

STEAL

a modern day crime roleplaying game

Matt Kershaw Ken Finlayson

Preliminary Release

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1 Terminology, Measurements, and all that guff

What is a roleplaying game?

This is a roleplaying game. A roleplaying game is a game of ‘Let’s Pretend’ for people who like to think they’re too mature to play ‘Let’s Pretend.’ It involves people sitting around a table, adopting imaginary personas, and saying things like “I kick the door down and charge into the room.” Most of the players take the roles of the game’s heroes (or, as in this game, criminals). The person in charge is called the GM (short for Games Moderator). Despite the name, the GM is as much a player as a referee. It falls to the GM to say just what happens when another player’s character tries to kick a door down and charge into the room (the referee part of the job). It also falls to the GM to play out the role of the boozed-up, psychopathic thug who lives in the room, perhaps by saying “Jimmy McGee drops his lager in surprise, then grabs a baseball bat and swings it at you.” (the player part of the job).

Dice

D10 refers to a ten-sided die. D6 refers to a six-sided dice. A number preceding the D indicates you should roll that many dice. For instance, 3D10 means “roll three ten-sided dice.” In most games, when you roll a number of dice you have to add the results together. Not here. In *Steal*, you’re more interested in the individual results. If you need to add them together, you’ll be told.

D% refers to a so-called percentile die. A roll of 1D% generates a number between one and one hundred. A D% is traditionally rolled as follows: Select two D10s of different colours. One is the ‘tens’ die, the other is the ‘ones’ die. Roll both dice, and read the tens and the ones together to make a two-digit number. For instance, a 3 on the tens die and a 7 on the ones die yields 37. Hooray for mathematics! While a 01 is read as a one, and a 02 is read as a two, a 00 is read as one hundred, *not* nought. (Nowadays, you can buy tens dice, with their faces marked 10, 20, and so on up to 00. You can even buy hundred-sided dice, but these tend to be pricy and take forever to stop rolling.)

1D5 is simulated by rolling 1D10 and halving the result (round up). 1D2 is simulated by rolling 1D10. A roll of 1–5 is a 1, 6–10 is a 2. Or you could

flip a coin, we don't care.

Measurements

Measurements are given in metres. For those who don't use metres, treat them as yards. This is woefully inaccurate, but it's quick, and this is a game of "near enough" anyway. While we're on the subject of inaccuracies, no doubt all the weapon details are wrong. If you care that much, write your own games system.

Who can read this book?

There is no 'secret information' in this book. Players need to be familiar with chapters 2–8, which is the bulk of the book. The remaining chapters are of more interest to GMs, but there is no reason why players can't read them as well. (GMs, of course, need to be familiar with all the book.)

A message from the authors

These rules are not complete.

Oh, there's everything you need to get started. But there's always room for improvement. We're still working on the game, keeping an eye out for whatever is missing or doesn't work. Thanks to the miracle of the Internet, we can make additional rules freely available.

But we're not the only people who can improve the game. If you have any house rules or resources which have helped you run Steal, and you'd like to share them with other players, please e-mail Matt at spyglass@nme.com. If you have any comments on this document, please e-mail Ken, the hapless editor, at kaf03@uow.edu.au. In either case, if your suggestion is used, we will credit you accordingly in future versions of this document.

Who to blame

This document is copyright ©2001 by Matt Kershaw and Ken Finlayson. It may be freely distributed provided you do not alter it in any way. These rules may be downloaded from <http://www.daftideasinc.esmartbiz.com>.

The original concept and the games design were done by Matt. He also wrote chapters 2, 3, 6, 7 and 10. Matt has been to London, but swears he had nothing to do with the crime wave that occurred during his stay.

Ken wrote chapters 4, 5, 8 and 9, based on rules created by Matt. Ken also wrote the two appendices and edited the entire book. He hasn't been to London, but then neither have any of his players, so they can't tell he's making it all up.

Thanks and acknowledgements

Thanks to the original playtesters who formed the Finsbury Gang (Raymond 'Tim the Tank' Coutts, Bruce 'Nutter' Porter, Michael 'Dodgy Dalton' Sweet and Chris 'Jimmy Jr' Wilson) and the Brixton Mob (Richard 'Crunch' Crookall, Tom 'Shifty McDoogle' Frost, Andrew 'Harold Bailey' Mathieson, Trevor 'John Laws' Osborne and James 'Special Guest Star' Zealey)

Thanks also to John Vlietstra, who was the first outside our gaming group to express an interest in these rules. No small feat, as he lives in Britain and we don't. He also provided information about illegal firearms in the UK which will appear in the full version of this document. (Sorry, John.)

About this release

Like the cover says, this is a preliminary release. Some small parts of the book haven't been typeset yet, and the index could be more extensive. All of these things will appear soon, probably in time for Christmas 2001. To vent your anger, e-mail the lazy editor (Ken Finlayson) at kaf03@uow.edu.au. He won't pay you any heed, but you'll feel better.

2 What's It All About?

A Note on Setting: The game of *Steal* was inspired by British crime films, so it is hardly surprising that we have chosen to set our game in the UK, and London in particular. We will assume that you too will set your game in London. However, all of the rules and most of the GM's advice will apply no matter where your game is set. As long as a GM can find relevant source material, *Steal* can be set anywhere.

The Point

In *Steal*, the characters are a group of young misfits, seeking to make their way in the London crime scene.

The Cost of Living

London is intrinsically one of the most expensive cities in the world. If you are unemployed in Britain, you can expect to get around £55 a week, which certainly provides a more-than-an-adequate reason to turn to theft for additional income.

Accommodation

The price of renting a single cheap room per week in London starts at around £100. If you take out a lease yourself, you must come up with 2 months of rent in advance.

Getting Around

In London, there is an underground railway system called the Tube (or the Underground). You will find it marked on most good maps.

There are red single- and double-decker public buses, and multi-coloured private buses. Similarly, there are black cabs and private minicab services. The price of travelling from outer greater London to the inner city costs about £4. You can get weekly and monthly passes, which allow you to use both the buses and the Underground.

How to Speak British

Or not. We're not going to teach you silly accents, although if you've never been to the UK it might surprise you to learn that Cockneys sound nothing like Dick van Dyke. No, here are a few notes to make your vocabulary more British.

Mild terms of abuse include git, berk, pillock, prat, tosser, scrote and toerag. (Although these last two probably only get used on UK cop shows.) Stronger terms include bastard, wanker and all the usual stuff derived from four-letter words. Extra emphasis can be added by prefixing 'right' to the term, e.g. 'He's a right tosser.'

If something is no good, it is 'rubbish' or 'pants.' (In the UK, pants means underpants.)

'Hard' is an adjective conveying toughness. A hard man is someone you don't mess with. Someone who is described as 'bastard hard' is very hard indeed. 'Have a go is you think you're hard enough!' is the tradition way of daring the listener to fight the speaker.

The site <http://www.peevish.co.uk/slang> has a dictionary of British slang, but don't overdo it.

Films and Television

Probably the easiest method of gathering both information and potential plots is by watching British movies and television. Here is a list of films and shows which might get you started.

Films

- *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*: The story of four young lads who get involved with serious gangsters after a poker game goes horribly wrong. A Guy Ritchie film (which means it is filled with criminals with oddball names).
- *Snatch*: The story of two would-be boxing promoters who get involved with a tale of guns, diamonds and a squeaky dog. Another Guy Ritchie film.
- *Twin Town*: A tale of two out-of-control young Welsh lads who get mixed up with a crime boss.

- *Shooting Fish*: A story of three grifters who use computers, fraud and sex to get their hands on money.
- *Shopping*: A story devoted to the exploits of young runaways who ram-raided their way to oblivion. GMs, this is an excellent reference for when your players take to ram-raiding.
- *Gone In 60 Seconds*: True, it's set in the US, but this recent Hollywood remake is a catalogue of modern car theft techniques. Required viewing for players who want to play car thieves.
- *The Krays*: The brothers Ronnie and Reggie Kray terrorised London during the 1960s. Excellent for developing fierce NPCs... or indeed player characters.
- *Get Carter*: An excellent film dealing with the criminal underworld. (The version with Caine, not Stallone.)
- *The Italian Job*: An excellent older film with a definite English sensibility.

Television Series

- *Lock, Stock...: A TV series inspired by the Guy Ritchie film *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. It's formulaic: each week, the lads become accidentally entangled in crime, escaping with their lives only through a combination of good luck and sheer bollocks. Nonetheless, it's a good source of crime-based plots.*
- *The Bill*: The long running British cop show. Excellent for developing a feel for police arrest procedure and issues.
- *The Minder*: Follows Arthur Daley, a disreputable businessman who seems to know more villains than fellow traders. Excellent for fleshing out fences.
- *Only Fools and Horses*: A sitcom, devoted to another disreputable trader full of all manner of crazy schemes to make his fortune. Excellent for providing a little light relief when needed.

- *The Sweeney*: An old 1970s cop show which is excellent for developing gritty British cops.

3 Campaign Advice for Players

Building Gangs

Due to the nature of gangs you have two options: Work your way up the structure of an existing gang by acts of bravery or hardness. Or create a gang which challenges the existing one.

A gang should really have a good base of talent: organisers, thugs, enforcers, fixers, radio techs, drivers, safe crackers, dealers, fences, forgers, hackers, security experts, money launderers, etc. A gang with such a mix usually has the necessary skills to take advantage of most situations.

Of course, such variety (and the ensuing ability to deal with anything) is a long-term goal. Your gang should have a central focus for their activities to begin with. Later, you should diversify your criminal activities, to get the most out of your turf.

Local Gangs

You should first devote your activities to securing the local area, wresting control away from others and hopefully putting them permanently out of business.

The ideal start is to gather information, or 'know your enemy.' No organised crime syndicate would wage war upon a group without expecting they could take the group down. Knowledge is central to this.

Obviously, there are people you are going to have to intimidate or kneecap. Others, however, just might be smart enough to realise that working for you would be a better, easier option.

Local Area

The local area you wish to work should be defined. It's no good having people working for you who invade the territory of another gang, and who are consequently wiped out by them. The established gangs need to believe that you are not a threat to their patch, or they might very well retaliate.

If you are seeking to wrest control of the local area from others, you must at some stage give them an adequate demonstration that they should move on. There are very hard men out there who don't have time for putting up with amateurs wasting their valuable time.

The protection racket is a good method of taking control of your area. Once you obtain a critical mass of control, the other store owners will eventually cave in. You will however have to make sure the civilians are protected from others stealing or cutting in on your turf.

Stealing

Stealing should not generally be perpetrated in your immediate vicinity. You'll have enough trouble with police in your area with hearsay about your protection racketeering to contend with.

However, you should really scope out as to whether the items you plan to steal aren't the property of other gangs or under their protection.

It is also worth noting that by surveillance of (or talking to) known thieves you can get to know their contacts, and more importantly, their fences. You can steal your weight in diamonds, but if you don't have an adequate place to sell them...

It is also worth noting that in most centres of London there are usually street markets, which may or may not be an adequate place to sell stuff.

Violence

Despite the image of gangs going about beating up all and sundry, you would be hard pressed to find them beating up someone who didn't deserve it. Firstly, it is unnecessary. Secondly, most gang members would spend a vast amount of their life behind bars.

Any organised crime syndicate worth their salt would not associate with two bit thugs just out to hurt people. Proponents of mindless violence are of no value to a serious crime organisation, because such people cannot be trusted, and bring unnecessary attention to the group's activities, endangering their operations.

Fixers and Legitimacy

If you're properly exploiting all the possibilities, sooner or later people will start to notice you. People from Inland Revenue, or the National Crime Squad. You will need people on your team who can deal with the authorities. You will also need to set up a legitimate business concern.

It will be awfully hard to convince local authorities that all the money you are flashing isn't the proceeds of organized crime, if you go down and collect your giro (unemployment benefits) every week.

Alliances

Just as in any other profession, it is often the case that people outside your organisation possess skills your group may need. It is not in the realms of fantasy to have two gangs working upon an individual activity—if they both stand to gain from the endeavour. However, maintaining the harmony amongst thieves is always going to be tricky... even if the saying is “Honour amongst thieves.”

Godfather

Eventually you will have developed a truly organised crime family, effectively laundering the proceeds to an offshore account.

This will raise an abundance of problems of its own, like: Can you trust the people you have working for you?

However, if you get to that stage, you should be able to work things out for yourself...

4 Character Creation

Some Good Advice: Although you can make any sort of criminal you want, you'll find criminal life easier if you coordinate your efforts with those of the other players. Think about what sort of character you want, and then discuss it with your fellow players. Like the last chapter says, a successful gang has a good mix of criminal abilities. The character generation system is slanted towards encouraging this. Your character can be quite effective if you take the opportunity to specialise in an area. But if you aim for a jack-of-all-trades, you'll quickly find your character is a master of none.

Grab a copy of the *Steal* character sheet, a ten-sided dice and two six-sided dice.

Give your character a name (which appears on the charge sheet), and a nickname (which everyone calls him). Nicknames reflect either a character's appearance (if distinctive), or behaviour/personality. Choose a nickname with care, as it will play a large part in how people will react to your character (*"Meet my friend. We call him 'Nutter.'"*).

Your character's age is $12 + 1D6$ years old. Yes, you're *young*. Whinge for long enough and you may convince your GM to read p. 29.

Your character has a bank account of $\pounds(100 \times 1D10)$. Despite the name, this money doesn't have to be in a bank. Your character can keep it in a mattress if you want.

Your character's physical appearance rank is $1D10$. A 1 is hideous, a 10 is a prettyboy. Then give your character an appropriate physical description. Making it sound like a police description is a good idea. Things to cover include height, build, complexion, hair, eyes, nose and any distinguishing features (scar, birthmark, mole, etc.).

Your character's education level is $6 + 1D6$. This corresponds to the level of secondary education your character has received, e.g. an education of 7 means your character has completed year seven. If your character achieves an education of 12, roll $2D6$ and total the results. If you rolled an 11 or a 12, your character has received some higher education. Roll $1D6$ to see how much:

Roll	Level of higher education
1-2	University drop-out
3-5	Undergraduate level
6	Master's level

If your character does receive higher education, you should probably raise your character's age to an appropriate level. That, or give your GM a really good explanation of how a thirteen year old earned a master's degree.

You have 60 skill ranks to distribute among the skills listed on the character sheet. No skill can start with a rank above 5, unless you can convince your GM otherwise. (For instance, if your character has a master's in computer science, that would be a good reason for having a Computer Usage rank of 8.)

Some Good Advice: If your character was born where the game is set, or has been living there for a while, then he's a local. You should consider giving him at least a couple of ranks in Local Knowledge.

If there's a skill you want, but it's not on the sheet, don't panic. You can choose to specialise in other areas (i.e., invent a new skill and write it in the space marked "Other Specialist Ranks") if your GM approves. Some of the specialist ranks that cropped up in our campaigns were Horse Racing, Police Procedure, Security Systems and The Knowledge (i.e., knowledge of London streets and landmarks, famously displayed by London taxi drivers).

What a particular skill allows you to do should be self evident, but see Chapter 8: Skill Definitions, if you must.

If your character is at least 17 years old, you can opt to give your character an adult criminal record. (Put the details in the space marked "Criminal Record," on the reverse of the character sheet.) In return, you get an extra 15 skills ranks to distribute, although your GM may grant you more (or less) depending on the gravity of the crime.

If you have ranks in the Contacts skill, your GM will supply you with a list of people you know. Write their details in the space marked "Known Associates," on the reverse of the character sheet. As the game progresses, use this space to note the names of any other criminals or shady figures your character has dealings with.

Your character's hit points is equal to 10, plus 10 times his Constitution ranks. Thus, a character with a Constitution of three would have 40 hit points ($10 + 10 \times 3$). If you're daft enough not to put any ranks in Constitution, you can expect your character to die an early death.

You start with no Notoriety, and no Trust. (More details on these scores can be found in Chapter 7: How to Make Enemies and Influence People.)

Some Good Advice: It's a good idea to create two characters, one to start play with, and one to use in case your first character falls foul of "trouble"...

Playing the numbers

In games where a character's ability scores are randomly generated, there's always a little section which talks about the need to explain why your character has Strength 19 but Constitution 4. But in *Steal*, your character is pretty much the person you want him to be. Want him to be shrewd? Put your points into Awareness, Psychology and Sense Motive. Want someone who's strong but unfit? Raise Strength and neglect Athleticism and Constitution. And so on.

However, there are some elements you'll have no control over—unless you're using loaded dice. Age, bank account, appearance and education can send seemingly contradictory messages. It's up to you to interpret them in sensible or interesting ways.

Does your fourteen year old have a bank account of £1000? How did he come by it? Is your character thirteen but with a physical rank of 10? Maybe he's an angel-faced pickpocket whom no one ever suspects. If your character has received a university education, what's he doing in the crime game? Does he get his kicks out of committing crimes? Or is he just a well-educated psychopath?

Answering questions like these will help flesh out your character.

5 How to do Things

Using skills

To use a skill, roll 2D10, plus an extra 1D10 for each rank you have in that skill. Do not add the results together. Instead, calculate the number of successes as indicated by the following table:

Roll	Counts for X successes
1	-1
2-6	0
7-9	1
10	2

Remember that anyone can attempt anything. Even if your character has no ranks in a skill, you may still roll 2D10 in an attempt to succeed.

Example: Bulldog, new in town, is trying to discreetly ask around if there's any "work" going. Bulldog is a criminal better known for his brawn than his brain, and has a Conversation skill of only three. His player rolls 5D10 (a base of 2 dice, plus 3 dice for a rank 3 skill). The dice come up with 3, 8, 10, 4 and 1. This results in two successes (1 success for the 8, 2 successes for the 10, and -1 success for the 1).

How many successes?

In most cases, whether a task succeeds or fails depends only on the person attempting it. In such cases, the (minimum) number of successes needed will reflect how hard the task is, as determined by the GM.

Difficulty of task	Successes needed
Very easy	1
Easy	2
Challenging	3
Hard	4
Very hard	5
Nearly impossible	6

(GMs, feel free to set any number as the number of successes needed. Even numbers greater than 6. This table is just a guide.)

A rank of 3 indicates competence in a skill. At this level, easy and very easy tasks present no real problem. Challenging tasks are completed about 40% of the time. A nearly impossible task can be done only 3% of the time.

A rank of 8 indicates professional ability. A person with such a level routinely succeeds at even hard tasks. Very hard tasks are completed about 40% of the time. Even the (nearly) impossible is possible 27% of the time.

(See Appendix A, the Math Geek’s Guide to Steal, for further details.)

Contests of Skill

Sometimes, whether you succeed or fail doesn’t just depend on your skill. Sometimes you have to be better than someone else. Winning an arm wrestling contest. Evading police pursuit. These are examples of contests of skill.

In such cases, both sides roll their skills. Whoever rolls the greater number of successes is the “winner”. It is up to the GM to decide what this means. Some contests (such as a bout of arm wrestling) are quick, and the winner of the roll is triumphant. But some contests take time (perhaps a lengthy car chase), and a number of rolls may be needed before the winning side is known.

Some example contests, and which skills are tested:

- Arm wrestle: one side’s Athleticism versus the other’s Athleticism
- Car chase: one driver’s Car Handling versus the other driver’s Car Handling
- Lie to someone: the liar’s Fast Talk versus the listener’s Sense Motive
- Shadow someone: the follower’s Stealth versus his target’s Awareness
- Threaten someone: the threatener’s Intimidation versus the target’s Willpower

How Well Did I Do?

To succeed at a task, you need to roll enough successes to beat the number chosen by the GM or as rolled by your opponent. If you roll many more successes than needed, your GM is free to interpret this as doing particularly well.

Example: If you remember, Bulldog was asking around for a shady job. Bulldog's player rolled two successes for his Conversation attempt, which was barely enough. The GM decides that Bulldog has found out about a job that will pay poorly. Slick Jimmy is also looking for work. His player rolls five successes for Conversation. As a result, Jimmy gets in on a nice little earner.

Failures and Botches

If the total number of successes is less than the amount needed, the character has failed in their attempt. There are no penalties for failure, other than the failure itself. Someone who tries to bypass a car alarm but fails doesn't trigger the alarm. The character just couldn't bypass it.

However, if the total number of successes is negative, the character has botched the job (aka a botch). The exact results should be determined by the GM, but should make the character wish he hadn't tried. For instance, a character who botches his Pickpocket roll might be caught with his hand in the victim's pocket.

Trying Again

So your character has just failed. It might not be as bad as it sounds. Depending on the task, your character may be able to try again, although some time might be needed before your character is ready.

In combat (more of which later), a failure is no reason not to try again next turn. (Unless you die, of course.) In other cases, your GM will have to decide. For instance, failing to bypass a car alarm won't stop you trying again in the future—after you know a bit more about car alarms. Or maybe the GM says that your character needs to study the alarm for a bit longer, and then you can try again.

There's no hard and fast rules. So long as your character is alive, and the task hasn't been spoiled by a botch, you can probably try again.

Taking Your Time

In some situations, your character will want to spend a lot of time on the task at hand. Such tasks might include repairing a car engine, or carefully forging documents. The GM will tell you how much time your character will have to spend on the task. Not all skills can afford the luxury of time: if

you're in a fight, waiting 40 seconds to land the perfect punch is 40 seconds of being beaten up.

When a character takes his time, it is assumed he automatically achieves a number of successes equal to their skill rank. However, the GM should secretly make a skill check on behalf of the character. A botch indicates there is some flaw in the work that the character has failed to notice. This flaw should not be severe as a botch under normal circumstances. A botched repair roll on the engine could mean that the car breaks down again later, but not that the engine is now ruined.

For especially complex work, the number of successes needed might be 10 or higher. Very few characters will have skill ranks of ten. In this case, your character will have to work repeatedly on the task at hand, with his successes slowly accumulating until the task is complete. Again, the GM should make a secret skill check.

Example: John Laws has started to forge a rather tricky document. His Forgery skill is five. The GM decides that Laws will need 20 successes to have completed the document. He tells Laws's player that Laws will need to spend four days ($4 \times 5 = 20$) to finish the document. The player agrees, and Laws stays out of circulation while he works on the document.

How to do Things... Better

As your character travels down the criminal road, he will no doubt learn from his experiences. Or end up in prison.

Whenever your character has performed a task with outstanding success, or when the successful outcome proved crucial to your gang's goal that week, the skill that was used may be eligible for an increase. Your GM will award extra skill ranks as he or she sees fit. To improve your chances, use your skills imaginatively and make your efforts vital to the group's plans. The GM also has the power to withhold skill ranks if you come up with stupid plans. (*"Hey, why don't we go on a shooting spree so I can increase my Gun Handling skill?"*)

You can also set long term goals for your character, with an eye to improving skills. Perhaps he starts to work out at the gym regularly, signs up for a first aid course, or performs 'research' in a chosen field (e.g., practices picking locks).

Every six weeks of game time, unless your GM feels otherwise, you can make a roll to see if your character has managed to learn anything new.

Make a Willpower skill test for your character. To improve a skill, you must roll more successes than you have ranks in that skill. Willpower is tested to see if your character has the staying power to work on improving the skill, or if your character gets bored and goes off to watch the telly. A successful roll means the skill in question advances by one. Skills you have little or no knowledge of are easy to improve, while skills you are quite good at are hard to improve.

However, Willpower can *only* be increased in gameplay.

6 How to Hurt People

Combat skills work just like any other skill: to use the skill, you must make a skill roll. To hit a person in a fight, you need to roll at least two successes. However, you have the option of placing a ‘called shot’ (aiming for a particular location on your target). This will raise the number of successes needed by 1 or 2, depending on the size of the thing you are aiming for.

A successful attack will inflict damage. Damage is the number of points that are subtracted from the injured party’s hit points. When a character’s hit points reach 0 or less, he is dead.

Brawling

As guns are scarce in London (and the UK generally), your character is likely to be in more scuffles than gunfights. The skill to be used in these cases is Brawling.

If the blow strikes home, you should add together your ranks in Brawling, the number of successes rolled, and the bonus for the weapon being used. A failed Brawling roll generally indicates a character has thrown an ineffectual punch or a glancing blow which causes no damage.

Example: Mugsy, with a Brawling of 4, is in a punch-up. Mugsy swings, and his player rolls 4 successes. Mugsy’s punch does a total of 4 (skill rank) + 4 (successes) + 0 (bare fists) = 8 points of damage.

BLUNT WEAPONS

Category	Examples	Bonus	KO chance
No weapon	Bare fists	+0	5%
Light weapon	Small hammer, small lump of wood, knuckle dusters	+1	5%
Medium weapon	Length of chain, jemmy, 4×2 piece of wood	+2	10%
Heavy weapon	Baseball bat, cricket bat, concrete slab, large crowbar	+4	15%

Note on heavy weapons: To successfully wield a heavy weapon in combat, the character must pass a Strength check with two successes. If the test is failed, the weapon may still be used, but it is treated as if it is a medium weapon for the purposes of determining damage and the chance of a knock out. (The character hasn’t the strength to wield the weapon effectively.)

If the test is botched, maybe the weapon flies out of the character's hands when it is swung, landing harmlessly out of reach. (Or whatever suitably embarrassing result the GM can devise.)

Knock outs

In combat, the larger the weapon that strikes someone, the more chance there is that the someone will be knocked out. If an attack with a blunt weapon is successful, the GM should roll percentile dice to see if the target is KO'd. At the GM's discretion, particularly good attack rolls (i.e., a large number of successes) may boost the chance of a knock out. (The chance should be raised in increments of five percent.)

Example: Mugsy has moved up in the world, and now uses a baseball bat, rather than his fists, to commit assault. In the course of settling a disagreement, Mugsy is forced to strike someone with said bat. His player rolls six successes. The baseball bat is a heavy weapon, and so does $6+4+4 = 10$ points of damage. The GM decides that such a mighty blow means the chances of the person passing out have increased, and raises the chance of a knock out from 15% to 20%.

Player characters can resist a knock out attack if they pass a Willpower test. The number of successes needed is equal to half the damage sustained, rounding up. GMs are within their rights to extend this privilege to important NPCs (major league villains, say, or hard men).

Dodging

If your character is throwing a punch, he cannot dodge a punch as well. To dodge blows, your character must be ducking, weaving, and generally trying not to get hurt *instead* of fighting. If this is the case, treat the matter as a contest of skills: your character's Athleticism versus the other fellow's Brawling.

Boxing

From time to time your character might like to try his hand at a more legitimate (or, in the case of illegal boxing matches, not-so-legitimate) form of fighting. You might even give your character a specialist rank in Boxing.

Or indeed, Martial Arts. Here are some optional rules we use, which might come in handy in such situations.

Who Goes First?

The fighter who gets the first swing is the one whose player rolls the greatest number of successes for an Athleticism skill roll. This roll is made at the start of each round of boxing. The two sides then trade blows until both sides have made all the attacks they can for this round.

Fighting Style

Before each round of boxing, you must state whether your character is going to fight defensively, cautiously, or go all-out.

If your character goes in defensively, he gets three opportunities to hit in a round. Your character can dodge blows as well as throw them. To dodge a punch, roll your character's Athleticism, rolling more successes than the attacker's Brawling roll. If your character's opponent has gone in defensively, he can try to dodge punches in the same way.

If your character goes in cautiously, he gets five clear shots a round. Your character can still try to dodge punches, but at the cost of throwing them. (This is just like regular brawling.) If your character's opponent has gone in cautiously, he too can forfeit an attack for a chance to dodge.

If your character goes all-out, you should make a Brawling roll. The number of successes you roll is the number of attacks you can attempt in this round. Your character cannot attempt to dodge any punches. Likewise, an opponent who has chosen to go all-out cannot dodge your character's punches.

Injuries and Knock Outs

The number of successes needed to hit your opponent, and the ensuing damage, are calculated as in regular brawling. If the fighters have boxing gloves on, damage is halved.

At the end of a round, the fabled magic sponge can be employed. It will restore 1D6 hit points to any fighter who receives its enchanted (and damp) touch.

If a character is knocked out, or if his hit points drop below 10, he must successfully roll at least 2 successes on a Willpower roll to remain conscious.

(Note that this is different to knock out blows in regular brawling.) If a character reaches 0 hit points, he can continue to fight if he rolls at least 6 successes on a Willpower roll, but he will risk serious, permanent damage. With each additional blow while on 0 hit points, the character must test his Willpower again, needing an extra 1 success each time.

Example: Crunch (run by the GM) and Caesar (run by a player) are in the ring. The first round begins. Crunch is fighting cautiously while Caesar has gone all out. Both parties roll their Athleticism, and Caesar has the greater number of successes. He swings first.

As Caesar is going all-out, the number of attacks he can attempt in this round is determined by rolling his Brawling of 5. Caesar's player rolls, and gets six successes. Crunch, who is fighting cautiously, can make five attempts.

Caesar swings for Crunch, and his player rolls. The dice show two successes, which is enough to hit Crunch. But Crunch sidesteps the blow. (The GM forfeits one of Crunch's attacks to do so. Crunch can now only make four attempts at punching Caesar. Note that the dodge is not automatic; the GM has to make a successful Athleticism roll.)

The action would now turn to Crunch, but he has just forfeited an attack. So Caesar gets his second swing in, with the player rolling four successes. The GM grimaces, and Crunch cops a left hook. The GM deducts 9 hit points from Crunch's total (4 successes + Caesar's Brawling of 5), and rolls 1D% to see if Crunch has been KO'd. The GM rules that the blow is powerful enough to increase the chance of knock out by 5%, bringing the chance to 10%. The GM rolls, but the roll is 92. Crunch is still conscious, and now tries to dish out a little damage in return.

The GM rolls for Crunch, getting five successes. Crunch's uppercut delivers 10 points of damage to Caesar. The chance of a knock out is again 10% on account of the large amount of damage. The GM rolls a 37. Caesar staggers back, then gathers his senses. He scowls at Crunch and swings...

Guns and Knives

Knives and all manner of edged weapons do damage in the same way as blunt weapons. If the weapon has a small blade, treat it as a light weapon; a medium blade counts as a medium weapon; a large blade is a heavy weapon (and needs a Strength check just like other heavy weapons—see the note on page 19).

Guns (that is, handguns) do a flat 10 points of damage per shot. No

messing about with different calibres or whatever. If you feel a need for more detail, consult Appendix B which provides a number of fiddly little rules to complicate combat.

What makes these weapons slightly different is their potential for causing fatal wounds. If your character enters a gun or knife fight, he runs the risk of being stabbed or shot in the heart, head or any number of extremely delicate places.

One way to resolve this matter would be to provide rules for determining where each blow lands. Frankly, that sounds like too much work. Instead, we'll just see if the character is lucky enough to survive the fight.

Right before combat breaks out, if there is any sort of piercing weapon involved, the GM rolls in secret for each character. This roll will determine how many wounds a character can take before he cops one which incapacitates him.

A character's Constitution is a measure of his body's ability to withstand trauma. So it is Constitution we will use to see how much piercing damage a character can endure.

Constitution	GM rolls...
0	1
1-2	1D2
3-4	1D5
5	1D6

(For each extra rank above 5, add 1 to the roll. So for a character with a Constitution of 8, the GM rolls $1D6 + 3$.)

This number covers gun shots, knife wounds, or any mix of the two.

Example: Since we last met him, Mugsy has acquired a firearm. Which is just as well, as he's currently in a gunfight. Mugsy has a Constitution of 5. The GM rolls 1D6, and gets a 4. Mugsy is decidedly lucky today, and can take four shots before he requires urgent medical attention. If Mugsy's opponent was wielding a knife instead, Mugsy's luck would run out after four stab wounds.

Remember, this number is a secret. Mugsy won't know how much more he can take until it's too late.

7 How to Make Enemies and Influence People

At the start of the game your character will be unknown to most of the criminal underworld. However, word will start to get around when your character (and his friends) commit crimes. The bigger the crime, the greater the Notoriety. People will get to know your character, or at least know of him. Your character can even try big-noting himself to raise his Notoriety.

Notoriety	Typical criminal
0	A nobody
5	Petty criminal
10	Thug with rep
15	Hitman
20	Master thief
25	Professional crim
30	Crime boss

It's not just your crimes that people remember, though. They'll also remember how you handled the job, whether you showed respect and how you treated your associates. This is represented by your character's Trust score.

Notoriety rarely decreases. Even if a criminal goes straight, his past crimes will be remembered by those he's left behind. No, what changes is Trust. If someone is given a job, and fails, their Trust goes down, not their Notoriety. If the job is a complete balls-up, Trust goes down while Notoriety often goes up! (This reflects the fact the character now has a bad rep—criminals are more likely to recognise him as someone *not* to work with.) Conversely, if a criminal takes the rap for another, his Trust would be increased.

Trust	Typical attitude
10	I trust him with my life
5	He's all right
0	Why should I trust him?
-5	I trust him as far as I can throw him
-10	Scum!

Anyone who informs on a gang (and is exposed as a grass) can expect their Trust drop to -10.

In game terms, when your character meet with other criminals, the GM makes a D% roll. If the result is less than or equal to your character's Notoriety then your character's reputation precedes him. The other criminals will know his name and his most memorable crimes (or, if Trust is negative, his most horrible screw-ups).

8 Skill Definitions

Appraisal Allows your character to determine the street value of goods.

Athleticism Represents physical ability: running, climbing, throwing, etc. It also allows you to dodge physical attacks (see p. 20). Not to be confused with the Strength skill, which is mere brute force.

Awareness How alert your character is. Use it to search for hidden goods, notice police surveillance or to spot suspicious bulges in a person's coat.

Brawling Covers armed and unarmed hand-to-hand combat.

Car Handling How well your character can drive. Under regular driving conditions, no roll is needed. Roll when in a car chase, or on dangerous roads, or when performing manoeuvres like a bootlegger's reverse.

Car Stealing Knowledge of the different ways to steal a car. It includes knowledge of car alarms.

Chemistry The ability to identify chemical compounds, and in particular, drugs. With a high enough rank in Chemistry, and the right set-up, you may even manufacture drugs.

Contacts Not what you know, but who you know, right? You know one dodgy person per rank in this skill. Your GM will tell you who these people are. (GMs, see p. 29 for more on contacts.)

Constitution How hardy your character is.

Conversation The art of talking about illegal activities, without saying stuff like "Anyone interested in robbing a bank?" GMs, this skill exists so a player's intent can be translated into something suitably subtle. When a player says something like "I ask around if anyone's doing a bank job," a Conversation roll tells whether the character was subtle enough, or whether he sounds like a total prat.

Do not confuse this skill with Fast Talk. Fast Talk relies on deceiving the person you're talking to.

To have your character charm someone, use Savoir Faire.

Computer Usage Knowledge of computer operations. High levels may allow computer hacking, at the GM's discretion (but you're probably better off putting such points in a specialist rank).

Electronics Use this skill to repair, sabotage, or bypass everyday electrical devices or systems. To deal with security systems, use Car Stealing (for car alarms), or invest in a specialist rank.

Fast Talk The skill of lying to people. It can be resisted by Sense Motive.

First Aid Allows your character to assess injuries, take a pulse, and administer very basic first aid. You also know how to remove bullets with only a penknife and a bottle of vodka. This skill is not a substitute for medical training.

Forgery Use this to manufacture false ID, fake passports, or even counterfeit bank notes. The number of successes rolled should be noted by the GM, as an Awareness roll which rolls a greater number of successes will reveal the forgery.

Gaming Whether it's dogs, horses or poker, this skill covers it. Use it to choose how to place bets, or to tell if a game (or a race) is fixed.

Gun Handling The use and maintenance of a gun. Pistols, shotguns and air weapons are all covered by this skill.

Intimidation The art of saying nothing, and still getting the point across. Your GM may grant you bonus successes if your character looks strong (high Strength or high Athleticism), or has already put on a convincing display of violence. Likewise, weedy characters (low Strength or low Constitution) might be penalised.

Local Knowledge What your character knows about the area he is living in: shortcuts, local business leaders, abandoned lots, etc.

Lock Picking Use this to open locks when your character doesn't have the key. At higher levels (a rank of at least 5 or 6), it can also be used to open safes without knowing the combination. This skill usually requires special tools. (GMs, see p. 31 for more details on lock picking.)

Mechanical Repair Use this skill to repair or sabotage mechanical devices such as cars (but *not* car alarms—use Car Stealing instead), handguns, etc. Covers both household items and industrial devices.

Pickpocketing The ability to steal small items from a person without being noticed. (If the mark is alert, resolve the attempt with a skills contest: Pickpocketing versus Awareness). This skill should also be used for shoplifting.

Psychology The ability to “read people”. A successful roll lets your character know the emotional state of a person he’s talking to, or what psychological weaknesses can be exploited. Not to be confused with Sense Motive.

Savoir Faire Covers stylishness, dress sense, charm and coolness. If you want your character to impress someone, roll this skill.

Sense Motive This skill is used to tell when people are lying to you, and why. It relies on a smattering of psychology, and observation of such things as the speaker’s body language and tone of voice. Not to be confused with Psychology.

Stealth The art of avoiding attention. Use it to hide yourself, to conceal objects, and to shadow people.

Streetwise How much your character knows about illegal matters (what different drugs do, how much you could expect to pay for them), who the local heavies are and a basic knowledge of your legal rights (learned from previous arrests, no doubt).

Strength Measures the sheer muscle power of your character. Test this skill when you want your character to lift something heavy: a large club, bulky (stolen) goods, or the scrote you’re trying to intimidate.

Willpower A measure of your character’s self-control and discipline. A successful Willpower roll is needed to improve skill ranks, withstand pain, or to stick to an unpleasant task.

9 Rules Advice for GMs

I Don't Want to be Thirteen!

Characters in this game are designed to be young people starting out on a life of crime. The aim is that players will work together to form a gang, and through good judgment, increase the area of their control and rebuff rival gangs' attempts to move in on them.

As a result, characters range from 13 to 18 years old. Young characters (under 17) are minors, which means they can make a mess of their first few crimes without the full weight of law falling on them. (This is only true if the crimes are minor, like shoplifting.) However, not being allowed to enter bars and pubs could be a problem, as these are the traditional place for arranging shady deals. (Of course, the characters might know someone who can supply them with fake IDs.)

For some GMs (and some players), the prospect of having 13 year old characters is a problem. If this is the case, consider changing the age roll to $12 + 2D6$, giving ages of 14 to 24, but with extremes being more unlikely.

Contacts

Characters with the Contacts skill know one (dodgy) person per rank in the skill. These people are useful resources, "business associates," friendly but not friends. They might introduce the characters to a fence (for a fee), but they wouldn't help steal goods. Remember, the characters are supposed to start out as small timers.

Things a character could get from his contacts include help in gathering information, help getting work (either criminal or legit) or providing an outlet for fencing stolen goods. Don't let one contact be able to do all this. Characters need to cultivate a network of contacts.

Players are likely to have their own ideas for contacts (corrupt policeman, solicitors, members of other gangs, C&E men, doctors, etc.). While these are all good ideas, mix them in with more regular folks to provide balance and realism. People like newsagents, local small-time criminals, barmen and stall holders are all able to function as contacts. In many cases, they are also far more plausible. (How many 13 year old criminals will know bent coppers?)

Contacts won't always be able to supply reliable information, either because the contact has been misinformed, or is deliberately lying. (Which is

likely is the players abuse their contacts or fail to properly reward profitable information.) It's suggested that when you assign contacts to a character, you secretly roll 1D10 for each of the contacts, to estimate how well informed each one is. A roll of ten means the contact always knows something relevant, while a roll of one means the character is better off guessing than speaking to this contact.

General Remarks on Characters

Once a player has created a character, you should give it the once over. One thing to consider is whether a certain skill can justifiably be in the possession of the character. If a player wishes their 14 year old to have a rank of 5 in Stock Market Trading, there will have to be a very good story why a mere youth has such abilities. That said, under most circumstances the players should be accommodated.

A player doesn't have absolute control over his character's nickname. A character could end up with a nickname he *doesn't* want if he bungles too many crimes.

It is your job to decide what each character has as personal possessions. You can assume that the characters possess reasonable, everyday items, and never bother listing them. However, players may want their characters to have special equipment (safe cracking tools, firearms, materials for forgery). Remember that in the UK, firearms are hard to obtain. If a player wants an illegal firearm, make that the focus of a game session, rather than just letting the player add it to his character sheet.

Working with Gangs

There is no reason why the characters can't work with other gangs from time to time. A character can even be working for one gang, while doing jobs for another on the side. The players should make a note of who they are currently working for in the "Crime Family/Organisation" space on their character sheets.

Although the intent of the game is for the characters to develop their own gang, characters can start the game working for a gang, if you want.

Notoriety and Trust

Notoriety is a double edged sword. Ask yourself: Could Ronnie Biggs have slipped back into the UK unnoticed? If a character continues to be less than secret about his criminal activities (e.g., openly bragging of his exploits, or even courting the media), his “fame” will no longer be restricted to criminal circles. The wider public will hear about him, and there will be pressure upon the police to do something about it.

Stealing from your employers (or your friends) is a surefire way to lose Trust. (The only way to lose Trust more quickly is to be caught grassing on someone.) If a character continues to rip off his associates he runs the risk of being bundled into a car boot and driven off into the night, never to be seen again.

Lock Picking

The art of lock picking is not something one can find a lot of information on, for obvious reasons. The following site has the *MIT Guide to Lock Picking* in both PostScript and HTML form:

<http://www.lysator.liu.se/mit-guide/mit-guide.html>

However, for game purposes, it's enough to ask whether the potential lockpicker wishes to ‘scrub’ the lock or pick the lock. Scrubbing is quick and opens most locks. True lock picking is a slow and careful process, which could take ten minutes or more to complete. In game terms, a scrubbing attempt requires more successes to open a lock than a picking attempt. How many more is up to you. Some locks cannot be opened by scrubbing and will require the character to concentrate on individual pins.

Improving Skill Ranks

Depending upon how you run your campaign, awarding extra skill ranks to your players will work slightly differently.

If you intend to run a game where the players have clearly defined objectives each week, you should award points after the current plot has wrapped up.

If you are trying to run an open-ended game, where there are a number of choices available to the characters in a unfolding complex story, you may

wish to award points after each gaming session. (Of course, the events of some sessions may not deserve any skill points.)

Either way, when you award skill points, no award should be more than two extra skill points. It is recommended that you award the points to specific skills a character successfully used during the game. For example, if a character wins big at poker, the extra skill point(s) should be added to the character's Gaming skill. If you just hand the points to the players, they might use them to improve skills that they didn't use that session. (Award points any way you please, but be aware of this potential problem.)

We think it is also worthwhile granting a 'GM's Award' bonus point to the player who has used his or her skills best during play, or who came up with important elements of a plan. We have found this gets the players involved and keen to be central in the game, which is important for the player-centred, open-ended style of play we have tried to encourage. (For more on the open-ended style of play, see p. 33.)

Improving Willpower

Willpower is a special case. If a character presses on with a difficult task, or acts in a brave manner, then you should award the player an extra point of Willpower, subject to a successful Willpower roll. (The number of successes must exceed the character's current level of Willpower. There is no penalty for botching this roll.)

In special cases, you might wish to award an automatic increase in Willpower for players who roleplay a suitable determination (or foolishness), such as charging a man armed with a semi-automatic. Provided they live.

Where Are the Modifiers?

You will have noticed a dearth of modifiers. No consideration of cover, lighting, called shots or unusual conditions exists in the combat section. There is no discussion of how the chance of success at Stealth may be improved by wearing black at night.

Use your common sense. These rules are easily learned and easily expanded. Make up whatever seems necessary.

10 Campaign Advice for GMs

Styles of Play

Realistic or Cinematic?

This game was inspired by such films as *Snatch*, and *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. But when we ran it, we adopted a more realistic style of play. Why?

Both styles have strengths and weaknesses. The cinematic approach certainly is something most people would like to attempt. Running about, blowing away all and sundry, robbing the rich and getting away with it certainly has its charm. However, we felt that after a while it would become cartoon-like. We didn't think this would suit long-term play. If you disagree, don't let us stop you from running a two-fisted tale of crime!

From experience, a realistic game does mean hard work initially for players. In our games, early attempts to behave in a suitably criminal manner led to characters being locked up, hurt or even killed off. (Never spit in a crime boss's drink.)

However, once the first weeks have passed, players (and characters) will have learned a few home truths about committing crime and getting away with it. If you can successfully preserve cause and effect, this will lead to an absorbing game.

In the end, the decision is up to you and the players. The rules can accommodate either style of play. Pick the style that both you and the players will enjoy, and establish the tone from the very first session.

Open-Ended Gameplay

One of the reasons for writing this game was to experiment with a different style of play. Traditionally, a GM would present the players with a story goal, in a your-mission-should-you-choose-to-accept-it way. More sophisticated GM-ing involves having a number of goals, which the players can deal with in any order they choose, but this is a marginal improvement. Think of this as "GM-driven gaming."

With *Steal*, we tried to encourage "player-driven gaming." We hoped the players would set the story goals. In the first session, one player said his character was waiting in his flat, in case one of his contacts called with a job for him to do. The player was politely told that his character would be better

off making his own luck. So his character went out and started a protection racket.

The long term goal of the campaign was that the players would develop a gang of their own, a gang that would grow in power and strength. For this to plausibly happen, the characters have to develop plans of their own, rather than do someone's bidding from session to session. (A standard tool is to get the players to write down their characters' long-term goals.)

This doesn't mean that the GM has less to do. Although the bulk of a session's events will be dictated by the players, the GM must judge how people (such as locals, rival criminals, and the police) react to the gang's actions, and have these groups take appropriate action. The GM will need to have some generic locations prepared in advance, or be able to improvise details as needed. (*Steal* is not a strategy-oriented game, so maps marked with 1" squares and the like are unnecessary.) The GM should also have some contingency plans, in case the players are at a loose end that session. E-mail (see page 35) can help the players with their pre-planning.

This kind of open ended gameplay works only if the players are willing to cooperate. If you can't gauge how your players would cope with this, ask! You might consider starting the players off with a more traditional style of play (being young and nobodies, they won't have the resources to pull off big capers), and ease into a more player-driven game.

Setting Up the Campaign

What the Characters Need

The characters need somewhere to meet on a regular basis. For a campaign to start plausibly, there must be a reason why the players' characters get involved with one another. They might go to the same school, work at the same place, live in the same estate, etc. If the characters are old enough, perhaps they all hang out in the same pub or bar. (Ideally, the reason should be picked by the players, not the GM. This ties in with the advice on page 4.)

The characters need a reason to become involved in illegal activities. The number one motivating factor is a lack of money, but other reasons include: anti-authoritarianism, dealing with racist attitudes, the glamour of crime or an overwhelming desire to be rich (a.k.a greed). Lack of money is a good prompt to get players into events, as they will need to pay bills... eventually.

Maps

Acquiring maps of the gang's local area should be a high priority. If you're sticking to the campaign setting outlined in Chapter 2, then you'll want a map of London. A *London A-Z*, if you have one, is handy. However, there are web sites that offer London street maps. A site which we recommend is Streetmap.co.uk (<http://www.streetmap.co.uk>).

We set our game in Greater London, encompassing Finsbury, Tottenham, Hammersmith, Camden Town, Brixton and Chelsea. There's no reason to restrict the player's activities to a single city, of course. Setting some events elsewhere can offer a touch of variety if the players are getting tired of London (but hopefully not tired of life). It can also serve to illustrate the depth of their rivals' criminal activity. The movie *Get Carter* could provide inspiration for this second type of storyline. (The Streetmap site has maps of selected areas around the UK, which could come in handy for this.)

For our campaign, we printed out street maps of the general regions involved. The Streetmap site also offers aerial photography of London in 500 metre sections. We were lucky enough to be able to use a friend's A3 colour printer to print out a section of each suburb from the aerial photographs. We ended up with a shot of the main street areas with clear pictures of buildings, parks and houses, which add a great deal to the atmosphere. (It also saves the GM from having to draw up maps to adjudicate line of sight, etc.)

We covered these photos with a clear film and used overhead and white-board markers to gradually build up our suburb, by colour-coding buildings and numbering them according to a key. If you print out both the photo and its accompanying street map, you can furnish the printed photo with street names as well.

E-mail

The use of e-mail can greatly improve any roleplaying game, not just Steal. However, it's only fair to use e-mail if all your players have access to it.

In our campaign, we used <http://groups.yahoo.com/> to set up mailing lists, allowing our players to communicate easily as a group. Used properly, a mailing list can prevent game sessions from turning into planning sessions, as players can discuss their plans for the next game session in out-of-game hours. We used a mailing list managed by the GM so that new players could be instantly added by the GM to the discussion.

E-mail also allows the GM to deal with individual character events without affecting the rest of the group. This allows players to be a little more devious, with the ability to cut secret deals that the others remain ignorant of. Say goodbye to the player knowledge/character knowledge dilemma! It creates a lot more tension (and a suitable degree of paranoia) when a player isn't quite sure of the intentions of fellow players, never mind those of the NPCs.

Mythology

The basis for Guy Richie's two gangster films, or any of the recent gangster-inspired Brit Flix, is usually the mythology of the gangsters of the 1960's. Such names as the Kray Brothers, who ruled the streets of East London, have very specific associations that might be worth exploring. So why not do an Internet search using words like 'Kray'?

Here is also an article, about a recent Brit Crime novel called *The Long Firm*, which also discusses the Krays.

<http://www.sohopress.com/timeoutlondon.html>

Campaign Outline

Here is a brief outline of a Steal campaign we have run. We hope that this will serve as a concrete example of how to set up a Steal campaign. Of course, it is only an example. Adapt or ignore it as you see fit.

Peculiar to our campaign, we had two groups of players, one group GM'ed by Matt, the other by Ken. The games ran on the same night, with events happening concurrently. The players (and their characters) of one group were able to interact with the other group. This gimmick is not necessary to play *Steal*. (But if you and a friend ever get the chance to try something like this, we highly recommend it!)

The campaign began with the two groups of characters situated in different parts of London. One group was living in Brixton. The other was in Finsbury Park, on the other side of London. Just before the campaign began, there was a gangland dispute involving the two gangs controlling these regions. Many gang members died.

Design Notes: The gang war was used to provide the two campaign regions with weakened gang power. As a result, the players' characters were now free to begin strengthening their power base. It also meant that there were immediate openings for criminal activity, for any players who were not yet used to being the driving force behind the game. Such activities included: drug dealing (the local gang has been wiped out, and the suppliers need new distributors), protection rackets (the old racketeers can no longer stop anyone from moving in on their turf), or working with the few remaining gang members (who want to regain their power, or who need help to slip quietly away).

The proportion of surviving gang members will depend on how your players take to being the centre of the action. If your players are having trouble adapting, then having survivors gives them a clear goal (the players will have to eliminate what remains of the old gang before their characters can gain control). But if your players quickly take control of the action, then there should be very few survivors, or maybe even no survivors. The players will have enough to deal with when they meet neighbouring gangs.

Later, after the players had time to develop their style of play and establish gang operations, we introduced other gangs from neighbouring suburbs. After relatively easy sessions of the plan-a-robbery-commit-a-robbery kind, the appearance of rivals added depth to the game, through conflict and complication. It also allowed players get to grips with intimidation techniques and ruses. The ultimate aim of this stage was for the players/characters to develop 'natural' (criminal) reactions, with one of the two groups of players acting on the chance to seize unguarded territory.

The third stage (not reached) would be the development of a *Godfather*-like situation, where the group has underworld power, but is confronted with the problem of being isolated from their cronies on the street.

Background Details: Crime

Organised Crime

If you have issue 15 of **arcane**, a UK gaming magazine, there's an article on organised crime (mostly adventure ideas) on pp. 33–34, by Paul Pettengale.

The *Organised Crime Registry* might also help you get to grips with organised crime.

<http://members.tripod.com/~orgcrime.faq.htm>

LaundryMan has many handy details about the process of laundering money.

<http://www.laundryman.u-net.com>

Fences

Fences are people who deal in stolen goods. A fence accepts stolen goods from a thief, giving money or goods in return. The fence then sells the stolen goods at a market stall or a store, or sells the goods to another fence, or hocks the goods at a pawnshop (but never a local pawnshop), or perhaps sells the goods to a reputable merchant.

Fences are important to any game of crime as they are generally the people that make organised crime possible. It isn't worth stealing items without some way to dispose of them.

Most fences dedicate themselves to dealing with certain types of goods. (It's only logical—they have to know what's a reasonable price to pay and still be able to make a profit.) It is rare to find someone who will simply buy anything. (We call these people 'pawnbrokers.')

You should let your players gradually get to know different fences. The players might have to sit on some goods for a number of weeks until they find the right buyer. Selling stolen goods shouldn't always be an automatic process.

Background Details: London and the UK

Critical Miss's article 'Roleplaying in Blighty' will be of use to anyone outside the UK who wants to avoid hideous cliches. That means you.

<http://www.criticalmiss.com/backissues/issue2/blighty1.html>

Slang

The streets of London have their own colourful language. You only have to watch British shows to pick up some of it. Indeed, if you want to develop a campaign resembling a Guy Richie film you must know some colloquial expressions. You might find the following site handy. We did.

<http://www.peevish.co.uk/slang>

It has all the British slang you could ever need. (One trick that works well is to choose a few phrases for each of the regular NPCs in your game.)

Police

Obviously, some attention has to be paid to developing police. The players should after a while start to sort out the local police into the ‘soft and kind ones’ they can manipulate, and the ones who will not cut them any slack whatsoever. There might even be a few officers who will turn a blind eye to their activities, for a healthy payment of course...

Uniformed police ranks are (in ascending order or superiority): constable (denoted P.C., for police constable), sergeant, inspector and chief inspector. Beat police (those police who patrol the area, both on foot and by car) are constables.

Detective ranks (whose members are plainclothed) are, in increasing superiority: detective constable (D.C.), detective sergeant (D.S.), detective inspector (D.I.) and detective chief inspector (D.C.I.).

(There are higher ranks in each division, but these are more concerned with the running of the station.)

Police999 is an excellent friendly site for developing an understanding of the day-to-day activities of police officers in Britain. It has details of the overall structure of the police service. It has an overview of the specialist forces at the disposal for serious crimes. Plus, it has sections devoted to drugs, police slang and powers of arrest.

<http://www.police999.com>

Police Law is another site which is handy for developing and understanding of police activities. It includes sections devoted to powers of arrest and a section outlining equipment carried by police.

<http://law.rainertech.co.uk>

Watching British police dramas (*The Bill*, *Burnside*, *Cops*) are an easy way to get to know the UK police system; and the fansites are a handy source of information. In particular, the technical section of *The Billboard* contains details of uniform, call signs, police lingo, equipment, etc.

<http://www.uq.net.au/~zzsusko/tech.htm>

British Law

Sooner or later, one of the characters is likely to have to make a court appearance. Depending upon whether you want to recreate the strict laws and legal procedure. You may wish to check out the following sites.

Nolo isn't strictly a site devoted to British Law, but it is certainly a good site for understanding key concepts in Law, as it takes to time to explain things in clear English.

Especially, take a look at Criminal Law: An overview.

<http://nolo.com>

Start Law Machine is of interest mainly for the sections devoted to police officer powers of interrogation and the rights of the individual when arrested. They are contained within the section devoted to English Law.

You may even wish to take a look at sections devoted to the British Court system and the charging of minors in English Law.

<http://www.startlawmachine.com>

Police Law is *the* site for the outlining of possible charges players might get arrested for. The friendly, clean outlay makes the process a breeze. Just don't tell your players you didn't go searching through all the British legislation...

<http://law.rainertech.co.uk>

Cars

If you are really keen about using real British cars in your campaign. You might like to check out the following site for reference material.

Finchley Car Centre <http://www.finchleycarcentre.co.uk>

Just break the frames and print out the for sale cars sections.

We like it because it has a nice layout with picture, details and retail prices of late model cars.

You may even like to number the print out cars from 1 to 100 for a handy random car table.

Stores and Everyday Items

Below are is a link to Brent Cross Shopping Centre just on the fringes of the Greater London Area. If you do a search for other shopping centres in the London area and cross reference the information, you should find a few familiar names popping up like Boots Chemist, Tesco's, WH Smith etc... These basically denote the larger British chain store, which might help you develop greater authenticity in your campaign.

<http://brentcross-london.com/stores.htm>

A The Math Geek's Guide to Steal

The table below lists the percentage chance of achieving at least X number of successes, for varying skill ranks. For instance, a person with one skill rank has a 10% chance of a botch, a 22% chance of no successes, 68% chance of rolling at least one success, 40% chance of rolling at least two successes, 17% chance of rolling at least three successes... get the picture?

These numbers have been rounded, but in the interests of completeness, even results with a less than 1% chance of occurring have been listed on the table. < 1% indicates a less than one percent chance. << 1% is much, much less than one percent. A dash indicates an impossible result.

Successes	Number of skill ranks (Number of dice rolled in brackets)								
	0R (2D)	1R (3D)	2R (4D)	3R (5D)	4R (6D)	5R (7D)	6R (8D)	7R (9D)	8R (10D)
botch	11%	10%	9%	7%	6%	5%	5%	4%	3%
0	31%	22%	16%	13%	10%	8%	7%	6%	5%
1+	58%	68%	75%	80%	83%	86%	89%	91%	92%
2+	26%	40%	51%	60%	67%	73%	77%	81%	84%
3+	7%	17%	28%	38%	47%	55%	61%	67%	72%
4+	1%	5%	12%	20%	28%	36%	44%	51%	57%
5+	—	1%	4%	8%	14%	21%	28%	35%	41%
6+	—	<1%	1%	3%	6%	10%	15%	21%	27%
7+	—	—	<1%	<1%	2%	4%	7%	11%	16%
8+	—	—	<1%	<1%	1%	2%	3%	5%	8%
9+	—	—	—	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	2%	4%
10+	—	—	—	<<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	2%
11+	—	—	—	—	<<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
12+	—	—	—	—	<<1%	<<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
13+	—	—	—	—	—	<<1%	<<1%	<1%	<1%
14+	—	—	—	—	—	<<1%	<<1%	<<1%	<1%
15+	—	—	—	—	—	—	<<1%	<<1%	<<1%
16+	—	—	—	—	—	—	<<1%	<<1%	<<1%
17+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	<<1%	<<1%
18+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	<<1%	<<1%
19+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	<<1%
20	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	<<1%

B House Rules for Combat

A Note From Ken: These are the combat rules I use in my Steal campaign. Feel free to use them. Or not.

To hit a target in a combat situation, make a skill test roll.

The skill being tested depends on the type of attack being made. To punch, kick, or otherwise physically assault a person, make a Brawling test. To shoot someone, make a Gun Handling test. To throw something at someone, make an Athleticism test.

The number of successes you need depends on how far away the person is, as the next two sections make clear.

Melee Attacks

Melee attacks can only be made on a target within striking distance (about 2m). If the target is further than 2m away, you must spend time closing in, or make a ranged attack instead.

- To hit a person in melee, you need at least two successes.

Ranged Attacks

Ranged attacks may be made on a target at any distance. Ranged attacks are classified by distance, with close targets being easier to hit than far ones. An attack's range varies from weapon to weapon.

- To fire at a target at point blank range (1m), you need only one success.
- To fire at a target at close range, you need at least two successes.
- To fire at a target at near range, you need at least three successes.
- To fire at a target at far range, you need at least four successes.

Exception: Sawn-off shotguns reduce the number of successes needed by one. That's right maniacs, a point blank shot will succeed on anything but a botch.

Damage

If you score enough successes, then you have inflicted damage on the target. To calculate damage, multiply the number of successes scored by the number listed for the weapon in the table on page 44. This result is the number of hit points to be subtracted from the target's current hit points.

Example: Diamond Bill tries to punch a man in a bar brawl. Bill has a Brawling rank of 2. His player rolls 4D10, getting 3 successes. This inflicts 3 hit points of damage, as fists have a $\times 1$ multiplier. Had Bill been wearing brass knuckles, the damage would have been 7 (3 + the character's ranks in Brawling). Had Bill been wielding a knife, the damage would have been 12 hit points.

The Effects of Damage

Any character who is reduced to zero hit points is dead. However, death may occur even if a character has not been reduced to zero hit points. For instance, a pistol pressed against a person's head is at point blank range. It's possible (on a poor roll) that the shot only inflicts 7 points of damage. The GM is free to rule that this is more than enough to destroy the person's head, killing the poor bastard, even though the victim might technically have some hit points remaining.

Any character who loses more than half their current hit points in a single blow must get 3 successes on a Willpower roll or pass out. (The GM is free to raise this to 4 or more successes if the damage is particularly severe.)

Any character who loses hit points equal to or greater than their Constitution in a single blow must get 2 successes on a Willpower roll or be stunned for one round. A stunned person can only stand and look stupid. Note: if the amount lost is also more than half their current hit points, the player should roll to see if the character passes out, as described in the previous paragraph, *instead* of rolling to see if the character is stunned.

In addition, each character can only take a certain number of bullets before succumbing to shock (and passing out as a result). The GM rolls in secret before the fight begins. This number varies from fight to fight, so a character (and his player) never knows which bullet will be the one to incapacitate him.

Constitution	GM rolls...
0	1
1–2	1D2
3–4	1D5
5	1D6

For each extra rank above 5, add 1 to the roll. So for a character with a Constitution of 8, the GM rolls 1D6 + 3.

(This is the same as the rule in Chapter 6, but the table is reprinted here for convenience.)

Some Good Advice: Avoid gun battles.

Sample Weapons

Melee weapons	Cost	Availability	Damage
Bat	15	Common	×2
Bottle, broken	N/A	Illegal	×2
Brass knuckles	5	Illegal	×1, then add Brawling ranks
Crowbar	10	Common	×2
Fist	N/A	All	×1
Knife	8	?	×3
Meat cleaver	10	Common	×2
Truncheon	N/A	Police	×2

Ranged weapons	Cost	Availability	Damage	Ranges (P/C/N/F)
CS spray	N/A	Police	incapacitates	1 / 2 / 4 / —
Pistol	200	Controlled	×7 / ×5	1 / 6 / 12 / 40
Shotgun	250	Controlled	×9 / ×7 / ×3	1 / 6 / 12 / 30
Shotgun, sawn-off	N/A	Illegal	×9 / ×7 / ×3	1 / 3 / 6 / 12

Cost is given in pounds. (A note to UK citizens: please don't laugh. I have no idea how much these items cost in Australia—where I live—never mind the UK.)

Common weapons require no licence, and are readily available for purchase.

Controlled weapons are available to special police units, criminal gangs, and to any private citizen who has a hard-to-get licence. If a character is unable to obtain a weapon legally, its black-market cost is at least triple the listed price.

Possession of illegal weapons is an arrestable offence.

Ranged weapons list a variety of damage multipliers. These should be read in order as being the damage for point blank, close, near and far ranges. If there are fewer than four numbers listed, the last number applies to all remaining range categories. For instance, a pistol does $\times 7$ damage at point blank range, and $\times 5$ at every other range.

Ranges are in metres.

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