

# *CUTTHROAT*

LIFE ON THE HIGHWAY



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## Cutthroat

Circa: 1970's

Location: Mythic America

Protagonists: Biker Street Gangs

### What the game is about:

The game is about dominating your fellow player-characters through coercion and force. You take on the role of an early 1970's biker gang member. The object is to become the undisputed Top Dog of the Gang. This is accomplished by using your opponent's vices and weakness against him, as well as using your talents and assets to assist yourself. Humor is definitely a part of the game, so play up on the stereotypes and mythos surrounding biker gangs. It is possible for play to become contentious at times, but no one stays on top for very long. Be cool, let things go, and see how they play out.

### What the characters do:

Characters start out as either Bikers or Girlfriends. Bikers maraud about the countryside satisfying their Vices as well as their Girlfriend's Desires. They'll roam from place to place and have a Raid- where they bust into a town, take what they want, and skedaddle before the Police can do much about it. After a tiring Raid, the Bikers will come together for a Rally. At the Rallies, they will Brag and Challenge each other, trying to earn the title of Top Dog- which is the supreme and unchallenged leader of the Gang. At the Rallies, Girlfriends will often Approach other Bikers. Sometimes it's just to flirt or satisfy their Desire, but usually it's to wheedle out another Biker's Vice or Secret. One should never trust a dame, but out on the road it's hard to resist such pleasant company.

### What the players do:

Each player has two characters to play simultaneously: a Biker and a Girlfriend. The Girlfriend belongs to the player's Biker. And "belongs" really does mean "is owned by" in this case. As long as the Biker satisfies the Girlfriend's Desire (usually by collecting something on a Raid), then she cannot leave him and must follow all his orders. Players use their Girlfriends to learn the Vices and Secrets of other Bikers in order to weaken them during a Challenge (which is when two Bikers face off to see who is more dominant/stronger). The player wins when his Biker has managed to Dominate all the other Bikers in the Gang.

### Chargen:

Character generation is very simple in Cutthroat, but that doesn't mean you don't put much thought in it. Be mindful of the words you choose to describe your character, and don't get too caught up in his/her Stat right away. It's bound to change and be modified constantly.

**Biker Chargen:** To make a Biker, first roll 2d6- that's your Stat, which is short for Status. This is your character's rank in the Gang. Rank is everything to a Biker. When he's got a higher Rank, he performs better, he's stronger against other Bikers, and he can stand up to the Police. However, his Rank is not the only thing a Biker has. He also has a Bike, a Girlfriend, a Talent, a Secret, and a

Vice. Creating a Girlfriend is covered later, but now you must choose a Bike, Talent, Secret, and Vice for your character.

*Bike:* A Biker can begin with two types of Bikes: Crappy or New. A Crappy Bike gives the Biker a –2 to his Stat, but does grant him or his Girlfriend (player's choice) one additional Talent. A New Bike does not modify his Stat in any way nor does it grant additional Talents. A man who loses his Bike (even if it's a crappy one) receives a –2 penalty to his Stat. Word of advice: don't lose your bike! Players may eventually buy a Custom Bike. A Custom Bike is a souped up model that reflects the Biker's personality. It adds +2 to his Stat and makes him the envy of all the Bikers who don't have one. Custom Bikes cost \$10,000, and since all the Bikers start out broke, it may take a while for them to Raid enough to earn that sort of cash.

*Talent:* This is something your Biker can do very well. It should be a narrowly defined activity associated with Biking. Examples include: Riding (his Bike), Shooting, Drinking, Fighting, Intimidating, and so on. Whatever Talent you choose, it must be a verb, and it must end in –ing. Your Talent will come into play quite often, so give it some thought before just slapping it down on your character sheet. It's part of what defines you.

*Secret:* Every Biker has a secret that he brings with him to the Gang. You must choose a secret for your Biker. It can be anything from "Nicotine Addiction" to "I used to Be an Accountant." Whatever it is, you do not want anyone else to find out about it.

*Vice:* A Biker's Vice is similar to a secret, but not as closely guarded. This is some activity your Biker likes to indulge in. It could be anything from Gambling to Overeating to Drag Racing. Your Vice makes you weak, but it's a necessary part of who you are.

Players are free to add any equipment to their Biker they choose, though none of it will provide any Stat Bonuses or additional Talents. Once you have your Stat, Bike, Talent, Secret, and Vice completed, your character is done. Fast and easy, just like the next character you're about to make.

**Girlfriend Chargen:** Making a Girlfriend is somewhat similar to making a Biker. Roll 2d6 to make her Stat. If it's higher than your Biker's Stat, don't worry that's just fine. The two aren't really related. Like a Biker, a Girlfriend also has a Talent and Vice, but she also has a Leash and a Desire. You will need to create these for her to complete her character.

*Talent:* This is something your Girlfriend is good at. She will often use her Talent to trick other Bikers into telling her their Vices and Secrets. She can also use her Talent to encourage her Biker to do well in a Challenge.

*Vice:* Your Girlfriend has a weakness. It is like the Biker's Vice, but should be a little more elaborate. Other Bikers and Girlfriends will use it against her to prevent her from encouraging her Biker.

*Leash:* A Girlfriend's Leash is what ties her (in a figurative sense) to her Biker. This is how she came to be his Girlfriend and why she sticks with him no matter what. The leash also ties the Biker to her. Bikers are not aloud to replace their Girlfriends and can only lose a Girlfriend by not fulfilling her Desire, dying, or during an Approach.

*Desire:* This is something your Girlfriend wants. It might be jewelry, it might be clothes, it might even be a thirst for violence. Whatever it is, you must fulfill her desire in order to keep her around. A Desire should be something that can only be met on a Raid; that means it will probably be something material or thrilling. If her Desire is something that you cannot fulfill on a Raid, you will lose her.

Once you have her Stat, Talent, Vice, Leash, and Desire created your Girlfriend is done. If any Biker should somehow lose his Girlfriend, his stat is halved, round down. Yeah, it is kind of a bummer, but she is more important than your Bike.

Once all characters are made, everyone reveals their Girlfriend's Vice and Desire to all other players. This is not kept secret by anyone, and players are free to ask to be reminded of it at any time.

### The Rat

The Rat is a special character. He's a Biker too, but he's a little bit more. The character who gets to be the Rat is the character who *starts* with the lowest Stat. If there is a tie, it goes to the one with the Girlfriend with the lowest Stat. If it is still a tie, each rolls 2d6. The lowest roll wins (repeat as necessary). The Rat always stays as the Rat even if his Stat increases beyond another Biker's. Once it's decided who the Rat is, it's final.

The Rat is the runt of the litter as far as the Gang goes. He's weak, he doesn't succeed at his raids very often, and no one really likes him. In fact he'd probably get kicked out if it weren't for the fact that he knows everyone's Vice and Secret. That's right, after the Rat is decided and everyone makes their Bikers, they must pass the Rat a slip of paper with their Vice and Secret written on it. The Rat should keep track of this and he **MUST** keep it safe from the eyes of the other players.

The Rat also has a special responsibility. After each Raid, the Bikers must Brag about what they did. The Rat chooses the best bragger or braggers (explained later in Advancement) and those characters receive a reward. It is a very important job and one he should take seriously. Even though you've been kicked around a lot by the other Gang members, the Rat is a very important role to play.

### Resolution

The resolution system in Cutthroat is very easy. There are two different kinds- Task and Conflict. Each is used in a specific circumstance.

Task resolution is used when the Biker is trying to accomplish something basic like "knock over a bank", "shoot at Police", or "ride out of town." It is used to see whether or not the Biker accomplished that action. To resolve a task, the player rolls 2d6. If the result is less than or equal to the Biker's Stat, then the attempt succeeds.

Conflict resolution is used only during a Challenge or an Approach. A Challenge is when one Biker is trying to exert Dominance over another Biker. In this case, both Bikers roll 2d6 and *add* their Stat. The Biker with the highest total succeeds. An Approach is something similar. This is when a Girlfriend tries to get another Biker to reveal his Vice or Secret to her. Just as before, each player

rolls 2d6, adds their character's Stat, and the highest total wins. The exact details of Challenge and Approach are related later, but resolution always works like this.

### Raids and Rallies

All play in Cutthroat is divided into two modes: Raids and Rallies. A Raid is any time a Biker goes to a town, store or some other public/semi-public location to accomplish some goal (even if it's by himself). Those goals can include but are not limited to fulfilling a Girlfriend's Desire, purchasing a Bike, obtaining some item to appeal to another Biker's Vice or Secret, showing off his skills to the townsfolk, etc.

When on a Raid, the Biker with the highest Stat acts first, followed by the Biker with the second highest, and so on until each has had a chance. After each person has a chance, narration starts over with the Biker who went first. The Biker with the highest Stat is considered the Raid Leader; only he can call off the raid once it has begun. Each player takes turns narrating what he does until a roll is called for or they choose to pass. After a player rolls to accomplish something (rob a jewelry store for instance) it becomes the next person's turn. They narrate, roll, then pass. Each player may go as many times as they want until a Raid is called off. Once a Raid is called off, any player may ride out with the Leader. Bikers are welcome to stay after a Raid is called off, but things get a little more dangerous if they do (explained later). Any Biker who leaves *before* the raid is called off, is considered a Coward, and that might come back to hurt him latter during Bragging. During a Raid, the Girlfriends stay behind. They are not allowed to accompany their Biker (psst, they just get in the way).

A Rally is any time the Bikers are not on a Raid. They congregate in some remote spot, far from any Police. There they party, celebrate their latest caper, and most importantly Challenge each other for Dominance. While at a Rally, Bikers are not allowed to physically Harm other Bikers or Girlfriends. That isn't to say that Rallies aren't exciting. They are. In fact, it's where the true action of the game takes place. The Rally is created as an environment where the Bikers and Girlfriends may Challenge, Approach, Brag, Call a Raid, describe themselves, introduce their characters, and socialize with other Biker/Girlfriends. Bikers may also strike deals with each other and secretly or openly plot against other Bikers. The sky's the limit!

While at the Rally, order of play is reversed from a Raid. The Biker with the lowest Stat goes first, followed by the next lowest, and so on to the Biker with the highest Stat (then it starts again with the lowest). Girlfriends do not get a turn of their own, but go on their Biker's turn. Each player takes turns narrating what his characters do until a roll is necessary or they pass. Once the roll is resolved, narration rights pass to the next player. Players are free to pass if they choose. Their characters are not required to act.

### Calling a Raid

Any player may call a Raid. To call a Raid, they must use their turn during a Rally to announce that they intend to Raid a town, store, whatever. Once they do, they are skipped over as far as narration turns go until the Raid begins. All players are *not* required to join in the Raid. They are free to choose to sit it out. Sitting out a Raid has it's own risks, but it also has it's own rewards. Players must decide which is best for them.

If a player wants to join the Raid, they must declare they are going to do so on their next turn. After declaring they are going to join the Raid, they are still free to act until they make a roll or pass the narration rights, but as soon as their turn is over, they too are skipped until the raid begins. If a player does not declare they are going to join the raid during their next opportunity to do so, they may not declare they will join after. They missed their chance.

A Raid begins once all players have either passed or joined the Raid. The Raid leader is always the Biker on the Raid with the highest Stat, even if he didn't call it.

### Bragging

Characters advance in Cutthroat by Bragging. After each Raid, when all the Bikers return to the Rally point (instantaneous after they leave a Raid unless there is some special circumstance) they begin a Bragging session. During the session, each player takes two turns boasting about what they did on the Raid. These two turns are non-consecutive, so narration will pass around as normal. Bikers are free to insult, undermine, and denigrate (calling them a Coward for instance) the other Bikers in order to make it appear they were more heroic in the Raid. Likewise, Bikers are free to rebut and turn the tables on the other Bikers on their second Bragging turn. Again, players may pass if they choose.

Once everyone has taken their turns, the Rat must decide which Biker or Bikers did the best job *Bragging*. The rewards are not given for what was actually done on the Raid, but for how the players make it *sound* like it happened on the Raid. The prize goes to the one who can sell himself the best. If there are 4 or less players, the Rat chooses only one. If there are more than four, the Rat chooses two. If you are chosen by the Rat as the best Bragger that session, you gain a permanent +1 bonus your Stat. The Rat automatically receives a permanent +1 Stat bonus after each Bragging session and therefore cannot choose himself as the best (however, he is still free to participate and show them how it's done).

It is important to remember that this is all in good fun. The Bragging and insulting is to be directed from Biker to Biker NOT player to player. Any player who intentionally insults or disparages another player automatically has 2 points deducted from his Biker's Stat. That's *not* what Cutthroat is all about.

### Trumps

Each player begins with 3 Trumps. A Trump allows you to alter the order of turns at a Rally. To play a Trump, declare that you are doing so at the *beginning* of another Biker's turn. Narration rights immediately switch to you, and you may take your turn as normal. After you are done, narration moves on to the person who normally follows you according to their Stat. It does *not* automatically return to the person that you Trumped unless that person normally follows you in the rotation. Once all 3 Trumps are spent, you cannot earn extra ones. Also note that you cannot play a Trump during a Raid.

### Police

The main opposition to the Biker Gang is the Police. Sometimes they will be around, sometimes not. Police are played by the players who are not participating in the Raid. All Police have been instructed to “shoot to kill” all Biker Gang members. Meeting them on a Raid is very dangerous.

Creating a Police officer is easy. They automatically have a Stat of 5. They have no Talents, Vices, Secrets, Desires, or Girlfriends. They are there simply to shoot and be shot at. Once a Police officer dies, the player playing him is out for the rest of the Raid and may not make another one until the next Raid begins.

### Harm (Combat)

For the most part, Cutthroat is not about trying to kill (although it can be a viable strategy if played right). It can happen however, and players should be wary of it. Bikers (and Police) have three physical conditions in Cutthroat- Alive, Wounded, and Dead.

*Alive:* This is the default starting position for all characters. They are alive and well. They have no Stat penalties for their physical condition and are ready to take on the world.

*Wounded:* A character who is wounded has been successfully shot either by the Police or by another Biker while on a Raid. A Wounded character has a –1 penalty to their Stat. To remove a Wound, the Biker must sit out a Raid.

*Dead:* If a Biker is successfully shot while Wounded, he is considered dead. Combat is very lethal in Cutthroat. A Biker who dies may not come back for any reason. His Girlfriend then passes to the character with the highest Stat. The player may still play Police during a Raid but is otherwise out of the game. All his Biker’s possessions are considered destroyed.

### Challenge and Approach

In order to win the game, a single Biker must exert his Dominance over all other Bikers. This is done through the Challenge. Challenges are tough, however, and a Biker needs all the advantages he can get. Enter the Girlfriend who can learn his opponent’s weaknesses through the Approach.

*Approach:* To make an Approach, the player takes on the role of the Girlfriend. She must go to another Biker, engage in conversation, and then learn his Vice and/or Secret. Once she has engaged him in conversation, a roll is made. Each player rolls 2d6 and adds their character’s Stat. Consult the table below to see the results:

- Girlfriend wins by 6 or less: She learns her opponent’s Vice
- Girlfriend wins by 7 or more: She learns her opponent’s Secret
- Girlfriend loses by 6 or less: She gives away her Biker’s Vice to her opponent
- Girlfriend loses by 7 to 11 or more: She gives away her Biker’s Secret to her opponent
- Girlfriend loses by 12 or more: She leaves her current Biker and becomes leashed to her opponent

If the Girlfriend knows her opponent’s Vice, she gains a +1 bonus to her Stat for this roll. If she knows his Secret, she gains an additional +3 bonus. If her Talent somehow relates to her opponent’s

Vice, she gains another +2 bonus. If her opponent's Talent relates to her Vice, he gains a +2 bonus to his Stat for this roll.

In order for a Girlfriend to use her Talent in an approach, the player must narrate how she does so. This may be a stretch for some players, but that's the point of the game. You will be put in positions that may, at first, seem uncomfortable and new. That's okay. Don't be afraid to act out what is going on and what you are intending to do. Players should not poke fun of those who do attempt to act out and/or describe the actions of the Girlfriend. Instead, they should encourage and recognize a player for taking on a more difficult persona. The game is about having fun and exploring new avenues of role-playing, not lambasting someone to the point they are afraid to act. Everyone will take on the Girlfriend role eventually, and just remember you're all in it together.

If a Girlfriend manages to learn anything from her Approach, she immediately tells her Biker. After which, her Desire is considered Unfulfilled. While she is Unfulfilled, she cannot make another Approach.

*Challenge:* To issue a Challenge, a player must declare which Biker his Biker wishes to go up against. A Challenge is vaguely analogous to a fistfight, but neither character suffers any Harm during a challenge. A Challenge cannot be refused. Once it is issued, both players roll 2d6 and add their stat. If the Biker who issued the challenge has the highest total, his opponent is now considered Dominated. If the Biker who issued the challenge has the lowest total, he has a permanent -1 penalty applied to his Stat.

There are several modifiers to a Biker's Stat during a Challenge:

- If a Biker knows his opponent's Vice, he gains a +1 bonus to his Stat for this roll.
- If he knows his opponent's Secret, he gains an additional +3 bonus.
- If his Talent somehow relates to his opponent's Vice or to Challenging in some way, he gains another +2 bonus.
- A Girlfriend whose Talent somehow relates to Challenging gives her Biker an additional +1 bonus.
- If her Talent relates to her opponent's Vice or Secret and she knows either or both, her Biker gains another +2 bonus.
- If her Talent relates to her opponent's Girlfriend's Vice, it cancels out any bonus that Biker gains from his Girlfriend.

That's a little complicated, but if you read it carefully and slowly, it should all come together for you. These rules are standard for all instances, except those involving the Rat. Rules for him, are a little different and are as follows.

First, anytime you wish to Approach or Challenge the Rat, you must first get by his Girlfriend. This is done through a simple, unmodified Conflict Resolution roll. If the person Approaching/Challenging has a higher total than the Rat's Girlfriend, then he/she gets by and can speak to the Rat. If you then make a successful Approach to the Rat (as per normal rules above) you get to choose to learn the Vice or Secret of any player of your choice at the table from the Rat. Also, the Rat is the only Biker who can be approached by any other Biker. However, each Biker may only approach the Rat once per Rally. A successful Challenge of the Rat does *not* grant you access to the Vices or



Secrets of the other players. You must still follow the Approach procedures outlined above with the *exception* of you do not have to go through his Girlfriend anymore.

If, during a game, a Biker Challenges and Dominates another Biker who already Dominated him, then the Domination switches. That sounds like it needs an example. For instance, Rasputan Milewalker made a successful Domination against Alester Twotone during the second Rally of the game. Later, in the fifth Rally, Alester Challenges and wins against Rasputan. Now Alester is considered to have Dominated Rasputan and sadly Rasputan no longer is considered to have Dominated Alester. The pecking order has switched.

It is important to remember that if you are Approached or Challenged, it does not count as your turn to narrate nor does it count as one of your Trumps.

### Becoming the Top Dog

To win at Cutthroat, you must Dominate all your opponent's Bikers that are still left in the game. Depending on the level of Police activity and the hostility of your fellow Gang members, that number may vary from game to game. Just remember, to win you must have made a successful Challenge to all the living Bikers. It doesn't matter who has a Girlfriend and who doesn't. It doesn't matter who has the highest Stat. And the Rat is only one of many Bikers in the Gang. Dominating him is no more prestigious than any other.

### Rewards

In many games, winning doesn't mean much the next time you play. Oh sure, there might be something you learned about Strategy or about how to tweak the system a little better. However, for the most part one win doesn't carry over to the next time you play. Cutthroat is different. Your wins grant you advantages the next time you play with your group and compound as you continue your winning ways. The rewards are voluntary, so if you feel it's not very sporting you don't have to take them. But they really are there so you and your friends have something to play for, something at stake. What follows below is a simple table that describes the reward system for winning Cutthroat.

- 1<sup>st</sup> win: Winner may choose to be the Rat next time regardless of Stats.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> win: Winner may begin with a Custom Bike.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> win: Winner may begin with 2 Girlfriends instead of 1.
- 4<sup>th</sup> win: Winner may be all-time Raid Leader and the only person who can call a Raid regardless of Stat or circumstance.
- 5<sup>th</sup> win: Winner's Girlfriend may make two Approaches before her Desire becomes Unfulfilled.
- 6<sup>th</sup> win: You're the King! Now take the game to another group of players who have never played and introduce them to it.

Note: Rewards are only in effect if you are playing with the same exact people you have won against in the past. If the group has a different make-up, then everyone starts on a level playing field, i.e. no rewards are in effect for anyone. Rewards are only in effect for one game. So if you win one and then don't with the next, you don't get the advantage twice. If you do win for a second time with the same group, you go on to the 2<sup>nd</sup> win Reward and so on.

## Starting the Game

It seems strange that the last chapter of the book is about Starting the Game, but that's really the best thing to leave you with. The game begins at a Rally. No one is Dominated by anyone else, and everyone pretty much starts with the same advantages and resources unless they are a previous winner. All Girlfriends begin with their Desires Unfulfilled, so a Raid is definitely in the works. Players may Challenge and Call a Raid immediately, there is no rule that says you have to wait. Once all the characters are created you're ready to go. Good luck!

### Biker Character Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Bike: \_\_\_\_\_

Talent: \_\_\_\_\_

Secret: \_\_\_\_\_

Vice: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

### Girlfriend Character Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Talent: \_\_\_\_\_

Vice: \_\_\_\_\_

Leash: \_\_\_\_\_

Desire: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

### Rat Sheet

Biker's Name:

Vice:

Secret:

Biker's Name:

Vice:

Secret:

Biker's Name:

Vice:

Secret:

Biker's Name:

Vice:

Secret:

Biker's Name:

Vice:

Secret:

Biker's Name:

Vice:

Secret