

Easy, fast-play *The Law of the Gun*, by Chris Peers

Reviewed by J.J. Parus
(Terrement on TMP and elsewhere)

The concept of the rules is explained by the author in his introduction where he explains why there is a place for another Western Gunfight rules. It is, like many, a single figure = one man skirmish game meant to capture the feel of the Old West. The emphasis is simple, fast, and easy to play and designed to have the players reacting as a gunfighter would do – fast and decisive. This is intentional and meant to preclude the need for repeated stoppage of play to look up and check the details for a particular action they might want to attempt on a given turn. To do this, there are some simplifying assumptions. Though artificial in nature at times (my opinion) they work well, and can still be modified easily enough by the gamers – as they often do.



It is designed to cover the period from about the outbreak of the American Civil War (ACW) in 1861 until the last of the Indian fights, at Wounded Knee in 1890. It is also designed as much for multiple player use rather than a simple two sided battle, as well as covering the flavor of the game, from historical record to Hollywood. One feature I really like is the incorporation of the possibility of differing victory conditions for each side, based on the scenario. This allows for multiple “winners” based on their objectives and avoids the “shoot them all until one side is dead or breaks.” I’ve included some comments of my own in the appropriate sections where the item is discussed rather than having a full section at the end where I would discuss all of them. Seems to me it will be easier to have them in the place and context where they occur.

Title: *The Law of the Gun**

Author: Chris Peers

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Physical Description:

The rules are provided in softback with 35 heavy stock, glossy pages. The layout is simple and streamlined, without eye-candy pictures and without explanatory diagrams. That latter item is not to its detriment, in my opinion, as the rules are straightforward enough to not require them. The Table of Contents provides a detailed listing of sections and sub-sections with pages indicated so it is easy to find the item in question quickly.

Production Quality: Excellent.

** Note: I received a complimentary copy of the book directly from North Star for review purposes.*

There is a quick introduction by the folks at North Star here:

<http://theminaturespage.com/news/1793440193>

Book Organization:

The book is laid out in a logical order with chapters detailing,

- Introduction

- Figure Classification, Skills, and Armament
- Set-Up and Deployment
- Sequence of Play
- Actions
- Shooting
- Hand to Hand Fighting
- The Results of Hits
- The Morale Test
- Horses and Horsemanship
- Special Situations
- Three Historical Scenarios

The items are identified in the rules by page number and are easy to find if needed.

Basic Game Attributes:

Nearly all of the dice used in *TLOTG* uses six-sided die (D6) for resolution. “Wound Dice” and “Wind Dice” are the only exceptions, and D6 can even be used in their stead. All measurements are in inches and a ruler or tape measure will be needed. You will also need two different types of markers for “near miss” (one per figure) results and gangs that suffer a morale failure (one per gang).

The basic maneuver unit in the game is termed a **Gang**, ranging from one to four figures. These are all mounted singly, with the size of the base a function of keeping the figure from falling over, but small enough to allow for use of the figures in confined spaces in your game terrain (building interiors, balconies, in and around rock formations). The gang is treated as a single unit for most things, though each man may be doing different things in a move.

Figures are assumed to be armed with what is actually on the figure, though players might want to agree that folks with a long arm also have a “hideout” pistol, and all figures having Bowie knives or similar for hand-to-hand combat.

Gangs are defined by four broad headings:

- a. Civilians, which include anyone who ordinarily would not be in combat. This includes townsfolk, settlers, farmers and similar
- b. Fighters, who are the vast majority of folks out west. They are the cowhands, some of the more self-reliant settlers and pioneers, and most members of outlaw gangs. All are capable and familiar with their guns used as a part of their jobs or life, but are neither killers by trade nor willing to take on more serious opposition
- c. Gunmen, who not only use the weapons well as tools of their trade, but who could kill without hesitation. The Hollywood versions were few and far between in reality. Most would be veterans of the ACW now acting as lawmen, bounty hunters, Indian fighters, and the men upon whom the Hollywood movies and “Penny-Dreadful” stories were based. Of course, your version of this last category could be either the actual Wild Bill Hickocks, Doc Hollidays, Jesse James, or others we all know.
- d. Warriors are the fighting men from Indian tribes. They were exceptionally skilled with their tribal weapons, having grown up using them to hunt and battle other tribes. Firearm use was also a part of their warfare, but shortage of arms and lack of ammunition resulted in them often being less capable with these. Many tribes were better horsemen, and some, like the Comanche, were the best there was in terms of horsemanship.

Skills are included to personalize the figures in the game, and are typically limited to a few of the figures on each side. More can be appropriate in cases where it is needed in the scenario for balance, or, for those cases where the “gang” in question is a single, extremely capable individual. The ones identified in the rules are:

- a. Leadership
- b. Marksmanship
- c. Archery
- d. Fast Reactions
- e. Nerves of Steel
- f. Horsemanship
- g. Strength

All of these affect the figure’s ability to do certain things and are pretty self-explanatory from the title. Players may want to add additional ones as “house rules.”

Armament

Missile weapons are grouped into general categories. There is no differentiation within the categories, as the assumption is that in a gunfight, in most cases the effects were similar enough to make differentiation unneeded in the game. The options are:

- a. Pistols
- b. Muzzle loaders
- c. Breech loaders
- d. Repeaters
- e. Shotguns

Bow and arrow and thrown weapons are not discussed in the write-up of armament types, but rules and values for their use are included in the rules.



Set-Up and Deployment

Unlike many games that detail specifics on board edges, measurements, and other particulars, the placement rules are intentionally general with some guidelines provided. The possibility of hidden deployment and movement is discussed for where it is appropriate. Deployment may also be scenario dependent, as one would expect, with High Noon or Gunfight at the OK Corral being different than if members of a gang were entering a town for a robbery or jailbreak, or if members of two competing factions were engaging in a “turf war” like the Tunstall – Murphy battles in the Lincoln County Range War, or homesteaders vs. cattlemen.

Sequence of Play

Play sequence is designed to follow a strict order, with each gang completing all of their phases before the next gang in the sequence takes their turn. The order is decided at the start of the game either as dictated in the scenario, agreement of the players, or by the gang with the highest quality combatants going first. I suspect players will try some other methods as well which add a different feeling to the gameplay and add to the uncertainty. Rolling for sequence each turn, for example, adds uncertainty at little cost to game time and precludes cases of where one gang knows what it can and can’t do relative to an opposing gang based on the order of play. There are other uncertainties built into the game that adds further unpredictability.

The three phases are:

- a. the rally phase
- b. the action phase
- c. the morale phase

What the gang members can and can't do is based on their permitted and rolled for actions.

Actions

The player will throw a number of D6s based on the type of gang they are. Each "6" allows the gang members to do a single action. All of the gang members need not do the same thing. If the gang gets spread too far in distance from closest members, the total numbers of die are reduced.

Diced for actions include:

- a. Encourage another figure
- b. Attempt to rally gang
- c. Move
- d. Mount or dismount
- e. Sneak up
- f. Shoot
- g. Move and shoot
- h. Fast draw
- i. Fight hand-to-hand
- j. Remove a spear or arrow
- k. Escape from under a horse
- l. Take a scalp
- m. War whoop

Free actions - only one per figure, even if failed rolling D6s

- a. Keep riding
- b. Reload
- c. Wild Firing
- d. Flee
- e. Take cover

Shooting also considers cover and near misses.

I like the fact that for simplicity, most weapons are assumed to be reloaded by the figure as they go, and only muskets need to be reloaded. This saves on bookkeeping and speeds play. I also like Wild Firing, which will not cause any casualties but will suppress enemy figures.

Use of dynamite and hand to hand fighting is also covered. A later section covers firing from and at mounts, shooting at horses, and stampeding cattle

Wounds

Effects of combat can result in wounds. Wounds are by body location, with appropriate results for that part of the anatomy. Wound severity can be Graze, Drop, Mobility hit, Wound, and Kill.

Morale Test

Unlike in the movies, most historical battles did not continue until the other side was dead. Non-professionals would typically prefer to back away than fight to the last. Morale is tested when casualties are suffered, with Civilians most likely to become demoralized and Gunmen/Warriors the most stout-hearted. Two unremoved morale breaks will usually cause the gang to flee.

Rallying

This may be needed to keep a gang active. Free actions are still allowed, but no dicing for other actions occur with an unrallied gang. As written, rallying is not a given thing and players may find it more restrictive than they prefer. It tends to lead to the historic rather than Hollywood version of actions by participants. You might consider adjusting the “to Rally” number based on the scenario in question where special factors may be in play or to play a more Hollywood like scenario.

Forces and Scenarios

Suggestions are provided for gang creation, but the authors encourage the gamer to customize as needed to play a scenario, refight a historical or movie scenario, or for types of gangs not covered in the rules.

Factions included in the rules are:

- a. Plains Indians
- b. “Civilized” Tribes
- c. Apaches
- d. Lawmen
- e. Outlaws and Cowboys
- f. Homesteaders
- g. Bounty Hunters
- h. Lone Killer
- i. Soldiers or Militia
- j. Texas Rangers

Each of these has a brief discussion of their likely reason for being and composition notes. Again, these are neither hard and fast nor strictly required.

Scenarios

Three scenarios are provided. These should serve both as a point of departure for picking up the rules in a game setting with different types of gangs covered, different victory conditions, as well as give gamers an idea on how to construct scenarios of their own. They include

- a. Apache Pass 13 July 1862
- b. The Lost Valley Fight 12 July 1874
- c. Iron Springs 24 March 1882

This last one has various “historical” records of how it transpired, who was involved and the results. It was depicted in both of the films Tombstone and Wyatt Earp. The version here is based on the Osprey version. The author noted that they considered doing the Gunfight at the OK Corral, but found it to be too one-sided to make a good game. I have seen different other games handle this problem by randomizing who was or was not available for each side – so Doc Holliday might not be there, presumably due to his consumption, and it might be just the Earps, or the Earps and either or both of Buckskin Frank Leslie and Texas Jack Vermillion. The cowboys might have an armed Ike Clanton, as well as either or both of Curly Bill Brocius and Johnny Ringo. There are others from each side that were in and around Tombstone at the time, so there are a number of game-able possibilities.

My take on the rules

So, the question is whether or not this rule set is needed among all of the other entries that are out there already – and there are several, many of which are quite good and widely used. Others are less well known, but still used by some. I find them to be a good set of rules, with some ideas not included in other sets. They are simple enough to be learned or taught very quickly, played without having to repeatedly consult the rule book, and I think would work well as an introductory game for a new gamer,

as a fast and easy game for a club who wanted to do an Old West game without becoming overly invested in it, or at a convention as both an attraction to draw in new players and acquaint them to Old West gaming or as a competition game. It lends itself well to multi-gamer participation. There is enough there to provide substance, enough uncertainty to cause friction in the decision process of what to do, yet still support the “act on instinct” approach intended by the authors.

The generalized gangs allow for easy customization and the attributes provided lend themselves well to personalizing the characters in a game. I like the different scenarios included in the rules as they play well on their own and do provide a great introduction to the game and some of the differences. Although I don't think it will replace any of the well-established and widely used rule sets out there already, I'd pick it up just the same for the reasons I've indicated above. I have a number of the ones already available and certainly don't NEED yet another rule set for the period, but would likely pick one up from a game shop if I were to see it and leaf through it.

There are a few things that I'd like to point out to fellow soloists

1. The rules are simple enough to pick up and easily and quickly get into play. They are not written as solo rules, but with any of the standard tricks of the trade we use in solo, IMHO, they would work well.
2. The author encourages tinkering with them, and they are loosely constructed so that tinkering with the rules would not seem to throw the rest of the rules out of balance.
3. The game design and mechanics seem to be easily adaptable to other periods. We are used to doing this sort of thing anyway. I intend to change the weapons used in two directions and see how it runs as a skirmish game for the FIW/AWI period, as well as interwar / Roaring 20's period.

Give them a look and see what you think.