

Between the Two of Us...

Black Cadillacs has gripped me, in one way or another, for about five years. You're holding a work in progress. I'm calling this first printing of the game the Steel Toe'd Edition for a good reason. It's really rough around the edges, missing huge, bleeding chunks of text, and is, to put it briefly, far from perfect. It is, however, a serious tool for putting the boots to your friends (in a good way!) and coming up with some excellent stories in the process.

Here's the thing; I'm not charging you money for the book. That, I'm giving you for free. I'm charging you money for your commitment.

Yeah, you heard that right. I'm charging you for your commitment. "That takes some fucking nerve!" you say? Damn skippy.

I've been actively developing Black Cadillacs since September of 2005. I've beaten, hammered and mutilated the rules to get it to do what I want it to. And it does...

When it's me and my friends playing it. We know this game inside out. My friends know my design goals. We all fill in little procedural gaps. We cut the game some slack. We literally are a crutch, and Black Cadillacs is the battle-scarred soldier limping along on us.

That's where you come in. If I managed to get you to read this, you see some merit in the game. What I need from you is a commitment to playtesting this game without me, and then to get me some feedback. That's why I'm charging money; if I handed you a freebie copy with a hang-dog look in my eyes and asked "pretty please with sugar on top, won't you playtest my game?" you'd probably take it just to shut me up. And then it would sit on the back of your toilet for the next year.

I'll take this opportunity to welcome you to the Steel-Toe'd edition of the game. I'll also mention that this column is more-or-less reserved for "designer's callouts". This is where I'll be pointing out the things I need your help with.

All of my callouts should be in this font, so that should make them easier to spot.

I now return you to your regularly scheduled programme...

So, if you want to make Black Cadillacs better, pony up the green, mate! Think of it this way: if the game ends up sucking, you can track me down and give my ass a \$15 beating.

Thanks for playing!



Black Cadillacs

by Darcy Burgess

edited by Sean Moreland

Steel-Toe'd Edition – Summer 2008

Published in Oxford Mills, Ontario. Covers handcrafted by the author.
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II: Gird Yourself for War

Preparing Your Game

Necessities

- Between three and five people (including yourself!), as Players.
- About three hours to play, per session. Your first session will take about an hour longer.
- Paper, index cards & pencils.
- Printouts of all the play aids, available at: www.achtung-spiel.com
- Lots of six-sided dice, in three distinct colours. You'll need one big, bad-ass black die. You'll need two White Dice per Player. You'll need a whole mess of Red Dice, about five or six per Player.
- A deck of playing cards, with the Jokers removed.
- Poker chips, in as many colours as there are Troopers. These are used for tracking Strain.
- Three tokens. These can be anything. (I like little Axis & Allies infantrymen.) These are the Conflict Tokens.
- A clock or watch with an alarm function.

Play Aids

There are three major play aids in Black Caddilacs. They all serve critical, but different, functions in the game. A full description of all three is provided in Appendix A (page 91). What follows is a brief primer.

The Playmat

This is the visual focus of play, and provides a clear representation of the strategic elements of the game. There are three main sections to the Playmat.

- The Strain Stacks, which are adjacent to the Playmat. You'll use poker chips to track your Troopers' fluctuating statistics, with one colour for each Ally/Trooper pairing.
- The Card Piles, which are also adjacent to the Playmat. These clarify which cards are in the Deck, which are in the Discard Pile, and which are in the Face-up Pile.
- The Dice and Conflict Boxes, which help with managing the two most important strategic resources in the game: Red Dice and Conflict Tokens. Both of these resources are critical during Conflicts.

The War Sheet

Initially, the War Sheet is just a record of the broad setting and situation for the game. However, as play progresses, it becomes an honour roll, chronicling the sacrifices made by the Troopers. It's also a useful aide-memoire when you had to cancel a session or two, and you want to remember what happened over a month ago!

The Trooper Sheet

Ideally, you'll refer to the Trooper Sheets as little as possible during play. The Playmat should be your focus. However, when the situation on the Playmat is too grim, it's time to turn to the Trooper sheet. There, you'll find existing Memories (which you can use to improve your odds), as well as the important Cost Boxes, which control how much Strain you may spend (which you need to do in order to do things like buy Memories).

War Creation

The first order of play is for everyone to sit down together and build a general setting and situation. If you want to prepare for this, a little casual research is a good idea. I like to click around Wikipedia, digging through different wars, and browsing for stuff that grabs my eye. Since images are really evocative, consider bringing a print-out of a photo or two with you to the game. Keep in mind that all of this stuff is really supposed to be creative fodder; don't commit to playing "your idea." That doesn't mean that you shouldn't be enthusiastic; just be open to what everyone else shows up with. An important part of enthusiasm is also sharing why you're keen on your idea; talk about why it moves you.

Here's a list of the things you need to cover during your War Creation. Generally, you'll want to follow this list from top to bottom, but not slavishly. Feel free to bounce up and down the list as necessary. Sometimes you'll discover a cool idea that will require re-thinking something you've already discussed. This is fine. Right now, your number one job is to brainstorm with your fellow Players, and get a feel for what everyone's expecting from the game. Hell, you're going to be playing this for a few evenings. It makes sense to have everyone's interest.

By the end of war creation, you need to know:

- The War you're gaming.
- The Side of the conflict that the Troopers are on.
- The Front (or battle, theatre, etc.) that the action will take place in. The terminology here is loose; Front is very appropriate to things like WWI or the North African

campaigns of WWII. Battles are much more appropriate to Napoleonic wars. The idea is to focus the action within a manageable chunk of the larger War.

- The Unit Type that the Troopers are from. The default assumption is some sort of infantry unit. Other units are possible (sub-mariners? bomber crew?). I've even played with tank crew Troopers. However, if it's your first time out, I really do suggest footsloggers.

History

I always assumed that Black Cadillacs would be used in the context of historical wars. My stock answer when people asked me "Can I use this to play a fictional war?" was "Umm, I guess...if you want." It wasn't something that I wanted to do, but that was just me. That changed when Jake Parent asked me a variant of the fiction question at his birthday party in 2008.

"Hey Darce, can I use your game to see attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion?"

If that quote makes you half as excited as it does me, then you'll know that fictional wars are just as legitimate as historical ones. It's all about finding the right one!

On the subject of historical wars (if that's what you're doing), it's often helpful to have a history wonk in your play group. They're really handy for big-picture data ("The Germans were really short on rations during the later years of WWI."), minutiae ("No, no, no! The Mark IV was first used at Stalingrad, not Carentan!") and everything in between. If you don't happen to have a history nut, don't worry. Wikipedia isn't always the most rigorous scholarly endeavour, but it's useful for

I'm hesitant to call this out, so I'll do it gingerly. If you're really confident in yourselves, please consider doing something like sub-mariners or fighter jocks. I just don't know how well the game will hold up to that kind of environment. If you do this, please tell me about how the unit type influences the choices you make in play.

If you choose to game a fictional war, I really want to hear from you about how it goes. I'm leery about settings like Star Wars or the Firefly universe. I suspect that play will forever be overshadowed by the "canonic" plotlines. That's why the Blade Runner suggestion is great for me – it's based entirely on an inspirational yet totally throw-away line.

our purposes. Plus, it's just mouseclicks away!

However you get your historical data, don't become a slave to it. Black Cadillacs is about small-scale, human stories. You won't "break" history by taking liberties with it.

Choosing the Foe

This may blindside you a bit. No one is the Foe...yet. Somebody at your table is about to volunteer.

As it stands, I'm having a hard time describing the Foe's job. Some of it's pretty conventional GM stuff, but a lot of it isn't. In fact, a lot of the duties that are normally associated with GMing are distributed out to the Players.

Here are the major things that the Foe is responsible for:

- Setting up scenes with interesting content to spur the Players' imaginations.
- Taking a leadership role in keeping the table orderly and ensuring that the procedural aspects of the game are followed.
- Making tactical and strategic decisions regarding her die pool.
- Making tactical and strategic decisions regarding her hand of cards.
- Looking for opportunities to put the Troopers in untenable situations. (That means dump them in the shit, and do it often!)
- Looking for opportunities to put the Players in uncomfortable situations. (Make 'em squirm!)
- Deciding what Extras do, sometimes.

Tell me about the kinds of historical facts you use in developing your setting. I'm also keenly interested in knowing how the absence of "pre-built" settings affects your experience with Black Cadillacs.

This is the closest I've come to writing a "how to GM" chapter. It's also as close as I'm going to get. I refuse to herd players like cattle. However, I could use some extra eyeballs to catch some Foe duties that I've undoubtedly missed mentioning.

- Deciding what Troopers do, sometimes.
- Engaging in free play.

Compare and contrast this with an Ally's duties:

Ditto, but for Allies!

- Concluding scenes with interesting content to spur and guide the Foe's upcoming Scene Frame.
- Making tactical and strategic decisions regarding his die pool.
- Making tactical and strategic decisions regarding his hand of cards.
- Looking for opportunities to weave his Trooper's life "back home" into the narrative.
- Deciding what his Trooper does, sometimes.
- Deciding what other Troopers do, sometimes.
- Deciding what Extras do, sometimes.
- Engaging in free play.

With those duties in mind, someone at your table needs to volunteer to be the Foe. If your group is like mine, you've probably got someone who usually GMs. If that's who you want to go with, great! However, Black Cadillacs is very friendly to first-time GMs. If you've got some neat ideas about what you'd like to explore in play, step up and be the Foe!

Troopers

The Troopers are the core characters in the fiction. Before the scene-to-scene action of play begins, enough Troopers will be created so that each Ally has one. However, the game rules do not acknowledge ownership of a given Trooper by anyone. (Remember my rant on page 12?) Instead, the rules assume that all of the players create the fiction together, and that the Troopers are the focus of the action. Individual Allies take particular responsibility for the fiction surrounding their Trooper, but they are by no means the only contributor to it. However, when no one else is building your Trooper's storyline, you're expected to do so.

The creation of a Trooper is a group exercise. Each Ally begins creating a Trooper by giving him:

- a Name
- a Next of Kin. This doesn't have to be the legal next of kin. It needs to be someone back home who the Trooper is tied to in a powerful, emotional way. Include the Next of Kin's name as well as a quick sense of their relationship. "My mother" isn't acceptable. "Gloria McGee, negligent mom" is.

Next, pass the Trooper to the Player to your right (including the Foe!). That Player gives him:

- a Background. This isn't an exhaustive story. Rather, it is a quick, sketchy description of the Trooper's life thus far, and how it fits into the big picture.

Again, pass the Trooper to the player to your right. That Player gives him:

- a Last Night at Home. Again, this isn't a novel. It's a brief tale about the Trooper's last night of true freedom.

Here are two sample Troopers. They're taken from a recently-wrapped playtest set in the German trenches of the Western Front of WWI.

Kurt von Steuben

Next of Kin: *Hans von Steuben, Father. Strict and proud career officer.*

Background: *Sickly as a boy, always second-best next to his brother.*

Last Night: *Argued with his father about his acceptance to the university.*

Gerhardt Steigler

Next of kin: *Hana, devout mother.*

Background: *An idealistic patriot, he has re-enlisted against his family's wishes. He's also not a fool.*

Last Night: *Skipped out early on dinner with his family to join Leda and Hans, childhood friends, at a musical performance.*

Looking at those examples, two things become clear: the purpose of character generation is to get a sense of what makes each Trooper tick, what they're like as people. The other item of note is that character generation is meant as a springboard to further creative endeavours on the Players' part. Tantalize us, but do not spell every thing out. If Kurt was going to the university, why is he now in a trench somewhere? What kind of a person is Gerhardt to leave his family to go off to a show, especially when he knows that he may never come back?

Finally, return all Troopers to their original creators. The remaining entries on the Trooper sheet are all left blank for the time being, as they will develop during play. However, for the sake of completeness, they are:

- Three Strains (Horror, Hubris, Valour). These are a Trooper's primary attributes. Black Cadillacs does not attempt to simulate a physical reality. Such a reality may

have been characterized by descriptors like “strength”, “speed” and “toughness”. Instead, Black Cadillacs concerns itself with a cinematic/psychological reality. The Strains are simultaneously representations of how the War weighs on the Trooper, as well as how your group’s “collective camera” sees the Trooper’s actions. Strains will be tracked with poker chips; there is no need to write them down except between missions. Since each Trooper/Ally pair has their own distinct colour of chips, it becomes very easy to evaluate who’s got the most of a particular Strain. For complete details of how to manipulate and evaluate Strain Stacks, see Strain Stacks on page 92 (manipulating) and Gos on page 54 (interpreting).

- an Indefinite number of Memories. Troopers don’t start play with any, and you’ll be recording these on index cards.
- Mettle, which is a measurement of how competent a soldier the Trooper is. It allows the Trooper to aid other members of his squad.
- The Cost Boxes. These are checked off to track what options you have left when buying Cards and Memories during play.

Stories (the Big Picture)

The majority of Black Cadillacs play revolves around creating a piece of fiction (the imaginary events you’re about to create together; they’re what we usually think of as roleplaying.) However, a smaller but equally significant part of play is about creating versions of the fiction. They’re called Stories. Think of them as “war stories”; they’re the tales that make it back from the front. Maybe they’re out and out lies, maybe they’re just slight exag-

The lynch-pin of this design is this notion of Story as personal editorial/soapbox. I really, really need to know if your group seizes this opportunity, or simply goes through the required

generations, maybe a few select facts have been left out; the variations are legion. Regardless, those editorial choices give you enormous latitude; Stories are meant to be your personal soapbox, your opportunity to comment on the fiction you just created!

paces when making their Stories. I think that I've got this problem licked, but it really needs blind playtesting at this point.

This personal commentary is so critical to my vision of play that your Stories are also a powerful resource. You'll be rewarded for introducing ideas into play that intersect and mesh with existing Stories. That's great! The catch is, until you've actually got some in-game fiction to create Stories about, that puts you at a disadvantage, right?

Rumours

Rumours are the solution. At the beginning of the first session of play (and other sessions, on occasion), each Ally gets to create one Rumour. Rumours are literally the tales circulating among the soldiers at any given moment. They may be true, they may be false, they may fall somewhere in between. They may be about the Troopers. They may not.

Record it on an index card, and mark it as a Rumour. In terms of game mechanics, Rumours do exactly what Stories do, but they only do it once (Stories persist). Once you've used a Rumour to gain a mechanical advantage, you tear it up and throw it away. This doesn't mean that within the fiction the Rumour has disappeared, only that it has lost its metagame potency.

To inspire your Rumour, draw two cards from the Deck, and compare them to the following table. These generate the first two Rumour elements.

<i>Face Value</i>	<i>Card One</i>	<i>Card Two</i>
2	replacement	timely
3	officer	decision
4	support	struggle
5	supplies	confusion
6	enemy	disruption
7	weather	jealousy
8	the brass	excitement
9	another unit	trouble
10	civilian(s)	significance
J	home	pettiness
Q	orders	braggadoccio
K	another front	frivolous
A	R&R	unpopular

The third element is derived by comparing the colours of the two cards. If both cards are of the same colour (say, a heart and a diamond), then the Rumour is generally favourable. If the cards are of different colours, then the Rumour is generally unfavourable.

This is important! The three elements are meant to inspire you, not shackle you. If one of them seems incongruous to you, discard it or tweak it. Similarly, if you've got a kick-ass idea for a Rumour, feel free to skip the cards altogether.

"I heard that the quartermaster managed to trade for enough beer for all the fellows to get a bottle each. The Captain'll have his head if he finds out..." (supplies, pettiness, favourable)

OR,

"Colonel Rudd wanted command of the landships. They went to Colonel Fitzwilliam instead, and Rudd is looking for ways to sabotage the program!" (brass, jealousy, unfavourable)

Once everyone's done with their cards, reshuffle them into the Deck.

Appendices

Appendix B - Glossary

Ally: any Player who isn't the Foe.

Banked Cards: the payback against the Troopers for the Allies' use of the Death Die. (page 63) Banked cards drastically improve the Foe's position when answering the Big Three Questions. (page 71)

Big Three Questions: the crux of the End-game phase. Answering the Big Three Questions determines the survival, distinction and discharge of the Troopers. (page 71)

Blood: squad points that improve the Troopers' odds against the Foe. Earned as the squad loses Troopers. (page 76)

Conflict Proposal: a suggestion of a Goal for the upcoming Conflict. Made instead of a normal Rising Action turn. (page 46)

Conflict Resolution: the entire process of resolving the outcome of a Goal. (page 51)

Conflict Token: used to track the progress of the Conflict. Your side needs all three to win. (page 51)

Cost Boxes: checkboxes on the Trooper sheet, used to track what choices you have remaining for how to spend Strain to buy Memories and Cards. They are refreshed at the beginning of every Mission. (page 95)

Death Die: a solitary black die. Only the Allies may roll it, and must include some "dodging death" narration to be allowed to do so. (page 63)

Declaration: an Ally's expression of intent during the blow-by-blow time of Conflict

- Resolution. (page 52) See Free and Clear. (page 53)
- Dice Economy: the procedures for determining who may roll a given Red Die at any point in time. Red Dice flow back and forth between the Foe's Dice Box and the Troopers'. (page 61)
- Endgame: the third major phase of play (along with Mission Generation and Scene Play). Endgame involves wrapping up the fiction for the evening and learning the answer to the Big Three Questions. (page 69)
- Extra: any fictional character who isn't a Trooper.
- Falling Action: the fiction created by the Allies that concludes a Scene. It occurs after a Conflict, and the Foe is not involved in its creation. (page 47)
- Free and Clear: a "friendly table" agreement that allows Allies to freely revise their Declarations at the outset of a Moment. Only once everyone is satisfied do any dice get rolled to resolve individual Gos. (page 53)
- Foe: the Player who's primarily responsible for providing the Troopers with adversity. (page 25)
- Foe's Dice: any dice the Foe rolls go wild on a roll of one. Wild dice may be set to any value the Foe desires. (page 63)
- Goal: the articulation of what's being resolved by the Conflict. It's usually stated as a Goal for the Troopers, but may also be a Goal for their opponents, or other actors in the fiction. (Conflict Proposal, page 46)

Gos: the finest increment of the turn structure during Conflict Resolution. Each Ally gets one Go during each Moment. (page 54)

Matches: two or more dice in a roll that show the same value are said to be Matching. Matches are more powerful than non-Matches. (page 56)

Memories: a mini-flashback that the Ally creates to give his Trooper increased effectiveness during a Go. The Memory establishes a link between the current action and the Trooper's past. (page 64)

Memory Dice: When Allies are rolling dice in conjunction with a Memory, their dice are treated as wild dice. If the Memory interacts with a Story (or Rumour), results of one and two are wild. If there is no interaction with a Story (or Rumour), results of one are wild. (page 63)

Mettle: Trooper points that allow the Trooper to help his squadmates during Conflict Resolution, (page 51) earned by beating the Foe in the "Who Distinguishes Himself?" question during Endgame. (page 72)

Mission: a session of play, typically consisting of three to six scenes. (page 35)

Mission Generation: the first major phase of each evening's play. Mission Generation is characterized by a card game that generates the initial Mission Elements for the evening. (page 35)

Mission Elements: six situational facts that serve to provide a launchpad for the evening's fiction. The Mission Elements are created during Mission Generation. (page 35)

Moments: a turn during Conflict Resolution. During each Moment, each Ally will receive his own sub-turn, called a Go. (page 52)

Narrative Constraint: any number of elements that help guide the fiction. Players must contribute to the fiction within the strictures of various Narrative Constraints. (page 15)

Player: anyone sitting at the table with you.

Red Dice: Dice that Players may add to their rolls to improve their odds of success on a given Go. Red Dice are subject to the rules for Dice Economy. (page 61)

Rising Action: turn-based fiction building that occurs after a Scene Frame but before a Conflict Resolution. (page 45) The duration of the Rising Action tends to vary with the aggressiveness of the Scene Frame. (page 43)

Rumours: a mini-Story whose content is typically about in-theatre matters. Rumours are lighter versions of full-fledged Stories. When combined with a Memory, a Rumour is used up. (page 30)

Scene: the basic unit of fictional time. Each Scene has (one each): Scene Frame, Rising Action, Conflict and Falling Action. (page 43)

Scene Frame: the Foe's major role in the game is to introduce each Scene. The Scene Frame sets the immediate situation for the Troopers, providing the

Players with a picture of “what’s going on now.” (page 43)

Size: the number of dice in the best Match in a given roll of the dice. (page 56)

Stories: literally, “War Stories.” Stories are the Players’ individual opportunities to make personal commentary on any portion of the evening’s fiction. (page 29) Stories are also resources for the Allies and are written down on index cards. (page 76)

Strain: the three characteristics of the cinematic/psychological landscape. The three Strains are Valour, Horror and Hubris. (page 28)

Strain Stacks: the physical representation of each Trooper’s Strains. Tracked using the Playmat and Poker Chips. Having the highest Stack in one or more Strains increases that Trooper’s effectiveness in Conflict Resolution. (page 92)

Trooper: a focal character in the fiction. Associated with, but not owned by, an Ally. (page 12)

White Dice: the basic Dice in the game. Each Player always gets a free White Die on each Go. (page 54) More White Dice may be introduced into a roll to break ties. (page 55)

Who Distinguishes Himself: One of the Big Three Engame questions. Resolved by comparing highest red cards. (page 72)

Who Gets Out: One of the Big Three Endgame questions. Resolved by comparing best matching cards. (page 72)

Who Lives: One of the Big Three Endgame questions. Resolved by comparing highest black cards. (page 72)