The Cozy Mystery Clue & Suspect Log

The amateur sleuth's notebook - suspect boards, clue ledgers, alibi grids and a verdict sealed before the reveal

Free sample - three real pages: The Fair-Play Pact, Case Opened and The Clue Ledger - a working mini case file, enough to start detecting in tonight's chapter. Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

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The Fair-Play Pact - How to Use This Log

The five rules that make the game honest - and the scoring rubric the whole log grades by (journal p.3). Every case file assumes this page.

1. Log clues as you meet them.

Chapter noted, ink dry. No quietly improving your ledger after the reveal: a clue you misread stays misread, because the misreading is the record that teaches.

2. Seal your prediction before the final act.

Guideline: before the last three chapters, or before the sleuth starts gathering people into rooms - whichever comes first. Write it, date it, close the page.

3. Score yourself honestly.

The ten points below are the whole law. Nobody audits this log but you - which is exactly why it works.

4. Judge the book's fairness separately from your score.

Being beaten by a fair book is one of reading's great pleasures. Being beaten by evidence the author withheld is a foul. This log records which one happened.

5. Misses are data.

It bears repeating because you will be tempted, around case three, to skip a miss. Don't. Future-you reads those pages with delight.

How a case file runs

Open the case on the book's first page (Case File p.1) - five minutes, including your page-30 instinct suspect, named before you have a shred of evidence. Work the board and the ledger as you read (pp.2-3) - two minutes at each chapter break beats an hour of reconstruction later. Pin the alibis (p.4) the moment the book starts arguing about where everyone was. Watch the fish (p.5) whenever something smells wrong. Seal, then debrief (p.6): prediction before the reveal, verdict after it, one line in Cases Closed to close the file.

The Detective Score (out of 10)

- 4 points - Naming the culprit
- 2 points - Getting the method: how it was done
- 2 points - Getting the motive: why it was done
- 1 point - Spotting the key clue before the reveal
- 1 point - Refusing the biggest red herring

9-10 - Beat the sleuth. Frame the page.

6-8 - A nose ahead of the village. The sleuth is asking for your card.

3-5 - Solid legwork. Most fictional detectives do worse with a whole police force.

0-2 - The book played beautifully. Rematch terms are in the full log.

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Case File Page 1 - Case Opened

Open the file on the book's first page: the puzzle stated neutrally, and your evidence-free opening instinct, written down while it's still pure (case file p.1). The case-file header prints on all six pages: CASE No. ___ - Book: _____ - Sleuth: _____

Title:

Author:

The sleuth: **Their day job:**

Their method in three words:

Setting (town / place): **Book # in its series:**

First in series for me? (Y / N) **Started:** **Format (Print / Audio / Ebook):**

Reading it with (solo / buddy / book club):

The case, in one line (tick whichever fits - this log takes all cozies as they come):

The puzzle: [ ] a theft [ ] a disappearance [ ] a forgery or a fake [ ] sabotage [ ] a contested will [ ] blackmail [ ] a death [ ] something stranger

In one sentence, what has happened (or what everyone says has happened):

The victim, or the prize at stake:

The stakes - what happens if this is never solved:

Opening positions:

Why I picked this case:

What I've heard about this one (no spoilers - reputation only):

My page-30 suspect (named by instinct alone, before any evidence - the Pact protects this guess):

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The character I already don't trust, and why:

Every case begins with the reader knowing less than anyone in the book. That's not a weakness. That's the job.

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Case File Page 3 - The Clue Ledger

The fair-play reader's core page, and the heart of this log: every clue entered when met, in ink, with what it seems to mean recorded separately from what it might mean - because a good mystery lives in the gap between those two columns (case file p.3). The full log prints 14 rows.

Clue 1 - the clue (what, exactly - quote the detail): **Ch. found: _____**

It looks like... Paid off? [ ] paid off [ ] it was a herring [ ] still open

It might really mean...

Clue 2 - the clue (what, exactly - quote the detail): **Ch. found: _____**

It looks like... Paid off? [ ] paid off [ ] it was a herring [ ] still open

It might really mean...

Clue 3 - the clue (what, exactly - quote the detail): **Ch. found: _____**

It looks like... Paid off? [ ] paid off [ ] it was a herring [ ] still open

It might really mean...

Clue 4 - the clue (what, exactly - quote the detail): **Ch. found: _____**

It looks like... Paid off? [ ] paid off [ ] it was a herring [ ] still open

It might really mean...

Clue 5 - the clue (what, exactly - quote the detail): **Ch. found: _____**

It looks like... Paid off? [ ] paid off [ ] it was a herring [ ] still open

It might really mean...

Clue 6 - the clue (what, exactly - quote the detail): **Ch. found: _____**

It looks like... Paid off? [ ] paid off [ ] it was a herring [ ] still open

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It might really mean...

Clue 7 - the clue (what, exactly - quote the detail): **Ch. found: _____**

It looks like... Paid off? [ ] paid off [ ] it was a herring [ ] still open

It might really mean...

Clue 8 - the clue (what, exactly - quote the detail): **Ch. found: _____**

It looks like... Paid off? [ ] paid off [ ] it was a herring [ ] still open

It might really mean...

Log the small thing that snagged your eye, not the thing the chapter underlined. Fair-play authors hide their best clues in plain sight and their herrings in neon. A clue entered here with the wrong 'might mean' is not a mistake - it's a fossil of your thinking, and the Debrief (case p.6) will want it.

Star the clue you believe is the key clue - the one the whole case turns on. You may move the star once. Once:

The detail the book keeps coming back to:

This free sample holds three real pages of The Cozy Mystery Clue & Suspect Log (44 pages: the Fair-Play Pact and Detective Score, the Detective's Desk - Cases Closed index, Series Sleuths and Detective Stats - five complete six-page case files (Case Opened, the Suspect Board, the Clue Ledger, the Alibi & Timeline Grid, Red-Herring Watch & the Motive Map, the Sealed Prediction & Reveal Debrief), the Fair-Play Honour Roll, The Ones That Beat Me and My Year in Cases - US Letter, A4 and tablet editions). It works inside one book while you read it; its shelf-mate the Series Catch-Up & Recap Journal works between books, and the two share no pages. Pagelyra's own cozies were built fair-play for exactly this ledger: The Saltmarsh Inheritance plants fourteen clues, Taken for a Ride seventeen. All live at pagelyra.vercel.app