

Mantis Falls
Action Card Compendium

Covers Base Set, Full Circle & Triad
Written by the Game's Designer

-- Introduction --

Like most games of tactics, Mantis Falls has the capacity to create two very different types of experiences. The first experience comes when the game is still mostly unfamiliar, with players discovering tactical possibilities for the first time and working to rapidly adapt to new opportunities they didn't before know existed. The second experience comes later, when the basic tactical possibilities are already understood and the vying for a competitive edge becomes a series of kaleidoscoping anticipations and countermoves.

The first of the above two experiences is one I have had the joy of sharing with many new players in many places, and one that I look forward to sharing many times more. But it is that second experience, the one of kaleidoscoping countermoves, that I have been most gratified to see resonate with players. It is *that* experience that kept me up at night for years of crafting, in search of just the right balance of possibilities that could make players feel like there existed nearly limitless ways to plan and nearly limitless things to fear. And it is from the building of *that* experience that the world of Mantis Falls has come to feel so real.

There is no right way to understand a game, and your enjoyment of Mantis Falls will never require you to read this book. But I offer this to you as a way, for those who seek it, to move from that first level of experience to the second more swiftly. It is a composite of thoughts and musings about the possibilities that lie buried within the action deck, told from the perspective of how I have come to view these cards myself when they hit my hand. It is not intended to be understood all in one sitting - it's designed to be read early, late and often in one's coming to know the game. Some points may feel easily understood even before your first playthrough, some you may come to disagree with and others may be illuminating to even skilled players after many plays. It is less a reference manual than a travel companion, something to keep under your arm as you enter into the dark roads ahead.

-- "Usefulness" Ratings --

Every action card in this book has a number of dots (1 through 5) beneath its title. These represent an entirely subjective "usefulness" rating I have assigned the cards for this guidebook. "Usefulness" can be a tricky thing to summarize, as some cards are slightly useful a lot of the time (e.g., Whispers) and other cards may be *extremely* useful very occasionally (e.g., Conditional Release). So reducing that to a single number can be an oversimplification. But still, there is little doubt that a Ricochet or Call in a Hit provides game-changing power in a way that a Baseball Bat (for example) does not. And so, across the scope of many games, I have found there to be an undeniable stratification in terms of how I prioritize and value the different cards. Although applying any value system requires flexibility and nuance (the most poorly rated of cards can still win a game), it is my hope that offering these general assessments will help inform your strategies and decision-making in a positive way.

-- Insets --

Although the bulk of this guide is dedicated strictly to discussing action cards, there are several insets that provide related explanations or information. Find these here:

PAGE 11 - "Onslaught Attacks"

PAGE 15 - Under the Rose

PAGE 20 - The Suits

PAGE 29 - "Hand Space"

PAGE 30 - Road Statistics

Advantage

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If you are at least three roads in front of the other player, heal two of your wounds.



BASE SET: 1 Hunter

This card pairs a simple effect (heal two wounds) with a steep requirement (stand at least three roads in front of the other player). But any card that can heal you may be the difference between winning and losing and so should never be regarded lightly. And Advantage is at the heart of enough powerful combo possibilities to place it among the more valuable cards in the game. The fact that this card triggers the ability of the Doctor's Bag further adds to its use and versatility.

CONSIDER SAVING IT FOR A LAST GASP! Because your wounds can never go above maximum, you may get the most benefit by using this (or any healing card) during a Last Gasp!

MOVEMENT COMBOS: Hunter has several cards that you can put before Advantage in your action play to help you move three roads in front of the other player. A Bus Ticket can do that. Or put a Duck in front of an Advantage for a simple two-card combo that can possibly move you forward, heal you *and* wound the other player.

For another nice two-card combo, use a Reckless Abandon in front of an Advantage during a Last Gasp play. No overkill means the wounds from Reckless Abandon will do nothing to you. And the big forward movement it provides will often be enough to get you the three roads in front of the other player that you need. Throw in a Repetition or a Grenade, and this has the makings of a game-defining play.

Amalgam

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If you are within one road of the other player, heal one of your wounds and deal one wound to the other player.



BASE SET: 1 Hunter

A potent card, but an exacting one. It will sometimes seem extremely powerful, but it can also toil in your hand all game - taking up valuable hand space in search of a moment that never comes.

In games that are cooperative (or at least still appear to be), wounding the other player can be a tricky price to pay. And the requirement of being next to the other player may prove more challenging to count upon than you may expect. Although pairing it with Hunter cards that provide forward movement (Bus Ticket, Duck or Reckless Abandon) should certainly improve your chances, the necessity of Amalgam that you be in a fairly precise area on the road means forward movement can be a less-than-reliable way to get to the spot you need.

In the right situation, though, Amalgam can singlehandedly win you the game. Once a game becomes adversarial, the ability to heal yourself and simultaneously wound the other player is nearly the ultimate Last Gasp play. And to do both of those things with just a single card is an uncommon and impressive opportunity. If the other player is within one wound of maximum, think about putting Amalgam at the end of a Last Gasp play with Quick Thinking and either Reconsider or Ball and Chain. This heals you and makes for a smothering attack all at once.

USEFUL WHEN BOTH PLAYERS ARE AT MAXIMUM WOUNDS! When cooperating with the other player, there's a way to heal with Amalgam with no drawback at all. If something puts both of you at maximum wounds simultaneously and you take your Last Gasp first, heal with the Amalgam right then. No overkill means the wound you deal to the other player is harmless!

Badger



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The other player must either move forward two roads or receive one wound (their choice).

BASE SET: 1 Granite

Effects that primarily help the other player, such as Badger's, are usually less valuable than those that directly help you. So the usefulness of Badger can't compete with something like Sneakers. Thus, Badger is not an uncommon choice for discarding, nor is it uncommon to put it in Conserved Energy (often coupled with wishful thinking that the other player may retrieve it and play it for your benefit). But anything that helps the players get over the broken road is an important tool, and Badger has enough versatility and uncommon uses to make it quite helpful in the right situations.

WAYS TO USE IT: The most obvious play with Badger is to simply use it to help the other player move forward (a friendly, cooperative move). But consider, also, the possibility of using a Quick Thinking to put Badger in the *other player's* action play and move *yourself* forward two roads.

As part of an adversarial move, Badger can be an effective way to deal a wound to the other player. Towards the later stages of the road, forward movement is more likely to push the other player towards an ambush or out of range of a phone (and thus unable to Call in a Hit). In these cases, the other player will likely simply take the single wound. This doesn't make for a huge attack by itself, but Granite is a powerful suit with only a few options for damage-dealing - so the chance to deal a wound with Badger in the same action play as other Granite cards can be a compelling option.

Ball and Chain



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Steal up to three randomly selected actions from the other player's hand. Condition: Skip your initial movement phase.

BASE SET: 1 Granite

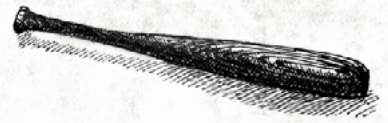
A hostile card that costs you your movement phase and also, often, the other player's trust. It therefore might be played only very infrequently (many games could pass in a row without this ever coming up in an action play). But it's powerful enough to always merit fear and consideration. Alongside Reconsider, Ricochet and Betrayal, Ball and Chain is one of the key powerhouse adversarial cards within the suit of Granite, and can be a cornerstone of a vicious attack. The decent chance this card provides you of robbing the other player of their Call in a Hit and/or last remaining healing card may sever their hopes in an instant.

As an assassin, you may want to hold onto this card from the moment you find it - giving it precious hand space all game as you build around it a deadly combo to use in the endgame. As a witness, the choice of whether to hold it indefinitely is less clear (although one benefit is that this keeps it away from other players). Because an assassin might covet this card more than a witness, it's one of the key "suspicious-seeming" cards for a player to find from a Little Look-See or Show of Trust.

DEADLY COMBOS: Stack this card in an action play alongside other Granite heavy-hitters (e.g., Reconsider, Ricochet, Betrayal) as part of a brutal "surprise - I'm an assassin and trying to kill you now" action play. Ways to deal wounds in this attack might be tough to come by, but a Granite Bullet will do the trick if you have the Gun. Other options include Smoke Bomb or Badger. Or include Quick Thinking to open up the possibility of a Hunter card such as Amalgam or Grenade.

TIMING TIP: If you play this card after the other player has created an action play with numerous cards (on their turn), their momentarily smaller hand size means you'll have a better chance of snagging their most crucial remaining cards (e.g., their Call in a Hit and/or a healing card).

Baseball Bat



Deal one wound to event opposition.

BASE SET:
1 Hunter, 1 Lilac, 1 Royal

Among the least powerful cards in the game, Baseball Bats are common fodder for discards and Conserved Energy. But they're also among the easiest ways to deal wounds to event oppositions, and a single wound from a Baseball Bat may well be what prevents you from suffering a punishing blow from an event. Don't build your strategy around these, but use them when you have them.

Betrayal



If you are in the dark, heal three of your wounds.

Affliction: Play until death (cooperative victory is no longer possible).

FULL CIRCLE: 1 Granite

This card signifies such a thorough betrayal that all hope of cooperative escape is lost for good. Betrayal is a powerful card (three healed wounds is a huge effect), but one with only niche uses.

As a witness, your hopes for a cooperative victory will make this card difficult to rely upon. As you approach the dark, though, it becomes an interesting card to hold onto as a safeguard against a possible forthcoming assassin's attack.

As an assassin, you'll know from the opening deal of roles that a cooperative victory is not possible, and so Betrayal's drawbacks will seem relatively slight. But consider that your assassin role also means you will have much less incentive to move into the dangerous, ambush-laden roads of the dark - and doing so just to make your Betrayal play possible may be a high price to pay. If other circumstances push you into the dark (e.g., needing to continue moving forward to avoid seeming suspicious), then Betrayal starts to emerge as a powerhouse in your hand. But keep in mind that the moment you play it, all pretense of cooperation is gone, and with it your ability to ever again catch the other player by surprise. Save it for a big, game-swinging moment and be prepared for the other player to come at you afterwards with all they've got (including Call in a Hit).

To make this pay off, pair it in an action play with other adversarial Granite cards like Reconsider, Ricochet, or Ball and Chain. Or include a Badger *before* revealing Betrayal to try to trick the other player into straying out of range of a phone. If you use Quick Thinking to add Repetition, then you can heal six wounds in one sequence, making for an enormously powerful endgame action play.

Bullet



If you have the Gun as a condition, deal two wounds to event opposition or the other player.

BASE SET: 1 Granite,
2 Hunter, 2 Lilac, 1 Royal

The most common action in the deck; Bullets are great when you have the Gun but nearly useless when you don't. Without the Gun, the Fence will still let you get some value from these. When the other player has the Gun, one tactic to consider is to build up a combo of Bullets and then try to convince them to hand over the Gun when you're facing a particularly damaging event opposition.

Bus Ticket



If you are on a road with a bus stop in either the sunset or night, move forward until you reach another bus stop.



BASE SET: 1 Hunter, 1 Royal

With a powerful movement effect and no direct drawbacks, Bus Tickets may stand out for their sheer ubiquity of use in the early to mid-stages of games (before players enter the dark or give way to adversity). The movement they provide pairs well in several combinations (e.g., with Advantage, Amalgam or Repetition), but also presents on its own a highly reliable way to cross the broken road. Depending on the arrangement of the roads, Bus Tickets may provide as much as four or five roads' movement in a single play, but two or three roads is far more typical (refer to "Road Statistics" on page 30 to see the distribution of bus stops on the road).

As a general rule, if you're using a Bus Ticket to get over the broken road or an ambush, then you're likely using the card well. And be sure to play it before you enter the dark (which renders it useless)!

Assassins may be a little reluctant to play these, as accelerating toward more dangerous roads when escape is not a goal may seem unappealing. But the benefits of crossing the broken road (getting an Action by the Night, moving closer to being able to use Betrayal or Forsaken, etc.) are still useful. Moreover, the suspicion raised by deliberately choosing to *not* play a Bus Ticket (e.g., if it's learned you discarded one) is very hard to explain away and may not be worth the risk.

Call in a Hit



If you are within one road of a phone, either: (1) Deal six wounds to event opposition or (2) If you're a witness, the other player randomly discards a number of action cards equal to half their current wounds (rounded up) and then receives nine wounds.



BASE SET: 2 Midnight

The most powerful card in Mantis Falls and the main reason an assassin will want to maintain the illusion of cooperation for a large portion of the game. The second effect option (available only to a witness) is an absolutely devastating attack that players will rarely survive.

If you're a witness: Deciding if, and when, to pull the trigger on this play should constantly be on your mind, and maintaining it as an option should be among your top priorities. Staying near phones will be fairly easy early on, but it becomes more difficult as you move down the road (refer to "Road Statistics" on page 30 to see the likelihood of being within one road of a phone in the sunset, night and dark). In many cases, you're better off standing still near a phone for multiple turns than you are advancing without a plan in place. When straying from a phone, try to do so with a healing card in hand as well as a Bus Ticket, Sneakers or other movement card to help you get back near a phone as quickly as possible.

If you're an assassin: You should, of course, fear this card as a consequence of you seeming too suspicious or adversarial, but also fear the "desperate witness effect" (when the other player feels they have nothing left to lose by killing you). Keep things cooperative *and* hopeful until the time is right. When the other player strays from a phone, your best chance to strike may last for only a moment, so be ready to take advantage. Make the moment last longer with a well-timed Tar. Or rob them of their chance to Call in a Hit entirely with Reconsider, Cut Wires or Ball and Chain.

A big possible tell: Witnesses will be reluctant to move too far from phones, so savvy assassins should make it seem they have this concern, too. And sharp witnesses should notice if they don't!

Call in a Medic



Condition: Whenever you wound the other player with a Call in a Hit, heal two of your wounds.

BASE SET: 1 Amber

This is the simplest way to heal in the same play as an attack on the other player with a Call in a Hit and is therefore a comforting card to have on your side as a witness. Although you can't benefit from this card directly as an assassin, it's still one you'll want under your control (to keep away from the other player). As with any condition that costs nothing to bring out, Call in a Medic is a nice draw because you can play it quickly and reap its benefits without tying up space in your hand.

Car Bomb



If you are at the end of the road, deal five wounds (each) to event opposition, the other player and yourself.

BASE SET: 1 Midnight

Car Bomb is perhaps the least desirable of the Midnight cards (found as Actions by the Night or Actions by the Dark), but it still packs a wallop and, in the right context, can turn a game in your favor in a heartbeat. Use it to kill the other player if you think you will be able to heal and they will not. Or use it when you think you're out of hope and you just want to take the other player down with you to salvage a tie. Or use it when an event opposition is going to hurt only you and you want to level the playing field between you and the other player. A Car Bomb + Street Light Healer combo played during a Last Gasp will result with you healed to two wounds below your maximum and the other player absorbing five wounds.

Cats and Dogs



Add one action card (of any suit) face down to the end of your current action play sequence.

BASE SET: 1 Amber

The ability to create action plays in multiple suits can be a powerful and versatile effect (see Quick Thinking and Marionette). But the limited options in Amber mitigate Cats and Dogs' usefulness, and so this card seems to frequently land in the discard pile or Conserved Energy. Despite this humble legacy, Cats and Dogs can be the key piece of numerous dynamic plays. Consider the following:

Foresight: Cats and Dogs can be the ideal Amber card to trigger Foresight's healing effect. Use it in your Last Gasp to heal, then add another powerful card (even a Call in a Hit) to the end of the play.

Cut Wires: Playing Tools + Cut Wires is absolutely an "I'm an assassin" type of play, and you usually want those plays to have as much punch as possible. Pair Tools and Cut Wires with Cats and Dogs to break out of the Amber suit and add another powerful card to the play.

Killer: Catching someone off guard with a successful Killer attack is one of the most deadly attacks you can make, and Cats and Dogs makes this possible. Heal in Amber (perhaps with a Foresight) to get your wounds to three fewer than the other player's, then use a Cats and Dogs to unleash the Killer. Make this even more powerful with a Forsaken + Cats and Dogs + Killer combo.

Chameleon



Process Chameleon as though it is either a Strength in Numbers or Teamwork (your choice).



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Amber

Chameleon is an adaptable card that can pair successfully with either a Strength in Numbers to deal four wounds to event opposition or with a Teamwork to prevent the event entirely. Both of these options are highly useful effects, but they are hindered by their reliance on the play of an additional card (and, often, the cooperation of the other player). Given its imitative nature, the strengths and weaknesses of Chameleon are largely the same as the cards it emulates. Additionally working against it is its place in the relatively limited Amber suit. Working in its favor is, of course, its flexibility. It is also boosted a bit by its chance to pair with a Cats and Dogs, which may make for a nice Chameleon + Cats and Dogs + Teamwork/Strength in Numbers combo; allowing you to enact this card's mighty effect all on your own. Overall, Chameleon is a useful card that appears regularly in cooperative plays, but it is not commonly central to tactical plans.

Conditional Release



All conditions in play for both players are discarded.



BASE SET: 1 Granite

Destructive, double-edged and trust-eroding, Conditional Release may be entirely useless to you far more often than it ever proves to be a valuable play. But its effect is so sweeping and pivotal that its presence in the deck merits substantial consideration. And in the proper situations, this card can be a vital part of multiple tactical plays.

Level the playing field: This card can, of course, be useful if the array of conditions controlled by you and another player tilts in their favor. This is powerful, but can be quite adversarial and perhaps detrimental to the hope of cooperative victory. You may find that it is not often worth the damage to trust, or to the chances of escape, to use it in this way.

Kill or hamstring the other player: Sometimes a Conditional Release can be part of a devastating enough play to make it well worth all loss of trust. This is particularly true if you can destroy the other player's Foresight, Doctor's Bag or The Pact right at the time they are counting upon it. In this case, pair it with any number of other aggressive Granite cards (Reconsider, Ricochet, Betrayal, Ball and Chain) for a full-scale attack.

Remove Cut Wires: If an assassin plays Cut Wires, Conditional Release is the only action card in the deck that will make Call in a Hit usable again. Assassins may therefore be smart to already have this card in their hand before playing Cut Wires to prevent a witness from getting it.

Remove Pied Piper: Once Pied Piper is in play, cooperative victory is impossible until it's gone. Conditional Release is the only action card in the deck that will remove Pied Piper.

Combat Sanctuary: This is the big one. Because a Sanctuary allows a player to stop any Granite card, it can undercut even your best adversarial Granite combinations. You can combat this somewhat by having multiple strong Granite cards, but the other player still can pick and stop the most deadly of the bunch. Conditional Release is the card that solves this and unlocks the power of Granite again. Place it at the start of a strong Granite combo and force the other player into a miserable choice: Either sacrifice the Sanctuary to stop the Conditional Release or don't. Either way, the Sanctuary ends up in the discard pile and your Granite cards proceed unobstructed.

Contention



Steal a condition from the other player; then they may choose to take Contention into their hand. If they do, they receive one wound.

FULL CIRCLE: 1 Lilac

A very powerful, very selfish card that may sometimes be hindered by being *too* powerful (and too selfish!). Contention is a card that exemplifies one of the key tenets of the game: trust and cooperation may be intangible ideas, but in Mantis Falls, they are vital resources to be managed and utilized with the same care you might apply to resource tokens in other games. As a consequence, you may find that whether you're a witness or an assassin, a little selfishness is smart, but too much can make your game unravel in a hurry. Consider:

A LITTLE SELFISHNESS IS SMART: As an assassin, the motive for selfishness is obvious (you know it's a competitive game right from the deal). But as a witness, selfishness is strategically sound as well. After all, you *know* that you're a witness and you can only *suspect* the other person's intentions. So, if one player needs to be in a better position than another (better conditions, better hand, fewer wounds, etc.), it's perfectly logical that you'd want that person to be you.

TOO MUCH SELFISHNESS MAY BE YOUR UNDOING: An assassin obviously needs to fear that too many self-serving plays will result in their identity being found out (and perhaps result in a Call in a Hit). A witness, though, also needs to fear seeming too much like an assassin (perhaps the saddest losses are when one witness calls in a hit on another due to suspicion). More subtly, selfish choices here and there may soon slip into an arms race of self-serving reciprocity. And the result of this is not just a diminishing hope for cooperative victory, but also a loss of your ability to discern the behavior of an assassin.

THE LINE: And somewhere, oscillating around the thin line of "too much" selfishness, lies the card Contention. For example, imagine the other player has a Doctor's Bag and you draw a Contention. It may seem perfectly defensible to use the Contention to steal the bag (after all, you know you're a witness). But then on the next turn, the other player chooses for an event to deal three wounds to you, making the argument that they're not an assassin, they're just leveling the playing field after you stole their Doctor's Bag. You may go so far as reaching for your Call in a Hit before you realize that, actually, they're making a fair point. And so now what? You're three wounds down, you can't identify if that's suspicious or not and many of the possible future benefits of cooperation are perhaps slipping away. At that point, it's fair to ask if stealing the Doctor's Bag was worth it, after all.

Or consider that once you steal the Doctor's Bag, the other player may simply decide to retrieve Contention (costing themselves a wound) and steal the Doctor's Bag right back. And then maybe you'll make the same decision. And soon, you'll both be dead in the road - laid bare as tragic metaphors for the dissolution of trust and cooperation. Oh no!

And so it is that an extraordinarily powerful card may be strangely difficult to use. In many games, we've observed that Contention may often simply be put in Conserved Energy as a "show of good faith". Or, more commonly, a player may voluntarily reduce the card's power by using it to take another player's second- or third-best condition as kind of a "compromise".

GO FOR IT: Of course, you can throw out all of the cost-to-trust concerns if you're making an explicitly adversarial play. And for that, this card is excellent. Once the game is already adversarial, use it to snag a player's best condition (Doctor's Bag, Sanctuary, the Gun and The Well all being good choices). And you can reduce the likelihood of them retrieving Contention if you make this play when they're already very close to maximum wounds.

Or this could be a key feature in an assassin's surprise attack. The fact that it's not in Granite reduces your ability to make it part of the most dynamic of attacks, but Lilac has enough firepower (two Bullets and a Grenade) to make for a highly destructive combo. Use Contention at the start of an action play to steal a player's Gun and then hit them with Lilac Bullets.

Curtains

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Deal one wound to event opposition. Action processing stops; all unprocessed actions are discarded or conserved (your choice).



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Granite

Among the most satisfying of moves is playing Curtains at *just the right time*. It can ruin a surprise attack from an assassin, and can even stop a Call in a Hit. Pulling this off, though, requires perfect timing, and allocating hand space all game long waiting for that moment can be a mistake. In fact, if it can help you, using a Curtains for its "consolation" effect (one wound to event opposition) may not be a bad option. But still always be on the lookout for ways to use Curtains as a game-changer.

ROPE-A-DOPE: As an assassin, an interesting "rope-a-dope" play is to make a feeble (but believable) surprise attack against a player on their turn. Then, on the following turn (your turn), make Curtains the first card in your action play. If the other player played a Call in a Hit, then you rendered it useless! (Relatedly, this is a reason you may wish to only play a Call in a Hit on your own turns).

TIMING: For any Curtains play, consider the important distinctions according to when you play it:

On your turn: By having your Curtains revealed and processed before the other player's first card, you can prevent the other player's entire action play. Then, when you put your choice of prevented cards into Conserved Energy, you get the first chance to draw these into your hand.

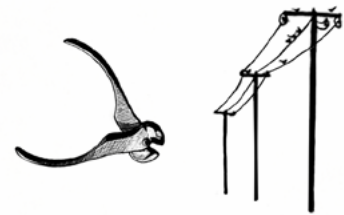
On the other player's turn: The other player will be able to get one action card revealed and processed before Curtains can take effect. They also will have the first crack at drawing cards put in Conserved Energy. However, use of the Mole means you can see the other player's action play before you decide whether or not to use Curtains, which is very useful!

During a Last Gasp: This is an interesting one that allows you to use the Curtains reactively, rather than prophetically. If the other player wounds you and puts you to a Last Gasp with cards still remaining to be revealed in their action play (presumably as part of an ongoing attack), use Curtains as the final card of your Last Gasp and destroy the rest of their play. The challenge here is that this only helps you if you can heal prior to revealing Curtains, and Granite makes that tough. Perhaps a Betrayal could work. Or heal with Amber (from a Forsaken or the triggering of Foresight) and then use a Cats and Dogs to add Curtains to the play.

Cut Wires

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If you revealed The Tools in an action play this turn, keep Cut Wires as a condition. Condition: Call in a Hits do nothing.



BASE SET: 1 Amber

A fair number of cards can seem "assassin-y" (e.g., Betrayal, Desertion, Ball and Chain, etc.), but Cut Wires is perhaps the only card in the game you'll find should only ever be played by an assassin. And this makes Cut Wires, for all its power, a dangerous card to just even hold in your hand. When it makes its way onto the table, though, it is an obvious game-changer.

CONTRABAND: The clear challenge with Cut Wires is you can only reap its benefits if you can pair it with The Tools. And the entire time you work to build that combo (i.e., because you have one card but not the other), you are at risk of exposure from a simple Little Look-See or Show of Trust.

MAKING IT COUNT: Playing the Cut Wires combo is an admission that you are an assassin, and so you need to make that play count! Do it when you have Sanctuary in play (to stop a Conditional Release) or when you have the Conditional Release in your hand (so the other player can't play it). Include Cats and Dogs so you can add a powerful off-suit attack card to your Cut Wires play.

Desertion



Heal one of your wounds or move your gasp marker one space left.
Affliction: Play until death (cooperative victory is no longer possible).



TRIAD: 1 Amber

Alongside Betrayal, Desertion is one of two "affliction" cards that permanently remove the hopes for a cooperative victory. Unlike Betrayal, Desertion is found only in 3-player games. It is more versatile (the chance to restore a Last Gasp is a great option) and easier to play (doesn't require being in the dark) than Betrayal, but also has less raw power (one healed wound rather than three). Desertion also suffers some from being in Amber, which creates fewer combo opportunities. For assassins, this card is a fairly good draw at any time because they know forthcoming adversarial moments are inevitable. And for witnesses and assassins alike, Desertion quickly elevates to one of the strongest cards in Mantis Falls the moment any game descends into pure confrontation. But what should you make of Desertion when you are a witness and the game still has at least a pretense of cooperation? Desertion is certainly powerful, but it also costs you the hopes of cooperative victory. How big a price is that to pay in 3-player games, exactly?

THE VALUE OF STRIVING FOR COOPERATIVE WINS WITH 3 PLAYERS? From before the deal of roles, simple math tells us that, in 3-player games, there is only a 1 in 4 chance that all the players will be witnesses. The odds actually change a bit when you receive your own role and see it's a witness, as that information improves the chances of an all-witness game to 1 in 3. But still, only 1 in 3? Is it really worth devaluing a very powerful card like Desertion (not to mention making other dangerous decisions in search of escape, such as moving through ambushes) when there is a 2 in 3 chance you have an assassin among you, anyway?

The data has told us that yes, it actually is well, well worth it to work towards cooperative escape. As a thought experiment, consider an extreme case in which you decide a 1 in 3 chance of an all-witness game doesn't cut it for you, so you just play Call in a Hit on the first turn. Since you don't know which player to attack (and the assassin card may have even been dealt out of the game), that tactic would result in success about 33% of the time. In contrast, a cooperative-minded witness should expect to win a 3-player game approximately 50% of the time or more. So that's clearly the better tactic, then. And, without getting too deep into it, what the data has shown us is that not only do the occurrences of true cooperative victories make this an advantageous strategy, but the chances of surviving and killing the assassin are actually *improved* by playing in a cooperative manner (even when it involves making sacrifices and moving dangerously down the road).

The reason for this is similar to what's observed in other hidden traitor games: simply that the mere *threat* of escape is a tool by which to flush out and find the assassin. Keep in mind that escape from Mantis Falls is a loss for an assassin, and so as that possibility approaches, the pressure mounts on the assassin to tip their hand in their efforts to stop that from happening.

SO WHAT ABOUT DESERTION? To bring this back to Desertion (pardon the tangent), the point is that a witness may be mistaken to highly value this card in their hand, thinking, "it's likely there is an assassin among us, anyway, so why shouldn't I plan to play this card if I need it?". This logic is true if you're able to save it only for *after* an assassin has revealed themselves with adversarial moves, but that can require a long time of giving the card valuable hand space. A play of Desertion before that point, though, gives everyone permission to try to kill each other, and this robs the witnesses entirely of any chance of using clues to skillfully identify who the assassin is. Worse yet, your play of Desertion likely gives the other witness(es) great reason to decide *you're* the most suspicious and respond by doing all they can to kill you as quickly as possible. Yikes. Healing that one wound or restoring that gasp may have been a desperate necessity, but upon playing Desertion, your chances of victory have likely plummeted towards 0%.

Desertion is a fantastic card in adversarial situations, and a great card for assassins. Much of the time, though, it may be a double-edged sword. Dedicate hand space to it accordingly.

Doctor's Bag



Condition: Heal one wound whenever you reveal a Suture Kit, Medicine or Advantage in an action play.



BASE SET: 1 Lilac

This is a simple and powerful condition that costs nothing to play, takes up essentially no hand space (because you can play it as soon as is convenient), creates no suspicion and is valuable to all players in all contexts. For these reasons, Doctor's Bag is among the most coveted cards in the entire game. In addition to making healing plays even bigger (e.g., a successful Advantage *plus* the bonus of Doctor's Bag), the Doctor's Bag produces life-saving healing opportunities where they didn't exist before (i.e., upgrades the otherwise humble Suture Kit to a card that can save your life and upgrades Advantage to a card you can rely upon even when you're not well ahead on the road). Healing cards are powerful and rare in Mantis Falls, and the healing opportunities a Doctor's Bag provides can be of immense consequence.

The value of the card is, of course, improved greatly for players with the Doctor character (try to save your Doctor's Bag plays for during your Last Gasps!). But even a Pugilist character shouldn't consider this card unhelpful. Although Pugilists cannot benefit from this card during their Last Gasps, you can still reap its rewards during any other action play.

Doctor's Bag is a solid choice for retrieving with any Plan Ahead or Flashback play, and a prime target of Contention. Seek it out and play it when you have it; make having it on your side a priority.

COOPERATIVE HEALING: At times when you are feeling cooperative with another player, a play of Suture Kit with Doctor's Bag out can save both your lives in a single play. Do this after something has simultaneously put you both at maximum wounds for the greatest life-saving power!

Driver



The bystander may randomly discard up to three action cards; you must then move forward one road for each card discarded.



TRIAD: 1 Hunter

Cooperative escape for three players is a tall task, and Driver (along with the similar Rider) can make it much more possible. The chance to move as many as three roads can be huge, and unlike Bus Ticket, Duck or Night Owl, you can get that big movement even if you're standing in the dangerous ambush-laden roads of the dark. Pair it with Repetition to travel up to six roads at once!

The drawback, of course, is that you're putting a lot of faith in the bystander with this play. They may see this as a chance to push you onto an ambush or out of range of a phone. And their status as bystander means you won't even have the chance to immediately retaliate that turn. This is quite a risk for you! The further drawback is that a bystander's lack of cooperation may not even be clear evidence they're an assassin. A bystander may decline to help here at all, making the plausibly valid argument that random discards are simply too steep a price to pay for helping you advance.

ONE WAY WITNESSES CAN MAKE DRIVER SHINE: Hold it in your hand while waiting on a safe spot in the dark and then play it only once the other players are at the end. The movement Driver provides will then be enough to achieve escape. If the bystander is a witness, they should give you the movement you need. And if they choose *not* to, then you've almost certainly found the assassin.

IF YOU'RE AN ASSASSIN: Set up a moment that makes Driver look extremely helpful for escape. If the bystander cooperates, they may completely ruin their own hand (perhaps losing a Call in a Hit!)

Duck



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Move forward based on where you are (3 roads in sunset, 2 in night, 1 in dark). If you land ahead of the other player, they receive 1 wound.

FULL CIRCLE: 1 Hunter

A nice, versatile, moderately-powerful card. In cooperative-feeling games, the Duck is a useful movement card with a drawback (the possible wound to the other player). For assassins, or anyone in adversarial situations, the Duck is a decent attacker - but the value of forward movement may be less clear. The combo possibilities of Duck can make it sometimes worth holding onto and building a big play around. But it also can be quite valuable in a more expendable use-it-when-you-have-it sort of way. One way or another, few games seem to pass without Duck appearing in an action play at some point.

GET OVER THE BROKEN ROAD OR AMBUSHES: Although those three roads of movement in sunset or one road of movement in the dark can be appealing for some specific uses, the most common place to use the Duck is in the night. In the night, you may use the two roads of movement for the important task of getting over the broken road. Moving two roads in the night also is your best chance to skip over ambushes (refer to "Road Statistics" on page 30 to see the distribution of ambushes on the road).

From our observations, using a Duck to get over an ambush or broken road is a good use, and it is also a reasonably justifiable move even if it results in the other player receiving a wound. The other player may not like it, but the value of the move makes it hard to call the play *that* suspicious. Depending on your role and state of trust in the other player, the justifiable wound you send their way could be a minor drawback or a nice bonus.

COMBOS APLENTY: Pair this with an Advantage in a Last Gasp for a nice survive-and-deal-damage two-card combo. Or, if you're near the other player, you can accomplish something even more destructive with an Amalgam + Duck combo. If you're a witness under attack, this type of play can also surprise an attacking assassin by surging you into range of a phone. Also, when combined with some of the numerous other Hunter damage dealers (Bullets, Amalgam, Grenade), Duck can be the finishing touch on a powerful onslaught attack.

-- "Onslaught Attacks" --

This guide repeatedly mentions "onslaught attacks". This is an unofficial term that describes lining up, in a single action play, multiple cards that deal wounds to the other player. The value of this is *not* usually to simply do a lot of wounds to the other player, but rather to push a player that is *already near their maximum wounds* to a repeated series of Last Gasps. For example, you reveal a Bullet, they heal with a Medicine, your next card is a Pocket Knife, they need to heal again, etc. If you can line up more ways to get them to maximum wounds than they have ways to heal, they will not survive. Good onslaught attacks can require a lot of planning to build, but are among the most effective ways to kill a player.

From the perspective of defense, the threat of an onslaught attack is one of the reasons you should consider it vitally important to have as many healing cards in your hand as possible. Cards that heal multiple wounds at once (e.g., Betrayal, Pied Piper, etc.) may be especially disruptive to another player's onslaught attack plans if they can drop you to further below maximum wounds than the next piece of their attack can overcome.

Faith



Discard all cards in conserved energy. The bystander may randomly discard two action cards; if they do, heal one of your wounds.



TRIAD: 1 Amber

One of two "heal if the bystander helps you" cards found in Triad (Nightshade being the other). Healing effects are usually lifesavers, but here they are entirely undependable (the last thing you want is for an assassin to know your life depends on their simple choice of whether or not to help you heal). As such, these are relegated more to the odd and diminished "use them to heal when you're *not* really counting on them" status. And so, the more alluring power of these is perhaps in their potential to help you figure out the role of another player. The interesting possibility there is described more in the discussion of Nightshade.

In comparing Faith and Nightshade, Faith may well be the weaker of the two. The request of the random discards from the bystander is steep, and if a witness actually does this for you, the card-loss could be damaging to the hopes of a cooperative victory. Moreover, this gives the bystander a defensible excuse to not help you in a way that doesn't necessarily show them to be an assassin (two random discards is a high price to pay and they'd be right to hesitate).

The Falls



If you are at the end of the road and truly a witness, the other player receives nine wounds and cannot heal this turn.



BASE SET: 1 Midnight

Among the very strongest and most pivotal cards in the game. Along with Call in a Hit, The Falls is the other card that provides witnesses a potent tactical advantage (offsetting the assassin's advantage of having greater knowledge of the game dynamic from the start). Since it requires retrieval from Actions by the Night or Actions by the Dark *and* for the player to stand on the end of the road to use it, The Falls is less influential than Call in a Hit for much of the game. But as players begin creeping towards the end, this enormously powerful card should shift to the forefront of *all* players' minds. It can be the single greatest incentive for a witness to strive to reach the end of the road, and perhaps the greatest reason an assassin should fear a witness making it there.

As a witness: A play of this card on someone you believe to be an assassin is a death sentence they will not be able to survive. The only way it could be stopped would be if they preempt the play of The Falls with Curtains or Ricochet. For this reason, you may wish to save a play of The Falls for your own turns (i.e., so The Falls will be the first action card processed). You can also protect against either Curtains or Ricochet if you have a Sanctuary in play.

Once this attack is made, the other player will have no hope for survival but *can* still use their Last Gasp to levy a counter-attack. So you will want to make sure you have a way to heal when they do this. As long as you can survive their counter-attack, then you are assured of being the only one to survive the confrontation.

As an assassin: You should be very well aware of the risk this card presents you as the witness approaches the end of the road. Consider trying to find the card first as, even though it does nothing for you, keeping it away from the witness can be very important. As they approach the end, consider Tar to stop them. Or, if you suspect they have it, perhaps play a Reconsider or Ball and Chain to get it out of their hand as quickly as possible. As the moment approaches, you should consider even frantic and haphazard attacks rather than just letting the witness control the game by attaining this power. As a final tactic, try to push back on The Falls with a Curtains or Ricochet.

Fence



Condition: At any time, you may discard a Bullet to draw two actions. Keep one, discard the other.



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Royal

Fence is a helpful condition that can benefit any player. You can play it as soon as is convenient (thus taking up little hand space) and reap its rewards throughout the game.

Along with the Gun, this is the only other card that makes use of Bullets. So if the game is feeling cooperative, the most communally-advantageous play is to spread these effects out and make sure the Fence and the Gun are controlled by different players. If you already have the Gun and draw Fence, consider putting it in Conserved Energy as a trust-building "gift" to the other player!

GUN VS. FENCE: If you are in a position to choose, I'd rate the Gun as the more powerful card of the two. But I also consider that to be a closer call than many players may expect.

Firestarter



Deal three wounds to the event opposition, the other player or yourself (bystander's choice).



TRIAD: 1 Amber

A fun, fairly powerful card for which the usefulness depends almost entirely on the state of trust between the players.

PLAY IT SAFE: You can force the success of this card a bit if you use it against an event relatively early in the game (when wounds are still low and players are still near phones). At that point, even if the bystander is an assassin, they would probably be very reluctant to turn this against you. And so they will likely just go along with the play.

NOT SO SAFE: Later in the game, though, relying on Firestarter too much can be a death sentence! Imagine the consequences of playing this card near your maximum wounds, with the plan of defeating a dangerous event. The bystander could turn it on you, and that would not only directly put you into a Last Gasp, but then you'd also need to deal with the wounds from the event opposition later in the turn as well. Unless you can survive two Last Gasps in a row, the assassin will have taken you down, hoisted by your own petard. Keep in mind that in such cases, you cannot even go after the bystander with an attack of your own (because they're the bystander). Ouch.

ASSASSIN KILLER: If the assassin is ever found out, then this card is obviously a doozy. Play it when the other witness is a bystander and do three wounds to the assassin with a single card.

ASSASSIN HUNTER: As with other cards that give a lot of control to the bystander (e.g., Faith, Marionette and Nightshade), consider using this as a way to trick a player into exposing themselves as an assassin. For example, what if you were to recreate that play described in the "Not So Safe" section above, but you actually *could*, secretly, survive two Last Gasps? Or what if you did it with an unseen event that you only pretended would be dangerous if not defeated? One way or another, you may be able to build a very plausible bluff that the bystander need only flip the Firestarter on you and you'll be done for. If they take the bait, then you've found out they're the assassin. And that may be worth far, far more than the wounds it cost you.

ASSASSIN HUNTER HUNTER: If you're an assassin that thinks you're maybe being tricked (as described above), maybe choose for Firestarter's wounds to go to *the other player* (i.e., not the player who played it). They may not be ready for that and this could become a kill for you after all!

Flashback



Shuffle the action discard pile, then take from it any card of your choice.



BASE SET: 1 Granite, 1 Royal

An extremely useful card. The biggest decision to make with a Flashback is whether you should use it shortly after you get it to find the best card you can (Doctor's Bag, Sanctuary, Pied Piper, Foresight, Medicine or Ricochet would all be great choices), or save it to help you get the key card you later need for a particular play or combo. In my experience, both of those are good uses for the card, and so that choice should depend on the specific situation of your game.

SEEING THE DISCARD PILE: In addition to being able to get a good card, Flashback lets you do some detective work by seeing what has been discarded. If you're a witness and you find a Cut Wires in there, does that mean maybe the other player is a witness, too? If you find a Bus Ticket or Sneakers, could that mean they're an assassin? If you're an assassin and you find a Call in a Hit in there (presumably lost to an ambush discard), then that suddenly changes everything! For this reason, the idea of waiting and using the Flashback later in the game can really pay off. *(As a side note, this is why the card requires you to shuffle the discard pile before looking at it - getting to see those cards in order could be too powerful.)*

QUICK THINKING COMBO: A classic combination is to follow a Granite Flashback with Quick Thinking. Use the Flashback to go get whatever Granite or Hunter card will help you the most that turn, and then use the Quick Thinking to add it to your action play right then. Put a Granite Plan Ahead before that combination to give yourself a plethora of options!

Foresight



Condition: Whenever you reveal an Amber card in an action play, you may discard Foresight to heal one of your wounds.



BASE SET: 1 Hunter

Healing cards are rare and extremely important in Mantis Falls, and having a Foresight under your control effectively adds substantially to the number of healing cards you can find in the deck. It doesn't cost you hand space to benefit from Foresight's effect and there's nothing suspicious or costly about playing it. Although its single-use-only effect can't compete with the permanent benefit of the Doctor's Bag, Foresight is still highly valuable. It should be regarded as a worthy choice for retrieval by Flashback or Plan Ahead, or for stealing with a Contention.

SAVE IT FOR LAST GASPS: Like other healing cards, no overkill means that a single healed wound will do you far more good during your Last Gasps than it likely will at other times.

COMBOS: Trigger Foresight's effect with Tincture during a Last Gasp for a dynamic heal-and-restore-a-gasp-and-attack play. Or use a Cats and Dogs to combine healing with a powerful card of any suit. In 3-player games, respond to an assassin's surprise attack with Firestarter for a move that heals you and deals three wounds to the other player (with the bystander's presumed cooperation).

EVEN BETTER WITH TRIAD: The incorporation of Triad makes Amber cards a little more common in the deck, which further improves the usefulness of Foresight.

Forsaken

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If you are in the dark, heal one wound and the other player either moves backwards two roads or receives one wound (their choice).



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Amber

Bearing some resemblance to Amalgam, Forsaken is another card that can turn an adversarial game in your favor with a single play, but can also be a tricky one for which to find the right time to use. The location requirement of Forsaken is more within your control than for Amalgam (depends only on your location, rather than your relationship on the road to another player), but the necessity of being in the dark is in some conflict with the card's adversarial nature (in adversarial games, the need to move towards the end of the road diminishes). Overall, it's a card you may consider discarding or conserving until you are near the dark. When everything is in place, though (especially when backwards movement would move the other player on an ambush and/or out of range of a phone), this can be the single card heal-and-deal-wound play that wins you the game.

Grenade

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Deal four wounds to event opposition and two wounds to the players (divided as you choose).



BASE SET: 1 Hunter, 1 Lilac

Grenades are powerful, versatile cards with two key uses: As big event-defeaters with a price (the two wounds absorbed by the players), or as the single most reliable way to hit the other player with two wounds. Both uses are valuable, and so Grenade appears commonly both in cooperative plays and also as a destructive piece in onslaught attacks.

HOW TO SPLIT WOUNDS: In games that are feeling cooperative, the question will often arise of how to divide the wounds the Grenade deals to the players. Some players may elect to simply push them both to the other player every time, but that usually bears destructive consequences (see the write-up for Contention). Others may adopt the habit of always splitting them (one wound apiece). My suggestion is to divide the wounds when the players' respective wound totals are either equal or in your favor, but give both to the other player if they have fewer wounds than you. Some people I've played with have balked at receiving both wounds, but my argument is that it would be foolish for me to willfully maintain a disadvantageous dynamic for myself when it is within my control to adjust it to be more even. I've used this tactic plenty of times and, although it's yielded some frustrated sighs here and there, it hasn't translated to a lasting and damaging effect on trust. That speaks to player psychology, though, and your mileage may vary!

POWER SUITS: The suits of Hunter and Lilac both have one Grenade and two Bullets, making them great choices for onslaught attacks aimed at the other player. If you have the Gun, a surprise attack of Grenade + Bullet + Bullet on a player near maximum wounds would be nearly impossible to survive. In Hunter, include a Repetition in there, too, for good measure! If the other player has the Gun, consider a giant Lilac attack of Contention (to steal their Gun) + Grenade + Bullet + Bullet. These are big attacks! But keep in mind that you may still need to survive possible counter-attacks!

-- Under the Rose --

This advanced variant is not a focus here, but the analysis of action cards in this guide may illuminate how this card-hiding module can greatly twist the game's strategies. Consider what tactical domino effects could result from the thoughtful burial of just even one crucial card!

Gun



Condition: Allows you to use Bullets. (Once out, the Gun may be transferred by the controlling player to the other player at any time.)



BASE SET: 1 Royal

A formidable and important condition, the Gun turns the six Bullets in the deck into powerful wound-dealers that can target the event or the other player. At first glance, the Gun would seem to be among the very best cards to acquire in the game. In practice, though, very few games will pass without one player eventually having the Gun out (thus helping cooperative victories), and the importance of it actually being on your side (rather than anyone else's) can be uncertain.

WITH GREAT POWER... Ownership of the Gun seems to often come with a responsibility to use it cooperatively. As a result, you may find it is very difficult to build a combo with Bullets in your hand during times of cooperation. Imagine the following: Every time a Bullet or two accumulates in your hand, a dangerous event opposition comes along soon after. With six Bullets in the deck, you find you can't very plausibly bluff to the other player that you're *never* drawing them. So then, unless you're ready to launch an attack, you're likely left using your Bullets to defeat events over and over. This not only robs you the ability to collect those Bullets for later combos, but also monopolizes a decent number of your action plays. And then later, to top it off, a moment comes in which you're facing a deadly event, but this time the only Bullets left are in the other player's hand. At that point, it can be very hard to justify not just handing the Gun over prior to the endgame, anyway.

STEALING IT! One of the unique things about the Gun is it can be given freely from one player to another. In the paragraph above, I describe this from the sad perspective of you handing it over. But consider the possibilities of making this work in your favor! If the other player has the Gun, consider hoarding some Bullets (or even bluffing you have Bullets). When facing an event opposition that will harm the other player, they may feel no choice but to give the Gun to you. To make this all very mean, use your Bullets to attack the other player as soon as the Gun is yours.

Killer



If the other player has at least three more wounds than you, they receive nine wounds and cannot heal this turn.



BASE SET: 1 Midnight

The deadly counterpart to The Falls (this one available to assassins and witnesses alike). In practice, Killer seems to actually land a successful attack only infrequently. But more than anything, that is a tribute to the respect this card merits and the efforts skilled players may go to defend against it.

PROTECTING AGAINST IT: You should learn to always be on alert against reaching "Killer territory" (i.e., three wounds down) with a player who has already crossed the broken road. And, unless the other player can prove they don't have Killer, you may always be well-justified to purposefully wound them just to prevent chances for Killer plays.

HAVING IT: Because savvy players should protect thoroughly against it, it can be very hard to get your wounds to three fewer than another player's without immediate consequences to the game's trust and your safety (some may Call in a Hit the moment another player engineers the possibility of attacking them with a Killer play, and may be right to do so). So your best hope may be to fulfill the Killer's three-wounds-fewer requirement as part of a single combo play. For this, a Street Light Healer + Killer combo may do it, but it will leave you defenseless against a counter-attack. Consider instead a Forsaken (with Foresight) + Cats and Dogs + Killer combo. The other player will be toast, but will still have a chance to retaliate, so you'll want to have another way to heal lined up.

Little Look-see



See two random actions in the other player's hand
(don't let them see which cards you saw).

BASE SET: 1 Lilac

Rivals the Baseball Bat for the most expendable card in Mantis Falls, but is also not without its moments. The random viewing into someone's hand can hit suspicion-inducing pay dirt (e.g., Cut Wires, Killer or a card they'd specifically stated not having) and that knowledge can change a game for you. Don't hold onto this for combos, but use it when you have it! Try improving your chances of seeing the most secret of their cards by playing this *after* the other player has put a relatively large number of cards down for an action play (thus temporarily making their hand smaller).

Marionette



The bystander may add one action of any
suit to the end of your action play.

TRIAD: 1 Lilac, 1 Royal

An endlessly versatile card made unpredictable due to its reliance on the bystander's cooperation. When you can fully depend on the bystander, Marionette not only lets you complete key plays with cards from the bystander's hand, but also allows for the building of diverse and powerful cross-suit combos (e.g., Medicine + Marionette + Call in a Hit). But if you lean on the Marionette too much, it can become your undoing in an instant (counting on a healing card from the bystander in order to survive, for example, is *extremely* risky). For this reason, Marionette may often be used in situations with lower stakes (e.g., helping to defeat an event in early to mid-game), and benefiting in this way is not a mistake. But do also be aware of some of the more dynamic possibilities:

WHEN YOU'RE AN ASSASSIN WITH THE MARIONETTE: Don't ignore the hidden value of this card as a way to con a witness out of their best cards. Try to convince the bystander that the only way you can survive is if they add a healing card to your play.

WHEN YOU'RE AN ASSASSIN BYSTANDER: As a deadly trap, try to convince players with Marionette to rely upon you as the bystander. For example, if a player has Pied Piper and is near the end of the road, offer to provide a useful card if they play Marionette. Then when they play it, give them a movement card to push them to the end of the road and end the game. Or make a surprise attack whenever they're near death by putting a card like Firestarter in their action play. Or simply have them pin their hopes on you providing a healing card and then give them anything else!

WHEN YOU'RE A WITNESS WITH THE MARIONETTE: Try to learn another player's allegiances by making yourself appear more vulnerable than you are and then see how they react. Specifically, create a situation in which it seems all the bystander need do is contribute one unhelpful card as part of your Marionette play in order to kill you. If they take the bait (i.e., give you an unhelpful card), then you likely have found the assassin. If they help you when you seemed to be at death's door, then they are either trustworthy or they saw through your bluff. This sort of trick may actually be better accomplished with Nightshade (the healing and the ability to pair with a Cats and Dogs helps there), but can also make for a nice play with Marionette when the circumstances align for it.

PUPPET MASTER: This opportunity only emerges once in a blue moon, but it's a big one. If you are a bystander holding The Falls when a player standing on the end of the road plays a Marionette, consider putting The Falls in their play. If you do this as an assassin, this should be a game-winner. But what if you do this as a witness? I'll let you work out the details, but the short of it is you're either identifying a witness *and* killing someone else or you're definitely finding the assassin.

Medicine



Heal one wound for either you or the other player.



BASE SET: 1 Royal

Despite its apparent simplicity, Medicine is one of the most powerful cards in the game. Skilled players should *always* be thinking about how they will survive their next Last Gasp and no card helps accomplish this more painlessly and reliably than Medicine. This card will likely always be worth the hand space it takes up. Even if drawn in the opening deal, consider holding onto it all game if necessary - saving it for the moment you need it most. Don't ever discard Medicine, and consider it a solid choice at any time to pick up with Flashback or Plan Ahead.

SAVE IT FOR WHEN YOU NEED IT (USUALLY LAST GASPS): A common mistake of new players is to use Medicine early in the game when they are still low on wounds. This dramatically undervalues the card. One reason is that an early healed wound will often quickly get balanced out (e.g., the other player will process an event with wounds "divided as they choose" and will feel more free to give most of them to you because of your lower wound count). Another reason is that no overkill (no receiving wounds beyond maximum) means that a key aspect of endgame strategy is *resiliency* rather than simple wound avoidance. Medicine can provide such resiliency. During a Last Gasp, even just the single healed wound from a Medicine is certain to bring you below maximum and that can often be the difference between winning and losing. Treasure the value of this appropriately.

WHAT ABOUT THREE LAST GASPS AND YOU'RE DEAD? Death due to three Last Gasps is a concern, but our data shows it is far less common than death due to a failure to heal during a Last Gasp. So while you should look for ways to make Medicine a lifesaver that won't cost you a Last Gasp (e.g., use it right before an event is processed to avoid reaching maximum wounds), in most cases, the benefits of saving healing cards for Last Gasps will outweigh the negatives of utilizing a Last Gasp.

SHOULD I USE MEDICINE TO HEAL THE OTHER PLAYER? This will be necessary in some rare cases, but usually the Medicine is far too valuable to relegate to the strength of a Suture Kit!

Mole



Condition: Right after the other player places cards down as an action play, you may discard Mole to look at those cards.



BASE SET: 1 Granite

A useful condition that, with good timing, can provide you information that could swing a game. Its additional subtle benefit is that as long as you have the Mole in front of you, the mere possibility of using it may make the other player more reluctant to bluff their action plays.

WHEN TO USE IT: Although Mole can sometimes be useful on your own turns, the far more common choice is to use its condition effect on the other player's turn. Since the other player makes their action play first on their own turns, you can use Mole after they've created their action play but before you've created yours. Try to time this for the most high-leverage of situations and you may see an assassin's surprise attack (or a witness calling in a hit on you) before it even occurs. Depending on what you see, Curtains or Ricochet may be the perfect choices to destroy their plans.

SUSPICIOUS ASSASSINS ARE LESS SUSPICIOUS: When you're an assassin, keep in mind that witnesses should always be weary of the other player. So part of pretending to be a witness means pretending to fear the other player is an assassin. Therefore, it may seem suspicious if you have the Mole out and let possibly dangerous moments pass without at least appearing to consider using it.

Necessary Sacrifice

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Return up to two completed allies in play (for either player) to the ally deck. Deal three wounds to event opposition per ally sacrificed.

BASE SET: 1 Granite

A dual-purpose card; Necessary Sacrifice can be a (potentially costly) way to defeat an event and can also be a powerful way to destroy another player's allies. If you're an assassin, you may wish to include this alongside other Granite cards as part of a clearly adversarial play at some point. But also look for ways to more subtly undermine the other player by noticing opportunities to remove their allies in a manner that you can present as necessary. Bluffing an unseen event to be a highly powerful opposition can be a great excuse to take out an ally or two of another player.

Night Owl

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If you are in the night, move forward two roads and deal one wound to the other player.

BASE SET: 1 Royal

As a dependable way to get over the broken road or an ambush, Night Owl should be regarded highly if you can foresee such a use in the near future. The wound it gives to the other player is usually defensible for such a purpose, and so depending on your sense of allegiance, that may be a minor detriment or a nice bonus. As a wound-dealer in Royal, Night Owl can prove handy as part of a heal-and-deal wounds play (e.g., with Medicine) or an onslaught attack (e.g., with Pocket Knife, a Bullet or The Well). For a nice effect, strategically put the Night Owl either before or after the Pocket Knife in an action play to maximize the chances of qualifying for the Pocket Knife's extra wound.

Nightshade

...



Discard all cards in conserved energy. Heal one of your wounds or receive one wound (bystander's choice).

TRIAD: 1 Amber

Alongside Marionette, Firestarter and Faith, Nightshade is another Triad card that is very useful when you can count on the bystander, but a dangerous card to rely on if the bystander's loyalty is in any doubt. Trusting an (as-yet-unrevealed) assassin bystander to let you heal with Nightshade is a good way to hand them an easy win; avoid taking that risk if possible! Use it in lower-stakes situations when the bystander will feel more compelled to maintain a semblance of cooperation.

CATCH AN ASSASSIN: Relying on a bystander to save you is risky, but *making them think* you're relying on them can be a nice play. Try putting a Nightshade + Cats and Dogs in a Last Gasp play (in that order). When you reveal the Nightshade, convince the other player your survival depends on them choosing to let you heal. The bluff is unavoidably undermined somewhat by the unrevealed second card in you action play, but if they fall for it, they may believe this a safe time to expose themselves as an assassin and deny you the help you need. Then with Cats and Dogs, add a healing card to your play. You've survived *and* found the assassin. A similar move can be made with Faith, but Nightshade is the purest test of allegiance because it asks for no sacrifice from the bystander and therefore makes an unwillingness to be helpful very nearly indefensible.

The Pact



Condition: Whenever you reach maximum wounds, the bystander may give you one action from their hand.



TRIAD: 1 Midnight

The opening deal in Triad gives two players a Call in a Hit and one player The Pact. Although it may seem somewhat of a consolation prize, The Pact is a close rival to Call in a Hit in power and value.

WHEN TO BRING IT OUT: This can be a difficult decision. One downside of bringing it out early is that it becomes vulnerable to being stolen (by Contention) or wiped out (by an event or Conditional Release). Another downside is that playing this card usually tells everyone exactly who did and did not receive a Call in a Hit in the opening deal (quite useful for an assassin to know!). But I still favor bringing it out early; you will definitely want this card already out by the time any key high-stakes situations occur, and the sooner you get it out, the more valuable hand space you can free up.

USING IT: Once out, an important value of The Pact is that, if an assassin springs a surprise attack on you, the bystander (who will certainly be a witness in this case) should be willing to help you extensively. They may even use this chance to give you their Call in a Hit. But don't discount how useful it will be for getting other valuable cards from a bystander even in less adversarial situations.

WHAT IF I'M AN ASSASSIN? If you draw this as an assassin, the bad news is there are two Call in a Hits out there in the other players' hands. The good news is that you may be able to use The Pact repeatedly as a way to con other players out of their most vital cards (try to make it seem you need them more!). With some real social manipulation, you may get a bystander to even give you their Call in a Hit. If you're an assassin and you see this card come out for another player, consider the impressive power of putting Contention as the first part of a deadly Lilac surprise attack!

-- The Suits --

The five main suits of Mantis Falls (Amber, Granite, Hunter, Lilac and Royal) are not entirely distinct in terms of their possibilities, but they *do* each have their own sets of strengths and weaknesses. Here are brief summaries and statistics of the suits to help you plan your plays:

Amber: The only suit on this list with fewer cards than the others, so it is inherently weaker in its combo possibilities. The most distinct features here are the Cut Wires combo (which can be the basis of an entire strategy) and the ability to trigger Foresight's effect. But Cats and Dogs, Forsaken and Tincture can all be powerful in the right moments.

Granite: The most hostile suit, defined by big cards that can make game-turning attacks and combos (Ball and Chain, Betrayal, Conditional Release, Curtains, Quick Thinking, Necessary Sacrifice, Reconsider and Ricochet). Ways to wound another player are limited, though (Badger, Bullet and Smoke Bomb) and healing nearly nonexistent (Betrayal).

Hunter: A diverse suit defined by movers (Bus Ticket, Duck, Driver, Reckless Abandon), healers (Advantage, Amalgam, Foresight), damage dealers (Amalgam, two Bullets, Duck, Grenade) and the range of possibilities provided by Repetition.

Lilac: The most distinct feature of Lilac is its two powerful conditions (Doctor's Bag, Sanctuary) and the ability to steal another (Contention). But it's also a strong attack suit for a player with a Gun (two Bullets, Grenade) and also includes one of the best healers (Pied Piper) and one of the best movers (Sneakers) in the game.

Royal: Perhaps the most well-rounded of suits, with a few big conditions (Gun, Fence, The Well), a couple movers (Bus Ticket, Night Owl), a key healer (Medicine) and a decent array of attack options (Bullet, Night Owl, Pocket Knife, The Well).

Phone Call



●●●

If either player is on a road with a phone, that player takes any two ally cards from the ally deck.

BASE SET: 1 Hunter, 1 Lilac

A nice use-it-when-it's-convenient card. The key choice here is whether to use it at a time it benefits the other player (because they're on a phone, too), or when it helps you alone. You may wish to precede this card with a movement card to get to a phone and make this card successful. But note that Bus Tickets will *not* work for this (the only road with a phone *and* bus stop is the start of the road). Other options include Duck and Reckless Abandon in Hunter and Sneakers in Lilac.

Pied Piper



●●●●●

Heal two of your wounds. Condition: If any turn ends with you at the end of the road, move your gasp marker to "3" (you die instantly).

FULL CIRCLE: 1 Lilac

Perhaps no card better illustrates the value of healing in Mantis Falls than Pied Piper. Novice players may focus on this card's drawback of killing you at the end of the road and consider this a card to be discarded or ignored. As you calibrate to the balance of the game, though, it should become apparent that the price of Pied Piper is small compared to the ability to reliably heal two wounds. Unless you are on the end of the road (or perhaps very near it), witnesses and assassins alike should hold Pied Piper with similar regard to a Medicine and be prepared to use it at the moment it is needed most. Yes, the condition can be troublesome, but that's nothing compared to the trouble of dying! Rely upon Pied Piper for survival and worry about the consequences later.

SO I'VE PLAYED IT - NOW WHAT? First off, don't panic! There's a good chance there's an assassin in the game (meaning that getting to the end of the road may never even be necessary), so dealing with Pied Piper's condition effect shouldn't be a top priority until the chance for escape becomes a near-approaching possibility. As that moment draws near, Conditional Release will be the one action you can use to remove Pied Piper. (There is one event that accomplishes this as well, but taking turns waiting for that event to arrive could make for a very long wait!)

PAYING THE PIED PIPER: It would obviously be foolish to purposefully step onto the end of the road with the Pied Piper as a condition, but what about the risk that you will be forced onto the end of the road? Yep, that's a possible concern and a reason why you may want to stay at least two or three roads away from the end until you are ready to remove Pied Piper (it should also be cause for pause before playing a Marionette). From the more adversarial side of things, if you're looking to kill a player with a Pied Piper out, look for ways to use forced movement as a deciding blow. The unique power of such a play is that a player dying due to Pied Piper's effect gets no Last Gasp and can't even counterstrike. Here's how movement to the end can be forced on an unwilling recipient:

Earthquakes. Earthquake is the name of two incident events (one seen, one unseen) that push both players one road forward. This is the only one on this list that requires no active choice made by one player to force the movement onto another.

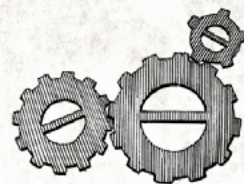
Event oppositions. There are five event oppositions (two seen, three unseen) that, if defeated, provide movement of "up to your green number; divided as you choose".

Quick Thinking + a Hunter movement card. Quick Thinking allows players to put a Granite or Hunter action on another player's action play. Paired with a Duck or Reckless Abandon, this can be a diabolical way to force a player with Pied Piper to the end (note: the distribution of bus stops means a Bus Ticket *cannot* take a player to the end of the road).

Plan Ahead

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Discard the top five cards of the action deck. Search the action deck for any card and place it in your hand.



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Granite, 1 Royal

Like Flashback, the big question here is if you should use it as soon as is convenient or save it to find the exact card you need at a critical time. Both uses can be the right choice, but if the deck is getting short, you'd probably do well to at least wait for it to exhaust and get re-shuffled before using this card. A Granite Plan Ahead + Quick Thinking can be a great two-card combo to meet a lot of purposes. When not saving Plan Ahead for something in particular, excellent choices of cards to retrieve include Doctor's Bag, Sanctuary, Pied Piper, Foresight, Medicine or Ricochet.

Pocket Knife

••

Deal one wound to event opposition or the other player. If the other player is within one road of you, you may deal two wounds to them.



BASE SET: 1 Royal

At a minimum, the Pocket Knife is as useful as a Baseball Bat, with the additional option to use it in an attack on the other player. When you're next to the other player, the Pocket Knife becomes a formidable adversarial card, equaling a Grenade or Bullet for firepower. Pair a Pocket Knife with a Night Owl or Bus Ticket to improve your ability of getting next to the other player in time to do the most damage. Overall - don't treasure Pocket Knife so much as to not use it against an event when helpful, but also don't underestimate its role in late-game phases as a potentially critical piece in Royal onslaught attacks (alongside Night Owl, a Bullet and/or The Well).

Private Call

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If you are on a road with a phone, take any two ally cards from the ally deck.



BASE SET: 1 Granite, 1 Royal

Very similar to a Phone Call, with the lone difference being this one excludes the more magnanimous possibility of helping the other player get allies as well. This one's a nice draw early on and is worth holding onto until the soonest convenient time to use it.

WHAT ALLIES SHOULD I GET? It's hard to say - they're pretty well-balanced! As a general guideline, though, consider the following simple suggestions: In early to mid-stages of play, if you can forecast ways to complete them any time soon, get Edwards, Cardello or Rocco (perhaps to be considered in that order). In late game, if you can see a way to complete her, Arrieta may well be the top choice. At any stage in which you think you'll have no chance to complete a more demanding ally (i.e., one that requires the completion of a larger set), Nash should probably be the pick. DiVarco can be an interesting choice early in a game if you have a lot of ways to get allies lined up behind him, but I mostly consider DiVarco as a piece of a DiVarco + Barnes two-ally combo. This pair, over the long course of a game, is usually much less helpful than Edwards. But in a late-game situation, the chance to influence the other player's event draw in a pivotal moment can absolutely win a game and so should merit serious consideration.

Quick Thinking

...

You may add one Granite or Hunter action card face down to the end of either player's current action play sequence.



BASE SET: 1 Granite

Considering how often Quick Thinking is mentioned in this guide, it's perhaps apparent that this card is useful in a large array of interesting combinations. So in that respect, it could be considered among the more powerful cards in the game. But it can also be a mistake to indiscriminately dedicate too much hand space to something that relies solely on combination-building to help you at all. As a result, Quick Thinking is a card that may be discarded or conserved to little surprise, or could instead be the linchpin in a game-deciding play. How to properly value this card will depend on the game-situation and the combos you may see emerging, and will rarely be an easy decision.

COMBOS: There are more combos for this than we can list, but here are some of our favorites:

Plan Ahead and/or Flashback + Quick Thinking. Go find a card you need and add it to the same play. Or build a Reconsider + Plan Ahead + Quick Thinking combo to give yourself a potentially key advantage of card-playing options over the other player.

Quick Thinking + Reckless Abandon or Quick Thinking + Any Destructive Movement. For these, use Quick Thinking to put the movement card on the other player's play. Reckless Abandon will cause wounds all on its own, and any other movement card may place the other player on an ambush. Moreover, the movement could push them away from a phone! For a particularly vicious play, this tactic can also be used to move a player with Pied Piper to the end of the road.

Ricochet + Quick Thinking + Reckless Abandon. This time, use the Reckless Abandon on yourself. You'll get all the movement while the other player is left taking all the wounds.

Quick Thinking + Badger. Less diabolical than most of the others on this list, but by putting Badger on the other player's action play, you'll have a nice makeshift Sneakers.

Quick Thinking + A Show of Trust. Put A Show of Trust on the other player's action play to see their entire hand.

Ball and Chain or Betrayal + Quick Thinking + Repetition. If you're going to play a costly card like Ball and Chain or Betrayal, use this combo to get twice the benefit.

Reckless Abandon

...

Move forward until you reach a road with a red number of four, then receive one wound for every road traveled.



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Hunter

A dynamic and dangerous card replete with possible uses (you can find it mentioned in discussion of Advantage, Amalgam, Phone Call, Pied Piper and Quick Thinking). Perhaps its most common use, though, is simply as a costly but powerful mover. The damage this card incurs can be very destructive, but a Reckless Abandon can also be manna from heaven when you are standing three ambush-filled roads away from the end. Reckless Abandon will get you over all of them, and even if it puts you in a Last Gasp, you'll need only heal just once to recover.

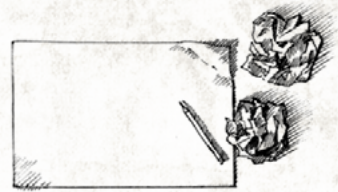
NO AMBUSHES: A key strength of Reckless Abandon is that there are no roads with a red number of four that also contain an ambush. So Reckless Abandon plays will never land you on an ambush!

USE DURING LAST GASPS! Because there's no overkill, use Reckless Abandon as the first card in a Last Gasp and get all the movement without suffering for it at all. You'll still need to have a way to heal lined up after this (e.g., Advantage or Amalgam), but this move can be an absolute game-saver!

Reconsider



Shuffle the discard pile and both players' hands into the action deck, then both players draw seven actions. Repeat if both players agree.



BASE SET: 1 Granite

A giant multi-purpose card. One possible use is as a desperate play in late-game situations (usually in search of a healing card). Another use may be to preemptively knock a dangerous card (e.g., Ricochet) or combo out of the other player's hand. Most important, though, is the ability of this card to wipe out another player's hand at the most destructive of times. This use puts Reconsider on a short list of dangerous attack cards that deserve constant consideration from all players.

FOR AN ASSASSIN: As an assassin, you can concoct a game-winning surprise attack with a single well-timed Reconsider. Play it when the other player is due to receive wounds from an event that will put them at maximum, and they may be rendered helpless. Even if they had a Call in a Hit or healing cards in their hand, they will lose them and be subject to the luck of their draw. Of course, in the decently likely possibility they do get something useful (even just a single card with which to lob a counterattack during their Last Gasp), you will have lost all of your cards as well, and so your fate could be similarly precarious. Push the situation further in your favor by following a Reconsider with a Ball and Chain or Plan Ahead. Or play it when your condition advantage makes you feel comfortable with the risk (e.g., having a Foresight or a Doctor's Bag out would be key here).

FOR A WITNESS: Perhaps more important than knowing how to use Reconsider is having a plan for how to *stop* it. The most direct way is to have a Sanctuary in play, and for this reason, a tug-of-war over that condition can be one of the major dynamics of a game. Another is to make sure Reconsider is in your hand rather than the other player's. Dedicating hand space all game long to a card you don't necessarily intend to use is costly, but not unreasonable. Even using a Plan Ahead or Flashback to get Reconsider just for this purpose is not outlandish, and may be smart if your read of the situation is that a Reconsider attack may be one of your key vulnerabilities. Using a Ball and Chain in an effort to steal Reconsider is a little extreme, but not unprecedented. Consider also that having a strong condition advantage will also make you better able to absorb Reconsider's blow.

Other ways to stop this card involve anticipating the attack. If you fear a Reconsider is coming (a suspicion you could verify by using Mole's effect), you have options. For one, you could play a countermeasure such as Curtains or Ricochet (or even a preemptive Call in a Hit). Another option, comes from the fact that face down (unprocessed) cards in an action play of yours are available to you for use in a Last Gasp. For example, if you suspect the other player is playing a Reconsider followed by a wound-dealer, you could put a healing card queued late in your action play. Then, even when you lose your hand to Reconsider, you could retrieve that healing card during a Last Gasp as a way to survive. This is a tricky maneuver to pull off, but this tactic has won people games.

Repetition



Process Repetition as though it has the same name and text as any action card that has been revealed in an action play this turn.



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Hunter

A very helpful card with nearly limitless uses. Hold it as precious in your hand, but also don't shy away from opportunities to benefit from it when they reveal themselves. Among some of its fine applications would be to complete a Strength in Numbers or Teamwork, or pair it with a Bus Ticket to zoom down the road. Also consider its viability in a big attack (e.g., with a Grenade) or in a big Granite + Quick Thinking play. And don't forget you can duplicate cards played by the other player!

Ricochet



For the rest of this turn, all wounds received by you from any source are instead received by the other player.



BASE SET: 1 Granite

An imposing and vicious card that rivals, and very possibly surpasses, Reconsider as the most destructive hostile force in the game. Witnesses will find plenty of uses for this card (especially in games that have become adversarial), but the clear, key power of Ricochet is as a piece of a surprise attack from an assassin. Experienced players may come to consider the struggle for control of this card to be a pivotal game-within-a-game all its own. Assassins should covet it, everyone should fear it and nobody should ignore its presence in the deck.

FOR AN ASSASSIN: As an assassin, your goal with Ricochet should be to finish the game the same turn you play this card. A key feature of Ricochet is that it will make you completely invulnerable to counter-attacks for one turn (even invulnerable to Call in a Hit), so once you process a Ricochet, you have an invaluable one-turn-window to do all you can to make the other player stay down.

In late stages of games, another player will likely be close to maximum wounds much of the time, but may also have one or two ways to heal lined up. Your challenge is to get them to a greater number of Last Gasps than they have ways to recover. One thing you can do to this end is choose your Ricochet play for a turn with a tough wound-dealing event that can help finish the other player off if your attacks don't complete the job. To part them from their healing cards, you can try to sabotage their hand directly with Ball and Chain and/or Reconsider. Or you can make them use up their healing cards by lining up multiple ways to wound them. Wounds in Granite are scarce, but a Gun will let you use a Granite Bullet. And here even the feeble Badger can win you the game (if its movement were to push the other player to an ambush). A Quick Thinking followed by a Hunter damage-dealer could also be a great way to pile on damage. If the other player has Sanctuary as a line of defense, a Conditional Release at the start of your action play will restore Ricochet's powers.

FOR A WITNESS: Like with Reconsider, a key piece of a witness's strategy should be in anticipating and defending against a Ricochet play. And also as with Reconsider, the clearest methods of defense will be to either possess the card in your own hand or have a Sanctuary in play. Unlike Reconsider, a Ricochet attack can also be overcome by sheer ability to heal and recover. A single Betrayal, for instance, could completely foil an assassin's plans (the multiple healed wounds don't only help you to survive right then, but could drop your wounds to enough below maximum so as to exceed the forthcoming attacks lined up for you). You can accomplish similar big heals with a successful Advantage that also triggers the Doctor's Bag's effect (especially if you're a Doctor). Add a Repetition (requiring a Quick Thinking in the case of Betrayal) for even more healing. A Pied Piper or Street Light Healer may be all you need. Or sometimes, even just a Medicine will be enough.

PRIORITIZATION: An important aspect of Mantis Falls strategy is recognizing that having a card as powerful as Ricochet in your hand at the most crucial of moments does *not* need to be primarily a matter of chance. In fact, such a thing could rightfully be the result of an entire game's worth of planning and effort. Every Plan Ahead, Flashback, Reconsider and Ball and Chain you find is another way to perhaps put Ricochet in your hand and no one else's. Or every time you use your main play to discard two cards (even good ones), you're increasing the chances that a powerhouse like this will come your way. You can also build your defense around getting Sanctuary at any cost (including with a Contention), and keeping Conditional Release in your hand as a way to make sure your Sanctuary stays in place. The point is, if you notice other players beating you with Ricochet with any regularity, consider escalating your prioritization of obtaining and/or stopping this card.

So does that mean Ricochet should be your sole number one priority from game start (e.g., get it with the first Plan Ahead you see and hold it for the rest of the game)? In my view, that would be a bit extreme (I'd prefer to grab Doctor's Bag). But Ricochet's power means that level of prioritization could merit consideration according to the situation and the tactics of the game's players.

Rider



*The bystander may discard their entire hand;
if they do, they move forward three roads.*

TRIAD: 1 Granite

A relatively cooperative card that can save the day when seeking a three-player escape, but also a card limited by its niche usefulness. Discarding one's entire hand can be a tall order that may only very occasionally feel worth it. Even the prospect of getting over the broken road may not be enough. Most commonly, the value here is when one of three players is stuck behind multiple ambushes and may see Rider as their best hope of making it to the end. Even then, a play of Rider can be undone by suspicion - as it always runs the risk of being an assassin's attempt to part a witness from all their cards as a prelude to an attack.

Safe House



*Move forward one road, ignoring
the effects of ambushes.*

BASE SET: 1 Midnight

A valuable card to find as an Action by the Night, but much less so as an Action by the Dark. After clearing the broken road, ambushes are likely to be plentiful and phones may be hard to find, so a Safe House should prove quite useful. Aside from the obvious benefit of helping you get closer to the end, try to get additional value from the Safe House by using it to get within range of a phone (making a Call in a Hit play possible), creep into the dangerous dark (making a Betrayal or Forsaken play possible) or to navigate the dreaded "double ambush" road.

Sanctuary



*Receive one wound. Condition: You may discard Sanctuary to
prevent the effects of a Granite card played by the other player.*

FULL CIRCLE: 1 Lilac

You can only use its effect once, it could simply be stolen (by Contention) or wiped out (by Conditional Release) and it costs you a wound to play. That's a high price! But the terrifying surprise attack possibilities in Granite (e.g., with Ball and Chain, Reconsider, Ricochet, etc.) mean a witness with Sanctuary should feel *much* safer than a witness without one. For an assassin, Sanctuary can benefit you directly, too, but its greater value is simply that if you have it, then nobody else does.

USING IT: Get it in front of you when it's convenient, but save its condition effect for a key moment. I'd rather end a game with an unused Sanctuary than waste its effect too early. Sometimes a supposedly cooperative player may try to force you to use Sanctuary early by playing a damaging Granite card (because they don't like the advantage Sanctuary is providing you). I'd consider that a hostile play and recommend setting the precedent that such a tactic will receive your own hostile tactics in return (maybe even a Call in a Hit). The same goes for stealing Sanctuary with Contention.

OVERCOMING IT: If the other player has a Sanctuary interfering with your plans, you can try to use Contention or the mean Granite card trick mentioned above (maybe they'll be more forgiving than I'm recommending you be). Or re-empower a Granite attack by starting it with Conditional Release.

A Show of Trust



Show your entire hand to the other player; the other player may show you as much or as little of their own hand as they like.

BASE SET: 1 Hunter

A relatively expendable card, but a nice one to use when it's convenient (assuming you don't have anything to hide). It really can go a decent ways towards earning trust, which is helpful to all-witness games and can also help an assassin lull a witness into false security. On some occasions, what the other player is and is not willing to show may be quite illuminating. One nice trick is to use a Quick Thinking to put this on the other player's action play to gain a free view of a player's hand.

Smoke Bomb



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Prevent event; deal one wound to other player; give this condition to the other player. Condition: Other player's events are unseen by you.

FULL CIRCLE: 1 Granite

A three-pronged card. Depending on your feelings of allegiance and the importance of trust in the current game, two of the three effects on this card (the wound to the other player and the fact that the other player will no longer be able to see your events) might be construed either as moderate positives or small negatives. In balance over many plays, the good and the bad of these two effects will probably tilt towards slightly detrimental. But the heart of this card is its simple ability to prevent an event all on its own. Neither Teamwork nor Solicit a Favor can be relied upon without some external circumstance (either another Teamwork or ally cards to spare), so Smoke Bomb stands out for its unique dependability. Value this card highly and use it to stop a destructive event.

A USEFUL DAMAGE-DEALER? It's been mentioned repeatedly in this guide that cards capable of dealing wounds to the other player are hard to come by in Granite. So the Smoke Bomb can, indeed, be useful for that purpose as part of a larger Granite attack. And in some cases, you'll choose to launch this attack when preventing the event is to your benefit, giving the Smoke Bomb a powerful dual-effectiveness. But keep in mind that it is often a good tactic to time your big attacks for turns in which the event can help finish the other player off for you. In those moments, the Smoke Bomb's prevention of the event will actually work against those plans.

Sneakers



••••

Move forward two roads.

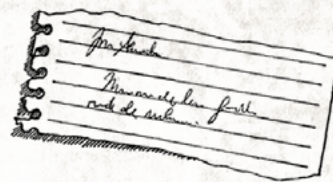
BASE SET: 1 Lilac

A simple little powerhouse and probably the best movement card in the game. The absence of location-dependent effects in the suit of Lilac means that there are not many combos to be made with Sneakers. But unlike Bus Tickets, you can use this card no matter where you are - even when standing in the dangerous ambush-filled roads of the dark. Be sure to appreciate the value of this card and use it at a time when it helps you substantively. Good uses include passing over ambushes (especially the "double ambush") or the broken road, or using it to move quickly through areas of the road in which you are out of range of a phone.

Solicit a Favor

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The other player may give you up to two face down ally cards; you may sacrifice two of your face down ally cards to prevent the event.



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Lilac

The cost of two face down ally cards might seem a little steep, but will usually be well worth it compared to suffering from a destructive event. And if you're able to play this when the other player is willing to have it be *their* face down ally cards that get lost rather than yours, then that's, of course, all the better. If the ally cards necessary to make Solicit a Favor succeed are out, then this is a good card to hold onto and use when helpful. When the ally cards *aren't* out, it can be a tricky question as to whether this merits the hand space it takes up.

CON-ARTIST: Solicit a Favor offers an interesting chance for sabotage: convince the other player to give you their ally cards and then decide to just keep them (i.e., not sacrifice them to prevent the event). This is pretty cool if you can pull it off, but the breach of trust here will likely make it more harmful than helpful in most cases. It could be a fun first piece in a Lilac surprise attack, though!

Spyglass

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*You or the other player (you choose) keeps Spyglass as a condition.
Condition: Discard Spyglass to see an "unseen" event.*



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Royal

A nice card to just play as soon as is convenient and benefit from without cost of hand-space. Some players may give this to the other player to build trust, but most seem to keep it for themselves. The value of seeing an "unseen" event in a high-stakes moment can be quite helpful (if you pick your spot just right). The other nice effect is the threat of Spyglass's use may keep the other player more honest throughout the game.

Street Light Healer

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Heal two of your wounds; discard your entire hand; remove this card from the game.



BASE SET: 1 Midnight

Probably the most consistently sought-after card of those available as Actions by the Night or Actions by the Dark. Losing your entire hand is *rough* - as not only does it blow up all of your hand-building to that point, but it leaves you completely defenseless until you get the chance to draw more cards. But like Pied Piper, this card shows that, even at a high price, two healed wounds is a precious effect that you would do well to value highly. Save it for after you've exhausted all of your other healing options, and at that point, you'll probably be very happy you have it.

THE MIDNIGHT SOCIETY: Street Light Healer offers some rare chances for powerful all-midnight combos. Pair it in a Last Gasp with a Call in a Hit or The Falls for a huge heal-and-deal wounds play. Or put it before Killer in a regular action play to unexpectedly unlock Killer's effect. For all of these, though, be wary of the other player using their Last Gasp to send enough wounds your way to put you at your own maximum (you'll have no cards to defend yourself!).

Strength in Numbers



If another Strength in Numbers has already been revealed in an action play this turn, deal four wounds to event opposition.

BASE SET: 2 Lilac, 2 Royal

A nice use-it-when-ever-it's-helpful card. It's among the least costly ways to deal large numbers of wounds to an event opposition, and therefore a commonly played card that is often crucial to cooperative victories. But it's also a card that usually hinges on successful coordination with another player, and that is always risky. Counting on this when facing a potentially fatal event can be a dangerous proposition! In these cases, try keeping your imminent death a secret to reduce the chances of the other player taking advantage. Or try the opposite - bluff imminent death when discussing a possible Strength in Numbers play even though you know you can survive. If the other player lies about playing one, you've caught them in a lie that is very difficult to explain!

CONSERVATION: These are among the best cards to put into Conserved Energy. Free up space in your hand and retrieve it once there is another of these in someone's hand.

Suture Kit



Heal one wound for the other player.

BASE SET: 1 Lilac

Perhaps in a more perfect world, healing someone else would be as valuable as healing yourself. But, alas, not so on the streets of Mantis Falls. And so this card's value lies somewhere closer to the bottom of the bunch, saved from the lowest tier mostly by its ability to trigger the effect of the Doctor's Bag. If you can time it just right, you might be able to use this card to save the other player's life, and that can be a wonderfully important trust-building moment. The trust that play can earn (if deserved) could swing cooperative victory to well within your reach. But is it worth the hand space to wait for that moment? Unless one player has the Doctor's Bag out, the sad, common fate of this card is to sit in Conserved Energy, with both players wistfully hoping that the other may soon retrieve it and use it to help them.

-- "Hand Space" --

A common theme throughout this guide is that of prioritizing "hand space", which refers to thinking of the limited room in your hand (seven actions) as a key resource. This is likely already well understood by readers with experience in hand-management games, but it's so crucial to good strategy here that we decided it merited explaining. Imagine this example: An inexperienced player decides they have powerful cards in their hand (e.g., Quick Thinking, Conditional Release, etc.) and therefore passes on opportunities to discard. Later, they are attacked, have no way to heal or counter-attack and so lose the game. They failed to explore the deck for the cards they needed most and thus utilized their hand space unsuccessfully.

Think critically about if cards are fitting into your plans, if they can save your life or if they can win you the game. Sometimes, according to your situation, "good" cards may accomplish none of these and you'll have to make the tough choice to move on. Other times, choosing to prioritize keeping a card will be absolutely right (don't discard a Medicine!). Either way, always bear in mind that choosing to hold onto cards is an important decision not to be made lightly.

Tar



*You or the other player (you choose) keeps Tar as a condition.
Condition: You can't move. Discard 4 suited actions to discard Tar.*

FULL CIRCLE: 1 Hunter

Tar presents an interesting, powerful and undeniably adversarial way for an assassin to immobilize a witness out of range of a phone. In this capacity, Tar could be a key addition to any well-timed Hunter attack. It can also be used by an assassin as a desperate measure to prevent the players' impending escape from Mantis Falls. The usefulness of this card is relegated to highly specific purposes, though, and this may feel like a bad draw in the vast majority of game situations.

TAR... MYSELF?! A nice use of this card is for a player (usually a witness) to stick themselves to a spot near a phone and prevent any movement being forced upon them by the other player. This can be a great play for anyone with a Pied Piper out that fears being pushed to the end of the road!

Teamwork



*If another Teamwork has already been revealed
in an action play this turn, prevent the event.*

BASE SET:
1 Hunter, 1 Lilac, 1 Royal

Similar to Strength in Numbers, but this one has the benefit of also being able to stop an incident as well as an opposition. If things are still fairly cooperative and another player has a Teamwork, then it should be worth the hand space to hold it in anticipation of a key event to dispatch. If there is only one Teamwork among the players, consider conserving it until another one appears. Also - don't ignore a Hunter Teamwork + Repetition combo as a way to prevent an event on your own!

Tincture



*Move your gasp marker one space left.
Deal one wound to the other player.*

BASE SET: 1 Amber

We find death-by-Last-Gasps to be *much* less common than death-by-wounds, which makes this card less useful than a Medicine. But when death-by-last-gasps begins to loom on the horizon, Tincture can elevate to among the most coveted cards in the deck. The wound to the other player can sometimes complicate matters, but also gives Tincture a nice second use as an Amber attacker.

-- Road Statistics --

	AVERAGE STOPLIGHTS			FREQUENCIES			CHANCE OF BEING WITHIN ONE ROAD OF A PHONE
	GREEN	YELLOW	RED	PHONES	BUS STOPS	AMBUSHES	
SUNSET	1.2	1.8	2.4	3/5	3/5	0/5	97%
NIGHT	0.8	2.5	3.5	1/4	3/4	2/4	64%
DARK	0.8	2.6	3.4	1/5	2/5	3/5	53%

The Tools

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Deal one wound to event opposition.



BASE SET: 1 Amber

Basically a Baseball Bat, but bolstered meaningfully in importance by its role in the The Tools + Cut Wires combo. If you draw this as an assassin, you may want to start considering crafting a Cut Wires play if enough other pieces start to fall in place. For any player (witness or assassin), using this card against an event can give a small, but nice, little boost to your apparent trustworthiness.

The Well

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You or the other player (you choose) receives two wounds and keeps The Well as a condition. Condition: Whenever you receive wounds from an event, you may discard The Well to prevent those wounds.



FULL CIRCLE: 1 Royal

An interesting multi-use card. It can sometimes rightfully teeter into "maybe I should just discard this" territory, but it can also come up very big in the right moments. The Well will usually be played in one of three distinct ways, which I'll describe here in ascending order of how highly I rate them:

PLAY IT ON YOURSELF RIGHT AWAY: My least favorite option, but not bad. This quickly frees up hand space, and although two wounds is a lot, it's fairly likely you'll eventually offset that and more against an event in the future. The risk here is it could be lost or stolen (this is a very nice prize for a Contention play). In that case, the two wounds you took loom as a big cost to have paid for nothing.

USE IT TO ATTACK THE OTHER PLAYER: It can feel a little strange giving someone such a useful condition in an effort to harm them, but a reliable way to deal two wounds is no small thing. If you can use this as part of a fatal attack on the other player, then you won't ever need to worry about them reaping some benefit from The Well's condition effect in the future.

PLAY IT ON YOURSELF AS THE FIRST PART OF A LAST GASP: This one's my favorite, but it only works if you have The Well in your hand at the right time and can pair it with a healing card. As the first card of a Last Gasp, put The Well on yourself. Then follow it up with a Medicine to survive the Last Gasp. The wounds from the Well are absorbed harmlessly into the "no overkill" rule and you've managed to get this enormously useful condition out for free.

Whispers

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If you're at least one road from the other player, take any ally card from the deck. If at least two roads from them, take two instead.



BASE SET: 1 Granite, 1 Hunter

If you get this when already sufficiently far from the other player, this should be a quick, useful inclusion in an action play. The tougher choices come when this card's effect is *not* usable (due to being right in step with the other player). In such cases, I suggest being cautious about how much hand-space or planning you commit to making this card pay off. Try to make it happen in dual-purpose ways (e.g., paired with a Bus Ticket that gets you over an ambush). But if the chances aren't there, keep an open mind to discarding or conserving this card in search of better options.

