

MathSnacks Murderous Mathematics

by Marty Ross,
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and QED (the cat)

Oxford Outrage



The Oxford Murders (2008) is a fun mystery, with John Hurt and Elijah Wood as two mathematicians taking on the role of detectives. More philosophy than mathematics. However, part of the mystery is figuring out the pattern in an emerging sequence, pictured above. And, there is a subplot of a professor giving his proof of "Bormat's Last Theorem".



Fabulous Furuhata

Furuhata Ninzaburō is a fun, Columbo-like Japanese detective. *Murder of a Mathematician* (1995) is an episode set in Cairns, where two mathematicians are to receive the prestigious Arbuckle Award (for mathematicians under 40). It includes a copy of *The Australian* with the front page announcing the award. We wish!

One of the mathematicians is murdered, and the other is a suspect. Furuhashi slowly closes in on him, while they repeatedly play a Nim-like game. Furuhashi eventually figures out the game *and* nabs the murderer. Fermat's Last Theorem is intimately involved.

Ripper Reference

<http://www.math.harvard.edu/~knill/mathmovies/>
A page full of mathematical movie clips.

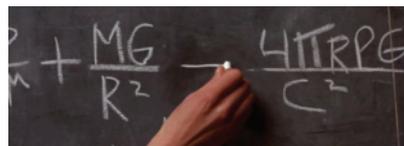
Fibonacci Fanatic



Brutal (2007) is a nasty movie, but it's great for maths kitsch. A series of teenage girls are brutally murdered, with no known connection. The key turns out to be Fibonacci numbers and associated flowers. Check out the whiteboard with the blood-spattered Fibonacci rabbits!

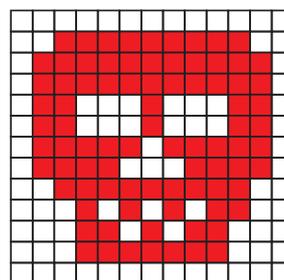
Leroy, who figures out the pattern, is mentally disturbed. He has to open and close a door 34 times before entering a room. In the climactic scene, when Leroy has to rescue the damsel in distress, he figures the quick way to get in: he starts counting up in Fibonacci numbers! He saves the damsel while yelling "thirty-four!" over and over.

Dangerous Dustin



In *Straw Dogs* (1971), Dustin Hoffman plays the role of a mild-mannered physicist. He ends up killing a number of people. At one point Dustin's wife changes a plus sign to a minus in his involved blackboard calculations. Surprisingly, this is not what triggers the killing.

Devilish



Details

In *Fermat's Room* (2007), four mathematicians are invited to a party by Fermat, their mysterious host. The invitation is a trap, and the four are imprisoned in a square room. They are then set mathematical problems to solve. The solution to one puzzle is the skull above: can you come up with the puzzle?

Not really enough murder, but plenty of great maths puzzles.