Ultimate Guide to Mystery, Murder, and Mayhem
Version 1.0

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- *The Marvel Superheroes Yahoo Group (http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/mshag/)*
- *My Blog, the MSHAG Library (http://mshaglibrary.wordpress.com).*

Summary & Description:
The mystery/crime genre is a staple of the entertainment industry, and for good reason. Everybody loves a mystery. One of the more interesting features of the genre is the idea of the perfect detective. No ordinary gumshoes, these super-sleuths capture our attention by cracking mind-boggling mysteries with the greatest of ease. No matter how clever the criminal, the super-sleuth tracks down the one little mistake the perpetrator has made in an otherwise perfect crime. Thus, the almost-perfect criminal's fate is sealed and their budding criminal career is halted in its tracks.

On the other end of the spectrum is the ultimate double agent; the super-spy. A clever detective and cunning master of subterfuge, the super-spy has both brains and brawn. Dancing on the line between cop and criminal, the super-spy plays fast and loose with international laws in order to advance the goals of his country.

The Hero

The sleuth is obviously the hero of the adventure, but what does that mean? What makes a good hero? What skills and abilities does a typical hero have? Well, naturally, that depends on the type of campaign you're running and the heroes (and players) you're running within it.

Creating a Hero: The Motivation

The adventure isn't just some fantasy scenario for the character. Your hero isn't just going on the adventure, he is *living* it. Make sure your players (or you, as the player) have a good understanding of what makes your hero tick.

Sleuths can have widely varying motives for solving crimes. Some wish to protect the public, some wish to protect or avenge their loved ones, some are just doing their job, some are fulfilling a personal sense of honor or justice, some care more about solving the puzzle than seeing justice done, some are seeking notoriety or fame, and some may be trying to make up for a past crime or other sin. Be sure to apply an appropriate calling based on the sleuth's motivations: Investigator will probably be most common, but Adventurer, Guardian, Mentor, Gloryhound, Responsibility of Power, Explorer, Protector, and even Repentant may crop up, too.

Because of these varied motivations, the adventure would be slightly different with each hero at the helm; they would make different choices when faced with the same decisions. Be sure to tailor your puzzles and challenges to the type of sleuth(s) running your scenarios. You don't want to have Miss Marple (the elderly spinster) squaring off in a fistfight with a bunch of goons, but it would be perfectly acceptable for Sam Spade (the gritty private eye).

Once again, the player should know the character well enough to make this sort of decision, but you, the Narrator, should also have a contingency plan in case the player surprises you. And you should make sure that this question is more than theoretical. Such decisions should crop up frequently during the campaign.

Creating a Hero: The Stats

Beyond the motivations of the hero, you'll want to know some other vital statistics, like just what sort of body and mind he's throwing at all of these challenges. Skills help greatly in the detective's line of work, so you'll want to invest in those as much as you can. Most heroes in this type of campaign will be baseline humans, so skills (along with Edge) are what really set the hero apart from the crowd.

Detectives naturally tend to be more of a cerebral lot. Most feats you will see frequently will be of either the Intellect or Willpower variety, so you'll want solid scores in both. In general, heroes in these sorts of adventures will be doing a lot of observation, deduction, and reasoning, so choose non-combat skills appropriate for your hero archetype. (More information on archetypes can be found in the templates section.)

Some sleuths; especially spies, policemen, and detectives; may occasionally get into a scuffle or be called upon to assist in an arrest, so you may not want to ignore the physical side entirely, unless your hero concept calls for it.

Following are templates for various character archetypes. The format should look familiar to anyone who has read my article "Building a Better Hero. The type of hero you play can greatly influence the type of campaign you run (and vice-versa) so be sure that

you and the narrator are in sync with the type of heroes you create. As always, feel free to grab skills for flavor instead of (or in addition to) the min/max options listed in the templates section below.

The Adventure

There are countless types of mysteries. Listed below are some of the more common themes of mystery books and movies. You may find these basic tropes either alone or in combination. Quite often, the mystery plot elements are mixed with other genres, such as action, adventure, fantasy, western, epic, or even historical media. Many of the story hooks are closely linked with only a few key differences.

Along with each theme is a basic explanation of the trope, along with some source materials that use the trope. Many examples will have a sequel or even a whole series, but for simplicity sake, I generally only list the name the series or franchise is known by or the first film of the series. So, for example, the listing "Sherlock Holmes" actually encompasses some or all of dozens of films, books, TV series, and comics. These books and movies are excellent sources of inspiration for your adventures. Like a magpie, take the shinier scenes or features of these sources and weave them into your own story to make a grand new adventure.

Also included for the purposes of this resource, are some of the more common clues that a hero might find. These clues are not strictly necessary, but are listed to point you in the right direction as far as what sort of mystery you are plotting out. Any, all, or none of them may appear in the mystery you are preparing.

You may notice that some media are listed in multiple themes. This is because some of the best stories happen when you build upon, stack, and weave elements together. A single style or theme may suffice for a quickie adventure, but especially as you view the campaign as a whole, your approach will benefit from greater variety and a more intricate and complex overall story.

Appendix: Sources of Inspiration

Since so many of the plot points and character types are so universal, I have decided to list the sources of inspiration in one post rather than mentioning the same TV shows and movies over and over. Most serial fiction (such as a book or TV series) will contain many or all of the tropes listed below, eventually. Please note that due to the prevalence of book/comic adaptations in Hollywood movies, many franchises listed in the TV or movies sections may have original source material from the literary world. Finally, the list of sources is by no means comprehensive; these are just the tip of the iceberg.

TV Series: Elementary; Sherlock; Bones; CSI (and spin-offs); Law & Order (and spin-offs); Murder, She Wrote; JAG; NCIS (and spin-offs); Psych; Monk; Columbo; House, M.D.; Scooby Doo (and spin-offs); Quincy, M.E.; Veronica Mars; Matlock; Magnum, p.i.; Perry Mason; Charlie's Angels; White Collar

Movies: Copycat, Running Scared, Witness, The Client, Connie and Carla, Bad Boys, Smokin' Aces, The Interpreter, Ocean's Eleven, Lucky Number Sleven, The Thomas Crown Affair, Sin City, RED, Enemy of the State, I Know What You Did Last Summer, Mission: Impossible, Minority Report, The Fugitive, A Perfect World, The Changeling,

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Undercover Blues, Who Framed Roger Rabbit, Primal Fear, A Time to Kill, Seven

Books: Sherlock Holmes; Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot, Encyclopedia Brown, Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, Alex Cross, Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe, Lew Archer, Archie Goodwin, Mike Hammer, Peter Gunn

Character: The Copycat
A copycat is a criminal (often a serial murderer) who commits crimes in the style of another (usually famous) criminal. A copycat may have any one of many reasons for copying another criminal. A psychopath may become obsessed or fixated on another criminal or his crimes and wish to emulate them to feel the same sick thrills as the original. Alternately, a criminal may be trying to shift blame for his crime(s) by copying someone else's MO. For example, a man may kill his wife in the style of an ongoing serial killer in an attempt to get away with the murder.

Character: The Guy Incognito
The Guy Incognito is somebody who isn't quite what he or she seems. This person can be literally disguised (using make-up, surgery, superpowers, etc.) or figuratively posing as (assuming the identity, but not appearance of) somebody else. This can be either over the long or short term. For example, a criminal may disguise himself as somebody else to shift the blame for the crime. Alternately, a long-lost relative may disguise himself as a friend, neighbor, or employee to covertly get close to his family.

Character: The Exile/Outcast
The hero is (or meets) someone who has been ostracized from a community (be it a society, organization, etc.). The desire for revenge is a fairly common motivation for this type of character, as is the desire to finally gain acceptance from the exclusionary body. Whichever way the character is leaning, the outcast provides a vehicle for conflicts, both literally and figuratively, via morality choices or actual physical conflict between the outcast and the organization that shunned them.

Character: The Informant/ The Mole/The Whistle-blower
Similar to the Witness or Snitch, the Informant is wagging his tongue to the opposite side. However, unlike them, the Informant is keeping his tattling a secret and maintaining contact with the organization. Informants play a dangerous game as the man on the inside. Getting caught spying on a legal organization is likely to find you blackballed or jailed, while double-crossing a criminal organization is liable to lead you to an early grave.
Despite these risks, there are usually no shortage of Informants willing to work with the police or other law enforcement agencies. Undercover police officers, confidential informants, whistle-blowers, turncoats, spies, and more could fall under this category.

Character: The Local
The hero runs into a person native to the exotic locale that he is visiting who is willing to help him in his task. Locals make great guides, sidekicks, and comic relief. They can be used to great effect in The Escort or The Rescue.
Alternately, you can flip the script and have the local get up to all sorts of betrayal-related hi-jinks, secretly sabotaging the group he is pretending to help.

Character: The Outsider/Wannabe
The hero (or another party member) is a member on the outside of a group or society that desperately wants to break into that group but has thus far been unable to do so. Quite often, though not always, this lack of acceptance comes down to prejudice or bigotry of some sort. This angle can take many bents in its execution; the woman trying to prove herself in a role/profession normally reserved for men, the forward thinker whose ideas are not accepted by the more conservative traditional thinkers, the young kid/rookie anxious to prove he can hang with the big boys, or the person of a different race trying to prove that his group is not inferior. Regardless of whether the discrimination is based upon age, gender, race, or ideology, the end result is the same: somebody has been told they can't hack it, and they'll stop at nothing to prove their doubters wrong.

Character: The Suspect(s)
Most mysteries will have a veritable laundry list of possible suspects, which must be whittled down to solve the case. A suspect will have one or more of means, motive, and opportunity, with the more tantalizing suspects meeting more categories. Don't be afraid to throw your players a curveball, though. A suspect may appear to have an alibi (no opportunity), lack the ability to commit the crime (no means), or no reason to commit the crime (no motive), but with a little more prodding, the false evidence is cleared away, and the truth is revealed.

Character: The Thief
An unforeseen encounter with a thief spurs the hero (and possibly some villains) on to adventure. Perhaps the thief steals something from the hero (or a villain) that the hero must reclaim for safety's sake. Perhaps the thief beats the hero to the punch in acquiring the object that is the goal of his mission. Perhaps the thief's theft has put him in mortal danger and the hero must catch up to and protect the thief before the bad guys get to him. Perhaps the thief stashed stolen loot on the unwitting hero (or on his property) figuring the hero will keep it safe. Regardless of whether the thief is the hero, the villain, the comic relief, or the spur, an unexpected theft can be a great story hook.

Character: The Witness/ The Snitch
Somebody knows too much. This is usually in the form of an innocent (and helpless) bystander who has seen or heard something that the bad guys don't want anyone else to know. However, it can also take the form of a crook coming clean and turning on his former associates (or doing so for leniency or even his own nefarious purposes). Either way, the bad guys will naturally want to find and silence the would-be snitch before they have a chance to squeal. Perhaps the witness comes to (or is referred to) the hero for help. Perhaps the hero is a law officer and protecting innocents is simply part of his job. Perhaps the hero witnessed the same event and noticed the witness in peril. Regardless of how or why the hero and the witness cross paths, the man who knows too much is a staple of any crime-based adventure story.

Sub-Genre: The Locked Room
This type of mystery appears to be unsolvable because it presents itself as having been committed in a way that is simply not possible. The example from which it gains its name: the body of a murder victim is found within a room that has no exits, except for a door that was locked from the inside. The key to solving the mystery is finding out how

the killer escaped (or perhaps sniffing him out if he's still hiding within the room). Note that The Locked Room can also apply to thefts, or perhaps even other mysteries, if presented correctly. It does not, strictly speaking, have to be a murder. The key element is a seemingly impossible set of circumstances that are not what they appear to be.
Common Clues: Hidden passageways, hidden doors, sliding wall panels, trick screws/nails, hidden locks. Camouflaged or secret items rule the day, here.

Genre: The Cozy Mystery
The hero is usually an amateur sleuth, and the crime is usually discovered as a matter of happenstance. Cozy mysteries are called such because they tend to be "Safer" than other genres. If the hero is a novelist, kid, old lady, high school girl, or any other sort of unlikely hero, the genre is probably a Cozy. Cozies tend to have few fights or conflicts and instead rely more heavily on a more intricate or complex mystery to further the plot. The case is usually solved through an act of genius, be it observation, deduction, a logical leap, or some combination thereof. The case may be a murder or other violent crime, but if so it will probably happen "off-screen" and be presented in a rather sterilized way. Thefts, kidnappings, disappearances, embezzlement, and other less-violent crimes will appear more regularly than in many competing genres.
Sources of Inspiration: Scooby Doo; Miss Marple; Murder, She Wrote; Encyclopedia Brown; Nancy Drew; The Hardy Boys

Genre: The Hard-Boiled Mystery
The hero of the hard-boiled mystery tends to be rather rough and tumble compared to other detectives. The hero is usually a P.I. rather than an amateur or consultant. He tends to be good in a conflict, often having past law enforcement or military experience. Hard-boiled heroes tend to be loners, drinkers, and/or smokers. They tend to rely more on persistence, street-smarts, and cunning than any actual intellectual brilliance. These are your classics trenchcoats and dark alleys type of detectives.
The story tends to have more gore, violence, and action than many other genres. The crime is usually a murder, an assault, a rape, or some other brutal or violent crime. The hero will almost certainly get into a few fights (perhaps even gunfights), and end up with a few bumps and bruises before finally cracking the case. Oftentimes, the case will be solved because the detective applies pressure to suspects (intimidation, coercion) than any sort of logical leap or amazing deduction.
Sources of Inspiration: Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe, Lew Archer, Archie Goodwin, Mike Hammer, Peter Gunn

Sub-Genre: The Medical Mystery
The hero and/or his allies operate as a medical service provider of some sort, usually as a physician, surgeon, or medical examiner. Naturally, this job leads them to many opportunities to interact with injured, ill, or deceased victims.
There are many ways to go with a medical mystery. The mystery can revolve around finding out who inflicted the ailments, how they were inflicted, or even what the ailments are (i.e. diagnosing the poison/disease before it's too late).
In the superhero world, this genre presents a unique opportunity to fight the diseases firsthand, by shrinking down to a microscopic level and getting hands-on inside the victim's body.
Common Clues: Blood/Hair/DNA, fibers, eyewitness statements, video surveillance

Sources of Inspiration: House, Diagnosis: Murder, Bones, Quincy, The Magic Schoolbus, The Fantastic Voyage

Sub-Genre: The Police Procedural Mystery
The hero is connected with a law enforcement agency, usually as an official officer, but sometimes in a consulting capacity. The detective is investigating a seemingly-unrelated series of crimes. These crimes may actually be unrelated, but it is a not-uncommon twist to have the detective catch the lucky break of finding a connection between the crimes that points the finger to a single culprit hatching a complex scheme. An example might be a robbery where explosives go missing, a homicide (of a man who turns out to be an employee at a key company or location), and a break-in where nothing seems to be taken (because the bombs were being planted).

The key to the police procedural mystery is, as the name suggests, to explore police procedure. Who enters the crime scene? What clues or details do they notice? What do they do with this information? What happens when the DA refuses to prosecute a suspect the officer believes to be guilty? Alternately, what happens if the DA moves ahead to prosecute someone the officer believes to be innocent? These are the sorts of things you should delve into during your mystery.

Common Clues: Blood/Hair/DNA, fibers, eyewitness statements, video surveillance
Sources of Inspiration: CSI, Columbo, Law & Order, Bones

Genre: The Soft-Boiled Mystery
Something of a middle ground between the Hard-Boiled Mystery and the Cozy. The hero may be anywhere along the spectrum from professional to amateur. Be sure to have story elements that match the character concepts of your players.

The story may have mature themes or gore, but if so, it is generally watered-down (mentioned or suggested, rather than shown). Any violence, sex, or gore that actually is shown will probably be framed in less-detailed ways, or will be smaller in scope or less severe. Think: PG or PG-13 instead of R. So: fistfights, not gunfights; a stabbing, not a butchering; heroes get wounded, not killed.

Sources of Inspiration: Hercule Poirot; Magnum, P.I.; Jesse Stone, Charlie Chan, The Saint, Castle

Sub-Genre: The Thriller
The thriller is an emotionally-driven genre, mixing in many twists and turns to heighten suspense. Red herrings, plot twists, bluffs, frame-ups, and cover-ups abound as layer after layer of plot is built up or torn away to keep the audience on the edge of their seat.

Most spy-related adventures will be of the thriller variety. Political intrigue and straight-up action elements can be mixed in with the mystery elements to create the roller coaster effect that is the Thriller genre's bread and butter.

Sources of Inspiration: Bourne Identity, James Bond, Alex Cross, Mercury Rising

Plot Point: Blackmail
Blackmail is the demand for money, property, or actions in exchange for silence regarding potentially damaging information. Typically the blackmailer has knowledge (or perhaps even evidence, such as photos, videos, audio recordings, etc.) that he will divulge if the victim does not pay a specified sum of money. This sum often escalates, even to the point that the victim cannot afford to make the payments.

This plot device is an excellent motive for murder, but could also spur a victim to turn to crime for fast cash to pay the blackmailer in a mystery centered around theft or a con game.

Plot Point: Coercion

Coercion is the act of compelling victims to act against their will through force, threats, manipulation, or trickery. Technically, both Blackmail and Extortion are forms of Coercion, but this entry references the more generalized types of coercion. Coercion can serve a variety of purposes within your story. A victim might have been forced to commit a crime, cover up evidence of a crime, give a false alibi, or perjure themselves, among other things.

Plot Point: Extortion

Extortion, often confused with its close cousin Blackmail, is coercion in order to illicit money, property, or actions. The coercion often takes the form of a threat, either of violence, destruction of property, or an abuse of power (such as an unwarranted arrest or job dismissal). The classic "protection racket," in which a victim must pay a fee to prevent violence (usually caused by the extortionist) is also a common form of extortion.

Plot Point: Secondary Crimes

Secondary Crimes can serve equally well to cloud a mystery or to clarify it, depending on how it is presented. The primary crime is the criminal's ultimate goal. The Secondary Crime(s) are any other crime(s) committed in furtherance of that goal, whether committed simultaneously or at different times. For example, a thief might break into a bank manager's home to steal an electronic key in order to break into a bank vault at a later time. Making this connection could help a sleuth solve both cases. Alternately, a murderer might commit a theft in order to confuse investigators into following a false motive.

Plot Point: The Bluff

As with the Red Herring, The Bluff is a type of misleading evidence. In this case, however, the false evidence is being given directly by a person and is a knowing and deliberate attempt to mislead the detective. This may be by giving a false confession, providing a false alibi, giving false testimony, etc.

A person might Bluff to protect themselves or a loved one by shifting scrutiny away from them. A daring criminal may even attempt a "double bluff" in which they draw attention to themselves trying to mask their genuine guilt by making it look like a frame-up.

Plot Point: The Clue

The Clue is some single piece of information or evidence that leads the detective in the direction of the culprit or helps to solve a mystery. This can come in many forms; a verbal slip-up, a logical inconsistency, or even a physical object.

Plot Point: The Confession

The Confession is when one or more parties come forward to admit their guilt in a crime, and to explain or offer evidence. The Confession may be true, partially true, or totally false (see:The Bluff). Most often, The Confession comes when the criminal realizes he has been busted, for example, after the hero has summed up all the evidence and presented The Summation. However, this may also be used to set up The Plot Twist, especially if the confession also implicates other parties.

Plot Point: The Cover-Up
A Cover-Up is where someone attempts to hide evidence of a crime. This may be either in the attempt to hide an individual's guilt in a crime or possibly even to hide that a crime was committed at all. The most obvious reason to cover up a crime is to hide one's own guilt, but there are many others, such as upholding the "good name" of a family/company/organization, protecting a loved one, or an attempt to prevent related secrets from coming to light (such as a murder being revenge for child sexual abuse).

Plot Point: The Distractions
A mystery is sure to be full of distractions that will lead the detective astray or simply slow him down. These might be other cases/crimes, civilians in peril, family obligations, or even a concerted effort to delay the hero. Whether an intentional scheme by nefarious parties or just the natural chaos of life getting in the way, be sure to throw a few twists and turns into the detective's path to spice things up.

Plot Point: The Epiphany
The Epiphany is that one shining moment when everything seems to click into place for the hero. Often this epiphany is triggered by a random snippet of conversation or perhaps a visual image that sets the hero's brain down an alternate path of thinking that makes the whole mystery seem clearer.
If your heroes are struggling to piece together the clues, you can drop some clues in your descriptions or dialogue to help spark an epiphany for them.

Plot Point: The Evidence
The evidence is the sum total of all the data gathered to prove or disprove the case or the facts thereof. This includes all clues, objects, testimony, forensics, and other facts both physical and intangible.
Both players and Narrators may find it useful to keep a list of the evidence as it's uncovered.

Plot Point: The Frame-Up
The Frame-Up is a classic mystery plot point. The criminal has chosen an innocent party on which to pin the crime. The most common way to use this plot is to have the victim of the frame-up (or an agent working on his behalf) trying to prove his innocence to the police. Alternately, you may have the heroes racing the clock to find the real culprit before the police even become aware of the crime.

Plot Point: The Means
The Means is the literal ability, skill, or resources to have committed the crime. For example, if a victim was strangled, then a viable suspect must possess the strength to have choked the victim.
This should not be confused with Opportunity. For example, an expert marksman that was out of the state during an assassination attempt would have had the Means to commit the crime, but not the Opportunity.
The best suspects must generally have all three parts of the holy trinity of crime: The Means, The Motive, and The Opportunity.

Plot Point: The Motive
The Motive is the desire or reason to have committed the crime, or at least the appearance thereof. For example, the beneficiary of a large insurance policy would have a financial

motive in a murder, arson, or theft case. This is especially true in cases where a suspect is someone with rocky finances, massive debts, particularly illicit debts (such as gambling, drugs, or loan sharks). Other financial motives might be crime for hire (a hitman/mercenary), collecting a bounty or reward, gaining advantage in a business rivalry, or any other financial windfall. There are also many other kinds of motives: an unhappy marriage, a personal vendetta, thrill-seeking, or organized crime, among others. There might be multiple possible motives for the same crime. For example a kidnapping is often perpetrated by a parent that desires custody but cannot get it legally. However, a kidnapper might also be seeking ransom, or else just wish to punish the parents/loved ones of the kidnapping victim. Alternately, mental illness may play a part, such as fulfilling a psychological compulsion (serial killers, rapists), or seeking to acquire/replace a dead or absent family member (substituting the victim for a missing child, sibling, parent, etc.).

The best suspects must generally have all three parts of the holy trinity of crime: The Means, The Motive, and The Opportunity.

Plot Point: The MO (Modus Operandi)

The MO, or Moudus Operandi, is literally translated as "method of operation." This is the particular way in which a criminal conducts his crimes. If a criminal leaves a "signature" of some sort, uses a particular knot, favors a specific weapon, enters a building in a particular way, etc., then these are all parts of his MO. An astute detective will not only notice these habits, but may also be able to glean information from them. This can be either ongoing or historical information. For example, a detective might gather that a perpetrator is weak (perhaps very young, very old, or possibly injured) if he disblaes a victim before committing the crime. Alternately, a fixation on a particular type of victim (such as children, blonde women, or mother figures) might indicate a past trauma the perpetrator is playing out.

Plot Point: The Opportunity

The Opportunity is literally the chance to have committed the crime. This speaks to facets such as physical proximity to the crime scene, or a window of time in which the victim and/or suspect is unaccounted-for. The Alibi is often used to prove or disprove Opportunity.

This should not be confused with The Means, which is the ability to have committed the crime. For example, an elderly woman who was at the scene of a vicious beating would have had The Opportunity to commit the crime, but probably not The Means.

The best suspects must generally have all three parts of the holy trinity of crime: The Means, The Motive, and The Opportunity.

Plot Point: The Plot Twist

Just when the hero thinks he has it all figured out, the other shoe drops. The Plot Twist is a revelation that turns the case on its head. This can come by many means, including changing the meaning of evidence, exposing false evidence, or revealing new evidence. As often as not, this revelation can lead to the case being solved more quickly, as the new/corrected information makes a clearer picture of the case.

An example might include a seemingly unimportant sideline character being revealed to be a long-lost heir, spouse, or sibling, thus producing a previously-unknown motive. Another option would be a forensics test coming back to exclude the prime suspect, or

conversely to verify a suspect you know can't be the culprit, leading to new suspects, or a search for new clues, such as a connection to the forensics lab that provided the errant tests.

Plot Point: The Puzzle/Secret/Mystery
This is the point of the whole thing; the mystery itself. As the name suggests, the unknown quantity can take a variety of forms. A puzzle might be one or more literal puzzles, clues, or riddles that must be solved to move on to the next step of the adventure. The secret might be the one piece of information that would save the day, and could be the answer to a question, or pretty much any other bit of information (a password, a name, the motive for a crime, etc.). The mystery can be a crime or any other mysterious activity, and can come in the form of finding out what happened, why, or who did it.

Plot Point: The Red Herring
Nothing throws a detective off the scent like a nice red herring. This is a false clue that leads the detective in the wrong direction. This might serve to exonerate a guilty party or to point blame at an innocent party, or even both at the same time.
Common examples might include; stealing a murder victim's wallet to stage a murder as a robbery-gone-wrong, planting evidence (such as DNA or a murder weapon) to frame an innocent party, a false alibi that excludes the culprit as a possible suspect, etc.
Interestingly, a red herring may be either intentional or accidental, or possibly even both at the same time. For example, evidence (a piece of jewelry/clothing, footprints, fingerprints, etc.) implicating an innocent party may have been inadvertently left at the scene by the would-be suspect or the victim before the crime, unaware that a crime was about to take place or even that any evidence was being left. Alternately, a person may be telling the truth as they understand it, even though their testimony is false (i.e. they are not lying, but they are wrong).

Plot Point: The Reveal/The Summation
After the sleuth has figured it all out, he will usually announce his findings to the authorities. Often, though not always, he does this in front of the gathered pool of suspects. This allows the guilty party (or parties) to be taken into custody immediately, but also allows for a nice dramatic way to wrap up the mystery. The sleuth(s) can lay out to all those involved (both characters and audience) exactly what happened and how the case was solved.

Sub-Genre: The Howcatchem
Also called an "inverted mystery," the howcatchem turns the typical mystery formula on its head. The crime, how it was committed, and even its perpetrator are known from the start. It is often shown or explained to the point of the guilt of the suspect being left in no doubt. The mystery comes in the form of how the detective will be able to prove the criminal guilty. Usually, the criminal has made one fatal flaw in an otherwise perfect plan that proves his downfall.
Sources of Inspiration: Columbo

Theme: The Cameo
A character from a past adventure shows up temporarily in a new adventure. It can be a hero, a villain, or even an NPC. The point of the cameo is to lend a sense of continuity to a campaign and by extension, the game world. The cameo can be as subtle as an off-

screen shout-out or as direct as a short-term team-up. It can be something as simple as a familiar NPC providing tip-offs or assignments at regular intervals.

Evidence of off-screen action is often enough to lend the adventure a sense of excitement by hinting at a larger picture going on. For example, the fight scene at the end of the Avengers movie would have been much cooler (and made much more sense) if there was the feeling that other well-known heroes were also on the case. Finding a webbed-up alien or seeing a flaming 4 in the sky is enough to let you know that those other heroes aren't just sitting around on their butts without ever actually showing Spidey or the FF on-screen and in action.

Theme: The Caper/Heist

The hero must solve or prevent a theft, usually of some valuable showpiece. Whether solving a con game, sorting through an intricate heist, or tracking down the culprits of a simple strong-arm robbery, detectives will be called upon to solve their fair share of thefts.

Common Clues: Maps, hair/clothing fibers, footprints, fingerprints, video surveillance, electronic footprints

Theme: The Cry for Help

The hero receives a plea for help, either to solve a crime or to help prevent one. The request can come from the surviving friends or family of a murder victim, or from the victim(s) in pretty much any other crime. In the case of impending crimes, a would-be victim might ask for help in preventing their own murder.

Theme: The Patchwork Victory / The Tapestry Effect

The hero grapples with lots of little challenges while working toward a larger, more important goal. Often, these low-level struggles are (or at least seem to be) unrelated to the bigger struggle and seem to be more of a barrier or distraction. However, in the end, it is often the hero's handling of these smaller issues which mark the difference between success and failure, so reward the hero when he does the heroic thing and fights the small fight, too. This isn't the hero losing sight of the bigger picture, but instead a refusal to let the little things slide in favor of the whole.

Just as scraps of cloth come together to form a quilt, all of the hero's little victories can come together to save the day in his time of need. Perhaps the family who the hero saved from falling rubble offer him safe haven when he needs a place to lie low. Perhaps the doctor he saved from a mugging provides him with first aid when he's wounded. Perhaps the kid who the hero pulled out of the line of fire provides a distraction at an opportune moment, allowing the hero to escape. The important thing is to make a showing of the hero's good deeds coming back to reward him in a karmic sense.

Theme: The Revenge

The hero has been wronged, and the action centers on the hero's attempts to correct (or simply avenge) those wrongs. This theme plays well with anti-heroes and darker heroes because it provides a natural dramatic conflict: can the hero stop himself once the injustice has been addressed, or will he go too far and become like those he seeks to condemn?

When including this string in one of your campaigns, make sure the hero has lots of opportunities to make the right (or wrong) choice and see that they are appropriately

rewarded (or punished) for their righteousness (or lack thereof).

Theme: The Showdown
The hero has an archrival or nemesis that is dead-set on a collision course with the hero so as to ensure that the two square off and face each other one-on-one. Often, this opposite number is his equal in almost every way, except morality. Regardless of the reasoning, the deep-seated need to prove which one is superior becomes the driving force for the bad guy to time and again engage the hero in singular combat, even if it repeatedly leads to failed plans or even their own demise.

Alternately, a misunderstanding may lead to blows, setting up some hero vs. hero showdowns. These confrontations are generally shorter, less fatal, and more dramatic than the arch-nemesis variety. Though usually temporary, and almost always leading to a Team-Up against the true villain, these are a good way to indulge in all of those fan-boy fantasies and answer the questions we always ask. Who would win if X faced Y? Who is faster, stronger, better, more powerful? (Don't forget, those aren't always the same answer. The stronger character might still lose in a fistfight if his opponent is more ruthless or aggressive.)

Theme: The Team-Up
The hero must join forces with somebody else to defeat the villain(s). Perhaps this is because the hero needs more firepower to handle a tougher villain. Perhaps two (or more) villains have teamed up themselves, causing their hero rival(s) to do the same. Perhaps the villain is an organization too large or wide-spread for one hero (or team) to handle alone, such as Cobra or Hydra. Perhaps a personal vendetta prompts two heroes to seek the same villain and neither will back down on who gets to take down the villain. Perhaps two heroes or teams are working the same case and bump into each other as they close in on the villain. Perhaps a jurisdictional grievance will allow the hero (or his team) to operate within an area only if they are escorted/supervised by the local hero(es). Perhaps the hero simply runs into an old friend/ally who is willing and able to lend a helping hand when he finds out the hero's situation. There are literally as many reasons as you can think up for heroes to team up and work together.

Don't think that all of the conflict has to come from the villain, though. Team-Ups can cause internal conflict for a number of reasons. Perhaps the character is more of a loner and dislikes teaming up on general principle. Perhaps the potential teammate shares a checkered or even negative history with the hero, making them an uneasy ally. Perhaps it takes some time to iron out a new social structure or pecking order, causing friction while those unused to taking (or giving) orders find themselves in a new role within the new group dynamic. Perhaps simple jealousy comes into play as somebody who is used to being the strongest/fastest/smartest team member must now work alongside somebody who is an equal (or even superior) to them in their traditional strong suit.

Theme: The Ticking Clock
The hero faces a limited window in which he can achieve success. Basically, any time that the hero is artificially limited by a time constraint, you're dealing with The Ticking Clock. In effect, time itself becomes the hero's enemy and is likely one of the bigger challenges he will face.

The Ticking Clock tends to magnify a situation. A tricky task becomes even more difficult because there is no time for mistakes or second chances. The awareness of this

heightens the stress for the character (and the player).

The Ticking Clock can be either literal or figurative, and the window could be either to do something or to prevent it. A disease might eventually kill the victim. A curse may become incurable after a certain time. A bomb counting down will explode at zero. An artifact might only be usable while the planets remain aligned. A power outage may provide a few minutes of vulnerability to a normally unassailable enemy.

Theme: The Wager

The hero accepts a bet to accomplish a seemingly impossible task that he nonetheless believes he can accomplish. It is not uncommon for the wagerer to attempt to sabotage the hero, despite the task's apparent impossibility, especially when/if the hero shows signs of success.

This hook tests a character's grit, determination, ingenuity, and perseverance. The classic "mission or morals" dilemma discussed in The Quest also features heavily in The Wager. This hook pairs naturally with The Outsider/Wannabe, with the classic gentlemen's wager being a means of acceptance for the outsider (if he wins) or a means of being rid of the nuisance once and for all (for the elitist organization).

Theme: The Wanted

The hero is the target of a manhunt. Heroes in this theme tend to be at an extreme disadvantage, especially in terms of firepower and/or equipment. The full might of the law is brought to bear against the hero. His face (or at least his costumed identity) is well known, and/or appears periodically in News Bulletins or Wanted Posters. The vast majority of the public will be against him whenever or wherever he shows up. Heroes caught in this situation are often wrongly-accused, and must work to clear their name while also avoiding further trouble with the law.

Sub-Genre: The Whodunnit

The classic mystery, the whodunit begins with a number of unknown quantities. Typically, there is a list of numerous possible suspects for the crime, which must be whittled down to find the culprit. There may be multiple explanations for the crime or even some doubt as to whether a crime was actually committed (i.e. was it a murder, accident, or suicide?).

The Super-Sleuth
(a.k.a. The Master Detective, The Gentleman Detective, The Consulting Detective)

Examples: Hercule Poirot, Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple, Adrian Monk, Shawn Spencer, Patrick Jane
Key Skills: Observation

Minimum / Recommended Stats:

Attribute	Intensity
Strength	1 / 2+
Agility	1 / 2+
Intellect	6 / 7+
Willpower	6 / 7+
Edge	1+
Minimum Number of Skills	1 (Observation)

The Rundown:

The Master Detective relies on his keen eye for observation and his impressive intellect to ferret out clues, piece together the puzzle, and point the police to the proper culprit. The super-sleuth may be working on his own (private detective), with law enforcement (consultant), or as an actual law enforcement official (CSI, police detective, FBI agent).

Super-Sleuths come in all shapes and sizes. Sherlock Holmes can handle himself in a fistfight, and Shawn Spencer is athletic enough to wriggle his way out of most jams he gets himself into, but not all of them will be action heroes on the side. Miss Marple is an elderly woman, Hercule Poirot is a portly older gentleman, Adrian Monk has crippling phobias, but all of them have brilliant intellects and encyclopedic knowledge of all things criminal. They rarely or never let the bad guy get away, regardless of any physical limitations they may have.

When selecting your skills and abilities, be sure to stick to your character concept. A Miss Marple-style hero shouldn't have much in the physical stats department, but will have extra skills or a higher edge to make up for it. A younger, more rough-and-tumble hero might have mid-range physical attributes and a skill or two (like Climbing or Acrobatics), but these will come at a cost of mental aptitude. Know who/what your hero is supposed to be and assign stats accordingly.

When it comes to mental attributes, Super-Sleuths have them in spades. A super-sleuth will want Intellect and Willpower on the upper end of peak human capabilities and generally as many skills as they can get. It's not uncommon to have one or more sciences as a field of expertise (Biology, Botany, Chemistry, etc.) and you can never go wrong with Trivia (and one or more fields of expertise). The gentleman detective may have one or more skills related to unusual or eccentric hobbies, such as gardening, stamp collecting, woodcarving, candle-making, etc.

Sources of Inspiration: Psych, Monk, Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot, The Mentalist, Encyclopedia Brown

The Spy
(a.k.a. The Secret Agent, The Covert Agent)

Examples: James Bond, Simon Templar, Jason Bourne
Key Powers: None
Key Skills: Espionage, Martial Arts

Minimum / Recommended Stats:

Attribute	Intensity
Strength	4 / 5+
Agility	5 / 7+
Intellect	5 / 6+
Willpower	5 / 6+
Edge	2 / 3+
Minimum Number of Skills	2 (Espionage + Martial Arts)

The Rundown:

A ninja in a business suit, the Secret Agent is a force to be reckoned with. Though generally more of a finesse fighter than a hard-knuckle brawler, he will usually have physical attributes in the mid-to-upper range of human ability, slightly favoring Agility over Strength. As a skill-based hero, card play is more important to the Covert Agent than to most hero types, so consider dumping some points into Edge.

Strength-related combat skills will generally favor the sneak attack, but brutal street-fighting tactics are not uncommon. Examples include Garrotes, Brawling, Knives, and Wrestling. Agility-based combat skills often include Contingent Attack, Marksmanship, Martial Arts, or Flinging.

The Secret Agent is generally a cerebral sort of hero, using intelligence, stealth, and deceit where mere brute force would fail. These heroes often have non-combat skills to flesh out their bag of tricks, such as Climbing, Acrobatics, Disguise, Gadgetry, Repair, Thievery, Sleight of Hand, Computers, Cryptography, Linguistics, Mechanics, Photographic Memory, Weapon Systems, Intimidation, Manipulation, Observation, Survival, Performance, Photography, or Tracking.

For a Super-Spy, having one or more fields of scientific expertise (not necessarily related), such as Physics or Chemistry, is not unheard-of. Being familiar with one or more systems of government and their paramilitary tactics (Politics, Law Enforcement, Military) is also helpful to the Covert Agent, as is the gathering of information (Espionage, Journalism).

Sources of Inspiration: James Bond movies, The Saint, The Bourne Identity series

The Novelist
(a.k.a. The Mystery Writer, The Author)

Examples: Rick Castle, Jessica "J.B." Fletcher, Lord Peter Wimsey
Key Powers: None
Key Skills: Writing, Observation

Minimum / Recommended Stats:

Attribute	Intensity
Strength	1 / 2+
Agility	1 / 2+
Intellect	4 / 6+
Willpower	4 / 6+
Edge	1+
Minimum Number of Skills	2 (Writing, Observation)

The Rundown:

The Novelist seems like an unlikely hero, but despite what should be a somewhat sedentary and socially-isolated life, crimes keep finding their way into the Novelist's path. Fortunately, they tend to share a variety of traits that make them ideally suited to detective work and these crimes almost always get solved.

As an unlikely hero, The Author is quite often on the lower end of the physical scale. Rick Castle is about average for a middle-aged male, while Jessica Fletcher is an aging woman. While both are physically-fit enough to endure basic legwork, jogging, biking, or the occasional chase, neither is going to engage in many fistfights. Following this mold, a Novelist will have mid-level physical stats at best, and probably no or few physical skills.

Mentally, crime novelists tend to be both pretty bright and fairly strong-willed, and will have Intellect and Willpower scores in the mid-to-upper range of human ability. The Author will usually done extensive research into both sides of the criminal coin and have a unique insight into both the criminal and investigative mind (Criminology, Law). Often they will have a working knowledge of weapons, poisons, and past crimes both solved and unsolved (Trivia: Crime Lore). It's not uncommon for the Novelist to have an extensive network of friends, contacts, and informants that help them hone their craft (Journalism). Finally, they are almost always insightful, observant, and logical, as well as gifted writers (Assessment, Observation, Writing).

Sources of Inspiration: Castle; Murder, She Wrote; The Lord Peter Wimsey novels

The Private Eye
(a.k.a. The Gumshoe, The P.I.)

Examples: Thomas Magnum, Veronica Mars, Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, Joe Mannix
Key Powers: None
Key Skills: Observation

Minimum / Recommended Stats:

Attribute	Intensity
Strength	4 / 5+
Agility	4 / 5+
Intellect	4 / 5+
Willpower	4 / 5+
Edge	2+
Minimum Number of Skills	1 (Observation)

The Rundown:

The Private Eye (a play on Private I.) is, as the name suggests, a private investigator. They are typically required to do their own surveillance, undercover work, and investigation. Owing to their autonomy, they tend to be a more well-rounded lot than many detectives, having to handle both physical and intellectual pursuits on their own.

A private investigator will likely have both physical and mental stats in the mid-to-upper range of normal human levels. An Edge of 2 is reccomended, but a 3 would be very useful if you can swing it. A gumshoe is likely to have a fairly broad collection of skills to help bring his abilities to bear, having a tendency towards being a jack-of-all-trades.

Private investigators may have some skill in hand-to-hand combat or other forms of self-defense (Boxing, Brawling, Wrestling, Martial Arts). They may have a few skills that help them pursue suspects on foot (Climbing, Acrobatics, Tracking), or else follow them covertly or in a high-speed vehicle chase (Driving). Generally, a P.I. has training in doing covert surveillance, undercover assignments, and intelligence gathering (Disguise, Espionage, Journalism). It is not uncommon for a private eye to have some skill in the thieve's trade, finding the ability to pick locks, pick pockets, or hide small items through misdirection to be useful in his investigation and pursuit of suspects (Sleight of Hand, Thievery). Finally, any private investigator worth his salt will know his way around a camera, being adept at taking covert images of people or even evidence (Photography).

Often, though not always, private investigators work with the police, although in most states they are individually licensed authorities in their own right, having the right to carry and use firearms in the course of their work, and sometimes even have limited arrest permissions (Marksmanship, Law Enforcement). Regardless of their ability to conduct arrests, they are likely to have a working knowledge of both police and court procedures, and a good P.I. Will more than likely have at least a few friendly contacts in the local police force (Law, Law Enforcement).

Sources of Inspiration: Barnaby Jones, Cannon, Magnum p.i., Veronica Mars, Mannix

The Police Detctive
(a.k.a. The Cop)

Examples: Theo Kojak, Steve McGarrett, Ovilia Benson
Key Powers: None
Key Skills: Law Enforcement, Observation

Minimum / Recommended Stats:

Attribute	Intensity
Strength	4 / 5+
Agility	4 / 5+
Intellect	4 / 5+
Willpower	4 / 5+
Edge	2+
Minimum Number of Skills	1 (Law Enforcement, Observation)

The Rundown:

The Police Detective plies his finely-tuned detective skills for the public good, serving as an official of law enforcement at some level.

Police detectives are usually (though not always) in pretty good physical shape, having physical attributes ranging roughly from above average to athlete (Strength & Agility 5-8). They will likely have a smattering of unarmed and armed combat skills and some non-combat skills representing their basic police combat training (Boxing, Clubs, Wrestling, Driving, Marksmanship)

Police detectives tend to be more intelligent and strong-willed than many of their non-detective brethren, having mental attributes ranging roughly from above average to gifted (Intellect & Willpower 5-8). Aside from the obvious skills (Law Enforcement, Observation), police detectives may have training in one or more fields of expertise related to the types of cases they usually work (Biology, Biochemistry, Computers, Cryptography, Electronics, Mechanics, Medicine, Weapons Systems).

More often than not, police detectives are expected to do their own legwork, investigating crime scenes, tracking down leads, interviewing witnesses, etc. Despite this, they do have access to a vast network of back-up, including other detectives, normal officers, lab technicians, and forensic experts. Aside from their local police department, law enforcement generally has access to additional assistance at the state, federal, and possibly even international level. Most states in the US have state police, state highway patrols, and state bureaus of investigation. At the federal level, we have the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), National Security Agency (NSA), Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), among others. Additionally, many civilian companies are willing to work with law enforcement providing anything from expertise and testimony to equipment or services, especially if they are personally involved in a case.

Sources of Inspiration: Hawaii 5-0, Kojak, The Streets of San Francisco, Law & Order

The Lawyer
(a.k.a. The Legal Eagle)

Examples: Perry Mason, Ben Matlock
Key Powers: None
Key Skills: Law, Observation

Minimum / Recommended Stats:

Attribute	Intensity
Strength	1 / 3+
Agility	1 / 3+
Intellect	4 / 5+
Willpower	4 / 5+
Edge	2+
Minimum Number of Skills	2 (Law, Observation)

The Rundown:

The Legal Eagle is a lawyer with a penchant for playing detective. Although usually a defense attorney scrambling to prove a client's innocence, sometimes a prosecutor joins in on the fun (usually to prove a suspect's guilt).

The Lawyer himself tends to be more brainy than brawny, usually having mental stats in the mid-to-upper range of human (5-10 Intellect and Willpower). Lawyers will of course have a formal legal education and will be in good standing with the bar association for any venue in which they practice law (Law). They often, though not always, possess good research skills and have many contacts from which to draw information (Journalism, Law Enforcement). A select few may have a keen insight into the criminal mind, or an outstanding memory, which greatly aids them in their work (Criminology, Photographic Memory). Lawyers tend to be masterful orators, with fine attention for details, making them highly persuasive (Observation, Politics). Some few lawyers with more flexible morals may even use their persuasive abilities in less-than-noble ways (Intimidation, Manipulation).

Lawyers have no real need for physical stats, and any physical skills will likely be tied to hobbies and personal interests, as none are needed for their work. Even physically disabled lawyers will have no trouble fulfilling most of their regular legal duties.

Depending on the type and demeanor of the Lawyer, his relationship with Law Enforcement may be anything from friendly to openly combative. They often, though not always, have at least one assistant that works as a private investigator, if not an entire investigative team. These are usually the burly, beefy types that may find themselves in physical trouble on the lawyer's behalf. The Lawyer is likely to have one or more paralegals or other research assistants who will work in the background and occasionally show up with helpful tips for the lawyer. These are usually, though not always, the shy, quiet, bookish, or geeky types, from the librarian-esque assistant with the quirky filing system to the computer-savant uber-nerd/hacker.

Sources of Inspiration: Matlock, Perry Mason, Law & Order, Boston Legal, The Practice, JAG

The Doctor
(a.k.a. The Scientist)

Examples: Dr. Gregory House; Dr. Temperance "Bones" Brennan; Dr. Mark Sloan; Dr. R. Quincy, M.E., Gil Grissom
Key Powers: None
Key Skills: Medicine

Minimum / Recommended Stats:

Attribute	Intensity
Strength	1 / 3+
Agility	1 / 3+
Intellect	4 / 5+
Willpower	4 / 5+
Edge	2+
Minimum Number of Skills	1 (Medicine)

The Rundown:

The hero works in the medical field in some capacity, often as a doctor, medical examiner, or forensics lab technician. This access to the sick, injured, or dead leads to many opportunities for medical mystery. A doctor may need to solve the mysterious cause of an illness, or simply diagnose a rare disease before the patient dies. A medical examiner may discover evidence that a seemingly natural or innocent death was in fact a murder. A forensics tech may help piece together how a crime took place.

In most cases, the doctor-type hero will spend most of her time in a more cerebral environment, such as a lab, hospital, or office. While a few may venture into the field to do their own legwork, it is more common to have a few handy assistants or pals (often involved in law-enforcement) to handle the rougher or more official parts of the investigation.

The Doctor herself tends to be more on the intellectual side, usually possessing Intellect in the mid-to-upper range of human (5-10 Intellect & Willpower). Doctors will of course have a formal medical education and a license to practice general medicine (Medicine), but may also have a specialization or secondary field of expertise (Biochemistry, Biology, Bionics, Genetics, Psychology, Radiology, Super-Physiology). Doctors who frequently find themselves drawn into mysteries are probably more observant than most of their colleagues (Observation). A Doctor who works as a medical examiner or forensic scientist may have an extensive background in criminal behavior, or even possess active credentials in law enforcement (Criminology, Law Enforcement).

The Doctor's work may or may not be physically demanding, depending on the type of medicine they practice, so there could be a wide range of physical attributes. Most types of medicine require long periods of standing and may even include some heavy lifting. Although a Doctor's knowledge of anatomy can be handy in the event she has to defend herself, formal combat training is rare among doctors and scientists.

Sources of Inspiration: Quincy, House, Bones, Diagnosis: Murder, CSI

The Amateur Detective
(a.k.a. The Junior Detective)

Examples: Nancy Drew, Frank Hardy, Joe Hardy, Leroy "Encyclopedia" Brown, The Scooby Doo gang, Detective Conan
Key Powers: None
Key Skills: Observation

Minimum / Recommended Stats:

Attribute	Intensity
Strength	1 / 3-6
Agility	1 / 3-6
Intellect	4 / 5+
Willpower	4 / 5+
Edge	1+
Minimum Number of Skills	1 (Observation)

The Rundown:

The Junior Detective is generally a teenager, or tween, who happens to be particularly bright and curious, and possessing a highly logical mind. Owing to their less-developed brain structure, pre-teen detectives are quite rare, though not unheard-of. As you would expect, Amateurs are usually far less experienced than their professional counterparts (Edge 1).

Much like the professional detectives they emulate, Amateurs tend to have high mental stats (Intellect & Willpower 5+) and a keen eye for detail (Observation).

Owing to their age, the Junior Detective is usually in relatively good physical shape, but still comparatively weaker than their adult counterparts (Strength & Agility 3-6). Fortunately, they usually handle smaller and less-serious instances of crime, limiting their exposure to physical danger.

A Junior Detective may have a friend, parent, or older sibling who works in Law Enforcement, but otherwise is unlikely to have many contacts in the field. In fact, they are less likely to have professional contacts of any kind, including reporters, investigators, medical personnel, etc.

An Amateur's limited social circle lends itself better to less-formal settings, such as schools, small towns, or neighborhoods. Globe-spanning adventures would be extremely rare for an Amateur. That said, they are great at finding cases that fall through the cracks, such as cases that are too small to be noticed or bothered-with by professional detectives. Such crimes might include petty theft, vandalism, minor forgeries/fraud, missing pets/items, or similar low-priority mysteries.

Sources of Inspiration: Scooby Doo, The Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, Encyclopedia Brown, Case Closed

The Mystery

The mystery is what the adventure is all about. There has to be some unexplained quantity to work towards identifying or unraveling. This is what moves the story along.

This is your first chance to define the adventure and, by extension, the adventurer. What mystery is the hero trying to solve and why? Is it solving a crime to bring the perpetrator to justice? Is it investigating a disappearance to determine if foul play was involved because that's your job? Is it identifying an unknown ailment to save one or more lives by curing it or preventing an outbreak? Make sure that your mystery is a suitable story hook to pique both the player's and the character's interest.

Always keep this motivation in mind as you design your adventure. You want the player to have a chance to really play his role. A mystery that tempts the hero in some way is pure story-telling gold. For example, a hero with a strict no-killing policy may be sorely tempted to break that vow in cases with extreme crimes, such as rape or murder (especially with a child victim). Or perhaps the hero would be tempted to use threats, coercion, torture, or other morally questionable tactics if he's running out of time to find a bomb and save millions of lives in a city.

The Crew

Friends, allies, sidekicks; whatever the nature of their relationships, no detective is complete without his crew. Be sure to have stats on hand for your hero's circle of friends, even if it's just a generic soldier or scientist from the NPC Roster Book.

The detective's team varies widely depending on the type of detective he is. He may have only a single assistant or sidekick, with which he shares a close relationship (literally, serving as a bride between the aloof super-genius detective and the presemably-not-a-super-genius-detective reader). Alternately, he may have a small team of specialists in various fields, especially if he is a doctor, lawyer, or private investigator. As members of law enforcement, police detectives have access to the entire national (and maybe even international) law enforcement network, including all manner of specialists, officers, databases, etc.

Take advantage of these natural hooks and twists to flesh out your adventure. Good storytelling makes for good adventures. Throw in opportunities for cunning deceptions (and seeing through them), last-minute reprieves, betrayals, and the sudden epiphany. These are the bread and butter of mystery stories.

The Competition

Any high-profile crime-solver is sure to attract all sorts of attention. It is likely that colleagues and rivals will form a somewhat antagonistic relationship fueled by jealousy, envy, and a (perhaps justified) sense of being overlooked. Detectives also have the dubious honor of attracting attention from villainous counterparts who wish to pit their wits against the fabled detective.

Friendly rivals will normally be a little behind the curve and desperate to catch up. Rival detectives usually aren't as smart, fast, or well-connected as the hero, but they tend to have a certain moral flexibility that the hero doesn't have. In general, they should be good enough to make a nuisance of themselves, even if it takes a bit of cheating, lying, or stealing to keep pace. Arch-nemesis characters will tend to be the equal of the hero, but without the morals (i.e. "the evil twin" approach).

This is a good place to illustrate the differences between the hero and his rivals by throwing some moral conundrums at him. Any time that the hero has the chance to outshine the competition, but at the cost of a personal moral code, you have the basis for good role-play. Whatever the character has sworn never to do (be it stealing, lying, killing, etc.), be sure the opportunity arises to break that vow. Reward the player for sticking to his character's motivations, even as his competition takes the easy road, and punish him if he gives in to temptation and strays too far away from his core.

The Chase

Whether a common criminal or a bona fide criminal mastermind, the culprit isn't likely to be sitting around the crime scene waiting to be arrested. At least, not unless that is part of their intricate and nefarious schemes, that is. A detective may have to chase his quarry across the city, the state, the country, or even the world in order to end the villain's reign of terror.

Chasing down the criminal presents many opportunities for interesting locales. Crime knows no bounds, affecting the wealthy and the poor alike, so you have the ability to run completely wild with your locations, jumping from one extreme to the other. Just make sure that whichever direction you go, the story has a continuous, logical thread running throughout it. For example, if the crime scene is a high-rise apartment building for the extremely wealthy, your next stop probably isn't going to be shaking down the local riffraff in a seedy bar. Unless, of course the victim had a betting slip in his apartment and the bar is the hangout of the bookie who took the bet. Just make sure that the evidence you present to the player drives the investigation in a logically consistent direction, rather than just presenting some random mishmash of locations for no reason.

Since the investigation could include multiple such locations, you could even stretch out a single case to cover an entire campaign full of adventures by stringing the hero along on clue after clue at varied locales. Instead of having several small adventures in one evening, you could flesh out each stop to be a full adventure with the campaign culminating with apprehending the culprit (the TV series approach). Even if you're planning a one-shot adventure, be prepared to have at least two or three stopovers at other locations on the way to the criminal (the movie approach).

Don't be afraid to mix-and-match locations within a campaign or adventure, providing you justify the locations (as outlined above). A story that involves going into multiple disparate locations tends to be more interesting than a story that repeats itself. For example, using the plot we began above, a hero may find a clue at the apartment crime scene that leads him to the seedy dive bar where the bookie conducts his business, who denies any involvement, but points the hero to another suspect: the victim's wife was having an affair with their neighbor. The hero manages to track down the neighbor at the marina where they both stored their yachts, and upon interviewing him, the detective concludes that the neighbor is innocent, but picks up on an interesting new clue; both the victim and the neighbor also worked for the same company, a tech research lab. The investigation at the lab leads the detective to believe that the victim may have been involved in international corporate espionage, so off we go to the rival company's headquarters in Hong Kong. The chain can continue in this fashion for as long as is necessary. Just note how the choice of location affects more than simply the floor layout: these sites offer a variety of climates, and the type of challenges (mental vs. physical) you

are likely to encounter can vary greatly. In the example above, each location could present a unique challenge. The crime scene presents a mental challenge in making sure that all of the available clues are observed and recognized, the dive bar may involve a brawl with hired thugs or other patrons, the marina may require sneaking past security, the tech lab may require some undercover work to infiltrate the company as a "reporter," and the rival company's Hong Kong headquarters may require the help of a local contact to get an appointment. Try to mix in a variety to keep things balanced, but once again, it is important to keep in mind the sort of detective you are dealing with. You don't want your hero getting into fistfights in the dive bar unless it actually makes sense for your hero to do so.

Regardless of which approach you're taking, remember: in a good mystery story, just tracking down the criminal is an adventure in itself.

The Site

Getting to the next site is only the first step in an adventure. Once at the location, the detective must observe all of the available data, locate the relevant clues, and deduce their importance to the case.

A detective can expect to encounter a wide array of puzzles and challenges. Even a case with a normal criminal may contain security guards, competitors, friends of the criminal (who will lie to, or even attack, the detective to protect their friend), obscured clues, confusing evidence, and more. Add in a criminal mastermind and booby traps, hired thugs, puzzles, riddles, public threats, and more could come into play. Just be sure the intensity for any challenges is appropriate for your hero's power level. Intensity 8-12 actions would be a suitable challenge for most normal humans, but you may have to beef things up if your hero has superhuman powers or abilities, or a particularly high Edge.

As hinted at in the previous section, be aware of the setting your site indicates and be sure to mix things up. Certain types of sites tend to lend themselves to different challenges. For example, the crime scene is likely to be inhabited only by law enforcement or fellow detectives, so the challenges there would probably be mostly mental. Dark alleys, seedy bars, shady storefronts, mob-connected restaurants, public parks, public restrooms, and other dark and/or secluded locations could be used to launch an ambush. At the very least you should build suspense to the point that a player is aware that a threat could occur in such locations. You should have several challenges (mental, physical, or both) at each location, and make sure that each challenge is fleshed out to the point that it's not just a series of scenes that amount to "go to point A and do an observation check, now repeat for point B, C, D, etc."

More than almost any other genre, the mystery relies on the cerebral aspects of storytelling. The world and the adventure will be only as exciting as you make it. As often and as much as possible, role-play the scene with your players instead of just giving a summary of the information they learned. If you're doing an interview scene, be prepared with some pre-written responses to likely questions. Don't say "you learn that his neighbor keeps a yacht at the marina." Try something more like "Oh, everyone knew that Bob was sleeping around with Mike's wife. They were always down at the marina together. The Shady Palms, I think it was called. Anyway, it was an open secret that he took her on all of these little day-trips, 'love cruises' we used to call them. Bob may have used the yacht to lay low for awhile or maybe even make a run for it."

Roster Book of Ready-Made NPCs

This roster book consists of generic NPCs that should fit in with any standard modern comic book campaign. The stats and names may be used as-is or merely as a starting point. As always, feel free to adjust them to meet your needs. You can find many, many more ready-made NPCs in the NPC Roster Book.

The Rival Spy (Agent Antonin "The Scorpion" Balishnikov)
Calling: Soldier   Edge 2, Hand Size 4 (25)
Strength 6D (Climbing), Agility 7C (Marksmanship, Martial Arts), Intellect 6B (Cryptography, Espionage, Journalism), Willpower 7B (Manipulation, Politics, Observation)
Powers: None.
Equipment: None.
Description: Nothing gets on a hero's nerves like his self-proclaimed equal (or superior) number: the Rival. The Rival is often an imperfect copy of the hero. This may mean that he is a slightly less-skilled challenger to the throne, or else that they are an intellectual equal, but moral mirror (i.e. the "evil twin" approach).

The P.I. (Frank Moody)
Calling: Investigator   Edge 2, Hand Size 4 (25)
Strength 6D (Boxing), Agility 6B (Disguise, Marksmanship, Thievery), Intellect 5B (Espionage, Journalism, Law), Willpower 6B (Law Enforcement, Photography, Tracking)
Powers: None.
Equipment: Revolver +3
Description: Frank Moody is an old-fashioned, no-nonsense type of gumshoe. Equally adept at cracking heads and beating the streets, Frank almost always finds his guy. Frank's services could be hired out by somebody in need of an investigator, such as in a medical-type mystery. Alternately, he could be inserted as a partner or rival to a fellow detective.

The Scientist (Dr. Nicholai Andrimov)
Calling: Explorer   Edge 0, Hand Size 2 (10)
Strength 3X (), Agility 3X (), Intellect 7D (One or more *Science* skills), Willpower 4X ()
Powers: None.
Equipment: None.
Description: A scientist makes a great story hook. The scientist can be the only one who can figure out a puzzle or decipher some information in his field of expertise, or the only one in possession of needed information. Alternately, the scientist may have been captured and held hostage because his research promises to unlock wealth or power for the villains.

The Contact (Joey the Rat)
Calling: Greed   Edge 0, Hand Size 2 (10)
Strength 4X (), Agility 5D (Marksmanship), Intellect 4X (), Willpower 4X ()

Powers: None.
Equipment: None.
Description: The contact is the source of inside information for the adventurer. Whenever the hero needs to get intelligence on the criminal underworld, an exotic country, or a mysterious artifact, he'll likely have one or more contacts in place that can point him in the right direction. Alternately, unknown or unreliable contacts may just as likely be setting a trap or intentionally misdirecting the hero.

The Bodyguard (Mike North)
Calling: Guardian   Edge 2, Hand Size 4 (25)
Strength 8D (Brawling), Agility 6C (Marksmanship, Martial Arts), Intellect 5X (),
Willpower 6D (Survival)
Powers: None.
Equipment: None.
Description: A Bodyguard is hired to serve as a human shield for his employer. Most often obtained by the bad-guy types, a good bodyguard can nevertheless make up for a lack of physical prowess in the more bookish detectives, if they can afford one.

The Hired Goon (Jimmy "Two-Toes" Bochetti)
Calling: Demolisher   Edge 1, Hand Size 3 (17)
Strength 6D (Knives), Agility 5D (Marksmanship), Intellect 4X (), Willpower 4X ()
Powers: None.
Equipment: None.
Description: Typically found in large packs, hired goons serve as the low-level muscle needed to secure an international adventure. Alternately, they could make up the bulk of a gang or mob-related local adventure. If the bad guy needs a distraction, the Hired Goons are the first to be offered up as cannon fodder while the higher-up villains make their escape.

The Love Interest (Sally Lowe)
Calling: Civilian   Edge 0, Hand Size 2 (10)
Strength 3X (), Agility 4X (), Intellect 3X (), Willpower 4X ()
Powers: None.
Equipment: None.
Description: Just your average human, the love interest serves as an excellent story-hook generator for the adventurer. The love interest may be captured or endangered, increasing the stakes for the hero. They might be a useful partner or distraction, making things easier on the hero. If the Love Interest is unaware of the hero's adventuring ways, he or she can make an excellent obstacle by narrowing the windows of opportunity (time, place) or else the hero risks blowing his or her cover.

The Con Man (Edward "Fast Eddy" Green)
Calling: Greed   Edge 0, Hand Size 2 (10)
Strength 3X (), Agility 3X (), Intellect 3X (), Willpower 4D (Persuasion)
Powers: None.
Equipment: None

Description: A con man ("con artist") is a criminal that makes his money by tricking others into trusting him (by playing a "confidence game"). While not much use in a fight, con artists can talk their way out of most situations – it's what they do for a living, after all.

Police Detective

Calling: Protector   Edge 0, Hand Size 2 (10)

Strength 5X (), Agility 4D (Marksmanship), Intellect 5C (Criminology, Espionage), Willpower 5C (Law Enforcement, Observation)

Powers: None.

Equipment: Kevlar Vest +2, Pistol +3

Description: Police Detectives are the officers assigned to investigate and solve cases by gathering evidence, conducting interviews, and following leads. These are the types of officers you've seen on shows like Law & Order.