

MODUS OPERANDI

By David Lipschutz

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SYNOPSIS: As two detectives interrogate a suspect, things aren't as they seem.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 either)

DETECTIVE 1 (m/f)45-75; the “good” cop; cool and calm; a human lie detector. (31 lines)

DETECTIVE 2 (m/f)45-75; the “bad” cop; more reckless and hotheaded than Detective 1. (41 lines)

SUSPECT (m/f)25-35; easygoing; baffled as to the reason for the interrogation. (37 lines)

LAWYER (m/f)25-35; assertive; the smartest person in the room. (18 lines)

CASTING NOTE: Each character can be played by any/all/no gender(s) performers. Identifiers throughout script are set as female and she/her for DETECTIVE 1 and LAWYER and male and he/him for DETECTIVE 2 and SUSPECT, but they should be changed to reflect the performers’ genders and pronouns.

SETTING: A table and at least two chairs, representing an interrogation room.

PROPS

- Two coffee mugs
- Watch

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

Modus Operandi premiered with Kankakee Valley Theatre Association in Kankakee, IL, August 13-14, 2021. The production was directed by Paul Snyder. The cast was as follows:

DETECTIVE 1 Adam Schindler
DETECTIVE 2 Randy Fisher
SUSPECT Natalie Beckman
LAWYER Case Koerner

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AT START: *Lights up. DETECTIVE 1 is setting up a table and two chairs. DETECTIVE 2 enters, holding two mugs.*

DETECTIVE 2: *(Surveying the scene.)* Looks good.

DETECTIVE 1: Thanks.

DETECTIVE 2: This should make 'em sweat.

DETECTIVE 1: Mmhmm.

DETECTIVE 2: Oh yeah. He's sure to confess to something.

DETECTIVE 1: Good. Then I've done my job. *(Indicating the mug.)*

S'that for me? (Takes mug from DETECTIVE 2, is about to take a sip, then.) This the way I like it?

DETECTIVE 2: I think I know it by now after all these years.

Tablespoon of cream, two cubes, and just a pinch of cinnamon.

DETECTIVE 1: *(Taking a sip.)* Mmm. Just the way I like it.

DETECTIVE 2 stares at DETECTIVE 1 while DETECTIVE 1 is lost in the coffee. After a beat, DETECTIVE 1 notices.

DETECTIVE 1: W-what?

DETECTIVE 2: We uh, doing this?

DETECTIVE 1: *(Almost spilling drink.)* Oh. Oh! Right right. Here. Take this. *(About to hand mug then stops.)* Wait. *(Takes one more sip, smiles to self.)* Okay. I'm ready. Go ahead and bring in the suspect.

DETECTIVE 1 hands mug to DETECTIVE 2. DETECTIVE 2 exits with both mugs. After he exits, DETECTIVE 1 surveys the scene, maybe moves one chair slightly, adjusts the table a little, etc. Once she is done futzing, she leans on table; then thinks it might not be a tough looking position, so she stands, arms akimbo; then thinks that might not be tough enough either, so she crosses arms and walks behind chairs. SUSPECT enters, followed by DETECTIVE 2.

SUSPECT: *(As he enters.)* Oh I haven't been in this room yet. What's the uh—*(Stops talking as he turns around to see DETECTIVE 2 is within his personal bubble.)* Whoa.

DETECTIVE 1: *(Cooly.)* How 'bout ya take a seat?

SUSPECT: Sorry?

DETECTIVE 2: *(More direct.)* She said. Take. A seat.

SUSPECT: Ohhkay.

SUSPECT sits in chair DETECTIVE 1 indicated.

DETECTIVE 1: You know why we brought you in here?

SUSPECT: No, I—

DETECTIVE 2: *(Interrupting; slightly aggressive but with a bit of ham.)*

That's "No, ma'am," ya punk.

SUSPECT: Oh. Uh, no, uh, no ma'am.

DETECTIVE 2: That's better.

DETECTIVE 1: We know what you did. So how about you come right out and tell us?

SUSPECT: I-I didn't do nothing.

DETECTIVE 2: You didn't do nothing? Double negative huh? So you did do somethin'?

SUSPECT: No! I didn't do... anything!

DETECTIVE 1: C'mon. Just tell us. It'll make things go a lot easier for ya.

SUSPECT: What's this all about? What are you accusing me of??

DETECTIVE 2: Oh wouldn't you like to know!

SUSPECT: Y-yea. Yes I would. What'd I do?

DETECTIVE 1: Listen kid. We ask the questions here.

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 stare at SUSPECT. After a beat, SUSPECT laughs out of discomfort/awkwardness.

DETECTIVE 2: S'somethin' funny? Are we amusing you?

SUSPECT: No, I—

DETECTIVE 2: *(Interrupting; unnecessarily aggressive.)* You better wipe that smirk off your face before we wipe it off for you.

DETECTIVE 1: Hey hey. Let's just take a calming step back.

SUSPECT: Chyeah. Take a chill pill, man.

DETECTIVE 2: *(Walking to DETECTIVE 1; quietly as an aside.)* 'I go too far?

DETECTIVE 1: *(To DETECTIVE 2; smiling.)* Just a little.

DETECTIVE 2: *(Realizing he went too far.)* You're right. Lost my cool there for a minute. I am getting too old for this—

DETECTIVE 1: *(Interrupting.)* Shh. Don't say that. You're doing great.

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DETECTIVE 2: I am?

DETECTIVE 1: Yeah. Hey. You know you're number one in my book.

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 stare lovingly at each other. SUSPECT watches them in muted confusion. Then, SUSPECT unexpectedly sneezes.

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2: *(Simultaneously. Snapping out of gaze.)* Bless you.

SUSPECT: Th-thanks?

DETECTIVE 2: Okay, punk, we have some questions for ya.

DETECTIVE 1: Yes we do.

DETECTIVE 2: And you better answer truthfully. Cuz my partner here is known as the "human lie detector."

DETECTIVE 1: *(Cracking knuckles and neck.)* The human lie detector.

DETECTIVE 2: So if you'd kindly put out your arm and let my colleague do her thing.

SUSPECT: I. *(Reluctantly, then gives in.)* O-okay.

SUSPECT stretches arm on table. DETECTIVE 1 leans on table or sits next to SUSPECT. DETECTIVE 1 then looks at watch as she puts her fingers on SUSPECT'S wrist to check his heart rate.

DETECTIVE 2: *(To DETECTIVE 1.)* You ready?

SUSPECT: *(Simultaneously with DETECTIVE 1.)* No.

DETECTIVE 1: *(Simultaneously with SUSPECT.)* Yes.

DETECTIVE 2: Okay. Question 1. How many partners have you ever been intimate with?

SUSPECT freaks out and pushes DETECTIVE 1 off his arm.

SUSPECT: What? Whoa whoa whoa! What kind of question is that?

DETECTIVE 1 crosses to DETECTIVE 2 where they stand together.

DETECTIVE 1: *(To DETECTIVE 2.)* Does it look like he's sweating to you?

DETECTIVE 2: Oh yes. He is definitely sweating. How about you
(*Overenunciated.*) “take a chill pill” punk?

DETECTIVE 1: You got somethin’ to feel nervous about?

SUSPECT: Yeah. I mean, no. I mean, I don’t know!

DETECTIVE 1: (*Walking towards SUSPECT.*) This all seems pretty
clear to me. I—

DETECTIVE 1 is interrupted by a buzzer SFX.

DETECTIVE 1: Well well. Looks like you’ve been saved by the bell.
We’ll be right back.

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 exit, leaving SUSPECT alone on stage. He stares dumbfounded at door, then surveys the room, looking under the table. He then makes a decision to get up and leave. As he reaches the door/exit, DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 re-enter. They are followed by LAWYER.

SUSPECT: (*Seeing LAWYER.*) Oh thank goodness. They locked me
in here and were being like not cool, and I didn’t do noth... anything.

LAWYER: (*Looking at DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2.*) Is this true?
Were you communicating with my client without counsel present?

SUSPECT looks on in muted confusion.

DETECTIVE 1: Hey. He came in here voluntarily.

DETECTIVE 2: And he was free to leave whenever he wanted.

LAWYER: Well, I’m here now. So. You can go.

DETECTIVE 2: (*To DETECTIVE 1.*) I don’t like it. Somethin’ fishy’s
going on.

LAWYER: Oh is there? Remember the Cal Wilkington case? You
boffed that one up pretty bad, didn’t ya?

DETECTIVE 1: (*To DETECTIVE 2.*) Come on, big guy. Let’s give these
two some “privacy.”

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 exit. LAWYER and SUSPECT watch them leave. Once they have left...

SUSPECT: I think I'm wiggin' out. What on Earth is going on?

LAWYER: Don't worry. I've been through the same song and dance with ol' Sherlock and Watson there many times before.

SUSPECT: But I. I'm... innocent!

LAWYER: Then it sounds like we have nothing to worry about!

SUSPECT: But—

LAWYER: *(Interrupting.)* C'mon. Let's just rip the band-aid off; get through these questions so you can be home in time for supper.

SUSPECT: I. Uh. *(Defeated.)* Sure. Fine, I guess.

LAWYER: *(Walking to exit and shouting out.)* Okay. We're ready for you.

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 re-enter.

DETECTIVE 2: May we continue with our questions now, sweetheart?

LAWYER: Yes. *(Pause; quietly as an aside.)* And sweetheart? Really?

DETECTIVE 2 gives what looks like an "oops" face and then an apologetic look to LAWYER. Meanwhile, DETECTIVE 1 goes to SUSPECT and puts fingers on SUSPECT'S wrist.

LAWYER: Excuse me. Do not put your hands on my client.

DETECTIVE 1: But I—

LAWYER: *(Interrupting.)* Cal Wilkington?

DETECTIVE 1: Okay. We'll play it your way. All I need are my eyes to catch someone in a lie anyway.

DETECTIVE 2: First question. Do you have a job?

SUSPECT: *(Looks at LAWYER.)* I...

LAWYER: *(Coaxing.)* It's okay. You can answer.

SUSPECT: Yes. I have a job.

DETECTIVE 2 looks at DETECTIVE 1, who nods that it is the truth.

DETECTIVE 2: Question 2. Do you cook meals?

SUSPECT: I mean. Sometimes?

DETECTIVE 2: Do you have a clean home?

SUSPECT: I-I think it's clean.

DETECTIVE 2: You think?

SUSPECT: I dunno. I vacuum and dust once a week and make sure to wash the dishes and not leave clothes out. So, yeah, yes. It's funky fresh.

DETECTIVE 2: (*Judgmental.*) Funky fresh?

SUSPECT: It's clean, dude.

DETECTIVE 2: Hmm. Moving on. What is your religion?

LAWYER: (*Makes loud fake cough sound.*) Are we really going there?

DETECTIVE 2: What? It's a simple question!

LAWYER: And I will just say in response: Cal. Wilk. Ing. Ton.

DETECTIVE 2 crosses to DETECTIVE 1. They confer silently then DETECTIVE 2 returns to SUSPECT.

DETECTIVE 2: Do you love our daughter?

SUSPECT: Yes.

DETECTIVE 2: Does the world revolve around her?

SUSPECT: Totally.

DETECTIVE 2: Will you ever do anything to hurt her?

SUSPECT: No way.

DETECTIVE 2: Do you want to be a part of her life? Through thick and through thin? In sickness and in health?

SUSPECT: Absolutely.

DETECTIVE 2: Til death do you part?

SUSPECT: I do.

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 stare at each other. Together, they run and hug SUSPECT and LAWYER.

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2: (*Simultaneously.*) Welcome to the family!

DETECTIVE 1: I knew he could do it.

DETECTIVE 2: I was unsure there for a bit.

LAWYER: Mom, Dad, you two are so ridiculous!

SUSPECT: Wait. What's going on?

LAWYER: You passed the test!

SUSPECT: I did?

LAWYER: Yup. And you're the first one to do so!

DETECTIVE 2: Oh boy, you should have seen what we did to that Cal
Wilkinson kid.

DETECTIVE 1: What a punk he was.

SUSPECT: I don't know what to say.

LAWYER: Sorry if it's a bit jarring. My parents are pretty traditional in
that way.

SUSPECT: Traditional is one word.

DETECTIVE 1: Oh it's all in good fun.

DETECTIVE 2: But we hope we didn't scare you too much.

SUSPECT: No, I. This was... *(Brief pause, then smiles and laughs.)*
awesome! Bonkers but awesome.

They all laugh. As laughter dies down...

LAWYER: So. When do I get to meet your parents?

Lights down.

THE END