

# LEGWORK AND LARCENY



EXPANDED HEIST MECHANICS

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# AMONG THIEVES

**H**eists are a staple of role-playing games. Most game masters have run heists before, possibly without intending to. Spies stealing top-secret plans from enemy governments or terrorist organizations. Superheroes breaking into a villain's lair to rescue hostages or stolen goods. Even classic dungeon crawls to relieve a dragon of their treasure horde could be considered a combat-focused heist.

Some of the fun of heist adventures is pooling together a team's strengths to find the best way to overcome the challenge. You don't need to be playing a rogue or thief to enjoy a heist, though having one on the team certainly helps. Some groups prefer stealth, others prefer subterfuge, some prefer a more direct and violent approach. When we ran modules at conventions, where the premade characters remain the same, we found that different groups of players developed entirely unique strategies.

Heists require both GMs and players to remain flexible when events deviate from the plan. Bad die rolls, a slip of the tongue, or any number of unexpected developments cause plans to spiral out of control. In this regard, the Genesys Narrative Dice System trains players to adapt to dice results by providing opportunities to progress the story in unexpected ways, whether it's in their favor or not.

In **Part 1**, we establish some guidelines to help GMs structure heists using the Genesys system. We provide a range of complexity for heists and tools to keep the

action moving and the PCs guessing. Legwork mechanics reward PCs for proper preparation before the adventure, but keep things moving at the table.

The *Expanded Player's Guide* introduced the Heist Tone, along with mechanics for players generating heat, the attention drawn to illegal activities. These heat points work well for the long term ramifications of illegal activities. **Part 2** offers alternative mechanics that provide more dramatic -- and instantaneous -- repercussions to keep the pressure on.

## AVOIDING ADVERSARIAL PLAY

Heist encounters always present unknown threats to the characters. This increases the paranoia of players and can lead to the practice of being overly cautious. The classic example is checking for traps every five feet in a dungeon. On the other side of the screen, some GMs punish players for not being cautious enough, taking advantage of players not checking specific things, or not asking questions at exactly the right time. This is adversarial play and best avoided.

These rules prevent adversarial play by keeping things out in the open. The legwork rules have a risk-reward dynamic depending upon the dice results. The heat mechanics empower the GM to make a situation more complex, but the players get something in return. In the end, rules are only tools that help you play the game, it's up to the GM and players to use them so everyone has a good time.



# PART 1: PLANNING A HEIST

All heists begin with a simple enough formula. A person, place, or thing the PCs want is in the control of an adversary. This object is known as a MacGuffin. The adversary established defenses around the MacGuffin to prevent any enterprising thieves. Players attempt to circumvent these defenses to gain access to the MacGuffin and escape with it.

GMs often assume they need to plot out all the defenses beforehand. This assumption can lead to preparing too much material to be ready for any

contingency the clever PCs concoct. When the PCs enact their plan, they may never encounter a majority of the prepared material.

Heist complexity is a guideline that helps GMs create a heist from a broad view, then work out the details in play. It sets the number of challenges the PCs must overcome, and a system for developing details in reaction to PCs' actions.

## HEIST COMPLEXITY

When preparing a heist mission, the GM determines the overall challenge of the heist adventure. Table 1.1 Heist Complexity provides the number of obstacles and hitches to begin the mission. Heist Complexity is not an indicator of the difficulty to overcome individual obstacles. GMs tailor obstacle difficulties to the narrative and the skill level of the PCs as normal.


### OBSTACLES

Many types of obstacles could stand between the players and the MacGuffin. A good heist features obstacles which represent all the possibilities of the setting, be they magical, mechanical, or technological. There are three categories of obstacles that apply to any setting.

#### PASSIVE

Passive obstacles discourage threats by making access difficult or a lengthy process. They do not require direct monitoring by personnel. Passive security includes

recording devices monitoring an area for later identification and incrimination.

Passive obstacles start with no  in their pool. Failure to overcome a passive obstacle costs the players time as they struggle to get around them.

Examples: remote or hidden locations, walls, fences, locks, recording devices, magical wards, and computer firewalls.

#### ACTIVE

Active obstacles focus more on catching threats in the process of gaining access. These systems cause a reaction including alarms or traps. Security guards are also active obstacles, usually assisted by other active systems.




















All active obstacles start as opposed checks. Failure to overcome an active obstacle may cause the PC to suffer strain equal to net . Non-lethal weapons may spend  and  may be spent to activate weapon qualities.

TABLE 1.1 - HEIST COMPLEXITY

COMPLEXITY	INVESTMENT	OBSTACLES	HITCHES	EXTRA HITCHES
1	Side Job	2	3	   or 
2		3	6	   or 
3	Encounter	4	9	  or 
4		5	12	  or 
5	Session	6	15	 or 



**TABLE 1.2 - SPENDING HITCHES**

COST	OBSTACLE MODIFICATION
1	Add ■ to the difficulty of one obstacle. This may be applied to the same obstacle up to four times.
2	Upgrade a passive obstacle to active.
3	Upgrade the difficulty once. Upgrade an active obstacle to lethal.
5	Add 1 passive obstacle. Upgrade a lethal obstacle to a minor combat encounter.
10	The employer betrays the party. The MacGuffin is a fake or has been moved off-site.

Examples: security guards, computer sysops teams, monitored cameras, guard dogs, motion sensors, stun weapons, knockout gas, ICE programs, trap doors, and guardian spirits.

### LETHAL

Lethal obstacles are a type of active obstacle designed to harm or kill instead of capture or incriminate. Some active obstacles are able to escalate to a lethal one as the encounter develops.

Always opposed checks, failure to overcome lethal obstacles cause wound damage as if from a weapon. ⚡ and ☠ may be spent to activate weapon qualities or cause Critical Injuries.

Examples: high threat response (HTR) teams, spiked pits, deathtraps, and point defense weapons (automated or controlled).

### TRAPS

Traps are an active or lethal obstacle that springs upon the unwary thief. The variety of triggers makes checking for traps an imposing task, especially when in a tense situation. Assume that the PCs are generally on the lookout for traps, especially if their legwork tipped them off beforehand. Only ask for a roll when there is a trap present, to see if the PCs find it in time, or it springs upon them.

The type of check depends on the PCs' approach. If actively searching for traps, a Perception check is appropriate, but slows overall progress. Being ready for anything is in the realm of Vigilance; this may modify the difficulty of the check, but improves the team's speed. On a success, the PC avoids, circumvents, or notices the trap before triggering it. ⚡ and ☠ may assist the following Skulduggery check to disarm the trap. On a failed check, the trap triggers, and affects the PC.

Active traps seal the target in a cage or net, entangle their feet, or simply alert the guards. Lethal traps have weapon statistics, using the negative results from the check. On a failed check, the lethal trap deals base damage plus one for each uncanceled ✖. The GM may spend ⚡ and ☠ to trigger weapon qualities or Critical Injuries.

### HITCHES

Hitches serve as a way to keep things unpredictable without becoming adversarial. Similar to the practice of GMs saving ⚡ and ☠ to use later, GMs spend hitches to add or alter obstacles due to misinformation or enemy agents altering the obstacles in reaction to the legwork phase.

PCs avoid additional hitches by restricting the legwork phase, which keeps the game moving.

**TABLE 1.3: TRAPS**

NAME	DAM	CRIT	TYPE	SPECIAL
Rope Snare	0	☠	Active	Ensnare 4
Knockout Darts	2	☠	Active	Blast 2, Linked 2, Pierce 2, Stun 4, Stun Damage
Poison Darts	2	4	Lethal	Blast 2, Linked 2, Pierce 2
Barbed Wire	2	4	Lethal	Ensnare 2, Pierce 1
Electrified Fence	3	☠	Active	Pierce 2, Stun 4, Stun Damage
Explosive	5	3	Lethal	Blast 5
Spinning Blades	5	2	Lethal	Linked 2
Gun Turrets	7	3	Lethal	Auto-fire



# RUNNING THE HEIST

Legwork is a key element of a good heist. Several axioms support this: “knowledge is power,” “forewarned is forearmed,” and “be prepared.” Historically, film and television skipped over this phase entirely or gave us a brief montage of activity. Occasionally, the montage stops long enough to show a meaningful interaction. Recently, it’s more common to show how the thieves did their legwork in a flashback scene, after they performed some miraculous feat.

In role-playing games, this phase tends to slow the game down, as players want to play out every scene or try to cover all possible contingencies. This leads to the players that lack legwork skills to become bored. Occasionally, this phase derails the entire session by getting into unexpected fights, or falling down a rabbit-hole of intrigue and conspiracy theories.

We recommend making the legwork phase optional. Skipping this phase allows the PCs to use the Flashback talent (see “Flashback” on page 9), and games start in the middle of the heist, getting into the action immediately.

## LEGWORK PHASE

If the players choose to run a legwork phase, ask each PC to perform one day of legwork by making a skill check or assist another PC with their check. These checks are usually opposed checks as they are either talking to someone (social defense skills) or finding something intentionally hidden by someone (stealth skill).

Success allows the Player to learn about one of the obstacles in their path, and they may spend **A** and **⚙** to gather resources to overcome it. Failure on a legwork check allows **A** and **⚙** to assist the next player’s legwork check as they narrow down the leads. Once all obstacles are revealed, further checks may be spent gathering more resources for particularly important, or difficult, obstacles. For example, activities like acquiring or building equipment, recruiting allies, or dedicated research.

### GM Tip

During the legwork phase, consider encouraging the PCs to do the heavy lifting for you. Allow Players that succeed on their Legwork checks to declare one of the obstacles. This gives them agency in the creation of the adventure, and showcases their characters expertise in the field.



If the PCs fail three legwork checks, they have attracted too much attention and the legwork phase ends. The GM then privately determines any undeclared obstacles and may spend **A** and **⚙** from legwork checks to increase the number of hitch points of the heist. The number of **A** required to gain hitch points depends on the complexity of the heist. The GM may also spend **⚙** results to flip a Story Point from the PC pool to the GM pool. Any remaining **A** may be spent to incur -- or increase -- the monetary cost to acquiring the necessary equipment.

## ADVERSARIES AS OBSTACLES

When people represent an obstacle, the benefits from Legwork apply to checks made to avoid or bypass them, usually by using social or stealth checks. Legwork dice pool benefits do not modify combat checks.

TABLE 1.4 - SPENDING **A** AND **⚙** IN LEGWORK

COST	RESULT OPTIONS
<b>A</b> or <b>⚙</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain a tool that adds <b>□</b> to checks against one obstacle.</li> </ul>
<b>A A</b> or <b>⚙</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain a tool that adds <b>□□</b> to checks against one obstacle</li> <li>Gain &lt;AD&gt; against one obstacle.</li> </ul>
<b>A A A</b> or <b>⚙</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain a tool that upgrades checks against one obstacle.</li> <li>Gain &lt;SU&gt; &lt;AD&gt; against one obstacle.</li> </ul>
<b>⚙</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain a tool that adds <b>◆</b> to checks against one obstacle.</li> <li>Gain a tool that upgrades checks against one obstacle.</li> <li>Players may move one Story Point from the GM pool to the Player pool.</li> </ul>
<b>⚙⚙</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain a tool that adds <b>□</b> to checks against all obstacles in the heist.</li> <li>The Legwork phase may continue for one additional failed check.</li> </ul>



## FAILING FORWARD

When running the heist, it's important for GMs to stay flexible and keep the action flowing. In order to do that, maintain a mentality called “failing forward” with these tips.

First, obstacles always have more than one way to be overcome, though some methods are less difficult than others. Second, failing to overcome an obstacle does not halt progress. Instead, it costs the PCs time or resources (including strain or wounds), depending on what is vital to the encounter.

### INFILTRATION PHASE

Now that you have all the elements of a heist encounter, it's time to run through it. Describe the scenes and reveal the obstacles in the order the PCs encounter them. Narrate the results of the dice as they attempt to overcome the obstacles, including how negative results are working behind the scenes. Informing the PCs that they tripped something or that security is closing in on them adds tension.

As players attempt to overcome the obstacles, keep track of the number of net successes and net failures. After the final obstacle is attempted, compare the two totals. More successes means things went smoothly for the PCs. If time is a factor, they have arrived on time or perhaps early. If the next encounter is a combat, they are in a better position to start it on their terms. More failures could mean they are running behind schedule, or missed their window. In a combat encounter, they are at a disadvantage, face well prepared opponents, or are ambushed.

### THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

This is the key part of the heist. The PCs gain access to the MacGuffin, and test themselves against the final defenses and adversaries placed in their way. This encounter may include an obstacle, but it also features other challenges to make it a larger, more complex scene.

### EXFILTRATION PHASE

The GM may reserve some obstacles or hitches to complicate the heist after the PCs reach the MacGuffin. Narratively, this could include previously encountered obstacles that have been reactivated or altered by the circumstances.

The end goal of this phase is to judge how quietly or rapidly the PCs are able to leave the location. The end results may affect a subsequent chase scene, or long-term consequences from evidence they leave behind. These consequences can be similar to the Heat rules introduced in the *Expanded Player's Guide*.





# PART 2: NEW HEIST MECHANICS

The heist theme in the *Expanded Player's Guide* provides a good layout of the elements of a heist, but the heat track adds one more thing for GMs to keep track of. Instead, we offer the following options.

## STORY POOLS

During heist encounters, alter the use of the Story Point pools to provide more dramatic shifts to the action. Player Story Points are a measure of luck or the upper hand that helps things to go their way. GM Story Points represent how things could potentially go wrong, or how much attention the players have attracted.

GMs may spend Story Points in the normal ways, with the following alterations during heist encounters. It's important to use good judgement with these options to make an encounter more dramatic, but not extend it too long. GMs need to know when to allow the PCs to move to the next part of the session before spending more Story Points.

### DURING A HEIST ENCOUNTER, THE GM MAY...

- Spend 1 result from player checks to flip a Story Point from PC to GM.
- Spend up to three GM Story Points to upgrade the difficulty of a single check three times (instead of being limited to one per check).
- Spend GM multiple Story Points to introduce elements to the scene.

TABLE 2.1 - GM STORY POINTS DURING A HEIST

STORY POINTS	HEIST DEVELOPMENTS
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A passive obstacle becomes active.</li><li>• An active obstacle becomes lethal.</li><li>• In a combat encounter, add a group of 3 Minions.</li><li>• A small group of bystanders enters the scene (tourists, office workers).</li></ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add a passive obstacle.</li><li>• In a combat or chase encounter, add a Rival.</li><li>• A large group of bystanders enters the scene (food court, parade, airport terminal).</li></ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In a combat encounter, add a Nemesis.</li><li>• Security continues to chase the PCs after they leave the premises.</li></ul>

## THE FLASHBACK TALENT

In movies and television, it's common for heist stories to reveal the preparations done for the heist in the middle of the action by using a flashback scene. The heroes surprise the audience with their amazing actions, then a flashback reveals how the trick was done.

The Flashback talent allows players to narrate a flashback to explain their character preparing a contingency for their current situation. The type of elements they can introduce is determined by their skills. While the previous change to Story Point pools give GMs more options on how to spend Story Points, they may not spend a Story Point to directly negate the use of a Flashback talent.

GMs need to remember that the effects of using the Flashback Talent needs to be more powerful than using a Story Point alone.





## FLASHBACK

**Tier:** 1

**Activation:** Active (Incidental)

**Ranked:** No

*Your character must have two ranks in a General, Social, or Knowledge skill before purchasing this talent. Once per session when your character is in a heist encounter that did not have a Legwork Phase, you may spend a Story Point to introduce a previously undocumented item or fact to the encounter that your character prepared earlier. What you introduce is based on one of the skills your character has at least two ranks in. Briefly describe a scene of how your character previously prepared for this situation.*

## TYPES OF FLASHBACKS

Below are some examples of what kinds of flashbacks can be introduced.

## CONTACTS

- Your character met a person that gave you information about an obstacle.
- Your character established a relationship with someone for the heist. Possibly bribing a guard or trading places with a janitor.

## COUNTERMEASURES

- Your character devised a plan or device to deal with a certain type of obstacle.

## GEAR

- Your character acquired a piece of gear before the mission. This item may have more dramatic repercussions than the normal expenditure of a Story Point but is only useful once.

## PHYSICAL ACCESS

- Your character devised a means of entrance or egress from a location. This could include, placing parachutes on top of a building or knowing a route through the air ducts.

## STAKEOUT/TRACK

- Your character watched a location or followed a person and learned important information.

**TABLE 2.2 - FLASHBACK SKILLS**

SKILL	FLASHBACK
Alchemy	Magical Gear
Athletics	Physical Access
Charm	Befriended Contacts
Coercion	Intimidated Contacts
Computers	Software and other computer Gear
Cool	Social Countermeasures
Coordination	Physical Access
Deception	Duped Contacts Disguises, fake ID, and similar Gear
Discipline	Magical Countermeasures Social Countermeasures
Driving	Stakeout/Track
Leadership	Tactical Countermeasures
Mechanics	Technological Gear
Medicine	Medical Gear
Negotiation	Contacts (hired) Legally available Gear
Perception	Stakeout/Track
Piloting	Stakeout/Track
Skullduggery	Breaking and Entering Gear Countermeasures for traps
Stealth	Physical Access Stakeout/Track
Streetwise	Bribed or criminal Contacts Restricted Gear
Survival	Natural Gear Wilderness Stakeout/Track
Vigilance	Stakeout/Track