

# niteside dreams

## A Film Noir Setting For Call Of Cthulhu

It was two thirty in the morning, and raining. In the City it was always two thirty in the morning and raining.

Kim Newman, *The Night Mayor*

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# A Word of Explanation



This is an unofficial, alternate setting for Chaosium's **Call of Cthulhu RPG**.

It somehow strips off part of Lovecraft's supernatural horror from the proceedings and replaces it with the style and mood of film noir and hard-boiled stories. A liberal dash of *weird-menace* flavour was added to season the whole.

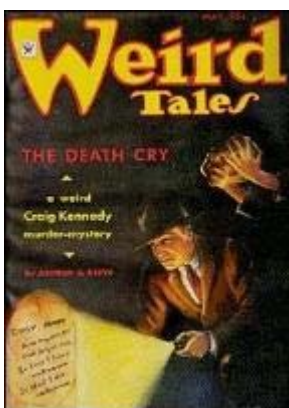
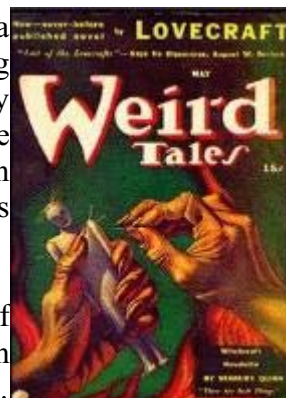
The actual work on **niteside dreams** (a title inspired by Frank Bellknap Long's memoir of his friendship with lovecraft "*HPL, A Dreamer on the Nightside*") started after a highly constructive discussion (as usual) on the *Strange Aeons* mailing list, about the possibility of mixing game systems and setting one-shot games in the universe portrayed in the movie "*Cast a Deadly Spell*": fast, sharp, horrific and yet tongue-in-cheek. One thing led to another and we started typing. Soon, matters such as the development of a sound set of alternate rules gave way to extensive discussion on the background setting.



The overall results should not displease estimators of the Providence Gentleman's opus, as film noir sensibility was not far from his overall worldview.

But sure, with the addition of a dry, hard-boiled sense of humour and the twists of a magically changed reality, it makes for a different adventure atmosphere.

For starters, we decided to develop **niteside dreams** as a quick-and-dirty plug-in kind of thing, so that anyone owning a copy of the *Call of Cthulhu* rulesbook and a few other easy to get and inexpensive essentials can start and play and have fun (hopefully). A lengthier and more detailed version soon surfaced through discussion, thanks to the many suggestions that were made about the setting in particular.

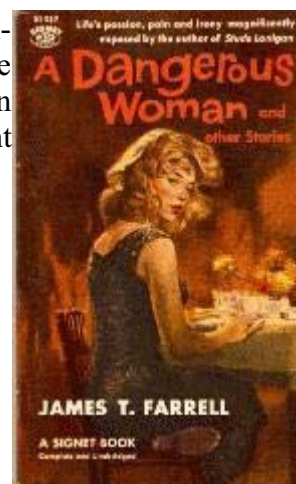


For the time being, this pages will feature the complete set of *Call of Cthulhu* adaptations and background information on the game world we developed from the original core of notes.

Time permitting, we plan to add a full length, stand-alone version of this game and setting, using *The Window*, a high quality, freely distributed, free-form game system, as our engine of choice.

Most probably, many will find this setting ideal for non-canonical one-offs (and we strongly recommend it for the April Fool's Night Game, or for something different on Halloween's Night), while we hope that a few others might

feel like giving a try to a longer, more articulate campaign play.



# mean streets

Simple things can breed terror. A lonely road, a cloud masking the moon, the cry of a cat, or the eyes of a bent old man... meaningless things, but sometimes charged with weird menace....

Hugh B. Cave, *Modern Nero*

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**niteside dreams** takes place in a post-war, 1940s/1950s parallel world in which magic is a commonplace practice, existing side by side with science and technology, and commanding a similar status.

Here we will define the basic traits of this world, that serve as a background for the adventures, where they deviate more drastically from the '40s-'50s we know; this is followed by a few practical tricks to help said background come alive.

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## Magic & Society

### Origins

Magic has always been an element of human culture, from the most ancient sciamanic rituals performed by cavemen up to the fringe magic practitioners surviving in the superstitious shadows of the Illuminist revolution.

Magic became better-known in the late 1800's as enlightened students of the occult began to systematically study esoteric tomes and form Occult circles and Societies. From dark practice to quaint entertainment to serious scholarly pursuit, the field evolved through the romantic nineteenth century, to emerge as an established set of facts and practices at the dawn of the new century.

By 1920 a populist magic revival was under way, spurred on by organisations such as the Golden Dawn, the Freemasons, etc.

Reaction to the Great War and the horrendous waste of life probably made humanity less inclined to trust the orthodox Church, which denounced magic as a tool of the Devil.

Religious schisms, sects, cults and suchlike flourished in the 1920 - 1940 period, whilst the power of the Church (and other orthodox religions such as Islam, Buddhism et al) was slowly but greatly eroded.

Things reached a balance when the Catholic Church relented in its attack against magic. Currently there are still quite a few excommunicated spells (all the necromancy ones, to start with), while the Church accepts and even tacitly support things like healing spells and the like. A radical Christian sect centered in the Salem area still opposes any form of magic as the work of the Devil - and a few other groups of this kind exist in the world. A magic-oriented dissident branch of the Church is also active, commonly known as "The Church of Our Lord Spellcaster". Finally, magic-based pagan religions are much more

widespread and influential than they used to be - you can't call them "ignorant natives" anymore, after all.

In everyday life a 50-50 mix of old-school Christians (chiefly older people) and new-age believers (children of the Bright Young Things era) who embraced the new ways had to learn to coexist and face the future.

*And those surviving 1920's characters can sit around and talk about the good old days when you rarely saw a spell, nowadays you have to be careful who you shout at in case you get cursed for real, it was much simpler when an Elder Sign and a .45 was all you needed...*

## **The War Years**

It was logical to assume that some kind of magic application would be devised during the war years, first in Britain (to face the onslaught of the Axis forces) and later in the United States.

Detection magic can be used as a quickly deployed and often more precise substitute for radar. Also, you can equip aircraft with precision targetting systems by simply putting a medium on board.

Similar applications of simple magical effects were used during the war in place of mine detectors, to enhance the nightsight ability of snipers, and for many small scale support activities.

For all practical purposes, the mundane/magic alternative currently dominating the '40s society was first established and became a standard through the wartime.

But it was as the conflict soured that the magical heavyweights entered the field.

Nazis were evil.

So their magic was the worst possible in terms of morals and style, and was finally deployed as on the Eastern front in the face of relentless Russian opposition: vast undead armies, powered by mass human sacrifices (a.k.a. Final Solution) that were fully known and comprehended only after the end of the conflict.

In the last few years mighty strange tales have been told by some veterans, tales that would have the Nazi party backed by some Great Evil Entity, and the highest ranks of the Regime as sort of priests of some unnamable cult. No proof has so far emerged to support these stories.

The mass destruction Unique Deadly Spell used to end the war by smithing the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and later became the "Deterrent" instrumental in maintaining the Balance of Power finally showed that the Allies could play the same game of the Axis, if for higher moral reasons (?)

Moral alibis apart, something is weighting heavily on the conscience of a nation.

The use of magic made by the Nazis and against the Japanese targets left a black stain on the popularity of spellcasting. Necromancy and Dead magic, already seen by many as against morals, were fully rejected by all the major western nations. Due to the high strategic importance of some magical practices, however, the citizens of the two Power Blocks are currently subject to a heavy campaign to reestablish magic as a friendly, positive force.

## **Now**

Now, in 1940s, man places his faith in a mix of science and sorcery. Since magic has only become popular in the last 20 years there are no established magical marketplaces being exploited by big business (other than those markets such as zombies exploited by organised crime figures who needed a new source of income). Charlatans are many, miracles are still big news, every businessman wants an edge over his competitors and the law of supply and demand means that there are plenty of mugs out there to be fleeced. Real sorcerors are most respected by those in the know, and it still holds true that 'it is not what

you = know it is who you know'.

Industry is getting back to peace-time production after many years of war effort, and a few interesting solutions are being dreamed up by enterprising tycoons.

Industries mass-producing cheap, short-lived, one shot magical gadgets are a new, fresh field of employment and money-making. Imagine long benches with people sitting and "imprinting" with a few magic points an amulet after the other.

The expenditure of magic points leaves the workers exhausted but otherwise undamaged. They'll only need to sleep and recuperate. And is a perfect reason for the deserted city streets at night (a classical noir cliché). Cue to huge dormitory districts in the suburbs, and soul-less masses like those seen in "Metropolis".

The industrial process also has another side: if zombies make great bodyguards, how do they perform when it comes to line-production? Unless you need a very delicate manipulation (zombies being clumsy), a factory full of undead is the best you could wish: no vacations, no unions, no problems with overtime...

You can now also imagine a zombie import racket - the advantages over illegal immigrants are obvious. So: humans working in magical-manufacturing factories, and zombies working on mundane production lines.

But there are some obstacles in the way of this dream-image.

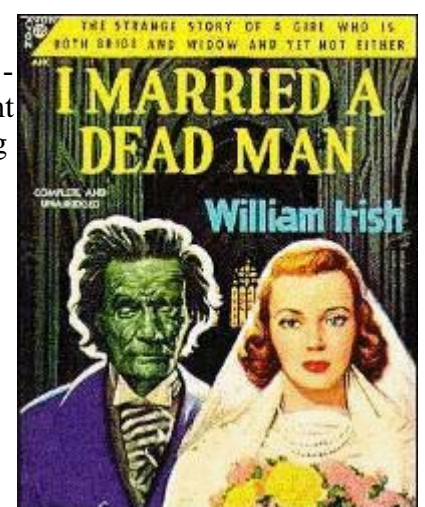
The Governments of many nations had to face a sudden surge of magical practices, creating new laws and new Departments delving with the growing field of magical crimes and misdemeanors - even if the field grew much faster than the legislator's attempts to handle it, and much of what they know about it all was hype.

First attempts were generally botched and ineffective at best: the Magical Restriction Act of '21 simply meant that a lot of people made a lot of money selling not only bootlegger booze but also and chiefly lucky charms and love potions during Prohibition. The Act was revoked in the early '30, but by that time a lot of the original bootleggers had emplyed part of their fat income to become virgins again, starting respected careers in politics and in the stock exchange. As a result, a common set of laws for Magic is still long to come, and the many gray areas are being exploited by the crooked and the mean.

The Zombie Question is a classical exhample.

The reason why zombies are problematic is not that they may have rights - it's that it's necromantic practice. And a good number of people who might accept glowing lampposts and anti-aging amulets still object to shambling hordes of the walking dead. If there was one kind of magic that Congress would pass laws against, it would be necromancy. (And if there was one kind of magic that would turn into a thriving underground trade...)

Developed, first world countries have strict laws against zombie creation (not to mention necromancy in general, & demonology etc.) These laws are strictly enforced with severe penalties, which drives up the prices for the illegal trade, which would make it an attractive market for organized crime. This basically means lots of opportunities for corruption of police and government officials, too. Meanwhile, things are much more loose in the underdeveloped third world countries. They may or may not have laws officially on the books to appease the developed nations, but such laws, if they exist, are much more loosely enforced. (Just bribe the right official...)



Plans for the creations of a specifically trained Law Enforcement Agency (Dead Enforcement Agency, or DEA) is underway, but is facing a serious oppositions from the high-ups in the ATF that have so far taken care of this side of the business.

The situation, by the way, is handled in a totally different way by the Eastern Block: in a mandatorily materialistic country, good citizens can serve the party even after their death (however, there's no afterlife, right?).

In the USSR we have finally a perfect home for our zombie workers.

*Heck, they might even send a zombie to the Moon, one of these days!*

*And the classic Deighton line "I was shaded by two STASI zombies" assumes a totally different meaning.*

In the western world the employment of zombies other than by crime syndicates is certainly frowned upon - it smells either of Nazi revival (which is bad) or of Communism (which is worse - cue to MacCarthy-like investigations and witch-hunts). Even so, the option is being explored by highly influential (= string-pulling) industries, limiting their use to a few factories, working zombies in nightshifts as an experimental evaluation of the resource.

And the question of sentient undead - if any - rights is still open.

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## Establishing the Background

### Make Your Own Standard Noir City Setting

Noir can be regarded as an urban genre, or even better an **indoor** genre. We will not explore here the reasons (economical? artistic?) that led the pioneers of the genre to use chiefly urban interiors as a setting for their movies, but will use this general attitude to better establish the setting mood in our games.

Fist off, a few Standard City Districts

**The Waterfront:** docks and warehouses, shacks where night-guards spend their time reading sports-papers and listening to late-nite radio while the night rolls by.

The place is wet, cold, foggy.

A siren can cut the silence once in a while.

Dock-workers arrive early and sometimes stay late, wearing rough plaid or leather jackets in the cold or tank-tops in the heat, talking in grunts, wary of strangers. Anyone down on his luck and strong enough can join their ranks, but it will take time to join their tribe.

**Chinatown:** small streets running at strange angles, filled with exposed merchandise that from the shops spills on the pavements. People arguing loud in foreign tongues, kids running and playing, beautiful and dangerous women in short "Suzy Wong" dresses walk by, while huge crates to and from laundries are loaded on old lorries.

At night, large areas are deserted.

Behind closed doors, in clubs and restaurants, rich western thrillseekers will get more than what they bargained for.

Women disappear in this place, never to be seen again.

And anything can be found. For a price.

**The Business District:** is where PIs will probably have their offices, on sidestreets, with windows facing brickwalls. The streets are busy, cabs crowding them together with black big-shor limos.

Not all the business carried out in this district is legit, of course. Somebody owns a fair share of the Mayor, while the Chief of the Police is still available for cheap. Developers feud for land and influence, and for making more money. Sometimes someone jumps from one of the scy-scrapers.



Sometimes somebody helps him doing it.

**On the Beach:** a few idle rich prefer the sound of the sea to the whisper of money coupling in their safes, and wooden bungalows are here to provide'em some distraction. The music is loud and popular, parties and barbeques frequent. Writers, and character actors live here, together with a few climbers looking for the right catch, and some of those guys that make a habit of sneaking in the back to take a look at the garbage. You never know where a string to pull can be found.

**Quality Street:** this is where the rich and powerful come to pet their dogs and their wives, where local politicians keep their golfclubs and bottles. Each villa has a name, a gravelly path and an imposing door behind which lurks a butler that might not be the murderer, not this time. Some of them have conservatories, pools, stables, dependances where the handyman lives with his wife. Few cars go along these streets, but when they do often it's fast, and following a none too straight path.

**The Suburbs:** being the place where the working man lives, the suburbs are often deserted - as the majority is at work by day and fast asleep by night. A few kids playing stickball in the street during the day, maybe, a few shopkeepers standing on the doors of their shops, the occasional cab, but little else is seen on the streets. And by night the streets are truly deserted and menacing. The only light comes from a few lampposts and the all-nite cafe where the workers on their way to or from their shift stop for a donut and a cup of tar.

## Other Elements of Style

Dampen the lights.

Set every scene you can at night, and indoors.

If you can't have a deserted street, fill it with a faceless crowd.

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## Name-Dropping

**Foods:** Coca-Cola, Campbell's, Kellogg's, Nestlé, Kraft, Del Monte

**Smoking Items:** Camel, Lucky Strike, Huppmann, Coronas Major, Gitanes, Ronson

**Weapons:** Smith & Wesson, Colt, Remington, Purdie, Brochadt-Luger, Mauser, Bodeo

**Magazines:** Cosmopolitan, Vogue, National Geographic, Harper's Bazaar, The New Yorker, House Beautiful, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Astounding Stories, Reader's Digest, The Beano, Weird Tales

**Writing Implements:** Parker, Aurora, Waterman, Fabiano

**Toilet:** Gillette, Aqua Vellv, Procter & Gamble White/Ivory Soap, Roger & Gallet, Jurgens Lotion, Noxzema, Prep, Avon, Coppertone

**Perfumes:** My Sin, Shalimar, Chanel n.5

**Leather Goods, Accessories:** Gucci, Hermes, Ray-Ban

**Over the Counter Drugs:** Aspirin, Band-Aid, Listerine, Vick's Vaporub, Alka-Seltzer

**Precision Equipment:** Karl Zeiss, Eberhardt

**Motor Vehicles:** Alfa Romeo, Mercedes-Benz, Tucker, Citroen, Renault, Daimler, Bentley, Cadillac, Ford



# hard boiled

It got darker. The glare of the red neon sign spread farther and farther across the ceiling. I sat on the bed and put my feet on the floor and rubbed the back of my neck.

I got up on my feet and went over to the bowl in the corner and threw cold water on my face. After a little while I felt better, but very little. I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun. I put them on and went out of the room.

Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*

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Characters for **niteside dreams** are slightly different from those used in a normal Call of Cthulhu game. Not only they are acting in a magic-rich environment, but they also have to follow the classical clichés of hard-boiled and noir fiction.

What follow are fast and loose guidelines for adapting the standard rules to help the keeper and players entering this new world.

## Character Creation

As per Call of Cthulhu rulesbook (any version, any edition), or variant thereof. Starting characters for this game do not differ from the basic CoC character when it comes to basic stats, character development points or skill allotments.

We personally favour Pagan's optional approach (as published in "Realm of Shadows"), in which you pool all your character creation points and spend them to draw a character closer to the player's concept than to a published template; but that's a matter of tastes and we can't expect all keepers to own the campaign book or share our preferences.

Also, please note that wherever possible we will stick to the basics as published in the Call of Cthulhu rulesbook (5th edition), the only book we're pretty sure all interested parties own or have ready access to, summarizing those part we lift or adapt from other sources. Freely available, net-based resources will be privileged whenever possible.



Individual keepers are free (more than that, they're openly invited) to use any other resource, option or rule-twist they feel will make their games more entertaining.

## Skills

All the basic skills in the 1920s Investigator Sheet, as they are the closer (if not arguably the same) to the ones representing a 1940s background.

A few Magical Skills will be added, in the Magic section, for those characters proficient in the wizardly arts.

## Carreers



Finally we come to the part where we can observe the game world as it directly influences our game: in a noirish setting, Lovecraft's classical characters (reclusive erudites, poets, dreamers) must leave the scene to other, rougher archetypes.

### Suggested character carreers:

- Criminal
  - Entertainer
  - Journalist
  - Lawyer
  - Musician
  - Police Detective
  - Private Investigator
- Dilettante

All of the above are featured prominently in noir films and novels, so that examples and inspiration sources abound. Also featured, if less frequently, are

- Artist
- Clergyman
- Doctor of Medicine
- Engineer
- Hobo



Many variants can be created starting from the simple templates of the above, so that variety should not be a problem.

Chaosium's "1920s Investigator's Companion" offers dozens of carreers among which to chose, some particularly useful in this setting. Other career collections are available.

More characters professions, unique to the **niteside dreams** setting can be found in the Magic section.



## War Experience

Noir is a post-war genre.



While a case could be made about a few noir precursors from the thirties (Hammett's novel "The Maltese Falcon" chief among these), the war as "death of all illusions" is an important element in setting the general mood.

During the War (a large scale conflict similar to World War II, and briefly described in the Setting section), men lost their hopes and dreams facing death daily, while women at home learned of their potential doing "men's jobs" and keeping the war machine going.

To put the above in game terms, we'll apply a slightly revised version the old war experience system published by GDW in

### ***Green and Pleasant Land.***

Any man eligible for service (CON>7) has probably seen action during the conflict. This adds 1 point of EDU for each year spent in service, and costs him 1d4 SAN per year - to a maximum of 4 years.

Women eligible for Civil Services (working in factories, e.g.) have it lighter, gaining in EDU as men but losing only 1d4 SAN overall (comes from tension, from knowing that you are building killing devices, and from realizing that you're not the porcelain doll they let you believe).

The increase in EDU creates a bonus in Character Points that can be spent on the following skills

**Men** - Hide, Climb, Credit Rating, First Aid, Handgun, Make Maps, Rifle, Submachine Gun, Sneak, Spot Hidden, Swim, Operate Heavy Machinery/Pilot Aircraft

**Women** - Drive Auto, Accounting, Credit Rating, Electrical Repair, First Aid, Mechanical Repair, Operate Heavy Machinery, Spot Hidden

In addition to poor health, among the factors that might have spared the character's his or her war years we can remember age, wealth and status, living abroad, being in jail or being in the police forces.

## **Weapons and Equipment**

Refer to the Cthulhu Rulesbook for available items.

Generally, noir characters have limited firepower and fights tend to be short and unpleasant for all involved. The Violence section holds a few stats and general guidelines.

Additions to the equipment list can be extracted from the Sections about Magic and Setting. As already stated in the background section, in our gaming world we decided to introduce a magical/mundane duality, the rule of thumb being: ***"Wherever both a magical and a technological solutions to a given problem are possible, both will be available and in competition on the market."***

A Name-Dropping chapter is included in the Background Section to help you establish a more coherent setting by naming brand-names (if it works for Stephen King it will work also for you).

We usually give our Call of Cthulhu characters a minimum list of default items they have with themselves at the onset of an adventure, and we'll do the same here.

Unless differently stated we'll assume that all characters in play own:

- lighter or box of matches
- small pocket knife, swiss-army style
- pen and notebook
- handkerchief

- a handfull of coins

Magically inclined characters can add to the above a single small amulet or lucky charm.

# shots in the night

Cairo smiled and took a short compact flat black pistol out of an inner pocket. "You will please," he said, "clasp your hands together at the back of your neck."

Dashiell Hammett - The Maltese Falcon

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## Violence at Work

Weapons of the 1940s come in both revolver (6 bullets) and semi-automatic (7 bullets) flavour.

Basic calibres are

- **.22** : a lady's toy - 1D6 damage  
*Cairo's short compact flat black pistol*
- **.32** : general purpose - 1D8 damage
- **.38** : cops and robbers - 1D10 damage
- **.45** : heavy duty - 1D10+2 damage

Basic skill for all of the above is 20%.

Revolvers fail on a 00 roll, autos on a 99 or 00 roll.

Easy.



Heavier firepower is usually absent from noir movies. Even the otherwise ubiquitous Tommy Gun & Sawed-Off Shotgun are rarely seen in action in proper Noir.

Keepers are advised to remember that both in hard-boiled and noir films violence was more hinted at than actually shown. So these weapons are more for menacing people, not so much to kill them off. Of course players will not stick to this rule, and you can find all the stats you like in the Main Rulesbook, any edition.

Other means of inflicting violence upon your neighbour are

- **Blackjack** - a leather pouch filled with lead pellets, the weapon of choice to precipitate your foe in a gulf of darkness for a few hours so that he can wake up in the office with the dead guy and the cops coming up the stairs to ask unpleasant questions. Give it 1D8 damage plus any bonus that applies, and concede the wielder the possibility to stun the target. Starts at 40% skill.
- **Brass Knuckles** - a tough-guy standard, can be replaced by a small roll of quarters. Gives a +2 bonus to punch damage, it hurts a lot and will be used any time someone has to be given "a lesson". Girls packing one of these are usually considered comedy relief.
- **Broken Bottle** - counts as a nasty knife (1D4+2 damage, basic skill 25%), and unless you are in a

casual barfight it means you are facing one sick guy that will use it on your face.  
Go and see a doctor for that cut.

- **Garrote** - downtown stuff, probably used by foreigners living in the docks area or specialist killers for the mob (in which case it can be considered some kind of signature weapon). The base skill is 15%, and the victim has to face suffocation (apply drowning rules).
- **Knife** - up-close and personal, the problem-guy kind of weapon; Roman Polanski uses one to slash Jack Nicholson's nose in *Chinatown*. Assume 1D4/1D4+2 (plus damage bonus when feasible) for switchblades and dirks. The basic skill starts at 25%
- **Poison** - a dame kind of thing, but also a good alternative to a blackjack application; Sidney Greenstreet uses a mild poison to knock out Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*. Poisons have a characteristic POT that must be crossed on the Resistance Table as an active characteristic against the characters passive CON. A narcotic will have generally a POT of 15, while strong poison will be over 20. Times of action can vary depending on the Keeper's choice. An antidote could not be available, giving you only a few hours of life (cfr. *D.O.A.*)

To the above, the enterprising keeper can also add all the damages that can be inflicted by a band of tough-guys (possibly led by Lee Marvin) that simply get to the character and then

- throw him down a few flight of stairs
- punch him and then kick him while he is down
- throw him through a shop-window (usually a florist)
- push him off a bridge
- throw him off a train, or under it
- you can imagine the rest...

Eventualities such as being hit by a runaway car in a back-alley or being pushed off-road by a car by night on a solitary stretch of road are also not to be excluded.

And talking about cars...

Simulated accidents will also be a common occurrence, as they both hide the hand of the killer and will help him (or her, or them) to fraud the insurance company.

Therefore, once the character has been made unconscious either by poison, alcohol overdose or by a rightfull application of the blackjack, he or she will face a death threat ranging from the commonplace - locked in the garage with the car motor running (Ida Lupino does in her husband Alan Hale in *They Drive By Night*) - to the truly vicious - placed at the wheel of a car running down a mountain road (Martin Landau tries to see Cary Grant off in *North by Northwest*, which is not a proper Noir but...)

more things  
that are  
dreamt of

The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom.

H.P. Lovecraft, The Call of Cthulhu

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## Magic Part 1 - Philosophical Musings

Here comes the hard part: mixing magic in a modern setting can be tricky. We already established the background in (hey!) the Background Section. Now we have to go deeper.

**Q:** If magic works in this world, how much does it influence everyday life? Are cars running on gas or on "magic"? How do telephones work?

The approach we are going for is: magic is costly, both in terms of material components and personal energy.

So, while it's still possible to create a car that runs on magical energy (for instance), it's cheaper and more practical to go for regular petrol drinking engines.

On the other hand, some form of low-end, consumer oriented magic industry is perfectly suited for the setting. We'll have therefore a world in which small luck charms, love potions, protection spells, precharged crystal balls and other similar stuff are available for a modicum price, and can be used instead of (respectively) life insurance, professional matchmakers, house and car alarms and telephones.

To the above, and just for kicks, we can also introduce the following: wherever an alternative exists between magical and mundane, both options are available. Does a headache charm work better than aspirine? What's better, a crystal ball or a telephone?

Both alternatives will have their estimators and their detractors.

Think about PC vs Mac, Gasolie vs Diesel, Vegetarian vs Omnivore to get an idea of the way the thing might turn out in a discussion. Generally speaking, magic is for the better off, and so carries a small amount of status.

So we can imagine a ladder-thing when it comes to magic, prices and prestige

**a - consumer magic** - e.g., ready made charms and potions

**b - over the counter personalized magic** - small scale, mass produced, Brand X lucky charms, mild potions etc.

**c - over the counter personalized magic** - big scale, mass produced, Big Name Brand stuff, or artisan-produced personal items

*around here we border the economical feasibility line. What follows is expensive and so reserved to an elite; what if a father needs a rare designer spell to save the life of his hailing son? You've got an adventure hook there...*

**d - legit designer magic** - Big Name made to order items and spells

**e - personally researched magic** - done by a warlock for his own personal use, virtually above the law

**Yeah, the Law.**

I guess a revenant or a zombie is a succession attorney's worst nightmare.

We'll have to imagine a whole new set of laws.

Magic is an alteration of the ongoing, plain vanilla reality.

Is there a degree up to which we can alter reality?

Probably there is, something along the line that you can alter reality as long as your alteration does not extends to a third party's reality.

But to some, rules are just frosting on the cake.

So we get

**f - bootleg magic** - necromancy, voodoo, soul-twisting etc

Much more on the Laws regulating the use of magic in the USA and in some other countries can be found in the Background Setting section.

**Q:** What's magic to the people in this world?

We'll be as materialistic and cynical as possible (in perfect noir style), and go for "magic as a consumer's good".

Hence people uses it, buys and sells it, craves it, amasses great quantities of it. Might even kill for it. And probably does.

Another angle is the psychological and social level of the thing.

Does people still believe in gods?

Yes ("Magic is the greatest miracle" makes for a good slogan).

And then, people can believe anything they think will benefit them (another noir-tinged reflection).

Here we are on a delicate ground.

*Please notice: the following is for satirical and gaming purposes only; we do not want to offend anybody's beliefs.*



Let's not forget that this is still a (heavily manipulated) Lovecraftian universe.

Hence, Religion (any kind), is essentially a form of placebo - the religious myths being just distorted interpretations of what we remember of the history of the Great Old Ones.

Having established this, there are probably quite a few excommunicated spells (all the necromancy ones, to start with), while the Church might accept and even support things like healing spells and the like. A radical Christian sect centered in the Salem area probably opposes any form of magic as the work of the Devil - and a few other groups of this kind exist in the world.

A magic-oriented dissident branch of the Church is also likely, something along the lines of a "Church of Our Lord Spellcaster".

Finally, magic-based pagan religions are probably much more widespread and influential - you can't call them "ignorant natives" after all.

Refer to the Background Setting section for further discussion of the above.

More generally, the widespread use of magic to modify everyday reality has some heavy social effects: some people (those that have access to magical manipulation especially) will see the world as full of opportunities while many others will adopt a more fatalistic outlook, in a world in which magic means a further decrease in certainties.

We're piling disillusionment upon disillusionment.

Which is fine, by noir standards (and still in a Lovecraftian vein).

More details on the impact of magic on everyday life are to be found in the Background section.

---

## **Magic Part 2 - Bean Counting**

Now we have to translate the above musings in game terms.

The Call of Cthulhu magic system (or lack thereof) is perfectly suited for the traditional setting, but lets us down badly when we face a magic-rich environment.

One thing is certain: this being a magic-rich environment in which magic is commonplace spells cost no sanity at all for casting; the spell effects, on the other hand, if particularly nasty, should be treated as usual according to the shock table found in the Cthulhu rulesbook.

But we still need a way to cast them in the first place.

So we dug out an old copy of RuneQuest, and took a look at the "Spirit magic" and "Sorcery" sections.

The main difference between Call of Cthulhu and RuneQuest is that you do not normally increase your starting POW in CoC, so that sacrificing POW is really a once-in-a-lifetime thing (if you are smart). This makes the rather common POW sacrifices of RQ much more dramatic under CoC/nd rules.

### **Spirit Magic**

We'll skip the part about the rituals required to become a shaman, as they are rather complicated. The Keeper will have to find a suitable way for regulating the access to spirit magic (you go to schools, it runs in the family, there's a 15% probability, whatever), and make up his own rituals to fit the tone of his campaign.

The character learning spirit magic will have to be initiated, by sacrificing 1 or 2 POW points. Therefore, the learning of spirit magic is restricted in this setting to characters starting with a Power value equal or

above 15.

However, here's how Spirit Magic works: the caster has a Spellcasting ability equal to his POWx5 %.

Each enchanting spell has a cost in POW points (usually 1 or 2) and needs a "focus" to be cast (trinkets, amulets, tattoos, stuff...). The Focus subsequently acts as a spell activator, allowing the caster to use the spell without the need to memorize it.

Spirit Magic Spells are passive so once cast can be forgotten and they'll continue to work. Perfect for creating marketable amulets and the like.

On the other hand, much cheaper, mass produced Focuses are currently marketed for a moderate price in the **niteside dreams** world. They are enchanted by Magic point expenditure, so that their charge lasts only for a fixed number of castings, and then have to be replaced or recharged. The Law strictly requires of manufacturers that the exact number of charges, counterindications and safety regulations be printed on a small label attached to the focus.

## Sorcery

The good news - anyone can learn sorcery as long as he finds someone to teach him, as it's a more mechanistic thing than spirit magic (see below). This education can range from cheap "Teach Yourself Sorcery" courses advertised on the pages of "Weird Tales" to highly exclusive Sorcery schools (see below for more), usually abroad, like in "My daughter is in an exclusive Sorcerous College in Switzerland"

*He thinks so: she ran away from school to follow a sweet talking no-good and is currently working as an "entertainer" down in Chinatown - this is a noir setting, remember.*

The bad news: it's more complicated, casting spells is Magic Point-expensive and requires constant concentration.

So here's how it works.

By studying sorcery, the character gains the following skills:

- **Spellcasting** (actually doing it, the basic skill needed)
- **Intensity** (that lets him tune the intensity of the spell)
- **Duration** (that lets him gauge the duration of the spell effects)
- **Range** (you guess it...)
- **Multispell** (the ability to actually cast more spells in the same time, combining them. Pretty advanced stuff)

Each of the above skills starts at a basic level given by the formula

**(DEX-10)/2+(INT-10)+(POW-10)**

*yes, we know, it looks ugly*

So Harvey Walters, the bloke they use as an example of character creation in the Cthulhu book, with DEX 12, INT 17 and POW 9, would have in the end a total of 7% as a starting skill value (what RQ rules call the Magic Bonus) . Not much, but believable as the starting level of a non-professional spellcaster.

And any character gains 1d6% for each week spent studying sorcery.

A basic spell works at intensity 1, for 10 minutes at a 10 meter range and costs 1 Magic Point to cast.

Increasing Magic Points expenditure by 1 doubles one of the three parameters (so to double all three, you

have to spend 3 Magic Points).

**Memory Requirements:** A sorcery spell takes up 1 point of INT.

Professional Magic Users start with a higher basic % in magic skills

**Warlock** - Botany, Credit, Fast Talk, Library Use, Occult, Spot Hidden; Magic (Spellcasting, Duration and Intensity starting at 50%, Multispell at 25%)

---

## Learning Spells

**Mystical Orders and Sorcery Schools** - the equivalent of lodges, clubs and colleges for the well to do.

Some of said clubs, dealing with Spirit Magic, are the later extension of those old pagan practices (like the Golden Dawn considered itself an extension of ancient Celtic mysticism) that have not maintained their religious nature. In a world in which magic works so fine, something like the Golden Dawn is bound to be by the mid-'40s in the same league of the Rotary Club.

*While we are at it - many of the initiation rituals in shamanic religions are pretty gruesome and revolting by modern standards. It would be fun to include in a campaign a high class Mystical Order using a sanitized and "tamed", even fashionable version of the original ritual.*

Some others are Magic Schools proper, set up through the years and teaching Sorcery Spells and Skills.

Rules similar to those published in the Pagan Publishing supplement "*The Golden Dawn*" might be useful for regulating access to spells in Schools and Orders. Each of these has its own grimoire, including some exclusive spells.

The main advantage of studying magic through an Order or a School is that a given character will be allotted a number of extra character points to spend buying magic-related skills and spells; said points depend on the character abilities and skills, according to the following criteria

- POW x 0.5
- INT x 0.3
- Credit Rating x 0.5
- Occult x 0.2
- Cthulhu Mythos x 0.4

For the purposes of this setting, each spell costs as many character points to buy as Magic Points to cast.

Otherwise, a character has still two other ways to learn magic

**From an instructor:** this takes 50 hours of training from someone with skill in the spell being learned of at least 90. At the end of the training, the student receives a spell skill equal to 1d6 plus his Magic Bonus. If this is 0 or less, the spell is useless to him. Another 50 hours adds another 1d6 to his skill, and this can be continued until he is finally at a positive level. A spell teacher can train a number of students equal to his INT.

**From a Book:** a student who successfully Reads a work describing a spell and studies it for 50 hours can learn the spell by rolling his INT or less on 1d100. If he fails, he can study another 50 hours, then try his INT x 2. Then INT x 3, etc. A special Read doubles the reader's chances. A critical Read is an automatic success.

---

# Grimoire

Spell lists are not good.

They are time and space consuming and can awaken the power-player hiding even in the best roleplayer. So I won't reprint spell lists taken from Runequest, Call of Cthulhu or any other fantasy/horror setting.

You have certainly something of that kind at home: go through it and adapt what you feel suits better your games, using the general guidelines about magic given above.

Please notice: what is called "The Lesser Grimoire" in CoC has a few dozens of spells that are not directly Mythos-connected. These can be given more or less freely to players as Sorcery or Spirit Magic skills. In this case, POW/Magic Points costs and sanity expenditures no longer apply, of course.

It's logical to imagine that spells are written down in books, from the cheapest DIY thing to the most sought after, ancient treatise.

And this talking of old books is fine, as there are some musty old books that do not tell you how to cast regular spells, but can teach you a much more dangerous knowledge.

It's time to look at the Mythos.

---

## The Mythos.

OK, so what about the Great Old Ones?

Well, for starters, the GOO are well pleased with the way things are going. A society relying heavily on magic is much more open to the subtle infiltration and corruption of the Mythos.

On one hand, the commonplace use of magic, somehow lowers the overall level of Sanity in the population. The worldview of the niteside dream denizens, while close to our own, includes a few elements that really belong to the classical cultist mindset.

On the other hand, there are those that, for personal gain, are more than ready to embrace the Mythos, that they might see simply as "A much more powerful magic" (suckers!) or a way to get on top of the world (suckers again!)

We can even imagine a corrupted Order slowly introducing Mythos elements in everyday magic, in order (pun intended) to make an easier way for the return of the Great Old Ones.

So, all in all, the Mythos is alive and well and at work in this world as it is in the regular one.

You get cultists, mad wizards and strange critters all the same.

Mythos magic has almost nothing to do with regular spellcasting, so POW and Magic Points expenditures are still the same.

Sanity losses are somewhat less devastating, as our characters are used to the supernatural, and things not being what they are supposed to be (or vice versa, you figure it out). I guess a die-level reduction is in order (so 1d6 becomes 1d4, 1d12 becomes 1d10) for San losses caused by meetings with minor races and mundane-looking critters.

There are some things that are sanity shattering nonetheless - facing great Cthulhu is 1d100 no matter what. So the sanity effects of the Great Old Ones are still pretty stiff.

It has also been pointed out that cults might even be a little more public about their matters, like having public churches and regular mass (just for show).

They could worship "Pan, the Goat-Legged Young" instead of "Shub-Niggurath, the Goat with a Thousand Young". The sacrifices would take place behind closed doors and only to those that have been already been brought into the church.

So, to the unknowing masses, the Cult of Cthulhu might just be another fringe cult, like the Ahum sect, or Scientology or what. A safe way for cultists to increase their power and their hold in the world. As long as the ugly truth is kept hidden.

This kind of cult could even have unknowing faithfuls (the lower ranks), providing in good faith (!) a Magic Point reservoir for the dark deeds of the ruling orders...

As for sacrifices, once again regulations might change from state to state and nation to nation, so that in California, as long as you do not sacrifice unwilling human beings or stolen animals, anything goes.

A good reason for some cults to have their fiscal seat and assets overseas!

And finally, there's the role the Cults had in the War.

## **The Mythos and the Bomb**

*"Today Magic has known sin!"*

There's a few things that the wider public does not know about the war.

About how exactly they ended it, that is.

The most assume a Deadly Spell was cast by a few selfsacrificing magic-users over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But few have actually gone deeper, following such a reasoning

Such a powerful annihilation spell would need scores upon scores of casters, maybe working from some super-secret complex (in Los Alamos), and would most likely end the life of the casters; the actual workings of the Deadly Spell are unknown to the majority, and covered by State Security Secrecy Act.

What people does not know is, "The Bomb" was created by Cthuga Cultists

The Military was more than happy turn a blind eye on "non-ortodox" magical practices as long as the goods got delivered and the Allies stayed ahead of their German counterparts, and for the Cultists this was an unmissable opportunity for:

- getting a foothold in the Government structure
- flexing their muscles waiting for the Big Day to come
- pleasing their favourite Great Old One with a free meal and a weekend in Japan.

The Cthuga worshippers have ever since infiltrated the USA Government using its need of magic, to the point of promoting secret operations to carry over the States the magical and Mythos knowledge from the Axis research centers.

The Government is actually rather reluctant to use the Deadly Spell once again, for the simple reason that the Government is messing with forces it doesn't quite understand but knows to be dangerous.

Also, the few non-Cultist in the know fully realize that, should this concept became known, the balance of world power would shift in favour of those nations with strong magical traditions (China, South America, Haiti/Caribbean, Scotland and Ireland, the Basque region...) totally upsetting the world balance of power.

# headshots

Round up the usual suspects...

Casablanca

---

## Herbert West

Army Surgeon and Scientific Positivist

When the Uncle Sam finally got involved with the War, someone down in Washington dug out Dr. West's file and took a good reading at it.

The idea of reanimating corpses through a completely scientific method seemed just what the Allies needed to face Hitler's Undead Stormtrooper Corps in Northern Africa and in the Ardennes.

So two men in black took a train down to the place in Arizona where the guy had holed up under an assumed name and offered him a lab, a staff, unlimited equipment and... subjects.

Herbert jumped at the opportunity, and after a few weeks of frantic experimentation finally produced a (barely) stable serum. He was flown to the Old Continent and set up a hospital just behind the lines. Soon the tide turned. Casualties were drastically... reduced. Evil was defeated. Men returned home to their wives.

Currently spending his senior years as a General Army Surgeon (Ret.), grown fat on the many pharmaceutical patents in his name, West still has some misgivings about the lot that they forced him to spare after the war ended, and was therefore permitted to get back.

The veterans problem is giving him nightmares, of late.

# filing cabinet

The Detective's job consists in studying the ripples forming on the water, and in discovering who threw the stone.

Alfred Hitchcock

---

## General Conventions

**niteside dreams** adventure outlines are structured in sections

- **the hook** - this is how the players get involved in the whole story
- **the case** - basic informations that can be discovered through legwork and dedication
- **the score** - what lies behind the facts, the elements that will put the players straight and force them to make a choice.
- **the twist** - the unsuspected element to tighten the atmosphere on the last reel

Ideally, Mythos references, if any, should be confined to either the score or the twist, at least in beginning scenarios.

In some cases, like the following scenario that was used to playtest the setting, Mythos references can be left completely out of the picture.

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## Ripples

### The Hook

Rebecca Mitchell has a problem - and as a fresh widow of a wealthy doctor (Elliott, killed in a car crash) she can buy someone to solve it. Fact is, in the last few weeks she has been followed. And someone's entered her house. And messed with her things in her room. She scared. And she'd be **extremely grateful** should the investigators put a plug on the case (Look at the pic. Get it?).



### **The Case**

It will not take long to learn the late good doctor's main source of income: he was doing some stiff biz faking Health Department certificates for counterfeit Brazilian zombies - for a share on the price when the corpses were sold as certified Haitian products.

Handling the good doctor's business partner - Luis "El Loco" Montero, Cuban gangster and part-time houngan, will take quite a bit of work.

The cops might like to learn a bit of what's happening, too, and will probably keep an eye on the team.

### **The Score**

The dame iced the doc for the dough.

Elliott's back from the dead, courtesy of "El Loco" and a little "life insurance" thingy the cuban had given his friend years ago, and is waiting for the right moment to exhalt his revenge on the chick - or maybe just get back together. He does not like nosey-parkers. And is dead jealous.

### **The Twist**

Faced with "The Ugly Truth"(TM), the dame might as well side with the corpse against the investigators.



# dealer's choice

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## 1 - using niteside dreams with your Gaslight/1920s campaign

In the *niteside dreams* world, magic becomes an everyday thing in the late 19th/early 20th century.

By choosing this rationalization, we made relatively easy for a keeper to graft the *niteside dreams* world onto his ongoing Gaslight/1920s campaign. All he needs, is for the players to blunder badly enough.

In this sense, this game setting can be an highly instructive demonstration of what our world could look like should the forces of darkness ever get a greater sway.

No particular modifications are necessary to the rules and background as presented; just remember to age your players' characters as needed - or introduce in the game their offspring.

---

## 2 - the tongue-in-cheek factor

Being generally the kind of guys that like a good laugh once in a while, we have presented the setting as a mix of horror, paranoia and fun.

The degree of humor in games depends completely on the Keeper's decision.

The rules and the background as they are will let you play any kind of game, from WoD-style angst-fests to Paranoia-like slapstick.

We are well satisfied with the balance as presented herein, but there you go...

---

## 3 - early noir: the 1930s

The magical word for the 1930s is: **depression**.

Please disregard such joking 1930s "celebrations" like "The Sting", and stick to darker, Hammett-inspired moods.

A few reminders are probably in order.

a - the role of women - the attitude towards the fairer sex is still in its conservative phase, so that strong willed, independent women are the exception more than the rule, and will generally have a bad reputation.

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## **4 - war-years campaign**

### **a - fifth column**

There's a war going on, and the Enemy is among us.

Players can now be OSS agents or "consultants" whose mission is to infiltrate dangerous Nazi spy-rings, stop the smuggling of secret technology (or magic), foil cunning plans devised to weaken the war effort. Innocents drawn in the machinations of the evil guy are also a good PC archetype.

### **b - la resistance**

The Nazis are here, but they'll have to fight us in every home.

A variant of the Fifth Column campaign, this moves the action to War Torn France and Paris in particular.

Now that the lights of the Ville Lumiere have been turned off, it's up to the players to keep the freedom flag flying, intercept secret messages, help war-camp fugitives and lost pilots and paratroopers reach safety behind the lines, set up daring traps.

A dirty work, but somebody's got to do it.

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## **5 - spooks - spy-oriented games, late '50s/early '60s**

We relocate to Post-War Berlin for this campaign, in which the two blocks (and as many independents as the keeper feels like) face each other across the Wall.

Please avoid Bond-style playing and go for the IPCRESS/Quiller Memorandum feel.

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## **6 - Anytown, USA**

While we stressed the suburban setting of noir, we must not forget that suburban areas still offer a lot plotwise. Think Peyton Place or, for a modern source, Twin Peaks.

The classic High Sierra is after all set primarily at a mountain resort.

So what do you need to set a game in a small town off the beaten track?

- a quiet place in the country - peopled by well-to-do, pipe smoking professionals, their permed wives and their healthy children. Add a dog if suitable.

- some city slickers for player characters - nothing better than being outsiders for enhancing the feeling of alienation

- gossip - be sure to put the rumour mill at full speed

- skeletons in the closets - a few dark secrets straining to get out in the broad daylight are just what it takes to turn an idyllic small town into a den of rabid wolves.

# slang

The sucker with the schnozzle poured a slug but before he could scam out two shamuses showed him the shiv and said they could send him over.

---

## Twists, Slugs and Roscoes: A Glossary of Hardboiled Slang

If you've ever read a hardboiled detective story, you may have come across a sentence like,

"I jammed the roscoe in his button and said, 'Close your yap, bo, or I squirt metal.'"

Something like this isn't too hard to decipher. But what if you encounter,

"The flim-flammer jumped in the flivver and faded."

"You dumb mug, get your mitts off the marbles before I stuff that mud-pipe down your mush - and tell your moll to hand over the mazuma."

"The sucker with the schnozzle poured a slug but before he could scam out two shamuses showed him the shiv and said they could send him over."

You may need to translate this into normal English just to be able to follow the plot.

Or maybe you want to seem tougher. Why get in a car when you can hop in a boiler? Why tell someone to shut up when you can tell them to close their head? Why threaten to discharge a firearm when you can say, "Dust, pal, or I pump lead!"

This is the language spoken by Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, Mike Hammer and the Continental Op. When Cagney, Bogart, Robinson and Raft got in a turf war, this is how they talked.

Now, with the help of this glossary, you too can speak it like a native!

---

*Ameche*

Telephone (e-mail)

*Ankle*

Woman (e-mail)

*Babe*

Woman (Vengeance, 37)

*Baby*

A person, can be said to either a man or a woman (Art, 52)

*Bangtails*

Racehorses (Op, 74; Partridge's)

*Barbering*  
Talking (Knockover, 70)

*Be on the nut, to*  
To be broke (Pick-Up, 3)

*Bean-shooter*  
Gun (Art, 156)

*Beezer*  
Nose (e-mail)

*Behind the eight-ball*  
On a streak of bad luck (e-mail)

*Bent cars*  
Stolen cars (Sleep, 154)

*Berries*  
Dollars (Knockover, 402; Thin, 148)

*Big house*  
Jail (Knockover, 354; Op, 59)

*Big one, the*  
Death (Falcon, 44)

*Big sleep, the*  
Death (a term coined by Chandler) (Speaking, 88)

*Bim*  
Woman (Lake, 191)

*Bindle*  
1. of heroin: Little folded-up piece of paper (with heroin inside) (Art, 54)  
2. The bundle (or "brindle") in which a hobo carries all his worldly possessions (e-mail)

*Bindle punk*  
A hobo or derelict hired to do rough or unpleasant work. (Could perhaps refer to a small time drug dealer, as well.) (Pick-Up, 116).

*Bindle stiff*  
Chronic wanderers; itinerant misfits, criminals, migratory harvest workers, and lumber jacks. Hobos who carry their own cooking utensils and blanket on their backs (ie. fry pan, stew pan, tin cup, fork, knife, spoon, etc.) From the 1890's. Called so because they carried a "bindle." A stiff was a rough, clumsy person. George and Lenny in *Of Mice and Men* are bindle stiffs. (e-mail)

*Bing*  
Jailhouse talk for solitary confinement, hence "crazy" (Thin, 148)

*Bird*  
Guy (Op, 52)

*Blip off*  
To kill (Knockover, 366)

*Blow*  
Leave (Knockover, 49; Playback, 39; Key, 164)

*Blow one down*  
Kill someone (Sleep, 123)

*Blower*  
Telephone (e-mail)

*Bo*  
Pal, buster, fellow, as in "Hey, bo" (Sleep, 172; Farewell, 8)

*Boiler*  
Car (Knockover, 69)

*Boob*  
Dumb guy (Lake, 154)

*Boozehound*  
Drunkard (Night, 3)

*Bop*  
To kill (Sleep, 76)

*Box*  
A safe (e-mail)

*Box job*

A safecracking (Art, 180)

*Brace* (somebody)

Grab, shake up (Art, 182)

*Bracelets*

Handcuffs (Op, 80)

*Break it up*

Stop that, quit the nonsense (Art, 133)

*Breeze*

To leave, go (Pick-Up, 26), also breeze off - get lost (Playback, 35)

*Broad*

Woman (passim)

*Bruno*

Tough guy, enforcer (e-mail)

*Bucket*

Car (Turner)

*Bulge*, as in "The kid had the bulge there"

The advantage (Op, 220)

*Bulls*

Plainclothes railroad cops; uniformed police; prison guards (Knockover, 380; e-mail)

*Bump*

Kill (Night, 35)

*Bump off*

Kill (Pick-Up, 32); also, bump-off - a killing (Sleep, 161)

*Buncoing some* (people)

Defrauding some people (Knockover, 205)

*Bunk*

1. As in "That's the bunk" - that's false, untrue (Op, 98)

2. As in "to bunk" - to sleep (Knockover, 395)

*Bunny*, as in "Don't be a bunny"

Don't be stupid (Pick-Up, 32)

*Burn powder*

Fire a gun (Knockover, 425)

*Bus*

Big car (Pick-Up, 72)

*Butter and egg man*

The money man, the man with the bankroll, a yokel who comes to town to blow a big wad in nightclubs. (Playback, 55) (see [reference](#))

*Button*

Face, as in "a poke in the button" (Farewell, 217)

*Buttons*

Police (Pick-Up, 29; Sleep, 66)

*Butts*

Cigarettes (Vengeance, 25)

*Buy a drink*

To pour a drink (Art, 139)

*Buzz*, as in "I'm in the dump an hour and the house copper gives me the buzz"

Looks me up, comes to my door (Art, 90)

*Buzzer*

Policeman's badge (Playback, 103)

*C*

\$100, also a pair of C's = \$200 (Vengeance, 27; Sleep, 157)

*Cabbage*

Money (Shoot, 14)

*Caboose*

Jail (from "calaboose," which derives from *calabosa*, the Spanish word for "jail") (Farewell, 8; e-mail)

*Call copper*

Inform the police (Pick-Up, 156)

*Can*

Jail (Knockover, 203; Op, 268)

*Can-opener*

Safecracker who forces open cheap safes (Speaking, 89)

*Case dough*

"Nest egg ... the theoretically untouchable reserve for emergencies" (Speaking, 88)

*Cat*

Guy (Shoot, 16)

*Century*

\$100 (Pick-Up, 32; Sleep, 162)

*Cheaters*

Sunglasses (e-mail)

*Chew*

Eat (Op, 186)

*Chicago overcoat*

A coffin (Sleep, 163)

*Chick*

Woman (Vengeance, 33)

*Chilled off*

Killed (Sleep, 78)

*Chin*

A conversation (Art, 190); also chinning = talking (Sleep, 85)

*Chin music*

A punch on the jaw (e-mail)

*Chinese angle*, as in "You're not trying to find a Chinese angle on it, are you?"

Seems to mean a strange twist, not that Chinese people are actually involved (Thin, 125)

*Chinese squeeze*

Grafting by skimming profits off the top (e-mail)

*Chippy*

Woman of easy virtue (Lake, 48)

*Chisel*

To swindle or cheat (Pick-Up, 157)

*Chiv, chive*

Knife, "a stabbing or cutting weapon" (Speaking, 87; Dain, 188)

*Chopper squad*

Guys with machine guns (Pick-Up, 88)

*Clammed*

Close-mouthed (as in clammed up) (Pick-Up, 188)

*Clean sneak*

An escape with no clues left behind (Knockover, 436)

*Clip joint*

In some cases, a night-club where the prices are high and the patrons are fleeced (Partridge's), but here, a casino where the tables are fixed (Pick-Up, 174)

*Clipped*

Shot (Pick-Up, 81)

*Close your head*

Shut up (Shoot, 16)

*Clout*

Shoplifter (1930s) (e-mail)

*Clubhouse*

Police station (Lake, 24)

*Coffee-and-doughnut*, as in "These coffee-and-doughnut guns are ..."

Could come from "coffee and cakes," which refers to something cheap or of little value. (Knockover, 400)

*Con*

Confidence game, swindle (e-mail)

*Conk*

Head (Postman, 33)  
*Cool*, as in "He cooled me"  
To knock out ?? (Playback, 140)  
*Cooler, the*  
Jail (Op, 55)  
*Cop*  
1. Detective, even a private one (Vengeance, 140)  
2. To win, as in a bet (Key, 23)  
*Copped*  
Grabbed by the cops (Op, 57)  
*Copper*  
1. Policeman (Op, 190; Key, 65)  
2. As in "All time served except his copper" - ?? (Farewell, 29)  
*Corn*  
Bourbon (as in corn liquor) (Pick-Up, 186)  
*Crab*  
Figure out (Sleep, 161)  
*Crate*  
Car (Art, 39)  
*Creep joint*  
?? Can mean a whorehouse where the girls are pickpockets, but that doesn't fit here (Pick-Up, 8)  
*Croak*  
To kill (Key, 84; Pick-Up, 86)  
*Croaker*  
Doctor (Knockover, 69)  
*Crushed out*  
Escaped (from jail) (Knockover, 372; Op, 54)  
*Cush*  
Money (a cushion, something to fall back on) (Knockover, 410)  
*Cut down*  
Killed (esp shot?) (Knockover, 210)  
*Daisy*  
None-too-masculine (Art, 201)  
*Dame*  
Woman (passim)  
*Dangle*  
Leave, get lost (Pick-Up, 3)  
*Darb*  
Something remarkable or superior (Dain, 181)  
*Dark meat*  
Black person (Dain, 37)  
*Deck*, as in "deck of Luckies"  
Pack of cigarettes (Vengeance, 36; Op, 203)  
*Derrick*  
Shoplifter (1930s) (e-mail)  
*Diapers*, as in "Pin your diapers on"  
Clothes, get dressed (Key, 74)  
*Dib*  
Share (of the proceeds) (Knockover, 400)  
*Dick*  
Detective (usually qualified with "private" if not a policeman) (passim)  
*Dinge* (Farewell)  
Black person  
*Dingus*  
Thing (Falcon, 147; Op, 11)  
*Dip*  
Pickpocket (Knockover, 377)  
*Dip the bill*

ave a drink (Sleep, 163; Art, 212)

*Dish*

Pretty woman (e-mail)

*Dive*

A low-down, cheap sort of place (Knockover, 199)

*Dizzy with a dame, to be*

To be deeply iin love with a woman (Art, 217)

*Do the dance*

To be hanged (Knockover, 446)

*Dogs*

Feet (Pick-Up, 17)

*Doll*

Woman (Pick-Up, 11), also dolly (Op, 224)

*Dope*

1. Drugs, of any sort (Farewell, 82, 143)
2. Information (Dain, 30; Op, 146; Sleep, 161)
3. As a verb, as in "I had him doped as" - to have figured for (Op, 233)

*Dope fiend*

Drug addict (Dain, 119)

*Dope peddler*

Drug dealer (Op, 52)

*Dormy*

Dormant, quiet, as in "Why didn't you lie dormy in the place you climbed to?" (Lake, 184)

*Dough*

Money (passim)

*Drift*

Go, leave (Pick-Up, 53; Sleep, 69)

*Drill*

Shoot (Knockover, 410)

*Drink out of the same bottle*, as in "We used to drink out of the same bottle."

We were close friends (Dain, 15)

*Droppers*

Hired killers (Double, 73)

*Drum*

Speakeasy (Knockover, 357)

*Dry-gulch*

Knock out, hit on head after ambushing (Farewell, 63)

*Ducat*

1. Ticket (Key, 73)
2. For hobos, a union card or card asking for alms (e-mail)

*Duck soup*

Easy, a piece of cake (Knockover, 44)

*Dummerer*

Somebody who pretends to be (deaf and?) dumb in order to appear a more deserving beggar (Knockover, 198)

*Dump*, as in "We did the dumps"

Roadhouse, club (Knockover, 431); or, more generally, any place (Art, 90)

*Dust*

1. Nothing, as in "Tinhorns are dust to me" (Pick-Up, 3)
2. Leave, depart, as in "Let's dust" (Pick-Up, 13) (also Art, 52; Sleep, 64)
3. A look, as in "Let's give it the dust" (Pick-Up, 28)

*Dust out*

Leave, depart (Op, 81)

*Dutch*

1. As in "in dutch" - trouble (Postman, 56)
2. As in "A girl pulled the Dutch act" - committed suicide (Vengeance, 122)
3. As in "They don't make me happy neither. I get a bump once'n a while. Mostly a Dutch." - ?? relates to the police (Art, 119)



*Egg*

Fellow (Knockover, 395)

*Eggs in the coffee*

Easy, a piece of cake, okay, all right (Knockover, 44; Dain, 192)

*Elbows*, as in "And there's no elbows tagging along"

Cops? "Elbow" also means a collar or an arrest. Someone being arrested will "have their elbows checked." (Knockover, 180; e-mail)

*Electric cure*

Electrocution (Key, 153)

*Fade*

Get lost (Shoot, 103)

*Fakeloo artist*

Con man (Farewell, 87)

*Fin*

\$5 bill (Playback, 11; Vengeance, 40)

*Finder*

Finger man (Speaking, 87)

*Finger*, as in put the finger on

Identify (Knockover, 380)

*Flat*

1. Broke (Knockover, 413)
2. As in "That's flat" - that's for sure (Op, 99)

*Flattie*

Flatfoot, cop (Art, 58)

*Flimflam*

Swindle (Op, 23, 251)

*Flippers*

Hands? (Lake, 139)

*Flivver*

A Ford automobile (Speaking, 87; Knockover, 436)

*Flogger*

Overcoat (Op, 219)

*Flop*

1. Go to bed (Speaking, 87)
2. As in "The racket's flopped" - fallen through, not worked out (Op, 268)

*Flophouse*

"A cheap transient hotel where a lot of men sleep in large rooms" (Speaking, 87)

*Fog*

To shoot (Falcon, 212)

*Frail*

Woman (Sleep, 127)

*Frau*

Wife (Pick-Up, 195)

*From nothing*, as in "I know from nothing"

I don't know anything (Shoot, 65)

*Gams*

Legs (especially a woman's) (e-mail)

*Gashouse*, as in "getting gashouse"

Rough (Pick-Up, 17)

*Gasper*

Cigarette (Turner)

*Gat*

Gun (passim)

*Gate*, as in "Give her the gate"

The door, as in leave (Dain, 195)

*Gaycat*

"A young punk who runs with an older tramp and there is always a connotation of homosexuality" (Speaking, 87)

*Gee*

Guy (Art, 105)

*Geetus*

Money (Turner)

*Getaway sticks*

Legs (especially a woman's) (e-mail)

*Giggle juice*

Liquor (Turner)

*Gin mill*

Bar (speakeasy?) (e-mail suggestion)

*Gink*

Guy (Knockover, 433)

*Girlie*

Woman (Vengeance, 34)

*Give a third*

Interrogate (third degree) (Pick-Up, 70)

*Glad rags*

Fancy clothes (Knockover, 366)

*Glom*

1. To steal (Art, 217)
2. To see, to take a look

*Glaum*

Steal (Knockover, 46; Dain, 17)

*Go climb up your thumb*

Go fly a kite, go stick your thumb up your ass (Lake, 17)

*Go over the edge with the rams*

To get far too drunk (Night, 25)

*Go to read and write*

Rhyming slang for take flight (Op, 80)

*Gonif*

Thief (Yiddish) (Knockover, 364)

*Goofy*

Crazy (Knockover, 112)

*Goon*

Thug (Vengeance, 49)

*Goose*

Guy (Knockover, 366)

*Gooseberry lay*

Stealing clothes from a clothesline (see [reference](#))

*Gowed-up*

On dope, high (Farewell, 81)

*Grab (a little) air*

Put your hands up (Sleep, 72; Pick-Up, 178)

*Graft, the*

1. Con jobs (Op, 170)
2. Cut of the take (Lake, 76)

*Grand*

\$1000 (Pick-Up, 33)

*Greasers*

1. Mexicans or Italians.
2. A hoodlum, thief or punk.

(Pick-Up, 171)

*Grift*

1. As in "What's the grift?": What are you trying to pull? (Art, 39)
2. Confidence game, swindle

*Grifter*

Con man (Knockover, 354)

*Grilled*

Questioned (Op, 36)

*Gum*

1. As in "Don't ... gum every play I make": Gum up, interfere with (Op, 224)
2. Opium (e-mail)

*Gum-shoe*

Detective (Op, 36), also gumshoeing = detective work (Knockover, 197)

*Gun for*

Look for, be after (Op, 98)

*Guns*

1. Pickpockets (e-mail)
2. Hoodlums (Knockover, 400)

*Gunsel*

1. Gunman (Falcon) (Hammett invented this use)
2. Boy homosexual (Falcon)
3. "1. (p) A male oral sodomist, or passive pederast. 2. A brat. 3. (By extension) An informer; a weasel; an unscrupulous person." (Underworld)
4. (Note Yiddish "ganzl" = gosling; see [reference](#))

*Hack*

Taxi (Farewell, 35; Vengeance, 35)

*Half, a*

50 cents (Shoot, 28)

*Hammer and saws*

Police (rhyming slang for laws) (Knockover, 70)

*Hard*

Tough (Art, 119)

*Harlem sunset*

Some sort fatal injury caused by knife (Farewell, 14)

*Hash house*

A cheap restaurant (Shoot, 9)

*Hatchetmen*

Killers, gunmen (Knockover, 202)

*Have the bees*

To be rich (Knockover, 62)

*Have the curse on someone*

Wanting to see someone killed (Turner)

*Head doctors*

Psychiatrists (Night, 193)

*Heap*

Car (Knockover, 400; Dain, 194)

*Heat*

A gun (Sleep, 73), also *heater* (Knockover, 160)

*Heeled*

Carrying a gun (e-mail)

*High pillow*

Person at the top, in charge (Farewell, 165)

*Highbinders* (Knockover, 242)

1. Corrupt politician or functionary
2. "Professional killer operating in the Chinese quarter of a city"

*Hittin' the pipe*

Smoking opium (Op, 62)

*Hitting on all eight*

As in cylinders, in good shape, going well (Dain, 182)

*Hock shop*

Pawnshop (Dain, 63)

*Hogs*

Engines (Art, 175)

*Hombre*  
Man, fellow (Sleep, 209; Knockover, 413)

*Hooch*  
Liquor (Art, 206; Knockover, 383)

*Hood*  
Criminal (Pick-Up, 141)

*Hooker*, as in "It took a stiff hooker of whiskey" (Knockover, 408)  
A drink of strong liquor (Partridge's)

*Hoosegow*  
Jail (Knockover, 354)

*Hop*  
1. Drugs, mostly morphine or derivatives like heroin (Farewell, 143)  
2. Bell-hop (Lake, 73)

*Hop-head*  
Drug addict, esp. heroin (Op, 52)

*Horn*  
Telephone (e-mail)

*Hot*  
Stolen (Knockover, 70)

*House dick*  
House detective (Vengeance, 25)

*House peeper*  
House detective (Playback, 118)

*Hype*  
Shortchange artist (1930s) (e-mail)

*Ice*  
Diamonds (Dain, 17)

*In stir*  
In jail (Knockover, 380)

*Ing-bing*, as in to throw an  
A fit (Key, 8)

*Iron*  
A car (Key, 115)

*Jack*  
Money (Op, 265; Sleep, 114; Art, 104)

*Jake*  
Okay (Pick-Up, 29; Sleep, 108)

*Jakeloo*  
Okay (Sleep, 163)

*Jam*  
Trouble, as in "in a jam" (Shoot, 8)

*Jane*  
A woman (e-mail)

*Jasper*  
A man (perhaps a hick) (Lake, 77)

*Java*  
Coffee (e-mail)

*Jaw*  
Talk (Op, 99)

*Jerking a nod*  
Nodding (Turner)

*Jingle-brained*  
Addled (Knockover, 365)

*Jobbie*  
Guy (Knockover, 439)

*Joe*  
Coffee, as in "a cup of joe" (e-mail)

*Johns*

Police (Sleep, 69)  
*Johnson brother*  
Criminal (e-mail)  
*Joint*  
Place, as in "my joint" (Knockover, 199)  
*Jorum of skee*  
Shot of liquor (Turner)  
*Joss house*  
Temple or house of worship for a Chinese religion (Knockover, 207)  
*Juice*  
Interest on a loanshark's loan (e-mail)  
*Jujus*  
Marijuana cigarettes (Farewell, 62)  
*Jump, the*  
A hanging (Dain, 203)  
*Junkie*  
Drug addict (e-mail)  
*Kale*  
Money (Art, 180)  
*Keister*  
Suitcase (Pick-Up, 11), also spelt keyster (Also means buttocks or safe/strongbox) (Key, 72)  
*Kick, as in "I got no kick"*  
I have nothing to complain about (Thin, 103)  
*Kick off*  
Die (Knockover, 69)  
*Kicking the gong around*  
Taking opium (e-mail)  
*Kisser*  
Mouth (Sleep, 173; Playback, 38)  
*Kitten*  
A woman (e-mail)  
*Knock off*  
Kill (Knockover, 197)  
*Knockover*  
Heist, theft (Knockover, 399)  
*Lammed off*  
Ran away, escaped (Lake, 37)  
*Large*  
\$1,000, as in "twenty large" (e-mail)  
*Law, the*  
The police (Shoot, 121; Pick-Up, 29)  
*Lay*  
1. Job, as in Marlowe saying he's on "a confidential lay" (Farewell, 17); or more generally, what someone does, as in "The hotel-sneak used to be my lay" (Op, 86)  
2. As in "I gave him the lay" - I told him where things stood (as in lay of the of land) (Op, 70)  
*Lettuce*  
Folding money (e-mail)  
*Lid*  
Hat (e-mail)  
*Lit, to be*  
To be drunk (Art, 149)  
*Loogan*  
Marlowe defines this as "a guy with a gun" (Sleep, 138)  
*Looker*  
Pretty woman (e-mail)  
*Look-out*  
Outside man (Speaking, 87)  
*Lousy with*

To have lots of (Knockover, 363)

*Lug*

1. Bullet (Lake, 193)
2. Ear (Thin, 107)

*Lunger*

Someone with tuberculosis (e-mail)

*Made*

Recognized (Knockover, 99)

*Map*

Face (Art, 175)

*Marbles*

Pearls (Art, 176)

*Mark*

Sucker, victim of swindle or fixed game (e-mail)

*Mazuma*

Money (Art, 206)

*Meat*, as in "He's your meat"

There's your man, in this case, there's the guy you'll follow (Knockover, 368)

*Meat wagon*

Ambulance (Lake, 94)

*Mesca*

Marijuana (Playback, 126)

*Mickey Finn*, take a

1. Take off, leave (Op, 229)
2. A drink drugged with knock-out drops

*Mill*

Typewriter (Vengeance, 81)

*Mitt*

Hand (Art, 182; Farewell, 5)

*Mob*

Gang (not Mafia) (Op, 118)

*Moll*

Girlfriend (Knockover, 382; Playback, 55)

*Monicker*

Name (Knockover, 356; Vengeance, 75)

*Mouthpiece*

Lawyer (Pick-Up, 183)

*Mud-pipe*

Opium pipe (Op, 62)

*Mug*

Face (Op, 98)

*Muggles*

Marijuana (e-mail)

*Mugs*

Guys (esp. dumb) (Knockover, 401; Key, 87; Art, 92)

*Mush*

Face (Art, 191)

*Nailed*

Caught by the police (Thin, 109)

*Nance*

An effeminate man (Pick-Up, 188)

*Nevada gas*

Cyanide (Pick-Up, 172)

*Newshawk*

Reporter (Pick-Up, 17)

*Newsie*

Newspaper vendor (Knockover, 357)

*Nibble one*

To have a drink (Farewell, 6)

*Nicked*  
Stole (Knockover, 205)

*Nippers*  
Handcuffs (Pick-Up, 18)

*Nix on (something)*  
No to (something) (Pick-Up, 30)

*Noodle*  
Head (Op, 23; Playback, 14)

*Nose-candy*  
Heroin in some cases (Knockover, 199)

*Number*  
A person, can be either a man or a woman (Art, 33, 84)

*Off the track*, as in "He was too far off the track. Strictly section eight"  
Said about a man who becomes insanely violent (Shoot, 117)

*Op*  
Detective (esp. private), from "operative" (Playback, 109)

*Orphan paper*  
Bad cheques (Dain, 109)

*Out on the roof, to be*  
To drink a lot (Lake, 30)

*Oyster fruit*  
Pearls (Art, 180)

*Pack*  
To carry, esp. a gun (Knockover, 60; Op, 228)

*Palooka*  
Guy, probably a little stupid (Knockover, 392)

*Pan*  
Face (Art, 201)

*Paste*  
Punch (Knockover, 66, 392)

*Paw*  
Hand (Knockover, 246; Op, 82)

*Peaching*  
Informing (Op, 85)

*Peeper*  
Detective (Playback, 96; Sleep, 161)

*Pen*  
Jail, penitentiary (Farewell, 29)

*Peterman*  
Safecracker who uses nitroglycerin (Speaking, 89)

*Pigeon*  
Stool-pigeon (Pick-Up, 156)

*Pill*  
1. Bullet (Falcon, 13)  
2. Cigarette (Knockover, 398; Playback, 38)

*Pinch*  
An arrest, capture (Art, 118)

*Pins*  
Legs (especially a woman's) (e-mail)

*Pipe*  
See or notice (Speaking, 87)

*Pipe that*  
Get that, listen to that (Shoot, 55)

*Pipes*  
Throat (Thin, 110)

*Pistol pockets*  
?? heels? (Turner)

*Pitching woo*

Making love (Turner)

*Plant*

Someone on the scene but in hiding (Lake, 183)

*Plugs*

People (Op, 222)

*Poke*

1. Bankroll, stake (Pick-Up, 32)
2. Punch (Farewell, 217)

*Pooped*

Killed (Key, 147)

*Pop*

Kill (Op, 42)

*Pro skirt*

Prostitute (Night, 12)

*Puffing*

Mugging (Knockover, 46)

*Pug*

Boxer (Vengeance, 83)

*Pump*

Heart (Falcon, 13)

*Pump metal*

Shoot bullets (Op, 230)

*Punk*

1. Hood, thug (Vengeance, 28)
2. "A jailhouse sissy who is on the receiving end." (Also as a verb, as in "to get punked.") (e-mail)

*Puss*

Face (Art, 27; Pick-Up, 37)

*Put down*

Drink (Postman, 56)

*Put the screws on*

Question, get tough with (Dain, 34)

*Queer*

1. Counterfeit (Speaking, 88)
2. Sexually abnormal (Speaking, 88)
3. As a verb, to ruin something or put it wrong ("queer this racket") (e-mail)

*Rags*

Clothes (Knockover, 429)

*Ranked*

Observed, watched, given the once-over. (Knockover, 70)

*Rap*

1. Criminal charge (Knockover, 47)
2. Information, as in "He gave us the rap" (Op, 51)
3. Hit (Postman, 33)

*Rappers*, as in "There were a couple solved for the record, but they were just rappers"

Fakes, set-ups (Farewell, 165)

*Rat*

Inform (Key, 78; Night, 5)

*Rate*

To be good, to count for something (Art, 55)

*Rats and mice*

Dice, i.e. craps (Dain, 29)

*Rattler*

Train (Dain, 158; Op, 51)

*Red-light*

To eject from a car or train (e-mail)

*Redhot*



Some sort of criminal (Pick-Up, 114)

*Reefers*

Marijuana cigarettes (Farewell, 172)

*Rhino*

Money (Knockover, 401)

*Ribbed up*, as in "I got a Chink ribbed up to get the dope"

Set up, arranged for? "I have arranged for a Chinese person to get the information"? (Knockover, 203)

*Right*

Adjective indicating quality (Pick-Up, 21)

*Right gee*

A good fellow (Sleep, 157)

*Right guy*

A good fellow (Knockover, 111)

*Ringers*

Fakes (Art, 176)

*Rod*

Gun (Op, 80, 219, 242; Vengeance, 11)

*Roscoe*

Gun (Key, 182)

*Roundheels*

1. A fighter with a glass jaw (e-mail)
2. A woman of easy virtue (e-mail)

*Rub-out*

A death (Knockover, 416)

*Rube*

Bumpkin, easy mark (Pick-Up, 127)

*Rumble, the*

The news (Knockover, 372)

*Run-out*, as in to take the

Leave, escape (Falcon, 164; Key, 18)

*Sap*

1. A dumb guy (passim)
2. A blackjack (passim)

*Sap poison*

Getting hit with a sap (Art, 188)

*Savvy?*

Get me? understand? (Farewell, 120)

*Sawbuck*

\$10 (Night, 33)

*Scatter*, as in "And don't bother to call your house peeper and send him up to the scatter"

1. Saloon or speakeasy.
2. A hideout, a room or lodging

(Lake, 188)

*Schnozzle*

Nose (Art, 190)

*Scram out*

Leave (Lake, 76)

*Scratch*

Money (Art, 56)

*Scratcher*

Forger (Op, 49)

*Screw*

1. Leave, as in "Let's screw before anybody pops in" (Op, 183)
2. Prison guard (e-mail suggestion)

*Send over*

Send to jail (Knockover, 353; Dain, 124)

*Shamus*

(Private) detective (Playback, 41; Lake, 37; Sleep, 68)

*Sharper*

A swindler or sneaky person (Op, 75)

*Shatting on your uppers*

To be broke (Sleep, 161)

*Shells*

Bullets (Pick-Up, 3)

*Shine* (e-mail)

1. Black person.
2. Bootleg whiskey.

*Shine box*

Bar for blacks (Farewell, 5)

*Shine Indian*

?? (Knockover, 89)

*Shiv*

Knife (Speaking, 87)

*Shylock*

Loanshark (e-mail)

*Shyster*

Lawyer (Farewell, 111)

*Silk*, as in "all silk so far"

All okay so far (Knockover, 393)

*Sister*

Woman (Knockover, 44)

*Skate around*, as in "She skates around plenty"

To be of easy virtue (Sleep, 83)

*Skid rogue*

A bum who can't be trusted (e-mail)

*Skipout*

Leave a hotel without paying, or a person who does so (Playback, 108)

*Skirt*

Woman (e-mail)

*Slant, get a*

Take a look (Key, 31)

*Sleuth*

Detective (Sleep, 65)

*Slug*

1. As a noun, bullet (passim)
2. As a verb, to knock unconscious (Lake, 191)

*Smell from the barrel, have a*

Have a drink (Art, 205)

*Smoke*

A black person (Farewell, 14; Pick-Up, 111)

*Smoked*

Drunk (Key, 182)

*Snap a cap*

Shout (Op, 84)

*Snatch*

Kidnap (Pick-Up, 156)

*Sneak*

1. Leave, get lost, as in "If you're not a waiter, sneak" (Op, 73)
2. Type of burglary, as in "The hotel-sneak used to be my lay" (Op, 86)

*Sneeze*

Take (Pick-Up, 102)

*Snitch*

An informer, or, as a verb, to inform

*Snooper*  
Detective (Lake, 18)

*Snort* (as in of gin)  
A drink (Art, 56)

*Snow-bird*  
(Cocaine) addict (Pick-Up, 78; Knockover, 202)

*Snowed*  
To be on drugs (heroin? cocaine?) (Pick-Up, 97); also snowed up (Op, 149)

*Soak*  
To pawn (Knockover, 92)

*Sock*  
Punch (Knockover, 66; Sleep, 173; Art, 153)

*Soup*  
Nitroglycerine (e-mail)

*Soup job*  
To crack a safe using nitroglycerine (Double, 77)

*Souping the kidneys*  
?? driving fast? (Turner)

*Spill*  
Talk, inform (Pick-Up, 43; Sleep, 99), spill it = tell me (Shoot, 96)

*Spinach*  
Money (Knockover, 385)

*Spitting*  
Talking (Knockover, 70)

*Spondulix*  
Money (e-mail)

*Square*  
Honest (Art, 130), "on the square" = telling the truth (Knockover, 379)

*Squirt metal*  
Shoot bullets (Knockover, 67)

*Step off*  
To be hanged (Knockover, 446)

*Sticks of tea*  
Marijuana cigarettes (Farewell, 62)

*Stiff*  
A corpse (Pick-Up, 195; Sleep, 99)

*Sting*  
Culmination of a con game (e-mail)

*Stool-pigeon*  
Informer (Op, 148; Knockover, 199)

*Stoolie*  
Stool-pigeon (Art, 53)

*Stringin'*  
As in along, feeding someone a story (Knockover, 356)

*Sucker*  
Someone ripe for a grifter's scam (Knockover, 203)

*Sugar*  
Money (Pick-Up, 50; Op, 71)

*Swift, to have plenty of*  
To be fast (on the draw) (Lake, 201)

*Swing*  
Hang (Op, 42)

*Tail*  
Shadow, follow (Pick-Up, 67)

*Take a powder*  
Leave (Pick-Up, 29)

*Take it on the heel and toe*  
Leave (Knockover, 70)

*Take on*  
Eat (Op, 183)

*Take the air*  
Leave (Sleep, 85)

*Take the bounce*  
To get kicked out (here, of a hotel) (Art, 102)

*Take the fall for*  
Accept punishment for (Dain, 56)

*Tea*  
Marijuana (Playback, 126)

*That's the crop*  
That's all of it (Dain, 158)

*Three-spot*  
Three-year term in jail (Art, 85)

*Throw a joe*  
Pass out ?? (Key, 86)

*Throw lead*  
Shoot bullets (Sleep, 139; Op, 216)

*Ticket*  
P.I. license (Vengeance, 15)

*Tiger milk*  
Some sort of liquor (Thin, 110)

*Tighten the screws*  
Put pressure on somebody (Knockover, 81)

*Tin*  
Badge (e-mail)

*Tip a few*  
To have a few drinks (Pick-Up, 21)

*Tip your mitt*  
Show your hand, reveal something (Knockover, 98)

*Tomato*  
Pretty woman. Also "hot tomato" (e-mail)

*Tooting the wrong ringer*  
Asking the wrong person (Knockover, 68)

*Torcher*  
Torch singer (Sleep, 116)

*Torpedoes*  
Gunmen (Farewell, 215)

*Trap*  
Mouth (Vengeance, 13)

*Trigger man*  
Guy who does the shooting on a job (Sleep, 209)

*Trip for biscuits*, as in "You get there fast and you get there alone - or you got a trip for biscuits"  
Make the trip for no purpose, achieve no results (Art, 209)

*Trouble boys*  
Gangsters (Art, 85)

*Turn up*  
To turn in (to the police) (Falcon, 164)

*Twist*  
Woman (Falcon, 164; Knockover, 46; Sleep, 163)

*Two bits*  
\$25 (Key, 3), or 25 cents.

*Up-and-down*, as in "to give something the up-and-down"  
A look (Knockover, 97)

*Uppers*, as in "I've been shatting on my uppers for a couple of months now"  
Broke (Knockover, 54)

*Vag*, as in vag charge, vag law  
Vagrancy (Op, 52)

*Vig, Vigorish*

1. Excessive interest on a loanshark's loan (e-mail)
2. Advantage in odds created by a bookie or gambler to increase profit (e-mail)

*Weak sister*

A push-over (Op, 42)

*Wear iron*

Carry a gun (Sleep, 67)

*Wheats*, as in "a stack of wheats"

Pancakes (Op, 183)

*White*

1. Good, okay, as in "white dick" (Knockover, 379)
2. As in a gallon of - gin (Dain, 175)

*Wikiup*

Home (Turner)

*Wire*, as in "What's the wire on them?"

News, "What information do you have about them?" (Shoot, 24)

*Wise*, to be

To be knowledgeable of (Pick-Up, 32), "put us wise" - tell us (Lake, 81)

*Wise head*

A smart person (Thin, 106)

*Wooden kimono*

A coffin (e-mail)

*Worker*, as in "She sizes up as a worker"

A woman who takes a guy for his money (Op, 139)

*Wrong gee*

Not a good fellow (Sleep, 184)

*Wrong number*

Not a good fellow (Art, 84)

*Yank*

?? tough situation? (Turner)

*Yap*

Mouth (Vengeance, 12)

*Yard*

\$100 (Pick-Up, 103; Art, 54)

*Yegg*

Safecracker, "who can only open a rather cheap and vulnerable safe" (Op, 51, 146; Speaking, 89)

*Zotzed*

Killed (e-mail)

## Bibliography

Key:

Abbreviation = *Full Title* (year of first publication) by Author (Publisher and year of publication for the copy I used)

Probably no-one will care about exact page references, but they were included for the sake of completeness.

(\* = not as yet analyzed for slang, ss = short stories collected years after first publication)

- Art = *The Simple Art of Murder* (ss) by Raymond Chandler (Ballantine, 1972)
- Dain = *The Dain Curse* (1929) by Dashiell Hammett (Vintage, 1972)
- Double = *Dougle in Trouble* by Richard Prather and Stephen Marlowe (Gold Medal, 1959)
- Falcon = *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) by Dashiell Hammett (Vintage, 1984)
- Farewell = *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) by Raymond Chandler (Vintage, 1976)
- Goodbye = *The Long Goodbye* (1953) by Raymond Chandler \*

- Harvest = *Red Harvest* (1929) by Dashiell Hammett \*
- Key = *The Glass Key* (1931) by Dashiell Hammett (Vintage, 1972)
- Killer = *Killer in the Rain* (ss) by Raymond Chandler \*
- Knockover = *The Big Knockover* (ss) by Dashiell Hammett (Vintage, 1972)
- Lake = *The Lady in the Lake* (1943) by Raymond Chandler (Vintage, 1976)
- Night = *Night Squad* (1961) by David Goodis (Vintage, 1992)
- Op = *The Continental Op* (ss) by Dashiell Hammett (Vintage, 1975)
- Partridge's = *Partridge's Concise Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* edited by Partridge and Beal (Collier Macmillan, 1989?)
- Pick-Up = *Pick-Up on Noon Street* (ss) by Raymond Chandler (Pocket Books, 1952)
- Playback = *Playback* (1958) by Raymond Chandler (Ballantine, 1977)
- Postman = *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) by James M. Cain (Vintage, 1978)
- Shoot = *Shoot the Piano Player* (1956) by David Goodis (Vintage, 1990)
- Sister = *The Little Sister* (1949) by Raymond Chandler \*
- Sleep = *The Big Sleep* (1939) by Raymond Chandler (Ballantine, 1971)
- Speaking = *Raymond Chandler Speaking* edited by Gardiner and Walker (Allison & Busby, 1984)
- Thin = *The Thin Man* (1934) by Dashiell Hammett (Vintage, 1972)
- Turner = "Death's Passport," a Dan Turner story by Robert Leslie Bellem. Published in *Spicy Detective* in 1940.
- Underworld = *The Dictionary of American Underworld Slang*. I lost the name of the author.
- Vengeance = *Vengeance is Mine* (1950) by Mickey Spillane (Signet, 1951)
- Window = *The High Window* (1942) by Raymond Chandler \*

I suggest you go through the remaining works of Chandler and Hammett looking for more slang terms, & then move on to other hardboiled authors. Interestingly, some of the toughest of the hardboiled writers (like Mickey Spillane) don't use that much slang, but occasionally words do crop up that aren't used by anyone else.

# the rap

## Consulted Bibliography

### Gaming Materials

- Aniolowski, Hall, Hatherley, Smithee, Snyder, Tynes - The Golden Down - Pagan Publishing, 1996
- John H. Crowe III - Coming Full Circle - Pagan Publishing, 1995
- Greg Farshtey - The World of Bloodshadows - West End Games, 1994
- Keith Herber et al. - The 1920s Investigators Companion - Chaosium, 1997
- David Ladyman et al. - Chill - Mayfair Games, sd
- Steve Perrin & Lynn Willis - Basic Role Playing, in Casus Belli Hors-series n.19, July 97
- Steve Perrin, Greg Stafford, Steve Henderson, Lynn Willis - RuneQuest De Luxe - Avalon Hill Game Company, 1986
- Brian Sean Perry et al. - The World of Indiana Jones - West End Games, 1994
- Sandy Petersen, Lynn Willis et al. - Call of Cthulhu Horror Roleplaying, Edition 5.5 - Chaosium, 1998
- Lester W. Smith - Dark Conspiracy - GDW, 1991

### Other Resources

- Phil Hardy - The BFI's Companion to Crime - BFI, 1998
- Roz Kaveney - SF-Noir - in Odissey Magazine, n.0, September 1997
- Elizabeth Ward and Alain Silver - Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles - The Overlook Press, 1987

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### Suggested Readings

The works of Howard Phillips Lovecraft (of course), Raymond Chandler (stay clear of Playback) and Dashiell Hammett are to be considered fundamental as a source of background material. And if you can find some David Goodis, grab it and read it.

To the above, we strongly suggest you add a sprinkling of the following:

- Hugh B. Cave - Death Stalks the Night - Fedogan & Bremer, 1995
- Mike Chinn - The Paladin Mandates - The Alchemy Press, 1998
- Fritz Leiber - Conjure Wife - 1943
- Fritz Leiber - You Are All Alone - Carrol & Graf, 1992
- Jonathan Lethem - Gun with Occasional Music - NEL, 1995
- Kim Newman - The Night Mayor - Carrol & Graf, 1992
- Kim Newman - The Big Fish - in "Famous Monsters" - Pocket Books, 1995

- Kim Newman - Quarter to Three - "Famous Monsters" - Pocket Books, 1995
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Movies to See

They are an awful lot. A generic list might include...

## **Noir**

- The Maltese Falcon (the one with Bogart)
- Double Indemnity (McMurray/Stanwick frauding the insurance company)
- The Postman Always Rings Twice (the old one, with Lana Turner)
- The Big Sleep (Bogart again; learn his lines by heart)
- Gunmen (Burt Lancaster)
- Sunset Boulevard (it's narrated by a dead man!)
- Dark Passage (Bogart, Bacall, plastic surgery)
- Kiss me Deadly (stolen artefact, espionage, double crosses)
- High Sierra (yes, there's Bogart in it. Any problem?)
- Night and the City (Richard Widmark, Gene Tierney, urban alienation at its best)

## **Noir in Colour**

- Chinatown (Jack Nicholson directed by Polansky)
- The Two Jackes (Nicholson directs himself in the sequel)
- Hammett (biopic of the creator of the genre)
- Mulholland Falls (blackmail, secrets, intrigue)
- L.A. Confidential (classy, bitter)

## **Supernatural Noir**

- Cast a Deadly Spell (Fred Ward as H.P.Lovecraft, P.I.)
- Witch Hunt (Dennis Hopper as H.P. Lovecraft, P.I.)
- Night of the Eagle (from Leiber's "Conjure Wife")
- The Haunting (probably the best horror movie ever)
- Little Shop of Horrors (both versions - humorous but nasty)

## **Retro Urban Settings**

- The Mask
- The Rocketeer
- Dark City
- The Shadow

## **Humorous Noir**

- Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid (all the cliches are in here)

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