

THE BIG CRIME

Film Noir Roleplaying



A Cynthia Celeste Miller Production

THE BIG CRIME

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I would like to dedicate this book to Shelly Bateman, who has clocked in many hours of watching film noir with me over the years. I treasure all the moments we've spent, sitting in a dark room while eating popcorn and watching the likes of Robert Mitchum, Lawrence Tierney, Veronica Lake, Peter Lorre and Ida Lupino act out these stories of immorality, dark desires and greed.

And looking at the larger picture, Shelly has stuck by my side without hesitation for over twenty-one years, encouraging me to make my dream of becoming a professional game designer a reality. That dream came true in 2002 and she has continued to be my staunchest ally since then.

This is why *The Big Crime* is dedicated to her. Here's to you, Shelly. Thank you for everything you've done. You're the sultry femme fatale and the dutiful dame all rolled into one amazing package.

Cynthia Celeste Miller

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Film Noir

Film noir exists in a world almost identical to our own world during the 1940s and '50s. *Almost* identical. The word “almost” has to be emphasized because this cinematic take on a bygone era is darker and more pessimistic than the world actually was. During the daylight hours, it was indeed more or less identical, give or take a few shadows here and there. But once the sun gave way to the moon’s eerie light, everything changed. Shadows became longer, the streets became more sinister, the city became a vastly more dangerous place; a true jungle constructed of steel, asphalt and corruption.

In these motion pictures, society’s collective fears, doubts, and even desires spilled across the big screen in a way scarcely understood by those watching them. The filmmakers managed to tap into the collective subconscious of a society that repressed its

thoughts and feelings about the world and the people that populated it. Through film noir, filmgoers could alleviate the negative thoughts that ran through their heads by experiencing it all in living black-and-white. Perhaps it was a release or perhaps it was oddly comforting for them to see that others had these exact same thoughts. Misery loves company after all.

Whatever the case may have been, film noir spoke to the audiences, making them want to come back time after time for a gritty dose of greed, moral ambiguity, and desperation.

Defining what film noir is, however, isn’t an easy task. Film historians have debated for decades whether it’s a style or a genre. Strong arguments have been made on both sides of the debate, but ultimately it makes little difference. Film noir is what it is: a type of movie that contains its own set of distinctions and trappings. For



the sake of clarity and because it focuses exclusively on crime thrillers (rather than noir-like westerns, sci-fi or other settings), this book will refer to it as a genre.

At its heart, film noir is largely about crime in one form or another. In fact, it is widely considered to be the direct descendent of the gangster films from the 1930s. It's certainly difficult to dismiss that notion, as there are numerous similarities. Film noir, though, has evolved greatly since then, both in terms of style and content. Gone is the

glorification of the American mobster and the assumption that policemen are courageous, moral crime fighters who stop at nothing to right wrongs. These fixtures have been replaced by the humanization of criminals and the proliferation of the archetypal crooked cop. The only things that are black and white in film noir are the stark, menacing shadows. Everything else resides in a blur of grays. Even the protagonists are flawed or, worse, downright rotten to the core. This is, without a doubt, a large part of the appeal of film noir.

So, what is film noir exactly? Symbolism and social commentary aside, film noir is a film genre that represents the darker part of our souls; the part we really don't want people to know exists. But it does exist and these movies quench the needs driven by the ugly side of us all. These are films about desperate, imperfect people who ultimately make lousy decisions or take part in activities that would be ill advised under any circumstances. These are films that chronicle the seedier side of humanity, wherein morality is a commodity to be cherished or wasted with wild abandon. Most importantly, these are films in which style is equally as important as substance. Rain-soaked streets, blinking neon lights, swanky nightclubs, looming buildings, dingy, half-lit apartments, twisting back alleys. It is here that a myriad of shifty or unusual characters dwell in the darkest recesses of the night – corrupt cops, hard-boiled private detectives, sultry femmes fatales, small time crooks, hired thugs, smarmy racketeers, and naïve wives. It's time to visit an all-too familiar, yet distinctly foreign, world. Welcome to *The Big Crime*.

The Big Crime

The Big Crime is a roleplaying game that allows you and your friends to step into the dark and dangerous world of film noir. The game rules are designed to be easy to learn, fast to play, and true to the genre. Make no mistake, however. This is not a generic game that can be used to delve into other genres. So, if you're looking to cut down orcs in a subterranean dungeon or engage in action-packed starship dogfights, you're barking up the wrong tree. Every single aspect of *The Big Crime* is devoted to the themes and nuances of film noir.

If you like the thought of playing a disillusioned WWII veteran trying to find his place in the world or a frantic criminal on the lam from the law, then you've checked into the right motel room. Does roleplaying amidst a tarnished cityscape full of perpetual unscrupulousness and vile deeds get your imagination churning? If so, then *The Big Crime* is a custom fit for you. Does playing out a dangerous heist or running for your life from violent mobsters sound like a good time? Should you answer in the affirmative, you should feel right at home here.

The Big Crime works is intended to be a one-shot game. That is, the characters aren't held over from one story to the next. Much like the films that inspired it, this game is designed to tell a story involving a set of characters that will never appear again. As often as not, it will be because those characters end up with tags on their toes.

The Definition of Roleplaying

The roleplaying game (or RPG) is a unique beast as far as games are concerned. There are no losers, only winners. The goal of the game is to collaboratively tell an exciting and dramatic story and if that occurs, everyone wins. Roleplaying can best be thought of as interactive, improv theatre.

Most of the participants are referred to as the *players*. Each player creates his own alter ego that he will portray during the game. This alter ego is called a Primary Character (or PC). One participant, however, doesn't create a single character to play. This participant, known as the Director, is the primary storyteller. He's the one who sets up the basic storyline, adjudicates the rules, and takes

on the roles of the characters the Primary Characters meet (called Secondary Characters – or SCs).

Previously, RPGs were likened to interactive improv theatre. While this is a relatively appropriate analogy, there is one hitch. In RPGs, everything is done verbally. Nobody has to get up and act things out, nor do they need props. It's actually just a group of friends gathered around a table, orally describing the scenes and the actions of the various characters.

The game functions best with one Director and one player, though it's possible to accommodate a couple more players.

It must be noted that the PCs don't always operate as a team, as is the case in many roleplaying games. Some PCs may be on the same side; others might not be. It's perfectly acceptable for one PC to be a criminal while another PC is a police detective doggedly trying to bring him to justice.

What You Need

One swell aspect of RPGs is that you don't need to acquire many material items in order to play them. In the case of *The Big Crime*, you're going to have to get

your mitts on a pencil, a character sheet, and a handful of six-sided dice (d6s), eight-sided dice (d8s) and ten-sided dice (d10s). As long as the participants have access to about six or eight of each type of die, you should be fine.

The Director will need some extra supplies, including a copy of this book and scratch paper. Additionally, it is advisable to print the Setback Tokens, Genre Points and Director Points out on cardstock. These can be found on pages 172-173. Alternatively, you can simply use poker chips, glass beads or other counters.

Personal Pronouns

Throughout this book, the author has elected to use male-specific personal pronouns. The reason for taking this approach rather than one of the more politically correct options is that film noir was almost exclusively told from a male perspective. This was most evident in the voiceover narrations and other similar narrative devices. Given that *The Big Crime* was designed to emulate film noir in every way possible, the decision was an easy one.



Inside This Book

The book you hold in your hands is organized in such a way that you can read it from cover to cover with minimal references to rules that you haven't learned about yet.

Chapter One: Introduction

There's no reason to go over all this information, since you've already read it by this point. You know what it's about.

Chapter Two: Film Noir Defined

Chapter One gave you the basics of what film noir is, but this chapter explores it more fully. If you walk away from the chapter and still don't know what makes film noir so special, then you haven't read it very thoroughly.

Chapter Three: The Game System

This is where you'll learn how the game actually plays. Everything

a player needs to know can be found here.

Chapter Four: Character Creation

Now that you understand film noir and the game rules, it's time to make your character. This chapter teaches you how to do that.

Chapter Five: The Players

Learn all the tips for being a good player.

Chapter Six: The Director

If you aren't planning to act as the Director, you should stop reading here. This chapter is divided into two sections: one for running the game and another for creating films.

Chapter Seven: "Search By Night"

This chapter contains a fully fleshed-out, ready to run film, complete with maps, character stats and pre-generated PCs.

Chapter 2: Film Noir Defined

Film noir is crime; the type that epitomizes all of humankind's worst characteristics. Film noir is morally ambiguous men and women running amok in the urban jungle, scratching and clawing to reach whatever goals the city allows them to have. Film noir is alienation, fear and despondency manifested as cinema. Film noir is dark streets that slither their way through the bottom of the canyons constructed of glass, concrete and steel. Film noir is labyrinthine storytelling made all the more difficult to follow by narrative devices like flashbacks and flash-forwards.

Film noir is all that and much more besides.

This chapter is dedicated to exploring some of the more important elements that are hallmarks of these brooding motion pictures.

Visual Style

The visual style that defined film noir is unmistakable. The filmmakers utilized low-key lighting to create harsh contrasts between light and darkness. In the world of noir, no shadow was accidental. Great pains were taken to use them to frame shots, produce a mood, or direct the viewer's eye. It has been said that the shadows were as much characters as the characters themselves.

Shadows weren't the only distinctive feature of film noir cinematography. Another characteristic was the dramatic use of camera positioning. The oblique-angle shot, in which the camera was tilted to the side, was a common device used to produce an uneasy, uncomfortable feeling in those watching the movie. Low-angled shots were used to give characters a more imposing or menacing visage. Wide-angle lenses were employed to obtain more room for scenes or to evoke an empty, lonely mood.

Single-source lighting was another defining affection. This created a despondent vibe for the more desperate or uncomfortable scenes, as evidenced by the final sequence in *The Big Combo* (1955), in which a far-away spotlight swept back and forth to provide the lighting. Another favorite source of lighting was from blinking neon signs in the background, often filtered in through Venetian blinds in a nearby window.

In short, the filmmakers experimented wildly with the cinematography to achieve whatever ambiance they felt best fit the story.

Storytelling Style

The telltale sign of film noir storytelling is the complex, intricate, and often convoluted plots. The convolution was often derived from an abundance of flashbacks and flashforwards that tended to disrupt the standard time frame of the stories. If you don't pay attention, you'll most likely be completely lost in a matter of minutes.

The action sequences of the genre are decidedly far and few between. But when they *do* occur, they happen at breakneck speed

and with all the suddenness of a gunshot. It must also be noted that they are inclined to be more than a little violent.

Speaking of violence, one thing that sometimes shocks modern audiences about film noir is how utterly brutal it can be. While the actual bloodshed was kept at a minimum, the implication of bloodshed was all the more disturbing because of it. Despite this, the filmmakers seemed to thrive on the shock value of allowing characters to be viciously slain at the drop of a proverbial hat. Secondary Characters and Primary Characters alike were always in grave danger, which significantly heightened the suspense. The viewer was kept entirely off guard as a result.

Nothing in film noir was any more shocking than the scenes that concluded each movie. While some of the movies sported happy endings, most of them ended on a negative note. Death, despair, loss, and tragedy were all common elements of the final sequences.



The Environment

Daylight was something that seldom showed itself in film noir, as most of the activity took place after dark. On the occasions that daylight was depicted on screen, it was usually muddled or downplayed in some way, either by having it filtered through Venetian blinds or by keeping the scenes minimal in length. Some films noir were more open to daytime sequences than others, but the world (especially the underworld) began to come alive once the sun went down.

Whether it was daytime or nighttime, the favored environment was “the city”. The urban landscape provided the perfect backdrop for these dark vignettes of alienation, pessimism, and disenchantment.

Unlike the wilderness, cities are completely man-made. They were created by us as some kind of twisted, idealized utopias that have long since been stained and tarnished by our own greedy ambitions. The cities are our own dark souls made reality.

It should come as no surprise that the cities perfectly embodied the very dark themes that ran rampant in film noir. For one thing, cities were viewed partly with contempt in those days... or at the very least, with suspicion. The advent of the urban metropolis was fairly recent at that point in time. Even forty or fifty years prior to the onset of film noir, the cities still resembled large towns rather than the asphalt monstrosities they had become. And as we all know, human nature insists that

we distrust anything that is new to us. Cities of this magnitude fell into that category for many people. Not everyone looked at things this way though, including many of the filmmakers. It was also common for people to view the modern city with awe and fascination, much like a child would a new toy. Despite the fact that the city reflected all the worst elements of the human psyche, it just as aptly reflected our most lofty dreams and desires. This enchantment played into the genre just as much as the loathing of the American city. For all its vileness, the urban landscape possessed an undeniable allure.

Within the city, the potential for intriguing locations is limitless. The filmmakers fully realized this and offered viewers a plethora of places that furthered the look and feel so intrinsic to the genre, from run-down backrooms and shoddy apartments to seedy motels and dank warehouses on the waterfront. There was no shortage of mood-inspiring sites to be found in the city.

Sometimes, however, the stories told in film noir escaped to crowded urban nightmare. Such stories were still as brooding

as those set entirely within the confines of the city. In fact, the contrast between the two settings allowed for some interesting juxtaposition that served to actually enhance the brooding nature of the genre. What better way to characterize the rural environment as being wholesome than to contrast it by also letting us see the contemptible city?

In many of the movies, the countryside represented freedom -- freedom from the smog-choked city, freedom from the evil that strangled the few remaining honest citizens, freedom from all the pressures and temptations found within the proximity of the urban environment. This is exemplified by characters fleeing into the countryside, which was a common occurrence in film noir. Little did they know that the purity of the rural environment was a façade. The shadows cast by the trees and rustic farm structures were just as malicious as the ones cast by the skyscrapers and tenements. Trouble followed the characters of film noir to whatever locale they tried to take sanctuary in, for that was their lot in life.

The Themes

As mentioned previously in this book, crime was almost invariably at the core of all films noir. Murder was the most common form of crime that took center stage in these terse stories, but it wasn't an exclusive deal. There was room for just about any type of crime, including extortion, racketeering, kidnapping, smuggling, and just about anything else the black heart of humanity has dreamed up. If it's morally wrong, you can bet the mortgage that someone has engaged in it and has made a profit from doing so. The motivation for committing such crimes ran the gamut. Good old-fashioned greed probably topped the list, followed closely by jealousy and desperation.

Romance was also a principal theme in film noir, though it wasn't typically as pure as depicted in other types of fiction. One might even argue that the majority of the romance revolved around lust rather than love. The frequent sexual overtones and innuendo were enough to lend credibility to such a claim. It was this theme that gave rise to the manipulative, seductive femme fatale, an archetype used repeatedly throughout the existence of film noir.

Another prominent theme was that no matter how far away a character runs, he can never escape his past; his transgressions simply cannot be buried. It all comes back to haunt him in a way that invariably sends his life into complete disarray and threatens to destroy him in every way possible.

The Characters

For the most part, the characters in film noir were normal, everyday people just like you and me. They weren't action heroes in the modern sense, nor were they always individuals that could easily be labeled as "good guys" or "bad guys". Those concepts were relatively rare in film noir. No, the characters found here were normal folks, albeit normal folks with a turbulent future ahead and, just as likely, a turbulent past as well. In most cases, they were flawed (sometimes cripplingly so) and morally questionable. The characters had gambling problems, alcohol addictions, abusive tendencies, hateful demeanors, or a weakness for dishy dames with long gams. One of the primary differences between the protagonists of film noir and those found in modern cinema is that



the former were as often as not unlikable or even unabashedly deplorable. Modern protagonists may sometimes have a negative quirk, but seldom to the degree of the film noir protagonists.

It's time to come clean about something, though. Throughout this book, the characters of the genre have been painted as being universally nasty souls with few redeeming qualities. This is a generalization that could be construed as unfair, for some of film noir's denizens are decent and honest people. They're in the minority, mind you, but they do exist. The classic hard-boiled private dicks are the most likely to fall into this category. Aside from them, the honest characters are inclined to be victims – fall guys, scapegoats, or poor schleps who get taken advantage of by femmes fatales, con men and other social predators. In film noir, nice guys (and gals) usually finish last; private eyes aside, of course.

Gender

In the films noir produced during the 1940s and '50s, there was a very distinct line between how men and women were portrayed. By and large, men were strong, tough and unflinching; they didn't cry and they were the masters of their realm. Women, on the other hand, were either good-hearted and nurturing or scheming and duplicitous. There were exceptions both ways (Christopher Cross from *Scarlet Street* could hardly be called strong), but they were far and few between, especially for women.

The most common theory for why this was the case goes like this: While the Second World War raged on overseas, women stepped up to the plate and took factory jobs and the like, effectively emancipating themselves from the kitchen to a certain degree. This didn't always sit well with the men, many of



gender roles in many ways. She was fiercely independent and willing to commit atrocities to stay that way or to get ahead in the world. This dragon lady embodied everything that was “wrong” about the modern woman.

Eight Essential Films Noir

Assembling a comprehensive list of films noir is far beyond the scope of this book. Such a job would surely necessitate its *own* book. That having been said, below you will find a selection of films noir that shouldn't be missed by *The Big Crime* players and Directors.

You'll no doubt notice that many quintessential films noir are absent from the list (*White Heat*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *The Maltese Falcon*, etc.). This was no accident. The intent wasn't so much to provide you with a list of the *best* films noir as it was to present a selection that will be useful for gamers and cover many of the themes and nuances the genre has to offer.

The Asphalt Jungle (1950)

With funding from a crooked lawyer, recently paroled criminal mastermind “Doc”

whom were returning home from the battlefields to find a new breed of independent woman; a breed that had learned to fend for themselves. This dissatisfaction spilled over into the films, which were made predominantly by males.

In creating these movies, the filmmakers created a societal utopia: an idealized society that harkened back to the way things were – strong men and dependent women who cried at the drop of a hat.

So, what about the classic femme fatale? How did she fit into this? The femme fatale represented a direct attack on traditional female

Riedenschneider assembles a crack group of veteran crooks to pull off a highly lucrative heist. Things go south, as they often do, and the entire situation unravels before the audience's eyes.

The Asphalt Jungle is the definitive heist flick that embodies nearly every aspect of film noir. It has it all – criminal specialists, police corruption, a naïve mistress, a truly flawed central protagonist, an in-depth look at the criminal underworld, and a suitably unhappy ending. It also serves as a good example of how if you see just one film noir, this one wouldn't be a bad choice.

Double Indemnity (1944)

This film tells the story of an insurance salesman who finds himself entwined in a plot to kill a woman's husband. A tenacious investigator thinks it's foul play and may suspect his co-worker and the recently widowed femme fatale.

Double Indemnity is widely considered one of the genre's best films... and for good reason. First and foremost, the movie's mood must be commended, as its use of shadows is creative and atmospheric. It's also worth noting that almost the entire

movie is presented as a flashback with a voice-over narrative by the primary character (i.e., the insurance salesman). Finally, the seductive femme fatale is masterful in her ability to bend the will of the opposite sex. If you want to experience how a femme fatale can drive a story, then look no further than this gem.

The Big Sleep (1946)

Private detective Philip Marlowe calls on a new client, General Sternwood, who wants him to deal with a man who has been blackmailing his youngest daughter. The General's seemingly straight-laced older sister suspects that her father has an ulterior motive: to find his friend who had disappeared a month earlier. Marlowe ends up getting hip-deep in the complex mess that left even the screenwriters scratching their heads. Seriously.

Trust me when I say that the story only gets more perplexing from there. Not in a bad way, mind you, but certainly enough to prohibit the printing of the full summary here. *The Big Sleep* isn't the first film noir to star Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, but it's the best (at least in this author's

opinion). If you want to run a game that prominently features a private eye, then you should give this movie a serious look, as Bogart's Marlowe is absolutely the definitive gumshoe. The movie boasts witty dialogue, sexual tension, a femme fatale (with a soft spot for the protagonist, no less), extortion, murder, and much more.

Raw Deal (1948)

Joe Sullivan, a man who took the fall for a crime he didn't commit, escapes from prison with the help of his girlfriend, Pat, and sets in motion their plan to leave the country. When things go awry, the couple kidnaps a social worker named Pam, sparking a wonderfully doomed love triangle. Joe learns that he was betrayed by the sadistic, pyromaniac mobster, Rick Coyle, and decides that revenge is in order.

Raw Deal is violent and hypersexual, and is one of the darkest, shadow-infested films noir ever made. The cinematography is just stunning! This film was selected for inclusion here for many reasons. For one thing, the aforementioned love triangle is tense and shows what a game of *The Big Crime* could be like with three players.

For another thing, the pacing of the movie is something that Directors should take note of before running the game. Then, there's the remarkably flawed central character (Joe), the imposing yet worried antagonist (Rick) and the ending that was about an inch away from being happy.

Scarlet Street (1945)

Christopher Cross is a milquetoast man who is married to a domineering, nagging wife. But then he meets Kitty March, who seduces him, erroneously believing him to be a famous painter and wanting to sap him for everything she can. He falls for her hard, proving to be the worst mistake of his life, one that he'll regret forever.



Scarlet Street is a bleak psychological thriller masterfully directed by Fritz Lang and starring Edward G. Robinson, who flexed his acting muscles as the timid and meek Christopher Cross. This movie is all about the shockingly brutal climax, which was instrumental in it being banned in Milwaukee, Atlanta and the entire state of New York. This is the perfect example of how a good, soft-spoken man can be driven to extreme behavior by a conniving spider woman.

Born To Kill (1947)

It's a match made in Hell in this unrelentingly grim noir thriller, when murderous psychopath Sam Wild meets soulless manipulator, Helen Brent. She keeps her distance, so he courts and marries her wealthy (but naïve) foster sister, Georgia. Sam and Helen find themselves wrapped up in a lurid lust affair that turns ugly... very ugly!

Born To Kill is a perverse pleasure to behold, as real-life bad boy, Lawrence Tierney, and Claire Trevor truly clock in memorable performances. Watch them as they finagle, manipulate and maneuver each other and everyone around them! This is a prime example of

a film that focuses on two terrible, black-hearted people as the main characters. If you're a Director interested in running a game featuring characters of that nature, *Born To Kill* is your blueprint.

Out of the Past (1947)

Jeff Bailey is a friendly but slightly mysterious proprietor of a mountain-village gas station. Little does anyone know, Jeff has a shady past that threatens to turn his world upside down, including his engagement to local girl, Ann Miller. When a man from Jeff's past comes rolling into town, that threat becomes all too real. Soon, he finds himself caught up in the murky waters of his former existence, entangled with the deceitful Kathie Moffat and crooked Whit Sterling.

Many noir historians consider *Out of the Past* to be *the* textbook example of the genre. Frankly, it's hard to disagree with that assessment. The performances by Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer and Kirk Douglas are flawless and the whirlwind story that unfolds via flashbacks keeps you engrossed from the opening credits until the screen goes black. This movie is the total package!

Touch of Evil (1958)

The setting: a sweltering U.S./ Mexican border town. The situation: While on his honeymoon, Mexican-born policeman, Mike Vargas, agrees to investigate a car bombing and ends up rubbing corrupt local police chief, Hank Quinlan, the wrong way. Quinlan wants the upstanding Vargas out of his hair so badly that he makes a deal with a crime boss to frame his new bride for drugs. The entire situation spirals out of control and leads to an atmospheric showdown at the climax of the movie.

The opening sequence – a three-minute, twenty-second tracking shot – is a thing of artistic beauty and is widely renowned among film aficionados for being among the best shots of its type in cinema history. And that’s just the beginning of the movie! *Touch of Evil* oozes blistering, sweaty, shadowy atmosphere with its immaculate cinematography. Additionally the story is tersely penned and the acting is phenomenal. These things combined make for some absolutely harrowing scenes that push the noir envelope.

Other Suggestions

The eight films noir listed in the previous section is but a drop in the bucket. There are literally hundreds of great specimens of the genre out there, just waiting to be watched. Film noir has never before been so accessible.

Public Domain

Many of the film noir titles (including one of the entries in the “Eight Essentials” list) are in the public domain and can be legally watched or downloaded for free. We highly recommend you take full advantage of this. Here are eight public domain films noir we suggest (aside from *Scarlet Street*, which has already been listed):

- ***Blonde Ice* (1948):** A female “society reporter” does whatever she has to do in order to keep herself in the headlines... including murder.
- ***D.O.A.* (1950):** A poisoned man races against the clock to solve his own murder and bring his killer to justice.
- ***Detour* (1945):** A stroke of bad luck traps a hitchhiker in an ever-tightening noose, complicated by a scheming femme fatale.

- ***He Walked By Night (1948):***

A cop-killing crook evades the authorities, baffling them at every turn.

- ***Kansas City Confidential (1952):***

An ex-con is wrongfully accused of involvement in a bank robbery and goes after the crooks that actually pulled the caper off.

- ***Quicksand (1950):*** A young auto-mechanic slowly descends the slippery slope into a life of crime.

- ***The Big Combo (1955):*** A police lieutenant goes on a personal crusade against a sadistic gangster and ends up falling for his target's girl.

- ***The Killing (1956):*** A veteran criminal plans one last heist before hanging it up. Complications arise in true film noir fashion.

Non-Public Domain

This list offers eight more suggestions for those craving more noir. They can generally be found on DVD at an affordable price and are well worth your time.

- ***Criss Cross (1949):*** A man returns to Los Angeles to find that his ex-wife has taken up with a shady gangster.

- ***Gun Crazy (1950):*** A gun-obsessed fellow and his psychotic dame set off on a crime spree à la Bonnie and Clyde.

- ***In a Lonely Place (1950):***

A cynical, down-on-his-luck screenwriter is accused of murder and falls in love with his new neighbor, starting what becomes a twisted relationship.

- ***Laura (1944):*** While investigating the murder of a beautiful advertising executive, a police detective becomes obsessed with the deceased. The twist in this film is fantastic.

- ***The Big Caper (1957):*** A con man and his boss's girl pose as a married couple in suburbia in order to pull off a big heist. A truly obscure gem!

- ***The Glass Key (1942):*** A crooked politician pledges support for a candidate whose daughter he has taken a liking to, angering a sinister political associate in the process.

- ***The Maltese Falcon (1941):*** A shamus takes a case involving himself with three eccentric criminals, a beautiful femme fatale and their quest for a priceless statuette.

- ***Where the Sidewalk Ends (1950):*** A brutal, crook-hating police detective accidentally kills a man and covers it up while trying to pin it on a gangster he despises.

Chapter 3: The Game System

The Film

When the group assembles to play a game of *The Big Crime*, they are playing out a *film*. A film, in this context, is one story with a beginning, middle and end. This usually takes place over the course of one session, though there's no harm in allowing it to stretch over into another game session. The rules are designed to play fast, though, so one session is usually enough. Most films noir were relatively short affairs and the rules were intended to follow suit.

Scenes

A film is essentially a series of interconnected *scenes* that eventually make up an entire story. In other words, scenes are the building blocks of a film. In truth, a scene in *The Big Crime* is no different than a scene in an actual film noir.

There's no hard and fast rule regarding when a scene begins and

when it ends, though a scene often ends when the story cuts to a new location, thus beginning a new scene. The new scene may include different characters or it may represent a lapse in time, following the characters from the old scene as they go to a new location. The Director is the final arbiter of exactly when a scene ends.

There are three special types of scenes, which are described in greater detail elsewhere in this rulebook: drama scenes (pages 40–43), fight scenes (pages 44–53) and chase scenes (pages 54–62).

Story Structure

Each film follows the three-Act structure that has been used in fiction of all mediums for a very long time.

- **Act One** is the film's setup. It's where we meet the Primary Characters, and establish who they are, what they do and what their

situations are. It's also where the inciting incident (an event that sets the rest of the story in motion) occurs.

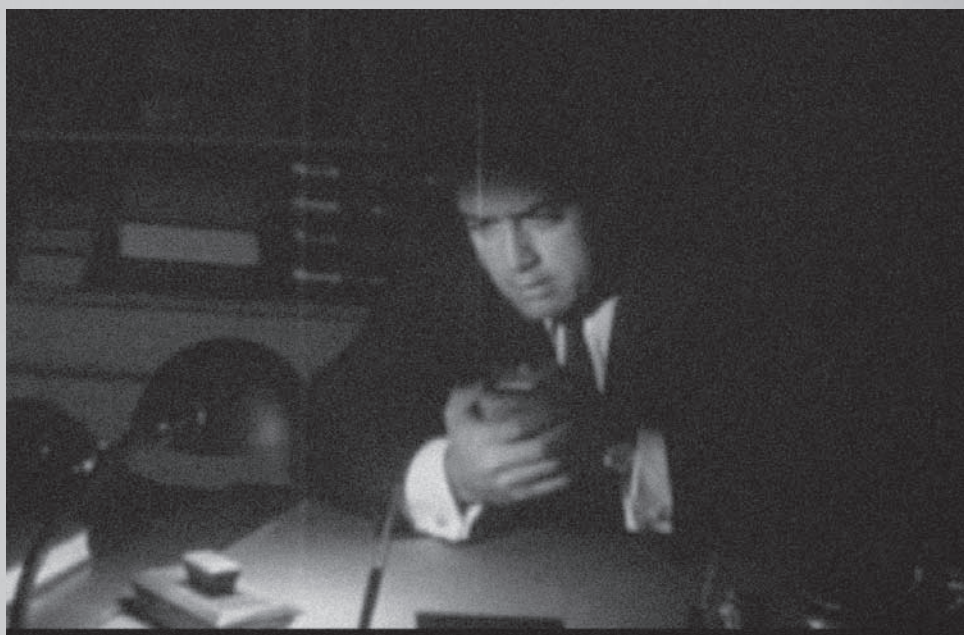
- **Act Two** is where the Primary Characters try to deal with the ramifications of the inciting incident and come out alive and, preferably on top. This Act makes up the bulk of the film.

- **Act Three** is the climax of the film, where the main tensions of the story are brought to their most intense point and resolved, either leaving the Primary Characters alive and well or dead and buried.

These acts are very important to the game, as things become more and more dangerous and challenging with each successive Act. This is carried forth in the game rules themselves, as will be evidenced later on in the rulebook.

Continuity Between Films

Movie sequels that maintained continuity from film to film were simply unheard of. While the likes of Philip Marlowe and Mike Hammer were portrayed in more than one movie, there was no attempt to maintain any sense of continuity, nor were most of the same people involved. They



were, for all intents and purposes, completely separate endeavors.

For this reason, *The Big Crime* has no rules for character advancement.

The Dice

"I don't like being at the mercy of those little white squares that roll around and decide whether you win or lose. I like to have the say-so myself."

-- Born to Kill (1947)

The Big Crime requires three types of dice: six-sided dice (referred to as d6s), eight-sided dice (referred to as d8s) and ten-sided dice (referred to as d10s).

Additionally, the game system will sometimes ask you to roll a d3.

A d3 is used by rolling a d6 and reading the results as follows: 1-2 counts as "1", 3-4 counts as "2" and 5-6 counts as "3".

When asking you to roll a certain number of a type of die, we will place the quantity immediately before the "d". Therefore, if you need to roll three eight-sided dice, we'll write it as "3d8".

You may also encounter text that calls for a roll of one or more dX. The "X" acts as a variable die type. The type depends on which Act the game currently is in: d10s for Act One, d8s for Act Two and d6s for Act Three.

A Disclaimer About Gender

As we discussed on pages 19-20, men and women in film noir were treated very differently in virtually every way imaginable. The often-misogynistic portrayal of women can be rather jarring to modern audiences, but it was considered perfectly acceptable during that era.

Given that *The Big Crime* was designed to faithfully emulate those movies, we felt compelled to follow suit by reflecting that mindset within context of the game rules. We at Spectrum Games do not condone chauvinistic attitudes or behavior. In fact, the author is a feminist. However, there's no way to convey the source material successfully without following the conventions of the genre.

Those who would rather present a more progressive version of film noir in the game can easily drop out any rules that could be construed as sexist.

Characters

"So, you're a private detective. I didn't know they existed, except in books... or else they were greasy little men snooping around hotel corridors."

-- *The Big Sleep* (1946)

From the hapless victim of circumstance whose bad luck landed him in deep trouble to rotten gangsters trying to live his own demented version of the American Dream, the characters of film noir drove the story forward as it raced toward those inevitable words "The End" that appeared on the screen at the movie's conclusion. The same, then, holds true for *The Big Crime*. Every character has a role to play and every role is important in its own way.

There are two main types of characters in the game.

- **Primary Characters (PCs)** are the stars of the film. The story revolves around their troubles and turmoil, as told from their perspective. Each player takes on the role of one PC. The player is sometimes referred to as the character's controller.

- **Secondary Characters (SCs)** represent the entire supporting cast. They are the characters the

PCs interact with during the game and are controlled by the Director.

Most characters (the PCs and important SCs) have their game stats recorded on a character sheet (found on page 169). The rest of this section is devoted to explaining what you'll find on that sheet.

Shade

"Decency and integrity are fancy words, but they never kept anybody well fed... and I've got quite an appetite."

-- *Shakedown* (1950)

As we all know, characters in film noir fall somewhere in the various shades of gray in terms of morality. But exactly *where* in that spectrum do they fall? Is the character as close to ethical as a film noir protagonist can be or does he behave with utmost cruelty and greed? Or is he somewhere in between – a fella (or dame) who walks that line between virtuousness and darkness?

A character's **Shade** gives an indication of where he stands at the beginning of the film. It acts as a roleplaying guide, but has game system implications as well, namely during character creation.

Light Gray

"Well, I know a lot of smart guys, and a few honest ones. And you're both."

-- Out of the Past (1947)

This character is a good person, all in all, but often (though not always) has some weakness that can ultimately cause him to sink to levels of depravity he never thought possible. Maybe he's a sucker for a pretty face and a sob story or just wants to live comfortably for the rest of his life. Perhaps he has a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time or is just too gullible to remain untarnished in this ambiguous world. It could be that he gets overly mouthy when he's had too much hooch or that he's too weak-willed to say no. Whatever



the case may be, this character is, as Raymond Chandler so aptly puts it, a knight in dirty armor and is very capable of moral redemption.

Common "Light Gray" characters are cops (such as Detective Lt. Dan Muldoon and Detective Jimmy Halloran from *The Naked City*), private eyes (such as Philip Marlowe), normal Joes with bad luck (such as Jimmy "Fergie" Ferguson from *The Devil Thumbs a Ride*), folks who are seduced by a spider woman (such as Christopher Cross from *Scarlet Street*), dutiful dames (such as Ann Miller from *Out of the Past*), crusading reporters (such as P.J. McNeal from *Call Northside 777*) and ex-cons trying to go straight (such as Joe Rolfe from *Kansas City Confidential*).

Medium Gray

"Two people dead... just so we can live without working"

-- Gun Crazy (1950)

This character isn't a bastion of goodness, but he's not entirely without scruples either. He falls somewhere in the middle ground, an awkward place that forces him to straddle the fence and make difficult choices at times. Sometimes, he'll land on one side of the fence; other



as Lt. Ditrich from *The Asphalt Jungle*), corrupt journalists (such as J.J. Hunsecker from *Sweet Smell of Success*) and non-psychotic femmes fatales (such as Vera from *Detour*).

Dark Gray

"I'm just warning you. Perhaps you don't realize - it's painful being killed. A piece of metal sliding into your body, finding its way into your heart. Or a bullet tearing through your skin, crashing into a bone. It takes a while to die, too. Sometimes, a long while."

-- Born to Kill (1947)

times, he'll land on the opposite side of it. Some characters have a tendency one way or the other. The character is no angel, that's for sure. He's either seen too much of this stench-ridden world to stay innocent or he simply doesn't mind giving into his baser instincts when the need arises. This can include murder, though he usually takes no great pleasure in it; it's simply a means to an end. The character is capable of moral redemption, but it's not terribly likely.

Common "Medium Gray" characters are crooks (such as the heist team from *The Asphalt Jungle*), cops on the take (such

This character is as close to a true villain as a film noir character can be. In most cases, such characters act as the film's antagonists. However, that's not always the case; there are some films in which "Dark Gray" characters are the focal points. The character delights in cruelty, greed and (or) power, and thinks nothing of committing the most deplorable acts without so much as a second thought or remorse after the fact. It's as easy to him as breathing. The character isn't capable of moral redemption; he passed that turn-off many miles ago.

Common "Dark Gray" characters are mobsters (such as Rick Coyle from *Raw Deal*), serial killers (such as Reverend Harry Powell from

The Night of the Hunter), brutish psychopaths (such as Sam Wilde from *Born to Kill*), murderous femmes fatales (such as Phyllis Dietrichson from *Double Indemnity* and Claire Cummings from *Blonde Ice*) and absolutely corrupt cops (such as the bloated Hank Quinlan from *Touch of Evil*).

Abilities

Every character has four stats that measure how good he or she is in certain areas. These are Body, Finesse, Smarts, and Spirit. Collectively, these traits are known as **Abilities**.

Body is the measuring stick for how physically able the character is. It takes into account strength, durability, endurance and general toughness.

Finesse is how we figure out how graceful the character is. It takes into account agility, balance, coordination and reflexes.

Smarts is what we use to gauge the character's mental traits. It takes into account book smarts, common sense and knowledge.

Spirit determines the character's moxie, panache and other esoteric aspects. It takes into account charisma, wit, the ability to express oneself and willpower.

Each Ability has a **grade** that reflects the character's level of competency.

Poor: The character is noticeably deficient.

Normal: The character is pretty much an average Joe here.

Good: The character is gifted or talented.

Aspects

Characters also have **Aspects**. Aspects represent skills, talents or areas of expertise. Every Aspect is directly related to a particular ability. Unlike Abilities, Aspects have no grade. A character either has an Aspect or he doesn't.

Four of the Aspects cover too much ground. Characters with Driving, Knowledge, Art or Performance will have to select a **Specialization** for them. It is possible for a character to have more than one of the same Aspect, each with a different Specialization. For example, the character might possess "Knowledge (Auto Mechanics)" and "Knowledge (Biology)". They simply count as two separate Aspects.

Body Aspects

Athletics: The ability to perform fe athleticism such as running, jumping, climbing and swimming.

Endurance: The body's fitness and ability to resist disease, toxins, poisons or exhaustion.

Fighting: The art of up-close fighting, either with a melee weapon or with fists.

Strength: The application of raw physical power; useful for lifting, pushing, pulling and carrying.

Toughness: A measure of one's ability to take damage and keep going.

Finesse Aspects

Coordination: Fine motor skills, often referred to as hand-eye coordination.

Driving*: The operation of vehicles. *Specializations* – Ground Vehicles, Air Vehicles, Water Vehicles

Reflexes: The ability to use agility and to react to danger quickly; often used to avoid incoming attacks.

Shooting: The skill of hitting a target with a ranged weapon, such as pistols, rifles, grenades, etc.

Skulking: The act of sneaking, hiding or concealing.

Smarts Aspects

Ingenuity: Skillfully and promptly dealing with new situations and obstacles using whatever means one has at his disposal. In other words, it simulates resourcefulness.

Investigation: Scrutinizing clues and carefully examining the facts. It also helps the character know where to go for more answers based on the information already gleaned. This is a crucial skill for detectives and reporters.

Knowledge*: Topics and subjects the character has acquired information on during his lifetime. It is the most versatile Aspect in the game, as you can use it with Finesse under certain circumstances. Unlike other Aspects that require Specializations, there isn't one definitive list of Specializations. *Example Specializations* – History, Biology, Politics, Business, The Criminal Underworld, Doctor, Auto Mechanics, Accounting, Law, Construction, Carpentry, Nurse, Military, Safecracking, Demolitions, Chemistry, Archaeology, Psychology, Electronics, etc.

Memory: The ability to recall things that you've seen or learned.

Perception: Using one's senses or gut instincts to observe his surroundings (spotting clues, hearing conversations in the next room, detecting an ambush, etc.).

Spirit Aspects

Art*: Expressing oneself by creating something tangible and creative. *Specializations* – Painting, Drawing, Sculpting, Writing, Photography, Crafts

Intimidation: Causing fear by utilizing threats, physical pain, bullying tactics and rougher forms of interrogation.

Manipulation: Using guile, cunning, seduction, misdirection or lies to get what you want from others. This is also used for interrogation, when you want to trick the subject or play tricks with his mind.

Performance*: To entertain or inspire others by performing. *Specializations* – Dancing, Singing, Musical Instrument, Oration, Comedy, Acting, Oration, Magician, Parlor Tricks

Persuasion: Convincing others by means of reasoning or bargaining with them. This is also used for "softer" interrogations.

Resolve: Staving off persuasion, manipulation, intimidation or temptation by using one's willpower.

*Requires a Specialization

Temptation Tracks

Nobody's squeaky clean in film noir... at least not for long. Even the most moralistic and virtuous characters can get entangled in situations that strip them of their innocence and toss them down into the gutter with the rest of the filth. As characters engage in immoral actions and use questionable tactics, they will gain **Temptation Points**.

There are three types of Temptation: Guilt, Desperation, and Alienation. These are called **Temptation types** (or simply **types**). For details about what they mean, check out page 64.

As you can see on the character sheet, a track of ten boxes accompanies each Temptation type. As a character gains Temptation Points, the player marks out the appropriate number of boxes at the ratio of one box per Temptation Point. Only PCs gain Temptation Points.

You can find the full rules for Temptation on pages 63-68. At this point in the book, you haven't read enough for them to make sense.

Hooks

Each character has three **Hooks** that give us some insight into who he is beyond what the game stats can tell us. They can be personality traits (Smarmy, Smart-Mouthed, Arrogant, Overly Sensitive, etc.), background information (WWII Veteran, Ex-Con, From a Small Town, Farmboy, etc.), goals (Wants Revenge for Brother's Death, Seeks Power, Wants To Escape From His Past, Wants a Simple Life, etc.), psychological problems (Obsessed With Guns, Fear of Heights, Hatred of Foreigners, etc.) or physical problems (Bad Back, Disfigured Face, Wheelchair-Bound, etc.).

Hooks encourage roleplaying and players can earn Genre Points (see pages 68-70) by bringing them into play in some fashion.

Genre Points

When you play your PC to the hilt, the Director will reward you with Genre Points, which can be used to help your character out in various ways. Check out the detailed section about Genre Points on pages 68-70 for more details.

Items

Characters have a list of objects that they typically carry on their person on a day-to-day basis.

Special Rules

Rules are great. They keep things structured, balanced and organized. You know what's even better than rules, though? Breaking them. And that's exactly what Special Rules do. They allow PCs that possess them to step outside the game system proper and do something not normally allowed. Pretty swell, eh?

You can find the full list of Special Rules on pages 80-88.

Checks

"With my brains and your looks, we could go places."

— The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946)

In order to accomplish a tricky task, the character must make a successful *check*. The character initiating a check is referred to as the *acting character*. Making a check requires the player to roll between three and five dice, in most cases. The type of dice rolled depends on which ability is being tested.

Poor: d10s

Normal: d8s

Good: d6s

As a default, you'll roll four dice. However, this can be altered as follows:

- If one (and *only one*) of the character's Aspects would logically help him succeed in the task at hand, roll an additional die. The Aspect must be linked to the Ability being tested. The exception is the "Knowledge" Aspect. Under certain circumstances, Knowledge may be used for Finesse. For example, if a character has "Knowledge (Demolitions)", it could be applied to Finesse instead of "Coordination" if the player wishes.
- Certain Special Rules may adjust the number of dice rolled under particular conditions.
- The character may use the "Dirty Upper Hand" Temptation Benefit to roll an extra die (see page 66).
- One or more characters lending a hand for a task in which such a thing would help can grant extra dice (see pages 38-39).
- The Director may declare that the situation at hand will either help or hinder the character. Each negative condition allows/forces him to roll one more/less die.

Rolling Extra Dice

It's important to remember that players and the Director never roll mixed die types. In other words, all the dice you roll for a check will always be of the same type. Therefore, if you're instructed to roll additional dice, they will be of the same type as the dice you were already rolling for the check.

Success or Failure

Once you sort out the number of dice you need, roll them. Look at the dice and check for *matching results*. Matching results are defined as identical numbers. For example, if you roll four dice and get 2, 4, 4 and 6, the two 2s are matching results. The more matching results you roll, the better your character did.



Meanwhile, a *threshold* must be determined. Continue reading to find out how the threshold affects the check's outcome.

Unopposed Checks: For tasks that aren't directly contested by another character (leaping from rooftop to rooftop, kicking in a door, trying to

spot a clue, etc.), the Director rolls 4dX. The type depends on which Act the game currently is in: d10s for Act One, d8s for Act Two and d6s for Act Three. *The number of matching results he gets will be the check's threshold.*

Alternatively, the Director can forego rolling and simply assume that the threshold is 2 during Act One and 3 During Acts Two and Three; this can be increased by one for particularly difficult tasks.

Opposed Checks: For tasks that are directly contested by another character (socking an enemy in the jaw, seducing someone, catching a fleeing hoodlum, etc.), the participant controlling the opposing character must also make a check (i.e., players roll for their own Primary Characters and the Director rolls for Secondary Characters). The check uses the most appropriate Ability, applying



an appropriate Aspect if applicable. ***The number of matching results rolled will be the check's threshold.***

In order to succeed in the check, the acting character must roll equal to or more matching results than the task's threshold. If the threshold was 0, however, the character still needs at least two matching results.

EXAMPLE: I'm searching a crime scene for clues, so the Director asks me to make an unopposed Smarts/ Perception vs. 4dX check. I have Smarts of Good and also have the "Perception" Aspect, allowing me

to roll 5d6. I get 1, 2, 4, 4 and 5. The film is in Act 2, which means that dX equals d8, thus the Director rolls 4d8 and comes up with 2, 5, 7 and 7. We both rolled two matching results, but since I'm the acting character, I had to roll equal to or higher than the threshold. Therefore, I succeed.

Other Considerations

The following factors must also be noted.

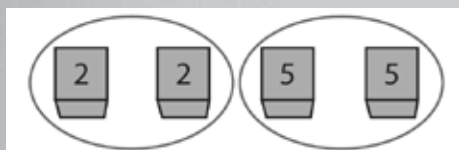
Separated Matches

Sometimes, the dice will produce two or more sets of matching results. When this

SCs and Checks

Supporting Characters never have to make unopposed checks. The Director simply decides whether the character is a success or failure based on what's best for the story. The same is true for opposed checks between SCs, except during drama scenes (pages 40-43), fight scenes (pages 44-53) and chase scenes (pages 54-62); for those types of scenes, the Director can either do all the rolling himself or let the players roll for the opposing SCs.

happens, they all count toward your total matching results. So, in the example below, there would be four matching results.



Toppers

A **topper** is the highest possible number on a die – a 6 on a d6, an 8 on a d8 or a 10 on a d10. Likewise, the term “**matching toppers**” refers to rolling multiple toppers.

If, during a check, you roll matching toppers, you count them as matching results as usual. Additionally, add one to the total number of matching results rolled. This bonus matching result counts as a topper. For example, let's say I roll four dice and end up with 1, 3, 6, 6. The two 6s count as two

matching results and because they're also matching toppers, you can add an additional matching result, for a grand total of three matching results (all of which count as toppers).

There are also other instances in which rolling matching toppers can affect the game.

- Certain Special Rules may give advantages for rolling toppers or matching toppers. See the Special Rules listings on pages 80-88.
- During drama scenes, fight scenes and chase scenes, if the acting character rolls matching toppers, it can help defeat opponents faster. See pages 40-62 for more details.

Lending a Hand

If a character specifically helps another character (to the extent of doing nothing else), the character

Shorthand for Checks

In this book and in future supplements, we use shorthand for checks.

- For unopposed checks, text will be written as follows: Make an unopposed [Ability being tested]/[appropriate Aspect] vs. [number and type of dice the Director will roll to determine the threshold] check. For example, “Make an unopposed Body/Athletics vs. 4dX check”. If there isn’t an appropriate Aspect, only the Ability will be listed.
- For opposed checks, text will be written as follows: Make an opposed [acting character’s Ability]/[appropriate Aspect] vs. [opposing character’s Ability]/[appropriate Aspect] check. For example: “Make an opposed Finesse/Skulking vs. Smarts/Perception check”. If there isn’t an appropriate Aspect, only the Ability will be listed.

being helped rolls an additional die for the check. A second helper grants yet another die. Three or more is a crowd, though, thus further helpers will not add dice to the check.

Long-Term Checks

If a character is performing a task that takes longer than a few minutes, the Director may tell him that a *long-term check* is needed. The character will have to make three (usually) identical checks and succeed in two of them.

Each of the three checks takes an amount of time determined by the Director. For example, I want my character to break into a bank vault. The Director states that this will be a long-term check and that each individual check will represent five minutes. I fail the first check, but succeed in the other two. Thus it took fifteen minutes to crack the vault.

Depending on the circumstances, the Director may allow you to try again, starting over from scratch.

Drama Scenes

"If only you could know how low and worthless I feel."

"I didn't even know you had any feelings."

-- *Killer's Kiss* (1955)

Many people think of films noir as “action movies” crammed full of gunfights, chase sequences and fisticuffs. All of these elements are certainly well represented within the genre, but these are essentially crime dramas. As the word “drama” implies, the action often takes a backseat to heated arguments, innuendo-laden seduction, chess-like manipulation and third degrees given under an excruciatingly hot hanging light. These things are as important to film noir as nighttime cityscapes, desperate crooks, abrupt violence and flashing neon signs filtering into a room through Venetian blinds.

Some situations are minor and only require a simple check to resolve. Suckering a random hotel clerk into giving out the room number of someone you're looking for shouldn't take up much time; just make a check and move on. Many scenes, however, are more crucial to the story and can provide dramatic tension that will heighten

the fun for everyone. When this is the case, the Director can call for a *drama scene*.

At its core, a drama scene can be defined as a scene comprised of character interaction, peppered with opposed checks, in which two or more characters are attempting to give each other four Setback Tokens.

Starting a Drama Scene

The Director declares the beginning of a drama scene as soon as it becomes obvious that the scene in question holds potential for an exciting verbal conflict. The character initiating the drama scene must declare exactly what his goal for the scene is (find out where the suspect lives, distract the character, etc.).

Carrying Out a Drama Scene

The scene plays out as normal, as the characters speak back and forth. At critical points, the Director will call for the speaking character to make an appropriate opposed check, referred to as a *crucial check*. The same character cannot make a crucial check twice in a row, so they must take turns.

The “Lending a Hand” rules apply here, as it's possible for the acting character to have pals

contributing to the conversation to pour on the heat. It's also possible for the opposing character's friends help him out by backing him up, providing moral support or whatever else makes sense.

Most crucial checks for a drama scene will be Spirit vs. Spirit. The acting character will most often use Manipulation, Intimidation or Persuasion, while the opposing character will make use of Resolve.

Giving Setback Tokens

If the acting player succeeds in a crucial check, the opposing character gains one or more **Setback Tokens**, along with any of

his pals who lent him a hand.

How many Setback Tokens does the opposing character gain? In most cases, he gains one Setback Token. However, if the acting character succeeded *and* rolled matching toppers, the opposing character gains one Setback Token for each matching topper rolled instead of just one Setback Token.

Defeat

When a character receives his fourth Setback Token, he is **Defeated**. In a drama scene, a Defeated character succumbs to whatever it was the acting character was aiming to accomplish. This





can be, for example, con the other character or finally convincing the seducing character that he's not going to fall for it. If the Defeated character is a PC, the controlling player should be a good sport and go with the flow; otherwise, the Director may step in and choose the character's actions for him. This is a storytelling game, not a "winning or losing" kind of game.

In most cases, the scene ends shortly after a Defeat. At the conclusion of the drama scene, any Setback Tokens accumulated by characters are discarded.

Ending Drama Scenes Prematurely

It's not unheard of for a character to leave a drama scene. However, a character simply can't ditch out in order to avoid succumbing to the

wishes of the contesting character. A character can only bail on a drama scene under one condition.

That condition is that the Director introduces an event and he mandates that the drama scene ends as a result. For example, two of a gangster's henchmen are engaged in a drama scene against each other (they're daring each other to make a pass at the boss's dame). Suddenly, the boss walks into the room, ending the drama scene.

Unlike with fight scenes and chase scenes, you can't voluntarily drop out of a drama scene. After all, that would be an easy way to avoid giving the other character what he wanted. Leaving a scene early would simply mean forfeiting and you'd have to give the opposing character what he wanted in the first place.

Example of a Drama Scene

This short example offers a drama scene to serve as an example of how it works. In this write-up, my character (Sylvia) is attempting to use seduction to get a hoodlum (Davey) to tell her where his boss is.

Sylvia says, “Come on, sugar, how about you tell me where Joey’s staying? One good turn will get you an even better turn, if you take my meaning.” The Director says I have to make an opposed Spirit/Manipulation vs. Spirit/Resolve check. I roll 3, 3, 4, 5 and 6. That’s two matching results. The Director rolls for Davey and gets 2, 3, 4 and 7. No matching results. I win the check, giving him a Setback Token.

Davey’s down but not out. “You know what Joey would do to me if I told you that? I’d be dead before I woke up in the morning.” Since he’s trying to reason with Sylvia, the Director requires an opposed Spirit/Persuasion vs. Spirit/Resolve check. He rolls 1, 3, 8 and 8 (on d8s). Uh oh! Two matching toppers! As in the normal matching topper rules, he adds one extra matching topper to the result... for a total of three matching toppers. I roll 2, 4, 4 and 6. Only two matching results. I gain three Setback Tokens. Sylvia is starting to think Davey’s not going to bend on this issue.

Sylvia gives it another shot. “You and me, we can get out of here; leave this awful city far behind us... and Joey right along with it. By the time he figures anything out, we’ll be long gone. It’ll be just us for the rest of our lives.” This is still a matter of seduction, so it’s another opposed Spirit/Manipulation vs. Spirit/Resolve check. I roll 1, 2, 3, 5 and 5. Two matching results. The Director rolls 2, 2, 2 and 5. He has three matching results, which means that I fail and don’t give him any Setback Tokens.

His turn. “There ain’t no place on the globe we could go to get away from him. Don’t you get it? If I give him up, I’m finished. Kaput!” Again, he’s trying to make her see his point using logic, so it’s an opposed Spirit/Persuasion vs. Spirit/Resolve check. He rolls 3, 3, 7 and 7. You’ve got to be kidding me! Four matching results. I gulp nervously and roll 2, 2, 4 and 6. Only two matching results, thus giving me my fourth and final Setback Token.

The Director wraps up the drama scene. “I just can’t take that risk. You’re quite a tomato and all, but no dame is worth the price of a funeral. See you around.” With that, Davey walks out of the room.

Fight Scenes

"I caught the blackjack right behind my ear. A black pool opened up at my feet. I dived in. It had no bottom."

-- Murder, My Sweet (1944)

Danger is something that's never too far away in the dark, menacing world of film noir. There's always a hoodlum with a cheap rod just itching for a chance to give you a case of lead poisoning or a desperate crook ready to cave in your skull with a pipe for a quick buck. Without this threat of abrupt violence, film noir would present a much different landscape. It's this threat that keeps the characters clinging to the shadows like cornered rats. It's what causes their

hearts to practically pound right out of their chests, especially once the sun goes down. It's what makes them sweat bullets anytime they hear unfamiliar footsteps outside their seedy apartments. It's what makes film noir so exciting!

Some situations are minor and only require a simple check to resolve. Knocking out a hood from behind with a blackjack shouldn't take much time; just make a check and move on. Many scenes, however, are more crucial to the story and can provide dramatic tension that will heighten the fun for everyone. When this is the case, the Director can call for a *fight scene*.

At its core, a fight scene can be defined as a scene comprised of attacks and maneuverings,

peppered with opposed checks (and possibly some unopposed checks as well), in which two or more characters are attempting to put each other's lights out with physical violence.





Starting a Fight Scene

The Director declares the beginning of a fight scene as soon as it becomes obvious that the scene in question holds potential for an exciting physical conflict and one character states that he wants to attack another character.

Carrying Out a Fight Scene

To carry out a fight scene, the following information is vital.

Initiative

Once a fight scene has been declared, it becomes important to determine which character goes first, second, third and so on. This means an *initiative check* is in order, which requires each

participant to roll Finesse/ Reflexes. The character with the highest number of matching results goes first, followed by the character with the next highest amount and so forth. In the case of ties, look at the tied characters' actual numbers on their matching results. The character with the lowest number on their matching dice wins the tiebreaker. For example, if I rolled 1, 1, 4, 5, 5 and my opponent

rolled 2, 2, 3, 4, 4, I would win the tie, because my lowest matching results were 1s, which were lower than his lowest (2s).

Delaying Your Turn

When your character's turn comes around, you may choose to delay your turn. Instead of acting at that point, you can wait to act until later in the round, cutting in front of another character in the initiative order.

Tweaking the Order

The Director has the option to tweak the order to accommodate common sense. If, for example, some egg jumps out from around a corner with a heater and bad

intentions, the Director might declare that he'll automatically go first, as he got the drop on the other characters.

Grouping

The Director can choose to group SCs together when making initiative checks, rolling once for each group and using the character with the worst Finesse grade (if tied, he may choose which one to use for the check). The “Lending a Hand” rules cannot be used for initiative checks). For example, the Director has three henchmen SCs and one SC with better stats, who is meant to act as their boss. He may choose to have the three henchmen roll initiative as a group and roll for the boss separately. Or he could group them into one group of two henchmen and one group of one henchman and the boss. Or however else he wants.

Once the group's turn comes up, you may have grouped SCs act in any order you wish among themselves.

Turns and Rounds

Each character will get to take a *turn*, in the order established by the initiative check. After each character takes a turn, the *round* is over and a new one will begin, starting with another initiative

check. For fight scenes involving only two characters, the Director is advised to maintain the same initiative order throughout the rest of the scene.

This process continues until one side has been Defeated.

Taking Your Turn

When it comes time for a character to take his turn, the character's controller narrates what he wants to do. There's no etched-in-stone number of things the character can do, though the Director has the authority to step in and say that he's hogging too much screen time. As a rule of thumb, a character should be allowed to move and perform an action (usually one that requires a check); this may be done in any order (i.e., the character can perform an action and then move or vice versa).

Crucial Checks

When a character takes an action intended to cause physical damage to another character, the Director will call for the acting character to make an appropriate opposed check, referred to as a *crucial check*. The acting player states what his character is going to do and the opposing character's controller gets to state how the

targeted character responds (“I duck the punch”).

Most crucial checks during a fight scene will be Body vs. Body for up-close attacks such as punching or stabbing or Finesse vs. Finesse for ranged attacks such as shooting guns. The acting character will usually use Fighting or Shooting, while the opposing character will employ Fighting (blocking, sidestepping, etc.) or Toughness (sucking it up) against up-close attacks and Reflexes against ranged attacks. With some creative thought, the Director may allow a character to use a different Ability and (or) Aspect. For example, I want my character to kick open a door so that it hits an enemy on the other side who’s pursuing him. The Director allows me to use Body/Strength for the crucial check.

Giving Setback Tokens

If the acting player succeeds in a crucial check, the opposing character gains one or more ***Setback Tokens***.

How many Setback Tokens does the opposing character gain? In most cases, he gains one Setback Token. However, if the acting character succeeded *and* rolled matching toppers, the opposing

Weapons in the Game

As written, the rules treat weapons as little more than props. That is, they have no mechanical representation (though you obviously need a ranged weapon in order to perform an attack from afar). *The Big Crime* is about telling a story, not stockpiling “bigger, better” weapons to maximize accuracy, range and damage.

This level of abstraction may not suit your group’s play style. That’s fine. Different strokes and all that jazz. Our suggestion is for the Director to grant an additional die for crucial checks during fight scenes (or for chase scenes if gunplay is involved; see pages 58-59).

character gains one Setback Token for each matching topper rolled instead of just one Setback Token.

Multiple Opposing Characters

In some instances, more than one enemy may be on the receiving end of a single crucial check (such as if the acting character lobs a grenade). In such cases, the opposing characters will get to use

the “Lending a Hand” rules. Setback Tokens are applied to all opposing characters involved in the check. Thus, if one Setback Token was dealt, each of them receives one.

Defeat

"Nobody's your pal now. You're dead. Lay down."

-- Johnny O'Clock (1947)

When a male character receives his fourth Setback Token in a fight scene, he is **Defeated**. When a female character takes her second Setback Token in a fight scene, she is Defeated (Women simply weren't portrayed as being capable of withstanding much damage in the films noir of old).

A Defeated character is taken out of the action and the scene ends poorly for him. For SCs, this can mean death, unconsciousness, capture or whatever else seems appropriate to whoever controls the character that dealt the final blow.

PCs, however, have a bit more clearance on such matters, seeing as how they're the stars of

the film and all. As soon as a PC is Defeated, it must be determined whether he stays in the game (he was just knocked out, taken captive, etc.) or the game ends abruptly for him (death, imprisonment, etc.). The character's controller rolls a single die to determine his future. This is called the **fate roll**.

- The type of die rolled depends on whether or not the character is the only PC left alive. If he is, he rolls a d10; if other PCs are still in the film, he rolls a d8. Major Secondary Characters (see below) always roll a d8.
- The number that must be equaled or exceeded on the die depends on which Act the film is currently in. PCs cannot be out



of the film in Act One, so there's no need to roll at all. If the film is in Act Two, the die must roll 4 or more for the character to remain alive. If it's in Act Three, the die must roll 7 or more for the character to remain alive.

Major Secondary Characters

An SC designated as a “Major Secondary Character” (see page 133) is treated mostly like a PC when it comes to Defeat. The only exception is that the character always rolls a d8 for fate rolls.

Ending Action Scenes Prematurely

Some situations may cause an action scene to end prematurely or at least cause the removal of a character from the scene. Such instances are generally rare, but the possibility exists. Consider this: Two generally law-abiding characters are slugging it out in an apartment. Both characters have some Setback Tokens, but no one has been Defeated yet. Suddenly, there's a knock on the door, followed by a voice that identifies



the knocker as a police officer. Neither character wants to go to jail, so they abort the fight scene to answer the door.

As mentioned, it may just be one character that is eliminated prematurely from the fight scene. For example, there's a multi-character shootout going on in a riverside warehouse. During the fight scene, one character decides to flee by leaping into the river and letting the current take him away. The Director may force the character to go one more round in the scene in case someone wants to take a pot shot at him as he floats away. After that, he's out. If another character dives in after him, those two will split off into a chase scene.

Lingering Setback Tokens

"Well, he won't get very far, that's for sure. He hasn't got enough blood left in him to keep a chicken alive."

— The Asphalt Jungle (1950)

Setback Tokens caused by physical damage don't just automatically go away when a fight scene concludes. Instead, they become *Lingering Setback Tokens*. These Setback Tokens represent lasting damage, such as gunshot wounds, broken bones, etc.

Don't worry too much, however. Some of the damage taken is superficial and will go away by the time the next scene begins. Before the next scene, each character involved in the fight scene can remove one or more Lingering Setback Tokens.

- Each character removes one Lingering Setback Token.
- Each character with the "Toughness" Aspect can remove an additional Lingering Setback Token on a d8 roll of 6 or more.
- Each character with the "Resolve" Aspect can remove an additional Lingering Setback Token on a d8 roll of 6 or more.

If another fight scene breaks out while a character has Lingering Setback Tokens, he'll begin the scene with them, which can be pretty harsh, to say the least.

Chase Scenes and Drama Scenes

Lingering Setback Tokens stay in effect for chase scenes (it's pretty hard to run while in excruciating pain) and compound with any Setback Tokens gained via the chase scene. Only the Lingering Setback Tokens will remain after the chase scene ends.

On the other hand, Lingering Setback Tokens don't affect drama scenes in any way. That is, Defeating the character in a drama scene will require four new Setback Tokens, regardless of how many Lingering Setback Tokens he has.

Obtaining Lingering Setback Tokens Outside of Fight Scenes

So, your PC is walking on the second-story ledge of an apartment building when you botch your unopposed Finesse/Reflexes check. He takes a tumble into the alley below. There's not a fight scene going on, but I'd say it's a cinch that he's going to be feeling the pain for quite some time. So, how does that work?

If failing a check would logically hurt the character, he suffers one Lingering Setback Token. If one of the dice rolled a 1, he suffers an additional Setback Token. Such checks are referred to as *dangerous checks*.

Now, what if the character failed the check while on the thirtieth-story ledge instead of the second-story ledge? The Director can declare the check to be a *deadly check*. Failure means instant death.

If a character fails a dangerous or deadly check, the Director may be gracious enough to allow you

one last chance to get out of it (e.g., grabbing onto the ledge with your hands). Success in that check will keep the character from injury or death.

The character can try to get rid of Setback Tokens at the end of the scene in the same way that characters do at the end of a fight scene (see page 50).

Healing

Time heals all wounds... or so they say. A character with Lingering Setback Tokens can rest and maybe even get medical treatment to rid himself of them.

After each day of rest, the character can make an unopposed Body/Toughness vs. 4dX. If at least one of the Setback Tokens was caused by an attack that would cause a serious amount of bleeding (stabbed with a knife, shot with a gun, etc.), the check will be vs. 6dX instead. The character will not be able to get rid of the final Setback Token if serious blood loss is involved without medical treatment.

Medical Help

If a character possesses an appropriate medical-based Knowledge specialization, he can make a check immediately before the injured character makes his



check. The check in question is an unopposed Smarts/Knowledge (appropriate medical-based specialization) vs. 5dX check. One less die is rolled if proper medical equipment is not available (stitches, antibiotics, etc.). If the check is successful, the wounded character gets a bonus die for his Body/Toughness check. Should the character tending to the wounded character roll matching toppers, the wounded character rolls bonus dice equal to the number of matching toppers rolled.

Remember, if the Setback Token is the final one possessed by the character and at least one Setback Token was the result of an attack that caused severe blood loss, medical treatment is the only way to heal it.

If the wounded character has an appropriate medical-based Knowledge specialization, he may treat himself. He'll roll one less die than normal, though, as it's difficult to treat yourself while in excruciating pain.

Example of a Fight Scene

This short example offers a fight scene to serve as an example of how it works. In this write-up, my private detective character (Eddie) walked into his shabby office to find a shady-looking mook rummaging through his files. After a brief exchange of words, I decide to have Eddie punch his lights out.

The Director calls for an initiative check. Eddie has Normal Finesse and possesses Reflexes. As such, I roll 5d8 and get 2, 4, 4, 7 and 7, for a total of four matching results. The Director rolls 4d8 and gets 1, 4, 6 and 8. No matching results, which allows me to go first.

Eddie starts off by trying to slug him in the jaw. The mook is going to attempt to block it. The Director states that it requires an opposed Eddie's Body is Good and he has Fighting. So, I roll 5d6 and get 1, 1, 4, 5 and 5. That's four matching results! The Director rolls 2, 3, 4 and 4; two matching results. I clobber him but good, dealing a Setback Token to him. The Director says that Eddie manages to knock him across the desk.

So, now it's the mook's turn. The Director says that he gets up, pulls his heater and shoots at me. In response, I declare that Eddie dives for cover behind the door. This will be an opposed Finesse/Shooting vs. Finesse/Reflexes check. The mook rolls 4, 5, 8, 8 and 8. That's four matching toppers (remember that rolling matching toppers adds an additional matching topper). I'd better roll amazingly or Eddie's toast. I get 2, 3, 3, 5 and 7. Only two matching results. The mook scores a lucky shot and puts Eddie down for the count, thus ending the fight scene.

But we're not quite done yet. I have to make a fate roll to determine if Eddie's still in the movie or if he buys the proverbial farm. This is a one-player game, so Eddie is indeed the only PC alive. That allows me roll a d10. And the game is currently in Act Two, which indicates that I have to roll 4 or higher. Sweating bullets, I throw the die and end up with a 5! Whew!

The Director states that I wake up some time later, sprawled out on the floor, bleeding from my side. Apparently, the mook made off with whatever file it was he was looking for.

Now, Eddie has four Lingering Setback Tokens. I automatically remove one of them. He possesses Resolve, so I can roll a d8. If I roll a 6 or more, Eddie removes one more. I roll a 3, so he's still at 3 Setback Tokens. He should probably get some medical attention or, at the very least, some rest and a bandage.

Chase Scenes

"Johnny, you've got to run!"

"Eh. What's the difference?"

-- Murder, My Sweet (1944)

Everyone in film noir is running from something. Often, it's their past. Other times, however, it's something more literal... like someone wanting to hurt, capture or even kill them. Whether through the city streets in vehicles or amidst winding back alleys on foot, chases seemed to happen with alarming regularity. Dripping with metaphor and symbolism, chase sequences served many purposes in these movies.

Some situations are minor and only require a simple check to resolve. Tackling a twitchy suspect as he tries to dart through the door shouldn't take up much time; just make a check and move on. Many scenes, however, are more crucial to the story and can provide dramatic tension that will heighten the fun for everyone. When this is the case, the Director can call for a *chase scene*.

At its core, a chase scene can be defined as a scene comprised of narration, peppered with opposed checks, in which one character (or group of characters) is attempting to pursue another character (or group of characters).

Sides

Chase scenes typically involve two "sides". A side can consist of one character or several characters. The details of this fact will be explained as this section progresses. For now, all you need to know is that sides exist. Unless a truly unusual situation arise, the "Lending a Hand" rules do not apply here (helping a partner run or drive makes little sense).

Starting a Chase Scene

The Director declares the beginning of a chase scene as soon as it becomes obvious that the scene in question holds potential for an exciting pursuit situation. The side being pursued always acts first in a chase scene; they are the ones that dictate where the chase scene goes.

Carrying Out a Chase Scene

The scene plays out with each side trying to outmaneuver the other; the pursuers want to catch the pursued, while the pursued want to get away from the pursuers. Pretty simple setup.

As mentioned previously, the side being pursued begins a chase scene as the acting side. If that side consists of PCs, the players need

to decide on a course of action for the side. One participant from the pursued side narrates what they want to do (“We charge down the narrow alley, hoping to lose them in the night”). That’s when a **crucial check** is required. A crucial check is an opposed check that can cause the opposing side to gain Setback Tokens (see “Giving Setback Tokens” below).

The default Abilities and Aspects are Body/Athletics vs.

Body/Athletics for chases on foot and Finesse/Driving vs. Finesse/Driving for chases involving vehicles. The “Alternate Abilities and Aspects” section will give you more information about situations/actions that change the scope of things.

Once the pursued side settles on and declares what they want to do, the Director will declare which Abilities and Aspects each side will use for the crucial check. Each side



then selects one of its characters to make the check.

After the crucial check is made and Setback Tokens are given (if any), the pursuing side gets to take its turn, thus becoming the acting side in a crucial check. The pursuers now get to narrate what happens (“We find a shortcut and try to head them off at the pass”).

It then goes back and forth, with both sides alternating between being the acting side and the opposing side.

Giving Setback Tokens

If the acting group succeeds in a crucial check, the opposing side gains one or more **Setback Tokens**. A side gains Setback Tokens as a group, not as individual characters (the exception is if an attack is involved; see “Alternate Abilities and Aspects” below).

How many Setback Tokens does the opposing side gain? In most cases, it gains one Setback Token. However, if the acting side



succeeded *and* rolled matching toppers, the opposing side gains one Setback Token *for each matching topper rolled* instead of just one Setback Token.

Given the rather abstract nature of chase scenes, you may be wondering exactly what Setback Tokens represent. Each one that you force upon the other side represents an advantage in positioning and distance. When the pursuing side forces a Setback Token, it means that they are closing in on them and catching up. When the pursued side forces a Setback Token, it means they are putting more distance between them.

Defeat

When a side receives its fourth Setback Token, it is **Defeated**. In a chase scene, a Defeated side either gets caught (if it's the pursued side) or fails to catch its prey (if it's the pursuing side).

In most cases, the scene ends shortly after a Defeat. At the conclusion of the drama scene, any Setback Tokens accumulated by characters are discarded (except perhaps those gained due to physical damage; see "Alternate Abilities and Aspects" below).

Ending Chase Scenes Prematurely

In rare cases, something may cause a chase scene to end prematurely or at least cause the removal of a character from the scene. Consider this: One character is chasing another character through a factory building. At some point, they both realize that mutual enemies have surrounded the factory and they're armed. The two characters disengage from chasing one another to concentrate on the larger threat.

As mentioned, it may just be one character that is eliminated prematurely from the chase scene. For example, a car chase is in progress through the crowded downtown area. The pursuing side consists of two cars, while the pursued side consists of only one. The driver of one of the pursuing cars decides he has bigger fish to fry and removes himself from the scene. The chase scene continues, but the characters in that car won't be a part of it.

Alternate Abilities and Aspects

The standard rules for chase scenes are straightforward, but they don't necessarily cover every situation. Below, we discuss the use of other Abilities and Aspects.

Non-Standard Actions

Characters can do more than just run while on foot. When the action takes place in vehicles, you're a bit more restricted, so this section mostly deals with pedestrian chases.

Participants are encouraged to use their imaginations when narrating what they do. Coming up with clever actions can lead to the use of different Abilities and Aspects. For example, let's say that my character is involved in a one-on-one pedestrian chase in which I'm the pursued side. I run out of the meat market's back door and knock over the overflowing trashcan as I charge forward, in an effort to slow my pursuer down a little. The Director says I can roll Smarts/Ingenuity instead of the usual Body/Athletics.

Shooting While on Foot

It wasn't uncommon for firearms to be discharged during intense film noir chase sequences. There's nothing like some flying lead to make an enemy scatter for cover, thus slowing them down; something that's pretty important in scenes of this nature. And you never know – some of that lead may even find its mark.

The acting side can choose to use its crucial action to have one of the characters fire a shot while on the move. The acting side must select one of the opposing characters to target. The crucial check will usually be Finesse/Shooting vs. Finesse/Reflexes, though strange circumstances may warrant other combinations instead (at the Director's discretion). For this crucial check, the acting side rolls one less die than normal to reflect that it's not terribly easy to line up a great shot while beating feet.

Should the shot succeed, the opposing side gains Setback Tokens as normal. Additionally, the targeted character gains an equal number of Lingering Setback Tokens. The Lingering Setback Tokens do not add to the side's Setback Token total, but will stick with the character as described in the "Lingering Setback Tokens" section on page 50. If the Lingering Setback Tokens put that character at his fourth Lingering Setback Token, the character is Defeated and must follow the rules for Defeat found in the Fight Scene rules (pages 48-50).

Shooting While in a Vehicle

The rules for shooting during vehicular chase scenes are the same as for shooting during pedestrian chase scenes (see above), except that you can choose to shoot at the vehicle or a character inside it.

Shooting at the Vehicle

The shooting character rolls one less die than usual to account for the fact that landing a good shot while moving is anything but easy. The crucial check (usually Finesse/Shooting vs. Finesse/Driving) is then made as normal, but if you manage to succeed *and* roll matching toppers, you hit a part of the car that will cause the driver to have to immediately make an unopposed Finesse/Driving vs. 4dX check. This could be hitting a tire, hitting the engine and making smoke billow out, etc.). If the driver fails the check, his side gains yet another Setback Token (in addition to the normal amount gained via matching toppers).

Shooting at a Character in the Vehicle

The shooting character must select an enemy character in the other vehicle. He rolls two dice less than usual to simulate that it's hard to square up a good shot

while moving and that a vehicle offers protection to those inside it. The crucial check (usually Finesse/Shooting vs. Finesse/Reflexes) is made as normal.

Should the shot succeed, the opposing side gains Setback Tokens as normal. Additionally, the targeted character gains an equal number of Lingering Setback Tokens. The Lingering Setback Tokens do not add to the side's Setback Token total, but will stick with the character as described in the "Lingering Setback Tokens" section on page 50. If the Lingering Setback Tokens put that character at his fourth Lingering Setback Token, the character is Defeated and must follow the rules for Defeat found in the Fight Scene rules (pages 48-50).

Splitting Up

Despite the fact that characters are grouped into "sides", it's possible for the sides to split up into smaller sides, effectively creating two (or more) separate chase scenes that occur simultaneously.

If one side wants to split up, it must be declared on its own turn, immediately before a crucial check is made. If the splitting-up side is the pursued side, the pursuers may

then decide to split up as well, so as to catch the characters breaking away as well. If the splitting-up side is the pursuing side, the pursued side may or may not be allowed to split up as well (it's the Director's call, based on the situation).

Upon separating themselves from the main group, the splitting-up characters create their own side with the same number of Setback Tokens the main group has.

If one side splits off without any members of the other side splitting up as a reaction to it, the characters who split up still get to act during their side's round, but they won't gain or lose further Setback Tokens, unless something happens to change that (e.g., an

enemy character later goes off to pursue them). They may rejoin their original group later on if the opportunity arises. If this happens (i.e., two groups rejoining), the newly reformed group has a number of Setback Tokens equal to the sub-group with the most Setback Tokens. For example, Crook Group B splits off from Crook Group A and is pursued by Cop Group B (who split off from Cop Group A to follow them). Two separate chase scenes play out. Crook Group A only has 1 Setback Token, while Crook Group B ends up with two Setback Tokens. The two groups eventually re-combine. The newly formed Crook Group will have two Setback Tokens.



Example of a Chase Scene

This short example offers a chase scene to serve as an example of how it works. In this write-up, my private detective character (Eddie) has been attempting to lay low while he recovered from his gunshot wound (see the “Example of a Fight Scene” on page 53). Unfortunately, he had to go to a greasy spoon diner to meet with a contact while he still had one Lingering Setback Token. Just as he was walking up to the diner, he realized that two hoodlums have been following him. If they see him with his contact, the contact’s life will be in danger. So, I decide that he should try to lose them in the somewhat crowded streets. Thus, I have initiated the chase scene and get to go first.

I dictate that Eddie keeps walking past the diner in a casual manner. At the next corner, he’ll turn off and sprint for the nearest alleyway to turn down. The Director says that although Eddie’s sprinting, he’s really trying to use his brains to make them think he doesn’t notice them and then outsmart them by finding an alley. As such, he stipulates that it’s an opposed Smarts/Ingenuity vs. Smarts/Perception check (Perception to see if they notice and figure out his ploy). Eddie has Normal Smarts and doesn’t possess Ingenuity, so I’ll roll 4d8. I get 3, 4, 4 and 8. Two matching results. The Director rolls for the hoodlums’ side and comes up with 3, 4, 6 and 8... nothing! The hoodlums are given a Setback Token and Eddie slips down the alley, unseen.

It’s the hoodlums’ turn. The Director says that they are going to look all around in an effort to spot Eddie. He says it’s an opposed Smarts/Perception vs. Finesse/Skulking check. He rolls 3, 3, 3 and 7, totaling three matching results. Eddie doesn’t have Skulking (he’s a more direct kind of fella), so he just relies on his Normal Smarts. I roll 4, 6, 6 and 8. Since the hoodlums represent the active side, they succeed and I gain a Setback Token (his second one, counting the one he started the scene with). They see Eddie in the alleyway and close in on him a bit.

Eddie is going to beat feet through the alleyway, looking for a turnoff. The Director states that this requires an opposed Body/Athletics vs. Body/Athletics check. That works well for me, because Eddie has Good Body and possesses Athletics, too. I roll 3, 5, 6, 6 and 8. Two matching results. The Director rolls 1, 2, 4 and 7. Zero matching results. The hoodlums gain a second Setback Token. Eddie turns down a side alley and ends up pulling ahead of his pursuers.

Continued...

Example of a Chase Scene (Continued...)

As the hoodlums round the turn-off, one of them takes a shot at Eddie with his rod. This is to be an opposed Finesse/Shooting vs. Finesse/Reflexes check. But if Setback Tokens are dealt to Eddie, they will be Lingering Setback Tokens. The hoodlum has a Finesse of Normal and has Shooting. Normally, he'd roll five dice, but the rules for shooting while running mandate that the shooter rolls one less die than usual. He gets 2, 3, 6 and 6. Two matching results. I roll 1, 1, 4, 4 and 7. Four matching results! The hoodlum misses the shot.

It's back to Eddie, who I determine will just continue running through the alleyways. That will be an opposed Body/Athletics vs. Body/Athletics check. I roll 1, 4, 5, 6 and 6. Three matching toppers. The Director rolls 2, 2, 5 and 6, garnering only two matching results. I deal three Setback Tokens to the hoodlums, meaning that Eddie slipped away from them. He's now late for his meeting with the contact, but at least he's not perforated.

Quick Scene Resolution

The rules for Drama Scenes, Fight Scenes and Chase Scenes were designed to be fast and dirty. But what if you want them to be even faster and dirtier? That's where the quick scene resolution rules can be used. We advise against using them during Act Three, though, as they don't create the dramatic impetus needed for a film's most climactic sequences.

Drama Scenes

For drama scenes, roleplay everything out as normal. When you're done, the Director will ask for an opposed check, with each character using the most appropriate Ability and Aspect. The winning character Defeats the other character. The "Lending a Hand" rules apply as normal.

Fight Scenes

For fight scenes, the Director will call for an opposed check. Use the highest Body or Finesse grade among all the characters on a side. Each side will then add a die for each of the following factors:

- If at least one character on the side has the “Shooting” Aspect.
- If at least one character on the side has the “Fight” Aspect.
- If at least one character on the side has the “Toughness” Aspect.
- If at least one character has the “Marksman” Special Rule.
- If at least one character has the “Tough Customer” Special Rule.
- If the side has some distinct advantage in the situation (high ground, ambush, etc.).
- If the side outnumbered the other side.

The winning side deals out four Setback Tokens and Defeats the other side. The “Lending a Hand” rules do not apply. Each controller of the winning side rolls a d6 and subtracts 2 from the result. That’s the number of Setback Tokens his character acquired during the scene. The characters on the losing side are considered to have four Setback Tokens each.

For both the winners and losers, the rules for fate rolls and getting rid of Lingering Setback Tokens apply as normal.

Once the check is made, one participant from the winning side can describe what happened during the fight scene. Alternatively, the Director can describe it.

Chase Scenes

For chase scenes, the Director will ask for an opposed check, with each side using the most appropriate Ability and Aspect; Body/Athletics while on foot or Finesse/Driving while in vehicles. The winning side Defeats the other side. The “Lending a Hand” rules do not apply.

Once the check is made, one participant from the winning side can describe what happened during the chase scene. Alternatively, the Director can describe it.

Temptation

"One who follows his nature keeps his original nature in the end."

-- The Lady From Shanghai (1947)

In the asphalt jungle, corruption and disillusionment is everywhere. As such, characters can easily get dragged down into the depths of depravity. To represent this in the game, PCs may acquire **Temptation Points** as the game progresses. SCs never gain Temptation Points.

Temptation Types

There are three types of Temptation possessed by PCs: Guilt, Desperation, and Alienation. These are called Temptation types (or simply types).

Guilt: Most decent people feel remorse when they succumb to their coarser instincts. They don't always want to do these amoral things, but times are tough and sometimes, you just don't have a choice. Steal or be stolen from; kill or be killed. Keep rationalizing it, why don't you? It won't stop the guilt from chewing away at your conscience like maggots devouring dead flesh. Why can't you just forget about it and move on? Why do you keep waking up in a cold sweat in the middle of the night?

Desperation: When life begins spiraling out of control, as it often does in film noir, even the most principled soul can become desperate for a way out; a way out of the situation that threatens to make his life even more of a living hell. Ordinarily, the character may not even consider stooping half – or even a fourth – as low as he has lately. But what else can he do? He has to stay afloat; he just *has* to! He's looking for a way out, yet no doors have opened. Maybe he'll have to pick the lock and get out the hard way.

Alienation: The feeling of powerlessness is an always-present theme in film noir. The world was changing and many people felt left behind, stuck forever in the pre-WWII way of life. Soldiers fought to create a utopia, but returned home to find that America was anything *but*. Big business was taking over and the “little guy” was being swallowed up by it. Technology was advancing at unheard of speed as well. All these things caused many individuals to feel increasingly despondent.

As you can see on the character sheet, a track of ten boxes accompanies each Temptation type. As a character gains Temptation Points, the player marks out the appropriate number of boxes at the ratio of one box per Temptation Point.

Once a type of Temptation has all its boxes marked out, it is *nixed*. A nixed type can cause complications as dictated below.

Guilt: The character becomes indecisive and unsure of his actions. When the character makes a check, the Director rolls an additional die for determining the check's threshold.

Desperation: The character becomes frantic and panicky. When making checks, 1s don't count as matching results.

Alienation: The character becomes emotionally isolated and estranged, which affects his thought processes and ability to interact with others. The character cannot use Aspects for Smarts or Spirit checks.

Each time a type is nixed, the Director gains d3 Director Points (see pages 71-73). It's fate's way of saying, in true film noir fashion,

that it's going to kick your teeth in while you're down.

Gaining Temptation Points

A PC gains Temptation Points in two ways:

Using a Temptation Benefit

Temptation is a powerful and alluring thing, especially in the world of film noir. Characters can give into it in order to come out ahead in the short term... but such things always come with a price; and that price is a loss of his humanity, as he edges ever closer to immorality. The aforementioned short-term boons are called ***Temptation Benefits*** and are discussed in detail below.

Upon declaring that your character is using a Temptation Benefit, you must select one of the three types; this is where you'll be adding the Temptation Points.

As soon as you declare this, roll a d3. That's how many Temptation Points you must add to the type you selected. Just mark out the stipulated number of boxes on the appropriate track.

The Temptation Benefits available to players are as follows:

Dirty Upper Hand

The character uses a morally questionable tactic or unethical trick to give himself an advantage over someone else. Perhaps the character picks up a nearby makeshift weapon to clobber the enemy with or threatens a person's family while trying to get him to give out some information. Maybe he's going to shoot someone from behind so they'll never see it coming or position himself behind innocent bystanders in order to keep the cops from getting a good shot at him.

Declare that you're using Dirty Upper Hand before making an opposed check to roll an additional die for that check. You cannot use this Temptation Benefit more than once for a single check.



Before you make the check, however, you must explain what it is your character is doing to gain the extra die (“I play dead and just when the crooks think my lights are turned off for good and turn their backs, I reach for my gun and blast one of them.”).

Act of Violence

It's a tough, violent world out there, and sometimes you have to take the kid gloves off and get your hands bloody just to survive. It's ugly business, to be sure, but what else is a Joe to do? You either escalate the violence or end up facedown in the gutter with a bullet in your gut.

Whenever your character causes another character to gain one or more Setback Tokens during a fight scene, you may use this Temptation Benefit to force one additional Setback Token upon him. This may only be used once per crucial check.

You must also explain what it is your character did to increase the damage.

Taking Advantage

The character takes advantage of a situation to bolster his chances of succeeding in a task. It may not be the most respectable solution, but as long as it gets the job done, that's all that matters.



Declare that you're using Taking Advantage after making a check (but before the outcome is narrated). Pick up one, some or all of the dice you just rolled and roll them again, keeping the new die results instead. You cannot use this Temptation Benefit more than once for a single check.

Committing Immoral Actions

Film noir protagonists aren't always heroic. In fact, some of them are downright contemptible. They lie, they cheat, they commit crimes. Sometimes, they kill. Even

the noblest of the lot can be pushed to the edge of reasoning and find themselves capable of doing truly vile things.

Whenever a PC directly participates in a deplorable action, the Director may force him to gain a Temptation Point. So, what constitutes a deplorable action? Truthfully, the world of film noir is so shady that the smallest actions won't do anything to push a character toward. It's really only the more grievous actions that warrant the doling out of a Temptation Point. The Director is the final

arbiter, but here's a list of actions that should probably be considered.

Murder: Killing someone can chip away at someone's soul in a big way. Each person killed will net the character a Temptation Point. Even if it's justified as self-defense, it still creates an impact.

Serious Crime: Directly engaging in some form of serious crime will also do the trick: larceny, blackmail, kidnapping, assault of an innocent person, etc.

Personal Betrayal: The willing betrayal of a friend, relative, lover or ally can take its toll on morality. It's definitely worthy of gaining a Temptation Point.

Getting Rid of Temptation Points

Temptation is a slippery slope. Once you start sliding down it, climbing back to the top again isn't a cakewalk. Still, nobody said it was impossible. At the beginning of Act Three, PCs may remove Temptation Points.

- Each PC removes d6 Temptation Points, taken from whichever track(s) his controller wishes.

- Each character with the "Resolve" Aspect can remove two additional Temptation Points on a d8 roll of 6 or more.

Also, it must be mentioned that characters can negate the gaining of Temptation Points by spending Genre Points on a one-to-one ratio. See "Genre Points" below for more details.

Genre Points

In a genre as specific and nuanced as film noir, it's important for the principle characters to stay within its boundaries to a certain degree and maintain the suspension of disbelief for everyone involved. It's also important for the players to roleplay their characters as entertainingly and creatively as possible. These things enhance the experience for the entire group.

The Director will award players who endeavor to do these things with **Genre Points**. It's a way of saying, "well done". Once gained, Genre Points can be spent to help your character out in a variety of ways during the game.

Earning Genre Points

The Director can award players with Genre Points for virtually anything he feels furthers the enjoyment of the game.

Below, we discuss some surefire ways to land yourself some Genre Points.

Acting “In Genre”

When your character does something that is particularly true to the genre, you may find yourself with a Genre Point being tossed your way. You don’t have to be a film noir expert to pull this off. As long as you’re relatively familiar with the genre, you’ll know enough to get you by.

Tagging or Double-Tagging Hooks

Your character is more than a collection of game stats written down on a piece of paper; he should be viewed as a person who exists in the world of film noir; a character with a past, a personality and goals. Check out your character’s Hooks on the character sheet. Bringing one into play during a scene and roleplaying it is called *tagging a Hook*. Tagging a Hook will net you a Genre Point.

You even take it a step further in many cases. If the Hook

could logically affect a check in a negative way (such as “Fear of Heights” affecting a check to keep the character’s balance on a building ledge), you can roleplay it and voluntarily roll one less die than normal in order to gain two Genre Points. This is called *double-tagging a Hook*.

Each Hook can only be tagged or double-tagged once per scene. That is, you cannot tag *and* double-tag any given Hook during a scene; it’s one or the other.

Creativity

The characters in film noir were often endlessly inventive. They came up with crafty ploys, ingenious set-ups and brilliant crimes. This kept the movies from becoming boring. Players in RPGs are also known for their ingenuity and innovation, so it goes without saying that applying it to a film noir game should be a cinch. A Genre Point can be given out to any player who uses creativity in the game.

Losing Genre Points

Whenever a player blatantly detracts from the game by acting disruptively, being inconsiderate or intentionally going against the

grain of the genre, the Director is encouraged to give him a warning. Should he persist in this behavior, he should lose one or more Genre Points, even if that sends him into the negatives.

In regard to going against the grain of the genre, it may simply be a case of the player not knowing much about film noir or the 1940s and '50s in general. If that's the case, he shouldn't lose Genre Points for it. The Director should instead give him some advice and help him along throughout the film.

Spending Genre Points

You'll quickly find out that Genre Points can make your character's life a lot easier. You can spend a Genre Point on any of these options.

Negate Temptation Points

You may reduce the number of Temptation Points your character gains by one for each Genre Point you spend. This expenditure must occur immediately after gaining the Temptation Points. That is, you cannot use this option to get rid of Temptation Points you gained earlier in the film.

It should be noted that this option effectively allows you to use Genre Points to reduce or even entirely neutralize the number of Temptation Points you gain from utilizing Temptation Benefits.

Scene Editing

The Director is responsible for creating the world in which the characters live. This option allows you to make small changes to that world. Doing so usually requires you to spend one Genre Point, though the Director may charge two if the alteration is fairly drastic. The Director can veto any alteration he feels is too major or detrimental to the story.

As an example, let's say that my character is attempting to slip away from someone who has been tailing him on foot throughout the city streets. The Director already stated that the streets are deserted at this hour, but I really want a quick way to ditch him, so I spend a Genre Point and state that a lone taxi rolls down the empty road. I hail it and get in, telling the cabbie to "just drive." Not feeling that my alteration was too major, the Director allows it.



Director Points

"That's life. Whichever way you turn, Fate sticks out a foot to trip you."

-- *Detour* (1946)

If there's one thing you need to understand about this dark-tinted version of our own world during the 1940s and '50s, it's that it's not just an ambivalent, uncaring place; it's actually out to get you. That's right, the world of film noir maliciously and relentlessly tries to wear down its inhabitants with one surge of shabby luck after another,

before finally chewing them up and spitting them back out again.

That sounds pretty harsh, doesn't it? Well, you'd better get plenty used to it, pal, because this is the reality all the characters will face during the course of the film. No, it's not fair. Not even close. Them's the breaks, as they say.

One of the ways *The Big Crime* emulates the malevolent nature of this world is through Director Points, which are spent by the Director in order to make the PCs' lives more... interesting. And by "interesting", we mean "miserable."

Acquiring Director Points

At the beginning of Act One, the Director receives one Director Point for each PC in the game. When Act Two starts, he receives two Director Points for each PC. For Act Three, he obtains another two Director Points for each PC still in the film. These are cumulative, thus unspent Director Points will carry over from one Act to the next.

There are other situations that can earn the Director more Director Points.

- If the Director has no Director Points when a player rolls matching toppers, he gains an amount equal to the number of matching toppers rolled. If he already has at least one Director Point when matching toppers are rolled, he doesn't receive any.
- When one of a PC's Temptation types is nixed (see page 65), the Director gains d3 Director Points.
- Once per scene, the Director can tag or double-tag an SC's Hook to gain one or two Director Points, respectively. See page 69 for details about tagging and double-tagging Hooks.

Spending Director Points

The Director can spend Director Points on any of the following options:

- After a player makes a check, the Director can spend one Director Point to force him to re-roll one, some or all of the dice (Director's choice). This option may only be used once per check.
- After an SC makes a check, the Director can spend one Director Point to re-roll one, some or all of the dice (Director's choice). This option may only be used once per check.
- Before rolling to determine the threshold for an unopposed check, the Director can spend one Director Point to roll an additional die. This option may only be used once per check.
- Before an SC makes a check, the Director can spend one Director Point to roll an additional die. This option may only be used once per check.
- When an SC causes a PC to gain one or more Setback Tokens via a crucial check, the Director can

spend two Director Points to make the PC gain one extra Setback Token. This option may only be used once per check.

- When a player announces that he is using a Temptation Benefit (but before its effect is implemented), the Director can spend Director Points to increase the number of Temptation Points gained by one for each Director Points spent. This option may not be used more than three times per d3 roll.

Replacement PCs

Once Act Two begins, the PCs are no longer safe. Death will be nipping at their heels and if one of them stumbles, it's lights out. Does this mean the player whose PC took the big sleep has to just sit around doing nothing while everyone else continues having fun?

Unless the Director feels it's unfeasible for the story, the you may bring a new PC into the film if your original PC perished during Act Two. Perhaps it's the slain PC's revenge-minded cousin, someone who was inadvertently drawn into the mess or someone else entirely.

You can either make a new character or use your old character as a basis. If you choose the former, go off on your own and follow the creation rules as normal. If you choose the latter, you must follow the steps below:

Step 1: Gender and Shade both stay the same; erase any Temptation Points and Genre Points gained during the film.

Step 2: Swap the grades of two Abilities with each other. Females still cannot have a grade of Good in Body.

Step 3: Replace d3 Aspects with new Aspects. Females still cannot have Strength.

Step 4: Keep mandatory Special Rules; you may replace other Special Rules with new ones.

Step 5: Replace all Hooks with new ones.

Step 6: You may replace any or all items with new ones.

Chapter 4: Character Creation

Using This System

This system is designed exclusively for the creation of Primary Characters. The guidelines for creating Secondary Characters can be found on pages 132-133.

Important Considerations

Before you begin creating a PC, you need to consider the following factors.

Film Requirements

Some films have very specific roles that need to be filled, while others are a bit looser. It really depends on the Director's style and how he likes to structure the films he runs. Directors are encouraged to fill out a *Casting Sheet* (see page 168) before players begin creating their PCs. The Casting Sheet will contain a brief summary of the film's premise, as well as any requirements for the PCs.

Making A Film Noir Protagonist

Squeaky-clean good guys and truly evil bad guys were actually in short supply in the nighttime world of film noir (a few detectives and cops notwithstanding). Instead, viewers were presented with flawed, morally gray protagonists and greedy antagonists whose motivations we can almost relate to. Unlike the starkly black shadows that so enticingly enveloped the environments, the characters were typically stuck somewhere in the various shades of gray.

The Primary Characters represent the main protagonists of the film and, as such, should be at least somewhat sympathetic. Even if he's a hardened crook or a corrupt cop, you should give him a hook that would make audiences root for him. Perhaps he's trying to escape his past and turn over a new leaf; maybe he knows he's trapped in a bad life of his own making

and hopes to do at least one good deed... even if it means sacrificing himself; or it could be that he's found a love interest who makes him see that he can change for the better. You needn't make him a Boy Scout; just find something relatable about the character and run with it.

If you fashion your character in a way that at least one aspect is sympathetic, you'll have a believable film noir character on your hands.

Step 0: Gender

Due to the vast differences between how film noir portrayed men and how it portrayed women, choosing your character's gender is important. It's a decision that will affect numerous things in the game, especially during character creation.

Male Characters

- Males cannot have the following Special Rules: Dangerous Allure, Duplicitous, Dutiful Dame and Waterworks.

Female Characters

- Female characters cannot have the following Special Rules: Able-Bodied, Anti-Hero, Get Lost, Sister! or Right Back At Ya!

Common Noir Characters

Film noir boasted characters from all walks of life, but there were staple characters that appeared with regularity. We'll list some of the more common protagonist archetypes below.

Keep in mind that they sometimes spilled over into other archetypes. For example, the protagonist from *Kansas City Confidential* was both The Average Joe and The Ex-Con.

- The Ex-Con
- The War Veteran
- The Normal Joe
- The Private Dick
- The Police Detective
- The Cop
- The Hood
- The Professional Criminal
- The Boxer
- The Journalist
- The Amnesiac
- The Artist/Musician
- The Dutiful Dame
- The Femme Fatale
- The Politician

- Female characters gain the “Waterworks” Special Rule automatically, though the player may turn it down if it doesn’t fit the character.
- Female characters cannot have a Body grade of Good.
- Female characters cannot have the “Strength” Aspect.
- Female characters can automatically take the “Manipulation” Aspect or the “Persuasion” Aspect.
- During fight scenes, female characters are Defeated upon receiving their second Setback Token.



Step 1: Hooks

Each character has three *Hooks* that give us some insight into who he is beyond what the game stats can tell us. They can be personality traits (Smarmy, Smart-Mouthed, Arrogant, Overly Sensitive, etc.), background information (WWII Veteran, Ex-Con, From a Small Town, Farmboy, etc.), goals (Wants Revenge for Brother’s Death, Seeks Power, Wants To Escape From His Past, Wants a Simple Life, etc.), psychological problems (Obsessed With Guns, Fear of Heights, Hatred of Foreigners, etc.) or physical problems (Bad Back, Disfigured Face, Wheelchair-Bound, etc.).

Think of these as facts about your character that you’d like to call attention to during the film; nuances that you’d like to point out as being significant.

Step 2: Shade

Select a Shade for your character to reflect his morality at the beginning of the film. Each Shade has its advantages as well as its disadvantages, as shown below. You can find out the details on what each Shade means on pages 29-32.

Light Gray

- The character begins the film without any Temptation Points.
- The character automatically gains the “Right Gee” Special Rule.

Medium Gray

- The character begins the film with three Temptation Points, spread among the three tracks however you wish.
- The character automatically gains the “Anti-Hero” Special Rule (if male) or the “Duplicitous” Special Rule (if female).

Dark Gray

- The character begins the film with six Temptation Points, spread among the three tracks however you wish.
- The character automatically gains the “Unethical” Special Rule.

Step 3: Abilities

First off, you’ll need to determine the character’s grades for each of his four Abilities (Body, Finesse, Smarts and Spirit). This requires choosing one of the following arrays and assigning each grade in that array to an Ability.

Array #1

Normal, Normal, Normal, Normal

Array #2

Poor, Normal, Normal, Good

Array #3

Poor, Poor, Good, Good

*Array #4**

Normal, Normal, Normal, Good

*Array #5**

Poor, Normal, Good, Good

*Array #6***

Poor, Normal, Normal, Normal

*Array #7***

Poor, Poor, Normal, Good

* The character receives one less Aspect in Step 4 and cannot be given more than one non-mandatory Special Rule during Step 6.

** You receive two extra Aspects in Step 4.

Step 4: Aspects

Your character receives six Aspects as a default. If you chose Array #4 or #5 during Step 3, the character receives only five Aspects. If you chose Array #6 or #7, the character receives eight Aspects. For your convenience, we've duplicated the Aspect List on the opposite page.

Four of the Aspects cover too much ground. Characters with Driving, Knowledge, Art or Performance will have to select a Specialization for them. It is possible for a character to have more than one of the same Aspect, each with a different Specialization. For example, the character might possess "Knowledge (Auto Mechanics)" and "Knowledge (Biology)". They simply count as two separate Aspects.

Step 5: Items

Pick out a handful of items the character would normally carry on his person. How many items are allowed? There's no hard limit; just use logic, based on the character's profession and personality. You won't find an exhaustive list of items in this book (though we do provide some examples for your

convenience), as items are mostly props with storytelling potential.

Most characters will have a bit of cash on them as well. Remember that in 1950 (which is smack dab in the middle of the film noir era), one dollar was the equivalent of roughly ten dollars in today's money. The amount the character carries on him should depend on how wealthy you view him (the Director is the final arbiter):

- Destitute (homeless, squatter, drifter, petty thief, etc.): 25¢
- Poor (waitresses, clerks, low-rent private eye, etc.): \$1
- Lower Middle Class (dock worker, normal private eye, nurse, crook, cop, etc.): \$5
- Upper Middle Class (accountant, shop owner, etc.): \$10
- Wealthy (business man, doctor, lawyer, mobster): \$20
- Filthy Rich (business tycoon, top mobster, major politician, etc.): \$60

Body Aspects

Athletics: The ability to perform fe athleticism such as running, jumping, climbing and swimming.

Endurance: The body's fitness and ability to resist disease, toxins, poisons or exhaustion.

Fighting: The art of up-close fighting, either with a melee weapon or with fists.

Strength: The application of raw physical power; useful for lifting, pushing, pulling and carrying.

Toughness: A measure of one's ability to take damage and keep going.

Finesse Aspects

Coordination: Fine motor skills, often referred to as hand-eye coordination.

Driving*: The operation of vehicles. *Specializations* – Ground Vehicles, Air Vehicles, Water Vehicles

Reflexes: The ability to use agility and to react to danger quickly; often used to avoid incoming attacks.

Shooting: The skill of hitting a target with a ranged weapon, such as pistols, rifles, grenades, etc.

Skulking: The act of sneaking, hiding or concealing.

Smarts Aspects

Ingenuity: Skillfully and promptly dealing with new situations and obstacles using whatever means one has at his disposal. In other words, it simulates resourcefulness.

Investigation: Scrutinizing clues and carefully examining the facts. It also helps the character know where to go for more answers based on the information already gleaned. This is a crucial skill for detectives and reporters.

Knowledge*: Topics and subjects the character has acquired information on during his lifetime. It is the most versatile Aspect in the game, as you can use it with Finesse under certain circumstances. Unlike other Aspects that require Specializations, there isn't one definitive list of Specializations. *Example Specializations* – History, Biology, Politics, Business, The Criminal Underworld, Doctor, Auto Mechanics, Accounting, Law, Construction, Carpentry, Nurse, Military, Safecracking, Demolitions, Chemistry, Archaeology, Psychology, Electronics, etc.

Memory: The ability to recall things that you've seen or learned.

Perception: Using one's senses or gut instincts to observe his surroundings (spotting clues, hearing conversations in the next room, detecting an ambush, etc.).

Spirit Aspects

Art*: Expressing oneself by creating something tangible and creative. *Specializations* – Painting, Drawing, Sculpting, Writing, Photography, Crafts

Intimidation: Causing fear by utilizing threats, physical pain, bullying tactics and rougher forms of interrogation.

Manipulation: Using guile, cunning, seduction, misdirection or lies to get what you want from others. This is also used for interrogation, when you want to trick the subject or play tricks with his mind.

Performance*: To entertain or inspire others by performing. *Specializations* – Dancing, Singing, Musical Instrument, Oration, Comedy, Acting, Oration, Magician, Parlor Tricks

Persuasion: Convincing others by means of reasoning or bargaining with them. This is also used for "softer" interrogations.

Resolve: Staving off persuasion, manipulation, intimidation or temptation by using one's willpower.

*Requires a Specialization

Step 6: Alterations

By now, you should have a pretty good handle on what your character is like; his demeanor, his capabilities and so on. Now, you may choose three of the following Alterations. No Alteration may be taken more than twice, unless otherwise noted.

Alteration #1: Increase a “Poor” Ability to “Normal” or increase a “Normal” Ability to “Good”. This option may only be taken once.

Alteration #2: Gain two new Aspects.

Alteration #3: Gain a Special Rule (some Special Rules count as two Alterations).

Alteration #4: Gain two additional Hooks.

Alteration #5: Begin the film with two Genre Points.

Special Rules List

What follows is a selection of Special Rules for you to choose from. Each entry explains how it works and lists which Shades of characters can have it. If it’s listed as mandatory for a specific Shade, every character of that Shade receives it automatically. It doesn’t require an Option to be spent to acquire it.

It’s important to note that only PCs have Special Rules and cannot have any given Special Rule more than once.





Able-Bodied

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray; male characters only)

The character is an athlete, was an athlete or should have been an athlete.

Once per Act, after making a Body/Athletics check, you may turn all your matching results into matching toppers instead.

Anti-Hero

(Medium Gray – mandatory; male characters only)

The character lacks the qualities of a hero, yet there's just something about him that makes moviegoers root for him despite his obvious flaws.

Once per film, during a fight scene, you may have the character gain d3 Temptation Points to any one track to remove an equal number of Setback Tokens he has

acquired. There's one prerequisite, though. You must have him say or do something that adds to his tough guy aura.

Comeback Quip

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)

The character knows how to banter. When someone misses a beat, he is sure to be ready to capitalize on it with a witty remark of his own.

During a drama scene, if an active character fails to give your character any Setback Tokens after a crucial check, you may come up with an insult, barb, reasoned argument or other verbal swipe that will hit home with the enemy. Then, roll a d8. On a 7 or 8, the enemy character gains a Setback Token.

Dangerous Allure

(Medium Gray, Dark Gray; female characters only)

Femme fatale. Spider woman. Temptress. Seductress. All these terms describe the character to a tee. Darkly sensuous, she knows how to get what she wants from men by using her feminine wiles. They are the tools of her trade.

When the character uses the “Manipulation” Aspect in an opposed check against a male character, you may gain one Temptation Point to re-roll any non-matching results. This Special Rule can only be used once per Act. The character must have the “Manipulation” Aspect in order to possess this Special Rule.

Duplicitous

(Medium Gray – mandatory; female characters only)

This character is deceitful, double-crossing or downright predatory.

Before making an opposed Spirit/Manipulation check against a male character, you may roll an additional die. On the other hand, women aren’t so easily fooled by her dishonest nature. Any opposed Spirit/Manipulation checks made against other females will grant the opposing character an additional die to roll instead.





Dutiful Dame

(Light Gray; female characters only)

If there is a polar opposite of the femme fatale, this character is it. She's loyal, truthful and trustworthy. With but a few reassuring words or a display of romantic emotion, she can bolster a man's soul, reinvigorating him when he's at his lowest point.

Upon taking this Special Rule, select a male PC. This is the character she's nurturing to. The exact relationship between them is up to you and the male PC's player. They can be lovers, siblings or friends. Perhaps they haven't even met yet, but when they *do*, the sparks will fly.

Once per film, when the character and the chosen male character are in a quiet or peaceful environment

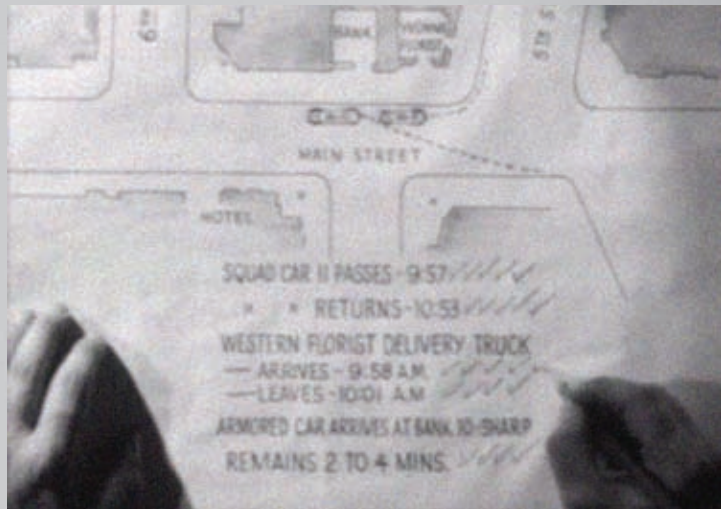
for a few hours or so, she may remove 4 of his Temptation Points, taken from whichever type(s) you choose. Her bolstered sense of self-worth increases as well, giving her d3 Genre Points. You must roleplay this scene.

Expert

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)

There's a subject or area of knowledge that this character is renowned for. He's considered an authority on the subject and is a cut above other skilled individuals.

Write "2" next to one of the character's existing "Knowledge" Aspects. When using this Aspect in a check, roll two extra dice rather than the usual one normally afforded by Aspects.





Fancy Maneuvering *(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)*

Thinking fast either while being chased or being chased yourself is a critical skill. You have to really take in your surroundings and immediately know how best to exploit them. This character is a master of that, allowing him to pull off some cunning maneuvers.

During a chase scene, if an active character fails to give your character any Setback Tokens after a crucial check, you may come up with a maneuver, tactic or trick that will give your character leverage. Then, roll a d8. On a 7 or 8, the enemy character gains a Setback Token.

Flawed *(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)*

Have you ever met those people? You know the people I'm talking about; the ones who always seem to land on their feet, no matter what. Well, this character isn't one of them.

Upon taking this Special Rule, choose one of the four Abilities and write it down beside the Special Rule's name on your character sheet. When making checks using that Ability, 1s never count as matching results. If the character's "Desperation" Temptation type is nixed, then neither 1s nor 2s count as matching results for checks using this Ability.

On the plus side, film noir loves a flawed character. For each matching 1 you roll when making a check using the Flawed Ability, you gain a Genre Point. If the character's "Desperation" Temptation type is nixed, this doesn't extend to matching 2s.

Get Lost, Sister!

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray; male characters only)

"I don't have time for your eye-batting and bedroom eyes. I've got enough hassles on my plate and I don't have an appetite for any more."

Once per Act, after making an opposed Spirit/Resolve check against a female who is trying to use Spirit/Manipulation to seduce your character, you may turn all your matching results into matching toppers instead.

I Know a Fella

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)

The character knows just the right person to help out.

Once per film, the character can announce that he knows someone who can help out with whatever situation is at hand. Usually,

this help comes in the form of information, but if the Director agrees, it can be something else (an item, a favor, etc.). Conversing with the contact requires roleplaying. The Director should endeavor to make the information (or item, favor, etc.) very useful indeed; obtaining it should require no checks. If, for whatever reason, the Director feels that the information shouldn't be given, he can ask the player if he wants to keep the usage of this Special Rule for use later in the film or if he'd rather cash it in for three Genre Points.

Marksman

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)

Put a heater in this character's mitts and you'll see some serious lead fly!

Write "2" next to the character's "Shooting" Aspect. If the character doesn't have that Aspect, you may not choose this Special Rule. When using this Aspect in a check, roll two extra dice rather than the usual one normally afforded by Aspects. ***This requires two Alterations in Step 6!***

Not Going Out That Easy *(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)*

This character likes to finish what he started. That's fairly hard to do when little imaginary birdies are fluttering around his head while he investigates the back of his eyelids. And it's even harder to do when he's pushing up daisies. Fortunately, it's no simple matter to put the character's lights out.

Whenever the PC takes his fourth Setback Token (or second Setback Token for females) during a fight scene, roll a d8. On a 1-6, the character is Defeated as usual. On a 7-8, the character stays at three Setback Tokens (or one Setback Token for females).

Right Back At Ya! *(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray; male characters only)*

The character tends to favor counter attacks during slugfests.

During a fight scene, if an active character fails to give your character any Setback Tokens after a crucial check representing a close combat attack against him, roll a d8. On a 7 or 8, the enemy character gains a Setback Token.

Right Gee *(Light Gray – mandatory)*

The character is a “right guy” or “right gee”, as they say (“gal” works in the case of female characters). In other words, he’s a stand-up guy; a real good fella. Since that’s the case, he feels guiltier, more desperate and more alienated than most when he gives in to temptation.

Any time the character gains a Temptation Point from engaging in an immoral activity, roll a d8. Ignore the Temptation Point if the die rolls a 7 or 8. However, if you roll a 1, the character gains an additional Temptation Point (for a total of two).



Rotten Luck

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)

If he didn't have crummy luck, he wouldn't have any luck at all... which would probably be preferable.

Once per film, after you make a check, the Director may force you to re-roll all matching results. On the plus side, if you still manage to succeed in the check, the character has his confidence bolstered; remove d3 Temptation Points from any track(s) you want and gain a Genre Point.

Sleuth

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)

Whether the character is a shamus, a police detective, an intrepid reporter or just a private citizen, this character knows how to put two and two together and end up with "four" as the answer.

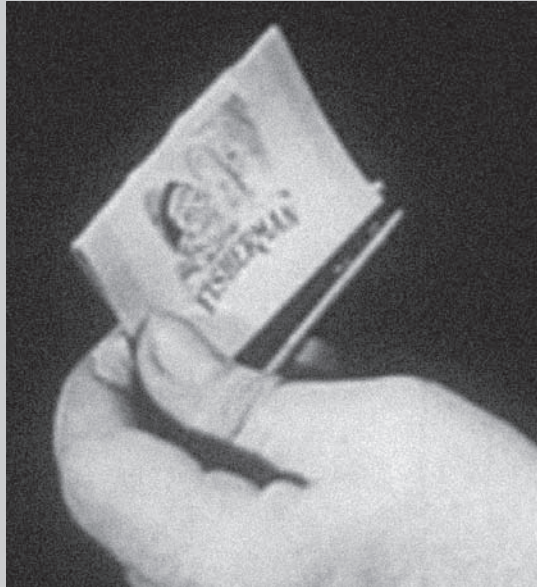
Once per Act, after making a Smarts/ Investigation check, you may turn all your matching results into matching toppers instead.

Sucker

(Light Gray, Medium Gray)

There's a sucker born every minute... including this character. He's easily manipulated by dames and falls for whatever they tell him, hook, line and sinker. If the character is a female, she's easily manipulated by men and often does what they tell her.

When attempting to con, seduce or persuade this PC, characters of the opposite gender roll one additional die for the opposed Spirit/ Manipulation or Persuasion vs. Spirit/ Resolve check. However, there's an added benefit: the character is so enamored or smitten that giving in to the opposing character's whims and desires doesn't bother him. In fact, it



makes him feel less apprehensive. If the PC fails the check, remove a Temptation point from any track immediately and gain a Genre Point.

Tough Customer

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)

The character's proficient at roughhousing, brawling or otherwise fighting when things get up close and personal.

Write “2” next to the character’s “Fighting” Aspect. If the character doesn’t have that Aspect, you may not choose this Special Rule. When using this Aspect in a check, roll two extra dice rather than the usual one normally afforded by Aspects. ***This requires two Alterations in Step 6!***

Unethical

(Dark Gray – mandatory)

The character doesn't let his conscience bother him as much as the next guy. Doing questionable things is so ingrained into his thought processes that he barely even notices when he does them. Or it could be that he simply couldn't care less.

When the character gains Temptation Points, reduce the amount gained by one (down to a minimum of one).

Waterworks

(Light Gray, Medium Gray; female characters only)

Whether it was a quiet tear and quivering lip or full-on crying and sobbing, the women of film noir could usually turn on the waterworks and get what they wanted from men.

Once per Act, after the character uses the “Manipulation” or “Persuasion” Aspect in an opposed check against a male character, you may declare that she starts crying. Upon doing so, force the opposing character to re-roll a single die of your choice.

Way With Words

(Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray)

The character is a smooth talker or slings quips so fast and efficiently that people don't question him all that much.

Once per Act, after making a Spirit/Persuasion check, you may turn all your matching results into matching toppers instead.

Example of PC Creation

In this section, we'll show you how character creation works by way of example, as I create a classic hard-boiled private detective named Victor Kane.

Step 0: Gender

As the name Victor Kane suggests, the character is a male.

Step 1: Hooks

Basing Victor on the Bogartian gumshoe prototype, I give him “Cynical”, “Stoic” and “Sarcastic”.

Step 2: Shade

I really see Victor as a straight-and-narrow kind of guy. He's no angel, mind you, but he generally stays clean and maintains his scruples... at least so far. With this in mind, I give him “Light Gray” Shade.

Step 3: Abilities

Right off the bat, I decide to keep it Arrays 1-3, thus avoiding the more exotic choices. After perusing the options, I select Array #2, giving me Poor, Normal, Normal and Good. I want him to be pretty strong, so I dump my “Good” into Body. “Poor” gets tossed into Finesse and my two “Normals” fill out Smarts and Spirit.

Body: Good

Finesse: Poor

Smarts: Normal

Spirit: Normal

Step 4: Aspects

Given the array above, I am allowed to choose six Aspects for Victor. I probably should have put my “Good” into Smarts since Victor's a detective, but I make up for it by giving him Investigation and Perception. Two down, four to go. He needs to be able to handle fights of all sorts, thus Fighting and Shooting are both required. I go for Reflexes as well, because I shortchanged him in the Finesse area (with a Poor) and I don't want him to be a klutz. My last choice is Resolve, as it goes with his “Stoic” Hook.

Continued...

Example of PC Creation (Continued...)

Body: Good (Fighting)

Finesse: Poor (Shooting, Reflexes)

Smarts: Normal (Investigation, Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve)

Step 5: Items

Victor will carry a pistol, a pack of cigarettes, a lighter and a wallet with money in it. How much money? Well, he's a typical private eye, so he starts with \$5.

Step 6: Alterations

I select Alteration #1 to increase Finesse to Normal. That "Poor" was starting to bug me. Next up is Alteration #2, so I can give him two more Aspects. I want him to be physically capable, so I choose Athletics. I also need Victor to be good at getting information from people; Manipulation seems the perfect choice. Lastly, I select Alteration #3, enabling me to pick a Special Rule. He already has "Right Gee" due to his Shade, but I need one more. Many of them would be perfect choices, but I'm limited to one. In the end, "Sleuth" seems to be a good option, furthering his detective capabilities.



Character Name: *Victor Kane*

Shade: *Light Gray*

Gender: *Male*

Hooks:

Cynical

Stoic

Sarcastic

Body: *Good*

Fighting, Athletics

Finesse: *Normal*

Shooting, Reflexes

Smarts: *Normal*

Investigation, Perception

Spirit: *Normal*

Resolve, Manipulation

Special Rules

Right Gee, Sleuth

Temptation Points

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Guilt

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Desperation

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Alienation

Player's Name:

Items:

Pistol

Cigarettes

Lighter

Wallet

\$5

Notes:

Chapter 5: The Players

The Importance of This Chapter

The Director may be the one who sets the scene and fleshes out the world, but it's you, the players, who drive the story forward. Without you and your fellow players, there's nothing; no story, no momentum and no game. *The Big Crime* revolves around you!

Given the importance of the players in the grand scheme of things, it only makes sense to include a chapter that offers advice and suggestions. Whether you're an old hand or new to the roleplaying hobby, you should find useful information here.

Understanding Film Noir

You needn't be an expert on film noir to enjoy *The Big Crime*, but having a rudimentary grasp of its themes, tropes and nuances

is certainly helpful. So, where should you start if you aren't terribly familiar with the genre? Chapter 2 is a good place to start. It presents you with a rundown of what makes film noir unique and offers eight suggestions for movies to watch.

We could dole out page after page of text dealing with every tiny aspect of film noir, but it wouldn't even begin to compare to what you can glean from sitting down with some popcorn and watching a handful of the movies. Going directly to the source is always preferable. That said, we may avoid giving you an all-encompassing, definitive guide to film noir (there are full-length books devoted to that), but we *will* give you enough to run with so that you can understand the source material that this game seeks to emulate. Read on.

Player Tips

The tips found in this section are meant to give you a quick handle on playing a film noir protagonist.

Tip #1: Interact

Snappy or evocative dialogue is at the heart of film noir. Since that's the case, you should get into character and speak for your character firsthand. Don't say, "I ask the bartender if he's seen the girl in the photo" when you could say, "Hey, pops. Have you laid eyes on this tomato before?" Without dialogue, the game isn't going to feel like the source material.

If you've not roleplayed in this manner before, you'll likely feel a little silly at first. That's okay. It

will get easier as time goes on and by the end of the film, you'll be bantering like a pro.

Tip #2: Keep Gender Roles in Mind

We live in a more progressive world than the denizens of film noir did. As such, we view things from a modern perspective; a perspective that accepts women as equals to men and acknowledges that they are very capable individuals. We, as a society, have evolved to the point where women aren't relegated to the home, dependent upon their husbands for support.

But when playing *The Big Crime*, we have to put ourselves into a



1940s and '50s mindset. It may be tempting to create a female character that is a badass private detective, a hard-as-nails police investigator or even a tyrannical gangster. Before the temptation gets the best of you, stop for a few minutes and ask yourself if this is a character that would have been found in the films noir of the era.

The women of film noir typically fell into one of two basic molds (the dutiful good-girl and the dangerous femme fatale), but there were numerous exceptions. Not all of them batted their eyelashes and doted on their men, nor did all of them use their femininity as a weapon. Take, for example, Nora Goodrich from *Strange Impersonation*. She was a research scientist who put her career ahead of her love life, refusing to marry her beau (also a scientist) until she finished her current project. Then there's Kathy Ferguson, a newspaper advice columnist who single-handedly delivered a fugitive to the police, much to the police Captain's chagrin; he didn't like being upstaged by a woman. These gals strayed from the stereotypes, yet were still portrayed as ladies.

It's fine to create female characters that push the envelope a bit. Just keep it reasonable.

Tip #3: Move the Story Along

Take a glance at the running times of the various films noir at your disposal. You'll find that most of them run at an hour and a half or less in duration. This means that the scenes in the film are brisk, with little to no screen time wasted on non-essential filler. Things happened rapidly, like the staccato rhythm of a machine gun.

A game of *The Big Crime* should be paced likewise. To these ends, some of the responsibility falls on your shoulders. You're playing one of the protagonists in this film, after all, and you don't have a pesky writer dictating what your character does. So, our advice is simple: do stuff!

Take matters into your own hands and move the story along. Is a scene starting to drag on? No problem. Have your character take action. Are the other characters dallying around in a scene? Step in and declare that you're leaving; perhaps the others will follow your lead. Rapid-fire momentum is the key!

Should all scenes be rushed through? Of course not. Some of the most memorable scenes in film noir affected a slower pace. The trick is to figure out when a scene has outlived its usefulness and forge ahead.



Tip #4: Narrate

It's true that the Director is the primary narrator of the film, but that doesn't mean he has to go it alone. Saying, "I get in my car" is acceptable; just like getting a "C" on a school test is acceptable. But do you really want to settle for that? Are you actually amenable to getting by on the bare minimum? Not likely. "I get in my car" may be acceptable, but it simply adds nothing to the game. Something along the lines of "I step out into

the chilly night air and get into my car, as the neon nightclub sign flashes on and off again in a hypnotic rhythm" would be much more evocative. You can even do your narration in the style of a voiceover narration, a common narrative device used in film noir.

Read some of the advice we give Directors in Chapter 6 if you'd like some more insight on integrating camera angles, lighting and other film noir techniques into your narration.

Tip #5: Make the Most of Bad Situations

The nature of drama scenes is such that, if you lose, you will find your character being “forced” to do things that you may not have wanted him to do. For example, should your character lose a drama scene in which a femme fatale was attempting to seduce him, you’ll be faced with having to roleplay it, even if you didn’t want it to happen that way. This may take some adjustment, but it’s just a part of

the story. After all, the characters in film noir found themselves doing all manner of things that they didn’t want to do. That’s the nature of the genre and it was an intentional design decision on our behalf.

Just go with the flow and make the most of it. The truth is that it can be a great deal of fun and you never know – if you’re a good sport and roleplay it to the hilt, you may even wind up with an extra Genre Point.



Tip #6: Gun For Genre Points

PCs may be able to make it out of a film alive and kicking – or at least alive – without Genre Points, but make no mistake, that’s a long, hard road to take. Genre Points may not look that impressive on paper, but in practice, they have a massive impact on the game. Their most important use is deflecting Temptation Points as they are doled out to the character. This makes it possible for you to tap into Temptation Benefits and decrease or even eliminate the Temptation Point cost. That’s a big deal!

The Genre Point is also the currency utilized for scene editing. Being able to control your PC’s environment and actually alter reality can be a real game changer!

First, try to act according to the genre. If you’re new to film noir, watch a few of the movies we’ve listed in Chapter 2 (pages 20-25). You’ll pick up on how characters act in a big hurry.

Second, try to make the game entertaining for everyone by devising nifty plans and staying involved with the story.

Lastly, tag and double-tag your character’s Hooks whenever possible. This is the surest way of all to keep the Genre Point flow coming. Double-tagging sounds harsh, as it gives you one less die to roll... and it is. However, gaining those two Genre Points for doing it is a nice little pick-me-up that can seriously help your character out.

Group Dynamics

The traditional PC group found in roleplaying games is comprised of various characters that work together to accomplish one ultimate goal. They head into battle, shoulder to shoulder, fighting anything that stands in their way. They are adventurers in a fantasy world who delve into deep, dark dungeons in search of treasure. They are





members of a starship freighter looking to do whatever they need to do in order to put some credits in their pockets. They are a team of superheroes fighting for truth justice and the American way.

That mentality has to be chucked right into the garbage can for *The Big Crime*. Well, if the PCs are involved in a heist together, the “group” concept may still hold some water; otherwise, forget it! It won’t hold water. Can the PCs work together? Yeah, under the right circumstances. Is it possible for them to have the same goals? Sure, why not? Are they a cohesive

group who thinks of themselves as a team? Not very often. In fact, they may not even work directly together at all.

Look, film noir protagonists had their own agendas; sometimes, they coincided with each other... other times, they were diametrically opposed and ended up creating a conflict in the end. Don’t be too surprised if the climax of a film in *The Big Crime* revolves around the protagonists trying to bump one another off. In a genre where one film was narrated posthumously, stranger things have happened.

Sample Dynamics

Below, you'll find some ideas for group dynamics. This is not an exhaustive list, by any means.

Two Players

- A cop and his partner
- A guy and his gal
- A guy and his ex-flame
- Two escaped criminals
- Two con artists
- A war veteran and his old flame
- A reporter and his camera man
- An ex-con trying to go straight and an old friend
- Two unrelated victims of circumstance

Three Players

- A group of crooks involved in a heist
- Two cops and a wrongfully accused suspect
- An ex-con and members of his old gang

Who Decides the Group's Dynamics?

Depending on your Director's style, you and your fellow players may be allowed to create your own group dynamic. He would then base the plot of the film on that dynamic.

Take a peep at the nearby sidebar for some ideas for group dynamics you can run with.

Some Directors prefer to already have a basic group dynamic planned out, allowing you and the other players fill in the blanks with characters of your own creation. In other words, he may tell you that the group needs to consist of a crook on the lam, his best gal and the crook's lawyer. You and your group would then create characters specifically for the given parts.

Most official films for *The Big Crime* will use a specific dynamic and pre-generated characters. There's nothing stopping you from replacing them with characters of your own creation, though.

Chapter 6: The Director

Due to the fact that Directing covers so many different things, we have divided this chapter into two sub-chapters. The first focuses on advice for running the game, while the second deals with creating films for your group to play.

SUB-CHAPTER 1: RUNNING THE GAME

You're about to begin a journey; a journey into the world of the 1940s and '50s, as viewed through a dark lens. You've no doubt already heard a similar spiel earlier in this very book... but this is a different journey. How, you ask? This is a journey in which you will learn to not just manipulate that seedy world, but craft it however you wish for the enjoyment of yourself and your players. Step into the shadows. The weather's not great and the people you'll meet aren't exactly model citizens, but things are never boring here.

The Basics of Directing

This little corner of the sub-chapter is something of a crash course on running a roleplaying game; all the basics are to be found here. Before you can learn about run, you have to learn to walk. The best place to start is to learn exactly what is expected of you.

Narration: You, as Director, have to act as the characters' senses. You set the scene by verbally describing the PCs' surroundings. There is a

fine art to this, but don't worry – you'll get the hang of it and find the right balance.

Playing the Supporting Cast: The PCs aren't the only characters in the world. In fact, they make up only the tiniest fraction of the world's population. Guess whose responsibility it is to play the multitude of characters the PCs will interact with? That's right... you!

Rules Adjudication: The rules are here for you to use or *not* use, at your discretion. That's one of the biggest differences between roleplaying games and other types of game – the rules are basically guidelines; guidelines that help you and your players tell a story. The job of applying those rules is yours.

Basic Narration Advice

For those of you who have already run games, this will be familiar territory. Feel free to move along. If, however, you're new to running RPGs, you should find the information within useful. This text is generalized and can be applied to any roleplaying game for the most part.

Descriptive Detail

The last thing you should do is drone on and on about the scene at hand. Over-describing a scene is a quick way to make the player lose interest. Nobody wants to sit through a long-winded description. On the other hand, you shouldn't be so brief that it's boring or that important information is left out. Find a happy medium and stick to it.

Example #1: “As you step into the alleyway, the police cruiser that has been chasing you drives by.”

While the above description adequately tells you the most important information, it lacks atmosphere, drama or anything else that might make it interesting. It's utilitarian at best; staggeringly boring at worst. Let's try this again.

Example #2: “You step into the dark alleyway. It reeks of trash and rotten meat. The moon shines down into this canyon between two old buildings, but it does little good. It just can't manage to pierce through the blanket of darkness that inhabits the area. There are three trashcans nearby and three more about ten feet further into the alley, all of them

overflowing with refuse of every imaginable kind. A couple of stray cats are retrieving their dinner out of one of the cans. The building on your left is made of red bricks and has two doors along it, both of which haven't been opened in a very long time. The other building is an ugly gray monstrosity that should have been torn down years ago. Only one door can be found on it and it's metal, held shut by a thick chain. You stay close to the red wall to minimize your visibility. The police cruiser that has been following you slows down to a crawl. The officer peers down the alleyway carefully. You can practically feel his gaze burning a hole in you, as yet another bead of sweat trickles down your face. It seems like forever that he's looking, but in actuality, it was only a few seconds. Once he's content that you're not in the alley, he drives on. Finally, you can breathe again."

Talk about sensory overload! There's just too much information here and any mood that might have been established is destroyed beneath the massive amount of mundane detail. The Director in the example wasn't entirely off the mark, though. He definitely did some things right – there's definitely an attempt to create an evocative situation and some of the

descriptive bits are actually quite good. The main problem is that the good stuff is crowded out by the unnecessary minutia. If the player wants to know exactly how many trashcans there are or what the buildings of the alleyway look like, he can ask.

Let's have one more whack at it.

Example #3: *"You step into the dark alleyway. It reeks of trash and rotten meat. The moon shines down into this canyon between two old buildings, but it does little good. The darkness is impenetrable. There's a few overflowing trashcans here and there, but not much else. You stay close to the wall, minimizing your visibility. The police cruiser that has been following you slows down to a crawl. You can practically feel his gaze burning a hole in you, as yet another bead of sweat trickles down your face. Once he's content that you're not in the alley, he drives on. Finally, you can breathe again."*

See? The above example provided all the necessary information without bogging the game down. Moreover, it was told with an eye toward evoking a sense of desperation. Both of these things are desirable in a narrative.

Pacing a Scene

Pacing is the art of keeping the game moving at an appropriate speed. If you're running a scene in which the PC is talking to a murder victim's widow about the last time she saw her husband alive, don't rush through it too much. Let it play out naturally. It might even be told as a flashback cutscene (see pages 123-125). By their very nature, these scenes require a slower, more deliberate pace.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, if you're running a frantic, edge-of-your-seat fight scene or chase scene, keep the pace brisk and tense. The descriptions of the environment should be minimal in order to reflect the fact that the PC wouldn't realistically have much time to notice that much about his surroundings. Make it snappy and don't let the player have a whole lot of time to ponder his characters' actions.

Most scenes should be somewhere in between these two extremes. You'll need to cultivate a sense of forward momentum without making it feel rushed. Over time, you'll

develop a natural instinct for determining how to properly pace any given scene.

Improvise Wildly

There's simply no way to predict what the player is going to come up with. This often means that his ideas and actions will threaten to derail your carefully created plot. How do you deal with it? By improvising! The worst thing you can do is to tell the player that he can't do something because it goes against your plot. Give the player some rope and see what he comes up with. It may end up being better than how you originally envisioned the film. Plus, it offers a challenge



for you, which is always a good thing. If there aren't any surprises for you, then there's little point in even participating. You might as well just write a short story instead.

When the player deviates from the plot, run with it. Make stuff up on the fly and let him carry out his ideas. You can always nudge him back on track eventually if he goes too far off course, but don't let him know that's what you're doing.

Cinematography

At first glance, it may seem as if the term "Director" is merely a more thematic name for what most games refer to as the "Game Master". And, in some ways, that first glance is on the money. But there's more to it than that. In *The Big Crime*, the Director has to step into the shoes of the likes of Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, Nicholas Ray, John Huston and all the other prominent film noir directors. This section discusses how you can use many of their techniques (as well as some new ones) to bring the film noir genre alive for your game group.

Cinematography played an absolutely vital role in film noir. Without those unconventional camera angles, dramatic uses of shadows and other camera tricks,

film noir would probably not have had the impact that it did. Every single shot was visually meticulous; nothing was accidental.

This is all well and good, but roleplaying games don't use cameras. How could this be important to how you run the game? The truth is, it's extremely important. You, the Director, are the one who verbally tells the players what their characters see, smell, hear and feel. This is par for the course in all roleplaying games. But what if you stepped back, so to speak? What if you de-personalized the experience by describing what the "viewers of the movie" see as opposed to what the *characters* see? The films noir conveyed a detached tone, so this notion is perfectly holding to the source material. Plus (and this is a huge plus!), you can now describe the cinematography – the angles, the shadows, the camera movements... everything. Here's an example of some in-game dialog from a player and the Director, illustrating how this can be done.

Player: "Okay, so I heard the clattering sound outside, right? I grab my heater and step through the window if there's a fire escape there. Otherwise, I'll just lean out the window."



Director: “The high-angled camera shows you stepping out onto the fire escape attached to the side of the apartment building. Its cold metal bars cast ominous shadows onto the alleyway below, thanks to the light bulb radiating from the window behind you. Footsteps echo throughout the manmade ravine. Someone was there all right... but who was it? And why would they be skulking around out there at 3 o’clock in the morning?”

In the example above, the player is still told what his character sees, but from a removed standpoint – that of the camera.

This is what your goal should be as a Director. You have to immerse your group in the film noir experience and this technique can assist you in that.

All that having been said, use cinematography-based descriptions in moderation. If you use it constantly, it will lose its effectiveness. Sprinkle it around modestly, especially for important or dramatic scenes in which you want to convey a certain mood.

Below, we will discuss specific applications of cinematography.

Camera Angles

If you're going to use the camera to your advantage, you're going to need to know more about some of the interesting camera angles used in film noir.

Oblique Angles: Also known as the Dutch angle or canted angle, this shot involves tilting the camera off to one-side. The amount the camera is tilted can vary greatly depending on the effect you're hoping to get. It can be utilized to give a sense of discomfort, disorientation, exoticism or frantic action. To get your point across to the players, hold your hands up in front of your face and fashion your fingers into a makeshift camera frame. Then, tilt your "camera" as you describe the scene. They'll get the idea.



Low-Angle Shots: A low-angle shot is when the camera is positioned down low, looking up. It is particularly useful for making the subject appear menacing, powerful or "in charge". To utilize this camera technique, simply describe the shot from that point of view ("The low-positioned camera looks up at the sadistic button man, whose eyes seem to beam with a dark kind of joy as he glares down at your injured, prone body").



High-Angle Shots: A high-angle shot is when the camera is positioned above the eyeline, looking down on the scene or subject. It very efficiently creates a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. For added dramatic impact, add someone at a higher level (such as at the top of the stairs or on a balcony) that the subject



is interacting with. To make use of this camera angle, describe the shot from that point of view (“The camera peers down at you as you hang precariously from the ledge of the five-story building with desperation and fear in your eyes”).

Lighting and Shadows

One of the most distinctive elements of film noir is its use of shadows and light to establish a mood and reinforce the themes of the story. This is usually the result of low-key lighting. As opposed to traditional lighting wherein a key light, a fill light and a back light are utilized, low-key lighting uses only one key light (sometimes controlled with a key light or simple reflector). The effect? Sharp contrasts and deep shadows that create a sense of alienation and entrapment.



These shadows are your playthings. You can use them in your narration to add spice and atmosphere to any scene that demands drama. Describe how the shadows seem to swallow other elements up or how they put an emphasis on any element not within their choking grip. You can evoke a sense of imprisonment by having elements such as Venetian blinds create bar-like shadow patterns across the characters or a sense of dissonance by placing characters in the only brightly lit spot in the scene.



Shadows can also be used for more practical applications as well, such as concealing the identity of something or someone you don't want to reveal; or to give a bonus to characters attempting to make Finesse/Skulking checks.

There's another fun lighting technique you can use called backlighting. Backlighting is when the lighting for the shot is directed at the camera from behind the subject in the foreground. This causes the subject to be cast in semi-darkness or as silhouettes, thus essentially separating them from the background. Describing a figure in the foreground as being a silhouette is enough to get this effect over.



Other Camera Tricks

There were a couple of interesting techniques that weren't common practice in film noir that can still be of use to you, the Director.

Traveling Shots

In a tracking shot, the camera is mounted on a vehicle, which moves along with the action during the filming process. Traveling shots weren't used often in film noir, where static, unmoving shots were the norm. However, this fact made them stand out all the more when they *were* used. The most famous traveling shot was the particularly elaborate one from the beginning of *Touch of Evil*.

In roleplaying terms, traveling scenes are more or less the default. The Director describes the movement and the players "see" the movement as an ongoing thing in their minds. As such, using traveling shots is a snap. You might want to point out that the camera is moving along with the scene, though it's not exactly necessary.

Establishing Shots

The establishing shot gives the viewer a look at the locale in which the scene is going to take place. These were used only sparingly in film noir, especially later in the movie, when the filmmakers wanted to convey a feeling of claustrophobia and lack of control; as the plot becomes more tense, we as viewers have our spatial orientation yanked from us like a baby playing with an electrical cord.

Using establishing shots in *The Big Crime* is a simple matter. You describe the location in greater detail than usual, without going overboard. Instead of simply starting a scene off with, "Cut to the interior of the witness' shabby, run-down apartment", you might say something along the lines of, "Cut to the exterior of what could best be described as a tenement building that has seen better days... and even those so-called 'better days' were pretty crummy. Meanwhile, inside one of the apartments..." This gives us a sense of where we're at as an audience before being thrust into the situation unfolding within.

SUB-CHAPTER 2: Creating A Film

"It takes a lot of lights to make a city, doesn't it?"

-- The Blue Dahlia (1946)

The previous sub-chapter showed you the proverbial ropes with regard to actually running the game. That's important stuff. No less important, though, is what you must do *before* you run it. Without a film, there's nothing to run; no story, no background, no SCs... nothing! In the pages that follow, you'll learn how to create your very own film for you and your group to enjoy.

Preliminary Considerations

There's little doubt that you're rearing to charge into the creation of your own film straight away. Who wouldn't be? It's an exciting feeling, knowing the myriad of plots, scenes, themes and twists that are at your disposal. They are collectively your clay; clay that you can use to sculpt an unforgettably noir-like experience for all to enjoy.

That excitement is understandable, but it's not wise to run headlong at it without some consideration. It's okay, pal. A little waiting never hurt anyone.

Primary Cast

The PCs are your central protagonists; they will be the focal points of the film. As such, the entire premise will revolve around how you handle their creation. There are three methods for you to consider. Before choosing one, you should talk to your players to get their input.

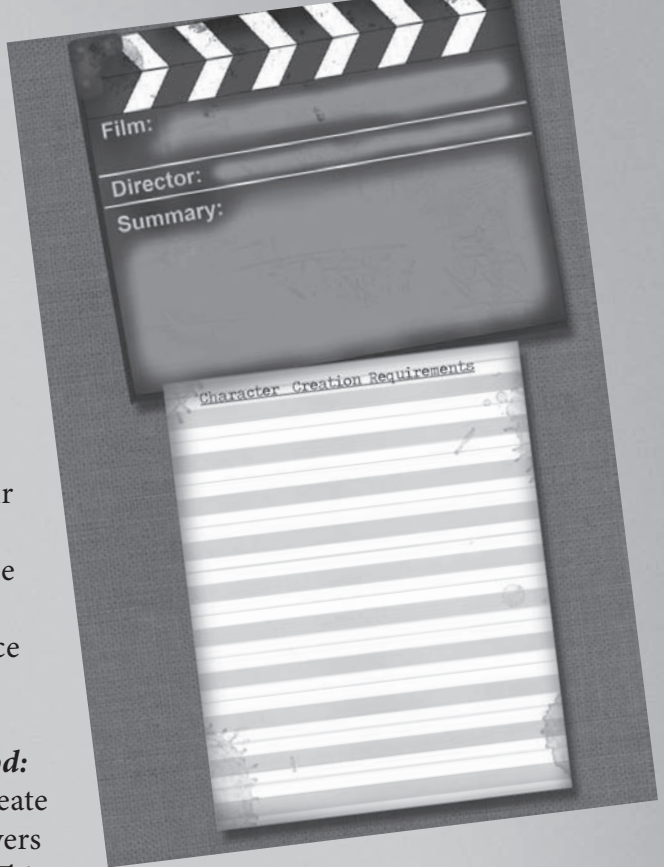
The Freeform Method: This method puts the power entirely in the players' hands. They create whatever characters they'd like and it's up to you to create a film around those characters. The upsides of this method are that the players are allowed total freedom and that if you encourage them to create ties between their characters, some of your work will be done for you. The downside of this method is that you may end up with a less focused film.

The Standard Method:

With this method, you give the players a Casting Sheet (found on page 168) that you have filled out. It gives a short spoiler-free synopsis of the premise, along with a list of requirements that the players must follow when creating their characters. This method enables you to develop the film you want, while still giving the players a chance to make their own PCs.

The Pre-Generated Method:

Using this method, you create the PCs and allow the players to choose between them. This allows you to craft films that revolve specifically around those characters, since you can tie their backgrounds and personalities into the story. The downside is that the players may feel as if they have no real stake in the characters, given that they had no input into their creation. It's great for published films and films run at conventions though.



The Central PC

Most films noir had one *central primary character*; that is, a character from whose point of view the story is told. Sure, they may have had other lead characters, but they usually played second banana to the central primary character, to one degree or another.

If you wish to stay absolutely true to the genre, you should maintain this concept by designating one character to be the central PC. Ideally, the most

experienced player should play this character, though this isn't a necessity. As long as a player has no problem being the main driving force behind the story, he should be eligible. If your group is made up of experienced roleplayers, let them take turns. The next time you run *The Big Crime*, the "central PC" role can be passed to another player.

So, what makes the central PC different in game terms? Nothing. They are created the same way as any other PC. They just have the story structured to revolve around them a bit more and if there's any voiceover narration, it will be from their perspective. The other PCs will still play a very vital role to the film though.

Step-By-Step Film Creation

There's no definitive way to create a film for *The Big Heat*. Each Director will have (or find) a method that works best for him. Variety is the spice of life, as they say. What follows is a basic approach that you can use if you'd like.

Step One: Premise

The film has to be about *something*. What that "something" is, however, is entirely up to you. If you used the Freeform Method (see the previous header for details), you're somewhat beholden to the types of PCs the players created. Otherwise, the sky's the limit. The goal for this step is to end up with a short summary of the film. There's no need to get elaborate at this point. The premise simply serves as a foundation that you can build upon in later steps. The classic film noir story is notoriously convoluted, but the convolution is almost always in the details, not the core concept. Start simple and complicate matters later.

If a friend came up and asked you what *Double Indemnity* was about, you might say something like, "It's about an insurance salesman who gets seduced by a femme fatale into helping her kill her husband and collect a huge insurance payout... but a brilliant claims adjuster suspects that something is fishy." That is about all you need for your premise. It's simple, lacks much detail and will act as a great springboard for all the juicy details that are sure to come.



Step Two: Development

Your next order of business is to add some meat to the story, expanding on what was established in the basic premise. Create a bullet-point list of things that you'd like to include in the film. It can be a fact, an event, a scene, a theme, a plot twist... anything you can think up. If the premise was the film's foundation, these bullet-points are its skeleton.

The level of detail you use makes no difference. Some Directors prefer quick, choppy notes, while others go into a great detail with each bullet-point. There is no right or wrong. Just do whatever feels right to you.

Keep in mind that there are indeed films noir with very simple, linear plots. They do exist. Most of them, however, were crawling with plot twists, double-dealings, unlikely coincidences and anything else that could conceivably confuse matters. You should consider holding true to that pattern for your film.

Step Three: Organization

The three-act structure is a format that has been used in fiction for a very long time. The reason for its continued use is simple: it works. Best of all, it works for role-playing games as well, which is why we have adopted it in *The Big*

Crime and made it a vital part of the game.

Because the structure is indeed so crucial, it is important for you to fully grasp the three-act structure and learn to use it as an organizational framework for your tale. It will allow you to take the information you developed in the first two steps and organize them into something more cohesive. This is how the tale starts to take shape.

Start off by figuring out which acts the events and plot ideas will surface in and make notes accordingly. Flesh out important scenes and determine how they all come together. You can even create a flowchart if that would help you keep particularly complex stories straight. Or perhaps just take a piece of paper, turn it sideways, and create a column for each Act, writing the bullet-point notes into the appropriate columns.

The end result should be a series of scenes that can be played out as the film progresses. Each scene should be represented by a few sentences that describe its purpose. For example: “If the PCs find the matchbox with ‘The Backstreet Tavern’ on it at the scene of the crime, they’ll probably go to there. It’s a rundown dive with a friendly bartender; he has seen the mobster

in the place with a guy named Teddy Phillips.”

Before you can do any of this, however, you should learn more about the three acts.

Act One: Setup

For organizational purposes, Act One is divided up into two broad segments: “The Exposition” and “The Inciting Incident”.

- ***The Exposition*** represents roughly the first half of the first Act, though this proportion varied wildly at times. It introduces the PCs, and the situation. In short, the Exposition gives the players everything they need to know about the current situation so that they can start moving the story along.
- ***The Inciting Incident*** is the event that sets everything in motion. The rest of the film usually revolves around resolving the inherent conflict(s) created by the inciting incident. The inciting incident actually took shape during Step One. You simply have to add some detail to it.

The end of Act One is almost always the “point of no return”. At this point, the protagonist’s life will probably never be quite

the same again thanks to the long-lasting repercussions of the inciting incident.

Applying Act One to Your Film

When it comes down to it, three things must be accomplished during Act One:

- The PCs must be established – who they are, what they do, why we should care, etc. In a few rare cases, one or two of them can be established early in Act Two, but this should be avoided if at all possible.
- The situation (as it stands at the beginning of the film) should be

established – what the story is going to be about, what the general status quo is, etc.

- The inciting incident should be established – the initial ramifications of the event may be felt as well. As long as it spurs the characters into action, the goal is accomplished.

Act One is also something of a “safe zone” for the PCs. The rules are designed so that it is impossible for them to die or otherwise be taken out of the game permanently.





Act Two: Rising Tension

Act Two is the meat and potatoes of the story, which is why it tends to be the longest segment. It's when they begin truly acting upon the things that came their way in Act One. They learn what must be done in the previous Act and set out to do it in this Act, giving impetus to the unfolding plot.

In traditional stories, Act Two is where the antagonist's plan is challenged by the protagonist's actions. In film noir, however, there isn't always a singular antagonist; or oftentimes, fate itself is the antagonist. For example, *The Asphalt Jungle* doesn't have

a particular antagonist in the traditional sense, unless you count the police as a whole. No, fate was their number one enemy. And when there *is* a classic antagonist, the film isn't necessarily about his plan being challenged by the protagonist's actions. It may contain those elements, but the skewered nature of the genre makes it just as likely to have a different dynamic altogether.

A sizeable portion of Act Two usually involves a good deal of problem-solving and forward momentum. Things happen in this Act, and they often happen at breakneck speed. The nature of

this largely depends on what type of plot you are setting up. Act Two of a “detective” film will feature sleuthing and legwork as the central PC navigates his way through a maze of information and clues. Act Two of a “heist” film will probably focus on a great deal of legwork and preparation, and possibly even the heist itself. Act Two of a “wrong man” film is likely to be fairly similar to that of a “detective” film (investigation and clue-gathering), but with the added complication of avoiding a pursuing character or group.

Act Two is the most freeform Act in the film. You can do anything you’d like within its framework, so use that to your advantage. Get a good mix of different activities if possible and integrate drama scenes, fight scenes and chase scenes where needed.

Applying Act Two to Your Film

Three things must be done during Act Two:

- The PCs must be drawn into the events of the story and given the opportunity to act upon them.
- The PCs must struggle to deal with the conflicts created in Act One... and possibly some unrelated conflicts as well.

- The tension must escalate as the Act progresses, cumulating in the set-up for the final climactic sequence that will come in Act Three.

Act Two is where the stakes get higher and the danger is more omnipresent. The rules are designed so that it is possible for the PCs to die or otherwise get permanently ousted from the film. It’s not likely, but still possible.

Act Three: Climax and Resolution

At its core, Act Three is the grand finale. Sometimes, this means a final confrontation between the PC(s) and whoever the main antagonist is. More often than not, though, things aren’t that simple. And just because the term “confrontation” was used, it doesn’t necessarily indicate that there’s going to be a fight scene as the climax. Film noir relies on similar sequences as the conclusion, but it’s seldom a drawn-out affair when it does happen, unlike modern cinema with its elaborately long battles.

The closing scene of Act Three is often called the denouement and it’s generally defined as a period of calmness, where a state of equilibrium returns. Film noir didn’t always follow the rules in that regard. In fact, the typical film

noir ending is unhappy, bleak or even downright soul-crushing. Happy endings were fairly uncommon and usually came packaged with not-so-happy aspects.

Applying Act Three to Your Film

Two things must be carried out during Act Three:

- The climax must happen, whether it involves a traditional antagonist or not.
- The denouement must occur, where we see the results of the now-finished climax.

Act Three is when the PCs are in the most danger. The rules are designed so that it is extremely likely to end badly, especially if a fight scene is involved in the climax. Life is cheap in film noir, no matter who you are.

Step Four: Key Scenes

Certain scenes will need to have special attention given to them, due to their importance to the story. These are called *key scenes*.

Decide which scenes need to be elaborated upon and set about doing it. Exactly what needs to be elaborated upon depends on the

nature of the scene. A map might be helpful, even if it's just a quick one drawn hastily on scratch paper. Stats for important SCs can be whipped up as well, or you can check our list of stock SCs on pages 174-180 to see if any of them could be pressed into service. You might also want to list anything that has to happen during the scene (“While the PCs investigate the apartment, three gunsels bust in and attack”) and any clues that can be found.

Step Five: Troubleshooting

During this step, look at your film with a critical eye. What is it missing? Do all the PCs have interesting things to do? Do all the clues lead to the right places? How will the film handle PCs going in unforeseen directions? Will everything be challenging enough? Or too challenging? Does it feel like film noir? Is there anything that can be done to make it better?

There's no way to plan for every eventuality. You may as well try to carry water in a butterfly net! But you should consider the more obvious ones and address them before the film begins. It will save you some massive headaches during the session.

Step Six: Film Title

At some point in the future, your players are likely to talk about the film. Do you really want them to refer to it as “that game where our characters were crooks trying to take down the corrupt cop who murdered their friend”? Or would you rather them refer to it as “Behind the Crooked Shield”?

Every film needs an evocative title. It gives it an identity of its own and makes it instantly more memorable. Look at the titles for actual films noir for inspiration. They ranged from vague, one-word titles (*Suddenly*, *Nocturne*, *Whiplash*, etc.) to names that were basically phrases (*He Walked By Night*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *I Wake Up Screaming*, etc.) and everything in between. Film noir titles often contained the following words: Night (*So Dark The Night*, *Clash By Night*, *The Night of the Hunter*), Big (*The Big Combo*, *The Big Sleep*, *The Big Clock*, etc.), Dark (*The Dark Corner*, *Dark Passage*, *The Dark Past*, etc.), Street (*Scarlet Street*, *Side Street*, *99 River Street*, etc.) and Man/Woman/Lady (*Manhandled*, *The Woman in the Window*, *The Lady From Shanghai*, etc.).

Film Creation Advice

This section offers you a vault of advice that will help you create more compelling films that feel exactly like the films noir of old.

Urban or Rural... or Both

"One of these days, I'll make a real killin' and then I'm gonna head for home. First thing I do when I get there, I take a bath in the creek and get this city dirt off me."

-- *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950)

The city – that urban mountain range of steel and glass that reaches up into the night sky with its black, greedy fingers, as it strips its citizens of their hopes, their dreams... their lives. It's a place of contempt and corruption; of ugly people doing ugly things to good people. No one can flourish in this sick, apathetic environment; no one of any redeeming value, at any rate. Those malevolent souls who can flourish here do so only because they feed on the decent souls until those decent souls either die or become morally bankrupt as well.

Is there any doubt as to why the city is the archetypal setting for film noir, with its somber,

cynical and dreary overtones? It's the perfect environment.

However, it's not the *only* environment.

Film noir didn't simply pretend that the entire world was an urban landscape. Crafty filmmakers utilized rural environments in several different ways.

Some films noir dipped their toes into the rural environment by having a portion of the action occur there, usually in a deliberate contrast to the big city. The countryside symbolized purity, wholesomeness and salvation; the exact opposite of the city, with its rampant crime and corruption. It

was an escape... a place you could go to be free.

But not always.

In many cases, the people escaping the city just brought the crime and corruption along with them, contaminating the peace and quiet in the process. Suddenly, the rural area was no different than the urban area... just with trees in place of skyscrapers, and farmhouses in place of tenements.

Still other films noir take place mostly or even wholly outside of the confines of the modern city. The action instead played out on the open road, in small knock-about towns or even in the



wilderness. In these films, no place was safe from the grim realities of this ambiguous post-WWII era.

So, where do you want your film to be set – in the city, beyond the city or both? The choice is yours. That choice will assuredly affect the tone of the story. Play around with it. Don't run all your films in the urban environment. Shake it up a little. Try something new. A stint through the countryside might be exactly what a film needs to provide a new experience.

Locations

Just as with any genre, film noir featured many of the same locations repeatedly. They had cheap “no-tell” motels, rundown apartments, greasy spoon-style diners, offices of varying quality, busy police stations, eerily quiet docks, restaurants (posh and chintzy alike), swingin' nightclubs, echo-prone warehouses, smoke-filled boxing arenas, mansions that have seen better days, respectable hotels, corner drugstores, bustling train stations, dirty factories, hole-in-the-wall beer joints and, of course the city streets and alleyways.

Locations can be used to reinforce the mood of the scene or to reflect the character of those



inhabiting them. They can also become visual metaphors for all manner of things. Vehicles represent a means of escaping the filthy city; sterile middle-class houses with white picket fences represent joyless, homogenized normalcy; gambling dens represent desperate greed. The beautiful thing is that you don't have to beat the players over the head with metaphors and symbolism. It's a subconscious effect.

Not all of the locales used in film noir were of the stock variety. At times, particularly during important sequences, the filmmakers would employ more exotic or even surreal settings to create the perfect backdrop for the film's action. There was, for instance, the mannequin factory from *Killer's Kiss*, where the audience was treated to the slightly disturbing sight of dozens of stark

white dummies; those mannequins were actually used during the scene as well. Then, there was the dramatic finale of *The Naked City*, in which the antagonist was fled on foot down the Williamsburg Bridge and ended up climbing onto one of the towers. And how can we possibly forget the tense climax at that godforsaken oilfield in *Touch of Evil*? These locales weren't common settings for film noir and that's exactly why those scenes were so memorable.

Props and Set Dressing

A location is often only as interesting as the objects found there. You might be wondering why such things are important enough to warrant a separate section of this book. Fair enough. Objects were used for many different functions in film noir; for functionality as well as for symbolism; for atmosphere as well as for storytelling. It's all about film noir iconography.

Something as simple as a clock, in the hands of capable filmmakers,

became devices that conveyed a sense of impending doom. This was especially true when time was of the essence (e.g., counting down to a man's execution, showing time passing for a man who has been poisoned, etc.).

Set dressing also saw much use as implements of symbolism. Characters found themselves trapped behind the frames of windows or metaphorically imprisoned behind banisters. The use of mirrors and any other reflective object became profound statements about a character's two-faced nature.

Various items were used to segment the scene, slicing up the available space and thus creating frames within frames to show entrapment; like the whole world is closing in on the characters.



Unless the intention was to create a feeling of loneliness, the filmmakers typically avoided openness in favor of cramped, confined spaces. Horizontal or symmetrical placement/positioning were also passed over whenever possible, replaced by diagonal, vertical or asymmetrical placement/positioning. Nothing was to be comforting; everything was askew.

When describing the locations to the players, you should keep all this in mind. A few well-placed props can go a long way toward making your film seem authentic.

Flashbacks

"I never saw her in the daytime. We seemed to live by night. What was left of the day went away like a pack of cigarettes you smoked. I didn't know where she lived. I never followed her. All I ever had to go on was a place and time to see her again. I don't know what we were waiting for. Maybe we thought the world would end."

-- Out of the Past (1947)

Most genres have pressed the flashback narrative device into service at one time or another. Film noir, however, used it in complex ways that could potentially boggle

the mind... and, sometimes, that was the point. The convoluted plotline was a common approach to film noir storytelling and the flashback was a useful tool for complicating things exponentially. So, too, is it a tool for you to use in your games of *The Big Crime*. Below, we'll discuss two common methods of using them.

The Convoluted Approach

Some films noir dove into and out of flashbacks like birds fluttering through a forest, in such a way that you could barely keep track of what the heck was going on. This all served to heighten the sense of displacement that the genre was always so fond of creating. In fact, an entire film could be a series of flashbacks and flash-forwards or even flashbacks within flashbacks for some added fun. How's that for a head-spinning explanation? *Out of the Past*, *The Killers* and *Sorry, Wrong Number* are the poster children for the convoluted approach to flashbacks.

Integrating convoluted flashbacks into your games something that must be planned out when you create the film. In most cases, flashback sequences are initiated when characters think back or tell someone about the

events that will play out in the flashback that transpires.

Once initiated, however, you have a couple of options as to how to press forward into the flashback at hand. The first option is to let the relevant players play out the flashback organically, just as they would do in any other scene.

This is perfect for longer, more involved flashbacks or flashbacks in which you don't mind the players' participation causing some changes. The second option is to treat it like a cutscene (see later on this page) wherein you simply narrate the past events. This works well for very short flashbacks or flashbacks in which you need very specific things to happen without the players' participation potentially mucking it all up.

The Extended Approach

Somewhere in between the aforementioned extremes was the movie that began with the denouement and then told how the situation came to be. Thus, most of the film would actually be a flashback. Then, toward the film's end, we would find ourselves where the film started... at the story's end. Got it? *D.O.A.*, *Sunset Boulevard* and *Double Indemnity* are perfect examples of the extended approach to flashbacks.

As with the convoluted approach, you'll need to design the film itself to accommodate this type of flashback. That said, extended flashbacks are much simpler to implement than convoluted flashbacks, given that almost the entire film is a flashback that is only end-capped by the present.

Cut-Scenes

Linear storytelling seldom happened in film noir. Instead, these movies jumped around from place to place and (with flashbacks) from one time to another time. It wasn't a simple matter of dryly following the protagonists around while they went about their business. In fact, often times, the scenes didn't even include the protagonists at all. They may be the stars of the show, but they're certainly not the only characters deserving of screen time. The viewer would get to check out what the film's antagonists were up to or see other important events that would undoubtedly impact the story at some later point. Such scenes were useful not just for giving the viewer more information, but also for breaking up the action into easily digestible chunks and keeping things lively.

The term “cutscene” is derived from video games in which cinematic events transpire without any input or participation from the PCs. The players become the audience, as they watch (or listen to, in this case) plot developments occur, character development take place, background information become known, etc. In short, you play out a short scene by yourself, taking on the roles of any SCs involved in the action.

The players will have to separate “character knowledge” (i.e., things the characters know about) from “player knowledge” (i.e., things the players know about) for the sake of a more authentic film noir experience. The players may know, via a cutscene, that the cops have set up surveillance on the PCs... but the PCs don't know about it. This is a roleplaying challenge for the players and you should consider giving out a Genre Point when they play along with the situation rather than try to act upon player knowledge.

Voiceover Narration

"She liked me. I could feel that. The way you feel when the cards are falling right for you, with a nice little pile of blue and yellow chips in the middle of the table. Only what I didn't know then was that I wasn't playing her. She was playing me, with a deck of marked cards and the stakes weren't any blue and yellow chips. They were dynamite."

-- Double Indemnity (1944)

Despite being considered one of the most iconic film noir signatures, the first-person voiceover didn't happen as often as one would imagine. It wasn't rare by any means, but it wasn't as commonplace as a lot of people believe. Either way, it has become synonymous with the genre over the decades.

So, what exactly is voiceover narration? It's when the film's main character speaks directly to the viewer during the movie, giving exposition, insight or simply adding color to the scene at hand or the story as a whole. It's usually done in a matter-of-fact tone and tends to be a matter of self-reflection.



Using voiceover narration in *The Big Crime* can be tricky, but rewarding. It's tricky because the ball is really in the players' court, as they would be the ones doing the voiceovers (though only one character should do them). To further exacerbate the problem, the players don't have insight into what's really going on, making them unable to share much insight in their voiceovers. Particularly creative players can overcome this, however, without a problem.

One way to handle voiceover narration is to write short voiceover scripts for one specific player to read aloud at designated points

during the film. The player should be the one controlling the central character. Many of our official films for *The Big Crime* will make use of voiceover scripts.

Sexuality

"I need a drink. What do you need, Miss Doyle?"

"Let's say a drink."

-- Clash By Night (1952)

Sexuality played a huge role in the narrative language of film noir, despite the fact that the filmmakers were severely limited by the production code. Any overtly sexual material would be



prohibited outright. Being the savvy lot that they were, writers and directors had to invent subtle (or not so subtle) ways to convey sexuality on the screen. As it turned out, this manner of innuendo was more stylish and alluring than a more blatant manner would have been had it been allowed. Sexual symbolism ranged from “vague” to “oh-my-goodness-I-can’t-believe-that-wasn’t-vetoed.” Some of it was visual, such as the creative use of cigarettes to suggest sexual activities, and some of it was nestled in the dialogue, like the quote above.

As Director, you can imbue the film with sexuality as needed... or wanted. Suddenly, a pistol being slid into a holster becomes something more than simply a weapon being put away and a train going into a tunnel while a couple aboard it kisses will take on a whole new meaning. Interweave things of this nature into your films from time to time and you’ll find the effect to be satisfying.

Character dialogue in the film can be laden with innuendo as well. This is often harder to plan out ahead of time, due to the improvised nature of “character speak”. Just be sure to look for



situations that call for it and have your SCs say it. You'll be surprised at what cleverness you can come up with on the spur of a moment.

Before setting up any sexual-oriented subplots in your film, you should consult with your players, especially if your idea is to have PCs involved with each other. Most players will be game for such aspects, but it's common courtesy to check nonetheless.

Romance

"I was born when she kissed me. I died when she left me. I lived a few weeks while she loved me."

-- *In a Lonely Place* (1950)

All this talk about sheer, unbridled sexuality makes one wonder if romance even plays a role in film noir. It does. Sort of. Before you start conjuring up mental images of the man carrying the woman off into the sunset to start their wholesome lives together at the end of the movie, you must



understand that romance in these pessimistic, cynical movies took on a more perverse complexion than in other genres. It's altogether something more impure, often tainted with undertones of obsession, control and, yes, even abuse. Abuse? Sure. Just watch the interaction between Joe and Peggy in *Clash By Night* and you'll see exactly how abuse can factor into romance. Hell, he half-jokingly started strangling her with a towel (right before she punched him in the kisser, no less). They were certainly in love, but in the world of film noir, love is seldom the innocent, unblemished thing one might think.

Sometimes, one person's love is pure, but seldom both parties. The other character treats them poorly,

cheats on them, doesn't share their feelings or loves them, but not in a virtuous way. The tarnished party wasn't exclusive to males either. After all, this was the genre that fixated on femmes fatales. Both genders were guilty of romantic defilement.

How about marriage? Oh, boy. Here we go. Whereas most movies of the era held marriage in high regard, as a goal of personal bliss, film noir offered a less flattering take on the subject. It was viewed as confinement. Some characters avoided it; others wanted to escape from it. This was usually, but not always, the male character.

However corrupted a relationship (or crush) may be, romance can provide some intriguing roleplaying challenges. It can even provide motivation for PCs to act upon the events of the movie; the "damsel in distress" plot device wasn't unheard of in film noir. It can also be the launching point for an amazing unhappy ending.

As with sexual situations, you should ensure that any player whose PC is to be involved in a romantic sub-plot is comfortable with the notion.

Working With Hooks

Regardless of which method of casting you choose (see pages 110-112), you'll have access to the Hooks of each PC before you start putting together the film. Hooks offer a fantastic way for you to truly personalize the film for the players, making it so that the story pertains directly to them. They become not just generic characters thrown into an already-existing story, but integral characters to a story that was created specifically for them.

You should endeavor to directly tie at least one of each character's Hooks into the film. Look through all their Hooks and decide

which one(s) would be the most compelling to highlight during the story. Let them dictate and guide your scenes as you create them. For example, if a character has a Hook called "Fear Of The Dark", by all means set up a scene that requires that PC to go into the sewers or hide in a dark closet. Does one of your characters have "Low Opinion Of Women" as a Hook? Great! Make sure to have a scene in which he has to rely on a woman for help or use charm to get information from a woman. The idea is to give the players a challenge and make the story pertinent to them.



The End

"There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them."

-- The Naked City (1948)

If you want to see a happy film noir ending, you'd better be prepared to search for a while. They're out there, no doubt about it. However, they are in the vast minority. The film noir genre exuded doubt and glumness at every turn, presenting a worldview in which "happily ever after" endings seemed drastically out of place.

In the movies, the filmmakers had full control over how a film should end. But this is a roleplaying game and the rules do have some "say" in the matter, as do the actions of the PCs. Does this mean that you're going to end up with an endless stream of happy endings that go against the grain of the genre? Not at all. There are a couple of factors to regard.

The first factor is that the game system is geared toward downbeat endings, especially if the climax is a fight scene. All it takes is for a PC to be Defeated in Act Three and the likelihood of him stepping away and brushing himself off is



relatively marginal. The third Act is intentionally brutal for PCs. Death can come pretty darn easily.

The second factor is the fact that you have Director Points at your disposal. It's always a good idea to have a supply of them on hand at the onset of Act Three, so be sure to save a few from Act Two. You may need them to waylay the PCs with. You see, throughout the earlier stages of the game, you were supposed to simply provide the PCs with challenges. You were not their enemy, nor were you out to kill them off. That mentality changes in Act Three, at least to a certain degree. You should coax the film toward a despondent ending; this usually means coming at the PCs with everything you've got. Your goal is simple: to end the movie on a negative note or at least a partly negative note.

Creating Secondary Characters

The PCs don't exist in a vacuum. Those streets may look barren of life, but if you look deep in the nooks and crannies, you'll find people of all walks of life, from the little old lady looking out of her basement-level apartment window to the shady fellow with shifty eyes and a knack for breaking

and entering. These Secondary Characters make up the rest of the world's inhabitants.

Regular Secondary Characters

You don't have to create game stats for every single SC the PCs meet. If the SC is a quick throwaway character (a willing eyewitness, a bartender, etc.), there is no need to even bother. If an SC is going to be involved in a scene in a significant manner, you should peruse the stock SCs on pages 174-180 to see if any of them will suit your purposes. If so, use its game stats. If not, simply give the SC what you think he – or she – should have and be done with it.

Here are some things to keep in mind when creating SC game stats:

- The rules for gender (pages 75-76) apply to SCs.
- SCs never gain Temptation Points, thus there's no need to include the three Temptation Tracks.
- SCs are still given a Shade, though it's only used as a guideline for roleplaying the character.
- SCs never have Special Rules.
- If you want the SC to be particularly renowned at Fighting, Shooting or

Knowledge, write “2” next to it. He will roll two extra dice rather than just one. This should be given out very sparingly, though.

Major Secondary Characters

Some SCs have a recurring and impacting role in the film. For example, if the film has a main antagonist, he should assuredly be considered a Major SC. Just as with normal SCs, you should simply give the Major SC whatever you feel he should have. Follow all the guidelines for normal SCs.

So, how is a Major SC different than the normal variety? There’s really only one difference, but it’s a big one! A Major SC is treated like a PC when it comes to being Defeated, except that he always rolls a d8 for the fate roll.

Stock SCs

On pages 174-180 is a selection of archetypal characters that can typically be encountered in *The Big Crime*. They can be used so that you don’t have to spend time creating game stats for every henchman or cop the PCs come across. Best of all, they’re extremely easy to tweak and customize to suit your needs. For example, if you don’t like one or more of the Hooks



a stock SC has been given, simply replace them with new ones. Ditto for the rest of their game stats and items. Keep what you want and ditch what you don’t want.

Also, it goes without saying that we couldn’t include game stats for every single type of SC the PCs may encounter. In many cases, though, existing stock SCs can be used as stand-ins for similar types of characters. For example, let’s say that you plan for the PCs to encounter a burlesque dancer. We may not have a stock SC by that name, but you could certainly use “Lady of the Night” as a viable substitute. She even has “Performance – Dancing”.

Chapter 7: ‘Search By Night’

Warning!

If you're a player, please stop reading here. Further perusal will result in major spoilers that will no doubt lessen the film's fun for you. Be a pal, huh? Read one of the other chapters instead. Beat it, will ya?

If you intend to act as the Director for this film, that's a different story altogether. Come right this way and feel free to read on. Got it? Good. Then let's see what kind of trouble we can get into.

The Scoop

Search by Night is an introductory film. It is presented in two formats. The first uses pregenerated PCs and is very structured; this is so the Director and players can jump right in and start getting their hands dirty in the grimy world of... *The Big Crime*. But, we also acknowledge that some players and Directors resist this sort of structure and

rules; that they are live-on-the-edge types who want to play by their own rules. Well, for those guys and dames, we're presenting *Search By Night* in a much looser format, ready for a Director to customize and equally ready for players to bring in their own PCs and start telling their stories of life in the dirty city. If you're the type that is not going to want any part of the Theatrical Release, you still need to read through it and get a feel for how it works.

Film Summary

Joe Bendix is an ex-con who has just been released from the state penitentiary after drawing a three-year stretch for armed robbery. About three months ago, his girlfriend, Violet Morgan, suddenly stopped writing and visiting. It seems that no one has a clue as to where she went or what has become of her.

Joe's best pal is a right guy named Danny Barnes who is utterly loyal friend. Danny's long-time girl, Leslie Parr, told him that Violet met a man and ran away with him to Acapulco. Joe didn't buy that at all... and for good reason. The truth is that Leslie's hardly the goody-good that she pretends to be. She has had designs on Joe for a long time, but he never thought twice about her (she wasn't his type); she hooked up with Danny to have an excuse to be near Joe. When Joe and Violet became an item, Leslie became desperate. She wanted Violet out of the picture and hired gangster George Kenser to kidnap her assuming he'd take her to his swanky penthouse

apartment. There, she'd be under constant supervision by his mooks, including the psychotic Charlie Johansen and the creepy (and not too bright) Cookie Mullins. Leslie's plan is to kill Danny – framing Kenser for it in the process – and seduce Joe by playing the “grieving girlfriend” card.

What Leslie didn't count on, however, is that Joe isn't gonna just lay down and accept “running away to Central America” story. He begins looking into her disappearance, with Danny at his side. The closer they get to the truth, the more things heat up. The stage is set. Will Joe and Danny find what Leslie has been up to or will they die trying?



Theatrical Release

Number of Players

Search By Night is a film for three players. The PCs are provided below and on the following page.

If you end up with less than three players, the remaining PCs can be used as Major SCs. It's even perfectly fine if nobody chooses Joe, who is more or less the lead protagonist in the film. In fact, this was the case during one of the playtest sessions involving only two players and it worked out just fine.

Having more than three players is a smidge more difficult, as the entire game system was really designed to accommodate three or less players. Still, it's not impossible. The other players can take on new characters; the tough part will be fitting them into the story, but don't say we didn't warn ya!

Joe Bendix

Shade: Medium Gray

- Ex-Con
- Wants to Find his Girlfriend
- Trying to Start Fresh

Body: Good (Athletics, Fighting, Toughness)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes, Shooting)

Smarts: Normal (Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve, Intimidation)

Special Rules: Anti-Hero, Not Going Out That Easy

Items: pistol, wallet, cigarettes, lighter, \$10



Danny Barnes

Shade: Light Gray

- Fear of Heights
- Wants a Simple Life
- Low-Income Upbringing

Body: Normal (Toughness)

Finesse: Good (Shooting, Coordination, Skulking)

Smarts: Good (Perception, Investigation)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve)

Special Rules: Right Gee

Items: wallet, notepad, pencil, cigarettes, lighter, \$12



Violet Morgan

Shade: Light Gray

- From a Small Town
- Extremely Gorgeous
- Fiery Temper

Body: Poor (Athletics)

Finesse: Good (Driving – Ground Vehicles, Reflexes, Coordination)

Smarts: Normal (Perception, Knowledge – Cosmetology)

Spirit: Good (Persuasion, Art – Photography, Resolve)

Special Rules: Right Gee, Waterworks

Items: purse, make-up, hairbrush, perfume, cigarettes, lighter, \$12



Act One

Scene 1

On the opposite page is a voiceover script that should be read aloud by the Director, Joe's player and Danny's player, as directed. Once read, move on to Scene 2.

Scene 2

Cut to Leslie's house at suppertime. Joe, Danny and Leslie are all eating. Leslie is an SC here, so it is the Director's duty to convey the following:

- Leslie offers to let Joe stay in the small apartment above her garage, since Danny's place is so small. Remember that Leslie's motivation here is to be close to Joe. Emphasize the fact that since this is her place, there isn't a landlord to get all up in arms for breaking a lease. She has set up the apartment real nice and she'd never ask him to pay rent. If Joe insists, she will accept, but only after he gets back on his feet. Don't push too hard; she is just a friend helping out another friend.

- (Ideally, after an awkward silence) Leslie informs Joe that she heard yesterday that Violet met a man and ran off with him to Acapulco. It should be made obvious that Leslie and Violet know each other.

Leslie Parr

Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Female

- Pretends to be Virtuous
- Loves Joe Bendix
- Conniving

Body: Poor

Finesse: Normal (Skulking)

Smarts: Normal (Ingenuity, Perception, Memory)

Spirit: Good (Manipulation, Persuasion, Resolve)

Items: Small pistol, cigarettes, lighter, purse, makeup, \$10



Voiceover Narration

This should be read aloud.

Director: Joe walks through the hallway of the state penitentiary... toward freedom. As he takes this long walk, the audience sees the title card, followed by the film's credits. Finally, as the last credit disappears from the screen...

Joe: “Three long years. For nothin’. All because I wanted to buy my girl Violet a nice engagement ring; something real classy; something that would make any dame’s eyes gleam. I should’ve known I could never get away with robbing that bank. Nobody ever accused me of being a genius, I suppose. Violet stood by my side the whole time. She came to see me; wrote me every week... sometimes twice a week. Then, about three months ago, she stopped. No more visits, no more letters... not so much as a peep. The guys in the hoosegow with me said she probably got sick of waiting. But they don’t know her. She’s not like other girls. No, something’s wrong. I’m sure of it.”

Director: Joe puts his John Hancock on some paperwork at the front desk, grabs his stuff and steps out the door to the outside world – a world he’s all too ready to be a part of again. He feels the hot afternoon air and breathes it in. There’s a car parked about thirty feet away, with a man leaning on it. As Joe breathes in, the man snuffs out his cigarette.

Joe: “Now that I’m a free man again, I’m gonna get to the bottom of it... or die trying. Luckily, I got my friend, Danny, and his gal, Leslie, in my corner. They’ve been asking around about Violet’s whereabouts, but came up short. I’m not letting that stop me. I ain’t gonna rest till she’s in my arms again.”

Director: The man smiles warmly and shakes Joe’s hand.

Danny: “It’s good to see you, pal.”

Joe: Joe returns the smile and says, “You too, Danny.”

Director: Both men get inside the car and drive toward the city.

Scene 3

Cut away to a posh penthouse apartment on the top floor of a fancy building. Inside is Violet. She's being held in a bedroom.

George Kenser is straightening up his tie and primping. George takes his appearance very seriously. He lets Violet know that he has a loose end to tie up since her boyfriend has been released today. He is arrogant and smug. Emphasize that Violet is a prisoner and that Joe being released today is something she *didn't* know about.

George assures her that Cookie will stay behind to "look after her". Explain to Violet's player that Cookie is George's lowest-rung henchman, who is sometimes picked on by the others.

George Kenser

Shade: Dark Gray **Gender:** Male
• Cold-Hearted Gangster • Abusive
• Obsessed with his Looks

Body: Good (Fighting)
Finesse: Normal (Reflexes, Shooting)
Smarts: Normal (Ingenuity, Knowledge – Crime, Perception)
Spirit: Good (Intimidation, Manipulation, Resolve)

Items: Pistol, wallet, knife, \$100

Cookie Mullins

Shade: Medium Gray
Gender: Male
• Creepy Little Man • Twitchy
• Low Self-Esteem

Body: Normal (Athletics)
Finesse: Normal (Shooting, Driving – Ground Vehicles)
Smarts: Poor
Spirit: Normal

Items: Pistol, wallet, \$6



Scene 4

Joe and Danny get a message that their pal Dizzy heard that Joe was out and said he has some news about Violet. Dizzy will be working at the Full Moon Diner tonight, starting his shift at 9 o'clock.

The message is delivered by a 13-year-old newspaper boy that everyone calls "Soapbox"; he knows Joe and Danny (though he was a lot younger when he knew Joe). Maybe they are in the city looking for clues or maybe the kid runs up to Leslie's house, out of breath. Either way, that's all the kid knows. As he's leaving, he says something to the effect of, "Oh, yeah, I almost forgot! My sister, Wendy, was askin' about ya and said to tell ya hi."

Soapbox

Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Male

- Hyper Newspaper Boy
- Persistent
- Looks Up to Joe and Danny

Body: Poor (Athletics)

Finesse: Normal (Coordination, Skulking)

Smarts: Normal (Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve)

Items: Bundle of newspapers, bubblegum, worn-out baseball cards, 15¢

Scene 5

What follows is a cutscene and should be read aloud to the players:

In a rundown, one-room apartment, a man washes his face in the only sink to be found. As he's drying his face with a small towel, there is a knock on the door. He puts the towel down and answers. It's George Kenser and a slender, blonde-haired man with a psychotic gleam in his eye.

"Mind if we come in, pal?," asks George, though it's not so much a question as it is a statement. Before the man can respond, the fair-haired henchman forces his way through, with George calmly following behind.

"Nice joint you've got here," says George as he shoves the man back onto the couch that has been made up to serve as a bed as well. A bottle of cheap booze falls off the table and shatters on the floor. "What do you think, Charlie?"

The blonde man smugly observes, "Sure, it ain't half bad. But it could use a little somethin', you know? Like maybe some blood stains on the walls."

George visibly doesn't want to get his hands dirty, literally as well as figuratively, so Charlie takes over and starts roughing the fellow

up. George unbuttons his coat and takes out a small pouch and sets it down on the table. The man reaches manages to push Charlie off of him and grabs for George, ripping his shirt sleeve. George looks none too pleased, smashing the man's jaw with his fist. Charlie pushes himself back up and holds the man down. George opens the pouch and the camera focuses on its contents a set of dental tools. Close-up on George's smiling face, followed by a close-up on the victimized man's mouth as he opens it to scream. Fade out.

The man being assaulted is none other than Dizzy, who is supposed to meet up with the PCs at the Full Moon Diner.

Scene 6

As the scene begins, it's just after 9 o'clock in the evening at the Full Moon Diner.

A police officer named Smitty is finishing up his coffee and leaves his money on the counter. The owner is looking frantic. The officer puts his hat on and says goodbye to the owner, referring to him as Deuce. "Later, Smitty. See you tomorrow," replies Deuce.

Smitty stops momentarily. "Joe, I heard you got out. Not looking for any trouble tonight, are you?"

Give Joe and Danny a chance to talk with Smitty. Smitty and Joe go back, but there are no hard feelings between them. But, how this plays out will help determine what happens later if the coppers get involved.

After Smitty leaves, Deuce asks Joe and Danny to sit down and then pours them each a cuppa joe. He tells them that his cook should be here soon if they want anything to eat. Little does he know, the cook (Dizzy) will never show, and this isn't like him at all. He's always on time, usually early.

Hopefully, the PCs will think to go to Dizzy's apartment. If not, have them make an unopposed Smarts/Ingenuity vs. 4d10 check. If they simply choose not to go there, that's fine too. Roll with the punches and improvise. Perhaps the cops end up getting there instead and Smitty lets them know what they find (see the next Scene for details).

Smitty

Shade: Light Gray **Gender:** Male

- Good Cop
- Has a Sense of Humor
- Likes Joe and Danny

Body: Normal (Fighting, Toughness)

Finesse: Good (Driving – Ground

Smarts: Normal (Investigation, Protocol)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve, Persuasion)

Items: Pistol, nightstick, wallet, \$2



DEUCE

Shade: Light Gray **Gender:** Male

- Diner Proprietor
- Gruff
- Lost Two Fingers in the War

Body: Normal (Fighting)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Business)

Spirit: Normal

Items: Spatula, wallet, cigars, lighter, \$4

Scene 7

The door to Dizzy's apartment is unlocked. If the PCs enter, they'll find Dizzy's body on the floor. Suggest to them that it's pretty brutal, but avoid going into detail. The Production Code of the 1940s and '50s simply wouldn't abide by too much visual gore. Implied gore was fine. Go figure.

The only real clue to be found is a ripped-off section of a nice shirt clutched in Dizzy's stiff hand. If they pry the hand open, they'll see that it's part of a sleeve and that it has a very ornate custom cufflink attached.

The PCs could talk to Smitty, though you can remind them that there's a risk that the murder will get pinned on them. Or not. Ask Danny's player to make an unopposed Smarts/Memory vs. 4d10 check to remember that he knows a guy who could help; the kind of guy you might take jewelry to if you were hard up for dough. Or if you feel nice, simply give Danny's player the information without a check.

Frankly, there isn't much more that can be done that night, given the late hour.

Act Two

Scene 1

Kicking off Act Two, we cut back to the posh apartment, where Violet is being held prisoner. Cookie is watching over her and, despite being weird, he shows a human side by complimenting her (or something). Allow the character of Violet to talk to George if she wants. Encourage the conversation with to develop naturally. Don't just give it to her that Cookie can be swayed by this dame. If you want it to be a bit more challenging for Violet, you might also call for an opposed Spirit/Manipulation or Persuasion vs. Spirit/Resolve check or even initiate a drama scene.

And just when things look good for Violet, George enters the room, ordering Cookie to take a break. Make it menacing. After he dismisses Cookie, he will probably wash his hands, take off his shirt, leaving him only in his white undershirt. Maybe he will put on a fancy bathrobe. Menace. George should exude menace... but a strangely dignified menace. And just when that menace is reaching a climax, maybe when George is sitting on the bed with Violet, end the scene.

It's entirely possible that Violet will figure out another way to get out of the mess. Outright tricking Cookie is a good example, as is sneaking up and clobbering Cookie from behind with a blunt object. If she manages something like that, she'll run right into George before she can cement her escape.

The point of the scene is two-fold: to give Violet an idea of how to escape and to build George up as a nasty man who is also bit of a dandy.

Scene 2

The camera comes up on Joe, restless in bed. As it moves through his small apartment, we see an ashtray, a pack of cigarettes, a bottle of scotch and an empty glass on the nightstand. The tattered piece of shirt is also on the table next to the glass.

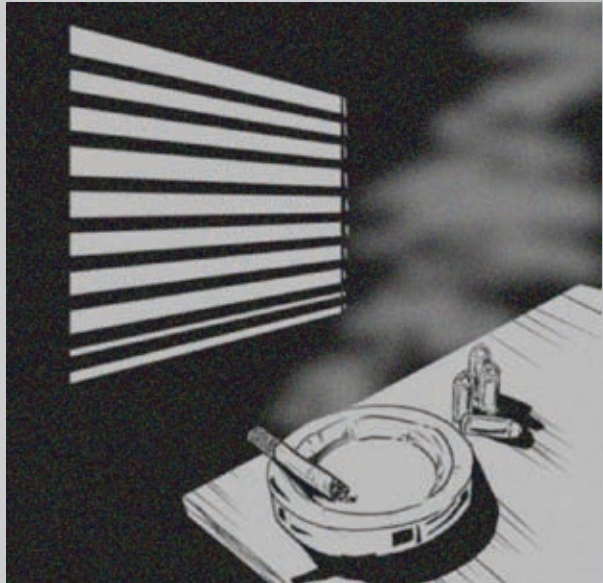
A knock on the door wakes Joe up. Tell Joe's player that, out of sheer instinct, he reaches over and produces his pistol from the nightstand drawer. It is the first time we are seeing such a violent tool with Joe. It lets everyone know that he is a rough man.

A hard man. The type of man who has a pistol.

If you feel having him grab the pistol is exerting a bit too much control over the PC, you can scale it back by simply mentioning that as Joe wakes up so abruptly, his mind is immediately inclined to reach for the gun in the drawer. This way, you're not actually mandating that he grabs it.

What is Happening

Leslie is coming to bring Joe breakfast. If he answers the door with a gun, she will feign surprise and horror, playing up the innocent "good girl" image that she has worked so hard to cultivate.



She is nosy and is going to snoop around while Joe eats. If at all possible, have her see the piece of shirt with the cufflink. Maybe it fell out of his pocket or simply laid it on the nightstand. Upon seeing it, she'll feign shock and horror that such violence has occurred. After all, Leslie's story is that Violet went to Acapulco. Leslie is gonna start spinning this one, because, frankly, she didn't know about Dizzy and certainly didn't know about George "taking care" of Dizzy. If Joe tells her the truth or even a fib, she will concoct all manner of possible explanations; anything to steer things away from what she figures is the truth (i.e., that George was involved).

But like all evil dames, she is gonna play it cool, pretend to be mortified and adapt on the fly. Through Leslie, try to coerce Joe into saying that he and Danny are going to see someone about the cufflink; that Danny knows a guy. If Joe doesn't tell her about Danny knowing a guy, have her muse mostly to herself that she think Danny knows someone who's an expert in that area. In truth, she's planning to race over to Danny's apartment and kill him before he can lead Joe to the expert.

Leslie will then try to convince Joe to shower-up. She mentions that he looks like death warmed over and could use some freshening up. You might even have Leslie flirt a bit (should he give in at all, he gains a Temptation Point). If Joe hits the shower, she will yell to him that she'll take his bed sheets and have them washed. This gives her a chance to snoop around more. If she didn't have a chance to find the shirt and cufflink, this will be the perfect chance to have her do so. While she's meddling around, describe the heat of the shower; Joe shaving, enjoying the peace and quiet of being out of prison; clean towels. As the mirror fogs up, fade to black and move to Scene 3.

He might not shower at all. If not, have her close off the conversation and leave before anything gets too awkward, thus transitioning to Scene 3.

Scene 3

Eventually, Joe will try to contact Danny. If he calls, there's no answer, nor does Danny show up at Leslie's house. Eventually, it's likely that Joe will go over to Danny's apartment. Allow Joe's player to explore other avenues if he chooses. All leads point to

Danny not having been seen at his usual haunts.

If Joe knocks, nobody answers and Joe will probably get “déjà vu” vibes, considering what happened at Dizzy’s place. The door isn’t locked. This sounds a bit familiar, now doesn’t it? After he knocks a couple times, the neighbor – an old crone in hair curlers – opens up her door and says, “Knock off that racket, will you? Hasn’t there been enough noise in there for one day?” She slams her door shut immediately. This is what’s called a clue!

Speaking of clues, the door is locked, but not via the latch on the inside. More on this later. Luckily, Joe knows a way to bypass the lock, by jiggling the way-too-loose handle a certain way and pushing. Danny has lived here for a very long time; since before Joe was sent up to the Big House even.

Danny’s apartment is small and has seen better days. Emphasize the claustrophobic nature of this tenement and the fact that Joe wouldn’t have been uncomfortable had he stayed here with Danny. In the bedroom, on the bed itself, lies Danny’s dead body with a bloody pillow on his face. He’s been shot in the head. Three times, even. Here’s no sign of struggle.

What is Happening

Okay, yes, Danny’s dead. Leslie drove over quickly and offed him. She knew she didn’t have much time before Joe got there. She knocked on the door. Danny got up, and opened the door for her. Leslie needed him to get into the bedroom to muffle the noise of the gun, so she suggestively unbuttoned the top button of her blouse. As he crawled back into bed, not one to turn down a little pre-breakfast delight, she picked up a pillow and held it over her gun and shot him in the head. Three times to make sure he was dead. The murderous vixen quickly gathered up her stuff and left.

Joe can look for clues. If he doesn’t, he can learn the clues from Smitty later on.

The Door: The door was not latched from the inside, although it was locked. An unopposed Smarts/Memory vs. 4d8 check will allow Joe to remember that Danny always used the inside latch lock when he was at home and would use his key to lock it from the outside when he would leave the apartment. He never locked it with the key while at home. This indicates that someone with a key locked it on their way out, after killing

Danny. And if Joe looks, he'll find that Danny's key is sitting on the kitchen table.

The Button: When Leslie undid the top button of her blouse, the button itself came off and rolled under the coffee table in the living room. Finding it requires an unopposed Smarts/Perception vs. 4d8 check. You can either tell the player that the button matches the blouse Leslie was wearing earlier or you can require him to make an unopposed Smarts/Memory vs. 4d8 check in order to obtain that info.

Mrs. Beach: Remember the be-curlered old lady who grumped at Joe for knocking? Well, she can provide Joe with some potentially helpful information. This should require an opposed Spirit/ (Manipulation, Intimidation or Persuasion) vs. Spirit/Resolve check. Give Joe a bonus die if he treats her with respect; she's big on that. Success means that she'll relay the following information: about 20 or 30 minutes ago, a woman came to Danny's door and knocked several times, before asking him to wake up and let her in. Mrs. Beach didn't see the woman; she just heard her. The door opened up and the woman presumably

went inside. No more than two or three minutes later, she heard the door open and shut again. There was a pause and the jangling of keys. After that, she heard female footsteps going hurriedly down the hall and stairs.

Mrs. Beach

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Female

- Grouchy
- Untrusting
- Nosey

Body: Poor

Finesse: Poor

Smarts: Normal (Perception, Knowledge – Other People's Business)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve)

Items: none

Danny's Player

You should now take Danny's player aside and explain that, per the rules on page 73, he will now be playing Smitty. Smitty lives upstairs in the same building. Noir is like that sometimes. A perfect introductory line might be "Whattaya know, Joe?" but obviously you don't have to put words into a PC's mouth. Whatever

the case is, Smitty should show up at Danny's apartment. Give Joe and Smitty a chance to roleplay here, so they can get on the same page. Smitty may be a bit leery of Joe, though, so that could lead to some fun interaction.

Use Smitty's normal game stats found on page 143, but the PC version has two Special Rules: Right Gee and Sleuth.

What Now?

By this point, Joe is likely spooked. With any luck, he still has the cufflink. If not, he can easily describe what it looked like in great detail. So, he's not totally out of luck.

Hopefully, the players of Joe and Smitty will smarten up and realize that the clues they discovered here are fine and dandy and all, but the cufflink is still a big clue. Smitty, being a beat-cop, knows a guy who can help get a fix on that cufflink. It's probably the same guy Danny knows. His name is Ole Tom. He owns a pawn shop (see Scene 5).

Smitty may want to report this to the police, but they won't be very responsive. Sure, they'll send their boys out to collect evidence and bring the body to the morgue, but they won't give him any support. They will give him all manner of excuses.

Scene 4

Cut away to George Kenser's lavish apartment. Violet is on the elaborate antique sofa, which George pitches woo to her; he likes her in his own sick way. More appropriately, he's obsessed with her.

George receives a phone call (secretly from Leslie, who has found out about the cufflink). He gets his jacket on and departs in a slight rush, leaving Cookie and Charlie in charge. Cookie is not in the room, but Charlie is. He starts acting menacing toward Violet, pinning her against the wall. This is a good chance to get some roleplaying in. As Charlie, you should show a psychopathic side. He knows George wants Violet for himself, but Charlie has other plans for her. All of a sudden, Cookie (who just came back into the room) slams a heavy glass ashtray into the back of his head, knocking him out cold. He seems beside himself, like he just can't believe he did what he did, but when he snaps back to reality, he tells Violet to run, promising to catch up to her later. As soon as she gets out of the apartment, she hears two gunshots. Charlie killed Cookie and comes after Violet. It's now time to conduct a chase scene through the streets of the city.

If Violet is caught, that will be that for her until Act 3. Continue to Scene 5.

If she escapes, as Director you have to manipulate things such that Leslie comes across her before Joe and Smitty. This will be dealt with in Scene 6.

Charlie Johansen

Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

- Sadist
- Thinks He's Smarter Than Everyone
- Untrustworthy

Body: Good (Fighting, Athletics, Toughness)

Finesse: Good (Shooting, Reflexes)

Smarts: Normal (Ingenuity)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve, Intimidation)

Items: Pistol, brass knuckles



Scene 5

This scene happens when Joe and Smitty go to Ole Tom's Pawn. The outside of the place is shabby, with a neon sign flickering in the window (the "l" and "m" have long since burned out). The inside isn't much better. There's a haze of smoke as Ole Tom is puffing on a stogie, reading the racing forum. Ole Tom finishes reading before asking if he can help the PCs.

Regardless of how much info they spill to Ole Tom, he'll take out a jeweler's lens and examine the cufflink, taking his time. He puts the lens down, takes a puff off his stogie and offers them \$50 for it. Ole Tom is a business man. He knew Danny, sure. And he knows Smitty. But, he's gonna need some "convincing" to give up any more details. In other words, it's time for a drama scene.

- If the PCs are Defeated, he'll tell them that he just can't get involved. Before they can argue, a couple of customers come in to divert his attention; they'll have to find somewhere else., which means it's time to do some ad-libbing.

- If the PCs Defeat Ole Tom, he'll relent and tell them that he found a small engraving on it – a jeweler's

mark. He explains that jewelers – the high-end type that make nice jewelry for well-off folks – leave a mark on their work, so folks can identify their craftsmanship. It's like an artist's signature. This piece, this cufflink, is by a local guy named Jacoby. Ole Tom is willing to call Jacoby and find out who this belonged to... for a price, of course, unless the PCs create a convincing argument. If the PCs comply, he tells them to come back later and he'll give them what they want.

Ole Tom

Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Male

- Likes to Haggle
- Miser
- Old

Body: Poor

Finesse: Normal (Coordination, Knowledge – Item Values)

Smarts: Normal (Perception)

Spirit: Good (Persuasion)

Items: wallet, cigars, lighter, \$14

Scene 6

Switching back to Violet and her situation... If Violet didn't escape, skip this scene.

If she did escape, she's not gonna find Joe and Smitty. She might find Danny's body though. She might talk to the cops. Because she's a woman (and women had their role in films noir), they will be helpful in their own slightly condescending way. They won't release her until someone comes to pick her up. She is far too fragile and upset, at least in their estimation. Of course, the person they find to pick her up is Leslie. Leslie is happy to get her.

At any rate, the police will take the information on George and his apartment. Holding a woman hostage; that doesn't seem like the sort of business someone like George Kenser would be in, though. Silly dame, telling crazy stories.

Leslie should find her no matter what. She'll probably take her back to her house, "in case Joe gets back." What happens when Leslie finds her is very much going to set the stage for Act 3. You'll need to decide what approach you want Leslie to take.

Slip Violet Some Drugs: This is the most logical action, as it requires less hassle for Leslie. Leslie tries to calm poor Violet down and offers her a drink. Insert drug into the liquid and the trick is done. About a minute after drinking it, Violet will start to feel dizzy and sleepy. She can try to fight the effects with an unopposed Body/Endurance vs. 4d8 check. If she succeeds, a fight scene or chase scene will probably begin. At the beginning of each of Violet's turns, she'll have to make another check, though you'll roll an extra die for each consecutive turn this goes on. When she fails the check, the scene ends prematurely, she falls unconscious and will be returned to George. Move on to Scene 7.

Knock Violet Out: She could knock Violet out (you know, a good whack on the back of the head with a vase or frying pan) and return her to George. If Violet isn't suspicious, you could make it an automatic thing, citing it as a plot device. That said, unless your players are cool with such actions, you should make it a fight scene, with Leslie automatically going first and getting bonus dice for the surprise factor. Don't hesitate to dump some Director Points into Defeating Violet. That said, no fate roll will be

required if Violet is Defeated – she'll just be knocked out: move on to Scene 7. If, however, Violet Defeats Leslie, you'll need to do some ad-libbing as to what happens next.

Kill Violet: Like knocking her out, but with the intention to kill her, thus requiring a fate roll if she is Defeated. She could make it look like Violet was the one that broke into Danny's place and killed him, and then came after Leslie. The blouse with the missing button is a great piece of evidence to plant. If Violet is killed, however, you have to get all your ducks in a row. Leslie will set up Violet at her place to look like Violet attacked her. Violet's player will be given the chance to play Wendy, Soapbox's sister (Act 1, Scene 3). Remember when Soapbox said Wendy wanted to see Joe? Well, it turns out that Wendy has grown from a cute kid into a very attractive young woman, though she's still a tomboy. She works as a mechanic as the gas station across from where George's penthouse is. Furthermore, she has seen Leslie there awhile back, and then she seen Violet there with George and a couple of his toughs. How you hook Wendy up with Joe and Smitty is up to you. It could be a happenstance meeting or perhaps she was going to see Joe. Or something else entirely.

Wendy Slater

Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Female

- Tomboy
- Has a Crush on Joe
- Stubborn

Body: Normal (Athletics, Fighting)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes, Driving – Ground Vehicles, Coordination)

Smarts: Normal (Perception, Knowledge – Automechanics 2)

Spirit: Good (Resolve, Persuasion)

Special Rules: Right Gee, Expert (Automechanics)

Items: \$2



Scene 7

This scene occurs if the PCs convinced Ole Tom to contact Jacoby.

The streets are wet with rain and the neon sign at Ole Tom's still flickers... most of the letters, anyway. Inside, he has an old wind-up Victrola playing some low music as they enter.

He talked to Jacoby; told him some punk kid came in trying to pawn the cufflink. Ole Tom said he gave him five bucks and stack of baseball cards for it. He wanted to feel Jacoby out without raising any suspicions. Tom told him that he would be happy to drop the cufflink off – the custom design is real nice and whoever had these made is sure to be missing it. Or, Tom would be happy to drop them off himself, if Jacoby was busy. With a bit of cajoling, Tom got Jacoby to give him an address.

After proudly explaining all the details of how he succeeded in his mission, the old fellow reaches under the racing forum and pulls out an envelope. The cufflink and address are in there... along with a name: George Kenser. Kenser is known publicly as an upstanding pillar of the community, although many suspect that he has his fingers in some pretty crooked pies. But as

long as Kenser continues to open orphanages, pump money into the police precincts and feed the needy, people are perfectly willing to look the other way. This includes the police. As such, Smitty will get zero cooperation if he reports that Kenser is responsible for kidnapping and murder.

Allow Smitty to make an unopposed Smarts/Memory vs. 4d8 check to see if he has a recall about the address. Success means that he knows right where the address is at – a tall and luxurious apartment building. Otherwise, they'll have to find it the hard way.

Either way, the rain is coming down in the city at night, we are ready for the final act!

Act Three

Scene 1A

This is the scene that you'll go to if Violet has been re-captured and brought back to George Kenser at his apartment. Or if Violet escaped Leslie in Act Two, Scene 7 (the only difference is that Violet won't be at the apartment).

As Director, it is your job to get things moving now. You have to

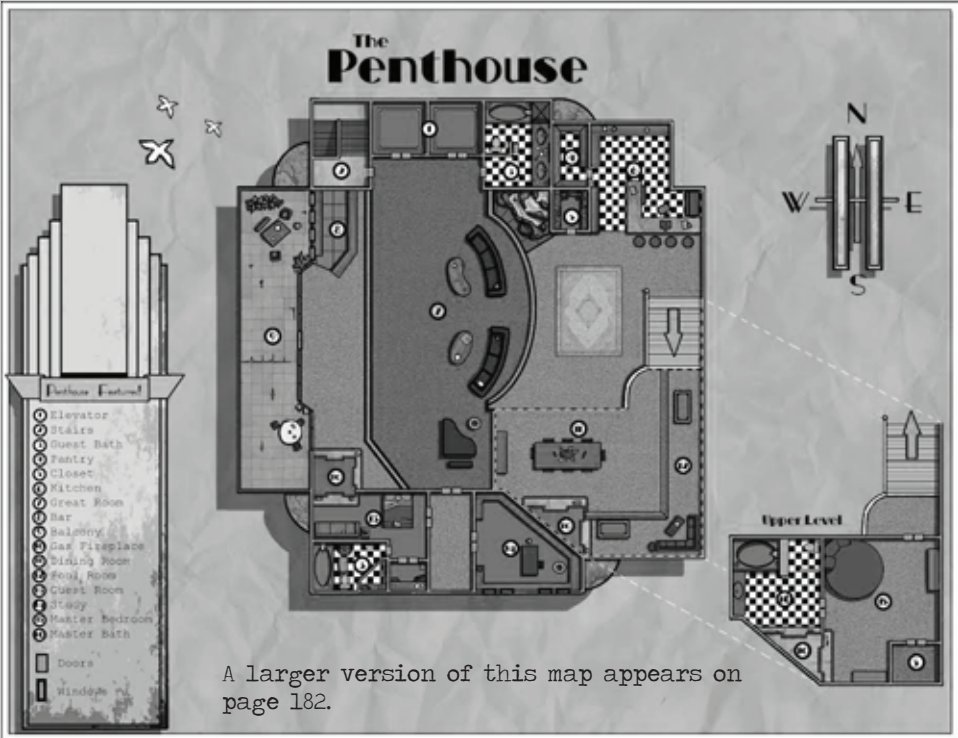
get Joe and Smitty to George's penthouse apartment. Now. Not tomorrow. Tonight! Time is of the essence.

There should be a doorman, of course. Will they bribe him? Explain they have the cufflink? Let players do whatever they want here, because ultimately, all it does is set up the finale.

George, Charlie, and Leslie are upstairs, and Violet is just regaining consciousness, thrown on the bed.

When Joe and Smitty arrive, Leslie will try and talk her way out of it. She will attempt to play the victim for Joe's benefit. She doesn't see that Violet is waking up. Ask the player of Violet to hold off a bit before actively entering the Scene; she's still too groggy to walk or even yell just yet. Throw her a Genre Point for her cooperation.

As soon as Violet makes her presence known, though, Leslie will spring back and take a pistol out of her purse. She is a bit deranged, and will try and shoot Violet first. Things are going to get chaotic very quickly. Will George and Charlie team up with Leslie, or will they try and help take the crazy dame down to wash their hands of this? Either option is appropriate. Go with whatever works for you. It's a big ol' mess, and likely, at least one of the



people in this room is gonna end up dead. Do not rush through this Scene. Each character should be allowed to have their say, to scream in character, tension should mount, if this were a movie, we should want to turn away knowing that soon, gunshots will ring out and several people will end up dead.

If you feel the scene might be too easy when the lead starts flying, have a couple of George's anonymous underlings burst through the door to help out. Use the Gangster Henchman stock stats on page 175 for them.

If Violet is not present, let the pieces fall where they may. One of the bad guys should let them know that she's gone and that they have no idea where she ran off to.

Scene 1B

If Violet is killed in Act Two, Scene 7, this is the scene you'll be running.

Joe, Smitty and Wendy will still end up at the apartment, but will find that George is gone. His servants can easily be coerced into divulging the fact that George

mentioned that they were going to “straighten that Leslie broad out once and for all.” This should lead them to Leslie’s house.

So, we’ll have Joe, Smitty and Wendy showing up at Leslie’s as Leslie starts telling her story, spinning things so that she’s a victim. In terms of pacing, allow for a drama scene between Leslie and the PCs and just as it starts heating up and reaching it’s own climax, George and Charlie break-in, maybe one in the front door and one from the back. And things will go all to heck! See, Leslie called George up and ripped him a new one for letting Violet get away in the first place... and no one talks to George Kenser like that, “especially a dumb broad.” He has come to teach her that lesson in person. This will set the final act up as a very violent climax! And of course, it’s dark, and raining; don’t forget to use that to your cinematic advantage.

Scene 2

When the smoke clears and the dust settles, who is still left?

The wail of sirens in the background as Joe makes his way out of the building (assuming he’s still breathing), looking ruffled and with blood on his coat. The sun has just come up. If Violet is alive and present, her and Joe will probably embrace. Let the characters interact a bit.

Soapbox is there (“Hey Joe, how’s the other guy look?”) and calls Joe over and takes out a wallet sized picture and shows it to Joe. “That’s my sister Joe, I told ya, she’s been asking about ya.”

Of course, various factors can alter this (such as if the action took place at Leslie’s house or if Violet had escaped from Kenser earlier on). Given all the possibilities, you’re best off playing it by ear and letting things wrap up organically. You’ll undoubtedly figure out the best place to declare “The End”.

Director's Cut

First, as with any director's cut, go read through the theatrical release. See how that is paced. Note the noir-like elements. Observe the twists and turns that get more and more violent. Learn all the basics.

Now, you want to make this film your own. Your players want to bring their own characters into the mix. Great. Improv is your friend.

First- the main character (Joe in the theatrical release) needs a reason that he has been away. He could have been in prison, fighting in the war, overseas as a merchant marine, in the hospital, etc. Whatever the case, he needs to have been gone. It doesn't need to have been three years, but at least three months. But in that time, he heard from his Violet quite a bit; very regularly, in fact. Until about a month ago.

Then she stopped.

Talk to the player playing "Joe" and explain the situation. Why did he go away? He is a hard man. Noir is filled with hard men. Men with dark pasts. He ain't no angel. Have him tell you about "Violet."

Now, when "Joe" returns to town, greeted by his pal "Danny", he is going to want to find out what is going on with his dame. And then

there's Leslie, saying Violet went off to Acapulco with a new beau. Maybe Joe buys the story. So, what happens with Violet? Does she show up again? There's not much of a story there is there, unless she has amnesia and seeks to find out what happened during the time lapse? This isn't some indie film that meanders about. This is Noir. Things happen and they happen with urgency.

Introduce the Leslie character. Her background should remain pretty much the same as in the Theatrical Release. She is in love with Joe but is saddled with "Danny". So, if you can, and if Joe's player is willing and able, ask him to do a voiceover. Tell him to wing it and see what happens. Dim the lights a bit. Set the stage.

In the meantime, be ready with Leslie. She is a firecracker and we mean in the way that she is explosive and dangerous. How far will she go?

Think about the structure of Scenes and Acts. If you have three players and one of them is playing "Violet" you need to give her plenty of on-screen time too, and you need to be sure to eventually bring all the PCs together at some point. (Okay, we can dispense with putting the PC names in

quotations now, as we're sure you understand that these names are essentially just placeholders.)

Here's the thing of it all: players generally like their characters to stay alive. Hopefully, you know your players, and you know whether or not they will be okay if you whack one of them in Act Two. If so, that gives you more tools to play with. If not, then you have to get creative, but that's why you're the Director, right?

So, Leslie. She's this dame. She wants Joe. So, likely she will need to frame Danny and Violet, getting them both out of the picture in one fell swoop. She might plant evidence linking the two of them together romantically. She might try and link them to George. But, here's the thing: she might have to kill Danny or Violet. If she kills Danny, she gets herself beat up a bit; planting evidence linking him to Violet... and then shows up, scared, asking Joe for help, saying she did it out of self-defense. If she kills Violet, she needs to make it look like Danny did it.

What happens if Violet gets free? Maybe Leslie gets whacked trying to get even with George. Now, we have a new mystery on our hands and Danny becomes the principal. Maybe though George was into some kinky stuff. Doped-up call girls, and maybe he needs to get Violet back, and while he's at it, Leslie seems

like a girl who'd be good to party. Remember that most "kinky" activity was carefully alluded to in film noir; not depicted outright. Symbolism and innuendo are your best allies.

It is the humble opinion of this writer that a good Director needs to always have his ducks in a row, and needs to always be upping the ante. Different genres require this in different ways. With noir, you have to always be going deeper and darker down a very sinister path. Always be pushing. The key is to make sure you never contradict yourself. You can change the plot, it can even get a bit indecipherable at times. Not every film noir was a masterpiece. If you have the trust of your players and they want their characters involved in an evocative story, they will let you modify their characters on the fly. "Yeah, Danny was seeing Violet on the side. But not for love. For money. Violet got hooked on H, she was in it bad. So, when you were gone, she was hard up for cash. And Danny, well he was hard-up too. Seems that Leslie, well, her attentions were elsewhere. So, yeah, that's how Danny's been looking after your gal while you been gone. And now, that mobster guy has her. Pays her weekly. Danny, you been wanting some more of that sweet stuff, but you don't want any part of no mobster. So, whattaya gonna do, Joe?"

Is it harder to keep the pacing “perfect”? Sure. Players like to explore, they refuse to accept “no” for an answer. As Director, you sometimes need to yell “CUT!” and end a Scene. The characters have to sleep for the night. Or at least whatever they do, nothing will get accomplished through their efforts. Hand over the reigns to them. Ask them how their night went. Maybe they’re nursing a hangover at the diner, telling their woes to the overnight waitress whose varicose veins have her longing for Epsom salt in a hot tub.

What is the worst thing you can do to a PC? It isn’t killing them; that’s an easy out. No, the worst thing you can do is to destroy everything they thought to be true. It is to crush everything they care about. It is to give, and to take away. To mix genres, but hear me out, what would Bruce Wayne do if his parents returned? No catches. He lives in a world with magic. So they are

brought back. No monkey’s paw. Is he still Batman? Can he still justify putting his life in jeopardy when his parents are alive? That is the worst thing you could do to Batman/Bruce Wayne. You have taken away everything he was. Just. Like. That. In *The Big Crime*, characters are likely not to be as developed as Master Wayne. And, in many cases, characters might be disposable. They *should* be. But, that doesn’t mean you have to kill them.

In closing, make this film *yours*. Know the characters. Know their motivations. But change everything on the fly when needed. After all, plot twists make everything much more interesting.

Ask Rollo Tomasi*.

*And for those that might appreciate the reference, I suggest you take a look at Tomasi in the book the movie was based on. See how different he is.

THE END

A Spectrum Games Release

After "The End"

I know that when "The End" pops up on the screen at the conclusion of a movie, the curtains are supposed to close, signifying that the show is over. But I would like to pry those curtains back open for a moment, if I may, to say a few words about *The Big Crime*.

My Noir-igins

My love affair with film noir started simply enough, but not in a terribly traditional way. It was 1989 and Tim Burton's *Batman* was getting ready to hit the theaters and rake in a ton of money. The marketing blitz had already begun and I was reading a brilliant book that was released as a part of that blitz. It was called *Tales of the Dark Knight - Batman's First Fifty Years: 1939-1989*. In it, the author mentioned that the then-upcoming film adopted a style of cinematography reminiscent of film noir. Film noir? What the hell was *that*? My 15-year-old brain was intrigued. Even the word itself sounded awesome. I lived in a very small midwestern town at the time, so my resources were limited. I asked some family and friends what film noir was, only to be greeted

by a whole bunch of responses like, "Beats me." It wasn't until the following year that I found out.

You see, the next big summer blockbuster was on the horizon: *Dick Tracy*. Okay, so it never did make the huge pile of dough that *Batman* made a year earlier, but that's neither here nor there. The point is that I discovered Dick Tracy, the comic strip, via that film and I purchased several books about the character. In one of those books, it was mentioned that the older Dick Tracy comic strips used interesting camera angles and stark shadows to create a mood the same way film noir would go on to do in the next decade. There was that world again! *Film noir*.

Being young and stubborn, I wasn't about to be defeated twice. Not on your life! I trekked to the nearest city of a decent size and went to the bookstore. The result? I found a couple of books that finally told me what I had been hoping to learn for a year. I soaked in all the photos of these black and white movies; urban scenes of desperation, fear and greed, capitalized by dramatic shadows and dynamic camera angles. I was

transfixed. I had heard of some of the movies; I just had no idea that they were a part of this brand new world (well, new to *me!*).

For one reason or another, though, that excitement slowly fell back into the darkest recesses of my mind. From time to time, I'd think of film noir and those deliciously atmospheric images I saw in the bookstore, but that was about it.

Until 2002, that is. I was living in Springfield, Missouri and one of the local stations started showing a couple of films noir every Friday night (or was it Saturday?). The program was hosted, if I recall correctly, by a local business that plugged its wares via a cheesy "late night" TV host. I found out about it and set out to finally, after all those years, watch one of these movies.

The film I caught was *Kansas City Confidential*. From the minute it came on until the moment it ended, I was completely enthralled. Everything about it captivated me – the lighting, the grainy film, the moral ambiguity, the story of a wronged man exacting revenge... everything. I was hooked.

The years that followed involved me watching every film noir I could track down. Thanks to Turner Classic Movies, I was able to feed my need pretty regularly and even began developing my own

collection of film noir DVDs. But I didn't stop there! I voraciously bought and read books about film noir, all the while haunting various online forums devoted to it. I wanted to learn more; more about the films themselves, more about the actors, more about the filmmakers, more about everything! If it involved film noir, I was an eager student.

My love of film noir has never faded; never fallen by the wayside as other interests moved to the forefront. It has become a part of me, scratching a certain itch that I have – an itch for dark movies about lost souls in godforsaken cities; for a world where a sense of right and wrong is often compromised out of desperation or greed; for stories that don't try to teach us anything but instead says, "This is the cruel, lonely world we live in... deal with it." Yes, film noir is indeed a part of me and it will be until I take my dying breath.

The Big Crime Journey

I always knew I was going to create a film noir roleplaying game. Somehow, I always knew. My first foray into that general realm was with *Midway City*, which was a short-lived, noir-ish sci-fi play-by-post game that I ran in 1999. Keep in mind that my knowledge

of noir at that time was limited to the images I saw in the books at the bookstore back nine years earlier. *Midway City* owed more to Dick Tracy than to film noir early on. At one point, I had designed a large chunk of a pen-and-paper roleplaying game for it, but I lost it all when my poor, overworked computer decided to get out of the computing racket once and for all. Dismayed by the loss, I shelved it until a few years later, when then-Vice President of Spectrum Games, Eddy Webb, showed interest in developing it as an RPG. I gave him all the leeway he needed to make it his own and that's exactly what he did. The result was an incredible game that stayed true to the original, but offered a much richer gaming experience. The truth is that Eddy added a lot more noir into the mix. Z-Man Games published *Midway City* in 2005.

Still, I longed to design a roleplaying game that was pure noir, without any sci-fi trappings. In 2007, it looked like that was going to happen with a setting book for *Savage Worlds* called *Crime Street*. For various reasons, that didn't pan out. It's a shame, really, as it had some fun material in it. Some of it has spilled over into *The Big Crime*.

A little over a year ago, a burst of inspiration swept over me like a tidal wave. I busied myself with crafting a system with which to run film noir for my group. It went well initially, but I hit a roadblock in the design and the importance of other products forced it to be tossed to the side.

Recently, while pondering other things, my mind drifted back to the unfinished game system. It was at that moment that an epiphany struck me. It was the perfect solution to the design issue that had stalled the project. I rushed to my computer, dug up the old document and set about fixing it up into a workable game. The results were such that I decided that it shouldn't be reserved solely for my game group. It dawned on me that this could make for a great published product to add to Spectrum Games' ever-growing catalogue of "genre emulation" roleplaying games.

The Big Crime was born.

Conclusion

It's still shocking to me how quickly *The Big Crime* came together once I lifted it from the mothballs. Within a couple of weeks, I had a fully playable (albeit rough-around-the-edges) game system to try out. Not only

did the system come together at a rapid-fire pace, everything else went smoothly as well. The system adjustments were spot-on, the playtesting was uber-productive and the words flowed from my fingertips with little effort at all. It was kismet; it had to be.

Maybe I'm generalizing a bit. There were some tough calls that I had to make along the way. Chief among them was how to handle gender in the game. Originally, the system treated females no differently than males, but it created some seriously weird moments that felt positively un-noirlike. In those old films, women and men were not written to do the same things. Was it sexism? Of course, it was. Sadly, that was the status quo of the era. Women were just starting to find happiness outside the home while the fellas were in Europe and Asia, fighting the Axis. The men returned and didn't necessarily like what they saw. Women in factories? Women acting independently? What was the world coming to? The filmmakers transferred their negative thoughts on the matter into the films noir, thus popularizing the evil femme fatale and her opposite, the doe-eyed, docile good girl. For the longest time, I struggled with how to

address the situation. Should I treat the genders the same and lose out on authenticity or should I maintain authenticity and risk being politically incorrect. In the end, I chose the latter because Spectrum Games has garnered a reputation for faithfully emulating genres in our games... and it's a reputation we're proud of. I'm not about to purposely ignore a huge aspect of film noir simply to keep the heat off of us.

I have never been more proud of how one of our games has turned out. I made some hard choices, but I stand by each and every one of them, as they were made with the single-minded goal of preserving the film noir "feel". I want The Big Crime to be your portal back to the world as it was portrayed in those old black and white films that bristled so cynically with rampant crime, uncertainty, corruption, urban nightmares and dark, ominous shadows. And fedoras. You can't forget the fedoras.

Cynthia Celeste Miller
February 24th, 2014

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Film:

Director:

Summary:

Character Creation Requirements

Character Name:

Shade:

Gender:

Hooks:

Player's Name:

Body: _____

Finesse: _____

Smarts: _____

Spirit: _____

Special Rules

Temptation Points

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Guilt

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Desperation

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Alienation

Items:

Notes:

Film: _____

Director: _____

Summary: _____

Character Creation Requirements

Casting Sheet

Character Name: _____

Shade: _____

Gender: _____

Hooks: _____

Body: _____

Finesse: _____

Smarts: _____

Spirit: _____

Special Rules

Temptation Points

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Guilt

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Desperation

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Alienation

Player's Name: _____

Items:

Notes:

Character Sheet

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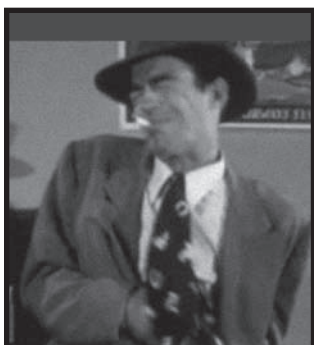
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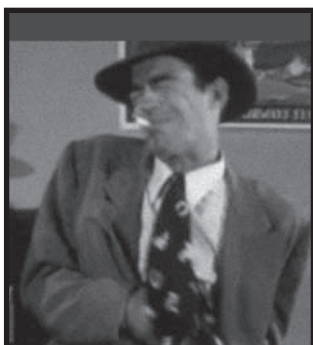
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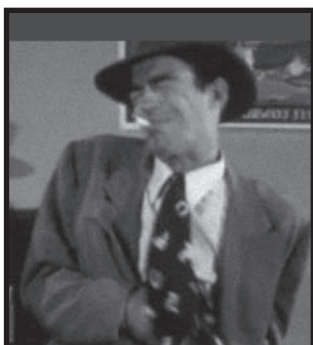
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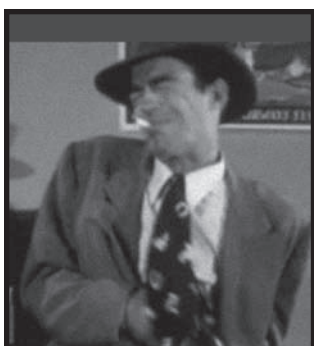
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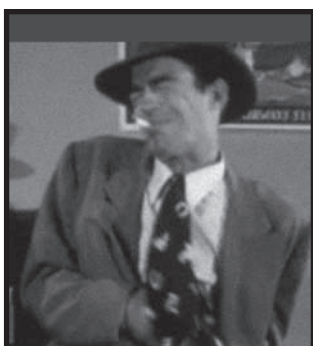
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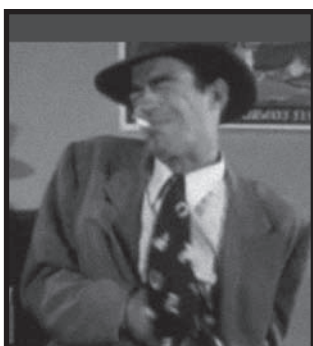
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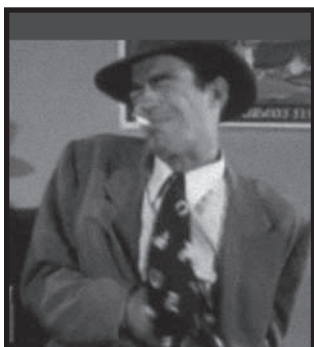
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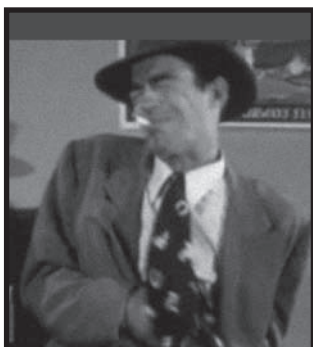
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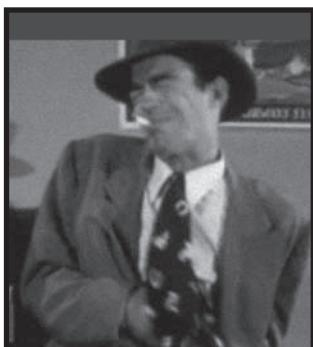
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**Setback
Token**

Stock Secondary Characters

Bartender

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Female

- Informant for the Police
- Greedy
- Divorced

Body: Poor (Athletics)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes; Coordination)

Smarts: Good (Investigation; Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Manipulation)

Items: Derringer, notepad, lock picks, camera

Beat Cop Bad

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Gambles
- Drinks too much
- On the Take, bribes

Body: Normal (Toughness)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting; Skulking)

Smarts: Normal (Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Intimidation; Persuasion)

Items: Pistol, cigarettes, lighter, handcuffs, sobriety token, blackjack

Beat Cop (Good)

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Experienced in police procedure
- Family man
- Streetwise

Body: Normal (Fighting)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting; Driving – Ground Vehicles)

Smarts: Good (Investigation; Knowledge – The Criminal Underworld)

Spirit: Poor (Persuasion)

Items: Pistol, notebook, switchblade, handcuffs

Blue Collar Worker

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Police Record
- Lives in an Eyesore Apartment
- Hard Working

Body: Normal (Strength; Fighter)

Finesse: Normal (Coordination; Driving – Ground Vehicles)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Repair; Ingenuity)

Spirit: Poor (Resolve; Persuasion)

Items: Repair tools, cigarettes, lighter, old panel truck, work overalls

Bookie

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

- Mob Connections
- Greedy
- Family Man

Body: Poor (Toughness)

Finesse: Poor (Shooting, Skulking)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Gambling; Knowledge – Politics)

Spirit: Normal (Manipulation; Persuasion; Intimidation)

Items: .38 Special revolver, cigarettes, matches, satchel, ledger of clients

Boxer

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

- Wanted for Murder
- Desperate
- Heart of a Warrior

Body: Good (Strength; Fighting; Toughness)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes)

Smarts: Poor (Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Intimidation)

Items: Duffle bag, boxing gloves, medical supplies, blue collar working clothes

Burglar

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Professional Thief
- Acrobatic
- Level-Headed

Body: Normal (Endurance; Fighting)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes; Skulking)

Smarts: Poor (Perception; Ingenuity)
Spirit: Normal (Performance – Dance; Manipulation)
Items: Lock picks, thieves tools, black suit, crossbow

Business Man

Typical Shade: Medium Gray
Gender: Male
• Greedy • Lecherous • Immigrant
Body: Poor (Endurance)
Finesse: Good (Driving – Ground Vehicles)
Smarts: Good (Knowledge– Business; Memory)
Spirit: Poor (Manipulation, Persuasion)
Items: Pipe and tobacco, lighter, pocket knife, flask of alcohol, cheap car

Con Man

Typical Shade: Dark Gray
Gender: Male
• Cold and Methodical • Greedy
• Charlatan
Body: Normal (Fighting, Toughness)
Finesse: Normal (Skulking; Driving – Ground Vehicles)
Smarts: Good (Perception, Ingenuity)
Spirit: Normal (Manipulation, Persuasion)
Items: Flask of alcohol, .38 special pistol, preachers bible; ornate gold cross

Corrupt District Attorney

Typical Shade: Dark Gray
Gender: Male
• Lecherous • Greedy • Blackmailer
Body: Poor (Toughness)
Finesse: Normal (Reflexes)
Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Law; Ingenuity; Perception)
Spirit: Normal (Manipulation; Persuasion; Performance, oration)
Items: Sharp suits, .38 Special, briefcase, the goods on somebody

Crook

Typical Shade: Medium Gray
Gender: Male
• Ex-Con • Greedy • Two-Time Loser
Body: Poor (Toughness)
Finesse: Normal (Driving – Ground Vehicles; Coordination)
Smarts: Good (Memory; Knowledge – Construction)
Spirit: Normal (Resolve)
Items: 38 Special revolver, lock picks, cigarettes, lighter, blackjack

Crook, Specialist

Typical Shade: Dark Gray
Gender: Male
• Ex-Con • Clever • Professional Thief
Body: Poor (Endurance)
Finesse: Normal (Coordination; Skulking; Shooting; Driving – Ground Vehicles)
Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Safe Cracking Knowledge – Demolitions)
Spirit: Normal (Intimidation)
Items: Lock picks, lighter, explosives, fast automobile, 1911 Colt .45

Crusading District Attorney

Typical Shade: Light Gray
Gender: Female
• Police Procedures • Hard Working
• God Fearing
Body: Normal (Athletics)
Finesse: Normal (Drive – Ground Vehicles)
Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Law; Ingenuity)
Spirit: Normal (Persuasion; Performance – Oration)
Items: Bible, sharp professional clothes, briefcase, Cadillac automobile

Doctor

Typical Shade: Light Gray
Gender: Male
• Prominent Surgeon • Blackmailed
• Believes in the Good of People
Body: Poor (Strength; Athletics)

Finesse: Poor (Coordination)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Surgeon; Knowledge – Biology; Knowledge – Psychology)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion; Resolve)

Items: Expensive watch, medical satchel, expensive car, lots of cash

Dragon Lady (Marlene)

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Female

- Underworld Queen
- Ruthless
- Psychopath

Body: Normal (Endurance)

Finesse: Poor (Shooting)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Psychology; Knowledge – Underworld; Knowledge – Business)

Spirit: Normal (Intimidation)

Items: Luger, stainless steel spikes (worn in her hair bun), expensive clothes, excessive emerald jewelry

Drunk

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Broken Hearted
- Angry and Mean
- Weak-willed

Body: Poor (Endurance)

Finesse: Normal (Skulking)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Carpenter; Knowledge – Booze)

Spirit: Normal (Art, Painting)

Items: Flask of rotgut whiskey, cigarettes, lighter, handy man's tools

Femme Fatale (Dita)

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Female

- Sexy, Slinky and Seductive
- Decadent
- Escaping Her Past

Body: Normal (Athletics)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes)

Smarts: Normal (Ingenuity)

Spirit: Good (Manipulation; Persuasion)

Items: Browning .25 pistol, cigarettes, lighter, stiletto knife

Fence

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Lecherous
- Greedy
- Criminal Connections

Body: Poor (Athletics)

Finesse: Normal (Coordination; Skulking)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Jewelry; Knowledge – Smuggling; Knowledge – Criminal Underworld)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion, Resolve)

Items: Jewelers tools, fine pocket watch, diamond ring, small caliber revolver

Gambler

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Equestrian Expert
- Two Time Loser
- Games of Chance

Body: Normal (Fighter)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes; Coordination)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Gambling; Perception; Memory)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion; Resolve)

Items: switchblade, cigarettes, matches, grungy dress clothes, flask of vodka

Gangster, Boss

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

- Psychopath
- Lots of children
- Addict

Body: Normal (Athletics; Fighting)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting; Driving, automobiles and trucks)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Business; Knowledge – Nightclub Owner)

Spirit: Normal (Intimidation)

Items: walking stick with diamonds and dagger, cigars, lighter, excessive gold jewelry

Gangster, Henchman

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

• Police Backup • Gruff • Impatient

Body: Normal (Fighting)

Finesse: Good (Driving, Reflexes)

Smarts: Normal (Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Manipulation)

Items: Pistol, rubber hose, straight razor, note pad, flask

Gangster, Killer

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

• Murderer • Loyal • Avid Hunter

Body: Good (Fighting)

Finesse: Good (Shooting, Reflexes)

Smarts: Poor (Demolitions)

Spirit: Normal (Intimidation)

Items: Two pistols, cigarettes, lighter, dynamite, bowie knife, rope,

Gangster, Lt.

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

• Elusive • Quick Witted • Religious

Body: Poor (Toughness)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting; Skulking)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Safecracking; Knowledge – Chemistry)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion; Manipulation; Resolve)

Items: Pistol, cigarettes, lighter, lock picks, sand paper

Gumshoe

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

• Breaks the Law • Mean • Cheapskate

Body: Poor (Fighting)

Finesse: Poor (Shooting; Reflexes)

Smarts: Normal (Streetwise; Memory; Perception)

Spirit: Good (Intimidation; Persuasion)

Items: Pistol, cigarettes, lighter, lock picks, switchblade, sawed-off shotgun

Judge

Typical Shade: Medium Grey

Gender: Male

• Lecherous • Blackmailed

• Financially Strapped

Body: Normal (Endurance)

Finesse: Normal (Driving – Ground Vehicles)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Law; Knowledge – Politics; Memory)

Spirit: Normal (Manipulation)

Items: .22 pistol hidden in Bible, automobile, paddle, gavel

Lady of the Night

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Female

• Hooker • Greedy • Addict

Body: Normal (Endurance)

Finesse: Normal (Skulking)

Smarts: Poor (Perception; Ingenuity)

Spirit: Good (Manipulation; Performance – Dancing)

Items: Straight razor, Mickey Finn (hidden), slutty clothes, picture of her baby

Lawyer

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

• Police Procedure • Addict • Greedy

Body: Poor (Strength)

Finesse: Normal (Skulking)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Law; Ingenuity; Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Manipulation; Persuasion; Performance – Orator)

Items: Automobile, cigarettes, lighter, briefcase, heroin and needles

Loan Shark

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

• Psychopath • Greedy • Impatient

Body: Normal (Strength, Fighting)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting, Skulking)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Accounting; Memory)

Spirit: Normal (Intimidation, Manipulation)

Items: 1911 Colt .45; bloodstained tin snips, cigarettes, lighter, garrote

Mechanic

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Male

- Veteran war hero
- Limps and Smells Bad
- Out to Make a Buck

Body: Poor (Fighting, Strength)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Business; Knowledge – Military; Knowledge – Auto Mechanics)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve, Persuasion)

Items: Revolver pistol, cigars, lighter, grubby overalls, mechanics tools

Merchant

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Male

- Struggling to make ends meet
- Cultural Ties to the Community
- Doting Family Man

Body: Normal (Athletics)

Finesse: Poor (Driving, trucks)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Accounting; Knowledge – Business)

Spirit: Good (Persuasive)

Items: Panel truck, pens and pencils, business ledger, checkbook,

Mob Doctor

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

- Veterinarian
- Greedy
- Lost His Medical Practice

Body: Poor (Strength; Athletics)

Finesse: Poor (Coordination)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Surgeon; Knowledge – Biology; Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion; Manipulation)

Items: Medical satchel, medical supplies, lots of cash, seedy office

Musician

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Female

- Struggling Artist
- Musical Genius
- Lives Life Decadent

Body: Poor (Endurance)

Finesse: Poor (Coordination)

Smarts: Good (Ingenuity, Memory)

Spirit: Good (Performance – Singing; Performance – Musical instrument)

Items: Guitar, switchblade, harmonica, gig bag with sheet music, slutty clothes

Night Club Owner

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Alcoholic
- Former Mob Boss
- Mob Debts

Body: Poor (Toughness, Fighting)

Finesse: Good (Shooting, Skulking)

Smarts: Poor (Knowledge – Accounting; Knowledge – Politics)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion, Intimidation)

Items: Flask of single malt scotch; lighter, cigars, eye glasses, 1911 Colt .45; business ledger of contacts

Normal Bettie

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Female

- Christian
- Girl Next Door
- Sweetheart

Body: Normal (Athletics)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes)

Smarts: Normal (Memory)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion; Art – Photography; Performance – Dance)

Items: Camera, Sketchbook w/pencils

Normal Joe

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Male

- Alcoholic
- Salesman
- Lecherous

Body: Normal (Endurance)

Finesse: Normal (Coordination)

Smarts: Poor (Knowledge, Auto mechanics; Knowledge, Accounting)

Spirit: Good (Persuasion; Manipulation)

Items: briefcase, glasses, pocket watch, pocket knife

Pawn Broker

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

- Underworld Contacts
- Greedy
- Bossy

Body: Poor (Fighting)

Finesse: Poor (Driving – Ground Vehicles; Shooting)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Sales; Knowledge – Business)

Spirit: Good (Resolve, Persuasion, Intimidation)

Items: .44 Magnum pistol, diamond pinky ring, expensive automobile

Police Chief

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- Police Veteran
- Divorced
- Listens to jazz

Body: Poor (Endurance)

Finesse: Poor (Shooting)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge – Law; Psychology)

Spirit: Good (Manipulation; Persuasion)

Items: Pistol, flask of gin, pocket watch, reading glasses, wedding band

Police Detective

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Male

- Police Backup
- Gruff
- Impatient

Body: Normal (Fighting)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting, Reflexes)

Smarts: Good (Investigation, Knowledge – Law, Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve, Intimidation or Persuasion)

Items: Pistol, cigarettes, lighter, handcuffs

Policeman

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Male

- Rookie Policeman
- Serves the people
- By the book

Body: Normal (Athletics, Endurance)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting)

Smarts: Normal (Ingenuity)

Spirit: Good (Resolve)

Items: Pistol, notebook, St. Christopher's Medal, handcuffs

Politician

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

- Power hungry
- Greedy
- Lecherous

Body: Normal (Toughness)

Finesse: Normal (Skulking)

Smarts: Good (Ingenuity; Knowledge – Law; Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion)

Items: .25 Browning pistol; expensive suit; gold pinky ring; eye glasses

Public Defender

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Female

- Overworked
- Immigrant Heritage
- Underworld Contacts

Body: Poor (Endurance)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Law; Perception)

Spirit: Good (Manipulation, Intimidation)

Items: Walther P 38 pistol, cigarettes, lighter, briefcase, bribe money

Reporter

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

- War correspondent
- Unscrupulous
- Impatient

Body: Poor (Athletics)

Finesse: Normal (Driving – Ground Vehicles)

Smarts: Good (Investigation; Art –

Writing; Memory)

Spirit: Normal (Persuasion)

Items: Camera, typewriter, flask of fine scotch, notebook, pens and pencils

Sailor

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

• Family Man • Gruff • Hard Working

Body: Normal (Fighting; Strength)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes)

Smarts: Good (Knowledge, fishing)

Spirit: Normal (Resolve)

Items: Bowie knife, pipe and tobacco, lighter, fishing tackle, fishing boat

Socialite

Typical Shade: Light Gray

Gender: Female

• Wants a Better World

• Sexy and Slinky

• Loves the Decadent Lifestyle

Body: Normal (Athletics)

Finesse: Normal (Coordination)

Smarts: Normal (Ingenuity, Knowledge – Charitable Organizations)

Spirit: Normal (Art – Painting; Art – Drawing)

Items: Derringer in her purse, cigarettes, lighter, appointment book, expensive sexy outfits

Stoolie

Typical Shade: Dark Gray

Gender: Male

• Police Ties • Mob Connections

• Greedy

Body: Poor (Athletics)

Finesse: Normal (Reflexes)

Smarts: Good (Investigation; Memory; Perception)

Spirit: Normal (Manipulation)

Items: Camera, notepad, pen and pencils, flask of rot gut whiskey

Thug

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

• Ex-Convict • Menacing • Ruthless

Body: Normal (Fighting; Strength)

Finesse: Normal (Shooting, Skulking)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Area Knowledge)

Spirit: Normal (Intimidation)

Items: Bowie knife, ropes, hatchet, 1911 Colt pistol, flask of chloroform

Torch Singer

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Female

• Passionate Singer • Vamp

• Living a Life of Regret

Body: Poor (Athletics)

Finesse: Poor (Driving – Ground Vehicles; Skulking)

Smarts: Good (Perception)

Spirit: Good (Performance – Singing; Manipulation)

Items: Sexy lounge singer attire, cigarettes, matches, photos of her dead husband

War Veteran

Typical Shade: Medium Gray

Gender: Male

• War Torn Veteran • Stubborn

• Alcoholic

Body: Poor (Fighting)

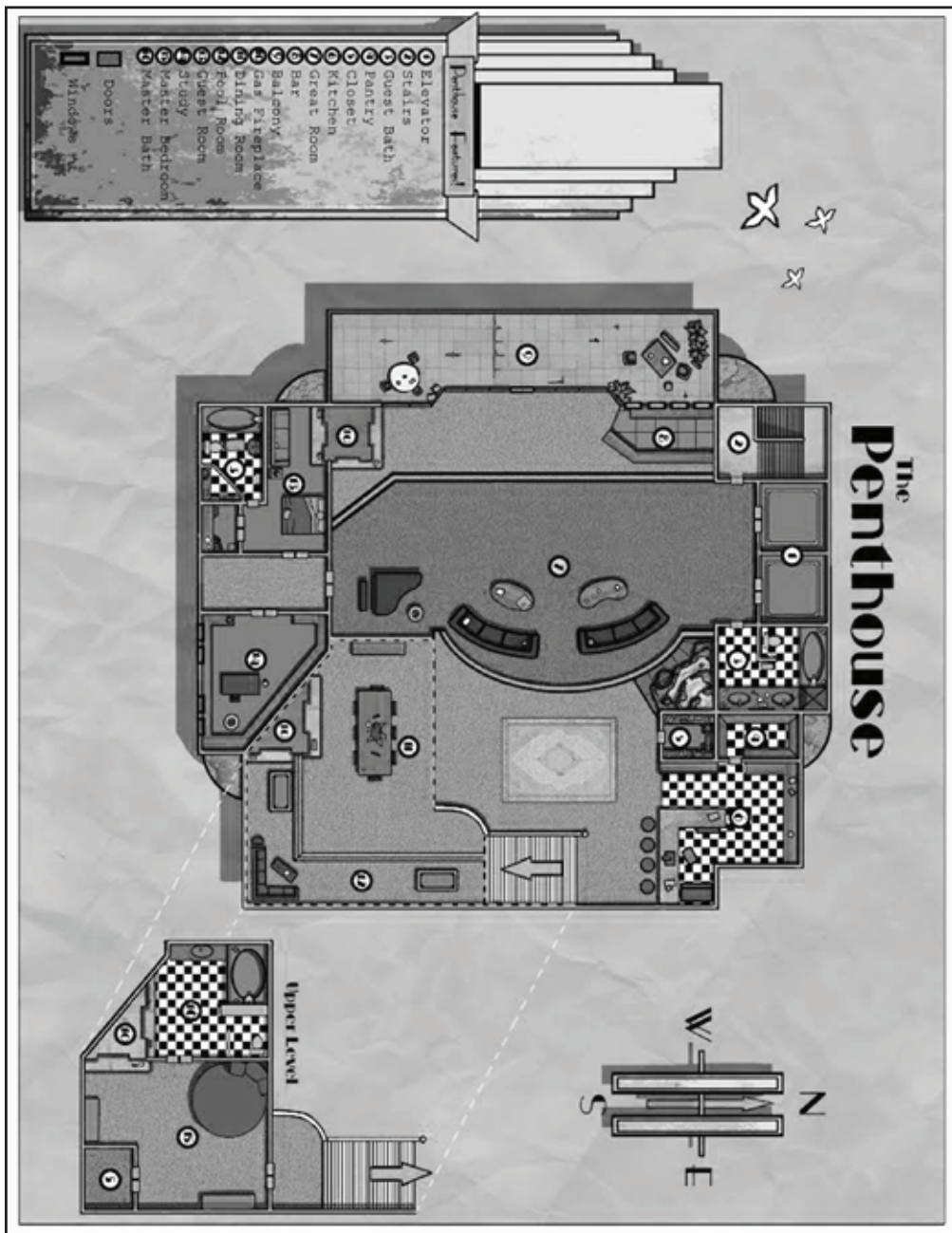
Finesse: Normal (Shooting; Skulking)

Smarts: Normal (Knowledge – Military; Knowledge – Carpentry; Ingenuity; Knowledge – Auto mechanics)

Spirit: Normal (Intimidation)

Items: 1911 Colt .45, cigarettes, lighter, flask of rot gut whiskey, photos of dead buddies from the war

A larger version of the penthouse apartment map for "Search By Night".





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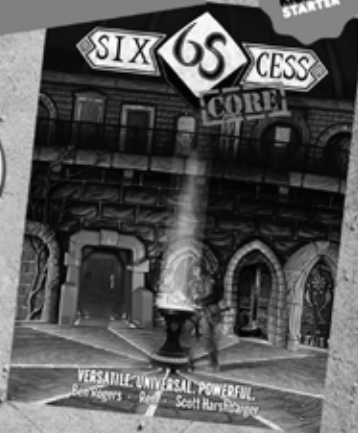
Invasion of the Fourth Reich



They came from a clear sky, without warning. Black parachutes floating serenely from a sky devoid of aircraft. It was the last serene day we'd ever experience. We were invaded, from another dimension, by Nazis! Invaders from a universe where the Nazis didn't lose WWII.



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FILM NOIR



"For sixteen years, I've been a cop. For sixteen years, I've been living in dirt and take it from me... some of it's bound to run off on you. You get to hate people; everyone you meet." -- *Shield for Murder* (1954)

The Big Crime is a roleplaying game that faithfully and meticulously emulates the bleak, shadow-drenched crime thrillers of the 1940s and '50s – *Out of the Past*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep* and hundreds more! Every aspect of the game was designed to evoke the pessimistic, desperate tone of these films!

- Extensive information about film noir, so that even those unfamiliar with these movies will be able to get in on the fun right away!
- A game system that plays fast and “feels” like the source material in every way imaginable!
- Rules for Temptation that immerse players in the world of film noir!
- A quick-and-dirty character creation system that is neither random, nor points-based.
- Advice for players, aimed at helping them embrace the genre!
- Advice for the Director, including details about integrating cinematography to enhance the authenticity of the games he runs!
- *Search By Night*, an exciting ready-to-play adventure for you and your group to enjoy!