

# the Locked Room Murder Mystery Game

1-6 PLAYERS • 1-3 HOURS • HIGHLY REPLAYABLE

|                              |    |                                  |    |
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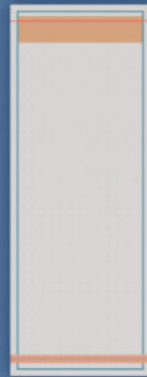
# Components



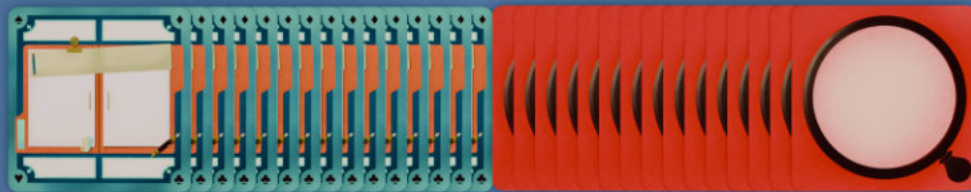
4 double-sided reference boards



20 playing cards



notepad



30 double-sided dry erase journal cards



6 dry erase markers



12 peril



killer



sleuth



4 case files

## Introduction

The story we are about to tell is one of mystery, murder, rumors, and disgrace. It's a convoluted tale of a detective in search of the who, how, and why of the most impossible type of crime: the locked room murder. With the victim of the crime found behind closed and locked doors, the killer's escape from the room is as much of a mystery as their identity. While attempting to untangle the web of evidence and deceptions surrounding the case, our detective will uncover the twisted and troubling rot at the core of everything.

This game puts players in the role of shared authors of a murder mystery story you are creating on the fly. Inspired by detective novels like *The Mystery of the Yellow Room*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, and *The Honjin Murders*, our story and the mystery it revolves around will unravel as we play the game.

There are no winners or losers in this game, nor is there a solution determined ahead of time. Instead, all of the characters and clues we create will act like a game board. A game piece called the killer will bounce around the board and determine which character gets murdered and which character is the culprit.

To start the game, we'll create all of the relevant characters, each of whom will be a suspect. We'll narrate chapters of our story in the lead-up to the murder as our suspects leave clues behind. After the murder, the detective investigates those clues to reveal new information about them throughout the investigation chapters. The game ends with the summation, when the culprit is revealed and the players interpret all of the clues to explain the mystery.

This format allows us to be dramatic with our chapters, layering in clues and tidbits and theatrics without knowing exactly how it will connect in the end. We may know that Alfred briefed his wife and son about some clandestine plot in the limo ride to the gala, but not what sort of plot he had in mind. We'll get a glimpse of Mrs. Willard finding a threatening note that was slipped under the door of her study, but its author will remain hidden. In the grand finale, we'll reveal these hidden truths, pull sense from the chaos, and tie everything together to solve the mystery.

# The Killer

Learn the most important rule first!



The game decides the murder victim and the culprit.

The killer visits a different suspect each turn during the *Lead-Up* and *Investigation* phases of the game.

At the end of *The Lead-Up*, the suspect visited by the killer becomes **THE MURDER VICTIM**.



At the end of *The Investigation*, the suspect visited by the killer is revealed as **THE CULPRIT**.

All suspects in the game are equally as likely to be the culprit as they are to be the victim, and no player knows who is who until the game reveals it.

During *The Summation*, it's up to the players of the game to piece together all the clues and explain how the revealed culprit committed the crime.

# Setup

1. Place the *Meet the Suspects* reference board face-up at the top of the playing area.
2. Shuffle the deck and place it on the reference board.
3. Set up the journal by laying out a 5x5 grid of alternating suspect and clue cards, like a checkerboard, under the reference board. Start with clue cards in the corners.
4. Set the other reference boards, sleuth, killer, and peril aside for later phases of the game.
5. Give all players a dry erase marker.
6. Choose a case file and begin the game.



# The Phases of Play

*The Locked Room Murder Mystery Game* has five phases.

The rules for each phase of play are designed to be read aloud as you progress through the game. When you start a new phase of the game, go over the next section of the rules and resume play.

*It's helpful if one player reads the full rules ahead of time, but it should go smoothly even if you play it blind, straight from the rulebook.*



## Meet the Suspects

Mix and match details from your chosen case file to create a cast of characters, each as likely to be murdered as they are to be a murderer. Each character gets added to a suspect card in the journal.

## The Lead-Up

Begin the story. Write chapters to show the suspects mingling and leaving plenty of clues behind. The killer moves between the suspect cards in the journal, ready to strike as soon as a full house is drawn.

## The Locked Room Murder

One of the suspects is found murdered in a locked room. Add crime scene clues to the journal based on the cards that were drawn in *The Lead-Up*, and describe the scene of the impossible murder.

## The Investigation

Write chapters that show the detective's investigation. Reveal the secrets lurking at the heart of the case. Thwart the killer's murderous cover-up. Study the clues until the culprit is revealed with a full house.

## The Summation

The detective exposes the culprit and spills secrets. Identify the culprit's accomplices and the crime's would-have-been witnesses. Discard red herrings and clear the names of the uninvolved.

# Starting the Game

## Creating the Detective

One of the most important characters of any murder mystery is the detective. The first step of playing the game is to come up with a detective character. Give them a name, describe them, and think about how long they've been solving mysteries. Draw four cards from the deck and use the below table to get a baseline.

|   | card 1              | card 2            | card 3       | card 4         |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------|
| A | world-renowned      | private detective | dresses      | stylishly.     |
| 2 | largely-unknown     | amateur sleuth    | speaks       | disheveledly.  |
| 3 | A locally-respected | journalist/writer | who observes | enigmatically. |
| 4 | nearly-mythical     | teacher/student   | intuits      | confidently.   |
| 5 | much-maligned       | criminal/lawyer   | operates     | positively.    |

### Optional: The Detective & Associates Mini-Expansion

If you plan to play *The Locked Room Murder Mystery Game* many times, use the more in-depth detective creation mini-expansion that's included with the case files.

It takes a bit more time to complete, but gives your detective an entourage of associates who can help or hinder throughout your mysteries. Imagine Holmes without Watson, or Poirot without Hastings. Tragic.

## Choosing a Case File

Choose a case file for your game. Case files in *The Locked Room Murder Mystery Game* provide a starting situation, suspect traits, and crime scene clues. You'll take these building blocks and create your own story, so they'll turn out wildly differently even if you play the same case file again and again!

### Murder on a Train

Everyone loves a classic train murder. Our suspects are all passengers aboard some long-distance train, and one of them is going to end up dead.

### Huckleberry's Art Lodge

Hubert "Pinky" Huckleberry has a world-renowned art collection that nobody in the world ever gets to see. Our suspects get a once-in-a-lifetime invite to view this prized gallery that art critics have called "a collection you could truly die for."

### Death at a Podcast Convention

The best podcasters in the business meet up in Latrobe, PA to discuss their craft, but tensions quickly begin to rise. What could drive someone to kill their co-host and frame their rival?

### Small Town Turmoil

Summer break is about to begin, and the Spring Bazaar is right around the corner. The people of the township are preparing for a weekend of carnival games, food booths, live music—and a murder.

# Meet the Suspects

The player who last read a detective novel goes first, and will open the case file to the suspect tables on the inside of the folio. Players will take turns drawing cards and adding descriptions, relationships, and traits to the suspect cards in the journal until all 20 playing cards of the deck have been drawn.

## Each turn: Draw a Card and Update a Suspect

Draw a playing card from the top of the deck. Find that card's corresponding row in the case file's *Meet the Suspects* table and read the three options aloud.

Choose either the trait, description, or relationship and write it on a suspect card in the journal.

Pass the case file clockwise to the next player, who draws a card and takes a turn.

## When the deck is empty: Name the Suspects

Continue in turn order. Each turn, add a name to any unnamed suspect with at least one detail written on them. Once all suspect cards with at least one detail have been named and introduced, place the killer piece on the last-named suspect.

Then, read the rules for the journal, the killer, and writing chapters and move on to *The Lead-Up*.

Each suspect card in the journal represents a character in the story who is as likely to be murdered as they are to commit a murder. They all have a motive for the murder to come.

Suspects will be defined by the descriptions, traits, and relationships you add to them during *Meet the Suspects*. These each have a designated spot on the suspect card, but not every spot needs to be filled in with details from the case file's folio.



It's normal to have a few blank suspects at the end of this phase. Leave them blank for now!

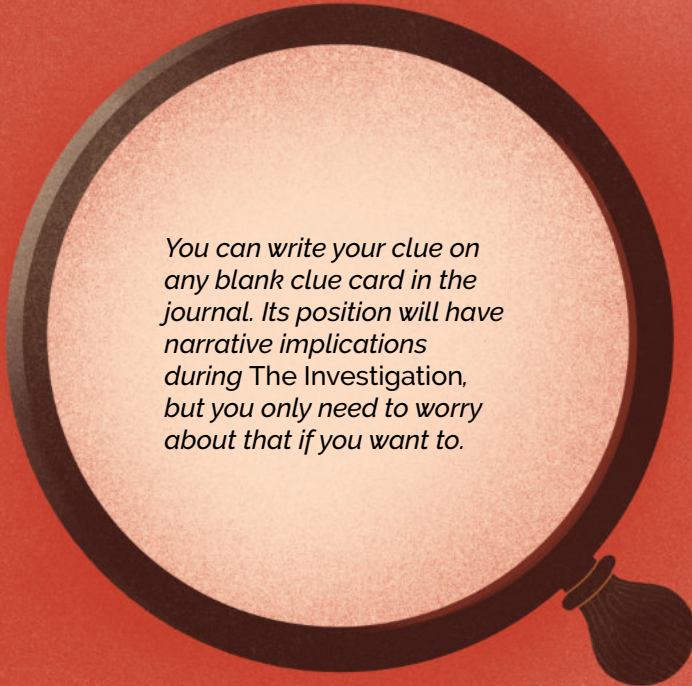
As you play, feel free to update existing text on these suspect cards, or fill in empty spaces and cards with details you learn in your chapters.

# The Journal

The journal is the grid of suspect and clue cards at the center of the table.

To add a clue, you write a brief summary of it on an empty clue card. Clues are added after each chapter of *The Lead-Up*. Five crime scene clues are added during *The Locked Room Murder*.

In the rare case that there are no empty clue cards in the journal, erase a clue that feels irrelevant now, or combine the new clue with an existing one.



You can write your clue on any blank clue card in the journal. Its position will have narrative implications during *The Investigation*, but you only need to worry about that if you want to.

# The Killer



Any time a rule references the killer, it's specifically talking about the game piece. The killer represents the very idea of murder as it looms over the characters in our story and infiltrates their every moment.

The killer is placed in the journal on the last named suspect at the end of *Meet the Suspects*. Once it enters play, the killer will always rest on one of the suspects in the journal until the game is over. It moves from suspect to suspect each turn during *The Lead-Up* and *The Investigation* phases. It reveals the victim during *The Locked Room Murder*, and the culprit during *The Summation*.

## The Killer's Movement Rules

1. The killer moves a number of spaces equal to the rank of the drawn card.
2. The killer starts its movement in the direction corresponding to the corner of the suspect card that matches the suit of the drawn card.
3. The killer turns 90 degrees to continue its movement if it would move through the edge of the journal.
4. If the killer lands on an empty suspect card, the active player chooses either to create a new suspect immediately or continue the killer's movement until it hits a named suspect.

To put it simply, the killer moves like a bishop from chess crossed with the screensaver from a DVD player.

# Writing Chapters

In the *Lead-Up* and *Investigation* phases, you will take turns writing chapters. To write a chapter, you narrate the next part of the story, and then create or update clues in the journal. In *The Lead-Up*, you create new clues, and in *The Investigation*, you update existing clues with new information.

Each chapter has a focus character. In *The Lead-Up*, the focus character is the suspect that the killer is currently visiting. In *The Investigation*, the focus character is the suspect that the sleuth is adjacent to. The focus character must be involved in the scene.

To start a chapter, describe a situation the suspects are in. You can write a chapter that's as specific as a single conversation between characters, or as far-reaching as a character traveling to a new city and getting up to some sort of hijinks.

## Challenge: Involve More Suspects!

Aim to involve a number of suspects equal to the rank of the playing card drawn that round. This helps add drama and ensures you're not forgetting about any suspects.

There are many ways to involve a suspect: include them in the scene, gossip about them, root around in their belongings, observe them from afar, etc.

## Narrating or Roleplaying

Each chapter, you can choose to simply narrate the action, or get other players involved by casting them as the various characters you've chosen and acting it out to see what happens. Either way, keep your chapters brief! You don't have to come up with some complex situation or fill every single chapter with loads of details. It's good to start with either the characters you want to see interact ('I want to show Chester and Ms. Claretta together') or a specific clue you want to add to the journal ('I want a documented instance of Gerry being lactose intolerant') and see where it goes.

*Fans of GMless roleplaying games might be familiar with this structure, but everyone has an innate storyteller. You're going to do great!*

When narrating a chapter, you have final say over what happens. If you want other people's ideas, set up a scene to get more players involved. The best games have a healthy mix of narrated and roleplayed chapters, and plenty of ideas from all players.

## Optional: The Table of Contents

One use for the notepad is to keep a running table of contents for your developing story. After each chapter concludes, give it a name and add it to the table of contents.

It's a great way to remember what's happened so far, and it can also help emphasize the tone you've set for your story; a more silly murder mystery might have punny chapter names, whereas a more serious one might have grave and foreboding chapter names.

# The Lead-Up

Flip the *Meet the Suspects* board to reveal the killer movement reference on the back. Set it to the side of the journal.

Place the *Lead-Up* reference board at the top of the journal. Shuffle the deck and place it on its spot on the reference board.

*The Lead-Up starts the story and sets the stage for the murder to come. You'll write chapters and create clues while the killer bounces around the journal.*

## **First:** Cause of Death & Detective Arrival

Draw a card to determine the cause of death by finding the corresponding entry on the case file's cause of death table. Write it on the clue card at the center of the journal. Add the card to the tableau.

Draw a second card to determine how and when the detective arrives using the case file's corresponding tables. The rank of the drawn card indicates how the detective gets involved with the case, and the suit indicates when they arrive. Add the card to the tableau.

## **Then:** Write Chapters

Take turns writing chapters following the steps on the next page.

## **Finally:** The Locked Room Murder

Move to the next phase as soon as a full house is drawn into the tableau.  
*(three cards of one rank, two cards of another)*

# Steps of a Turn

## 1. Draw a Card

Draw a card from the deck and add it to the tableau. If the tableau now has a full house, skip the other steps and advance to *The Locked Room Murder* phase.

## 2. Move the Killer

Move the killer using the suit and rank of the card drawn in step 1.

## 3. Write a Chapter

Write a chapter where the suspect the killer just landed on is the focus character. End the chapter when you know what clue you will add to the journal.

## 4. Add a Clue

Your clue can be just about anything: physical evidence, the weather, a conversation someone had, or even an intent that was shown. Write what you described on any empty clue card in the journal.

# the Locked Room Murder

When a full house is revealed during *The Lead-Up*, the moment we've all been waiting for finally occurs: an impossible crime has been committed. One of our suspects is found murdered in a locked room. We'll collaborate on a special chapter where we will add crime scene clues based on the cards in the tableau, and decide the time, place, and other key facts of the crime.

Leave the cards in the tableau as they are and place the *Locked Room Murder* reference board on the table so everybody can follow along. Turn to the crime scene clues section of the case file that you're playing, and follow these steps.

## 1. The Victim

Do not move the killer. The suspect currently being visited by the killer is found murdered in a locked room.

## 2. The Witness

The suspect the killer would have moved to using the card that was drawn this round is the first to discover the crime.

## 3. Crime Scene Clues

Each of the card ranks from 1-5 will add a clue based on how many cards of that rank were drawn. Go through each card rank, starting with 1 and proceeding to 2, then 3, 4, 5. For each, determine which clue gets added based on how many of that card rank are in the tableau. Discuss these clues and add each one to a blank card in the journal, or combine them with another clue if no blank cards remain.

## 4. The Scene

With the crime scene clues revealed, discuss where and when the victim is found. Consider why the victim might be alone with a murderer. Consider what leads the witness to find the victim, who else is there with them, and what they do immediately in the aftermath.

*Remember—this is The Locked Room Murder Mystery Game! Your victim should be found in a locked room, which is detective novel shorthand for an impossible situation. It may be a true locked room, or it could be somewhere you can't immediately conceive how the killer would escape from, unseen and unheard.*

## 5. The Chapter

Once we have a shared understanding of the murder, summarize its discovery into a chapter. Ensure everyone is on the same page before moving on.

## Next: The Investigation

Review the rules for peril, plots, the rot, and the sleuth before continuing to the next phase of the game.

# Peril & Plots

During *The Investigation*, the killer does not rest. Its movement in *The Investigation* phase represents the culprit's attempts to cover up their crime. They'll stop at nothing to get away with murder, and may even claim other victims to hide the truth.

When the killer moves during *The Investigation*, add a peril to the suspect it lands on. If the suspect already has a peril, resolve a plot on that suspect's life by choosing one of these two options:

## 1. Allow the Plot to Succeed

Announce that the suspect is dead, and describe where and how they're found.

*You make this choice as an author of the story. Your choice doesn't imply that another character allowed the plot to succeed, but you are welcome to narrate the plot and implicate suspects however you want in your chapter.*

—or—

## 2. Attempt to Thwart the Plot

To give the imperiled suspect a chance at life, draw another card from the deck and add it to the tableau. If it matches the color of the card you first drew this turn, the plot is thwarted. Otherwise, the character dies.

*If you draw the final card of a full house, this ends *The Investigation* phase and pushes the game right to *The Summation* after you finish resolving the plot. This would mean that the victim of the plot is the culprit of the crime!*

## Update a Clue

Once you know how the plot resolves, choose one of the clues adjacent to the imperiled suspect, and update it to reflect the central role it played in this plot. Include the plot and this clue in your upcoming chapter.

*Plots are always perpetrated by the same culprit that performed the original murder, and thus always leave clues that will help solve the whole mystery. The mere attempt at another murder tips the detective off that the imperiled suspect is connected to something very important.*

# The Rot

The rot is how we refer to the lies and secrets that surround the murder case. It's shorthand for the social conditions that allow a murder to happen among this group of suspects in the first place. The rot turned our gathering of people into a journal full of suspects, and thus is the reason that any one of these suspects could conceivably be the culprit. Uncovering the rot is the key to solving any locked room murder mystery.

When writing chapters in *The Investigation*, have the detective reveal secrets that our suspects would much rather sweep under the rug. By investigating the rot, the detective gets closer to knowing why this murder was committed and why it seems like every suspect has something to hide. Many of these secrets may turn out to be irrelevant to the case, but we won't know which ones are critical until all is revealed in *The Summation*.

# The Sleuth

## Questions

The journal now has quite a few filled-in suspect and clue cards. Each suspect borders up to four clues, and each clue borders up to four suspects.

We refer to these borders as questions. At its simplest, each question is, *"How are these things related, and how does that help solve the mystery?"*

Enter the sleuth. Any mention of the sleuth in the game refers to this game piece. If the killer represents the specter of murder, the sleuth represents the pursuit of the truth. As such, the sleuth doesn't rest on suspects like the killer does. Instead, it lives in those gaps in the narrative; it moves through the questions and works to answer those questions to untangle the mystery. During *The Investigation*, the sleuth moves before each chapter.



## The Sleuth's Movement Rules

Think of the questions like a grid of streets between the suspect and clue cards in the journal. You will move the sleuth through the intersections made by these streets.

You get to choose which direction it goes at each intersection, and must move it through a number of intersections equal to the rank of the drawn card.

The sleuth may turn left, right, or continue straight through each intersection, but may not directly backtrack while moving.

## Removing Peril

When the sleuth ends its movement, you may remove a peril on the suspect the sleuth is now adjacent to. You can save a life by investigating an imperiled suspect!

## Updating Clues

During *The Investigation*, we will write chapters to update the clue the sleuth sits next to. Once you find a connection between the suspect and the clue, update that clue with the new information. You can append these new details to what's already there, or erase and re-write the clue based on how you now understand it. The important thing is that the clue itself changes in some way, reflecting the deeper understanding of the mystery now held by the detective.

# The Investigation

Flip the *Lead-Up* and *Locked Room Murder* boards to reveal the sleuth movement and peril references on their backs. Set them to the side of the journal.

Place the *Investigation* reference board at the top of the journal. Shuffle the deck and place it on its spot on the reference board. Place the sleuth on a question next to the suspect that found the victim. We will resume turn order to write more chapters where we update clues based on what the investigation reveals.

*The Investigation* ends when once again a full house is drawn into the tableau, at which point the killer reveals the culprit.

The Investigation shows the detective's attempts to untangle the mystery. You'll write chapters and update clues while trying to stay ahead of the killer's plots.

## Challenge: Incorporate the Rot!

Use the color of the card to determine whether the chapter you write relates to the rot or the murder itself.

If you drew a red card, write a chapter about the rot. Explore interpersonal relationships and reveal juicy secrets without worrying if these secrets are the motive for the murder.

If you drew a black card, write a chapter about the puzzle of the murder itself. Focus on the hard evidence, the clues about the crime, and the specific way suspects talk about the murder and the victim.

# Steps of a Turn

## 1. Draw a Card

Draw a card from the deck and add it to the tableau. If the tableau now has a full house, skip the other steps and advance to *The Summation* phase.

## 2. Move the Killer

Move the killer using the card drawn in step 1. If the suspect it lands on has a peril on it already, resolve a plot on that suspect's life. Otherwise, add a peril.

## 3. Move the Sleuth

Move the sleuth to a new question in the journal using the card drawn in step 1. If the suspect the sleuth is now adjacent to has a peril, you may remove it.

## 4. Write a Chapter

Write a chapter where the detective investigates the link between the suspect and clue they're adjacent to.

## 5. Update the Clue

Update the clue that the detective was investigating to represent the information revealed in the chapter. You may erase what was written to re-write it, or just add the new information.

Keep in mind that we as players don't need to know how specifically these chapters lead the detective to the culprit. It's enough to make a connection between the suspect and clue and flesh out some narrative details. We know that our brilliant detective is synthesizing the meaning of each clue in their mind and will reveal all to us during *The Summation*.

# The Summation

*A full house was drawn, so the journal is now officially complete. The detective has everything they need to reveal the truth to the world and put an end to our story.*

The suspect that the killer rests on is the culprit. They committed the grisly crime that our story revolves around, and their attempts to hide the truth have been for naught.

The time for vague narrative beats is over. Decide together how the detective breaks the truth. Do they trick the killer into revealing themselves? Do they summon all involved to a parlor room to reveal all secrets? Do they swoop in right as the wrong person is about to be accused by the police? Or do they stage an experiment to recreate every step of the murder, thus proving once and for all the truth?

Leave the playing cards in the tableau on the table. Put the rest of the deck aside. Flip the *Investigation* reference board over to reveal the *Summation* board.

Remove the culprit from the journal and place them in the designated spot of the *Summation* board.

Remove the victim and any suspects that fell victim to a plot from the journal. Place them in the designated spot of the *Summation* board.

Then, go through each card rank in the *Investigation* tableau and count the number cards of that rank. Resolve the corresponding prompt for each card. For example, if there are three 2s, reveal three critical clues. Work with the other players to resolve the narrative implications of each step.



## For Each Ace: Red Herrings

Remove from the journal a clue to reveal it as a red herring. Explain what other mystery it pointed to. Take it out of play completely; you no longer need it.



## For Each Two: Critical Clues

Remove from the journal a clue that is critical to the case. Explain why the mystery cannot be solved without it. Set the clue on the *Summation* board.



## For Each Three: Uninvolved Suspects

Remove from the journal a suspect with secrets that are irrelevant to the case. They may be guilty of something, but not this murder. Take them out of play completely; you no longer need them.



## For Each Four: Accomplices & Actors

Remove from the journal a suspect who played a role in the murderer's plot whether they knew it or not. Set them on the *Summation* board.



## For Each Five: Would-Have- Been Witnesses

Remove from the journal a suspect who could have been a key witness had they only shared everything they saw, heard, knew, or thought. Set them on the *Summation* board.

Set aside the remaining suspects and clues in the journal. It's time to write one last chapter where the detective explains the whole crime. You must use all of the clues and suspects on the *Summation* tableau in your recreation of the crime. The remaining clues and suspects from the journal may be used, but don't need to be.

Once everyone is satisfied with the solution, the game is over.

# Adam Bell's Ten Rules of Detective Stories

*These ten rules provide the groundwork for a great detective story. Follow them, and you'll have a fantastic murder mystery on your hands. These rules are, of course, heavily inspired by Knox's Ten Commandments and S.S. Van Dine's Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Fiction.*

1. All of the main characters in the story are as likely to be victims of a murder as they are to be perpetrators of one, and thus are considered suspects.
2. All suspects have secrets to hide, whether related to the crime or not. These secrets shroud the murder in mystery; without them the identity of the culprit would be obvious.
3. The solution to the crime shall not defy the natural laws of the world. The same is true for the methods and tools of the detective's investigation.
4. The solution to the crime shall not hinge on bigoted logic or stereotypes, be it racist, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, etc.
5. No deaths subsequent to the initial locked room murder shall be unrelated to the murder at hand. If the culprit kills again, the clues left behind will serve as clues that help solve the original murder.
6. The culprit will commit the crime due to a personal motive and not on behalf of some mafia or other organized group.
7. The detective shall not commit the crime.
8. The detective is not obliged to share what they know with the audience or author until the end of the story, but they will reveal all secrets once the culprit is discovered.
9. The detective's sense of justice need not align with the tenets of the law, and the detective's obligation to share secrets with the audience does not extend to the other characters in the story, nor to the police.
10. The detective shall deduce the culprit's identity before the end of the story; the answer will not be accidentally revealed, nor will the culprit confess for no reason.

# Key Terms Glossary

- CHAPTER • The basic unit of play; a scene dictated by a player on their turn to drive the story forward
- JOURNAL • The grid of dry erase cards containing all of the suspects and clues important to the case
- SUSPECT • A character with a card in the journal; each suspect can turn out to be the culprit and/or the victim
  - CLUE • A piece of evidence on a card in the journal: bloodstains, a conversation, the weather; anything that pertains to the case
- QUESTION • The space in the journal between a suspect card and a clue card; the sleuth moves between questions
  - KILLER • The game piece in the journal that represents the influence of the culprit and murder over the story
  - SLEUTH • The game piece in the journal that represents the influence of the detective over the story once *The Investigation* begins
- CULPRIT • The murderer, as determined at the end of *The Investigation* and proven during *The Summation*
  - VICTIM • The murdered character, discovered dead in a locked room at the end of *The Lead-Up*
- TABLEAU • The playing cards that have been drawn for the current phase of the game, stored on the reference board for that phase
- THE ROT • The twisted secrets at the heart of the case that lead to both the murder and its mystery
  - PERIL • A cube placed on suspects by the killer during *The Investigation* which represents the culprit's attempts to hide the truth
  - PLOT • An attempted murder that may happen when adding a second peril to a suspect
- CASE FILE • A playset that includes a character table, causes of death, and crime scene clues

# The Author's Reading List

*The Locked Room Murder Mystery Game* could not exist without my local library. I had never really read many murder mysteries until the recent translation of *The Devil's Flute Murders* by Seishi Yokomizo caught my eye on my library's new arrivals shelf. I read and enjoyed it, then read Yokomizo's *The Honjin Murders* right after, and then sought out the books that the famous detective Kindaichi mentioned as his favorites, and suddenly I was designing this game as my love letter to the Golden Era of detective fiction. Here's a list of the books that shaped this game in some way, presented in the order I read them:

|                    |   |                                 |                                        |
|--------------------|---|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Seishi Yokomizo    | — | The Devil's Flute Murders       | <i>translated by Jim Rion</i>          |
| Seishi Yokomizo    | — | The Honjin Murders              | <i>translated by Louise Heal Kawai</i> |
| Gaston Leroux      | — | The Mystery of the Yellow Room  |                                        |
| Seishi Yokomizo    | — | The Inugami Curse               | <i>translated by Yumiko Yamazaki</i>   |
| Patricia Highsmith | — | The Talented Mr. Ripley         |                                        |
| John Dickson Carr  | — | Till Death Do Us Part           |                                        |
| Yukito Ayatsuji    | — | The Mill House Murders          | <i>translated by Ho-Ling Wong</i>      |
| Christianna Brand  | — | Death of Jezebel                |                                        |
| Yukito Ayatsuji    | — | The Decagon House Murders       | <i>translated by Ho-Ling Wong</i>      |
| Agatha Christie    | — | Cards on the Table              |                                        |
| Seishi Yokomizo    | — | Death on Gokumon Island         | <i>translated by Louise Heal Kawai</i> |
| Josephine Tey      | — | The Man in the Queue            |                                        |
| John Dickson Carr  | — | The Mad Hatter Mystery          |                                        |
| S.S. Van Dine      | — | The Benson Murder Case          |                                        |
| Seishi Yokomizo    | — | The Village of Eight Graves     | <i>translated by Bryan Karetnyk</i>    |
| G.K. Chesterton    | — | The Man Who Was Thursday        |                                        |
| Ellery Queen       | — | The Greek Coffin Mystery        |                                        |
| John Dickson Carr  | — | The Problem of the Wire Cage    |                                        |
| Ellery Queen       | — | There Was an Old Woman          |                                        |
| John Dickson Carr  | — | The Hollow Man                  |                                        |
| S.S. Van Dine      | — | The Canary Murder Case          |                                        |
| Dashiell Hammett   | — | Red Harvest                     |                                        |
| Agatha Christie    | — | Murder in Mesopotamia           |                                        |
| Agatha Christie    | — | The Mysterious Affair at Styles |                                        |
| Agatha Christie    | — | Murder on the Orient Express    |                                        |
| Seishi Yokomizo    | — | The Little Sparrow Murders      | <i>translated by Bryan Karetnyk</i>    |
| Agatha Christie    | — | Death on the Nile               |                                        |
| Dashiell Hammett   | — | The Maltese Falcon              |                                        |
| Yasuhiko Nishizawa | — | The Man Who Died Seven Times    |                                        |
| Flann O'Brien      | — | The Third Policeman             |                                        |
| Yukito Ayatsuji    | — | The Labyrinth House Murders     | <i>translated by Ho-Ling Wong</i>      |
| John Dickson Carr  | — | The Arabian Nights Murder       |                                        |
| Agatha Christie    | — | The Murder of Roger Ackroyd     |                                        |
| Seishi Yokomizo    | — | Murder at the Black Cat Cafe    |                                        |
| Dorothy L. Sayers  | — | Whose Body?                     |                                        |

# Making Your Own Case Files

*The Locked Room Murder Mystery Game* comes with four case files. Because you only use a third of the suspect details and a fifth of the crime scene clues in a game, you are able to replay each one several times with many different results. The real limit lies in how many times you can get yourself excited about a podcaster's death, a reclusive rich guy's art gallery, a suburban carnival, or a murder on a train.

You can write your own case files! Include all of the elements that you see in the ones included with the game—pitch, detective information, cause of death, suspect tables, and crime scene clues. Here's a brief overview of how I approach each element:

**The Pitch** – Write the pitch like it's the blurb on the back of a trade paperback detective novel, complete with a pithy cliffhanger about murder. Use discretion on how much detail to include; some case files benefit from specificity like you see in *Huckleberry*, but others feel best when left broad, like *Train*.

**Detective Information** – Some detective novels focus on the detective from page one, others treat the detective like a background character.

**Cause of Death** – Honestly, this is the trickiest one for me; you could easily reuse shot/stabbed/poisoned/other for each case, as most authors do. For sillier case files, like *Podcast*, I like to be a tad more outlandish.

**Suspect Tables** – Think about the types of characters you might find in the story represented by your pitch. Don't be afraid of some repetition across a column or row. In *Podcast*, I filled a whole column with "Podcast Co-Host" relationships, because I wanted players to pick at least one of them. In *Train*, I filled a whole row with the idea of a murder that occurred in the past, so that it's guaranteed to be in the story in some way each time that case file is played.

**Crime Scene Clues** – I like to give each row a theme that makes sense with the pitch, and then make variations on that theme with each entry. Keep in mind that players will only ever get one clue from the 3 and 4 card columns, so some repetition there is okay. 4 cards is pretty rare, so I try to make those clues ridiculous.

You can also distribute case files that you create commercially, as long as your work is not bigoted and your process makes zero use of generative AI. If you do release commercial work, include this text where you put your credits:

"[Product Name] is compatible with *The Locked Room Murder Mystery Game* but is an independent production by [publisher name] and is not affiliated with Adam Bell Games."

## Achievements

Mark these off if your game meets the criteria. Some achievements unlock rules variants, found on the next page.

- ☐ **An Elaborate Suicide:** The victim and culprit of your story are one and the same. Every author gets to do this once, but to repeat this trope across multiple stories may be seen as crass. Unlock *Let the Dead Lie*.
- ☐ **Self-Administered Justice:** The culprit is revealed when drawing a card to attempt to thwart a plot. Unlock *The Rule of Discretion*.
- ☐ **Dead Again:** An already dead suspect falls victim to a plot. Unlock *Faked Death*.
- ☐ **A Full Journal:** All suspect cards contain a named suspect. Unlock *Extended Journal*.
- ☐ **You Need An Editor:** A full house appears after eleven cards are added to the tableau. Unlock *The Short Story*.
- ☐ **Breakneck Pacing:** A full house appears when the fifth card is added to the tableau. Unlock *The Long Game*.
- ☐ **The Notorious Recluse:** Play a game solo.
- ☐ **Writer's Room:** Play a game with more than 6 players.
- ☐ **This One's Personal:** One of the detective's associates is the victim.
- ☐ **My Dear Friend!:** One of the detective's associates is the culprit.
- ☐ **A Very Brief Appearance:** A character introduced by the killer landing on an empty suspect card that turn is revealed to be the victim by the next card drawn.
- ☐ **Who?:** A character introduced by the killer landing on an empty suspect card that turn is revealed to be the culprit by the next card drawn.
- ☐ **Locked Room Express:** Play a game using *Murder on a Train*.
- ☐ **Private Collection:** Play a game using *Huckleberry's Art Lodge*.
- ☐ **RSS Feed:** Play a game using *Death at a Podcast Convention*.
- ☐ **Picket Fence:** Play a game using *Small Town Turmoil*.
- ☐ **Local Author:** Play a game using a case file written by one of the players.
- ☐ **Platinum:** Unlock every other achievement.

## Rule Unlocks

When you unlock a rule variant from an achievement, mark it off here. You can implement any number of your unlocked variants in your games.

- ☐ **Let the Dead Lie:** When a suspect dies, either from the *Locked Room Murder* or a plot, remove them from the journal and place them above the reference board. Fill the slot with a blank suspect card.
- ☐ **The Rule of Discretion:** When drawing a card to attempt to thwart a plot creates a full house in the tableau, you may decide if the imperiled culprit lives or dies regardless of the color of the card. The detective is aware of the culprit's attempt on their own life, and can allow it to pass or prevent it at their own discretion, using their own sense of justice.
- ☐ **Faked Death:** When an already dead suspect falls victim to a plot, you can choose to (1) bring them back into the story in a grand reveal of a faked death; (2) transfer the peril and killer to another suspect to resolve the plot and reveal that this new suspect is the dead suspect in disguise (either as a body swap or as a new identity); or (3) reveal that they were in fact alive the whole time until falling victim to this plot, and resolve the plot normally. Across all of your games, you must choose each of the options once before you can repeat a choice.
- ☐ **Extended Journal:** When setting up the journal, you may add up to four extra suspects, one on each end of the center row and center column.
- ☐ **The Short Story:** When starting the game, reduce the number of rows and columns in your journal, and take away that many ranks of cards from the deck. For example, you could make a 3x3 grid and a 12 card deck consisting of only 1s, 2s, & 3s. Choose wisely which cards you eliminate, as the missing cards will affect both the crime scene clues and the *Summation*.
- ☐ **The Long Game:** For a potentially longer game, change the phase ending condition of *The Lead-Up* and/or *The Investigation* to require a four-of-a-kind or flush instead of a full house. A full house is guaranteed to happen after drawing between 5 and 11 cards; a four-of-a-kind will happen somewhere between 4 and 16 cards; a flush will happen somewhere between 5 and 17 cards. Each is likely to happen in the middle of their range, but the four-of-a-kind and flush could turn the game into a true marathon, especially if used in both phases.

# Game Overview

## Meet the Suspects

FIRST

- Set up the journal
- Choose a case file

TAKE  
TURNS

- Draw cards to add details to suspects until all cards drawn
- Name the suspects

## The Lead-Up

FIRST

- Learn about the journal, the killer, and writing chapters
- Draw a card to determine the eventual cause of death
- Draw a card to determine the detective's arrival

TAKE  
TURNS

- Draw cards until full house
- Move the killer
- Write chapters & add clues

## The Locked Room Murder

FIRST

- Don't move the killer
- The victim is the suspect the killer is currently visiting
- The witness is the suspect the killer would move to

TOGETHER

- Use the *Lead-Up* tableau to add crime scene clues
- Tie everything together in a special murder chapter

## The Investigation

FIRST

- Learn about peril, plots, the rot, and the sleuth

TAKE  
TURNS

- Draw cards until full house
- Move the killer and sleuth
- Write chapters & update clues

## The Summation

FIRST

- Don't move the killer
- The culprit is the suspect the killer is currently visiting

TOGETHER

- Use the *Investigation* tableau to sort suspects and clues
- Tie everything together
- End the game