

The Reel That Kept Turning

THE CASE FILE

Ambrose Whaley lay face down between the admissions kiosk and the first ramp, twenty minutes into the second feature. The coroner filed three readings and ranked none: a shock, a drop, a swallowed dose. The old neon sign has leaned unbolted on the projection shed wall since spring, and it flickered the same way last season. Ramp grit rides every glove, rail and rung on this lot.

Fourteen calls hang on the board, one hand each, every hand on every kind. They read power calls, ladder calls or bait calls, three to a post. Admissions kiosk: power Trantham, ladder Trantham, bait Cullum. Concession stand: power Trantham, ladder Yarber, bait Cullum. Projection shed: power Yarber, ladder Cullum, bait Sluder. Off post, on the field: power Cullum, Trantham; ladder Yarber, Sluder; bait Sluder. The lab returns two lines: reading and post.

THE VICTIM	FOUND AT	TIME	APPARENT CAUSE
Ambrose Whaley	Starlight Ridge lot	9:40 PM	Undetermined

THE SUSPECTS

1

HOLLIS TRANTHAM

Lot hand, six seasons

Motive: Whaley struck his name off the winter payroll and said so at the gate.

Alibi: "I walked the back row for pass-outs." The gate tally carries his mark at 9:25; a mark dates one pass, not the hour around it.

2

ODESSA YARBER

Lot hand, nine seasons

Motive: Whaley blamed her count when the season's cash ran short.

Alibi: "I was restocking behind the counter." Her stock sheet closes at 9:30; a sheet dates a count, not the hours before it.

3

MARLIN CULLUM

Lot hand, four seasons

Motive: Whaley would not sign his hours for the whole summer run.

Alibi: "I ran the truck out for ice and back." The road log times him out at 9:15; a log dates a passage, not a return.

4

JUNE SLUDER

Lot hand, three seasons

Motive: Whaley cut her nights to two and told the crew why.

Alibi: "I was up on the screen frame, patching." Her ladder card is signed 9:05; a card dates a climb, not the reel after it.

G	N	I	N	W	O	R	D	W	O	T	D	G	A
S	S	Z	C	H	O	K	I	N	G	R	G	A	Z
V	O	R	L	X	E	N	O	N	O	E	N	D	J
L	C	U	U	L	V	A	N	U	R	C	I	P	G
T	A	A	N	F	A	B	F	R	T	I	D	O	N
R	O	M	R	D	R	F	E	T	I	L	L	I	I
E	T	T	P	H	H	E	L	P	X	P	A	S	B
T	E	D	A	H	O	E	E	A	I	S	C	O	B
T	K	O	F	K	O	P	A	Z	T	N	S	N	A
A	C	U	B	A	E	U	C	D	I	A	S	I	T
L	O	S	S	G	G	U	S	F	T	N	F	N	S
P	R	E	X	W	D	U	P	E	L	B	G	G	V
W	P	R	V	V	J	D	T	E	K	F	G	A	B
H	S	I	F	N	C	U	E	M	A	R	K	H	S

EVIDENCE 2 - THE HIDDEN MESSAGE

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|-------------|---------------|---------------|------------|
| 1. SNIPE | 2. XENON | 3. CARHOP | 4. DOUSER |
| 5. TAKEUP | 6. PLATTER | 7. CUEMARK | 8. SPLICER |
| 9. SPROCKET | 10. LAMPHOUSE | 11. SOUNDHEAD | |

YOUR LETTERS

THE HIDDEN WORD

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EVIDENCE 1 - THE MISSING WORD

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|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ DROWNING | ☐ CHOKING | ☐ ELECTROCUTION | ☐ FATAL FALL |
| ☐ STABBING | ☐ POISONING | ☐ SCALDING | ☐ FREEZING |

EVIDENCE 1 - METHOD

EVIDENCE 2 - PROFILE

VERDICT - CULPRIT
