

A Game of Bastards

Core Mechanic:

The use of a hand of five cards for every action your character makes. An action that would provoke opposition (determined either by the Dealer or by an opposing player) results in an opposed hand – each side of the opposition plays a card, with the higher card determining the winner. Each hand, every player involved draws a new card from the deck, and may discard a card if they wish. If anyone involved is unsatisfied with their entire hand, they may **mulligan** by sacrificing their action in the hand and discarding all of their cards and drawing five new cards. Played cards are also modified by the player's skills and individual Fate scores – covered in character building further down.

Example:

Blaine's character **Kodos** and Stella's character **Cynthia** are rival inventors who have managed to corner a wealthy investor – unfortunately, both of them appear before the man at the same time. All three characters are in **Opposition** – Kodos and Cynthia both need this contract to pay their respective rent and utility bills, and the investor, played by Edward, the **Dealer**, would really prefer to hang on to as much of his wealth as possible. Each character draws a hand of five cards.

This is a simple action(not combat or anything more intense like a skill check) and thus each player simply chooses a card to play, with the highest coming out better in the deal.

Stella plays her King, as Blaine and Edward play a 7 and a 9, respectively. The dealer describes the exchange, as the investor is a bit put off by Kodos' intensity and becomes wary about his offer, as the more serious and put together offer made by Cynthia becomes far more acceptable by comparison. The Dealer then decides whether the **Opposition** should continue – for simple agreements like this example, one hand is enough, while something like combat will generally last until someone falls over or gives up. Combat has addition rules which will be handled in the appropriate section.

Combat

J = 11

Q = 12

K = 13

A = 14, or 1 for init

$C < S < H < D$

1. **Trait Pool** = **Trait** x 5

Shuffling

The deck is shuffled at the beginning of every scene, and at the end of an **Opposition**. Some

Advantages allow the player to shuffle the deck under specific circumstances, and the deck is shuffled after any character draws a Joker.

When the deck runs out in a sustained opposition, the players should take a moment to consider whether or not it is worth it to their characters to continue. If so, shuffle the discarded cards back into the deck and continue as normal. Otherwise, the players may consider a shift in the type or opposition, a tactical retreat, or talking the situation out.

Jokers – Unbound by Fate

Opposition – When drawn, finish the draw and then reshuffle the discard pile into the deck. The player gains a Wildcard, which can be spent at any time to draw a new card that is directly added to the current hand.

Fate Draw – Operates the same way.

Steps

Opposition

1. Draw Step.
2. Player with lowest init draw or mulligan step.
3. Player active phase. Non-round actions(like drawing a weapon), flavor, etc.
4. Player declares action (+ target if needed) or sacrifices action to use ability. Declare raises.
5. Play Step vs. all affected.
6. Betting Step(affected) & declare relevant ability use.
7. Betting Step(current player)
8. 6 & 7 until no more cards will be played.
9. Consequences. Usually success = damage to appropriate pool = difference between cards.
10. Player end step. Optional time to add flavor to results, indicate character end state, etc.
11. Repeat 2 – 9 with next highest init.
12. All players have played. End of round. Return to 2, restarting with lowest init.
13. When characters wish to stop(or fall unconscious/die), end opposition.
14. Shuffle all cards back into deck.

Skill Hands in Oppositions

Most opposed hands are going to be a chosen skill by one character opposed by a chosen skill from another. The player with the lowest initiative goes first, and plays 1 card face down, adding the relevant trait to the final value. The Opposition enters the Betting step, in which the opposing character(s) may choose to play one card and then either play more face up cards from their hand(up to their ranks in the skill being used) or use a Wildcard to draw and play a new card from the deck face up. The betting step goes back and forth between the two players until both decide to call it(or if no players can place any more cards) and reveal the face down cards, the aggressor succeeding by the difference in total value of cards played(or failing by said difference).

Skills

Athletics

- Yoga (x Meditation)
- Specialized Strike (x Unarmed Combat)
- Sword technique(x Weapon Combat)
- Wrestling(x Grapple Combat)
- Sailing(x Technology)

Dexterity

- Acrobatics (x Craft<Perform>)
- Stunt (x <Weapon> Combat)
- Clown (x Technology)
-

<Weapon(type) or Unarmed> Combat

- Martial Art(x Meditation)
- Sword Tech(x Athletics)
- Wrestling(x Athletics)
- Sneak Attack(x Stealth)
- Mercenary(x Business)

Stealth

- Prestidigitation (x Perform)
- Lockpicking(x Technology)
- Pickpocket(x Influence)
- Cheat(x Gambling)
- Sneak Attack(x Knife Combat)
- Fence(x Business)

Technology

- Vehicle (Technology x Perception)
- Computer(Technology x Academics)
- Machinery(Technology x Craft<Metal>)
- Jury-Rig(Technology x Perform)
- Invent(x Craft<type>)
- Marketing(x Business)
- Disarm(x Stealth)
-

Academics

- Biology(x Athletics)
- Chemistry(x Craft<Potion>)
- Astronomy(x Perception)
- Astrology(x Influence)
- History(x Technology)
- Art(x Craft<Painting>)
- Teaching(x Perform)
- Bureaucracy(x Business)
- Law(x Influence)

Influence

- Incite (x Perform)
- Cold Read (x Perception)
- Lie(x Stealth)
- Intimidate(x <Weapon> Combat)
- Haggle(x Business)

Craft(Type)

- Sword Sage(Craft<Blacksmithing> x Sword Combat)
- Trapping(Craft<Trap> x Stealth)
- Machinery(Craft<Metalworking> x Technology)
- Boatswain(Craft<Carpentry> x Technology)

Business

- Agent(x Perform)
- Invest(x Perception)
- Finance(x Academics)
- Advertising(x Influence)

Perception

Meditation

- Faith(Meditation x Academics)
- Religion(Meditation x Business)
- Preach(x Influence)
- Feng Shui(x Craft<Decoration>)
- Ritual(x Perform)
-

First Aid

- Diagnose (x Perception)
- Surgery (x Technology)
- Medicate(x Academics)
- Poison(x Stealth)
- Quack(x Influence)
- Bureaucracy(x Business)

Guts

Specialties

A synergistic bonus between two skills at rank 2 or above. A player may spend 1 point to gain a Specialty between any two skills at rank 2 or above – this can be almost anything but should refer to a specific action (Like using Influence x Craft(Theatre) as an “Acting” Specialty) or realm of study(such as Academics x Athletics resulting in Biology as a specialty). The player gains their rank in the specialty to any fate draw involving the specialty, regardless of the actual Skill involved. The rank of

the specialty is equal to the lower of the two skills involved, and increases as the skills are upgraded. Some specialties, like weapon combat schools, have additional effects which will be discussed in their source material. A few are also included in this reference.

Random Rules

Fighting with Two Weapons – a character may use a weapon in each hand. They suffer a -2 penalty to the related skill(s) of the weapons involved. The character still makes only one attack draw, but adds the damage of both weapons if successful.

Items in the environment – A character may spend an action during their turn to pick up a weapon or some other object on the ground. They can choose to wield it or put it away in the same action. Drawing a weapon on the character's person that is readily accessible (like a sheathed sword or holstered gun) does not require an action, but any item that is not prepared in such a way (like something in a backpack) does still require an action to retrieve

Advantages

Characters start the game with 2 advantages. If a character has a 0 in the trait pool indicated by the suit, they cannot use advantages of that suit.

Defensive

Counter<Weapon> - Spades

The character has learned to use their opponent's movement against them in melee combat. When attacked with a melee weapon and wielding the chosen weapon above, this character may sacrifice any number of skill cards on the defense (leaving a minimum of 1) – if successful, they may then immediately use those skill cards to initiate an attack action against the same opponent.

All-Out Defense - Clubs

At any point during or before this character's action this round, the character may declare the use of the **All-Out Defense**. All of the character's defense draws against physical attacks add their **Body** bonus instead of **Mind**. The character's **Body** bonus is doubled for all of these draws, but they cannot take any actions this round.

Defensive Stance – Clubs

During your action, you may voluntarily lower your attack draws by a number of cards equal to or less than your **Body**. You may increase your cards on all of your defense rolls by this amount until the end of the current **Opposition**.

Serendipity - Diamonds

The character may spend 1 **LP** to use their **Luck** bonus on their next physical defense draw instead of **Mind**. This may be used at any time, and can be done multiple times per hand.

Iron Wall - Clubs

The character may spend a wildcard at any point in an opposition round. During that round, damage to the character's **BP** is reduced by their **Body** score.

Karmic Shuffle – Diamonds

The character may spend a wildcard to make all characters involved in the opposition(including themselves) add **Luck** to their physical defense rolls instead of any other trait.

Soul of Steel – Hearts

The character may spend a wildcard and sacrifice their action at any point during a round. During that round, they reduce any damage directed toward their **SP** or **BP** by twice their **Spirit** bonus.

Study – Spades

The character may use their action during a turn to **Study** a single opponent. For the remainder of the opposition, double the character's **Mind** bonus for physical defense rolls against that opponent.

Careful – Spades

When this character successfully avoid taking damage from an attack, they may draw a card.

Dodge – Clubs

The character may spend 1 **BP** to use their **Body** bonus on their next physical defense draw instead of **Mind**. This may be used at any time, and can be done multiple times per hand.

Mind Over Matter – Spades

The character may spend 1 **MP** when taking damage to their **BP**. If they do, the damage is dealt to their **MP** instead.

Tenacity – Clubs

Always active. When this character sustains damage to their **BP**, they may draw a card.

Offensive Advantages

Savage – Clubs

The character may spend 1 **BP** before making a physical melee attack. If the attack is successful, they may make an additional physical melee attack immediately at -2.

Ambidextrous – Clubs

This character reduces the two weapon fighting penalty to 1 card.

Florentine <Weapon>- Spades

This character does not suffer the two weapon fighting penalty to defense when defending with the chosen weapon.

Zeal – Hearts

This character may spend 1 **SP** when making a physical attack. They add their **Spirit** to this draw instead of **Body**.

Fortune – Diamonds

This character may spend 1 **LP** when making a physical attack. They add their **Luck** to this draw instead of **Body**, and the defending character uses **Luck** in place of **Mind**.

Ass Pull – Diamonds

This character may spend 1 **LP** during their action. They immediately draw two cards, then discard two

cards.

Faith – Hearts

When this character takes damage to their **SP**, they may draw a card.

Speedy – Spades

This character may replace their initiative card during their action without sacrificing the action to do so.

Berserk – Hearts

The character may spend a wildcard during their turn to become **Berserk**. **Berserk** characters add double their **Body** bonus to any physical damage they inflict. In addition, they may only use offensive advantages, and play 1 less card on defense draws(minimum 1). A character remains **Berserk** until the end of the current scene or they may end it by sacrificing an action and succeeding on a **Meditation Fate Draw** off of **Mind**.

Wild Swing – Clubs

The character may spend 1 **BP** before making a physical melee attack. They may lower their **Body** bonus to minimum of 0 on the attack roll – if the attack succeeds, they add double the subtracted amount to the damage.

Disarm – Spades

This character may spend 1 **MP** to make a physical melee attack off of **Mind**. If successful, the attack deals no damage, but the opponent drops their weapon. If the draw succeeds with two raises(so 4 or more above) then the character may choose to place the weapon in one of their empty hands. (Otherwise, it takes an action to recover a dropped weapon.)

Utility Advantages

Cunning Linguist - Spades

This character may play an additional card in any opposed social draw.

Criminal – Diamonds

This character may play an additional card on **Stealth** or **Influence** draws.

Hearty – Clubs

This character may play an additional card on **Athletics** or **Manual Dexterity** draws.

Acrobat – Clubs

In the draw step of a fate draw involving extreme movement(running a great distance, swinging, leaping a chasm, etc.) this character may discard a number of cards up to their **Body** and draw a new card for each one discarded.

Toughness – Clubs

Always active. Reduce damage toward a character's **BP** by 1. This advantage can be taken up to 5 times.

Resolve – Hearts

Always active. Reduce damage toward a character's **SP** by 1. This advantage can be taken up to 5 times.

Brawler – Clubs

This character adds their ranks in the **Unarmed Combat** skill to their damage when making a physical attack using the skill.

Grappler – Clubs

This character adds their ranks in the **Grapple Combat** skill to their damage when making a physical attack using the skill.

Optional Rules

Followers/Henchmen (Touched)

A **Follower** is any character that while not **Fated** is in some way swept up by the tides of fate, and thus either brought into **opposition** with the players or their enemies. They are not as impressive as the **Fated** in these conflicts but may nonetheless provide some valuable support.

Every **Follower** is given a **Power Rating** between 1 and 5, with 1 being an inexperienced or non-combat sort of character and 5 being a character nearly on par with one of the **Fated**. **Followers** draw a hand equal to their **Power Rating** at the beginning of any **Opposition** in which they are involved, and are considered to have their **Power Rating** in any relevant traits or skills they may need (using a weapon, avoiding traps, etc.). Followers have a single **Power Pool** that absorbs all of the damage done to the follower regardless of intended pool, and they are **Knocked out** when that pool is empty. Most **Followers** will be controlled by the **Dealer**, but some characters may gain advantages granting them loyal **Followers** that they control directly.

Extras/Brutes ()

Extras are background characters, or nameless thugs assisting an enemy **Fated**, or any other basically faceless cannon fodder role. Like **Follwers**, **Extras** are assigned a **Power Rating** of 1 – 5. **Extras** operate in groups of up to 5, with the number of members determining the size of the group's hand, and the **Power** Rating the number of cards they may play in attack/defense actions. When an opponent deals damage to a group of **Extras**, they lose 1 member for every 2 points of difference (so if the opponent plays cards totalling 14, and the extras only manage a 5, they lose 4 members). Brutes armed with weapons gain the damage bonus of the weapon on attack hands. **Extras** cannot use advantages or skills.

Indirect Opposition

Suggestions for games with no dealer.

If the character has no reason to directly oppose the player, but a player feels there should be some opposition from the world, an **Indirect Opposition** begins in which the player not directly involved takes control of the hands and actions of opposing forces.

The exact nature of the opposing force will depend largely on the context of the situation, but it should be decided by the consensus -1 model discussed above. A logical opposing force for a character attempting a bank robbery is likely either a single **Fated** police officer, two or three **Touched** cops, or a group of **Extras** in more relaxed settings.

Building A Scene

Suggested Dramatic Actions:

Reinforce: A Player may spend a wildcard to have an opposing group of 5 **Extras** enter the scene under that player's control. They can be themed in any way appropriate to the setting, representing anything from societal forces (like the police mentioned above) to the character's own underlings (like a group of thugs in a gangland kind of setting). Their **Power Rating** is equal to the highest trait of their controlling player's character. The player may choose a single weapon type for the group to all possess, which must have a damage bonus equal to or below the group's **Power Rating**.

Skill Check: If a player attempts any action that has logically associated difficulty (picking a lock, sneaking past guards, etc.) then any player may ask them to make an appropriate **Fate Draw** using the skill. This can be done for free, but should be used judiciously – no one likes making five draws to cook breakfast.

Appearance: If the character is invested enough in the **Opposition** then they may choose to make a personal appearance to settle matters. This does not cost a wildcard but the character is now in a **Direct Opposition**, which comes with its own dangers. Note that while the player can force their character to appear, it may not necessarily mean the character is able to immediately work to end the **Opposition** - they must still find the other involved character if they are hiding, resolve any fights going on, etc.

Involve: A player may spend a wildcard to get two **Touched** characters involved in the scene with a **Power Rating** equal to that player's character's highest Trait. They come with one weapon of their controller's choice each.

Distance: This action is used at the beginning of the scene. The character involved may spend a wildcard to have all further characters enter the scene at some significant distance – for every wildcard spent, it takes a full round of movement before other characters can engage the character in melee. Only one player can use this action for any given scene.

What This System Needs To Function (Goals for Alpha v. 1.0)

1. Character Building Rules

i. Suits

Every player begins by choosing a **Suit** – **Clubs, Hearts, Spades, or Diamonds**. Using Tarot decks with Cups/Swords/Staves/Coins works if you prefer, and is more appropriate for some settings. Accordingly, each character has a relevant stat for each suit, to represent his ties to each of the four Fates and a relevant Trait. Each of these Traits starts at rank 1 – excluding the

trait indicated by the character's **Suit**, which begins at rank 2. :

Body(Clubs/Swords) represents the physical capabilities of the character, from actual brute strength to agility and overall fitness and endurance. The **Clubs** character is in some way tied to the Fate **Kranos**, destined to live a rigorous life but challenged to use it as a means to attain ultimate knowledge of the self and one's capabilities. A **Fated's Body** is added to physical damage rolls, physical attacks, and skill checks requiring raw power(such as lifting heavy things or breaking out of a grapple), agility-based challenges(scaling a fence, leaping a great distance), the <magic skill>, or endurance tests(running a few miles, holding one's breath underwater).

Spirit(Hearts/Cups) represents the characters resolve, determination, or raw willpower, as well as things like spirituality or empathy. The **Hearts** character is tied to the Fate **Loressa** and inevitably becomes someone of conviction and passion, destined to determine their own path and challenged to make their changes to the world left behind last after they're gone. A **Fated's Spirit** is added to rolls involving fear effects(like seeing an angry crocodile, or a clockwork monstrosity bigger than your house), skill attempts such as those to incite or lead(like riling a crowd up for a much needed revolution, or keeping your men's morale up during a war campaign), sanity damaging effects(like seeing a **Fate** in person, or killing someone for the first time), the <> magic skill, and if your character is **Desperate**, a number of combat hands.

Mind(Spades, Staves) is the character's intellectual capability, ability to think and solve problems, and directly correlated to one's reflexes. The **Spades** character is quick-witted and aware of their surroundings, a nod to their patron **Fate Aiyala**. Characters of this suit are destined to stumble upon questions no other could solve, and are challenged to push the boundries of human knowledge. A character adds their **Spades** score to intellectual skills(Research, disarming traps, tactical decisions), attempts at trickery or influence(lying, bribery, haggling), reflexive hands(defense hands, dodging traps, taking cover), mental contests(chess, psionic influence, repartee, or performance), and the related magic skill of <>.

Luck(Diamonds/Coins) is one of largest deciding factors in any **Fated's** life, and indeed one of the most important aspects of this game. It is chance, the ultimate result of being touched by one of the **Fates**. The **Diamonds** character isn't quite sure how they've made it through life – it just seemed like opportunity came their way. **Esme**, the **Smiling Lady** to most of her more devoted followers(the sort seen betting their entire savings on a hand of cards, or just fortunate enough to always find a warm place to sleep at night) is very generous to those that become attached to her strings. Of course, there is always the risk of losing it all soon afterwards, but the faithful know she's got them taken care of. They just have to do the legwork.

A **Fated** adds their **Diamonds** score to any skill roll that is more dumb luck than technical know-how(like attempting to fix a TV by hitting it), and those of this suit have access to a number of advantages to use their **Diamonds** bonus on other skills as well as defense and attack hands. <>, **Esme's** magic skill, is powerful and unpredictable, though its users rarely realize just how much power they actually possess. In **Desperation**, a character may use their Luck score for many of their hands.

ii. Points & Costs

Every character starts with a 1 in each trait(2 in their chosen suit), 1 in each skill, and 10 XP.

Increasing a trait, gaining an advantage, upping a skill, or gaining a specialty costs 1 XP. Disadvantages may be taken only at character creation – the character gains 1 XP for each disadvantage.

- iii. Traits
 - iv. Skills
 - v. Specialties
 - vi. Advantages
 - vii. Disadvantages
2. Core Mechanics For Non-Opposition

- i. Fate Draws

Fate Draw

Draw Step.

Play Step. Declare Raises.

Betting Step(P2)

Betting Step(P1)

(Continues until both players can't or don't want to play any more cards)

Reveal Step.

Consequences.

Shuffle all cards back into deck.

Skill Hand – When a player uses a skill that is not directly opposed by another player, they play a hand against a **Fate Draw**. The player draws a number of cards equal to their rank in skill and adds the relevant trait as a straight numerical bonus to the card they choose to play from that hand. The Dealer or another player draws 6 cards minus the trait being used by the player, and unless the draw has a **Difficulty Modifier** (see below) does not add any bonuses.

Example

Carlton, a mechanic in a Space Opera setting, is attempting to do basic repairs on his spaceship. He doesn't have opposing forces in the area of space he's in, so this is a simple **Skill Hand**. Carlton has a Mind of 3 and a Repair of 2 – So he will draw 2 cards and add 3 to the card he plays. **The Dealer** draws 3 cards(6 minus **Carlton's** Mind of 3) and attempt to beat **Carlton's** roll. **Carlton** manages a 9(12 after adding his Mind) and beats the dealer's Jack(Worth 11).

Difficulty Modifier

If a player attempts something that is decidedly more difficult than a simple **Skill Hand**, either the Dealer or the players may decide the draw should have a **Difficulty Modifier** between 1 and 20. Add this number to the opposing hand during the **Skill Hand**.

Here are some guidelines:

+1 – Minor increase in difficulty, minor annoyances that interrupt the work – attempting to work in cramped conditions, while being bitten by mosquitoes, etc.

+3 – Noticeably difficult. Things like performing delicate work while missing a few fingers, working in extreme heat or cold without proper gear, arguing about a subject you don't know anything about, etc.

+5 - Significant challenge. Reloading a gun while being attacked by five guys in melee range, or attempting to pick a lock or fix a car with improvised tools.

+7 - A serious undertaking, not likely to succeed without great hardship. Leaping a chasm

while carrying a decently sized goat. Trying to make a shirt out of fishing line. Lifting a car off someone.

+10 – A challenge requiring the peak of human ability. Towing a truck with your genitals.

Inventing a new type of Math. Making a repair with no tools at all.

+15 – Basically impossible. Lifting a car over your head. Driving two boats at once. Climbing up the slippery wall of a giant beehive while being savaged by said giant bees.

+20 – The stuff of legend, impossible until you just did it. Convincing the Pope that there is no God. Building a computer out of rocks and clams. Leaping the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle. While on fire.

3. Core Mechanics for Opposition

i. Indirect Actions

ii. Combat of all sorts

a. Initiative

At the beginning of a direct opposition, each player draws a hand of 5 cards. They then choose one of these to be played as their **Initiative**. The players then act in order from whoever plays the lowest card. A player's initiative remains this played value for the rest of the Opposition. During the player's turn, they may sacrifice their action and replace their initiative card with a different one from their hand, discarding the old card.

b. Quick Actions(Stuff that doesn't use up your action)

c. Opposed Draws

d. Reflexive Actions

e. Player States(desperation, knocked down, asleep, dead, undead, etc.)

Desperation – Triggered when a character has emptied any 1 trait pool. Damage in this case does not “roll over” from one pool to the next. A character that is desperate immediately draws a number of cards equal to their **Spirit or Luck**. Any hand played while in **Desperation** uses the character's **Spirit OR Luck** bonus instead of any other <trait>.

4. The Charts

i. Weapons

ii. Armor

iii. Stuff and what it costs

What the Game Needs to Succeed (Beta 1.0 goals)

1. Introduction & Game Tone

Design Goal : To create a lightweight, minimalist pen and paper role playing game utilizing a standard deck of cards to maximize portability and varied outcomes. A game with real complexity and depth that can be played spontaneously with or without a GM and requires the least supplies, accessories, and space possible.

Secondary Goal(s):

To develop a setting that fits naturally with the aforementioned mechanic, encourages friendly competition between players(or outright conflict), not to the point of disruption but as a means of increasing investment and reward for achievement. To function both as a long-term campaign-type role-playing system and as a pick-up travel or party game.

Needed Materials:

2x deck of cards(Jokers included)

Character sheets(Index Cards)

A reference sheet of rules for play

(Optional) This book for more in-depth rules questions, suggested Skills, setting information, and glossary.

2. The Setting
 - i. The Four Fates
 - ii. Magic
3. Dealer Section
4. Layout
5. Examples for everything

What the Game Needs to be Finished (Pre-Release 1.0 goals)

1. Aaaaart.
2. Testing
3. Kickstarter
4. Wiki
5. Advertising
6. Player feedback & independent testing

Release 1.0