

Based on the GUMSHOE One-2-One system by Robin D. Laws

CTHULHU™

Confidential

SAMPLER



Robin D. Laws
Chris Spivey
Ruth Tillman



Pelgrane Press

Based on the GUMSHOE One-2-One system by Robin D. Laws

CTHULLWU™ *Confidential*

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- Dedicated to everyone whose stories have not been shared enough.

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YOUR INVESTIGATION

In *Cthulhu Confidential*™, detectives of the hardboiled crime era probe beyond its guns, mobsters, and corruption to even darker mysteries — those involving the appalling creatures and insane deities of H. P. Lovecraft’s tales of cosmic terror.

It adapts the GUMSHOE system, a set of rules for roleplaying games centered around mysteries and investigation, to a new experience: GUMSHOE One-2-One™. Here one Game Moderator (GM) runs a game for one player.

As in other roleplaying games (RPGs), the GM portrays all of the places, people, and monstrous entities with which the Investigator interacts in the course of play. The GM knows the answer to the mystery; the player, taking the role of a lone Investigator, uncovers it — and either puts the horror to rest, or is destroyed by it.

This introductory version of GUMSHOE One-2-One features three distinct solo protagonists:

- hard-boiled shamus *Dex Raymond*, braving shots to the kisser as he navigates the corruption and glamor of Los Angeles, 1937
- crusading journalist *Vivian Sinclair*, on the hunt for compelling newspaper copy in 1937 New York
- private eye *Langston Wright*, a scholarly veteran fighting for room to breathe in the official world of wartime Washington

All star in their own scenarios. Like any role-playing adventure, these serve as blueprints-slash-first-drafts of the stories you create together. Your GM reads the scenario thoroughly before play begins. The player reads none of it, preserving its surprises.

Using the guidance given in this book, GMs can use these three scenarios as models to create their own further adventures.

Expect Intensity

Early testers of this game shared one observation with us again and again: it creates an extremely intense experience for both player and GM. One respondent added the word “intimate.”

Here, the sometimes-welcome distractions of group play drop away, to keep the spotlight on the two participants at all times. Exhilarating and occasionally daunting, the process results in a narrative that feels more like a well-structured, unified mystery novel than you generally get with a group tugging the story in various directions.

Tips for preserving the One-2-One intensity as a feature and not a bug appear in the GMing chapter on p. 34.

Getting Started

This book assumes a GM experienced with basic roleplaying concepts, ideally having run at least one multiplayer game. GUMSHOE One-2-One makes an ideal introduction to roleplaying for a player entirely new to the form. The best way to show your player what roleplaying means is to run her through a scenario. This shows, rather than tells, what it’s all about.

Note, though, that the scenarios found in this book present extended, fully-fleshed out mysteries meant to evoke the twists, turns, and complexities of a novel by Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett — or at least a movie adaptation of the same. Though some first-time players take to them like ducks to water, others find them a touch daunting. For a stripped-down introduction for

true neophytes, head to the Pelgrane Press web site to download a simpler, shorter One-2-One scenario, “The Red Mist.”

Need to convey the concept of roleplaying from the ground up? Provide your newbie with the handout on p. 294 of this book’s Appendix, or verbally paraphrase its contents.

Exciting Pronoun Notification

In the text to follow “you” sometimes means you the player, and sometimes “you”, the character you’re playing. From context, you’ll see which is which.

This convention saves us from having to divine which pronouns you and your character prefer, which will remain difficult until we complete that secret project where books develop psychic powers.

Normally, game books skirt this dilemma by using the plural for players, but in GUMSHOE One-2-One there is only one.

Every now and again, clarity requires us to pick genders for the player and GM. In these passages we call the player “she” and the GM “he,” though of course anybody can take on either of these roles. Please bear with us, mentally editing the text to reflect your pronouns of choice.

Rules Quick Reference

This summary quickly presents the game’s essential rules concepts, which we’ll go on to explain in greater depth.

Are you an experienced GUMSHOE GM who’d like to start by seeing how One-2-One differs from its predecessor? Flip to p. 293 in the Appendix.

Your character attempts actions in the storyline by using abilities. Abilities come in two main types: Investigative and General

Investigative Abilities (p. 7) allow you to gather information. The animating principle behind GUMSHOE states that *failing to get key information is never interesting*. If you have the right ability and you look in the right place for clues you need to solve the mystery, you will always find the information you seek. If you lack the relevant ability, your character can talk to a friendly Source (p. 9), who will also provide guidance and assurance as needed.

A piece of information need not be critical to the case for you to gain it without chance of failure and at no cost. Much of mystery-solving lies in sorting the important from the tangential. If only the crucial clues came for free, it would give the game away.

In some situations, you can spend a resource called a Push (p. 9) to gain an additional benefit. This might be information you don’t absolutely need to solve the case; more often it consists of advantages that clear the character’s path through the story, such as favors from witnesses, knowledge that keeps the character safe, or prior relationships to central figures.

You start the game with 4 Pushes, and can gain others during play.

General Abilities (p. 17) determine whether you succeed or fail when trying to take actions other than gathering information, usually in an event called a test. The most important kind of test is the Challenge (p. 22).

You have either 1 or 2 dice in each General Ability your character possesses.

The game uses standard six-sided dice, which roleplayers sometimes refer to as d6s.

Whenever it might be as interesting for you to fail as it would be to succeed — say, fighting a thug, running away from a creature, or trying to repair your car before you die in the desert — you roll your die or dice.

When rolling multiple dice, roll one at a time: you may succeed without having to roll all of them.

At the end of the Challenge, your die roll total may match or exceed that of an Advance (the best result), or a Hold (an okay or middling result). If not, your Outcome is a Setback, which means that something bad happens.

On an Advance you will probably gain an Edge (p. 25): an advantage you can use later in the scenario. As a reminder, you gain an Edge card. The card’s text will tell you how it works. Often, you must discard the card to gain the advantage. If you reached the Advance threshold without rolling all of the dice you were entitled to, you also gain a Push.

On a Setback, you often gain a Problem (p. 25), representing a dilemma that might cause trouble for you later. Again, you receive a card to remember it by — a Problem card. Certain cards might lead

to a terrible end for your detective should you fail to get rid of, or Counter, them (p. 26) before the scenario concludes.

Most Challenges allow you to voluntarily take on an Extra Problem, in exchange for rolling one more die.

Every so often you'll make a simple roll, called a Quick Test (p. 27), to see if you succeed or fail, without the possibility of Advances, Edges, Setbacks, or Problems.

The rest is detail. You don't have to learn any special rules for combat or mental distress, as

you would in standard GUMSHOE and most other roleplaying games. The Challenge system, with its descriptions of outcomes, and its resulting Edges and Problems, handles it all.

Character Cards

For the purposes of this chapter, let's assume you're playing Vivian Sinclair, one of our three default protagonists. The information you need about your GUMSHOE One-2-One character looks like this:



VIVIAN SINCLAIR

Investigative Journalist

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

- Accounting
- Assess Honesty
- Bargain
- Bureaucracy
- Cryptography
- Evidence Collection
- Flattery
- History
- Inspiration
- Locksmith
- Oral History
- Photography
- Reassurance
- Research
- Streetwise

GENERAL ABILITIES

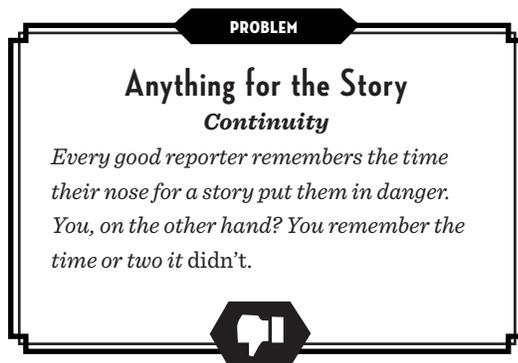
- Athletics
- Cool
- Disguise
- Driving
- Fighting
- Filch
- First Aid
- Fleeing
- Preparedness
- Sense Trouble
- Shadowing
- Stability
- Stealth

STORY

Pad and pencil in hand, journalist Vivian Sinclair tracks down leads, grills witnesses, and turns in hair-raising stories of corruption, crime, and parts of the city's underbelly most would rather not see. Where a detective sees a case, Viv sees a story. She'll follow it relentlessly to its conclusion, even putting her life in danger to get at the truth.

Choosing Your Starting Problem

You begin play with at least one Problem: a card representing some kind of ongoing trouble, which you pick for your character from a list of four. This starts the process of personalizing your character, turning the baseline Viv, Langston or Dex we supply into your distinctive version of the character. Text on the card explains the exact nature of the Problem, often specifying its rules effect and perhaps a way to Counter it. During play, you may gain additional Problems. For more on Problems, and their positive counterparts, Edges, see p. 25.



Using Investigative Abilities

Your character solves the mystery driving the scenario by moving from scene to scene gathering information. You, the player, solve the mystery by figuring out what the information means. As you piece together a narrative and sort relevant facts from evocative side detail, you work out who did what to whom, and why. Then you send your character to deal with the wrongdoers, who may be human inhabitants of decadent Los Angeles, monstrous creatures evoking the cosmic horror of the Lovecraftian Mythos, or a combination of the two.

As you can see from Viv's character card, she has a number of Investigative Abilities, ranging from Accounting to Streetwise. Descriptions defining what each of these do appear later in this section.

When a scene starts, the GM describes what your character can sense about it right off the bat. What does the place look like? What mood does it conjure? What objects or furnishings does it

contain, and what do they tell you? Who, if anyone, is present, and what do they do or say in response to your arrival?

You then respond by posing questions. You might ask these directly to the GM, or, through in-character dialogue, to the supporting characters present at the scene. In the second case, the GM acts out the roles of these characters, improvising dialogue and describing their actions.

Some facts appear in plain sight, right in front of you. The GM mentions these straight out when painting the scene. "There's a bloodstain on the carpet and everything in the apartment lies in disarray, as if someone — or more than one someone — were looking for something."

In key instances, though, you'll have to ask about the scene in a particular way to get the clues you need. Describe how you're gathering information and what Investigative Abilities, if any, you're using to get it. When you just say what you're doing without specifying an ability, the GM may immediately see what ability you're using without having to ask.

Let's say you're talking to Eddie Waldron, the shifty gunslinger of a crooked nightclub owner. The GM, in Waldron's voice, says, "The boss ain't been here since last Sunday." You might then ask the GM: "Using Assess Honesty, does he seem like he's lying?" The GM, in neutral narrative voice, says, "You get the feeling that he's telling the truth, which is not his usual habit."

When your character looks for information in the right place, and has a credible way to get it, you get the clue, simple as that.

Some roleplayers might be used to games where they have to roll dice, scoring a successful result of some kind, to get information. GUMSHOE works exactly like that, except without the roll, removing the chance of a failure that doesn't advance the story.

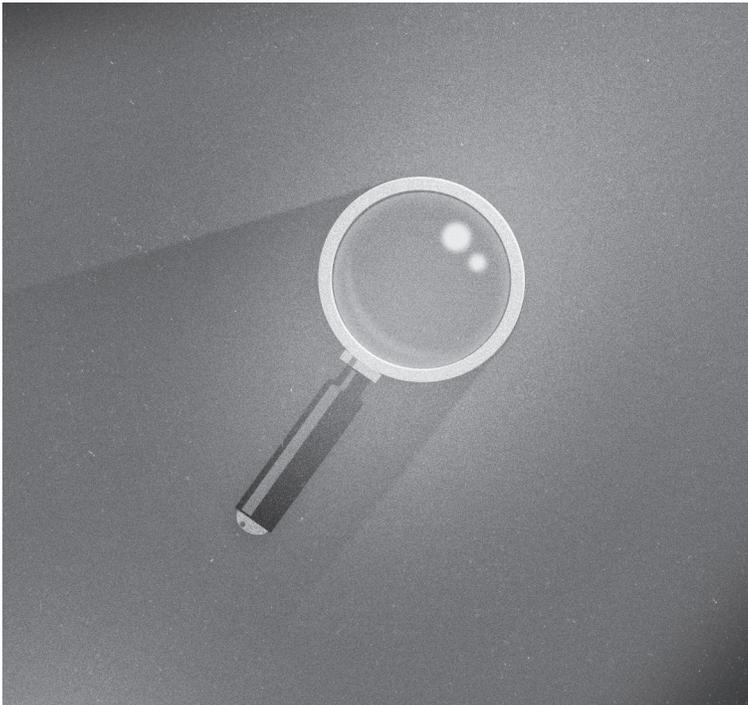
In order to obtain clues, you always have to describe your character interacting with the contents of the scene. You never just read the names of your abilities off your character card and wait for more description. Instead you have

to talk to Waldron, or ask about the strange mold on the windowsill, or go talk to the Professor about that weird manuscript you found in the sideboard.

Sometimes, you discover clues just by describing your character completing simple tasks. This happens when no special training or method is required. For example, if there are financial documents taped to the bottom of a desk, and you say, “I look under the desk,” the GM replies, “You find an envelope taped to the underside of the desk top.”

For certain clues, ones that an expert character with specialized training would not miss, the GM gives you time to ask. Before the scene ends, the GM describes you noticing whatever the clue happens to be, even if you didn’t specifically ask. That gives you the opportunity to have the fun of discovering the clue, without painting your detective as incompetent or unaware.

Usually, the best information comes from conversations — sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile — with other characters played by the GM. We call these supporting characters, or Game Moderator Characters (GMCs for short). GMCs include your ongoing allies, brief contacts who play walk-on roles, and the major figures of the case at hand, from your client to suspects to the imminent victims of dread forces.



INVESTIGATIVE ABILITY LIST

Ability	Type
Accounting	Academic
Anthropology	Academic
Archaeology	Academic
Architecture	Academic
Art History	Academic
Assess Honesty	Interpersonal
Astronomy	Technical
Bargain	Interpersonal
Biology	Academic
Bureaucracy	Interpersonal
Chemistry	Technical
Cop Talk	Interpersonal
Craft	Technical
Cryptography	Academic
Cthulhu Mythos	Academic
Evidence Collection	Technical
Flattery	Interpersonal
Forensics	Technical
Geology	Academic
History	Academic
Inspiration	Interpersonal
Intimidation	Interpersonal
Languages	Academic
Law	Academic
Locksmith	Technical
Medicine	Academic
Occult	Academic
Oral History	Interpersonal
Outdoorsman	Technical
Pharmacy	Technical
Photography	Technical
Physics	Academic
Psychology	Interpersonal
Reassurance	Interpersonal
Research	Academic
Streetwise	Interpersonal
Theology	Academic

GM-ING ONE-2-ONE

This chapter, addressed to the GM, shows you how to run the game for the player.

Intensity Management

In our responses from playtesters to this game, one theme stood out above all others: the one player, one GM format makes for an intense, intimate experience. Tension increases without other players to fall back on. The sole player remains constantly in the spotlight, without opportunities to sit back while others take the lead. Responsibility for thinking of the right questions and looking for information in the right places rests with your one player, who has to solve the puzzle without bouncing ideas off others. Nor is there any emotional respite from the bursts of lighthearted out-of-character kibitzing, banter, and digression that often relieve tensions in multiplayer games.

In the story, the character walks the mean streets alone, much more vulnerable to danger than a gang of well-armed Investigators ready to defend one another from enemies. Consistent with the physical realism expected from a hard-boiled detective tale, an outnumbered Investigator fights to get away unscathed, and does not hope to beat up four or five goons like the hero of an action movie.

Because the format inherently keeps the pressure on your solo player, as the GM you may find yourself looking for ways to give the player hope and confidence. Where most games contrive situations to make sure that the player characters physically overcome any final threats, here the detective can call in the cops or other reinforcements to handle the apprehensions — after she figures out who needs apprehending. This is what happens in the source material; it does not by definition deprive the hero of agency.

(Are you adapting One-2-One to a more

outlandishly stylized genre? Your samurai, wuxia or time agent detective might well lay waste to large teams of lowly henchmen in a single flurry of blows. Making that work requires only that you adjust the outcome descriptions as you write up Challenges. In these instances, you're relaxing tension by portraying a more forgiving universe, rather than easing up on the apparent difficulty of actions in an unforgiving one).

Guiding the Player

When the feeling of the solo format threatens to turn the tension of individual play into the pressure of an overwhelming problem, act as a partner and guide your player through the story.

HOW TO DISLodge A STUCK PLAYER GENTLY

Detectives in fiction — not to mention in real life — often reach a point where they hit a wall and can't think where to go next. There's nothing wrong with that happening to a game character. These moments of frustration intensify the feeling of triumph that comes from finally solving a puzzle. But they have to be moments, and not long stretches of frustrated stasis.

As the GM, you must expect to do more than you would in a multiplayer game to subtly point a stuck player toward the next fruitful lead. Before intervening, though, be sure that the player really has become stymied, and isn't just thinking things through.

You have the scenario in front of you, so you know what leads the character has yet to investigate, what has been learned but forgotten, and what might have been uncovered had a previous scene unfolded differently. Depending on

the situation, it might be most helpful to:

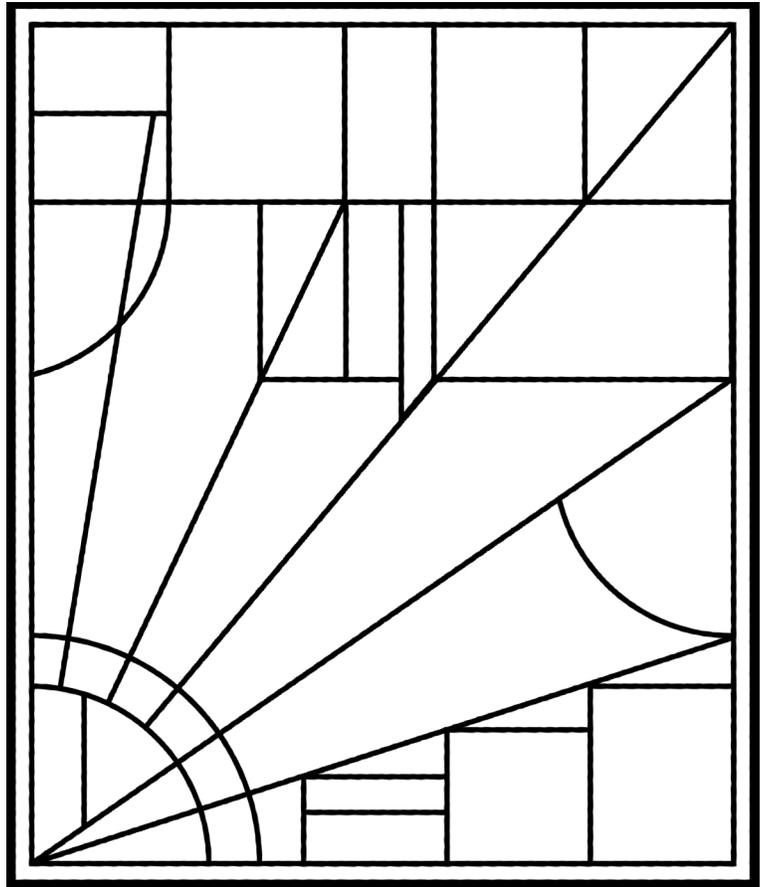
- review with the player the list of leads that haven't yet been looked into
- review what the Investigator knows so far
- mention lingering questions from previous scenes that cry out for follow-up

The balance between gesturing toward the right track and leading the player by the nose is easier to strike in practice than it is to talk about in theory. A quick verbal nudge is often all it takes to prompt the player toward the needed intuitive leap and choose a course of action.

COMMON STICKING POINTS

Players tend to get stuck for a few common reasons.

- 1. Not wanting to talk to people.** Especially in the days of the internet, we'd rather get information from impersonal sources than engage with other people who might confuse, threaten, or embarrass us. Yet the detective genre depends on characters being willing to put themselves out there and engage in face-to-face questioning scenes; only by this means can they get the kinds of information that no one willingly commits to paper. Nudge the player toward actual conversations.
- 2. Especially not wanting to talk to scary people.** Players sometimes unconsciously remove from their mental list of leads encounters with GMCs whom they have good reason to fear. This came up more than once in test runs of "The Fathomless Sleep", with players blanking on Mickey Cohen as a person to talk to. Remind the player that *Cthulhu Confidential*, which is noir as well as horror, expects Investigators to be willing to talk to dangerous types.
- 3. Not wanting to talk in person.** Your player may try to protect the character by conducting interviews over the phone instead of in person. Remind the player that that same distance protects the witnesses from giving themselves away. Key interpersonal abilities like Intimidation, Reassurance — and, perhaps most importantly, Assess Honesty — don't work with Ma Bell standing in the way. Sometimes you have to look a mug right in the kisser to see if he's on the up-and-up.



- 4. Adopting too false a false persona.** To protect themselves from probable bad guys, players sometimes describe their detectives as approaching them under false pretenses. This happens in the source material, too, but it only works with a persona allowing the detective to ask the key questions. More than one "The Fathomless Sleep" player had Dex pretend to be an interested spiritual seeker when meeting Clara Nebel and/or William Pelley. After a certain point this made it hard to ask questions about Helen Deakin's disappearance. Address this by reminding the player, as she chooses her fake story, that it has to let her get at the key facts.
- 5. Needing to re-interview.** Often the player has missed a key point and should go back to a witness or suspect for more information. Remind the player that there is no shame in this. Happens all the time, in both fictional and real-world investigation.

DEX RAYMOND

Archetypal hard-boiled private Investigator Dex Raymond prowls the haunted streets of *Cthulhu Confidential* Los Angeles as an outsider by choice. With his smarts and grit, he could be part of its corrupt establishment. Instead he prefers to operate on its fringes, setting himself up in a crummy office to solve problems the bought-and-sold police department can't be relied on to care about.

Like fictional predecessors Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, the Continental Op, and Lew Archer, Dex appears here as a bit of a cipher: a detective whose greatest mystery is himself. Unlike our other characters, Viv Sinclair and Langston Wright, he begins his first scene without a predetermined biography, allowing players to develop as much or as little past history for him as they see fit, in the course of play.

Also unlike our other two characters, Dex's fringe existence places him outside the support of a community. In a world that isn't ready to make room for them, Viv and Langston need friends. Maybe that's exactly what Dex fears — that Los Angeles wants to enfold him in its embrace. If he craved the company of others, he'd be partying with the Hollywood elite or using his razor intellect to swing shady deals in the steam room of the L.A. Athletic Club. But either would compromise him.

Dex's roster of Sources already lends him more companionship than we ever see Marlowe, Spade, or the Op taking solace in. And none of them appears to know each other, or spend time with him when he isn't asking for the low-down on some bizarre clue.

Outside of them, he counts one other friend worth mentioning: police contact Ted Gargan.

In a town where you can belong or you can

pursue justice, Dex chooses the latter. Why and how he came to this conclusion remains a matter for the player to decide.

- Did he briefly attend the police academy, quitting when confronted by the brutish quality of his fellow recruits?
- Did he perhaps gain his law enforcement bona fides as a military policeman before embarking on civilian life?
- Did he start with the Pinkerton Detective Agency and then strike out on his own?
- Or did he pick this line of work on some perverse whim?

That's all up for grabs, should the player elect to fill in the blanks. If those questions never come up, the player — consciously or otherwise — has chosen to follow the precedent of the source material, leaving the question of origins to hang over Dex's cases as an unaddressed mystery.

Friends, Acquaintances, Rivals

Ted Gargan

Dedicated to finding the truth in a city determined to conceal it, Dex has earned the contempt and distrust of L.A.'s corrupt cops. One notable exception: Detective Sergeant Ted Gargan, world-weary commander of the homicide night shift. Unlike most in the Department, Gargan has kept his hands clean. When he bends the rules, it's to achieve a just result, not to serve the System.

Dex has done favors for him in the past, rooting out facts Gargan wouldn't trust his crooked co-workers with. When you first introduce him, if it fits the flow of the narrative, invite the player to recount the last such favor Dex did for him.

His abilities overlap Dex's, so there's no need



DEXTER “DEX” RAYMOND

Hard-boiled Shamus

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

- Accounting
- Assess Honesty
- Bargain
- Cop Talk
- Cryptography
- Evidence Collection
- Intimidation
- Inspiration
- Law
- Locksmith
- Photography
- Reassurance
- Research
- Streetwise

GENERAL ABILITIES

- Athletics
- Cool
- Conceal
- Devices
- Driving
- Filch
- Fighting
- Preparedness
- Sense Trouble
- Shadowing
- Stability
- Stealth

STORY

Archetypal hardboiled private investigator Dex Raymond prowls Los Angeles’ haunted streets as an outsider by choice. With his smarts and grit, he could have wormed his way into its corrupt power structure. Instead, he operates on its fringes, righting wrongs for a modest fee, plus expenses. In addition to his contacts, he counts one more key friend—LAPD Detective Sergeant Ted Gargan, a rare honest man in a town where cops can be bought by the barrel.

to treat him as a Source. Many of Dex’s uses of Cop Talk might, however, be directed to Ted. Gargan prefers to meet Dex at **Wilbur’s Pharmacy** (p. 100), where his coziness with an unpopular shamus may go unnoticed.

Gargan might — in a pinch, if the higher-ups haven’t tied his hands — come across with some practical assistance of the kind only a cop could grant. This only goes so far. A family man with two young sons to worry about, Ted can’t afford to stick his neck out the way Dex the loner can. Gargan can help, but Dex must always remain the lone hero who truly cracks the case.

Occasionally Dex needs the kind of undignified or unsavory favors he wouldn’t ask of a straight arrow like Ted. For grubby or menial stuff, he goes

to **Sergeant Len Pollard**, an uninspired desk jockey whose chief hobby is complaining about the weight his doctor has ordered him to lose. While investigating a shady divorce attorney for another case, Dex found out that Len was one of his clients, and that the attorney was sleeping with his wife. For that tip-off, Pollard performs shady favors for Dex like pulling confidential files or fixing traffic tickets. Hardly a valued member of the force, he can’t swing the big stuff or serve Dex as a useful sounding-board.

L.A. Sources

When in need of outside expertise or a sounding-board to trade theories with, Dex seeks out the following Sources:





HARDBOILED

L.A.

HARDBOILED

L.A.

featuring

DEX RAYMOND

in

THE FATHOMLESS SLEEP

HARDBOILED L.A.

Los Angeles, 1937. Beneath beguiling surfaces, corruption rules. Dig down past that seething layer of human indifference, and the one obsessed enough to keep looking finds a deeper, occulted indifference of cosmic proportions. That obsession belongs to you, a private detective, witness to a coming reckoning. You will walk down insane avenues, and hope not to go insane yourself.

Cue the Exposition Card

Take the American experience in all its garish, grasping glory, collapse it into a span of less than forty years, and you have the sprawling chaos that is Los Angeles. At the turn of the century you wouldn't call it more than a sleepy cow town. A measly three hundred thousand people lived there — many, incidentally, Spanish speakers.

When the pastures beneath the feet of rich ranching and farming landowners turned up thick reservoirs of oil, these early scions grew wealthier still.

Those reliant on mere crops became sacrifices on the altar of L.A.'s future. In 1913, at the behest of snaky municipal fathers, engineer William Mulholland erected an aqueduct to drain the Owens River Valley of precious water, redirecting it to the city. Since then, the metropolis that sprang from nowhere set the record books ablaze, establishing itself as the fastest-growing city in the world. By 1920 the lure of cash had swelled its population to over half a million people. The roaring twenties more than doubled that figure, as hungry Midwesterners flooded in, trying and failing to cling to prairie virtues against the din of Prohibition boom times. Throw in surrounding

L.A. County, which you might as well because the boundaries of this sprawl mean little to its residents, and the population balloons further, to two and a half million.

Winners won hard and losers lost big as property values increased six-fold from 1920 to 1930.

The rampant gangsterism of the illicit booze era stayed under wraps here — not due to civic virtue, but thanks to its polar opposite. The business establishment, cops, and crooks operated not as a mere alliance but as different arms of the same organization: the System. When Al Capone swanned into town in '27, avuncular local crime kingpin Charlie Crawford sent his favorite LAPD lieutenant, the towering, machine-gun toting Dick Lucas, to have a few words with him. Capone scrambled.

The Depression dealt the town a hard left in the gut. Banks died. Property empires cratered. Foreclosures swept through town like a seismic shock.

Los Angeles shed its rep as an ever-growing utopia to claim a much more dubious honor, as the globe's suicide capital. Death's siren call brought so many defeated souls to throw themselves off Pasadena's Colorado Street Bridge into the abyss of the Arroyo Seco Canyon that everyone calls it Suicide Bridge.

In the land's dark corners dwelt entities much older than any human inhabitants. They stirred, and fed.

When dust storms ravaged the prairies starting in '34, with another wave two years later (and a third two years in the future), desperation sent a new wave of migrants here. They sought fruit-picking jobs, their distended ranks robbing

Story Hooks

Story hooks in this chapter appear after a  icon. These suggest ways to interweave historical facts with Lovecraft-tinged private investigation cases.

The plot lines suggested in story hooks only become true in your version of the *Cthulhu Confidential* setting when you bring them onstage by turning them into scenarios. The events suggested by the story hooks aren't necessarily all happening at once. So if Dex goes to see the Reverend Robert "Fighting Bob" Shuler during an unrelated case, you needn't feel obligated to play him as being in psychic communion with dholes. Your version of Fighting Bob might be entirely mundane, or he might connect to the Mythos in some completely different way. Focus on maintaining consistency with what you've established to the player during games. Treat everything else as an open option until it comes up in play.

them of bargaining power. When they kicked, labor bosses dispatched men with clubs to beat them into obedience. Nervous city power-brokers sent L.A. cops to the California border, far from their jurisdiction, to turn back the migrant tide. Those who didn't have the dough-re-mi, as Woody Guthrie sang, were forbidden entrance to the tinsel city.

The blue skies hadn't visibly darkened. Palm trees still swayed. But past the shimmer of beauty, entropy tightened its grip. The city's daytime beauty went ink-dark and eerie at night. Raymond Chandler, oil exec turned laureate of crime, caught a whiff. "Outside the bright gardens had a haunted look, as though wild eyes were watching me from behind the bushes, as though the sunshine itself had a mysterious something in the light," narrates his hero, Philip Marlowe, in *The Big Sleep*.

Your hero now confronts a bigger sleep still. A fathomless sleep.

People

Cthulhu Confidential blends history and the Mythos, mixing real people with eldritch horrors. Using historical figures poses the question of what to do when players want to take actions that remove them from the picture sooner than our timeline allows. You can either decide that it's more fun to give your player the freedom to turn your setting into an alternate history, or you can restrict the action to filling in the weird details between the cracks of history as we know it. One-2-One rules render the second course easier than in standard GUMSHOE. You can frame Challenges to make sure that an Advance does something highly useful for the detective without requiring you to define that victory as killing Mickey Cohen thirty-nine years too early.

The following brief entries give you the basic detail required to present these characters as peripheral figures in Dex Raymond mysteries.

Alternatively, you can do what Raymond Chandler had to at the time. He fictionalized the scandals and syndicate maneuverings of Los Angeles in his short stories and novels. His version of establishment crime lord Guy McAfee gets rubbed out somewhere around 1939, the publication date of his novel *The Big Sleep*. The actual man made it to 1960, felled not by a hail of bullets but from complications after surgery. In his fiction, Chandler sent thinly-veiled versions of local heavy-hitters to satisfying demises, even as their real-life models continued to live and breathe and demonstrate that the bad guys often win.

Entries for historical figures list their ages as of 1937. Ages of birth and death allow you to adjust or accelerate your timeline. *Cthulhu Confidential* defaults to the 1930s, but the noir era is only picking up speed. You could easily span a series of *Cthulhu Confidential* mysteries through the war years, the age of post-war anxiety, and on into the gritty fifties.

GANGSTERS, COPS AND OTHER POLITICIANS

Atop the 1937 gangland pyramid perches former vice cop **Guy McAfee**, 49, (1888–1960), unaware that his hold on L.A. is about to crumble. Tousled white hair and jug ears play to his aw-shucks manner, which he cops from his predecessor. Nicknames include "Slats", "Stringbean" and "the





Whistler.” The last stems from his cop days, when he would whistle down the phone line to alert criminal cronies of raids in the offing. McAfee rose in the ranks of The System as right-hand man to old-timey crime boss Charlie Crawford, whose career extended back to the Klondike gold rush. In 1931, a hard-charging city prosecutor named Dave Clark fatally shot Crawford and an associate in Crawford’s office. In one of L.A.’s already notoriously circus-like criminal proceedings, Clark claimed self-defense and won acquittal on a retrial. Though McAfee was never charged, everyone assumes he ordered the hit that cleared the way for his ascension. He may wink about it himself. McAfee sees himself as a regular businessman, and in this city he sort of has a point. He believes in politeness, right up the point where he decides someone poses a liability and requires a lead breakfast. Dex Raymond may encounter him during “The Fathomless Sleep”; see “Top of the System,” p. 129. Next year, pushed out by Buggy Siegel’s eastern gang, he’ll decamp to Las Vegas and a comfortable career as a legit-seeming casino mogul. Siegel gets all the credit for turning Vegas into a gambling mecca, but it’s McAfee who names the Strip, after Los Angeles’ Sunset Strip.

The System has always succeeded in keeping outside rivals at bay. The closest L.A. comes to a classic Mafia don would be **Jack Dragna**: 46, (1891–1956). With his horn-rimmed glasses and weary features, this first-generation immigrant

from Corleone, Sicily looks more like a beleaguered mid-level executive than a fearsome criminal. Overshadowed by the System, he picks up scraps in the town’s small Italian community. He maintains an alliance with New York’s Lucchese family, but that’s mostly a handshake affair, with scant resources flowing his way from back east.

The imminent breaking of the System benefits him only a little; he winds up playing second fiddle to an emergent Mickey Cohen. A heart attack will kill him in 1956.



Like many mobsters, Dragna seeks credibility in his community through regular church attendance. When a new young priest of his local parish is found dead, his kneeling corpse rigid, his eyes burst in their sockets, Dragna sees it as a warning issued by gangland rivals. He arranges for a square-seeming parishioner to hire Dex to investigate. Instead, the trail leads to the priest’s previous posting in Providence, Rhode Island. There he led prayers to ward off the so-called “Haunter of the Dark,” released when a would-be occultist tampered with an artifact called the Shining Trapezohedron. What followed the priest from sleepy Providence to hopped-up Los Angeles? And can Dex put it down?

Only now has an out-of-town threat to the System with true punch materialized. **Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel**, 31, (1906–1947) has landed in the city, exuding matinee-idol charisma. He serves as the L.A. vanguard for the east coast Genovese crime family, led by expansion-minded racketeers Frank Costello and Meyer Lansky. With number-one goon **Mickey Cohen**, 24, (1913–1976), in tow, he means to replace the close-to-the-vest criminality of Los Angeles with a modern outfit that sends its tribute elsewhere. Siegel and Cohen appear in greater detail in “The Fathomless Sleep”; see p. 130 and p. 132 respectively.

Siegel will catch a rifle bullet to the eye in ’47, after his Vegas dreams take him wildly over budget on his confederates’ money. Cohen will blossom from a thug to the publicity-loving king of L.A. crime, his run ending with a 1961 tax evasion conviction.

PROBLEM 28

Beaten Black and Blue

You've been beaten within an inch of your life.

Until you Take Time to recuperate, all General tests result in automatic Setbacks. Even after that, all General/Physical tests take a -1 Penalty. Discard at end of scenario.



PROBLEM 29

Fight, Not Flight

To escape that scrape, you called on the terrified animal deep inside you. Desperation that stark isn't easy to forget.

-2 Penalty on Cool or Stability tests. Discard after your next Fighting test.



PROBLEM 30

You Called him Buggy

Unless you somehow earn his forgiveness for this usually unpardonable slight, the story ends with a hit ordered against you by Bugsy Siegel. Everyone told you not to.



PROBLEM 31

Something about that Rock**Mythos Shock**

A little piece of stone with some weird hieroglyphs on it shouldn't chill your blood to ice. But it does. In a way you can't pretend to understand, you sense it will drop you out of this world, and into the terrible awareness that lurks just below it.



PROBLEM 32

Strain your Ticker

You made yourself do something every fiber of your being told you not to. You've flooded yourself with adrenaline and can't calm down.

Counter by accepting a -4 Penalty on any Challenge. If still in your hand at end of case, you suffer a heart attack.



PROBLEM 33

Indelible Image

You saw something you sure wish you hadn't. Now you can't get it out of your mind.

Counter by accepting a -4 Penalty on any Challenge. If still in your hand at end of case, you suffer a heart attack.



PROBLEM 34

Imminent Catatonia**Mythos Shock**

Rather than truly correlate the significance of what you just witnessed, your mind is about to shut itself down. Maybe for good.



PROBLEM 35

Mortal Wound

You just took an injury that cooked your goose for good. You have maybe an hour left to tie up loose ends. Then you're dead.



PROBLEM 36

Twitchy Continuity

If you are still holding this card at the end of the case, you develop a permanent nervous tic.

If you have this card in hand at the beginning of a case, lose 1 Push.



HARDBOILED

**NEW
YORK**

featuring

VIVIAN SINCLAIR

in

FATAL FREQUENCIES

VIVIAN SINCLAIR

Combining Nellie Bly’s nerve and Dorothy Kilgallen’s adventurous spirit, Vivian Sinclair epitomizes the noir journalist. In her investigations for the *New York Herald Tribune*, she encounters things she’d never imagined — and tries to convince herself don’t exist. While her profession and gender may keep Viv from experiencing the same raw violence as Dex or Langston, they don’t immunize Viv from the repercussions of her work. Viv may not wind up in a hospital with two broken legs and missing teeth (see “Kneecapping the Lady Detective”), but when she takes on Problems, elements of cases that she can’t fix haunt her, those her stories exposed stalk her, unhappy editors threaten her livelihood, and people around her get hurt. When

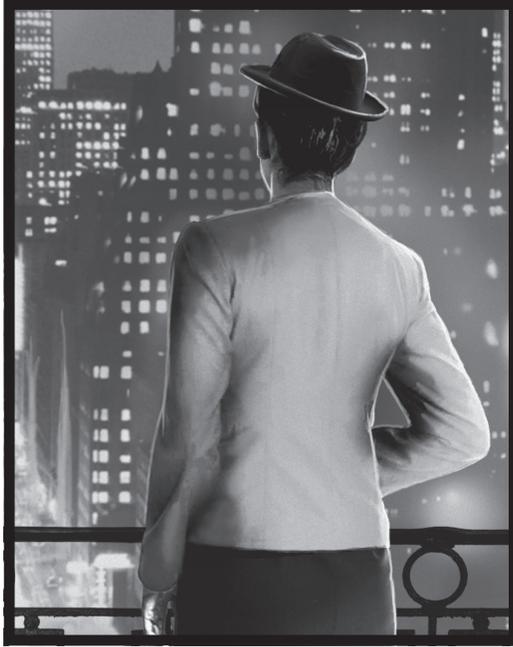
Viv’s colleagues and targets throw around the term “bloodhound,” it carries an undertone of grudging respect. Other descriptors that spring to the tongue: “determined,” “meddling,” “snoop,” and “sharp as a tack.” When she found work as a columnist at the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1926, after spending several years as a stenographer and freelance journalist, Viv soon grew bored of covering fashion and society. So, with the dedication she continues to show to her profession, she doubled her efforts, bringing in both timely columns and unassigned scoops.

Sharp-dressing, straight-talking, and with over five years of proven track record, Viv now works as one of the *Herald Tribune’s* primary investigative

Lady Detective, Not Femme Fatale

While detective fiction contains legions of Sam Spade knockoffs, the 1930s noir lady detective is a rarer and mostly forgotten species. Between genre rules about hurting women — unless it motivates a man — and sexist assumptions about their competence, lady detectives saw much lower page counts than their male counterparts and rarely made it onto the silver screen. Yet the modern noir lady P.I. has her legacy in the same era as Philip Marlowe and Nick Charles. Zelda Popkin’s Mary Carner works as a genuine department store dick. Rex Stout’s Dol Bonner and Hugh Pentecost’s Carole Trevor run their own detective agencies, although Stout only features Bonner as his protagonist once and Pentecost’s stories typify screwball as much as noir.

For player, GM, and writer, the lack of definitive examples means we draw on elements of the genre, the few characters that do exist, and other sorts of lady detectives to cobble together a 1930s noir lady detective who’s fun to play in the 21st century. Vivian Sinclair offers one approach. If the player would rather play a female version of Dex or Langston, she could easily do so — consulting the Investigative sections on gender and noir and asking that the GM incorporate or disregard as she desires. Take inspiration from Jessica Jones or Lisabeth Salander, who suffer significant physical and emotional damage. Or she might rather play a Viv without the noir edges — a sharp journalist who solves crimes and uncovers cultists at some peril but without the lasting damage, inspired by Kerry Greenwood’s Phryne Fisher or Nora Charles from the *Thin Man* movies. In GUMSHOE One-2-One, only the two voices at the table matter when deciding the “right” way to play through the adventures.



journalists. Pad and pencil in hand, she tracks down leads, grills witnesses, develops sources, and turns in hair-raising stories of corruption, crime, and parts of the city’s underbelly most would rather not see. Like any journalist, she works on sufferance. If a story she turns in ruffles too many feathers upstairs or with the wrong people in the city, she may find herself back on the fashion beat or even out on the street.

Through her work, Viv has become an amateur detective, although she doesn’t generally think of herself as such. What others consider cases, Viv considers stories. Sometimes people ask her to employ her skills after hours for some extra money, or for the chance of a good story — and of course she says yes. Decide on and describe Viv’s biggest scoop of the last year to the GM. What challenges did she face, and how did the public receive her article? Or did her editors squash it? A few possibilities for players paralyzed by indecision:

- an investigative report on working conditions among the city’s longshoremen
- proving the innocence of a socialite heiress accused of murdering her father for her inheritance
- exposing the pseudo-kidnapping of an actress’s child as a bid to regain the public’s attention

Investigative Abilities and Gender in the 1930s

... or: “Now see here, little lady.”

Investigative Abilities represent competence. The world presumes incompetence. Such is the bind of any talented lady detective — or any woman whose aptitudes lie outside those prescribed to her gender, such as a talented female journalist in a newsroom full of men. Female players (and GMs) experience this even now. Replicating the depth and breadth of 1930s sexism at the table rarely provides a satisfying gaming experience. Before game play, GM and player may discuss and tailor the degree of sexism the female character experiences. Several options present themselves.

First, Vivian Sinclair perseveres through sexism to achieve her goals. Precedent certainly exists. Allan Pinkerton employed a “Female Detective Bureau” 70 years before Vivian Sinclair’s stories take place. Pioneer of investigative journalism Nellie Bly, one of Viv’s inspirations, died around the time Viv began her work (albeit at the young age of 57). With dogged determination and an adequate support network of people who recognize her abilities, she navigates barriers set up to keep her out. Her whiteness (see Langston’s material on playing a black male Investigator and combine with gender to set up the one-two punch for a non-white female Investigator) assists her in this, but she still faces material opposition as well as sexist commentary. She may need to come up with creative plans which get her around these obstacles instead of smashing straight through.

In many cases, ways around obstacles parallel the alternatives that Dex might use as well, particularly when he’s acquired Problem cards that make his life more difficult. When the police guard won’t let some “tabloid broad” examine a crime scene or see photographs, Viv uses her knowledge of Evidence Collection (for Viv, Flattery also works here) on the junior officer until he proudly mentions some important piece of evidence that the others would never have found if he hadn’t spotted it. One commonly sees this approach in literature and film, both for the sake of verisimilitude and so the audience can admire the

lady detective's cleverness. However, it may prove draining at the table and the player may quickly tire of hearing, "No, you're a woman; they wouldn't let you do ____," particularly if she hears versions in everyday life. This leads us to a second option.

Sexism still exists, but in muted form.

Particularly difficult or evil characters still throw out sexist opinions and hassle Viv. The rest may occasionally make comments. The player chooses whether to make this treatment of Viv the exception or the rule for other women. While the concept "not like other girls" plays out toxically in the real world, allowing women around her to experience sexism while she remains unscathed may keep the story from feeling entirely unreal.

Or player and Keeper may agree upon a third approach, removing sexism entirely from the equation. Viv's challenges never stem from her gender, only from her being an interfering snoop, same as any P.I. Class still exists and complicates or smooths her investigation.

By default, adventures presume that Viv experiences a degree of sexism from some GMCs and suggest alternatives for overcoming a particularly hostile or patronizing GMC as well as a straightforward approach. The GM then chooses how to narrate the situation based on the player's preferences and his own comfort level in roleplaying hostile sexism toward the player. As mentioned in "Lady Detective, not Femme Fatale," the player chooses the kind of Viv she wants to play. If she sees Viv as a woman constantly punching sexist assumptions in the face, she may want more sexism thrown in so she can experience a "girl power" thrill in overcoming them. GM should model additional confrontations off the ones already presented.

Kneecapping the Lady Detective

Even egalitarian sensibilities recoil at the thought of Vivian Sinclair tossed onto the street with two broken legs. Perhaps it's an effect of genre conventions, or perhaps the trope itself is one of those horrors to which we grow accustomed through repetition. Decades of novels and films in which half-dead male protagonists stagger into the final scene have us expecting to see Dex suffer. No

Bisexuality in 1930s New York City

In an era which threw around words like "invert" more than "bisexual," Viv considers herself susceptible to pretty faces or charming personalities regardless of gender (if she holds Problem "Sucker for a Pretty Face," her susceptibility often gets her in jams). When dating women, she may patronize New York's underground lesbian bar scene, with likely mob connections and possible plot hooks or Problems. Even if caught in a raid, she probably escapes unscathed — police in the 1930s focused almost exclusively on men when enforcing anti-homosexuality laws. However, her gender would not protect her from psychiatric confinement and expensive attempted "cures" if those in her family considered her flexibility in taking lovers to be more than a harmless eccentricity.

parallel exists for the traditional lady detective. This should not mean that Viv is immune to violence or even debilitating violence. But in traditions of noir and lady detectives, she deals damage and experiences brutality differently than her male counterparts.

GUMSHOE One-2-One uses the flexible General Ability Fighting to handle all kinds of combat. When she's not actively Fleeing, a different ability, Viv's 2 dice in Fighting may operate in quite a few ways. Fighting isn't always right hooks; sometimes it's being the nimbler party in the scuffle or knowing when to take advantage of another's surprise — a quick punch to the nose of a goon who wasn't expecting to encounter a dame. When someone attempts to grab her, Viv stabs her stiletto heel into an opponent's foot or twists neatly out of his hands (if dodging and ducking don't sound like fighting, put down this book and watch a few rounds of boxing). In direr situations, Viv gets 2 dice worth of her purse-sized derringer, either convincing an opponent to allow her to leave or dealing some serious damage. If the player would rather see Viv regularly throwing punches or flipping surprised opponents over her shoulder,

she may explain how Viv belongs to a small society of female boxers, studied judo or jujutsu (both known in 1930s America) in special classes at the YWCA, or otherwise acquired the necessary skills.

On a Setback, can a villain or thug shoot Viv? If it advances the plot. Much violence against women in noir follows the same formula: put the woman in peril, allow peril to do dirty work, force protagonist to choose between rescuing her and some other need, allow protagonist to derive motivation/pain from her death if he sacrifices her. This trope goes against the player-facing ethos of the game. Just as it does with Dex, adventure moves forward on success or failure, allowing the player opportunities to extricate herself or dig in deeper, not wait for help. If goons overpower Viv as she breaks into the crime boss' warehouse, she wakes up in his office, recovering from a nasty blow to the head or a dose of chloroform. In situations of less narrative import, where thugs might give Langston a sound beating before dumping him on the street, the same thugs pick up Viv, drop her on the pavement outside, and slam the door, damaging only her dignity and her dress.

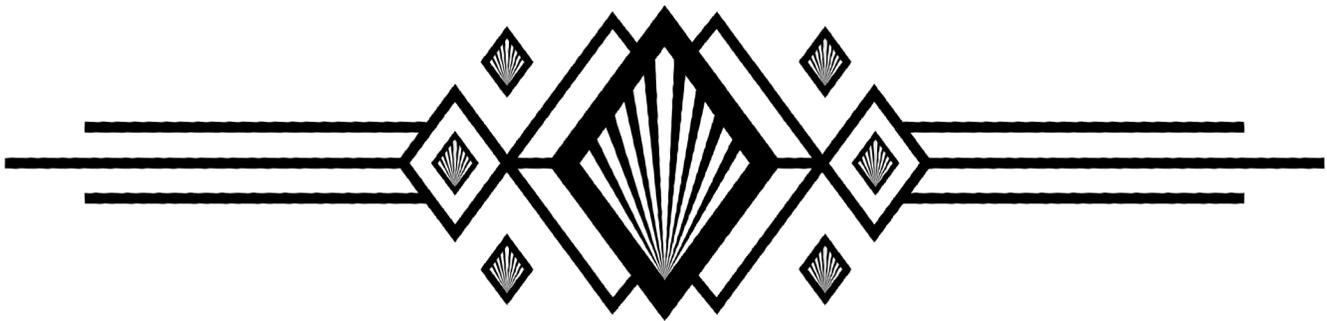
So, is there an equivalent to the kind of punishment that forces Dex to visit a doctor before he can move on with the adventure? Absolutely. Viv's ability to write forms the basis of her career and her investigative work. Anything which prevents her from getting her story turned in imperils the adventure and forces her to visit a doctor or take a detour, whether it's the theft of her notebook, hands too swollen from rope bindings to write or type, or a strange drug that won't let her think clearly.

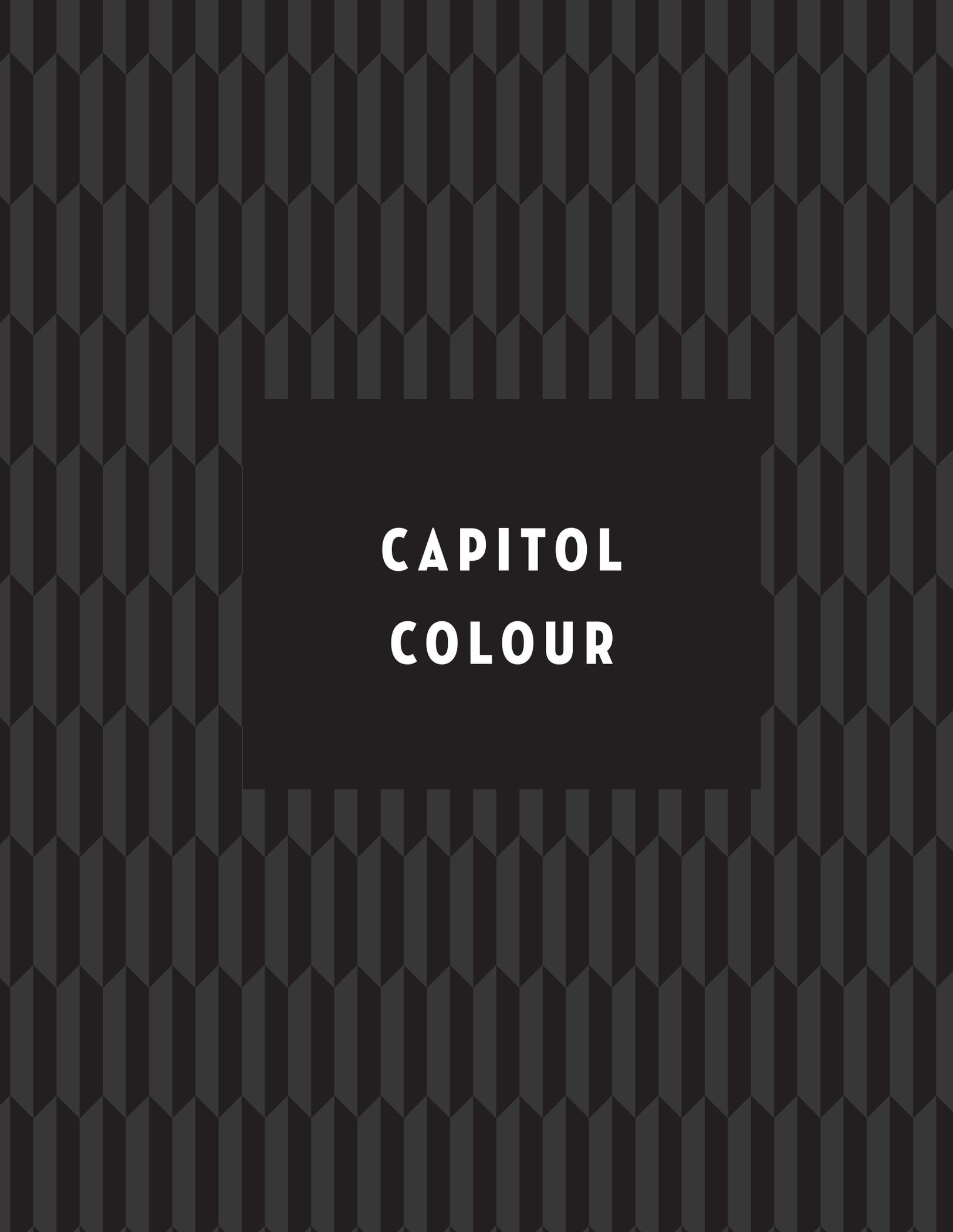
Sexual Violence

For a lady detective, the explicit or implicit threat of sexual violence is often par for the course. However, though few authors follow through on such threats, many GMs and players may not wish to encounter this aspect of life in any form at the table. Consider alternative threats which still provide adequate menace. "This company has very deep pockets, Miss Sinclair. Do you think any newspaper in the country would hire you once we won a libel suit that cost the *Herald Tribune* thousands?"

(Sample problem: **Fingers Like Sausages.** When those thugs tied your hands, they damaged the circulation. With rest and ice water it'll go down by morning, but you can't file your column on your own.)

Viv plays for the same stakes as Dex and Langston. At the end of the adventure, she may face lethal peril or the loss of her sanity. If she dies at the hands of gangsters or cultists or ends up in her Source Louisa's sanitarium, the tabloids gleefully print the tragedy of a young woman who didn't know her place. Society loves nothing more than to see its outliers get a comeuppance.





**CAPITOL
COLOUR**

“It is so easy to be hopeful in the daytime when you can see the things you wish on. But it was night, it stayed night. Night was striding across nothingness with the whole round world in his hands... They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against cruel walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God.”

— Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

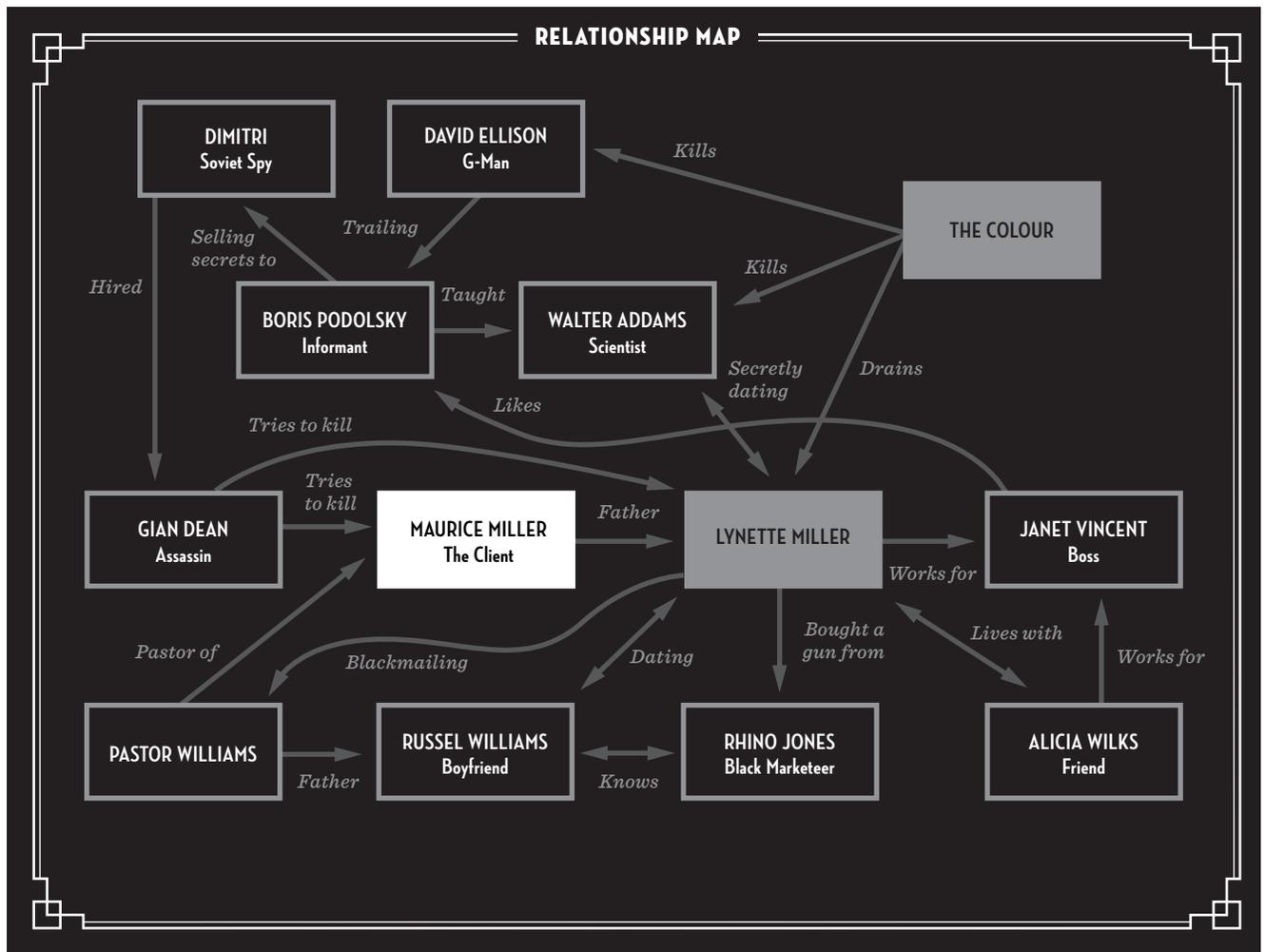
CAPITOL COLOUR

Where is Lynette Miller, and can you find her before it is too late? Her worried father comes to you — Langston Montgomery Wright, part-time shamus — to locate her. Time is running out before you even start the case. A scheming villain, questionable politicians, a deadly trap, and the horrors of the Beyond all await you.

Cast

Maurice Miller: 55, concerned father and crippled veteran of World War I. He calls on Langston to find his missing daughter.

Lynette Miller: 23, dazzling and determined. She has seen the Colour and knows Boris is stealing from the lab.



Russell Williams: 33, beefy and flat-footed secret boyfriend. Russell knows Lynette wanted money and a gun.

Boris Podolsky: 46, (1896–1966), bitter and brilliant professor turned traitor. Boris is selling the mutated Colour specimens to the Soviets.

Special Agent David Ellison: 29, brash and hot-headed. Jack loves his job finding and killing bad guys. He has tracked Podolsky, whom he believes is a fifth columnist, and is determined to catch or kill him once he has more proof.

Walter Addams: 37, smart yet gullible. Former student of Boris who called him to help with his work at Navy Munitions Plant Echo.

Dmitri “Richard Davis” Yusoff: 43, unassuming and perceptive. A Soviet spy masquerading as a congressional aide and Boris’ contact. They are to meet in four days.

Janet Vincent: 28, conformist and stern. Lynette’s boss at Navy Munitions Plant Echo who knows about the secret base under the plant.

Alicia Wilks: 23, friendly and honest. Roommate of Lynette; knows about her boyfriends.

Gian Dean: 26, cold and methodical. Hired killer with no moral compass.

Rhino Jones: 37, bruiser in an expensive suit. Black-market dealer who sold Lynette a gun.

The Colour Out of Space

The Colour is a nonhumanoid extraterrestrial of unknown origin and incomprehensible thoughts. Colours primarily arrive during meteor storms, and suck the life out of creatures and plants in the area around their landing-spot until they are fully grown. They then return to space, leaving countless desiccated husks and horrifically mutated species behind them.

The Colour feeds on its prey multiple times; each feeding leaves the victim more and more drained of life. The victim’s skin greys, their body begins to die, hair falls out, and their will slowly erodes away. Once the Colour has fed on a victim, it can track this individual to continue its feeding. If an adult Colour attacks someone directly, it can drain all of the life out of them instantly; the victim crumbles to dust. This is not the preferred method, as the creature does not gain as much life-force as it would by feeding slowly over multiple attacks.



WARTIME

DOC

featuring

LANGSTON MONTGOMERY WRIGHT

in

CAPITOL COLOUR

LANGSTON MONTGOMERY WRIGHT

I, too, sing America.

*I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.*

*Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.*

*Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—*

I, too, am America.

— Langston Hughes, *I, Too*

Welcome to the home front in Washington, DC: a time and place of hope under the crushing weight of the war, corruption, and rampant racism. You are stepping into the shoes of a down-on-his-luck, wounded war-hero-turned-two-bit-shamus, fighting for those who have no one else.

The war bolsters the once-crippled economy and the sleepy capital of the United States is transforming into the Goliath that it will become in the modern day; industrialization and backroom dealings are the norm. The streets are safe, with hundreds of soldiers and heavy artillery strategically placed around the city to knock out any enemy Jerrys or fifth columnists.

But there is something more sinister in the dark corners of the city: those smoky back rooms with politicians selling the souls of their constituents for a little more power and a lot more wealth, sacrificing anything to keep their elected office. They are the players destroying people's lives and hopes, shattering their sanity.

Langston Wright's story boils down to one good black man doing the best he can against the rising tide, and making the hard choices no matter the cost.

It's up to you to give the people a moment's hope in the dying of the light, for just one more day. One more day of rationing, working, and enduring the oppressive Jim Crow laws. One more day without getting killed.

Langston is driven by his sense of scholarship to expand human knowledge and understand those things he does not know. His life changed during that secret Axis attack at the Casablanca Conference. Langston saved a dozen people, but he still has the shrapnel in his body. The wound forced him to return home with an honorable discharge, while the war raged on without him.



LANGSTON MONTGOMERY WRIGHT

Private Eye

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

- Assess Honesty
- Bargain
- Chemistry
- Cop Talk
- Cryptography
- Evidence Collection
- Flattery
- Inspiration
- Intimidation
- Languages
- Oral History
- Physics
- Psychology
- Reassurance
- Research
- Streetwise

GENERAL ABILITIES

- Athletics
- Cool
- Devices
- Driving
- Fighting
- Filch
- Preparedness
- Sense Trouble
- Shadowing
- Stability
- Stealth

STORY

Langston Montgomery Wright is an African American WWII vet who battled Nazis across Europe until he took shrapnel saving some GIs. He was honorably discharged, and sent home to Washington, DC, a city that's near busting. He's a second class citizen trying to make a place for himself in a world that challenges him at every turn. He uses his smarts, morals and willingness to do whatever it takes to make rent, solving cases and battling enemies, one Mythos threat at a time.

(As an African American in the 1940s, Langston has Interpersonal Abilities, but usually does not start with the upper hand in social situations. As such, he must pay 2 Pushes for his first Interpersonal challenge of any scenario).

Personalizing Langston

To make Langston more personal, have the player answer the following questions:

1. Langston had five siblings, but they didn't all survive to adulthood. How many died, and how?
2. What is Langston's favorite drink? (Bourbon is always a classic if in doubt.)
3. Is Langston religious? If so, which religion? If not, why not?
4. What does he enjoy the most about his one day a week at the Naval Observatory?
5. Langston is a week behind on the rent. How did he handle his landlord when he met him yesterday?

A month after recovering, he found a part-time job, working one day a week at the Naval Observatory at 3450 Massachusetts Avenue NW. Originally hired to process astronomical data, he's more often tasked with keeping the telescope in running order. It's not enough to pay his rent, but it's better than cleaning toilets. He has access to a car: it's on loan from his friend and former boss, OSS chief "Wild Bill" Donovan, to help with his recovery. Any day now, though, Donovan might ask for it back. Still, favors from friends is the best Langston can hope for. Like many black veterans learn after returning home from the war, Langston knows that the Government will not provide for him and has no plans to do so, regardless of his service. But at least in his own neighborhood, Langston is considered a hero, a vet, and a stand-up guy.

Friends, Acquaintances, and Rivals

William “Wild Bill” Donovan, Friend:

Soldier, lawyer, and diplomat turned intelligence operative, after being hand-picked in 1942 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to found the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), America’s first national intelligence agency.

Langston was assigned as Donovan’s driver in 1941 while he served as Roosevelt’s unofficial emissary to Britain. Donovan discovered Langston’s gift for languages and drafted him into the army under the OSS as a codebreaker, but under the guise of being his driver/steward. Both of them knew that, as a black man, Langston was practically invisible, which enabled him to acquire intelligence few others could. Still active on the war front, Donovan values Langston’s skills. He has even supplied him with his current car, which he has nicknamed Adelaide.

Detective Calvin Watts, Fair-Weather

Rival: Watts is one of just a few black police officers, following nearly a century later in the footsteps of Charles Tillman— one of the first African Americans to join the force and eventually advance to detective in the District— Watts does whatever it takes to close his cases. He and Langston have crossed paths a few times, and he knows the egghead gets the job done, no matter what. He will offer some help — but always at a price, since Langston once cost Watts a promotion by solving a case before he did.

Miguel Balcazar, Acquaintance: Miguel is a Hispanic dock-worker who came to DC with the mass population boom of the war. Occasionally he helps make a crate or two disappear for the right price, but mostly he keeps to himself and under the radar of his supervisors. Langston and Miguel have a passing business relationship: Langston has paid him for tips about activity on the docks.

Laura Wayne, Acquaintance: Laura owns Langston’s favorite jazz club: the Club Caverns, a black-owned-and-operated joint that has hosted such artists as Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. It is where he goes to relax, to forget a tough case, or to escape the memories of the war. The music is always hopping, the booze flowing, and the company divine. Laura and Langston were lovers in the past, but neither considers it anything of note.

James Jackson, Friend: James is a janitor at the Pentagon and an aspiring actor who spends all of his free time watching movies and listening to radio serials, hoping that one day he will get his big break. James knows that radio is the only opportunity for a black person to get a good part, other than playing a waiter or a mammy. Langston and James frequently bump into each other at the few black nightclubs, and James has helped Langston come up with some mannerisms to help conceal his identity when he needs to.

Sources

ROSAMUND CARTER

Professor of Sociology & Anthropology

Brilliant and sharp-eyed, Professor Carter is a legacy of Howard University (see p. 232), with each generation of her African American family having taught at the institution since its inception. Hidden beneath looks that rival those of movie star Nina Mae McKinney is one of the shrewdest minds in all of DC.

Few would believe that Langston and she are friends, due to her firm belief in the supernatural



LANGSTON MONTGOMERY WRIGHT

I, too, sing America.

*I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.*

*Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.*

*Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—*

I, too, am America.

— Langston Hughes, *I, Too*

Welcome to the home front in Washington, DC: a time and place of hope under the crushing weight of the war, corruption, and rampant racism. You are stepping into the shoes of a down-on-his-luck, wounded war-hero-turned-two-bit-shamus, fighting for those who have no one else.

The war bolsters the once-crippled economy and the sleepy capital of the United States is transforming into the Goliath that it will become in the modern day; industrialization and backroom dealings are the norm. The streets are safe, with hundreds of soldiers and heavy artillery strategically placed around the city to knock out any enemy Jerrys or fifth columnists.

But there is something more sinister in the dark corners of the city: those smoky back rooms with politicians selling the souls of their constituents for a little more power and a lot more wealth, sacrificing anything to keep their elected office. They are the players destroying people's lives and hopes, shattering their sanity.

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LANGSTON MONTGOMERY WRIGHT

Private Eye

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STORY

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VIVIAN SINCLAIR

Investigative Journalist

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

- Accounting
- Assess Honesty
- Bargain
- Bureaucracy
- Cryptography
- Evidence Collection
- Flattery
- History
- Inspiration
- Locksmith
- Oral History
- Photography
- Reassurance
- Research
- Streetwise

GENERAL ABILITIES

- Athletics
- Cool
- Disguise
- Driving
- Fighting
- Filch
- First Aid
- Fleeing
- Preparedness
- Sense Trouble
- Shadowing
- Stability
- Stealth

STORY

Pad and pencil in hand, journalist Vivian Sinclair tracks down leads, grills witnesses, and turns in hair-raising stories of corruption, crime, and parts of the city's underbelly most would rather not see. Where a detective sees a case, Viv sees a story. She'll follow it relentlessly to its conclusion, even putting her life in danger to get at the truth.

Connections and Complications

Unlike the classic loner P.I. of noir fiction, the journalist's daily routine involves bustling newsrooms and networks of friendly (and rival) professional connections. When not working on a big story, she pays her rent by covering stories for overwhelmed departments, whether politics, arts, or general news, always with an ear cocked for her next scoop. At times Viv feels as though she cannot get away from people — friends, colleagues, family.

The nature of her work, and of the noir genre, reveals the fragility of this normal life. Players and GMs should consider introducing non-Source characters in her work or social life who embody the "everyday," both as counterpoints to the darker

veins of her investigations and as cat's-paws for the GM to imperil. A few suggested characters for the GM to consider using as non-Source GMCs:

Lawrence Ames, Rival Journalist at the Times: When not looking over her shoulder for angry subjects of her stories, Viv's keeping an eye out for Lawrence. She respects him as a fellow journalist in dogged pursuit of the truth but plans to get a fuller, better write-up of that truth printed the day before his goes to press. Several years ago, the two had an ill-conceived affair sparked by adrenaline and elation after a narrow escape from bootleggers, but the past stays in the past — probably.

Emma Sinclair Lowell, Aunt: While Viv comes from the middle class of the early 1900s,

Rules Quick Reference

This summary quickly presents the game's essential rules concepts, which we'll go on to explain in greater depth.

Your character attempts actions in the storyline by using abilities. Abilities come in two main types: **Investigative** and **General**

Investigative Abilities (p. 7) allow you to gather information. The animating principle behind GUMSHOE states that failing to get key information is never interesting. If you have the right ability and you look in the right place for clues you need to solve the mystery, you will always find the information you seek. If you lack the relevant ability, your character can talk to a friendly **Source** (p. 9), who will also provide guidance and assurance as needed.

A piece of information need not be critical to the case for you to gain it without chance of failure and at no cost. Much of mystery-solving lies in sorting the important from the tangential. If only the crucial clues came for free, it would give the game away.

In some situations, you can spend a resource called a **Push** (p. 9) to gain an additional benefit. This might be information you don't absolutely need to solve the case; more often it consists of advantages that clear the character's path through the story, such as favors from witnesses, knowledge that keeps the character safe, or prior relationships to central figures.

You start the game with 4 Pushes, and can gain others during play.

General Abilities (p. 17) determine whether you succeed or fail when trying to take actions other than gathering information, usually in an event called a test. The most important kind of test is the **Challenge** (p. 22).

You have either 1 or 2 dice in each General Ability your character possesses.

The game uses standard six-sided dice, which

roleplayers sometimes refer to as d6s.

Whenever it might be as interesting for you to fail as it would be to succeed — say, fighting a thug, running away from a creature, or trying to repair your car before you die in the desert — you roll your die or dice.

When rolling multiple dice, roll one at a time: you may succeed without having to roll all of them.

At the end of the Challenge, your die roll total may match or exceed that of an **Advance** (the best result), or a **Hold** (an okay or middling result). If not, your **Outcome** is a **Setback**, which means that something bad happens.

On an Advance you will probably gain an **Edge** (p. 25): an advantage you can use later in the scenario. As a reminder, you gain an Edge card. The card's text will tell you how it works. Often, you must discard the card to gain the advantage. If you reached the Advance threshold without rolling all of the dice you were entitled to, you also gain a Push.

On a Setback, you often gain a **Problem** (p. 25), representing a dilemma that might cause trouble for you later. Again, you receive a card to remember it by — a Problem card. Certain cards might lead to a terrible end for your detective should you fail to get rid of, or Counter, them (p. 26) before the scenario concludes.

Most Challenges allow you to voluntarily take on an Extra Problem, in exchange for rolling one more die.

Every so often you'll make a simple roll, called a **Quick Test** (p. 27), to see if you succeed or fail, without the possibility of Advances, Edges, Setbacks, or Problems.

The rest is detail. You don't have to learn any special rules for combat or mental distress, as you would in standard GUMSHOE and most other roleplaying games. The Challenge system, with its descriptions of outcomes, and its resulting Edges and Problems, handles it all.

Handout For New Roleplayers

In a tabletop roleplaying game, a group of participants gathers to talk its way through a story they spontaneously create together, adjudicated by a set of game rules. Here, unusually, that group consists of two people only.

Many, but by no means all, popular roleplaying games present detailed rules where you manipulate numbers and make tactical choices, most often during elaborate fight sequences. Some assist with this by encouraging you to move figures around on a map.

GUMSHOE One-2-One is more like storytelling, with you in the role of a hard-boiled detective, fearless reporter, or similar character, solving a mystery prepared by the GM. Every now and then you'll roll a die, creating suspense and an unpredictable outcome. You'll accumulate, and attempt to get rid of, cards marking your position in the story. Your choices shape the way the story unfolds and ends.

You don't win or lose a roleplaying game. Often you play many times, building a story featuring the same character and setting. You may play many scenarios, coming to follow your chosen detective as you would the hero of your favorite mystery show on TV. The difference is, you control the character's fate.

Your Game Moderator (abbreviated as GM) guides you through the events of the story. The GM:

- populates the setting of the game with interesting places, people, and things for the main characters to interact with

- portrays those secondary figures, called GMCs (Game Master characters) or supporting players
- describes the setting's places and things to you when your characters encounter them
- provides you (when your character looks in the right place and uses the right ability) with the information needed to solve the mystery — and much more besides, requiring you to sort the important clues from background color
- shapes the Challenges that determine whether you succeed superlatively, merely hold your ground, or suffer a setback. Challenges require you to roll an **ordinary 6-sided die**, sometimes making further rolls and adding them to your total.
- hands out, and helps you interpret, the Edge and Problem cards your character gains as consequences from good and bad Challenge results
- decides how the rules apply, should confusion arise
- refocuses your attention, guiding you when you feel at a loss for a next choice

As player, all you have to do is imagine your character in the situations that the GM narrates to you. Then describe what your character does in response to those situations. The rest will take care of itself, with explanations of rules as they become necessary.

Starter Notes for Experienced GUMSHOE Hands

Already steeped in standard multi-player GUMSHOE and want to get the lay of this new land quickly? We made these bullet points just for you.

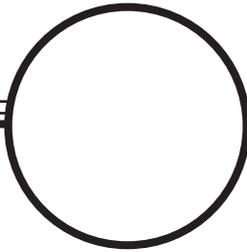
- Investigative Abilities do not have pools. In place of point spends, the player spends Pushes, which can be applied to any Investigative Ability. The character starts with four Pushes and can gain additional ones during play, as laid out on p. 23.
- General Abilities don't use pools, either. Instead each is associated with a number of dice — usually 1 or 2 — you roll in an attempt to hit a difficulty number, the number to Advance.

Why no pools, you ask? In multiplayer GUMSHOE, pools divide spotlight time between players. A solo format dispenses with the entire issue of dividing up time and coolness between players, making pools an unnecessary complication.

- In place of the basic pass/fail outcomes of General Ability tests, One-2-One uses a more detailed story-branching format called the Challenge. Here the player can achieve great,

okay, or disastrous results. In that order, we call these Advances, Holds, and Setbacks. Difficulty thresholds for these are customized for the Challenge at hand.

- The player receives cards acting as reminders of ongoing advantages (Edges) and impediments (Problems) that the character can use, or must face, over the course of an investigation. Sometimes you have to spend, or, discard, an Edge card to gain its benefit. In other cases the card text grants an ongoing benefit.
- The character can take action to get rid of (Counter) Problem cards. Sometimes you spend an appropriate Edge to do this; in other instances the detective must undertake particular actions in the storyline.
- Health hits the road in One-2-One.
- Stability remains an ability but works a little differently. The character doesn't die or permanently succumb to Lovecraftian insanity in the middle of the story. The player, however, may have Problem cards in hand that indicate this will happen at or after the climax, unless those cards aren't Countered beforehand.



Player's name:

Protagonist's name:

Protagonist's occupation:

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

- Accounting** (Academic)
- Anthropology** (Academic)
- Archaeology** (Academic)
- Architecture** (Academic)
- Art History** (Academic)
- Assess Honesty** (Interpersonal)
- Astronomy** (Technical)
- Bargain** (Interpersonal)
- Biology** (Academic)
- Bureaucracy** (Interpersonal)
- Chemistry** (Technical)
- Cop Talk** (Interpersonal)
- Craft** (Technical)
- Cryptography** (Academic)
- Cthulhu Mythos** (Academic)
- Evidence Collection** (Technical)
- Flattery** (Interpersonal)
- Forensics** (Technical)
- Geology** (Academic)

- History** (Academic)
- Inspiration** (Interpersonal)
- Intimidation** (Interpersonal)
- Languages** (Academic)
- Law** (Academic)
- Locksmith** (Technical)
- Medicine** (Academic)
- Ocult** (Academic)
- Oral History** (Interpersonal)
- Outdoorsman** (Technical)
- Pharmacy** (Technical)
- Photography** (Technical)
- Physics** (Academic)
- Psychology** (Interpersonal)
- Reassurance** (Interpersonal)
- Research** (Academic)
- Streetwise** (Interpersonal)
- Theology** (Academic)

GENERAL ABILITIES

- Athletics** (Physical)
- Conceal** (Manual)
- Cool** (Mental)
- Devices** (Manual)
- Disguise** (Manual)
- Driving** (Manual)
- Explosives** (Manual)
- Fighting** (Physical)
- Filch** (Manual)
- First Aid** (Manual)
- Fleeing** (Physical)
- Hypnosis** (Mental)
- Magic** (Mental)
- Preparedness** (Mental)
- Psychoanalysis** (Mental)
- Sense Trouble** (Mental)
- Shadowing** (Physical)
- Stability** (Mental)
- Stealth** (Physical)

SOURCES & NOTES

STORY

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