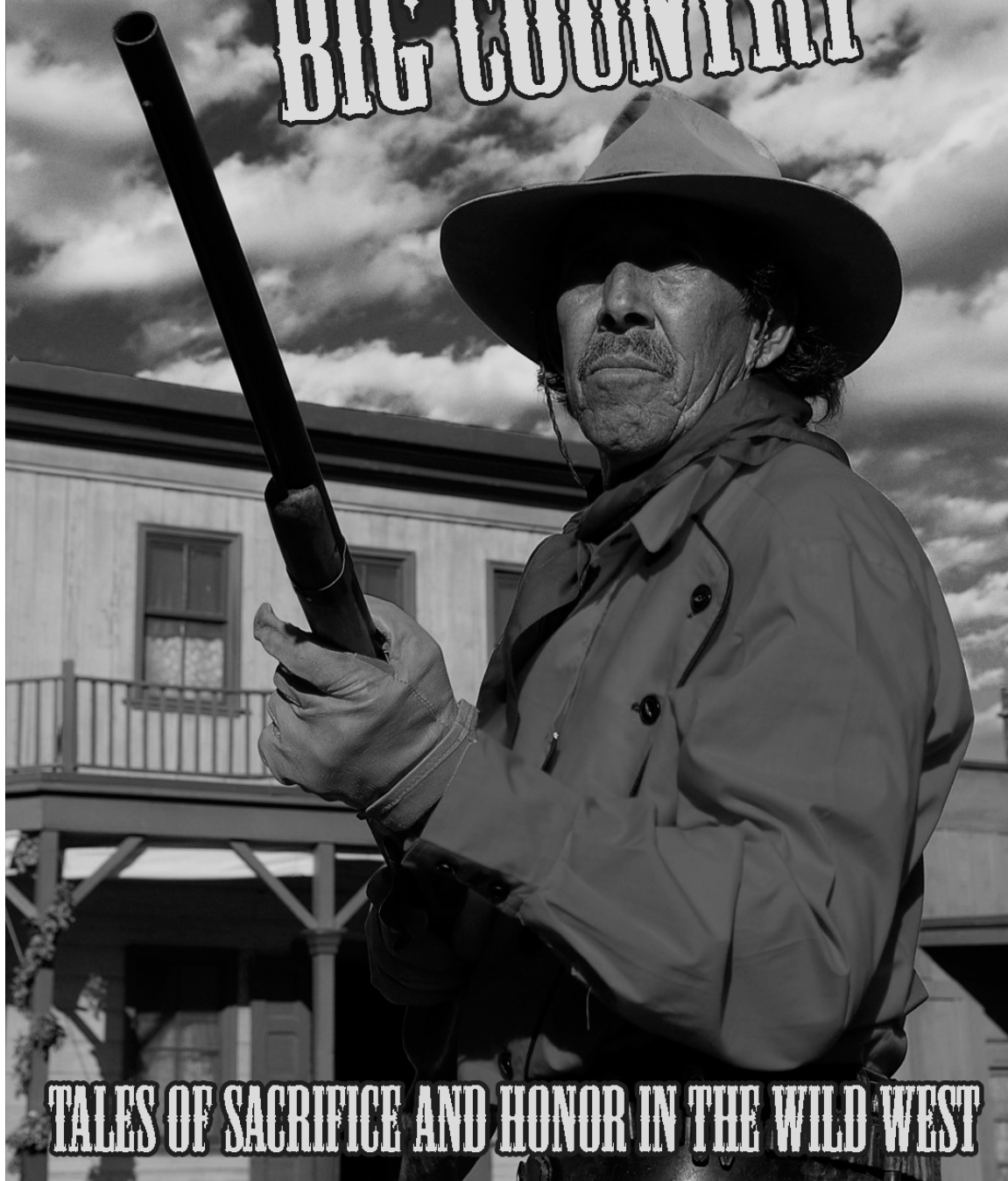


BIG HEARTS IN BIG COUNTRY



TALES OF SACRIFICE AND HONOR IN THE WILD WEST

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Tales of Sacrifice and Honor in the Wild West

by C.C. “*El Pistolero*” Chamberlin

Big Hearts in Big Country is a cowboy-themed RPG which centers on what cowboys do best, at least in the movies: staring down the villain in the black hat, waiting for him to twitch, and then being fast on the draw. You’re the guys (or gals) who clean up bad towns.

Big Hearts in Big Country assumes that you are familiar with the general activity of tabletop roleplaying. One player is the “storyteller” who acts as referee, while the other players play characters in the game world the storyteller relates.

Getting Started

Unlike other RPG’s, you don’t need a character sheet. Instead, you’ll use the things you’d find in a wild west saloon: two decks of playing cards, one for the storyteller and one for the players, a couple dozen six-sided dice, and lots of blue and white poker chips. You’ll also need a bandana or handkerchief. (Whiskey in a dirty glass is optional.)

Character Creation

Character creation is easy. Roll a die, and take that many white chips. Then roll another die, and take that many blue chips. Then shuffle the player deck and draw eight cards.

When you understand what the chips and cards mean, it may suggest a character to you. If so, run with it! Otherwise, come up with a character that interests you. The cards and chips are not what *define* your character; instead, they fuel your character to do the cool things he or she does based on personality. Remember, most of cleaning up the town is about asserting your personality...until the shooting starts.

The Core Mechanic

Whenever the storyteller wants to check to see if you succeed at something, he or she will ask you to roll three dice, and try to get above a target difficulty number. This is known as a *Character Check*.

For most tasks, the default difficulty is 10. The storyteller adjusts the difficulty based on two things: the *Character Conception* you’ve conveyed so far, and any *Acting Job* you deliver for the particular task at hand.

The *Character Conception* should be taken from the three adjectives that pop into the storyteller’s mind first when thinking of the character. For instance, if a character seems primarily described as strong, dumb, and calm, then any test which would benefit from these should get a bonus, and any test which would suffer from these should get a penalty. Bonuses could reduce the difficulty by up to 5, while penalties should raise the difficulty by up to 5.

If the player doesn't like his odds, or just wants to have some fun, he can deliver an *Acting Job* with the attempt. As long as it's not half-hearted, injects anachronisms into the portrayal, etc., it should provide a bonus by reducing the difficulty by at least one, more for particularly dramatic, evocative, or memorable performances.

Once the difficulty has been determined, the dice are rolled.

If you don't like the outcome, you can then spend *Goodwill* or *Clout* to reroll some or all of your dice - see below.

Goodwill

The white chips represent *Goodwill*, a measure of how "white hat" you are.

Characters with a lot of white chips are heroes of the people, or take inner strength from the honest desire for justice. They don't start bar fights, or cheat at poker. John Wayne would have a lot of white chips.

Goodwill chips are used when you are interacting with people in a positive way, typically when interacting with innocent villagers. If you fail a *Character Check*, you can perform another *Acting Job* to tie your need to succeed at this task with your altruism, your desire to serve, your kind-heartedness, or even an uncharacteristic moment of mercy.

The storyteller will assess the performance (and any *Acting Job* you performed for the original *Character Check*), and tell you how many *Goodwill* chips you can spend. It should always be at least one, if it reasonably connects, but particularly good monologues, justifications, or drama should allow up to three chips to be spent.

Then, you can spend *Goodwill* chips, one at a time, to reroll dice from your *Character*

Check, up to the number of chips the storyteller allowed.

In addition to the above uses, you may also be able to spend *Goodwill* at plot points to make things happen.

Clout

The blue chips represent *Clout*, a measure of how "black hat" you are. Of course, heroes are never as bad as the black hats they fight, but some are more likely to start a fight in the saloon than others.

Characters with a lot of blue chips tend to scare the local townsfolk, children, and puppies, even if they know you're essentially a good guy. Clint Eastwood would have a lot of blue chips.

Goodwill chips are used when you are interacting with people in a negative way, typically when interacting with the bad guys. If you fail a *Character Check*, you can perform another *Acting Job* to tie your need to succeed at this task with your grittiness, toughness, rowdiness, intimidating nature, etc.

The storyteller will assess the performance (and any *Acting Job* you performed for the original *Character Check*), and tell you how many *Clout* chips you can spend. It should always be at least one, if it reasonably connects, but particularly good monologues, justifications, or drama should allow up to three chips to be spent.

Then, you can spend *Clout* chips, one at a time, to reroll dice from your *Character Check*, up to the number of chips the storyteller allowed.

In addition to the above uses, you may also be able to spend *Clout* at plot points to make things happen.

Gunfights

When a good guy squares off with a bad guy, it's time to pull out the cards. Each gunfight has several stages: *Setup*, *Stare-Down*, *Flying Bullets*, and *Resolution*.

Setup

Each combatant's decks are shuffled and placed face down in front of them.

A pool of dice is placed within easy reach of each combatant.

A bandana or handkerchief is placed equidistant between all players.

Each combatant then sits on one of their hands; the rest of the fight is conducted one-handed. Moreover, you cannot have more than one thing in your hand at once; dice and cards must be handled one at a time.

When all combatants are ready, they place their free hand face down on their deck to indicate they are ready. As soon as each combatant's hand is on their deck, the *Stare-Down* begins.

The Stare-Down

Many a gunfight is decided before any shots are fired. The stare-down is the time when you are trying to read your opponent, checking your surroundings, and watching for a hand twitching over a holster.

They can then start drawing cards from their deck, one at a time. They can look at them, and then place them *face down*, or *face up* in front of them.

Flying Bullets

At any time, either combatant may "reach for their gun" and start the bullets flying. Once the bullets start flying, the goal is to get all your cards turned face up, roll a die for each card (placing it on the card), and then, perhaps, snatch the bandana.

When one player has all his cards face up with a rolled die on them, he can yell "Bang!" Once this happens, no one can roll any more dice or try to snatch the bandana.

Resolution

Once all the cards and dice are placed, the cards are interpreted to see who crumples to the dust and who is left standing.

Each combatant starts with an *Aim* score of zero. The cards add to this *Aim* score, or cause other effects, and whoever garnered the most *Aim* is the victor. See the section on *Gunslinger Cards* for more information on the effects of the cards.

Tips for Effective Gunslinging

While gunfights could be played mechanically, the whole point of this game is to capture the feel of a showdown. You're encouraged to draw cards slowly and meaningfully, and make faces like those you'd see in a Sergio Leone movie while doing it. Have fun with it!

Multiple Combatants

If you have multiple combatants, a'la *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, you'll need to place cards facing the character you want to shoot at.

If there are too many combatants for this to be practical, instead, before revealing your *Aim* score, get a sheet of paper and divvy up the points and indicate who you are shooting at with each amount. Keep this hidden, and then all combatants reveal at the same time.

Gunslinger Cards

The playing cards represent your *Gunslinger* ability. The suit and number on the card influence the outcome of a gunfight.

Unless otherwise noted, the number on the die rolled for a card is added to the gunfighter's *Aim* score for that fight.

Face Cards: Fast-Draw

Jacks, Queens, and Kings are known as *Fast-Draw* cards. When you're done rolling all your dice for all your cards, you can try to grab the bandana as your last action. You cannot try to grab the bandana unless one of your cards was a face card.

If you are holding the bandana, each face card is worth five more than the number rolled on the die. Otherwise, they act as a normal card, adding the number rolled on the die as *Aim*.

Aces: Trick Shot

Aces are *Trick Shot* cards. Aces act like normal cards except when you have more than one ace in your "hand." Each ace is worth the total rolled value of all ace cards in *Aim*. For example, if you had two aces, and rolled a 3 and a 4 for them, both of them would add 7 *Aim*.

Twos: Disadvantages

This card does not add to your *Aim* directly. If there are any disadvantages in the current scenario, they are activated with this card. Your die roll determines what disadvantage occurs.

Seven: Dive for Cover

This card does not add to your aim. Instead, it adds to the *cover value* you have. Your die roll determines what cover you take advantage of, and how much *cover* you gain. The *cover value* is subtracted from all enemies shooting at you.

Tens: Advantages

This card does not add to your aim directly. If there are any advantages in the current scenario, they are activated with this card. Your die roll determines what advantage occurs.

Hearts: Big Heart

Good guys double the value of any *Aim* gained by a card in the suit of hearts. Bad guys get nothing for this card, but an ace of hearts still adds to the aim of his other aces.

In addition, good guys can spend *Goodwill* chips to roll extra dice and place them on the card, if they have time.

Spades: Black Heart

Bad guys double the value of any *Aim* for this card. Good guys get nothing for this card, unless they spend a *Clout* chip to make it a normal card that yields *Aim*. An ace of spades still adds to the aim of other aces.

Diamonds: Goodwill

In addition to any other effects of this card, good guys earn *Goodwill* chips equal to their roll if they win the contest. If they lose the contest, they can bequeath the chips on another player if they wish.

Clubs: Clout

In addition to any other effects of this card, good guys earn *Clout* chips equal to their roll if they win the contest. If they lose the contest, they can bequeath the chips on another player if they wish.

Jokers: Wild / Story

Jokers are wild, able to mimic the effects of any other card. However, the storyteller has the option of injecting a story element into the fight (or its outcome) whenever a joker is played.

Gunfight Locations

Different locations for gunfights affect the odds of winning in different ways.

Cover

If a player draws a seven, he manages to dodge for cover. Depending on where the gunfight happens, cover may have no effect at all (such as out in the middle of a deserted street at High Noon), add a *cover value* which is subtracted from the *Aim* of all people shooting at him (such as a water trough he can dive behind), to entirely avoiding the fight (such as jumping into a mine shaft).

Typically, the die roll on the card indicates the cover taken advantage of. If there is only one type of cover, then the die roll is ignored.

Advantages and Disadvantages

If a player draws a 2 or a 10, he can be affected by the location's advantages or disadvantages.

The actual effect of the advantage or disadvantage may vary by location, plot, or even character. For instance, a disadvantage may be "Shooting into the sun," which subtracts 2 from all your dice rolls. An advantage might be "High Ground" which might doubles all rolls of six.

Outcome of the GunFight

When all the *Aim* is totaled, the character with the most *Aim* is the one who hits the other first. If the *Aim* is a tie, both characters are hit by a bullet.

Bad Guys Who Lose

For most bad guys, losing a gunfight means permanent residency at Boot Hill, but the Storyteller may decide that certain

important villains may survive to fight another day.

Good Guys Who Lose

For good guys, the Storyteller may decide that the wound is not fatal for plot reasons, but this should only occur with good reason.

Otherwise, the character lasts long enough to make a *Dying Monologue*. The player can act out his final words, and if the Storyteller likes the performance, each other player may collect a die roll's worth of either *Goodwill* or *Clout*, to represent their newfound determination or their anger and thirst for revenge.

After the Fight

After the fight is done, look at the die rolls on each of the cards. Discard any cards which the die rolls were a 1 or a 2 (before applying any effects for disadvantages, etc.), and draw new cards to replace them. This cycles out new capability. You might want to explain what happened to cause the change; for instance, if you lose a Quick Draw card and gain a Disadvantage, you could say that your enemy's bullet grazed your arm.

In addition, the Storyteller may award you with new cards or chips depending on the story-level effect of the outcome.



Photo by peasap

Other Scenes

In most circumstances, player characters can only be killed in gunfights. These are larger-than-life characters that just don't get taken down by a stray bullet.

However, that doesn't mean that they can just waltz around indifferent to the "grunts" of the rival gunfighters.

Progress Awards and Penalties

When non-gunfight situations present themselves, they are resolved in the manner described in *The Core Mechanic*. By stringing together *Character Checks* to tell a story, a scene will unfold in favor of the heroes or in favor of the bad guys.

After a scene is over, or even mid-scene in a long scene, the Storyteller can award chips or cards for a job well done. Alternatively, if the players perform miserably, the Storyteller can insert spades and twos into the decks of the characters, or take cards or chips, which makes their chances to survive against the boss gunfighter lower.

Example

Suppose a player character, Rico, needs to sneak into the manor of a wealthy landowner to find out what he's up to at the mine. Rico has burned all of his *Goodwill* just to find the place, so he's plumb out, but he does have some *Clout* left over from teaching a real thug a lesson back at the saloon.

Rico arrives at the *Hacienda*, and notices that there are two guards with rifles walking along the balcony on the second floor. He attempts a *Character Check* to avoid notice as he climbs up to the balcony. The Storyteller thinks Rico has established himself as a limber, athletic person, so he sets the check difficulty to 7. Rico rolls well - a 14 - and makes it up without a problem.

Rico decides to attempt two *Character Checks* to knock out the guards before they can raise the alarm. This is tougher, since there are two of them, and Rico hasn't really established himself as a fistfighter, so the difficulty is set at 11. Rico rolls a 12 on the first check, knocking the first guard unconscious.

Unfortunately, he rolls miserably on the second check - a 4! Two one's and a two! Rico decides to do an *Acting Job* on the roll, and stands up. He crouches, and with a dramatic snarl, says, "See how easy he went down? That's how easy you're going down. That's how easy your boss is going down." The Storyteller decides this was some "good cinema," and is definitely in the realm of *Clout*, so he rules that Rico can spend up to three *Clout* to correct his roll.

Rico spends his first point of *Clout* and rerolls one of his one's. It comes up a 6! Now he has a total of nine, which is a lot closer to the 11 he needs, so he spends another point of *Clout*. He rerolls his remaining one, and gets another one. Oh, no! He spends his last point of *Clout*, and rerolls the one, and it comes up a 2. Rico groans - even with three *Clout* spent, he only made it to 10, which is just shy of the 11 he needs.

The Storyteller tells Rico that his punch doesn't even faze the other guard, who grins nastily as he whispers, "You're the one going down, cowboy. *Six feet* down!"

The guard raises the alarm, and our hero hears more thugs running up the stairs, so he leaps off the balcony and makes a run for his horse, making this roll and escaping.

As a result of this disastrous attempt at infiltration, the Storyteller rules that when Rico jumped off the balcony, he hurt his arm. Rico groans as the Storyteller looks through his Gunfighting deck, and removes a Quick-Draw card...

What the Cards Mean: Summary

Your character is determined by your cards:

Card	Meaning
Jack Queen King	Fast-Draw: Add the number rolled to your aim, and when you're done rolling all your dice, you can try to grab the handkerchief. If you get it, add +5 to each face card you rolled a die for.
Ace	Trick Shot: Aces add to your aim, but each ace roll is worth the total of the rolls of all ace cards. For example, if you had two ace cards, and you rolled a 2 and a 3 for them, each would be worth 5.
Two	Disadvantage: This card does not add to your aim directly. If there are any disadvantages in the current scenario, they are activated with this card. Your die roll determines what disadvantage occurs.
Seven	Dive for Cover: This card does not add to your aim. If there is any cover in the current scenario, you can use it. Your die roll determines what cover you take advantage of. The cover value is subtracted from all enemies shooting at you.
Ten	Advantage: This card does not add to your aim directly. If there are any advantages in the current scenario, they are activated with this card. Your die roll determines what advantage occurs.
Hearts	Big Heart: Good guys double the value of any aim for this card. Bad guys get nothing for this card, but an ace of hearts still adds to the aim of other aces. Good guys can also spend <i>Goodwill</i> to add dice.
Spades	Black Heart: Bad guys double the value of any aim for this card. Good guys get nothing for this card unless they spend a <i>Clout</i> , but an ace of spades still adds to the aim of other aces.
Diamonds	Goodwill: In addition to the other effects of the card, good guys earn <i>Goodwill</i> chips equal to their roll. If they didn't win the contest, they can give the chips to other players.
Clubs	Clout: In addition to the other effects of the card, good guys can earn clout equal to their roll if they win the contest.
Joker	Wild: Jokers are wild. You can have it mimic the effect of any other card. At the storyteller's option, you can instead decide an aspect of plot.

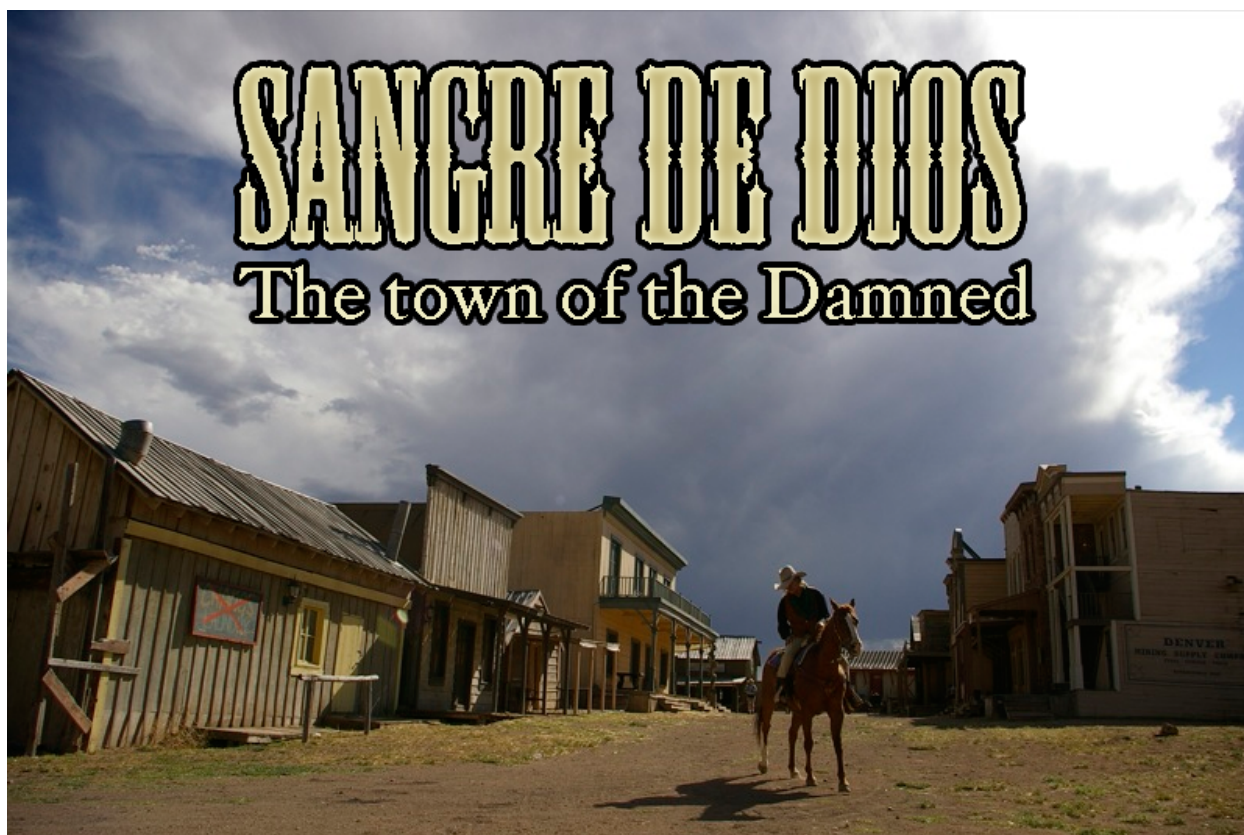


Photo by eb78

Welcome to Sangre De Dios

The villagers stare as you ride into town. They don't know what to make of you. Strangers are rare here, and usually don't stay long. They either have a drink and continue on their long journey northeast to Las Cruces, or they take a much shorter trip southwest up to Boot Hill.

Long ago, the townspeople stopped daring to dream that a big hearted gunfighter would come clean up the town. But then, they've never met *you*...

Introduction

Sangre de Dios is a sample setting with adventure hooks for *Big Hearts in Big Country*. It's a "sandbox" style setting, with plenty of plot hooks for you and your

players to follow up on. Adventures are meant to hinge as much on personality as on plot points, so you are encouraged to inject special considerations for the particular character styles of the players.

The Town

Sangre de Dios, "Blood of the Gods" in Spanish, is a small New Mexico town just north of the border to Mexico, about 60 miles west-southwest of Las Cruces. Crouched only a few miles from the mountains, the town's primary function is to serve a silver mining operation.

Sitting on a minor trade route between New Mexico, Arizona, and Mexico, the town is small, but sees occasional visitors who come to town looking to trade for silver or find work at the mines.

The town's bloody history is etched into its name. Before the gold rush, the town was a peaceful farming and ranching community with a Catholic mission and a mercantile that supported the outlying areas. When the gold rush hit, greedy speculators descended on the town.

At first, the money they brought in was welcome, but the corrosive effects of greed, lust, and corruption soon took their toll, and the new saloon only made things worse as tempers flared and gamblers and con men arrived.

Attempts to bring law and order to Sangre De Dios have failed, in large part due to the Sheriff being in the pocket of the mine owners, and easily bribed. It is safe to say that if there is to be any justice in this town, one must extract it himself, and stay on the good side of the mine owners while doing it.

The town is laid out in three districts. The first district, in the northeast, is the original part of town, containing a plaza, the mission, the old mercantile, and a handful of other businesses. This is where most of the oppressed locals live.

The southwest district is the newer area, where the saloon, jail, and other businesses owned by newcomers are located. It's also where the rich mine owners and their cronies live. This is where most of the 'bad guys' can be found.

To the northwest is a semi-permanent camp for the mine workers, consisting of tents and shacks. Its squalid conditions are plain, and the misery is compounded by cruel gang bosses who keep the workers in line.

There are also some interesting features outside of town. To the southwest is 'Boot Hill,' the dusty cemetery where gunfighters who lose fights end up. In all directions can be found homesteads where farmers

and ranchers make their homes. To the east are the lands of the Apache, who are well aware of the cesspool Sangre De Dios has become, and have little patience for its residents. Not far to the south is the border with Mexico, where shrewd *Federales* keep an eye on the border towns and deal harshly with those who cross them.

The Dusty Belle Saloon

The Saloon is likely the first place a visitor to town will go after a long, dusty ride. Most roads entering town pass right by it, and its facade boasts that it has the 'best whiskey anywhere' and 'rooms for twenty cents'. A large sign shows a Saloon girl who has fallen to the ground, having tripped over a bottle of whiskey.

Ruffians in the employ of the mine owners tend to lurk on the portico outside. They will glare menacingly at all who enter, but will typically not do anything unless a fight breaks out inside.

Dusty

The proprietor of the saloon is a man named Dusty Logan. Although his heart goes out to some of the victims who have met with misfortune under his roof, he's a businessman through and through, and is unlikely to cross the mine owners. He runs the bar himself, and keeps a shotgun behind the bar to deal with rowdies.

Spending a *Goodwill* on him, plus a little money, will get him to give up a piece of information, so long as doing so wouldn't put him at odds with the mine owners. Trying to use *Clout* on him will largely be ineffective; he's seen it all.

Raney Hansen

The lead entertainer is a woman named Raney Hansen. She's beautiful, and knows it. She is disgusted by practically all the

men in town, either because they are degenerate criminals, or because they aren't, but are too scared to do anything. She's smart enough to know not to cross anyone, and is talented at navigating between getting too close or too cold to those who have their eye on her.

If a character manages to demonstrate his courage and convictions to her, she may be willing to help them in a time of need, such as busting them out of jail by seducing the guard. But until then, she will view the players as just more desert vermin.

Unfortunately for Raney, one of the mine owners, Blake Johnson, has taken a shine to her. Blake is not in the habit of accepting "no" for an answer, and is posing an increasingly imminent danger to Raney. Raney feels she can handle him, but even she is not aware of what a black hat Blake is. At some point, the players may have to step in to protect her. If they put an end to Blake Johnson while protecting her, the gunslinger who deals the final blow gains a Joker for his deck.

Delilah Burke

An aging entertainer, Delilah yearns for her glory days. She is highly susceptible to flattery, and is quick to take offense to insults real or imagined, but is essentially a good person. Unlike Raney, Delilah is a terrible judge of character and often finds herself in trouble with jealous or domineering men.

Though she is easily recruited for help, thanks to her desire for acceptance, she is also weak-willed, and will quickly turn on her newfound friends if leaned on by the mine owners. Spending a *Clout* will coerce her to spill the beans on anything.

Roy Houston

A gambler by trade, Roy haunts the saloon looking to play cards. Though he seems

shady, he's on the up-and-up. He is a shrewd judge of character, and very smart, which makes him an excellent poker player.

He has very little patience for cheaters. Anyone who tries to cheat him will find himself roughed up by his two lackeys, Clint and Morris, who sit at nearby tables. If need be, he'll duel someone who gives him trouble. He might be recruited to the side of the good guys if the town is deteriorating and action is called for; otherwise, he prefers not to burn any bridges.

His deck includes:

- 5 regular cards
- 1 Quick-Draw
- 1 Cover

Rodrigo

Rodrigo is a dusty ten-year-old boy in a sombrero a little too big for him. His mother was an entertainer here who was killed by one of the mine workers, and his father was killed by the same man as he tried to avenge her. Dusty took pity on the boy, and lets him hang around the saloon, acting as something of a surrogate dad, although not much of one.

Rodrigo makes his living running errands for the patrons of the saloon, and informing on the comings and goings of people. He will inform on anyone to anyone so long as there is money to be had, but this is largely because he is unaware of the higher-level politics. If he understood the implications of his assistance, he may be convinced to keep his mouth shut or deliver false information, in exchange for some *Goodwill*.

The Mission

For those who eschew the sins of the flesh and drink, the Mission might be the first natural stop. A large, adobe building up on a hill, the Mission is home to fifteen monks and two nuns. Because Sangre De Dios is an orphan-maker, the Mission's walls also house a makeshift orphanage, which watches over twelve children of varying ages.

Father Juan Eduardo Castellano

Father Juan is revered in town as a holy man, at least amongst the faithful. In his time, he has done much to ease the pains of the villagers.

Unfortunately, he is advancing in age, and has taken sick as of late, so he is a mere shell of the strong, brave man he once was. He spends his days in bed or in his office attending to correspondence and his clerical duties.

Father Juan is deeply troubled by what is happening to his town, and is willing to help those who can help set it right. But he is wary; a disastrous mis-judgement of a man's character cost two of his priests their lives recently, and so he is wary of making the same mistake.

If the players can prove their capability and intentions to him, he can provide them with monetary and popular support, as well as *Goodwill*. In addition, if the players come to him before they embark on a particularly dangerous task, Father Juan can bless them; this provides them with either a 10 of hearts or an Ace of hearts.

Sister María Teresa Mogollón

Sister María Teresa is the day-to-day manager of the Mission. When Father Juan finally passes, leadership will fall to her, in all likelihood.

She is fiercely protective of Father Juan, as he saved her life when she was but a young girl. She would gladly give her life for him (and if he keeps speaking out against the mine owners, she may get the chance).

She is also fiercely protective of the children under her care. She will sometimes be seen going into the Saloon to fetch a stray orphan who has followed Rodrigo inside.

Sister María is a capable woman, and is no stranger to firearms, having grown up on a ranch. She keeps a Winchester rifle in her office, and is an excellent shot with it, although she is careful to keep these facts quiet, lest she be seen as a threat by the mine owners.

Sister María is more trusting than Father Juan is, and is willing to listen to what newcomers have to say. She wisely feels that if there is any hope of the town changing, it will have to come from outsiders. With some cajoling, she would be willing to take risks to support the players.

She may also be convinced to invoke the right of Sanctuary to protect a wounded player who comes to her. The mine owners are wary of invoking the wrath of the church, since so many locals are devoutly faithful, but that wouldn't stop them from trying to assassinate someone she is protecting in the dead of night. At least this would buy the players some time.

Sister Patricia

Sister Patricia is a young girl who has only recently become a nun. An orphan who grew up in the Mission, when she came of age, she chose to stay and help Father Juan in his work.

She is a sheltered, foolish girl, however, and is easily cajoled, frightened, enticed, and bamboozled. Sister María is aware of this,

and accompanies her into town whenever she goes, but some of the ruffians in town have learned of her naivete, and would like nothing better than to separate her from her mentor.

Frank Johnston, the son of the Mercantile owner, has a romantic past with her, but Sister María wisely counseled her to take up the life of a nun, rather than get involved with the affairs of businessmen in a corrupt town. Patricia still has feelings for Frank, and will help him however she can if he gets in trouble, but she is committed to her choice.

Brother Ricardo Hernández

Ricardo is a young priest who was transferred here from Santa Fe only a few months ago. Unused to seeing such misery, he is outraged at both the cruel depredations of the people by the mine owners, and dismayed at the complicity and docility of their victims.

A young, strapping man of high ideals, Brother Ricardo is quick to anger, and more than once has had to be talked down from confrontations by his elders.

If it comes to it, Brother Ricardo is willing to set aside his priest's robe and pick up the gun. Though he has shot a gun before, he is no gunfighter. His faith in God lends him strength, but also foolhardiness. If the players trigger his sense of outrage, they may have to stop him from doing something that will get him killed.

Chuy

Chuy is one of the orphans who lives at the Mission. He is the one most likely to be hanging around with Rodrigo, as he dislikes the boring confines of the Mission.

Unfortunately, Chuy is a little slow. A wide-eyed, doughy kid, Chuy is often getting in the way of things, ending up in places he shouldn't be.

It will seem as if whenever things are going well for the players, Chuy will be around getting into danger, walking out in front of a galloping horse, running across the road during a gunfight, trapped on a runaway carriage, caught eavesdropping on heartless men, etc.

Maddeningly, he will be totally ungrateful for help he receives, not out of malice, but out of a simple disconnect in his mind; he doesn't perceive the danger he gets into, and doesn't realize the sacrifice people make to spare him. More often than not, when saved, he'll bite the arm of someone who just helped him, and run off up the street towards the Mission.

Manny

Manny is a growing boy who remembers what the mine owners did to his father, and thirsts for revenge. He has been stewing in impotent rage for years, but now that he is in his teens, he is beginning to believe that he can realize his revenge fantasies.

Unbeknownst to María and the others at the Mission, he has been saving up to buy a gun. The players may run across him buying a gun at the Mercantile. He will not want to talk about it and run away, but if he sees any of the players win a gunfight, he'll later seek them out and ask them to train him in the "Way of the Gun."

If he is not dissuaded from his path, Manny will eventually get himself killed. If the players can steer Manny away from his deadly course, they each deserve a heart card.

The Mercantile

The mercantile is located at the base of the hill that the Mission sits on, amidst some other establishments.

It looks like a large warehouse, and is one of the few buildings with a stone foundation rather than wood. Stagecoaches carrying goods arrive every few days to stock up the warehouse, and farmers and ranchers arrive daily to purchase needed goods.

Hoss Johnston

Hoss runs the Mercantile. A hardy ex-rancher, he knows what it means to run a ranch, and is smart about what people need and what they will want. His prices are reasonable, and his is the only thing that stands between the townsfolk and “general store” usury.

As such, the mine owners are starting to chafe at the continual operation of the mercantile. Their initial overtures to acquire the property have been soundly rebuffed, but they are quickly getting to the point where “playing nice” is off the table.

Hoss keeps a sawed-off shotgun under his counter, and he has several tough young men working for him, all of whom are more than capable in a brawl, if not in a gunfight. And Hoss is smart enough to have everyone stay together and go places in pairs. He lives above the mercantile on the second floor, so he keeps watch over his store at all times.

Hoss is a good source of information about the surrounding area, since he talks to farmers and ranchers who come from all parts nearby every day. A little *Goodwill* goes a long way with him.

Frank Johnston

Frank is Hoss’ only son, all that is left of Hoss’ wife who died in childbirth. Frank is a hotheaded but upstanding young man, and has less patience for the indignities that have been heaped upon his father.

Frank is a crack shot with a rifle, and he likes to show this off when he can. Many of

the mine owners’ thugs are aware of his skill and give him a clear berth, but if they could get him without his rifle, no doubt he’d be in a world of hurt.

Frank is cantankerous. When he gets in one of his moods, *Clout* is useful, but *Goodwill* will get you nowhere.

Frank is especially depressed lately. He had taken a shine to Sister Patricia before she decided to become a nun, and her decision is a source of great personal pain and self-doubt for him, as well as a source of mockery and jeers from his rivals.

Frank is eager to help anyone going up against the mine owners. If he lends cover support to a gunfighter in a dirty fight, he adds two Ace cards to the players to split up however they want.

The Jail

It is telling that the Jail is in the new part of town. Until the silver mine came, the town didn’t even need a jail.

The Jail is a sturdy building with a stone foundation and thick, adobe walls. Heavy iron bars are set into the walls and make escape nearly impossible.

Fairly often, a poor soul who crossed the mine owners will end up here, doomed to dance at rope’s end the following morning, as a result of some real or imagined offense.

Sheriff Marlowe

The man who is Sheriff of the town could not be further from the expected image of an upstanding servant of justice. Sheriff Marlowe is a malodorous, toady figure who spends more time gorging himself at the Saloon (on Keeton’s indulgences) than doing his job.

He enjoys being Sheriff, and loves to lord his authority over the townsfolk when they

give him reason to. When the jail is empty, he feels it's his duty to fill it, so he begins seeking out even the most minor of infractions among the townsfolk to try to drum up a charge.

The Sheriff is so deep in Keeton's pockets that he eats lint for breakfast, so to speak. He is an eager informant, almost to the point of making up things and exaggerating. If the player characters cross him, he wouldn't be above fabricating a story about them.

Sheriff Marlowe is not a particularly good shot with a gun, although he has used it. In a gunfight, he just draws from the regular deck instead of a custom deck for him.

The Hacienda

Near the saloon in the new section of town is an impressive, two-story hacienda where the mine owners live. The house opens onto a tiled courtyard with a fountain and gardens surrounded by a tall adobe fence punctuated by two ocotillo doors.

The place is usually crawling with the thugs for the mine owners. A direct assault is unlikely to work as a result; a better plan would be to create a diversion at the mine or saloon to send the thugs running from the scene.

Keeton Lane

Keeton is the nastiest, shrewdest, cruellest, most black-hearted cur of all the mine owners. He's the guy to beat at *Sangre De Dios*; if he's out of the picture, the iron grip the bad guys have on the town will dissolve.

Unfortunately, this is no simple matter. Not only is Keeton smart and careful, but Keeton is also a crack shot, and quick on the draw.

Keeton does not go anywhere without his entourage of loyal thugs, and he is

unassailable from outside the Hacienda; all curtains remain closed. He's also filthy rich, and everyone in town is terrified of him. No one is under any illusions about what he would do to them should they cross him.

His deck consists of:

- 5 regular non-spades cards
- 3 regular spades
- 2 Quick-Draw, one spade
- 1 Cover
- 2 Aces

Over the course of the adventure, the players should be trying to weaken his hand and strengthen theirs. Bringing Keeton's greedy plans to ruin, turning his thugs against him or against each other, etc., allows the players to insert one Heart card into his deck, representing how the heroes are "getting under his skin."

Keeton has his hand in many pots in town. He is the major stockholder in the mine, and manages its finances. He gets paid protection money from most of the town's businesses, and sells the whiskey that the saloon buys. He seeks to ruin the Mercantile, or take it over, so that he can set the prices for goods in town and set up a "company store" which will be the only place to buy goods locally, so people will get so in debt to him they will essentially become indentured slaves. He pays the Sheriff and Dusty to look the other way and ignore the illegal activities in the Saloon, and then takes a cut of those activities. And he arranges the deaths of those who oppose him. Should any other opportunity to make more money or increase his power present itself, he is likely to be interested.

Douglas M. Lancaster

Douglas is an expatriate of Britain, who came to the wild west because he finds it

“quaint” and “delightful.” Truly a cold-hearted soul, he is almost pathologically indifferent to the suffering of others if it interferes with his own luxury.

In his own way, he feels he’s a good guy; giving people jobs, advancing “civilized” pursuits, and acting as an economic driver. He enjoys pointing out how much the town has grown since the miners came, but will resent the implication that the growth may not be all good.

Considering himself a cultured man, his personal prize is the personal library he keeps in his quarters. He loves his library more than people, and enjoys flaunting it to people, even if they don’t understand its significance. (If someone were able to destroy the library, they would make him careless - add two Heart cards to his deck.)

In addition to his library, he is trying to pressure the Saloon girls to learn and perform Shakespeare.

Douglas carries a finely-crafted pistol, which he’s trained with long and hard, that essentially gives him +1 to all his dice rolls.

- 5 regular cards
- 2 regular spades
- 1 Quick-Draw
- 1 Cover

The bond between Keeton and Douglas is a strange one. They don’t trust each other, but they’re about the closest thing to a friend that either is liable to get. If either dies, the other will come gunning for the killer, no matter how justified the reason.

Rosa Nuñez

Rosa is a beautiful, well-appointed woman who appears on the balcony of the Hacienda at times to look over the town. Though she appears regal, by any reasonable measure, she is a prisoner in the Hacienda. She sleeps in Keeton’s bed,

though her disdain for him is plain. Keeton took her from her husband while down in Mexico, and brought her here. Keeton falsely believes that if he showers enough luxury on her that she’ll come to love him, so he puts up with her defiance. Indeed, she is the only person in town who can speak disrespectfully to him and live.

She will not move against him, however, because she is in complete fear of what he’ll do to the family she left behind in Mexico should she cross him. Should anyone try to recruit her to their cause, it will take a herculean effort to get her to trust them.

Pujo

Pujo is Keeton’s and Douglas’ enforcer. A brawny, steely-eyed man, he towers over most people in town. He is usually found wherever Keeton and Douglas are, but he often gets sent out alone to do “dirty work.”

Pujo is not a gunfighter, but he is a powerful, dirty brawler. *Character checks* to fight him are difficult, so it’s best to stay out of his way.

Pujo’s main characteristic is that he is nearly indestructible. Things that would kill a normal man – falling off the top of a building, getting trampled by a bull, being in a building that explodes – will merely hurt him. (He is not supernaturally immortal, just tough.) Moreover, he is relentless. Once he has been ordered on your tail, he will stop at nothing to follow.

Pujo is heartless. *Goodwill* used on him is useless, and it takes twice as much *Clout* to influence him than usual.

Story Hooks

You should have an idea of how the damned town of *Sangre De Dios* works. It's a town full of oppressed people, thugs, and villains, ripe for the players to come save.

When starting your game, let the characters ride into town, together or from opposite directions, and let them start interacting with people. Have thugs pick fights with them. Have thugs oppress innocents in front of them. Get them involved in the politics of the town, learn the history, and start realizing the magnitude of what needs to be done.

Here are some other possible hooks:

- A kid looking to prove himself as a gunfighter tries to call out one of the players. If his mark doesn't play along, the kid draws.
- A group of black men, who have come here after being laid off from railroad work in Utah, are met with racism which threatens to break out into violence.
- An Apache man who was visiting town ends up dead, and it threatens to unravel the uneasy truce between the two communities.
- The mine suffers a collapse, burying ten men, but the mine owners don't even attempt a rescue, telling the workers to get back in line. A violent uprising by the workers in the camp threatens to break out.



Photo by eb78

Character Archetype Generator

You can use the following tables to quickly generate wild west archetype characters, either for players or for non-player characters. Roll dice, or pick the one that sounds good.

Used to be a...

1. Farmer
2. Rancher
3. Businessman
4. Clergy
5. Entertainer / Traveller
6. Soldier

1. Laborer
2. Student
3. Independently Wealthy
4. Prospector
5. Craftsman
6. Proprietor

Picked up the gun because...

1. Necessity
2. Revenge
3. Passion / Anger
4. Greed
5. Duty
6. Pride

1. Desperation
2. Curiosity
3. Hope
4. Camaraderie
5. Fear
6. Tradition

Nature

1. Heart of Gold
2. Grim and Cynical
3. Friendly
4. Loner
5. Drunkard / braggart
6. Ambitious

1. Old soul
2. Hot-tempered
3. Stoic
4. Naive
5. Worldly
6. Haunted

Stature

1. Average
2. Tall and lean
3. Burly or stocky
4. Short and wiry
5. Slight and limber
6. Heavyset

Race

1. Anglo / American
2. Anglo / European
3. Hispanic / Spanish
4. Hispanic / Mexican
5. Native American
6. Black

Dark secret

1. Killed someone
2. On the run from bad guys
3. On the run from good guys
4. Related to infamy
5. Not who (s)he seems to be
6. Chasing someone

1. Seeking revenge
2. Has a price
3. Great failure in the past
4. Lecherousness
5. Gambler
6. Seeking redemption

Motivator

1. Protecting the innocent
2. Punishing the wicked
3. Keeping the peace
4. Fame or fortune
5. Personal relationship
6. Sense of duty

Seeking

1. Redemption
2. Revenge
3. Peace
4. Self-worth / excellence
5. Adventure
6. Challenge

Back Matter

Thank you for trying the *Big Hearts in Big Country* game. It was a lot of work for a 24 hour RPG contest, especially since I only had less than half of that to work on it.

If you have any comments, suggestions, improvements, or play reports, send them to nephilim@mac.com.

Vaya con Dios!

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Credits

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Interior text is Hoefler, headlines are Birch, subheads are American Typewriter, and title text is Mesquite.