


# AC/DC: The Savage Tale of the First Standards War

*By Tom McNichol*

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**AC/DC: The Savage Tale of the First Standards War** By Tom McNichol

[Read by Malcolm Hillgartner]

Long before there was VHS versus Betamax, Windows versus Macintosh, or Blu-Ray versus HD-DVD, the first and nastiest standards war was fought between alternating current (AC) and direct current (DC).

*AC/DC* tells the little known story of how Thomas Edison bet wrong in the fierce war between supporters of alternating current and direct current. The savagery of this electrical battle can hardly be imagined today. The showdown between AC and DC began as a rather straightforward conflict between technical standards, a battle of competing methods to deliver essentially the same product, electricity. But the skirmish soon metastasized into something bigger and darker. In the AC/DC battle, the worst aspects of human nature somehow got caught up in the wires; a silent, deadly flow of arrogance, vanity, and cruelty. Following the path of least resistance, the war of currents soon settled around the most primal of human emotions: fear.

*AC/DC* serves as an object lesson in bad business strategy and poor decision making. Edison's inability to see his mistake was a key factor in his loss of control over the "operating system" for his future inventions -- not to mention the company he founded, which would later become General Electric.

The battle over whether alternating or direct current would be the standard for transmitting electricity around the world changed the lives of billions of people, shaped the modern technological age, and set the stage for all standards wars to follow. Today's Digital Age wizards can take lessons form Edison's fierce battle: control an invention's technical standard and you control the market.

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**AC/DC: The Savage Tale of the First Standards War By Tom McNichol Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
A little more than 100 years ago, two titans of industry faced off in one of the most vicious battles the marketplace had ever seen. On one side, Thomas Edison, inventor extraordinaire, the creator of the phonograph and the electric light; on the other, George Westinghouse, tycoon and titan, backing the mysterious eastern European inventor Nikola Tesla. They fought over the very nature of the electrical system in America: would it be built on alternating current (as Westinghouse proposed), or direct current à la Edison? Though a battle over electrical standards sounds dry, this tale is anything but. McNichol's solid if brief survey of this relatively unknown moment in the history of technology ranges from macabre electrocutions of hapless animals (and eventually prison inmates) as demonstrations of the "Death Current" to the gleaming "electrical wonderland" of the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. Though the author focuses on when it's wise to fight a standards battle and when to give in, some might wish that he had another 200 pages in which to flesh out the story. His book tantalizingly scratches the surface of Edison's ingenuity and force of will, Westinghouse's shrewd business sense, and most of all the sheer eccentricity of Nikola Tesla. *(Sept.)*
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Review
"Though a battle over electrical standards sounds dry, this tale is anything but . . . [The] book tantalizingly scratches the surface of Edison's ingenuity and force of will, Westinghouse's shrewd business sense, and most of all the sheer eccentricity of Nikola Tesla." --*Publishers Weekly*

"A tale of astonishing genius and greed, a perfect reflection of the competing forces that built corporate America. McNichol offers us a ringside seat at the birth of a superpower, and it's a bloody, messy, and altogether fascinating spectacle." --Brooke Gladstone, cohost, NPR's *On the Media*

"From the twisted copper wires of electricity's early years McNichol spins a story buzzing with genius and fraud, ambition and infamy, hilarity and humiliation. It's a joy to read: a comic operetta of American industrial history, full of great men, small minds and an alarming number of dead dogs." --Craig Stoltz, health editor, *Washington Post*

Review
"You'll never look at your wall socket the same again."
—Evan Ratliff, coauthor, *Safe: The Race to Protect Ourselves in a Newly Dangerous World*

"From the twisted copper wires of electricity's early years McNichol spins a story buzzing with genius and fraud, ambition and infamy, hilarity and humiliation. It's a joy to read: a comic operetta of American industrial history, full of great men, small minds and an alarming number of dead dogs."
—Craig Stoltz, health editor, *Washington Post*

"Few writers explain technology as well as Tom McNichol. No one's as good at finding the humor in it."
—Jeffrey O'Brien, senior editor, *Wired* magazine

"A fascinating history of the battle that decided what comes through the wires when we flick a switch. A great story of how far people will go to prove they're 'right' – and make a buck."

—J. J. Yore, executive producer, public radio's Marketplace

"A tale of astonishing genius and greed, a perfect reflection of the competing forces that built corporate America. McNichol offers us a ringside seat at the birth of a superpower, and it's a bloody, messy, and altogether fascinating spectacle."
—Brooke Gladstone, cohost, NPR's *On the Media*

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**From reader reviews:**

**Kristy Lange:**

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or read a book titled AC/DC: The Savage Tale of the First Standards War? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have different opinion?

**David Rutherford:**

AC/DC: The Savage Tale of the First Standards War can be one of your basic books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to put every word into joy arrangement in writing AC/DC: The Savage Tale of the First Standards War however doesn't forget the main level, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource information that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information can certainly drawn you into completely new stage of crucial pondering.

**Krystal Sutherland:**

This AC/DC: The Savage Tale of the First Standards War is great reserve for you because the content and that is full of information for you who else always deal with world and have to make decision every minute. That book reveal it data accurately using great plan word or we can say no rambling sentences within it. So if you are read this hurriedly you can have whole details in it. Doesn't mean it only provides straight forward sentences but challenging core information with wonderful delivering sentences. Having AC/DC: The Savage Tale of the First Standards War in your hand like finding the world in your arm, details in it is not ridiculous one. We can say that no e-book that offer you world throughout ten or fifteen tiny right but this publication already do that. So , this can be good reading book. Hi Mr. and Mrs. active do you still doubt which?

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