

# BUST

## Explosive Roleplaying



by  
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# BUST

## Designers notes

Having previously designed a crunchy, heavily structured and focused rule set in the Split System I wanted to create its opposite, a sleek, flexible, free form system driven by narrative, and with a single unified resolution mechanic.

**Bust: Explosive Roleplaying** isn't a huge prescriptive system with fixed stats, skill lists, powers and weaponry. It attempts instead to provide a framework for players to create characters using descriptive words and phrases to develop interesting and diverse character concepts, whilst still having a strong gaming element to play.

Bust supports a fast, cinematic style with a certain level of script immunity built into the mechanics to engineer dynamic and heroic gameplay. Heroes are meant to come out on top the majority of the time, and through careful resource management players can dictate this with near certainty. On the flip side Bust is also pretty deadly with swift and dire consequences for running out of moves and going bust.

Bust won't be suitable for gamers who like structure and detail, and it is unlikely to better a system designed around facilitating a specific game. But give it a go.

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# BUST

Bust is a fast, narrative focused, card based system that uses player created traits in a single explosive resolution mechanic.

## narrative

Scenes are generally outlined by the Buster (Games Master) and then left open for the players to fill with narrative. The Buster presents challenges in these scenes for the players to overcome. If they are successful the action within their narrative happens, if busted an unfavourable alternative told by the Buster unfolds.

## EXPLOSIVE

Scenes are explosive with players mechanically rewarded for dynamic, inventive play. Bust supports gritty, cinematic type action in that scenes are typically fast, brutal and stylish. Bust aims to blend knife edge risk with heroic balls to the wall style feats. Its about playing big, fast and loose and as such players and Buster shouldn't get hung up on meticulous detail, just enjoy the ride.

## actions

Players narrate the action they want their characters to undertake in the scene. Unlike some roleplaying games characters are not limited to a single action of some description like taking a swipe at an opponent with an axe or retrieving an item from a backpack. They can take several actions much like an actor does in a movie action sequence. So a player playing a cop character could after seeing a wanted perp on the street, brake the car he's driving, get out of the car, slam the perp against a fence, cuff him and read him his rights all within a single turn.

## scenes

These episodes of play are elastic. A scene could be a 3 second gunfight or a 3 hour rock climb. It all depends on what's involved and how it is narrated. A brawl for example could be an epic 90 minute struggle or a dramatic 5 second hammering. A scene may contain only a single play (one round of cards) or if it is not resolved in one play several others until it is. Cards are not shuffled during a scene.

## Traits

In Bust there aren't any fixed character stats like strength or charisma. Instead players are free to describe their characters according to personal preference and the requirements of the setting. Players simply assign traits to their characters like "Sneaky" or "Ace Pilot", "Driven" or "Speak Spanish". These traits then assume for purposes of play their literal meaning and are applied in situations and ways that the players and Buster imagine.

## Resolution

Bust uses a single play of cards to progress or potentially resolve a challenge. All features relevant to the challenge are considered and factored into the one play of cards, the result of which is then applicable to both the challenge and the



challenge taker. In the just mentioned cop and perp example the challenge is for the cop to make the arrest against the criminals ability to resist arrest.

## CARDS

Bust uses a deck of regular playing cards with the jokers set aside. Suits are only relevant in a specific way, and cards assume their numerical value with Aces low and Jacks, Queens and Kings worth 11,12 and 13 respectively. Cards in a challenge are added together for a total with the aim of not busting 21. A dealt King explodes and another card gets dealt into the hand increasing the difficulty of the challenge.

A two card challenge.

- (7) 7 of Hearts
- (13) King of Spades, Explodes deal another card
- (6) 6 of Diamonds

Total 30

Aces work the other way by removing along with itself the highest card in the hand.

A four card challenge

- (3) 3 of Clubs
- (10) 10 of Hearts
- (1) Ace of Clubs Cancels itself and highest card in hand
- (11) Jack of Diamonds Aced

Total 13

## Challenges

Tasks, obstacles, manoeuvres and threats represent challenges for the players to overcome. The difficulty of a challenge is expressed in the number of cards the player has to turn over without going bust. Some challenges like dispensing with a puny, two bit punk will be easy (1 card), while others like lifting and rolling a car over onto its roof will be considerably more difficult (6 cards). When creating a challenge consider the inherent difficulty and then take into account any Edges (advantages) and Drags (disadvantages) that maybe had. Edges and Drags are relative and as such are able to cancel each other out. They are always applied to the challenge and not to the player.

### Challenge Rating

Certainty	(-1 card)	Very Hard	(5 cards)
Walkover	(0 cards)	Immense	(6 cards)
Simple	(1 card)	Herculean	(7 cards)
Easy	(2 cards)	Ridiculous	(8 cards)
Moderate	(3 card)	Absurd	(9 cards)
Hard	(4 cards)	Oh God	(10+ cards)



**Sample Threats (Fight)**

**Zombie** (1 card)  
**Goblin** (1 card)  
**Lowly Street Punk** (1 card)  
**Office Worker** (1 card)  
**Typical Thug** (2 cards)  
**Cop** (2 cards)  
**Orc** (2 cards)  
**Soldier** (2 cards)  
**Large Brutish Orc** (3 cards)  
**Tough Experienced Cop** (3 cards)  
**Agent** (3 cards)  
**Crack Soldier** (3 cards)  
**Ruthless Enforcer** (3 cards)

**Assassin** (4 cards)  
**Special Forces Soldier** (4 cards)  
**Special Forces Sergeant** (5 cards)  
**Pirate Captain** (5 Cards)  
**Low Powered Vampire** (5 cards)  
**14 Foot Tiger Shark** (6 cards)  
**Ogre** (6 cards)  
**Alien** (6 cards)  
**Conan** (7 cards)  
**Giant** (8 Cards)  
**T Rex** (9 cards)  
**Greater Demon** (10 cards)  
**Godzilla** (13 Cards)

**Intellectual Threats (Out Think, Solve, Create, Subterfuge)**

**Moron** (1 card)  
**Orc** (1 card)  
**Dopey Thug** (1card)  
**Average Dude** (2 cards)  
**Detective** (3 cards)  
**Conan** (3 cards)  
**Police Lieutenant** (4 cards)  
**Professor** (4 cards)  
**Maniacal Scientist** (5 Cards)  
**Genius** (6 cards)  
**Sherlock Holmes** (7 cards)  
**Superior Alien Life Form** (8 Cards)  
**Advanced Artificial Intelligence** (10 cards)  
**Deity** (13 cards)

**Social Threats (Seduce, Persuade, Befriend, Con)**

**Barfly** (1 Card)  
**Office Worker** (2 cards)  
**Poor Salesman** (2 cards)  
**Con Artist** (3 cards)  
**Pretty Good Salesman** (3 cards)  
**Actor** (3 cards)  
**High Class Escort** (4 cards)  
**Politician** (4 cards)  
**Preacher** (4 cards)  
**C.E.O** (5 cards)  
**Movie Star** (5 cards)  
**TV Evangelist** (5 cards)  
**President** (6 cards)  
**Cultural Icon** (7 cards)  
**Mythical Siren** (8 cards)  
**Goddess** (13 cards)



**Edge Of Drag**

- Outnumbered** (+/-1 card for each opponent)
- Knuckleduster/Improvised Weapon** (+/-1 card)
- Bat/Knife/Hammer/Bow** (+/-2 cards)
- Small Calibre Handgun .22/.25** (+/-2 cards)
- Sword/Two Handed Axe** (+/-3 cards)
- Small Shield** (+/-1 card)
- Large Shield** (+/-2 cards)
- Medium/Large Calibre Handgun** (+/-3 cards)
- Assault Rifle/SMG/Shotgun** (+/-4 cards)
- Grenade** (+/-4 cards)
- Large Calibre Sniper Rifle** (+/-5 cards)
- ♠ **Automatic Fire** (+/-1 card)
- Attacked From Behind** (+/-2 cards)
- Ambushed/Surprised** (+/-2 cards)
- Body Armour** (+/-2 cards)
- Extensive Military Style Body Armour** (+/-3 cards)
- Partial Cover Or Cover Nearby** (+/-1 card)
- Full Hard Cover** (+/-3 cards)
- Hurt/Dazed/Drunk** (+/-1 card)
- Badly Injured** (+/-2 cards)
- Severely Injured** (+/-3 cards)
- ♦ **Difficult Manoeuvre** (+/-1 card)
- ♣ **Favourable Range** (+/-2 cards)
- Fully Equipped With Excellent Tools/Kit, Eg. Holy Water** (+/-2 cards)
- Reloading** (+/-2 cards)
- Difficult Terrain** (+/-1 card)

♠ This is added to an assault rifle or SMG when it is fired in automatic mode.

♦ This could be trying to do too much in the scene, attempting something very tricky against an opponent or simply making a poor move.

♣ Describes a situation where a person with a handgun engages another with a knife at a range of say 20 feet where the handgun is very effective but the knife is not. This is also applicable to similar situations such as a rifle engaging a handgun at 60 yards, or an archer reloading and firing in the midst of close combat against an opponent armed with a knife.

Two enforcers carrying handguns making a 40 yard approach towards a player armed with an assault rifle would work out like this: The (3 card) enforcers get a card each for outnumbering the player but this is negated by the 1 card edge that an assault rifle has over a handgun, and then moved into the player's favour by the favourable range for the assault rifle over the handgun. The player now faces a reduced threat of two separate (2 card) challenges.

If however the enforcers were also armed with assault rifles then there would be no weapon and range advantage for either side, and the threat of the enforcers to the player would increase by (+1 card) due to numerical superiority. The player would face two separate (4 card) challenges.



## Small Distinctions

There may be occasions when there is a need to mark a distinction between the same type of threat. For example the edge in self defence capabilities of a .50 Desert Eagle handgun over a .32 calibre revolver or a large hunting knife over a small pocket knife. For something you think is good award up to a 3 to be used by the threat to bust 21 or by the player to keep it under. For something you believe is of poorer quality or less effective reduce by up to a 3 and apply in the same way. This also applies to a threat where it may be slightly less or slightly more capable than the average for its type. EG. A bit stronger, faster, smarter or meaner.

## Bust or Under

The narrative control of a scene is decided by whether the player busts or stays under. If under the scene plays out as the player describes, if not the Buster narrates an alternative version of events. To draw out dramatic tension there are degrees of narrative control where the described events still happen, but not to the complete effect wished for. These half results then set the scene for further conflict.

**+/-21 Spectacular** - (Incapacitated or Dead) The result is extraordinary, dramatic and conclusive. The Buster or player is free to describe an appropriately severe and emphatic outcome. EG. beaten unconscious, ripped to pieces or utterly humiliated.

**+/-14 Decisive** - (Critically Injured) An equally impressive or disastrous performance leaves the victim clinging onto his life, savings, pride. Injuries could include a sword thrust through the chest, a multiple fracture to the skull, or several lesser breaks accompanied by internal bleeding. Alternatively the recipient could be severely restricted in a pin or stunned by a blow if the intention was not to injure. In most incidences this result is compelling and final reducing or increasing the threat by 3 cards. If this is enough to reduce the threat to 0 cards then the threat has been eliminated.

**+/-7 Significant** - (Badly Injured) The result is of consequence being serious and substantial in scope. A debilitating gunshot wound to the stomach, convincingly coned, disarmed or caught unawares. The Buster or player is free to describe anything that doesn't severely maim or kill. The loser in the challenge suffers through injury and error a +/- 2 card penalty. If the player, the threat in the challenge gets 2 more cards, if the threat then the challenge is reduced in strength by 2 cards. If this is enough to reduce the challenge to 0 cards then the threat has been eliminated.

**+/-2 Minor** - (Hurt) One side achieves a small victory that is slighter in scope and margin than was intended. The intention to double tap a foe in the chest with a Colt .45 results in the foe being winged in the arm instead. The intention of swindling a guy out of all his money results in him only handing over a smaller sum. Injuries can include a broken nose and ribs, a broken ankle or several superficial stab wounds. If the player, the threat in the challenge gets 1 more card, if the threat then the challenge is reduced in strength by 1 card. If this is enough to reduce the challenge to 0 cards then the threat has been eliminated.



**+/-1 Impasse** - (Draw) The challenge becomes a competitive struggle with neither force gaining the upper hand in the scene. Examples of this could include an exchange of gunfire that leaves both parties unscathed, or a climber on a rock face getting stuck on an overhang. If appropriate the scene is continued but with initial edges like surprise or rear attack being lost. If it's a strict matter of yes or no like whether the character gets squashed by a falling boulder then read 0 and under as a minor success and +1 and over as a minor bust.

In some situations a Buster may wish to stretch the range of the impasse to reflect an unlikely no win situation like two drunk gang bangers popping at each other with handguns in darkness and from some distance away. In such instances minor successes become impasses and significant successes become minor successes and so on.

## Characters

Bust characters are typically tough and talented; they are not your run of the mill Everyday Joes, and as heroes and anti-heroes they have abilities that make them capable of pulling off breath taking cinematic style feats. This general ability to do cool stuff is represented by a bust value of 21. In games more grounded in realism a bust value of 7 or 14 would be preferable, or in a low powered supers game a bust of 28 or 35.

Characters are then given individuality by ascribing them various Traits and Flaws such as "Marksman" and "Poor Shot", "Smooth Talker" and "Inarticulate", which either then subtract from (good thing) or add (bad thing) to this base. Traits help stop the player going bust while flaws by adding to the challenge make it more likely to happen.

## Tags

The first thing is to come up with a tag for your character, something that basically sums him up in a sentence. A tag is a basic character concept that the player plays to. These can be well worn clichés of a genre or something fresh and original. When players play to their tags they get Aces and Jokers. Here are some examples:

Tough Ex-Convict	Laconic, World Weary P.I.
Crusading Journalist	Troubled, Conceited Actor
Computer Geek	Passionate Preacher
Wise Cracking Truck Driver	Cold Blooded Killer
Flamboyant Designer	Daredevil Biker
Scurrilous, Rum Sodden Pirate	Swashbuckling Dandy
Maverick Fighter Pilot	Radical Activist
Rugged Mercenary	Selfless Revolutionary
Intrepid Explorer	Self loathing Comic
Sanctimonious Rock Star	Studious Stuntman
Burnt Out Hockey Pro	Brooding Novelist
Bloodthirsty Barbarian	Mad Sorcerer
Cocky Young Gunslinger	Determined, On The Edge Cop
Manipulative Executive	Reluctant Thief
Brassy Campaigner	Mysterious Hermit
Sarcastic Underachiever	Rude, Outrageous Radio Host
Self Assured Martial Artist	Drug Addled Army Vet.



## Tags and Their Traits

Tag Traits are the prominent features and skills associated with a Tag and can be described how the player wishes.

### Crusading Journalist

Solicit Information  
See The Angle  
Flowery Prose  
Dogged Determination

### Troubled Conceited Actor

Acting  
Handsome Hunk  
Hell Raiser  
Does Own Stunts

### Passionate Preacher

Chapter & Verse  
Booming Voice  
Conviction  
Respect

### Cold Blooded Killer

Shadow Man  
Deadly Hands  
Vicious  
22. Ruger

After coming up with some features put a few words behind them to explain how they will effect play and what tricks they have to them.

### Cold Blooded Killer

**Shadow Man** (Sneaking Up, Blending In With The Crowd, Hiding)

**Deadly Hands** (Throat Strike, Nerve Points, Fast Combo)

**Vicious** (Ruthless, Aggressive, Scary)

**.22 Ruger** (Head Shot, Take Two Out)

## Character Traits

These qualities describe the particularly striking aspects of a character outside of his Tag, and can be anything the player chooses.

Sly Mutha	Brainbox	Born Leader	Good Shot
Bronzed Adonis	Artistic Flair	Know The Law	Tactful
Handyman	Play Football	Stealing	Honourable
Funny	Dig My Shotgun	Hard To Hit	No Nerves
Hammer Time	Guitar Man	Party Hard	Tracker
Chess Master	Burly Beefcake	Swift	Suspicious
Graceful	Bomb Maker	Stealthy	Auto Repair
Fast Runner	Skateboarding	Skiing	Paramedic

Players get 21 points to put into Tag Traits and 21 points to put into Character Traits. This amount can be increased or decreased according to the power level of the particular game you want to create. Easy, accessible and naturally possessed types of traits like "Fitness", "Communicate", "Add Up", "Use Knife" or "Driving" that most people have to a degree but are not described, get tested at the bust, but with Queens as well as Kings automatically primed to explode on any challenge. With skills technically demanding, obscure or specialized like "Engineering", "Playing The Guitar" or "Flying A Plane" apply a straight +2 card penalty.

In making this decision just ask yourself the question, could a person make a half assed effort at it without training. In answering this I would say for example that shooting a handgun would be yes, whilst performing gymnastics would be no.



## Pounded Characters

The power gamer may say why take a behavioural trait like "Honourable" or "Party Hard" when on the surface of it, it won't help me get stuff or kill things. Taking "Honourable" as a Tag Trait for a Noble Samurai or "Party Hard" for a Destructive Rock Star is essential currency in the worlds in which they exist, and invoking those traits earns development points, Aces and Jokers.

## Broad and narrow traits

"Agile" is a broad trait because it has a number of possible applications like climbing, jumping, evading, dancing, playing sport, fighting, balancing. "Dig My Shotgun" is a pretty narrow trait because it only applies to using a shotgun and as such it becomes a Focus. Focuses get a number of Aces to play to the value of the trait. Broad traits like "Alert" get 1 Ace for every 5 points invested in the trait. So a broad trait of 8 would only net a single Ace, but one of 10 would get two.

## Very narrow traits

A trait like .22 Ruger Pistol is a very narrow trait and applies only to that make, model and calibre of handgun and as such a 1 point investment buys 2 point in the trait. The Buster is the final arbiter of what counts as a broad and narrow trait.

## Strongest suit

Each suit represents a particular method of dealing with a challenge and all characters have a strongest suit, which describes the most formidable approach that they have to overcoming a threat. A player picks a suit that best represents his character's traits and this then becomes his strongest suit. So a character with "Swift" and "Graceful" as dominant traits would adopt the Finesse suit Diamonds as his strongest suit. Another character with "Devious" or "Intelligent" as dominant traits would have the Cunning suit Spades as his strongest suit. The dominant trait is the highest rated character trait a character has.

### Hearts (Empathy)

Understanding, Charm, Empathy, Likeability, Read Intent, Intuition, Magnetic Personality, Converse, Oratory, Seduce, Connect, Divine, Feel, Honour, Integrity.

### Diamonds (Finesse)

Grace, Swiftness, Speed, Agility, Poise, Accuracy, Precision, Rhythm, Elegance, Dexterity, Gentle Touch, Style.

### Clubs (Fortitude)

Strength, Toughness, Endurance, Determination, Aggression, Force, Hard To Hurt, Fighting Spirit, Guts, Intimidate.

### Spades (Cunning)

Devious, Conniving, Shrewd, Tactical, Smart, Manipulative, Calculating, Deceptive, Figure Out.

During a challenge that employs a dominant trait a player can look for sets of his strongest suit to form a surge. A surge is the gathering of momentum, the building



of rage, the glimpse of true knowledge, the periphery of being in the zone.

Challenge	Set	Surge
2 cards	both	1
3 cards	all	4
4 cards	three	2
4 cards	all	8
5 cards	four	6
5 cards	all	12
6 cards	four	4
6 cards	five	10
6 cards	all	16
7 cards	five	6
7 cards	six	12

### POWERING UP

The dominant trait provides the base on top of which points for surges are added. Once a surge exceeds 21 points the character busts his limits and enters into terrible rage, hatches an ingenious deceit, becomes one with his surroundings. For instance a character with the trait "Aggressive" at a rank of 7 provides a base of 7 from which to surge beyond 21. After a power up has been vented the surging process starts all over again. A character can hold a surge until needed.

**Cold Fury** (Fortitude) - The character burns with a cold determined fury that makes him hell bent on achieving his objective. So driven is he that he can ignore any injury penalty inflicted on him, and can continue fighting until he reaches a level 5 injury and is literally cut to pieces. The savage hatefulness of fury also increases any injury inflicted upon a threat by one level. The fury lasts the duration of a scene or several interconnected scenes if they are consecutive. Once the fury is over the character feels his injuries and will die if level 4 is reached or surpassed.

**in The Zone** (Finesse) - The character flows with effortless skill, perfectly anticipating conflicting actions and responding with swift, pinpoint precision. The character's brilliance reduces the difficulty of any athletically skilful challenge by 1 card. The zone lasts the duration of a scene or several interconnected scenes if they are consecutive.

**Read and Weep** (Empathy) - The character is able to read and avoid a threat's deadly moves. By understanding the threat King's, Queens and Jacks are all diffused as exploding cards. Furthermore through an almost supernatural intuition all successes against the character are reduced by a level as though he were taking a cautious approach to a challenge, but without his own successes being diminished as a result. This ability to predict lasts the duration of a scene or several interconnected scenes if they are consecutive.

**Deadly Deceit** (Cunning) - The character is able to confuse a threat through clever distraction and subterfuge. By masking his intentions and hiding a manoeuvre



he is then able by completely wrong footing a threat to temporarily reduce its effectiveness by 2 cards. This only works for one play and must be deployed against a target that is capable of being fooled or misled. EG. This would not work towards fixing the engine of a car, but could work in misdirecting or confusing the visual of a CCTV camera.

### **ace UP The sleeve**

Aces are tricks and special moves the character can put into play to swing a challenge his way. They are things within a trait that the character is really good at doing, be it bluffing in a poker game or performing a fast handbrake turn in a car. For instance the trait "Barroom Brawler" could have "Head Butt" or "Struggle Free" as Aces. At the start of the scene the player would state that he was going to play a particular Ace. In being played the Ace takes out the highest card in the challenge. Aces within a trait are starred \*. Up to three aces can be used per play. Aces are really powerful and greatly increase the chance of a character busting a challenge. Unfortunately for the player they are a limited resource.

### **gambling**

Aces are a precious commodity and as such a player needs to decide when and when not to play them. 3 to 4 card challenges pose the greatest dilemma as they are capable without the play of an Ace of both easily busting and being busted. Players will have to assess the risk, and consider whether it prudent to conserve their Aces for truly dire situations, and at such times gamble their fortunes on raw ability and the turn of a card. A player can to a degree hedge his bets by counting the cards as they are dealt through a scene.

### **splitting an ace**

In certain situations a character can split an Ace between two opponents. The Ace has to be specific like "Split Kick", "Death Arc", "Cover Up" "Two Against One", "Bang Heads", "Take Out Two" and allows a character to take out with the Ace the second highest card of two opponents.

Two card challenge.

(10) 10 of Hearts Aced

(10) 10 of Clubs

Total 10

Aces once played are spent and have to be earned back through the following:

- ♠ Confronting The Character's Issue - 1 Ace
- ♠ Coming Through A Difficult Challenge - 1 Ace
- ♠ Being Cool, Clever, Daring - 1 Ace
- ♠ Playing A Tag Trait Like "Honourable" Or "Wise Cracking" - 1 Ace
- ♠ Achieving An Objective - 1 Ace
- ♠ Reaching And Spending 150 Development Points.
- ♠ Anything Else Considered Worthy - 1 Ace



## Character Flaws

A flaw is something that lets a character down, his Achilles Heel. Flaws work against the character by adding their values to the total of the challenge. Here are some examples:

Greedy Grabber	Grubby
Poor Shot	8 Stone Soaking Wet
Tactless Oaf	Sausage Fingered Klutz
Bad In Business	Weak Chest
Butt Ugly	Gambler
Everyone's Out To Get Me	Chip On Shoulder
Fool In A Car	Candidate For Drowning
Needs A Drink	Easily Influenced
Uneducated	Stiff Jointed
Head In The Clouds	Impaired Hearing

A character gets 7 points worth of flaws in a heroic game and 14 points in a more down to earth game. They can be put into a single flaw or spread around several. The player decides what he might find interesting to play. A flaw shouldn't be something obscure though like "Can't Fly A Plane."

For example a character that had a 3 point flaw in "Stiff Jointed" would have 3 points added towards his bust in challenges such as climbing or acrobatics. A character with a 5 point "Greedy Grabber" flaw would have this added onto any temptation and judgement challenges concerning money or other material possessions.

## Issue

An issue is a significant problem or concern that the character has in his life. Most heroes and anti-heroes have somewhat troubled pasts, ghosts that both haunt and drive them. Issues always have associative consequences, and a need to be resolved. When a character plays his issue and seeks redemption in some way he can earn back Aces and Jokers.

### Issue

Abandoned as a child  
 Grieves over wife's death  
 Brother murdered by Triads  
 Wrongfully imprisoned  
 Bullied in school  
 Overly possessive of people  
 Incapable of being faithful  
 Deeply in debt  
 Killed a child in a car accident  
 Has a weight problem  
 Can't accept authority  
 Harbours hateful prejudices  
 Suffers depression

### Consequence

Unable to love or trust  
 Reckless, suicidal behaviour  
 Seeks revenge  
 Bitter at authorities  
 Unconfident or overly aggressive  
 Smothers them then frightens them off  
 Sex addiction and failed relationships  
 Commits crime, loses home  
 Grief stricken, contemplates suicide  
 Yo yo diets and lacks self esteem  
 Loses jobs, gets arrested  
 Abuses minorities, conspiracy theorist  
 Doesn't wash or eat for periods of time



The player must narrate the measures the character takes to resolve his issue. The Buster may intervene at certain points in the narration to set challenges for the player to overcome, or the player may put forward challenges himself. The narration will normally be in episodes over several sessions of play. It is then for the group to agree as a whole whether the issue has been dealt with or whether there is further conflict to resolve. Issues provide a good platform for immersive roleplaying and serve as interesting plot devices.

### Character Concept

Tank Johnson is a rowdy roughneck working as a diver on an oil rig in the South China Seas. Hulking and wild haired he has a fractured past and destructive temperament dulled and fuelled in equal measure by vodka benders.

**Tank Johnson** (BUST 21) (Traits 21) (Flaws 7) (Suit + Clubs)  
**Tag** (Rowdy Roughneck)

### Tag Traits

- (4) Oil Rigging (Drilling\*, Safety)
- (4) Repair (Patch Up\*, Assess Problem)
- (4) Diving (Swim\*, Search\*, Knife\*)
- (4) Rig Monkey (Climb\*, Balance\*, Work Ropes\*)
- (3) Blowing Off Steam (Drinking\*, Cavorting, Telling Tales\*)
- (3) Sailing (Steer Boat\*, Maintain Boat, Navigate\*)

### Character Traits

- (10) Built Like A Brick Shithouse (Imposing, Strong, Hard To Hurt\*, Hurl\*)
- (4) Barroom Brawler (Improvised Weapons\*, Right Cross\*, Struggle Free\*)
- (4) Tenacious (Determined, Aggressive)
- (2) Alert (Bad Vibes, Eyes In Back Of Head, Small Detail)
- (1) Put Straight (Argue Point\*, Intimidate, Get Way)

### Flaws

- (4) Needs A Drink
- (3) Pig Headed And Rude

### Issue

Abandoned As A Child

### Consequence

Unable To Trust And Love

### Style Bonus

Clever, detailed and colourful narrative describing the character's actions in a scene should be rewarded with a style bonus. This is at the Buster's discretion and means treating a 2 and even a 3 for a particularly excellent description as a randomly dealt Ace. However this isn't a licence to wax lyrical in a tedious 5 minute monologue inspired by the shenanigans of Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, crammed full of flowery prose connecting one outrageous stunt on top of another. In fact less is often more in conveying the urgency and drama of action. So keep it short, sweet and sick.



**Player**

*"Tank screws his face in disgust and hurls himself at the slaver. He grips him violently around the throat with his shovel sized mitts and smashes his head repeatedly against the wall. A wide smear of blood trails the unconscious slaver as he slides down the wall."*

Having these three cards Aced Up creates a 12 in 52 chance of taking out some difficulty. Style Bonuses also add their value as development points.

5 card challenge.

6 of Hearts

7 of Clubs

2 of Diamonds Acts as an Ace

9 of Hearts

Jack of Diamonds Aced By 2 of Diamonds

Total 21

**Shaped narrative**

Players construct scenes together agreeing on the course of action each will take in the scene. This is an open dialogue between the players and the resulting actions may be resolved separately or in a combination.

**Flyboy**

*"Flyboy pins the vampire's arms against his sides in a bear hug and holds them in place for Stevo to stake his heart."*

**Stevo**

*"I ready the stake and when flyboy turns the unholy bloodsucker to face me I drive the stake without hesitation into his cold undead heart."*

In the above scene the 5 card vampire tackled by the two players would have its threat reduced to 4 cards. Flyboy in hugging the vampire could reduce the vampire's threat by the degree of success in his attack, and in cleverly working together even prime 2's, 3's and perhaps 4's as Aces for Stevo to impale the vampire (Buster's discretion).

**The Big Kill**

Material edges like firing two handguns or firing an SMG on full auto can also earn these bonuses. Eg. A threat firing an Uzi sub-machinegun on full auto could prime Jacks and Queens as exploding cards. In these instances where there is mass fire-power employed by both sides it becomes more likely that someone will get hit, and hit bad so don't cancel out the edges.

**Types Of Bonuses**

Large Bonus +/-1 card

Medium Bonus increase Ace or exploding King range (up to a 7 card total)

Small Bonus +/-1 to +/-3



## Using Traits

When faced with a challenge identify a key trait to tackle it, which is in nearly all circumstances what common sense dictates it to be. For instance a challenge involving the bypassing of a computers security system would employ a trait like "Hacker" or "Computer Programmer". If the character didn't have a trait like "Hacker" or "Computer Programmer" then he would because the challenge was specialized be at a +2 card penalty to completing it.

Hacker is a focused trait and so would have tricks like (Virus, Breach, Defraud) that could be played as Aces to accomplish the challenge. If the character also had relevant traits like "Smart Alec" or "Persevere" then they could also be applied to assist in the challenge.

A non-specialized challenge like walking across a narrow ledge could use a focused trait like "Cat Burglar" and/or a broad trait like "Agile" without any penalty.

A number of traits can be brought in to support the key trait. In "Boxing" for example traits like "Fast Hands", "Light On feet", "Strong As A Bull", "Tough As They Come" "Wily", "Slick", "Never Say Die" and "Fit" would all contribute something to the outcome a challenge. Although "Boxing" as the focus trait would be able to play several Aces.

Bust recognizes that there are often many ways to get the job done and that what ultimately matters is getting it done. The big punching slugger or the crafty, tactical boxer can both win the fight. What will determine the outcome is the number and strength of the traits called upon to form what is called a trait total.

## Less Relevant Traits

Sometimes traits will have a bearing on the outcome of a challenge but not to the whole value of the trait. For instance being swift in a gunfight is of more importance than being big and hard to put down. Both have relevance but being big less so. In instances where this is the case contribute only half the value of the less relevant trait. Aces are still considered at the full trait.

## Who Decides The Traits?

The player puts forward the traits that he would like his character to bring into play. The Buster is however the final arbiter of what is played and to how much it contributes.

## Different actions

In a scene where different kinds of actions are performed like sneaking up on a sentry to knock him out with a sap the character undergoes two separate challenges. One test for the sneak to gain an advantage and another then for the assault. Whether a scene plays out in one challenge incorporating several fluid actions or contains several different challenges is down to the Buster's discretion.

Laurie's night of tucking into Hagan Daas and watching an Aniston chick flick has ended with her fighting for her life as The Sweet Heart serial killer pursues her through her home chopping at her with a meat cleaver. Laurie reaches the kitchen and wants to get a carving knife from a draw. She could play a joker if she had one to automatically get the knife, or otherwise she has a challenge on her hands to get the knife out before the killer brings the cleaver down on her.



**EXAMPLE OF PLAY**

Diving in the South China Seas Tank Johnson gets caught up in a treacherous current and is getting dragged out to sea.

**Buster**

"A vicious riptide pulls you irresistibly out into the murky swirl of the open sea." The challenge is very tricky - 5 cards.

**Player**

"I grit my teeth and with frantic, powerful strokes plough through the choppy water towards land."

I'll use the Swim Ace from my "Diving", "Built Like A Brick Shithouse" and "Tenacious" to break free from the clutches of the current. Together they're worth 18.

**Buster**

Good narrative and flippers gets a style and equipment bonus of 2's 3 as an Ace.

- (11) Jack of Spades
- (12) Queen of Hearts
- (12) Queen of Spades Aced By Trick
- (4) 4 of Clubs
- (8) 8 of Hearts
- (5) 5 of Diamonds

Total 40 - Trait Total 18

Result 22 - Impasse.

**Buster**

"Tank makes initial headway only to be sucked back to where he started."

**Player**

"In between the waves that slap my face I take a deep breath and thinking of my little girl Lola May, kick out harder with my flippers and claw my way through spiteful sea. I keep going until I catch a break in the rip and then swim at an angle across the shore onto the fine white sands of the Iguana Bay."

**Buster**

Tank's lungs burn and his arms start to leaden from the effort. Tiring the challenge is now more difficult. Your description is still good, you get 2's and 3's as Aces.

- (10) 10 of Spades
- (3) 3 of Diamonds Ace
- (11) Jack of Clubs Aced by the 3 of Diamonds
- (12) Queen of Clubs Aced by the Ace of Hearts
- (8) 8 of Diamonds
- (1) Ace of Hearts

Total 18 -18 Trait Total

Result 0 - Spectacular Success



**JIM ROCKFORD** (BUST 14) (TRAITS 21) (FLAWS 14) (SUIT \* HEARTS)

**Tag** (Soft Hearted Private Investigator)

### Tag Traits

- (7) Dig Up The Dirt (Investigate\*, Question\*, See The Angle\*)
- (4) Tail (Look Innocuous\*, Follow Car\*, Stakeout\*)
- (4) Police Contacts (Know The Sergeant\*, Police Procedures, Law)
- (3) Handle Himself (Elbow Block\*, Kick To The Shin\*, Plexus Punch\*)
- (3) Talk Himself Out Of Trouble (Smooth Things Over\*, Lie)

### Character Traits

- (6) Affable Guy (Befriend\*, Call Favour\*, Thought Well Of)
- (5) Fills Out A Jacket (Hurtful Punch, Lift, Force Open\*)
- (5) Careful (Suspicious\*, Wary, Watchful)
- (2) Drive (Pursue, Getaway\*, Avoid Collision)
- (4) Use .38 (One In The Belly\*, Duck\*) (Narrow Trait)

### Flaws

- (5) Stigma Of A Convict
- (3) Always Broke
- (6) Sucker For A Sob Story

### Issue

Wrongly Convicted

### Consequence

Tries To clear His Name

## ANOTHER HEADACHE FOR ROCKFORD

### Player

"Having picked up Cherie Jim is worried about being tailed by those goons that Nash sent around to rough him up. He checks the mirror of the Camarro to see what's behind him and then does a lap of the block and re-checks his mirror."

### Player

I want to use my "Careful" backed up with "Tail" as I know how its done. I'm not going to waste an Ace.

### Buster

"Careful" yes, but "Tail" as a less relevant trait because its geared towards doing so you've got a Trait Total of 7 not 9. Good measures primes 2's for Aces. It's rush hour so I'm making it a (3 card) challenge with +2 added for "Sneaky S.O.B."

- (5) 5 of Hearts
- (12) Queen of Diamonds
- (6) 6 of Hearts
- (2) "Sneaky Son Of A Bitch"

Total 25 - 7 Trait Total

Result On a Bust Of 14 18 - Minor Bust



**Buster**

*"Jim drives around the block and looks for a tail in his mirror. Traffic is heavy and Jim has to break hard at a stop light. He doesn't see a follow."*

**Player**

*"Jim relaxes a little and heads for the Seaview Diner On the way he tries to get a handle on the case. When he pulls up he does the gentlemanly thing and opens the door for Cherie."*

**Buster**

Make an alertness challenge at 3 cards +2. You can't get a style bonus.

**Player**

I haven't got an Ace to use so I'm going to have to go with Jim being watchful from his "Careful" trait. Its worth 5.

- (4) 4 of Clubs
- (3) 3 of Diamonds
- (5) 5 of Diamonds
- (2) "Sneaky Son of A Bitch"

Total 14 - Trait Total 5

Result On A Bust Of 14 - Minor Success

**Buster**

*"Jim hears a clunk of a car door and quick footsteps from behind him on the sidewalk. Jim looks to his left and sees a tall, wavy blonde haired man in a grey three piece suit rush at him with a tire iron. A younger bushy headed man in a tan suit follows a few steps behind him."*

**Player**

*"Jim gives his best "Oh God" look as the blonde thug tries to brain him with the tire iron. Jim reacts quickly and thrusts his left forearm into the crook of the thugs weapon arm. Jim then grips him by the lapel and using the thug's momentum hurls him to his left over the hood of the Camarro. The thug bounces off the metalwork and thuds awkwardly onto the tarmac bruising his right side. Jim feels a thick hand pulling on his shoulder, going with it he turns and slams the younger thug in the kisser with a hard left cross knocking him backwards jelly legged.*

*Quickly Jim jumps around to the front of the car where he stamps on the goon's hand as he tries to retrieve the tire iron. Blonde cries in pain as Jim lifts him up by his lapels and sets him up for a humdinger of a right hook to the solar plexes, followed by a right uppercut that spreads him clean out over the hood of the Camarro.*

*Jim shakes his hand and meets the younger thug head on at the side of the car. Jim takes a stiff shot to the cheek but fires back with a series of head snapping right and left crosses sending the groggy goon crashing through a hedge at the edge of the sidewalk."*

**Player**

I'm going to use "Handle Himself" and "Fills Out a Jacket" for a Trait Total of 8.



I'm going to use two Aces from Jim's "Handle Himself", "Elbow Block" and "Plexes Punch" on the blonde haired thug.

### Buster

An excellently described action sequence primes 2's and 3's as Aces. The blonde haired thug is worth (2 cards) but with the advantage of the tire iron and his bushy headed partner backing him up poses a threat of (5 cards -1 for the tire iron). The second thug just gets his partner backing him up for a threat of (3 cards).

### Blonde

- (11) Jack of Hearts Aced By Trick
- (9) 9 of Clubs Aced By Trick
- (3) 3 of Hearts Ace
- (8) 8 of Hearts Aced By 3 of Hearts
- (4) 4 of Hearts
- (-1) Tire Iron (Small Distinction)

Total 3 - 8 Trait Total

Result - Decisive (The 2 card thug is incapacitated by a 3 card injury)

Set 4 out of 5 Hearts. Suit Surge of 6.

### Bushy

- (3) 3 of Clubs Ace
- (4) 4 of Spades Aced By 3 of Clubs
- (2) 2 of Clubs Ace

Total 0 - 8 Trait Total

Result - Spectacular

### Player

*"Jim blazes away hitting both muscleheads for home runs. He says to Cherie "Just goes to show there's life in the old dog yet."*

## CONVERTING CHARACTERS TO THREATS

In circumstances where two characters or npc's compete against one another then one character assumes the bust while the other takes the role of the challenge. Cards are worth the average of their 13 point range. Zero and negative point ratings reflect the situation where edges reduce a threat or challenge to a negative status.

Rating	Bust	Challenge
Dead Certainty	-7 Points	-1 Card
Walkover	0 Points	0 Card
Weedy	7 Points	1 Card
Average	14 Points	2 Cards
Tough	21 Points	3 Cards
Dangerous	28 Points	4 Cards
Deadly	35 Points	5 Cards
Legendary	42 Points	6 Cards
Superhuman	49 Points	7 Cards



Traits are added for the challenge and subtracted for the bust. The player providing the challenge can play Kings in the same way as he would normally play Aces. Basically it is a reverse with Queens and Jacks as style bonuses.

## injury

There are four point levels of injury which are accumulative. Player characters can keep going until they are dead, but threats are eliminated (incapacitated) when they run out of cards or reach dead or incapacitated.

Point Value	Injury Level	Injury Penalty
(1)	Hurt	(+/-1card)
(2)	Badly Injured	(+/-2 cards)
(3)	Critical	(+/-3 cards)
(4)	Dead Or Incapacitated	

EG. A character that is hurt in two consecutive scenes becomes badly injured and receives a +2 card challenge penalty. A character that gets badly injured and then hurt would become critical, and receive a +3 challenge penalty. A 3 card threat injured in the same way would lose 3 cards and be incapacitated, though not dead.

## Beaten up

A threat or character taken to a 4 point injury through an unarmed beating is incapacitated and rendered defenceless. This can be narrated to be a long, vicious, bone crunching, spleen rupturing assault, or a swift, clean knockout. In any event the victim is completely vulnerable to further assault, which can be narrated to the full extent of the player's or Buster's wishes EG. Beaten black and blue or kicked to death.

## recovery

As a general rule characters take a month per level of injury to fully recover. Though this could be less depending on the nature on the injuries EG. Single knife wound to an artery or being beaten up.

## Dangerous Threats

Some threats have tricks of their own that cause a dealt Queen to explode in the same way as a King. For instance a serial killer could have "Throat Slash" or "Impale" as a deadly finishing move, a ninja could have "Shruiken To Throat", an actor could have "Scintillating Smile". Threats will typically have no more than one to three of these fatal tricks with each one priming an additional card to explode.

EG. A deadly hitman could have "Fast On The Trigger" and "Head Shot" as tricks expanding his explosive range to include Queens and Jacks.

## Outmatched

If a threat or a challenge is stripped of all its difficulty by the edges the character confronts it with, then it assumes a zero or even negative card rating. When facing a zero rating the player automatically succeeds to the extent of his trait plus



7 points for any Aces he wishes to use. When up against a negative rating the player again automatically succeeds to the extent of his trait plus a single card or 7 points.

In a hairy barroom fight Tank Johnson faces the last punk left standing armed with a stool in his hands. Unarmed the (1 card) punk is at a disadvantage and so loses a card from his threat. Tank has the trait "Barroom Brawl" at 4, which includes using improvised weapons and the character traits "Built Like A Brick Shit House" at 10 and "Tenacious" at 4 for a combined trait of 18. The punk offers a threat of 0 - 18 for the trait which measured against Tank's bust score of 21 produces a (39) spectacular success.

If Tank had picked up a knife he would have had a two card advantage over the unarmed punk. The punk would have been reduced to -7 or -1 card.

## approaches

In combat and other some other endeavours there can be three approaches to tackling a challenge. A character could take a cautious, safety first approach in an attempt to minimize harm to himself. He could balance zeal and caution in an even approach, or he could assume a high risk, zealous, do or die strategy in an effort to completely overwhelm the challenge.

### Cautious

Failures and successes are reduced by one degree EG. From Spectacular to Decisive or from Hurt to Impasse.

### Balanced

Results stay as they are.

### Zealous

Failures and successes are increased by one degree EG. From Significant to Decisive or from Hurt to Significant.

An Impasse result is unaffected by any approach. So whenever a result is an Impasse it stays that way.

## Jokers

Jokers represent the capricious hand of fate, the vagaries of fortune, the balance of karma and the makings of one's own luck. Playing a joker alters the reality of the scene in some way that benefits the dealer. This could mean a drowning man being seen and rescued by a passing fishing boat or a character's gun jamming at a crucial moment. It could mean a seagull smashing into the windscreen of a speeding car or, a couple of curious cops being called away by their radio. The dealer of the joker narrates how it affects play, and an open door could become locked, a 60 foot cliff face could be staggered with overhangs into several 6 foot drops instead.

At the start of the game the two jokers are removed from the pack and set aside on the table between the players and Buster. These cards are up for grabs but can't be used until there are earned through the following:



**Player**

- ◆ Resolving the character's issue.
- ◆ Achieving a major objective.
- ◆ Overcoming incredible odds without playing a joker.
- ◆ Risking/sacrificing the character in something noble.
- ◆ Accumulating 50 style points - deuce (1), three (2).
- ◆ Accumulating 200 development points.
- ◆ Dealing the Ace of Hearts off a separate deck.\*
- ◆ Anything else you consider worthy.

**Buster**

- ◆ Compounding and worsening the character's issue.
- ◆ Characters failing to achieve a major objective.
- ◆ Characters embarrassed and beaten by an insignificant challenge.
- ◆ Characters behaving cowardly and selfishly.
- ◆ Dealing the Ace of Spades off a separate deck.\*
- ◆ Anything else you consider worthy.

\* This rule is entirely optional and is to be included or excluded according to the preference of the group. At the start of a scene the Buster shuffles the cards and deals one face up. If it is an Ace of Spades (the death card) then a joker gets played against the characters, if it is the Ace Of Hearts (the life card) it gets played against the Buster. If both jokers are owned by the players then they lose one to the table, where it remains to be earned again and likewise if they are owned by the buster. If the joker is on the table it gets picked up by the buster or player. Once a joker is played it is returned to the table and is up for grabs again. A Joker can be played to the benefit of another player or npc.

**magic & psi**

Magic employs traits like "Cast Spells", "Summon Demons", "Black Arts", "Telekinesis" and "Voodoo Magic". Think of the type of magic you want to perform and describe it. Up to three magic types can be taken with favourite spells as tricks.

**Voodoo Magic** (Make Zombie, Curse\*, Speak To Spirits, Heal Sick)

**Cast Spells** (Fireball\*, Strike Blind\*, Unlock, Invisible)

**interpreting spells**

We've all had ideas for cool spells and in Bust you get to put them into action. Think of what you want a spell to do and describe it.

Possible manifestations of Curse:

- ♣ Victim smells like a rotting corpse.
- ♣ Victim suffers from frequent uncontrollable outbursts of swearing.
- ♣ Victim suffers episodes where his own limb works against him.
- ♣ Victim suffers dramatic hair loss.



## Spell Effects

The better the success the longer a spell will last for, the more severe its effects will be, the greater the number of people it will affect. EG. A fireball will completely engulf its target and set it alight. A "Stop Heart" spell will cause a massive and fatal heart attack instead of angina type discomfort from a minor success.

Decisive failures can cause a spell to be misdirected. Spectacular failures can cause a spell to backfire on the caster.

## Creating and Changing

Spells to create something or affect something inanimate are made against a challenge difficulty. Bringing down a thick fortification wall is going to be ridiculously difficult (8 cards), but opening a normal locked door is going to be easy (1 card). Raising a skeleton is pretty straightforward (1 card), raising half a dozen more difficult (3 cards).

## Resisting Magic

Magic spells like "Explode Heart" and "Inflict Disease" cast directly against a character or threat are resisted by traits such as "Strong Minded", "Magically Resistant", "Determined", "Religious Conviction", "Iron Will" and by flaws such as "Faint Of Heart", "Weak Willed", "Panic" and "Susceptible To Magic". If no trait or flaw is applicable the character tests at his base value (14, 21, 28 etc.) Threats resist with their cards and any distinctions they may have. Magic is powerful and automatically gains a (+/-1 card) effectiveness against its intended target. Thereafter a spells effectiveness can be increased through the expenditure of additional plays.

## Plays

- (1) Standard (+/-1 card)
- (2) Strong (+/-2 cards)
- (3) Intense (+/-3 cards)
- (4) Overwhelming (+/-4 cards)

## Avoiding Magic

Missile spells like "Fireball", "Ice Spear" and "Shower Of Stones" that are aimed at a target can be avoided by cards and traits in the same way bullets and knives are. Missile spells start off rated at (+/-1 card) and are able to be increased in power (+/-cards) through the expenditure of additional plays.

## Plays

- (1) Small Fireball (+/-1 card)
- (2) Large Fireball (+/-2 cards)
- (3) Firestorm (+/-3 cards)
- (4) Supernova (+/-4 cards)

## Fatigue

Magic places great demands upon the caster and will eventually exhaust him of the ability to perform magic. Magic is measured in plays and a character can perform as many as he has points in the relevant magical trait. A caster's trait



represents his power level and this depletes when he uses magic. So after a single play a caster with 8 plays in the trait "Elemental Magic" would drop to 7 plays. If the caster had invested 3 plays in a spell to make it more powerful then his power level would drop down to 5.

Plays regenerate daily or with rest, at the rate of 1 play per hour of sleep. Plays can also be stored in magical items like wizard's staffs for use at a later time.

### Edges And Drags

Prepared Spell (+/-1 card)

Casting Spells During Close Hand To Hand Combat (+/-2 cards)

Favourable Range (+/-2 cards)

### SUPER TRAITS

Superhuman characters and supernatural threats can have certain traits like strength, toughness or intelligence at prodigious levels of perhaps 5, 10, 15 times that of the average person but still have others within the normal range.

For instance The Incredible Hulk could have traits "Anger" and "Strength" at values of 200, whilst having an intelligence in hulk form of 21.

### SUPER POWERS

Many of the powers possessed by super heroes and villains like The Human Torch and Magneto can be worked the same way as magic is. The exception is that the ability concerned doesn't diminish with use.

### High Stakes

The higher the stakes of the challenge the more a character will gain from it. Each card in a beaten challenge is worth its square in development points. So a 2 card challenge would earn 4 development points, a 5 card challenge 25 development points.

Development points can be used to purchase the following:

- ♠ 150 points buys an Ace
- ♠ 150 points buys a 1 point improvement in a Trait up to an existing value of 5
- ♠ 150 points buys a 1 point start in a new Trait
- ♠ 200 points buys a Joker
- ♠ 250 points buys a 1 point improvement in a Trait above an existing value of 5
- ♠ 400 points buys a 1 point improvement in a Trait above an existing value of 10

### The amount of Fire

In a shootout a character could describe killing the threat with a single pin point shot to the heart or a 5 shot salvo to the chest and head. The first method conserves ammo but takes a slight risk in producing the one shot kill. The second method uses more ammunition but is probably a more effective approach in eliminating a threat. It will of course depend on the situation EG. sniping at a distance or being in the midst of a frantic close quarters gunfight as to which is preferable. As a general rule though more is better with (1 point +1) taken off a threat for each shot fired above the first. So a 3 shot burst would earn -3 off the bust.



**OKURA Watanabe** (BUST 21) (FLAWS 7) (SUIT \* HEARTS)

**Tag** (Obedient Samurai)

### Tag Traits

- (9) Bushido (Obedience\*, Honour, Fighting Spirit\*, Tradition\*)
- (8) Katana (Side Roll & Neck Cut\*, Block & Leg Cut\*, Double Stomach Slice\*)
- (4) Horsemanship (Gallop, Jump, Charge\*)

### Character Traits

- (4) Poetry (Compose\*, Recite\*)
- (5) Bow (Shoot From Horseback, Straight Through Chest\*, Fast Shot)
- (6) Swift As An Arrow (Fleet Of Foot, Fast Hands, Quick Reactions\*)
- (4) Intrigue (Strategy\*, Hide Intent\*, Plot\*)
- (2) Resilient (Endure, Keep Going, unwavering)

### Flaws

- (4) Narrow Minded
- (3) Unforgiving

### Issue

Wrongly Maligned As A Traitor

### Consequence

Pursued By Daimyo's Brother

### Buster

*"The clank and cry of battle passes through the paper screens of the approach to the young Daimyo's chamber."*

### Player

*"Watanabe kneels in silence, eyes scanning the doorway with his hands resting on his sheathed Katana. He will gladly sacrifice his life to save his dead Daimyo's heir."*

### Buster

*"The screen suddenly tears open like an angry wound and three black masked ninjas burst through, blackened swords poised above their heads. The lead ninja snaps his wrist and two shiny shruikens whirr through the air."*

### Player

*"Watanabe rises and draws his sword in one deft motion, and with stunning speed launches into a forward side roll a fraction of a second before the shruikens whoosh past where his head would have been.*

*Rising up Watanabe with an efficient downward slice opens the ninja's neck in a gush of blood. The ninja spins decorating the screen with generous splatters of dark red and crashes heavily into the bamboo mat. (Ace)*

*Watanabe pivots and calmly parries the two remaining ninjas as they beset him with frantic strikes, and from a high block brings the beautifully crafted katana down in a vicious arc hacking the left leg off just below the hip. The ninja shrieks in agony and collapses into a squidgy pool of his own blood. (Ace)*

*The last ninja skilfully steps back to avoid a backhand strike and then lunges at Watanabe with a thrust to the chest. Watanabe diverts the strike and dropping low*



executes two abrupt left, right cuts to the ninja's abdomen. Sinking to his knees the ninja clutches his torn stomach as his entrails slip through his hands. (Ace)

### Player

In this scene I employ "Katana" as my key trait and assist this with "Fighting Spirit", and "Swift As An Arrow" for a combined Trait Total of 23. I will use all three remaining Katana Aces that I have in this play. I am using my exquisite Takagama sword.

### Buster

The ninjas are very skilled assassins and singularly pose a 5 card threat with a +2 for speed and ruthlessness. Together as a team they become a 7 card threat. Their Queens and Jacks are primed through the talents "Eviscerate" (a stab to the abdomen followed by an arcing, ripping withdrawal) and "Blind" (a short disorientating cut to the face delivered from a lunge). They are armed with short, black bladed katanas for a +1 edge and shruikens, which makes the lead ninja an 8 card threat.

For great description you get 2's and 3's primed as Aces. Your katana is worth +3 which cancels out the ninja's trait and weapon edges.

### Lead Ninja

- (6) 6 of Hearts
- (5) 5 of Clubs
- (8) 8 of Hearts
- (5) 5 of Spades
- (9) 9 of Hearts Aced
- (4) 4 of Diamonds
- (7) 7 of Spades
- (3) 4 of Spades

Total 39 - 23 Trait Total  
Result 16 - Minor Success

### Player

*"After narrowly avoiding the shruikens I only manage to cut the recoiling ninja along the shoulder with tip of my sword."*

### Second Ninja

- (6) 6 of Clubs
- (7) 7 of Hearts
- (11) Jack of Spades Explodes
- (5) 5 of Diamonds
- (13) King of Hearts Explodes Aced by Trick
- (1) Ace of Hearts
- (10) 10 of Clubs
- (4) 4 of Clubs
- (12) Queen of Hearts Explodes Aced by Ace of Hearts
- (6) 6 of Diamonds

Total 49 - 23 Trait Total



## Result 26 - Minor Bust

**Buster**

*"The ninja drops his sword down to block a sweeping cut to the leg and then responds with a flurry of blows from the parry backing Watanabe into a corner where a scything blow opens a six inch slit across Watanabe's ribs, and the return backhanded slice finds the right forearm, cutting deep into the muscle. Watanabe flinches from the wounds and is now hindered."*

**Third Ninja**

- (9) 9 of Clubs penalty card Aced by 3 of Diamonds
- (3) 3 of Diamonds Ace
- (7) 7 of Diamonds Aced by Ace of Spades
- (13) King of Clubs Explodes Aced By Trick
- (5) 5 of Hearts
- (1) Ace of Spades
- (10) 10 of Hearts Aced by 2 of Hearts
- (4) 4 of Hearts
- (2) 2 of Hearts Ace

Total 9 - 23 Trait Total

Result -14 - Spectacular Success

**Player**

*"With a banzai Watanabe disembowels his foe."*

**2nd Play****Player**

*"Watanabe raises his katana over his head and circles the two ninjas. Duty and spirit swell inside him and he is indifferent as to whether he lives or dies, only that he that either must be with honour. As the ninja close in Watanabe shouts "Banzai" and lunges at the injured ninja with two downward blows aimed at the neck and head. The first overhead strike is parried but the second angled strike cleaves the ninja through the base of the neck and shoulder. The ninja drops to his knees and crumples to the floor as the blade is ripped out of his chest. (Ace)*

*Watanabe sidesteps an upward arcing attack and cuts through the charging ninja's stomach, spraying the floor with blood and folding the mortally wounded ninja in two."*

**Player**

I will invoke my fighting spirit and use it as an Ace against the first ninja. I will take a zealous approach fighting aggressively, pursuing attack over defence.

**Buster**

A good description primes 2's as Aces. These are now only two ninjas. One poses a 6 card threat as your injuries cancel each other out, but the second ninja fights at 7 cards because he is not injured and enjoys a two to one superiority in numbers.



**First Ninja**

- (3) 3 of Hearts
- (11) Jack of Hearts Explodes Aced by Trick
- (8) 8 of Spades
- (1) Ace of Diamonds
- (11) Jack of Diamonds Explodes Aced by Ace of Diamonds
- (2) 2 of Clubs Ace
- (6) 6 of Clubs
- (10) 10 of Diamonds Aced By 2 of Diamonds

Total 17 -23 Trait Total  
Result -6 - Spectacular Success

**Second Ninja**

- (6) 6 of Spades Penalty Card
- (2) 2 of Spades Ace
- (12) Queen of Spades Explodes Aced By 2 of Spades
- (11) Jack of Clubs Explodes Aced By Ace of Clubs
- (3) 3 of Spades
- (9) 9 of Spades
- (3) 3 of Clubs
- (10) 10 of Spades
- (1) Ace of Clubs

Total 31-23 Trait Total  
Result 8 - Significant Success, becoming Decisive because of approach

**3rd Play****Player**

*"Watanabe seeing the ninja wince but not fall, immediately follows up with a blistering returning strike to the back of the ninja's neck that cleanly decapitates him. A geyser of blood pumps from his jagged neck as his masked head thumps and rolls along the floor. Watanabe holds the strikes finishing pose, katana aloft, a rivulet of blood streaming down the shiny blade."*

**Player**

I'm not playing any Aces.

**Buster**

The ninja is critically injured and now fighting solitary. He has been reduced to a three card threat. Your description flows and gives Watanabe a tactical advantage of 2's and 3's as Aces.

- (10) 10 of Clubs
- (7) 7 of Spades
- (12) Queen of Clubs Explodes Aced By 2 of Diamonds
- (2) 2 of Diamonds Ace

Total 17 - 23 Trait Total



Result -6 - Spectacular Success

### Player

*"Having lopped off his head Watanabe appreciates the moment, before gathering himself for the next assault."*

### Changing narrative

In scenes where multiple threats are faced a character may start to come unstuck after taking on the first or second threat, and then not wish to pursue the rest of his intended action. If this happens a character may intervene and change his narrative to take a more defensive approach to try and avoid the threat in some way, like seeking cover in a gunfight. This may still result in the character having to face the threat in order to extricate himself from it, especially if the threat is able to pursue the character.

### Who goes First

1) In instances where a character or threat can clearly see or anticipate an attack there is no edge or drag for deciding to initiate the action. Narratives for the scene are made either in separation (two completely different versions of the scene) or one narrative is made in reaction to the first narrative. EG. dodging a burst of fire from the first narrative.

2) In instances where a character uses stealth or a deception to mask his intentions a challenge is made against the challenge rating or an appropriate trait like "Awareness", "Eyes In The Back Of Head" or "Suss You Out" with a success setting the aggressor up for a -2 card challenge. In such a scenario the victim of the attack must take account of the aggressors narrative and react to it. If the deception is unsuccessful 1) applies.

### BUSTERS CONTROL

The Buster has the option of of stealing the initiative in a scene and forcing the players to react to his narrative. This is useful at certain times to increase the tension in the game, and as a regular tool in particular genres like horror where the atmosphere should be oppressive, and the shock and terror relentless.

## BUSTing

A few pointers for the Buster.

### negotiation

During character creation players and Buster should negotiate and agree the traits and how they will play. What constitutes a broad trait, a narrow trait and what potentially could be used together. The traits and therefore the character will then work, and getting this right at the outset smoothes the way to a good game.

### Doing What Feels Right

There are no right or wrong ways to play a roleplaying game. Go with what you



like, have fun and don't worry about the details. Want to give a card advantage, instead of priming 2's and 3's as Aces for going into a shootout firing two handguns or prime 4's as Aces for an epic description, then do it. What matters is what you as a group think is cool, what you as a group think is fair.

### **Bad moves**

If a player's narrative is misjudged and plays right into the hands of the threat penalize the challenge accordingly, with an additional level of difficulty or a number of exploding cards.

### **Tweaking**

Bust is a fast and loose engine driving the story you and your group are going to tell. However like all engines Bust can be tinkered with and tweaked to get it to perform as you want it, less crunch, more tricks whatever. As a games designer who has done this since first picking up a dice I would encourage would be mechanics to get their hands oily and refine it to fit their purpose.

### **Decisions in play**

Gaming is a to and fro between players and Buster to create a fun, interactive story telling experience. In such discourse reason and rightfulness usually prevail when coming to a consensus on a situation. However where there isn't agreement the Buster for the sake of continuity and stability has the final say of what goes and what doesn't.



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**Tag** ..... **BUST** ( .... ) **Flaws** ( .... ) **Suit** ( ..... )

**concept** .....

.....

.....

**Tag Traits**

**Current aces**

[ ] ..... [ ..... ] [ .... ]

[ ] ..... [ ..... ] [ .... ]

[ ] ..... [ ..... ] [ .... ]

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[ ] ..... [ ..... ] [ .... ]

**Character Traits**

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[ ] ..... [ ..... ] [ .... ]

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[ ] ..... [ ..... ] [ .... ]

**Flaws** ( ..... ) ( ..... )  
( ..... ) ( ..... )  
( ..... ) ( ..... )

**issue** .....  
.....

**jokers** ( ..... )                      **surge** ( ..... )

**power** ( ..... )

**plays** ( ..... )                      **development points** ( ..... )

<b>injury</b>	<b>Hurt</b> ( ..... )	<b>Badly injured</b> ( ..... )	<b>Critically injured</b> ( ..... )	<b>Finished</b>
	+1 cards	+2 cards	+3 cards	n/a

**equipment** .....  
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**notes** .....  
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