

That Old Black Magic

A Fantasy Noir Setting For Mean Streets
Requires the use of Mean Streets



Written and Produced By
Mark Bruno

Edited By
Samantha Downing

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That Old Black Magic is a freebie supplement for Deep7's role-playing game of classic film noir *Mean Streets*. Veering slightly to the left of the game's default 1943 setting, **Black Magic** presents an alternate setting for the game, incorporating sorcery against the backdrop of 1940s Hollywood. It's a world where gangsters in expensive suits are master sorcerers, spirits get the third degree from cops, zombies come six to a crate just like bon-bons, and your landlady is a licensed witch.

Black Magic gets its influence from films such as *Cast a Deadly Spell*, *Witch Hunt*, and other role-playing games, specifically West End Games' *Bloodshadows*. Don't take the setting too seriously, though, as it was written tongue-in-cheek and meant for a little light-hearted change of pace, interjecting a bit of Hollywood magic quite literally.

It's a mythical 1946, and to most people, magic is just a new everyday tool to make life easier. People wield sorcery as a means of attaining success, pleasure, and also as a method for crime. Hollywood producers and directors use magic to an even greater extent, resurrecting long-dead writers and playwrights to work on the next big Hollywood blockbuster.

But to Senator Thomas Lloyd Gretings, sorcery signals a sinister, moral decay, a threat to the family and the eventual collapse of the American way of life. Senator Gretings sets his political and publicity sights on a personal quest to rid Hollywood of magic, which he preaches against as being degenerate and corrupt. Much like the McCarthy era "witch hunts" of the '50s, his personal vendetta shatters many Hollywood careers.

Gretings certainly has his opponents, many of which are fellow Congressmen and citizen's action groups. Challengers to Gretings' campaign argue that the senator should be focusing less on Hollywood and more on the criminals who utilize magic to further their own nefarious schemes. Criminal syndicates in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago rule the underworld in their respective cities with an iron fist, using magic as a method for committing crimes. Fortunately, because of the split in Congress regarding Gretings' radical views, not much has been done to quell the use of magic in society. While debates and arguments on Capitol Hill rage on, magic remains a powerful tool for millions of Americans.

Film noir and Fantasy

The beauty of film noir is that, as a theme, it's flexible and can be molded to fit the needs of any genre it's applied to, from westerns to science fiction to fantasy. By taking the dark and gritty setting of *Mean Streets* and applying the mystical elements of traditional fantasy epics, **Black Magic** takes the classic film noir tale to an all-new level. It opens the door for further exploration into the occult and fantastical that many detective pulp authors found fascinating (as in *The Dain Curse*) and film noir directors explored sparingly (as in *Kiss Me Deadly* and *Dr.*

Mabuse, The Gambler). Armed with the power of psychometry, private eyes and detectives gaze into the past with a heightened ability to discern crime scenes; femme fatales cast illusory spells, luring unsuspecting men into their web of deceit; gangsters skilled in the black arts are able to pull off daring bank heists in broad daylight and murder rivals with impunity. All of this is made possible by interjecting a bit of magic into the classic film noir tale.

How it all Began

The setting used in **Black Magic** makes no assumptions about how or why magic works and when it came into existence; that's left up to the GM. People just simply take it for granted, as if it's always been there and is here to stay. Mrs. Jones never thinks twice when she conjures up breakfast for the kids with a simple snap of her fingers. Johnny's third-grade teacher doesn't bat an eyelash when he launches a spitball, because she knows her Shield of Solid Air spell will block the moist projectile. Hollywood producers have no problem paying big bucks to utilize special effects wizards for their next release, or resurrecting dead actors from the Silent Film era to star in the latest blockbuster screwball comedy.

The point is, magic has become a large part of American pop-culture, but like many crazes before it, there are a certain faction of politicians, religious fundamentalists, and self-righteous yahoos that want to see it go away. Unfortunately, something as pervasive and powerful as magic isn't repressed so easily.

Alternate Histories

For those who like a bit more backstory, and aren't satisfied with "magic has just always been," three alternate reasons are outlined below. The first two assume that magic is a relatively new phenomenon.

Atomic Age

In 1942, an atomic bomb test via the Manhattan Project suddenly goes haywire. When a prototype bomb is detonated it rips a hole in the fabric of reality, releasing otherworldly energy particles into the Earth's atmosphere, which awakens latent magical abilities in human beings.

Ancient Secrets

In 1899, wealthy philanthropist-turned-archeologist William Geddenheim unearthed an ancient Egyptian sorcerer-priest's tomb. Disturbing the tomb unlocked the sorcerer's ancient powers, thereby releasing powerful magic which blanketed the Earth, allowing everyday men and women to harness this newly awakened power.

Hollywood Magic

What many refer to as "Hollywood Magic" is actually the culmination of Tinsel Town's creative energy, which acts as a catalyst that awakens latent abilities in folks with an artistic bent. The more movies Hollywood puts out, the more this creative dynamism fuels magical powers in people.

Magic and the Law

By and large, public use of magic goes unnoticed, unless the caster performs a particularly destructive act or uses magic in such a way as to cause a public distraction. That blasé attitude quickly wanes, however, if one uses magic to commit a crime, no matter how heinous. Local and federal law enforcement agencies impose strict penalties and punishments on perpetrators of magical crimes, with sentences and fines often doubling their mundane counterparts. Below are several examples of minimum sentencing requirements for magical crimes (GMs are free to develop additional sentencing structures):

Assault	66 months
Manslaughter	56 months
Burglary	42 months
Auto Theft	40 months
Possession*	30 months
Homicide	149 months
Rape	117 months
Kidnaping	104 months
Robbery	95 months
Unlicensed use**	6 months suspension

*Denotes possession of an unlicensed magical item

**Denotes using magic without a license

All citizens who display an aptitude for magic must register their ability with a local DMU, the Department of Magical Usage. Much like a driver's license, those with a state-backed license can practice magic freely within the bounds of the Sorcery Criminal Code (or SCC). Those who are caught practicing sorcery without a license can face up to 2 years in prison and \$1,000 in fines.

Most law enforcement agencies in large cities have a Sorcery Victims Unit, a department comprised of veteran detectives tasked with investigating magical crimes. These intrepid individuals are powerful sorcerers in their own right and have much leeway in apprehending and investigating heinous acts of sorcery.

Spell Mechanics

Black Magic introduces a new stat to *Mean Streets* called Influence, which dictates how much control one has over the forces that power spells and wards. If a player wants to design a spell-slinging private eye, for instance, then he must place some of his original 20 Character Points (a minimum of 1) toward the Influence stat. Next, the player must distribute points from the original 30 allocated for skills, which represent the power level of the spell, or its Spell Rating. When a player wishes to cast a spell during the game, he simply rolls against the Target Number that is comprised of the Influence stat plus the applicable Spell Rating (hereafter referred to as an Influence check). The player must roll equal to or lower than the Target Number in order for the spell to be successful.

Unskilled Checks

Unlike skills, magic spells cannot be used untrained. That is, if the PC possesses the Influence stat he must allocate points toward purchasing spells.

Critical Failure and Success

As in *Mean Streets*, rolling snake eyes (a natural 2) is always considered a critical success, while rolling boxcars (a natural roll of 12) is considered a critical failure. Rolling a critical success when casting a spell can be particularly disastrous, either resulting in harm to the caster or causing a backfire with unintended results. For instance, a detective rolling a critical failure when using Divination can result in erroneous information, leading him on a wild goose chase. GMs are urged to use their own discretion when determining the results of a critical failure.

PCs who roll a critical success should be appropriately rewarded with beneficial results. For instance, if the detective rolled a critical success when using Divination, the GM should reward him with additional information above and beyond what he was originally searching for. Again, GMs should use common sense when applying critical successes and failures.

Resisting Magic – New Asset

Players may design characters who are especially resistant to the effects of magic by purchasing the Spell Resist Asset (which will cost the player 3 character points). When applied, all spells used against the character suffer a –3 penalty to Influence checks. Subsequently, the PC also suffers a –3 penalty when using magic himself.

Spell List

On the following pages are more than two dozen spells that PCs and NPCs can use within a fantasy noir game of *Mean Streets*. The list is by no means exhaustive; GMs are encouraged to develop additional spells, as are the players, at the GM's discretion. Each spell listing includes the following information:

Spell name: The name the spell is commonly called.

Duration: The time the spell lasts. If the spell is instantaneous, then the duration is listed as instant.

Range: The distance the spell will work.

Prerequisites (if any): Requirements that are needed in order for the spell to work.

Description of effect: describes the effects of the spell if successfully cast the character.

Allure

Duration: Instant

Range: Touch

Prerequisite: Emotion Sensing

The power of persuasion is a very potent ability to possess. Those with the ability to cast Allure may control the target's reactions toward the caster. In order to do so, the caster must make an opposed Influence check against the target's Resist check. If successful, the caster gains an immediate +1 bonus to Con and Etiquette checks.

Banish

Duration: Instant

Range: 25 feet

Prerequisite: Special

This spell forces a spirit back from whence it came (the spirit must be Sensed or seen before this spell can be used). If the spell is successful, the spirit is instantly whisked away. On a fumbled Influence roll for this spell, the caster's spirit is

whisked right along with the banished spirit to wherever it came from. The only way to bring the caster's spirit back is through the successful casting of the Summon Spirit spell. Note that Unseen Servants do not need to be banished, as they simply disappear when the caster has no use for their services.

Confusion

Duration: 1 round x Spell Rating

Range: Touch

Prerequisite: None

Beings affected by this spell are placed into a confused state, unable to perform actions with any degree of accuracy. If Confused, the target receives a -2 penalty to all Target Numbers for the duration of the spell.

Create Sustenance

Duration: 24 hours

Range: None

Prerequisite: None

Food created with this spell can take any shape or form, from a simple snack to a seven-course gourmet meal. Additionally, the food is highly nutritious and flavorful, but spoils after 24 hours. Drink can also be conjured, and will typically last 48 to 72 hours longer.

Dark Shroud

Duration: 10 minutes x Spell Rating

Range: 20-foot radius

Prerequisite: None

This spell causes darkness to emanate from the character, casting the area in pitch blackness. Normal or magical lights will not pierce the shroud and any actions taken while surrounded by the darkness are performed with a -2 penalty.

Disguise

Duration: 10 minutes x Spell Rating

Range: Self

Prerequisite: None

With this spell, the caster can change his appearance to resemble another person entirely. The caster cannot change his basic body type, however. For instance, the caster cannot change his shape to resemble that of a dog or fish. Otherwise, the extent of the physical change is left up to the caster.

Divination

Duration: Instant

Range: Self

Prerequisite: None

With this spell, the caster can acquire information regarding a future goal or event. In order to maintaining play balance, the GM should dole out information in the form of short cryptic phrases or even rhymes. In any case, the GM controls the type and amount of information obtained through this spell.

Domination

Duration: 1 round

Range: 25 feet

Prerequisite: None

Once successfully cast, the caster can command the actions of the target by issuing simple commands, such as "stop right there

and surrender" or "hand me your money." Fortunately, this spell cannot be used to make someone perform a task they would be morally against, such as murdering another human being or committing suicide. Nonetheless, this can be a dangerous spell in the wrong hands.

Emotion Sensing

Duration: Instant

Range: Line of sight

Prerequisite: None

This spell allows the caster to determine the general emotional state of a living being and whether the target has hostile intentions toward the caster. This spell will not work on animals.

Healing Hands

Duration: Instant

Range: Touch

Prerequisite: None

Healing Hands allows the caster to clean away disease and injury with a simple touch. It will completely cure the effects of sickness, physical trauma to the body, disease, poisons, blindness, and deafness. The number of Wound Levels cured by Healing Hands equals the caster's Spell Rating. Because this spell requires the caster to channel large amounts of positive energy through his own body, Healing Hands can only be used once per day.

Firestarter

Duration: Instant

Range: 20 feet

Prerequisite: None

This particularly deadly spell causes living targets to spontaneously combust, engulfing the body in flames and searing heat. For every round the target remains engulfed in flames he suffers one Wound Level. The fire can be extinguished, however, by using the "stop, drop and roll" method (a successful Agility check minus any penalties from subsequent Wound Levels).

Flash

Duration: Instant

Range: 25 feet

Prerequisite: Illumination

This spell allows the caster to create an instant, blinding flash of light. Such a flash will cause the target to become dazed for 1d3 rounds and suffer a -1 penalty to all attack rolls.

Hocus Pocus

Duration: Instant

Range: 25 feet

Prerequisite: None

Hocus Pocus (also known as Cantrip or Parlor Magic by some) allows the spell caster to perform small feats of magic mostly for effect, as they have no real purpose other than to amuse or impress. As an open-ended spell, Hocus Pocus allows the caster to perform such tricks as conjuring specks of dancing lights that swirl about the caster, causing every candle in a room to light simultaneously with a wave of the hand, or making small objects like coins and trinkets to disappear in thin air. The choices are only limited by the caster's imagination.

Illumination

Duration: 10 minutes x Spell Rating

Range: 20 feet

Prerequisite: None

This spell causes an object to glow with light in a 20-foot radius from the point of contact. An object imbued with Illumination cannot pierce an area shrouded in magical darkness.

Life Sensing

Duration: 1 minute

Range: 50 feet

Prerequisite: None

When cast successfully, the character can determine the location and direction of any living being (animal or human) within a 50-foot radius of the caster.

Mind Reading

Duration: Instant

Range: Line of sight

Prerequisite: Sense Truth

A powerful spell, Mind Reading lets the caster read the subject's mind. The spell works exclusively on human beings and can only detect surface thoughts, or those the target was just thinking.

Psychometry

Duration: 30 seconds

Range: Touch

Prerequisite: None

This spell allows the caster to gain impressions about an object or area. It is primarily used by law enforcement types to gather the history of an object used in a crime, or to gather information about past events at a crime scene. The visions gathered from the use of Psychometry are usually quick in nature and occur with no logical sequences. The GM should use this element to control the type and amount of information players will gain from the use of this spell.

Scrying

Duration: 1 minute

Range: Special

Prerequisite: None

This spell allows the caster to "see" or "hear" through solid objects (like walls) by projecting his senses. The range of this spell is determined the Spell Rating x 1 foot. Thus, if the caster has a Clairvoyance rating of 3, he can see or hear through 3 feet of solid material.

Sense Magic

Duration: 1 minute

Range: 50 feet

Prerequisite: None

The caster can detect the use of magic in an area or on an object. He can also utilize this spell to detect magical ability in others.

Sense Spirit

Duration: Special

Range: 20 feet

Prerequisite: Spiritual Projection

Characters with this spell can sense ghosts or the spiritual

essence of another using Spiritual Projection. When successfully cast, the character knows that a spirit is in the general vicinity but cannot actually see the spirit form. The duration of this spell equals the Spell Rating x 1 minute.

Sense Truth

Duration: Instant

Range: Line of sight

Prerequisite: None

When cast, the character can determine whether the target is being truthful or not. This spell will not, however, tell the caster the actual extent of the lie just that one was given.

Slumber

Duration: 1 minute x Spell Rating

Range: 100 feet

Prerequisite: None

The slumber spell causes targets within a 15-foot radius of the spell target to fall asleep for a number of minutes equal to the caster's Spell Rating. Those targeted with slumber can attempt to withstand its effects by making a successful Resist check.

Solid Air Shield

Duration: 1 round x Spell Rating

Range: Self

Prerequisite: None

This protective spell creates an invisible, solid wall of air to form around the caster, thus protecting him from both melee and ranged weapons. Magical attacks can pierce the force field, however. The spell provides the caster with an Armor Value of 3.

Spectral Servant

Duration: Special

Range: None

Prerequisite: None

This spell allows the caster to summon a minor apparition to perform menial tasks for the sorcerer. Many people summon a spectral servant to help with household chores, run errands, deliver brief messages, etc. Private investigators are particularly fond of spectral servants as they make an ideal assistant, performing duties the PI may not have time for. The downside, however, is that these otherworldly entities are not very intelligent, requiring instructions in exacting detail. And while the servant can interact with corporeal objects, they cannot speak (unless instructed to relay a message, which they perform by mimicking the caster's speech) and are not capable of independent thought.

Spectral servants remain in service to the caster until their services are no longer required, in which case they are simply banished.

Spiritual Projection

Duration: Special

Range: None

Prerequisite: None

Spiritual Projection allows the caster to have an out-of-body experience, thrusting his essence and senses into the spiritual realm. With this ability, the caster can travel great distances and pass through solid objects, essentially becoming a ghost.

Additionally, the caster is invisible to others unless one possesses the Sense Spirit spell. The amount of time that a caster can remain in this state is equal to the Spell Rating in hours. For every hour spent past his limit, the character suffers one Wound Level. Damage sustained by remaining in spirit form for too long can be healed by resting for a number of hours equal to the Wound Level.

Summon the Dead

Duration: Special

Range: None

Prerequisite:

With this spell, the caster may call forth hordes of undead equal to double his Spell Rating. The undead will arrive in 2d6 turns and are able to follow simple commands, but cannot communicate. The undead minions exist until destroyed. Their stats are as follows:

Undead Minions

STR 5. All other stats equal 1

Skills: None

In combat, undead minions don't roll INITIATIVE; they act once – last in the round. Should an undead minion make a success attack, it has a WR 3. All weapons have a WR of 1 against an undead minion. Undead minions are destroyed when they reach their final wound level. If their heads are separated from their bodies, they can't be resurrected again.

Summon Spirit

Duration: Special

Range: None

Prerequisite: Sense Spirit

This spell allows the caster to summon the ghost of one departed for the afterlife; however, just because one is summoned doesn't mean it will acquiesce to the wishes of the caster (unlike Spectral Servants, spirits retain the qualities they had in life). In order to bind a spirit to perform a service, the caster must make another successful Influence check. A single success is enough to control the spirit and can keep it around indefinitely. However, if the spirit is willing to perform the needed action (for instance, the spirit of a murdered man helping to locate his killer), a second Influence check is not needed

While Hollywood uses ghosts to great effect, such as summoning dead playwrights to write the next blockbuster, for instance, unscrupulous types can use spirits for more nefarious deeds. Regardless, all spirits have the same abilities, listed below:

Attack: A spirit can attack an enemy using the PCs Influence + Summon Spirit combo as its combat ability. A successful hit from a spirit has WA 0 and WR 1.

Telekinesis: Spirits can move, carry, or throw objects up to the STR of the controlling PC times 10 in pounds. This could include knocking over an oil lamp, sliding the bolt on a door, throwing a heavy stone, etc.

Incorporeal: Sprits can fly, pass through walls, etc. They also make great scouts and spies.

Materialize (ghosts only): The ghost takes solid form and has the stats, skills, and equipment it had in life. It can maintain this corporeal state for up to one hour, or until it is "killed" again. Then it goes back to being a ghost and can't materialize until the next day. While the PC commands the ghost, it is still considered an NPC and likewise will not attempt any action it deems foolish or dangerous. The GM is responsible for determining the ghost's relevant abilities.

Wards

Wards are a unique type of protective magic used to guard locations from magic and prying eyes. For instance, a mob kingpin may cast a ward over his hideout, preventing government and law enforcement officials from unauthorized entry. Using wards works similar to other spells, in that you have to purchase a ward spell, which falls under the Influence stat. There are two types of wards: mundane and magical.

Mundane wards prevent people from entering a location, but magic can still be used in the area, often breaching the mundane ward. For example, the mob kingpin's hideout may be warded to prevent police from physically entering, but they could breach the ward via a spell such as Soul Projection. In order to successfully protect a location from physical entry, the caster must make a successful Influence + Ward check. If successful, the ward's Spell Rating becomes the Target Number penalty applied to any Skill Checks used to gain entry (lock picking, demolitions, etc).

Magical wards hinder the use of magic in the general vicinity of and inside the protected area. In order to successfully ward a location, the caster must make a successful Influence + Ward check. If successful, the ward's Spell Rating becomes the Target Number penalty applied to any Influence checks used when in the vicinity of a ward.

Example: Guiseppe Bontano has just pulled off a successful jewelry heist and stashed the loot in an underground vault. Hot on his trail is private eye Jack Holland, who eventually discovers the mob boss' secret hideout. Unable to enter the vault through conventional means, Holland casts Spiritual Projection, knowing that his spiritual essence can penetrate the thick steel walls. To his dismay, however, the private eye discovers that Bontano has secured his vault with a magical ward. Bontano's ward's spell rating is 3, so Holland must apply a -3 modifier to his Target Number if he wishes to enter the vault magically.

