

DAGON

#683, APA-Q #594

February 2017

O CANADA, LA TERRE DE NOS ENFANTS!

Over eight years after a presidential candidate named O'Bomba promised to withdraw all U. S. troops from the Muddle East, he concluded his term of office by sending yet more troops into that war-loving region. Purportedly he did this to "advise" or "assist" Iraqi and Kurdish troops to seize the Iraqi city of Mosul from the fanatics variously and confusingly called "Da'esh", or "ISIL", or "ISIS", or "the Islamic State", or "the Caliphate". From previous American military adventures in that part of the world, we know perfectly well that what are called "our Arab allies" will send out for their culture's equivalent of pizza, and say, "Good! The Americans are going to fight this war for us. We can relax at home and enjoy life." In addition, the real Kurdish ambition is to seize areas populated by Kurds but controlled by other nations, and to then form an independent "Kurdistan". As a consequence, America's alleged NATO ally Turkey, which rules some of those Kurdish regions, will attack Kurds and anyone they consider to be the allies of the Kurds. Guess whom that will include.

Expect no relief from the inauguration of President Trump. He has announced that his plan to "make America great again" means that he will call for a "vast expansion of the U. S. military". (*New York Times*, 8 September 2016) This will mean adding 90,000 soldiers at a cost of "up to" \$90,000,000,000 a year. I can recall when another national leader promised to make Germany great again, so I am not impressed by this one..

The intrusion of American troops, of course, will not work. When the Pentagon discovers that Americans are not enlisting in huge numbers for this war, and that many Americans live next door to some poor shmendrick who lost a few vital organs in Iraq or Afghanistan, they will be puzzled by the fact that far too few Americans are volunteering for the same treatment. The Pentagon's response will be the same as it was for a lot of earlier wars - a military draft. And they also know that, in flat defiance of the words of the Constitution, the Supreme Court will refuse to describe a draft as "involuntary servitude" as described - and firmly forbidden - by Amendment XIII of our Constitution. (All these things were allegedly settled by the Court in 1917. Don't you believe it!) So this country will be back in the same situation as it was during the American invasion of Vietnam.

So any American at risk of a military draft would be well advised to do what their predecessors did during that American invasion of Vietnam - prepare to depart in great haste for Canada. Canada does not extradite people to stand trial in another country for what is not a crime in Canada, and Canada has not had a draft since 1945. (And even then no drafted Canadian was sent out of the country unless he volunteered for it.)

There have been some changes in Canadian law about immigrants since the time of the war in Vietnam, and it would be wise to get acquainted with them. I have written for information to the War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, NY 10012, and also asked the WRL for information about Canadian anti-war groups that could help the draft refugees to

get resettled. The WRL's phone number is (212) 228-0490.

The last time there was a draft in this country, it was valid for men of ages 18-26. There was an exception for anyone satisfactorily enrolled in higher education, but it also extended their age of draft eligibility to 35. However, men in their thirties were apparently regarded as poor raw material for the armed forces, and I know of none of that age who were drafted after they got their degrees - including myself; I extended my student years far enough to get three degrees. (If an attempt had been made to draft me, today I would be in the Canadian Arctic, teaching algebra to Eskimos.) Then there is also the matter of drafting women, which has been promoted by several politicians, including Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY), and, of course, in a recent announcement, ex-President O'Bomba.

I will keep readers informed about further developments in these inquiries.

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THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY

This is **Dagon**, a monthly fanzine of commentary on science, science fiction, fantasy, mystery novels, comic art, role-playing games (RPGs), and anything else that seems like a good idea at the moment, is published by John Boardman, O At 12716 Ginger Wood Lane, Clarksburg, MD 20871. My land-line telephone has P Great been put back on line; its number is still (301) 515-4271. **Dagon** circulates E Intervals through **APA-Q**, an amateur press association (APA) which is edited once a R This month (if enough contributions come in) by Mark L. Blackman, Apt. 4A, 1745 E. A Appears 18th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11229. The copy count for **APA-Q** is 15 print copies. T To **Dagon** also goes to others who have indicated an interest in its subject I Inflamm matter. Subscriptions are 10 issues for \$10 in the United States, and for \$25 O Optic N Nerves elsewhere.

Recently my subscription to the *Washington Post* lapsed, and before I #2218 could get it renewed, I missed several issues. This means that I could not send clippings from those issues to the **Dagon** readers who are interested in their subject matter - principally Ruth Berman, Paul Cardwell, Judith Judson, Fred Lerner, Ed and Sandy Meškys, David Millians, Albert A. Nofi, Bob Rodriguez, and Roberta Rogow. My *Post* subscription has finally been renewed, and I am now getting it every day again.

There is a misprint in the **Dagon Directory** published in the January issue. Angelique Trouvére's ZIP code is actually 20902.

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Q: When is a fact not a fact?

A: When Donald Trump says it's a fact.

Yes, that seems to be the case. Furthermore, it is not merely a notion of our dubiously elected president, but the official position of the Republican Party, that it's a fact. This was made clear by Scottie Nell Hughes, "a frequent surrogate for President-elect Donald Trump and a paid commentator for CNN during the campaign". (Margaret Sullivan, *Washington Post*, 5

December 2016) This was anent the frequently quoted claim by Trump that “he, not Hillary Clinton, would have won the popular vote if millions of immigrants had not voted illegally.” Sullivan traced this claim to the website <infowars.com>, “a site that traffics in conspiracy theories and is run by Alex Jones.”

We have seen this man’s name before. In the *Washington Post* of 29 November 2016, Dana Milbank identified him as “an adviser to Trump” and the source of numerous and highly imaginative conspiracy notions, which are too vague and insubstantial to be entitled to the respectable scientific term “theories”. Go look up his website if you wonder what other, and even sillier, notions he deals in.

Even stupider than Jones are the people who snatch up his “conspiracies” and run with them. But how are Trump’s campaign workers dealing with his versions of Jones’s conspiracies? Ms. Hughes put it this way: “There’s no such thing, anymore, of facts,” Sullivan quotes her as saying. “What matters now is not whether his fraud claim is true. No, what matters is who believes it. Mr. Trump’s tweet, among a certain crowd, a large part of the population, are truth. When he said that millions of people illegally voted, he has some - in his view - amongst him and his supporters, and people believe they have facts to back that up. Those that do not like Mr. Trump, they say that those are lies, and there’s no facts to back it up.” (These ungrammatical passages are direct quotes of Hughes by Sullivan.)

And Corey Lewandowski, another CNN reporter, comments as quoted by Sullivan: “You guys took everything that Donald Trump said so literally. The American people didn’t. They understood it. They understood that sometimes - when you have a conversation with people, whether it’s around the dinner table or at a bar - you’re going to say things, and sometimes you don’t have all the facts to back it up.” Without saying whom she is now quoting, Sullivan went on to report that “Trump probably didn’t mean that he would appoint a special prosecutor/build a wall/deport millions of immigrants. His statements are not meant to be taken literally but rather as broad suggestions of a feeling, he was experiencing on a particular day.”

So now we know. We know how to interpret any statement of Donald Trump, or of members of the party which nominated him for the presidency, or of the government that he now leads. We can now ignore their disappointment when his famous wall is not built, or when Hillary Clinton is not “locked up” without the superfluous formality of a trial, or when he fails to hire all the police that would be needed to round up and deport those famous eleven million illegal immigrants he talks about. And even if he does send the bill for that wall to the Mexican government, the only reply he is likely to get is “¡Chinga la leche de tu madre!”

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The newsletter of the Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games (**CAR-PGa**) is still being published. On 19 December 2016 there arrived here both the November and the December issues of **CAR-PGa Newsletter**. (The editor is still David Millians, Paideia School, 1509 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30307.)

The lead article of the November issue is by Carsten Obst, and has the title “Serial Killers and Other Psychopaths: The Project of a Private Eye-FBI Campaign during the Great

Depression". While serial killers first came to public attention in late 19th century London with the activities of the still unknown murderer known as "Jack the Ripper", very few people in the English-speaking world knew about the career of Fritz Haarmann, "the Werewolf of Hannover", until he was arrested in 1924 for what turned out to be the murders of 27 young men. (There were also suspicions of cannibalism, and, considering the fact that all of Jack the Ripper's victims were women, of Haarmann's homosexuality.) Haarmann, a former police informer, was convicted of capital murder, and executed in 1925.

As in so many other situations, art follows life rather than preceding it. It was only after real-life serial killers that they became the subjects of fiction and, potentially, in RPGs, about the planning of law-enforcement agencies. The conditions which produced serial killers might have been taken up in an FBI sourcebook that dates from 1931. It led to the establishment of a new FBI department to study and deal with serial criminals. Haarmann's homosexuality may also have seemed personally dangerous to Hoover, since rumors have occasionally surfaced about Hoover's own sexual proclivities. Obst goes on to suggest how such an FBI campaign might even be adapted to an RPG.

As in every issue, there are news items sent in by other readers about RPGs. Some have to do about prisons who prevent their inmates from playing RPGs.

The December **CAR-PGa Newsletter** leads with the brief "An Editorial with Questions" by David Millians. There follows a great mass of "New Material" from readers including myself. H. Alan Thomas II sends in such topics as "Dungeons and Dragons as Therapy" from Kendall Ashley, and "70-Year-Olds Play D&D for the First Time (and Love it)" from Tim Kearney. Millians contributes "The history of Satanic Panic in the U. S. - and why it's not over yet" from Aja Romano, and "Dungeons of the Mind: Table RPGs and Social Therapy" from Chris Berg. And several people sent in articles about how RPGs might help people with autism. This last topic does not seem particularly relevant to me, since what I've read about "autism" makes it seem to be an invention by a psychologist who believes that "Anybody whose personality does not resemble mine is sicksicksick!"

Several upcoming RPG conventions are mentioned, with details on attendance, in every issue of **CAR-PGa Newsletter**. Subscriptions to **CAR-PGa Newsletter** are \$15 per year or \$1.50 per copy in the U. S., and \$20 per year or \$2.25 per copy elsewhere. By e-mail subscriptions are \$5 anywhere. Order them from Millians, whose address appears on page 3.

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When I published a list of authors and titles of detective stories with historical settings in **Dagon** #681 (December 2016) it did not include Peter Finch, who at the age of 36 is the author of ten such mystery novels set in and around London during the 1860s and 1870s. This is because I first heard of him and his works when I read the "Book World" column by Patrick Anderson in the *Washington Post* of 19 December 2016. His latest work, *The Inheritance*, is set in 1877, but actually begins some years earlier when his eventual detective Charles Lenox, and

(continued on p. 9)

GETTING CAUGHT UP

(This review of the comments of **APA-Q** members and other readers of **Dagon** has been delayed by the amount of other material that has taken up space in **Dagon**. I am now up to **APA-Q** #591 (November 2016), and will continue from there.)

Blancmange #511 (Blackman): I would guess that Charles Schultz's (spelling?) *Peanuts* routine about "the Great Pumpkin" had its origin in Schultz's devoutly Christian beliefs. (I do not know whether these beliefs moderated over the years.) It is the belief of many Christians that our present panoply of Christmas customs has been so heavily modified over the decades that un-Christian elements have entered into the traditional ways of celebrating the holiday. One of the changes to which they object is the way in which St. Nicholas, beheaded in 305 CE and regarded for centuries as a Christian martyr, has been transformed into Santa Claus, complete with a North Pole workshop full of elven toy-makers, who drives a team of nine flying reindeer (one with a shiny red nose) all over the world on Christmas Eve, bringing toys to children not on the "Naughty List". In some versions there is even a "Mrs. Santa Claus", although as a Christian cleric St. Nicholas never married.

So Schultz created a "Great Pumpkin" who, every Hallowe'en, comes to the world's "most sincere" pumpkin patch and hands out unspecified presents to good little boys and girls. The "Great Pumpkin" bears the same relation to the original religious meaning of the Eve of All Saints Day (which is what "Hallowe'en" really means) as Santa Claus (his martyrdom forgotten) does to the purported birth of Jesus Christ.

Both religious holidays have slipped into popular culture. It can even be demonstrated that Jesus was not born anywhere near 25 December. The scriptural version tells us that his birth took place "when shepherds watched their flocks by night". In boring ol' reality, shepherds watch their flocks by night only during the lambing season, when they need to stay on watch in order to deal with difficult births or potential predators. And the lambing season is in late February and early March. Schultz was merely offering his protest against what he must have regarded as a distortion of his Christian beliefs.

To take up other matters in **APA-Q** #591, the Russian word transliterated as "Kraine" means "border", so "Ukraine" has something of the meaning "borderland", since it more or less constitutes the southwestern border of Russia. This leaves open the question of whether Ukrainian is a dialect of Russian or a separate language. Such a question has ramifications all over the world. Is Scottish a dialect of English or a separate language? Is Dutch a separate language or a dialect of Plattdeutsch? ("Low German") For that matter, is English merely a dialect of Plattdeutsch with delusions of grandeur? With a little difficulty I can read Dutch (though not speak it) since it reads like a head-on collision between English and German.

I fully agree with Mark's comments about H. P. Lovecraft, his writings, and his racist beliefs. And this fanzine is named **Dagon** because that was the title of Lovecraft's first published story.

Mark, like me, was surprised by the highly contrived "election" of Donald J. Trump. But

the polls were correct about public opinion. A majority of voters did prefer Clinton to Trump. But this majority of nearly three million was not allowed to be effective, owing to notions in the Constitution and its Twelfth Amendment that were deliberately designed to prevent majority rule. And it works! In six of the last seven presidential elections, the Democratic candidate got more votes than the Republican candidate, and yet Republicans now control not only the presidency but, thanks to ingenious drawing of district lines, they also control Congress and many state legislatures. This undemocratic situation will continue until the Electoral College is abolished and federal courts take firm control of how congressional and legislative district lines are drawn.

What might bring this to pass is the impeachment and removal of "President" Trump. Fortunately, his campaign speeches make such an outcome very likely. Many of his policy pronouncements would be rejected even by a Republican Congress. He would then try to rule by decree, and this would lead to his impeachment and very likely conviction.

Mark describes Trump voters as "a loose bunch of loony ultra-conservatives...their informal ideology is white ethno-nationalism, nativism/anti-immigration, anti-feminism, anti-Semitism, anti-Islamicism & traditionalism". But I think my term, "hillbillies", is more concise and just as applicable.

To the best of my knowledge and recollection, hillbillies were the butt of humor in the 1930s, thanks to a series of cartoons that ran in the popular monthly magazine *Esquire*, the *Playboy* of that era. The cartoons showed scrawny, lazy men dressed in tattered overalls, loafing on the porches of shabby wooden shacks up in the hills, and wearing beards down to their waists. The punch lines displayed them as ignorant yokels, unemployed and unemployable. I can easily imagine them as Trump voters.

I agree with Mark; Trump's follower Ben Carson is no biblical scholar. However, as a devout Christian he is out to defend the accuracy of his bible, and he can make a better case for this belief if he asserts that the pyramids were Joseph's granaries rather than the tombs of pharaohs. But do we have any *reliable* evidence that Joseph and his granaries even existed?

I also noted that, in *all* the arguments about who gets to vote, Democrats want more people to vote while Republicans want fewer people to vote. The meaning of this fact should not be lost on the public - principally the obvious fact that there are now more Democrats than Republicans in this country, and people of both parties know it.

Mark informs us that the story whose author and title I could not remember is "Hands Off", written in 1881 by Edward Everett Hale, the author of "The Man without a Country". This was the time travel story in which the quarrel between Joseph and his brothers was made up, and Joseph never went to Egypt where, according to the Bible, his dreams warned an unnamed pharaoh of a dangerous famine against which grain had to be collected and stored. He also observed that the poem "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night" was written by Alfred Hayes sometime around 1930, and set to music by Earl Robinson in 1936.

Dagon #680 (me): I have been told (by whom, I don't recall) that the cartoonist Thomas Nast intended his symbol for the Democratic Party to be not a donkey but a mule. This

presumably would indicate how sterile of ideas the Democrats were. But I am not convinced that a hybrid of two species so closely related as horses and donkeys would necessarily be sterile. Mules are usually not regarded as capable of breeding. Early in his career, a male mule is inevitably subjected to an operation that removes his interest in the matter. Female mules may believe that they are fertile, but this belief affects them only rarely. Back when mules were more commonly used in farming than they now are, there would be occasional reports that a female mule had given birth. What may have happened was that she happened to meet a functioning stallion of either species, under conditions unknown to her owner, and nature took its course. As for Pepe the Nazi frog, little was heard of it during the Trump campaign, and its notoriety may have persuaded most of Trump's supporters to abandon it.

And, in case she is still of interest, Representative Barbara Comstock (R) was handily re-elected by Virginia's 10th congressional district. But Virginia's governor, a Democrat, recently vetoed a bill that would have banned abortions after the 20th week of pregnancy, thus undercutting one of Comstock's principal political concerns.

Fred Lerner has furnished me not only with details about a Rudyard Kipling story that I described as science fiction, but also with a copy of the story. It is "As Easy as A. B. C." and was written in 1912. It is a sequel to "With the Night Mail". In these stories, Kipling assumed that a transatlantic freight service using dirigible balloons would be established. (Anticipations of air travel, using balloons rather than heavier-than-air craft, were quite common in science fiction of that period; compare H. G. Wells's *The War in the Air*.) Fred writes that John Campbell, the long-time editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, once told him: "'With the Night Mail' was the first SF story to use the technique of using material extraneous to the story proper to provide background information about the environment in which the story was set. This sort of world-building is done less obtrusively these days, but Kipling pioneered the technique."

The View from Entropy Hall #57 (Meškys): Michael Rosen's book *Alphabetical: How Every Letter Tells a Story*, which Ed reviews, sounds like a most interesting book, and I would have liked to have read it before writing the part of **Dagon #682** (January 2017) which tells how and why three useful letters were dropped from the English alphabet.

But now a few corrections in your account of one of the books on which Rosen's book is based. For one thing, the name of its author was Michael Girsdansky, who died a few years ago. He and I were classmates at the University of Chicago in 1950-52. Mike was briefly married to Perdita in the 1950s, and he was the father of my step-daughter Karina. His book was entitled *The Romance of Language*, and is an interesting account of linguistics, and of languages and their relationships. I would not have thought that Mike had the intellectual discipline to write a non-fiction work, but it turned out that he certainly did.

We speak of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin alphabets, but they are really variants on one standard alphabet, probably originally designed for a Semitic language about three millenia ago. The similarity of the names, and of the ordering of the letters, virtually guarantees this. To go no further than the first letter of each alphabet, the similarity among the names "aleph", "alpha", and "a" provides a strong indication. In the Hebrew alphabet, the names of the letters

are actually words which begin with that letter. When a child recites the first four Hebrew letters “aleph”, “beyt”, “gimel”, “dalet”, he or she is actually saying “ox”, “house”, “camel”, “door”. (Mark Blackman took up this topic in considerably more detail in **Blancmange** #512, his contribution to **APA-Q** #592, December 2016.)

To take up another topic cited by Ed, every so often a rumor resurfaces to the effect that German was once proposed as America’s national language. This claim was emphasized during the 1930s by a German-American organization that was vainly trying to explain the “new Germany” to Americans, and possibly to secure a military alliance, or at least American sympathy for Nazi Germany’s ambitions. However, this rumor was eventually traced to a German-American community in 18th-century Maryland that used German as its working language, and which asked whether the laws passed by Congress could be published for them in German. This is the only solid ground to that rumor.

Although the speaking of German in the middle Atlantic states has practically died out, Oktoberfest is still celebrated here. When I was still living at Montevue in Frederick, the residence’s omniscient recreation director Ryan Stanley showed up one autumn day in *Lederhosen* and announced plans for the observance of this traditional German holiday. He asked if any of the residents had any German background or suggestions for Oktoberfest, and was pleasantly surprised when I told him I can speak German. Ever since, as long as I lived at Montevue, he made sure that if one of the entertainers who visited us was German, the entertainer and I would converse in German.

And the critical masses of fissionable materials is one of the Pentagon’s worst-kept secrets. For uranium 235 it is 15 kilograms (33 lbs.), and for plutonium 239 it is 5 kilograms (11 lbs.). But, as I used to tell my physics classes when the concept of critical mass came up, these are secrets, so don’t tell anybody.

And I am not certain that the Postal “Service” has any definite policy about how to deal with letters whose addresses do not include ZIP codes. I always use them when I know them, including nine-digit ZIP codes. But if I don’t know the ZIP code, I address mail without it, and it usually is not returned to me.

My comments about manipulating numbers, in **Dagon** #671 (?) about a year ago, were perfectly obvious to anyone who had studied algebra, and an utter mystery to those who have not.

APA-Qover #592 (Blackman): “If you think this country’s bad off now, just wait till I get through with it,” Groucho Marx’s announcement to the people of the Republic of Freedonia at the beginning of the film *Duck Soup*, certainly fits the mood of this country in the first month of Donald Trump’s presidency. But several movements in opposition to Trump’s inauguration and reign are at least going to make him nervous, and might even provoke him to actions that will get him impeached and removed from office. Keep your hopes up!

Blancmange #512 (Blackman): The International Astronomical Union did not “rename” Alpha Centauri, but simply called attention to its Arabian name (which many stars have, thanks to medieval Arabian astronomers). “Rigel Kentaurus” is Arabian for “foot of the Centaur”, its

position in the constellation. (Compare *regel*, Hebrew for “foot”, or Rigel (Beta Orionis), the star conventionally located in the foot of Orion.) For more details of this sort, consult *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning*, whose author’s name I cannot recall at the moment. The book was written in the 1890s, so its astronomical information cannot be relied on, but its history and mythology seem to be accurately reported.

There has been much talk about Russian hacking of the 2016 U. S. election, but no one has bothered to tell us whether it had any effect on the reported results, or what other consequences it may have had. We can only assume that it had no effects whatsoever.

The plot and characters of the TV show *Pitch* were not revealed as fictional when they were announced at the 2016 All-Star Game, or at several other TV spots prior to its first broadcast.

That Original American who was on the Democratic ballot for Elector in Washington was elected, since Clinton carried the state. He voted for a Chief Spotted Eagle. A few other Electors elected on Democratic or Republican tickets voted for people other than Clinton or Trump. The newspapers which I read did not give a detailed tally of how Electors voted, and the 2017 *World Almanac* went to press too early to have the detailed count of electoral votes.

The usual “s” plural in English comes from the French influence imported by the Norman Conquest, since it is common in French, and also in Spanish. The “s” plural in the Romance languages seems to ultimately derive from the “s” ending in the accusative plural of numerous Latin nouns. And bad Latin, spread mostly by soldiers, was widespread in many provinces of the Roman Empire. As another example, the proper Latin word for “horse” is *equus*, as in “equine” or “equestrian”. But “horse” is *caballo* in Spanish (and, I believe, in Italian), and *cheval* in French. These words come from Roman army slang, in which “horse” was *caballus*, which might better be translated as “nag”.

As for other English plurals, some come from *proper* Latin or Greek, as “data”, “flora”, “phenomena” or “spectra”. Some are Germanic, and form plurals by changing the vowel: “man/men”, “mouse/mice”, “goose/geese”. And for a few nouns from various sources the singular and plural have the same form: “sheep”, “deer”, “series”.

“Upper case” and “lower case” letters are considerably older than printing. Ancient Rome used only what we call “upper case” letters, but lower case forms were introduced by the scribes of the Holy Roman Emperor Karl the Great (“Charlemagne”). He ruled the largest European empire since the fall of Rome, and needed numerous scribes to write the numerous communications with its outlying regions. They probably considered lower case letters as their way of lightening their work load. When the brother missionaries Kiril and Mefody designed a script for the Slavic languages they also gave it this feature. But lower case does not, to the best of my knowledge, exist in Hebrew.

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY (continued from p. 4)

Lenox’s wrongfully accused client Gerald Leigh are fellow-students at Harrow, a public (but

actually private and very pricey) school for the boys of the upper classes. Despite wide differences in their character, they became good friends at Harrow. But in 1877 Lenox has been a private detective for about ten years, and has fallen out of touch with Leigh, who is a world-famous scientist (in what field, Anderson does not tell us) who finds himself in serious trouble when he goes to London to collect what he has been told is a fabulous inheritance. But the lawyer who has charge of this mysterious inheritance is mysteriously murdered, and suspicion apparently falls on Leigh.

The reviewer concludes: "As crime series go, the Lenox novels are exceptionally civilized."

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interest to you on page ____.