

A BODY IN THE RESTAURANT: THREE PALINDROME PUZZLES

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"Detective Katz? This is Captain Ramsey speaking. You are desperately needed! We have a body in a restaurant and three eyewitnesses who saw everything that happened. The case has one highly unusual feature though. The patrons of this restaurant only speak in ciphered palindromes! You're our only hope, Stacy!"

"Yes, Mark, I can help. I'm lunching at the Diogenes though, so just forward the eyewitness statements to me here and I'll solve your case before my dessert arrives."

"What a relief! I'm forwarding them as we speak. Eyewitness statement #1 describes what happened. We have reason to believe the witness is a fan of acrostics. Eyewitness #2 seems to be trying to tell us what action we should take. This witness's extra-palindromic interests include Francis Bacon, writing that uses the prisoner's constraint, and homophones. Eyewitness #3 tells us who did it. The witness authored a book on Trithemius and is known to have a fascination with tri-numeral alphabets and syllables."

"Ah yes, I see. Don't worry, Mark, this case will be a cinch to solve."

Here are the eyewitness statements Captain Ramsey sent to Ace Logophile Detective Katz. Can you puzzle out their meaning?

Statement #1: What happened?

Clues: witness likes acrostics

Spasm saps!
(Snafu, fans)
Deli, riled:
Salad?! Alas,
Knife, fink!
Stir! It's...

Statement #2: What action should we take?

Clues: witness likes Bacon, prisoner's constraint and homophones

Devil's Eton notes lived.

Statement #3: Who did it?

Clues: witness likes Trithemius, tri-numeral alphabets and syllables

Cain: a maniac!
Regal Livy, villager
Sonar posse's sopranos
Adieu! Cue Ida.

Answers to A Body in the Restaurant: Three Palindrome Puzzles

1. Murder

Murder is spelled out in acrostic form by the center hinge letter in each palindrome:

SpasM saps!
(SnafU, fans)
Deli, Riled:
SalaD?! Alas,
KnifE, fink!
StiR, It's...

2. Seize

In the prisoner's constraint, occasionally used in Oulipo writings, the prisoner doesn't have enough paper for tall letters and can only write with short letters. Using the prisoner's constraint to divide the letters in the palindrome into A and B forms (short letters (aceimnorsuvwxz) are A form, tall letters (bdfghjklpqty) are B form), the palindrome converts to baaab aabaa aabaa baaab in Bacon's biliteral cipher:

Devil's Eton notes lived.
devil seton notes lived
baaab aabaa aabaa baaab

Using Bacon's alphabet key, baaab aabaa aabaa baaab translates into SEES. Knowing this witness is a homophone fan, we know then that SEIZE is the action we should take.

3. Cook

This witness has a fascination with syllables. The syllable count of each word in each palindrome line is:

Cain: a maniac! 113
Regal Livy, villager 223
Sonar posse's sopranos 223
Adieu! Cue Ida. 212

113, 223, 223, 212: In the Trithemius tri-numeral cipher alphabet that spells COOK.

When we combine all three statements together we get: "Murder! Seize cook!" From our three eyewitnesses we now know that a murder was committed and we need to arrest the cook! There was probably poison in the salad, alas.