

University of Southampton National Cipher Challenge

Solutions

Solution: Message 9

Plaintext:

Friends,

It was with some shock that I recognized the initials in the last communiqué. I know of this rogue and his reputation, but did not think that even the French would stoop to collaboration with such a diabolical rogue. It may be possible to act in law to retrieve the plans, but I fear that the notorious case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce suggests that the law courts are not the most effective instruments when speedy action is required.

(Indeed, as far as I can tell that awful case could make only a lawyer happy, or perhaps a journalist with an eye for narrative.) The very nature of this disloyal rogue may be our good fortune. I understand that the rogue has recently lost very heavily by gambling at cards and on the horses and is therefore likely to be in want of funds.

This might well provide us with a good opportunity to reacquire the plans by means of a more commercial transaction. However I fear that he will demand a price that is beyond our resources.

What are your thoughts on this matter?

Yours W.

Cipher:

- A Vigenere cipher based on the keyword EPSRC, which is not, contrary to appearances a random collection of letters, but rather the acronym of one of our main sponsors, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Notes:

- The case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce is the long running case that appears in Charles Dickens's novel Bleak House, in which he took up arms against the English legal system. He said "The one great principle of the English law is to make business for itself". Check out <http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/bleakhouse.html>
- The reference to "a journalist with an eye to narrative" refers to Dickens himself, who started out as a journalist.

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