How to Solve a Crypt*

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In recent years, there has risen a seemingly insurmountable wall about ciphers and methods of cryptogram solving. It would appear that some few look upon crypts as a labyrinthine jumble of pie-eyed inanities. Such a thought, my sweets, is about to be dispelled. Here, in this brief sketch, Old Helpful is prepared to tear the veil surrounding the mystery of cryptogram solving. For the nonce, we deal with naught but the simple facts and eternal verities. Some day, perhaps I'm going to find out exactly what the eternal verities are, and then—watch out! In the meantime, read this article. When you have finished, you will realize that crypts are no longer a bugaboo. You are about to be shown not just one way of obtaining the answer to a difficult specimen, but five different ways. Count them—five! So, with high hopes of presenting to a waiting world the easiest and best methods of cryptogram solving, we assemble our array of pertinent factors. "Crack crypts consistently!" shall be our motto from now on.

The first thing to do is to obtain some sheets of white or square-ruled paper and a few sharpened pencils. A dashing air of bravado may be given to the proceedings by the use of a fountain pen. The use of a pen, however, may be considered crass and even gauche by others, so why make enemies? The obvious purpose of our epistolary equipment, that of copying down the crypt to be solved, is immediately apparent, but one finds that there lurks within each of us an atavistic link to the Crean Masters of Art when we come in contact with nice clean paper and pointed pencils. The earth is strewn with sheets filled with a decipherer's name, his initials intertwined with mystifying scrawls and drawings that make surrealistic art, by comparison, the ultimate in simplicity. The cryptogram solver, after all, is the world's champion doodler.

We now copy on paper the crypt awaiting solution. After you have finished copying it, check it at least once to make sure that no errors have crept into the transcription. Next, a steely glare. Don't be stand in a clear light sound like a crackp three flights of wood "Forward!" Don't let that . . . Carry on, old a bit of territory there.

If one reads the crypt with its author's careful; however, at the of artistry that will weeny vowel in any joy. Nothing but could be being rubbed over a line reading "ZXVBN" in the Inner Circle of letters of complaint to paste stamps on this.

If you are one of foreign-language ciphers French ciphers aloud is a transposal of O sound to each group instance mean "No" symbolically. When in

The next step is time it appears in instance of the word "abNORMAL" something, e. This appears the greatest all the way to the lower say to yourself that a must be "E." Waste not an "E." Besides, tough.

We have now reached "impasse." We have It is at this point when crack. Little things to all sorts of thoughts to him this time . . . I there's a typographical . . . I'm a sap to waste.

The next phase in so to speak. We place thoughts may be inner hidden recesses of th...
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The transcription. Next—and this is important—eye the work in hand with steely glare. Don't be afraid of any contretemps, whatever that is. Now sit or stand in a clear light and slowly but firmly read the crypt aloud. You may sound like a crackpot kulak muttering imprecations while falling down three flights of wooden stairs during a thunderstorm, but—the command is "Forward!" Don't let the heat of India get you down . . . . White tie and all that . . . . Carry on, old fellow . . . . Over the Alps lies Italy! (We covered quite a bit of territory there, didn't we?)

If one reads the cryptogram through thoroughly, an impalpable sense of kinship with its author seems to well up from one's innermost depths. Be careful, however, at this point, because you may become aware of a degree of artistry that will leave you utterly speechless. Notice! Not one teeny-weeny vowel in any group of letters to make fluency and euphony things of joy. Nothing but consonantal sounds akin to a pair of socks filled with rocks being rubbed over a broken washboard! When you have learned to repeat a line reading "ZXVBN QWPJLM . . . ." you become eligible for membership in the Inner Circle or the Way of the Whirled. This allows you to write letters of complaint to the Editor without signing your name or bothering to paste stamps on the envelope.

If you are one of those who likes to borrow trouble by delving into foreign-language cryptograms, it is necessary to point out that, in reading French ciphers aloud, one should hold one's nose (note, please, that NOSE is a transposi of ONE'S!) between thumb and forefinger, adding an -NG sound to each group ending. NG, we hasten to assure you, does not in this instance mean "No Good," and the finger position is not to be construed symbolically. When in Rome, do as Mussolini says—or is that a different story?

The next step is to count each letter in order to determine the number of times it appears in the cryptogram. This is called a "norm," central to the word abNORMal, which most of the crypts are. (Now we're finally learning something, eh?) The norm is written down beginning with the letter that appears most frequently in the cryptogram, all the way to the letter that appears least frequently.

We have now reached that stage in the game technically described as an "impasse." We have the crypt, its norm, and a feeling of desolate despair. It is at this point when even the strongest nerves, though never the crypt, may crack. Little things take on deep significance. There flit through one's mind all sorts of thoughts: His last cryptogram wasn't so tough, what got into him this time . . . . I wonder why the editor publishes this tripe . . . . Maybe there's a typographical error in this crypt . . . . There's no such word as that . . . . I'm a sap to waste precious time on this bilge . . . . etc., etc.

The next phase in the unfolding sequence of events is the infantile period, so to speak. We place pencil in mouth and suck on it as though sustaining thoughts may be instilled from the plumbeao. One's eyes scream into the hidden recesses of the mind amid a void of intangibilities, seeking to espy
some raftlike clue that may save the day and daze. But, alas, no answer is forthcoming. Then—with a mutter that sounds like the words "with it" preceded by "2 L."—we cast aside our literal sleuthing and, in a depressing, fogbound mood, turn in to woo our Mistress Sleep.

All this has happened to every cryptogram solver, at least once, possibly many times. How easily the sequence of events could have been avoided merely by observing the rules that follow! If you are confronted by a difficult crypt, there is no need to spend many hours in brain-wearying labor. Just choose one of the methods in this sheaf:

(1) Take the crypt to be solved and encipher it in a different code. Send this to the editor as your answer. He'll think that you are fit fodder for the loony bin, but wishing to retain your subscription or your good will, he may give you credit for a correct solution. (Note, please, the subjunctive tenor of the foregoing statement.)

(2) Get your answer from an organized group of crypt solvers. If you don't belong to such an indescribable coterie, write (do not run) to the nearest solver with a reputation for cracking the toughest ciphers with a vengeance.

(3) Write to the author of the cryptogram, letting him know the trouble you had in solving his brainchild. (Of course, you haven't even attempted to solve it, but that's irrelevant.) In your letter, ask the author what the devil the fourth word in the crypt is supposed to mean. He will reply, not only giving you the etymological derivation of the word, but also a detailed analysis of his work. Presto! . . . There's your answer.

(4) Construct the most difficult crypt specimen yourself and submit it to the editor for publication. Then, you have no worry, none at all.

(5) We have purposely saved the simplest, most ingenious, method for last. Its sweet simplicity is such that the mere thought of it lifts one out of and beyond this mundane sphere, into the Realm of Higher Things: Wait until the solution is published in your puzzle magazine. The perfect method, n'est-ce pas?

**MISPLACED LANDS**

Are you thoroughly familiar with European geography? Can you tell us, for instance, where ALBANIA, IBERIA, and ROMANIA are? Before you dash off an obviously erroneous reply, let us tell you. ALBANIA was an ancient name for the Highland region of Scotland, north of the Clyde River. IBERIA was an ancient region south of the Caucasus Mountains, corresponding very nearly to the modern Soviet republic of Georgia. ROMANIA, during the millennium from 800 to 1800, was a province of the Papal States. It now forms the Italian provinces of Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna, and Forli. Geography rearranged!

**WORD WAYS**