



# STRANGERS ON A BUS

by Bruce Glassco

## INTRODUCTION

The following document is an example of a micro-game—a game that involves minimal time in writing, set-up, and play. The entire game was written in an evening. It is designed for five players (though more could easily be added), and shouldn't take more than half an hour to be acted out. It is designed to introduce new players to some of the most basic concepts of live gaming, through the hoary cliché of switched briefcases. In a sense, it is live action in its most stripped down form, being to a real game what a roller skate is to a Rolls-Royce.

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## GM INSTRUCTIONS

### PRE-GAME PREPARATION:

Cut out the six cards that follow. Tape the one starting with “a box...” and the one starting with “switch...” together, so that only the “a box...” card is visible. Put the taped card and the four other cards into identical manila envelopes, which will represent briefcases. Hold onto these for now.

Invite five people, and cast them in the various roles. Note that two roles, P. C. Dubois and Alex Garbeau, could be cast as either gender. The other roles are written as two men and one woman, though they could be rewritten as necessary.

### IN GAME:

Give everyone their character sheets. While they read them, set up a bunch of chairs in two aisles to represent a bus traveling from New York to Washington, D.C. Let everyone find a seat on the bus. Give them a few minutes to introduce themselves to each other, if they want to. This period can go quicker if they start talking, slower if they clam up. After a few minutes, give appropriate sound effects of screeching tires and crashing noises. Indicate to everyone that they have just been in a horrible crash, and are all thrown clear of the bus. Everyone should end up lying in a rough circle, semi-conscious.

Place the briefcases next to them in the following order:

<b>Briefcase with money:</b>	Millicent Lapwing
<b>Briefcase with gun:</b>	P. C. Dublanche
<b>Briefcase with manuscript:</b>	Det. Henderson
<b>Briefcase with bomb:</b>	Alex Garbeau
<b>Briefcase with sketches:</b>	Mohammed Akbar

Then tell everyone that they are gradually regaining consciousness. Everyone should quickly realize that they have the wrong briefcase. How they recover the correct one is up to them. Be prepared for the following eventualities.

Someone tries to put together the gun. Det. Henderson or Alex Garbeau could do it in a few seconds; anyone else would take longer. If someone tries to fire the gun, it should wound or kill the target: the exact result is up to you.

Someone untapes the bomb. Everyone has seven seconds to react (The GM should count silently). Tearing or cutting slip of paper so that it severs the bottommost wire will disarm the bomb. If other wires are cut as well, it's still OK. If any of the other wires is cut, and the bottom one is not, it goes off immediately. It will go off in seven seconds in any case. A reasonable amount of cover will prevent injury - it wasn't really that big a bomb after all.

(Rationale: the object labeled "object" is the detonator. As long as power is supplied to it from the battery, it does not trigger the explosive. Power is supplied originally through the switch. When the switch is tripped, it diverts power to the clock, which permits power through for the set amount of time, then shuts off. Trying to take the bomb apart results in tripping the switch. Once tripped, the switch cannot be reset. Originally the time was longer, but the bus crash jostled it.)

A fistfight breaks out. Everyone has a combat number, from 3 to 8. Add the numbers on each side in the fight. The higher number wins.

Someone tries to examine closely the contents of one of the other briefcases. You may give more clues if characters have more time to look. The detective is always thinking about crime and doesn't read much, so he will take quite a bit of convincing before he accepts that the story is fiction.

Anyone but Akbar will recognize the Da Vinci drawings..



## STRANGERS ON A BUS

### **DETECTIVE GUS HENDERSON**

You are Detective Gus Henderson, New York Police Department, undercover division. You are here to apprehend a possibly dangerous criminal; you just don't know who it is.

A week ago you were on another assignment. Someone stole a set of Leonardo Da Vinci drawings from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They were priceless, but you'd been unable to find any leads whatsoever. It was very frustrating.

Finally, you told your supervisor that you wanted to be switched to another case. The case you were put on was the ongoing investigation of the group involved with the World Trade Center Bombing. The NYPD just got a hot tip that someone from the terrorist group would be traveling on this bus to Washington, D.C., possibly with more explosives, to try to blow up the Library of Congress. The department wants him or her identified, which is why they don't just search and seize the luggage. You don't have any more to go on than that.

There's one other thing. You aren't entirely honest. You are usually pretty honest, but you do have a price. You have occasionally taken payoffs from high powered drug lords. You have always been very careful not to get caught, though - it's not worth losing your job over. If you could ever get in a position to get hold of hundred thousand or so, though, you might be willing to retire - out of the country, that is.

### **ITEMS:**

Since you may run into some rough customers, you have a disassembled rifle in a briefcase in the luggage rack.

### **COMBAT: 8**



## STRANGERS ON A BUS

**MOHAMMED AKBAR**

Actually, your real name is Fred Jones, but when you converted to Islam a few years ago under the charismatic preacher in New York, you changed your name. You have always disliked people, though. Your new orders to cause damage to the country were welcome to you.

You were recently involved in the plot to blow up the World Trade Center. You purchased explosives and carried them back and forth. Fortunately, you haven't been caught - yet.

Yesterday, you got orders that the war against the great Satan of the United States must be expanded. You were told to board a bus and go to Washington, D.C. When you get there, you are to plant explosives inside the Library of Congress.

You have some training in setting up and detonating explosives. You know nothing about guns, though, except what you have seen on cop shows.

### **ITEMS:**

You have a detonator in a briefcase on the luggage rack. It could create a small explosion. Most of your explosives are in a suitcase in the luggage compartment.

### **General Information:**

You were a bit worried when you watched them put it together, though - it seemed a bit unstable.

**COMBAT: 7**



## STRANGERS ON A BUS

### MILLICENT LAPWING

All your life, you have been prim and proper. You have always done what you were supposed to do - go to the right schools, etc. However, things never really worked out the way they were supposed to. You never managed to find a husband, for one thing. That was one thing you were supposed to do. But you've found that you like having your independence anyway. Now you are in your late thirties. Due to a good inheritance, you don't need money. You work as a librarian.

What you've always wanted to be, though, was a detective. You can hardly read enough mystery novels, and you're an expert on everyone from Agatha Christie to Dashiell Hammet to Dick Francis. You especially like Christie's Miss Marple, or Angela Lansbury's character in *Murder She Wrote*. You've always wished that you could find a mystery to solve - you think you could do it just as well as your heroines. You also like the way they avoid violence - you can't stand guns, don't know anything about them, and don't want to be around them. Still, if you found out about a possible crime, you'd rather investigate it yourself than report it to the police.

Finally, you decided to realize your ambition in a more realistic way. For the past three years, you have been writing your own mystery novel. You finally finished it last week. It's about a rich art collector who hires thieves to steal artwork for him. Recently, you heard that somebody stole some Leonardo Da Vinci works from the Metropolitan Museum. It sounds a lot like your story, actually.

**ITEM:** You are hand-carrying your manuscript, *The Knave of Arts*, to a publisher in Baltimore, in a briefcase in the luggage rack overhead, because you would just die if you lost it.

**COMBAT:** 3



## STRANGERS ON A BUS

### **P.C. DUBLANCHE**

You are an extremely wealthy jet-setter. You think nothing of flying from coast to coast at a moment's notice, because you have inherited a fortune. You are used to getting whatever you want, when you want it.

Having everything you could get was starting to become boring, though. You thought about going after things you couldn't get. What about art? Lots of rich people have art collections, but the museums have all the really good stuff.

With your money, it wasn't too hard. You made a few connections, and figured out how it was done. A rash of museum thefts across Europe have been caused by your minions. Afterwards, an agent of yours meets them, and swaps the paintings for cash. You have a Van Gogh, three Gauguins, a Monet and a Picasso that way.

Recently you found out that there was a display of Leonardo da Vinci sketches at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. You wanted them, and money was no object. Your local thief wanted \$50,000 - a pittance. You would have gone to three times that much.

Then, at the last minute, your agent, who has done all your communication work for you, choked on a fishbone in a restaurant and died. Rather than finding someone else, you decided to go make the swap yourself. He had arranged for the exchange to take place on the bus from New York to Washington. You've never been on a bus before - interesting.

Since you've never met the thief, you have a password. You are supposed to mention something about horses, and he or she is supposed to say something about libraries.

**ITEM:** a briefcase with \$50,000, in the luggage rack overhead. You also have a checkbook, on which you can write unlimited amounts.

**COMBAT:** 4



## STRANGERS ON A BUS

### ALEX GARBEAU

You are a master thief. You specialize in bypassing elaborate security systems. Houses, banks, museums - nowhere is safe from you.

Sometimes you steal for yourself, and sometimes for wealthy clients on commission. That was your most recent job. You got a contract from someone - you don't know who - to steal a set of priceless Leonardo da Vinci drawings from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The job itself was not too difficult. They have great security, but after all, you are the master.

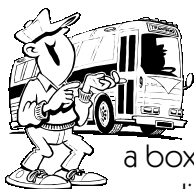
All that's left now is the switch, where you give the briefcase with the drawings to someone, and get paid. You were told to board this bus, and your contact would be on it. You have passwords to recognize each other - you are supposed to say something about libraries, and he or she is supposed to say something about horses. Then you will exchange briefcases.

In all your time as a professional, you have never had a job turn nasty on you. You know quite a bit about guns, but you've never had to use one - in fact, you find them rather distasteful. You'd much rather use your wits.

Incidentally, you are a bit greedy. If there is some other way to get more money from your sponsor, such as blackmail, you might go for it.

**ITEM:** A briefcase containing sketches by Leonardo da Vinci, in a briefcase in the luggage rack overhead.

**COMBAT:** 5



## Strangers On A Bus

a box with complex wires and  
lights coming out of it

(untape if you want to mess with it)



## Strangers On A Bus

an assault rifle, disassembled



## Strangers On A Bus

switch—battery  
—clock  
object—C4 blocks  
You hear: <tictictic>



## Strangers On A Bus

a stack of papers  
(they seem to involve some  
kind of art theft)



## Strangers On A Bus

stacks and stacks of \$100 dollar bills



## Strangers On A Bus

some beat-up pictures  
of men and horses