

# RIFTS®



The following Design Diary by Sean Fannon reflects some details from the upcoming *Savage Rifts®*. It isn't final and some details may change before the book is finally sent to print.

## MAKING RIFTS® SAVAGE—MEGA DAMAGE, VAMPIRES, AND JUICER BURN

Fans of both *Rifts®* and *Savage Worlds* have had lots of great questions about how different rules, characters, and monsters are interpreted between the two systems. While there's no way to explain every decision, we thought a few good examples would go a long way toward telling you what we were thinking, how the rules played, and what eventually became game you're about to receive.

This should help you understand how this is both very much *Rifts®* while remaining a very *Savage Worlds* game.

### MEGA MATTERS

*The Glitter Boy strode onto the field, even as two dozen Skelebots and a squad of Dead Boys fired hundreds of lasers at him. They all bounced harmlessly, and even a couple of grenades did little more than make a couple of scratches on the chrome. Some of the Skelebots dropped their guns and activated their embedded vibro-blades, those being the only weapons they had that could hurt him. His teammates, however, started taking them out with rail guns, lasers, and magic.*

*The pilot laughed as he drove the pylons into the ground and brought his Boom Gun to bear. One thunderous shot later, scrap metal and shattered bodies flew everywhere as the remaining forces scrambled for cover. It was only when the UAR-1 Enforcer arrived that the Glitter Boy pilot became concerned.*

*"Now things get interesting," he thought, as the race to see who shot first was on...*

This is an actual play experience, repeated often, during the initial play test sessions and demos we've run over the last year all over

the country. Folks wanted to know how Mega-Damage and M.D.C. armor would feel under the *Savage Worlds* version of *Rifts®*, and universally, they've been everything from generally pleased to practically giddy.

It did, however, take us a longer journey than you might expect to get there.

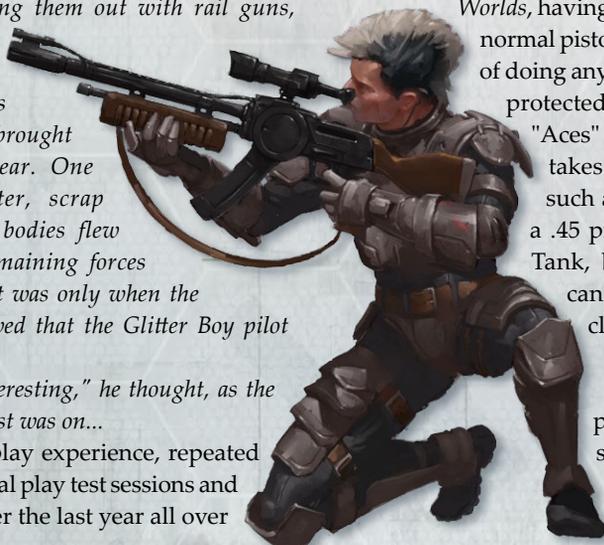
Probably the single most asked question is some variation of "How are you handling the concept of Mega-Damage and M.D.C. (Mega-Damage Capacity) armor from *Rifts®*?" This question entered the wrangling phase for us on the very day that I got Kevin Siembieda's blessing to pursue making this project a reality. Immediately after getting Kevin's approval, I called Pinnacle Core Rules Brand Manager, Clint Black, and we gushed and fan-boyed and just relished in the giddy feeling.

Right there and then, we discussed how Heavy Armor and Heavy Weapons, as per *Savage Worlds* rules, was the way to go. For those new to *Savage*

*Worlds*, having Heavy Armor means a normal pistol or knife has no chance of doing any damage to whatever is protected, no matter how many "Aces" you roll for damage. It takes Heavy Damage to hurt such a thing. In other words, a .45 pistol can't hurt a Tiger Tank, but a rocket launcher can. Boom, we had a nice, clean, easy solution.

And yet...

Years later, as the project finally got seriously underway, we decided to question all assumptions. We



dropped the idea that the "Heavy Solution" was the only way to go, and we experimented and discussed many different alternate concepts. It was only after we'd beat up all the other ideas that we finally concluded that "if it walks like a tank and talks like a tank, it's a duck...er, tank."

In this way, we also made a fundamental change that differentiates *Savage Rifts*® from the original Rifts®. Not every suit of armor is M.D.C., and not every weapon does Mega-Damage. This was another area of much discussion, wrangling, thinking, and more discussion, but I think I can boil down the moment that solidified it. *Savage Worlds* creator Shane Hensley and I were chatting online and Shane asked what would happen if a Glitter Boy pilot were sitting next to a campfire, wearing normal body armor, and a guy with leather armor and a spear jumped out at him. I explained that, under Rifts® rules, the spear-wielder would have no chance of hurting the pilot, who would then blow him into a fine red mist with a laser pistol.

We both agreed that, while that was absolutely Rifts® in nature, it wasn't *Savage Worlds*. In this way, we've definitely opted for a shift in game play that makes our game similar, yet different from the core Rifts® experience. We brought this to Kevin, who was very supportive of the decision. He liked the idea of a different game system granting a different experience, while at the same time remaining true to the heart of Rifts®. This has been the design experience every step of the way, sharing ideas of both fidelity and change with the Palladium team, and coming up with a fantastic new window into that gonzo, incredible world.

So while not everyone will necessarily have a Mega-Damage weapon, neither will everything they face have M.D.C. armor. At the same time, there are solid options for a team to handle both normal and M.D.C. threats; for example, we did decide to make virtually all advanced melee weapons do Mega-Damage, mostly because *Savage Worlds* is a very hand-to-hand friendly game, and we thought bringing the chain sword out to deal with the SAMAS armor was a great thing to support. As well, there's grenades, plasma weapons, and the capacity for spellcasters and psionics to amp up their damage spells to do Mega-Damage as needed. Of course, rail guns in the hands of cyborgs and vehicle weapons on robot armor take care of those threats pretty handily.

## A RIFTS® VAMPIRE IS NOT A SAVAGE WORLDS "VAMPIRE"

Some concern exists that we might rely heavily on previously published versions of things to represent monsters, demons, and other antagonists in *Savage Rifts*®. We recognize that the internal truths and consistency of a setting demand attention to the details that make entities in that setting specific to the world they reside within.

Let's look at a vampire as an example, specifically the wild vampire. As with every other monster and antagonist we put into the *Savage Foes of North America* book, we first reread and researched all the details of the Rifts® vampires. Translating something in a way that is exciting for new players, yet very recognizable to established fans, drove every design decision. With Rifts® vampires, there are some important distinctions that make them the kinds of threats they are to those who face them. This includes making them invulnerable to most weapons and attacks; granting them the ability to change into a wolf or bat; and giving them effective immortality, able to regenerate from nearly all damage in the way that a particularly famous image from Palladium's original *Vampire Kingdoms* depicted.

In truth, much of the abilities and powers of a Rifts® vampire are similar to that of a master vampire in core *Savage Worlds* rules. It's the various vulnerabilities of a Rifts® vampire that required specific attention. For example, vampires in this setting take damage and can be destroyed by water (not something a standard *Savage Worlds* vampire has to worry about), and that's in there. So are the vulnerabilities to silver, magic, sunlight, etc...

The stat block for a Rifts® wild vampire (we'll get into the other ones when we journey further west in later products) is a rather long and involved one. This was necessary in order to preserve what makes a Rifts® vampire special to the setting, as well as establishing the kinds of conflicts that traditionally exist between Rifts® heroes and vampires. Honestly, I can't imagine a battle with vampires that doesn't involve water guns and a light with a cross-shaped shadow emanating from it. Well, those and the automatic wooden stake-throwers...

## JUICERS BURNING BRIGHT

As I said, fidelity to what makes *Rifts*® the setting it is was and will always be a key concern of ours. At the same time, we do have the advantage of looking back over a quarter century of history with this setting and considering new ideas that might make a certain concept pop in a new, vital way. This is how we came to change the nature of Juicers, and it may be one of the coolest things we've done with this vision of *Rifts*®.

The story begins with Ross Watson—my Evil Beagle partner, co-writer on a number of *Savage Rifts*® products, and the author of *The Garnet Town Gambit*—deciding we should really find a way to do something with the "death arc" of the Juicer, and challenging me to hammer at that idea. We went round-and-round on it, never quite getting what we wanted, but agreeing that we wanted something that reflected the short life/exchange for power as a profound part of the Juicer story.

Cut to a trip to Arizona, where we gathered in Shane's garage with Michael Conn, Jimmy Macias, and John Wick for a play test and design jam session for a couple of days. We brought up the thoughts we had about Juicers over dinner at one of the many awesome restaurants Shane knows, and John essentially demanded that we must make a game mechanic aspect that reflects the Juicer arc—and he suggested some of the core ideas that would eventually become what's in the game. The epic story of the Juicer's short life span just didn't feel right without specific and dire *game mechanics* to back it up.

Pens on bar napkins scribbled furiously as the conversation delved further into the matter, and ultimately we ended up with a game mechanic that John swore he'd steal and make an entire game upon if we didn't use it. We were, however, entirely determined to use it. The trick would be to see if Kevin would also be comfortable with a new approach to the Juicer's short life span as something that could actually be played with.

Imagine my delight when I discovered that he really, really loved the idea!

Essentially, it works like this. Every Juicer has a Burn Rating; starting Juicers have 8, and there's

a Background Edge (which means it's meant to be taken at character creation, which is vital in this case) called Freshly Juiced that can bring that total to 10. Every Juicer also has a Burn Die, which serves two purposes.

First, at the beginning of every session, the player of the Juicer must roll the Burn Die (no Wild Die for this), and compare it to her current Burn Rating. If the result is equal to or greater than that number, the player must make a choice—mark off a point of Burn, permanently (there's no known way to replenish Burn) or die by the end of the session. Naturally, early on, most players will spend the Burn. However, it should be readily apparent that, no matter what, that Burn Rating will decrease over time, simply by mathematical attrition.

However, there's that second use of Burn to consider as well. We wanted Juicer players to have a meaningful choice when it came to their life span being so short, and we wanted them to have a way to spend that precious asset for even more superheroic actions than they normally could perform. As such, a Juicer player may spend a point of Burn at any time to add his Burn Die to a Trait roll or a damage roll! There are also special Edges that Juicers can take that further add to the preternatural things they can accomplish by spending Burn.

While a Juicer player can play it safe and keep their character alive for as long as any other *Savage Rifts*® hero, it should be pretty clear that most will play for the short, glorious career, whereby they can pick their moment and truly go out in a Blaze of Glory.

Which, by the way, there's a Setting Rule for, but we can get into that another time.

**Sean Patrick Fannon**  
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