

Suspects might be obvious or could come to light during the investigation. One technique often used in detective fiction is to create a closed circle of suspects—a finite number of individuals whose circumstances make them the only possible suspects.

One tip for keeping the players and the adventurers guessing as to the identity of the villain is to ensure that more than one suspect has a secret. When questioned by the adventurers, a suspect might appear nervous or attempt to lie, despite being innocent of the crime. A secret business deal, an illicit affair, a dark past, or an uncontrolled vice are flaws that make suspects more interesting than NPCs with nothing to hide.

CLUES

Clues point to the identity of the villain. Some clues are verbal, including the statements of the suspects and witnesses that help the adventurers develop a picture of what happened. Other clues are physical, such as an unfinished message written in the victim's blood, a piece of jewelry left behind by the villain, or a weapon found hidden in a suspect's room.

A clue should connect a suspect to the crime, typically by shedding light on the suspect's motive, means, or opportunity. Some clues connect the wrong suspect to the crime, leading the adventurers in the wrong direction. Eventually, they must find other clues pointing in a different direction, or come across evidence that absolves the suspect.

It's better to populate your adventure with too many clues than too few. If the adventurers solve the mystery too quickly, you might feel some disappointment but the players will feel a sense of accomplishment. If the mystery is too hard, though, the players will become frustrated. Since you have to account for the possibility that the adventurers will overlook some clues, use redundant clues to ensure that the players have the knowledge needed to catch the villain.

INTRIGUE

Intrigue adventures are event-based adventures that revolve around power struggles. Intrigues are common in the courts of the nobility, but power struggles can play out just as easily in merchants' guilds, crime syndicates, and temple hierarchies.

Rather than dark events and villainous plots, an intrigue adventure typically revolves around the exchange of favors, the rise and fall of individuals in power and influence, and the honeyed words of diplomacy. A prince's efforts to be named heir to the throne, a courtier's ambition to sit at the queen's right hand, and a merchant's desire to open a trade route through enemy lands are the stuff of intrigue.

Like all adventures, an intrigue adventure works only if the players and their characters are invested in the outcome. If no one cares who the king's chamberlain is or who has logging rights in the elven woods, throwing the characters into an adventure centered on those issues will fall flat. However, if having the ear of the king's chamberlain means the characters can use royal soldiers to help them defend their own stronghold on the borderlands, players will be invested in the scenario.

Adventurers usually become embroiled in intrigue when they need a favor from a powerful creature and have to perform a favor in exchange, or when the plots of powerful NPCs get in the way of the characters achieving their goals. Some of the event-based goals discussed earlier in this section lend themselves to intrigue adventures. For example, if the adventurers must uncover a conspiracy, negotiate a peace treaty, or secure aid from a ruler or council, you might be looking at an intrigue adventure.

The process of creating an intrigue adventure is similar to creating any other event-based adventure, with two main differences: how villains are handled and how the characters can gain influence.

VILLAINS

Some intrigue adventures are driven by the actions of a single villain, such as a noble plotting the assassination of a monarch. However, an intrigue adventure can have multiple villains or no villain at all.

No Villain. Some intrigue adventures revolve around the exchange of favors in the absence of a villain. For this type of adventure, skip steps 1 and 2 of the event-based adventure creation process (the villain and the villain's actions) and move straight to the adventurers' goals in step 3. Figure out why the adventurers become involved in the intrigue, then spend the bulk of your time creating the NPCs they interact with.

Many Villains. Some intrigue adventures feature a whole cast of villains, each with its own goals, motivations, and methods. The adventurers might be drawn into the struggle of a court full of nobles vying for the throne in the wake of the king's sudden death, or could find themselves negotiating the end to a deadly turf war among thieves' guilds. In this scenario, you'll spend a lot of time on steps 1 and 2, developing each of the major NPCs as a distinct villain with an agenda.

In step 5, you'll need to develop each villain's reactions to the potential setbacks they face during the adventure. However, you don't need to put equal effort into detailing the reactions of every villain, since many will likely echo each other or cancel each other out. Whenever the adventurers foil one villain's plans, it might let another villain's schemes move forward, advancing the adventure whether the foiled villain reacts or not.

INFLUENCE

Depending on the scenario, you might want to track the party's influence with different NPCs or factions, or even track influence separately for each character.

One way to handle influence is to treat it like inspiration. A character gains influence in a certain situation only if you grant it, and bringing influence into play requires spending it. Characters can gain influence by doing favors for NPCs, advancing the cause of an organization, or demonstrating their power and heroism, at your discretion. As with inspiration, a character can choose to spend influence to gain advantage on a roll relevant to that influence.

Another way to handle influence is to treat it like renown (see chapter 1), allowing characters to gain renown at court and within various key factions.