

GENTLEMAN BANDIT



*A solo roleplaying game exploring
violence, woe, and dissociation,
set in the American Old West*

ALLISON ARTH



They call you the Gentleman Bandit,
because no one knows your name.

They call you a monster, a villain, a dealer
of death. They call you all manner of
Unsavory, the most feeble epithets from
shriveled minds; they call you Devil.

But they don't know you.

Not your Heart, your Poet's Heart filled
with rage or filth or the expansiveness
of True Love; not your Grieving Heart
loosed over a chasm, making a sound
like the sorrow of wolves as it plummets
toward wet river stones, cracked bones
left to bleach; not your Tarnished Heart,
barbed with jealousy; not your Heaving
Heart, beating in meter, callous or
kind or barren.

You're a highwayman of the old guard, possessed of a fine suit and even finer elocution, such that when you speak, you command; and when you command, people divest themselves of their valuables: the strongboxes, the sparkling baubles, the bricks of gold and other earthly goods too sublime for their irrepressible mediocrity.

And in those uncommon instances when your commands fall flat, you avail yourself of more overt means of coercion, your Remington single action, known to you and only you as Blue Bonnet, Harbinger of Poor Health. You call her this *in privitas*, your own personal joke. Blue Bonnet, Muse and Unmaker. Blue Bonnet, A Final Call to Arms.

When you discharge her in service to your cause, when you lead with hot lead into an unwilling breast, you wax eloquent, composing 13 lines of glorious verse which you leave at the scene, a last stand for art and beauty, your lasting Words to prove them wrong.



DRAWING DEAD ON THE TRAIL



YOUR TOOLS

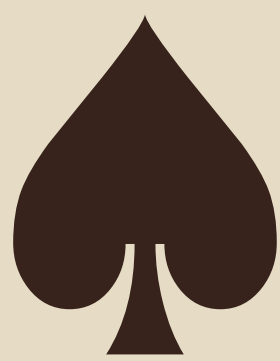
- ❖ Writing implements of your choice
- ❖ A well-shuffled deck of 54 playing cards, Jokers intact
- ❖ A six-sided die (optional)

THE GAME

Write a 13-line poem to be left for the dead—and the ones who discover them.

Draw a card. Use the chart on the following page to determine the **Motif** and **Matter** of your line: the Motif gives you the theme of your line; the Matter prompts a topic.

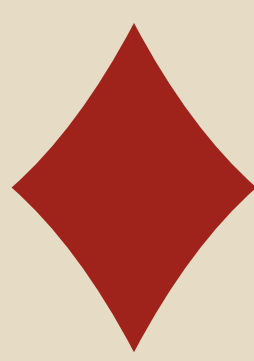
MOTIF



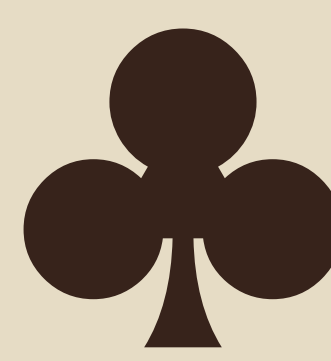
Loss



Love



Freedom



Fear

MATTER

A

*What drives
you?*

2

*Who needs
you?*

3

*What is
missing?*

4

*What is your
outlook?*

5

*What is your
darkest truth?*

6

*What is your
secret need?*

7

*Where are
you from?*

8

*Where are
you going?*

9

*Who did
right by you?*

10

*Who wronged
you?*

J

*What do you wish
you'd done?*

Q

*What brought
you to this fate?*

K

*Will you
change?*

Joker

*Wild
(pick any Motif and Matter)*

For example, if you draw the **Three of Spades**, craft a line framed by *Loss*, addressing the question *What is missing?*

- ❖ *When will I see my home again, that place of solace dear?*
- ❖ *This soul of mine, so pocked and lean, laid waste upon the stones.*
- ❖ *Brutes abound! They jeer and jest and drink to death upon my hard-won spoils.*

Conversely, if you draw the **Three of Hearts**, craft a line framed by *Love*, addressing the same question:

- ❖ *In truth I am a hollow shell, torn lately from my Love.*
- ❖ *Love, you Puck, you wicked imp—you mock me from your perch.*
- ❖ *The sumption of a heart so wan: how would one carry emptiness?*

Draw the next card; write the next line. Continue until you've completed all 13 lines, then commit your work to History.

If you choose, you can roll a **Mode**, which applies a poetic device to your work. Before you begin drawing cards, roll 1d6 and follow the instruction below.

- 1** Apply a **rhyme** scheme to your poem, e.g., AABBCCDDEEFFG.
- 2** Compose each line using eight **syllables** or fewer.
- 3** Write in a poetic **meter**, such as iambic pentameter.
- 4** Craft six **couplets**, followed by a one-line summary.
- 5** Include a word or phrase with a **double meaning** in every other line.
- 6** For each line, roll 1d6; use one of the words from the corresponding **diction** list (on the following page) in that line. You may prescript your poem further, choosing the word that corresponds with the line number you are writing—for example, if you are writing Line 7 and roll a 3, use the word *home*; if you are writing Line 13 and roll a 5, use the word *blossom*.

DICTION

1 *blind*

false

wobegone

terrestrial

worthwhile

brave

depraved

gauche

brazen

ill-fated

leaden

beguiling

inborn

2 *march*

expect

betide

stretch

bind

expel

dally

aver

coddle

grasp

delimit

brandish

loathe

3 *bile*

rage

cost

might

desire

will

home

bauble

grace

breast

war

merit

lacuna

4 *amid*

since

away

during

toward

adrift

within

throughout

abound

lo

aloft

near

withal

5 *cavern*

scrub

sand

blood

vale

hill

core

rime

frost

heart

stain

pool

blossom

6 *base*

hollow

blessed

withering

beloved

kind

stunted

alone

vast

unfettered

small

arid

bemused

POKER PLAY

Each time you finish a poem, look at your final array of 13 cards. If you hold one of the hands below, approach your next poem with the suggested fictional position in mind. If you hold more than one, choose the fictional position that resonates most with you.

Royal Flush— *You're at the top of your game, untouchable.*

Straight Flush— *You've been lucky so far, but the law is a bloodhound, unfazed.*

Four of a Kind— *Your resolve has been shaken ever so slightly—by a memory, a moment of grief, a flicker of remorse flitting like a lace handkerchief on the wind.*

Full House— *There's a competitor in your vicinity, a ruffian reaching into your coffers.*

Flush— *You've been left behind by someone you once called Beloved.*

Straight— *You can't sleep, you haunt the night highway, searching for something you haven't yet named.*

Three of a Kind— *You hold hard to what was, but can't seem to keep it in range.*

Two Pair— *A past deed devours you day in and day out—you wish for reprieve, mercy, redemption.*

Pair— *The law, the mob, the ones you left behind: someone is dogging your footsteps, hell-bent for leather.*

MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS

PARLOR PLAY, 2 to 13 players, in-room:

Gather a group, and provide paper and pen along with your deck of playing cards. Play as written, rolling Mode if you choose before the game begins. Each member draws a card in turn; writes a line and folds the paper to hide it; then passes it to the next player, who repeats until all 13 lines have been written.

Then, read the poem aloud. **PARLOR PLAY online:** Follow the in-room format, but compose in a shared document or thread. You won't be able to hide the lines that have come before—take them in or ignore them; it's your choice.

THE CALL, a boundless quantity of players, online: Play *Gentleman Bandit* as written, solo; post your poem to social media and tag another player to create a poem based on your final poker hand. For example, if you end the game with Three of a Kind, tag a friend with the prompt to play as such: *You hold hard to what was, but can't seem to keep it in range.* Let your tagged player decide whether to roll Mode.

ARC OF A BANDIT, up to 9 players, in-room or online: Assign one poker hand (or more, depending on your player count) to each player. Roll a Mode for the entire group if desired, then play through *Gentleman Bandit* as written, solo, crafting your poem based on your assigned Poker Play prompt. When everyone has finished, share your poems in order, from Royal Flush to Pair (or Pair to Royal Flush), to play through an arc that takes your *Gentleman Bandit* from top of the world to the pits of despair (or vice versa).

CREDITS

DESIGN & WRITING

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LAYOUT

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ILLUSTRATION

Alfred Rudolph Waud

IN GRATITUDE

Thank you to **Nadja Otikor**, a fierce inventive spirit. Thank you to **Andi Carrison**, for notes on grief and love; for the always-magic. Thank you to **John Harper**, more than muse, and the best creative partner. Thank you to the writers of the West who have my heart in spades: **Charles Portis**, **Cormac McCarthy**, and **Willa Cather**. And thank you to my father, **Mike Arth**, for hours of *Bonanza*, and for the greatest rendition of *Streets of Laredo* I'll ever hear. ❤️

THE GENTLEMAN BANDIT STRIKES AGAIN

WILL THIS CRAVEN BALLADEER EVER COME TO JUSTICE?

Yet another heinous crime has befallen our fair town and its environs, committed by that foul scourge known as THE GENTLEMAN BANDIT, a murderer of the basest morals, a thief of worldly possessions, a depraved menace to whom the lives of Honest Christians means nought.

His most recent work of verse, pinned haphazard to the waistcoat of the Hon. Everwood Lightfoot, U.S. Marshal, 52, lately of Sparrow's Folly — God Rest his Soul — we publish here that we may draw out the Knave to serve his sentence in shame and repentance before Our Father.

Good Citizens of Trillium and beyond, bar your doors, keep far from the highway, cover the heads of your children — for this coward is yet abroad! If you have any information as to the identity of THE GENTLEMAN BANDIT, report it at once to Sheriff Cly Medford, that he may bring to heel this bane, this True Prince of Damnation!

THE WORDS OF THE FIEND HIMSELF

*I hail from Ungodly land, where dust will choke a steer;
where every birth is met with scorn and Mothers weep with fear.
And to this day I tread the Earth to find a peaceful home:
a lake serene, a river wide, a plot replete with loam
and fertile like my Dear Old Pap — buried now, par moi —
the beast I bled to death for love, in Righteousness, by claw
and bite so fierce; we fell upon with purest hate, like dogs in rut will do
when summer's heat does boil their brains and sets their madness to.
"For love," I said — in sum, my Ma, dear Saint, released from mortal toil
by Pap's right hand across her cheek, his fingers cocked and coiled
'round Ma's white throat, her collar wet, the tears astream; no sound
came from her mouth; my heart stopped once, I tried to stand, but
toppled to the ground.
If only I'd been older then; bolder then; more like him, as whet
for blood and bile.*

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