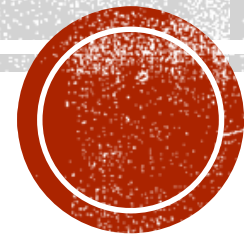


COWBOYS OF CYDONIA

A Lady Blackbird Hack



Lady Blackbird by John Harper

COWBOYS OF CYDONIA

- **Mars - the Red Planet.** It's a dusty, dry, hardscrabble existence for the Humans living out in the Cydonia region. They tell stories to each other of the Old Earth that centuries ago sent folks here to fight in the War of the Worlds. Meanwhile, they dig for water, raise whatever crops and animals they can, and mine for the Cavorite that powers the trains and the guns and the lights.
- **Cavorite.** When the Humans of Old Earth took apart the tripods of the failed Martian invasion force, they found they were powered by a mysterious red quartz-like substance. They called it cavorite, and they soon learned they could create all kinds of marvels with it, including great space-going battleships that formed a retaliatory strike against Mars. That war was long ago, and no one's heard from any Martians, nor from Old Earth, in anyone's memory. People have a hard enough time surviving on Mars, though there's air and water and soil where there wasn't before. Cavorite made it all possible. When processed, it powers engines and lights, and creates the plasma energy that guns fire.

- **Melkotia Gulch** is a watering hole, just a small village, lying along the rail line between the City on the shore and the mines in the mountains. There's not much there worth fighting about, but that never stopped anyone from fighting anyway.
- There's a mayor and a sheriff, but everyone knows it's really **Don Bastardo** that runs the town. He's got his gang in front of him, and behind him the powerful syndicate from the City. He keeps things running just how he likes, especially the local bank. Most folks just keep their heads down.
- Zed Balls, the **Old Man** as everyone called him, was found dead in his shack on the edge of town, shot once in the chest. Don Bastardo's gang soon brought in Winkin, a low-life thief that's been slinking around town for years. Winkin had always been a nuisance, but now he'd done something worth hanging for. Winkin is in the stocks now, awaiting trial, which won't take longer than it will to build the scaffold.

- *Who are the strangers who have suddenly appeared in Melkotia Gulch, all brought by the news of the Old Man's murder?*
- *Will Winkin survive to be brought to trial?*
- *If the whispering about town is correct, and Winkin didn't do it, then who did, and why?*
- *Is it all leading up to a showdown in Melkotia Gulch?*



COWBOYS OF CYDONIA

Player:

Character: **Curtis Rose, the Gambler**

Condition Track: Dead Injured Stunned Tired

Key of the City Slicker - Hit your key when using your cultured style, refined manners, or polished speech to get your way. *Buyoff*: Sometimes you have to get down and dirty.

Key of the Long Game - Hit your key when you pull off a con, a lie, or a manipulation that brings you a step closer to your ultimate, hidden goal. You always keep your eye on the prize, but you never look like that's what you're doing. *Buyoff*: Chuck the plan and grab an opportunity.

Key of Gambling - Hit your key when you enter into a bet with someone. This is how you make your living, but your marks don't need to know that. *Buyoff*: Sometimes you just want to give a sucker an even break.

Secret of the Cards - In a gambling session, you refresh your pool dice up to 7.

Secret of Turning the Table - Once per refresh, you can force a re-roll of a gambling result.

Secret of Reading Faces - You have a knack for figuring out who's the leader, the biggest threat, the one with something to hide, the one who's angling for something, and who's the dumb sucker in any group.

TRAITS

Play the Game (Strategy, Bluff, Cheat, Distract, Size Up Situation, Detect Cheating, Spot a Tell, Sense Bluff)

Fortitude (Hold Liquor, Restrain Your Tell, Keep On Your Feet, Fight Past the Pain)

Fight (Sucker Punch, Low Blow, Dodge & Weave, Improvised Weapon)

Resourceful (Got Just the Thing, Extra Cash, Know a Little About That, Book Learning)

"The old man is dead, and I'm going to find out who killed him. I owe him that much. When I was just starting out, he taught me some lessons about cards. He cleaned me out, but I've made a living on what I learned ever since."

RULES SUMMARY

Rolling the Dice

When you try to overcome an obstacle, you roll dice. Start with one die. Add a die if you have a trait that can help you. If that trait has any tags that apply, add another die for each tag. Finally, add any number of dice from your personal pool of dice (your pool starts with 7 dice).

Roll all the dice you've gathered. Each die that shows 4 or higher is a hit. You need hits equal to the difficulty level (usually 3) to pass the obstacle.

Levels: 2 – easy; 3 – difficult; 4 – challenging; 5 – extreme

If you pass, discard all the dice you rolled (including any pool dice you used). Don't worry – you can get your pool dice back. If you don't pass, you don't yet achieve your goal. But, you get to keep the pool dice you rolled and add another die to your pool. The GM will escalate the situation in some way and you might be able to try again.

Conditions

When event warrant or especially when you fail a roll, the GM may impose a condition on your character. When you take a condition, mark it on your sheet and describe how it comes about. [Note: the "Dead" condition just means "presumed dead" unless you say otherwise.]

Helping

If your character is in a position to help another character, you can give them a die from your pool. Say what your character does to help. If the roll fails, you get your pool die back. If it succeeds, you don't.

Keys

When you hit a Key, you can do one of two things:

- Take an experience point (xp)
- Add a die to your pool (up to 10 max)

If you go into danger because of your key, you get 2xp or 2 pool die (or 1xp and 1 pool die). When you have accumulated 5xp, you earn an advance. You can spend an advance on one of the following:

- Add a new Trait (based on something you learned during play or on some past experience that has come to light)
- Add a tag to an existing trait
- Add a new Key (you can never have the same key twice)
- Learn a new Secret (if you have the means to)

You can hold on to advances if you want, and spend them at any time, even in the middle of a battle.

Each key also has a buyoff. If the buyoff condition occurs, you have the option of removing the Key and earning two advances. Refresh

You can refresh your pool back to 7 dice by having a refreshment scene with another character. You may also remove a condition or regain the use of a Secret, depending on the details of the scene. A refreshment scene is a good time to ask questions (in character) so the other player can show off aspects of his or her PC – "Why did you choose this life?" – "What do you think of that person?" – "What is motivating you right now?" etc. Refreshment scenes can be flashbacks, too.

COWBOYS OF CYDONIA

Player:

Character: **“Austin Gray” (Anthony Ford), the Gunfighter**

Condition Track: Dead Injured Stunned Tired

Key of Blood - You look out for the good people in your life. You pay back good for good, and bad for bad. You pay your debts, even if it means sacrifice. Hit your key when you act to "set things square." *Buyoff*: Turn your back on what your code says you ought to be doing.

Key of Kin - You look out for your little brother, and help him out as you're able, even though he's an ungrateful, no-good thief that always takes advantage of you. Hit your key when you get him out of paying the price for his actions. *Buyoff*: Let him take the heat. It's the only way he'll learn.

Key of Not Who You Used to Be - Travel, time, and wear-and-tear have altered your appearance greatly. Your clothing and body language mark you as a dangerous gunfighter, and most folks in Melkotia Gulch don't connect you with the boy you used to be. Hit your key when you behave in ways beyond your lowly origins. *Buyoff*: Slink off, hat in hand. You're just a local peon, after all, and you don't want trouble.

Secret of the Gun - In a gun duel, you refresh your dice pool back to 7.

Secret of Survival - In a battle scene, you can ignore conditions for one roll.

TRAITS

Spot (Detect Hidden Weapons, Detect Ambush, Find Cover, Sense Motive)

Talk (Intimidate, Gather information, Distract, Glib)

Fight (Punch, Shoot, Fast Draw, Make 'em Dive, Grapple, Dead Eye)

Move Quickly (Run for It, Duck for Cover, Get Over There Pronto, Fast Grab)

Know Things (Stuff About Guns, Treat Injuries, Treat Gun Wounds, Local Knowledge, Basic Geography, How to Get Paid for Shooting People, How to Deal With Strangers, How Not to Die in the Desert)

"The old man is dead, and they say it was my brother that killed him. I swore I'd never go back to that town, and I said I'd never owe anyone anything, but I can't let this stand. My brother may be a no-good, lousy thief, but he's no murderer. As for the old man, I owe it to him to find out who did him in. People in that town never thought much of me. I don't plan on reminding them who I am if I can help it. Got a feeling there's going to be some killing needs done."

RULES SUMMARY

Rolling the Dice

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Conditions

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If your character is in a position to help another character, you can give them a die from your pool. Say what your character does to help. If the roll fails, you get your pool die back. If it succeeds, you don't.

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- Add a new Trait (based on something you learned during play or on some past experience that has come to light)
- Add a tag to an existing trait
- Add a new Key (you can never have the same key twice)
- Learn a new Secret (if you have the means to)

You can hold on to advances if you want, and spend them at any time, even in the middle of a battle.

Each key also has a buyoff. If the buyoff condition occurs, you have the option of removing the Key and earning two advances. Refresh

You can refresh your pool back to 7 dice by having a refreshment scene with another character. You may also remove a condition or regain the use of a Secret, depending on the details of the scene. A refreshment scene is a good time to ask questions (in character) so the other player can show off aspects of his or her PC – "Why did you choose this life?" – "What do you think of that person?" – "What is motivating you right now?" etc. Refreshment scenes can be flashbacks, too.

COWBOYS OF CYDONIA

Player:

Character: **“Winkin” Brian Ford, the Thief**

Condition Track: Dead Injured Stunned Tired

Key of Taking Things - Hit your key when you relieve someone of something you can use without their permission. *Buyoff*: Do a respectable bit of Honest Work.

Key of Making Excuses - Hit your key when you try to talk yourself out of trouble. *Buyoff*: Own up.

Key of Not Gonna Lie to You - Hit your key when you lie to someone in order to get them to do something for you. You are trying to talk yourself into trouble, but you think it may be worth it this time. *Buyoff*: Do something heroic, or just even nice, for someone even though it's going to cost you something.

Secret of Survival - Once per refresh, when things aren't going your way, you can force a re-roll or a separate Trait roll to catch a lucky break.

Secret of Loot - You've either already stolen something, or have been planning to steal something from just about everybody within a day's journey. You have insider information on where the good loot is and how well guarded it is.

TRAITS

Athletics (Agility, Climb Like a Monkey, Wriggle Like a Snake)

Thievery (Sneak, Pickpocket, Conceal Object)

Conning (Appraise, Haggle, Lie, Excuse, Distract, Grovel)

Escape (Run, Hide, Escape Grapple, Evade Pursuit)

Improvise (Improvise Object, Improvise Weapon)

"The old man is dead, and now they say I killed him, but I didn't do it. The old man was good to me. He gave me food, little jobs here and there, sometimes a place to sleep, even some money once. Of course I stole from him just like I stole from everybody else, but somehow I always felt bad about disappointing the old man. Never felt that way about anybody else. He's gone now, and they're probably going to hang me for killing him. Why do I always get all the bad luck?"

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COWBOYS OF CYDONIA

Player:

Character: **Tracy Griswold, the Farm Kid**

Condition Track: Dead Injured Stunned Tired

Key of the Hick - Hit your key when your rustic background comes to the fore. There's a lot of civilization you've never seen before, and it's easy to get a reaction out of you. *Buyoff*: No big deal. Act like you're not impressed.

Key of Ma's Counting on Me - Hit your key when you act to safeguard or advance the cause of your family farm. *Buyoff*: Well, nothin' I can do. Might as well catch the rail to the big city.

Key of the Fresh Face - Hit your key when someone counts on your youth and inexperience. They might have a surprise in store for them. *Buyoff*: Act big. Convince someone that you're some kind of hero.

Secret of the Natural - When using a skill untrained or improvised, and the die roll succeeds, add a new trait and/or tag to your list (phrasing at the game master discretion).

Secret of the Lucky Break - Once per session, when all hope is lost and it looks like you're going to die, an improbable event happens and you miraculously escape with your life.

Secret of the Chosen One - Once per refresh, when making a roll with dramatic consequences, you can add two dice to your pool, but the game master may choose to add a plot twist at this point.

TRAITS

Shoot (Plink Stationary Target)

Notice (Keep Your Eyes Peeled, Keep Your Ears Open)

Fighting (Bounce Back, Stronger Than You Look, Find the Weak Point, Resist Grapple)

Know Things (Local, Farming, Desert, Create Simple Object, Fix Things)

"The old man is dead. He was going to help us save the farm. I guess it's up to just me now. He said he had a way of getting some money to pay off the banker, and he needed my help, but he never got the chance to tell me what it was all about. What with the banker being in cahoots with Don Bastardo, I'm not sure what to do now. These strangers look ready to fight the gang - maybe they can help."

RULES SUMMARY

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COWBOYS OF CYDONIA

Player:

Character: **Smith, the White Hat**

Condition Track: Dead Injured Stunned Tired

Key of the Paladin - Hit your key when you risk trouble to stand up for the weak and the oppressed. You adhere to a simple standard of grace and mercy, and arguments about legality and justice do not sway you. *Buyoff*: Well, they did break the law, and society has to have some rules, right?

Key of Justice - Hit your key when restoring peace and harmony, even if it means causing harm to evildoers. When someone is actively threatening a neighbor, sometimes it is necessary, though always regrettable, to take him down. *Buyoff*: Maybe things are more complex than I realize. I might make things worse by interfering.

Key of Naivety - Hit your key when something happens or someone says something to you that requires some cultural or local knowledge. You take a guess as to what the best response might be, which often causes shock, bemusement, or offense to your neighbors. *Buyoff*: I understood that reference!

Secret of Blessing - Once per refresh, you can bring someone back from the brink of death through laying on hands. They'll be awful sore, but they'll be able to function normally.

Secret of the Ghost Blade - You can summon, in your hand, a ghostly transparent blade. Its configuration is up to you: longsword, rapier, dagger, but not a spear or other reach weapon. You cannot throw it. The blade has no weight or material mass, but when it touches flesh, it causes debilitating pain.

Secret of Old Earth - During every refresh, you heal your own wounds and injuries, even if you are seemingly dead. When you heal from a serious injury, ask the game master for a memory fragment that you can now access.

TRAITS

Athletics (Strength, Endurance, Agility, Speed, Coordination, Reflexes)

Uncanny Endurance (Resist Elements, Eat Anything, Go Without, High Pain Tolerance)

Knowledge (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Metallurgy, Cavorite, Logic, Biology)

"The old man said I was a White Hat -- a strange visitor that shows up in the desert once or twice a generation. The White Hats always fight evil and injustice, right wrongs, and help the weak and defenseless. I know I have a mission, and what the old man tells me seems right. I just wish I could remember."

RULES SUMMARY

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