

A QUICK & DIRTY GAMES PRODUCTION

THRILLING NOIR STORIES

THE 1940S DETECTIVE ROLEPLAYING GAME

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It was another cold and rainy night. I was sitting in my 20 square yards apartment and bureau, staring into a half-empty glass of bourbon whiskey. A knock on the door brought me back to reality and ended the daydreaming. Who might that be? A gorgeous blonde who wants to hire me to spy on her cheating husband or the landlord trying to get last month's rent...

Credits

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(see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Humphrey_Bogart_by_Karsh_\(Library_and_Archives_Canada\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Humphrey_Bogart_by_Karsh_(Library_and_Archives_Canada).jpg) for details on source image)

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Quick&Dirty
Games 😊
»Don't worry and enjoy the game«

Introduction

Thrilling Noir Stories is a storytelling or roleplaying game

where the players impersonate private detectives, cops or other investigators from 1940s USA.

Thrilling Noir Stories was designed to allow the players to immerse in stories based on the pulp magazines from the first half of the 20th century or the movies of the “Film Noir” genre. If you have read the detective stories by Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler, or movies based on those works, you probably know what we were aiming for.

What do you need to play it?

In order to play the game, you need at least two players (one takes over as Game Master), a couple sheets of paper, a couple of dice (including six-sided (d6) and twenty-sided dice(d20)), pens or pencils, this booklet and a vivid imagination.

What is a roleplaying game?

This booklet was created for people already having some experience with roleplaying games. If you have no idea how RPGs work, you should check out this article: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roleplaying_game

Basic rule

Thrilling Noir Stories (or TNS for short) uses a twenty-sided die to resolve all actions. For example the character Jonas has a Larceny skill value of 7. That means you have to roll 7 or less on a d20 to succeed in opening a standard lock. The GM may modify this difficulty according to the given circumstances.

Golden rule

TNS is literally a quick & dirty design. That means it's not as sophisticated as many more complex games. If you don't like a rule, just change it.

Characters

The character is a player's alter ego in the game. A character run by the GM is called non-player character or NPC. Each character is described by various traits including attributes, skills, health and stability.

Attributes

Attributes are rated from 1 to 10 and describe the basic physical and mental abilities of a character. All characters in TNS have the following attributes:

Strength - physical strength, ability to lift or throw things, important in fist fights

Wits - intelligence, knowledge, thinking fast, important for every

investigator

Tenacity - physical and mental endurance, important for any gumshoe

Coordination - agility, dexterity, important when the bullets fly

Charm - charisma, physical beauty, having your way with the other sex

At character creation you may either generate the attributes by rolling the dice (D6+3 for each attribute) or you can distribute 35 points to the attribute as you see fit.

Skills

Most of what a character can do is described by skills. Skills are not inborn abilities but are learned over the course of one's life. It is assumed that each character in TNS knows all basic skills listed below. Each basic skill starts at 2 plus the relevant attribute. Advanced skills start at 0.

Basic skill list

Blades (Str) - you have training in the use of melee weapons like swords, knives etc.

Pugilism (Str) - the art of fist-fighting, brawling, using improvised weapons like broken bottles

First Aid (Wit) - training in using bandages, applying first aid, etc.

Law (Wit) - training in civil and criminal law

Perception (Wit) - using all of your senses to detect things around you

Research (Ten) - researching clues in the library, the office of records, in the newspaper, etc.

Resist (Ten) - the ability to resist poisons, diseases, suffocation

Driving (Coo) - you are able to drive a car or motorbike

Larceny (Coo) - pick-pocketing, breaking and entering, also hiding, sneaking and palming objects

Shooting (Coo) - training in all kinds of firearms

Persuasion (Cha) - you can use arguments and rhetorics or your wits and a fast tongue to convince or bluff people

Seduction (Cha) - the art of seducing the other sex

Advanced skills

There are certain skills that not everyone is trained in. Some of those skills are considered more or less obsolete in the 1940s and are probably hobby skills like Fencing, Archery or Sailing. Other skills restricted to certain professionals like Surgery, Theoretical Physics

or Demolitions. There's no list of advanced skills. Players and GMs should make up new advanced skills as they see fit.

If you want to put points into advanced skills you need to ask your GM first.

During character creation you choose three main skills, that start with a bonus of 5. These may be chosen from the advanced skills, too.

Character creation summary

1. Generate your attributes
2. Distribute 12 points on your skills. Please note that you can't put more than 6 in any skill. You may use those points to buy advanced skills, too (GM discretion advised). No skill may start at 20 or higher.
3. Pick your main skills (or choose one of the backgrounds) and calculate the values of all skills
4. Choose your starting equipment

Task resolution

Every time a character wants to perform a non-trivial task, his player has to roll the dice. The GM then decides which skill is relevant for the task at hand. When there is no skill fitting for the situation a check vs. an attribute may be used instead.

For example Mike's character Sam wants to break open the door to a suspect's flat. The GM decides that

he has to roll on Larceny to do so. His Larceny skill value is 8, so he has to roll a 8 or less to succeed. But alas he fails and so he decides to use brute force to kick down the door.

The GM decides Mike has to make a Strength check. A successful attribute check is done by rolling equal or under 10 + the attributes value.

Example: Sam has a Strength of 6, so he has to roll 16 or less to kick the door down.

Please note that the GM shall always try to find an appropriate skill before letting the player make an attribute check.

Favorable/Unfavorable Circumstances

In certain cases the GM can decide that the circumstances make the task at hand easier or harder. To reflect that he can assign a modifier of -5, -2, +2 or +5.

Please note that a roll of 20 always fails, even if the chance was higher than that! But a roll of 1 does not always succeed. Life is unfair sometimes.

Contest of skills

In some cases the abilities of a second person is relevant for the success of a given task. In such cases you talk of a "contest of skills". For example Mike's character Sam wants to sneak past a guard. That's a contest of skill be-

tween Sam's Stealth skill and the guard's Perception skill. In that case the skill check for the active player is modified by (10 - passive player's skill).

For example: Sam has Larceny of 5 and the guard has a perception of 3. Sam has to roll under $12=5+(10-3)$ to succeed.

It is easily possible that some contests of skill become impossible to win for one side, because their opponent is very highly skilled. Deal with it, kid!

Combat

Combat is handled a bit different than normal gameplay. At first combat is in turns of 10 seconds each and secondly it's important who acts first.

The character with the highest Wits acts first. After he has acted it's the turn of the character with the second-highest Wits and so on.

When it's a character's turn he may perform a reasonable amount of actions. Running across the room to hit an evil-doer may work, writing a novel would probably take too long. Just use common sense. If in doubt, the GM decides if you can perform an action in one turn.

Attacking and defending

In the "film noir" genre combat is usually short and deadly. This is especially the case in gunfights

because it's very hard to dodge bullets.

In close combat the attacker declares his attack first. Then the defender is allowed to state his intended defense.

Example: Sam wants to use his Pugilism skill to punch Mack in the face. Mack tries to defend using his knife (and his Blades skill). Sam has now to succeed in a contest of skill between his Pugilism and Mack's Blades skill.

Ranged combat works a bit differently. In most cases you can't dodge bullets, so the attacker makes a normal Shooting roll. If he succeeds the target is hit.

There may be cases when one of the combatants uses an inappropriate weapon. The GM should then penalize the player with a modifier of -5.

Ranged combat, distance, lighting and cover

When using ranged weapons (like firearms) the distance between the combatants plays a role. In most cases combatants start pretty close to each other, so weapon ranges can be ignored. This changes in chase situations.

Trying to hit a fleeing foe is penalized by 5/turn after the first and trying to hit a fleeing vehicle is penalized by 10/turn after the first.

The defender can get a bonus to his Perception skill (for dodge purposes only) when he's in cover.

50% cover adds 2 to the roll, 75% cover adds 5. Thick fog or smoke may be counted as cover.

Fighting in bad lighting conditions also penalizes the attacker. Near darkness equals a penalty of -5, full darkness of even -10.

Damage and dying

If the attacking character wins the contest of skill he causes damage. In the noir fiction, guns are super-lethal, maybe even more so than in real life. The same applies to close combat. A well-aimed stab with a knife will probably kill a character outright.

There are the following possible damage results in Thrilling Noir Tales:

Shaken - The character is visibly shaken and gets a -2 penalty on all action during the next turn.

Knocked Out - The character has been knocked out cold and will probably have a headache when waking up again.

Wounded - The character has been wounded badly (for example by being grazed by a bullet). He has a penalty of -10 on all actions until treated properly

Dying - The character has been incapacitated and is dying from shock, trauma or blood loss if not

treated properly

Dead - Your character is pushing up the daisies!

At first the GM decides if the attack caused bashing or lethal damage. Usually fists, blunt weapons etc. cause bashing damage. Weapons like knives, pistols, etc. cause lethal damage.

Bashing damage

The hit character makes a roll vs. 10+Strength. If he's successful, he's only Shaken. If he fails, he's Knocked Out.

Lethal damage

The hit character makes a roll vs. 10+Tenacity. If he's successful he's just Wounded. If he fails, he's Dying or Dead (GM decision).

Restoring health

Character usually can recover from most injuries when they have enough time and get a proper treatment.

Shaken - a shaken character recovers on a successful roll vs. 10+Tenacity. This roll can only be made one turn after he received the Shaken condition.

Knocked Out - a K.O.ed character recovers after a couple of minutes. A successful First Aid roll can be used to get a character back up to

his feet.

Wounded - a wounded character needs to be treated by a physician. A successful First Aid check may remove the -10 penalty for one scene (GM discretion advised).

Dying - a dying character will die if not treated by a physician. A successful First Aid test may stabilize the character, so that he can be moved (GM discretion advised).

Dead - Forget it. He's dead, Jim!

Chases

Chases are one of the tropes of the genre. There is almost no "film noir" without a car chase or the subject running from the police or the private detective.

Basic chase rules

At the beginning of a chase the fleeing character/vehicle and the pursuer are 1 step away from each other.

Then both sides take turns making either Tenacity attribute checks for chases per foot or Driving checks for car chases. The GM may grant bonuses if one side is much faster than the other.

If the fleeing side is successful, the distance is increased by 1 step.

If the pursuing side rolls a success, the distance is decreased by 1 step.

If both sides succeed or fail, there's

no change in distance.

If the distance gets to 5 or the pursuer rolls an automatic failure (natural 20) the fleeing party got away.

If the distance gets to 0, the pursuers catch up and may initiate combat.

Improving the chances

The players are encouraged to describe what they're doing to elude pursuit or to catch up so the GM will give bonuses. Either side can choose to be reckless, which gives them a +5 bonus but means that a failure results in making a check or tripping/crashing which ends the chase and possibly getting injured.

Tripping/Crashing

Tripping is similar to getting bashing damage, crashing with the car can result in lethal damage.

Poisons and environmental damage

Poison damage or environmental damage like suffocation, drowning works much like combat damage. The GM decides if the damage is considered "bashing" or "lethal" damage. Usually a Resist skill roll is made instead of a Strength or Tenacity attribute check.

Advancement

Everytime a character uses a skill in a significant way, he is allowed

to mark it. At the end of each session each player rolls for every marked skill. When he fails the roll, he may add 1 to this skill. When he rolls a 20, he may even add 2 to the skill. If he succeeds he doesn't improve the skill.

No skill may be improved above the maximum of 20.

Optional rule: the GM may allow a player to improve his attributes by training. How this works should be up to the GM. Be creative!

Running Thrilling Noir Stories

TNS is quite a different beast than classic fantasy roleplaying games. When you want to run TNS as a GM you should first think about what kind of campaign you want to run. In the classic "film noir" movies the protagonists usually worked alone or only in small groups. If you want a larger group of players you have to come up with ideas why they are often at the same place.

The easiest way to retain the feel of the genre, you can let the characters separate. This is obviously more work for the GM but if you have prepared your adventure right, it should pose no problems. Adventures for TNS should be non-linear. Plan certain events and scenes beforehand but make sure that it's not important that scene A happens before scene B. The adventure should make use

of clues and encounters, the story is mainly written by the actions of the players and NPCs.

The best way to prepare for a session of TNS is by watching classic movies from the genre like the "Maltese Falcon" or "The Big Sleep". And make sure you have a lot of 1940s music that you can play in the background.

One last note on rules: if you don't like a rule, change it. If you need a rule that's not in the book, make one up. And the most important rule: It's a game! Have fun!

Appendix 1: Equipment

A note on equipment

TNS is not about grabbing loot and finding treasures. Because of that equipment only plays a minor role in this game. Each character should have the equipment needed.

But that does not mean that each character has access to unlimited funds.

Each character should at least have several sets of clothes (for warm and cold weather, formal attire, etc.) and the tools of his trade. Each character also has a flat, house or at least a small rented room above a seedy bar. If a player thinks he needs more stuff, he has to ask the GM for permission.

I advice having a look at Berin Kinsman's excellent Ultimate Pulp Era Gear Archive for inspiration: http://unclebear.com/?page_id=563

Weapons

The following weapons lists a few common weapons for the era. The listed maximum ranges are just a guideline. Usually weapon ranges play no major role in the genre.

Bare fists

Skill: Pugilism
Damage: Bashing
Range: Melee only

Every character can attack with his

bare fists.

Brass knuckles

Skill: Pugilism
Damage: Bashing
Range: Melee only

Brass knuckles, also sometimes called knuckles, or knuckle dust-ers, are weapons designed to deliver the force of punches through a smaller and harder contact area.

Knife/Dagger

Skill: Blades
Damage: Lethal
Range: Melee only

Knives and daggers are small bladed weapons. Everything from the basic kitchen knife to an army knife or punching dagger fits this category.

Throwing knife

Skill: Blades
Damage: Lethal
Range: 20m

Some knives can be thrown. The usual rules for ranged weapons apply. If you need exotic weapons like shuriken, you can use these stats, too.

Hand weapon

Skill: Blades
Damage: Lethal
Range: Melee only

Most other melee weapons like longswords, sabres, rapiers, axes, etc. below to this category. They are not commonly used as weapons in the 1940s.

Revolver

Skill: Shooting
Damage: Lethal
Range: 50m
Ammo: 6+1

A standard .38 caliber double action revolvers with 6 chambers. Must be reloaded for one turn after all shots are fired.

Semi-automatic pistol

Skill: Shooting
Damage: Lethal
Range: 60m
Ammo: 12

A standard 9mm semi-automatic pistol. An empty magazine can be replaced in one turn. The 9mm semi-automatic pistol wasn't in widespread use in the 1940s unlike today.

Appendix 2: Sample backgrounds

Those sample backgrounds should help players and GMs to come up with characters and NPCs of their own. Advanced skills are noted with an asterisk.

Private Detective

Main Skills: *Pugilism, Persuasion, Research*
Starting equipment: *fedora, cheap suit, photo camera, whiskey bottle (half-empty), trenchcoat*

Street cop

Main Skills: *Law, Perception, Shooting*
Starting equipment: *uniform, .38 revolver, nightstick, notepad, pencil*

Police reporter

Main Skills: *Persuasion, Photography*, Research*
Starting equipment: *fedora, cheap suit, press card, photo camera*

Mobster

Main skills: *Pugilism, Shooting, Larceny*
Starting equipment: *suit, tommy gun (SMG), expensive shoes*

Hollywood actor/actress

Main skills: *Seduction, Acting*, Persuasion*
Starting equipment: *expensive suit or dress, expensive shoes, a winning smile*

Spy

Main Skills: *Larceny, Research, Shooting*
Starting equipment: *suit, notebook with secret codes, photo camera, trenchcoat, revolver*

Scientist

Main Skills: *Advanced Skill (Archaeology, Biology, Nuclear Physics, or something similar), Perception, Research*
Starting equipment: *suit, lab coat or fedora and suit, notebook with*

Playtest note

If you want to report any errors you found or if you have any ideas on how to improve the game, please let us know.

<http://quickanddirtygames.com/simplemachinesforum/index.php?board=2.0>