

# GAUNTS AND THE UNDERWORLD

## CLASSIC GANGSTER STORY STRUCTURE

The perennial gangster story has a basic five-act structure, which makes an excellent template for an extended campaign.

### Early Roots

The early stages of the campaign detail the characters' backgrounds, where they come from, and why they opted for a life of crime. It will likely begin with the characters as young men or women, and cover both how they meet and why they decide to stick together. The scenarios at this stage are usually based around survival on the streets and making a name for oneself: acts of petty crime, ridding the local neighborhood of rivals, and aspirations to either join a larger organization or create one of their own. It ends either with their induction into the lowest ranks of a syndicate's hierarchy or establishing themselves as an independent force in the local underworld.

### Rise to Power

As the campaign progresses, the characters move more deeply into organized criminal activities. They serve as capos or foot soldiers for the syndicate, carrying out tasks at their superior's behest. They run crooked gambling rings, hijack trucks, or mix it up with rival gangs. They might be called upon to perform an assassination or two, or keep their superiors safe if a mob war breaks out. They gradually learn the ropes, moving upward through the ranks as they defend their organization from external threats. Enemies within the organization are placated or disposed of as the characters display their efficiency to the Don and his underbosses.

Alternately, if they've established their own operations, they need to maintain them in the face of external pressure. The police will need to be paid off or avoided, competing operations shut down (usually forcibly), and existing activities protected from harm. In the early stages, they'll likely need to pay protection to a bigger crew, which carries its own set of tensions and scenario opportunities.

This section should take up a fair bulk of the campaign, as the players go about bettering themselves and their crew. It ends with them in powerful and influential positions: either underbosses serving the Don directly or as a burgeoning organization unto themselves, too big to legitimately be a part of any other crew.

### King of the Hill

With the characters now firmly established as powers within the order, the time has come to seize the top spot for themselves. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. If they're part of an established syndicate, they'll need to take rulership from the current Don. In an ideal world, he would die of old age, or retire after designating the characters as his heirs. But in *The Edge of Midnight*, ideals are hard to come by. Most likely, the Don will either die unexpectedly, prompting a scramble from several groups of underbosses... or the characters will need to engineer his exit themselves. Killing him off would take a great deal of planning, lest anyone else suspect foul play. If someone else does it for them, they'll still need

to contend with rivals' efforts to seize the top spot for themselves (which creates the same sort of chaos as an unexpected death does). And of course, whatever the circumstance, they'll have to cement their power base before any other syndicates take advantage of the situation.

Independent operators face a similar task, though one posited in slightly different terms. Having set themselves up as a power unto themselves, they must now take the leap that gives them dominant control of a wide area — they must go from being a minor force to a major one. Usually, this means seizing additional territory from a rival crew, sometimes sparking a long and bloody gang war. Or they can engineer the destruction of a competing organization, then quickly move in to fill the void. Both circumstances require considerable will and a good sense of timing, as well as the forethought to anticipate any consequences. And of course, while they're busy solidifying their empire, their supposedly loyal underlings may be getting ideas of their own...

This section of the campaign ends with the characters firmly ensconced as the head of a major criminal organization.

### Stagnation

Now that they have become the top dog, the players will find a very large target painted on their backs, as everyone starts grasping at the power they have accrued. Competitors will stake out their territory, minions plot and scheme, and while the Don's word is law, it only lasts as long as he can back it up. Scenarios shift from acquiring power and new territory to defending what they've gained from attackers: blocking hits, wiping out challengers, and keeping their operations safe. They involve much more plotting and scheming, and less direct work; the Don can't lower himself to common shake-downs and leg breakings, can he?

Furthermore, the characters must constantly be on the alert for new enemies and carefully monitor the other syndicates in their city. They must watch for treachery from below as well, for plenty of supposedly loyal followers will be happy to claim their spot if they lower their guard. Legal authorities, too, will have their eye on the characters, as an arrest or indictment will strike a serious blow to the city's underworld.

The process leads to an overall sense of stagnation, as the need to maintain control slowly consumes the characters' lives. With no more worlds to conquer, they find themselves stranded atop their hard-won peak. From here, there's only one direction they can go...

### Downfall

There is no retirement home for mobsters. While a precious few live long enough to reach old age, the rest die — often quite messily — long before then. The theme of sin and repentance comes full circle as the characters must answer for their crimes. Maybe it's an indictment, leading to a sensational trial followed by a lengthy prison term. More likely, it's death from an assassin's bullet, brought down by their hated competitor from across town, or maybe an underboss who decides it's time for new blood. Perhaps they go quietly; perhaps they fight back and perish in a glorious hail of bullets. But whatever the circumstances, it spells the end of the characters and their campaign.

# THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

The downfall is usually fairly brief, constituting a single scenario covering the players' final days. It might be as short as a single scene — a sudden gunfight or an arrest that comes out of nowhere. While it may be brief, however, it requires a fair amount of foreshadowing. The players should be quietly prepared for its eventuality and ready to face it when it happens (though they may be unsure of the exact time and circumstance). Similarly, it should contain a sense of proper closure: a tragic end, a defiant end, or whatever suits your campaign. The players should leave with a sense of fulfillment and completion — satisfaction at the conclusion to their characters' story — even if the party winds up lying face down in a pool of their own blood.

Of course, there's always the chance that the party will ease gracefully into retirement: relaxing on some Borderlands beach or ensconced within the protected luxury of their fortress-like mansions. It's uncommon with the mob, but it does happen. Specific details of such retirement — and whether it still means the end of the campaign or not — are up to the GM.

## JULIUS DULANO

Julius is a mid-level capo working for the Scarelli Mob in Central City. He runs a prime slice of Scarelli territory, collecting fees on three brothels, six underground casinos, and a plethora of other interests in the city's teeming lakeshore district. Ostensibly, he's a local businessman; though he keeps an office in a local mechanic's shop and doesn't appear to own a briefcase, he's worth millions of dollars.

Julius started out running errands for his cousin, a close associate of mob boss Angelo Scarelli. He sold stolen liquor out of the back of his car, helped clean guns belonging to older members, and even planned a few robberies of his own before he was made. He did them all with an air of detached professionalism, enjoying the sense of rebellion it conveyed but never letting his emotions run away with him.

He was formally made following an incident with a gaunt at the Friendly Boys mechanic's shop. The leatherback had applied for a job and been turned down because of his condition. He returned with a pair of gaunt friends, and was in the midst of pounding the owner senseless when Dulano walked in. He shot the first gaunt dead and held off the remaining two until other members of the Scarelli mob showed up. In gratitude, Antonio made him capo, granting him his protection and allowing him to use the Friendly Boys as his permanent headquarters.

Dulano is a good face man, always ready to help someone out with a little extra cash or muscle applied to the right irritant. Indeed, he views himself as a generous rich man, happy to spread his good fortune around to his friends and neighbors. There's a high price for his services, of course, but he's smart enough not to collect personally; he has plenty of flunkies to do that for him. His foot soldiers meet every morning before the Friendly Boys opens, where he explains the day's "chores" to them. Fearful of prosecution, he never writes anything down, instead committing it to memory. His underlings are unnerved at how well he remembers every task he assigns them

and keep track of every dollar earned. He allows them to skim a bit off the top so long as they're not greedy, and none of his crew ever wants for money.

The local neighbors fear him, but not unduly so, and most pay monthly fees to his protection racket. To Dulano's credit, he has kept overt crime in the immediate area down; outsiders who think to rob one of "his" stores will have their legs crushed beneath the Friendly Boys' hydraulic car lift. His bodyguards are all mechanics at the shop. Some half-dozen are always working there when he's around, and they all carry handguns beneath their mechanics' overalls. One of them is a minor warlock, who enjoys using his abilities to fix cars when not protecting Dulano's behind. When the capo has to visit his superiors, he travels in a jet black limousine, kept in storage around the clock in case he needs it. The warlock mechanic always serves as his driver.

Dulano is short, about five-foot eight, with black hair and a thick mustache. He keeps himself in good shape by working a heavy bag hanging in the back of his office. He can usually be found in shirtsleeves and suspenders, though his clothes and workplace are always immaculately clean. His desk contains carefully organized receipts of the Friendly Boys' proceeds, and a large chalkboard behind the desk lists various incoming and outgoing repairs. None of it has even the slightest taint of illicit money to it; an accountant going through his desk would find nothing but above-the-boards materials. Scarelli uses the place as a money launderer, which depends solely upon Dulano's outstanding memory, and a set of books kept as far away from the Friendly Boys as possible.

Personally, Dulano comes across as warm and friendly, like an uncle who enjoys corny jokes a little too much. If someone in the neighborhood comes to him for a loan, or asks for a couple of bruisers to help out with a strike, he handles it the same way he would a small child asking to borrow a quarter. He speaks in calm, measured tones and always looks people in the eye. His propensity for violence is as strong as any mobster, but he always has an explanation for the harm he inflicts; he'll deliver beatings or stabbings with a matter-of-fact verbal rundown of the victims' various transgressions. He retains the same prejudice against gaunts as Scarelli himself, though he never lets it show to outsiders. In recent years, Dulano has become a go-between for outsiders wishing to speak to Scarelli or his underlings. Anyone who has business with the higher-ups in the Scarelli mob would be well advised to seek him out.

### Julius Dulano

**Attributes:** Brains 6, Brawn 6, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

**Wounds:** 5, **Vigor:** 35.

**Skills:** Athletics 4, Brawl 7, Evasion 7, Firearms 6, Intimidation 7, Perception 7, Streetwise 8.

**Backgrounds:** Alert, Rugged, Wise.

**Profession:** Gangster 2.