MEAN™
STREETS

The RPG of Classic Film Noir

MEAN STREETS

The RPG of Classic Film Noir

Written and produced by Mark Bruno

XPG System Design
TODD DOWNING

Editors
TODD DOWNING
SAMANTHA DOWNING

Front Cover Photo
PETER HINCE

Front Cover Layout and Typesetting
TODD DOWNING

Illustrations
JASON McCUISTON
HULTON | ARCHIVE
PETER HINCE

XPG Line Producer
MARK BRUNO

Dedicated to Lydia and Taylor

Acknowledgments
Quiet honestly, this game may never have seen the light of day without the diligence and help of two very dear friends: Todd and Samantha Downing. Their advice, insight, and direction were invaluable in helping shape *Mean Streets*. I thank you both from the bottom of my heart.

Special Thanks
Sharon Tripp of Rogue Publishing and
Aaron Rosenberg

Playtesters
Kris Bijnens, David Boucherie, Bernard Cana, Stacey Cana, Dave Crokaert, Katherine Doyle, Stephen Efird, Dave Jones, Michael Jones, Berin Kinsman, Guy Miller, Catherine Parlow, Tim Poels, Jack Salerno, Jon Simpson, Tristan Soyka, Werner Van den Nauwelandt, Dirk Vervecken

Visit Deep7 on the web at www.deep7.com

Table of Contents

Chapter One
Introduction

Dark rooms with light slicing through Venetian blinds; alleys cluttered with garbage; abandoned warehouses where dust hangs in the air; rain-slick streets with water running down tin gutters; dark office buildings overlooking crowded city streets. This is the stuff of film noir—a perfect blend of form and content, where desperation and hopelessness is reflected in a brooding visual style that drenches the world in shadows. Film noir is usually cynical—and often enthralling—giving us characters trying to elude some mysterious past that continues to haunt them, hunting them down with a fatalism that taunts and teases before delivering the final, definitive blow.

Film Noir as an RPG

Mean Streets takes the best (and bleakest) aspects of film noir, presenting all the information above in a concept with which to role-play private eyes; femme fatales; district attorneys; grifters and con artists; government agents; reporters and more, during the "Classic Age" of 40s film noir. In this role-playing game, GMs and players alike are encouraged to explore the themes presented in film noir, and to craft engaging storylines around them.

The default setting for *Mean Streets* is New York City, 1943—a vibrant yet despondent era where the city is noted as a visible economic power, with magnificent architecture and monstrous billboard advertisements, all designed to arouse envy among war-ravaged Europeans. The 1940s also marked the first decade in which more people left New York than came. Jean-Paul Sartre, a Nobel Prize-winning author and philosopher, visited New York in 1946, and thought the city was acquiring a history; "it already has its ruins," he wrote.

If you're planning on participating in *Mean Streets* as a player, you are encouraged to not only drive the story along, but to examine (and question) your character's place in the grand scheme of things. Develop an intricate past (one with plenty of secrets) and a background for your character, and play off popular film noir archetypes. Perhaps playing a cool private eye with a secret past will appeal to you. Maybe portraying a deadly femme fatale on a path of romance and self-destruction is your cup of tea. For games set after World War II, you can play a grizzled war veteran, defined by his ability to survive and restore normality to an otherwise bleak world.

Crime is also a popular theme explored in film noir and will be presented in *Mean Streets* as well. There's nothing to stop players from portraying characters that embody the "other, darker side" of human society, such as gangster thugs; racketeers; gamblers; mob kingpins; or good-looking, devil-may-care playboys.

If you're reading this book as a potential GM, you'll have a wealth of information at your fingertips as well for running games that encompass the film noir "genre." This game contains information on popular film noir themes and images; advice on how to utilize those elements in an RPG; information for setting games during the mid-20th century and in New York City in particular; and tools to get you started in the form of a full-length game scenario, notable (and not so notable) NPCs, and more.

A Primer on Film Noir

Presented below is just a taste of what film noir offers to the role-playing experience. A more detailed look at its origins and subject matter, as well as GM advice for utilizing popular themes and techniques, is presented in *Chapter Five: Mastering Film Noir*.

Film noir literally means "black film," a term given to the genre by French film critics, who noted the dark visuals and themes that characterized many American crime and detective films released in France following the war. Essentially, this is more of a tone or theme than a genre—a style of American film that evolved in the 1940s, and lasted in a so-called "Classic Period" until 1960. Classic film noir developed during and after World War II, taking advantage of the post-war ambience of anxiety and suspicion. At it's most fundamental level, film noir is a distinct descendant of the crime/gangster sagas from the 1930s (i.e. *Little Caesar*, 1930; *Public Enemy*, 1931; *Scarface*, 1932), but they are different in tone and characterization. The crime element in film noir is a metaphoric symptom of society's evils, with a strong undercurrent of moral conflict.

The Tragic Hero

The heroes (or anti-heroes) of these films are often corrupt or tragic individuals themselves, yet they still have redeeming traits. In actuality, because there are never black-and-white areas in film noir, heroes and villains alike can be sinister and menacing, with both struggling to survive in a cynical world.

The females in film noir are one of two types: dutiful and reliable women or femme fatales: double-crossing, manipulative "black widows." Usually, the male protagonist in film noir has to inevitably choose (or have the fateful choice made for him) between the two women. Invariably, he picks the femme fatale.

Basic Precept Behind the Game

Film noir has all the good trappings to make a highly entertaining and suspense-filled RPG, what with all of its stark imagery, moody themes, and character-driven plots. It is this combination of visual and mood elements that drives the basic precept behind *Mean Streets*. But the game isn't all about pretentious melancholy and post-Depression Era angst, it's also one of character development and personal involvement with the plot and characters that drive the story along toward its eventual conclusion (even if they are bitter-sweet endings).

The Mechanics of Mean Streets

The system used to drive the setting is XPG. The complete rules for creating characters and running a game with XPG are detailed within the pages of *Mean Streets*. All of the information is packed neatly into two chapters for easy reference and convenience. For the uninitiated, XPG is a simple, easy-to-use rules system that allows players and GMs to focus on story and character development over detailed and unwieldy mechanics that can hamper a free-flowing, immersive role-playing experience. It is currently being used in Deep7's *Red Dwarf: The Roleplaying Game*. XPG is also highly customizable, allowing gamers to fit *Mean Streets* to particular tastes.

Contained Within

Mean Streets contains the following game rules and setting, organized into six chapters and two appendices. They include:

Chapter One: What you're reading; an introduction to the game and the film noir genre in general.

Chapter Two: This section details the specifics of character generation and provides generic character archetypes that players can use to start playing the game right away.

Chapter Three: The most utilitarian chapter in *Mean Streets* that details action resolution, combat, damage, and healing.

Chapter Four: The default *Mean Streets* setting of 1940s New York in all of its decadent glory. This chapter offers players and GMs information on the city itself, its neighborhoods, and notable landmarks. New York's movers and shakers are also included. Organized crime is presented in Chapter Five, too, with a detailed look at several prominent crime families, their history, and those involved.

Chapter Five: Provides a more detailed look at film noir—its origins, themes, and history, with advice on how GMs can incorporate those elements into a game. Players aren't excluded, either, and can use the information presented in Chapter Five to craft believable characters.

Chapter Six: Provides a full-length scenario for GMs so *Mean Streets* can be played with little preparation time.

Appendices A & B: Equipment, accoutrements, and weapons of the 1940s are detailed in the appendix complete with XPG stats. Appendix B includes an annotated filmography of some classic film noir examples, a map of New York City, generic NPC stats, and the character sheet.

Chapter Two
Character Creation

F*ilms noir are filled with interesting characters ripe for exploitation in a role-playing game. Character creation in XPG does not require the use of dice, just a combination of Character Points and your own imagination are all that is required. For those who need a little direction, Character Archetypes have been provided at the end of this chapter to give players a good idea of the types of characters that appear in films noir. The archetypes are general write-ups, though, and do not provide statistics, so players are free to design the character they want without being pigeon-holed into the process.*

Character Concepts

Before even delving into the meat of character creation, you should ask yourself what type of character you want to play. As stated before, films noir are filled with character types from all walks of life. Please refer to the Character Archetypes on page 12 to get an idea of the types of characters you can play: gangsters, private eyes, gangster molls, government agents, femme fatales, war veterans, and journalists are just the tip of iceberg. Just about anything is possible.

Next, you should decide what motivates the character. Is it greed? A lust for power? Revenge? Most likely, you'll be gaming with a group of two or more other players, so it's also important to think about your character's interpersonal traits. Think about what connections he has with the other PCs. Typically, film noir characters are a solitary lot, alienated from the rest of society and perpetual loners. Unfortunately, such character types do not make for an exciting role-playing session. By their very nature, RPGs are a cooperative effort, often requiring the skills and abilities of a number of players in order to be successful.

It's important, then, for all players involved to discuss the type of character each player will be portraying in a *Mean Streets* game session. It's unlikely that a mob gangster would be adventuring with a group of private investigators,

but perhaps a government agent would. Maybe the group would enjoy playing members of a crime syndicate? Or a team of tabloid journalists, who become embroiled in a volatile mix of paranoia and fright after becoming witnesses to a mob hit. For additional information on how to incorporate group play into *Mean Streets*, refer to *Chapter Five: Mastering Film Noir*.

The Skill Profile

Once you've decided what type of character you want to play, take a look at the **Skill Profile** section on the character sheet. You'll notice that characters are really just a group of numbers distributed among six Primary Statistics (or stats, for short) and a host of dependent skills. Each stat governs an area of raw talent or ability, attributes that every player character possesses.

Assigning Stats

Start creating your character by distributing 20 points into the six Primary Statistics. Newly created characters cannot have more than 6 points in any given stat. They are as follows:

AGILITY (AGL): This stat represents the character's general physical prowess and gross motor function. It influ-

ences things like playing sports, dancing, or brawling.

DEXTERITY (DEX): This is a character's fine motor skill and hand-eye coordination. It covers things like using a lock pick and firing a weapon.

PERCEPTION (PER): A general interactive ability, from the passive (Awareness, Empathy) to the active (Con, Etiquette). A character with a high PERCEPTION knows his place in life and in the psychological exchange between individuals.

STRENGTH (STR): This represents a character's raw muscle. It governs things like climbing and swimming, and comes in handy when the character is in a fight for his life.

INTELLIGENCE (INT): Gray matter and raw brainpower, INTELLIGENCE is a blend of instinctive knowledge and book learning.

WILLPOWER (WIL): Mental and emotional stamina. WILLPOWER helps the PC keep his cool or resist the effects of psychological tampering. It's what sets many hard-boiled types apart from their peers.

Derived Stats

Once you've used up your points for the Primary Stats, you'll need to determine your character's Derived Stats, which are listed at the bottom of the **Skill Profile** section on the character sheet. These stats are INITIATIVE, SAVE, and SHRUG.

INITIATIVE is the sum of the character's PERCEPTION and AGILITY. The total is a value that determines how quickly your character responds to stimulus, or how fast he springs into action. SAVE is the sum of the character's STRENGTH and WILLPOWER. It dictates how tough and resilient the character is when faced with bodily harm.

SHRUG is the average of the character's STRENGTH and WILLPOWER. It indicates the character's innate ability to ablate incoming damage. All three concepts are detailed further in *Chapter Three: Character Creation*.

Destiny Points

Every character automatically receives one point to place into DESTINY. This represents a character's special lot in in life. You may use a point of DESTINY at any time during the course of the game to re-roll a failed Skill Check or Wound Save. Of course, the second roll—no matter how much better or worse than the first—must be accepted. Once used, the spent DESTINY point returns at the start of the next game session.

Using a DESTINY point in a fundamentally evil or uncharacteristic manner will get it taken away permanently. Using a DESTINY point in a heroic way or manner appropriate to the character concept may earn an additional point, however. The GM should use discretion and refrain from handing out DESTINY points; they should be hard to gain, yet easy to lose.

Skill Mechanics

Now that you've placed points in your character's Primary and Derived Stats, it's time to decide what your character is good at. Distribute 30 points into any combination of skills, using the following guidelines:

1. Place no more than 4 points into any individual skill.

2. If the skill requires you to choose a Category (such as Drive: Automobile or Drive: Motorcycle) then select one that fits your character concept and allocate points to the skill as normal.

Skill Combinations

A skill/category combination only allows the character to perform an action using that particular grouping. For instance, if you chose the Drive: Automobile skill, then the character can only operate automobiles. If you want the character to have the ability to operate another vehicle (like a truck, for instance), you must allocate points to another Category. If a skill has Categories listed under the description then one must be taken. Again, multiple skill/category combinations can be purchased.

Skill Specializations

Many skills in *Mean Streets* are general in scope (such as Search and Stealth), but some can be specialized further into a particular subset of a skill. Specialization is completely optional, and works like this:

1. Choose a Specialization for a particular skill and write it in parentheses next to the skill listing. For instance, Firearms (Revolvers).

2. Every Skill Check falling under the Specialization receives a +1 bonus to the base Target Number.

3. Every Skill Check falling under the skill but outside the Specialization suffers a –1 penalty to the base Target Number.

Skill Rating

Each skill in *Mean Streets* has been broken down into key areas of ability called the Skill Rating. The Skill Rating key is as follows:

```
1 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .Terrible
2 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .Incompetent
3 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .Mediocre
4 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .Average
5 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .Expert
6 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .Master
7+ . . . . . . . . . . . . . .Legendary
```

Skill Listings

Please keep in mind that the optional Specializations and Categories listed with certain skills are only suggestions and not all-inclusive listings. Players and GMs are encouraged to devise their own.

AGILITY SKILLS

Boating: Those skilled in boating have the ability and know-how required to pilot seafaring vessels. Possible Categories include: Rowboats, Sailboats, Motorboats, Rafts, Yachts.

Brawling: Individuals with this skill know the intricacies of fisticuffs. Hands, feet, elbows, head, and other body parts can become dangerous weapons for those trained in the art of brawling.

Note: Brawling attacks use raw STRENGTH for the damage of an attack. Fists and feet effectively have a Weapon Rating of 0, with a Damage Bonus equal to the attacker's STRENGTH (see page 17).

Dodge: This grants the character an ability to physically dodge an attack, whether it's from a melee or ranged weapon, a fist, or a run-away vehicle. Awareness may grant someone the ability to spot an attack before it happens, but Dodge allows one to evade while it's occurring.

Drive: This represents a character's ability to drive a motor vehicle be it a car, motorcycle, truck, bus, etc. Normally, players should not be required to roll dice for everyday driving; however, it should be used to determine the outcome of a dangerous or challenging situation. Possible Categories include: Automobile, Motorcycle, Truck, Bus, Bicycle.

Melee: This skill represents a character's ability to use hand-to-hand weapons, such as nightsticks, police batons, blackjacks, or knives. Optional Specializations include club, knife, sword, stiletto, blackjack.

Pilot: Characters with the Pilot skill can successfully operate airborne vessels, such as hot air balloons, dirigibles, and civilian prop planes. A player should be required to roll against his character's Pilot skill during take-offs, landings, during severe weather conditions, or to perform aerial stunts. Possible Categories include: Hot Air Balloon, Civilian Airliner, Civilian Prop, Dirigible.

Ride: A character with the Ride sill has been trained in the art of riding horses or other beasts of burden. Like the Drive skill, Ride checks should not be necessary for riding an animal under normal circumstances. Possible Categories include: Horse, Pony, Camel.

Stealth: This skill comprises two distinct abilities. First, it allows a character to move silently when trying to sneak past a guard or set an ambush. Second, a character can use Stealth to track a suspect through urban and rural areas, for instance.

DEXTERITY SKILLS

Firearms: A character with this skill has been properly trained in the use and care of firearms, such as machine guns, pistols, and shotguns. Optional Specializations include: Revolvers, Machineguns, Shotguns, Hold-out Pistols, Rifles.

Electrical: Not only does this skill govern the ability to repair electrical devices, such as home appliances, radios, and vehicle electrical systems, it also allows the character to disable hard-wired security devices found in expensive homes, warehouses, office buildings, etc. Optional Specializations include: Disable, Repair, Jury-Rig.

Lock picking: This skill allows the character to bypass physical locks, such as those found on doors, safes, windows, etc. It does not, however, give someone the ability to bypass an alarm system. That ability is governed under the Electrical skill. Optional Specializations include: Locks, Safes.

Mechanics: This skill represents a character's ability to diagnose and repair complex or simple mechanical objects, such as automobiles, boats, planes, etc. Optional Specializations include: Automobiles, Boats, Motorcycles, Planes.

Performance: This skill should actually be taken once for each performing art a character possesses, such as dancing, acting, singing, or public speaking. A successful Performance check can result in a favorable reaction from NPCs, the ability to earn some cash, etc. The skill is primarily used to impress people, not deceive them.

Throwing: This skill allows characters to throw objects with a relative amount of accuracy.

STRENGTH SKILLS

Carousing: The ability to hold one's liquor. Characters with this skill are more hardy individuals and can resist the debilitating effects of consuming too much alcohol. GMs are urged to use their own discretion when determining whether a character has had too much to drink. Characters with this skill can receive a +1 to +2 bonus modifier to Resist checks when resisting the effects of alcohol on the system.

Climb: Characters with Climb are adept at scaling and descending obstacles, such as ropes, walls, foothills, mountains, fences, etc.

Endurance: The level of resistance to physical hardship, specifically food and water deprivation and exposure.

Jump: While anyone can jump relatively short distances, this skill allows a character to jump those that are far greater, such as the distance between two tall office buildings.

Strength Feat: The ability to perform amazing tricks like throwing a 300-pound mook out the window, or bending an iron bar in one's own bare hands.

Swim: This skill allows the character to propel himself through water without having to worry about drowning.

PERCEPTION SKILLS

Awareness: This represents a character's general knowledge of his surroundings and the ability to spot ambushes, detect hidden locations or objects, or discern a particular feeling about a place.

Con: This skill represents the character's ability to lie or fast-talk his way in or out of any given situation.

Empathy: This skill gives a character the ability to discern when someone is being dishonest with him. Empathy can also be used to determine a subject's general state of mind.

Etiquette: PCs will often find themselves in social situations where exuding proper manners and highbrow protocol can mean the difference between making one's way into a formal ball or getting kicked to the curb. Optional Specializations include: High-Society, Corporate, Gangland, Politics.

Gambling: This is the skill of being able to play games of chance, a popular pastime in films noir. Additionally, a successful Gambling check can tell the character whether a game has been rigged. Optional Specializations include: Poker, Craps, Blackjack, Gin, Roulette.

Interrogation: This is the skill of obtaining information from an unwilling subject through deception, veiled threats, or lies. It does not govern the use of physical violence (perceived or otherwise), however.

Negotiation: A character skilled in the art of negotiation can utilize this skill to barter for a better price on goods (whether buying or selling).

Seduction: This skill represents the art of controlling, beguiling, or tricking an individual through sexual coercion.

Streetwise: A character with this skill can move about in rough circles and obtain information from the seedier side of life. It also allows the character to locate illegal goods or information; find out which cops, gangsters, or politicians can be bought; or where to locate safety in a large city.

INTELLIGENCE SKILLS

Bureaucracy: This skill represents an individual's knowledge of business or political practices and how to best utilize the system to accomplish a goal. Bureaucracy is especially useful when red tape might hamper one's investigations. Optional Specializations include: Business, Politics, Law Enforcement.

Disguise: This skill allows the character to pass himself off as someone else, using clothes, makeup, wigs, etc. When approaching someone while under disguise, keep in mind they may roll an appropriate Skill Check to see through the deception, if they suspect something.

First Aid: This skill allows the character to apply proper care to someone who has been physically wounded. See *Damage* on page 17 for more details.

Forgery: When you need to forge someone's signature on an incriminating document or generate a false passport, Forgery is the skill of choice. An optional Specialization includes Counterfeiting.

Investigation: A character with this skill has been trained to properly follow leads, trails of evidence, and the uncovering of facts. Optional Specializations include: Forensics, Analysis, Trail.

Law: Characters with this skill have been trained in the practice of legal procedures, such as courtroom activity, legalese, contracts, precedent, etc. Optional Specializations include Contracts, Courtroom, Enforcement, Corporate, Trade.

Research: Unlike Investigation, Research allows the character to sift through records and evidence that has already been gathered together and properly organized in some form, such as library data, phone records, or personnel files.

Science: This is actually a broad skill category. Players wishing to give their characters knowledge in a particular science must choose a Category for each branch of science. Possibilities include: Anatomy, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Zoology.

WILLPOWER SKILLS

Cool: The ability to keep one's wits under stress. It also denotes self-control, assurance, and mental stability.

Intimidation: Unlike Interrogation, this skill allows a character to obtain information through fear and/or physical violence. Sometimes roughing up an informant or prisoner is more effective than tricking them.

Resist: Mental defense against the psychological effects of drugs, sleep deprivation, or torture. All players should consider taking this skill for their characters, as Resist checks turn up quite frequently during play.

A Final Note on Skills

If, for some reason, you don't find a skill, Category, or Specialization listed here that you really want your character to have, by all means consult with the GM and write it in next to "Other" on the character sheet.

Personality Traits

While the player makes up most of a character's psychology on the spot, there are a few quantifiable aspects to the character's personality that can serve as reminders to the player. While the purpose of these secondary traits are mostly in the realm of fun, they also serve to balance out the character in a numerical manner. There are three categories in the personality section of the **Character Profile** on the character sheet. These are Assets, Liabilities, and Behavior Tags.

Assets are benefits the character possesses. They can be purely psychological or material (which still act as a psychological benefit). Each Asset has a point cost associated with it, based on how beneficial it is to the character. Players must purchase Assets with Character Points during character creation.

Liabilities are aspects of the character that tend to hamper his progress in life. They can be internal factors or environmental in nature. Each Liability has a point benefit associated with it, based on how detrimental it is to the character. Taking Liabilities allow the player to buy Assets, or add points to the Skill Profile. Just remember that no skill can start higher than 4. Also remember that the character's personality must be role-played. Indeed, characters in film noir often are flawed individuals, but take care not to make them so flawed as to make them fundamentally unplayable.

Behavior Tags are little quirks the character displays, from cracking his knuckles to chain smoking. Each Behavior Tag is worth 1 point toward Assets or rounding out the Skill Profile. Again, players should use caution to make sure the character is playable.

ASSETS

Ambidextrous (-1): This allows the character to utilize both hands without any penalty. Typically, a character using a tool or weapon in his off-hand or wielding two weapons at once will accrue a -1 penalty to his base Target Number.

Attractiveness (-2): Just as there are many "ugly" people portrayed in classic film noir, so there are those who exude physical beauty and hard-to-resist charisma. A character bestowed with this asset can add +1 to the base Target Number for all Empathy, Seduction, and Etiquette checks.

Contact (-1 to -3): In classic film noir, the adage, "it's not what you know, but who you know," holds true to the genre. Contacts who would just as likely sell out the character as give him information 75% of the time are worth 1 point. Those contacts whose information is reliable more or less 50% of the time are worth 2 points. Contacts who are true allies, very reliable, and willing to offer assistance no matter what are worth 3 points.

Courage (-3): The character knows no fear. He passes any normal Resist check for fear or terror, unless boxcars are rolled (see page 14), in which case he'll most likely lose his cool.

Direction Sense (-1): Armed with this Asset, the character always knows which direction north faces. This prevents the character from becoming lost whether outside under the stars or inside a building. However, when used indoors, the character suffers a -1 penalty to the base Target Number. Direction Sense is extremely useful when chasing a thief through city streets and back alleys, or tracking a suspect through thick, dark woods.

Insight (-1): The character has a mind for solving problems of all sorts. The character should be privy to inside information regarding intricate problem solving at the GM's discretion.

Law Enforcement Powers (-3): This asset gives characters legal jurisdiction to enforce the law with all of its privileges and restrictions. Law Enforcement Powers should only be given to characters actively employed in law enforcement, such as police officers, detectives, government agents, etc. Additionally, this Asset allows characters to carry concealed weapons, arrest criminals, and perform searches.

Luck (-1 to -2): During the course of an adventure, the player can roll 1D6 and add it to the Target Number of any skill check. Of course, this does not guarantee success, but it can certainly promote success with a convincing wink. This Asset can be used either once (1 point) or twice (2 points) per game session.

Rational (-3): A character possessed with Rational thought has a better than average chance of stopping himself from making a dangerous, humiliating, or stupid mistake. Each time the player attempts his character to perform

an unintentional, irrational action, the GM should warn the player of the potential outcome.

Toughness (-1 to -3): The character possesses a toughness and resilience to physical trauma. Each point spent on Toughness (up to 3, maximum) increases the character's SAVE by 1. This will help keep him conscious and upright when wounded.

Wealth (-1 to -3): The character with this Asset isn't necessarily a wealthy individual. Rather, the Wealth asset implies that the character came into some money prior to the start of the campaign. For instance, a Gangster could've had a particularly good week shaking down the neighborhood for protection money, or the crooked Detective might have skimmed a little cash off the money confiscated from an illegal gambling ring.

Characters can begin the game with twice (-1), four times (-2), or six times (-3) their base income. The extra wealth gained from this Asset is applied to the character's base monthly income before he rolls for an incremental increase (see *Starting Wealth*, page 11).

LIABILITIES

Addiction (+1 to +3): The character has a dependency ranging from the mild (caffeine, chocolate) to the moderate (nicotine) to the severe (cocaine, heroin). The degree of addiction purchased becomes the penalty to the Target Number of any skill checks attempted while without the chosen substance. Withdrawal occurs at different times for different addictions, so common sense and GM discretion is essential here.

Age (special): The character is past his prime. The offset benefit to this Liability is that for every point taken from a Primary Stat, the character gains 3 points to assign to skills or toward purchasing Assets. For every 10 years of actual chronological age beyond 30, the character may reduce any one stat by 1 point, for redistribution, as noted above.

Bad Luck (+2): If it weren't for bad luck, the character would have no luck at all. Characters with this unfortunate Liability can have something go wrong during the course of the game, subject to the whim of the GM. Of course, it is considered bad form should a GM abuse this, which could result in PC death or permanent injury.

Bloodlust (+1): A character with this Liability is a merciless, cold-blooded killer who wants nothing more than to see his opponent dead. The character will never try to subdue an opponent nor spare his life under any circumstance.

Compulsion (+1 to +3): The character must engage in a certain behavior to function normally. The point benefit is directly proportionate to how invasive the behavior is. It can be a mild compulsion to brush after every meal (+1), an obsession with material wealth (+2), or a compulsion to avoid germs at any cost (+3).

Coward (+1 to +3): For whatever reason, the character has an aversion to confrontation and will avoid physical confrontation if at all possible. Any time the character is exposed to a situation that could lead to physical harm, he must make a successful Cool check with a –1 to –3 modifier, depending on the level taken. If the check is unsuccessful, the character suffers a –1 penalty to all Skill Checks until the threat of physical harm has passed.

Enemy (+1 to +3): At some point in the character's past he has acquired the enmity of a rival, be it a politician, mob kingpin, slighted lover, police officer, etc. A minor enemy with minimal resources to hamper a character is worth +1 point. An enemy with moderate resources and the ability to harm the character is worth +2 points. An enemy or organization with considerable resources and the ability to kill the character is worth +3 points.

Gullibility (+2): The character's default behavior is to believe what he's told by others, no matter how foolish such information is. He's easily tricked into believing any initial impression or visual image. The character must make a successful Empathy check to determine if he's being duped, and is at –2 to any Empathy vs. Con opposed checks when trying to avoid being fooled.

Hidden Past (+1 to +3): The quintessential film noir character comes complete with a shady past, and characters in *Mean Streets* should be no different. Possible examples include: being wanted for an alleged crime in another city or state (+1); possessing a secret family history or separate identity (+2); being wanted for murder (+3). The Liability lies in the fact that should a character's Hidden Past ever be revealed, he will suffer from a poor reputation and negative reactions from those he meets (possibly including harm).

Impulsiveness (+2): The character prefers action over talk and will frequently act first and think later. This can be especially dangerous during combat or while tracking/shadowing a suspect.

Moral Restriction (+1 to +3): The character has a prohibition on certain behavior. It can be as mild as "not drinking" (+1), to a more moderate "not causing harm to individuals" (+2), to the extreme "will not under any circumstances

harm a living creature" (+3). If the character ever engages in the restricted behavior, he becomes flooded with self-doubt and uses the level of the restriction as a Target Number penalty for any Skill Checks until the situation is resolved and the restriction is back in place.

BEHAVIOR TAGS

All Behavior Tags have a point bonus of +1 and should be role-played as much as is appropriate at the gaming table.

Cynicism: No matter how good the circumstances, the cynical character will always be able to find the black cloud to the silver lining.

Fidgeting: The character is constantly moving some part of his body in a harmless, yet potentially distracting manner, from cracking knuckles, to hand wringing, to leg vibrating, to tapping his pencil.

Nervous Tic: This tag manifests itself whenever the character comes under stress (and sometimes for no apparent reason whatsoever). It is an unconscious, automatic muscle spasm in a visible part of the head or neck, like a twitchy eye.

Pet Peeve: Something small and insignificant really disturbs the character. It can be any one thing, from another character's Fidgeting, to someone else's Cynicism. More than one Pet Peeve may be taken.

Ritual: The character has something that has become a daily habit, and must be done in the proper order, with proper timing. Whatever the ritual, the character will begin to get surly if it is ever postponed or interrupted.

Superstition: Whether it's an old one (crossing fingers, salt over the shoulder, not walking under a ladder) or an individual mandate (lucky ring, trusty weapon), the character will always go out of his way to adhere to the superstition. If he is unable to, the character begins to doubt his abilities and the GM can randomly make the player re-roll a successful Skill Check.

Starting Wealth

Rationing began early in the United States at the onset of the country's involvement with WWII. Among the rationing of meat, cheese, fats, and all canned goods, President Franklin D. Roosevelt froze wages, salaries, and prices to forestall inflation. In the early- to mid-forties the median family income is $2,685 per year.

Starting wealth for characters in *Mean Streets* is, more or less, based upon that average income, but on a monthly basis. Additionally, players should expect the monthly average income to fluctuate depending on the type of character they wish to play. Once the player has determined the base monthly income apropos to the Character Archetype, he must roll 1D3 to determine how many month's savings the character has prior to the start of the game. Please note that this die roll is applied to the base amount only and not on the extra wealth a character may have obtained through the Wealth asset.

Character Archetype	Base Monthly Income
Assistant DA	$300
Detective	$200
Dilettante	$900
Femme Fatale	$300
Gangster	$700
Gangster Moll	$200
Girl Friday	$70
G-Man	$250
Grifter	$100
Private Eye	$120
Reporter	$180
Stooge	$90
War Veteran	$100

If a player has designed a character that does not apply to the default *Mean Streets* archetypes, then simply take the median family income for 1943, round it up to $2,700 and divide by 12 to determine the character's base monthly income. Roll 1D3 as normal to determine savings.

Women and Starting Wealth

As sexist as the notion is to the 21st-century mind, men and women were viewed by much different standards in the 1940s. Although women in this day and age (1943) are paid only a fraction of the income enjoyed by their male counterparts, they still enjoy the old-fashioned benefits of their gender: free meals and drinks (depending on the source of the meal ticket) and a modicum of physical protection. A shrewd female character who knows how to "sink her claws into a man," or effectively play the field, can have a remarkably smooth ride, as is evidenced by Character Archetypes like the Femme Fatale and the Gangster Moll.

Filling in the Blanks

Once you have the **Skill Profile** and **Character Profile**

filled out, you'll need to jot down a few extra tidbits to further flesh out the character. Write down a few key goals for the character (space is provided on the back of the character sheet), what the character would most like to be remembered for, and a tagline or slogan the character is noted for. At the top of the character sheet, there is space to fill in all the personal vital statistics, like name, age, height, weight, etc. If you aren't sure about any of it, check the Character Archetype and consult with the GM

Although it's entirely optional, you should begin to draft a personal history and background for your character, taking into consideration all of his skills, abilities, and personality traits. Characters in film noir have rich, diverse backgrounds and intricate pasts, so feel free to "let your hair down" and have fun creating this aspect of your character. This is the one aspect of your character that isn't determined solely by numbers, so feel free to express your creativity.

Character Improvement

Each game session in which a character participates will earn him some sort of experience. A good rule of thumb for a single session is roughly 10 Character Points. After the GM has awarded the base points, he may decide to award additional points to characters he felt overcame an obstacle, solved a problem, or achieved part of the character's personal goals. An additional 1-3 points is considered a good range, depending on the circumstances for which they are being awarded.

New skills (those not taken during character creation) may be learned at a cost of 10 points for a Skill Rating of 1. The cost is halved if the character has an instructor. Existing skills may be improved using the following rules:

To improve a skill already possessed by the character he must spend an amount of character points equal to twice the current Skill Rating to raise it one level (i.e. raising a skill from 2 to 3 costs 4 points).

Raising stats is also allowed in the game, but at a much higher cost—the current rating times 20 (i.e. raising a stat from 4 to 5 would cost 4 x 20 = 80 points). In addition, stats may not be raised more than 2 points beyond their starting value, and cannot exceed the stat cap of 6.

Character Archetypes

This section deals with some of the possible Character Archetypes that players can assume the roles of during a *Mean Streets* campaign. They are only broad character templates, however, meant to give players an idea as to what types of characters to play.

Additionally, players are encouraged to develop their own character concepts based on either their own whims or clas-

sic film nor characters, a film genre seasoned with all types of interesting individuals.

Assistant District Attorney

The Assistant DA can be the most versatile character to play in *Mean Streets*. He can either be a staunch supporter of the justice system or a crooked lawyer under the thumb of a local crime boss. In classic film noir, this character doesn't just sit behind a desk all day or spend all of his time in a courtroom, prosecuting criminals. Instead, the ADA is out and about in the field, investigating alongside Detectives and Government Agents, or making deals with mob kingpins in speakeasy backrooms and smoky nightclubs.

Detective

Unlike the Private Eye, the Detective is still an officer of the law, and one who is sanctioned by a local law enforcement agency. Aside from working the ubiquitous homicide, the Detective often goes undercover, attempting to infiltrate crime syndicates, smuggling rings, or illegal gambling operations. It's not unlikely that this Character Archetype would investigate a crime with different characters, such as Reporters, Private Eyes, and Government Agents.

Dilettante

Another popular character in classic film noir is the Dilettante, the wealthy man or woman who wants for nothing, yet nonetheless becomes embroiled in dangerous situa-

tions they cannot hope to escape (as either perpetrators of a crime or the victim themselves). Regardless, many a Dilettante has hired the services of a Private Investigator, and there's nothing to suggest they wouldn't tag along "just for the fun of it." A Dilettante's vast resources and influences would make a worthy addition to any investigation.
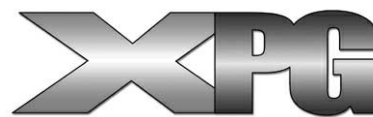
Femme Fatale

The Femme Fatale is the black widow, the double-crosser, and the catalyst for the downfall of many an unwitting member of the opposite sex. Portrayals of women in film noir run the gamut of characters, but the Femme Fatale is the most popular. That is not to say, however, that women characters in *Mean Streets* cannot be strong-willed individuals with their own agendas, motives, and strengths. Players are encouraged to create diverse female roles.

Gangster

If the Private Eye is the quintessential "hero" in film noir, then the Gangster is his exact opposite. Essentially, this is a catchall label that can describe any type of gangster character, from mob capos, to enforcers and assassins, to ordinary street thugs, gamblers and racketeers. Whatever their lot in life or ranking in one of New York's infamous crime families, the Gangster is not one to be trifled with.

Gangster Moll

She may not be as wicked as the Femme Fatale, but neither is she a slouch when it comes to getting what she wants. The Gangster Moll is the antithesis of the Girl Friday. While the Private Eye's female companion is devoted, hard working, and prepared to handle the unexpected, the Moll is cold, calculating, and would sell-out her mobster boyfriend for the price of a diamond ring. But can you blame her? She lives in a world of corruption, deceit, and merciless players, so she does whatever it takes to survive. The Gangster Moll is nobody's fool.

Girl Friday

While she may be the quintessential film noir "sidekick," the Girl Friday isn't just an office secretary responsible for mundane tasks; she's the "glue" that keeps her private eye boss together when the going gets tough. With her knack for finding obscure references, to her witty repartee, to her unwillingness to back down from anyone and anything, the Girl Friday is a take charge, no-frills kinda gal.

G-Man

The Government Agent is also a popular character in film nor. Like the Femme Fatale, these intrepid men and women can run the gamut from hard-nosed federal employees determined to root out evil where it festers (thus preserving the American way of life) or they can be unscrupulous people who are no better than the criminals they attempted to prosecute in the first place!

Grifter

The Grifter is known by many different titles—con artist, swindler, gold digger—but whatever his designation, the Grifter knows how to get what he wants, when he wants it. Unfortunately, this character can never stay in one place for too long, lest local law enforcement officials catch on to his act and move in to arrest him. The Grifter is also something of a "procurement specialist," and typically knows where to get the best deals on the best merchandise (legal or otherwise).

Private Eye

This archetype is the quintessential classic film noir character—a hard-boiled ex-cop or detective that chose to strike out on his own. Often, these characters are cynical individuals, having seen it all, but can still fall from the ubiquitous double-cross. Most have a difficult time paying the bills, so anyone willing to pay a P.I.'s fee is fair game.

Reporter

The media also plays an important role in classic film noir, so it should be no surprise that the Reporter can fill a useful role in any *Mean Streets* game. Like other film noir character types, the Reporter can be an unscrupulous yellow journalist or an individual determined to "get the truth out," whatever the cost. With excellent investigative and research skills, the Reporter has the potential to be a valuable addition to any group.

Stooge

He's the quiet, unassuming man that blends in with the crowd. Maybe he polishes your shoes on the street corner in the morning, maybe he runs the corner newsstand, or pours your Turkish blend at the local coffee shop. He could even be a police informant with his nose to the grindstone and his ear on the streets. However he gets it, the Stooge is a primary source of information on anything to do with anything. Unlike the Grifter, who utilizes his "skills" to procure material items, the Stooge specializes in getting intangible information.

War Veteran

Many films noir made during the 1950s featured the grizzled War Veteran—an alienated, tragic hero thrown back into society after experiencing the horrors of World War II. Often, these characters attempt to survive the trials and tribulations while attempting to restore some normality to an otherwise bleak world.

Chapter Three
Game Mechanics

This chapter covers how to determine whether a character in Mean Streets succeeds at an attempted action, as well as covering other important elements, such as combat resolution, damage, and healing. In addition to this rulebook, you will only need a copy of the Mean Streets character sheet, a pencil, and two standard six-sided dice (referred to as 2D6).

Stats and Skills

A character is made up of several standard characteristics called stats (short for statistics). Stats are the bolded entries located under the **Skill Profile** on the character sheet. Under each stat is a list of potential skills the character can have. A skill falls under the stat most appropriate for its use within the game. Each stat has a rating from 1 to 6 (the Stat Rating), while each skill has a rating of 0 or higher (known as the Skill Rating). When combined, they help determine whether using a skill succeeds or fails. Successful skill use is determined by making a Skill Check.

Making Skill Checks

To make a Skill Check, add the skill you want to use with the stat it falls under. This is the base Target Number—the number you'll need to roll equal to or less with 2D6 to successfully use the skill. On most Skill Checks, a simple success is satisfactory. In combat, the margin by which you make your roll becomes important. Obviously, the lower you roll, the higher your margin of success. A natural result of 2 (snake-eyes) is always a success, and a natural result of 12 (boxcars) is always a failure. Keep in mind, however, that modifiers may be added by the GM, thereby altering the required Target Number. For instance, hitting a fast moving target may require a –1 modifier. Trying to pick a lock while under fire from mob hit men may require a –3 modifier. Trying to disable an alarm system with the help of building schematics might warrant a +1 modifier. Even if a Target Number rises above 12, it is still possible to fail miserably. Subsequently, even if it falls below 2, it is still possible to succeed.

Active and Passive Skill Checks

An Active Skill Check is anything the character does that takes time, concentration, or utilizes a physical skill. A Passive Skill Check is anything the GM mandates as a reaction to the character's environment, like Awareness, Endurance, Resist, etc.

Unskilled Checks

If a character has a Skill Rating of zero, he may still attempt to use the skill in question. The Target Number is simply the appropriate Stat Rating, plus the Skill Rating of 0. In this case, the character is relying on raw talent. If the stat is 2 or less in such a case, only a simple success will be possible because the Target Number is too low to provide a margin.

Preparing A Skill Check

Players may choose to take extra rounds to prepare for a Skill Check. For each round the character prepares the

action, he receives a +1 bonus to the Target Number, up to a maximum of +3. If the character is interrupted by taking damage or engages in any other Active Skill use, the preparation bonus is negated. Note that a player cannot prepare a Passive Skill Check, only Active Skills can be prepared.

Critical Success and Failure

If the result of a Skill Check is snake-eyes (a natural 2), the character has had a critical success. Re-roll the Skill Check and add the margin of success (if any) to that of the first. This can really make a difference, especially in combat. If the player rolls a Skill Check and the result is boxcars (a natural 12), the character has had a critical failure—not only did the character fail, he failed spectacularly, tripping over his own feet, losing control of his vehicle, etc.

GMs should use discretion here. Having the character fumble with a weapon or losing his next action because he tripped and fell is usually warranted; accidental death or losing a limb are usually not.

Running Combat

In *Mean Streets*, time is usually a subjective element and should not be strictly adhered to under normal circumstances, unless a time element is imperative to the plot. Combat is another story, however—each combat round constitutes 3 seconds of "in-game time." When the GM calls for combat rounds, each player makes an Initiative check. Roll 2D6 against the number in the box labeled INITIATIVE on the character sheet. The player with the highest margin acts first and may perform one action, then the player with the next highest, and so on.

Every player gets one action per round. Multiple actions are possible, with the following rules:

* The player must declare the total number of intended actions on his own turn during the first pass through the play order.

* For each subsequent action beyond the first, the character applies a –3 penalty to each Target Number. This penalty is cumulative, so a second action would be –3, a third would be –6, etc. This penalty is in addition to any Target Number modifiers due to environment or Wound Status (see page 17).

Once all players have resolved their first actions for the round, play returns to the first player, who may then resolve any secondary actions, continuing down the line once more. Play continues in this manner until all actions for the round have been resolved. An action consists of one of the following:

* Making an Active Skill Check.
* Making an attack or dodging.
* Falling prone or rising from a prone position.
* Moving the character's AGILITY in meters.
* Drawing, readying, or reloading a weapon.

Performing a Passive Skill Check (i.e. Awareness and similar receptive skills) and parrying an attack are considered reactive, and do not cost an action.

Players who roll a critical failure against their INITIATIVE are required to have their character perform actions last in the round. Subsequently, players who roll a critical success can allow their characters to perform actions first in the round (regardless of the margin of success). If more than one player critically succeeds against their INITIATIVE, their characters should go in order of highest margin of success to lowest, although their actions are considered simultaneous. If more than one player critically fails against their INITIATIVE they can "dice off" (roll 1D6, highest roll

A player may always decline to take a declared action. Once an action is taken, however, its effects are binding unless a DESTINY point is spent (see *Destiny Points*, page 5).

ssic Film Noir
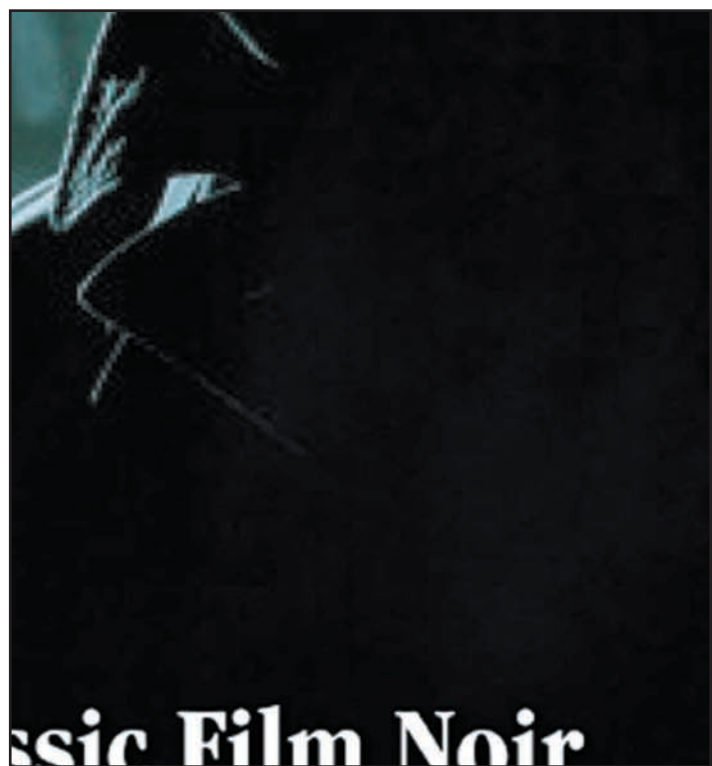
wins) to see in what order they go last.

Opposed Rolls/Melee Combat

When a player wants his character to engage another or an NPC in melee combat, the player rolls a Skill Check vs. the character's appropriate Target Number (AGILITY + Dodge, DEXTERITY + Firearms, etc). Be sure to add the weapon accuracy (WA) of the weapon to the Target Number (and the defense roll, if applicable).

The defending character must make a Skill Check against AGILITY + Dodge or AGILITY + Melee to jump, roll, parry, or otherwise move out of the way of a melee or ranged attack. The character with the highest margin of success is the winner, and has either landed the hit or avoided getting hit. If the defender is successful, the attack is completely negated, parried, or avoided, and no damage is done. Ties go to the defender.

For game purposes, parrying is considered passive (a Reactive Skill Check), and therefore does not cost an action. Ranged attacks cannot be parried. A character can attempt to parry any number of attacks from visible opponents without penalty. However, there's always the danger of that hitman hitting the PC from behind with a blackjack; you can't parry (or dodge) what you can't see.

Ranged Attacks

Shooting a firearm is treated like any other Skill Check, with possible modifiers for distance, size, and movement of the target. Although dodging a bullet is unlikely, diving aside still lowers the likelihood of being hit, and thus opposed rolls are called for. Area effect weapons (explosives and the like) may not be dodged as a general rule, although if we follow cinematic precedent, hitting the deck will cut the weapon rating (WR) of the weapon in half (round up). If the ranged attack is successful, multiply the margin of success by the WR of the weapon. Ranged weapons do not receive the STRENGTH bonus that melee weapons do.

Calling Shots

Unless otherwise declared, any successful attack will hit the torso (undoubtedly the largest target on the body). There are occasions, however, when you may want to aim for a much smaller target, like your opponent's weapon hand, for instance. The general range of modifiers for a called shot is as follows:

-1 for the arms or legs
-2 for the head, hands, or weapon

Targeting Modifiers

It's relatively easy to shoot a stationary target a few meters away, unless you're unskilled with a firearm. To simulate the effects of outside influences (other than skill) that can hamper an effective ranged attack, GMs can utilize the following modifiers:

-1 if the target is moving
-2 if the target is moving quickly
-3 if the target is behind cover

Note that if the target is an actual character it may be best to try to avoid the incoming fire by dodging, explained in the following section.

Dodging

A character may try to evade a specific incoming attack by diving aside or otherwise making himself a harder target to hit. See *Ranged Attacks* for details. Dodging counts as an action, but doesn't need to be declared ahead of time. If a character decides to dodge, any subsequent actions or Skill Checks during the round are at the cumulative –3 penalty.

A full dodge is when the character attempts to avoid the entire gang of hoodlums shooting at him down the corridor. The PC accomplishes the maneuver by making a single Dodge (or Melee) roll and using the margin of success as the penalty for all enemy fire to hit the character that round. A character performing a full dodge may not perform any other Skill Checks during that round (including parries) and cannot declare additional actions.

Surprise

If a character succeeds in surprising another (opposed rolls: Stealth vs. Awareness), the sneaking party gets one free combat action before combat rounds officially begin. The surprised party gets no dodge, parry, or other defensive action, but may perform actions as normal once combat rounds begin.

Running Fire

A character performing a basic combat move (AGILITY in meters) may attempt running fire, snapping off a single ranged attack. The penalty for running fire is –1 to the combat skill's Target Number in addition to any penalties to called shots or automatic fire.

Automatic Fire

Some weapons allow automatic fire. This is usually in the form of either a three-round burst or full auto (where the goal is to hose down an area with a hail of bullets). A three-round burst applies a –1 penalty to the combat skill's Target Number, hits a single location, and does three separate applications of damage. A character may fire full auto at –3

to hit, emptying up to 50% of the weapon's magazine. If the shot is successful, roll 1D6 for every 10 rounds fired. The result is the number of hits to be distributed among targets as the shooter wishes.

Damage

If the attacker is successful, subtract the defender's margin from the attacker's and multiply the result by the WR of the weapon being used. No need to roll randomly; the damage is a direct result of the precision of the hit and the weapon being used. If the weapon has a damage bonus (DB) listed, add that to the damage result. If the weapon is a melee (non-ranged) weapon, add the attacker's STRENGTH to any damage. Finally, apply the remaining damage to the character's SHRUG.

If the damage result is less than SHRUG, the character takes no wounds, but is knocked about and suffers a –1 penalty to his next action, Skill Check, or INITIATIVE.

If the damage result is more than SHRUG, the character suffers 1 wound, and should mark the appropriate box in the Wound Status area of the character sheet. If the damage result is more than twice SHRUG, the character suffers 2 wounds, etc. See *Wound Status* for more information.

Wound Status

Each level of damage taken is represented on the character sheet's **Current Medical Condition** chart, a gradually worsening representation of the character's physical state. If the character has taken 1 wound, he is at condition 1, or Scathed. If the character takes 2 wounds, he is at condition 2, or Roughed Up. This Wound Status is cumulative, i.e. if the character is currently Scathed and takes another 2 wounds he's now at condition 3, or Worse For Wear. Medical Conditions are as follows:

1. Scathed: The character feels euphoric and slightly fatigued; however, there are no Wound Penalties at this level.

2. Roughed Up: The character has some mild cuts, abrasions, and bruises. At this level, the character has a –1 Wound Penalty.

3. Worse for Wear: The character has broken bones, bleeding wounds, and may be in shock. At this level, the character has a –2 Wound Penalty.

4. Hurt Badly: Things are not going quite well at this point. The character has internal bleeding, shattered bones, and has gone into shock. At this point, the character can fall unconscious and has a –3 Wound Penalty.

5. Incapacitated: The character is so badly wounded that taking an action at this point is nearly impossible. He is in a dazed stupor and is fighting hard to remain conscious and cognizant of his surroundings. At this level, the character has a –4 Wound Penalty.

6. Near Death: The character is not only unconscious, but is in danger of dying. At this level, the character has a –5 Wound Penalty.

7. Dead: The character is clinically dead.

Saves

When a character has been wounded, the player must make a Wound Save. This is done by rolling 2D6 vs. the PC's SAVE score. As long as the player rolls a simple success, the character remains upright and kicking. If the SAVE is unsuccessful, the character falls unconscious from wound shock. He may continue to attempt making a SAVE roll as normal during his turn in the combat round, but the character cannot make any other Skill Checks or take any combat actions.

When the player has rolled a successful SAVE, he revives and may act as normal (minus any wound penalties) in the next full combat round.
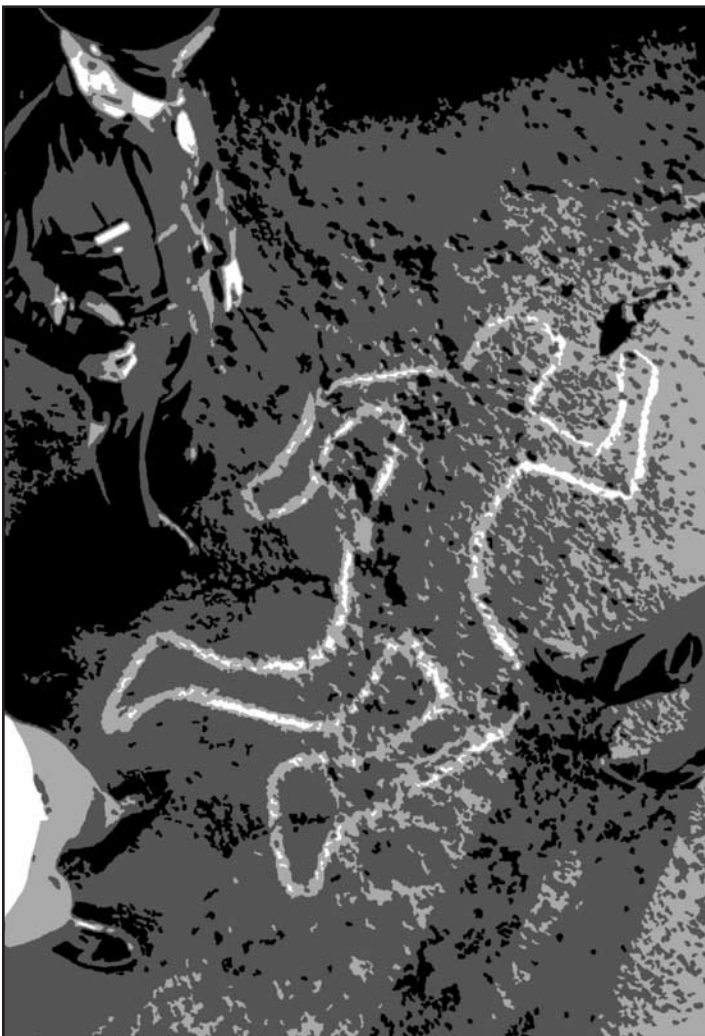
Wound Penalties

When a character has been wounded, he or she will suffer a Wound Penalty (the negative number in parentheses next to the wound level). This negative modifier is applied to any Skill Check as long as the character remains in his wounded state. This includes SAVE checks and INITIATIVE, as well as any physical or mental Skill Checks. Although a character may have a Target Number less than 2, the player may always attempt to roll a critical success.

Non-Lethal Damage

There are many times when attempting to knock out a character is preferable to outright killing him.

To knock a character unconscious, the player must declare his intent to do so, and must be either unarmed or carrying a blunt instrument (pistol butt, nightstick, club, etc). The attack is made as normal, but instead of marking off wound damage, the defender must make a SAVE to keep from getting knocked out. Damage is figured as normal (see *Damage*, page 17), but instead of dealing wounds to the character, he simply makes a SAVE, minus the appropriate Wound Penalties.

To be clear: the character is not actually wounded. He's been thumped on the head and, if the SAVE fails, will be dozing for 1D6 hours. When awakened, the character will function as Scathed for the amount of time spent unconscious.

Stabilizing a Wounded Character

Any player may attempt to stabilize a wounded character by performing a First Aid check, modifying the skill's Target Number by the Wound Penalty for the appropriate wound level. In this case, the Wound Penalty is treated as a difficulty modifier and subtracted from the aiding character's First Aid skill.

If the First Aid check is successful, the character is stabilized and will not worsen unless he is wounded again. If the check is unsuccessful, the character will remain just as wounded as before. If the check is a critical success, the character is not only stabilized, but improves by one level. If the check is a critical failure, the character automatically downgrades one level (and is not stabilized). Once a character has been stabilized, subsequent successful First Aid checks will upgrade the character's condition by one level each (but only at a maximum rate of one level per day).

If a character takes cumulative damage that puts him in a Hurt Badly condition, his condition will degrade by one level for every 5 minutes of game time due to blood loss and internal trauma unless stabilized.

Vehicle Combat

The car chase scene in classic film noir is often loud, fast, and deadly, so the optional rules here attempt to simulate that cinematic element. Each vehicle is rated for Speed (SPD), Maneuverability (MAN), and Chassis Strength (CHA).

When driving an automobile, add the SPD and the MAN ratings to the character's Drive skill. For vehicle combat, characters roll INITIATIVE as normal. A character may perform one of the following for each combat action he has declared:

* Close with or pull away.
* Take evasive action.

Close with or pull away: The driver must make a SPD roll to determine whether his vehicle closes with or pulls away from his opponent's vehicle. Add the SPD rating to the character's Drive skill and make a Drive check. The vehicle closes or pulls away up to the margin of success in tens of meters.

Evasive Action: A vehicle may take evasive action to avoid being hit, in much the same way an active dodge works in melee combat. The driver adds the MAN rating of the vehicle to his Drive skill, and the margin of success becomes a penalty to the opposed roll for any incoming attack that combat round.

Collision and Ramming: If one vehicle collides with another, use the difference in the two vehicle's CHA as the weapon rating, and the difference in SPD as the margin of successes. Damage is applied to both vehicles. When a vehicle has been depleted of its Chassis Strength, it is destroyed.

Damage to Vehicles

It's unlikely that a .38 snub-nosed revolver will cause significant damage to, say, a 1947 Packard sedan, based solely on the size of the vehicle and the materials used in its construction. Therefore, a vehicle's CHA is used to determine the strength of a vehicle when rammed by another of relatively the same size. That is not to say, however, that a character cannot elect to aim for a certain component of a vehicle in an attempt to either damage its occupants or render it inoperable.

If a player wishes his character to shoot out the tires of a fleeing vehicle, the GM should impose a logical modifier to the task, such as a -3 penalty to hit a small object on a moving target. Alternatively, the GM can require that in order to hit a vehicle component while moving, the player must achieve a critical success on the attack roll.

Chapter Four
New York City

T he year is 1943. Three years prior, America left behind an era of despondence and desperation in The Great Depression, only to be thrust into another of disillusionment and adversity with World War II. It is this turbulent age where players and GMs are invited to explore the world of classic film noir and New York City, with all of its vibrancy and decadence.

America in the 1940s

World War II essentially defines the 1940s. As Dwight D. Eisenhower commands American troops in Europe, President Franklin D. Roosevelt guides the country on the home front. Life in America is vastly different than it was during the Great Depression.

The successful use of penicillin by 1941 has revolutionized medicine. Unemployment is almost nonexistent, mostly because hundreds of thousands of men were drafted and sent off to war. As a result, the government reclassified 55 percent of their jobs, allowing women and African Americans to fill them. There are scrap drives for steel, tin, paper, and rubber—all sources of supplies that give people a means of supporting the war effort. And even though automobile production ceased in 1942, and food rationing began in 1943, millions of Americans are faring much better than they were five years ago

Entertainment

Music reflects American enthusiasm, yet it is tempered with European disillusionment. While the European émigrés like Bueno Walter and Nadia Boulanger introduced classical dissonance to the States, the era of the Big Bands has begun, with that form of jazz dominating the popular music charts. Individuals like Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Duke Ellington lead some of the more famous bands.

Radio is the lifeline for Americans during this time, providing information and entertainment to the starved masses hungry for diversion and news of the war effort.

Popular programming includes soap operas, quiz shows, children's hours, mystery stories, fine drama, and sports. Kate Smith and Arthur Godfrey are popular radio hosts, known and loved by many Americans. In popular dancing, the Jitterbug, which made its appearance at the beginning of the decade, is finally becoming the first dance in two centuries to allow individual expression.

Fads and Fashions

The Zoot Suit is the height of fashion among daring young men, while women adopt the "convertible suit," which consists of a jacket, short skirt, and blouse (the jacket can be shed for more formal attire at night). Silk stockings are unavailable at this time, so to give the illusion of stockings with a prominent seam, women draw a line up the backs of their legs with an eyeliner pencil. In the work place, "Rosie the Riveter" takes on a man's job, so slacks became acceptable attire.

Organized Crime

The gangster has, in fact, become as American as apple pie and baseball. Even before the 1940s, people have both marveled at and been reviled by this genre of criminal activity in the United States. Underworld figures like Al "Scarface" Capone and Jack "Legs" Diamond captured the public's fascination during the 1920s. In the 1930s it was a different brand of criminal that became popular. Bank robbers like John Dillinger, "Pretty Boy" Floyd, and "Baby Face" Nelson were the rage of what was known as the "Midwest Crime Wave."

The 1940s, however, have brought forth a new kind of criminal. Organized crime not only festers in the shadows but behind legitimate business interests as well. Gangsters have taken their fight to the streets, with daring public shootouts, assassinations, and bank robberies. Men like Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel and the killers of Murder, Inc. have made the term gangster synonymous with celebrity. Along with the glamour these individuals provide, their murders make for exciting front-page headlines, not to mention sensational photographs.

Politics

World War II dominates government attention and American politics for much of the '40s, specifically after 1941, when the United States enters the war. World War II is predicated in the devastating aftermath of World War I, which left legacies of anger and hardship among the German people. After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles imposed large reparations on the country. Those reparations, coupled with Germany's infrastructure being reduced to rubble, imposed severe economic hardships on the country's people and its government. Additionally, other European nations were grappling with their own problems after WWI. Old war debts, hunger, homelessness, and fear of economic collapse made life very difficult for Europeans, and it was under these circumstances that totalitarianism festered and spread.

In the United States, life is much better and on the road to recovery, but nonetheless, it's not exactly a picnic. Unlike their European counterparts, however, the cause for American hardships is due largely to the effects of the Great Depression, even though it ended three years ago, with the country's involvement in the war.

Coincidentally, the New Deal is not the reason for the end of the Great Depression. In fact, even as late as 1940, 15 percent of the labor force was unemployed. Nor did the New Deal redistribute wealth or challenge capitalism. Many politicians and economists, however, do believe that in the short run, the New Deal helped the United States avert disaster and alleviated misery. Its long-term effects will be profound.

City of Shadows

In a sense, New York City is a microcosm for what is happening throughout the rest of the country in 1943. In fact, the start of the decade caught the city like a gigantic mood swing, flinging its fortunes into unexplored space. Economic hardship blanketed New York throughout the '30s, particularly in Harlem, where 40 percent of the families were on relief.

Yet when war ravaged Europeans began to arrive in

rhythms. Fashion is not left by the wayside, either, as young black men in Harlem improvise the first street styles in the Zoot suits of the late '30s.

   The Seventh Avenue designer Claire McCardell creates clothes for women straight from a native acropolis of casual health and free motion, setting an international trend that proves to be extremely influential among women living and working in the '40s

...is not Gold.

   But all is not sunshine and roses in the Big Apple. Prior to 1939, federal programs precipitated a dramatic change in New York City's hegemony as the center of American power. Developers now marshal enormous power to reshape the geography of the metropolis, focusing resources on suburban expansion and the middle and upper classes, rather than addressing the needs of the expanding urban underclass and the now-rotting inner-city infrastructure.

   Poverty among the lower class is rampant, and crime is at an all-time high. Putting the city's mob families aside, outlaws and ne'er-do-wells engage in lawless acts of unscrupulous behavior, putting the hardworking man and woman in constant fear for their lives and livelihoods.

   Murder and kidnappings are also at an all-time high. Muggings in Central Park and other public recreation areas of the city are as common during the day as they are at night. Bank robberies are growing in frequency as well, particularly because expansion of newspaper wire services and the radio has made these events national news instantaneously. Much to the chagrin of city officials, these criminals are national celebrities, who symbolize the public's lack of faith in the city's crumbling institutions. And while the public finds their notoriety exciting, the government does not.

   Seeking assistance from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover,

droves, the city's visible economic power, magnificent food markets, and monstrous billboard advertisements stunned them. Since 1938, New York City has become the recognized capital of American culture, but its triumphs have come in chiaroscuro—as full of darkness as of light. The city has yet to regain economic superiority over the rest of America that it enjoyed in the pre-Depression '20s and no one is certain if it ever will; the '40s have begun to mark the first decade in which more people are leaving New York City than are coming.

All That Glitters

   To newly arriving immigrants, New York City is an eclectic mish-mash of sights, sounds, and smells—many of which prove to be overwhelming to the uninitiated. Automobiles, which resemble "enormous upholstered sofas," pass by on Brooklyn streets; airplanes "gnaw—geometrical—through a cloud-flowered sky;" while narrow, tall Manhattan closes around its inhabitants. To the war ravaged European, all Western cultural heroes must be intellectuals.

   New York in 1943 is currently undergoing an artistic renaissance as hundreds of artists flee Hitler's Europe for New York. Jackson Pollock, the "cowboy painter from Wyoming," extrapolates a revolutionary new style called Abstract Expressionism out of the myths he found in his own past, giving New York City artists a new, faux-virile, working-class and very American image in the process.

   Dance, too, is undergoing revolutionary changes, as George Balanchine, a Russian émigré, transforms modern ballet in New York City, fusing European elegance with American

government agents and New York City Mayor Arthur Lopresti's law enforcement agencies are targeting them for pursuit. Unfortunately, only a smattering of these famous outlaws have been killed or captured by FBI special agents. To make matters worse, these independent outlaws often take on special jobs for the crime rings—like murdering an enemy—that a particular organization wants done, but doesn't want to take the blame for.

The City's War on Crime

New York City's most visible players are as flagrantly outsized as its skyscrapers. Mayor Lopresti—half Jewish, half Italian, and all temperament—is only five feet tall, but he speaks several languages (including Croatian and Yiddish), and he bullied and cajoled the city through the Depression. Lopresti finds Hitler a personal affront, publicly calling for his inclusion in a "chamber of horrors." German newspapers have responded by publishing cartoons of the Mayor as King Kong, and Goebbels fantasizes about bombing New York City—that "medley of races," into extinction.

Another one of Lopresti's personal vendettas is directed toward the city's reigning crime families, collectively known as the Syndicate. On his climb up the steps of City Hall his first day as mayor, Lopresti shook his fist and said in Italian, "No more free lunch!" The people had witnessed such pledges before, specifically from Lopresti's predecessor, Michael O'Brill. But while O'Brill's promises had been empty, Lopresti meant what he said. Directly after coming into office, he purged the city government of thousands of workers who had gained jobs in exchange for favors and votes. Lopresti is also undergoing a campaign to replace the old system of corruption with a new civil service, guided by men of expertise and merit, but it's a long road ahead, and there's still much to do. Thankfully, he also has appointed good, tough, honest cops to help him—law enforcement officials whom O'Brill had pushed aside. With the city watching, Lopresti is starving the old machine.

Serving as the city's chief of police is Walter Ellis—a former tough, hard-nosed cop from Brooklyn, who is still very much tough and hard-nosed. He commands the city's beat cops and detectives with an iron fist, keeping tabs on all of his top officials. Yet nonetheless, try as he might, Ellis has been unsuccessful in completely rooting out corruption among the city's police departments. It's not from a lack of trying, though; the Syndicate is firmly entrenched in all aspects of New York City government and it will take years before they can be "smoked out."

Unfortunately, Lopresti has just as many opponents as he has supporters. For one, many of the Mayor's challengers criticize his tough stance on organized crime at the expense of other, equally important, civic duties. Things like addressing the needs of the city's poor, its teetering infrastructure, and curbing the impudence of overzealous urban developer barons have angered many citizen action groups.

The City Boroughs

In 1898, a new charter was adopted, making the city Greater New York a metropolis of five boroughs. Massive immigration, mainly from Europe, swelled the city's population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Below are descriptions of New York City's boroughs.
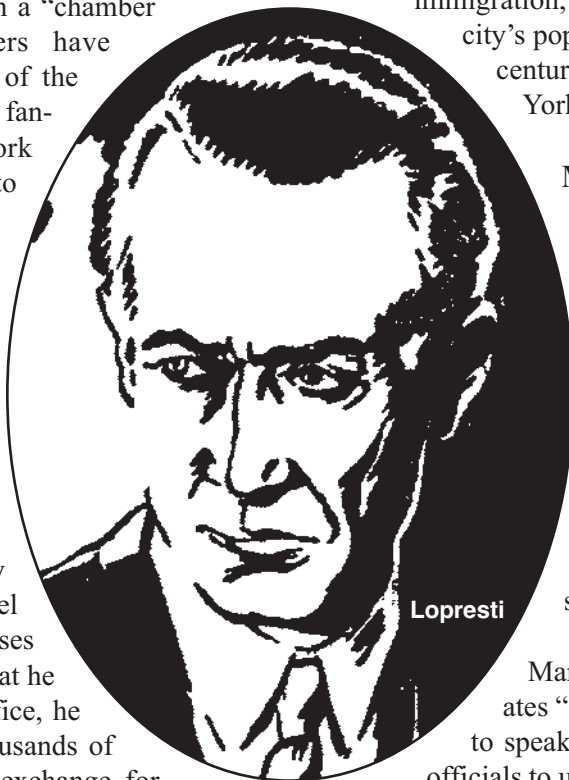
Manhattan

Giovanni da Verrazano may have been the first European to explore the region, and Henry Hudson the first American to visit it, but Dutch settlers truly began the city. Since its humble beginnings as New Amsterdam, the Manhattan borough has remained the playground of the rich and famous. Its exquisite architecture, towering high-rises and opulent decadence, casts a long, dark shadow over the rest of the city.

Lopresti

Unlike the city's other boroughs, Manhattan's criminal underground operates "in the shadows," testing the waters, so to speak. This has made it very hard for city officials to uncover acts of corruption and misconduct. Still, even the more powerful families of the Syndicate are finding it hard to establish a stranglehold on the area.

Brooklyn

Brooklyn was settled in 1636, and chartered as part of New York City in 1898. The largest of New York's five boroughs, it has diverse industries and a waterfront handling both foreign and domestic commerce. Unfortunately, the Mancini crime family is firmly entrenched in Brooklyn. From shipping, to packaging, to industrial manufacturing, not a single industry remains untouched by the family's

Timeline: New York City

1929 – October 29 becomes the worst single day in the history of the New York Stock Exchange. It will take months for the reality of what has happened to set in, and more than a decade for the economy to fully recover.

1931 – The Empire State Building is completed, and its construction becomes a symbol of hope in the darkest of times. The building's final height is a mind-boggling 1,250 feet—202 feet higher than the Chrysler Building. Two large mooring masts serve as a docking point for dirigibles and as a broadcasting wand for radio.

1932 – Following the crash on Wall Street, the nation slumps into an economic crisis known as the Great Depression. Many families lose their livelihoods, their homes, and even their lives due to starvation. Few cities are harder hit than New York.

1933 – Michael O'Brill is elected as mayor of New York City. He immediately begins a mock campaign to clear the entire city of crime and corruption.

1934 – Development of Manhattan's West Side is halted by government officials after it's dis

covered that Robert Simone, the developer, is affiliated with the Govani crime family. It's whispered in City Hall that Mayor O'Brill knew of Simone's background, but awarded the project to the mobster regardless.

1935 – Riots break out in Harlem,

underscoring the discontent of the city's largest minority group. Black New Yorkers during the Great Depression faced greater employment discrimination than did their white counterparts.

1936 – Mayor O'Brill resigns from office as political pressure builds concerning his involvement with Simone. *The New York Times* reports O'Brill also had ties to the Govani family and was awarding city construction projects to mob-

affiliated businesses. In June of the same year, O'Brill is found dead, floating face down in the Hudson River. His murderers are never found, and Manhattan's West Side remains a wasteland. Arthur Alexander Lopresti is elected mayor. He adopts his predecessor's campaign of rooting out crime—his is not a sham.

1939 – The New York World's Fair, featuring such spectacles as General Motor's Futurama, demonstrates models of the future to an enamored public, and highlights the drive of industry to reinvent America's cities to accommodate new consumer marvels. Germany invades Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, an act of aggression that starts World War II.

1942 – The Central Park Massacre makes headlines as one of the worst cases of mob brutality in nearly a decade. Members of the Innocentini family ambush associates of an Irish crime syndicate. Ten of Innocentini's soldiers lie dead, while more than six innocent park-goers are murdered and two dozen injured in the crossfire. Mayor Lopresti issues a public statement on the steps of City Hall, declaring that "New York will no longer be a safe haven for those who disrupt the American way of life."

1943 – The current year.

influence. Many backroom deals have been made in some abandoned warehouses on the Brooklyn docks.

Queens

Most of the settlement of this area had occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries, with an influx of immigrants looking for the American dream. Now, the borough is a massive urban complex with a population of more than 1 million residents. Although the Great Depression of the 1930s ended that population boom, growth of another kind got underway, namely the buildup of those facilities that now help to identify Queens as a place, and establish its local, national, and international significance. The borough's most notable landmarks are the Triborough Bridge, Grand Central Parkway, Queens College, and LaGuardia Airport (built in 1939 by wealthy land baron Fiorello LaGuardia, who was later indicted on embezzlement charges). Even more critical was the World's Fair of 1939-1940, which put the new borough on the national map for the first time.

Bronx

Jonas Bronck originally settled the Bronx in 1636, claiming the area for his farm. The population explosion that took place in the 19th and 20th centuries was due to an influx of Italian and Irish immigrants. To this day, the two ethnic groups continue to dominate a large portion of the borough's population. The Bronx features many parks and open land areas. In fact, almost 24 percent of the land area is parkland, including Pelham Bay Park, which is the largest park in New York City. Via public transportation, the borough is easily accessible by subway, rail, and bus. The population consists mainly of working-class people who, at the end of a business day, come home to a neighborhood in which they can relax without having to endure a lengthy commute.

Like Brooklyn, the Bronx has its fair share of criminal influence, although the Syndicate isn't as deeply rooted in the borough's politics and business sectors. The most prominent family in this area is the Innocentini family, who constantly battle openly against the Irish and Jewish criminal consortiums.

Staten Island

The Island was originally discovered by 16th-century Florentine explorer Giovanni Da Verrazano. At one point, Staten Island was a community of lavish homes, grand hotels, yacht clubs, country clubs, hunting preserves, and assorted splendid playgrounds. In fact, a sporting-minded member of the old Outerbridge family introduced America's first tennis courts at the Staten Island Cricket and Baseball Club. Then a developer named Erastus Wiman

began to carve out cheap residential subdivisions, and the middle classes started flocking in with their large families and small down payments; the rich moved elsewhere.

Whispered rumors are beginning to surface that Staten Island's borough president, Raymond Stafford, is making deals behind closed doors with both the Govani and Colombino families. What these deals pertain to, no one has any idea, nor is there conclusive proof that such things exist. Regardless, it is a situation in which Lopresti has taken considerable interest.

Other Notable Locations

Chinatown

Today's Chinatown is a tightly packed, sprawling neighborhood that continues to grow rapidly, despite the satellite Chinese communities flourishing in nearby Queens. Both a tourist attraction and the home of the majority of Chinese New Yorkers, Chinatown is packed with hundreds of restau-

rants, booming fruit and fish markets, and shops of knick-knacks and sweets on torturously winding and overcrowded streets. The Syndicate rarely conducts business in this neighborhood, largely because it's the home turf of the city's Asian gangs.

The Upper West Side

Still seen as more intellectual and less wealthy than its blue-blood East Side brother, the Upper West Side is, however, once again experiencing an inundation of young, affluent men and woman, primarily because the available apartments in New York disappear faster than they appear on the

market. Unfortunately, this gentrification has wiped out many of the small businesses that once made the Upper West Side distinctive, although holdouts remain.

Central Park

As the city and the park moved into the 20th century, the lower reservoir was drained and turned into the Great Lawn. The first playground, complete with jungle gyms and slides, was installed in the park in 1926, despite opposition by conservationists, who argued that the park was intended as a countryside escape for urban dwellers. The playground, used mostly by the children of middle working-class parents, turned out to be a great success; by 1940, under the direction of parks commissioner Robert Morris, Central Park was home to more than twenty playgrounds. The view of Central Park as being a utopic respite from disruptive city life has been somewhat tarnished, however, since the Central Park Massacre of 1942.

Organized Crime

Essentially, mobsters belong to organized crime rings. They generally live and operate in large cities, and most are immigrants, or children of immigrants. While the Italian/American mafia is easily the largest and most powerful, other ethnic groups also have organized crime rings, most notably Jews and the Irish.

While the different Italian families certainly compete with each other, since the early 1930s they have started to collaborate more closely because public opposition to gang violence makes them so conspicuous.

Prior to the end of Prohibition, Mafia leaders held their first national conference on May 13-15, 1923, in Atlantic City, New Jersey. They solidified the networks formed through bootlegging to become national in scope. Mobsters expanded their markets to racketeering and legitimate enterprises, yet public displays of violence are hardly less discreet. Nonetheless, their power has been increasing dramatically, despite what government officials are saying, largely because they are somewhat willing to work together (when it suits them), albeit through a tenuous alliance.

The Syndicate is Born

New York City is the place of origin for organized crime in the United States. Currently, there are four families in the New York City outfit, who call themselves the Syndicate. Prior to 1935, no one knew the names of these families, nor could law enforcement officials properly identify them. That changed, however, when Joseph Francini effectively blew the whistle on some of Americas most deadliest criminals. Francini was a low ranking soldier of the Govani family, and was the first man to break the *omerta*, or code of silence. Francini testified in front of a New York Grand Jury as to who the bosses were of the four families at the time of his arrest in 1936. Since then, the major crime families making up the Syndicate have been identified as Govani, Innocentini, Colombino, and Mancini.

In 1923, the fragmented New York underworld had coalesced under the leadership of Giuseppe "the Boss" Bontano—an old-fashioned crime boss who cloaked his various illegal enterprises under the guise of familial traditions of honor, respect, and oaths of loyalty. Bontano was

the don of a fifth crime family that eventually disbanded. The younger bosses, notably Joe Cattaneo (Innocentini), Thomas Brambilla (Colombino), and Albert Fontana (Govani) bitterly resented the older boss, who they thought was cloaking New York's crime families in outmoded and irrelevant European customs. In fact, Cattaneo was quoted once as having said, "No one should be telling us what to do."

Thus, the "Young Turk" faction aligned itself to Brooklyn boss Salvatore Rossi (Mancini), who aspired to become the

Bontano

Boss of Bosses. Rossi was born in Calabria, Sicily, and the war he initiated against the Neapolitan Bontano in 1928, came to be known as the Calabrian War.

For three years the combatants traded insults and bullets, with no immediate resolution or hope for victory on either side. Tiring of the endless bloodshed, Jimmy Romano, initially an ally of Bontano, pressed for settlement of the dispute. When the aging don refused, Romano, along with Cattaneo, Brambilla, Fontana, and Rossi, plotted the older man's demise. These five men would all be destined to play important roles in the development of the Syndicate and its ruling City Commission.

Bontano was murdered inside the Nuova Villa Tammaro restaurant in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn on April

15, 1931. The Neapolitan gang boss was shot six times as he sat alone at his table eating antipasto and linguine after Romano excused himself and disappeared into the bathroom.

Believing himself to be invulnerable to the intrigues of his jealous upstarts, Romano, backed by an army of more than 600 soldiers from Bontano's family, proclaimed himself Boss of Bosses at a secret meeting inside a Bronx, New York social hall that same year. Romano delineated the lines of authority and drafted the organizational structure that would guide the Syndicate in New York. Allegedly, it was Romano who coined the term "Syndicate" for his newly formed mob organization.

Rossi and the other young bosses endorsed the concept, but drew back when it became evident that Romano would never relinquish power. Accordingly, they had him assassinated inside his real estate office at 230 Park Avenue, September 10, 1934. Four men dressed as police officers brushed past security and emptied their revolvers into Romano. The body was later recovered in Newark Bay. In the next twenty-four hours, three other "Mustache Petes" from New York were systematically liquidated.

Now, more than ten years later, the Syndicate remains a largely democratic union whose control spans across almost all areas of business, and perhaps life, in New York City. Not only do the bosses control the criminal rackets, they also venture out into legitimate businesses, partially to make more money, but mostly to launder the illegal millions coming in from their rackets.

The Crime Families

The City Commission, which was established as the ruling body of the Syndicate, is somewhat akin to a corporation's board of directors, with each crime family's don and underboss sitting on the board. That's not to say, however, that the Syndicate is one big happy family…far from it.

The Syndicate has more than its fair share of in-fighting, bickering, and squabbling over who controls what and whom. For the most part, neither one of the individual families and their dons are willing to make a step toward disbanding the Commission. If anything, they at least realize that there is strength in numbers when it comes to dealing with Lopresti and his war on crime. As long as they can remain cordial toward one another, and convene on important matters, the Syndicate can remain strongly opposed to an administration that wants them gone. As stated before, the four remaining crime families in New York are Govani, Innocentini, Colombino, and Mancini.

Govani

The first boss of the Govani family was Salvatore Govani

and, in fact, was the Boss of Bosses until his murder by a rival family in October 1900 in Brooklyn, New York. Frank Scalise, who was in control until 1923, quickly succeeded Govani. Albert Fontana now heads the family since becoming don of the Govani family since 1923.

The Govanis primarily operate out of Staten Island, specifically on Todt Hill, where Fontana lives in an opulent mansion, much to the resentment of the soldiers and lieutenants in the family, who feel that their patriarch is losing touch with them. Nonetheless, the Govani family remains a powerful entity in the Syndicate, with dealings in just about every illegitimate business in the city, including prostitution, racketeering, gambling, and more.

Mancini

The Mancini family's first boss was Giuseppe Mancini, who headed the family until his death in 1902. Marco Gallo succeeded Mancini, and in turn, was succeeded by Salvatore Rossi after Gallo died of natural causes in 1920. Salvatore Rossi has since then become one of the city's most infamous gangsters.

The Mancini family calls Brooklyn home, but they've quietly been making inroads into Queens, much to the dismay of the other families.

Colombino

Gaetano Colombino first led the family until a sudden heart attack took his life in 1898. Colombino's son, Philip, assumed the role of head of the family. Thomas Brambilla succeeded Philip in 1920. Since then, the family's main racket has been the garment industry.

Unfortunately, for Brambilla, membership in the family has been dropping steadily since the '30s, from about 400 members in 1931 to less than 200 in 1943. The family has also been hurt by a few members ratting on the family, three of which have done so in the last few years. They include Johnny D'Arco, former underboss Anthony "Lead Pipe" Casso, and former capo Peter "Fat Pete" Chiodo. Brambilla has to keep his soldiers in line if the family is to move back into prominence. However, he was recently indicted on charges of racketeering involving the garbage industry in New York City. His oldest son, 35-year-old Vincent, is acting don in his father's absence.

Innocentini

Louis Innocentini was the first boss of this family that originally took his name. He ruled from 1900 to 1920, and was a very prominent don.

Innocentini was frequently in the papers, and he liked the attention. The only problem he ever encountered was when a lieutenant, "Crazy" Joe Gallo, launched an all out war against his boss in an attempt to gain control of the family. However, Gallo did not have much support, and Cattaneo's faction of the family soon defeated him.

Cattaneo has recently had his hands full competing against the Irish and Jewish gangs who also operate out of the Bronx. Open hostilities against the three factions have diverted much of Cattaneo's attention away from the family's "legitimate" business enterprises, which has had an adverse effect on the family coffers. Public shootouts in broad daylight and assassinations, while once relegated solely to the Bronx's neighborhoods, have recently spilled out into other parts of the city. This has brought additional unwanted attention toward all of the city's crime families, something the other members of the Syndicate are frowning upon. It's only a matter of time before the City Commission steps in and takes matters into its own hands.

Notable NPCs

   This section details stats for New York's most notable NPCs, including the mob bosses. Stats for "non-essential" NPCs, like bartenders, cops, shop owners, and the like appear in Appendix B.

Arthur Lopresti, Mayor, New York City

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 5; WIL 4
Initiative: 7; Save: 7; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 5, Bureaucracy (INT) 6, Cool (WIL) 5, Empathy (PER) 4, Etiquette (PER) (*Politics*) 5, Law 6 (INT), Performance (PER) 5, Resist (WIL) 4
Assets: Insight, Rational
Liabilities: Enemy (3, crime families), Moral Restriction (1, will not gamble)
Description: At only 5 feet tall, Lopresti nonetheless is an imposing figure. He is hot-tempered, passionate, and politically shrewd. As an outspoken individual, Lopresti has made it his personal mission to root out crime in the city.

Walter Ellis, NYPD Police Chief

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 5; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative: 7; Save: 8; Shrug 4
Skills: Awareness (PER) 5, Cool (WIL) 4, Dodge (AGL) 3, Empathy (PER) 4, Firearms (DEX) 5, Interrogation (PER) 5, Investigation (INT) 6, Law (INT) 5, Melee (AGL) 3, Resist (WIL) 4
Assets: Law Enforcement Powers
Liabilities: Compulsion (2, rooting out corruption), Enemy (3, crime families)
Description: Ellis is a tough, hard-nosed cop who fought his way to the top tooth and nail, despite the corruption that was rampant in the city's police department under the old regime. As current top dog, Ellis (like the Mayor) has made rooting out crime and corruption a personal goal.

Albert Fontana, Govani Crime Boss

AGL 2; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 4
Initiative: 6; Save: 8; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Con (PER) 5, Cool (WIL) 3, Empathy (PER) 5, Etiquette (PER), (Gangland) 5, Firearms (DEX) 3, Gambling (PER) 4, Interrogation (PER) 4, Resist (WIL) 2, Streetwise (PER) 5
Assets: Insight, Wealth (3)
Liabilities: Enemy (2, federal government)
Description: At 73 years old, Fontana runs one of the most successful crime families. Because of this, Fontana is a very rich man who loves to spend money flamboyantly. He rarely directly involves himself with the day-to-day operations of the family and that has many under him concerned that their boss is loosing touch with his members.

Salvatore Rossi, Mancini Crime Boss

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative: 7; Save: 6; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 3, Con (PER) 4, Cool (WIL) 4, Etiquette (PER) (*Gangland*) 5, Firearms (DEX) 3, Gambling (PER) 5, Interrogation (PER) 5, Intimidation (WIL) 5, Resist (WIL) 3, Streetwise (INT) 4
Assets: Wealth (2), Attractiveness, Luck (1)
Liabilities: Enemy (2, federal government), Addiction (2, cigars), Bloodlust
Description: Rossi is a man driven by a lust for power; it was he that initiated the mob war against the city's Boss of Bosses, Giuseppe Bontano. Rossi is a Sicilian immigrant with a penchant for violence and ruthlessness, and is not averse to carrying out a hit himself against a rival. He rules his family through a combination of fear and respect.

Thomas Brambilla, Colombino Crime Boss

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 3; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 4
Initiative: 6; Save: 7; Shrug: 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 2, Carousing (STR) 5, Con (PER) 4, Cool (WIL) 5, Drive (AGL) 3, Firearms (DEX) 4, Forgery (INT) 3 , Gambling (PER) 6, Resist (WIL) 4
Assets: Wealth (3)
Liabilities: Enemy (2, federal government)
Description: Brambilla is something of a dottering old man, almost to the point of being out of touch with reality. He is so sure of himself and his ability as a mob boss, that the 60-year-old Sicilian-American does not have a firm grasp on the inner workings of the family. Members come and go under his regime, and more often that not, it's to hand over family business to the feds.

Joe Cattaneo, Innocentini Crime Boss

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 5; WIL 4
Initiative: 7; Save: 7; Shrug: 2
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Con (PER) 5, Cool (WIL) 4, Empathy (PER) 5, Etiquette (PER) 5, Firearms (DEX) 2, Gambling (PER) 4, Interrogation (PER) 5, Resist (WIL) 3, Streetwise (INT) 6
Assets: Insight, Wealth (2)
Liabilities: Enemy (3, Jewish and Irish mob), Bloodlust, Bad Luck
Description: Unfortunately for Joe Cattaneo, not only does he have to worry about the federal government cracking down on his family's operations, but those of other ethnic gangs operating out of his neighborhood, too. Since Cattaneo came to power, his family has been at constant odds with Jewish and Irish gangs. Needless to say, it occupies much of his time and resources.

Chapter Five
Mastering Film Noir

F*ilm noir first appeared in the early 1940s in movies like* Stranger on the Third Floor *and* This Gun For Hire. *At its most fundamental level, film noir exposes a darker side of life, balancing the optimism of Hollywood musicals and comedies by supplying seedy, two-bit criminals and doom-laden atmospheres. While Hollywood strove to help keep public morale high, film noir gave the public a peek into the alleys and backrooms of a world filled with corruption. And film noir remained an important cinematic form in Hollywood until the 1960s.*

One of the earliest films to utilize the dark and shadowy noir theme was a detective thriller titled *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). It was directed by John Huston and stared Humphrey Bogart as the cool private eye hero Sam Spade, who many consider to be the quintessential film noir private eye.

The Maltese Falcon was a priceless artifact that served as the center of the film. Many different people, for as many different reasons, desired the valuable object. But more importantly than the story itself, *The Maltese Falcon* is known for a number of memorable portrayals of corrupt, hard-nosed villains, low-life crooks, and traditional heroes. This eclectic mix of characters was interwoven with complex interactions between them, double-crossing intrigues, and deceptions; all of which embody the heart and soul of the classic film noir story.

As important as characterization, plot, and dialog are to film noir, locations also fill a vital role, typically embodying the culmination of all society's ills and woes. Towering skyscrapers, darkened alleys, long shadows cast over damp streets all embody a sense of desperation and cynicism so important to the mood and underlying theme of film noir. In fact, all of those elements are still in place today through modern films noir, with movies like Ridley Scott's 1982 science-fiction thriller *Blade Runner* and Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor*.

The Root of all Evil

Narratively speaking, film noir can trace its roots back to the hard-boiled detective pulp fiction of the 1920s and 1930s, by writers such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James Cain (although the crime story itself can be traced farther back, to the late 1800s). These wonders of pulp fiction were primarily detective mysteries, whose stories frequently portrayed the dark and gloomy underworld of crime and corruption.

Primarily showcased in pulp magazines (of which there were some 20,000 in print in 1922) and in the dime novel, detective fiction is a diverse literary genre that shares some common characteristics with film noir. Detective fiction often features a central character who is a strong-minded individual, tough on himself and others, though not necessarily an overachiever. The setting in which these stories take place are mostly hostile and aggressive, with locations that range from urbanized metropolitan centers to the occasional rural area or small town. Plots are a mix of murder, organized crime, and violence, with a heavy dose of authoritative abuse and corruption on all levels of society.

Additionally, the plots in detective fiction analyze (whether knowingly or not) human nature, social realism, and daily life. Most of the time, the "background" or backstory of the novel serves as a basic mechanism to launch the hero (or antihero) on a quest for social redemption or justice.

Directing a Film Noir

It is hoped that GMs will utilize this information around which to build film noir scenarios, keeping in mind the genre's basic precepts and themes. Essentially, a film noir scenario can be built around three basic fundamentals:

* The Scheme
* Characterizations
* Narration and Location

The Scheme

The first step in crafting a film noir scenario is to begin by considering what the story will be about, the scenario's Scheme around which everything will revolve, but also an element that shouldn't dominate playing sessions. Like those commonly found in early detective fiction, a film noir plot should be an initial springboard, allowing the players to develop their characters throughout the time frame, discovering things about themselves they never knew existed, or didn't want to.

And while it's not the intention of *Mean Streets* to debase the underlying importance of the plot, GMs may wish to consider incorporating it as a "McGuffin." In other words, a McGuffin is a term for the device or plot element that catches the viewer's (or, in this case, the player's) attention and drives the logic of the plot. According to Hitchcock, who coined the term in 1966, the McGuffin can be ignored as soon as it has served its purpose. Examples are the mistaken identity at the beginning of *North by Northwest* (1959) and the entire Janet Leigh subplot of *Psycho* (1960). The point is this: the plot should foster solid character development by accenting and facilitating the process. Here's an example:

In Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), the basic plot is that of murder and betrayal, and involves two major characters with "an unholy love and an almost perfect crime." One is a cold and callous housewife, who takes a life insurance policy out on her husband, only to have the second main character, a likeable insurance salesman, help her to murder him. Their calculated scheme to kill the husband for purposes of lustful desire and financial gain, because of a double indemnity clause in his accident policy, ultimately fails. Their fraudulent, almost perfect crime leads to guilt and thrilling intrigue. But that's just the backdrop of the story…the McGuffin. What really drives the story along is the torrid relationship between both the female and male character and how the woman slowly drags the insurance salesman into her scheme, against his better judgment.

So how can this approach be applied to a *Mean Streets* scenario? Well, using the movie as an example, the GM can craft an engaging story, using the murder plot as a means to an end. If the characters are playing gangster-type characters, then its relatively easy—she simply hires them to kill her husband for a share of the insurance money. If the players are private investigators, perhaps they've been asked to investigate the mysterious circumstances surrounding the husband's death. In that case, the focus of the plot moves from investigating a homicide to focusing on the interpersonal relationship between the murderess and the PCs, although that underlying precept of murder is still there.

Characterizations

The characters will most likely be troubled, hard-boiled, and pessimistic individuals, so a scenario should reflect that and feed off the players' fears and worries, utilizing common techniques like paranoia and suspicion (of the antagonists, not necessarily each other, although that could be an option as well, if the GM doesn't mind dealing with inter-party conflict). Additionally, the PCs should be frequently tested and persecuted, but not so much that they're destined to fail. The GM must develop a plot that will not only test

the PC's abilities, but will allow them a chance to emerge safely and uncorrupted. That's not to say the ending of a good *Mean Streets* scenario can't have a bittersweet ending. For example, consider the finale to a scenario wherein the player characters are double-crossed by the femme fatale. While she may have escaped arrest, causing the PCs to take the fall, she may have left behind some incriminating evidence, thereby giving the PCs some amount of justice. Just keep in mind that people in film noir are not what they seem, they change identities, and the plot has unforeseen twists and turns.

Internal Setting: The internal world of film nor are the trauma and nightmares going on within the heroes' minds. Consider how their backgrounds fit into the setting. Are they simply one of the masses? The poor souls who toil about the city, living a droll and meaningless life? Or are they self-righteous individualists, who want to make a change in the world? Do they have any secret pasts or hidden agendas that could surface during the game, only to lead to their eventual ruin if something isn't done about it? If the city you choose to set a game of *Mean Streets* in is the PCs "home base," have they built a reputation for themselves, good or bad? Is there anyone who may be looking to ruin them?

NPC Characterizations: The antagonists in film noir run the gamut from gun-totting thugs, to cold and calculating femme fatales, to overzealous government agents, to conniving and dangerous mob kingpins. A successful scenario will take these people into consideration and develop believable histories, complete with hidden agendas and motives. That's not to say that NPCs must be as completely developed as the player characters are (indeed, it's a character's traits that sets him apart from the bad guys), but they should be believable enough or at least have a framework with which to make them seem more than PC fodder. For instance, the dangerous femme fatale the PCs are to eventually meet can be outlined as a dangerous female, who lures the male characters into her web of deceit. She already possesses another man—a wealthy, older husband who is proprietal toward his wife—representing an Oedipal complex by the outsider seeking to destroy the powerful father figure to possess the woman.

Isolationism: The hard-boiled heroes of film noir are typically anti-social loners that are subject to existential angst. The environments they live and work in are dark and scary metropolises, often red-light districts, or otherwise dehumanizing environments like large desolate office buildings. Essentially, they experience anonymity through their large-scale surroundings. While this can be perceived as a problem for role-playing games since games of this type are, by their very nature, cooperative efforts where the players are
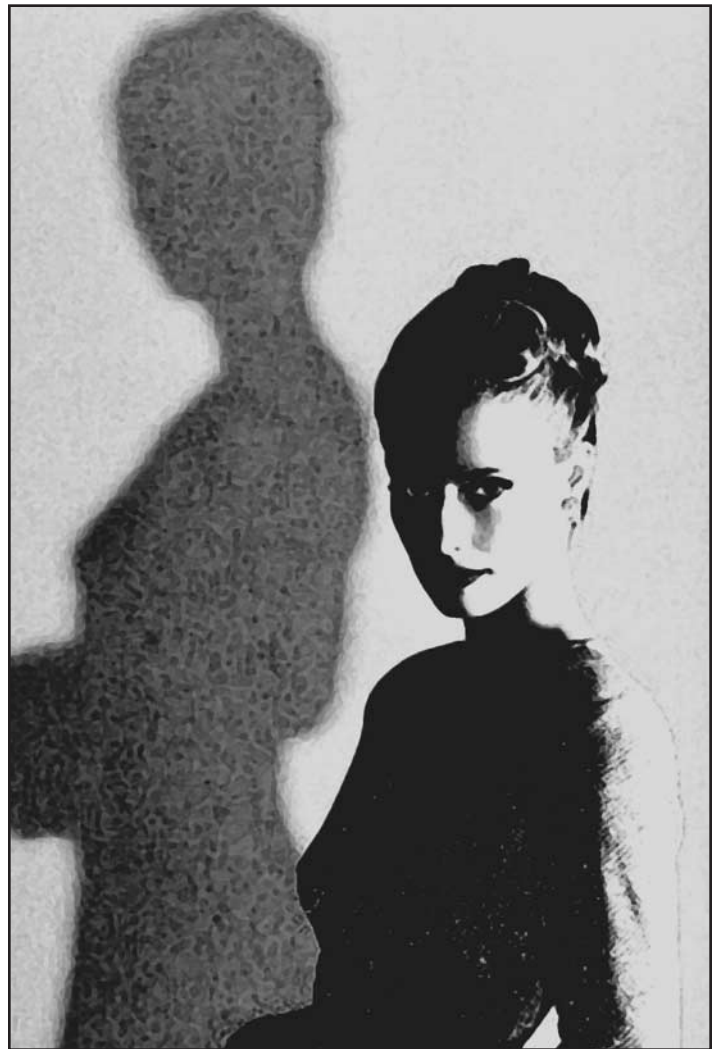
encouraged to work together in order to succeed at a common goal, not all films noir are based around a single protagonist. In fact, many of the genre's popular offerings feature an ensemble cast. Films noir such as *All Through The Night*, *Scandal Sheet*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, and *Laura* feature an eclectic mix of enigmatic characters all portrayed as collective protagonists. With this in mind, GMs can craft troupe-based film noir scenarios. Other options for facilitating troupe-style play are presented in the section titled *Building a Cast*, page 33.

Narration and Setting

Another element to consider is the actual world setting itself and how the character fits into it. *Mean Streets* provides a default setting—New York City—but if you're looking for something different (say, Chicago, Los Angeles, or even London) then consider how it might look and feel in the 1940s. What are the people like? Who are its notable movers and shakers? Who controls the dark underbelly of crime? Is it gangs, a single mob czar, or corrupt government or law enforcement officials? Identify those individuals who

could either help or hinder the player characters in the "big city." Also, consider the location's more aesthetic elements; the external world of film noir is usually the dark, mean streets of a big city, with plenty of nightclubs, cafes, police stations, and regular haunts of the underworld.

Narration: It's the GMs job to accurately portray the world in which the PCs are going to be playing in, so it's important for him to master the fine art of narration, describing the scenes to the players so they have an accurate picture of what is happening. This technique is similar to the voice-over in film noir—the narration personalizes the experience, like a first-person novel. Additionally, the GM should try his best to capture the visual style of film noir, which has a hard, undiffused look like a tabloid newspaper.

If inspiration is needed, the GM should feel free to catch up on classic film noir by watching some of the genres better offerings, such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Out of the Past* (1947), T*he Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), and *D.O.A.* (1950). Appendix B has a filmography of the more popular films noir.

The GM should take care to build up suspense and narrate scenes with stunning imagery, keeping in mind cluttered, claustrophobic, and dark interiors; many night scenes; stark chiaroscuro; bleak and fatalistic overtones of despair and madness; and "heightened" expressionistic views with elements that are nightmarish and exaggerated.

Iconography: More or less related to narration and setting, the iconography of film noir utilizes dark sidewalks; rain-drenched streets; flashing neon signs; fairgrounds and carnivals (associated with madness in German expressionism); the city as a dangerous, hostile villain; the border town or the casino; imagery of water and alcohol that represent merging and release, rather than fragmentation and blockage. Media technology is also frequent, with objects such as the telephone, voice recorders, and newspapers very prevalent in film noir. These are metaphors of a desire to overcome limitations and alienation, allowing people to connect with others.

Building a Cast

GMs can certainly run a game of *Mean Streets* with only one or two characters, keeping in mind to scale encounters and opposition so as not to wipe out the PCs in one fell swoop. NPC encounters on this level should be more positively reinforced, and implemented in such a way that the players have an opportunity to develop their characters more fully and in response to encounters with the antagonists.

The second option, particularly in place for large playing groups, is to have the players discuss what types of characters they would like to play and what goals they would like to set as a group. For instance, the players can portray a team of tabloid journalists (each with different skills and talents) determined to get the truth out about society's dark evils. Maybe the players would prefer playing members of a Mafia crew, hoping to establish themselves as the most powerful in New York.

If playing similar roles is unattractive to the players, then perhaps they should discuss ways to incorporate different roles into a playgroup. For instance, Government Agents may wish to work with a team of Private Eyes or Detectives to root out a local crime boss. Perhaps a Dilettante teams up with a Private Investigator and an Assistant District Attorney to investigate the mysterious murder of the Dilettante's husband or wife.

The third option is to design a *Mean Streets* scenario around the characters, incorporating their backgrounds into the plot (thus creating a few subplots in the process), or using those backgrounds as the entire basis for an original plot idea. This requires a lot more work on the part of the GM and the players, however, but it also creates a more role-playing-intense scenario.

During character creation, players should discuss

with each other the relationships their characters will have. Some characters can be designed with backgrounds comprised of mutual interests, while others can be developed with cross-purposes in mind. For example: James, the GM, wishes to craft a scenario around the murder of a Dilettante's wealthy husband. With this basic premise in mind, he asks his players to choose the Character Archetypes they'd like to create. Lydia decides playing the Dilettante would be fun and asks to develop that Character Archetype. Taylor expresses an interest in playing a Femme Fatale. Kelly is keen on playing a rookie Private Eye, while Art loves the idea of playing a hard-boiled Detective.

With those archetypes in mind, James and his players begin laying the foundation for their characters' interpersonal relationships. Taylor and James both decide that her Femme Fatale will be the mistress of the dead husband, who was more in love with his money. Lydia views her character as a proper yet shrewd woman, so she and James decide that her Dilettante suspected the affair and thus hired Kelly's Private Eye to trail Taylor's character. Kelly is a big film noir buff and likes the idea of having his character end up falling for the Femme Fatale, much like Robert Mitchum did in *Out of the Past*, when his character fell in love with Jane Greer's. Art's character is the easiest to incorporate—he's been assigned to this high-profile homicide case.

With these relationships now defined, the group can set about putting things into motion and creating a type of soap-opera effect, with numerous subplots and interparty scheming. Perhaps over the course of the game Lydia's character also falls for the Private Eye, thus initiating a love triangle between the three. Maybe Art decides to focus his attention on the Femme Fatale and/or the Dilettante—they certainly both have motives—so Kelly's Private Eye must now find a way to clear the Femme Fatale's name, while Lydia takes matters into her own hands and investigates her husband's death on her own.

The possibilities for this type of play are endless, but they can open a can of worms if not done properly. For one, the GM must ensure that each character or certain groups of characters can take center stage in some storylines and fade into the background in others, so characters and subgroups only work together when appropriate. Also, the GM must make certain that these subplots do not interfere with the basic plot he has created. One way to tie things up is to provide a catalyst, like a universal clue, for instance, which will bring the characters together for the scenario's climax.

In the above example, maybe Lydia's Dilettante eventually discovers that her husband's business partner was embezzling money from their shipping company. Sensing a motive for murder she asks Art's Detective for assistance to help investigate the possibility further. Kelly's Private Eye catches wind of this and makes an offer to help the investigation by suggesting that Taylor's Femme Fatale try to seduce a possible confession out of the business partner. This will take the heat off Kelly's love interest and get him involved in a high-profile case. Meanwhile, Lydia's and Art's characters can follow up on additional leads should the seduction attempt fail (for whatever reason; maybe the business partner is a false lead).

> If a more suspenseful scenario is desired, the GM can develop these interpersonal relationships in secret with each player, so that none of them know the other's involvement with the plot.

Building a Bigger Cast

Character creation in XPG is built around the assumption that PCs begin their adventures as marginal individuals in a world that is ready to chew them up and spit them out. Only through their survival instinct and a willingness to persist can the PCs hope to rise above the bleakness and despondence around them. The key to character creation (and indeed the foundation for which it's based upon) is that players should create characters with "professional level" skills in certain areas where they would normally excel (as opposed to becoming a jack-of-all-trades). With that mind, there's nothing to stop GMs from increasing the number of initial skill points at the start of character creation. If players wish to create veteran characters, the GM can award an additional 10-20 points with which to purchase skills.

Film Noir Roles

Heroes in film noir forever struggle to survive. Some of the heroes learn to play by the rules and survive by exposing corruption. That same precept should be applied to characters in a game of *Mean Streets*. The section below outlines useful tips for both the GM and players on how to accurately portray classic film noir archetypes, but more specifically, gender roles. The beauty of role-playing games, however, is that these outlines can be tweaked and modified to fit everyone's tastes.

Women in film noir

The woman plays a crucial role in film noir. Traditionally, these are women who slowly draw in the male heroes with good looks and sultry voices. In this role, the woman knows how to use the men in her life and is always there to pull the hero down; however, many women in film nor are just as apt to destroy the lives of other women, such as the case of the mother/daughter sub-genre of classic film noir.

From a role-playing game perspective, this could present problems for the GM should a player wish to portray the femme fatale archetype in *Mean Streets*, primarily because, by their very nature, femme fatales were relegated to that of antagonist. That's not to say, however, that these traits couldn't be transferred to a female private eye.

Although it can be viewed as a misogynistic stereotype of women, nonetheless, the femme fatale was a vital part of film noir and should not be dismissed entirely. The beauty of role-playing games, however, is that these stereotypes can be dismissed and an entirely different spin on women can be implemented. There's nothing to stop a player from portraying a woman character (like a Private Eye, District Attorney, or Government Agent, for example) with strengths that do not solely rely on her sexuality or hyper-sensuality. Nor does the female character have to be portrayed as the naïve, virgin Madonna type, also typical of women in film noir.

The dark, strong femme fatale can be portrayed as a char-acter given not only sexual powers, but also ambitions and motives other than for revenge or greed. The femme fatale can long or look for independence (economic or otherwise), and freedom, often from relationships with dangerous or abusive men. Such female characters can be masters and possessors of their own sexuality, representing an opportunity for change and threat to the old school patriarchal system.

If the GM wishes to stay true to the genre, then he should feel free to represent NPC femme fatales as promiscuous, exciting, intelligent, and narcissistic individuals. If using an NPC in this way, then the GM should consider some options. First, it is often the woman that dominates and controls any given scene she is part of, both because of her own strength and because of the male heroes' attraction to her. On that same note, the GM should carefully balance her role with regards to that of the player characters—the PCs should not become static participants, held in thrall by the whims of an NPC antagonist. She should be a powerfully alluring character, no doubt, with hidden agendas and secret motives, but ultimately will fail because of the diligence of the player characters. Yet, even though she is destroyed, it is her vital, deadly strength the characters should remember.

Despite the fact that many female characters in film noir are portrayed as black widows, nonetheless, in any given film one will find women playing other roles, such as a cold-hearted murderess or a dogmatic reporter, a mercenary double-crosser or a supportive helpmate, a shrewish house-wife or an innocent bystander. Regardless of their lot in life, these femmes can transform a run-of-the-mill tale into a suspenseful thrill ride. Listed below are some of the other types of female characters one can expect to find in a film noir. GMs should feel free to utilize this info when crafting female NPCs, or he can pass this information along to the players for their benefit when creating characters of their own.

Menaced Woman: This particular character in film noir is often the passive servant of a dominating male master bent on making her life miserable. Often, these women are at the mercy of the men in their lives, and have no choice but to be subservient to a male counterpart. In addition, the menaced woman is incapable of fleeing and must often rely on another man to rescue her from the clutches of a danger-ous situation. An example of the menaced woman is Ingrid Bergman's character in *Gaslight* (1944). Bergman plays a woman driven to near insanity by her menacing, mentally cruel husband, played by Charles Boyer.

Scorned Woman: This character typifies the woman who decides to take matters into her own hands, exacting revenge on a husband or boyfriend that slighted and/or took advantage of her. Unlike the femme fatale, the scorned

woman does not necessarily need to resort to cold-hearted murder or blackmail to bring down her persecutor. Neither must she rely on her physical attributes and sexuality to bring a man down. The scorned woman can accomplish her task with a combination of intelligence, acumen, and dogmatic pragmatism. An example of the scorned woman is Rosemary DeCamp's character in *Scandal Sheet* (1952). DeCamp plays an embittered woman bent on revenge from the husband who deserted her.

Naïve Girl: The naïve girl is typically portrayed as an almost angelic figure that begins with good intentions and a charming naivete, but eventually gets pulled down into a world of corruption, murder, and betrayal. Whether the catalyst be the girl's own mother, an imposing husband, or something more material like fame, eventually, the once-naïve girl gets a hard lesson in life and at a great price. An example of the naïve girl is Jean Peters' character in *Vicki* (1953). Peters plays a naive waitress whose fame as a fashion model transforms her into a cold-hearted monster

Working Woman: During World War II the role of women in society and in the workplace underwent drastic changes. As more and more young men were drafted to fight the war, women in 1940s America were left to care for the family. As a result, millions of women entered the workforce, performing jobs that were once relegated as "man's work." As such, many films noir modeled this aspect of American life, portraying women as strong-willed, take charge individuals who displayed constancy, fortitude, and determination. An example of the working woman is Dorothy Malone's character in *Loophole* (1953). Malone plays the steadfast wife of a man whose life is ruined when he is falsely accused of a bank heist

Men in film noir

In film noir, the male protagonist is often a detective, but there are exceptions to the rule, as is the case with *Double Indemnity*, where the main character is an insurance salesman. And in fact, *Mean Streets* allows players to portray any type of character they desire (see *Character Archetypes*, page 12).

The "tough guy" character is often marked by an excellent gift of verbal wit, even if he does not always have strong intellectual capacity. The men are, much like the women, portrayed as stereotypes. As a result, male characters are not allowed to live their lives in alternative ways any more than women. The male character cannot show much emotion lest he debases his own masculinity, and follows a system that provides him with purpose in life—to work, provide, protect, and serve. The existence led by men in film noir is one of toil. He is victimized by society, and perhaps also by a woman, and expresses the awareness of the loss of the fixed ties that bind a man to a community.

As antagonists, men in film noir often represent all that is base and depraved in society. They represent corruption in politics and business, and are the patriarchs in organized crime syndicates. And while the male antagonists in film noir run the gamut of backgrounds and professions, it is the gangster and the outlaw that is the quintessential villain. Gangsters have already been presented in Chapter Four, but the outlaw has not.

Outlaws typically come from rural areas in the Midwest, Southwest, or the West. According to one FBI special agent, "Most of the top-flight hoodlums of the Middle West were 100-per-cent American boys with no foreign background whatsoever." The term outlaw applies to robbers, kidnappers, and occasionally, murderers, but also one who is not affiliated with a crime syndicate.

But gangsters and outlaws don't have to be solely relegated to the role of villain. Often, these men of unscrupulous character were the catalyst for film noir plots, as is the case with Kirk Douglas' character, Whit, in *Out of the Past*. Douglas' character hires private eye Jeff Markham to track down a missing girlfriend, thus setting the foundation for the rest of the film. GMs are urged to use discretion when developing antagonists for their games—if all the players have to thwart are the machinations of mob bosses and racketeers, the campaign can quickly get boring and predictable. On the other hand, for those players who desire a more combat-orientated game, gangster thugs make great enemies to mow down with a Thompson SMG.

Chapter Six
A Tangled Web

Illustrated by Jason McCuiston

A *Tangled Web is a complete adventure based on Fritz Lang's 1953 film noir classic* The Big Heat, *and can be used by GMs and players to jump right into the action of* Mean Streets. *Additionally, it can serve as a device to introduce a group of characters to one another, or to serve as a springboard for an ongoing campaign.*

While *A Tangled Web* is set in New York City, circa 1943, it can easily be dropped into any city, such as Chicago, Los Angeles, or Miami Beach, for instance. As always, if you're reading this and you intend to be a player, then it would best to stop reading at this point. If you're a GM, please read through the entire scenario before playing the game, to familiarize yourself with the plot and the NPCs.

Prologue

The chrome plating of .38 snub-nosed revolver glistens in the sharp light of a desk lamp in some nondescript living room in a two-story townhouse somewhere in New York City. A middle-aged man is seated behind the desk with a stoic look on his face. He quietly stares at the revolver as if admiring the pistol's craftsmanship. Then, with a heavy sight, he reaches for the revolver and places the barrel to his temple. Without a single change to his expression, the man pulls the trigger. The gun goes off with a bang as he falls forward, slumping over the desk.

Moments later, a women dressed in a black evening gown quietly descends a flight of stairs leading into the room. She is dark and alluring, with auburn-colored hair, a fair complexion, and cold, steel-gray eyes. Upon reaching the bottom of the stairs, the woman notices the body and calmly steps toward the desk without so much as uttering a sigh. Side stepping a small pool of blood that has puddled at the edge of the desk, the woman notices a piece of paper resting under the dead man's hand. She gently eases it from its grim resting place and opens it—it's a confession note, addressed to the District Attorney at New York's Hall of Justice.

After quickly glancing through the contents of the pages, she reaches for the nearby phone.

"Yes, this is Evelyn Bishop. I need to speak with Mr. Thomas Mantone; it concerns my…husband."

The Plot

Evelyn Bishop is a black widow. She's the type of cold-hearted individual that would just as soon smile at your face as she would thrust a knife once your back was turned. For most of her life, Evelyn skirted by, moving from one marriage to the next in the hopes that she would one day marry "Mr. Right," provided he had the cash to fund her extravagant lifestyle.

Which is why those who knew her couldn't understand what she saw in Mike Bishop, a cop working the Bronx for the last 20 years. What no one knew, however, was that poor old Mike was on the take, accepting hush money from one of New York's up-and-coming gangsters, Tommy "Two-tone" Mantone. The young thug, a lieutenant associated with New York's Innocentini family, runs a lucrative racketeering and smuggling business. Mantone also has a lot of politicos and law enforcement officials in his pocket as

well, helping him shadow his activities from the prying eyes of the FBI, Mayor Lopresti, and Police Chief Ellis.

After accepting bribes for several years, the pressure and guilt finally got to Bishop, but he feared going directly to his supervisors or the city's DA for fear of what would happen to him; cops in prison were never popular. So, not knowing where to turn, the cop finally took his life, but not before leaving a full confession in the form of a 12-page letter.

In one sense, Evelyn is partly guilty for her husband's suicide, because every time Bishop said he was going to spill his guts, Evelyn talked him out of it. Sometimes she used fear and blackmail, other times she berated him for being "a stupid old man who wouldn't know a good thing if it hit him in the face."

On the night of her husband's death, Evelyn discovers her husband's confession note and phones the gangster before calling the police. She intends to blackmail Mantone with the information contained in Bishop's letter: If Mantone doesn't agree to pay her $500 a week, she'll make sure the letter makes it to the DA. Mantone has no choice and agrees to her demands, but it's only a matter of time before the gangster makes his own move, silencing Evelyn forever.

Getting the Players Involved

The player characters are called to investigate the death of Mike Bishop and will eventually discover that what appears to be an open-and-shut case is more than that; it's a startling discovery of betrayal, blackmail, and cold-blooded murder.

The adventure works best if the player characters are either cops or detectives working for the NYPD; however, other character types can be used as well, with just a bit of plot tweaking. The events to follow are predicated on the PCs being notified by their commanding officer that one of the department's own was found dead in his home, killed by a single gunshot wound to the head. Through the course of their investigation, the PCs will learn that Mike Bishop was accepting bribes from a local mob lieutenant.

With that in mind, the GM can alter the initial starting point to make it more plausible for other character archetypes to become involved. In fact, with a bit of tweaking, any Character Archetype can work. For instance, one option would be to require at least one player to play a detective or private eye. The other characters can work for, with, or be allies of the "starring" PC. These supporting characters can be small-time gangsters or thugs hired as strongarms, police officers as "old partners" and contacts in the force, or gamblers and girl fridays who best serve as contacts and snitches.

One thing to keep in mind, however, is that while a sole PC is often more cautious, a troupe tends to resort to vio-

lent solutions more quickly. When a "hide and tail later" situation is the more appropriate solution in the game, make sure you at least discourage a more violent solution. If this means a huge amount of thugs, so be it...

Additionally, GMs can elect to use the rules as outlined in *Chapter Five: Building a Cast*, and craft the scenario's plot around the character backgrounds, so that they really have a vested interest in wanting to investigate the "suicide" of Mike Bishop.

Strange Portents

Read the boxed text aloud to the players.

When you arrive at the crime scene, the flash of a police photographer's camera bulb briefly illuminates the corpse of police officer Mike Bishop, a 20-year veteran of the force. His lifeless body lies slumped over an old oak desk, blood pooling underneath his head from a single gunshot wound. A .38 revolver rests in one hand. The small, nondescript living room in Bishop's house is crowded with police officers and forensics specialists, taking photographs, collecting evidence, and dusting for fingerprints.

It's a grizzly scene made even more desperate by the wind howling outside the front window, currently being pelted by heavy drops of rain. Apparently, that doesn't seem to deter the crowd of on-lookers from gathering on the front lawn behind the police line.

Standing next to the body are two men, one short and thin with a tidy uniform, the other tall, disheveled, and tie-less as if he just arrived on the scene after being roused from bed. He is Lieutenant Dave Ford, and speaking to him is Dr. Henry Rutherford, the department's forensic specialist.

After a few moments, Ford notices the player characters and motions them over to the desk. If the PCs are members of the police force or fellow detectives, he greets them in his usual cynical style and gets down to business. If any government agents or district attorneys are with the group, he greets them cordially, yet with a hint of suspicion in his voice. He doesn't appreciate non-departmental types nosing in on city investigations, but his hands are tied at this point. Reporters and private eyes will be ejected from the room immediately unless one of the other PCs can vouch for them. Even then, it will take a successful Con check with a –3 modifier to convince Ford that the "trespassers" are legit and will keep things on the QT.

Ford tells the PCs that it looks as if Mike Bishop had com-

mitted suicide, although he has no idea why because "there's no note or anything." Still, the upper brass wants a full report, he says, and asks the PCs to see if they can dig anything else up that may shed some light into Bishop's mysterious suicide.

At this point, the player characters are free to proceed as they see fit. While there isn't much in the way of physical evidence to collect (other than the gun), feel free to allow the PCs to investigate whatever part of the house they choose. Eventually, however, they should be steered toward a meeting with Bishop's widow, Evelyn, who is still in the house resting in the master bedroom. When they decide to question her, read the following aloud:

> As you walk through the doorway of the Bishop's darkened master bedroom, the quiet sobs of a woman can be heard from a corner of the room. Stepping further through the threshold it becomes apparent that Evelyn Bishop is wallowing in the sudden death of her husband.
>
> Upon hearing you enter the room, she looks up and attempts to compose herself. At only 40 years old, Mrs. Bishop is a beautiful woman with dark, auburn hair and steel-gray eyes rimmed with puffy redness from crying.
>
> Even in the dim light of the room, Evelyn's black evening gown exquisitely outlines her hourglass figure.
>
> "I was wondering when they were going to send someone up here to speak with me," she says. "I immediately called the police when I…found…my husband in that horrible position. But I couldn't bear to stay in that room."

Obviously, Evelyn is putting on an act, and a good one at that. Being the cold-hearted woman that she is, Evelyn views her husband's death as the perfect opportunity to get rich. Armed with her husband's confession note, Evelyn uses it as a bargaining chip to blackmail Tommy Mantone. Play on the heartstrings of the player characters and portray Evelyn as a genuinely devastated woman, trying unsuccessfully to come to grips with the death of her husband. She'll also frequently reminisce about certain aspects of her husband to the PCs while they question her.

If any of the PCs are suspicious off the bat, allow them to make an Empathy check with a –2 modifier. If successful, tell the PC that something doesn't seem right about Evelyn, but it's hard to pinpoint exactly what.

When asked about her husband's death, Evelyn feigns another few sobs and fakes recomposure. She then tells the PCs that Mike was a good cop, and she should have seen the

warning signs. If pressed further, she says that over the last few months Bishop was suffering from depression over his failing health, but he was afraid to tell anyone at the department, for fear they would put him behind a desk.

If the PCs question Bishop's health, Evelyn tells them: "It must have been his health, I'm sure of it. Several times in the past few months he complained about a pain in his side. When I suggested he see the doctor, Michael would just make excuses. I think he was afraid to find out what the problem was."

The PCs may also want to question how Evelyn discovered her husband, to which she replies: "I was awakened by a single shot at about midnight. I rushed downstairs and found my husband…lying there, with blood all over the wall and the desk. He was still holding the gun in his hand when I found him. My poor Michael. He didn't deserve this."

Unfortunately for the PCs, that's the extent of Evelyn's help. If prodded more, she stands by her story and reiterates that there aren't any other circumstances surrounding her husband's tragic death. Additionally, if the PCs ask about a suicide letter, Evelyn tells them he left no such note.

Case Closed?

As the county coroner collects Bishop's body and the police on scene wrap-up their investigation, the PCs are approached by Ford, who asks for an update. If one or more of the PCs made a successful Empathy check and relate their suspicions to Ford, he shrugs it off, arguing that Mrs. Bishop is under a lot of stress and shouldn't be bothered.

The next morning, as the player characters return to work, they read an article on the *City Herald's* front page:

POLICE SERGEANT SUICIDE
Wife says he was in ill health

NEW YORK, April 20, 1943—Concealing the knowledge from his wife that he was suffering from bad health, police officer Michael Bishop, 45, of 205 Beech Wood Dr., last night shot and killed himself in the living room of his own home.

Mrs. Evelyn Bishop, 40, told police that she was awakened by a single shot at midnight. Rushing downstairs, she found her dead husband's lifeless body slumped over the living room desk, his right hand still clutching his service revolver…

As the PCs go about their duties, a woman named Mary Martin, who claims that Michael Bishop's suicide was no accident, contacts one of them. Not willing to speak further on the phone, Mary requests the PCs meet her at a local nightclub called The Hideaway at 9 p.m. If any of the PCs are detectives, allow them to update Ford, if they want to. His reaction is one of genuine interest and requests the PCs investigate further.

The Hideaway is a run-down nightclub in a particularly dangerous part of the Bronx and well-known for the rough crowd that patronizes the place. Many honest, hardworking New Yorkers avoid the bar. Play up the scene, utilizing popular film noir moods and themes. Describe the desolate, empty streets and dim lighting in a neighborhood long forgotten to the city's upper crust. The area is a working-class poor neighborhood and it shows—many of the commercial storefronts and residences are long abandoned. The silence and wretchedness of the area is almost suffocating to those not used to such living conditions.

Just before the PCs approach the nightclub's front entrance, they are confronted by a group of mob soldiers, looking to convince the player characters that a meeting with Mary Martin is ill-advised. They have been sent by Tommy Mantone, who knows the PCs are investigating Bishop's "suicide." Mantone is the type to take matters into his own hands, and he fears that the PCs will eventually learn of Bishop's confession note, implicating him in numerous criminal acts.

The number of opponents should equal one less than the party (so, for example, if four PCs are present, three mob soldiers approach them). The thugs will attempt to sneak up on the party, preferring to attack them from behind. Have the players all make Awareness checks versus the soldier's Stealth rolls. If one or more of the player characters are caught unaware follow the rules for *Surprise Attacks* on page 16. Regardless, the mob soldiers will attack first with melee weapons. If it looks as if the PCs are gaining the upper hand, the thugs will draw their pistols and begin firing.

Mob Soldiers
AGL 4; DEX 4; PER 3; STR 4; INT 2; WIL 3
Initiative 8; Save 9; Shrug 3
Skills: Brawling (AGL) 4, Dodge (AGL) 4, Drive (DEX) 3, Firearms (DEX) 4, Intimidation (WIL) 5, Melee (AGL) 5, Stealth (AGL) 2, Resist (WIL) 3
Assets: Toughness (1)
Liabilities: Bloodlust
Weapons: Colt Detective Special, Lead Pipe

Even if it looks like the PCs are going to win the fight, the thugs will keep at it until they are all killed or knocked unconscious. Should the PCs manage to arrest one of the thugs, it will take a successful Interrogation or Intimidation check with a –2 modifier to get him to talk. Even then, the thug will not be forthcoming with any information, only telling the PCs they had better watch their step; they're in way over their heads.

Provided none of the PCs are wounded too badly, they can enter the nightclub. Read the following passage:

> As you step into the dark interior of The Hideaway you're instantly overwhelmed by the stench of stale cigarette smoke, cheap beer and even cheaper whiskey. This place definitely isn't the Ritz-Carlton, or the Cotton Club, for that matter. What few decorations The Hideaway has are old posters of pin-up girls lining the dingy walls.
>
> Aside from the nightclub's obvious stench, the place also reeks of desperation, of lost causes, and forgotten dreams…much like the neighborhood The Hideaway calls home.
>
> A few down-and-out locals are gathered in groups around the bar, while others sit at old tables scattered haphazardly about the small room. No one looks up from their drinks as you walk in and it's probably just as well, considering what just happened outside.

Locating Mary is relatively easy since she's only one of two woman in the nightclub. She won't approach the PCs, so it's up to them to confront her for an interview. Even if approached slowly and with care, Mary is a bit apprehensive. She'll periodically look over her shoulder and speak in hushed whispers as if fearing that someone in the nightclub might overhear the conversation. Before speaking with the PCs, Mary will need convincing that they're the "real deal." If one or more of the player character are detectives, then allow them to make a Con or Interrogate check with a +1 modifier to the target number if they flash a badge. If not, impose a –1 modifier to the Skill Check.

Mary will tell the PCs that she read the article in the morning paper, and knows that Bishop had no reason to kill himself. She says that Bishop's wife is a liar and that he was not suffering depression over health problems.

"This story is all wrong," she says. "Why, Mike wouldn't kill himself. There wasn't anything wrong with his health."

If asked how she knows this, Mary drops a bombshell—she was Bishop's mistress. Mary then proceeds to tell the PCs that, "Tom was a wonderful guy and he was never happier, especially since Evelyn agreed to divorce him." Depending on what the player characters ask of Mary, she imparts the following information:

- She and Bishop would often meet at his summer home when his wife was away traveling.
- Bishop was caught between the two women.
- Evelyn is a cold-hearted woman who only cared about Bishop's money and loved to spend it.
- Evelyn definitely had something to do with Bishop's suicide, but Mary has no idea what part she may have played.

Observant players may question Mary's claim that Bishop owned a second home and her allegations of Evelyn's wanton spending. After all, how could the Bishops afford such a seemingly extravagant lifestyle on a cop's salary? Was Bishop on the take? Was he being forced to spend above his means by Evelyn? Unfortunately, Mary cannot answer these questions, although she will vehemently deny that Bishop had any ties to organized crime. In any case, the interview with Mary should raise some red flags with the PCs and prompt them to give Evelyn a second look.
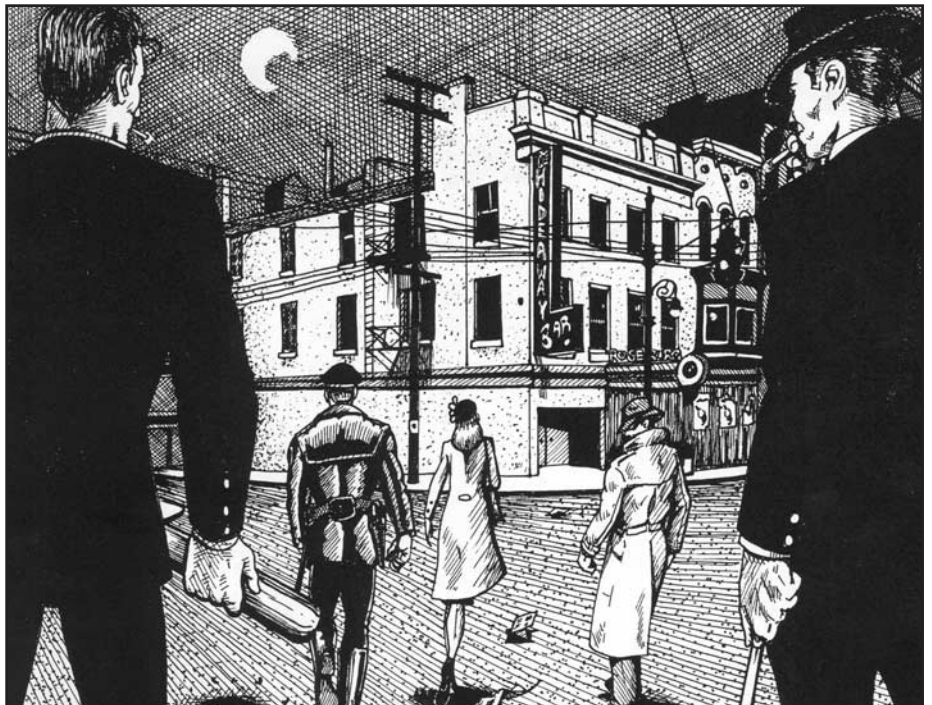
Into the Web

If their suspicions are slightly aroused, the PCs may wish to interview Evelyn Bishop a second time the following morning. Unfortunately for them, she's a pro at what she does and will not crack under pressure so easily. When the player characters arrive to check up on Mary's story and to find out what really predicated Bishop's suicide, Evelyn mockingly confesses to her family's dirty laundry and Bishop's affair with Mary. Evelyn will impart the following information willingly:

* She knew of her husband's affair with Mary Martin.
* If asked about a divorce, Evelyn denounces Mary as a liar and denies agreeing to a divorce.
* She asserts that Bishop had a terminal illness.

If Evelyn senses that the PCs are suspicious of her involvement with Bishop's suicide, she'll quickly change her tune about her husband, trying to make herself the victim. Evelyn now tells the PCs that Bishop was, in fact, a womanizer and had frequent affairs with many women during the years of their marriage.

"Michael was a vain man and had to prove to himself that he was still attractive to women despite his illness. He's had many affairs that I know of."

Evelyn knows who Mary Martin is and suggests that perhaps her husband only boasted to his mistress that he was in good health.

If asked about how she and her husband could afford a second house, Evelyn suddenly turns confrontational and haughty. She refuses to answer any questions regarding the house, stating that she "resents the implications" of their questions. At that point, Evelyn will refuse to answer any further questions, and demands the investigators leave her home at once, before she calls their superiors.

Dead on Arrival

The next day, the PCs are once again treated to a front-page article in the local paper's afternoon edition. This one is a bit more shocking, however—Mary Martin was found dead in an abandoned warehouse in the Bronx. She was beaten badly and apparently tortured to death.

If the PCs think to, they can easily make a trip to the Medical Examiner's office, who will gladly impart some information, although it's not much. He tells the PCs that the woman's body was littered with cigarette burns in various places on her body and that the woman was slowly tortured before finally succumbing to wound shock.

While the players may not know this fact, their characters may be able to recall hearing stories of gangland torture tactics during the Prohibition. It was common for gangsters of that era to burn their victims with cigarettes as a sort of sick calling card that the mob claimed another victim. If the players have not or cannot make the connection, have them make a Streetwise check to discover the information. Characters who have had prior dealings with the mob receive a +1 modifier to the Target Number.

At this point, it's up to players as to how they wish to proceed. If they return to the police station, Ford will be waiting for them, and he has an earful. The Lieutenant tells the PCs he just received a call from upstairs and proceeds to reprimand them for their "bad judgement" in bothering "a cop's poor widow" with sensitive questions about his alleged love affairs. Because somebody complained (Ford won't say one way or another that it was Evelyn Bishop), and the Lieutenant doesn't wish to antagonize any higher-ups in the hierarchy of command, the PCs are then told to close the case due to pressure calls from upstairs.

The PCs can also return to The Hideaway to question anyone there who may have seen something or has additional information. It won't be easy, though. In order to successfully pry information from the club's patrons, the PCs will need to make judicious Con, Intimidation, or Interrogation checks with a –2 to –3 modifier to the base Target Number. If they do manage to get someone to speak about Mary Martin, the person being questioned will advise the PCs speak with the bartender, Billy Morgan.

When the PCs approach the bartender he's busily wiping the counter with a wet rag. Upon questioning Morgan it should become apparent to them that he's adopted a don't-ask-don't-tell policy with his workers, especially the barmaids. His typical response to initial questions is to deny knowing anything about Mary's death or the type of company she kept. Nothing the PCs do can get information out of Morgan. He's also under the thumb of Mantone's gang,

---

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN FOUND DEAD

NEW YORK, April 21, 1943—At roughly 6:30 this morning, New York City police found the battered body of a woman hidden amongst some debris in an abandoned warehouse at 325 Bellevue Dr. in the Bronx borough.

Police officials say the woman, identified as Mary Martin, 26, was badly beaten and tortured, gangland style. An autopsy will be performed today by the city's Medical Examiner.

---

and is more afraid of what the gangster would do to him than the cops. Physical violence will get the PCs nowhere, either, and may only result in a barfight. Before the PCs leave, though, Morgan arrogantly gloats that he knows the PCs have been warned against further investigations and to "stop annoying people."

Where to turn

It's likely that the PCs may want to pay another visit to Evelyn Bishop and confront her for complaining to the department, but remind the players that doing so would be unwise. At the very least they could get another reprimand from the upper brass, at the very worst they'll lose their badges (if detectives) and be stationed behind a desk for the next six months. Regardless, Evelyn will have nothing further to do with the PCs and avoid them at all costs.

If the PCs think to trail Evelyn, allow them to do so, for shadowing the woman may reveal some important clues; however, should the players forget, remind them that no amount of cajoling will convince Ford or the department brass to investigate further.

For the most part, Evelyn follows a fairly standard schedule: up by 10 a.m., out the door for shopping at Bloomingdale's by noon, followed by a late afternoon lunch at 2 p.m. Evelyn will perform this routine for the next several days, so play up the monotony of the situation; surveillance is often boring and tedious work.

Then, just when the player characters are about to give up, have Evelyn suddenly change her schedule. Instead of having lunch at a posh downtown restaurant, she takes a sudden drive into the Bronx and parks in an old factory parking lot. To make matters more urgent, have the PC driving make a Stealth check against Evelyn's Awareness check. If she spots the PCs following her, she will attempt to lose them in the heavy afternoon traffic.

If they manage to follow her all the way to the factory have them wait several tense minutes until another vehicle pulls up beside her Packard. A tall, heavily built man exits the car and hands Bishop's widow something in what looks like a brown envelope. After a brief exchange of words, the man enters the car and both vehicles exit the parking lot.

The man meeting Evelyn is named Vincent Lagasse, Tommy Mantone's right-hand man and underboss. Legasse is delivering Evelyn's hush money. Riding in the car with him are four other thugs (use the Mob Soldier stats from page 40) armed with Tommy guns, so it behooves the PCs to stay out of sight, unless they're looking for trouble. The five thugs have no qualms about blasting any witnesses.

Especially diligent PCs may think to write down the license plate number of the thugs' vehicle, in which case it's just a matter then of heading back to headquarters and search for the plate number via the city's Department of Motor Vehicles. A successful Research check with a –1 modifier, plus a few hours of searching will produce the car's registration—one Thomas Mantone.

If the PCs do not choose to follow Evelyn, there are other options for them as well, although it largely depends on how astute the players have been during the scenario. If a PC made a successful Streetwise check at the Medical Examiner's Office they should have a good idea who was responsible for Mary's hit. The mob is very prolific in New York City, although with four different crime families it will be relatively difficult to determine which one is responsible for her death. However, knowing that Mary was murdered in the Bronx, as well as the fact they themselves were attacked in that borough, the PCs may be able to piece everything together, implicating the Innocentini family in the attacks. Then it's just a matter of finding out who from the Innocentini family ordered the hit.

If the PCs have contacts they can also put feelers out on the street, trying to gain information on who ordered the hit on Mary Martin. GMs should use discretion, however. It's unlikely that a level 1 contact will have any useful information, while a level 2 contact may only be reliable 50% of the time. Even then, if the PCs are successful in gathering information on Mantone, there's an equal chance that word will reach the mobster. If any PC attempts to gather information

---

Evelyn Bishop, Femme Fatale
AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative 7; Save 6; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 5, Con (PER) 4, Dodge (AGL) 4, Drive (DEX) 4, Etiquette (PER) 5, Seduction (PER) 4, Forgery (INT) 4
Assets: Attractiveness, Wealth 2
Liabilities: Enemy (2, Mantone), Compulsion (2, obsession with material wealth)
Weapon: Enfield .380 revolver

Vincent Legrasse, Mob Underboss
AGL 3; DEX 4; PER 3; STR 4; INT 3; WIL 3
Initiative 8; Save 9; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Brawling (AGL) 4, Con (PER) 4, Dodge (AGL) 3, Drive (DEX) 4, Firearms (DEX) 4, Melee (AGL) 3, Intimidation (WIL) 4
Assets: Toughness (1)
Liabilities: Bloodlust
Weapon: Walther P38

party for his daughter at his Manhattan home. Another successful Streetwise check will procure a copy of the invitation for the PCs, but one of the characters will need to forge additional copies. Armed with invitations, the player characters will have easy access to the house.

Another method requires the characters to utilize stealth and subterfuge to gain access to the party, but it presents considerably more danger. Eight thugs with instructions to let no one in without an invitation protect the property. Use the standard Mob Soldier NPC template for all eight of the mooks, but half of them are armed with Tommy guns.

The PCs can attempt to sneak into the mansion through a back entrance, but they will have to time the break-in based on the guards' timeframe. If the PCs pull surveillance they will notice that four thugs patrol the mansion's expansive driveway, while another four, traveling in pairs, make regular patrols around the home's perimeter. If timed correctly, the PCs can sneak through a back service entrance once the two pairs pass each other at the rear of the property. Once at the back door, the PCs will need to pick the lock with a –1 modifier to the base Target Number. Time is of the essence here, so it's important that the PCs gain entrance quickly. It takes almost 20 minutes for the thugs to make a complete round across the perimeter, so for each unsuccessful attempt at picking the lock subtract 5 minutes from the 20 allotted. A critical failure will bring the guards toward the PCs' position in a matter of minutes.

Once inside, the PCs will need to make their way toward Mantone's office, which is located on the third floor of the house. Judicious use of Stealth checks is in order. Particularly sadistic GMs may wish to throw the PCs a few close calls, just to keep them on their toes. Essentially, the PCs are trying to, obviously, locate incriminating evidence, especially something that will implicate Evelyn Bishop as well. Luckily for the PCs, Mantone and his underboss have been keeping detailed (albeit well-guarded) records of their payments to her.

What the PCs are looking for is located in Mantone's study—an expansive, rectangular room roughly 1,100 square feet. Mantone uses this room for important meetings and to entertain visiting "family members," in addition to

from a level 1 contact, Mantone will definitely find out and send a few of his mooks after the player characters. This time, however, their intent will be to kill the PCs. If a level 2 contact is utilized, there will be a 25% chance that word reaches Mantone. A level 3 contact is the safest way to gain information.

Alternately, any PCs with the Streetwise skill can roll with a –2 modifier to the Target Number to find information. On a critical failure, however, word will surely reach Mantone. In any case, have the players role-play the situation as opposed to relying solely on a Skill Check. Require them to patronize seedy bars, back alley meeting places, red light districts, or abandoned buildings as they meet with contacts.

Into the Fire

Upon discovery that Mantone was responsible behind Mary's murder, the PCs will most likely wish to confront him, especially since it may provide a link to Evelyn's involvement with Bishop's suicide. The mob lieutenant lives a somewhat extravagant lifestyle in Manhattan and is always surrounded by no less than six thugs and Legasse, and that's only when he's traveling. Basically, going in with guns blazing is an unwise decision and could very well lead to the PCs' death. Two ways present themselves, however.

Depending on how the PCs fared with their contacts (if they indeed used them) word will eventually reach the PCs that Mantone is throwing an upper-class, invite-only dance

using it as his personal office. The room is filled with expensive furniture and an exquisite mahogany bar that takes up the room's entire western wall. Opposite the bar, also lining the entire wall, are ceiling-to-floor windows that overlook the mansion's backyard, so it's important for the PCs to operate with as little light as possible. If flashlights are being used, the guards outside have a chance to spot the beams on a roll of 2 or less on a six-sided die.

Also in the study is a large oak desk set against the far northern wall. Inside a locked drawer is a hidden panel that safely hides a bankbook of sorts, which Mantone has been using to keep track of payments to Evelyn. PCs searching the desk will find the hidden panel on a successful Awareness check with a –2 modifier to the base Target Number.

Once the PCs locate the incriminating evidence, have the ball suddenly drop. As they make their way out of the room, Mantone, Legasse, and three mooks show up unexpectedly. GMs may allow PCs to make a successful Awareness check, in which case the PCs will have one round to either plan an ambush or scatter and hide. If the PC's presence is unknown to Mantone and his thugs, the player characters will gain automatic surprise and can proceed as necessary.

If the players are interested in a little gunfight, let them proceed with guns blazing. In true film noir fashion, however, the PCs can confront Mantone with their evidence. The suave mob lieutenant will remain calm at first, attempting to con the PCs, claiming he has no idea what they are talking about. If the PCs persist, Mantone gets progressively indignant, accusing them of breaking into his home and disrupting his daughter's party. He'll then threaten to remove the characters "from their position." To keep the flavor of a film noir gangster, GMs should feel free to interject the following bits of dialog from Mantone:

* "You came here to my home about a murder? This is my home and I don't like dirt tracked into it."
* "If you mooks don't leave now, come tomorrow morning I'll make sure you don't get a chance to put the screws on me again."
* "I've seen some dummies in my time, but you're in a class by yourselves."

If Mantone suspects that the PCs are not about give up and leave (which they most likely won't), the mob boss will order his four mooks to attack. Fortunately, for the PCs, Mantone sticks around to make sure the job gets done. If the party is outnumbered, then GMs may feel free to adjust the opposition accordingly.

Once combat has begun, the PCs will have roughly four minutes before reinforcements arrive; the guards patrolling the perimeter rush to the sound of gunfire. If it looks as if the PCs are outnumbered, make them sweat a bit more…that is, until the police arrive (the guests downstairs panic when shots ring out, although one has the sense of mind to phone the authorities). Once sirens are heard in the distance, Mantone and Legasse will likely attempt to escape in a waiting car.

If the PCs are unable to prevent their escape, then at least

Tommy Mantone, Mob Lieutenant

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative 7; Save 6; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 5, Brawling (AGL) 5, Cool (WIL) 4, Con (PER) 4, Dodge (AGL) 5, Drive (DEX) 3, Firearms (DEX) 5, Intimidation (WIL) 5, Resist (WIL) 4
Assets: Courage, Wealth (2)
Liabilities: Bloodlust, Enemy (2, city government), Impulsiveness
Weapon: Colt .45

"You came here to my home about a murder? This is my home and I don't like dirt tracked into it."

---

they'll still have conclusive evidence linking Evelyn Bishop to Mantone. Additionally, his mooks will effectively surrender and will likely implicate both he and Legasse in the murder of Mary Martin (although they have no idea about Evelyn's involvement or the confession note). This will allow GMs to extend *A Tangled Web* into a full-blown campaign, effectively making Mantone and/or Legasse recurring antagonists. Regardless of what happens to Mantone, the PCs will have one more loose end to deal with—Evelyn Bishop.

If the PCs prevent Mantone from escaping then he and Legasse will continue to fight, unwilling to go down without one. At this point, the gangster feels he has nothing to lose and would much rather go out in a blaze of glory then to be arrested and imprisoned.

Armed with evidence to implicate Evelyn Bishop in the scandal resulting in her husband's suicide, the PCs have two choices: they can either hand over the records to Ford and let him handle the rest (once he arrives on the scene), or they can approach her themselves.

Turning the Screws

With such incriminating evidence, Evelyn will have no choice but to come clean. For a more lighthearted game, GMs can elect to have Evelyn calmly acquiesce to the blackmail attempts and hand over her husband's confessional letter. But that wouldn't necessarily make for an exciting film noir story, would it?

Alternatively, Evelyn will flat-out deny any knowledge of Mantone, but if the PCs relent and show her proof of Mantone's record keeping, she'll finally confess to everything, but not before pulling a gun on the PCs, threatening to shoot. Evelyn will return to the night of her husband's suicide and explain that Michael did, in fact, leave a note, but it was not a suicide note. Rather, his last words described his dealings with Mantone and the bribes he accepted for essentially giving the mob lieutenant carte blanche to conduct business without fear of persecution and arrest. Also in the letter, Bishop outlines all of the criminal acts that Mantone engaged in right under the nose of the police department. These crimes run the gamut of illegal activities, from racketeering, to bribing government officials, to illegal gambling.

Once Evelyn finishes confessing she'll go on a tirade about her unwillingness to take the fall for a mob boss, much less a husband who wouldn't give her what she wanted. Keep in mind that Evelyn won't beg the PCs to let her go, but she won't attempt to flee, either. Evelyn's state of mind at this point is a whirlwind of confusion; she honestly thought she would get away with her scheme and is unwilling to believe she did anything wrong. As she speaks, Evelyn will grow progressively irritated and irrational. Eventually, this will culminate in her firing a few shots toward the PCs' direction with her outstretched revolver.

In the interests of cinematic film noir precedence, this encounter should not drag out into a long, involved combat sequence. Rather, Evelyn should be allowed to fire a few misplaced shots at the PCs, with the PCs returning fire in a climactic progression. Evelyn will look on with surprise at the PCs and then gaze down at her wounds. She then drops the gun, and with a blank stare she slowly slides down the wall before resting peacefully on the floor. Evelyn gazes up at the PCs and manages a slight smile.

"It doesn't matter now, does it?" she says meekly. "Michael's dead and now his confession will be made public. That bastard Mantone will finally get what's coming to him."

If the PCs managed to take Mantone alive, at this point it doesn't really matter whether or not he comes clean with his involvement with the Bishops. Upon Evelyn's death, her lawyers release Bishop's confessional note to the media, who have a field day with the exposure. In the end, a mob boss has been brought down and a heartless woman has been thwarted.
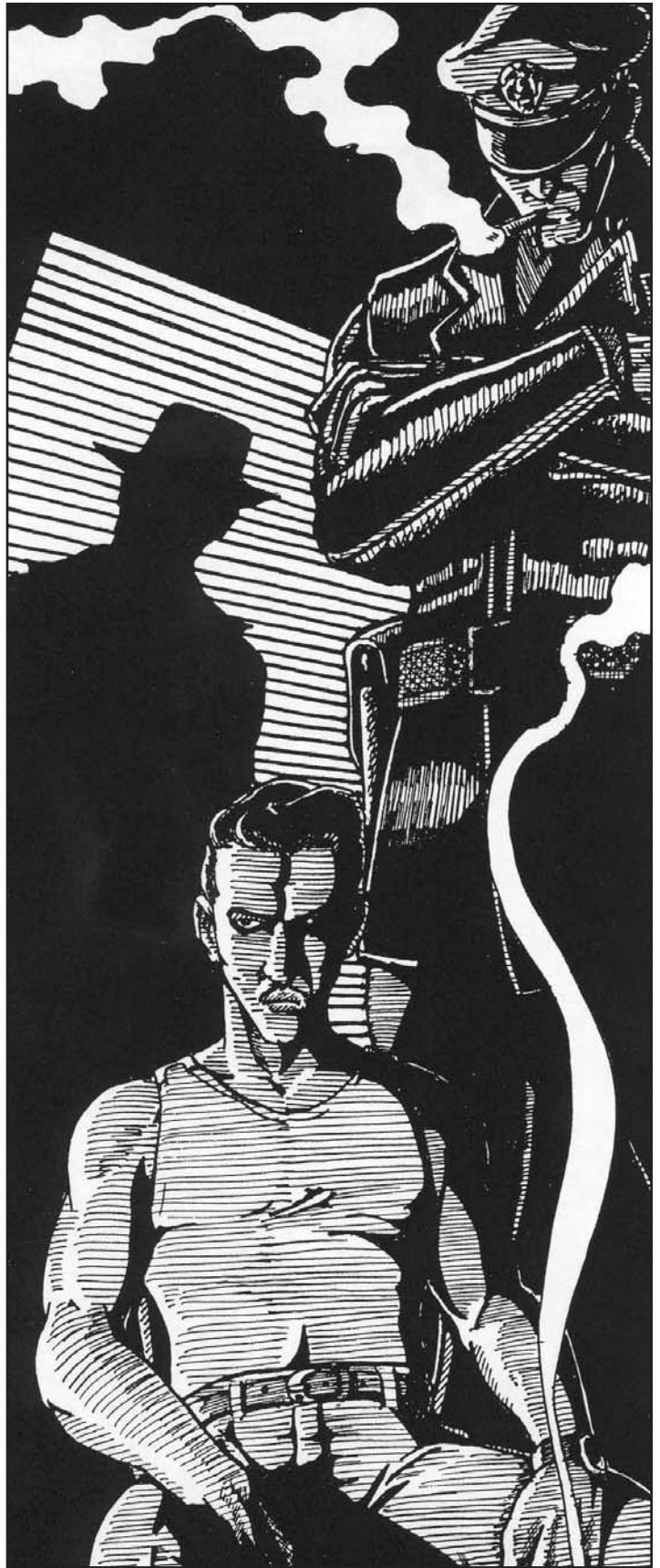
Appendix A
Costs and Equipment

Automobiles

Austin 7 Roadster - $275
The Austin Seven was introduced to a skeptical public in 1922, the first proper large car "in miniature," as opposed to the crude and unreliable cycle-cars then available. By 1939, some 290,000 Sevens were in service throughout the world. This tough little car continues to give amazing service and enjoyment to yet another generation, whether for simple touring trips or just puttering about on a summer day.

SPD 3	MAN 3	CHA 5

Chevrolet Phaeton - $515
Put into production during the 1930s, the Phaeton continued to be a popular sports sedan well into the 1940s. The convertible model features a cowl ventilator, chrome-plated hood parts, and an ashtray and vanity case in the rear. A very reliable, sporty car.

SPD 2	MAN 3	CHA 4

Ford Convertible Coupe - $325
At the end of the Great Depression, Ford introduced the Convertible Coupe at the World's Fair in Flushing Meadow Park, New York. The centerpiece of Ford's exhibit was the 1939 Ford Convertible Coupe, considered by many as the most beautiful Ford ever. Features a rumble seat, Ford's famed V-8 engine, and a spare tire that is kept in a compartment behind the driver's seat.

SPD 2	MAN 2	CHA 4

Lincoln Continental Mark I - $1,830
With its unmistakable split grille prow and flawless body paint, to the exposed spare tire in a distinctive body-colored housing that is then mounted on the back of the car's trunk, the Mark I is truly a car for the upper class. The Mark I also features a lavish interior, with its instrument panel bezels, horn ring and radio speaker, all richly embellished with 24-karat gold electroplate.

SPD 1	MAN 1	CHA 6

Packard Convertible Sedan - $1,435
Packard defined and re-defined what a luxury car should be. To own a Packard is to be among the elite. This particular model features a generous sweep of the fenders, distinctive radiator grille, slanting V-shaped windshield, and familiar Packard radiator mascot.

SPD 0	MAN 1	CHA 6

Clothes & Accessories

Men's Boots	$3
Fedora Hat	$10
Lady's Convertible Suit	$30
Lady's Designer Dress	$100
Lady's Dress	$1
Lady's Shoes	$3.50
Lady's Gown	$10.75
Haircut	$0.25
Lady's Handbag	$7
Leather or Suede Bag	$2.25
Men's Dress Shoes	$9
Men's Tailored Dress Suit	$125
Men's Tie	$1
Men's Wool Dress Suit	$30
Men's Workshirt	$0.65
Men's Broadcloth Shirt (dress shirt)	$2
Overcoat	$18
Sweater	$1
Winter Coat	$28

Entertainment

Drink (Wine)	$0.20
Drink (Beer)	$0.10
Drink (Whiskey)	$0.15
Newspaper Subscription (3 months)	$0.50

Newspaper Subscription (1 year) $1.50
Nightclub Cover Charge $0.50
Prewitt Theatre (1 adult admission) $0.10
Ritz Theatre (1 adult admission) $0.25

Misc.

Apartment (rent/month) $12
Cab Fare $0.10
Cigar $0.50
Cigarettes (single) $0.01
Cigarettes (pack) $0.10
Coffee (1 cup) $0.05
Dining (Breakfast) $0.45
Dining (Lunch) $0.65
Dining (Dinner) $1.50
Doctor's Visit $3
Hotel (Average) $5
Hotel (Good) $20
Hotel (Poor) $1
House, 3 bedroom $3,900
Office Space (per month) $30
Subway ticket $0.05

Weapons

Weapon Accuracy (WA): Some weapons are better balanced than others. Add this number to the Target Number to hit with this weapon.

Weapon Rating (WR): This number is the minimum STRENGTH needed to wield it effectively and serves as the damage rating. Characters with a STR less than the WR of the weapon wield it at a penalty of –1 per point of difference.

Range: This number is the maximum distance a firearm or similar ranged weapon can be fired effectively. If targeting beyond the maximum range, the player suffers an additional –1 penalty to hit, and the WR is halved (round down). For game purposes, a weapon exceeding twice its listed range is completely ineffective.

Damage Bonus (DB): Weapons with a damage bonus are considered high-powered weapons with improved penetration or stopping power. Add the DB points listed to the total amount of damage.

Ammo: The number of rounds used before the weapon needs to be reloaded. For a more cinematic game, GMs can elect to forego having PCs worry about keeping track of ammo. Instead, should a player ever roll a critical failure on a ranged attack, rule that his weapon has spent its last bullet or jammed.

Firearms

Following the weapon name are two cost listings. The price before the slash refers to the cost of the weapon, while the price after the slash refers to the cost of ammo for one box of 100 rounds/shells.

Browning Auto-5 (shotgun) $50 / $4.95
WA: *   WR: 4   DB:+1
RANGE: 100 AMMO: 5
*The shotgun has a WR of +1 for one-half range or less: -1 WR for more than one-half range.

Browning .25 (automatic pistol) $15 / $0.50
WA: 0   WR: 3   DB: +1
RANGE: 40   AMMO: 6

Colt .45 (automatic pistol) $30 / $9
WA: 0   WR: 4   DB: +2
RANGE: 60   AMMO: 6

Colt Detective Special (revolver) $24 / $2
WA: 0   WR: 3
RANGE: 50   AMMO: 6

Enfield .380 (revolver) $15 / $0.50
WA: 0   WR: 3
RANGE: 50   AMMO: 6

Ivor Johnson .22 (revolver) $10 / $0.50
WA: 1   WR: 3
RANGE: 30   AMMO: 6

M1 Carbine (rifle) $50 / $6
WA: 1   WR: 4   DB: +2
RANGE: 500 AMMO: 15

Remington 870 (shotgun) $50 / $8
WA: *   WR: 4
RANGE: 150 AMMO: 5
*The shotgun has a WR of +1 for one-half range or less; -1 WR for more than one-half range.

Smith & Wesson .38 (revolver) $12 / $2
WA: 1   WR: 3
RANGE: 50   AMMO: 6

Smith & Wesson M19 (revolver) $15 / $1.50
WA: 0   WR: 3
RANGE: 50   AMMO: 6

Thompson 45 (SMG) $150 / $9
WA: 0   WR: 4   DB: +3
RANGE: 175 AMMO: 25

Walther P38 (automatic pistol) $60 / $2
WA: 0   WR: 3   DB: +2
RANGE: 50   AMMO: 10

Walther PPK (automatic pistol) $75 / $2
WA: 1   WR: 3   DB: +1
RANGE: 50   AMMO: 10

Winchester 12-gauge (shotgun) $45 / $7
WA: *   WR: 4
RANGE: 100 AMMO: 4
* The shotgun has a WR of +1 for one-half range or less; -1 WR for more than one-half range.

Melee Weapons

Blackjack
COST: $3   WA: 2   WR: 1

Bottle
COST: -   WA: -1   WR: 1

Brass Knuckles
COST: $2.50 WA: 0   WR: 2

Cleaver
COST $2   WA: -1   WR: 1

Club
COST: $5   WA: -1   WR: 2

Chain
COST: $1.50 WA: 0   WR: 3

Chair
COST: -   WA: -1   WR: 2

Fire Axe
COST: $2   WA: 0   WR: 1

Hatchet
COST: $4   WA: 0   WR: 1

Lead Pipe
COST: -   WA: 0   WR: 1

Nightstick
COST: $4   WA: -1   WR: 2

Small Knife
COST: $2.50 WA: 0   WR: 1

Shovel
COST: -   WA: 0   WR: 2

Stiletto
COST: $2   WA: 1   WR: 1

Sword Cane
COST: $10   WA: +1   WR: 3

Whip
COST: $7   WA: 2   WR: 1   DB: -3
*The negative damage bonus represents the whip's function as a weapon used primarily for entanglement and not to wound.

Armor Values of Common Items

Another Character . . . . .SHRUG
Army Flak Vest 2
Brick Wall 10-15
Briefcase 1
Car Door 9
Cargo Crate (empty) 5
Cargo Crate (full) 10
Chair .4
Concrete Wall 10-15
Leather Jacket 1
Metal Sheet 10
Oak Desk 8
Vault Door 15-20
Table .7
Trench Coat 1
Wood .5
Wood Door 6

Appendix B
Filmography

While this in not an exhaustive list of films noir by any means, it does outline some of the best the genre has to offer. Film noir encompasses so many different moods and themes and is inarguably one of the most diverse genres ever to come out of Hollywood since the 1940s. There are documentary-style noirs, prison noirs, menaced-woman noirs, romantic noirs, and even modern films noir that propagated non-traditional classics such as *Chinatown*, *Blade Runner*, and *L.A. Confidential*.

If you're unfamiliar with the genre in general, then renting a few of these movies will surely help you understand film noir's popular themes and moods. GMs are encouraged to study some of these classics to collect ideas for their own campaigns, antagonists, and locations. Likewise, players will find a wealth of information if they're looking for ideas on character concepts and backgrounds. Of course, all of this is optional.

The Maltese Falcon (1941)
Directed by John Huston
Starring Humphrey Bogart and Mary Astor
Based on Dashiell Hammett's 1929 novel of the same name, *The Maltese Falcon* is one of the most popular classic detective mysteries ever made. Many film historians consider it the first in the dark film noir genre. Humphrey Bogart plays private eye Sam Spade in pursuit of thieves who are after a jewel-encrusted statuette.

Double Indemnity (1944)
Directed by Billy Wilder
Starring Fred MacMurray, Barbara Stanwyck.
Billy Wilder's adaptation of James M. Cain's 1936 novel, *Three of a Kind*, features Barbara Stanwyck as a femme fatale who convinces insurance agent/lover Fred MacMurray to murder her husband, so they can share double indemnity insurance proceeds. *Double Indemnity* involves two major characters with "an unholy love and an almost perfect crime."

Laura (1944)
Directed by Otto Preminger
Starring Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews, Clifton Webb, Vincent Price, and Judith Anderson
Laura is one of the most elegant and stylish classic films noir ever made, with an impressive ensemble cast of characters. To quote Filmsite, "Laura is characterized by shad-owy, dream-like, high-contrast black-and-white cinematography, and taut and smart dialogue in a quick succession of scenes. It presents a decadent and morally corrupt group of upper-class society types."

Gaslight (1944)
Directed by George Cukor
Starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer
Gaslight is a perfect example of films noir's diversity. This 1940s classic is the quintessential menaced-woman noir. Ingrid Bergman won an Oscar for her performance as a terrified wife being slowly driven insane by her mentally cruel husband, played by Boyer. The film was advertised as "the strange story of an international criminal's love for a great beauty," and "the strange drama of a captive sweetheart." The gothic, noirish, and effective melodrama with the theme of a menaced, terrorized, or threatened woman (or wife) was one of a number of similar films made in the 1940s.

The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946)
Directed by Tay Garnett
Starring Lana Turner and John Garfield
According to film critic Tim Dirks, this 1946 film noir classic is "one of the earliest prototypes of today's 'erotic thrillers.'" The screenplay is based on James M. Cain's 1934 novel of the same name. Modeling the novel it is based on, director Tay Garnet weaves a tale of forbidden lust, raw sexiness, and adultery-motivated murder.

The Dark Corner (1946)
Directed by Henry Hathaway
Starring Lucille Ball, Clifton Webb, and William Bendix
A taut detective story with plenty of attitude! Private investigator Bradford Galt moves to New York from San Fransisco after serving a jail term because of his lawyer-partner Tony Jardine. When Galt finds someone is tailing—and possibly trying to kill him—Bradford deduces his ex-partner is behind it. Eventually, he discovers there is a lot more to it, and is glad to have his attractive new secretary, Kathleen, around, for more than a few reasons.

The Big Sleep (1946)
Directed by Howard Hawks
Starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall
From IMDB: Private eye Philip Marlowe is hired to keep an eye on General Sternwood's youngest daughter, Carmen,

who has fallen into bad company and is likely to do some damage to herself and her family before long. He soon finds himself falling in love with her older sister, Vivien, who initially takes a deep dislike to Mr. Marlowe; however, the plot thickens when murder follows murder.

Out of the Past (1947)
Directed by Jacques Tourneur
Starring Robert Mitchum, Kirk Douglas, and Jane Greer
Director Jacques Tourneur's quintessential film noir *Out of the Past* features Robert Mitchum playing the doomed, double-crossed private eye who falls for a gangster moll played by Jane Greer. Mitchum's character was originally trailing her on behalf of Kirk Douglas, who plays Greer's boyfriend, a mobster named Whit. The movie was remade in 1984 and called *Against All Odds*. The original 1947 screenplay was based on Geoffrey Homes' 1946 novel *Build My Gallows High*.

The Lady From Shanghai (1948)
Directed by Orson Wells
Starring Orson Wells and Rita Hayworth
An unsettling whodunit film noir classic with stunning cinematography and fascinating visuals. *The Lady From Shanghai* is a tale of betrayal, lust, greed, and murder. Wells plays an Irish sailor who accompanies a beautiful woman (Hayworth) and her handicapped husband (Everett Sloane) on a cruise and becomes involved in a murder plot.

The Third Man (1949)
Directed by Carol Reed
Starring Joseph Cotten, Alida Valli, and Orson Welles
An American writer arrives in postwar Austria to find the friend who invited him has died under mysterious circumstances. The mystery ensues, including ties with the black market, the multinational police, and with his girlfriend.

The Asphalt Jungle (1950)
Directed by John Huston
Starring Sterling Hayden and Louis Calhern
Technically, *The Asphalt Jungle* is a caper film, but it does share many qualities with typical film noir offerings. Huston's crime drama classic features a wonderful ensemble cast who comprise a group of two-bit criminals and a recently paroled German criminal mastermind. The motley group of social degenerates plan a detailed million-dollar jewelry store heist to provide salvation and a means of getting away from their impoverished lives.

The Big Heat (1953)
Directed by Fritz Lang
Starring Glenn Ford and Gloria Grahame
Fritz Lang is one the quintessential film noir directors, often fusing German expressionism into his brutally realistic and bleak films. *The Big Heat* is a film noir tale that centers around the suicide of a crooked cop, and the subsequent struggle of an honest detective, Dave Bannion, to investigate a corrupt city government, a ruthless mobster, and a blackmailing femme fatale to uncover the truth. *Mean Streets'* introductory scenario, *A Tangled Web*, is based on this classic film, which, in turn, is based on a *Saturday Evening Post* serial, and the hard-hitting, brutal 1952 novel by William P. McGivern.

Kiss Me Deadly (1955)
Directed by Robert Aldrich
Starring Ralph Meeker and Albert Dekker
Inarguably, one of the greatest detective pulp-fiction authors is Mickey Spillane. So, it's no surprise that his character, private eye Mike Hammer, makes an appearance in this startling, apocalyptic film noir based on Spillane's 1952 novel of the same name. *Kiss Me Deadly* features the sleazy and contemptible private investigator/vigilante Mike Hammer in his solitary pursuit of a white-hot apocalyptic object that eventually leads to nuclear catastrophe and annihilation during an explosive ending. It's a masterful film, primarily because there is no explicit mention of the words bomb, atomic, or thermo-nuclear. *Kiss Me Deadly* is also considered the definitive science-fiction film noir tale.

Night of the Hunter (1955)
Directed by Charles Laughton
Starring Robert Mitchum, Shelley Winters, and Lillian Gish
From IMDB: Ben Harper has committed murder for $10,000. He hides the money and makes daughter, Pearl, and son, John, promise not to tell anyone where it is hidden, not even their mother Willa. In prison and awaiting hanging, Ben meets his cellmate, the Preacher, who tries unsuccessfully to get Ben to reveal where he stashed the money. When Preacher is released from prison he heads for the Harper home, intent on finding the money. Preacher charms Willa and wins her hand in marriage, only to kill her when she learns what he is really like. With only Pearl and John separating him from a small fortune, the Preacher unleashes the full force of his true, evil self.

Touch of Evil (1958)
Directed by Orson Welles
Starring Charlton Heston, Janet Leigh, and Orson Welles
From IMDB: A Mexican government investigator and his young American wife put their honeymoon on hold in an American border town when they become embroiled in a frame-up planned by the town's chief investigator. Featuring one of the longest continuous shots in Hollywood. Its features such unusual and seedy characters as a sex-crazed motel manager, a blind shopkeeper, a drug smuggler, a sweaty drug dealer with a poorly-fitting wig, a gang of juvenile delinquents, among others.

NPC Stats

The following NPC stats can be used by GMs as opponents or allies to the player characters, while the players can choose some of these NPC templates as contacts or associates. Some of these NPCs have been design around 20 skill points, but GMs are free to adjust anything they wish on the templates.

Bartender

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative 7, Save 6, Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Brawling (AGL) 2, Carousing (STR) 3, Cool (WIL) 3, Empathy (PER) 4, Streetwise (PER) 4
Assets: Contacts (2)
Liabilities: Addiction (2, alcohol)

Borough President

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 3; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 4
Initiative 6, Save 7, Shrug 3
Skills: Bureaucracy (PER) 4, Cool (WIL) 3, Empathy (PER) 3, Etiquette (PER) (*Politics*) 3, Performance (PER) 3, Law (INT) 4, Streetwise (PER) 4
Assets: Contacts (2), Rational, Wealth (1)

Cab Driver

AGL 4; DEX 4; PER 4; STR 3; INT 3; WIL 2
Initiative 8, Save 5, Shrug 2
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Con (PER) 3, Dodge (AGL) 3, Drive (DEX) 4, Negotiation (PER) 4, Streetwise (PER) 3
Assets: Direction Sense
Liabilities: Addiction (1, caffeine)

City/Government Official

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative 6, Save 6, Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Bureaucracy (INT) 4, Cool (WIL) 3, Con (PER) 2, Etiquette (PER) (*Politics*) 4, Law (INT) 4, Performance (PER) 4
Assets: Contacts (2), Rational

Detective/Private Eye

AGL 4; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 3; WIL 3
Initiative 8, Save 6, Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Con (PER) 3, Dodge (AGL) 3, Firearms (DEX) 3, Interrogation (PER) 4, Law (INT) 3, Research (INT) 2, Resist (WIL) 3, Stealth (AGL) 4, Streetwise (PER) 3
Assets: Contacts (2), Law Enforcement Powers
Liabilities: Addiction (2, alcohol)
Behavior Tags: Cynical
Weapon: Colt Detective Special

Federal Agent

AGL 3; DEX 4; PER 4; STR 3; INT 3; WIL 3
Initiative 7, Save 6, Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Bureaucracy (INT) 2, Cool (WIL) 3, Dodge (AGL) 3, Empathy (PER) 4, Firearms (DEX) 4, Interrogation (PER) 4, Law (INT) 3, Resist (WIL) 3
Assets: Law Enforcement Powers
Liabilities: Moral Restriction (3, uphold the law)
Weapon: Colt .45

Femme Fatale

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative 7; Save 6; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Cool (WIL) 4, Con (PER) 4, Dodge (AGL) 4, Drive (DEX) 3, Etiquette (PER) 4, Seduction (PER) 4
Assets: Attractiveness, Insight, Wealth 2
Liabilities: Compulsion (2, material wealth)

Informant

AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative 7; Save 6; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Con (PER) 4, Cool (WIL) 3, Dodge (AGL) 3, Etiquette (PER) 4, Gambling (PER) 4, Streetwise (PER) 4, Resist (WIL) 3
Assets: Contacts (3)
Liabilities: Addiction (2, nicotine), Enemy (1, rival informant)

Mob Soldier
AGL 4; DEX 4; PER 3; STR 4; INT 2; WIL 3
Initiative 8; Save 9; Shrug 3
Skills: Brawling (AGL) 4, Dodge (AGL) 4, Drive (DEX) 3, Firearms (DEX) 4, Intimidation (WIL) 5, Melee (AGL) 5, Stealth (AGL) 2, Resist (WIL) 3
Assets: Toughness (1)
Liabilities: Bloodlust
Weapons: Colt Detective Special, Lead Pipe

Police Officer
AGL 4; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 3; WIL 3
Initiative 8, Save 6, Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Dodge (AGL) 3, Firearms (DEX) 4, Interrogation (PER) 4, Investigation (INT) 4, Law (INT) 3, Streetwise (PER) 3, Resist (WIL) 3
Assets: Law Enforcement Powers
Liabilities: Moral Restriction (1, cause no harm to innocents)
Weapons: Colt .45

Prostitute
AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 3; WIL 4
Initiative 7, Save 7, Shrug 3
Skills: Carousing (STR) 4, Con (PER) 4, Negotiation (PER) 4, Resist (WIL) 2, Streetwise (PER) 4, Seduction (PER) 4
Assets: Attractiveness
Liabilities: Liabilities: Addiction (3, drugs)

Shop Owner
AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 4; WIL 3
Initiative 7, Save 6, Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Con (PER) 3, Melee (AGL) 2, Negotiation (PER) 4, Resist WIL) 3, Streetwise (PER) 4
Assets: Contacts (2)

Shop Owner (Hotel/Bar Manager)
AGL 2; DEX 2; PER 4; STR 4; INT 4; WIL 4
Initiative 6, Save 6, Shrug 4
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Con (PER) 4, Etiquette (PER) 4, Melee (AGL) 3, Negotiation (PER) 4, Resist (WIL) 4, Streetwise (PER) 4
Assets: Contacts (2), Insight

Street Punk/Hoodlum
AGL 4; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 3; WIL 3
Initiative 8, Save 6, Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 3, Brawling (AGL) 4, Cool (WIL) 4, Con (PER) 4, Dodge (AGL) 3, Firearms (DEX) 4, Resist (WIL) 3, Streetwise (PER) 4
Assets: Toughness (2)
Liabilities: Bloodlust
Weapons: Stilleto, S&W Model 19

Mob Underboss
AGL 3; DEX 4; PER 3; STR 4; INT 3; WIL 3
Initiative 8; Save 9; Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Brawling (AGL) 4, Con (PER) 4, Dodge (AGL) 3, Drive (DEX) 4, Firearms (DEX) 4, Melee (AGL) 3, Intimidation (WIL) 4
Assets: Toughness (1)
Liabilities: Bloodlust
Weapons: Walther P38

Waitress, nightclub
AGL 3; DEX 3; PER 4; STR 3; INT 3; WIL 4
Initiative 7, Save 7, Shrug 3
Skills: Awareness (PER) 4, Con (PER) 3, Dodge (AGL) 2, Melee (AGL) 1, Negotiation (PER) 3, Seduction (PER) 2, Streetwise (PER) 2
Assets: Attractiveness
Liabilities: Gullibility

Map of New York City, circa 1943

Mean Streets
Character Record Sheet

NAME

AGE

GENDER

HEIGHT

WEIGHT

EYES

HAIR

CHARACTER PROFILE

ASSETS

LIABILITIES

BEHAVIOR TAGS

CURRENT MEDICAL CONDITION

SCATHED (No Wound Penalties)

ROUGHED UP (-1 Wound Penalty)

WORSE FOR WEAR (-2 Wound Penalty)

HURT BADLY (-3 Wound Penalty)

INCAPACITATED (-4 Wound Penalty)

NEAR DEATH (-5 Wound Penalty)

DEAD (Wound Penalty N/A)

SKILL PROFILE

AGL

Boating .... _____
Brawling....................... _____
Dodge.......................... _____
Drive .... _____
Melee........................... _____
Pilot .... _____
Ride .... _____
Stealth .... _____
Other: .... _____

DEX

Firearms .... _____
Electrical..................... _____
Lockpicking................. _____
Mechanics .... _____
Performance............... _____
Throwing..................... _____
Other: .... _____

STR

Carousing .... _____
Climb .... _____
Endurance .... _____
Jump........................... _____
Strength Feat.............. _____
Swim........................... _____
Other: .... _____

PER

Awareness................... _____
Con.............................. _____
Empathy .... _____
Etiquette .... _____
Gambling .... _____
Interrogation .... _____
Negotiation .... _____
Seduction .... _____
Streetwise................... _____
Other: .... _____

INT

Bureaucracy .... _____
Disguise...................... _____
First Aid .... _____
Forgery .... _____
Investigation .... _____
Law.............................. _____
Research .... _____
Science....................... _____
Other: .... _____

WIL

Cool .... _____
Intimidation .... _____
Resist .... _____
Other: .... _____

INITIATIVE

SAVE

DESTINY POINTS

SHRUG

CHARACTER HISTORY

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

WEAPONS

WA:	WR:	DB:	RANGE:

WA:	WR:	DB:	RANGE:

WA:	WR:	DB:	RANGE:

WA:	WR:	DB:	RANGE:

WA:	WR:	DB:	RANGE: