High Larceny

A game about meticulous planning and stealing what's been stolen

Designed by Josh Temple

In *High Larceny* players are highly skilled international thieves planning and executing their next heist. However, this is no ordinary gang of convert crooks out to make a quick score, this is a troop of modern-day Robin Hoods out to steal back what had already been stolen. In this heist game players are not trying to steal gold bars or rob a casino blind, they're after something altogether more precious: Art.

This game aims to explore in a playful way the very real history of stolen art in museums across the world, with the goal of returning said art to its rightful place.

For 3-5 Players and 1 Game Master (GM)

Required Materials:

Sticky-notes in a different color for each player, Index Cards, Pens/Pencils, paper, and at least 3 D10s.
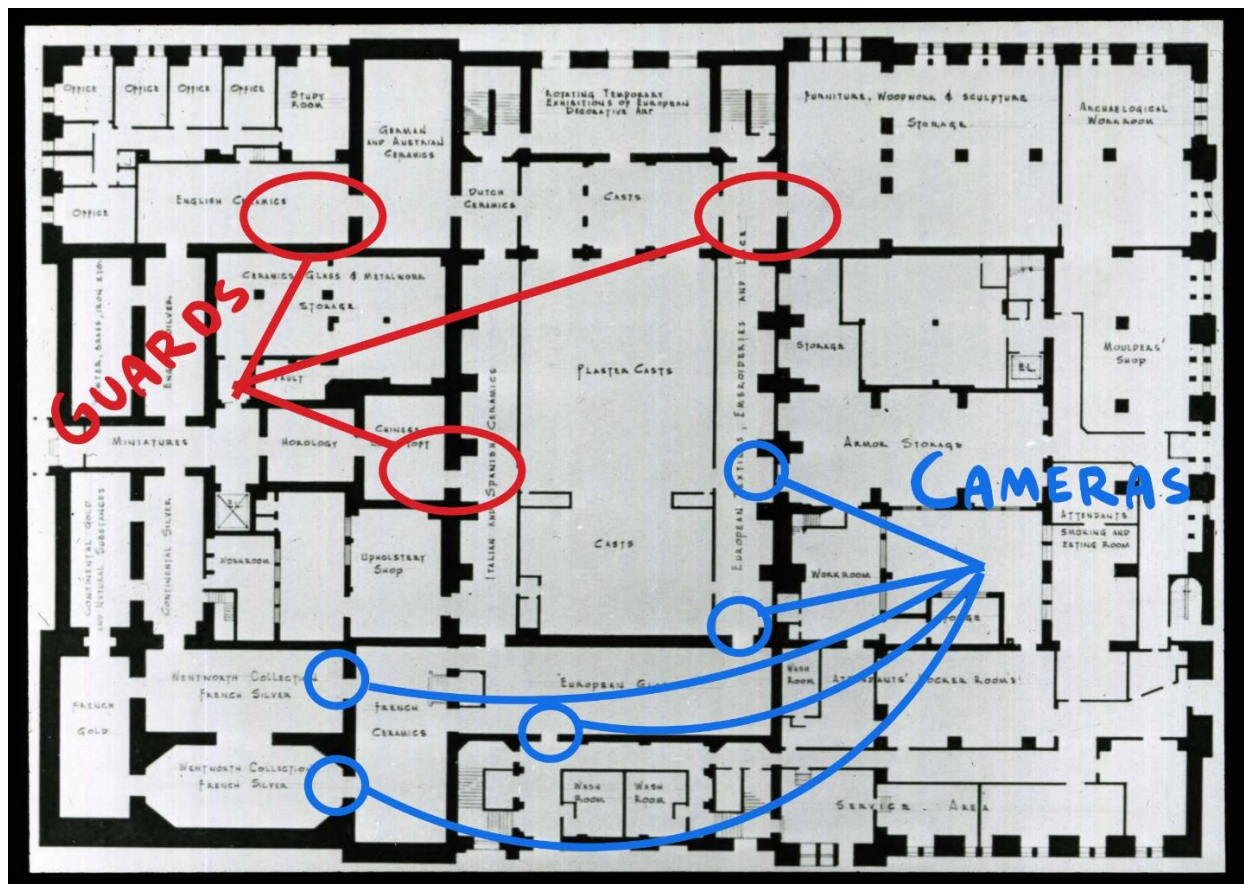
Miro Template for Remote Play: https://tinyurl.com/sfr3rtnt

Figure 1: Floor Plan of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Basement source

For the Game Master: Heist Setup

What is being stolen? From Where?

Discuss and decide with the players what they will be trying to steal and from where. Whatever the players are trying to take, it must not belong in the place they are taking it from.

Ask yourself and the players these questions: How did it get there? Who originally stole it? What significance does it hold for the people it was taken from? Why was it stolen?

Feel free to take inspiration or use examples of stolen art from real history. However, be aware that the stories of stolen art often tread upon the real and painful histories of oppression and colonialism, so before using any real history as inspiration make sure all your players are comfortable with the subject matter.

While this game was originally conceived as taking place in the modern-day real world, nothing outlined in these rules requires that setting. The game can be set in any imagined past, present, future, or other word without any modification.

What Problems Do the Players Need to Solve?

Every heist has three key stages: *Get In, Get It,* and *Get Out.* Along the way the thieves will encounter a number of *Obstacles* they will need to work their way around or through in order to succeed. For each of the three stages create 2-4 *Obstacles* for the players, writing each down on its own index card and placing it face down in front of the players, keeping *Obstacles* within their stages. Think of these *Obstacles* as a kind of outline for the heist and the game.

These *Obstacles* can be anything thieves might encounter along the way that prevents them from *Getting In, Getting It,* or *Getting Out.*

Examples: laser security systems, a very secure safe, rival thieves, police detectives, security guards, etc.

For the Players: Character Creation

A character in *High Larceny* needs 3 things:

1. A Name
2. Skills
3. Motivations

Once your character has a Name, give them two **Skills** (Locking picking, hacking, hand-to-hand combat, getaway driving, sleight of hand, etc.).

Next, give them at least one motivation for taking part in the heist. Why are you here? Do you have a connection to what you're trying to steal?

Finally, leave some space to note any items your character might have or any they acquire during play.

Game Play:

Taking An Action: When a player wants to accomplish something, and the outcome is unclear, they roll 2 D10s to determine the result. The GM sets a target (between 2-10), any die on or above the target is a success. Any die below is a failure. If there are any successes in the roll, the action succeeds but something goes wrong for each failure. A higher target not only represents a more difficult task, but also a more dangerous and riskier one (a target of 2 being the easiest and 10 being the hardest).

Players may use a **Skill** they have to perform **An Action** if the skill is relevant to that action. Example: "I use my locking picking skill to open the door." When using a **Skill**, you ignore 1 failure from the role.

Recon Phase:

Once setup is complete game play begins with character introductions. This can be done in many ways, but a recruiting-the-team montage is recommended. Once that is complete, it is now the player's job to prepare for the heist as best they can. In turns each player uses their skills and wits to take action to investigate the heist location, aiming to uncover the different hidden *Obstacles* the GM created during setup. When, through a player's action an *Obstacle* is discovered, the GM flips the corresponding index card face up. This Phase continues until the players are ready to begin the **Planning Phase** or the GM determines that the players are no longer able to investigate further.

Planning Phase:

Now it is time for the players to create a step-by-step plan for the heist. Using the information gathered in the **Recon Phase** and the *Obstacles* as guideposts, players create a timeline of actions they will execute during the heist design to *Get In, Get It,* and *Get Out.* Players write each action they plan to commit on its own sticky-note, placing it somewhere along the timeline. Actions do not need to be done sequentially; they can be done concurrently.
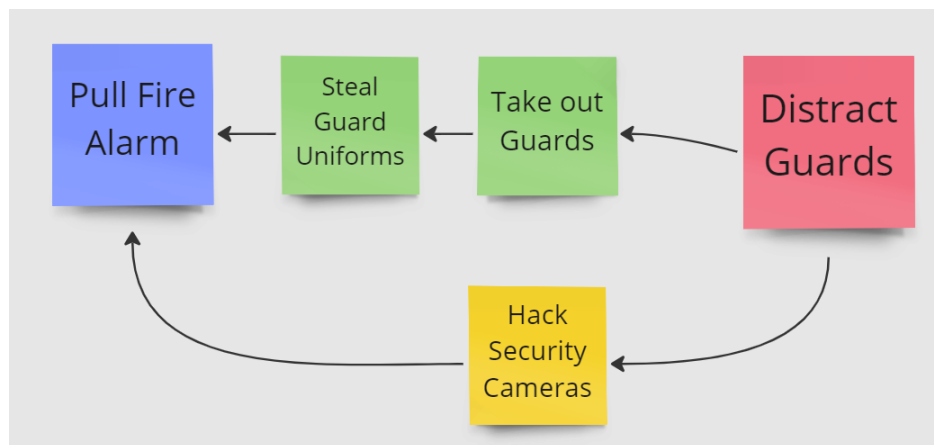

Fig 2. An example timeline. Each color represents a different player. Here the "take out guards" and "hack security cameras are stacked vertically to represent that they will be performed at the same time

Heist Phase:

Once the plan is complete, it's time to execute it. Play follows the timeline created in the **Planning Phase**, with players trying to execute each action as best as possible. Players are not required to follow the plan; they can improvise and adapt as they succeed and fail along the way. Whenever a player does an action that they planned for, they roll an additional D10 when performing that action.

Notes and Suggestions for the GM:

As the **Heist Phase** advances the players will inevitably be forced to go off their plan, taking away the clear player turn order. When this happens, it is up to the GM to determine the order in which players can act. This can be entirely

structured with the players taking turns in order around the table or it can be entirely unstructured and free flowing.

If the players did not uncover all the *obstacles* during the **recon phase**, the GM may reveal any *obstacle* that is unknown to the players when players encounter it during the execution of their plan.

NPC Actions:

Much like for the players, when an NPC takes an action where the outcome is in doubt the GM makes a roll using the rules laid out in the **Taking an Action** section. However, as the GM, you do not need to strictly adhere to "something goes wrong for each failure," feel free to ignore or include failures wherever you see fit.

Player Character Injuries/Damage:

In *High Larceny* player characters do not have a health stat or any other concrete way of tracking damage. As such, it is up to the GM to decide what injuries result from the actions of the characters and NPCs and how those injuries affect play going forward. For instance, a player character might sustain a leg injury in a tussle with a guard, making all further action rolls that require them to put strain on their leg to be more difficult. Injuries in *High Larceny* can be both gruesome and fetal. As the GM, make sure to clearly discuss with the players beforehand how much violence and gory detail they want included in their game, tailoring how you handle injuries accordingly.

Optional Rule: Real World Timer

If you are playing with a group of experienced players and are looking to add more tension into your *High Larceny* experience, you may incorporate a real-world timer into the game. This can be in the form of a short timer that forces players to decide their actions quickly on a turn-by-turn basis or in the form of a timer that forces players to finish the entire heist within a set amount of time.