



**content manager:**  
**charles rice, chris davis**  
**layout:**



**chris davis**



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## Hot Piece

By Charles Rice (RPGObjects)



### Introduction

Hot piece is an adventure for modern d20 games. Since the adventure revolves around investigation more than combat this adventure is suitable to a wide range of character levels, though some classes (such as Investigator) will be much handier than others.

Once the PCs have solved the mystery of the "hot piece" they can attempt to solve the problem themselves (through apprehending the suspects) and this will require 4 PCs of approximately 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> level; however, the PCs could just as easily end the adventure by calling the police, and this could be done at any level.

### Adventure Synopsis

Five years before the adventure begins, Sgt. John Hamish, a highly decorated, popular officer on the local police force was murdered with his own service revolver. His weapon was never recovered but ballistics confirmed beyond a doubt that his own weapon was used in the murder.

Three years ago this same weapon was used in the murder of Ronald "Downtown" McCown, a local figure in the city's underworld. Then last year it was used in the murder of Sedrick Howe, a local union official with alleged ties to organized crime.

The weapon has not been seen since.

Not, that is, until it arrived yesterday, wrapped in a local newspaper, in the PCs mailbox.

### Running Hot Piece

Hot Piece is as far from a traditional canned module as an adventure could be. The adventure is broken down into episodes and conclusions. These episodes are triggered (for the most part) by actions and decisions of the PCs. These episodes can be run in any order, in the middle of or in between the events of an ongoing adventure and many of them may not be used at all.

Further, there is no set resolution. Several possibilities are provided but the episodes pursued by the PCs and the tone of the campaign should have the most bearing on what the solution to the adventure should be.

While it may seem this places a lot of burden on both the game master and characters (the one to determine what happens and the other to diligently pursue leads) this is only true if the adventure is treated as a typical adventure; that is started and pursued exclusively until completed. Hot piece is designed to ease the game master's burden, giving him something to drop-in during a lull in the current campaign. The PCs can then pursue it until they hit a dead end, get bored, or something more interesting catches their eye. When they are ready, they can return to the mystery, or the GM can drop another clue into another lull and so forth.

Following the episodes are events labeled conclusions. The conclusions provide several ways for the game master to conclude the events of the hot piece in the way that best suits his campaign.

## **Episode: Calling the Cops**

Some PCs might want to wash their hands of the hot piece ASAP. This is not the low-risk/low-reward option that it may appear to these PCs at first blush. For starters, the murder of Sgt. Hamish is a “red ball” (extremely important and politically sensitive) case that has never closed.

PCs who call the police and say, “hey we have this gun” will immediately become the prime suspects in the murders of Hamish, McCown and Howe, the “break” the police have been waiting for since the murder of Howe last year. If the PCs actually handle the weapon without gloves, even for an instant, things become rather worse, as their prints will be the only prints found on the weapon.

The story “I never heard of Sgt. Hamish, just found this gun in my mail this morning” is the kind of story not easily accepted by the police. First, why would the weapon be dumped in that manner? Dumping it in the river makes much more sense. And even if the weapon *was* dropped on the PCs, it would be by someone who *wanted* to implicate them, meaning they know who was involved in the murders.

At any rate, the PCs who turn the gun in can expect to be grilled, detained, followed and harassed for the rest of the adventure by skeptical police who don’t believe in conspiracy theories.

## **Episode: Examining the Hot Piece**

Examining the gun itself will turn up little. It’s a typical .38 service revolver, the kind most police departments don’t even use anymore in favor of automatics. The gun has been wiped down of all prints and does not appear to have been fired recently. PCs can also tell on an Investigate skill check (DC 15) that the weapon has been extremely well cared for in the past five years.

## **Episode: Did You read the Paper Today?**

Some PCs might not pay any attention to the newspaper the hot piece is wrapped in. In fact it is a much more substantial clue than the hot piece itself. If the PCs do not state they are examining the newspaper, allow each PC a Spot check (DC 15) to notice that they were not delivered today’s newspaper. This could involve noticing the date or a particular story that makes no sense for the current time of year (such as a Hockey box score in the middle of a lockout).

In fact the newspaper describes the murder of Ronald “Downtown” McCown, a small time mobster killed gangland style with one bullet to the head, delivered by the hot piece three years ago. At the end of the brief article there is a sentence circled with a red pen: “Police are questioning McCown’s sole surviving relative, labor leader Jacob McCown, who has also been tied to several mob related slayings”.

## **Episode: Movin’ on Uptown**

Assuming the PCs do any investigating relating to the murders themselves (they should be not-so subtly pointed this way by the episode above) they will learn that not one, but two of the murder victims are in fact connected with a little digging. Successfully learning of McCown’s organized crime ties, as well as his ties to Sedrick Howe will require a Research skill check DC 20 or Gather Information check DC 15 at the evidence room of the local police station.

McCown is unofficially considered a “person of interest” in both murders. He has ties to numerous unions (who themselves are tied to some significant underworld figures) and made an unsuccessful run for city council last year. In fact it was the taint of the Howe murder that was largely considered responsible for the failure of McCown’s efficient, well-run campaign. He maintains an active campaign website

promising another run in the coming year.

Should the PCs start snooping around after McCown, they will find that he has some rather unfriendly men with disproportionately long arms to discourage such unofficial snooping. Should the PCs simply make an appointment and confide in McCown that they are investigating his brother’s murder, he will be rather more helpful as long as he believes the PCs do not suspect him.

A search of financial records (Research skill check DC 20) will show that the only major financial move McCown made after his brother’s death was to hire a top-notch private bodyguard, William Wilcox, formerly of the police department, for his own protection.

A much more difficult piece of information to divine is that Sgt. Hamish was also on McCown’s payroll. This was actually uncovered by police during the investigation into Hamish’s murder and made McCown the lead suspect, but with no other evidence of his involvement, it was decided to bury Hamish as a hero. This information could only be gleaned from the police themselves requiring a Gather Information skill check with a DC of 25.

## **Episode: Security Blanket**

Should the PCs investigate the chief of McCown’s security force they will find that he used to serve on the local police force, where he was the partner of Sgt. John Hamish. As Hamish moved to duties as a desk sergeant, William Wilcox, his partner’s career seemed to stagnate. Then he retired from the force and took a job with a personal security firm where his police background served him well.

## **Episode: The Murder of Sedrick Howe**

Regardless of what conclusion the GM intends to use, the murder of Sedrick Howe should provide the key to solving the mystery of the hot piece. If William Wilcox has been performing the killings (either on

his own or at the behest of Jacob McCown), then a witness will place him talking to Howe in the hours before the murder.

If Jacob is the killer a car registered in his name is placed near the scene.

If the devil gun itself is possessing the killers, have the PC have a nightmare in which he kills Howe (what the PC does with the information that he might in fact be a murderer could give a nice slant to the campaign).

Finally if Hamish is the killer the PCs could have a run-in with him. Having faked his death and covered his tracks he isn't about to let some interloping PCs mess things up, so he decides to simply take the PCs out with a force of security guards outnumbering the PCs three to one. The PCs will get a call telling them to meet in an abandoned building where they will learn the truth behind the hot piece.

## **Conclusion: Suspicious Minds**

In this conclusion Jacob is indeed the killer. He and his brother had risen together through the ranks of organized crime, with one concentrating on the street while the other worked his way through law school in order to be able to move through the "legitimate" world.

All good things must come to an end and eventually Jacob decided he would do better at running things without his brother, who was always being arrested for some silly act of violence that could be as easily solved through negotiation. Ron had an ace in the hole however, his contact with John Hamish in the local police precinct, who would insure the investigation would not be placed on the back burner like so many mob killings.

For the murder of a popular police Sergeant, McCown turns to his ex-partner, William Wilcox and the two of them laid out a plan to murder the policeman, as well as implicate him for criminal

involvement. This would stop the police from investigating his murder as strongly as they would a "good cop".

## **Conclusion: Devil Gun**

In this scenario the gun used by Sgt. Hamish is a much older gun than it appears. In fact it dates back to the 1860's and can appear as any type of gun it wishes. This possessed weapon seeks vengeance on the descendants of its original owner's killer, a carpetbagger killed months after the end of the Civil War.

Its revenge is almost complete, and with the death of Jacob McCown the curse will be lifted and the gun will become an extremely valuable Civil War-era antique revolver. In this conclusion the PC who is keeping the gun must make a Will saving throw each week (DC 20) or fall under the gun's spell and begin formulating a plan to kill McCown.

The devil gun in its true form (a perfectly preserved Colt revolver from the 1860's) makes it worth a wealth award of +10.

## **Conclusion: Someone to Watch Over Me**

In this conclusion William Wilcox is the killer. Jealous over his ex-partner's sterling image, Wilcox retired from the force, intending to find another life's work. It was while working in private security that Wilcox discovered Hamish's criminal involvement. This discovery, that Hamish's image as the perfect cop was just a veneer truly pushed Wilcox over the edge and he assassinated him in a parking lot where he was waiting to meet McCown.

Years later, after Wilcox had begun work for Jacob McCown, he learned that his younger brother knew who had killed Hamish. This prompted Wilcox to murder Ronald McCown as well.

## **Conclusion: The Greatest Trick**

In this conclusion John Hamish is the killer of Ronald McCown and Sedrick Howe. Five years ago, under investigation by internal affairs for ties with Ronald McCown, Hamish faked his own death by altering his fingerprints and dental records on file to those of William Wilcox, his alcoholic ex-partner, whom he then shot in the face.

At the behest of Jacob McCown he then killed Ronald and Sedrick over the years, using the same gun as a way to distract the police department he had come to hate. Hamish feels nothing but contempt for his fellow officers and delights in presenting them with unsolvable crimes that have tantalizing leads, which lead to dead ends.

## **Conclusion: Endless Curse**

In this scenario the curse of the devil gun does not end when the last "revenge killing" takes place. The gun's insidious evil spirit keeps its hold on the hapless PC, forcing him to kill again and again. Worse yet, the curse seems to be advancing on the character, turning him into more and more of a pawn for the gun.

## **Conclusion: Deep Throat?**

Following the events of the adventure, one question might still linger in the PCs minds and this is who sent the hot piece to them in the first place? Depending on the events the game master has chosen, this answer will vary. It could have been Jacob McCown, who sought to expose the involvement of his own security chief William Wilcox. If a supernatural explanation is used the gun might have chosen the PC to be its next host. And of course the PCs might have been dragged into the adventure by Al Bannister (see below).

## NPCs

### Jacob “Uptown” McCown

Jacob McCown and his brother grew up on the wrong side of town. In fact they grew up in a place worse than the wrong side of town. For most of their lives the brothers have fought to improve their lot in life, first on the streets where it was Ron, not Jacob doing most of the fighting. Now Jacob continues fighting, using his brains and street smarts to continue advancing the family cause.

**Jacob “Uptown” McCown (Smart Hero 3/Charismatic Hero 3):** CR 6; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d6+3 plus 3d6+3; HP 28; Mas 12; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; Defense 12, touch 12, flatfooted 12 (+0 size, +0 Dex, +2 class); BAB +2; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee (by weapon), or +2 ranged (by weapon); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL none; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +4; AP 3; Rep +6; Str 8, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 14.

**Occupation:** White Collar (Diplomacy, Knowledge [Business])

**Skills:** Bluff +8, Computer Use +9, Craft (writing) +9, Decipher Script +9, Diplomacy +11, Forgery +9, Gather Information +8, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (Art) +9, Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences) +9, Knowledge (Business) +17, Knowledge (Civics) +12, Knowledge (Current Events) +12, Knowledge (Streetwise) +14, Research +9

**Feats:** Combat Expertise, Educated (Knowledge [Business], Knowledge [Streetwise]), Personal Firearms Proficiency, Renown, Midas Touch, Rumor Monger

**Talents (Smart Hero):** Savant (Knowledge [Business]), Exploit Weakness

**Talents (Charismatic Hero):** Coordinate, Inspiration

**Possessions:** Wealth +12

## The Devil Gun - New Item

This possessed weapon can appear as any weapon a potential wielder would consider desirable. In fact it is an antique colt revolver possessed by the vengeful spirit of its original wielder. When being used to pursue its goal of vengeance against the descendants of those who wrong it, the devil gun gains a +3 enhancement bonus to hit and damage.

### William Wilcox

**(head of McCown’s security detail)**

William Wilcox always seemed to be a day late and a dollar short. His police career, while not exactly a failure, could not be described as a success either. As his partner John Hamish used to say, “If it were raining 100 dollar bills Will would be outside with boxing gloves on”. Once he left the force however, things seemed to turn up for Will as his skills proved especially valuable in the private security industry. Always a good shot, Will parlayed his toughness and police background into a highly successful career as a private bodyguard and security specialist for several large corporations.

**William Wilcox, head of McCown’s security detail (Tough Hero 3/Bodyguard 4)** CR 7; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d10+9 plus 4d12+12 plus 6; HP 70; Mas 16; Init +1; Spd 25 ft; Defense 19, touch 15, flatfooted 18 (+0 size, +1 Dex, +4 class, +4 equipment); BAB +5; Grap +6; Atk +6 melee (1d6+1, Metal Baton), or +6 ranged (2d6+0, Glock 17); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL Jacob McCown; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +4; AP 3; Rep +2; Str 12, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 8.

**Occupation:** Law Enforcement (Knowledge [Tactics], Listen)

**Skills:** Concentration +9, Drive +7, Gather Information +2, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (Tactics) +3, Spot +8

**Feats:** Armor Proficiency (light), Armor Proficiency (medium), Combat Driving, Double Tap,

Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Toughness

**Talents (Tough Hero):** Robust, Damage Reduction 1/—

**Talents (Bodyguard):** Harm’s Way, Combat Sense +1, Sudden Action

**Possessions:** Concealable Vest, Metal Baton, Glock 17; Wealth +6

**McCown Security (Strong Ordinary 2)** CR 2; Medium-size humanoid; HD 2d8+2; HP 11; Mas 13; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 15, touch 13, flatfooted 14 (+0 size, +1 Dex, +2 class, +2 equipment); BAB +2; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2, Club), or +3 ranged (2d6+0, Beretta 92F); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL none; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will -1; AP 1; Rep +0; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

**Occupation:** Law Enforcement (Drive, Intimidate)

**Skills:** Drive +6, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (Tactics) +5

**Feats:** Armor Proficiency (light), Combat Martial Arts, Personal Firearms Proficiency

**Talents (Strong Ordinary):**

**Possessions:** Light Undercover Shirt, Club, Beretta 92F; Wealth +2

### John Hamish

To the media that glorified him after his death, John Hamish was everything that was right about the police department; daring, brave, dedicated, a family man who served his community, and died defending it. As is usually the case with such wonderful stories,



the reality was a little different. In fact it was almost the opposite. The real John Hamish was on the payroll of several small time hoodlums to look the other way and help nullify arrests against them, such as Ronald McCown. He was also far from brave and even cheated on his wife. At the time of his death, despite ongoing internal affairs investigations it was decided to let Hamish die as the hero he never quite was in life and this is how he is likely to be remembered forever.

## John Hamish (Strong Hero 3/Dedicated Hero

2) CR 5; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d8+3 plus 2d6+2; HP 26; Mas 13; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; Defense 18, touch 16, flatfooted 16 (+0 size, +2 Dex, +4 class, +2 equipment); BAB +4; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2, Club), or +6 ranged (2d6+0, Glock 17); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL none; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +5; AP 2; Rep +2; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 8.

**Occupation:** Investigative (Computer Use, Gather Information)

**Skills:** Computer Use +9, Gather Information +7, Investigate +6, Knowledge (Current Events) +7, Knowledge (Streetwise) +7, Knowledge (Tactics) +4

**Feats:** Advanced Firearms Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (light), Brawl, Combat Martial Arts, Low Profile, Personal Firearms Proficiency

**Talents (Strong Hero):** Melee Smash, Improved Melee Smash

**Talents (Dedicated Hero):** Empathy

**Possessions:** Light Undercover Shirt, Club, Glock 17; Wealth +7

## Dr. Alejandro Montoya

Montoya is a defrocked Catholic priest turned paranormal investigator. He has a great belief in the supernatural and tends to see a supernatural explanation for things. He was removed from his office as an official church exorcist after his appearance on the late night radio show “East to West” where he went on a ranting tirade about secret societies existing unknown even by high-ranking officials in the Catholic Church called “the Doctrine” and “Frater Torquemada”.

**Dr. Alejandro Montoya (Dedicated Hero 3)** CR 3; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d6+3; HP 14; Mas 12; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; Defense 12, touch 12, flatfooted 12 (+0 size, +0 Dex, +2 class); BAB +2; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee (by weapon), or +2 ranged (by weapon); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL none; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +4; AP 1; Rep +1; Str 8, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 13.

**Occupation:** Religious (Knowledge [Arcane Lore], Knowledge [Theology and Philosophy], Sense Motive)

**Skills:** Knowledge (Arcane Lore) +10, Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences) +8, Knowledge (History) +8, Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) +10, Listen +8, Sense Motive +8, Treat Injury +8

**Feats:** Educated (Knowledge [Arcane Lore], Knowledge [Theology and Philosophy]), Sacred Ritual, Exorcism

**Talents (Dedicated Hero):** Empathy, Intuition

**Possessions:** Wealth +7

**Quote:** Your trouble is indeed grave my son. But I can help you.

## Al Bannister

Al Bannister, host of the late night “East to West” radio show is a leading proponent of supernatural and alien phenomena. He is convinced that John Hamish’s death was the result of a police conspiracy involving a cover up of an alien/military joint operation in the home city. It just so happens that he is in the area investigating the killing again for a week long special on his radio show. Even though the murder had nothing to do with aliens, Bannister still knows a great deal about the crimes and might provide some valuable assistance to the PCs. Of course if they do not come to the conclusion that aliens are involved, and agree to talk at length about it on “East to West” they will be labeled as “government black ops agents” and become part of the urban legend themselves.

**Al Bannister (Charismatic Hero 3)** CR 3; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d6+3; HP 14; Mas 12; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; Defense 11, touch 11, flatfooted 11 (+0 size, +0 Dex, +1 class); BAB +1; Grap +0; Atk +0 melee (by weapon), or +1 ranged (by weapon); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL none; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +2; AP 1; Rep +5; Str 8, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 15.

**Occupation:** Creative (Bluff, Craft [writing], Knowledge [Arcane Lore])

**Skills:** Bluff +10, Craft (writing) +8, Diplomacy +8, Disguise +4, Gather Information +8, Knowledge (Arcane Lore) +8, Knowledge (Business) +8, Knowledge (Current Events) +8, Knowledge (Popular Culture) +8, Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) +8, Perform +8, Profession +2

**Feats:** Banter, Deceptive, Renown, Windfall

**Talents (Charismatic Hero):** Fast-Talk, Dazzle

**Possessions:** Wealth +10

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