

Chapter 11

Sleight of Hand

Handgun Concealment

Clarke Lantham is a hard-boiled private detective working out of Oakland in the present day. Like most fictional detectives, he manages to get into quite a lot of trouble involving firearms and being on the wrong end of them. His years in the local police department taught him to carry a gun wherever he went, and that one is never quite enough. If one goes missing, or runs out, or malfunctions, he doesn't want to be caught naked in public.

So he carries two. The primary weapon, he uses for intimidation. It's his first-draw, carried on his upper body. A 1911 model .45. Accurate enough for city work, it's bulky and difficult to conceal, so he's got modified clothing to fit it in. His trench coat features a leather cross-draw sewn under his left arm, and for working in the summer he wears it in the small of his back in a custom-molded leather quick-draw holster with an extra layer of fleece on the outside, to keep him from going “clunk” when he settles down against a hard wooden bench.

His other is a .357 snub carried just above his right ankle. Under loose jeans or slacks, it's invisible, and being a revolver, it never malfunctions. He only goes for it when he's got no other options, because he has to reload it with a speedloader, which isn't exactly fun when you're ducking lead.

Between the two, he finds himself ready to meet almost anything he's likely to come across in his day-to-day life. This carry configuration—given a few period and area-specific modifications to the primary weapon—is fairly standard for plainclothes police officers and security personnel who trained in police academies. It'd designed as a compromise between the demands of firepower, concealability, accessibility, and safety. Balancing these four factors involves trade-offs, and those trade-offs are governed by who you are, when you are, how you're dressed, and what genre you're working in.

Considerations for body concealment

When choosing a weapon for concealment on the body, your character will need to consider the following things, which are conditioned by her historical, economic, and sociological context as well as personality and occupation:

1. How accessible does the weapon need to be?
2. Where on the body will be the most comfortable, and effective, concealment position?
3. What kind of combat are you going to be in? What range will you need?
4. What kind of capacity will you need?
5. What opportunities for concealment does your wardrobe allow?
6. What non-visual considerations do you need to take into consideration?
7. How will you re-conceal it after you've used it?
8. How likely are you to be searched, who will search you, and what techniques will they use?

The answers to these questions will often direct you to the proper weapon for your character—what follows is a detailed consideration of some of the interesting wrinkles you can run into when answering these questions.

Concealment Technology

When it comes to handguns, the world operates according to a holy trinity:

The firearm, the slug, and the Holy Holster.

Without a holster, the weapon is not suitable for carrying—the extra second it can take to wrest a gun from a pocket or a waistband is a full second in which the other guy has a clear shot. Remember, the O.K. Corral fight (the most famous gunfight in history) didn't even last thirty seconds.

Everyone thinks they know what a holster looks like and how it works, because everyone watches movies. Alas, movies don't even begin to touch on holster technology, and the lost details can make for great character texture and worldbuilding in fiction.

Conventional Holsters

Most important part of the holster is the surface that touches your weapon—does it cause corrosion, how does it affect glide and grip. This is why a leather holster with a slick exterior and a suede interior is the time-honored classic.

Suede doesn't scratch a weapon's finish to open pathways for rust. Cow hide (or pretty much any leather) is easily treated to be hard outside and soft inside. It breathes, so it doesn't allow condensation to build up on the gun during the heating/cooling cycles of the day (which protects from corrosion in both gun and ammunition), the seams can be repaired on the road with anything from fishing line to shoelaces and a swiss army knife. Leather also dampens vibration, and a suede interior provides grip at low velocities and smooth glide at high velocities—your gun won't jostle out of its place when you walk, but it will draw smooth. Leather can be custom molded to the specific gun, giving a perfect hand-in-glove fit. A well cared-for leather holster will easily last two or more lifetimes. Indeed, Civil War-era leather holsters are still common family heirlooms in old families in the southern and eastern parts of the United States.

But leather isn't the only game in town. In the last twenty years, Kevlar has come into its own as a holster material, and for good reasons: It doesn't creak, it's less visible at night (because it's not glossy), and is very cheap. However, Kevlar is soft, allows the gun to move around inside it, and doesn't grip. Also, although it does so very slowly, Kevlar does eventually wear out, and like all fabrics it's prone to unraveling if it's damaged.

Leather used to be the only acceptable material. For cost and other reasons noted, since the mid 1990s Kevlar has become very common among law enforcement at all levels, which has marketing effects among the general public, who generally figure that if it's good enough for the cops, it must be the best thing going. However, for most purposes and considerations (durability, grip, solidity, fit), leather is better suited for almost all situations, whether carrying concealed or open.

Design Characteristics



Figure 11.1: A Holster. Public domain line drawing by Pearson Scott Foresman

Holsters are a fabric or leather tube that are open at both ends. The butt end allows for drawing, and they're open at the muzzle-end so that it doesn't catch on fire if you shoot yourself in the foot.

Modern holsters are generally categorized first by where they're carried (shoulder holster, hip holster, back holster, ankle holster, etc. as covered below), their method of draw (cross-draw, direct-draw), and their intended context when it differs from a normal on-the-body walking-around carry (riding holster, car holster, etc.) or when it's built into an accessory rather than worn directly on the body (muff holster, purse holster, etc.).

A quick-draw holster, for example, covers less of the weapon than does a standard holster, and is worn or cut to an angle to facilitate fast draw times (“fast” being tenths of a second faster than “normal”—in a gunfight, even a very slight edge can mean the difference between life and death). This speed, though, comes with some drawbacks. Reduced coverage of the weapon means that the holster won't grip as well, so the gun might slide out if you sit wrong or if the leather isn't properly cured.

Here's how to properly cure a holster:

- Unload your gun
- Remove the grips
- Thoroughly coat every square centimeter inside and out with a thick layer of [cosmoline](#) (a grease similar to petroleum jelly, but without detergents or other additives)
- Take the holster, rub it down with [neatsfoot oil](#). Enzymes in this particular oil will digest the leather. When the leather softens to the consistency of *al dente* pasta, put the cosmoline gun into the slimy holster. Carefully mold the holster around the gun, then press the whole mess against your body where you intend to wear it until you achieve a good fit.
- Once the molding is done, throw gun and holster (still wedded to one another) into a well-used

horse trough for seven days.

- Important: Don't clean the trough. The saliva, algae, and fungi are what are doing the curing work.
- Remove the weapon and holster from the trough.
- Let them dry for several days. Do not separate them.
- Remove the gun and clean it thoroughly.
- When the holster is completely dry, take some rough-grade sandpaper and re-rough the inside.
- Polish the outside with glove oil and/or a wax-based shoe polish.
- You now have a holster as firm and strong as mild steel.

A holster so conditioned will never bind, never drop the gun or pop it out, or otherwise foul. An open holster that hasn't been so cured is prone to dropping its weapon unless secured by a thumb strap or a flap. Modern industrial leather curing and molding techniques seek, with varying degrees of success, to replicate this tried-and-true cowboy practice.

Regular modern holsters come both with and without thumb straps, which wrap around the butt of the weapon and snap in place to keep the weapon from jostling loose. Open-carry holsters, particularly those worn by cops, almost always include safety straps—both to retain the weapon through a variety of moving and sitting postures and to make it more difficult for another person to draw the weapon from the wearer's belt. Concealed-carry holsters only sometimes include straps—with concealed carry, the risk of another person drawing your weapon is small, but in some carry positions, such as shoulder carry, the loss of the weapon is a risk. As such, straps are uncommon in concealed holsters worn on the belt, and are more common on Kevlar than they are on leather, since properly-cured leather grips very well and Kevlar does not.

Thumb straps are unpopular with combat shooters, due to the risk that they might snag the gun on draw (a common hazard).

Some other common holster types:

Riding holster: Ubiquitous from the early nineteenth century until the end of World War 2, these sported a full flap that covered the butt of the gun, which both retained the weapon and protected it from dust and mud. They also featured leg lanyards for securing the holster to the leg to prevent the draw from binding. This also prevented bruising while riding a horse or a motorcycle.

Cowboys and soldiers had other solutions to the bruising problem: sometimes they'd have a hook on the saddle to secure the holster to, and sometimes they'd undo the lanyard and swing the gun across their lap. Both of these prevented accidental discharge that killed the horse or damaged the motorcycle. Another common solution for this problem was to carry a belt-mounted cross-draw instead of a traditional long-drop hip-mounted holster. Either way, most holsters (with the exception of trick-shot quick-draw, and shoulder holsters) before the 1920s sported full flaps.

Driving holster: open-carry holsters with a long drop. These allow the weapon to be worn lower on the thigh to facilitate draw from a seated position in a car. These frequently employ thumb straps.

Pocket holster: Wearing a gun in a pocket is a recipe for disaster on the draw, unless you've got one of these. They generally take up the whole pocket.

Fixed holster: Anything from a traditional holster that's screwed to a fixed surface to clamps to hold a weapon in place, fixed holsters can be found around shotguns in the front of police cars or under counters in convenience stores. The important part of the engineering for a fixed holster are the anchor points, and these same tricks are used when building holsters into purses, brief cases, and other luggage.

Trick Holsters

Human ingenuity doesn't stand still. Trick holsters have been around almost as long as holsters themselves. They consist of traditional holsters with unique designs or materials, and active mechanical devices.

In the former category, there are two common types:

Teflon-lined holsters have been marketed for quick-draw purposes from time to time (due to their poor grip, they are useful in quick-draw competitions, but not in combat).

Home-modified quick-draw holsters are popular among some competition shooters. These are generally regular holsters modified with an X-acto-knife to shave a few seconds off the draw time, or with steel inserts for added rigidity, and other things like that. The best way to learn about these is to hang around gun shows and talk to hobbyists.

In the other category, several forms of active-mechanism holsters have been invented throughout the years. Spring mounted armband holsters, controlled by the forearm muscle, were once popular among gamblers for carrying anything from a derringer to a .38 snub (the size of the gun depends on the size of the forearm on which it is concealed).

More recently, clamshell “safety” holsters have been heavily marketed to law enforcement and private security firms.

A clamshell is a plastic hard-shell that springs open with the press of a button. Once open, the gun is pulled out and up to draw it. It's sold as being safe, since it's immune to quick-draw by people other than the wearer (thus preventing your weapon from being used against you) and immune to the gun dropping out of the holster, even if you're being held upside down by your ankles from the ledge of a building.

Unfortunately, “safety” is one thing these things don't deliver, for a few reasons.

First, in order to open the clamshell and draw the gun, you must press a button *inside the trigger guard*, which encourages drawing a weapon with the weapon's weight on the trigger. Goodbye, toes.

Second, it requires fine motor muscles to operate. In a combat situation, as the adrenaline ramps up, fine motor skills are the first thing to go. Fumbling with a lock is not a good way to ensure survival in a gun fight.

Third, if you manage to get it open despite the adrenaline, and not shoot your toes off on the draw, you're still screwed. The clamshell opens outwards, making your body profile several inches wider than you're used to. Forget about moving around in tight quarters and tense situations; you'll catch your hip-mounted temporary wing on something. This kind of distraction is not on anyone's list of “must haves” during a fight.

Fourth, these things are bulky. They will catch on your steering wheel as you climb or dive out of the car. And, even assuming everything goes well under fire and you manage by some miracle to get out of the car, open the clamshell, retrieve your gun, and close the device successfully so you can move around, you can forget ducking, rolling, and crawling with a large cumbersome chunk of plastic tied to your hip. And if, heaven forbid, you trip and fall on it, you're looking at a bad bruise and a charlie horse at best, or a fractured hip at worst.

Finally—a problem common to all active-mechanism carry devices—it contains moving parts. Moving parts break, wear out, and foul due to contamination. Having your release catch fail on you when you're attempting to draw under fire is a quick way to nominate yourself for a Darwin Award.

So, if you've got a character using one of these gadgets, don't neglect the comic and dramatic potential inherent in them. Having a device fail when the hero needs it most is a time-honored tradition, and anything that makes the simple act of drawing a weapon into a complex mechanical operation is prime fodder for this convention.

This principle goes double for clamshells that are electrically operated (and thus also vulnerable to battery run-down and EMP), and for other boneheaded ideas sometimes added on to guns and holsters, such as thumbprint readers for your holster and grip biometrics for your handgun (i.e. a signature gun).

The appeal of such devices—that they prevent anyone but the authorized user from grabbing or firing it—is obvious. Less obvious, particularly from the advertisements, are the safety and dependability problems they create.

To be safe and effective, a handgun (and its accessories) must function with 100% reliability. Normal wear and tear, poor maintenance, and user error already make them dangerous enough. Do you really want to introduce more points of failure? More to the point, who *really* wants a weapons system that is as (un)reliable as a cell phone?

The Geography of Concealment

Guns are carried either direct-draw fashion (on the same side of the body as the dominant hand), or cross-draw fashion (carried, like a sword, on the opposite side of the body from the dominant hand). All other things being equal, a weapon draws faster from a direct-draw holster than a cross-draw. However, things are not always equal.

There are six basic concealment positions on an adult human wearing contemporary Western clothing common to both sexes (shirt, long pants, and an overshirt or jacket) where a weapon will hide from view but remain quickly accessible. They are:

Under each arm: Underarm carry is always cross-draw. Most frequently, underarm carry is done with the use of harness holsters—less frequently, they are built into suspenders or into jackets. Ergonomic considerations are dictated by individual body shape and the style of clothing—under a tailored double-breasted suit, the weapon is often worn right up in the armpit, while under a bomber jacket or a sportcoat it's worn lower down to take advantage of fabric that falls free as the body tapers inward.

Guns in underarm holsters can hang right side-up, with the barrel pointed back or down, or they can hang upside down. Generally speaking, heavier guns are worn the former way, and only lighter guns are worn in the latter fashion. Upside-down carry is very unusual, and is often considered quirky. It is unpopular due to the very real danger of shooting oneself in the armpit—a potentially lethal wound due to the arteries running through the area—when drawing your weapon in a panic. See the film *Bullit* for an example of an upside-down carry in action.

Underarm weapons are subject to corrosion from the salts in sweat, so stainless steel or non-ferrous weapons (polymer, aluminum, and magnesium construction) are preferred for underarm carry. Because of the rubbing and potential bruising underarm carry subjects its users to, thin-profile weapons are far preferable to bulky weapons. The harness-nature of most underarm holsters means they can comfortably (and invisibly) support heavier weapons than some other carry options.

On the hip: Worn on the waistband, this is only a concealed position if worn with a sufficiently long coat or overshirt. This position is not good for effective concealment—it's too easy to accidentally flash your weapon when adjusting your clothing, but it is good for “casual concealment” by those expected to carry weapons who nonetheless don't wish to display. Plainclothes (but not undercover) cops and private security are the most likely people to carry in this fashion. Hip-carried weapons can be mounted either direct-draw or cross-draw.

The small of the back: The small of the back is a natural depression that all but the most skin-hugging clothes leave concealed. When carried here, a weapon is placed muzzle-down at the tail bone with the butt pointing away from the dominant hand. To draw, reach behind as if you were going to press your palm to your lower back, grasp the grip, and pull the weapon up to clear the holster and around the body. This carry position is the only concealed quick-draw option for jeans and a t-shirt (though the t-shirt needs to be long and carried un-tucked). Because of the awkward draw angle, it's important to use a very good holster and a weapon with low-profile, ramped sites when carrying here. Due to the fact that the weapon can make noise when sitting in plastic, metal, or wooden chairs, a holster with extra padding (fleece is common) should be selected to protect the wearer from detection.

Short barrels are the order of the day for this carry position—anything over five inches is impractical even on a tall, long-torso'd man. Under four inches is preferable.

Some police departments disallow carry at this position, due to the safety risk—if the wearer falls backwards and lands on the weapon, spinal injury, hip fracture, and paralysis can result. People who wear weapons in this position should regularly practice their falling and tumbling techniques to protect the weapon and their tail bone.

Weapons carried on the waist (either on the hip or in the small of the back) can be worn either inside or outside the waistband, and need to be light enough that they don't pull the pants down or make them sag visibly. Belts are *de rigueur* for waistband carry.

The groin: When in a holster worn as a codpiece, this position is a fast draw when worn under a long shirt. Wearing a gun here without a codpiece-style holster carries the risk of self-castration.

Strapped to the outside of each ankle: This is the most common location for a backup weapon. Compact automatics and snub-nosed revolvers are preferred for this position, as the weapon needs to be small enough for the shooter to lift the leg cuff on his pants, unstrap, and draw the weapon in under half a second.

Additional Places to Conceal on a Woman

Those are all carry positions available to both men and women in contemporary clothing, but different eras have different fashions in clothing, providing extra options for concealment of full-sized through subcompact and snub-nosed weapons. Regardless of era, assuming your characters aren't in a tribal situation or a nudist camp, women are going to have a few more options for concealment than men.

The most obvious, for a woman with large enough breasts, is in the bra. A well-padded bra will conceal a multitude of ballistic sins—a bra with falsies, even moreso, as the gun can be tucked between the falsie and the breast. A woman with a mastectomy is in an even better position, as her artificial breast(s) are already heavy and closed compartments. If she hollows one out and conceals a snub-nosed revolver inside she can make it past even a strip-search. The underwire in the bra provides an excuse for the metal detector that will stand up to a wand-sweep, and if the false breasts are made of material of the proper x-band density, they can fool a backscatter x-ray (the sorts of full-body scanners used in airports).

Additionally, holsters are on the market that secure to the underwire of the bra cups to dangle a subcompact or snubbie between the breasts or just beneath them, taking advantage of the natural billowing of even fairly tight clothing. Drawing a weapon so concealed is an undignified affair, but it makes a great place for a backup weapon or for female cops doing undercover work.

Women can also take advantage of purses, handbags, and (in the proper eras and situations) muffs and hand warmers. To insure a clean draw, the accessory will need to be specially modified for stiffness and sound insulation (usually by building a holster into the structure of the purse or muff).

On the thighs under skirts—with access provided by false pockets—and under aprons are also good concealment options for women in dresses. The only thing men have that's comparable are thigh-strapped holsters in kilts, should you have a character ballsy enough to wear a kilt in public (now much more common than it used to be, but still pretty unusual).

Unconventional Carries

Shoulder holsters, small-of-the-back belt holsters, and ankle holsters are the most popular, but there are any number of places to effectively conceal a weapon.

Some unusual things we have personally seen:

Guns in false hunchbacks, pregnancy pillows, high-top sneakers, padded-butt pantyhose and

girdles, under the hip wings of corsets, in the boning of corsets, codpieces, under wigs, inside bras (covered earlier).

Loved by writers but totally impractical for concealment are a high-back holsters, clip-on belt holsters (the holster comes with them on the draw unless you grab it *just* right, which you never do in a fight), fabric pockets (the gun gets snagged—this only works if you shoot through the pocket or if you've prepped the pocket with special lining or a pocket holster), sweat pants (even the smallest snubbie weighs upwards of a pound, and will pull your pants down). Only in the movies can a woman reach into her purse in a gunfight and pull out *only* the gun (unless she's got a specially modified purse with a built-in holster). If you're a woman and don't believe us, think about the last time you had to get your keys out in an emergency.

A writer interested in how many ways and places people chose to hide firearms should look in the back of *Guns and Ammo* for “custom holster” advertisements. If there's a part of the body you've got, there's someone out there who's figured out how to hide a handgun on, under, behind, or inside it.

How To Spot a Carry

In the film version of *The Bourne Identity*, Jason Bourne's suspicion that he's more than just an ordinary guy are aroused by, among other things, the fact that he can tell who of the people around him is carrying a weapon. The scene, though highly glamorized, illustrates an observation technique called *threat assessment*.

Most law enforcement people are formally trained in threat assessment—the training is also available to private security and government personnel in quasi-enforcement positions, but is not often taken advantage of. People who live under constant threat in high crime areas or war zones often develop many threat assessment skills as a byproduct of surviving.

Many of these cues are behavioral, and subtle. People's eyelines, the way they sit, their situational awareness, the way they handle personal space and react to invasions, and the way they walk are all cues to how dangerous they might be (there are dozens of other subtle cues as well).

An experienced eye can often spot a carry by one or more tell-tales.

Clothing Ride: The easiest is to watch the way the clothing rides in the typical concealment locations. Over an underarm holster, fabric might bulge or catch in an unusual way. The wearer might keep her coat or jacket half-buttoned or zipped even when style or comfort would dictate wearing it open. On bending over, the weapon might flash through a carelessly unbuttoned lapel that billows just the right way. Over the shoulders, particularly on men, you can sometimes spot what look like bra strap lines from the holster harness. When you can't spot it, you can feel it by touch, just by patting the wearer on the shoulder.

On a waist holster worn under an overshirt, seater, or t-shirt, the fabric will tend to ride up and bunch on top of the weapon when the wearer stands up after sitting down, particularly if the wearer is in low-rise jeans. To compensate for this, the wearer will habitually perform what Trekkies call “The Picard Maneuver,” unconsciously tugging at the fringe of the garment and pulling it down. If the weapon is being carried on the hip, rather than at the small of the back, the wearer interested in remaining concealed will habitually clutch his loose-fitting overshirt or jacket together in front of him, even when temperature or modesty renders such behavior inappropriate.

People wearing a weapon on the upper body will often wear jackets in weather that's slightly too warm for it, though they might vary the jacket's weight with the weather to keep themselves as comfortable as possible.

For ankle holsters, watch the swish of the pant leg cuff around the shoe—particularly, check for differences in the ways the material moves on both legs against each other. If the gait is even, but the fabric flow is not, it's a good tell that there's something concealed beneath.

Of course, a well-concealed weapon (i.e. one using a proper holster and support) is harder to spot than one that's simply carried in the pockets or shoved in the waistband (or under the belt).

Purse Weight: Purses, hand muffs, clutches, camera bags, and other such carry-luggage can give themselves away by heft and motion. Carrying one of these items with a built-in holster is an exercise in ballet—one must learn how to move with the item to minimize swinging, jangling, and other moves that will give away that the item weighs far more than it's supposed to.

Posture: The weight of a weapon affects the posture of the person carrying it—and the greater the weight of the weapon, the more effect it'll have on the posture and movement of the carrier. A handgun carried in the small of the back will affect how the wearer sits—they'll tend to sit forward at the edge of a seat to avoid the discomfort of putting their weight on a big, solid piece of metal.

Bearing: Carrying a weapon can have a couple typical effects on a person's bearing. An inexperienced civilian carrier may appear agitated, cagey, or shifty. An inexperienced criminal looking to make his bones might conceal the weapon, but he will do everything he can with his body language to give the impression that he's carrying and not afraid to use what he's got. An experienced criminal will play the same telegraphing game, but in a subtler, more aloof fashion. However, bearing assessment is more properly a subset of threat assessment than it is a specific weapon-spotting technique.

Smell: When in doubt, sniff. Guns have two distinct sets of odors. Hoppe's No. 9 Solvent is the most distinctive. While not the only gun cleaner, it is the most popular, and it has a distinct cedar-banana smell familiar to almost anyone accustomed to being around firearms. It's used to remove powder, rust, and metal residue from a weapon before lubrication. Many shooters are not diligent about wiping all the solvent off the weapon before lubricating it, so the smell lingers and can hang around a weapon for days—or, if the weapon is stored in a grease rag when not in use, months. Nothing else in the world smells like Hoppe's, and a whiff of it in a coffee shop will stand a cop's hair up on end.

The other distinctive smell that wafts from a weapon is powder residue. A sharp, metallic smell, it's part cordite, part hot steel, and part lead. Like Hoppe's, it's a distinct smell, almost impossible to mistake for anything else. If your character's fired a weapon but hasn't cleaned it yet, and is carrying it on him, he's in danger of failing the sniff test. If he's a PI or someone who's got good presence of mind, and who has reason not to want to be connected to the shooting, he'll try to avoid standing within ten feet of a cop until he's had a chance to clean the weapon.

Pat-Downs, and How to Fool Them

The idea behind frisking is to quickly check, by touch, all the places on a body for weapons. Should be easy, right?

Not so much. Pat-downs are not easy to administer, and they can be fooled. A police officer administering one must do it while maintaining control of the suspect, and his attention is necessarily divided. This makes the officer nervous, and vulnerable, and some officers—particularly inexperienced ones—are prone to rush the procedure at the risk of their own life. The safest way for a cop (and a subject) to conduct a pat-down is in the presence of another person who the cop doesn't consider a threat. A frisking that isn't rushed is far less likely to miss anything obvious.

A thorough pat-down will cover the arms, inside and outside, the underarms, the waist, the chest (including beneath the breasts on a woman, well-endowed women can hide derringers sandwiched between the undersides of their breasts and their rib cage), between the breasts and along the bra straps on women, the hips, the small of the back, the undersides of the butt, the genitals, between the butt cheeks, the inner thighs up to the crotch, and down the full length of each leg to the ankle.

However, it is possible to defeat even a good (non-strip) body search by taking advantage of three basic aspects of psychology:

Homophobia: People subject to searches by members of the same sex will often not be subjected to

searches as thorough as they might be. Male officers often shy away from checking under the butt cheeks and high on the inner thigh of male suspects, and they will almost never check the genitals or in other sensitive areas. Female officers similarly will often fail to check crotch, or to give the butt more than a very cursory examination. Thus, for men, a gun may be stuffed between the butt cheeks in an emergency, assuming that the weapon is small enough to fit. For women, the same trick can work, as can concealing a small weapon between skin and a maxi pad, or inside a heavily-padded bra, or beneath butt padding in padded pantyhose.

Fear of Sexual Harassment Charges: This one is less reliable, as cross-gender searches can also go the other way due to the authority figure taking sexual advantage of an opposite-sex subject, but assuming you've got a cop who's concerned about his reputation (or under the watchful eye of a partner) and he senses that the subject might file a complaint or otherwise cause trouble, he might shy away from the more invasive parts of a pat-down.

Fear of Embarrassment: This one is also highly dependent upon the cop, and is more likely with rent-a-cops or civilians who haven't had the training to desensitize them. That said, an untrained frisker who finds the subject either attractive or intimidating will often shy away from sensitive and sexually loaded parts of the body.

Disgust: People pretty reliably don't like excreta. Hiding a gun inside a full colostomy bag (or behind one that's taped to the skin) or an adult diaper is, therefore, a fairly safe bet.

Because of these psychological quirks, most frisks given by most law enforcement officers are less than thorough and can thus sometimes be defeated if, and only if, the subject is not behaving in a way that sets off an officer's behavioral radar.

It goes without saying that most of the concealment locations that can defeat a frisk do not leave one with a readily accessible weapon—these are the kinds of things your characters would only use to smuggle a weapon or as an emergency ditch if they're about to get caught by the cops.

Imagine someone getting caught in a gunfight and having to dive into their diaper or butt crack to fumble for a weapon and defend themselves. There is something to be said for physical comedy, after all.

Non-body Concealment

In *The Big Sleep*, Philip Marlowe didn't like carrying a gun—he didn't like being left helpless if someone were to take it from him and turn it on him—but he knew that in his line of work, he sometimes needed ready access to one. So, he kept a couple guns stashed under the dash in his car, clipped to a spring-loaded panel that would swing down when he fiddled with the cigarette lighter.

Sometimes, your characters will want to have a weapon near to hand without keeping it on their body. Perhaps they're running a business where they expect robbery, or they're drug runners who keep weapons in the car in case of interception, or they're homeowners in a bad neighborhood.

Pretty much anywhere can work for non-body concealment, so long as it's non-obvious, non-dangerous, and quickly accessible. The latter is the place where most people fall down in real life, storing weapons in places they'd never be able to get to in an emergency—and they don't drill going for it, so when the panic sets in, they may as well be unarmed, but because they're thinking they've only got to get to the weapon and they'll be okay, they're more likely to do something stupid in a standoff that can get them killed.

If you've got a smart character keeping weapons hidden away in a ready-to-hand hide, think about the geography your character is hiding weapons in, and think about having them hide more than one.

Legal Considerations

The laws surrounding the carrying of a weapon on the person and in a car vary wildly from country-to-country and state-to-state. The laws governing the jurisdiction where your story is set will influence the way your gun-toting characters behave, be they cops, criminals, or civilians who find themselves in a tough spot. In some places, open carry is legal while concealed carry is illegal or requires a permit. In others, the opposite is true. In some places, only certain kinds of weapons may be carried, while in others there is no restriction at all—and each of these either/or statements carries within them a broad gradient between with every possible point occupied by one location or another in the world.

The best way to learn the law around guns for the jurisdiction where you're setting your story is to look for quickie references in gun stores and at gun ranges (for locations in your country, if your country allows gun stores and ranges), or to call the local embassy of the country where you're setting your story (for foreign countries) and ask for a good reference on weapons laws in their country.

Do not rely on word of mouth, even if that word comes from a cop. Cops, just like civilians, often do not know the finer points of the laws they are meant to enforce—that's one of the reasons that police departments have lawyers, just like everybody else. Industrial and post-industrial societies have far more laws than any one person can hope to comprehend. When in doubt, trust a source you can cite—at least then you'll be able to defend yourself if you're on a panel or on tour and a fan takes you to task for getting something wrong.

The Art of Concealment

Despite its technical considerations, concealment is an applied social science, and can get as counter-intuitive as you care to imagine. It relies on many of the same perceptual and social trickery you already employ as a writer, that stage magicians employ against their audiences, and that special effects artists and con artists use to make their living.

During the 1990s, there was a large fundraiser in San Francisco for the Mayor and the then-Governor of California. A friend of ours, a middle-aged woman with a taste for herbs of questionable legality, was working setup. As part of the standard security procedures, SFPD brought in bomb-sniffing dogs to give the place a once-over. One of the dogs took an active interest in our friend's pocket.

She immediately knelt and started petting the dog, speaking nicely to it, roughing its ears, and playing with it as if it were a long lost puppy. He was a good dog—he must smell her cats, and wasn't he a curious fellow?

The dog's handler watched this interaction for a moment, then decided that our friend was not a threat, and moved the dog along. He didn't discover the joints in her pocket, didn't find out whether she was holding drugs or packing a gun, but it didn't matter. He knew what to look for, and she knew what he was looking for, and they negotiated a silent truce.

This is how successful criminals operate.

The most effective method of concealing a weapon is to appear unworthy of the time it would take to arrest you. It's not really up to a cop's macho standards to arrest a grandmother, or to hassle a paraplegic, or to offend a man in an expensive suit—that much everyone knows, which is why comedians make fun of TSA agents for...well, everything.

All security assessment is ultimately human assessment—the cop is sizing up whether the person they're about to hassle might be a problem if they're not accosted, or if they might fight back, and whether they might fight back with a weapon or just with fists. This is why an experienced cop can walk into a bar and tell you within about forty-five seconds who is carrying a weapon, which armed people are worth worrying about, and which unarmed people are more dangerous than that biker at the

back with a .357 in his belt.

Failure to accurately make this assessment is what keeps young cops from becoming old cops.

Contrary to popular fantasy (often called “policy”), there is no way to systematize this process. Removing the discretion of individuals from security situations (i.e. “doing everything by the book”) is the direct cause of the kinds of travesties we hear about on the news surrounding certain airline security issues. Issues like that are the inevitable result of removing individual judgment and authority from street-level law enforcement.

Successful cops, criminals, and private operators all learn the same basic skills for spotting a threat. To effectively conceal a weapon, your character must know those skills well enough to deflect them. When your hero goes up against an adversary (and it's not the climax), you want the adversary to be a Stormtrooper, convinced that your hero is not the droid he's looking for.