype. The idea was actually inspired by Lee Garvin's excellent *Tales of the Floating Vagabond* more than D20, but WOTC solidified the concept with feats in *Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition*®.

So we modified our Edges a bit and made them more accessible. About every other game session, you'll get to increase your hero's skills or add a new Edge. You can even increase an attribute once per "Rank." (And you'll get to "level up" four times between each Rank until you get to Legendary, when it slows down a bit.)

What's a Rank? It's a measure of how many experience point awards you've received. Characters start out at Novice. When they've received 20 experience points they become

Seasoned, then Veteran, Heroic, and Legendary. (Things slow down a bit at Legendary—a whole slew of new Edges become available, but you only get to advance every 10 experience points.) Legendary also opens up a whole host of really cool Edges—such as followers, hideouts, "supernatural" stats, and so on.

PART V: GADGETS, SPELLS, AND POWERS

The rules were basically in place for making characters and blowing things up, but that still left one major critical area to be developed—spells.

The *Great Rail Wars* has a good, solid spell system, but a character can basically cast a spell whenever he wants (though the backlash might kill him). That works fine in a miniatures game where figures have very limited lifespans, but not in an RPG. So that meant adding in "spell points" of some kind. Fortunately, the way Edges work in *Savage Worlds*, it was very easy

to give characters a base number of spell points and then let them increase them—if they want—through the Edges they get as they advance.

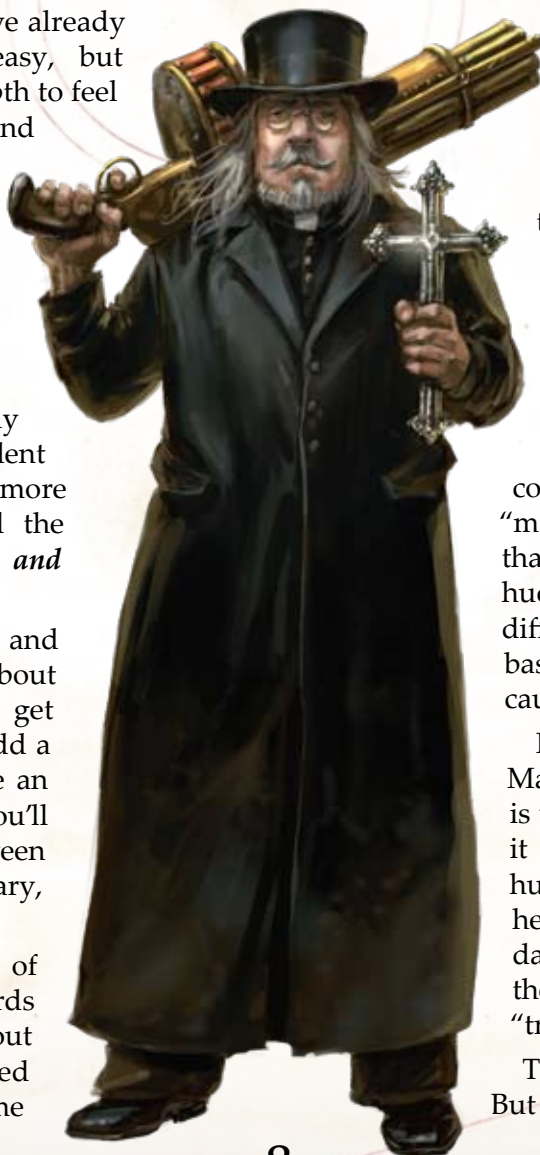
This little change was solved in no time flat.

But "spells" had to cover far more than just, well, spells. They had to cover psionics, super powers, mad science, or even innate arcane or alien abilities.

Spells now became "powers"—conceptually. That means a wizard's "magic missile" is really no different than a mind flayer's "mind blast" or a huckster's "soul blast." They all look different, but they really have the same basic effect—to fire an arcane bolt that causes damage.

I had some experience here. The Marshal's "black magic" in *Deadlands* is very generic, but players won't see it that way. An evil shaman might hurl a swarm of biting locusts at a hero while another fires arrows of darkest midnight—but they're both the *bolt* power. What's different is the "trappings," or how it looks.

This works in *Savage Worlds* as well. But why? Why have one *bolt* power



instead of dozens all with unique names and slightly different rules? I'll use D20 as an example because it's the game most are familiar with. How many different "magic missile" type spells are there, from *burning hands* to *Melf's acid arrows*. And yes, they do have different parameters, but in the end basically do the same thing.

But having a dozen different "magic missile" spells means the GM or the player has to look them up and check the spell's statistics during combat. If you have one basic *bolt* power, that becomes much easier. And if you allow such a spell to be beefed up by pumping more "power points" into it, it makes an experienced wizard with lots of power far more deadly than an apprentice with very few power points.

And that's just "magic missile" type spells. Apply the same logic to other spells. Armor gives your character armor, deflection makes him harder to hit with ranged attacks, invisibility makes him. . .well, you should get it by now.

Which brings up another point. My personal preference is to have powers with simple names so that everyone knows instantly what it does. "Maestro's Sangrilarious Picnations" sounds cool, but what does it do? When a player tells me he's casting that, I (as a GM) am very likely to say "Er, okay! Great! Um, who's up next?"

In a given game, the character might know his blast power as "Rage of the Fire Elemental," and he can even call it that when he wants—but rules-wise, we all know it's the *blast* power and he's about to cut loose with an area-effect attack.

PROFESSIONS

So how do you make a wizard's fireball different than a superhero's flame-strike? Easy. The first answer is through its trappings. The wizard utters some mumbo-jumbo and hurls a fireball. The superhero makes a pithy statement and points his palm at his foe.

Thesecond answeristhroughprofessions.Professions let you define just how different types of characters do things. For those with "arcane backgrounds," such as wizards, priests, superheroes, and so on, their profession determines how many powers and power points they get, what skills they use with them, and any other special rules we need to make them work.

Rules-wise, both characters have an "arcane skill." For the wizard, it's Spellcasting, and it covers all his different spells. He gets the skill cheap but has to buy lots of powers and fulfill many roles (opening locks, dispelling magic, etc.)

The superhero probably only has this and a couple of other powers. He has an arcane skill for each. His

skill is whatever he calls it—let's say "flame strike," and it only applies to the one power. He has to buy more skills and probably can't buy new powers, but he gets a whole lot more power points to use with them.

PART VI: EVERNIGHT



I've told you how *Evernight* came about before. Skip the quick recap below if you don't want to spoil some of *Evernight's* surprises.

For those who missed it, when D&D3E first came out, we wanted to try it and I ran a trilogy of trilogies. One of them was TSR's Illithid series. The short version is that the mind flayers are trying to plunge the world into eternal darkness and take over the world. My party screwed up royally and killed the only creature that could have told them how to get to the mind flayer's home world and stop it. The campaign ended by me saying, "Ooooookay then. A few months later, the sun goes out, mind flayers invade, and the world basically ends."

DARKNESS FALLS

But as bummed as we were that our campaign was over, several of my friends had the same thought I did. No sooner had the above statement slipped my lips than we were looking at each other and thinking what a great campaign world that would make! How challenging would it be to play the resistance once this mind-numbingly overwhelming power lands and enslaves humanity?

The idea remained burning in my head for quite a while, though I was unable to do anything with it while we worked on *Deadlands* and *Weird Wars*. Then this whole *Savage Worlds* thing happened and the world of *Evernight* was born!

2009 Update: Wow. There's a lot of backstory I just skipped over here. It's mostly business-oriented and not particularly relevant to the creation of the game system, but it's definitely relevant to why I was able to suddenly stop making "classic" *Deadlands* and move on to something else. The long story short is that Pinnacle and I went through hell and all but closed down over the course of a year or so.

When the fires died down, it was a different ball game and I figured I could do the game I had wanted to do all this time. I was also shy of getting into another massive line with dozens of books (and the market wasn't looking for that at the time either). *Savage Worlds* allowed me to "scattershot" our settings without having to commit to dozens of follow-on products. That's something that's changing again, but that's a story for another day...

There's lots to say about what goes on in *Evernight*, but I want to talk here about one specific part of it—the adventure format. Not all *Savage Worlds* will be this way, but *Evernight* is what I've coined a "scripted campaign." Inside the book are a number of adventures that you play in order, starting just before the Evernight until the climactic finish.

As those who have played *Deadlands* know, I like a story-driven campaign with lots of cool events to keep things interesting and dynamic. The problem with most games—ours included—is that you have to be on

board for several years and dozens of products to keep up. This time out I wanted just as many cool secrets, but I also wanted to put them *all* within reach so that players and Game Masters could actually keep up and be part of such an epic tale.

I know what some of you are thinking about this, both good and bad. So let me run down the list of questions/statements I think you've got in mind.

1) *A scripted campaign? I want a setting to run my own adventures in!* There are literally thousands of those out there already. I've always liked to do things differently when it makes sense, and the story we have to tell in *Evernight* absolutely makes sense to do it this way.

2) *I repeat, I want to run my own adventures!* Okay, if that's really what you want, you certainly can. There's plenty of detailed information on all the locations, creatures, and people within the book to let you do what you want with it. Or you can cut some middle ground and insert your own ideas in between the scripted campaign.

3) *I hate linear adventures.* I've taken special care to organize these adventures more like scenarios than adventures. These scenarios present your heroes with a situation, problem, or opportunity, and then let them handle it however they wish. What they do in one scenario certainly has an effect on the next, but (in general), no particular actions are required to play the next one. There are certainly some exceptions, but most of these "missions" simply benefit the group when the next situation presents itself.

And because you're going to have your own player characters with their own motives and backgrounds, there's plenty of room for improvisation, adding in your own side-quests, and so on.

4) *Hey, that sounds pretty cool to me!* Me too! That means each week I've got 2-4 pages to prep before the game (most missions will finish in 1-2 sessions), so I can work on the little things that make it special rather than reading an entire 64-page module to find out if the goblins in Area 63 will attack when there's a noise in Area 7.

5) *So... what happens when it's over?* Well, that depends. Conceptually, your group will be legendary heroes at that point and they'll have either "saved the world" or failed (there's actually more to it than that, but I don't want to give anything away). You can quit and move on to another game or another of our *Savage Worlds* if that's what you want.

Or if your heroes survive the final "scenario," you might want to let them regroup and figure out what to do next. If they die, you might want to start with a new group, altering the setting to fit the "repercussions"



A Kraken mage from 50 Fathoms.

of the previous group's failure, and start your own campaign. (There are several fully-outlined aftermaths in the book for those who want more.)

We might also do a follow-up if demand justifies it. There's certainly room for lots more material and events after the final, er, conflict, but right now I want to concentrate on the main story.

2009 Update: A draft of *Evernight II* was written by BD Flory, but we changed the way we do books since then and it would require significant rewrites that are no fault of the author's. We'll get to it one day though—promise!

PART VII: HOW WE GAME

I get a lot of questions about exactly how we game—what props we use, how often we play, do we use minis and battle mats, how big our group is, and so on. Shining a spotlight on our habits should also help you understand the philosophy behind the game.

CAMPAIGNS AND ONE-SHOTS

By and large, our group plays mostly short campaigns. Most just last a month or so, but there are many exceptions. Hopley's *Hell on Earth* game ran from well over two years, and his current *Clash of Kings Savage Worlds* game is in its 6th month. My own D&D game, which we used to test 3rd Edition when it first came out, ran for about 9 months.

We play about once a week, generally on Wednesdays (weekends are sacred for those with kids). We start around 6 and generally wrap things up around 11. When your group is made up of older people (30-ish and up) with full-time jobs, having a regular schedule is critical. An irregular game means you'll very rarely play as everyone is busy and won't know to schedule around it ahead of time. If they know they have a regular thing, they're much more likely to schedule other events around it.

THE MONDAY NIGHT GAME

Groups have lots of different interests, but most of us think in terms of running never-ending campaigns. That's certainly more rewarding—usually—than one-shots, but there's something else you might try if you're having a hard-time getting everyone to agree on what to play.

For a long time, my group had the "Monday Night Game." Never mind that it didn't actually take place on Monday night (though it started that way). The idea was that each person who wanted to run something would run one "adventure." The adventure might take 3-6 sessions, but then it was done and we'd move on to something else.



An early game of *Savage Worlds* with our dice, cards, and playtest printouts.

I'd love to see folks play *Weird Wars* for a bit, then play out the *Evernight* campaign, then play a little *Deadlands*, and so on. And sure—play some good old D&D now and then. Or better yet, try Atlas' *Unknown Armies* or Fantasy Flight's *Blue Planet*.

If you're like me, you've got a wall full of games you'd really love to play but just never get to. Taking the "Monday Night" approach may be a great way for everyone to try new things without having to commit to a long-term game. It also puts all those unplayed games to good use, and is a great change of pace after wrapping up a long-running campaign.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Miniatures, miniatures, miniatures. Use 'em. Most of those who like Pinnacle's kind of games already do. It doesn't matter if your minis don't look anything like what they're supposed to be—just put something out on the tabletop so that everyone understands what's going on. We make Cardstock Cowboys for our *Deadlands* and *Hell on Earth* lines for those who don't want a ton of lead, and genuine sculpted minis for those who do. But even gaming stones, bottlecaps, or the always-convenient dice work just as well.

I know some of you out there are very esoteric gamers. You're not looking for a role-playing wargame—you're looking for deep character development and plot advancement. But using miniatures and a battle mat will help you do both. While it may look and feel like you're being too technical, what you're really doing is helping everyone understand the situation as *you* see it. How many times in a game have you described a room, and then, a few rounds later, realize your group doesn't have a clue about their relative locations or where they're at?

The point, of course, is that the more everyone understands their environment, the more they can interact with it. Tell someone “There are four orcs in the room,” and he’ll probably say “I attack.” Show him where they are and he’ll start positioning himself, using teamwork with the other players, and perhaps use whatever else is in the room to help win the fight instead of just swinging their sword.

2009 Update: I’ve seen many comments over the years about RPGs and miniatures, particularly from those who are turned off by them. I get that, and you definitely don’t have to use them to enjoy our game. But I’d recommend those of you who don’t *try* it next time, whether it’s with *Savage Worlds* or D&D or whatever else you’re playing. I’ve run literally thousands of games over the years with everyone from close friends to total strangers at conventions. In my experience, miniatures encourage *more* roleplaying and use of the environment. Communicating what’s in your head is really difficult, but show a player even the most basic sketch map and his hero’s position and he’ll start thinking up all kinds of clever ideas. He’ll also be less-confused and thus more interested in your game.

WOMEN

A third to half of our group are females. You may not think this is important, but I guarantee the married gamers in your group will. Why? Because when the spouse doesn’t game, it’s a lot harder for the other to get free once a week, and then there goes that whole regular schedule thing we talked about before.

Now it’s time for a gross generalization. Having women in your group changes the way you game. I’m sure I’ll get in trouble for these generalizations, but here are a few quick tips from someone who runs a lot

of games with a lot of female players, both in our group and at dozens of conventions around the world.

A) Describe options rather than handing them a list of modifiers. Most women don’t care so much about the system—they’re looking for a cool story with lots of awesome highlights. It also greatly helps if you print out a quick cheat-sheet with the common combat maneuvers on it. They can milk them as well as anyone, they just may not be as interested in looking them up on their own as some of the guys.

B) Give them graphic descriptions of monsters. Say they’re being attacked by “a huge hairy thing” rather than “an owlbear.” (A very good example, btw. “Owlbear” is a really goofy name, but the creature itself is pretty creepy if you give it a chance.)

C) Memorable villains and NPCs are very important. Try not to describe characters as “10th level sorcerers.” Describe them with real-world idiosyncrasies and foibles. Women tend to personalize NPCs (if you give them a chance) whereas guys are more likely to move quickly past the personalization and start summing them up as threats or allies.

When I was writing for *Dark Sun*, I had a group of PCs who were prisoners taken across the deserts of Athas. Their jailer/tormentor was a really cruel and sarcastic priest of the Dragon Kings who had a really annoying giggle that I’d mimic in real life. The guys in the group were plotting how to kill a character with his particular powers—working on their limited spells, figuring out how to improvise weapons, etc. The gals were literally seething to get free and punish the creep as well, but were way more focused on why they hated him so much—and that annoying cackle—than how they were going to get free and do him in.

HAVE A GREAT TIME!

In the end of course, you and your group need to play what works for you. If you see something here that helps, then my job is done. Our group has stayed together for well over 16 years, played hundreds of games, and had thousands of incredible memories. I get lots of emails from fans who say their group is falling apart for one reason or another, and maybe something here will help a bit.

2009 Update: This is a goal we’ve definitely accomplished. I get a lot of email from gamers telling me *Savage Worlds* was just what they needed for their busy lifestyles, and has allowed them to game again. Many in our gaming crew actually moved across country and works together. That’s amazing, and shows you how strong the bonds in gaming groups can be.



Three of the lovely gals who play *Savage Worlds*—Jackie, Michelle, and Jenny.

PART VIII: DAMAGE

This part is a little more technical than most—you'll need to understand how the damage system works to really get much out of it, so we'll start there.

Since the game was based off the *Great Rail Wars*, I at first didn't give a whole lot of thought to damage. I planned on leaving it alone, and that's just what we did for the first few sessions. But those first games were either with very small groups (the first *Dead from Above* adventure at Scott Nethery's house) or just big skirmish games (my French and Indian War scenario).

Then we moved on to Zeke's *Legend of the Five Rings*. Like me, Zeke was excited about being able to actually use NPCs and assigned us a squad of Crane daidoji. In the first adventure, we had a massive fight with over 50 combatants, including our NPCs (around 15) and a mess of Lion clan spearmen led by a shugenja. Now the bells and whistles were blaring, and it was a blast.

The combat went smoothly, but there was just too much die-rolling—especially between the NPCs. Roll to hit, roll to defend, roll to wound, roll to resist. To fix it, we came up with the Parry stat, which gives you a static TN to hit someone. Though that was tweaked a few times, it basically stayed the same.

Damage was more elusive. My first attempt to make it static (like the Parry stat) was to use a Size chart, much like in classic *Deadlands*. You compared your damage to a creature's Size and then did the whole "Shaken to wounded" thing. When we fought our first large creature—some massive undead dinosaur raised by rogue naga shugenjas—we realized that didn't work so well. (It also made Vigor really unimportant for NPCs.)

OF ORCS AND EVERNIGHT

So we changed it to 2+ half of Vigor plus armor adds (as it is now), and ran the first mission in *Evernight*. My group of typical fantasy player characters found themselves fighting a massive non-Wild Card thing and getting a bit frustrated because they either killed it in one lucky blow or didn't seem to have any effect at all.

Later, the party was sneaking past 20 orcs and botched their Stealth roll. I'm a bit . . . severe. . . as a GM and decided the orcs would attack. In my mind, the party was really going to have to come up with something clever to survive this fight. I was wrong though, because the group just countercharged and wiped the orcs out in a couple of rounds.

The problem was that even with the orcs' decent d8 Strength and long swords (+3 at the time), they just couldn't get above the average PC's armor value enough to wound him (especially John Hopley's big

"tank," Roland the half-orc musketeer with chain mail and a corselet). They got plenty of Shaken results, but just couldn't hurt anyone.

So we made some more changes. We tried upping the damage from weapons (long swords did Strength plus a d6, short swords a d4, etc), but that didn't really work either. The average was the same as the plus, required a lot more die-rolling when you were dealing with lots of grunts, and the Aces just seemed to make it more about luck than your weapon of choice.

2009 Update: Of course that's right where we ended up after struggling with this some more. In hindsight, the two extra dice give you a slightly higher damage without Acing and thus a greater chance of higher damage once Acing was figured in. Plus, it's just more fun! The new way we did raises (+d6 rather than +2 per raise on the attack roll) greatly improved this as well.

Next up, we played *Deadlands: Lost Colony* and went back to opposed die rolls between your Vigor and the weapon damage. This worked great for several sessions and we were satisfied.



One of the afore-mentioned orcs, from *Evernight*.

TEST DRIVE ARRIVES

So I finally put the *Test Drive* rules up and you good folks downloaded and started playing it.

It was quickly very obvious I'd made a mistake. The opposed damage system works fine statistically, but has two problems:

1) It requires an awful lot of die-rolling, and it was obvious right away that folks really wanted those big battles I'd been blabbing about for a while in these very articles.

B) It was still frustrating for folks who seemed to hit just fine but couldn't put something down.

The first part I knew how to fix, in principle. Your damage resistance had to be a static number. I was about to start on the table-top skirmish rules portion of the book anyway, and knew I wanted to be able to play big *Warhammer* type battles in formations, so this was crucial. How would you even assign the dice to see who hit who?

Fixing this part was really tricky, and here's

why. Fantasy characters have armor values of +2 to +4 (leather to plate mail). With a d6 Vigor, that's a Toughness (derived from half Vigor+2) of 8 in chain mail. Damage from a d6 Strength and a long sword (+3) does an average of 7. (Note that averages in SW are very "wonky" due to Aces and the

fact that Wild Cards get Wild Dice, whereas norms don't). Since you need a raise to cause a wound, the average Joe has to Ace even to shake another average Joe in armor. That's perhaps a bit realistic (armor does protect, after all), but it doesn't *feel* right to hit someone over and over with no effect. That's where hit point systems really shine—you do feel like you're getting somewhere.

Where they fail, in my opinion, is when you can't kill someone with one shot, and having to keep track of them.

The answer to problem 1 came in solving problem 2, and was provided by culling the many excellent ideas from the *Savage Worlds Yahoos*. (Meaning the group on the Savage Worlds Yahoo Group list-serv.)

The first tweak was making raises on the attack roll more important by changing the +1 damage per raise to +2 per raise. That helped a little, but wasn't there yet.

2009 Update: We later changed this to "get a raise, add a d6." It's just easier, faster, and lets you roll another damage die.

The next change—and the one that really brought everything in line—was to decide two Shaken results equaled a wound. With one last minor change (equalling the TN instead of having to exceed it, thus artificially lowering Toughness a point), the damage system really seems to finally be where it needed to be. This one came right off the Yahoo Group.

Non-Wild Cards can usually soak up one hit before they're down, giving them the feel of hit points. Those men-at-arms you hired can hang a bit—especially if they've got decent armor—but you and the poor GM won't have to sit there all day trying to crack them out of their shells.

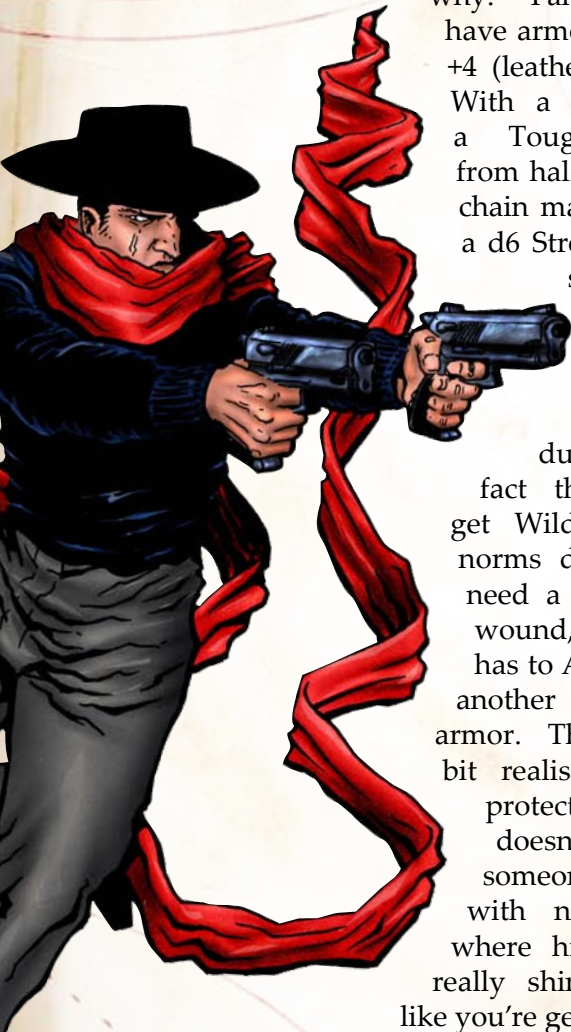
One last change really helped as well. Since there was no opposed roll to resist damage, bennies (which allow re-rolls) weren't much use. So we added the Soak rule, which allows a hero who got nailed a chance to save his skin. This side-effect worked out really well. I'm especially happy that it's a die roll and not an automatic negation of wounds (unlike classic *Deadlands*), so you can't just ignore that shotgun at your back because you know you can cancel a few wounds.

ONE LAST DETAIL

So what happens when a Wild Card takes too many wounds? That one was solved by John Hopley. In the original draft, it worked just like the *Great Rail Wars*—you rolled on a critical hit table after every wound. The problem there was that heroes would be fine, fine, fine, then dead. There was none of the ablative feeling you get with hit points or other wound systems, like *Deadlands*. That just wasn't much fun.

I came up with some other ideas that didn't really work, but Hopley nailed it. He pointed out that how hard you went down should be tied to how bad that last wound was—it has nothing to do with the one to three wounds that came before.

Hopley's solution works like this: Let's say you've got all three wounds left and you're doing fine. Then you take six in one blow. You're not looking at the three wound result on the Knockout Table—you're looking



at the six wound result (even though you were healthy beforehand). (Six wounds in one blow is very lethal, by the way!) That reflects the fact that you got hit with a really nasty blow, no matter how healthy you were beforehand. Similarly, if one wound puts you down (because you've already lost the first two), you look on the one wound entry (which is very mild).

2009 Update: This has changed slightly to a simpler table system. The best part to me are the permanent injuries you can get. That may sound sadistic but those wounds eventually tell a story about your hero and add to his legacy, especially in campaigns.

PART IX: LOVING THE GAME!

A game company shouldn't put out something it isn't in love with, so please forgive the hyperbole. Our last playtest session for *Savage Worlds: The 'Nam* was a very typical night. Allow me to tell you about it, and you'll see just why.

THE SETUP

The mysterious Teller came down for a visit and ran Jason, Zeke, and myself through a tough little adventure in the 'Nam. We played Green Berets out to win the hearts and minds of certain villagers along the Vietnamese—Cambodian border. These villagers were a reclusive group of monks rumored to possess incredible martial prowess. They weren't friends of the Viet Cong or the murderous Cambodian raiders, and might prove valuable allies to our cause.

Since it's *Savage Worlds*, Teller wasn't afraid to give us a full squad of combat-ready NPCs as well. We rolled up their personalities and got the gamut of types. Jason was our promotion-hungry lieutenant, Zeke played "Rainman," our "thumper god" (a "thumper" is an M79 grenade launcher), and I (Shane) played a brawny pre-med student from New York everyone immediately called "Doc Bronx." My size made me a natural for the M60, so I served as both our gunner and our medic.

THE VILLE

After our briefing and a short chopper trip to the tune of *Surfin' Bird*, our trip started in a small village where a bunch of Western civilians had just been slaughtered. We found one survivor and found out—to our surprise—that a covert American team called the Black Cats were responsible. Evidently, the civilians were searching for treasure in the area—perhaps the fabled treasure of the very monks we had come to find as well.

While Rain Man and Doc Bronx passed out chocolate bars to the kids and tried to do a little damage control, Lt. Guy radioed HQ and was told that the survivor must be "mistaken." The Black Cats didn't really exist after all. A little penicillin (and the sharing of my View Master with slides of NYC) got us a little bonus info as well. One of the kids told Doc Bronx that giant bats from the forests had been stealing their pigs.

BAT ATTACK!

We proceeded with our mission and bedded down for the night in a small canyon somewhere between the Nam and Cambodia. As we had been warned, a massive swarm of giant bats descended on us. To our horror, when bunched together, the things were strong enough to carry away a full-grown man! Two of our precious squad mates suffered this terrible fate. Doc Bronx and Rain Man forced the lieutenant to try and find them, but after an all-night trek through the broken canyons of the mountains, we realized it was hopeless.

Game-wise, this scene was incredible. *Savage Worlds* has simple but very effective fatigue rules that simulate everything from heat exhaustion to hunger to sleep deprivation. Our part of Vietnam was very hot and humid, so the long trek and the furious pursuit through the mountains truly threatened to start inflicting negative modifiers on our squad.

Reluctantly, Doc Bronx and Rain Man agreed with Lt. Guy that we had to give up the chase. Our friends were either already dead or trying to make their way back to us. Jason (Lt. Guy) did an awesome job here and deserves a special note. Lt. Guy really wanted to press on with the mission, but he knew what would happen to the squad if he refused to try and find our missing friends. He let us go just long enough to start



Aaron running a game of *Weird Wars: Vietnam* at Origins in 2003.

blowing bennies on fatigue rolls then “let” us decide when to give up. It was masterful manipulation.

FIREFIGHT!

After a few more great scenes, we eventually wound up at the village of the mysterious monks—only to find ten Black Cats mercilessly gunning them down.

We’ve played Vietnam before, and fighting poorly trained VC with AKs is one thing. Fighting a fully-armed American squad with grenade-launchers, M60s, and high Shooting skills wasn’t something we were looking forward to.

Our squad lay on a high ridge directly behind the Black Cats, in a perfect position to shoot them all in the back. Before we could decide what we would do, however, an unseen attacker from the right chucked

a grenade up at us! A few of our NPCs were Shaken before we chucked grenades back at our mysterious foe.

About this time, Lt. Guy shouted “Americans! Americans! Cease fire! Cease fire!”

The Black Cat’s commander, a Major, screamed “Hold your fire!” and everything stopped for a few tense minutes. My character, Doc Bronx, has the Vow Hindrance, which is the Hippocratic Oath, so I left my M60 on the ridge, grabbed my medic’s bag, and ran down to the right to give aid to whoever we had peppered with grenades. Turns out it was the Black Cat’s support team—an M60 crew. One of their medics ran over to help as well.

The Black Cat’s Major waved Lt. Guy to him, and they met in the middle of the field between our two forces. Fortunately, Jason had taken the Weird Edge “Combat Antenna,” (later Danger Sense) and realized something was up. The Major and Lt. Guy were both on hold so it came down to a contest of Agility. Jason won and managed to dive into a creek while tossing a grenade at the Major’s feet. The Major—being a Wild Card—soaked the damage with a benny and dove into a shallow trench as well, barely avoiding all the damage.

Now all Hell broke loose. Zeke had the Thumper God Edge and started raining in 40mm grenades on the rest of the Black Cats at half deviation. Another of our squad manned the M60 I had left behind and started suppressing like mad. That made it much easier for the riflemen to put their targets down (since a second Shaken result is a wound, suppressing with a heavy weapon while selectively picking off the shocked foes with rifle fire works perfectly!)

A QUICK ASIDE

In this one battle were twenty combatants all firing a mix of full-auto, M60 rounds, grenades, and 40mm grenades. Would you want to keep track of the ammo spent? Us either. Fortunately, *Tour of Darkness* has a cool mechanic to prevent this nightmare for both the players controlling allied NPCs and the GM.

We polished this one during the session. The complete rules are in the book of course, but here’s the gist of how it works. PCs keep track of their ammo normally—tracking every round. For NPCs, they start at a particular level, such as Very High, High (normal for a patrol), Low, and Out. At the GM’s discretion (usually after every fight), the ammo level for the NPCs drops a level. In a fight, the ammo level also drops if the group is dealt a Deuce. That means a group of allies with low ammo can actually run out of bullets smack in the middle of a firefight!



The original cover for *Weird Wars: Vietnam* by the extremely talented Gil Formosa. We didn’t use it because Zeke Sparkes and I had decided we wanted “iconic” covers, like *Evernight* and *50 Fathoms*. I like that we were trying to establish a style for the entire line, but in hindsight, this is just a better cover, and I think would have sold better. We did the same thing with *Necessary Evil*, and I regretted it as well. The new version looks much better to me.

That's not only easier, but it makes for really dramatic decisions during a game. If your group is low on ammo, you might choose to detour to refresh your supplies or raid an enemy village.

Just like the Aftermath rules that tell you which combatants are really dead and which are just wounded (forcing you to decide what to do with them), the ammo rules make you think like a real world commander with real world issues, without having to do a bunch of bookkeeping!

"LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY CHARACTER"

While that fight was raging, something really interesting happened to my character (Doc Bronx). The medic I was helping stuck an M16 to the back of my head. In game terms, he had the drop on me and I was likely a goner (+4 to hit, +4 damage). I waited until I had a Hold action, and knowing he wasn't looking for prisoners, decided to try and break free. Jason and Zeke shook their heads and smiled—"Maybe you can play this guy when he blows your head off," Zeke laughed, pointing at one of our NPCs.

The enemy medic and I (Doc Bronx—I always talk in the first person when roleplaying in case you're confused) were both on hold. To interrupt his action, I had to beat him in an opposed Agility roll. I got a lousy 4 after spending a benny, but luck was with me. The medic got a 2. I swung my fist and hit—but rolled crap for damage.

Now the medic had a choice. He still got his +4/+4 on me for having the drop, but he was armed with a rifle. He couldn't shoot me in close combat unless he backed up, but that would give me a free whack. Teller chose to make him back up, likely thinking he'd go full-auto after he weathered one lousy punch. I kissed my lucky dice and rolled. I barely hit. Groan. But, I was a big guy and had a d8 Strength. I rolled the d8 and my Wild die and got lucky with an Ace on the d6. The reroll gave me a total of 8—no wound but enough to make the medic Shaken! I had a chance! Better yet, before he could recover, our NPC sergeant cleared the ridge and turned him into a grease-stain with his own M16.

2009 Update: Note that the melee damage has changed since then—there's no longer a Wild Die on your Str-based damage roll as there used to be when weapons were expressed as +1, +2, etc, rather than +d4, +d6, and so on.

THE MORAL OF THIS TALE

At the end of the night, when we were all kibitzing about how cool the game was, the comment everyone kept making was how awesome it was that the game

handled a huge firefight with 20 combatants with machine guns blazing and explosives flying—and at the same time handling a very detailed scuffle between two individual combatants (the fight between the medic and Doc Bronx).

We started about 7PM, made characters, had two big fights, took our time doing some awesome roleplaying with the NPCs of the villages and between our own characters, and chatted for at least an hour about the last of a few cool GM rules we'd been playing with. All by midnight.

WRAP-UP!

That's all. Reading back through this has really made me appreciate all the hard work the team of playtesters and hundreds of Yahoos put into it. You have my sincere thanks—not only as the guy who sells it, but as a gamer who just LOVES to play it.

PARTING SHOTS, 2009



Whatever Happened to Jack? "Smilin' Jack" was our original mascot, patterned after the old EC Crypt Keeper and other hosts. It seems many felt he was annoying, but it was also just hard to make him fit every setting we were doing. So we ditched him for the most part. But he calls to me from his lonely box now and then. And there's nothing worse than an angry Jack in the box...

Scripted Campaigns: We don't plan on doing any more scripted campaigns like Evernight. Now that we've figure out how to do Plot Points we're really keen on the balance between backstory and non-linearity.

A \$10 Rule Book?: The \$10 "Explorer's Edition" of *Savage Worlds* has been a massive hit, and is now in its second printing. We're thrilled so many new faces have joined our community.

The Origins Award: We're pretty aggressive at Pinnacle for going after Origins Awards for our new games. *Savage Worlds* won the Player's Choice Award for 2003, though Origins forgot to announce it at the awards show, and still hasn't sent us our statues. Our industry is unfortunately far less professional than we'd like it to be. You did your job and voted though, and we certainly thank you for it.

Surprises: The biggest surprise with is that *Savage Worlds* succeeded. Between the old Pinnacle and the new, things were bad. I wrote it not to rebuild the game company as it had been, but because it was the game I wanted to play. It still is, and re-publishing this article has just excited me even more. Fortunately, I've got a game tomorrow night. We're back in Stalingrad and those damn 88s have to be blown up again...