

# MURDER IN THE MONASTERY

A Novelization of a Game

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## Chapter 1: The Gate

“MERDE!” The word oozed past the lips of the dour, mustachioed man as he leaned back to read the wrought-iron inscription above the massive gate. He pulled his trenchcoat tighter about him—although it was warm for All Saints’ Eve—and remembered what the superintendent had said to him that morning, “Don’t let it get to you, Claude. It’s only The Abbey of St. Isosceles.” Easy for him to say—he didn’t have to spend the night digging up clues in the most mathematically mysterious place on earth.

Claude la Mort, Inspecteur d’Hommeicide of the Sûreté, had hopped a jet from Orly to Dulles, and after a short briefing by the DC police chief, been driven to the small village outside of Washington DC. He now stood outside the Abbey gate, feeling like a very minor imp, dwarfed by the twenty-foot walls that surrounded the 14th Century monastery. Ten years ago it had been brought over from France and reconstructed, brick by brick, and now it was the home of a group of monks and nuns. The sun was just starting to dip over the wall to the west.

The superintendent had picked him to investigate the death of Abbot Costello, the head of the Abbey, who had been killed the night before. La Mort figured he had been chosen because of his “success” in the Calhoon Museum caper earlier that year, although the superintendent probably knew that if it hadn’t been for a lot of luck, and a well-placed adze, La Mort would be pushing up grapevines right now. But maybe this case needed a Lucky Pierre.

He knew that once he entered the Abbey gate, he would be expected to stay inside until he solved the case so he looked around the area surrounding the gate. Who knows? Maybe the killer left his car parked in a No Parking zone. La Mort smirked at his natu-

ral pessimism, thinly disguised as optimism, then leaned over and picked up a piece of paper sticking in a nearby bush. It was a newspaper clipping, a review of a book by one Father Murphy, called “How to Change a Light Bulb”. Murphy’s main claim to fame seemed to be the invention of “soul-detecting” lights and sound-sensitive locks. The inspector vaguely remembered hearing about Father Murphy. Didn’t he live at the Abbey? He put the clipping in his trenchcoat pocket.

La Mort looked down to review an info sheet the chief had given him. He might as well know what he was getting into before he entered what may be his own private apocalypse.

The sheet read:

- ~ At 8:03 A.M., October 31, 1963 a monk reported to the police that he had discovered the body of Abbot Costello on the floor of the south confessional of the church.
- ~ The lab reports that he died of a synthetic strain of the Bubonic plague, so all residents of the abbey have been evacuated to St. Dismal’s.
- ~ Six people are missing. Since the villagers didn’t see anyone leave the abbey it is assumed they are still inside.
- ~ No one seems to know how to get into the library so it hasn’t been searched.
- ~ Matins, a bell and prayer ritual usually rung at dawn, was mysteriously heard at midnight last night.

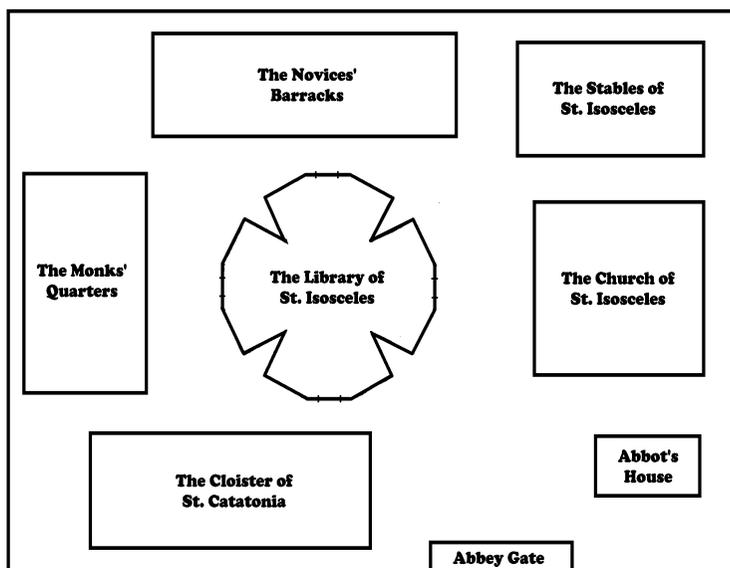
The missing and/or deceased are:

- ~ ABBOT COSTELLO (deceased)—the saintly figurehead of the abbey.
- ~ CARDINAL MUSIAL (missing)—visiting consul from Rome, arrived October 29.
- ~ FATHER NOSTER (missing)—the head monk, in charge of the monks and novices.
- ~ MOTHER PULEEZE (missing)—Mother Superior of the cloister, in charge of the nuns.

- ~ NOVICE SCOSHA (missing)—fledgling monk, reputed to be a practical joker.
- ~ SISTER DEBBIE (missing)—young nun, said to have several un-nunlike tendencies.
- ~ DOCTOR DEE (missing)—the village physician, last seen entering the abbey the night of October 29.

Not much to go on.

He turned the sheet over and saw that there was a map of the abbey drawn on the back. He glanced at it and saw that the abbey was a typical monastery/cloister, except for an unusually shaped building in the center of the vaguely square grounds. This was the famous Library of St. Isosceles, a four-lobed building with angular slits between each of the lobes. Judging by the building's shape on the map, it seemed to have triangular rooms, rather than rectangular.



### **The Abbey of St. Isosceles**

To the right of the gate, inside the abbey, was the house where the victim had lived. Directly north of it was the church, and beyond that the stables. Continuing on around the library were the barracks for the novices, then the monks' quarters and finally the Cloister of St. Catatonia, which was just to the left of the gate.

Each lobe of the Library faced a building, with the church to the east, barracks to the north, monks' quarters to the west and the cloister to the south.

Well, I've got all night, La Mort thought, and maybe I can find one of those missing people to give me a better idea of what went on last night.

Taking one last look at the wrought-iron inscription that read "The Abbey of St. Isosceles: Abandon Joy All Ye Who Enter Here", La Mort sighed and shuffled through the gate.

## Chapter 2: The House

Might as well check out the Abbot's house while there's still some light, La Mort thought, and walked along a stony path to the house to the east. It was a grey, nondescript building with an ascetic air to it—the kind of house a homeless person might have. The front door was closed, but not locked, and La Mort entered to see a gloomy sitting room, the only room in the house. On a table by a Lazee-Boy was a book. He picked it up.

It was a weekly daily planner—Costello's—for the week of October 25 to 31. "The gendarmes must've left this for me," he muttered to himself as he thumbed through the pages, noting the small, cramped handwriting. He decided to settle down in the chair and digest this first clue to the Abbot's murder.

"Sacre bleu!" La Mort spat as the roughness of a rhinoceros-tough hide gouged him through the bulk of his trenchcoat. It was a hair-chair, modern equivalent of a hair-shirt. The victim definitely wasn't killed for his riches and high lifestyle, he thought, and tried to ignore the discomfort and outright pain as he read the Abbot's diary.

- ~ October 25—The St. Swithins Day Ceremony was ruined today when the altar mysteriously exploded. Under the rubble was discovered a small, previously unknown catacomb.
- ~ October 26—Found a disgusting scroll in the Room of the Ram. Must speak to Father Noster about this.

- ~ October 27—Spied Sister Debbie giving more than proper succor to a grieving villager. I related to her the parable of the Bashing of the Sodomite and sent her on her way.
- ~ October 28—Overheard Mother Puleeze talking to the heathen Doctor Dee. She said something about “services rendered”. Must follow this up. Only priests may perform liturgical services.
- ~ October 29—My official seal seems to be missing. Cardinal Musial arrived from Rome and was quite interested in the Papal Bull of 303 AD which was found in the catacomb. I’ll show it to him tomorrow night right after confession.
- ~ October 30—Tonight I’m hearing the confessions of Father Noster, Mother Puleeze, Novice Scosha, Sister Debbie and Cardinal Musial. The Cardinal will hear mine.

There was no entry for October 31. Since he was killed prior to 8:00 that morning, that was understandable. La Mort digested this new information which placed all of the missing people except Doctor Dee at “confession” the night before. It looks like at least five people had “opportunity” to kill Costello in the confessional. And what’s to stop Doctor Dee from creeping in?

The inspector gratefully got up out of the painful Lazee-Boy and, seeing nothing else of note in the room, walked out into the early evening.

### Chapter 3: The Church

The path to the north led past the Church of St. Isosceles. It seemed to be a typical Gothic church on the outside, a couple of flying buttresses on each side, a large belfry above the nave. La Mort opened one of the two cast iron doors and entered the vestibule, which he recognized as a prime example of ante-Lutheran extremism. The Inspector was a dabbler in medieval architecture when he wasn’t running suspects to ground.

Inside the church proper was an altar, which looked to be under construction, and a huge statue. To either side were the confessionals. Upstairs was presumably the belfry. La Mort walked to the statue and, squinting in the scant light shining through a stain-

glass window, read the inscription under the statue: “St. Spurious—There is Knowledge Nil Until Ye Fill.” “Fill what?” the Inspector asked aloud, trying to dispel the spookiness of the church.

He strode to the altar and leaned over to see down into a small pit in front of it. This must be where the altar exploded at the St. Swithins Day ceremony. Not much of a catacomb, he mused. Completely empty.

The confessional to the south was where the Abbot’s body was found so La Mort went to it first. It was a typical confessional; two small compartments separated by a partition with a wicker screen at face level for anyone sitting at the chair on the side which seemed to be the confessor’s. On the other side was a kneeler for the confessing person. Something glinting underneath the kneeler caught the Inspector’s eye and he bent down to pick up a string of beads. La Mort’s memory of his early schooldays told him that it was a rosary, a cross attached to a loop of beads. There was just enough light for him to see the initials “M.P.” on the back of the cross. It was a strange-looking cross, but La Mort couldn’t put his finger on what was different about it.

He crossed the church to the north confessional, which looked just like the south one. On the priest’s side was a prayerbook, which La Mort recognized as a breviary. La Mort picked it up and noticed that it had a ribbon marking a page. In the margin someone had scribbled, “Thrice Three and Two are the Laws of the Holy Tablets.” That’s clear as merde, he thought, and then noticed that there was also something written on the ribbon in a different hand. “Bull in Boar.”

There was nothing else to see in the confessional so the Inspector climbed the spiral staircase to the belfry. He found a five-sided room with a bell rope in each corner, leading up to a bell. There was a chart on the wall which read: “The Five Bells of St. Dapiacle” and below that, “For Matins, start with the Bell of St. Pentomino.” St. Dapiacle? Where had he heard of that saint before? Something about a cabinet? Maybe it would come to him later.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It never does occur to La Mort what the significance of “St. Dapiacle” is. The term was a mnemonic used back in the 60s to help one remember the order of ascension to the presidency in case of incapacitation—after the Vice-President and Speaker of the House. The order then was: Secretary of (S)tate, (T)reasury, (D)efense, (A)ttorney General, (P)ostmaster

In any case, if he needed to ring Matins, he knew which bell to start with, he chuckled to himself. They seem to have a saint for damn near everything in this godforsaken abbey. He inspected the famous bells, noting them to be made of solid molybdenum and numbered from 1 through 5. The five bellropes were fashioned of the finest Marin County hemp. Hmmm, he thought, those ropes could come in handy later. That hemp is good stuff.

The Inspector, who was now carrying an info sheet, a map, a newspaper clipping, a diary, a rosary and a breviary, as well as his Sûreté-issue flashlight, descended the staircase and exited the church, finding that the sun had set and an ominous grey cloud was blotting the moonlight. La Mort shivered and headed north to the stables. He wasn't sure if he was getting anywhere.

#### Chapter 4: The Stables

He didn't need light to know he was entering the Stables of St. Isosceles, but he flipped the flashlight on to keep from spooking the horses. It didn't take him long to see that the horses of the Abbey were the results of years of Mendelian inter-breeding. In the largest stall was a nervously pacing, two-headed gelding. A sign on the wall read: "Stall must be cleaned before Matins." Apparently no one had cleaned the stall that day because there was a wealth of ordure beneath the horse. He shuddered at the thought of having to clean up after a two-headed gelding.

La Mort sincerely hoped there weren't any more clues in the stables and decided to move on to the barracks to the west.

#### Chapter 5: The Barracks

The first thing La Mort noticed about the barracks was its architectural style: post-Holocaust utilitarianism. Each of the novice's cubicles were spotlessly clean and orderly, except for one, Novice Scosha's, which looked as though it had been recently ransacked. Under the bed the Inspector spied a piece of paper which he found to be an intra-abbey memo. "Novice Scosha, you are bellringer for

the week.” It was signed by Abbot Costello. On the back was written, “For Matins, do not ring adjacent bells consecutively.”

I never knew there was so much to Matins, La Mort opined. I just figured they were rung in the mornings to annoy the poor souls on the second shift. Nothing else caught his eye so he gladly left the depressing barracks and headed for the monks’ quarters to the west. So far he had seen two sides of the library and no sign of a door. Just a window in each of the east and north lobes.

## Chapter 6: The Monks’ Quarters

The quarters—apparently designed by St. Torquemada, La Mort cynically mused—resembled nothing so much as a pre-Franciscan abattoir. Upon entering, he noticed that the room was divided into cribs for the monks. All of the cribs were starkly devoid of any luxuries except for one, Father Murphy’s, who apparently was the Abbey electrician. His crib was full of electronics books. Across the room was a closed door.

The lights had come on as soon as La Mort entered the room and he determined, by stepping outside for a second, that the lights would go out as soon as he left. Aha! These must be the soul-detecting lights the clipping had mentioned. He thumbed through a few books but soon quit, figuring that if he were to find a clue here, he’d have to check every one of them.

Then he was suddenly aware that there was a low, bubbling sound coming from behind the door across the room. He strode to it, threw it wide and saw that it was apparently an office. The sound was coming from a hot tub, the first La Mort had ever seen. He stared at it, wondering if he’d have time later on for a well-desired—and hopefully, well-deserved—dip.

Then he noticed there was something dark in the deep end. He looked around, wondering if he should take the time to undress, decided against it, and waded into the tub. Any other time he’d have enjoyed the hot water, but he quickly reached down and grabbed what he saw to be a waterproof strongbox, with a chain attaching it to the tub.

This ought to be a real clue, he rejoiced. Who would keep anything trivial in a strongbox in a hot tub? He lifted the strongbox out of the water and set it on the side of the tub. He opened the box, which wasn’t locked, and found only receipts for “art re-

prints". Hmmph. Some clue. Well, at least I know whose office this is, the Inspector thought, the receipts were signed by Father Noster. Apparently, the good father received \$20 a scroll from a Capitol Hill bookstore.

His shoes and pants ruined, La Mort sloshed out of the tub and left the monks' quarters, with angry, wet footprints following him out the door. The west lobe of the library had the same kind of window as the other lobes, but still no sign of a door into the library.

## Chapter 7: The Cloister

La Mort gagged as he neared the Cloister of St. Catatonia. It didn't take an architecture buff to see that it was a paradigm of ante-deluvian depressionism. He entered the ghastly building and saw that the main room held the austere cells of the nuns. He quickly peeked through an ornate door and saw that at least one of the cloister's inhabitants lived in sumptuous splendor. Must be Mother Puleeze's, he figured, remembering the hubris of Sister Edwina, the crone-nun who ruled over his childhood parochial school with an iron thumb and a slap of steel.

He decided to search the nun's cells first and, finding that none of them had doors, entered one that had "Sister Debbie" carved above it. The young nun must be hung up on early gulag, judging by the decor. The only thing of note was a handbook by the bed. La Mort picked it up and perused it. "Knots of a Trappist Trapper" by Friar John. The well-thumbed book was full of directions for tying various kinds of knots. Kinky. He flipped a few pages and, finding nothing too interesting, went into Mother Puleeze's boudoir.

In the middle of the spacious, magnificently decorated room was an emperor-sized waterbed, again the first one La Mort had ever seen. Beside the bed was a brassbound book, which had the word "Ledger" embossed on the cover. Now *this* ought to have some clues in it, the Inspector beamed, and tried to open it. Curses! It was locked. An ornate keyhole on the front taunted La Mort mercilessly.

The shape of the keyhole reminded him of something but it was just beyond his mind's grasp. This case is full of meaningless clues, he moaned, full of sound and fury, signifying *rien*!

He stomped out of the Cloister of St. Catatonia, hell-bent for the library. There's got to be a door somewhere. Whoever heard of a library without a door!

## Chapter 8: The Library

La Mort inspected every foot of the exterior of the library and found no doors. Each of the four lobes had a window but they were too high for him to see through. They looked too dark to see through, anyway.

The triangular slits between each of the lobes suggested, as he had noticed before, that the library had triangular rooms. That made sense, he thought, after all, it's called the Library of St. Isosceles. In fact, the whole damned abbey is named after St. Isosceles. Let's see, isosceles triangles are those with two of its sides having equal length. That fits.

La Mort wondered if it would be difficult to navigate through a building full of triangular rooms. He decided to head back to Mother Puleeze's boudoir and study the coatful of clues he had accumulated. He had a info sheet, map, newspaper clipping, diary, breviary, rosary, intra-abbey memo, receipts for "art reprints" and a handbook on knots. No wonder the other inspectors at the Sûreté called him the "shopping cart detective". He just couldn't seem to drop anything, once he'd put it in his pocket.

At least the boudoir is comfortable. Maybe he could figure out how to get into that ledger. This case is turning into a real mystery-adventure. And where the hell are those missing people?

He trudged over to the cloister and flopped down on Mother Puleeze's waterbed. His mind was racing.

## Chapter 9: Ruminations

Surrounded by festoons of velvet, silk and the finest terrycloth, La Mort snuggled deeper into Mother Puleeze's four-poster waterbed and mulled over the various things he knew. All of the missing people could have done the deed if they had had access to a synthetic strain of the plague and had a way of administering it to the unfortunate Abbot. Cardinal Musial and Doctor Dee were ciphers,

but the other four seemed to be involved in some sort of chicanery, at least the Abbot's mind.

The untimely ringing of Matins must have some bearing on the case. Why would anyone ring it at midnight, and was it Novice Scosha, whose job it was for the week? The missing people must be in the library, but how do you get into the dang thing?

No, there just wasn't enough evidence to work with. He sat up and examined the ledger again. Then something that had been nagging him hit him like a wet fist—the rosary's cross! It had the same intricate ornateness that the ledger's lock had! He took out the rosary and tried inserting the crucifix into the keyhole. Success! The ledger sprang open.

La Mort's teeth gnashed audibly as he saw that everything was in some sort of code. A typical page read:

11 16 9 15	15 22 15	7 6 6
5 19 1 5 6 6	5 6 3 3 10 6	7 19 6 6
9 16 7 7 2	14 10 15 6	25 13
11 7 12	5 10 21 21 16	4 4 13

He tried a simple substitution code, where A is 1, B is 2, and so on but it didn't make any sense.

K P I O    O V O    G F F

After thumbing through a few more pages, he gave up in disgust and sat on the edge of the bed wondering what he should do next. It was now after 9:00 P.M. and the sleepy village was probably shutting down for the night. A wry smile crept across his face as he figured, maybe it's time I reconstructed the crime—and annoyed a few people at the same time. He left the cloister and headed for the church.

## Chapter 10: Matins

At the entrance to the church, he hesitated and looked over to the stables. Why did the sign in the stables say that the stables must be cleaned before Matins? What did the two things have to do

with each other? He decided to check out the stables again before he carried out his plans.

The stable with the two-headed gelding was as malodorous and filthy as ever. Entering the gelding's stall, La Mort sighed and used a pushbroom to sweep out the ordure of the day. Luckily, the gelding gave him a wide berth. La Mort wasn't in the mood to cozy up to any hooved animal, even a two-headed one.

"Sacre merde!" he exclaimed. In the floor of the gelding's stall there was a trapdoor! He threw the broom aside and knelt down to tug on the brass handle of the trapdoor. Locked! There was an unusual type of lock on the trapdoor, and upon closer look, he saw that it was one of Father Murphy's sound-sensitive locks. But what kind of sound would open it? "D'eau!" he exclaimed, thumping himself on the forehead with an open palm, and ran to the church.

With a stout length of hemp in his hand, the Inspector looked up at Bell #5. According to Costello's memo to Scosha, you start with "the Bell of St. Pentomino" when ringing Matins. There was also something about not ringing non-adjacent bells consecutively. The memo refreshed his memory. Let's see, if I start with 5, then I can't ring 4 or 1 next. If I ring 3 next, then I can't ring 2 or 4 after that. So I'll ring 1. Then I have to ring 4, since it and 2 are the only ones left.

It made sense. He could ring the bells in this order—5, 3, 1, 4, 2—and he would not be ringing adjacent bells consecutively. With a wide grin, knowing he'd probably interrupt the amorous activities of dozens of villagers he rang the five bells in that order. BONG! BING! BANG! BUNG! BENG!

From the direction of the stables came a strange whinny—actually two whinnies in harmony, a perfect fourth apart. That's got to be the gelding, he thought, and ran down the staircase, out of the church and north to the stables.

Sure enough, the trapdoor was open! Maybe this was the entrance to the damnable library. He pointed the flashlight down into the hole in the stable floor. A few steps led down then leveled out into a tunnel, tall enough for a man to walk upright. It headed in the direction of the library. La Mort, his trenchcoat filled with meaningless clues, entered the tunnel. Maybe something would finally happen.

## Chapter 11: The Courtyard

With his heart dancing in his chest, Inspecteur Claude La Mort saw an ever-growing circle of light at the end of the tunnel. Fifty feet later he found the tunnel opened inside what appeared to be a water well, a couple of meters below the top of the well and about three meters above the waterline. Metal rungs, set into the inside of the well led up over the edge. He climbed them, noticing that a chalice was perched on the edge of the stone well, and found himself in a square courtyard. He quickly glanced around, admiring the art-deco decadence, and noted a door in each of its walls. Above each door was a sign, inscribed with the name of an animal.

He tried one of the doors but it was locked, apparently with another of Father Murphy's sound-sensitive locks. The locks were labeled "holy-locks". He turned around to gaze at the massive stone well.

It was a masterpiece of pre-Inquisition realism, with a sign reading "The Courtyard of the Chimera" above it. Below the sign was an inscription in Latin, and on the edge of the well a large pewter bucket sitting next to the chalice. He looked in the chalice and saw that it was filled with something. Reaching out for it, the inspector fumbled it in his hands and it dropped into the well where it splashed into the water and sank. It seemed to be filled with wafers. *Merde!* That could have been an important clue!

A spot on the well where the chalice stood attracted La Mort's eye and, dipping a finger in the spot and tasting it, he spat violently. That's arsenic di-cyanide, he muttered, a powerful poison whose symptoms resemble those of the plague. That explains what killed the Abbot. But how was it administered? In the wafers? But why would a priest ingest a wafer in the confessional?

La Mort reviewed what he knew about arsenic di-cyanide. If the poison is inhaled, death is almost instantaneous; if it's taken orally, paralysis sets in within minutes but death doesn't occur for a day or so. Hmmm. That means that Abbot Costello must have inhaled the poison—it wasn't the wafers. So why was the chalice with the poisoned wafers sitting on the edge of the well?

Leaving that mystery for later, La Mort turned his attention to the bucket. It was a heavy pewter bucket, made to last for centuries. There seemed to be something etched in the bottom of the inside but it was too small for him to make out. Wish I had a mag-

nifying glass, he thought to himself, then beamed as he remembered the nonsensical verse beneath the statue of St. Spurious in the church. What had it said? There is knowledge nil until ye fill?

Holding the rope in his hands he lowered the bucket down to the water and let an inch or two of water flow into it. Pulling it back up he looked into it and was pleased to find that the water did indeed magnify the words etched in the bottom. “To open the holy-locks of the Library, pray the name of the room you wish to enter.” It was signed by St. Spurious.

La Mort let the bucket drop back in the well and was dismayed to find that the rope wasn’t attached to the top of the well. The bucket and rope sank into the black water. He climbed up on the edge of the well and examined the stout bar atop the well, to which the rope had been attached. Aha! Someone had cut through the rope, leaving it attached by only a few strands. Luckily he had grasped the rope with his hands when he filled the bucket, or he might never have found out about the holy-locks.

Well, there are four doors, he thought, might as well start with the north one, the one whose sign read OTTER. The east, south and west doors were named TOAD, GIRAFFE and PIG respectively. It was dark and ordinarily it would be difficult to get one’s bearings in an enclosed courtyard, but luckily the inspector had a Sûreté-issue compass watch.

La Mort strode up to the north door and, rolling his eyes in embarrassment, muttered in what he hoped was a fervent tone, “otter”. The door opened soundlessly and he peered into the room beyond.

## Chapter 12: The North Lobe

Just as La Mort expected, the Room of the Otter was a triangular room—isosceles, at that. He walked into the room through the door that was in the middle of the hypotenuse. The other two walls met at the vertex directly across the room. The left wall was completely covered with bookcases but the right wall had a door with the word “CAT” above it. The doorway behind him was named “CHIMERA”. How nice of St. Isosceles, mused La Mort sarcastically, to put the names above the doors. It almost makes up for the holy-locks.

The Room of the Otter seemed to have Father Murphy's soul-detecting lights because the light was on. There was a light switch on the wall with the door; the switch down. Below it was the ubiquitous Latin inscription. I sure wish my barroom Latin were up to translating the inscriptions around here, he thought, as he walked to the door and prayed, "Cat". The door opened revealing a deep blackness beyond. La Mort leaned through the door with his flashlight and cursed when the bulb went out. These are brand-new batteries, he spat, and became even further confused when the flashlight came back on as he moved back into the Room of the Otter.

La Mort vowed to pistol-whip Father Murphy if he ever ran into him in the future. Apparently the electrician's sophisticated wiring in parts of the Library short-circuited conventional lighting devices. The inspector walked into the Room of the Cat but it was so dark he saw immediately there was nothing he could do in there without seriously injuring himself. Apparently the Room of the Otter had the automatic lights and the Room of the Cat didn't. He flipped the light switch up and peeked into the Room of the Cat again, but it stayed dark. What's with the light switch?

He decided to try one of the other lobes and headed back to the Courtyard of the Chimera, angrily praying "Chimera" to open the door. At least he had determined that the holy-locks weren't picky; you didn't have to sound fervent. In fact you could sound downright nasty.

### Chapter 13: The Other Lobes

La Mort went up to the door to the east of the well and prayed, "Pig". It sounded good, and the door opened into a room very similar to the Room of the Otter—a featureless wall on the left and a door in the wall to the right. The sign by the door read "Bear" and below it was a Latin inscription. There was a light switch by the door and it was up. He said, "Bear" and as the door opened, peeked into the dark room. Sure enough, the flashlight went out as he leaned into the room, coming back on as he stepped back into the Room of the Pig. He flipped the light switch down, spat "Bear" and saw that the room was still dark. What had that fool Father Murphy done to the lights?

“Chimera,” the inspector prayed and stepped out into the courtyard. He strode to the door to the south of the well and muttered, “Giraffe” and entered a room similar to the others. The door in the right wall was named, “LION” and it had the usual Latin inscription and light switch, which was up. La Mort quickly said, “Lion” and flipped the switch down and back up, seeing that the room beyond stayed dark.

Shaking his head, he mumbled “Chimera” and stomped over to the last door, to the west of the well. “Toad.” Again, the same room, door, inscription and light switch on the wall to the right; simple wall to the left. He didn’t even bother to pray “Deer” or flip the switch. He had an idea.

#### Chapter 14: Father Murphy’s Crib

The Inspector walked over to the well, climbed over the edge and clambered down the rungs to the tunnel. He was just about to enter it when he noticed that there was another opening in the inside of the well about two meters above the waterline. It was on the other side of the well from the tunnel so he couldn’t reach it without breaking his neck. It was high enough above the waterline that he knew he couldn’t reach it from the water were he to jump in. He’d need a rope to get to the hole. Too bad the well rope fell in the water.

He turned and trotted down the tunnel, back to the stables. The trapdoor was closed, but not locked from this side and he pushed it open and climbed up into the gelding’s stall. The equine mutation stood to the rear of the stall, looking decidedly unhappy. As La Mort left the stables, he heard the trapdoor slam shut behind him. Quelle damage, he grinned, thinking of the villagers; now I’ll just have to ring the bells again.

Moments later he entered the monk’s quarters and began searching Father Murphy’s crib. He had searched everything but the textbooks when he remembered about the newspaper clipping with the review. What was the name of Murphy’s book? How to Change a Light Bulb? Maybe that’s where I can find out how to get past those four rooms, he thought. He quickly scanned the book covers. Aha! Here it is. Sitting down on the monk’s sagging cot, he thumbed through the short tome.

In a chapter entitled, “Apologia” was the sentence, “I’m afraid that in spite of my years of experience in electrical design, I’ve never been sure whether ON is supposed to be up or down. Usually it doesn’t make much difference since you can just try it both ways until the light comes on, but in systems such as in the Library of St. Isosceles, where four switches are in series, you have to have them all ON at the same time in order for the lights to be on. Sorry about that.”

In the margin beside this passage was penciled, “O=1 T=2 G=3 P=4 UP=7”. La Mort stared at this for a moment then yelped, “I’ve got it! O is for otter, T is toad, G is giraffe and P is pig. The UPs equal 7 so I’ve got to have 1, 2 and 4 UP. Otter, Toad and Pig UP. Giraffe down. Elementary Boolean algebra! And those other detectives at the Sûreté laughed at me when I said that the insane scribblings of the Englishman George Boole would have some practical use in the future!”

The excited inspector ran back to the stables, tried the trapdoor, and when it remained locked, sprinted to the church and ran up the stairway. He was in such a good mood that he tried a different Matins this time. He reasoned, if 5–3–1–4–2 satisfied the requirements for Matins: start with 5 and don’t ring adjacent bells consecutively, then 5–2–4–1–3 ought to work just as well. BONG! BENG! BUNG! BANG! BING!

A harmonic whinny from the north proved him right, and he sped out of the church to the stables, where he saw the trapdoor standing open. The gelding stood to the side, its four eyes glaring at him malevolently. La Mort quickly entered the tunnel and hot-footed it back to the well.

## Chapter 15: More Rooms

His trenchcoat flapping, the wily inspector climbed up the rung ladder out of the well and ran to the north door, shouting “Otter!” He flipped the switch up, and tried to get back out into the courtyard before the door behind him closed but was too late. “Chimera,” he muttered and moved to the east door. “Pig.” He flipped the switch up. “Chimera.” Over to the south door. “Giraffe.” He flipped the switch down and sped over to the east door. “Toad.”

He stood in the Room of the Toad and flipped the switch down. Then he said “Deer” and saw that it was dark inside the Room of

the Deer. If my theory is correct, the light should go on when I flip the switch up. He flipped it and said, "Deer."

Eureka! The room was lit! He entered the Room of the Deer. Of course it was triangular, the same size as the other rooms he had been in. But this time he entered through one of the equi-sized walls. The vertex was to his right; the hypotenuse to his left. Each of the walls had a door in it, and a sign above it. The door he had entered through read "TOAD" of course. The door on his left, the hypotenuse, had a few obliterated letters and looked like "--M-AT". The sign above the door on his right was totally illegible. Merde! Don't these monks ever repaint their signs?

A small table stood in the middle of the room and on it was a scroll. La Mort snatched it up and saw that it was blank except for a title that read, "ELZGAEL" and a small inscription, "St. Jumblius". Those cryptic monks! La Mort briefly mused that it might have been better if the St. Swithins Day explosion had been in the megaton range.

He searched the room, found nothing and with an expletive-prefaced "Toad, chimera" he crossed the courtyard to the Room of the Otter. "Otter, cat," he spat and found himself in the Room of the Cat. It looked a lot like the Room of the Deer, down to the table with a scroll on it. He picked it up and saw that it too was by St. Jumblius. It was entitled, "OBNOAB". Utter nonsense.

The sign above the door in the hypotenuse read "--EP-AT". The sign to his right was illegible, just as in the Room of the Deer. Again he searched the room and found nothing. "Otter, chimera," he intoned and headed west to the door marked "PIG".

"Pig, bear," took him to the Room of the Bear where he found a scroll entitled "MTAWBO". As expected, the door to the left was partly legible, "-A-E-LE", and the door to the right, totally unreadable. At least the monks are consistently negligent, he fumed. Might as well get the fourth scroll.

Performing the familiar litany he found himself in the Room of the Lion, where he picked up a scroll named "NEPLAHTEL". The partly legible door was named, "--BO-N" and the other was of course totally unreadable.

La Mort started to curse violently, then, taking a deep breath, decided to sit on the table and think things over. I've got four scrolls and four locked doors; surely there's a connection, he thought. He took the "NEPLAHTEL" scroll and examined it more closely. Looked like an ordinary scroll. Then he got up and scruti-

nized the lock on the door below the "--BO-N" sign. Hmmm. In tiny etched words, it said, "Scroll-lock by St. Jumblius." So there WAS a connection between the scrolls and the locks!

He pulled the other three scrolls out of his trenchcoat pocket and checked them out. "MTAWBO", "ELZGAEL" and "OBNOAB". The only one that shared letters with the "--BO-N" sign was the latter. Let me think. St. Jumblius. Sacre merde! Could they be jumbles? La Mort kicked himself. What a fool I am! Of course! They are all animals! Surely with my experience with word puzzles I can figure these out.

Within seconds La Mort had solved them all. BABOON, GAZELLE, ELEPHANT, and the hardest one, WOMBAT. He looked up at the "--BO-N" and, holding the OBNOAB scroll, intoned "Baboon". The door opened! I'm finally getting somewhere, he thought as he sprang into the Room of the Baboon.

## Chapter 16: Big Rooms

The Room of the Baboon was triangular, with the two equal sides quite a bit longer than the hypotenuse, through which La Mort entered. There were doors in all three walls, and *mirabile dictu!* The doors were all legibly marked! On his right the sign read, "ARMADILLO" and on the left, "RAT". He decided to see what's inside the Room of the Armadillo.

He was gratified to find that no obnoxious locks barred his way and found himself in a large triangular room permeated by a deep, red light that seemed to exude from the walls themselves. As the door closed behind him he gulped, realizing that there was only one door in this room, the one through which he had just entered. Just to be sure, he prayed, "Baboon" and was thankful to see the door open. He didn't go through it, and a few seconds later it closed, miring him in the ruby-colored room.

There was enough light to see a table in the middle of the room with a book on it. He picked it up and identified it as a missal—a prayerbook used to follow the arcane rituals he was subjected to as an adolescent. The roseate light was bright enough for him to see that the missal was a typical one, nothing out of the ordinary. But just in case, he added it to the many items in his trenchcoat pockets.

Quickly glancing around, he saw nothing of note and went

back to the normally lit Room of the Baboon. Forging ahead, he intoned, "Rat," and found himself in the Room of the Rat, a large triangular room. He had entered through one of the long, equal walls; the vertex was to his left and the shorter hypotenuse to the right. There was a window in the short wall, about eye level. Aha! He had found one of the rooms that looked out on the rest of the abbey. The other wall had a door with "LEOPARD" above it.

He peered over the bottom edge of the window and saw the Cloister of St. Catatonia. It figured. He had entered the library through the Room of the Giraffe, to the south of the well, and had continued more or less in that direction through the confusing triangular rooms. The cloister was to the south of the library so he was looking out the southern window. The cloister was dark and forbidding, and, seeing that there were no clues in the room, prayed the word "Leopard" and strode into yet another triangular room. How many rooms are there in this damnable library?

The Room of the Leopard had its vertex to his right and a short hypotenuse to his left. The door on the right was labeled "CIVET" and the door to the left, "COW". La Mort saw nothing of interest in the room so tried the door to the right. "Civet," he prayed. Nothing happened. Then he saw, in tiny print, inscribed right above the door, "To enter the Room of the Civet, you must first solve the two Puzzles of St. Caliban." The rest of the inscription is in Latin.

La Mort stared at the taunting inscription with seething anger, then, shaking his head ruefully, spoke the word, "Cow." He entered a small, triangular room with one other door, whose sign was totally illegible. Oh no, not one of those again! La Mort then saw that there was a fireplace in this room, filled with ashes. He knelt down to see the ashes better and saw that a sheet of paper had burnt, but not crumbled into grey ash. Squinting, he was able to determine that it was an official summons from the Vatican to Abbot Costello: "Under penalty of excommunication, you shall bring the Bull to Rome where it belongs."

He tried to gently remove the burnt summons from the fireplace but it crumbled into powdery ash. Hope I don't need that for evidence, the inspector gulped. Well, that seems to be it for this section of the library. Now that I have the scroll-locks figured out I should be able to explore the other lobes of the library, as I have the southern one.

"Leopard, rat." As he passed through the Room of the Rat, he

glanced out the window one more time. *Sacre Bleu!* There was a light on in Mother Puleeze's boudoir! "Finallement!" he ejaculated, "At last I may meet someone in this godforsaken abbey. Perhaps the murderer of Abbot Costello?"

With a quick "Baboon, lion, giraffe, chimera," La Mort sped to the well and sprinted down the tunnel. Those other lobes could wait.

### Chapter 17: Back to the Cloister

La Mort violently slammed the trapdoor up, hoping to re-geld the two-headed horse, and trotted past the church and gate to the Cloister of St. Catatonia. The lights were all out, including the light in Mother Puleeze's boudoir. He entered the building carefully, not knowing what to expect and saw nothing in the nun's cell room. Then he slowly eased into the boudoir. Nothing. No, wait! On the bed, right where he had lain the last time he was in the boudoir, was a perfume atomizer.

He snatched it up and examined it closely, careful not to squeeze the rubber ball. By now he had formulated a theory that this just might be the murder weapon. What better way to kill a priest than to spray him through the confessional screen with a deadly poison? The liquid in the atomizer resembled the spot he saw on the edge of the well where the chalice had stood. Probably arsenic di-cyanide.

The inspector looked around and saw nothing amiss, so he left the cloister, keeping an eye out for whoever set off the soul-detecting light in the boudoir that he saw from the library. It was just after midnight as he trudged up the stairway of the church, rang Matins a little louder than he really needed to, and headed over to the stables and an increasingly livid gelding. He entered the tunnel and climbed up into the Courtyard of the Chimera.

### Chapter 18: The North Lobe Again

Having charted the southern lobe, La Mort decided to try the north lobe this time—for no particular reason, really. He went through the Room of the Otter into the Room of the Cat and, holding the ELEPHANT scroll of St. Jumblius, spoke the word, "Elephant."

He walked into a large, triangular room, as he expected and saw doors to his right and left, labeled “BOAR” and “GNU” respectively. So far, everything in the library had been the same from lobe to lobe. Same room layout, different animal names. La Mort spouted, “Boar,” and entered the Room of the Boar.

The first thing he noticed was a thick acrid smog that made him cough. He squinted to see through it and found himself getting disoriented. The room was starting to pulsate in a sensuous fashion and looking down, La Mort was mortified to see small, paisley squids attaching themselves to his legs. Trying to brush them off, the frantic inspector screamed as tie-died gerbils started nibbling on his magnificent mustaches, “Gotta get outta here.” He stumbled towards the door as lentils and chives began raining from the ceiling. “What the hell is the name of the room outside?” he babbled, and just before careering to the floor, remembered, “Elephant!” The door opened and a zoned out La Mort fell into the Room of the Elephant, gasping for breath.

He lay on the thick rug that all of the rooms of the library seemed to have and within minutes had recovered his senses. Must be a psychedelic fog filling the Room of the Boar. In other circumstances it would be quite enjoyable spending a few hours in there, but he was on the job and he had to decide what to do about the Room of the Boar. Speaking of Boar, where had he heard of that room before? He wracked his brain, which was back to almost normal, but couldn’t remember.

Then it occurred to him that he still had most, if not all of the clues he had found. Maybe it was in his pockets. He quickly emptied them and while examining the ribbon in the breviary saw the scribbled note that said, “Bull in Boar.” That’s it! The mysterious Papal Bull of 303 AD referred to in the Abbot’s diary must be in the Room of the Boar! But how can he find it in that psychedelic smog?

He mulled it over for a few minutes, considering calling out for a gas mask, but how could he call? There are no phones in this godforsaken abbey. He didn’t come up with anything concrete so he decided save the Boar for later and do some more exploring. He look at the door he hadn’t tried yet and said, “Gnu.”

It was a typical room, and as he suspected, had a window in it, facing north. He looked through it and saw the novice’s barracks in the darkness. It looked as austere as ever. He tried prying the

window open but it was solidly made. He was hoping he could find a quick way out of the library, just in case he needed one.

The other door in the Room of the Gnu read “OX”, so a quick syllable later he was in the Room of the Ox. The room on his right was labeled “PANTHER” and under it was a similar inscription to the one in the Room of the Leopard, “To enter the Room of the Panther you must first solve the Two Puzzles of St. Caliban.” The rest was in Latin. I must figure out a way to translate the Latin inscriptions, he mumbled to himself. He tried the door with a fervent “Panther” but it didn’t open.

Above the other door in the room was the sign, “RAM”. If parallelism continued, it would be a small room with two doors, one of them unreadable. Sure enough, it was. He searched it anyway and in a corner he found a pornscroll illustrated with the figure of a young nun in a very provocative pose—tied to an altar. On the back is what appears to be an eight-letter word, written in garish red ink. The only letters La Mort could make out were the fourth and fifth, “P” and “K”. What kind of eight-letter word has a “PK in the middle? And what does it mean, anyhow?

Well, La Mort thought, there’s still a couple of lobes to explore, as well as that spacey Boar room. Might as well get to it. Before he left he looked up at the illegible sign. I wonder if that leads to a different lobe, perhaps the west one. Wasn’t there an illegible sign in one of the two west lobe rooms he had been in? Maybe it was the same door. He tried to remember the name of the rooms and they finally came to him, the Pig and the Bear. He tried it. “Bear.” The door opened.

Amazing! A quick way to get from one lobe to another without retracing all those steps. He was in the Room of the Bear and had St. Jumblus’ GAZELLE scroll with him. “Gazelle,” he ventured and seconds later was in a large triangular room. The door on the right read “TIGER” and the door on the left “RHINO”. He, as in the other lobes, tried Tiger first and found himself in a room with only one door, the one he had just entered. On a table was a cruet of water.

He took it and found that it seemed to be ordinary water. There was a stopper in it so he put it in his pocket with the rest of his clues. He left the Room of the Tiger and going through the Room of the Gazelle entered the Room of the Rhino. It had a window, and if he hadn’t gotten totally disoriented, it should look out upon the monk’s quarters. He peered through the window and was star-

tled to see a light on in Father Noster's office! Someone was out there. Maybe if he hurried he could catch them before they left.

The inspector, who was getting a little tired by this time, took the quickest route to the courtyard by going back through the Gazelle, Bear and Pig. Then through the tunnel, where the gelding took a vicious bite at him. Two bites, actually. He dodged and sprinted past the novice's barracks to the monks' quarters. It was dark, but as soon as he entered, Father Murphy's soul-detecting lights came on. He ran into the office, finding no one there. Merde! Too late again!

He was about to leave when he noticed something in the corner that he could swear was not there before. A suitcase. Picking it up, La Mort noticed it was made of rich, Corinthian leather and opened it. Empty. He started to fling it in exasperation into the hot tub but then stopped suddenly. It seemed heavier than it should be. He opened it again and tore at the silk bottom. Aha! A false bottom! Ripping it out he found a strange electronic gadget. "Quelle l'hell?" he exploded, and turned it over in his hands, looking for a clue as to its function.

It had a keyboard of sorts, with the letters from A to Z. There were two buttons, one labeled "English" and the other "Latin". Hey! This might be the answer to my prayers, he thought. What's the closest place that has some Latin for translating? He couldn't remember there being any Latin signs outside the library so he hotfooted it over to the church, rang a quick Matins, and headed to the stables. The gelding attacked as he entered the stall but after the inspector gave him a couple of swift whacks with the broom, retreated to the back of the stall, licking its wounds with both tongues. La Mort was really getting sick and tired of that stupid horse.

## Chapter 19: Latin Revelations

On the way back through the tunnel La Mort re-assessed the situation. There was one more unlocked room in the western lobe he hadn't be in yet, and practically the whole eastern lobe. Maybe the Latin translator would show him how to get into those locked rooms, the ones that required him to solve the Two Puzzles of St. Caliban. But where were they? He hadn't seen anything with that name on it, except the signs.

He climbed the rungs to the courtyard and, grasping the electronic translator, immediately punched in the Latin inscription atop the Well of St. Spurious. Miraculously, in a tinny voice the device beeped, "The well is the locus of the final knowledge." This is great, he exulted, even if this particular inscription doesn't help much. So far, all the well has provided is the way in and out of the Library. But then there's that other hole—

He decided to go back through the west lobe, checking out the Latin signs along the way. The message in the Room of the Pig translated to "Carvings by St. Binarius". Will this litany of perverse saints never end?

A short "Bear, gazelle, rhino, dog," later he found himself in the Room of the Dog where the translator told him "To enter the Room of the Gorilla you must first solve the Two Puzzles of St. Caliban. The room of the Second Puzzle must be entered via the Room of the Deer." Interesting. So the room with one of the puzzles shares a wall with the Room of the Deer. That's over by the Toad in the east lobe.

But before heading that way he decided to finish inspecting the west lobe. He didn't even bother checking the Room of the Gorilla; he was sure it would be locked. So he prayed the name of the other room, "Horse," and entered.

The sign above the door he faced was illegible, as he expected but the room had a desk in it. There was nothing on or in the desk but under it he spied a torn sheet of paper. He snatched it up and saw that it was part of a letter or note. The fragment read, "...if the Bull is as subversive as I think, you and I better update our resumes." La Mort didn't recognize the handwriting, but it had a Vatican watermark. Another clue indicating a Roman connection, perhaps involving Cardinal Musial, the Papal emissary.

La Mort, who had been making a mental map of the lobes of the Library, decided to see if the room he was in was analogous to the Room of the Ram, which also had an illegible sign. If his map was correct, on the other side of the wall should be the second room of the south lobe, the Room of the Lion. "Lion," he purred and was pleased to see the door open. He entered.

The quickest way to the east lobe, the only one he hadn't explored, was to go through the courtyard via the Room of the Giraffe. Also, wasn't there a Latin inscription there? But there was also an inscription in the Room of the Leopard, if he remembered correctly. He decided to go there first. "Baboon, rat, leopard,"

took him to the Room of the Rat where he saw that the inscription below the CIVET sign read, "To enter the Room of the Civet, you must solve the Two Puzzles of St. Caliban. The Second Puzzle is adjacent to the Room of the Giraffe."

The Giraffe? That was the first room in this lobe. La Mort retraced his steps and made it back to the Room of the Giraffe. Using the translator, the message was, "Ten walls in each room are equal in length." Talk about cryptic! Every room he had been in so far was triangular; what could "ten walls" possibly mean? La Mort was beginning to despair because of the mysteries that were piling up. When would he run into the missing people, or at least the person or persons who were wandering around outside the Library?

He was also getting tired of all this walking. He mumbled, "Chimera," and stumbled into the Courtyard of the Chimera. One more lobe to go.

## Chapter 20: The Last Lobe

La Mort decided to quickly zip into the Room of the Otter to read its message before tackling the east lobe so with a breathless "Otter" he scooted across the courtyard. The translator decoded the message, "There be one hundred thousand rooms in the Library." Sure. What kind of mathematical flake was this St. Binarius, who claimed to have carved the message?

Then it hit him like the wet fist of an overweight onanist. Of course! St. Binarius! The messages are in binary, not decimal! The translator was an electronic gem, but how was it to know that the messages used the binary number system? That would explain the "ten walls" crack. In decimal, "10" is ten; in binary, "10" is two. There are two walls of equal size in each room. That's right.

And as for the "one hundred thousand" message, "100000" in binary was, let's see, thirty-two! That made sense. So far, each lobe contained eight rooms, making 32 rooms in all.

With this exhilarating new info in mind, La Mort sped across the courtyard and entered the Room of the Toad, the first room in the east lobe. The message was translated as, "There are one thousand, one hundred small rooms." The inspector's ability to convert decimal to binary was taxed somewhat but he soon came up with "twelve" for the number of small rooms in the Library. That jibed.

The first two rooms in each lobe were small, as well as the last room. All the other rooms in each lobe were large.

Now onto the rooms he hadn't explored yet. With the WOMBAT scroll in hand he almost fervently prayed the word and entered a large, triangular room. It resembled all the other large rooms in the Library, with WOLF to his right and ELK to his left. He spoke the word, "Wolf" and strode into a large room with only the one door behind him.

On a table he spied a cruet containing wine, or what smelled like wine. It sat on a napkin. He picked up the cruet, putting the stoppered bottle in his pocket with the cruet of water. Then he examined the napkin. It seemed to be a sacramental napkin and, judging by the indentations in it, had a message written on it. But La Mort couldn't decipher the message. It was too faint.

He pulled the two cruets out of his trenchcoat pockets and set them on the table. What if he were to mix the two fluids; would anything result? After all, wasn't there something called "transubstantiation" that was supposed to occur during the ritual called "Mass"? What the hell? Why not try it?

La Mort poured a dollop of each fluid on the table and dipped the sacramental napkin in it. Aha! The message surprisingly—some might even say, miraculously—appeared. It read, "The Abbot has no real evidence of our pornscroll and call-nun services here at the monastery, so don't let him scare you. I'll take care of Cardinal Musial myself if he gets too nosy. I've never met a cardinal yet who won't listen to reason, especially when it's backed up by cold, hard cash." The message was signed, "Dr. Dee."

La Mort had almost forgotten about the village physician who was one of the missing people. So *that* was his scheme—running a pornscroll and call-nun service. He must be the village contact. But was the revelation of such relatively innocuous crimes as pornography and prostitution enough to inspire murder? Not in France, of course, but this was the United States, and even though the youthful president had seemed to indicate a softening of the rigid moralism of the Republican years of Eisenhower, there was definitely an air of abject prudery about the country.

But then again, this was a monastery, where religious passions ran high. There's no telling what a monk or nun would do when threatened.

Time to explore some more. He intoned "Wombat" and left the Room of the Wolf. As he crossed the room to the door to the

Room of the Elk, he stumbled over a small bump in the rug. “Quelle—” he began, and bending down to feel the rug, determined that there was a book-sized object under the rug. He started to pull the rug back, and saw a tag that read, “Hand-woven by St. Caliban.” Caliban? The saint with the puzzles? Could the puzzles be in the rug? Or under the rug?

He pulled the rug back further and found a small black book with the initials “M.P.” on the front. Must be Mother Puleeze. The inspector flipped through it and saw that it was filled with daily prayers and benedictions.

There were two messages written in a flamboyant hand, “Subtract one from code,” and “Find who stole my perfume atomizer.” Aha! Subtract one from code! That may help to decipher the contents of the ledger in Mother Puleeze’s boudoir. When he tried a simple substitution code before, it didn’t work. But he didn’t subtract one from the code.

He stood there a few moments—should he go over to the cloister now and check, or should he continue his search of the final lobe? His legs moaned, “Continue, please. Don’t make us go all the way to the cloister,” so he prayed “Elk” and entered the Room of the Elk.

It resembled the Gnu, Rhino and Rat rooms—as La Mort knew it would—complete with a window on the east wall. La Mort quickly checked the rug and it, too, was hand-woven by St. Caliban. Would he have to peek under every damn rug in this place? Thirty-two rugs?

He went to the window and looked out. “Sacre merde!” He bleated. There was a glow in the church! Should he rush there to try to encounter him? It never worked the other times he tried it. And there’s always those moaning legs. He went into the next room, the Room of the Hyena.

This was a room with the locked door and the Latin message below it. The message, when translated read, “To enter the Room of the Fox, you must first solve the Two Puzzles of St. Caliban. The room of the First Puzzle shares a wall with the Room of the Otter.”

A grim smile crept over La Mort’s visage. He now knew where the two puzzles were. His mental map of the Library was just about complete and everything was falling into place. The four Latin messages in the rooms outside the four locked rooms gave two separate pieces of information: one, the room that shared a

wall with the puzzle room; and two, the door that had to be entered in order for the puzzle to be solved. It wasn't clear how St. Caliban had rigged the doors so that they had to be entered in a certain direction, but since the rugs were all made by him, the door may catch the rug a certain way.

There was one more room to explore—except for the four locked rooms, of course—and the inspector was getting exhilarated by the thought of finally encountering the two puzzles. He mentally flipped a coin and decided on the last room, the Room of the Beaver. He entered it.

It was a small room of course and had an altar against the left wall. On the altar was a grey candle. He picked it up and scrutinized it closely. It had a putty-like feel to it and a thick black wick. In fact, it looked to La Mort exactly like plastique explosive. Explosive? Could this have something to do with the explosion on St. Swithins Day? He was beginning to suspect that the St. Swithins Day desecration had precipitated just about everything that had happened at the abbey, culminating with the murder of Abbot Costello.

La Mort hoped that he would have no reason to light the “candle” but put it in his pocket anyway. You never know.

La Mort decided to test his theory of the layout of the library. “Cat,” he spoke and smirked when the door under the illegible sign swung open. He strode in, mumbled “Otter” then “Chimera” and limped over and sat on the edge of the well. His feet were aching. It was almost 4:00 A.M.

## Chapter 21: The Puzzles

La Mort felt that he knew how and where to find the Two Puzzles of St. Caliban. But there might be someone in the church. Should he check that out first? He decided he should, and clambered down the rungs to the tunnel. Minutes later he was pushing the trapdoor open and dodging the nips of a sleepy, irate gelding. He cursed as the left head's teeth clicked near his elbow, and sprinted for the church.

The church was dark, the belfry too, so La Mort used his flashlight to quickly scan the belfry and the two confessionals. Nothing had changed. Then he peered over the edge of the catacomb in front of the altar under re-construction. A footprint! La Mort was

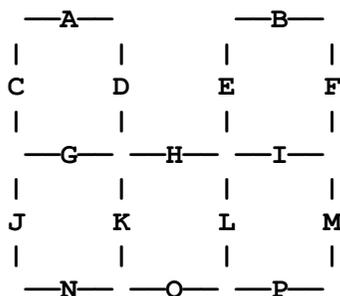
sure there hadn't been one there before. He slid down into the catacomb and stared at the footprint, his flashlight just inches away. The heel of the shoe had some kind of icon etched in it—a cross with a body on it? A staff with something twined around it? He couldn't tell for sure.

He clambered out of the catacomb and willed his legs to take him back up to the belfry where he rang Matins for what he hoped was the last time. Then he trudged back to the stables. Wearily he threatened the gelding with the broom, and dropped through the trapdoor. By now even the two-headed horse had resigned itself to a sleepless night. Soon he was back in the courtyard.

He knew the First Puzzle of St. Caliban was on the other side of the doorless wall in the Room of the Otter. If his impression of the Library was correct, that was the Room of the Ram. But he had to enter the room via the Room of the Bear, so he turned west, to the door marked "PIG". He prayed "Pig" then "Bear" and faced the door with the illegible sign in the Room of the Bear. "Ram" he prayed and entered the room when the door opened.

Once inside the Room of the Ram he pulled the rug back. Voila! The First Puzzle of St. Caliban was carved in the hardwood floor. It was a diagram of monastic staffs, describing a series of connected squares. A legend read, "There are five squares formed by the Staffs of St. Caliban. By moving THREE of the staffs to new positions, you will end up with FOUR connected squares of the same size. All sixteen staffs will be used. Pray the letters of the three staffs when you know them."

The diagram looked like this:

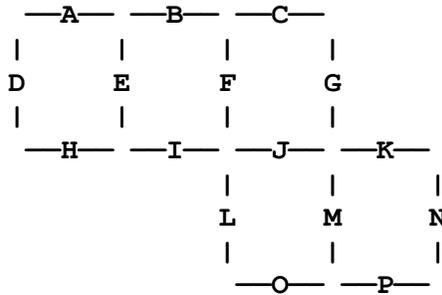


### FIRST PUZZLE OF ST. CALIBAN

La Mort burned the image of these sixteen staffs into his mind. Why, this reminds me of the toothpick puzzles that one often sees in bistros and saloons, he thought. Let's see, move three staffs to form four squares. Four connected squares.

He moved staffs around in his mind for a while, then gave up in exasperation. Maybe he should try the other puzzle and come back to this one later. He spat, "Bear, pig, chimera," and went to the west door, named "TOAD". He went through it to the Room of the Deer and prayed, "Cow." From the Latin inscriptions he knew that the room with the Second Puzzle of St. Caliban shared a wall with the Room of the Giraffe, therefore the Room of the Cow. He had to enter it via the illegibly signed door in the Room of the Deer.

In the Room of the Cow he pulled the rug back and saw a diagram similar to the first one. The Second Puzzle of St. Caliban required you to move only TWO of the sixteen staffs to form FOUR connected squares. The diagram looked like this:



### SECOND PUZZLE OF ST. CALIBAN

This one seemed even harder than the other one, where you had to move three staffs. Again, La Mort memorized the layout and letters of the staffs. He walked over to the rolled up rug and sprawled down on it, determined to relax until he solved these two puzzles.

La Mort wished that his old crony-in-arms, Lovejoy the antiques dealer, were here. He wouldn't be any help, but his friend Tinker Dill knew every matchstick puzzle known to man. For about a half hour he juggled staffs around in his mind but got nowhere. He was beginning to develop an almost spiritual hatred for all things monastic, especially monks and their stupid staffs.

“Cherchez le merde!” he finally cursed and decided to go to the cloister and see if the ledger had any information that would help him.

He went back through the Deer and Toad rooms to the courtyard and descended the rungs into the tunnel. This time he eased the trapdoor open, and was immediately glad he did, because he was able to dodge a huge load of gelding droppings that had been cleverly deposited on the edge of the hole, and fell in a sickening splat on the floor of the tunnel at his feet. La Mort reached in his pocket and pulled out the perfume atomizer. He didn't know if arsenic di-cyanide had any effect on the equine species but one little two-headed horsie was going to find out.

But the gelding kept to the back of the stall and the incensed detective turned and, placing the atomizer back in his trenchcoat, trundled to the Cloister of St. Catatonia.

As soon as he entered the lavish boudoir, he flopped down on the waterbed and closed his eyes. Would this night ever end? He knew that he was getting close to finding the murderer, or at least the missing persons. Could they all be the murderers, as in the Orient Express case he solved back in '58, sending all of the relatives of the kidnapped baby to the guillotine?

After a few moments of exhausted thought, he sat up and opened the ledger. Subtract one from code. That made the top line:

10 15 8 14 14 21 14 6 5 5

Using a simple substitution code where A equals 1, B equals 2, and so on, he came up with:

JOHN NUN FEE

But of course! This proves that Mother Puleeze's sideline was a call-nun service. He quickly deciphered the rest of the code:

DR0DEE DEBBIE FREE  
HOFFA MINE XL  
JFK DITTO CCL

Obviously the good mother catered to a highly placed clientele. La Mort was amused to see that in spite of the young president's

religious affiliation with Mother Puleeze, she socked it to him for 250 big ones, while the pugnacious labor leader had his teamster ashes hauled for a mere 40. But the first entry loomed ominously above—so Dr. Dee was definitely implicated, and Mother Puleeze had evidence. A motive for murder perhaps? But as far as La Mort knew, the Mother Superior was still alive.

It was time to solve the Two Puzzles of Caliban and see what was in those final four rooms. He headed once more for the church.

He was ringing the third bell of Matins when it struck him that if he was ever to see what was in that other hole in the well he would need a rope—which he just happened to have in his hands. He quickly rang the other two bells, and hardly hearing the harmonic whinny from the stables, examined the rope where it was attached to the bell. It was quite firmly attached. He'd have to cut the rope somehow.

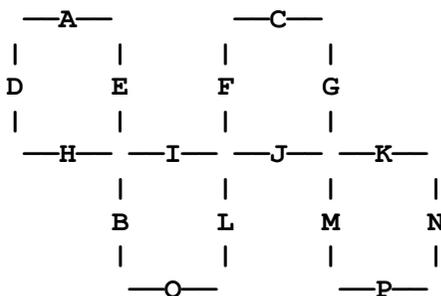
La Mort reached in his pants pocket and brandished his Sûreté-issue Trim-Trio. Probably the handiest gadget on the face of the earth, it just wasn't made for cutting through two-inch thick bellropes, particularly ones made of the finest hemp. He'd need a more formidable blade to cut one of those ropes.

He sped down the stairs to the stables. The gelding was waiting and with an insane chorus of neighs, reared back upon its hind legs, its forelegs slashing like quixotic windmills. La Mort, having dealt with many a recalcitrant animal in his years at the Sûreté, dodged them adroitly and leapt into the tunnel. "Merde!" He had forgotten about the gelding's booby trap. Scraping his boots on the cobblestones of the tunnel, the determined detective made yet another journey to the Library of St. Isosceles.

It was just before he reached the opening in the well when he shouted out loud, his voice echoing in the stony cloaca. "I've got it!" In his steel trap of a mind, he had been shuffling staffs around like a demented shepherd, and it had all of a sudden become crystal clear—he had solved the Two Puzzles of St. Caliban! He knew which staffs to move, and where to move them.

Over the well he scampered, into the Room of the Toad. He had decided to tackle the second puzzle first. A curt "Deer" and "Cow" and he was looking down on the Second Puzzle of St. Caliban carved in the hardwood floor. Taking a deep breath, he intoned, "B" then "O". He figured by removing the B staff, then

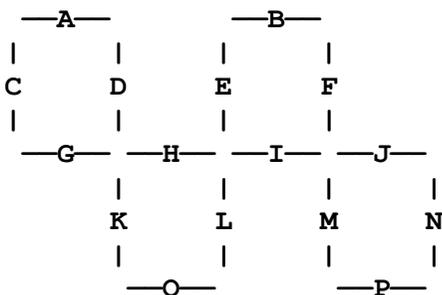
placing it vertically below the E staff; then sliding the O staff to the left, he would end up with a layout that would look like this:



As soon as he spoke the “O” the lights in the room glowed more brightly and a sound, similar to that of a chorus of Gregorian monks singing a major chord, reverberated through the room. I think that’s the solution, La Mort beamed.

The Room of the Civet was the closest locked room to him so he quickly skipped the Room of the Leopard and prayed, “Civet.” The door remained closed. That didn’t surprise him; the inscription said that BOTH puzzles must be solved first.

“Rat, baboon, lion, giraffe, chimera,” and La Mort scampered into the courtyard. Then “Pig, bear, ram” and he was in the room with the rolled up rug and the First Puzzle of St. Caliban. He looked down at the diagram and prayed, “J, N, P” and was rewarded by another glow and major chord. The revised diagram he envisioned looked like this:



Now he was ready to search the final four rooms of the Library of St. Isosceles!

## Chapter 22: Missing Persons

Wishing he had a four-sided coin, La Mort stood by the Well of St. Spurious. He had decided to go to the courtyard and gather his wits before attacking the four locked rooms. “Eenie, meenie, miney, meaux,” he ventured, using the traditional French method of making military decisions. And when that didn’t work, remembered the advice of the Gallic philosopher, Le Petomane: “Go east, young man.” The intrepid inspector prayed “Toad, deer, wombat, elk, hyena,” and found himself outside the door to the Room of the Fox. “Fox,” he prayed, and stepped into the room.

Immediately he saw a crumpled form in the corner. Racing to it, he saw that it was a young monk, Novice Scosha apparently. He was dying. In his clenched fist was a note, which the inspector pried from his fingers. He read:

“It is extremely important that you meet me at midnight in the Room of the Fox. Wait for me there.” It was signed with the seal of Abbot Costello.

The poor novice gasped, “Will you hear my confession?” and La Mort, with mixed emotions, placed his ear next to Novice Scosha’s lips to hear, “Bless me, Inspector, for I have sinned. It was me. I was the St. Swithins Day Desecrator. Dr. Dee was always showing me tricks and when he gave me the dynamite-candles I put them on the altar. He told me they were stink-candles. I wanted to tell the Abbot about him but Cardinal Musial said for me to keep quiet and he would take care of Dee personally.” The novice coughed a couple of times, then added, “Tell Debbie I love her. I’m sorry for these and all the sins of my past life.”

With long-forgotten words of absolution quavering on his lips, La Mort watched the young trickster succumb to the Final Joke.

His mind racing, the inspector left the east lobe and wended his way to the Room of the Ox in the northern lobe. With breathless anticipation he intoned, “Panther,” and hurried in.

“Oh no!” he groaned as he saw a fetchingly shaped form in the corner. Rushing to its side, he saw to his dismay that it was a young nun, Sister Debbie no doubt. She, too, had a note clutched in her tiny hand. He gently pulled the note loose and read:

“Meet me in the Room of the Panther at midnight. Wait for me there.” It was signed with the seal of the Abbot.

La Mort was preparing to administer heroic measures to resuscitate her when she moaned, "Would you please hear my confession?"

"But of course, my dear," the detective sympathized and placed his head upon her heaving breast, where he could hear her faint, but tremulous, voice.

She whispered, "Bless me, Inspector, for I have sinned. I have broken my sacred vows of squalor by accepting the financial favors of vile men who appreciated my excessive nubility. I had a crush on Dr. Dee and he put me to work for Mother Puleeze. I wanted to give it all up and tell the Abbot but Dr. Dee talked me out of it. He said that the Abbot is too worried about the Bull of 303 AD to concern himself with my problems." A tear came to La Mort's eye as the ecumenical Lolita gasped, "Tell Novice Scosha I wish he'd been able to save up that twenty dollars. I'm sorry for these and all the sins of my past life."

As La Mort gamely tried to find the five points of the body to be anointed in the rites of Extreme Unction, Sister Debbie fetchingly passed on.

This is too, too tragic, the inspector moaned, as he stumbled, Humbertlike, from the room. With tearing eyes he staggered from room to room, until he faced the Room of the Gorilla in the west lobe. With a guttural, simian growl, he was inside the room, where he found, to no great surprise, the dying body of a voluptuous, black-habited nun, a little long in the tooth, but quite toothsome in the long run. The note was similar to the other two, except the instruction was to meet Costello in the Room of the Gorilla. It was looking as though someone—not the Abbot though, since he reported in his diary that his seal was missing—had lured the three victims to the Library—and to their death.

With a certain amount of anti-climacticism, La Mort heard Mother Puleeze ask him to hear her confession. Still stinging from the loss of Sister Debbie, he acceded to her request.

"Bless me, Inspector, for I have sinned," she gasped. "I have procured pleasures of the flesh for evil men of lucre and have even offered my own considerable charms if their filthy lucre was big enough. I wanted to tell the Abbot of my sins but was always dissuaded by Dr. Dee and his cunningly linguistic arguments. If only I had been satisfied with being Mother Superior, and hadn't let him talk me into becoming Madame Superior!"

She deliriously continued, "I confessed to Cardinal Musial today but he was too concerned with the Bull of 303 AD to do anything. I'm sorry for these and all the sins of my past life."

Then, as Inspector La Mort of the Sûreté vainly tried to remember the words to the "act of contrition" for the good mother, Madame Puleeze gently shuffled off her mortal coil.

Grimly, the inspector stomped through the rooms to the final room of the Library, the Room of the Civet in the south lobe. "Civet," he spat, fearing for the life of Father Noster, and prepared to face what may be two murderers, one ecclesiastical, and the other, decidedly secular.

The Room of the Civet yielded only the form of a monk in the corner, Father Noster, of course. Guiltily stifling a yawn, La Mort pried the note from the monk's hand, saw that it was similar to the others, and without waiting for the monk's entreaty, leaned over to hear his fourth confession of the night.

"Bless me, Inspector, for I have sinned. I have catered to sinners of the flesh by supplying them with filthy and highly artistic pornscrolls. I abhor my weakness and greed but those congressmen paid so well, and hot tubs don't come cheap. Believe it or not, I was on the verge of telling Abbot Costello everything, but he was so involved in deciding what to do with the Papal Bull of 303 AD that I never got the chance."

With a final breath, the dying monk wheezed, "I wish Dr. Dee had never gotten me into this fine mess. I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life." As La Mort cursorily mumbled a few random Latin phrases, Father Noster peacefully expired.

Suddenly, the detective was startled to hear Matins, followed by a single, sad toll of a bell. He jumped to his feet, kicking Noster's brown robe slightly as he turned towards the door. He started towards it, then noticed something glistening underneath the dead monk's cowl. He reached to pick it up and was shocked to see it was a sharp, twelve-inch knife. "Sacre epee!" he ejaculated. "This is just what I need."

Anticipating that he was nearing the end of his monastic nightmare, he ran through the Library to the courtyard.

## Chapter 23: The Papal Bull of 303 AD

La Mort climbed over the edge of the well and stared down at the hole across from the rungs, two meters above the water. Now that he had a knife he figured he could cut a bellrope, and by tying it to the crossbeam at the top of the well, lower himself to the hole. It ought to work. And if something goes wrong, the worst that could happen would be a tumble into the cold water of the well. Not a problem; he was an excellent swimmer.

But not with a trenchcoat full of clues, some of them rather heavy. He quickly emptied out his pockets and marveled at the pile of “clues” before him on the sand of the courtyard. He had:

- ~ A map of the abbey
- ~ A police info sheet
- ~ A newspaper clipping
- ~ A breviary
- ~ A rosary/key
- ~ An intra-abbey memo
- ~ A breviary
- ~ A handbook on knots
- ~ An electronic Latin/English translator
- ~ Four scroll-keys
- ~ A perfume atomizer filled with arsenic di-cyanide
- ~ A cruet of wine
- ~ A cruet of water
- ~ A pornscroll
- ~ A little black book
- ~ A missal
- ~ A note, signed by Dr. Dee
- ~ A page with a Vatican watermark
- ~ A knife
- ~ A flashlight
- ~ A Sûreté-issue Trim Trio

La Mort put the knife and flashlight back in his pocket and gazed at the pile. Just about every one of these items had given him a piece of information about the chaotic goings-on at the monastery—except for maybe the missal he had found in the Room of the Armadillo, the room with the deep red aura. He picked up the missal and thumbed through it again.

“Mon Dieu,” the inspector uncharacteristically expectorated, “the only time I looked at this was in the red room, and I saw nothing.” This time he saw that Sister Debbie, whose missal it obviously was, had scribbled all over it in what the shrewd detective knew to be Passion Red ink. It didn’t show up in the Room of the Armadillo, but now it was quite visible.

One scribbling brought a tear to his eye and a curl to his lip, “If the boar gets too strange, hold your breath.” Once again the inspector slapped his forehead with open palm. “But of course! It is too simple!”

The Room of the Boar was in the northern lobe so with a swift “Otter, cat, elephant,” La Mort screeched to a stop in front of the door. “Boar,” he triumphantly prayed, and taking a large breath and holding it, he entered the smog-filled Room of the Boar.

The psychedelic smog stung his eyes slightly, but he was able to see a rolled-up sheet of papyrus on a table. He grasped it and then, taking a small hit of the smog for old time’s sake, breathed the word “Elephant.” The door opened and he exited the Room of the Boar, the Papal Bull of 303 AD in hand.

At last, he was going to gaze upon the document that had cost the lives of at least four more or less innocent players in the game of life.

With trembling fingers, La Mort unrolled the papyrus and read:

**OMNIA EST NULLUM ET VOIDUM**  
**Hear ye, all ye faithful! The Third Tablet**  
**of Moses has been found, and on it is**  
**the Eleventh and final commandment:**  
**THOU SHALT NOT BELIEVE**  
**EVERYTHING THOU READETH.**  
**Pope Pompous III**

There was a cover letter to the document. It read, “This document is definitely authentic. It was found by Novice Scosha in a small catacomb under an altar that mysteriously exploded during the St. Swithins Day Ceremony.”

The letter was signed by Abbot Costello.

La Mort was visibly shaken. Could this be true? Could there be an Eleventh commandment—and could it mean that all two thousand years of Christian tradition have been based on nothing more than a mosaic joke? He didn't claim to be a theologian, but this sounded pretty ominous, especially for anyone who relied on faith and dogma for an income. Like Cardinal Musial and his vicar in Rome. Indeed, for a lot more people than that.

He shook his head to clear it and decided there was only one thing to do. It was almost dawn and he had searched every place in the abbey except one—the hole in the well. He needed to get a bellrope and lower himself down to it. As he ran to the courtyard, he looked forward to ringing Matins for the last time. He knew that once he cut a rope he wouldn't be able to ring Matins again. That was okay with him. The obnoxious melody, even with its variation, was getting on his nerves.

At the well he paused by the pile of clues. A great sense of loss came over him as he bent down to pick up the missal, pornscroll and the handbook on knots. They were his only link to someone he knew he would dream about for years to come.

## Chapter 24: The Rope

The tired but exhilarated inspector's footsteps echoed in the cobblestoned tunnel as he neared the trapdoor under the stables. A sobering thought had occurred to him—what if the Matins he heard right before he found the knife were rung so the murderer could come back to the library? And what about that extra toll? Could that, gulp, have been the sound of a bellrope being cut? If so, with only four bells to ring, how would he get back through the trapdoor?

Sweat sprang out on the detective's brow as he mulled over his situation. Let's see. There wasn't any rope hanging from the beam of the well, so that means the murderer isn't in the hole. Unless he knew of some way to lower himself on a rope and still keep the rope with him. It would take a special type of knot. If I only had—

La Mort's eyes crossed involuntarily as he thwacked himself on the forehead for the third time that night. Of course! He had a handbook on knots. Using the flashlight in the dark tunnel he paged through the handbook. It was full of interesting knots but none of them he saw would do what he wanted. If the murderer

had tied the rope to the beam, lowered himself to the hole, then somehow took the rope with him, he'd need a knot that would remain tied as long as there was pressure on it, then loosen when the pressure was taken off.

As he perused the handbook, his eyes momentarily caught the pornscroll sticking out of his pocket. He took it out and stared at the chiaroscuro nun that reminded him so achingly of Sister Debbie. Then he turned it over and gaped at the eight-letter word on the back. Eight letters, two middle letters "PK". An eerie, hollow clarity enveloped his mind and he dully turned his attention to the handbook.

"Slipknot. Slipknot. That's the kind of knot I need. And that's what Sister Debbie wrote on the back of the pornscroll for me. Somehow she foresaw that I would find the pornscroll and need that knot." La Mort was babbling, his obsession with the young nun and the rigors of the nightmare taking their toll on his sanity.

He looked up SLIPKNOT in the handbook and saw that it was a relatively easy knot to tie. Closing the book, he placed it inside his shirt, close to his heart.

Now all he had to do was tackle the gelding once more and hope that all five bellropes were intact. He looked up at the bottom of the trapdoor and formulated a plan. It was crazy—as crazy as he was—but it just might be crazy enough to work.

He slowly opened the trapdoor about halfway and began shouting anti-equine epithets up through the opening. Soon a shadow fell over the opening and La Mort could see the malevolent faces of the gelding looking down at him. "Swaybacked plug!" he shouted, "Oat-eating bar of soap!"

He opened the trapdoor a little wider and made an obscene gesture with his fist at the fuming horse. Finally, as the inspector spat a particularly vile expletive slandering the gelding's dam, one of the heads dipped through the open trapdoor, its large, oat-stained teeth closing on La Mort's left shoulder. With a scream of terror and glee, the wily detective jumped back into the tunnel, pulling the trapdoor down hard on the horse's neck. The door's mechanism clamped down firmly.

His ploy had worked! There was just enough room for him to squeeze past the snarling horsehead through the trapdoor. As he got to his feet in the stable the other head gnashed at him violently but the rock-solid trapdoor held the gelding in position. La Mort trotted to the church and up the steps to the belfry.

His heart sank as he saw that one of the bellropes was missing. But that was okay, he thought, this just proves that the murderer, Musial or Dee, took the bellrope and used it to climb down into the hole in the well while I was getting the Bull from the Room of the Boar.

He gripped the knife and cut one of the bellropes where it attached to the bell, giving him a stout length of hemp about five meters long. As he cut the rope, the bell swung once and a mournful toll rang out. He coiled the rope around his shoulder and headed back to the stables. He was a rope's length from solving the murder of Abbot Costello. Or getting himself killed by a maniac who had already poisoned five people—maybe six.

## Chapter 25: The Well

Getting past the gelding was easy; the trapdoor kept one head in the stables and the other in the tunnel. La Mort slipped past and was on his way down the tunnel, going over this confusing and complex case in his head.

The murderer was Dr. Dee or Cardinal Musial—or both. Apparently whoever it was stole Abbot Costello's seal and sent notes to the four people found in the library, luring them there some time around midnight of the 30th. There, the murderer had somehow convinced the four to ingest arsenic di-cyanide, perhaps with the chalice? That pointed to Cardinal Musial, but not conclusively.

Then the murderer had met with Abbot Costello in the church and sprayed him with the atomizer through the screen in the confessional. Very, very neat.

The murderer left a footprint in the catacomb when he was wandering around outside the library while I was in it. The imprint in the heel is a clue but not until the shoe is found. The design could have been a religious symbol—a crucifix; or a doctor's symbol—a caduceus. An ambiguous clue, at best.

The Cardinal had a motive. He wanted to cover up anything to do with the highly subversive Papal Bull of 303 AD, perhaps under orders from the Vatican. Costello knew about it so he had to go. The other victims were pestering the Abbot and he might have spilled the beans about the Bull to them. They had to be terminat-

ed, or as they say in the ecumenical underworld, “excommunicated with extreme prejudice.”

But the Doctor also had motive. His pornscroll and call-nun rackets were about to be exposed. There’s no telling how much he was pulling down in fees, as well as shakedown of important politicians. The Abbot knew about it and wasn’t the type to let a pagan like Dr. Dee make a profit on his turf. Dee’s partners in crime had to be eradicated; they were spilling the beans to Abbot Costello. Yes, it all fit. The wily Dr. Dee could have figured some way to get his four victims to ingest the arsenic di-cyanide. As for the Abbot’s murder, spraying him through a confessional screen was deliciously blasphemous, which sounded like Dr. Dee’s style.

La Mort reached the end of the tunnel and climbed up into the courtyard. He slipped the rope off his shoulder and tied it to the beam, using a slipknot. Keeping the tension on the knot, he gripped the rope and slid down it until he was level with the hole. Then he swung from side to side until he was able to swing into the hole. He fell onto a hard surface and looked up to see a large sign that read, The Catacomb of St. Faustus. He still had a grip on the rope so he shook it a couple of times and smiled grimly as the rope fell from the beam. He hauled it in and coiled it at his feet.

He was in a tunnel, tall enough for a man to stand upright. It ran straight for about five meters, then curved sharply to his right. A priest hole, he figured, an escape route for the clergy that many medieval homes and castles had. There’s undoubtedly an exit into the village at the end of the tunnel.

He started down the tunnel, made the turn to the right and gasped as he found himself in a large catacomb. There was a pulpit on one side and a lab table on the other. Behind the pulpit was a short, pale man dressed in the red cassock of a cardinal. Behind the lab table was a tall, dark man dressed in Harley Street finery.

Cardinal Musial exclaimed, “Thank God you’ve come! I’ve just now escaped from Dee’s bonds and now we have him! He was using the monks and nuns to further his lustful ambitions and when he found out they were going to repent and confess to Abbot Costello, he killed them all.”

Warming to his speech, he continued. “He stole the Abbot’s seal and sent notes to each of his victims telling them to meet him in the Library. Then he lured me down here and drugged me so he could murder the Abbot in the church with Mother Puleeze’s atomizer. For God’s sake, help me apprehend this fiend!”

From across the room came a cry from Dr. Dee. "Wait!"

"Cardinal Musial has described the plot most admirably, except for the minor point that it was he, not I, who murdered everyone. He had received an order from Rome to keep the Papal Bull of 303 AD under wraps and when the Abbot refused to comply, he gassed him in the confessional. He had to kill everyone who knew about the Bull so he lured them into the library where he gave them a little thing he called 'Last Communion'."

At this exposition by Dr. Dee, the Cardinal squawked, "That's a lie, you fiend! You killed everybody in the library by giving them an antidote to the plague in my favorite chalice!"

The dapper doctor retorted, "Again you have credited me with actions that you yourself have undertaken. Surely it's obvious that this man of the cloth is consumed with zealotry."

In unison, the two suspects turned to the inspector and pleaded, "Help me tie him up!"

La Mort was in a turmoil. One of these two bozos was a methodical, cold-blooded killer who had murdered five people without a shred of remorse—and the other was either a hypocrite who conspired to cover up a 2000-year mistake, or a Hippocrat who corrupted simple, innocent believers, one of whom was a nubile angel.

The inspector was almost feverish with indecision and disgust. He had been through several levels of hell, fought a demonic, two-headed monstrosity, and had had four people die in his arms. But the superintendent expected a neatly-wrapped solution to the case.

With a short, painful intake of breath, La Mort slowly slid the knife from his pocket.

## Chapter 26: La Mort at Peace

Inspector La Mort of the Sûreté strolled down the Champs Elysées, basking in the warm Parisian sun. He flicked a pebble with his cane and smiled at the honking, chaotic swarm of automobiles that streamed by. He was at peace.

The six weeks he had spent in the hospital in Washington had been good for him. The superintendent had flown over from Paris and visited him regularly, congratulating him on solving another major case. Who'd have thought that two such disparate people as Cardinal Musial and Dr. Dee would have flipped out at the same

time, senselessly poisoning five members of the abbey, before stabbing each other to death.

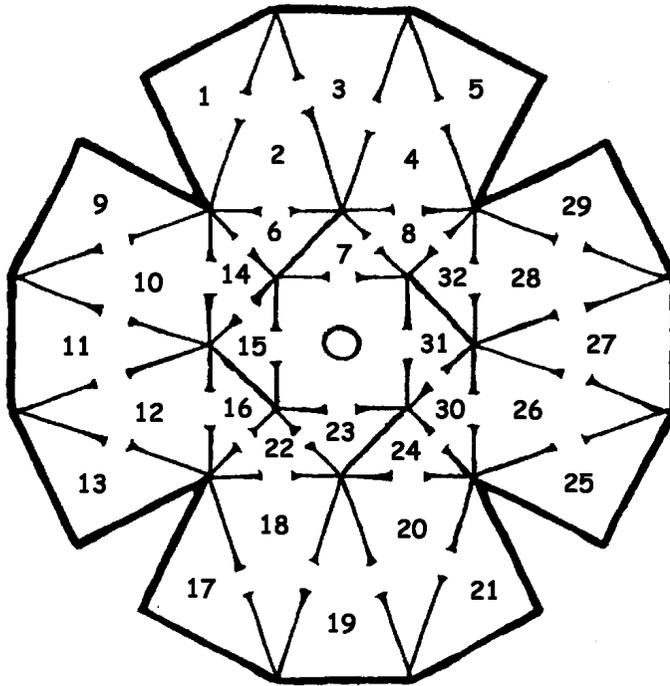
It was a brilliant piece of detective work. All loose ends were tied up, the victims buried, the murderers dead. The Papal Bull of 303 AD was never found, but apparently it was just some minor essay by a forgettable pope. The Vatican, who presumably would have been the only agency interested in it, had remained curiously tightlipped.

Yes, a very neat case, indeed.

La Mort stopped in front of a little bistro and tipped his hat to a couple of young nuns sitting at a table. “Bon jour, mademoiselles,” he purred, “bon jour.” They tittered gaily; La Mort was well known throughout the city as the man who solved the monastery murders. He was at peace with himself and the world. He knew that on the day he died—hopefully a natural death after a long, hedonistic life—a safe deposit box in Zurich would be opened and the contents, a scroll written by Pope Pompous III, delivered to the editors of the *Skeptical Enquirer*, an American magazine specializing in debunking popular delusions.

La Mort smiled wanly. It was only late at night, after too many cocktails of absinthe and hashish, that he remembered the last, gasping words he heard that unholy All Soul’s Day in the Catacomb of St. Faustus—“The horror!” and in a different, dying voice, “The horror!”





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- |            |               |            |
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| 2 Ox       | 12 Dog        | 23 Giraffe |
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| 4 Elephant | 14 Bear       | 25 Wolf    |
| 5 Boar     | 15 Pig        | 26 Wombat  |
| 6 Ram      | 16 Horse      | 27 Elk     |
| 7 Otter    | 17 Armadillo  | 28 Hyena   |
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| 9 Tiger    | 19 Rat        | 30 Deer    |
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|            | 21 Goat       | 32 Beaver  |



