

THE HOT LAMP

This is a game for three or four players. Two will be suspects accused of some serious crime, and one or two will be police detectives. It'll be most fun with two and two. Cut out the cards below and hand them out.

This game operates on the principle of agreement – when someone articulates some fact about the crime, the suspects, or the overall situation, you must accept and build on that fact. The detectives will tell the suspects what crime they are involved in, and until they do, the suspects won't have any idea. One of the suspects will probably explain that they are related, and until their relationship is laid out, no one will know what it is. Everyone can and should use this information as it emerges, and use it to inspire their own additions. One caveat – it's probably obvious, but the suspect players shouldn't use the private conversations of the detectives or the deals their fellow suspect might be cutting to inform their own decisions.

The game ends after twenty minutes or when the detectives are satisfied they've got as much as they are going to get out of the suspects.

YOU ARE A DETECTIVE

You have two suspects sitting in separate interrogation rooms. Your goal is to elicit confessions.

You create the crime for which the suspects have been apprehended. The suspect players won't know what they are accused of until you tell them, hopefully in lurid detail. The crime should be something serious but not too heinous – something that might easily net them a half dozen years in prison. Breaking and entering, assault, motor vehicle theft, sale of narcotics, or fraud would fit the bill.

Given that the offenses are not too serious, you have the power to cut deals. The rules are simple:

1. If a suspect cooperates completely, they can walk on a minor charge with no jail time. They must provide evidence that will get their partner locked up for five years, along with a signed confession.
2. If a suspect wants to be a hard case, they can rest assured that you will testify against them and make sure they receive the maximum sentence of 10 to 12 years.

You can confer privately with your fellow detective, use a "good cop, bad cop" routine, or switch perpetrators – whatever you think will serve your purposes. You can, and should, lie. Anything you hear can be used in furthering your goals. Any background information on the suspect's family, the crime, or other events in the past that you hear should be accepted and built on.

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YOU ARE A SUSPECT

You've committed a crime and been caught. There's no way around that, although you don't have to admit anything to the police and don't know how much evidence they have against you.

Your partner is a relative of yours. Maybe your brother, or daughter, or whatever. Close kin. Now you are both in separate interrogation rooms being grilled by police detectives.

You need to think up an overwhelming reason why your character must not go to jail. Maybe you are up for a college scholarship, or are the only provider for a baby, or will be shanked the minute you walk through the gate.

You must remain in your chair throughout the game. In a perfect world you'd be handcuffed to a desk for verisimilitude.

Although you'll hear everything that is said, remember that you can't act on contemporary information – the deal your fellow suspect is cutting, and the hallway scheming of the detectives, is beyond your ear-shot. Enjoy it but don't act on it. In contrast, any background information on your family, the crime, or other events in the past, should be accepted and built on.

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