

FIELD MANUAL 10-4-2

GRUNT SPADES

OFFICIAL FIELD MANUAL

RULES • PROCEDURES • TRADITION



IF YOU AIN'T CHEATING

GS-1

CIVILIAN

PFC PORTER

INDEPENDENT PUBLICATION • AUGUST 2026

GRUNT SPADES • GS-1 • CIVILIAN

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GRUNT SPADES

Official Field Manual • GS-1

Rules, Procedures, and Table Tradition

By PFC Porter

Civilian Edition • August 2026

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This independent publication uses the visual language and organizational style of a military field manual for instruction and entertainment. It is not issued, endorsed, or sponsored by the United States Army, the Department of Defense, or any government agency.

Grunt Spades is presented as a distinct rules system. Local variations may be enjoyable, but they do not replace the official doctrine recorded in this manual.

Dedication

For the soldiers, veterans, partners, and opponents who kept the game alive wherever four players and a deck could be found—and for my old man, a Vietnam veteran, who taught me that you can educate the ignorant, but you cannot help the stupid.

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FOREWORD

In the trenches of card tables across the world, a battle continues—not with rifles or bayonets, but with Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs, and, most importantly, Spades.

Grunt Spades is more than a way to pass time. It tests judgment, memory, nerve, accountability, and the ability to work with another person under pressure. A player must read the table, trust a partner, anticipate the opposition, and adapt when the plan meets reality.

This manual records the official doctrine of that game. It is written for the player learning the system, the veteran settling an argument, and the **partnership** determined to sharpen its execution. Advanced offensive, defensive, psychological, and competition doctrine belongs to later manuals. GS-1 answers the first question: How is Grunt Spades played correctly?

STANDING ORDERS: Bid wisely. Play smartly. Always watch your partner's back.

*"The cards may decide the **hand**. The players decide the game."*

INTRODUCTION —

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

Read the Missions in order the first time through. Return to the Quick Reference, FAQ, and Tactical Glossary when a dispute or unfamiliar term arises. Official Rules control the game. Recommended Practices improve execution but do not change the rules. Field Notes preserve the culture, hard-earned lessons, and barracks wisdom surrounding the table.

Authorized local administrative procedures appear under Unit Amendments; they may not alter Official Grunt Spades doctrine.

Throughout this manual, one play is one card placed on the **board**—the center area where the four cards are played. A **trick** is the four cards played in one **round**; once captured, that trick becomes a **book**. A hand contains thirteen books. The partnership's **combined bid** states how many books it promises to capture.

DOCTRINE BEFORE DEBATE: When a local habit conflicts with this manual, the manual controls Official Grunt Spades. A table may play a variation, but it should call the variation what it is.

Scope of This Manual

Grunt Spades is intended to provide a practical system for learning, playing, and improving at partnership Spades. It is not—and does not claim to be—an exhaustive examination of every strategy, situation, or school of thought associated with the game. Entire works can be devoted to subjects such as opening leads, card counting, trump management, partnership communication, defensive play, probability, and reading the table.

Players are encouraged to study other reputable books, articles, and bodies of work that explore these subjects in greater depth. Compare their recommendations, test them at the table, and retain what improves your partnership. This manual establishes our doctrine; it does not declare that learning ends here.

The manual gives you the map. Experience teaches you the terrain.

MISSION 1

WELCOME TO THE BATTLEFIELD

MISSION OBJECTIVE: Understand what Grunt Spades is, why it exists, and the mindset expected of every player.

1-1. A Distinct Game

Grunt Spades is a partnership-based, trick-taking card game built around a modified deck, partnership bidding, disciplined play, strict accountability, and the traditions of the tables where the game was learned. It is not regular Spades with military vocabulary painted over it. The deck, bids, penalties, special contracts, and table customs create a different operating environment.

1-2. The Four Laws of Grunt Spades

1. **The Mission Comes First.** The partnership's **contract** controls the hand. Individual glory is secondary to making the bid and protecting the score.
2. **Every Card Matters.** A low card may reveal a **void**—a player can no longer follow that suit—protect a partner, draw out Spades, avoid an extra book that becomes a **bag**, or preserve control. There are no meaningless plays.
3. **Accountability Builds Better Players.** Own the bid, the play, and the mistake. Conduct the **AAR**—a brief **after-action review** of what worked and what failed—make the correction, and drive on.
4. **Respect the Partnership.** Trust is the center of the game. Watch your partner's back and never sacrifice the partnership to protect your pride.

1-3. The Expected Mindset

- Know the rules before challenging the call.
- Bid what the partnership can reasonably capture.
- Track the board instead of asking the table to coach you.
- Expect mistakes to be remembered; use them as training.
- Play hard, clown when deserved, but do not make it needlessly personal.

TABLE DOCTRINE: Know the rules. Play the rules. Master the rules.

MISSION 2

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT (ROE)

MISSION OBJECTIVE: Understand the official equipment, setup, deal, play, bidding, and scoring rules governing every game.

2-1. Operational Deck

Begin with a standard 52-card deck and add the **Big Joker**, the highest card, and the **Little Joker**, the second-highest card. Remove the 2 of Hearts and 2 of Diamonds. The operational deck contains 52 cards, including fifteen (15) Spades.

Spade ranks from highest to lowest: Big Joker, Little Joker, 2 of Spades, Ace of Spades, King of Spades, Queen of Spades, Jack of Spades, then 10 through 3 of Spades. **Non-trump** suits do not outrank one another; the suit led controls unless trump is legally played.

2-2. Unit Organization

Four players form two partnerships. Partners sit opposite each other. The deal and play proceed clockwise. Each player receives thirteen cards.

2-3. Preparing and Dealing

- The dealer shuffles. The player to the dealer's right may **cut** the deck or knock. **Chinese Cuts** and **Polish Deals** are nonstandard table flourishes, but they never excuse an incorrect distribution; the dealer owns the deal.
- Deal one card at a time, face down, clockwise, until all cards are distributed.
- Each player is authorized one **Power Check** per deal—an official request to expose one card during the deal.
- Players count their cards and inspect the hand before play begins.

FIELD NOTE — THE CUT IS A TRUST RITUAL

A proper cut is not magic. It is the table saying, before the first card leaves the deck: nobody is dealing off the bottom, nobody is protecting a stacked pack, and nobody has to wonder. In a game played by the same four people night after night, that small ritual saves more arguments than it starts.

During World War II, card expert John Scarne taught soldiers a more thorough middle-of-the-pack cut to frustrate common hustles. Grunt Spades does not require a Scarne cut. It requires a real shuffle, an offered cut, and enough visibility that honest players never have to defend an honest deal.

2-4. Misdeal

Any player may call a **misdeal** before the first card hits the board, but the caller must immediately show a legitimate reason. A player dealt no Spades has a misdeal. For this purpose, the Big and Little Joker count as Spades. A hand holding either Joker is not a no-spade hand, even when it contains no spade-suit card. Improper card distribution or an incorrect deck may also establish a misdeal. Getting dealt a weak hand does not.

2-5. Opening and Following Suit

- Spades and Jokers may not be led on the opening play. Period.
- A player must follow the suit led whenever able. Failing to do so while holding that suit is a **renege**.
- When unable to **follow suit**—play the same suit as the first card—the player may **throw off** or cut with a Spade.
- The first legal cut **breaks Spades**. Spades may then be led thereafter.
- A player who is **Spade Tight**—holding only Spades—may lead Spades because no legal alternative remains.
- Once a card hits the board, it is played. **No takebacks**: reversing a played card invites cheating and disrupts gameplay. If the card creates an accidental renege, the player's partner had better hope to God nobody calls it.

2-6. Authorized Bids

Partnerships submit one combined partnership bid. The non-dealing partnership bids first. Legal standard bids are Board, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10. **Zero / NIL** and bids of 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 12, and 13 are not authorized. The scorekeeper records the game and will reject an **illegal bid** – any unauthorized number – and tell the partnership to try again.

FIELD NOTE: Thirteen is not a bid. Thirteen books is a Boston, and a Boston wins the game whether anybody called it or not. Above ten, the contract you want is Ten for Two.

2-7. Scoring

A successful standard bid earns ten points for each book bid plus one point for each Sandbag—an extra book beyond the bid—commonly shortened to bag. A **set** costs ten points for each book bid. Nine or fewer accumulated bags carry no penalty. Ten bags: –100 points; reset the bag counter. Bags remain part of the final score. At the end of a hand, a partnership at 500 or more wins if it holds the higher score; a tie requires another hand.

OFFICIAL RULE: A **Boston**—capturing all thirteen books—is an automatic win regardless of the score.

MISSION 3

KNOW YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

MISSION OBJECTIVE: Understand the duties carried by the dealer, every player, the partners, the **Bookkeeper**, and the Scorekeeper.

3-1. Dealer

- Do not begin the next hand until the scores and bags are verified.
- Maintain deck integrity and shuffle thoroughly.
- Offer the cut to the player on the right.
- Deal clockwise and correct exposed or distribution errors before play.

3-2. Every Player

- Count their hand before play begins; an incorrect count is a misdeal, not merely a violation.
- Call a misdeal or violation before the required deadline and show evidence.
- Know the bid, score, bag count, suit led, and books captured.
- Follow suit, play in turn, and secure cards from accidental exposure.

TABLE TRUTH: Exposed cards are like a bad poker face: once you show them, folks are going to look.

3-3. Partnership

Partners evaluate their hands together, submit one contract, and accept the result together. Each partner must protect the bid, support the other player's likely plan, and avoid sacrificing books for individual recognition—though revenge can be satisfying when somebody cut your partner on the previous hand. Satisfying is not the same as tactically sound.

3-4. Bookkeeper

Each partnership's Bookkeeper is determined when that partnership captures its first book. The partner who did not win that book becomes the Bookkeeper and maintains the partnership's captured books until the hand ends. Stack captured books from left to right, alternating vertical and horizontal orientation. This is bookkeeping, not camouflage. The count should be visible, orderly, and easy to examine for an alleged renegade.

3-5. Scorekeeper

The Scorekeeper records both partnerships' bids, scores, bags, penalties, and Blind Six attempts. A Ten for Two (Hundred) receives special scoring only when it is clearly declared to the Scorekeeper. Saying only "Ten" creates an ordinary Ten bid. We're not mind readers.

FIELD NOTE: A Ten for Two is annotated 00, like "Wagon Wheels."

FIELD NOTE: Count the books. Know the score. Memory is not a scorekeeping system.

MISSION 4

THE ART OF THE BID

MISSION OBJECTIVE: Evaluate the hand, determine an accurate contract, and give the partnership a plan it can execute.

4-1. Bid What You Hold

Count certainties first. Then evaluate Possibles, suit length, **short suits**, trumps, position, and your partner's assessment. **Card Counting** means mentally tracking what has been played. Identify **Long Suits** with four or more cards, **Short Suits** with fewer than three, and **Singletons** with exactly one card before committing the partnership. Hope is not a book. A bid should describe the work the partnership can reasonably perform.

4-2. P or Possible

A **Possible** identifies an uncertain book. "Three and a P" means three expected books with a possible fourth. Two Possibles equal one book when calculating the partnership bid. A Possible is a planning tool, not permission to inflate the bid.

4-3. Partnership Conference

Partners may communicate before submitting the combined bid in the manner they have agreed, but they may not name specific cards or expose detailed suit information. One partner delivers the final bid to the Scorekeeper. The second bidding partnership may say **Lock It Up** without giving an actual bid number. That locks up all possible books.

4-4. Bumping Up the Bid

After hearing the opposition's bid, a partnership may **bump up the bid** — raise its own bid by one. It may never lower the bid. A bump must land on a legal bid: a partnership holding eight may not bump to nine. It stands at eight or it goes to ten. Once the first card hits the board, both bids are final.

FIELD NOTE: Eight has nowhere to go but ten. Stand on eight and live with your bags, or declare Ten for Two and put two hundred points on the table. There is no comfortable middle, and there was never meant to be one.

4-5. Blind Six

Blind Six is available only when a partnership trails the opposing partnership by 100 or more points. It must be declared before the deal, is limited to three attempts per game—win or lose—scores +120 when made and –60 when set, and produces no bags.

4-6. Ten and Ten for Two

Ten is the default contract for any ten-book bid that is not declared as Ten for Two. It scores +100 when made, –100 when set, with bags applied normally.

Ten for Two must be declared by name to the Scorekeeper before the first card hits the board. When made it scores +200, produces no bags, and automatically sets the opposition. When set it costs –100.

A partnership does not choose plain Ten because it prefers plain Ten. Plain Ten is what a partnership gets when it failed to declare. Saying "ten" and claiming afterward that it meant Ten for Two is not a declaration — it is an argument, and the Scorekeeper's record ends it.

TABLE DOCTRINE: Declare it or don't have it.

4-7. Bag Doctrine

A bag is a tactical cost. Going set is strategic failure. Take the books necessary to complete the mission. Never volunteer to go set simply to avoid an overtrick, and never let opponents control the battle by bidding low and feeding bags. Consistently taking two bags is an AAR indicator that somebody needs to shore up the bid.

THE SEVEN Ps: Porter says: Practicing Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance. Count the certainties, account for the Possibles, consider the board, and establish the plan before committing the partnership.

MISSION 5

FIELD NOTE — THE TENTH BAG HAS A SHADOW

Bags make otherwise sensible players act superstitious. They count them, fear them, and sometimes start seeing a trap in every extra book.

The fear is useful when it keeps a partnership disciplined; it becomes poison when players begin planning throws or farming bags instead of making the bid.

A bag strategy that cannot be explained in the open is usually a sandbagging story waiting to happen. Make the bid. Count the score.

Take or release a book only for a lawful, visible reason.

PLAYING THE HAND

MISSION OBJECTIVE: Execute the contract through disciplined play, board awareness, trump control, and partnership support.

5-1. Follow Suit

The suit led establishes the immediate requirement. Follow it when able. If unable, decide whether the mission requires a throw-off or a cut. That decision should serve the contract, not the desire to win one flashy book.

5-2. Every Card Sends a Message

A lead, duck, cut, or discard changes what the table knows. Track which suits are exhausted, who is void, where the remaining trumps may sit, and who has **Control of the Board**—the ability to win the current book and choose the next suit. Watch the Board: pay attention to the cards already played!

5-3. Trump Is a Resource

Do not waste trumps merely because one can win the current book. Use them to protect the bid, **Flush Out** opposing Spades—force them into play—seize control, deny the opposition, or reach your partner. The Big Joker may end an argument, but timing determines whether it also advances the mission.

TABLE SLANG: Dropping the Marne Hammer is the dramatic act of crushing an unsuspecting book with the Big Joker—especially after the opposition has been running its mouth at the table.

5-4. Protect the Partnership

Read your partner's plays as part of a developing plan. Preserve likely winners, avoid unnecessary friendly fire, and do not cut your partner's winning card without a reason worth defending during the AAR—or your partner may decide to cut you!

5-5. Adapt to the Battlefield

The bid is made before the hand reveals itself. When distribution, cuts, or opposition change the terrain, adjust. Play the table you have, not the table you hoped to see.

5-6. Claiming the Rest

TRAM — The Rest Are Mine may be declared only when every remaining book is mathematically certain and no possible order of play can defeat the claim. Confidence is not proof.

MISSION 6

BATTLEFIELD CONTINGENCIES

MISSION OBJECTIVE: Resolve irregular deals, unsecured books, reneges, claims, and disputes without losing control of the game.

6-1. Misdeal Procedure

Call the misdeal before the first card hits the board and show the reason immediately. A no-Spade hand, improper distribution, or an incorrect deck may establish the call. A weak hand may not. Collect the cards, correct the problem, shuffle, and redeal.

6-2. Kids in the Street

A book left unsecured—or claimed too slowly—becomes a **Kid in the Street**. The opposition may attempt a **kidnapping**. If caught during the attempt, release the book. If the kidnapping is completed, ownership changes, the matter is settled, and the kidnapper must immediately lead the next card.

6-3. Renege

A renege occurs when a player fails to follow suit while holding that suit. Any player may call it before the hand concludes. The accuser must identify and show the alleged book. Once the book is shown, verify the suit led and the offending player's remaining cards. A proven renege awards the disputed book to the opposing partnership and costs the offending partnership three books for the current hand.

The disputed book belongs to the non-offending partnership. If the offending partnership captured it, transfer it. If the non-offending partnership already captured it, it stays where it is — the same book is never awarded twice. The three-book penalty is separate and applies in addition.

The penalty changes the battlefield. It does not automatically set the offending partnership and it does not automatically make the opposing bid. Both partnerships still have to secure their contracts out of the books that remain.

An unsupported accusation costs the accusing partnership the same three books. Apply the penalty, correct the book count, and finish the hand.

FIELD NOTE: Reneging is the most grievous violation at a Grunt Spades table. The formal penalty ends with the hand. The reputation may last much longer. As Sgt. Fletcher warned: one mistake can erase a thousand atta-boys.

6-4. Claims and Card Counts

Every player is responsible for counting the original hand and maintaining the correct number of plays. A late-discovered extra card does not erase the duty to have counted. Stop, establish what happened, apply the controlling rule, and record the result before the next deal.

6-5. Dispute Control

State the call, identify the evidence, consult the doctrine, and settle the issue. Table heat is expected; threats and violence are not part of the rules. Speak this hand or forever hold your peace.

6-6. Out of Turn

Turn order is part of the record. Any player may call **Out of Turn** the moment a card is played before its proper turn. Freeze the table.

Nobody plays another card and nobody gathers the book.

If the call comes before another card is played, the offending card stays face up on the board. The proper player acts. When the offender's legal turn arrives, that card must be played if it follows suit. If the offender must follow a different suit, the offender follows suit and the exposed card stays face up and committed until a later legal opportunity.

If more than one card is played out of turn, every exposed card stays face up and play resumes with the proper player under the same rule.

A card played out of turn is never returned to the hand.

If the book was already completed and gathered before the call, the result stands unless the play also establishes a provable renege or another violation.

An out-of-turn play is not a renege and carries no three-book penalty by itself.

FIELD NOTE: Once is a mistake. Twice is sloppy. A pattern is manipulation, and the table should say so out loud.

MISSION 7

DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR AT THE TABLE

MISSION OBJECTIVE: Preserve the competitive culture, partnership trust, and integrity that make Grunt Spades worth playing.

7-1. Competitive Bearing

Grunt Spades is not a silent examination. Trash talk, clowning, celebration, and hard lessons belong to the culture. A serious mistake may be remembered for years. Take the lesson without allowing the table to become needlessly personal.

7-2. Talking Across the Board

Talking across the board means partners may not coach active plays, announce hidden information, or direct one another during the hand. When somebody asks what was led, the traditional answer remains: “They played as they laid” followed by “Watch the Board!”

7-3. Signals and the Gray Area

Signals occupy deliberately gray ground. This manual neither teaches nor formally authorizes them. The table remains responsible for watching the opposition, recognizing behavior, and calling what it can prove. Information the opposition carelessly exposes may be intercepted and used against that partnership; observation is not coaching or cheating.

7-4. Turn the Table

Once per game, one player may **turn the table** by rotating seats with the player opposite between hands. It is a table superstition with no proven effect on the cards. Everyone still understands why it was attempted.

FIELD NOTE — THE ACE, THE TABLE, AND THE THINGS WE CARRY

Soldiers have carried cards into barracks, field sites, and deployments for as long as they have had pockets. That makes cards natural homes for luck, dark humor, and unit folklore. The Ace of Spades has been a good-luck mark, a death-card story, and an inside joke depending on the war and the teller.

None of that changes a legal play. But it explains why a player turns a chair, changes something in a pocket, refuses to whistle over the deck, or eyes a long early run of Spades as if the cards know something. In Grunt Spades, ritual may settle nerves; it never settles a score.

7-5. Teaching the Game

Correct the player who does not know. Separate inexperience from refusal. The purpose of doctrine is to make the next game better, not merely to win the current argument.

FROM THE OLD MAN: “You can educate the ignorant, but you can’t help the stupid.” —The author’s father, Vietnam veteran

FIELD STORY — THE BRADLEY RAMP TABLE

A Bradley ramp is not built for cards. After a long day in the field, though, it is flat, waist-high, and close enough. Add ammo cans for chairs, a poncho liner to keep the cards from walking in the wind, and suddenly the ramp is the finest table in the world.

Rank relaxes at a field table, but the standard does not. You still bid your hand, watch the board, and explain why you just played your partner's ace into a losing book. When the platoon sergeant asks who won, the only safe answer may be: "Sir, technically, everybody lost."

7-6. The Grunt Standard

- Bid your hand.
- Watch the board.
- Count the books.
- Know the score.
- Play the table you have.
- Own the mistake and drive on.

BARRACKS WISDOM: If you ain't cheating, you're not trying. If the table catches you, accept what comes next. You're obviously not trying hard enough.

FROM THE AUTHOR'S SITREP — During a United Nations deployment in FYROM, the Sergeant Major of the Army dropped in on an observation post. Everybody expected a challenge coin. He handed out blue-ink pens instead—useful tools for reports, letters, maps, logs, and the thousand small things that keep a soldier moving.

After he left, somebody found a deck. An MRE box became the table, and that blue pen became the official scorekeeper's instrument. Years later, nobody remembers the speech. Everybody remembers the pen—and who said six and came home with five.

CONCLUSION — SECURE THE VICTORY

Your introduction to Grunt Spades is complete. You now understand the equipment, rules of engagement, bidding, scoring, table responsibilities, partnership discipline, and fieldcraft required to take a seat and hold your own.

But no field manual can play the hand for you. Proficiency is earned at the table—one bid, one book, and one lesson at a time. Count what falls. Learn your partner. Own your mistakes. Conduct the AAR, make the correction, and drive on.

You will not win every hand. Bad cards happen; strong opponents do too. Maintain your bearing. Adapt to the battlefield in front of you, and remember that every card has a purpose. There is no **NIL**—a bid of zero books—in Grunt Spades. Every player contributes to the mission.

Your training began with three standing orders: bid wisely, play smartly, and always watch your partner's back. Carry them to every table.

Training complete.

Take your seat.

Secure the Victory.

ANNEX A — TACTICAL GLOSSARY & TABLE LEXICON

Language at a Grunt Spades table carries tactical meaning. A misunderstood word can cost a book, the bid, or the entire game. Definitions marked Table Slang explain the culture but do not alter the rules.

AFTER-ACTION REVIEW (AAR) — A post-hand or post-game review identifying what worked, what failed, and what must change.

BAG / SANDBAG — A book captured beyond the partnership's standard bid. Ten accumulated bags: -100 points.

BIG JOKER — The highest-ranking card in the operational deck.

BID — The number of books a partnership declares it will capture. Grunt Spades uses a combined partnership bid.

BLIND SIX — A pre-deal contract available when at least 100 points behind; three attempts per game; +120 / -60; no bags.

BOARD (1) — The center area where the four cards of the current trick are played. "Hits the board," "watch the board".

BOARD (2) — A partnership bid of four books; the minimum legal contract. Grunt Spades says Board. It does not say four.

BOOK — A completed trick captured by a partnership.

BOOKKEEPER — The partner who did not capture the partnership's first book and maintains its books until the hand ends.

BOSTON — Capture of all thirteen books by one partnership; an automatic win.

BREAKING SPADES — The first legal use of trump to cut another suit. Once broken, Spades may be led.

BUMPING UP YOUR BID — Increasing the partnership contract by one after hearing the opposing bid. The bid may not be lowered.

CARD COUNTING — Lawful mental tracking of played cards, especially trump and high cards.

CHINESE CUTS — Table Slang. A nonstandard cutting flourish. Whatever the style, the deck and distribution must remain correct.

CONTRACT — The partnership's combined bid and minimum book requirement.

CONTROL OF THE BOARD — The ability to win the current book and choose the next suit led.

CUT / CUTTING — Playing trump when unable to follow the suit led.

EXTRAS — Books not committed through the combined contracts. Extras become bags when captured beyond a standard bid.

FLUSH OUT — Force important cards into play, often by repeatedly leading a suit or drawing trump.

FOLLOW SUIT — The mandatory requirement to play the suit led whenever able.

HAND — One complete deal containing thirteen books.

ILLEGAL BID — Any unauthorized contract. Reject it and tell the partnership to try again.

KIDNAPPING — The attempted seizure of an unsecured book. If completed, ownership changes and the kidnapper leads.

KIDS IN THE STREET — Captured books left unsecured or claimed too slowly and therefore vulnerable to kidnapping.

LITTLE JOKER — The second-highest card, below the Big Joker and above the 2 of Spades.

LOCK IT UP — Table Slang. A declaration that the combined contracts account for all thirteen books.

LONG SUIT — Four or more cards of the same suit.

MARNE HAMMER, DROPPING THE — Table Slang. Playing the Big Joker onto an unsuspecting book for maximum tactical and psychological effect.

MISDEAL — An invalid deal, including a player receiving no Spades, improper distribution, or an incorrect deck. The caller must show the reason before play begins.

NO TAKEBACKS — Once a card hits the board, it is played.

OUT OF TURN — A card played before its proper turn. It remains face up and committed. It is not a renege.

P / POSSIBLE — An uncertain book used in bid calculation. Two Possibles equal one book.

PARTNERSHIP — The two-player tactical unit that bids, scores, wins, and loses together.

POLISH DEALS — Table Slang. A nonstandard dealing flourish. It never excuses exposed cards, an incorrect count, or a misdeal.

POWER CHECK / FACE-UP DEAL — An authorized request to expose a card during the deal, limited to one per player per deal.

RENEGE — Failure to follow suit while holding the suit led. A proven renege awards the disputed book to the opposition and costs the offending partnership three books for the current hand.

ROUND — One cycle in which all four players contribute a card; the completed round becomes a book.

SCOREKEEPER — The player maintaining bids, score, bags, penalties, attempts, and special contracts.

SET — Failure to capture the contracted books; normally costs ten points per book bid.

SEVEN Ps, THE — Practicing Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

SHORT SUIT — Fewer than three cards in one suit.

SINGLETON — Exactly one card in one suit.

SPADE TIGHT — Holding nothing but Spades after side-suit cards are gone.

DRIVE ON — **Barracks Wisdom. Stop complaining, recover, and continue the mission.**

TALKING ACROSS THE BOARD — Unauthorized coaching or information sharing between partners during active play.

THROWING OFF — Discarding a non-trump card when unable to follow suit.

TRAM — THE REST ARE MINE — A claim to every remaining trick, permitted only when mathematically certain.

TRICK — The four cards played in one round; once won and collected, it becomes a book.

TRUMP — The Spade suit and its Jokers / 2-Spade hierarchy, which defeats non-trump suits.

TURN THE TABLE — Table Superstition. Once per game, one player may rotate seats with the player opposite between hands in an unproven attempt to improve their luck.

WATCH THE BOARD — Table Slang. We are not coddling anyone. Pay attention! Traditional response: "They played as they laid."

ZERO / NIL — An unauthorized bid of no books. Grunt Spades does not permit it.

ANNEX B — GRUNT SPADES QUICK REFERENCE

Equipment and Deal

- Modified 52-card deck: Big and Little Jokers included; 2♥ and 2♦ removed; 2♣ stays.
- Four players, two partnerships, thirteen cards each.
- Deal clockwise; player to dealer's right may cut or knock.
- One Power Check per player, per deal.
- No-Spade hand is a misdeal. Caller must show the reason before the first card hits the board.

Bidding

- One combined partnership bid.
- Legal standard bids: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10.
- Blind Six: eligible only when at least 100 points behind; declare before the deal; three attempts per game.
Scores +120 when made or -60 when set; no bags. Ten for Two must be declared to the Scorekeeper.
- Zero / NIL and bids of 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 12, or 13 are illegal. Tell the partnership to try again.

Play and Violations

- Follow suit when able. Spades are trump and may not open the hand.
- Know what you are playing. If you make the wrong call, that is on you—and whatever happens, happens.
- Once a card hits the board, no takebacks; reversing a played card invites cheating and disrupts gameplay.
- Bookkeeper is the partner who did not win the partnership's first book.
- Proven renege: award the disputed book to the opposing partnership; the offending partnership also loses three books. Unsupported accusation: the accusing partnership loses three.
- Boston: automatic win regardless of the score.

Scoring at a Glance

Situation	Result
Bid 6, take 6	+60
Bid 6, take 8	+62; two bags
Bid 6, take 5	-60
Plain Ten, take 12	+102; two bags
Ten for Two made	+200; no bags; opposition set
Ten for Two set	-100
Blind Six made	+120; no bags
Blind Six set	-60; no bags
Ten accumulated bags	-100; reset bag counter
Boston	Automatic win

Recommended Equipment

- Quality bridge-size playing cards with two distinguishable Jokers.
- Score pad with Bid, Score, and Bags columns.
- Writing stick (pencil) or Gov-issued black ink Skilcraft pen; calculator authorized when needed.
- Stable playing surface; any flat surface can become a Grunt Spades table.
- Quick Reference card and this manual within reach for disputes.

Official Score Sheet

Running-total demonstration:

US (LEFT)	THEM (RIGHT)
Hand 1: 8 / 0 = +80 Running total: 80	Hand 1: 5 / 0 = +50 Running total: 50
Hand 2: −6 = −60 (set) Running total: 20	Hand 2: 7 / 1 = +71 Running total: 121
Ten for Two — write 00	Resolve: +200 made / −100 set; no bags
Bags carry forward	At ten bags: −100; reset bag counter to 0
Blind Six made	+120; no bags; mark attempt ¹ , ² , or ³
Blind Six set	−60; no bags; mark attempt ¹ , ² , or ³

For the opening hand, write the locked-up bids as 8 / 5. If both bids are made with no bags, record 8 / 0 and 5 / 0; the hand scores +80 and +50. If a partnership goes set, repeat its bid with a minus sign: -6 equals -60. On every next hand, add that hand's result to each partnership's prior total. Those running totals are the current score of the game. Mark Ten for Two as "00" until the hand resolves. Mark Blind Six attempts with a small 1, 2, or 3.

US	THEM

US	THEM

ANNEX C — FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Is this a standard deck?

No. Add both Jokers and remove the 2 of Hearts and 2 of Diamonds. The 2 of Clubs stays. Fifty-two cards remain.

2. Do players bid individually?

No. Partners submit one combined partnership bid.

3. What is the minimum bid?

Board—four books.

4. Can a partnership bid Zero or NIL?

No. Tell them to try again.

5. May Spades be led immediately?

No. Spades and Jokers may not open the hand. Spades must first be broken, unless a later player is Spade Tight and has no alternative.

6. What happens when the wrong card is played?

Once it hits the board, it is played. If the play creates a renege, apply the renege procedure.

7. Who may call a misdeal?

Any player, before the first card hits the board—but the caller must immediately show the legitimate reason. A bad hand is not one.

8. Who keeps the books?

When a partnership wins its first book, the partner who did not win it becomes Bookkeeper until the hand ends.

9. What happens to an unsecured book?

It becomes a Kid in the Street and may be kidnapped. If the attempt succeeds, ownership changes, and play proceeds from there with the kidnapper immediately leading.

10. Does turning the table improve the cards?

Absolutely not. That has never stopped anybody from trying to improve their luck.

11. Which bids are legal?

Board, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10; Blind Six and Ten for Two apply only under their special procedures.

12. May a partnership change the bid?

It may bump the bid upward by one after hearing the opposition. It may not lower it.

13. When is Blind Six available?

When at least 100 points behind; declare before the deal; three attempts per game; +120 / –60; no bags.

14. What distinguishes Ten from Ten for Two?

Ten scores normally and takes bags. Ten for Two must be declared to the Scorekeeper; it scores +200 when made, –100 when set, and provides bag protection.

15. What is a Boston?

Capture all thirteen books. It is an automatic win.

16. Do bags count?

Yes. Nine or fewer carry no penalty. Ten bags: –100 points; reset the counter.

17. When does the game end?

At the end of a hand when a partnership is at 500 or more and holds the higher score. A tie requires another hand.

18. When must a renege be called?

Before the hand concludes. Keep your trap shut. You know why they call it a trap? Cause whenever you begin to run your mouth, it invariably lands you in trouble.

19. What must the accuser produce?

The specific book containing the alleged renege.

20. How many Power Checks are allowed?

One per player, per deal.

ANNEX D — UNIT AMENDMENTS

A Unit Amendment may establish local administrative procedures without changing Official Grunt Spades doctrine.

Authorized Administrative Matters

- Tournament or game time limits
- Registration and table assignments
- Bracket or round format
- Score sheets or electronic scoring
- Designated tournament officials
- Procedures for reporting disputes
- Break schedules
- Responsibility for cards, tables, pencils, and equipment
- Entry fees, prizes, and eligibility requirements
- Local traditions that do not affect gameplay

Limits of Authority

Unit Amendments may not change the deck, card distribution, legal bids, partnership bidding, scoring, bags, Blind Six, Ten for Two, Boston, following suit, renege, or the prohibition against Zero / NIL. A table changing official rules is playing a variation—not Official Grunt Spades.

Amendment Record

Unit or Organization: _____

Amendment Number: _____

Effective Date: _____

Procedure Affected: _____

Authorized Amendment:

Operational Reason: _____

Approved By: _____

Review Date: _____

After-Action Findings: _____

ANNEX E — AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

The AAR identifies what happened, why it happened, and what the partnership should sustain or improve. Keep it brief, honest, and focused on the next engagement.

Date:

Partner:

Opposing Partnership:

Final Score:

Result — Win / Loss:

What was our plan?

What actually happened?

What worked well?

What cost us books or points?

Were our bids accurate?

Did we communicate effectively within the rules?

What cards, suits, or patterns did we miss?

One action to sustain:

One action to improve:

Orders for the next engagement:

STANDING ORDER: Conduct the review. Make the correction. Drive on.

ANNEX F — HAND ODDS & PROBABILITY

For the math nerds, bookies, and players who insist the deck is personally attacking them: the operational deck contains 52 cards, including fifteen trump cards. A thirteen-card hand therefore averages 3.75 trump. The distribution forms a rough bell-shaped curve centered on three to four trump.

Trump Cards in a Thirteen-Card Hand

Trump	Probability	Approximate Frequency
0	0.5610%	1 in 178.3 hands
1	4.3759%	1 in 22.9 hands
2	14.1374%	1 in 7.1 hands
3	24.9586%	1 in 4.0 hands
4	26.7413%	1 in 3.7 hands
5	18.2579%	1 in 5.5 hands
6	8.1146%	1 in 12.3 hands
7	2.3559%	1 in 42.4 hands
8 or more	0.4976%	1 in 201.0 hands

Useful Landmarks

- No natural Spades: approximately 1.2791%, or 1 in 78.2 hands. Under Official Grunt Spades doctrine, that dealt hand is a misdeal.
- Any specific card—including the Big Joker, Little Joker, or 2 of Spades—appears in a player’s hand 25% of the time.
- Both Jokers appear together approximately 5.8824% of the time, or 1 in 17 hands.
- The Big Joker, Little Joker, and 2 of Spades appear together approximately 1.2941% of the time, or 1 in 77.3 hands.

PROBABILITY IS NOT A BID: Odds provide perspective; the thirteen cards actually in your hand still control the contract. Count first, calculate second, and never bid on what you wish had been dealt.

THE GRUNT SPADES PLAYER'S CREED

I will know the doctrine before I challenge it.

I will bid wisely, play smartly, and always watch my partner's back.

I will support my partner, protect our books, and place the partnership
above personal glory.

I will own my mistakes, accept the consequences, make the correction, and
drive on.

I will compete without excuses, maintain the integrity of the table, and hold
every player—including myself—to the same standard.

I will teach those willing to learn and respect those who taught me.

I will study every hand, remember every lesson, and continue improving
until the cards are put away.

I will know the rules.

I will play the rules.

I will master the rules.

Above all else, I will Secure the Victory.

AUTHOR'S SITREP

Grunt Spades was not born in a publishing office. It was built around barracks tables, recreation rooms, kitchen tables, and whatever could be assembled in the field—even an MRE box converted into furniture when nothing better was available.

Wherever soldiers gathered with a deck of cards, Spades became more than a way to kill time. It tested judgment, memory, nerve, trust, and the ability to work with another person under pressure. The way someone bids, handles a setback, protects a partner, or owns a mistake tells you plenty about who is sitting across the table.

At the table, think of your partner as your battle buddy away from it. Watch their back, trust them to watch yours, and understand that neither one of you succeeds alone.

This manual is my effort to preserve that game: not a softened version, not somebody else's house rules, and not a generic explanation of how Spades might be played. These are the rules, traditions, language, and hard-earned lessons of Grunt Spades.

Some lessons came through victory. Others came from getting set, missing the board, cutting a partner, or making the kind of mistake nobody at the table lets you forget. Every one of them belongs here.

The doctrine has been recorded. The traditions have been preserved. What happens next belongs to the players who shuffle the deck, take their seats, and carry the game forward.

The mission isn't over. It's your deal.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the soldiers, veterans, friends, partners, and opponents who kept this game alive—this manual belongs to every table where the cards were worn, the beer was cold, the coffee was strong, and the trash talk was stronger.

To every partner who trusted my bid, covered my weakness, and carried the partnership when my cards could not. To every opponent who exposed a mistake, punished a bad decision, or taught a lesson that stayed with me long after the score was forgotten.

To the dealers, Scorekeepers, and Bookkeepers who maintained order—or at least something resembling it. To those who defended the rules, argued the finer points, guarded against reneging, kidnapped the occasional Kid in the Street, and never allowed a serious table violation to disappear quietly.

To Sgt. Fletcher, whose reminder remains as true at the table as anywhere else: “One mistake can erase a thousand atta-boys.”

To my old man, a Vietnam veteran, whose plainspoken doctrine still holds: “You can educate the ignorant, but you can’t help the stupid.”

And to every soldier who ever turned an MRE box into a table, pulled up whatever passed for a chair, shuffled the deck, and made an unbearable stretch of waiting feel a little more like home.

Thank you for every book captured, every battle fought across the table, and every memory made around it.

Hooah.



THE RULES OF THE TABLE—SETTLED.

GRUNT SPADES • GS-1

Grunt Spades is not a loose collection of house rules. It is a complete table syatam built around partnership, accountability, judgment, and the hard truth that every card played leeves evidence.

GS-1 establishes the controlling doctrine: the deck, the deal, legal bids, scoring, tabla duties, Blind Six, Ten for Two, Boston, reneging, Kids in the Street, and the traditions that separate Grunt Spades from every other version of the game.

From the kitchen table to the deployment table, this is where every player begins.

THE GRUNT SPADES DOCTRINE SERIES

GS-1 ESTABLISHES THE RULES.

GS-2 DEVELOPS THE PARTNERSHIP.

GS-3 COMMANDS THE COMPETITION.

PFC PORTER

Permanent Fucking Civilian



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