

(just) a game by Jason I Blair

guns

IN THE SUBURBS

“Good afternoon, Joan, did you hear what happened at the Hendersons’ last night?”

“Hear last night? Brenda, did you see what happened this morning at the McCoys’ place?”

Or, The Houses on Roulette Street



GOOD FENCES MAKE FOR GOOD NEIGHBORS.

Roulette Street is an ideal neighborhood to settle down and raise a family. The median income is 7.4 million dollars a year, with no house bringing in less than 1.3 million per annum. It's a gated community, with an exclusionary admissions policy, but you belong there—your husband is an important man.

Guns in the suburbs is a card game for four players. It uses a standard deck of playing cards, which can be purchased in discount stores and game shops worldwide. Not that you would shop at such places, personally, but maybe you could send the maid out for one.

Each player is a housewife in one of four prominent families on Roulette Street. Once the children are out the door to school or college or their internship at your husband's law firm, you have little to do during the day except sit around and gossip with the other wives. Throughout the game, players will reveal dirty little secrets about one of the neighbors—one of the other ladies who has sat down for brunch. Be careful what you expose, as everyone has laundry they'd rather not air in public. Especially you.

MOVING DAY.

You need a deck of standard playing cards, all 52 of them. One player should shuffle the deck thoroughly then deal the cards out, one at a time, to everybody, starting with the player to the left and continuing clockwise. Every player will end up with 13 cards. The player to the left of the dealer goes first.

Let the cattiness begin.

STARTING TROUBLE.

Before every round, each player gives one of her cards to each of the players at the table. This is handed to each player face-down.

A round starts with a player laying down one card in front of her. With that card, she starts a rumor about one of the other women or that woman's family. The player names both the target and the gist of the rumor. The target has the option to abstain and let the rumor build or to start a rumor of her own. The person to the first player's left has the option of building upon any of the rumors in play. If she plays on a rumor, it gets stronger. If she doesn't, the next person, going clockwise, may build on it and so on. When a player builds on a rumor,

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she introduces new facts or people involved—and this continues until a run has built to five cards or is finished by the target of the rumor.

AGHAST AT THE THOUGHT.

The player whose family name is about to be dragged through the mud has two options: Either let the rumor continue or fight back.

If she decides to let the rumor continue, she does nothing but sits idly by and lets the other woman chat. If she decides to fight, she defends herself by starting a rumor of her own. The rumor must be directed back at the accuser but can be of any rank or suit.

A player fights back by placing a card of her own in front of her and starting a new rumor. The original accuser (at whom the new rumor is focused, cannot rebuke or fight back as she already has a rumor in play.

When a player has decided to fight back, the other players may choose to play on either side. A player can only play on one rumor per turn (but can play on multiple rumors in a round). The first run to hit five cards is the dominant rumor. The target of the rumor then gets the cards (and their points).

A rumor that does not reach five cards is unsubstantiated and those players who contributed to it get the cards.

Why not fight? Well, if the player who has been targeted can play a card on the run, the rumor ends immediately and the accusing player gets the points. And points are not good things in this game. Also, any rumor you start can end up unresolved and those points will come back on you.

Once a run is started, each player, in turn, has three options:

Pass: If a player passes, she lays down no cards and play continues to the next player.

Gossip: If a player decides to gossip, she can either lay down the next card in the run (of the same suit) or any higher card in the run (again, of the same suit). So if a current run has the 4, 5, 6 of diamonds, she may play the 7 or any card higher than 7.

If a run hits the Ace without having five cards in play, the next card can be the 2 of that suit or any higher card. If a run hits

the highest card in play and that card is not an Ace, the run will remain unsubstantiated.

No matter which card is played, its rank (the number on the card) must be higher than the one it is being played upon.

Escalate: Finally, a player may choose to escalate. To escalate, the player must play the card of the very next rank but of a higher suit. This not only ups the points in the run, but the narrative as well since a fact relating to the new suit of the run must be incorporated into the rumor. Subsequent cards in the run must either be of the new suit (again, higher than the previous as discussed in “Gossip”) or the next highest card of a higher suit (so, yes, you may escalate upon an escalation—just be sure to incorporate that escalation into the narrative).

The hierarchy of the suits, from highest to lowest is:
Spades > Clubs > Hearts > Diamonds.

Note: A target cannot escalate a rumor against her. She can only end a run by playing the exact next card, of the same suit, on a run during her turn.

SHE’S SEEN TOO MUCH.

It’s possible for a player to have cards in sequence or even a complete five-card run in her hand. If she does, the player may play all the cards in the sequence, building up a pretty solid rumor.

In the case that a player has the complete run, the rumor cannot be countered or defended against; the target simply gets all the cards. If a player has multiple cards that can be played on a single run, she may only do so if the cards immediately follow the card they’re being played on in sequence.

WHAT DID THAT BITCH SAY ABOUT ME?

The suits each correspond with certain, shall we say, *transgressions*. When rumors are started, their basic gist is determined by the suit of the run. No matter what the rumor is, it must have the potential to deface the household or the family that it is about.

(spades)

This is the suit of weapon-related or federal crimes. This can include a child being caught with a gun at school or robbing a liquor store, a husband’s embezzling hitting the newspapers, or even the young son shooting the neighbor’s cat. If it involves a weapon or the crime is a felony, it fits the suit of spades.

(clubs)

This is the suit of domestic violence and abuse in all its forms. This can include late-night, paint-peeling rows that can be heard down the block, physical or sexual abuse within the household, drug or alcohol problems, etc.

(hearts)

This is the suit of problems relating to love, infidelity, marital issues, and all the wonderful things that go with it. These can include extramarital affairs, pregnancies (pre-teen, teen, out-of-marriage, or from those aforementioned affairs), the outing of a gay child, impotence/frigidity, etc.

(diamonds)

This is the suit of money problems, changes at a job situation. Examples include a husband being passed over for a promotion, losing his job; a spend-easy child racking up massive credit card debt; repossession of a car or major appliance, etc.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES.

A round is resolved when either one of the rumors is ended (by hitting five cards or by being finished by the target's card) or all players have passed and played no cards on any of the rumors in play.

All those who played cards on unresolved runs are stuck with those cards and the points they ensue. Sometimes, being a gossip comes back on you.

RUMORMONGERING.

The strength and complexity of the rumor should correspond with the build-up in the run. If a person plays only one card, the rumor should start off more suggestive than explicit. More, "So did you all hear about Rebecca's husband and the babysitter?" Then, with each card played, the rumor should build. "Oh yeah, in the back of the Range Rover no less." Then, "It wouldn't be the first time, either." And so on.

A rebuttal might be, "We traded in the Range Rover for an H2 last year. If it's the green one that's been parking at the cul-de-sac, Rebecca, that would be your husband humping the jailbait, not mine."

TEA & ENMITY.

Here are some examples of **Guns in the suburbs** in play.

There are four players. They are, starting from the first player: Brenda, Joan, Deborah, Rebecca.

Example 1: A black eye.

Brenda (playing a 3 of clubs): So, Deborah, are those bruises I saw on your son Jesse's date last week? They looked nasty.

Deborah, at this point, can abstain or fight back. Deborah chooses to abstain: Whatever are you talking about?

Joan is the next player but she passes, cho. Play advances to Deborah who also passes.

Rebecca (playing the 6 of clubs): Oh, are you speaking of Tyne? Have you seen the way she shies away whenever Jesse comes close. Poor girl.

Brenda (has the 5 and 6 of clubs, playing them both): Really, I don't know how she can stand being treated like that. I guess Jesse got that from his father. (Because Brenda had two consecutive cards, she decides to heat things up.) Didn't Jesse's last girlfriend end up in the hospital?

Play advances to Joan, who passes again.

With a catty grin, Deborah plays the 9 of clubs, ending the run and, since Deborah's family is the one at stake, she must turn the rumor on Brenda, who started it): Jesse broke up with Tyne a month ago. If I remember correctly, Brenda, she's now dating your boy. As for his last girlfriend, she was having her tonsils out, Brenda. Really, you should know better.

All the cards go to Brenda's player who will be stuck with all the points.

Example 2: Turning the wheel.

It is now Joan's turn to go since she's next, going clockwise. Joan (playing a 4 of clubs): Brenda, I hear your husband hit a pole coming out of a bar yesterday. Has Roger been hitting the bottle again?

Brenda (as the target she must decide to abstain or fight back; Brenda decides to fight back and puts down a 7 of diamonds): Unlike you, Joan, we have the money to take care of the dent, no matter its origin.

The sides have been set.

It is now Deborah's turn, since she's to the original player's left. If Deborah has a playable card, she can put it down and build on whichever run her card fits. If she has a card that can be played on either of the runs, Deborah must decide if she's going to back up Joan's or Brenda's story. If she has no playable cards, or doesn't wish to get involved, she can simply pass.

In this case, Deborah is going to play the 5 of clubs.

Deborah (playing the 5 of clubs on Joan's run): Oh yes, I saw Roger stumbling home the other night around 2 in the morning. Poor man. I guess he has nothing worth staying home for.

It is now Rebecca's turn. She has both the 7 of clubs (to build on Joan's run) and the 8 of diamonds (to build on Brenda's run). Rebecca decides to back up Brenda.

Rebecca (playing the 8 of diamonds): Brenda, you heard that too? Oh Joan, you poor thing. However will your family survive now that your husband's been demoted?

It is now Brenda's turn to play. She has the next card in her run (the 9 of diamonds) and the next card in Joan's run (the 6 of clubs). If she plays the 6 of clubs, she will end Joan's run and Joan will get the points (since the rumor is about Brenda's family and Brenda is playing the final card). If she wants, she can choose to extend her run in the hopes of finishing it out. Brenda ponders for a moment then plays the 9 of diamonds on her run.

Brenda (playing the 9 of diamonds): It's not the first time Joan's family has fallen on hard times, is it, Joan? I remember when she spent all that money on her daughter's cotillion and no one came. Really, some people just can't handle money.

Play goes to Joan who has no playable cards. Deborah is the next player and she has the 10 of diamonds. It looks like Joan's rumor-mongering is working against her.

Deborah (playing the 10 of diamonds): That is so true. Ah well, Joan's family wouldn't be the first in this neighborhood to lose everything.

It is now Rebecca's turn. Rebecca has the Jack of diamonds, ending Brenda's run.

Rebecca (playing the Jack of diamonds): Joan's new money, anyway. Those types never last long.

Brenda's run against Joan is now complete: all five cards in the run are in play. Brenda hands the cards to Joan and Joan is now sitting on a bunch of points.

Since there is still a run in play (Joan's run against Brenda), play continues around the table. It is now Brenda's turn. Brenda has the next card in Joan's run against her and plays it.

Brenda (playing the 6 of clubs): Oh, and Joan, I wouldn't spread lies about anyone falling off the wagon after your display at last month's New Year's party.

Since the target ended the accuser's run, the cards (and their points) go to the accuser. Poor Joan has had her own rumor turned on her but has had another rumor thrown at her. Joan will have quite an axe to grind next round.

Example 3: Pruning the flowers.

It is now Deborah's turn to go since she's next, going clockwise. Deborah decides to start a rumor against Rebecca.

Deborah (playing an 8 of hearts): So, Rebecca, how's the new babysitter working out? I hear your husband's taken quite a liking to her.

Rebecca is not only the target but the next player. Nothing changes here; she can either abstain or start a rumor of her own.

Rebecca decides to abstain: I'm sure you're reading too much into it.

Play advances to Brenda.

Brenda (playing the 10 of hearts): She only lives down the road. Why does your husband always drive her home, Rebecca?

Joan decides to escalate and, in doing so, will have to escalate the narrative as well.

Joan (playing the Jack of spades): My maid told me she saw some hickeys on that girl's neck. How old is she, anyway? 15?

The suit is now spades and, since, spades is the highest suit, the run cannot be escalates—only sustained.

It is now Deborah's turn again but she has no cards that can be played.

Rebecca (playing the King of spades): Oh, she's had those hickeys ever since she started with us. Deborah, wasn't it your husband who recommended her?

Since Rebecca was the target and she played on the accusing run, the round is over and the rumor is turned around on Deborah, who is stuck with the points.

CALCULATING BITCHES.

Once a player is out of cards or no more runs can be made, the houses settle their differences. Each card is worth its stated numerical value (2s are worth 2 points, 3 are worth 3 points, etc), face cards are worth 10 points, and aces are worth eleven—even if they were used as ones in a run.

Sum the total for each suit and separate them. There's one last bit of calculation that must be done.

The total for spades is multiplied by 4; clubs is multiplied by 3; hearts is multiplied by 2. Diamonds are not multiplied by anything.

The woman with the lowest score wins the game. In the case of ties, all who tie are winners.

Well, as much of a winner as you can be when there are guns in the suburbs.

(just) a game by jason l blair

guns IN THE SUBURBS

"I don't know what Joan told you but let me clear something up-- I've never even seen the pool boy naked much less--?"

"Dear, you don't have to explain anything to me."

Or, The Houses on Roulette Street

The houses on Roulette Street are towering and immaculate. Their exteriors are well-kept and the lawns are expertly manicured.

The people inside are small and petty. Their exteriors are well-kept and their nails are expertly manicured.

The blood on their hands is invisible, but the roses that line the street are breathtaking.

This is (just) a game.

Guns in the suburbs, or the houses on Roulette Street was written and designed by Jason L Blair. Many thanks to Seth A. Ben-Ezra for his assistance with the expanded mechanic.

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Suit Cheat Sheet: Transgressions & Hierarchy



Trumps All Other Suits

This is the suit of weapon-related or federal crimes. This can include a child being caught with a gun at school or robbing a liquor store, a husband's embezzling hitting the newspapers, or even the young son shooting the neighbor's cat. If it involves a weapon or the crime is a felony, it fits the suit of spades.



Trumps Hearts & Diamonds

This is the suit of domestic violence and abuse in all its forms. This can include late-night, paint-peeling rows that can be heard down the block, physical or sexual abuse within the household, drug or alcohol problems, etc.



Trumps Diamonds

This is the suit of problems relating to love, infidelity, marital issues, and all the wonderful things that go with it. These can include extramarital affairs, pregnancies (pre-teen, teen, out-of-marriage, or from those aforementioned affairs), the outing of a gay child, impotence/frigidity, etc.



Does Not Trump

This is the suit of money problems, changes at a job situation. Examples include a husband being passed over for a promotion, losing his job; a spend-easy child racking up massive credit card debt; repossession of a car or major appliance, etc.

Placeholders: Family Names (optional)

If you like, you can print this page out, cut out the four name cards, fold them in half, then place one in front of each player. Otherwise, make up your own names or just use your real ones.

(second player)
Joan Monroe
Joan Monroe
(second player)

(fourth player)
Rebecca Fairbanks
Rebecca Fairbanks
(fourth player)

(first player)
Brenda Childress
Brenda Childress
(first player)

(third player)
Deborah McCoy
Deborah McCoy
(third player)

Placeholders: Family Names (optional)