

THE FIRST ONE occurred on a Friday. At 11:42 A.M., a silent alarm was triggered, alerting the police of Adelaide, South Australia, of a break-in at 210 Eucalyptus Lane. A squad car was dispatched. Arriving at the suburban residence, the officers found a splintered door frame, but no other signs of a burglary. The homeowner was notified and immediately came home from work.

"Nothing's missing," Doug Atkins reported. "I keep me a careful inventory of valuables. Not a gnat's hair is out of place. Lucky us, no one was home. The kids are in summer camp and my wife's visiting her family's station in the outback."

The very next morning, Saturday, at 11:35 A.M., it happened again. The silent alarm at the Atkins's house was once again triggered. The patrol officers arrived and again found the door forced. As before, nothing was missing. "If this ocker is looking for something, he's very neat," observed a patrolman. "Not a speck of dust seems to be disturbed."

On the third day, Atkins made a show of getting into his car and driving off to church. By 11 A.M., he had sneaked back and set up his own lookout post directly across the street. Atkins found an angle that gave him an unencumbered view of his own door. But no one came. His trap hadn't worked.

On Monday morning at 11:41, the intruder struck again. This time, Doug Atkins was prepared. He had hidden a camera just inside the living-room door, giving himself a video of the inner half of the entry hall and of the second-floor staircase. But even this proved futile. The sound of the break-in was duly recorded, but no intruder ever walked in front of the camera's line of sight.

"This blighter's toying with me," Atkins growled. "The next time he comes . . ." But there wasn't to be a next time. The door was never again forced and the alarm never again went off.

This odd little crime spree was made even more notable by the victim's occupation. Doug Atkins, as it happened, was Adelaide's well-respected police chief, and his colleagues throughout the territory were having a good, long laugh at

Chief Atkins's expense.

A week after the last break-in, he received a note in the mail. "Chief Atkins, For the past couple months, you've been doing your best to get the goods on me. I guess I finally outsmarted you. Sorry I had to break into your home to do it." *Signed:* Still at large.

"Well, at least this provides some motive," Atkins mused. "Whoever broke in was somehow trying to escape arrest."

Atkins decided to review his unsolved cases and found three that fit the bill, cases that he had personally pursued over the previous two months.

Case #1: *Robbery and Murder.* The safe of the Second Baptist Church had been broken into and \$100,000 of the building fund stolen. In the process, a church janitor was shot to death, having been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Chief Atkins suspected the robber/killer of having inside help. The Reverend Billy Green was the prime suspect and had been interviewed several times. Just when Green seemed ready to crack, he disappeared, never to be seen again. This happened just one day before the first Eucalyptus Lane break-in.

Case #2: *Arson and Murder.* The Bulky Woman Clothing store was near bankruptcy. Then one night, seven weeks ago, it went up in flames, killing a homeless man who had crawled inside for shelter. Traces of accelerant were discovered as was a hefty fire insurance policy. The owner, Jessica Grandee, had an alibi for the night of the fire, but she was still under suspicion. The nature of the work suggested to Chief Atkins that she had hired a professional. All attempts to track down the arsonist failed.

Case #3: *Kidnapping and Murder.* Holly Buckley, the daughter of Jason Buckley, was kidnapped after ballet class while waiting for the chauffeur. A ransom was paid and a week later Holly's body was found in the bush five miles out of town. Art Tyner, a former employee, had been seen loitering in the vicinity of the ransom's drop-off site, but there was never enough evidence to make an arrest.

"It's gotta be one of these cases," Chief Atkins theorized.