



THINKER
IN
BOXES

GENERAL HENRY MARTYN ROBERT

Team: Ducks All in a Row

Position: Gully

Status: Unchanging

Many scholars argue that General Henry Martyn Robert (1837–1923) is the third most boring person to have ever lived. It seems obvious to me that he's the second most boring person in recorded history, but I don't really care enough to bother arguing about it, especially since General Robert was all about taking all the fun out of a good old argument. Actually, it's probably not fair to say that a man who almost fought a war over a pig is nearly the most boring person ever. The Pig War, which almost occurred on San Juan Island in the state of Washington, started out as a dispute between British and American settlers over a pig that got into a garden. The Brits brought in some warships, and General Robert gallantly responded to the provocation by digging a big hole in the ground, and somehow that action convinced the Brits not to blow anyone up. All in all, as the defining moment in the general's military career, it was a rather humdrum affair.

What truly cements Robert's place as an icon of the mundane is a little book he wrote, *Robert's Rules of Order*. Someday, in the not-too-distant future, when your very essence is being whittled away by the monotony of yet another pointless meeting about nothing, you will realize that *Robert's Rules of Order* is the cheese grater of the soul. General Roberts had an unnatural interest in parliamentary procedure and an obsession with efficient and orderly meetings. He combined these two mental defects and created a book that outlined, in excruciating detail, how to run an orderly meeting. For cooperative associations, legislative institutions (particularly town councils), county commissions, Luxembourg, and other tiny governments around the world, this book makes Robert a god. Every little council and commission in the world runs its meetings according to the holy word of Robert, and it is guaranteed that some uptight person on every committee will have every detail of *Robert's Rules of Order* memorized and will end up constantly shouting out the rules like a plastic-haired TV preacher quoting scripture.

Now, if you think about it, writing the rules that govern the vast majority of legislative debates in the world, that's a pretty big thing. It's not as interesting as almost fighting a war over a pig, but it is still a big thing.