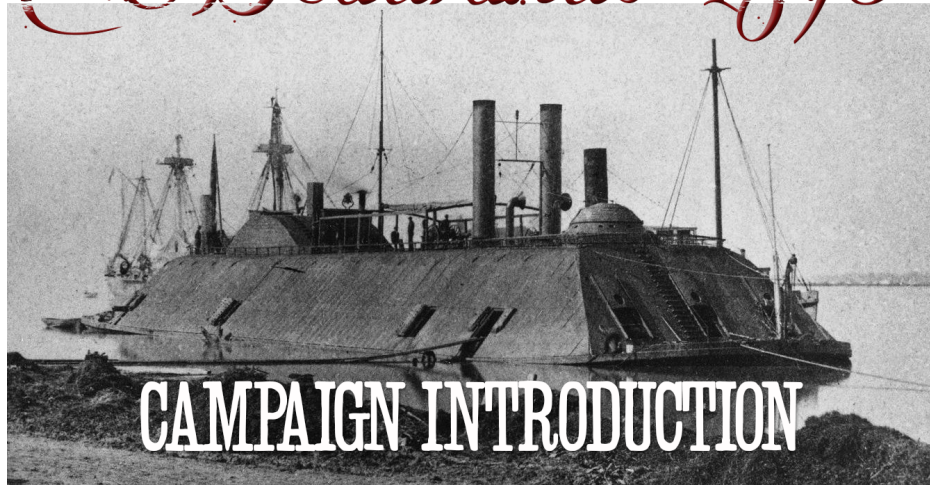


Deadlands 1876



Introduction

Hello, and welcome to *Deadlands 1876*! For those of you who remember my “New York By Night” campaign for White Wolf’s role-playing game *Vampire: The Masquerade*, this is my new obsession. This site will continue to grow over the next few years, collecting my various game-related documents as web pages and downloadable PDFs.

What Is *Deadlands 1876*?

Deadlands 1876 is a campaign setting for the *Deadlands Reloaded* role-playing game, which uses Pinnacle Entertainment’s generic *Savage Worlds* system. The general milieu of *Deadlands Reloaded* occupies an alternative history where the Civil War resulted in Confederate independence, and combines elements of several genres including horror, steampunk, and the “Weird West.”

Deadlands 1876 represents my own personal campaign, a work-in-progress that I hope has generated a few potentially useful or interesting resources for other *Deadlands* players. (Or any gamer interested in a Western setting or Civil War milieu.) The introduction you are reading now is not meant to serve as a general introduction to *Deadlands Reloaded*, *Savage Worlds*, or role-playing games in general; but only to the material and resources found on this site.

How Does *Deadlands 1876* Differ from the Official Campaign Setting?

Deadlands 1876 is set in a centennial America that resembles, but does not reproduce, the official scenario of *Deadlands Reloaded*. Most of the core setting’s foundational ideas are recognizable and remain intact: The Great Quake destroyed much of the West Coast, forming the “Great Maze” and catalyzing California’s exit from the Union. This earthquake first exposed the rare and precious mineral called “ghost rock,” which has fueled a revolution in steampunk technology. A protracted Civil War gradually resolved into a tense armistice between the Union and an independent Confederacy. Since the Great Quake, the world has been subjected to increasingly more hostile incursions by apparently supernatural forces. However, besides being set a few years earlier, *Deadlands 1876* differs in several important ways from the official scenario. These differences may be summarized by a brief discussion of the campaign’s unique timeline, its dominant themes, and the changes I’ve made to the standard game mechanics.

Alternate History

The alternate history of *Deadlands 1876* diverges significantly from the timeline offered in the published rules. Being a Civil War buff, I have taken painstaking—one might even call it obsessive!—care to craft a feasible, if perhaps neurotically detailed, alternate history. While the complete timeline may be seen on the “Deadlands Timeline” page, the broad strokes are as follows: After the Great Quake shattered coastal California, two important factors allowed the South to continue fighting. The first was ghost rock, a resource with the power to indelibly alter the world’s economy, and originally found solely in California’s Great Maze. When the South discovered a new vein of ghost rock in the Florida Everglades, they became an irresistible trading partner for Great Britain and France, who suddenly found they could overlook the South’s penchant for human chattel after all. This trading relationship blossomed into an alliance that granted the Confederacy access to British technology. Secondly, but just as importantly, a terrible disease known as the Blue Plague emerged in America during the spring of 1864. A generally fatal affliction that predominantly infected adult males, the Blue Plague inexplicably ravaged the North while leaving Southerners curiously untouched. Over the course of a six-year pandemic, the Blue Plague decimated the Northern ranks and precipitated the fall of Washington DC and the relocation of the Union capital to Boston. Supported by the British and in possession of a healthy army, the Confederacy managed to tread water after Sherman’s death, and eventually fought the Union to a standstill by 1874. (As mentioned above, a detailed breakdown of this time period is available on the “Deadlands Timeline” page.)

Notes on Ghost Rock

For the most part, *Deadlands 1876* follows the official rules regarding ghost rock and its alloys, but treats it more “scientifically” and explores its broader geopolitical ramifications—in *Deadlands 1876*, ghost rock is positioned somewhere between modern petroleum and the Spice of *Dune*. More commonly called “blue coal” or “azrucite,” since the Great Quake there have been three additional strikes of ghost rock: The “Confederate Strike” in the Everglades allowed the South to remain a going concern; the “Mammoth Cave Vein” unearthed in Kentucky re-ignited the Civil War before quickly running dry; and the recent “Labyrinth Canyon Vein” in southern Utah secured Mormon Independence and hammered the final nail into the coffin of the former United States of America. Because of ghost rock, the map of North America is now a balkanized puzzle of competing nations: the Dominion of Canada, the Union, the CSA, the Second California Republic, the Republic of Texas, the Coyote Confederation, the Republic of Deseret, the effectively-independent Colorado Free State, and the Sioux Nation, a Union territory currently fighting for its sovereignty.

Themes

Steampunk & The Weird West

Although *Deadlands 1876* employs plenty of standard steampunk tropes, the focus is on subtlety, not fantasy—you’ll find no giant mechanical spiders or clockwork soldiers here. In *Deadlands 1876*, the elements of steampunk are restrained to realistically “futuristic” contraptions with origins in actual history: difference engines, submersible ironclads, airships, bolt-action rifles, phonographs, etc. For reasons based solely on personal eccentricity, I have also shifted the invention of ragtime and jazz a few decades into the past, so “gutbucket” music is a phenomenon that’s slowly replacing the national passion for minstrelsy. (I have always thought airships were more fun while hosting a band playing “East St. Louis Toodle-oo.”)

As with steampunk, I have also dialed down the more over-the-top supernatural elements of the original setting as well—there are no undead presidents secretly in charge of the railroad; no giant sandworms burrowing beneath the desert or dragons patrolling the Maze. *Deadlands 1876* strives to portray a haunted and darkly sinister world, one of whispered tales of lost armies clashing in the Antietam twilight; ghost trains howling through a blizzard on spectral tracks; long-abandoned desert towns suddenly repopulated during an eclipse, now filled with blind sinners and amnesiac hangmen. In general tone, *Deadlands 1876* is more in line with Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* or White Wolf's "World of Darkness" than *Dungeons & Dragons*; it's more *Bram Stoker's Dracula* than *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*; more *El Topo* than *Wild Wild West*.

Sources of Inspiration (Or, "Where I Steal Ideas From")

I was influenced by many different sources as I developed *Deadlands 1876*. In order to immediately acknowledge my thieving ways, let me briefly list of my main sources of inspiration—it may also help convey the atmosphere of my campaign. My principal literary muse is Thomas Pynchon's steampunk epic *Against the Day*. From its mysterious airship organizations to its deadly mining wars, from its crazed inventors to its temporal invaders, this sprawling Western laid the blueprint for much of my world-building. Next on the list is William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's seminal novel *The Difference Engine*, which has so many brilliant ideas I simply lifted many of them wholesale. And the last of the "big three" is Alan Moore's "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," a dazzling series of comics that encouraged me to populate my world with as many obscure fictional allusions as I could pilfer from the pages of my incompletely-read and inadequately-understood library. In terms my supernatural influences, the feeling of the unreal subverting and/or invading our everyday reality is nicely captured by *The X-Files* and *Fringe*, while the fiction of Tim Powers and Orson Scott Card showed me how to blend fantasy with history and still maintain a sense of dignity. Strictly in terms of the Western genre, *Deadlands 1876* strives for the surreal, apocalyptic fervor of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, the gritty authenticity of *Deadwood*, the ebullient violence of *Django Unchained*, and the crazy-quilt eclecticism of *Hell on Wheels*. And finally, there's my list of "usual suspects," those favorite writers who creep into all my gaming material: Herman Melville, H.P. Lovecraft, Jorge Luis Borges, Michael Moorcock, and Grant Morrison. A full account of my various sources and resources may be found on the "Deadlands Bibliography" page.

What Kind of Horror Do You Usually Have Here? Oh We Got Both Kinds—We Got Supernatural and Moral!

The other genre sprinkled into the eccentric mélange of *Deadlands 1876* is horror. After a lifetime of writing, running, and playing *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios, a passion for cosmic nihilism and a fondness for creeping dread are in my blood—my corrupt, Whateley blood—and all my projects eventually turn dark. I'm sure if I started a *Bunnies & Burrows* campaign, it would degenerate into a vile Lovecraftian romp. Therefore, the supernatural horror of *Deadlands 1876* is more in the vein of "Holy shit, the old Aztec gods are returning?" and "What the hell, did that saloon girl's head just detach and fly off into the night?" than "Get up on that giant mechanized rattlesnake, pardner! It's the only way to defeat the Sheriff's posse of werewolf bounty hunters!" When I do toss in supernatural adversaries, they're usually based on folklore or mythology. Most of the "monsters" of *Deadlands 1876* are derived from authentic legends, particularly those of the Irish, English, German, Mexican, and Native American people; and are usually given a Lovecraftian twist, sympathetic goals, and a membership card to Midian.

However, as enjoyable as it is to murder one's player-characters with beings borrowed from Iroquois folklore, the most horrifying source of horrible horror is, of course, one's fellow humans, and *Deadlands 1876* drinks deeply from the inexhaustible well of man's inhumanity to man. There's a goodly amount of cheerful violence and unnecessary cruelty in this campaign. The nineteenth century is no exception in the annals of human misery, and *Deadlands 1876* does not shy away from man's capacity for brutality. For that reason, a few more changes have been made to the *Deadlands Reloaded* "official" scenario, in which sexism is on the wane and the South has voluntarily abolished slavery. To quote the official rules: "Women in the Weird West can be almost anything," and "By 1879, racism is becoming a thing of the past." Although the rulebooks offer half-hearted explanations for both of these astonishing statements, I feel they are the well-intentioned but specious result of historical misreading. Indeed, these statements aren't even true today, over 150 years later! To believe that sexism and racism would be eliminated in the 1870s is not only antithetical to human nature, it expresses a blind optimism that does a disservice to the millions of people who have suffered under the forces of malignant governmental policies, repressive religious beliefs, and destructive cultural practices. I appreciate that the authors of *Deadlands Reloaded* had good intentions—they didn't want to prohibit the creation of female or non-white characters—but this bowdlerization of the historical narrative robs players of the chance to grapple, even through the safety of fiction, with the destructive historical forces of plunder and dehumanization.

For these reasons, in *Deadlands 1876* slavery is still an awful reality within the Confederate states; in fact, this "peculiar institution" may soon spread to Nicaragua and Cuba. Meanwhile, the women of both North and South are disenfranchised and treated like second-class citizens, while their status under the theocracy of Deseret or within the boundaries of the Sioux Nation is even more reduced. And speaking of the Sioux, while the introduction of magic and the extension of the Civil War has granted many Native Americans a degree of tangible power, they are still the victims of a genocidal campaign of extermination being conducted by the surrounding white governments. The oft-institutionalized forces of racism, sexism, colonialism, and manifest destiny are integral to *Deadlands 1876*, and indelibly shape the "horror" of the campaign setting. Players are still encouraged to roll up a broad range of characters—Arikara trackers in the pay of the Union, lesbian gunslingers on the lamb, black bounty hunters apprenticed to dentist assassins, apostate Mormons escaping from Deseret, Irish deserters turned outlaw, Kentucky witches seeking revenge on the South, lady engineers from the Maze, former Klansmen infiltrating the Underground Railroad, etc. Supported by a solid backstory, such diverse characters offer excellent opportunities for rewarding role-playing. After all, part of the satisfaction of good gaming is confronting challenge, struggling with adversity, and resolving conflict!

One additional note on religion. Mormons play a key role in *Deadlands 1876*. Although it is safe to say that I am not a Mormon, this campaign is not intended to disrespect or trivialize the Mormon religion, and I have tried to portray the nineteenth-century Saints as faithfully as possible given my fantastic milieu. I have established the sovereign nation of Deseret, but I've allowed Salt Lake City to evolve along plausible historical lines, rather than casting it into the steampunk hell known as the City O' Gloom in the official rules. The Mormons of *Deadlands 1876* have been subjected to terrible ordeals by their fellow "Christians," but have also committed heinous deeds themselves—in other words, they are, like everyone else, human.

Rules & Mechanics

Being an inveterate tinkerer, over the years of playing *Deadlands* I have rejected some official rules, altered or clarified others, and invented a few of my own. None of these “House Rules” are necessary to using or enjoying the campaign materials on this site, but they may be useful to understand any unique game mechanics I detail in my scenario notes. Of course, if you like any of these House Rules, you are free to adopt or adapt them for your own *Deadlands* or *Savage Worlds* campaign.

Campaign Terminology

A few notes on some of my specific terminology may be useful for understanding this site:

Regulators

The player characters in my *Deadlands 1876* campaign are known as the Regulators; specifically, the “42nd Company of Union Blue Security Regulators.” For this reason, many of these pages use the word “Regulators” as a generic term for player-character, the way *Call of Cthulhu* uses “investigators.”

Target Number (TN)

The *Savage World* system pits dice rolls against specific Target Numbers, abbreviated in these pages as “TN.” For instance, a roll of Fighting vs. TN-6 means the Fighting skill must be rolled against a Target Number of 6. When no Target Number is specified, it’s assumed to be TN-4.

Final Word

It is my sincere hope that you enjoy this material! Feel free to use it, reject it, or adapt it in any way you wish. I only ask three important things:

1. Please do not reprint or redistribute this material under your own name. You may share it freely, but kindly preserve the original authorship. Additionally, if you enjoy using my material, please consider making a small donation to the site. Even a few dollars helps keep the lights on, and it’s tremendously appreciated!
2. Please do not email me asking for extensive clarifications on my scenario notes. I’m running an active campaign, and I generally don’t have the time to revise earlier work. Some of the pieces on this site are more polished than others, and you will certainly find inconsistencies and contradictions. My *Deadlands 1876* campaign is a work-in-progress, and things are changing and evolving all the time.
3. Please understand this is a fictional game of historical horror. As such, you may find some of the attitudes and language expressed by various characters as objectionable, and some of the terms I use are deliberately antiquated or inflammatory. For instance, Native Americans are broadly referred to as “Indians,” and many people on the continent are still being bought and sold, defined by white society only as “slaves.” You will come across highly objectionable words like redskin, savage, heathen, half-breed, darky, bitch, whore, and even worse. I trust it’s well understood that these terms do not reflect the author’s beliefs, and even a casual reading of the material should reveal the proper historical context. Furthermore, some of the scenarios in these pages feature moments of savage violence, acts of racial hostility, or transactions of an illicit and/or sexual nature. I intend no cultural, gender-based, or religious disrespect. I am trying to

capture an already-grim world trapped in a dark, apocalyptic reality. So, please feel free to email me corrections about historical inaccuracies and cultural misunderstandings, but if you feel offended at any point, I'd like to remind you to re-read my above notes.

Thank you, and enjoy!

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