

# LAS VEGAS: 1968

BY KENNETH HITE



Pelgrane Press

# LAS VEGAS:

## KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

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PUBLISHER CATHRIONA TOBIN  
AUTHOR: KENNETH HITE  
LAYOUT: CATHRIONA TOBIN  
ARTWORK: JESÚS BLONES

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# 1968

*This is one of the hallmarks of Vegas hospitality. The only bedrock rule is Don't Burn the Locals. Beyond that, nobody cares. If Charlie Manson checked into the Sahara tomorrow morning, nobody would hassle him as long as he tipped big.*

— Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

## LAS VEGAS: 1968

In 1946, New York gangster Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel came to this wide-open casino town in a Mojave Desert oasis and built the Flamingo, the first resort casino hotel in the American West. The Flamingo hemorrhaged money, and soon enough Bugsy absorbed four bullets in a Los Angeles living room, but his Mob patron Meyer Lansky realized Siegel’s vision was sound even if his accounting was not. “The Syndicate” of American organized crime funded and founded casino after casino, hotel upon hotel, drawing showbiz celebrities, millionaires, and soon enough millions of tourists annually. Half a billion dollars a year, much of it not even recorded, much less taxed, poured into those casinos and into the Syndicate’s various pockets under the eternally bright neon skies of Las Vegas, Nevada.

From these dizzying heights, a fall must come. The overconfident psychopath Tony Spilotro manages to alienate and splinter the Syndicate and unify law enforcement, letting the Mormon banks finally sideline their far-from-silent partners. Under their patronage new moguls like Kirk Kerkorian and Steve Wynn remake Las Vegas twice, as a “family friendly” tourist destination and as a libertine futurist oasis of fine dining and global brands, where “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.”

But that’s all in the future. For now, the Mob hasn’t killed its golden goose. Howard Hughes hasn’t fled to Atlantis. Sinatra plays Caesars Palace. It’s 1968: welcome to fabulous Las Vegas.

## LAS VEGAS (1968): ONE LOOK

### POPULATION

125,000 (city), 250,000 (metropolitan area); plus an average of 45,000 tourists at any given time

### LANGUAGES

English; approximately 5% Spanish-speakers.

### CURRENCY

\$1 in 1968 = \$6.84 in 2015.

### BEST HOTEL

Caesars Palace, the newest hotel on the Strip. A high-roller suite costs upwards of \$1,000 per night, if it’s not comped.

### BAD NEIGHBORHOOD

One good thing about Mob rule is that there’s not a lot of street crime in Las Vegas, even off the Strip. In the 1960s, the city is just beginning to desegregate (housing redlining officially ends in 1971), and the prosperous black middle class is leaving the Westside ghetto to decay. North Las Vegas (where the Hispanic population mostly lives) is another impoverished suburb, where the Mob sends junkies and misbehaving soldiers to cool off.

### SPECIAL RULES EFFECTS

**Gambling:** Agents with the Gambling ability in a casino can gamble and roll a die: on a 1, lose 2 points from Gambling; on a 2-5, gain 1 on even and lose 1 on odd; on a 6, refresh 3 points of Gambling.

**Guns:** It’s very easy (-1 Difficulty) for an agent with **Streetwise** to get a gun in Las Vegas, but the Mob doesn’t like people using guns in their town. Heat (*Night’s Black Agents*, p. 87) for gun use in Las Vegas is +1 – and after firing that shot, the agents have to make their Heat test twice: against both the law and the Mob.

**Heat and Thirst:** The desert outside Las Vegas can easily top 40°C in summertime. Treat characters in direct desert summer sun as Hurt after an hour’s exposure. Health tests may be needed if they go without water for hours.

**Chases:** Foot chases inside casinos are Cramped, but the traffic on the Strip is not as horrendous now as it will become later. Car chases are Normal on the Strip and downtown, and Open everywhere else in the city unless special circumstances supervene.

## LAYOUT THE LAND

The map of Las Vegas resembles a lollipop with a bent stick pointing northeast in the city proper and south outside it. The south-pointing stick is South Las Vegas Boulevard, better known as the Strip, lined with fabulous resorts, hotels, and casinos. That's right, the Strip isn't in Las Vegas at all. It's in the unincorporated township of Paradise just south of Las Vegas, so all its lovely tax money goes (after suitable bites for the county commissioners who allowed Paradise to stay separate in 1951) back into its own pockets. The rest of Paradise holds less fancy motels, shops, and the campus of Nevada Southern University (which changes its name to UNLV in January 1969).

Northwest across the Union Pacific railroad tracks (the city proper stick) is Westside, the black ghetto. The southeast half of the lollipop centers on "Downtown," along the old casino road Fremont Street, nicknamed "Glitter Gulch" for its extravagant lighting. The eastward bulge of the lollipop is, like Paradise, well-watered suburbia, housing not just casino workers but airmen serving at Nellis Air Force Base, 10 km northeast of downtown.

32 km farther southeast still is the town of Henderson, made possible by the Basic Magnesium plant, the other major employer in the region.

## GATEWAYS

On average, around 19,000 people a day arrive in Las Vegas, most of them expecting to win. Until June 15, 1968 some of those travelers came in on the City of Las Vegas streamlined passenger train from Los Angeles, but Interstate 15 proved too convenient and too tempting for day trippers, weekenders, and motorists in love with their new Camaros, Bonneville, Mustangs, and Eldorados. The highway ends at Sahara Avenue inside the city limits; tangled real-estate negotiations so far prevent its linkup with U.S. 91 running from North Las Vegas to Salt Lake City. So far, this means Las Vegas motels continue to flourish as transcontinental drivers stop to rest and recoup. Many of these transients stay in Vegas for days or even weeks, waiting for their luck to turn and

pave their way out of the valley of sin.

McCarran Airport (renamed McCarran International Airport this year) brings in a different crowd: vacationers, not impulse buyers. Given the cost of jet travel, these customers can better afford their losses — but their losses can mount much higher. Over 150 flights daily bring thousands of well-heeled visitors not just from Los Angeles but San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. They can see the Strip casinos from the windows of their 737 as it rolls to a halt on the taxiway.

## MARKETS AND MASSES

Las Vegas in 1968 is not the shopping mecca it becomes in the 21st century. In mid-May every year, thousands of cowboys flood into town for three "Helldorado Days" of parades, Old West re-enactments, and rodeo competitions — and then flow back out. The 7,000-seat Las Vegas Convention Center is far from the nation's largest though it does occasionally host a national-scale event: a Beatles concert in 1964, the Cassius Clay-Floyd Patterson championship boxing match in 1965. Bottom line: in 1968 if you're looking for people in Las Vegas, you'll find them in a casino.

## THE STRIP

This list covers many, but not all, of the main Strip casinos, from south to north. Although they're far from the panopticon surveillance palaces they will become, someone is indeed always watching on the floor at least.

**Hacienda:** Although the Civil Aeronautics Board forced owner "Doc" Bayley to shut down his "Hacienda Airlines" charter service in 1962, Doc's widow Judith still operates four Lockheed Constellation four-turboprop passenger planes, flying customers from Burbank to McCarran.

**Tropicana:** The "Tiffany Hotel of the Strip" has the best jazz in town: the Blue Room features Mel Tormé, Benny Goodman, Al Hirt, and Julie London. In 1968, Texas Airlines buys the resort, although it's still run by and for Mafia families: Costello (New York), Marcello (New Orleans), and Civella (Kansas City) primarily.

**Aladdin:** The former Tally-Ho reopened in 1966 as the Aladdin, including the largest casino floor in the state and featuring a six-story neon "Aladdin's lamp" sign costing \$750,000. Elvis Presley married Priscilla Wagner here on May 1, 1967.

**Dunes:** Added a new 24-story high-rise tower (the tallest building in Vegas) in 1965, as part of a comprehensive overhaul including a new 60m neon sign and a revival of the hundred-year-old "Casino de Paris" complete with its legendary impresario Henri Varna. Its main *padrone* is Providence, Rhode Island mob boss Ray Patriarca.

**Flamingo:** Bugsy Siegel's original hotel remains a home-from-home and cash cow for Meyer Lansky's Florida mob and the Chicago Outfit. In 1967, airline mogul Kirk Kerkorian bought it after a failed bid by Japanese billionaire Kenji Osano.

**Caesars Palace:** Jimmy Hoffa, the Chicago Outfit, the Patriarca family, and Lansky capo Vincent Alo greased this 14-story, 680-room luxury hotel built in 1966. Developer Jay Sarno incorporated the "magic shape" of the oval into the hotel's architecture, gaming tables, pool, and furnishings.

**Sands:** In 1967, Howard Hughes bought the Sands and Frank Sinatra left his long-time headquarters after a fistfight with casino manager Carl Cohen.

**Desert Inn:** Howard Hughes' headquarters in Las Vegas. He and his entourage occupy the top two floors of the high-roller "St. Andrew's Tower." Cleveland gangster and Vegas fixer Moe Dalitz still has loyalists here, even though he sold the hotel to Hughes in 1967 for \$13.2 million.

**Frontier:** A new skyscraper hotel built on the site of the Pair O'Dice, a 1930 speakeasy and illegal gaming hall and the oldest casino on the Strip. Howard Hughes bought it before its opening in 1967, and installed the first computerized reservation system in Vegas. Young singer Wayne Newton headlines here.

**Stardust:** Another Dalitz-Outfit casino, the Stardust boasts 1,460 rooms, making it the largest hotel in the world. Frank "Lefty" Rosenthal has been the Outfit "inside man" at the Stardust since 1967, establishing the first sports book inside a casino here. Howard Hughes begins his attempt to buy the Stardust in 1966; Justice Department opposition stalls him.



**Riviera:** This prime Outfit operation has struggled financially ever since Chicago boss Tony Accardo ordered its erratic manager Gus Greenbaum murdered in 1958. The Syndicate-connected combine Parvin-Dohrmann Group has a bid in to buy it, but faces serious opposition from the Nevada Gaming Commission.

**Circus Circus:** Opening October 18, this Hoffa-financed casino has no attached hotel yet. It features the world's largest big top and plenty of nightmarish clowns in the décor and on the staff.

**Sahara:** The Portland and Chicago mobs hold major stakes in this Moroccan-themed resort, along with Meyer Lansky. Legendary bartender Don the Beachcomber holds court at his own restaurant here.

## DOWNTOWN

The other major constellation of Vegas casinos runs along Fremont Street downtown. Like the Strip list, this list is evocative, not exhaustive.

**Horseshoe:** On the site of the former Eldorado and Apache casinos, the Horseshoe boasts “no limit” tables and a world-famous million dollar display: 100 \$10,000 bills behind glass under a metal horseshoe. No poker room, though: the floor is too small, and poker draws too little money and attention for the space.

**Golden Nugget:** Former LAPD vice cop Guy McAfee opened this iconic downtown luxury casino in 1946. Although Costello-tied bookmaker Jerome Zarowitz owns a big piece of the action, it's relatively Mob-free.

**Mint:** Owned by Bugsy Siegel's foreman Del Webb, now lord of a \$60 million construction and real estate empire. In 1967, Webb organized the first annual Mint 400 off-road race from the front of the Mint downtown to the Sahara Hotel in Lake Tahoe.

## THREE BACKDROPS

Backdrops are what you set your stories against. They might be the main setting, a scenic or thematic element, or just somewhere to stage a fight scene. In this case, the casinos and the gargantuan Yesco neon signs are backdrop enough for Vegas proper, so these three locations spread story possibilities out of town a bit.

## AREA 51

About 150 km north-northwest of Las Vegas, beside the dry bed of Groom Lake

inside the U.S. Air Force's Nevada Test Range, the USAF and CIA built a secret complex of runways, hangars, and factories nicknamed “Dreamland” or “Paradise Ranch” or just “The Ranch.” Some aeronautical charts denote the forbidden airspace over the Ranch with the number 51, but nobody calls it Area 51 for another dozen years.

This top-secret facility hosts the production and testing plant for Lockheed's U-2 and A-12 spy planes and D-21 drone craft, as well as the USAF/US Navy joint foreign technology assessment program, “Have Doughnut.” Test pilots fly captured or illicitly acquired Soviet aircraft in dogfights against US jets, learning the enemy planes' performance and limits. Personnel for all these projects either live on base or commute from Vegas on “JANET” (Just Another Non Existent Terminal): a clandestine airline running DC-6 flights out of McCarran.

In 1968, the few UFOlogists who believe in a salvaged Roswell craft place it at Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio or Kirtland AFB near Albuquerque, not in the Nevada Test Range.

## HOOVER DAM

Built between 1931 and 1935 in the Black Canyon of the Colorado River on the border between Nevada and Arizona, Hoover Dam generates the power that drives Las Vegas, along with 4.2% of the energy used in the U.S. The sixth-largest hydroelectric dam in the world, its concrete face rises 221 meters above the river, topped with distinctive Art Deco revetments and U.S. Highway 93. Artist Allen Tupper True incorporated Navajo and Pueblo art and motifs into the floors and walls of the power station,

and designed a star map for the terrazzo floor of the memorial plaza depicting the heavens as they were at 11 a.m. September 30, 1935 when President Roosevelt dedicated the dam.

Hoover Dam created Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the U.S., filling the Colorado River valley (including the Virgin and Temple Basins) behind the dam over three years. The lake drowned the town of St. Thomas, Nevada, which can still be seen breaking the surface in dry months. Vegas jet setters and vacationers travel the 60 km to Lake Mead for boating, fishing, and hiking.

## RED ROCK CANYON

Crimson sandstone bluffs thrust 900 meters up through the earth 24 km west of the Strip, easily visible on a clear day. Plentiful springs in these hills attracted Indian tribes for centuries, along with mountain lions and antelope, and campers and picnickers from the city. In 1967, the federal Bureau of Land Management designated the region the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands. The same year, Howard Hughes bought the stretch of desert surrounding Red Rock Canyon for unknown future developments. On many rock faces in the park, Indian shamans cut or chipped petroglyphs: animals, hands, geometric shapes, gods and spirits. They considered such rocks doorways to the sacred world; many of them have been vandalized in the decades since.

The Las Vegas area features many sets of petroglyphs, some recorded only in dusty ethnological reports from the last century. Major sites include the Valley of Fire park 80 km northeast of Las Vegas, and the so-called “Anasazi Lost City” near Overton.

## ATOMIC CITY: LAS VEGAS

From 1951 to 1962, the U.S. military conducted 100 aboveground nuclear tests at Yucca Flat and Frenchman Flat in the Nevada Test Site, 105 km northwest of Las Vegas. Tourists gathered on hotel rooftops to watch the blasts and party by mushroom cloud light; Las Vegas dubbed itself the “Atomic City.” Among the evocative features of the Test Site were two hollow towns built to test bomb effects on civil structures: “Doomtown” in Area 5 and “Survival City” in Area 1. Populated with dummies and mannequins, they slowly return to the desert now that Nevada atomic testing is an entirely underground affair.

## CONFLICTS

Mayor **Oran Gragson** is a reform Republican in a town where corruption is bipartisan. Committed to civil rights and desegregation, he does what he can in a city and a country roiling with racial conflict. Integrated Rancho High and Clark High see student fights that become near race riots almost every year from 1965 to 1971; in 1969 the Westside explodes in a major riot that hospitalizes dozens.

## FACTIONS

For now, the Mob polices its own. To help with that task it funnels bar supply business to the brother of **Clark County Sheriff** Ralph Lamb, a major political power broker with a convenient seat on the Clark County Liquor & Control Board. Since the city of Las Vegas doesn't include the Strip, the sheriff and his deputies have jurisdiction there, not the **Las Vegas Police Department**. Mayor Gragson asked Chief Leo Kuykendall to resign in 1964 and appointed in his stead Clark County Undersheriff Lorin Bunker, who retires in June. Gragson next appoints N.D. "Pete" Witcher, former chief of security at the Flamingo and Dunes: in other words, an Outfit-Lansky employee serves as the Las Vegas chief of police.

With Director J. Edgar Hoover resolutely avoiding the Syndicate, the **Las Vegas Division of the FBI** (headquartered in the Federal Building at 11th and Bridger) is a dumping ground for problem agents such as, perhaps, the PCs. The only enforcement body with any real teeth in Las Vegas is the **Nevada Gaming Commission**, which (directed by the Nevada Gaming Control Board) actively bars known organized crime figures from owning shares in or managing casinos. In extreme cases, a mobster goes in the *NGC Black Book*, and is barred even from setting foot in a Nevada casino. The key word in the foregoing is, of course, "known." As long as a soldier doesn't park his 1948 Cadillac Coup de Ville with Chicago plates in the owner's spot outside the Thunderbird Hotel, like Meyer Lansky's

brother Jake famously did, he can get a lot done in a town like this.

## THE MOB

*"I wouldn't say Caesars Palace is exactly Roman. More kind of early Sicilian."*

— Alan King

Ever since Bugsy Siegel spotted this town's potential, American organized crime has run Las Vegas as a combination gold mine, money-laundering scheme, and source of connections ("juice") in show business and politics. They keep the money and juice flowing by following a few simple rules: no killing, no drugs, no wars. You can't hit a guy in Vegas — you have to hit him out of town like Bugsy Siegel or Gus Greenbaum. You can't sell drugs in Vegas, because it attracts national attention and a bad element. Users and junkies, Syndicate or otherwise, get exiled to North Las Vegas. Finally, Vegas is an open city: any mob can play there. If you can raise the cash and find a front guy, you can set up your own casino.

Former Cleveland bootlegger **Moe Dalitz** acts as a general fixer, putting money and mobsters together with "Miami hotel men" (veterans of Lansky casinos in Cuba) to run things. The Chicago Outfit enforces the rules, so far with very little trouble: when two made men, Tony Brancato and Tony Trombino, robbed the Flamingo in 1951, an unknown assailant shot them both to death in L.A. a little over two months later with the full cooperation of Los Angeles capo Jack Dragna.

To keep competition friendly, most of the casinos give "points" of their skim — cash taken from the casinos before being declared as income — to a number of different Syndicate mobs. For example, the Detroit and Buffalo mafias share the Frontier; Detroit and St. Louis share the Aladdin. The Outfit has points in most joints. And it gets even more interlocked: the Desert Inn has a twelve-way skim. Each mob has an "inside man" watching their interests in their casinos. Meyer Lansky collects the skim from all the hotels and divides it among the participating mobs. Most of the money

to build hotels comes from loans made to shell companies by the Teamsters' Union pension fund, itself completely mobbed up under Jimmy Hoffa. So the Syndicate borrows money from itself to build hotels, leases the hotels to itself, hires its own to run them, and skims a vast percentage off the top — over \$1 million a day — as a bonus.

Chicago Outfit capo **Johnny Roselli** books talent for the casinos through his Hollywood connections, and puts various families into deals as well. In 1967 the FBI raided a rigged card game at Los Angeles' Friars' Club, arresting Roselli for installing a covert casino surveillance system enabling the fraud. Roselli's trial lasts through most of 1968; after his December 2 conviction, his role as Chicago's "outside man" or *representato* in Vegas ends. In 1967, the Outfit sent Roselli's predecessor as "Don of Las Vegas" **Marshall Caifano** (a.k.a. "Johnny Marshall") back to Vegas to enforce its will with a backslap and a blowtorch. Caifano killed ten Syndicate-linked figures during his last term as *representato*, from 1958 to 1960, but he's now listed in the *Black Book*, perhaps limiting his range of action this time around.

## GOALS AND STORIES

The Syndicate mostly wants to keep everything calm and keep the skim flowing. Open warfare almost wrecked everything in 1952 and 1958, but as long as the system keeps working everyone keeps winning. And that's the real goal in Vegas, right? The trouble is that even Hoover's distracted FBI has informants planted at every level in the Syndicate: high-profile trials can be just as dangerous as high-profile killings, without the upside. The result is a zero-sum game where nobody trusts anyone, and anyone could be out for number one.

## MR. HUGHES

By Thanksgiving 1966, when Howard Hughes slipped into the city on a secret train car, he was no longer the legendary moviemaker, aviator, inventor, and political powerhouse he had been. Forced to sell his airline TWA by the government, he was a sick, drug-addicted, obsessive-compulsive recluse with \$547 million in cash. So of course he came to Vegas. He



and his “Mormon Mafia” moved into the Desert Inn, and bought the hotel rather than move when his reservation ran out. Then he bought the Castaways, Frontier, Landmark, Silver Slipper, and the Sands. (He already owned the Green Valley Ranch from a previous trip.) Even the NGC backed down, allowing him to testify by phone during his casino licensing hearing. He bought virtually all the available gold or silver mines in the state of Nevada, no matter how tapped out they were. He bought all the vacant lots on the Strip and lots of land in the desert, both in the Vegas valley and far away. Nobody knows what he wants, or why he wants it. Nobody sees him or communicates with him.

Nobody except **Robert Maheu**, that is, and Maheu doesn't even see him. Hughes' confidant and communicator is ex-FBI, who retired in 1947 to open a private detective agency. Hughes hired him in 1955, and Maheu now pulls down \$10,000 a week plus (unlimited) expenses to get things done for the mogul. Maheu also has juice: he and Johnny Roselli have been friends ever since the two worked for the CIA trying to hit Castro.

There are two versions of the Howard Hughes legend. The first is this: Nevada and Utah banks, tired of dealing with thugs and murderers, leveraged Hughes into Vegas in the first place. Once there, they could count on Mormon probity and on Howard's eccentricity to begin the random walk of unstoppable financial force that would finally break the Syndicate's hold on the city. Hughes famously bought the Silver Slipper because he worried the giant rotating slipper atop its sign could see into his room in the Desert Inn. He drove Sinatra out of the Sands in a jealous fury at the crooner's behavior, ethnicity, and success with Ava Gardner in the 1940s. Whatever the inspiration, Syndicate ownership no longer had Vegas on lockdown.

The other is darker, and thus perhaps more likely: the Nevada and Utah banks, and the Syndicate, both saw Howard Hughes as a billion-dollar mark, another sucker to be taken. Maheu manipulated the invalid, incompetent Hughes into paying well over market value for a string of hotels, all Lansky properties conveniently owned in part by Moe

Dalitz or his partners with Teamsters Union mortgages. Hoffa got his Vegas investment repaid on an immense scale as the Syndicate traded Teamster notes for huge paychecks (with a fat percentage, and the new mortgages and leases, going to the Mormon banks) and kept their own people in all the key positions in Hughes casinos to continue the skim.

## GOALS AND STORIES

Literally anything is possible with Howard Hughes in the picture. His goal may be to morally cleanse the valley and create a luxurious resort complex in its place, to help the USAF reverse-engineer flying saucers in the desert, or to just eat all the banana nut ice cream in the world. (When Hughes changed his favorite flavor to chocolate marshmallow in 1967, the Desert Inn offered free banana nut ice cream to all its guests for a year.) The goal of everyone around him is to keep the gravy train going, and possibly to divert some of it to private projects. The FBI and CIA and other more shadowy government agencies aren't shy about requesting



Hughes' help, usually through Maheu. The king of deniable actions, Maheu claimed his agency was the model for the IMF in *Mission: Impossible*. Maybe Hughes has more than one deniable team of experts at his beck and call – the player characters?

## POWER PLAYERS

In a rich game like Vegas, there's room for a few more power players at the table with the Syndicate and the mogul. **Intertel** is another deniable-services team, composed primarily of former CIA, FBI, IRS, Justice Department, and Secret Service investigators. Owned by Resorts International (and working with Meyer Lansky), in 1970 it spearheads the palace coup against Maheu that exfiltrates Hughes from Vegas to the

Resorts International-controlled Bahamas. It might be doing anything in Vegas now.

Former Dallas mob boss **Benny Binion** founded the Horseshoe and runs it from his "office" in a corner booth of the Horseshoe restaurant. Although he likely killed four men in Dallas, he actually did his time in Leavenworth for tax evasion. (He and Hughes knew each other back in the Dallas days.) He got out in 1957 and recovered complete control of the Horseshoe by 1964. Although the law says convicted felons can't run casinos, it also says they can't carry guns, and that doesn't stop Benny from packing a .45 pistol and sawed-off shotgun. His sons Jack and Ted, and wife Teddy Jane, run the Horseshoe on paper. Binion's solid police connections (cops

can always borrow money from the cage to use in sting operations) and ties to Lansky keep the Horseshoe mostly independent.

*Las Vegas Sun* editor and publisher **Hank Greenspun** is the most powerful newsman in Vegas. He hit town as Bugsy Siegel's public relations man, and took a few years off to run guns for the Haganah and Israel in 1947-1949. He is also, of course, on the take: his juice comes from Buffalo, he holds a half-million dollar Teamster loan from Hoffa, he's pals with Sinatra and Outfit boss Sam Giancana, and Howard Hughes pays him an "advertising retainer" of over \$900,000 per year. He hasn't left all his Mossad and CIA connections behind him, either. A self-proclaimed reforming crusader, Greenspun instead makes and breaks stories that profit him and his friends and allies, and spikes those that don't.

# LAS VEGAS STORIES

Las Vegas in 1968 has an immediate appeal for *The Fall of Delta Green* agents, given the prevalence of secret-government bad actors there already. The CIA already works with both the Mob and Howard Hughes, and the military-industrial-alien complex beavers away at Area 51. Lots of promising NPCs with lots of promising secrets fill the area already, even without a drinking, gambling, or blackmail problem for the agents to intervene in.

Time-traveling tourists flock to the Rat Pack era when the dollar is powerful and the music likewise, and that means *Time Watch* troubleshooters

do too. The temptation to cure Howard Hughes or meet Elvis (or vice versa) draws temporal do-gooders, and as for temporal do-badders, Vegas has more than enough of the regular temptations in stock. (As well as the actual temptations, appearing in the Flamingo Room from May to August 1968.) Nuclear bombs are handy for would-be time changers, as are oceans of untraceable cash.

Between them, *Diamonds Are Forever* and *The Night Stalker* demonstrate that bell-bottom *Night's Black Agents* games have real potential on the Strip, although both films were shot in 1971 rather than 1968. But the vampiric vibes

in Howard Hughes as hidden recluse and the Mafia as hidden, clannish parasites have hardly been scratched: between those two and Intertel, Vegas 1968 is practically an *NBA* campaign already.

A city full of image-crazed, superstitious obsessives sounds like an *Esoterrorists* Station Duty setting in any decade. If you wanted to move *The Hills Have Eyes* back from 1977, the Nevada desert invites a *Fear Itself* experience, a villain-forward *Mutant City Blues* crossed with *Ocean's 11* cries out to be gamed, and the *Trail of Cthulhu* leads everywhere and everywhen. Tom Wolfe and Robert Venturi discovered the newborn postmodern in 1960s Vegas

## THRILLING ELEMENTS: LAS VEGAS

Here are ten thrilling elements to introduce into a Las Vegas chase scene (see *Night's Black Agents*, p. 54):

- Tourists with cameras eagerly taking your picture
- A bland but narrow concrete alley behind the glittering façade
- Casino security, well-heeled heels
- Giant neon sign that moves into your path, or at least explodes dramatically when hit
- Enormous roulette wheel, piles of chips, tables to run on
- Crowd of drunks
- A convention of policemen from out of state, wandering around and packing guns
- Famous starlet attracting crowds of press and photographers
- Construction debris: cement mixer, wheelbarrows, picks and shovels, steel cables hanging down half-finished wall frames
- The Mint 400 road rally, or a similar drag race



## ZARIAMANCY

Vegas is already a city haunted by enormous inhuman presences, not just the Bomb and the Mob but its weird Tarot trumps: Vegas Vic, the Pioneer's neon embodiment of the town's cowboy past; the djinn conjured by the Aladdin and the Sahara; Dorothy's (or Cinderella's) witchy Silver Slipper; the black-and-white Joker of the bankrupted Moulin Rouge; the Suicide Kings and Black Queens that reincarnate in various would-be lords of Vegas. Combine this pantheon with the kabbalistic beauty of odds and numbers constantly forming and shifting, the cartomantic fortunes (both kinds) won and lost on every deal, and the chaos-magickal potential of postmodern Vegas and a thousand dice rolls a minute and you have some real juju to go with the juice.

A Vegas campaign of any sort can thus benefit from Idiosyncratic Magic (*Trail of Cthulhu*, p. 212) derived from this sort of weird power and iconography. Rather than spend her own Stability straight up, a Vegas magus must gamble with the Powers: she rolls a die instead of spending Stability points to improve General tests.

**1-2:** A bad deal, pay 4 Stability points for +1 to a General test.

**3-4:** A normal trade, 2 Stability points for +1 to a General test.

**5:** A good deal, 3 Stability points for +2 to a General test.

**6:** The best deal, 1 Stability point for +1 to a General test.

Actions that placate the Power (the more obsessive, ritualistic, and weirdly focused the better) might grant bonuses to the die at the GM's discretion.

A zariamancer (from the Greek *zaria*, specifically a version of craps but generally applied to all gambling) can always open a "line of credit" if she doesn't want to spend all that Stability right now. The GM should keep track, however, and once her borrowed Stability equals her Stability rating, the Power can literally commandeer her body and mind to do anything it wants. Getting out of Stability debt requires a favor, of course...

Clever GMs can blend zariamancy with the various charms and effects given in the *KWAS Voodoo* singles for extra fun, swapping out Vegas icons for the Invisibles.

neon — an updated *Dreamhounds of Vegas* game might present drug-addled sign-makers and architects building mirrored doors into the Dreamlands from the land of broken dreams.

## SEEDS AND HOOKS

These tidbits of lore and history turned up during my research. Any of them might be the kernel of a good villainous plot, or the intriguing backstory to an otherwise conventional adventure.

- Along with Bugsy Siegel's killing, the other "founding death" of Las Vegas was Tony "Mr. Lucky" Cornero's mysterious demise at the Desert Inn craps table on July 31, 1955. Cornero had run gambling boats off L.A. for the Syndicate before coming to Vegas to build the Stardust. Moe Dalitz expertly played him until the Cleveland mob owned the Stardust's notes, at which point Cornero died at Dalitz' casino drinking Seven and Seven. His glass was washed and his body was not autopsied.

- On April 18, 1962, dozens of witnesses in Las Vegas saw a UFO shaped like a "flaming sword" overhead and heard an explosion to the northeast over Nellis AFB. This may have been the same UFO reported over Oneida, New York and reported landing in Eureka, Utah that same night.

- John Wayne Gacy worked in the Palm Mortuary in Las Vegas for a few months in 1962 before returning to Chicago. Did he commune with or contract some murder-spirit that led him to begin his serial-killing career a decade later?

- In 1965 the pulp writer, former Scientology "clear," and yoga enthusiast Paul Twitchell declared himself the "971st ECK Master" in Las Vegas and founded the vaguely Theosophist Eckankar movement. Twitchell divides his time between San Diego and Las Vegas, initiating acolytes, practicing astral projection, publishing earnest tomes, and feuding with L. Ron Hubbard.

- Small-time hood and cab driver Marvin Shumate plotted to kidnap Ted Binion and unwisely shared his plans. On December 2, 1967, sheriff's deputies found Shumate's body in the desert a mile from the Strip with a shotgun hole in his chest and a pistol wound in the head. The killing remains "unsolved."

- Having finally unloaded his unfinished "Leaning Tower of Vegas" landmark casino on Howard Hughes, developer Frank Carroll (born Francis Carraciola in Kansas City) builds the New Orleans-themed DeVillie Casino

across the street in 1968 and even prints up chips for it. Carroll never obtains a casino license, and it stands empty until 1992. Recall Dracula's pseudonym in London: could the Count have secretly created the empty — and very dark — DeVillie as his local base?

- For *Moon Dust Men*, 1968 UFO sightings in Las Vegas include a close encounter with UFO inhabitants (May 19), a meeting with bearded "Dodonians" on a dirt road near their landed saucer (June 23), encounters with aliens in "divers' suits" (July 2), nocturnal lights over Vegas (Sep. 10) and Nellis AFB (Sep. 17), and the sighting on Tropicana Boulevard of a "nebulous figure" behind a square UFO edged in blinking lights (Oct. 28).

## LAS VEGAS MYTHOS

Neither Lovecraft nor his immediate epigones mention Nevada, much less Las Vegas, in their tales. The cult of Yig of course extends across the desert Southwest, the various Navajo legends of skinwalkers and snake-demons indicate Serpent Folk at work, Derleth's sand-dwellers doubtless haunt the area, Robert Bloch's Ambrose Dexter ("The Shadow From the Steeple") may work



at the Nevada Test Site, and Bloch's doomed Boston gangster Joe Regetti (from "Creep in the Crypt") may have had brothers who fled west to a younger city away from the ghouls that gnawed him. Here are three more possible Vegas Mythos story seeds to grow on:

- The Patriarca family in Providence obviously has a Mythos connection, probably extending back to the bootleggers of Innsmouth in the 1920s. Whether they are deniable allies of the FBI in the war against Cthulhu, or trying

to leverage their elder knowledge to take over Vegas by sorcerous subterfuge, is up to the Keeper.

- The roiling flood of numbers and images constantly conjured at Las Vegas gaming tables may inadvertently summon or empower an avatar or permutation of one of the more mathematical gods or titans: Daoloth, of course, but also Yog-Sothoth or Nyarlathotep might apply here. Quachil Uttaus seems apropos for a desert metropolis invoking the past and desperate for immortality. Hastur

immanentizes when despair is near, which is every day in the Atomic City.

- OSS veteran and Provençal native Gilbert Pierrel is the head chef at the Frontier. He worked with Project Covenant or its equivalent Mythos-fighting force during WWII and now recognizes the rise of a Cthulhu cult at the Stardust. They carry out their rites around the giant Easter Island moai head outside the Aku-Aku tiki restaurant, attempting to reconcile the madness of R'lyeh with the chaos of Vegas.

## SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Many websites feature photographs of "Classic Las Vegas" or even fuller essays on the trivia of individual casinos, but there's also no shortage of film footage lovingly recording the Vegas of the 1960s. The original "Rat Pack" *Ocean's 11* (Lewis Milestone, 1960), the best of the Elvis vehicles

*Viva Las Vegas* (George Sidney, 1964), and even the mediocre Euro-crime film *They Came to Rob Las Vegas* (Antonio Isasi, 1968) provide windows to the past amid their sporadic virtues as cinema. The 2012 CBS TV show *Vegas* also covers this era. Only slightly out of period, *Diamonds Are Forever* (Guy

Hamilton, 1971) fictionalizes Howard Hughes amidst a late-Connery Bond plot, and *The Night Stalker* (John Llewellyn Moxey, 1972) is not just the debut of Carl Kolchak but a great period vampire Vegas TV movie.

The middle book of James Ellroy's Underground Trilogy of crime novels,

*The Cold Six Thousand*, uses 1960s Vegas as a main location and provides great material for games of Hughes-Mafia-FBI skullduggery. Tim Powers' secret-historical fantasy novel *Last Call* is set in the late 1980s, but flashes back to the 1960s and gives great Vegas magic vibe besides. Even Ian Fleming's 1956 novel *Diamonds Are Forever* has much to recommend it as a location study, although a nuanced portrait of the Mob it isn't.

On the hazy boundary between fiction and nonfiction we have Tom Wolfe's 1964 essay "Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can't hear you! Too noisy) Las Vegas!!!" and of course Hunter S. Thompson's magnificent yawp *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971). (The Terry Gilliam film takes you into yet another version of Vegas chaos.) Mitch Pileggi's book *Casino* (and the 1995 Martin Scorsese film) and Dennis Griffin's *The Battle for Las Vegas* deal with the 1970s

fall of the Syndicate in Vegas, but still have lots of thematic juice along with the other kind. In 1963 Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris wrote the first, and far from the last, expose of Sin City, *The Green Felt Jungle*. In that same tradition comes Sally Denton and Roger Morris' 2001 heavy-breather *The Money and the Power*, while Steve Fischer's *When the Mob Ran Vegas* is more anecdotal and friendly and thus perhaps more immediately gameable.

