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# NANO MYSTERIES



Match Wits with Professor Nano  
The Virtual Detective  
in the World's Quickest Mystery Puzzles

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ALAN ROBBINS

## **MATCH WITS WITH PROFESSOR NANO**

The Virtual Detective!

Is your gray matter growing even grayer?  
Are your wits dimming by the moment?  
Is your IQ number too short for the questionnaire?

Well don't look to Professor Nano for help!  
But at least in this collection of lightning-fast puzzles, you can  
have some fun and not get in trouble with the law.  
The short mystery tales in this book aren't just any old puzzles.  
These are real braintwiddlers that don't rely on dull logic but call  
for a spark of insight.  
So drain that blubber from your brain cells with these challenges  
from Professor Nano, the virtual detective and master of the little  
known science of noticing the obvious!  
Guaranteed to give a whack to any type of head, from bone to  
dunder.

## **Nano Mysteries**

By Alan Robbins

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## INTRODUCTION

“Professor Nano!” you say, handshake first, eyebrows high with hope.

“Allow me to introduce myself.”

“Don’t say a word!” Nano snaps, “let me tell *you* who you are.”

Nano is floating like cigar smoke above his projection box but thanks to the science of artificial touch, he easily handshakes you into submission. Releasing your hand, Nano gives you a long overview from head to toe with squinty virtual eyes.

“We have never met before this very moment...is that correct?”

“Yes,” you answer, feeling rather uneasy under his piercing probe.

“And yet by simple deduction, I can tell that you had eggs for breakfast this morning, that your initials are HN, that you came here in great haste to discuss a matter of the utmost gravity. And that you are new to this city and left-handed!”

You are amazed. Astounded. Nano has not gotten a single thing right!

“Am I correct?” he asks with a wily smirk.

“Sort of. I mean, I did eat breakfast this morning but it wasn’t eggs.”

“No eggs? Then how do you explain the yellowish stain on your blouse?”

“That’s not a stain. It’s part of the design. See? There’s a matching one on the other side. I guess your programmers are still having trouble with pattern recognition.”

“Well then Hilbert...” he says, taking a bold stab at your first name.

But you quickly correct his mistake and tell him your real name.

“Then why in heaven’s name do your shoes carry the initials HN on the front?” he asks.

“Oh! I’m afraid you’re reading them upside down. The letters are NH. It’s the monogram of the famous shoe designer... Nemian Hands.”

“I see,” Nano says, somberly. There’s a slight shimmy in his image but that, you figure, could be due to a random gust of air.

“But I did just move into the upstairs apartment!” you say kindly. “Only it wasn’t from another city.”

“And this matter of utmost urgency that impelled you to summon me like a genie?” Nano asks.

“Sorry, I was just tinkering with the box. I didn’t realize I would activate the program. I mean summon you,” you say, pointing to the black case with your left hand.

“Left-handed?” Nano asks sadly, already knowing the answer.

“Nope,” you say.

A glum silence prevails as Nano stands stiffly and translucently in the center of the room, waiting for you to continue.

“It says in the instructions that you are a kind of detective,” you offer.

“Virtual detective...the world’s first,” Nano announces proudly.

“So that’s why you were trying to guess who I was.”

“Bah! That was just a silly game to test your mettle,” he says.

“Luckily, mettle isn’t my quarry.”

“That’s very lucky indeed.”

“A silly game for mere sherlocks. I find logic and reason intensely boring. If you need that kind of deduction, I believe the company makes a Poirot-to-Go. Check the catalog.”

“Well then how do you detect?”

“With a far more interesting instrument...the flash of understanding, the creative hoopededoo.”

“The hoop-de-huh?”

“Intuition!” he says, tapping his skull and releasing tiny specks of digital bits into the image.

But he can see from your squashed eyes and buck teeth that you still don’t get it.

“I am an expert in the obvious.”

“Aha!”

“Precisely. I am summoned on cases when reason has fallen flat as a pancake. They call me in when the police are stymied because they are at then end of their rational ropes.”

“What kind of cases?”

“Murder, codebreaking, theft, all sorts of things. Anything that doesn’t rely on rigid logic or seasoned reason.”

“What then?”

“A shot of lunacy, a quirk in the old noodle, the revelation of the obvious!”

Another tap on the head, more virtual dandruff.

“I call them braintwiddlers,” Nano continues. “They’re puzzles all right. But not of the ‘if three men drank three beers in three days’ variety. These are tests of how sharp you are, not how smart.”

“I see,” you say. “Can you tell me about them?”

“Certainly, my young friend. Let’s make a game of it and see if you can outwit the old professor. How about this...I’ll describe the case and you try to solve it.”

“I’m not too good at puzzles.”

“Even better! Try to use your imagination instead. Trust your wits.”

“I’m not sure my wits are up to snuff.”

“Rubbish. Even a halfwit has half a wit. Let’s start with an easy one first,” Nano says and gives the appearance of rummaging his memory for a sample.

Being only a computer projection, there is, of course, no rummaging and no memory. But the programmers have thought of everything to give Nano the impression of reality. Right down to the curl at the ends of the lips which even you can see is the kind of sly smirk designed to fool an innocent dolt like yourself.

## AN ORCHESTRATED MURDER

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When the cellist Hektor Pechmerle died, they had a funeral big enough to match his ego. The black limos that pulled up to the cemetery blocked traffic for a mile.

Suddenly one of the limos broke out of the line. The driver, honking to get people out of the way, raced to the front. Someone inside the limo rolled down the rear window and began shooting. The gunman was trying to kill Pechmerle's brother, the conductor of the orchestra, who was in the first car.

The shots caused pandemonium as the limos broke rank to get out of the way. After firing six shots, the gunman rolled up the tinted window and the driver simply guided the car back into the mass of identical cars. Since all the cars looked alike, no one could say which limo the shots had come from. By not leaving the scene, the assassins were able to hide in plain sight.

Pechmerle's brother, the conductor, was only wounded but he could barely speak when the police asked him which car the shots came from.

"A flat," he muttered before passing out.

But there wasn't a single car with a flat tire. And the cops couldn't find a gun anywhere. They had no hope of solving the murder until Chief Pratt had a brilliant insight...he called me! After hearing about the events, I made one simple request of the drivers and solved the case.

What do you think I did?



---

“The flat the conductor was talking about was the spare in the trunk!” you shout triumphantly.

“Which no one would have been able to see,” Nano says, shaking his head. “No, the answer is simple once you realize that conductors know musical sounds perfectly. I simply went around to every car with another of the musicians who had perfect pitch and asked each driver to sound his horn.”

“But why?”

“Because the conductor was talking about the car whose horn sounded a perfect A flat! That led to our gunman, a rival from another orchestra. He claimed the conductor had stolen his symphony and he was trying to settle the score.”



*The puzzle Unsolved~*

## A SECRET LETTER

---

Strudelberg during the war was a delicious old city. And crawling with spies. Our people were trying to intercept messages passed between foreign agents, particularly Meissner who was a master of secrecy. No one knew what Meissner looked like, not even his fellow spies.

One day we found out that Meissner was going to receive crucial information from another spy. They were to meet at one of the many baroque buildings in the center of town. So our boys managed to kidnap Meissner.

They planned to send one of their own in his place. They had heard that Meissner had a secret letter that he was going to trade for the information. It was a code they used to establish identity between spies. But when they picked him up, Meissner didn't have any such letter on him. All he had was a floor plan of one of the buildings.

The floor plan showed a perfect semi-circle which could only have meant the old court house. An X marked the spot at which they would meet. So they knew where the hand-off was to take place but without the letter itself they had no way to get the information.

Our agents were stymied but luckily one of them had heard of me and they immediately sent for me by FedEx. After booting me up, I was able to find the letter in no time thanks to my talent for making the obscure self-evident.

Is the answer self-evident to you, my friend?

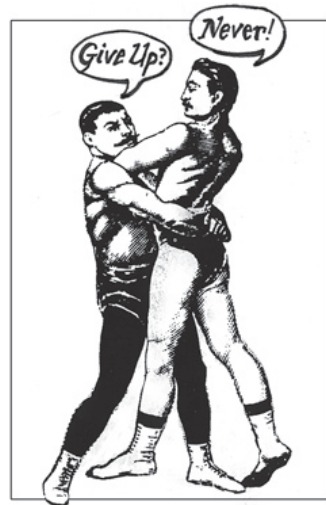
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“The letter isn’t a document at all,” you say proudly. “The secret letter is the letter C!”

“Not bad,” Nano says, somewhat let down. “How did you figure that out?”

“The floor plan did indicate where they were to meet, but it also contained the secret letter. It was shown in the floor plan itself, a semi-circle, which is the shape of the letter C!”

“Hmm,” Nano muses. “Perhaps that one was too easy. Shall we move on?”



## A MATTER OF TIME

---

The scene of the crime was a room at the Last Gasp Motor Lodge, a dingy place with damp towels and a broken TV. The room itself was a mess - torn sheets, a smashed lamp, and the body of the victim sprawled on the floor like a rag doll - all indicating a violent struggle. There were no fingerprints and very few clues.

Detective Dumbrow, whose shoe size and IQ were pretty much interchangeable, was at his wit's end until it occurred to him to call me. Once I materialized he went over the facts in his methodical manner, then sat back hoping I could provide the solution.

The clerk in the lobby remembered seeing the victim return to his room on the second floor at eight o'clock that night. The clerk also recalled seeing the other guest, a Mr. Rellik, return and go upstairs at 10:30. Then the clerk fell asleep.

Rellik would have been picked up but for one little detail. Dumbrow knew that the murder must have occurred at 10:11. When I asked how he had arrived at this precise fact, he pointed to the digital clock lying in the corner of the room. It was one of those flip-over affairs that got smashed during the struggle because the numbers were stuck at 10:11.

That meant that Rellik had not gone up the stairs until after the murder was committed. At least that was Dumbrow's thinking until I noticed his mistake and set him straight.

What do you think I did?

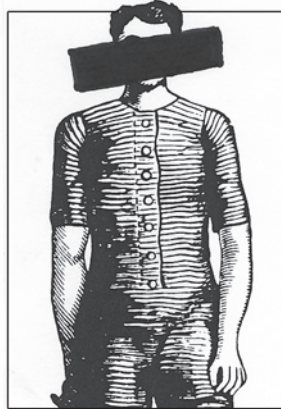
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“Well,” you say, trying to take your time and not rush into a trap, “you pointed out that the clerk committed the murder.”

“Interesting theory,” Nano says. “And why do you say that?”

“Because I can’t think of anything else,” you confess.

“I see,” Nano says, sighing wearily. “The fact is that Dumbrow was looking at the digital clock upside down. He hadn’t bothered to pick it up and, as usual, didn’t know which end was up. When I had him place it correctly, it proved that the time of the murder was not 10:11, it was 11:01. After Rellik was seen going upstairs.”



*The Innocent  
Duly Protected*

## INSUFFICIENT FUNDS

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One of the most annoying criminals I ever dealt with was Elmo Bagman, a notorious swindler. Before his reputation was established by a long prison sentence, he leased me to work for him. It was early in my career and I was working for lawyer on a test basis just to see how I would handle things. The problem came down to nothing more than finding a needle in a haystack but when I was through, Bagman naturally tried to swindle my owner out of his fee.

You see my owner billed him \$1,000 for my work. Pretty cheap when you think about it. Bagman dutifully forked over a check for that amount. But the check bounced once it was deposited and came back from the bank stamped Insufficient Funds.

My owner tried calling him about it but, as you might expect, could never get through. He tried depositing it again and again it bounced. Then, out of frustration, he hired a hacker to find out that the con artist only had \$950 in his account and no overdraft privileges. As a lawyer, my owner did not want to steal the money out of the account electronically.

That was Bagman for you, always trying to swindle everyone and assuming, as con artists always do, that the victim will just give up. But, of course, he didn't realize whom he was dealing with in this case. Not my owner. I mean me.

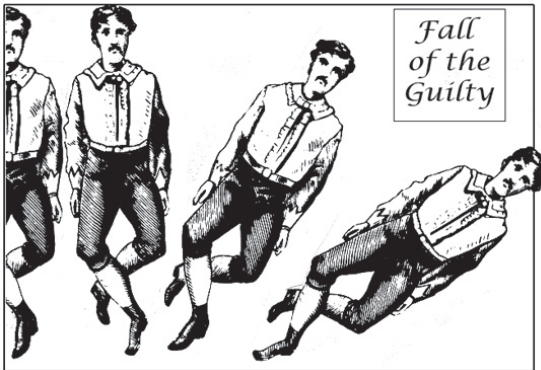
How do you think I solved the problem?

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Rather than rush into a blunder, this time you take your time to analyze the problem carefully.

But still incensed by the memory of the scam, Nano doesn't wait for you and quickly launches into the explanation.

"Simple," he says. "I told my owner to go to Bagman's bank and deposit fifty dollars into his account, then go ahead and cash the check! Sure he was out fifty, but he got the rest of the money. Besides, it was worth it just to get even and not become a thief himself."



## A CONTEST OF WITS

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I like this one because the solution is so simple. And that, of course, is the whole point of pointing out the obvious. There are no dead bodies though. All it involves is a simple contest that appeared in *Rag*, the weekly newspaper.

The paper was trying to increase its readership and they came up with a clever way to induce people to buy it. On the first Monday of the month they published a list of fifteen unusual words. Then they offered \$100 to the first person to find and circle the words as they appeared, throughout the paper, in the following Monday's edition.

Naturally, I can never resist making fools of people who think they can outwit me. So I had my technician set me up at the offices of *Rag* on the second Monday, along with fifty or so other human contestants, all hoping to get a head start by getting the paper hot off the press.

The moment the new issues were tossed onto the counter, all the contestants got out their pencils and started racing through the issue looking for the words to circle. It took an average of thirty minutes to do it.

For everyone else, that is.

I, of course, had set things up to give myself a distinct advantage. By doing what I did, my technician, under my direction, was able to win the contest in just a few seconds.

Can you figure out my little ploy?



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“Did you take a course in speed reading?” you ask.

Knowing that this guess is just plain dumb, you expect it to be met with a withering frown. You are not disappointed.

“No need for that kind of stuff,” Nano says. “You see, as soon as the list of words was published on that first Monday, I took out a classified ad in the next week’s edition. The ad contained nothing but the list of words itself. The only thing I had to do when the second issue came out was to have my technician turn to the classified section and circle the words in my own ad.”

“And the money?”

“Unfortunately, the classified ad cost me \$125. I never said that uncovering the obvious was profitable.”



*What's Wrong With This Picture*

## LUGS

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This time we were in hot pursuit of Grant Larson, the noted cat burglar. Dumbrow and I had been waiting in his old Yugo outside the Findings mansion all night for Larson to show. When he finally appeared, Dumbrow was too slow to react and Larson was quickly off in his Aston Martin.

We gave chase but we didn't get very far. Two blocks later, the Yugo got a flat tire. All was not lost though because I use GPS and figured out a short cut. There was still a chance to get to Larson's hideout before he got rid of the stolen goods.

So Dumbrow jumped out and started to change the tire. He unscrewed the six lugs, you know, those hexagonal nuts that hold the wheel on. He put them on the hubcap and then pulled the wheel off. Then, in a move only Dumbrow could have managed at a time like that, he stepped back onto the hubcap, flipped it over, and sent all the lugs rolling down into a sewer drain.

Without the lugs, there was no way to put the spare tire on. And there was no other car in sight to help us out. The jig was up or so Dumbrow thought. But he was wrong, as usual, because we had something better than a spanking new car to rely on...namely my virtual brain. I thought of a way to get us going again.

Do you know what I did?

---

“Did you drive the car on three wheels?” you ask.

But even as the words come out you know they will be met with Nano’s imperious sneer.

“*Au contraire*, my simple-minded friend. I merely suggested that we take two lugs from each of the other wheels, as a temporary expedient, and get a move on! Dumbrow did so and we barely made our arrest.”



*Seduced By Evil*

## THE THIRD KEY

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The second Earl of Duke summoned me up to his vast estate. He had read about me in the papers and assumed, correctly I must say, that I was the only one – virtual or real – who could help him out with this little mystery.

It seemed that the first Earl, his father, just died and left him the lavish Brigston Manor. Earl Jr. had not been there since his childhood. While exploring his new domain, he came upon a gorgeous grand piano and sat down to plunk out a tune. That's when noticed a locked door hidden behind some curtains.

The servants said that the previous Earl kept his priceless violin collection there. Pressed for cash to keep up the manor, the new Earl was anxious to get into that room. But none of the servants knew how to open the door. All they knew was that his father had installed a sophisticated lock on the door and said, on his deathbed, that the third key would open it. But there were dozens of keys for rooms in the manor and none of them opened the lock. So where exactly was the third key?

It seemed quite hopeless. To the Earl, that is. Naturally I thought about the problem for a moment and was able to open the locked door fairly easily.

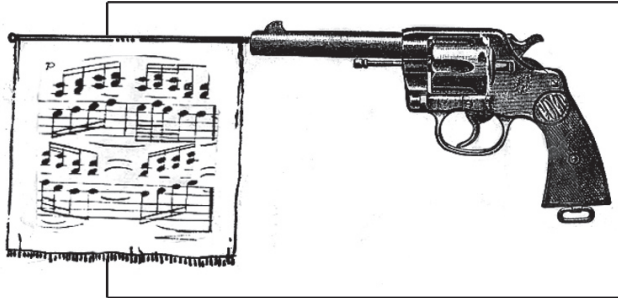
What did I suggest?

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“Um...uh...you...”

But your stammering is obviously getting on Nano’s nerves and almost causing a flicker in the hologram.

“I suggested that it wasn’t a mechanical key at all that the old man had referred to. It was a musical one because the lock was acoustic. It worked on sounds. The third key referred to the third key of the piano keyboard. I instructed him to play it and the lock opened instantly.”



## THE CHAINED DOG

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After two months of effort, I finally tracked the Crimson Bauble, a huge ruby, to the home of one Manford Patina. I knew he was keeping the gem somewhere in his backyard but it wasn't until he was away on a trip that I had a chance to see what I was up against.

Studying the situation, I soon became convinced that the gem was hidden inside a small doghouse. That was simple enough. But ten feet to the right of this doghouse there was a tree. A vicious Doberman was attached to the tree by a twelve-foot chain.

The dog was well trained and when I told my technician to walk around the yard, we found out two things. First, that he could walk completely around that yard just beyond the dog's reach. And second, that the snarling dog followed his every step like a real predator. That's what he was trained to do. There simply was no way to get near the doghouse.

But then I let my insight handle the problem and was able to devise a method that allowed my technician to get to the doghouse without harming, or even touching for that matter, the dog in any way.

What was it?

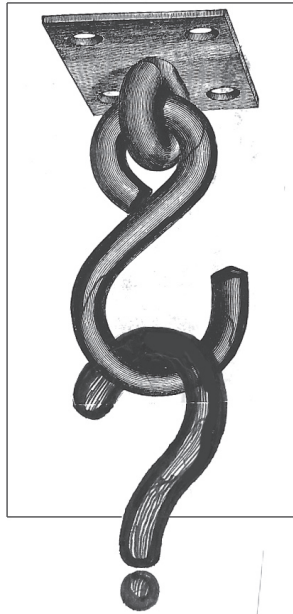
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“Did you try distracting it with a female in heat?” you ask, thinking that you’ve got him this time.

“Not a bad idea,” Nano says, almost wallowing in his own sarcasm. “A terrible one!”

“Oh.”

“What I did was tell my technician to keep walking around and around the yard just out of reach of the dog. As he did so, the dog eventually wrapped the chain completely around the base of the tree until the chain was shorter than the ten foot distance to the doghouse!”



## NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK

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Remember Elmo Bagman, the swindler, who tried to scam my owner out of some money? I said that he had asked us to find a needle in a haystack and I wasn't kidding.

Bagman had made a deal to buy a sample sliver of experimental high-tech metal that someone had stolen from an electronics company. It looked just like a needle but it was very valuable and he knew that he could resell it for a huge profit.

There was just one problem. The man he bought it from was also a crook. He arranged to meet Bagman at a remote farm in the area. But instead of just handing it over, he dropped it into a silo filled with hay. Then he took the money and ran.

Thus, Bagman was faced with the classic problem...finding a needle in a haystack. Since it would have taken him weeks to search through the hay, he thought for a moment and got a better idea. He called on me because at that time my programmer was so interested in testing my abilities that he was not very careful about the type of people we worked for. He had no idea who Bagman was.

In any case, it took me less than a minute to come up with the solution to his problem which has puzzled mankind for centuries.

Do you know what it was?



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“Got it!” you say snappily. “You drove a herd of goats out to the farm to eat the hay!”

“Nice try,” Nano says, tongue in virtual cheek. “But they would have eaten the needle too.”

“Oh right.”

“No, it was all much simpler than that. I simply told Bagman to light a match to the hay. When it all burned down to a pile of ash, the needle would be easy to spot!”



*Strike Four~*

## THE SIGNAL

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The robberies all took place at Mallview Towers, one of those big new high-rise apartment buildings. Some members of the co-op board had called me in to investigate.

They met me at a courtyard in front of the building, where we almost collided with a young woman on rollerblades. She was doing some fancy skating moves in front of the building, a familiar sight, and the group that hired me had to relocate my box to the far edge of the yard to avoid her.

As they explained the situation, there had been seven robberies over a two-week period, each taking place during the day and always when the tenant was out. But the strange thing was that all the tenants in question worked at home and they were only gone from their apartments at odd hours during the day.

This meant that it had to be an inside job by someone who knew when people were out. The only person who was in a position to know the comings and goings of all the tenants was the doorman. But he had worked there for twenty years and the victims refused to believe that he could be part of it.

So it was up to me to figure out what was going on. I did naturally. And it did not involve the doorman but instead a rather elaborate scam.

Do you know what it was?

---

This time Nano's explanation comes much faster than your futile attempts at insight.

"That skater! She wasn't out for exercise. She knew the people in the building. As soon as she saw the departure of a likely victim, she figure-skated the apartment number on the courtyard floor. Her accomplice, on one of the floors above, could easily see it with binoculars and slip into the empty apartment."



## THE TACO CODE

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This one took place in the midst of all the drug smuggling going on in Miami. The Agency, you know the one I mean, had recorded a conversation between two smugglers on a street corner. They were convinced that the discussion was a cover for passing information like a drop location or a contact. But even with all their expertise, they could not figure out what was really being conveyed.

That's when they called me in. Because I have no area of specialization, I can keep an open mind and often see things that so-called experts miss. When they played back the tape for me, sure enough, I immediately picked up the hidden message. See if you can find it in the transcript:

“*Mira*, amigo. Good to see you again.”

“*Que pasa?* Did you go to that Taco Eating Contest I told you about?”

“Si, I did. But I dropped out early. Big Juan was the winner. He ate 35 tacos at one sitting.”

“Santa Maria, that's a lot. Did anyone else even come close?”

“Martino was right up there with him. Until they hit the 30th taco. Then Martino had one more before he got sick. But Juan ate one too, then ate four and won.”

“Too bad I missed it. How did you celebrate after it was all over?”

“Same was a usual. I threw up, *amigo!*”

---

“Elementary,” you say, sucking on your thumb instead of a pipe.  
“Tacos is an anagram for Coast, a street in Miami. And 35 is the house number...#35 Coast Street.”

“You sure are getting the hang of this,” Nano says. “Not!”

“No?”

“Cheer up, that’s just what the Feds thought too. But if you listen carefully to the conversation, as I did, you can clearly hear one smuggler tell the other a phone number. Juan ate one too then ate four and won. In other words 1, 8, 1, 2 then 8, 4 and 1 or 181-2841.”



*Signs of Reckless Behavior*

## MURDER IN THE TUB

---

The dead man in this case was a heavyset fellow named Mort. He was lying in the bathtub with a one leg over the edge of the tub and his right hand still clutching the water faucet. The curtain was still drawn around the tub. There was water all over the floor, and the towel that had been hanging on a rack had fallen into a puddle and was soaking wet.

Mort's slippers were neatly laid out next to the toilet. And his straight razor was still lying on the shelf, ready to be used. There were no wounds or bruises, or blood, anywhere on his body. As if he hadn't been touched.

Allonzo, the handyman at the boarding house where this took place, was the first person on the scene. The cops asked him a few questions but his story held up. And since he wasn't carrying any tools that could be used as weapons – only a long extension cord but there was no sign of strangulation – they moved on to the others. They also found out that Mort was an obnoxious oaf that no one could stand. In other words, plenty of motives but no method. So as usual the police decided that Mort died of natural causes, a heart attack perhaps. Case closed.

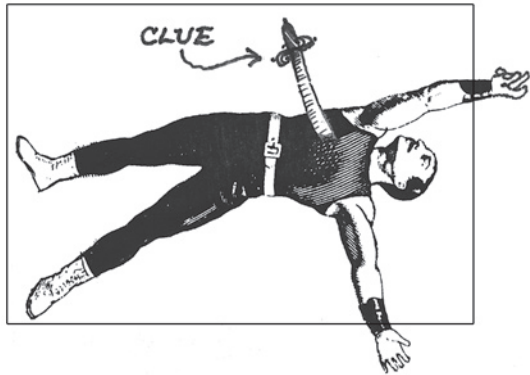
I disagreed. And after examining the scene in more detail, I found that my hunch was right. Allonzo did it.

Can you figure out how?

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“Did he lull the victim to sleep and then push him under the water?” you ask hopefully.

“Murder by lullaby?” Nano says, shaking his virtual head. “No, it was much simpler than that. When I saw that there was an electrical outlet near the medicine cabinet, as in all bathrooms, I realized what Allonzo had done. He went into the bathroom, plugged in the extension cord, then simply let the other end drop into the water of Mort’s tub. The two exposed contacts electrified the water. I would say shocking if it weren’t such a cliché!”



## THE LAST LAP

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The body was floating face down in the pool like a gruesome raft. It belonged to Eleazar Longshore, one of the owners of the health club. He was an older man, in his seventies, but in fairly good shape, and wearing a serious swimsuit. That's why I found it hard to believe that he drowned while doing his morning laps. Even though, as Sergeant Dumbrow proudly pointed out, the old man had a huge bump on his head that he apparently got from hitting it against the side of the pool.

On the morning of his death, the elevator man recalled picking Longshore up from his penthouse apartment and taking him down to the 6th floor health club in the building. That was at 8:30 a.m. The elevator man remembered the time clearly because Longshore, who was hard of hearing, asked him to repeat it three or four times as he tapped the hearing aid in his ear.

Because the club was closed at that hour, Longshore had to open the door with one of his keys and let himself into the pool.

It was all rather straightforward but then I found out that Longshore was literally in over his head. There was a stock scandal brewing and Longshore had been arguing with his partners all week about divulging it. That made his death awfully coincidental.

So I studied the dead man's head a little more carefully and found something that convinced me that he had, in fact, been murdered!

Can you guess what it was?



---

“You didn’t by any chance examine his temple and find a large kitchen knife sticking out?”

“Nice try,” Nano says. “No, it was the fact that he was still wearing his hearing aid. Since no one would go swimming with a hearing aid, that suggested that Longshore was killed in the locker room and dumped in the pool to make it look like an accident. The elevator man had a lot more explaining to do.”



*Never Too Young*

## GRAND OPERA

---

Remember Heidelberg, the city of spies? I had another interesting encounter there, during an opera at the famous Pallasa Musika. I was hoping for an evening's relief from my usual challenges; even virtual detectives need time off. But once the State Police found me in attendance, they naturally dragged me into another of their intrigues.

They were tracking Emile Buquet, the double agent, and knew that someone was going to pass the number of a secret bank account to him. It was a simple three-digit number.

So the police watched him like a hawk. But nothing much happened. He waited quietly on line at the ticket booth with all the other theatergoers. He removed his hat and checked it, just like everyone else, when the clerk at the booth explained that this was a new policy of the theater. Then he took the ticket he was given and went to his seat in one of the upper balconies.

The seats around him were occupied by undercover police and they swore that no one passed anything to him, or spoke to him, or signaled him in any way. He didn't even get opera glasses.

Yet soon after the performance began, Emile left the theater in a hurry and the police knew he had gotten the code number. But from where?

When I asked the manager of the theater a very simple question, his answer suggested that the clerk himself was Emile's accomplice and had given him the information.

Do you know how he did it?

---

“Did he give him a ticket with the number on it?” you ask, meekly.

“Quite direct and quite wrong,” Nano says. “Braitwiddlers are never that simple. Instead, I asked the manager if it was standard policy to have patrons check their hats. When he said it was a special policy for just that evening, I realized what was up. The clerk was giving bald men certain seats in the orchestra section. The pattern of their bald heads – like pixels on a screen – was spelling out the code number when seen from high in the balcony.



*A Murderess*

## FOUL PLAY

---

This next little twiddler proves that you don't have to actually be a moron to think like one. Which is always refreshingly insightful. I was having lunch with Sergeant Dumbrow – watching him eat, that is, since I do not technically have either an appetite nor a stomach – when one of his rookies burst in on us.

The rookie had been eating at one of the other booths in the diner and had overheard a conversation at the next table. He said that the three men there were obviously talking about a robbery that had just been committed. And since they hadn't left yet, there was still time to nail them.

Dumbrow calmly asked the rookie to explain what he had heard and the young man did so with relish to prove his attentiveness.

"I heard one of them mention something about a big score," he said, "and that's what made me suspicious. So I listened more carefully. Two of them were bragging to the third man about it, arguing over who would tell the story. One of them said that since he had stolen first, he should tell the story. Then he went on to describe how he was crouching and waiting and when a man arrived at home, he whipped off his mask and lunged at him. I heard him say the word safe, Chief. Have there been any robberies in the area lately?"

Dumbrow frowned. I laughed.

What do you think?

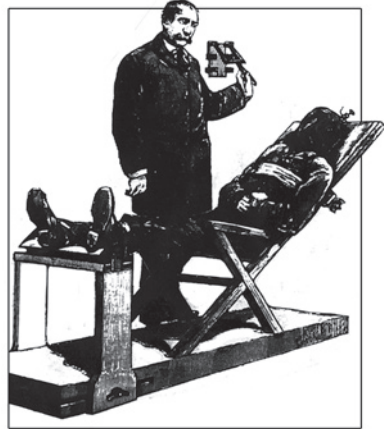
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“That the rookie himself was part of the scheme!” you shout triumphantly.

“Why do you think that?” Nano asks.

“Because I couldn’t think of anything else,” you admit.

“Well, better to goof than sit there like a goofball,” Nano says kindly. “Luckily I realized right away that the men in the booth weren’t talking about robbery at all. They were discussing a baseball game. The man talking had stolen first base. Then, waiting at home plate, whipped off his catcher’s mask and lunged at the runner going home. He missed, and the umpire shouted safe!”



*And Justly Punished*

## EVEN STEVEN

---

My reputation for brilliant insight, as you can see, has gotten me into some pretty peculiar situations. I was once even consulted by a gang of thieves to help them solve a dilemma.

The Burgle brothers had just ripped off a huge amount of cash from an armored car. The robbery itself went fine but back at their hideout they ran into a different problem. No matter how they worked it, they couldn't figure out a way to divide the cash fairly.

Because of the way the hideout was set up, one of them had to keep watch at all times. That meant that one of the brothers was on lookout while the other one counted out the money. But neither one trusted the other to divide the stack of bills evenly. And they were running out of time.

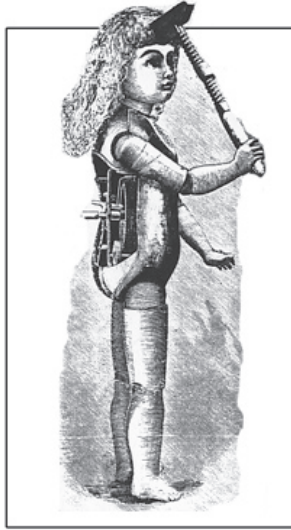
Knowing about my work from one of their underworld friends, they had me delivered and asked my advice about the situation. Could I come up with a solution to the dilemma? While I certainly didn't support their criminal activities, I could not very well ignore the obvious solution to the problem.

Can you figure out what it was?

---

“This is an easy one,” you say. “You went down and counted the money for them!”

“Easier than that!” Nano says, with a jaunty toss of his head. “I simply told them to make a deal. Let one brother count out the money into two piles, then let the other brother pick which pile he wanted. Think about it!”



## ISLAND QUANDRY

---

The thieves in the Gold International job must have thought they were being terribly clever. They had highjacked one of the armored cars, tossed out the guard and driver, and driven off before anyone knew what was going on. Their haul that day was one million dollars, stashed inside a safe.

Rather than waste time opening the safe, they buried it with the money inside on an island 100 yards out in the middle of Lake Idyll. In order to do that, they had to abandon the truck on the shore of the lake, then paddle off to safety in a tiny inflatable boat, planning to return weeks later to open the safe when things cooled down.

But the cops got lucky. A helicopter pilot looking for the missing truck spotted the inflatable and noticed that there was no fishing gear on board. So the cops picked up the thieves who eventually told them where the safe could be found. That left only one question. A minor one, to be sure, but it was still braintwiddling enough.

How did the thieves get the heavy metal safe from the truck on the shore to the island 100 yards in the middle of the lake? It was much too heavy to float across in the inflatable.

The thieves weren't talking so the cops were stumped. But by taking a very simple course of action, I solved the problem.

What did I do?



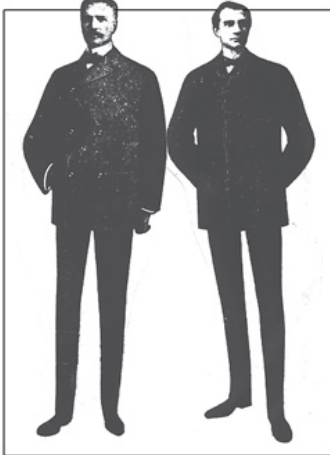
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“Was it one of those new-fangled floating safes?” you ask.

“No such animal,” Nano says. “All I had to do to solve this one was wait.”

“For what?”

“Low tide. At which point there was a very helpful land bridge all the way to the island which the thieves used to drive the truck there and back!”



*Suspicious Characters*

## POISONED STAMPS

---

I don't usually get involved in politics, but Senator Fullright was the only candidate who thought that thinking was a virtue. So he had my vote. And I also agreed to do some volunteer work for him.

That's how I ended up in his campaign headquarters directing some of the fund-raising activities. But on that day all they were doing was stuffing and mailing envelopes with PR material in them. The problem was that there was no water and the volunteers were facing a morning licking a thousand stamps to put on as many envelopes. Tedious work, not mention unsavory, but that's politics for you.

Imagine how happy I was when this dumb little chore turned into a classic braintwiddler!

Before we began, a call came in from one of the Senator's rabid detractors. To protest the rise of thinking, this lunatic had arranged to deliver a batch of poisoned stamps! They weren't deadly, just vile enough to make the lickers sick and tired of the status quo.

There was a panic in the office as everyone realized that the morning's fund-raising efforts were doomed.

But I assured them that this was not the case at all. There was a simple way around the problem.

Do you know what it is?

---

“I don’t suppose you had them coat their tongues with antidote first,”  
you guess.

“You don’t suppose correctly!” Nano says with glee. “What I told  
them to do was to lick the envelopes, not the stamps!”



## SIGN STRUCK

---

It was a standard high-speed chase. The usual series of hairpin turns and screeching brakes. Not my cup of tea at all. I prefer racing thoughts but in this business you have to be ready for all sorts of twists and turns.

In this case, I happened to be on hand in the town of Highmount when Cal Pritt robbed one of the stores there. As he leaped into his car and sped out of town, Dumbrow tossed me into his old Yugo and gave chase. We knew he was heading to Lowmount but had to intercept him before he got there and was lost in the crowds.

It was a fairly thrilling race across the sylvan hillside but we could never quite catch up with the dashing thief. I thought we had him when he stopped his car for a moment, but by the time we got to that spot, he was gone again. Thankfully, to break the monotony, Pritt had left me with a braintwiddler instead.

The spot was a crossroads where six different roads came together. In the middle of the intersection was a sign, one of those crowded posts with the names of ten different towns and arrows pointing you off in the right direction.

But Pritt had cleverly pulled out the signpost and left it lying on the ground. We had no map and didn't know the area at all. All we did know was that we had to get to Lowmount fast.

Dumbrow was dumbfounded.

Not me.

How did I know which way to go?

---

“You took a random guess!” you shout, eager to get one right for a change. Eager but not successful.

“A fine idea when there’s no alternative,” Nano says kindly,” but in this case there was. I simply put the signpost back in the hole and turned it so that it faced the right direction.”

“But how did you know which way to face it?”

“I may not have known which direction the towns were, but I certainly knew the direction of Highmount, where I came from. Once I lined the arrow for Highmount up correctly, I knew the rest would be right.”



## THE WRONG WAY

---

I hate to admit this but over the many years of our association, I have actually come to rely on Dumbrow. Not just on his summoning me like a genie but also on his uncanny ability to foul up. Perhaps that explains the occasion on which I was even able to save Dumbrow his job.

You see, we were both part of a task force following the movements of a gang of thieves through the city. From our surveillance we knew that they were about to move a big shipment and we were determined to stop them before they could do it. The key figure was the guy who would be driving the truck. We knew who he was and we decided to pick him up, but a good legal excuse to detain him didn't present itself.

The day of the shipment was therefore very tense because it meant that the task force would have to use force to confront the gang. A very risky affair. As Dumbrow and the other cops prepped for this, I was positioned in the office with the task force leader. He was going over Dumbrow's surveillance report, when one line in particular caught his attention. According to this entry, at 11:00am Dumbrow had "observed the truck driver going the wrong way down a one-way street."

"That fool," the team leader said, "why didn't he arrest him then and there and save us all this? I'm going to have his head!"

But I knew Dumbrow – knew him to be the literal boob that he was – and on that basis I explained to the team leader precisely why he had not arrested the driver, thus saving him his job.

What did I explain to the leader?

---

“That Dumbrow didn’t have his ticket book with him,” you say, trying to squeeze a note of the obvious into your tone.

“You don’t need a ticket book to arrest someone,” Nano says slowly, as though talking to a child. “No, I am afraid it is much simpler than that; another example of the bolt of the obvious.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning, as only Dumbrow could, that the truck driver was on foot.”



*A Brilliant Scheme*

## NICE ICE

---

When the famous Langhurst Diamond was stolen from a display in a store in Bucharest, suspicion immediately fell upon a well-known Romanian jewel thief named Janilek Ostrov. Ostrov specialized in diamonds, better known in the thief trade as ice. He had been seen at the exhibit the day before and so the cops kept him under surveillance for a day or so after that. When he bought a ticket for the overnight train to Paris, where his fence was known to live, they figured he was taking the stone there.

Luckily for them, I happened to have been shipped by FedEx to Bucharest to work for Interpol, so naturally the police arranged to take me along when they arrested Ostrov.

But when we burst into his compartment on the train, we found Ostrov sitting there calmly having a cigarette, leafing through a magazine, clinking the ice in his water glass. His trademark beret was perched jauntily on his head and he smiled as we confronted him. The police searched him and the compartment but found nothing at all except a small traveling kit in which he had his passport, toothbrush, address book, and a small snuffbox with a white powder in it.

With nothing to show for their efforts, the police were about to leave, when it suddenly hit me where the diamond was.

Do you know?



---

“The beret!” you shout like a hooter at a football game.

“No way!” Nano shouts back, mimicking your rhythm and rhyme. Then, coming back to a more sober tone for the explanation: “The ice was in the ice. He had dropped the diamond in his glass of ice water, where it was barely visible and hidden among the cubes.”



*Justice Prevails*

## CIRCUS MURDEROUS

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Most people think of circus folks as a happy family of misfits but they have their own passions too, you know. I learned this once when I was called in to investigate the murder of the Tattooed Man. His body had been found inside the big top in the early morning hours but since they didn't trust the cops, they arranged for me to help them out.

By the time my technician set me up, all the sideshow people were standing around the body: the Bearded Lady, the Fat Man, the Fish Boy, the World's Tallest Human, the Sword Swallower, and the Strong Man. All of them.

It was quite a scene as you can imagine, surrounded by some of the most unusual suspects you could ever expect to see. At first they weren't even sure that the man had been murdered because there were no visible signs of violence. But after I studied his tattoo-covered body, I realized that someone had stabbed him right in the head of John the Baptist and that real blood was flowing from the picture. It was no leaky tattoo.

One of them had obviously attacked him as the others set up for the show but no one had seen it. And worse, none of them were seen to be carrying any kind of weapon nor was one found anywhere.

Of course, to an expert like myself, the lack of evidence is merely an inspiration and I easily figured out which one of them committed the crime.

Do you know who it was?

---

“My guess is that the Fat Man stuck a knife in the ground, then sat on the victim, plunging him into it!” you shout with great confidence.

“That’s quite a guess,” Nano says, “I would make you my assistant if I didn’t think it would end my career.”

“You mean it was someone else?”

“Very much so. It was the sword swallower who had simply hidden the knife in his throat.”



*Method B*

## THE UNUSUAL SUSPECT

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As a student of the obvious, I am a great fan of the so-called “locked room” puzzle because all of the clues for solving it are right there under your nose. Which reminds me of a classic example of one that involved yours truly.

I had been invited to the home of Henry Dodd to discuss – at great length - my astounding career. I was there for hours of course. Dumbrow, a frequent guest, arrived after I had left but stopped instantly when he saw the body of Dodd lying face down in the study through the locked glass doors. Dumbrow had to break through those doors to search the room but there were no clues of any kind anywhere to be seen.

There were no marks on the body or disturbances or fingerprints anywhere. No other ways in or out of the room besides those locked glass doors. No witnesses, nothing. Plus, we both knew that Dodd himself was a jovial fellow who was very unlikely to have committed suicide. Dumbrow was stumped by all this but, of course, this was his typical state of mind. It was hardly any consolation when I told him that I was as puzzled as he was by the scene since he was fine when I last saw him.

But that was lie because, in truth, I knew precisely who the murderer was and how the crime was done.

What do you think I knew?

---

“That the man wasn’t dead,” you shout. “He was just napping!”

“A state of mind with which you are, no doubt, quite familiar.”

“No clues, no marks, no evidence, yet you knew who did it?” you mutter, hoping for a drive-by insight. “How can that be?”

“Because I did it. Obviously,” Nano says.

“You? But how? You’re virtual.”

“Precisely why Dumbrow never considered me a suspect. Yet my method was quite simple; I talked him to death. You don’t need a body to cause mayhem.”

You cringe at that, but you can see by the glint in his eye and the tongue in his virtual cheek that Nano’s only crime has been to tease you unmercifully.



*The Key To The Mystery*

## THE END OF HIS ROPE

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Now here is one that should not give you too much trouble; at least it did not give me any. But then again, I am of course...me.

It involved an escape from a holding cell by a crook named Benny. After he was arrested for another of his petty larcenies, they put him in a room in the detention center downtown and more or less forgot about him. Now the windows in this particular room were not very well reinforced: this was not a cell really but only a hearing room. No one gave this a second thought because Benny wasn't too bright. They never figured that he might even try to escape.

Sure enough, when they came in the next morning, the window was broken and Benny was gone. Now I just so happened to be in the building solving another problem when and I overheard the commotion and asked to be relocated there. After some simple analysis, I found out that the janitor had pushed his cleaning cart near the holding room that night and that a piece of rope was missing from it.

But here's the problem...the rope in question was thick and short. A hefty piece of cable, but only about fifteen feet long. But the drop to the ground from the window was 35 feet! Had Benny jumped the 20-foot gap? I don't think so. He was stupid but not foolhardy.

How do you think he actually pulled off the stunt?

---

“It was all a ruse! He hadn’t actually escaped but was hiding under the table...” you begin but Nano cuts you off with the speed of a barber.

“Sorry, “ he says, “but I’ve heard it all before. So let me get to the point. Cable is made of twisted strands of rope. Benny uncoiled it so he wound up with two pieces that he tied together to make a 30-foot long piece. Then he only had to jump 5 feet.”



*The Prosecution Rests*

## BLAND LARCENY

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Do you know the new skyscraper they just completed? I actually had a hand – a mental hand that is – in its construction. I didn't build anything for it, of course, didn't do a stitch of manual labor in fact. What I did do was stop a crime in progress.

I was contracted by the foreman of the building site when they had just started. It seems that one of the workers there was engaged in some peculiar behavior and naturally they needed an expert in peculiarity, so they got me. I only had to be down there once to see what was going on and to instantly solve the problem.

Each day at quitting time, the fellow in question would load up a wheelbarrow of discarded material from the site – pieces of wood, lengths of tubing, broken chips of concrete, scraps of paper, and so on – and carry it out past the man guarding the site. He had been doing this for an entire week. It was unusual behavior but since the material was nothing but useless junk with no value at all, the guard let him pass. Still, the foreman felt that something was wrong. Why would anyone do such a thing?

He hadn't a clue, needless to say, so I had to clue him in.

What did I tell the foreman?



---

“That the man was using the discards to build a clever but illegal copy of the building where he would...” but your voice trails off as even your own warped imagination begins to peter out.

“But it’s so simple,” Nano says. “The man was stealing wheelbarrows and selling them to other construction sites!”



## A GENERAL QUESTION

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Naturally I don't always take on every challenge that presents itself to me. Some are questions of hindsight not insight. And others are questions that are really better left unanswered. Nonetheless, I save them all for a time just like this to demonstrate the art of the obvious.

Take for instance, this email I received from a general who was the dictator of a country that shall remain nameless for our purposes. This general wanted to prevent any possible future coup by the sons of the officers in the army. That the general's own son was to remain safe was obvious. Was there any way, the general asked, for me to apply my unique skills to solve the problem?

There was of course and it was a very simple way.

Naturally I never actually responded, but if I had I would simply have suggested that the general pass a law that any boy whose father was in the military was to be shot on the spot.

It was the perfect solution.

But do you know why?

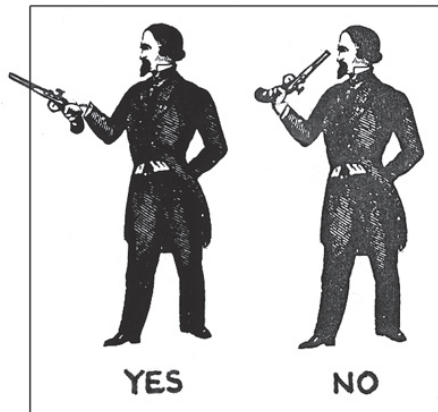
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“Because dictators can do whatever they want, like change the law to suit themselves,” you suggest.

“Very wise, answer, my friend,” Nano says, “but my suggestion did not need to be changed.”

“But any boy whose father was in the military would be shot. And the general too was in the military.”

“True...but the general was a woman!”



## A BREATH OF AIR

---

It never fails to amaze me how the moment I become known as an expert problem-solver, solvable problems seem to present themselves all the time. Wherever I am, such riddles just pop up. Like the time I was at a rather posh spa here in the city, trying desperately to escape all pressures and impingements. Even virtual persons like myself need a break. But naturally, this was not to be.

Just as I was floating poolside and relaxing, I heard a splash and there was a great commotion in the water. By the time I redirected my attention, I could see that one of the guests was in the process of rescuing another man from the pool. He quickly pulled this limp fellow from the water, threw him down onto the tiled floor, and immediately began frantic CPR.

In the scuttlebutt that emerged among the onlookers, it became clear the heroic effort being performed was all the more dramatic since the two men were business rivals. I watched along with the others as the one man pinched the other's nose, pressed his mouth against the victim's lips, and pushed repeatedly on his chest for almost ten minutes. Alas it was all to no avail.

By the time he stopped, gazing serenely and sadly at his late associate, he knew as we all did that it was too late.

But not too late for me to have my final word on the matter.

What do you think I said?

---

“Anyone for a swim?”

“I said arrest that man for murder. Far from performing CPR to save his rival, he had suffocated him by pinching his nose closed and only pretending to breathe into his chest. The two actions look the same, except that after such heavy breathing, our hero ought to have been out of breath himself!”



*Is This Man  
A Threat?*

## SHAFTED

---

A thief broke into the Museum of Ancient Artifacts and stole a priceless figurine from the Trobriand Islands. It was carved in cork 600 years ago, a beautiful sculpture of a bird. He skipped all the masks from ancient Africa, the canoes from the far north, and grabbed this statuette simply because it was so small.

Unknown to him, of course, he set off a laser alarm and the guards soon chased him. Somehow he managed to outrace them to the front doors and get outside, but they continued to pursue him.

A block away, seeing that he was on the verge of getting caught, he dropped the little statue into a hole and got away. But that presented the problem, the kind that only a master of the obvious like myself could solve.

You see, the hole was actually the top of a pipe stuck in the ground for a drainage system that was never built. It was thirty feet deep and only a foot in diameter but just wide enough to drop the cork statue into. No doubt the statue was sitting at the bottom of the shaft but any attempt to drop some device down to retrieve it would possibly have damaged it.

The statue was stuck, the guards were stuck. I was not.

I saw the solution immediately and was able to solve the problem by making one simple call.

Who do you think I called?

---

“Er...a troupe of trained mice?” you say witlessly, but even you know that you are stalling.

“No, I called the fire department of course.”

“Did they have teensy little ladders?”

“They had a hose,” Nano says, ignoring your failure at humor, “which allowed them to gently pour water into the pipe, thus raising the cork statue, which rose as the water did.”



*The Melancholy  
Life Of Crime*

## THE SMOKING GUN

---

I am sure that you have heard of the proverbial smoking gun, no? It means proof that someone is guilty. Well here is a case where there actually was a smoking gun. Except that in actual fact, it was a knife.

It happened to be a very fancy knife with a carved ivory handle and it was found lying right next to the victim in the kitchen in a pool of blood. Sounds rather like a game of Clue but this was no game. The victim was a food critic and he was found lying on the floor of the kitchen that belonged to Chef Shiff at his restaurant Chez Chef Shiff.

This happened after the restaurant had closed for the night and the Chef himself claimed to have been out at the time of the murder. He said that he returned to find the body. It was clear that the knife belonged to the chef, the chef to the restaurant, and the victim to the coroner...but Shiff adamantly denied any wrongdoing.

Dumbrow was there of course and as usual put two and two together to get four...he slapped the cuffs on the chef. If I hadn't been there to save the day, Shiff would have been prepping his next meal in the joint.

Lucky for him I was immediately able to see that Chef Shiff was innocent.

How did I know?



---

“Chef Shiff,” you shout, “was right-handed and the knife was for lefties!”

“Once again I see that your rationality is getting the better of you,” Nano says. “ But no, it was much simpler than that. I could see from the bullet hole in the head that the victim was shot not stabbed.”



## THE BOOKIE'S BOOK

---

Reggie the Rat was a real rat.

What they call a squealer, a snitch, or a buzzboy in the colorful language of the streets. In other words, he gave information on people he knew. And this time Dumbrow knew that Reggie knew something about a recent jewelry store robbery.

Thinking he could get the little rodent to talk, Dumbrow had cornered him at his job at the local library on the other side of town and took him down to the precinct for questioning.

But time was running out and they both knew that Dumbrow could only hold Reggie for another hour. Then he would have to let him go. At the end of his dim wits, Dumbrow threatened to pin an unrelated theft on Reggie if he didn't cooperate. The Rat finally broke down and confessed that he had hidden the names of the thieves in a book in the library.

"Where exactly?" Dumbrow demanded.

"Right between pages 123 and 124 of a copy of *Murder My Sweet* by Raymond Chandler.

"Which shelf?"

"Dunno. The librarian put it away."

Dumbrow had his jacket on and was almost out the door when he saw me shaking my head sadly. I instantly knew that Dumbrow was off on a wild goose chase and I told him so.

What exactly did I tell Dumbrow?

---

“That *Murder My Sweet* was only 122 pages long?”

“Nice try! But the real answer is far more obvious, which is the way I like them. You can’t hide anything at all between pages 123 and 124 of any book since they are on two sides of the same sheet of paper!”



*The Criminal Mind*

## A REMOTE POSSIBILITY

---

Here's a case that didn't involve any crime at all. Well...except for the common misdemeanor known as stupidity.

I was at the mall directing my technician to buy some virtual exclamation points when I noticed a set of keys that someone had lost. This was a standard key case with a bunch of keys for house, office, mailbox, and a car key with one of those automatic car door openers on it. There was there was no identification tag nor any other way to locate the owner of the keys. Even I with instant data access could not tell what kind of car they went with.

Now I could have simply told the technician to take the keys to the lost and found and be done with it.

But you know me...when I hit upon a brilliantly obvious solution, I cannot resist.

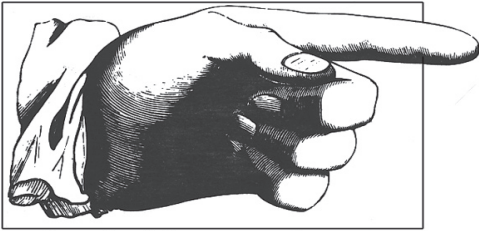
So I found my own unique way to return the lost keys.

What did I do?

---

“You stood at the top of the stairs and shouted at the top of your lungs...”

“The obvious is never about shouting, my young friend. It is a quiet pursuit. No, I simply had my technician walk around the parking lot trying the automatic door opener in all directions until he heard a car door unlock. Then he waited for the owner to show up and shower me with gratitude.”



*The Finger of Guilt*

## THE FIREPLACE CASE

---

Well this one really wasn't a case at all, but I was so proud of my insight that I keep it with my finest solutions.

You see, a friend of mine who installs fireplaces came to me once with a problem. Now you might not associate fireplaces with the art of the obvious but that is the beauty of this field of endeavor...everything applies.

The problem in question was that he had a series of bad business ventures in which he installed the fireplaces for customers who then refused to pay for all his work. And when they did, all his effort went up in smoke, so to say. What my friend wanted was some method for making the fireplaces unusable until the checks cleared.

That sounds like a simple enough request but of course you cannot exactly lock up a fireplace.

Nonetheless, I was able to devise a very simple method by which he could complete his work but render the fireplace totally unusable until he decided to "unlock it."

I'll give you a hint...the method I came up with involved the use of a single brick.

What did I suggest to him?

---

“This one’s easy,” you say with the confidence of the befuddled.  
“He threatens to beat his customer with a brick until he coughs up the dough.”

“That might have worked but I found a much safer solution. I simply told him to install a sheet of glass halfway up the flue, which would block the air and prevent an updraft. No updraft, no fire. When the check cleared, he could simply drop a brick down the chimney...and open the fireplace up!”



*Innocent or  
Scheming?*

## THE A/B MURDER

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As a virtual person, I would not get invited to many dinner parties because I am not a very good eater. In fact, I don't eat at all unless you call the electricity that runs me a form of nourishment.

But as you can imagine with my background, I am a very good dinner guest with many entertaining stories to tell. And so when Lord and Lady Briskett had me to dinner, I was not at all surprised. They positioned me at the table where I was able to mimic dinner party behavior rather well and be rather charming.

But when one of the guests dropped dead it proved to be quite lucky that I was invited.

The victim in question was poisoned and fell head first into the stew. The reaction was so clear that I knew the stew had to be poisoned but here's the problem. All the other guests ate the exact same stew and none of them dropped.

I thought about it for a moment and soon realized what must have happened and who was implicated.

Do you know?



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“The victim was allergic to stew and the murderer – his allergist – knew it!” you say.

“Nice try but, as usual, wrong. What I realized was that the murderer must have used a two-part poison that only killed when mixed. The victim had been given part one in another serving and only died when it mixed with part two in the stew. The chef had a bit of explaining to do.”



*Planning the Perfect Crime*

## THE OLD RACE SWITCHEROO

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Only Dumbrow could have gotten himself into this kind of fix. And only I could have gotten him out of it.

Like anyone with no horse sense at all, Dumbrow was a bettor and loved to go to the track. He made the usual bets based on tips, names, track conditions...all the things that keep racetracks in the black. But he also made side bets all the time with his circle of fellow gamblers.

This one time a strange bet came about because those fellows will bet on anything. In this case, two of the owners were arguing about the relative skills of their jockeys and decided to settle their disagreement with a bet of course.

But leave it to Dumbrow to come up with this idiotic idea for a race...that the winner would be the one whose horse lost!

I guess he thought this would be more fun.

But you see the problem?

How can you have a race when you want your horse to lose? No one would leave the starting gate.

Luckily Dumbrow contacted me and I was able to come up with a way to actually run such a race.

What did I suggest?

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“That they leave the track and settle for a nice game of bridge?”

“No, the answer was right there at the track. I told them run the race but to have their jockeys switch horses. That way you tell your own jockey to do what he always does...try to win the race. And if he does, on the other horse, then you win the bet!”



## A COLD CASE MURDER

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Determined as I am to prove that the brain is more than a lump of beef that can make lists, I offer you the following little challenge. This episode took place in a ski lodge where my technician and I were on vacation. Well, he was the one vacating...skiing and bathing in the hot springs. I was there gathering data for my studies of dumb behavior.

It was pure luck on my part that a murder broke the serenity.

It seems that Nils Dortmun, an alpinist loved and respected by everyone, was found dead in one of the ski shacks. It was an empty shack with nothing in it at all. Just Dortmun's body lying there on the ground with a puncture wound and blood all over. There was nothing else there but a small puddle of water.

No weapon, no clues, no marks.

And no motive on the part of anyone.

On top of all that, the shack had been locked from the inside.

The local police had no idea who had killed him or the method of his murder. Naturally I was able to help out because in studying the scene I immediately knew the weapon, the method, and the whodunnit.

Do you know how he was killed?

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You take a deep breath, straighten your shoulders, and plunge into your theory, with all the hope of one who might very well drown in the pool of stupidity. “Did he kill himself by stabbing himself with an icicle which later melted into the pool of water near the body?” you say with all the gumption you can muster.

“Well I’ll be,” Nano says softly. “We might turn you into a master of the obvious yet!”



## About the Author

Alan Robbins is the Janet Estabrook Rogers Professor of Visual and Performing Arts at Kean University in New Jersey where he is also the director of The Design Center, producing unique publications, award-winning online exhibitions, and innovative products.

Professor Robbins is also an award-winning writer and graphic artist. He is the author of 30 mystery science fiction, puzzle, and humor books and the winner of both a New York State CAPS award and a Reader Views Award for Best New Fiction. His essays on technology have appeared in *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*.

His card, board, and computer games – including 25 mystery jigsaw puzzles – have fans nationwide and his cartoons, illustrations, photographs, and graphics have appeared in numerous publications. His channel on Youtube has over 9 million viewers.

All of his work can be seen at [alanrobbins.com](http://alanrobbins.com)