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Matthew is an award-winning writer and game designer, and has worked on Alien RPG, Vaesen and Coriolis. He's also a designer and consultant to the heritage visitor attractions sector, working at Historic Royal Palaces, Kew Gardens, museums and the National Trust. His Doctorate was in Ludic Narratives in Cultural Heritage Attractions. Matthew has been a roleplayer even longer than Dave (by a year or two), but when he's not gaming he loves mucking out his chickens, giving Dave a hard time, and trying, at this late stage, to learn guitar.



DAVE SEMARK

Dave is a multi award-winning writer and game designer with a wide range of gaming credits. He is a mainstay of Free League Publishing's Alien RPG, and has worked with other big industry players, including Modiphius, Monolith, Magnetic Press and Firelock Games. As both a historian and lifelong roleplayer Dave enjoys nothing more than delving into different worlds and the lives of those who inhabit them, that is when he's not enjoying good beer and food, taking care of his German Shepherd, or disagreeing with Matthew on the Effekt podcast.

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CHAPTER I

WELCOME TO THE OLD WEST

**“MAY YOUR BELLY NEVER GRUMBLE, MAY YOUR HEART NEVER ACHE,
MAY YOUR HORSE NEVER STUMBLE, MAY YOUR CINCH NEVER BREAK.”**

THE COWBOY BLESSING

Life is hard. Life is short.

And life don't owe you a goddamn thing.

But you are extraordinary.

In this land of raw opportunity nothing can limit what you can become—not race, nor gender, nor how few dollars you have in your pocket. It don't matter where you come from, or what you've done before, you make yourself in the West, and the West makes you. There are no monsters but other folk, and only the dead forget the land is your enemy. Everyone has faith—many in God, but others in the power of the spirits, the strength of their compadres, or simply in themselves. Your Faith keeps you going when times get tough.

YOUR TALE OF THE OLD WEST

Tales of the Old West is a game about making your way in the West in the 1870s. Blessed with opportunity, cursed by hardship, and riven by conflict and struggle, it's a dangerous and competitive world. To thrive you'll need to find good friends, outwit your enemies,

and maybe resort to violence to protect what's yours. You play folks of the Old West, with no limit on who you can be or what you can become—farm hands or barkeeps, lawmen or outlaws, ranchers or cattle barons, bordello madams or saloon owners, card sharps or rubes, gunslingers or drifters, Native, African or white American, Mexican, Asian, or European. You may have little more than the shirt on your back, your skill with the iron, or your winning way with people. You may just be looking to stand up for yourself and earn a few bits for whiskey at the saloon. Or you may have grander ambitions—to make your name ring down the ages.

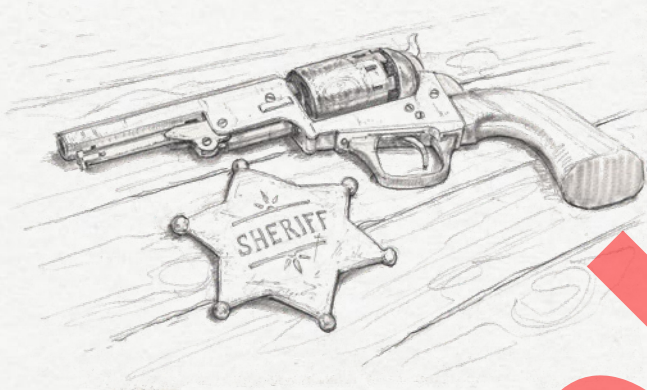
If you want to start fast and easy you can learn all you need in Chapters 1 to 5, use the character archetypes to decide who you are, and set off into the introductory scenario, “Patience is a Virtue”, in Chapter 10. If you want to let fate decide who you are, then turn to the random lifepath generator, “Your Tale Begins”, in the Appendix, and let the dice decide. Life in the Old West was challenging and ever changing, but some things were vital to getting by. You need to take

A NOTE ON FAITH

*Religious faith, and mostly Christian faith at that, was a fact of life in nineteenth century America. The Christian concept of Manifest Destiny was at the forefront of western expansion. For many devout pioneers this was a true belief in a purpose decreed by Providence. For others it was a convenient way of clothing imperial ambition in a higher purpose or a convenient justification for seeking economic riches. But whatever the motivation, the influence of religion was present in everyone's day-to-day life. To reflect that, the push mechanic in *Tales of the Old West* is called Faith.*

That said, we don't want faith to be a barrier to players enjoying the game. Your character can be of any faith, or none at all, in which case their “faith” comes from something else entirely—perhaps their own self-belief, their reliance upon friends and family, or their connection with nature. Faith can be anything you want—it's your choice.

account of your horse, your gun, where you live, what you do for a living, and the dangers of the land. To learn all about them—and more—turn to Chapter 6. This is a game set in the time of colonial expansion into Native lands, and a nation grappling with the effects of the emancipation of millions of men, women and children. It's about the impact of greed, capital and so-called civilized society on the West, and how the people of the time learned to live in this land.



You're living in a vibrant place, a melting pot of diverse peoples, cultures, and history that have combined in a unique way to create the Old West. Take a look at Chapter 7 to learn all about that.

You'll have a town to call home, a place full of ne'er-do-wells, con artists and thieves, with a few good folk thrown in there somewhere, that grows with the turn of the seasons. You might care about this

town, where you have your outfit, your business, your living. Or perhaps it's a place to scavenge and exploit, but then don't expect help when you most need it. For all you need to know about life in town, and the way the turn of the seasons builds your campaign, turn to Chapter 8.

And then there are tales a-plenty to be told. If you want to take a closer look at New Mexico, and see the campaign that runs across that territory, look no further than Chapter 9.

THE WILD WEST OF 1873

The West of 1873 is a newly painted picture splashed across an ancient landscape.

The annexation of Texas into the union and the subsequent Mexican–American War are still fresh in people's minds. It transformed the political landscape—US territory expanded enormously, bringing Texas and the previously Mexican territories of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and parts of New Mexico and Colorado into US hands. The wounds of the American Civil War are still healing—it ended only eight years ago. The Union victory has brought earth-shattering change: the emancipation of all those once held in bondage, the economic crises left by the war's destruction, and the humiliation of the former Confederate states. Settlers flood westward, first in their tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, then millions—an explosive expansion

CONTENT WARNING

The Old West of the 1870s was a time of hardship, struggle, conflict, exploitation, and violence, with some specific elements of the history that stand out: the constant colonial pressure of settlers moving west, the treatment of Native American communities, and the impact of slavery and the experience of millions of emancipated people. This game does not retreat from the realities of the history of the time, but encourages GMs and players to explore and understand those realities, and not to revel in them. GMs and players should all make sure they are comfortable with the themes this game explores and play it in the right spirit. If at any point the themes become uncomfortable for any participant, it's right and proper to say so. There are various ways you can manage this, called Safety Tools, that are available online. In this eventuality, it is also right and proper to modify the approach of the game accordingly, or to stop playing.

that far out-strips the government's ability to manage. Political chaos, corruption and cronyism are rife.

All this, imposed upon land already populated by Native American tribes and formerly Mexican citizens. Political realism has seen many Mexicans—now US citizens—mollified by the US government, although it doesn't reduce the prejudice shown towards them. The same can't be said of the Native American tribes. The precedent set in the previous two hundred years of colonization has not changed, and these communities are exploited, marginalized, hunted, moved, deceived, betrayed and destroyed. Many fight back, and in 1873 there are still so-called "Indian Wars" playing out, with more to come.

Towns are springing up anywhere people think they can make a fast buck, from digging up gold and silver, to lumber, farming and cattle ranching. As these places attract speculators seeking a quick

fortune, they also attract everyone else looking to make a living—saloons, bawdy houses and hotels, general stores, blacksmiths and livery stables, beef outfits and horse ranches. Places like Deadwood, Dakota, Silver City in New Mexico, Carson City, Nevada, Dodge City, Kansas, and Cheyenne in Wyoming, will soon become infamous as they grow and develop on the promise of gold, silver or beef.

These towns are diverse melting pots of all the cultures that have flocked to the West. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, from every European background, from the indigenous Native American heritage of the West itself, to the Mexican and Hispanic peoples, and the Chinese workers who came to build the railroads and decided to stay.

This is the picture of the West in 1873, a landscape of opportunity, of risk, of danger, and one in which only the cleverest, the fastest, or the most cunning will survive.



WINCHESTER RIFLE

A NOTE ON HISTORY

The nineteenth century American West is a challenging place to set a roleplaying game. It's a period that includes a civil war dominated by the clash over whether dark-skinned people were people or not, and which is marked by the treatment of Native Americans as "savages". This history, and its portrayal, sidelines the millennia of Native American influence on the land, along with that of Mexican and Hispanic cultures. The myth of the West, particularly in cinema, has tended to portray the protagonists as exclusively of white European descent. The history has been overlaid with iconic representations that whitewash the cowboy, and for the most part portrayed Native American culture as antithetical to Anglo civilization. As two white boys from England, we can't expect to do full justice to all these issues, but we hope to make this game accessible to as wide an audience as possible. We are respectful of the real history, and have endeavored to reflect all the people in the US and the western territories at that time, without stereotyping anyone. We are, however, making a game that is intended to be fun, and we hope we have got the balance right. If you think we can do better, tell us. We are keen to learn. - Dave & Matthew.

INTRODUCTION TO RPGs

THE BASICS

This section introduces some key concepts in roleplaying, and how they are used in *Tales of the Old West*. If you have made your way here without knowing what a roleplaying game is, congratulations! Welcome to a rewarding and creative hobby. Roleplaying is a unique form of gaming or cultural expression that combines tabletop gaming with storytelling. Roleplaying games give you a set of rules and let you create your own story with your friends in a way that books, movies, TV, and even video games cannot.

THE PLAYERS

Each player, except one, controls a player character (PC). You decide what your player character thinks and feels, and what they say and do—but not what happens to them. It is your job as a player to immerse yourself in your player character. They may be an adventurer in a distant and faraway place but they are still, at heart, a person with feelings and dreams, just like you. What are their big dreams? What are their likes and dislikes? What motivates them to get up every day? How would you react if you were in their shoes? What would you do? The player characters are always the protagonists of the story. The game is about you. Your decisions, your destiny, your tale.

THE GAMEMASTER

The final player is the Gamemaster, the GM. They describe the game world to the players, portray all the people they meet, and control the enemies they fight. The game is a conversation between the players and the GM, back and forth, until a critical situation arises where the outcome is uncertain. Then it's time to break out the dice—read more about this in Chapter 3.

It is the GM's job to put obstacles in the player characters' path, to challenge them, and force them

to show what they're really made of. But it is not up to the GM to decide everything that happens in the game—and above all, not how your story is supposed to end. That is decided in the game. That is why you are playing—to tell your own tales of the Old West.

TOOLS OF THE GAME

CHARACTER SHEETS

To document your character, you use a character sheet. How you create your character is described in Chapter 2. In addition, there are other sheets to document the town where you live, any property or business outfit you may own, and any compadres who accompany you on your tale. There are blank sheets at the end of this book, and you can find copies to download at <https://www.effektpublishing.com/home/downloads>.

DICE

As a character in *Tales of the Old West*, you will have to take risks. Sooner or later, you will end up in situations where the outcome is uncertain, no matter how cunning you are. It's time to break out the dice. *Tales of the Old West* uses a modified version of Free League Publishing's Year Zero Engine, with D6 dice pools and the reroll, or "push", mechanic. You only need six-sided dice (known as D6) to play. You will need a handful of dice, five of which must all be the same color—these five are your Trouble dice (we explain how these work on page 38).

ROLLING DICE

The rules will sometimes ask you to roll D3, 2D6 or D66. D3 means you roll a D6 and divide the result by two, rounding up. 2D6 means you roll two six-sided dice and add the results to get a score between 2 and 12. D66 means you roll two D6. The first die represents the tens digit and the second die represents the units digit. That generates a result between 11 and 66.

