

# DORM DETECTIVE

Version 1.1

Dorm detective is a short two-player roleplaying game designed to introduce new players to the hobby. It is designed to play in 10-30 minutes from start to finish.

The player plays a student paying for their schooling in part by working as a private eye for their richer classmates.

The game is card-based so the players can always see what their characters can do and how the fiction will be affected.

To get started, print these sheets on thick cardstock. If you want to be fancy, print the first two sheets on one color of cardstock, and the last two sheets on a different color, so that the detective cards and the GM cards are readily distinguishable. Be sure to print 2-sided, flipping on the short edge. Then cut the cards and grab 3 six-sided dice.

Before play, you, the GM, will need to have read all the cards. As you'll see, you'll need to do a small amount of prep in the form of daydreaming about the possibilities of the case.

## How to Play

To play, divide the cards, so the GM has their cards and the player has theirs.

Let the player read their Information cards or summarize the information for them, or both.

Both players should put their Move cards on the table before them.

The detective's Advantage cards make up their "hand," and the GM's Heat cards make up theirs. Begin play with all those cards in your hands. There is no deck to draw from.

Information and Tools cards can be kept in front of the players or put away, as you prefer.

You'll find everything else you need in the cards.

Detective Information Card

### Who You Are

You're playing a **college student** in the last quarter of your freshman year at a high-ranking and expensive private university.

You're here because you're smart and industrious, and because you've earned scholarships to cover the exorbitant costs.

Most of your fellow students are monied.

You've gained a reputation for being someone who can learn things and solve problems, and you have supplemented your finances by doing **private eye work**.

Detective Information Card

### The Background

Another student, **Robin**, has hired you to find out if their boyfriend, **Arturo**, is cheating on them as they suspect.

Arturo's been spending a lot of time with **Sam**, whose room is on the same floor as yours.

Robin doesn't want Arturo to know about their suspicions, so you are under strict orders to keep it low key. The extra \$200 they gave you lets you know they mean business.

Detective Information Card

### Right Now

You're heading out of your dorm room this morning after pulling an all-nighter on a paper. You plan to grab a bite before heading to your professor's office to turn the paper in before it's due (yeah, the fossil still insists on printed papers).

Arturo comes bolting out of Sam's room and makes a bee line for the stairs at the other end of the hall without even looking around.

You have a moment to act. You can catch the door before it shuts, or you can follow Arturo before he gets too great a lead.

Detective Information Card

### Your Job

Your job as a player is to play your detective as a bold, decisive student who's not afraid of getting into a tight spot. Embrace the drama and challenges facing your detective.

Say what your detective does and answer any questions the GM (the other player) asks. If you ever don't know an answer, just make something up.

Ask questions whenever you need to understand what is happening or where it's happening around your detective.

Detective Information Card

### Play

Play takes the form of a back and forth between players.

You say what your detective does and the GM says how the world and other characters react.

Both players ask and answer questions as needed to clarify what is happening.

Look at the 3 **Move** cards. Any time you describe your detective doing something that fits these actions, you'll do what the cards say.

At any time you are rolling dice, you can play one of your **Advantage** cards to gain an extra die. You can only play one card per roll of the dice.

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Detective Move Card

## Dig Up a Clue

Any time you're trying to gather information using your quick eyes and instincts, you're digging up a clue. It can mean searching a room or a backpack, but it can also mean searching someone's face or body language to understand a hidden truth.

Tell the GM what you want to find or learn and how you're going about it. Answer any followup questions the GM has.

Then turn this card over.

Detective Move Card

## Pull a Fast One

Pulling a fast one is any act of deception from the smallest lie to the most elaborate con job.

Describe the manner of your deception and what you want to convince your target of. Answer any followup questions the GM has.

Then turn this card over.

Detective Move Card

## Everything Else

When you do anything outside of digging up a clue or pulling a fast one, just describe your actions and words to the GM.

If the GM tells you, "**it's not as simple as all that,**" ask questions until you understand the complications and risks involved. You can adjust your actions if you wish until it is as simple as all that or until you and GM agree you should let the dice decide just how simple it is.

If you agree to let the dice decide, turn this card over.

Detective Advantage Card

## Hidden Talent

When you play this card, declare what your hidden talent is and how it helps you achieve your goal.

Answer any follow up questions the GM has for you.

Add a d6 to your roll, then put this card in the discard pile.

Detective Advantage Card

## A Well-Timed Distraction

When you play this card, describe a distraction in the scene that occurs either serendipitously or by your own making and how it helps you achieve your goals.

Answer any follow up questions the GM has for you.

Add a d6 to your roll, then put this card in the discard pile.

Detective Advantage Card

## Luck Favors the Bold

When you play this card, describe yourself acting ridiculously bold or brazenly dangerous, relying on good fortune and the shock of others to see you through.

Answer any follow up questions the GM has for you.

Add a d6 to your roll, then put this card in the discard pile.

Detective Advantage Card

## Don't I Know You?

When you play this card, you know someone in the scene who can help you achieve your goal. Who are they? How do you know them? Why will they help you?

Answer any follow up questions the GM has for you.

Add a d6 to your roll, then put this card in the discard pile.

Detective Advantage Card

## I've Done My Research

When you play this card, describe how your previous learning or current research has give you the information you need to help you accomplish your goal.

Answer any follow up questions the GM has for you.

Add a d6 to your roll, then put this card in the discard pile.

Detective Move Card - Back

# Dig Up a Clue

**Roll 2d6.** Every 1-3 is a miss; every 4-6 is a hit. You may play an Advantage card for an extra die.

**2+ hits.** . . . Tell the GM it's **cool**. The GM will give you a straight and full answer to what you want to know.

**1 hit.** . . . . . Tell the GM you're **feeling the heat**. The GM will play a card and describe the new situation. You'll still get a straight and full answer to your question.

**0 hits.** . . . . . Tell the GM you're **in hot water**. The GM will play a card and describe the new situation. The answer to your question, might not be so straight or full.

Detective Move Card - Back

# Pull a Fast One

**Roll 2d6.** Every 1-3 is a miss; every 4-6 is a hit. You may play an Advantage card for an extra die.

**2+ hits.** . . . Tell the GM it's **cool**; your target buys what you're selling, hook, line, and sinker.

**1 hit.** . . . . . Tell the GM you're **feeling the heat**. The GM will play a card and describe how your target is wary of your deception & the cost to you to convince them.

**0 hits.** . . . . . Tell the GM you're **in hot water**. The GM will play a card and describe how your deception is jeopardized by external forces.

Detective Move Card - Back

# Everything's Else

**Roll 1d6.** Every 1-3 is a miss; every 4-6 is a hit. You may play an Advantage card for an extra die.

**2+ hits.** . . . Tell the GM it's **cool**; it was in fact as simple as all that.

**1 hit.** . . . . . Tell the GM you're **feeling the heat**. The GM will play a card and bring the discussed complications and risks to bear.

**0 hits.** . . . . . Tell the GM you're **in hot water**. The GM will play a card and bring the discussed complications and risks to bear.

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GM Move Card

# If You Do That...

You can use this phrase at any time to offer an opportunity or to alert the detective to a possible consequence to their actions.

If they follow through, so should you.

## GM Information Card Heat Cards

Each Heat card indicates an obstacle or complication that confronts the detective.

Play these cards when the detective player tells you they are feeling the heat or are in hot water.

When you play a Heat card, put in on the table before you to remind you of the fiction you created with it. Only after you have played through all your Heat cards should you restock your hand with them.

Feeling the Heat options often put pressure at a little distance, while In Hot Water options put immediate pressure on the detectives.

GM Heat Card

### FEELING THE HEAT

You've alienated or upset a potential ally.

# Antagonism

### IN HOT WATER

You've made an enemy.

GM Heat Card

### FEELING THE HEAT

You've piqued someone's or some group's interest.

# Unwanted Attention

### IN HOT WATER

Someone you'd rather not is watching you closely with interest

GM Move Card

# It's Not as Simple as All That

You can use this phrase at any time to introduce a complication or risk to detective's actions.

The detective can adjust their actions if you wish until it is in fact as simple as all that or until you both agree to let the dice decide just how simple it is.

GM Heat Card

### FEELING THE HEAT

Without help, this will be risky or difficult. (Define the danger or possible bad outcome and see if the detective wishes to go ahead with their action).

# Help Needed

### IN HOT WATER

Without help, this will be impossible.

GM Heat Card

### FEELING THE HEAT

To do this, one of two things is going to happen. (Detail two possible less-than-ideal outcomes.)

# Tough Choice

### IN HOT WATER

To do this, one of two things is going to happen. (Detail two possible unpleasant outcomes.)

GM Heat Card

### FEELING THE HEAT

Something is temporarily lost or impermanently damaged (item, reputation, relationship, physical/emotional health, &c)

# It's Gonna Cost You

### IN HOT WATER

Something is permantely lost or damaged (item, reputation, relationship, physical/emotional health, &c)

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GM Information Card

## Your Job

Play the world and its inhabitants reacting to the detective.

Put the detective in position to make decisions in pursuit of their goal.

Ask and answer questions that clarify the fictional situation in the game.

When the detective is feeling the heat or in hot water, bring the heat.

Be generous with your information. The fun is in seeing how the detective reacts to and uses that information.

GM Information Card

## What They Know

When the detective asks you what info Robin has already given them, here's what they know:

- Arturo and Robin have been together for years, since high school.
- Arturo's been distant lately, and he's been slipping away a lot.
- Robin has seen him with Sam, but Arturo has denied it.
- Robin has caught Arturo dancing and singing to himself, which he never does with Robin.
- Arturo says he's been studying, but we all know that that's not right.

GM Information Card

## Arturo's Schedule

Here's Arturo's to do list for the day:

- Pick up the camera from Sam's room.
- Meet with a friend to give them the camera so they can record the proposal.
- Meet with Sam for one final, quick rehearsal of his own part. Sam will play Robin's role.
- Surprise Robin at the student union for the proposal.

# A Note

You may think it strange that there are instructions for GMing since the game is designed to introduce new players to the hobby, which assumes that the GM is an experienced player. This is true.

But I want the game to also serve as a possible entry point for players who wish to move into the role of GM.

GM Tools Card

## Questions

You can ask these and similar questions at any time of the detective:

- Who's your best friend here at school?
- Who's your roommate, and what relationship do you have with them?
- What's your major?
- What enemies have you made doing this work? Who worries you the most? Who's just blowing smoke?
- What class is giving you trouble?
- How are you in danger of losing your scholarship?
- Who was it a huge mistake to hook up with that first semester?

GM Tools Card

## Pressure Points

Being a detective is risky business. Here are some vulnerable aspects of the detective's life that you can lean on when you play  
Heat cards:

- their reputation/social standing
- their finances/scholarships
- their academic standing
- their physical/emotional well-being
- their relationships
- the stuff and well-being of the people they care about.
- their deadline for delivering their paper

Ask them questions that make them say what's important to them, and then gently threaten those things.

GM Tools Card

## People & Places

Professors  
Lab assistants/T.A.s  
Janitorial staff  
Classmates  
Dormmates  
Groundskeepers  
Studying students  
Grad students  
Athletes  
Friends  
Other clients  
Love interests  
Buskers  
R.A.s

University cafe  
Book store  
Dorms  
Computer labs  
Lecture halls  
Library  
Student union  
Quad/Fountain  
Stadium  
Greek houses  
Oncampus theater

I designed Dorm Detective for the OnRamp Jam (and immediately violated its page limit). I freely took inspiration from Vincent and Meguey Baker's Apocalypse World, TSR's Bullwinkle and Rocky Roleplaying Party Game, John Harper's Five Mintue One on One, among others.

Thanks to Paul Beakley for creating and hosting the jam!

Jason D'Angelo (October 2019)

GM Information Card

## Possible Events

Daydream about ways to make Arturo and Sam look suspicious and guilty.

Here are some possible events to get you started:

- Arturo looking suspiciously around to avoid being seen by Robin.
- Arturo subtly nodding or gesturing to members of the flashmob around campus.
- Arturo hiding from Robin when seeing her early in the day.
- Arturo and Sam's rehearsal with embraces and kisses "in character," all with real tension.

Think about what evidence the detective can find in Sam's room,

GM Information Card

## The Real Deal

Here's what's really going down:

- Arturo is planning on proposing to Robin via a flashmob. Today is the big day.
- Sam, deep in the drama scene, is helping Arturo plan and execute the proposal.
- Sam is in love with Arturo.
- Did Sam and Arturo have a charged encounter or even more, something to feel guilty about? You need to decide.
- Arturo was in Sam's room picking up a small video camera to record the proposal. Sam was not in their room.

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