

SERPENT SCALES

FRAGMENTS FROM THE WORLD AFTER THE SERPENTFALL 2

Well, here we are heading into the second issue of *Serpent Scales: Fragments From The World After The Serpentfall*. Without further ado, Let's let DAR creator Kenneth Hite explain why, after the world comes apart ...

— (HAPPINESS IS A) STEN GUN —

*"You wicked piece of vicious tin!
Call you a gun? Don't make me grin.
You're just a bloated piece of pipe.
You couldn't hit a hunk of tripe.
But when you're with me in the night,
I'll tell you pal, you're just alright!"*

— **Gunner S.N. Teed,**
"Ode to a Sten Gun"

It was the best of guns, it was the worst of guns. Okay, it was mostly the worst of guns. They called it the "Plumber's Abortion" and the "Stench Gun." Soldiers shot themselves and each other with it, or saw it jam up in combat instead; they feared it more than they feared their enemies' weapons. It was the only weapon of the war that produced groans among soldiers when issued fresh from the factory—only after weeks or even months of patient cajolery and test-firing could it be made to work satisfactorily.

But the British paratroopers used it at Arnhem rather than pick up the "Schmeissers" that littered the ground around them.

And all across Europe it spelled power to the Resistance, and death to the Nazis.

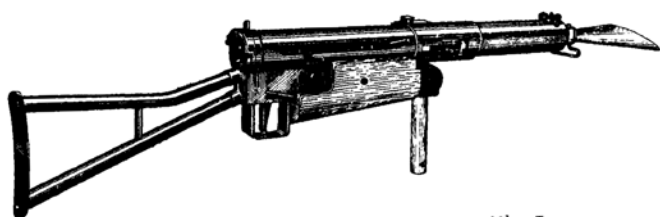
And after the Serpentfall, it may be the only gun in town.



THE STORY OF THE STEN

The Sten gun was born in the desperate year of 1940, after the BEF lost its gear at Dunkirk and the German invasion across the Channel was expected every week. Britain couldn't afford enough American Thompson submachine guns, and couldn't import the metal to make their own. So the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield built their own SMG. More specifically, Major R.V. Shepherd and Mr. Harold J. Turpin built it: the "**S**hepherd **T**urpin **E**nfield" machine carbine became the "Sten gun."

They borrowed much of the design from the German MP28 submachine gun, in which the “open bolt” does all the work in the gun. Pulling the trigger releases a spring, shooting the bolt forward into the cartridge, which explodes. The bullet goes down the barrel, and the blowback from its firing sends the bolt backward, compressing the spring and either recocking the gun (if the trigger is released) or sending it forward for another shot. In theory, a Sten gun can fire all 32 shots in its magazine in under seven seconds. Assuming they all get off—part of the design Shepherd and Turpin borrowed was a touchy, temperamental side-mounted ammunition magazine prone to jamming if jiggled or bent or looked at wrong.



CARBINES, MACHINE, STEN, 9mm. Mk. I.

The Sten Mk I came off the line in January of 1941, and was almost immediately replaced with the even simpler, more stripped-down Sten Mk II. This was the most successful Sten model of the War; British and Commonwealth

manufacturers turned out over two million Mk IIs. The Mk III was simpler still: the case, ejection port, and barrel sleeve were all die-cast as one piece of metal. The Mk V (ready in time for D-Day) was the “luxury” model, complete with wooden stock (instead of a single metal strut), dual pistol grips, a better front sight, and a bayonet mount. By the end of the War, the Germans were pirating the design for their own Volkssturm as the MP3008.

The Sten also used 9mm Parabellum ammunition, the same as the German Luger and MP40—making it ideal for Resistance use. The British SOE smuggled Stens into Nazi-occupied Norway, Denmark, Poland, France, and Czechoslovakia. Those Resistance fighters built their own Stens, in bicycle shops or basements, using stolen or captured German barrels and seemingly innocuous or repurposed parts. Perhaps the most characteristic story of the Sten gun is this: On May 27, 1942, the Slovakian patriot Jozef Gabčík fired his Sten gun point-blank into the face of Obergruppenführer-SS Reinhard Heydrich—and it jammed.

ODDS AND SODS

Not counting the magazine, it takes fewer than 40 parts to build a Sten Mk II. By cutting corners—combining the receiver cap and the rear sight, eliminating the trigger housing cover and butt stock, replacing the barrel sleeve with a canvas sock—you can get it down to 29. Of those 29, only two parts need to be machined, the bolt and the barrel. Six parts can be cut from spring or wire; six more cut from metal rods (though the firing pin should be better-hardened, you can always repurpose a drill bit). Including the firing pin, barrel, and the bolt, only six parts need to be made from hardened steel.

The casing and return cap can be cut from galvanized steel fence posts, or from any similar metal tube; the butt stock can be aluminum tubing or even thick wire! You can make the trigger out of tin, or even plastic. Five more parts are just washers or screws of various sizes. The rest of the gun can be stamped out of sheet steel—Britain’s largest maker of toy trucks built the Sten Mk III

What’s All This “Serpent Scales” Business, Anyway?

The *Serpent Scales* are little pieces of lore fallen off the big body of *The Day After Ragnarok*. Released on no set schedule, these bursts of wonder will cover the people, places, and things of the post-Serpentfall world that might be a bit too esoteric for a full supplement. Sizes and prices will vary for each issue. But don’t worry—playability and usability are our top priorities, no matter the length. All killer, no filler!

pretty much from existing parts. In short, if you have the bolt and the barrel, you can build a Sten gun with a handful of salvaged screws and springs and about four pounds of scrap metal. Even a well-looted hardware store in the Poisoned Lands probably contains the raw materials (bolt and barrel aside) for 2d6 Sten guns. An abandoned car can provide the hardened steel for them from its springs and engine block.

For a good machinist (Repair d6+) who has a set of tools, plans, and parts, building a Sten gun from bolt, barrel, and scratch takes about five hours, including the time to build a 32-round ammo clip. That magazine requires another spring and a specially-stamped magazine follower on the bottom to push the bullets up the clip. Or, you can replace the stamped magazine follower with a dummy slug soldered to a plate.

You do need a decent drill press or a milling machine to make the bolt and the barrel, although you can drill out a barrel rod using hand tools with a diamond bit and a lot of patience. But the rest of the gun needs only a drill, a file, a hacksaw, and a welder. (And you can spot-weld it with a melted coat hanger or more of that salvaged wire.)

In extremis, you don't even need the welder—the Polish underground built Sten guns with screws and bolts! That will add extra time (and a lot more screws) to the process, but sometimes you've got nothing better to do all day than build an awesome submachine gun for killing Nazis. Or whoever.



CARBINES. MACHINE. STEN. 9mm. Mk II.

AN AWESOME GUN FOR KILLING NAZIS OR WHOEVER

Why is it so awesome? Start with the basics. It's a submachine gun on a rifle-dominated battlefield. (Or a spear-dominated battlefield, some places.) It fires 500 rounds per minute, instead of 15. Within its (admittedly short) 100-yard range, it can throw lead at bad guys like nothing else except another SMG. Weight of fire makes up for a lot of mistakes.

Also, it's light. Empty, it weighs a little over 7 pounds; the German MP40 weighs 10, and a Tommy gun weighs over 12. So people unfamiliar with toting weapons around all day can still lift and shoot it when it counts.

It's not just light, it's short. The bolt is a little over four inches, and it weighs a little over a pound ... it's easy to

conceal in your pocket. The barrel is a little under 8 inches; slip it inside your coat or down your pant leg. Pop off the butt stock, take off the barrel, and the Sten gun is just about a foot long; hide it in a picnic basket or under a car seat. Just a quick twist to reattach the barrel, and you're in business. Even fully assembled, it's not even a yard long: 30 inches of grim death. Slip it under your duster, stick it in a saddle holster.



CARBINE, MACHINE, STEN, 9mm Mk V

Like we mentioned earlier, it's easy to make, even if your entire industrial base has been taken over by the Nazis or the Reds ... or has been smashed and drowned by a trillion-ton snake.

It doesn't need a lot of lubricant—hardly any, really. It barely has any moving parts, so there's very little to corrode or clog. (As long as you clear the bolt track of carbon buildup, that is.) It's good for carrying across deserts, or through swamps, or into the High Plains.

Powerful, simple, light, concealable, easy to make and maintain. In short, it's a very ... *democratic* gun.

Sten Stats

TYPE	RANGE	DAMAGE	RoF	COST	WEIGHT	SHOTS	MIN. STR	NOTES
Sten Mk II SMG (9mm)	12/24/48	2d6-1	3	\$12	7	32	--	AP 1, Auto
Sten Mk V SMG (9mm)	12/24/48	2d6-1	3	\$20	10	32	--	AP 1, Auto

NOTES

Part of the fun of special guns is all the special rules to represent them. Part of the fun of *Savage Worlds* is the lack of special rules for things. Which of these two types of fun your game leans toward is up to you. No GM has to use any of these rules if she doesn't want to, but a Sten that doesn't jam is just a line on a character sheet.

Bump Fire

Some Sten guns were temperamental, firing when jarred, dropped, or banged hard. To make things interesting, a Stealth roll of 1 by a hero (or NPC) carrying a Sten gun means the gun fires off a round—possibly into an ally!

Jam

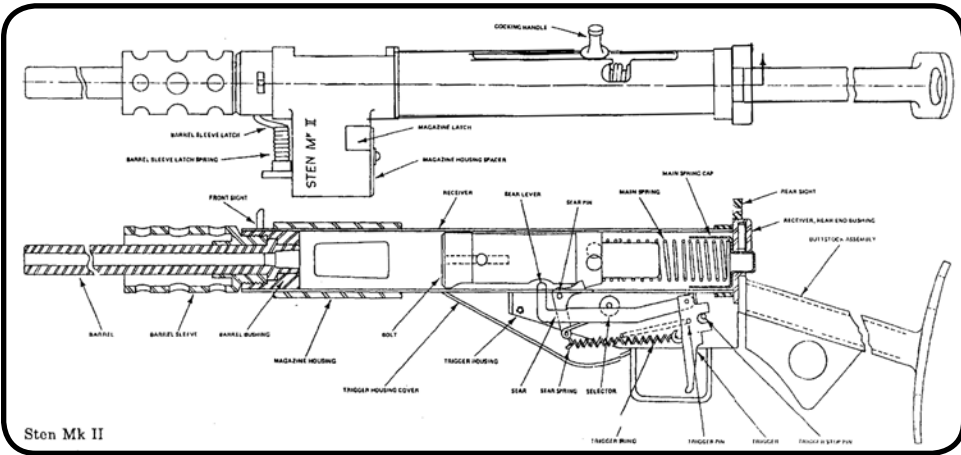
A Sten gun jams or misfires on a Shooting roll of 1, requiring a Repair roll (or Shooting at -2) and 1d6 actions to fix. This is usually because something has crimped the magazine, or because the ammunition was unevenly loaded. Or fully loaded: most Tommies loaded only 28 rounds into the magazine clip to lessen the chance of jamming, or left the clip out of the gun until the firing actually started! If you carry your Sten unloaded (meaning your first action in combat is to clip on a magazine) or “underloaded,” you jam only if the Shooting roll die and the Wild die both come up 1.

A Mag is Not a Grip

Savvy shooters know not to brace the Sten by holding the magazine; it makes the weapon even *more* likely to jam! Hold it by the barrel sleeve, or fire it one-handed. (-2 to one-handed Shooting rolls, or on models without a barrel sleeve—that barrel heats up fast!)

Pistol Grip

The Sten Mk V has a wooden pistol grip; putting a pistol grip on a Sten Mk II is simplicity itself with a Repair roll. With a pistol grip, the penalty for shooting a Sten one-handed drops to -1.



Runaway

The Sten gun had a reputation for going “runaway,” firing continuously whether the trigger is depressed or not! (This was usually because the spring and receiver heated up and expanded during combat, or because the sear projection on the bolt wore down.) If you Ace your Shooting roll, and your next die is a 1, the Sten “goes runaway” and fires off its entire ammunition load. Roll 3 more Shooting dice, resolve damage as normal, and then you’re out of ammo and have to reload.

Stripped Down

The “minimalist” Sten gun mentioned above—no trigger housing cover or butt stock, no separate sight or barrel sleeve—takes a -2 to all Shooting rolls and a -1 to all Repair rolls to fix or unjam it. These cannot be corrected without adding the missing parts.

TLC

All of the above aside, the Sten could be remarkably reliable in trained, careful hands. Filing off spurs, carefully selecting (or stiffening) the clip and ammo, drilling out the cocking handle hole, tightening up springs and triggers, and remembering to brace the magazine on the firer’s arm turn the Sten into a rugged, steady weapon. Any hero with the Soldier or Mr. Fix It Edge who makes two successful Repair rolls on the same Sten (at one roll a day) can eliminate either the Bump Fire, Jam, or Runaway problems. So after six days of careful nurture, your Sten can shoot like a Schmeisser! (Better, actually.) Unless you loan it to someone else. Making your Sten your Trademark Weapon immediately eliminates all three problems.

Sten Stories

Using Sten guns in a *Day After Ragnarok* adventure might be as simple as setting the adventure in Canada or British Africa, where the Sten gun is still standard issue. (Australian troops use the Owen gun, although Lithgow Small Arms in New South Wales builds a Sten knockoff called the Austen.) M16 smuggles Sten guns into Japanese-occupied China, Indochina, and Indonesia; His Majesty’s Government supplies them to clients and allies in the Middle East and India.

In the Poisoned Lands, Long Branch Arsenal (which built several hundred thousand Stens during the War) supplies Stens not only to the Mayoralty of nearby Toronto but to granges and county militias rebelling against Toronto’s rival city-states on the Great Lakes. The great handicap with such exports, however, is that Long Branch Stens (like all Stens) use 9mm Parabellum pistol ammunition, which is in short supply on the American shore.

Individual gunsmiths have kitbashed Stens for all manner of American needs, but simplest “USten” is a Sten Mk II rechambered for .380 ACP Colt ammunition. With no overall structure, however, an individual factory or gunsmith might build a “USten” for whatever ammunition he has the most of: .38 Smith & Wesson and .38 Special UStens are not unknown across the Mayoralties.

STEN SEEDS

- It’s a lot lighter to cart bolts and barrels across the Poisoned Lands than whole guns—and it’s harder for bandits to jack your cargo and kill you with it that way, too. The best markets for Sten bolts and barrels, though, are places that already have Sten guns ... which tracks uncomfortably with places that already have guerrilla wars going on.
- Which means someone else has an interest, and that someone might hire the heroes to bring a cargo of Sten guns to one side or the other. Or the heroes might hijack such a cargo, and become the kingmakers for every local squabble within riding distance. (A single 2½ ton truck can carry about 450 Sten guns with three clips of ammo apiece. Or about 2,000 bolt-and-barrel sets, enough for an entire Mayoral army.) Whoever they arm, wins. Which side are they on?

- Running a “Phoenix and the Sword” style game? Remake *The Magnificent Seven* with Sten guns. You know you want to. Even “Wolves Across the Border” freelancers might want to brush bandits off a village if there’s a MacGuffin or a fiery blonde there worth protecting. The heroes have to hold off the hordes of raiders (or Wehrmacht POWs, or New Konfederate klommandos (see *Serpent Scales #1: The New Konfederacy*), or Iowa Reds, or ghouls) until the villagers can build enough Sten guns to turn the tide in a final—and totally awesome—gunfight.

MY +2 STEN GUN OF COMMIE-SMITING

Why stop with silver bullets? A Sten gun might be possessed by the ghost of its former owner, or enchanted by a hounigan of Ogun the loa of metal and fire, or inscribed with runic maledictions, or stamped out of meteoric iron, or built from pieces of Fenway Park, or quenched in holy water. Suitable magic effects include:

- **+1 BONUS** (or more) to Shooting rolls, or to damage, or both. Or the bonus might only apply against minions of the Serpent, or against dictators and their servants. Or perhaps it only jams if pointed against a Serpent-fighter or a resister of tyranny.
- **ENCHANTED** to be able to hit ethereal, magical, or other targets normally immune to bullets.
- **LIFE-DRINKING STEN GUN:** Killing someone with the Lifedrinker Sten preemptively cancels out the next Jam or other malfunction ... and may have other effects, too.
- **STEN OF LUCK-DRINKING:** The Sten never malfunctions, but one random weapon or mechanical device within 100 yards acts like its user has the All Thumbs Hindrance. Once that device is broken, the Sten begins drinking the luck from another one.
- **STEN OF LUCK-THROWING:** When the Sten malfunctions, the results are applied to a gun on the other side. So when the hero’s player rolls a 1 on his Stealth roll while carrying his magical Sten, the bad guys give themselves away instead.

Published by Hal Mangold for Atomic Overmind Press

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PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE U.S. ARMY

STEN GUN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE BRITISH C.O.D. ILLUSTRATED IDENTIFICATION LIST, 1942.

FOR BALBINUS, SINCE HE ASKED

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Published by Hal Mangold for Atomic Overmind Press



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