

# McGUFFIN

BY JEFF CHAFFEE

You and your team have been tasked with stealing...something. It don't pay to ask many questions...it pays to get the job done.

ITEMS NEEDED: at least 1d8 for each player, standard deck of cards with two Jokers. Mark one Joker "red" and the other "black."

## GOLDEN RULE #1: DON'T SWEAT THE SUITS.

Whenever a rule references cards, only pay attention to red/black. The suits are as below and used just for shorthand:

	Standard Suits			
	HEARTS ♥	DIAMONDS ♦	SPADES ♠	CLUBS ♣
PLAYER SKILLS	Contacts	Brains	Weapons	Tools
MASTERMIND DECKS	The Staff	The Schematic	The Guards	The Locks

## GOLDEN RULE #2: CARDS ARE WORTH WHAT THEY'RE PRINTED (USUALLY).

Aces are always 1. Jacks are 11, Queens 12, Kings 13. The Red Joker is 0 and always a success for the player, while the Black Joker is 14 and always a failure to the player.

### MAKING A CHARACTER:

Give your character a name, then decide what their specialty is. Write this on your character card. Don't worry too much about assigning this specialty to a skill score as yet. Sample specialties are things like "John Woo Guns," "getaway driving," "parkour," "conman" or "hacking." Anything can be a specialty (well, aside from "instantly win the game" or something), so use this as a chance to get very creative.

Next, the GM (the MASTERMIND) deals out four face-down cards. Announce which skill you're rolling for from the table above then roll 1d8 while the Mastermind flips the card.

- When your announced skill matches the color of flipped card, add your roll and card modifier to a max score of 10.
- If the card's color does not match the skill's (say you rolled for Tools (black) and flipped diamonds (red) for example), subtract the card modifier to a minimum score of 0. You can't have more than one skill at 0.

### CARD MODIFIERS:

When the card flipped is ABOVE your roll (say an 8♥ when you rolled 4), the modifier is +1/2. When the flip equals your roll, No change. When the flip is UNDER your roll (say 4♥ on a roll of 5), the modifier is -1/1.

Overall, these results are called your *Base Skills*. Your highest Base Skill is also your character's *Health*, used when actively doing something that could harm you.

### PULLING THE JOB:

*McGuffin* doesn't use a traditional initiative like other games; players may add an action at any time. However, the Mastermind can direct traffic by asking particular team members what their plan is. A general rule of thumb for players is to attempt at most two actions then let someone else do the same. When a player takes their turn, they suggest a course of action, like "I try to dodge all the moving lasers." The Mastermind then sets up a Check by asking the following questions:

1. Which part of the Hideout does this action fit into?
2. Which skill score does the action key off of?
3. Does this work with the player's specialty?

Using the "dodging lasers" example, here's how the Mastermind process works.

- 1) Lihely maneuvering a laser grid requires knowledge of the alarm system, so use the *Schematics*.
- 2) Schematics checks use **Brains** as their key skill.
- 3) The player took "Flirts with a Teller" as a specialty (which is more than likely a **Contacts** skill). So no, not a match. No additional bonuses happen here.

### THE HIDEOUT:

After all players have their Skills scores, the Mastermind collects the cards dealt out, then shuffles and deals out four piles to form the Hideout Area, four decks as follows:

1. The Locks (♣)—the actual mechanisms for guarding whatever it is you're stealing: locks, laser grids, death traps, safes...if it's designed to keep you out, it's a check vs. the Locks deck, which players will use their Tools versus.
2. The Staff (♥)—insiders at the place you're robbing. They can be accessories to your acts (like the disgruntled teller giving you safe combinations), bystanders, hostages, or just rubes you plan on exploiting. Whenever your success or failure depends on having a man on the inside, use the Staff deck; players use their Contacts skill versus the Staff.
3. The Law (♠)—police, feds, agents, and private eyes. If it's a person whose job it is to stop you at all costs, make your check against the Law deck. When making a check vs. the Law, use your Weapons skill.
4. The Schematic (♦)—casing the joint, knowing alarm systems, hacking a computer network...if you need to know about the target's physical location or attributes, make a check against the Schematics using your Brains skill.

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE? The Mastermind takes on a dual role. First, she guides the story of the game by laying out what your crew is to steal. Secondly, she's in charge of setting up the various challenges your crew will take. Also, remember that the Mastermind is in fact a *mastermind*, so they also adjudicate the game, coming up with fair and logical answers when questions come up. Lastly, the Mastermind can reward imagination/good roleplay with bonuses or punish laziness with penalties at her discretion.

### MAKING A CHECK:

Successes and failures are gauged by the color-match rule, similar to building skills scores. When flips match colors on skills, you succeed by having a skill check ABOVE the flipped card. When the skill/flip do not match, you succeed when your check is *under* the card. The card is flipped first. Then:

Check your base skill. Does your move already succeed?	YES NO	Hell yeah! The move succeeds. No sweat. Roll d8
You've rolled 1d8; add your Skill score. Do you pass the check?	YES NO	Cool. Move onto either another action or pass to another player. Oh well. Better luck next time.

Players may not have consecutive automatic successes, either using two actions per turn OR on back-to-back turns.

### BONUSES AND MISCELLANEOUS STUFF:

- Any tie that results during a check favors the player.
- Look back over there a second. See how it says something about Specialties giving bonuses? When the Mastermind agrees that your specialty applies to the check, she can give up to a +3 to the check at her direction.
- Whenever a Hideout Deck runs out, the Mastermind collects all four decks, shuffles and re-deals each Hideout.

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## FIGHTING:

If it were easy to steal stuff, seems like more people would be stealing stuff, right? It's likely that at some point one or more of your players are going to get into a fight of some type with cops, security, or each other (no honor among thieves, right?).

All fights begin as Opposed checks vs. Guards♠. This means that both sides of the fight will roll (that's the opposed part) and that the player will add his Weapons♠ value.

**IN PLAYER VS. PLAYER FIGHTS:** Both will roll, add their weapons, and check vs. the flipped card. Whoever succeeds by a wider margin is the winner of the fight and deals damage to the other player's health equal to the difference between their success and the flipped card. If both players fail, they each take 1 Damage.

For instance, Travis is Fighting against Christine. The Guards♠ flip is 7♥. Since this is a check using Weapons♠, the colors don't match so a success would be 7 or less. The person damaging is in **bold italics** below:

TRAVIS	GUARDS	CHRISTINE
Roll: 2 Weapons♠ Skill Score: 4 <b>TOTAL: 6 (success!)</b> <b>Damage: 1 (7-6=1)</b>		Roll: 6 Weapons♠ Skill Score: 3 TOTAL: 9 (Fail)
Roll: 2 Weapons♠ Skill Score: 4 TOTAL: 6 (success by 1)		Roll: 1 Weapons♠ Skill Score: 3 <b>TOTAL: 4 (Success, by 3)</b> <b>Damage 3 (7-4)</b>
Roll: 8 Weapons♠ Skill Score: 3 <b>TOTAL: 11 (Fail)</b> <b>Take a damage</b>		Roll: 7 Weapons♠ Skill Score: 3 <b>TOTAL: 10 (Fail)</b> <b>Take a Damage</b>

**IN FIGHT VS. NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS,** such as the team shooting back at police, the only change is that the NPCs won't have a Weapons value. To compensate, apply another color match. When the flip is Black (Guards runs off ♠, remember), double the die roll. When it doesn't halve the roll (round down) and add it to the roll. When players succeed, the person they're fighting is taken out of the fight; when NPCs win, the player takes damage equal to the difference of the result.

TRAVIS	GUARDS	GUARD RESULT
Roll: 2 Weapons♠ Skill Score: 4 TOTAL: 6 (FAIL)	7♣	Roll: 5 The flip is a Black suit, so this becomes 10, a success. Travis takes 4 Damage
Roll: 6 Weapons♠ Skill Score: 4 TOTAL: 10 (success)	Q♥	Roll: 2. Halve this (1) since it's a Red suit; a total of 3. This NPC is toast.

**HEALING DAMAGE:** Field surgery or painkillers (or both) are handy. A player can choose to fail any single check to heal 1d8 damage once per phase of the game (Casing/Heist/Getaway).

**CHARACTER DEATHS:** If a PC is ever reduced by Damage to 0 Health, they are dead and can no longer take part in the robbery. In addition, whenever a player dies, the rest of the team takes -1d8 to their check total on their next check (roll and flip first; then the Mastermind rolls the -1d8 penalty).

**“LOOKING AT THE FOUNTAIN”—OR—“ONE LAST WORD:”** Remember that regardless of the outcome or the tension at the table, *McGuffin* is meant to be a fun way to play cops and robbers. And remember that those at the table, roleplay or no roleplay, are your friends. Bickering over rules or purposely trying to cheat? Don't be *that guy*. Additionally, the author, publisher, play-testers, etc. do not condone using *McGuffin* as an actual planning exercise for any kind of illicit activities. Seriously, don't be *that guy* either. Tom Hanks will never agree to play you in the movie.

## A THREE-PART PLAN...

Your heist is a multi-layered endeavor. As the game opens, your team is in the *CASING* stage, where they meet at their headquarters and receive their marching orders, share intel, etc.

Next is the actual dirty work, the *HEIST* stage. Here your crew is executing their plan hatched during the Casing stage. The HEIST has a special condition—called the Combination—that needs to be completed in order to advance the storyline.

Lastly, there is the *GETAWAY* stage, where either you're beating a professional retreat with the goods back to the headquarters, the police are stopping you, or a little of both.

**CASING THE JOINT:** Most of your checks during this stage would be the training montage of a heist picture: tough guys hitting heavy bags, sharpshooters at the range, making false IDs and poring over technical blueprints. You'll advance past Casing when the Mastermind has heard good table-talk about how to get around those items that can be planned for and once all players have succeeded on 4 checks.

**PULLING THE HEIST:** Your checks and roleplay here all should be about how you are going to do the things needed to successfully rob this place. In order to move on, your team needs a total of 4 successes per player, then must face the Combination. Here, each person is dealt one facedown card from each of the Hideout decks and must succeed on 2/4 checks; additionally, at least half (rounded down) of your team must meet this 2/4 successes rule to actually obtain the target of the Heist. Regardless of the Combination outcome, once it is either passed or failed, move on.

**MAKING YOUR GETAWAY:** Your ease of escaping is highly dependent on how your Combination section goes.

On a Team Success (e.g. over half of the team passed their Hideout checks), Things start easily enough, but in order to make a clean escape, you must pass a check before even declaring an action. Success here allows you to take a normal action with its resulting checks.

On a Team Failure, you start off in deep trouble. Begin the round with an immediate check using each player's weakest skill score vs. the deck of their choosing. Those that pass may attempt to leave the building they have robbed. All checks for those leaving are at -2 to their rolls, so now is a great time for ensuring you're using those specialties to earn bonuses. Before taking an action, all players leaving must also succeed a Fight check first.

It is 100% possible that your team could fail utterly, be gunned down in the vault, and lose everything...so best be sure your Casing plans AND Heist rounds go well!