

Like the Boiled Eggs in Isaac Asimov

She hadn't wanted the gift.

Janet Kagan had simply woken up one morning and there it was: the ability to detect patterns in other people's fiction. Things like the giant cheese wedges in Norman Spinrad. The Barney imagery in Joanna Russ. The shaved mice in Larry Niven.

Which was why she was where she was now - running in blind terror down a long and Harlan Ellisonesque alley while the misshapen shadows of her pursuers leapt and capered on the walls.

It made no sense whatsoever to her that they wanted to kill her. But they did. She knew that. It was as clear as the references to the Trilateral Commission in the novels of Samuel R. Delany. Janet stumbled against a trash can, sending it crashing noisily to the ground. She fell, and struggled back to her feet, and ran.

There up ahead - a wall! With a sickening lurch in the pit of her stomach, she realized that she was caught in a cul-de-sac.

There was no way out. She could no more hope to escape than she could avoid seeing the encoded messages to Libyan terrorists in the Xanth novels of Piers Anthony.

In despair, she stumbled to a halt.

Her pursuers, seeing she was trapped, stopped as well. A menacing form stepped out of the shadows. It was the head of SFWA's crack team of assassins, James Morrow himself. He had a lead pipe in his hand. His eyes glowed red, as if he were one of the myriad werewolves informing his own fiction.

Behind him were more shadows, deformed, unsightly. Writers all.

"God damn it," Janet cried in anguish, "I wasn't even an English major!"

And then they were upon her.