

Deadlands 1876

The Rail Wars

Railroad iron is a magician's rod, in its power to evoke the sleeping energies of land and water.

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Introduction

In the early nineteenth century, the United States realized that it would have to develop a system of infrastructure to connect its cities, transport goods from the interior to the coast, and help carry pioneers further and further west. Toll-roads and turnpikes began to spring up across the east, while the success of the Erie Canal (constructed 1817–1825) connecting the Great Lakes to the Hudson River ushered in a boom for canal-building that occupied the imaginations—and fortunes—of many over the next few decades. Of course, the steam engine quickly rose to prominence, and America's waterways were soon filled with steamships, able to paddle their way upriver or push effortlessly against offshore currents and tides. But it was the railroad that would eventually win the day, demonstrating the most effective use of steam power and establishing a dominant form of transportation that would reign for nearly a century.

Inspired by English innovations, American rail had very humble beginnings, and was initially used to pull coal carts over wooden tracks. As more people recognized the value of the “iron horse,” tracks became longer and more sturdy, able to support the weight of the rolling stock required to transport increasingly larger burdens over greater distances. America's first railroads of note were the Charleston & Hamburg (constructed 1828–1833) connecting Charleston, South Carolina to Hamburg, Georgia; and the Baltimore & Ohio (constructed 1828–1852), linking the port of Baltimore, Maryland with Wheeling, Virginia. As the 1830s progressed, railroads began multiplying at a dizzying pace, laying tracks across landlocked areas and rendering canals obsolete virtually overnight.

Early Rail Politics

From the very beginning, the railroad occupied a murky position in American politics. Theoretically prevented by the Constitution from directly investing in business ventures, both local and Federal government found increasingly more brazen ways to promote the construction of rails. Initially, the states had more power than Washington, and could grant charters to various railroad companies as they saw fit. Once a company was given license to develop a railroad, a state government could invoke “eminent domain,” a power that allowed compensated confiscation of private lands in order to benefit the public good. Railroads were given tax exemptions and remissions from import duties, bestowed with valuable land grants, and permitted to hold public lotteries. Private companies were granted the use of Army surveyors and civil engineers, and many railway projects were financially supported through massive government subsidies. As railroads became more important to the economy, it began to be increasingly difficult to disentangle public interests from private corporations, and many a man who held public office also occupied a seat on a railroad's board of directors.

North vs. South

There were a few difference between northern and southern railroads even during this time. For one, southern railroads tended to be more strictly confined to individual states, and were frequently used to connect plantations to rivers. Southern railways were often built more quickly than their northern counterparts, partly because slave labor was used to lay the track, but also because there was less oversight, and often inferior materials were used. Additionally, southern railroads were more directly financed by state money. In the north, where there was less attention to “states’ rights” and more reliance placed on the Federal government, rails still tended to develop along state lines, but were more thoroughly integrated into the commercial infrastructure of the entire region. Northern railroads also tended to draw more on private capital, particularly the great financial institutions of the eastern seaboard.

The Antebellum Period

As rail technology developed, more ambitious lines could be constructed. The New York & Erie was established to connect the Hudson River to the Great Lakes. Helmed by Benjamin Loder and involving thousands of Irish workers, the railroad took nearly two decades to build, opening in 1851 to great acclaim. Soon it was extended from Jersey City to Buffalo, and helped establish New York City as a dominant commercial and political force. Shortly after the Erie was announced, two other important railroads had their start. The Pennsylvania Railroad launched itself from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, guided by “Quaker with a vengeance” John Edgar Thomson and assisted by engineering genius Herman Haupt. After the line was completed in 1858, Thomson extended it all the way to Chicago in the west and to Jersey City in the east. Meanwhile, a group of businessmen in New York merged ten smaller railroads to form the New York Central, which was knit into a cohesive system by the great Erastus Corning. In the Antebellum south, little effort was made to consolidate lines, but Atlanta was clearly emerging as an important hub, while Sandusky and St. Louis each enjoyed a period of western prominence before becoming eclipsed by Chicago. Already the focus of numerous canals and shipping lanes, Chicago boomed as more travelers arrived by rail. In 1852, the city was connected to the east by the Michigan Central, which was eventually absorbed into the New York Central. By the time the War began, Chicago had become the terminus of every major northern railroad: the Erie, the New York Central, the Pennsylvania, and the Baltimore & Ohio.

The Civil War

There is no doubt that the superior state of her railroads was a major advantage for the North during the early years of the Civil War. Possessing greater connectivity and more standardization than southern lines, the northern railroads were quickly adapted to the War and saddled with a staggering amount of troops and matériel. With his history in railroad law, Lincoln intuitively understood the necessity for a strong railway system, and established the United States Military Railroads to impose government authority. Led by the vice president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Thomas Scott, and a young Andrew Carnegie, the USMR was supported by legislation that allowed the Federal government to take possession of rails, rolling stock, depots, and even telegraph lines. Down south, Jefferson Davis placed the southern rails under the protection of the Quartermaster Bureau, but the same political ideology that led to the inferior condition of southern railways ensured constant friction with a central authority.

Transcontinental Railroad

As long as Americans have been building railroads, they have dreamt of establishing a continuous line from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Efforts to realize this dream, however, were usually stymied by the southern states, who consistently voted against any measure that would place such a railway in the north. As soon as the South seceded, Lincoln and his Republican congress passed a resolution for the establishment of a “Pacific Railroad,” and the race began, with the Central Pacific working eastward from Sacramento and the Union Pacific building westward from Omaha.

Deadlands Rail

Historically, the North relinquished control of the railroads after the War, and history went on as we know it, with the Transcontinental Railroad being completed in 1869. Of course, given the extension of the Civil War and the ravages of the Blue Plague, the world of *Deadlands* is quite different. The rest of this document represents *Deadlands* “alternate history,” but attempts to incorporate as many historical facts and personalities as possible.

Important Alterations

It may be useful to keep a few *Deadlands* territorial alterations in mind when reading this document—besides the obvious secession of the South, of course!

Utah Territory vs. Deseret

The drive toward Mormon independence has resulted in Deseret being larger than our modern state of Utah. Historically, in 1866 the government stripped off a western slice of the Utah Territory and ceded it to Nevada. They reduced Utah again in 1868 by clipping off the northeast corner and ceding it to Wyoming. These divisions never happened in *Deadlands*, which means the Nevada Territory is more narrow than its historical counterpart, and the Wyoming Territory is “missing” a piece of its southwest corner. Additionally, many Mormons believe that parts of Nevada, New Mexico, and even California rightfully belong to them, and will one day be part of “Deseret Fulfilled.”

Confederate Arizona and New Mexico Territory

Modern Arizona and New Mexico were essentially formed by splitting the Territory of New Mexico down the 109° meridian, with the western half taking the name Arizona and the eastern half retaining the name New Mexico. In *Deadlands*, this division actually occurred *lengthwise* along the 34th parallel, with the northern half remaining the Union Territory of New Mexico and the southern half becoming the Confederate Territory of Arizona. The origins of this lengthwise division are historical—Confederate Arizona actually existed in this form between 1861–1865. This difference leads to several interesting “relocations.” The New Mexico of *Deadlands* borders Colorado *and* Utah to the north, and contains the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, and Canyon Diablo Crater. Arizona now borders El Paso, and contains Carlsbad Caverns, Rock Canyon, and White Sands. Arizona was made a Confederate State in 1874, with Mesilla as its capital and Lewis Owings as governor. With New Mexico to the north, the Second California Republic to the west, the Republic of Texas to the east, and Mexico to the south, Confederate Arizona is an “island” state, surrounded on all four sides by sovereign nations.

Union Rail

After Black Friday and the lynching of General William Tecumseh Sherman, the fortunes of the North took a terrible turn, leading to the assassinations of Presidents Lincoln and Johnson followed by the Colfax Scandal. The Union lost control over its western territories, the state of California declined into chaos, and work on the Transcontinental Railroad was abandoned. Finally the Union entered what many consider to be its darkest period—the Suspension. After Grant and Seward declared martial law, they introduced a series of shocking “General Orders” designed to “safeguard and preserve” the Union. They suspended the Constitution, re-organized the military, established extralegal agencies, conducted clandestine courts-martial, rewrote existing drafting legislation, imposed strict curfews and health-related quarantines, and silenced dissident newspapers. They also pushed through a series of unconstitutional measures eventually referred to as “The Nationalization.”

Union Blue (UB)

In April 1869, Grant dissolved the United States Military Railroads and issued “General Order No. 21,” also known as the “Union Blue Edict.” This order established Union Blue, a “national company” that assumed control of the North’s most important railroads. The New York Central served as its principal infrastructure, but Union Blue also absorbed the Burlington & Missouri River, the Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati & Indianapolis, the Cleveland & Toledo, the Illinois Central, the Chicago & Rock Island, the Michigan Southern, the Northern Indiana, the Mississippi & Missouri, the Lake Shore Railway, the Union Pacific Eastern Division (Kansas Pacific), and over two dozen other smaller railroads. Although Union Blue’s initial charter also included the moribund Union Pacific and the increasingly rogue Central Pacific, the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Erie & New York were left under the private ownership of John Edgar Thomson and Jay Gould respectively, who were allowed to develop them as they saw fit.

Union Blue emerged as a strange hybrid of government and business, able to dispense land grants and utilize government funding, but still charged with maintaining competitive standards and producing a profit. Its board of directors featured business tycoons and rail barons such as Cornelius Vanderbilt, Erastus Corning, Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, Anthony Drexler, and Thomas C. Durant; however government oversight was provided by Thomas Scott and Grenville Dodge. It was a risky experiment that many thought would lead to disaster, and after a restored Congress formalized Grant’s actions with the passage of the Railroad Nationalization Act of 1871, there were moments when Union Blue almost collapsed under the collective weight of its directors’ egos. However, stability emerged as every man involved became filthy rich, and in early 1874 Cornelius Vanderbilt was formally elected CEO and George McClellan was appointed president. Today, Union Blue operates the largest amount of rolling stock in the world, and has become a commercial and political behemoth, maintaining its own security apparatus and receiving the full support of Republicans and Democrats alike.

Central Pacific Railroad (CP)

Conceived by Theodore Judah and authorized by Congress in 1862, the Central Pacific was originally charged with constructing the western half of the Transcontinental Railroad by laying rail from San Francisco to Utah. Unfortunately, after the Great Quake devastated most of the California coastline, only Sacramento remained as a feasible starting point. Financed by a group of California businessmen known as “The Big Four”—Leland Stanford, Collis Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins—the

Central Pacific begun work in earnest in 1863, but was shortly forestalled by the War. Sporadic work on the Transcontinental occurred during times of relative peace, but the Blue Plague, the Second Utah War, and the Hammer of '74 have all imposed disastrous setbacks and delays. During such periods “off-project,” the Big Four wisely spent their time developing infrastructure throughout northern California, extending CP track through Oregon state into the Washington Territory, and negotiating contracts with the emerging Second California Republic.

As of 1876, the Central Pacific exists in a state of uncertainty regarding its legal and commercial future. Initially included in the list of railroads nationalized by Grant during the Suspension, the determined unwillingness of the Big Four to be absorbed by Union Blue and the general isolation of post-Quake California rendered Grant's edict unenforceable. Subsequent political maneuvering by the Big Four kept the Central Pacific from being legally acquired under the Railroad Nationalization Act of 1871, and so like the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Central Pacific has retained its independence as a private corporation. With the Armistice promising that the state of “North California” will soon enter the Union, work on the Transcontinental Railroad has begun anew, with current efforts focused on crossing the Sierra Nevada mountains via the “Summit Tunnel.” The Big Four are now in negotiations with the Grant Administration to decide the future of the Central Pacific Railroad after the Transcontinental is completed. Most believe that once the golden spike is pounded home, the Central Pacific will finally merge with Union Blue, and the Big Four will retire rich as Croesus.

Northern Pacific Railway (NP)

Begun in 1873, the Northern Pacific is a second transcontinental railroad, intended to connect the Great Lakes with the northern Pacific coast. The railway is a unique collaboration between Union Blue and the Central Pacific—indeed, the Big Four's cooperation in the project was one of the stipulations that allowed the Central Pacific to avoid nationalization. With Montana's Gold Creek as the proposed meeting point, the Central Pacific is laying track eastward across the Washington Territory from the small port town of Kalama, while Union Blue's “Northern Pacific Line” is building westward from Duluth. Unfortunately, as described later in the “Rail Wars” section, problems with the Sioux have caused unforeseen delays.

Confederate Rail

After taking a beating during the Northern invasions of the early War, Southern rail recovered in the mid-Sixties, and the Gray Revival witnessed an explosive period of growth marked by increased standardization and a greater willingness to cooperate across state lines. While some of this progress was certainly due to technological advances—the Confederate Strike provided an ample supply of ghost rock, and the Confederate's tacit alliance with Great Britain granted them access to superior engineers—much of the credit goes to President Davis, who exerted considerable political will through the controversial Emergency Powers Act of 1866.

Firmly establishing Richmond's central authority over Confederate governors, EPA66 had a profound effect on the Confederacy, touching upon everything from mandatory crop rotation to the establishment of the Richmond Secret Police. Southern railroads were covered by no less than six hundred pages detailing overarching structural changes, imposing new regulations, and establishing a unified system of standards. Most significantly, the Quartermaster Bureau was granted “immediate and uncompensated”

use of all Southern rail for “any and all purposes relating to affairs of national security.” The position of Confederate Railmaster was created within the Bureau, and Davis asked Texan general Sidney Sherman to serve as its first occupant. Because only President Davis has the authority to decide which matters constitute “affairs of national security,” there has been considerable friction over Richmond’s various interpretations of EPA66—especially when Davis declared the transportation of ghost rock to be a “self-evident matter of national security.” On the other hand, even though the Act stipulates “uncompensated” use of the rails, in reality everyone involved benefits; governors, contractors, and owners are rewarded with considerable political capital, lucrative government contracts, and wholesale tax exemptions.

Furthermore, Davis’ appointment of General Sherman as Railmaster touched off a separate controversy. Known as “The Hero of Galveston,” Sherman had recently run afoul of Texas President Frank Lubbock and his brother Tom, whom Sherman suspected of burning down his Harrisburg mansion and engineering a hostile takeover of his railroad, the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos & Colorado. Although all Texans have honorary CSA citizenship, few expected Sherman to “switch sides” so completely, and his unwavering support of Confederate rail has occasionally tested the limits of the “Grand Old Alliance.” (And the fact that a “General Sherman” is in charge of Confederate railroads poses an irony not unremarked upon by southern governors!)

Dixie Steam & Rail (DS&R)

Established under the Emergency Powers Act of 1866, Dixie Steam & Rail is the South’s largest transportation company, and the only one legally permitted to transport and distribute ghost rock. From its corporate headquarters in Atlanta, DS&R controls a considerable network of railroads, paddle steamers, and packet airships, and is presided over by General Alexander R. Lawton, a Sharpsburg veteran who served as Davis’ second Quartermaster-General. Although Dixie Steam & Rail is similar to Union Blue in many ways—both were created by executive fiat, and both were formed by the absorption and conglomeration of existing railroads—Dixie is nominally a private company. In reality, its shareholders are mostly politicians and military brass, and include President Jefferson Davis himself, General Sidney Sherman, Fitzhugh Lee, General J.E.B. Stuart, infamous blockade runner Captain Rhett Butler, and vice presidential candidate John Breckenridge. This flagrant-yet-unspoken relationship between DS&R and Richmond has led to Dixie’s unflattering nickname among many unconnected Southrons: “Dixie Pork & Trough.”

Bayou Vermilion (BV)

In 1865 Texan General Sidney Sherman found himself on the losing end of the “Harrisburg War,” a series of shady business maneuvers that resulted in the hostile takeover of his railroad, the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos & Colorado Railway. Engineered in part by the Lubbock brothers—President Frank and General Tom Saltus—the takeover passed ownership of the railroad to a New Orleans holding company called “Vermilion Equity.” Operating from a Louisiana feudality known only as “The Plantation,” Vermilion Equity is entirely owned and operated by the mysterious LaCroix family, a venerable French clan that made their fortune in the slave trade before expanding into banking, insurance, medicine, and steam. In 1869 the Plantation purchased both the Houston & Texas Central Railway and the Texas & New Orleans Railroad Company and “Bayou Vermilion” was born. Dedicated to laying track thorough Louisiana and Texas and thenceforth all the way to the Maze, Bayou Vermilion has a reputation for aggressive business practices and is notoriously willing to resort to blackmail, extortion,

and violence when legal methods fail to meet their objectives. Bayou Vermilion has a troubled relationship with Richmond, which has consistently denied their requests for a ghost rock charter once they've gained access to the Maze. This has not stopped Bayou Vermilion from advancing westward, and most observers believe that Richmond will finally relent once BV has "tracks on the ground."

Black River Railroad & Telegraph Company (BR)

Beginning its career in 1845 as the Nashville & Chattanooga Railway, this line was initially presided over by Vernon K. Stevenson, a Nashville businessman who embodied several affluent Tennessee families through connections established over three marriages. In 1854, he married his third and final wife, Maria L. Bass. The granddaughter of Tennessee political legend Felix Grundy, Maria's father John Bass was the former mayor of Nashville and the president of Nashville's Union Bank. Her wealth allowed Stevenson to promote and expand the railroad, but when the War came to Tennessee, it brought an entire Union army hell-bent on capturing its valuable tracks. After the fall of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in 1862, General Don Carlos Buell set his sights on Nashville. Fueled by rumors of Union ironclads on the Cumberland, Nashville's citizens began to panic. Appointed the Quartermaster of Nashville, Stevenson disgraced himself by fleeing to safety in the face of the Union advance, allowing much-needed supplies to fall into Federal hands. Earning the scorn of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, Stevenson became a reviled figure, and was assassinated a few weeks later by an unknown gunman. Meanwhile, Nashville was occupied by Union forces.

In a shocking turn of events, Stevenson's widow changed her name back to Bass, publicly renounced her late husband's "cowardice," and established the Volunteer Fund to help repair damages caused by Federal forces in Tennessee. After the Second Battle of Nashville liberated the Nashville & Chattanooga from Union domination in 1865, Maria and her sisters Mina Grundy and Myrtle Maney assumed control of the company. In 1868, the sisters used their family fortune to purchase the Nashville & Northwestern Railroad and the Hickman & Obion Railroad. Merging their three holdings into the "Black River Railroad & Telegraph Company," the sisters appointed Myrtle's brother General George Maney as president and began an audacious campaign of expansion, laying rail throughout Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas and Missouri. Known for their shrewd business acumen and progressive thinking—in 1873 Black River abolished slave labor on all their concerns—the sisters have recently made overtures to Union Blue, trusting that the Armistice will soon reopen the North to southern commerce. Black River has already entered the Disputed Territories, financing the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe in Kansas and negotiating with Colorado for a connection to Denver City.

Independent Rail

There are six other significant players on the field—the Denver Pacific, the Denver & Rio Grande, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, the Golden Republic Railroad, the Texas Railroad, Navigation & Banking Company, and the Wasatch Rail, Steam, Air & Telegraph Company.

Denver Pacific Railway & Telegraph Company (DP)

Conceived in 1867 to link Denver City with Cheyenne and thence to the eventual Transcontinental Railroad, the Denver Pacific was formed by Union-friendly interests in Colorado led by Territorial Governor John Evans and bankrolled by the "Denver Syndicate," a collection of industrialists, bankers, politicians, mine owners, surveyors,

newspaper publishers, and Mormon entrepreneurs. After a somewhat shaky start, the Denver Pacific eventually took root, and now owns and operates most of the rail in Colorado and eastern Utah. However, the Armistice has placed Denver Pacific in a politically sensitive position linked to the fate of “disputed” Colorado. If the territory officially becomes a Union state, Denver Pacific will likely be nationalized and absorbed into Union Blue; whereas if Colorado throws in with the Confederacy, DP may be appropriated by Richmond and “encouraged” to merge with Dixie Steam & Rail. Of course, if Colorado retains its newfound independence, Denver Pacific will continue to act as a private company—an outcome clearly desired by the majority of the Syndicate.

Denver & Rio Grande Railway (D&RG)

Founded in 1870 by English expatriates General William Jackson Palmer and Dr. William Bell, the D&RG is a narrow-gauge railway originally intended to link Denver City to Santa Fe. Upon reaching the Colorado town of Pueblo, Palmer and Bell decided to add a western branch connecting their railroad to the rich mines of Leadville and thence all the way to Salt Lake City. Taking full advantage of Colorado’s functional independence, they ignored Union protestations and rapidly laid tracks toward both nominally-Federal territories. Currently the main branch of the Denver & Rio Grande has reached Trinidad near Colorado’s southern border, while the western branch is paused at Cañon City. Unfortunately, further progress is hindered by a pair of significant physical obstacles. In order to reach Leadville and Utah beyond, the western route must pass through a canyon known as the Royal Gorge. The southern route must cross the Sangre de Christo Mountains through the Santa Fe Trail’s Ratón Pass. Both represent choke points only offering room for a single railroad—and both are contested by the Denver & Rio Grande’s rival, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe.

Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (AT&SF)

Chartered in 1859 by Topeka founder “Colonel” Cyrus K. Holliday, the original Atchison & Topeka connected those eponymous towns before extending west to Dodge City in 1872. Having done a great deal to open the Kansas plains to settlement, Holliday decided to continue the line all the way to Santa Fe. Unfortunately, the hardships of the War forced him to declare bankruptcy, and his railroad remained stalled at Dodge City. A year later, Black River quietly approached “Colonel” Holliday and offered financial backing. After a few rounds of intense negotiation—including Holliday’s demand that Black River abolish slave labor across *all* their lines—the “Colonel” accepted the three sisters as silent partners, and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe was born. Currently, the AT&SF has laid tracks all the way to Pueblo, which puts them in direct competition with the Denver & Rio Grande for access to the Ratón Pass. Furthermore, last year the AT&SF announced their intentions to undercut their competitor to Leadville, and have laid additional track from Pueblo to Rockvale, just east of Cañon City. This charged rivalry is detailed further under the “Rail Wars” section.

Golden Republic Railroad (GR)

Born from the exigencies of the Great Quake, California’s Golden Republic Railroad is operated by a consortium of financiers commonly referred to as “the Quakers,” a phrase denoting their origins in disaster as opposed to any religious affiliation. Including such notables as Theodore Judah, David Hewes, Yung Wing, Darius Hellstromme, and Alonzo Horton, the Quakers represent interests in the four major cities of the Second California Republic: San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Lynchburg. Conceived to transport ghost rock from the Maze to various ports of trade, Golden Republic is also essential for the transportation of foodstuffs from the California heartland to its shattered

coast. Although the endless political infighting of the Second California Republic ensures that GR rarely operates smoothly, it has maintained an amicable relationship with its neighbor the Central Pacific, which it correctly sees as a future lifeline to the Union. Golden Republic is also an important backer of President Walker's Nicaragua Canal, which will greatly reduce shipping times to Union and Confederate ports alike. When asked about Bayou Vermilion, the Quakers just shrug: "Let them cross the Mojave, then we'll talk."

Texas Railroad, Navigation & Banking Company (TRN&B)

In 1866, New York financier Hamblin Stilwell arrived in Galveston. The former mayor of Rochester and an associate of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Stilwell helped develop the Erie Canal and the New York Central Railroad. Taking over the failing Houston and Texas Central Railway, Hamblin made a series of curious business decisions, acquiring certain moribund railroads while ignoring others seemingly more lucrative; modernizing some of his holdings while dismantling and cannibalizing others. In 1874—the year of his death—Hamblin renamed his company the Texas Railroad, Navigation & Banking Company, a charmingly improbable name he resurrected from an unrealized charter dating from 1836. He then bequeathed his strange empire to his grandson, 15-year old Arthur Stilwell. Confounding all expectations and ignoring the advice of his considerably-more experienced advisors, the young Stilwell immediately followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, strengthening and expanding his railroad through a series of contrarian moves and ostensibly prescient decisions. Even more so than Hamblin, Arthur Stilwell seemed possessed by an almost preternatural ability to see opportunity where others saw only disaster, and to disengage from a profitable course of action moments before the bottom fell out. Stilwell's uncanny talent for "fortune-telling" soon set the rumor mill churning; some suggested the young man retained a powerful spiritualist, others believed that Stilwell himself was a gifted psychic, while a few intimated that perhaps an infernal pact had been struck at some lonely railway crossing.

Only once did Stilwell himself address the issue. At a cotillion in Galveston, he was bluntly asked about his "supernatural powers" by a charming but impolitic debutante. Without missing a beat, Stilwell replied, "Young lady, I am advised nightly by brownies." His flip answer defused the awkward moment with general laughter—but by all accounts, a *nervous* laughter....

Today, the Texas Railroad, Navigation & Banking Company is the largest and most powerful railroad in the Republic. Modeled in part after Union Blue and Dixie Steam, Stilwell has introduced standardization, lowered fares, and wisely invested in new technologies. He has also thwarted numerous attempts to oust him from power, including an attempted coup launched by the railroad's most powerful shareholders. To the consternation of his allies and the delight of his rivals, the "Young Tycoon" still engages in reckless and often counter-intuitive behavior. Despite the progress Bayou Vermilion has made laying tracks to the Maze, Stilwell refuses to do business with the Plantation, and seems oblivious to the potential advantages of a future stake in the ghost rock trade. There are also reports that Stilwell's men have been sighted in the Coyote Confederation; a well-known bastion of intractable hostility to the white man's railroad! If TRN&B has indeed opened negotiations with Quannah Parker and Satanta White Bear, it could give the Republic of Texas a direct line into Union Kansas.

Wasatch Rail, Steam, Air & Telegraph Company (WR)

Recently chartered in Deseret as an exclusively Mormon-built and Mormon-owned enterprise, the Wasatch Rail, Steam, Air & Telegraph Company is still in its infancy, connecting Salt Lake City and Provo to outlying towns and fielding a single packet airship. The president of Wasatch is Brigham Young's son John Willard Young, but few decisions are made without his father's direct involvement, and the board of directors are all members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Despite the small size of Wasatch, the Mormons have big plans, and have been negotiating with Union Blue, the Denver Pacific, the Denver & Rio Grande, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, and even Dixie Steam & Rail. The Saints clearly envision Deseret at the heart of a future "Europeanized" America consisting of sovereign nation-states, and they recognize that a strong railway system is required to keep the lifeblood of commerce in healthy circulation. As Mormon ghost rock is pumped out of Deseret, food, water, and materials are drawn in; and if the Good Word is carried from Salt Lake upon those iron arteries as well, does not Wasatch perform the work of Heavenly Father with each new mile of track hammered into the good earth?

The Rail Wars

A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad.
—*Theodore Roosevelt*

It is impossible to overstate the amount of untapped wealth represented by North America, from the rich timber fields of the Pacific Northwest to the coal beds of Appalachia, from the gold veins of the Black Hills to the caves of azurite riddling the Maze. But such resources can only be translated into wealth, influence, and power if they can be exploited and transported—and whoever owns the railways controls these means. Needless to say, the expansion of iron rail across the states and territories of North America has not always happened peacefully, and the countless armed skirmishes, casual assassinations, strikes and strike-breakings, acts of sabotage, bouts of industrial terrorism, and myriad convulsions of political treachery that have accompanied this march of progress are collectively known as the "Rail Wars."

The most sought-after goal of the various so-called Rail Barons is to unite California with the rest of the continent, an achievement made unfortunately complex by a host of factors both natural and political. For one, the Sierra Nevada mountains are difficult to cross, keeping much of California locked behind a wall of solid granite. To the southwest lie the scorching-hot barrens of Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona; while the Rocky Mountains impose a central obstacle requiring much ingenuity and dynamite. There's also the Mojave Desert, where explorers report many strange phenomena; some even claiming that the desert gets larger the deeper one penetrates! Human factors include the War, of course, but also the fractious politics of Deseret, the rise of the Sioux Nation, and the general antagonism of the Coyote Confederation.

The five most significant "fronts" of the Rail Wars are as follows:

Colorado Territory

Boasting two independent railroads and cheerfully accommodating any competitor with enough financial backing to keep the palms of Denver politicians well-greased, the

Colorado Territory is the epicenter of the Rail Wars, as different companies compete for access to her lucrative mines, negotiate for rights in neighboring Deseret, and gaze hungrily across Nevada to the distant riches of California. It is here is where the Rail Wars most frequently flare into open violence; and given her history of brutal mining confrontations, Colorado's endless granite seems more than willing to soak up fresh blood. Still, Denver City has certainly benefited from the attention, playing host to several different railways and growing fat on the profits.

The Leadville War

Of all the railroad companies operating in Colorado, the two in most bitter conflict are the Denver & Rio Grande and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. Both have occupied Pueblo, both have designs on Leadville to the west and Santa Fe to the south, and both are willing to employ violence to achieve their ends. (Despite the importance of Santa Fe, observers have taken to calling the rivalry the "Leadville War.") The biggest points of friction are the Royal Gorge and the Ratón Pass. The former is a tremendous canyon just west of Cañon City, carved by the Arkansas River and situated directly along the route to Leadville. The latter is a narrow pass crossing the Sangre de Christo Mountains at the Colorado/New Mexico border. Both of these bottlenecks offer space for only a single railway, and neither company has any desire to go back to the drawing board. So far, the "Leadville War" has been mercifully bloodless, waged solely in courtrooms and across the pages of the press; but given the aggressive natures of both players, few expect a peaceful resolution. Indeed, locals report that hired goons have been streaming into Pueblo and Cañon City, and both companies have recently placed their offices under armed guard.

Kansas/Nebraska

Ever since the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 laid the foundation for "Bleeding Kansas," the state's general atmosphere of torn lawlessness has exposed Kansas to all manner of exploitation. Union Blue, the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Denver Pacific, and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe have freely laid track through Kansas, sometimes with the locals' cooperation, and sometimes using intimidation, dirty tricks, or subterfuge to secure the necessary land. On more than one occasion, railroad companies have callously manipulated Red and Blue politics to achieve their goals, shamelessly taking advantage of the violence that followed. There's also the ever-present threat of hostile Indians, and both the Sioux to the north and the Comanche to the south have dispatched raiding parties to harass work gangs and tear up rail. This problem extends into the Nebraska Territory, where the "Sioux Nation" has been growing increasingly more belligerent in response to white encroachment in the Black Hills.

Transcontinental Railroad

The North has pinned their California dreams on the Transcontinental Railroad, meant to join Union Blue with the Central Pacific; however the CP is still blasting through the Sierra Nevadas, and the new political realities of a sovereign Utah and an independent Colorado have sealed the pork barrel and shattered the crowbar of eminent domain. With significantly reduced authority in these regions, the Union is forced to negotiate for rights once considered inviolable.

The Black Hills War

The renewal of hostilities with the Sioux has brought additional problems to the Transcontinental. With the Lakota and her allies on the warpath, the newly-created Wyoming Territory has become increasingly more dangerous, despite the Union's uneasy peace with the Yanktonai and Santee. After a rail gang was murdered by an Arapahoe

war party, work on the Union Pacific has slowed considerably, with Hell on Wheels stalled in Sulphur Springs and her workers laboring under the protection of soldiers from Fort Laramie. The war has also affected the Northern Pacific as well, which recently established the town of Bismarck in the Dakota Territory. With the discovery of gold in the nearby Black Hills, Bismarck has attracted hundreds of prospectors, adventurers, and settlers, and has transformed almost overnight from a small railroad outpost into a lawless boom town. If the local Sioux were unhappy about the Northern Pacific to begin with, this “invasion” of whites has pushed them into open confrontation, and they’ve been stepping up attacks against surveying parties, work gangs, and gold-fevered wagon trains. In response, the Union has begun moving units of cavalry into the region, housing them in former Fort McKeen—now expanded, reinforced, and renamed Fort Abraham Lincoln.

Texas/Arizona

The Republic of Texas has dozens of privately-owned railroads that range across her great black prairies, but her very sovereignty has proved to be problematic, working in tandem with her general isolation to keep the Lone Star Republic disconnected from her English-speaking neighbors. Although Texas borders the Union Territory of New Mexico, Boston sees little reason to allow the rebellious Republic access to northern markets, while the Confederacy tends to honor the “Grand Old Alliance” more in word than deed, and has placed tremendous pressure on Austin to partner with Dixie Steam & Rail. This political pressure has a personal component as well, with the bad blood between President Frank Lubbock and Confederate Railmaster Sidney Sherman circulating freely through every business arrangement. While regular trade is convoluted enough, ghost rock presents its own knotty tangle. Because Texas has no azrucite resources, she is forced to purchase her ghost rock from the Second California Republic and the Confederacy. (The Union’s alliance with Deseret has closed off that avenue for the foreseeable future.) The former option is quite expensive; until Walker’s Nicaragua Canal is completed, the Maze must ship ghost rock around Cape Horn to Galveston. Although the Confederate option is significantly cheaper, it comes attached with disagreeable political strings binding the Republic even closer to Richmond.

And finally there is the possibility of a “Southern Transcontinental,” a line that would connect Atlanta with the Maze. Because such a road must run through Arizona as a matter of necessity, it would have to cross Texas on its way. Dixie Steam & Rail has made numerous offers to the Republic, some of which have been undeniably generous, others taking the less magnanimous form of political threat. For her own part, Texas has little desire to become the Confederacy’s poor relation, watching passively as millions of dollars in California ghost rock are eventually shipped east across her front yard on Dixie Steam & Rail. As a result Texas has awarded her rail contracts to Bayou Vermillion, who have offered a significantly more equitable partnership. Because neither Austin nor the Plantation are willing to discuss the exact terms of their deal, President Davis has made his “grave displeasure” at this arrangement quite clear. Although Richmond worries that Texas may be growing too ambitious for her own good, Davis is unwilling to force the issue and upset the “Grand Old Alliance.” Everyone knows that when Bayou Vermillion reaches the Maze, some new arrangement will have to be found—there’s little doubt that Richmond will be happy with a Southern Transcontinental that crosses sovereign Texas and cannot legally transport ghost rock!

Fortunately for those politicians looking to avoid the issue, the problem won’t require a solution any time soon, as Mexican insurgents and their Indian allies have recently

blunted Bayou Vermilion's relentless expansion. This conflict has led to some wild tales coming out of Arizona; rumors of wholesale slaughter in the desert, reports of railroad executives committing sudden acts of suicide, and strangest of all, whispers of enslaved workers who never sleep....

Utah/New Mexico

Fueled by the azurite mines of Labyrinth Canyon and proclaiming a "Sacred Right" to the entirety of Utah, Wasatch Railroad may be the young upstart, but it has entered the fray with both fists eagerly raised. Uniting a sense of manifest destiny with an evangelical mandate to spread the Good Word, Wasatch is expanding at a dizzying pace, and it's quite clear that President Brigham Young views the Territories of Nevada and New Mexico as potential Mormon acquisitions. This has created a potentially explosive situation. Under the terms of the Recognition, Union Blue has pledged their support to Wasatch; but they remain justifiably concerned by the long-term goals of their new ally. This is balanced by the Union's innate and profound distrust of the Confederacy, which has signaled their own interest in New Mexico. As long as Salt Lake helps keep Richmond in check, Boston is likely to tolerate Mormon rail south of the 37th parallel.

Of course, Wasatch is not putting all of her eggs into a single Blue basket. Wasatch president John W. Young has been openly pursuing partnerships with Denver Pacific and Denver & Rio Grande, exploring a possible "fallback" alliance with Black River's Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, and secretly negotiating with Dixie Steam & Rail. With Santa Fe being an important part of these negotiations, it is evident that Deseret does not expect New Mexico to remain a Union possession indefinitely. Meanwhile, the Union has been conducting its own clandestine talks with the quasi-independent Black River, which Union Blue sees as a potential business partner offering access to southern markets. If these negotiations bear fruit, Union Blue would not only "recognize" Black River's involvement in Kansas' Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, they'd allow the line to legally extend through Union territory.

As might be expected, such Byzantine political intrigue occasionally erupts into violence, and Wasatch rail has fallen victim to several acts of mysterious sabotage; and with so many potential enemies, correctly assigning blame is no easy task! As a result, Deseret has grown justifiably suspicious of all Gentiles—a political stance that does little to alleviate the Mormons' reputation as desert-dwelling paranoids. Furthermore, all of this scheming over New Mexico's destiny assumes that the territory is ready and willing to be "civilized." In reality, like Arizona to the south, many who have explored the rugged interior of New Mexico have returned with unsettling stories—campfire tales of rogue nations populated by deserters and outcasts; sightings of lost Indian tribes who dress like monsters and dance in masks; entire pueblos of Mexican insurgents who sacrifice *gringos* to long-dead gods and pray for the advent of "México Restaurado."

So as far as railroads go, why, it's the wild west out there....

RAILROAD, n. The chief of many mechanical devices enabling us to get away from where we are to where we are no better off. For this purpose the railroad is held in highest favor by the optimist, for it permits him to make the transit with great expedition.
—*Ambrose Bierce*

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