



A Study in Mystery

2- Elements & Stories

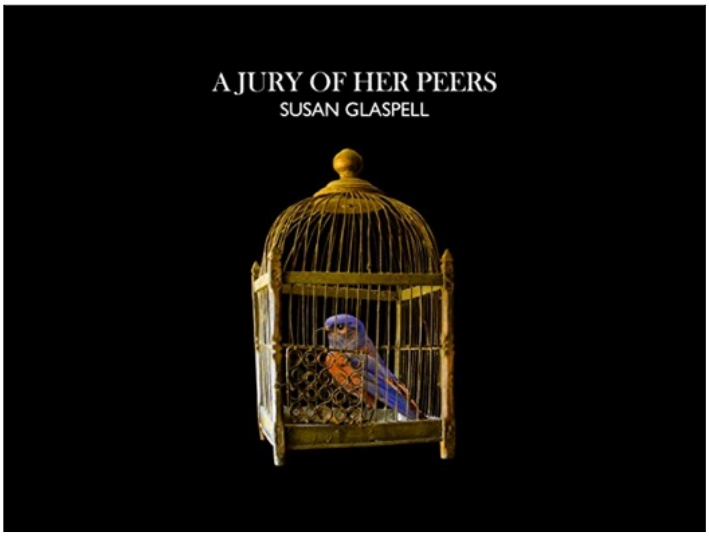
with
Johnny Worthen

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Today's Goals

- Elements of Mystery
- 2 Stories
- Character Building
- Victim & Villain
- The First Story





Workshop/Share

What ifs,
Mystery Questions

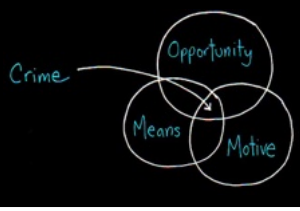
Elements of Mystery

- The Puzzle
- Deduction
- Sleuth as Hero
- Worthy Villain
- Fair Play
- Realism and Logic



The Puzzle

- The important question that drives the plot of the story.
  - The *Dunnits...*
- Bar to prove guilt is also the pieces of the puzzle
  - *Means*
  - *Motive*
  - *Opportunity*



Detection

- The investigation of the puzzle constitutes the story's central action.
- When the puzzle is solved, the story is over.
- Detection:
  - *Observation*
  - *Interview*
  - *Research*



Sleuth as Hero





- The protagonist is the character who solves the puzzle. *(usually)*
- Endowed with noble qualities
  - (*perseverance, intelligence, courage, physical strength, moral conviction*, a combination)
  - Qualities help sleuth solve the puzzle
- Tests and Trials / Hero's Journey

Worthy Villain

- Antagonist (villain) tests the limits of the sleuth's abilities.
- Endowed with qualities that make them a worthy foe.
  - *Resourceful, clever, single-minded, powerful, etc.*



Fair Play



- Story doesn't have to be a "plot puzzle," but, to be fair...
  - ...all of the evidence uncovered by the sleuth, in the form of clues, is equally available to the reader.
- The climactic revelation presents **NO NEW EVIDENCE** that hasn't already been disclosed in the course of the story.
  - *Okay to explain and connect, but no adding!*

Ellery Queen



- Challenge to the reader:
  - *"It is a point of honor with me to adhere to the Code. The Code of play-fair-with-the-reader-give-him-all-the-clues-and-withhold-nothing. I say all the clues are now in your possession. I repeat that they make an inescapable pattern of guilt.*

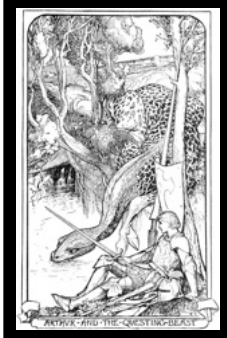
    "Can you put the pieces of the pattern together and interpret what you see?"

Realism & Logic



- Everything fits, makes sense, and could happen the way it's depicted in the story.
- Characters resemble real people.
- Settings are realistic and believable.
- Situations, however unlikely, could occur.
- Coincidence and luck are downplayed or non-existent.

Journey



- Mystery is Quest Story -
  — *the oldest story, the only story*
  - Explore the human condition, themes
  - Or just be a ripping good yarn
- Sleuth and Reader journey together
  - Share clues and conclusions
- *Aren't all stories mysteries?*

Keeping Promises

- Writers makes promises to their readers
- If you create expectations, meet them
  - Entertain, enlighten but don't disappoint
- Satisfaction, surprises, adventure - FANS!



A Story of Stories

TRUTH

- **Story One** - the story of the crime
- **Story Two** - the story of discovering **Story One**
- **Other Stories** - connecting **One** and **Two**
- Self-reflective genre
- ***The Sleuth's Story is about finding Stories to detect the True Story***

Writing It Down

- A mystery story is a story about another story.
- Two Main Stories
  1. The crime (puzzle)
  2. The investigation of the crime (detection)
- Sleuth story "digs down" to the crime story



The Crime: The Villain/Victim Story

- THE CRIME HAPPENED BEFORE THE MURDER
- The underlying crime story is the MORE important of the two stories.
- The Victim is the MOST important character in your book.
  - Their secrets are the book's secrets
  - They might not even ever appear alive, but they will be talked about, investigated and examined throughout.



Victim & Villain

- Relationship
  - How/when/why/where did paths crossed
- Motivations
  - Victim doesn't have to be innocent
    - *Sometimes they have it coming*
  - Villain doesn't have to be evil
    - *Ends might justify the means*
  - Complexities are interesting



Two Kinds of Villains



- Understandable
  - "Anyone would have done the same thing"
- Despicable
  - "What a bastard!"



Two Kinds of Victims





- Innocent
  - "What a tragedy"
- Culpable
  - "Had it Coming"

The Classic Motives

- Profit
- Jealousy
- Revenge
- To cover for a crime
- To avoid humiliation or disgrace
- Accidental homicide
- Homicidal Mania

Creating Characters

- Believable and Interesting
  - Secrets, Strengths & FLAWS
- What you MUST know to start:
  - Name
  - Function
  - Relationships
- Everything else is gravy
  - Add as you go





CHARACTER QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:_____ Age (DOB):_____

Physical description:_____

Spouse's/partner's name:_____

Children:_____

Occupation:_____

Parent(s) name(s):_____

Brothers/Sisters names:_____

Earliest memory:_____

Most embarrassing moment:_____

Proudest moment:_____

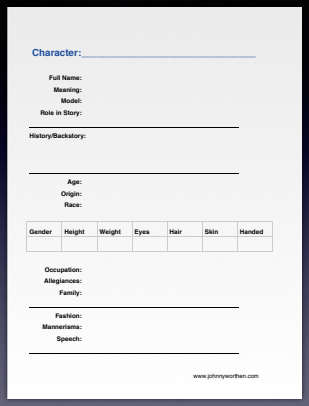
Secret dream or wish:_____

Favorite things:_____

Things in my wallet or purse:_____

What I want you to know:_____

What I don't want you to know:_____



Character:_____

Full Name:
Meaning:
Model:
Role in Story:

History/Backstory:

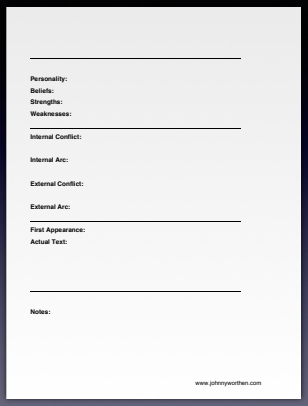
Age:
Origin:
Race:

Gender	Height	Weight	Eyes	Hair	Skin	Handed

Occupation:
Allegiances:
Family:

Fashion:
Mannerisms:
Speech:

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Personality:
Beliefs:
Strengths:
Weaknesses:

Internal Conflict:

Internal Arc:

External Conflict:

External Arc:

First Appearance:
Actual Text:

Notes:

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Character Sheets

Know What Happened!

- Pre-Writing / Planned Writing
  vs.
  Discovery Writing / "Pantsing It"
- It is possible to write from inspiration either the crime or the detection story, but it's best not to - especially the crime story.
- Weaving an intentionally confusing tale
  - Easy to get confused
- Doesn't have to be a bonifide outline, but have an idea

Stakes

- Doesn't have to be a murder but the stakes should be high enough to interest all parties
  - Victim
  - Sleuth
  - Reader
- *If it's important to your characters, it'll be important to your readers.*



First Story Sketch

- The Crime Story (First Story)
  - *Specialized BACKSTORY*
- The TRUTH
- The Victim
- The Villain
  - Motive/Means/Opportunity
- What happened?
  - What appears to have happened?
- *Note: Sleuth doesn't necessarily need to be included*



Example

- On a trip to tropical island a tour group accidentally sees a notorious dictator who was supposed to have been killed a year earlier. The dictator is having all the tour group killed to be safe even though none of them recognized him or know the significance.

Example

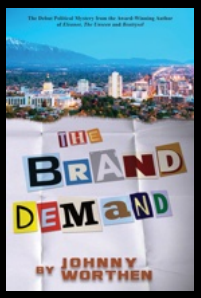
- A professor making a new designer drug in his laboratory kills a graduate who discovers his secret. He makes the killing look like a hate crime because the student is active in the LGBTQ community. He later kills a janitor who tried to blackmail him, making that death look like a suicide.

Example

- A suburban housewife is apparently killed in a random carjacking, but was in fact the victim of a professional killer hired by her husband, a repressed conservative preacher, when he discovered that she led a double life as a prostitute for kicks.

Example

- A self-centered jerk makes a deal with some dangerous people to hide deadly nuclear waste in an old uranium mine owned by his wife's family.



Example

- An East European gangster kidnaps a young girl to extort money from her mother who stole a suitcase full of cash and ran after he killed her husband. The mother can't ask for help because she is afraid her daughter will be hurt while she tries to ransom her back.

Example

- An eccentric venture capitalist tries to sell a memory supplement that turns out to be shit. The fall-out drives him insane and he flees into the wilderness of his youth to live as a hermit, his mind broken. A former partner who suffered terrible humiliation at the debacle moves to the area to patiently await a chance for revenge.

Example

- Fossil fuel interests create an astro-turf environmental group to disrupt public opinion and protect their interests. The group spawns a charismatic leader who, by importing pseudo-spiritual precepts, grows it in religious as well as political relevance. Now receiving donations from all sides, the leader grows rich while still serving the secret masters. When a seer detects the secret, the leader uses the confusion of a religious conclave populated by similarly deceitful villains, to murder the seer.

Example

- A psychopath, working as a school counselor in a small town, goads vulnerable students into killing themselves.

THE Mystery-Stories

- **The First Story (Victim/Villain)**
  - **The Second Story (Sleuthing)**
    - **Third Story**
      - ***The Crime:***
        - *What have we here?*
      - ***The Fiction:***
        - *What appears to have happened?*
      - ***The Truth:***
        - *What really happened?*
      - ***The Gap:***
        - *What information feeds either interpretation?*
      - ***The Breakthrough:***
        - *What information sets it right?*

Plotting:
Changes, Details and What to Expect

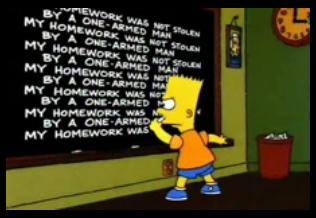
- You may be adjusting details of your **First Story** all through the writing of the **Second Story,** but start as complete as can.
  - Details and plot points (**Other Stories**) can get ironed out later, but the overall shape (mystery and solution) are set as guiding principles and will lead you unerringly to a satisfying conclusion.
  - *Knowing what happened and why start planning clues*
    - *Who must be or could not have been in the room?*
    - *What time did it all happen?*
    - *What did Adelaide know and when did she know it?*
    - *etc.*
- ***Warning:* The hardest part of writing your *Second Story* will be holding back information about your *First Story* and not divulging anything too soon!**

Title

- It's never too early to get a title.
  - *A name makes all the difference.*
- Come up with a **Working Title** for your story
  - It should mean something to you now
- Final Title?
  - Publisher may change your title
    - It's a marketing tool then. Don't sweat it.

Your next move...

- Read "An Alpine Divorce"
- Character Questionnaires
  - *Victim*
  - *Villain*
- Write up Your First Story Sketch
  - What happened?
  - *What appeared to have happened?*
  - *Who is the victim?*
  - *What put them in harm's way?*
  - *Who is the villain and why?*
  - *What was the motive?*
- Come up with a **Working Title**
- For Critique (Standard Manuscript Format and sent to me)



To Share —
Email to me by Sunday afternoon:
johnny@johnnyworthen.com
in .pdf or Word (.doc, .docx) Format
(Or Bring Copies enough for everyone on the day)