

You meet a lot of screwy people when you do police work. Like the guy who popped up in a murder job. Offered to solve the case with —

Dalrymple's Equation

by

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Illustrated by W. E. Terry

IT'S THE not knowing that gets you. The wondering. Thinking sometimes one way and sometimes the other. But never knowing for sure. Being suckered is bad enough but *wondering* whether you've been suckered is rougher. Or whether you've let the biggest thing since fingerprints slide right by you.

Someday the case may be solved. Then we'll know for sure—one way or the other—Donovan and I. What case? Wait 'til I tell you. It won't take long.

The thing started with as crazy a murder as two Homicide cops ever got called in on. In a bar on Tenth Avenue near Grand—you probably know the place and you probably read about the case. It was in all the papers. But the whole story never saw print.

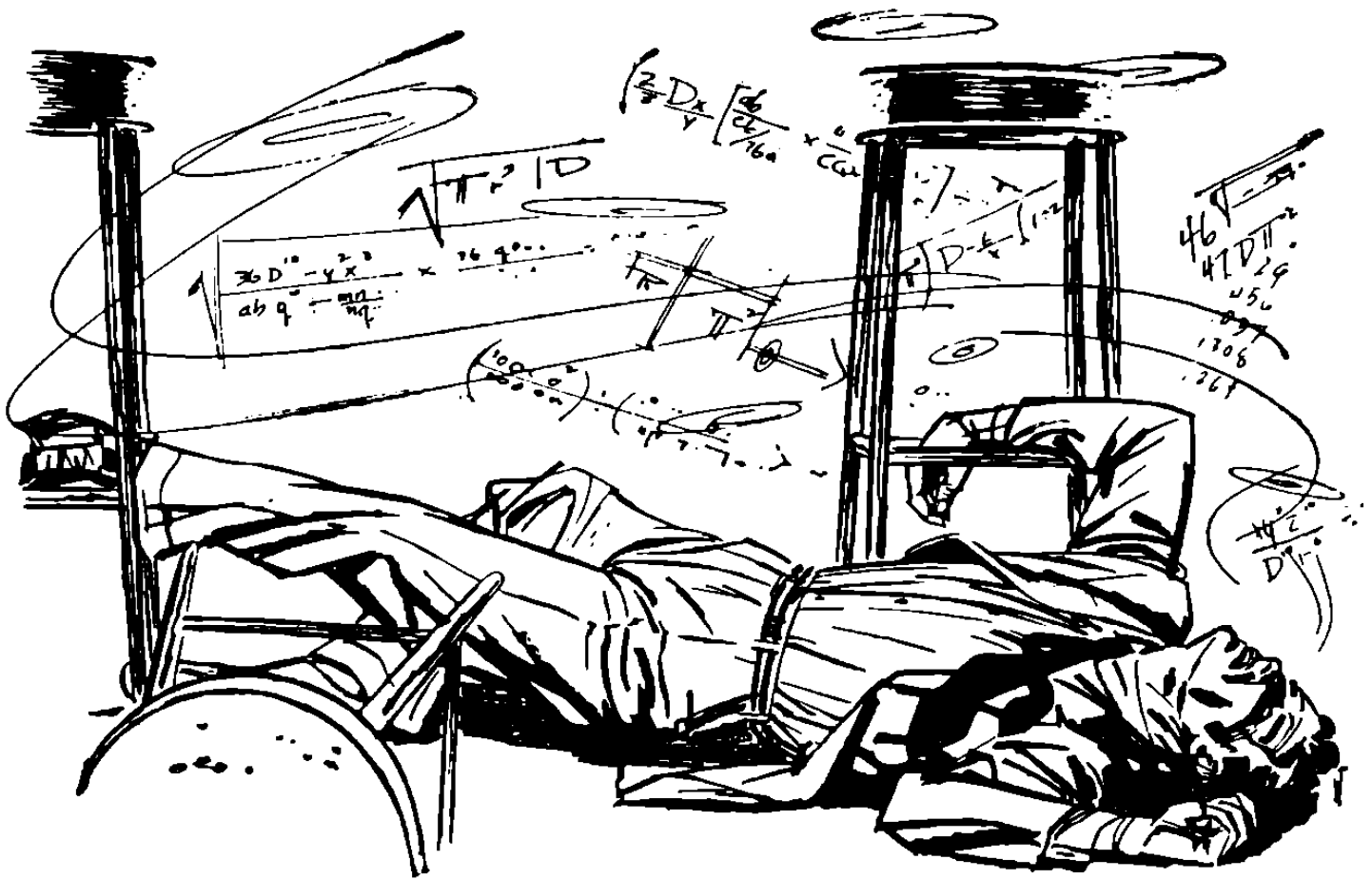
We were rung into it by a call from the squad car boys who got there first. We walked in and a cop I didn't know pointed a thumb at a young guy lying with his head on the bar and said, "Deader than a lamp post for my money."

A young lad—around twenty-three or four—lying there as though he'd had one too many and was sleeping it off. He *had* downed one too many. And he would spend all eternity sleeping it off.

He was all through.

The barkeep stood there with his apron hanging out and a baffled look on his face. A look that had all the earmarks of being genuine. I said, "Kennedy—Homicide. What happened?"

The barkeep shrugged and licked his dry lips. "I dunno. He just keeled over. I got scared and called



the cops.”

The kid certainly looked like a morgue job, as I said, but we don't take things like that for granted. The squad car boys had called General Hospital and now a couple of internes came in with a respirator. They didn't use it, though. One of them put his nose close down to the kid's mouth and then looked at the barkeep. “You served him a drink?”

The barkeep nodded. “That's what he came in for.”

“Let's see the bottle.”

The barkeep gave that a little thought and then took a bottle off the rack and pushed it over the

bar. The interne sniffed it, made a face and said, “There's enough arsenic in there to depopulate New Jersey.”

“Arsenic!” the barkeep croaked. “You're crazy! We don't serve nobody no arsenic here!”

The interne looked at Donovan and me and said. “Call your meat wagon, lads. This one is beyond us.”

He had identification—an Arthur Davis, with nothing at all sinister in his wallet. The lab men came and there was a lot of activity for an hour or so and then we padlocked the joint and took the barkeep downtown with us. His on-the-spot story was simple. Davis had

come in and ordered a drink. The barkeep served it up. Davis knocked it off. The drink, in turn, knocked Davis off.

The barkeep's name was Timothy Garver. He was a middle-aged cork puller who had been in the business most of his life. We ran him through R and I and found him clean. Then we sat him down in the interrogation room and started digging into him.

"What did you have against Davis?"

Garver looked like a flabby-jowled ghost. His hands shook. "Nothing. So help me. I never seen the guy before."

"You think we'll swallow that?" Donovan asked. "You think you're playing with school kids? Telling us you poison a guy you never saw before?"

I said, "Maybe he did it for laughs."

"I didn't poison him!" Garver pleaded. "You got to believe me!"

"You mean there wasn't any poison in that bottle?"

"Sure there was—if you say so. What I mean is I didn't put it there. I didn't know it was there. I—"

"What you mean is you'd planned to get the guy out into the alley after he was dead and you lost your nerve after he keeled over."

"No—no! Nothing like that."

"You had that bottle spiked, waiting for Davis to come in."

"No—no! It was just an ordinary bar bottle."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Every tavern has a brand of whisky they push—their bar whisky. When a customer isn't particular about his brand we give him the bar liquor."

It seemed to me the guy was gaining courage. He wasn't quite as nervous as he'd been. "You served other people out of that same bottle?" I asked.

He licked his lips and dropped his eyes before he answered. "Sure I did."

"But that was before you put the arsenic in it."

"I didn't put any poison in that bottle. And you guys can't pin this on me!"

"What makes you think we can't?"

"Because I never knew the fellow and you can't prove I did. So how are you going to make anybody believe I killed somebody I didn't know and had nothing against. You think I'm nuts or something?"

"It's a possibility," I said.

DONOVAN narrowed his eyes at Garver and said, "You're

holding something back. Come on! Out with it."

Again that guilty look as Garver shook his head. But you can't send a guilty look to the chair and it seemed Garver had us stymied. At least for a while. We juggled him on suspicion but we knew unless we got something else to strengthen the case we wouldn't get an indictment against him. There just wasn't enough.

Donovan and I chewed it over with the Captain and he couldn't give us any help except the advice to keep plugging. We told him we'd try to come up with something and went on back to the tavern.

The owner had been there and gone and we still had a patrolman stationed in front. Donovan unlocked the door and released the patrolman for his regular beat and we went inside.

It was very quiet. Naturally. Nothing is quieter in this world than an empty bar. I said, "Well, where do we start?"

Donovan shrugged. "You got me. And you know damn well nothing's going to happen on this case until it breaks from the outside."

"That's right." What he meant was a new angle coming from a stoolie. Or something opening up while we investigated Davis' background or Garver's.

But something new was added right there in the tavern. Very suddenly. A guy popped up from behind the bar and said, "Hello."

We whirled around and looked at him and Donovan snorted, "Who the hell are you?"

"My name is Tennyson Dalrymple."

"What kind of a label is that?"

The man came around from behind the bar. "I liked it—I took it. If it annoys you I'm sorry." But you could tell by the sneer on his face that he wasn't sorry at all.

He was a medium-sized unattractive figure of a man and yet you couldn't put your finger on just where the unattractiveness came from. He wasn't good looking but neither was he repulsive. He didn't have a superman's frame but neither was he a cripple nor a malformed freak. There was just something about him you took an instant dislike to and the dislike stayed with you.

And Dalrymple seemed to enjoy increasing the antagonism. He wore a habitual sneer and his voice had a cutting quality to it.

I said, "What the hell are you doing in here?"

"Going about my business."

"Entrance is prohibited. There was a policeman in front. The door was locked."

"There's a back door."

"That was locked too."

"Locks are silly things. Any fool should be able to handle such feeble devices."

Donovan was snarling. "Look, brother. You're talking yourself right into trouble. Now tell us what you're doing here and tell it quick."

"Reading the gas meter."

"Why?"

"Why would anyone read a gas meter? I work for the gas company. This place is on my route."

"I think you're lying."

"It will be easy enough to find out."

"Well find out at headquarters."

"You're taking me in?"

"What do you think?"

Dalrymple certainly wasn't afraid of cops. He shook his head in disgust and said, "This is certainly a stupid world you live in. A world of idiots. Really it is."

Normally I'm pretty easy going but this punk with his talent for rubbing people the wrong way, just plain got me. "If you're so damn smart why are you reading meters for the gas company?"

He grinned and his grin said he was happy at getting a rise out of me. "I just arrived recently. The job will do until I get around to what I'm planning."

DONOVAN vented his hostility by hauling the guy out to the car. Dalrymple made no resistance but Donovan managed to get mildly rough regardless. This also seemed to make the little intruder happy. As though he took the roughness as a sign he'd got under Donovan's skin too. Which he had.

He threw a few insults at us while we rode to headquarters but we held in, knowing if we gave ourselves an inch we'd take a mile and slug him and have it over with.

In the interrogation room we went at him with all the fixings. A strong light in his eyes—cigarette smoke in his face.

Donovan, with a snarl on his puss said, "All right, buster. Let's cut out the jokes. What were you doing in that tavern?"

"Reading the gas meter."

"I said cut out the jokes."

"You've got my identification. What makes you think I had any other reason for going there?"

"I'll ask the questions. Maybe you don't realize what a spot you're in."

"This is idiotic. This whole procedure emanates from your personal dislike of me. All you have to do is call the company."

"What do you know about the Davis killing?"

"Only what I heard in the neigh-

borhood. Intriguing little equation, isn't it?"

I think we'd realized from the beginning that we had nothing on Dalrymple and that we wouldn't be able to involve him. He'd hit it on the nose when he said our motivation was personal dislike. Finally I went out and called the gas company, realizing we'd delayed doing this because we knew it would lose Dalrymple for us.

When I went back and told Donovan, he still hated to let go. "You know," he told the sneering little meter-reader, "we can still throw you in the can."

"What for?"

"Trespassing, Breaking and entering."

"Oh, yes. But you won't."

"And why not?"

"Because it would be too small a triumph and you know you would be acting from spite. It would diminish your stature in your own eyes."

Donovan was trying to swallow his helpless wrath when I remembered something Dalrymple had said. "Listen, punk. Exactly where did you come from?"

"That's right. You made some funny cracks. You said, to quote, 'This is certainly a stupid world you live in. A world of idiots.' You also said, 'I've just arrived recent-

ly.' Now it occurs to me—"

"That I might have come from a place beyond this planet you call Earth?"

"No. That you're a crackpot — a psycho — and maybe we'd *better* hold you."

He sneered at me and ticked off his replies on his fingers. "I did come from a world far away from yours. I'm not a crackpot — not a psycho. And you will not hold me."

I looked at Donovan. Donovan looked at me. His voice gentled into a tone of soft contempt.

"Just where *do* you come from, punk?"

"From Arva Majoris and don't bother looking it up. It's a planet in a galaxy beyond the conception of your most brilliant minds. And I use the term *brilliant* very loosely."

"And how did you get here?"

"You couldn't possibly understand if I told you. Your elemental mind simply couldn't grasp the mathematical accident that brought me here; nor the ten-million-to-one chance of it ever happening again."

Donovan grinned in anticipation. "And you actually think we aren't going to turn you over to Psycho?"

"Of course you're not."

"And for what reason will we refrain from such?"

"Because if you do that, you'll never get your stupid little murder solved."

I found myself poised and ready to pounce. "Then you *have* been holding out."

"If you mean do I know who killed Davis — no. If you mean can I find out—yes."

"Well, well," Donovan growled. "He's a detective too."

Dalrymple split a sneer between us. "It's nothing but a mathematical problem. In the world I come from, students corresponding to your first-graders are started out on far harder equations."

"So you can just take a pencil and figure it out, eh?"

"Certainly."

I'VE TRIED to remember since, exactly what my reaction to Dalrymple was at that time. Hatred transcended any other emotion I may have had. But there was something else. A feeling of almost personal discomfort springing from the certainty that he wanted us to hate him, or at least didn't care whether or not we did. This was a part of my reaction. And wondering why, also.

There was an element of vague fear, too, and of this I'm sure —

a vague senseless conviction this crackpot could do all he claimed he could.

I remember that when this last came to my conscious mind, I rejected it with indignation. And I knew Donovan was rejecting something too. He turned from Dalrymple with a sneer and said, "We haven't got time to fool with psychos. We've got a murder to solve. Kick this guy out and let the white coats find him all over again."

I was sneering too. I took out a pencil and threw it at him and said, "All right, wise guy. There's one. Let's see what you can do."

"Have you got a piece of paper?"

Almost savagely, Donovan ripped a page off the calendar. It was blank on the back. He threw it on the table and all the time I could see his eyes. They were asking, *Why in the hell am I doing this?* and trying to cover the question by showing contempt.

We glanced swiftly at each other and there was guilt in both our faces; like two realists meeting outside a fortune teller's tent. Then Dalrymple took over.

"We have certain facts," he began. "A dead man; the person who admits he went through the physical motions of killing him. We also have the method of producing

death — poison — and the setting of the crime.”

“I think we’ve had enough of this clowning,” Donovan said in a husky voice.

Dalrymple ignored the interruption, not even bothering to sneer at Donovan. “As every school child on my planet knows, each of these facts must be given a symbol and must become a part of our exploratory equation.”

I was a little rusty on such things but it sounded to me about the same way school children on our planet went about solving problems in algebra. I didn’t say anything though.

Dalrymple had the pencil racing over the paper, laying out a series of weird symbols the like of which I had never seen. They were neither numbers nor letters; nor the kind of geometric or algebra symbols used on earth either. Of that I was sure.

The closest I can come is to compare them to Egyptian hieroglyphics and yet that’s far from the mark. But whatever they were, Dalrymple seemed to know exactly what he was doing.

After a few minutes, he leaned back and said, “There — the exploratory equation is complete. Now we search it for flaws.”

Donovan and I had got inter-

ested to the point that hostilities were temporarily suspended. Donovan asked, “Search what for which flaws.”

“You haven’t the mental scope to understand even the basics of what I’m doing, but maybe you can understand this: There is no such thing as chance in a civilization or a culture which is properly based upon mathematics. In such a civilization lies and evasions are unheard of because all action and motivation past, present, or future, can be evaluated and revealed in complete exactitude.”

WE WERE trying to follow along. I said, “We’ve got things like that. Robot brains, we call them. They figure out impossible problems.”

And it came to me at that moment how we were taking for granted, through our conversation, our statements, and even our thinking, that this Dalrymple was exactly what he’d said he was — a man from another world.

He said, “I know what you refer to, but they are so childishly conceived as to be almost useless.” The old sneer again.

Donovan growled. “You talk a lot but you haven’t proved a damn thing.”

“On the contrary. The flaws in

this equation stand out by themselves. For instance, our *zong* is implicated but must obviously be supplemented in order to balance the *terz* shading of the exploratory equation."

"Are you kidding?" Donovan rasped.

"I'll forego technical terms and translate into realities you can grasp. It amounts to this: The bartender poured the actual poison into the glass, but all unknowing. However, as a dominant factor of the equation he must be further developed along the lines of secondary motivation. In other words, a completely unrelated motivation on his part cleared the way for the crime."

Dalrymple's fingers were flying. More of the weird symbols were appearing. "The motivation for the weight he bears in the case is made up of two characteristics—habit and greed."

"And where does that get us?" I asked.

"It reveals the fact that the bartender poured the poison into the bottle. "But without knowledge that it was poison nor with malicious intent."

"That's impossible!" I said.

"Not at all. The whole sequence becomes clear when we strive to complete our equational balance

in the first phase. The bartender poured an unconsumed drink back into the bottle after whoever ordered it walked out without drinking it."

Of course! The logic of it hit Donovan and me at the same moment. Donovan said, "How in the hell did you ever think of that?"

He meant it as a compliment but Dalrymple did not take it as such. "I didn't think of it, you fool. I worked it out. Haven't you understood anything I've told you? It's all here in the progression of the equation. Incidentally, that factor is the pivot of the whole sequence. Your stupid logic should carry you on from there."

"Somebody was trying to poison somebody else!" Donovan said.

"There had to be two men," I added. "They came in and ordered drinks. One poured poison in the other's drink. Then they left without—"

Dalrymple was leering at me. "How about one man and— suicide?"

I swore at myself inwardly for giving him the opening. But he turned back to his symbols and said, "By sheer blundering chance you hit it, though. It was two men and attempted murder."

Donovan wasn't having much to say. Dalrymple threw down the

pencil. "I'll be going now. I have more important things to do."

"Can you give us the names of the two men?" I asked, and again swore at myself for being over-eager.

Dalrymple gave me a long, disgusted clinical look. "I can, but I won't. It would take another hour to round out the equation and I don't feel like doing all your work for you. If you can't take what I've given you and tie up the case, then you'd better both resign."

He got up and started to leave. At the door, he turned. "I live at the Crestwood Hotel if you want to get in touch with me again." He sneered. "Maybe you'll need help some day in tying your shoes."

He left. Neither Donovan nor I made any attempt to stop him. After a long minute Donovan said, "We can't let him go. He's involved in that killing. He's got to be. How else would he know?"

"Are you sure he's involved?"

Donovan didn't answer. He picked up the pencil and snapped it in two with a savage gesture. "The sneering little son-of-a—"

"Besides, we've got no proof he was right in anything he said."

"Lets go find out."

We found out. It didn't take long and we got a citation. We hit Gar-

ver with one question—"Who was in the bar just before Davis entered?" and he collapsed right in our laps. We got all he knew and it wasn't hard to trace down two guys named Kinder and Walpole.

They were both drunk when they came in and Walpole had some arsenic with him he was going to make a bug spray with. He got sore at Kinder for some drunken reason and poured some of the stuff into his drink while Kinder was in the washroom. Then something pulled them back into the street before they had their drinks. Garver heard metal grind and thought that was probably it. Once outside, they probably forgot what tavern they'd been in because they didn't return.

Garver was glad to get rid of them. He hadn't seen the poison-pouring bit and dumped the shots into the bottle. When Davis keeled over as a result of the next shot out of the bottle, Garver was scared. He could lose his job and his boss could have lost his license for serving drunks and for pouring the whiskey back.

So that was the case. A tragic incident, with Walpole not even remembering what he'd done. And with Davis dead.

W E WOULD have been better off leaving it there—

charging Dalrymple off as a crackpot who had made a lucky guess and taking the credit for breaking the case. We *did* take the credit, but it was hard to believe, once he'd gone, that Dalrymple was actually for real. So one afternoon a couple of weeks later we were passing the Crestwood Hotel. Donovan braked the car and squinted at the building.

"This is where he said he lived."

I knew who Donovan meant.
"Uh-huh."

"Let's go up."

"Why not?"

We went in and got the room number from the clerk and went on up. We knocked. Dalrymple opened the door. He hadn't changed a bit. There was a sneer on his face, hostility in his voice when he said, "Ha—the police force. What happened? Somebody steal your squad car?"

He turned around before we could answer and went back into the room. We followed him and stood there looking at the layout. He had a big table in the middle of the floor and there was a huge sheet of paper on it. The sheet was almost completely covered with the funny symbols he'd used in solving the bar poisoning. Or had he solved it?

Anyhow, he went back to his

work as though we hadn't even come—adding more symbols along one edge—and finally Donovan asked, "What in the hell are you doing?"

Dalrymple looked up as though annoyed at being disturbed. "I'm arranging to stay on your planet. I like it here."

"But what's all that got to do with staying?"

"I have to have money. The way things are done here, money is vitally necessary."

"How are you going to get it?"

Dalrymple looked up and his sneer brightened. "I'm going to steal it."

Donovan and I looked at each other in a kind of double-take. Then I said, "I don't suppose you'd care to tell us how and where you're going to do the stealing?"

"I won't tell you how—that would be silly. I don't mind telling you where." He put down another symbol.

"All right—where?"

"I'm not quite sure yet. Chicago, or New York, or Pittsburgh, or This is the master plan. I've almost finished. It involves the principals—the method of operation. There is much more to be done of course. Assistants will have to be approached, analyzed ma-

thematically as to capabilities—”

“How much money are you thinking of stealing?”

“I figure I’ll need about five million,” Dalrymple said calmly.

Donovan and I looked at each other again and our eyes asked the questions. What should we do about this? Haul the guy in and get laughed at? Or did we have a right to haul him in if we wanted to? Just call him a crackpot and let it go at that?

Sure. It was the obvious thing to do. And the easiest. Why stick our necks out. And at that moment I saw Dalrymple smile ever so slightly as though he knew exactly what was going on in our minds—had made allowances for it on his damned chart.

Donovan shrugged. “Let’s get away from this creep,” he said.

We turned and walked out.

AND WE never saw Dalrymple again. In fact I’d practically forgotten about him, when a year later—the date was January 17, 1951 — I came back to the squad-room late in the afternoon and there was a paper lying on the desk Donovan and I used. Its headline read:

STICKUP MEN GET SEVEN MILLION IN BOSTON

And the story went on to tell

of the now famous Brinks holdup in that city; a holdup that had not been solved to this day; a seemingly perfect crime.

Still nothing for me to get excited about. Not until I saw the letter that had been lying under the paper. It was addressed to both Donovan and me — the names and destination printed in lead pencil. There was no return address. I tore it open. A white card fell out. On the card was printed two words—nothing else. The words read:

—OR BOSTON.

SO THAT’S where we sit now. Almost seven years ago that stickup occurred. For seven years Donovan and I had waited for the law to crack it so we could quit wondering; so we could tell ourselves that Dalrymple was just another screwball.

But the statute of limitations nearly ran out on the great Brinks robbery and now we’re beginning to wonder if it really was solved. Wondering if we could have stopped it by stopping Dalrymple, the brain behind it all.

Wondering if he really was a man from another — oh hell! It just couldn’t be!

Or could it?

THE END