



Notes from the Bunker

Mystery Plots

by Rich Redman

"I suppose you all wonder why I called you here today."

-- Apocryphal

Welcome to my bunker. As one of the designers of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**, and a veteran of real-world modern combat . . . oh, wait -- those qualifications have nothing to do with this month's column.

I like mystery stories, and more than one person has asked me for advice on creating mystery scenarios for the **d20 Modern** game. While the only mysteries I've actually written were short stories, the classes I took and the books I read to prepare me for them apply just as much to writing adventures. This month, as I celebrate my birthday, I'll give you a gift by condensing that information for you.

The First Step

Before you make your first notes, talk to your players about the idea. Make sure they actually want to play a mystery game before you write or run one. If one of your players based his hero on [Biff Hardslab](#), chances are that solving a mystery will frustrate him, though he'll enjoy confronting the villain at the end.

Plotting

Once you know that a mystery will be welcome, you can start building a plot. When crafting your story, consider the difference between a mystery and a chase movie. *Silence of the Lambs* is a chase movie because the audience knows who committed the crime early on, even though the investigators don't. Buffalo Bill (played very well by Ted Levine) also gets a lot of screen time! The movie isn't about solving a mystery; it's about the competition between the murderer (Buffalo Bill) and the detective (Clarice Starling). One's trying to get away (or get away with it), and the other is trying to prevent his escape.

A mystery is about discovering the answers to questions, and that's where the writing gets interesting. A good mystery actually involves two stories -- what appeared to happen, and what did happen. These two tales are sometimes called the surface story and the real story. You have to know both of them. The heroes know only the first at the beginning, then they gradually uncover the truth.

When you design your plotline, focus on the crime, the criminal, and the victim. Most authors writing mystery fiction focus on the hero or heroine, but you have your players to assume that role! The crime, the criminal, and the victim constitute the real story. The surface story is what can be observed from the scene of the crime.

A cardinal rule of mystery fiction is not to over-plot. Keep the crime simple and the reasons why the criminal's identity isn't obvious equally simple. A murder in an isolated place doesn't leave many clues beyond the corpse and maybe some tracks. A conveniently placed river could wash the body miles

downstream, ensuring that it won't be of much use as evidence and concealing the crime scene in the bargain. Such a setup is simple, but it makes the job of catching the criminal infinitely more difficult.

Finally, give the heroes a reasonable chance to succeed. Whether they know it or not, most people enjoy mysteries because in the end the problem is resolved and the guilty party is punished. Your players will come to the game with the same expectation, so don't disappoint them.

Heroes

"But down these mean streets a man must go who is not in himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid."

-- Raymond Chandler in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder."

When setting up a mystery for your heroes to solve, you first need to know whether they are amateurs or professionals. This piece of information determines not only the style of the investigation, but also the resources that the heroes have at their disposal.

The amateur, or consulting detective, has a long tradition in mystery literature that dates back even further than the most famous detective of the genre, Sherlock Holmes. The amateur isn't bound by the rules of law and evidence, but his power to detain or arrest suspects is quite limited. Thus, it's often difficult for him to actually bring a criminal to justice. A successful Investigate check means that the hero has gathered evidence properly, but an amateur still isn't part of the "chain of evidence" required by the courts. Government prosecutors generally insist on hard evidence before even scheduling a hearing. On the other hand, the amateur's limited resources make it easier for you to write your mystery because you don't have to account for all manner of sophisticated gadgets. The amateur generally has access only to his five senses when examining evidence.

The professional, on the other hand, has access to criminology labs and databases of all sorts. His resources are likely to include the NCIS national fingerprint database, national genetic databases, and an army of other professionals who can track down leads and question witnesses. But professionals too have their limitations. While they can provide evidence in court and arrest suspects, they also have to obey the rules of law and respect the suspects' rights.

From a fiction writer's point of view, using a professional as a protagonist helps avoid problems with disbelief and the suspension of it. There's a joke among mystery writers that the most dangerous place to live in America is the small town on *Murder She Wrote*, and the most dangerous person to know is the main character, an amateur investigator. Anyone who lived in that town and knew her was likely to end up dead. Professionals get involved in solving crimes because it's their job, and everyone can accept that. Amateurs get involved because they want to, and when they do so repeatedly, it sometimes strains credulity more than a little.

You also need to know a little something about your heroes' backgrounds. After all, their previous life experiences determine what access they have to locations and investigation resources. A hero with a military background probably still has friends in the service and may be able to get visitors' passes to nonclassified areas of military facilities. A hero with a law-enforcement background may have friends on the force who can provide access to police labs. You need to consider such connections when writing your mystery, both as hooks to get heroes involved and as potential ways that they might get around obstacles

to the investigation.

Settings

The classic setting for a hard-boiled detective story is Los Angeles, presumably because LA offers a variety of social classes, ethnicities, and corrupt officials. But any area that can provide those elements is ripe for your story.

A city offers many advantages for a mystery story, including a wide variety of locations and an initial list of suspects too long to investigate effectively. That degree of variety can only help your story. Mysteries set in isolated farming communities or in locked houses must focus on character development rather than action.

The setting is one point at which authenticity can trip you up. If you make a mistake about the details of the setting and the players detect it, they're likely to jump all over it, and perhaps conclude that the inaccuracy is important to the story when it isn't. While it's acceptable to lead your heroes astray, it can be frustrating when they latch onto a mistake you made rather than finding the clues you want to give them. Thus, if you set your story in your home town, make sure you that actually visit the scenes you're using (assuming that the public is allowed in those places). If you set your story elsewhere, try to avoid using a city that one of your players knows well. In fact, feel free to make a city up!

Use the setting to advance the story and provide clues. Add some weather effects. Engage all the senses, including taste, touch, and smell. Make the encounters for your investigation exciting and atmospheric. That's basic adventure writing.

Crimes

"Murder will not out, justice will not out, unless some very determined individual makes it his business to see justice done."

-- Raymond Chandler

If there's no crime, there's no mystery. The next step in crafting your mystery is picking a crime. Once you know the type of crime, you can create the villain.

No crime grabs attention as well as a brutal murder, or the possibility of a murder. Arson, disappearance, and kidnapping all engage our attention because there is a real possibility that a death will result from the crime. Theft is a crime, but you have to develop your characters very well for such a story to be interesting. *The Thomas Crown Affair*, for example, is less about art theft than it is about the characters and their relationships. If you want to get your players emotionally involved in your mystery, murder is the ideal choice of crimes.

If you don't want to use a murder, however, it is possible to craft a good mystery out of almost any crime. Even vandalism can produce a gripping mystery. The trick is to increase the consequences in inverse proportion to the significance of the crime. If the vandalism reveals some knowledge of a long-lost family secret, the heroes must find out who knows that information and how much they know. Later in the story, you can up the ante by advancing from vandalism to death threats or blackmail.

You don't need to stop at one crime, either. Your villain doesn't have to be a serial killer, but she should be willing to commit other crimes to cover up the first one, and to protect herself from those who accuse her or inform on her.

Many writers are tempted to create complex crimes their first time out. Try to avoid that temptation. Complex crimes with elaborate methodologies only provide more clues and more opportunities for authenticity to trip you up. If you choose an exotic chemical or venom for a poisoning, you may find that the chemistry major or the zoologist in your group knows more about the method than you do. Keep the setup simple and stick to what you know, or what you can research.

Villains and Other Scenery

"It would have worked if it wasn't for you darn kids."

-- Scooby Doo.

When populating your mystery story, give every GM character a character flaw. Make one a liar, another a gossip, a third a petty thief, a fourth a spouse abuser, and so on. If you give the heroes a reason to dislike everyone, the villain's flaw can hide in plain sight.

One of the "rules" of mystery writing is that you have to introduce the villain early. Thus, one of the first characters the heroes meet should be the person who committed the crime.

A mystery story is more emotionally powerful when the villain is a single person, but a single opponent often doesn't constitute much of a threat for a group of heroes. However, the villain could always have some friends or allies who are completely ignorant of his guilt. Such protectors can present fearsome obstacles for your heroes.

Once you decide who your villain is, you have to address his motivations. This person has a desire so powerful that he commits a crime -- possibly a heinous one -- to satisfy it. Thus, when you sit down to create him, you must determine what he wants and what frightens him. He will do anything to get what he wants -- except that which frightens him.

A serial killer has a powerful, usually sexual, drive to kill. But serial killers have been done to death, if you'll pardon the pun, in American fiction. Instead you might write about a daredevil who goads a friend into doing something risky. The friend dies accidentally, but the daredevil desperately needs people to believe that he would never be involved in such an incident. (Perhaps he is highly ambitious and wants to run for political office, or just wants to open the best nightclub in the city and needs a liquor license.) So he hides the body, or makes it look like suicide, or rearranges the scene of the accident to shift the blame onto a street gang or a business rival. At that point, he's committed a crime by not reporting the death, and he's interfered with the investigation of a felony by tampering with the evidence. Even though he may be riddled with guilt, he's already committed at least two crimes, and if he climbed a construction site or explored a subway tunnel in the process, he was probably trespassing as well. Thus, he is now more willing to commit additional crimes to protect himself.

Victims

Victims can be completely unlikable. *Drowning Mona* presents a fine example of a victim with whom the audience cannot sympathize, as does *The Orient Express*. Such victims work well in mysteries in which the challenge isn't finding a killer, but figuring out which of the many suspects is the actual killer. Otherwise, you should make the victim someone that people like to get the investigators emotionally involved in the case.

Next, you have to decide why that particular victim was chosen, since that detail may help the investigators learn additional clues. For example, in *Manhunter*, the investigator figures out that the killer saw a home movie because he knew about one lock that was visible in the film but didn't know about another installed after the movie was made. If your victim died surprising a robber, perhaps the intruder knew the victim's schedule or that she routinely forgot to turn on the house alarm.

Clues

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

-- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *Silver Blaze*, 1892

The basic clues in a mystery should answer the questions who, what, when, where, and how. "Why" addresses the motive, and the heroes should figure that out for themselves. Having chosen your villain, victim, and crime, you already know the answer to "who" and "what." The answer to "how" is the means by which the villain committed the crime. "When" and "where" establish who might have had the opportunity. These three elements -- means, motive, and opportunity -- are the three key points that the investigators should be trying to establish, so it pays to consider them up front when you develop your villain and your clues.

It's a good idea to give one character no motive, no means, and no opportunity to prove herself innocent. Chances are your audience will assume this seemingly innocent person is the criminal.

Clues versus Red Herrings

The difference between a clue and a red herring (a false clue) is that a clue fits the real story, and a red herring fits the surface story. A clue can fit both, but a red herring cannot.

Since red herrings lead to people who did not commit the crime, scattering a few of them around gives you opportunities to present colorful characters and give them some time in the spotlight.

Types of Clues

Clues fall into many different categories, and it's worth reviewing the various kinds when developing your mystery.

The Omitted Clue: The omitted clue is the sort that appears in *Silver Blaze*, the 1892 Sherlock Holmes mystery quoted above. Since the dog in the story did not bark when the racehorse was taken from its stable, Holmes reasons that the dog knew the villain. That deduction considerably narrowed his list of suspects!

The Clue That Can't Be Found: One interesting mystery story involved a murder committed with a knife, but the investigators couldn't locate it. The twist was that the knife was made of ice, so after it melted, there was no murder weapon. Such clues may leave strange traces that make no sense in the context of the surface story, such as the puddle of water left behind by the ice knife.

The Clue in Plain Sight: This ever-popular clue was made famous by Edgar Allan Poe in *The Purloined Letter*. Poe's detective, Auguste Dupin, learns of a blackmailer who has stolen a letter that gives him leverage over an "exalted personage." The prefect of police searched the residence of the blackmailer from top to bottom but could not find the incriminating letter. Dupin carefully evaluated the intelligence of the criminal and deduced that the letter was hidden in the open -- albeit in another envelope with a different seal.

Sources for Clues

By all means, feel free to base your mystery on a real-life crime. Watch shows on the Discovery and History channels (among others), and adapt real-life clues to fit your story.

Placing Clues

When describing scenes that the heroes visit in the course of their investigation, be careful to describe the common, obvious things that are present while also planting misleading clues. For example, if the heroes are looking for someone missing and presumed dead, have a clue lead them to the dank cellar of an abandoned farmhouse. Describe the rot, the cobwebs, the rusting household items, and a peculiar stain where a wall doesn't quite meet the floor. The heroes are likely to assume that the stain is blood and start tearing at the wall to see if there's a secret room on the other side. But their focus on the wall means they haven't checked the household items to see whether any of them are sharp, or to see whether any of that "rust" is really dried blood. Make the heroes work for their clues!

Suspense

"It's starting to smell a little like danger in here, or heavily fried food."

-- The Tick

To introduce suspense into your mystery, you need a menace, be it a storm, a killer, or a ticking time bomb. A kidnapping accompanied by a ransom demand, for example, imposes a time limit after which the victim will be harmed or killed if the ransom has not been paid. In *The Cell*, the killer locks his victim in an elaborate death trap, and the investigators know from his past crimes that they have only a limited amount of time in which to locate it.

GM Techniques for Running Mysteries

"Until you guys own your own souls, you don't own mine. Until you guys can be trusted every time and always, in all times and conditions, to seek the truth out and let the chips fall where they may -- until that time comes, I have a right to listen to my conscience and protect my client the best way I can. Until I'm sure you won't do him more harm than you'll do the truth good. Or until I'm hauled before somebody that can make me talk."

-- Philip Marlowe in *The High Window*, by Raymond Chandler, 1942.

No matter how thoroughly you plan and how tightly you plot, the heroes will do something unexpected. When the players find an element of the story that doesn't make sense because you made a mistake, just shut up and wait. Chances are that their overactive imaginations will come up with an explanation they can accept. When they've done so, move on.

Many players assume that the GM's body language, intonation, word choice, and expression accurately reflect those of the GM character with whom their heroes are conversing. So if you wince when they discover something you don't want them to, they'll assume the GM character also winced. There are two ways to avoid this kind of situation. First, don't allow that sort of metagaming. Second, practice your poker face. Get into the character you're playing and really react as the character would.

Frustration can ruin your game. I promise you that if you run a mystery game, you will experience a moment when the essential clue is right in front of the heroes and the players don't recognize it. When you see them getting frustrated, you need to drop some hints. Don't just hand over the answer; instead, suggest new ways to consider the scene and new ways to think about all the evidence. In traditional literature, the Fool often helped characters to see the world in new ways. You might even want to use a GM character such as the ever-dense Biff Hardslab to suggest alternatives.

Whatever you do, don't lie. Your job as GM is to convey the information provided by the heroes' senses to the players. Tell the truth, but be more reserved about it than usual. Make them ask you for specific information.

You can't go wrong with player handouts and props. Ransom notes, suicide notes, burned journal entries, scissors or knives smeared with dried ketchup, cap guns, and so forth can really engage your players' imaginations and enrich your game.

FX: Slayer of Mystery

FX presents several advantages and disadvantages when crafting mysteries. Most mystery writers don't have to deal with what happens when investigators employ occult techniques, but they're part of the **d20 Modern** game, so you need to plan for their use.

When writing mysteries for games that use magic, watch out for divinations and necromancy. If a hero can cast *speak with dead* (which isn't in **d20 Modern** or **Urban Arcana**), murder victims can identify or at least describe their killers. In a world where *raise dead* is available as a spell and not limited to religious miracles, proving that a murder even happened may be difficult, especially if the game includes spells that

alter memory.

On the other hand, your criminal has many more options in such a campaign. With a quick glance at the spell list for the game, you can readily identify spells that are ideal for criminals -- and I don't just mean *invisibility*.

As for psionics, *object reading* can quickly reveal clues from doors, windows, and murder weapons. Furthermore, like magic, psionics also provides a way for criminals to commit their crimes.

Your task as a writer is to consider what tools are available to your heroes and to make allowances for them in the game. You want heroes to be able to use the abilities that make them special, but at the same time you don't want those abilities to ruin the mystery. You should also consider how much your villain knows about FX. In some games, heroes are the only ones who know that FX abilities exist, so the garden-variety villain shouldn't take any action to negate them. The occasional villain who does know about FX should use FX abilities and also take action to negate their benefits to investigators.

Monsters: Fanged Clichés

If your campaign includes monsters, try to include them only as witnesses in your first mystery adventures. The monster as killer is too obvious a ploy, except when heroes are ignorant of the true nature of the world around them. When heroes are just starting to discover Shadow, or whatever brings monsters into your world, they may not realize that a corpse with an unbroken skull and no brain means that illithids have been at work. Once the heroes understand the true nature of your campaign world, monster-hunting isn't really the same as mystery solving.

Even using a monster perpetrator as a sympathetic character doesn't bring the kind of reaction it once might have because the "monster as victim" concept has become a popular cliché in modern fantasy fiction. It's too easy to say that the crime isn't the gigantic ape's fault; it's the fault of those who took him from his natural habitat. In the same manner, it's not the flesh golem's fault; it's the fault of a creator who couldn't be bothered to train and educate his creation.

On the other hand, gargoyles are tough to notice and may very well see things without being spotted. Of course, their allegiance to evil and their ability to camouflage themselves make them difficult to question, but that's a challenge for your players, not for you.

Example Plot

Here's an example of a no-FX plot that your heroes might have to investigate. The events happen in a big city, but which one isn't important. In this city, urban exploration is an underground movement practiced by people from all walks of life. They trespass in areas such as the tops of public buildings, sewer and subway tunnels, and suspension bridge towers for many of the same reasons that people climb mountains. A quick Google search on "urban exploration" gives more than half a million hits, so we have plenty of research material.

The crime is murder, and our killer is a young man who grew up in a neighborhood controlled by organized crime. We'll call him Logan Quinn. Logan idolized the made guys when he was a kid and often ran errands for them. He wanted to be a tough guy, and he participated in a number of fights, beatings, and robberies

as a young man. During that time, he stumbled into the Ecstasy trade, and that led him to the city's club scene. Somehow he managed to avoid entanglements with the law, and when he met an ambitious young woman named Nora, he fell in love.

Nora changed Logan. Born into a wealthy, upper-class family, she introduced him to high society and taught him manners and polite behavior. Some of the more daring members of her social set were into urban exploration, and the thrill of that "sport" fulfilled Logan's need for danger and excitement. He spent the next few years distancing himself from his drug-selling days (though he occasionally stashed a few drugs or items that his friends needed to hide) and learning how to run a nightclub.

Logan's background gave him a desire for both wealth and independence. Rather than live off Nora's inheritance, Logan decided to rejuvenate the city's night club scene by opening his own club. His place would provide a spot where urban explorers could hang out and new DJs could display their talents. Logan had good ideas, and Nora had connections, but they still needed money. So Logan went back to the mob guys in his old neighborhood and convinced them to "invest" in his club idea. The one remaining challenge was the liquor license. The State Liquor Authority insisted that all applicants for liquor licenses be respectable and responsible -- even a whiff of criminality would get an application rejected. So the pair put Nora's name on the application.

At this point, we have Logan Quinn, a former neighborhood tough guy. He has wise guy friends, though he himself is not "connected." He is an ambitious young man accustomed to physical violence who prides himself on his athleticism, his independence, and his ambition to be the new king of the city club scene. Now we need a victim. This person should be someone who could threaten one of Logan's motivators, or his sense of pride. The organized crime guys from his past are good candidates, but they're real criminals with their own means of dealing with someone who hurts one of their own. Instead, let's go with a junkie -- someone who used to be Logan's customer and who never forgave him for leaving the business and "cutting him off." The junkie's name is Frankie May.

Frankie discovered the club kid lifestyle before he was old enough to drink. Clubs were places where he could express himself any way he wanted and do almost anything he cared to. When he tried Special K (an animal anesthetic properly named ketamine), he became addicted almost immediately. He also enjoyed Ecstasy, which Logan supplied to him for several years. When Logan quit selling drugs, Frankie was devastated. In his mind, Logan's defection to "respectability" meant the end of Frankie's life as a club kid. That assessment was an exaggeration, of course, since Logan was far from the only drug dealer on the club circuit. But Frankie had long ago stopped talking to his family, and the club scene was the only life he knew. Thus, he saw any disruption as a personal affront.

Frankie did find other sources to feed his addiction, but he still nursed his grudge against Logan. Eventually, he started seeing the publicity for the new club and recognized Logan from the old days. Now Frankie needs money as much as any junkie, and in a rare moment of lucidity, he realized that he could blackmail Logan. If Frankie told what he knew about Logan to the police or the press, the State Liquor Authority would not give the former neighborhood tough and drug dealer the license he needed for his new club, even in another person's name. So Frankie started loitering around high-society hangouts until he saw Logan, then followed him home. The next time Logan came out of his condominium, Frankie quickly put the threat to him. Years of living in high society had taught Logan to control his temper, so he didn't beat Frankie to death on the spot. Instead, he gave the junkie the money he had on him and asked Frankie to hook up with him at a club in a few days.

Over the next two weeks, Logan met Frankie several times in out-of-the-way bars, giving him a few

hundred dollars at a time and enthusing about urban exploration. Finally, he managed to talk Frankie into coming with him to a construction site by offering him a drug experience atop the skeletal structure of a high-rise. Once they were at the top, Logan simply pushed Frankie to his death. As a finishing touch, Logan left a suicide note atop the building, weighed down with a hammer.

So now we have our crime, our victim, and our killer. The surface story is that a junkie named Frankie May, despondent over the wreckage of his life, jumped to his death from a building under construction. Assuming that our heroes are amateurs, the best way to get them involved is through Frankie's family. His parents had clung to the hope that he would resurface for years, only to reconnect with him at last in the morgue. A junkie's suicide is a low priority for the police, so the family seeks outside help to find out what "really" happened to Frankie. This sort of wording is a message to the heroes that the surface story isn't necessarily the truth.

Now we need to make sure there are sufficient clues to lead the heroes to the killer. We have the following avenues for investigation.

- Club kids who know that Frankie used to buy from Logan.
- One or two of Frankie's close friends -- perhaps a girlfriend and fellow junkie -- who knew he had "a plan" to get some money.
- Urban explorers angry because some junkie beat them to the top of that building.
- Urban explorers surprised because Logan wasn't the first one to reach the top of that building.
- Urban explorers who hadn't seen as much of Logan in the weeks preceding the "suicide" as they normally did.
- Nora, who knew that Logan was upset and seemed to have less time for her and the business in the weeks preceding the death. She also says that he was very secretive about what was taking up his time.
- The suicide note, which anyone who knew Frankie would realize was fake. The note may also provide additional clues via analysis of the handwriting, paper, ink, and so forth.

That selection of clues should do nicely for a start. We know also that Logan is not only personally capable of violence, but that he also has friends in the old neighborhood from whom he can ask favors. Our heroes are likely to encounter a lot of guys whose middle name starts with "The," if you know what I mean.

Bibliography

If you want to learn about the motivations of criminals and how to write mysteries, I recommend the following books from the Writer's Digest Book Club: *Writing Mysteries* (edited by Sue Grafton), *How to Write Mysteries* (by Shannon O'Cork), *Modus Operandi* (by Mauro V. Corvasce and Joseph R. Paglino), *Malicious Intent* (by Sean Mactire), and *The Writer's Complete Crime Reference Book* (by Martin Roth).

If you're interested in mysteries full of monsters, I recommend the following from IDW Publishing, all by Steve Niles: *Savage Membrane*; *Guns, Drugs, and Monsters*; and *Dial M for Monster*. Steve Niles also wrote the comic books *30 Days of Night*, *Dark Days*, *Criminal Macabre*, and *Wake the Dead*. Check out your friendly local comic shop and ask for them!

Finally, if you missed the whole club kid scene (like I did), check out *Clubland* by Frank Owen from St. Martin's Press.

Summary

Summarizing my longest column to date is a tough task, but I'll take my best shot.

- Make sure your players want to investigate a mystery.
 - Don't over-plot. Keep things simple.
 - Plan out both the real story and the surface story.
 - Consider who the heroes are and what information they have access to.
 - Set your first mysteries in cities.
 - Murder is the most exciting crime for a mystery, but it's not your only choice.
 - Your villain must be someone who is both capable of committing the crime and has a reason to do so.
 - The victim is the heroes' route into the mystery, so choose her carefully.
 - Make a list of clues that could lead the heroes to the villain, considering all the different kinds of clues.
 - Suspense happens when something menaces the heroes because of their investigation. The closer the heroes get to the truth, the higher the level of menace should become.
 - Practice your poker face and tell the players the truth -- just not all of it.
 - Consider FX when crafting your mystery, both as a tool for the heroes' investigation and as a tool for the villain to commit the crime.
 - Monsters as killers are too obvious, and monsters as misunderstood victims are clichés. They do make interesting and hard-to-track-down witnesses, though.
 - Do your research not only on methods, but also on locations, criminals, and crime fiction.
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About the Author

Before [Rich Redman](#) came to the RPG R&D department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., he had been an Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast, Inc.'s Customer Service department. Rich is a prolific game designer who has worked on the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**, the **Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game**, and **Dark*Matter**. When he's not working as vice president of [The Game Mechanics](#), a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and practices yoga, tai chi, and silat.
