

# BUBBLEGUMSHOE

A TEEN DETECTIVE STORY GAME



Based on the  
GUMSHOE system  
by Robin Laws

**GUMSHOE**

EMILY CARE BOSS | KENNETH HITE | LISA STEELE

# BUBBLEGUMSHOE

## A TEEN DETECTIVE STORY GAME

SOMEONE STOLE MY KID BROTHER'S BIKE...

SOMEONE SABOTAGED THE PEP RALLY...

SOMEONE DESTROYED THE HOMECOMING QUEEN'S REPUTATION...

The world is full of mysteries. It's up to your group of intrepid teen sleuths to solve them. In Bubblegumshoe, players step into the shoes of high-schoolers solving mysteries in a modern American small town. Discover clues, solve problems, and throw down with enemies in this streamlined RPG based on the GUMSHOE system.

In this stand-alone game, you'll find:

- Rules to create your Sleuth's web of relationships and make the most of GUMSHOE's resource-management
- A simple setting system designed for large scale town creation all the way down to scene locations, plus extensive information on Drewsbury, a ready-to-go setting
- A variety of short mystery starters, including a full introductory mystery: Hey! That's My Bike!
- Extensive support to help GMs create their own mysteries using pre-established characters and settings
- Rules for social Throwdowns as well as physical altercations to reflect the drama of high school noir
- A slimmed-down list of investigative abilities vs GUMSHOE's default to make for faster decision making

**BUBBLEGUMSHOE. THE SECRETS WILL OUT.**

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## A TEEN DETECTIVE STORY GAME

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# INTRODUCTION

*Bubblegumshoe* (*BGS* for short) is a GUMSHOE system game intended to reflect the dramatic reality of teen-detective stories, from *Nancy Drew* and the *Hardy Boys* to *Pretty Little Liars*. While some of its source material is suitable for younger kids, *BGS* is a game intended for PG-13 or older audiences.

Although the *BGS* concepts can apply to anything from small-town America in the 1930s to a space station to Little Italy, the “default” *Bubblegumshoe* story is as follows:

*High schoolers solving mysteries in a modern,  
American small-town setting.*

Think of a town like Santa Barbara, California, or Morristown, New Jersey, or Beloit, Wisconsin: one close enough to a major city that problems can leak in from there, but self-enclosed enough to be its own community.

The problems your Sleuths resolve include standard mysteries:

- Where is the missing will?
- Who strangled the homecoming queen?
- What’s up with those creepy guys hanging out by the track and field shed?
- Is the vice principal embezzling from the school?

And more personal mysteries:

- Why did Serena leave school and delete her Facebook page?
- How can I get Kendall’s iPhone back without anyone seeing the pictures on it?
- Why does my BFF suddenly hate me?
- What new hell has Gabriel’s new hookup gotten him into this week?
- Who ratted us out to the vice principal?

Any of these goals might provide the direction, the plot, the through-line of a scenario or adventure, usually referred to in this game as an **episode** or (for more literary groups) a **mystery**. One episode may take many sessions of game play; 2 or 3 sessions per episode is normal.

This plot is not a story. The Game Moderator's notes on this plot are especially not a story. The story emerges as you, the players, bring that structure to life through the actions of your characters. The story then proceeds from scene to scene, where you determine the pace, discovering clues and putting them together. Your characters gather physical evidence, talk to who might know what's going on, check out suspicious locations, and deal with Gabriel's needy texts.

In *Bubblegumshoe*, players define their town alongside the Game Moderator, or **GM**, turning it from a backdrop into a true setting for mysteries. Thus, over the course of several cases, the larger social background may come to resemble its own mystery, as the players explore the web of secrets, favors, and hatreds behind the scenes of their high school, their small town, or even their own family.

In some mysteries (especially in the film noir tradition), a particular crime shows these social tensions in symbolic high relief, or opens the way for the detective to penetrate the dark heart of the town. It's up to the GM whether she wants to provide such a setting-defining crime up front (as in *Twin Peaks* or *Veronica Mars*) or wait for rising social tensions to produce it within the narrative (as in *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Vampire Diaries*). Either way works, as does just telling a series of mystery stories and allowing the background to emerge organically.

### She's Got the Look

From Nancy Drew to Veronica Mars, the iconic teen sleuth is gendered female, in much the same way, perhaps, that the iconic armored knight is gendered male. Thus, the default pronoun in the *Bubblegumshoe* rules set is "she." We use "he" to refer only to specifically male characters (her Dad, her boyfriend) or when clarity would completely collapse otherwise.

Players, of course, may create and portray Sleuths of other genders if they wish.

# GUMSHOE 101

GUMSHOE games are about solving mysteries by accumulating clues. In GUMSHOE, if you have the ability, you get the clue. No roll needed.

Check your character sheet. Most of it is a list of abilities. You buy points in those abilities at the beginning of the game, and can add a few points to them after each adventure (or if you've saved some points to add in the middle of play). The total number of points you've bought in an ability is its **rating**, usually expressed this way: Athletics 5. As you spend points from that ability, you're spending from its **pool**. Your pool can go up or down as you spend and refresh: if you spend 2 points of Athletics to help scramble over the bleachers in time to hide, your Athletics **pool** is down to 3, but your Athletics **rating** stays Athletics 5.

The **Investigative abilities** listed there *always work*, even if you only have a rating of 1 and a pool of 0. Whenever it seems relevant, all you need to do is tell the GM you have the ability—she'll give you the clue from that scene. Sometimes, the GM will even prompt you: "Who's got the best Fashion?" You might feel like roleplaying your discovery or realization out, which is cool as long as you're not delaying the other players from their own spotlight time in the next discovery scene.

You can spend Investigative ability points to get special benefits: more information, better reactions from folks interested in those topics, a sweet roleplaying moment like a flashback, or even a point to use in a future contest if you spend well. Like using abilities for free, the GM might offer a spend: "Who wants to spend a point of Fashion?" Spends are story currency: when you spend, you're saying, "My character can add neat stuff to this scene"; when the GM offers a spend, she's saying, "There's more neat stuff beneath the surface, if you want it." Spend if you want to—even if you spend your Investigative pool down to 0, that ability still always gets you a core clue.

Now for **General abilities**—these abilities might not work. These are things like Driving and Sneaking. If you've got a 0 in those abilities, you're just no good at them. If you've got **any** General ability score, the ability usually works about half the time. To try for a better result, you spend points from your pool. (Remember, spending is a request for neat stuff: in this case, for the chance to look good and do well.) Roll a d6 and add your spend: if you beat the Difficulty, you succeeded! The GM sets the Difficulty, from 2 (super easy) to 8 (super hard). The usual Difficulty is 4, so you usually succeed half the time if you don't spend. Failing a General ability test might stink, but it makes the story more interesting: now the gangbangers saw you trying to Sneak past them...

...which means it might be time for some **Interpersonal abilities**!

These abilities normally work just like Investigative abilities, except with people instead of crime scenes. Most people you deal with respond to some kind of Interpersonal ability: Intimidation, Flirting, or Reassurance, for example. Talking to them reveals a core clue without a spend, or you can spend Interpersonal points to dig a little deeper or get a better reaction. You can also spend Interpersonal ability points not just for special benefits, but for bonuses to your roll in the General ability **Throwdown**: social combat with your hated rival or stupid ex-boyfriend.

**Relationship abilities** are basically bonus ability pools tied to specific people. Spending those points helps you out—but it puts stress on your relationships!



# CHARACTER CREATION

This game uses the term **Sleuths** to refer to the main characters, the teen detectives played by the players. Outside the Roadster Era (ca. 1920-1960), the character is unlikely to refer to herself as a sleuth, but you never know.

Sleuths begin with build points distributed among four areas: Investigative, Interpersonal, General, and Relationships. For all but General abilities, the number of points depends on the number of players:

# of Players	Investigative Build Points	Interpersonal Build Points	Relationship Build Points
2	8	12	18
3	7	10	15
4	6	9	13
5+	5	8	12

All Sleuths begin with 40 General build points. You receive 4 points in Cool for free.

All the players should go through the abilities lists to make sure the whole team has all the Investigative abilities covered among them. Having all the Interpersonal abilities covered is handy, but not as crucial.

We have four players in our group, plus the GM. That means everyone gets 6 Investigative build points, 9 Interpersonal build points, and 13 Relationship build points.

Our four Sleuths are:

**JESSICA PARK**, only child of the county forensic pathologist, second-generation Korean-American. Learning Korean in memory of her late father, a GP who worked for rich and poor in town. She likes photography and wants to be a journalist to help fight injustice.

**TYLER LINCOLN**, only child, Black American. His father, an architect, wants him to follow in his footsteps. Stays on the straight and narrow since his mom, a cop, would blow her stack if he strayed. Into computers and music, plays bass and keys.

**AMANDA BARRETT**, third child of four, star soccer forward. She lives with her aunt, works for a garage in town (fixes her own car), and stands out only on the soccer field and in art class. She gets into trouble with terrible bands or terrible boys.

**ELIZABETH SORIANO**, younger of two kids, Latina. Bi- or pansexual and biracial. Her parents are "amicably" divorced, and lightly spoil her. She's a cheerleader with impressive artistic talent and amazing taste in music and clothes; her brother Gabriel is a jock king with more issues than her.

We'll mostly follow Jessica, but the others will show up when we need them to. All four characters' sheets are in the back of this book (starting on page 254) as examples or as quick-start characters for your game.

*If you'd like, you can start defining how your characters befriended each other now, or you can play the process out in your first few episodes.* You must spend at least 5 build points defining Relationships during character creation.

*You can absolutely positively save build points to use later*, defining abilities or relationships (mostly Like, one assumes) on an ad hoc basis in play. These don't represent the sudden gaining of knowledge or techniques or parents—although Relationships do tend to pop up out of nowhere at weird moments. Instead, spending a build point during play shows the Sleuth revealing an ability or friend she has always had, but didn't bother to mention until now.

You can't move points from one box to the other, though: Relationship build points have to be saved for Relationships, for example.

*Bubblegumshoe* assumes that the Sleuths know each other. "The New Girl" is certainly a viable concept for one character if you plan to rapidly interlink the newcomer with the other Sleuths and the town, but it's hard to work the antisocial loner into adventures week after week.

### Getting the Band Together

During character creation you'll want to figure out how your Sleuths know each other and why they cooperate to solve mysteries. Are they good friends or reluctant allies? Do they trust each other, and if so, how far? It's probably a good idea to think about this early—while you're creating your character concept and before you get too deeply into buying skills, creating Relationships, and thinking about **CLASS**, **CLIQUE**, and **CLUBS**.

Sleuths might know one another all the way from the kindergarten sandbox, or might have met and bonded during a boring summer job last year. Each player could say a sentence or two about her Sleuth's general reputation, with an emphasis on how she deals with problem solving. Have the player to the right add a sentence or two about how their Sleuth knows the first, or helped the first solve a problem. Then have the player to the left add a similar sentence or two. Move on to the next player until all the Sleuths are interlinked.

Another option is to have the players ask each other questions about their Sleuths like:

- Where do we usually hang out?
- How do we go way back?
- What secret of yours do only I know?
- How was I there when you really needed help?
- How did I let you down when you relied on me?
- What do I owe you?

### Character Creation Checklist

Based on number of players, assign Investigative, Interpersonal, and Relationship build point totals. Assign each player 40 General ability build points (refer to table page 9).

- Spend Investigative and Interpersonal build points on your chosen abilities. Make sure all the abilities are covered by at least one Sleuth (page 13, 15).
- Spend points on General abilities. Take 4 free points in the Cool ability (page 18).
- Spend at least 5 of your Relationship build points on Relationships. If you take a Hate, you get 3 more Relationship build points (page 23).
- Define your Class, Clique, and Club (page 34).
- Decide how your Sleuths know each other.
- You might want to wait until after Town Creation for these last two steps. Or not (page 130).
- Choose your Drive (page 36).
- Decide on a compelling story arc.
- You're done!

cat loaf  
new pad  
com  
5 stat types /

# WHAT YOU CAN DO: ABILITIES

Characters take action by using their abilities: Investigative, Interpersonal, and General. As in other GUMSHOE games, the abilities are designed to overlap, and to allow multiple solutions for any given problem. Don't be afraid to interpret broadly if it moves the story forward and produces excitement.

## INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

These are the skills your young Sleuths use to hunt down leads, research crime-related information, and gather evidence to pin down the guilty. They reflect awareness, exposure, and insight into the world, as well as talents and abilities to take action and narrow down the field of inquiry. The game doesn't care how your ability manifests. If you have even 1 point in Scholarship, for example, you can be a grind who studies four hours a night for all your classes—or just a lucky guesser with a trick memory.

In classic GUMSHOE fashion, if a core clue is needed to solve the mystery, and a Sleuth with the right Investigative ability is on the scene, she gets that clue without a roll or a spend.

## Complete Ability List

### INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

- Fashion
- Notice
- Outdoors
- Photography
- Pop Culture
- Research
- Scholarship
- Town Lore

### INTERPERSONAL ABILITIES

- BS Detector
- Flattery
- Flirting
- Gossip
- Grownup Face
- Impersonate
- Intimidation
- Negotiation
- Performance
- Reassurance
- Taunt

### GENERAL ABILITIES

- Athletics
- Computers
- Cool
- Driving
- Fighting
- Filch
- First Aid
- Intuition
- Preparedness
- Repair
- Sneaking
- Throwdown

If one of your Investigative abilities has a rating of 0, it means you just won't contribute to solving the mystery with that ability. Your skills don't pay the bills. For example, anyone can snap a selfie, but it takes points in Photography to take pictures in low light without a flash or from a long distance, spot digital retouching or Photoshop, work backwards from a photograph to figure out where it was taken, take a clear picture "from the hip" without being noticed, or see telling clues in a photo.

Look at it this way: if another player spent points in Photography, she wants her character to do the shutterbugging for your group. Go do what you spent points in and let her have her spotlight-flash?—moment.

**FASHION:** What do his shoes say about him and his socioeconomic class? How can I dress to hide my social class?

**NOTICE:** See things nobody else saw. Or see something anyone was bound to see eventually—but see it **first**.

**OUTDOORS:** Nature, birds, all that stuff. Spot broken twigs or tracks.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Take pictures, especially when and where you're not supposed to—or not supposed to be able to. Also, look at them with a keen eye.

**POP CULTURE:** What's hot, what's not. Know bands, anything the kids these days are into. Consider it a catchall for youth culture.

**RESEARCH:** Look things up. This includes Google, city records, and your school library, but not "hack into the DMV database."

**SCHOLARSHIP:** Anything you'd learn in school, from diagramming sentences to trig. It might also include useful information. It can include French, German, or Spanish (or Latin in some schools or settings), but most Languages come out of Relationships ("My boyfriend is Vietnamese so I can speak it a little").

**TOWN LORE:** Stuff about your town, its personalities and feuds and weird locations.

# INTERPERSONAL ABILITIES

The time comes in every investigation when you've identified a suspect and the next step is to put the hard questions to them. Depending on who you are, you may take the subtle approach where they don't know they're being probed, pepper them with direct and honest questions, or face them down with physical or emotional intimidation.

## Interpersonal abilities

determine how well you can shake or psych the information out of someone, as well as influence their choices and even feelings about you, your clients, loved ones, or friends. Spreading dirt, spinning information, and manipulating information can be getting down and dirty, but it's also par for the course in high school.

Sleuths can use Interpersonal abilities to gather clues: by Flirting with the chess nerd, she might learn who was hanging around school that afternoon, or by using Grownup Face on the vice principal, she might get a locker searched. These work just like Investigative abilities; if they provide core clues, the Sleuth doesn't have to spend any points. If they could give her extra information or another advantage, she can spend points if she wishes.

Sleuths can also use Interpersonal abilities as spends for Throwdown contests and other social combat tests. They provide flavor to the fiction, showing each of the Sleuths' own personal takes on the social take-down. Spending 1 point of an Interpersonal ability in a social combat adds +2 to the die.

## Jessica Park: Investigative Abilities

Jessica has 6 points to spend. In GUMSHOE, even 1 point indicates impressive skill in a topic. 2 points is a defining characteristic, indicating all-state ranking, huge natural talent, or dazzling expertise. 3 points is something you want your Sleuth to do a lot in every episode.

Jessica puts 3 points into Notice, and 1 point each into Photography, Research, and Scholarship. (She talks Tyler into taking Town Lore so she can triple-down on Notice.)

## Capital T That Stands For Throwdown

A “throwdown” is the general word we use to describe any social combat or hostile social contest. The “Throwdown” ability is the capacity to be good at throwdowns. When we mean the ability, it’s capitalized.

If it helps, think of the two as like “a fight” and the Fighting ability. Except, since throwdowns are actually important, we have more rules for them: pages 59-68.

**BS DETECTOR:** Spot a liar, even if you don’t know what the truth is. Yet.

It's not perfect; some drug addicts are too messed up even to lie recognizably, people who don't know they're lying don't signal mendacity, and the occasional genuine sociopath just lies and lies so often the signals are permanently burned out.

**FLATTERY:** Tell them what they want to hear about themselves.

**FLIRTING:** Feminine wiles. Or if your Sleuth is male, whatever it is guys have that works like that. Brooding in a tight T-shirt, maybe.

Also, notice someone else flirting—with you, or with someone across the room.

**GOSSIP:** Find the “word on the street” in school and in your own teen subculture. Who’s dating who, who’s hating who, who’s holding, and so on.

**GROWNUP FACE:** Get an adult to take you seriously.

Amanda  
Abe Park  
3:00

## Does This Ability List Make Me Look Fat?

Players of other GUMSHOE games may ask: where are the Bureaucracy and Streetwise abilities? We answer: get Relationships with the administrative assistant or a drug dealer.

We've slimmed down the list of abilities, and consolidated some of them, to give the players more mental and story room to explore their Relationships—the “teen” half of the “teen detective” genre, if you will.

**IMPERSONATE:** Pretend to be someone you're not, usually on a phone or online. With a white shirt and dark pants, in-person Impersonate might work at a restaurant ("I'll be your server, Kimberley"). With a fake ID, it might get you into a bar. If you have 2 points in Impersonate, you may have a fake ID.

Impersonating a specific person in the flesh is pretty much impossible if the target knows the person you're impersonating. Stick to online or texts.

**INTIMIDATION:** Might be a bluff, might be a threat. Get in their space, make them back down.

**NEGOTIATION:** Find what they want and promise it to them. This very much includes "You don't like me, but we both hate Kaitlyn Price. Let's gang up."

**PERFORMANCE:** Dancing, singing, playing an instrument, cheerleading, theater arts, and so forth. This might aid Throwdown contests at the prom, or let the Sleuth convincingly grind on someone's ex, for example, or threaten someone in the context of an innocent-seeming karaoke song or *Hamlet* monologue.

Performance-minded players of Performance-minded Sleuths will find ways to use this ability: short of turning the game into *Glee*, the GM should let them.

**REASSURANCE:** The opposite of Intimidation: you're not a threat, and you'll keep them safe from threats. Encompasses fast talk, sympathy, and calm.

**TAUNT:** Get them angry and stop them thinking.



### Jessica Park: Interpersonal Abilities

Jessica has 9 points to spend. Since you can spend Interpersonal Abilities on social combat contests, it's worth "overstocking" the ones you will enjoy roleplaying, or that you think really fit your Sleuth's personality and skill set.

Jessica puts 3 points into Grownup Face, 2 points each into BS Detector and Impersonate, and 1 point each into Performance (her saxophone) and Reassurance.



## GENERAL ABILITIES

General abilities are used for a wide range of actions you may need to take during the course of investigating a case. You **roll 1d6 to succeed** in a General ability against a target Difficulty number usually ranging from 2 (easy) to 8 (nearly impossible). You may **spend points** from a General ability pool to increase your die roll, giving you a better chance of success. In most situations, you can guarantee success just by spending 3 points! And remember, if you have **any** rating in a General ability, you usually have a 50% chance of doing something (Difficulty 4), even if you've spent your pool down to 0.

Someone with a General ability rating of 0 can't even try, at least not against any opposition or under any kind of time pressure. With Driving 0, you can drive down the street and maybe parallel park if people just stop yelling at you for two minutes—but you can't follow another car, or win a drag race.

You can also use many General abilities as either Investigative abilities (Athletics tells you that weight set wasn't put back right—the fullback wouldn't have done it) or Interpersonal abilities (Athletics lets you talk to athletes as a peer). Your GM will let you know if you're being out of line with those.

**ATHLETICS:** Jock stuff, run away from thugs, climb over fences.

**COMPUTERS:** Hack into the DMV, put up a convincing phony website, send an anonymous email. You will almost always be able to **do** the exploit—the roll is usually for your ability not to get **caught**.

This is a prime ability to use Investigatively as well.

**COOL:** This is “cool,” as in “keeping a cool head” or “keeping your cool,” not as in “cool kids’ table.” You can be a calm, serene nerd or a twitchy, hair-trigger cheerleader. That said, high school being what it is, a high Cool rating often goes along with higher teen “rank.”

This ability can be considered “social hit points”—it’s covered in more detail further on. See “*Cool*,” page 49.

Your Sleuth begins with 4 free points in Cool. If you have a rating of 10 or more in Cool, then you can be “school royalty” if you wish: star athlete, head cheerleader, socially protected class clown, etc.

***Cool ability points function similarly to both Health and Stability in normal GUMSHOE.*** They are the currency that allows you to act freely in dangerous social (or occasionally physical) situations. The longer you can keep Cool, the more you can do in a scene.

**DRIVING:** Just driving to school takes no skill. This ability covers driving a car unusually fast or unusually well, or special activities like drift racing or tailing someone by car.

**FIGHTING:** Any form of physical combat. Fighting is against school policy, and against the law. See page 58 for rules.

**FILCH:** Steal small things unobtrusively. This ability also covers planting stuff on someone, or hiding something small somewhere unobtrusive.

**FIRST AID:** Use this ability to move people back up the Injury Track. See “*GETTING INJURED*,” page 80.

This ability also covers Investigatively noticing that someone is sick, hiding an injury, or the like.

**INTUITION:** If it could hurt you right now, this is your chance to notice it. This especially includes social trouble: if this party looks skeevy, or if Kaitlyn seems way too happy to see you.

This is also the roll you make to “just happen by” the old mill to find your chum Helen tied up there.

*This is the equivalent of the GUMSHOE standard ability Sense Trouble.*

**PREPAREDNESS:** This roll is the “of course I had it in my backpack” roll. This includes “I brought my pepper spray” or “I brought Wolf. My dog. My big dog.” The less likely you were to actually have it in your backpack, the higher the Difficulty. If not just the GM but the other players think it’s bogus, your Difficulty may be “don’t bother rolling.”

You already have the standard equipment for abilities you have points in. If you have any points in Photography, you don’t need to roll Preparedness to have a camera; if you have a rating in Computers, you don’t need to roll to have your laptop; Sleuths with Repair have multi-tools squirreled away in their purse or jeans pocket. And so forth.

**REPAIR:** Basic repairs to stuff, from handbags to Hondas. Also covers lock...smithing. Ahem.

If your game owes more to *Scooby Doo* than it does to the *Hardy Boys*, this is also the ability for constructing booby traps. See page 207 for rules.

**SNEAKING:** Move around without being seen or heard. Also covers tailing someone on foot.

**THROWDOWN:** Any form of social combat, usually amplified with an Interpersonal ability. If your game likely involves a lot of social combat, and you plan for your Sleuth to hold her own on that front, this is a helpful stat to take a high score in.

The Throwdown ability is **not** required to take part in a social combat scene; you can often use other abilities or Relationships.

See pages 59-68 for rules for social combat.

lewin -  
Mr. Will  
- connection!

## Jessica Park: General Abilities

Jessica has 40 points to spend. In GUMSHOE, a General ability rating of 0 is basic competence at best: Computers 0 lets you surf the Web and write a term paper in Word, but not hack an account or write code. A rating of 1-2 is a sideline, 3-4 is solid but not off the charts, 5-7 is a personal specialty, and 8 or better is really impressive.

Jessica's player wants to dominate the detective archetype: she puts 8 points each into Intuition and Sneaking. With a doctor in the family, 5 points in First Aid makes sense. She puts 4 points into each of Preparedness and Throwdown, just in case; then 3 into Fighting (leftover martial arts training, perhaps). She puts 2 points into Athletics, Computers, and Driving for some kind of chance with those abilities, and adds her last 2 points to the 4 free points in Cool for a total of Cool 6.

## CAP ABILITIES

If a player wants a specific, generally narrow, ability not on this list—Art, Crime Scene Procedure, Escape Artist, Electronic Surveillance, Skeleton Keys, Cop Talk (as opposed to a Relationship with a specific cop), Stunt Driving, Drug Culture—she can buy it with a Cap. A Cap ability has four main constraints:

- Can only be bought up to 2 if an Investigative or Interpersonal ability, or 6 if a General ability.
- It costs 5 build points (from anywhere) to get your first point in a Cap ability.
- Only one player may have any one Cap ability.
- Only one Cap ability per player.

It is almost always cheaper to buy a Relationship with someone who has that skill, or access to a firearm, or whatever it is you want. Then you spend points from that Relationship to get it done. But some folks like having skills that are always available.



Tyler buys Electronic Surveillance as an Investigative ability. He has to spend 6 build points to get it at the maximum rating of 2: 5 build points for the first rating point, and 1 point for the next.

Elizabeth wants to be an artist. Anyone can draw a simple sketch, but she wants to have the kind of talent that draws even adult attention. She spends 5 build points for the first rating point in Art.

Missing since  
Thurs, early  
already Strange...



## There's Always Someone Thinks They're Tough: Violent Cap Abilities

If you really, really want to be "that guy," you can take a Cap ability in Firearms, or Knives, or Tasers—or Jeet Kune Do or Brazilian Jiu Jitsu or whatever. Since this is not actually a game about fighting people, these Cap abilities don't do much for you.

Pretty much the only mechanical bonus you get from having a Cap ability is:

- With a successful hit, you can move someone from Fine to Injured directly by spending 2 extra points of Cool, of Fighting, or of your Cap ability. This automatically occurs if you're using a weapon. See page 58 for damage rules, and for the Cool cost you pay for doing damage.
- If you have a Cap ability for unarmed combat, you can kill someone without using a weapon.
- You can also use your Cap ability Investigatively like you can other abilities: Firearms lets you blend in at the shooting range, while Boxing might let you spend fewer points of Cool to get into the illegal fight club. The GM adjudicates these uses as she sees fit.

That's it! Hope you enjoy your time in jail.

# CREATING RELATIONSHIPS

What is a Relationship? It's the bond that one of the Sleuths has with a member of the supporting cast: a character played by the GM instead of one of the other players, called a **Non-Player Character** or NPC. These are the people that help them investigate mysteries. They can also get themselves and the Sleuths into trouble.

Relationships fall into one of three categories: Loves, Likes, or Hates.

- **LOVES** are best friends, close relatives, and romantic partners who feel strongly about the Sleuth and who are committed to her.
- **LIKES** are friends or friendly contacts that the Sleuth has been there for. They'd be willing to go the extra mile a time or two.
- **HATES** are people who can't stand the Sleuth and take the time to make things hard for her.

The Relationship itself refers to how the NPC feels about the Sleuth. It shows how strongly this person feels about her, positively or negatively. It reflects how far out of their way they will go to help the Sleuth they know. Relationships can fluctuate. They start with point pools determined at character creation. Players spend Relationship points during sessions to use abilities the Sleuths don't have or to gain access to places the teens have difficulty entering. Likes and Loves are catnip to GMs: ready-made dudes in distress that can come to the Sleuths for help, become swept up in events, or become collateral damage when things go pear shaped.

Relationships can also be with people who hate the Sleuths. These are often liabilities since these people will go out of their way to make the Sleuths' lives a little more difficult, possibly even interfering in the investigation. These are the GM's friend. It's always great to put a twist in a straightforward investigation by bringing out someone with a grudge. However, when you take a Hate Relationship for your Sleuth, there are benefits to the Sleuth. If you ever succeed in a social conflict with someone who Hates your character, that's a time to celebrate. Your peers respect you for it, and there are mechanical rewards in the game.

You gain 3 Cool when your Sleuth beats a Hate in a contest.

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: SLEUTHS

Each player gets a set number of build points to put into Relationships during character creation. (See "*BUILD POINT TABLE*," page 9.)

Invest at least 5 of these points in Relationships.

Leftover points can be put into Relationships you create on the fly during the game.

If you're setting up for a campaign and you create many Relationships during character creation, not all

may come into play during the first session. If this is a one-shot game, you may want to make just a few important characters, and leave the majority of your points open to help make allies (or enemies) as you play.

If you're using a Supporting Cast Checklist (page 93, 256), add your Relationships to it as you create them.

Begin by defining your Loves, then add Likes if you wish. The GM will work with you on creating Hates.

Each Relationship starts with five things:

**NAME:** Who the Relationship is with.

**NATURE AND TAG:** The Nature of the Relationship (Like, Love, or Hate), plus a Tag—a brief elaboration on how the character feels about the Sleuth.

**POINTS:** The number of build points invested in the Relationship.

## Among Peers

Although the Sleuth gang is a group of friends, the players do not set up Relationships between them. These characters enter play as friends or acquaintances as you see fit. They may have arguments or fall in love, but that's up to you as players to say how it goes without any kind of mechanical benefit or penalty. You can (and will) help each other with your General abilities (and Interpersonal ability spends in Throwdown contests), but you get to decide when and how. The rules for NPCs are there because supporting cast members don't have a player devoted to playing them all the time—and because they aren't the stars.

**ABILITY:** A new General ability that the NPC can loan to a Sleuth who has a Relationship with that NPC.

**LOCATION:** A Location (page 92) where they are at home. Note that now, or add it during Town creation (page 130).

The GM—and in some games, the players!—will add to this NPC description over time. Specifically, the GM adds a Thumbnail and a Trouble to one or two Relationships at the beginning. This is just like sketching out the NPC for any game; add details to characters you suspect will show up early.

**THUMBNAIL:** A brief description of the NPC's real self, true nature, or convenient dramatic fate. The GM may or may not reveal this to the player (See page 91).

**TROUBLE:** The NPC's biggest worry, or at least his biggest worry likely to trigger drama or story movement (See page 92).

## School Supplies

The GM will probably want to have a notebook (or a dedicated file in her tablet) to write things down in. Things like: all these NPCs and their various values. The Locations in the Town, and her secret notes on them. Plans for future plots and story beats for character arcs. The name of the mastermind. Which Hates haven't turned up lately.

For a lot of these things—NPCs and Locations especially—it may be easiest to use index cards or note cards. The players can keep track of their own characters' Relationships or Locations they've visited on the cards, making their own notes about favors owed or weird conversations overheard. The GM's "cards" might just be pages in her notebook, although actual cards are easier to move around while planning an adventure.

## Name

This is the name of the character. Include how the Sleuth is related to them.

**MONICA PARK**, Jessica's Mother



**GREG HANNOVER**, Tyler's Best Friend



**ALBINIA BARTEK**, Amanda's Coach

**GABRIEL SORIANO**, Elizabeth's Brother

## Nature and Tag

The description is a simple statement about what the NPC feels. It's written from the point of view of the Sleuth. It must include the word Love, Like, or Hate and another tag that explains or gives more detail about the relationship. The tag may be a word or a phrase.

Jessica's player mostly focuses the Relationships on her, but she tags one of Tyler's Relationships to help the story along. All the Sleuths are likely to have some Relationship with Principal Sanchez, either now or as the campaign develops.

**MONICA PARK** (Mom) Loves me and worries I'm pushing myself too hard.

**GREG HANNOVER** Likes me, even though I broke up with him.

**GINNY MONTROSE** Likes me and looks up to me for standing up for her in gym class.

**PRISCILLA ORTIZ** has Liked me since grammar school, but her friends on the cheerleading team tease her for it.

**PRINCIPAL VIRGINIA SANCHEZ** Likes me because she saw me stand up for another student.

**KAITLYN PRICE** Hates me for dating Greg even though she told me Greg was too good for me.

If you spend from that Relationship, invoking or otherwise harmonizing with that tag can earn you a refresh of Relationship or Cool points. Contradicting that tag can make that spend more expensive. (See “*RELATIONSHIPS AND COOL*,” page 98.)

## **LIKE, LOVE, AND HATE**

The Nature always includes the type of Relationship the character has with the Sleuth: Love, Like, or Hate.

**Loves** are people who love you, almost always more than you deserve: parents, boyfriends, girlfriends, BFFs. These are characters who are the closest to the Sleuths, and their support goes a long way. Cool points spent involving a Love Relationship count double. However, when you call on their help, it means that the GM may take that as an invitation to get those your Sleuth loves most involved in the trouble you’re investigating.

**Likes** include frenemies, acquaintances, people who sit behind you in French 2, and friends from Clubs and Cliques. A Pet can be included as a Like, but be sure you can use them enough to make it worth spending the points—a dog who can track people, intimidate gangsters, and look cute in the dog park might be worth it. You can have a cat or bird or hedgehog to add flavor to the Sleuth without spending Relationship points.

**Hates** are people who hate you, who would go out of their way to do you dirt. These might be rivals in love or academics, step-brothers who resent your relationship with their dad, queen bees of the clique you’re threatening to infiltrate, losers you rejected in 8th grade and haven’t thought about since. The Sleuths are good kids, but we’ve all done someone wrong. Or crossed the wrong person and lived to regret it. The GM will create a Hate Relationship for you, or you can work with her to do so. When you take a Hate, that Relationship starts at 3 for free, and you gain 3 build points to put into your other Relationships. Hates help put the pressure on your Sleuth, but they strengthen your other Relationships as your friends back you up against this threat. The Hate gives the GM resources to use against you, but if you defeat someone who Hates you, you gain Cool points. New Hates may be added later in play.

## Points

The number of build points you invest in a Relationship lets you know how important that character is to your Sleuth, as well as how much you can call on this person for help in a given session. (See "USING RELATIONSHIPS," page 94.)

You must invest at least 5 build points into Relationships when you create your Sleuth. The GM may offer to create a Hate with you, which gives you 3 free build points to invest in your Like and Love Relationships.

Jessica's player has 13 points to assign, plus 3 for taking a Hate. Jessica's Relationships look like this when she's done:

Mom	Love 6
Ginny	Like 4
Greg	Like 3
Priscilla	Like 1
Principal Sanchez	Like 2
Kaitlyn	Hate 3



Warehouse deserted.  
Took some pics  
#creepy!

She figures Jessica is close to her mom and has a real ally in Ginny. Jessica will need every point she can squeeze out of Principal Sanchez, but Jessica's player thinks keeping Greg close will really pay off in drama later.

## Relationship Ability

Each Relationship character has some skill or talent that may be able to help the Sleuths in their investigations. This is an Investigative or General ability *not* on the existing list. It may be a specialization of one of the existing abilities, or it may be a broad description of their job. Pick something that makes sense based on who the character is. Use them to round out the skill set available to the Sleuths.



Adults likely have abilities related to their work or some interest of theirs: police officers may have Forensics, Cop Talk, or Interrogate; a language teacher could have a language like Russian or Chinese; someone who runs a bike or car shop could have Trace Vehicle, Business, or just Bike Shop.

Other possible abilities are very broad, tracking with the NPC's position in school or society: Cop, Computer Geek, Gangster, Quarterback, Librarian, Shop Teacher, Judge, etc. But they might be anything from Heavy Construction Equipment to Aramaic.

The GM should veto crazy or out-of-genre abilities (e.g., Terrorist, X-Ray Vision).

Fellow teens may have a hobby or academic area they specialize in. Club members may be able to provide specialties for areas the Sleuths

have some knowledge of. For example, a Computer or Photography Club member might be able to provide Electronic Surveillance, or Fraud Identification.

Sleuths with a Relationship to the NPC can “borrow” those abilities, either by involving the NPC or (with something like Firearms or Sport Fishing) borrowing the specialized tool involved. This, of course, can get the Sleuth into trouble.

Additional abilities get added over time, as builds awarded between sessions by the GM (page 83).

## **Location**

Each Relationship character has a place she frequents where she has influence. If it’s a Location with a Threshold Cost for the Sleuths to enter, having a Relationship with them can allow the Sleuths to waive the cost. Choose a Location during character or Town creation (pages 92-93).

See pages 122-130 for more on Locations.

## **Recording Relationships**

Players write down their Relationship characters on the character sheet for their Sleuth. The entry will look like this:

 Monica Park, Jessica’s Mother. Loves me and worries I’m pushing myself too hard. Love 6.

**ABILITY:** Forensics

**LOCATION:** Medical Examiner’s Office

The GM tracks the Sleuths’ Relationships using her own Supporting Cast Checklist. This gives a space to record relevant information about the NPC, and to keep track of how much she has come into play during the game.

The entry on the GM’s Supporting Cast Checklist will look like this:

 Monica Park, Jessica’s Mother. Love 6. Forensics.  
Debt. Medical Examiner’s Office.

For important NPCs, the GM can also write out their information on a note card, adding Thumbnail and Trouble. It's fair game—indeed, it's practically mandatory—to use these NPCs to get the Sleuths into trouble, especially after a bad throwdown or other contest where they are used.

An entry on a note card might look like this:



#### JESSICA'S RELATIONSHIP:

Monica Park, Mother. Love 6.

**THUMBNAIL:** Biggest Fan: Believes in her daughter, but is worried that Jessica is pushing herself too hard. May suggest distractions from schoolwork.

**TROUBLE:** Deeply in debt and suddenly without her husband's income.

## Pick Up and Play Relationships

Different Sleuths have different types of Relationships. Use these profiles to kick-start your creation of Relationship NPCs. (The numbers are based on a four-player game, with 13 points allocated.)

**TIGHT FAMILY:** Strong bonds between the Sleuth and family members.

- Parent/Sibling Love 5
- Aunt/Uncle/Grandparent Love 3
- Cousin Like 2
- 3 Extra

**TEEN LEADER:** Popular and influential at school and with other teens.

- Best Friend Love 4
- Protégé Like 3
- Club Champion Like 2
- Favorite Teacher Like 2
- Clique Rival Hate 3
- 5 Extra



**SOCIAL BUTTERFLY:** Draws people to her.

- o Best Friend/Parent Love 4
- o Ex-Significant Other Like 2
- o Club Crush Like 1
- o Older Classmate Like 2
- o Best Friend's Sibling Like 1
- o Angry Ex Hate 3
- o 6 Extra



**UPSTANDING CITIZEN:** Involved in the Town.

- o Fellow Teen Volunteer Love 5
- o Librarian/Business Owner Like 3
- o Police Officer/Town Official Like 3
- o Volunteer Coordinator for Charity Like 2

Call Adore  
during study  
Hall Thurs.  
10/2

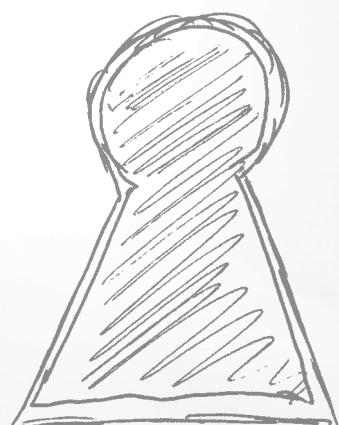
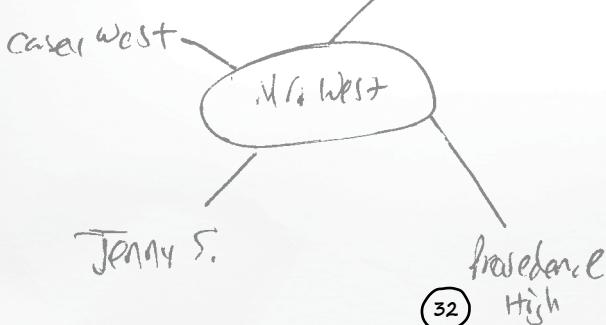
**MAKER:** Highly skilled in a hands-on hobby.

- o Parent (mechanical/computer expert) Love 5
- o Longtime Collaborator Love 4
- o Hackerspace Coordinator Like 3
- o Tech Shop Employee Like 1

**LONER:** Keeps to herself but inspires loyalty.

- o Best Friend Love 7
- o Mentor Love 5
- o Enemy Hate 3
- o 4 Extra

Axie Co.





# WHO YOU ARE: BACKGROUND, DRIVE, STORY

The way the character fits into the world tells us some basic things about who she is and what resources she has available.

## BACKGROUND

Characters fit into roles and cliques in their adolescent world. Who you are determines what kinds of ties you have to other people in your life, and what access you have to skills and resources.

School is a hotbed of social networking and joining up. Clubs and activity groups give you ready-made allies and skill sets you'd never get on your own.

Define three backgrounds for your Sleuth. Try to keep them simple and clear.

## **Class**

This is your Sleuth's socioeconomic class: Upper Crust, Working Stiff, Wrong Side of the Tracks, Middle Class, etc. This is used to determine in a common sense, freeform fashion what kind of clothes/house/cars are associated with the character. This also can affect her Cool Threshold cost to enter Locations. (See "*THRESHOLD*," page 125.)

## **Clique**

This is your Sleuth's natural friendship and social base at school (or wherever): Jocks, Cheerleaders, Gangbangers, Nerds, Stoners, Gearheads, etc. Your Sleuth may well have hatreds, rivals, etc. within this clique, but she is not automatically excluded from it. Try not to double-define your Class and your Clique: Rich Kids is both, for example.

In campaigns or settings foregrounding racial tensions, a minority Sleuth's race might be her Class or her Clique. Players should decide if that's a game they want to play before you define your Sleuth by her race. Racial tension can still play a part in some stories (usually as modifiers to Throwdown contests or Thresholds) even without an explicit decision to center on those issues.

## **Club**

This is some activity you engage in that doesn't exactly fit your Class or your Clique. It might be a school activity (School Paper, Game Club, Drama Club, Field Hockey) or a job or civic activity in town (Young Greens, 4-H, Library Page, Starbucks, Church Group).



*With a single-parent family, Jessica is Lower Middle Class. Her Clique is the Grinds, the hard-studying kids who pay attention in class and do extra credit work. Her Club is the Marching Band where she plays the saxophone, although it could just as easily be Library (where she works) or Photography Club. But it's best to pick one that stands out: her Grind Clique could overlap too much with many aspects of a Library Club.*

## Using Backgrounds

Backgrounds help define your Sleuth in relation to the setting, providing flavor and keynotes for scenes. They kickstart your imagination: Who do you know? What do you do?

Consider these elements as penumbras: If you're a stoner, you don't just know your buddies on the loading dock, but also the hippie who runs the head shop/record store/frogurt stand in town. If you're in Robotics Club, you know your maker-geek friends and the science teacher and the guy who runs the monthly swap meet at the fire hall where you can find electronic components no one outside of the CIA is supposed to have.

Your GM may let you use them to **define a “free” Relationship** in play:

“Hey, I’m in 4-H. Do I know the pig lady?”

“Sure, you have a 1-point Relationship with her. Her name is Mrs. Huffins, and she thinks Mrs. Dalrymple cheats at the pie contest every year.”

If you play your interaction with such a free Relationship entertainingly enough, the GM may promote her to a 2-point Like next time you use her, or even let you write her on your character sheet.

Your GM may let you use Backgrounds as **free-range abilities**:

“Your time in Drama Club tells you this is a fake knife.”

Or to **boost General ability rolls**:

“As an Upper Crust brat, you get an extra 2 pool points for your Driving test on this Maserati.”

Some Backgrounds will **lower (or raise) the Threshold** for a Location: Upper Crust kids get into the country club easily, while they sweat serious Cool to get into the Irish mob bar. If the Threshold modifier for a particular background is undefined, the GM will define something and record it on the Town Map (page 132).

# DRIVE

To be teen detectives, you have to really, really want to stick your nose where it doesn't belong. You can't play it smart, you can't turtle up and ignore the problem, you can't let things slide. Your Drive keeps you from behaving like a risk-averse game piece, and lets you act like a lead character in a dramatic crime show or novel.

Your Drive is your fundamental personal quality that drives you into mystery solving: Hates Not Knowing, Friendship, Lovesick, Sense of Justice, etc. Pick your Drive and write it down on your sheet.



*Jessica's Drive is Fairness. She wants good people to succeed and bad people to fail.*

*Tyler's Drive is Family Code. He's trying to live up to his parents' expectations.*

*Amanda's Drive is Risk Taker. If her life doesn't change radically, she'll hate it as she gets older. Solving mysteries is the only way she knows to change things for the better.*

*Elizabeth's Drive is Subconscious Curiosity. She doesn't know why she wants to know everything, but she really does. It's part of what makes her such a good socializer, and what gets her into trouble with her Clique.*

The GM gives you 1 or 2 Cool points for obeying your Drive, depending on how well you roleplay it and on how idiotic it would be to do the thing you're doing under normal circumstances. If you really put your heart into an entirely stupid activity to fulfill your Drive, you might get 3 Cool points.

Conversely, if you ignore your Drive because it might be stupid or dangerous to act on it, the GM will penalize you 2 or 3 Cool points, depending on how much the Drive eats at you for not doing it.

# STORY ARC

Write one sentence of something you want to accomplish on a personal level that does not include solving a mystery. This should be an ongoing character story, not the sort of thing one adventure can accomplish: "I want to become head cheerleader" or "I want to get my dad remarried" are good examples.

Characters may have mutually inconsistent arcs: two characters may want to win the same scholarship or one may want to get two other characters together, while the other wants to break them apart. When mutually inconsistent arcs appear, ask both characters for ideas of how to make their character's possible failure an interesting story (after all, only one of you can succeed). If failure isn't interesting and doesn't move the character forward, perhaps you should re-think creating inconsistent arcs.

The reward for completion of a scene in a story arc is 1 free point to define or change a Relationship. Reward for completion of the whole story arc is 5 free points to define or change a Relationship. These should be with NPCs involved in the story arc, even if it's as vaguely as "Mom is so proud (or irritated) I'm head cheerleader now!"

Once you've completed a story arc, pick another.





# RULES

Once you've built your Sleuth, it's the GM's job to involve her and her friends in a mystery. This might be anything: a conventional crime, or a teen crisis over anything from bullying to a lost dog. It might be more of a "puzzle" the players decide on themselves: "How can we get Elizabeth's brother broken up with Kaitlyn?" or "How can we get access to the morgue in case those weird missing-corpse incidents start up again?" These rules let your characters gather information, take risks, and have lots of meaty interpersonal drama along the way.

# CLUES

In teen detective stories, the detective always gets the clues she needs to solve the mystery. In GUMSHOE, the rules work the same way: you always get the clues. How you put them together is the mysterious part. Detectives, teen and otherwise, often solve the mystery too late to help the victim—moving through the story fast enough to beat the bad guys is the real challenge.

The first scene sets the scene and asks some questions: What's going on here? What do we want to happen here? Your Sleuths then gather information, conversation, and indications of where the next question might be asked, and maybe what it might be all about. Each scene contains clues: info or details pointing to a new scene. To move from scene to scene, and to solve the overall mystery, you must gather clues. They keep you moving, and move the story forward.

# GATHERING CLUES

Gathering clues is simple. All you have to do is:

- Get yourself into a scene where relevant information can be gathered.
- Have the right ability to discover the clue.
- Tell the GM that you're using that ability.

As long as you do these three things, you will never fail to gain a piece of necessary information. ***It is never dependent on a die roll.*** If you ask for it, you will get it.

You can ask for specifics: "I search the gym for footprints." You can ask in general: "I search the gym." You can speculate: "Is there a timestamp on the phone pic? I have Computers (or Photography)." You can fish: "I use Gossip to see if anyone knows anything about any weird hazing." If it's something anyone might find, like a bloodstain in the trunk, the GM gives it to the Sleuth with the highest Notice, or the Sleuth who hasn't had a spotlight moment lately.

The Sleuths want to find out who last saw Larissa leaving Kaitlyn's party on Saturday night.

**ELIZABETH:** I head into the breezeway between classes and see if the cheerleaders are gossiping there. I have Gossip 2.

**GM:** Sure enough, Erica is giving everyone the 411 on the party. To hear her tell it, it was almost an epic orgy: people were hooking up right and left.

**GM AS ERICA:** "But Larissa missed out on it, because she had a raging fight with Cameron and stormed out around 11."



# INCONSPICUOUS CLUES

Sometimes a character instinctively notices something without actively looking for it. Often this situation occurs in places she's moving through casually and doesn't regard as scenes in need of intensive searching. The team might pass by a concealed door in an old mansion, spot a blue pill in the carpet of a hotel suite, or see a genuine Banksy sprayed on the wall of the warehouse. Interpersonal abilities can also be used to find inconspicuous clues. The classic example is of a character just "acting suspicious."

We don't expect players to ask to use their abilities in every single transition or montage scene. This would waste game time and involve a lot of repetitive listing of abilities. That's crazy talk.

Instead, the GM tracks (or asks, if she doesn't have the Sleuth Ability Matrix handy, page 255) which Sleuth has the highest current pool in the relevant ability. (When in doubt, either Notice or BS Detector is the likely winner here.)

If two or more pools are equal, the spot goes to the Sleuth with the highest rating. If ratings are also equal, they find the clue at the same time.



*Jessica and Tyler are both in class when they see a girl run past the door, leaving school early. Both Sleuths have Notice; Jessica's is better.*

**GM:** "Jessica, you saw a stuffed animal in her purse, a red bird."

But Tyler has Pop Culture, and knows his football.

**GM:** "When you mention it to Tyler, he recognizes Richelieu, the Cardinal mascot of State. You see them all over, especially at pep rallies and parties on campus. Guys give them to girls they want to charm."

# SPENDS AND BENEFITS

Certain clues allow you to gain special benefits by spending 1 or 2 points from the relevant ability pool. During your first few scenarios, your GM will offer you the opportunity to spend additional points as you uncover these clues. After that, it's up to you to ask if there's anything to be gained by spending extra time or effort on a given clue. You can even propose specific ways to improve your already good result; if your suggestion is persuasive or entertaining, the GM may award you a special benefit not mentioned in her scenario notes.

Benefits might give you:

**EXTRA INFO:** By spending a point of Town Lore, you don't just know who owns the haunted mill, but the name of the caretaker and where he lives.

**AN ADVANTAGE LATER:** By spending a point of Gossip, you learn a secret about Megan you can Taunt her with in a throwdown.

**A FAVORABLE IMPACT:** By spending a point of Fashion, you know to compliment Marcie on her expensive scarf, so she's more likely to help you out.

**A TIME SAVINGS:** By spending a point of Research, you find the blueprints for the solar plant open on a table, and you don't have to spend the whole day at the grubby county records building.

**A SOLUTION TO THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM:** By spending a point of Grownup Face during the food fight, you get the lunch lady to report everyone in the cafeteria except you—and you can sneak off to look for clues.

**A MOMENT OF PERSONAL SPOTLIGHT:** By spending a point of Photography, you remember seeing Shelley when she took that selfie. You can narrate a flashback emotional moment, advance a personal story arc, or even establish a fact about Shelley or that day: "I don't think Chad ever loved her more than he did then."

Or other benefits that you or the GM come up with. Benefits make the story richer, more complete, and more fun. Offering a spend is the GM's way to say, "There's more neat stuff in this story." Asking to spend is the player's way to say, "I'd like to do something neat with this." Both GM and player should be eager to add neat stuff to the game.

Jessica wants to find out more about this argument, so she approaches Cameron.

JESSICA: I'm going to explain that we're all friends with Larissa, too. We don't blame him for anything.

GM: Cameron slowly opens up to your Reassuring ways. He explains that Larissa was obsessed with her big sister, and wanted him to drive her up to State to make sure she was okay. He called her paranoid, and she blew up at him and stomped out. Now he's really worried.

JESSICA: "What did she think was going on at State?"

GM: He's nervous about telling you. Do you want to spend a Reassurance point?

JESSICA: Sure. "I promise I won't tell anyone."

GM: He says Larissa was suspicious of this frat, the Kappa Omegas. She said they have a bad rap—but they have a lot of friends in high places, and he's going to State next year. "It's probably nothing. Forget I said anything."

## Failsafe Tests

In the course of laying down clues for the intrepid Sleuths to follow, it can seem to the GM that any reasonably competent vice principal or Oxycodone dealer would keep their secrets behind locked doors or encrypted files. In other words, that no plausible Investigative or Interpersonal ability could discover the trail; that some degree of opposed effort is required for a core clue.

But in GUMSHOE, the PCs never fail to gain a core clue. What to do?

In these circumstances, use a **failsafe test**. This is a General test that never fails. In mysteries, it's usually a test of Computers (accessing a file), Repair (breaking into an info-rich room), or Sneaking (following the smugglers to the cove), but there are no doubt others.

Set the Difficulty of the test as normal: a Sleuth who spends any General points at all will automatically succeed. (The GM can either provide a plausible excuse for the ease of the test, or just let the players believe they got lucky.) If the Sleuth doesn't spend at all—either because of point-hoarding or point-dearth—she still succeeds, but trips an alarm, shows up on the security camera, gets spotted by thugs, or otherwise increases the risk of danger *after* getting the clue.

# TESTS

A **test** occurs when the outcome of an ability use is in doubt. (Failsafe tests—discussed in the previous section—are the partial exception.) Tests apply to General abilities only. Unlike information gathering attempts, tests carry a fairly high chance of failure. They may make problems if you lose, provide advantages if you win, or both.

Even in the case of General abilities, the GM should call for tests only at dramatically important points in the story, and for tasks of exceptional difficulty. Most General ability uses should allow automatic successes, with possible bonuses on point spends, just like Investigative abilities.

There are two types of tests: simple tests and contests.

## Die Rolls

All die rolls in GUMSHOE use a single ordinary (six-sided) die, or d6.



# SIMPLE TESTS

A **simple test** occurs when the character attempts an action without active resistance from another person or entity. Examples include driving on an icy road, jumping a fence, sneaking into an unguarded building, binding a wound, hitting your target, remembering to bring a magnet along, or resisting the drummer's offer to come backstage and meet the band.

The GM determines how hard any given action is by assigning it a Difficulty number, or **Difficulty**, ranging from 2 to 8 (occasionally even higher), where 2 offers only a slim chance of failure, 4 is average, and 8 verges on the impossible. The GM might also set the Difficulty dramatically: if it's helpful for the obstacle to be overcome, perhaps because it's early in the story, she might lower the Difficulty.

The player rolls a single d6; if the result is equal to or higher than the Difficulty, the character succeeds. Before rolling the die, the player may choose to spend any number of points from the relevant ability pool, adding these to the final die result. Players who forget to specify the number of points they want to spend before rolling are stuck with the unmodified result.

As you spend points from your ability pool, your **pool** dwindles but your **rating** stays the same. Thus, even if you've spent your Throwdown pool from 8 to 5, you'd still go first in a social combat with Megan (Throwdown 6).

In the game world, expenditure of pool points in this way represents special effort and concentration by the character, the kind you can muster only so many times during the course of a mystery.

Jessica wants to climb the chain link fence outside the frat house after dark. While climbing it isn't too hard, climbing it fast, without ripping her clothes, and without making any noise is a little tricky. The GM assigns the task a Difficulty of 4. Jessica's player decides to spend 1 point of Athletics, and rolls a 3.  $3+1 = 4$ , right at the Difficulty level. She just makes it over!

Jessica's Athletics rating is still 2; her Athletics pool is now 1.

## Retries

The test represents the character's best chance to succeed. Once you fail, you've taken your best shot and cannot retry unless you take some other supporting action that would credibly increase your odds of success. If allowed to do this, you must spend more pool points than you did on the previous attempt. If you can't afford it, you can't retry.

## Piggybacking

When a group of characters acts in concert to perform a task together, they designate one to take the lead. That character makes a simple test, spending any number of her own pool points toward the task, as usual. All other characters pay 1 point from their relevant pools in order to gain the benefits of the leader's action. These points do not add to the leader's die result. For every character who is unable to pay this piggybacking cost, either because she lacks pool points or does not have the ability at all, the Difficulty of the attempt increases by 2.



All the Sleuths are sneaking into the campground to spy on the frat party. Jessica's Sneaking 8 is normally best, but she's already spent some points and her Sneaking pool is down to 5. So Tyler (Sneaking 6) is the leader. The GM sets the Difficulty at 4: dry leaves and drunk frat boys cancel each other out. Elizabeth has already used her 1 point of Sneaking earlier in the session, so she can't spend now. That kicks the Difficulty up to 6. Everyone else spends 1 point, Tyler spends 5: he really wants to spy on these jerks. Tyler's player rolls a 3, plus 5 is 8—everyone moves silently through the dry leaves, even Elizabeth in her Jimmy Choos.

## Cooperation

When two characters cooperate toward a single goal, they agree which of them is undertaking the task directly, and which is assisting. The leader may spend any number of points from her pool, adding them to the die roll. The assistant may pay any number of points from his pool. All but one of these is applied to the leader's die roll.

Jessica and Elizabeth see someone sleeping it off in the woods—but he has a big bloodstain on his shirt, and it's spreading! Jessica takes the lead on a First Aid attempt to stabilize him enough to live, and to regain enough consciousness to tell her what happened. Elizabeth assists. The Difficulty for taking the boy from "Dying Fast" to "Able to Describe His Stabbing" is 8. Jessica spends 4 points from her First Aid pool; Elizabeth spends all 3 of her points, 2 of which get added to Jessica's roll. With a total spend of 6, Jessica rolls a 2, for a result of 8: the girls barely get him stable, but he's able to describe his attacker while Tyler calls 911.



## Continuing Challenges

Some tasks take a longer time than a single test represents, whether that test takes a round or a day of effort: trying to drill through a wall with Repair, or shove a heavy industrial freezer across the door with Athletics. Or they're tasks that that should be played out narratively over numerous scenes or even numerous adventures: trying to hack a military database with Computers, trying to restore a Shelby Mustang with Repair, trying to weaken the head cheerleader's social position with Throwdown.

The GM sets a total Difficulty (usually very high: 15+) and a minimum number of tests, and says how often the players can test (once per day, once per session, once per adventure, etc.). The Difficulty for each test is always 4. The Sleuths succeed when they've succeeded at the total Difficulty. "Extra" success does add to the total. Failed tests don't add to the total.



You're trying to take down the University's web server so you can hack into the frat's email when the system reboots. The GM sets the Difficulty for this hard and time-consuming DDOS attack at 20, sets the minimum number of tests at five, and says they can test once every two days. Tyler sets his Difficulty at 4, spends 2 points of Computers and rolls a 4, making the Difficulty. Elizabeth uses the school computer lab, but spends nothing: she rolls a 4 and succeeds—the total is 10. Jessica tries to help from home, spends 1, but only rolls a 2. Her points are wasted. The remaining 10 points of Difficulty have to wait for two days and at least two more tests.

*(Handwritten notes)*  
Alca's password:  
\$00262\$  
G

## General Spends

Occasionally you'll want to create a task at which there is no reasonable chance of failure, but should cost the characters a degree of effort. To do this, simply charge the Sleuth(s) a number of points from relevant General ability pools. Where tasks can be performed by

cooperative effort, multiple characters may contribute points to them. 1 or 2 points per character is a reasonable General spend.

## COOL TESTS

Drama and danger can make you lose your Cool. The GM may call for **Cool tests** in such cases. Usually the Difficulty for such a Test is 4. Depending on the severity of the situation, the potential loss varies:

STIMULUS	POTENTIAL COOL LOSS
Big test in calc; going stag to prom; other teen crisis	3
Argument with Love; involuntary principal's office visit	4
Seeing a dead body; seeing a Like injured; involuntary police station visit	5
Seeing a dead Like; seeing a Love injured; jailed	6
Seeing a dead Love	8

A Cool test that risks a 3-point loss, as an example, is called a "3-point Cool test." The GM can extrapolate other Cool test losses from these examples.



Some jerk throws a brick through Amanda's aunt's window. Seeing her aunt injured by glass, Amanda must make a 6-point Cool test. She spends 2 of her 4 Cool points and rolls a 2: she succeeds, but her Cool is now 2. If she had rolled a 1, she would have failed and lost 6 Cool, plus the 2 she spent: her Cool would be -4 and the GM would talk to Amanda's player about what kind of self-destructive, impulsive thing Amanda does as a result.

We talk about Cool damage more fully on page 68.

## General Tests Without Ability Ratings: Optional Rule

The normal GUMSHOE rule is this: if you don't have a **RATING** in a General ability, you can't make a test. (Remember, even with a pool of 0, you can still use any ability in which you have a rating.) Sure, you can eventually clamber over that fence, but not any faster than anyone with that ability. And not quickly or quietly. And you've probably ripped your coat and cut yourself a little and maybe fallen on the far side of the fence and gotten mud in your hair. This standard rule exists to reward players who decide to build generalists, with 1 or 2 points in a wide variety of abilities, at the cost of another spotlight ability or two. It also keeps Sleuths who've spent their pools empty still demonstrably better than characters with 0 ratings.

If this seems too mean for the GM, she might use this optional rule:

You may make General tests with a 0 rating in an ability, but you still cannot spend, ever, or use other abilities to give you a bonus. Also, a roll of 1 is an automatic and damaging failure: a 1 on a Fighting test means you hit a friend, a 1 on Computers means your current location is pinpointed, a 1 on Repair means you break the item, a 1 on Driving means you wreck the vehicle, etc.

Furthermore, if you have a rating of 0 in Throwdown, even if you succeed, you still do less Cool damage: a -2 penalty.

## CONTESTS

Contests occur when two characters, often a player character and a supporting character controlled by the GM, actively attempt to thwart one another. In the GUMSHOE system, the GM can escalate between two separate types of contests, depending on how dramatic the scene should be.

**Player-facing contests** are for quick, active, "one and done" sorts of contests: i.e., using Sneaking to get past the janitor.

**Full contests** amp up the drama; they're "showdowns" or "level boss" sorts of contests: i.e., using Sneaking to trail a gangster who's trying to avoid being followed.

# PLAYER-FACING CONTESTS

Player-facing contests work exactly the same as simple tests: you roll against a Difficulty, and spend ability pool points to add to your die roll. The one exception: there are no “retries” against active opposition. If you fail, you either suffer the consequences immediately or kick the contest up to a full contest as your opponent gets a chance to counter your failed move.

It's called a “player-facing” contest because the GM doesn't roll. To see if a Sleuth is surprised, the player makes an Intuition test. To see if a Sleuth surprises an NPC, the player makes a Sneaking test. The player character's fate—the die roll and any spent points—is entirely in the player's hands. The Difficulty in a player-facing contest is usually 4,

## Optional Rule: Mastery

This rule radically reduces the chance of total failure on ability tests.

It may be used for tests of any General ability in which your rating is 8 or above. When you spend from that pool to add to an ability test, you may spend 1 point to instead get an extra die. As with all other spends, you must choose to take the extra die or the extra point before you roll any dice. Roll both dice and keep the larger of the two results; add any other spent points to get your total result.

Tyler has Computers 8. He's trying to hack into the security files of Cherry Software, the local tech wunderkinds. His player spends 3 points: the first to get an extra die, and the next 2 to add to the result. He rolls a 1 and a 4 on the dice, so he dumps the low die (the 1) and adds 2 to his higher result (the 4) for a total of 6. That beats the firewall's Difficulty of 5, so Tyler is in without setting off any warning bells.

You may only get one extra die per roll. You never add both dice. Rolling a 6 on either die is a “natural” or “unmodified” 6 for the purposes of other rules, maneuvers, etc.

To make failure even less likely, the GM might allow Mastery for all ability tests, not just for abilities with ratings of 8 or more.

unless the GM shifts it up or down. Often, this shift appears in her notes as an **Alertness modifier** (modifies the opponent's alertness), a **Stealth modifier** (modifies the opponent's stealth), or a **Status modifier** (modifies the opponent's social status). Note that these modify the player character's Difficulty in the contest: higher numbers represent a more skilled opponent.

## Player-Facing Social Contests

You can also make a player-facing contest against an NPC to get that NPC to do what you want. The GM modifies the Difficulty (base 4) by the target's Status modifier and by how reasonable, dangerous, or embarrassing the request is. The ability is usually Throwdown, even though the player might not even spend any Throwdown points. Like full Throwdown contests (page 59) the Sleuth can spend Interpersonal points to modify this test.

Such Interpersonal spends modify the test by +2 per point spent.

Obstacles (page 113) and other NPCs can often spend one of their own Interpersonal points to raise your Difficulty by +1, if the ability is designed to thwart just such a request: BS Detector to see through a fake sob story, for instance. The GM decides if the spend is relevant to the Sleuth's tactic. The NPC can only spend one such point, once, in a player-facing social contest.

Remember that using an Interpersonal ability to get a core clue from an NPC **is always free**, and you can usually get even more information (if not cooperation) from an NPC just by spending Interpersonal ability points. These social contest rules are for other things than clue gathering.

## GETTING YOUR WAY WITHOUT A CONTEST

You don't need a contest to get your Like or Love to do things for you. Instead, the Sleuth can spend from her Relationship pools:

To get your Like or Love Relationship to do something, just spend 1 or 2 points (see "*HELP*," page 96, and "*Risky Action*," page 96).

## **ESCALATING TO A THROWDOWN**

When a lot is on the line, or the drama of the moment calls for it, the GM may declare that a social contest turns into a full-blown Throwdown contest (page 59). For example, using Taunt to get Jackie to disrupt detention is a player-facing contest; using Taunt to get Jackie to admit she slept with your boyfriend takes a throwdown. When this happens, a player can back down if she wants rather than going full throttle for the Throwdown contest. Backing down costs 1 Cool point.

Obstacles (page 113) never escalate to a full Throwdown contest.

## **FULL CONTESTS**

In a full contest, each character acts in turn. The first to fail a roll of the contested ability loses. The GM decides who acts first based on the contest's logic and circumstances. For example, in a chase, the character who bolts from the scene acts first. Where the characters seem to be acting at the same time, the one with the lowest rating in the relevant ability acts first. In the event of a tie, supporting characters act before player characters. In the event of a tie between player characters, the player who arrived last for the current session goes first in the contest.

The first character to act makes a test of the ability in question. If she fails, she loses the contest. If she succeeds, the second character then makes a test. This continues until one character loses, at which point the other one wins.

Typically each character attempts to beat a Difficulty of 4.

Throughout the contest, GM and players should collaborate to add flavor to each result, explaining what the characters did to remain in the contest. That way, instead of dropping out of the narration to engage in an arithmetical recitation, you keep the fictional world verbally alive.

## **The Opposite of Cooperation: PvP**

The goal in *Bubblegumshoe* is for your Sleuths to work together. They help each other solve Mysteries. But friendships can have tensions,

and some groups of players may wish to emphasize this through player vs. player (PvP) contests. (For a setting supporting PvP play, see the Kingsfield Academy drift on page 204.) For standard play, if two player characters come to loggerheads, there are many ways they can express this. For example, they can avoid helping one another, walk away during a tough moment, or simply argue about their disagreements. But if they're on the opposite sides in a conflict you can use the full contest rules for their clash just as with NPCs.

Each Sleuth acts in turn. She can call on help from Relationships and ask other Sleuths to Cooperate with her (page 46). Perhaps Jessica is asking the president of the computer club to help her break into the Truman High grade database, but Tyler thinks they're going to get caught so he's stonewalling their attempts. The GM sets a difficulty and each side takes turns attempting to succeed at a test of the ability in use. Each roll is the characters taking actions to continue. The first side to fail or drop out loses.



Jessica is sure that someone has changed the grades on her friend Jake to make him fail English. Tyler is sure that she'll be discovered, so he's decided to hinder her plan to break into the school database. Jessica goes to Min-Ji, the president of the Hacker Club, and promises to introduce her to Elizabeth (who she has a crush on) if she'll help her (Jessica creates a Relationship "Min-Ji Like 2"). The GM sets the Difficulty at 6. It won't be easy for the girls to get in and out without alerting someone, but it's not that hard to access the database since it's old and out of date. For Tyler, he has to anticipate what the other two are doing and try to hamper them, which will be challenging. But he's talented, so it's not impossible. Jessica has a Computers rating of 2. Tyler's Computers rating of 8 is a great advantage here.

Jessica and Min-Ji go first. They add 3 points in total (2 from Jessica's Min-Ji Relationship and



1 from Jessica's Computers ability) and roll 3, so they succeed in entering the database. (This isn't Cooperation, because it's really Jessica spending the points for Min-Ji.) Tyler uses 2 points and rolls a 5, so he was able to slow down their computer ahead of time. Jessica makes one more roll, spending her last Computers point. She rolls a 2, adds that 1, and fails. The contest ends and Jessica has to find a different way to prove her suspicions. However, Jessica also asks if she can spend Notice to find out who is jamming her up. The GM loves drama and agrees. Jessica spends 1 point and the GM says, "When you and Min-Ji leave the computer room, you see Tyler's car in the parking lot. And he'd have to be on school grounds to hook into the Truman intranet, you know..." Tyler is going to hear it from Jessica!

## Contest Advantage

Where the odds of success are skewed in favor of one contestant, the GM may assign different Difficulties to each: in a foot race, the character in sneakers and running pants has an advantage over the character in heels and a skirt. A character with a significant advantage gets a lower Difficulty number. A character facing a major handicap faces a higher Difficulty. When in doubt, the GM assigns the lower Difficulty to the advantaged participant.



Amanda is trying to follow one of the frat boys in her car. He knows someone has been watching the Kappas, so he's trying to avoid being followed, which makes it a full contest. He's got a Porsche, while she's in her stupid Pontiac Grand Am. The GM decides that gives him the Contest Advantage, so his Difficulty in the Driving contest is 3. Amanda's is the standard 4. However, her Driving is better than his: she has her whole pool of 6 points, while he has a "rich boy 2" from driving fast and racing his idiot friends.

Amanda has to go first, as the active participant. She spends 1, dropping her pool to 5, but rolls a 4, for a total of 5. "I hang back, idling a little bit while I watch him peel out of the frat parking lot. Then I stay two cars back when he turns off University Drive."

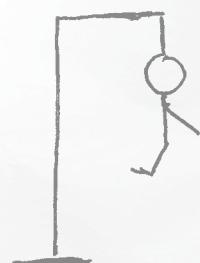
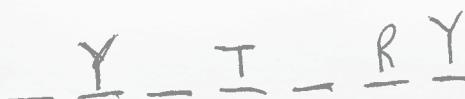
On behalf of the Kappa, the GM spends 1 and rolls a 2, barely succeeding. "He stays ahead of you and guns it through a yellow, leaving you at the intersection. But he hasn't turned yet, so you can still see him."

Amanda spends 2 now, and rolls another 4, crushing it. "I keep it cash, and roll on green. I know where University hits Grand is always a tie-up, so I pop over a block to let him think he has room."

The GM spends the Kappa's last point, rolling a 4 for a total of 5. "When you get to Grand, you don't immediately see the Porsche. Maybe he turned off early."

Amanda spends another 2, keeping a little in the tank. She rolls a 2, a near thing. "Okay, I made it—maybe while I'm stuck in the Grand intersection, he gets overconfident and blows past on Elm."

The Kappa has no points left, and the GM rolls a 1: a failure. "Whoops. Looks like you called it. He blows past on Elm, but he's overconfident. You can easily keep him in sight until he gets to his destination—an abandoned Tastee-Freeze in North End. He hops out, hits his keychain, and goes inside."





# CONFLICT

Most conflicts in *Bubblegumshoe* are social conflicts.

For simple social conflicts, perform a player-facing contest against a target Difficulty number, modified by the foe's Status modifier, just like testing Stealth against a Difficulty + foe's Alertness modifier.

You can spend points from Relationships, where relevant, and from Cool if you used a Relationship. (See "*USING RELATIONSHIPS*," page 94.)

Or, you can spend points from relevant Interpersonal abilities. Spending 1 point of an Interpersonal ability in a social conflict adds +2 to the die.

For bigger social conflicts, use the Combat rules.

# COMBAT

Combat is a specialized sort of contest, usually involving any of the following abilities:

- **Fighting vs. Fighting:** the characters are fighting in close quarters.
- **Throwdown vs. Throwdown:** the characters are engaged in high-intensity social combat.

As with full contests, the combatants take turns using their abilities. The other girl may swing first, but the fighter with the highest *rating* seizes the **initiative**. Unlike an ordinary contest, in a fight it's usually advantageous to strike first.

Resolve ties in this order: the character with the highest pool, the character with the most allies present, the Sleuth, the Sleuth whose player has had the least screen time this session, the Sleuth whose player showed up earliest for the game session. Are you seriously still tied? Flip a damn coin.

A contest proceeds between the two abilities. When a combatant rolls well, she gets the opportunity to deal damage to her opponent.

Unlike other contests, a participant does not lose when she fails her test roll. Instead, she is forced out of the fight only when she loses all her Cool, or when she becomes Injured.

## Fighting

The Difficulty to hit a foe is usually 3.

For a foe with an Athletics rating of 8+, the Difficulty to hit them is 4.

Fighting is high stakes in *Bubblegumshoe*. See Fighting Damage (page 80) for the Cool fallout for hurting someone. The most common kind of fighting is scuffling, where damage is minimal, and the main point is to get someone to back off or run away. A scuffle ends with, at worst, some bruises, scrapes, and torn clothes. The GM controls whether the NPCs get harmed, and how much. Players do the same for their Sleuths.

The GM should remind the group the serious consequences of successfully injuring someone: suspension, expulsion from school, arrest, etc.

# BEGIN THROWDOWN

Pick Lead Characters

- Allies Cooperate to help or
- Allies start separate Contests

Optional Called Attacks

- Insinuate: With Allies of Target
- Humble: In Target's Home Turf
- Expose: With Authorities
- GM Sets Difficulties
- 3 for equal or lower status
- 4 for higher status opponent
- 5 for special threat

## START EACH ROUND

Describe Character Actions

- Choose Spends to Add:
  - Throwdown (+2)\*
  - Relevant Interpersonal Ability (+2)\*
  - Cool (+1)
  - Relationships (+1)
- GM Decides who Rolls first
- Roll 1d6
- \*Throwdown and Interpersonal Abilities add:
  - +2 if Cool 6 or higher
  - +1 if Cool 0 to 5
  - None if below 0, must make Cool Test to continue

## COMPARE

Total [Roll + Spends] vs.

• Total is Equal or Above:

- Stay in or Run Away

- If Roll 6 and best Target by 5, Crushing It

• Total Below: Lose

If Both Stay In

- Describe Character Actions
- Start next Round
- If Lose or Runs Away

- Describe Character Actions
- Take Damage
- Scene Ends

## DAMAGE

Standard Damage: -1d6 Cool

Opponent Crushing It: -2d6 Cool

Called Attack Extra Damage

• Insinuate: -1 Damage, Sleuth +3 Bonus next Contest with

Target

• Expose: +3 Damage and Consequences

• Humiliate: +3 Damage and Consequences

- But if Sleuth is Humiliated: +2 Damage, -2 Penalty against

Target in following Contests

Deflect Damage

• Explain how Relationship is affected

• Reduce Cool Damage by 2 per Relationship Point Spent

GMs should keep this in mind when they create threats for the Sleuths. It's reasonable for them to face physical danger in places that are Risky, but give them options to minimize the chance of being harmed. The point of the slavering pit bulls is to scare off the Sleuths and let them come up with some clever way to get past, not to actually bite off a limb. If the Sleuths seem stumped, give them suggestions of ways the Sleuths could escape or get help.

If the Sleuths fight one another for whatever reason, treat it as a scuffle. End the fight once both combatants reach Scuffed damage; the "winner" is the scuffer with the most Cool left.

## THROWDOWN

In a throwdown, the conflict is longer than a simple conflict, with more at stake, and possibly some blowback against innocent bystanders. Thus, the players should only go for a full social combat if it's a major scene dramatically. If the GM is angling for a throwdown, but the players decide to use some other clever solution, that's fine as well. A throwdown may be initiated against any other character, whether Sleuth or NPC.

# THE FULL THROWDOWN

A Sleuth initiates a throwdown in an area relating to one of her Interpersonal abilities. They color the nature of the conflict.



*Elizabeth is trying to undermine Kaitlyn's reputation. She uses Throwdown with a spend from her Gossip to spread a rumor about Kaitlyn at school. Kaitlyn can respond with Gossip or with another ability.*

The GM should make sure all the Sleuths' Hates or other likely social foes have their Interpersonal, Cool, and Throwdown abilities statted out. (See "BUILDING NPCs," page 113.)

The Difficulty to "hit" a foe of the same or lower (as perceived by your peers) Class or Clique is 3; for a higher Class or Clique, the Difficulty is 4.

For a foe who poses a specific challenge (usually by GM fiat) the Difficulty of the throwdown test increases by +1. Social combat with school royalty (quarterback, head cheerleader, etc.) is usually at a Difficulty 4 for fellow Jocks, and Difficulty 5 for everyone else, for instance.

Throwdown Difficulty against authority figures (teachers, principals, police detectives) is at least 5, or more! Sleuths need to have lots of evidence (or dirt) before they try to bring it with a grownup.

A throwdown combatant can spend points from the throwdown ability, as with any contest. She can also spend from Relationships, Cool (if she used a Relationship in the combat), or relevant Interpersonal abilities. The GM can spend Hate points for the opposition, of course.

- To spend from a Relationship, just quickly narrate its relevance:  
**"I inherited my dad's temper"** or **"I think I see Brad in the crowd and I don't want to back down in front of him."** The GM may disallow a spend if the Relationship is too tenuous:  
**"I hate Kaitlyn as much as I like Mrs. Huffins' pie."** Or the GM may make a note to bring that Relationship into the story inconveniently: **Kaitlyn babysits for Mrs. Huffins, and now she's turned the whole church group against the Sleuths!**  
In any circumstance, spending from a Relationship signals the GM to involve that Relationship in any blowback or side effect of the contest. (See "*USING RELATIONSHIPS*," page 94.)
- If you invoked or echoed that Relationship's tag, you may refresh 1 to 2 points in that Relationship or refresh 1 to 2 points of Cool. If you contradict or violate the tag, you must spend 2 Relationship points to add +1 to the die. (See "*RELATIONSHIPS AND COOL*," page 98.)
- Once you've spent from any Relationship, you can spend Cool on your Throwdown roll, although it can be a self-defeating strategy to "spend yourself stupid." If you've spent from a Love Relationship, the Cool points you spend count double: spending 1 Cool point after spending Love adds +2 to the die.
- Spending 1 point of an applicable Interpersonal ability in a social conflict adds +2 to the die.

Fellow Sleuths can gang up on one target, or go after the target's allies in a multi-sided throwdown. NPCs can, of course, throw down against anyone the GM wishes.

At the end of any single round of a Throwdown contest, a Sleuth or named NPC can run away or back down at the cost of 1d6 Cool, ending the scene.

A Throwdown contest loss in a Location is a signal to the GM to increase the level or frequency of threat offered when present there. If Jessica loses a big dustup with Aaron in school, other kids are more likely to pick a fight with her there. It may also cost more Cool to enter a Location where a Sleuth has lost a big throwdown. (See "*THRESHOLDS*," page 125.)

## **Called Social Attacks**

Indicate before the roll that you're going to try for one of these special effects. GMs and players should come up with lots more possible types of social combat—this only skims the surface.

### **INSINUATE**

This subtle attack that uses knowledge of the target against them must be launched in the company of the target's allies. (This knowledge must be gathered in a scene before the Throwdown contest.) Successfully done, this places doubt in others' minds about the target. Social damage is lessened but continuing. Subtract 1 from rolled damage outcomes, but the Sleuth can add +3 to the *next* contest against this opponent by calling on one of the target's allies as though she were the Sleuth's own Like.

### **HUMBLE**

Requires the Throwdown contest to take place in a public setting, in Home Turf for the target. Adds +3 Cool damage. However, a failed attack throws an automatic 3 Cool damage onto the Sleuth.

### **EXPOSE**

Also known as "If not for these meddling kids..." An Expose attack must happen in the presence of authorities. It must include the revelation of clues found during the investigation. A successful Expose

attack adds +3 Cool damage, and possible in-game consequences such as grounding, incarceration, or deposing from a position of authority (for example, no longer the Homecoming Queen or class president). If unsuccessful, the Sleuth takes 1d6+2 Cool damage, and the GM applies -2 to all rolls by that Sleuth in the next contest between her and the target she tried to Expose.



Jessica and Elizabeth spend the Kappa frat party avoiding the brothers and hanging out with freshman pledges for social invisibility. Finally, Amanda shows up with a Women's Studies professor her aunt knows. Jessica throws the punch bowl at Chet and reveals his ties to the Russian mob, making an Expose attack. Usually, a thrown punch bowl would be Intimidating, but Jessica doesn't have that ability. Instead, she says, "In the sudden silence, I speak very calmly and Reassuringly, laying out all the evidence we've found and asking him where Larissa's sister is." Jessica can spend Throwdown and Reassurance on the test. If she says "my mom's a cop" to give her accusations weight, she can also spend Relationship and Cool on the test.

Jessica decides to leave her mom out of it for now and spends 2 Throwdown and 1 Reassurance for a total of +4. The GM rules the Difficulty of her test is 6, given Chet's (fraternity president) and her (unknown weirdo high schooler) respective social standings at the party. If she rolls a 1, she fails and takes 1d6+2 Cool damage—and probably has to run before someone calls the cops. If she rolls a 2 or higher, she adds +3 to the Cool damage Chet takes—and the professor probably calls the cops on Chet. He might have enough Cool left to talk his way out of it, but Jessica still has her mom as an ace in the hole.

## Heavy Material

Gossip, humiliation, bullying: high school and teenage conflicts are some of the harshest many people experience. During throwdowns, you're intentionally tapping into that little bit of hell many of us lived through in our teen years. While these kinds of conflicts are great grist for the mill of a teen detective's investigation, be conscious of how hard a toll they may exact on the players themselves—and on the GM, whose job it is to bring the pain.

Here are some tips for helping lighten up what could be some very hard moments in play:

- Narrate the worst of it. Rather than giving in-character insults, provide some distance by describing what your character says. *Instead of saying "You're worthless!" it would be: "The head cheerleader gets in Jessica's face and shouts "You're worthless!"*
- Acknowledge the hits. When your character is going in for the kill, address the other player out of character and comment on it. *About the cheerleader's insult, "Can you believe she went there?"*
- Crack a joke. Levity lightens the mood. *Jessica's player responds to the GM playing the cheerleader by saying "Freud might say this girl has some self-esteem issues."*
- Check in. If things seem to be getting grim, ask how it's going. Be direct, and if necessary, take a break or give an interlude before going on. *The GM sees that another player has been really quiet and seems distracted. "Is this hitting too close to home? We can cut back to see what's going on with Tyler and Elizabeth, and come back to this later."*

## Friends Feuding

Just as with any other ability, Sleuths can challenge each other to a Throwdown contest. High school is a time of high stakes, and sometimes your friends end up on the other side of an argument. This can heighten the drama and let you look at the mystery from

more than one angle. Things are rarely as black and white as they may first seem. Groups using the Kingsfield Academy drift (page 204) may wish to use this to highlight the conflicts between their characters.

Intra-party social combat operates the same as it would against an NPC. Other Sleuths can help either side. If both Sleuths have a Relationship with an NPC, the one with the higher rating in the Relationship gets the help. (It doesn't matter if either Sleuth has used some of the points during the adventure.) If there's a tie, the NPC can't decide, so helps neither side.

This kind of conflict sets a strong tone for the game and has mechanical effects. Cool damage in throwdown contests is substantial if you lose, and during the fight both Sleuths are likely to spend Relationship points, ability points, and Cool points. All damage, for example, increases by +1 Cool per hit. Provide appropriate refreshes—or don't, and let the Sleuths go into the rest of the Mystery ragged and on edge, just like they've come through a serious emotional storm.

Intra-party physical combat should be rare: tempers flare, scuffles happen, but a serious "I'm really trying to hurt you" fight between Sleuths can wreck a campaign. Consider alternatives: rather than target a fellow Sleuth directly, a teen might vandalize a rival's car or locker, steal a cellphone, or destroy a homework project. (The sample adventure has some examples of bullying on page 167.)

Social conflict between Sleuths gives a lot of spotlight time to the player characters involved, so GMs may want to balance that by giving juicy investigative leads to those who stay out of it. Intra-party conflict should only happen when the players are on board and enthusiastic. If just one player wants to face antagonism and all the other players want to focus on the Mystery, providing a GM-run nemesis for that Sleuth might be a better solution.

## **Damage**

A successful social combat attack takes 1d6 points off the foe's Cool.

Damage taken can be ratcheted up or down by the GM depending on the location. If you are out of your Home Turf, or in a Location of a different Class, or somewhere you've recently been humiliated

(by losing a previous throwdown there, say), you get progressive Cool point penalties: +1 per disadvantage.

If you take Cool damage from one of your Likes or from a fellow Sleuth, that's another +1. If you take Cool damage from one of your Loves, that's +2 Cool damage.

## Optional Rule: Sabotage Points

Every so often in the game, the Sleuths may do something that promises to embarrass or irritate or otherwise damage the Cool of an NPC: post their love email to Instagram, or date their sister, or plant weed in their locker. If the player wishes, she can set the trigger for Cool damage by spending points from another ability, or **SABOTAGE POINTS**. In the examples above, she might spend from Computers or Gossip (to hack the email or get it on the down low), from Flirting (to attract the sister), or from Filch or Repair (to plant the weed or open the locker undetected). Creative players will rapidly come up with more possibilities for such pre-planted Cool damage.

If the action would normally require a test or contest, the Sleuth must succeed at that test, **then** spend any extra Sabotage points.

Make a note of the target and the number of points spent.

During the next social combat pitting that Sleuth against the target—even, or even especially, if it's not a full throwdown contest—that target immediately loses Cool equal to the Sabotage points previously spent. (At the GM's discretion, spending Interpersonal points for Sabotage may do double Cool damage, mostly if it's really well done.)

Note that a Sleuth needs to have both:

- carried out some in-game action, and
- spent Sabotage points

to cause this “delayed charge” to go off.

This is an optional rule not only because it adds a bit more record keeping, but because for some groups it delays the mystery story as they go around planting social land mines on their foes. Of course, for some groups, that's a feature fun activity!

Really jazzy experimental groups might let the Sleuths spend Sabotage points retroactively during the contest: “Oh, I totally planted weed in her backpack.” If that retroactive action required a test, the Sleuth (or her allies) must still succeed at that test before spending retroactive Sabotage points.

## CRUSHING IT

When your unmodified die roll on a throwdown test is a 6, and your total result (after pool expenditures are taken into account) exceeds the Difficulty of the test by 5 or more, you **crush it**, rolling two instances of damage and adding them together.



*At the Kappa frat party, one of the brothers tries to smooth-talk Amanda into dropping the whole thing. She wants to shut him down fast. Since he's a college senior (the equivalent of high school royalty), her Difficulty in a throwdown is 5. She spends 2 Throwdown points and 1 Intimidation ("I get up in his personal space and don't break eye contact at all, like I've done to juvie bullies since forever") for a total bonus of +4. She then rolls a 6, for a final result of 10. This exceeds the Difficulty by 5, so she crushes it. Amanda crushes his Cool twice as hard, rolling a 4 and a 5 for 9 total Cool damage. Since the Kappa was just a haircut, he's out before he knew it was on.*

Remember, all major, named NPCs ("series regulars" and "guest stars" for example) can crush it in throwdown contests, just like the Sleuths can.

## DEFLECTING COOL DAMAGE

If you take Cool damage in a throwdown contest and you can implicate a person you have a Relationship with somehow, you can deflect the damage from you onto your Relationship. You need to explain, either in dialogue or out of character, how you can use others to avoid social damage. This is a signal to the GM to bring some drama into being with respect to that character. The action may cause tension between the Sleuth and the NPC, or some threat may be brought to bear on the NPC.

It may be that you call upon their reputation to get you through:

**"Priscilla is my friend, you're going to make her angry if you hurt me."**

Or you may be throwing them under the bus:

**"Priscilla is okay and all, but I'm just hanging out with her because she's from a broken home."**

However you do it, subtract 1 from your Relationship pool for each point of Cool damage averted.

If you used a Love Relationship, each 1 point you spend from that Relationship pool deflects 2 points of Cool damage.

## Effects of Cool Damage

Damage to Cool affects you emotionally.

**COOL 5 TO 0:** Your Interpersonal spends only add +1 to a throwdown die.

**COOL 0 TO -5:** You can't spend Investigative or Interpersonal points. You have to make a 4-point Cool test to continue the throwdown. You can "spend yourself negative" on this test. Non-named or background NPCs ("haircuts") drop out of the contest at this point.

**COOL -6 TO -10:** All Relationship spends cost double. You have to make a 4-point Cool test to continue the throwdown. You can keep "spending yourself negative" on this test.

**COOL WORSE THAN -10:** You react like a child to every setback, shrieking and crying and snot and OMG. If you haven't already lost the throwdown, you've lost the throwdown.

After the damage has been done, you can put negative Cool points into a Hate: either the foe who embarrassed you, an existing Hate you can blame for your failure, or some new Hate you just realized exists. This restores those Cool points immediately. Of course, it also gives the GM lots of ammunition for the next throwdown contest.

Or you can wait to heal.

1452 Julius Lane  
N. on Roosevelt, 1 mile  
left on Canary, cool  
soaring until reach 1st  
gas station. Right, follow  
house



## HEALING COOL

If you beat a Hate in a throwdown scene, you refresh 3 Cool immediately. The GM may also allow a refresh for other major, episode-defining triumphs over Hates even if no full throwdown contest happened.

A Love (if they're not mad at you right now) can spend 1 Interpersonal point (Reassurance, Flirting, etc.) to heal 3 lost Cool. A Like or a fellow Sleuth can spend 1 Interpersonal point to heal 2 lost Cool. You cannot spend to heal your own Cool.

If nobody spends anything, you heal 1 Cool point per day. You can also refresh Cool from Relationships (page 98) and by fulfilling your Drive (page 36). Cool refreshes to full at the start of a new session.

# Throwdown Summary

Social combat in a high-stakes situation, using the Throwdown ability. Initiate a throwdown with an action relating to one of the Sleuth's Interpersonal abilities.

The character with the highest Throwdown rating goes first, if there's no clear initiating act.

Combatants alternate rolling against the Throwdown Difficulty, as set by the GM.

## DIFFICULTY

Difficulty depends on foe's Class or Clique:

- Same or Lower than the Sleuth: 3
- Higher: 4
- Grownup Authority Figure: 5+
- Special Challenge (someone with a special position and very high relative status, e.g., starting quarterback, head cheerleader): +1 to Difficulty

## SPENDING

Combatants can spend points from:

- Throwdown ability
- Relationships (Like and Love only)
- Cool (only after a Relationship spend; each Cool point counts double after a Love spend)
- Relevant Interpersonal abilities (+2 to die per point spent)
- GM may spend Hate against Sleuth if relevant (if Hate is in combat, or her machinations caused it)
- Remember to refresh Relationship or Cool by +1 or +2 if you bring in the Relationship's tag

## COOPERATION

One character who has the Throwdown ability or is the target of an attack takes the lead; others may assist using the Cooperation rules or pull away the opponent's allies into parallel conflicts.

## BACKING DOWN

At the end of any round of a Throwdown, a Sleuth or named NPC can run away or back down at the cost of 1d6 Cool. She loses and the scene ends.

## CALLED SOCIAL ATTACKS

Player says their Sleuth will do this before the contest:

### Insinuate

Target must be with allies, use knowledge gathered about the target to place doubt in allies' minds.

SUCCESS: -1 to damage to target, +3 to all rolls for Sleuth in next contest against target.

### Humble

Throwdown must happen in public, on target's Home Turf.

SUCCESS: +3 to damage to target.

FAILURE: 3 Cool damage to Sleuth, immediately.

### Expose

"If not for those meddling kids..." Throwdown must happen in presence of authorities (police, teachers, etc.), and include clues found during investigation.

SUCCESS: +3 to Cool damage to target; possible in-game consequences such as grounding, incarceration, etc.

FAILURE: Sleuth takes 1d6+2 Cool damage; -2 to all rolls for Sleuth in the next contest with target.

## DAMAGE

A successful social combat attack takes 1d6 points off the target's Cool.

+1 TO DAMAGE: not on Home Turf, not in native Class Location, was recently humiliated (e.g., lost previous throwdown) in this Location; damage dealt by Like.

+2 TO DAMAGE: damage dealt by Love.

### Crushing It

Throwdown roll is a natural 6 **and** total result (roll + spend) exceeds Difficulty by 5+.

Roll two damage rolls (including modifiers) and add them.

Applies to Sleuths and major/named NPCs.

### Deflecting Damage

You can deflect Cool damage from social combat onto a Relationship by dialogue or description: blame, betray, disrespect, etc.

LIKE: -1 to Relationship pool per 1 point of Cool damage diverted.

LOVE: -1 to Relationship pool per 2 points of Cool damage diverted (round up).

The GM will bring the blowback from this deflection onto the Sleuth in this or a later scene.

## **LOSING**

A haircut or other background NPC loses when her Cool drops to 0.

A Sleuth or major NPC loses:

- When she voluntarily backs down.
- When Cool damage lowers her Cool to 0 or below and she fails the 4-point Cool test to stay in.
- When her Cool reaches -11 or below.

## **LOCATION**

A big throwdown loss in a Location should be noted by the GM. This Location may become a hostile environment for the Sleuth in the future; this may increase the Cool Threshold needed to enter it.

## **WINNING REFRESHES**

The winner of the throwdown contest:

- Refreshes all Interpersonal abilities used in the contest.
- Refreshes +3 Cool for defeating a Hate.

Regardless of the contest outcome, Sleuths receive 1 to 3 points worth of Relationship refreshes.

## **Full Throwdown Contest Example**

It's senior year after the homecoming game, and Jessica, Tyler, and Elizabeth have sneaked into the Homecoming Queen Kaitlyn's party. It's at her home in the wealthy neighborhood of the Acres, and they're convinced that they can catch her selling molly to other teens. Successfully spotting her in the act, they now have to get proof or face social isolation and hazing for the rest of the year by Kaitlyn's guests. The Sleuths could flee and take Cool damage, but they decide instead on a Throwdown contest.

The GM decides that both sides are acting at the same time to escalate the fight, so she looks to see who has the highest Throwdown rating. Elizabeth and Kaitlyn are tied at Throwdown 9, so the GM moves to the highest current pool. Kaitlyn spent some of her Throwdown in an earlier confrontation, so Elizabeth's pool of 8 in Throwdown beats Kaitlyn's current Throwdown 7 pool. The Sleuths get to go first.

Jessica takes a stand and uses her Grownup Face to shame Kaitlyn's friends into turning on her. Tyler Cooperates with Jessica.

Meanwhile Elizabeth tries to take Gabriel out of the fight. His loyalties are torn, since he's Kaitlyn's jock boyfriend but also Elizabeth's brother. She decides to Negotiate with him about the threat that drugs pose to his future in sports.

Out come the six-sided dice.

### NPC Records

For the Sleuths' abilities, see pages 250-253.



## Kaitlyn Price

**THUMBNAIL:** Queen Bee of the Acres (Queen of Mean).

**TROUBLE:** Keeping up appearances while family is in dire financial straits.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 6, Cool 9, Gossip 3, Intimidation 3, Throwdown 9

**NOTES:** Stays Queen Bee of the Acres by being the Queen of Mean.

Has dated Gabriel Soriano longer than any other guy. Family troubles: her father has been out of work for a while (he has been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, but the family is keeping that quiet).

**RELATIONSHIP:** Hate 3 [Elizabeth], Hate 3 [Jessica]

## Gabriel Soriano

**THUMBNAIL:** Truman High's Quarterback, dating Kaitlyn Price.

**TROUBLE:** Getting behind in classes.

**ABILITIES:** Intimidation 3, Performance 3, Gossip 2, BS Detector 1, Cool 8, Throwdown 3

**NOTES:** Gabe is an upperclassman at Truman High. He's popular, a talented quarterback for the Truman Lions football team. He's enjoying life—heading up the team and dating Kaitlyn, one of the most popular girls in school—but his social life is distracting him from his schoolwork. He loves his sister, but he thinks she's a spoiled brat. He thinks that Kaitlyn, his girlfriend, has been a bit more wild lately, but he figures everybody has to let loose when you're about to graduate.

**RELATIONSHIP:** Love 3 [Elizabeth]



JESSICA: Since we are going after Kaitlyn in her Home Turf, we should go for the called attack to Humble her.

GM: She hates Elizabeth, so I have her 3 Hate to use against you. Also, this is an Upper Class neighborhood, and you are all out of your element. Remember, you all lost -1 Cool each when you came to the party.

ELIZABETH: Well, since we're trying to Humble her, that gives us +3 extra Cool damage per attack. Sounds worth it. But are you up for getting that if you lose, Jessica?

JESSICA: I'm ready. This is the big moment. We've got to take her down here and now. I start lecturing Kaitlyn on the ways that molly can affect your brain, and describe the anxiety and confusion it can give you. Like you've got cotton in your brain.

TYLER: I watch for how Kaitlyn's friends are reacting, and see that one of them is flushed and looking scared. I take her by the hand and point out that she's having that feeling right now.

GM: Good, go ahead and make your roll. You're going up against Kaitlyn who is higher status in Class than you, and since she's also Homecoming Queen, the Difficulty is a 5.

JESSICA: I'm going to call on my Relationship with my mom the doctor, to have really detailed knowledge about how the drug affects you. I'll spend 1 point of Grownup Face and 1 from my Relationship with Monica Park.

GM: Since you lost that point of Cool stepping up to the Upper Class, your one-point Interpersonal spend only gives you +1 to the roll, remember.

JESSICA: Right. I'll also spend 1 point of Throwdown, then.

TYLER: I'll spend 1 point of Throwdown to add 1 to Jessica's roll, and 1 point of Grownup Face since I'm making them face the facts.

GM: Jessica, you add 3 points to your roll; 1 each of Relationship, Grownup Face, and Throwdown. Tyler, your Cool is still above 5 so you add 2 points for the Grownup Face point. Your Throwdown point got spent to let you tag in to Cooperate with Jessica. Your total bonus is +5: go ahead and roll.

Jessica rolls a die and gets a 2. Without Tyler's help, Jessica would have failed and immediately lost 3 Cool for a failed Humbling attack.

GM: 2 plus 5 equals 7. You beat the 5 Difficulty, so you get to deal damage. Kaitlyn's friends are looking squeamish as you describe the effects of the drug. The girl that Tyler brought out into the middle of things, ummm...Shelby, starts crying and saying how bad she's been feeling.

Jessica rolls a die for the Cool damage. She rolls a 2 and adds the +3 Humble bonus. The GM marks off 5 Cool points from Kaitlyn's sheet, bringing her down from 9 Cool to 4. For all Kaitlyn's rolls, her Interpersonal spends will now only add +1 to her roll since her Cool is below 6.

GM: Kaitlyn is visibly shaken by Shelby's distress. Some of her friends are starting to whisper to one another and look at Kaitlyn. Kaitlyn takes a deep breath and then gives a scary Homecoming Queen smile. She walks right up to Jessica, towering a few inches over her,

her sequined dress shimmering next to Jessica's jeans and ratty T-shirt. "Who's going to listen to you, Jessy snotbrain? Daddy's little girl trying to be better than everybody else? You're a narc like your mom, aren't you? You're a busybody, trying to destroy everyone else's fun because you're no one and you have no life." I'm calling on her Intimidation, Throwdown, and Hate. Gabriel, Kaitlyn's boyfriend, looking furious, stands up and says to Elizabeth about Jessica, "Sis, get her out of here, you're not wanted here."

**ELIZABETH:** When Gabriel steps forward, I'm in his face. I'm not going to let him back up Kaitlyn against Jessica. "Gabriel, Mom would die if she ever found out what you're doing here! You'd get thrown off the team. I know how much football means to you. You could get a scholarship to Yale, but that'll never happen if anyone found out you were using. Kaitlyn is the one risking everything you care about by getting you into this, not Jessica or me or anyone else who points this out!" I'm using 1 point of my Relationship with my dear brother Gabriel. This means I can call on my Cool points, too, if I want to, since I spent Relationship from him—and since he Loves me, they count double.

**JESSICA:** Yes!

**GM:** Okay, Gabriel squares off against Elizabeth. Kaitlyn rolls against Jessica alone. This is major for Kaitlyn. She stands to lose a lot more than friendship. She could get exposed for drug use and even dealing, so she wants to destroy anyone's trust of Jessica. I'm using 1 point each from my Throwdown and Intimidation, and calling on 2 of my Hate points.

**TYLER:** Your Interpersonal spend for Kaitlyn only gets you +1, since she just got hit so hard by Jessica.

**GM:** That's right. And it's going to deplete Kaitlyn pretty badly if I fail.

The GM rolls a die and gets a 4 on the Throwdown test.

GM: 1 for Intimidation, 1 for Throwdown and 2 for Hate, makes +4 to my roll which equals 8. Jessica is getting the stink eye from all of Kaitlyn's friends now.

JESSICA: I'm putting up a good front, but these are the people who can make my life hell for the rest of the school year.

The GM rolls a die and gets a 2 for damage.

GM: That's 2, plus 1 for not being remotely on your Home Turf, plus another 1 for this place not being your Class. Total of 4 to your Cool.

JESSICA: My Cool rating is 6, but I lost 1 to come to this stupid party, so now I'm down to 1! At least I can still spend Interpersonal ability points.

ELIZABETH: Let's resolve my confrontation with Gabriel. I'm going to continue to talk about how much this could screw up all his plans, and be loud about it. I'm spending 1 Relationship point with him, plus 1 for Negotiate, and 1 Cool, which counts as +2. My Interpersonal points don't double, since my Cool is too low, so I just get a bonus +4 on my roll.

GM: Gabriel is high status, and also among his friends. Beating him has a Difficulty of 5.

Elizabeth rolls a die and gets a 1.

GM: Matching the Difficulty is a success, so you just got it. That +4 is a real sweet spot. Gabriel is distracted from Kaitlyn's fight with Jessica, and starts talking with Elizabeth in earnest. He's distracted by arguing with his sister, and won't be able to help support his girlfriend. Kaitlyn and Jessica are both below 5 Cool. Jessica,

a full round has just ended. Would you like to back down? You'd lose 1d6 Cool, but with no modifiers—and if you're leaving anyway, it won't matter if you go negative.

JESSICA: No way. Everything depends on this. Elizabeth's got Gabriel out of the way, and Tyler can help me.

TYLER: Right. I've got a plan for this round. I'm going to use my 2 points of Performance to back you up. My Interpersonal spends still count double.

GM: How are you performing?

TYLER: It's a party, right? These rich girls must have a karaoke machine set up. I'm a techie so I see that it's set up to go. I line up Run-D.M.C.'s "Pause" and launch into it. Seems like some people must want to party instead of all this lame arguing, and this is a classic hip-hop anti-drug song, so...

GM: Go ahead. You're adding 3 to Jessica's roll then, since you pay one to help her out.

JESSICA: Nice! With the music distracting some of the guests, I pull myself together and use what I know about the other students. "You're the pathetic one. You're destroying your life and pulling down everyone around you. Gabriel could lose his scholarship, Shelby would be thrown out if her parents ever found out, and Lily would lose her chance of going to Yale. I'm not a narc, I just care about these people. Unlike you, their so-called friend!" I'm using my point of Taunt, and my point of BS Detector.

GM: How are you using BS Detector?

JESSICA: It's like cold reading, right? I can tell what Kaitlyn is really worried about is her friends dumping her.

GM: Pretty sweet. +1 each for your two Interpersonals, +3 from Tyler, and that's a total +5.

Jessica rolls the die and gets a 5.

GM: 10! That beats the Difficulty by 5...oh, wow, if you had rolled a 6 you would have crushed it and done double damage. But you're going to for sure do 4 damage to her Cool at least. Kaitlyn is looking like toast. Do you want to roll anyway?

JESSICA: Yes! (rolls damage) 4. Plus 3 for Humbling her. So Kaitlyn loses 7 Cool.

GM: Kaitlyn is down to -4, so I'll roll to see if she can stay in. The Difficulty of a Cool test is always 4, she'll spend 1 to avoid dropping below -5. (GM rolls a 2) And she's out. She's denying it, but her friends are converging on her, some asking if it's true that there are drugs at the party, others blaming her for starting them on it.

ELIZABETH: I feel bad about pushing Gabriel so hard, so I'm going to try and convince him to leave now, before things get ugly.

GM: He's pretty upset with you right now. Unless you want to convince him to go, he's going to stay and help Kaitlyn. But since you did try to help him out, when he thinks about this all later, he'll be grateful. Take a +1 to your Relationship with Gabriel. Jessica, take your spent point of Mom Relationship back. Everybody refresh your Interpersonal pools, the ones you just used anyway. Also, Jessica takes an immediate +3 Cool refresh, since she beat a Hate relationship. You guys didn't catch her with drugs in hand, but it sounds like there will be several people at the party who will be willing to turn her in now.

# NO, I MEAN FIGHTING DAMAGE

Characters (Sleuths and NPCs alike) have four possible levels of health:

- Fine
- Scuffed (visibly damaged but not really hurt)
- Injured
- Dead

Turning a character from one level to the next—Fine to Scuffed, say—requires a Fighting roll, usually a contest. The first combatant to lose the Fighting contest (fail to land a blow on their foe) drops a level of health.

At the end of any single round of a fight, a Sleuth or named NPC can run away at the cost of  $1d6+2$  Cool, ending the scene. (A really determined Sleuth can launch an Athletics contest to chase her foe down and resume the fight.)

Physically Fighting another character requires a 3-point Cool test.

Sleuths who Injure someone must make a 5-point Cool test. Sleuths who kill another human make a 10-point Cool test. No Sleuth can kill someone with weaponless Fighting alone, unless she has a Cap ability like Jeet Kune Do or something.

Cool tests while fighting (including the test to start fighting) are always at Difficulty 5.

**IF A SLEUTH HAS A WEAPON (A TASER, A KNIFE, A GUN):** She can either spend Intimidation or Performance and get what she wants (usually “out of here,” very seldom a clue) or make a 5-point Cool test and spend (usually from a Relationship, but maybe a Cap ability) to use it. If a weapon-user wins a round of combat, her foe is dropped to Injured automatically. If you fail the Cool test, the GM can, but need not, declare that you’ve accidentally used the weapon: fired a shot into the wall, cut yourself or an ally while swinging a knife wildly (leaving her Scuffed and with a wound that may be hard to explain), or broken the taser until it’s repaired.

**IMPORTANT NOTE FOR GMs AND PLAYERS:** Injury caused by a Sleuth in a fight should have very grave in-game consequences: suspension, grounding, even arrest and jail time. The GM should feel free to lower Likes and Loves across the board for such violent Sleuths.

NPCs, of course, can fight or kill other NPCs at the GM's whim.

## Healing Fighting Damage

Use First Aid, or send the poor bastard to the school nurse. Or the hospital.

The Difficulty of a First Aid test depends on the degree of injury, and on the target healing level.

Health Level Shift	Difficulty
Dead TO Gonna Die If The Ambulance Doesn't Get Here Soon	6
Dead TO Injured	8
Injured TO Scuffed	4
Scuffed TO No Visible Scars	2

"Dead" in this sense obviously doesn't apply to the victim in a murder mystery; it's for Sleuths and other people who suffer a sudden on-screen trauma.

This is also a great way to boost those Relationships: it's hard to stay mad at someone who's bandaging you.

# REFRESHES AND EXPERIENCE

A "refresh" restores an ability pool. If not otherwise quantified ("a 3-point refresh") a refresh fully restores the pool.

See "*REFRESHING RELATIONSHIPS*" (page 102) for rules governing that. You cannot refresh a Relationship in trouble; if it requires a big scene or other concrete action to repair, you can't use anything else in this section to fix it.

You can only refresh Investigative ability pools after the adventure.

You can refresh physical General pools (Athletics, Driving, Fighting, Repair, Sneaking) every 24 hours in-game.

If your Sleuths play, or eat pizza, or hang out with friends, or take a similarly pleasant long lull in the action, you can refresh any three General ability pools (except Cool).

Interpersonal pools refresh after 24 hours also or (for the Interpersonal ability involved) after *winning* a Throwdown.

Cool usually refreshes by following Drives, obeying Relationships, or defeating Hates.

## REFRESH AS REWARD

We've found it works remarkably well to offer pool refreshes when a player does something really neat and helpful to the game. So:

- Made the whole table laugh, or gasp, or cry, or sigh? That player gets to refresh one pool by 3 points.
- Did something incredibly clever? Refresh two pools by 3 points.
- Discovered a crucial clue, or twigged to the mystery? Refresh one or two pools entirely, depending on how much panache you showed.

In general, use pool refreshes to reward excellence in play. If you're making the game more fun for other players, expect that you'll get more refreshes than if you were playing conservatively. If you'd like, put poker chips or dice or Jolly Ranchers or other tokens into a bowl in the middle of the table: 2 per player, including the GM. Any player (including the GM) can give a token to another player whenever she thinks one is deserved for being awesome. That token is good for a 3-point refresh.



## Noir Narration

Once per session, any player can narrate some pithy hard-boiled summary of her emotional life, the mystery, or the realities of high school.

- “He looked like a tall drink of milk with Justin Timberlake’s hair. I knew he was trouble.”
- “It’s the sad truth that if you don’t care about prom, nobody cares if you don’t come.”
- “This was looking uglier than the locker room after the women’s lacrosse team loses to Central High.”

That player can refresh 3 points in any one pool. If the rest of the group thinks she really nailed it, totally brought the noir, she can refresh 4 points.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

You get 2-3 build points at the end of each adventure. You can use these points to:

- Add points to any of your current ability ratings.
- Add a new ability, ideally one you can explain having acquired in play (“I’ve been taking auto shop this semester, so I’m putting my points into getting Repair”).
- Add a new ability to a Relationship character: this costs 2 build points per ability. These points do not add to the Relationship rating. Any player with a Relationship with that NPC can add an ability, or two players can each spend 1 build point to add a new ability.

You can save build points for later: build points gained in experience can go in any “bucket” including Relationships (new or existing).

Usually an adventure has also given you a smattering of free Relationships (mostly Likes).



# RELATIONSHIPS

Once you've created your *wunderkind*, the Sleuth has skills, clubs, and drive aplenty, but what makes her life tick? Who does she care about, and who helps her get through study hall? The background players of her life will become people you care about, too.

Teens have instant communication with almost anyone and the sum of all human knowledge on devices used mostly for cat videos, amusing selfies, gossip, and porn. In some ways they're better stocked than James Bond would have been during the Cold War. But at the heart of it all, they're still just kids, growing into themselves and learning about the world outside.

The Town of Drewsbury is a big place. It's full of neighbors, lovers, dreamers...and criminals waiting to take advantage of the hapless. It's your Sleuths' mission to find the wrong-doers and right the wrongs. But they'll need the help of more than just their spunky gang. They're going to need a little help from their friends.

## WHO ARE THE NPCS?

In between the mysteries, the Sleuths live their lives. They try to get good grades (or not), graduate, fall in love, win the sprints competition, get into college. This normal background hum of a teenager's life plays under and over her Relationships with others. For some reason, the all-star sprint partner has been pushing past all her

old records. Is she doping? Why would she risk her promising career? Or has she been failing her grades? What's going on?

Behind each mystery you'll find rival teens who compete to lead the team, vie for girl- and boyfriends, beat each other to be top of the class. You'll also remember friends that go back to kindergarten, crushes and sweethearts, allies and unlikely friendships formed in detention. Adults watch out for the Sleuths, teachers mentor them, and coaches provide backup when needed. Guidance counselors and tutors open doors to careers and knowledge, or just help them get through another day of hazing and heartbreak in high school.

Family and friends are the main supports for the Sleuths. Parents watch out for them, but have to balance the needs of the whole family. Siblings go through high school too, with their own cliques, ambitions, and rivalries to deal with. But they may be there when no one else can. Some families still extend to—or depend on—grandparents, cousins, aunts, or uncles. As well as the mail carrier who's seen them grow up, the librarian who helped teach them to read, or the neighborhood artist who sees their unique potential. Many folks in Town take an interest in the Sleuths' well-being.

When those people get threatened, it's time for the Sleuths to go into action and see what they can do to help the ones they care about. These Relationships also provide boosts to the Sleuths' ongoing investigations. But push them too far, and you'll need to work on getting back in their good graces. Push the investigation too far, and it may put the people you love most in danger! The players and the GM both want to see these characters in play, for completely different reasons.

## Playing Relationships

Many times the GM will play these characters. They are important people in the story, and you'll want to get a sense of who they are and what they look like in action. Eventually, as the players get a sense of the NPCs' personalities, they may pick them up to play, especially in scenes with more than two people talking. (The GM should still play Hates, though.) If you can at all avoid it, don't play a character in a scene with your own Sleuth, to avoid having a conversation with yourself!

# BEYOND THE TEENS' WORLD

The teen investigators in this game are talented, smart, thoughtful people. They have many skills that will help them take action to help others and get themselves out of trouble. However, they are still teenagers. Their experience of the world is limited to what they've learned from going to high school and surfing the web. They may have a lot of opinions but not as much experience as they think they do. This is where Relationships come in handy. (See "*CREATING RELATIONSHIPS*," page 23.) The people in the Sleuths' lives bring a world of experience that the teens themselves may not have. The gang gets together for the same reason—they can accomplish way more together than they can alone.

Relationships are the backdrop for the adventures you'll play, and they also are fertile soil for the seeds of mystery and complication that happen in the characters' lives. These characters have many roles, as important resources for the players as well as for the GM.

## Call a Friend

Each character with a Relationship with a Sleuth has abilities or access the Sleuths can use. They may be arcane or specialty skills that no one else has—they are most helpful if they have skills that none of the teens could have. These come from who they are and what they do. Jessica's photographer uncle might have Photography from his job, but also Long Range Listening from using directional microphones for wildlife work. Cousin Isobel might be a Professor of Classical Languages, and have Ancient Art Appraisal as a skill that could help crack an art smuggling ring in the Town. Uncle Jun might be in the Rotarians with the Mayor, while Isobel might be friends with the cops who work second shifts as museum guards—and either one might be an extreme sports junkie.

Some of these abilities are called out on the Supporting Cast Checklist (see page 256). Other likely abilities, and anything else the Relationship can do for them—bail her out of jail, call in a favor from the Mayor, loan her a hang glider—are abstracted in one Relationship ability: Uncle Jun 4, Isobel 6.

## Backstage Pass

Also, Relationships with adults and other teens can help the Sleuths enter a world that they would be shut out of otherwise. A friendly clerk

at Town Hall can make all the difference in getting to see records, or getting a ride from Mom across town might be necessary to be able to interview a key witness if a Hate put sugar in your gas tank. Relationships can also help with resources: money, rides, permission that can pave the way to let the Sleuths enter places they would not otherwise be allowed (or able) to enter. This is reflected in the game by letting a Sleuth forego the Threshold cost (see page 127) and enter a Location for free, if she gets the help of a Relationship who lives in or is connected to that Location.

## Trouble on the Run

Relationship characters have their own agendas and lives that can intersect with the Sleuths to their help or detriment. These details create openings for the story of the game to build upon. The Sleuths know what their friends and relations need. It may give them ideas about how to provide a trade in return for asking the favor they need. It also can give the GM ideas about what kinds of crimes may be going on. Perhaps Uncle Jun gets phished by a grifting operation that looks for lonely hearts to fleece. Or Isobel might have gotten pushed out of her position because the department heads are involved in art smuggling, and they thought she could not be trusted to look the other way.

## Hates

Hates are a trade-off. They are a liability, and will make your life hellish. But at character creation, the GM awards you extra Relationship points if you have a Hate. Your friends may be more protective, bond more tightly since you've fought off this aggression together. You don't get that bonus if a Like or Love turns into a Hate, or if a new Hate appears during play thanks to the character's actions.

If a Hate Relationship is even tangentially involved in a mystery, Sleuths should be encouraged to blame them—red herring or not. Hates can interfere with the Sleuths just for the sheer spite of it—ratting them out to the principal, vandalizing their car, stealing their notes, pouring a cold (or staining or odoriferous) drink on the clothes they need for that stakeout or impersonation, blowing their cover at just the wrong time. Hates hate for a reason—they should be a frequent presence in the Sleuths' lives.

The GM can use your Hate against you, spending Hate points in any contest the Hated person is involved with, even if you don't know that. GM-spent Hate automatically refreshes at the end of the contest.

Throwdowns are important moments for Hates. If you overcome a Hate in a throwdown or other contest, you get an immediate refresh of 3 Cool. And you have the option to see if you can change the Hate into a low-level Like by acting with mercy or compassion.

If a Sleuth loses a throwdown, instead of taking Cool point damage she may create a new Hate. Hates built this way do not give you the bonus to your other Relationships. But they do let you avoid having to make collateral damage reduce your Relationship levels.

## You Hate Me but I Love You

You can have a different Relationship with someone than she has with you. For example, even though your best friend turns her back on you, you might hold on to those childhood memories you shared. Make a note of this by writing in parentheses after the Nature and Points how your Sleuth feels about her:

*Marcia Smith Hate 2 [Amber Love]*

Get a 1 point Cool Refresh immediately if you act on your feeling in the face of her Hate, Like, or Love.

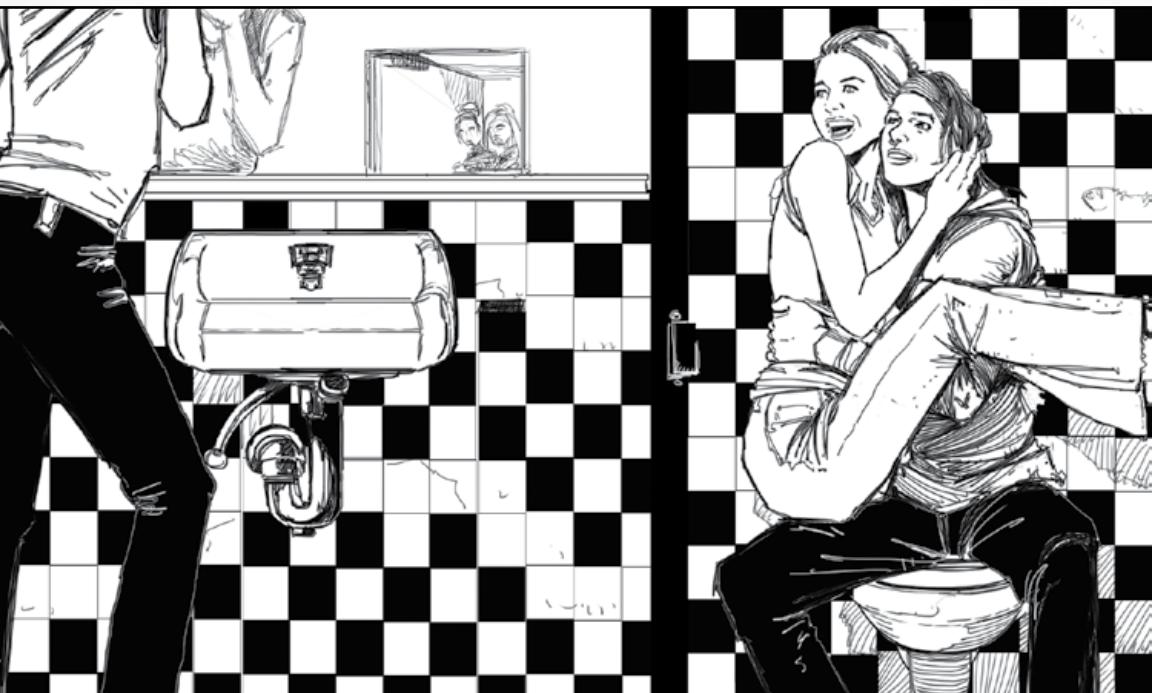
## Secret Relationships

Sometimes a character will have a Relationship with you that you don't know about. If a player agrees, the GM has the option of creating a Secret Relationship for her. The Sleuth means something to this NPC that they have not yet revealed. Maybe they have a secret crush on them (Love). Or have looked up to the Sleuth after a killer performance in *Macbeth* or basketball (Like). Or maybe the Sleuth always beats them at the track meets, which means a lot to this character, but the Sleuth doesn't even realize she is seen as a major rival (Hate). They may be an NPC with a Like or Love Relationship with another Sleuth, or another character the Sleuths interact with in the course of the investigation, a seemingly minor Like.

Once a Secret Relationship is revealed, you can use it like any other Relationship; add it to your character sheet. Secret Hates that spring from in-game actions generally don't supply points; Secret Hates that spring from the GM's desire to change up the story (the new vice principal, the sleazy club owner) should supply points. This character is seething inside, waiting for an opportunity to get back at the Sleuth. Accepting a Secret Hate is a great way to create a surprise spotlight for your character. It also gives an opportunity for the GM to throw a monkeywrench into an investigation.

GMs, be sure to introduce the character as an NPC, and have them meet up with the Sleuths before revealing them as a Secret Hate. Having a nebbishy bookworm get his revenge by taking the opportunity to turn in the Sleuths for breaking into the principal's office has so much more impact if you saw him (or better yet "helped him") break out of his shyness. It lets the Sleuths feel betrayed by someone they thought they knew.

Once you learn about it, you can use it as any other Relationship. Once a Relationship is revealed, add it to your character sheet. Each Sleuth should have no more than one Secret Relationship, and it's good practice to only reveal one such Relationship per session. So, for single session play, just pick one Sleuth (if any) to have a Secret Relationship.



*Bobbie*

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: THE GM

A Relationship gives the GM another character to play with in the world of *Bubblegumshoe*. Rather than use them for their skills or access, the GM uses Relationships to create new mysteries and problems for the Sleuths to solve.

The Sleuth built her Relationship's Name, Nature and Tag, Ability, and Points (see page 24).

To represent the story hooks they offer, the GM can add a Thumbnail and a Trouble, and usually adds a Location if the player hasn't already suggested one.

Relationships who are likely to actually appear in a scene as GM-controlled allies or enemies may have Interpersonal abilities (for throwdowns) and General abilities (for other contests) assigned as need be by the GM. (See "*FIENDS, FOOLS, AND FOILS*," page 113; and "*The People in Your Neighborhood*," page 112.)

## Thumbnail

Sum up the character in a phrase or sentence. The Thumbnail should tell you something about who the NPC is (or appears to be), what she does (and how), or what's important to her self-image: Dean of Discipline, Reluctant Coach Doing Community Service, Store Owner Eager to Get Out of this Hick Town, and so on. A good Thumbnail is succinct without being bland; informative without being wordy. Thumbnails are a good shorthand for Sleuths and the GM to remember who this NPC is, particularly as the Town (and the list of NPCs) grows over the course of a campaign.

Ideally, begin with a Thumbnail for at least the one or two Relationships with the highest points for each Sleuth. Thumbnails can be archetypes: Affable Smart-Ass Jock, Ambitious Yet Lazy Corrupt Cop, Den-Mother to Troubled Youths, Self-Destructive Rebel, Up-and-Coming Gangbanger, and so on.

Thumbnails can, of course, change over time—either as play reveals new aspects of the NPC, or as the GM inserts her into ongoing mysteries.

The GM and players will also add more details to the character portrait, usually recorded as notes on the card or form.

It can be helpful for the GM to note on her NPC record which Interpersonal ability is likely to work best on the NPC, if only as a quick-and-dirty way to provide benefits for Sleuth spends (see “*SPENDS AND BENEFITS*,” page 157). Quite often, however, clever roleplaying on the Sleuth’s part can make almost anything seem plausible in the context of the story—don’t hold out for a specific ability if the drama’s moving along (or just plain moving).

## Troubles

Troubles are just what they sound like: trouble knocking on the Relationship character’s door. Keep them relatively clear and short: debt, loneliness, a rival at work. These can become springboards for mysteries, which will add plenty of nuance or detail in play.

The GM creates Troubles, although she may do so while listening to players describe or discuss the Relationship. For each Sleuth, try to add at least one Trouble to one Relationship at the start of play, ideally one you want to build a mystery around.

The GM may worsen the Trouble, or even add more Troubles, on other Relationships as outcomes of failed contests and throwdowns (or even “successful” ones) where the Sleuth involved the Relationship. Also, failed outcomes can escalate a Trouble, or involve the Relationship in problems relating to the mystery at hand.

If the GM is stuck for a mystery, resolving a Trouble (or keeping it from worsening) is always a good fallback. In the best and brightest of cases, Sleuths can help their Relationships cross off Troubles through a successful investigation.

NPCs who are not Relationships do not necessarily need a Trouble, but having one can give the NPC depth and a point of leverage for clever Sleuths.

## Location

Pick a place where the NPC is commonly found. It may be her home, where she works, or a place where she hangs out. The principal’s

Location would be the Principal's Office. A friendly mechanic might work at the Devil's Gear bike shop. Jessica's Medical Examiner Mom's location would be the Forensics Lab.

The player who creates the NPC can choose their Location. It may be an existing Location, or a newly added one. If it's not at school or otherwise obvious, the GM determines its Class, and whether it is in the Free Zone, Adult World, or Risky Places. (See "*THRESHOLDS*," pages 125-126.)

NPCs have only one Location normally, although the GM can assign others if the story seems to demand it. However, keep the number of Locations manageable: the players need to ease into the Town, not drown in options. (See "*MAKING THE TOWN*," pages 130-136.)

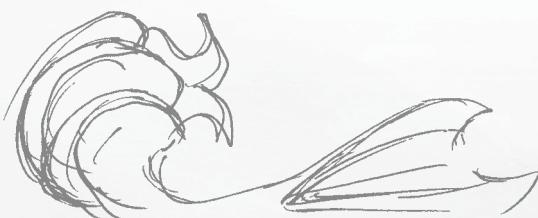
Locations tend to accumulate NPCs, and can have plenty of them. For example, the Police Department may have both an adversary (Tunnel-Vision Prone Detective) and an ally (Former Young Hell-Raiser, Now Desk Sergeant). The high school likely has several NPCs, including the vice principal (typically the disciplinarian) along with multiple mentors and antagonists on staff.

## SUPPORTING CAST CHECKLIST

Use the Supporting Cast Checklist (page 256) to keep track of the important people in the Sleuths' lives. Record the Relationship (nature and current point pool), and the NPC's Abilities, Trouble, Location, and some notes about them.

Check off the Relationship when that character has come into play in a session. At the end of play, look at this list and use those who have not come into play as a suggestion for NPCs to involve in future sessions. Those with Troubles can be involved in a mystery.

The players may drop or replace their Relationships over the course of the game, or ask you to make them more interesting in various ways (see page 103). Update the Supporting Cast Checklist to match the changes the players make.



## Relationship Abilities and the Spotlight

NPC abilities are usually powerfully focused, or flexibly broad. But while Sleuths can tap an NPC ability for a core clue, the NPC still either isn't investigating the mystery or is off on a red herring—possibly one that implicates one of their own unjustly!

Relationship characters never activate a clue on their own. Their skills may be called upon to help a Sleuth, or they may simply have seen or heard something crucial without recognizing it. The Relationship characters are there to support the Sleuths, not take spotlight time.

Keep mystery stories from being co-opted by characters that none of the players are playing. The young Sleuths are the ones on the trail. The cops or the vice principal shouldn't sideline the teens. (Also see "**YOU CAN'T RUN TO PAPA**," page 150.) The GM's job is to make sure that the type of mystery the Sleuths are on is one that makes sense for them to keep following up. They may be warned off by their parents or police, but it's still reasonable that the kids would think they could make a difference. The Sleuths are not going to go hunt down some serial killer. But they could try and get a friend out of being framed for selling drugs on the school campus, or hunt down a mysterious weirdo...who turns out to be a serial killer.

## USING RELATIONSHIPS

Players can spend Like and Love points in a Relationship to help the Sleuths:

- Borrow an ability from an NPC (this often includes borrowing the necessary equipment for that ability).
- Have an NPC do something to help or get them on the Sleuth's side.
- Even get an NPC to do something risky, dangerous, or out of character.
- In a test or contest involving the Relationship NPC.
- Get into a Location with a Cool Threshold for free.
- Deflect Cool damage (see page 259).

The GM generally uses Hate points as a free pool of points to spend against the Sleuth, but an inventive player might get a Hate NPC to do something with a sufficiently fiendish setup.

## Borrow an Ability

A player can tap the Relationship points invested in an NPC to "borrow" the special Abilities that Sleuths won't normally have. This might represent asking the NPC to use her ability, remembering information the NPC might have told her, or simply using gear associated with that ability like a firearm or a tracking device.

Describe how the NPC is helping, then mark off the used Relationship points.

This might be the equivalent of an Investigative spend:

Jessica finds some strange-smelling chemicals hidden in a teacher's office at school. She asks her mom to take a sample to the Forensics Lab for her. Her player spends 2 points from her Relationship with Mom, the equivalent of a 2-point spend of Research to find out what the chemical is, what it does, what it might be used for—the whole megillah.

Or a General spend:

Jessica is checking out the abandoned Tastee-Freeze and sees some metal drums in the back. The GM calls for an Intuition test. Since it looks like chemicals might be involved, the GM agrees that Jessica can use her Relationship with Mom. She spends 2 points from that Relationship, and spends 3 more points from her own Intuition ability. This allows her to add 5 points to her die roll: when she succeeds, the GM tells her that the drums are leaking something both flammable and poisonous. Jessica decides not to use a lighter to look around, but just take a few photos with her phone and skedaddle.



Or just give the Sleuth access to something special:

Jessica spends 2 points from her mom Relationship, “liberates” a corpse-eating beetle from the forensic entomology lab while her Mom isn’t looking, and puts it in Kaitlyn’s locker. The ensuing shriek distracts everyone enough for her to sneak into the principal’s office to search for any more of those chemicals—the GM lowers the Difficulty on that Stealth test by those 2 points: a Difficulty of 3 instead of 5.

## Help

The Relationship character gets involved in the situation on the side of the Sleuth despite reasons that might make them back off. Spend 1 Relationship point.

Tyler asks his mom, Andrea Lincoln, to cover for him when he’s skipped class to investigate for a case. After explaining how his classmate was threatened, his mom helps him out but makes him promise to keep her in the loop.

Tyler marks off 1 Relationship point with his mom. She gives him a note that says she had to pull him out of class.

## Risky Action

Spend 2 Relationship points to make the NPC take an action in a situation (including a test or contest) that puts them in danger physically, emotionally, or socially. This spend “lasts” for at least one scene. At the GM’s discretion, it may last for the rest of the session or even the whole episode, although this much help may require some roleplayed sweet-talking.

Greg Hannover sees Jessica being bullied by Cynthia Miller, the head cheerleader.

Jessica marks off 2 points from her Relationship with Greg to have Greg help her out.



He steps in to take Jessica's side, despite how popular Cindy and the other cheerleaders are. If this turns into a throwdown, she can spend more points from her Relationship with him—and if she roleplays it well, the GM might give her those first 2 points back to spend first.

This spend may produce blowback, recriminations, or other side effects, especially if the Sleuth has taken advantage of the Relationship without "giving back" recently. Especially egregious spends may cause the GM to weaken the Relationship (see page 99).

## Test or Contest Assistance

The NPC can add points to help the Sleuth as she would be helped by another player character.



After making friends with Suzie Yeung, the star cheerleader, Elizabeth gets her help to get over a wall so she can sneak around past some security guards. She boosts Elizabeth up and over the fence.

Elizabeth is making an Athletics roll to try to get over the wall. It is a tall wall, so the difficulty is a 6. She has a high Athletics score, so she could do it on her own, but she thinks she may need points later. So she gets Suzie's help, and uses 3 points from her Relationship, along with just 2 points from her own score. She makes a roll at +5, handily getting over the wall. The GM lets her describe a flourish, and Elizabeth says she sails over the wall, thrown by Suzie, landing quietly on the other side.

## Enter Location Free

If the Relationship character goes to a Location with the Sleuths, or reasonably makes it possible for them to get in through some other way (i.e., gives them fake IDs to get into a club, etc.) all who would have had to pay a Threshold cost can get in for free instead.



Amanda wants to investigate the storage tanks at the chemical processing plant at the edge of Drewsbury. Her boss at the garage works on trucks at the plant. She volunteers to help on an on-site repair trip, so gets a free trip in.

The plant is a Risky Zone, so normally she would have to lose 2 Cool when entering. Since her boss Carlo goes with her, Amanda (and any Sleuths she convinces him to let her bring along) get in for free. It's free, so she doesn't need to mark off any Relationship points. But, since Amanda's boss is right there, she may have to make an excuse to get away to investigate, and she could easily get him in some kind of trouble.

## RELATIONSHIPS AND COOL

You can always use Cool points in any test or contest where you spend a Relationship.

If you bring in the tag in your relationship description, you get 1 or 2 (or more) extra Relationship or Cool points to spend (GM's decision). If the whole table thinks it's perfect and awesome, you can even get a Cool refresh of 4 points. If it contradicts, weakens, or otherwise violates the tag, you either can't do it or must spend 1 or 2 more points than usual from the Relationship or Cool (GM's decision). If the whole table agrees with the GM, you can't do it at all.

## RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

The nature of a Relationship is not a constant, especially in high school. Minor fights and friendships are normal—they come up and blow over like summer storms.

### Major Shifts

Significant events will happen that will change everything. A Hate can turn into a Love, in the right circumstance (and vice-versa). I hate

you; now we're trapped in a warehouse with guys with guns; I see something in you as you get us out of this situation and it reaches my heart; now I love you; time passes, we go out, but then you dump me; now we're back to me hating you; etc.

After a major throwdown, climactic scene, tragic loss, betrayal, or full-on soundtrack-swelling bonding moment, the GM can suggest that a Relationship swing from Like to Love or Hate—or from Love to Hate, along with giving the Sleuth a Cool refresh of 5 points. If the Player accepts, the change happens. No more than one of these shifts happens per player per session.

In rare cases, Hate can change to Like or even Love. This takes action above and beyond the call of duty on the Sleuth's part. For example, if a Sleuth goes out of their way to help or save someone who Hates them, or someone their Hate Loves. The GM must approve the change.

## Deepening Relationships

You can spend Interpersonal ability points to enhance a character's Relationship with your Sleuth. Spending 2 Interpersonal points shifts 1 Relationship point, for example:

- Spend 2 Reassurance points ("Logan means nothing to me") to move Gregory from Love 2 to Love 3.
- Spend 2 Gossip points ("You won't believe who Theresa was making out with") to move Janice from Like 2 to Like 3.

## Weakening Relationships

To reduce a Like relationship, spend 1 Interpersonal point per Relationship rating point lost.

You must also spend Cool points (2 per 1 Interpersonal point spent) to weaken a Love relationship.

To weaken Love, you must *also* play out a scene with that NPC that shows how the Relationship is diffused.

It may be easier to betray them during a throwdown contest or abuse their trust and count on the GM to weaken the Relationship for you!



## Creating New Relationships

Relationships with a new NPC can be created at any time, including during a test or contest. However, you or the GM can introduce new Likes and acquaintances once per scene: "*Mrs. Huffins from 4-H Club Likes me.*" Often, the GM gives you such a 1-point Like for free as a roleplaying reward.

You can only create a new Relationship with an already named NPC once per session. For characters that are newly created, there is no per session limit except the number of Relationship build points you have handy.

### LIKES

During a session, a player can spend 2 Interpersonal points to create a Like Relationship:

- Spend 2 Flirting points to make Wayne Like you. (Wayne Like 1)
- Spend 2 Taunt points on Clarice to make Clarice's rival Jack Like you. (Jack Like 1)

The GM can award build points to create a Relationship with an NPC in a scene as a bonus for excellent play.

## **LOVES**

You can create a new Love using Relationship build points, but you must invest at least 4 points in the Relationship. This can be a pre-existing NPC, even one of your Likes. You still have to spend the 4 points, however.

You may need to play out a scene with the new Love, or at the very least explain how you captured their heart.

## **HATES**

GMs can add a 3-point Hate Relationship as a consequence of a throwdown or other major event. Unless the Sleuth went out of her way to earn the Hate, the player gains 3 Relationship build points to put into other Relationships.

## **IMPROVISED RELATIONSHIPS**

It's often a good idea to hold back some of your build points to create Relationships during the game. This allows the player to improvise connections between their Sleuth and NPCs in Locations she visits during the investigation, as well as to create new allies in places previously traveled.

It may be that the Relationship had existed before this, but only just now comes into focus. Or it may be that the Sleuth strikes up a friendship in a meaningful way as she interacts with the people in the setting. It is unlikely that a Love Relationship could start in this way—except in teen drama, and to a lesser extent in teen reality. A Like or a Hate are even more likely. The GM and the player should work together to play out or describe the interactions that can reasonably establish this Relationship if it starts right then and there.

Create improvised Relationship characters in the same way as regular Relationship NPCs: each has abilities, a Need, and an associated Location. The player must describe how they know one another and got friendly. These characters are then fair game for the GM to get involved in the investigation or future troubles.

## Changing NPC Relationships

Some GMs who enjoy lots of record keeping may allow players to spend points to change NPCs' Relationships with each other. Use these point values as a guideline. You can't "make it never happen," and if you create a secret ("Bobbi is blackmailing the gym teacher" or "Lori and Donna are lovers") the GM can always veto it now or at the end of the session/adventure.

## Refreshing Relationships

At the end of major scenes or conflicts (such as a throwdown), you receive 1-3 refresh points to refill any of your Relationship pools. At the start of a new session, you may refresh all your Relationship pools.

Once per session, you can refresh a Relationship pool in full by narrating a brief scene where the Sleuth helped out or spent quality time with the Relationship character.



Tyler has been calling on his mom for a lot of favors. They haven't been able to go have fun together in a while. So he meets up with her when she gets off a shift, with a football in hand. They spend the afternoon at Crystal Park, tossing passes back and forth. Tyler catches up with Jessica and the others later in the evening.

Tyler refreshes his Relationship with his mom back up to 5.

## COOL REFRESHES FROM RELATIONSHIPS

When a Sleuth fulfills a Relationship tag (in a contest or just during play), she gains a 1-2 Relationship build point bonus or 1-2 Cool point refresh: GM's choice. If the table thinks it was super-excellent, the GM can award a Cool refresh of 4 points.

Gain 2 Cool points (in addition to refreshing the Relationship pool) for playing out or narrating a scene with an NPC your Sleuth has a Relationship with that has to do with the NPC's Need.

If you beat a Hate in a contest or throwdown, you refresh 3 Cool immediately.

When a Relationship undergoes a major shift (see page 98), receive a Cool Refresh of 5 points.

## HATE REFRESHES

The GM can use your Hate against you, spending it in any contest the Hated object is involved with, even if you don't know that. GM-spent Hate automatically refreshes at the end of the contest.

# RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

At the end of each session, look over your Relationships.

**Players:** Do the Relationship tags still make sense? Change or update Relationship descriptions for those that may have changed, particularly ones that went through a major shift. Are there Relationships who have not come into play for quite a while? Consider one of the "*REPLACING RELATIONSHIPS*" options below.

**GMs:** Check your list. Are there Relationship characters who did not get called upon that you expected to be? Or who haven't been involved in the story in a while? Consider involving them in the plot for the next episode, or building a mystery for which their abilities might be useful.

## Replacing Relationships

Each player character will have several relationships associated with them. How important, interesting, and useful the Relationships are may change over time. If a Relationship is not firing your interest as a player, there are various ways to replace or change them.

## UNUSED NPCs

Relationships may or may not be called upon in a given play session. If you find that a character has not been involved in the story in several sessions, this is a good time to think about getting the GM's help to involve this character, or to let it go and take the character out of circulation.

If you want to get that NPC involved, let the GM know. She may be able to create a mystery for next session that either requires the

skills that that NPC has or, better yet, may find some way to put that character in trouble so that the Sleuths get called in to help.

This may not be appropriate for every character. If you just find that you're not inspired by a Relationship you created, you can remove it from your character sheet and use those build points to create another Relationship. However, before you do erase a Relationship, check in with the GM to make sure she doesn't have something big planned around this character. You can also check with the other players: perhaps one of them might want to pick up this character as a Relationship.

## **PLAYED-THROUGH CHARACTERS**

Another thing that might happen is that an NPC is heavily involved in your Sleuth's storylines. Their Relationship may go through some changes—a Like turning into a Love, or a Hate. It might be that the Relationship with this character runs its course. Enemies come to terms with one another, romantic partners become just friends. It's fine to take a character that has been used quite a bit and to put her on the back burner, or to take her out of the game for a while. She might travel, or move, or go to college. This can be a good way to let other characters take a more active role in the Sleuths' lives, giving some variety to their interactions with the world around them. This can also give the GM the opportunity to bring that character back transformed.

## **BACK IN BLACK**

A removed character still exists in the world. You may even call upon them again in the future by creating a new Relationship with them. The GM has free rein to bring back this character in the future. But for now, if you replace her, that character is no longer important for the mysteries coming up.



# SAMPLE RELATIONSHIPS

## MONICA PARK

**NATURE AND TAG:** Jessica's mother Loves her and goes to bat for her at school.

**POINTS:** Love 6

**THUMBNAIL:** Super Mom. Worried to a fault about providing for Jessica, and putting her own needs last.

**TROUBLE:** Deeply in debt and suddenly without her husband's income.

**ABILITIES:** Forensic Pathology, Medicine, Legal System Contacts

**NOTES:** Forensic pathologist (assistant medical examiner at the Greenville University Medical Center's satellite office of the state Medical Examiner's Office). Recently passed over for a badly needed promotion.

**LOCATION:** Medical Examiner's Office

## DANNY KANG

**NATURE AND TAG:** Jessica's cousin Likes her but teases her mercilessly.

**POINTS:** Like 3

**THUMBNAIL:** The center of attention, good or bad.

**TROUBLE:** The Red Scorpions take me more seriously than my family.

**ABILITIES:** Jopok Contacts, Football

**NOTES:** Ambitious but has trouble in school, trying to get in good with the Jopok (Korean mafia). Takes risks that worry Jessica. Star defensive end for the Truman Lions.

**LOCATION:** Market Square

## KURTIS LINCOLN

**NATURE AND TAG:** Tyler's dad Loves and worries about him and wants him to stay on the right side of all the lines.

**POINTS:** Love 8

**THUMBNAIL:** Ambitious career-focused architect who never cuts corners.

**TROUBLE:** Getting underbid by shady competitors.

**ABILITIES:** Architecture, Pillar of the Community

**NOTES:** Kurtis loves his family and has high hopes for his son to follow in his footsteps and take over his business when he retires. It's hard for him to take Tyler's interests seriously, and thinks that he will "get over" his obsession with music. Kurtis tries to communicate with his son, but his long hours at work get in the way.

**LOCATION:** Drafting Office

## ANDREA LINCOLN

**NATURE AND TAG:** Tyler's mother Loves him and does guy things with him.

**POINTS:** Love 5

**THUMBNAIL:** Policing is my never-ending calling.

**TROUBLE:** Refuses to overlook low-level corruption in the police station.

**ABILITIES:** Lowlife Connections, Cop, Firearms

**NOTES:** She's a dedicated police officer, and has a good relationship with the people on her beat in the North End. The hours are long, though, and she's under pressure all the time at her job. She sees the way too many people's lives go wrong, and she wants something different for her son.

**LOCATION:** Drewsbury Police Station



There must  
be a  
connection.

## GREG HANNOVER

**NATURE AND TAG:** Tyler's best friend since elementary school Likes him for having his back, and Likes Jessica despite her breaking up with him.

**POINTS:** Like 5 [Tyler]; Like 5 [Jessica]

**THUMBNAIL:** Can't wait to get out of this burg and see our names in lights.

**TROUBLE:** Spends too much on his music.

**ABILITIES:** Musician

**NOTES:** Used to date Jessica, but she broke up with him. His band with Tyler practices regularly in Greg's garage, which he's re-fitted with sound insulation.

**LOCATION:** Hannover Garage

## CASSANDRA JAHODA

**NATURE AND TAG:** Amanda's aunt Loves her and always answers the phone at 3 in the morning; she Likes and approves of Tyler.

**POINTS:** Love 7 [Amanda]; Like 2 [Tyler]

**THUMBNAIL:** Den-mom/mentor to troubled teens.

**TROUBLE:** Unfriendly teacher has revealed her troubled past.

**ABILITIES:** Math, Bureaucracy, Drug Knowledge

**NOTES:** Cassandra is a math teacher at Truman High, and keeps an eye on her sister Agata's daughter Amanda. She sponsored Amanda for a soccer scholarship, but as a former hellraiser during her own high school days she's gotten Amanda out of many scrapes and covers for her with her family. She also looks out for Amanda's friend Tyler, and thinks they'd be cute together.

## **AGUSTÍN SORIANO**

**NATURE AND TAG:** Elizabeth's father Loves her and dotes on his little girl.

**POINTS:** Love 5

**THUMBNAIL:** Schmoozing fixer tempted by clients in distress.

**TROUBLE:** Out of his depth representing criminal defendants who need assigned counsel (volunteering this time makes the firm look good).

**ABILITIES:** Law, Wealth, Powerful Contacts

**NOTES:** Agustín is an attorney in Drewsbury. Elizabeth lives with him, and spends part of the summer with her mom. He is a partner in the firm Schlesinger, Soriano, & Miller with offices in Burditt Hill. He represents many of the powerful and influential people in town. Provides outside tutoring for Elizabeth and has a spot lined up for her at Yale, his alma mater.

## **SHERI MACKINLAY SORIANO**

**NATURE AND TAG:** Elizabeth's mother Loves her and watches her cheerleading practices via smartphone.

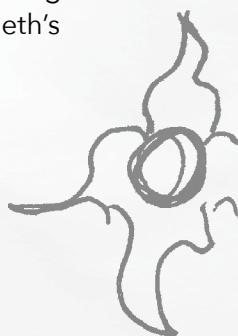
**POINTS:** Love 4

**THUMBNAIL:** On the road mom, parenting by Facebook.

**TROUBLE:** Worried funding for her research program will be cut.

**ABILITIES:** Astronomy, Government Contacts

**NOTES:** Sheri is an astrophysicist and consults for NASA. She and Agustín had an amicable divorce and split their time with Elizabeth. When Elizabeth joins her during summer vacation, she travels with her to wherever Sheri is stationed to do radio telescope observations. She's encouraging her daughter to go to Princeton like she did. She tries to keep up with Elizabeth's life, but is busy with her own work.



## **GABRIEL SORIANO**

**NATURE AND TAG:** Elizabeth's brother Loves her but thinks she's a spoiled brat.

**POINTS:** Love 3

**THUMBNAIL:** Big man on campus, dating Kaitlyn Price.

**TROUBLE:** Getting behind in classes.

**ABILITIES:** BS Detector 1, Cool 8, Gossip 2, Intimidation 3, Performance 3, Throwdown 3

**NOTES:** Gabe is an upperclassman at Truman High. He is popular, a talented quarterback for the Truman Lions. He's pushing back against their dad's plans for him to go to Yale, and he's taking the divorce harder than Elizabeth.

## **KAITLYN PRICE**

**NATURE AND TAG:** Dating Gabriel, but Hates and picks on Elizabeth and Jessica.

**POINTS:** Hate 3 [Jessica], Hate 3 [Elizabeth]

**THUMBNAIL:** Queen Bee of the Acres (Queen of Mean).

**TROUBLE:** Keeping up appearances while family is in dire financial straits.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 6, Cool 9, Gossip 3, Intimidation 3, Throwdown 9

**NOTES:** Stays Queen Bee of the Acres by being the Queen of Mean. Has dated Gabriel Soriano longer than any other guy. Family troubles: her father has been out of work for a while (he has been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, but the family is keeping that quiet).

Gabriel and Kaitlyn have abilities like a Sleuth because in the story seeds and examples they frequently come into conflict with the Sleuths. See "*BUILDING NPCs*" on page 113.



# THE TOWN

Every campaign needs a setting: *Bubblegumshoe's* is usually a high school in a small American town.

The Town is the setting for the story. Each place gives a look and feel to the events that happen to the characters. Give it a Thumbnail: Up-and-Coming Suburb, Rust-Belt Relic, Paris of the Midwest, etc. Now give it a Trouble: Growing Heroin Problem, Biggest Employer Looking to Leave Town, etc. Here, the Trouble isn't a mystery to solve, but (like the Trouble for Relationships and other NPCs) it provides background tensions, B-plots, and motives for mysteries. If, like many noir settings from *Chinatown* to *Twin Peaks*, the Town has a deep mystery at its heart, it may emerge from play without you ever building it! You'll also want to add a few key Locations (see page 122) like the high school (see page 133), police department, and a couple of teen hangouts.

The Town and the characters go together: you may start with an idea for the Town and build characters who live there, or you may start with an idea for characters and build a Town for them to adventure in. Even if the GM has a firm idea about the Town, work with the players to create Locations: this takes some of the creative load off the GM, adds depth, and gives the players an emotional investment in the setting. You can use the Town Map framework (page 263) to remember the places you've been, and to help add more as you play.

NPCs and Locations often go together, but you need not detail every Location when you create a character. By the time the Sleuths finally go to Jessica's mother's office in the Medical Examiner's Office, the GM will have had plenty of time to do some research and make things appropriately clinical, creepy, or gross. Use Relationship Maps to keep track of them and to structure your mystery (see page 119). The list of these Relationships, Locations, and specific Sleuth hooks becomes your "series bible." Don't get too ambitious right up front and lock yourself into ideas too early; your bible will grow as your stories do.

This chapter includes Drewsbury, our sample Town, and Truman High School.

### Bringing the Town to Life

The Town is a place where the characters have a history. They know parts of the town well, and care deeply about people who live and work there. Other parts have bad memories associated with them. The School may be both of these things together. Creating the Town is also about creating the lives of the Sleuths. Having people and locations that have a strong resonance for the players makes for a vivid environment for your stories.

## THE PEOPLE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

The other people in the world around the teen investigators have lives, loves, and emotions that don't revolve around our young detectives. These should be direct, and simply represented.

Just like a Relationship, any NPC can have a Thumbnail, Trouble, and Abilities (page 91). If she is a major NPC, create her attributes as a Relationship. If she is a Face for a Location (page 124), a walk-on character, or a haircut (a non-named or background NPC), she needs a brief Thumbnail and maybe a Trouble if you want the Sleuths to be able to create leverage. If the NPC becomes a Relationship, add an Ability.

thumbnails and Troubles are used in generating mysteries (page 163).

Having clear NPC motives allows the GM to push the Sleuths, provide clues or at least tactics, and make solving the mystery

suitably personal, on someone's part. Not everyone's agenda should be highlighted in each episode, but letting the secondaries move on their own, giving them a bit of "artificial intelligence," makes the whole world breathe and also offers opportunities for plots to develop.

To avoid over-complicating things, pick one NPC per episode to "advance" on her own story arc. You can involve a Sleuth, or just have the news show up in a Gossip trawl or in a Facebook update.

## FIENDS, FOOLS, AND FOILS

The GM's best friend is the roster of NPCs to be found in your Town, people to liven up and give flavor to the world. Their Troubles give you vulnerabilities to tweak and entries for mysteries, and their abilities open doors for Sleuths and story alike. The ranks of other NPCs the Sleuths interact with give you ammunition to push the Sleuths in a variety of ways: as adversaries, as nemeses, and as obstacles.

**Adversaries** are the baddies of the mystery, those who are doing real harm to a friend or acquaintance of the Sleuths who come to them for help.

**Nemeses** are rivals and just plain jerks who go out of their way to make life bad for the Sleuths just because they've got an axe to grind.

**Obstacles** are probably just doing their job. It's nothing personal. But no, these underage kids cannot go into the nightclub. No, you cannot enter the high security area at the corporate headquarters. The secret of obstacles is that you can't mount a full Throwdown contest to get what you want. You get past obstacles with a quick player-facing contest or by invoking Relationships—or by using Sneaking and Repair to sneak in the back.

There are helpful NPCs as well. Not everyone in the Town is out to keep the Sleuths from bringing a little more justice into other peoples' lives.

## Building NPCs

The fully statted NPC is a rarity in GUMSHOE, and *Bubblegumshoe* is no exception.

Investigative abilities are almost never relevant to NPCs, as Sleuths do all the investigating. Some “occupational” abilities can function as Investigative abilities if the GM desperately needs something to do so, or she can just add any Investigative (or other) ability needed.

Adversaries and nemeses can have point totals commensurate with Sleuth totals, or even more. They may have abilities like NPCs, or like Sleuths: just assign points for any contests that turn up. Give them a sidekick or lackey or two so they don’t get swarmed by the Sleuths working in tandem.

Provide an Alertness, Stealth, or Status modifier (page 52) as needed: the -3 to +3 range should cover everybody in Town. You may want to add the NPC’s Status modifier to her Cool total, and definitely keep it in mind when setting throwdown Difficulties.

Every NPC should have a quick Cool rating:

- **Cool 2:** haircuts, easily flustered mean bees or nerds
- **Cool 6:** obstacles, possible peers or threats
- **Cool 9+:** alphas, queen bees, school royalty

Likely social combatants will need Interpersonal abilities and a Throwdown rating.

Give adversaries and nemeses a main Interpersonal ability at 3, a secondary Interpersonal ability at 2, and two others at 1 each. Their sidekicks can take one Interpersonal ability at 2 and two at 1 each. Feel free to boost these points or add new abilities as roleplaying them reveals that yes, Charlie should also have Flirting 3.

Throwdown ratings should begin at 4 for named characters—if they’re lower than that, it’s hardly worth running a contest. A named sidekick might have Throwdown 6-8 with 10-12 reserved for queen bees and other state finalists in mean. As the Sleuths’ ratings increase, nudge up their foes if need be—or set them against mean teachers, rich jerks, or other grownups they can’t humiliate in the lunch room.

Obviously, NPCs might also be resilient but hapless (Cool 8, Throwdown 2) or one-shot “glass cannon” wonders like the classic haircut build (Cool 2, Throwdown 6) or serious contenders (Cool 8,



Throwdown 8). Remember: for each 4 points in the ability, the NPC can deal (or withstand) one near-certain hit.

Set other likely contested General abilities (Athletics for foot chases, Driving for car chases, Fighting just in case) at the same equivalent levels. Feel free to give cops and other "scene enders" massive totals, or just spend 4 points per roll until the problem is cleaned up. Most groups will let you just narrate the end of the situation:

*"The cops show up and wade into the fight. Quick cut to the station, where you're sitting in uncomfortable plastic chairs waiting to get booked."*

## EXAMPLE NPCs

These sample NPCs don't have listed Troubles, since any NPC might have any Trouble at all: alcoholism or drug addiction, money problems, self-esteem, illness, rivalry with another NPC, a problem child in the Sleuths' high school, etc.

### ADVERSARIES

#### ABUSIVE TEACHER

**THUMBNAIL:** Makes life hell for students.

**ABILITIES:** Bureaucracy 2, Cool 8, Intimidate 3, Taunt 3, Teacher 3, Throwdown 10

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +1

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +2 (school only)

#### BAD COP

**THUMBNAIL:** Serves and protects the wrong people.

**ABILITIES:** BS Detector 2, Bureaucracy 2, Cool 6, Cop 3, Fighting 7, Firearms 7

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +2

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +1

**STEALTH MODIFIER:** +1

211 - robbery  
207 - kidnapping  
240 - assault  
187 - homicide  


## CORRUPT BUSINESS OWNER

**THUMBNAIL:** Making a living at the expense of others.

**ABILITIES:** Business 3, Cool 10, Flattery 2, Negotiation 3, Throwdown 7

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +2 or +3

## DRUG PUSHER

**THUMBNAIL:** Kingpin of the School.

**ABILITIES:** BS Detector 3, Cool 10, Drug Knowledge 3, Fighting 8, Intimidate 2, Throwdown 6

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +2

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +1 (school only)



## NEMESES

### BULLY

**THUMBNAIL:** Top dog at school.

**ABILITIES:** Cool 10, Fighting 8, Find Weakness 2, Intimidation 3, Taunt 2, Throwdown 6

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +2 (students only), +1 or -1 (teachers)

**STEALTH MODIFIER:** +1

### CLASS PRESIDENT

**THUMBNAIL:** Highschool politico.

**ABILITIES:** Cool 8, Debate 2, Grownup Face 3, Throwdown 10

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +1 (school only)

### HARDASS PRINCIPAL

**THUMBNAIL:** Rules with an iron fist.

**ABILITIES:** BS Detector 3, Bureaucracy 2, Cool 12, Intimidation 3, Throwdown 8+

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +2

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +3 (school), +1 (town)

**STEALTH MODIFIER:** +2

## **NEIGHBOR**

**THUMBNAIL:** Nosy busybody.

**ABILITIES:** Cool 5, Gossip 3, Taunt 1, Throwdown 6

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +3

**STEALTH MODIFIER:** +1

## **OBSTACLES**

### **BOUNCER**

**THUMBNAIL:** There to keep folks in line.

**ABILITIES:** BS Detector 2, Cool 9, Drunk Detector 3, Fighting 8, Intimidation 3

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +2

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +1 (club only)

### **SCHOOL MAINTENANCE ENGINEER**

**THUMBNAIL:** Rules the school after hours.

**ABILITIES:** Cool 5, Gossip 2, Intimidate 2, Repair 8

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +1

**STEALTH MODIFIER:** +1

### **SECURITY GUARD**

**THUMBNAIL:** Strong arm for the company.

**ABILITIES:** BS Detector 2, Cool 5, Driving 4, Fighting 5, Negotiation 1, Taser 5

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +1

### **TOWN CLERK**

**THUMBNAIL:** Bored and petty public servant.

**ABILITIES:** Cool 8, Negotiation 2, Reassurance 2, Red Tape 3

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +1

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +1 (city hall only)

# HELPERS

## CABBIE

**THUMBNAIL:** Knows everybody in town.

**ABILITIES:** Cool 4, Driving 6, Short Cuts 3

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +1

## NEIGHBORHOOD COP

**THUMBNAIL:** Part of the community.

**ABILITIES:** BS Detector 2, Bureaucracy 2, Cool 6, Cop 3, Fighting 6, Firearms 6, Intimidation 2

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +2

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +1

**STEALTH MODIFIER:** +1

## PUBLIC DEFENDER

**THUMBNAIL:** Well-meaning attorney.

**ABILITIES:** BS Detector 3, Cool 7, Law 3, Negotiation 2, Performance 2

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +1 (or +0 in some Towns and for some public defenders)

## SCHOOL SECRETARY

**THUMBNAIL:** The one who really runs the school.

**ABILITIES:** Bureaucracy 2, Cool 8, Intimidate 2

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +2

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +1 (school)



## THE RELATIONSHIP MAP

This tool helps keep track of the Sleuths and the people they know. It helps the GM create mysteries by seeing who in the town might be responsible or victimized. It helps the players remember who they can call upon for assistance, or have dealt with in the past.

### Creating the Relationship Map

You can create a Relationship map for each of the Sleuths. (Use pencil so you can change and update it over time.) Write the names of their Relationships surrounding the Sleuth at the center. Connect the Relationships to the player character: use a single line arrow for Likes, double lined arrows for Loves, and dotted/intermittent lines for Hates. Add or subtract characters as their relationships change over time.

Some NPCs will have Relationships with more than one of the Sleuths. You can create a universal Relationship map to show the intertwining Relationships the group has. Write each NPC only once—if multiple Sleuths have Relationships with them, draw arrows from each Sleuth to the relevant NPC. You may also add Relationships between NPCs, if they're important or suggest stories or drama. (“Jeannie Hates me, but Likes Skyler who Likes me.”) It's probably visually clearer to use a dotted line between the NPCs and make a note about how they relate to one another.

The GM will likely create at least one or two NPCs who are not on the Sleuths' radar at the start of play. These can be added to the Relationship map after or before a session. The new character's (at least superficially obvious) connections usually appear as the GM reveals the mystery, or reveals the clue that points to that NPC. It's fine for a new NPC to be introduced and added to the map right away. Over time, everyone finds out how they feel about the Sleuths, and about the other people in the Town.

The Relationship map is a helpful tool, not a required part of play. Use or skip this part of record-keeping as your play group sees fit.

Cat into Catalyst

Cat:

Walgreens receipt  
newborn New Can (empty)

Sunglasses

Ricotta sauce (fine)

Klonopin prescription bottle

## Police Tips

As the Sleuths begin investigating crimes, the police likely enter the story on an ongoing basis. They may not take the Sleuths seriously at first, but solutions (in teen mystery drama at least) produce at least grudging or informal acceptance. And when things get dire, it's nice to have a little uniformed backup. Of course, the police showing up is just as likely to short-circuit an investigation ("She's trespassing, officer!") as it is to defuse a situation. The GM should create at least two frequently-appearing officers: one who typically acts as an adversary and one who typically acts as an information source or ally. Establish the nature of the officers when they first appear, with a touch of backstory or a telling character detail.

As the Sleuths are hanging around trying to stake out the Kappa Omega picnic, Detective Oscar Stevenson walks past and strikes up a conversation. He seems to know everyone—he even dated (pick a Sleuth)'s mother in high school. Of course he knows the Kappa Omegas are bad news: that's why he just happened to be walking his dog here and is using the Sleuths as an excuse to linger nearby.

Officer Josie Renko arrives moments after the Sleuths find Danny Kang's car full of industrial foam. It barely takes NOTICE to smell alcohol on her breath as she berates Kang for being stupid enough to park his car on Islander territory and to leave the sunroof open.

You won't need to know the details of the force, at least at first, but you may want to think a bit about size and structure. A police force's size is based on the town's population: a rule of thumb is 2.3 full-time officers per 1,000 residents. So small towns may have just one police chief who takes his own car out to check up on calls about loose animals or break-ins. Larger towns will have more officers, with about 15% acting as supervisors (sergeants, lieutenants, or captains in large departments) and a chief appointed by the mayor or city manager. In hard times, those numbers will drop and everyone has to take on more territory to police or more cases to solve, raising tensions.

Large town and city departments have specialty positions such as detectives, youth officers, and evidence technicians. The county has its own sheriff and deputies; their influence might exceed that of a small-town force, rival a larger force, or just stick to traffic tickets and trespassing in state parks. Sheriffs and small towns usually don't have their own crime lab, but send out evidence for testing to the

state police. State police will have a crime lab, some with more than one for different kinds of evidence. State police, other than enforcing traffic laws on interstate highways, will have a major crimes unit to address serious crimes beyond a town's ability to address. Federal agents are unlikely to venture into small towns with some exceptions. The FBI does investigate all bank robberies. DEA, ATF, and Immigration get involved in large-scale investigations or regional task forces. When they show up, something really serious is going on.

Frequently, rivalries emerge between these various levels of police that the Sleuths may be able to exploit.

## LOCATIONS: WHERE THE STORY HAPPENS

Every Town and every story will need some Locations: one or more high schools, the police station, teen hangouts, maybe a couple of Sleuths' homes.

As well as serving important story functions, Locations have some mechanical effects:

- They may have a Cool cost to enter, called a Threshold (see page 125).
- Losing a throwdown in a given Location may increase that Threshold (see page 126).
- Relationships may provide specific access to a given Location (see page 127).

You don't need a big list of Locations: look at the Sleuths' abilities, hobbies, and Relationships, and build a few places to start with from those. You might want to hint at locations (or even Locations) outside of Town: the high school's sports rival, a nearby college, an amusement park, or a bigger city the Sleuths may take a trip to at some point. Most game play happens in the Town, but it's nice to be able to stretch your legs once in a while and get a fresh setting for events.

Players and GMs can use the Town as a tool to steer their investigations and to find the needed resources to accomplish what is needed. By creating the Town, you also set up likely locations for crimes. Each new Location opens up opportunities for meeting people who may need help, or those who are victimizing others. Each Location also has people who could be friendly to the Sleuths, who can help them in their quest.

Create just a few Locations at the start of play. They can be built easily on the fly, and it's probably better to let them bubble up organically. Having a few at the start helps you get a sense of the Town, but the place won't come to life until you have an interesting scene there.

## CLASS

Class matters in this world, just like our own. At character creation, Sleuths note whether they are, e.g., Upper Crust, Working Stiffs, or From the Wrong Side of the Tracks (see page 34). This can cause trouble (or at least drama) if they try to go somewhere that's obviously from a Class not their own. Class can also be used as one way to add a temporary Threshold cost increase for a Location.

These differences can be used as story stuff, or can be left aside if that's not what your story and community are focused on.

## CREATING LOCATIONS

Make a record of the Locations you create: players and GMs may use note cards for each Location, or write them up on a record sheet or in a notebook or tablet.

Keep track of the Locations on the Town Map (see page 263) that everyone can look at. This public knowledge helps the players decide where to go next.

The GM needs a little more information about the Locations. Read about seeding clues and threats in "*HIGH SCHOOL NOIR: MYSTERIES*" on page 149.

Each Location also needs a few details to help you set it up for the players to interact with it:

- **Set Dressing** describes the Location's appearance and any notable objects.
- **Face** puts an NPC there, described as thoroughly or as briefly as you need.
- **Threshold** is the cost in Cool points that a Sleuth must pay to enter unless she has a Relationship or other "in."

Use note cards, one for each important Location, or record these details on a record sheet or in a notebook or tablet.

## **Set Dressing**

When you enter a scene, create or suggest some details to make it feel real. If it is a nightclub, what kind of music are they playing? What section of town is it in? Is it dark and seedy, or new and trendy? When the players ask questions about the Location, the GM should give the players what they want whenever possible, or better yet turn it around and let them co-create.

*"Is there a boat at the slip?"*

*"You tell me. And tell me, what kind of boat is it?"*

*"Do they have my dad's book in the store?"*

*"Sure they do. Is it piled in the remainder section or given a prominent end-cap?"*

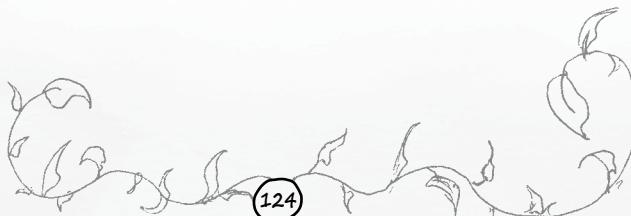
*"Is there a fire extinguisher here?"*

*"You bet. Just break that glass."*

*"Do I know anyone here?"*

*"Scan the crowd—who do you spot across the room by the bar?"*

Of course, sometimes the GM wants to bait a hook or lay a trap, and must close off options in the interest of drama.



“They have that frozen custard you really like.  
And that super-cute boy in your French class is manning the register. What’s his name again?”

“Looks like the phone cord has been cut by vandals.”

“The fire extinguisher is empty. Whoever owns this place has been paying someone off in city hall, maybe.”

## Face

Also, create a Face, a person the Sleuths interact with in the location who may be the gatekeeper or someone to ask for information on an investigation.

Who would the Sleuths meet first here? At a bar or nightclub, it might be the bouncer or bartender. At a library, perhaps the reference librarian on call. The GM should furnish this character with a brief description for the players. You can begin with nothing more than “sales clerk” or “homeless person” if you want, and add details in play, especially if the Sleuths go to a Location you haven’t prepped.

See “*BUILDING NPCs*” (page 113) for more stats when you have time to add them. Provide Abilities and Modifiers, at least, for NPCs who you intend to be threats or key connections. If he’s a potential Sleuth Relationship, give him a Trouble like other NPCs.

Feel free to add more NPCs to a given Location.

## Thresholds

Some Locations are quite harmless: the Sleuths’ homes, the school, the local burger joint. Others may be difficult for the Sleuths to access because they are teenagers: the court house, factories, a trendy nightclub, or the homes of victims. And other places may be dangerous or risky for anyone to enter: construction sites, areas of high crime, toxic disposal sites. With each level of difficulty to enter, there is a Threshold cost of Cool that must be paid before the Sleuths can enter on their own.

**FREE ZONE:** Most areas in School and Around Town are “free” to enter. These are places the Sleuths go all the time and don’t need

to worry about being allowed in: School (with the possible exception of Locations like the Principal's Office or the Boiler Room), their Homes, Mall, Mcburger Hut, Town Green, Skate Park, Town Library.

**ADULT WORLD (1 COOL):** Places any teenager might have a hard time entering or being allowed to stay for long without drawing unfavorable attention: Business Office, Town Hall, Courthouse, Police Station, Nightclub, Bar, Race Track, Principal's Office.

**RISKY AREAS (2 COOL):** Locations where those unfamiliar with the location or without the skills associated with it might be in danger of being hurt or accosted: Construction Site, High Security Home, Red Light District, Drug Stash House, Shooting Range.

### **OPTIONAL RULE: SITUATIONAL BARRIERS**

The GM can add 1 point to the Threshold cost if she thinks the Sleuths are at a disadvantage for a specific reason on entering a Location.

This would most normally be done to make a Free Zone cost 1, but can be added to Locations in other Zones. Once you enter, the Barrier is broken, and you can enter next time at the normal level.

Reasons to add an extra Cool point cost:

**CLASS:** You're of a lower class than the Location or the people there, or of a high enough class that you're unwelcome in it (rich, spoiled-looking teens in a longshoreman's bar, for instance).

**HATES:** If the Location has someone who Hates a Sleuth in it, she'll make it harder on everyone.

**LOST THROWDOWN:** If a Sleuth loses a throwdown at a Location, it's harder to face the social fallout when you go back.

**SPECIAL THREATS:** The GM can always add another point to the Threshold if the Location has something specifically dangerous, unwelcoming, or difficult about it.

Remember that Threshold costs aren't intended to keep the character out of the Locations, but to let her know she's taking a risk by going

in there, to get her to think creatively about how she can manage to enter places, and to encourage her to interact with the people in the world around her to overcome the Threshold.

## **RELATIONSHIPS AND THRESHOLDS**

You can get the help of a Relationship to be able to do away with the Threshold cost of a place. To do so, one of the Sleuths needs to ask the help of someone who either:

- Is associated with the Location, or
- Can reasonably be expected to have influence there.

For example, Jessica is trying to get into the Police Department to ask for help identifying someone they think has a criminal record. The cops aren't taking the Sleuths seriously, and tell them to let the police handle the break-in at the school. The Sleuths think it was an inside job, and have some theories about which teachers or staff at the school have a motive based on their past record. Jessica and the others can:

- Get help from Tyler's mom, who is a cop.
- Drop the name of Jessica's mom, the Medical Examiner.
- Talk to Isaiah, Amanda's friend in the ROTC club, who is doing an internship at the Police Department.
- Create a new Relationship with the Truman High security guard, Ken Lee.

Any of these might be able to help the Sleuths get the investigating officer to take them seriously, or maybe could bring back information on the school staff in question.

If time and drama allow it, when you get a Relationship to help out, call for a scene with that character. Play out asking for help, and spend 1 point in the Relationship to have them act on your behalf (see "*HELP*," page 96). If it's an easy favor, the GM should let the NPC do it, no sweat. If it's something more out of the ordinary, the NPC might want something in return. If it's something dangerous, or not in the NPC's best interest, the GM may ask you to spend 2 Relationship points (see "*RISKY ACTION*," page 96).

# LOCATIONS IN PLAY

The Locations in the Town and beyond provide the framework within which the events of play occur. They can be an important and fun part of play. Some game groups jump right in and want to explore the world, or spend time describing the spaces they play in. Others just want to have a word or two about the space and move right on to the action happening there. Whatever your style, the Locations have various uses, and it is up to the GM and the players to find the right balance of how they function in your game.

The Locations flesh out what teenagers' lives are like today, modeling the constraints they face: they have to get home by curfew, borrow Dad's car to get around, and aren't allowed into nightclubs. Teens find ways to get around these obstacles and make places their own, or create spaces of their own. The best spaces are often off adult radar: the abandoned house in the neighborhood, cemeteries, McDonald's parking lots. Look outside the obvious for where the teens may end up in this game.

## Scene Settings

The first and primary role of Locations is as settings for scenes. At the start of a given scene, the GM or players must choose where the characters are. This gives the players something to react to. Having a chat sitting outside of the principal's office is a lot different from sitting out in the quad after lunch. Players can help describe Locations, add unique details that help set off how their character would respond to a given place, and create a dynamic relationship between the Sleuths and their surroundings.

## Plot Ideas

Locations will be the sites of major plot points. It's exciting when the gang has hunted down a key informant to his pool hall dive. Or perhaps they get to the abandoned warehouse in time to see a follow-up crime in action. If you have a possible great scene in mind, try to set it in a pre-existing Location—or build a great Location to go with it.

Locations also sprout their own plot ideas. For example, if you know that the kids go swimming in an old quarry, that means that there's a

place in town where large objects can be hidden (cars, bodies, etc.), possibly a gravel or cement business elsewhere in town with lots of trucks for carrying mysterious objects, and a lonely spot where discreet transactions can take place or where kidnapping victims may be taken where no one can hear their pleas for help. If there is a hacker lab in the school, students may be trying to program the 3D printer to churn out bongs, or build a surveillance robot to help them cheat on tests. If the players create a Location, this signals their interest in who is there and what can be done in this place. Bring it into the story and let it shape the crimes around it. (See "*MYSTERY DESIGN*," page 155.)

## **Clue Locations**

As the Sleuths investigate the crime in question, they find clues in Locations that help them get to the bottom of things. They may sweep for clues and interview potential witnesses in offices, alleyways, or city streets. They may hit the libraries, computer labs, and bars to use informational resources or hear the word on the street about what may have gone down. They can find experts on questions beyond their ability in schoolrooms, businesses, or the homes of Relationship NPCs. The Face or another NPC at a Location may have seen a suspect or victim here. Or security cameras from the convenience store across the street might have caught the license plate of a getaway car. All of this helps them narrow down the possibilities and move the investigation along. (See "*CLUES*," page 157.)

You may wish to seed in red herrings, too—clues that seem important, but that don't relate to the main case. Be sparing. (See also "*KEEP IT SIMPLE*," page 161.) Players may get frustrated by being sent down too many dead ends. Instead, it's always possible to let a seeming clue lead to another character who is having difficulties: a B-plot or C-plot mystery. Or maybe that "red herring" becomes an A-plot case later on down the line.

## **OBSTACLES AND THREATS**

As well as resources, each Location potentially presents barriers to the Sleuths' investigation, or at least places they can get themselves into trouble. The stakes increase as the Sleuths move farther out of their comfort zone. This is reflected in the Threshold cost in Cool points to enter these places, but should also play out in the types of threats that

the Sleuths encounter. It doesn't all have to be mobsters in track suits or the vice principal on the prowl. Simple obstacles like wary office secretaries, crushed out underclassmen and women, or drunk partiers help keep things from being too easy or simple for the Sleuths. (See "PLAYER-FACING SOCIAL CONTESTS," page 52; "OBSTACLES," page 113.)

## MAKING YOUR TOWN

Set your story in our sample Town of Drewsbury (see pages 139-157), or pick a different name—or a different Town—that your group likes. Perhaps set your game in the hometown of one of the players, or somewhere in the area you are living.

The default *Bubblegumshoe* Town is a mid-sized town, probably somewhere between 15,000 and 40,000 people, and definitely under 100,000. It's just big enough to have a mall and some nightlife, but small enough to have neighborhoods and businesses where the kids can get to know their neighbors.

This may seem old-fashioned in our rapidly growing world, where virtual interactions are becoming more common than face-to-face communication. But it's a fertile setting for a group of kids who want to make a difference and rely on people to be there. The Town is just small enough that the word can get around about goings-on, but big enough that you're not hemmed in by everyone knowing everyone and there are stores and neighborhoods you might not have visited yet. The town's not small enough to homogenize its local minorities (ethnic or cultural), but not big enough that it can sideline and ignore them, either.

But maybe you disagree with us. You'd like to set *Bubblegumshoe* in a big city, or in a Town more polarized or divided, or add some other

### R-E-S-P-E-C-T

As you create your Town, use your common sense to avoid stereotypes. Neighborhoods are people's homes, whichever side of the tracks they fall on. Think of it from the point of view of the people who live there. Create Locations and NPCs that you can understand and empathize with. Speak up if you think something is a caricature, and change it. You might take the original idea and say that that is how people think it is, then re-work the idea to show what it is really like. Give that part of the Town a more human face.

twist. Go right ahead! Those setting changes might inspire some rules tweaks, alongside the different tenor of the mysteries. Some more possibilities for both appear in "*DRIFTS*," pages 187-217.

For more variety, add different areas near the Town. Set the "Big City" nearby (well, a bigger city anyway) where people from neighboring towns go to see the theater, get trashed after graduation, or to follow their dreams and perhaps grow up. Colleges and universities there or in neighboring towns add some peers of a slightly older set, to give your Sleuths people to look up to, or to look into. Keep natural places in mind, too: parks, campgrounds, beaches, and forest preserves are all good Locations where things can happen or where a trail of clues can lead.

## A Diverse Palette

Stories have more options if your Town is diverse, mixed with respect to class, age, ability, sexual orientation, and ethnic origin. It's not paradise; especially in crime fiction, diversity doesn't mean everyone gets along. But your Sleuths and the people they meet will reflect more of the true diversity of the country's (and the world's) population. Part of being a teenager in the contemporary world is coming to terms with and embracing the global nature of our world. Making the Town a rich fabric of differences helps you capture that feel, as well as offering a wide variety of interesting material for stories. Get to know the people in this Town in all their differences, and you'll find issues and situations play out that will give you a broader set of stories emerging from peoples' lives.

The Town is probably a complex place with people from all walks of life, with all the richness and complications that brings. Create black, white, Latino, South Asian, Native American, and Asian communities and characters, with their own tensions and their own troubles. Show how everyone's lives and communities come together or fray at the edges. Have the Sleuths meet gay and trans characters living their lives. Create queer and physically challenged Sleuths and Relationships. Since its inception, noir fiction has always highlighted class differences. Present the rich and poor, their different options and different demons.

None of this diversity comes with judgment or preaching; noir fiction has also always embraced an "everyone might be a victim or a villain" attitude. (True heroes of any color or class are pretty thin on the ground in noir.) Present a living picture of the world, combining hard-boiled cynicism and teenage optimism. The Sleuths, fundamentally, want to help others. This makes them potential heroes—and brings them into contact with a wide variety of people, all of whom have their own loves, dreams, and anxieties.

## Town Creation Checklist

The group creates the Town collaboratively at the beginning of the game.

- Start your Town Map, adding Locations to this as you go along
- Name the Town
- Create the School
- Choose Locations for Relationship NPCs
- Create Adversaries and Authorities
- Add final Locations: Home Turf, Hangout, etc.

## The Town Map

Add your Locations to the Town Map that comes with the game (see page 263). This is a list of the Locations divided into four columns: School, Around Town, Adult World, and Risky Areas. This allows you to tell at a glance how difficult things will be at a given place. The characters can enter places Around Town and most Locations at School at will. Some places (like the Principal's Office or the Police Station) are in the Adult World where teens would not normally be welcome. Other places are out and out dangerous: Risky Areas. (See "*THRESHOLDS*," page 125.)

Keep track of other information connected with the Locations (Set Dressing, Faces, clues and secrets, etc.) in the GM's notes or series bible (see page 112). If you wish, make a bigger Town Map with room for the players to make their own notes on NPCs, clues found, etc.

## Name Your Town

Pick a name for your Town. What region is it in? What country? Some example US Town names include:

- **Northeast:** Mameeg, New Middleford, Chateauberg, Sussexdale, Nashwe
- **Southeast:** Isabel Key, Fort Stuart West, Lamour, St. Etienne, Moss Port
- **Southwest:** Dzil, Red Butte, Los Santos, Chaparral, San Leon
- **North and Far West:** Rock Landing, Santa Carlita, Sage Pass, Skagit, Bear Mountain, Pohick

- **Pacific Northwest:** Drift, Peak Bay, Spukani, Elk Port, Redwood City, Issaquah
- **Midwest:** Carthage, Nekaamow, Brook Falls, Hamilton, Cherryville

## Make Your School

Once you've picked a name for the Town, make the High School your Sleuths attend. The name of the School often sets the tone for the whole series, so you may want to keep your options open for now and just call it "[Town] High." Here are some examples for when you're ready to give your School some character:

- John and Robert Kennedy Charter School
- Rocky Mountain County Regional
- Sojourner Truth Magnet School
- Birkenstock Free School
- Prairie Street Middle and High School

Drewsbury Town Map

TRUMAN HIGH (0)	AROUND TOWN (0)	ADULT WORLD (1)	RISKY AREAS (2)
Hackers' Club	Memorial Rock	Triple Diamond Pawn Shop	Johnny's Bar
Gym	Starsmash Theater 8	Police Station	Market Square Grocery
Library	McBurger Hut	Devil's Gear Bike Shop	Industry Row
Courtyard	Oatgrass Café		The Acres
Principal's Office (1)	The Mars Trip		
Teachers' Lounge (1)	Joyland		
Boiler Room (2)			
The Roof (2)			

The School is an important aspect of the Sleuths' lives. Knowing a few things about it shapes the rest of the game. During Town creation, each player (including the GM) should say something true about the School. For example:

- Our football team always loses.
- The teachers went on strike last year.
- The food in the cafeteria wins awards but the kids hate it anyway.
- Feeder school for Yale and Harvard.
- State funding was slashed last year.
- Got a high tech grant from a corporation with some strings attached.

## **Roll Call**

After everyone has said one thing about the School, start creating other Locations in the Town. Start with the Locations where the Sleuths' Relationships might be found. Start with one Location per NPC for now; feel free to skip NPCs where the Location is just "Home." It's fine if some Relationships have the same Location; for example, Jessica's mother is a forensic pathologist and Tyler's mother is a police officer. They could both have the Police Station as their Location.

Add these Locations to the Town Map.

## **Adversaries and Authorities**

Once you have a sense of the major Locations in the Town, create some important NPCs who the Sleuths do not have Relationships with. Of particular interest are those who will hold power over the teens. Who are the major adversaries in their lives? The vice principal? A mean neighbor? A rich resident who's got clout with the local law? And who are the authorities? These may overlap with the adversaries, but should go beyond them. These would be people the Sleuths may have to ask for help, or bring evidence of crimes to during a mystery. The sheriff. The principal. The local fixer who knows a guy. Look over the Locations you've created that represent power in the Town, and associate them with characters who fulfill these roles.

Write them down on a “public” Supporting Cast Checklist (see page 256), if you’re keeping one. Like the Town Map, this can function as a memory jog for the players: “Hey, we haven’t asked Brenda where she was during the party.”

The GM might introduce obvious villains (“sanctimonious rich jerk,” “publicity hound police chief,” “overly handsy soccer coach”) or keep her Big Bads a secret for now, writing them down in her own notes only.

## Final Locations

Give your Town a once over. Is there anything else obvious that is missing? A restaurant teens frequent? The Town Hall? If the GM has an introductory mystery in mind this is a good time to introduce one or two specific Locations for it.

### OPTIONAL: HOME TURF

If your Sleuths have taken some trouble to set up an area as their own, they can create special status for a Location as their Home Turf. When there, NPCs get a +2 to their Difficulty for throwdown tests against the Sleuths. This is only true of NPCs who don’t “belong” there: if the Sleuths make the Loading Dock their Home Turf, the stoners and goths who also hang out there don’t suffer any penalties in throwdowns if the Sleuths piss them off. Don’t mess where you eat, in other words.

The main characters may also adopt a Location as their headquarters: maybe they use the surveillance bots in the hacker lab to broadcast images of a Hate being petty and cruel, or they’ve helped one of the football players get out from under a cheating scandal, so the locker rooms are now a safe haven for our intrepid teens. Foes take a +1 Difficulty to their throwdowns in such “adoptive Home Turf,” or just have to pay a 2 point Cool penalty to start something there. Helping others can make a difference in your life!

If the GM would rather present all of high school as a jungle red in tooth and claw, she can decide that no turf is Home Turf except (possibly) a Sleuth’s actual Home.



## OPTIONAL: HANGOUT

You can give your Sleuths a base of operations. This might be the burger joint where everyone ends up after school, or the cemetery by the river that spooks everyone else out. Maybe it relates to how they all know each other. Perhaps they all volunteer at the local radio station?

Have the players choose a Location together. Put it on the Town Map as a Free Zone Location. The GM gives it a Face and Set Dressing. Then it functions as Home Turf for any of the Sleuths present there during a social contest. For groups playing with the Kimball Middle School drift (page 199), having a Hangout might be just the thing to create a sense of safety and security. For groups interested in drama and PvP conflicts, this rule might break the intended tone.

## Welcome Wagon

Creating characters and the Town can be a good goal for the first session of a campaign. Rather than launching right into a full-blown mystery, the GM can run a brief encounter between the Sleuths and some disposable adversaries at the school. This gives everyone a chance to introduce their character and learn how the rules work. You may wish to stat up your own set of NPCs for the Sleuths to face together, or use this sample encounter with a pack of football players and cheerleaders.



*One of the Sleuths crossed Cyril, defensive captain of the Truman Lions football team, and he's out for revenge. Yesterday, the Sleuth saw Cyril browbeating Regina to make her write an English paper he can turn in as his own. She's an outstanding student, and Cyril needs an A to pass the class. The whole gang plans to confront Cyril to get him to leave Regina alone, but Cyril has some help, too...*

### CYRIL MILLER

**THUMBNAIL:** Mean and ambitious defensive captain of the Truman Lions football team. "Anything I can do to get ahead is okay by me."

**TROUBLE:** Failing English.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 4, Cool 7, Gossip 3, Intimidation 4, Performance 3, Throwdown 6

**NOTES:** Cyril is a sharp leader for the team and is loyal to his friends, but he's convinced that results are all that matters. The team respects him but is afraid of him, too.

**LOCATION:** Locker Room

### MARIA REYES

**THUMBNAIL:** Head J.V. cheerleader. "The team has to stick together."

**TROUBLE:** Boyfriend is cheating on her.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 4, Cool 8, Grownup Face 3, Performance 3, Preparedness 3, Throwdown 7

**NOTES:** Best friends since elementary school, Cyril and Maria have dreamed of taking their teams to the national competition. Maria helps coordinate the logistics for games on the road and is beloved by both the football team and cheerleaders.

**LOCATION:** Gymnasium

## **KEITH JONES**

**THUMBNAIL:** New recruit to the football team looking to prove himself.

**TROUBLE:** Actually wants to be on the cheerleading team.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 4, Cool 4, Intuition 3, Performance 3, Throwdown 6

**NOTES:** Keith loves to cheer and just came from another school where he was on the team. He was afraid to try out here, so instead he joined the football team. He wants to be accepted by both teams. Has started helping Maria make up new cheers.

**LOCATION:** Gymnasium

## **SUZIE YEUNG**

**THUMBNAIL:** Rising star, talented wide receiver for the football team.

**TROUBLE:** Facing serious opposition for joining the football team.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 8, Cool 7, Fighting 4, Negotiation 2, Throwdown 8

**NOTES:** Suzie has been training for track and gymnastics, but recently fell in love with football. She's strong and limber, and fought for a tryout for the team. She shows real talent, but her place on the team is still very controversial. She relies on her team mates, and wants the team to succeed. Grateful to Elizabeth's brother Gabriel who supported her joining the team. Often wears a shirt that says "Girls can't what?"

**LOCATION:** Weight Room

The team is preparing for the regional football league competition. If their team leader gets caught plagiarizing and bullying another student, the whole team may be penalized and disqualified from competing. Cyril will deny it at first, but if pushed may argue that it is a victimless crime: in this case the only ones who get hurt are the other team members who would lose their chance to compete.

KL 6340

Mrs. West

Science class

Blue devy

CR

L

The Sleuths have many different options here (with possible abilities they could use in parentheses):

- Investigate the team and use tensions within it to weaken Cyril's position (**GOSSIP**).
- Instigate a major throwdown to humiliate Cyril or turn team members against him (**TAUNT, THROWDOWN**).
- Investigate Cyril to get proof that he's stolen the paper from Regina and threaten to narc on him (**SNEAKING** or **COMPUTERS, INTIMIDATION**).
- Come up with some way for Cyril to incriminate himself to the English teacher (**GROWNUP FACE, COMPUTERS, FILCH**).
- Find something else Cyril wants and try to talk him out of cheating (**GOSSIP, NEGOTIATE**).
- Something else of your group's devising.

Describe the situation to the players, allowing them to confront Cyril and the others. Then based on their choices, run them through that part of the system to demonstrate how it works. Fast forward to the final showdown, if any: wrap up the conflict after two or three scenes, and let the chips fall where they may. Reward the players with 1-2 build points each if things worked out for the best, and let them customize their characters further based on what happened here.

## SAMPLE TOWN: DREWSBURY

The sample Town included in *Bubblegumshoe* is Drewsbury. We've included some Locations, NPCs, and mysteries for your group to use as jumping off points if you'd like. Drewsbury is our homage to that iconic teen sleuth, Nancy Drew, who explored mysteries penned by authors writing under the pseudonym Carolyn Keene for over 50 years.

Drewsbury has boroughs and a strong class divide that is important in the sample adventure included, "Hey! That's My Bike!" (pages 219-249). You don't need to include neighborhoods in your Town, but we found it was good shorthand to keep track of the flavor of the Locations, and of the kinds of reception our Sleuths might receive.



Drewsbury is a small city of about 40,000. It has the usual amenities: a multi-plex at the higher-end strip mall, several lower-end strip malls, a recently renovated library, and a small historical society. Socially, Drewsbury is known for having more bars than churches.

The town is divided between The Acres (recently developed areas on the edge of town whose residents commute to jobs elsewhere); Germantown (originally industrial housing known for its German immigrants, still an immigrant community divided between a largely Hispanic and Korean population); Burditt Hill (the traditional upper class of the town); and the North End (a largely Black American neighborhood that used to be part of Germantown).



We created many locations, in Truman High and throughout the Town, to give a wide range of examples. Pick a few for your game, or create a handful to start off for your own Town, and watch the Town grow over time as you play in new Locations each session.

## THE HIGH SCHOOL: TRUMAN HIGH

Four players and the GM create Truman High together. Each adds an aspect to the school's Thumbnail or Trouble:

Truman High is a **CROSSROADS** for all the different strata of kids from Drewsbury, with students from the Acres, Germantown, Burditt Hill, and the North End all attending together. Built in the 60s for the baby boom, it is a **BIG SCHOOL** with lots of labs and classrooms, but its facilities are somewhat **RUN-DOWN**. This is in sharp contrast to **RIVAL SCHOOL** St. Joan's (which has a disproportionate number of students from The Acres and Burditt Hill), with its beautifully landscaped grounds and well-appointed, Georgian



style red-brick buildings. Truman High Principal Virginia Sanchez has been fighting with the School Board to increase the facilities budget for a decade, but the economic downturn has seen the school's **BUDGET SLASHED** by the town.

## FREE ZONE LOCATIONS IN TRUMAN HIGH

### HACKERS' CLUB

**Set Dressing:** Basement maker lab area, full of wires and hard drives.

**Face:** Parker Yip, president of the club. She wants to get into Yale.

### GYM

**Set Dressing:** Fancy, old-style wood parquet floor, state of the 20th century sports equipment.

**Face:** Albina Bartek, phys. ed. teacher. Wants her daughter Iva to compete in the Olympics.

### LIBRARY

**Set Dressing:** Brand new tablets recently donated, leaky skylight.

**Face:** Barad Pawar, Librarian. Regrets the information age is upon us.

### COURTYARD

**Set Dressing:** Splintery picnic tables no one uses. Corner behind dumpsters is good place to smoke if you don't want to be seen.

**Face:** Bella Al Zahrani, layabout in chief. She is secretly applying to Harvard.

## ADULT WORLD LOCATIONS IN TRUMAN HIGH

### PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

**Set Dressing:** Pictures of every graduating class, framed letters from loving students.

**Face:** Principal Virginia Sanchez. Lobbying for increase to school budget.

## TEACHERS' LOUNGE

**Set Dressing:** Scuffed up green faux-leather couch. Vending machine with healthy snacks.

**Face:** Richard Klyme, the vice principal. Vendetta against students who taunt him with his nickname.

## RISKY ZONE LOCATIONS IN TRUMAN HIGH

### BOILER ROOM

**Set Dressing:** Smoky and hot, kids call it "hell." Card table used for games by maintenance staff.

**Face:** Cathy Jones. Oldest janitor in the school. Chain smoker.

### THE ROOF

**Set Dressing:** Triple locks on the hatch to get out there. At least one student has fallen and been badly hurt.

**Face:** Andre Dubois, Building Custodian. Eccentric. Likes to not be seen.



# WELCOME TO DREWSBURY

Popular hangout spots for teens often depend on where you're from. The North End has the River Gardens, a public park and recreation court complex heavier on concrete than green space, busy with people playing basketball or walking dogs in the summer. Germantown youth frequent Joyland, an arcade next to the Triple Diamond Pawn Shop in a strip mall near the highway, with outdated video games and pinball machines, run by proprietor Allan Tripp, who helps keep the boat afloat by supplying marijuana to patrons.

The top hangout currently for kids from The Acres is the Oatgrass Café, a juice-bar and gluten-free establishment in the Old Town Green neighborhood, which is on the gentrifying cusp of turning into a thriving restaurant and cute-shops district. Recently opened there is The Violet Ray, a feminist collective book shop.

The City of Friends Country Club in Burditt Hill is a hub for upper-class teens, who spend the summer there being coached in tennis or golf, or going on dates at its Rockridge Grille throughout the year.

Everyone ends up at the Eastside Mall, with its mix of Dollar Stores, chain clothing stores, and boutique shops for designer handbags or custom golf gear. A favorite mall shop is Mars Trip, a sci-fi/mystery book and game store run by Ruby and Randy Bell, twins and avid geeks. The Starsmash 8 movie theater has recently added new screens, where everyone sees the latest blockbusters. In the Old Town Green, the refurbished Fletcher Theater shows foreign, indie, and arthouse films.

# AROUND TOWN/FREE ZONE LOCATIONS IN DREWSBURY

## MEMORIAL ROCK

**Set Dressing:** Large granite boulder on the outskirts of town, painted by townie high school students (and recent graduates) with memorials to peers killed in accidents or military service.

**Face:** None

## HANNOVER GARAGE

**Set Dressing:** Hannover Garage: Greg Hannover's sound-insulated garage. Tyler Lincoln and the Vice Presidents are a hip hop band modeled after Stetsasonic and the Roots, featuring Tyler on keys and bass, Jessica on saxophone, Greg on turntables, and a rotating cast of emcees, guitarists, etc. from the local student body.

**Face:** Greg Hannover, Tyler's best friend and Jessica's ex.

## STARSMASH THEATER 8

**Set Dressing:** Flashing lights with green and purple theme. Jester mascot.

**Face:** Starsmash Clown. Mascot played by various staff people.

## McBURGER HUT

**Set Dressing:** Scottish themed burger joint. All waiters wear kilts.

**Face:** Grace Ortega, manager. Studying business at night.

## OATGRASS CAFÉ

**Set Dressing:** Pots with various grasses everywhere. Patrons put in orders via tablets at tables.

**Face:** Bernice Jackson, proprietor. Wants her fiancé to set a date.

## KOREAN CULTURAL COMMUNITY CENTER OF DREWSBURY

**Set Dressing:** Built by community volunteers. Friday Korean film nights. Offers concerts, classes, and translation services. Jessica's father used to volunteer here.

**Face:** So-yi Chung, Director. She is working hard to set up a capital endowment for the center.

## THE MARS TRIP

**Set Dressing:** Hard-to-get SF and mystery novels. *Dark Crystal* and *Fanboys* posters on the door.

**Face:** Ruby and Randy Bell, book/game shop owners. Get new store off and running.

## JOYLAND

**Set Dressing:** Hopelessly out-of-date video games, now "retro."

**Face:** Alan Tripp, proprietor. Surreptitiously selling pot to keep business going.

## AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH OF DREWSBURY

**Set Dressing:** Historic brick building in the North End of town. Busy community center.

**Face:** Frederick Wendt, Pastor of the Church. Working with interfaith council and local Black Lives Matter chapter to address hate crimes and law enforcement abuses against black citizens and other people of color in town.

## ADULT WORLD LOCATIONS IN DREWSBURY

### TRIPLE DIAMOND PAWN SHOP

**Set Dressing:** Concrete building, shuttered windows. Lots of security cameras.

**Face:** Rick Brown, pawn shop owner. Hopes to get Jason, his 30-year-old son, out on his own.

### POLICE STATION

**Set Dressing:** Brightly lit, many charts and posters with statistics on the walls.

**Thumbnail:** Overwhelmed town force.

**Trouble:** Reforming Chief vs. "We've always done it this way."

**Face:** Police Chief Daniel Wright, member of the Lenape Nation. Getting his master's degree in anthropology.

## DEVIL'S GEAR BIKE SHOP

**Set Dressing:** High-end bike shop mostly catering to serious gear-heads from the Acres.

**Face:** Victor Price, Kaitlyn Price's uncle. California gear-head eager for sales.

## BAD NEWS IN DREWSBURY

There are growing gang problems: in recent years, several large-city families sent their troubled sons to stay with relatives in Drewsbury to keep them out of trouble only to find the urban gangbangers recreating their street gangs in Germantown and the North End. A small group of wannabe gangbangers turned into several organized groups of middle and high school aged kids enticed into a more aggressive, violent lifestyle by young gangbangers in their late teens and 20s. By the time Chief Wright recognized the problem, it was already well entrenched. He wants to adopt the latest policies and reforms to solve his gang problem, but he tends to go from one fad to another, never sticking with any program long enough to actually solve his problems. The department has mostly been trying to sweep its gang problem under the rug to avoid adverse affects on real estate prices.

"confirmed" case sightings

- Lake, 9/28
- Truman Acres mall, 10/5
- Travel Stop, I60, 10/8

Mr. Wright  
not returning  
calls

# RISKY ZONE LOCATIONS IN DREWSBURY

## JOHNNY'S

**Set Dressing:** Dark, grimy bar. Full of regular customers at 3 p.m. Common place for fights.

**Face:** Archibald Smith. Bartender and bouncer. Studying for GED.

## MARKET SQUARE GROCERY

**Set Dressing:** Well-stocked Korean grocery. Central hangout for Red Scorpion gang.

**Face:** Danny Kang, Jessica's cousin. Looking to prove himself to the gang.

## INDUSTRY ROW

**Set Dressing:** Ramshackle buildings. Abandoned factories full of rusting partially-stripped machinery, decaying floors, and old, forgotten chemicals.

**Face:** Jim, white homeless man with a Jack Russell Terrier. Looking for odd jobs.

## AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH PARISH CENTER

**Set Dressing:** Wooden Arts and Crafts style building on lot adjacent to church. Windows broken and walls of great hall covered with unskillful graffiti from break-in. Closed for repair.

**Face:** Jeffrey George, Church Sexton. Head of committee to restore the Parish Center.

## THE ACRES

**Set Dressing:** McMansion houses with gates, security, and guard dogs.

**Face:** Artemis Yilmaz, chief private security officer for neighborhood. Recovering from injury.

Bobby  
FBI movie





# HIGH SCHOOL NOIR: MYSTERIES

In *Bubblegumshoe*, adventures take place in a community and involve the Sleuths' family, friends, and acquaintances. The Sleuths can't just move away, no matter how much they had to alienate the principal, the police chief, their parents, or that hottie in third period History. They have to live with the consequences, which will affect their Relationships. These Relationships give characters skills and resources that a teenager normally would not have access to, but with a cost. The GM needs to resolve that cost, either in the occasional B-story or a narrated scene between adventures.

A tension exists between investigative adventures and soap opera. Too little focus on how the characters fit into the community and maintain relationships, and the game feels like any other detective story, but with pint-sized private eyes. Too much soap opera, and the players may roll their eyes and contemplate a nice simple dungeon crawl in that other game. Each group will find its own balance. As the GM you'll need to listen to your players to figure out what interests them.

## ↳ Interesting HIGH SCHOOL: THE GOOD PARTS

*Bubblegumshoe* isn't real high school! Don't get mired in reality. In the real world, police, parents, school administrators, social workers, guidance counselors, and all sorts of other well-meaning adults insulate (or try to insulate) teens from actually solving their own problems. *Bubblegumshoe* isn't like that. The Sleuths are on their own.

Their friends, their family, have real problems that need to be solved. Either no one else cares, or getting adult authorities involved is just going to make things worse.

Sleuths are very competent at what they do. True, they don't have the experience, resources, or knowledge of an adult private eye or police detective, but no adult knows the locker rooms, science labs, and homerooms the way they do. Adults, to many teens, are the enemy. If you want a teenager to tell you who brought the roofies to last week's party, vandalized the coach's SUV, or is going out with the quarterback, you need to be a teen.

## **Conceits: A High School Handbook**

A conceit is a storytelling device that's important to make a kind of narrative work. It's a shorthand that makes the story more interesting than it would be in reality; just accept it so your story can move along. Our subgenre, high school noir, borrows some conceits from typical detective fiction—things happen more quickly than they do in reality, for example—and adds a few specific to this genre.

### **You CAN'T RUN TO PAPA!**

Sleuths can't just call the cops or the principal and let them solve the problem: that makes for a boring story. Give your Sleuths some reasons why adults are untrustworthy, don't care, or are just too clueless to be useful, and let them take the reins from there.

Teens and school administrators are naturally suspicious of each other. The principal has to worry about the school board, powerful or pushy parents, lawsuits, bad press, and all sorts of mysterious grown-up nuances. Best to keep things running smoothly by suspending (or expelling) troublemakers at the first whiff of a problem, rather than risk ruffling feathers by punishing the scions of the wealthy and connected for their misdeeds.

Teens and police are even more suspicious of each other. Once the police are involved, things get serious fast. The police have to worry about parents, lawyers, political activists, civil rights lawsuits, cell phone video filmed at the worst times, reporters, and the mayor. Some chiefs and sheriffs may need to worry about re-election. There are

major crimes going on; who needs the distraction of a high school dust-up?

Most teens are not savvy about the subtleties of interrogations, interviews, *Miranda* warnings, and the criminal justice system. What they do know from friends or family caught up in it is likely terrifying. In some places, there's overt social pressure not to cooperate with police—the Stop Snitchin' movement, for example—and serious consequences for being known or thought of as a snitch. Even if the Sleuths are on the law's side, they've likely ignored various legal niceties (trespassing, breaking and entering, electronic eavesdropping, for example) in getting their proof. Having the police take too much interest in how the case was tied up in a neat bow is dangerous.

Then there are the Sleuth's parents. Snitching to your parents about teen stuff just isn't cool. After grounding a risk-taking Sleuth, parents are likely to make a well-meaning, concerned call to the school administrators, or the police, which is just going to make the situation worse. Parents may be busy with work or other obligations, distracted by their own problems, unreliable, irresponsible, unable to cope with their own problems never mind the Sleuth's, or just absent.

At worst, from a Sleuth's point of view, the authorities are more concerned with their jobs than any sort of just result. They'll protect the interests of the wealthy, connected, and powerful. They talk a good game about justice and fair treatment, but never seem to live up to their words. The adult world is mysterious, illogical (to a teen), full of nuances and harsh punishments.

This doesn't mean that Sleuths can't have relationships with their parents, or authority figures, that make them sometimes sympathetic. Sympathetic adults are part of the genre. But there should be reasons why the Sleuths can't just go to that sympathetic adult to solve their problems.

## **You JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND!**

Adults just don't get why things are so important to a teen. They've forgotten the rush of teenage love, the heartbreak of a friend's betrayal, the obsession with cliques, and the sheer cruelty that teens

inflict on the weakest in the hallway herd. So teens respond with monosyllabic grunts to parents' inquiries about their lives.

Teens bring problems to a Sleuth because adults can't or won't solve them. When someone steals a teen's smart phone, fancy jacket, or tricked-out bike, the police will take a report, but not do much more. Absent clear physical evidence, thefts are hard to solve and rarely excite the press, prosecuting attorney, or one's superiors at promotion time. It's just not worth much adult effort. But to the teen, that phone, that jacket, that bike is important. They may not be easy or even possible to replace. Replacing something also means admitting to your parents that you lost it which comes with its own consequences.

Teens may have all sorts of relationship problems: someone is bullying them, spreading rumors, blackmailing them with ill-advised cell phone pictures, or cheating on them. The problem may be too embarrassing to admit to an adult (who is, of course, likely to tell one's parents), so the Sleuths are the best option for rough justice. Bullying, sexual assault, teen drinking, and teen drug abuse are, on and off, on school officials' radar, but they are more likely to respond with a sledgehammer of punishment rather than figure out what actually happened and actually solve the problem.

Remember that adults are clueless about the teen world, even (perhaps especially) the teachers who think they are cool and relate to their students. They don't understand the relationships, the unspoken tensions and alliances, the slang, the customs, or often the tech involved.

## **BUT YOU GOT THE WRONG GUY!**

Genuine violent crime—murder, serious physical assaults, sexual assaults, child abuse, etc.—is a serious issue that the adult authorities involve themselves in. It is hard to plausibly explain why the adults are unconcerned with a dead body, and even more so when several start cropping up. A murder or a serious assault should be a big thing, a season-long arc rather than an individual adventure. It should also have ramifications on the Sleuths' Relationships, who may be suspects, witnesses, or friends of the victim.

Sleuths may get involved when they know that the adults are wrong. When the wrong person is getting railroaded or hounded by the

## Triggers

When the players create Relationships and Locations with Troubles, they are giving the GM some hints about the kinds of tensions that are fair game: class and ethnic tensions, drug abuse, and gang violence are all explicitly or implicitly part of the Drewsbury sample setting. If, as a player, you would strongly prefer not to have a topic or theme as part of your setting, you may want to let the GM know up front.

Sexual violence—such as rape and child abuse—is serious and may be something that not all groups are comfortable portraying in their hobby, and one that a GM and players may want to talk about before making it part of the game. Even if it's part of the drama, it doesn't have to take center stage every time. For example, at several points in *Veronica Mars* Veronica is threatened with rape, but it only actually occurs to her once, off-screen, in the background events before the start of the series. The event is a central part of Veronica's motivations thereafter. This is also a topic to handle with care.

*Bubblegumshoe* strongly discourages actual violence, especially when committed by Sleuths. When violence occurs, it should be serious. The GM Google Image searching for actual autopsy photos when the Sleuths encounter a murder may be a bit much: this isn't a horror setting. But it is fair to emphasize the social and emotional consequences of violence, even if you leave the physical descriptions vague.

media, it may be up to the Sleuths to find some way to prove the authorities wrong—a thankless task as it will embarrass everyone involved in the wrongful prosecution.

In some stories (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for example), people die, disappear, or turn into demons with shocking frequency. The conceit here is that the students recognize this, but the adults either are in denial or are secretly complicit with the vampires and demons. Even in *Buffy*, vampires vanish in a convenient cloud of dust, leaving no bodies to trouble the police. Demons likewise rarely leave inconvenient corpses. It is plausible, barely, that most adults just don't know what's going on.

## **WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS**

Given all of this, the Sleuths have **primacy**. While they may seem like ordinary, everyday teens, they get involved in every major thing that happens around their school, and even their town. Problems that should be the bailiwick of the police or the principal are routinely investigated and solved by our young heroes. Other teens turn to them with their problems and trust them with their innermost secrets. Adventures happen because something has gone wrong for the Sleuth's friends, enemies, team mates, and lab partners. The victim ("client") may expressly ask for help, or the Sleuths may stick their noses in to help a friend, teach an enemy a lesson, create a favor to trade later, or sometimes just for a bit of cash to pay for a new phone or laptop.

Adventures should be personal and should affect the Sleuths' Relationships. Don't limit this to the obvious benefits of helping your BFF out when her credit card was stolen and used to fund a buying spree at Hot Topic. The culprit may be friends with a Relationship who doesn't approve of what he did, but also doesn't approve of having a nosy investigator making things public. Worse, a Relationship may be (or may be suspected as) the culprit.

Primacy also means that the Sleuths will tend to interact with the same people. Regardless of how many patrol officers a small town should have, if the characters have a Relationship or history with a particular officer, that's the one who shows up when they are trying to get into the evidence room or getting busted for speeding. The same local detective coincidentally gets the assignment when the Sleuths are involved in a significant crime, and interrogates them when they are suspects.

## **PHYSICAL EVIDENCE WON'T SAVE THE DAY**

Modern forensics are a great thing. Current techniques can extract DNA samples from only a few cells on a surface. The Internet puts basic techniques just a mouse-click away. But the high school Sleuth doesn't have access to law enforcement databases (or at least not easy access to them). When a crime involves the police, there won't be unambiguous physical evidence that points clearly to the right

culprit. (If there were, the police could solve the case without the Sleuths' involvement.) In this case, *Bubblegumshoe* is close to reality: crime scene evidence may be ambiguous, contaminated by random passers-by, poorly collected, or not collected at all. Obvious key videos may be too dark, blurry, and murky to show the culprit, while still providing a clue to the savvy Sleuth. If obvious physical evidence is there for the police to find, it is probably misleading, coincidental, or a fake.

In cases (like teen drama of some sort) where police aren't involved, you can give the Sleuths some physical evidence. To maintain plausibility, limit it to comparing a bit of crime scene evidence to a known sample: a latent fingerprint to a specific suspect, or that shoe impression in the mud to a specific teacher's sole. In general, high-school CSI can tell you that the evidence is "consistent with" a known example, but will not let you search databanks or link crime scene evidence like fibers or DNA to a specific suspect. Forensic evidence can help narrow the suspects, but it won't solve the mystery.

## MYSTERY DESIGN

Each *Bubblegumshoe* adventure should present the Sleuths with a problem that's personal to them or their friends, and plausibly something that they can solve. Once you have the problem, you can work out the opening scene (the **hook**), a possible denouement, and at least one logical path that gets the Sleuths from one to the other (the **spine**). Typically you will have an A-story, which focuses on the investigation, and a B-story that focuses on one or more character's Relationships. You may even have a C-story that advances a larger season-long mystery. In some cases, you may invert these: the A-story may advance the season-long mystery, the B-story might be how the character uses or repairs a Relationship in order to find clues towards that bigger mystery, and there's a C-story with a short session adventure that threatens to distract the Sleuths from their larger goals.

### The Hook

The hook is the only scene you can usually count on to go as you intended. Present an interesting problem that needs the Sleuths'

personal attention, and make sure there's a clue that clearly gives them a place, person, or thing to follow up on. A good hook is vivid and starts the action; let the Sleuths back-fill as needed to figure out why and how they are in the midst of this scene.

## The Spine

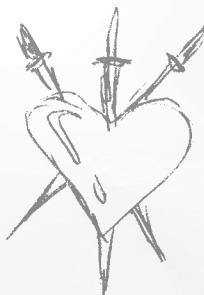
The path from hook to resolution forms the spine of the adventure. It is less a rigid framework than a trail of breadcrumbs that you cast in front of the players. Importantly, the spine does not indicate how the adventure *must* go, only how the adventure *can* go. You need the spine to make sure solving the mystery is possible in the first place; how the Sleuths actually solve it is a different question.

They can, and almost always do, wander off the path you had in mind. Sometimes the players come up with an idea that's more interesting than what you had in mind; by all means embrace it if you like it. Sometimes, they will start thrashing about in a speculative swamp. In those cases, remind them of the next breadcrumb that they haven't investigated yet, or sprinkle more in their path. The breadcrumb trail is not a railroad; it is a logical, orderly path available if the Sleuths want to follow it. You may wind up with more than one trail to the solution, especially when the players pull something you hadn't anticipated.

You don't have to have a fully written-up outline, but it is handy to have some ideas about scenes, NPCs, snippets of possible dialog, physical clues, encounters, and incidents that might occur during a scene. An outline can help with pacing, breaking up exposition and social scenes with action sequences.

You may find yourself juggling scenes around. Sleuths may leapfrog scenes with an intuitive deduction. Or they may spend a long time in a scene, and you'll need to condense some things to maintain your pacing and get to a resolution by the end of your game session.

Creepy guy on campus today.  
Seen him around before. Had  
this tattoo (rough sketch)



## CLUES

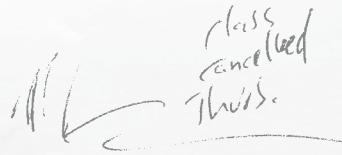
GUMSHOE has four kinds of clues:

**CORE** clues are the ones necessary to solve the mystery. **Core clues are available to any Sleuth in the right place with the right ability who is using that ability OR to any player who provides a credible and entertaining alternate way to get that clue.** The Sleuths never need to spend points or make rolls to get core clues. If they "had to" spend a Cool point to get into a Location with a core clue, return the points as a refresh at the end of the scene.

**PIPE** clues are important to the mystery, but do not seem significant when they first appear. ("Pipe" is screenwriting jargon: when you give exposition that is relevant later, that's "laying pipe.") Ideally, it doesn't matter when the players put the pipe clues together in a burst of inspiration: when it happens, the Sleuths will suddenly have part of their problem solved. Players may not remember pipe clues, so you may have to emphasize them or refer back to them later in the adventure (ideally in NPC dialogue).

**EXTRA** clues add context, flavor, or meaning to the situation. These non-essential clues are available for 1- or 2-point spends. Pool spends are about letting characters show off and sharing the spotlight. Extra clues can also shorten the path to the solution, or provide information that helps the Sleuth out in a later scene even if it doesn't resolve the mystery. (See "*SPENDS AND BENEFITS*," page 42.) If there is an extra clue available, then make it worth the character's expenditure. And don't be shy about adopting a Sleuth's interesting idea. If a player thinks it would be awesome if Fashion told her something useful about the victim, then see if there's a logical clue you could provide.

**LEVERAGED** clues are a two-step process in which the Sleuths combine a previously acquired clue with an Interpersonal ability to obtain a new clue from someone. Think of it as the point where the Sleuths confront a witness or culprit with evidence of their misdeeds, and leverage that knowledge to force a further admission. If the Sleuths don't have the prerequisite clue, but guess at it and bluff the target, you may want to give them the leveraged clue anyway.



## SCENES

**INVESTIGATIVE** scenes are the heart of *Bubblegumshoe*. Here, the characters find physical evidence, talk to witnesses and culprits, hack smart phones, and stake out culprits. These scenes will normally have a core clue, but that doesn't mean that they are without tension. Expository data dumps are boring! Make these scenes lively and entertaining. The players are more likely to remember information if they feel they had to work or roleplay to get it. Once the Sleuths have all the available clues in a scene, find some way to signal to them that the scene is over. (Some GMs use an index card with the word **SCENE** written on it that they can hold up when the action begins to drag.)

**ACTION** scenes in *Bubblegumshoe* are likely to involve pursuits, fleeing, or intimidation. Violence is threatened, but actual blood is rarely spilled. Guns and knives may be flashed about, but are rarely used. Adults pay much less attention to teens hitting each other with fists and feet than to knife wounds or even the sound of a gunshot. Threaten violence, but offer a way for the Sleuths to flee (or otherwise regain the initiative) before things get entirely out of hand. Action scenes use General abilities, which makes them unpredictable. While the Sleuths always have some success in an investigative scene, they can utterly fail in an action scene. Keep an eye on the characters' General pool points; you want them to have spent enough to feel challenged when the final confrontation looms, but not so depleted that they have no chance of success if action is required.

**DRAMATIC** scenes involve character development. These advance a Sleuth's story arc or resolve Relationships that a Sleuth might have spent down or betrayed in the adventure. Give the character interesting decisions in these scenes and then work out the ramifications. Every game will have a different balance of action, investigation, and soap opera. Ideally, a drama scene should be linked by theme or information to the adventure. If it is wholly isolated, keep it short.

**PUSHBACK** scenes are common in *Bubblegumshoe* mysteries. Here, an authority figure—the vice principal, a police detective, or the Sleuth's parents—threatens harsh consequences if the Sleuth continues to get involved. The Sleuth may also be threatened by a teacher, coach,

teammate, lab partner, or study buddy because she spends time on the mystery at the cost of classwork, sports practice, or being at the big game. The scene may exist to create tension ("I need to figure this out before Friday's dance"), to motivate the Sleuths, to raise the stakes, or to provide a clue in and of itself. ("Would Mr. Federici threaten me if I wasn't onto something?")

**THROWDOWNS** (pages 60-64) are a special kind of dramatic scene. They are longer than a simple conflict: there is more at stake and a risk that victory may come at a cost to the Sleuth or to her Relationships. These are major dramatic scenes, and may be part of the resolution to the adventure, especially for episodes centered on the teenage social scene.

## PACING

If the Sleuths have multiple explanations (or no explanation) for the clues they've found, they need more information. Remind them of that breadcrumb core clue they've overlooked. Look over their Relationships and see if there's anyone who might help them. Maybe there's a promising Location they haven't yet visited.

If they have the information they need, but are hesitant to act, then give them a prod. The culprit may strike back at them or at a Relationship. Their client might call or stop by to ask about progress. Each group has its own preferred pace, but in general, keep things moving forward.

## The Resolution

You should have an interesting denouement in mind when you start the adventure. Classically, a *Bubblegumshoe* resolution ends with a dramatic reveal, a sneaky manipulation that forces the culprit to confess, or a full-on throwdown. Some things may be left to the rough justice of high school halls. Some offenses can be passed on to authority figures, the solution neatly laid out for them, with the implication that ignoring it will cause problems (a convenient leak to the press, for example). Don't force the conclusion. If the PCs come up with a suitable, interesting ending, then embrace it and adjust accordingly.

Remember that *Bubblegumshoe* takes place in a community. Resolutions have consequences. Proving that Skinny Duane was the teen hacker who created the fake page mocking Vice Principal Klyme and forcing him to take it down and recant may both earn a favor from Mr. Klyme and make an enemy of Duane and his friends. Future consequences should not negate the players' victory, nor be so serious that they hesitate to act in the future, but even a spiteful glare in the cafeteria a session or two later keeps the world feeling alive and organic. In a classic noir, every solution creates more problems. You don't have to go that far, but it's a good principle to keep in mind when you're stuck for an episode's B-plot some day.

## **General Guidelines**

A mystery adventure assumes that there is a solution; one that the Sleuths can figure out by collecting clues and reasoning through them. It's harder in a mystery to improvise a scene or a clue, because whatever you improvise, it has to fit together logically at the end. However, be adaptable and listen to the players' ideas. If the players put together the clues you provided in a way that makes logical sense, is interesting and exciting, but is completely different from what you thought was going on, by all means adopt their solution and pretend that was your intent all along.

## **ORGANIZE YOUR INFORMATION**

It can be handy to have a bullet point list of clues the Sleuths would need to solve the mystery. If the players decide to do something unanticipated, which they generally do, you know that they should still learn certain information even if it's from a NPC created on the fly. It's vital that the Sleuths get the core clues to move on to another scene and eventually reach the resolution. It's not vital that they get them in a particular order, or from a particular source, or even that they get them in time for a happy ending.

Equally, if there's some surprise that you want to spring on the players, you should make sure to hold that information back until it fits in. The culprit should be a presence throughout the adventure, but may not even be "on screen" until the very end.

## **KEEP IT SIMPLE**

This can't be stressed enough. Things that seem obvious to you as you design the mystery or improvise on the fly may be utterly baffling to the players, particularly if your adventure spans more than one session with significant time between games. It's okay, even desirable, to have more than one source give Sleuths the same basic information in slightly different ways. Some GMs advise always coming up with three clues to anything you want the players to figure out; this is a good idea assuming you have the time.

Players are rarely unhappy about having an obvious thread—or better yet, several obvious threads—to pull on. Sitting around waiting for them to twig to your subtle yet brilliantly foreshadowed devious twist, on the other hand, is a recipe for disaster. Don't overdo the repetition, though; each scene should have something new to offer in addition to reinforcing core information.

## **RELATIONSHIPS AND OTHER SUPPORTING CAST**

Remember that Relationships exist to help the Sleuths or make their lives more complicated or both. You don't need to use all of the Sleuths' Relationships in each adventure, particularly when you are first starting the game. Pick a couple, and let the players bring in others if they want to spend Relationship points.

Look for ways to get the Sleuths involved in a Relationship's actions. If Big Ted is putting pressure on Skinny Duane to sign over his prized signed baseball card, don't try to figure out Duane's Cool; give Elizabeth or Amanda a chance to make a Reassurance spend to forestall him. If Danny Kang is going to steal Marci's iPad and the Sleuths can't stop him (perhaps because the episode opens with the stolen iPad), don't worry about his Filch; just assume that he's successful. If the Sleuths can't affect the outcome, don't bother rolling dice.

## **GMING WITHOUT A NET**

Improvised mysteries are hard, but not impossible, with the right combination of GM and players. Normally, you should probably come up with at least a rough spine: work out the backstory, the clues,

and a logical way of progressing through the investigation. It will, by necessity, make sense to you. When your players find something that doesn't make sense to them, or doesn't fit as you expected, then you need to improvise and adjust the adventure to solve the problem. Ideally, your patch should not introduce other complications, and should feel to the players like it was intended to be that way all along.

If you decide to build the adventure on the fly, you still need a strong opening scene and an idea for a logical next scene. From there, enlist your players' help. Listen to them as they offer theories and make suggestions about where to go next. Nudge them a bit if they start thrashing about because either they don't have enough information, have too many options, or can't settle on a plan because of the risks. Use their Drives to scoot them onward. Remind them that if they don't solve the case either no one else will care, or the adults will get involved and will get it wrong.

Try to keep a couple of scenes ahead of the players. Some rough notes for possible NPCs, locations, and clues will help. The more you can stay ahead of the players, the more you can foreshadow the resolution and make it look like you planned it all along. You don't have to accept every player idea. Use the ones that seem interesting and give them a twist when you do incorporate them. Avoid scenes where nothing happens, or where what does happen is less interesting than something a player suggested.

When you figure out a logical resolution, move that scene forward or start pointing the players toward it. The key risk here is anticlimax: the Sleuths have worked hard to solve the problem, only to find that the villain folds when first confronted, or is otherwise unworthy of their efforts. Again, the more you can keep ahead of the players, the more time you have to think about how to wrap up the loose threads in a satisfying manner.

## The Campaign Game

*Bubblegumshoe* could be run as adventure-of-the-week, with no continuing plot elements from session to session. However, it is designed for campaign play, where Relationships change and the Town Map grows. That does not mean that every adventure has to

be linked to other adventures. Modern series television often has a season arc, an overarching problem that builds over the course of 20-22 individual adventures, usually ending in a two-part season finale that wraps up the problem and may introduce a new problem for the next season.

In a typical season, some episodes are stand-alone adventures. At least on their surface, they have little to do with the season arc. Other episodes are clearly arc adventures and primarily advance the investigation into that problem. Some episodes mix the two, varying the proportion of stand-alone and arc scenes.

If you are running *Bubblegumshoe* for a group of players who are either unfamiliar with GUMSHOE or unfamiliar with high school noir, you may want to make your first adventures stand-alone. Think of them as pilot episodes or standalone movies, intended to introduce the players to the world and hook them on its potential without committing them to a long-term campaign. If your group is enthusiastic about a long-term game, then hook them with the season arc in the first adventure.

## The First Adventure

The sample adventure “Hey! That’s My Bike!” (pages 219-249) is more of a prequel webisode than a pilot for a *Bubblegumshoe* campaign. It is designed to introduce you to a typical A-plot/B-plot structure, the mix of mystery and relationship drama, and to demonstrate many of the rules and features that make *Bubblegumshoe* special. There are some notes about how to adapt it to your group if you don’t want to test-drive the system using pregenerated characters.

When it comes to the first adventure for your group, using your characters, it may make more sense to jump into the story assuming that the characters already know each other. This gets the adventure moving without an introductory “you all end up in detention together, introduce yourselves” scene. If you need to, you can backfill how the Sleuths came together over the course of several stories.

The first adventure is a good place to introduce major themes for the campaign. “In Hey! That’s my Bike!,” the plot sets up the rival gangs, and the tensions between the old town guard (Kaitlyn) and more

recent arrivals like Danny and the Scorpions. It also introduces three potential adversaries: Vice Principle Klyme, Kaitlyn Price, and Big Ti. A police contact is introduced; depending on how the Sleuths resolve the case, Detective Stevenson might be a contact or even an ally. If you are building a season-arc mystery, you may want to introduce that thread in the pilot, but it need not be the focus.

## USING THE RELATIONSHIP AND TOWN MAP

The Relationship Map (page 119) is only the layer of Relationships that the Sleuths are aware of. The GM's copy shows the hidden connections between PCs, NPCs, and Locations. You may want to make notes or checkmarks on the map itself as people and places are used, to see whether there's something that you want to make more prominent, or use before it is in danger of being forgotten.

As noted above, Relationships are there to support and challenge the Sleuths. Locations are the same: they exist to provide interesting places for the Sleuths to interact with each other and with the setting. If a Location isn't working out the way you expected, then change it, burn it down, or create something else that grabs the characters' interest.

## MYSTERY OF THE WEEK

For a stand-alone mystery, you need a **CULPRIT**, a **CRIME**, and a hook, usually a **VICTIM**.

### *The Victim*

Pick a victim. Decide why they would go to the Sleuths for help. Perhaps there's a minor connection: the victim is on the basketball team with a Sleuth and confides the reason for her recent poor play in the locker room. Perhaps it is something more serious: the Sleuth owes a Relationship a favor and it is time to collect. Or the victim may just go to the Sleuths because they have a reputation for solving problems. If inspiration fails, choose the victim from the Relationship Map.

The Sleuths should care about solving the victim's problem for a reason: the victim is sympathetic, the nature of the crime is repellent,

the suspected culprit is a hated foe, or there's some favor they can get out of this for later use. Give your victim some flaws to make it plausible that someone wishes them harm. In traditional noir stories, the victim doesn't tell the detective the whole truth at the start. Fortunately, the victim is not the only source of information about himself. He will have family, friends, and classmates who can tell the Sleuths more. Also consider other clues: social media pages, clothing, his locker, or his house. Sometimes the victim may be an actual culprit, trying to trick the Sleuths into doing the dirty work.

## **The Crime**

Now pick a crime. It should be, in general, something important to the victim, but not the sort of thing that the victim can or will go to the adult authorities to solve. A murder is usually not crime-of-the-week material. Major felonies swiftly draw adult attention. A possible prelude to a major crime—a teen that has gone missing for a night after telling her friends she's meeting someone from an internet chat room—could be appropriate. The authorities might not be interested without more proof of wrongdoing, which the Sleuths would need to uncover. Cyberbullying, stalking, thefts, rumormongering, blackmail, vandalism, low-level drug/alcohol distribution, and cheating are the sorts of things to look at. See "*HIGH SCHOOL BULLYING*" on page 167 for more ideas. When in doubt, look at your local headlines to see what trouble nearby youths have gotten themselves into; instead of narcotics, your culprit might be pushing study drugs or steroids.

## **The Culprit**

Now you need a culprit. A good villain drives the adventure. She, or he, has a good reason for whatever harm they've done to the victim and are intent on enjoying their success. Culprits should not be two-dimensional, but they should be people the Sleuths will feel proud or happy to have thwarted. They are the bad guy (or gal) regardless of their respectable façade. Honorable or sympathetic culprits should be very rare: if the Sleuths disagree about how to resolve the case, you may have an unsatisfying or anticlimactic ending to your adventure. (That said, the occasional virtuous coverup has tradition and variety on its side.)

Sometimes the culprit will be unknown and the mystery is a classic whodunnit. If the culprit is unknown, the Sleuths will likely start with the classic questions: who had the means to commit the crime, who had a motive to do so, and who had the opportunity. Sometimes the victim knows who the culprit is, but the problem is how to stop them, recover the stolen bicycle, destroy the embarrassing digital photo, and/or prove to the adult authorities that the culprit is guilty. Here, the Sleuths will likely investigate, look for weak spots, find the missing Macguffin, and perhaps even punish the culprit themselves, socially if in no other way.

## ***The Puzzle***

Expand those questions into your witnesses: who had the means and opportunity to see something? What could motivate them to spill their guts? Ideally, you want a small supporting cast of well-defined NPCs who serve a specific function in this episode. A mob of poorly defined walk-ons will confuse the Sleuths as they try to figure out who or what is important. Give your NPCs distinctive names or nicknames and something memorable about how they speak, or act, or what they wear. (This helps the players remember them.) Some of your witnesses may also be suspects; figure out how you're going to suggest that possibility to the Sleuths.

Except in the season-arc mystery (page 168), use twists and red herrings sparingly. What looks simple to the GM may be clear as mud to the players. If they seem stumped, then offer them more clues. Certainly it is in the genre for the Sleuths to suspect or discover that their friends, family, or current romantic interest is keeping secrets and may, just may, be the episode or season-arc culprit.

## **CHARACTER ARCS IN EPISODES**

Sleuths who are less involved, emotionally or investigatively, in a particular episode may be spotlighted with a scene that advances their personal goals. In sum, each Sleuth has a personal story arc (page 37) with a goal and some possible subplots related to it. The arc lets the player explore the character without overly interfering with the ongoing detective story.

# High School Bullying

Teens are endlessly creative when harassing each other. When a target is directly insulted, threatened, pushed/shoved, or attacked, the culprits are at least known. Anonymous attacks are much scarier. Bullies are often cowards, afraid to confront the target directly. Some common methods include:

## IN SCHOOL

- Art by target posted in halls or classrooms removed or defaced
- Books knocked out of hands in crowded corridors
- Food, paint, etc., thrown at or poured on target
- Items flicked at target in class
- Items put into hair or clothes (especially hoods of sweatshirts)
- Locker damage (graffiti, lock jammed, or things pushed into locker through vents)
- Slurs or threatening graffiti
- Name with circle and slash through it
- Target's picture defaced on posted photographs
- Tripped, particularly at lunch

## SOCIAL MEDIA

- Creating Facebook Hate Group
- Fake websites in target's name
- Harassing texts, tweets, etc.
- Circulating images of passed out student posed in embarrassing ways, Photoshopped images, etc.

## VEHICLE DAMAGE

- Breaking windows, headlights, or mirrors
- Keying
- Painting or carving slurs
- Smearing with feces

Tattoo - 3 blades - which c heart.  
Possible target reference, 3 of suicide:  
Heartbreak, grid, sorrow.



When designing an adventure, look at the Sleuths' arcs. See if you can give an adventure an emotional resonance for a Sleuth. Perhaps she encounters an NPC with a similar goal or challenge. Perhaps the mystery advances her suggested subplot. Or perhaps the mystery just includes a possible scene for a blowout or reconciliation with a Relationship. Ideally, the adventure should give the group its own goal, so everyone is engaged with the main adventure, regardless of how they feel about a character's arc.

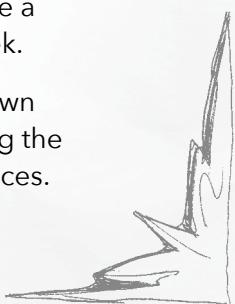
## SEASON-ARC MYSTERIES

One way to outline a season-long mystery is to adopt the Conspyramid from the Pelgrane RPG *Night's Black Agents*. Essentially, draw a pyramid with 4-5 layers. Line up one or one-and-a-half elements in the bottom layer per player, with a minimum of 4 elements. The bottom layer has the easy clues: loose ends from the crime scene, suspected witness lies, the bit of evidence that doesn't fit the timeline. The Sleuths may know some of these at the start of the campaign, which is how they know there's a mystery to be solved.

The next layers are, in effect, leveraged clues (page 157). The Sleuths cannot get to them without a prerequisite. It might be one of the bottom layer clues. It might be creating a Relationship with a particular NPC. It might be finding a way to get access to a particular Location. Other clues may put stress on existing Relationships as the Sleuths find out things they'd prefer not to know about their family and friends. If the Sleuths don't actually have the ability (or desire) to investigate a certain lead, let the mystery unfold at its own pace. Point them gently toward the prerequisite clues that will let them get the information they need.

Each layer narrows the possibilities and eliminates red herrings and gives more clues until the last layer reveals the season-arc culprit, the evidence needed to prove the culprit's guilt, or both. Not every adventure should be an "arc" adventure, but the arc should be a background element alluded to even in a mystery-of-the-week.

Sometimes you can offer the Sleuths choices between their own personal arcs, solving the mystery-of-the-week, and advancing the season arc. If the players choose to delay, impose consequences.



Delays may mean that the trail gets colder, physical evidence is lost, witnesses' memories fade, electronic records are routinely deleted or overwritten.

Assume the ultimate season-arc culprit (often called the Big Bad in *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer*) has already used his network of resources to create the initial coverups and paper over loose ends, with the result that the adult authorities are bamboozled. When the Sleuths start to poke into the matter, they meet very little active opposition. The Big Bad is busy trying to make sure the adult authorities stay distracted, and assumes that nosy teens won't do better than professional investigators. Over time, the season-arc culprit rebuilds his resources and recruits more. He uses them to start papering over the cracks the Sleuths are making in his carefully improvised façade, or to interfere with the Sleuths themselves by pressuring them or their loved ones. Eventually he begins using his own skills, taking a personal hand in the "season ending" episodes when things become crucial.

### BS Detector

Wait, you say. If the Sleuths have a skill, and always get a clue, then isn't BS Detector an adventure buster? The instant my nemesis or her henchman tries to lie to the Sleuths, I have to tell them that the NPC is lying! Yes. You have to give them the clue that the NPC is lying—but lying about what? BS Detector just gives you leads. You don't have to tell the Sleuths what the lie specifically concerns, or why the NPC is lying. You yourself shouldn't lie to the PCs, but you can give the clue in a context that will lead them to the wrong motive for the lie, at least for a time.

When Caitlyn Price insists that Gabriel Soriano was with her during the entire homecoming dance, tell the Sleuth with the highest BS Detector that Caitlyn's lying. But about what? Did she or Gabriel separate? Does she know where he went or is just covering for her boyfriend out of loyalty? Or is she just the one who needs an alibi and for what? Or perhaps she is not lying about them staying together, but they weren't at the dance all night?

Sleuths unaccused  
for this year:

Casey Sims Kedra Wilson  
Genna Wiley



## ROLEPLAYING LIARS AND CULPRITS

A key conceit for mystery fiction, be it novels, television drama, or RPGs, is that NPCs are either reliable or liars—they are rarely honestly mistaken. If the witness is unreliable, there are clear clues like intoxication, drug abuse, mental impairment, or obviously diminished senses. The conceit exists to make it easier for the audience, which does not have the experience of a trained investigator, to keep track of information and to decide how to weigh it.

In a television show, a trained and rehearsed actor portrays the witness, speaking lines created by a team of writers. The witness appears to be someone responding to the detective's clever, unexpected question, but she is not actually trying to recall an answer or come up with a lie on the spot. If the character gives verbal or physical cues that suggest dishonesty, then they are a conscious decision on the writer and actor's part.

The GM, on the other hand, is almost always lying to the players, in the sense of improvising answers on the fly. It can be very hard for players to decide whether the GM's response is evasive because the GM can't recall the answer and is trying to think, or because the GM is trying to signal that the NPC is a liar.

One option is to use the Sleuth's BS Detector. After the NPC speaks, you can turn to the Sleuth with the highest rating in BS Detector and

say "You can tell Raymond is lying." The player can then spend to find out more about what Raymond is concealing or why. You could even write "Liar!" on an index card and turn it up at the appropriate points in the conversation. Some liars are not susceptible to BS Detector (page 169); the Sleuths will have to find some other way to crack them.

Some groups are not satisfied with breaking the fourth wall this way. They would prefer to catch the NPC in the act as part of a roleplayed conversation. To play a liar as the GM, make your signals very clear. Remember that you are not portraying a real person in a real situation: you are portraying an NPC conveying information to the players in a plausible social interaction.

The signals below are gleaned from behavior and statement analysis techniques. Many real-world investigators swear they work, while others consider them pure hokum. It doesn't matter whether these signals work in the real world; they work in fiction because they fit our expectations about how liars behave.

Remember that these signals can be ambiguous. A genuine victim might be furious that the Sleuths keep asking questions about a difficult event and attack them, for instance. Use more than one if you want to more clearly convey guilt to the Sleuths. If they still don't get it and are going to miss a core clue, then turn to the BS Detector ability and tell them the NPC is lying.

## Signals of Truth

- "I." Truthful people say "I did..." People who say "we," use the passive voice, use "you" (you try to do this, you usually do that), or just skip the subject in a sentence, may be trying to deflect blame or minimize involvement.
- Short, direct, emphatic denials of guilt:  
"No! I didn't steal that phone!"
- Direct, concise answer to the question posed:  
"I was at the mall with Bren last night."
- Consistent answers with an appropriate level of detail:  
"We got to the mall around 7 and left around 10."



## **Signals of Deception**

- Exaggerated first impressions: trying to impress the Sleuths at the start with one's importance, contacts, charitable activities, or other signs of being the kind of person who would never be a culprit. This can include excessive politeness or compliments.
- Long pauses before answering the question.
- Avoiding the question or answering the question the liar would prefer was asked.
- Not clearly denying the accusation: "I would never do something like that!"
- Refusing to answer: "I don't know." "I don't remember." "Let me check with my staff."
- Buying time: "That's a good question." "Glad you asked me that." "I understand your concern."
- Euphemisms: vague terms to minimize or distance from what actually happened.
- Inconsistent answers. Incoherent answers. No, hold on, inconsistent answers.
- Inappropriate detail: adding true but irrelevant facts can be a way to buy time while thinking about a lie or to bury a lie within a pile of verifiable truth.
- Going on the offense: "How dare you ask me that?" "Do you know who I am?" "Are we almost done, I'm a busy person!"
- Going on a guilt trip: "Don't you trust me?" "I can't believe you think I'd..." "I love you, I'd never..."
- Invoking faith and family: "I swear on my mother's grave!" "On my honor." "As God is my witness."
- Minimizing: "What's the problem here?" "Who cares about this?"
- Overly specific answers: "I looked at my watch, it was 10:17 when I left the mall last Tuesday."
- Overuse of qualifiers: "to the best of my knowledge," "usually," "typically," "possibly."
- Referral to past answers: "I already told the police that..."

- Pronoun trouble: odd use of titles, first names, his son, our daughter, etc. Using names instead of "we" or "our" may show estrangement.
- Tense trouble: referring to the missing victim in the past tense before being told that they are dead, shifting from the past to present tense during a narrative (the events in the present tense may be being created on the fly).

## Some Thoughts for Players

Listen! This is a mystery story! The GM is giving you clues, introducing NPCs, and describing locations for a reason. There will be some extraneous information—a free-form RPG can't be as tightly plotted as an Agatha Christie novel—but if the GM has spent her time creating an NPC or thinking about a scene, there's a reason for that investment. This is even more so if the GM has taken time to prepare props: there's usually a clue buried in those maps and handouts.

Take notes! Perception and memory will play tricks on you. You will think you heard things that were not said, said in a different way, or said by someone other than the source you recall. As you get more information, your memory will edit itself to make things consistent with that new information. Your mind will also weigh information depending on your theories and assumptions. This is great if you're on the right track and disastrous if you're headed down a blind alley. You don't need to record the whole session, but write down those core clues, at the very least, and look over your notes if you find yourself flailing about.

If you are puzzled, you need more information. Generally, there will be at least one thread left dangling at the end of the last scene. If you don't know what to do next or are casting around aimlessly, chase down that clue. Look back at your notes to see if there's some lead you haven't followed up.

The Sleuths are teens. They aren't expected to be seasoned professional investigators, but they have been exposed to the same kinds of procedural shows, movies, and documentaries that you have likely watched. They have picked up some basic techniques (as reflected by their skills) so use what you've learned from your favorite shows to figure out how to ask the right questions, interpret a clue, or intimidate a witness. Take chances; teens are rarely patient observers. Be confrontational; teens are also rarely concerned with long-term consequences. Stand by your friends and your family. Stand by your principles. And don't trust grown-ups more than you have to.

Tak  
called

555-47



# MYSTERY SEEDS FOR BUBBLEGUMSHOE

This chapter presents a few short mystery seeds for *Bubblegumshoe*, to get GMs started. They indicate the variety and diversity of stories you can tell about teen problems—and their solutions.

## HEY! THAT'S MY BIKE!

When bike thieves descend on Drewsbury, a jock comes to the Sleuths to recover his little brother's ride.

"Hey! That's My Bike!" is an introduction to, well, everything in *Bubblegumshoe*. It's a gateway into the seedy world of stolen bikes, addicts using flea markets to fence their wares, sophisticated bike theft rings, gangs and gang protection, tensions between town and outsiders, and one man doing something stupid to get quick cash to help his family.

**Crime:** Bike theft

**Culprit:** Victor Price and two out-of-town bike thieves, backed up by a rival gang leader

**Hook:** Andy, the victim of a bike theft, and little brother of a Sleuth's fellow Clique member



# STORY

A fellow jock, whose little brother's bike has been stolen, approaches the Sleuths. A security video of the theft leads them into interactions with the vice principal and (likely) a police detective. The bike thieves are outside professionals, working for a local bike shop owner and under the loose protection of one of the two rival gangs in the school. To complicate matters, the Sleuths are drawn into aiding one of the gangs, gaining them a possible ally at the cost of a throwdown with the high school's Queen of Mean.

The Sleuths' investigation wanders from a high-end bike shop to a seedy flea market in search of the stolen bikes. Mostly, their results are negative—the thieves are not locals and are not selling in the usual spots. Using a "bait" bike, the Sleuths can track the thieves to their storage locker and rescue Andy's bike. With a bit of ingenuity, they can unmask the thieves and either get them arrested or force them out of town, unmask their sponsor (the local bike shop owner and uncle to the Queen of Mean), and tangle with their patron, the leader of their allied gang's rival. The shop owner folds fast—he's in over his head to make quick cash to pay for his brother's medical care.

# CLUES

- A successful interrogation in the boys' locker room of a rival gang tough who seems to know the thieves may result in the tough switching sides when the Sleuths unmask the gang's leader as the thieves' patron.
- Checking the usual places where stolen goods might turn up leads to a pair of fast-talking, irritable meth addicts who sell stolen bike parts (though not the ones the Sleuths are looking for).
- The Sleuths make a bait bike (either partly disabling its gears or hiding a GPS transmitter on it with **REPAIR**), which leads them to the thieves and their storage locker.
- Using **TOWN LORE** while following the bait bike shows that the thieves are not locals—they use routes suggested by a GPS without knowing local short cuts or traffic patterns.

As an example of how to do it, we expand this seed into a full-fledged adventure on pages 219-249.

# LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

"Let's Talk About Sex" focuses on teen sexuality and the many messages teens receive from peers and adults. It touches on current topics such as teen pregnancy, sexting, abstinence promotion, queer youth, and sex education debates.

**Crime:** Stolen phone

**Culprit:** The guidance counselor pressuring a pregnant student

**Hook:** Jessica's friend, the victim of phone theft

## STORY

Students at Truman High start a petition to update the current Sex Ed curriculum. To gain support for the petition, lead Sleuth, Jessica Park, interviews her peers about pressures to have sex and the inadequacies of the curriculum. Jessica's friend Monique Carter, who supports the petition, is suspended after explicit photos are found on her phone. Vice Principal Richard Klyme threatens to charge Monique with distribution of child pornography. Monique argues that her phone was stolen and given to the vice principal.

Jessica uses her exposé as a cover to find out who stole Monique's phone and why.

Michelle Chun, head of her church's abstinence group, found the phone in the cafeteria with explicit photos visible on the screen. She believes Monique's ex-boyfriend, Matt Enriquez, stole the phone to get revenge. Matt is able to prove he didn't steal the phone. He discusses the pressure on young men to be sexually active. He argues that adults encourage "safe sex" but don't really discuss ways for teens to experience pleasure without the risk of pregnancy.

An investigation reveals that pregnant students are being forced to attend "alternative" classes by the administration. When interviewed, Nancy Anderson and Maria Guerrero discuss the double standard for girls who get pregnant. They are written off as "losers" by the administration and the "alternative" classes are worthless. Nancy and Maria believe the vice principal has been using underhanded tactics to put pressure on Monique and the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) to cancel the petition.

## CLUES

- The tip from Nancy and Maria leads the Sleuths to the offices of the GSA, the group spearheading the Sex Ed petition. Cory Wainright, GSA president, believes the current curriculum is too focused on pregnancy prevention and doesn't meet the needs of queer or straight youth. Cory claims the vice principal and guidance counselor have been harassing and blackmailing students so they drop the petition.
- Find information that helps the Sleuths access administration offices (maybe a stolen key or the fact that the janitor leaves a door open so she can take a smoke break during the evening).
- Find a letter in the administration offices from Sandra Garcia, a pregnant Honors student, asking for permission to take AP rather than "alternative" classes. Her schedule places her in the right spots to steal and plant the phone.
- After a successful throwdown, Sandra admits to stealing the phone at the request of Guidance Counselor Connie Williams, in exchange for permission to take AP classes. She doesn't want her pregnancy to derail her dreams of attending college, especially since she will be the first in her family to attend.
- Hacking into the school email exposes plans by Richard Klyme and Connie Williams to intimidate students into dropping the petition.

## THE WRONG KIND OF MESSAGE

"The Wrong Kind of Message" shines an AV Club light on bullying. But contrary to what you hear, all publicity isn't good publicity.

**Crime:** Bullying and harassment

**Culprit:** A girl in the AV Club, Mara Toomey

**Hook:** Amanda Barrett's friend Angela McQueen, friend of the victim Denny Wright

Mr. West left early after assembly!

# STORY

Angela is a whiz kid and former juvenile delinquent who doesn't trust anyone easily except her friend Amanda, one of the Sleuths. From a struggling Irish-American family, Angela was voted Most Likely To Create The Next iSomething in freshman year, having taught herself coding by age eleven.

Now Angela is in the middle of a serious situation. There's been a rash of cyber bullying of teens at school and one of them, Denny Wright, has disappeared. His family and the administration are worried about him, as Denny suffers from chronic depression and was targeted with horrible messages that preyed on his mental illness. The administration have set their sights on Angela as the prime suspect. Angela tutors Denny in computers and is worried for his safety, as well as her own future. The Sleuths have a two-pronged mystery to solve: find Denny and discover who the real bullies are.

With Angela as an ally, they hack into Denny's email account and eventually find him crashing in a squatter's apartment. Denny's been using drugs to self-medicate away the depression since the harassment started. He shows them videos he received of himself walking home from school, along with harassing messages and threats. He is sure Derrick Hanscomb from the AV Club is responsible. Angela reluctantly reveals that she and Derrick dated for a bit before she went straight, and they share the same social worker. The social worker and Angela both say Derrick has been trying to turn over a new leaf. Approaching Derrick, however, leads to a throwdown with his girlfriend Mara and their pack of friends from the AV Club. The plot thickens when other members of the AV Club break down and admit that Derrick and his friends have been involved in some kind of crazy bet, and that they're planning something big in a few days. They've borrowed two cameras from the school for the event.

The Sleuths can separate Derrick from the others. With some social pressure and Angela's help, he flips on Mara. She and his friends made a bet over who could make Denny's life more miserable, knowing that he has depression. Mara hates her "rival" Angela, and wants to blame whatever happens to Denny on her. The bet's not online; it's in a spiral notebook in Mara's backpack. Derrick tells the Sleuths that Mara has

hacked Denny's email and forged a message from Angela to lure him into a trap at the squat. There he'll be roughed up by the bullies, the whole thing taped and posted to the internet, and the blame laid on Angela. The Sleuths can warn Denny and set a trap for the bullies, catching them in the act. With that and the notebook, they prove Angela innocent and bring the bullying to light.

## CLUES

- **TOWN LORE** gives the Sleuths a lead on the squat.
- Convincing Denny to help them results in Denny becoming an ally who agrees to stand up for Angela against the administration, and also helps bait the trap for the bullies.
- A canvass of other students with **GOSSIP** finds witnesses who saw Derrick's friends and girlfriend placing bets and planning something major.
- Pressuring Derrick successfully (with good Interpersonal skill use or a throwdown) results in him switching sides to help distract his girlfriend while the Sleuths **FILCH** the list from her backpack.



# A TROUBLING IMAGE

Who sees us can be as hard to pin down as how we see ourselves. And sometimes, it can be even more disturbing.

**Crime:** Blackmail

**Culprit:** Ex-boyfriend Brian, dad's rival Ms. Stenger

**Hook:** The victim Tobi Marks, a friend of Sleuth Elizabeth Soriano

## STORY

Elizabeth's friend Tobi Marks, a cute quiet trans boy who mostly draws comics, has recently received a series of instax photos of him and his girlfriend Alayna kissing and holding hands at school. The photos were slipped into his locker with a note that he needs to drop \$100 a week in a spot designated on campus or the anonymous blackmailer will out Tobi as a trans man to his parents. Tobi isn't too outspoken about his gender ID or relationship with Alayna at school, but he definitely hides it at home. At school he uses the pronouns he/him/his, slips into the boys room with his friends, and switches out the skirt he leaves the house in for the pants and bowtie he wears around school. Tobi's been getting braver about it the past six months, becoming more secure in who he is and feeling safer about expressing it.

Elizabeth thinks that Tobi is going to come out to his parents about everything to solve the issue. He's not generating enough cash to pay the blackmailer and has needed to dip into his parents' wallets. Elizabeth wants to be supportive about Tobi coming out, but his parents are members of political and religious communities actively campaigning against marriage equality and queer rights. She's sure they're going to react badly and kick him out of the house. His dad is also in local government, and the fact that Tobi is transgender has the potential to ruin Mr. Marks' career, which is another reason Tobi's been kinda quiet about it.

Tobi feels safe with Elizabeth and a few of their friends, but the rest of the school might as well be a war zone. People walking by in the hall giggle and say "gay" or "fag" or "Hey, is that a boy or a girl? What is

that thing?" He usually tries to shrug it off. Tobi's been beat up a few times after gym when he was the last one off the field, and is especially disliked by a few of the jocks who like to vocalize that he's not a real man and shouldn't be playing on the boys' teams. It seems like there are so many people with a motive, it'll be hard for the Sleuths to narrow down the culprit.

## CLUES

- Investigation (with Tyler's **ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE** or a stakeout at the spot with **SNEAKING**) into who's picking up the money reveals that it's Brian Liang, Tobi's ex-boyfriend from only 6 months ago, before Tobi started presenting more masculine. Brian is on the football team with Elizabeth's brother.
- Interrogating Brian shows that the reason he agreed to blackmail Tobi was out of a sense of disgust for Tobi's new gender ID (he's worried it makes him gay that he hooked up with a trans man), and his jealousy about Tobi's new girlfriend Alayna. But someone gave him the pictures to do the blackmailing with, and he doesn't know who; he just got them in his mailbox one day. He doesn't really care about the cash—it just makes him happy that Tobi's in a rough position.
- Investigation into Tobi's dad's politics (with **GOSSIP** or **TOWN LORE**) uncovers an old family friend, Ms. Stenger, who's wanted to destroy Mr. Marks' political career since Marks beat Stenger in the election last year.
- A throwdown with Tobi convinces him not to come out to his parents, showing him the safety of a roof over his head and the financial security of his parents until he's 18.
- A conversation with the Art Teacher, Mrs. Strayhorn—a married black lesbian with two kids—can advise Tobi to go to the Gay Straight Alliance for counseling and support, and prepare him for being out once he's 18. The Gay Straight Alliance can also provide info about Trans Lifeline, a support line for trans people by trans people.
- An investigation into Ms. Stenger (maybe crashing a fundraiser or other social event at her home) uncovers the instax camera



and more photos that weren't sent to Brian Liang. Her intent is obvious, and what the Sleuths decide to do with her at that point is up to them. It's a delicate issue, because they don't want to out Tobi to his parents, but they also need to do something about Ms. Stenger.

## THE WHEELS OF STEAL

Jessica, Tyler, and their friends like hip hop as much as solving mysteries. They've modeled their band, Tyler Lincoln and the Vice Presidents, after ensembles like the Roots and Stetsasonic, featuring Jessica on saxophone, Tyler on bass and keys, and a rotating cast of MCs, DJs, and instrumentalists from their school. But does making music mean making enemies?

The charity concert Tyler has planned to help his church recover from a recent robbery is about to become a criminal and political battleground when Jessica's cousin, Danny Kang, is accused of that very robbery. If the band doesn't step in to find out the truth, their artistic freedom will be forfeit, racial tension will fracture their school and their town, and Jessica's family will suffer worst of all.

**Crime:** Church robbery

**Culprit:** Trey Hackford, druggie

**Hook:** Jessica's cousin Danny falsely accused of the robbery

## STORY

Danny Kang figures he doesn't need his attention-deficit medicine. Although he spends most of his time ingratiating himself with the Red Scorpions, a Korean gang, he gets good grades. His profits from selling methylphenidate to Trey Heckford meant more than the difference between a B+ and an A-.

To fund these purchases, Trey and his friends broke into the Drewsbury African Methodist Episcopal Church's parish center. Trey figured if he robbed a poor, predominantly Black neighborhood,

then local hoodlums, not rich white kids, would take the heat. The break-in was messy and loud. The neighbors called 911, but by the time law enforcement arrived 45 minutes later, Trey and friends had already vandalized the premises with spray paint and vanished into the night with some high-end DJ equipment purchased for a gospel performance.

Black community leaders decried the law's slow response—which followed closely after multiple allegations of police brutality in the church's neighborhood—as racist, classist neglect; while police supporters called it unfair to criticize cops' performance instead of criminals' actions. To support the church and the neighborhood, Tyler Lincoln and the Vice Presidents have organized "Hands in the Air," a charity concert to be held in the school auditorium. The concert features musicians from many genres, but most of the acts are hip hop. Many parents are protesting the concert, claiming that rap music glorifies violence and crime. Vice Principal Richard Klyme is inclined to agree.

When Trey offered to settle his long-overdue debt with some shiny new decks, Danny, an aspiring DJ, accepted without thinking. Then, halfway through a HitA rehearsal, Trey entered the auditorium with school security and publicly accused Danny of stealing the parish center's turntables. As tension mounts between Blacks and Asians at school, Danny begs the Sleuths to help him before he goes to juvenile hall, Klyme cancels the concert, and the whole thing gets blamed on hip hop.

## CLUES

- The Red Scorpions, or any of the street gangs in the church's environs, can give the Sleuths important information, likely with Relationship abilities. Players might get the idea because police are investigating the gangs, or from gang members complaining about unwarranted suspicion.
- Tyler's mother, Sergeant Andrea Lincoln, wants to support her son; but other cops, many of whom already resent her hardline stance on corruption, think she's a traitor for not shutting HitA down. If the Sleuths convince her the concert is positive and



won't wreck her reputation (Tyler spending those Relationship points), she'll sneak them into the parish center crime scene. Otherwise, they might have to Sneak into the premises without cops catching them.

- The Sleuths **NOTICE** that the break-in was an amateur job, not up to any actual gangs' standards. Trey's spray tags are uncreative and graceless, unlike the technically and artistically impressive graffiti used by either neighborhood gangs or the Red Scorpions (**POP CULTURE** or a Relationship ability).
- Sarabeth and Judah Heckford know what their son did. They're covering for him. Judah is a judge and a town councilman with political aspirations, which Trey's misbehavior might endanger if it comes to light. He's secretly glad Trey's actions will shame Drewsbury's "thuggish elements." He nevertheless excoriated Trey for his choices in front of the entire family—including Trey's sister Frankie, age eight. Frankie doesn't totally understand why her parents and brother are fighting, but she wants it to stop and she thinks the Sleuths can help. She relates what she remembers of the argument, and might even help Sleuths sneak into her house to check Trey's room for evidence. However, she'll make all of them pinky-swear not to get Trey in trouble with this information. If that doesn't sound serious, it's probably been a while since you broke a pinky oath to an eight-year-old.
- Trey passed the merchandise to Danny at the Mill Square flea market. Danny's *hyung* in the Red Scorpions are witnesses. But if Danny wants to come clean, he must admit that a) he sold drugs, and b) he rolls with gangbangers (who may see his admission as snitching). Convincing Danny to admit to a lesser crime to clear himself of a greater one—or convincing Red Scorpions to volunteer information to the authorities—will be tough.
- Moreover, if these details leak, you can bet local news and overwrought parents will spin Danny as a violent gangsta crack pusher, in line with ethnic stereotypes of hip hop performers. Even if Danny can escape, will hip hop emerge unscathed?

*Batch 103  
at warehouse  
after hours,  
txt pics  
to Mandy*



# DRIFTS

This chapter presents a few of the variant possibilities and settings for *Bubblegumshoe*. Each drift changes something about the game, often in fairly fundamental ways. If your drift doesn't do that, it's probably just a slightly different Town or School, which is totally cool.

## BELLAIRS FALLS

Bellairs Falls is a town somewhere in the Upper Midwest, or maybe New England, where dark and destructive magics roil beneath the placid surface. Something in the area attracted wizards, or turned rich and hateful men into wizards. They called up corpses, tried to destroy the world, and finally attempted to escape death itself. But that was long ago, and they're all dead now.

Probably.

This drift deals with stories of horror, especially horror of place and the past. Its name pays homage to the greatest YA horror writer of all, John Bellairs, author of *The House With a Clock in its Walls*, *The Dark Secret of Weatherend*, *The Figure in the Shadows*, *The Spell of the Sorcerer's Skull*, and many more. In those books, the heroes are younger kids, similar to the Sleuths in the Kimball Middle School drift (page 199). You can decide which works best for your campaign after you read them.

# RULES CHANGES

The feeling of creeping horror plays a crucial part in this drift. Sleuths who encounter something scary have to make a **COOL** test.

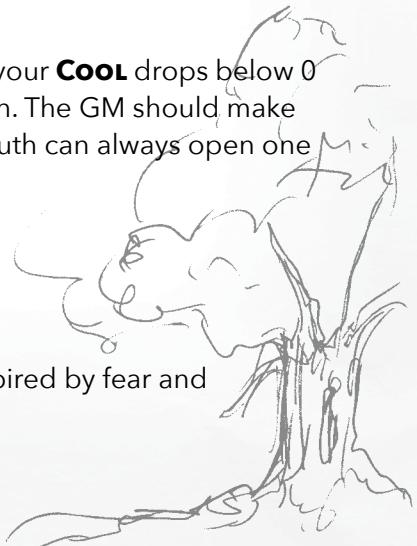
The Difficulty of the **COOL** test against scary stuff goes up by +1 at night, or if the GM rules the environment is super-creepy.

Stimulus	Potential Cool Loss
Spooky feeling about this; major déjà vu; weird noises or smells	3
Weird illusion; nightmare; spooky shadows; howls or scary shrieks; being followed by something you can't see clearly; blood or insects or rats or other common but not deadly frights	4
Clearly seeing or hearing something obviously supernatural or deadly; living nightmare	5
Was that a monster? Attacked or threatened by something spooky	6
Attacked by a no-fooling ghost, zombie, or vampire; recognizably supernatural and malevolent horror	8
High-tailing it out of there is a great option: if your <b>COOL</b> drops below 0 because of something spooky, you <i>have</i> to run. The GM should make sure there's a getaway possible: if not, the Sleuth can always open one up with a player-facing contest of <b>FLEEING</b> .	

## New Abilities

### **FLEEING (GENERAL)**

You don't have to be a great athlete to be inspired by fear and adrenaline.



When frightened by a supernatural threat or during chase sequences, substitute **FLEEING** for **ATHLETICS**. It can only be used defensively, not when hunting or pursuing an enemy. If your Fleeing rating is more than twice your Athletics rating, you can buy rating points in Fleeing at a reduced rate, getting 2 points for each build point spent. For example, if you have Athletics at 1, you can spend 4 build points and get Fleeing 6. Sometimes it pays to be the scaredy-cat!

## **OCCULT (INVESTIGATIVE)**

You know a little something about the occult: witchcraft, magic, monsters, and the supernatural. You cannot do magic, although you can very easily trigger a dead wizard's spell.

## **Magic**

Magic is almost always evil, and always dangerous. The Sleuths may know, and even have a Relationship with, one (or perhaps two) good magicians, but good wizards and witches are almost always quarrelsome, idiosyncratic, and have issues focusing on the problem at hand. For truly effective wizardry, you apparently need the single-mindedness that only obsessive evil provides.

Thus the GM should keep the "white magic" on screen to a bare minimum. Perhaps a lucky amulet that lowers the Difficulty of a **COOL** test, or lets you re-roll a test in which your Sleuth was injured. Maybe a lamp of protection, which keeps ghosts at bay as long as you can keep it lit—in this rainstorm. Most often, a free ability pool refresh over tea or cocoa is all your white-witch neighbor is good for.

If the Sleuths cast magic, it is ritual magic, meant to undo whatever evil work they've uncovered. The GM should pick three to five things (a chant, a Hand of Glory, a magnetic knife, **TOWN LORE** 4+ for a Sleuth, etc.) needed for the ritual, and make learning or obtaining each component one (or more) adventure. Casting a ritual involves a 6-point **COOL** test from all involved, and usually the participation of the "good magician" NPC.

Black magic, on the other hand, is slow and insidious. Often, a Sleuth triggers a long-slumbering doom or curse by a moment of weakness or curiosity: picking up a ring from a hidden compartment, or tracing

a peculiar rhyme off a gravestone and trying to solve it. Such a Sleuth slowly loses her connections to the outside world: at the end of each session of play, she loses 2 rating points from either **COOL** or a Relationship. (Keep track of lost points; they return once the doom is broken.) Worse yet, she gets an **OBSESSION**.

## **OBSESSION**

You are obsessed with something: the doom, puzzle, curse, or what-have-you that haunts you. When presented with an opportunity to study or wallow in your obsession, you must make a **COOL** test to resist. It begins as a 3-point test, going up one point (7-point maximum) when the GM believes the story or the curse have moved to the next level.

Further, take 6 of your rating points away from any abilities and put them in an **OBSESSION** pool. You can only spend these points to directly study, steal, etc. the obsession subject or object. You can reassign these points as you wish once your curse is lifted.

- Flashlight  
- Fright  
Kit  
- Camera  
- Snickers  
Biscuit

## **STORIES**

Once each Sleuth has been cursed, doomed, or obsessed, you're probably done with one Bellairs Falls campaign. Solving curses and dooms for NPCs can be intellectually satisfying, but often lacks the emotional depth of first-person haunting. See what you think after running one of each kind of story!

Possible mysteries in Bellairs Falls might include:

- A Sleuth finds an antique dollhouse that matches a house on the edge of town. She notices the dolls match people in the town, and the house can control them somehow. If only she could learn more, she could really help people...
- A Sleuth's mom is really sick with some kind of blood disease. She hears rumors that old Archibald DeFenestre was a vampire. If she could find his crypt, she could maybe get some blood to cure her mom, but his supposed gravestone is just a coded puzzle...
- A Sleuth finds a weird amulet inside the plaster wall of the school and takes it to her friend, Professor Wiggenby, who

knows a little something about magic. The Professor identifies it as a Soul-Joiner, just before she collapses into a sudden coma. And now, all the kids at school are beginning to dress like people from the 19th century...

- A Sleuth goes to the island in Bramble Marsh at midnight on a dare, and finds some rocks set up in a weird pyramid. When she comes back in the morning, it's two days later and she discovers she can't tell anyone where she was or what she saw there. And she dreams about that island every night, and the pyramid gets bigger and bigger...

### Investigating the Impossible

If your game involves genuine magic, superpowers, or actual monsters, the weirdness should follow some consistent rules to make mysteries solvable. If ghosts appear only at night and cannot abide cats in one adventure, then three adventures later when something supernatural happens by day in a cat shelter, the Sleuths should be able to rule out ghosts.

Depending on the setting, the Sleuths (and the players) may not start knowing any of these rules and may need to discover them in play. Pop Culture or Occult (page 189) or Cap abilities like Folklore or Wicca might be helpful, or dangerously misguided. Look at *Trail of Cthulhu* for more on GUMSHOE investigations into supernatural lore and impossible monsters.

## DANVERS HIGH

Every hero has an origin—the time in her life when she figured out who she was and took the first steps toward being an iconic hero. *Smallville*, *Gotham*, *Arrow*, *The Flash*—all these stories play with the backstory of well-known characters and settings, exploring their heroes' early years. The links between puberty and incipient superpowers—mysterious changes to one's body and personality, new desires and responsibilities, coming of age and discovering who

one is—have been well-mined by comic book publishers for decades, which makes them good (and familiar) fodder for a game.

Superheroes struggle with social issues—maintaining their humanity in the face of great power, keeping their identity secret (or dealing with the side-effects of publicity), and getting their homework done while saving the day. All of that fits nicely with *Bubblegumshoe*'s focus on teens and their relationships.

How did the Sleuths get their powers? That's likely to be the first arc-mystery of the campaign. Related mysteries may be how common powers are, who else has them, and what their limitations are, if any.

So why don't the Sleuths go public? (Or do they?) That's something to discuss during campaign generation. Embarrassment, fear of the authorities (justified or not), fear for one's family and friends are all good reasons to try to keep the secret.

## RULES CHANGES

Borrow the mutant powers from *Mutant City Blues* (*MCB*). At character generation, player characters should be limited to 20 points for mutant powers, in addition to the points otherwise available in *Bubblegumshoe*. Often, teenage heroes are the first (that they know of) to have superpowers and have to figure out how they work as they go along. As GM, you may want to have a system for how powers are interrelated (*MCB* uses the Quade Diagram) which the Sleuths can discover through the campaign. Ideally, powers should be consistent and predictable once introduced to make mysteries solvable. Danvers High is not a world where anything can happen—superpowers do follow rules, even if they aren't well understood at first. Villains will likely be iconic: focused around a single power or theme, which they too may be struggling to master or even comprehend.

A natural tension can develop between the action of a superhero universe and the combat-light focus of *Bubblegumshoe*. You can embrace the inevitable fight scenes, adopting *MCB*'s action rules. Give the Sleuths Health ratings like *MCB* characters in that case; they start with 4 Health for free. Or you can restrict combat-focused powers to encourage characters to use social skills rather than toss an SUV at

a foe. One possible compromise: leave the *Bubblegumshoe Fighting* rules in place, but make deadly superpowers Cap abilities. A deadly superpower acts just like a gun or knife, including the **COOL** test to use it. This makes fights short and abstract, which is good, as the purpose of the game isn't a punchemup but a whodunit.

## STORIES

Possible mysteries in Danvers High include:

- o A Sleuth's Hate is in deadly peril from a jealous empowered rival—can the Sleuths stop the rival without letting the Hate know their secret?
- o There's a new star on the basketball team—who is empowered. Will the Sleuths allow her to cheat? A basketball scholarship is her best shot at college; she doesn't want to give up the game.
- o "Secret Identities"—a new social media site has all too revealing tidbits about everyone. Who is running it? What do they know? And will they stumble onto the Sleuths' secrets?
- o Kingsfield Academy, a prestigious prep school, is offering a full scholarship to a student the Sleuths know is empowered. What does the school know about powers, and what do they want?
- o While cleaning Grandma's attic, the Sleuths stumble across her WAC (Women's Army Corps) footlocker, including photographs and mementos clearly suggesting Grandma had powers of her own. Maybe Grandma's wild stories weren't a sign of senility. When the footlocker is stolen, the Sleuths need to figure out who else is in on the secret and why.

## DYMOND CITY



Dymond City is a struggling urban neighborhood in the dystopian present or near future. The Sleuths can be anyone who has reason to keep their heads down around the authorities—undocumented immigrants, vampires, members of ethnic minorities, mutants—choose your reason for your students being even more reluctant than the average teen to expect fair and just treatment from the authorities.

The goal? Survive. Beyond that, help make a difference in a place despite adult adversity. Get the dirt on a corrupt cop or politician or administrator and maybe make things better. It can be as small-scale as today's news or as epic as any teen dystopia series.

Teens have to solve most of their own problems because there's no one else to do it for them. Parents are often absent or ineffective, even more so than in a normal *Bubblegumshoe* game. Overworked, underpaid teachers fear the next round of budget cuts and layoffs. Locals see the police as the enemy, more occupying force than Andy Griffith, or even John Munch. Groups of kids from the same street or block band together into street gangs for mutual support and defense. These are not the Crips and the Bloods, or even the Jets and the Sharks, although kids may borrow their imagery to seem tougher than they are. These are local kids and young adults relying on each other for mutual protection. Many gangs are involved in a series of rivalries and vendettas over perceived slights and encroachments on their territory. Most kids expect to be dead, or in jail, by the time they're 30.

School is the one place the students are safe (mostly), but they have to get there and back, often across the territory of rival gangs. Jobs are scarce for adults, more so for teens—there's pressure to get involved in crimes or grifts to get by, enjoy a few luxuries, or help the family with bills. Getting an education, a job, or skills that will get you out of here without a criminal record will be hard.

## RULES CHANGES

Thresholds are very important in this setting. Each gang zealously guards its territory and takes exception to intruders, even those just walking to school or the store. When two rival groups come into contact in neutral territory—a local club, amusement park, or the high school dance—things can get explosive. Gangs presume a Sleuth is a member of whatever gang claims her street or block. If a Sleuth spends too much time hanging out with friends from rival neighborhoods, she may be challenged about where her loyalties truly lie.

Gangs are ruthlessly status-focused. You may want to use the Head-to-Head rules in the Kingsfield Academy drift (page 205) to track the Sleuths' status in their gang. None of the Sleuths begin as Alphas in

this drift, though! Backing down to a rival gang on anything is a great way to become a Target.

Detailed combat rules or no, the Sleuths are in a dangerous environment. Teens may get caught up in serious crime as lookouts or getaway drivers, not realizing how serious being a co-conspirator can be. Older gang members may not care who's caught in the crossfire when they settle a dispute. Some may actively recruit teens or even young kids as lookouts or runners because police treat them less harshly. Police may react to a defiant attitude or sudden movement with deadly force.

This setting adapts the Heat mechanic from *Night's Black Agents*.

## **Heat**

Heat measures the tension between the gangs and the police response to it. Heat starts at 1—many of the people the Sleuths deal with are known to police, have criminal records for minor or major offenses, are on parole or probation for past crimes, are undocumented immigrants, or are fugitives from justice. Sleuths can, but need not, start with their own legal problems—a juvenile arrest record or undocumented immigrant status. Heat increases when the Sleuths either generate tensions through their own actions, or don't solve a problem in a timely or satisfactory manner, instead leaving the affected parties to solve it themselves in a messy way that generates tensions.

Any fight that results in serious injuries, use of a firearm (especially on or near school property), or some other crime-du-jour results in increased Heat. If a Hate has evidence of a Sleuth committing a crime (or can plausibly fake it), they can drop a dime on the Sleuths to the school or police and add +1 Heat. Only increase the Heat once per session—use the most significant event to determine by how much.

Once per session, one player rolls against the current Heat. She can spend from any justifiable General pool to affect the roll. The Sleuths can choose who rolls—it need not be the same person from session to session. If the Sleuth beats the Heat, then the Sleuths avoid additional police attention for this session. They can still take actions that increase the Heat or draw a police response—they just don't get singled out for extra attention during this session. Failing the roll means the police (or

school authorities) take gratuitous swipes at the Sleuths, or at their Likes and Loves. This could range from a sudden locker search to a "friendly chat" with a detective in the vice principal's office to a full-prone-out felony traffic stop or, in extreme cases, a no-knock search warrant on a Sleuth's home. Heat should complicate the Sleuth's activities, but should not derail their investigation. Heat also affects the minimum Difficulty for General tests involving the police, school authorities, and rival gangs—nobody wants to deal with you when the cops might take an interest.

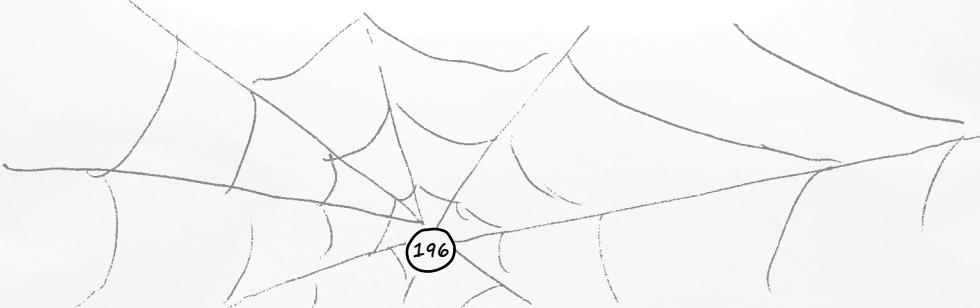
Sleuths can reduce Heat by:

**KEEPING THINGS CALM:** This may involve solving disputes among rival students or gang members. Heat drops by -1 for 72 hours without incident, again by -1 for each week without incident, and again if a month goes by without incident. (Remember that minimum Heat is 1.)

**FAVORABLE PUBLICITY:** Sometimes getting a reporter or social organization (ACLU, Innocence Project, local clergy, etc.) involved in ongoing tensions calms things for a while, at least on the surface. This involves bringing proof of wrongdoing to the do-gooders, and may involve throwdowns to get squabbling rivals to cooperate with intermediaries or the press.

**GETTING THE DIRT:** In a dystopian/noir setting, the cops themselves may have something to hide—corruption, brutality, racism, etc. Getting the dirt on a corrupt cop may get that officer suspended or fired, and the department itself distracted managing the scandal, taking the focus off the streets for a while. However, if the cops can trace the dirt back to the Sleuths, expect retribution later when public attention moves on to the next scandal.

**SHIFTING BLAME:** Providing the police with a plausible suspect for a high profile case—and letting them take credit for the bust—reduces tensions as police attention moves on to the next crime.





# HEAT TABLE

Action	Heat Gain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Committing a violent offense (assault, robbery, mugging)</li><li>○ Car chase or theft</li><li>○ Fleeing police</li><li>○ Obnoxious vandalism or property damage</li></ul>	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Possession of small amount of narcotics, public possession of alcohol by a minor, or repeated loud parties that annoy the neighbors enough to call the cops</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Any offense involving public use or display of a gun, knife, or other weapon</li><li>○ Drug dealing (especially near a school or to minors)</li><li>○ Failed or obvious intrusion into a government computer system or police station</li><li>○ Interfering in a police investigation</li><li>○ Low profile death or serious injury</li><li>○ Major property damage</li></ul>	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Child sexual abuse (may include an over-reaction to sexting)</li><li>○ Death or serious injury to a high-profile victim (could include a suicide as a result of bullying, fatal DUI involving minors, minor's death from drug overdose, or drive-by where a child was injured in the cross-fire)</li><li>○ Firearm used, displayed, or even threatened to be used near a school</li><li>○ Major property damage in a public area</li></ul>	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Death or serious injury to a law enforcement official</li></ul>	4

# STORIES

Bobbi.m@truman.edu  
2  
:-)

Possible mysteries in Dymond City include:

- A Sleuth's Hate has been accused of a convenience store robbery that the Sleuths know he didn't do, but they can't provide an alibi. Will they let an innocent foe be convicted or will they clear him?
- A Like is suddenly flush with new clothes and jewelry. Where's the stuff coming from and how far in over her head is the Like?
- The Sleuths, being known busybodies, are accused of snitching to police about a steroids scandal. Can they clear their reputations? If they find the real snitch, will they out her? And what about that steroid problem on the track team?
- Who was behind the drive-by shooting of the quarterback's brother and how can the Sleuths stop the school authorities from cancelling prom over fears of a violent reprisal?
- Why is the kid who recently transferred in provoking the gangs? Is he an undercover cop? A kid trying to get a "safety" transfer out? Or is he just clueless?



# KIMBALL MIDDLE SCHOOL

How come the high school kids get to have all the fun? Some junior Sleuths are ready to tackle a mystery of their own, but there are some different rules of the road. In Kimball Middle School, younger teens and tweens help their friends solve perplexing—but perhaps a bit lighter—puzzles and problems. Consider this *Bubblegumshoe, Jr.*.

Kimball Middle School goes from grades six through eight. Every day after school, a team of brave and intrepid students meet up at the Kimball Junior Detective Agency Clubhouse to see what mysteries they can crack together. They've had some success helping friends find their lost homework, figuring out who stole the head librarian's wig, and recovered a missing quadcopter drone that followed the wrong signal home. They don't tackle the tougher problems that older kids might: no drugs, no violence, no serious issues. If something big comes up, it's definitely time to call Mom or Mr. Brown from school. But there's no end to the little troubles that this gang can solve.

Examples of this kind of story include *Encyclopedia Brown* by Donald J. Sobol, the McGurk Detective Agency books by Edmund Wallace Hildick, *The Boxcar Children* by Gertrude Chandler Warner, *Kalle Blomkvist* by Astrid Lindgren, and the films *Clubhouse Detectives* (1996) and *Mystery Team* (2009).

## RULES CHANGES

### Keeping it Light

Lighten the tone of play and lower the consequences by downshifting the scale of physical damage. When characters are fighting, cap the maximum damage at Scuffed. This means healing Damage using **FIRST AID** has a top Difficulty of 4. Junior Sleuths may run away from a fight with no **COOL** penalty.

Junior Sleuths can and should Call the Authorities when things get too hairy. This brings in an adult NPC of the GM's choice.



## **Mentors and Sidekick**

Each junior Sleuth starts with a Relationship with an adult parent or mentor with 5 Relationship points. This NPC watches out for the character: a go-to for rides and advice, they try to keep the Sleuth safe from harm.

To add comic relief, think about having a sidekick, as in the Ruby Hollow drift (page 207). However, this isn't a fantasy setting: the sidekick is more likely someone's (even) younger sibling, a pet, or a robotic companion someone built, rather than a talking animal.

## **Group**

Instead of Cliques and Clubs, pick groups that fit this age group. Rather than Debate Club or Students Against Drunk Drivers, go with Skaters, 4H, *Magic: the Gathering* Champions, Stable Hands, or Double Dutch Troupe. Shared experiences and hobbies bring them together: for example, summer camp buddies, video game aficionados, catechism class, soccer teammates, or the neighborhood gang.

## **Clubhouse**

Create a Clubhouse in the same way you create the School, with every player saying something true about it ("MAKE YOUR SCHOOL," page 133). This is a Hangout (page 136) and counts as Home Turf.

## **Getting Around**

Junior Sleuths have more obstacles in getting around than teens would. They have a curfew, for starters—if you're out after dark, you need to be at a friend's house or otherwise accounted for and must report back to your parent or mentor. It's also impossible instead of just harder or riskier to get into some places. Locations in town that are in the Adult World are off limits unless the kids bring an adult or older friend to give them passage. If they have a strong Relationship (3+ points) with someone who lives in the Location, they can visit them. Mom's not going to drop you off at Industry Row, but she might help you interview the CEO at her office if you have a plausible reason for wanting to talk to her. However, the Sleuths are at the mercy of the adult's schedule.

## **SWEET RIDE**

Give each Sleuth a bike, skateboard, or scooter. Everybody needs their own ride! This won't let you enter an Adult World or Risky Area Location without an adult or contact, but it gives you the freedom to get places all together and on your own time.

## **New Abilities**

In addition to these new abilities, consider eliminating **FASHION**, or making it a Cap ability for the pageant kid. In the typical pre-teen detective story, kids don't care about that stuff. That said, middle school kids start caring about it pretty fast nowadays, and it's your game.

Some of the existing abilities may drift a bit in play. **NOTICE** includes eavesdropping: being in the right place at the right time to hear important information, while being overlooked by adults because you're "just a kid." The GM can definitely feed you eavesdropped clues as flashbacks: "Suddenly you remember something you overheard the teller say while waiting for your mom at the bank..."

Many of the stories in the "junior detective" subgenre deal with kid-capitalism: not just fees for their "detective agency" but everything from lemonade stands to Girl Scout cookies to lawn-mowing gigs. The modern version might incorporate an Etsy store or minis-painting business. Put these skills and marketing possibilities under **NEGOTIATION**, which can cover "I just happen to have some delicious cookies right here..."

### **FLEEING (GENERAL)**

See page 188 in the Bellairs Falls drift.

### **KID CULTURE (SOCIAL)**

Understanding the jokes, songs, memes, and fashion trends that are "in" and being able to use them to be accepted or sway your peers. This replaces **POP CULTURE**.

### **REINDEER GAMES (INTERPERSONAL)**

Having an in-depth knowledge of the many games of childhood such as double dutch, jacks, clapping games, tag variants, and re-mixing tricks. Lets you make friends with strange kids; like **PERFORMANCE**, this ability is as useful as the player wants to make it.

# STORIES

Possible mysteries at Kimball Middle School include:

- Ginny Rogers is on the verge of failing Science since her term project on air quality testing at the school has been stolen. Is it her rival Harald Andersson or did her project uncover something one of the school staff has been hiding?
- Officer Myung has started a volunteer corps at the Korean Cultural Center for kids who want to help keep their neighborhood clean. A sudden rash of graffiti and tagging breaks out, and the Kimball Middle School Junior Detective Agency wants to help find out if anyone in the corps knows what's going on.
- Pedro Alvarez has been working on his quadcopter since the beginning of the summer. He's planning to use it to start up a small delivery service on his block. When it disappears, he enlists the Kimball Middle School Junior Detective Agency to track it down.
- Somebody at Kimball Middle School is pranking Benson North: his desk had chocolate syrup dripped in it, and his crickets for Biology ended up getting out and jumping all over the class. Benson wants the Sleuths to find out who it is so he can get some revenge—turn-about is fair play. The Sleuths think things are getting out of hand. They're going to find out who's doing it, and maybe they can stop things before someone really gets hurt.

C<sub>12</sub>H<sub>16</sub>N<sub>2</sub> - Not klonopin!

Ack Davey later



# KINGSFIELD ACADEMY

*“Look to your left, look to your right. One of you won’t be here next year.”*

*—Harvard Law School Dean to every incoming class*

Kingsfield Academy is a private boarding school dominating its small town. The Academy is a rigorously selective meritocracy. The best of the best compete to join the first year class: those few who succeed are guaranteed a full scholarship. Students can enter in later years, but need to show exceptional talent.

Getting in is hard. Staying in is even harder. One out of three students fails to move on each year. Some flunk out. Some give up. A few commit suicide under the pressure. Take the worst stories about high-stakes Japanese high schools, add a bit of American overachieving, and stir in some teen dystopian paranoia. Heat until boiling.

Kingsfield emphasizes self-reliance. Students earn the right to have visitors, including parents, through academic success (either continuing challenges or a full contest).

## RULES CHANGES

Kingsfield students begin at “outstanding” and are expected to get even better. At character generation, Sleuths should have a rating of 3 in an ability like **COMPUTERS, PHOTOGRAPHY, PERFORMANCE, RESEARCH, or SCHOLARSHIP**. Athletics is a plus, but not Kingsfield’s focus.

### Player vs. Player

Kingsfield is intensely competitive, and that includes competition between the Sleuths for class rank and social status. This is a good drift for Sabotage Points (page 66), as long as the truth doesn’t come out. Some groups may prefer external conflicts over Stakes; others may prefer to engage in direct competition with each other.

## **STAKES**

A Stake is a kind of Relationship, but a fluctuating one. You can't put points into it: you have to earn it. For most Stakes, only one character (NPC or Sleuth) can have it at a time. There's only one First in Class or valedictorian's date to the dance. For Clubs or other Stakes that can have multiple members, only one Sleuth can be a member at a time. The GM and players should create 2-3 Stakes as part of generating the School.

Examples include:

- A PRIZE:** *First in Class, Lead Singer in School Musical*
- A PATRON:** *Protégé of Ms. Minerva, Math Teacher's Pet*
- A LIMITED-ENTRY CLUB:** *Honor Society, Robotics Club*
- STATUS RELATIONSHIP:** *Dating the bad-boy valedictorian, BFF with the buttoned-up genius inventor*

Like all Relationships, a Stake has a name, a tag (created by the Sleuth when she earns it), a primary ability used for challenges involving it, a second ability, and a Location. Stakes can be made more valuable if they give access to a Location or person who would otherwise be difficult or impossible to reach. All Stakes are Like 1: the Stake isn't that invested in any particular person. So, Trident Robotics Club: (Tag), Like 1, **REPAIR, ELECTRONICS SURVEILLANCE**, and access to team's drones and robots; Location: BotSys Workshop (Club's sponsor).

## **GETTING A STAKE**

At the start of the game, the Stakes are in NPCs' hands. Ideally, that NPC is a Hate (or will become one when the Sleuth steals the Stake away). You earn a Stake through:

- o In-game plot chicanery: "Yeah, I guess if you prove her mother innocent of embezzling, Janice will give you the lead in the play."
- o A continuing challenge (Difficulty 15+).
- o A full contest, but only if the Stakeholder NPC provides an interesting interaction.

In the latter two cases, often the ability to be challenged is an Investigative or Interpersonal ability. Multiply your Sleuth's ability rating by 3 and run the challenge as if the ability were a General ability. When you're done, divide your remaining points by 3 (round down) and drop your pool to its new level; you spent those points on the Stake. Make sure the Stakeholder NPC has a similar or higher ability rating to make challenges interesting, and perhaps encourage the Sleuth to get an advantage some other way.

Once a Sleuth has a Stake, there will be challengers. Any time the Sleuth seems vulnerable—lost a throwdown or low on **COOL**, for example—the GM should add insult to injury by having someone, preferably a Hate, challenge the Sleuth to a contest for the Stake.

## HEAD TO HEAD

If the Sleuths really want to compete directly, then divide them (and perhaps their school-age Relationships) into three social ranks:

**ALPHA GIRL:** Can call on one refresh of 3 Cool once per session so long as she's on top. The Sleuth with the highest Cool rating starts as Alpha Girl (use Throwdown rating as a tiebreaker). The Difficulty to "hit" her in a throwdown is 5. There can be only one Alpha at a time.

**MID-PACK:** Can call on one refresh of 2 Cool once per session. Most of the Sleuths will be Mid-Pack.

**TARGET:** Only gets a Cool refresh when the rules permit. When something bad happens, it usually happens to the Target first, or worst. The Difficulty to "hit" her in a throwdown is 3. The Sleuth with the lowest Cool starts as the Target. Again, use Throwdown rating (in reverse) as the tiebreaker.

If a Sleuth loses a throwdown or exhausts her **COOL** to -10, she's reduced by one rank (Alpha to Mid-Pack, Mid-Pack to Target. Things can't get worse for the Target.) If a Sleuth causes another Sleuth to lose a throwdown or lose her **COOL**, that Sleuth rises by one rank.

You can't go directly from Target to Alpha: the best a Target can do is rise to Mid-Pack and promote the next girl in line. If a Sleuth's Hate beats her in a throwdown or causes her to lose her **COOL**, she is reduced to a Target.

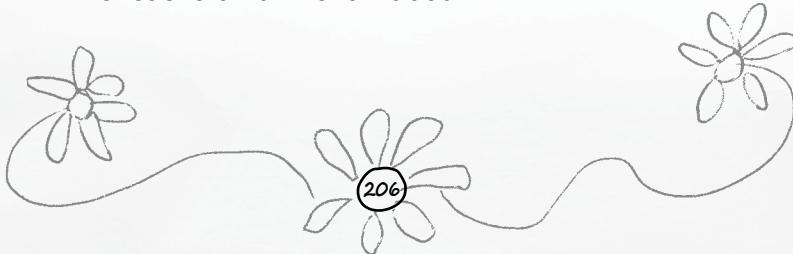
If a Sleuth wins a throwdown against the Alpha, she becomes the Alpha. If the Target wins a throwdown against an NPC of superior status (Difficulty 5 in the throwdown; page 60), she moves to Mid-Pack. The Sleuth with the next lowest **COOL** rating becomes the Target. The GM shouldn't allow only NPCs to be Targets, if only to avoid letting the players gang up on them.

## STORIES

Overt sabotage or cheating will get you expelled, but subtle harassment and sabotage, study drugs, or stealing an answer key may be the difference between passing and failing a class. In addition to inter-student intrigue, this is a teen dystopia: there should be ominous secrets about Kingsfield's alumni, history, purpose, teachers/staff, and backers.

Possible mysteries at Kingsfield Academy include:

- Why did the leading science fair project fail so spectacularly: sabotage or just bad design? Was the most logical suspect responsible, or someone else hoping to eliminate two rivals at the same time?
- Why didn't your roommate's parents come to visit last month, and why do her letters and emails get only bland, reassuring responses?
- What is Ms. Minerva's protégé working on all night, and why do her protégés always drop out in their third year?
- Who's supplying the study drugs and was a batch spiked before the Friday exam?
- What happened to that bad-boy valedictorian and why don't the teachers want to talk about him?



# RUBY HOLLOW

Ruby Hollow is a small town—just like any other small town, really—that has a big problem: something supernatural has set its sights on making life difficult for anybody and everybody trying to make a good (or bad) living. Ruby Hollow has had years of trouble from one thing or another: creepy ghosts, wicked witches, and soulless automatons alike. Lucky for the town, there's a plucky group of kids who like to meddle in other people's affairs (that's the Sleuths) and *they* have a snarky sidekick.

Often enough, the supernatural threat turns out to be the cover for some very mundane ne'er-do-wells. The Sleuths get to geek out and bring their scientific powers to bear, and maybe build a trap or two. And if it's real-deal supernatural, then things get really interesting. A big part of this game is indulging in the scare factor. Chances are good the ghosts and ghouls aren't real—this time at least—but for most of the adventure everyone should act as though they are.

The criminals' schemes are a bit over the top, and the whole adventure is meant to be fun and breezy. The kids should have a lot of fun solving the mysteries, too, especially with that sidekick. What's a group of teenagers without a robot dog, talking dolphin, or friendly raccoon?

## RULES CHANGES

Add the new abilities **FLEEING** and  **OCCULT**, and the **COOL** tests for spooky stuff, as in Bellairs Falls (page 187).

### Traps

**REPAIR** covers building booby traps for ghosts and smugglers.

The player must describe the trap to be built, at least in general terms: "We string a trip line across the deck, attached to a pulley or something on the cross-mast that lowers the fishing net onto the Deep One."

The Sleuth makes a player-facing **REPAIR** contest against a standard Difficulty of 4. On a success, the trap goes off as intended and leaves either a physical mark on the target or evidence of the target behind,

or both at the GM's discretion. To actually trap a grown man effectively enough for kids to unmask or permanently restrain him requires success against a Difficulty of 8. Cooperation (page 46) is usually a must for such traps.

The Sleuth can make a **PREPAREDNESS** test to have trap-building gear in her backpack. If the Sleuth succeeds at that test by 4 or more, lower the Difficulty by -1. (Sleuths can cooperate on the **PREPAREDNESS** test, too.)

Also modify the trap's Difficulty by the target's Alertness modifier (page 52).

Further modify the player-facing **REPAIR** contest Difficulty as follows:

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Difficulty Modifier</i>
A whole building's or ship's worth of gear available to build a trap with	-2
A lot of gear handy to build a trap with; Sleuth succeeded on Preparedness test by 4+; trap is in a constrained space (a hallway you know the ghost will run down); trap is on Home Turf; a long time to prepare the trap uninterrupted	-1
Basic trap gear handy; Sleuth succeeded on Preparedness test; a Sleuth remains on scene to set off the trap	+0
Minimal trap gear handy; trap must be set in a short period of time	+1
The trap is remotely triggered or triggered solely by the target's actions; trap must be set during combat or chase contest	+2

Det. Can't not  
Ring my calls.  
On our own.

These modifiers stack: a remotely triggered trap (+2) in a constrained space (-1) would have a net Difficulty modifier of +1.

These rules are for wacky or soft-edged settings like Ruby Hollow or perhaps Kimball Middle School (page 199). In the real world, making booby traps results in probable injury, likely criminal charges, and definite expulsion from school. Sleuths must still make the **COOL** test for Injuring or killing a person with a trap.

## Sidekicks

Sidekicks are valuable to have along when solving a mystery, and they help lighten the mood of play. The Sleuths build the sidekick as a team, defining the personality and standard behavior of their sidekick so there's guidance for roleplaying. It's great to start with a main personality shtick: is the raccoon hungry all the time? Does the talking dolphin always have a smart alec comment?

The sidekick is a shared resource with a pool of sidekick points. Sidekick points work just like normal build points, except they're put into a pool exclusively for the group to share, and they represent your sidekick. The sidekick starts with 20 General build points and gets 2 points in **COOL** and 2 points in **FLEEING** for free. They also get a number of Investigative and Interpersonal build points equal to half of what the Sleuths get based on the number of players (page 9). Try to spend most of their build points on specific abilities during play, based on the needs of the group or inspired by how the sidekick develops.

When you're playing and the sidekick happens to be around, any Sleuth in the group can spend points in the sidekick's pool instead of their own. (First to speak up gets to spend the points.) Maybe you have a big dog who can croon the tunes of 80s cartoon theme songs, and his score in **POP CULTURE** just happens to be a little better than yours; you can pull a point from his sheet to have him howl out the *Thundercats!* theme just in time for you to impress your hopefully-maybe-someday boyfriend.

Sidekick points can be replenished by any Sleuth by diverting a reward given to them by the GM to the sidekick instead, even if that Sleuth isn't present in the scene. This is a way to indirectly help other Sleuths who may be tapped out. The sidekick's pool is refreshed in full at the start of each adventure.

Once in a while, you may wish to focus an adventure on the sidekick. Especially if everyone has bonded with it and cares for the critter, everyone will get on the case if the sidekick disappears. Or if the sidekick is a bit played out and you want to liven up its entertainment value, time to re-write that comic relief:

- The sidekick is kidnapped!
- The sidekick retires and is replaced with their progeny!
- All dogs go to heaven—except this one! A sidekick once thought lost is returned and renewed, but *how*?

## STORIES

This drift typically works best as a picaresque series of stories in which you encounter new monsters or events each episode.

Possible mysteries in Ruby Hollow include:

- Why is a ghost haunting the local theme park, and how can we get rid of it? *Is it a ghost, or is it the theme park owner's son trying to ruin the business to make his mom sell the land for a development project?*
- Who is the mysterious creeper hanging out on Old Town Road? *Is this the site of an alien landing, or are the local yokels trying to trump up a story to bring in tourism?*
- Whatever happened to the group of teens partying on the lake, and why do people in town keep disappearing when they look for them? *Is there an underwater menace like Nessie in the lake? Did the missing teens make friends with the lake monster Ruby, or is a gang using the lake to smuggle goods and keeping witnesses on ice somewhere?*
- Who are the ghosts who walk the Ruby Hollow Town Circle? *Are these the founders of the town, cursed to walk for eternity to pay the price for stealing the land? Or are they men and women from the retirement community in town, trying to teach the younger folk a lesson?*
- Is the old guy who moved into the haunted mansion a vampire, or just really creepy? *Is he just a wine salesman whose medications make him allergic to the sun? Or is he really what it seems?!?*

# STRANGEHILL SCOUT TROOP 221

Over in Strangehill, Troop 221 has a reputation for being able to solve mysteries. They pride themselves on putting the skills they use for their Badges to work for the community. Boys and girls work together, learn new skills, and share what they learn with other kids, seniors, and people in need in the community. And they always remember that they have as much to learn from the people they help.

Scout Troop 221 builds on the Kimball Middle School drift (page 199) with modifications to character, town, and mystery creation. The tone of the game is light-hearted with a focus on the ideals of being a good citizen. Play focuses on the Sleuths (called Scouts in this drift) becoming empowered through learning and finding ways to give back.

## RULES CHANGES

When making Scouts, skip the creation of Clubs and Cliques. The Troop is the social group that play focuses on.

## Badges

The Scouts gain their abilities primarily through Badges. These are packages of General abilities, Investigative abilities, and Interpersonal abilities that are associated with a given field of study or endeavor. Some Badges provide special Cap abilities. Since any Scout can get a Badge, more than one Scout can gain these Cap abilities and each Scout can gain more than one Cap ability. However, limits to the top level for each Cap ability are the same as in the main *Bubblegumshoe* game.

### The Strangehill Scouting Story

Rosalyn Luna, a student of education and child development, founded the Strangehill Scouts a decade or so ago: long enough to be a tradition in the area. She hoped to create a group for boys and girls together to learn and give back to their community. During college, Luna began losing her sight to hereditary retinal degeneration. She continued with her work and formed a collaborative network of like-minded teachers, parents, and community members. Together they created the Strangehill Scouts as a troop accepting of and accessible to all.

Each Scout starts with two standard stats: **COOL** 5 and **THROWDOWN** 4.

All Scouts also start with the Badges **FIRST AID** and **COMMUNITY**

**HISTORY.** Then players each choose two more Badges that their Scout has already gained, and one that she is working toward attaining. Use the Custom Badges rules (page 215) to make new ones if need be.

After Badges are chosen, each Scout gets 15 build points to purchase additional abilities or bolster her skills from the Badges.

Experience points (page 83) allow players to build upon abilities given to them through Badges or add additional abilities. Some Badges award points in an ability a Scout already has. Those points can be added to the Scout's existing ratings. Encourage the players to confer about what Badges they choose, to help support one another or to get a good spread of abilities in the group. If gaining a Badge brings a Cap ability to its maximum, those points can be shifted to any other ability the Scout already has that she could plausibly have learned during that time.

The GM awards Badges in progress after an adventure (one to two sessions) in which the Scout used those abilities, or succeeded at a specific in-game challenge. These can be "in-game" prerequisites (to earn the **ANIMAL SPOTTING** Badge, the scouting manual says a Scout might have to find an endangered bird) or dramatic ones (to earn the **HACKER** Badge, a Scout has to help the teen center secure its website—which means finding out who's the jerk who keeps hacking it).

## Troop Leaders

Each Scout gets a free Mentor Relationship with the Troop Leader, an adult who directs the Troop and guides the Scouts. This Relationship starts with 3 points for each Scout. Just as the Strangehill Scouts are a co-educational group that accepts young scouts of all genders and sexual orientations, so too do the Troop Leaders represent a broad cross-section of the people of Strangehill. Troop Leaders start with 8 Badges and 20 build points to customize their skill levels. Give the Troop Leader a Thumbnail, Location, and Trouble (page 25), as with any NPC in *Bubblegumshoe*. If there is a Scout Troop Hall, the Troop Leader is the Face of this Location.

Troop Leaders often call upon other members of the community to help the Troop learn abilities they themselves do not have. Create NPCs with an ability associated with a Badge or set of Badges that Scouts are interested in gaining—or that fit with a mystery that you create for them!

## **Relationships**

Scouts have Relationship build points to invest. Players should choose a neighbor (an adult or child who lives near their home), a parent or other mentor (as in Kimball Middle School), and—once the players have chosen the Troop’s Community Commitments—a Community Friend and add a total of 8 points to these Relationships. Hold the remaining Relationship points for connections to be created during play.

## **Town Troubles**

When creating the Town for Strangehill Scout Troop 221, create Locations associated with Relationships, the grade school or middle school, or reflecting the Badges: e.g., a State Park or Planetarium. As in Kimball Middle School, Scouts can go to Free Zone Locations, but are barred from entering Adult World or Risky areas without an adult or contact in that Location. The GM then introduces two to three Town Troubles. These aren’t huge or dangerous troubles; they’re issues and problems that people in the community face and may include ways that community members are trying to help out. For example, the transitional house for people looking for shelter is in need of a new roof, or a big feral cat population has colonized an abandoned building. The players may suggest some Town Troubles as well. Then, the players pick several Community Commitments that the Scouts have made to help out: raise money for the new roof; try to humanely trap, neuter, and release or resettle the cats. Both the GM and players can introduce new Town Troubles, but if the players do, they need to select a Community Commitment to go along with it.

## **Mystery Creation**

Each session, the GM should offer a mystery that relates to one of three things: the Scout Troop’s Community Commitment, a Neighbor of one

of the Scouts, or a Badge that one or more of the Scouts is working toward. Occasionally, the Troop may become involved in a rivalry with a neighboring Troop, or perhaps one that has a mystery to solve.

## **Badge List**

Cap skills are indicated by (C).

**ANIMAL CARE:** Intuition 2, Cool 2, (C) Animal Handling 2

**ANIMAL SPOTTING:** Sneaking 2, Outdoors 2, (C) Zoology 2

**ARCHITECTURE:** Photography 4, BS Detector 2, Computers 4

**ART APPRECIATION:** Grownup Face 3, Research 4, Kid Culture 3

**ASTRONOMY:** Notice 3, Performance 2, Computers 5

**COMMUNITY HISTORY:** Computers 2, Negotiation 3, Town Lore 5

**CUISINE:** BS Detector 2, (C) Cooking 2, Pop Culture 2

**DANCE:** Athletics 4, Fashion 2, Performance 4

**FAMILY HISTORY:** Town Lore 3, Scholarship 4, Grownup Face 3

**FIRST AID:** First Aid 4, Cool 3, Reassurance 3

**GARDENING:** Outdoors 4, First Aid 2, Entrepreneur 4

**HACKER:** Computers 5, Repair 3, Kid Culture 2

**MAKER:** Repair 4, Research 4, (C) Entrepreneur 2

**PERFORMING ARTS:** Performance 5, Negotiation 2, Preparedness 3

**PLANT ID:** Preparedness 2, Outdoors 2, (C) Botany 2

**SPORTS:** Athletics 5, Intimidation 3, Notice 2

**SWIMMING:** Athletics 5, Outdoors 2, BS Detector 3

**WILDERNESS TRAVEL:** First Aid 3, Outdoors 5, Cool 2

## **ADVANCED BADGES**

To earn an Advanced Badge the Scout must already have one or more Pre-Requisite Badges, listed in parentheses.

**ANIMAL TRAINING (ANIMAL CARE OR ANIMAL SPOTTING):** (C) Animal Handling 2, Intimidation 2, Notice 2

**ROBOTICS (HACKER OR MAKER):** Repair 4, Computers 3, Research 3

**RECITAL (PERFORMING ARTS):** Performance 3, Grownup Face 2, Cool 5

**WILDERNESS SURVIVAL (WILDERNESS TRAVEL, AND ANIMAL SPOTTING OR PLANT ID):** Sneaking 3, Outdoors 4, Reassurance 3

## CUSTOM BADGES

Pick a new area of knowledge and choose three abilities to associate with the Badge:

- Two General abilities and an Investigative or Interpersonal ability, or
- One General ability and *either* two Interpersonal abilities *or* one Interpersonal and one Investigative ability.

Distribute 10 points among the abilities (max 5 to any ability). You can include Cap abilities with the same purchase constraints (page 21) as regular *Bubblegumshoe*. However, Scouts can have more than one Cap ability, and multiple Scouts can have the same Cap ability. Use only one Cap ability per Badge; it may take the place of any other ability type.

## STORIES

Possible mysteries for Strangehill Scout Troop 221 include:

- During the Troop's visit to the homeless shelter, their friend Jade's dog, Kirby, was stolen. Dogs aren't allowed at the shelter. Did the staff send the dog to the dog pound? Or did someone else at the shelter fall in love with Kirby and take him away?
- It's fall and the Troop is taking a trip to go apple picking at a farm near where one of the Scouts lives. But when they get to the orchard, the cider press has been broken and the horses have been let out of the corral. Who did this and why are they trying to hurt the farm?
- Competition with another troop for a can drive uncovers embezzling at the town's Garbage and Recycling Transfer Station.
- Trying to be the first to reach the top of a mountain trail, the Troop finds clues to long-lost loot from a bank robbery.

# VERONICA BASE, MARS

This drift is set on a Martian base some time in the future. Technology is fairly standard mid-21st century stuff: no instant truth pills or teleporters. But 3D fabricators, LED greenhouses, and virtual reality headsets can do a lot to make Mars feel like home—including social pressure and the possibility of crime.

The Mars Authority (which depending on your game might be a part of NASA or the ESA, or a transnational body like the UN or the Antarctic Treaty Organization, or a private corporation) believes that the key to human survival and sanity on a planet millions of miles away from Earth is family: all the scientists (except a few indispensable geniuses) are married with kids. The Authority allows the scientists to pretty much run their own affairs; there aren't enough scientifically trained law enforcement personnel for a smallish base like the one here in Veronica Crater to have its own marshal, and there sure isn't the spare mass on the yearly supply shuttle to fly one out. Maybe Elysium Station can spare a marshal, but she can't get all the way around the planet to Veronica Base for at least a week, maybe more if the sandstorms have kicked up again.

Nope, you're on your own. Shut up inside a bunch of domes and habitrails. On Mars.

## RULES CHANGES

The abilities **FASHION** and **POP CULTURE** don't exist. Frequently cut off from Earth's media by sandstorms and time lag, and without spare resources for consumer crazes, there's no reason to use either of them. **TOWN LORE** becomes **BASE LORE**. The only vehicles at the base are a handful of exploratory rovers and mining trucks, but **DRIVING** drifts to cover drones and remotely piloted vehicles of all sorts.

### New Investigative Ability: Areology

You know about Mars and any relevant scientific question that might come up in your investigations.

## **Base Inventory**

Teenagers on Mars are expected to do their own research, so you can use lab equipment if need be. If you think the base should have a specific piece of equipment or a given resource available, spend 2 rating points of **PREPAREDNESS** and it does (unless the GM and other players veto it as a crock). These don't refresh, but you can regain them with experience.

## **Recycle!**

Veronica Base is small; just how small might be up to the GM, but there's a hard upper limit on Locations and on NPCs. (Say, 30-40 Locations and 90-150 NPCs.) About half the NPCs are grownups, and half are kids. Once you've used up all the NPCs, you have to start doubling and tripling up, introducing new aspects of previously met supporting cast members: the nurse is also a composer, or the bootlegger (distilling alcohol from food waste) is also the radar technician. The Locations work similarly: the low-gravity basketball court is also the "picnic ground" on base holidays, perhaps; the physics classroom becomes the "Russian bar" for the cosmonauts after school hours.

With this much doubling up, most Locations become Free Zones. Dangerous areas like the Reactor or the Arms Locker remain Adult Areas.

## **STORIES**

This drift might work best as a short-term campaign; an arc moving from the petty to the murderous reinforces the themes of isolation and intensity in the setting.

Possible mysteries in Veronica Base include:

- Who is plagiarizing your friend's mom's research?
- Who's sneaking extra sucrose from the hydroponic station?
- Why does Academician Livanov drive out toward Mount Olympus every Tuesday at 23:00 hours?
- Why are Linda's parents and Carl's parents suddenly angry at each other? It's bad for their joint research and way bad for our crew of Sleuths.
- Why isn't Elisa's boyfriend vidding her any more? Just because he's still on Earth doesn't mean he's dumped her, she insists.



# HEY! THAT'S MY BIKE!

This *Bubblegumshoe* sample adventure introduces Drewsbury, the rules, and, gosh, everything. It uses the sample Sleuths developed in the first chapter. Their full stats appear on pages 250-253.

It's fall in Drewsbury and still warm enough for those without cars to use their bikes to get around. But no bike is safe from a rash of thefts. The police take reports, but seem uninterested in actually catching the thieves. When Sid Monroe's little brother's bike is stolen, the high school soccer star vows to get it back—by asking for the Sleuths' help.

## WHO'S WHO

**MARCUS ADAMS:** Football lineman with Islanders gang tattoos.

**GABRIEL SORIANO:** Truman High's quarterback, dating Kaitlyn Price.

**BROWN (KYLE) AND GRAY (KARI):** Brother/sister team of skilled California bike thieves, known by the color of their hoodies.

**DANNY KANG:** Jessica's cousin, hotheaded thug from the Red Scorpions, and Truman High's best defensive star.

**MR. KLYME:** Truman High's vice principal; by-the-book disciplinarian.

**MITCH AND MIKE:** Two meth heads who steal bikes to strip for parts, or build into Frankenbikes (bikes cobbled together from various parts) and resell them.

**SID MONROE:** Star forward for the Truman High boys' soccer team, the client.

**ANDY MONROE:** Sid's brother, age 10, the victim.

**KENNETH PRICE:** Kaitlyn Price's father and Victor Price's brother.

**KAITLYN PRICE:** Queen of Mean, dating Gabriel Soriano.

**Victor Price:** Owner of the Devil's Gear Bike Shop, Kaitlyn's uncle recently back from California.

**Joon Roh:** Red Scorpion, former student, died last fall in a bar fight in Fentonville.

**Detective Oscar Stevenson:** Experienced detective nearing retirement who has to break in the new guys. He's been around, seems to know everybody, but sometimes leaps to conclusions based on reputation, not evidence.

**Tyrese (Big Ti) Walls:** Recent Truman graduate and head of the Islanders.

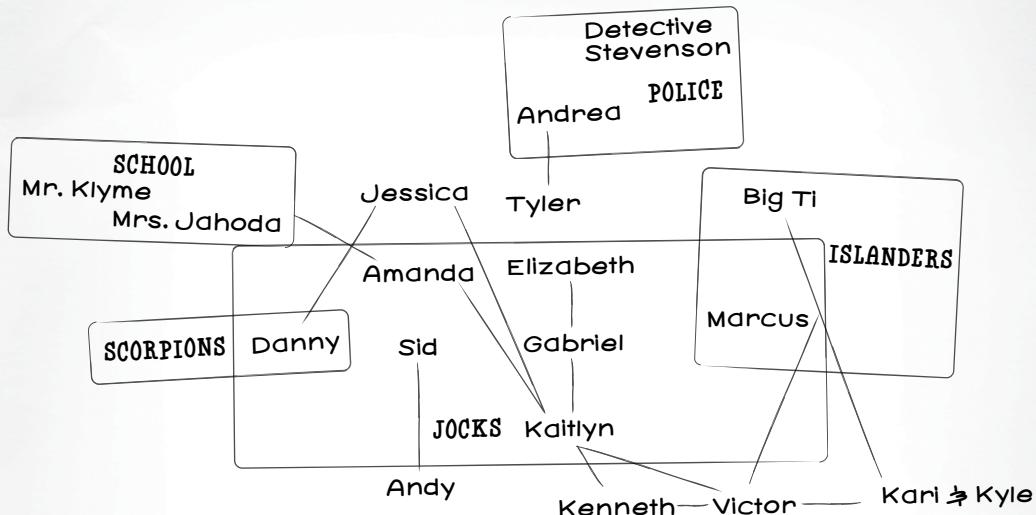
### Drewsbury at a Glance

Drewsbury, in this incarnation, is a small city of about 40,000. It's sharply divided between its waning industrial core and its burgeoning commuter community living in new developments along the periphery. "Hey! That's My Bike!" involves rivalries between two local gangs: the Islanders and the Red Scorpions, and tensions between townies (families with generations-old roots) and the newcomers.

Drewsbury is not a high-crime area. The police have the usual problems with teen drinking and drug use, minor thefts and burglaries, bar fights, intractable neighbor disputes, and domestic violence. Homicides are rare, although there was a fatal stabbing last year in nearby Fentonville that involved a Drewsbury boy from the Red Scorpions and, rumor has it, a couple of Islanders. The department has mostly been trying to sweep its gang problem under the rug to avoid adverse effects on real estate prices.

There is one large public high school, Truman High, and a Catholic high school (St. Joan) in town. Fentonville High, Truman's rival, is in the neighboring small city. It is fall, which means the start of football season. Managing the Lions, Truman High's football team, is an ongoing challenge because it has members from different social strata, including key players from the Red Scorpions and the Islanders.

# RELATIONSHIP MAP (FOR THIS ADVENTURE)



## WHERE'S WHERE

**MILL SQUARE:** Strip mall in a mostly Black American neighborhood. The Korean-owned grocery is one of the Red Scorpions' favorite hangouts.

**DEVIL'S GEAR BIKE SHOP:** A high-end bike shop mostly catering to serious gear-heads from the Acres; owned by Victor Price (Kaitlyn Price's uncle).

**MEMORIAL ROCK:** A large granite boulder on the outskirts of town, painted by townie high school students (and recent graduates) with memorials to peers killed in accidents or military service.

## THE SPINE

The adventure begins with **MY LITTLE BROTHER** when a fellow soccer player asks Amanda Barrett for help. At the principal's office, the Sleuths see a video of the theft, and the thieves. They can find someone who knows a thief, but asking questions annoys the Islanders. Things get worse if the Sleuths help out Danny Kang at **MEMORIAL ROCK**. Looking in **THE USUAL PLACES** doesn't turn up

anything, but this is itself a lead: the bikes aren't being sold locally. Things come to a head at school in **HALLWAY JUSTICE**. The Sleuths use a **STING AND STAKE OUT** to follow Brown and Gray to the storage locker where the bikes are kept. With that, they can **UNMASK** Victor Price and perhaps get Big Ti off the streets for a while.

## Customizing for Your Group

If you want to use your own group, keep these key elements in mind.

Big Ti and the Islanders are the villains. If the Sleuths have gang ties, they should be tied to a rival gang. The Scorpions are potential allies if there's a physical showdown. It is also less plausible that a Sleuth with good sources among the Islanders wouldn't quickly be able to find out too much about Brown and Gray.

Andy and Marcus are jocks. Connections to the athletes make it more likely Andy will go to the Sleuths for help and that Marcus might help them in one of the possible final confrontations.

The "B-Plot" involves class/ethnic tensions between the "townies" and groups newer to the community. At least one of the Sleuths should have contacts with the Scorpions or a similar outsider group to make the Memorial Rock scene and its fallout work.

This should get personal: here, several characters have a relationship with Caitlyn, who will be directly affected when they unmask her uncle.

A Sleuth with police connections or at least a neutral relationship with the police will make it easier to get information from Stevenson. One option here is for Tyler to borrow his mother's **CRIMINOLOGY** skill to boost the group's chances of Brown and Gray taking the bait bike.

You don't need a Sleuth with **ART** for Memorial Rock. If you have a character with a different Cap ability, try to find a way to work it into an important scene.

# PREMISE

Victor Price, a bike mechanic from California, returned to Drewsbury a couple of years ago when his brother Kenneth was diagnosed with Parkinson's. Victor opened up the Devil's Gear Bike Shop and has been making a reasonable living selling high-end bikes to the Acres adults. As the Price family fell steadily into debt, Victor decided he needed to make some cash. He had some contacts in a California bike theft ring, and hired Brown and Gray with a promise of easy pickings. Brown and Gray then made contact with the Islanders, a local gang, paying them off for warnings about police patrols, scouting for likely targets, and payoffs if things get hot. Victor isn't happy to be in bed with gangsters, but he needs the money.

Brown and Gray steal new and high-end bikes and take them to a storage unit on the edge of Germantown near the Acres rented under a false name. When there's enough to fill a moving truck, Victor drives the bikes to a contact in a neighboring state to sell them using Craigslist and split the profits.

## HOOK: MY LITTLE BROTHER

Sid Monroe, star forward for the boy's soccer team, sits down next to Amanda Barrett at lunch:

*I hear you solve problems sometimes. I want my brother's bike back and the name of the guy who took it. Just tell me what it'll cost me.*

*It's a green and white Hotrock 20': got a picture of it here. Cost my dad \$350 bucks for Andy's 10th birthday. Couple days ago, he biked here from his school and locked it on the rack by the gym while he watched me at practice.*

Any of the jocks would know that the Monroe family has been going through a rough patch, but Sid has channeled his frustrations into soccer. He was always a great older brother to his little brother Andy, who hangs out at practice after school, but he's acting more and more like Andy's dad while their own father is distracted.

His parents reported the theft to the cops. They took a report, but nobody's expecting them to do much about it. The bike rack is next to the gym door, and all the school entrances are covered by video: footage is kept on a server in the vice principal's office.

## THE VIDEO

With **GROWNFACEx**, the Sleuths can convince Vice Principal Klyme to let them look at the video from that camera for the time during practice (**CORECLUE**). If the Sleuths are reluctant to approach Klyme, they could get access through a secretary, the IT staff, or even sneak into Klyme's office. It's a classic bike theft. Sid and the soccer team are in the far practice field. The football team is doing warm-up exercises and drills in the near field. A young adult in a brown hoodie parks his bike next to Andy's and watches the football practice in the closer field from the fence. (It seems a bit warm to leave a hoodie up, but he never pulls it down or looks at the camera.) He's texting while he watches. While he's watching, Marcus Adams, a football lineman, walks past, stops to talk to him, and gives "dap." (Basically, a complicated handshake.) Another young adult in a gray hoodie walks up. Marcus and the other teen have their back to him (actually *her*, but hard to tell under the hoodie) and ignore him while he fiddles around with Andy's lock for a few minutes. (It is hard to see what he's doing, but with a 1-point **REPAIR** spend, he's using a car jack to break the U-lock.) When it breaks, Gray leaves on Andy's bike, followed soon thereafter by Brown on his bike. Marcus hustles back to the field.

Mr. Klyme isn't going to call Marcus Adams into his office based on this. There's no proof that Marcus knows the thief, that he saw anything, or that his friend, whoever it is, was involved with the thieves. Even if he called him in, he wouldn't expect to get any useful answers. (This would also warn Marcus that there's a problem.) Mr. Klyme will not give the Sleuths a copy of the video, but they could take surreptitious screen shots on a cell phone using **FILCH** (Difficulty 4 test) or **PHOTOGRAPHY** (1 point spend). Hacking the office server is a Difficulty 6 test of **COMPUTERS**. If asked, Klyme will let the police know the video exists: it wouldn't occur to him to notify them on his own.

Sid, if shown the video, can't recognize either of the two teens from their build or body language, but he's ready to go after Marcus and demand answers: a 1-point **REASSURANCE** spend will calm him down, for now.

## OTHER CLUES

Neither Sid, nor Mr. Klyme, nor the Sleuths, recognize Gray and Brown from their build or body language. While there isn't much to go on, this does suggest that they aren't students at Truman High.

**FASHION:** The clothing visible on Gray and Brown is relatively new (not more than a month or two's wear) and generic, available at any Wal-Mart or Target. Gray is wearing gloves.

**FLIRTING (OR ATHLETICS AS AN INVESTIGATIVE ABILITY):** *2-point spend:* Gray is female.

**GOSSIP:** Marcus is a tough guy, a good football lineman, who otherwise keeps to himself. His family is trouble: his father, older brother, and several male cousins are Islanders. Marcus himself has Islander tattoos. He sits in the back of classes when he can, never raises his hand, and gives short (but correct) answers when called on. *1-point spend:* He's almost enthusiastic in art class and has some talent.

**NOTICE:** The two are slim, likely late teens to mid-20s (at a wild guess), could be male or female, hard to tell. *1-point spend:* Brown's hand is visible when he greets Marcus: he's Caucasian.

## THE POLICE

*"Bikes are one of the four commodities of the street—cash, drugs, sex, and bikes... You can virtually exchange one for another."*

*- Victor Veysey, bike mechanic, San Francisco*

The Sleuths might talk to the police, or perhaps to Tyler's mother. If the Sleuths do not have the video, Tyler's mom (or the desk sergeant if they go to the station) shrugs. Bike theft is not a priority for police, or prosecutors. Probation is the worst that a bike theft could expect. It just isn't worth a detective's time.

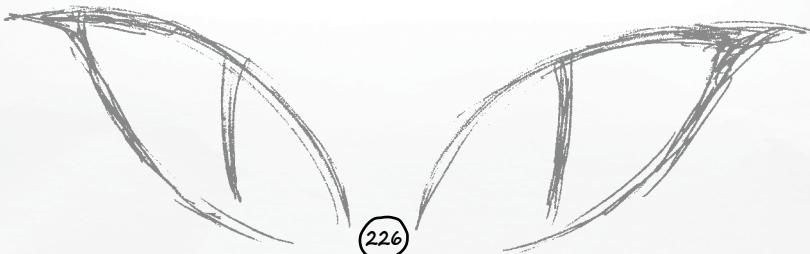
Usually it's some addict who's already sold it for drugs. You might look at the Market Square flea market, the pawn shop, and the second hand stores; it might turn up in the hands of someone who bought it from the thief. Wouldn't hurt to put up a note at the bike shop too. We've got the report; if it turns up here, we'll call you.

## With the Video

If the Sleuths somehow have a copy of the video or talked Klyme into passing it along to the cops (**LEVERAGED CLUE**), the desk sergeant is much more interested in the case and sends them to Detective Stevenson. The Chief asked Stevenson to look into things because someone's been stealing higher-end bikes from the Acres, the commuter rail station, and some health clubs. Solving this quietly would be good for the town. (If the Sleuths go through Tyler's mother, she can introduce them to Stevenson: she's been helping him compile reported thefts.) The Sleuths learn that there's been a big upsurge in reported bicycle thefts since the start of school. There are always some thefts, usually of bikes that are unlocked or poorly locked. In the past two months, however, high-end bikes with decent locks have been vanishing too. Stevenson has seen the youths in the gray and brown hoodies in other videos, but they carefully keep their faces off-camera.

*This is a solid lead. Thanks, kids.  
We'll let you know if we get that bike back.*

With the video, Stevenson is willing to pick up Marcus and try to sweat him. If, somehow, the Sleuths bug the police interview room (Tyler does have a Cap ability in **ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE**) or can talk their way into being able to watch, Marcus is an up-and-coming Islander: he gives the cops nothing but attitude. He looks at the video and says it's some guy, he doesn't remember, he gives dap to lots of people. (**BS DETECTOR** is barely needed to show he's lying; he's loyal to his buddies and not a snitch.) The police have nothing to hold him on: the best they can do is pressure him for a while then turn him loose.



# THE LOCKER ROOM

The Sleuths could confront Marcus themselves, instead of using adults as catspaws. Marcus is a tough guy and built like a brick. Made of other bricks. On the other hand, he knows how to deal with nosy adults—he's not used to being questioned by his peers.

The Sleuths could try to approach him at practice, in the halls, or at lunch. The most audacious approach would be for one or more female investigators to confront him in the boys' locker room (2-point **COOL** Threshold for girls, 1 point for boys who are not jocks). It would be very hard to **INTIMIDATE** him. **FLIRTING**, from a female Sleuth, gets a favorable response, but not information. Oddly, **NEGOTIATION** and playing it straight, **FLATTERY** about his art, or using a Relationship spend with a team-mate (Gabriel Soriano, for example) gets some success: Marcus won't admit to knowing anything, but he's willing to "ask around" about the bike. (A Relationship spend using Danny Kang has different overtones because Kang is part of a rival gang.)

## What Marcus Knows

At this point, Marcus knows that Brown and Gray are working with Big Ti. Marcus doesn't know where Brown and Gray hang out, or who they are, but he does know they aren't from around here. The Islanders are supposed to help them if asked and otherwise stay out of their way. There's some serious money involved and Big Ti would break someone if they screw up the deal. (So he's not talking!)

He didn't actually see Gray take Andy's bike, but he can put it together once someone starts asking questions. This fits in with some other things he knows. Big Ti is involved in some bike thefts: the Islanders are supposed to text Ti if they see any particularly valuable bikes around. They are also supposed to warn Ti if the police start nosing around for information about the bike thefts.

Marcus isn't a bad guy and he knows Sid: he's not going to spill anything above, but if the Sleuths can appeal to him he's willing to try to ask around to see if he can get Andy's bike back, so long as there's no blow-back to him or the Islanders.

Tuesday Day  
at Bobbit's, then went  
to Stan's  
(lunch), 9pm.

Ideally, the Sleuths realize that Marcus isn't as hard-core as he seems. He's a decent guy trying to keep his head down in the gang. The Sleuths may be able to play on his ambivalence, but it would take something serious to turn him against his gang brothers.

## Playing Marcus

**You're Big:** Pull your shoulders back and loom; you can take anyone in this room and you know it.

**You're Street Smart:** Look down at adults and most kids; they wouldn't last a day in your neighborhood; your gang has your back, for better or worse.

**No Snitchin', Ever!**: A snitch is the most vile thing imaginable. You never tell anyone anything that could hurt a friend.

**It's What I Know:** You're an Islander because it's expected of you. Your dad was an Islander, your older brother was an Islander, your male cousins are all Islanders. You're hoping that if you keep your head down you won't have to do anything that will send you to jail and derail your chances for a football scholarship to a local college.

## MEMORIAL ROCK

**Memorial Rock** and **Hallway Justice** (page 236) are B-plots. They don't provide core clues. If the Sleuths participate, they can get additional help from Danny Kang and the Red Scorpions, and would have a reason to find out more information about the Price family's financial woes, explaining Victor Price's motives. If the Sleuths decline to get involved, it should not hinder their ability to solve the case.

While all this goes on, Danny Kang wants his cousin Jessica's help. It's been a year to the day since Joon Roh (one of the Red Scorpions) died in a bar stabbing. Nobody was arrested. The cops seem to have forgotten about Roh, but the Scorpions haven't. Danny thinks the gang is all talk about doing something to remember him. He's going to impress them with some action. Danny wants to paint Roh's name on Memorial Rock. Everybody knows about the Rock: it's obvious as you drive out of town. Any Sleuth with **Town Lore** knows the unwritten

rules about who can paint the rock and why: Danny isn't a townie (his parents sent him to live with family to get him away from bad influences at home); Roh wasn't a townie either; and a gangbanger killed by another gangbanger isn't the kind of death the Rock is used for. Danny knows this and doesn't care: he and the Scorpions are sick of being looked down on by the townies and the Acres kids.

The Sleuths have a choice about whether they want to be involved. Danny does it with or without their help. If they help him, he owes them a favor. The Red Scorpions watch over the Market Street flea market and the Triple Diamond Pawn Shop. They also know many of the local addicts who might know something about Andy's bike. If the Sleuths help him, the Scorpions could help with the case.

## **Painting the Rock**

Memorial Rock is a huge glacial boulder on the side of a highway leading out of Drewsbury. The side facing the road is a smooth vertical face, perfect for painting. Since the 1980s at least, it has always been used by townies to paint the names and death dates of teenagers and young adults who die in accidents. The rock currently memorializes B.D. Davis, a Truman High graduate who joined the military and died last spring in a training accident.

Technically, it is vandalism to paint the rock. It must be done late at night, and quickly, so that no one calls the police before it is finished. It is almost always painted by high school students or recent graduates in honor of their peers. Rarely, someone has defaced the rock with graffiti: it is repainted as a memorial the following night. There are rumors about townie students ostracizing or beating up the offenders.

The rock is big: painting it takes time, but the more painters, the faster it goes. If Elizabeth is there and spends 1 point in **ART**, it's done before anyone interrupts and it looks impressive. You don't need **ART** to spray paint a name and a simple design on the rock, but it is a big, uneven surface that has been painted many, many times. Using Elizabeth's **ART** means that the tribute looks good (perhaps taking advantage of the rock's unevenness for a 3D effect) and it won't smear or run during the first rainstorm. If someone drives by while the rock is only half-painted, they could call the police, so this is a rush job.

If the Sleuths refuse Danny, he doesn't have enough people to finish before a car goes by. He's too stubborn to run before he's done, and so is caught by the police. It's a misdemeanor vandalism bust, but it strains his relationship with Jessica. The Red Scorpions are uncooperative if the Sleuths ask for their help.

If Elizabeth is not there, or chooses not to spend a point in **ART**, and a Sleuth with **INTUITION** is present, the painters do an adequate job, know when to run, and have enough people to be done just in time. The Sleuths could also spend a point of **IMPERSONATE** (or of **FASHION** ahead of time) to make a passing car think they are townie jocks, who many drivers would not report.

By morning, townie outrage spreads rapidly first across social media and then by in-school gossip. Danny and the Red Scorpions are the primary targets: Gabriel has a loud argument with Danny in the hall that threatens to turn into a brawl before being broken up by Ms. Jahoda and Coach Kipling. (The Sleuths can decide whether to claim credit or keep their heads down: Danny won't snitch on them, but others may guess that Jessica was involved.) Within a day, the rock is repainted to its prior memorial.

## THE USUAL PLACES

If the Sleuths talked to the police, or looked up bike theft online (**RESEARCH**), they have an idea of the kind of places to try: pawn shops, second hand stores, and flea markets. You can summarize most of the interactions, which are dead ends. If the Sleuths helped Danny at Memorial Rock, he can tip them to Mitch and Mike at the flea market (who are decent red herrings). Detective Stevenson might mention Victor Price at the Devil's Gear Bike Shop, who has a message board with lost bike notices.

The basic takeaway is that the bikes aren't being stolen by a typical thief interested in quick cash. Nor are the bikes, or their parts, turning up anywhere local. This is the work of a small, experienced team targeting new and high-end bikes. Introduce Price and at least one other viable suspect (either Mitch and Mike (see page 231) or Big Ti (see page 246)) in this part of the adventure, but the Sleuths need not chase down every dead end.

## TRIPLE DIAMOND PAWN SHOP

This scene is a dead end, but can add flavor to the investigation or set up future episodes.

The pawn shop is actually a concrete building on the end of the Market Street Mall separated from the mall proper by a narrow alley. Every window is protected with thick bars when the shop is open. The back door is heavy steel, with a shuttered peep hole. The front door is glass, but it leads into a narrow vestibule and a thick steel door. (At night, a steel shutter covers the entire storefront.) A sign across the street side says "Exchange your valuables for cash!" Neon signs on the front say "Open" and "Cash For Your Stuff." Inside, there are several video cameras covering the counters, glass cases, and open area for stock.

If the Sleuths try to sell something (or just ask about sales), first they are told they have to be 18 to sell: "Sorry kids, state law." The clerk, Jason Brown (owner Rick's son, see page 145), needs to see a state-issued photo ID, and record all the details of the transaction: the seller's name and address, the item's description, any serial numbers, and the pawn contract. Police frequently check the books to see if anything matches a reported theft. Pawned goods are kept in a storage area until the contract expires. If the owner doesn't repay the loan, then the item is brought up front to sell.

Andy's bike isn't here. **BS DETECTOR** says Jason is on the level about not wanting to buy stolen goods. If the Sleuths are reasonably polite, he suggests they check out the Market Square flea market. (Mitch and Mike are competitors, of a sort, who the Browns wouldn't mind seeing shut down.)

## MARKET SQUARE FLEA MARKET

On Saturday morning, various vendors set up tables, or sell their wares from their vans or car trunks in the parking lot. Prices are low, and cash only. The Sleuths can find one bike parts seller, a beat-up red van run by two sweat-stained men: Mitch and Mike. Mitch, a thin young man with the bad teeth of a meth addict (**NOTICE** or any Cap or Relationship ability related to drugs or criminal culture), leans against the open door. Mike, a heavy-set lad in a sweaty wife-beater, seems to

be asleep in the passenger seat using a rumpled gray sweatshirt as a pillow. A dozen tires, some rims, and a couple of frames are on pegs and hooks attached to an upended palate leaning against the van's side. A battered plastic tub on the floor is filled with handlebars, seats, brakes, gears, reflectors, and other bike bits. A few Frankenbikes lean against the van's side. The van smells of sweat and grease.

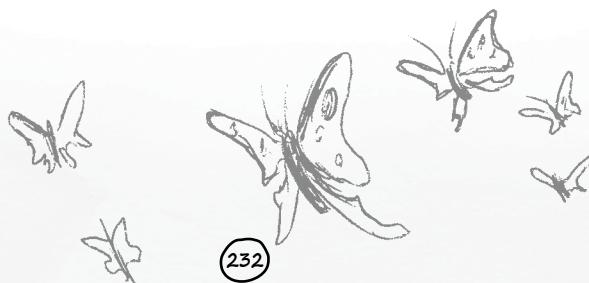
Mitch is desperate to sell something and has little time for nosy questions. If the Sleuths buy anything, he's more friendly, but still wary. If they seem uninterested in buying bike stuff, Mitch has a few tubs of miscellaneous household goods that "fell off a truck." Neither man has seen Andy's bike. They claim to collect bikes off the street and from dumps, buy them from folks who need a quick dollar, repair them, and then sell them. **BS DETECTOR** is hardly needed to show they are lying about their wares, but not about Andy's bike.

If the Sleuths make a scene, Mike (the second man) wakes up to tell them to shove off. (If the Sleuths manage to get a look at Mike's sweatshirt pillow, **FASHION** clearly reveals that it is too stained and torn to be the one in the video.) If they continue to make a scene, a couple of Red Scorpions come over from the grocery.

If the Sleuths helped Danny at Memorial Rock, the gangsters sweat the bike sellers and get the same result: they don't know about Andy's bike (or about any high-end bike thefts). Mitch says: "Look online, maybe someone's selling on Craigslist."

If the Sleuths refused to help Danny, then the Scorpions suggest they leave before someone gets hurt.

If things are on the verge of getting out of hand, or when the scene begins to drag, a police cruiser shows up: it's here to harass the flea market vendors or to put pressure on the Red Scorpions for painting the rock. Mitch and Mike slam the van doors and bolt as soon as it shows up, leaving whatever was outside behind.





## Playing Mritch

**PITCH THOSE BIKES!:** You and Mike have a habit to feed and the only way you're going to get it is to sell something. If the Sleuths aren't buying, you're wasting time talking to them. Meth makes you hyperactive, and you haven't slept in the past 3 (or was it 10) days, so talk fast.

**METH SWINGS:** The meth makes you irritable, aggressive, anxious, and prone to mood swings. You can go from friendly to hostile, and back again, in a blink of a bloodshot eye. It also makes you hot and itchy.

**THEY'RE OUT TO GET YOU:** The meth also makes you paranoid. They are out to get you. Even Mike sometimes. Look around as you talk. Keep your head on a swivel, keep them eyes moving. As soon as the cops show, blame the Sleuths for ratting on you.

## DEVIL'S GEAR BIKE SHOP

The Sleuths might try to find out more about bikes and bike theft from Victor Price, owner of the Devil's Gear Bike Shop. Price sells and repairs higher-end bikes for Acres parents who commute to work or at least to the commuter rail station. The hours are a bit irregular. Price takes care of his brother (Kaitlyn Price's father), who's going through another round of physical therapy.

The bulletin board has posters about how to properly lock your bike surrounded by a dozen or more "missing" flyers for high-end bikes. On top of the board is a sign "BIKE THIEVES SHOT ON SIGHT."

Price opens up freely to almost any friendly or curious approach. It's an open secret that bike theft is profitable and almost riskless. Customers frequently come in to have bikes repaired or tuned up that they should have known were stolen. There's no central registry for serial numbers (found on frames), and no serial numbers on most parts. Price has been hearing complaints about thefts from customers having to replace expensive bikes stolen from around town.

If the Sleuths ask about how Andy's bike was stolen, Price knows that trick: takes about 6 seconds to break one of those locks with the right tools. Or you can pick some locks with a Bic pen ("the Brennan"). The problem is that a lock good enough to deter a skilled thief is too heavy for most customers. And most don't take the time to properly lock their wheels and frame to something solid.

The cheap stuff usually gets broken up for parts, made into Frankenbikes, sold at flea markets, or sometimes shows up on Ebay or Craigslist. Pawn shops? Too much paperwork, at least if the owner is honest. Consignment shops? Sometimes, depends on the owner. The thief is going to want cash up front: that's a sign something is not right.

**BS DETECTOR** (only if the player asks) says Price is on the level about how bike theft works, but something just doesn't sound right. His patter seems glib or his concern seems superficial. If the Sleuths start pressing too hard about what doesn't sound right, have Detective Stevenson show up to ask Victor to help: if they come here after meeting Mitch and Mike, the police want Victor to look at the Frankenbikes to see if any parts come from the stolen bikes. (Let the Sleuths think, for now, that Victor is not telling them something because he's working for the cops.)

hacked Cways account. Finally  
got dirt on Price. Price not seen  
at office since holidaes.

## Playing Victor

**DUDE! PLAY UP THAT CALIFORNIA ACCENT:** Yeah, you're a Drewsbury townie underneath, but someday you'll be back on the coast and can forget all about this hick burg. (If your version of Drewsbury is set in California, make Victor from New York and play up that accent. Don't forget to make Brown and Gray New Yorkers as well.)

**BE ANGRY:** Bike thieves are scum, but bike riders just ask for trouble. You warn them. You offer them good, expensive locks. If they don't listen, they get what they deserve.

**BE OVERLY HELPFUL:** You've got nothing to hide. Anybody can see that from how helpful you are.

## THE INTERNET

**RESEARCH** gives information similar to what Price knows. It will also turn up stories of bike theft rings: seizures of storage units full of stolen bikes, whole containers of stolen bikes found on freighters, stolen bikes being smuggled into Mexico, and, more mundanely, bikes being taken across state lines to sell on Craigslist and similar sites. Theft rings are rare, but they fit this case: high-end bikes being stolen by skilled thieves, and not turning up in the usual places.

One prominent result (**CORE CLUE**) is Symmes' article "Who Pinched My Ride?" (*Outside* magazine January 2012), where he mentions using a GPS transmitter to track his stolen bike. Other stories also mention police sting operations using GPS transmitters attached to "bait bikes."

If the Sleuths have gone to the Internet before they meet Victor and specifically ask about a bike theft ring, Victor says there were some in the big cities: San Francisco and the Bay Area, Seattle, New York City, maybe. But Drewsbury? (He's sticking to the truth, not the whole truth—but enough of it to sound plausible.)

## USING A RELATIONSHIP

Another option is for Tyler to use his mother's **CRIMINOLOGY** skill; perhaps she left some reports about the bike thefts at home or

would be willing to talk with Tyler about Andy's stolen bike. With **CRIMINOLOGY**, the Sleuths can figure out what bikes are most often being stolen and from where.

The bikes tend to be higher-end bikes; the thieves don't seem to have trouble with most common locks. They seem to take time to look for cameras and to keep their faces hidden by their hoodies when on camera. The Sleuths can also figure out which types of bikes are most likely to be stolen.

The thieves don't tend to steal in either Islander or Scorpion territory. That's not entirely surprising: there are bikes there, but mostly lower-end ones.

**TOWN LORE** *1-point spend:* Bikes are rarely stolen from places with a Threshold that would keep out lower and middle class kids, from places that don't have good escape routes for a fast rider, or from places that only a townie would know about. The Sleuths may conclude, correctly, that thieves are not from around here. (Brown and Gray do some scouting on their own, but also rely on tips relayed from the Islanders to Big Ti.)

*2-point spend:* The Sleuths can figure out the most likely place for Brown and Gray to snatch a desirable bike. This will optimize the Sleuths' chances of getting the thieves to take their bait bike quickly.

## HALLWAY JUSTICE

Assuming Marcus spoke with the Sleuths and agreed to ask around about Andy's bike, he finds them first thing in the morning. He asked around, and might be able to find it. (Again, **BS DETECTOR** is hardly needed to tell this is a partial truth. He's confirmed that Big Ti's friends snatched Andy's bike, but hasn't been able to figure out how to get it back.) But that's not why he came to find them: he wanted to let them know that Big Ti (Tyrese Walls) is really mad about the rock. If any of the Sleuths were involved and did not take precautions to avoid being seen, Marcus says Ti heard they were part of painting the rock and he's going to get them back. If they weren't involved or covered their tracks well, Marcus says Ti is going to do something to Danny, and he figured Jessica would want to know.

The school is on edge. The townies, egged on by queen bee Kaitlyn Price, are outraged at the Red Scorpions and, not being sure who's in the gang, are taking it out on all the Asian students. The Islanders are likewise angry about a rival gang member being memorialized on the rock. The Acres kids aren't taking sides yet, but are very conscious that most of them are new to town and looked down on by the townies. It's causing problems on the football team: Gabriel is trying to keep Danny from being suspended (and ineligible to play) while keeping a lid on tensions between several different factions on the team.

## **Big Ti's Revenge**

Big Ti's revenge should be something obvious and nasty: burning Danny's car while it is parked in a public place (particularly if Jessica has been driving it) would send a clear message. Big Ti isn't stupid enough to burn it at school: the Sleuths could return to find it torched after visiting the library, or even while they were on a stakeout. If the Sleuths did not make a **REASSURANCE** spend with Sid earlier, he gets into a fight with Big Ti off-screen (likely around Danny's car) and they find him badly injured next to the torched car. If they did make the spend, Sid confronts Big Ti later, likely leading to him being injured just before the **UNMASKING**.

## **Kaitlyn's Attack**

Play this by ear: Kaitlyn is dating Elizabeth's brother and will target Jessica because she's Danny's cousin. This forces Elizabeth to take a side. Bring in Tyler and Amanda: if they are not directly targeted, then they witness other students (perhaps a Relationship) being bullied or learn of plans to bully either Jessica or another student and have to decide whether to stand up, or stand back.

Kaitlyn and her cronies use a couple of the methods in *High School Bullying* on page 167 on Danny and Jessica, building to a full-scale throwdown (pages 60-64) between Kaitlyn (and perhaps a reluctant Gabriel) and the Sleuths. Sid backs up the Sleuths, since they are helping his little brother.

If the Sleuths investigate Kaitlyn, they find the following ammunition to use in the throwdown. If used, each clue adds +2 to one throwdown roll. Kaitlyn will use her own **GOSSIP** against the Sleuths:

look over their background for juicy tidbits. For example, she might **TAUNT** Elizabeth about Min-Ji's crush (page 54). She prefers to use **TAUNT**, with precise frosty barbs, to provoke her foes into losing their cool.

**FASHION** reveals that Kaitlyn hasn't been keeping up with the latest fashions. She's been doing an excellent job putting together outfits, but it is so last year (*1-point spend*).

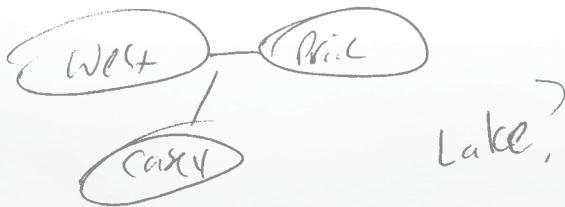
Gossip reveals that Kaitlyn's father is sick and has been out of work (2-point spend). (Jessica can make a 1-point Relationship spend with her Mom to know that Kaitlyn's family is struggling with debts to Jessica's father's practice, which is causing some financial ripples in her own family.)

Kaitlyn's family's financial troubles are a clue to Victor Price's motives. The family is struggling to maintain itself. Victor came back to help take care of his brother Kenneth when he was first diagnosed three years ago. The shop is profitable, but not enough to pay all the medical bills.

## Playing Kaitlyn

**COLD AS ICE:** Your words drip with frozen condescension, particularly if your target is one of *those* people (anyone whose parents didn't grow up here, who's not at least middle class, or who doesn't fit in to a respectable high school clique).

**UNEASY RESTS THE CROWN:** You have been reigning social queen of your peers since your freshman year, but jealous rivals are always looking for a way to tear you down. Pause before you speak, to make sure you've got every shot lined up.



# STING AND STAKE OUT

The easiest way for the Sleuths to crack a professional bike theft ring would be to set up their own sting operation. A high-end bike, like Elizabeth's, would be perfect. Amanda could even hide a GPS tracker on the bike using **REPAIR**.

A physical stake out is a Difficulty 4 **SNEAKING** test (and a failsafe one; see page 44). The culprits were aware of the school camera: they are not your typical opportunistic addicts. Brown typically observes a location for a few minutes before going near a bike, looking for the bike's owner, nosy passers-by, and surveillance cameras. If things look safe, he moves in and texts Gray. If the Sleuths have planted a tracker, then it is a Difficulty 4 **REPAIR** test (again failsafe) to hide the tracker where it won't be noticed.

If the Sleuths fail either test, Brown and Gray know someone is onto them, and that it isn't the police; they call their friends in the Islanders to back them up. They don't know the town well, so they pick an ambush spot near the storage facility.

Once the culprits take the bait, shadowing them is a **SNEAKING** contest (Difficulty 4). The Sleuths at least need bicycles to keep up, as the culprits take off casually, then speed up as soon as they are out of sight. If the culprits spot the Sleuths, it becomes a contest of **ATHLETICS** to catch up to the fleeing culprits (who split up; Gray is on the bait bike).

## Attack of the B-Plot

You may find your players more interested in the townies vs. newcomers feud than in a missing bike. That's okay. You can run with it: develop the escalating tensions on campus, and keep bringing Ti and Caitlyn into the mix. Then double down on the mystery by making it personal. Maybe Big Ti decides to frame Danny by hiding a couple of stolen bikes in the tool shed at Jessica's house. Doesn't it seem suspicious that Danny's cousin has been at the pawn shop and talking to meth-heads like Mitch and Mike? Didn't she seem awfully interested when Vincent was explaining how a Brennan worked?

Unless, of course, the Sleuths have also disabled some of the gears with **REPAIR** to limit the stolen bike's speed: Difficulty 5. This gives the Sleuths a contest advantage (page 55) in either the **SNEAKING** or **ATHLETICS** contest. (Deciding retroactively that you disabled a gear or planted a GPS tracker is a Difficulty 5 **PREPAREDNESS** test; you still have to make the **REPAIR** test to have succeeded in the past.)

If the Sleuths have a car, then the culprits meet up with a van a few blocks away and toss the bike inside. If the Sleuths are spotted, it's a **DRIVING** contest (Difficulty 4) instead.

If the Sleuths fail, Brown and Gray are alerted and flee. Again, they call their Islander friends and arrange an ambush. If need be, Gray pretends to be lost and bikes back into the Sleuths' sight to lure them into the attack.

A Sleuth with **TOWN LORE** figures out that Blue and Gray aren't from around here: they take the route that a GPS suggests, rather than the best route given typical traffic for that time of day.

The two thieves end up at a storage place near the highway. They have the key code to the outer gate; the Sleuths don't. (Unless someone makes a Relationship spend to say they have a unit in that same storage facility.) The Sleuths can sneak around the exterior of the facility to keep Brown and Gray in sight and identify which locker they are using (failsafe **SNEAKING** test, Difficulty 5). After about five minutes, Brown and Gray leave, Gray on a different bike. (Anyone can take a picture with their cell phone, but with a 1-point spend of **PHOTOGRAPHY**, the Sleuths can get a clear picture of the two culprits' faces as they leave from a longer distance or without being obvious about it.)

If a Sleuth's failure hasn't alerted the thieves, before they leave they make a cell phone call to a prepaid cell phone (owned by Victor Price) to let him know they've dropped off another bike.

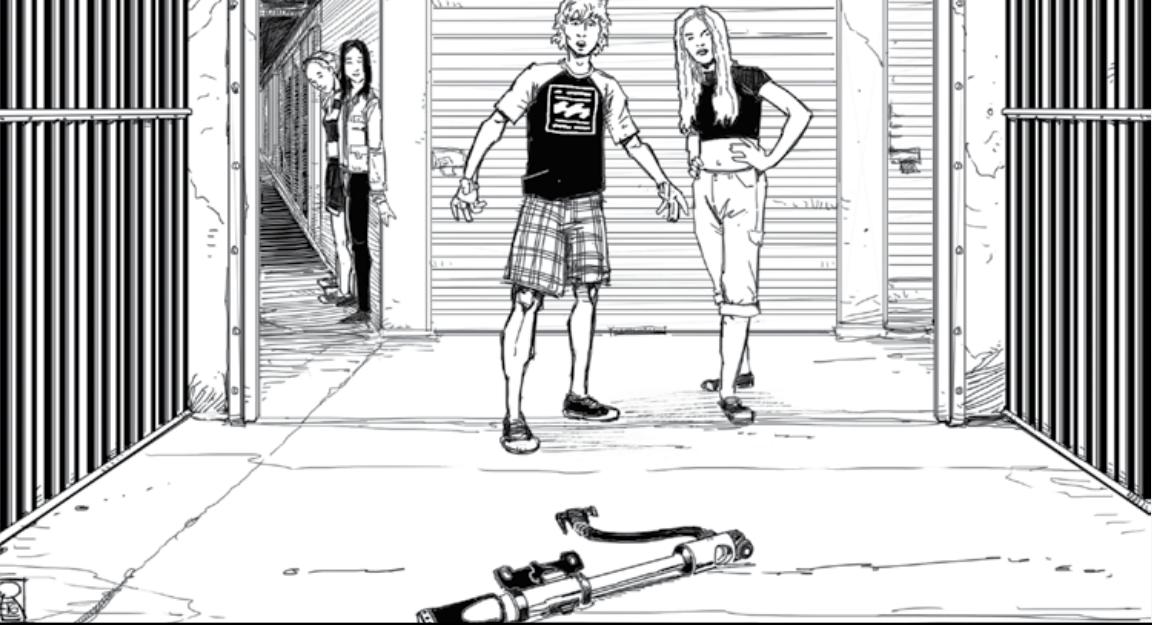
If they were alerted, then during the chase they made a cell phone call to the Islanders. A group of tough teens (at least one per Sleuth) shows up near the storage facility to scuff the Sleuths up a bit. Brown and Gray will vanish as soon as the Sleuths seem distracted. It will be tough for a Sleuth to follow them to the nearby storage facility, but not impossible (Sneaking, Difficulty 7). If the Sleuths called the

Red Scorpions for backup in confronting Brown and Gray, then the Scorpions might show up as the cavalry. (Alternately, Elizabeth or Tyler could make a 1-point Relationship spend to have retroactively called the Scorpions or the cops.)

If they haven't been caught, the Sleuths have several options from here:

- Once they know which locker Brown and Gray used, they could call the cops. It isn't heroic, but they have enough information for the police to get a warrant and search the unit. This recovers Andy's bike, as well as many other bikes, but Brown and Gray vanish.
- The unit was rented using a false ID. The Sleuths could break into the locker and search it themselves. They would need the combination for the fence gate, and to **REPAIR** the unit lock. If the Sleuths use a Relationship to rent (or have rented) a locker in the yard, they could even clean out the thieves' locker and hide the bikes elsewhere in the facility.
- They could confront Brown and Gray when they leave the facility. If they helped Danny at Memorial Rock, they could call the Red Scorpions for backup. A brief interaction reveals Brown and Gray's strong Californian accent and gives the Sleuths a good enough look at them to be able to track them to the Oatgrass Café. (If the Sleuths somehow lost the pair before the ambush or the storage facility, a 1-point **NOTICE** spend recalls someone who looked like Gray hanging out at the Oatgrass last week.) Brown and Gray bolt on their bikes: they are fast and split up. They head for Islander territory, where the Sleuths are unwelcome.

Lincoln 2 Sase  
Police scanner  
459



## RESOLUTION: UNMASKED

There are several ways to resolve this mystery, depending on the group's preferences.

**If your group prefers social vengeance and some sneaking around,** focus on catching Brown and Gray and one-upping them by stealing or vandalizing their bikes under their noses. If arrested, they won't be held for long (one of the things they are paying Big Ti for is a good lawyer and money for bail), but they'll have to live with being outsmarted by the Sleuths. The police can find enough incriminating evidence in the storage unit to arrest Victor Price, who likewise won't serve much time. Big Ti is likely to escape punishment.

**If the players prefer to focus on catching Victor and Big Ti,** one possible resolution is as follows. The Sleuths steal the bikes from the locker, hide them in another locker, and leave a cell phone number (a Difficulty 4 **PREPAREDNESS** spend allows a Sleuth to have a pre-paid one handy). This forces the mastermind (Price) to come to them. Victor folds fast under **INTIMIDATION**, and agrees to meet. With a 2-point spend of **IMPERSONATE**, the Sleuths could pretend to be from the Red Scorpions or a random rival bike theft gang. This more action-oriented conclusion puts the Sleuths in some danger from Big Ti and his Islander buddies. In this case, you may want to leave Brown and Gray to a narrated epilogue, in which they are arrested off-screen as part of Victor's confession.

# THOSE HICKS ARE SMARTER THAN US?!

If the Sleuths photographed Brown and Gray at the storage facility, they can find out more about them with **GOSSIP**, **RESEARCH**, or, if they have friendly relations with the police, **GROWNUP FACE**—which skill they use colors the following information.

The thieves' real names are Kari and Kyle Shelley: California siblings once well-known in the San Francisco bike messenger community. After losing several bikes to San Francisco's infamous thieves, they learned that high-end bike theft was far more lucrative, easier, and often safer than their day jobs. They earned their reputation as high-end bike thieves: but why are they in Drewsbury?

With a 1-point **GOSSIP** spend, the Sleuths learn that the Shelleys frequently hang out at the Oatgrass Café and other trendy health cafés in the Old Town Green neighborhood. They are not hard to find: look for the high-end (and well-locked) bikes outside the Café (**FASHION**). (The bikes are Frankenbikes: fast, light, and good looking.) Kari and Kyle are experienced criminals and sit where they can watch their bikes and the back door as well. They are not dumb enough to wear their generic disguises here, but their more fashionable garb still features their favorite colors.

A direct confrontational approach is not going to work: the culprits know that if the Sleuths had anything solid, the police would be there. An indirect approach—Amanda using **REPAIR** to bond over bikes, or **POP CULTURE** in general—yields a few clues. The siblings came to town a month ago and expect to go home soon. They're here for a job: if pressed, they claim to be with a band (a blatant, but practiced lie, according to **BS DETECTOR**). If asked about the rash of bike thefts, they share Victor's view that stupid bike owners bring thefts on themselves by using cheap locks and leaving their bikes in vulnerable places. If the Sleuths do call in the cops, the siblings immediately lawyer up. A Sleuth with a legal Relationship (or a 2-point **TOWN LORE** spend) knows that the Shelleys' lawyer is also the Price family attorney.

If there is time in the session, the Sleuths may want to extract some karmic revenge by stealing the siblings' bikes. This is hard: the Sleuths have to distract both long enough for someone to make a very difficult **REPAIR** roll (to pick/break the lock, Difficulty 8) or **FILCH** (to steal the keys, Difficulty 7).

## Playing Kari and Kyle

**DUDE! PLAY UP THAT CALIFORNIA ACCENT:** Kari and Kyle's accent should match Victor's, a clue to their relationship.

**THIS PLACE SUCKS:** You're only here because the pickings and profits are easy. These people are rust-belt hicks with pretensions. Even their café is barely adequate. Look down your nose at the Sleuths, then vaguely past them.

**BE STILL:** Keep your body language as still as possible. You're the predator, they're prey and too stupid to realize it.

**BE PROFESSIONAL:** You're experienced bike thieves. You know how to avoid being caught. You scout, you make sure to keep your faces out of sight and not to leave fingerprints, you use pre-paid phones. If something looks off, there's always another bike.

## THE CONFRONTATION

Let the Sleuths pick a reasonable place for a meeting. If the Sleuths get mired in planning, remind them that they can use **PREPAREDNESS** to retroactively have something they need, or to have made logical preparations. Pretending to be the Red Scorpions using **IMPERSONATE** is most likely to get both Victor and Big Ti to show up. If they helped Danny, they could get help from the Red Scorpions, with the risk that things could get out of hand rapidly.

If the Sleuths didn't use a pre-paid cell phone at the storage locker, or if you just want to up the stakes, Big Ti tosses a beaten-up Sid (or another appropriate Relationship) onto the ground at the start of the meeting. Marcus should be present, and might be an ally.

Victor is not much of a threat. He's been backed into a corner by his brother's medical bills and saw a quick bike theft score as the way out. He never expected to actually get caught and will fold fast under **INTIMIDATION**. Big Ti, on the other hand, knows he's the biggest badass in the Islanders and he's not afraid of anyone. If the Sleuths are trying to get an intimidating admission from him, a player-facing social contest (page 52) using either **FLATTERY** (about how clever he is) or

**TAUNT** (playing on his pride and bad temper) works. Set the Difficulty between 5 and 7 based on the players' roleplaying of this scene.

Victor tries to bargain his way out, offering most of his share of the profits to keep himself out of jail. If the Sleuths are not known to be involved in Memorial Rock and did not claim to be Red Scorpions (perhaps impersonating some new third faction), they can **NEGOTIATE** with Big Ti as well. Otherwise, Big Ti tells Victor to shut up and **INTIMIDATES** the Sleuths as best he can. He's quite willing to hurt them, here or later. If they need an ally, they may be able to turn Marcus: this is a decision point for him—help beat up fellow students or stand up to his gang peers.

If the Sleuths were the type of folks to call the cops and let them resolve it, they probably would have done that at the storage unit. It's anticlimactic, but it does resolve the case. If you want the option of police on hand to keep things from getting violent, or to wrap it up quickly, the Sleuths can **THROWDOWN** with Victor and Big Ti to get an incriminating admission, and make a Difficulty 6 (or lower if you're in a hurry) **PREPAREDNESS** test to have called the cops a dramatically appropriate amount of time earlier.

With a Difficulty 4 **COMPUTERS** test, they can livestream the confrontation over a smart phone to the Internet. (This won't stop Big Ti from beating them up, but would give Marcus a reason to step up and help them.)

## Playing Big Ti

**YOU'RE EVEN BIGGER:** Pull your shoulders back and loom; you've proven you can take anyone on the street, and you've got some scars to prove it. The madder you get, the lower your voice goes.

**CAN'T BACK DOWN:** You're only the leader so long as people fear you. Your gang won't obey if they aren't afraid, and they won't think you can protect them if you don't scare everyone else.



# LOOSE ENDS AND FURTHER OPTIONS

Breaking up the bike theft ring smoothes over any lingering problems between the Sleuths and most of the students. As established, bike theft is not punished harshly. Police and prosecutors are more interested in getting Big Ti off the street than punishing the well-connected Victor. They are willing to give Victor a generous plea deal for his testimony. Kari and Kyle likely melt away and return to California unless the Sleuths make a special effort to get them caught.

Recovering Andy's bike, which is in the storage locker, improves the group's relationship with Sid and his teammates.

Unmasking Victor will increase Kaitlyn's Hate for the Sleuths, particularly if they were crass enough to use her father's Parkinson's against her in the throwdown.

## MAJOR NPCs

See pages 105-109 for Danny Kang and the other Relationship characters appearing in this episode.

### BIG TI (TYRESE WALLS)

**Thumbnail:** Survived the cops, other gangs, and my own gang-brothers to become leader.

**Trouble:** Everyone wants what I have.

**Abilities:** Cool 9, Driving 4, Fighting 8, Intimidation 3, Throwdown 10

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Status Modifier:** +1

**Notes:** Big Ti chose the gang life. He had a stable family, a decent high school education, even a year of college. But he couldn't resist the idea of the gangs: easy money (or so it seemed), plenty of women, and being his own boss. He used the proceeds of his father's life insurance policy to buy his first kilos of cocaine and forced his way into the Islanders. He's fought and schemed his way up and won't let anyone stand in his

way. Under his watch, the Islanders have an ironclad rule: No snitchin', ever, on a gang brother. He does business with Kari and Kyle, and will give them the protection they pay for, but not at significant risk to him, or his brothers.

**LOCATION:** Islander Hangout (not established in this adventure)

## MARCUS ADAMS

**THUMBNAIL:** Talented athlete with gang tattoos.

**TROUBLE:** Being in the gang is what I know.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 6, Cool 4, Fighting 4, Scholarship 1, Throwdown 2

**NOTES:** The gang is practically family, but Marcus also knows how many of his uncles and brothers have been to jail, or gotten shot, or both—he's hoping for an althetic scholarship to give him an excuse to get away from town. So far, he doesn't have a serious record that would stop him, but Big Ti wants him to do more for the Islanders.

## TYPICAL ISLANDER MUSCLE

**THUMBNAIL:** Young man with more muscles than sense.

**TROUBLE:** Can't back down to outsiders without losing face.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 3, Cool 3, Driving 2, Fighting 5, Intimidation 2, Taunt 1, Throwdown 2

**NOTES:** Snitching on other gang members is a beat-down offense. (The snitch gets beaten badly by all his gang buddies.) Giving information about the Scorpions or non-gang members to the cops isn't cool, but it is sometimes necessary.

## VICTOR PRICE

**THUMBNAIL:** California bicycle gear-head pushing to make a living.

**TROUBLE:** Rather be anywhere than here.

**ABILITIES:** Cool 4, Negotiation 1, Reassurance 2, Repair 8, Throwdown 4 (mostly from being an adult)

**STATUS MODIFIER:** +2

**NOTES:** Kaitlyn Price's uncle. Victor would rather be anywhere other than back home in "Drewsboring," supporting his ailing brother's family, but he's here out of a mix of obligation and love. He's terrified of what Parkinson's will do to his brother, and what happens when his brother doesn't know him anymore, so he's taking risks to fund various cutting-edge treatments in addition to just supporting the family.

**LOCATION:** Devil's Gear Bike Shop

## KAITLYN PRICE

**NATURE AND TAG:** Dating Gabriel, but hates and picks on Elizabeth and Jessica.

**POINTS:** Hate 3 [Elizabeth], Hate 3 [Jessica]

**THUMBNAIL:** Queen Bee of the Acres (Queen of Mean).

**TROUBLE:** Keeping up appearances while family is in dire financial straits.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 6, Cool 9, Gossip 3, Intimidation 3, Throwdown 9

**NOTES:** Stays Queen Bee of the Acres by being the Queen of Mean. Has dated Gabriel Soriano longer than any other guy. Family troubles: her father has been out of work for a while (he has been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, but the family is keeping that quiet).

Corey found at 4th  
Lake. Homicide?

## BROWN (KYLE SHELLEY)

**THUMBNAIL:** California bike-thief, more hip than you will ever be.

**TROUBLE:** Overconfident and contemptuous of the locals.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 8, Cool 6, Filch 3, Notice 3, Repair 3, Sneaking 6, Throwdown 5

**ALERTNESS MODIFIER:** +1

**STEALTH MODIFIER:** +1

**NOTES:** Kyle is the scout of the pair: he is usually the first to approach a target bike with practiced nonchalance. Both Kyle and Kari are strangers and haven't bothered to get to know the town well. This may give Sleuths an advantage in surveillance and chases because the pair uses the GPS-recommended routes to get around, rather than knowing the various shortcuts and back ways.

**LOCATION:** Oatgrass Café

## GRAY (KARI SHELLEY)

**THUMBNAIL:** California bike-thief, more hip than you will ever be.

**TROUBLE:** Overconfident and contemptuous of the locals.

**ABILITIES:** Athletics 9, Cool 5, Filch 4, Notice 1, Repair 7, Sneaking 4, Throwdown 5

**NOTES:** Kari is the more mechanically apt of the pair: she usually waits for Kyle's signal, then quietly disables the bike's lock (if any), and rides off with it.

**LOCATION:** Oatgrass Café

sent photos to police.  
price arrested  


# SAMPLE SLEUTHS

## JESSICA PARK

Notice 3, Photography 1, Research 1,  
Scholarship 1

BS Detector 2, Grownup Face 3,  
Impersonate 2, Performance 1,  
Reassurance 1

Athletics 2, Computers 2, Cool 6,  
Driving 2, Fighting 3, First Aid 5,  
Intuition 8, Preparedness 4, Sneaking 8,  
Throwdown 4



### RELATIONSHIPS

Mom Love 6, Marc Love 2

Greg Like 5, Ginny Like 4, Principal Sanchez Like 4, Priscilla Like 2

Kaitlyn Hate 3

### BACKGROUND

**CLASS:** Lower Middle Class

**CLIQUE:** Grinds

**CLUB:** Band

**DRIVE:** Fairness

**STORY ARC:** Find true love

# TYLER LINCOLN

Electronic Surveillance\* 2, Notice 1,  
Outdoors 1, Pop Culture 1,  
Scholarship 1, Town Lore 2

BS Detector 1, Flirting 1,  
Grownup Face 2, Impersonate 1,  
Performance 2, Taunt 1

Athletics 2, Computers 8, Cool 7,  
Driving 1, Fighting 3, First Aid 4,  
Intuition 2, Repair 2, Sneaking 6,  
Throwdown 4

\* Cap Ability



## RELATIONSHIPS

Dad Love 8, Mom Love 5

Greg Like 5, Tasha Like 3, "Aunt" Cassandra Like 2

Hector Hate 3, Aaron Hate 2

## BACKGROUND

**CLASS:** Upper Middle Class

**CLIQUE:** Hip Hop Heads

**CLUB:** Computer Club

**DRIVE:** Family Code

**STORY ARC:** Decide between music/street and computers/  
office complex

# AMANDA BARRETT

Fashion 1, Outdoors 2, Photography 1,  
Pop Culture 1

BS Detector 2, Gossip 1, Intimidation 3,  
Taunt 3

Athletics 8, Cool 4, Driving 6, Fighting 4,  
Filch 3, Intuition 3, Preparedness 2,  
Repair 8, Sneaking 3, Throwdown 3

(1 ability point saved)

## RELATIONSHIPS

Aunt Cassandra Love 7

(saving the rest of her 12 Relationship points to spend in play)

Secret Hate 2

## BACKGROUND

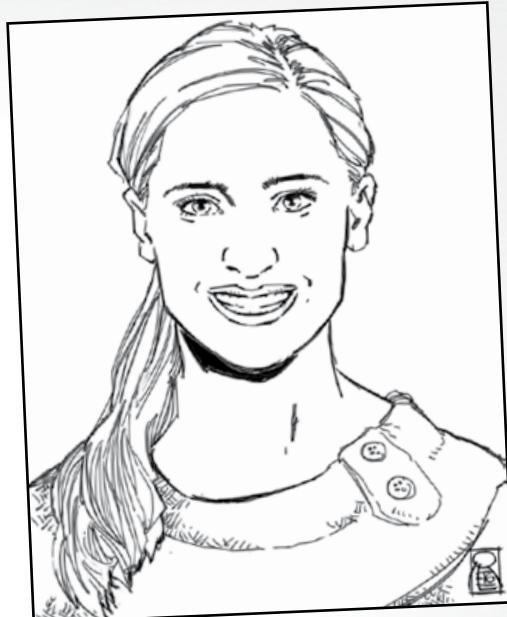
**CLASS:** Working-Class

**CLIQUE:** Girl Jocks

**CLUB:** D&D Club

**DRIVE:** Risk Taker

**STORY ARC:** Find a stable future



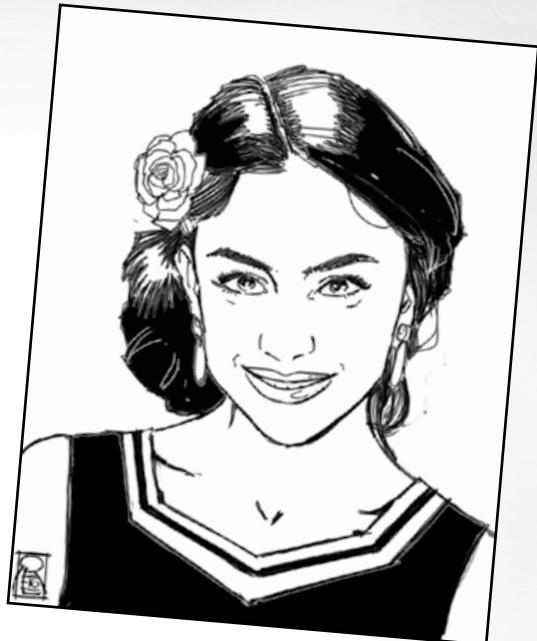
# ELIZABETH SORIANO

Art\* 1, Fashion 2, Pop Culture 3,  
Scholarship 1, Town Lore 1

Flattery 1, Flirting 2, Gossip 2,  
Grownup Face 1, Negotiation 2,  
Performance 1

Athletics 6, Computers 2, Cool 8,  
Driving 2, First Aid 3, Intuition 7,  
Sneaking 1, Throwdown 9

\*Cap ability



## RELATIONSHIPS

Dad Love 5, Mom Love 4, Gabriel (brother) Love 3

Priscilla Like 3, Samantha Like 2

Kaitlyn Hate 3

(saving her last 1 Relationship point to spend in play)

## BACKGROUND

**CLASS:** Upper Class

**CLIQUE:** Cheerleaders

**CLUB:** Honor Society

**DRIVE:** Subconscious Curiosity

**STORY ARC:** Get into Stanford on her own

# CHARTS, SHEETS AND FORMS



# SLEUTH ABILITY MATRIX

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES		Sleuth 1	Sleuth 2	Sleuth 3	Sleuth 4	Sleuth 5	Sleuth 6
GENERAL ABILITIES	Fashion						
	Notice						
	Outdoors						
	Photography						
	Pop Culture						
	Research						
	Scholarship						
	Town Lore						
	BS Detector						
	Flattery						
	Flirting						
	Gossip						
	Grownup Face						
	Impersonate						
	Intimidation						
	Negotiation						
	Performance						
	Reassurance						
INTERPERSONAL ABILITIES	Taunt						
	Athletics						
	Computers						
	Cool						
	Driving						
	Fighting						
	Filch						
	First Aid						
	Intuition						
ACADEMIC ABILITIES	Preparedness						
	Repair						
	Sneaking						
	Throwdown						

# SUPPORTING CAST CHECKLIST

The GM should put a check in the column when the NPC has appeared in the episode. One or two NPCs without checkmarks should "guest star" in the next mystery if possible. Once that row is full of checkmarks, erase it and start over.

# THROWDOWN SUMMARY

Social combat in a high-stakes situation, using the Throwdown ability. Initiate a throwdown with an action relating to one of the Sleuth's Interpersonal abilities.

The character with the highest Throwdown rating goes first, if there's no clear initiating act.

GM and Players alternate rolling against the throwdown Difficulty, as set by the GM.

## Difficulty

Difficulty depends on foe's Class or Clique:

**SAME OR LOWER THAN THE SLEUTH:** 3

**HIGHER:** 4

**SPECIAL CHALLENGE (SOMEONE WITH A SPECIAL POSITION AND VERY HIGH RELATIVE STATUS, E.G. STARTING QUARTERBACK, HEAD CHEERLEADER):** +1 to Difficulty

## Spending

Combatants can spend points from:

- Throwdown ability
- Relationships (Like and Love only)
- Cool (only after a Relationship spend; each Cool point counts double after a Love spend)
- Relevant Interpersonal abilities (+2 to die per point spent)
- GM may spend Hate against Sleuth if relevant (if Hate is in combat, or her machinations caused it)
- Remember to refresh Relationship or Cool by +1 or +2 if you bring in the Relationship's tag

## **Cooperation**

One character takes the lead; others may assist using the Cooperation rules (page 46) or pull off the opponent's allies into parallel conflicts.

## **Backing Down**

At the end of any round of a throwdown, a Sleuth or named NPC can run away or back down at the cost of 1d6 Cool. The scene ends.

## **Called Social Attacks**

Player says their Sleuth will do this before the contest:

**INSINUATE:** Target must be with allies, use knowledge gathered about the target to place doubt in allies' minds.

*SUCCESS:* -1 to damage to target, +3 to all rolls for Sleuth in next contest against target.

**HUMBLE:** Throwdown must happen in public, on target's Home Turf.

*SUCCESS:* +3 to damage to target.

*FAILURE:* 3 Cool damage to Sleuth, immediately.

**EXPOSE:** "If not for those meddling kids..." Throwdown must happen in presence of authorities (police, teachers, etc.), and include clues found during investigation.

*SUCCESS:* +3 to Cool damage to target; possible in-game consequences such as grounding, incarceration, etc.

*FAILURE:* Sleuth takes 1d6+2 Cool damage, -2 to all rolls for Sleuth in the next contest with target.

## **Damage**

Successful social combat attack takes 1d6 points off target's Cool.

**+1 TO DAMAGE:** Not on Home Turf, not in native Class location, was recently humiliated (e.g., lost previous throwdown) in this Location; damage dealt by Like.

**+2 TO DAMAGE:** Damage dealt by Love.

## **CRUSHING IT**

Throwdown roll is a natural 6 and total result (roll + spend) exceeds Difficulty by 5+.

Roll two damage rolls (including modifiers) and add them.

Applies to Sleuths and major/named NPCs.

## **DEFLECTING DAMAGE**

You can deflect Cool damage from social combat onto a Relationship by dialogue or description: blame, betray, disrespect, etc.

**LIKE:** -1 to Relationship pool per 1 point of Cool damage diverted

**LOVE:** -1 to Relationship pool per 2 points of Cool damage diverted  
(round up)

The GM will bring the blowback from this deflection onto the Sleuth in this or a later scene.

## **Location**

A big throwdown loss in a location should be noted by the GM. This Location may become a hostile environment for the Sleuth in future; this may increase the Cool Threshold needed to enter it.

## **Winning Refreshes**

The winner of the throwdown contest:

- o Refreshes all Interpersonal abilities used in the contest.
- o Refreshes +3 Cool for defeating a Hate.

Regardless of the contest outcome, Sleuths receive 1 to 3 points worth of Relationship refreshes.

## RELATIONSHIPS

NAME:

NATURE AND TAG:

POINTS:

THUMBNAIL:

TROUBLE:

ABILITIES:

NOTES:

## RELATIONSHIPS

NAME:

NATURE AND TAG:

POINTS:

THUMBNAIL:

TROUBLE:

ABILITIES:

NOTES:

### NPC TEMPLATE

NAME:

LOCATION:

THUMBNAIL:

TROUBLE:

ABILITIES:

INTERPERSONAL

COOL

THROWDOWN:

ALERTNESS

MODIFIER:

STATUS

MODIFIER:

STEALTH

MODIFIER:

NOTES

### NPC TEMPLATE

NAME:

LOCATION:

THUMBNAIL:

TROUBLE:

ABILITIES:

INTERPERSONAL

COOL

THROWDOWN:

ALERTNESS

MODIFIER:

STATUS

MODIFIER:

STEALTH

MODIFIER:

NOTES

## LOCATION

NAME:

THRESHOLD:

SET DRESSING:

FACE

If the Face is an important NPC, provide them with their own template card, or at least make a note somewhere of which Location their stats or details are written up in.

NOTES:

## LOCATION

NAME:

THRESHOLD:

SET DRESSING:

FACE

If the Face is an important NPC, provide them with their own template card, or at least make a note somewhere of which Location their stats or details are written up in.

NOTES:

# TOWN MAP

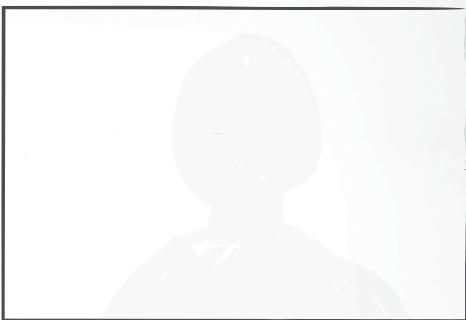
Add Locations to the proper Zone as you create them. Values in parentheses indicate the default Threshold (the Cool point cost to enter) of Locations in that Zone. Indicate Locations with special Threshold costs.

SCHOOL (0)	AROUND TOWN (0)	ADULT WORLD (1)	RISKY AREAS (2)

# BUBBLEGUMSHOE

A TEEN DETECTIVE STORY GAME

NAME  
SCHOOL  
CLASS  
CLIQUE  
CLUB  
DRIVE  
STORY ARC



ACADEMIC	RATING	POOL
Fashion		
Notice		
Outdoors		
Photography		
Pop Culture		
Research		
Scholarship		
Town Lore		

COOL

INTERPERSONAL	RATING	POOL
BS Detector		
Flattery		
Flirting		
Gossip		
Grownup Face		
Impersonate		
Intimidation		
Negotiation		
Performance		
Reassurance		
Taunt		

GENERAL ABILITIES	RATING	POOL
Athletics		
Computers		
Cool		
Driving		
Filch		
First Aid		
Intuition		
Preparedness		
Repair		
Sneaking		
Throwdown		

## RELATIONSHIPS

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