

BLACK WIDOWS

a game about super-spies, broken hearts, and sweet revenge

by Clinton R. Nixon

There is a man, the world's greatest super-spy, named Cobalt Gunn. Tall, dark, and handsome, he travels the globe doing super-spy things. If it's an English-speaking country, he's probably worked for it, stealing technology, learning secrets, shooting bad guys, and sleeping with exotic beauties. Wicked, deadly exotic beauties that he so casually left behind without even as much as a convenient lie to at least show he cared; not even so much as a "well, that was nice, but I've got to go out and save the world early this morning and I'll call you later."

That son of a bitch.

The Widows

In this game, you play those wicked, deadly exotic beauties, women spurned by Cobalt Gunn. Under the leadership of a mysterious benefactor named Spyder, you thwart Gunn's activities and wreak super-villain havoc the world over.

Ok, actually, one person gets to play Gunn. This person plays a lot of roles: he'll play Gunn and all the minor characters that aren't directly under the control of one of the Widows. He also plays Spyder, and is in charge of directing the story. We'll call him Spyder, or the Spyder Player, or the GM.

Everyone else plays one character, an ex-girlfriend of Gunn and a spy-villainess.

You'll need a 54-card deck (this includes two jokers.)

Making your Widow

Grab a character sheet. Make up a sexy name for your Black Widow. Think about over-the-top spy fiction: the female seductresses always have soft-core porn names. Go with that. I've already sort of pushed the limit on that with a name like "Cobalt Gunn." Feel free to push it even further. My sample character's sexy name for this will be "Ophelia Balzac."

Then write down your sexy description. You don't have to get too detailed: I'm sure more purple prose will come up in play. Ophelia's sexy description is "Euro-African goddess, very tall with white straight hair, always wearing snow-white leather."

Next, you get to specify your character's strengths. You have four areas you can use in conflicts: Violence, Attraction, Intelligence, and Technology.

- *Violence* is what it sounds like. It's fighting and bad-ass-ness. It's kung-fu.
- *Attraction* is sex appeal. It's catering to prurient interests and making others want you.
- *Intelligence* is super-spy secrets and knowing how to escape from NSA headquarters and the codes to the Latvian nuclear device and stuff like that.
- *Technology* is kind of a wild card. It's where your Ferrari whips out caltrops or you have a high-powered laser in the tip of your Bic.

Take 21 points and distribute them among the four of these attributes, having a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 10 in each attribute.

The GM should make Gunn the same way, although his sexy name is already set. You can describe him however you want, though, as long as it's the hotness.

The players playing Widows get to do one more thing, though. On your character sheet, you'll see two sections: "Why I hate Cobalt Gunn" and "Why I especially kick ass." Put down something Cobalt Gunn did to you in the "why I hate Cobalt Gunn" column and some awesome schtick like "I know the art of Senegalese poison darts" in the "why I especially kick ass" column.

How to play the game

The GM, playing Spyder, starts each session with introducing a plot straight out of a bad spy movie. He's like Charlie in *Charlie's Angels* but evil. So he calls the Widows: "Ladies, we have a mission of utmost importance. The Premier of South-Eastern North Korea-stan is meeting with the Grand Sheik of Western Irania to trade fifteen exceptionally gifted children for a warhead that explodes with enough nuclear force to mutate the Ebola virus found inside it to a strain of even more deadly Ebola. Cobalt Gunn has been alerted and will stop at no end to prevent this meeting. You must assure the meeting's success."

At this point, deal out five cards to each player. The GM gets five cards plus one for every other player.

From there, the Widows should take turns introducing scenes. You don't have to do this in exact round-table order or anything, because that would be super-lame. Everyone should get a fair chance to go, though.

When one of the Widows introduces a scene, she must be in that scene. She can always place Gunn in the scene, but she doesn't have to. The scene could be with other contacts or people on Gunn's side. Whoever the scene's with, it must involve at least

one person unfriendly to the Widow. All the non-Widow people in the scene are played by the GM.

More than one Widow can team up to be in the same scene together. That's all well and OK.

Conflikt!

Sooner or later, the scene will turn into a conflict. When it does, this is how things work.

(First things first. I don't know a better place to put this. If the scene is with a bunch of goons, they have attributes, but they're all at 2. If the scene is with another named character, they have attributes, but they're all at 4.)

A Widow always starts the conflict. She announces what she's doing to defeat the other side. This could be anything from "steal codes" to "kick butt" to "seduce the Prime Minister" to "hack the security system."

She lays down a card of the suit corresponding to her action type. (It's on the character sheet, but: Clubs = Violence, Hearts = Attraction, Spades = Technology, and Diamonds = Intelligence.) If it's a number card (2 through 10), then add the Widow's attribute to the card to determine your score. (We'll get to the other cards in a minute.)

The GM can then play a card for the opposition. You can either beat the Widow's score - your attribute + number card of the same suit must be higher than the Widow's - or play the suit that trumps the current one. (Clubs beat Hearts, Hearts beat Diamonds, Diamonds beat Spades, Spades beat Clubs. Again, on the character sheet.) You have to narrate an action here, so if you try to beat the score, then describe how you beat the Widow's action with a similar one. If you trump, then you change the action to the new action type. You can also just play any card to lose the entire conflict. If you do this, the Widow gets to narrate how she kicked ass.

This plays out back and forth until someone loses.

Other cards

So, what do the other cards do? All of them finish a conflict when played.

Kings represent Gunn. If a Widow plays a King, then she plays to Gunn's weaknesses and gets to describe how awesomely she used his weakness against him. Of course, she might have a conflict with his cohorts or someone else, so in this case "Gunn" is the competition. If the GM plays a King, he plays to one of Gunn's supremacy and gets to narrate how absolutely kick-ass his side was in this scene. If the GM plays one of these, the Widow in the scene has to write down another reason she hates Gunn.

Queens represent the Widow. It works like a King, but oppositely. If the Widow plays one of these, she gets to write down another special way she rules.

Jacks are henchmen and lackeys. When you play a Jack, you win, but must narrate how your own people saved the day or whipped down or whatever.

Aces are Pyrrhic victories. You end the conflict when you play one, but you don't win. You get to narrate your character losing, but you can add one good side-effect for yourself.

Jokers are total outside elements. No one wins with a joker, but the player who laid it down gets to narrate the dome bursting, the volcano erupting, Nessie rising from the deeps, or whatever other craziness the world throws at you.

Hates and schticks

Or "reasons I hate Gunn" and "ways I especially kick ass." Basically, the Widow, if she can narrate an action that fits one of the ways she especially kicks ass, can draw another card from the draw pile. If the GM - when Gunn is in the scene - can narrate an action that highlights one of the ways the current Widow hates Gunn, he can draw another card from the draw pile.

Losing and really losing

If you lose at a scene, but have cards left, you're ok. You live to fight another day.

If you lose by running out of cards, you're permanently screwed. This game uses total movie logic, so no one ever dies. You might appear to be killed, or blown up, or have your heart broken, or be exposed as a double agent, or something else that changes you forever. You can keep playing the same character, but you basically have to re-write her. Change the scores and make up one reason you hate Gunn and one way you kick ass. These can't be the same as before.

Winning

When you're the one to close a scene, you can refill your hand to its maximum size, choosing first from any cards laid down that weren't yours. If you don't like these cards, stop picking them up.

Then take all the played cards and shuffle them into the draw deck. Everyone draws cards back up to their maximum hand size.

Helping out

Other Widows can totally jump in on scenes. They can give cards to the acting Widow or to Gunn. (Yes, you can help Gunn. You might even fall back in love with him.) To do this, you have to narrate your character in the scene, though.

And that's it

Really, this game could use a lot more. Its reward system is needs a lot of work, but the basic mechanics work well. I need to write about how to run a series - or even one episode - but I think you get it. It's a spy movie. Just play that out, and then do another one. Watch some James Bond.

An idea I really like is that Spyder might be Gunn.

About this game

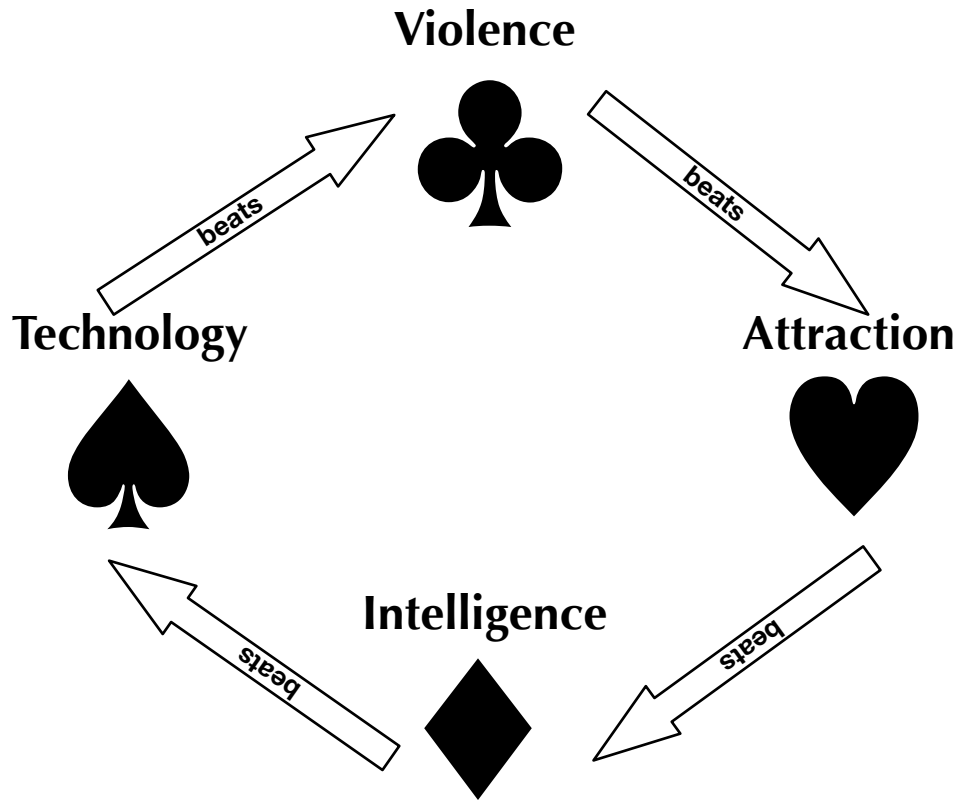
This game is a "24-hour RPG," a game written in 24 hours. Most of it was written on a Greyhound bus. It's an entry for "the Ronnies," some crazy competition started by Ron Edwards. You have to choose two words that your game is about in this competition from a list made by Mr. Edwards, and my two were "girlfriend" and "hatred." Find out more at <http://www.24hourrpg.com>.

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BLACK WIDOWS

Sexy Name:

Sexy Description:



Why I hate Cobalt Gunn

Why I especially kick ass