

The Gold Crown Con

by Matt Wilson

Using this Mystery

This mystery is probably best used later in an on-going campaign, as one of the core conceits of the story is that the Mavens have made themselves enough of a reputation within the Gold Crown Mystery community that they might have fans. Furthermore, it is an excellent location to introduce and amplify whatever plots your Midwives have cooking in the background. It is almost certainly the case that one or more members of the Midwives will be present, perhaps waiting to be unmasked as the Ringleader.

This mystery has a “twist”—what I had in mind, structure-wise, is this: “The Mavens PREVENT a crime BUT while doing so they are FRAMED for a different crime.”

Additionally, this mystery will work best if your group has invoked the “Gold Crown Murder Mystery” move on multiple occasions, or worked more lore from the series into your role-play. You’ll see “placeholders” in the text below marked like so: (Name of Book). Interpolate freely from your series’ repertoire of Amanda Delacourt lore!

If you have played *Let the Night One In*, this is an excellent place to work callbacks to your play-through of that scenario into your framing of this one. Finally, this scenario is heavily inspired by *A Throng of Vice and Liars*, and I’ve included one of the Suspects from that mystery here to honor it.

Presenting the Mystery

Brindlewood Bay is playing host to this year’s *Gold Crown Con*, the premier event for fans of the bestselling mystery series penned by Robin Masterson... and there’s big news!

The series has been picked up by Prestige TV, which has sent the fan community into overdrive with enthusiasm and speculation. Casting decisions are naturally providing internet forums with plenty of fodder for debate. TV royalty will be descending on Brindlewood’s diminutive Convention Center-slash-Farmers’ Market... along with a bigger than expected crop of fans!

The Mavens are now semi-famous in the community for their exploits, and so they’ve been invited as VIP guests through Robin’s agent (or another suitable party). What’s more exciting for everyone is that the renowned and reclusive author is going to put in a rare public appearance. Her agent is delighted to report that she’ll be reading from her long, long-overdue novel “Let the Night One In”, which apparently includes some reference to the Mavens themselves in a guest-starring role!

Pose this Question: *How do the Mavens prepare for the Con? What do they think of the notion that Robin has*

fictionalized some of their exploits? Are they eager to talk to her about it, or worried?

They can attend the convention like any other fan, of course, but they’ll also have badges which give them access to the “backstage” areas and a VIP lounge, where any number of the Suspects might be met—or caught in an indelicate moment.

While wandering the show floor (see Happenings and Locations), the Mavens should quickly pick up on the fact that something isn’t quite right. Strive to convey an air of mild paranoia. Someone, somewhere in the crowd, is *planning* something nefarious and hoping that the thronging crowds of this packed con will provide cover.

Pose this Question: *Since the books have been optioned for TV... naturally we have to ask the Mavens who they’d like to play themselves on-screen, assuming the show lasts that long.*

This scenario has one final surprise in store for the Mavens: when they arrive at the convention center, they discover that, unbeknownst to them, someone has added a “Maven-a-like” contest with a coveted prize: a private tea-time with Robin Masterson herself.

Paint the Scene: *What evidence do we see that the Midwives of the Fragrant Void are haunting the Convention Center / Farmer’s Market with their presence?*

Happenings and Locations

Cosplay!

Naturally, there are lots of folks cosplaying as Robin, Amanda, and other beloved characters. Most unexpectedly, some fans are cosplaying as the Mavens themselves! Throughout the day, winners in various categories will be announced. *Who else from the books do we see?*

Panel Discussions

Other than the “keynote”, which is Robin’s appearance, there is a packed day of panels going on, with titles like “Delacourting Controversy: Reading Amanda’s Politics” or “Crowns from Foreign Parts: Decoding Amanda’s Travel Attire.” *What other unusual panel catches your eye?*

Artists & Bookseller’s Alley

There is, naturally, a ballroom set aside for Gold Crown Merch, selling anything and everything official and fan-made. First-editions (signed and otherwise) and, of course, related

but clearly less good series are on offer. *What deeply unusual item stands out at the auction table?*

Mockups of Stage Sets for the TV Show

Prestige TV is really going all out to woo super-fans and has recreated a couple of the sets they plan to use in season one. One highlight of the day is going to be a table-read of a scene on one of the mockups. *What detail seems either spot-on or jarringly different than how your Maven imagined it would be?*

The Reading and Q&A Sesh

Naturally, the event on the tips of everyone’s tongues all day is that Robin Masterson will be live and in-person giving a first read of the new book, which almost never happens! *What outrageous fan theories do you hear circulating about the book?*

The VIP Green Room

The backstage area has a little cozy Green Room, one place that is truly away from the press of the crowd. Many of Robin’s favorite things are here, including an armchair and typewriter that were flown in from her estate. *What do we see that shows how much effort the little town of Brindlewood has gone to in order to host such a huge event?*

Questions & Opportunities

These can be answered in either order.

What Caper is Being Planned at the Con? (Complexity 4)

Someone’s up to something here, but what is it?

Who is the Ringleader? (Complexity 2)

There’s *clearly* a ringleader, a mastermind directing this plot, but who—and how can the Mavens catch them alone?

(Proceed to *The Turn* once both questions are answered.)

Moments

- There’s a palpable hush in the crowd, as Robin Masterson arrives in a limo, fashionably late.
- Two proponents of differing theories concerning some aspect of Amanda’s upbringing nearly come to blows.
- A group begins workshoping theme music for the TV show on an unlikely collection of instruments.
- You’re briefly overwhelmed by how many people are here. The crowd is unlike anything you’ve experienced in Brindlewood Bay before!

- One of the Mavens' favorite Brindlewood restaurants has catered special something for the event. What is it?
- You stumble upon a small gathering of fans playing a Gold Crown Murder Mystery "Madlibs" game—quick, what's an "improbable predicament"? About about a "old-timey interjection"?

The Turn

When the Mavens have isolated The Ringleader in an out-of-the-way-area, read this.

All of the power in the hall goes out suddenly, and pandemonium erupts, muffled but unmistakable. Something real and serious has happened: pick a crime that seems likely based on how the Mavens have answered the Questions and anything their interest has been drawn to. It could be a murder, or a theft of something, or a kidnapping. Robin is a good target—an easy default is to have some "Maven Cosplayers" shuffle her off into a waiting car. The Ringleader could also conveniently disappear during the power outage.

The goal is that *the Mavens themselves* are the prime suspects. Sheriff Dalrymple got a tip that something was going to go down and has hustled over just in time to see "the Mavens" making a quick getaway. Checking security camera footage appears to show them doing the crime! They've been framed! A new Question appears:

Who framed you and why? (Complexity 4)

Clearly, someone has it in for the Mavens. But who? And to what end? Answering this Question unlocks an opportunity to confront this culprit.

Suspects

Leila Henly, the Lead Actress

Middle-aged, glamorous. Seems to always have a glass of wine in hand. Excited to be playing Amanda, but expresses some private surprise that she was chosen. Rumored to be having an affair with someone involved with the production. She is a major investor in a condo development in Brindlewood Bay, and wonders if that is somehow related to why they're even having the convention here. Clearly working on getting in shape, and seems a little too interested in Kayla. (I borrowed this character from *A Throng of Vice and Liars*; if unavailable due to the outcome of that adventure, you'll have to re-cast her.)

Quote: *"Ah, now this promises to be a role with more adventure to it than just swanning about on balconies becoming synonymous with 'scheming bitch', and hey, I happened to be in the area and the wine is still good."*

Chandler Connelly, the Rival Mystery Author

California suntan. Wry humor. The very picture of a "cool author guy." Always jotting things down in a notebook or

dictating purple prose into a voice recorder. A younger crime novelist with a passionate internet following and several successfully crowd-funded books. Chandler churns 'em out, but has yet to really break mainstream like Masterson has done. Does a lot of ghostwriting with politicians, TV shows, and celebrities to punch up their thriller ideas. None of "Robin's People" seem to know why he's here.

Quote: *"Of course I'd kill to have an 'Amanda Delacourt' in my owre... well, not literally, of course! And when the rumors started that Robin was overdue, what novelist wouldn't jump at the chance to pinch-hit for her..."*

Kayla "Best in Show" Brandon, the Cosplayer

Athletic, well dressed, and always apparently at the center of a gaggle of hangers-on, Kayla is in full "Delacourt Cosplay Champion" mode. She's won for her interpretation of Amanda every year she's entered. She's somehow in a look equally ready to take on a Shanghai nightclub's worth of opium dealers or dance the Charleston all night in a glitzy New York jazz club. Seems a little envious of, but also star-struck, by Leila.

Quote: *"Oh, goodness, have you seen Leila? Simply perfect, though a bit of a... different role for her. Are you with the production company? I'd love to talk about some ideas I have for my... I mean, her wardrobe... on the show."*

Clive Exeter, the Prestige TV Producer

Nice suit, but a nervous handshake. Stylishly trimmed beard. A longtime TV showrunner and writer who made his name cutting fan-favorite faithful adaptations of numerous interchangeable British detectives. Well, until that last season of *Welshlander*, at least. That went off the rails. The Gold Crown series secretly worries him a little, because he fears he's lost "it" and, although he's told Prestige TV he's read the books... he hasn't. He deflects conversations about the series towards reminiscences of his previous successes.

Quote: *"Bringing something so beloved to the screen always involves dancing a careful quadrille with fans of the novels. But I've always risen to the challenge, just like Miss Delacourt. Didn't she say something about rising to challenges? I could swear she did... or maybe I'm thinking of Welshlander..."*

Brittany Flowers, the Crime Castle Podcaster

Black t-shirt with the podcast logo and a quote from (Name of Book). Carefully groomed with a slightly gothy presentation. Brit hosts the internet's third most popular crime fiction podcast and is a renowned figure in the community. Amanda Delacourt is their particular speciality and they curate the official "Tier List" of books that the fans consider canonical—and has dedicated many episodes to deep dives on fan-favorite Gold Crown books. Brit feels like Clive has been ducking interview requests, and will spare no effort to enlist the Mavens to introduce them.

Quote: *"No, no, it was in (Name of Book) where we first saw Amanda reference growing up in Canada. Canada! There are only two novels—well, and the one oblique*

reference in the short story collection—where she is said to have spent any time in Canada..."

Zachary Taylor, the Agent

Bags under his eyes. A rumpled suit. Just clinging to a cup of coffee. Zachary exudes the impression he lives life in transit. He's been saddled with the thankless dual jobs of negotiating the Prestige TV deal—and Robin Masterson had a lot of conditions—and trying to get her to deliver this overdue book. Which is still not done, despite what he told everyone. Because of course she decided to re-write the ending! The publisher is hotly anticipating co-marketing it with the TV production, and he's already scheduled overseas printing...

Quote: *"You might think she resents me for all the work I've been putting in. If I hadn't shepherded this deal through, she wouldn't have had a chance to expand that compound of hers up there at the edge of the world. What thanks do I get? I get dragged down here to arm-wrestle the publisher."*

Ingrid Jean Asquith, the Publisher

Ingrid wears English hunting tweeds with her hair in a tight bun. Shining hairpins with ornate designs hold it in place. An old friend of Robin's from an elite boarding school, Ingrid used to want to be a novelist but now—perhaps thanks to The Gold Crown Mysteries—spends all of her time running a large publishing house. Is somewhat put out about the TV deal; she disdains TV and thinks it will distract Robin from her true calling—publishing more books with Asquith Press.

Quote: *"The real world is substantially messier than anything you see on TV, my dears. I used to have my hands full wrangling these Delacourt novels out of Masterson, but now that's Taylor's job. Not that he's doing it. Too busy getting a cut from TV, of all places. He's always been a sellout. It's not like Robin needs the money; I've given her more than she'll ever use."*

Quentin Prendergast, the Contrarian

Wanders around grasping a small valise that appears to be full of paperbacks. Wears a cozy sweater and has a pair of cats-eye glasses and a sharpie on a lanyard. Quentin is a local Brindlewoodian and a fixture at the Candlelight Booksellers. He has a day job as a paralegal at one of the law firms in town. This litigiousness spills over into his hobby, which is dissecting mystery novels and telling anyone who will listen why that thing they like isn't good and sliding into people's mentions with an unsolicited "well, actually." He is forever trying to fob paperbacks of dubious quality and uncertain provenance onto the unwary.

Quote: *"Say, if you're looking for something a little more creative than Robin's recent work, I have just the thing... here, you'll love this one because the detective is a vampire and instead of a cat he's got a little space alien creature... what? Oh, I know this says it is book 17 in the series. This is sort of a reboot of the canon..."*

Clues

- A hidden shrine to Robin Masterson in an unexpected place.
- A bloody set of fingerprints inside a signed, first edition copy of the first Gold Crown novel, (Name of Book).
- Evidence that the security cameras have been tampered with in some way.
- A love letter to a Suspect, mis-delivered. (Maybe Leila gets these a lot.)
- A duffel bag filled with a full set of disguises for a small group (i.e. not a change of clothes).
- An empty holster, just like the one Amanda carries, amongst a suspect's belongings.
- Documents suggesting that Masterson is unexpectedly exploring a Gold Crown Travel Show series.
- A thumb drive labeled "Rough draft of *Let the Night One In*," found in an unexpected place.
- A Suspect complaining that that Amanda's love interest got killed off.
- Online comments from a Suspect joking that Amanda might have to investigate Robin's death if the book is delayed too much longer.
- A draft letter from Robin Masterson to her lawyers, asking them to kill off all the licenses and leave her alone.
- A poster for the upcoming TV series, defaced somehow.
- Printouts, with annotations, of a Suspect's fanfic.
- A recorded phone call from Robin to Exeter where she is castigating the teaser trailer for the TV show.
- A letter demanding hush money or a ransom.
- A copy of (Name of Book) with copious crazy musings scrawled in the margins.
- A strongly worded letter from a Brindlewood Bay law office to Robin Masterson.
- Detailed blueprints for the Convention Center/Farmer's Market, heavily annotated.
- An online video in which two Suspects appear, unexpectedly, to be old friends.
- An ominous letter demanding that the recipient return something that was stolen. They know what.
- Literature detailing a local business deal involving one or more of the Suspects.
- An envelope printed with a distinctive logo, stuffed full of cash.
- An envelope with a surprising DNA test result.

Void Clues

(Tailor the hints at the Dark Conspiracy to your particular campaign's needs wherever you see reference to Keys and Gates.)

- A black-clad stagehand/event-manager steps close to you and whispers "Persephone is at the Gate" before disappearing into the crowd.
- A cosplaying fan doesn't seem to notice that the area around them has become alive with a scene of real danger from (Name of Book).
- A copy of (Name of Book) begins whispering about whatever the Dark Conspiracy is up to.
- The text on the cover of (Name of Book) rearranges itself to read: "Persephone. The Gate. Find the Key."
- For a moment, it looks like massive, cyclopean gate rises from the ocean, which is visible through the windows.
- A fan asking a question of one of the panels enters into a bizarre stage-like interlude and utters a dark prophecy. Nobody else seems to notice.

Rewards

Upon the successful conclusion of the mystery, allow each Maven to narrate a flashback during which they secretly bought one or more of other Mavens a gift from the convention hall. They may add these gifts to their Cozy Little Place.

We hope you've enjoyed your trip to the Gold Crown Con!

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