

FUZZMOTOR: PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

CRIMINAL ELEMENT

A GAME OF DESPERATE DEEDS

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**CREATED BY
MICHAEL P. O'SULLIVAN**

VERSION 0.38

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Written and designed by
Michael P. O'Sullivan

Playtest Edition
version 0.36

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for Star.

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**BECAUSE THAT'S WHERE THE
MONEY IS.**

**ATTRIBUTED TO FAMED THIEF WIZZIE SUTTON,
ON WHY HE ROBBED BANKS.**

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Wrong Side of the Tracks

Criminal Element is a role-playing game about a crew of heisters, all working together to pull down a big score. Players' characters will be the members of that gang of thieves, crooks and conmen.

Criminal Element is a game inspired by heist and caper movies, a genre that spawned such classics as *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Heat*, *Snatch*, *Sexy Beast*, *Killing Zoe*, *the Sting*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and many more. This game gives you the tools to make your very own heist or caper story, just like those great movies.

Defining the Game

First and foremost, Criminal Element is a Role-Playing Game. The purpose of a role-playing game is to give its players some of the tools needed to create certain kinds of stories. Criminal Element is a game built to help a group of players create the kinds of stories you see in your favourite heist and caper films. Role-playing games help you create stories by giving you rules.

We give you the rules to help you create characters, find out who wins in a fight, how hard it is to crack a safe, stuff like that. You bring the imagination to create interesting characters, design intriguing settings, describe cool fights and plan out how you're going to get to that safe in the first place.

Being a Player

The people that play Criminal Element take one of two roles: the Player or the Director. The Players create characters called Player Characters, (or PCs for short). The PCs are like the main characters of a movie. They're the ones that all of the adventure and excitement happens to and are what the story of the role-playing game is about. Also like a movie, the PCs are roles that the Players act out. The difference is that a role-playing game is completely improvised. The Players control almost every aspect of their PCs, speaking for them and deciding and describing their actions.

Calling the Shots

The other kind of player is called the Director, and he's got that name for a reason. He's a lot like the director of a movie. It's the job of a movie director to craft a fun, meaningful experience for his viewers with the help of his actors, as well as anyone else on the sound stage. The Director of a game of Criminal Element is meant to do that as well, working along with his Players to make a cool, engaging game for everyone involved.

In game-specific terms, the Director's the guy that describes the story that the PCs are the protagonists of. The Director is the eyes and ears

of the Players, detailing the people their PCs meet and places they go to. The Director is also concerned with story-related things. He's the guy responsible for dreaming up most of the dangers that the PCs will face throughout the course of the game. Through the way a Director describes things he can also set the pace of a game and help establish mood and themes to spice things up.

Players will often want to know things like if they were able to hit the guy they just shot at or if they can break through the alarm system in time. In instances like this the Director uses the game system to find out what happens. He decides how tough an action is, decides on the actions of Non-Player Characters (or NPCs) and describes outcomes.

Redefining the Game

When you get right down to it Criminal Element, thematically, is about desire. Sure, the crooks in most Heist flicks have slick, cool exteriors, but at their center they always have a dark heart, a heart that is fed by need.

Everyone needs money. It helps pay the bills and it sends the kids off to college. But most people aren't willing to get together with a couple of other people, gather together some guns and explosives and go take a bunch of money from a bank. That takes a crook.

The theme of desire is hard-wired into the rules of the game. Defining desire is an integral part of character creation, and interacting with those desires is what gives a character his power. Without the fuel of desire, a character in Criminal Element would be nearly powerless.

Ultimately, the game is about two simple questions. What do you want most in this world? And what are you willing to do to take it?

Where It All Goes Down

Criminal Element doesn't have a specific setting, though it does assume a modern urban environment. Many play groups prefer to keep the setting loosely defined and treat it like a backdrop. Most players don't need to know what's on the corner of 17th and Pine or where in the district the best Chinese restaurant is. They just need to know what the time period is like, what people are wearing, how they talk; flavour-stuff really. Most details that a player may need during gameplay can be made up on the fly by the Director.

Want to get more specific than that? Choose a real world city, maybe even the one that you live in. Every city always has a history of crime and a couple of books that detail it. Go down to the library, do a little research. You can also normally find some floor plans for public buildings pretty easily if you're the kind of Director that likes to use maps.

The only constants in this game are characters with the ability and motivation to take what doesn't belong to them and something for them to take. Games can be set in any place or time. Got a cool idea for a train heist game set in the Old West? Just make sure that everyone is on the same page and go for it. Or maybe a train heist on the Moon. Lunar colonies, Roman

churches, medieval castles and more can be settings for a game of Criminal Element.

The Blood, The Guts

This book is a tool. In here you'll find most everything you need to take the ideas that you and the rest of your play group has and turn them into a fun and entertaining game.

THE LINGO *A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CRIMINAL SZANG*

Crew: A group of criminals working together on a job.

Jug: A bank or other holding location. Also sometimes refers to jail.

Jugmarking: The act of mapping out a plan to rob a bank or pull of any other kind of heist.

Mark: The target of a confidence job.

Second Story Man: A criminal that specializes in breaking and entry. Also sometimes referred to as a Greaseman.

Inside Man:

Roper: The person in the crew that wins over the trust of the mark.

This is then used against the mark. Also sometimes referred to as the Outside Man.

Stickman: a crook that specializes in stick-ups. Also, a crook that specializes in violence.

Heat, the: The kind of trouble that can mess up a perfectly good score.

Score: the item or material that is being stolen. Also called the Take.

Note Job:

THE ROOT OF EVIL MOVIES, SHOWS, AND BOOKS THAT INSPIRED THIS GAME

Film and Television

Heat: the chief inspiration for the creation of this game and arguably the pinnacle of the heist movie genre. LAPD Robbery/Homicide detective Vincent (Al Pacino) and master thief Neil (Rober DeNiro) cross paths when things goes murderously wrong on a heist. The movie grows only more interesting as it draws parallels between these two opposed people and their lives and families.

Heist: a love letter to the heist film from master writer David Mamet. Double- and triple-crosses become dizzying as a crew of pros are forced to go on one last job by their banker. After reading through the section on Dramatic Shifts later in this book, go back and watch Heist.

The Sting

Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels: Proof that a game of Criminal Element doesn't have to be wall to wall drama. Four friends get twisted up in a hair-brained robbery scheme after a gambling debt threatens all of their lives.

Thief: After a family tragedy, expert thief Nick Atwater (Andre Braugher) must decide between the job and his step-daughter, all set in the backdrop of post-Katrina New Orleans. Masterfully acted and a perfect example of Motive and the conflicts it can create in a game of Criminal Element.

Hustle

Sexy Beast:

Reservoir Dogs

Killing Zoe: a sweaty, savage, hyper-sexualized tale of morality told during a bank heist that was wrong from its inception. Zed (Eric Stoltz) has to chose between friends and love when the bank job he's working on takes hostages, including Zoe (Julie Delpy), a girl he fell for only the night before.

Smith

The Getaway

Point Blank

Books and other media

The Hunter, by Donald Westlake

The Wheelman, by Duane Swiercynski

This Here's a Stick-Up, by Duane Swiercynski

100 Bullets, by Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Barreto

CHAPTER TWO: THE SETUP

A good entry man doesn't just go into a place and steal stuff at random. A good entry man is going to put together a team that will get the job done. He lines up the capitol he's going to need and gets the equipment that the job calls for. He cases a joint, he studies alarm systems, gets blueprints. He lays out getaway routes and practices them constantly with his driver. He lines up buyers for the hot product. He secures fake identification and buys airline tickets weeks in advance. He has a plan.

A game of Criminal Element ain't so dissimilar. A play group should put a plan together before they begin playing. And that's what this chapter is for; helping a group put together their game plan, which we're going to call the Setup. The Setup covers a couple of common elements that all play groups in a game of Criminal Element are going to have to hash out to set the story up.

By the end of the Setup the play group will know what kind of game they are playing in and what sort of characters are going to be the stars of it. They'll even know the basic layout of their caper.

The play group should be sure to discuss each of these following things together before gameplay begins. The ideas below are not broken down into steps and may be discussed in any order that the play group prefers. It's pretty common for ideas to bleed over from point of point.

The Same Page

The first step of the Setup is to talk about style. The play group should discuss the sort of game they want to play in and the kind of stories they want to tell. You won't need anything too in depth mind you, just some broad strokes are enough for now. Should the game be a bloody massacre or should the action be more light-hearted? Should it be deadly serious, or maybe a wicked sense of humor is more popular with the group?

Don't be afraid to reference movies or any other source for that matter. This game finds its inspiration in movies, so use them to your advantage. Want a fun crime romp? Talk about *Snatch*, *The Sting* and the British TV series *Hustle*. Craving a bit of the ultraviolence? Bring *Reservoir Dogs* to the table. Want something with some introspective character moments mixed in with the action? Bring up *Heat* or the TV show *Thief*.

Most games will likely be set in a modern day city like New York or London, but some play groups might want to try mixing it up a little. For those players, talk about where and when the game takes place. A heist in the Wild West is much different from modern day California. Bring up your favourite places and eras: the Roaring '20s, the Old West, the Swinging '60s and Victorian England are some of the easier eras to play in this game.

Character Concepts

Once you know a little bit about the kind of game that the group will be in, it's time to start talking about the main characters. The players should openly discuss the kinds of characters they're thinking about playing. The depth of these starting concept will vary from player to player. Some like to use a couple of broad, undefined brush strokes to work from. Other players prefer to put a great deal of forethought into their character at the earliest stages. Both approaches have their advantages and neither should be thought of as the "right" way. Simply come up with enough information as you feel comfortable working with and begin from there.

Criminals are not like other, regular people. They can be by turns methodical and reckless, violent and subtle. Think about your character and take a couple of minutes to try and answer a couple of the following questions about him.

•Okay, so you're a crook. That's a decent job description, but most crooks tend to specialize. What is your character's strong suit? Does he have a talent or gift for something?

•Stealing stuff is one thing, but being a professional thief takes dedication. Why does your character steal? What is he in this racket for?

•Criminals aren't exactly known for their mental fortitude. What is your character's weakness?

It's always a good idea to think about where your character falls into the group. A player might decide that he wants to play the "Idea Man" for the group, the guy that comes up with all of the scores, or at least the plans on how to take those scores down. Another player may want to play the newcomer character that none of the group trusts yet.

You can expect players to start yelling out their favourite archetypes or characters from heist movies when they talk about character concepts. This is good as not only does it get players to talk about their characters, it also starts to draw the players' minds in to the world of Criminal Element. Talking about Wheelmen, B & E men, crackers, thugs and faces tends to get the players into the feel of the game.

Marking the Jug

By this time we've defined a whole lot of who, when, where and why. Let's start talking about what and how; as in "What are you going to steal?" and "How are you going to do it?"

Laying out all of the particulars of a job is called Jugmarking in the slang used by heisters and thieves. The Jugmarker's the guy that scouts out the score and learns everything he can about it, from what's being stolen to the security measures that protect it. Some Jugmarkers do contract work, digging up all of the information on a heist and selling it for a share of the take. Other markers work as part of the team, plotting out the best plans for his own people and getting a bigger part of the take, but it's also much riskier for him than if he just sat at home.

Jugmarking is also a term used in Criminal Element for a part of the Setup. A real crew isn't ever going to rob a place without knowing what's going on inside, what their taking, and what they need to do to get it out. A crew in a game of Criminal Element shouldn't expect any less, and that's exactly why the Jugmarking steps of the Setup exist. During these next two steps the play group hashes out some integral parts of the story that their characters are about to go through: the Score and the Heat.

Jugmarking in Criminal Element is a team effort. All of the players at the table should work together to decide on the Caper and the Heat, not just the Director alone. Openly discuss your ideas. Throw stuff around and see what sticks.

The Score

Crooks ain't nothing without something to steal. Sacks full of cash. A safety deposit box loaded up with uncut diamonds. A mysterious attache case. An antique statue from Malta. To a crook, it's all just the Score.

This step of the Setup describes the Score, that being the thing that the crew is trying to steal. The play group should decide what the Score is, whether it be sacks full o' cash or one small and priceless diamond.

Stuck for something? You can always go the Macguffin route, cherished storytelling device that it is. A Macguffin is simply an important object that everyone wants, but it is never truly defined what that item is. Just define simple things that heisters might need to know: how much it weighs, how it is carried, etc. Hell, the mystery of "what's in the box" can add a lot of fun to a game.

A part of describing the Score is also saying where it's at. Bank vaults are, of course, the most common *casa de* Score, but the play group can set up their heist anywhere. Private art collections, museums, casinos, government facilities and other places are fantastic places to rip off.

Also a smart thing to consider is the owner of said Score. While most bank jobs will only hurt the banks themselves, since insurance will cover the loss of money for the bank's customers, other jobs aren't so "victim-friendly". It might be a good idea to know if you're ripping off someone important or powerful. Billionaire businessmen and filthy rich drug czars are notorious for their security services and vengeful streaks.

The Heat

Now we get to the fun part of every caper: the Heat. That's what this game calls all of the security guards, car chases, difficult vault doors, detectives on your tail and all of the other obstacles that your crew will run into during the caper.

Jugmarking extends into the design of the Heat. Any kind of Jugmarker is going to know the problems with a heist and he'll have a couple of solutions for them as well. The crew in a game of Criminal Element shouldn't be any different.

The Heat is a problem or obstacle that a character will not only run into in the course of the heist, it's an integral part of it. The Heat your character is going to face is likely the reason that he was brought onto the crew, or at the least your presence on the crew was why the job could even be taken in the first place.

To design the Heat each player in the group should suggest one kind of opposition for each other player's character in the group. The Heat is normally taylor-made to a character's capabilities. An expert driver is going to do some fast wheelwork as part of his Heat while a Cracker is likely going to face down an intricately-designed and very secure vault door.

The Heat itself can be a specific task to overcome ("Disarm an explosive attached to the Take") or a goal to reach ("Seduce the mousy, attractive curator of the museum"). Some players may even come up with a whole scene ("Swerve down a busy intersection, dodging through and around crowds of pedestrians, then cut between crossing lanes of traffic to lose some persuers").

When all of the players have chimed in on ideas for a character, the controlling player of that character picks his favourite, which will be used during the game.

The Heat decided on here is something that the characters in the Crew know they are going to have to come up against as part of the caper. Feel free to plan for it; gather up the appropriate tools and resources, dig up info from your contacts, whatever you need to get the job done.

Don't think that's enough Heat for you? Don't worry about that. The Director is going to create plenty of Heat that the players didn't even expect or plan for.

CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTER CREATION

In the previous chapter you had the chance to outline some basic ideas for the character you wanted to play. What we've got here are the rules for taking those ideas and making them into a character in Criminal Element. Each of the following steps will define and explore specific aspects of your character, refining those concepts from the Setup into fine details.

Knack

All characters have one thing that they excel at, that separates them from the rest of the lames working the grift. Some call it a talent, others a gift. This game calls it a Knack.

Simply, a Knack is what your character is really good at. Most Knacks will find their origins in a character's concept. Those roles the players yelled out often make for great Knacks, like the classics "Getaway Driver", "Femme Fatale" or "Ace Hitman".

Some players may choose to describe their character's Knack in a more arcane way. A conman may come off as "A Good Shoulder to Cry On", or you might wind up with "the Man with the Plan".

A character has only one Knack and can never change it or get a second one. Think of it as the one thing your character was born to do, or trained all of his years at becoming. Be sure that whatever Knack you go with is the one that you're going to want to keep.

Players should also define what their Knack is, just to make sure that everyone is on the same page. A Knack can be as broad or as narrow as you like, though something like "Good at Everything" probably won't fly with the Director. Take a moment and discuss what your Knack will and will not cover. For instance, a "Getaway Driver" might be awesome at swerving through intersections at 80 m.p.h., but that Knack might not cover banging dents out of the fender.

Motive

Every crook understands that the world is about one thing: desire. The world revolves around what people want, what they need, and the criminal is the ultimate embodiment of that desire. These desires, or Motives, exist in all characters and are the reason that they do the bad things that they do.

Motives are goals that a character tries to attain. Motives can cover everything from "Keep my family living well" to "Control everyone I meet" to "Bloody Fucking Anarchy".

Each character has one Motive, and it will only change on very rare occasions (see Chapter Three). As with Knacks, it is up to the player to define his character's Motive. They can be drastically different from

character to character and will often be the source of some great inter-character conflict.

Motives are life-long goals so they should not be something that can be easily resolved. Some Motives may be recurring ones, like “Supporting My Family” or “Adrenaline Junky”. They can also be long term plans, like “Squirrel Away Enough to Retire” or “Get Revenge on Agent Baldwin”.

A Motive is also something that the character will not react to casually. Motives burn within a character with a need to be fulfilled. They have to feel powerful and significant, otherwise why bother. Chasing after goals also brings with it some gains (as discussed in the section on earning Drama Points, next chapter) so it is important to remember your Motive in all things.

Ultimately, Motives are one of the things that make a character worth playing. A weak Motive leads to a weak character, one you will most likely grow tired of playing rather quickly. Be sure to take a couple of minutes and design a good Motive for your character, one that will entertain you and hold your interest. As always, remember to discuss your ideas for Motive with the other players and the Director.

Vice

A Vice is a fault or failing in a character’s personality. It’s an immorality or a terrible, destructive practice. It’s the ultimate kind of bad habit.

A character can’t help but act out their Vice. A vice is never good for a person, though sometimes it may feel right. They make you do the things that you don’t want to do, that you know aren’t the smart moves, but you just can’t help it. It’s something that the character can’t change about himself, no matter how badly he may want to. When a Vice takes hold it can screw up a job, force you to betray your friends or even wind you up dead.

A character’s Vice is activated at certain times by the Director. Those moments are called Meltdowns. When you’re in the midst of a Meltdown, you’ll have to act up your character’s Vice to the fullest. This is described in more detail in Chapter Four.

Players must design one Vice for their character. For a Vice to work it must be the kind of personality trait that not only could, but will seriously endanger your chances of pulling off the job. You’ll also want to make sure that your Vice is a bit broad. Doing this will just make life easier on you. It can be much harder to act out an arcane Vice at the drop of a hat than one that is more flexible and open. Take your time in creating yours as a Vice will only change if a character’s Motive is resolved.

The inspiration for a character’s Vice can come from any number of places, but most often it is an expression of Motive taken too far. Adrenaline Junkies may “Never Back Down”. Those that want payback might have “Furious Anger”.

Vices can also be a Motive inverted. A character that loves being in

control may be a “Sucker For a Pretty Face”. A character that wants to prove how smart he is might be an “Irrational Thug” underneath it all.

Knacks can be a good source of Vices as well. A character that is a bit of a skull crusher may be “Abusive”. You could take it the other way as well and say that he’s a “Love Fool.”

Traits

So you know broadly what your character is good at thanks to his Knack. But what can he do specifically? Those certain details of character are represented by Traits, which are the catch-all for the specific talents, skills, aptitudes, resources and qualities that a character has.

Traits can represent just about anything, from “Good with Guns” to “Cool Manipulator”, from “Street Connections” to “Trust Fund Baby”.

While Traits can be simple, one-word descriptors, the phrasing of a Trait can add more personality to a character. A character can be “Strong”. Alternatively, he can also have “Massive Muscles” or be a “Brick Shithouse”. Each means for the same thing but they all also give a different sense of who the character is.

Traits are rated in three different levels: Novice, Expert and Master, each representing an increasing capability in the Trait. Novice implies some skill, something that puts you above the average, but nothing exceptional. An Expert Trait represents advanced knowledge or ability, like that learned after practice and a lot of in the field experience. Master-level Traits represent skills and abilities that are truly remarkable, learned from years of use or an incredible natural aptitude.

Your character begins play with six Traits; three rated at Novice, two at Expert and one at Master. Create six traits and assign their ratings. Be sure that the Traits you design are well-suited to the type of setting that the game will take place in and that you get the approval of the Director on them.

Wounds

Characters in a game like Criminal Element will find themselves getting punched, kicked, stabbed and shot at quite often. Wounds represent your character’s capacity for damage. Taking its cue from the movies and books that this game tries to emulate, Wounds aren’t gauged by how hardy or powerful a character is. Instead, Wounds represent how important a character is to the story. Minor characters will only have a couple of Wounds while Major ones will have many more Wounds.

All characters have one Wound for each of the following game characteristics they have: a Name, Knack, Motive, Vice, and each individual Trait. Thus, all starting characters will have 10 Wounds.

Tools of the Trade

Make a small wish list of the items you want your character to have and give

this to the Director. He will then tell you what items you can and cannot have. Try and be reasonable in your requests. Keep within your character's means. If your character has a Trait such as "Trust Fund Baby", then you could probably get away with asking for expensive things for your character. A character with "Black Market Connections" might be able to score himself some fancy weaponry.

Some items you ask for might require an Acquisition Draw. This is when your Director puts your connections and money to the task to see if you can get the item you're looking for. More information on Acquisition Draws can be found in the next chapter.

Remember, the Director has final approval on all choices for equipment. Be nice to him.

Drama Points

All Players begin play with 10 Drama Points. Drama Points can be used in two ways. First, they can be spent to increase a character's capabilities by purchasing new Traits or increasing the level of existing ones.

Drama Points can also be used to create Dramatic Shifts. A Dramatic Shift is a way to effect a change in the game landscape. These alterations can be Minor (a gun that wasn't stated as being in your pants' leg previously is suddenly there), Major (your friend Louie knows exactly who stole your money and where to find him) or Miraculous (not only did you expect that guy to shoot you, you planned on it. And here's how it all works out in your master scheme).

Drama Points and Dramatic Shifts are covered in more detail in Chapter Four.

Meltdown

A Meltdown is what happens when your character succumbs to his Vice. Meltdowns are caused by players spending Drama Points to create Dramatic Shifts. Each Dramatic Shift that the player creates also brings with it either one, two or three Meltdowns. Characters do not begin play with any Meltdowns reserved.

You'll find more information on Meltdowns in Chapter Four.

Telling Your Story

After all of the players have created their characters, it's time for everyone to tell their story. Each player should take turns and tell everyone else a story about their character. This can cover anything that the player would like. A childhood sob story, a con job that went just right, a tale of prison life, any and all of these are good subjects. As long as the story somehow illuminates a part of the character's personality then it is good for this.

All stories should be told in character. This is a great time to take

your character out for a “test drive”. Play up any mannerisms you imagine your character might have, use an accent, just try him on for size and see if you like the fit.

A great way to approach this is for everyone in the group to pretend that they are their characters sitting around a table at a bar and they’re all talking over a couple of beers. Truly inspired players may even talk with other players while they are telling their story, asking them questions and drawing out more details. Some might even tie their story into that of another player.

If you’re having a hard time figuring out which player should go first have everyone draw one card from their deck and place it face up. The highest card drawn acts first, followed by the second highest and so on until every player has told his story.



CHAPTER FOUR: **PLAYING THE GAME**

You've got a plan. You know what the Take is and you know what's going to get in the way. You've got a character. He's ready, willing and able in his cheap suit with the 9mm-bulge at his side. You've got a crew. Like-minded, well-trained and ready for action. Now it's time to drop the hammer.

This chapter is all about what most RPGs call the conflict resolution system. It's what the players and Director will use whenever something happens during gameplay that doesn't have an obvious outcome, like when you try to shoot someone in the face.

Everything that you need to know about conflict resolution, from arguments to assault & battery, is detailed throughout this chapter. The basics of it are upfront, while the vagaries and weirder things are more toward the end of the chapter.

Blackjack

The first thing that you'll need to know in order to play this game is the rules to Blackjack. Most conflict resolution systems used by role-playing games employ a random element in their play, and this game is no different. As Players of Criminal Element, you'll use a variation on the playing card game Blackjack to handle any conflicts that come up in the game.

The basic rules behind Blackjack are really simple. First, all players involved in a hand of Blackjack receive two cards from a standard deck of playing cards, jokers removed. One of these cards is played face up so that all of the other players can see it; the other card is played face down. Only the owner of the face down card is allowed to look at it.

Play begins to the left of the dealer. Each player decides whether they want to receive another card, to "hit", or whether they will stay with what they have, or to "stand". Players in a gambling game of Blackjack may also decide to fold if they do not like the cards that they have received.

The value of numbered cards to a hand is equal to the number on the card. Face cards are always rated as 10, though in the case of a tie, the higher the rank of the face card, the better. Finally, aces can be read as either 1 or 11 points. The player doesn't have to decide if the ace is read as either until his hand is revealed.

Once all players have had the opportunity to gather together the best hand possible, all players reveal all of their cards. To win a hand of Blackjack a player must have as high a total possible without going over 21.

If at any time a player has drawn over 21, he has "gone bust". A player who has gone bust should immediately turn all of his cards face down and discard them, making his fellow players aware that he has busted.

The best possible hand a player can draw is "Blackjack" which is

when a player draws for their first two cards both an ace and a face card of any suit.

In the case of a tied total the player with the highest single card in their draw wins the hand. In this instance any aces drawn count as the value that they were played at in their hand

Variations on Play

While Blackjack serves as the inspiration for the resolution mechanic, the mechanic doesn't work exactly like that game. There are minor changes to it that you'll see throughout the rest of this chapter that spice things up, but the basics are still the same. There are two big exceptions to the Blackjack rules that you should know up front.

First, players do not get the chance to "Hit" or "Stand" during play. We deal out hands a little differently here, as you'll see later in this chapter.

Also, players should not discard their draws if they ever go bust. The draw is still required to determine the margin of success, or the Spread as it's called in this game. You'll find more on that later in this chapter, too.

Outside of those two exceptions, the draw of cards will work largely the same. Players will still compare hands and try to get the highest without going over 21. Face cards and Aces are still given the same values. All the other stuff, like when you'll need to use the cards, how you face them, all of that is explained right here, in this chapter.

What you need...

Every player, including the Director will need one standard deck of playing cards, jokers removed. The play group will also need poker chips, tokens or coins to represent Drama Points.

The Round

Things can get a little crazy when the guns come out and the bullets start whizzing past. It's easy to lose your head. That's exactly why we have the Round.

A Round is a moment in time. During that moment everyone gets to try to accomplish one major thing, their Intent. That Intent is resolved by following a sequence within that Round, a couple of quick and simple set of steps that streamlines the gameplay and keeps things moving. The resolution of every conflict in the game, from an important debate to a barroom brawl, goes according to a Round.

The Round works in two broad parts. The first part of a Round sets everything up and gets everyone organized and ready for the mayhem to follow. Players say what they want their characters to do, draw their Hands and get turn order straight. Then the second part is when everything happens. Each player and character gets their time in the spotlight and resolves their actions individually. The steps to a Round are as follows:

THE ROUND

- 1. Declare Intent:** Each player declares what their characters intend to do during the upcoming round, including the Director for all of his characters.
- 2. Determine Draw:** The Director determines the appropriate Traits for each player's actions and whether a Knack or Vice will impact the action. Using this, all players determine their hand size and initial facing.
- 3. Form Draw and Determine Initiative:** Each player draws the hand for their character's action, playing face-up and face-down cards appropriately. Players can examine their draws freely. Initiative is determined, the player with the highest face-up card getting first Initiative, the second highest acting second, and so on.
- 4. Resolve Actions:** Actions are resolved individually, based on Initiative order. When a character's turn comes around the following steps are taken.
 - *Opposition Hands:* The Director (or Player, when appropriate) draws an Opposition Hand for any defense or difficulty the character is facing.
 - *Place Your Bets:* A Player can bet Drama Points on his Action now if he wants to.
 - *Determine Success:* Hands are revealed, success and the Spread is figured out and immediate fallout (ie: damage, etc.) is applied. Director narrates outcome.
 - *Pay-out:* A Player pays out whatever Drama Points he may owe on a losing bet or is immediately payed out by the Director on a winning Hand.
 - *Repeat:* Until all of the characters involved in the round have had their turn or are eliminated from play.
- 5. Wrap Up:** The Director surmises of all of the action of the completed Round and sets the stage for the next. Everyone shuffles their decks.

At first glance that may seem like more than a little bit to chew but it really is pretty simple. The first three of the five steps amount to making a simple statement like "My character is going to shoot the blonde guy", then drawing some cards and looking at them. Step four is basically comparing your Hand with another and finding out who wins, and deciding what happens to the winner and loser. Then you tie up the loose ends with step five. Once you sit down and play through a Round or two you'll see that all of that stuff listed above only takes a couple of seconds to get done.

The Round and Time

The length of a Round is the time that it takes to accomplish one action. Some rounds will be very short, like those normally used in combat, which will only be a second or two long. Other Rounds may be longer depending on what happens in them. A round of character interaction and debate can take up a couple of minutes in game time.

Intent

At the beginning of a Round each player will declare their character's intended action, simply called your Intent. It's what you hope to get done in the round. It can be anything from trying to seduce the stewardess to pulling your shotgun on a goon and letting the hammer drop.

The only restriction when deciding Intent is that characters are able to attempt one complex task per round. Characters cannot shoot at people and hack security passcodes at the same time. In instances like this, players will simply have to prioritize.

Intended actions aren't necessarily one compartmentalized task. Instead, an Intent can be any combination of minor, connective actions that total up to create the same outcome. Thus, one strong punch to the face and a series of swift kicks can mean for the same thing, as mechanically, the intent of the action is to cause damage to the other character. The cause of this damage is simply flavorful narrative.

Intent isn't just about what your character is doing, but why he is doing it and what you want the outcome of your action to be. It is very important to make clear to the Director what you want the outcome of your action to be, as it can have a big impact on what Trait he tells you to use in your Draw.

Phrasing Intent

Your intent should not state your actions in present tense as if you were actually accomplishing them. Remember, this is what you are hoping your character accomplishes, not what he is doing already. Use phrases like "I try" or "I want to", like "I try to shoot him in the face" or "I want to punch him in the gut".

Some players will try a different tact, describing their characters actions right up to the point of conflict. For example, a player might say "I turn around quickly and level my gun at his head, squeezing the trigger".

See how that didn't sound anything at all like "I shoot him in the head"? It's a cool little description that gives the player some control over the action. At the same time it doesn't take any of the power away from the Director or try to dictate the outcome of an action.

The Hand

Whenever your character is engaged in conflict resolution you will need to

draw a number of cards. These cards will be used to determine whether your character's intended action is successful or a failure. Just like in most other card games, all of the cards that you draw for your character is referred to as your Hand. The total number of cards drawn and their facing depends on some features of your character. How you assemble that hand is described in the next couple of steps.

The Initial Draw

Just as in standard Blackjack, a player will always first draw two cards. This is your Initial Draw.

In any standard situation players will normally play their cards with one facing up, so that all of the players can easily see it, and one facing down, so only the player himself can look at it. Facing is important as it impacts the way in which you total the value of a hand as well as the betting of Drama Points.

If a character has a Knack that is appropriate to the task he is trying to accomplish the player may play both of these initial cards face down. This will give you better control of the outcome of the action, as described later in this chapter.

If your character possesses a Vice that can be tied into the action that your character is attempting to achieve, both of the cards in your initial draw will be played face up. This will impact the way you total your hand at the end of the round, and normally not in the best way.

If both a character's Knack and Vice relate to the attempted action then they cancel each other out, leaving the player to draw an initial draw of standard facing, one card facing up and the other facing down.

Players can, if they want, play any of their cards face up instead of face down. Cards that are forced to be played face up by a character's Vice cannot be played faced down. The playing of cards and their facing is described in more detail later in this chapter.

Traits

Traits allow you to draw additional cards for your Hand. If you have a Trait that can be thought to help in your character's Intent, you can draw a number of extra cards based on the level of the Trait, as seen below.

Level of Trait	Extra Cards Drawn
Novice	1 extra card
Expert	2 extra cards
Master	3 extra cards

A player may only use one Trait for an action. The Director must decide what Trait a character has, if any, that is appropriate for the intended action at hand.

The facing of these extra cards is completely up to the player

drawing them. You may play any or all of them face up, or simply err on the side of caution and play them all face down, or any combination of the two.

Initiative

Actions are resolved in an order based on the cards that were played face up. The player with the highest card placed face up gets to go first, with the second highest going next, and so forth until all actions have been resolved.

Players that played no cards face up go dead last. If multiple players played no cards face up, the player with the most cards in his hand goes first, with the second most acting second, and so on.

If there is a tie, defer to the second face up card in the players' hands. Use the third, fourth or however many more face up cards there are to break the tie. If you are still tied, the player with the most cards in his hand, face up and face down combined, will go first.

As a last resort, the player closest to the left of the Director goes first and around the table from there, leaving the Director to go last.

Card Facing

As players actually draw their hands from their deck they are faced with a decision: Which way should they play their cards?

Unless a player is forced to play some of his cards face up because of his character's Vice, that player can face most, or when his Knack is active, all of his cards however he likes. The playing and facing of cards is done individually. For each card drawn from the deck the player can decide on playing it face up or face down. This decision must be made before looking at the value of the card being drawn, or any other cards that have already been drawn and played face down.

For instance, a player has drawn his initial hand of two cards, one up and one down. He shows a 4 of hearts, not a good face card for initiative. That player is doing something that he has an Expert trait in, so he gets to draw two more cards. He decides to draw his next card face up and shows a Jack of Spades. Because he's showing that and feeling pretty confident in it he decides to draw his last card face down.

After all of the cards of a players hand have been dealt, that player can feel free to look at his cards and assemble his best hand.

Totaling Your Draw

After you have finished dealing yourself cards you will put together your best possible Hand. Chose your cards to give yourself the highest possible total you can get without going over 21. Just as in standard Blackjack, numbered cards have a value equal to their number, face cards have a value of ten, and aces are worth either one or eleven.

The difference between standard Blackjack and this game is that in Criminal Element you can discard any cards that were played face down. All

face up cards must be used in the final Hand, but any face down cards that you don't like can be ignored.

Opposition Hand

Alright, so we've got one half of Conflict Resolution covered with the Hand, representing everything that a character wants to do with his Intended Action. But every action taken in Criminal Element is done against something. That something could be conceptual, like the quality of the security measures of a safe, or it may be very real, like the ducking and diving enemy in your crosshairs. Whatever the source of these difficulties are, they are represented in this game by the Opposition Hand.

Simply, the Opposition Hand is a hand of cards, just like what the Players use. The Director uses this hand to represent the overall difficulty of any action that a character is trying to take. It is a number of cards drawn, just like a regular hand, that goes up against a character's action. How big the hand is depends on how hard the attempted action is.

Opposition Level	Cards Drawn
Tricky	1 up, 1 down
Arduous	1 up, 2 down
Intimidating	1 up, 3 down
Impossible	1 up, 4 down
Fuck-All	1 up, 5 down

Note that there isn't a listing for "simple" or "average" oppositions. If the action being attempted were simple, or if the average guy could do it with no problem, then why bother drawing cards?

The Director should think of the difficulty of a given action in as abstract a fashion as possible. Don't split hairs over wind direction, lighting, humidity, facing and other matters of detail. Just decide on how hard the intended action is overall and draw a hand based on that.

As you may have noticed in the order of the Round, Opposition Hands are played after all of the other hands at the table have been played and Initiative has been determined. As such, Opposition Hands don't have an Initiative rating. They exist purely to gauge how hard it is for a character to make his action happen.

Remember, the card drawn face up is for everyone to see, so don't go hiding it behind a GM's screen.

Players as Opposition

Sometimes a Player Character will be the target of an Intended action. Actually, this will happen pretty often. Player Characters are often the targets of arguments, investigations and gunfire.

Whenever a Player Character is the target of an Intended Action, that

Player gets to draw his own Opposition Hand. This hand is always assigned to that Player by the Director but is usually formed just like a regular hand for a PC, by referring to a character's Traits. Card facing is also always assigned in the same way, depending on the relevance of a character's Knack or Vice.

Players are allowed to bet on any hand that they draw, and that includes Opposition Hands. If your draw is a nice one, feel free to toss a stake on it.

Direct Opposition

There may be the occasional moment when two characters will declare intents that are directly opposed to one another. As a for instance, let's say one character intends to wriggle his way past two bodyguards. Of course, those two bodyguards declare that they want to catch this guy.

At times like these, rather than drawing Opposition Hands for each character's hand, simply have the characters use their hands as Opposition hands against each other. Using the example above, The wriggler would compare his hand directly to the hands of the bodyguards trying to catch hold of him, and vice versa.

Defending Yourself

Punches, kicks, tire irons, lead pipes, mean pistols and roaring shotguns are all part and parcel of the grift. In a game like this there will be more than a couple of times when an opponent is going to try to hit you with one of these or any other myriad weapon.

Whenever a character is getting attacked, whether you're doing the attacking or it's the other way around, the Opposition Hand against the attacker will always be "Tricky". This represents any characters basic desire to not get hit, along with the standard problems that crop up in combat. This hand is simply called a Defense hand.

Characters draw a new Defense Hand for every attack that comes their way. This hand defends against one attack, and once that attack is resolved is discarded. Standard facing rules from Knack and Vice apply. And remember Players, you can bet on any hand you draw, so if you've got a good Defense Hand, feel free to toss a couple of chips on it.

Enhancing Actions

You've got a Master trait and a pile of Drama points but sometimes that just doesn't feel like enough. You're looking for security. You're looking for assurance. What you're looking for is an Enhancing Action.

An Enhancing Action is any action taken by a character that can help him accomplish another action. This can be any two actions as long as the completion of the first action can be thought to help the second one succeed. Diving for cover can help someone dodge better. Punching someone in the face can make a person seem more intimidating.

Whenever a character succeeds on a draw that would help his next action, that action's draw is increased by one card. If a character makes a successful attempt at doing some on-the-fly security research he can get an extra card on his "Breakin' n' Enterin'" draw. A big bruiser character successfully landing a punch could get an extra card on his "Intimidating Demeanor" draw.

Enhancement Actions are the only way in the entire game to increase your hand size, so get used to using them a lot.

Enhancing Actions cannot be stacked. A draw can be increased by only one card through Enhancing Actions. If you've already enhanced your a draw you cannot increase it further.

Defense draws may also be effected with Enhancing Actions. Players attempt their action like normal. If their Action is successful then, until the next time that character takes a new Intended action, any Defense draw they make is increased by one card.

A Trait can enhance itself with an Enhancing Action. For instance, a character is trying to learn some information about the security system of a place from a technician. That character can use her "Feminine Wiles" trait to get the tech-head's heart aflutter. She can follow that up with another use of the same trait to actually weedle the information out of him, which has now been enhanced by the first action.

Failing an Enhancing Draw doesn't mean that the character cannot still do the action he was hoping to enhance. The character simply doesn't get the extra card added into his draw.

Success and Failure

To find out if you are successful in any action, simply compare your hand to the opposing hand. The player with the highest total without going over 21 is successful, getting to accomplish his action.

The difference between the two hands is called the Spread. The Spread tells you how much impact your character's Intent had. To find the Spread for any action just subtract the lower hand from the higher and check the difference on the chart below.

Difference	Spread
0	Tenuous
1-2	Normal
3-4	Remarkable
5-6	Amazing
7+	Exceptional

If both hands in a conflict are tied, the player with the highest single card in his final hand wins the conflict, with a Spread of 0.

Any hand that shows a total above 21 automatically fails. Just like in regular Blackjack, this is called Going Bust. Whenever a hand Goes Bust

the Spread is calculated as the difference between the Busted Hand's total and 21, not the difference between the two opposed Hands.

Going Bust

That's correct. You read that bit above right. Characters can fail outright, and on purpose, by showing a total of higher than 21. And trust me, this is a very important thing to understand. It might seem odd at first, to intentionally force your character to fail at an action. However, it does have it's own distinct and often helpful advantage.

Like it said above, whenever a hand goes over 21 the Spread is always totalled as the difference of the Busted Hand and 21, no matter how well the other player's Hand did. Even if he drew a 21 right on the button. Using this rule, a player can control the outcome of a lot of actions. Sure, if you Go Bust you fail, but you get to say how badly you fail. This is a great way to defang those huge Opposition Hands.

So, let's say you flop a crap Hand of 7, 7 and 8. So you're left with the decision of showing a 14, a 15 or a 22. You could go with the 14 or 15 and hope that the other guy didn't draw a 16 or higher, but that ain't very likely.

Or you could go the other way and maintain some control over the situation, even in failure. Instead of going for the 14 or 15, the more cautious player's going to take the 22. That way he knows that he'll be staring down the bad side of a Spread of just 1. A 1-point Spread isn't much of anything to worry about in most circumstances. It's the sort of damage that's pretty easy for most PCs to just shrug off.

Shuffling

After his action has been resolved, a player may place his hand and any discarded cards back into his deck and reshuffle it. You may shuffle in any way you choose, and as much as you like, but once you have engaged in another action that you have drawn cards for you cannot shuffle your deck until that action has been resolved.

Drama Points and Dramatic Shifts

Drama Points are a type of currency that allows players to directly affect the landscape of the game as well as alter their characters.

Drama Points are also used to simulate how characters in movies always seem to have a little bit of luck in reserve. Maybe a character has a back-up gun that he never mentioned before, or is able to find the combination to a safe tucked away in a desk drawer. These changes to the game environment are called Dramatic Shifts and come in three levels: Minor, Major and Miraculous.

In order to use a Dramatic Shift, a player has to do two things. First you have to spend a number of Drama Points according to the kind of Shift

you are using. Also, whenever you use a Dramatic Shift you accrue some Meltdown points, the more powerful the Shift, the more Meltdown you get. Meltdown Points are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Minor Dramatic Shifts are instances of synchronicity and luck that help a character in small ways. Minor Shifts allow a player to affect slight changes in the environment or his own character. These changes are always small in scope, help your character a little bit and never break the “rules” of a scene. If the character needs a replacement gun all he has to do is buy a Minor Shift and, voila, the gun is tucked away in his pants’ leg, just like it was always there. Trying to find your way out of that skyscraper and got turned around? A Minor Shift later and you’ve got the fire escape map in your hand and your blazing a trail like Sacajawea. A Minor Dramatic Shift costs 5 Drama Points. Creating a Minor Shift will also give the PC one Meltdown Point.

Changes to the environment that are a little more extreme or that are a major “cheat” for your character are Major Dramatic Shifts. Knowing a guy that can get his hands on a SAW rifle for you, or getting only a scratch from a gut shot that should have sprayed you across the room are Major Dramatic Shifts. These types of Shifts cost a player 10 Drama Points and will net a PC two Meltdown Points for his trouble.

Then there are the big boys; the huge changes to the environment or narrative that can change the outcome of an entire story. These are called Miraculous Shifts and will cost you 15 Drama Points on top of giving you three Meltdown Points. The most commonly used Miraculous Shift is called “Flashbacking”, and is when a player “rewinds” the narrative a little bit to change what had gone before and sets himself up in a better way, like flashbacking to before a character was nabbed by the cops and narrating a scene in which the cops were bought off and brought in on the job. Players can also shake off all of the damage that they’ve received in a scene with “Not Dead Yet”, though only for a time.

Creating New Dramatic Shifts

The examples shown below are exactly that: examples. Players shouldn’t be afraid to come up with their own ideas for how to spend their Drama Points.

Whenever a Player comes up with an idea for a new Dramatic Shift it should be carefully considered by the Director and the rest of the Play Group. First, the shift must be clearly defined. What exactly does it allow a Player to do if used? Does the new Shift make sense for the kind of game you’re playing? How powerful is it?

The group should also consider how well the new Shift fits in with the game they are playing. Does it make sense for the kind of story that is being told? Is it something that isn’t easily replicated by using one of the existing Dramatic Shifts already? Most of all, is it fun?

If everyone in the playgroup approves of the Dramatic Shift, then

EXAMPLES OF...

MINOR DRAMATIC SHIFTS

- **“Backup Piece”**: The use of this DS allows the PC to produce a small, minorly useful item from out of nowhere, as if it had been there the entire time. “Backup Piece” is normally used to create a new gun out of thin air, though it can also create other small objects, like a fake ID, or a bobby pin to pick a lock with.
- **“Don’t Look Now”**: When a player uses this Dramatic Shift he forces one form of security to not see him for one Round. This is normally due to some great bit of synchronicity. A security guard sneezes just as a player character accidentally drops a tool or goes to buy a soda from a vending machine when the player character needs to silently stalk across the hall.
- **“Adrenaline Rush”**: A PC employing this Shift gets a sudden burst of energy. Any Killing damage that a character has taken so far that Scene is turned into Bashing damage. A player may only use this Dramatic Shift once per session.

EXAMPLES OF...

MAJOR DRAMATIC SHIFTS

- **“I Know a Guy”**: The Player using this Dramatic Shift introduces a character into the story that has information relating to one specific topic of the player’s designation, or connections that will get him one piece of equipment that the player desires. This character will allow the Player to make a Requisition Draw for the desired knowledge or piece of equipment as if he had a Master-ranked related Trait. This can be used even after a character has already failed at getting the desired item or information previously. The Opposition Hand for this Draw is set by the Director just like it were any other hand.
- **“Kevlar”**: By activating this DS, the damage done to a PC from a single attack is reduced to one point of Bashing damage. This does not “unwrite” the attack being successful, it just supplies a good reason as to why it did such minor damage. This DS is normally seen in film as a character pulling away his shirt to reveal a bullet-proof vest. This DS can only be used once per session and must be used directly after the successful attack that the player wants to reduce.

EXAMPLES OF...

MIRACULOUS DRAMATIC SHIFTS

- **“Flashbacking”**: Using this DS allows the player to “freeze” the game at the moment that the DS is activated. From here he is able to go back to the end of any scene earlier in the same session and pick up where that scene left off, extending it. From here the PC is able to retroactively add in details that can change the tide for his future self. The Flashback ends as soon as the player makes one successful draw while in the past. It is through the judicious use of this spectacular DS that criminal masterminds can truly control all possible outcomes.
- **“Not Dead Yet”**: With this powerful Shift a Player Character ignores all of the damage a character has taken so far in a scene, as well as any damage that the character will take for the rest of the scene. This effect lasts until the end of the scene, at which time all of the damage that the character has had inflicted on him is applied in full. This normally results in a dead PC. A player may only use this DS once per scene.

it comes into regular play. If there is even one voice that doesn't want the Dramatic Shift introduced, including that of the Director, then the new Shift is spiked and is not added to the game. Players should be ready and willing to compromise when introducing new Shifts.

When a new shift makes it through the vetting process of the play group it becomes just like any of the ones listed in the book. The Player that created it gets to give his Dramatic Shift its name. The Director assigns the Dramatic Shift its level, be it Minor, Major or Miraculous. This new Dramatic Shift is just like any other and can be used by any Player at the table. This is something that should be considered when creating the new Shift.

Getting What You Need

Pulling off a heist isn't all talent. Sometimes its down to the tools. Most of the time a character is going to be able to get the things that he needs without any muss or fuss, but sometimes you just need to have the hard-to-get things, like a complete fake identity, a working pass-card into a secure facility or those weapons-grade explosives that you put on your christmas list.

When a player character wants to get his hands on something that the Director considers rare or hard to get, it's time for an Requisition Draw. This is a draw just like any other but the Opposition Hand is figured on how hard it is to get the item that the character is looking for. Simple, easy to get

items won't even require a draw while rare, esoteric, powerful and strange things might require the drawing of cards. Directors should use the same guidelines for an Opposition Hand of this type as were outlines before.

A character can use any Trait for this draw that would make sense, though the most common ones used generally involve leveraging contacts or having a large wad of capitol. See why those "Black Market Connections" are so important? Of course, it's the Director's final word on whether your Trait is going to help you get what you need.

Requisition Hands are also handy for getting information. Players can expect to make a bunch of these kinds of draws when their trying to dig up intel on people and places; the more secretive the info, the higher the Opposition Hand.

Growing... As a Person

During gameplay, a Player will (hopefully) earn himself a nice little stack of Drama Points. Some of those points are going to get spent on Dramatic Shifts if the Director is doing his job, but Players will also want to set some aside so that they can increase their Traits, or even buy some new ones.

A player can get himself a brand new Trait rated at novice for five Drama Points. For ten Drama Points a Player can raise one Novice Trait to Expert. Fifteen Drama Points will make one Expert Trait into a Master.

Whenever a character gets a new Trait he also gets a new Wound Point to go along with it. Remember, the more details a character has, the harder he is to put down.

Players can raise their Traits at any time. Just spend the points and the Trait gets the bump. If a player spends the points between sessions then there are no complications. He's bided his time, he wasn't greedy, so he gets away free and clear. However, if a Player raises a Trait during gameplay, that raise is considered to be a Dramatic Shift with a level according to the number of Drama Points spent. Thus, a new Novice trait is a Minor Dramatic Shift, an Expert Trait is a Major Dramatic Shift, and so forth. This means that the character also earns himself the same amount of Meltdown Points he would if he had done any other Shift of that level.

Also, remember, the Drama Points that a player earns belong to the Player, not his character. As such, you don't have to spend those points just on your own character. Lets say that you, the gunman in the group, really want to get into this safe. Only thing is, you're not too sure about your break-in man's Expert "Safe Cracker" Trait. Not a problem. Spend the fifteen Drama Points and raise his Trait from Expert to Master. Just remember, if you do this during gameplay it's a Dramatic Shift. Since you're the guy that made the Shift, you're the one that's going to have to eat those Meltdown Points and not the guy you bought the increase for. So be careful with your charity.

Where Drama Points Come From

All players get 10 Drama Points for their characters at character creation. Everybody needs a little start-up capitol.

Beyond that, Directors may give out 1 point Drama Point awards for doing particular things in game, like saying something really smart or funny in character, or doing something that surprises everyone with its coolness.

These little kickers, called House Rewards, are rare and a player should never rely on them. They're there mainly to help you out of a hole that you might have dug yourself into. The best way to get a thick stack of Drama Points is by betting them.

Betting Drama Points

Players can bet Drama Points on any action that they are involved in. As long as cards are being dealt and hands are being compared, a player can bet on his own hand coming out on top.

A player may bet no more Drama Points than the number of cards he has played face up in his hand. For this reason alone it is almost always a good policy to play at least one card face up.

Bets can only be placed on a Player's own hand. No betting on your friends to come up "aces and faces". It's their success to take the glory for, and their failure for the hurtin'.

Bets are placed after a player has seen his entire hand but before the hands are revealed. This gives players the ability to be at least a little careful with their Drama Points. Use it. You'll need it.

The Return

The Return is the reward you earn for betting Drama Points on a successful action. The standard Return is 1:1. This means that if you win the bet you get an amount equal to the bet that you made (the first "1" in the equation) and you get your original amount back (the second "1"). Thus, a player that bet 3 Drama Points on a standard 1:1 action and won would earn a total of 6 Drama Points; his original three plus the three for winning. You get a Return of 2:1, that means you get 2 DP for every one you bet.

Sure, a 1:1 Return is alright, but it's chump change to the real players out there, but there are ways to raise that Return. Grifters that play it right can get a return of 2:1, 3:1 or even an incredible 4:1. To do that though, you've got to put more than just your Drama Points at stake. If a Player bets on his character's action while he's under some certain conditions, he can raise his Return. For each of the following conditions connected to the action, the Return goes up by one point.

Remember, fortune favors the bold in all things. The biggest payouts will always come from the biggest risks. Players that play a high number of cards face up and bet as many Drama Points as they can while chasing after their Motive and suffering through a Meltdown will earn a

bunch more than those that sit on the sidelines and wait for backup.

THE RETURN

- Motive:** If a character is actively engaging his Motive in this action, the Return is raised by one point.
- Meltdown:** If the character is in Meltdown when attempting the action, the Return is raised by one point.
- Drawing “21”:** If the player’s final hand after discarding facedown cards is a “21”, the Return is raised by one point.

Meltdown

If a character has any Meltdown Points, he is in danger of freaking out, breaking down, cracking under the pressure or just going plain loco. Or, as we like to call it, having a Meltdown. When a character goes through a Meltdown his Vice takes possession of him, guiding his actions

A Meltdown is a cue for the player from the Director. Whenever the Director wants he can spend one of the player’s Meltdown Points. This is a “heads up” from the Director for that player to start acting up his character’s Vice and playing it to the hilt. A Meltdown lasts for the remainder of the Scene. A player may never spend Meltdown Points on his own.

Every character will have a different way of playing his Vice. Some are subtle, working their horrible magic under the surface. Some Vices explode with rage and hatred. Some players will want to play their Vice differently according to what’s going on in the scene. Some Vices will lead to a character’s destruction, while in rare moments a Vice may be a character’s grace. All that a player must know is that he cannot ignore a Meltdown when the Director calls for it.

The Director never has the right to take over a character if he feels that the player is not portraying his Vice well. The Director controls the expenditure of all Meltdown Points; that is all.

If a Director calls for a Meltdown and the player cannot think of how to work one into the scene then the Meltdown is not activated. The Meltdown Point is not spent and the character can act as normal.

Damage and Dying

All characters have a number of Wound points. These represent the amount of damage that a character can take before he’s out of the picture. Some characters are going to have a bunch of wound points, some will only have a couple. The number of Wound points that a PC has is equal to the number of all of his details, as explained in the chapter on Character Creation.

Every time a character gets hit, he checks off a number of Wound boxes on his character sheet equal to the amount of Damage he took. The Damage of a successful attack is always equal to the Spread of that attack.

AN EXAMPLE OF MELTDOWN

WHEN THINGS GO BAD...

Tim is playing *Jacob*, an undercover cop with the Vice of Betrayal. *Jacob* and the crew he's gotten into are attempting a daring mid-day bank robbery. The bank's patrons are all bound up on the floor of the main room. *Jacob's* got a couple of black Meltdown markers on his character sheet when he finds himself alone with the hostages. *Marie*, the Director, decides to call in one of his Meltdowns.

Marie: "Hand me one of those Meltdown markers and start freaking out."

Tim: "Okay, I can do that. I walk over and kneel down next to one of the security guards. I reach around behind his head and untie his blindfold. Then I pull a switchblade out of my pocket and flick it open in front of the guards eyes."

Marie: "The guard's eyes widen and he starts to shake."

Jacob: "It's okay. I'm a cop. I'm going to untie you"

Tim: "I reach around behind him and cut his ropes free."

The other players all stare at **Tim** with mouths agape.

Jacob: "I'm going to let you go. Run. Tell the police what's going on here."

Marie: "The guard pulls himself up to his feet. He is obviously still shaken and afraid. Cold sweat runs down his face."

Security Guard: "What about the others here?"

Jacob: "Let me worry about them. Just run."

Tim: "I walk over to the side door and unlock it. I usher the guard through and push him out."

Marie: "As you do so, *Bryan*, your character *Crawley* comes walking into the main hall. You see *Jacob* standing at the side door, pushing someone through it."

Crawley: "What the hell is going on here?!"

Tim: "Aw, shit. I reach for my gun and pull it out of its holster."

Jacob: "I'm sorry."

Crawley: "Not as much as you're gonna be!"

AN EXAMPLE OF MELTDOWN

WHEN THINGS GO GOOD...

A little while later into the same session *Jacob* is in the bank's vault. He's gotten one of the security guard's walkie-talkies and he's on a police band trying to get in touch with his fellow boys in blue. *Crawley's* lying in a heap of blood on the floor and *Jacob* isn't looking too good either. *Jacob's* just gotten the police on the radio when in comes **Danny's** character, *Wheeler*, an old pro at this racket. *Wheeler* knows the score and he's got a gun in hand just for this special occasion.

Wheeler: "Just put the radio down, son. I don't want to have to get messy."

Jacob: "It's already gotten messy. Now I'm just aiming to finish this."

Wheeler: "Looks like I'll be aiming for the same thing."

Marie: "Hey, Tim. Time for another Meltdown. Toss me one of your markers."

Danny: "Oh, this should be good."

Tim: "I press down on the button on the radio. My mouth hangs open for a second."

Danny: "I bring my gun up and line up a shot right at *Jacob's* head."

Jacob: "They're exiting through the west sewer line. Move quick!"

Danny: "But we were going to go through the air ducts..."

Wheeler: "What are you doing?"

Jacob: "Probably getting fired. Get going quick before I reconsider."

Danny: "I kneel down and pick up a bag of cash, my gun still trained on *Jacob*."

Wheeler: "Don't know why, but I always knew I could trust you."

Jacob: "Yeah, I'm a real honest motherfucker."

Tim: "Oh, man am I going to have fun with my Aftermath."

So, a character that was the victim of a Four point Spread Shotgun Blast would check off four Wound boxes on his character sheet.

There's two varieties of Damage that a character can be dealt: Bashing and Killing. Bashing Damage represents the bumps, bruises, scrapes and cuts that come from punches, kicks and other non-lethal injury-makers. Killing Damage is the sort of deep gashes, wucking chest wounds and punctures through flesh and bone delivered by guns, spiked bats and high-speed cars that can end a character's life.

Any time a character takes damage from an attack that the Director considers Bashing, the player marks off the Wound boxes with one slash, like this: /. If the character takes Killing Damage, the Wound boxes get big crossed slashes in them, like an 'X'.

When marking off damage on your Wound track, Killing damage and Bashing damage goes along side by side. Killing does not replace Bashing damage in most circumstances. If a character takes three points of Bashing damage and two points of Killing damage, then he would have three slashes and two Xs for a total of five wound boxes checked off.

The only time that Killing damage replaces Bashing damage is if a character has completely filled up his Wound track. If a character's Wound track has been filled completely with Damage checks and the character takes more Damage, then you double back on the Wound track, turning a number of Bashing wounds into Killing wounds equal to the amount of Damage that the character has received.

The Symptoms of Damage

If a character has filled in all of his Wound track with damage marks, that means it's Bad News time. Take a look at the types of damage you've received. If your character's Wound track is filled with all Bashing damage, or a combination of Bashing and Killing, then your character is Knocked Out. That means that you're out for the rest of the Scene. You'll wake up at the beginning of the next Scene, with all of your Bashing damage gone completely, leaving you only with any Killing damage that you were unlucky enough to take.

A Character can fight off unconsciousness, though. Whenever a knocked out character wants to stave off unconsciousness and stay awake, aware and able for a Round, he just simply takes another point of damage. Doing this will turn one point of Bashing damage into Killing Damage. A character must do this at the beginning of every round that he wishes to stay awake in. Once a character has allowed himself to fall unconscious he cannot awaken himself again and must wait until the beginning of the next Scene before he can be roused again.

Characters with Wound tracks filled up exclusively with Lethal Damage are dead. Finito, Gone to meet their Makers, Pushing Up Daisies, Making the Big Goodbye, and any other tired euphemisms you may know.

The Player with a dead character isn't out of the game at all, though. Read up on that in the sections on the Spoiler and the New Guy alter in this chapter.

How Bad Does It Hurt?

Often players will want to know how hurt a character is. Did that shotgun blast only graze you, or do you have ten ounces of buck swimming in your guts? It's a reasonable question with a fairly simple, if fluid answer.

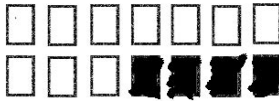
Damage and Wound points are in no way supposed to track realistic damage. As you may remember from the chapter on character creation, the number of wound points a character has doesn't represent hardiness. Those

EXAMPLES OF...

HOW TO TAKE DAMAGE

Lets say that a beginning PC has gotten himself into a nice little fight. At the beginning of the game his Wound track is going to look like this.

WOUNDS



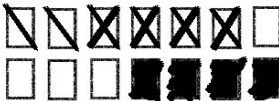
That character gets into a brawl with another, and the bad guy lands a strong punch on our PC here, getting a two point Spread. That means for two points of damage and, since it was a punch, the Damage is considered Bashing. The PCs Wound track is going to look like this now.

WOUNDS



Next, our unlucky PC gets to meet the business end of a revolver. He's been plugged with a shot with a four point Spread. Since a gun is obviously Killing damage, the player marks down four Xs on his Wound track, like this.

WOUNDS

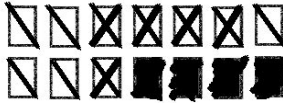


CONTINUED EXAMPLES OF...

HOW TO TAKE DAMAGE

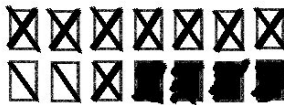
After a couple of more Rounds of brawling and shooting, our PC has fallen unconscious, having had his Wound track filled with both Bashing and Killing Damage.

WOUNDS



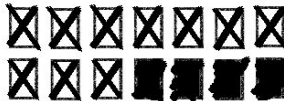
But we're not out of the fight yet. Our PC takes one point of Killing damage and keeps himself going, pushing past the KO. Sadly, he only does this to take another two point attack from a man with brass knuckles. While that would only normally be considered Bashing damage, our PC has already taken his full track in Damage, so he has to double back and change two Bashing points into Killing points.

WOUNDS



This guy just won't go down without a fight. He turns another Bashing point into a Killing point to stay in the fray. Which is too bad, because this unlucky shlub of a PC did that only to get shot in the back with a standard-issue .38. The spread was only one point, but it was enough to fill up his Wound track with Killing damage and send our PC off to the Hot Place. So much for "a life of crime", eh?

WOUNDS



points are really a sign of how important a character is to the game. Wound points come from character details, like their Name, Traits and Knack. The more detailed a character is, the more wound points they have. Unimportant characters normally don't get named. And if they do, they don't often get much more detail. So, the bank teller, the waitress, that guy on the corner with the funny hair, any of those unnamed extras with no background that

just walk into a scene are going to have barely any wound points to call their own.

Important characters that should have a lot of impact on a particular Story or Series will have a bunch of Wound points to represent that importance. The PCs are perhaps the most obvious example. They have lots of detail to them, and that becomes Wound points. Most Directors will also come up with a couple of NPCs that are important enough to warrant a high Wound point count. Arch-nemeses, rival heisters and such will take more than one punch to the jaw to put down.

As for damage, those points don't represent how badly a particular character was hurt. At least not by themselves. You have to take into account the number of Wound points that the injured character has as well. A character with only four Wound points is going to view a three-damage attack very differently than a beginning PC with his ten Wound points.

Headshots and Other Vicious Bodily Injuries

There may be an instance somewhere along the line that a character might want to shoot someone in the face. Or the hand. Or another, more... uncomfortable place. While it may happen a lot in a given game, there are no rules in Criminal Element for called or aimed shots. They simply aren't needed.

The rules for Criminal Element are built specifically to resolve conflict issues and then get out of the way when it comes to the details. So while the system will tell you if a person was hit by a slug or not, it won't tell you where the GSW is at. That's the Director's job.

If you want to kill someone with one attack you simply need to do enough Killing damage to take out all of the other guy's Wound points. Easy as that. And if your Intent set up the possibility of a grievous head wound, then the Director might just describe one for you.

If your Intent was to shoot something out of a person's hand all Lone Ranger-style, then the Director will set up the Opposition Hand according to that. If you succeed, then *pting* in the air goes the thing that was in his hand. If you fail, then you miss, plain and simple.

Scars, Sutures and Feeling All Better

When a fight is over and characters get a moment or two to relax and collect themselves, anyone that isn't Knocked Out or Dead can recover. Concious characters can erase any Bashing damage they took. Most of that stuff is just cuts and bruises and doesn't mean for long-lasting harm. The rest becomes permanent damage, with the character until he gets some medical attention.

Knocked Out characters do not get the chance to recover until the beginning of the next Scene. When they do recover, a Knocked out character wakes up from unconsciousness and erases any Bashing damage, just like a concious character would have done the Scene before.

Killing damage can only be healed through medical attention. This being Criminal Element, that medical attention normally comes in the form of doctors with revoked medical licenses, friends with first aid kits, or a sewing kit and your own shaking hands.

To heal Killing damage, the character performing the medical services has to decide how much he's going to heal up. The Opposition Hand for the test depends on the amount of Killing damage being healed by that one action. It's much easier to try and help a character for one or two points of Killing damage than it is for five or more.

MEDICAL AID

Killing Damage Healed	Opposition Level
1	Tricky
2	Arduous
3	Intimidating
4	Impossible
5	Fuck-All

The medical practitioner and the Director draw hands and compare totals like normal. If the practitioner is successful, the wounded character is healed by the number of Killing damage points that the practitioner based his Opposition Hand on, no matter what the Spread is. The Spread is used to determine how long it takes for the doctor to heal his patient.

For example, a character is applying some first aid on a downed friend. He's going to try and take care of some of the smaller terrible wounds and calls for an Arduous Opposition. The Player of the character applying the medical aid and the Director draw, with the Player winning. Arduous means that the injured character gets to erase two Killing damage points from his character sheet. The Spread was three, so the Director decides that it only takes a couple of minutes to stitch up the wound.

Characters with a large amount of Killing damage on their Wound track might have to have their doctor work on them a couple of times. The most Killing damage that can be healed in one action is five points. Anything left over from that will have to be treated in a different action entirely.

The Spoiler

Whether it is due to the power of money, the seduction of sex or the aftermath of a Meltdown, there are some instances when a player's character may be forced to kill off another player's character.

When this happens the player of the killed character becomes a Spoiler. The Spoiler makes it harder for the murdering PC to accomplish his actions. Think of him as a little bit of divine vengeance.

Whenever the murdering PC tries an action that requires the drawing

of cards, the Spoiler gets to draw an Opposition Hand against the player in addition to the Director's own hand. This Spoiler hand is made up from the same number of cards as the Director's and is played in the same fashion. A Spoiler may only draw Opposition Hands against the player of the character that killed him. Spoilers may also play as many cards in their hand face up as they like. This decision is made as described in the section on betting Drama Points.

If either the Director's or the Spoiler's hand is successful, the murderous PC fails in his action.

Spoilers may bet Drama Points on their hands as well. The Return on a Spoiler hand is always 2:1.

Spoilers may still spend Drama Points to create Dramatic Shifts. Any Meltdown Points earned in this fashion will be applied to the Spoiler's next character when he is introduced.

A Spoiler can also create a new character. Just as is described in the chapter on Character Creation, it is important to discuss the kind of character you want to make with the other players and the Director. After a Spoiler creates his character the Director will introduce him into the game at the next best opportunity. Once a player's new character is introduced into the game he loses his role as Spoiler and can no longer draw Opposition Hands against the murdering PC.

The New Guy

PC death is a real possibility in this game. The bad guys are normally pretty well armed and it's not unusual for your fellow Players to come gunning for you every once in a while. For this reason there exists a framework for the introduction of new PCs into the game. This can be used to introduce either a new Player into the game or an old Player whose character died.

First, the Player makes his new character using the same rules as in the previous chapter. Remember, discuss your new character with the Director and the rest of the play group. It's very important to not create a fifth wheel kind of character, especially when you'll be coming into things in the middle. Be a nice guy and set your character up so that he can be easily introduced by the Director. If it's alright with another player you can say that his character and yours are old friends. Maybe you're the nephew of the boss man that put together the current caper. Select a role and Knack that will be useful to the group or that will at the least add to the story.

Unless the Director is feeling particularly nice you will still start with the same number and rankings of Traits as a new character from the character creation chapter, no matter how advanced the other players are.

The only exemption when making your new character is when it comes to Drama Points. The ten-point Kicker that is given in the character creation chapter is for new Players, not new characters. You only have as many Drama Points as you had when your character died, plus or minus the

points you may have earned or lost if you were a Spoiler.

You may spend your Drama Points to increase your character's Traits if you like. If you decide to do so, you do not generate any Meltdown Points. Your old character died. There's no need to rub salt in that particular wound.

When you are all done making your character, get ready for him to be dropped right into the middle of things. When the Director feels it is appropriate he will introduce your character. This will almost always happen at the beginning of a new scene. Now is when you "Tell Your Story", just like it's laid out at the end of the Character Creation chapter. A good tip is to use the "Your Story" to help set you new character up firmly in the game, tying him into the plot in some way.

When you're done telling your tale, the Director will introduce your character into the game and your new character gets to walk "on stage" for the first time. Try and not die. Again.

Changing Your Stripes

Motives are impossible feats to achieve, so great and difficult they can constitute a life's work or more. And that's exactly what every player likes to hear.

So it happens every great once in a while that a PC's Motive will be resolved. This is a huge moment for a character, it's the end of everything that they've been wanting to achieve with their life. He shoots dead the guy he was hunting down. He gets his family out of the country.

Resolution doesn't just have to mean a happy ending; it could go the other way too. Resolution simply means that the Motive has come to an end, whether that means it's been solved or can no longer be solved. A player hoping to get his family out of the country sees his Motive resolved if his family leaves him or worse, if they are killed by some rivals.

A player has two options when he resolves his character's Motive. The first one is pretty simple: it's the end. Your character exits the game at the end of the scene. You get to describe this exit in pretty much the same way as an Aftermath. This happens at the end of the scene in which the Motive was resolved, even if it's in the middle of a game session. After your character has been written out make up a new one following the guidelines for the New Guy.

But maybe it's not your character's time to leave just yet. Perhaps the resolution of the Motive has left you with a brand new kind of unfinished business, or maybe the character is just a little too cool to let go. Either way, your character is changed by the experience of resolving his Motive. In a case like this you create a new Motive for the character to replace the old one on the spot. This new Motive can be an evolution of the old one or a completely different Motive entirely.

A character that's seen his greatest desire through to the end is so

utterly changed that he may even see the darkness inside of him change too. If a character's Motive is ever changed, that player may also change his character's Vice. This must be done at the same time as the change in motive.

Aftermath

Once a series is over it's time to tie things up. After the Director has resolved all of the things he needs to in the last scene of an adventure he hands the reigns over to the players and allows them to narrate a short coda for each of their characters. This is called the Aftermath.

Any players with characters that survived through the final scene of the story get to tell the other players what happens to their characters next. Take the same approach as the "Telling your Story" part of character creation. Describe whatever ending you think is fitting for your character. Maybe you want him to run off to the Bahamas for a much-deserved vacation. Perhaps your character deserves a good bloody ending. Maybe you even want to set him up for a sequel. This is the Players' time to shine, and without the Director controlling things even. Make it good.



ABUSING THE SYSTEM

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF CRIMINAL ELEMENT

- Bet Often:** The best way to gain DP in the game is by betting them. You should come out of the gate betting strong. Try and throw at least one DP on every action you draw a hand on.
 - Bust... Alot:** It's the easiest way to control the action. If you flop over 21 you may be failing, but you're also failing by a lot less than if you had flopped under 21.
 - Run for Cover:** It's the only way to get your defensive hands larger than two cards. Do it. It's a good way not to die.
 - Reload:** It's the same thing as running for cover, just for shooting people. Do it at least once per fight.
 - No Nicknames:** Callous bastard Directors the world over will always bump up the Wound count on any unnamed extra as soon as you give him a nickname. It's what we do. Try to avoid phrases like "How do you like that, Blondie!"
 - Blaze of Glory:** So you killed one of the other PCs. No big deal. Now it's time to go out in a hail of bullets. Run outside, pull out your biggest gun and go buck wild. If you can, fail a whole bunch. That way the Spoiler PC can earn some DP from your imminent demise. It goes a long way to helping you get over the guilt of popping his favourite PC.
 - Spend It All:** Most games of Criminal Element run somewhere between one and five sessions. You shouldn't bother holding on to all of those DP for a rainy day 'cause, if the Director's doing his job right, it's been torrential since the beginning of the game.
-

CHAPTER FIVE: THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

Being the Director of a game of Criminal Element can be a little strange when compared to other role-playing games. Players are given a lot of control of the story, thanks to the Setup, as well as the “Telling Your Story” and “Endgame” mechanics. Those players that have been around the RPG block a couple of times are going to use “Telling Your Story” to set themselves up with a good introduction and maybe even set up the play group’s crew with a little bit of history. And “Endgame” gives the players their own endings, granting the players with the power to introduce new plot twists and threads as well as set the game up for sequels, prequels or any kind of continuation.

That’s the beginning and end of the game, all down to the players. So where does that leave you, Mr. Director? Right in the middle, and that’s exactly where you want to be.

The following chapter details a couple of different techniques and approaches that the Director can use to tell a story for Criminal Element, that being a story about robberies and heists and the bad people that do those things. These techniques should be applied through all parts of the game, from before character creation through actual gameplay.

Bringing the Pain

Okay, let’s get this straight right off the bat: PCs need opposition. Without people for them to fight and trouble to get out of PCs would sit at home and watch daytime television. It’s through conflict that PCs will get the Drama Points they want, not to mention that it’s what the play group needs for the game to be entertaining.

With that thinking in mind then it is the Director’s most important job to create conflict. Yes, the Director still has to describe scenes and events and all of that. But your true job is to understand your players and their characters, and give them threats that are actually going to mean something. You should already have a couple of dangers for the PCs figured out, thanks to the Heat part of the Setup. But you’re going to need more than those few instances. Much more.

Threats and conflicts can mean for all sorts of things though. Some threats are simply challenging actions that a character has to pull off. Others will be defined by the personal interest that the character has in them.

PCs are just chock-full of a bunch of fun Traits. A Director worth his salt is going to use those Traits to set up opposition. Players are going to want a couple of challenges based around the Traits that their characters are good at, and they should definitely get them. Playing a Driver-Knacked character isn’t going to be any fun unless you get a couple of good driving

scenes in.

If you really want to spice things up, throw a couple of good curve balls at your players and get your PCs into a jam or two that they aren't really set up for. Got a PC that's good at conning people? Put him in the middle of a gunfight. That bonecrusher PC in your group need a little attention? Get him into the kind of trouble that you can only talk your way out of.

Even more fun than that is using a character's beliefs. Those Motives and Vices that the players made up for their characters are goldmines of conflict. Put the PCs into situations that engage them, where their Motives and Vices are called into question. Confront them with tough decisions. Make them choose between something they really want and their Motive or Vice. Set their Motive against their Vice. Hell, set the PCs Motives and Vices against each other. What ever you do, don't let them get off easy.

Do these things right and you'll have the players captivated, anxious for the next turn of events and the next turn of the cards.

Pacing

A key element of the heist flick is its pace. Most capers get out of the blocks fast and don't slow down for a heartbeat. As the Director it's your responsibility to keep scenes from devolving into tread water. This can be done very easily by simply controlling when a scene begins and when it ends.

Understanding the timing of scenes is as simple as knowing what you want. Each scene should have at least one simple agenda or function. Once that agenda is achieved you can safely move onto the next scene. Get in and get out. After the agenda is covered feel free to say "You guys pack up and head out. Later that night..."

Feel free to skip over moments that don't have much impact on the story. When a player says that his character wants to go to a diner for a quick blue plate, you don't have to describe the entire meal. Hit the fast forward button. If nothing's going to happen there just say "The meal was its usual state of greasy and somehow satisfying. Afterwards you head to the flophouse and meet up with the rest of the crew".

You don't have to jump into the next scene if there's still good stuff happening in the current one, even if the scene's agenda has been met. If you feel like the game group is getting some good grist then stick around for a minute or two. As soon as you feel things are starting to lose their momentum though it is time to move on.

Bang, Bang

Another way to keep things rolling is through the judicious use of Bangs. Originally coined in Ron Edwards' excellent Sorcerer, Bangs are those events and instances in a character's life that present him with a decision that he has to make right then and there. That's all they are, a moment and a choice to be made.

Bangs can be simple things like the blare of a police siren and the stomp of the SWAT team's boots outside the bank's front door. You could go with the more subtle, smaller stuff as well, like a PC coming home and finding a note slid under their door signed by the local mob boss.

At the beginning of every session just take a minute and come up with one or two bangs for each PC. Think about what they've done in the previous sessions, what the characters care about, and build a bang or two around that. Hell, Motive and Vice are just trumped up bang generators.

Bangs should never have predestined outcomes. They're all about spontaneity; mapping them out just goes against form. They're a spice that you can use to add to the soup and kick up the flavor. Most Bangs don't even require justification, not immediately anyway. If it sounds like a cool setpiece or moment in your head then just go ahead and plunk it down right in the middle of the scene. You have the rest of the campaign to come up with a reason for the cops to have known where the PCs flophouse was, so don't feel like you have to have a reason for it right away.

What System Does

There's a great line from the song Hunter by Bjork that goes "I thought I could organize freedom". As much of an oxymoron as that may be, that's what I think a roleplaying game's system does; organize the freedom of choices that players can make and give them all validity and power within the game.

As such, the system presented in this game is built to do one thing: resolve conflicts. A conflict is a moment in the story of an RPG session when multiple things could happen, when a player character can't just chose his favourite outcome and go toward it. A character tries to punch another character in the face or break into a safe. They could succeed at their action. They could also fail.

When the players use the system they are actively trying to pare down multiple outcomes to one. Some of those outcomes can be good, some bad. The system determines this in two parts.

The first part that the system decides is success, specifically which force between two opposing sides is successful. It can tell you whether a character's action has passed or failed. Did your punch land, or did your opponent dodge away? Did you crack the safe open, or were the security measures too hard to overcome?

Secondly, the system can describe the quality of an action in very broad terms. If you succeeded, it can tell you by how much. If you failed, it can give you an idea of how badly you did. The system can tell you things like your opponent dodged your punch very easily or you cracked the safe quite well.

Use of the system will not create outcome, it will simply guide the players and director toward one. What the system expressly does not do is

generate detail. It won't tell you where you hit someone with your punch. It won't tell you how much blood was lost from a gunshot wound. It won't tell you how the safecracker opened the safe. Detail is something generated by the players and Director. Because of this, Players and Directors can have much more say in what happens in their games. It's the players that say "I lunge forward and try and bash his nose in!" Or, "I gather my tools around me, sit indian style on the floor and start humming while I try to open the safe". It's the Director that says "Your punch whistles through the air where Big Bob's head used to be", or "You pull the drill from the safe door and turn the lever. A satisfactory 'click' resonates as the tumblers lock into place, the pylons slide back and the safe door glides open. All that and you're five minutes ahead of schedule, too!"

As a nice side effect, this system will generate a little bit of style. There are certain aspects of the system that were built to help create mood within the game and support themes like greed, desire and other bad things that bad people do.

Ultimately, the system is meant to sit in the background, wait until it is needed, and then perform its task with brutal efficiency, while at the same time adding a little bit of extra drama, unpredictably and fun to the game. It is with this philosophy in mind that this system is presented

The Director's Entourage

Book keeping can be a hell of a thing. Just ask Al Capone. So let's make it easier on you Directors out there.

Rather than keep track of all of the individual Knacks, Motives, Vices and Traits of every NPC that you might have, don't bother. Instead, use the fantastic resource that is the Opposition Hand chart.

Want your NPC bruiser to be good at handing out punches? Then make all of his draws to attack your PCs "Intimidating" ones. And if that same bruiser ain't so much of a driver, then just draw a "Tricky" hand for him when he's behind the wheel.

As for wounds, give your NPCs a number of Wounds that you feel would be appropriate. Some characters are nothing more than glorified extras with no names or developed backgrounds, so they shouldn't get very many Wounds at all. Other characters are more important, like the NPC enemies of your PCs. Feel free to give them a bunch more Wounds.

For a quick reference, just take a look at the chart below.

NPC Importance	Number of Wounds
Extra	1 or 2
Minor NPC	1/2 the PCs average Wounds
Important NPC	More than 1/2, less than the average
Integral NPC	Equal to/greater than the PCs average

And I'm sure some you may have thought "What about the NPCs

Vices or Meltdown Points?”

What about them? They don't get any. Remember, it's your job to make the PCs lives difficult, not your own. You making the game harder for your PCs often means for making it easier on your NPCs. And since you're the Director, you can just do that by describing things, so you don't really need Drama Points. And since you aren't spending any Drama Points, what's the sense in having Meltdown Points, or Vices for that matter.
