

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
Film Noir as an RPG	2
A Primer on Film Noir	3
Tragic Hero	3
Basic Precept	3
Mean Streets' Mechanics	3
Contained Within	3
CHARACTERS	4
Character Concepts	4
The Skill Profile	4
Assigning Stats	4
Derived Stats	5
Destiny Points	5
Skill Mechanics	5
Skill Specializations	5
Skill Ratings	6
Skill Listings	6
Agility Skills	6
Dexterity Skills	7
Strength Skills	7
Perception Skills	7
Intelligence Skills	8
Willpower Skills	8
Personality Traits	9
Assets	9
Liabilities	10
Behavior Tags	11
Starting Wealth	11
Women & Starting Wealth	11
Filling in the Blanks	11
Character Improvement	12
Character Archetypes	12
Assistant District Attorney	12
Detective	12
Dilettante	12
Femme Fatale	13
Gangster	13
Gangster Moll	13
Girl Friday	13
G-Man	13
Grifter	13
Private Eye	13
Reporter	13
Stooge	13
War Veteran	13
GAME MECHANICS	14
Stats and Skills	14
Making Skill Checks	14
Active and Passive Checks	14

Unskilled Checks	14
Preparing a Skill Check	14
Critical Success & Failure	15
Running Combat	15
Opposed Roles/Melee	16
Ranged Attacks	16
Calling Shots	16
Target Modifiers	16
Dodging	16
Surprise	16
Running Fire	16
Automatic Fire	16
Damage	17
Wound Status	17
Saves	17
Wound Penalties	18
Non-lethal Damage	18
Stabilizing	18
Vehicle Combat	18
Damage to Vehicles	18
NEW YORK CITY	19
America in the 1940s	19
Entertainment	19
Fads & Fashions	19
Organized Crime	19
Politics	20
City of Shadows	20
All that Glitters	21
...is not Gold	21
The City's War on Crime	22
The City Boroughs	22
Manhattan	22
Brooklyn	22
Sidebar: New York Timeline	23
Queens	24
Bronx	24
Staten Island	24
Other Notable Locations	24
Chinatown	24
Upper West Side	24
Central Park	25
Organized Crime	25
The Syndicate is Born	25
The Crime Families	26
Notable NPCs	28
MASTERING FILM NOIR	30
The Root of All Evil	30
Directing a Film Noir	31
The Scheme	31

Characterizations	31
Internal Setting	32
NPC Characterizations	32
Isolationism	32
Narration & Setting	32
Building a Cast	33
Building a Bigger Cast	34
Film Noir Roles	34
Women in Film Noir	34
Men in Film Noir	35

A TANGLED WEB 37

APPENDIX A 47

Automobiles	47
Clothes & Accessories	47
Entertainment	47
Misc.	48
Firearms	48
Melee Weapons	49
Armor Values	49

APPENDIX B 50

Filmography	50
NPC Stats	52
NYC Map	54
Character Sheet	55

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.

Chapter Four

New York City

The 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 Buena Vista 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."

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.

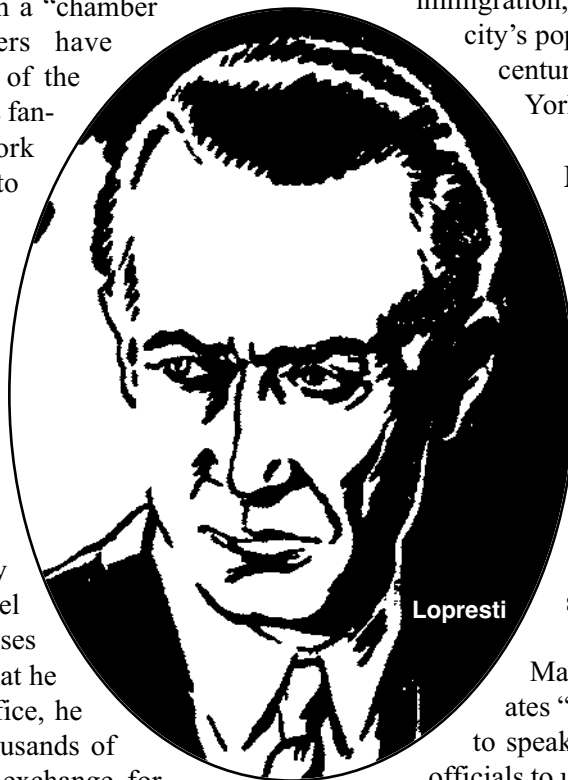
Manhattan

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.

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.