



WHEN A PLAN COMES TOGETHER

When *A Plan Comes Together* is a *Modern AGE* adventure spark, meaning it's a brief resource designed to tell Game Masters how to run a particular type of adventure, from a one-shot to an extended campaign, using the *Modern AGE* roleplaying game. *Modern AGE* lends itself to a vast array of scenarios. This tells you which options to use from the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* and any relevant supplements, and presents a few new ones, to help you lean into your game's story goals.

THE SERIAL CAPER

A "serial caper" is a variation of the caper or heist genre, which involves executing a predetermined plan to pull off a theft or other criminal act, for profit or the greater good. Some capers have more of an espionage focus, or don't involve crime in the traditional sense, but no matter the job, it requires a team of experts, each working within their special niches. In other words? It needs Player Characters.

We're calling this a *serial* caper because while some variations of the genre are about a single, highly impactful job, this adventure spark is about more lighthearted stories, suited to a TV or film series. This also means the emphasis isn't on the grim realities of the criminal underworld (though these can be referred to) or tragic stories that break down into brutal violence. Michael Mann's *Heat* is a great movie, but this isn't

about stories like it. Finally, while action can be a part of a serial caper, combat and chase scenes aren't the main course of the plan. This isn't there for the *Fast & Furious* movies either, fun as they are.

MEDIA INSPIRATIONS

This is a big genre with fuzzy edges, especially when it comes to tone—remember, we're focusing on a lighter take. And although capers appear in written fiction, comics, and manga, too (and in a few video games, though these are rare) we'll be selecting TV and movies alone for accessibility purposes and to keep the list down to a reasonable length.

TELEVISION

The A-Team

Cowboy BeBop (some episodes; also, science fiction)

Heist (cancelled)

Hustle

Leverage

Lupin

Lupin III (anime series; also, manga, films)

FILM

Army of Thieves

The Italian Job (both versions)

The League of Gentlemen

Logan Lucky

Now You See Me and sequel

Ocean's 11, including its remake, and its remake's sequels and spinoffs

Sneakers

The Great Train Robbery

20 CAPER JOBS

LET'S GET YOU STARTED WITH A FEW IDEAS:

1. Get back a kidnapped loved one.
2. Escape prison.
3. Free someone from prison.
4. Use your skills to make someone appear more or less competent and responsible.
5. Rob a casino containing millions in cash.
6. Frame a notable figure in a scandal.
7. Eliminate or discredit the varied evidence of a scandal.
8. Kidnap or rescue someone who knows the location of buried treasure.
9. Liberate millions in criminal proceeds from a Mob-guarded facility.
10. Steal a technology that could be used to create terrible weapons in the wrong hands.
11. Fake a kidnapping to help someone escape from an oppressive individual or organization.
12. Counter another crew with comparable skills, looking to do a job you or an ally wants to fail. On the other side, a competing crew can function as a complication for other jobs.
13. Sabotage a facility.
14. Replace genuine valuables with fakes.
15. Con a wealthy mark out of their valuables.
16. Impersonate an individual or representatives of an organization to provide an alibi or conversely, implicate them in a scheme.
17. Run a scam promising to multiply a mark's money that lets you abscond with their investment.
18. Compete with another crew. Whoever makes the most money, or reaches a specific goal first, wins.
19. Ruin a genuine investment opportunity for revenge or some other advantage.
20. Reveal or create a secret identity.

SERIAL CAPER FEATURES

To navigate specific game advice, let's boil this genre down to a few critical points.

A TEAM OF EXPERTS

A caper needs a team of experts able to perform each part of the job. These are typically specialists, rare talents, or both. This form of expertise doesn't necessarily even need to exist as depicted in real life. For instance, in real life safecracking is usually done by locksmiths when the safe's owner runs into a problem. In a robbery, criminals usually either don't bother with the safe or employ brute force methods, such as explosives or tunnelling into vaults. In this genre, that reality doesn't matter. In a one-shot, these forms of expertise can be very narrow, but in an ongoing series of adventures, expertise tends to be generalized in classic roleplaying game fashion, with the "face," "wheels," and other broad specialties.

THE JOB...AND THE COMPLICATION

Serial capers revolve around The Job, which usually has a single obvious objective. Many jobs are robberies of specific places, as they have all the story conveniences that in role-playing games, we associate with site-based adventures: a map, guards, and an environment the story's creator can tightly control. Others revolve around an object—a classic MacGuffin—or a special person. Many jobs are illegal, but all of them feature opposition that can't be dealt with through brute force until the climax, if at all. Yes, even in *The A-Team*. However, most jobs have a complication that the heroes didn't anticipate—or seem not to have anticipated....

THE PLAN...AND THE TWIST

In serial capers, the heroes usually follow a plan to get the job done, but much of the time we don't see all the specifics. For *Modern AGE*, that's a good thing, since it's hard for players to know all the details their characters should and could know about what's happening in a fictional world. This also fits some of the game's systems for creating and executing plans, explained later. Plus, of course, everyone sitting around and talking about what to do can be a real momentum-killer. Sometimes plans are improvised at need instead, but in any event, the plan often has another plan within it: a twist that addresses the job's complication or otherwise turns danger or defeat into triumph.

A LIGHTER TONE

Serial capers aren't grubby crime dramas featuring the most explicit violence or dark themes, though they can allude to them and use them as motivators. In campaigns inspired by TV shows, you might descend into the occasional sober, serious episode, but in most cases, serial capers revolve around idealized, even sanitized versions of what you might see in thrillers. A team of thieves might be forced to do their job for a brutal mob boss, but we don't see the boss' people commit bloody acts of violence. We don't see their connections to human trafficking or addicts forced to sell the boss'

OPTIONAL RULE: HELPLESS

You may wish to use the serial caper standby of a gunshot wound or other injury leaving the victim articulate but wincing and limited in what they can do. Thus, the GM can say a character reduced to 0 Health due to wound damage is **Helpless** instead.

A Helpless character automatically fails all Accuracy, Dexterity, Fighting, and Strength tests, and they are vulnerable to a coup de grace as per p. 40 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, where another successful attack can kill them instantly. They cannot move without the help (hand, shoulder to lean on) of another character, in which case the Helpless character and the helper are reduced to half Speed. However, Helpless characters are otherwise able to speak and act. At the conclusion of an encounter however, a Helpless character begins dying.

Helpless doesn't apply to incapacitation from stun damage, as knocking someone out is well within the genre.

product to stave off withdrawal. Note, however, that you need to walk a fine line between leaving darkness at the edges and trivializing it, which is a form of exploitation. Thus, in the 2001 *Ocean's 11*, Andy Garcia's Benedict is a casino owner with a tough reputation, but he never does anything truly stomach-turning. In fact, he's okay enough to join the team in a sequel!

FOILS AND FOES

Speaking of the character Benedict, the "bad guys" (well, from the characters' point of view, given that they could just be doing their jobs) in serial capers need personality. They generally fall into three categories. The first are the targets of the caper, or people close enough to them to want it to fail. Again: Benedict in *Ocean's 11*. The second category consists of NPCs who are less interested in the caper per se than an opportunity to catch the characters. For Arsène Lupin, that's Inspector Ganimard (Guerchard in various adaptations). For the A-Team, he was Colonel Lynch, after them for the crime they didn't commit. The third, least common antagonist is the rival thief, spy, or other operator. No matter who they are, they need strong descriptions and broad, less than subtle personality traits to make their marks, encounter after encounter. The *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* tells you how to give NPCs just this sort of flair on pp. 116-117.

SERIAL CAPERS WITH MODERN AGE

We've talked about serial capers in the abstract, but this is a *Modern AGE* guide to the genre, so naturally, game considerations will have to interrupt this delightful discussion at some point. Inevitably then, here's how to use them to support the genre.

CAPER-WORTHY CHARACTERS

A classic serial caper requires a team of experts in their fields, and in *Modern AGE* that's reflected by abilities, focuses, and talents—especially talents, because these are what reflect truly notable skill in an area of expertise. Here's how we suggest you create this band of rogues, or lighthearted agents, or whatever they are.

UP THEIR LEVELS

Serial caper protagonists are rarely inexperienced, though the ensemble might have a neophyte or two who exists to provide a naïve window on the rest of the cast. Therefore, we recommend starting at a but of a higher level than usual. Level 3 is well suited to serial capers in several respects. First, it becomes possible to reach the Master degree in one talent. Second, ability improvements help characters lean into their niches. Level 3 also comes before specializations, leaving this as rewards that further define their niches. Make them level 3!

COORDINATE CHARACTER CREATION

Your general guideline should be that characters can come from similar or diverse backgrounds, but if their backgrounds are similar, that implies a connection, and if their professions look like they could be current or former members of the same organization, clique, syndicate, or whatever, they almost certainly *are*—or were. Drives should especially support participating in capers and revolve around strong obligations and professional pride, and like all drives, inspires the characters to participate. Nobody should have the same highest ability or best talent. Combat specialists should be in the minority, but that doesn't mean they're the only ones who know how to fight. Serial caper inspirations have their ex-military forces or capable field agents, and *Modern AGE* supports this by providing a very forgiving basic degree of competence for any character with a decent ability rating to add to their roll.

CAPERS WITH MODERN AGE RULES

Let's look at how to use *Modern AGE*'s rules work with serial capers.

MODES

While the lighthearted tone of the genre seems to make it a shoo-in for Cinematic Mode, or at least Pulpy, you can use any Mode with serial capers, though Gritty and Pulpy really belong to campaigns where the procedures of the caper are the most prominent, and combat is uncommon. In the extremely varied source material, action can take many forms, from high octane shootouts (where strangely nobody seems to get seriously hurt, but more often driven away) to

Chekhov's Gun-worthy scenarios where once you introduce a weapon, someone will use it to deadly, even decisive effect.

As Game Master, what you should do is decide what in the story, exactly, should stop someone in their tracks. In many cases, the Pulp approach to Toughness, where stalwart heroes can endure impact damage from clubs and even edged weapons, but not ballistic damage from guns and similarly serious sources, strikes the right balance. However, while you may want firearms to represent a serious threat, you might not want them to be immediately lethal.

INVESTIGATIONS AND SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

An important part of the serial caper is the setup, usually accomplished by following clues and getting the team's "face" to trick, seduce, or cajole information out of relevant Non-Player Characters. The standard *Modern AGE* rules for investigations and social encounters should work well. Most social encounters should consist of basic tests, unless gaining the confidence of a particular NPC is essential to do the job.

One mainstay of the genre, especially where the protagonists are do-gooders, is the friend of the week: A sympathetic character who, once approached properly, becomes a steadfast friend of the group—sometimes even a romantic interest. In many cases these are characters in distress and helping them is the point of the entire job, whether it's finding evidence to clear them of a crime they were accused of or recruiting their marine biology expertise as part of a plot to save whales from extinction by transporting a mating pair to the future.

BREACHING TESTS AND CAPERS

Breaching tests, as presented in Chapter 8 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, are custom-designed for things like breaking and entering. Options requiring multiple focuses to be used in such advanced test variants were designed for heists and other serial capers from the get-go. However, in serial capers, the Game Master must use them differently.

The principal difference between breaching tests in serial capers and in standard *Modern AGE* games is that the Player Characters are much more involved in designing the specifics of the test in terms of the actions they're taking and the focuses they're using. In a standard *Modern AGE* game, the GM may just assume the characters are coming up with the best plan they have based on what they know, and design a

breaching test to abstract the entire process. In a serial caper, however, planning—at least *some* planning—is brought directly into the story. The GM provides them with what they know, including any challenges or unusual circumstances they uncovered during the "pre-heist" investigative phase.

Each participant should say something like, "Because of (circumstance) I'll be using (ability + focus) to accomplish (task that contributes toward success)." If the character has an accurate understanding of the situation (such as knowing the correct patrol routes of guards), they may contribute that effort, and the associated ability + focus roll, to the breaching test effort. If the characters have a less than accurate understanding of the situation, the GM can impose a penalty of -1 or -2, or even decide that the character's efforts are misguided, and don't contribute to the breaching test. The GM still sets the accumulated degrees of success required.

Breaching tests being more specific also means that the range of actions they cover tends to be more constrained, limited to the caper itself instead of the supporting work around it, which is normally covered by pre-job information gathering.

Because progress along the caper is the spine of an adventure in the genre, the GM should take breaks in the progress of the test for other encounters without unduly affecting the heroes' progress—that is, unless they run into a problem in one of those interstitial encounters. These are in addition to any complications generated by the breach test that might prompt encounters of their own.

OTHER NOTABLE OR OPTIONAL RULES

The following rules are also useful in serial caper games.

CONVICTION

Introduced on p. 29 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, Conviction is an optional system that grants a player a pool of points they can use to enhance their character's actions. Given that serial capers usually have a lighter tone and assume the protagonists are highly competent, consider this system to reinforce that.

COMPLICATIONS AND SERENDIPITY

CHAPTER 8 of the *Modern AGE Companion* introduces Serendipity and Complications. Serendipity is a system to provide

CHARACTERS KNOW STUFF

The most awkward part of planning anything in-character is getting a handle on the vast amount of knowledge characters would have about their world that doesn't even come up in other circumstances. As Game Master, reassure players that they know anything that would fall under the realm of this kind of miscellaneous information or common sense. Examples include weather forecasts, knowing how heavy foot or vehicle traffic might be in a familiar place, and so on. Characters also have miscellaneous knowledge related to their backgrounds, professions, focuses, and talents. A character with firearms-related talents will often have a basic knowledge of how gun ranges operate. Characters with medical professions or talents may know ordinary hospital procedures.

Nothing kills the momentum of a plan by asking players to consider extremely precise, thinly sliced information—or worse, getting them to guess what the "slices" are. *Modern AGE* heroes are broadly competent, and you shouldn't undermine that by reducing planning to an overly specific guessing game.

OPTIONAL RULE: BACKUP PLAN STUNTS

Many serial capers include the reveal that the original plan was a cover for an even better plan, and that even though the heroes appeared to be misinformed, that's just what they wanted the opposition to think. **Backup Plan Stunts** simulate this.

Using this system, when a participant scores doubles on a roll that's part of a breaching test, they can set aside a number of stunt points equal to the Stunt Die (this doesn't come out of points that add to the degree of success) -3. This penalty means only Stunt Die results of 4 or higher do this, because otherwise, characters could amass too much SP for the system to work.

Pool these SP collectively. They points can be spent on stunts to address any challenge that appears to be a surprise that *wasn't* factored into the original breaching test. Furthermore, these can even be gained through "misguided" rolls, since it transpires that the characters either had a backup plan, or that the "misguided" rolls were part of an elaborate ruse or scheme after all.

more stunt points as compensation for a run of bad luck, while Complications provide more challenges when characters have a string of good luck. Both reflect the reality of serial capers, where a stroke of luck often comes after a seeming reversal, and where something eventually disrupts even the best-executed plans.

HEAT

CHAPTER 4 of *Enemies & Allies* covers people you might meet connected to crime and law enforcement, but it also introduces an optional system, Heat, in its introduction, which lets GMs add mechanical weight when an organization—could be the cops, could be the mob, could be something else—is looking for the characters. Heat goes up when characters leave behind traces of their actions. This system is especially appropriate for serial capers, where getting caught is a constant risk. However, since the most over the top capers seem to occur in a world where the police don't especially pay attention, you might limit Heat to opposing criminal groups, spy agencies or other covert parties.

DRAMATIC EXPLOSIVES AND MURDER

Serial capers don't usually involve heavy combat, but they can involve plans to blow things up—and sometimes, even to kill people. But deaths in these stories are rarely people on the wrong side of "combat encounters," but victims of some sinister plot. Further, when heroes blow things up, it's usually to satisfy one step in the caper plot, not to achieve combat goals. Pp. 67-69 of the *Modern AGE Mastery Guide* presents rules for using explosives as a dramatic tool, as well as other hazards, without rolling for damage. Only the outcome, and how it might be accomplished or foiled matter.

ENEMIES AND ALLIES

The following entries in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* and *Enemies & Allies* sourcebook are more likely to figure in serial caper campaigns than others.

FROM THE MODERN AGE BASIC RULEBOOK, CH. 9

Cat Burglar (p. 135)
Demolitions Expert (p. 136)
Getaway Driver (pp. 136-137)
Guard Dog (p. 137)

Police Detective (p. 138)
Police Officer (pp. 138-139)
Security Guard (pp. 138-139)
Black Hat Hacker (p. 143)
Criminal Mastermind (p. 144)
Hustler (p. 144)
Information Broker (pp. 144-145)
Private Investigator (pp. 145-146)
Con Artist (p. 147)
Corrupt Power Broker (p. 148)
Fixer (p. 149)
Rich Socialite (pp. 150-151)
Smooth Operator (p. 151)

FROM ENEMIES & ALLIES

Double Agent (pp. 32-33)
Field Commander (pp. 35-37)
Mediator (pp. 37-39)
Stunt Performer (pp. 43-44)
Enforcer (pp. 71-72, usually to intimidate instead of cause physical harm)
Mob Boss (pp. 75-77)
Pickpocket (pp. 77-78)
Special Agent (pp. 80-82)
Smuggler (pp. 82-84)
Trial Lawyer (pp. 84-85)
Dr. Vanya Patel (pp. 86-87)

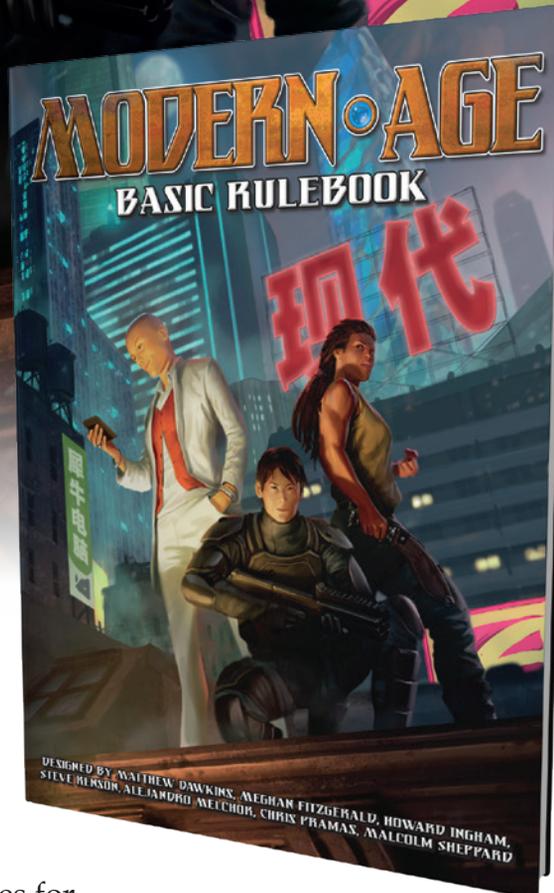
I LOVE IT WHEN...

Hopefully, this guidance helps you run serial capers with the right combination of wit, planning, and sudden reversals—and counter reversals. Naturally, the same ideas work well to switch things up in other genres. Military action does it—that's the *Dirty Dozen* to some extent—and even the classic cyberpunk anti-corporate heist uses a similar structure. Use what's here, mash it up with your own ideas and other resources, and your plan will come together.

现代



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A CAMPAIGN
SETTING FOR **MODERN AGE**

THE WORLD WE KNOW is one of many planes of existence. Some are alternate worlds, where history took strange, even apocalyptic paths. Some are Otherworlds: weird realms where magic leaves its blazing mark through cities built on the back of monsters, and the floating warships of demigods. Finally, demon princes with wills of iron rule the Netherworlds, planes with twisted natural laws and legions of tormented souls. In ornate archways or simple alley doors, gates connect the myriad planes. You know where to find them. You've been initiated into the truth.

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The first original setting for the *Modern AGE* roleplaying game, *Threefold* presents a vast Metacosm able to support virtually any character concept – even any genre – within it. *Threefold* includes characters with extraordinary powers, and provides additional rules and powers for soul talents, magic, psychic disciplines, occult rituals, and technological enhancements. *Threefold* unleashes the full potential of *Modern AGE*, and requires the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* to use.

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MODERN AGE

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AN ADVENTURE SPARK FOR MODERN AGE



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