

GHOST LETTERS

Crime investigation game with secret roles

GAME RULES

PROLOGUE

"Who's there?!"

The sheriff nervously swung the flashlight back and forth, attempting to pinpoint the source of the sound. A dark silhouette detached itself from the fence and moved slowly toward him.

"Hey, I won't ask twice!" the sheriff's hand, slightly trembling, was already reaching for his holster.

Soft laughter of a woman echoed from the darkness.

"Hopkins, stop shining that light in my eyes. Explain what you're doing alone in front of the house of a prominent murder victim at half past two in the morning".

The district police chief audibly sighed in relief and lowered the flashlight. His frequent thoughts in recent days oscillated between "Will I live to see my vacation?" and "These damn journalists."





"Susan, I answered all questions about this case at yesterday's press conference, so please, no more..." the sheriff attempted to send the journalist home, but she didn't let him finish his sentence.

"The only thing we learned yesterday is that the police haven't come a step closer to solving the crime. And the fact that you are returning to the house that your officers have already searched from top to bottom only confirms this."

"We are in the midst of an active investigation and I don't have to report to you. Actually, Susan, I should be the one asking what you're doing here. It might not be safe for a young woman to walk through empty streets at night, don't you think?"

"Of course not. What can happen to me when such professionals ensure law and order?"

Hopkins brushed off the thinly veiled sarcasm, keeping his cool. He was pretty sure that she had a recorder in the handbag. A report about a sheriff snapping at an innocent journalist would certainly not be good for the reputation of the local police.

"Alright, Hopkins, let's assume that you won't give me details of the investigation. But what do you say about this?"

She took out some photos and handed them to the sheriff.

"What is this?" Hopkins' tone was slowly becoming angry.

"These could be clues, couldn't they? Don't tell me you don't have these clues in your case file."

Fatigue and irritation increasingly took over Hopkins' self-control; a formal tone was no longer possible. There was no strength left for it.

"So you track me down in the middle of the night and then present me with some obscure photos that probably have nothing to do with the case?" Hopkins couldn't stop. The urge to vent his anger on someone for his incompetence was too great. "No, wait, you're the great detective here! How can I compete with you in solving this crime? Well, Susan, let's look at your theories. Why don't we ask the murdered person himself? There's his letterbox. Let's send him these photos. Then he can tell us what happened. How does that sound?"



With these words, he threw the photos into the letterbox slot and demonstratively walked to the front door, blocked by police tape.

The letterbox suddenly rattled wildly with its lid, trembled, and emitted an incomprehensible howl. At the next moment, it was over, as if nothing had happened. The sheriff and the stunned journalist looked silently at the letterbox and then incredulously at each other. After the initial shock Hopkins slowly approached the letterbox and peered cautiously through the slot.

"Susan, there's only one photo left here..."

There was a tense silence for a moment.

"You realize that nobody will buy into our story, right?" the journalist's voice slightly trembled.

"I know. But I believe that I know someone in our town who..."



THE GAME

You assume the roles of detectives attempting to solve a complex crime. The Sidewood police have uncovered clues that might expose the **Motive**, **Place** and **Means** of the Murder, but only three of the **clues** are **real**.

One player takes on the role of the **Ghost**, aiding the detectives in solving the case. Communication between the Ghost and other players occurs exclusively through a mysterious **Letterbox** where players dispatch their clue cards to the Ghost. The Ghost examines the received clue cards as **hints** and unveils only those linked to the real clues, relegating the rest to the **Deck of Vanished Clues**.

Your task is to discern the **three real clues** within a few rounds through discussion and scrutiny of the hints revealed by the Ghost and the disappearing clue cards. However, stay vigilant, as the **Murderer** and his **Accomplices** may be concealing themselves among you. They will make their best efforts to confound the other players and obstruct the investigation.

GAME MODES

You can engage in a **competitive mode** (4+ players) or a **cooperative mode** (2+ players).

In competitive mode, the Ghost and the Detectives face off against the covert Murderer and his Accomplices. In cooperative mode only the Ghost and the Detectives participate, collaborating to solve the crime.

Towards the end of the rules, you will discover additional game variants that can add more variety to your games. For instance, consider incorporating **Characters** with unique abilities.

You do not have to read the full rules beforehand. Choose a player who will read aloud the next part of the rules, and immediately follow these steps.

COMPONENTS

150 Clue Cards



Letterbox Token



14 Secret Role Cards



12 Double-Sided Character Cards



3 Category Tokens



Walkie-Talkie Token



ROLES DESCRIPTION

Ghost - Knows the roles of all players and the real clues. The Ghost aids the Detectives in solving the case and shares victory with them.

Detective - Tries to deduce the real clues and the identity of the Murderer. The Detectives **solve the case** by either unraveling **all 3 real clues** or correctly guessing **2 real clues**, along with **arresting the Murderer**. If the Murderer accurately discerns the identity of the Witness or Detectives, the Detectives lose even if the case is solved.

In Co-op mode:

The Detectives can only win if they unveil **all 3 real clues**.

Murderer - Knows the real clues and his Accomplices (if present in the game). At the start of the game, he secretly selects the clues (revealing them to the Ghost and Accomplices) and endeavours to thwart the Detectives from deducing them during the game. The Murderer wins if the Detectives fail to solve the case or if he accurately guesses the identity of the Witness or the Expert.



Accomplice - Knows the other Accomplices, the Murderer and the real clues. Impedes the Detectives from solving the case and refrains from revealing him. The Accomplice wins if the Detectives falter in solving the case and if he avoids arrest.



Witness - Knows the Murderer. Assists the Detectives in solving the case but must not disclose him to the Murderer. Shares victory with the Detectives.



Expert - Knows the real clues. Assists the Detectives in solving the case but refrains from exposing him to the Murderer. Shares victory with the Detectives.



Blackmailer - Knows the Murderer. Strives to deduce the real clues and obstruct the Detectives from solving the case. Wins if the Detectives fail to solve the case and if he accurately guesses the real clues without revealing himself to the Murderer. The variant with the Blackmailer is detailed in the "Additional Game Variants" section.



PREPARATION AND START OF THE GAME

1. Assigning roles

When playing in co-op mode (2+ players): No role cards are required. Designate one player as the Ghost while all others assume the role of Detectives. There is no Murderer among you, and your joint objective is to uncover all 3 real clues.

Competitive (4+ players): Assemble a deck of role cards corresponding to the number of players according to the table. Shuffle the deck and distribute one role card to each player. The player assigned the Ghost role immediately reveals their card. Other players keep their roles concealed until the end of the game.



Number of players	Roles
4	Ghost, Murderer, Detective x 2
5	Ghost, Murderer, Detective x 3
6	Ghost, Murderer, Detective x 4
7	Ghost, Murderer, Accomplice, Witness, Detective x 3
8	Ghost, Murderer, Accomplice, Witness, Detective x 4
9	Ghost, Murderer, Accomplice, Witness, Detective x 5
10	Ghost, Murderer, Accomplice x 2, Witness, Expert, Detective x 4
11	Ghost, Murderer, Accomplice x 2, Witness, Expert, Detective x 5
12	Ghost, Murderer, Accomplice x 2, Witness, Expert, Detective x 5

Witnesses and Experts can be replaced by Detectives for simplicity in the first games

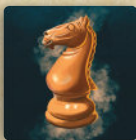
2. Gathering Clues

Shuffle the **Clue deck**. Arrange the **3 Category tokens** side by side on the table: **Motive, Place, Means**. Starting with the Ghost, each player draws 1 clue card from the clue deck and places it in a row to the right of any category token where fewer than 4 clue cards have been placed. During this process, players formulate hypotheses on how these clues might be linked to the selected category. The hypotheses don't have to align; on the contrary, they can present entirely contradictory narratives. The hypotheses created about the clues will assist you in tracking subsequent connections throughout the game.

***Example:** A player draws an Oak Leaf card. They suggest that the oak leaf might indicate that the murder took place in the forest and put this card into the Place category. The next player reveals the Wet Footprints card and explains that the victim was stomping around loudly at night, falling under the Motive category.*



There should be four cards in each category.
5 cards are placed in each category in games with Character cards.



All clues are gathered together

3. Choosing the Real Clues

In Co-op mode: There is no Murderer in the game, so the Ghost secretly chooses 1 real clue in each category and remembers the clues for the rest of the game.

In Competitive mode: Pass the rules to the Ghost. The Ghost reads the following text aloud, and each player performs the specified actions according to their role.

All players except the Ghost close their eyes. The Murderer and his Accomplices (if any) open their eyes and get to know each other. The Murderer selects one real clue in each category. The Ghost points the Murderer to each category token, and the Murderer indicates the number of the chosen card with their fingers, counting starting from the category token. The Murderer and his Accomplices close their eyes.

The Ghost, Murderer and Accomplices must remember the real clues for the entire game!

In a game with the Witness: The Witness opens their eyes and the Ghost points to the Murderer. The Witness closes their eyes.

In a game with the Expert: The Expert opens their eyes and the Ghost points to the real clues. The Expert closes their eyes.

In a game with the Blackmailer: The Blackmailer opens their eyes and the Ghost points to the Murderer. The Blackmailer closes their eyes. All players open their eyes after that.



The Murderer chooses the real clues

4. The First Clue

Each player (including the Ghost) draws five cards from the clue deck. Players are not allowed to show or discuss their clue cards with each other.

The Ghost can (if desired) choose one of their cards connected to one or more real clues and openly place it on the table as the **first hint**. The Ghost then draws 1 card from the clue deck, restoring their hand to 5 cards. The other players can discuss the clue before the start of the first round.

The Ghost must not communicate with the players through words, gestures, or any other means until the end of the game. The Ghost can only guide the Detectives through hints. Even if the Detectives are completely confused and on the wrong track, the Ghost must remain calm and emotionless.



*The Ghost played the "Thermos" card as a hint.
This is to allude to the Oak Leaf (camouflage design) and the Donut (tea with sweets)*

Now let the game begin!

The game is played over 2 to 5 rounds. The number of rounds depends on the number of players:

Players	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Rounds	5	5	5	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	2

GAMEPLAY

1. Sending Cards to the Ghost

At the beginning of the round, each player (including the Ghost) chooses one of their clue cards and places it face down on the mysterious Letterbox token. In this way, players attempt to find out from the Ghost whether these clues point to the real clues. Until the Discussion phase, players are not allowed to reveal which clue cards they want to send or verify.

In a two-player game: The Detective and the Ghost each place 2 cards in the Letterbox.

***Example:** A player sends the “Mosquito Repellent” card to the Ghost to check the clue “Acorn” in the Place category; both of these cards are related to the forest.*



The player who is the first to place a card on the Letterbox token (excluding the Ghost) receives the Walkie-Talkie token.

This player will speak first during the Discussion phase.



2. Ghost Hints

The Ghost retrieves the cards from the Letterbox token, shuffles them and examines them. From the drawn cards, the Ghost selects those that can be linked to the real clues, places the chosen cards as **hints**, and places the remaining cards on the Deck of Vanished Clues without revealing them.

***Tip:** Position the Deck of Vanished Clues next to the Ghost's role card to prevent confusion with the discard deck.*

The Ghost can choose any number of hint cards or choose not to select any card. The Ghost reveals all selected cards simultaneously and provides no clues about the order or placement of the hints on the table or about the categories to which the hints belong.

3. Drawing new cards

Each player (including the Ghost) may discard **one face down card** from their hand onto the discard deck and then draw cards from the evidence deck so that they have 5 cards again.

4. Discussion

The player holding the Walkie-Talkie token initiates the discussion. It is helpful to mention which card you sent to the Ghost (especially if it has vanished), your thoughts on the hints provided by the Ghost and the vanished cards, and which clues you believe to be real. The Walkie-Talkie token is then passed clockwise to the next player, giving all players in the round an opportunity to express their opinions. The Ghost remains silent and simply passes the Walkie-Talkie token. Other players can contribute, respond, and discuss, but they should consider the player with the Walkie-Talkie token; their opinions and ideas are now the focal point of the discussion. Every player will have their turn.

***Tip:** The Murderer, Accomplices, and Blackmailer can sow confusion and bluff to mislead other players. For instance, they might claim to have sent a specific clue card to the Ghost (even if they didn't and still hold that card). They know which cards they hold or have discarded. That allows them to lie, withhold crucial information from the Detectives, and divert attention from the actual clues.*

***Example:** A real clue in the Place category is "Acorn". The Murderer sends the Ghost a "Knife", an item unrelated to any real clues, and the Ghost places the "Knife" on the Vanished deck. During the discussion, the Murderer asserts to have submitted "Mosquito repellent" even though this card is still in their possession. Since there is no way to verify and as "Mosquito repellent" is not among the hints unveiled by the Ghost, "Acorn" remains free from suspicion of being a real clue. This strategic move by the Murderer aims to deflect attention from the actual clue.*

A new round commences after each player in the round has had the Walkie-Talkie token. During the new round, while the Ghost selects the ghostly signs from the cards sent to them, all received information can be collectively discussed.

FINAL VOTE

At the conclusion of the last round, you must decide by voting which clues you deem real and whom you will apprehend as the Murderer. All players except the Ghost participate in the vote.

Voting occurs in 4 steps: Motive, Place, Means, and the Identity of the Murderer. In the first three steps, all players simultaneously, following the Ghost's command, indicate with their fingers the number of the card in the category row, which they believe to be the real clue. The clue with the majority of votes is considered chosen: turn the card slightly. The Ghost does not disclose whether the clues have been correctly guessed! In the last step, each player, upon the Ghost's command, points simultaneously to the player they suspect to be the Murderer.

If none of the categories achieves an absolute majority of votes in a step, this step is repeated. If the situation repeats a second time, the players have failed.

In a game with Accomplices: If an Accomplice is apprehended, they reveal their role card, and players proceed with another apprehension. The apprehended player does not participate in the vote.

After all the voting steps, the Ghost announces whether the Detectives have succeeded in solving the crime **(without revealing the real clues)**, and the Murderer reveals their role card. *Reminder: The case is considered solved if all 3 real clues or 2 real clues and the identity of the Murderer were correctly guessed.*

When playing with a Witness or Expert and the case is solved:

The Murderer attempts to identify the Witness or Expert by pointing to one of the players and naming their role. If they correctly identify the Witness or Expert, the Murderer wins and the Detectives lose.

In a game with the Blackmailer if the case is not solved: The Murderer tries to expose the Blackmailer by pointing to one of the players. If the Murderer fails to guess, the Blackmailer states the clues they believe to be real. If they correctly name all clues, the Blackmailer wins and everyone else loses.

Finally, all players reveal their role cards, and the Ghost discloses the real clues. You can now also unveil the cards from the Deck of Vanished Clues and discuss how the investigations unfolded for the Detectives, the Murderer and the Ghost.

ADDITIONAL GAME VARIANTS

Playing with Character Cards

Inhabitants of Sidewood have decided to actively participate in the investigations. However, the question remains: do all of them genuinely want to assist in solving the crime or are some merely attempting to obscure their tracks?

Following the assignment of roles, each player, excluding the Ghost, receives a randomly dealt Character card. These Character cards are double-sided. The player chooses which of the two characters they want to embody and places their character card in front of them with the selected side face up. Each character has a unique ability that can aid the player in achieving their objectives. All character abilities are single-use, and after using the ability players, set the character card aside.



In some character ability descriptions you'll find the phrase "The other players close their eyes". When a player uses such an ability, all other players, excluding the player and the Ghost, must close their eyes. Only the player using the ability gains additional information, allowing the Murderer and their Accomplices to bluff about what they've learned through their characters' abilities.

Several abilities empower the Ghost to point out specific objects on the table to the player. If the Ghost believes that demonstrating this ability would only confuse the Detectives, they can choose not to show anything.

When incorporating character cards into the game, place 5 cards in each category (Motive, Place, Means) during the clue phase instead of the usual 4.

Adding the Blackmailer Role

When playing in a competitive mode with 8 or more players, you can replace 1 Detective card by the Blackmailer.

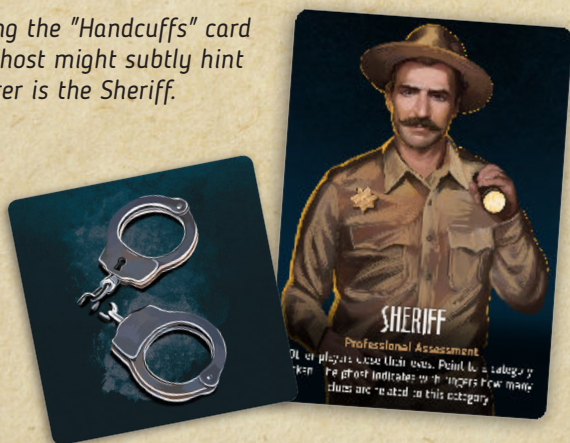
The Blackmailer knows the Murderer and the Accomplices. His goal is to hinder the Detectives from solving the case while independently uncovering the real clues. The Blackmailer can later use this information to blackmail the Murderer, threatening to expose the whole truth about the crime. However, the Murderer has the chance to identify the Blackmailer at the end of the game, so the Blackmailer must be discreet.



Clues Pointing to the Murderer

When playing with Characters, the Ghost can drop hints about the real clues and about the Murderer. By sending a card to the Ghost, players can signal that they intend to check a character. However, when revealing hints, the Ghost doesn't explicitly specify whether they pertain to a character or real clues.

Example: Placing the "Handcuffs" card as a hint, the Ghost might subtly hint that the Murderer is the Sheriff.



Discarding a Random Role Card

In competitive games with up to 6 players you have the option to discard a random Role card before assigning roles. During the game, players must deduce whether there's a Murderer among them.

When preparing the Role Card Deck, set aside the Ghost card, add an extra Detective card, shuffle, and discard a random card. Then reintroduce the Ghost card, shuffle again, and distribute 1 role card face down to each player. The player receiving the Ghost card secretly views the discarded role card to determine who won't be in the game.

If the Murderer card is discarded, the Ghost must choose the real clues. The Ghost must not reveal that the Murderer is absent. The Ghost reads the same text aloud, pretending that the Murderer is among them and has chosen the real clues.



If you suspect that the Murderer is not in the game, point to the Ghost when voting for the Murderer's identity. If most players point to the Ghost and there's no Murderer, it is assumed that the Detectives successfully deduced the Murderer.



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BORGOS: www.borgos-shop.de

Author: Nikita Kuznetsov

Game development: Fedor Korzhenkov

Illustrations: Daniela Ryabicheva

Rules layout: Anastasia Loginova

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**Video rules, additional materials on the game
and much more on our website: www.borgos-shop.de**