

# PRESS GANG

## 2hr Convention Edition

### SETUP:

- Character sheets
- Personal notes
- Jenga tower
- Pens, pencils
- Sharpies/markers
- Post it notes (multiple colours)
- This document!
- Bluetooth speaker and phone to play audio cues - [link to music](#) (optional)
- Stickers for name badges (optional)

### PREMISE:

Nothing gets in the way of the Story. Locked doors are meant to be opened, security meant to be cracked. Plan the perfect heist to uncover the facts - and then toss the plan aside when it inevitably falls to pieces!

### RULES (10mins)

Dread is a role playing game that is played with no dice and no numbers. Instead, we use a Jenga tower resolve player actions. The rules for Dread are as follows:

- The tower starts with 3 blocks missing.
- Whenever players make an action they must pull blocks from the tower.
- The GM will tell you how many blocks to pull. Simple actions may only need a single block pull, but riskier actions require more block pulls.
- Normal Jenga rules apply: only pull with one hand, blocks get stacked back on top of the tower, the block being pulled must be from beneath the topmost complete layer, etc.
- If the tower topples, then that means the end for that player character – usually via a grisly death.
- Player death will only ever occur from a tower falling over – but that doesn't mean the player characters' can't get seriously hurt.
- Players can choose to sacrifice themselves by smacking down the tower. This is their "go on without me" moment as they face a horde of enemies with only a baseball bat. They allow the rest of the players to move to the next point of safety, but at the cost of their life. Make this spectacular.
- After a tower collapses, the tower is rebuilt, minus 3 blocks and then minus an ADDITIONAL 3 blocks for EVERY player character that has died/left the game. In this way the longer the game goes, the closer to another tower collapse you get.

### **What's new for this game:**

This game is played in two distinct phases: Planning and Operation. In the Planning phase, players gather information, source equipment and generally prepare. The Operation phase is when players try to carry out their meticulous plan, have things go wrong and then adapt on the fly to carry off a (hopefully) successful heist.

### **Planning Phase:**

Players are given an introduction to set up their characters, the world and the upcoming mission. After players have been given their mission brief, a **15 minute timer** starts. Players now have 15 *real-world* minutes to make any and all plans. Since the characters start out with basically no equipment (other than maybe a smart phone) and no intelligence, this means they will have to act quickly to formulate a successful plan.

The ideas are generated on the fly in this game. Aside from the mission briefing, most of the world will be generated by all of us. As such, I'll be using post-its to keep track of what get generated.

- **Location** – Information collected on ODIN such as fences, weak spots, building layout, maps, security checkpoints etc.
- **Assets** – Tools and equipment players buy into the the game during the Planning phase.
- **People** – Useful contacts on the players' character sheets and created throughout the game. People can be sources of information, department heads, important enemies, allies, etc.
- **Strategies** – Any rough ideas people have for getting in or out of the building and accomplishing their objectives.

There are several rules that apply only during the Planning Phase:

- The timer continues for all actions, including any talking and making pulls from the tower.
- No pausing the timer. Not even for bathroom breaks.
- When timer tickers down to zero, the Planning phase immediately ends. If players are mid-way through an action, then that action has failed. We move on the Operations phase of the mission.
- If the tower falls during this phase, then this also ends the Planning phase.
- A player can still choose to use the sacrifice rule and knock down the tower. Doing so will immediately end the planning phase, but automatically succeed the action they were attempting. But there is a lockout period – during the final 3 minutes of the countdown players cannot intentionally knock down the tower to auto-succeed an action.

### **Operation Phase:**

Now it's time to carry out the plan and see if it survives in the real world.

- Now whenever the tower falls, this will eliminate a player character through death, being arrested – or worse
- Players should try and use everything they planned for in the planning phase. Any new intelligence or equipment that you're missing will have to be found during the mission itself.

- The countdown timer returns, but in a different form with timed pulls. (For example: “You want to pick that lock? OK, you’ve got 3 minutes to pull 2 blocks before that patrolling guard will pass by.”)

### **Any questions about rules?**

### **CHARACTER CREATION (15mins)**

- Choose a role
- Draw a personal note and fill out the questions  
(Remember personal notes may not fully make sense until you hear the mission briefing)
- Lastly the group comes up with the name of your newspaper

### **Character introductions:**

Go around in a circle and give the 1min version of your character.

## **Introduction (5min)**

*In which we meet the characters and are given the mission briefing.*

The GM should cue up [this song](#).

(Speak the following slowly and dramatically over the ambient sound at the start of the song; this lasts 0 seconds to 35 seconds)

*<Insert Newspaper Name here>*

*Australia’s most respected newspaper*

*It’s here that the world’s top reporters are sent all over the world*

*They are sent to find the facts and report on what they find*

*They shine an unbiased light of truth that illuminates the darkest corners of the globe*

*They are the nation’s best journalists*

*But when the best fail*

*You call for the team who are better than the best*

*You call...for the Press Gang*

> At 36 seconds music drops into the full beat. After this point you should introduce each of the characters are introduced in turn. Players are welcome to throw in a one-liner or a catchphrase. Then fade out the music.

### **Mission Briefing:**

*The Press Gang have convened in the secret basement level of the newspaper offices. It’s a utilitarian space with pipes snaking all over the walls.*

*In the center of this space stands your editor in chief, but down here you call them by their codename: The Weatherman. They cut quite a figure in horn-rimmed glasses, a bow tie and a three-piece suit in dark lilac. They proceed to pull down a projector screen and launch into the mission briefing.*

*“Thanks for tuning in everyone. Tonight the forecast is cloudy, with a cold front blowing in from Canberra. As you are all aware, earlier this year the Defence Industry Minister announced Australia’s plans to become a leader in the trade of exported weapons. This foray into the world of international arms dealing was met with no small amount of criticism.*

*But recently we received a tip-off from an anonymous source claiming to be a staff member working on a top secret project to develop new weapons for sale – chemical weapons. They allege Australia is developing chemical missiles and plans to sell them to the highest bidder, an act that would violate numerous international treaties. We've attempted to verify this through our usual channels and had no luck digging up any solid evidence. Our anonymous source has since gone silent, but we were able to track down their GPS coordinates and determine this as the address of their transmissions: ODIN – The Office of Defence INnovation.*

*It's up to you to find out the truth of the matter. Your mission is to infiltrate ODIN and resolve the following objectives:*

- *Obtain photographs of the prototype chemical missile*
- *Obtain the technical documents of the weapon and its chemical payload*
- *Obtain evidence that proves this weapon is destined for the international black market*

*As always time and money is short. I trust you'll abide by the two principles of the Press Gang – no killing and keep things under the radar where possible. You need to move and you need to move fast. How you go about this is all up to you."*

> Players may have a few questions before launching into the planning phase to clarify the specifics of the mission and what little is known about the anonymous source. Don't worry about giving them too many leads on who the anonymous source is. Finding that out isn't a mission objective. The goal is to get them out into the field and planning the heist. With that, you're ready to start the 20 minute timer and enter the Planning phase.

## **ACT 1: Planning (15min)**

*In which the players gather information and decide their strategy.*

### **Starting assets:**

Make it clear that players should have basically no assets at the start of the game – or at least no assets that relate to the mission. They don't already own a grappling hook or night vision goggles. In saying that, there are certain things you can allow players to have that are very useful. All players would probably have smart phones – except The Police Reporter because technology is their weakness. The Police Reporter will probably have an old 90s phone or something even more limited. Some players probably have cars and some character roles lend themselves to already owning certain items. For example The Celebrity Photographer definitely has a DSLR with a telephoto lens. But they'll have to make pulls if they want to add an infrared camera to their arsenal.

### **The ODIN Building:**

The layout of the building will be defined by the players actions – basically if they have a cool idea then you bring it into existence. But here are two good template locations to get you started:

- **The Heritage Building** – Don't be fooled by the 19th century architecture, the inside of this building is a state of the art facility that extends deep underground. On the plus side, the exterior is only a couple of floors high – but on the down side the building is

surrounded by acres of gardens and grounds bordered by tall fences, making getting close to the building without making a dash across the expensive lawn quite tricky.

- **The Skyscraper** – Atop the top floors of this building are dedicated to the facility you need to infiltrate. The lower parts of the building is a mix of finance companies, Defence contractors and so on. The elevator system is requires a key card to get to get to any floor – and only specific cards let you access specific floors. So ascending the building is quite tricky, but you can get inside the lobby without problem and there are plenty of nearby towers that you can conduct surveillance from – or perhaps even abseil from. It is however the tallest tower in the area, so you cannot abseil onto the roof. That would be too easy.

## **ACT 2: Operation (1hr)**

*In which the Press Gang pull of their heist*

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. **Obtain photographs of the prototype chemical missile:**

This requires finding out the location of the missile, probably going through several layers of security checks, impersonating a scientist or guard or two – or maybe even something entirely different. However the players get there the missile should be a tough nut to crack. Of course, players only need to take photos of the missile – their mission brief isn't to disarm, sabotage or steal it. But that doesn't mean that some of them won't try. The missile is likely to be a boiling point for players with contrasting personal notes.
2. **Obtain the technical documents of the weapon and its chemical payload:**

Depending on how you are going for time, the documents may be in the same area as the missile – or you can place them in an entirely separate part of the building they need to infiltrate. The documents can be all paper, all digital or a mix of both. Play to the strengths of your players. Questioning scientists or engineers may be a good way to find the location of the documents – but they won't give up the information easily. And who's to say that the documents aren't also locked behind a second layer of security requiring say, the retinal scan of the chief scientist
3. **Obtain evidence that proves this weapon is destined for the international black market:**

This is the most malleable objective since this evidence can take many forms. But it is also the most vital evidence to recover. Without this the government can easily deny that this missile was designed for international markets. The evidence may come in any form – quotes, lists of potential bidders, incriminating emails. I like to say the list of potential buyers include the Syrian government and New Zealand, but feel free to incriminate who you see fit as long as you're not punching down.

## Epilogue:

*In which we see what goes to print*

Depending on the actions of the players – and whether they achieved all three objectives – the fallout of this story will be quite different. If players were killed or arrested, play out a montage of scenes of funerals or being questioned by police.

For the player(s) that made it through the heist intact, craft a scene in which they can read/watch/listen to the news unfold. If the player is willing, have them narrate parts of it as though reading the news aloud.

Of course you should look for ways in which the Australian government might try to deny or minimise the reports – especially if objective 3 wasn't achieved. Uncovering the truth and reporting it is only the first step. What happens after that is beyond the control of even the Press Gang.

So did you stop the bad guys and save the day? Well there's an old go-to line that journalists use whenever they don't know how to end a story, because the story hasn't really come to its final resolution. When that happens reach down and pull out this closing line: "Only time will tell."