

Professor Q's Guide to the Voodooist

Welcome to my guide to the probably overlooked Voodooist Arcane Background that can be found in the Hexarcana of Deadlands Classic. This class is another testament to the Classic Writer's ability to create a unique experience for every pathway you can choose, because the Voodooist's mechanics are difficult to compare to other classes. If I were to take a stab at it, I'd say mechanically, and also thematically, they're something of a cross between the Huckster and the Shaman. While they have reverence for spirits and have relatively reliable spells, they also focus more on "offensive" magic rather than the more utility-based magic available to the Shaman.

Once you've gotten beyond whether you want to play a Louisiana Witch Doctor, the first question most players ask is whether the Arcane Background is even any good. The answer is yes, very yes.

But there are a couple of drawbacks to the class to consider:

1. **Voodooists are very much a supplement class** – They simply don't have the support that the excellent Blessed and Huckster have as far as spell options available, just because they were added later in DL Classic's lifespan. Because of this, you're going to lack a lot of versatility that other Arcane Backgrounds enjoy unless you work with your Marshal to create new spells.
2. **Voodooists are more expensive than their competitors** – The Voodooist is a dice-dependent caster that requires TWO skills to support their casting – Conjurin' and Faith. You can focus on one more than the other, but you want the benefits of both. Aside from that, they're literally more expensive. You're either going to want to get a lot of Scroungin' (ANOTHER skill) or you're going to want the Dinero Edge.

So what are the advantages?

1. **Completely unique spells** – More on this in the Spell Section, of course, but the Voodooist does a couple of things really well compared to other classes, and they have the ability to count coup, which is normally unique to playing as an extremely risky Harrowed.
2. **Reliable casting** – Much like the Shaman, the Voodooist enjoys almost complete reliability for their spells in the moment. They do have a "backlash" mechanic, but it only happens on a bust – so if you have 5 dice in your casting stat like you should that's really a minor point. More to the point, because some of the Voodooist's best spells are prepared ahead of time and have no fail chance when actually used, you have an ace up your sleeve that only stored appeasement can trump.

How to build your Voodooist

First things first, of course, is to make sure you have five points in Faith and Conjurin'. Where to put your dice types is extremely dependent on which spells you want to specialize in though, because unlike the Huckster whose power is entirely based on card hands, you really want high dice types in your main casting stats, otherwise you're either going to see a lot of failure and a sad lack of raises when it could matter. In general, anything less than a d12 isn't going to see hardly any raises at all. But then, there are a lot of spells that simply don't have any benefits for raises.

Because of this increased dice dependency I'm going to organize my spell ratings a little differently for this class. Instead of ordering them alphabetically, I will list them based on the stat they are associated with. Additionally I will be marking spells with raise benefits as well (with the (@) symbol).

One big advantage Voodooists have is shrines. They're fairly easy to set up if you have time, which is really your biggest enemy for any of your spell casting. You get a +4 to your Conjurin' with a shrine, so any prepare ahead of time spells with no raise benefits can easily get away with a d8 in the associated stat.

There are four major casting stats for the Voodooist: Cognition, Knowledge, Smarts, and Spirit. Out of those Cognition and Spirit benefit the most from getting raises, though Knowledge has two spells that require an opposed roll, and those generally benefit from high dice. Besides Eye of the Beholder, the raise benefiting Cognition spells aren't really that great.

So my best suggestion for how you should put the dice in your stats is if you have a d12, put it in Spirit. It has the most benefit for raises. If you have any d10s, I'd pick either Knowledge or Smarts, with a slight emphasis on Smarts because of Scroungin'. Ideally, of course, you might want a d10 in both. Cognition can probably get away with a d8, or could be completely ignored (for casting purposes only, of course. It's a good stat normally).

Beyond Casting

I HIGHLY Recommend picking up Shootin' with your Voodooist. Thematically speaking, it's probably more appropriate to be a knife user or something of the sort, but because of the nature of your casting you probably can't afford to pick up both Strength and Nimbleness, and you really don't need greater than a d8 in Deftness to be a decent gunman.

You can still technically do the knife thing if you're throwing them, but your main damage source as a Voodooist comes from the spell "Wanga", so you definitely want a weapon that can be used over and over again to take full advantage.

With that said, it's not impossible to provide damage support with other options, I just think that picking up Deftness and a good Rifle, Pistol, or Shotgun is just way more optimal.

The Rating System

As always, I will be using a 5 point scale to rate each aspect of the Voodooist:

* - This option is garbage and should never be taken except in very bizarre circumstances

** - This option has redeemable qualities, but is too circumstantial to consider most of the time

*** - This is a solid option, and is worth taking for most characters

**** - This is a great option, you'll definitely want this eventually if not right away

***** - This is an awesome option. Prioritize this.

In addition, I will be adding a special (@) symbol for any spell that especially benefits from raises.

Favored Loa

From what I can tell, the favored Loa isn't required. So with that in mind, my suggestion for which Loa you should pick is "Don't." They're expensive, they come with drawbacks, and overall they're a waste of Edge points or Bounty points. My biggest problem with these guys is that the Voodooist has no equivalent to Holy Roller or the Shaman "Luck" Favor to give them more chips to spend on the powers (the closest thing they have is Foretellin' but that's a dubious spell at best). So you're often going to be spending good BP for a small benefit.

But, I'm going to rate them anyway. Keep in mind that the possession effect of the Loa only occurs when you use the chip power. For the most part they aren't anything you can't work around, but if they're really bad, I'll mention them.

Agwe ():** The water Loa. White chip improves Trade Seamanship by +5, Red chip makes you auto-succeed Cognition checks to avoid surprise for around 6 to 12 hours, Blue chip makes you a fast swimmer who can overcome any swimming challenge Legend chip makes your ship invincible on the waters. Obviously this is completely circumstantial to a water-based campaign like the Maze or Mississippi. In that case this power is tempting to have around, since as long as you keep a few Fate Chips handy you're pretty much set. The white chip power is duplicated by the Spell Charm o' Success, but nothing says they don't stack.

Baron Samedi (*):** White chip lets you heal Harrowed with the "Heal" spell (which I assume refers to Conjure Doctor, unless you're suddenly dabbling in shamanism) – which is fantastic if you have a Harrowed character in your party. Red chip lets you speak with the dead – which is actually one of my favorite things to be able to do, if you're ever doing any mystery solving, speaking with the dead is completely broken.

Blue chips make you invisible to zombies, except they have to be created by Black Voodoo – pretty much worthless most of the time unless there's a ton of Voodoo going on where you're at. Legend chip lets you summon a Zombie to do a specific bidding. Cool, but it's a Legend chip. Overall I think that Baron is something you might consider if you have a Harrowed friend in the party, but the main selling point is the Speak with Dead power. If one of your friends is playing a Blood Mage though, they get a similar spell without needing to spend a Fate Chip. Also the possession effect will let you win drinking contests.

Damballah-Wedo (*)**: White chip gives you the ability to spend a Fate Chip to get money equal to a Faith: Voodoo roll – total garbage.

Red chip makes you immune to all poisons – potent, but it only lasts 5 minutes or so. Great if you want to poison both glasses with locane powder (if they're not weirded out by you acting like a snake after you start drinking).

Blue chip lets you climb anything and lets you fall up to 30 feet. Also lets you squeeze through tight passages. Cool power overall, and has a decent duration.

Legend chip gives you a poisonous bite that paralyzes the target's limb. Not useful against any abomination, meaning that it's probably not worth a Legend chip in most cases, even if it's a really cool power.

Overall this one is weird, but the red and blue chip powers are pretty solid.

Ezrili-Freda-Dahomey (*)**: White chip gives you a +5 to Persuasion vs. men, and +2 to women. Solid, if you've got a decent Mien.

Red lets you boost that Mien, even to supernatural levels. +5 dice types is an insane amount, and will net you at least a d12+2 if you completely dumped the stat.

Blue lets you charm someone on an opposed Faith vs. Spirit roll, completely preventing them from attacking you. This doesn't work against abominations unless they're a Harrowed male, so overall not terribly useful for a blue chip.

Legend chip lets you make a suggestion for another Faith vs. Spirit roll. This is good for manipulating society, so I'll give it a pass.

Final verdict: the Mien boosting is insane, and the Persuasion bonus is solid for a white chip. If you're playing a female character (or the ultimate drag queen) this makes you a great party face in the right places, if not a slightly sleazy face.

Legba (**)**: White chip gives you Tongues; very useful.

Red lets you open any non-magical lock; also very very nice.

Blue gives you a massive bonus to Strength, making the minimum dice type d12+2 if you took my suggestion for 5 points in Faith.

Legend chip gives you the effect of Babble-on mixed with Parley – you can completely control the communication in an area. It doesn't give a duration, but I assume it lasts at least for the normal possession time (an hour). Not worth a Legend chip, probably.

So far this sounds really great. What's the drawback you ask? Complete and total incapacitation unless you succeed a TN 7 Spirit check for 1d4 rounds. If you have a decent Spirit though, this is probably my favorite Loa for overall usefulness, and if you decide to go melee, the blue chip power is downright incredible.

Loco (**):** White chip makes you untrackable for enough time to throw anyone off your trail – which isn't too shabby if not a little circumstantial.

Red chip lets you heal one wound point on a target after a minute casting time with no roll necessary. I think this is pretty worthless, especially considering a Red chip can block 2 wounds in the first place. Helpful for other people, maybe, but you also have Poultice or Conjure Doctor for that.

Blue chip instantly restores wind to you and your party – awesome.

Legend chip lets you use Conjure Doctor to heal maimed wounds, which is the only way you can do that with this class. This Legend power is actually worth it.

I'm not a fan of the red chip power, but the other chip powers make this Loa very worth considering if you want to bolster the healing aspects of your class.

Ogu (**):** White chip is a 5 minute +2 bonus to your favorite attack aptitude – pretty good if you want to try a few trick shots, otherwise a TN 5 isn't normally too hard to hit. Better if you're a melee fighter though since Fightin' aptitudes add to the TN of hitting a target.

Red chip gives you 3 armor vs fire based attacks and makes you immune to smoke. Oddly circumstantial, but since it comes in a package you mostly just need to not forget you have it if the opportunity suddenly comes up.

Blue chip gives you 1 armor and lets you ignore 2 wound levels. This is good, but maybe a little underpowered for a blue chip.

Legend chip raises all of your dice types by 1 for a duration – and this is incredible.

I think I like Legba a little more, but for a combat focused Loa, this is pretty good.

The Spells

Cognition Spells

Buried Treasure (*): (@) A good idea, considering the Voodooist's dependency on material goods. Unfortunately the limitation of being able to cast this once a week, a 4 hour casting time, and a payoff of only around \$15-\$30 makes this a waste of BP overall, when a couple of points in Dinero is much better for a similar cost.

Dream Send (*)**: One of the longest range communication spells available. Perfect for if the party is split up or if you need to check in with someone from time to time. While 100 miles at the start of the game is relatively long compared to similar options, it's not perfect though, and it requires the target to be asleep to communicate. But it could save you a few hundred bucks on telegraph fees over the long-term (and of course, it's usable anywhere).

Eye o' the Beholder (**)**: (@) A super potent locate person spell. Requires two people to cast, but it doesn't seem to require the other person to actually know the target. While not perfect, this will be a great boon to any manhunt.

Foretelling' (**): (@) Lets you see someone's future for a flat bonus to all rolls (or penalty). There's about a 50% chance for the first card drawn for anything to happen at all, and if something does happen there's a 50% chance it's bad. The more cards you draw the less chance this happens, but I'm far more worried about the low odds of general success than I am about failure. This is truly a gambler's power. There's not really any reason NOT to use this every day if you have it, but unless you have d12s in Cognition to bolster your odds it's not worth the BP in the first place. The duration is the only thing that earns this spell its second star.

Red-Handed (**): (@) If a stolen item is within 5 miles of the place it was stolen from, you're going to find it with this spell. Sadly, the hour casting time gives the thief some time to get out of range, and because it has to be cast from where the item was stolen, you're not going to get your Shrine bonus on this one. I imagine you'll get to use this once or twice in a campaign to shorten up a wild goose chase, but as much as I like this spell, I can't really recommend it to everyone.

Knowledge Spells

Cloud the Mind (****): Incredible duration and powerful debuff to Cognition against a LARGE area of targets. Just about every campaign has moments that can benefit from methods of distraction.

Poison Powder (***): Makes packets that deal 1d6 damage per Conjurin' roll, or 5d6 from the start. Target has to be able to breathe, but unless they're wearing a gas mask, there's little that protects from this damage. Quite good overall, the only thing keeping me from giving it more stars is the Nimbleness requirement for using it (a 4d8 in Nimbleness is all you need for a pretty good chance of success, but you're probably spreading yourself pretty thin as it is).

Pool O' Doom (**): (@) A super convoluted way to poison someone at a ridiculous range. Even with Scroungin' this always costs at least \$25 to cast. In spite of all the downsides to this spell, it's still decent simply because it has such an incredible range and it's nearly undetectable that you were involved with any kind of assassination attempt. It'd be worth 3 stars if you didn't need that thimble of blood from your victim.

Poultice (****): Makes a medpack that always cures a wound by one level if it's heavy or light. The Scroungin' TN to avoid the \$10 cost is pretty easy, and these guys are definitely worth having around. This spell's existence is kind of an "I'm Sorry" for the ridiculously long casting time on Conjure Doctor. What's also nice is that you can give these to your friends to use on themselves, which is a great advantage over other healing abilities in Deadlands.

Revelation Dust (****): Lie detection spell and can also reveal disguises if thrown at a target. It requires opposed rolls for everything, so you'll need a decent dice in your Knowledge to really benefit from this. If you have the dice though, the multi-use aspect of this spell makes it recommended. I think a d8 or higher is acceptable since a good number of people you might be

interrogating will probably have a low enough Spirit for it to not matter – and you don't get any benefits for raises.

Zobop's Fix (****): If you have an additional 6 hours to burn and a piece of your target, this is incredible, granting you your usual massive bonus to your Conjurin' spells against a target. The increased range is nice icing and could mean the difference on an Eye of the Beholder locating attempt. This is another opposed roll using Knowledge, so make sure you have a decent dice type before taking this.

Smarts Spells

Bite of Arignee (**): Adds a poison effect to one bullet. It really seems like they worked hard to try to balance this to the point where it's just not very impressive. The poison lasts a number of rounds equal to your Conjurin', but the damage diminishes each round until it's only dealing one dice a round. At that point, you'd be lucky to make the size threshold to actually deal a wound. Obviously this is best with higher dice types, but that's nerfed as well – unless you're dealing with larger creatures. So that's the circumstance I'd recommend this spell – if you know you're going to face a big mean abomination. The hour casting time and less than 24 hour duration really takes down this spell's rating though.

Bitter Tongue (***): Lower a target's Mien by an amount equal to your Conjurin'. Normally I would give this two stars because of the odd circumstantiality of that particular debuff, but with a max starting Conjurin' that's a whopping -5 to their rolls. Add in the dang long duration of one day per Faith, and if you ever find yourself needing to mess up someone's Mien, then you're one scary jerk who's fully capable of ruining that person's day. Probably the biggest drawback of this spell is the difficulty in gaining the primary material for the bag – and of course the ease of dispelling it if they catch on to your antics and know what to look for.

Charm o' Success (***): Instead of searching for buried treasure, you can buff your money making skills the honest way. Like many of the other buffs that the Voodooist has to offer, it's very potent, and in addition, profession and trade skills help with many other things (a party Blessed for instance would ironically be a much better Priestcrafter with this – assuming the Marshal doesn't understandably ban that applicability).

Coax (****): Sort of the opposite of Bitter Tongue. Slightly convoluted in application, but a +5 bonus to Persuasion is nothing to sneeze at. What's great is that you can set this up for your more Mien-based party face to be able to take advantage of this in case you don't have the social skills yourself.

Conjure Doctor (****): The obligatory healing spell. On a potency level it's comparable to the Huckster's Helping Hand spell – it affects only a single location and can only heal up to a critical level of wound. This has triple the cast time of Helping Hand and a limit to how many times you can cast a day – that latter “balance” factor I think is a little unnecessary considering the cast

time, but whatever. With all that said, it sure beats waiting it out for natural healing, and you also have the ability to heal yourself, and you have a major advantage over Helping Hand in that it cures ALL wounds at once on the targeted location. Additionally, if you're at your shrine, you've also got better odds at healing critical wounds than most of your competition (but the Shaman will always win in a healing competition).

Curse o' Failure (*)**: Lets you give a penalty to a target's profession and trade skills. Unlike Bitter Tongue, I see this being even less useful. Why would you want to ruin someone's business? With that said, the penalty is still massive, and who knows, maybe you might need to thwart the lawyer that's going to put your outlaw party member in jail.

Derange (*)**: (@) Gives the target a Hindrance of your choice, one point of Hindrance per success. Lasts a very long time. This is a quite versatile spell, but you really need those raises to make it completely awesome. It has a very long casting time and requires you to put it on the person or at their residence which keeps me from rating it any higher.

Gad (**)**: Gives a whopping penalty to any negative Black Magic effect directed at you, and reduces any damage you might take from such effects by the same amount. You can also make multiples of these and pass them out to your friends. Remember when I said that the Voodooist is very worth playing? This is one of the reasons.

Ogu's Aura (**)**: The second half of the ultimate defense you offer to your party. This one blocks physical damage, and like Gad, you can spread it around to your friends. The mitigation the Voodooist offers to the party is unparalleled with these two spells combined.

Voodoo Doll ()**: A potentially expensive way to deal wind damage to a single target, which is determined by an opposed roll that will likely not net a very large benefit. The only real advantage here is the relative safety from which you can affect your target, but unless your posse happens to be near the target, the most you're going to do is make them mildly uncomfortable until they can rest their wind back. The timing of your pokes might embarrass them if they're in front of people, but if all you want to do is sully their reputation, then you're better off with Bitter Tongue or Curse o' Failure.

Wanga (**)**: Holy crap this is potent. Turn your gun into a hand-cannon by adding a massive +5 (or higher) damage bonus to every shot. For human sized targets this is basically a bonus wound. The Blessed need to spend Fate Chips to get this kind of benefit, and you get it for days at a time. The only really restricting factor is the 6 hour casting time on the first day, but it's totally worth the investment if you can do it.

Winnin' Ways (*)**: Charm o' Success, but for gambling. Could be useful, and is potent. It kind of sucks that you have to spend an additional 5 BP for it though.

Spirit Spells

Baron Samedi's Pact (*): (@) Increases the chance that you're resurrected as a Harrowed, and lasts for weeks after casting.

There are a lot of things I don't like about this. You're spending 5 BP on something that you're likely going to only benefit from once, and even then you're only adding something like a 10-20% chance you even see a benefit. Furthermore, the only option here is coming back as a Harrowed, and with that option is a pretty good chance you get a black joker on that draw. There's nothing worse for the party than a dominated Harrowed "friend".

Finally, you just don't need to be Harrowed as a Voodooist. You have access to one of the most interesting Harrowed powers – Counting Coup – through spells anyway. Additional Harrowed powers come at a high BP price, and I don't think simple access to those powers is worth the price of admission.

Bad Juju (****): (@) This is a bread and butter spell. You can have a number of bags up to your Conjurin' level, and you should try and keep it at that number as much as you have time to support it. The primary selling point is that you can use a bag after the target makes their roll, giving you unrivaled manipulation over the situation – especially if you get a few raises on your craft roll.

Cemetery Gates (***): Prevents undead from passing through a portal of some kind (window, door, etc). It has a relatively fast casting time (for a Voodooist) and a black and white effect – it can't be resisted, even by more powerful undead. It has its drawbacks – it only affects one portal at a time and only affects undead abominations – but undead are prevalent enough and the duration and power of this spell more than justify a purchase – again if you know you're going to be facing the threat it covers.

Malison (****): (@) The only speed 1 spell the Voodooist has. It causes the target to be stunned, and does not seem to have any restrictions on what you can stun, so abominations that can be stunned seem to be fair game. This is definitely one to keep in your toolbox and a great argument for putting a d12 in Spirit.

Powerful Mojo (*****): (@) The opposite of Bad Juju where you can boost you or your friends dice rolls after the roll is made. And just like with Bad Juju you're going to want as many of these as you can make at all times.

Salango's Charm (***): (@) Grants a minor bonus to Cognition checks vs. immediate danger – so surprises basically. The weeks long duration is the selling point here, though the fact that you can only have one at a time is a downer. Big Ears costs 2 BP less and gives a guaranteed +2 to Cognition checks that arguably cover the same things, but this stacks and has the versatility of being able to give it to someone else, so it's pretty solid.

Sending o' the Dead (**): Gives the target the "Bad Luck" hindrance for several weeks at the potential cost of \$50. From a role-playing perspective, this could be very good, but that all

depends on your Marshal. From mechanics perspective, Bad Luck simply makes busts more lethal – but that requires the bust in the first place. If you had some way to make it more likely someone is going to bust, then I'd recommend this. Otherwise the long duration is all it really has going for it. Derange is the better pick overall in my opinion, in spite of this being a 5 point Hindrance.

Soul Trap (***)**: Expand your spell list from the abominations you face by making these bags. My interpretation of this spell is that you have a few weeks to count coup, and once you do, you get to keep that power for as long as you have the bag (it says nothing about the bag expiring once coup is counted). Needless to say, this is an extremely unique ability for the Voodooist, and you can have up to 5 coup powers (from the beginning) without any of the drawbacks of being Harrowed. Obviously the usefulness of this power is ultimately dependent on what the Marshal makes available to you, but I'd still pick this up early and have a bag on hand at all times just to see what I get.

Spell Breaker ()**: (@) Dispels spells, which is normally recommended, but this has a major flaw: a 15 minute casting time. That means this was definitely intended for dispelling other Voodooist spells above all else. Some Black Magic might make this spell useful, but overall I think it's a bit too circumstantial. If you have a Blessed or Huckster in the party, make them dispel things instead.

Zombie Master ()**: (@) Gain limited control over mundane undead. Could be useful, but I don't like the speed of 2 and concentration duration at all. I think you're better off firing your Wanga powered gun at the undead twice than spending two actions on this.