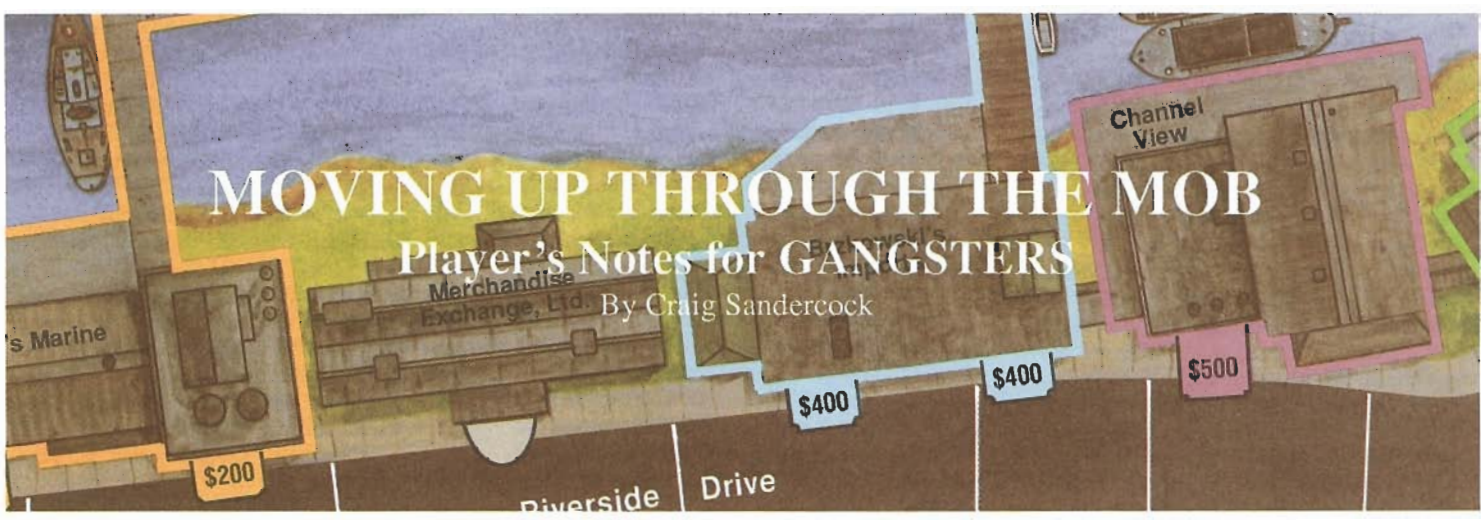


MOVING UP THROUGH THE MOB

Player's Notes for GANGSTERS

By Craig Sandercock



GANGSTERS is our newest multi-player family game; in fact, the ink is barely dry on it yet. Hoping to give you readers an edge over the opposition when GANGSTERS inevitably shows up at your local game club, we culled the following hints on strategy from the reports of one of the best playtesters involved in its final development.

Basic Principles

Even before the game begins, there are some decisions to be made . . . and I've some suggestions for players first entering the world of the Roaring Twenties.

Buy your first three Joints in the same neighborhood, as they will be easier to defend from the Cops and attacking Gangsters if they are close together. Buildings that are connected to each other are particularly useful as they can help your Gangsters maneuver while on their own "turf". Once the game has begun, when you have a bit of money to spare, move your Racketeer around your neighborhood buying more Joints to give yourself more opportunities for Organized Crime. Start with the cheaper properties, and accumulate some cash before moving up to the higher class of corruption. And put aside a reserve of cash (I like at least \$2000) for emergency recruiting. Owning fancy gin joints will not help you much if an all-out Gang War begins.

Always start the game with at least one of each character (and preferably at least four Racketeers) so that you will have two movement options each turn. Recruiting more members is important to keep up your Gang's strength and influence, but do not pay to raise your Thug's or Racketeer's level above "6"; they are too easily reduced by Shootouts and Seduction to make that expense worthwhile. Taking a Racketeer up to a strength of "6" is very important, since you will then have that third movement option.

Once the game begins, bribe a Cop whenever you roll a "1" on the blue die; the expense is small and moving any Cop one space is rarely a matter of "life or death". When moving Cops, first look to see if you can do so to arrest an opposing Gangster (criminal-side up) or Raid an opponent's Joint (any with a Public piece inside). Many first-time players forget that Cops can use the subway and so miss such

opportunities; always study the board carefully. If there are no arrests or raids to be made, check to see if you need to move away any Cops infringing on your territory. If your neighborhood is already free of Cops, bring on a new Cop in the territory of your enemy (assuming the Crime Level is high enough).

Extortion is the easiest way to make money in *GANGSTERS*, and getting your Thug and/or Vamp into unowned buildings is your first priority. Both characters extorting every turn will bring in an average of \$700, an income for which I am sure you will find a use. When extorting, you must always keep your eyes open for approaching Cops, as getting arrested can ruin your day. The gray buildings are better Extortion sites, because they have only one entrance - which makes it harder for the Cops to catch you during your nefarious activity. Never leave any Gangster white-side-up within six spaces of a Cop on patrol. Try to move them to another unowned building where no Cop can reach them in one move; but if that is not possible, then just move them anywhere and flip them back to being honest citizens.

Organized Crime can be very remunerative, but requires more care than simple Extortion. After your Thug and Vamp are in safe locations and raking in a steady income, use your remaining movement options to bring the Public into your neighborhood. Even if you cannot move a Public piece into one of your Joints immediately, having it in the neighborhood both increases the chances of enjoying some Organized Crime on your next turn and temporarily keeps the Public away from your opponents' Joints. While keeping the Cops away from your Joints is always good policy, don't become overly worried about Police Raids. Even a single payoff from Organized Crime is guaranteed to generate income at least equal to the loss you would suffer from a possible Raid there, and sometimes you will collect much more.

Avoid fights with other Gangs as much as possible. Mob Violence is always costly for both sides - not only because of the expense in replacing casualties but also because the movement options you must use in making "hits" could have been more profitably used in raking in loot. But there is no reason not to encourage other players to fight it out with each other (as long as you stay out of the battle yourself). If one player is clearly in the lead and on the fast

track to victory, the others may need to combine their efforts and attack him to catch up . . . but even then it is best to open the operation with a unified front of Cops, not Gangsters.

Vamps should always begin the game by Extorting in a safe place. Once some money has been stockpiled for emergency uses, your lady can move on to a more aggressive activity - Seduction. If your Racketeer is not yet at level "6", those of the other players should be her first targets. Vamping can lead to violent retribution; but if you are well prepared financially to replace her, the rewards are worth that risk.

As mentioned with regard to Mob Violence, the first diplomatic priority of a trailing group of players should be a general agreement to use the Cops exclusively against the leader. A further step in such an alliance would be to agree to a concerted effort to keep the Public away from the leader's Joints. While player-interaction in *GANGSTERS* is limited, as in many other multi-player games, there will be times when co-operation is the "name of the game". Stay open to all approaches.

If, however, *you* are perceived as the player in the lead, you should try to convince the others that you are not actually in the lead at all . . . or at least not significantly. Failing that, do all you can to foment disagreements among the opposing Gangs. Since all have conflicting needs for money, it should not be too hard to disrupt their alliance. Simply leaving a Public piece in place in one of their Joints during your own turn can often work wonders. If that does not work, there is always whining and groveling.

The easiest path to victory is to quietly collect \$10000 cash. Always keep your cash secret (unless you want to prove that you have less money than they suspect, and even then you do not have to show them *all* of your money). Do not make the mistake of hoarding your money to the extent of neglecting your Gang, however. The good player will always have all three characters of his Gang in play, with reasonably strong Thug and Racketeer, and own several Joints. Having lots of money will not save you from severe setbacks if your Gang is not strong enough to repel a moderate attack. The best path for the beginning player is the "middle road": having neither the best Gang, nor the worst Gang, as either extreme invites attack from your rivals.

Intermediate Play

Now you have moved to the higher level of Crime and are no longer a mere “punk”; time to refine your strategy and tactics. Again, this starts before even the first piece is moved.

Buy relatively cheap properties at the beginning of the game, so that you will have money left over to spend on your Gang, which is more important than property at the outset. Buy a pair of either Protection or Rackets (or even three of a kind), and start your Racketeer in one of those Joints. In that way, you will have the opportunity to “improve” the Joint without even moving him into the “mean streets”. You may even want to consider saving enough money from the initial investments to improve a Joint on your very first turn.

The advantages of an “improved” Joint are obvious: increased profits from Organized Crime; the Joint is not lost to a Police Raid; it is more costly for other Gangs to “knock over”; and it provides increased protection if your Gangsters need to hide from an opposing Gang. But remember that Joint improvements don’t count towards Victory, so don’t get carried away by improving everything; be selective in terms of where and when.

Once this is done, you are ready to expand your criminal empire. When considering buildings to purchase, count the spaces from the nearest subway station. Nine of the colored buildings can be reached in exactly one move from a station (e.g., both the blue and green warehouses can be reached in one move from Subway Station #4). This means that you could bring a Public piece onto the board and into these Joints in one swift move. The drawback, of course, is that other players can also start a new Cop and move it into one of these Joints for a sudden Police Raid. Even if you face the possibility of a Raid, however, it is always worth the chance to collect a payoff; there is only one-in-six odds that the next player will roll what is needed to conduct the Raid.

If you save at least \$400 from your initial Joint purchases, you can afford to start the game with six Racketeers, one Thug and one Vamp. This will give you three movement options each turn, from the very beginning. Your first priority is still to get your Thug and Vamp into safe buildings for Extortion; but you can use that third option to start bringing on the Public at a time that other players may not be able to take advantage of them. As soon as you have some cash and a low black-die roll, recruit your Thug some company and make him less vulnerable.

If your Thug is eliminated, you should recruit at least one as soon as possible, regardless of the black-die roll. On a roll of “6”, one Thug costs \$600, which he will recover through Extortion in just a few turns. You want to build up the Thug’s strength quickly, but meanwhile any further high black-die rolls will generate a goodly income while you wait for a low roll. On the other hand, if your Vamp is eliminated, you will probably have to wait for a low red-die roll of “1” or “2” (even “3”, depending on how desperate or flush you are) before recruiting a new one.

When moving a Cop, keep in mind the Bribe markers you have. If you own Cop #5, for

instance, moving him will guarantee that the move can not be cancelled by another player. And, conversely, if the choice comes down to Cop #5 and one in your neighborhood, it is important to remember which is more dangerous to you and move him out first.

If you should happen to draw the “Untouchable” marker, consider who is bribing the most Cops. If you invest in Bribes more often than any other player in the game, keep the marker to reduce your losses. If all seem to bribe Cops as often as you, throw it back into the cup so others can share your misfortune . . . but not immediately. Wait until another player has actually made the announcement to bribe a Cop, because it may turn out that you are the one who wants to do so and there is no need to draw the “Untouchable” again if you can avoid it.

Give some thought as to how the Crime level compares to the current number of “Cops on Patrol”. In some situations, you may want to strategically alter the Crime Level by flipping your Gangsters. The advantage of doing this is that you can, in that manner, influence whether or not the next player is able to bring a new Cop into play. If you have some particularly lucrative Organized Crime in progress, you may want to lower the Crime Level enough to prevent the next player from starting a new Cop that could Raid your Joint - especially if it can be reached from a subway in one turn. If the Crime Level is low and you want the next player to be able to start a new Cop to use against a common enemy, you may wish to engage in some penny-ante crimes just to raise the Crime Level.

When possible, having your Thug and Vamp extort in the same building is often safer than splitting them up. If they are together, there is only one building from which to exclude nosey Cops instead of two, and the Thug can serve to protect your Vamp from hostile Racketeers. The danger is that if a Shootout does occur with Cop or enemy Thug, it could be doubly disastrous for your gang.

When choosing a site for your strong-arm tactics, keep in mind how safe the building is. Those with only one entrance (all gray buildings, and a few colored buildings) are the most difficult for Cops and other Gangsters to reach. Buildings close to a Subway Station are risky, as Cops can readily transfer from other parts of town and arrive right on your doorstep. The 13 buildings (nine colored and four gray) that can be reached in a single move from a Subway Station are definitely to be avoided. Buildings at intersections are also dangerous, as attackers can approach from several directions. The safest locations are found near the edge of the board and near bridges, since movement tends to be restricted in these areas.

Since there are only four Public pieces (of varying values), it is important to keep track of which are on the board already. For example, if you notice that both the higher value Public pieces are in play, you may opt to use a movement to move one of these more lucrative prey towards your neighborhood rather than start a new lower-value Public piece.

When moving the Public, look for long stretches of road without any intersections (par-

ticularly those around bridges) that pass through your neighborhood. All you need do is point the Public in your direction on these roads and they cannot be diverted nor turned back. Even if the piece does not get as far as your Joints, it is not available to be of profit to the other Gangs.

But what of attacking the other players? At some point, you’ll want to slow them down, or bring a leader back into the pack. A few tips for getting at the rival Gangs seem in order here.

The safest and most “defensive” hit is to use your Racketeer to eliminate an opposing Vamp. Vamps cannot return fire, so there is no immediate risk. And the benefits of a successful strike are several: there is less danger to all in having their strength “vamped” away; the target Gang’s income is reduced (at least temporarily); and the rival Gang must spend both money and a movement option to recruit a new Vamp.

Another type of attack you may wish to consider is using your Thugs against an opposing Racketeer. If the two are of equal strength at the start of the Shootout, odds say that you should inflict twice as much damage as you suffer. The dice may, of course, dictate otherwise; but in general pitting your Thugs against opposing Racketeers will always be in your favor. Even if the Racketeer is twice as strong as your Thug, on the average you will score the same number of hits on each other . . . but the Racketeer’s losses will be twice as expensive to replace.

Yet another kind of “attack” involves moving any one of your white-side-up pieces into the same space as a Public marker, so that the Public is removed at the end of your turn. Your own Gangster will be in danger of arrest, but it may be worth the risk to remove a high-value Public piece from the neighborhood controlled by a rival.

But, your Vamp remains the best “attacker” you have; Seduction is so much more subtle than a Shootout. To sneak up on an unsuspecting Thug or Racketeer, first move your Vamp close to a Subway Station. Once she is in position, try to calculate before your turn which red-die roll(s) your Vamp can use to reach an opposing Gangster. This avoids that clumsy counting of spaces which signals that your vamp is on the prowl, while saving you some precious seconds during your move.

When debating whether to vamp a Thug, check to see if that Gang’s Racketeer is more than six spaces away from the Thug; if so, the Thug is a much safer target. When vamping a Racketeer, first consider how easy it might be for him to circle back to the space and fire on your Vamp. Buildings with multiple entrances, Joints connected to others owned by the same Gang, and street spaces adjacent to the enemy’s Joints are particularly dangerous.

But if you wish to avoid conflict with a particular Gang, you can try to establish territorial boundaries that opposing members cross only as a declaration of open Gang Warfare. Such security is largely symbolic, however, as the subways allow for sudden movement to within your neighborhood no matter how secure.

If one player is in the lead, others will need to resort to unusual measures to redress the balance of power. Allies could agree to leave the Public in each other’s Joints as a way of

increasing income that is promised to be invested to harm the leader. Allied Gangs might move their pieces into the same location for increased security. If the leading player is particularly offensive, the weaker Gangs could even pool their property or money to produce a surprise victor from within their ranks (and so end an unpleasant game, perhaps).

A more aggressive approach to winning than just accumulating money becomes a real possibility as you gain experience with *GANGSTERS* - steadily buying property from the start of the game. Start your Thug and Vamp extorting to provide a regular income and use your movement options to keep them out of trouble with the Cops. Meanwhile, move your Racketeer from one cheap building to another around the map. Try to buy a new Joint every turn. But if you cannot reach a nearby building, leave your Racketeer in place and improve it a level on the following turn. Don't bother with Organized Crime unless a particularly profitable opportunity presents itself, as the inevitable Raid will reduce your holdings.

Once you have eight or nine Joints, your opponents will be forced to continually waste their energy attacking your operation in an attempt to close them down. You can keep the pressure on by buying another every turn. If this becomes a prolonged pattern, you could even sneak into a win by quietly collecting all of one color while your opponents are concentrating on stopping you from having ten Joints. Or you might even manage to reach that elusive ten grand during all this foolishness.

Advanced Play

Equipping your Thugs with "heaters" is obviously a fine idea before launching a Gang War. When used offensively, heaters are most effective when combined with the flexible movement that "wheels" can provide to your marauding band of Thugs. But if you can afford to buy these early, they can also be a useful deterrent against any attack. Do not buy heaters when your Thug's strength is less than "4" however, as they are too easily lost. If your Thug is badly weakened in a Shootout, make recruiting or vamping more levels a priority to reduce the risk of losing the heaters. In short, adding the heaters will be seen as escalation, and certainly "heat" up the game.

"Wheels", as noted above, can be very helpful in the game. They provide even greater flexibility to all three of your mob members. Even though they are used for only one each turn, you can always use them with whichever you need most to move. On a high roll of the three dice, and making use of the wheels and the subway, a Gangster can reach anywhere in the city. Figuring the route might be a bit complicated, however, so it is important to have a clear idea of where you want to be before your timed move begins. If you are trying to move a piece into a nearby building but did not get the needed low roll, you may still be able to use your wheels to get there in a circuitous fashion. (Remember, you can cut through Joints that you own, or can transfer to the subway in order to approach the building from the opposite direction.) The wheels are very powerful when used to make a hit or seduction. Such actions will

inevitably escalate the violence, so be sure to maintain a strong Racketeer to prevent the possibility of the loss of both movement options and your wheels if he is targeted.

As with heaters, a "Siren" is most effective when combined with the powerful movement of "wheels". Unlike heaters, however, outfitting a siren has no defensive excuse at all (it may even provoke a pre-emptive strike), so you'd best buy one only if you plan to make quick use of her. Usually this means that your Vamp is in striking range of other Gangsters, and you have enough money set aside that you will not need the Vamp to extort. The best sequence is to use your Siren to vamp a Gangster in a gray building (usually a Thug busy with Extortion), so that on your next turn she can become a siren again and land on another victim (preferably in a gray building again).

Then there is the most popular marker in the game, one unique in the annals of gaming - "Donuts". The mere smell of Donuts can be used to stall a Cop that is poking around in your neighborhood; but this should only be done if your blue-die roll is insufficient to get him out of it entirely. Moving a Cop into a Donut Shop only delays the problem, and there is always the possibility that another player can turn over that Cop's bribe counter to get him moving so he can annoy you. If a rival Gang uses its Donut marker to delay a Cop, check your own bribes when you (or an allied player) have an opportunity to reach out with him and strike the offender. Parking a powerful Cop in another Gang's neighborhood is an even better use of Donuts. Once there, the Cop threatens their criminal activities, yet is safely far from your own turf.

"Random Movement Order" is perhaps the wildest of the optional rules. It demands of the players the ability to think fast, yet offers so many opportunities that it is hard to resist using it once you have mastered the game's mechanics. Whenever your marker is drawn first from the cup, consider that if it is drawn last in the next series of turns, every other player will have taken two turns in between. This means that you must be extra careful not to leave your Gangsters in vulnerable positions where they can be attacked, arrested or vamped. If your Thug, for instance, has been extorting and you roll a black-die "1", it is best to forego that measly 100 bucks and move him (so flipping him back to a law-abiding civilian).

On the other hand, if your marker is the last drawn in a turn, you should keep in mind that there is a 25% chance (in a four-player game) that you will have the next move as well. Therefore, it pays handsomely to give extra attention to moving the Public into your neighborhood. If you can get one of those patsies into one of your Joints, you might well collect two Organized Crime payoffs in a row. And the possibilities for your Vamp and Thug (especially if combined with "heaters" or "wheels") boggles the mind.

Five-Player Game

With the fifth player, who takes on the role of the police in this crime-ridden metropolis, Gangster players should generally bribe a Cop on any blue-die roll of "1" or "2", as they so

reduce the activity of the Police Commissioner. As a Gang, players should keep more money in hand in this version for the more expensive bribes. If a Cop would be able to use your blue-die roll to arrest one of your Gangsters, it is better to pay the bribe than let him move. If the draw cup is empty (because all the bribes have been bought), you can still throw one of your own back in order to buy it back again. On the other hand, on a low blue-die roll, check to see if any Cop can use that to reach a rival gang member and catch him red-handed. If so, you may wish to pass up the cheap bribe and urge the Cop player to move against the other Gang. Obviously, however, don't do this if the Police Commissioner (the Cop player) is well in the lead; you may even need to pay more expensive bribes simply to keep the Cops from making lucrative arrests of other Gangsters (as well as your own)! When the Commissioner is close to winning, all the Gang players can do is bury the hatchet and work together to reduce police activity and arrests as much as possible. (Attacking Cops is always counter-productive, as they are easily replaced and the Commissioner will profit from the Shootouts.)

For the Police Commissioner player, strategy is a bit of a mix of opportunism and skill. Make arrests whenever possible, regardless of the odds. Patrols being shot up by Gangsters does not hurt your position, as you have an endless supply of "blue boys". Try to move each Public piece on the board out of the reach of all Joints; but when this is not possible, concentrate on moving the piece away from the most valuable Joints or those owned by the most successful gang.

Do not be afraid to spend \$300 or \$400 for a bribe marker, as they are crucial to your success in the game. The Gangsters are not likely to give you any better deals on their turns (remember that bribes are your *only* expense). Once you own a bribe, you need never give it up - even the "Untouchable" marker should be kept. The more bribe markers you have, the less chance there is that your movements on the board will be blocked.

If there are no arrests or raids to be made, and a bribe is too expensive or not available, use your turn to bring a new Cop into play. Don't bother to just move Cops around on the map (other than to make an arrest) until you have as many on patrol as possible. The more Cops you have in play, the greater the chances of making arrests in later turns. If the Crime Level is too low to allow you to put a new Cop on the streets, move one to a Subway Station; having one ready to transfer greatly increases your striking range and worries the evil-doers.

Conclusion

GANGSTERS is a clever, and fun, game. While light-hearted, the strategy and tactics are quite deep and mastering them a real challenge. The timed-moves aspect demands the best of the players, and victory will often go to the one who can best think under pressure and not be distracted from his game plan by momentary setbacks. I hope the above suggestions may prove of worth to you when you are under the gun in *GANGSTERS*.



