

THE CELESTIAL DRAGON #12



The King is gone but he's not forgotten

Featuring:

THE CELESTIAL STEAM LOCOMOTIVE #42

HERE BE DRAGONS #75

SUBPAR #12

THE TANGERINE TERROR #82

I AM THE KURIOUS KUMQUAT #12

SHILDON RAILWAY MUSEUM SPECIAL FEATURE

DEADLINE: Friday 12th December 2025



THE CELESTIAL STEAM LOCOMOTIVE

Track no. 42

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On 13th October 2025, I had to take Riley to the vets to be put to sleep. From seemingly rude health (he looked fine in last issue's synthesiser pic) he became very poorly and his tests revealed kidney failure (and other issues), with a very low survival prognosis. It was sad to watch such a proud beast fading away but nothing prepared me for the pain of his euthanasia.

I chose to stay with him for his final moments and it was heartbreaking. I had vowed to love and protect him, and having him killed felt like the ultimate betrayal, even if it was the right thing to do to spare him from suffering. Somehow I managed to hold it together at the vets then wept profusely when I got home.

My surviving cat, Raymond, showed signs of distress because her friend and protector (OK more like an embarrassing uncle) was missing, but she seems to have got used to it now. I've given her lots of playtime and cuddles and told her "it's just you and me against the world, cattonius".

I decided not to go for ashes, paw prints of fur samples, just some nice framed photos of the most handsome, daft, and affectionate cat in the world. My sister has provided some from his earlier years and I have several good ones from his dotage.

Riley was born in July 2011 (exact date unknown) and my niece brought him home not long after that and claimed she had "saved him from drug dealers". She was never pressed on this and the lovely ginger tom kitten was taken in by the family, and when my niece went to university in October 2011 my sister became his keeper.

He quickly gained a reputation for naughtiness, and was dubbed "The Ginger Ninja" and "The Evil One". But it seems this caused him to get into trouble with other local pets and he started licking his fur off due to anxiety. This changed when my sister's enormous dog (appropriately called Max) died and she replaced him with a Welsh Collie called Oona. Riley and Oona became best buddies and teamed up to repel all threats.

He had many happy years after that, and by the time I became his keeper just over 3 years ago, he was a retired hooligan, the *slightly naughty one*, more interested in cushions and cuddles than causing trouble (apart from stealing my chips, which always made me laugh).

Jumping to TV, I finished watching *Dark Matter* which ended abruptly after 3 seasons, then started to watch *Berlin Station*, as recommended by Steve H, on ITV-X. The last show I watched on that platform was Bernard Cornwell's excellent *The Winter King*, and I don't remember the adverts being excessive, but they are now - the 51-minute first episode felt like 90 minutes (I didn't time it) with all the ads, many of which were the same ones multiple times, ugh! I did check if there was a cheap DVD option but all three seasons is not much less than paying Amazon £2.49 per episode. Ad-free ITV-X is £6 a month. Giving it a miss for now.

Meanwhile, Amazon offered me Andromeda, Gene Rodenberry's *Star Trek lite* show from the early 2000s. Instead of the Federation it's the Commonwealth, but it's been gone for 300 years. Klingons are replaced by Nietzscheans, a super-race obsessed with eugenics. I did feel a pang of nostalgia for it but there's no way I can put up with 110 episodes of Kevin Sorbo's terrible acting (Lexa Doig, who was also in *Continuum*, is good though). Luckily the "remastered" *Blake's 7* series 2 Blu-ray will be hitting my doormat soon!

I have also just started watching the new series (9) of Richard Osman's *House of Games*. No new games yet but they do sometimes get smuggled in towards the end of the run.

Exciting (?) news on the PC front is that having obtained a year's grace on Windows 10 from Microsoft (it's either 30 bucks or upload your details), my older PC started having trouble so I brought forward its replacement. I went for the cheapskate option of a reconditioned Windows 11 machine. It does look remarkably like one I had at work 10 years ago (see picture). Actually I suppose it could actually *be* the same one! The box has a 1TB SSD, quad-core i7 processor and 32GB RAM (and a DVD drive) all for £280. Not bad.

At the time of writing I have almost finished installing software and transferring files. Like Jim I have been using MS-Office since the dawn of time and would rather not switch to Open Office / Libre Office. The standard price for a perpetual licence for MS-Office Home 2024 is about £120, but I spotted an offer for the older 2021 version for only £20 and snapped it up. I did think I may have bought a dodgy copy as the activation key didn't work over the internet, but the instructions I was sent said that if this happens the phone activation should work, and they even provided a web page that simulates the phone activation, and that did the job. So not a bent copy after all, m'lud.

By Wordley Demand starts in this issue. Note that I have updated the rules (reprinted this issue and on the website) for better clarity. We also have double game starts for Durham RR and Ynys Mon BB.

Thanks to Bob for the excellent (if a little geeky) special feature to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

And finally, it seems that global warming has now been shown to adversely affect penguins!
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c86737yg3jlo>

Richard

THE LETTERS BIT



BRENDAN WHYTE

Durham RR, fast track tokens: I read the cost as \$10 per half hex. Took me a while to realise we start with 20 quid, so it's 10 shillings, not 10 quid. Might need to make that clear (especially for Yanks)? e.g. "10/- i.e. 1/2 a pound"

Bob G also questioned the use of the old shillings symbol, but I decided to leave it as is, being playfully retro. Also, as many (albeit not all) RR players are British and over 60 they will know what it means.

Destination X: driving around in blacked out bus trying to be the last man alive... sounds like refugees trying to get to the UK.... or refugees being ~~sent on a vacation~~ deported from the US to a third party one-party state....

Careful not to give Reform ideas. I'm sure many of their MPs were disgusted that some of the contestants (including the winner) were not white, just like the adverts.

STEVE HAM

I hope you are well and keeping yourself motivated while you wait for R-Day. Do you have any plans to travel around the world or any other bucket list items? NHS reorganisation still ground to a halt due to disagreements over funding. Mergers still going ahead but will take months longer.

My retirement day may be brought forward if Rachel Thieves nobbles my pension in the budget. There's just enough time to give the required four months notice to get in before changes if they are scheduled to happen on April 1st.

CHRIS HIBBERT

The Shed has a new floor. It felt like pulling the tablecloth out from under a fully-set table, and sliding a new one in, though we did it piecemeal. Once we had the replacement plywood, I cut one of three 4' x 8' sheets in half the long ways (The shed is approximately 8' x 10') then painted each side of each sheet twice, using up all the old paint we have from remodeling the house 18 years ago. Then I shimmed up the ends of the shed to create a gap, and slid out the center board. I made sure we could move the two end sheets, shimmed the middle so the ends were free, and slid the old sheets out and the new sheets in. I then slid the shed around so it overhung each side in turn so I could nail the plywood to the supports. We used silicon sealer under the walls to make it water-tight. The final step was using screws to anchor the shed to the plywood using decking screws, so they mostly went through to the supports as well.

Janet used more silicon sealant to re-seal the roof, since we know that's where some of the leaks were before. We then moved everything back in, and replaced one of the decaying bookcases with a better set of shelves Janet found on free-cycle. We got it all done before the first slightly wet day. We've seen a few somewhat rainy days, but never more than about a half-inch so far. We're still waiting for serious rain so we can check to see how well sealed it is.

Sheds are definitely a "retirement thing" but my garden is rather small and I've got plenty of other activities lined up. Being single I also don't need a "man-cave" as a refuge from nagging. I guess rainwater ingress is one of the biggest problems for sheds, especially if they house valuable contents you don't want to go rusty or mouldy!

BOB PITMAN

(continuing from last issue) Our route was similar to Destination X and we didn't notice that! We spent nearly a week traversing Switzerland and we had excellent views of the Matterhorn during our stay in Zermatt, while the Destination X saw it from the Italian side.

We were close to Venice in Desenzano but we were both pretty tired by the weeks travelling we'd just completed and were not feeling 100%, probably due to the failure to acclimatise properly to altitude and changes in temperature, so we just stayed in the town rather than take a trip to Verona or further to Venice. In the South of France we were fairly close to the Cote d'Azur observatory (we could see the Alps Maritime and Nice across the bay). And then we went to Paris!

I would recommend Antibes to anyone looking for a relaxing time in a small and old city. The only poor bit there was the Picasso Museum which neither of us enjoyed in terms of the art by any of the exhibited artists! Otherwise, beach, food, ambience and lifestyle were excellent! Noel remarked in the absence of cats in most of the locations we visited, apart from Lausanne. Maybe they were just being sensible and avoiding the roads and the cold in Zermatt and St Moritz!

And a picture of a Destination-x destination, the Matterhorn a few weeks ago from our room ;-)



It all sounds great and going by train makes it more relaxing and you can admire the views as you go along (assuming you weren't wearing x-goggles). Not sure about seeing cats out and about, it doesn't happen that often to me on my daily walks though I did stop to pet a dear little grey and white one recently. The next day I was worried about running her over in the car as she obliviously wandered into its path (at 5mph luckily).

(health update) I'm on blood pressure pills but I am trying hard to cut out the need for them through exercise. I had a terrible year for health in 2024, loads of bits getting in the way of getting out to run or do classes at the gym so it wasn't totally unexpected that everything measured at my annual health check was worse in November last year. Hopefully with this year's checks looming I will have attended to some of those raised levels.

As I reported in last issue's editorial, I need exercise and drugs and a low salt diet to keep me out of the "danger zone". I wisely decided not to check my pressure whilst on the Crets holiday though it might not have been too bad as the large amount of walking will have to some extent countered the gluttonous food consumption and [censored] daily alcohol units.

(more on retirement) So how close to retirement are you? As I recall the civil service likes to start preparing staff early.

I tried to book my retirement for June 2026 in June 2025, knowing 4 months' notice is minimum and (I thought) 1 year being the norm, but they don't want me to start the process until 6 months before the proposed date. If Rachel Reeves does decide to tax my lump sum in the budget, I may be able to avoid that by going on March 31st.

Hopefully you can get your retired life sorted soon before any tax issues arise. I have begun paying tax again on my income since the state pension kicked in, and to be honest the price rises in everything this last few years are beginning to pinch a bit. Being in work may be useful if it keeps going like this.

As I mentioned in a previous issue, I have to use my lump sum as "fat" until I get to 67 and the state pension kicks in. I joked with some of the Crets that it means I can't afford to buy a motor home (not that I want to, it's just a "thing" that many do). I was then told of several people who are buying motor homes despite the current exorbitant prices.

JIM READER

For the first time in some while, I am finally catching up with my orders. It's been a pretty hectic few weeks with business travel and meetings, plus various events. We're now recovering from the visit of Hannah, Michael and our 6 year old step-Grandson Kyler which was pretty exhausting, although a lot of fun. I might finally have time to revisit the Togo and Benin map.

They say many things, such as grandparent duties, mean retirement does not equate to much reduction in activity, though I'm sure you'll pine for World of Concrete and The American Coatings Convention.

I think someone in one of the zines commented that busy in retirement can also include lots of tea breaks, rests and lie-ins, so the impression of being busy may be slightly rose-tinted.

It should be my last trip to Vegas next week for the Western Coatings Show. I haven't been to World of Concrete for years but I still can't escape going to Vegas. At least I'll be back in the Paris Casino and Hotel rather than some of the dumps I've stayed at. I'm curious to see how busy Vegas is given the drop in tourist trade and the economy slowing. I think it may be quiet.

Very sorry to hear that Riley has crossed the rainbow bridge (this appears the phrase for pet deaths over here). Sadly, cats rarely seem to recover from kidney problems. I think the cover is a fitting tribute.

I'd not heard the phrase "crossing the rainbow bridge" before but Googling it seems a popular answer to the do pets go to heaven? question in the US. As I'm 99.9% certain there is no afterlife, what's important is to give your pets your love when they are alive and your remembrance them when they die.



ALBUM REVIEWS

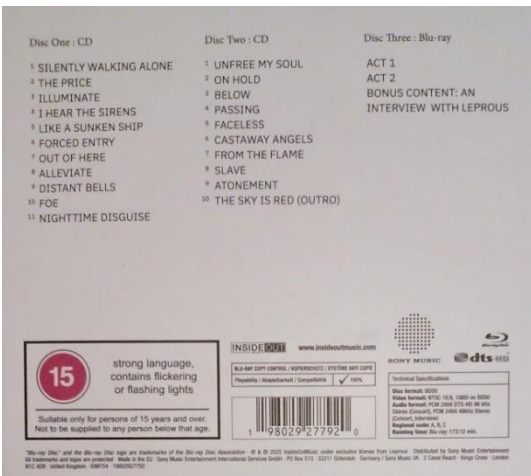
Leprous - An Evening of Atonement (2CD+Blu-Ray) (2025)



Double live album with video disc? Do people still buy such things? Erm, well I do. The Blu-ray sounds fantastic in 96KHz DTS through my home cinema system. I have some qualms over the visuals and will come to that later.

Leprous are a progressive rock band from Norway. Their sound is quite distinctive though their earlier music has more elements of metal, with the later stuff veering towards pop.

I have been a big fan of this band ever since their first album *Tall Poppy Syndrome* was released in 2009. Maybe this is common amongst their fanbase as they selected tracks from all of their albums for the concert.



During the concert, vocalist Einar Solberg asks if there are any new fans present, and only a few hands went up. So I think this album is very much preaching to the converted.

All the band members are top musicians and they perform every track flawlessly. I made a similar comment about Riverside in an earlier review - can a live band be *too* perfect?

Now on to the visuals. The stage is black, and the band wear black so it's all rather dark for most of the time. I guess it makes the big lights and flame throwers more exciting when they come on.

For me it's hard to think of a rock vocalist better than Einar Solberg - he belts, he trills high notes, he growls and screams (sparingly) all with great emotional impact. The bare-chested drummer (Baard Kolstad) is also very impressive, and of course he has to deal with the band's penchant for odd time signatures and syncopated beats.

At time of writing there are three videos available on YouTube. *Passing* is the first track from the first album (*Tall Poppy Syndrome*), and *Like A Sunken Ship* and *Atonement* are from the latest record (*Melodies of Atonement*). *The Sky Is Red* is from *Pitfalls* (2019).

Passing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnWzQFTKjql>

Like A Sunken Ship <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QA3FJnvkpAk>

Atonement / The Sky Is Red (outro) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC2j0v975XE>



Sleep Token - Even In Arcadia (CD) (2025)

This is a band I had been meaning to check out for a while, as cross-genre music can be interesting. Popularity is never a good barometer for how good the music is. Whilst I do listen to quite a bit of obscure fare, I've not got anything against big sellers (such as the Yungblud album reviewed last issue). I didn't know this was a No.1 album initially, though the 15 million views on YouTube video of the album's second track, Emergence <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIpFTUP6flo> was a clue.

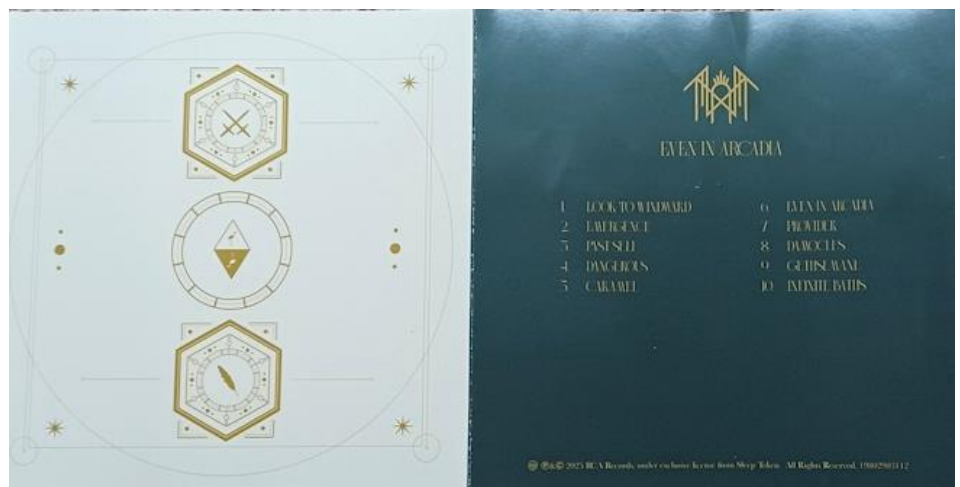


So how cross-genre is it? Previous albums by the band had quite a large amount of metal and djent in the mix but this is a lesser component in *Even In Arcadia*. It's not until the last track *Infinite Baths* that you get a proper blast of metal.

As well as the aforementioned djent and progressive metal, there's post-rock, pop, and R&B incorporating trap beats and piano interludes. Vocals are served up by the mysterious "Vessel" who does use a lot of effects such as the dreaded autotune, and a more interesting slowed-down effect. There is a mix of programmed drums, and real drums played by a band member called "II".

I decided to risk at tenner on this record after watching a video by Rick Beato in which he analysed some of the techniques used. Yes, there's some nice deep bass (that sounds impressive through a hi-fi), some pleasingly dark chord sequences, and he also mentioned the rather good sax solo by a guest musician.

This is all well and good, and listening to it a few times there are definitely some "good bits" such as cool intros and outros. The trouble is the songs are insipid, boring wallpaper music. Despite having played the album 5 times no melodies or lyrics have registered in my brain. The most forgettable album I have listened to in years.



I mentioned earlier that their previous albums were much more metal, but I've not got the urge to try them out. Whilst this record could perhaps be good background music for a trendy dinner party, and it does have a few good bits here and there, I have to be honest in my opinion: It's a bore.

Ah well, I will shortly be getting the new Anna von Hausswolff album (to be reviewed next issue) and I'm still hoping the new EBB record will be out soon. Both of these should be much more entertaining to listen to.

UPDATE: I now have Anna's long-overdue new opus and it's very long - a "two walks" record. Really impressed so far but more listens required before I can review it.

The new EBB record, *The Mirror* is out on 30th November, available as a CD or a download, see <https://ebbband.bandcamp.com/album/the-mirror>

BY MODERATELY POPULAR DEMAND - ROUND 5 OF 5



Rules: In this variant the highest scoring answer(s) AND the lowest scoring answer(s) all score no points, so you want to be somewhere in the middle with your choice. To complicate matters each player has four tokens to play on each round. The tokens can be distributed however the player sees fit, even all four on the same category.

- Double Token - double the score of one (named) answer (in one category)
- Half Token - halve the score of one (named) answer (in one category), rounding up
- Destroy Token - eliminate one (named) answer (in one category)
- Shield Token - prevent the elimination of one (named) answer (in one category)

Conflicting Double and Half tokens cancel, so two Doubles and a Half on the same answer equates to one Double. However, a single Shield token protects an answer from elimination by any number of Destroys. See TCD7 for examples.

Pretty low scoring this time, though Steve managed to double his score, and John managed to just about hold on despite drawing a blank.

- For the note type I took half-note and minim, quarter-note and crotchet etc. as the same answer.
- About 94% of pop music is in 4/4 time, as is 0.1% of prog. Having said that Pink Floyd are a band that don't use odd time signatures much, even though the 7/4 bassline of *Money* is an oft-quoted example.
- For chords, there isn't really a Cb but you could say that is an alternative for B (?). I did wonder if anyone would go for the chord corresponding to all 6 open strings in standard tuning, but there is some debate over what it actually is.
- For the organs and synthesizers I was after the brand rather than a model name, and tweaked a couple of answers accordingly.
- For the drum kit question, I decided to treat the generic "cymbal" as a separate answer to a specific type of cymbal.
- Frank Zappa has done loads of albums, and looking on the internet the ranking lists vary: *Hot Rats* and *Apostrophe* are usually near the top, some think *Joe's Garage* is his best work, and his biggest seller was the accessible but vulgar *Sheik Yerbouti*.

Categories for Round 5: The theme is Music. There is no start letter.

1) A musical note type

Before Tokens: *Minim* (3), *Semiquaver* (2), *Breve*, *Crotchet*, *Quaver*, *Demisemihemidemisemiquaver*, *Flat*, *Doh* (1)

Tokens Played: Double Minim, Semiquaver, Demisemihemidemisemiquaver; Destroy Crotchet, Treble Clef; Shield Minim

After Tokens: *Minim* (6), ***Semiquaver* (4)**; ***Demisemihemidemisemiquaver* (2)**; *Quaver*, *Breve*, *Flat*, *Doh* (1)

2) A time signature used in popular music (includes jazz and prog)

Before Tokens: 4/4 (4); 3/4(3); 5/4 (2); 7/8, 11/8 (1)

Tokens Played: Double 4/4; Destroy 4/4; Shield 5/4, 4/4, 3/4

After Tokens: 4/4 (8); **3/4(3)**, **5/4 (2)**, 7/8, 11/8 (1)

3) An open chord commonly played on the acoustic guitar (6-string, standard tuning)

Before Tokens: *E (4); A (2); C, Cb, D, Dsus4, G (1)*

Tokens Played: Half E, C, A; Destroy E

After Tokens: *A, C, Cb, D, Dsus4, G (1)* **No scoring answers**

4) A famous synthesizer or organ brand used in popular music

Before Tokens: *Korg (4); Hammond, Roland (2); Yamaha, Mellotron, Moog (1)*

Tokens Played: Double Yamaha, Mellotron, Korg; Half Moog x2; Destroy Korg, Roland, Yamaha; Shield Mellotron, Hammond, Korg

After Tokens: *Korg (8); **Hammond, Mellotron (2)**; Moog (1)*

5) Part of a drum kit

Before Tokens: *Hi-hat (4); Cymbal (2); Crash Cymbal, Floor Tom, Bass Drum, Snare, Stick (1)*

Tokens Played: Double Hi-hat, Cymbal; Half Cymbal x2; Destroy Snare, Bass Drum, Hi-hat; Shield Hi-hat

After Tokens: *Hi-hat (8); Cymbal, Crash Cymbal, Floor Tom, Stick (1)* **no scoring answers**

6) An album by Frank Zappa (with or without the Mothers of Invention)

Before Tokens: *Hot Rats, Sheik Yerbouti (2); Apostrophe, Jazz From Hell, We're Only In It For The Money, Zoot Allures, Halloween, I knew she was a nice girl cos she moved the dishes first (1)*

Tokens Played: Double Halloween, Hot Rats; Half Apostrophe

After Tokens: *Hot Rats (4); **Sheik Yerbouti, Halloween (2)**; Apostrophe, Jazz From Hell, We're Only In It For The Money, Zoot Allures, I knew she was a nice girl cos she moved the dishes first (1)*

Scoreboard:

Player	Note	Time Sig	Chord	Synth/Organ	Drum	Zappa	Score	Total
John Walker	Breve	7/8	E	Korg	Crash Cymbal	Apostrophe	0	25
Bob Pitman	Crotchet	4/4	G	Hammond	Snare	Hot Rats	2	25
Roger Trethewey	Minim	4/4	E	Korg	Cymbal	Sheik Yerbouti	2	21
Jim Reader	Demisemi hemidemi semiquaver	11/8	Dsus4	Hammond	Hi-hat	Jazz from Hell	4	20
Bob Gingell	Semiquaver	5/4	E	Korg	Floor Tom	We're Only In It For The Money	6	20
Martin Walker	Quaver	3/4	D	Roland	Bass Drum	Zoot Allures	3	15
Michael Pargman	Minim	3/4	E	Roland	Hi-hat	Sheik Yerbouti	5	15
Steve Ham	Semiquaver	3/4	A	Korg	Stick	Overnite Sensation	7	14
Brendan Whyte	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	13
Mike Pollard	Doh	5/4	Cb	Mellotron	Hi-hat	I knew she was a nice girl cos she moved the dishes first	4	12
Chris Hibbert	Flat	4/4	C	Moog	Hi-hat	Halloween	2	10
Brad Martin	Minim	4/4	A	Yamaha	Cymbal	Hot Rats	0	9
GM picks (non-scoring)	Minim	5/4	Am	Behringer	Hi-hat	Sheik Yerbouti	-	-

Congratulations to John Walker and Bob Pitman who share the glory (no tie-breaker)

Game end comments welcome. Is it too chaotic? Should it be binned or would a rule change help?

BY WORDLEY DEMAND - RULES

The game is best run over 5 or 10 rounds and is played as per standard BPD (5 categories per round) with the following additional rules:

- Each player is allocated their own personal Wordle answer when they join the game. This is a five-letter word with no repeat letters and it is not revealed to the player.
- Each round, the first letters of each answer in order must form a dictionary word according to the [Collins Scrabble Checker](#). Plurals are not allowed, and players may not submit a word used in a previous round.
- Should the word be invalid for any reason, BPD scores are awarded as normal but not the Wordle bonuses, described below.
- If the answer for category #1 begins with the first letter of the player's Wordle answer, that gets +4 points, if it begins with one of the other letters in the word, a +2 bonus is scored. And so on for #2-#5.
- They get the maximum 20 bonus points if they Wordle, but they are then allocated a new word.
- Players have a maximum of 5 rounds to solve each word, after which they get a new word allocated (if the game is still running).
- Players may choose to supply a wrong answer (likely to only get 1 point in the regular scoring) in order to boost their Wordle bonuses.
- Research is permitted.

Example, the player's word is BINGO and the categories are A Composer (surname), A UK town or city with an EPL or EFL football team, A musical instrument, A capital city and A US President (surname).

Brahms	+4
Oldham	+2
Organ	+2
Sofia	+0
Truman	+0

BOOST is a valid dictionary word, and the player now knows his word begins with B and the 4th or the 5th character is an O.

BY WORDLEY DEMAND - GAME START

The game will run for 5 rounds (if it goes well I may well try a 10-round game). In each round there are only 5 categories. See rules above for how the Wordle part works.

The theme is **movies directed by famous directors**. The letter used for Wordling is the first letter of the first word, even if it is "the" or "a". If a movie starts with a number that number is spelt out so 5 would be an F.

- 1) A movie directed by Alfred Hitchcock
- 2) A movie directed by Stephen Spielberg
- 3) A movie directed by Stanley Kubrick
- 4) A movie directed by Woody Allen
- 5) A movie directed by Martin Scorsese

Some players have already signed up but it is of course an all-reader game that anyone can join in at any time, and be allocated a 5-letter word. Exactly how I do this is shrouded in mystery...

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS KENDO NAGASAKI - DESTINATION X - ROUND 1



Destination X is available now on the BBC iPlayer (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0024pz8>).

In the TV show, the players are touring around Europe in a blacked-out bus (no internet or phones) and only get to see certain things via their X-goggles. These are various different clues to the destination, mixed in with red herrings. There are challenges

which can yield extra clues, but these are only revealed so some players, who may choose to share what they've learned with others, keep shh, or lie. At the end of each show, contestants go to the *map room* and place an X where they think they are. Whoever is furthest away is eliminated. Players do not see other people's guesses and don't know how accurate they were. Only the eliminated player gets the location fully revealed.

The Kendo game is only loosely based on the TV show, with just the elimination element in play (no clues, not limited to Europe). At the end of rounds 1-3, nothing happens. At the end of rounds 4-6, whoever's transmitter is furthest from Kendo gets their guess blanked out from the turn report, and they receive a *yellow card* (two yellows means elimination) from ~~Rob Brydon~~ the GM. At the end of rounds 7-9, it's the same except they now get a *red card* meaning elimination from the game.

Round 1:

Player	Who	Where	Lat	Lon
Bob Gingell	Tony Blair (1953-)	Jerusalem	31.778889	35.225556
Steve Guest	Bob Marley (1945-1981)	Ganja, Azerbaijan	40.682778	46.360556
Chris Hibbert	Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887-1920)	Guatemala City	14.641667	-90.513333
Dane Maslen	Michel de Nostredame (1503-1566)	Worlds End, Hampshire	50.9	-1.0999
Bob Pitman	Peter Thornley (1941-)	Lewisham Town Hall	51.4452	-0.0208
Jim Reader	Patrick Andrade (1993)	Praia, Cape Verde Islands	14.918	-23.509
Martin Walker	Mother Theresa (1910-1997)	Agra, India	27.18	78.02

Public response to the player with the closest guess: *We were born less than 10 years apart.*

DILEMMAS - GAME END STATEMENTS



Bob Pitman:

I found the game interesting but suspect my overly verbose questions and answers might have identified me to the other players! I enjoyed pondering the questions and thought that my questions were too scenario like rather than just a question. I guess I was influenced by events current at the time of writing them.

Like Richard I think the previous outing was slightly more fun although that's just a vague impression as I can't recall the last questions!

Good win for Bob in what was a tight race!

(GM) The scoring is rather fiddly so hopefully he was the rightful winner, although the game is more about the fun of answering the silly questions than scoring points.

CHOICE - SUPPENKASPER VARIANT - ROUND 23



<https://variablepig.org/rules/choice.html>

As per the standard game, except that only **7 Würfels** are allowed, and each player has 6 special cards that can be played once per game:

- FdH: Remove any two numbers from the five, leaving one pair plus 1 possible Würfel
- Null: Do not take a Würfel this round
- KUR: Take a Würfel but no numbers this round
- -1: Refuse all the numbers this round
- -2: Refuse all the numbers and decrement the count of one of your Würfels
- Suppen-Kasper: Create an extra round from your leftovers plate

Erratum: John did use his null in Round 21 and I forgot to cross it off.

Player	Round 23	Round 23.5
Chris Hibbert	(4+6)=10, (5+5)=10 w2	
Kevin Lee	-2 (decrement 2)	(4+6)=10, (5+5)=10 w2
Michael Pargman	(5+5)=10, (2+6)=8 w4	
John Walker	(2+5)=7, (4+6)=10 w5	

Player	Score	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Würfel	Würfel	Würfel
Bob Gingell	810				<u>10</u>		<u>7</u>	<u>11</u>		<u>11</u>			111111-	222222-	3333333
Steve Ham	450					<u>10</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>					11111-	2-----	6666666
Chris Hibbert	770		<u>6</u>		<u>9</u>	<u>11</u>				<u>15</u>			222222-	33333--	666666-
Kevin Lee	810				<u>11</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>		<u>7</u>			222222-	333333-	666666-
Dane Maslen	700				<u>10</u>		<u>12</u>			<u>11</u>			2222222	333----	4444---
Michael Pargman	570				<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>		<u>13</u>			222222-	333333-	444444-
Roger Trethewey	660				<u>12</u>		<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>		<u>7</u>			222222-	33333--	6666666
John Walker	160		4	4		<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>9</u>		<u>10</u>			111111-	333333-	5555555

Player	FdH	Null	Kur	-1	-2	Sup	Leftovers Plate
Bob Gingell	x	x	x	x	x	x	{eaten}
Steve Ham	x	x	x	x	x	x	{eaten}
Chris Hibbert	x	x	x	x	x	x	{eaten}
Kevin Lee	x	x			x	x	{eaten}
Dane Maslen	x	x		x	x	x	{eaten}
Michael Pargman	x	x	x	x	x	enabled	1,1,1,4,5,4,5,2,3,3,4,4,5,1,2,3,3
Roger Trethewey	x		x			x	{eaten}
John Walker	x	x	x	x	x	x	{eaten}

Kevin, without finishing, draws level with clubhouse leader Bob, whilst John finishes with a modest total - the gamble on 3s not paying off. Michael gets rid of the -200 on his 8s and still has Suppen-Kasper to play. Chris doesn't add to his score but will hope he can rustle up a few more points without opening a new number in the next two rounds - it will have to be 3s or 5s though.

New Roll: R24: 2,3,4,4,6

Note on Suppen-Kasper card: Unlike the previous game, you only make one round of 5, the rest of the numbers on the plate are fed to the dog. The round can be placed before or after any of the rounds, so this time it could be before R24 or after R24. You cannot use another special card on this round but you can engineer a finish. You can also choose not to play the card at all during the game.

CRYSTAL BALL 2025 - JIMMY DODGERS?



Just the baseball to go (will be resolved before the zine goes out). If the Dodgers win, I will nick it on the tie-break as the base rate is unlikely to change from its current 4% before 2026. A Jays win sees Jim triumph by one point.

DEADLINE DAY UPDATE: It's 3-3 with the decider to play tomorrow in Toronto...

2nd NOVEMBER: *The Los Angeles Dodgers became the first team for 25 years to win back-to-back World Series titles, coming from behind to beat the Toronto Blue Jays 5-4 after extra innings in the deciding seventh game.*

Scoreboard

No	Sport	Event	Date	Richard Smith	Jim Reader	John Walker	Martin Walker	Steve Ham
1L	Tennis	Australian Open - Men's	Jan	Alcaraz	Sinner [2]	Alcaraz	Alcaraz	Sinner [2]
2L	American Football	Super Bowl	Feb	San Francisco	Kansas City [1]	San Francisco	Detroit Lions	Kansas City [1]
3L	Rugby	6 Nations	Mar	England [1]	France [2]	Ireland	Scotland	Ireland
4L	Athletics	World Indoor US medals	Mar	22	25	20	20	24
5L	Athletics	World Indoor GB medals	Mar	6 [1]	8	4 [2]	10	7
6L	Golf	US Masters	April	Scheffler	Schuaffele	Scheffler	McIlroy [2]	Kepka
7L	Snooker	World Champion	May	Trump	Williams [1]	Trump	O'Sullivan	Allen
8L	Football	English Premier League	May	Arsenal [1]	Liverpool [2]	Man City	Liverpool [2]	Man City
9L	Football	Southampton EPL final position	May	20 th * [2]	15 th	20 th * [2]	20 th [2]	19 th [1]
10L	Basketball	NBA Champs	June	Boston Celtics	Philadelphia	Boston Celtics	Boston Celtics	Denver Nuggets
11L	Cycling	Tour De France	July	Pogacar [2]	Hirschi	Pogacar [2]	Pogacar [2]	Vingegaard [1]
12L	Golf	Ryder Cup	Sept	Europe [2]	USA [1]	USA [1]	USA [1]	USA [1]
13L	Baseball	World Series	Oct	LA Dodgers [2]	Philadelphia Phillies	LA Dodgers [2]	NY Yankees	NY Yankees
14L	Formula 1	Winning Constructor	Nov	McLaren [2]	McLaren [2]	McLaren [2]	McLaren [2]	McLaren [2]
TB	UK economy	Base Interest Rate	Dec	2.5%	2.25%	4%	3.5%	3.75%
SCORE				13	13	11	11	8

As I write this on 2nd November, there is just under four weeks to go before the UK budget. The Chancellor has some tough choices to make, but there appears to be pretty much zero chance that base interest rates will fall significantly from the current 4%, so....

Congratulations to ME! Game end statements welcome.

CRYSTAL BALL 2026 - GAMESTART



I have decided to run this game again - possibly for the last time as it's a bit samey, but never say never. I did wonder about changing it so that you can "bet" different numbers of points on different events but in the end decided on just a couple of small tweaks:

- 1) You may now play a Joker on one event, provided it's not a two-horse race.
- 2) I have removed the paid for changes, you just get one free change per game.

No	Sport	Event	Date	Richard Smith	Steve Ham	Martin Walker	Jim Reader	John Walker
1	Tennis	Australian Open - Women's	Jan	Sabalenka	Swiatek	Swiatek	Swiatek	Sabalenka
2	Winter Olympics	GB medals total	Feb	3	2	2	4	2 (JOKER)
3	American Football	Super Bowl	Feb	Buffalo Bills	Eagles	Packers	Buccaneers	Buffalo Bills
4	Rugby	6 Nations	Mar	England	Ireland	France	France	France
5	Cricket	World T20	Mar	England	India	India	Australia (JOKER)	India
6	Athletics	London Marathon (men's)	Apr	Mutiso	Sawe	Aseefa	Nageeye	Sawe
7	Golf	US Masters	Apr	Scheffler	McIlroy	De Chambeau	Fleetwood	Scheffler
8	Snooker	World Champion	May	Trump	Wilson	Trump	Williams	Trump
9	Football	FA Cup: Highest placed non-Premier League team	May	Southampton (JOKER)	Middlesbro	Millwall	Ipswich	Coventry
10	Football	World Cup winner	Jun	England	England	Spain	France	Spain
11	Cycling	Tour De France	Jul	Pogacar	Pogacar (JOKER)	Pogacar (JOKER)	Pogacar	Pogacar
12	Tennis	US Open (men)	Aug	Alcaraz	Sinner	Sinner	Sinner	Alcaraz
13	Golf	Solheim Cup	Sep	Europe	Europe	USA	Europe	USA
14	Baseball	World Series	Oct	LA Dodgers	Padres	Seattle	Cleveland	LA Dodgers
15	Formula 1	Champion Driver	Nov	Russell	Verstappen	Norris	Verstappen	Norris
TB	UK Politics	Reform opinion poll %	Dec	15%	26%	23%	22%	35%
SCORE				0	0	0	0	0

For medals 2 if exact, 1 if one off. For FA cup, there may be equals and the 3 points will be shared, so if two teams made the semi-finals, 1.5 points each, or if one made the semi-final and two the quarters, 2 points to the semi-final team and 0.5 to the two quarter-finalists.

When I chose the events, I didn't realise Pogacar was such a big favourite for the Tour de France. Of course he might get injured or disqualified, or a new cycling star may emerge.

As for the tie-breaker, I am very much NOT a fan of Reform and hopefully the British public will agree with me in 12 months time.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YyYbhp8x2c&t=308s>

RAILWAY RIVALS DURHAM 1826 (RR2570DH) GAMESTART



It's 1826 and time to expand the Stockton and Darlington line, which is being sold off. See <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/durhamrr.html>. Four rival companies start with £20 each and must bid for sections of the existing (grey) track as their start (instead of a town):

A: Y21/Y24 to Shildon
B: Shildon to Darlington
C: G66 to P66
D: Eaglescliffe to Stockton

- No bonuses are awarded for any of the towns on the existing line.
- Bids are made for choice order e.g. BCDA bid 9. Max 20.
- Ties are resolved randomly, losers get a free fast track token.
- These can be purchased at any time (from balance) during the game but must be applied to track as it's built. The cost is 10/- per half-hex.
- On unupgraded sections of track, 5s rolled become 4s during a race.
- Track cannot be built outside of Country Durham except for a half-hex over the border for specials.
- Minimum race length 5 hexes.

Our old-time entrepreneurs are Kevin Lee, Brendan Whyte, Steve Ham and Jim Reader. I need the usual company name / acronym and preferred line colour, plus your bid for the existing line.

It works as follows:

Alice bids 10 for ABCD, Bill bids 12 for CDBA, Carol bids 8 for ADCB and Dave bids 8 for CBAD. The GM flips a coin between Carol and Dave, and Carol wins so she gets third choice and Dave 4th plus a free fast track token.

Bill is then allocated C, Alice A, Carol D and Dave B, plus the token.

BUS BOSS YNIS MON (BB423MON & BB424MON) GAMESTARTS



BB423MON - GM Bob Gingell. Players (and build order): John Marsden, Roger Trethewey and Richard Smith.

Please send company names, preferred route colour and first round builds to Bob.

BB424MON - GM Richard Smith. Players Bob Gingell, Jim Reader and Brad Martin.

Please send company names, preferred route colour and first round builds to Richard.

Map: <https://variablepig.org/maps/bb/bb-mon-2b.jpg>

RAILWAY RIVALS SYRIA (RR2566SY) ROUND 1



Four of the five companies head directly for Homs, with ROGER's line over the desert getting there first. This city was considered as a start when the map was being designed but its position made it too strong compared to others.

SHIT heads for Raqqa and so far has no competition in the wide-open expanses in the east of the country.

The in-game map is available at <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2566SY.jpg>

BOB
Bob Gingell
Black
1a. [5] (Damascus) - - DOUMA - - K27 - K26
1b. [4] (K26) - - - - K22
1c. [4] (K22) - - Homs - K19 - L18
BANK: 20 +6 -3[SKR, L18] +2[BOOMS, K19] +1[SKR, K19] = 26

BOOMS
Jim Reader
Orange
1a. [5] (Latakia) - F14 - JABLEH - F16 - - H17
1b. [4] (H17) - I18 - - HAMA - K18
1c. [4] K18) --- - Homs
BANK: 20 +6 +6 -2[BOB, K19] = 30

SKR
Brad Martin
Blue
1a. [5] (Aleppo) - - - K11 - - MAARAT AL-NUMAN
1b. [4] (Maarat al-Numan) - - - K16 - L16
1c. [4] (L16) - L18 - K19 - Homs
BANK: 20 +6 -1[BOB, K19] +3[BOB, L18] = 28

ROGER
Roger Trethewey
Green
1a. [5] (Palmyra) - - - - P18
1b. [4] (P18) - O18 - - L19
1c. [4] (L19) - HOMS; (N18) - SALAMIYAH; (Palmyra) - - W20
BANK: 20 +6 +6 = 32

SHIT
Michael Pargman
Purple
1a. [5] (Al-Hakasah) - - I44 --- H44
1b. [5] (H44) - - - - D46
1c. [4] (D46) - - - - RAQQA
BANK: 20 +6 = 26

Rolls for Round 2: 2a) 5 2b) 3 2c) 6

RAILWAY RIVALS - SENEGAL & THE GAMBIA (RR2557SG) - ROUND 2



All three companies completed the Senegambia bridge but then went their separate ways. FAR connected the important city of Banjul and also headed north. LIONS went the other way from Mansa Konko to connect towns to the east. BEAR asked thier builders to "take me to Touba" then carried on east towards Matam.

So no parallel builds and only one West African CFA Franc changed hands at the phosphorous mine.

The in-game map is available at <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2557SG.jpg>

BEAR	2a. [2] (M7) - - M9
Kevin Lee	2b. [6] Build second half of Senegambia Bridge; (M9) - <u>TOUBA</u> - - J10
Black	2c. [6] (J10) - - <u>NDIBENE DAHRA</u> - - - <u>LINGUERE</u> - I16
	BANK: 30 +1[LIONS, M7] +6 +3 +3 = 43
LIONS	2a. [2] (O6) - - M7 / Phosphorus
Jim Reader	2b. [6] Build second half of Senegambia bridge - - - U14
Yellow	2c. [6] (U14) - - - - <u>BASSA SANTA SU</u> ; (U15) - <u>JANJANBUREH</u> ; (U13) - V13
	BANK: 31.5 -1[BEAR, M7] +6 +6 = 42.5
FAR	2a. [2] (L5) - <u>TIEBO</u>
Brad Martin	2b. [6] Build second half of Senegambia bridge - - - U8
Blue	2c. [6] (U8) - <u>BANJUL</u> ; (Tiebo) - J7 - <u>LOUGA</u> - G9
	BANK: 28.5 +6 +6 +6 = 46.5

Rolls for Round 3: 3a) 5 3b) 2 3c) 4

RAILWAY RIVALS BHUTAN (RR2550BT) ROUND 5



Only one of the eight unconnected towns was nabbed this time, with YETI winking along the south coast, BUTT going well in the east (and connecting Thimphu) whilst ROGER expanded in all directions (also making it to Thimphu).

No monastery or disputed territory connections as yet.

OMMMMMMM!

BUTT	5a. [4] (P11) --- O12; (J40) - <u>PEMAGATSHEL</u>
Bob Gingell	5b. [5] (Trashigang) - M38 - --- M36
Black	5c. [2] (O12) - N12 - Thimphu
	BANK: 51 +6 -1[YETI, O12] -1[ROGER, O12] +1[YETI, E44] +1[YETI, G44] +1[YETI, H44] +1[YETI, F42] +1[ROGER, G42] = 60
YETI	5a. [4] (C44) --- D44 - E44
Jim Reader	5b. [5] (E44) - F43 --- G44 - H43
Yellow	5c. [2] (H43) - I44; (F43) - F42
	BANK: 56 -1[BUTT, E44] -1[BUTT, G44] -1[BUTT, H44] -1[BUTT, F42] +1[BUTT, O12] - +8[ROGER, O12-THIMPHU] = 61
ROGER	5a. [4] (P12) - O12 - N11 - Thimphu; (G39) - G40
Roger Trethewey	5b. [5] (Thimphu) --- - K13 - Paro
Green	5c. [2] (G40) - - G42
	BANK: 73 -8[YETI, O12-THIMPHU] -1[BUTT, G42] +1[BUTT, O12] = 55

Rolls for Round 6: 6a) 2 6b) 6 6c) 3

The in-game map is available at: <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2550BT.jpg>

Reminder: This game is not using leapfrog, but the other one (next page) is. So far it seems the map has just about enough non-mountain hexes to make it not absolutely essential.

RAILWAY RIVALS BHUTAN (RR2551BT) ROUND 5

GM Bob Gingell

A rush to the South-East sees BOTI trailing while HAPPY and HEART enter Dungkar together. HAPPY is happy in the North-East as is BOTI in the South-West.

Build allowance for Round 5: 4, 5, 6

BOTI, red (Richard Smith): $68 + 6 - 7 + 1 = 68$.

5a. (B44) - C44 --- D44 [-5ht]

5b. (Samtse) - F19 - - - C18 - TENDU

5c. (D44) - - - G43 --- H43 [-1ht,-1hy]

HEART, purple (Steve Ham): $74 + 3 - 5 + 6 = 78$.

5a. (Lhuntse) --- - DUNGKAR

5b. (Panbang) - --- F44 - G44 [-1hy];

5c. (G44) - Nganglam - I45 - J44 [-3hy]; (S15) - - Q14 [-1b]; (Sarpang) - T21.

HAPPY, blue (Brad Martin): $50 + 15 + 5 = 70$.

5a. (H34) - - H32 - G32 - DUNGKAR

5b. (M38) - --- M36 - L35

5c. (L35) - L34 - TRASHIYANGTSE; (M38) - - - P36 - SAKTENG

Round 6 build allowance: 4, 5, 5.

The in-game map is available at: <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2551BT.jpg>

RAILWAY RIVALS SOUTH TYROL (RR2572ST) ROUND 1

GM: Bob Gingell

NIR single-mindedly beats WIERER into Kastelruth where the two companies' lines cross over one another. Both WIERER and STYLE build in two different directions. NIR and STYLE seem to be squeezing WIERER by heading towards its start region.

Round 1 build allowances: 4, 4, 5.

NIR, blue (Brad Martin): $20 + 18 = 38$.

1a [4]. (Brixen) - E50 - - KLAUSEN - D52

1b [4]. (D52) --- - KASTELRUTH

1c [5]. (Kastelruth) - - - - WELSCHNOFEN; (D55) - C56

STYLE, red (Richard Smith): $20 + 12 = 32$.

1a [4]. (Meran) --- S18 - S19

1b [4]. (S19) - LANA - - U21 - U22

1c [5]. (Meran) - - R18 - - NATURNS - O17

WIERER, purple (Steve Ham): $20 + 6 = 26$.

1a [4]. (Bozen) --- X23; (Bozen) - Z22;

1b [4]. (X23) - - EPPAN; (Z22) - - B55.

1c [5]. (B55) --- - Kastelruth - E54

Round 2 build allowances: 4, 6, 4.

The in-game map is available at <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2572ST.jpg>

RAILWAY RIVALS SOUTH TYROL (RR2565ST) ROUND 1



ROGER has a nice quiet start whilst STINK decide to try to muscle in to the two Bozen starters' area. BUST manage to stay out of trouble south of the river but STIFY and STINK ended up with a big parallel for the poor old GM to calculate: Payments cancel!

This kind of thing is why I never thought computer GMing RR would work, though Tom Howell has since proved me wrong.

BUST
Bob Gingell
Black

1a. [6] (Bozen) - - - --- C55
1b. [3] (C55) - KASTELRUTH - - F53
1c. [4] (F53) - - ST ULRICH - I55; (F53) - F52
BANK: 20 +6 +6 = 32

STIFY
Bob Pitman
Red

1a. [6] (Bozen) - Z22 - A56 - A55 - B54 - B53 - C53
1b. [3] (C53) - D52 - Klausen - E51
1c. [4] (E51) - F50; (Bozen) - - - X23
BANK: 20

STINK
Michael Pargman
Purple

1a. [6] (Brixen) - E50 - - KLAUSEN - - - B53
1b. [3] (B53) - B54 - - Z21
1c. [4] (Brixen) - --- FRANZENSFESTE
BANK: 20 +6 +6 = 32

ROGER
Roger Trethewey
Green

1a. [6] (Meran) - V18 - V19; (Meran) - U17 - U16 - V15
1b. [3] (V15) - ST LEONHARD; (Meran) - S17
1c. [4] (S17) - R16 - NATURNS
BANK: 20 +6 +6 = 32

Rolls for Round 2: 2a) 5 2b) 6 2c) 4

The in-game map is available at <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2565ST.jpg>

RAILWAY RIVALS AZERBAIDJAN (RR2536AZ) - ROUND 11

GM: Bob Gingell

Another good round for BAD sees it so far in the lead that it should be impossible for the others to catch up. The big battle in the final round will be for second place between Mars and AZERI. The link is finally made into Turkey, but it looks as if BAD will be the main beneficiary of that.

Races for Round 11 (max 5 entries, ties = *):

- R14. #2 (Turkey) – 34 (Ganja) *[not possible - reoffer]*
- R27. (66–51): BAD 20.
- 29. (14–55): MARS [23] 20; AZERI [20] 10.
- 30. (22–63): AZERI [27] 20; MARS [29] 10.
- 31. (35–#4): BAD [13] 20 -4a = 16; AZERI [14] 10 +4 = 14.
- 32. (44–16): MARS [7] 15* +3 = 18; AZERI [8] 15* -3m = 12.
- 33. (56–34**): BAD [32] 20 -3m-1a = 16; MARS [39] 10 +3 = 13; AZERI +1.
- 34. (64–45): BAD [19] 20 -1m = 19; MARS [18] 10 +1 = 11; AZERI [28] 0.
- 35. #2 (Turkey) – 24 (Zaqatala) *[also not possible - reoffer]*

** Qazax 31 was wrongly stated as the Race 33 destination in the Round 10 report. Players were notified it should have been Ganja 34 and given the opportunity to change orders.

Scores and builds (max 8 points):

BAD, green (Michael Pargman): 240 +86 +1 = 327 +71 -3 = 395.

(B22) --- A23 {Turkey}. [-3]

AZERI, indigo (Jim Reader): 228 +38 +1 = 267 +57 -0 = 324.

No builds. [-0]

MARS, orange (John Marsden): 189 +66 -5 = 250 +72 -0 = 322.

No builds. [-0]

Armenia: 13.

Races for Round 12 (enter any 5):

R14. #2 (Turkey) – 34 (Ganja)

R35. #2 (Turkey) – 24 (Zaqatala)

36. 13 (Baku) – #5 (Russia)

37. 23 (Siyazan) – 54 (Lankaran)

38. 36 (Mingachevir) – 11 (Baku)

39. 43 (Shamakhi) – 26 (Ismayilli)

40. 53 (Jalilabad) – 41 (Yevlakh)

41. 62 (Aghjabadi) – 33 (Ganja)

42. #6 Caspian Sea Port – 61 (Barda)

The in-game map is available at <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2536AZ.jpg>

Good luck to all and please send End Game Statements with your final round orders.

RAILWAY RIVALS AZERBAIDJAN (RR2535AZ) ROUND 12



The manats were shared out fairly evenly again with leader BOB winning one and losing one of the two short races (39 and 42). OILS did claw back a few points but had to settle for second in the end.

Another decent round for ROGER but the damage was done earlier in the game.

	BOB Bob Gingell Black	ROGER Roger Trethewey Green	GANJA Kevin Lee Red	OILS Brad Martin Blue
36. Baku (12) - Turkey (S2)	20 [49] -6			10 [54] +6
37. Stepanakert (64) - Sumgait (15)	0 [30]	10 [28] -4	20 [25] +4 +1	0 [30] -1
38. Nackchivan (65) - Lankaran (55)				20 [41]
39. Ismayilli (26) - Shamakhi (43)	20 [3]		10 [4]	
40. Shirvan (45) - Ganja (34)		20 [21]	10 [23]	
41. Zaqatala (24) - Jalilabad (53)	+2	10 [29] +1 -2		20 [29] +2 -1 -2
42. Georgia (S4) - Mingachevir (35)	10 [13] +5 -1	20 [13] +1 -5		

Last Turn	289	228	259	268
Points from Races	50	51	45	56
Points Total	339	279	304	324

The in-game map is available at: <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2535AZ.jpg>

Congratulations to Bob Gingell. Game end comments welcome

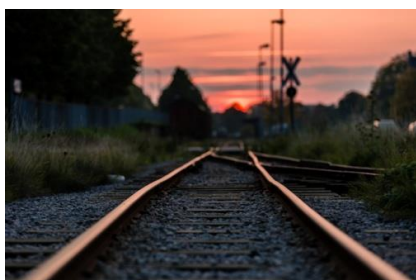
Comments from Bob G:

A bit of a gamble in Race 37 with the alternative being a certain 5 points from Race 38. I hope I do not lose because of that! It is looking good for me but Kevin's more direct East to West route across the central area ought to have given him more success. I think I can hold Brad off...

Comment on foreign connections - I do think that players building across Armenia should have an access point to that country from those marked routes and suggest F20. I also favour including the actual crossing to Iran from Nakhchivan at G29. Both would make that region a more profitable area to build to, especially given the rule that no parallel build payments are due from builds in Armenia. Removing the hill in M22 would ease access for more than one company to use the northern route, or alternatively add orange in O23 but prevent builds from O22 or P22 to O24 by putting a hill in O24. At present using the southern route also gains you access to Armenia (at O26) but using the northern route which is closer to the heart of Armenia does not. Otherwise the map seems to work well enough. Interesting (and understandable) that Ganja and Shirvan became hubs for all players.

Another thought: Could Nakhchivan work as a starting city? Remote but with a number of destinations close by if my suggested Iranian link is added. Would anyone else go there if the city bonuses were already taken? It is expensive to build there if there are few races likely to go there.

RAILWAY RIVALS ZAMBIA (RR2540ZM) ROUND 9



It's still pretty close but BAMBI now have a small lead thanks mainly to two uncontested races. The only race (18) with all three entrants could have gone any way and its outcome seemed to have a major effect on the scores, but perhaps only due to closeness.

BAMBI and MOSI both made some line improvements but BEMBA decided to stick. Nobody attempted a river crossing.

	BAMBI Bob Gingell Black	MOSI OA TUNYA Steve Ham Red	BEMBA Jim Reader Blue
15. Serenje (24) - Livingstone (53)		10 [23] +2 -8	20 [23] +8 -2
16. Chinsali (16) - Mufulira (32)	10 [17] +1 -3 (DRC)	20 [14] -1 -3 (DRC)	
17. Pitauke (25) - Lusaka (65)		20 [10]	20 [15]
18. Sesheke (51) - Kabompo or Kalabo (42)	10 [16] +8 -6	20 [16] +6 -8	0 [18]
19. Mazabuka (63) - Nchelenge (11)	20 [25] -3 -3 (DRC)	+3	
20. Ndola (36) - Tanzania (Sp5)	20 [19] -3 -3 (DRC)		10 [32] +3
21. Solwezi (44) - Mozambique or Malawi (Sp4)	20 [23]		

Last Turn	172	169	169
Points from Races	68	62	53
Builds	-8 +1	-8 -1 -1 -1	+1 +1
Points Total	233	220	224

Builds:

BAMBI: (X16) - Kitwe; (H40) - I40; (M30) - - M32 - - Livingstone; (Mwinilunga) - - I12 {Angola}
MOSI OA TUNYA: (U24) - - W25; (F46) - - - Mpika; (Samfya) - - - B43 [-1 BEMBA] [-1 BEMBA] [-1 BAMBI]
BEMBA: No builds

Races for Round 10:

22. Mazabuka (63) - Botswana or Zimbabwe (Sp3) 23. Angola or Namibia (Sp2) - Nchelenge (11)
24. Kaoma (46) - Samfya or Lundazi (22) 25. Lusaka (65) - Mansa (21)
26. Livingstone (54) - Kasama (15) 27. Sesheke (51) - Ndola (35)
28. Solwezi (44) - Kitwe (34)
Enter up to 5 races and build up to 6 points of track.

The in-game map is available at <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2540ZM.jpg>

RAILWAY RIVALS ZAMBIA (RR2541ZM) ROUND 9

GM: Bob Gingell

All races go to the shortest route. A disaster for TOZ which falls further behind while ZITS despite high building costs closes the gap with WILBURSMITH whose sole entries in two races keeps it well ahead of the other companies. WILBURSMITH and ROGER finish off spurs. ROGER builds across a swollen river into the DRC while others improve connections - TOZ to Lusaka, ZITS to Namibia and WILBURSMITH to Livingstone.

GM note: Despite my reminder last round about the rainy season which should have alerted them, two players ordered river crossing builds thinking they cost 1 rather than 4.

Races for Round 9 (enter any 4):

15. (16-41): ZITS [31 to Miwinilunga] 20; TOZ [39 to Zambezi] 10 -4w-3d = 3; WILBURSMITH +4; DRC +3.
16. (24-54): ROGER [24] 20; ZITS [24] 10; WILBURSMITH [25] 0.
17. (31-66): WILBURSMITH [11] 20 -2t = 18; ZITS [12] 10; TOZ [17] 0 +2 = 2.
18. (43-#4): WILBURSMITH 20 -2t-5z = 13; ZITS +5; TOZ +2.
19. (53-11): ROGER [34] 20 -3d = 17; TOZ [36] 10 -3d = 7; DRC +6.
20. (61-26): WILBURSMITH 20 -5z = 15; ZITS +5.
21. (#3-32): ZITS [15 from Z27] 20 -2r = 18; ROGER [23 From Livingstone] 10 +2 = 12; TOZ [24 from Livingstone] 0.

Scores and builds (max 8 points):

WILBURSMITH (Brendan Whyte), black: 159 +50 -6 = 203.
(K43) - - - Isoka; (H24) - G25 - Mongu; (O31) - - - R29. [-8 +2 = -6]
ZITS (Richard Smith), blue: 124 +68 -14 = 178.
(K25) - - - H23 - G24 [-1w-1t]; (P32) - - N31 - M32 - L31* [-2r-1w-1t]. [-8 -6 = -14]
ROGER (Roger Trethewey), green: 118 +49 -5 = 162.
(O21) - - - - Kaoma; (Z9) ---- Y9*. [-8 +3 = -5]
ToZ (Michael Pargman), orange: 107 +14 -6 = 115.
(W19) - - - - - W25 [-1r]; (W22) - Kabwe. [-7 -1 +2 = -6]
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): 27 +9 = 36.
* Orders modified by GM to correct errors.

Races for Round 10 (enter any 4):

- 22. 11 (Nchelenge) – 23 (Mpika)
- 23. 21 (Mansa) – #5 (Tanzania)
- 24. 34 (Kitwe) – 16 (Chinsali)
- 25. 45 (Kasempa) – 36 (Ndola)
- 26. 53 (Livingstone) – 64 (Lusaka)
- 27. 61 (Choma) – 44 (Solwezi)
- 28. #1 (DR Congo) – 55 (Mumbwa)

Build allowance for Round 10: 6 points.

The in-game map is available at <https://variablepig.org/maps/rr/ingame/RR2541ZM.jpg>

BAG OF DUNGEON - ROUND 2



Our intrepid dungeoneers are Jim Reader, Chris Hibbert, and Bob Gingell.

Game rules were printed in TCD8 and are available at <https://variablepig.org/rules/bagofdungeon.html>

No fighting this time, but the characters now have a common known dungeon map and (somehow, telepathy?) know where the others are at all times.

Note that Sirrus cannot use the Vampire Teeth on an unwilling fellow adventurer until *The Ring* appears. The item could be used willingly to aid in a battle, however.

Report for Round 2

Turn order: Alendra, Cirrus, Torvok.

Alendra spends 2 APs to advance to the healing pool, but does not activate it. She sees a new monster ahead, but cannot tell what it is until it is encountered (and the GM draws from the bag).

Torvok spends 1 AP to advance one square to reveal more tiles, with a preference to the passageway to his right. He can see an item square nearby but can't make out what it is until it is encountered (and the GM draws from the bag).

Sirrus spends 2 APs to advance to the item tile (GM rummages in bag). He finds a set of *Vampire Teeth* which he places in his backpack. The item requires 2APs to activate and draws 5 health points from any other character anywhere in the dungeon. If the victim has less than 5 health they die and the balance is obtained from the new life, if any.

Round 3 Actions

Turn order: Sirrus, Torvok, Alendra.

Discovery: All characters automatically discover the two nearest unknown tiles (-2AP) - note that preference can be specified for use where there is a tie, otherwise random. The discovered tiles are shown on the current map.

Inventory: Characters may rearrange items (no AP) cost, and characters can also swap items and this requires conditional orders from both, unless they are on the same square at the start of the turn.

Move, Collect Items, Use Items, Combat: Characters can use some or all of their remaining APs moving to known tiles. Collecting items does not cost an AP, but using items usually does (cost on tile). Combat is always the last action but remaining APs can be used to deploy items and / or escape.

Barbarian

Your barbarian is a savage, mighty-thewed, and masterless warrior.

Actions: 5
Combat: 3 D6

Special: +1 to combat roll for every 3 points below maximum health (+1 at 7, +2 at 4, +3 at 1).

1	2	3
---	---	---

Lives

6	7	8	9	10
1	2	3	4	5

health

dead!	1	2	3	4	5	6*	7	8	9	10**	11	12	13
-------	---	---	---	---	---	----	---	---	---	------	----	----	----

Monster health

Torvok

aps

5
4
3
2
1

health

19
18
17
16
15
14

10 health
2 DICE +3

health potion
1 ap 1 use
Regain 2 dice of health

strength potion
1 ap 1 use
+1 dice to cbt for one fight

Cannot use OR

*take one item on kill **take two items on kill

Player: Jim Reader

Character: Torvok the Barbarian

Alendra the Elf

Alendra is fleet-footed and a skilled archer. She is a former Calen Taur watch commander.

Combat: 2 dice +1

Special: Dead-eye. Inflict an instant kill when you roll a 6 on a bow attack.

1	2	3
---	---	---

Lives

6	7	8	9	
1	2	3	4	5

health

dead!	1	2	3	4	5	6*	7	8	9	10**	11	12	13
-------	---	---	---	---	---	----	---	---	---	------	----	----	----

Monster health

Alendra

aps

6
5
4
3
2
1
0

7 health
1 DICE +4

magic shield
-2 damage

Backpack

*take one item on kill **take two items on kill

Player: Chris Hibbert

Character: Alendra the Elf

Sirrus the fighter

Sirrus is a skilled warrior and renowned blademaker, brave and capable in battle.

Combat: 2 dice +2

Special: Lethal Blow. Once per game you may double your combat roll result.

1	2	3
---	---	---

Lives

6	7	8	9	10
1	2	3	4	5

health

dead!	1	2	3	4	5	6*	7	8	9	10**	11	12	13
-------	---	---	---	---	---	----	---	---	---	------	----	----	----

Monster health

Sirrus

aps

5
4
3
2
1
0

9 health
2 DICE +2

morning star
+2 to cbt roll

Vampire teeth
Drain and gain 5 health from any adventurer*

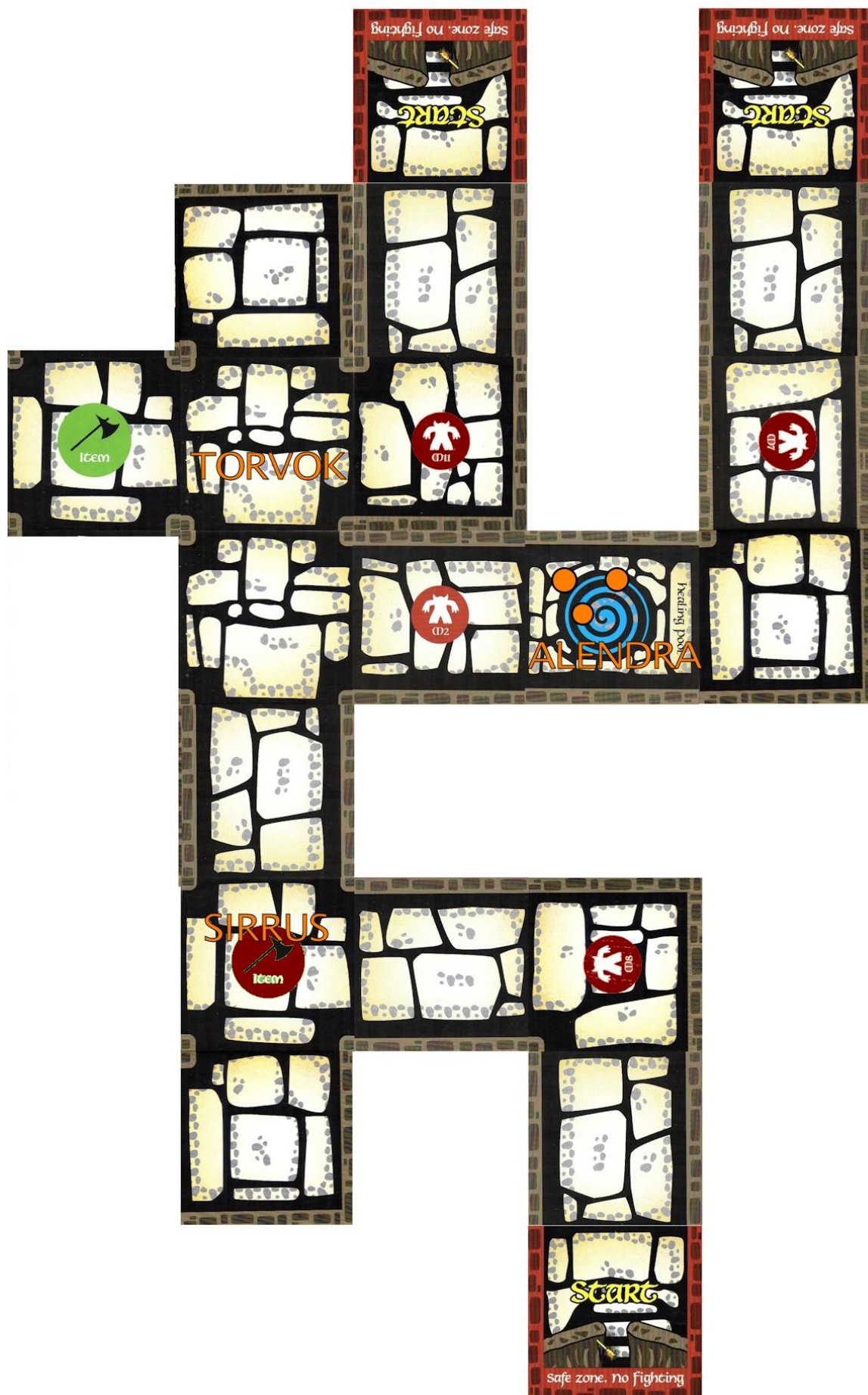
Back

*take one item on kill **take two items on kill

Player: Bob Gingell

Character: Sirrus the Fighter

Dungeon Map: (brown monsters and items are inactive)

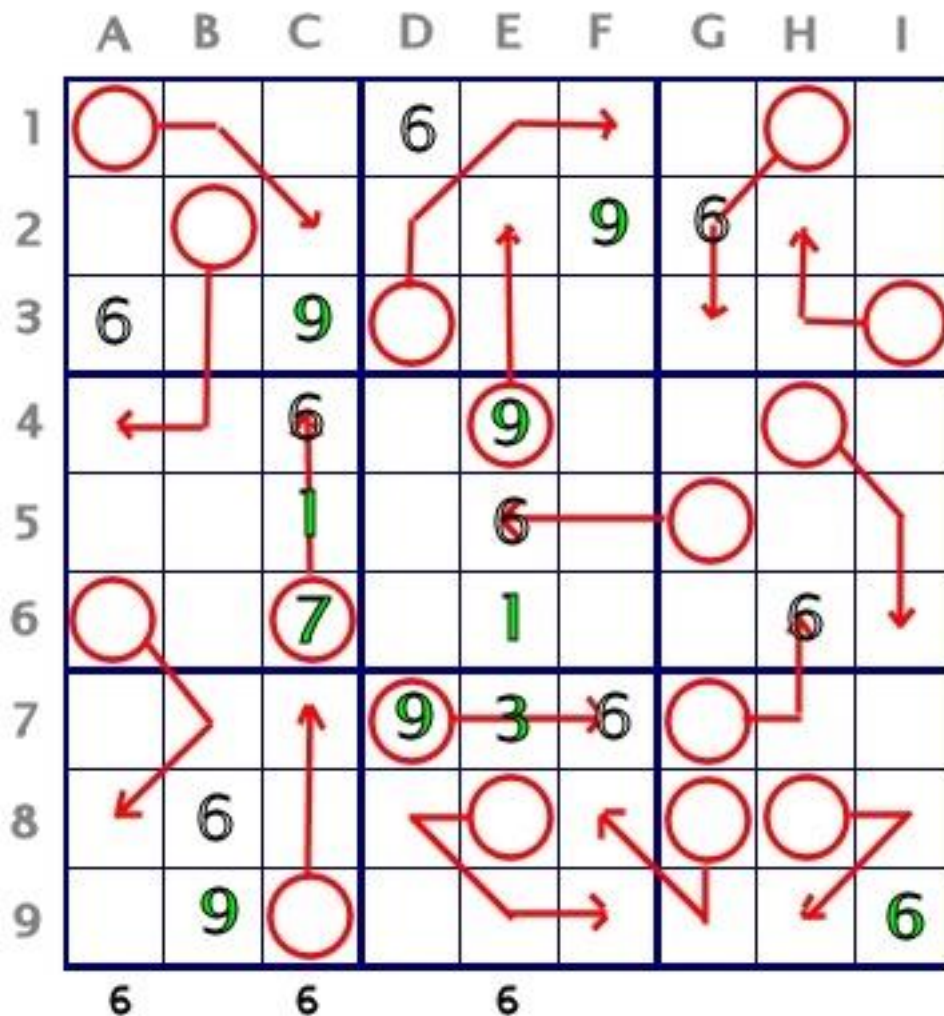


PUZZLE - THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST - ANSWER

This custom Sudoku is mainly an arrow puzzle, but three sandwich totals are given to help you!

Arrow Sudoku: The numbers on the line add up to the number in the circle. So the number in the H1 circle must be 7, 8 or 9 and the number on the point of the arrow must be 1, 2 or 3. It is possible for the same number to appear more than once in a line, provided the standard Sudoku rules (each 3x3 square, each column and each row contain the numbers 1-9) are obeyed.

Sandwich Sudoku: Each row and each column is allocated a number which represents the sum of the digits placed between 1 and 9. So **192345678** would be a 0 and **123456789** a 35. In this puzzle, only three numbers are given, all sixes, which must be from **169** or **1249**.



Chris Hibbert and Roger Trethewey solved it. The above picture shows the puzzle after processing the 3 Sandwich numbers. Doing this first is the key. When done (new numbers in green) it reduces the challenge to a not-too-difficult arrow puzzle.

Columns A, C, and E all have a sandwich value of 6. Combining the sandwich and arrow rules, you can see that the 1 and 9 can only go in one place in column C. It is impossible to place 1249 or 1429 and "no nines on lines" is an obvious rule. For column E, it's the same but the reverse "no ones in circles" rule applies. The 1 and 9 in column C constrain the options for column A. The 9 must be in A5 or A6 and the 1 in A8 or A9, which the 2 and 4 in between in either order. This allows you to place a 9 in B9.

The 9 in F2 is easy meat from the "no nines on lines" rule, and this then gives you the 9 in D7 and the 3 in E7. The 8 in the I9 corner is a freebee and probably should have been a start number. The rest of the puzzle can be solved by working the permutations of the arrows.



Issue 75

Parkrun 4 (1 of 4) - Richard sets off at quite a brisk pace to establish a lead. Bob P tucks in behind. Steve H and Dane make up the lead group. Andy and Howard head the next group. The rest of the runners are trying to sort themselves into position, causing them to run slightly further than the ideal line, but still have plenty of energy to spare, at this early stage.

Park Runner	Play	Turn SP	Lead/Tail	New Stamina	Time after 1k
Richard	12	12	4	$61-12+4=53$	4.48
Bob P	Track Richard	6	4	$60-6+4=58$	4.48
Steve H	11	11	0.5	$60-11+0.5=49.5$	4.49
Dane	2-11	11	0.5	$60-11+0.5=49.5$	4.49
Andy	6	6		$60-6=54$	4.54
Howard	5	5		$60-5=55$	4.55
Tom	1-4	4		$61-4=57$	4.56
Mike	1-4	4		$60-4=56$	4.56
John M	1-4	4		$60-4=56$	4.56
Brad	2-3	3		$60-3=57$	4.57
Roger	4-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Bob G	Track Roger	0	0.82	$61-0.82=60.18$	5.00
Martin	6-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Jim	5-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Chris	Track Jim	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Steve G	4-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Michael	6-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Allan	4-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Kevin	4-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
John H	6-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Paul	5-Fail	0	0.82	$60-0.82=59.18$	5.00
Parkwalker					5.01

Each stamina point used deducts 1 second from the standard time.

Each turn you can play any amount of your remaining stamina or can opt for one of the following strategies:

Track - If you are level or within 5 seconds of an opponent, you can select this option. You will run at the same pace, but only use half the stamina points used by the runner you are tracking.

Relax - Run at the same pace as your previous 1000 metres, but only use half the stamina points previously used.

Target - You may target any runner that is within 15 seconds ahead of you. You use the same stamina as them, but catch them up.

If any option fails (i.e. insufficient stamina points), it will not be used and you would then run a 5-minute 1k.

You cannot play the same strategy twice in a row.

If you are overtaken at any point 1 stamina point is deducted from your total.

If you are in the lead, you gain 5 stamina, second 3 stamina, third 1 stamina.

If you are last you lose 5 stamina, second last 3 stamina, third last 1 stamina.

Lyrics 1 of 5 – 1 point will be added, to your singer and song points, should you get the theme.

1 - Some call me the gangster of love/Some people call me Maurice / Cause I speak of the pompitous of love (1973) **The Joker – The Steve Miller Band** (John Hopkins, Richard Smith, Jim Reader, Paul Evans (singer only), Brendan Whyte (song only), Martin Walker, Bob Pitman, Steve Guest)

2 - She's pretty as a daisy, But look out man, she's crazy! / She'll really do you in, If you let her get under your skin! (1959) **Poison Ivy – The Coasters** (John Hopkins, Richard Smith (song only), Jim Reader (song only), Paul Evans (song only))

3 - Say your prayers, little one / Don't forget, my son / To include everyone / I tuck you in, warm within, keep you free from sin (1991) **Enter Sandman – Metallica** (John Hopkins, Richard Smith, Jim Reader)

4 - Every day is like survival (survival) / You're my lover (my lover), not my rival / Every day is like survival (survival) / You're my lover (my lover), not my rival (1983) **Karma Chameleon – Culture Club** (John Hopkins, Richard Smith, Jim Reader, Dane Maslen, Paul Evans, Brendan Whyte, Steve Guest)

5 - You're an outlaw lover and I'm after your hide / Well you ain't so strong, won't be long 'til your hands are tied

Tonight I'm gonna take you in / Dead or Alive (1989) **Just Like Jessie James – Cher** (Martin Walker singer only)

6 - Xxxx Xxxx, don't leave me hanging on the line / I knew you when you had no one to talk to / Now you're moving in high society / Don't forget I know secrets about you (1983) **Baby Jane – Rod Stewart** (John Hopkins, Martin Walker, Bob Pitman, Steve Guest)

7 - The man with the midas touch / A spider's touch / Such a cold finger / Beckons you to enter his web of sin / But don't go in (1965) **Goldfinger – Shirley Bassey** (John Hopkins, Tom Howell (song only), Richard Smith, Dane Maslen, Paul Evans, Brendan Whyte, Chris Hibbert (song only), Martin Walker, Bob Pitman, Steve Guest))

8 - You fooled me with your kisses / You cheated and you schemed / Heaven knows how you lied to me / You're not the way you seemed (1968) **(You're the) Devil in Disguise – Elvis** (John Hopkins (singer only))

9 - Beelzebub has a devil put aside for me, for me, for me / So you think you can stone me and spit in my eye? (1975) **Bohemian Rhapsody – Queen** (Richard Smith, Jim Reader, Dane Maslen, Paul Evans, Brendan Whyte, Martin Walker, Bob Pitman, Steve Guest)

10 - Clowns to the left of me / Jokers to the right (1972) **Stuck in the Middle with you – Steelers Wheel** (John Hopkins, Richard Smith, Jim Reader, Dane Maslen (song only), Paul Evans, Brendan Whyte (song only), Martin Walker, Bob Pitman, Steve Guest)

Theme – Anti Heroes/Villains (Richard Smith, Martin Walker, Brendan Whyte, Steve Guest)

John Hopkins 17

Steve Guest 15

Richard Smith 14

Martin Walker 12

Jim Reader 11

Paul Evans 10

Bob Pitman 10

Brendan Whyte 9

Dane Maslen 7

Chris Hibbert 1

Tom Howell 1

Paul - 1 Is the Steve Miller Band, but I can't remember the title. (Not Gangster of Love, though.) And the theme is... there's a theme? *GM Logic impeccable, points awarded nil.*

Brendan - The Joker/ Steve someone

5 - You're an outlaw lover and I'm after your hide / Well you ain't so strong, won't be long 'til your hands are tied / Tonight I'm gonna take you in / Dead or Alive (1989) - Dead or alive / Guns n Roses

6 - Xxxx Xxxx, don't leave me hanging on the line / I knew you when you had no one to talk to / Now you're moving in high society / Don't forget I know secrets about you (1983) - You're so vain / Carly Simon

9 - Beelzebub has a devil put aside for me, for me, for me / So you think you can stone me and spit in my eye? (1975) Bohemian rhapsody/ Queen (yes, you were right, I do hate this song, and band)

10 - Clowns to the left of me / Jokers to the right (1972)

Stuck in the middle with you/ Bob Dylan

Theme: false identities – *GM Not really, but close enough to scrape a point*

Chris - 2. Love potion Number 9

8 Stevie Nicks

9 I'm going to guess The Who, but I don't have a lot of confidence in this

I recognize 1 and 10, too, but can't put any names to them.

Bob P – Theme = They all have been used in films? *GM They have, but just a little too general for a point.*

John – 5 "Heartbreak Hotel", sung by the King *GM point given as I'm sure King Charles has released a version*

Richard – 2 Poison Ivy by (can't remember)

Theme: Comic book villains or movie villains. The first four are definitely from comics but Goldfinger is a movie villain (maybe in a comic too?), not sure about Beelzebub but sounds plausible for either. And of course loads of comics have been made into movies, so I'll plump for movie villains. *GM much simpler, they are antagonists, point still given as you definitely got the theme.*

Dane - 10 STUCK IN THE MIDDLE WITH YOU by STEELEYE SPAN. When I got 7 and 10, I thought I was onto a theme, but alas 4 and 9 have blown it out of the water and left me baffled.

Lyrics 2 of 5 – *Right, let's get it out of the way. This is the next set, that I suspect will not be very popular. 1 point will be added, to your singer and song points, should you get the theme. You may have spotted there are eleven this time, which is needed so the theme can be applied.*

1 - I'm going under, and this time, I fear there's no one to save me / This all-or-nothing really got a way of driving me crazy (2019)

2- Yeah, I'm gonna take my horse to the xxx xxxx xxxx / I'm gonna ride 'til I can't no more (2018)

3 – Yeah / I've been tryna call / I've been on my own for long enough (2020)

4 - One, two, three, four / Ooh-ooh, ooh-ooh-ooh / Every time you come around, you know I can't say no / Every time the sun goes down, I let you take control (2021)

5- If you wanna run away with me, I know a galaxy / And I can take you for a ride/I had a premonition that we fell into a rhythm / Where the music don't stop for life (2021)

6 - Holdin' me back / Gravity's holdin' me back / I want you to hold out the palm of your hand / Why don't we leave it at that? (2022)

7 - Road shimmer wigglin' the vision / Heat, xxxx xxxxx, I'm swimmin' in a mirror / Road shimmer wigglin' the vision / Heat, xxxx xxxxx, I'm swimmin' in a (2020)

8 - We were good, we were gold / Kinda dream that can't be sold / We were right 'til we weren't / Built a home and watched it burn (2023)

9 - Xxxx xxxxx we let the liquor talk / I can't remember everything we said but we said it all / You told me that you wish I was somebody you never met (2023)

10 - As you promised me that I was more than all the miles combined / You must have had yourself a change of heart like halfway through the drive (2022)

11 - Something's got a hold of me lately / No, I don't know myself anymore / Feels like the walls are all closing in / And the devil's knocking at my door, whoa (2023)

6 Nimmit! It's all over. I made the mistake of not reporting who was playing what number on the first adjudication. After thinking about it I'm not sure it makes much difference, other than people can check through the results a lot easier. Should we play another game, please let me know, which method you would prefer. I'll put the game on the waiting list for 3 to 10 players

Hand C						Score	
A	10	16	19	29		6	
B	23	26				2	Jim takes 28 41 44 49 for 8
C	88	97				6	
D	33	34	38	63	85	10	

Cards played 1 2 4 6 10 11 13 16 18 19 23 25 26 28 29 33 34 35 38 40 41 44 46 47 48 49 51 52 53 55 56 62 63 68 69 70 71 72 78 85 87 88 89 90 91 94 98 99

Points taken: Kev 68 Bob 61 Dane 55 Jim 46 Richard 24

Hand C						Score	
A	79	80				4	Jim takes 10 16 19 29 74 for 6
B	17	27				2	Dane takes 23 26 for 2
C	88	97				6	
D	33	34	38	63	85	10	

Cards played 1 2 4 6 10 11 13 16 17 18 19 25 27 28 29 33 34 35 38 40 41 44 46 47 48 49 51 52 53 55 56 62 63 68 69 70 71 72 74 78 79 80 87 88 89 90 91 94 98 99

Points taken: Kev 68 Bob 61 Dane 57 Jim 52 **Richard 24 Winner**

Fragments – Prominent People (14/50) – Only one special can be played each turn. The specials for this game are: Word breakdown, quarter century of year of birth or what they are famous for e.g. if it was David Beckham, you would get the reply, footballer. It is an all-reader game, so you can make a play at any time. There are no restrictions on any research you wish to undertake.

As the font produces the similar symbol for capital eye and small el, fragment 5 starts with capital eye followed by a small el.

Person 1 ***a* t*e*o m**n* *od*I 20 **i** to**h ***o* l** l* 40 *e*s* *c**i *s**n **i*h 60 **a*t *e**d **tw* *k**t 80 **m*o* * (86 letters, 7 points) (not Charlie Chaplin, Neil Armstrong, Mark Twain, Buzz Aldrin, Liz Truss)

Person 2 *n*e* t**p* o**l* y **e* 20 or*** m **t* a**u* e ***t 40 i**E* q *a*s **s** a*e* (59 letters, 7 points) (not Jack the Ripper, Ken Jennings)

Person 3 *b**f *s**n *h*** M***d 20 ***e* it**h **e** ***** 40 D***o* (46 letters 8 points)

Person 4 ***s* *t**n ***r* *i**n 20 ****h *****t *****a **s** 40 *a*** a*son th**i **d** 60 ****i ** (67 letters 8 points) (not Pocahontas)

Person 5 l'l**e **** There is an apostrophe after the first letter (9 letters 9 points) (not Donald Trump)

Person 6 l***** t***r ***** y***** 20 o***** s***** d***** f***** 40 *e*** *i**a ***n* *s*** 60 r***** *s*** r***** a**g* 80 ***** l e***** **l* *q*** 100 ***** u **e** ***** *s*** 120 *****t ***** (130 letters 9 points)

Person 7 ***** *****t *a*** ***** 20 ***** *****t* ***** 40 *****t *o*o* ***** ** (58 letters 10 points)

Person 8 ***** *a*** ***** *****r 20 ***** n***** ***** ***** 40 s***** *w*** *****a ** (57 letters 10 points)

A couple of people have begun their quest to reach 50 points

Fragment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Richard		8									8
Bob	8	8									16

Here is the AI designed game I mentioned last issue. I've done a few tweaks, but the original design wasn't too bad.

The Serpent's Gambit

The game's premise, you are a cunning merchant attempting to amass a fortune by dealing in certain goods. To win, you must collect a set amount of gold before your rivals. The cards represent the type of goods you acquire, while a dice roll determines the success of your ventures.

Game components

Players: 2 to 4 competitors.

3 decks of cards, which are:

Common Goods: 12 cards with values from 1 to 3.

Rare goods 3 cards with the value from 4 to 6.

Skill Cards: 2 x number of players, cards detailing a special ability.

Standard six-sided dice (d6).

Game setup

Starting wealth: Each player begins with 10 Gold.

Set up: The GM shuffles the common goods deck and deals each player one random card.

The game turn

The GM rolls a D6, this roll applies to all players for that turn.

Player actions: Each turn, players submit one of three orders

1 Acquire: You attempt to acquire a common or rare, good.

Example Order: "ACQUIRE Common."

GM Action: The GM draws a new card for you.

Result: If the GM roll is equal or higher than the value of the good the player gains the good.

2 Sell Goods: You attempt to sell one or more cards from your inventory.

Order: "SELL for x"

You must choose one card to sell. You can choose to bluff and say the card's value is higher than it is. The GM announces your intention to the other players, revealing only the bluff value.

Bluffing: Other players can challenge your value. If no one challenges you, you get your declared gold. If you are challenged, the GM reveals the card's real value. Challenges do not count as an order.

If your value was false: You get nothing for the sale and pay a penalty of 3 gold to the challenging player.

If your value was true: You receive the full value, and the challenging player pays you a penalty of 3 gold.

3 Gain Skill Card:

Order: "Gain Skill."

If the GM roll is 2 or higher, you gain the skill card.

Some skill cards will be revealed once they have been used.

Winning the game

The first player to accumulate 25 or more gold wins the game. If 2 or more players achieve this on the same turn any player with the most gold will win.

Postscript – Steve came up with an excellent parkrun suggestion - I wonder whether it would be interesting to add 6 AI runners each having a separate round 1 NMR start? *I might use this at some stage, either in parkrun or in another AI generated game.*

I asked Google AI to design a PBM parkrun game lasting 4 turns. This is what it came up with.

Here is a simple, 4-turn Play By Mail/Mobile (PBM) parkrun game called "Pacer's Pursuit", where the goal is to achieve a Personal Best (PB) by strategically managing your energy and pace over the 5k course.

Game Overview

Objective: Finish the 5km parkrun in the fastest time possible.

Players: 1 or more (competitive if more).

Duration: Exactly 4 turns. The 5km course is split into 4 segments.

Mechanic: Players choose a strategy each turn and a result (pace/time) is calculated and shared with the other players (or the game master).

Game Components

Player Profile: Each player starts with 10 Stamina Points (SP) and a 'Base Pace' (e.g., 6 minutes per kilometer, for a target time of 30:00).

Course: 4 segments of approximately 1.25 km each.

Turns: 4 turns representing the progress through the course.

Turn Mechanics

At the start of each turn, players privately decide on one of the following strategies and how many Stamina Points (SP) to use (if applicable) for that segment. The game master processes all player choices and announces the results (pace and position) for that segment.

Strategies (Choose One per Turn)

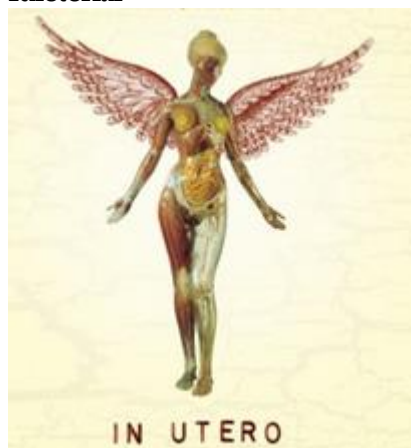
Strategy	Effect	Stamina Cost	Description
Push	Deduct 1 second from Base Pace for every 1 SP used. Max 5 SP per turn.	1-5 SP	Go for it and try to gain time.
Pace	Maintain Base Pace (or previous turn's pace).	0 SP	Run at a consistent effort.
Recover	Add 10 seconds to current pace, but gain 2 SP.	-2 SP (gain)	Take it easy and build energy for later.
Track	Match the pace of a specified runner ahead of you.	Half the target's SP use (min 1 SP)	Conserve energy by running with someone else.

You get the idea, I'll be contacting my lawyers to sue Google.

THE TANGERINE TERROR #82/I AM THE KURIOUS KUMQUAT #12

The "Impending Grandpa" Issue

Idiotorial



Daughter-in-law was due last Saturday (1st November), but the little ruffian is sitting tight in his warm special place for now.

First came the declining short-range vision, then senior railcard, and now I'm supposed to know how to know how to build model railways for grandchildren. I thought things would get easier rather than harder at this stage in life.

Away from the nearly burgeoning family tree, managed to sneak in a trip to the latest HandyCon in Milton Keynes. Got some of my board gaming mojo back. Some new things that people brought back from Essen, but some old favourites too :

Arkham Horror LCG, Fate Of The Fellowship, L'Oaf, Seas Of Strife, Challengers!, Wondrous Creatures, House Of Fado, Mongoose, Movie Tricks, Sanctuary, Ark Nova, Movie Fight, Botanicus.

DEAD LETTER OFFICE

Chris Hibbert (on protests)

I went to the local iteration of the "No Kings" Rally earlier in the month. I'm neither a Democrat nor a Republican, I'm a libertarian. The crowd was definitely all left-leaning to various extents, but the protest focused on the "no kings" theme. Very few far-left (socialist, woke, etc.) signs. Lots of American flags, and support for free speech, opposition to ICE, and anti-authoritarian themes. It was the first protest I've been to in at least 30 years. I liked the tenor of the crowd.

Auntie Tangerine

We should definitely protest more often. It gets us out of the house, helps us to meet people, and importantly, it reminds the fuckers in charge that they can't take us for granted. Could have done with slightly better weather for ours.

Allan Stagg (on having better weather for ours)

Hope all is well, and that you have not had too much rain. We have not had as much as was forecast for today, but I have had my hair cut, and that usually brings out the worst in the weather.

Auntie Tangerine

Yep. Haircut on Monday, rain all week. Still, it's pretty mild, so it's warm enough indoors that we've not had the heating on here yet.

Chris Hibbert (on being cold indoors)

I follow the San Jose Sharks, who play hockey. Last year they started the season with 10 straight losses, and finished in last place for the second season in a row. They're already doing better this year, having won 2 of their first 10 games. They earned high draft picks with those losing seasons, and now have a couple of players who are exciting to watch. They're still working on consistency and defense, but it should be a more interesting season.

Auntie Tangerine

It's always good to see improvements, even if they're small ones. As long as the people running the teams can also see where they're going wrong

Richard Smith (on seeing where I've gone wrong)

I've penned a couple of game end statements, feel free to ignore them as you didn't ask for any.

Auntie Tangerine

Don't worry, I didn't ask for Wham to be Christmas number 1 for a third year in a row or a second round FA Cup exit away at the Franchise FC, but I bet I'm going to get them.

HR Nardiello/JO Lochhead GAME END STATEMENTS

Richard (What's In Howard's Record Collection) : Quite a fun little game though it lacks replayability for obvious reasons. I suppose a bit like Fragments you could do different themes such as books or movies. The Talking Heads boob may have cost me the game - you hinted that you had a Talking Heads album but not one the two guessed, so I tried another - d'oh!

Richard (Just One) : It is an entertaining game and works nicely postally. I think I was lucky with the ones I had to guess, with most of them being quite easy. The only one I got wrong was dwarf for which Brendan had submitted halfling which is another word for hobbit. The other clue word was Gloin which I remembered was a character in The Hobbit, but (without Googling) didn't know he was a dwarf (Tolkien fans such as Nick Kinzett may gasp at my ignorance).

H (Just One) : I think it worked OK, but it loses a lot of the "fun" that playing face-to-face generates.

DW Kitching COMMUNAL DON'T WORDLE FINAL

The Wordle reaper finally catches up with Bob and Allan, but their 10 point hauls for JOLLY and WAVER are good enough to propel them to 44 points a share of the win with Mike. Well done all three of you. Game end statements please. I have thoughts about it.

	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3	Word 4	Word 5	Word 6	Word 7	Word 8	Total	Alive
Mike	7	2	1	6	7	8	8	5	44	0
Bob	6	2	3	5	8	5	10	5	44	0
Allan	5	4	2	3	7	10	10	3	44	0
Richard	5	5	4	6	3	7	1	5	36	0
Brendan	5	2	1	5	7	2	8	6	36	0
Chris	6	5	4	2	2	8	7	1	35	0
Roger	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	6	24	0

FUTURE SHOCK

Don't Wordle is over. Still on the fence about whether to offer another. **Just One** needs Just Three more.

NG Mvoto THE NAME OF THE GAME ROUND 9

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total
Paul Evans	2	3	3	1	2	0	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	1	3	2	0	3			34
Richard Smith	0	2	2	0	2	0	3	2	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	3	3			34
Allan Stagg	0	0	3	1	2	1	2	3	2	1	3	2	3	2	3	0	0	3			31
Brendan Whyte	3	2	1	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	0			18
Brad Martin	0	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			6
Tom Howell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0
Steve Guest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0

I was smugly pleased that Richard managed to get #17 from the most obscure clue in the world. Took me a while to screenshot just the right picture from the video. A good round for him takes him into joint first. Everyone who entered got something at least.

#13 : Was Happy Families

#14 : Was Western Legends

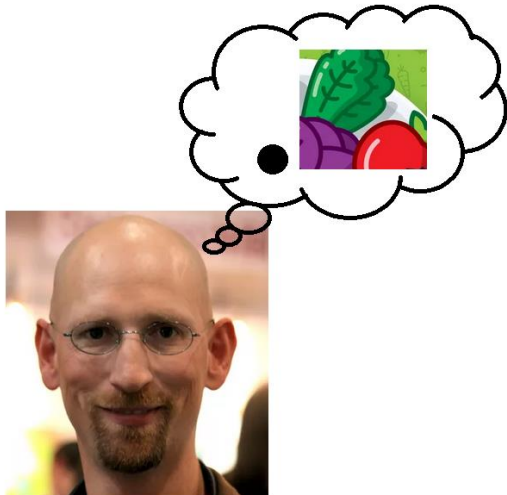
#15 : Not Suppenkasper, The Garden Game, The Crying Game

#16 : Not Suppenkasper, Carnivore, Salad Master, Bag Of Chips, Shove Ha'penny

#17 : Not Thirst

#18 : Not A Gest Of Robin Hood

GAME 15 (1 VP)



GAME 16 (1 VP)



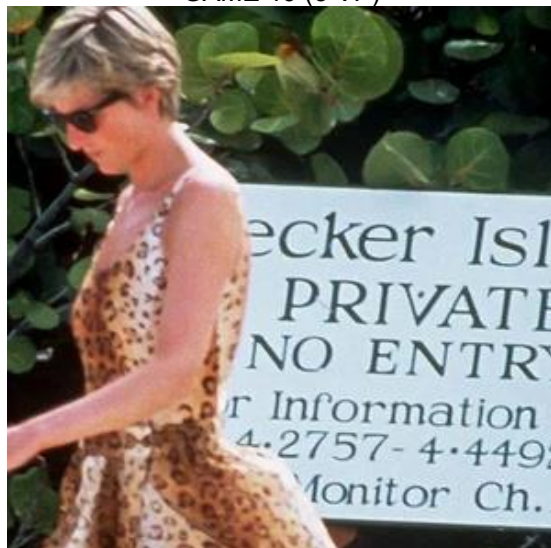
GAME 17 (2 VP)



GAME 18 (2 VP)



GAME 19 (3 VP)



GAME 20 (3 VP)



SubPAR 12

Pennsylvania Ramblings



We Are Young

Hannah and Michael visited last month and bought Kyler with them for the first time. We had a great time being grandparents, taking him to an Ice Hockey game, playing board games, taking him to the park and the Crayola factory where we could make our own crayons.

Operation Mindcrime

After a fun afternoon board gaming with friends, Jacqueline and I drove out to Harrisburg to see Geoff Tate, the former lead singer of Queensryche perform the whole of the Operation Mindcrime album live. This was a great show, and Geoff hasn't lost his voice. Sadly, we couldn't stay for the encores as Harrisburg is about 100 miles away and I had a business trip the following morning. We did also have an excellent steak dinner at a restaurant just outside the XL Live venue.

Time Warp

Theatre season is approaching again and we couldn't pass up an opportunity to see "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" on stage. The audience was encouraged to dress up and join in and were given some props on arrival to help. Frankie Grande (Ariana's brother) was excellent in the role of Frank N'Furter and had a wonderful time hamming it up.

Walk Awhile

Julie Taylor, one of the founding members of the Andover Youth Hostelling group, died recently. She introduced Jacqueline to the group as a teenager, where she met many friends and ultimately me at a hostel in Malvern. We are still in touch with many of the former hostelling group members. Julie was a wonderful lady, always smiling and laughing, a keen walker and passionate about preserving the group photos and memories. She will be greatly missed.

Shelter from the Rain

The 2026 season at Bethlehem Emergency Shelter opened this week and we started our bi-weekly support this Thursday. There were nearly 50 guests and more are expected as camp clearances in the Lehigh Valley continue.

Railway Rivals (Senegal and Gambia) - RR2556SG

Round Four

Correction: I missed COUER's 3c build V10 – V9 from the map last round. This was a parallel build alongside SETI so COUER should have paid another 3 to SETI.

COUER
Steve Ham
Purple

4a) 5. (V9) – W9 - X8: (V12) - V13,
4b) 3. (V13) – V14 – V15 - V16,
4c) 4. (V16) – V17 – V18 – V19 - V20.
BANK: 32 – 3 (correction) – 2 (ROGER) – 1 + 1 (BOGGER) = 27

SETI 4a) 5. (V8) – W8 - BIGNONA - - - ZIGUINCHOR,
 Richard Smith 4b) 3. (D9) – RICHARD TOLL: (V7) - V6 – Banjul,
 Blue 4c) 4. (M9) – Touba: (V6) - V5 (Zr): Kaolack – Q8 – Foundiougne.
 BANK: 32 + 3 (correction) + 3 + 6 + 6 – 2 (BOGGER) = 48

ROGER 4a) 5. (S14) - - - - - R13,
 Roger Trethewey 4b) 3. (R13) - Q13 – P13 – Kaffrine,
 Black 4c) 4. (Q13) – Q12 – Q11 - Q10 - P9.
 BANK: 53 + 2 (COUER) = 55

BOGGER 4a) 5. (W20) - VELINGARA - X18 - Y18 / Guinea-Bissau: (P21) - P22 – GOUDIN,
 Bob Gingell 4b) 3. (Goudin) - O24 - N24; (O9) - Kaolack
 Brown 4c) 4. (Kaolack) - Q8 - Q7 - M'BOUR: (Q8) - Foundiougne
 BANK: 62 + 3 + 3 + 3 - 1 + 1 (COUER) + 2 (SETI) = 73

The fifth-round die rolls are 5a) 4, 5b) 3, and 5c) 3. For clarity, COUER and SETI have built the now built the bridge. ROGER has bridged the Gambia river between U21 and U22 and between 14 and R13. BOGGER has bridged the Gambia river between U21 and T21.

Railway Rivals (Estonia) - RR2542EE2

Round Seven

	ARVO Richard <i>Blue</i>	BENDY Bob <i>Black</i>	ROGER Roger <i>Green</i>	MARS John <i>Orange</i>	ET Michael <i>Red</i>
1. Johvi (14) - Kunda / Narva-Joesuu (21)	0 - 3	20 + 3 + 4			10 - 4
2. Turi / Poitsamaa (42) - Narva (12)		15 + 5			15 - 5
3. Sweden (Sp2) - Tootsi / Sindi (56)			+ 1 + 1	20 - 1	10 - 1
4. Tallinn (62) - Voru (34)			20	10	
5. Parnu (54) - Kilingi-Nomme / Torva (43)				20	
6. Tartu (32) - Kivoli / Mustvee (26)	20 + 1	10 - 1 - 1	+ 1		
7. Keila (64) - Lake Resort (Sp6)	20 - 4 - 1	+ 4			+ 1

Points from last round	36	66	52	49	40
Points from races	33	59	23	49	26
Build Costs	- 12 - 1 + 1 - 3 + 1 - 1 - 1 + 1	- 12 + 1 - 1 + 2 - 1	- 12 + 3 - 1 - 2 - 1 + 1 + 1	- 12 + 3 + 1 + 1 - 1 - 1	- 12 + 1 - 1 + 1 - 1 - 1
Corrections	Happily, none this round				
Total	54	114	64	89	53

ARVO: (Y29) - X28 - W28 - V28: (J51) – I52 – H52 - G53: (N63) – N64 - N65:
 (D63) – D64 – D65 - D66: (W8) - Nehra.

BENDY: (A53) - Z19 - Z20 - Z21 - Z22 - Viljandi - Y24 -X24 - W25 - W26 - W27 - W28: (W25) - V25.

ROGER: (F53) – F52 – F51 – F50 – F49 – F48 - F47 - G47 – G46 – G45 – G44 - G43 - H42.

MARS: (Keila) – K7 - PALDISKI: (Rapla) – R13 – S14 – T14 – U15 – V15 - W16 – Turi:
 (W16) – X15 – Y15 - Z14.

ET: (O41) - Kohtla-Jarve: (B57) – B58 – B59 – B60 – B61 – B62 – B63 – B64 - B65:
 (P20) - P21 - O22 - N22.

The second set of races is

- 8. Tapa or Tamasalu (23) - Paldiski or Saue (65):
- 10. Tartu (31) - Kohtla-Jarve (16):
- 12. Valga (46) - Western Islands (Sp1):
- 14. Lihula or Rummu (52) - Maardu (66)

- 9. Tabivere or Anstala (33) - Latvia (Sp5)
- 11. Kohtla-Jarve (15) - Haapsalu (51)
- 13. Jogeva (25) - Moisakula (45)

Enter up to 4 races and build up to 12 points

Railway Rivals (Zambia) - RR2545ZM

Round Nine

Correction: ACR's builds cost 12 last round, not 9 as reported. I missed a build over a river.

Race	ACR <i>Brad Martin</i> Blue	PEAR <i>Kev Lee</i> Purple	MOSI <i>Steve Guest</i> Orange
15. Chinsali (16) - Kitwe (34)		10	20 - 3 (DRC)
16. Chingola (31) - Lusaka (64)	20	10 + 2	0 - 2
17. Tanzania (Sp5) - Mpika (23)	10	20	
18. Botswana or Zimbabwe (Sp3) - Nchelenge (11)			20 - 3 (DRC)
19. Mansa (21) - Kaoma (46)	+ 1	20 - 3 (DRC) - 1 - 5	+ 5
20. Lusaka (66) - Kataba (52)	10 + 4		20 - 4
21. Solwezi (44) - Sesheke (51)	20 + 2		10 - 2

Points from Last Round	205	150	183
Points from Races	67	53	61
Build Costs	0	- 3	0
Corrections	- 3	0	0
Total	269	200	244

ACR: No builds
PEAR: (Y25) - Z25 - Z26 - Z27 / Zimbabwe
MOSI: No builds

The fourth set of races is

- 22. Solwezi (44) - Kitwe (34):
- 24. Mansa (21) - Kasama (15):
- 26. Lusaka (66) - Mozambique or Malawi (Sp4):
- 28. Choma (61) - Livingstone (53)
- 23. Kaoma (46) - Samfya or Lundazi (22)
- 25. Mufulira (32) - Tanzania (Sp5)
- 27. Nakonde (13) - Sesheke (51)

Enter up to 5 (five) races and build up to 8 points of track.

Railway Rivals (Bhutan) - RR2552BT

Game Start

Our rivals for this new game are –

Roger Trethewey: Company Name: Right Old Git Enjoys Rivals (ROGER)
 Color: Black
 Start: Gelephu (1st choice)

John Walker: Company Name: Building Up Down Definitely Has Advantages (BUDDHA)
 Color: Red
 Start: Phuntsholing (1st choice)

Chris Hibbert: Company Name: Dzong
 Color: Yellow
 Start: Samdrup Johnkhar (2nd choice)

The first-round die rolls are 1a) 3, 1b) 5, and 1c) 5.

Railway Rivals (Durham 1826) - RR2571DH

Game Start

It's 1826 and time to expand the Stockton and Darlington line, which is being sold off. See <https://variablepiq.org/maps/rr/durhamrr.html> . Four rival companies start with £20 each and must bid for sections of the existing (grey) track as their start (instead of a town):

A: Y21/Y24 to Shildon
B: Shildon to Darlington
C: G66 to P66
D: Eaglescliffe to Stockton

- No bonuses are awarded for any of the towns on the existing line.
- Bids are made for choice order e.g. BCDA bid 9. Max 20.
- Ties are resolved randomly, losers get a free fast track token.
- These can be purchased at any time (from balance) during the game but must be applied to track as it's built. The cost is 10/- per half-hex.
- On unupgraded sections of track, 5s rolled become 4s during a race.
- Track cannot be built outside of Country Durham except for a half-hex over the border for specials.
- Minimum race length 5 hexes.

10/- = 0.5 units for the benefit of non-Brits. Our rivals for this new game are Brad Martin, Bob Gingell, Roger Trethewey and Richard Smith. Please can you send your company names, colour preferences and opening bids (these can be provisional) for next turn. This is a sealed auction – Richard has given an example below:

Alice bids 10 for ABCD, Bill bids 12 for CDBA, Carol bids 8 for ADCB and Dave bids 8 for CBAD. The GM flips a coin between Carol and Dave, and Carol wins so she gets third choice and Dave 4th plus a free fast track token.

Bill is then allocated C, Alice A, Carol D and Dave B, plus the token.

Bus Boss (Farnham and Aldershot) - BB422FAL

Round Three

The Shepherd and Flock Roundabout is so big, there are a few houses inside the roundabout plus the eponymous pub. BANG builds along the route of my old paperbound, although it was not possible to connect this when I was a teenager.

BANG	Sandy Hill - Beacon Hill: Farnham Town Centre - Farnham Station
Bob Gingell	96 – 12 = 84
Colour: Black	

CHAMPS	Shepherd and Flock - Runfold; The Rec - Hale; Heath End - Dollis Hill
Brad Martin	96 – 12 = 84
Colour: Brown	

ROGER	North Town - Lido - Badshot Lea
Roger Trethewey	94 – 11 = 83
Colour: Green	

FAB	Upper Hale - The Rec - Hale - Shepherd and Flock
Richard Smith	97 – 12 = 85
Colour: Blue	

FEAR	Weybourne – Aldershot Station: Wrecclesham - Rowledge
Kev Lee	97 – 11 = 86
Colour: Red	

The build order for round 4 is Brad, Roger, Richard, Kevin and Bob. Note that the round 6 build order will be based on highest to lowest points (i.e. the person that has built the least will go first).

For in-game maps go to <https://variablepig.org/#resources>

Locomotion Railway Museum, Shildon

Report and photos by Bob Gingell

I visited this part of the National Railway Museum on 23rd October so missed the celebrations and train rides of 27th September which was the 200-year anniversary of the first passenger steam train journey. However, there was lots to see and it was well worth visiting. First, a bit of history...



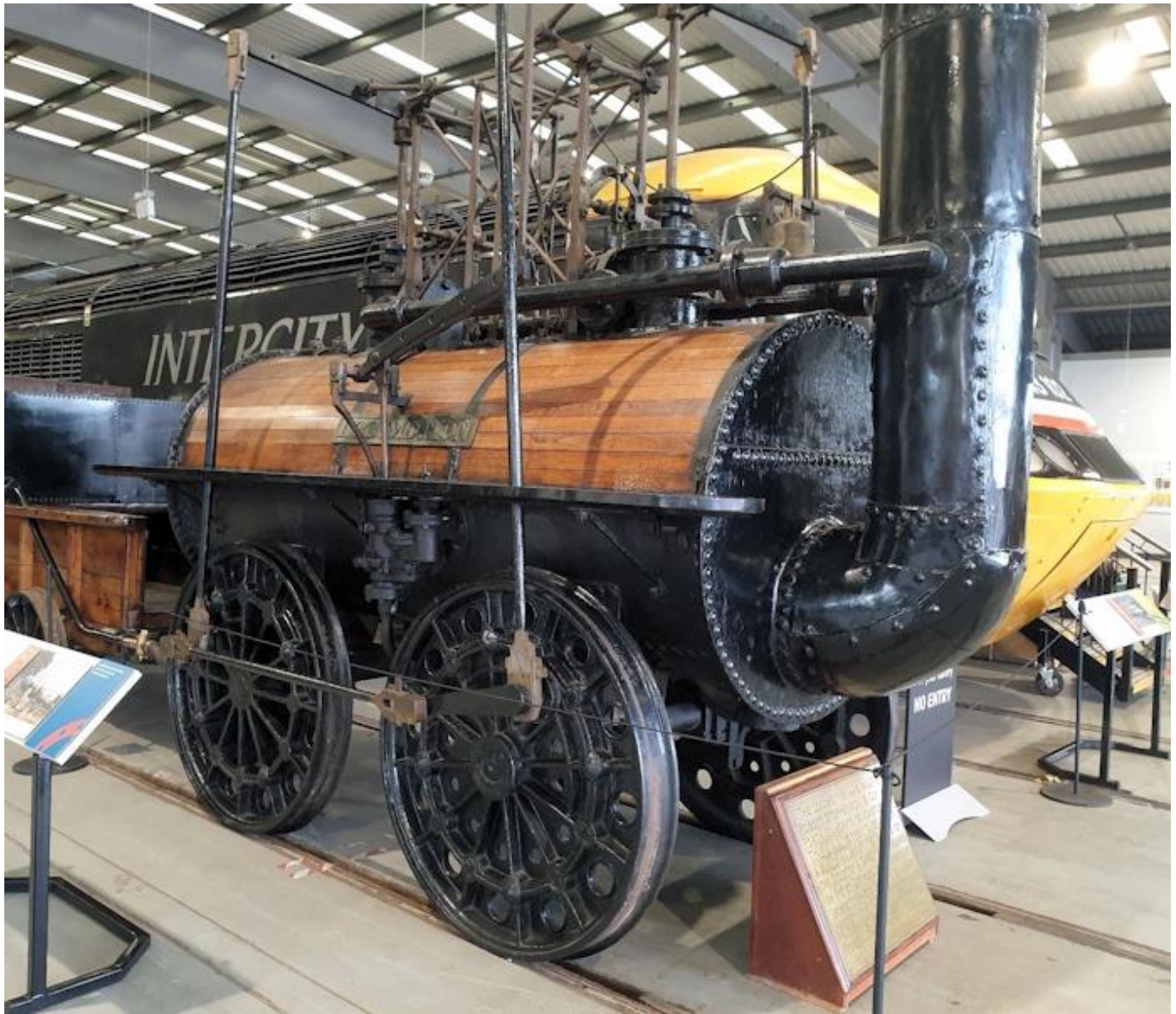
The Stockton & Darlington Railway was initially created to carry coal from mines at Witton Park to the River Tees (and so to the sea) at Stockton, with the 26 miles of track going via Shildon and Darlington. Originally horses were used to pull carts of coal along poor roads, but in 1818 mine owners, merchants and Quaker bankers (who much later merged to become Barclays Bank) agreed to construct a horse-drawn railway. Opposition from the Earl of Darlington delayed matters, forcing them to redesign the route to avoid his land, but as soon as the enabling Act of Parliament was passed in 1821 a successful engineer called George Stephenson persuaded them that locomotives would be more efficient and cheaper in use than horses.

This led to a second Act of Parliament allowing steam locomotives and adding passengers to the list of what could be carried. George's son Robert Stephenson's company manufactured Locomotion No. 1 in Newcastle and after some test runs the railway was officially opened on 27 September 1825. Locomotion pulled 13 full goods wagons brought by horses along track from Witton, 21 empty wagons filled with people and one special passenger carriage, amounting to an estimated load of 90 tons, from Shildon to Darlington then on to Stockton by which time there were 600 passengers. During the 26-mile journey the train proved to be faster than horse-drawn carriages racing along adjacent roads.



There had been horse-drawn wagonways with wooden rails before this, but the cost of buying, stabling and feeding horses was high after the Napoleonic Wars and the advances in technology with inventions such as wrought iron rails as well as both stationary steam engines and the locomotives themselves all came together at this time. The S&DR was also different from earlier railways as it was a permanent line that would not close if the mine closed and successfully combined transport of both goods and passengers. It was so successful that by 1827 it was carrying 30,000 passengers per year, and by 1830 it had 12 locomotives and had extended the track to the new town of Middlesborough (then called Port Darlington).

It was the model for all other railway lines not just in Britain but across the world, and as the pioneers had hoped the fore-runner of a national railway system in the UK. It invented railway stations, timetables (and ultimately standardised time across the whole country since Edinburgh time had to be the same as London time for a timetable to work), tickets, fines for non-payment, baggage allowances, signalling, commuting and ribbon development along the railway routes. Shildon became the world's first "railway town" due to its population growth around the engineering workshops for the S&DR.



What facts and trivia did I discover?

- 1) Early engine crew wore long beards to keep warm! I had never heard that justification for a beard before. Once cabs were introduced this became less necessary.
- 2) Locomotion's boiler was initially lit by focusing the sun's rays through a magnifying glass! Reliable friction matches were not invented until the 1830s.
- 3) George Stephenson's earliest locomotives were not that reliable and Locomotion's boiler exploded in 1826. The engine was rebuilt by Timothy Hackworth in 1828.
- 4) Hackworth was Superintendent of Engines for the S&DLR and improved Stephenson's designs substantially. His Sans Pareil lost out to Stephenson's more efficient Rocket at the Liverpool and Manchester Railway's Rainhill Trials in 1829, but his Royal George of 1827 was a game-changer in terms of reliability.

- 5) The early S&DLR had too few locomotives and relied heavily on horses to satisfy the increasing demand for its services, especially in providing for passengers.
- 6) I was surprised at the large number of wagons pulled by these early locomotives. The standard chaldron coal wagon carried a load of just over 2.5 tons.
- 7) The S&DR was the first to introduce lighter locomotives designed for speed for passenger trains alongside heavy duty locomotives aimed at freight transport.
- 8) Railway companies constantly improved their engines to give more power and speed. In 1896 the “Race to the North” competition between the East Coast and West Coast main lines from London to Aberdeen was ended after a major derailment at Preston.

What did I see at the museum? The early locomotives look very different to the later designs and it did not take many years before engineering advances evolved engines that resembled the steam engines that we see today. The museum had the original Locomotion No. 1 in its rebuilt form and replicas of other early engines including Rocket and Sans Pareil.



Although originally intended as a warehouse to display the National Railway Museum at York's collection of freight wagons it has a great range of engines spanning both 19th and 20th centuries. A highlight is the Deltic prototype diesel electric loco of 1955. It also displays engines on loan from different heritage railways and repairs and restores such in its workshops. The freight wagons are interesting in themselves, including a gigantic 102-ton coal wagon that saw little service thanks to the closure of coal mines.

I had not heard of Shildon and the museum before Richard started on his Stockton and Darlington Railway Rivals map. Well worth a visit, and free to enter (although donations are suggested).

THE CELESTIAL DRAGON #12



Deadline for all games: Friday 12th December 2025

Website: Still using the Variable Pig URL: <https://variablepig.org>

The Celestial Steam Locomotive	#42	Richard Smith	richard530smith@btinternet.com
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Waiting List / Notes:

BAG OF DUNGEON - game 2: John Walker, John Hopkins 1 or 2 more wanted
BUS BOSS Ynys Mon / Isle of Anglesey - BB423MON - GM Bob - John Marsden, Roger Trethewey, Richard Smith; BB424MON - 3P - GM Richard Bob Gingell, Jim Reader, Brad Martin. Game starts inside
RAILWAY RIVALS Durham 1826 - RR2570DH - Kev Lee, Brendan Whyte, Steve Ham, Jim Reader. Game start inside
KENDO NAGASAKI (Destination X Variant) - round 1 inside, more can join
NEW! BY WORDLEY DEMAND - all reader game starts inside

Here Be Dragons	#75	John Walker	hbdragons@btinternet.com
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Waiting List / Notes:

NEARLY THE BEST GAME IN THE WORLD - Chris Hibbert, Richard Smith, 3 more wanted
LYRIC QUIZ - game continues - anyone can play except Mr. Google.
WORLD RECORD 9.762 - Richard Smith, Chris Hibbert - 3-6 more wanted
FRAGMENTS (famous people) - all reader game - my favourite - any can join
SNAKES AND LADDERS - 5+ wanted - Richard Smith, Bob Gingell, Chris Hibbert
PARKRUN - First round inside, all can send in orders or "go random"
NEW! THE SERPENT'S GAMBIT - Richard Smith, 1-3 more wanted.

The Tangerine Terror I Am The Kurious Kumquat	#82 #12	Howard Bishop	laticsexile@outlook.com
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Waiting List / Notes:

THE NAME OF THE GAME - all reader game continues, anyone can join
ORIGINS OF WW2 - Brendan Whyte, John Marsden - 3 more wanted
DOS DE MAYO - 2 wanted
JUST ONE - new game to start when at least 5 sign up - Richard Smith, Allan Stagg

SubPAR	#12	Jim Reader	jim_reader@hotmail.com
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Waiting List / Notes:

BUS BOSS - Shikoku (BB418SHI) - Roger Trethewey, Brad Martin 2-4 more wanted
BREAKING AWAY - Richard Smith, Chris Hibbert, Allan Stagg - 3 more wanted.
RAILWAY RIVALS - Durham 1826 RR2571DH - Brad Martin, Bob Gingell, Roger Trethewey, Richard Smith. Game start inside.