

BLETCHLEY RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

The Unbreakable Book Code

Welcome code-breakers. See what you can do with this coded message:

11-5-3 132-2-5 313-4-8
285-20-7 74-10-6

Unreadable nonsense? Not if you know how to decode it.

This message was written in what's called the book code, a method of secret writing used by spies throughout history.

Let's say you need to communicate with a fellow spy. You agree, in private, on a book to use. You must both have copies of the same book. Secret messages are written in three-number groups, as shown above. Each group represents one word of the message. The first number refers to a page number in your agreed-upon book. The second to a line on that page. The third to a word on that line.

So to decode 11-5-3, you turn to page 11 of your book, count down to line 5, and count over to word 3 on that line. That is the first word of the message. Move to the second group and do the same, and so on, and the jumble of numbers will be transformed into words.

Let's try it. Say we use this article as our "book." All the page numbers are 1. The line beginning "Welcome" is line 1. We'll ignore the sample coded message, so the line beginning "Unreadable nonsense" is line 3. Got it?

You receive the following code:

1-7-1 1-10-2 1-3-6
1-3-7 1-17-2 1-8-6 1-6-3
1-11-1 1-5-2

Decode the message here:

Try it with a fellow spy (in a pinch, a student will suffice). Pick a book that you both have. Write out your coded message here:

Now exchange papers with your partner and decode their secret message.

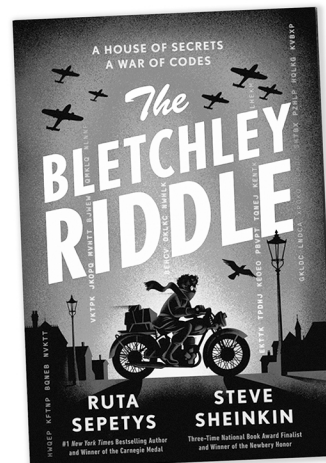
The book code may seem simple, but don't be deceived. If the identity of the book you are using remains secret, this is a *perfectly unbreakable code!*

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