



# TEEN DETECTIVE



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If you'd like to include these rules in a teen mystery you're publishing, please contact [epistolaryrichard](#) on Google+ or at yahoo dot com

## TEEN DETECTIVE PLAYER GUIDE

In *Teen Detective*, you don't just solve teen-based mysteries, it's also down to you to decide what to do about the culprits and how best to put things right. In some cases you can hand them over to the police, in others you may have to get a lot more creative. Your own teen may not be entirely innocent: your teen's motivation may clash with your fellows and your family may be harbouring a darker secret than you know.

You solve mysteries by talking to people, finding physical evidence, spotting the lies and then sifting out the truth. These people, the evidence and the wider world is portrayed by the Games Master (GM).

Sometimes witnesses are unwilling to tell the whole story or physical evidence is hard to find; in these situations you need to find leverage over the witness or more details on what you're looking for. When you have such info, it's called having an **Edge**. You pick up most Edges through unravelling the mystery, but if you're stuck you can also occasionally create one by using a Lightbulb. Once you have an Edge, the witness will be more cooperative or you'll be able to find additional evidence. Be aware, though, using an Edge may come back to bite you.

Should you ever feel completely stuck with a mystery, you have a very limited resource to help called **Lightbulbs**. Lightbulbs represent that 'Aha!' moment when a detective makes a new connection or realisation about the case. You start with only 1 or 2 Lightbulbs and can spend one to add something new to a previous scene. This should give you new leads to work in order to help towards a solution. You can also spend a Lightbulb to give yourself an Edge right in the moment.

Finally, occasionally, you may put yourself at risk or in danger where the outcome is uncertain. Here you roll dice to see how well it goes for you. Do this too often, however, and a **Dark Secret** about your family may emerge and take you out of this mystery.

## CREATING YOUR TEEN DETECTIVE

### Name, hook and how they became a detective

*Listen to the GM's description of the community in which the mystery is set (such as small-town America). Then create a teen with strong ties to one or more aspects of that community:*

Give them a name and a hook (e.g. 'jock with a heart', 'rebel daughter of the mayor', 'it crowder fallen out of favour'). Then add one or more ways in which they're tied to the community.

*Teen Detectives may start out as regular kids, but regular kids hang out with their peers, not investigate them.*

Detail what incident made them a teen detective and how they started working with the other player characters (PCs).

Then, introduce your teen to the other players and listen to their introductions.

### Family Dark Secret

For each PC, including your own, write a possible Dark Secret about their family. The other players will each write one for you.

Select two you like and hand them to the GM. The GM will discard one and keep the other

*Even you are not certain as to your teen's family secret.*

### Motivations

Unlike professionals, teen detectives often don't have the same motivation. The GM will offer you several different motivations suitable for the current mystery. Each player must select a different motivation for their teen.

### Starting Lightbulbs

If you decide that your teen detective has been ostracised from their peer group because of previous incidents then they start with 2 Lightbulbs. If not, they start with 1. How to spend and replenish Lightbulbs is described further below.

## PLAYING THE GAME

The GM will lay out the starting situation; she may ask you questions about what your teens are currently doing or she may start you in a particular scene. You play by describing what your teens say and do and the GM will tell you the consequences. At the end of the scene, it will be down to you to describe what you want to do and where you want to go next.

Early on, the GM will introduce elements of the mystery. You solve these mysteries by talking to people, finding physical evidence, spotting the lies and then sifting out the truth.

- Most lines of investigation will build on themselves, providing you info that you can use to get more info (this is called gaining an Edge).
- You can also generate connections where there were none before by creating info your teen suddenly “remembers” (called spending a Lightbulb).
- In the pursuit of the mystery, you may end up putting your teen in danger. You'll then roll dice to determine what happens and it may trigger the revelation of your family's Dark Secret.

### Edges

An Edge is a information that allows you to discover something that you could not before. Some examples of Edges include:

- Information about a person that will lead them to tell you more, e.g. knowing that they are cheating on their boyfriend (allowing you to blackmail them) or that they have a secret passion for jazz (allowing you to befriend them);
- Information about a piece of physical evidence, e.g. knowing the licence plate of a car will allow you to find it in an impound lot;
- Having a particular specialism, e.g. having a detailed knowledge of cameras will allow you to guess what type of camera took a photo.

Most Edges are picked up during the case. You can also create an Edge in the moment by spending a Lightbulb.

The GM will not tell you when you have discovered an Edge, it's down to you to be able to connect how information fits together and realise you have one. If you believe you have an Edge in a situation, though, tell the GM and let them decide.

*Be aware, Edges wear out. Also, some witnesses don't like being pressured or blackmailed and there may be consequences down the line.*

## Lightbulbs

- Spending Lightbulbs

You may spend a Lightbulb at any time to add something new to a previous scene or to gain an Edge in the current scene. Describe what your teen suddenly realises or connects. The GM may veto or change what you've created.

- Replenishing Lightbulbs

The GM, at her discretion, may replenish one of your spent Lightbulbs if another player deliberately makes trouble for your teen. Players can make trouble either:

- By adding an element to the scene (such as by introducing a suspicious boyfriend or by saying that you left a schoolbook behind when running from a crime scene). Either you or the GM may veto this if you wish.
- As their own characters (such as by accidentally letting slip that your teen snuck out of the house to your parents or starting a fight in the canteen and leaving you to deal with the consequences).

You cannot have more Lightbulbs than when you started the mystery.

## Taking risks

Mysteries should always be able to be solved by following clues, using Edges and lateral thinking. Taking risks will never be required, but you may find yourself in a situation where you want to put your teen in danger.

When you put your teen in danger, the GM will ask you to roll dice (d6s). You may roll as many dice as you wish and the highest figure dictates how successful your teen was (for example, 1 or 2 would be abject failure while 5 or 6 complete success). Give any 6s you roll to the GM who will place them on your teen's Dark Secret. As soon as there are 6 dice on the secret, the GM will bring it into play and your teen will be taken out of the mystery to deal with the fall-out. Your teen will return for the next mystery with their life quite changed, the stigma of associated shame and a new Dark Secret about their family.

## Putting things right

Discovering the truth behind the mystery may only be half of the story. You then have to decide what to do about it. Maybe a clear crime was committed and you've built up enough evidence for the police to get involved (if you trust them) but where you don't, or you're dealing with a culprit beyond the law then it'll be down to you as to how you are going to put things right.

*There are no particular rules for this; follow your teen's motivation and don't be afraid to go it alone. Your choices in this second phase will have the greater impact both on what happens within your community and how your own teens are seen by others.*

# TEEN DETECTIVE GM GUIDE

Teen Detective is an ultra-rules light game to play out teen mystery stories. It supports several different playstyles depending on your group's preferences.

## Methodical puzzle-solving

*For groups who like to tackle mysteries as a puzzle with a preset solution.*

Ensure that your mystery has a structure of initial clues, leads and obvious Edges. Downplay the individual teen agendas. Allow the PCs to move together as a group so that the PCs can speak freely to each other and give them plenty of time to talk. Do not include any moments where they would have to take risks to succeed. Have a single correct solution and have a means by which the group can know for certain whether they have solved the mystery correctly.

Encourage them to spend their Lightbulbs to give themselves Edge in a current scene rather than adding new elements to a prior scene and discourage them from making trouble for each other so that Lightbulbs aren't replenished. Play down any negative social consequences of using Edges and do not add other distractions. Dark Secrets should not normally be revealed in this playstyle.

Have them conclude on the mystery close to the end of the gaming session and allow them to sketch how they will put things right without necessarily playing it out. Then bring out the correct solution and briefly mention the consequences.

## Collaborative story creation

*For groups who like to collaborate to create the story of the mystery.*

Have one solution in mind but be open to alternatives. Allow the players greater input in tailoring the setting. Encourage them to spend their Lightbulbs to create new elements in previous scenes and move the mystery towards what they're interested in. Have the teens move separately and encourage them to make trouble for each other (and replenish their Lightbulbs). Keep a track of the evidence they're creating and adjust the content you provide to support it.

Play up that pressuring or leading on witnesses using Edge has consequences to the teens. Distract them with larger events happening within the community, divide their loyalties and have the teens conflicted between pursuing the mystery or their own interests. Throw new incidents into the mix and trust the group to integrate them into their solution or disregard them as red herrings.

Have them conclude on the mystery around two-thirds of the way through the session so that there is plenty of time for them to dispute what they should do to put things right and then play it out. Enforce a separation of player and character knowledge as the teens may well end up working at cross-purposes.

## **Pulp action investigations**

*For groups who like to beat an active and aggressive culprit.*

Simplify the structure of the mystery to be a relatively linear series of clues leading to a preset culprit. Have the culprit learn early on of the teens' investigation and then have them destroy evidence already collected or try to scare the teens off entirely. These attempts themselves can become clues leading the teens on. This group's story is not so much about how they solve the mystery or proving the culprit's guilt but rather about how the teens best them.

Encourage players to spend Lightbulbs to gain Edge in the current scene so they are able to move through the mystery quickly without backtracking. Have them create trouble for each other often to replenish those Lightbulbs (remember the player can create the trouble, it doesn't have to be the character).

Have them conclude on the mystery around half way through the session. Ensure that the teens cannot simply call the police, forcing them to exact their own justice and putting themselves at risk. Dark Secrets are most likely to come out with this playstyle; link them to the culprit and offer individual PCs evidence of the culprit's crimes along with a connection to the teen's family so they must choose to share it or destroy it (and perhaps allow the culprit to escape the law).

## **Considerations for particular playstyles**

- Destroying evidence to lower the Dark Secret level

Especially in pulp games, teens may run up a large number of 6s on their family's Dark Secret. If you wish, you may offer them the chance to remove all the 6s from their secret by destroying evidence linked to the mystery and their Dark Secret (thus hindering their own investigation, but keeping their teen in play).

- The passage of time

Mysteries never occur in isolation from the surrounding community. There should always be something that will happen if the mystery isn't solved. Perhaps an innocent friend will take the blame, a much-needed local project will fail, someone will seek revenge.

As GM you must convey how the situation is worsening the longer they take.

*Without this, Puzzle groups will feel that there is no cost to exhausting every single possible lead and so the investigation will be a grind rather than a fraught decision as to which leads will lead them closer to the truth.*

*For Collaborative Creation groups, this pressure generates the hard choices which are at the core of the experience they want.*

*For Pulp groups, this pressure is the reason why they must act now and take risks, rather than allowing them to play safe and gather their resources. The risk-taking is at the core of their experience.*



## STRUCTURING THE GAME

A game of Teen Detective could be broadly divided into five acts:

1. Building the springboard
2. Chasing leads
3. Proving their case and concluding on the mystery
4. Deciding how to put things right
5. Carrying out the plan and facing the consequences

### Building the springboard

The players need a base of information about the mystery before they can start making informed choices. Once they have this base they will then be able to decide which aspect of the mystery to investigate next. This springboard may include learning about the mystery, inspecting the crime scene (if any), talking to an identified witness and some basic research. You can present this as a fairly linear set of scenes or provide it as part of the opening set-up. If running for a Puzzle or Pulp group, then it's best to move through this as quickly as possible so as to move the players along to making decisions that will interest them.

### Chasing leads

Once the players have the basic information about the mystery, they should then have several lines of investigation (talking to new suspects or witness, going to new locations or obtaining needed Edges). They decide which order to tackle them and how far they go with each. Games for Puzzle groups may require some lateral thinking by the players while games for Pulp groups may be fairly linear and driven by players' response to the culprit's attacks. After chasing these leads, the players should then have a collection of information about the mystery.

### Proving their case and concluding on the mystery

There's a tipping point during each investigation where players stop simply gathering all the evidence they can find and start using their reason to anticipate the evidence they *will* find.

*If the suspect left boot-prints in the victim's yard and they believe Abe is the suspect then they anticipate they'll find those boots in Abe's locker.*

The players have moved on from information gathering and are now trying to prove a case that they are building. For Puzzle groups, this is the key moment. Encourage them to review all the evidence they've collected, put together what they think happened and what evidence they could find to prove it. If they're right, allow them to find that evidence even if you originally intended them to prove their case a different way. If they don't find what they anticipate then will likely consider their whole case to be incorrect and focus on a different solution.

For Pulp groups following a linear trail of clues, this is where the culprit is revealed, but not yet defeated, allowing them to move on to putting things right.

Collaborative Creation groups, similar to Puzzle groups, will have a mass of evidence to review, but much of it will have been created by the players and not by you. Your original solution may no longer fit as the players have pushed and created more where their interests led them. Just as with Puzzle groups, encourage them to review all the evidence they've collected and to build a case; here, however, you are listening to them and deciding at that moment which of the solutions they're discussing is best supported by all the evidence and will prove to be correct.

*Allowing them to talk gives you time to think and make your decision. Players are far more likely to accept solutions that they have considered rather than something completely out of the blue. Your role is to present that solution as coherently as possible, tying together the evidence you can and explaining how the unconnected evidence came to be.*

### **Deciding how to put things right**

Once the players believe they've explained the mystery they should decide amongst themselves how they will put things right. With Pulp groups, this may well emerge as an elaborate planning session. With Collaborative Creation groups, this may be where the teens are divided based on their differing agendas. While for Puzzle groups, this act will usually be brief as they will likely be calling higher authorities to step in.

### **Carrying out the plan and facing the consequences**

Once the players have the plan, then it's time for them to carry it out and—depending on how successful they are—bathe in glory or face the music. The players will have established in the prior act how ambitious they will be. For Pulp groups, the players should have a low opinion of either the loyalties or competence of local authorities and look either to capture the culprit themselves, publicly outing them or sabotaging their operations. Where the teens have differing agendas in Collaborative Creation groups, the players themselves will ultimately arbitrate who will get their way.

## Ending the game

There will always be consequences to face. Successful teen detectives may be rewarded, culprits who escape may vow revenge, victims may be grateful or disappointed. The teens may gain new allies, but equally those they pressured or misled may hold a grudge. The nature of the community itself will change; teens who've fought to expose the truth will influence the community to become more open, teens who've championed maintaining the existing social order will lead to the community become more perfect on the surface but with more repressed desires, while those who've negotiated for personal profit will encourage a more mercenary and exploitative community.

*Whether the players successfully solve the mystery or not, after the investigation the situation should always simmer down. The community will revert back to (largely) how it was before. A particular crime wave will pass, gang tensions will temporarily ease, failed projects will be replaced by new ones and the pain of others will be forgotten by most. After a moment of crisis, everyone needs to take a breath. Making only a few changes to the world after each investigation will help ensure the players still feel grounded, drawing them deeper into a community that they are slowly remodelling.*

## The world of the teenager

Teens do not have the same liberty as adults and so our teen detectives would not always be in control of where they can go and when they can go there. The lifestyle led by teens varies hugely and arbitrary restrictions aggravate players so instead look to use such restrictions sparingly, to inspire creatively and help structure play.

- Inspiring creativity

Having witnesses or suspects in age-restricted areas can spur the players to come up with creative means to gain entry. Or they have the choice to walk straight in if they want to place themselves at risk.

- Structuring play

School can provide a central focus or be an unnecessary restriction. You can use school hours to provide a structure for the players: specifying a particular moment where the teens can all get together and talk freely, then decide what each of them would do for the remainder of the day before they can reconvene. This can help them structure their thoughts and in sharing scene-time.