



# THAT OLD VOODOO

## INTRODUCTION

Voodoo has been a part of *Shadowrun* since early in the game. It's been used as a magical tradition appearing in the books *Street Magic*, *Magic in the Shadows*, and other magic source-books. It's also been used as a backdrop for a nation or city, like when talking about the Carib League or New Orleans. In other books, Voodoo is used as part of the archetype for some villain or faction that is to be feared.

In this book, we will provide rules updates to bring Voodoo fully into *Shadowrun, Sixth World*. This includes some optional adaptations to the rules that provide players and gamemasters with the ability to make the Voodoo magical tradition different from much of the Unified Magical Theory set of rules. These optional rules allow you to tie the magical tradition closer to the religious tradition's beliefs.

Voodoo is a religion that is practiced by millions of people today. We ask that you treat it in your games with care and respect. Using it as a caricature of the villainous, top-hat-wearing houngan who uses possession spirits to make others do foul things or even enslave others to their will paints a negative picture of a belief in the connections between the spiritual, unseen world and our world. Instead, take a look at the material here, read some additional books about Voodoo, and then build it into the tapestry of your game to bring additional depth and texture.

Remember that we never punch down at those who've been oppressed, but instead we punch up at those in power. Stay safe in the shadows and stick it to the man.

## CREDITS

**Writing:** Aaron Dykstra  
**Playtesting & Proofing:** Brad Kelley, David Light, Thomas Bloom, Dan C. Wlodarski, Chris Wolf  
**Production & Design:** Matt "Po Boy" Heerdt  
**Shadowrun Line Developer:** RJ Thomas  
**Cover Art:** David Hueso

**Interior Art:** Jeff Laubenstein  
**Shadowrun Ebook Developer:** Clifton Lambert  
**RPG Creative Director:** Jason M. Hardy  
**Shadowrun Art Director:** Ian King  
**Sensitivity Reader:** Matt Deos



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## THE HORSE

Misty sat in her car, staring out across the great river, and watching the marine traffic flow up and down the river. The stink rising from the Mississippi was enough to make you gag. Of course, that's assuming that you aren't wearing a respirator—and pretty much everyone in the shanty town on the edge of the river was wearing one. The job was simple. But then, according to Mr. Johnson, they're always simple.

Seated beside her in the front seat of her Wuxing Breezer was Robbie Rattle. Robbie was the houngan at the temple she went to. He was also a teammate and her best friend. The rest of their krewe was spread out, helping keep an eye out for the gambling boat—the Delta Queen. On-board was a girl who worked as a singer that they were being paid to extract. Mr. Johnson said that she was a willing extraction, but it was better to plan for her putting up a fuss.

"She's on the move," came the call from Durienne. He'd willingly gone on the boat to play the inside man.

"We'd best get down to the waterfront, Misty," came the calm voice beside Misty in the Breezer. She eased the car out of the parking lot at the Cajun Fries place and accelerated into traffic toward where they had stashed the flat-bottomed boat. Misty had been the one to pick out all the boats for the team. They wanted something quiet for getting on the gambling vessel, but something quick to get away. That meant a couple flat bottoms with an electric cavitation drive. The way out was going to be louder and faster, using an airboat with a big old fan.

It didn't take long for the two of them to get the boat in the water and pointed in the right direction. The comms were a steady chatter from Durienne, walking them through the place and the security—three stories of gambling and a theater on the main floor. That would be the location of their extraction target. Durienne hadn't seen her yet, but he was sure that she was in the back in the dressing rooms. Security was your standard set of muscles squeezed into a tight suit. They ran in two-person teams and would check in with the pit bosses every ten minutes. Plenty of time for the team to work with. They just needed to hit the agreed upon window which was ten minutes before the target was supposed to be on stage. Null sheen.

Pulling the small quiet boat alongside the gigantic Delta Queen, Robbie turned to Misty. His eyes glazed over for a second, and the ghostly glow of a bare skull shone over his own face as he intoned, "Guede Nibo, please assist us in rescuing this girl from the clutches of her gambling masters." And with that, Misty found herself shoved into the back of her skull, with another presence sharing that space with her. No matter how many times she's done this, she still jumped a little bit when it happened—or she would have, if she had control of her body.

*Dear child, it is so good to see you again. It seems we again must go out and free those who've been oppressed,* rumbled a deep voice that she knew was only in her skull. Guede Nibo's presence calmed her. The nerves were always rough for her when things could go sideways. "Let me tell you about the time ..."

Guede Nibo continued his story as Robbie and Misty climbed the side of the boat. Misty felt the tingle down her spine as she became aware that the lwa had magically concealed them. Robbie sent the "we're onboard" to Durienne, and the two of them made their way toward the dressing room, before finding the way to a pair of goons standing between them and their destination. Robbie quietly whispered, "Hey. Looks like we have another chwal guarding the way."

Inside Misty's skull, she heard Guede Nibo stop his story and speak in a low whisper, *Dear child, one who follows the Petwo nanchon stands before us. I believe this is going to be nasty before it gets better. Hopefully, we come through unscathed, but I promise to help you recover if we don't.* And with that, all was silent in Misty's head.

That silence was shattered a moment later as Misty's body sprang into action, quickly traveling the distance between the entrance to the theater and the two goons. She watched as her fists move, striking one guard in the throat, the chest, and the groin in rapid succession with Guede



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talking about how that will have him pissing blood for a few days. The guard straightened as if he wasn't even hit and lashed out with a roundhouse kick, while his friend appeared to be completely at a loss.

Back and forth the two horses fought on stage. To anyone watching, it'd look like one person was just going through their kata. Although when going through kata, you usually don't copy the movement of being struck repeatedly. But the fight worked in Robbie's favor as he dashed in the now-unguarded hallway, headed toward the back.

The other guard had drawn his taser at some point during the fight but wasn't able to see through Guede Nibo's magic. Misty heard in her skull, *If we can knock him out, the guard won't remember anything about this. But I fear that Ogou Badagri will let the mambo know that we've been here. I will make this last as long as possible, but your friend needs to hurry his sweet little butt up.*

On cue, Misty saw Robbie dragging an unconscious young elf down the hallway. Guede Nibo executed three sharp strikes to the chest of the guard who flew back against the way, collapsing in a heap. The elf singer dropped away from Misty's view, but she headed out to the back of the boat where the sound of a fan-boat came roaring up. Three splashes hit the Mississippi River as Robbie, Misty, and the singer dove over the back. Misty bobbed back to the surface and was suddenly cold and sore from the fight earlier.

The boat pulled up, and the two of them were able to push the slight singer onto the boat before hauling themselves up as well. Time to make the drop-off and then off to the temple to thank Guede Nibo for his aid tonight. It would have been much worse without the aid of the Iwa.

Sample



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## VOODOO AND MAGIC

POSTED BY: COVER

The practice of Vodou, or Voodoo as it is often spelled, has a history that twists and turns as the people who practiced the tradition migrated to new parts of the world. The core of the beliefs come out of the peoples from Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo, but they have evolved with outside influences and merged with new locations. These variations often go based on similar names such as Voodoo, Vodou, Vudu, Hoodoo, etc. and each of these have regional aspects that hold it unique from each of their sibling religions.

The name used by the practitioner will often tell you about their beliefs as well as what part of the world they come from. In Haiti and New Orleans, Vodoun is practiced with male practitioners known as houngans and female practitioners as mambos. In Amazonia, Candomblé is the name of the practice, with male practitioners referred to as pai de santo and female practitioners as mãe de santo. In Hispanic areas, the religion is referred to as Santería with men called santero and women called santera. Within Western Africa, the religion is typically referred to as Vodou, and their practitioners are referred to as oungans or mambos.

The commercial aspects of society have made it difficult to tell the difference between what is really Voodoo and what is some bit of marketing ploy meant to sell you trinkets, rituals, and spectacle. The marketing world has used the religion to both sell you Halloween trinkets and tell you all the horror stories. They will also tell you about unhinged houngan who are sacrificing pigs while laying curses on the populations of small towns and putting spirits into unwilling victims to command and control.

These horror stories have a grain of truth in them that talk about the beliefs and practices. There have been practitioners tainted by darker powers who have committed unspeakable acts, but this is far from what is normal in the various forms of the religion. Hopefully, I can dispel your fears about the practice and help you better understand how it is a core fabric to places like the Kingdoms of Nigeria, the Carib League, and Louisiana.

The religion is centered around the belief that there is an unseen world sitting beside our world—which was oddly prescient for the mundane Fifth World. This unseen world is filled with spirits, also called lwa or loa. These spirits are channeled via rituals to help guide the assembled faithful. The lwa are organized into both a divine pantheon with a creator spirit and a second set of spirits that reflects aspects of nature and people. This has led to some trying to associate it with shamanism, animalism, or ancestor worship. Others see the influence of Christianity in the creator spirit and the divine lwa, associating them with a single god and the associated angels and saints. Different branches of the religion will lean toward different interpretations of the relationship between the unseen world and ours, and they may adopt their own relationship with the lwa.

A second aspect of the religion entails the creation of charms—also called gris-gris—to influence the spiritual world, both for good and ill. This will often include herbs, animal parts, and other meaningful ingredients to create the fetishes. The ingredients used are central to the type of influence the practitioner wishes to wield and using the concept that these ingredients are inhabited by the spirits themselves. These talismans can help in healing, aid in mundane tasks, or cause harm through curses and hexes.

The Awakening changed only a few things to the core of the religion. With the presence of magic users, it was often believed that they were the chosen representatives of the lwa. And from what we have learned from the Unified Magical Theory, nothing really prevents Voodoo priests and priestesses from casting spells. My experience in the community is that they often rely exclusively on communing with the spirits and the use of ritual spellcasting.

## THE UNSEEN WORLD

The various lwa from the Voodoo tradition often go by multiple names. The names vary by different sects of Voodoo, but even within a single sect, a lwa will have multiple names. And that is before you consider the orisha, which play a similar role to lwa but within the Yoruba religion. I'm going to list out the major lwa and orisha, and where I can, I'll provide



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## GLOSSARY

- Asson (AS-son):** A specialized Conjuring focus used by the head priest for calling upon the lwa.
- Bokor (BAW-kawr):** A male Vodou practitioner-for-hire. Often not part of a congregation.
- Caplata (CAP-lah-tah):** A female Vodou practitioner-for-hire. Often not part of a congregation.
- Chwal (SHI-vahl):** A person who is currently possessed by a lwa. The term comes from the concept that the lwa, as a divine horseman is mounting the horse.
- Ginen (GEE-nay):** The conceptual afterlife for the Vodou religion. This is also the name of the metaplane that is home to the lwa.
- Gris-gris (GREE-gree):** Magical charms or fetishes used in Vodou rituals. These charms use colors, shapes, materials, and patterns that appeal to a specific type of lwa. The gris-gris carry spirits that petition the lwa on behalf of the owner of the gris-gris.
- Hounfour (how-oon-FOUR):** A Vodou temple or magical lodge.
- Houngan (how-oon-JAN):** A male Vodou priest.
- Lwa (luh-WAH):** The divine spirits of the Vodou religion.
- Mambo (mom-BO):** A female Vodou priestess.
- Nanchon (NAN-shawn):** A nation of lwa who have similar goals and behaviors.
- Poto mitan (PO-TO-mitt-tawn):** The center post of a hounfour and a core altar used in ceremonies.
- Serviteur (sir-vit-TOOR):** A servant of the lwa and adherent of the Vodou religion.
- Veve (vay-VAY):** A veve is a divine pattern related to an individual lwa.
- Vodou (VO-do):** The name of the religion associated with the worship of the unseen lwa who act as intermediaries between the vodouisant and the divine creator.
- Vodouisant (VO-do-ee-san):** A practitioner of the Vodou religion.
- Voodoo (VOO-doo):** The common slang of North America that has become associated with the magical tradition, as opposed to Vodou, which is associated with the religion.
- Zombie (zom-BAY):** In Vodou, "zombie" is used when talking about a corpse or living person controlled by a spirit who takes command from a bokor or caplata.

some of the other names associated with them. It won't be perfect, because attempts at categorization and organization are always somewhat messy when dealing with religion.

In regions that maintain colonized Catholicism, there is belief in a divine, central godhead named Bondyé who created the universe and maintains order. In Yoruba, they believe in the supreme creator, Olodumare. For the Fon people and Ewe people, Nana Buluku is the supreme goddess. From this central god was created or birthed the Mahu, goddess of the moon, and Lisa, god of the sun. These gods are seen as being apart from the world, and while they've created much of that world, they never get involved. In more practical terms, no voodoo priests summon them. I'm sure that some priest has tried to do so, but I'm not aware of anyone successfully being able to.

The lwa and orisha are major spirits in the unseen world. The lwa are the spirits most

associated with Haitian Vodou, while orisha are associated with Yoruba religion. In Catholicized forms of the religion, they act as the go-between for humanity and the divine. It would take many pages to enumerate all the lwa and orisha, so to keep this brief I will focus on a few of the more commonly summoned spirits. When talking to a few Vodou magicians and mages of other traditions, it sounds like the members of the divine pantheon don't get summoned, but instead act as mentors to the priest. A few mentioned having summoned one of the major lwa or orisha, but it was clearly unusual. Some of the most common spirits are: Agwe, the Lord of the Sea (Sea); Damballa, the Great Serpent (Snake); Erzulie, the Passionate Woman (Seducer); Ghede, the Undertaker (Cat, Mystery); Legba, the Old Man of the Doorways (Dog); Obatala, King of the White Cloth (Eagle); Ogoun, the Orisha of Iron and Fire (Wise Warrior); Shango, the Orisha of Thunder (Thunderbird, War).



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The members of the divine pantheon aren't the only spirits or even the most common that you will come across. Adherents believe that in all things—including animals, land, rivers, and more—have a spirit residing in them that the conjurer can entice to appear and help them. The skilled magician needs to understand what things that specific lwa loves, which can include food, colors, days of the week, and other restrictions. If successful, the lwa will be conjured into a nearby vessel to commune with the summoner.

To be frank, “summoner” is the wrong term to use. Interaction with a lwa is different from the relationship between mages of other traditions and spirits. The relationship between the lwa and conjurer is reversed. The spirit will provide help but at the cost of service from the mage, resulting in mages often being called *serviteurs*. These services are often part of the ritual of summoning, such as providing the right food or choosing the right day. And Voodoo priests have told me of times where the spirit they called upon declined to help them—or even lied to them. The hermetic mage in our group was shocked, even after our priest told him this is normal.

- ▶ Asking for favors from the spirits is not that unusual. Many of the traditions that have been classified as shamanistic or those based on ancestor worship require that the summoner offers placations to the spirit. So Voodoo isn't all that unusual in that regard. Although I don't know if I can really understand a spirit telling me “no.”
- ▶ Elijah

The other part of dealing with lwa is that Voodoo is a possession tradition. Many of the rituals call upon the use of a vessel known as *chwal*, also known as a horse for the spirit to mount. While the lwa can possess other prepared vessels, the use of animal and metahumanity is preferred. This work is made easier if the vessel is prepared for possession, but many priests have relied on a drug called zombie dust to work in a more ad hoc fashion. I spent several years as a *chwal*, and while the initial experience was terrifying, it was something that I became accustomed to. Eventually, I was able to reach some accommodations with the lwa who would displace my consciousness. Those first few experiences left me with no memory of the time outside my body, but after some

interesting negotiations with the spirit, I was able to tag along and observe but without any direct control.

- ▶ I could go into a lot more detail here, but if you really want to ask me a bunch of questions, just come down to the Aurora in Seattle when I'm on shift. You buy some drinks, and I can tell some stories.
- ▶ Cover

Some of the traditions have divided the lwa into *nanchon*, or nations, to group the lwa based on their affiliations and predisposition. This appears to be an affectation from the branches of the religion, whose practitioners came through Haiti during the slave trade—this includes the traditions in New Orleans. A summoner is often aligned with one of these nations and will ask for aid only from lwa that are part of the *nanchon*. The most common *nanchon* are the Rada, Petwo, Anago, Ibo, Djouba, Kongo, and Ghede, with the first two being the most dominant of the nations. Well, Ghede is not really a *nanchon* per se, but is more of just a family. The Rada and the Petwo often appear as opposite sides of the same coin, in which a spirit domain is reflected by a specific lwa in each of the *nanchon*. The Rada are often seen as having a more pleasant demeanor and focus more on helping the community and family. The flip side is the Petwo, which are often seen as hot tempered with a mischievous streak or even outright subversive behavior. This has led many of the criminal elements in Voodoo regions to revere Petwo lwa. That isn't to say that all followers of the Petwo nation are bad, but that any advice you get is likely going to be furthering their objectives and not necessarily yours.

There are several important-to-know aspects to Voodoo rituals when calling upon the aid of a lwa. My good friend told me of a few times when he needed to gain the aid of a lwa but didn't have the time for a ritual. In some cases, he was unable to enlist their aid, but on a few of those occasions a trickster from a different nation answered his call—which caused more problems than it was worth. The rituals usually start with *mangers-lwa* or feeding the lwa. Often food or drink is offered to the lwa, which is left for a specific period of time to allow for the spirit to feed upon the experiences of the food. Whether that food is raw or