



NATHAN RUSSELL

Trouble around every corner,
a secret on every lip, a gun
in every pocket... danger
is never far away in the

HARD CITY

NOIR ROLEPLAYING

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OSPREY GAMES

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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First published in Great Britain in 2022

This electronic edition published in 2022 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB 9781472849526; eBook 9781472849557; ePDF 9781472849533; XML 9781472849540

Originated by PDQ Digital Media Solutions, Bungay, UK

Osprey Games supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

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WELCOME TO THE CITY

Hey pal, welcome to the city. It's a place full of crime and danger and trouble at every turn. You'll see what I mean soon enough. Just take a look downtown. I mean a real look. Past the skyscrapers, neon signs, polished cars, and brightly lit mom-and-pop stores. See the hollow stare of the doorman who's in too deep with the Syndicate, or the scuffed-up pumps on the dame who's too proud to admit she should run back home to Daddy. Life in the city ain't what anybody expects. Chumps make their way to town with a dollar in their pocket and a big idea in their head, thinking they'll make it big. Well, let me tell you, the only thing that makes it big in the city is trouble. Grifters and dishonest cab drivers, no-good crooks and to-die-for dolls, crime bosses and crooked cops, nosy reporters, and down-on-their-luck gamblers. They've all got a story to tell just like you.

Watch the dark alleys and the shadowy corners, too. That's where hoods and gangsters and the truly desperate lie in wait for someone to swindle, shake down, or worse. It doesn't take much to get caught in a web of danger here in the city. If you're not careful you'll soon find yourself facing the smoking end of a gun, wearing a pair of cement shoes, or taking a one-way trip to the big house. And that's if you're lucky, pal. There are a lotta people here willing to do some dirty things to trade places with you, even just for a moment.

Sure, you mean well, you're not looking for trouble. But it doesn't matter why you're here, maybe you're just another enforcer or private dick, or a scrappy reporter looking to expose the corruption at City Hall. Think you're gonna make a difference in the city. Succeed where all those broken bums that came before you failed. Let me tell you, the city don't care about your good intentions, your big heart, or your burning need for justice. The city's gonna chew you up and eventually you'll look for escape at the bottom of a bottle or in the arms of the wrong person, or you'll end up as one of the problems you thought you were gonna stop.

Aw, hell, don't look so glum pal. What do I know? Perhaps you're different. Perhaps you'll last a little longer than those other guys. I dunno. What I do know is, if you wanna survive the hard city, you gotta be hard yourself. Keep your eyes open, think for yourself, and don't take nothin' at face value. Dig for answers, never trust a friendly smile, and be prepared to shoot from the hip, literally or metaphorically. It doesn't matter how you choose to make your way, think hard, act hard, be hard. Don't take no guff from scrappy kids, wise-cracking hoods, or lippy dolls. Stand tall and project a shadow as long as the skyscrapers are tall. Be prepared to fight for every answer you search for. If things come easy in the city, you're probably in the sights of someone bigger, meaner, and harder than you. Keep your head down, your eyes open, and your chin up. Maybe you'll last long enough to do whatever it is you came here to do.

Hard City is a roleplaying game of hardboiled action and noir mystery. Set in a city that never sleeps, it's a game about hard drinking P.I.s, dangerous dames, tough cops, and burly enforcers who stalk the shadowy streets and smoky bars of a world inspired by film noir and hardboiled detective fiction. It is a game set firmly in the classic black-and-grey era of fedoras and pistols, neon street-signs, and chrome fittings, where death lies around every corner and getting double-crossed is as common as a ten-cent shoeshine. It's a world of dark shadows and hard edges, all accompanied by a steamy crime jazz soundtrack.

The stories *Hard City* is designed to tell draw inspiration from the crime fiction and hardboiled detective stories of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, but the style and tone also lean heavily on the noir films and detective television shows that were popular at the time. You take on the role of the investigators, detectives, and hired guns who seek to stop criminal acts, or solve crimes perpetrated by desperate and dangerous individuals. This doesn't mean your characters are virtuous heroes in white hats, swooping in to save the innocent out of the goodness of their hearts, though. No, every hardboiled hero has their vices, and will have to grapple with tough decisions and moral quandaries before they can hang up their hat and call it a day.

NOIR

Film noir grew to prominence in the 1940s and 50s, identifiable by its distinctive use of lighting and deep shadows, disconcerting camera angles and increasingly risqué and convoluted plots. The core features of noir are found in all manner of movies of the period, including dramas (*Citizen Kane*) and comedies (*Sunset Boulevard*), but are most closely associated with crime and detective stories. *The Big Sleep*, *Double Indemnity*, and *The Maltese Falcon* are iconic examples of film noir. These films are filled with tough guys and gals fighting a losing battle with their personal demons or walking a thin line between right and wrong in the pursuit of justice. It is here that the dark filmic style matches so well with the cynical characters and plots.

Mood

Noir films are visually and thematically dark, with a pervading sense of melancholy, paranoia, and corruption. They invite the audience to consider themes such as the meaninglessness of life, the inevitability of betrayal, and the corrupting nature of power. In doing so, they convey the fears and tensions of the period in which they were created and hold a dark mirror up to society. In noir, the line between right and wrong is blurred and situations often seem hopeless with no good way out. You can never be certain who the bad guy is, where the next threat will come from, or how things will turn out.