

THE CELESTIAL DRAGON #13



Espeon using his telepathic powers

Featuring:

THE CELESTIAL STEAM LOCOMOTIVE #43

HERE BE DRAGONS #76

SUBPAR #13

THE TANGERINE TERROR #83

I AM THE KURIOUS KUMQUAT #13

DEADLINE: Friday 30th January 2026



THE CELESTIAL STEAM LOCOMOTIVE

Track no. 43

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Sorry, non-cat lovers, it's a double bill of pictures of Riley's replacement, a homeless 5-year-old small grey tom called Espeon. Any Pokémon fans out there will know the cat is psychic. So what message is he beaming out on the front cover? It's probably something mundane like "give me tuna" but it *could* be deep and meaningful.

The one downside of the new arrival is the resident queen cat, Raymond. She bonded with Riley at a very early age and I've never known her be anything other than hostile to all other cats. I hoped that Espeon's gentle ways and small size would mean her heart would soften after a while but so far she still hates him.

I followed a number of cat-buddying techniques such as gradual introduction and smell-sharing but nothing has worked. Raymond will ignore him, glare at him, growl and hiss at him, or break out the deadly claws depending on how far away he is.

So far I haven't dared let him outside as he might never come back. Being a tiny little chap (2kg) and Raymond being a big fatty catty (5kg) he has found some safe hiding places in the house. I then have to coax him out for food, play and cuddles. So it is possible that he will have to be re-re-homed.

On the next page I have included Zine Poll results, though I expect most of you have already seen them. Alex had reservations about his "overall winner" calculation so I've left that out.

I think the Dragon probably deserved the Railway Games gong with its large number of games efficiently run and well-presented, most with in-game maps available. And of course our crack three-man design team have produced some great new maps too. Speaking of which, Togo and Benin is ready to go with 2 games on offer, Westlands RR and Pays Cathar BB scheduled for issue 14.

8th is a little disappointing for the General Games list, as the zine does feature all sorts of games, old and new, from multiple GMs. Quite a few of the non-RR / BB games are struggling to fill up, but this happens to most zines. However, I am still a little surprised that Snakes and Ladders and Breaking Away are still short of players, given their previous popularity.

2025 ZINE POLL RESULTS

DIPLOMACY ZINES

- (1) Fury of the Northmen 80.56
- (2) Ode 63.69
- (3) Obsidian 62.92
- (4) God Save The Zine 57.38
- (5) The Cunning Plan 53.03

RAILWAY GAMES ZINES

- (1) The Celestial Dragon 83.58
- (2) mais n'est-ce pas la gare? 78.15
- (3) Ode 63.63
- (4) Minstrel 61.43
- (5) FourTrack Mainline 47.62
- (6) Obsidian 35.90
- (7) To Win Just Once 35.72
- (8) Dane's Games 32.50

OVERSEAS ZINES

- (1) back-of-the-envelope 75.56
- (2) Western Front 70.84
- (3) Northern Flame 65.00
- (4) Damn The Consequences 63.75
- (5) Cheesecake 58.88
- (6) S.O.B. 30.84

GENERAL GAMES ZINES

- (1) Will This Wind 75.67
- (2) Dane's Games 71.55
- (3) Fury of the Northmen 69.83
- (4) Obsidian 56.94
- (5) Ode 55.00
- (6=) The Cunning Plan 50.00
- (6=) Hopscotch 50.00
- (8) The Celestial Dragon 47.60
- (9) God Save The Zine 33.34
- (10) To Win Just Once 30.83
- (11) Minstrel 30.00

SPORTS LEAGUE ZINES

- (1) In Off The Post 68.75
- (2) PUMA 66.36
- (3) Top Of The League 56.77
- (4) Extra Time 52.50
- (5) Astro 42.50
- (6) Striker 39.38
- (7) Ninety Minutes 38.75
- (8) United Side of Hopscotch 25.00
- (9) Ford SuperLeague 20.00

Alex points out that the scores are the average of two percentages, one for an unweighted average votes score and one for performance in a preference matrix.

THE LETTERS BIT



DANE MASLEN

Sorry to hear about Riley. I believe kidney failure is an all too common problem for cats, quite possibly because of their high protein diet. Friends that have had many cats over the years have lost several to that cause. Meanwhile my neighbour has just lost the last of the three cats she had when I moved in 12 years or so ago, the other two having died within the last couple of years. All three made it to good ages – the one that just died was getting on for 20 – and all three were apparently convinced that I was a cat-eating monster: they used to flee my garden whenever I came out of the house. Perhaps they just had guilty consciences.

Yes, I expect they had most likely "fertilised" your bedding plants.

You might have noticed that a couple of months ago ITV broadcast the first two episodes of *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*, but subsequent episodes were available only on ITVX. I wasn't particularly impressed by the first two episodes, but even if I had been, I wouldn't have been inclined to watch the rest on ITVX, other than perhaps by watching the whole series in a month ad-free for £6. The other non-BBC streaming platforms for free-to-air TV get similarly ignored. I'm not prepared to sit through the adverts and I want to watch so little of what's available that paying a monthly subscription would be ridiculous. If any of those streaming platforms were to introduce a pay-per-view model to be ad-free, maybe I'd finish up watching the occasional programme.

Although I rarely fly, I first watched some episodes of Strange New Worlds on a plane, and ended up buying seasons 1 and 2 on blu-ray. A long wait for season 3 (due to the strike, most probably) but the blu-ray will hit my doormat in February. Amazon prices are currently £15 to stream the series, £20 for the DVD, £24 for the blu-ray and £40 for the 4K edition.

I see that you are using your new PC in its tower orientation. I've opted to have mine on its side so that the DVD drawer is horizontal. I can't begin to imagine how many CDs would finish up on the floor if I had to try to load them into a vertical drawer. Manual dexterity is not my forte.

The DVD drive is one of those where you have to click the disc into place, so no real problem with either orientation. I have yet to move the machine upstairs at which point it may well "go horizontal". Whilst on my work desk downstairs it has to be vertical to fit on.

I see Rachel Reeves chose not to nobble your pension. Obviously your vote is important to her. Or maybe she doubted that she could raise a few billion by taxing your lump sum even though Diane Abbott's quick calculation had suggested otherwise.

Poor old Diane Abbott - I guess she will always be remembered for her lack of mathematical skills.

I seem to have no orders to submit this issue, except Kendo. Well, other than an empty set to John for the Lyrics Quiz. There might well be only one song from the last decade that I could potentially identify, and even then it would probably only be from the most obvious parts. Having stopped listening to 'pop' music on the radio in the early 1990s in favour of listening to my collection of mostly classical CDs, I've subsequently only heard modern music on holiday when bus or coach drivers have had the radio on. On my most recent trip to Tenerife there were two songs that I heard twice and liked enough to be curious what they were. One turned out to be *Pray* by Tina Cousins. As that's over 25 years old, I've no idea why I got to hear it twice. The other was *Fate of Ophelia* by Taylor Swift, which is therefore the one modern song the lyrics of which I might hope to recognise. I hope that doesn't qualify me as a Swiftie.

John is expecting low scores for this round as not many of the players listen to modern pop by choice, but there's always indirect exposure such as via younger family members' in-car entertainment. I did know one song because it was on a recent Disco Volante mix, and these usually have a smattering of pop.

STEVE HAM

I hope you are well. Are you still on to retire in June now that Ms Reeves left your pension untouched in the budget? The NHS reorganisation has now started and things should be clearer for me by the end of January.

I have now officially booked my retirement for June, and it seems it's just as well I'd already done all the calculations as our Pension Portal has just moved to Crapita, currently without my data.

KEVIN LEE

Wow - what a transformation for Saints! Amazing how quickly things can change. Let's hope we can hold on for Scienza as he has been superb.

I find it hard to put my finger on why players that failed to perform under Will Still such as Fellows and Azaz suddenly hit form under Tonda Eckert. Leo Scienza is clearly a great find, unlike Damion Downs, though he might come good later. Some say the squad is a bit too big (Aribo and Edozie were both supposed to have been sold in the summer) but with the games coming thick and fast in the Championship a bit of depth comes in handy. (Update) It seems the new manager bounce has gone a bit flat!

CHRIS HIBBERT

Well, we've had one somewhat serious rain, and the shed leaks a little. We've taped pieces of paper to the walls and corners to help us locate the leaks. A small amount of water is coming from the ceiling, but it's managing to sneak between the detectors, so we haven't figured it out yet. In the corner that used to be wettest, we're getting some leakage that appears to be near the floor, and we should be able to seal that up. With a mostly dry shed, we should be able to make more room in the garage and other places.

That reminded me of when I last sorted out my garage - it was completely dry apart from a mystery damp patch in one corner, where, alas, I had stored my D&D books which went mouldy.

I was expecting to get a bumper crop of persimmons this year, and started pre-emptively trapping squirrels, in hopes of keeping them from eating much. We've caught more than 15, but the squirrels keep coming, and they seem to be making a significant dent in the fruit. We'll end up with a good amount, but not more than usual as I had been expecting.

Made me imagine you giving the squirrels a red card and a 2-munch ban from the garden!

BRAD MARTIN

Very sad to read about the death of Riley. You were braver than me, when my last cat was euthanized I had to leave the vets rapidly.

I think you made the right call on whether or not to stay during the cat euthanasia. If it happens to me again I won't hang around.

Congratulations in getting the best Railways Rivals 'zine for CD, especially after such a relatively short time span.

With the Dragon still having the same three GMs / designers for RR and BB as the Pig, it's not really a new player in the market. Western Front and back-of-the-envelope both run a lot of RR games but they're not British!

MICHAEL PARGMAN

On Saturday I'm travelling to Colombia with my brother and family and meeting up with my sister and family. Yes, it will be a long flight - and I'll start going in the wrong direction since the first stop will be Helsinki. Then Madrid and Bogota. We'll arrive 21 hours after starting, but it doesn't end there. We will stay at the airport for another 7 hours and then continue to Cartagena. I hope I'll be able to sleep on the plane.

I hear Colombia is currently considered reasonably OK for tourists provided they stick to the known safe areas. Terrorism and crime being rife in many other places. I guess Venezuela's not too popular at the moment.

I hope your retirement plan works out as you want it. When you go, will you need to turn over work and knowledge to someone? When I retired, I gave notice 6 months in advance. My idea was that they would get me a replacement so that we would have maybe two months to transfer knowledge and work procedures in an orderly way - and that I would have time to use all my vacation days. That did not turn out as I had hoped. When two months remained I was told that they had gotten permission to start advertising for a replacement. That meant that besides my normal job I also had to document everything I was responsible for and try to sketch out my plans for ongoing projects etc. I didn't have any vacation as I had hoped for and instead got paid for 30 unused vacation days. And it took about 6 months after that for me to wind down from that last stretch of very stressful months. In the end I think it took 3-4 months after I left before they had a replacement in place (and in the meantime used consultants to fill the gap). Really good economics in that...

Whilst I don't currently have a replacement allocated, I am expecting to train him or her up in the new year. It is complicated somewhat by a change of "tech stack" for the newer systems I support, whilst the old systems still have a while to go before they shut down. The old address matcher uses Elasticsearch and BM25 which is old hat but effective. Its replacement uses a product called Splink, after we briefly flirted with NLP using LLMs build with SBERT. We found that semantic relevance is not usually valid for comparing addresses. For example Kings Road and Queens Road.

BOB PITMAN

Really sorry to hear about Riley, he does look like a proud beast in your pictures. Our Missy passed away from kidney disease Feb 2024. She had been diagnosed 6 or 7 years before and had been on a human kidney medicine sematra, gabypentine for a bit of arthritis and a blood pressure pill for all that time. When her kidneys gave up it was painfully obvious, we came down several times during the night and she was still with us and early appointment with the vet gave us no hope. Like you I held her as she passed and blubbed. She was a rescue but she had an extra life with us. Still missed as I am sure Riley is. Oddly enough one of the ladies in the running group used to be a chemist and still has patents from when she had a role in developing gabypentine.

That does make me wonder if Riley's problem might have become apparent sooner, but he'd had routine checks at the vets and showed no signs of ill-health. In fact he was always incredibly fit and strong, and never got fat despite his enthusiastic eating habits (which I always assumed were the cause of his occasional honking, usually on the carpet, though once is was on my chest as I lay in bed).

We keep being tempted by another rescue cat but so far the lack of responsibility for another creature, the haunting memory of the cost of insurance, and the quarterly cost of private prescription cat medication is a useful reality check. That said our Facebook feeds are full of cats, Noels twitter following list is cat-heavy and my Instagram account is cat video clogged! The app algorithms have correctly identified our weakness!

The ubiquity of cat-related content on the internet is one of the reasons I've been trying to have less cat stuff in the zine, but the demise of Riley and the arrival of Espeon has put paid to such reduction.

Noel is causing me loads of Christmas stress. Her birthday is just before and I think she has asked for 1 item which I can't stretch over both events. It's always a nightmare sorting gifts for her and I should be used to it but her lack of steers and my addiction to present giving combine to put my blood pressure up.

Some of my family are doing a "Secret Santa" this year with a £50 limit, to save a bit of money. My sister's birthday is on Boxing Day and we always manage to keep it separate from Christmas. Last year she had lots of friends round, I guess most of them being on day-release from Christmas duties.

I've just finished "Loki" season 1 and "Star Trek Strange new Worlds" season 1. Loki is pretty entertaining but I don't like Mr Mount's Captain Pike and it detracts from the rest of the drama. Slow Horses is very good, it's not fast paced and it is heavily reliant on the nose of experience worn by Gary Oldman's "Jackson Lamb". Well worth the watch if you can get it

I have yet to sample Loki or Slow Horses. I've just started watching the new series of Fallout (on Amazon) and despite my reservations about the quality of the acting, I have watched a few more episodes of Andromeda. Trans Gemini no longer has a tail and is orange instead of purple.

MIKE POLLARD

Really sorry to hear about your cat. I'm finding it bad enough missing an ex-neighbour's cat, who is still alive but now lives half a mile away, so he doesn't come into our house anymore and stay most of the day, every day. During the first Covid lockdown, he was our only visitor on Xmas day. I actually feel like going round his owner's house and asking if Roly-Poly can come out to play!

Lots of cats have extra homes they visit (and cadge food), but it sounds like a bit more than that in the case of Roly-Poly. Perhaps his owners put him out in the morning and go to work so he wanted a warm second (daytime) home, or maybe there was another pet he didn't get on with.

BRENDAN WHYTE

I just wanted to offer my commiserations on the passing of your cat. I was in my 20s half way through a year's exchange to the US when mum had to put down my childhood cat, (Miss) Whiskers. Even at the distance I was very upset.

...and simply adopting out my recent cat Miss Kitty to a mate in Canberra before I came to the US again was a tear-jerking experience.

I can't remember how long you said you'd be in the US for. You might be able to reclaim Miss Kitty on return or at least go and visit her. The name reminded me of Katie Perry's former cat who was called Kitty Purry ☺

ALBUM REVIEWS

Anna von Hausswolff - Iconoclasts (CD) (2025)

I decided not to include the front cover picture in this review as I think it's a bit naff. A shame because the music is exceptionally good! The inside cover and CD have some minimalist artwork. I'm not sure what the significance of the stick is (?)



Iconoclasts is Anna's 6th studio album:

Singing from the Grave (2010)

Ceremony (2013)

The Miraculous (2015)

Dead Magic (2018)

All Thoughts Fly (2020)

Iconoclasts (2025)

It ends a long wait for fans who loved *Dead Magic* and *The Miraculous* and wanted more gothic art-pop (*All Thoughts Fly* being organ recitals).

The album is very long as are some of the tracks (*Iconoclasts* is 11 minutes and several others clock in around 7 or 8) which gives some credence to those who say Anna is prog. That label actually doesn't appear on her Wikipedia entry, and it is well-known that she has been accused of worse things than being a prog artist. Some of her concerts have been picketed by protesters claiming that she is "satanic", which is rubbish. Yes, she has contributed to tracks by US metal acts *Wolves In The Throne Room* and *Sunn O)))* and one of her songs contains the word "devil", as is also true of Cliff Richard.

As is common these days, two tracks were released as singles in advance, *Stardust* and *The Whole Woman*, the latter being a duet with Iggy Pop. Both of these are excellent arty pop songs, though most of the rest of the album is a lot less "pop" with lengthy saxophone and organ sections.

Of the longer pieces, the title track *The Iconoclast* is great and I do suspect that the (briefly) flat singing in it is a finger in the air to Autotune. However, for me, the jewel in the crown is the stunning *Struggle With The Beast*, with its powerful jazz-metal groove.

Video links:

Stardust https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpMHH_W8G9s

The Whole Woman <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lmOvpIh7Ws>

Struggle With The Beast <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rL3ATRkeKw>

EBB - The Mirror (CD and A5 booklet) (2025)

Right, let's get this bit over with. You can buy *The Mirror* from Bandcamp as a CD or a download, see <https://ebbband.bandcamp.com/album/the-mirror>. The CD comes in a lovely A5 booklet with some great photos and artwork. I set the booklet aside intending to take some photos for the zine but since then have been unable to locate it. Either it will turn up later, or perhaps I have binned it by mistake. So no pictures for the zine, you'll have to support the band and buy a copy if you want to enjoy the art.



Quite a few of the tracks on this album have been played live earlier in the year - *Reason* and *No-one's Child* being on the recent *Live at the 1985 DVD* and on YouTube. Despite being great songs brilliantly performed, the number of hits for these vids is disappointingly low.

You see a similar thing on Spotify, with the band only getting a few hundred plays per week. That of course earns them absolutely zippedydoodah so they do rely on selling merch to earn money. Bandcamp lets you pay a bit extra for things as a sort of "tip" if you want to support the band, which I have done.

EBB stands for "Erin Bennett Band" and the talented Erin writes all the songs (with some input from other band members) and performs lead vocals and guitar. The band's twin keyboard sound works well with Nikki playing elaborate piano parts and Suna simple synths. Nikki also plays the flute and sax and the rhythm section of Anna and Bad Dog (the only male band member) are consistently good.

TRACK LISTING

01. Evenfall (2:19)
02. Reason (8:45)
03. No One's Child (6:21)
04. The Mirror (11:03)
05. That's How It Goes (6:44)
06. Cuckoo (4:04)
07. Take To The Stars (9:06)
08. Day 19 (5:51)
09. Geneva (7:20)
- Total Time – 61:37

MUSICIANS

Erin Bennett – Guitar, Lead Vocals
Suna Dasi – Backing Vocals, Synth
Bad Dog – Bass
Anna Fraser – Drums
Nikki Francis – Keyboards, Flute, Saxophone
Kitty Biscuits – Backing Vocals, Spoken Word

Evenfall is a beautiful intro number leading to the aforementioned live favourites *Reason* and *No-one's Child*.

The title track is almost great in my view, just drags a little, and this does in part back up the feeling that the band still has some room for improvement. Hopefully this can happen without loss of the band's charm.

The funky *That's How It Goes* is a lively number with a great bassline and sparkling keyboards, whilst *Cuckoo* is atmospheric and relaxing.

Take To The Stars is good but perhaps a little too conventional, melodic prog for this band. The wonderfully eccentric, Gong-like *Day 19* (which includes lyrics about menstruation) certainly makes up for that. Finally, *Geneva* is a pleasing acoustic guitar-powered closer.

Video links:

No One's Child <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIwVxCReBfc>

The Mirror <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkxWX-yTnbY>

Reason <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pb7pliqGz8Y>

BY MODERATELY POPULAR DEMAND - GES

John Walker: It had some good ideas, but in practice I found it was not very playable, but hey I'll take the W.

Bob Pitman: For me I prefer a more vanilla version. This version is very playable and I quite liked it but it's a tad over-complicated. I'd play it again but I think it may be down to whether you want to GM it!

Mike Pollard: I didn't like the By Moderately BPD game, I'm afraid. Too chaotic and impossible to predict or use any strategy. Might have been better with more players, as any version of BPD needs 20+ IMO, but I think it would still have been pretty dire.

GM: There is too much going on at once to make it strategically satisfying. With lower numbers of players the danger of "wash-out" categories is significant. I am not currently planning a second attempt at this game, but what might work is...

- Everyone gets two double tokens and one destroy token to play each round, and they can be spread across the categories as the player sees fit (including all on the same one). There are no halves or shields.
- For each category, only the answer(s) getting the most destroys are eliminated.
- Any answer that gets 10 or more is considered "too popular" and scores zero. This will usually, but not always be as a result of double tokens.
- Any answer that only gets 1 point is considered "insufficiently popular" and scores zero.

BY WORDLEY DEMAND - ROUND 1 OF 5



New players are welcome and will start on the lowest score of the existing players (now 11).

Rules published in TCD 12 and on the VP website <https://variablepig.org/rules/bypop.html#Wordle>

Words must be valid according to this <https://scrabble.collinsdictionary.com/check/> and not plurals.

The R1 theme was **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 (Psycho, Vertigo and The Birds all scored 2)
- 2) A movie directed by Stephen Spielberg (ET and Raiders of the Lost Ark scored 2)
- 3) A movie directed by Stanley Kubrick (A Clockwork Orange scored 4)
- 4) A movie directed by Woody Allen (Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Sex scored 3)
- 5) A movie directed by Martin Scorsese (Raging Bull scored 3)

Random five-letter words have been allocated to each entrant. These words are not plurals and are made up of 5 different letters. I decided to exclude any words containing an X.

All 10 entrants submitted legitimate words this time and obtained a Wordle score, which should enable some "milking" of letters going forward. Wordling scores 20 but a new word is then allocated. Serial BPD winner Mike is the early leader, with Bob G and Roger just behind. Early days of course.

Scorecard

Player	Hitchcock	Spielberg	Kubrick	Allen	Scorsese	Score	Tot
Mike Pollard	Psycho [3,0]	Raiders of the Lost Ark [2,4]	A Clockwork Orange [4,2]	New York Stories [1,2]	Goodfellas [1,0]	[11,8]	19
Bob Gingell	Vertigo [2,0]	Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade [1,4]	Paths of Glory [1,0]	Everything You Always Wanted to Know ... [3,0]	Raging Bull [3,4]	[10,8]	18
Roger Trethewey	Psycho [3,0]	Raiders of the Lost Ark [2,0]	Eyes Wide Shut [2,2]	Sleeper [1,4]	Silence [1,2]	[9,8]	17
John Walker	The Birds [2,0]	ET [2,4]	A Clockwork Orange [4,0]	Coup De Chance [1,0]	Hugo [1,0]	[10,4]	14
Steve Ham	Blackmail [1,2]	Lincoln [1,4]	A Clockwork Orange [4,0]	Crimes and Misdemeanours [1,0]	Kundun [1,0]	[8,6]	14
Chris Hibbert	Vertigo [2,0]	Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom [1,0]	Lolita [1,2]	Everything You Always Wanted to Know ... [3,2]	Raging Bull [3,0]	[10,4]	14
Steve Guest	Psycho [3,0]	Schindler's List [1,0]	A Clockwork Orange [4,2]	Love and Death [1,0]	Mean Streets [2,0]	[11,2]	13
Martin Walker	Rear Window [1,0]	ET [2,4]	Spartacus [1,0]	Annie Hall [1,0]	The Wolf of Wall Street [1,2]	[6,6]	12
Brendan Whyte	The Birds [2,2]	Hook [1,0]	Eyes Wide Shut [2,0]	Radio Days [1,2]	Mean Streets [2,0]	[8,4]	12
Bob Pitman	Champagne [1,0]	Amistad [1,0]	Barry Lyndon [1,0]	Everything You Always Wanted to Know ... [3,0]	Raging Bull [3,2]	[9,2]	11
GM Picks (non-scoring)	The Birds	Raiders of the Lost Ark	A Clockwork Orange	Sleeper	Hugo		

Notes on Scoring

Each answer is given two scores in the format *[BPD, Wordle]*. A Wordle score of 4 indicates the letter is in the player's answer and in the correct position. A score of 2 indicates the letter is in the answer in a different position. Note that all the answer words do not have repeat letters, but a player's submitted word may have repeat letters, in which case both will score if the repeated letter is in the answer word (2 and 2 or 4 and 2).

Categories for Round 2

The theme for round 2 is **space**.

- For TV shows it's the first word of the title, even if it's "a" or "the" which means, for example, The Expanse gets you a T.
- For the astronomer and the astronaut, it's the surname, so Neil Armstrong gets you an A.
- The TV shows do not have to take place *entirely* in space.
- The astronauts, cosmonauts and astronomers can be alive or dead.

- 1) A British TV show set in space
- 2) An American TV show set in space
- 3) A planet in the solar system
- 4) A famous astronaut or cosmonaut
- 5) A famous astronomer

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS KENDO NAGASAKI - DESTINATION X - ROUND 2



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

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.

Quite a few oldies chosen this time - *Caine*, *Bassey* and *de Niro* are all still with us, for now. Two transmitters in China, two in Australia and one in the middle of the ocean give a good spread of locations this round.

Round 2:

Player	Who	Where	Lat	Lon
Bob Gingell	Nelson Mandela (1918-2013)	Beijing, China	39.9075	116.39723
Steve Guest	Richard III (1452-1485)	Cape York, Australia	-10.6667	142.5333
Chris Hibbert	Michael Caine (1933-)	Diego Garcia, Indian Ocean	-7.319500	72.422859
Dane Maslen	Shirley Bassey (1937-)	Beijing, China	39.9075	116.39723
Bob Pitman	Mary Tamm (1950-2012)	Odesa, Ukraine	46.485722	30.743444
Jim Reader	Yvonne Goolagong Cawley (1951-)	The Gabba, Brisbane, Australia	-27.484831	153.036166
Martin Walker	Robert De Niro (1943-)	Cairo, Egypt	30.06263	31.24967

Public response to the player with the closest guess:

We are the same sex, and whilst your transmitter is nearest to my hiding place, another's is sited close to my birthplace.

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.

New players can join without risk for round 3, and existing players do not have to worry about where the transmitter goes either this time. Mr. Brydon is, however, dusting off his yellow cards for round 4.

CHOICE - SUPPENKASPER VARIANT - THE END



<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

Player	Round 23.5	Round 24	Round 25
Chris Hibbert		(4+6)=10, (2+4)=6 w3	(2+3)=5, (4+5)=9 w6
Kevin Lee		(4+6)=10, (2+4)=6 w3	
Michael Pargman	(1+4)=5, (3+5)=8 w2		

Player	Score	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Würfel	Würfel	Würfel
Kevin Lee	910				<u>11</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>		<u>8</u>			222222-	3333333	666666-
Bob Gingell	810				<u>10</u>		<u>7</u>	<u>11</u>		<u>11</u>			111111-	222222-	3333333
Dane Maslen	700				<u>10</u>		<u>12</u>			<u>11</u>			2222222	333----	4444---
Roger Trethewey	660				<u>12</u>		<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>		<u>7</u>			222222-	33333--	6666666
Michael Pargman	660				<u>10</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>		<u>13</u>			2222222	333333-	444444-
Chris Hibbert	620		<u>6</u>		<u>10</u>	<u>12</u>			1	<u>16</u>			222222-	333333-	6666666
Steve Ham	450					<u>10</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>					11111-	2-----	6666666
John Walker	160		4	4		<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>9</u>		<u>10</u>			111111-	333333-	5555555

Kevin wisely decides to finish rather than risking another round with -1, especially as it was unlikely that Chris or Michael could beat 910. In the end Michael managed to finish on a respectable 660 via his Suppen-Kasper. Chris was not forced to finish but did not add to his score, so I rolled for the next round and...

New Roll: R25: 2,3,4,5,6

Chris is forced to finish and open a new number. The best he can do to offset the damage being to score a 5 via a 6 würfel.

CONGRATULATIONS TO KEVIN LEE - Game end comments welcome.

CRYSTAL BALL 2026 - A BIT NIPPY FOR TENNIS



The new game is underway with the same 5 players as last time. No events yet completed but the first four are now locked. I suppose the first event could have been The Ashes (sob!).

A reminder of the rule changes for 2026.

- 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
1L	Tennis	Australian Open - Women's	Jan	Sabalenka	Swiatek	Swiatek	Swiatek	Sabalenka
2L	Winter Olympics	GB medals total	Feb	3	2	2	4	2 (JOKER)
3L	American Football	Super Bowl	Feb	Buffalo Bills	Eagles	Packers	Buccaneers	Buffalo Bills
4L	Rugby	6 Nations	Mar	England	Ireland	France	France	France
5L	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 of one made the semi-final and two the quarters, 2 points to the semi-final team and 0.5 to the two quarter-finalists.

RAILWAY RIVALS DURHAM 1826 (RR2570DH) ROUND 0 - HOLDOVER



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):

Our old-time entrepreneurs are Kevin Lee, Brendan Whyte (NMR), Steve Ham and Jim Reader. I need the usual company name / acronym and preferred line colour, plus your bid for the existing line (see last issue for details). Orders on file from Kevin, Steve and Jim but can be changed.

BUS BOSS YNIS MON (BB423MON) ROUND 1

GM Bob Gingell

And they are off – with no parallel routes so far.

Press: John Marsden - Love the picture of a Bristol LWL. Brings back my teenage bus spotting! That particular vehicle is now preserved and can be seen at many rallies.

Mon's Attractively Roundabout Services (MARS) orange, John Marsden
Llanfair P G - Menai Bridge - Bangor - Snowdonia [2+2, 3+2, 1+2 = 12]

Rides Over Good Enough Roads (ROGER) green, Roger Trethewey
Llangefni - Rhostrehwfa (eastern route) - Gwalchmai - Bryngwran [2+2, 3+2, 1+2 = 12]

Central Anglesey Coach Houses United (CACHU) blue, Richard Smith
Llangefni - Bodedern (12+2) = 14

In-game map at <https://variablepig.org/maps/bb/ingame/BB423MON.jpg>

Bid order for Round 2: Roger, Richard, John



BUS BOSS YNIS MON (BB424MON) ROUND 1

GM Richard Smith.

Not everyone got their first choice as Bob (building first) nabbed the Brynteg to Moelfre short route that Jim also wanted.

BAA Green Bob Gingell	Brynteg - Moelfre - Penysarn (3+5+2+2=12) BANK: 100 – 12 = 88 <i>BAA = Bob's Adventure Accelerates</i>
NYE Blue Brad Martin	Llangefni - Pentre Berw - Llangaffo (3+5+2+2=12) BANK: 100 – 12 = 88 <i>NYE = New, Yellow, Electric (Buses)</i>
TAFF Yellow Jim Reader	Penrhos - Y Falli - Llanfachraeth - Llanfaethlu (2+1+3+2+2+2=12) BANK: 100 – 12 = 88 <i>TAFF = Terrific All-round Ferries and Freight</i>

In-game map at <https://variablepig.org/maps/bb/ingame/BB424MON.jpg>

Bid order for Round 2: Jim, Brad, Bob

RAILWAY RIVALS SYRIA (RR2566SY) ROUND 2



SHIT and ROGER built long straight lines across the desert, whilst BOB, BOOMS and SKR built mainly in the populous west, though SKR's build to Manbij could be a precursor to further eastwards expansion.

ROGER and BOB both built to the H19 connection point simultaneously, so no fees were incurred. Other companies also avoided any significant payments.

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

BOB Bob Gingell Black	2a. [5] (K19) --- - I20 - H19 2b. [3] (H19) - - <u>TARTUS</u> - F17 2c. [6] (F17) - F16; (L18) - Salamiyah - - - - M14 BANK: 26 +3 -1[BOOMS, F16] = 28
BOOMS Jim Reader Orange	2a. [5] (Hama) --- K16 -L15 - L14 2b. [3] (H17) - - <u>TARTUS</u> ; (L14) - L13 2c. [6] (L13) - Marat-al-Numan; (L13) - - L11 - - N10 - Aleppo BANK: 30 +3 +1[BOB, F16] -1[SKR, K16] = 33
SKR Brad Martin Blue	2a. [5] (K11) - - --- H12 2b. [3] (H12) - - - Latakia 2c. [6] (K11) - <u>IDLIB</u> ; (Aleppo) - - - - <u>MANBIJ</u> BANK: 28 +6 +6 +1[BOOMS, K16] = 41
ROGER Roger Trethewey Green	2a. [5] (Homs) --- J19 - I20 - H19 2b. [3] (W20) - - - Z18 2c. [6] (Z18) - - - - - F53 BANK: 32
SHIT Michael Pargman Purple	2a. [5] (Raqqa) - - --- <u>AL-THAWRAH</u> 2b. [3] (Al-Thawrah) - - - T13 2c. [6] (T13) - - - - - N16 BANK: 26 +6 = 32

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

RAILWAY RIVALS - SENEGAL & THE GAMBIA (RR2557SG) - ROUND 3



Another clean round with no payments between rival companies.

BEAR made connections to the east whilst LIONS expanded in the south and FAR pressed north, plus a quick trip south to Bignosa.

All three companies should be reasonably happy with their progress so far.

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

BEAR
Kevin Lee
Black

3a. [5] (I16) - LAGBAR - F17 - SALDE
3b. [2] (I16) - I18
3c. [4] (I18) - MATAM
BANK: 43 +3 +3 +6 = 55

LIONS
Jim Reader
Yellow

3a. [5] (V13) - KOLDA; (Bassa Santa Su) - - VELINGARA - W20 - DAI'ABA
3b. [2] (M7) - L7 - L8
3c. [4] (W20) - - -W23; (L8) - Touba
BANK: 42.5 +6 +3 +3 = 54.5

FAR
Brad Martin
Blue

3a. [5] (Mansa Konko) - V11 - V12; (Louga) - - SAINT LOUIS; (G9) - F9
3b. [2] (F9) - - RICHARD TOLL
3c. [4] (N5) - JOAL-FADIOUT; (U9) - - - BIGNONA
BANK: 46.5 +6 +6 +3 +3 = 64.5

Rolls for Round 4: 4a) 4 4b) 4 4c) 4

RAILWAY RIVALS BHUTAN (RR2550BT) ROUND 6



Going into the race phase there are still four unconnected towns and no company has yet entered any disputed territory. ROGER did run some track up a mountain for a monastery connection as well as going to Assam and China for some tea.

BUTT and YETI connect do some towns and some specials.

Unlike last round, there were very few payments between rivals.

BUTT
Bob Gingell
Black

6a. [2] (Mongar) - - H37
6b. [6] (H37) - - - - H32 - G32
6c. [3] (G32) - DUNGKAR; (Sandrup Jongkar) - L45 {Assam}; (M36) - M35 {Arunachal Pradesh}
BANK: 60 +6 = 66

YETI
Jim Reader
Yellow

6a. [2] (Samtse) - F19 - E19
6b. [6] (Q21) - - - Q18 - DAGA; (E19) - - C18
6c. [3] (C18) - TENDU; (Samtse) - E20 {West Bengal}; (T21) - T22 {Assam}
BANK: 61 +6 +6 +1[ROGER, T21] -2[ROGER, T22] = 72

ROGER
Roger Trethewey
Green

6a. [2] (U20) - T20 - T21
6b. [6] (T21) - T22{Assam}; (Paro) - J11 - - H10 - H9 - G9 {China}
6c. [3] (R11) --- R10 {monastery}
BANK: 55 -1[YETI, T21] +2[YETI, T22] = 56

Races for Round 7:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Chhukha (41) - Nganglam (54) | 2. Trongsa (34) - Paro (13) |
| 3. Trashigang (63) - Samtse (23) | 4. Panbang (53) - Gedu (24) |
| 5. Nubding (33) - Sarpang (44) | 6. Assam (Sp3) - Pemagatshel (65) |
| 7. Thimphu (16) - China (Sp1) | |

Enter up to 5 races and build up to 12 points of track.

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 6

GM Bob Gingell

A surprisingly large number of destination locations are now connected with only Special Run #4 not possible for races. A fairly generous set of build allowances means that there is no need for larger allowances during the Operating Rounds. All players can enter up to 5 races per Round and Leapfrog rules (not used so far) can be used in future builds.

Build allowance for Round 6: 4, 5, 5.

BOTI, red (Richard Smith): 68 -2 = 66.

6a. (H43) - Nganglam; (Paro) - J11 - - H10

6b. (H10) - H9 - G9 {China}; (H43) - I44 [-1hy]; (G43) - G42 [-1hy]; (Y21) - Y22 {Assam}

6c. (H13) --- G14 {Monastery}; (Phuntsholing) - I22 {West Bengal}; (G42) - G41.

HEART, purple (Steve Ham): 78.

6a. (Q14) --- P13; (F35) - G36

6b. (G36) - - G38 --- H38

6c. (P13) - P12; (H38) - --- J39.

HAPPY, blue (Brad Martin): 70 +6 +2 = 78.

6a. (Samdrup Jongkhar) - - - - O43

6b. (O43) - P42 - - R43 - JOMOTSANGKHA; (M36) - M35 {Arunachal Pradesh}

6c. (Z14) - - Z12 - A35 - Jakar; (Samdrup Jongkhar) - L45 {Assam}.

Races for Round 7 (enter any 5):

1. 15 (Thimphu) – 51 (Dungkar)
2. 23 (Samtse) – 32 (Wangdue Phodrang)
3. 35 (Jakar) – 61 (Trashiyangtse)
4. 46 (Gelephu) – 12 (Gasa)
5. 56 (Samdrup Jongkar) – 24 (Gedu)
6. 65 (Pemagatshel) – #4 (Disputed area) *Not possible*
7. #6 (Monastery) – 41 (Chhukha)

Round 7 build allowance: 12 points excluding payments to other players.

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

RAILWAY RIVALS SOUTH TYROL (RR2572ST) ROUND 2

GM: Bob Gingell

NIR continues to sneak around in WIERER's southern back yard but WIERER uses the same tactics to move north into NIR's back yard. Meanwhile STYLE is scooping up town bonuses in the West.

GM note: Correction - The game report for Round 1 correctly stated that STYLE had built to O17 but the game map mistakenly showed the build as being to O18. That is now corrected but it shows that players should rely primarily on the game report with the map as a back-up.

Press: Another update from Steve - Dorothea Wierer won the first women's World Cup Individual Biathlon race of the season. Aiming to go out on a high after the Winter Olympics in South Tyrol, beginning on 8th Feb!

Round 2 build allowances: 4, 6, 4.

NIR, blue (Brad Martin): $20 + 18 = 38 + 12 = 50$.

2a. (C56) - - A57 - A58 - Z24

2b. (Z24) - - LEIFERS --- - Kaltern

2c. (Brixen) - --- FRANZENFESTE

STYLE, red (Richard Smith): $20 + 12 = 32 + 12 = 44$.

2a [4] (U21) --- TERLAN; U22 - V22

2b [6] (V22) - V23; (Meran) - U17 - U16 - V15 - - ST. LEONHARD

2c [4] (O17) - - M18; (O17) - - M16.

WIERER, purple (Steve Ham): $20 + 6 = 26 + 12 = 38$.

2a. (Eppen) - KALTERN; (E54) - G53.

2b. (G53) - G50 - H49 - H48 - I48.

2c. (I48) - KIENS --- K47.

Round 3 build allowances: 3, 5, 4.

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

RAILWAY RIVALS SOUTH TYROL (RR2565ST) ROUND 2



ROGER beats two rivals to Terlan and strikes out to the west making it to Schlanders. BUST and STIFY continue to contest the central region, with STIFY reaching LANA and extracting a payment from BUST in so doing. Meanwhile, STINK touches base at Bozen and finally decides to connect some eastern towns (before STIFY muscles in).

Early days but some of those specials do look a bit distant.

BUST
Bob Gingell
Black

2a. [5] (Bozen) - - - Terlan; (Kastelruth) - - D56

2b. [6] (D56) - - WELSCHNOFEN

2c. [4] (Terlan) --- U21 - T20

BANK: $32 + 6 - 5[\text{STIFY, Terlan-T20}] = 33$

STIFY
Bob Pitman
Red

2a. [5] (Bozen) - - - Terlan; (X23) - W24 - EPPAN

2b. [6] (Eppan) - - KALTERN; (F50) - Brixen; Terlan --- U21

2c. [4] (U21) - - LANA - S19 - S18

BANK: $20 + 6 + 6 + 6 + 5[\text{BUST, Terlan-T20}] = 43$

STINK
Michael Pargman
Purple

2a. [5] (Z21) - Y22 - Bozen; (Y22) - - W21; (Franzensfeste) - G47

2b. [6] (G47) - - VINTL - - - L47 - BRUNECK

2c. [4] (Bruneck) - N46 - - - Q48

BANK: $32 + 6 + 6 = 44$

ROGER
Roger Trethewey
Green

2a. [5] (V19) - - TERLAN --- V22

2b. [6] (V22) - - T21; (Naturns) - O18 --- N18

2c. [4] (N18) - LATSCH - L19 - - SCHLANDERS

BANK: $32 + 6 + 6 + 6 = 50$

Rolls for Round 3: 3a) 6 3b) 4 3c) 5

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

RAILWAY RIVALS AZERBAIDJAN (RR2536AZ) - ROUND 12

GM: Bob Gingell

The final Round sees BAD coast to an easy win while the luck of the dice helped AZERI to hold onto a clear second place. Despite having the only connection to Turkey and having waited until the final round to make use of it, BAD gave MARS a clear run in Race 14 that was MARS's only race not dependant on dodgy dice throws. There were many equal (or almost equal) length races where the dice ruled, which disadvantaged MARS this Round.

Races for Round 12 (enter any 5):

R14. (#2–34): MARS 20 -2b = 18; BAD +2.

R35. (#2–24): BAD 20.

36. (13–#5): AZERI [20] 20; MARS [20] 10.

37. (23–54): AZERI [23] 20; MARS [24] 10.

38. (36–11): AZERI [22] 20 +3 = 23; BAD [22] 10 -3a = 7.

39. (43–26): AZERI 20.

40. (53–41): BAD 20.

41. (62–33): BAD [13] 20; MARS [14] 10

42. (#6–61): BAD [20 from Lankaran] 20 -1a +3 = 22; AZERI [20 from Sumgait] 10 +1 = 11;

MARS [20 from Alat] 0 -3b = -3.

Scores:

BAD, green (Michael Pargman): 395 +91 = 486.

AZERI, indigo (Jim Reader): 324 +94 = 418.

MARS, orange (John Marsden): 322 +45 = 367.

Armenia: 13.

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

CONGRATULATIONS TO MICHAEL PARGMAN

End Game Statements:

- Michael Pargman (BAD, 1st): I don't like writing game-end statements before the game ends, but in this game I can't really see anyone catching up with me. Rounds 9, 10 and 11 were amazing for me, and I think the key to this was me getting a monopoly in the South West. This meant that I could leave a race out that no-one else could enter and pick my races better. Also I had some luck with the build to Iran, just at the right moment.

Thank you all for the game and a big thank you to Bob for GM-ing.

- Jim Reader (AZERI, 2nd): Congratulations to Michael for a totally convincing win and thanks to Bob for the game. I wonder if this game might have been closer with four players.

- John Marsden (MARS, 3rd): Congratulations to Michael, who got the link across Armenia first. Could be close for second.

- Bob Gingell (GM): Not close for second place after all despite some close scores at the end of Round 11. Michael's southern build into Nakhchivan was a key part of his success, while he left the North East alone which may also have been good tactics. Michael's BAD had the lead at the end of Rounds 6 and 9, so the writing was on the wall early on. MARS had a slow route from East to West, but it does look as if Jalilabad was the weakest of the start cities. AZERI had a strong network but many links did not pick up town bonuses.

I have suggested a few changes to the map that would make Nakhchivan more attractive and more accessible, but otherwise the map seems to work well.

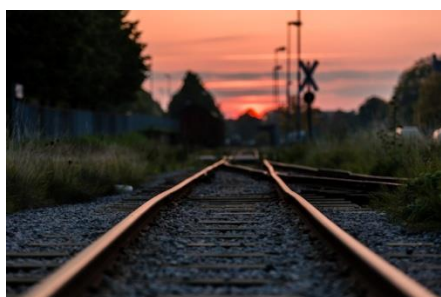
RAILWAY RIVALS AZERBAIJAN (RR2535AZ) GES PART 2

Brad Martin: OILS (Blue)

Thanks all for playing, and congratulations to Bob. The concentration of towns in the Kura River valley and the clear terrain mean that it is probably best to focus on this area. However, Roger has a nice straight line from northwest to southeast and that doesn't seem to have worked out. Reaching Nakhchivan costs a lot and doesn't reap many advantages (unless no other rival contests your presence).

GM: In the game in Western Front, the winner was the only company to connect to Nakhchivan, so I think Brad is right, the cost is worth it for a whole pie, but not for a slice. Some excellent suggestions for improvements from Bob G last issue.

RAILWAY RIVALS ZAMBIA (RR2540ZM) ROUND 10



It's BAMBI extended their lead slightly but all three companies are within 30 points with two rounds to go. BAMBI's lead would have been greater had MOSI not paid an extra 2 Kwachas to shorten their line.

MOSI make a connection to Chipata which will be in round 12, and BAMBI go to Nakonde, first "out of the hat" for round 11. BEMBA's line is not enhanced.

	BAMBI Bob Gingell Black	MOSI OA TUNYA Steve Ham Red	BEMBA Jim Reader Blue
22. Mazabuka (63) - Botswana or Zimbabwe (Sp3)		20 [10]	
23. Angola or Namibia (Sp2) - Nchelenge (11)	20 [27] -3 [DRC]		
24. Kaoma (46) - Samfya or Lundazi (22)	20 [23] -3 [DRC]	10 [25] -3 [DRC]	
25. Lusaka (65) - Mansa (21)	10 [16] +5 -3 [DRC]	20 [15] -5	
26. Livingstone (54) - Kasama (15)		10 [36] +2 -3 -3 [DRC]	20 [34] +3 -2
27. Sesheke (51) - Ndola (35)		10 [24]	20 [22]
28. Solwezi (44) - Kitwe (34)	20 [7] -1	+1	

Last Turn	233	220	224
Points from Races	65	59	41
Buils	-4	-5	
Points Total	294	274	265

Buils:

BAMBI: (I40) - - K41 - - Nakonde

MOSI OA TUNYA: (Petauke) - I56 - - - Chipata

BEMBA: No buils

Races for Round 11:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 29. Nakonde (13) - Kabompo or Kalabo (42) | 30. Ndola (36) - Monze (62) |
| 31. Tanzania (Sp5) - Mongu (43) | 32. Serenje (24) - Kitwe (33) |
| 33. Kabwe (56) - Lusaka (64) | 34. Airports (Sp6) - Mumbwa (55) |
| 35. Luwingu or Isoka (14) - Mpika (23) | |

Enter up to 5 races and build up to 4 points of track.

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

RAILWAY RIVALS ZAMBIA (RR2541ZM) ROUND 10

GM: Bob Gingell

A strong showing by ToZ is still not enough to catch up with the other companies, but ZITS closes the gap to WILBURSMITH which wins no races this round. ZITS builds to one of the two remaining half-towns, but it seems unlikely that anyone will connect to Lundazi. ROGER builds track to make it easier to avoid the pedicle road.

Races for Round 10 (max 4 entries):

22. (11 (Nchelenge) – 23 (Mpika) ToZ 20 -4w = 16; WILBURSMITH +4.
23. (21 (Mansa) – #5 (Tanzania) ROGER [12 to Mbala] 20; ToZ [14 to Nakonde] 10.
24. (34 (Kitwe) – 16 (Chinsali) ToZ [18] 20 -3d = 17; ZITS [19] 10; WS [34] 0; DRC +3.
25. (45 (Kasempa) – 36 (Ndola) ROGER [10] 20; WSMITH [12 xrp] 10, ZITS [12 xrp] 0.
26. (53 (Livingstone) – 64 (Lusaka) ZITS [12] 20; WILBURSMITH [12] 10.
27. 61 (Choma) – 44 (Solwezi) ZITS [23] 20 +1 = 21; WILBURSMITH [22] 10 -1z = 9.
28. (#1 both Mufulira – 55): ToZ [12] 20; ROGER [12] 10.

Scores and builds (max 6 points):

WILBURSMITH (Brendan Whyte), black: 203 +33 -5 = 231.

(Petauke) - I56 - - - L54 [-1z]. [-5 -1 +1 = -5]

ZITS (Richard Smith), blue: 178 +51 -1 = 228.

(G24) - F23 --- E23 - D22 - KALABO. [-6 +3 +2 = -1]

ROGER (Roger Trethewey): green: 162 +50 -9 = 203.

(U18) - - - - - Z20 [-1t-1w-1z]. [-6-3 = -9]

ToZ (Michael Pargman), orange: 115 +63 -4 = 174.

(Chinsali) - - --- N45*. [-5 +1 = -4]

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): 36 +3 = 39.

* Order modified by GM to match apparent intention and expected cost.

Races for Round 11 (enter any 4):

29. 12 (Mbala) – 54 (Livingstone)
30. 22 (Samfya / Lundazi) – 35 (Ndola)
31. 31 (Chingola) – 62 (Monze)
32. 42 (Kalabo / Kabompo) – 13 (Nakonde)
33. 52 (Kataba) – 24 (Serenje)
34. 65 (Lusaka) – #6 (Airport)
35. #2 (Angola / Namibia) – 43 (Mongu)

Build allowance for Round 11: 4 points.

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

BAG OF DUNGEON - ROUND 3



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>

Note that if a monster survives battle against one or more adventurers, it recharges hit points.

Also remember that in the postal game the discovery is done at the start of the round, so later in the round characters should position themselves where they want to discover and may express preferences for equidistant tiles.

Report for Round 3:

Turn order: Sirrus, Torvok, Alendra.

Sirrus spends 3 APs to engage monster M2, the one in front of Alendra. Brave or perhaps foolhardy as with no APs left he cannot tag Alendra and cannot run away from the monster, which is (GM rummages in bag) a Troll - HP 10 attack 2D6+4. Sirrus has a morning star so he also is 2D6+4

Sirrus Roll	Troll Roll	Sirrus Health	Troll Health	Notes
13	14	9	10	
12	12	9	10	
15	10	9	5	
12	14	7	5	
8	12	3	5	
8	9	2	5	
12	8	2	1	
14	11	2	0	troll dies

The slugfest ends with the troll dead and Sirrus badly wounded. It might have been better for Sirrus if he'd rolled a double or two, but it could have been worse. Sirrus collects and dons some steel armour.

Alendra spends 1 APs to advance to the monster M2 tile. The monster is already dead and Sirrus hands her an Elven bow. She needs to decide what to do with the shield and the bow. Note that any item can go in the backpack so although it is not possible to have both in hand, one could be stashed in the backpack, or donated to another character on the same square.

Torvok spends 1 AP to advance one square to investigate the item square, and states a preference for discovering to the right. The item is a Magic Sword (+2 to combat roll and once per postal turn it can be used to reveal the identity of a monster in an adjacent tile).

Round 4 Actions:

Turn order: Torvok, Alendra, Sirrus.

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).

Lives: 1 Solo, 2, 3 (circled)

Health:

6	7	8	9 (circled)	10
1	2	3	4	5

Items:

- Magic Sword: +2 to CBT roll. View adjacent monster*
- 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

aps:

5	19
4	18
3 (circled)	17
2	16
1	15
	14

Monster health:

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

*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.

Lives: 1 Solo, 2, 3 (circled)

Health:

6	7	8	9 (circled)	
1	2	3	4	5

Items:

- Magic Shield: -2 damage
- Elven Bow: 2 aps, Range 1-4, 1 dice damage

aps:

6	19
5	18
4 (circled)	17
3	16
2	15
1	14
0	13

Monster health:

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

*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.

Lives: 1 Solo, 2, 3 (circled)

Health:

6	7	8	9	10 (circled)
1	2 (circled)	3	4	5

Items:

- Morning Star: +2 to CBT roll
- Steel Armour: -1 damage
- Vampire teeth: 2 aps, Drain and gain 5 health from any adventurer*

aps:

5	17
4	16
3 (circled)	15
2	14
1	13
0	12

Monster health:

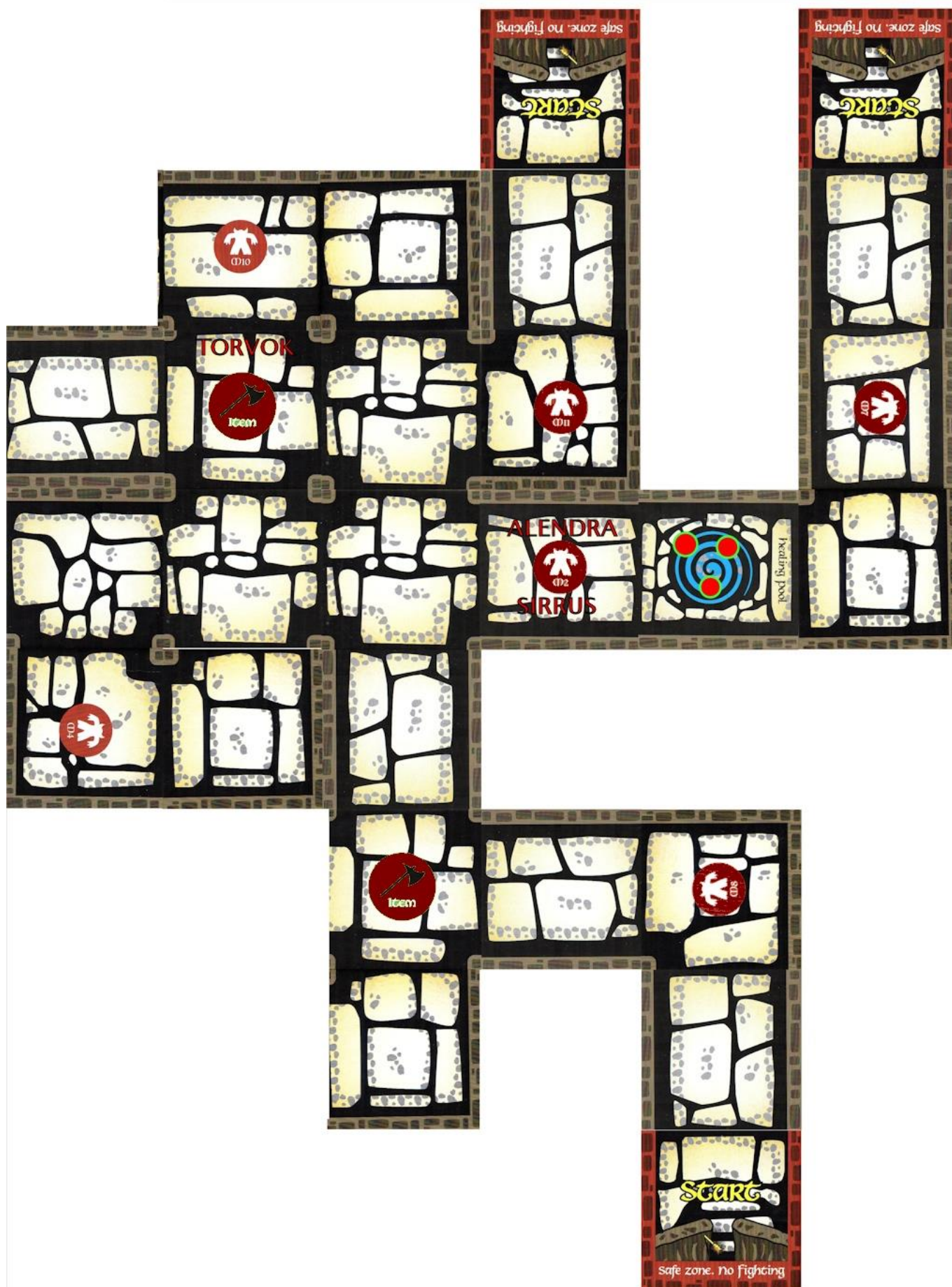
dead!	1	2	3	4	5	6*	7	8	9	10**	11	12	13
-------	---	---	---	---	---	----	---	---	---	------	----	----	----

*Take one item on kill. **Take two items on kill.

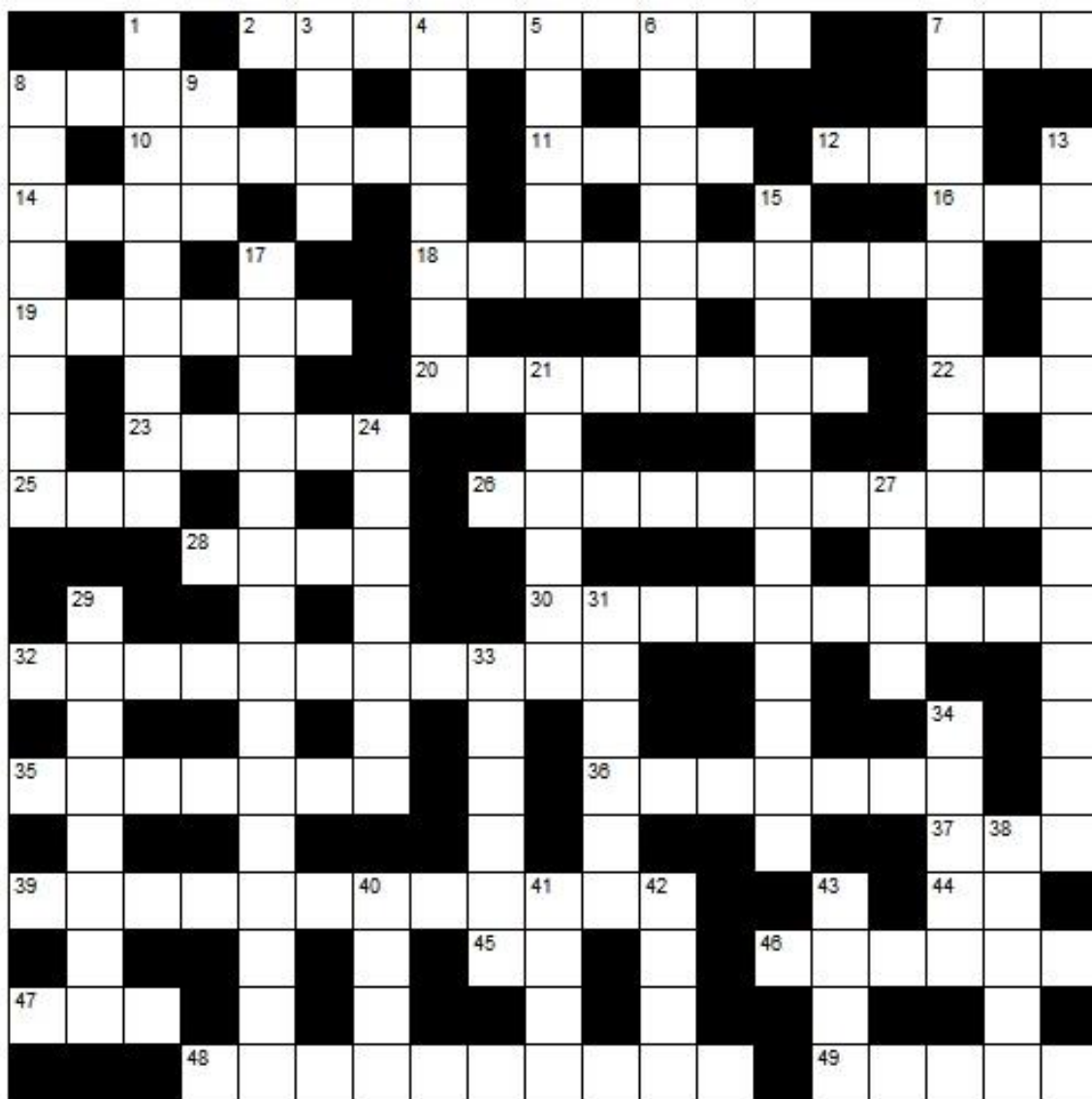
Player: Bob Gingell

Character: Sirrus the Fighter

Dungeon Map: (brown monsters and items are inactive)



RR MAD THEME CROSSWORD



Clues starting with a T in brackets are the theme answers and may not have a proper definition. There are 22 to get, 1 point for each.
Filler words do not have to be solved but may help.

Across

- 2 and 7D. [T] Eight bananas gleamed mysteriously in west Africa (7,3,3,6)
7 and 10A. [T] Tent holes affected water in southern UK (3,6)
8. Flipping 45's bear found on Celtic player's chest (4)
10. [T] see 7A
11. Brent's new oil? (4)
12 and 13D. [T] They saw two hounds playing in Hampshire countryside (3,5,5,3)
14. Radio German no square (4)
16. Sticky stuff found in 24 (3)
18. [T] Take horn or explosion in the land of many missiles (5,5)
19. Astronomical muse young and heart and wetter, we hear (6)
20. Played basses to make toxic silicate (8)
21. Precedes humbug at Christmas (3)
23. Country in which Queen nearly overthrown (5)
25. The madcap who laughed (3)
26. [T] African aura if knobs twiddled (7,4)
28. [T] Inside supernatural dragon riders' land (4)
30. [T] Gets woman before New Year, we hear, in Eurasia (10)
32. [T] see 1D

35. Measure particle found on railways (7)
36. [T] Second-rate Newton-John in South America (7)
37. No noise from horse heard (3)
39. [T] Old pals drunkenly herd oily cats (5,7)
44. Sober motorcycle race? (1,1)
45. Boozy car owners? (1,1)
46. [T] The Pink Panther's favourite cricket team according to Henri Mancini? (6)
47. [T] The Great British boondoggle? (1,1,1n)
48. [T] VAT and alms dealt out in Sweden (10)
49. [T] Country starts to steal your rubies in Arabia (5)

Down

- 1 and 32A. [T] Mutated organ in hand above size in Europe (6,3,11)
3. Electronic slash? No it's a thrusting weapon (4)
4. [T] Rough sea into Baltic (7)
5. Atkinson's abacus? (5)
6. Letters dropped in East End (7)
7. [T] see 2A
8. [T] Our hands washed in Central America (8)

9. Writer of endless ode (3)
13. [T] see 12A
15. [T] One giant bond made in Africa (4,3,5)
17. [T] Dung spaniel line danced in Ireland (6,9)
21. [T] Carbon negative, mountainous and happy place (6)
24. Burmese city telephoned with nothing on (7)
27. Block light sword (4)
29. [T] Game of Thrones diverted to sewers (8)
31. [T] Zulus start morning with ale, reportedly, in southern Africa (6)
33. Peninsula formed from most of Russian region (6)
34. [T] Florida is magic! (5)
38. Console using cat Ariana sheltered (5)
40. Leave out headless puke (4)
41. Roald or Tarka (4)
42. At first, young author regretted novelising rambling tale (4)
43. Unbeatable poker hand? Bollocks! (4)

Preface – Last call for The Serpents Gambit, which will start next issue. Rules are on the website.



Issue 76

Parkrun 4 (2 of 4) - At the 2k point there is a big pack sharing the lead. This contains Andy, Tom, Mike and Bob G Martin and John H who used Richard and Bob P to do a bit of work for them. Steve and Howard are just behind but got knocked out of their rhythm seeing so many people overtake. Chris moved through the field nicely as he upped his pace. Roger is just about still in contention but will have to use his resources well for the remainder of the race. The gap is probably too big for the remaining runners, who can just enjoy their morning exercise.

Park Runner	Play	Turn SP	Overtake	Lead / Tail	New Stamina	Time after 2k
Richard	Relax	6		1.13	53-4.87=48.13	4.48+4.48=9.36
Bob P	Relax	3		1.13	58-1.87=56.13	4.48+4.48=9.36
Andy	Target Richard	6		1.13	54-4.87=49.13	4.54+4.42=9.36
Tom	Target Bob P	3		1.13	57-1.87=55.13	4.56+4.40=9.36
Mike	6 Target Richard	6		1.13	56-4.87=51.13	4.56+4.40=9.36
Bob G	Target Bob P	3		1.13	60.18-1.87=58.31	5.00+4.36=9.36
Martin	5 Track Bob G	1.5		1.13	59.18-0.37=58.81	5.00+4.36=9.36
John H	6- Target Bob P	1.5		1.13	59.18-0.37=58.81	5.00+4.36=9.36
Steve H	Track Bob P	1.5	7		49.5-8.5=41	4.49+4.48=9.37
Howard	Track Andy	3	5		55-8=47	4.55+4.42=9.37
Dane	4 - Relax	5.5	7		49.5-12.5=37	4.49+4.49=9.38
Chris	Target Dane	5.5			59.18-5=53.68	5.00+4.38=9.38
Roger	12	12	3		59.18-15=44.18	5.00+4.48=9.48
Allan	2-9	9			59.18-9=50.18	5.00+4.51=9.51
Jim	2-7	7			59.18-7=52.18	5.00+4.53=9.53
Brad	4 - Relax	1.5	6		57-7.5=49.5	4.57+4.57=9.54
Paul	1-5	5			59.18-5=54.18	5.00+4.55=9.55
Kevin	1-4	4			59.18-4=55.18	5.00+4.56=9.56
Steve G	1-3	3		1	59.18-4=55.18	5.00+4.57=9.57
Michael	1-2	2		3	59.18-5=54.18	5.00+4.58=9.58
John M	3-4	4	12	5	56-21=35	4.56+5.04=10.0

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 2 of 5 – *Well I think I got away with it (Ahem). You may be pleased to know it's back to normality, with the next three sets. The reason why I set this one, was because I was interested to know if any of the recent biggest hits entered the consciousness of the aging PBM community. I'm sure most of you will have heard some of these songs.*

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) **Someone You Loved - Lewis Capaldi**

2- Yeah, I'm gonna take my horse to the xxx xxxx xxxx / I'm gonna ride 'til I can't no more (2018) **Old Town Road - Lil Nas X ft Billy Ray Cyrus** (Bob Pitman)

3 – Yeah / I've been tryna call / I've been on my own for long enough (2020) **Blinding Lights – The Weekend**

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) **Bad Habits – Ed Sheeran**

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) **Levitating – Dua Lipa**

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) **As it was – Harry Styles**

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) **Heat Waves – Glass Animals**

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) **Flowers - Miley Cyrus** (Richard Smith. Bob Pitman, Martin Walker)

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) **Last Night – Morgan Wallen**

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) **Stick Season – Noah Kahan**

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) **Lose Control – Teddy Swims** (Bob Pitman)

Theme – The highest selling singles in the UK and US (2019-25). I had to make it 11 songs as Blinding lights was the highest selling in both.

John Hopkins 17+0=17
 Richard Smith 14+2=16
 Bob Pitman 10+6=16
 Steve Guest 15+0=15
 Martin Walker 12+2=14
 Jim Reader 11+0=11
 Paul Evans 10+0=10
 Brendan Whyte 9+0=9
 Dane Maslen 7+0=7
 Chris Hibbert 1
 Tom Howell 1

Richard – my guess at the theme will be surnames of footballers (hence the 11 songs).

John – Theme So, “not popular” is right. And the theme is (possibly) “cricket team”

Bob - 2. Old Town Road – Billy Ray Cyrus? I can hear the song in my head and I'm sure I saw it on tv but I can't remember whether it was Billy Ray or his daughter – guess!!

What a terrible performance – for this episode I relied mostly on my wife's CD playing!! *GM Pretty good for this round if you ask me*

Theme - All been used in adverts?

Brendan - My guess: Taylor Swift for all of them. *GM I think that's a really unlucky wrong guess, Miss Swift could easily have been included in this theme.*

Theme Taylor Swift.

I don't think I've listened to a post-2010 song in... oooh, must be ... at least... 25 years.

Paul - OMG! Judging by the release dates on these, I'm not going to know any of them.Yep, none of them is familiar.

Dane – nul points *GM join the club*

Martin - 9. Lewis Capaldi?

Steve - A couple sound familiar, but I have nothing. I have enough trouble remembering lyrics from the mid to late 90s when I was still listening to loads of contemporary stuff. Theme: Lyrics I don't know

Lyrics 3 of 5 – 1 point will be added, to your singer and song points, should you get the theme. It's unlikely anyone will get the theme this time, as it's very niche. I've only really done one as it makes it easier to come up with 10 songs.

- 1 - Oh-oh, all the lights are shining so brightly everywhere (so brightly, baby) / And the sound of children's laughter fills the air (oh, oh, yeah) / And everyone is singing (oh, yeah) / I hear those sleigh bells ringing (1994)
- 2- Bittersweet memories / That is all I'm taking with me / So goodbye, please don't cry / We both know I'm not what you, you need (1992)
- 3 – In restless dreams I walked alone / Narrow streets of cobblestone / 'Neath the halo of a street lamp / I turned my collar to the cold and damp (1964)
- 4 - All alone, I have cried / Silent tears full of pride / In a world made of steel / Made of stone (1983)
- 5- Once bitten and twice shy / I keep my distance / But you still catch my eye (1984)
- 6 - Loneliness was tough / The toughest role you ever played / Hollywood created a superstar / And pain was the price you paid (1973)
- 7 - Those were such happy times / And not so long ago / How I wondered where they'd gone / But they're back again (1973)
- 8 - Blown (blown blown blown) / 'Round by the wind / Thrown (thrown thrown thrown) / Down in a spin (1975)
- 9 - And when the night is cloudy there is still a light that shines on me / Shinin' until tomorrow, (1970)
- 10 - Her weapons were her crystal eyes / Making every man mad / Black as the dark night she was / Got what no one else had, whoa! (1969)

6 Nimmit! GES

Richard - I think I was a bit lucky, on more than one occasion!

Bob G - Congratulations to Richard for a stunning win - no-one was near you.

Fragments – Prominent People (32 / 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.

Person 1 H**a* t*e*o m**n* mod*I 20 e*i*o to**h *A*o* l** l* 40 *e*s* *c**i *si*n **i*h 60 **a*t *e**d n*tw*
*ko*t 80 *em*o * (86 letters, 6 points) (not Charlie Chaplin, Neil Armstrong, Mark Twain, Buzz Aldrin, Liz Truss)

Person 2 In*e* t**p* o**l* y **e* 20 or*d* m o*t* a**u* e *u*t 40 i**E* q ua*s **s** a*ed (59 letters, 6 points)
(not Jack the Ripper, Ken Jennings)

Person 3 *b**f *s**n *h*** M***d 20 ***e* it**h *Ce** s**** 40 Dr*go *(46 letters 7 points)

Person 4 *h*s* *t**n **pr* *i**n 20 *o**h *U**t *d**a **s** 40 *a*p* a*son th**i **d** 60 l***i ** (67 letters 7 points) (not Pocahontas)

Person 5 l'I**e *a** There is an apostrophe after the first letter (9 letters 8 points) (not Donald Trump, Mohamid Ali)

Person 6 l*v** t***r **a** y**e* 20 o** *s**o* d**** f**o* 40 *e**a *i**a ***n* *s** 60 r**t* *s*** r****
a**g* 80 ****l e**** a**l* *q*** 100 s***u **e**r** *s** 120 ****t ***e (130 letters 8 points)

Person 7 ****u ****t *a*** ***** 20 *p*** **b*** **t* *****e 40 ****t *o*o* **i*** **e (58 letters 9 points)

Person 8 *u*** *a*** **b** ***r* 20 **** *n** ***c* *****o 40 s***** *w***** **a *k (57 letters 9 points)

Person 9 ***** ***** s**** 20 *p**a r**** **e* ***** 40 ***** **u* *s*** ***** 60 ***** a****
***** 80 ***** (85 letters 10 points)

Person 10 ***** **a* *****n ***** 20 ***** **a *****n ***** 40 ****U ***** ***** n* (57 letters 10 points)

The 50-point target looms ever closer

Fragment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Richard	7	8	8		9						32
Bob P	8	8									16
Bob G				8	9						17
Chris		7				9					16

THE TANGERINE TERROR #83/I AM THE KURIOUS KUMQUAT #13

The "Wet Grandpa" Issue

Idiotorial



I seem to have spent the last two weeks forever drowned, but at least the little Grandnipper (Freddie James Bishop) has arrived.

We could have done with a Freddie down under. Ashes already over. Well done ECB, pushing unfettered Bazball, not scheduling proper preparation games, and destroying a competitive County Championship with proper players, played during the warm dry days of August.

DEAD LETTER OFFICE

Chris Hibbert (on games not played in the warm dry days of August)

Our Sharks are doing well. They're in the thick of the race for the final playoff spot (it's only a quarter way into the season, so plenty left to go.) Our new young star (Macklin Celebrini) is battling with two aging superstars and another youngster for the scoring lead. Each game that they each play juggles the positions a bit, but Nate MacKinnon (30 y.o.) has 44 currently, Connor Bedard (20 y.o.) has 37, Celebrini (19 y.o.) has 37 and Connor MacDavid (28 y.o.) has 36. Bedard was the top draft pick in 2023, and Celebrini in 2024.

Auntie Tangerine

Always good when your team is based on good young prospects. Ours very much isn't. Most of them are over 30, big and clumsy, but willing. It's probably too much to ask for us to pick up someone under the age of 20 before the transfer deadline.

Allan Stagg (on getting stuff before deadlines)

Given that I'm currently missing a lot of deadlines, I'm making a big effort to get orders in before I forget.

Auntie Tangerine

Thanks for these Allan. One of the advantages of having hardly games running is that there aren't many orders to collect. I see you've voted for more Don't Wordle.

Brendan Whyte (on the consequences of bad votes)

Actually, the irony of the US 'no kings' protests, is that they're opposing a PRESIDENT, and if they had not got rid of KG3, they wouldn't now be in this bloody mess. Better a king you didn't vote for than a dickhead you did. (and it's not as if you weren't warned the first time). I feel like going to the next such rally myself with a "We need KC3" sign...

DW Kitching

GAME END STATEMENTS

Mike P : I enjoyed it, but I suspect there was some skulduggery during the last few rounds. I thought the spirit of the game was to use only words that you actually knew, not to look up obscure words? I can't see how the other two managed to catch me otherwise. But if it was genuine, then congrats all round.

Richard S : This game definitely works though it is easy for players and/or the GM to make boobs (as a classical sculptor might). As I mentioned before I think the "push your luck" idea is a goer but I would favour a modest consolation prize for Wordling (1 or 2 points).

Allan S : Thanks for running the game, Howard. I feel that it worked as a game, although it lost some of the key elements of Don't Wordle (e.g. being able to UNDO a guess, and having to submit a different guess each turn). I think that I gained from being able to use the same word in a guess multiple times (i.e. TOLLY), and I would suggest that if you run it again you have a rule that players can't submit the same guess on consecutive turns. There may also be possibilities to amend the points that players can score.

Brendan W : Feels like having an orgy... trying not to wordle before the others. I think I got confused and wordled too early. But hey, then I get to sit back, light a cigar and watch the others thrash around some more, which adds to my jolly.

	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	2	3	0	0	34
Richard Smith	0	2	2	0	2	0	3	2	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	3	3	0	0	34
Allan Stagg	0	0	3	1	2	1	2	3	2	1	3	2	3	2	3	1	2	3	0	0	34
Brendan Whyte	3	2	1	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	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	0	0	6

Allan picks up missing points for #16/#17. Top three tied on #34. All to play for.

- #15 : Was Point Salad
- #16 : Was No Thanks (AKA Geschenk)
- #17 : Not Thirst
- #18 : Not A Gest Of Robin Hood
- #19 : Not Temple Chess Island, Virgin Queen, Spirit Island
- #20 : Not Holy Grail, Quacks, Aleph Null

<p>GAME 17 (1 VP)</p> 	<p>GAME 18 (1 VP)</p> 
<p>GAME 19 (2 VP)</p> <div style="display: flex; flex-wrap: wrap;"> <div style="width: 50%;">  <p>CORAL PALACE</p> </div> <div style="width: 50%;">  <p>CLIFFS OF ABANDON</p> </div> <div style="width: 50%;">  <p>BRONZE GATE</p> </div> <div style="width: 50%;">  <p>TEMPLE OF THE SUN</p> </div> </div>	<p>GAME 20 (2 VP)</p> 

SubPAR 13

Pennsylvania Ramblings



Lights Last weekend, Thomas and Kelsey took us to see the Astra Lumina lights in Alverthorpe Park. This was a set of light displays set in the wooded gardens of a large house. The lights, also accompanied by some space-age music and were spaced along a 1-mile path in the woods, to hide the other displays. It was a nice event, and we also enjoyed some of the artwork on display in the house after. Some nice warm hot chocolate helped with the cold.

The Final Countdown I will retire in May next year after 38.5 years employment with Anchor Chemical, Air Products and Evonik. I don't have a countdown app (yet), but I recently counted the number of weeks I had remaining to help plan out customer activities and travel in remaining time. 21 weeks and counting....

We Are Family We enjoyed a relaxing Christmas. We flew out to Indiana to see Hannah, Michael and Kyler the weekend before and had a fun time with them. Jacqueline and I were busy at Church on Christmas Eve, so we had a lazy Christmas day with Thomas and Kelsey joining us for dinner.

Roll With It Someone asked if we were still bowling and the answer is yes. So far, we've had a successful season finishing 4th in the first half and we're currently top in the second half. We've been buoyed by Kelsey's stunning form with her average close to 200. Mine has slipped a little and is now below 170, but still respectable.

Snowblind It's been a cold December so far and we had our first big snowstorm earlier this week. A mere 6 inches to start with. More expected on Boxing Day.

We All Play the Game It took a little while, but I finally got back into the swing of map designing again. I completed the new Railway Rivals map of Togo and Benin with the help of Richard and Bob and there should be a waiting list or two open for this, I have a new Bus Boss map in development of the Pays Cathar region (Département l'Aude) of France.

Three Lions I have never been to a World Cup game although I did attend a few qualifiers in my youth. I was looking forward to the World Cup in the US, with several venues close by. I thought I might be able to get cheap ticket for some of the early games between the less known and smaller countries. Sadly, this is unlikely. The cheapest tickets for Ecuador (population around 12 million) versus Cote d'Ivoire (population 30 million, possibly restricted for travel to the US) are \$606 each, oxygen masks not included. Tickets for Curacao (whose total population is about 10% of Philadelphia) versus Cote d'Ivoire start at \$280. Expect lots of empty seats.

Railway Rivals (Senegal and Gambia) - RR2556SG

Round Five

COUER Steve Ham Purple	5a) 4. (J13) – J14 - <u>LINGUERE</u> - I16 - I17, 5b) 3. (I17) – I18 – I19 - I20, 5c) 3. (I21) – I22 - <u>MATAM</u> : (V18) - Velingara. BANK: 27 + 3 + 2 (ROGER) = 32
SETI Richard Smith Blue	5a) 4. (V10) - - - W10 - Sedhiou, 5b) 3. (Sedhiou) - - - X11, 5c) 3. (X11) – X12 - X13 - Kolda. BANK: 48 + 1 (BOGGER) = 49
ROGER Roger Trethewey Black	5a) 4. (P9) - Kaolack - P7 - O7 - O6, 5b) 3. (Sedhiou) – X9 - X8: (P9) - O9, 5c) 3. (Kolda) – X14 - Y15 / Guinea-Bissau: (O9) - N9. BANK: 55 – 2 (COUER) – 2 + 1 (BOGGER) = 52
BOGGER Bob Gingell Brown	5a) 4. (O9) - O8 - O7 - N6: (N24) - M24, 5b) 3. (M24) - L23 - K23 - J22, 5c) 3. (J22) – <u>MATAM</u> : (N24) - M25 – <u>BAKEL</u> . BANK: 73 + 6 + 3 – 1 (SETI) + 2 – 1 (ROGER) = 82

It's been pointed out that I've been a bit miserly with the build rolls in this game, with the average allowance per turn around 11. Therefore, the sixth-round die rolls are 6a) 6, 6b) 6, and 6c) 5. I will review whether I need to up the usual build allowances for the racing stages after this round. 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 Eight

Please note that Valka (a connection to Latvia has not been connected, so all races to Latvia this round were to Ipiiki.

	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>
8. Tapa or Tamasalu (23) - Paldiski or Saue (65)	20 - 4	10 + 4			
9. Tabivere or Anstala (33) - Latvia (Sp5)	10 - 2 – 1 – 2	+ 2	0 + 1 - 1	20 + 2	
10. Tartu (31) - Kohtla-Jarve (16)	10 - 2 + 1	20 + 2 – 1 - 1	+ 1		
11. Kohtla-Jarve (15) - Haapsalu (51)	No Entrants				
12. Valga (46) - Western Islands (Sp1)		+ 4		20 + 2	10 - 4 - 2
13. Jogeve (25) - Moisakula (45)	0 - 1 - 1	20 + 1 - 1	10	+ 1 + 1	
14. Lihula or Rummu (52) - Maardu (66)		20 - 1 + 3		10 + 1 – 3 - 1	+ 1

	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>
Points from last round	54	114	64	89	53
Points from races	28	82	11	53	5
Build Costs	- 12 +1 +2 -2 +1-3	- 12 - 1 + 2 - 1 + 2	- 12 - 2 - 2 + 1	- 12 + 2 - 1 + 1 - 2	- 12 + 3 -2 +2 +3-1
Corrections	Happily, none again this round except the build allowance				
Total	69	186	60	130	51

ARVO: (V28) – U28 – T27 – S27 – R26 – Q26 – P25 - O25 - O24:
(Tamasalu) – E43 - E42 – F41 - Rakvere.

BENDY: (M10) - M11 - N11 - O12 - P12 – Rapla: (V25) - U26 - T25 - S25 - R24 - Q25:
(H50) - I51 - J51. (*Bob, the last part of your builds were unclear*)

ROGER: (G47) – H46 – I46 – J45 – K45 – L44 – M44 – N43 – O43 – O42 – P42 – Q41 - R41:
(A52) - B51

MARS: (Z14) – A49 – B48 – C48 – D47 - E47 – E46 - E45:
(G67) - H66 – H65 – H64 – H63 – Elva/Otepaa.

ET: (F45) - F44 – F43 – F42 - F41 – Rakvere: (T40) – U40 - V41 - X40:
(P21) – SINDI: (B60) – A61 - Z26.

The third set of races is

11. Kohtla-Jarve (15) - Haapsalu (51):	15. Russia (SP4) - Narva (11)
16. Rapla (53) - Elva / Otepaa (36):	17. Polva or Rapina (35) - Paide (41)
18. Vijandi (44) - Tallinn (63):	19. Parnu (55) - Rakvere (24)
20. Finland (SP3) - Loksa or Kehra (22):	21. Tallinn (61) - Sillame (13)

Enter up to 4 races, plus race 11 and build up to 8 points (the build allowance should have been 10 last round).

Railway Rivals (Zambia) – RR2545ZM

Round Ten

Correction: PEAR's build across the Zimbabwe border should have cost 6 and not 3 as charged: +3 for crossing the river (Z26 – Z27) during flood season.

Race	ACR <i>Brad Martin</i> Blue	PEAR <i>Kev Lee</i> Purple	MOSI <i>Steve Guest</i> Orange
22. Solwezi (44) - Kitwe (34)	10		20
23. Kaoma (46) - Samfya or Lundazi (22)	10 + 1	20 - 3 (DRC) – 1 - 5	+ 5
24. Mansa (21) - Kasama (15)			20
25. Mufulira (32) - Tanzania (Sp5)		10	20 - 3 (DRC)
26. Lusaka (66) - Mozambique / Malawi (Sp4)	20	10	
27. Nakonde (13) - Sesheke (51)	10 + 2		20 - 3 (DRC) - 2
28. Choma (61) - Livingstone (53)	10		20

Race	ACR <i>Brad Martin</i> Blue	PEAR <i>Kev Lee</i> Purple	MOSI <i>Steve Guest</i> Orange
Points from Last Round	269	200	244
Points from Races	63	31	97
Corrections		- 3	
Total	332	228	341

There were no builds this round.

The fifth set of races is

- | | |
|---|---|
| 29. Chinsali (16) - Lusaka (65): | 30. Kabompo or Kalabo (42) - Kabwe (56) |
| 31. Lusaka (64) - Mwinilunga or Zambezi (41): | 32. Kitwe (33) - Livingstone (54) |
| 33. Botswana or Zimbabwe (Sp3) - Mpika (23): | 34. Nchelenge (11) - Airports (Sp6) |
| 35. Chipata (26) - Chingola (31) | |

Enter up to 5 (five) races 10 points of track.

Railway Rivals (Bhutan) - RR2552BT

Game Start

Questions

- Are leapfrog rules in effect? Yes\
- The Airport markers indicate that the associated cities have an airport, right? We don't have to build rail to where the airport markers are? Correct.

ROGER
Roger Trethewey
Black

1a) 3. (Gelephu) – U19,
1b) 5. (U19) - DAMPHU - S15
1c) 5. (S15) – R14 - Q14 – Q13 – WANGDUE PHODRANG: (Gelephu) – Y21.
BANK: 20 + 6 + 6 = 32

BUDDHA
John Walker
Red

1a) 3. (Phuntshuling) – GEDU - L19,
1b) 5. (L19) – CHHUKA - K17,
1c) 5. (K17) - K16 - L15 – L14 - L13 - M13.
BANK: 20 + 6 + 6 = 32

Dzong
Chris Hibbert
Yellow

1a) 3. (Samdrup Johnkhar) – I44 – NGANGLAM,
1b) 5. (Nganglam) - G44 - - - F43 - E44
1c) 5. (E44) - PANBANG - C43 – C42 - B41: (G44) - H43.
BANK: 20 + 6 + 6 = 32

The second-round die rolls are 2a) 5, 2b) 5, and 2c) 5.

Railway Rivals (Durham 1826) - RR2571DH

Game Start

Our rivals for this new game are –

Brad Martin	Company Name: COP (Coal Only Please)
	Color: Blue
Opening Bid	BADC bid 11
Bank: 20 – 11 = 9	

Richard Smith	Company Name: Durham's Unbeatable Steam Trains (DUST) Color: Red Opening Bid Bid 9 for DABC Bank: $20 - 9 = 11$
Roger Trethewey	Company Name: Read On Gorgeous, Exciting Risks (ROGER) Color: Black Opening Bid 11 for ABCD Bank: $20 - 11 = 9$ (1 free fast track token)
Bob Gingell	Company Name: Horses Are Best (HAB) Color: Green Opening Bid Bid 12 for ABDC Bank: $20 - 12 = 8$

Bob wins the first round of bidding and pays 12 for Y21/24 to Shildon. Brad and Roger both bid 11 for the next bid and Brad wins the tiebreaker to choose the Shildon to Darlington track. Roger gets a free fast track token and chooses the G66 to P66 track. Richard pays 9 for the remaining Eaglescliffe to Stockton track.

Some reminders – track can be upgraded to fast track at a cost of 10/- (of 0.5) per half hex. I will try to find some way to represent upgraded track on the map in future rounds. During races, a roll of 5 will be treated as a 4 on regular, not upgraded track. The minimum race length is 5 hexes.

The build allowances for the first round are – 1a) 6, 1b) 2, and 1c) 6.

Bus Boss (Farnham and Aldershot) – BB422FAL

Round Four

Bob builds the (relatively) new Blackwater bypass (A331) that was built after I left Farnham. I still usually take the Odiham exit off the M3 to get to Farnham as it goes past Folly Hill. I regularly used to walk the route of CHAMPS first build, down Cranmore Lane with its Monkey Puzzle trees and a notorious speed trap.

CHAMPS Brad Martin Colour: Brown	Heath End - Aldershot Town Centre: Runfold - Compton $84 - 12 = 72$
ROGER Roger Trethewey Colour: Green	Badshot Lea – Runfold: Hogs Back Brewery - Shepherd & Flock $83 - 12 = 71$
FAB Richard Smith Colour: Blue	Sandy Hill - Folly Hill - Ewshot $85 - 12 = 73$
FEAR Kev Lee Colour: Red	Farnham Station - Compton; Aldershot Station - Aldershot FC $86 - 12 = 74$
BANG Bob Gingell Colour: Black	Shepherd & Flock - Farnborough $84 - 10 = 74$

The build order for round 5 is Roger, Richard, Kevin, Bob and Brad. 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).

THE CELESTIAL DRAGON #13



Deadline for all games: Friday 30th January 2026

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

The Celestial Steam Locomotive	#43	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
 RAILWAY RIVALS Durham 1826 - RR2570DH - Kev Lee, Brendan Whyte, Steve Ham, Jim Reader. Game start held over due to missing orders.
 KENDO NAGASAKI (Destination X Variant) - round 2 inside, more can join
 BY WORDLEY DEMAND - all reader game underway, anyone can join
 NEW! RAILWAY RIVALS - Togo & Benin - Jim Reader, Brad Martin, 1 to 3 more wanted (GM will be Bob or Richard who are both playing in the game in SubPAR).

Here Be Dragons	#76	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 - the race continues all can send in orders or "go random"
 NEW! THE SERPENT'S GAMBIT - Richard Smith, Bob Gingell 0-2 more wanted.

The Tangerine Terror I Am The Kurious Kumquat	#83 #13	Howard Bishop	laticsexile@outlook.com
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Waiting List / Notes:

THE NAME OF THE GAME - all reader game in the final throes
 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	#13	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.
 NEW! RAILWAY RIVALS - Togo & Benin - Bob Gingell, Roger Trethewey, Richard Smith - 1 or 2 more wanted.