

Mean, Nasty Puzzlers

By Dennis Knight

Hey you, Mister Smarty-pants breezing through yet another Sunday crossword: What is a fifteen letter word for the scoundrel who came up with this week's puzzle? The answer, as if you didn't know it already, and I cheated to find out, is a *metagrobologist*, one who does or makes puzzles. It comes from a French word meaning to puzzle, baffle or mystify. Technically, a puzzle solver is a metagrobologist too, but I prefer to associate the term with the evil creators.

I have been the victim of many a metagrobologist when I have taken on mechanical monstrosities, disentanglement puzzles, logic puzzles and the daily crosswords. The most famous or possibly most infamous of them all may be Will Shortz, Puzzle Editor of the *New York Times* and Puzzlemaster for National Public Radio. Mr. Shortz has lured me into crossword addiction by offering me an easy one every Monday morning. I solve it quickly and a little smugly, needing only to wait for casual conversations throughout the day when I can drop an aside that I just dashed off not a run-of-the mill one, but the *New York Times* crossword puzzle. The next morning's crossword is a step tougher, but I often get that one as well. By Wednesday, Shortz and his team of malicious metagrobologists have me stymied with clues like the one that goes "It rarely has more than one part", with the four-letter answer being HAIR. Shortz crowed about that diabolical clue back in 2011.

In 1986, a Japanese company popularized Sudoku, a number puzzle that has since victimized societies around the globe. The objective is to fill a 9x9 grid with digits so that each column, each row, and each of the nine 3x3 sub-grids contain all of the digits from 1 to 9. In our local newspaper every day a metagrobologist provides a partially completed grid with varying difficulties from easy to impossible. When I first came across them in the early nineties, I set about creating a logical system for solving them. I have never succeeded, and in the meantime my brother and my son both came along and mastered the science in an hour. Those two solve complex Sudoku challenges today in a matter of minutes while I'm still working on the formula.

Someplace in the bottom of my closet, and I hope lost forever, is Rubik's Cube. It was invented in 1974 by Ernő Rubik, a Hungarian professor of architecture, sculptor and metagrobologist most wicked. It is advertised as having only one solution but 43 quintillion moves. I lost count of how many of those I tried before I conveniently misplaced it, still in a tidy cube of tiles in one of those quintillions of possibilities, certainly not the correct one.

Puzzle solving must be good for me because it sharpens my mind. That is what he wants me to believe, anyway, that mean, nasty, evil and downright villainous perpetrator of perplexing pandemonium, my friendly metagrobologist.