PUZZLED

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PUZZLED

Secrets and Clues from a Life Lost in Words

DAVID ASTLE



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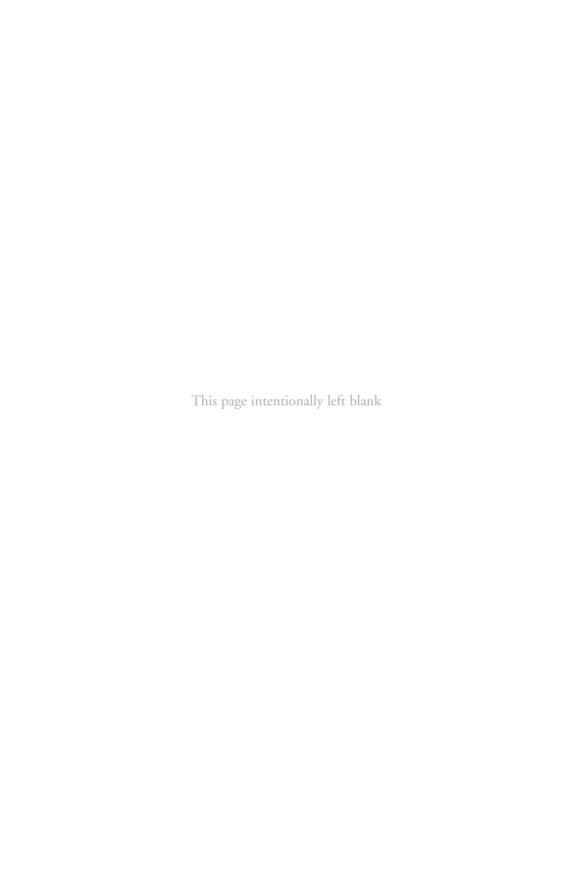
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CONTENTS

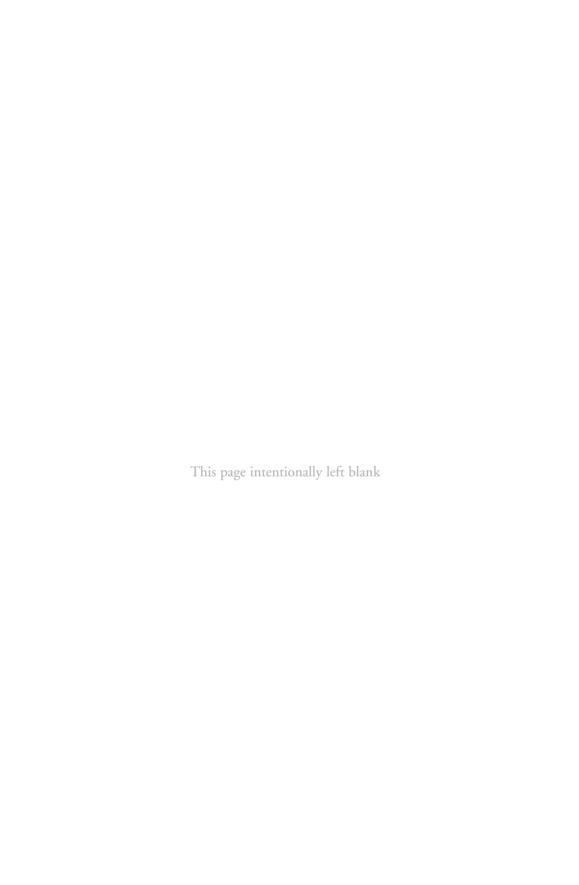
Introduction: How the Bug Bit	1
Master Puzzle	12
ANAGRAMS	
Chapter 1: Expose Russ, Ned, Hector (7)	16
Chapter 2: Ignorance spoilt nice scene (9)	28
Chapter 3: Enhanced means to focus on scatterbrain locus (10)	39
Chapter 4: Discourteous shift is dispatched, subcontracted (10)	50
CHARADES	
Chapter 5: Nebraskan City Circle gives old lady a laugh (5)	64
Chapter 6: A weir worker set (7)	76
Chapter 7: Early curve superb on cheerleader (7)	86
Chapter 8: Cockney chaos going to stir green (7)	97
CONTAINERS	
Chapter 9: Sucker pens article for website guide (4,3)	110
Chapter 10: Women's mag covers one Italian painter (6)	122
HIDDENS	
Chapter 11: Creepy film absorbed in autopsy chopping (6)	134
Chapter 12: Partial set closer?! (3.)	144

DOUBLE MEANINGS

Chapter 13: Giant flower shop online (6)	154
Chapter 14: Decrease anaemia remedy?(4)	164
HOMOPHONES	
Chapter 15: As mentioned, weather to get hotter? (5)	178
Chapter 16: Soundly ushered back and docketed (9)	187
Chapter 17: Nation hunting craft in Italian canal, say (9)	196
DELETIONS	
Chapter 18: Outlaw fled outlaw to repeat (5)	208
ALTERNATIONS	
Chapter 19: After boomers it regularly goes next! (3-1)	220
CODES	
Chapter 20: Koran avidly studied by Arab holy leaders here! (6)	232
EXOTICS	
Chapter 21: Pizza centre behind which French grill?(4)	244
MANIPULATIONS	
Chapter 22: Dope doubled his \$500 in seven days (4)	256
PUNS	
Chapter 23: Swinger's bar for partner pickups? (7)	268
Chapter 24: Twister for openers? (8)	278
REVERSALS	
Chapter 25: Snub regressive outcast (5)	292
Chapter 26: Pacific Islander immune to revolution (7)	300
SPOONERISMS	
Chapter 27: Seafood nibble causing pains for Spooner (4,5)	312
REBUSES	
Chapter 28: <i>M E</i> (4,2,4)	324

&LITS

Chapter 29: Central period in time-spread one spent! (7)	338
HYBRIDS	
Chapter 30: Almost completed month hosting upstart libertine (3,4)	348
Chapter 31: Disorientated, guided east of tall grass zone one slashed (10)	358
Chapter 32: Press disrupt opening about Russian writer (8)	368
Chapter 33: New 24-across-coated pickup yet to be delivered (2,5)	377
MINI PUZZLES	
Mini Puzzle 1: Friendly	388
Mini Puzzle 2: Friendly	389
Mini Puzzle 3:Tricky	390
Mini Puzzle 4:Tricky	391
Mini Puzzle 5: Gnarly	392
Mini Puzzle 6: Gnarly	393
Quizling Solutions	396
Mini Puzzle Solutions	406
A Word of Thanks	409



INTRODUCTION

How the Bug Bit

Forget Batman. My hero as a kid was The Riddler. Every afternoon after school I longed to hear that cackle coming from the television. I adored the lurid jumpsuit, the mask, the bowler hat: the whole puzzle package. How his crook-like cane was shaped like a question mark, and his henchwomen—Query and Echo—were smart, verbal babes trained in combat and repartee. And no-one got hurt. Or killed at least. Murder wasn't on The Riddler's agenda. His mayhem of choice was bank jobs and wordplay. True, the guy was a psycho, but my kind of psycho, a villain after my six-year-old heart.

His obsession of course was the riddles, those brain-curlers he left scattered round Gotham City. Puns, quips, codes: the puzzles were his calling cards, left behind in looted bank vaults, taunting the forces of good, hinting sideways where his gang was heading next. (What people are always in a hurry? Russians. How many sides has a circle? Two—the inside and outside.) Where Batman had the muscle, the stamina, the entire Batcupboard of gimmicks, he often struggled to match the limber brain of my lime-green pinup.

Where is a man drowned but still not wet? That's another riddle I recall, a coded warning for the caped crusaders. Drowned but not wet ... I pictured a man trapped in a silo, drowning in millet, or maybe a poor comedian, drowned out by boos. What picture was The Riddler painting? Quick, the clock was ticking. I dreamt up a vat of liquid honey—is sticky the same as wet? Or maybe talcum powder. Can a man drown in

fabric, or dust, or fairy floss? By the time I'd stumbled on quicksand, so had Batman, literally, drowning in the Riddler's booby-trap. If not for a Bat-grapnel we may have lost him.

The routine was relentless. *Riddle-crime-riddle-aha-crime-riddle* until the next episode, every caper a fresh string of clues. Somehow I began to think puzzles might well be a calling. (Bear in mind I was six at the time.) Just imagine, living day to day on a wordplay salary. Why not? The idea felt no less weird than selling sea monkeys or X-ray spectacles.

At my local library, I dug out jokes and limericks from Junior Reference, riddles and knock-knocks: a menace in search of ammo. I revelled in embarrassed zebras and ducks quacking up. I hoarded elephants in custard and backward-flying bees. Pity my family, each night copping the dandy-lions, the sand-witches and all the other groaners in the book. At one stage, when the clan was travelling to Uluru and back, I spent the trip reading 1001 Riddles. Rocking and rolling past The Olgas and Kings Canyon, I swotted centipedes with wooden legs and The Hatchback of Notre Dame.

I nagged Mum for puzzle books, the rainy-day kind with dot-to-dots and spot-the-difference pictures. I circled French towns in seek-a-word boxes, filled in the blanks, cracked the mazes, built pyramids out of letters.

The disease spread to the breakfast table. By late primary school, I started to see secret messages lurking in food labels and on cereal boxes. Eta Mayonnaise, I saw, held the sentence 'I annoy a mate' in reverse, and did I bug my family with that discovery. Shades of the day I found the fluke hiding in OVALTINE:

'No-one's leaving the table until you solve a puzzle,' I told my younger siblings.

'Not another one,' moaned Kate, Sister One, a future psychologist.

'Pass the milk,' said my brother, Richard, a defiant spirit to this day.

'Is this like a game?' wondered Sister Two, Lib, a multilinguist-in-the-making, barely out of nappies.

'What two colours are hiding inside Ovaltine?' I slid the tin across. 'You have to use every letter once, and once only.'

'Grnfff, said Kate, her mouth full of Weetie Puffs.

'Huh?' said Lib.

'Violet,' said Rich. 'Can I go now?'

Escape was never so simple. I stole my brother's spoon, pointed to the Ovaltine label as the only ticket to freedom. 'Is tin a colour?' asked Kate.

'The tin is green,' observed Lib.

Richard was seething. 'You want some Ovaltine on your head?'

'Tan,' said Kate. At least she was trying.

'Tan and ...?'

'Who cares?' they replied.

To say I was a pain in the neck is a fair summation of those days growing up. But puzzles were a virus in the blood. Even the fact that ASTLE, our surname, held a dozen different five-letter words seemed to vindicate my calling as a mix-master. Most names are lucky to produce one or two words, whereas mine carried its own treasure trove, from STALE to STEAL, from mill streams (LEATS) to the Serbian whiz behind the radio (TESLA), from SLATE to TEALS, from TELAS (weblike membranes) to TAELS (40 Chinese grams), from a memorial pillar (STELA) to bristly (SETAL), from TALES and, lastly, LEAST. Likewise I loved the idea that DAVID could lose his head to become AVID, and as long as I was losing myself in letters, I felt impassioned.

A billboard near my nan's house showed a butcher standing at his block. Pleased to Meet You, ran the caption. Meat to Please You. The effect was ethereal. I recited the slogan like a mantra, the ad a kind of scripture for a punster on the rise.

The taller I grew, the deeper the mania. Staying overnight with Jessie, my maternal grandmother, I burrowed mole-like into her Websters International, a burgundy-bound dictionary too heavy to lift. Inside were cross-cut diagrams of hydrants and spider orchids, camshafts and Spanish galleons. I confirmed such wonders as tael and tela. I dug up words like wittol (a tame cuckold) and had to check what cuckold meant. The book was a universe in alphabetical order. The day I learnt a word like frog had fifteen meanings beyond Kermit was to enter an uncharted continent.

Most visits, Jess and I played Scrabble on the dining-room table, matriarch versus punk. The board was a turntable model I ended up inheriting once Jessie drew her final tiles. But back then, a pile of arrowroots on a plate, I played ridiculous words like ITE and CAL and NAE, and Jess spent half the game combing Websters to see if her grandson was precocious or desperate. Possibly both.

Back home, my parents started buying me crossword magazines just to shut me up: the quick American variety where little words like ADIT (a mine entrance) and ORT (food scrap) ruled supreme. My fingertips turned black from the ink of umpteen grids. I grew familiar with baseball abbreviations, Orkney Isles and people with useful, vowel-heavy names like Oona Chaplin, Yoko Ono and the architect IM Pei. In Puzzleville your typical four-letter animals are not the lion and the bear, but pudu (miniature deer), anoa (extinct ox) and ibex (mountain goat).

When I was eleven I doted on Scrabble cubes. The game came with a cup and two dozen dice inscribed with letters instead of numbers. I blew weekends just rolling the cubes across the carpet. (Of course I also managed to break a nose playing under-12 rugby, fall in puppy love, play bad tuba, ride my bike, and explore the bush with plastic guns and pirate accents, but all this was downtime from the alphabet's thrall.) Shaking the cup, rolling out the cubes, I moved the letters into words, the words into step-temples, tight knots of criss-crossing Zs and Vs to maximise my score.

Genetically the letter-bug stems from Mum, an avid reader still, and long-time lover of Lindsey Browne, the man who made crosswords for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*. For Heather, come day's end, nothing beat a Gordons gin and a wrestle with LB's clues. I envied her rapture, in a way. Still just a kid, I could only shrug at the private dialect of cryptic puzzles. *Cat bites philosopher. Correspond with a Spartan almost*. What the hell did it mean? I blamed the gibberish on adulthood, a code to master once you understood how to drive, or hang a door, or talk to the opposite sex without your face catching fire.

If I remember right the first cryptic clue I solved was at our local drive-in. The bill was a James Bond double. The Commodore was teeming with siblings. Amid the chaos I can still picture the *Herald* folded to the puzzle page, Mum's pencil travelling over the grid's white spaces.

This was the summer between two schools. Sean Connery had just saved Jamaica and Dad was off getting choc-tops. Seizing her moment, Mum tried to finish the puzzle but had no chance of solitude, not with a tweenage verbaholic leaning over her shoulder.

Burning silver and blue, read one clue. Mum took her time, doodling

in the margin. Next she wrote AGLOW in the grid. The best I could muster was 'Why?'

'Chemistry,' she said. 'You'll do that in high school.'

'Chemical what?'

'The symbol for silver is Ag, which leaves us with blue. And what's blue?

'Hang on. What are you talking about?'

'What's another word for blue?'

'I still don't get Ag.'

'Not just the colour. What else does blue mean?'

'Don't ask me. A fight?'

'That's right. Or a blunder. Or here,' she added, tapping the page, 'blue means sad, or low.'

'So?'

'Put them together and you get a word for burning—AGLOW.'

'Oh'

So the flame was passed from one cryptic nut to the next. That first night of illumination, the choc-top oozing onto my hand, Mum went on to explain how a disrupted SIESTA spells TASSIE, or flower can mean a tulip as well as something that flows. She said that WONDER makes RED NOW when turned the other way, or POMEGRANATE sounds like Pommy granite when spoken. AGLOW, she said, was called a charade, since the word is broken into smaller pieces, just like the parlour game breaks movies into syllables. GASKET meanwhile was a sandwich, she added, since ASK is sandwiched inside GET, just like OVER is tucked into IMPISH to give you IMPOVERISH.

'Get it?' she asked.

'Give me another clue.'

'Here's one.' And she read the clue aloud: 'Follow in green suede shoes (5).'

No surprise, The Riddler sprang to mind, his dapper costume, though his shoes of choice were plimsolls. Jupiter Jones was another suspect, solver of such mysteries as The Stuttering Parrot and The Screaming Clock and other books I loved. Wasn't the Green Ghost one of the other cases? Did the ghost wear suede shoes?

'You've fallen for the trap,' Mum warned. 'Don't think literally. Ignore the shoes and concentrate on the words.'

'That's what I'm doing, isn't it?'

Bond by now was chasing Blofeld on a skidoo, and the rest of the family was shushing, but Mum persisted. 'Green suede. Look inside the letters. What do you see?'

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'Sue,' I said.
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'Stretch it out. What's a word for 'follow' that ends with SUE?'

'Pursue,' I said.

'Look deeper—it's all there.'

'Where?'

'Forget about the shoes. Look at the letters.'

'ENSUE?'

'Voila'

The buzz outlasted the movie, the drive home, the next day. Suddenly a month of camping down at Pittwater became a retreat devoted to the cryptic art. Mosquitoes made the most of my distraction, jabbing my skin as I swam inside the black and white squares. Little by little I learnt to spot anagrams, homophones, double meanings, red herrings. I lay awake on a canvas stretcher awaiting the burr of the Palm Beach ferry, her cargo the latest LB crossword, plus the answers to the puzzle from the day before.

Starting high school, a culture shock entailing Latin and straw hats, I needed to commute an hour each way. What better antidote than my new mate Lindsey? For several years our household succumbed to buying two *Heralds* in order to appease both resident junkies. But if anyone sealed my fate, it was a man called Snags. To this day I don't know why Keith Anderson, my Year 7 English teacher, had that nickname, but back in 1974, my first year of high school, Snags was good for two favours. One, he fostered my creative writing, and two—he caught the flu in August.

Enter Max from Geography, a fill-in teacher who took the helm one morning with a newspaper under his wing and no idea what class he was supervising.

'English,' we replied. Year 7, we were sucks.

'English, eh?' Max opened the *Daily Telegraph* and flicked through the pages. 'Here y'are.' He stabbed the puzzle section. 'Make me a crossword.'

Methodically I did. Max was amazed. Or maybe furious is a better word. His task had been intended as a sponge to soak up 40 minutes, but a few ticks before the bell here was some smart-arse submitting a 15-by-15 grid with symmetry and clues and the whole caboodle. Bugger—now he'd have to run off copies.

Those 15 squares of fame—a purple Roneo circulating the corridors—put a new spring in my step. With only one problem. Max had neglected to run off the solution on the same sheet of paper, meaning this black duck had to field inquiries from all levels of the academy.

'Hey Astle, what the fuck is PERFIDY?'

'How d'ya spell OCCURRED?'

If this was the puzzle life, I wanted more. To think half the playground was taking my name in vain, enmeshed in my logic. I felt like The Riddler, curbing the urge to cackle my glee across the PA.

At home, instead of drawing pie charts and Venn diagrams, I drafted grids and wove words inside them. I began collecting names and phrases from stories and articles. Overnight a drab textbook on Australian explorers gave up such gems as ERNEST GILES (SINGLE TREE), LEICHHARDT (mimics LIKE ART) and TANAMI DESERT (TAN + AMID + gnarly TREES). In my own small way I felt in step with the explorers, my landscape a sprawl of untapped language. I kept up the headway with LB on the train. And come 1979, amid final-year exams, I sent a parcel to the man himself, care of The Herald, Ultimo 2007.

Inside was a monster grid of 35-by-35 squares, hand-drawn and pencil-shaded, coinciding with the newspaper's milestone. CONGRAT-ULATIONS SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, read 1-Across, with the baseline adding: TEN THOUSAND CRYPTIC CROSSWORDS NOT OUT.

The 'not out' bit was a secret nod to Lindsey, a cricket tragic going by the flavour of his clues. Thanks to his puzzles I'd come to appreciate such gallant batsmen as Nugget McCabe and Slasher Mackay, as well as the exotic names of Paavo Nurmi and Golda Meir. So strong grows the bond between setter and solver that a curious friendship evolves by default, where the solver comes to recognise a compiler's bugbears and passions. In many ways my giant crossword was a tribute to the man for his years of mental bedlam, since I knew he had crafted most of those 10,000 crosswords himself. Or then again, it was my painstaking way of being noticed, an unspoken urge to join the fun.

LB took the bait. He sent me a reply, enclosing a copy of my clues now busy with arrows and stars, circles and crosses: schooling in the art of cluebuilding. Margins teemed with comments: nifty anag, awkward phrasing, less abbrev, more colour here. And slowly I rose to the challenge. A correspondence bloomed. Every month a slew of raw puzzles would return to my letterbox with LB's sage appraisal. DOFTOR, he thought, was a fresh way to clue FOOT IN THE DOOR, but would your average solver be on the same wavelength? GREAT STRIDES, he agreed, was a funny way of pointing to HOTPANTS, one he regretted missing as a setter.

We became penpals in the same city, chatting about grids and the Moscow Olympics, what anagram potential RONALD REAGAN might offer. But we didn't meet in person till 1982, some three years into our exchange.

I remember the day in living colour. Driving down the leafy ridge of Greenwich Point, a millionaire's row of QCs and mortgage brokers, I nursed the butterflies of a blind date. At 21, an adult on paper, I was due to meet a crossword god, aged 66, in his secret puzzle palace. But really, there was little blindness involved. I'd been entering the LB mindscape six days a week for almost a decade, divining clues as personal insights into their creator. I knew the man's humour (punny), his gripes (bureaucracy), his loves (cricket, classical music). And to a lesser degree, he knew mine.

First thing I noticed, his house was not a palace. The million-dollar view was a spray of jacaranda against a paling fence. The garden steps crunched with snails. I rang the bell and heard the footfalls. The man who opened up was every inch the mad professor, broad in the shoulders and with caterpillar eyebrows. We shared a pot of Irish Breakfast and ate some Yoyos on the patio. His office was a kitchen nook, a lifetime of battered books and graph sheets strewn across the bench. I felt honoured to share his company and spooked at the same time.

Hindsight has helped me explain that unease. As a protégé you sense your future self in your mentor, just as your mother-in-law foreshadows your wife. Yet passion in both scenarios tends to quash the doubts. Fatally I had no choice but to tamper with words. If my career path led to this kitchen cranny, so be it. And perhaps LB detected that mutual flaw, anointing me with a *Herald* debut a year later, in 1983.

SCAFFOLDING was my first 1-Across—Back off in burning metal framework—and I've been 'constructing' for the paper ever since. Anonymously at first, as was the house style, then later using my own initials. Those two letters—DA—are how most people have come to know me. Don't Attempt, swear some would-be solvers. Dangerously Addictive, the other camp. Over the years I've received feedback of both persuasions, from sporadic Christmas cards to the offer of a free manicure—with a pair of blunt pliers. You'll get a chance to read a few of these responses as this book unfolds, as well as hear more about LB plus other twists and turns in a chequered career.

But before mapping out the book, let me finish my Riddler confession. After 25 years of crafting clues I feel the time is right to lose my cream shirt and workaday denim and to reveal the lime-green leotard underneath. In many ways this book is a coming-out exercise ('Yes, I make puzzles and I'm proud of it!'), as well as a chance to lead you through the weird tunnels of Cryptopia. In the coming pages you'll see how the different clues operate and why each style throws new light on the words around us.

You may think you know English but I'll show you its other side. After a quarter of a century I've found some extraordinary features in what most think are ordinary words. (Even a name like OVALTINE can hide the tones of TAN and OLIVE.) You'll also get a grasp on cryptic puzzles as we face a Master Puzzle waiting to be solved around the corner.

That's right, a single grid awaits you, each of its 33 clues sparking a different chapter on the art of puzzling and the secret lives of words. You'll also read about the odd life of clue-mongers, including mine, and the tangled tale of human wordplay, how an ancient itch to toy with letters has led us to this black-and-white curio we call a cryptic crossword. Just be warned: the further you travel down this winding road, the more likely you'll catch the bug that once bit me.

SO WHAT'S GOING ON?

At first glance the Master Puzzle will seem like any other crossword: a tidy block of black and white squares, numbered and clued like any other you've seen. But this baby has some stories to tell.

To give you the best tour of Puzzleville I've loaded the box with the 12 principal recipes, from anagrams to rebuses, from manipulations to containers. Solving as we go, we'll encounter puns and codes, homophones and charades—each clue warranting its own chapter and detours, a solution included.

Expose Ned, Russ, Hector, for example. That's not 1-Across, but Chapter 1, and where we'll start to break the puzzle down, entering the grid and the cryptic story as a whole. Each chapter will help you produce a new answer for the interlock, as well as tips on how each recipe operates. Yet far more than a how-to manual, this book is a mystery tour through language, a central crossword to solve as we travel.

That's our destination—one completed puzzle. Yet as we unravel the clues, chapter by chapter, we'll also hear about such puzzling topics as the Papadam Argument, the Sator Stone, the Accidental Swastika, the Centipede Tower and more.

Lipograms? Signposts? Unches? Clue by clue we'll uncover the cryptic spectrum, the tips and traps, the origins of puzzles and changes over time, filling the blanks into the bargain. See the Master Puzzle as your ticket to strange locations with DA as your guide—tormentor as mentor. Come the final clue a crypt will be opened and a cryptic puzzle cracked.

Making the grid in advance, I picked each answer and shaped each clue to trigger a story. Some evoke my chequered past, while others stretch back to Pompeii graffiti, Renaissance Italy, or 1913, when the world's first crossword appeared in the *New York World*.

Via clues and answers you'll discover why MULBERRY almost saw an English setter hanged (and I don't mean the dog), and why SUB-TEXT and SCUMBAG triggered separate scandals in America.

Regardless of your crossword nous, you're bound to see old words newly. For the pro, the trip will sharpen your lateral reflexes. For the tyro, take heart: the rewards are wild, even if the head-spin verges on vertigo. Should you never confront a puzzle in the future, this trip at least tells you what the whole weirdness is about.

So turn the page and meet the Master Puzzle. If the spirit is willing, solve what you can on your own, filling in what you can, then plunge into the stories behind the challenge. Or better yet, skim the clues on show and see if you feel that dangerous tingle in the mind, the same I felt as a kid, looking for a way in. Cockney chaos? Swingers bar? What the hell is going on? Here's your chance to find out.

If you've never solved a cryptic crossword before, then make it this one. Or if this coming puzzle is number 10,000 in your life—give or take—then I will make your 10,001st memorable. At least I can promise you a completed solution, and we'll stumble on plenty of wonders and insights en route.

MASTER PUZZLE

1	2	3			4	5		6		7	8
				9							
10						11					
12									13		
								14			
15				16	17						
18	19			20		21		22		23	
24			25								26
		27									
28						29					
30							31				

MASTER PUZZLE CLUES

ACROSS

- Women's mag covers one Italian painter (6)
- 4 Press disrupt opening about Russian writer (8)
- 10 Central period in time-spread one spent! (7)
- 11 Almost completed month hosting upstart libertine (3,4)
- 12 Disorientated, guided east of tall grass zone one slashed (10)
- 13 Pizza centre behind which French grill? (4)
- 15 Snub regressive outcast (5)
- 16 Ignorance spoilt nice scene (9)
- 18 Seafood nibble causing pains for Spooner (4,5)
- 22 Nebraskan City Circle gives old lady a laugh (5)
- 24 Decrease anaemia remedy? (4)
- 25 Discourteous shift is dispatched, subcontracted (10)
- 28 Swinger's bar for partner pickups? (7)
- 29 A weir worker set . . . (7)
- 30 . . . Twister for openers? (8)
- 31 Creepy film absorbed in autopsy chopping (6)

DOWN

- 1 As mentioned, weather to get hotter? (5)
- 2 Sucker pens article for website guide (4,3)
- 3 M _ _ E (4,2,4)
- 5 Expose Russ, Ned, Hector (7)
- 6 After boomers it regularly goes next! (3-1)
- 7 Pacific Islander immune to revolution (7)
- 8 Nation hunting craft in Italian canal, say (9)
- 9 Giant flower shop online (6)
- 14 Enhanced means to focus on scatterbrain locus (10)
- 15 Soundly ushered back and docketed (9)
- 17 Partial set closer?! (3.)
- 19 Cockney chaos going to stir green (7)
- 20 New 24-across-coated pickup yet to be delivered (2,5)
- 21 Koran avidly studied by Arab holy leaders here! (6)
- 23 Early curve superb on cheerleader (7)
- 26 Outlaw fled outlaw to repeat (5)
- 27 Dope doubled his \$500 in seven days (4)

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	• _	•



CHAPTER 1

Expose Russ, Ned, Hector (7)

Last year a nephew tugged my sleeve at a family barbecue and asked, 'What is God?'

I took a deep breath, stalling for time, wondering how agnostic I felt that week. In the end I dished out some sloppy view of the cosmos only for Simon to interrupt. 'Wrong,' he said. 'It's a mixed-up dog.'

A bright kid, Simon loves *Spongebob* and *Doctor Who*—but he's yet to discover the pleasure of cryptic crosswords. (I'll give him time—he's nine.) My point being, most of us nurse a knack of juggling language. The day we misspell RECEIVE on paper, switching the middle vowels, or call someone Amy instead of May, or gaze at a STOP sign and see words like POTS or POST—we know how anagrams work. We order and disorder by nature. To see the message ELVIS LIVES scribbled on the subway wall is to get the verbal joke.

To prove how instinctive our brains can be when it comes to letter shuffling, try reading the sentence that follows. Turinug rdnaom ltteer grpous itno amgnraas ceoms eislay buaesce haunm birans nluralaty ajusdt cohas itno petantrs. (Or said more plainly: Turning random letter groups into anagrams comes easily because human brains naturally adjust chaos into patterns.) A mental boost in this little test is keeping the original words' first and last letters in the same position. I'm sure, even if you didn't pounce straight away, you grasped plenty. The brain is pre-trained to do so.

Bart Simpson's brain included. Stuck at the same age as Simon, Bart spotted the mix-up potential in a menu at The Rusty Barnacle. Lethally the letters were magnetised, allowing the brat to switch the words around

with ease. Thanks to one quick shuffle COD PLATTER turned into COLD PET RAT.

Aged nine, I wasn't any better. My dad was an old sea captain who thought our home needed a better communication system. So he put a batch of fluoro letters on the family fridge, a means for all of us to leave messages or make shopping lists. Imagine his rage when he saw BREAD MILK EGGS turn into guff like MILD GEEK BRAGS or KGB RAIDS ME LEG.

Even now I can't pass a MOBIL sign without LIMBO looming in my head, or pour a glass of PEPSI and not think PIPES. Picture this, a grown man, walking the detergent aisle of his local supermarket, all the soapbox powders whispering MOO and IRONS and PLIERS back at him. Crazy, I know. A benign affliction in many ways, and one I failed to stifle when dating in my early twenties.

Tragically her name was Melissa, a psych nurse from Gordon in Sydney's north. She may have laughed, driving to the restaurant, when I said her suburb held the word DRONGO. Perhaps she risked a smile when I noted her birth name could be rendered into AIMLESS. Yet by the time we'd passed a Capt'n Snooze showroom at Crows Nest Junction and I somehow felt the urge to report that SNOOZE is a blend of OZONES, we both sensed the night to be in trouble. If her grimace wasn't a clue, then I think it was the moment I caught her taking case-notes under the table.

Anyhow, if not Melissa then most other people have the anagram knack. The reflex is latent in our system. Making it time to meet three boys called Russ, Ned and Hector: our first clue of the Master Puzzle.

As you've suspected, we're talking anagrams—the oldest type of cryptic clue, and perhaps the most familiar to outsiders. Back in the late 1920s, when cryptic crosswords first emerged in England, the anagram was the original trick in the setter's bag of tricks. Leonard Dawe, the science teacher who scored the maiden crossword gig in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1928, chose a blend of plain vocab and trivia for his clues. *Incursion*, say, at 13-Across, was RAID. *Visionaries* led to SEERS. *A river in France?* LOIRE. Drawing a steady audience, the puzzle carried a touch of Greek myths and Oliver Cromwell, plus a smattering of new concepts in XRAYS and TNT. But no anagrams. Not yet.

That tack was taken three years later, in league with several other papers across the land, when suddenly Dawe and other setters ignored the obvious definition of a word like OVERLAP, opting instead for a clue like *A plover (anag.)* (7).

Little by little, a game was hatched. While the people of America—where the crossword puzzle began in 1913—still wrangled with clinical synonyms as clues, reading a clue like 'glut' to help reveal SURFEIT, the Brits had other ideas. Dawe, in fact, clued the same word as *Fur ties (anag.)*. Fittingly, in the same puzzle on 7 May 1928, the science teacher added one more anagram clue: *Cheer it (anag.)*, namely HERETIC, as that is how the whole cryptic deviation must have seemed to the US purist.

We'll be talking more about the American Revolution (and British Evolution) of crosswords in chapters to come, but for now, it's important to see how hand-in-hand anagrams and cryptic puzzles really are. Kissing cousins almost. Part and parcel certainly. Soon every cryptic across Great Britain was marbled with anagram clusters, with no other defining element aside from an order to rearrange.

Yet every good thing has its day, and soon the solving public required a little more subtlety. Blind Freddie can see that PLUM is a mix of LUMP, so what real joy is lurking in such a pallid clue as *Lump (anag.)*? Answer—not much. Add to that the annoyance of an absent definition and the wheels of change slowly turned. Leonard Dawe and his colleagues could no more depend on the bald and the blatant to satisfy their solvers. Instead compilers had to *disguise* their anagram clues, which leads us back to Russ, Ned and Hector.

For many readers this book's first clue—*Expose Russ, Ned, Hector*—will represent their first cryptic clue full-stop, a scary debut. In which case, to avoid too many false trails, let's take a step sideways and see how cryptic clues in general are put together.

RUMBA IN BURMA — quick versus cryptic clues

My two pinup poets as a teen were TS Eliot and WH Auden, those two enigmatic men with initials for names. The first, I knew, was an anagram of TOILETS, the second, I didn't realise, was a crossword nut.

One day, arguing with a pal across the Atlantic, Auden said that despite

cryptic puzzles seeming more complex than their US cousins, they also happen to be more precise. In other words, while straight clues are more straightforward, cryptic clues can diminish any doubts about the eventual answer. The best way to illustrate the point is to go dancing . . .

Imagine 1-Across in an orthodox puzzle reads 'Style of dance'. Sounds easy enough, but there are dances, of course, and then there are dances. In the 1950s alone, the floor was busy with the werewolf watusi, the Yuletide jerk and the Popeye waddle. So where does that leave us? Letter count will throw more light on the subject. In this case, our missing dance has five letters, allowing us to cancel the camel walk, the stereo freeze and the doctor's boogie. But then we're stuck in limbo, literally.

WALTZ? POLKA? STOMP? RUMBA? The choices stack up.

Next step—check the grid. Do we have any cross-letters in our imagined crossword—other answers crossing over our mystery dance? Let's say no. The grid is empty, with 1-Across awaiting our guesswork.

Fine, let's imagine the dance we need is WALTZ. If that hunch is right, then 3-Down (in a lattice-like grid) must begin with Z, the last letter of WALTZ. And if that's not likely, then we can safely ditch WALTZ as a starter. (These are the sort of stabs you make to limit your answer pool.) However, if a Z-word at 3-Down remains a maybe, then keep WALTZ lightly pencilled in the frame, and keep mulling.

Presuming WALTZ is the dance, how does 3-Down read, our supposed Z-answer? To prove how quick crosswords can be a misnomer, let's pretend that imaginary clue is *African nation (6)*.

Yay. This must be ZAMBIA. So now you opt for ink and enter both answers—WALTZ across and ZAMBIA down—convinced you're on the right track. But wait. Say the correct dance is SWING, meaning the G works just as well for GAMBIA. Or why can't RUMBA bring ANGOLA into play? Or POLKA and SALSA do the same thing? And if CAPER is kosher as a dance number, then RWANDA is up for the rumble too. Suddenly you're doing the hippy-hippy-shake in a minefield, the words of Auden ringing true.

Despite their name, quick clues often ask for slow and cautious responses. Unless a clue is dead-specific, like *young cat* for KITTEN or *Turkish hat* for FEZ, then a solver can never be sold on a single answer. Compare this to a cryptic's generosity, with each clue carrying two

elements. Different schools call them different names, but in this book we'll know them as the definition and the wordplay.

Definition, of course, speaks for itself. *Magic stick (4)* is WAND. Orthodox puzzles give you nothing else. A cryptic clue on the other hand does the solver two favours, providing both a definition of your answer and a little word-game to help get you there. The trick is picking which part is which. So let's get back to that mystery dance, and check out these two cryptic clues:

Dance revolutionised Burma (5) Burma-style dance (5)

As we know, *dance* in both clues is the definition. This leaves us with *Burma* in either case, plus a third word in the shape of *style* or *revolutionised*.

Notice anything in common with these last two? Think about *style*, the verb. The word means to shape, to make over, in the same way revolutionise means to shake up, or change. Both these words are labelled anagram signposts in the crossword trade, sometimes called anaginds (or anagram indicators), but I prefer signposts. They're telling you to agitate the adjacent set of letters, in this case BURMA, to reach your answer.

Signposts are vital when it comes to anagram clues. A setter needs to plant a word suggesting upheaval or renovation, a word like stir or shock or jostle or frazzle. Seasoned solvers look for these indicators on impulse, mixing the adjacent batch of letters to satisfy the clue's other half—the definition. Or in this case: *dance*.

Mind you, *dance* can also serve as a signpost, being a word of movement, as can any other word suggesting motion and mixture, making both these sample clues a bit more slippery. Even more so with the likely signposts (*revolutionised* and *style*) occupying the clues' midpoints. Placed there, a solver has to figure out which end needs revolving and styling, which bunch of letters must be mixed to give up the answer. Ten times easier if the signpost opens or finishes a clue, sending the definition to the opposite end. Nonetheless, looking closely at both examples, you'll find small hints within both clues to steer you down the right path.

In the first example—Dance revolutionised Burma—you know the middle word is the signpost as revolutionised is too long to be the fodder (or letters to scramble). So your eye then falls on Burma as the batch to 'revolt', giving you a kind of dance . . .

In sample 2—Burma-style dance—the chances of style holding a word that means Burma are next to zero. Besides, what else can Burma mean exactly? It's a country, right? The old name of Myanmar and word-wise, that's it. So style must be your signpost, again a word suggesting shaping, with dance the logical definition.

And bang, out jumps RUMBA. The jig is up. The clue surrenders its secret.

Bear that in mind as we go. As opaque as a cryptic clue may first seem, the opposite can apply. Where a quick setter gives you nothing more than a cold definition, the darker cousin will offer two roads reaching the one destination.

Solving more clues over time, you'll separate the two key elements with greater confidence, sussing out which is which and where the division falls. Jonathan Crowther, a long-time setter for *The Observer* in England, known to most of his fans as Azed, put it best. 'A good cryptic clue,' he wrote, 'contains three elements:

- 1. a precise definition;
- 2. a fair subsidiary indication [or wordplay];
- 3. nothing else.'

In other words, don't ignore any single word in a cryptic clue. Every syllable counts. In the case of pure anagrams, you'll be facing a definition, plus a signpost and the fodder (which adds up to the wordplay). Though signposts, as you've gathered, may be tricky to isolate. Already in this section we've had a range of words standing in for signal duty: jostle, frazzle, stir, dance. What next, you ask. Red, white and blue?

Well, *black and blue* could do the job, despite being a phrase, since the three words capture the sense of being battered. For that matter, *blue* could fill the bill as well, the same colour meaning slip or bungle. But I hear your uncertainty. Let's open the way to signposts.

SIGN HERE — anagram signposts and surface sense

Tangle Snarl Brew Jolt

If Paul Simon knew 50 ways to leave his lover, the cryptic compiler knows 500 ways to mislead his solver.

Wreck Wrench Crazy Kinky

The crunch is change. Even *crunch* is cool—or crush, or bash. So long as the word embodies an altered state. Yet change—the notion—is fickle in its own right. Words like odd, outré or outlandish can also suggest a break from the natural order. Thus a clue like *Exotic Burma dance* is a valid route to RUMBA.

Compatibility is the key. Setters look for signposts that chime with the definition and the anagram fodder. Drafting a clue for CHAIN-SMOKER, say, a phrase that holds HEROIN and SMACK, I may retain the clue's druggy flavour by choosing an indicator that doesn't spoil the narcotic vibe:

Smack, heroin, crack, tobacco addict (5-6)

Then again, composing another clue with a food focus, I might well rummage in my kitchen vocab for that simpatico signpost. ORANGE, say, is a blend of GEAR ON, making one possible clue:

Fruit gear on bananas (6)

That's the game as setter or solver—to hide or find the signpost. Staying in the pantry, the options are ample. If *bananas* doesn't work, what about nuts or fruitcake? (You look for terms that serve two masters—the clue's surface sense and the wordplay recipe.)

Cocktail is another option. Or crackers. Now we're cooking. Or maybe even cook can save the day—a verb meaning to prepare, or corrupt, as in cooking the books. To the same list you can add stew or stir or fry or most chef actions. (Think dice, beat, whip.) Or sifting through the drawers you'll come across jar and whisk and mill. As a solver, you need to be alert to that kind of camouflage. Take this gem, crafted by Simon Martin, alias Enigma of *The Independent*:

Response to Warne's spin (6)

A breeze once you know how the elements fall into place, but what a fiendish means of hiding the answer, ANSWER. Much like a leg-spinner, compilers rely on subtle variations and artful deception, and this clue displays both: a low-key signpost beside low-key fodder, the whole combining to create a perfect delivery.

Returning to RUMBA, I'd dabbled with other signposts. If BURMA, we agree, is the craftiest anagram (better than UM, BRA, or the dubious MR AUB), then how best to couch the clue? What's the least visible signpost? Perhaps a word like *rock* could fit—a music genre as well as a word meaning shake or sway. Opening the way for:

Burma rock dance (5)

Another idea is *club*, a word capable of playing double-agent. *Club* can sidle up to *dance* in its noun guise, as well as carrying its own nasty impact when treated as a verb. Giving rise to:

Burma Club dance (5)

Notice the capital C, a thicker smokescreen for the solver to see through, and not unfair in the grander etiquette of crosswords. Of course a neater RUMBA clue would read:

Burma dance club (5)

But that's a no-no. Can you see why? Because dance, your definition, is

perched *between* the signpost and what needs clubbing. Signpost and fodder must always be alongside each other.

By contrast, *Dance in Burma Club* can pass muster as an anagram clue, but why use four words when three do just as well? The answer hinges on surface sense, or how smoothly the clue reads on the page, the same brand of elegance Shane Warne's clue achieves. At the drawing board I tested other maybes:

Improper Burma dance Dance in Burma resort Steps around Burma

Different house styles (talking papers now, not music) have a bias towards different signposts. One common 'out' for setters is the word *out* itself. Let's say a total is out, then it's wrong. Errant. In need of adjusting. Of course *total* is a sly signal too, at least in Australia, where the word is slang for demolish, yet a British public would revolt as one—though *revolt* is workable on either continent.

Nick, the verb, is another sticking point. Ask a driver who's just nicked his duco and the same man will itemise the damage. But can a word be *nicked* into a new life form? That's a typical cryptic question. *Dented*, maybe. *Smashed*, no problem. The reason I'm asking relates to our three amigos—*Russ*, *Ned*, *Hector*—our maiden clue in the Master Puzzle.

RUSS, NED, HECTOR — Trojan horses and binary thinking

TURPENTINE holds two similar verbs—ENTER and INPUT. When making crosswords you pounce on these secret couples. POUNCED, for instance, holds CON and DUPE. Wallop WHODUNIT and you'll make HIT and WOUND.

One day, looking sideways at Stuart Appleby, the champion Aussie golfer, I found two ancient writing forms, TABLET and PAPYRUS. As a puzzle-maker you live for those small epiphanies, my brainstorms in a teacup.

PERPETUAL was another discovery, the keeper of two disciples—PETER and PAUL. Just as a tailored MACKINTOSH holds NICK and THOMAS. Or PAEDIATRICIAN nurses twin girls, ENID and PATRICIA. This name-game carries across in your maiden clue, RUSS and NED.

Wait, what happened to Hector? Let me tell you a quick story.

Famous for many reasons, from Achilles' heel to Brad Pitt's sixpack, Troy will be forever linked to a wooden horse, the ideal metaphor for a cryptic clue. Just because the creature stands like a horse, and looks like a horse, and casts a horse-like shadow, this doesn't mean it neighs.

Inside the belly of course was where the strife began. For the Trojans at least. The gift was a ruse, as Achilles and his mates hopped out of the horse and marauded the city. Yet Hector bravely resisted the Greeks, endowing his name to the English language as a word meaning to bluster, bully or badger. Some legacy, you may think, but a signpost ready-made for cryptic clues.

Some names—of both boys and girls—can deputise well as signposts. *Harry* is a regular starter, the name meaning to pester or ravage. *Pat* is possible, while *Dotty* is a tad dated. *Jimmy* is a candidate, thinking crowbars. *Dicky? Eddy?*

Let's look at the clue one more time: Expose Russ, Ned, Hector (7)

If you haven't solved the clue already, you should be assigning roles for each word and name. Hector is a classic signpost in both senses, that capital H akin to the big-C Club back in Burma, a curveball to catch you off-guard. Giving weight to the signpost theory is the nearby fodder of RUSSNED. That's right, no longer two boys but a clump of seven letters, the tally matching the answer you're after.

Here's a tip: ignore the clue's imagery. No matter how smooth the surface sense, look for the strategy behind it. The key to cracking cryptic crosswords is to think on two levels, to look past what the words evoke and decide what roles they play.

So get hectoring. Bully RUSS and NED into one verbal lump and see if you can make a seven-letter word. A word meaning what? Where's the definition? Simple—what word is left?

Expose is a word with several meanings. One relates to risk, where the wooden horse exposed the vulnerability of Troy. Then there's photography, to render to the light. Or a scandal—to wheel a dirty secret into view. Ask a mountaineer and the verb takes on a different meaning, a few missing toes as proof. Though of course the meaning here is perhaps the most common—that is, to bare, to peel away—as a solver starts to do with any clue.

Suddenly the clue is naked. As the chapter creeps to a close, can you hector RUSSNED into a word for strip? If the answer doesn't leap out then go through your synonyms, just as we did with our first dance clue, testing the options. (DISROBE? UNCOVER?) If that doesn't help, switch the RUSSNED cluster around. Juggle the boys in the margin. Put them in alphabetical order: DENRSSU. Throw them backwards: DENSSUR. Suddenly the boys become UNDRESS and the maiden clue has been laid bare.

RECIPE PRECIS: ANAGRAMS

Anagram wordplay relies on two key elements, the signpost and the fodder. The signpost is any word evoking riot or renewal, change or error, while the fodder is the adjacent swag of letters in need of swirling. Whenever you spot a possible signpost, check for possible fodder, which must lie adjacent. Words like strange, new, off or out are often used, but the signpost candidates below will help you see the range of possibilities.

adapt, bizarre, cook, dance, errant, fashion, ground, hack, in a mess, jar, kinky, lousy, modified, novel, odd, perhaps, queasy, resort, sort, terrible, upset, violent, wind, zany

QUIZLING 1.1 Can you double a letter in ASTOUNDING and mix the new eleven to make a word meaning astounding?

QUIZLING 1.2

What three countries, all five letters long, can be separately rearranged into three words that rhyme with each other?

QUIZLING 1.3

If two words for trick—CON and DUPE lie in POUNCED, can you pounce on the kindred pairs lurking in DUSTMAN, MARTINET and TREATISES? Every letter is

CHAPTER 2

Ignorance spoilt nice scene (9)

One night, with nothing on the telly, my brother and I staged a séance. The drill was simple. We pinched a wine glass from the special cupboard and laid out the Scrabble tiles, A to Z, around the edges of the rumpus room table. As the elder, aged ten, I played high priest. Looking to the ceiling I asked any spirits in the room to hop inside the glass. We waited a while, allowing the spirits to get comfy, and then gingerly turned the glass over, put our fingertips on the base, and started asking questions about our future. What would we be? Who will we marry? Nothing happened. The glass sat inert. We sat inert, and then we gave up. Maybe tried Ludo instead. But somehow the stunt opened my eyes to the idea that maybe, just maybe, letters held the answers to the great unknown. Besides, why would Rupert, my dead uncle, have any inkling of tomorrow? How would my late Aunt Agnes single out my bride from the masses? Bugger ghosts. Maybe anagrams held the key.

As kooky as the notion sounded, it wasn't original. ONE WORD has always promised a NEW DOOR in the minds of men. History reveals a great procession of loons prepared to invest heavily in jumbled letters and what they murmur.

Alexander the Great, no less, was a sucker for this type of prophecy. One night, back in 332 BC, while squeezing the lifeblood out of Tyre, the general dreamt of a satyr, one of those half-goat characters who rate poorly as omens go. Troubled, the Great One summoned his soothsayers, asking them to interpret this strange vision. The men responded by writing the word 'satyr' in the sand. They mixed things around until they found a version to lull their boss. In Greek, apparently, when SATYR is

allowed to stray, you end up with 'Tyre is thine'. So Alexander pounced, and the rest of course is ancient history.

Away from the battlefield, the common Greek citizen dabbled in a thing call alectryomancy, a similar brand of letter-shuffling but this time involving a rooster. The designated bird was let loose in a yard covered in grain. Depending on which version you believe, the same yard's dirt might also be inscribed by the alphabet. Wandering at will, the bird would peck what grain took his fancy. Once the animal had had his fill, a fortune-teller examined the aftermath, seeking letter-like patterns in those patches where the grain was eaten or determining which of the yard's pre-written letters had copped the heavier pecking. This way the seer could then fudge a message to predict the future. Of course, from a rooster's point of view, alectryomancy was a welcome improvement on hepatoscopy, or forecasting via entrails.

Come the new millennium, Jewish Gnostics joined the anagram racket. Keen for more beyond the holy words, the mystics took to crunching the scripture down to its composite letters, searching for deeper meaning. Here's how they wangled the famous showdown in Jerusalem, turning the question into the answer:

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Pilate: Quid est veritas? (What is truth?)
Jesus: Est vir qui adest. (It is the man before you.)
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Up, down, left, right, the Bible was pulled every which way by the Kabbalah, with another method involving a set of massive grids like crosswords on steroids. The mystics ran verses across the squares, seeing what messages sprang forth in seek-a-word manner. Other methods included *gematria* (letter-for-number substitution), *notariqon* (compressing the text into divine acronyms) and *temurah* (Hebrew for 'exchange'—the one closest to anagrams). As to what believers would do with all these hidden revelations, the next Master clue may murmur the truth:

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Ignorance spoilt nice scene (9)
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That is, who knows? Gnostics weren't exactly the talkative type, and two millennia is a fair chunk of time between drinks. Just as with anagrams, you can only work with the elements you're given.

The entourage of Louis XIII was said to have included a Royal Anagrammist, a courtier vested with finding prophecy in shuffled letters. Little more is known of Thomas Billon, though his status in the palace suggests the knack of mixing letters was slowly drifting from cult to wider public fashion.

Across the Channel, the Brits were equally hooked. When Mary Queen of Scots had her head removed in 1567, a nameless pundit turned the monarch's full Latin title—*Maria Steurda Scotorum Regina*—into her destiny: *Trusa vi regnis morte amara cado*. ('Thrust by force from my kingdom I fall by a foul death.')

Creepily, the king to replace Mary was James I, her own son, whose name was treated more gently by the Mix Masters of the day. Most courtiers in fact were quick to tell anyone that JAMES STUART was a cocktail of A JUST MASTER, if only to keep their heads intact.

Such letter-fixation was spoofed by Jonathan Swift. The Irish writer could spot human folly from a hundred paces. In *Gulliver's Travels*, his most famous book, Swift had his hero call on Tribnia, a kingdom of nincompoops besotted by letter-fiddling. Look twice at TRIBNIA and you'll soon realise the real-world realm that Swift was ridiculing.

With a madness to match, scholars have pored over the works of Nostradamus. The mystic wrote around 1550, during France's plague years, churning out more than 1000 quatrains. Even now, with forensic intensity, devotees still sift the work hoping for glimpses of tomorrow. The results are comical, with anagrams offering an insane degree of leeway.

PAU, NAY & OLORON, for instance, are three towns mentioned in Quatrain VIII-1, which fans have wangled to spell NAPAULON ROY, alias Napoleon the King. Elsewhere a strange town called DINEBRO is mentioned, where 'the weak band will occupy the land'. No question, say the cultists, this place is Scotland, since DINEBRO is a blend of EDINBRO, which sounds like Edinburgh if you say it fast enough.

An even longer bow is drawn in the case of Quatrain IX-44. This verse describes a menace named RAYPOZ who 'will exterminate all opposition'. Surely this is Hitler, claim the scholars. The felling of Europe, the seizure of Poland, the death camps . . . With only one problem: how to change RAYPOZ into HITLER? Easy. You switch the P with an N, then mix the new six and you get NAZROY, King of the Nazis.

Such hokum inspired Francis Heaney, one of America's finest anagrammists, to show how flaky this verse-tweaking can get. Early in 2009, the crossword-maker was asked by the History Channel to see if his mixing skills could unmask the so-called Third Antichrist mentioned in Quatrain II-62, specifically a character named Mabus who seems intent on bringing the world to its knees. Here's the verse in its English translation:

Mabus then will soon die, there will come
Of people and beasts a horrible rout:
Then suddenly one vengeance,
Hundred, hand, thirst, hunger when the comet will run.

Nostradamus junkies had already claimed this mysterious MABUS to be SADDAM, once you restyle the B into two Ds, and swap a vowel for good measure, but Heaney went one better, using the entire quatrain to create his version of the truth:

When Obama one-ups old McCain in two-thousand-eight run, We'll see well-heeled Enron-lovers defend thee, Antichrist, repellent netherworld deity—Bush? No . . . Rush Limbaugh!

Whatever our future holds, the weight of the unknown is clearly far too great for 26 letters to carry. DIVINATION, we should remember, is a blend of DO IT IN VAIN, just as the opaque prophet MICHEL DE NOSTREDAME (the real name of Nostradamus) can be rearranged into RANDOM ITEMS LEECHED. Our cue to focus on the next anagram in hand, 16-Across in the Master Puzzle.

SCRAMBLED SCIENCE — mixing methods and false anagrams

The actor ROBERT REDFORD hides RED BORDER FORT in his name. Given the same treatment, UNIVERSAL PICTURES converts into A TURNIP CURSES ELVIS. Both anagrams feature in the

credits of the movie *Sneakers*, a 1992 tech-thriller. The reason such anagrams share top billing relates to the movie's theme of decrypting. As for why the studio opted for such *lame* anagrams, I'm at a loss to explain. Mind you, ROBERT REDFORD is a tough nut to crack with 4 Rs to handle. Then again, UNIVERSAL PICTURES holds RECLUSIVE PURITANS, which capably describes the geeky gang of code-busters that includes Mr Redford.

The more you indulge in letter-switching, the more you come to appreciate the difference between sleek and clunky. Francis Heaney's mock-prophecy, for example, is pure grace, while finding SADDAM in MABUS is not just oafish, but wrong.

Imagine letters as Lego blocks, and therefore a word as being shapes created by those blocks. Sleek anagrams will change the original shapes into new and elegant forms. The best suggest their source by owning a related shape or style, all the more gracious once you consider that the two objects share the same pieces. Consider THE EYES—THEY SEE, or, returning to Western Europe for a moment, MOTHER-IN-LAW concealing WOMAN HITLER.

Clunky on the other hand is a mishmash. Turning a word like RUMBA into MR AUB is a good example of a bad anagram. Likewise, if HALT MIRE NOW is the best you can manage from MOTHER-IN-LAW, then you need to try again. The secret to anagrams is being alive to what the words whisper. Whether you're mixing or un-mixing phrases, you need to be awake to the potential of the letters at your fingertips. And just like playing Lego, you're always wise to break up the blocks in order to see what new shapes are lurking in the rubble.

Martin Bishop, the character played by Redford in *Sneakers*, is a computer hacker. When tackling anagrams, as he does in the story, he turns to the Scrabble box, picking out the relevant letters and sprawling them on the table.

John Graham, known to most British solvers as Araucaria, relies on the same method, choosing the tiles of a word he's clueing, and strewing them at his elbow to see what new structure he can make.

Others swear by the benefits of a circle. Confronting a tricky anagram, this breed will arrange the letters into a wheel and start looking for telltale clusters such as IVE or NCE, hoping the rest will jump out.

Just as many puzzle fans depend on the dash method, mapping the mystery word in a series of blanks and confirmed letters. Once that sequence is sketched, the solver will place her remaining letters into a clump above the dashes, and ponder.

Whatever works is the motto. Notably every technique (the pieces, the wheel, the clump, the dashes) involves a strewing of the source-phrase, just as kids rake Lego blocks to see what they have in free-form. If you stare at MOTHERINLAW for too long you'll keep seeing a mother-in-law staring back. Far better off to free the letters, put them in a circle and make random shapes on the page before you attempt to rebuild.

Getting back to crosswords, the challenge lies at two levels. First you need to spot the fodder (the letters to mix) and, second, have a rough idea of what the outcome will mean. Not so simple with the current clue we're facing:

Ignorance spoilt nice scene (9)

After dealing with signposts, you should be wary of the role that *spoilt* is playing here. The word looks a likely signal to jumble, but jumble what? That's the question, since the letter clusters on either side tally up to nine, the same count as your answer.

Sometimes this dilemma—wondering which end is your fodder—suggests a false anagram. You're not sure which clump is yours to stir and which part's the definition.

Perhaps the time is right to make a confession. As compilers, we can take pleasure in planting false anagrams. The temptation is always there, a chance to trap the rash solver, getting them to mix the wrong bunch of letters. For example, a false anagram of MONASTERY could be HOLY PLACE, which might lure a solver into treating the phrase as fodder rather than the answer's definition.

The other step in the false-anagram strategy, from a setter's point of view, is ensuring the signpost stands between the other two elements and so creating confusion about which way to look. Believe me, I fell for this trick myself a few years back, working in a Sydney pub. The clue came from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and seemed simple at first glance:

Piece of cake, I thought. You mix TYROLPANTS to render a word meaning *serene hold*. With that conviction I spent a lunch break barking up the wrong tree, looking at words PLATYSTORN and TROYPLANTS and wondering why nothing clicked.

Back behind the bar, serving beers to a bunch of Finnish builders, I asked their least homicidal member whether PALTRYSNOT offered serenity, but Esko wasn't sure. And then the lightbulb flickered. What does *serene hold* mean anyway? Damn it. All the while I'd been crumpling the wrong ten letters. *Tyrol pants* was the definition, not the fodder. Instead of treating *serene hold* as a legit phrase, I should have seen SERENEHOLD as a cluster. Then and there I made a pair of LEDERHOSEN before you could say 'Yodel-lay-hee-hoo'.

Careful then of the current clue—*Ignorance spoilt nice scene*. You have to decide whether the answer is a synonym of *ignorance* (meaning we mix NICESCENE), or vice versa, where *nice scene* hides in twisted IGNOR ANCE.

Ask yourself: which is more likely? Are we seeking *ignorance* or a *nice scene*? Which makes more sense as a definition? The odds favour *ignorance*, a word in any thesaurus. Compare that to *nice scene*, which may hint at PANORAMA or ARCADIA or even RIVIERA (if you look at nice twice), but which cluster is the surer bet?

Time to fetch the Scrabble tiles. Or make a wheel. Map the dashes. Whichever method alerts your brain. NICESCENE. Start looking for patterns. Importantly *ignorance*, your definition, is a noun, ending in NCE, the same trio lying in the fodder. Is SENICENCE a word? CENISENCE?

Of course, you can always solve this clue from the other direction. Do you know a nine-letter word for *ignorance*? There's STUPIDITY, I suppose. And DISREGARD. Yet neither sits in NICESCENE, so you swirl on.

That's when some will see SCIENCE hiding in NICE SCENE. You may recall your early lab classes, the teacher saying that science, the word, stems from the Latin for knowledge, and knowledge of course is the flipside of ignorance. Remove SCIENCE from NICESCENE and you have EN left over. ENSCIENCE? NESCIENCE?

Look both up if you feel the urge, but I'm thinking we've just solved our second clue. The beauty of cryptics is that almost every clue gives you the chance to *confirm* your answer. Check the letters in NICESCENE, and everything matches with NESCIENCE, which literally means not-knowledge, ironically a synonym of agnosticism, the very opposite of what those Jewish mystics embraced.

NESCIENCE IS BLISS — the Piñata Principle and rare words

Without giving too much away, NESCIENCE stands to be the rarest answer in the Master Puzzle. Other entries, by comparison, stand to be far more familiar, with the possible exception of one Italian on the horizon.

As a puzzle-maker you're expected to play down either end of the pool, splashing in the shallow end of pop culture and plunging into the erudite. Neither end is 'better' than the other, yet both are important. You're out to create diversity in a small box. For me the perfect puzzle swoops between Mozart and Oz art, highbrow and lowbrow, Dvořák and Tupac, with the occasional NESCIENCE to tease the vocab.

Obviously nescience floats on the obscure side of unusual, and that's why I chose the anagram recipe. Veteran setters develop a hunch for knowing when the answer itself is a challenge to grasp, so going a little softer in the clue, with anagrams deemed the kindest option of all.

Trust me, I toyed with some doozies before publication. Did you know NESCIENCE, say, combines six compass points and three Roman numerals with not a letter to spare? That aspect alone could invite a fiendish clue, but I resisted. Why? The answer is the Piñata Principle.

The best description of crossword-making is 'the art of losing grace-fully'. In other words, everything a setter makes needs to be *unmade*. Those Lego blocks again. Or going with piñatas, a crossword is useless if it doesn't crack open. Forget the frills, the garish paint, if that paper belly refuses to spill its treasure then pretty soon the good people at your party will stop taking a swing.

Roger Squires, the most prolific crossword-maker on the planet (with more than 64,000 puzzles published in over 470 papers and magazines),

regularly applies the Piñata Principle. Known to many as Rufus in *The Guardian*, Squires must have known that ORMOLU lies beyond most vocabs, and so opted for an anagram:

Rum loo embellished with gilt decoration (6)

Scarcely the sleekest of his million clues, but fair. The signpost is clear. All the Lego blocks are on display, and you already know this oddball answer means 'with gilt decoration'. The clue is primed for busting open.

Rare words matter in crosswords—solving or setting, quick or cryptic. Just because recondite (which means obscure) is obscure in its own right, this shouldn't jeopardise the word's selection. A key reason people turn to crosswords is to have their vocabs exercised, excited, extended. Thanks to Araucaria I've built a new annex for the strange words his puzzles have introduced, such as zori, otary and chasseur. (In order you've just met a Japanese sandal, an eared seal and an agile soldier.) Not that every puzzle should teem with archaisms. But now and then, adding a recondite specimen to the usual parade is part of the puzzler's brief.

A good thing, too, if you listen to the makers of the *Collins English Dictionary*. For every new edition, lexicographers decide which words will join the book and which among the older stock have grown obsolete. In comes Google, and out goes oomancy (or divination by eggs). Words resemble muscles; they wither without use. While recondite may well be obscure, it won't even exist by 2050 if English speakers continue to ignore it.

So in stepped HarperCollins, back in 2008, creating the Save The Last Word Project. With a new edition slated for 2010, a list of 20 words was destined to be culled. Among the endangered species were malison (a curse), agrestic (uncouth) and nitid (bright). Writers and celebs were approached to do a stint of verbal philanthropy. Choose a word and foster it. Comic actor Stephen Fry was thrilled to adopt fubsy (short and stout), while poet Andrew Motion fell in love with skirr (a whirring of bird wings in flight).

Use it or lose it was the message. Making any dictionary, editors will sift the massive database of word usage known as a corpus, seeing which new words have risen into vogue and which elders have shuffled off their mortal coils.

The adoption scheme is a challenge of sorts. If any of the chosen words failed to appear across six separate sources, from press to print, online or on TV, before the deadline of January 2010, then euthanasia was applied. While I've yet to watch Stephen Fry in America, the BBC travel series, I'd be prepared to wager that some bronco-buster in Wyoming or LA rapper or promising Midwestern quarterback was labelled fubsy.

In their own small way, crosswords perform a kindred duty. In recent years I've supplied oxygen to ABSQUATULATE (decamp) and the tenuous slang of POODLE FAKER (a ladies' man), but in the end the corpus will decree what stays and what goes. Here in the Master Puzzle I've thrown a lifeline to NESCIENCE, the long-lost cousin of ignorance. Whether that's enough to ensure the word's survival, I don't know.

QUIZLING 2.1 What's the lazy way of converting these four words ^{into} anagrams? ELBOW RIFTS GOTHS TAPED QUIZLING 2.2 SEW and RIP sit in WIPERS. Using every letter once only, can you scramble each word (and brand) below to make a pair of opposites in each case? **ALFRESCO** DYNAMITED **THEOLOGIST STOLICHNAYA** QUIZLING 2.3 What iconic mode of transport is 'parked' in the anagram of VERY COSTLY OLD ROAD MACHINES? • • • •

CHAPTER 3

Enhanced means to focus on scatterbrain locus (10)

Ted Validas is an old friend of mine. Like me, he crafts puzzles for the daily press. Or make that crafted—past tense. The guy disappeared in mysterious circumstances some 20 years ago, never to be seen again.

Back when I knew him, Ted made a variety puzzle involving words in some capacity. Most of the stuff was pretty breezy in those early days. A regular formula was the anagram, like mixing common words to find well-known authors—RENEGE for Greene or CLEARER for Le Carré. Occasionally, whenever a solver wrote to extend the list, adding STUPOR for Proust, say, or VIOLATER for Voltaire, Ted would write back in good spirit, never missing a beat, saying thanks for the feedback and maybe promising a sequel in the future. Whatever the reply, he'd always sign off the same way: *Yours verbally, Ted Validas*.

Now and then, when Ted flubbed a piece of trivia, calling Daleks robots instead of armour-clad mutants from the planet Skaro, for example, or getting confused between Celtic and Gaelic, then the puzzler would cop all corrections on the chin, promising to get it right next time, and hoping the solver continued to enjoy the daily challenges. *Yours verbally, Ted Validas*.

But after six years of correspondence, he vanished. His puzzles kept appearing in the paper, people kept writing in, but the name Validas fell off the radar. If people tried looking up his name in the directory or calling the switch at the *Herald* to seek an extension: nothing. The man was a ghost, his ongoing puzzles the only trace that he ever existed, that strange

procession of anagrams and riddles rolling through the week, relentlessly, namelessly.

So where'd he go? The answer remains a puzzle in its own right. One solver sent a Christmas card to the *Herald* in 1991, thanking Ted for 12 months of brain-bending, but the envelope was left to moulder in the mailroom, addressee unknown. Other readers wrote in regardless, sending in mail to nitpick or cajole, suggest alternative answers, offer other ideas, but nothing lured Ted from hiding. Instead they received the usual replies, using the same font, the same tone, but this time round the name at the bottom was another character called David Astle, whoever he was.

In case you haven't twigged, you can call off the dogs. There's no need to drag the harbour. Cancel the helicopter. Ted Validas and David Astle are the same animal. Back in 1985, when I first started making Wordwit, a variety word puzzle, I thought it wise to invent an alias. I think it was nerves that prompted the move. I think it was fear that the format would fall on its face.

Thankfully it didn't. Week by week, learning on the job, I kept tending the small box near the back of Section One, and the feedback kept flowing. Wordwit thrived. It had birthday competitions, random weeks of readers' puzzles, and even syndication interstate and overseas, all the while playing with headlines and punchlines, Olympics and phonetics, acronyms and anagrams, the whole verbal toybox, drawing a loyal following as the years progressed.

Location helped. The feature sat below the daily crossword, which I'd also begun to make around the same era. If you couldn't crack a certain clue, then readers tried the Wordwit, or vice versa. The puzzles were natural companions. Now in its 25th year, Wordwit continues as a Section One diversion, and I continue to make it.

Yet early on, I'd felt a stab of stage fright. What if the idea bombed? The solvers rebelled? After all, Wordwit had usurped an American import called *Scramlets*, an anagram challenge asking you to mix four words in order to reveal the cartoon's caption. Day in, day out, the same recipe, sometimes with American spelling to boot, but maybe just what Sydney readers wanted. And here I was, some local punk with peach fuzz, telling the public to scramble GIBSON DESERT to make BRIDGESTONES, or go find ZEBU in BOOZE BUS. It felt like risky business.

Hence Ted Validas. A daft name in hindsight, but Delta Davis sounded porno, while Levi Saddat had the whiff of zealot. So Ted took charge of my correspondence, my inner geek with a gift for eating humble pie. Until finally, after six years, with Wordwit part of the *Herald*'s furniture, I ditched the ploy and took to signing every letter with my own name, or DA at least, the crossword's new initial scheme, receiving the snubs and cheers like a man.

For different reasons, plenty of authors and puzzle-makers have sought the refuge of a pen-name. Some like the Brontë sisters invented aliases to jump the gender divide. Others, like triffid-man John Wyndham, whose full name was John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris, had a preference for convenience. But there exists a smaller band of scribblers who crafted an alias far more notable (and elegant) than Ted Validas by mixing their own letters.

Best known is Voltaire, the French satirist who wangled his Latinised surname—Arovet Li—to help sever ties with his noble past. Theodor Seuss Geisl, alias Dr Seuss, also plied his trade as Theo LeSieg. Another American, Edward Gorey, wrote a series of macabre books for kids under the manifold egos of Ogdred Weary, Wardore Edgy and Mrs Regera Dowdy.

Then there's Gwen Harwood, the Tasmanian poet who longed to break the male monopoly of published poets in *The Bulletin* magazine back in the 1970s. So Gwen hatched a plan. Hardly changing her verse at all, she found unprecedented success as the asexual WW Hagendoor. Yet perhaps the most surprising member of this curious club is the father of the telephone.

Alexander Graham Bell felt cursed by celebrity. Everywhere he went, his name was known before he arrived, all but eclipsing the person attached to it. Fine if you want the VIP treatment but not so hot if you want to write a paper on lizards.

That's right. When not playing with sound waves, the Scot was looking under rocks. In later years Bell wrote an article on reptiles, but knew that if he submitted his story to *National Geographic* under his given name, (a) his piece may well be accepted on the strength of his fame alone, or

(b) a thousand readers will see the byline and say, 'Hey, what's this talkie-machine chappie doing cavorting with iguanas?'

Hence Bell muddled his middle and last names to invent a noname naturalist, his magazine piece running in 1907 under the title of 'Notes on the Remarkable Habits of Certain Turtles and Lizards' by HA Largelamb.

Apart from pen-names, several other writers have kneaded their own letters to coax characters into life, like the mysterious biographer called Vivian Darkbloom who haunts the pages of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Almost restrained compared to the fervour of Richard Stilgoe, the British writer who couldn't be cured from fiddling with himself. In his 1981 anthology, the *Richard Stilgoe Letters*, all 30 stories feature characters drawn from the author's name. We meet Israel Rightcod the trawler boy, Italian Olympian Ricardi Hotlegs, big-game hunter Col Tiger Rashid and a choirmaster named Elgar I Chordist.

Speaking of music, we have one more side-trip before grappling with the Master clue. For this yarn we return to England, home of the cryptic, where a gifted clue-monger and a famous musician shared a talent for orchestrating letters.

HENDRA VIRUS — anagram codenames and solo lyricists

Devotion, obsession—it's hard to decide—but crossword-makers turn to anagrams like Catholic nuns to rosaries. Neither vocation can quit their sacred fumbling, intoning spells as they go.

Consequently, when not teasing solvers with anagram clues, many setters torment their own names in order to create a pseudonym. For most of last century the custom was illustrated best in *The Listener*, the one-time radio magazine that boasted possibly the most difficult cryptic of its day. Browsing back copies you'll find the works of Robin Baxter (alias Nibor), Richard Rogan (Aragon), Jack Gill (Llig) and Jeff Pearce (Caper), to name four. Obiter, another setter, was Isaac Torbe in real life. A neat manipulation, though the truly astonishing blend of ISAAC TORBE might well have served as the setter's prophecy. When not making clues, Torbe designed helicopters, as you'd expect, his name being a mix of AEROBATICS.

Chris Brougham QC was another setter to uphold *The Listener's* formidable reputation. Taking silk in 1988, Brougham spent his daytime

hours navigating the byways of bankruptcy law. By night, however, the lawyer entered different corridors, dreaming up crosswords for *The Spectator*, *The Times* and, at one stage, *The Listener*, under the cover of Dumpynose. For all the smirks the alias generated, Dumpynose was a practical solution, as BROUGHAM the surname offers very little in terms of anagrams. (What would you suggest—RUMBA HOG?) So the QC chose to jumble PSEUDONYM instead.

Editing crosswords for the *Wall Street Journal*, Mike Shenk faced a similar dilemma. Anagram-wise, SHENK is a tough ask, yet Mike still felt the urge to create a pen-name. His reasoning was sound. Seeing a paper's puzzle editor occasionally publish his own material is seldom a good look, despite the high quality of Shenk's work. So the puzzler tested alternatives, styling a couple of alter egos in the shape of MARYANNE LEMOT and NATALIA SHORE. Any ideas? Perhaps that's too much at short notice. Suffice to say that few New Yorkers suspected Shenk had manipulated NOT MY REAL NAME and ANOTHER ALIAS.

Leading us to Bert Danher, a Liverpudlian horn player who created scores of brilliant crosswords when not performing music. Inventive and witty, this popular compiler wowed *Guardian* solvers under the guise of Hendra. Spot the link? Yeah, yeah, you say, Danher/Hendra, but so what? Yet here's the curious thing. The eerie overlap in Bert's tale relates less to Hendra than the yeah-yeah part. Let me explain.

Thanks to a dual distinction, Danher's place in the puzzle realm is assured. Not only did he pioneer the *Independent* crossword in 1986, but in so doing he also became the first setter in history to provide crosswords for the five major UK papers, *The Independent* joining his roster of *The Times*, *The Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times*. In his prime the wordsmith was a dynamo, producing six crosswords a week as well as devoting his spare hours to blowing the French horn for the Liverpool Philharmonic. Nonetheless, for all these achievements, the most remarkable aspect of this setter's life goes back to his childhood.

Bert's mother was Ann McCartney, brother to Jim. Through the tragic death of Bert's father the two families were forged even closer, the future puzzler spending whole stretches with the McCartneys during the Depression. If jazz wasn't blaring on the radio, then Uncle Jim was teaching Bert the art of cryptics. Not only did those ad-hoc sessions nurture a

stellar career, the bond they created also saw Bert become the godfather of Jim's first son, a moptop by the name of Paul, the future Beatle.

Sharing a passion for words and music, the two cousins enjoyed a strong rapport, despite the age-gap of 16 years. Arguably this lifetime affinity, or the seminal influence of Jim in both lives, helped to fashion one of the finest anagrams in music history.

Paul himself is cagey on the subject, telling reporters that the title of his 21st album, *Memory Almost Full*, is merely a phrase borrowed from his voicemail, a metaphor for modern life, he said, but other observers favour an alternative theory. The record came out in 2007, five years after Bert's passing, but the anagram theories still rang loud in the music press. Scramble the title—MEMORY ALMOST FULL—and you'll spell FOR MY SOULMATE LLM (or Linda Louise McCartney), Paul's long-time partner and co-founder of the rock band Wings. Linda, sadly, had succumbed to breast cancer in 1998. Is the title a coincidence or a dash of anagram brilliance? The ex-Beatle's staying mum. But there's no question that verbal agility runs through the family. For evidence, turn to Paul's first-cousin-cum-godfather, a stylist known as Hendra, and you'll see the calibre of his mixology:

If I tail car carelessly that will be unnatural = ARTIFICIAL

World Cup Team poorly dressing after shower = TALCUM POWDER

Stalling in faulty air contraptions = PROCRASTINATION

Saw three pigs turning aside = STAGE WHISPER

In my book this fab four is as lyrical as anything Bert's younger cousin composed. And that's just the maestro's work in the anagram category. A tough act to follow, but the Master clue is beckening.

FAME AT LAST — embedded signposts and Robin Lucas

Where normal freaks collect beer coasters or teaspoons, I prefer sign-posts. Not the street-corner kind, but new and sneaky means to indicate an anagram. Travelling to England with a rugby team in 1983, I went to see Buckingham Palace with the rest of my mates. The only difference being, where they took photos of the Queen's guards, I got busy with

pen and pad to discover DAUGHTER results from 'changing of THE GUARD'. Forget snapshots, I treat tourism as a chance to roam the globe and gather more clue ideas, signposts included.

Rolling Stones is another example. Or *Dire Straits*. Most citizens will think of two English rock acts, but I'm inclined to read both bands as sly instructions to make ONSETS and ARTIST. Likewise a *mixed blessing* is GLIBNESS, while *flea powder* is LEAF. If the perfect signpost sits cosily beside its fodder, throwing the solver off-guard, then what better coupling than names or phrases that do the job already?

Off-guard in fact is another good example, bearing in mind that off means sick or askew. So suddenly off-guard is not just a word meaning unwary, but a cryptic pairing that leads to A DRUG.

Over years, collecting these covert couples, the list began to look like this:

```
Off-centre = RECENT
Off-roading = ADORING
Sneak off = SNAKE
Paired off = REPAID/DIAPER.
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The mania persists today. I'm always on the hunt for furtive signposts. Like NEW, for instance, a word asking solvers to renovate the adjacent letters, thus giving up such clue tricks as *new-ager* (GEAR or RAGE), *New Orleans* (LOANERS) or *New Testament* (STATEMENT).

Following the logic of this hobby, you can probably guess the likelihood of the two elements—signpost and anagram cluster—coalescing. That is, where the two halves marry into a single unit. *Newcastle*, say, is one name bearing both parts, paving the way for CLEATS to be clued like so:

Newcastle climbing gear (6)

Likewise, PHANTOM is the upshot of *Rockhampton*, MOANS comes from *stonemason*, and SHORE from *horsewhip*. Pushing the envelope, you could also argue that *spinaches* yields CHASE (as in *spin-ACHES*) and *offensive*, ENVIES (think *off-ENSIVE*). Even good old Burma, nowadays known as *Myanmar*, could betray MANY, since *mar* is a crossword-word for *spoil*.

You get the idea. Embedded signposts are fiendish, and therefore not so rife across cryptic puzzles. (We setters do show some mercy, you know.) That said, I did play with *harmonies* one day, surely the most ironic of examples, as the outcome is NOISE.

Innovative as it seems, the embedded signpost is not new, as noted in a 1968 collection of *Guardian* puzzles. John Perkin, crossword editor at that time, warned solvers in his introduction: 'Some anagrams can be decidedly tricky.' As proof, Perkin provided two examples, no less troublesome for the modern solver:

```
Les Miserables—or Turning of the Screw = WRETCHES

Sweet miscreant = NECTAR
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Subtle and sadistic, the best clues test how far a recipe can go, while never losing sight of the Piñata Principle. So now that you're awake to embedded signposts, let's take a new look at the Master clue:

Enhanced means to focus on scatterbrain locus (10)

By itself, *scatterbrain* is a tenable signpost, a word suggesting ditzy and disorganised. Then again, *scatter* also does the trick, freeing the word's other half—BRAIN—to combine with LOCUS. And bingo, in one clean cut you have a ten-letter cluster.

Before blabbing the answer, let me tell you why I chose this clue—and answer—for the book's central puzzle. The year was 1990. The clue appearing in a November cryptic was a benign anagram:

Robin Lucas tweaked optic gizmo (10)

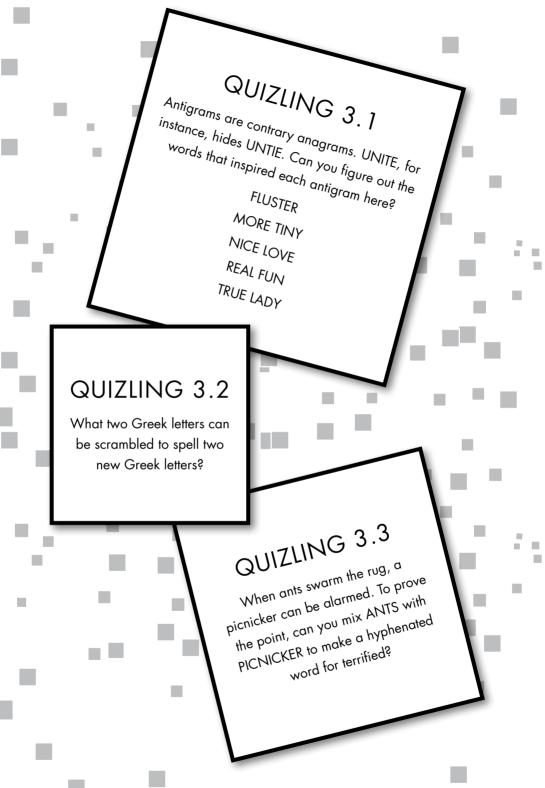
Can you see the false anagram? Having *tweaked* in the centre, serving as signpost, a solver had to figure out which cluster of ten needed tweaking. Predictably the cluster to mix is ROBINLUCAS, the letters kinder than OPTICGIZMO. Besides, what does *Robin Lucas* mean, assuming she/he/it acts as definition?

The answer arrived the following week. The envelope was nondescript. Handwritten, the opening line read 'Fame at last! I was thrilled to be an anagram in your cryptic crossword . . .' My eye drifted down to the sender's name and there was the florid signature of Robin Lucas, a solver from Mudgee in New South Wales who'd almost spilt her coffee over the usual breakfast challenge. Even with a pair of BINOCULARS I couldn't have foreseen such a sweet letter, not to mention the fluke of turning one random answer into a name that happened to be a reader who'd confront the same anagram a few weeks later. I said as much in my reply, thanking Robin for taking the time to write, hoping she'd enjoy more cryptics in the future. And being 1990, the last year of my professional camouflage, I ended the letter the only way I knew: Yours verbally, Ted Validas.

FURTIVE SIGNPOSTS

Here's a glimpse of a few more furtive signposts I've gathered over the years.

battleground (gives you tablet)
castor oil (coats—when you 'roil' CASTO)
feeding frenzy (feigned)
flesh wound (shelf)
Gordian knot (adoring)
halal butcher (Allah)
hypnotherapy (phony)
madrigal (grail)
odd couples (close-up)
odd man out (amount)
shipwreck (hips)
shortcake mix (track shoe)
Steinlager brew (generalist)
windowpane (weapon—when you 'wind' OWPANE)



CHAPTER 4

Discourteous shift is dispatched, subcontracted (10)

'Her men collapse,' says the comedian.

The crossword-maker hesitates. He rubs his jaw and says, 'Don't know.' Some bloke in a bomber jacket wheels a camera across the floor. The audience stays polite.

'O fat male,' continues the comedian, reading off his script.

The crossword-maker tugs his collar. 'How do you spell oh?'

'O,' says the comic and the audience erupts.

The compiler leans back in his chair, gazing at the scaffolding in the wings. 'Is it Tom Somebody?'

The comic frowns.'I thought you made crosswords for a living.'

'I do, but this is showbiz.'

'The show hasn't even started.'

Again the audience laughs. 'Last one,' says the comedian. 'What can you do with big melons?'

'Mel Gibson,' I say, exhausted, and the audience's cheer is more Bronx that joyous. The pain is over—for everybody. The comedian stows his script and says, 'Seriously, fella, I thought you'd eat anagrams alive.'

On paper, I felt like saying. In private, yes. Not with spotlights on my head and pancake make-up on my face, a baby microphone clipped to my pocket and my shirt going see-through with sweat.

The comedian was Paul McDermott, host of the offbeat quiz show *Good News Week* (Mark 1), and the anagram game was his idea of a warm-up, tossing me phrases that hid such celebs as Meatloaf and Elle Macpherson. Thankfully the cameras were yet to roll, as the game felt more like an ambush. As cool as VERY COOL TUNE may have read

aloud, I'd never spotted COURTNEY LOVE baking under a 500-watt globe.

To be honest, I was on the show to plug a novel, not crosswords. *The Book of Miles* is the story of a town obliged to move down the road in order to make room for a new dam, a true story I'd shaped into a novel. But flogging fiction can be a hard sell, so the publicist played the crossword card, sneaking me sideways into a few radio spots as well as the *Good News* gig, using the ruse of Meet the Puzzle-maker to smuggle the novel into the conversation.

The very reason I should have seen the ambush coming. Instead of scoffing sandwiches in the green room I might have been better off playing Scrabble, priming the reflexes, but there's a limit to switching letters under pressure. Next time you visit the circus, don't expect to see Alphonse the Amazing Anagrammer on the bill. People struggle to convert spoken words into letter-perfect anagrams, even those people who make crosswords for a living.

The job is made for pen and paper. If I ask you to find a singer in ONLINE GUY, I'm sure you'd uncover NEIL YOUNG in good time. It's a simpler task. All the bits are there. Much tougher if you *hear* the phrase I'M A JERK BUT LISTEN and try to grope for JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE. Nothing compares to seeing the letters on the page, as well as knowing what shape or flavour the outcome is going to be.

This last advantage is the crossword luxury. (Mix RUSS and NED into a word for *strip*.) Before any disarray begins, the clue pre-empts the result. Then again, away from puzzles, our minds can jumble VELCRO to stumble on to CLOVER without great call for wheels and dashes. Though obviously the degree of difficulty climbs in sync with the letter tally, making the popular Target puzzle a tricky assignment.

Found in umpteen newspapers, Target asks solvers to find as many words as possible from a scrambled nine-letter word. To spice up the recipe the words must be four or more letters long, no plurals, no proper nouns, and each word must include a nominated letter. Usually that letter's encircled by the remaining eight, much like a bullseye inside a target, and spatially a great help with mental acrobatics.

GREAT HELP in fact was one cluster I recall. It took me a while to ignore that phrase before I twigged to TELEGRAPH. (As you know, on

some days the Target word will leap out. Other times, like the morning I was booked to chat on radio, you'll be staring at alphabet soup.)

The interview was intended to be an audio tour of a newspaper's puzzle section, telling listeners how the various puzzles are assembled, from Wordwit to Target, plus the number twins—Sudoku and KenKen. I'd taken 20 minutes to prepare, going through the day's quick and cryptic clues in case any needed explaining. I'd even filled in the number squares and nailed APOCRYPHAL, the Target word. Perfect—everything sorted, until I glanced twice at the Target diagram. Wait, I thought, APOCRYPHAL has ten letters, not nine. I'd made an error. Was it APOCRYPHA? No, the mix had an L, and only one P anyway. Holy crap, what's hiding in YOYPCHARL? Quick, the interviewer was bound to ask, and all I had was LYCROPHAY, which was Hungarian for panic.

Seconds before the chat began I started reliving the *Good News* night-mare, the so-called whiz sitting clueless in the spotlight. The small talk started. I must have sounded like a trauma victim, vacantly discussing puzzles with my mouth while my brain was a blur of YOYPCHARL, or CHYLYPARO, but neither worked.

In my defence, POLYAR CHY (the government of many) is up there with nescience and fubsy. A rare bird, but one I should have caught. Gratefully the interviewer knew better than to spoil a listener's fun, and never asked for any answers anyway. Instead she quizzed me hard about my forthcoming unemployment.

DA: My what?

Radio journo: Aren't puzzles being outsourced?

DA: Imported, you mean? *The Australian* newspaper getting its crossword from the *London Times*?

RJ: I'm talking bigger picture. Who needs you, for example, if computers can make the puzzles for us?

DA: Well, sure, um . . .

RJ: Makes sense right? Brave new world, and all that.

DA: With anagrams I guess-

RJ: If Deep Blue can beat Garry Kasparov in chess, can't a computer be programmed to turn out grids and clues?

Rather than record my stunned response, let's leave the whole trainwreck and tackle the subject of cyber-clues in the next section, looking at breakthrough software, anagram engines and a seven-letter word that caused a moral shitstorm.

GREAT HELP — machine-made puzzles and naughty subtext

Strangely, when people learn I make puzzles for a crust, they often think that means (a) jigsaws or (b) that Target thing. Hopefully this book will set the record straight. I don't spend my days cutting autumn landscapes into small pieces. Nor do I arrange nine letters into a circle. Mind you, I wish I did. Target enjoys a lucrative franchise, though the people responsible are less compilers in the true sense than software operators. Every day the puzzle is generated by an inbuilt program, the game itself supplied by more than one contractor.

Sudoku is the numerical twin, a brilliant format inspired by the genius of Leonhard Euler, a Swiss number-cruncher back in the 1700s. His Latin squares—a grid of figures adding up to a common sum in all directions—have inspired modern puzzlers to refine the format. The word Sudoku is Japanese for 'the numbers must remain unmarried'. Not just addictive, the puzzle is ideal for any microchip to manage, a simple program capable of spewing out a million variations before morning tea. Some suppliers are aware of this perception, as if the format lacks a human heart, with one collection in the marketplace—*The Original SuDoKu*—carrying the bizarre selling point: *Over 300 Hand-Crafted Puzzles!*

Maybe it's true. Maybe hands were involved. I'm not going to argue. But you can bet your pocket calculator that the majority of Targets and number puzzles owe their existence to computers. Hop on the Web if you don't believe me. Tap in a phrase like 'puzzle software' and everywhere you surf you'll find your chance to download Target or Sudoku packages. Both puzzles are machine-friendly to make: a closed set of variables within a fixed grid. Sound a bit familiar? A little like crosswords, right?

Perhaps that's what Boris Johnson believed, the current mayor of London. Few people know that before taking public office Johnson was a journo, and part of the radical decision in the mid-1990s to replace crossword-setters with computers.

As deputy editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, Johnson and his colleagues saw sense in the move. Other diversions, like chess problems and pub quizzes, could be drawn from databases, so why not cryptics? Already the paper owned a deep archive of past clues. Rarer words like POLYARCHY may have laid claim to just one clue from an earlier appearance, but the more common entries were linked to dozens. Therefore, reasoned editors, ever keen to save a penny, why not ditch the compilers and run PC-generated grids? If machines aren't smart enough to craft a decent clue from scratch, then get the database to fetch and match.

Readers were appalled. Overnight, puzzles lost all subtlety. Worse than that, crosswords failed to balance clue-types. There seemed to be no life behind the pastiche. Recipes duplicated. Puns and words overlapped, or whole formulas were missing. The flak grew so heavy the *Tele* went back to the human touch, while Boris Johnson decided he'd try the relative calm of politics.

No question, though, computers have been a godsend for word puzzles, for both making and solving them. Once upon a time, when pen and paper were the lone tools, compilers had to fill grids and wangle anagrams using grey matter only. Now all of us can turn to online sites and software, feeding names or phrases like SAW THREE PIGS into the anagram engine and seeing what little sausages tumble out.

Mixing, in fact, is what computers do best, on top of helping crossword fans find what words may fit a selected sequence. (FLIPPANT and ELEPHANT, say, share their even letters and thus could fit the same grid entry.) But mixing and fitting are not the same as composing, that brittle task of generating fresh and elegant clues, complete with surface shine and deception. This cryptic dimension is the human dimension, beyond the ken of software commands—so far. Until such time, I still have a job to fulfil, borrowing whatever computer tools I can grab.

Again, as with Target and Sudoku packages, the web abounds in anagram generators. Many are gratis, some need subscription, some you pay to upload. Testing the range you'll come across slow ones, moody ones, shallow and archaic ones. Just like choosing a car, you'll need to experiment to see which engine suits your anagram lifestyle.

Anagram Genius is one proven vehicle, the first major generator of its type, the software developed over six years by Cambridge entrepreneur William Tunstall-Pedoe. Come release day back in 1994, Genius enjoyed widespread coverage. Even Johnson's *Daily Telegraph* was part of the hoopla, the paper learning that its own masthead could be massaged into DEEP EARTHLY LIGHT, HIGHLY DATA REPLETE or GLADLY PRE-HEATHITE in 40 seconds flat. But that was tame compared to the ruckus at the *Daily Mirror*, the paper running a front-page story in 1995 to promote the new device. The article carried a photo of the then Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, accompanied by a headline screaming I'M AN EVIL TORY BIGOT.

Other mixers carry such names as Anagram Artist, Anagram Ferret, Nanagram or, one that recently imploded, Errata Among Range (an anagram of ANAGRAM GENERATOR). Personally I can recommend Wordplay Wizard, a package created by an ex-editor of the *Listener* crossword, Ross Beresford. Thanks to his toy I discovered that helicopter man ISAAC TORBE is a blend of AEROBATICS, and a hundred other marvels. No doubt the gag-writers on *Good News Week* had similar tools. There's no sin in that. I might spend ten minutes a day just playing with anagram machines, throwing in a phrase like SWEATING BULLETS (because the letters look so ripe) and see what flashes back. The anagram clue below, in pre-computer times, might have taken more than an hour to craft:

Nervous about wellbeing status = SWEATING BULLETS

Another game I'll play with software toys is to seek out verbal flukes, like uncovering two eight-legged creatures (SPIDER and CRAB) in CRISPBREAD. Or trying the game in reverse, entering two painters (DALI and MATISSE) and getting ASSIMILATED.

The sorcery works best when brain and laptop combine forces, like the day I noticed LEGROPE sitting in Australia's new surfing queen STEPHANIE GILMORE. So rather than spend an hour futzing around with Steph's remainder, I pulled out LEGROPE from her name and keyed in her leftovers. After a brief purr, the machine supplied the essentials for another anagram clue: Of course, some anagram engines can be puritan, much like the Target puzzle that refuses to include 'naughty bits'. Search all you like, you won't find BUM and DICK in certain online crunchers. TIT and BOOB likewise, despite all four words being next to harmless, if only for their links to 'cleaner' meanings anyhow. A serial plea among Target solvers is the call for extended anatomy. Editors face the moral dilemma of condoning CLITORIS in SOLICITOR, or explaining how SPINE can be legit if PENIS doesn't seem to exist.

The practice is a type of bowdlerism, where slang and genitalia have been wiped from the database, just as Thomas Bowdler, back in the early 1800s, circumcised the Bard's 'prick of noon' in *Romeo and Juliet* for the nicer 'point of noon', and so on. Seasoned Target fans don't bother listing ORGASM for IGNORAMUS, while GUANO and AROUSING are borderline. In Target-ville, sex and the 21st century don't exist. If you chance upon MODEM in MODERNISM, bad luck. Or BEACHY in BELLYACHE: complain all you like. And don't even bother with VULVA—or VULVAE—in OVERVALUE. Ain't gonna happen.

Unless the unthinkable happens, and just as many solvers see the smut long before the setter's intended target, as occurred in the *Washington Post* back in 2008. The puzzle was called a Scrabble Gram, sponsored by Hasbro, the board-game's licence-holders. To reach the maximum score, solvers needed to rearrange four Scrabble racks—each with seven tiles—and aim to find the longest word. Here's how the racks appeared:

EUTTSXB AIYDDTK EEIVLHC EOODSPP

For Americans at least, rack 2 would be a pushover, the KATYDID (or cricket) part of every US summer. Then comes VEHICLE, while OPPOSED is your final answer. Leaving just the top rack for the good people of DC, possibly the hardest of the four. Oh Lord, surely not—BUTTSEX!? Since when has that depravity snuck into Random House?

The phones ran hot. The switchboard melted. The paper fell short of placing an apology, though the furore gained a lavish irony in the next morning's solution, where SUBTEXT was revealed.

As one user quipped in a puzzle forum, 'Well, the inventor of Scrabble was a guy named Alfred Butts . . .' Tongue-in-cheek, another comment insisted that courtesy must remain the bottom line of puzzle-making. But that's enough dirty talk. Time to examine 25-Across in the Master Puzzle, not just our last anagram clue but one composed (I swear) by human hand.

RISE OF THE NEW — everyday jargon and subtractive anagrams

Forty years back, a word like subcontracted came with a hyphen. Two centuries before then, the same word didn't exist. Nowadays it's as common as muck. You can't spend a working week without running into a subcontractor, or subcontractee, or maybe even operating under a subcontract yourself.

As the world changes, so does language. Out with fubsy, in with fax. Until fax turned quaint, getting the flick for text, which has since lost its e, and so on. The whirligig never stops. In fact, even whirliging is on thin ice.

Unlike the answer to our current clue, a robust ten-letter term that's growing more robust as each year passes. According to the *Shorter Oxford*, our mystery word was born around 1981, most likely debuting with a hyphen. If so, that gawky little attribute has since been lost, the term now part of modern conversation. Googling this mystery term (I realise I'm teasing you) will register close to six million hits, compared to the 150,000 incidences of nescience. And if you want further proof of how ubiquitous this one-time piece of jargon has become, then this chapter has already used the word in passing, and I'm guessing most of you missed your chance to snatch your final anagram off the page.

So let's refresh the memory banks. Here's how the clue reads:

Discourteous shift is dispatched, subcontracted (10)

Taken as a whole, the clue suggests the working realm. At least that's the surface sense: a rude bunch of workers somehow get the rocket, their new employment terms reduced to a subcontract. But don't let the clue's overall sense distract you. Ignore those images of open-plan offices, and focus on the building blocks.

Where's the signpost? *Shift* looks the stand-out, but that's leaving too many letters to disturb. To the signpost's left, DISCOURTEOUS has 11 letters, while ISDISPATCHED to the right has an annoying 12. Time perhaps to borrow a phrase from the employment sphere: *Help Wanted*.

As a category, anagrams are split into two kinds—the simple and the complex. The first sort we've met in the first three chapters: signpost plus fodder equals answer, as defined by the clue's other part. While *scatterbrain* was tricky for its embedded signpost, the rest of the game followed along orthodox lines. Going one more step, complex anagrams can spread their fodder across a longer phrasing, such as this deft sample from *The Guardian*, composed by John Halpern, a superb innovator known to many fans as Paul:

Ground rich with deep crack = DECIPHER

The words to grind are *rich* and *deep* to give a word meaning *crack*. Note how the fodder words sit astride *with*, the clue reading much like a recipe instruction: add X to Y to make Z. In complex anagrams, the fodder needs minor assembling before the reassembling can commence. That may entail adding—or taking away, as the next clues demonstrates. The first was styled by a setter called Flimsy from the *Financial Times*, while the other is drawn from my own scrapbook:

Tape's broken, not a bother (4)
Wet sitcom broadcast without copyright (5)

The word subtract, just like subcontract, owes its prefix to the Latin idea of being under, or away from. Tract means to draw, hence a tractor draws a plough. It's also why subtractive anagrams, as they're known, ask you to remove a few letters from the fodder before anything else can happen. Of course, for things to be fair, a clue must flag both operations.

Let's look at that first clue. Can you see the two indicators? Broken is your anagram signpost, and not—the word—tells you to exclude. Following the signs, then, if we break up TAPES (not with an A) we make PEST, a word meaning bother.

In the second clue, the hint of double-play is also there—to mix (broadcast) and to trim (without). Mix SITCOM minus copyright (or C) and you'll create MOIST, as clued by wet. Let's put the Master clue back in the frame:

Discourteous shift is dispatched, subcontracted (10)

Same deal, just a few more letters to handle. Where are the signs? As you probably figured, the anagram signal is shift. Excepting now we know that deletion is also on the agenda, as echoed by the word dispatched. In most other clues, the same word could be the anagram indicator—dispatched PARCELS could lead to SCALPER—but that role is already fulfilled, so here the meaning is to remove. But remove what?

Remember those words of Azed back in Chapter 1: 'A good cryptic clue contains three elements.' And what are they again? A precise definition. Fair wordplay signals. And nothing else. So don't overlook that little word is. No clue-word appears in vain. That tiny is, in fact, provides you with the letters you need to dispatch from a shifted DISCOURTEOUS, the new incarnation meaning subcontracted.

I'll make it easier for you: C E U R O ST U D O. As well as reminding you of a certain radio interview where the announcer forecast the downfall of human puzzlers, all the brainwork being entrusted to software packages. Certainly the DJ had a point, watching the likes of Target and Sudoku falling into programmers' hands, and even the large Fairfax army of staffers start to be decimated by wire services, feature buy-ins, offsite proofing and freelancers, but the day that clue-mongers are OUT-SOURCED to the microchip will be the day that robots run the asylum.

COMPLEX ANAGRAMS

Usually less tricky than they sound, complex anagrams ask you to scramble letters—with a twist. Perhaps a letter is thrown in before the shuffling, or extracted. Perhaps the anagram fodder doesn't sit primly in one cluster, but is supplied in separate bundles. This trio from the Financial Times will help you tune your radar to recognise the tactic.

From Falcon: Play in match and be beaten = MATCH + BE = MACRETH

From Neo: Sin once with serpent—in an original way—and there's punishment = SIN ONCE + SERPENT = PRISON **SENTENCE**

From Styx: Bonus remuneration removed from dodgy taxpayer = TAXPAYFR - PAY = FXTRA

HALL OF FAME: ANAGRAMS

Les, Tom, Dicky and Harry (6) [Cox & Rathvon, US] Every second letter an 'a'-bananas? (9) [Satori, FT*] Doctor accepted as trainee astronaut (5,5) [Times 8559] An acrostic puzzle in Latin (5,5) [Taupi, Guardian] Being out of one's class in semis, beaten badly (11) [Times 83801

UFO, for example, circling above Britain (12) [Crux, FT] * FT = Financial Times.

SOLUTIONS: Molest, alternate, space cadet, Costa Rican, absenteeism, abbreviation

QUIZLING 4.1

We know that HER MEN COLLAPSE hides former supermodel ELLE MACPHERSON. Can you refashion each phrase below to fashion a model HAILED POSH

SMOKES? TA UNHINGED CELEBS HELIUM KID

VAIN LADIES TANGLE NIGHTLY INSTRUCTOR

QUIZLING 4.2

Scrabble pros don't play BARONET, when REBOANT—meaning resonant—may draw a futile challenge from your opponent. Heeding this advice, we've played these weird sevens on the board, despite the same tiles holding which far simpler words?

AMBONES SONANCY FLANEUR DYFLINE ZINCITE OOCYTES PTYALIN TRISHAW

QUIZLING 4.3

If 'squandered zillions' is LOST LOTS, . can you figure out these other anagram pairs? Each coupling involves words of Exorcises?

Loathe warmth Eco-lit Mud-brick home Start pub-crawl

Ulna locale Fruit blemish

Bedtime story

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CHAPTER 5

Nebraskan City Circle gives old lady a laugh (5)

Cornflakes

Goalpost

Trousers

Menace

Lentil

Obviate

Perpetual

Domino

Radar Trap is a code puzzle I make every week for the *Herald*'s Metro section, a list of eight words or names encoded into wingding symbols. Usually the topic is declared, like Famous Stutterers (Porky Pig, Aesop, Noel Gallagher) or Things You Shake (Polaroid photo, drug habit, Etch-A-Sketch), while other weeks the task is twofold: cracking the code, and then determining the theme that unifies all eight.

What links friendship, say, with mozzarella, truth, limousine, hamstring and imagination? (They can all be stretched.)

Or these five movies: *X-Men, Muriel's Wedding, Notting Hill, Forrest Gump* and *Rear Window*? (Each film has a main character in a wheelchair.)

Another one: computer geek, healthy meal, lantern jaw, mahjong tile and 36. (They're all square.)

So how about our opening list? What quirk links Cornflakes and the rest? This was the challenge facing Sydneysiders in 2008, trying to find a common thread with a prize up for grabs. Search engines most likely came to the rescue, with rescue the operative word, as the link belongs

to modern history. Can you spot the connection before I spill the beans in the next paragraph?

How well do you know your history? All eight words were codenames for World War 2 operations, from bombing runs (Obviate) to propaganda mail-outs (Cornflakes). Hardly household names, but the terms were urgent business some 60 years ago. And once you solve our current Master clue you'll have a ninth code-name for the list, but instead of turning to codes or anagrams, this clue entails a new formula.

Players of charades, the popular mime-game, will know the rules already. You get a word like 'book', for example, and you need to act it out. Or maybe you draw a tougher example like 'cookbook'—and decide to break the word into halves—cook and book—as an alternative strategy. Breakdown in fact is the crux of charading.

Potentially, any movie or famous name can be broken into pieces—sounds or syllables or smaller words—and communicated through image, gesture or symbol. At first glance, Mahatma Gandhi looks a nightmare to dismantle, but then you unpick the seams and see five fragments: MA-HAT-MAG-AND-HI.

To illustrate how crosswords have adopted this game, let's choose a couple of those WW2 operations. MENACE is the prime candidate, the coupling of two smaller words, MEN + ACE. Clue-wise a setter may go this way:

Guys superb facing danger (6)

Guys are MEN. Superb is ACE. Marry them and there's a synonym of danger. So what is the word facing doing? The cryptic term is a linkword, namely any word helping to bring the other two elements together. Seldom desirable, sometimes linkwords are unavoidable. This may run contrary to Azed's dictum—two elements in every clue and nothing else—but wordplay and definition won't always mesh. It's best to view links as visible stitches that keep two panels tight and compatible.

Selecting linkwords has its own art. Choose the right one, and the word will not only describe what's happening in a wordplay sense (since *men* and *ace* are physically *facing* each other), but also contribute to the clue's overall surface meaning.

Let's try Operation 2, a naval attack on Sumatran oilfields codenamed LENTIL:

Here the marriage is cosier, as LENTIL can be defined as *pulse*, a term more readily linked to blood-flow. Pair that with *fast*—a word not just associated with Lent but also supporting the notion of heart-rate—and the trap is sprung. For added bait, the leftover IL translates as 49 in Roman numerals, the figure supporting the pulse idea. As the linking phrase, *close to* means both 'beside' and 'roughly', serving the needs of surface meaning as well as wordplay command.

Moving on to DOMINO, the last operation, the clue below was styled by America's best cryptic setter, Henry Hook, a gifted recluse from New Jersey. You'll see more of Hook's handiwork as the book unfolds, but for now consider this little gem:

Monk in oxygen mask (6)

Unlike my first two efforts, Hook has avoided a linkword, snugly making the two parts join. The best charades work this way. Here the wordplay side (*monk in oxygen*) spells out DOM+IN+O. The stroke of genius is how neatly the word *oxygen*—or O—sidles with *mask*, not forgetting that dominoes are not just spotty blocks but also those half-masks that The Riddler fancied.

Coincidentally the Master clue enlists the letter O as well. Charades are prone to isolating single letters (O), or letter clusters (IL), as most words when crumbled won't be as neat as the Mahatma. Take GALLI-VANT, for example. Broken down, we get GALL + IVAN + T, or G + ALL + IV + ANT, and so on. Playing charades, or building clues, you'll often need to convey a non-word chunk among the larger units. Such a challenge takes guile. Let's look at this special brand of nastiness.

STORM CENTRE — Ximenes vs Araucaria

Shirl O'Brien is an anagram of HORRIBLE SINS, but you won't meet a sweeter crossword compiler. The Brisbane mum of five has made more than 1200 puzzles for that city's *Courier-Mail* under the alias of Southern Cross. Now in her eighties, Shirl has quit the local gig to spend more time with her grandkids, though she still draws a puzzle income on the side, exporting her brand of homespun humour to the United Kingdom. Notably, Shirl belongs to a select group of females making cryptic puzzles at the top level, as well as being a very rare Australian who compiles for an English audience, her work appearing once a month or so in *The Guardian*, under the code-name of Auster.

'A lovely man called Custos, whose real name was Alec Robins, suggested I go with Auster, which means the southern wind.' Shirl can't help a girlish snigger when she recollects this. 'These days, with my flatulence, that's a good name for me.'

Alec Robins—one letter switch from becoming BINOCULARS—was a veteran setter for several English papers, *The Guardian* included. Together with a setter code-named Ximenes (christened after a torturer during the time of the Spanish Inquisition), Custos helped draft the rules of cryptic crosswords. Notably, both Custos and Ximenes, whose real name was Derrick Macnutt, taught classics at prestigious colleges, but maybe that's no coincidence, since a head for strange tongues often means a good head for puzzles. Nonetheless, in 1966, the two teachers took a break from Cicero and clueing to collaborate on a bestseller entitled *Ximenes on the Art of Crossword*. (Guess which compiler had the bigger profile.)

While both compilers have since moved on to that great conundrum in the sky, the impact of their tiny 130-page manifesto still ripples through Cryptopia. Not least in the matter of charades.

'Alec was a purist in that regard,' recalls Shirl. 'For him a phrase like CIVIC CENTRE is not an indication of the letter V, while CENTRE OF GRAVITY was fine. The difference is a matter of grammar.' Mind you, there are times when Shirl still signals a letter like B with the phrase BOTTLE-OPENER rather than OPENING OF BOTTLE, flouting the puritan rulebook and feeling a minor pang of guilt. 'I'll look up to heaven and say, "Sorry Alec" because he wouldn't have liked that.'

Bottle-opener, in other words, is an impure means of suggesting B, according to Custos and Co—a horrible sin in fact. Just as Radiohead is lazy shorthand for R compared with the technical honesty of Radio's head, which may well render R in purer fashion but looks daft on the page. To see where your impulses lie, browse the list below and choose which words or phrases seem to you to be a reasonable cryptic signpost for the letter R:

start of race middle of April end of summer ringleader birth centre never-ending

If you reckon the first three examples are the only fair ones, then you belong in the Ximenean camp. This posse makes up the hardliners, setters and solvers who insist on every clue being thoroughly sound in both grammar and execution, even at the expense of creative tangents or a dose of lateral thinking.

However, if you can live with all six listed samples, chances are you belong in the libertarian camp, the opposite mob. As a solver, I'm guessing, you don't mind facing a clue that seems a little out there, either in its wording or in how the wordplay functions, so long as the Piñata Principle prevails. No matter the mischief, the answer must be gettable, especially in reverse, when the solution and clue are held up for scrutiny.

The golden rule at the heart of cryptics was coined by Afrit, a *Listener* compiler of the 1930s whose real name was AF Ritchie. Dubbed the Afrit Injunction, the rule reads: *You need not mean what you say, but you must say what you mean.*

Despite the flame war between the two crossword schools, this dictum is central to both approaches, from the exacting Ximenes to the loose-limbed Araucaria, alias John Graham of *The Guardian*. For a sense of the latter, try this charade for size:

Garment of polyester not cotton? (7)

If the grid suggests SINGLET is the answer, can you figure out why? Because *polyester* (versus *cotton*) has a SINGLE-T. True-blue Ximeneans would be appalled at this outrage—a rubbery clue, a deviant whim—but I reckon it's funny, and inventive, and Araucarian—the other word to describe libertarians. Besides which, the Afrit Injunction has been obeyed.

Athens versus Sparta, Crips versus Bloods—the two camps have been staring daggers for decades, despite having so much in common. Ultimately any setter or solver wants their puzzle to be concise and witty. Regardless of your flag—Ximenean or Araucarian—the principles of neat wordplay and sound definition don't alter. You still want seamless clues with vivid imagery and subtle traps. Returning to the classroom for a moment, the Ximenean is much like the Classics master who demands a clinical translation, converting Virgil into crisp pentameter, while the Araucarian heads up the Art department, splashing colour on the canvas to mirror the galaxy Virgil wrote about. Both executions require great skill. Both can delude and delight, and keep the solver coming back for more. As with art, once you've seen your share of galleries, you'll get to know which style you like.

So what about 22-Across, our upcoming charade? Does it lean in a Ximenean or Araucarian direction? Let's see:

Nebraskan City Circle gives old lady a laugh (5)

The state abbreviation for Nebraska is NE. Will that be required? The state's capital is Lincoln, and its largest city is Omaha. Are we on track with that kind of thinking? The answer is yes, regardless of where the clue leads, as good solvers will toss up all those scenarios, keeping their mind alert to what the clue is murmuring.

Let's stick with the OMAHA theory. All the more since that has five letters, and we already know that O is the answer's opener, thanks to BINOCULARS. With that in mind, let's check to see if the wordplay backs us up.

So where's the wordplay? Remove the alleged definition—*Nebraskan City*—and see what's left: *Circle gives old lady a laugh*. You should be feeling encouraged. *Circle* may well suggest an O, leaving us with the tricky charade sequence of MAHA. Is it M + AHA? What about MA + HA?

Read the words carefully. Presuming *gives* to be the linkword, then *old* lady = MA, and *a laugh* (singular) has to be HA. Congratulations, you've just un-pieced the puzzle's first charade.

Although OMAHA, the answer, gave no cause for British Intelligence to celebrate 60 years previous. If the *old lady* is laughing in our current clue, then the old guard was furious back in 1944.

MULBERRY (BUSH) TELEGRAPH — D-Day Crossword Mystery

GOLD was a fluke, they thought, a common word just like SWORD. And then came JUNO, the Roman goddess of marriage, and a few feelers started twitching down at MI5, the Military Intelligence office. What are the odds, they must have argued. The *Daily Telegraph*, reduced by wartime economics to a measly six pages, had kept its crossword puzzle to help London citizens while their time away when hunkered down in air-raid shelters. Worryingly, this same crossword had just betrayed three code-names—GOLD, SWORD and JUNO—each one a classified landing spot for the D-Day invasion planned in a few months' time.

But still, went the reasoning, aren't these compiler chaps into the classics? Gold, sword, Juno: the very stuff of myths and legends, the same rich heritage upon which the military masters had drawn. Operation Overlord remained on track—6 June 1944—when a fourth clue made the pages:

One of the USA (4)

What the dickens? UTAH had nothing to do with Homer or his sea stories. The word in fact embraced a different maritime yarn, namely the Normandy beach assigned to the 4th US Assault Division, the western flank of the D-Day operation, and that was five weeks off.

There's a saying in journalism—once is an occurrence, twice a coincidence, while three times is a trend. So what's four, I wonder. Conspiracy? High treason?

To make matters worse, these crosswords had a precedent. Two years

ago, in August 1942, there was the Dieppe Debacle. The planning had taken months: the spy reconnaissance, the stealthy gathering of infantry and airpower. The target was a French port close to the Belgian border. As Chief of Combined Operations, Lord Mountbatten was intent on snatching Dieppe, flushing out the Germans and gaining a beachhead in northern Europe. Mine-sweepers had cleared the Channel. The raid was two days from swooping when up bobbed 18-Down in the bloody *Tele* crossword: *French port* (6).

As you can see, crosswords of the era happily blended quick clues as well as the evolving genre of cryptic. Sharing the bill with this and other straight clues (such as *Primitive boat* = DUGOUT) that day in August were clues of the cryptic kind, including anagrams (*The quantity required to make a great egg* = AGGREGATE) and a raw charade (*Agony, or makes a bit of a teaser* = TORMENTOR). But what tormented MI5 was DIEPPE. The timing alone was alarming. Add to that the heavy losses consequently suffered at the landing, and the government had no choice but to appoint Lord Tweedsmuir (the son of John Buchan, author of *The 39 Steps*) to investigate the culpable compiler.

He's a man you've met already. Like Custos and Ximenes, another classicist with chalk dust on his fingers, Leonard Sidney Dawe had pioneered the *Daily Telegraph* crosswords and also ran the Strand School in London. Students dubbed him Moneybags, a reference to his initials (LSD—pounds, shillings, pence), not to the bonus income he derived from his puzzle duties—or playing alleged snoop for Hitler. Not that he was a spy, concluded Tweedsmuir, examining Dawe's life in detail. In spite of the Prussian haircut, Dawe was the antithesis of a Nazi sympathiser and had no case to answer. DIEPPE, the word, was deemed an accident. As Tweedsmuir later remarked, 'We noticed the crossword contained the word Dieppe and there was an immediate and exhaustive inquiry which also involved MI5. But in the end it was concluded that it was just a remarkable coincidence—a complete fluke.'

Such tolerance began to evaporate in May 1944. On the eve of Overlord, the *Telegraph* crossword knocked the notion of coincidence on the head, running a fifth hush-hush location fresh on the heels of UTAH. On 22 May, just two weeks prior to US General Dwight D Eisenhower launching the assault, another clue appeared:

For those unfamiliar with American geography, the Missouri River flows through Great Falls and Sioux City, as well as a city called Omaha, a name that honours the area's original people. If Omaha rings a bell for you, imagine the alarm bells it set off in Westminster. The same city happened to be a class of light cruiser in the US Navy as well as a classified nook in the Normandy coastline. Give this Dawe fellow a damn good grilling, came the communiqué.

By this stage, the blitz a grim reminder of London's vulnerability, the Strand School had been evacuated to the safer dales of Surrey. Dawe himself was living with his brother-in-law, Peter Sanders, a senior member of the British Admiralty, causing further jitters in intelligence ranks. The home was in Leatherhead, which Ximeneans would despise as a signal for L almost as much as Moneybags resented the hell the MI5 lads gave him. One-time puzzle editor for *The Telegraph* Val Gilbert tracked down this Dawe recollection: 'They turned me inside-out and . . . grilled my brother-in-law. They went to Bury St Edmunds, where my colleague Melville Jones was living, and put him through the works. But they eventually decided not to shoot us!'

Again, MI5 decided, the words seemed to be a mind-boggling fluke. Dawe had no inkling of the covert plans. Comically his confusion evokes a certain Radar Trap 65 years later, where Sydney solvers had to reveal the military truth behind a list of haphazard words, though in Dawe's case, he'd both created the list and thankfully (for him) failed to identify the word's darker association.

Nor did the flukes stop. Only days from D-Day, a few more military secrets lobbed in the grid. Among the answers were MULBERRY (code for a floating harbour off the French coast), NEPTUNE (the initial naval assault) and OVERLORD (seriously).

Historians have readily placed the D-Day Crossword Mystery high on the list of all-time great coincidences, but the oddity gained a new chapter in 1984. A former Strand School student, Ronald French, was reading a 40-year anniversary article about the crossword episode and felt compelled to contact the paper.

It seems the fishy vocab of Leonard Sidney Dawe was less an accident

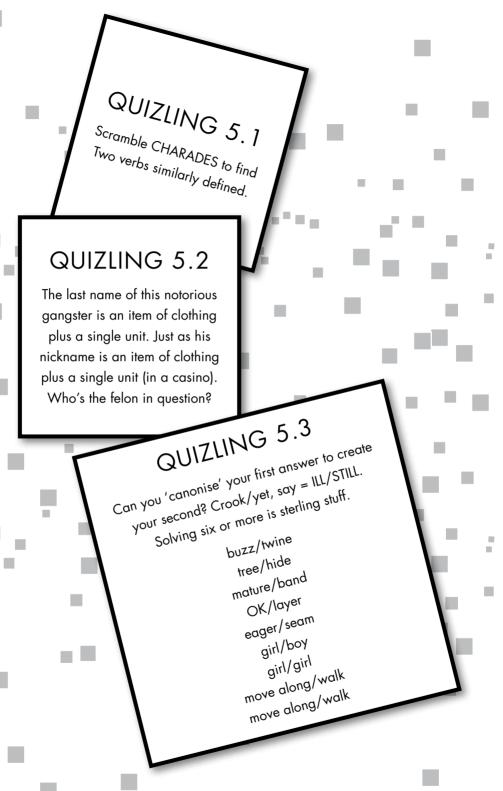
than a whim of geography. Based in its Surrey digs, the school was handy to an army camp for US and Canadian troops. Just 14 at the time, French was mesmerised by the men in khaki, as were dozens of other schoolboys, many of whom played truant to hang around the camp and see the army life first-hand. Men talk. Boys listen. 'We all knew the operation was called Overlord,' recalled French in a follow-up article by Val Gilbert. 'Everyone knew the outline invasion plan . . . Omaha and Utah were the beaches they were going to—'

From spoken word to crosswords, the story took one more step. Pushed for time perhaps, juggling the chores of teaching, school admin and puzzle-making, Dawe regularly challenged his students to create crossword interlocks as an intellectual test, giving the lads graph sheets and pencils and seeing what they could conjure up. What they did was almost overturn the course of WW2.

Though maybe it's fitting to give the military the final word on this crossword caper. After all, Chief Command was the primary source of these taboo terms, the original thinktank that dreamt up such ideal fodder as OMAHA and MULBERRY. Nine months after the critical success of D-Day, the Nazi empire shrinking and withdrawing deeper into Germany, the Allied forces sought to conduct a series of secret negotiations in Switzerland. Top-ranking officers on both sides of the conflict were slated to be involved, a chance to discuss the possibilities of a Nazi surrender in a civilised way. With power in such a delicate state of balance, this made the secrecy of Operation Crossword all the more pivotal.

RECIPE PRECIS: CHARADES

Often a lack of mixing signposts, or any other manipulation hints, can open your eyes to the charade category. Especially if the clue carries a word like and or other coupling cues, namely with, beside, by, on, along, next to or after. The slicker charades of course can be so lean as to avoid any so-called joiners, such as old lady a laugh yielding O+MA+HA. In which case let the clue's brevity put charades on the suspect list and keep your eyes peeled for common abbreviations—see the box at the end of the next chapter.



CHAPTER 6

A weir worker set . . . (7)

Hang on, before we start, let's check that clue again. W-E-I-R. Is that the right spelling? I mean W-I-E-R just looks wrong. But then again, we have PIER, which is correct. Or is it PEIR? How about we run the spellcheck over it?

Wish I'd had that impulse three years back. One thing you learn in the puzzle game—never presume. The moment you think you've made a spotless crossword, a blooper will have you on your backside. Maybe a charade skips a vital piece, a clue number is out of whack . . . or maybe you think WEIR is spelt WIER.

Without trying to duck for cover, I reckon the cause of this numb-skull lapse rests in part with Old French. That's the language to filter the Latin *pera*, so giving us the modern-day PIER, a word that slyly transposes the vowel pairing buried in WEIR, an Old English word that detoured via Middle German. Dumbly, on the eve of publication, I'd taken the two words as owning identical tails and made the fatal move from PIER to WIER (sic) in a bid to resonate a longer entry elsewhere in the grid. That other word was WARRAGAMBA, the principal dam supplying the sprawl of Sydney, and 14-Across in this Puzzle of Horror.

To clue WARRAGAMBA I'd chosen the charade option, breaking the word into bits: WAR, plus RAG, plus A, and then MBA (a Master of Business Admin). The clue took this shape:

Water supplier fighting newspaper article, gaining business honour (10)

Can you see each Lego block? *Water supplier* is your dam. *Fighting* = WAR. *Newspaper article* = RAG + A (the indefinite *article*), followed by the degree. As tough as the answer may seem, the dam is a household name to most Sydneysiders. A twisted but fair charade, until I spoilt the effect.

The original answer to 21-Down in this 2007 puzzle was PIER, which once owned the charade clue—Dock food rationing at first. (Again, dock is your definition, food is PIE, and rationing at first is a libertarian way of denoting R.) Yet during the proofing, when a setter gets his chance to iron out the wrinkles, I had a regrettable brainwave. What if, I said. What if I change PIER to WIER, because WIER is another word for dam, right? That way I can refer to the other entry of WARRAGAMBA. As a rule a crossword can be richer for owning several words that feed off each other through meaning or association. This WIER and WARRAGAMBA echo was a case in point, except that WIER should have been spelt WEIR. Worse than that, the entry was asking every solver to mirror the mistake so as to complete the puzzle.

The slip went to press and the uproar began. Emails jammed the *Herald*'s inbox, decrying the standards of public literacy etc. Lethal injection was thought too kind a punishment. What about toe-cutting? Death by drowning? At Crikey.com.au, the Australian e-newspaper, one reader seized upon 'nadir'—a classic crossword-word meaning an orbit's lowest point—to characterise the fiasco. Tellingly this reader was Richard Walsh, the former publisher of Oz magazine.

For those too young to recall the 1970 scandal, Oz was charged by Britain's Obscene Publications Squad with conspiracy to corrupt public morals, or more specifically for the act of depicting Rupert Bear with full wedding tackle. The Old Bailey trial enlisted the likes of John Mortimer QC for the defence, with assistance from Australian lawyer Geoffrey Robertson. Yet despite having weathered all the heat of that furore and the baying of every editorial in the land, Richard Walsh saw WIER as the nadir of modern journalism. If not the misspelling itself, then how such a booboo was ever allowed to make the page.

I wasn't too happy either. When you make a mistake as dumb as that the anguish lingers. If this paragraph contains a spelling mistake, then you and I may never notice. Or if we do, the chapter perseveres. But goofing a crossword answer is an exquisite type of sloppiness. Even now reliving this weir/pier mess is undermining some expensive therapy.

But Walsh was right. The proofing phase at the time of the error was shabby. He called it lamentable, whereas I think the better word is fractured.

Just like a charade, the Fairfax system of that period was broken into bits, with not every piece in close contact with the other. As a setter you may spot a blunder in your work and tell the editor, or vice versa, yet that's not the same as *making* the change and running the corrected copy past the other. Call it paranoia, but such caution is less crucial in magazine writing. If an adjective is AWOL, then the reader may never know. In the puzzle realm, however, one slip can be deadly. If anagrams are wonky, a signpost missing, the definition wrong—the whole band is out of tune.

So here's the plan. Since 29-Across, our new charade, also contains worker, I think we should move from treacherous piers and weirs, and jump into the Time Machine. Let's set the dial to 25 years ago, just to see how puzzle proofing has fluctuated over the interim. With one hint: block your nose. The pong of bromide can be overpowering.

AHAB'S WOODEN LEG — proofing and unpicking clues

When I first made crosswords for the *Herald*, back in 1983, the word 'internet' didn't exist, while 'outsource' was two years old. Preparing the grid meant using a texta to block out the squares and then a felt-tip to etch in the numbers. Clues I typed onto postcard-sized triplicate sheets—white on top, then pink, then yellow. Next I folded the bundle into an envelope and addressed it to the puzzle editor.

In those early days Ron Nichols was the man in charge. A veteran journo with a dry wit, Ron typeset the clues on his Visual Display Unit (the Jurassic equivalent of a computer), turning my scribble into an authentic puzzle with clues aligned and the grid as crisp as a chessboard. He'd then send the proofsheet back in the post.

Industrial love-letters, the Fairfax proofs could be smelt a few blocks away, the perfume of the stationery a giddy reek of bromide and chemical resin. Braving the smell, you'd comb the proofs for typos. If you spotted one, or had second thoughts about a clue, you'd phone through the corrections. (Yes, we had phones in 1983.) During our chats, Ron

and I would swap notes, seeing if we agreed on what needed fixing, and the amended puzzle was then put to bed, ready to appear inside four weeks. If the WIER business represents the nadir of proofreading, then possibly this one-on-one relationship was the zenith. Not that errors didn't occur, but at least editor and setter were wholly answerable for any stuff-ups, as it should be.

This rhythm prevailed for 15 years. From 1983 to the late '90s, the mail system kept both parties in contact. Despite the odd glitch, the exchange held strong, the follow-up calls keeping the bungles passably low as well as ensuring a rapport between setters and their continuum of editors. And what a continuum they were. I can't hope to list the Herald's complete sequence as the puzzle chair has been a swivel seat for years. Though I can tell you that the sports tragic who was Ron eventually made way for a Kansan named Jack Ames with a penchant for linen suits and William S Burroughs. After Jack came a pocket-sized rockchick named Deb, who needed to remove her latest piercing in order to speak on the phone, and then came the Taylor clan: Rebecca, Naomi and Linus. The current gatekeeper of Puzzle Land is Lynne Cairncross, an ex-journo with a passion for botany and gluten-free chocolate tortes. Yet undoubtedly the queen of editors is Harriet Veitch, the spare-parts player who has filled as many breaches in the crossword roster as she has different roles across the paper.

Critic, columnist, profiler—Harriet has worn many hats in her 22 years on staff. More recently you'll have seen her byline near the back of Section One, as Harriet is now the paper's obituarist, reducing the late and great to eloquent biographies. 'I get to be a sticky-beak for a living,' is Harriet's take on the gig, which is very Harriet. Her plum voice evokes all things proper, and yet the message is often mischievous: the auditory equivalent of a cryptic clue.

As sharp as every puzzle editor has been, Harriet stands alone for her free-ranging knowledge of trivia, a rare mix of classical and pop culture. She embodies the maxim once uttered by Lindsey Browne, the *Herald*'s iconic compiler, which was: 'A good journalist knows a little about everything.' That journo is Harriet, a woman as comfortable with Tudor lineage as with identifying which Bee Gee in a photo is which. (If you want her number as phone-a-friend for the next quiz show, stiff cheese—she's booked.) After

so many years setting and proofing the TV guide, Harriet has as much of a handle on *Malcolm in the Middle* as she does on Malcolm Fraser.

One day a clue of mine strayed into the equestrian ring, clueing LIP-IZZANER as a Spanish horse. But HV was quick to report that even though Lipizzaners are virtually synonymous with the Spanish Riding School, that school is based in Vienna and the breed itself comes from Slovenia. And she was right, of course, as well as being genial about it. And this whole episode predated The Gospel According to Wikipedia.

A trained subeditor, Harriet knows the usual chestnuts—the difference between refuse and refute, or discrete and discreet, uninterested and disinterested. Just as she knows the hair-splitting stuff as well—like Gambia is truly The Gambia, and The Pixies are actually Pixies, while polecats aren't cats. She's also a gifted speller, spotting a single-c cappuccino before the milk can cool. Ironic in fact, given the deadly IE/EI switch in Harriet Veitch's own name. Whenever we trade emails I need to murmur the mantra: I before E except after C, or V in her case, but after R is OK.

Regardless of the editor, however, whether it was Harriet, or blue-haired Deb, or Jack in his Truman Capote strip, the two-way ritual was time-honoured. Setter sent the puzzles by post; editor returned the type-set proof by mail; corrections were discussed over the phone. When the internet arrived, the only variation was setters leapfrogging the postie. New puzzles now travelled by email, while the proofing phase remained a mail-and-phone affair, setter and editor working in sync until a different sort of letter arrived in 2000.

The sender was Rebecca Taylor, the puzzle supervisor of the day, her opening line ominous: 'From July 31, the *Sydney Morning Herald* Crosswords will be following new production procedures.'

In a word, Pagemasters. Filling a niche, doing a lot of slog-work for editors, Pagemasters is the quintessential outsource operation that takes care of share listings, cinema sessions, weather, horoscopes and puzzles. Suddenly the *tête-à-tête* of editor and setter became a *ménage à trois*. Rather than sending Wordwits and crosswords to Fairfax, I sent them to a production bunker in Melbourne, and their staffers mailed me back the proof to check. Before too long the mail component dropped out of the equation and this tangled triangle existed wholly online, with setter, typesetter and editor remote from each other.

Our mission of course was to exterminate all bugs before the puzzles appeared in public, and we didn't always succeed. Owing to the disjunct of the new system, the lines of answerability blurred. Where did the buck stop, and whose inbox had the latest version of the buck? Wires often crossed, one party oblivious of the action of the other two, or an error was amended by email yet not on the proof. Or a word like WIER was entered, yet not sighted by Sydney, the bungle making the morning papers. Clearly, where two people could once get a puzzle to the page without a parade of grandiose blunders, three could not.

At least, not then. We took a while to right the wrongs. What has helped no end is Pagemasters having allocated regular staff to the puzzle department, with Emma Houghton first and now Rebecca Alford (to name two) on a rolling roster, ensuring continuity.

Second to that, triggered by the Wier Fiasco, all correspondence will entail three parties, and all changes are now endorsed in follow-up attachments. Step by step, the dance is choreographed down to the last comma.

Step One, I send a batch of four crosswords to the Pagemaster lair. Step Two, every week, they return one typeset draft. Three, I toothcomb the copy and zap any changes back to the sender, all changes flagged, as well as to Lynne Cairncross, Fairfax's current puzzle custodian.

Step Four, Lynne will study the amended copy and ask how various clues work. I get the anagram, she may write, but is *stone* a fair signpost? Or how do we get the second A of WARRAGAMBA? If a late tweak is made, then Pagemasters will input the change and the revised clues will be sighted and validated by Lynne. Fiddly as it sounds, it works. Finally. Almost perfectly.

We're humans after all. No matter how tight the system, lapses occur. Somehow Lynne and I considered HAJJI, a pilgrim to Mecca, as being plural, and the Library of Alexandria as one of the Seven Ancient Wonders, rather than that city's lighthouse.

Even Margaret Farrar, among the first and finest of crossword editors, made a comical lapse of judgment during her reign at the *New York Times*. At the helm from 1942 to 1968, Farrar single-handedly checked clues, ousted typos and seldom missed a beat. Long John Silver, however, once caused a minor splash. The pirate had already appeared just recently, Farrar remembered. Loath to have the same name repeated so soon, the editor needed a quick clue for WOODEN LEG. So it was Farrar who

opted to ditch Silver for another mariner, making the revised clue read: Captain Ahab's distinguishing characteristic. The gaffe was detected by an eight-year-old solver, who wrote to the paper wondering why Ahab now had a wooden leg instead of an ivory one, as in Moby Dick. For her part Farrar was wondering what kind of eight-year-old solved the New York Times crossword, let alone read Moby Dick.

ANT MUSIC — cryptic shorthand and multiple meanings

After all this talk of brain-fades, have you fired up your nerve cells? We have a charade to solve, right? Let's put the clue on the table:

A weir worker set . . . (7)

A weir is liable to be A + DAM, since weir has few other synonyms, and the letter A can't afford to be redundant. If our theory holds water, what seven-letter word starts with ADAM? Checking a large dictionary, you'll find three. One is a greenish cousin of zinc—ADAMITE—and the other is a surname, ADAMSON, likewise failing to satisfy the clue. Leaving us with ADAMANT. But if that's the answer—why?

Here's where things get slippery. Following *weir* in this latest clue are three separate pieces of treachery, each of which can serve several masters. If ADAMANT is right, then *worker* must be ANT, but how does that work?

If you are a regular solver, you'll start to grow aware of the cryptic shorthand. Point, the word, will often mean a compass point, being N, E, S or W. Journalist is ED. Way is RD or ST. Sport can be PE or PT—just like your gym class—or perhaps RU or RL, the two rugby codes. Cricket is another favourite, with team (XI), maiden (M) and duck (O) entering the fray. Any chemical element, any American state, any chesspiece can infer its abbreviation. As we saw with Warragamba, degrees can also be downsized, just as doctor can signal DR, GP, MO (Medical Officer) or MB (Bachelor of Medicine). Different papers will favour a different batch of abbreviations. Country codes (where The Gambia is GM) are far too obscure in my books, though *Financial Times* solvers are expected to know Germany (DE) and Spain (ES) among all the other

European nations. In the same vein every cryptic buff will know worker, the word, is liable to denote ANT.

Perhaps the logic harks back to Aesop, whose fable of the industrious ant has invaded the Western psyche. Then there's Biology 101, where we learnt most colonies are subdivided into various castes, from drones to soldiers to workers, just as bees (another option for *worker*) are classified. Yet after years of clueing I can tell you the most compelling reason for ANT earning such a simple definition gets down to the word's importance. Language is riddled with the little varmints! *Do get frantic. We can't escape their constant quantity. Unwanted but incessant, an insouciant word like ant guarantees the setter an elegant and pliant indicator* . . . Making ADAMANT our odds-on answer—

Adam Ant, did you say? The rockabilly singer with paint on his face? No, not him, as tempting as a dash of Britpop felt, back at the drawing board. But then I went cold on the idea. Soon you'll be grappling with wordplay to discover a Renaissance figure, then a novelist from the 1800s, as well as a 1960 movie and a spot of cyber-slang. Adding Adam Ant stood to be a cultural overdose. Besides, I found Ant Music irritating.

I went with a shot of plain vocab instead. But wait a tick—where's the definition? What is *set* doing there? And what about those scary dots in the clue's tail?

Best way to explain the clue's finale is to take a side-trip into pub trivia. Should words ever warrant a quiz-night question, then chances are the host will plump for these two:

- 1. What's the only English word that ends in MT?
- 2. What English word has the most meanings in the dictionary?

The first answer is DREAMT, the second, SET. For such a low-key word, set surely gets around, the Zelig of lingo. The *Oxford English Dictionary* allocates 25 pages to this versatile midget—that's some 60,000 words (give or take) to capture the protean life of set. From Lego set to set the table, from sport to nautical terms, music to slang, from transitive verb to intransitive, set has close to 200 meanings, a synonym for ADAMANT included.

The moral of the story? Take extra care with those little words, even more those of an elderly persuasion—such as *out*, *get*, *take*, *do*, *round*—as these are masters of misdirection. Each owns so many meanings you need

to be aware of which nuance is operating. As for those dots that end our charade, Chapter 24 will unveil that mystery. But first we have a pressing appointment with a cheerleader . . .

IN SHORT

Charade clues frequently call on abbreviations, since a word like TENACIOUS won't break into neat fragments the way ADAMANT or STUBBORN can. Instead, a setter may try TEN + AC [current] + IOUS [debts]. Below is only a glimpse of other abbreviations you can encounter across cryptic clues, charades or otherwise.

AB (sailor) IT (computing)

AD (nowadays)

L (line, learner, left)

AM (morning) M (married, maiden)
B (born, bowled) MP (politician)

BA or MA (graduate) NT or OT (books)
C (caught, cold) OP (work, opus)

CA (about, circa) P (quietly, parking)

CE, CH or RC (church)

PE (sport, gym)

DR or GP or MO (doctor)

PR (publicity, spin)

DR or GP or MO (doctor)

PR (publicity, spin)

E (drug)

R (river, right)

ED (journo) RE (about)

EG (say) RL or RU (football)
EP or LP (record) SOS (help)

ER (queen) ST (street, way)

ET (alien) T (time, shirt, model, Model T)

F (fellow, loudly) U (turn)

H (horse, heroin) X, Y or Z (unknown)

IE (that is)

Also watch out for point (E, N, S or W), note (A to G), chess pieces, chemical elements and Roman numerals.

QUIZLING 6.1

Each charade leads to an item of office supply. Enchanting + assessor =

lofty + fairer squeezebox + abrade dopes + limit sensed + prediction fix + fruit drink main + expert

QUIZLING 6.2

Ironically, what form of fortune telling can break into a charade saying: 'cheers bunkum'?

QUIZLING 6.3

My first is in one, but not in two; My second's in two, but not in three; My third is in two, but not in one; My fourth is in three, but not in two; My fifth is in five, but not in one; My sixth is in one, but not in five; My last is in eight, and the puzzle's twist Is technically the answer doesn't exist.

CHAPTER 7

Early curve superb on cheerleader (7)

Sex sells. Sex sizzles. It diverts and distracts. It titillates and shocks, makes us laugh and leer and catch our breath. Sex is how we got here, and sex is not going away.

Birds do it. Bees do it. And according to Cole Porter, even educated fleas do it. From the himbo torsos printed on cereal boxes to the smoky glances of night-time soaps, sex stalks every waking hour. Magazines are splashed with it, and catwalks bristle with it. We hear it in song, read it in scandal, confront it on billboards and in paperbacks. You may even be enjoying the *bona fide* article on a regular basis, though as Shakespeare is quick to remind us, 'Is it not strange that desire should so many years outlive performance?'

And is it not natural, then, that sex should bob up in crosswords too? After all, we are dealing with the twin realms of *double entendre*: the cryptic clue and the loaded phrase. Under sex the *Macquarie Thesaurus* lists 92 synonyms, and that's barely breaking into a sweat. *Score. Do. Shag. Mount.* Each offering so versatile—the ideal toys for a fertile mind.

A dirty mind, don't you mean? Which suggests the gag about the elderly woman. She thumps her fist on the library's front desk, telling the staff the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* contains over a thousand filthy words. 'You must remove this vile book immediately!' she demands.

'Listen, dear,' says the librarian, 'you need to know the words to look them up.'

If consenting adults (and typical teens) don't know all 92 synonyms for sex, then they know plenty more, not to mention the countless euphemisms for each relevant body part, and that fact alone provides ample

ammunition for the artful puzzle-maker. Noel Coward long admired Gustave Flaubert for his ability to create Madame Bovary, a rampant nympho, without the novel containing a single dirty word.

Done well, sex can add zing to a clue, a comic image, a dab of raunch. The crunch comes down to execution. One false move and innuendo can topple over into smut. Without trying to draw too many carnal parallels, composing naughty clues is all about establishing the right mood. A cheeky connotation is provocative with a small p, evocative even, as opposed to offensive. But that balance is hard to strike, as all the while a setter is trying to second-guess a solver's tastes. In the end, the same clue is as likely to make one reader smirk as see another go purple round the gills.

By the same token, crossword lovers learn to recognise those setters with an equivalent titter index. Comedians call it 'working blue', and once you sit through the first gig you'll know in your bones, hopefully your funny bone, whether the performer is worth an encore. Speaking of performance, here's a clue I made a few years back:

Perform on a bedspread (5)

Keeping to the charade recipe, the clue leads to DO + ON + A = DOONA. At drafting stage I'd tried for a tone that tiptoed between risqué and ribald. Or I should say *my version* of risqué and ribald, as in the end the solver will be the judge. The best you can expect as a compiler is that your stuff entertains the majority. Aunt Mavis might throw her paper across the room, or take up arms in the letters page, deploring the lapse in public morals, but for every Mavis in the world there's hopefully an Agatha and a John, a Miff and a Lachlan, getting a grin and coming back next week.

Sex is the humid air we breathe. At the top of the page, typing Madame Bovary, I noticed how literature's famous adulteress has a sleazy charade vibe, with MAD (bonkers) + AM (morning, or live) + EB (live up?) + OVARY. Not there yet, but the nudge-nudge potential is tantalising.

ADULTERESS too has plenty of legs, puzzle-wise. ADUL is a blend of DUAL, opening the way for an anagram with the right signpost—dual romp? With E—middle of bed?—covered in hair (or TRESS) the climax . . .

I've jotted down both ideas, the raw makings of future puzzles, which is how we clue-mongers operate. We live for hidden kinks in names and phrases, and if those kinks murmur boudoir business, then that's no bad thing.

Like AMATEUR, a word I clued ten years ago. There it was—A MATE with YOUR other half. True to the French, the whole means lover. With all these overlaps, the clue had to be:

Lover, a sex partner with your other half (7)

No paper is immune. Who'd ever suspect a *Times* compiler could channel the spirit of Mills & Boon when clueing PETROLEUM? But he or she did:

Crude caress with part hesitation (9)

'Oh Fabio, stop it, please, you'll ruin me! Your caress (PET) with part (ROLE) hesitation (UM) is so damnably crude (PETROLEUM)!'

In the same vein I once made CUBISM a school of depravity:

Copper faces sexual dilemma in art school (6)

Can you see the poor officer's crisis? There he is—CU, the chemical symbol for *copper*—facing the *dilemma* of BI (bisexual) or SM (sadomasochism). Certainly a bluer clue than average, one that Mavis *and* Chad may both resent, yet the cubist copper, just like the curvy cheerleader in our current clue, touch on an important issue.

How far is too far when it comes to sexual subtext? What clue-approach will see most titters turn into outcry? If erotica, says novelist Isabel Allende, is using a feather, and pornography the whole chicken—then where does plume give way to chook? And can we get coleslaw with that?

WAYWARD SEX — gender bias and crasswords

Researching racy clues, I recently dug up DUG. The word is archaic for breast, though this didn't stop it from appearing in two separate crosswords. The first was a morsel from *The Times*, a bit of charade shenanigans:

Here the synonym for *light* is RAY. Thus TEAT + RAY = TEA TRAY. Offensive? Hardly. Certainly no match for Rupert Bear with meat and two veg.

Further down the slippery slope one English setter made reference to the Murdoch innovation of 1969, when the media baron propped up drooping *Sun* sales by adding topless girls to Page Three. Did sex sell? It did in 1969. As for the clue in question, its compiler settled on a louche pun, trying to invoke Polynesia with *Dugout location* (4,5), when all along the answer of course was PAGE THREE.

But let's dwell on the Page Three concept for a moment, the buxom poppet and her al-fresco assets. In many ways this dated custom embodies the darker side of the risqué clue, that moment where sex mutates into sexism. I doubt whether Ximenes would escape public wrath these days with his (albeit brilliant) clue for HOUSEWIFE:

I have most of the time to stitch—then I iron (9)

Can you unpick the clue? *Most of the time* is almost all of HOUR. *To stitch* is SEW. *Then I iron* = I + FE (the chemical symbol again). Wrapped into one bundle, the wordplay also serves as the dubious definition, where the housewife is depicted as a dedicated seamstress and laundry-wallah. Scarcely a stereotype you can peddle in the new millennium, though the chauvinism pales in comparison with a storm created in Sydney 20 years ago thanks to an outrage sporting the fingerprints of one Lindsey Browne.

To set the scene fairly, Lindsey was well into his sixties by the time the clue appeared. Born between the wars, the bloke was the product of a less enlightened era when it comes to sexual equality. He was also a furious punster, one day daring to the call the HEAVENLY HOST a dreamboat who throws good parties. As cheeky as that sounds, it wasn't LB's cardinal sin. That occurred in the late 1980s, when the issue of domestic violence seized the media. One phrase in particular caught the old master's eye, which he tackled in his clue:

I won't torment you. The answer is BATTERED WOMEN, and the backlash was savage and sustained. Letters came from victims, social workers and the judiciary, all condemning the clue's perversion. Elspeth Browne, Lindsey's wife, herself a social worker, was gob-smacked. 'Lin,' she said when the *merde* was flying, 'whatever were you thinking?'

Lindsey for his part seemed mystified by the vehemence. Says Elspeth, her husband kept wondering why people couldn't see the 'punny side' of the wordplay. It's a crossword clue, after all, he argued, a piece of entertainment, but the *Herald* saw it differently and published an apology.

Ideally, once the dust had settled and a chastened LB had returned to his grids, that day would have marked an end of sexist clues, but that wasn't to be. As recently as 2004 I almost spat out my muesli when a *Herald* colleague—I won't name him—thought the following clue was in good taste:

Chick picked up by vacuum cleaner? (1,3,2,5)

The answer, I realised with mounting dread, was A BIT OF FLUFF, a double-meaning clue and the kind you'd hope we'd left behind with the Model T. To echo Elspeth, 'Mate, what were you thinking?'

But is that the real problem? Are too many middle-aged blokes in charge of clues? No wonder such bigotry prevails if every setter is a whiskered cad bred on a diet of Biggles and Benny Hill. But that sort of picture is as flawed as the all-sewing, all-ironing missus. Hugh Stephenson, the puzzle editor at *The Guardian*, recently did a head-count to learn that a third of his contributors are female, including Australia's own Shirl O'Brien. Nearer home, three of the seven Fairfax setters are daughters of Eve, namely Nancy Sibtain, Rose McGinnis and Elisabeth Palmer, better known to solvers as NS, RM and EP. With a twinkle in the eye I tried to highlight this equality trend with a charade:

Excellent to Ms, perhaps? (3-5)

The answer is TOP-CLASS, or TO-PC-LASS, where the lasses of yesteryear are the Mses of today. A classier clue with a kindred bent was

crafted by Pasquale, the code-name of prolific English compiler Don Manley. (You can tell when Manley is the man behind any crossword, as his bylines in numerous papers betray a notable Don, namely Quixote, Giovanni, Bradman or Duck.) Here's his clue:

Sexist description thus to upset females (3,5)

This construction is a hybrid of sorts, combining the two recipes we've already explored—anagram and charade. *Sexist description* is the definition. Upset the six letters in *thus to* and attach *females* (FF) to the tail and HOT STUFF emerges. Femocrats may view the clue as having your cake and eating it—getting away with a garish term as well as bewailing it—but I'm guessing the deft wordplay, as well as the social awareness, delighted most who solved it.

Unlike the clues of Cyclops, a setter who seems happiest when offending the most punters possible. His puzzle is a regular attraction in London's spoof rag *Private Eye*. With a hundred quid on offer for the first correct entry, the shockproof solver must navigate such anagrams as SEX ON CUE (NO EXCUSE) and A MA'S BUTTER (MASTURBATE), while HELP CASTRATION, HO renders LANCASHIRE HOTPOT. Then there's the charade batch, with *Poking fun* translated into SCREWING JOY. A retired telco manager, Eddie James (aka Cyclops) is the naughty sort of kidult to remind his solvers that PUBLIC is one letter away from PUBIC.

But whatever Great Britain can do, America can do bigger and better. Francis Heaney, the Mix Master to twiddle Nostradamus, spent a good part of 2007 compiling *Crasswords: Dirty Crosswords for Cunnings Linguists*. Under a brown-paper cover, Heaney and his fellow contributors have cocked a snook at sexual taboos, their pink-and-white grids awash with bodily secretions, gutter slang, porn gods and every possible word that once merited a gobful of soap. Using only quick clues—or make that quickie—the setters found their mettle tested when defining the plainer entries, trying to make the neutral sound naughty. NEPAL, for example, is a *Country that sounds like a part of the breast*. RED is *Post-spanking colour*, and as for the humble BEAN, they exercised the charade option with 'Don't ______ asshole!'

Filth in fact is a cultish subgenre of puzzling. In 2008, again in the US, Chronicle Books released a lewd book of brainteasers under the intriguing title of *Where's Dildo?* Thumb the pages and you'll find wonderbras shaped into mazes, X-rated riddles and find-a-words teeming with WELL HUNG and WHISKEY DICK.

Then there's the English chap named Hugh Janus from the University of Clitheroe who published *Rudoku:The Rudest Sudoku Word Puzzles Ever*. Instead of inserting the digits into boxes, um, solvers had to shuffle nine supplied letters into the rows and columns with one line revealing a taboo word intact. Taboos like what, you ask. Put it this way—SPAM FLUTE was one of the cleaner offerings.

But the cream of the salacious crop is claimed by the Kama Sutra. Not the original Hindu manual for the bedroom arts, but two enigmatic variations. The first is a jigsaw, with 83 love-making positions shattered into a thousand pieces—the ideal honeymoon gift for puzzle nuts.

The second incarnation outsold most novels during my stint working in a Melbourne bookstore. A cartoon collection at first glance, the book incited a mix of disbelief and intrigue among its browsers. On each double-page spread were the heads of the two lovers, each wearing a sublime grin, while scattered in between was a vast dot-to-dot galaxy. Contortion by numbers. Cue cheerleader.

PLEASURE PRINCIPLE— the last charade and the oldest joy

'Winning isn't Everything—It's the Only Thing.'This is one of the taglines from *Bring It On*, the best cheerleading movie ever made, mainly because it was the only one ever made, until *Bring It On 2* doubled the tally.

The first film is a dance-off between the sassy San Diego gals and the hip-hopping plagiarists of East Compton. As for who wins, you'll have to ask Tess, my tweenage daughter, as she's the only one in the family to go the distance. But one line stuck with me: 'It's all about making the best moves.'

Cheerleading *and* crosswording. One error and no charade will fall into line. So bring it on, Compiler. Let's see if we can't step it out:

As with *weir* in our last clue, *cheerleader* has next to zero synonyms. On top of that, just as *circle* signalled the O in OMAHA, or mid-April suggests R, a word like *cheerleader* is likely to indicate C, the leader of cheer.

Thinking this way, you start to isolate the clue's latter half as the word-play element—a big step forward in the solving stakes. The same theory also suggests your seven-letter answer ends in C, which narrows the possibilities. And what does the whole answer mean? *Early*? Or *early curve*? Which makes more sense?

Early—exactly.

Let's examine the cross-letters. Honouring the C-theory, dashing out the letters, we now have this spread: A _ C _ A _ C. (Does any word fit?)

Only one. And sweetly, this one word also means *early*—ARCHAIC. Breaking it down, let's match the pieces to the words: ARCH (*curve*), AI (*superb*—as in A-1) and then your C for cheer. All right. We've solved 23-Down, our final charade. Give me an A—A! Give me an R—R! Give me . . . a break.

By the way, beware that A-1 trick. Just like ANT in the previous chapter, clued by *worker*, AI is a regular ruse. Any word for excellent can suggest the pairing, while fine often denotes OK. Notice too how the 'one' of A-1 morphs into a capital I when entering the grid, another piece of close magic, where numbers turn to letters before your eyes.

Creating the clue, the moment I twigged that *arch* and *cheerleader* could both embody curve as a concept I knew I could enfold the wordplay into one entity, lending a bit of match-day sizzle to a staid word like ARCHAIC.

Not that ARCHAIC isn't sexy on its lonesome. English has precious few words ending in AIC, and rarities need our love and care. Sex in fact is as archaic as humankind, the mystery that brought us into being, and occasionally the analogy for solving a crossword.

I kid you not. Regardless of what clues a compiler designs, opting for the prurient or puritan route, he or she needs to remember that the pleasure principle outweighs all other considerations. Charade or anagram, the moral dilemma plays second fiddle to the joy a smitten solver can find in the challenge of their favourite crossword.

Take Dunn Miller for example. A 64-year-old librarian from California, Ms Miller was irate when the *Atlantic Monthly* decided to withdraw its brilliant cryptic, known as The Puzzler. Constructed by the conjugal duo of Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon, The Puzzler's grid could be shaped to mimic a pinball machine, a goldfish bowl or a pirate map, depending on the month's theme. However, the host magazine opted to run the feature online only, peeving thousands of devotees. When asked to describe the puzzle's appeal, Dunn probably shocked the *New York Times* journo doing the asking. Said Ms Miller, 'You get the pleasure of solving each clue, so there's the aha moment over and over—it's like having multiple orgasms.'

Away from analogy, some solvers can make a more direct link between wordplay and foreplay. Like the letter I received in 2009, days after sharing my puzzle passion on a radio show called *Lingua Franca*. The listener was a palindrome called Alamala, and she wasn't backwards in coming forwards:

I am one of a couple of cruciverbalists—that's couple as in two people who snuggle up together over cryptic crossword puzzles. We're evenly matched and complementary in that we have different areas of specialist interest. The satisfaction of this shared and cooperative intellectual activity brings us closer and excites our bodies via our minds. Usually we manage to finish at one go, but sometimes pen and puzzle are set aside for a more urgent activity. Sadly I think this aspect of cruciverbalism has been overlooked. Please tell your guest setter he makes people happier in more ways that he might imagine!

BLUE CLUES

Risqué is OK—till you cross the invisible line. How far is the envelope pushed by these five clues? The first two come from *The Times*, with Rufus and Paul (twice) of *The Guardian* bringing up the rear.

Not easy being like Casanova after time = THORNY Coach possibly organised porn at strip club = PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Stimulated to use a rod, perhaps? = AROUSED

As such, female unlikely to bend over = FRIGID

Swimmer giving bottom a good licking = SEA TROUT

QUIZLING 7.1

Charade-wise, what item of clothing is a narrow winning margin beside a shared win of no marginę

QUIZLING 7.2

To reveal today's mystical name, solve the four clues below, reverse your answers and link them together in the same sequence.

Male offspring (3)

Knack (3)

Commercial (2)

Aggregate (3)

• • • •

QUIZLING 7.3

Keeping with curves, what are the only two foods spelt entirely with curved capital letters? (No brand names please.)

CHAPTER 8

Cockney chaos going to stir green (7)

To see him in a tuxedo was to make you look twice—his towering frame, that purple-dark skin, darker than the jacket cinching his torso. Maynard had grace. He used that spoon like an extension of his fingers, scooping up pumpkin wedges with ease, an upper spoon all the while poised to prevent the load from toppling onto the floor. Maynard had the mojo to secure any morsel, a scrap never falling loose.

Silver service Meredith called it. A stiff woman with a gelled bob, Meredith sucked olive stones to deaden her smoking urge. But that was her only sloppiness. Everything else was military, her scissor-like gait, her terse instructions—less chatter, more wine, table four, water check. Rather than help, she liked to stalk the dining room to ask why the waiters weren't helping enough.

Look like a waiter and you'll be a waiter, she said, but that was bollocks. Catching the tube that afternoon, dressed in tux with patent leather shoes, I felt more the secret agent. Even the stations—Baker Street, Charing Cross—had that movie *déjà vu*. Yet the minute I walked into the kitchen the aura evaporated as Meredith transfixed me with her killer eye.

'Tell me you didn't commute in your uniform.'

'I thought it was OK.'

'You're wearing half of bloody London on your jacket.'

This was my first gig with Dunford Catering, a dog-and-pony operation that preyed on backpackers with no fixed abode, and no National Insurance numbers. Meredith ran a cloth under a tap, dabbing my jacket as she recited one of her ready-made lectures, 'Just because you work in a zoo doesn't mean you belong there.'

You couldn't see the zoo from the kitchen, or from any window in the dining room, not after dark anyway. When I first heard I'd be waiting tables at Regents Park Zoo I had monkeys in my mind, gibbons stealing avocado off the tray, but the room was a blank space of ten round tables with a low stage for ceremonies. The only hint of zoology was an idle howl from an open door or the faint smell of dung seeping through the air grilles.

Yet the name alone was ideal for postcards, if not for the curriculum vitae. Hi Dad, you'll never guess, I'm dressed up like a penguin in London Zoo. Aside from the tourist appeal, the zoo also had crossword kudos. Not that I told that to Meredith, the woman squaring my bowtie and telling me excellence was a benchmark. But later, hearing a phone in the distance, I thought of all those calls in the past, the early 1920s when crosswords first appeared in English papers. They were quicks back then, the fad imported from America. Before too long the Brits were as hooked as their Yank cousins. Afternoons all over England were spent leafing through dictionaries, trying to find that last elusive word which all too often was an obscure animal.

Brazilian aardvark (5) Camelopard (5) Madagascan bee-eater (6)

Who knew the names of such offbeat fauna? Regents Park Zoo was who, the phone running hot with solvers hoping to fill their final corner, hunting COATI and OKAPI and HOOPOE respectively, until the zoo snapped and banned all puzzle inquiries. That's right, this zoo, Regents Park, where I tried to balance a stewed pear on a spoon.

'Wait a tick,' came a voice. 'You doin' it all arsey-versey.'

I turned around expecting to see some real-life version of Andy Capp, the cartoon Cockney with the fag on his lip, but standing there was Maynard, all 190 centimetres of him, and my pear went splat as a result. 'No bovver,' he smiled. 'They grow on trees, don't they?'

I rescued the mess off the floor while Maynard went looking for a fresh pair of spoons. 'It ain't easy first time, but soon you'll do it wiv yer eyes shut.'

'My benchmark is excellence,' I said.

'Yeah, and my name's fucken Santa Claus.'

Despite seeming the most exotic of the waiting crew, Maynard was the sole Londoner. His parents came from Ghana and had settled down in Wapping on the Thames. We clicked straight away, faster than my spoons at any rate. The guy knew the restaurant game backwards, a natural mentor, excepting I was a D-grade student and Meredith was on the warpath. The harder I tried to master silver service, clapping two spoons in a single hand, the more I resembled a lobster on Mogadon.

First course was soup, thank God, a doddle apart from the dinner rolls. For all its advancements in engineering, Great Britain had yet to hear of tongs. Instead I used my spoons to pincer each roll, balancing the bread as the diners watched in a mix of amusement and dread. Meredith was just as nervous, looking on. Her job was to look for weak links and I was it. 'What's the story?' she seethed in the kitchen. 'The agency said you had waiting experience.'

Waiting for trains, I felt like saying, but this was zero hour, and Meredith had 200 mouths to feed, a charity gala with all the nobs of high society. 'As soon as those soups are done, I need you to perform.'

Maynard could see the problem. Just relax, he said. 'The more you 'assle the more you'll stuff it up.' Which wasn't the balm I needed but the voice did wonders, the familiar lilt of Family Steptoe in my ear, or maybe I was drawing on the comfort of crosswords, since cryptics rely on Cockney heavily, the East End habit of H-dropping a more than handy device when it comes to trimming words. To Maynard the zoo would be full of 'ippos and 'owler monkeys, whereas Meredith embodied Queen 'Orrorpants, or she did in my eyes. From the kitchen door you could hear the final slurps. Next on the á la carte was trout from the upland streams of Cumbria, poached and silver-served onto your plate.

'Ow did I go? In a word, 'opeless. The trout was so soft it sagged like wet paper. As soon as I betrayed my accent the diners were more simpatico, knowing a colonist would hardly have the wherewithal to manoeuvre silverware, but the mood of the table took a dive when I tried to convey one trout to a gentleman's plate, the animal's head falling loose, landing with an intimate thud on his ladyship's pumpkin. Meredith moved in. I was marched to the kitchen, banished to water

duties. Predictably, my first evening at Regents Park was also my last, the whole charade coming apart at the seams much like my rental jacket. I said goodbye to Maynard, knowing this Ghana giant had tried his best to save me, and he just beamed back, 'Take it easy, awright—'appy travels.'

WHITE ON BLACK — race versus racism

Where Cockney heartland begins and ends is a matter of debate but the rule of thumb applies to London's East End, in particular the working class hubs. Think Fagin and the Artful Dodger. Playwright Harold Pinter was the voice of the Cockney, and that voice is loud, proud and shy of a few Hs.

Not exclusive to charades, the Cockney trick can surface in most clue types, turning hedge into edge, harrow into arrow, hairline into airline. See if you can solve these two Cockneyisms:

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Cockney control of nightmarish street (3)
Mother of Cockney pet in The Netherlands? (9)
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First you must find your inner Eliza Doolittle. Try ELM and AMSTER-DAM, being Cockney reductions of *helm* and *hamster dam*. (Dam—when not a weir—is another word for mother.)

Beware too, not every setter will flag the device with the word Cockney but may opt for other ways to suggest this special patch of London. These next two stem from *The Times*:

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Snag commonly an irritation (4)
Scoundrel in Albert Square a slippery type (3)
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The answers are ITCH and EEL, paring back *hitch* and *heel*. *Commonly*, the adverb, is a dig at the raffish associations of the Cockney, the coarse voice of Tom, Dick and 'Arry. Albert Square meanwhile is Cockney territory. Other indicators to watch are East End, Eastender, Cheapside or Whitechapel—Jack the Ripper's turf.

A handy hint for the solver, then, is that whenever you see the Cockney code in action, you generally know the target word begins with an

H, and that this will be dropped. Our current clue, for example, opens with the phrase *Cockney chaos*. So what chaos synonym begins with H? That's the canny way to think.

Importantly the H can only be the initial and nowhere else in the word. A Cockney chook, for example, doesn't mean a COOK, nor will Cockney Irish equal IRIS. Think of the trout fiasco, where only the head is lost. Setters know this category in general as a deletion clue, which gets its own chapter around the corner, but for now let's return to the idea of race, the salad of Irish and African and Australians who can't use spoons. When is it kosher to refer to a person's ethnic difference in Puzzleville? Is kosher, for instance, a kosher word to use in this regard, or does that discredit the Jewish tradition? If Cockney warrants its own subgenre of clues, what other ethnic groups are enlisted?

Fewer than before, put it that way. Once upon a time, back in the Baby Boom, a pet trick of several *Herald* compilers went by the dubious banner of Orientalisms, or the Flied Lice Loutine. Here ROCK would turn into LOCK, or RAFTER into LAUGHTER (soundwise), the cheap trick a reference to Asians reputedly struggling to pronounce their Rs. Don't expect such cheap shots to recur any time this millennium.

Like outdated sexism, the notion of boxing one group of people has fast lost currency. Now and then Kiwis (people known to say *trek* for *trick*) or Brooklynites (*boyd* for *bird*) will be invoked, but this is tame compared to the racism of the past. Let's take a look at two notable jaw-droppers.

The first comes courtesy of Afrit, the alias of AF Ritchie, not just a postwar maestro of the cryptic art but a senior Anglican minister. This clue appears in Afrit's own anthology, *Armchair Crosswords*, published in 1949:

What do happen, Mose, if our gals lose deir heads? Oh, den you find de ways out! (8)

Stunningly the answer is EGRESSES, as the so-called gals of Mose were deemed to be NEGRESSES. Losing their heads, they become exits, or ways out. Blasphemy in this day and age, but Afrit was a setter of his epoch.

Some 30 years after Afrit's book appeared on the shelf a new clue

tested public mores, this time in the *Herald*. For reasons to become apparent I'll omit the setter's name, a colleague no longer among our number after presenting this clue:

Blackman goes walkabout in NSW town (9)

For non-Australian readers, the indigenous people of this country have suffered a legion of hateful labels, all of them taboo in the modern vernacular. One is ABO, which some English puzzles have only recently eschewed and US setters clue more wisely as *Blood classifications* (namely A, B and O). Another no-no is COON, borrowed from America as a shortening of raccoon. Here the town is COONAMBLE, and aptly the *Herald* took decisive action, telling the culprit to take a hike.

The message was clear. LB might have been able to wheel out such a clue as *Jap drink* in 1971 (the answer being NIP), but those days were history. An element of visual or moral naughtiness was one thing, but racism would not be tolerated. Clues could refer to ethnicity just as people in polite society can—an observation about place or custom or cultural background—but using pejorative names or mocking accents went against the grain.

So too did digs aimed at exotic food, or so you'd hope. Now and then lapses occurred. One compiler, the late Bob Smithies, alias Bunthorne, trundled out this clue in 2006:

Ruthless order to setter on Korean diet? = DOG EAT DOG

Moving on, what about those 'apless Cockneys, you ask. The Kiwis and Brooklynites? Seems some racial affronts are more affronting than others. In 2009, for example, when American Richard Silvestri built a crossword entitled Heard Down Under, toying with the Aussie habit of lengthening vowels (turning Purple Rain into PURPLE RHINE, and brainstorm into BRINE STORM), the *Los Angeles Times* wasn't beset by an Ocker jihad. On the contrary, the theme was widely applauded by fans as a fresh piece of 'entertinement'.

Measure this against the furore of 1993, when Hasbro, the licenceholders of Scrabble, received a letter of inquiry from Judith Grad of Virginia. According to *Word Freak* by Stefan Fatsis, a private tour through Scrabble subculture, Grad objected to the racist terms apparently condoned by the game's official wordlist. JEW, she discovered, meant to haggle, and therefore could be played on the board with impunity, as could JEWING or JEWED. NIGGER was also there, along with SPIC, MICK, KIKE and DAGO. Grad alerted Milton Bradley, of Hasbro's game division, prompting Dave Wilson, the company's president, to send a sympathetic reply. He described the listed words as abhorrent, but argued they existed under the rules of the game. Frederick C Mish, the editorin-chief of the Merriam-Webster dictionary, took a similar view. 'Such slurs are part of the language,' he wrote.

Grad wasn't satisfied. She enlisted the NAACP (or the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) in league with several Jewish alliances to have the slurs expelled from the game. Racism has no place on a civilised Scrabble board, she argued. Eventually, after nine years, the campaign won a compromise, with the game's overseers isolating 205 words for reasons of being vulgar, racist and/or derogatory. Nowadays any tournament has the option of playing or ditching the divisive set, from ABO to YID, and the fury has since diminished.

Mind you, here in Australia, Jewish campaigners were stirred into action on a separate front, owing to a freakish *Herald* crossword in the late 1980s. Unusually, the offence occurred not in the clues, but the grid itself.

Current puzzle-checker Lynne Cairncross recalls the episode: 'When I was head of Daily Events, my excellent crossword editor, Deb Shaw, let through a grid with a swastika on it . . . and so did I when I signed off the page. The compiler, a marvellous, philanthropic fellow, was horrified.'

Squinting, the pattern resembled a Third Reich flag: a regrettable fluke of the squares. Cold comfort to the Zionist lobby that contacted the *Herald* on the morning of publication. Just as quickly the mishap's main players apologised, the matter regarded as both vile and accidental.

Working so close to the grid, setters and their editors are periodically blinded to patterns and public sensibilities. Locked in our square world, we sometimes fail to see the black for the white.

MAYHEM MAYHEM — tautologies and tautonyms

So, has the ha'penny dropped? You're looking for a word meaning chaos that starts with H, then pretending a bloke like Maynard is pronouncing if for you. ('Jeez Dave, your trout 'ead caused one 'elluva 'ullabaloo.') Let's consider 19-Down with this hint in mind:

Cockney chaos going to stir green (7)

Seasoned solvers will know that the front end holds the wordplay for a couple of reasons. First, the Cockney mention is a giveaway to the H-free device. Second, *Cockney chaos* has no distinct meaning in isolation, exposing the phrase as wordplay.

What about *havoc*? That could work. Do you know a word starting with AVOC? I bet you do. One is the avocet, a black-and-white wader which may well reside at London Zoo. The other is avocado, which wasn't on the menu that night.

AVOCADO of course is defined by the clue's end word—green—which is not to suggest the fruit is a vegetable, but a shade of green. The balance of the wordplay rests in the word *stir*, which isn't a kitchen instruction, nor an anagram signpost, but more the muddle I created at table three, namely an ADO. The linking phrase—going to—captures the notion of transfer, how one half (AVOC) moves closer to the other (ADO).

Just like SPARROW, a bird doubtless free to roam London Zoo, AVOCADO has that rare quality of being two synonyms side-by-side, at least before a Cockney utters it: havoc + ado, in the style of spar + row.

Such rarities aren't to be confused with orthodox tautologies (such as *end result* and *new discovery*) or zoological tautonyms, being those creatures—a good many resident in Regents Park—who own such Latin names as *Uncia uncia* (the snow leopard), *Lemmus lemmus* (the Norwegian lemming) or *Cricetus cricetus* (which Sid Vicious, Eliza Doolittle and a handsome waiter called Maynard would know as the common 'amster).

SPELLING TROUBLE

Eccentric spelling turns some names into booby-traps for puzzle-makers. I had to undo an entire grid as a result of bungling JIMMIE BLACKSMITH—the black bushranger of Thomas Keneally's book—who I'd presumed was JIMMY. Likewise beware these names, both household and/or homegrown:

Addams Family Muhammad Ali Wil Anderson Brigitte Bardot Adrien Brody Sharan Burrows Nicolas Cage Steve Carell Willem Dafoe Kevan Gosper Jimi Hendrix Scarlett Johansson Keystone Kops Freddy Krueger Stieg Larsson Tobey Maguire Stephenie Meyer Olive Oyl

Clive Peeters
Condoleezza Rice
Axl Rose
Cybill Shepherd
Ashlee Simpson
Barbra Streisand
Kristen Stewart
Forest Whitaker
Salley Vickers

HALL OF FAME: CHARADES

Quick run ending in wicket (5) [Paul, Guardian]
Many revs make small car go (8) [Hendra, Guardian]
Polish plants and animals (9) [Cincinnus, FT]
\$ 100 springs doubled in disreputable garages (4,5) [Henry Hook, US]

Prisoner taking cellmate, perhaps, as wife? (10) [Times 8558] Shades of Clementine, K-K-Katy etc? (10) [Orlando, Guardian]

SOLUTIONS: fleet, ministry, buffaloes, chop shops, conjugally, sunglasses

QUIZLING 8.1 Drop the first or second word's initial H (in 'earty Cockney fashion) and you'll create each clue's answer. Abhor octet, for example, Toss aristocrat (4,4) Dump journos (3,5) For an Irish gun? (6,7) Tougher love? (6,6) L_{ance}? (6,6) Moorage urge (9,9) QUIZLING 8.2

What singer answers this charade: fair + fashionable + lumber + tarn?

- 1 m j

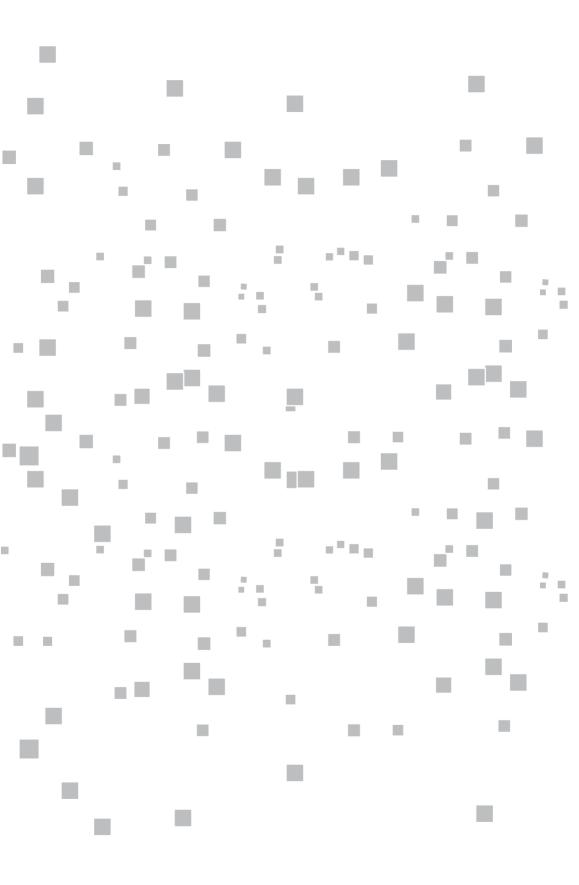
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QUIZLING 8.3 If B + bird = dog (that is, B + EAGLE =

BEAGLE), can you figure out the zoology below? No mixing is needed.

$$B + mammal = ns$$

 $T + seabird = seabird$



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CHAPTER 9

Sucker pens article for website guide (4,3)

Adam Ramona has paisley skin and pixie ears. He wears knee-high disco boots and purple mascara, and when he walks he prances like a marionette—clomp, clomp, clomp.

Usually he hangs around with Mashup and a guy called S1 Gausman. To tell them apart, Mashup has the jet-black drainpipes and the spiky hairdo, while Gausman prefers the slimline jacket and platform soles. Together they occupy ACVA Island, a grassy patch dotted with gum trees and a tower built of words.

Tall as the clouds, this tower grows nonstop, changing shape and angle before your eyes. Look closer and you see the tower is made of words, and these swoop like birds from the sky, a swarm of blue letters making for the island, the alphabet linking to the tower like molecules to a chain. A lower-case e hooks its tail around a G's open hollow. One s sidles up to a t. The letter u finds comfort in joining a free-falling n, the pair bedding down into the structure and turning green as they rest. Every letter follows suit, combining into incidental syllables, going from blue to green as they mesh and nest like starlings in a sprawling steeple. Known as Babelswarm, the tower is the world's highest structure built of language, virtually speaking, and a project fostered by the Australian Centre of Virtual Art—or the ACVA, sponsor of the marvel's island.

The island itself is closer than you think, locked inside a universe called Second Life, a parallel world where anything is possible. If real life can't accommodate a spire like Babelswarm, then Second Life can. A popular MUVE, or multi-user virtual environment, Second Life is a cosmos to itself, complete with day and night, laundromats and pine forests,

currency and market pressure. Much like Babelswarm, Second Life is shaped and enriched by its Residents—or signed-up users.

The world was created by San Francisco thinktank Linden Lab. Instead of car-jacking or shoot-the-alien, Second Lifers had a different game to play in 2003. Or is it a game? Among the 70,000 concurrent Residents worldwide—that's *this world* I mean—Second Life represents a chance to push your imagination, to explore and interact with the likes of Mashup and Gausman and all the other avatars.

Off-screen, Mashup is Christopher Dodds. He lives a few blocks from my place in suburban Melbourne. We met at a barbecue, our kids attending the same school. We kicked around the usual topics of suburban males—sport and news—when Christopher asked, 'So what are you into?'

A writer? A journo? A puzzle-head? As a crossword-maker you need to be careful with the Big Reveal, and the same caution applies to disclosing yourself as a journalist. Besides, most of us wear a dozen hats. The days of Fred and Barney working at the one quarry for a lifetime went out with the Stone Age. So to Chris I said, 'Words.'

'Yeah?' His eyebrows lifted above the sunnies. 'What do you do with them?'

'Put them in boxes. I mix them up and make clues. What about you?' 'I'm building a tower,' he said.

Not that Christopher—or Mashup—is doing all the making. Every syllable joining the tower comes from the passing crowd: that's the crux of Babelswarm. Just like the original Tower of Babel, the monument embodies the hubbub of umpteen languages uttered in earshot. As soon as Adam blew his chances in Eden, biting the apple, the paradise of one tongue divided into a hell of many. Poet John Milton imagines Babel as a place of jangling noise and hideous gabble, but as a puzzler after new expressions—or new ways to see old words—the blah-blah verges on musical.

Mashup and his virtual mates, S1 Gausman and Adam Ramona, are composers of a kind. Or decomposers, breaking down language into letters and rebuilding. Or maybe they're just plain posers—those disco boots for starters. But the architecture is staggering.

Nine to five, the artist in Dodds earns his keep as a graphic designer.

His cohort, Gausman, is Dr Justin Clemens, a lecturer in English at Melbourne University, while the paisley freak in boots is 3-D artist Adam Nash. To build their spire the trio relied on a start-up fund they won back in 2007, a creative grant from the Australia Council for \$20,000, the maiden sum invested into a virtual artwork. While you or I might use the dough to overhaul the family car or take a trip to Polynesia, Mashup and his mates converted most of the swag into Linden dollars, the virtual world's currency, and went about interlocking ethereal letters and setting up online galleries.

Is it art? What's art?

A game? You tell me.

A new direction for wordplay? That's a resounding yes.

French thinker Roger Caillois once put games into four boxes. Crosswords, for example, belong in the *Agon* box, where games of competition go. (Your opponent in this case is the puzzle's setter, and the challenge comes in the form of his or her clues. You strive, you agonise, and hopefully you triumph, or at least enjoy the trip—completed or not.) Other games, said Caillois, match the labels of *mimicry* (games of expression, like charades, or Second Life elements), *alea* (games of chance) and *ilinx* (games of giddiness—which include rolling downhill and, according to beginners, cryptic crosswords!). I don't know how long Caillois took to draft this natural order, but the universe pretty much turned upsidedown a decade after the Frenchman died in 1978, the world of websites and avatars and MUVEs moving the goalposts forever.

The Net has walloped conventional play out of the park. Instead of Go Fish or tennis or Space Invaders we have universes like Second Life, a habitat alive with risk, thrill, struggle: a meta-game, as eggheads call it. Or as Clemens/Gausman prefers, 'The game itself forces you to decide about what sort of game it is.' And that's just a corner of cyberspace, one microcosm inside the new cosmos. In the world of puzzling, the changes have been equally profound. The rise of crogs, for example, or 'crossword blogs', has turned the black-and-white art into Technicolor.

In fact, when you consider our current clue (Sucker pens article for website guide), the only false note is the notion of anyone still using a pen in this era, whether to write an article or solve a puzzle. At present this here sucker is banging away on a Microsoft Vista Home Premium, finishing

one 'article' about a word tower and moving onto the next marvel—the blogosphere—and how it enriches the puzzle universe, all without a ballpoint in sight.

FEEDBACK LOOPS — blogosphere and containers

When Michael Sharp started a blog back in 2006 he didn't know what a blog was. Talking to the *New York Times*, he confessed, 'It sounded like something that might be cool to develop in relation to a comics course I was teaching.'

Sharp also teaches noir fiction and 17th-century literature at New York's Binghamton University, and just like SI Gausman this hip academic plumped for an alias when braving the new frontier, going with the hardboiled handle of Rex Parker just in case the online caper laid an egg.

No danger there. After three years or so, Rex Parker Does The NYT Crossword Puzzle scores 10,000 hits a day, as many coming to enjoy the Sharp humour as to sneak in an answer or two. People hunting answers in fact was how the blog attracted early traffic. In pre-Web days, the major dilemma was pen versus pencil; more recently that question dwells on brain versus Google. If you need one more answer—do you go surfing? Hundreds do, if Rex's hit-rate is any guide. A great many of his first-time callers have stumbled on the site by virtue of a clue-search. Going by the steady traffic of repeat visitors, the seekers clearly liked what they found.

Sharp will solve the day's puzzle as it appears online, usually getting the jump on the hard-copy delivery. He'll then crank out his clue-by-clue appraisal the next morning before heading out the door to play professor. But this is no dry analysis or grammatical soap-boxing —Rex Parker is the love child of quipster Dorothy Parker and deadpan mumbler Raymond Chandler. Any given puzzle will inspire a welter of images cropped from photo banks and personal collections, adding colour and curiosity to Rex's running critique. One click and some of these images will morph into vodcasts, such as the Pointer Sisters performing Neutron Dance to illustrate ATOMIC at 13-Down. Or links may steer you to several sites that the other answers might suggest: a Dante Appreciation Society on the back of INFERNO, a gallery of Cartesian maps in honour

of MERIDIAN, a Superman fanzine to recognise XRAY VISION. (And no, that comic-book blog never left the ground. Sharp became too busy, hosting the growing flood of visitors.)

Yet ironically, back in those first timid weeks, the blog's initial post tried to jinx the project: 'Please do not comment on puzzles the day they are printed. This blog is just a bad idea. Signed, grandpamike.'

Amy Reynaldo, a Chicago book editor, struck this kind of attitude a year before Rex set up shop. Reynaldo once went to the *New York Times* crossword forum, keen to discuss the day's puzzles, only to find the likes of grandpamike lurking in the wings. Everywhere she looked a Spoiler Rule was in force, where all users were free to debate a clue's merits but forbidden to blab its answer. The edict cramped Reynaldo's style. How can you really rant or rhapsodise over a puzzle if its solution is off limits? It's like trying to discuss kayaking without using the words water, paddle or kayak. Amy's response? She set up Diary of a Crossword Fiend, the first crog of its kind in the United States, paving the way for Rex and the many uploaders to follow.

The sober twin of Rex's delirium, Crossword Fiend is the site for any American solver who takes puzzling to heart. An elite solver in her own right, Reynaldo is an omnivore, solving and discussing puzzles from New York, Los Angeles, Boston and Philadelphia across the week. Grids and answers are revealed behind the day's intro, and again the responses are multiple. Crucially too, editors surf Amy's site to see how their puzzles are being received, creating an ongoing feedback loop that keeps all players honest, and the calibre of puzzles high.

In many ways the blog craze acts like the Tower of Babel in reverse. Before chatrooms, a compiler could only guess how any puzzle was received. Back in the analog era, you sent your crossword to a far-off kingdom called the Community, hoping strangers found more fun that frustration in your work, but that old distance has diminished. Prior to blogs, I only discovered how a puzzle was received by accident, or possibly the editor would encounter a snarl or a cheer in the mailbag. Random clamour in a lot of ways. *Great clue! Bad clue! Boo, yay*, etc. But thanks to new media, responses to a puzzle are constant and orchestrated. Village greens in many ways, crogs are places for solvers to assemble and compare notes, single out flaws and strengths, declare a verdict. While

debate seldom reaches a consensus, the combined wisdom is out there for anyone listening, setters included.

In Australia the online trend is accelerating. Two active blogs chew over Fairfax puzzles most days, the first a long-running forum called Deef (or Feedback), the web annex of the Australian Crossword Club. The second, I discovered, is The DA Trippers, a site mounted in 2008 by three Melbourne solvers who go by the aliases of AS, RC and TH. (Do I know their real names? No. Are Mashup and Rex Parker any relation? Possibly.)

Holding my weekly puzzles to the light, the DA brigade debates fairness or ambiguity. Clues are divided into Gold, Confusion and Bullshit. Neat clues get a tick, sloppy clues a pasting. Errors are deplored and novelty applauded—no fear or favour. From a setter's perspective the feedback is priceless. Visiting either blog I feel like a pastry chef seeing how his latest confection went down—too much glaze? Not enough honey? Did those nougat snails work out?

In Great Britain the stand-out crog is Fifteen Squared, run by a team of erudite solvers who review under such Net-names as Uncle Yap, Rightback and Holy Ghost. While individual papers will engender their own micro-blogs, Fifteen Squared is the genre's hypermarket, sweeping up ten UK puzzles across the week. Each crossword is dismantled and judged. Browsing this site, you'll come across this kind of cryptic shorthand:

LOUISIANA (OIL IN A USA)*
DEPLORABLY (BOLD PLAYER)*
ABSENTEEISM (SEES MEN A BIT)*

All three answers stem from a setter called Virgilius, alias Brian Greer. As you read the list, the first word you see is the puzzle's answer, followed by the anagram that appeared in the clue, as denoted by the asterisk. Charade answers seem more like equations:

H + AMISH CRIME + ANWAR B + LOGO + SP + HERE Then you have containers, our latest recipe in the Master Puzzle, which appear like so in blogville:

GA(LAX)Y M(A+HOG)ANY CONTRA(CE)PTION

Seeing these three, you may intuit how the recipe works, where one word or letter nests inside another. But how do you spot them on the page? Let's look a little closer at some real McCoys, seeing what signposts they offer, what tricks they pull, before we unpack our own container regarding a certain sucker and his pen.

PANDORA'S CONTAINER — nesting names and container clues

Sally Heath is an editor with *The Age* in Melbourne, as well as being a friend in a condom. You're not following? Nor was Sally when I happened to let slip the condom thing in a phone chat.

Heath is in charge of the A2 section of the Saturday paper, the arts liftout that carries a blend of reviews, profiles and cultural features, as well as my own crossword at the back. Separate to this, I'd just written a story for *Meanjin* magazine, the literary quarterly, called 'One Man, One Box and 26 Letters'. The essay in fact was my first full-blooded confession about the puzzle side of life, in many ways the seed of the book you're now reading. To help pad out the silly season, A2 were interested in running an extract of the essay.

Hence the phone chat, and my rash inclination to say, 'Do you realise your name is a friend in a condom?' Worryingly, Heath's end of the phone fell quiet. Either the line had dropped out or I'd just ruined any chance of seeing '26 Letters' get a start.

'Come again?'

'Your letters,' I said. 'They're a perfect container clue: ALLY inside SHEATH, which I'd clue as friend in condom.'

In my late forties now, you'd think I'd stop saying this sort of stuff aloud, a thought that Sally must have considered, as the conversation returned to the business in hand. What was she meant to say?

'You bastard,' is what Bill Leak said when I pulled a similar stunt on his name. Perhaps Australia's greatest living cartoonist, Leak is also a puzzle addict and happened to be solving the *Herald* crossword one day when his gaze fell a few centimetres to read a Wordwit rhyme:

Despite thousands laughing at him This cartoonist is sick in grim. Who is he?

ILL in BLEAK is who, another container, and Bill rang Rebecca Taylor, the puzzle editor at the time, saying he had a message to pass onto Wordwit. Rebecca grabbed a pen. 'Sure, what would you like to say?'

'You bastard.' And Bill hung up.

Momentarily, Rebecca and I feared the cartoonist was genuine, and I rang *The Australian* to douse the spot-fire. I didn't mean to cause offence, I said. 'What offence?' he asked, 'It's what I've always suspected. I'm sick and grim all wrapped into one. Took a bastard like you to show me.'

Leak in fact rang me direct a few years later, seeking a little cryptic help with a novel he was writing. Dubbed *Heart Cancer*, the book follows a serial coke-snorter called Frank Thornton who loves loose women and hard crosswords.

'At least you picked the right drug,' I told Bill.

'How's that?'

'This Frank guy sounds like a self-destructive, living in the fast lane. A bit like COCAINE, the word.'

'Not following-'

'COE around CAIN, a champion runner hiding a murderer.'

'Cool,' said Bill. 'I might use that. The word I mean.'

Warmed up now, let's take a look at three container clues to see how they work. The first is from Virgilius, that *Independent* setter we met a few pages back, while the others come from my own batch:

Doctor binds a fracture (3) Greek island confiscates a coin (6) Pacer sees disciple coating basilica (9) You may recall *doctor* can lead to several abbreviations, including GP. When GP *binds*, or wraps, A, you create GAP (or *fracture*).

CREATE is your second answer, this time using the idea of seizure or detention. Here we have CRETE (*Greek island*) holding A, making *coin* (the verb) your definition. Verbs of enveloping are integral to containers, any word suggesting embrace or confinement. Think grab, swallow, hug, accommodate

Alternatively, in our CREATE example, rather that make CRETE do all the holding, you can just as easily pitch the clue to suggest the A is entering or invading CRETE. (So an alternative clue for CREATE could be: *Make army leader occupy island*.) Containers can function either way—evoking capture, or injection, depending on which angle the setter selects.

Down to the third clue above then—which word is the container signpost? If you suspected coating, then your senses are sharpening. Here PETER coats DOME to make PEDOMETER, or *pacer*. Predictably, the common preposition of container clues is in, as Bill Leak was sick in grim, or Sally Heath a *friend in condom*.

Though watch for the sneakier use of *without*, relying on the word's quainter sense, such as furniture capable of being within and without the house. In other words, *many without a hog* could render MAHOGANY. Though you'll be glad to learn our current clue, regarding the sucker penning a website guide, is without without:

Sucker pens article for website guide (4,3)

Now that we know containers will suggest surrounding, or being surrounded, where is that signal? Look twice at *pens*. As a reflex, most will think of biros, and this impulse is encouraged by the clue's surface sense. Just don't forget that hogs are as like to be penned as novels—so what *pens* what? We need a word for sucker to enclose either a word for *article*, or *article for website*, depending on what remaining chunk is the answer's definition.

Sucker can be a vacuum cleaner or the victim of a scam. What else? We need a smaller word to double for sucker—PATSY, MARK, GULL? What about SAP? If SAP is doing the penning, can you conjure a word for guide that starts with S and ends with P?

Ask these sorts of questions whenever you are tackling containers. The tactic is called bookending, speculating on the answer's edges to fill out its inner space. Or speculating the other way—imagining what word might own certain innards, and filling out the fringes.

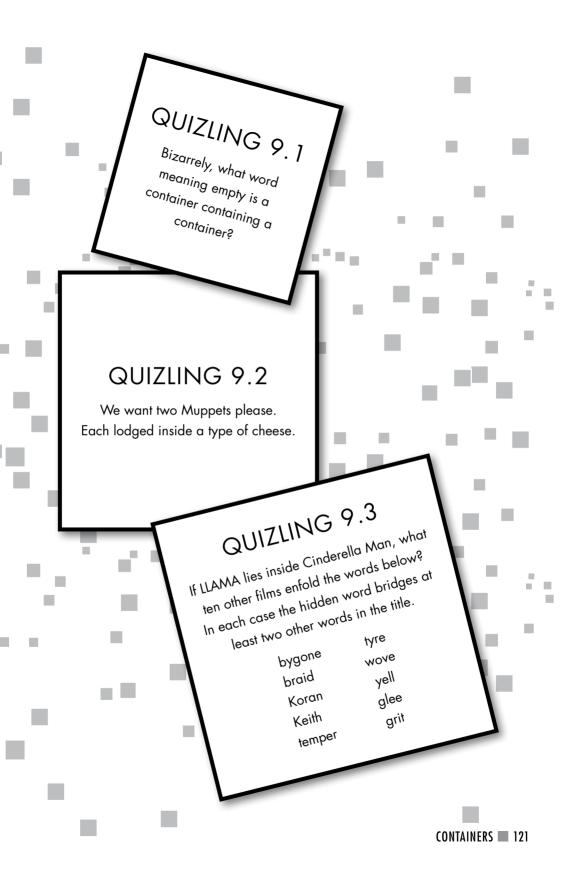
If SAP is the outer shell, then SNOWCAP or SUNTRAP are possible solutions, and then the Linden penny drops. In a realm of links and FAQs, avatars and bloggers, pages and posts, a browser can't exist without a SITE MAP. That's right, SITE MAP—where SAP pens ITEM—and 2-Down is done.

Yet to grasp containers more tightly, we should set our watches to 1500AD, packing our bags for Renaissance Italy, our next clue's destination.

RECIPE PRECIS: CONTAINERS

The surest giveaway of most container clues is the hint of holding, or being held. Wrong to swallow gird's first hint, for example, is SIGN, with SIN (wrong) to swallow G (grid's first) making SIGN (hint). Here's a loose A to Z of other common container signs:

about, absorb, accept, around, blocks, boring, boxes, bury, captive, carrying, clothing, cover, cut into, disconnect, disrupts, eat, feeding, fencing, grab, hold, in, interrupting, keeping, out, pocket, retained, ring, settle in, stocking, stops, surround, swallow, without



CHAPTER 10

Women's mag covers one Italian painter (6)

'Oh my god,' says the air hostess. 'Are you Jimmy Barnes as in the rock star Jimmy Barnes?' Jimmy shrugs. Sure. It's 9 am. Not a good time for icons. But the hostie can't let the moment rest. 'Maybe if you sign your boarding pass . . .'

That's how I opened my profile on James Dixon Swan—better known as Jimmy Barnes, best known as Barnesy. Touching down in Rockhampton I saw first-hand the glow of fame radiate onto baggage handlers, cab drivers, passengers in transit. Age meant nothing—teens, Gen-Xers, retirees. Everyone wanted their little piece of Barnesy, the singer of 'Cheap Wine' and 'Flame Trees', the Cold Chisel rabble-rouser, the soul phase, the vodka phase, *The Choir of Hard Knocks*—here he was in living colour.

Which was my side of the bargain—the colour. Off and on, I'd been writing for ten years for *Sunday Life* magazine, the feature liftout accompanying both *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Hard to put the stories into one neat pile—my first entailed jumping into a pool with ten lobstermen. This was 1997, the exercise part of a sea-survival course. The naval team in charge of the facility flipped off all the lights, the pool in total blackness. Next they kicked two engines into life, whipping up waves and turning the pool into a nightmare.

After that, I dived into pop psychology, chef profiles, fly-on-the-wall stuff, health stories, zeitgeist, the chemistry of love. I entered the world of blind cricket, followed the fates of amateur comedians, wrote 1200 words on fridge magnets. Whatever the topic, from biker clubs to gigolos, I added my brand of humour and colour, with a few accidental insights

along the way. More than a living, *Sunday Life* was a wonderful reason to leave the home office and enter strange realms. With two young kids and one large mortgage, freelance writing and puzzle-making kept our heads above water.

OK, so the mag never covered an Italian painter, but I did get to meet some remarkable people. Like the man who lost his memory thanks to a bush tick biting his groin. And a blind mother of five. And snake handlers plus the odd celeb too, including Barnesy. My job was shadowing the singer to a coal town in outlying Queensland called Moora. Ghoulishly I have to say, since six months earlier, in May 2007, surgeons had cracked open the singer's chest to insert a bovine valve into his heart. Planehopping, amp-humping, sound-checking, I felt like the post-op observer assigned to see if the implant was a success, or whether the explosive last chorus of 'Khe Sanh' would see the rocker himself explode.

Thankfully he survived. In many ways, at 51, Jimmy treated his zipper scar as a reminder to live wisely. No smokes, no booze, the only liquid that passed his lips on tour was bottled water to wash down his coenzymes, or the honeyed tea he gargled before the show. And the show was full-blooded. Vein-popping. The miners loved it. Jimmy loved it. He sang two encores and came offstage in a sheen of sweat.

I loitered near the cattle chute, the meeting place backstage, eager to grab a few quotes as to how Jimmy was feeling, how the ticker felt, what this one-off show meant for him, but he fired his question first, 'So you make crosswords, yeah?'

You need to be familiar with the singer's voice to hear how droll that question sounded. Just imagine if a grindstone could speak, and that grindstone was Glaswegian with an Ocker sense of humour, and you may understand my double-take. 'Um, yeah,' I said. 'Who told you that?'

'Like the cryptic one, yeah? Can never bloody do them, you know.'

'There's a formula,' I said. 'Each clue has a type of recipe and—'

But Barnesy wasn't seeking a tutorial. He needed a favour. A crazy idea, he said, but maybe I was the guy to ask.

Moona was October, the comeback concert. My feature ran as November's cover story, and closer to Christmas, on 21 December, a crossword appeared that seemed like any other crossword—unless you happened to be Jane Mahoney, the Thai–Australian wife of Jimmy Barnes.

Fluent in several languages, Jane was an ardent crossword fan. She was also approaching her 49th birthday, the couple intending to fly off to Bali for a romantic getaway with a twist. The twist was the puzzle, and the reason for Jimmy to hurtle left and right at Sydney Airport, raiding every newsstand in the departure lounge, stalking every caff and buying any *Herald* he could find, ensuring Jane would have the puzzle in perpetuity.

The why was simple. Almost every clue, every solution, was a reference to the couple's life. From their first meeting place (CANBERRA) to the city of TOKYO, where Jane fled to escape the Cold Chisel chaos. The puzzle also swaddled a daughter (ELIZA-JANE), a mate (NEIL FINN of Crowded House), and ARIZONA, where Jimmy hit the rock-n-roll wall in 2001, flushing out the drug and booze in a desert detox centre.

A time of equal darkness was captured at 32-Across in the shape of a container clue:

Operating pusher in Sydney fringes? (7)

Despite *pusher* sitting in the middle, the reference isn't addiction, but another scary chapter in the Barnes biography. *Pusher* here translates as URGER, being one who goads. The question mark at the clue's tail alerts the solver to this unorthodox reading, telling you that one part of the clue has a playful slant. As for *Sydney's fringes*, forget Windsor or Emu Plains, but the literal margins of SYDNEY, namely S and Y. Put URGER in SY and you have one more answer for Ms Mahoney to negotiate.

So that's how SURGERY works, and how *SMH* Crossword No. 18283 happened to own such an odd clutch of words—from BIRTH-DAY to SIAMESE, via SWAN and PARTNER—but how does our current clue work? Could the women's mag mentioned in the clue be *Sunday Life* by any chance? Is the Italian painter DaVinci, or do we have another code to crack?

GYPROCK AND ROLL — magazines and clue mix

Madison, the women's magazine, has fine container potential, with *Perry* embracing a *princess* perhaps, or MASON holding DI.

New Idea can also be unpacked, with WIDE perched inside a compass direction (NE) with an article (A) to finish.

When not writing articles for magazines, I've also helped to enliven their pages with puzzles, the client base as wide as online computer zines to *Inside Sport*. The briefest dabble would have to be *Club Gyprock*, a trade newsletter for the fibro-cement crowd. Surprisingly, perhaps, the client needed a full two issues to discover that crosswords held little sway for the makers of kit homes and inner-city townhouses.

That's the way it rolls in Magland. No matter the title, the latest issue is tomorrow's kitty litter, with puzzle contracts coming and going along the way. Fame, you could argue, has the same limitations. If Jimmy Barnes is a household name in Australia, try testing a Cleveland household or a village in Mogadishu. A certain Italian painter may have made signore swoon in the 1500s, but is he bathing in the same glow half a millennium later? Building a crossword, you need to ask yourself those kinds of questions. Dizzy Gillespie is a trumpet-blowing legend, but what about Herb Alpert or James Morrison? How deep does our consensus of fame extend?

The Rich List was a Channel 7 show which explored this question. The format saw two teams trying to add to a list of, say, Shakespeare comedies or governors-general, the loser the team to run dry. For me the quiz was akin to market research. Cruciverbalists seldom get to check how familiar any topic is to the public. If push comes to shove, I could name ten Aussie boxers, but how well would Joe Nerk and Mary Bloggs cope? Lionel Rose is a shoo-in, but how bankable is Johnny Famechon, or Danny Green? If crossword-solvers had to name as many Italian painters as they could, would they bag our man in question?

Answer: not likely, since his name rates as the Master Puzzle's least familiar, obscurer than NESCIENCE or OMAHA. Yet here the cryptic genre comes to the rescue. Though you may not know something as a cold definition, the wordplay will usually nudge you over the line. Here's the clue:

Women's mag covers one Italian painter (6)

Covers we can safely say is the container signpost. One is prone to be I or A, either vowel liable to be covered by a women's mag. Hang on, mag.

Why not magazine? Your detective skills are sharpening. Thanks to *mag* (versus magazine), you are more than likely required to need a title in its shortened form. Just as *SMH* is shorthand for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, or *The Oz* reduces *The Australian*, *mag* is your warning to apply a similar vernacular chop.

Using the letters already in the grid, we can guesstimate the title is five letters long (since only one letter needs to be contained). We can also speculate that S stands to be the mag's third letter, as the missing A or I is likelier to occupy position 4 or 5 in the solution. So dash-wise, we want a women's mag obeying the pattern of ____ S ____.

While you poke around for the title I'll confess to a Seinfeld temptation. Clueing 1-Across I'd almost recruited Jerry's mate Kramer into the fray, instead of the *women's mag*, as the Dada artist in me relished the collision of Renaissance Art and a modern sitcom. But I reneged. Too much, I thought. The solver has enough leaps to make, so I left Cosmo Kramer on the bench and opted for the more popular pop-reference, namely a magazine like *Cosmopolitan*, better known as *Cosmo*.

History books will tell you that Cosimo de Medici, the first of the great Medicis, ruled Florence until 1464. Consequently, with the sexiness of power, the name Cosimo infested the obstetric wards of Tuscany, à la Britney or Barack today. Lift a piece of Carrara marble and you're sure to find some kind of Cosimo hiding underneath, from an early pope to a boxer to half a dozen more Medicis, not to mention two Renaissance painters—Agnolo di Cosimo and Piero di Cosimo. Both hang in the Uffizi. Both did nudes and royal portraits. Both had a thing for sea monsters and died in Florence amid a horde of protégés. Like the Manet/ Monet muddle of their epoch, the Cosimos are as famous for their parallels as their canvases.

So which one did I mean here? Cosimo A or Cosimo B? *Non importa*, as the Romans say. Both or either. Agnolo had as much renown as Piero: big then and smaller now. Both answer to the one name with the same spelling. Either can double as our 1-Across solution.

Yet fame, we know, can fade like Titian blue under too much light—or lose its lustre in the attic gloom. For a heartbeat, of course, this puzzle's ADAMANT almost appeared as ADAM ANT, the singer, but I figured Britpop was candy-floss compared to *Crossing the Red Sea*, the famous

fresco of one or other Cosimo. Or I wanted to balance the centuries. After so much OUTSOURCING and SITE MAPS, why not an ounce of archaic Italy?

Nonetheless the question remains. How does a famous person differ from an oh-yeah-that-guy-in-the-TV-show person? While Sally Heath has rich potential as a container clue, she falls short on the matter of fame. A prestigious journalist, an accomplished editor, Heath is hardly a household name, and so I lack the licence to run her splendid name as an entry.

Jimmy Barnes is another matter. The singer is fair game for puzzling, in Australia at least. To up the temptation his surname has solid container credentials, being R in BANES, or N in BARES. Jane Mahoney, on the other hand, is even better (HONE in MAY) but her celeb rating doesn't soar at the same altitude. For most of us, being un-famous is a comfort. Look no further than Rockhampton Airport to see how irksome fame can be. If air stewards aren't begging for signatures, a crossword-maker is prone to taking liberties with your syllables.

So when it comes to VIP entries, enlisting names for puzzle fodder, what's the minimal score on the Fame Index? Where does Cosimo end and my Uncle Les, who dabbled in water colours, begin? And what about the beautiful people themselves? Unlike AVOCADO or UNDRESS, famous folk have hearts and minds. How do they feel being trapped inside the chequered square? We can't ask Cosimo, but we can consult a guy like Shane Morgan.

THE V OF VIP — fame factor and career highlights

If Nick Hornby's name bobbed up on *The Rich List* I'm guessing most teams would scrape together three of his novels at least. *About A Boy* was a hit film, in league with *High Fidelity*, and that's just for kickoff. In puzzle circles, the writer is open slather, whereas Shane Morgan is off-off-Broadway.

The difference between the two men—one a best-selling writer from Surrey, the other a battling actor from Sydney—was driven home by an Omega crossword in 2006. Running every Monday in the *Herald*, Omega is a jumbo grid blending trivia with current affairs. Arrayed below the puzzle is a picture gallery of seven familiar faces, each one

linked to a clue. Photo A, say, may be Nicolas Sarkozy, or Imelda Marcos, or Spongebob Squarepants, and the solver has to ID the portrait to fill in the answer.

Fine when the faces are famous, but imagine Shane Morgan's shock when he opened the paper to discover himself appearing as Nick Hornby in Picture E. The gaffe in part was forgivable when you consider Morgan was gearing up for a return season of *Nipple Jesus*, the play adapted from a Hornby short story. Shelved among the *Herald*'s photo files, the notable author had been mistaken for the flyer image of the less notable actor who plays Dave the bouncer in the famous one's play. Mind you, Morgan didn't begrudge the stuff-up. Indeed the timing was perfect, the *Nipple* show looming as part of the fringe festival. Tinkled pink, Shane wrote to the *Herald*:

I had people calling me saying you look nothing like Nick Hornby. I've only got slightly more hair than him. But it's absolutely fantastic—I'm right between Sandra Bullock and the robot from *Perfect Match*. I'm a couple down from Robert de Niro, so I'm in good company.

Mistaken ID is one sin. Yet a far greater lapse in the eyes of solvers is the use of almost-celebrities. Which footballers have entered the mutual psyche? Is a coach more famous than a captain? Is tennis (a national game) more household than rugby league, which is largely confined to two states?

For *Guardian* solvers the final straw was FI GLOVER, a broadcaster on Radio 4. Her name appeared in a puzzle composed by Enigmatist, who couldn't resist the luscious charade of FIG-LOVER. In fact his clue was quite funny if not over-long:

On the evidence of her dietary preferences, she should be a regular broadcaster (2,6)

As a container clue, LOG chopped in FIVER is another lush choice. The woman has serious wordplay chops. Add AB and the modified version becomes FORGIVABLE. Alas, the only unforgivable thing, according to *Guardian* gripes, was Fi's low score on the Star-O-Meter.

The Times avoids this scenario by recruiting only dead people as

answers. Tempting as LEVEL CROSSING may seem to the *Times* setter, being LESSING outside VELCRO, the container trick is on ice until the Nobel-winning Doris Lessing, born in 1919, pens her last sentence.

The *Herald* and most US papers have more elastic limits. American puzzles thrive on the contemporary, throwing baseball pitchers and talk-show hosts among astronauts and Cosmo Kramer. Long-time Hollywood stager Rip Torn is realistic about the lifeline his curious name has provided puzzle-makers. Owing to the verbal quirk of his two names—synonyms of varying tense—and the compact nature of his letters, the actor has stayed afloat in the national consciousness. 'Crossword puzzles,' he once joked in the press. '[They] kept my name alive for years!'

The Australian singer Sarah Blasko is famous in indie circles, a winner of multiple awards and maker of three best-selling albums. But was her profile high enough to cast her in the separate world of puzzles?

I faced that dilemma in 2008, devoting a grid to the Three Little Pigs. Owing to the offbeat theme, and a nasty interlock, the puzzle had little room to move. The major entries related to the well-known building materials: STICKS AND STONES, STANLEY KUBRICK and STRAWBERRY MARKS, plus a louche punchline asking YOUR PLACE OR MINE. Making the puzzle, trapped in one tight corner, the best word or name to promise escape was BLASKO.

Naturally I hunted for alternatives, checking to see if the _L_S_O pattern had other exit strategies. GLASCO is a town in New York state. GLOSSO is the Latin prefix for tongue. Then there was BLASTO, an obsolete arcade game, or PLASMO, a cute claymation alien from the planet of Monjotroldeclipdoc (I had to look that up), all of which confirmed my hunch that Sarah B was the answer for me, whatever her rating on the Limelight Charts. If the clue was a container it might have read like this:

Songwriter Sarah to request endless blog coverage (6)

Or ASK in BLO spells BLASKO. The day the puzzle went to press I anticipated the usual gripes about degrees of fame, but instead, some months down the track, I received an email sent by singer and songwriter Darren Hanlon, a mate of Sarah's, who wrote:

On the very day Sarah became immortalised in cluedom it was my phone that was all abuzz with text messages urging me to buy the paper and do the crossword. Until then I had no idea how extensive this indierock cryptic society was.

Though the BLASKO in question had no idea of her inclusion—not yet. Darren's email told the story:

Sarah was in a meeting and couldn't be contacted for hours and when I finally got through she told me to calm down and I said 'you won't believe this!' We met at a cafe to see it for ourselves . . . I then explained that although she'd already played the Commonwealth Games opening ceremony, gone platinum, programmed RAGE, shook Cate Blanchett's hand etc that this was her career pinnacle. She should bask in the moment.

HALL OF FAME: CONTAINERS

Face rival carrying flag (6) [Taupi, Guardian]
Gun sure to grab attention (7) [Paul, Guardian]
Square seen circling square, sort of square (7) [Paul again]
Cook in boiling water (8) [Rover, Guardian]
Stop old leftovers blocking sink (9) [Mass, Independent]
Bone from a fish found in tin? (10) [Times 8562]

SOLUTIONS: visage, firearm, sixteen, irrigate, forestall, metacarpal

QUIZLING 10.1 What four colours, three within the spectrum's red band, each carry the word CAR inside their letters?

QUIZLING 10.2

MALTA, the nation, can sit inside FORD to create two adjacent words-formal/tad. What three countries can separately sit inside TOM to create paired words on each occasion?

QUIZLING 10.3

Can you 'isolate' each Scottish island below within an English word? Arran, say, may lie in arrant, though warrant or rearrange are sounder, since they both encircle the island entirely.

Vaila Iona Barra Tiree Lamba Cava Danna Unst Islay

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CHAPTER 11

Creepy film absorbed in autopsy chopping (6)

Seven FBI trainees, one observer, one island, nine deaths—or maybe I lost count between the drowning and the beheading. When deaths outnumber the ad breaks, the census tends to falter.

Released in 2002, *Mindhunters* revives the spirit of Agatha Christie, with steel-shafted arrows replacing arsenic and lace. Though cyanide comes into play, as well as liquid nitrogen, one poor sap shattering like peanut brittle. The reason these 'seven little Indians' are stranded on the island in the first place is to solve a mock-crime committed by a makebelieve scumbag nicknamed The Puppeteer. The weekend is a test of nerve in the field, but soon the simulation turns into the real McCoy.

In the psycho tradition, each death is accompanied by a broken wrist-watch to predict the killing time of the next trainee. Of course, no spree is complete without a prime suspect, a role fulfilled by LL Cool J, the eighth member of the party, who's a former navy SEAL and current Philadelphia detective assigned to observe how these L-plated profilers cope with the strain. Older, wiser, blacker than his fellow castaways, Lieutenant Gabe Jensen spends his time tut-tutting the newbies, or solving crossword puzzles. At one stage, the camera stalking the grid up close, we see Gabe enter the word BAIT at 7-Down, which could be a clue, so to speak, or not.

So how did the critics cope? Stephen Hunter, a Washington reviewer, seemed to mind the schlock most of all, describing the movie as a perfect waste of six good watches. From a crossword perspective, however, Gabe is good for some solid advice.

When not chewing on a pencil, or lamenting FBI recruitment policy, the cop delivers two zinger lines. The first is just bad-funny

('Eeny-meeny-miny-mo, who's the next motherfucker to go?') while the other is the catchery of our next two chapters: 'What is the trap?' Where is the trap?'

As now we enter a maze of traps, where every string of words can hold your answer—or undoing. The hidden clue is a misnomer in some respects, since the answer itself is as plain as day, if only you have the keen eyes to see it. A trained solver will spot NICHE nestled in *macaroni cheese*, or CINEMA sitting in *medicine man*, but the rookie will need a bit more time in the field. To be a qualified solver of hiddens (as we'll call them), you need to step through words and phrases letter by letter, taking nothing for granted, and looking for covert combinations. Peter Sellers, Peter Ustinov and Sophia Loren may be old-time stars in your eyes, but to me they cradle TERSE, RUST and PHIAL respectively.

The first clue I ever solved, as you may recall from the Intro, was a hidden: *Follow in green suede*. Look within and there's ENSUE, a match for *follow*. The recipe dates back to the Jazz Age, when the early English cryptics were first experimenting with the unwritten rules. Back then, the hidden clue required neither brevity nor definition, meaning a setter could waffle at length, stashing the answer somewhere along the way. Check out these two clunkers from the *Daily Telegraph* of 1928:

'Thou rebel damsel, do me the favour of tying this turban,' quoth the knight (hidden) (6)

At Molokai a settlement was provided for lepers by Father Damien (hidden) (4)

Solvers can rejoice that wordplay has evolved since the Roaring '20s, losing its ancestral flab and gaining definition—in both senses. Let's track down the embedded answers.

And there's our trouble. With no hint of the answers' meanings, both clues carry more than one stowaway to match the answer's designated length. The first clue, for example, when you step through the consecutive letters, holds BELDAM (a less than flattering term for a woman of advanced years) and SELDOM. Which is right?

Clue 2 is sloppier, hedging its bets among TWAS, WASP, OVID, HERD and MIEN. For the record, the hidden words you needed were SELDOM and HERD. For the good of cryptics, the hidden art improved soon after

the formula's arrival. Nowadays such verbose specimens would be put to the sword. And if a clue did blather, winding like a turban around its mystery solution, at least the blather would include a definition.

So what's the deal with our current clue? Too early, you're thinking. Don't we usually take a side-trip through language or social history before reaching the big aha? Just like The Puppeteer on Psycho Island, my madness has a method. Hidden clues, once their category is revealed, are often easy to solve, the real task lying in recognising the category in play. Ask any profiler, the brain-strain comes with identification. The moment you realise the killer is the sexy Latina, the science geek, or the crossword dude with the sharp tongue, the chase is as good as over.

Okay then, here's the evidence:

Creepy film absorbed in autopsy chopping (6)

Different from clues of yore, the modern hidden spurns excess. Only words that count can be counted. If a word has no role, namely as definition, the camouflage or the link between the two, then it's out. Gone. Slashed from the scene.

Sticking with the creep-show concept, the answer to any hidden equates to a sniper, the consecutive letters stashed away from the solver's sight and waiting to pounce. To save your neck you need to examine the layout with care. Lurking about the furniture is a six-letter word that lazy eyes will miss at first sweep. So step warily.

Avoid red herrings too. If you're new to the game you'll see a word like *chopping* in the Master clue and suspect the anagram formula. Bang, you're dead. Wrong move.

So what about a container? The word *absorbed* is a plausible signpost in that regard. Maybe *creepy film* swallows *in* to make a morgue term? *Jaws* is a spooky film, for example. Is JINAWS a word? Bang, two shots. Dead twice over.

What is the trap? Where is the trap?

Diligence is needed. If you can't figure out which words are the definition, then unpick the clue letter by letter. Laborious, yes, but at least hidden clues have slimmed in the last 80 years, and you'd rather be methodical than maggot bait. Unwary souls will glance at a phrase

like *Soviet names etc*—thinking of Krushchev or Kiev—and fail to notice VIETNAMESE hunched in ambush. You need that jungle savvy to survive this jungle exercise.

Anagram clues, we know, require a signpost of change or conflict. Containers—a signal to protect or inject. Hidden clues are no different, though their means of declaration are more versatile, with three possible approaches to planting a signpost.

First, the idea of fragmentation. (Keep your eyes peeled for signposts such as *some*, *sample*, *part* or *slice*.) Here's a sample:

Cheese chunk in apricot tart = RICOTTA

Second, think confinement, akin to one breed of container clue. (For this approach, beware words like *nurse*, *bound*, *holding* or *stocking*.) Like this one:

Monster trapped in filthy drain = HYDRA

And finally, just as if the formula isn't treacherous enough, the hidden may declare itself with the idea of clustering. (Again, watch out for words like *sequence*, *string*, *train* or *bunch*.) Or something like this example:

 $Drop\ dolomite\ slab = OMIT$

With a three-way bet you can see why hiddens are a horror to detect—despite how simple they end up being once you suss out the category. All the same, the formula can be maddening. You spend five minutes staring at a clue, wondering what type it is, when the whole time the answer is staring back.

So what style of hidden is the Master clue? *Creepy film absorbed in autopsy chopping*. Fickle by tradition, this one clue offers three possible signposts, namely *absorbed*, *absorbed in*, or just plain *in*. Whichever is the right command, look twice at the less familiar groupings of words. Which is clunkier: *creepy film* or *autopsy chopping*? Tucked away is Hitchcock's black-and-white classic, ready for you to enter into your black-and-white square.

But wait a moment. PSYCHO may well be the answer, the clue

works, the letters fit, but what about the nastiness of that cadaver image, all those gory *CSI* vibes? If solvers want blood and guts, then solvers can rent *Mindhunters* rather than seek out slasher puzzles. This argument underpins a famous rule in Clueville, which editors know as the Sunday Breakfast Test. To go there, we'll need a change of table setting.

SEEMLY MUESLI — public taste and the S-word

What is the form of diarrhoea in which the food is discharged undigested? (8)

Hope you weren't eating. The quick clue above came from a *Sunday Age* crossword published in 2008. To salt the wounds, the answer is the medical obscurity known as LIENTERY.

Unless you're a gastroenterologist you probably haven't encountered this disease before now, and hopefully you won't need the word in the future. Puzzle-solvers are always thirsting to learn new vocab, yet a clue like this confirms that our thirst isn't (sorry) bottomless.

Margaret Farrar, the iconic New York editor to award Captain Ahab a wooden leg, called it the Sunday Breakfast Test. Nobody in their right mind wants to deal with FAECES over porridge or at most times in the day. LEUKAEMIA and SODOMY can be added to the list. AUSCHWITZ and AUTOPSY CHOPPING.

Among the personal papers of Merl Reagle, the only crossword-maker to appear on *The Simpsons*—more of that later—is a message from Margaret Farrar, dated 1966, that reads: 'Crosswords are an entertainment. Avoid things like death, disease, war and taxes—the subway solver gets enough of that in the rest of the paper.'

For Will Shortz, Farrar's eventual successor in the New York chair, the diktat still holds good. In a Q&A with puzzle fans back in 2008, Shortz admitted that, 'It's true that URINE has never appeared in a New York Times crossword . . .' Although public taste has loosened to some degree, with OVA and BELLY BUTTON getting the all-clear, and a late 2009 puzzle during the Shortz regime revelling in a toilet theme, including such entries as LITTLE JOHN, HEIR TO THE THRONE and ROYAL FLUSH.

Taking a similar tack in my own work, I ran with CHAMBER POT

in 2007, barely giving the phrase a second thought. Swine flu may be racking Mexico, wars raging in four corners, boatloads of refugees slowly sinking in the oceans, but invoke the concept of wee-wee or poo-poo in a crossword puzzle and you'll invite a furious letter like the CHAMBER POT harangue. The angry note ended in a kind of haiku:

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'Shame, shame, shame.
Friday's SMH is now being cancelled.
Yours in disgust . . .'
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A radar blip compared to the blitz that Shortz experienced in 2006, the day he green-lighted a certain seven-letter word starting with S. Ooh, what word, you're thinking. Must be a shocker like SHITFUL or SEXBOMB, or maybe a dosage of bad news like SCABIES or SUI-CIDE. Neither. In fact, just to test your breakfast reflexes, I've already used the S-word in this chapter's opening page. If the word sailed past your gaze I'm thinking you belong to the majority of New York solvers who saw no reason to complain. But a vociferous few made up for them. Margaret Farrar must be turning in her grave, they cried, now that such a distinguished puzzle has sunk to the low of SCUMBAG.

Depending on your age, the term has distinct meanings. To Gen-Xers, a scumbag is a scoundrel, which is how Lynne Lempel clued the entry. For an older solver, the slang refers to a used condom, with scum a quainter synonym of semen. Hardly the trinket you want in your Froot Loops, and Shortz was naturally contrite. In the blogosphere, on Diary of a Crossword Fiend, Lempel herself confessed, 'I'm dumbfounded—and also just plain dumb I guess. I was totally ignorant of its vulgar side.'

Etymology of course can be its own booby-trap. ORCHID, did you know, derives its name from the testicle, in the same vein as AVOCADO, a previous answer in the mix. As enough time passes, or the root language fades—such as Ancient Greek and Nahuatl in these two examples—the potential for offence recedes.

Though the argument didn't wash a few years back when the New York puzzle came a cropper with another S-word, this time SCHMUCKS as a synonym for *jerks*. Well, jerk is the popular meaning, but the Yiddish word has a more anatomical connotation. Comedian Lenny Bruce, a

noted potty-mouth of the 1960s, occasionally relied on his knowledge of Jewish vulgarity to disguise his natural blue streak. When the comic dubbed President Johnson a schmuck, the leader of the American people was in fact equated to a man's reproductive organ, deriving from the old Polish word *smok* meaning grass snake or dragon.

War, disease, the naughty bits—don't go there. Not at the breakfast table. Advice ignored by our next three clues, all culled from English sources that best remain nameless. In recipe order, you're looking at anagram, container and hidden:

Incest with boy could be this = OBSCENITY

Bodily fluid left inside granny, perhaps = PLASMA

Some fancy stitches employed in pouch = CYST

Even Alfred Hitchcock, our *Psycho* director, has suffered low digs at the hands of compilers. If it's not the building blocks that make up his name (anagram of FLARED + KNOT + umm, SCHMUCK), then it's the colossal shadow the man (literally) casts on his films. Hitch's obesity, in fact, triggered an impertinent pun from a setter known as Crux in the *Financial Times*:

Hitchcock's memorable double feature? = CHIN

The sort of clue to see breakfasters switch from hash browns to lo-cal oatmeal, though it's the director's other feature, namely *Psycho*, I wish to visit in our final section. Just like SCHMUCK or SCUMBAG, the entry may seem innocuous at a casual glance, but there's an ongoing blacklist of words and authors in Australia and the UK suggesting otherwise. To finish off, let's meet some media vigilantes, and appreciate the difference between one person's psycho and another's Froot Loop.

LOOSE SCREWS — SANE and mental health

David Plomley is not a malicious bloke. This civil engineer, and regular setter for the *SMH*, is as civil as they come. Though according to the media falcons at the SANE organisation, the setter was once a prize ratbag, creating a theme in 2008 that caused profound offence.

SANE is a UK-based group of advocates and charity-workers dedicated to the cause of improving the lot of people affected by mental illness. The group began in 1986, the impetus being a *Times* suite of features titled 'The Forgotten Illness'. The journalist involved was Marjorie Wallace, now SANE's chief executive. Several offshoots have sprung up in other countries, including Australia. Speaking as one with a dear friend who suffers from a personality disorder, I applaud SANE, even when their Stigma Watch goes a little cuckoo. Sorry, overboard.

Ask DP, alias David Plomley. Two years ago he chose lunacy as a theme, no doubt owing to the rich pickings in any thesaurus: harebrained, round the twist, off your rocker. The entries David chose were just as ripe: TROPPO, CRACKERS, A SCREW LOOSE, NON COMPOS MENTIS. But the fun wasn't appreciated by SANE's watchdogs in Melbourne. The website rebuked the compiler with a posting entitled Crass Crossword, adding the so-called outrage to the SANE Stigma File and expressing its disappointment to Fairfax.

You can only wonder whether the group's founding body made similar noises when this pair of anagram clues popped up in the British press:

Can't use bananas for fruitcake = NUTCASE Loonies entrust doctors = NUTTERS

Removed from the Sunday Breakfast Test, this is the issue of playing loose with a serious matter, in the same way PSYCHO (both the word and the movie) can be overused and misused to the point that fewer people can fully understand the term. On the SANE website: 'Media reports frequently confuse "psychosis" (which refers to psychotic mental illness) and "psychopath" (which relates to extreme violence and anti-social behaviour, not mental illness).' Do you think Alfred Hitchcock knew the difference? Or perhaps his shower stabber laid claim to both clinical conditions, as have many crosswords over the years. My advice to setters: if you have a ripper clue for BONKERS (and the mind does boggle), I'd suggest BENDERS, BANGERS or BONNETS could fit the grid just as snugly.

That said, not every solver will want your guts for garters over a mental-health allusion. Or so I must presume if one *Herald* letter is any guide. Unusually the SANE vigilante was off-duty on the day of the

letter's publication. I'd just constructed a crossword with a few more twists than usual, only for a solver to submit his thoughts: 'Having contemplated DA's cryptic crossword of last Friday, I am yet again uncertain whether he is a genius or a schizophrenic.'

RECIPE PRECIS: HIDDENS

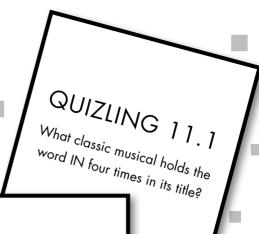
Similar to the container signpost, the hidden signal infers inclusion, or a stashed entity, though the most frequent indicator is *some*. (See other possibles below.) Add to this, the fodder to hold your answer can sometimes betray itself by an air of strangeness, like *Chicago gold* storing agog or *select rice*, electric.

accommodating, amid, among, bear, contribute to, harbour, inside, integral to, keep, lodgers, nurse, part, partly, protects, sandwich, stowaway, tenants, within

REVERSE HIDDENS

As with most other clue types, such as charades and containers, the element of reversal can spice up the recipe. (We look at pure reversal clues in Chapter 25.) Here are three reverse hiddens from my own kitbag. Notice the dual signposts of inclusion as well as backspin:

Some footnotes wrote up western sidekick = TONTO
Catch retro Op Art near lodging = ENTRAP
CSIRO's set nominee partly backed radical educator =
MONTESSORI



QUIZLING 11.2

Hidden in the sound-grab below are two whole names from the one pursuit. Namely? 'When it comes to Tassie salmon, I case less than 50 kilos,' utters the fishmonger. 'Mind you, I expect albacore fillets, which rise vertically in sales over winter, to increase tenfold in volume."

QUIZLING 11.3

STORM (7,2,7)

If SLANG hides within TEEN'S LANGUAGE, can you compose a terse definition of each word or name below that also embodies the consecutive letters of each example? BALSAM (6,6), say, could lead to HERBAL SAMPLE. TALC (5,8) EVIL (4,4) IMMERSING (8,7) CALLAS (7,4) CREDO (6,5)

CHAPTER 12

Partial set closer?! (3.)

'My smmr hols wr a CWOT. B4, we used 2go2 NY 2C my bro, his GF & thr 3:-0 kids FTF. ILNY, its a gr8 plc.'

Symbol for symbol, that's how a London teen began her English essay in 2003. No further details of the school or the 13-year-old girl's ID were provided, which makes most journos suspect an urban myth. But the snippet was posted (and translated) on the BBC website, only to be picked up by other news services across the globe.

For non-teens the translation goes: 'My summer holidays were a complete waste of time. Before, we used to go to New York to see my brother, his girlfriend and their three screaming kids face to face. I love New York. It's a great place.'

Great yarn too, no matter the veracity, since anyone over 30 seems to fear the rise of text-speak. John Humphreys, a British broadcaster, compares texters to vandals in the vein of Genghis Khan. 'They are destroying [our language]: pillaging our punctuation, savaging our sentences, raping our vocabulary.'

John Sutherland, a London professor of Modern English Lit, turned to the word's source to mock the value of text. Originally the word meant 'tissue' in Latin, he says, making textese akin to 'writing on Kleenex. One blow, then throw. Snot-talk'

Anti-texters turn to the same old rhetoric. Since when did BAG mean busting a gut, they ask. Or just a minute equate to JAM? Texting, they despair, is 2M2H (too much too handle).

BSF-but seriously folks-English has a history of mutation. For

an ancient corpus the dear old girl is remarkably limber. Textese is not another language, as some critics believe, but proof of our language's adaptability. Contriving a cluster like L8RG8R for 'later gator' is not the end of the world, but the glimpse of inventive wordplay, and IABF.

Steady on, you lost me with that last one. What does IABF mean exactly? I'm A Big Fan, of course. LHID, you say. Like Hell It Does. And here we have the crux of txt. LME: Let Me Explain.

Ironically, all this talk of reduction is exaggerated. Skimming txt glossaries you'll come upon logograms (clusters using symbols and letters—like L8RG8R—to represent a longer word or phrase) and initialisms (like BSF) favoured by the modern thumb.

Listed in the same glossaries are the evergreen LOL ('laugh out loud') or HAND ('have a nice day'), both examples of acronyms, where initials create a pronounceable new word. Weirder entries include NALOPKT ('not a lot of people know that') and BOSMKL ('bending over, smacking my knee, laughing'), which seem cool yet have as much chance of reaching the next decade as a typewriter.

It's survival of the handiest. A verbal brand of evolution, txt is where the clumsier stuff will die and the neater novelties flourish. LOL is a lock-in, good for the distance. As soon as BOSMKL requires a footnote, or loses sizzle, or threatens a message's clarity, it's toast.

Puritans, be warned. Don't be too holy about the language you're defending, as the mother tongue currently 'suffering' txt is no less riddled with abbreviations and spelling deviations. Starting this chapter, your hackles may have risen when reading of the girl's 'smmr hols', but was your fury matched by my mention of the BBC, journos or ID? Less than likely, I'm thinking. So how do you cope with the abbreviated terms exam and pram, vet and fridge, bus and tarmac? And if you're still taking a curmudgeonly stance, have you ever fallen for the moral filth of RSVP, BYO, PS, IOU or PTO? English speakers have been crafty since the year dot, very quick to find new means of moulding language to our needs. If pianoforte is unwieldy, then let's agree on piano, and the band plays on.

Or maybe your anguish is less about shrinkage and more to do with the poverty of a texter's vocab. Sorry, vocabulary. If so, chillax. A study mounted by Coventry Uni in 2006 discovered that a talent for texting, in all its mutant glory, reveals a positive link to literacy among young learners. In Melbourne, a kindred study in the same year found SMS can also boost the language skills of less literate students. In other words, U need to have a solid grasp of English in order 2 play with it.

Noah Webster, the editor of America's first comprehensive dictionary, in 1825, was a texter before his time, paring words down to match their sound or obeying a plainer logic in their spelling. In a penstroke the lexicographer turned GAOL into JAIL, DIALOGUE into DIALOG and MOULD into MOLD. (OK, so Noah didn't get his wish with TUNG for TONGUE, or SOOP for SOUP etc., but he tried.)

Telegrams wrought equal havoc about the time of Webster's death in 1843. (Strange how the minute word length or the number of words becomes a matter of dollars, the message tends to shrink.) Back in the days of cables and Morse keys, resourceful scrooges jammed their words together—like *tomorrownight*—or boiled terms to their bones—like *sd* for said—to reduce the effect on the bottom line.

Language will forever cope with meddling, as last century's telegrams are this century's text messages. Yet even this trend will rebound as Black-Berry sales restore the QWERTY keyboard to the streets, giving *Homo lexicus* new ways to evolve. Before too long we'll see which 'textonyms' deserve to survive and which will RIP.

Crossword-makers play a minor part too, choosing the abbreviations to warrant a place in their clues. *Mag* in our last container seemed a fair card to play, just as our current answer, another abbreviation, is familiar to everyone. You can tell the answer is a shrunken term by the numbering (3.), the full stop saying you're chasing a reduced term. Would it help if I said the answer's already appeared in this chapter, minus the optional full stop? Or maybe we should first investigate the clue's other punctuation marks. In short, WTF is '?!' all about?!

SHORT IS SWEET —? &! and &lit clues

Twitter. Haiku. Slogan. Txt. The common thread is brevity, distilling a message to its gist. You'll recall those prototype clues from the last hidden chapter, the tall tales of damsels and knights. Each sample owned over ten words, a modern mouthful. With shades of the old-fashioned

cable sender, the current clue-setter works on the principle that short is sweet.

The longest clue in the whole Master Puzzle has nine words only, while nine other clues possess four words or less. Such numbers go to highlight a cryptic law—be succinct. Which isn't the same as be bleeding obvious. Where telegraphers slashed words to save pennies, they did so at the risk of ambiguity. We compilers embrace a similar discipline, cutting the waffle, arguing the reason for every word on the line, yet all the while pursuing ambiguity.

If I say *autopsy chopping* and you think anagram, rather than a hideyhole for PSYCHO, then my job is done. Gemini in the *Guardian* composed a stylish hidden in early 2008, writing:

Worth reading—gripping yarn (6)

Four words only and the surface sense sublime. Misleading too, as I spent an age mentally thumbing airport novels, wondering which blockbuster was the answer to my prayers. None was. Gripping of course is the hidden signpost, and THREAD the hidden answer.

So what about 17-Down? The one with ?! for an ending? What's that all about? Let's take it one mark at a time.

You'll remember that in the last chapter we found a question mark tailing the CHIN clue: *Hitchcock's memorable double feature?*

In this clue the punctuation alerts you to a fresh perspective. Forget films—focus on flab. Often a question mark has the same effect as the vaudevillian wink, a pun alert directed at the audience. Take this clue for HERB GARDEN: *Place to make a mint?*

The other role the question mark can play is to suggest a looseness in the definition, asking the solver to give that element greater leeway. Wise if we return to the airport novel, using a clue I made last year:

British celebs George and Peter made hot cakes? (11)

This time round we're dealing with a charade. The celebs in question are two stars of the 1960s, namely George Best and Peter Sellers, or BEST + SELLERS = hot cakes.

Consult any dictionary and you won't find *bestseller* defined as *hot cake*. Hence the question mark here is an idiom-alarm. Punctuation is flagging the setter's licence.

Exclamation marks, on the other hand, declare a different mischief. And here we get our first peek at the '&lit' clue, an odd label for a rare achievement. The term was coined by Ximenes, drafter of the first cryptic rulebook, and applies to any clue where the wordplay not only suggests the answers but also *defines* the answer, literally. Here's an exquisite &lit from US master Henry Hook:

Insane Roman! (4)

Despite its brevity, this is a hidden &lit where the camouflage doubles as the definition. If you look in *-sane Roman* you'll uncover NERO, the *insane Roman*. Dovetailing the signpost—*in*—with the hidden fodder—*sane Roman*—is inspired, an embedded style of signposting. The exclamation mark is etiquette, warning solvers of the trickery. Whenever you see an exclamation mark, especially tagging a terse clue, consider the likelihood that words serve both demands of the cryptic clue, wordplay and definition all rolled into one. Here's another &lit hidden, drawn from my own archive:

He's smart in a mischievous vein! (6,4)

Vein here alludes to a sequence of letters, such as a vein of gold. Chip away the excess and you'll hit MARTIN AMIS, the smart and mischievous writer.

Because &lits occupy the top of the cryptic pyramid, a coming section will grant more space to these sly feats. More important now to make the quick intro, and warn you against treating the term &lit as a recipe unto itself. The tag is better viewed as an ideal, with any recipe capable of being involved. In this chapter we have the hidden &lit. A glance at the Master's unsolved clues, and seeing three more exclamation marks in waiting, suggests we have more &lit recipes looming. With that treat in mind let's return to the business at hand:

Partial set closer?! (3.)

Partial is a nimble word, meaning both biased and incomplete. The perfect guise for a hidden signpost. Partial payment, the phrase, could hint at MEN, lying inside payment, just as GIST may result from partial magistrates. So what part do we need to dismantle to solve 17-Down, the lynchpin entry that holds the pattern together? To find it, of course, you'll need nerve and knowhow etc.

Because ETC is exactly that—a *partial set closer*. An abbreviation of the longer Latin phrase, the word is partial for being shortened, just as you're likely to borrow the term as a rambling *set closer*. And there it is, ETC, enveloped by its own definition, with *partial* wearing two cryptic hats: signpost, and accomplice in the answer's definition.

Txters could well admire the clue's brevity, the message boiled down to its bones, while the answer itself is the king of space-savers. In this expanding universe of abbreviation, ETC is da bomb, that shortened phrase designed to keep any list from exceeding its measure. In the spirit of ETC, let's quit this chapter early.

EXTERNAL HIDDENS

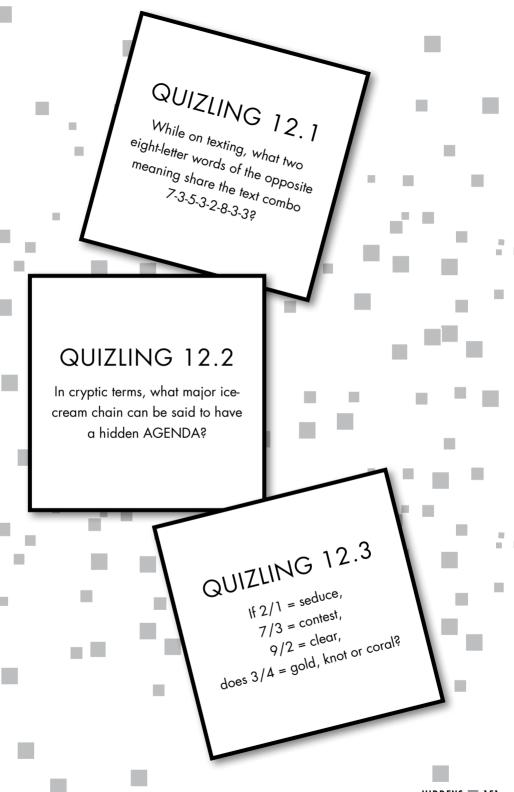
We've met orthodox hiddens, and reverse hiddens. The third member of the clan is dubbed the external hidden, where the answer lies on the edges of the fodder phrase—much in the vein of a MAD magazine's fold-in. Hardly common, but still a formula you may encounter. Here are two from my own archive:

Glad social fringes are moving slowly = GLACIAL Reserve bordering on Timorese validity? = TIMIDITY

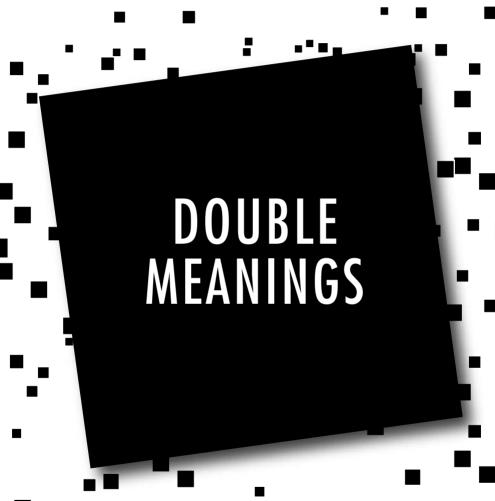
HALL OF FAME: HIDDEN

Some want it left? Right! (5) [Neo, FT]
Shy bride holds cross (6) [Henry Hook, US]
Some medicines supplied for cold (7) [Henry Hook again]
One more helping of tea (not herbal) (7) [Flimsy, FT]
Sign used by vendors everywhere (7) [Times 8531]
Rubric 'abracadabra' revealing old curiosities (4-1-4) [Brendan,
Guardian]

SOLUTIONS: title, hybrid, iciness, another, endorse, bric-a-brac



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CHAPTER 13

Giant flower shop online (6)

For a good part of 1988 I knew warfare backwards. I'd catch the train to Canberra a few times over spring, spending my weekend cooped up in the Australian War Museum, poring over medals and photos, xeroxing telegrams, taking notes on battalion-this or unit-that.

My job description was Fact-checker and Caption Writer for a series entitled *Australians At War*. Stretching from Gallipoli to Vietnam, the books were a Time-Life project packaged by John Ferguson, a publishing house occupying a reborn terrace on Foveaux Street, near Sydney's Central Station.

John had published *Marzipan Plan*, my first novel, back in 1986. I'm not sure why. Fiction was hardly his long suit. The house had a backlist of eccentric history titles, so maybe he aspired to a new business model as much as I aspired to be the next big thing. *Marzipan* sold modest numbers and somehow made the national shortlist for the Miles Franklin Award. Six months later a film offer appeared, and fell over.

Moral of the story? You can't build an empire on almond paste. Fresh off campus, I deemed myself a novelist when really I was a puzzle-maker with a bent for storytelling. Read the small print on my Bachelor of Communications and you'll guess that majors in Journalism, Creative Writing and Samuel Beckett were hardly likely to attract an executive salary. After a brush with English and drama teaching, my sole income for most of that period came from crosswords, which kicked off in 1983 at the *Herald*, followed by the daily Wordwit puzzle a few years later. That was it. No mortgage, no car, but enough to finance a meander round Europe, then later South America. Thanks to wordplay I'd become

a professional bum, inventing puzzles at the Gare du Nord, revising clues on Amazon ferries, writing short stories in Patagonia. Three wild years, only to return to Sydney with no career, no address, no money, a sputtering relationship, a deepening recession and a single novel about a mirror maze. At 28 I needed a real job.

'What do you know about war?' asked John.

'Which war?'

'Take your pick. We need someone who can write.'

Real experts wrote the manuscripts, yet often they needed a combover to rid them of jargon. Lay readers might know an F18 from a B52, yet not everyone will be able to distinguish an AK47 from its spot-welded cousin, the AK74. Even this nomad, fresh from the coca fields of Colombia, where teenagers wore machine-guns like disco bling, lacked the finer appreciation. So I went to Canberra; I haunted the armoury; I spoke to brass at Duntroon academy. And in between captions I chitchatted.

At least that was the accusation from the house's production manager. A true believer in books and efficiency, Tracy O'Shaughnessy had no truck for idle chatter, especially when the Battle of Long Tan was two days overdue. 'Are those captions ready yet?' she asked, not warmly either, and I told her some guff about clarifying artilleries, and she looked straight through me like the former radiographer she was.

We couldn't stand each other. I treated John Ferguson Ltd as a playground, a place to exchange one-liners with Julian, a closet librettist. Or I'd flirt with the barista downstairs, or relive great novels with Lesley, the bookshop owner and associate publisher who also shared the alcove. Make jokes, not war. My work ethic, after years of sleeping in Latin fleapits, was too mañana for Tracy's blood. She regularly stomped to my desk with a range of scowls to ask after my copy, which invariably was missing in action.

'Never knew the Nazis were Irish,' I whispered to Julian.

'Eva O'Braun,' he said to me, and we chuckled into our coffees.

On reflection I have no idea what position Julian actually held in the office except to sit beside me, surrounded by photos of soldiers and battle diagrams, and better my gags.

Anyhow, Saigon fell and the Paris Peace Accords were signed, meaning I was demobbed to a life of crosswords. That's when Lesley the book-lover asked a favour. Her farm in the Hunter Valley needed a care-taker. 'Ever used creosote before?' she asked.

'There's always a first time.'

So November was a month of low-key jackerooing, painting a fence near Wollombi and spraying Zero on the blackberry thicket. Two weeks later, Lesley and Tracy arrived, both women on their way to Armidale, four hours further north. Lesley was off to see her daughter, a boarder at the Armidale School, while Tracy was aiming to see her boyfriend, who worked at the same town's hospital. Tellingly this overnight stay was the first time Tracy and I had coexisted outside the office, not a deadline in sight, and we found ourselves talking freely. We argued why saffron was overrated, or how 'fun run' was an oxymoron. My own legs were giving me murder thanks to a day of mountain biking. My skin was burnt from too much sun. Both calves were welted with insect bites and a few fat ticks. While Lesley was having her own dramas on a long-distance call, Tracy volunteered to lasso tick-heads with a cotton strand and pull the varmints out.

Next morning the travellers left and I returned to my creosote duties, slopping along the fence and scratching my legs to ribbons. By December I was back in Sydney, house-minding for a friend in Dulwich Hill. Making puzzles and writing—what other life could I expect? Clearly, if I wanted a view of the harbour I'd need to invent something like Post-it Notes or kidnap a Vaucluse chihuahua for ransom.

Around this time the Time-Life gang threw a party, a chance to reunite with my fellow militants. The Foveaux Street office was lined with tinsel, the inner courtyard a makeshift bodega. Again, as on the farm night, Tracy and I could chat without the clock ticking and there she confessed her romantic weekend in Armidale was no great shakes. Perhaps the relationship wasn't working, she said. Not an invitation, as such, but a ray of light if I had any plans to know her better. What about a cliff walk, I asked her. 'From Bondi to the cemetery and back again?'

Metaphysical, sure, but the girl took the bait. This was 1988, before the same track was crowded with chin-up bars and bike racks. The weather played havoc with Tracy's long brown hair. The heat kept climbing, growing into a Sydney thunderstorm, and by the loop's end I suggested a thing called Eggs Perico.

Despite its fancy name, the meal was Venezuelan for scrambled eggs,

standard stuff with slices of capsicum and bacon etc., maybe a splash of Tabasco. As a chef I'm a reasonable crossword-maker, but the lunch idea was set to uncover a deeper truth. The house at Dulwich Hill was a mess. Tracy did her best to ignore the kitchen's junk while I broke eggs and warmed the pan. That's when she noticed the graph paper on the table.

'What's this?'

'A crossword.'

'I know it's a crossword, but what it's doing here?'

'That's how I make them.'

Irish in complexion, Tracy is pale for starters, but sitting at the table the girl went ghostly. 'What's wrong?' I asked.

She tapped the graph and said, 'This.'

The butter was burning. I was missing the significance. Then she read a clue aloud, 1-Across, 'Heavy metal fan a leading Snag.'

'What about it?'

'That's the Armidale clue. You wrote this?'

No, I felt like saying. I just do the Down clues and this black-and-white fairy comes in overnight and fills in the Acrosses. Of course I wrote the bloody thing. That was my job. Yet the puzzle side of life had never surfaced in our few off-work conversations. The weird thing being, the clue for HEAD BANGER, which Tracy had just read aloud, was the very clue to make her chuckle over a month ago, 400 kilometres away, seeking a moment of warmth in a glacial weekend with the boyfriend. HEAD BANGER of all clues made her smile, and so did the man with ticks in his legs and melting butter, and suddenly those two men were the one.

I'm tempted to call the moment eerie but that word's overdone in crosswords. She couldn't believe the boy on the kiwi farm was the boy inside the crossword, the same boy who made her laugh while trying to get some breathing space from the Armidale boy in a long weekend that felt too long. 'I love cryptics,' she said, and the rest of our lives felt almost straightforward in comparison. In the space of one puzzle, *Australians At War* became a couple of Australians in love, anointed by coincidence and the giggle-value of a random clue. To be honest I can't recall how the Eggs Perico worked out, but I'm grateful for another recipe, a slangy double-meaning my future wife worked out, a clue that made her smile all those years ago.

CHICKEN INCIDENT — homonyms and heteronyms

Often, when I think of double meanings, I recall that strange head-banger moment in a Sydney kitchen, or remember another story—about a boy called Luke. He was nine, a sweet kid whose dad was an old friend.

The meal was BBQ chicken. Luke was the eldest of four, chomping on a drumstick when his dad asked, 'So what did you do at school today?'

'Homonyms,' said the boy.

'What are they?' asked Maggie, his sister.

'Like bark and bark,' said Luke. 'You know, how tree has a bark and a dog has a bark, but they're different.'

The table was inspired. These sounded fun. Jo, the mum, held up her wine and said, 'Like stem on a glass and stem on a flower.'

Stuart rocked his hand. 'They're kind of related, aren't they? Maybe stem on a plant and stem the flow.'

'My name,' said Maggie. 'That's me and a bird.'

'Or chicken,' said Luke, pointing to his plate. 'There's chicken on the farm and the chicken you eat.'

The room fell quiet. Stuart coughed and said, 'They're the same thing, mate.'

Luke's face dropped. He stared at the drumstick and then his mum, who nodded. The boy left the table. That was ten years ago. He's been a vegetarian ever since.

Language is duplicitous. We take the word *rock* as a solid place, only to discover it's a verb, meaning wobble. We've already seen how *set* has 200 meanings, and that's one cranny in the dictionary. In a *split second* you'll realise that *split* and *second* both wear other masks, in other places, as does every synonym of the same term: *flash*, *tick*, *mo*, *wink*, *shake*, *instant*, *twinkling*. Older words, like *set* and *second*, commonly own several meanings, gaining layers as English evolves. Look at *cob*, which can be three different animals (a male swan, a squat horse or a black-backed gull) on top of being a cylinder of corn, a clay mix for building or a lump of coal.

This single (song) book (reserve) has type (kind) and pages (servants) and chapters (franchises) and letters (mail) and capitals (Rome or Paris) and commas (butterflies). This sentence (stretch) has (laughs) a subject (servant), an article (story), an object (complain) and a raft (float) of

brackets (supports), the whole lot (fate) approaching (resembling) a full (drunk) stop (stay).

Revisiting the clue that made Tracy grin—Heavy metal fan a leading Snag—we have the definition as opener, where a heavy metal fan is slangily known as a HEAD BANGER. Then a pair of alternative definitions, re-slanting both of the solution's two parts. Leading is HEAD, and snag the nickname for a sausage, or BANGER. SNAG of course is also the acronym for Sensitive New Age Guy, explaining the capital letter in the clue, a bid to have the solver imagine the modern male as a Motörhead tragic rather than the parcel of meat.

Double meaning clues are often good places to start solving a crossword, often because brevity exposes their category, and the shorter they are, the quicker you see them. Take these snack-size samples:

 $Career\ ladder = RUN$ $Fit\ exec = SUIT$ *Less inclined to sweet-talk* = FLATTER

Two words long in many cases, the double meaning recipe tends to be short because the wordplay element may simply be a second synonym of the answer, exploring a different nuance. Not that all double meaning clues are short. As you can see, the two definitions promising FLATTER are both two words long. Or an answer like HEAD BANGER could comprise two parts, both of which need to be newly defined. Seems 9-Down is up to similar tricks, our latest clue extending to four words:

Giant flower shop online (6)

As always, the dilemma comes down to the split. Do we isolate Giant, or Giant flower, or maybe the more absurd idea of Giant flower shop? Botanists, feel free to browse your mental list of colossal plants while the rest of us will test the internet angle: the kinder entry point.

Can you name any online flower shops? Google can—more than 5,000,000 of them—with no dominant name jumping out. Thankfully, says you. What sort of puzzle expects its solver to know some e-florist? If a retired netball defender with 12 Australia caps is not famous enough to qualify for black-and-whitehood, then why should a rose vendor be any different?

It's not. Crosswords can't afford to dabble in small-b brands—the human or the corporate kind. Proper nouns must be graspable through both wordplay and a sound general knowledge. Should either be unfair, then the compiler isn't keeping their side of the bargain. Hence my choice of a web retailer with perhaps the highest profile—handicapping neither techie nor luddite—to play one part in this double definition. I'm talking about the giant that is AMAZON.

Whoa there. A brand name? Am I getting bankrolled by private interests to make this Mastercard Puzzle? Before I face that accusation, let's tidy up 9-Down, our maiden clue in this category.

Branching out from books, Amazon can help you buy fresh flowers, or flower-print bathroom tiles, or a magic wand that pops out a cloth flower when you say 'Abracadabra'—but Amazon is no *Giant flower shop online*, or even a *flower shop online*. Instead it's simply a *shop online*. Meaning the clue's other half—*Giant flower*—is the formula's other half, the second definition. So how does *giant flower* equal Amazon?

After the Chicken Incident, the week young Luke turned into a vegetarian, he may well have tackled heteronyms at school, those words resembling another yet varying in pronunciation. Puzzle-makers love them almost as much as we cherish double meanings. Does *does*, for example, mean deer or a form of the verb to do? Is row a paddle or a spat? Is flower a blossom or something that flows? In our 'current' clue, the flowy idea applies, the Amazon river the biggest flower on the planet, just as shower can be drizzle or an exhibitionist. If you don't look twice at every word, then at least mumble the words aloud, testing the air for heteronym traps.

Getting back to those payola accusations, I'm guilty up to a point. Smack in the heart of the Master Puzzle is the so-called taint of trademarks, a registered company holding court in a central clue. What was the kickback? Do I own shares in Amazon Inc.? Why sully a perfect pastime with talk of dot-com merchants or the taint of corporate interests? Read on and you'll realise you've branded me all wrong.

CLUES R US — brand names and copyright

Slumped in your Jacuzzi, sipping Kahlua and milk from a Thermos, you are living the decadent life of trademarks. But fat cats and fashionistas aren't the only suckers for labels. The deeper we get into this millennium the more brands enter our conversation.

Jacuzzi was named after the Jacuzzi brothers, who dabbled in bubbles. Kahlua was a Mexican distiller, since bought out by Pernod, another brand. As is Thermos, coined by a Scottish chemist, James Dewar.

Excluding the guns and publishing houses, this chapter alone has borrowed a clutch of brands already, from Google to Xerox, Post-it Notes to Zero. The minute you Hoover the Lino, ride an Escalator, or open Facebook or Photoshop, you're inviting brands into your life. Velcro, the fastener stuck inside LEVEL CROSSING is a trademark, and so is the Zipper, its alternative. Name your game—Frisbee, Yoyo, Trampoline, Hula Hoop. Yep, all brands. Nowadays we can hardly move without colliding into a TM (or a word that started life as one).

Puzzles aren't exempt. While some peers make a wilful effort to avoid any 'merch' besmirching their grids, I embrace the practice. If our lives are choked in Chapsticks and Crock-Pots, or Toyotas and Nintendos, then puzzles should reflect that verbal storm. Besides, as soon as you see that NINTENDO is INTEND in NO, what compiler in his right mind can resist?

I recently made a puzzle with a chocolate theme, filling the grid with 15 well-known products, from Cherry Ripe to Kit Kat. Several of the clues called on double meanings:

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Faint chocolate = FLAKE
Chocolate piece of cake? = PICNIC
Bar laughter = SNICKERS
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For all the trademarks on display, the only solver to complain was a Lake Macquarie woman whose feisty email begged me to avoid such high-sugar temptations in the future as she was trying to shed her Christmas spare tyre. 'Having my puzzles come with calories,' she wrote, was giving her no chance.

Chocolate brands? No issue. It was more about the kilojoules. You'd

do well to find any compiler who dodges trademarks altogether, whether it's an overt reference to an online bookstore or accidental lapses like *kerosene* and *lanolin*. In all my years of crosswording, turning RENAULT into NEUTRAL, or seeing AEROBIC as a 'chocolate pen', I've never drawn any major flak from solvers or stakeholders—except once.

The year was 1991, the same year Tracy and I wed in Melbourne. The letter came via lawyers representing the Sony corporation. The matter regarded 'Clue 19-Across of the *Sydney Morning Herald* cryptic, 5th ult.' Midway down the page I found this lyrical burst of legalese: 'WALK-MAN ® is an Australian registered trademark No A351776 in class 9.' This was followed by more poetics: 'Preserving the value of a trademark is both in the public interest, as a trademark is both the public's guarantee of quality and reliability, and in the interest of the industry generally. It is particularly important in Sony's very brand-conscious industry.'

Forthwith I promised to eschew and desist any use of Walkman ® in future puzzles, but of course this was only a Band-Aid solution.

RECIPE PRECIS: DOUBLE MEANINGS

Generally the skinniest clues on the page, double meanings don't need a signpost. Instead, you get a double dose of definitions. While some examples (like FLATTER in this chapter) can carry several words, most double-meaning clues are short. Even when triple meanings come into play, like Cincinnus with MANDARIN—Tongue is orange, and that's official—the result is typically lean.

QUIZLING 13.1 What two golf shots—plus a slang word for golfer—are also computer terms? QUIZLING 13.2 What pizza ingredient, mainsail section, Alpine projectile, trumpet blast and two generic flowers become approximate synonyms when treated as verbs? Remarkably, half the words rhyme with each other. QUIZLING 13.3 Explain how BUTTON, elevated Equates to PIPE, relegated.

CHAPTER 14

Decrease anaemia remedy?(4)

We know about question marks. If one appears, then the wordplay or definition is likely to be curly too. Take BEACON, for instance. Away from crosswords, the word's meaning is as clear as the object it describes. Yet taking the lateral route, giving things a cryptic bent, the lighthouse can mutate into a jail sentence—your chance to BE A CON.

Keeping with CON, could CONTEST can be a trick question—in other words a quiz designed to deceive? Or CONQUEST, a bid to escape? Or CONTEXT, the screenplay for *The Shawshank Redemption*? Or CONFORM, a rap sheet? Every time I see a flashy salesman preaching the virtues of a time-share condo, I revel in CONDO being a pair of words for swindle. So let's get lateral, and go direct to the next Master clue:

Decrease anaemia remedy?(4)

Where's the trap? Look closely at *decrease*, as this is the more flexible word. By that I mean it has the best chance of stepping outside its standard meaning, largely because of its opener, DE. Just like CON, DE is one of those multi-purpose gadgets that can take on several guises, including removal (as in *debark* or *dethrone*), reversal (*decompose*, *deactivate*) or departure (*detrain*, *decamp*). Laterally the prefix is pliable, giving almost any DE- entry in the dictionary the chance to lead a double life. We all know DEMOTE means to move down, yet can't the same word mean to cleanse of dust particles? Can't DESPOT play a similar game? Deliberating, a longer list might read like this:

decay: annihilate atoll

decider: oust booze (see deport)

define: quash a penalty

delight: darken

deliver: perform a hepatectomy

depress: expel media from a venue or republic

device: purify

When the farmer's wife attacked three blind mice, was she *detailing*? Canadian author Margaret Atwood plays with the word *remember* in one of her short stories, wondering if the verb is the opposite of dismember—the rejoining of severed limbs. Lateral 'give' lies in countless words. Yet to expect a solver to see a word like *depot* and automatically imagine the removal of hemp plants is clearly demanding too much. A setter can't write *beacon* into his clue, banking on the solver grasping the kinky logic of *be a con*. Far more likely, a clue will deliver its strangeness from the opposite direction, an incentive to see the answer afresh. Paul of *The Guardian* does so with BEACON:

Do time and make light of it?

Or, returning to DEPOT, could the clue read:

Remove marijuana from terminal?

Again, a question mark alerts you to a twist in perspective. Though with our Master clue, the word in want of re-seeing is sitting on the page—decrease. A similar trap was set in the last double meaning clue for AMAZON, in this case the treachery resting in flower, a heteronym. Yet this time round we face a trap based on lateral meaning.

If CREASE means to rumple, then could DECREASE mean to smooth or iron? Wait a minute. Isn't IRON a means of fighting anaemia? Without getting too Dr House, iron is produced by haemoglobin in the blood and stored in places like the liver and bone marrow. If your haemoglobin decreases, or your blood supply in general, then your system soon craves iron, mainly in the form of fish, beans, nuts and dried fruit. This

tangent alone makes me love crosswords. Sudoku may tune your logic, yet no other puzzle can take you to Brazil in one clue, the liver the next, with Alfred Hitchcock in between. On top of that is the benefit of mindbending, getting your brain to embrace the idea that LIVER, the body's purifier, can also refer to a human being in general—or one who lives.

Premium compilers will make you see common words as though for the first time. The best clues play in that shadow zone between familiar words and their unfamiliar qualities. GORED, for instance, not only describes the matador's fate but also what happens to his clothes when injured. President OBAMA must be freezing, since the man equates to zero degrees, or 0+BA+MA. PARTOOK, once broken down, translates as fair-to-middling. In matching fashion, could SUBSIDE be a B-team, or LABORATORY an eloquent address of *woof-woof-woof?*

To a punster, ASP is a Nile biter. To a lateral logician, the snake can be a condiment dilemma—a case of Salt or Pepper? Other animals can get the lateral treatment. Is GOAT a phrase for attack? DOE a party drug? DINGOES the reason why jackhammer operators wear earphones?

The more you practise this black art the quicker you'll uncover a word's alter ego. Different from puns, a word's lateral version is a new interpretation of how to read what you see, versus a playful jostling of the word's sound or reflection on established meanings. One nudge and even LATERALLY can suggest a fifth-set comeback, or late rally.

The visual equivalent of this offbeat thinking must be the Magic Eye puzzle. You know those squares of funkadelic wallpaper printed in magazines? Stare at the pattern long enough and a 3-D *Titanic* will rise from the blur, or a space shuttle, whatever image is buried below the surface. Of course, for a share of the population that payoff doesn't occur. You may gawk for minutes on end, getting little but eyestrain for your trouble. But give it time, loosen the brain, and you may be delighted by the hologram beaming back.

Lateral thinking demands the same looseness. OK, so some of us may lack the keenness of eye to gaze at SNIPPET and picture its hidden synonym, SPAY. Or realise IMPLORE refers to FAIRY TALES, or dream that ALIMONY and EXCLAIM could share their meaning. But give it time. Keep gazing and one day the *Titanic* will rise.

This 'magic eye' is a vital tool for cryptic solving. Open yourself to a

word's potential and you'll start to see messages behind the pattern. It's like hearing voices, not in a psycho way. Take chess as a parallel. You may know what the knight can do, or how the queen can slide in any direction, but if you're not visualising the board a few moves ahead, seeing the pattern yet to appear, then you'll never flourish—or fall in love with the game. Lateral thinking, in a word sense, is the deeper strategy lying below a crossword's mechanics.

So don't expect to be Bobby Fischer in your first few puzzles, or first few years. The world in fact can only produce so many Fischers, leaving the rest of us to sharpen our hunches and keep gazing beyond the surface. The more devoted you are, the more developed you become. The key is to train your eye *away* from crosswords too. Small things—like seeing TESS in DELICATESSEN, or noticing Fe, the symbol for iron, ends KNIFE, a metal tool—are steps in the right direction. Let the mind meander and it will come home readier for battle.

But let's return to IRON, and why this word lies in the Master Puzzle. Back in 2008, writing that essay for *Meanjin* quarterly, I tried to capture the day-to-day mania that comprises an average day in Puzzle Land. As you'll see, the word I selected as a demonstration tool was IRON.

ALCHEMICAL REACTIONS — rare gleams in common words

Iron has been corrugated, galvanised, pumped, wrought. The stuff is as common as muck. Even Tiger Woods, iron in hand, can only obey the regulation heft of the club. On paper, however, IRON tells a new story. Apply heat and the letters make curious patterns. In real time, the riff below is a blink, a symptom of the craze I own for a headspace. While I've always had a verbal bent, I'm sure a life of solving and setting crosswords has only bent it more. Here goes:

Mixing IRON with its symbol Fe, I create the phrase ON FIRE.

Applying more flame, I note how IRON in reverse reveals NORI, a seaweed source of iron.

- NORI of course can also be read as NOR I—and not iodine? And not me? So who then? The answer: I, RON.
- Meantime NOIR, the other anagram, means black in French, though iron the mineral is red in the raw, while NOIR the genre is embodied by someone like Harry Lime on the silver screen.
- Pluralise IRON and out steps the actor, Jeremy. Mix the past participle—IRONED—and another screen star, DE NIRO, makes a cameo.
- Still with cinema, IRON MAN—the movie or triathlete—opens with a mixture of MINOR, the legal opposite of MAN.
- Weirder still, IRON MAN renders FE/MALE, a truer opposite of the macho hero, and an irony in any language.
- Soundwise, IRON mimics ION, its own constituent.
- Just as IRON is central to the earth's ENVIRONMENT, both on the page and on the ground. And that's not overlooking IGNORING, among a rare minority of words that hold our metal backwards.
- Globally, IRON is one country code (RO for Romania) nesting in India's IN.
- Rolling IRON backwards in the alphabet, sliding every letter back three places, uncovers the word FOLK.

So how did folk respond to this confession? Pity for the most part and who can blame them? We all yearn to see the Eiffel Tower looming out of the Magic Eye pattern, but I can't help staring after the initial thrill, wondering if there's an image traced by the scaffolding, or lying beyond the Champ de Mars. Anagrams aren't enough. Verbs, nouns, names, titles: I crave to uncover the dictionary's secrets. As soon as a new word enters the language—bling-bling or the irukandji jellyfish—I want to be the first to play with its potential. English of course has a limit on how many newcomers it can handle, which means we lateral thinkers need to stare

longer at household words, the everyday kind that must have been spoken and clued and solved a million times already, trying to find a novel vein in their composition.

A few years ago, the *Oxford Dictionary* trawled the million-odd words we say and write and converted the data into a Top 100, the commonest words in English. Heading the list was THE, with BE and TO sharing the podium. Surprisingly, coming in tenth was I, possible proof that egotism may not be as rampant as feared. The lower rungs were occupied by DAY, MOST and US.

Only two words—BECAUSE and PEOPLE—exceed five letters, lending weight to our abbreviation fetish. (And even these can be clipped into COZ and PEEPS.) Along with DAY and PEOPLE, the only other listed nouns were TIME, YEAR, WAY and WORK, the rest answering to verbs (HAVE, DO), pronouns (HE, ME), prepositions (IN, OF, ON) and three adjectives: GOOD, FIRST, NEW.

IRON doesn't qualify, yet all these words are iron-like in their reliability, the raw tools of communication. Shakespeare may have owned some 30,000 different words to fill his canon, but you and I cope with less. (On average, an educated adult has about a third of the Bard's swag.) Though who needs bismuth or iridium when iron fills the breach just as well?

The art of crossword-making, at one level, compares to a kind of alchemy, turning the everyday iron of human expression into gold. One setter who takes this challenge to heart is John Young, alias Shed in *The Guardian*. See the glister he lent these common words below, relying on the double meaning formula:

Perverted aptitude = BENT

One who pinches child = NIPPER

Threaten to go out with The Disemboweller = GUTTER

With Shed, the alchemy analogy is even sounder. When not shaping elegant clues, Young has devoted several years to encoding online conversions of ancient manuscripts, including the doodlings of Sir Isaac Newton. The gig inspired a treatise in 1998 entitled *Faith*, *Alchemy and Natural Philosophy*. Seems mysticism is never too far away from the art

of crossword-making or crossword-solving: that occult knack of making IRON dazzle in a dozen different ways, most of them laterally.

WOULD SIR LIKE PAPADAMS? — vowel dumps and alternative spellings

All this fuss over *decrease*, we've barely glanced at the Master clue's other morsel. *Anaemia* stands apart for owning more vowels than consonants by a large margin, joining the likes of *amoebae*, *nouveau* and *evacuee*. Scrabble players dub them vowel dumps, not a lyrical name, but useful to know when nursing the Hawaiian alphabet in your rack.

Hawaiians, by the way, have a vowel fixation. You won't find a word from their culture where two consonants are side by side. Every time a consonant appears, a vowel must follow, explaining why Maui and Oahu and all those other isles have such ample dumps as *aloha*, *hula-hula*, *taboo* and *ukulele*. This last one, curiously, shares a link with *anaemia*.

Sir Arthur Evans, the man to discover the Palace of Minos on the island of Crete, was an archaeologist. Indiana Jones, on the other hand, is an archaeologist. Notice the difference—AE versus the plain E. This spelling debate has been raging for eons, which were once known as aeons, since the word derives from Ancient Greek.

Already in this chapter I've sprung haemoglobin on you, which Indy Jones would spell without an A. Americans, in fact, began the pruning, turning paediatricians into pediatricians and selling *Encyclopedia Britannica*s door-to-door. Anaemia suffered a similar fate, at least in the USA. Elsewhere, in particular Great Britain and here, the AE/E squabble rages on. Call us aesthetic, but Anglos savour the ancient form, though not universally. *Primaeval* looks even older in that AE-guise, yet most of us have scrapped the A, while still plumping for *orthopaedic* and/or *mediaeval*.

Placing one of these debatable words in a clue is an acceptable risk. Printed on the page, the grey area will be recognised by solvers of the two different camps. (*Grey* on the other hand is emphatically *gray* in America.) Such local variations haunted Clint Eastwood in the 1993 movie *In the Line of Fire*. As Special Agent Frank Horrigan, our man is running against the clock, out to thwart an assassin intent on knocking

off the President. The cut-throat race is showing positive signs when up bobs the word UKULELE.

Or that's how Frank spells it. Agent Chavez, his contact, reckons it's UKELELE. The spelling is crucial, as the right combination is the seven-button number for the San Diego office, which Frank needs to reach before a bullet finds its mark. The dilemma captures the risks inherent in borrowing words from other tongues.

Chiefly an oral culture, Polynesia gave us ukulele via speech, and we haole types have been second-guessing its spelling ever since. While most of us have settled on Frank's version, the UKU-opener, the Oxford Dictionary is still hedging its bets, offering the alternatives of ukelele, ukalele and eukaleli.

Even when the source language has a written tradition, translation can still give rise to dispute. Open any tandoori menu to view the choices attached to such words as *pappadam* (*puppadam? poppadum?*) and *chapatti* (*chapati? chupatti?*).

Another foreign dish, filched from Persia, holds the record for culinary options, with the *Macquarie Dictionary* listing *pilaf, pilau, pulao* and *pilaw*. Imagine the hoopla if a setter picked one of those less favoured versions, just like Araucaria, who toyed with BERTOLDT BRECHT for one entry, rather than BERTOLT, as the majority of solvers insisted. And let's not mention the snakepits that are CHEKHOV, TCHAIKOVSKY and RACHMANINOFE.

Swapping continents, the Libyan ruler Muammar al-Kaddafi is only for the bravest to run in a puzzle. The issue isn't politics or religion or degrees of fame, but a spelling debate. If the Gershwin brothers could write a whole song about the variant pronunciation of tomato, as we hear in 'Let's Call the Whole Thing Off', then an opera's in the wings with the KADDAFI or KHADDAFI pickle. As a few readers may recall, *The West Wing* opened its majestic run with a crossword spat in the 1999 pilot episode. Here's a snippet:

Chief of Staff Leo McGarry: Seventeen across is wrong. It's just wrong. Can you believe that, Ruth?

Staffer Ruth: You should call them.

Leo: I will call them. [long tracking shot through the West Wing]

Margaret! Please call the editor of the *New York Times* crossword and tell him that Khaddafi is spelt with an 'h' and two 'd's and isn't a seven-letter word for anything.

Eventually Leo is connected. What follows is a glimpse of the passion nursed by so many crossword solvers, as well as the perils of playing with alternative spellings:

Leo: Seventeen across. Yes. Seventeen across is wrong. You're spelling his name wrong. What's my name? My name doesn't matter! I'm just an ordinary citizen who relies on the *Times* crossword for stimulation. And I'm telling you that I met the man twice and I've recommended a pre-emptive Exocet missile strike against his air force so I think I know how to—

Click. The phone goes dead.

LATERAL COUPLES

Decrease, we've seen, may well mean iron, just as warbling may refer to a medal (war-bling). Flexing the brain, can you see the lateral links between these 15 couples?

B-team/subside border security/hemlock callbox/title fight canned beef/toxin coma/understate demon drink/impale dunces/thickset doe/party drug

firefly/sack race alee club/joystick letterheads/Y-fronts ninepin/square lea pay phone/wagering reallot/zillion substandard/torpedo travel permit/triplet

HALL OF FAME: DOUBLE MEANINGS

Close walrus relative (4) [Paul, Guardian] Break silence (4) [Dogberry, FT] Trendy a while ago, like vinyl records? (6) [Fawley, Guardian] I order fish (7) [Times 8558] LSD, but not pot, is in this drug box (5,4) [Times 8097] Still together (2,3,4,4) [Orlando, Guardian]

SOLUTIONS: seal, rest, groovy, grouper, upper case, at the same time

QUIZLING 14.1 This device, designed to stretch Out your dough, is a word for wealthy beside a means of accessing cash. Weirdly, no Part in all this is connected to money. What's the device?

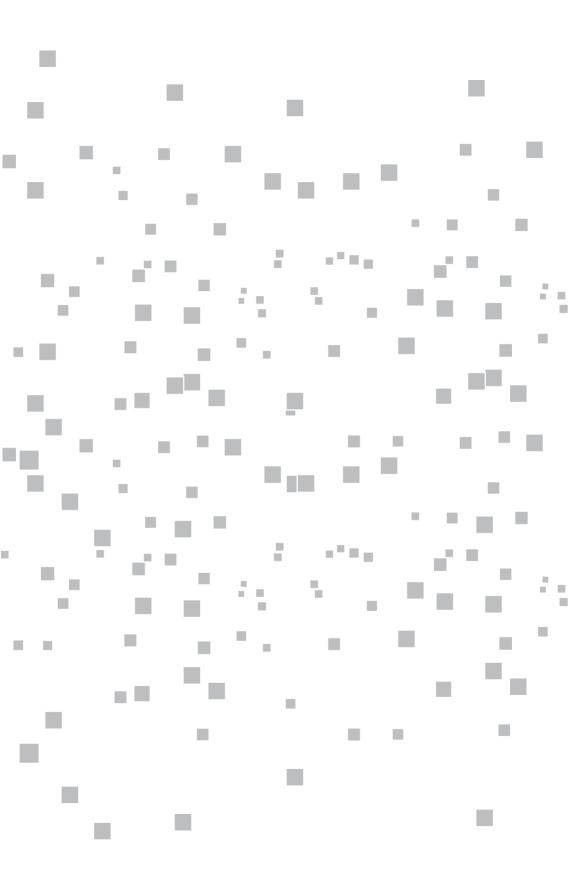
QUIZLING 14.2

Cleave means both to separate as well as to bind together. Also starting with C, what's a simpler word that owns the same two contradictory meanings?

. .

QUIZLING 14.3

If Generous sort = KIND, can you solve these other double meaning clues? Mixing the six initials of the correct answers will solve the double clue, Fix brush. Woved camb (8) Consider host (9) Summit custom (10) Look noble (4) Condition jockey (5) Cattle drive (5)



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CHAPTER 15

As mentioned, weather to get hotter? (5)

Chair/Resign/Felt

Say the words aloud. Does a certain comedian crop up? Not working for you? Then try the trio of *Eye/Sarcasm/Off*.

Can you hear Isaac Asimov? Better than Jerry Seinfeld in the first example? Sketchy, I know, but say these clusters quickly and I'm pretty sure that casual listeners will hear Jerry and Isaac loud and clear. I hope. Since there's always that doubt in the world of sound. Compare a *Seinfeld* episode (where *bomb* sounds like *balm*, or *cumin* comes out *koomin*) with *Wallace and Gromit* (which prefers short-a *grass* and a very long-u in *alluring*) to realise English is a child of multiple fathers.

Nowhere is that truth clearer than in the homophone category. Until now, the clue styles have dealt in letters, or tested an answer's multiple meanings (straight and lateral), yet that kind of comfort deserts us in the distinct realm of sound.

I remember entering an auditory debate in 1983 with a solver named John Le Gotha over the matter of PAWPAW. The impetus was a Wordwit puzzle. Solvers had to find a word of matching halves (such as *dodo* or *beri-beri*) where either syllable sounded the same as three other words. PAWPAW, the solution, did the trick, I thought, as each half mimicked *poor, pore* or *pour*. Yet join the halves, argued Le Gotha, and *paw*'s discrete sound is compromised.

PAW + PAW, he wrote, may equal two PAWS on the page, but as soon as you marry those halves that lavish *awww* sound gets clipped closer to a pair of *oars*. Measure this corruption, Le Gotha went on, against the

purity of AYE-AYE, either the sailor's consent or the possum-like lemur, whose twin parts likewise own three homophones—eye, *I* and ay (the poetic word for alas)—yet preserve their sound quality once coupled.

Small beer, true, but these issues loom large in the world of homophones, where one person's ado will never be another's adieu. I've always considered Ovid, the Roman poet, as matching a Cockney version of hovered, though that whimsy was scorned in 2009 when I ran this homophone clue:

Latin poet and Cockney hung around in recital (4)

Latin poet, of course, is OVID. In the wordplay half, *hung around* points to HOVERED, and Cockney we know signals the h's stripping. *Recital*, the final word, is a homophone signpost, your cue to utter the wordplay's outcome to reveal the answer. I'll talk more about signposts and homophone rules in the next section, but let's get back to that Latin poet, as the argument matters.

In the week of publication, blogs and forums made me 'hear' that my O-VID was not the equal of others' OV-ID. Same poet, different stresses. To nay-sayers, their OVID went closer to mimicking *off-id* (not *hovered*), meaning half the solvers had no idea what a Cockney was doing with an old Roman in the first place.

OVID and PAWPAW typify the delicacy of the homophone area. In 2008 I was locked in a cage-match with the crossword editor, Lynne Cairncross, over a BLOW-UP DOLL. The clue in dispute read like so:

Swell welfare invoice a comfort for the prurient loner (4-2,4)

With BLOW-UP DOLL I'd always presumed the issue would be taste. I was wrong. Taste played second fiddle to sound, the argument going from molehill to mountain in record time.

Teasing out the clue, we're looking at a hybrid, where a double meaning (*Swell* for BLOW UP) combines with a homophone (*welfare*—or dole—matching the sound of DOLL). Or so I thought. Lynne was less convinced. DOLL in her ears did not echo *dole*. 'I don't pronounce it the same way,' she wrote, in her first email. 'My husband doesn't either.'

But I do—that was the hitch. DOLL and DOLE. Say them together, swap them around, utter them in random order and you're all but uttering a singular sound over and over.

Convinced I had the stronger case, I wrote DOLL and DOLE on two words on separate cards and tested their pronunciation with students and tutors at the college where I teach. Even more drastic, I spelt D-O-L-L down the phone to Mum to see if her bias was mine.

Creepily, this speech test revives the infamous Parsley Massacre of 1937. Instead of blow-up dolls the soldiers under Dominican tyrant Rafael Trujillo showed thousands of suspected Haitians a sprig of parsley. 'What's this?' they asked. Should the response be *perejil* with the fricative j of pedigree Spanish intact, then the speaker was safe. However, if the j was soft, the speaker was shot at close range. In the end, some 30,000 speakers were executed, owing to a j's phonetic qualities.

While Lynne and I refrained from gunfire, we both knew the stand-off centred on a shibboleth. The Bible's idea of a password, a shibboleth refers to a term that distinguishes two clans. It stems from the Book of Judges, where the Hebrews of Gilead detected incognito Ephraimites thanks to their inability to pronounce the Hebrew word for flooded stream, or *shibboleth*. Stumble and you were smote.

In a lighter vein, that sci-fi writer we recently met, *Eye/Sarcasm/Off*, refers to a shibboleth in the chemist community. Much like doll-vs-dole, if you wrote UNIONISED on a slip of paper and showed it to a dozen people, then only the chemist would utter UN-IONISED, betraying their vocation. Just as two execs may glance at RESIGN, the pessimist pronouncing the word as a synonym of quit, while the optimist would lay his stress on the first syllable, the word a command to renew his contract.

Lynne and I did not resign over Doll-gate. Why bother? The poll results were a mishmash and rhyming dictionaries had a bob each way. While the *Macquarie* decrees that DOLE rhymes with POLE, and DOLL with POLL, many dissidents in the street insisted that both rhymed with MOLL, or MOLE, depending on whom you asked. In the end, we agreed to disagree. DOLL after all was one word among a thousand we handled every month, an iffy homophone rather than some life-or-death shibboleth. The flame war over, Lynne enjoyed the final quip: 'Can't believe I've spent two days talking about the sound of a blow-up

doll/dole!' But as you've heard already, the way we say words can fuel that kind of passion.

GETTING WARMER — homophone signposts

In the game of charades, an ear-tug signals a rhyme. LIFE, say, may be too vast to portray through mime, so a shortcut could be a pull of the lobe and the imitation of KNIFE. This tactic tells your guesser that the target word is a rhyme of what they're seeing.

In cryptic crosswords that ear-tug compares to a homophone sign-post—a word declaring the audio dimension. Run your eye (and ear) over these four examples:

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Heard sweet animal = MOOSE

Moved material, say = SWAYED

Ten years of rotten report = DECADE

Indulges Chinese vegetarians on the radio? (7)
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Heard is high on the list of signposts, along with all its variations—we hear, in hearing, overheard, hearsay and so on. The moment you encounter a word regarding sound, tune your ear. Essentially the first clue could be repacked into a riddle asking, 'What animal sounds like a sweet?' MOOSE echoes MOUSSE, so the beast is snared.

Ditto for SWAYED, a mimicry of SUEDE, or *material*. Notice how the audio signpost can only apply to the wordplay, and therefore needs to stand shoulder to shoulder with that element, much like anagram signposts need to neighbour the fodder.

DECADE, the third example, relies on *report* to do the flagging. Say aloud DECAYED (or *rotten*)—*report* it—and *ten years* emerge, or DECADE. Or do they? When I tackled this clue in a *Telegraph* collection, my palate wasn't convinced. More of the sex-doll scandal, in a way. Homophones are subtle creatures, which leads us to Chinese vegetarians.

Read it again: *Indulges Chinese vegetarians on the radio*. I've deliberately left this last clue unsolved as a step-through exercise. Rarer homophone clues will call on cuter hearing aids, so to speak—such as *so to speak*, or slyer signposts like *pronounced*, *invoice*, *vocal*, *outspoken* and *utter*.

Another left-field signpost concerns airwaves. Take extra care with any mention of *broadcasting* (a nod to either anagram or homophone), *registered*, *announced* and others. Of course radio is the other eccentric signal, which the final sample uses.

Guessing where the clue's division lies, can you name *Chinese vegetarians* that sound like a word for *indulges*? Come to think of it, can you name a Chinese vegetarian full-stop? Well, here the question mark joins the game. The definition is liable to be looser. Why *Chinese* in the first place? Why not *vegetarians* and leave it at that?

Attacking the clue from the opposite direction, how many synonyms for *indulges* can you list? MOLLYCODDLES is too long. So what about SPOILS? RELAXES? PAMPERS?

That last suggestion rang a faint bell. If not PAMPERS, what about PANDERS? Suddenly the sense of *Chinese vegos* emerges, the PANDAS of the airwaves lead to the PANDERS in the grid. So let's now pull in the Master clue:

As mentioned, weather to get hotter? (5)

Kindly, with *as mentioned* our homophone cue, we have the signpost coming first, removing any qualms about what needs uttering and which end is the answer's definition. Another word for *weather*? Does this mean *weather* in general—climate or elements—or what a forecast can dish out? Possibly there's a third option, with *weather* being a verb meaning endure.

Once more the question mark signals a note of caution, as the definition side could be devious. *To get hotter* may apply to increased fury or spice or raunch or a dozen other tangents—the *weather* even. Let's go back to the wordplay, as well as reviewing what letters the grid can offer.

C is the answer's initial, thanks to COSIMO at 1-Across. That lead alone puts CLIMATE back in the gun, the only suggestion to match that detail. CLIMATE sounds like CLIMB IT, which is almost there. What if we shrink the word to CLIME and test the homophone of CLIMB by itself? Does climb mean *to get hotter*? It does where weather is involved, the column of mercury climbing the tube, and giving you the confidence to enter 1-Down.

Though before writing your answer, double-check if it's CLIME or CLIMB. Which word is *mentioned* in order to create the other? A quick check will tell you that CLIME is spoken to render the other, so CLIMB goes into the grid. Yet before we tackle the next two homophones, a word about the weather.

SMALL VOICE OF PROTEST — partisan clues

Despite the movie's name, *Mercury Rising* is not about global warming but a secret code inside a crossword. The film stars *brew-swillers*, the aural equal of Bruce Willis, playing his usual crusader, this time trying to protect an autistic kid called Simon from an evil bureaucrat called *knickerless-could-row*, that is Nicholas Kudrow, played by Alec Baldwin.

Simon, we discover, is the only living American who can break the National Security Agency's code called Mercury. As a bragging exercise, the code-makers bury their new cipher in a puzzle, asking any successful solver to call the agency's number. Simon does, and does. The cryptographers are furious. Their only solution? To kill this pre-teen savant, as he poses a threat to federal security.

Life-or-death politics may seem misplaced in a crossword, but some compilers actively embrace the edgier subjects. CLIMB could inspire a dozen different clues, from charade (C + LIMB) to hidden (acrobatic limbo), yet the homophone option felt tailor-made for making a geothermal statement. Stepping through what recipes we've already met, let's take a look at a few more political 'statements' in the guise of clues.

Sleuth (alias Philip Marlow) composed the first example for the *Financial Times*:

Role in law spun—typical of Blair = ORWELLIAN

Remembering Orwell's real name was Eric Blair, this is a wicked anagram aimed at Tony Blair. Then we have charade politics, this time by Orense from the same paper:

Carbon charge for old car = C + RATE

Or a container, as executed by The Guardian's Arachne:

President who is snide about English-speaking nation = SARK(OZ)Y

Or a hybrid, pairing anagram with charade, conjured by Arachne in the same puzzle:

Our men going off to join American legion = NUMERO+US

Or a hidden, such as this Times gem:

Chancellor conceals big fiddle = CELLO

And finally two of my own, a double meaning and a homophone, both with a drop of satirical acid:

Scrub US president = BUSH

Monkey with outspoken craft in the Howard Years? = TAMPA

This last answer alludes to a Norwegian cargo ship that saved several hundred refugees from the Indian Ocean in 2001. Effectively the vessel became a seaborne prison as the Australian government hemmed and hawed about what to do with the castaways. The result was a makeshift policy dispatching the Afghanis to a detention compound in Nauru until more red tape could be fetched. The name of this policy—PACIFIC SOLUTION—has 15 letters, the ideal crossword length, and the central plank in my partisan theme. To clue the entry I took my chance to express my politics through the avenue of an anagram:

Howard's cop-out worsening pitiful occasion!

RECIPE PRECIS: HOMOPHONES

Listen up. Sound is everything in the homophone family, hence the signposts below (some more subtle than others) opt for audio. In the next two chapters we'll hear about double homophones, and how the formula can fall into hybrid clues, but for now, cock your ear to these warning calls:

announced, apparently, articulate, as they say, auditor, broadcast, by the sound of it, caught, echo, given voice, hear, in audition, in auditorium, in canal, in conversation, in speech, invoice, noisily, on the airwaves, on the radio, orally, outspoken, picked up, pronouncement, register, related, reported, say so, sound, spoken, they tell us, utter, vocal, we hear

QUIZLING 15.1

If _{urn-yells} mimics Ernie Els, can you arrange each cluster below to sound out six more famous names?

pacy, fins, care nerve, shark, villa iaw, yet, jelly riff, nicks, furphy luck, rubble, sand honour, corers, kino

QUIZLING 15.2

What beverage owns a homophone that describes what you'll do if you drink too much of the same beverage?

• • • •

QUIZLING 15.3

Two words. One means approval, the other opposition. And amazingly, When both words are changed into their homophones, the result is a new pair of opposites. What are the four

CHAPTER 16

Soundly ushered back and docketed (9)

Arthur Wynne stared at the emptiness. With no retail ad to run, no snippet off the wires, the *New York World* subeditor cursed the space on the Amusements page, wondering how he'd ever fill it. Deadline was looming. So desperation struck—he invented the crossword.

Or Word-Cross, as Wynne called it. Diamond in shape, with a hollowed centre, the diagram comprised 72 squares with small numbers inscribed on all the outer and inner extremes. 'Fill in the small squares with words which agree with the following definitions,' he wrote below the diagram. To give solvers a fighting chance the grid also sported the hand-drawn letters of FUN in the upper quadrant.

This was 1913, the year the zipper was invented, the year Henry Ford trialled the assembly line in Detroit, and Yorkshire factories won the world's attention with stainless steel. Down under, the first sod of Canberra was turned. The new world was evolving, but was it ready for its first crossword? Or word-cross—or wait, was this puzzle truly the first?

Even today, arguments simmer over whether Wynne's work can lay claim to being the prototype. *The Guinness Book of World Records* affords the honour to an English children's magazine named *St Nicholas* that ran a solid word-diamond in 1875. Hyperion was its mystery compiler, named after the Titan god of light, yet his or her creation lacked squares or clue numbering. Close, I'd say, but no *Havana product (5)*.

Intriguingly, Wynne himself grew up in Liverpool, cracking puzzles in *St Nicholas* with his grandfather. Word squares—or magic squares—were regular features: prim waffle patterns where every word appeared the same both across and down. Pushing the formula further, Hyperion had

his diamond, and elsewhere in the magazine were acrostics (where tops and tails of listed answers are spelt to solve an overall conundrum), yet none mirrored the modern crossword, complete with symmetry, numbers and tabled clues.

To enhance his innovation, Wynne made his clues pretty basic. Opposed to less, for example, was MORE. A talon a CLAW, while DRAW was What artists learn to do. Longer entries were no less generous with A written acknowledgement being a RECEIPT, and REVERIE A day dream. Really the only devils were A Russian river (NEVA), A fist (NEIF) and NARD—An aromatic plant. Leaving the paper that day, Arthur had no inkling his stopgap remedy would spark a frenzy across the eastern seaboard, and later the world.

Sequels followed quickly. Wynne's paper ran a second word-cross before the year was out, and a bank of readers' creations into January. Word-crosses, by that stage, had switched into being cross-words, possibly due to an editorial slip, the hyphen soon lapsing in tandem with the pastime's rising fever.

At the craze's height, the New York Library limited consultation time for dictionaries. The B&O commuter trains between Maryland and Ohio stocked reference books to assist the passengers' puzzle-solving. Broadway musicals embraced the novelty with songs, including the classic 'Crossword Mama, You Puzzle Me, But Papa's Gonna Figure You Out'.

Chequered patterns seized Greenwich Village boutiques. Mention of the puzzle popped up in sermons, classrooms and even divorce proceedings. (Plaintiff Mary Zaba of Chicago mournfully described herself as a crossword widow, suing her husband for neglect. She won, her contrite fellow agreeing to reduce his daily fix to three grids.)

Nonetheless there remained one more space to fill—the bookshelf. A woman known as Aunt Wixie was chatting with her nephew, Richard Simon, in 1924. She wondered why she couldn't find any crossword book for her daughter to solve. Later that week, when Simon did his homework, confirming the gap in the market, he got in touch with his old mate, Max, from Columbia, the two joining forces to remedy the problem. Under the banner of Plaza Publishing, the entrepreneurs secured puzzles from across the newsstand at \$25 a pop, binding them into one volume with a pencil attached. The resulting sales surpassed

300,000, providing the seed capital for the publishing empire we've come to know as Simon & Schuster.

About this time, English papers tested the format on their own readers. The first UK crossword, it's believed, appeared in 1922 in *Pearson's Magazine*, the cradle of such distinguished writers as George Bernard Shaw and HG Wells. One explanation for the puzzle's slow migration across the Atlantic ties it to an article appearing in *The Times* about the same period. Entitled 'AN ENSLAVED AMERICA', the piece identified the crossword as 'making devastating inroads on the working hours of every rank of society'. Five million man-hours, estimated the writer, were squandered daily. The Land of the Free, feared England, was no longer.

Before too long, however, the fever soon crippled Old Blighty too. By the late 1920s, most magazines and papers carried the black-and-white menace, though *The Times* itself—just like the *New York Times*—resisted the fad till nearer World War 2 when bleak news needed some kind of nostrum. The *Sydney Morning Herald* followed suit, the first crossword appearing in 1934, adorning the Women's Supplement.

Away from America, spicing up most other recipes, was the cryptic element. Though the move from definition to wordplay was organic, with hoopoe inquiries to London Zoo slowly turning into anagram scribbling on the Piccadilly bus.

As to why the English solver had a stronger appetite for deviant clues, all sorts of theories abound. One relates to a stronger tradition of parlour games, with Queen Victoria herself an addict of wordplay and acrostics. Another embraces a book like *Alice in Wonderland*, the secular gospel of British childhood, its author Lewis Carroll noted for his love of letterplay. A third theory is straight-out envy. If a former colony can invent a new verbal form, huffed John Bull, then we can re-invent it.

Prime mover in that regard was Oxford poet and translator Edward Powys Mathers, who found a niche in *The Observer* from 1926 onward. Creating what many deem to be the first cryptic puzzles, Mathers was the man to blend the American interlock with wry Anglo clues, choosing the alias of Torquemada after a prominent torturer during the time of the Spanish Inquisition. (A generation later, inheriting the same gig, Derrick Macnutt selected the fellow torturer Ximenes in honour of the

genre's forefather.) The coming decades would see the art-form evolve, with quotation clues and naked anagrams changing into slimmer specimens that Ximenes went on to codify.

Yet cunning as these early setters were, surely the oldest crossword debt must be repaid to Arthur Wynne. Common mortals cringe at the terror of the blank page, but Wynne decided to crisscross words and clue them, whatever the level of difficulty. In a small way our latest Master clue—Soundly ushered back and docketed—salutes Arthur's act of desperation.

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER — Wynn's fix and wiggle words

Pity those who invented glue or silk or scissors—these neat ideas prompted umpteen imitations, yet the originators would barely see a penny.

Such characters compare to Leonhard Euler, the Swiss number-cruncher whose doodles now serve as the bedrock for the Sudoku empire, 200 years later. Or Arthur Wynne, the man to omit a © among those 72 other letters he wove into his diamond. Soundwise, you have to say, Mr Wynne missed a win. If only he'd been a little shrewder, his family might now be making money hand over NEIF.

Which leads me to the other reason I sympathise with Wynne: his Vertical Clue N-8, where *A fist* leads to the lousy answer of NEIF. To a setter's mind, the word represents a clumsy escape from a tight corner. In hindsight the pattern could have taken a minor tweak to accept the stronger NEIL or NAIF—but no. Arthur opted for Scottish via Old Norse, a word that was quaint and dialectic even to his peers.

Even the best do it—running one dubious entry that stands apart from the grid's more familiar fill. Last year I succumbed to LOST CAT in one puzzle, and OPEN TEAM in another, two lacklustre phrases added in the name of preserving a high number of themed answers. That kind of lapse can only be forgiven if the remainder of the puzzle is pleasingly dense and interrelated.

Let's imagine you wish to fill your grid with cocktails—MAITAI and DAIQUIRI, SIDECAR and MANHATTAN. Pretty soon the drinks

will run dry, as no grid will let you load theme words with impunity—or any words you'd rather. Tighter corners will call on generic words. Usually the magic number of themed answers that elite setters can fit into a 15x15 grid is thirteen, with more entries a bonus, and a few words less, a modest feat. Now and then, to preserve that number, a LOST CAT may stray into the picture, if only to protect the likes of MARGARITA.

The great Araucaria yielded to TREK CART in 2004 to allow the grid to carry a lengthy quote. In America, among the tighter grids that Wynne ordained, the claustrophobia is relieved by such wiggle words as roman numerals, acronyms, third basemen and phrase chunks such as OF A, or IS TO. No argument from me—Americans are interlock wizards, with US software the rising leader in this regard. More to the point, the odd peccadillo is pulp by month's end, a solver forgiving that rare copout if the overall clue mix is rewarding. Yet poor old Arthur went for NEVA—that Russian river—plus a few other dodgy terms, including TANE (clued as *One*) and now his diamond is forever.

Anyhow, that's the bad news. Better news relates to the current clue we're solving. At the drawing board, when first listing words to include in the Master Puzzle, I was keen to share an entry that Arthur himself had chosen back in 1913. But it seems I was overlooking the words of LB: 'After the first dozen entries, the crossword takes over.' As so it proved with this puzzle.

Don't worry. It's not a LOST CAT—but it does embody a compromise. After BINOCULARS and IRON and several other terms had seized their berths early, I had little choice but to modify my ambition, captured most clearly by the answer to our second homophone. You'll soon discover the entry's not precisely the word that Arthur selected, but an extension:

Soundly ushered back and docketed (9)

Tuning your ear, you'll recognise *soundly* as the aural signal. So what is being sounded? Neither *ushered* nor *ushered back* offers abundant synonyms. At times this shortfall (remember the *Chinese vegetarians?*) can be helpful, reducing your options to a few prime candidates. Yet here the scarcity of possible synonyms can also make you agonise.

Past tense, *ushered* is another word for LED, or GUIDED or DIRECTED. But what about the *back* part? If you're led back to a place, are you being re-led? Re-steered? Could that be the clue's drift? The moviegoer has left her seat halfway through the film, and is therefore reseated by the ushering staff. Say that again. RECEIPTED. That's what I thought you said!

To allay any doubts, RECEIPT can be a verb, according to most dictionaries. To acknowledge payment by the issuing of paperwork, says the consensus.

But what about the word's cadence? This is the perilous realm of sound, after all. Do RECEIPTED and RESEATED own the same emphases? What say you inflate a blow-up phonetician and have that discussion with him. According to all sources, they are virtually interchangeable, meaning the wordplay is sound.

Far more troubling, apropos of *docketed*, is the parking fine I copped outside the noodle bar the week I made this crossword. This wretched luck leads us to a very different discussion, one among the great unspoken topics of puzzle-making: Accidental Voodoo.

FROM DIAMOND TO CRYSTAL — omen clues and accidental voodoo

Churning out a metric tonne of words and clues every year, it's only natural—or supernatural—that some of my selected entries will be published with eerie timing.

Like that parking ticket. Admittedly the sign said *No Standing*, and the noodle bar wasn't an emergency, but when I re-seated myself in the Subaru and noticed the yellow paperwork fluttering under the wiper I felt aggrieved and hexed at the same time.

Part of me blames RECEIPTED. Piteous I know, but maybe if I'd chosen another Wynne word, or tried a second recipe, then I'd never have ended up buying a curry laksa for the equivalent of \$195. RECIPE, in fact, can be found in RECEIPTED, followed by TED—a bear. Was that a safer bet? Abolish all talk of dockets and tickets, so ditching the chance for bad juju to intervene . . .

I realise how loco this sounds, but there have been occasions in my 30 years of puzzle-making where I feel as if I've left my fingerprints on a series of unfortunate events.

Roh Moo-hyun, for one, the former president of South Korea, is not a name you hear every day. Yet in May 2008 I went with ROH for an Omega answer. Back then I saw no harm in recruiting the gentleman, his first name at least. South Korea is an Australian neighbour after all, and Omegas often have a strain of current affairs. Sadly the decision backfired three days after the puzzle ran to press, a headline screaming: 'KORE-ANS MOURN ROH AFTER SUICIDE PLUNGE'.

You could understand my gooseflesh.

A similar grim coincidence involved Bea Arthur, the Golden Girl, who left us the week another Omega appeared, prompting the Pagemasters gang to send a list of other VIPs they were eager to jinx. For a while there I gained the reputation of being Dr Doom, one mention in my puzzles enough to snuff the best of them. Even a generic word like AVALANCHE, in August of the same year, coincided with an ice cornice detaching in the Kosciuszko National Park, entombing a snowboarder.

Ghoulish, flippant—I run the risk of being accused of either here, I know. Or worse—New Age. But when the hex descends I feel like a voodoo doctor, summoning heartbreak on all those named.

Being rational for a moment, I realise that one ROH MOO-HYUN outweighs a hundred BONOs, BRAD PITTs and TONY BLAIRs—a thousand names who pass through a puzzle with karmic immunity. Yet when the creepy echo occurs, you can't help but overhear it.

Like the day I saw a verbal quirk in Layne Beachley's name. I ran the whim in a Wordwit to appear beside the features section. Unfortunately the surfing champ happened to be the cover-girl that week, and not for the happiest of reasons. In a story called SHOCK WAVE, Beachley bravely discussed her own adoption scandal for the first time, a dark truth that had only recently come to light. Suddenly the anguish was on public record—27 September—the day Beachley discovered (a) her harrowing past and (b) that her last nine letters, when mixed, spelt BELLYACHE.

Still in the ocean, I clued TSUNAMI on the eve of the 2008 Samoan disaster. I've opted for LETTERMAN (seeing its postie potential) on the week of the TV host's blackmail blowup.

Wheeling out words, compilers are prone to such chilly flukes. Ann Tait, a stalwart setter at the *Daily Telegraph*, had the fright of her life in 1990 when her clue for BLUE MURDER (*Outcry caused by Tory assassination*) appeared two days after the IRA wired a bomb under Conservative MP Ian Gow's car, killing him.

Yet in 2006, thank God, one omen clue was saved from appearing. The answer was ZOO, one letter short of ZOOM, I noticed, so inspiring your first glimpse at the deletion formula:

Steve Irwin's property career cut short (3)

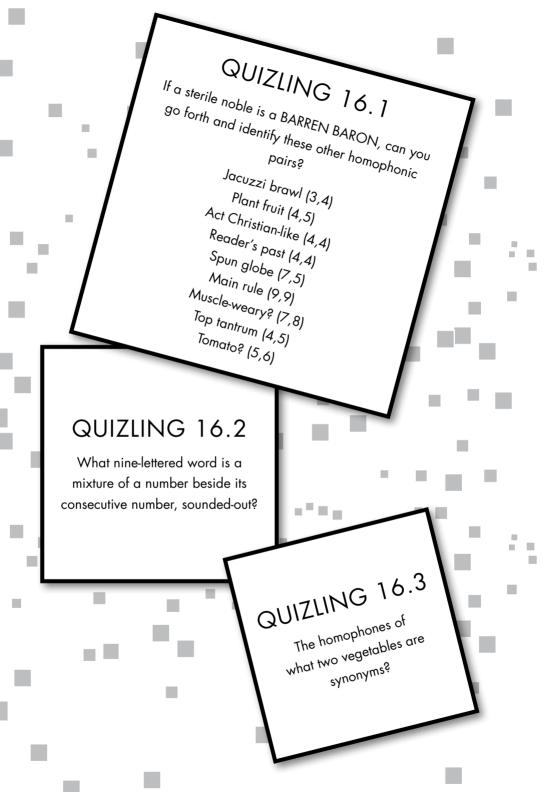
Career is ZOOM. Cut short, that's ZOO, an enterprise that the Irwin family own in Queensland. Run the clue in the same week a stingray barb stabs the man's heart and you had the makings of a national outcry. But thanks to quick thinking and a last-minute change, Steve was left in peace and ZOO found a harmless alternative.

As grisly as the Irwin clue could have been, the eeriest example of crossword voodoo in my life was a triple-whammy in 2003. I was the solver on this occasion. The *Times* puzzle ran on the day a book was being launched, a true-crime story I'd written with Senior Constable Joe D'Alo of Victorian Police. An insider's account of a murder case, *One Down, One Missing* shadows the investigation of two police officers shot during stakeout duties in 1998. Controversial for several reasons, not least due to Joe's inside status and the consequent threat of suspension, the launch attracted a fair amount of publicity.

We'd tried to keep the book under wraps for as long as possible, but the secret was out and the TV crews were swarming. Before the event, dodging any media, I took time out in a Flinders Lane café, seeking solace in a crossword. These were the clues I read:

Police officers two similar men replaced = SUPERS+ED+ED
Suspended? Previously one would be kept in = ON(I)CE
Unprecedented release just becoming known = RECORD-BREAKING

Trying not to flinch I folded the paper shut, checked the napkin dispenser for listening devices and left.



CHAPTER 17

Nation hunting craft in Italian canal, say (9)

I still see the dread on my young daughter's face when I told her we were going to the top of Centrepoint Tower in Sydney. Her fear, I presumed, was acrophobic. If anything like her mum, the girl probably distrusted skyscrapers, but for Tess the nightmare related to creepy-crawlies. Who in their right mind would choose to visit Centipede Tower?

Linguists know these slips as egg-corns, the 'fruit' of misheard words and phrases, named after a child's own versions of the true word, *acorns*. In the 'temple lobe' of the egg-corner's brain, if all goes well, babies sleep in the feeble position, executives get French benefits, while some senior citizens suffer old-timer's disease.

Column 8, a daily potpourri of readers' observations in the *Herald*, hoards egg-corns like a bionic squirrel, from Jesus and the Twelve Possums (as seen in your local naiveté play) to an anxious person hanging on tender hooks. Comic homophones also rate a mention, with real estate hoardings the prime candidates for claiming such attractions as sheik addresses, on-sweet bathrooms and laundry shoots. A reader in Kangaroo Valley reported a lost cat notice she saw. Fittingly, the missing moggy was 'Ginger and white with blue flee collar.'

Away from egg-corns and homophone fluffs, there's the other mess of human mishearing, or misunderstanding, where boxer Mike Tyson, after chomping on an opponent's earlobe, longed to 'fade into Bolivian', or an aspiring suitor is described as the 'pineapple of politeness'. This last quote belongs to Mrs Malaprop, a character in Richard Sheridan's play *The Rivals*. Thanks to this dame's clumsy tongue, any ill-suited word or phrase goes by the name of malapropism.

A college friend collects these booboos like normal people collect snow domes or beer coasters. Her list is impressive, from social piranha to buggering belief. For Rose a trip to India comprised weeks of scouring menus in the hope of such treasures as cinema rolls and meshed potato. Both sound like the kind of dishes to expect on the Australian sitcom *Kath & Kim*, a show featuring two alfalfa females using pacific terms in effluent society.

I didn't know whether to laugh or take offence when a caustic letter from a solver in 1993 claimed that one of my crossword clues, involving the unsavoury homophone of the Jewish HORA, was anti-semantic.

Language learning in its early phases is all about the ear. A toddler has only sketchy notions of letters, even vaguer ones about semantics, and yet seems to manage surprisingly well to imitate what parents or siblings say. A small child doesn't care how you spell YOGHURT, or about the word's Turkish history, just so long as blurting 'yo-kit' or 'yoke-cut' works on Mum, and the kid usually gets what he wants.

Second-guessing pop lyrics relives the experience for us literate beings. If we think Madonna is pining for 'Louise the Bra-Eater' (instead of 'La Isla Bonita') or the Cuban chant of 'Guantanamera' is all about a 'One-ton tomato', then who really cares? So long as we get to sing along with the radio, the imagined words make as much sense as those in the next tune. A vast amount of early language comes from soaking up sounds and echoing back an approximation. Until being shamed of course, or corrected, or we go check the sleeve notes.

I felt like a kid reborn when working on a cargo ship back in 1986, learning Spanish from a deckhand named Javier. A craggy Galician in his early fifties, Javier was born with a crocheted cap on his scalp and a Lucky Strike lodged on his lower lip. Between puffs, he taught me basic Spanish. Most nights, from 2000 to 2400 hours, we'd stand on night watch, Javier making small talk and yours truly playing parrot. Over three months, from Sydney to Oslo, we developed our chat from 'The sea is big' to 'The moon is beautiful' to 'Hecho crucigrammas' (or 'I make crosswords').

Spanish and crosswords in fact were my antidotes to the rigours of a long trip. The work was tough, compared to mixing letters. I had to clean the engine room from stem to stern, my body-clock unsprung by three months of racing the sun. When I wasn't scrubbing valves or painting

bilge pumps I was trying to relax with a word puzzle—solving or making one—or reading fat books like *Moby Dick* and Gogol novels, or else standing on the bridge in the beautiful moonlight, growing bilingual under a watchman's eye.

Javier had vaguely heard of *crucigrammas*, but cryptics were another dimension. Keeping things simple, relying on the present tense and my callow vocab, I tried in vain to enlighten the bloke, telling him of 'trucos' (tricks) and 'mal direcciones', but the sailor wagged his head and laughed. He dug around in his overalls and lit another Lucky Strike. 'Despacio,' he said, something of a mantra with Javier—Slowly. You can't hope to master a language in a hurry, just as cryptic crosswords demand your care and perseverance, whether you're manipulating letters or voicing experimental sounds.

PUZZLE OVER SECOND SOUND — double homophones

CROW lacks a true homophone, as does SHADE, but put them together and CROCHETED materialises. Does that mean the same verb when spoken equals black—the one and only crow-shade?

BOW has a homophone in BEAU, just as TIE owns THAI. Together, of course, the pair makes BOWTIE. Yet when the syllables switch positions, the same piece of apparel turns into TAE BO, the aerobic fad of the 1990s. Effectively a clue for this observation could read:

Exercise regime switching formal wear, say (3,2)

Code red, people. We're about to confront the double homophone, where CRUSADE turns into CREW'S AID (a map? a compass?) or TROUSSEAU can be reversed to seem SO TRUE. A few chapters back, where a simple toolshed once held such things as hammers and nails, or even homophonic plains and leavers, the same stash in double-homophone hands may include the meet-acts, the banned-sore, the mettle-phial and more.

Reflecting this new complexity, the harder clues in the homophone range will ask you to sound at least two separate syllables or words in order to bag your answer. In a sense, you could say, the innocence of a single sound has been lost to the double homophone. Here are three examples. The first pair was pulled from *Times* puzzles, the last one is mine:

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Tree said to be less healthy on heath = SYCAMORE ('sicker + moor')

Puzzle over second sound = ACROSTIC ('across + tick')

Audience bear Cockney's corny music machine = KARAOKE ('carry + 'okey')
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Can you see the double billing in all three clues? The signposts vary—said, sound, audience—but the trick is consistent. No different in fact than the subterfuge lurking in our current clue though with a more ambient twist.

Let me explain. MAP, you'll recall, was an all-encompassing suggestion for CRUSADE ('hearing' the double homophone as *crew's aid* rather than *crews* + *aid*). In the same vein BLACK could be the ambient definition of CROCHETED, in sound at least, or TOILET BLOCK could be the upshot of hearing LUCILLE (*loo-seal*). Entering a similar zone, our next Master clue asks you to pair two sounds together, treating the coupling as an entity. Let's take a look at it:

Nation hunting craft in Italian canal, say (9)

To help our cause, glancing at the grid, we know the answer ends in A. Second to that, given the audio signal appears as the tail, we can speculate that our answer is a country, since *Nation* is the clue's opener. Backing up that idea, the extended phrases of *Nation hunting*, or *Nation hunting craft*, make as a much sense as grammar to a toddler. One glimpse, and we've established three things:

- 1. We're after a place on the map.
- 2. It ends with A.
- 3. Homophones are implicated, as signalled by say.

Frequently, when two wordplay elements combine, or the wordplay cleaves to the definition, a linkword is called on. Low-key is best, with

joiners such as *with* or *on* or *and* describing the wordplay process, as well as refining the clue's surface sense.

Sometimes, to glue the pieces with a little more flair, the link can be a verb such as making or seeing. (For example, *Jim too drunk to make cocktail* = MOJITO.) *Hunting*, however, as appears in our current clue, is off-limits. Too conspicuous, and it cannot be justified to describe any wordplay operation. Which means the word must be a vital piece of wordplay, either in its own right or helping to qualify the *craft* we're seeking, just as *music* created a clearer picture of *machine* in the KARAOKE sample.

The cargo ship that gave me Spanish was not a hunting craft. All she did was roll-on-roll-off Japanese cars and carry steel boxes filled with cane furniture from Malaysia or clothing from Taipei. In three months the crew enjoyed its share of drama, from stowaways in Panama to a crewman booze-tanked in New Orleans. In the north Pacific we lurched hard left to dodge a basking whale. While the monster wasn't white, I felt like Ahab with his missing limb, cursing the behemoth as I tumbled headlong across my cabin.

Not only true, the whale story is also your clue-within-a-clue. But if that's not working for you, then let's explore Italian canals.

Depending on the paper's slant, most puzzle setters will presume the solver has a lay knowledge of geography. Rubicon, a crossword I make for the *Macquarie Dictionary*'s own gazette, has licence to use recondite words—like recondite—since obscurer words lie in reach of a more linguistic audience. Yet for the general public, when it comes to a topic like Venice, say, no fair-minded compiler would expect his solvers to know *Canale de Fabbri*, or *Canale di Fuseri*, or any other capillary I've yanked off Google Maps. The Grand Canal is the long and short of most of it. Anything else is too parochial, too specialist. Other Italian regions have their canals too, but Venice is the main game, so if the words *Italian* and *canal* get cosy you can be confident that Venice is where our gaze needs to linger.

Whales? Venice? Or said another way: Venice? Whales?

Since the clue asks for *hunting craft*, and not its prey, then WHALER is the word we need to try, assuming EELER and PRAWNER are out. Integrally, treating the two sounds as a single unit, could the *Pequod* of the Adriatic be a VENICE WHALER? Say it isn't so. But it is, we hear. Say it again. Fill it in. You've solved your last—and toughest—homophone.

CRUCIGRAMMAS — non-English cryptics and Javier

Before doing Cargo-ship Spanish, I did five years of Latin at high school, reciting the Roman hiphop of *amo, amas, ama*. Mates and career counsellors would tut-tut on a regular basis. 'What are you doing a dead language for?' To which I'd retort *carpe diem*, which roughly translates as 'I don't really know'.

Short of options, I did German too, less dead in comparison, though from an Australian perspective, especially a white-bread, pre-Web 1970s perspective, Deutschland was no less remote than the Circus Maximus. Ancient history or the northern hemisphere: both felt a million miles away, making the offer of a cargo ship, at the age of 25, a chance to break out of a vacuum.

Hopping off in Oslo, tramping south, I found it bewildering to meet Bavarians who actually knew the phrase *Guten Tag*. Not only that, they answered back. I felt like asking, 'Did you study with Miss Baker too?'—though I lacked the fluency for that.

I'd been to Italy before, defecting from the rugby tour when barely out of pimple cream, but even on my second visit, catching up with family, I still felt confounded that Latin didn't hold much currency in the land of Claudius.

Dazed from the overnight train, I staggered about the Stazione de Roma Termini wondering why none of the citizens knew what *ipso facto* meant. What was the problem? 'Didn't you invent the bloody language?' I quizzed the cab driver. Or more: '*Vos reperio maldita lingua?*' The cabbie shrugged. He took my money and left me on the corner of Via Bari and Via Catanzaro, where I went to find my *matertera*—which meant aunt—but not in Italian.

Mum's younger sister, Auntie Glen, had done what I was doing a generation before. Back then, also in her twenties, the Roseville girl had fled suburbia to end up in the Eternal City with a wedding rock and a tall Alitalia pilot named Cesare. Once we'd exchanged the usual double kisses, Glen gave me a wad of lire and told me to lose the beard. 'Here,' she said, 'por favore, go find a barber.'

'A tonsor,' I corrected her.

She pointed to Piazza Bologna. 'A barbiere'.

Curiously, Auntie Glen shared the puzzle itch as well. When not

creating subtitles for American movies, she nutted out these dense Italian word squares in a magazine called *Settimana Enigmistica*, a puzzle weekly full of wordplay and rebus puzzles—even a splash of Latin. Back in Australia, growing up with Jessie, Glen had also learnt to tackle cryptics, but the genre had yet to find a niche in Rome. Instead she got her fix in fact from haphazard dispatches of *Herald* puzzles—some of them mine—sent by friends from Australia. The smell of gum leaves, the drone of lawn-mowers and LB's anagrams were Glen's three reminders of her *patria*.

So where was the Italian cryptic, I wondered. Or the Dutch version? The French? How come Javier the Spanish watchman had no idea of what I did for a crust, assuming I was choosing the right words for my explanation?

The closest I came to finding a foreign-language cryptic was Frankfurt, where that city's paper ran a crossword with a few elongated clues, but on closer reading these went closer to puns, rather than abiding the Cryptic Code of Conduct.

Subsequent research has only confirmed my hunch. The Hindu Times has a lively cryptic made by local setters, as do other outposts of the British Empire, with the shared component being English. Our mongrel language seems custom-bred for duplicity. Like the black hole of space, pulling in fragments of any passing dialect, English has the ideal fusion of influences, with its erratic spelling, its promiscuous roots, the multiple shades of utterance and meaning—where MOLE can be a mammal, a skin blemish, a breakwater, a spy or (when spoken with two syllables) a chocolate sauce. And that's one word—serving as five—in a language of almost a million.

Writing half a novel, I left Italy and met up with my Australian girl-friend Lynda. We found a flat in Madrid together. She scored a job at the United Nations, typing up reports about the nuclear aftermaths of Pacific atolls, while I played rugby for Madrid University, existing on a false student visa claiming I was studying architecture.

I constructed crosswords instead, and continued the habit of gathering new Spanish words, striving for fluency, yet so much of my vocab harked back to the ship. I felt trapped inside a Conrad novel, the Spanish translation of one, where all I seemed to know were sea conditions and maritime slang.

Did those six months—living as a Spaniard-lite—impact on the puzzle-making? Yes on both levels—the flexibility that comes with a bilingual brain, and the small jewels I found hiding in a whole new treasury of words. TESORO, for example, the Spanish word for *treasure*, is also a blend of SORTEO—their word for *lottery*. Our word ORDEALS is their anagram for DOLARES, or *money*, depicting the lot of every wage-slave. Their RECETA (*recipe*) is our CREATE.

If I stayed any longer in Spain, if the visa scam didn't backfire and we hadn't been turfed inside seven months, I might still be an expat like Auntie Glen, bringing cryptic crosswords to the children of Pisarro. As it was, I played for the Uni Quince (or *fifteen*). When I wasn't stumbling on such marvels as UNO + CATORCE (1 + 14) being a blend of CUATRO + ONCE (4 + 11), I was crash-tackling Basques or getting hammered in return. Towards the end of the season, playing in San Sebastian in Spain's northwest, I got my chance to learn the eerie power of voice, which seems a fitting way to finish our homophone section.

Javier had described his native village so well that I'd already visited the place in my mind: the deli on the corner with giant wheels of cheese, the stone church, the Virgin and the Martyr, the two statues guarding the plaza. I ate salted cod in the bar I'd already imagined, and drank the sailor's favourite beer, Estrella. But when I sauntered over to the domino tables, asking after Javier, I knew there was trouble by the shadow that fell across the men's faces. They didn't wish to speak too much. Instead they gave directions to his home. A further clue was Maria, his wife, dressed in black, and the look of dread in her eyes when I started speaking.

'Hola,' I started. 'Me llamo David. Soy de Australia. Trabje con su marido sobre el barco . . .'

'Venga,' she yelled, calling to others inside the house, and suddenly the doorway was jammed with three or four faces, a boy in his late teens, and two young women roughly my age, all of them wearing that same startled expression. 'Habla,' they said. Speak.

Javier, I soon gathered, their father, Maria's husband, was dead. His heart had collapsed somewhere in Africa on the reverse run to Sydney, and I pictured those Lucky Strike cartons he stacked like bricks in his cabin. I tried to say sorry. To express my grief, to say what a patient mentor he was, but the family hungered for something else. Talk about

anything, they said—your country, your football, your *crucigrammas* if you must—so they could close their eyes and listen to the cadence of Javier's voice.

HALL OF FAME: HOMOPHONES

Heard question about identity of Cockney killer? (3) [Times 8376]

On the radio, get bigger hits (6) [Times 8552]

Bound to believe in pronouncement (7) [Orlando, Guardian]

Articulate frontier resident (7) [Patrick Berry, US]

Girl following nose, we hear (7) [Puck, Guardian]

A jousting contest said to be brief (8) [Times 8271]

SOLUTIONS: Uzi, whacks, trussed, boarder, Nanette, attorney

QUIZLING 17.1

There's a European country that opens its name with another part of Europe. Curiously, the rest of the country's name sounds like that other part's typical weather. Where on earth are we talking about?

QUIZLING 17.2

Homophones—such as PRIZE and PRISE—typically share more than a few letters. Yet what five separate homophone pairs reveal not a single letter shared by either partner? Award yourself a prize for naming three pairs at least.

QUIZLING 17.3

Remarkably this three-letter word has a five-letter homophone, Which can then move its end letter to the front to spell a synonym of the original word. Name this unique trio.

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CHAPTER 18

Outlaw fled outlaw to repeat (5)

Roger Anderson, a Sydney reader of the *Herald*'s Column 8, went to school during the 1940s. He recalled a certain Scripture teacher teaching the flock a moral piece of wordplay. If it doesn't make you see the light, then at least you'll see how the deletion formula works:

A habit is a hard thing to get rid of. Take away the H, and you've still got a bit. Take away the A, and the bit's still there. Take away the B, and you've still got it. Take away the I [point to self], and you've got it down to a t.

That's the principle—less is the key. When BLAIR loses face, so to speak, the former English leader becomes LAIR, a beast's home. (Which is bizarre when you consider another PM—EDEN—does the very same thing.)

Deletions encourage striking, though not the sort that PMs despise. The recipe considers words as being on the chubby side, with a shrewd nip/tuck turning DISCORDANCE into DISCO DANCE, or PALLY into ALLY, or FACTS and TRUTH (reverting to that Scripture class) into the Bible books ACTS and RUTH.

One of my favourite deletion tricks involves writer PHILIP PULL-MAN, a fluke which also has a Scripture echo. Author of *The Golden Compass*, among other adventure stories, Pullman has been seen by some church bodies as challenging Christianity through his latest novel, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*. The rap seems only fitting, given the man's deletion credentials. Get his name—PHILIP PULLMAN—and erase every letter that appears more than twice. With no mixing needed, the aftermath is secular—HUMAN.

Now that your mind is primed for strike action, let's turn our focus to 26-Down, our lone deletion clue. In the grid you'll notice that every possible cross-letter has already been secured, seeing us face the oddity of D _ T _ O.

What fits? Regardless of the recipe, or even knowing what category applies, it pays to think that way. Each cross-letter in place, why not try to winkle the answer from the grid first, and *then* consult the clue, seeing if your theory holds good? Is DETRO a word? What about DITTO?

In crossword parlance, any single-use square is nicknamed an unch, or unchecked square. American crosswords have none of these, every square being used twice for both Across and Down entries. In cryptics, however, thanks to the common waffle pattern, the unches abound, creating the two gaps in our current solution.

My advice, at this stage in any crossword, is consider the pattern before you turn to the clue—in other words, make hunches about the unches. Amazing how often you can intuit a solution by virtue of the letter sequence. Let's say you're chasing a nine letter word with this pattern:

What fits? Ask that question before you read the clue. Assuming it's a single word we can rule out MODERN ERA or LADY DIANA. After that the pickings are slim. Maybe nothing springs to mind. That's fine. The exercise is always worthwhile, priming the brain to what the unches may foreshadow.

In this case, with an A-ending, we could be hunting a proper noun—possibly a country or place name. Verbs are off the agenda. Could it be a fancy plural? Thinking this way, you're poised to pounce, hopefully with the clue your final piece of impetus.

Maybe HYDRANGEA is the answer. Then again, if the clue fails to mention plants or bloomers, you're probably amiss. On the other hand, you may see this clue:

London park shortened walk beside a flower (9)

Even if you don't fully grasp how the clue operates, you still have a handle on HYDRANGEA. And you'd be right too. Just like Steve Irwin's ZOO clue, this example belongs in the deletion category, or at least a deletion/charade hybrid. Here's how it works:

HYDE is the *London park*. The signpost to delete is *shortened*, asking you to drop the name's closing letter, so creating HYD. The rest is pure charade, where *walk* (RANGE) + A adds up to *a flower*.

Deletion clues are often used as part of something larger, like our HYDRANGEA example. Segmenting any word, charade-style, you'll often make an offcut or two—not whole words but scraps and clusters of letters. We've already seen how a single letter can be signified by subtle means (remember an R can be *nerve centre*, or *right*, or *war's end*), and the same sleight-of-hand is likewise used for larger fragments, with deletion the primary tool.

Typically, a single letter is removed, most often from the front or rear. Starting with the head—or its lopping—you should look out for sign-posts like *behead* or *topless* or the other useful handful in the recipe precis at the end of this chapter.

Down the other end, when it comes to snipping the tail, watch for commands like *almost* or *endless*. In Cryptopia, if a word *lacks finish* you crop its closing letter. Then again, if FRANK *doffs his cap*, he's RANK. Treat these actions as literal, and beware the more furtive signposts like *dock* and *clip* (often parading as nouns).

Deleting top or tail are the usual operations, though now and then a deletion clue will have you snipping both ends. This double action can be indicated by signals like *shelled*, *skinned*, *losing extremes* (or *extremists*). A *shelled* PRAWN, in other words, is RAW, with the outer casing stripped away. A skinned COYOTE is OYOT, which could fill TA to make TOYOTA. That's how deletions can come into play.

Alternatively, a PRAWN's shell is PN, and the word's meat, so to speak, is what needs deleting. That brand of shenanigans lurks in these two clues of mine:

Clear edges facilitating folding = CREASING (CR+EASING)

Aquatic animal trapped by extremely ravenous rats = ROTTERS

(OTTER in RS)

When it comes to culling, the other piece up for removal is the centre. If an APPLE is cored, it turns into APLE. (As a rule, the fragments to be removed are minimal. A setter won't expect you to carve out a larger 'heart' or an extended 'tail'—unless the clue specifies that liberty.) For this type of surgery, keep your eyes peeled for such signposts as *disheartened* or *gutless*.

The final trick is a deletion clue targeting a specific letter, or letters, to be removed, rather than suggesting any particular location. So *drug-free year* is YAR (losing the E of Ecstasy), or a pointless LESSON could be LO (as you lose all the word's compass points), just as *timeless Stuttgart* is SUGAR.

Now you can see why such an applied recipe is spared for the book's second half. The art is so versatile only a cryptic Jedi will master it. Fact is, I'm only now entrusting you with deletion lore at this point in the voyage, as your mind has done the necessary flexing. If I had laid out this lore 100 pages back, you'd have freaked. But now, I hope, you can appreciate the elegance of this deletion from a *Financial Times* setter called Flimsy:

Budget Speech beginning to be ignored (6)

Not only does the sentiment ring true, the wordplay is a delight. *Budget* here should be treated as a verb, while *speech* is not a homophone flag, but a definition of ORATION. Ignore that word's *beginning* and you'll end up with RATION. Cheeky? Yes. Compact? Ditto. Which leads us back to the Master clue:

Outlaw fled outlaw to repeat (5)

Yes, DITTO is your answer, but why? This is the benefit of a smart guess at the grid stage, just as HYDRANGEA allowed us to step through the Hype Park wordplay. Here *repeat* is the definition, while the adjacent word *to* accounts for your answer's tail, TO. So how does DIT, the other chunk, arise from *outlaw fled outlaw*?

Fled is clearly the deletion signpost, where one piece abandons another—but which escapes what? As a hint, don't forget that *outlaw* can

also be a verb, despite the clue presenting the same word as a noun. Given that DIT must play a role, what synonym for *outlaw* holds that trio?

BANDIT. Fine. Then what is fleeing? Logically it must be BAN, which is *outlaw* as a verb. When BAN flees BANDIT, you're left with DIT. Plus TO = DITTO.

Bravo. You've cracked your first deletion. Though a word of warning. Apart from charade, the other common accomplice in the deletion category is the anagram, where a clue can ask you to amputate and then perform the makeover. Here's a neat example from Phssthpok, another *Financial Times* setter. (The alias salutes a galactic pilgrim created by sci-fi writer Larry Niven.) See how you cope with this:

Playing sudoku almost earns prestige (5)

If I told you the answer begins with K, and owns D for its heart, would that help? Can you mentally fill in the unches? One word to obey that pattern is KUDOS, which means *prestige*. Following the wordplay then, *playing* looks like the anagram signpost. *Sudoku almost*, or SUDOK, is your fodder, while *earns* is a classy linkword, as your anagram play earns KUDOS.

Not that Sudoku enjoyed much kudos in June 2008. As scandals go, the strife in Sydney's District Court must rate among the darkest day for newspaper puzzles, and certainly the most infamous. That said, puzzles and outlaws have colluded to a considerable extent down the years, both on the bleak and heroic side of the ledger.

THE GAME'S UP — legal proceedings and puzzle novels

Judge Peter Zahra had no choice. Despite the millions ploughed into legal fees, the 60 days of court-time, the stream of witnesses, His Worship had only one road to take, discharging the jury and aborting the trial.

The culprit was a puzzle. One juror had photocopied a bunch of Sudoku, handing them round to help pass the hours spent listening to legal argument. Three months into proceedings, one accused saw a woman in the jury box juggling numbers in a smaller box. When other puzzle sheets were observed, the defence counsel applied for a discharge.

The judge obliged. The matter in hand was a complex trial, involving drug factories and firearm possession. No juror was the wiser for pencilling numbers during proceedings. The hearing was scratched and the alleged outlaws quit the dock.

Crooks may yet secure a second reprieve, thanks to puzzles. Michael B Lewis, a psychologist at Cardiff University, put 60 people through a simple cognitive test, first giving them a range of common pastimes, including Sudoku and both styles of crosswords—the quick and cryptic—as well as random passages of a Dan Brown thriller. Lewis then engaged his guinea pigs in a memory game, asking them to glimpse 14 faces for a period of three seconds each. Next, after five minutes of distraction, be it crosswords or Sudoku or Dan Brown's opus, the subjects were shown a larger batch of faces, 28 this time, with the earlier faces scattered through the deck. The challenge was to pick the faces previously seen. The results went to raise a few judicial eyebrows.

While a secret Sudoku habit may ditch a trial at the Sydney District Court, a cryptic crossword apparently has the power to unhinge an entire investigation. Too many anagrams, Lewis asserts, can severely handicap a witness who later surveys a police line-up. Too many double meanings, and crucial details start to blur. Put bluntly, Lewis says, 'Eyewitnesses should not do cryptic crosswords before an identity parade.'

The skill is known as 'face processing', referring to how we differentiate subtle details in the features of strangers and new acquaintances. According to this Welsh experiment, all other tested pursuits did little to jeopardise a brain's knack of face-spotting. Cryptics, meanwhile, are music to the perp's ear. Expose a witness to a few deletions and he's liable to finger Mickey Mouse for the Great Train Robbery.

In defence, it must be said that the crossword has collected one criminal scalp. The 1980 trial involved a man called Brian Keenan, no relation to the namesake writer. Scotland Yard accused him of being an IRA operative, which Keenan denied. He told the court he'd never been to a certain London address, a refuge associated with a known bombing cell, but that story came unstuck when detectives recovered a *Daily Mail* from the premises. Inside was a crossword partially solved in Keenan's own hand. Across and down—open and shut.

From evidence to document, a crossword played a vital role in a

probate hearing in 1999. One year shy of her 100th birthday, Anetta Duel died intestate in her East Sussex home. Or so it seemed. Leonard Andrean, a nephew, faced with the task of tidying up his aunt's belongings, stumbled on a page torn loose from the *Daily Telegraph*.

'Our aunt was mentally active until she died,' he said, which seems an obvious thing to say, but the crossword hobby was also a lifeline for the family. Above the clues, Leonard noticed a handwritten message: *Don't throw this sheet away please*.

Closer inspection revealed a scrawl on the puzzle's margins, a will of sorts in the same spidery hand: I leave all my money and possessions to Len and I hope he will be happy as long as he lives. God bless you, Aunt Netty. Goodbye.

A frail signature was attached. Yet being adrift from its newspaper, this last testament needed a date to be deemed official. Thus Val Gilbert was summoned, the *Tele*'s puzzle editor, whose filing system fixed Crossword 22515 in the calendar, and Len duly inherited his aunt's earthly goods.

Several yarns in fiction carry traces of Anetta Duel. One by Dorothy Sayers, creator of the detective Lord Peter Wimsey, is perhaps the first example of the crossword craze woven into a narrative. *The Fascinating Problem of Uncle Meleager's Will* appeared in 1925 within *Pearson's Magazine*, where the first English crossword had lobbed three years earlier.

The story is set in a quaint Roman-style villa in Dorking, where Uncle Meleager breathed his last. Before he died 'the very rich, curmudgeonly sort' set a trap. An earlier standard will had pledged his fortunes to the Tory party, much to the horror of his socialist relations. In the meantime a hidden redraft of the will is stashed somewhere in the villa, so the story goes, if only Wimsey knows where to look.

The breakthrough waits in the attic, where a sheaf of crosswords is lying. Most hail from the *Daily Yell*. The exceptions are hand-drawn, self-typed, evidence of Meleager trying his luck at DIY setting. In Wimsey's words, 'Some (early efforts, no doubt) were childishly simple, but others were difficult, with allusive or punning clues . . .'

Yet one set of clues is orphaned. Numbered in Arabic and Roman numerals, the clues lack a grid where any possible answer can fit. Frustrated, our sleuths return to the atrium below, where Lord Peter notices the tile pattern lining the water pool, a symmetry of red and white squares . . .

Carrying the crime baton further, Colin Dexter is a veteran compiler. Nudging 80, Dexter was a popular scourge for readers of *The Listener*'s page, composing a variety of puzzles as Codex. Away from clues, he created mysteries for his fictional coppers, Inspector Morse and Sergeant Lewis. (Both names derive from Puzzle-Land, with Jeremy Morse and Dorothy Lewis being Dexter's constant rivals in *The Listener's* clue-writing contests.) Reading deeper into the Morse books, several other puzzle-linked surnames bob up, including such eminent setters as Jonathan Crowther (aka Azed) and Don Manley (Quixote, Bradman or Duck), most typically as felons.

Around the early 1980s, the puzzle craze erupted into a subgenre of detective fiction known as crossword mysteries. Most cases hinged on customised grids that readers had to solve in league with the shamus, gleaning insights to the case. Titles to note in this tangent are A Six-Word Letter for Death (by Patricia Moyes) and Murder Across and Down (Herbert Resnicow—with the puzzles set by maestro Henry Hook). There's also a series composed by US spouses Cordelia Biddle and Steve Zettler under their pseudonym of Nero Blanc. With a dozen mysteries to untangle, including Corpus de Crossword and Death on the Diagonal, the case names are as eye-catching as the taglines. My favourite belongs to Two Down, whose cover sports the ominous warning: 'Up, down or across—SOS spells danger . . .'

A timely reminder, perhaps, that the clues remaining in the Master Puzzle won't be getting any easier. Death isn't waiting around the corner, but concussion certainly. Are you prepared? Down the alley lurk the rarer recipes, including puns and reversals, codes and rebuses—no relation to the Scottish detective. So if you ain't hardboiled, start running.

RECIPE PRECIS: DELETIONS

Deletion clues bank on different signposts, depending on what you lose. If a first letter is to be dropped, then look for leaderless, doesn't start, lose face or fail to open. If the last letter is to be lost, then curtail, detail, Manx (those cats with no tails), nearly, trim or incomplete are candidates. Gutless and heartless suggest you slash the centre, while peeled, shelled or skinned call for the outer two letters to go. In contrast, words like borders, fringes or extremely can indicate that the two peripheral letters are kept, with everything else scratched out. Extremely WISE, in clue-speak, can mean WE. When larger chunks go, like MI in MISLED to make SLED, then fair clues will specify which portion (or its size) that needs removing.

HALL OF FAME: DELETIONS

Caligula for one lost his heart to a horse (4) [Times 8309]
Jumped up, not using head—crash! (5) [Crux, FT]
Half Basque, half French? Cool (6) [Bonxie, Guardian]
Figure went during tragedy when outraged (6) [Times 8097]
First of autumn leaves turning putrid (7) [Henry Hook, US]
Mention having cup of tea skimmed (9) [Paul, Guardian]

SOLUTIONS: roan, prang, quench, twenty, rotting, reference

QUIZLING 18.1 We're thinking of a word meaning connect, but When prefixed by a vowel, the new word means cut. QUIZLING 18.2 Reading left to right, taking a letter per word, can you spell three related words? Your six leftover letters can be jumbled to spell a fourth member of the same set. CASH COIR CARE RANG WADE BAIT QUIZLING 18.3 What word meaning chicken Can lose its head To spell a second bird Insteads DELETIONS 217

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CHAPTER 19

After boomers it regularly goes next! (3-1)

'Guess what, Mom?' says Lisa Simpson. 'I'm a cruciverbalist!'

'Oh Lisa—another religion? You know you'll just drop the whole thing at college when you get a Jewish boyfriend.'

A short trip to Springfield Library would have eased Marge's nerves. Lisa's new obsession was secular. Mind you, cruciverbalism does ask for zeal. Robes and candles may not be involved but the ritual is prone to inspiring trances, meditation, close text study and the odd speaking in tongues, especially when homophones occur.

Lisa had her epiphany in Season 20, Episode 6, going from lemonade seller to crossword champion in a twinkling. Bitten by the bug, she dreams in black and white. Hopscotch grids in the playground turn into interlocking letters. Before too long she enrols in the Crossword City Tournament, where the showdown pitches our favourite whizkid against a sharky realtor called Gil Gunderson. The key is speed and accuracy. Despite her talents, Lisa loses, mainly after hearing Homer has wagered all his dough on Gil. The girl is furious. She renounces her surname and storms off the podium.

To repair the damage, Homer hires the two biggest names in American cruciverbalism—Will Shortz and Merl Reagle—and gets them to phrase the apology for him. Woven into a puzzle of course, with a hidden message. Viewers only get a glimpse of Reagle's grid on the small screen, though the same puzzle ran in the *New York Times* a week after the episode, on 16 November 2008. For Shortz, the *Times* puzzle editor, the synchronicity sealed the deal. When Tim Long, a producer of *The Simpsons* and the episode's chief writer, asked Shortz if he was interested

in contributing to the storyline, the editor was flattered. 'But I added it'd be really cool if the crossword on the show could also appear in *The Times* on the same day. He liked that idea. And that's when Merl got involved.'

A toon tragic from the crib, Merl had to pinch himself. Speaking to his old campus paper in Arizona, Reagle confessed, 'For me, to be such a total nut for animation since I was a kid, I never even dreamed . . . it's like a dream I never had coming true.'

Lisa did well to solve the puzzle. The grid is no gimmee. The central entries are eight celebs warped by Reagle's notorious wordplay. (*Passionate tennis star*, for example, is MONICA ZEALOUS, while LINDSAY LOW-HAND has *no face cards*.) Hiding obliquely inside the solution is Homer's apology: DUMB DAD SORRY FOR HIS BET. Lisa spots the message, hugs her dad and all is swell in Springfield again. Cut to credits.

Yet this is not the first secret message appearing in the *New York Times*, nor the only one inspired by a father's affection for his daughter. Winding the clock back 60 years we find the clean and swooping lines of Al Hirschfeld, one of last century's most distinctive cartoonists, a master of the minimal in a lifetime of caricature work.

Needless to say, Al plays the Homer role in this story, while the part of Lisa is fulfilled by Nina, the artist's only child, born in 1945, the year Hirschfeld began his secret tribute.

Hirschfeld enjoyed an illustrious career in every sense. Across half a century, at the top of his game, his work generated exhibitions, movie posters, lithographs. But his true signature became the stylish means of hiding NINA—the name—into his work.

The crease of a gown, a curtain's lacework, glassware: the name could appear anywhere within the portrait. Turning out etchings of high society, whole Broadway casts, senators and sex kittens, Al was a master at tucking NINA's letters into costumes and hairdos, jewellery and table settings, wherever the name belonged. Soon fans grew so fixated on playing seek-a-word that Hirschfeld feared his art was being overlooked. So he quit the gimmick for a few commissions, only for an uproar to erupt.

The darker reason for the man's reluctance to continue his NINA game was linked to a military rumour. Troubles in Vietnam demanded

a new generation of US pilots to be trained at pace, the defence academies adopting the term Nina as slang for a hidden target to be bombed. Hirschfeld found this repugnant. Though his adoring public spoke the louder, and after a brief pause, the word-game was restored.

Still active at 88, Hirschfeld was asked in 1991 by the US Postal Service to illustrate the century's great comedians for a series of stamps. The artist agreed so long as the NINA message could be embedded. Al knew full well the hellstorm he'd create if he didn't please his followers. For all the conspiracy theorists at work today, philatelists still claim this series is the first and only time American stamps have carried a secret message.

Possibly so, but the practice has since picked up steam in the crossword realm, setters burying messages inside their grids for only the vigilant to find. And the name for such a subterfuge? Cruciverbalists know their history: a Nina.

A true Nina comes without any neon lights. The smuggled word or name awaits your alert glance, and lacks any other indicator to declare its presence. Merl Reagle met that challenge elegantly in his *Simpsons* gig, since the diagonal message was there for a girl like Lisa to find. No shaded squares. No signposts. Just a secret seam in the cloth.

That said, Reagle tackled the task with his usual pizzazz. Keeping to the rules of restraint, the full-time puzzler opted for another route to whisper the idea of an extra layer. Not the grid this time, but the clues, using the 144 initial letters to hint at the diagonal Nina in the grid. From 1-Across to 109-Down, in Homeric style, those initials spelt DEAR LISA, YOU MAKE ME SO HAPPY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY HAPPY. SORRY, HE TOLD ME I NEEDED A HUNDRED-FORTY-FOUR LETTERS...WHAT WAS MY POINT AGAIN? OH RIGHT—BOUVIER OR SIMPSON, I CHERISHYOU.

NINAS AGOGO — hidden entries and alternate clues

As a solver I love a good Nina, though I don't always see them. Solvers in general seldom take two steps back to seek out any covert entry. Ninas in fact are commonly unveiled in forums and chatrooms by those clever enough to spot them. A setter for *The Independent* named Mordred, for

instance, whose real name is Derek Knight, once stood STALACTITE and STALAGMITE in parallel columns of unchecked letters, or unches. Even sneakier, the first Nina hung down, the second thrust upward, imitating the limestone masses.

Of all papers, *The Independent* is the most Nina-prone. Setters such as Monk and Phi habitually inlay messages for those with eyes to see. Celebrating the milestone of Beelzebub Number 999, that same paper's variety puzzle, the nameless compiler laced EMERGENCY SERVICES around the fill as a hidden treat, a furtive salute to the triple-9 number.

Perhaps the most elegant Nina I've seen belongs to Nimrod, a psychologist by the name of John Henderson, who also crafts puzzles for *The Guardian* as Enigmatist. Back in May 2009, the answer to the central axis was WAITING FOR GODOT. Flanking the play in twin columns, both disguised as Ninas, were the two tramps who did just that, VLAD-MIR and ESTR AGON.

But if prizes are being handed out for the most ingenious interlocks, the Americans enjoy a stranglehold on the competition. Visually and verbally, the *New York Times* and its dismantled cousin, the *New York Sun*, have dished out some dazzlers this millennium. Although strictly speaking most are not authentic Ninas, as a set of instructions, or the clues themselves will flag the subterfuge, but this takes nothing from the execution.

In August 2008, Kevin G Der presented New York Timers with a dotted line around the crossword's border. Solvers were bamboozled for a while, before realising the pivotal answers to the grid—entitled Come Fly With Me—acted as instructions as to how to convert the crossword into a paper aeroplane, as soon as you cut the grid from the page.

Elizabeth Gorski, the queen of visual surprise, has arranged her black squares to emulate the Empire State, Frosty the Snowman and the vortex spiral of the Guggenheim Museum, each time with theme words as the vital axes and visible Ninas to accompany the feat.

Patrick Blindauer, another giant of artful gridwork, has made his patterns mimic rope ladders, dollar bills and the Frogger video, to name three. Rather than bury a Nina, which is the English way, the American puzzle may carry a key entry which transforms the puzzle once the clues are solved. At the height of one New York summer, for example, Blindauer had his solver turn the final grid into a blazing sun, getting you to colour in every I that appeared in the grid, thus shaping a circle with six jutting rays. Patrick's instruction for such an operation was the central entry and also sun-related: SHADE YOUR EYES.

But now let's turn our gaze to the Master clue, as the formula has something of a Nina quality in its makeup. You almost need an alternative mindset to consider the 'other squares' of a word mesh, the unsung unches in the grid, just as you require a fresh approach to undo the alternate recipe, our next Master category:

After boomers it regularly goes next! (3-1)

Exclamation marks, you may recall, often indicate the &lit style, that rare case of wordplay both manipulating and defining the answer. (Think of a clue like *Awfully enraged!* for ANGERED and you'll start to get the picture.) A similar stunt was pulled by the clue for ETC, a hidden &lit that read: *Partial set closer!* Turning to our current clue we find the same emphatic symbol. But what's the formula? How do we read the wordplay? Right now our surest friend is the word *regularly*.

If the exclamation mark is bankable, declaring the &lit dimension, then *regularly* is reliable as a signpost for alternation. If not *regularly*, then its synonyms, as seen in these three clues here:

Twitch regularly?! (3)
What's this? Oddly coloured (4)
Explosive intermittently undisturbed (5)

The first stems from Monk, an *Independent* setter. The dual punctuation warns you of a skewed perspective, as well as the &lit dimension. The answer is TIC, since the regular letters of *twitch*, counting just the odds, spell TIC, a *twitch* synonym. Just like Ninas, alternation clues dare you to read between words or periodically across letters.

Oddness, the idea, is sustained in Orlando's jewel from *The Guardian*. The odd letters of coloured give up CLUE, which this piece of work decidedly is. (Just as neat, the word COUNTERCULTURE goes one better, alternately holding ONE CLUE.)

The last example, my own, opts for another adverb in intermittently, but the essence of alternation is unchanged. Visit undisturbed, so to speak, off and on, discounting every other letter and NITRE will emerge.

So now that your alternative mindset is humming, let's revisit the current clue:

After boomers it regularly goes next! (3-1)

So much easier with an instruction manual, yes? The enumeration of (3-1) is also a major leg-up. As soon as we turn the alternate signpost onto *goes next*, the phrase GEN-X will appear, the generation which happens to come next after Boomers.

Alternation clues are scarcer than mainstream recipes since longer words don't readily splay into new combinations. When they do, however, like GOAT in IGNORANT or the ARSES planted in BARRISTERS, the matter warrants sharing.

More common is the case where an alternation task makes up part of a longer answer. Rather than uncover CLUE in COLOURED, for example, a more tangled clue may ask you to ransack a word's alternate letters and mix them, or place them beside another word in the charade mode, such as this clue I ran in 2006:

A second membrane's regularly seen as simple life-form = A + MO (second) + EBAE (membrane's regular letters)

A tough clue, but a clear illustration of how Alternate thinking can permeate a longer piece of wordplay. Don't worry, though. The AMOEBAE clue is the kind of wall you may hit at the harder end of the crossword range, but all the pieces will be intact, every signpost, so long as you have the nerve to isolate them.

Deep as we are in the book, it's wise to revive WH Auden's truth. Peculiar as cryptic clues will seem to outsiders—or new players for that matter—their nature is precise. Compared to their quick cousins, cryptics are generous, despite the neural acrobatics you have to perform. Though, sometimes, a clue can be too generous. Less so in the alternate style, where some recipes are capable of suggesting two—or three—possible

solutions, despite the definition and wordplay intended to point to a unique answer. This alternate chapter, then, seems the right moment to meet those unusual clues that offer alternative answers.

A BOB EACH WAY — ambiguous clues

Double meaning clues are the prime culprits. If all you get are two definitions, without any added wordplay, then occasionally a choice may apply. Smaller words in particular own a wardrobe of different masks, as the next ambiguous handful shows:

```
Drug blow = CRACK or SMACK?
Runs lots of steps = FLIGHTS or LADDERS (think of a pantihose
run)?
Crust for the scoundrel = HEEL or SCAB?
```

Weirder are those clues owning more elaborate wordplay, yet still two answers can fill the bill. The first two clues below stem from the American cryptic duo Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon, who built an entire puzzle around two-way answers. The other belongs to Mercury of *The Guardian*. Take a look:

```
Number there is wrong = THREE or ETHER (thinking of a numb-
ing agent)?
Seabird heard change of direction = TERN or SKUA?
Problem parking by reservoir = DAM+P or SUM+P?
```

Auden would be turning in his grave right now. Where's that famous precision? I ran into ambiguity when publishing this next clue in November 2008:

```
Cast with or without one? (5)
```

The recipe is a variation on the deletion formula, where the answer is SHIED, a quaint term for *cast*, as in the olde-time coconut shy. As the clue observes, SHIED means *cast*—just as SHED (SHIED *without one*)

also means cast. The clue was designed to celebrate that peculiarity, a quirk of language with a single answer, I thought.

Wrong. An email arrived via the editor's desk to alert me to the word THROW, which also obeys the clue. No it doesn't, I first reacted. THROW doesn't even own an I to lose, so how could it play the game?

Easily, the email pointed out, for when with or sheds one, this new combo of WTHRO can be cast into an equally satisfying answer. The accidental anagram is freakier for the clue having cast as definition, a verb that needs no changing from past to present tense, so reinforcing the alternative view.

I'd presumed the fluke to be done and dusted when my inbox received a second email. Another point of view, from another solver. Couldn't the answer be SLING, this solver asked. This correspondent was convinced, especially after confirming the answer's first and middle letters as S-something-I . . .

SLING? How? Well, went the email, the writer an intern in the Emergency Department of a major Sydney hospital, seeing the wounded every week, 'a sling is still a sling whether or not a plaster cast is within it'. By that stage I was ready to jump from a great height. The only thing preventing me was the prospect of being spirited by ambulance to a particular ER wing of a Sydney hospital, where the argument would likely be revived on a corridor gurney.

RECIPE PRECIS: ALTERNATIONS

The vital word in most alternation clues is *regularly*, or any term suggesting every second letter such as *intermittent*, *periodic*, *evenly* or *defying odds*. Depending on nuance, these letters may need to be dumped or retained, so spelling the solution. Just as common is the alternation formula playing a small part in larger piece of wordplay, where the principle is the same.

HALL OF FAME: ALTERNATIONS

Perplexed as odds dropped in Olympic event (4) [Times 7940]
Railways subject to regular cuts, unfortunately (4) [Times 8649]
Good years regularly yielding flowing water (4) [Times 8374]
Drew as lots alternately? (5) [Phssthpok, FT]
Regulars in store aid new business (5) [Sleuth, FT]
Horse, seal, chimp evenly rendered in retro by cubist (7) [DA]

SOLUTIONS: epee, alas, Oder, dealt, trade, Picasso

QUIZLING 19.1

CUT hides in the alternate letters of COURT (or ACQUIT), depending ^{on} whether you opt for odd or even letters. Now cutting to objects that cut, can you find two words lincluding a remarkably appropriate word) that alternately hide the swords FOIL and SABRE?

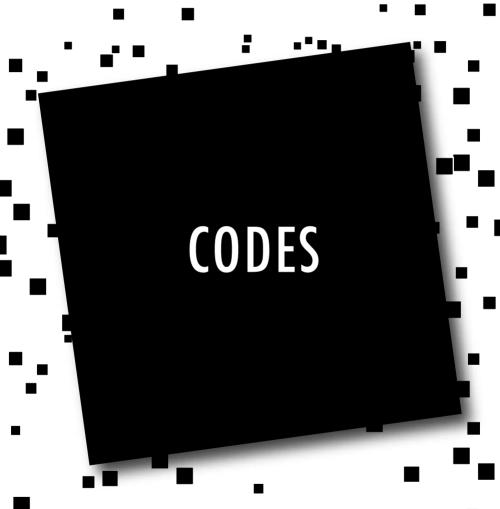
QUIZLING 19.2

Slash every even letter from the alphabet, and you'll discover that all five vowels, plus the Y, are among the survivors. Using no letter twice, what's the longest word you can make out of this group?

QUIZLING 19.3

This American actress spells a word for automobile with her first name's odd letters, while her surname can be scrambled into a more particular style of the same vehicle. Name her.

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	• _		•
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		• . •	



CHAPTER 20

Koran avidly studied by Arab holy leaders here! (6)

Got up.

Had a shave.

Did Times crossword.

Had another shave.

Roger McGough, the Liverpool poet behind this doggerel, was only half-joking, I'd say. Solving a cryptic can make an hour vanish, half a morning, and still you haven't fixed that last corner. The good news? Once you cut your teeth on those early puzzles, then the time you need to unravel the later bunch diminishes. The bad? If one setter becomes too easy, you move up the ladder and tackle the harder one—and there goes the morning again.

In the early 1920s, when the crossword craze hit England, a ghost-story writer called MR James took pride in the fact that he could undo *The Times* while boiling an egg for breakfast. 'And he did not like a hard-boiled egg,' joked Adrian Bell—that paper's first setter.

Twenty years on, as most clues became cryptic, the magic number shrank to 12 minutes. In 1942 a gent named WAJ Gavin set a challenge. As Chairman of the Eccentrics Club, Gavin promised that if any reader could crack the *Tele* cryptic in less than 12, he'd donate a hundred quid to the Minesweepers Fund.

There was a catch, of course. The feat had to be performed under strict conditions. Hence a posse of 25 hopefuls lobbed at Fleet Street on a Saturday in January, including an accounting clerk named Stanley Sedgwick.

The room was set out in exam fashion, as Stanley described, with tables

lined up in rows. A pencil and eraser lay on each one, along with a virgin sheet of blotting paper, plus a dictionary if required. Supervisors stalked a podium. Rules were explained and the crosswords unveiled. First to finish was Vere Chance from Kent in a touch over six minutes, but a spelling blunder disqualified him. Four others blitzed the puzzle, the winner managing close to eight minutes—and scoring a cigarette lighter. As for Stanley, he hit the wall at the last clue, the answer to which goes unrecorded.

What we do know, however, thanks to an interview Sedgwick granted the *Daily Telegraph* in 1998, is the cloak-and-dagger antics that came after this contest and perhaps revealed the true reason for the event being staged in the first place.

'Imagine my surprise,' said Stanley, 'when several weeks later I received a letter marked "Confidential" inviting me . . . to make an appointment to see Col Nichols of the General Staff who "would very much like to see you on a matter of national importance".'

Nichols headed MI8, the defence department in charge of a shadowy facility named Station X. In other memos the location was labelled BP, or Bletchley Park, a suburb an hour northwest of London. Assembled there in secret were some of the foremost English minds of the time, including Alan Turing, the father of the computer, their task being to intercept and unravel German codes. But as the war escalated, and staff numbers wavered, fresh blood was needed. 'Chaps with twisted brains like mine,' as Sedgwick recalls, jumped through the hoops of Spy School in Bedford, their puzzle savvy converted into more pressing code games. Proven spies were later dispatched to Station X.

TC was among them. A Wiltshire lad barely in his twenties, Tony Carson met two recruitment officers on campus one morning. As *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Harriet Veitch puts it, 'These defence types were handing out crosswords, asking people to solve them as quickly as possible, when Tony came up and said that he did crosswords as a hobby.'

'What's your best time?' quizzed the officer.

'Solving, you mean, or making them?'

'I'm sorry. You mean you make crosswords?'

'Yes,' said Tony.

'Cryptic?'

'Yes.'

The rest was a blur, Harriet laughs, as Tony was hoisted off his feet and marched to a room for immediate enlistment. TC's brief was cracking Italian codes, while other word-types, chess-players and mathematicians, did similar work in the Bletchley complex. (The film *Enigma* captures the spirit of the time and place.) Thanks to the code-breakers, British Command secured vital information about the Battle of the Atlantic, Rommel's campaign in Africa and of course D-Day, where the *Daily Tèle* had something of a karmic debt to pay. Prime Minister Winston Churchill described the code-breakers as 'the geese that laid the golden egg but never cackled'.

Tony Carson must have carried those words through his life. In the few times I met TC, a graceful *Herald* compiler who took up his role in 1986, he seldom discussed his 'contribution to the war effort'. Codebreaking was a chapter in a book pretty much closed. I do know his Italian assignment soon became a crash course in Japanese, and TC was relocated to Brisbane as part of US General Macarthur's Intelligence Unit. He also took part in the Allied landing in Borneo, and when he wasn't thwarting Emperor Tojo he turned his mind to crosswords.

After the war, moving to Perth with a young family, Tony had a go at farming (just like the first *Times* setter, Adrian Bell), before getting involved in health review and joining the board of Sydney Hospital. He made variety cryptics for *The Listener* back in the UK, under the alias of Swan, in honour of Perth's river, and later plied his trade at the *Herald*, where we first met in a Chinese restaurant.

The venue was selected by Harriet, our editor, because of its chequered décor. We met at the table, the full roster of Fairfax compilers, and practically needed to introduce ourselves, despite being long-time colleagues. A monkish pursuit, crossword-making is not the path you take if you aspire to the week-time esprit of an office.

We talked about favourite clues, the stuff-ups and inspirations. TC was urbane and handsome with a nonchalant warmth. His voice still retained a Wiltshire lilt. Perhaps in his mid-sixties then, a spring chicken compared to our patriarch LB, Tony would only live for another five years, succumbing to illness in 1994. But that night was a blithe get-together, a blue moon on the crossword calendar, and Harriet started speculating on the collective noun. If lions have a pride, what is a group of cruciverbalists? A distraction? A mesh? A crypt?

DP, or David Plomley, the civic engineer and Wednesday's stalwart, came up with abomination.

'Scan a kebab clue,' said LB, and we all presumed he'd lost his mind, not for the first time.

'What kebab?' I asked.

'Black bean sauce,' said Tony, studying the same menu and solving the anagram. The habits of code-breaking die hard.

Though every solver needs that Bletchley reflex. If random kebabs and German weather reports make no sense, then persevere, because they will, they must—codes and cryptics are ultimately crackable.

CRETAN TRANCE — ciphers and acronyms

By the time man could chisel an image into stone he was toying with symbols to pass on meaning to the tribal few. Arabic scholars used substitution codes (where V might be L, and so on) to disguise the Holy Word of Muhammad. Throughout history, kings and queens used codes to suppress battle tactics—or romantic liaisons.

Equally romantic, Edgar Allen Poe wrote 'The Golden Bug', a story where an insect bite equips the main character, William Legrand, with the freakish knack of interpreting runes. Suddenly a nonsensical line like 53+++305))6*, and I'm paraphrasing here, speaks of Captain Kidd's treasures and a hazardous romp on Sullivan Island, complete with skull and doubloons.

On another island, the rugged hills of Crete, archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans dug up a set of clay tablets in the early 1900s, each one bearing a list of strange letters. Divorced from Greek or any other language he recognised, Evans christened the mystery Linear B, presenting one of the great decoding challenges of the ages.

Michael Ventris, the ultimate solver, was an English architect who spoke six languages before he left his teens, as well as reading classical Greek and Latin. The tablets to him resembled ancient inventories. But listing what? To deepen the riddle, Linear B comprised strings of coupled symbols rather than whole words, yet after two years studying the tablets in his spare time, Ventris recognised recurring patterns. Four in particular. Could they be gods, or key words, or perhaps the major towns of Crete?

He followed this last hunch, replacing the most frequent cluster with AMNISOS, the island's port, and slowly the enigma was unlocked. Linear B in fact was found to be more an ancient form of Greek, a revelation that caused much of Mediterranean history to be rewritten.

More recently, as computers dominate the decoding caper, we've started to get a glimpse into the wonders of genetic codes and cosmological data. In software programming, codes have become a new way of speaking, as well as building walls against viruses and hackers. From trog days to blog days, humans have found a need to repack the message, ensuring the ongoing survival of codes and code-breaking.

The impulse literally lies in our blood. Ourselves made of codes, we are built to decrypt. Much like the puzzle of Linear B, the challenge on a crossword level is to spot a pattern and take an educated stab, bringing order to chaos. Here's the current enigma:

Koran avidly studied by Arab holy leaders here! (6)

Shades of the Cretan tablets, the answer seems to rest in foreign geography. The surface meaning murmurs a place in the Islam world. *Here*, reads the final word. But where?

To pinpoint the right location, let's test-run a second clue, much as Ventris contrasted Greek with Linear B. Written by Armonie of the *Financial Times*, this sampling likewise belongs to the code category. More than that, the clue shares a key element with the Master's own offering, which only shrewd cryptographers will detect:

Fool starts to imagine death is only temporary (5)

Look carefully. Compare the two. Before reading the next paragraph, can you figure out what idea the two clues share?

The crux is initiation. Perched in both examples is the concept of beginning or heading up: *leaders* and *starts*. Are the cogs now churning?

Acronyms, as you know, are words or names made up of initials, such as scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) or KOALA (Kids' Own Australian Literature Award). Sometimes overlapping is involved, whereby 'Canadian oil, low acid' generates the new term canola, or

South Western Townships yields the South African enclave of Soweto, but otherwise the key is found in initials.

Acronyms, or Abbreviated Coded Renditions Of Names Yielding Meaning, inspire the code category of cryptics, though in a more subtle guise. Typically upper-case initials—like COLT (City Of London Telecom) or ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps)—signal a standard acronym. Yet the cryptic cousin is a different mammal. In clue mode, the essence is camouflage, which is why acronyms in the wider world become acrostics in a cryptic setting.

When Arthur Wynne woke the world to crosswords, the next puzzle craze to follow was a reborn version of the acrostic. The strongest fad in this regard remains the scattered quote, where a line of verse, a quip or speech passage is broken piecemeal into a list of words—a colossal anagram in effect. These 20 or so words are then clued and arranged in such a way that their initials will spell the quote's origins. Imagine that Ralph Waldo Emerson, say, is the source. Then the list's initials might spell RWEMERSONESSAYONNATURE. As for the answers as a whole, the entire bunch is slowly fed into a numbered grid to reveal the wisdom: WHAT IS A WEED? A PLANT WHOSE VIRTUES HAVE YET TO BE DISCOVER ED.

Maintaining the acrostic tradition, we have our two code clues, the Armonie example and the current Master clue:

Fool starts to imagine death is only temporary (5) Koran avidly studied by Arab holy leaders here! (6)

Now can you see the acrostic answers? In the first clue the phrase *starts to* alerts you to the ensuing initials, IDIOT. In the same vein *leaders* in the Master example nudges you to pay attention to the preceding six initials, unveiling KASBAH. The exclamation mark, as we've discovered, is the cryptic way of declaring that the wordplay fulfils a double role, being definition as well, the KASBAH—or Arabic quarter of a city—being a likely place to see the *Koran avidly studied*.

Though don't think code clues are always about acrostics. True, the most popular strain of this category involves initials only, but variations exist. Some, as you'll see, entail garden gnomes.

PENAL CODE — code variations and schoolboy stunts

The Boat that Rocked, released as Pirate Radio in the US, is a clever name for a comedy, at least from a cryptographer's point of view, since the second letters of each word combine to spell HOHO.

(A similar fluke is the tagline for *The Perfect Storm*, released in 2000. *Based on a true story*, read the poster, which initially is BOATS.)

But let's scuttle the BOATS idea and think more along HOHO lines. Not every code you meet in a cryptic crossword will operate with initials. Scarce as this recipe can be, the variations are scarcer. Consider this bunch, all drawn from my own archive:

```
Doc, for one, added two vaccine grams after seconds = DWARF (second letters)
```

24 hours advanced last dying seconds = DAY (second letters)

Fretted guitar harmony, like Everclear medley by thirds = IRKED (third letters)

Tough 'losers' try to plumb Pub Keno = YOBBO (last—or 'losing'—letters)

Laggards in prank keen to throw trash into Law Faculty = KNOW-HOW (last—or 'lagging'—letters)

Other code clues may refer to the hearts of words, or maybe ask the solver to count across a clue rather than count the letters positioned in each distinct word. (CAT, for instance, hides in every third letter of JOCU-LARITY.) Dealing with GEN-X via the alternation tack, you've already seen how an answer may be dispersed, code-like, across even or odd letters. But, in the main, we've met the foremost traps. Although back in 1979 there was one bizarre code asking readers to isolate every 13th letter.

For some reason, 1979 was a big year for gnomes. Around that time, my last year of high school, a plaster gnome was kidnapped from an English garden, the abductors then mounting a year-long campaign of postcards. The story earned big press, the prank seizing the public imagination as the 'gnome' sent messages to his former owners from around Europe in letters of freedom and a growing self-awareness.

Stirred by this, a few of my mates indulged in a copycat crime, swiping elfish figurines from the surrounding suburbs and planting them throughout the senior campus. We had a dancing gnome, a fishing gnome and a laughing gnome, though the principal wasn't so jubilant. For some unknown reason he summoned me into his office to discuss the hostage situation

'You have a soft spot for pixies?' he asked.

'Sorry?'

'The gnomes and whatnot.'

'Not really,' I said. 'My sisters liked Enid Blyton when they were younger, Big Ears and so forth.'

'What about the garden variety?'

'My nana has a few frogs in her birdbath. She lives in Normanhurst.'

The conversation was going nowhere, so the boss went for the throat, blurting, 'Did you write the code in the school magazine or didn't you?!' 'Oh.' I blushed. 'Yes.'

As literary editor of the mag, I'd favoured a more refined cipher than your basic acrostic. The booby trap sat in a paragraph of the editorial. The key phrase introducing my little spiel was 'speaking in a superstitious way'.

As a puzzle junkie I'd hoped most students would pick up the hint, handpicking every 13th letter to find the message. Though most students needed telling directly, the rumour climbing the stairs to the staffroom as well.

For the record, the encoded phrase was an affectionate insult aimed at the mag's overseeing teacher. DUDLEY IS A GARDEN GNOME, it read, AND SMOKES DOPE TWICE DAILY. Obviously the gnome zeitgeist was strong that year. As soon as I fessed the code the principal didn't care two hoots whether I'd stolen the gnomes or not—my punishment was restoring each sprite to its rightful garden, liaising with local police and the Missing Gnomes Bureau.

At the opposite end of the gnomic scale, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger chose a simpler code to rankle authorities in 2009. Or did he? The letter was a message attached to a veto. In essence the Governor explained to the Californian State Assembly why he was rejecting a portside project, yet in code the letter said something else. Down the left margin, in acrostic style, read the message I FUCK YOU. Yours sincerely, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Freakish, said the office's spokesperson, Aaron McLear, who also

noted SOAP and POET had flukily occurred in the margins of previous letters. Loving a challenge, the statistics department of Berkeley tried to calculate the odds of the expletive falling into alignment by accident, bearing in mind the frequency of U and K as common English openers, and came up with one in 8,031,810,176. Monkeys have a better chance of banging out a screenplay of *True Lies II*.

RECIPE PRECIS: CODE

A rarity as clues go, codes can catch you napping for the same reason. If you see the likes of *leaders* or *initially*, then look beyond a single adjacent word and you may see the answer staring back. Likewise with even rarer formulas, where the second, middle or end letters are recruited.

HALL OF FAME: CODE

Sir as heard in Bangalore primarily? (5) [Times 8366]
Fool starts to imagine death is only temporary (5) [Armonie, FT]
First of December every year our tax return fiddled (5) [Times 8647]

Tips on friendship do as nice Christmas presents (5) [Times 8597]

Cement, in part, lasts during any cheap renovations, you claim (6) [DA]

Revolutionary House of Commons history is mentioned in new Hansard, initially (2,3,4) [Times 8252]

SOLUTIONS: sahib, idiot, toyed, poses, gypsum, Ho Chi Minh

QUIZLING 20.1 Who are the only two US presidents whose surnames can be spelt exclusively using the letters that end the surnames of any other US _{president}? QUIZLING 20.2 While Johnny Depp never appeared in HAIR, he did bob up in a 1993 movie whose title spells HAIR with the second letter of each word. No tangling needed, can you comb his backlist to find the film? QUIZLING 20.3 All seven numbers below are animals. How many can fly? (You may find a calculator will shed some light.) 300 338 733 900 5181 35009 90439034

CODES 241

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CHAPTER 21

Pizza centre behind which French grill?(4)

Pizza centre?

Fresh from codes, you'll be glancing at a phrase like *pizza centre* and give some thought to Z. Daycare centre, we know, denotes C, just as *Braveheart* is A and midyear is EA, at least for libertarians. So unless we're talking Dominos or Little Caesars, then *pizza centre* signifies Z.

The grid should convince you too, the Z of VENEZUELA ending this next answer. All the signs are positive. So where does that take us? We need a four-letter word, ending in Z, meaning what?

If *pizza centre* renders Z, then this section of the clue logically belongs to the wordplay. Jumping to the other end, therefore, we can isolate *grill* as the likely definition. Perhaps *French grill* is up for the task. But *French grill* makes as much sense as *pizza centre*, as far as definitions go. Safe to single out *grill* as the answer's meaning. A straight clue, then, if our theory holds water, would be *Grill* (4), with three dashes and a Z.

RAZZ in Australian slang can mean to tease or criticise, a shrinking of the word raspberry. Usually a verb, RAZZ means to tease or criticise. As a noun, RAZZ is a synonym of badinage or reprimand. But grill? The link looks flimsy. Turning to the wordplay, does the cryptic part of the clue give weight to the idea? Does RAZ—with one Z—mean anything in French?

Non.

QUI, on the other hand, is how Parisians say who, or whom, or that, or which. *Behind which French*, says the clue. Place Z behind QUI (*which French*) and there's your match for grill. But wait a second, is that really fair? Since when does a solver need to be bilingual to conquer every

clue? You don't. Though to paraphrase Alexander Pope, a *petite* bit of knowledge comes in handy.

I don't speak French, but like most people I know *eau* and *le* and all the other Gallic staples. You may well be a fluent French speaker, but that's not vital for making headway as a solver. On paper, my understanding of German and Italian is modest, and I can speak a Tarzan version of Spanish at best, but that doesn't permit me to throw in *a traves* ('across' in Spanish) or *unten* ('below' in German). Unless a crossword's designed for bilingual solvers, then setters can only refer to the exotic basics. Like these two from Auster, aka Shirl O'Brien, the Brisbanite of *The Guardian*:

```
King Charles possibly upset Spain and the Spanish (7)
Sprinter, the German, remains inside (6)
```

The first combines an agram and charade. The second is a container. Because that's the thing—exotic is not so much a recipe of itself, but a chance to warn you about this common ploy in crosswords.

Both of Auster's clues expect you to know the definite article in a foreign language—Spanish and German respectively—and not much else. SPANIEL is the King Charles in question, where a jumbled SPAIN annexes EL.

DASHER does the job in Clue 2, where DER (the masculine *the* of German) encloses ASH, or *remains* to create a *sprinter*.

Crossing the border, my next two clues presume a smattering of French:

```
Seduced the French professor (3,2)
Lament route, oddly or French-ly! (3)
```

Another article lesson, this time leading to LED ON, or LE + DON. The second clue is RUE, an alternation.

In the erudite hands of Araucaria perhaps, or wrestling a trickier puzzle such as *Beelzebub* or *The Listener*, your bilingualism will be more heavily questioned. How will you fare with this exotic trio from my own collection?

Adept climber of the wall in Paris (5)
German song was dishonest (4)
Subdue loyal sides after Spanish Inquisition (5)

LEMUR is your first answer, that nimble Madagascan that embodies the French word for *wall*, complete with article.

LIED is a German song, a word in most English dictionaries. The German national anthem is 'Das Lied Der Deutschen'. Instead of a charade this time, the clue relies on a double meaning across two cultures.

For the last, *loyal sides* are LL, just as *pizza centre* is Z. Here the word *after* is playing the same role as *behind* in our Master clue, telling you where to position the various wordplay components in order to build the answer. Fans of *Fawlty Towers*, of course, will know Spanish Inquisition is a subtle means of reaching QUE, the Manuel mantra, which guides you to the answer of QUELL.

Still with matters of inquiry, plus your latest Master answer, let's now take a look at how a frenzy of Irish curiosity saw the birth of a brandnew word: QUIZ.

WHO'S WHO OF CLERIHEW — creating words and verses

Several words of a querulous nature call on Q, from question to query, inquire to inquest. Even the bickering trio of quarrel, squabble and quibble can often pivot around a question. The reason for this Q-connection traces back to Latin, where *quaestio* meant question, and *quaestors* were treasury officials asking how every last *centavo* had been spent.

(As for why the Romans plumped for Q as their inquisitive signature, don't ask. Numerous English words have similar clans, such as the GL-words of illumination—*glint, glow, glisten, glitter*—or the SL-words of ooziness, the –ACK words of impact, or the W-words that dominate questions themselves. If an archaic sound felt right at the time, then kindred words would echo this decision down the line.)

More than likely then that QUIZ is one more cousin in the nosy Q-set, but who can resist a piece of Irish folklore claiming the term arose from a wager? James Daly was the man apparently. The Dublin theatre owner bet a chum in 1790 that he could endow a new word to the language inside

24 hours. The bet was made, impelling Daly to hire a gang of ragamuffins with a curious brief. I can just imagine the conversation:

'I want you to scrawl QUIZ all over town,' said Daly. 'That's Q-U-I-Z.' 'What's it mean?' asked a waif.

'Exactly.'

Come first light, when Dubliners woke to the graffiti, theirs was the same question. What was it? Was this a secret test? Becoming a quiz of sorts, the stunt caused a new word to be installed in the *Oxford*, and Daly made a tidy profit. Apparently.

Codswallop, I'm thinking, but the story has stuck with me for years. Where some rugrats long to fly to Mars or drive fire engines, I've always yearned to coin a word. Hundreds have managed the feat, from inventors (Laszlo Biro) to scientists (Georg Ohm), from Milton (*pandemonium*) to Shakespeare (*unreal*). Journalists have left their fingerprints too, with such words as blitz-krieg, metrosexual and flying saucer first appearing in newspaper copy.

Then again, you may have uniqueness on your side, a maverick perspective or burst of radical thinking. If a grim existence is not Orwellian, it's likely to be Dickensian or Kafkaesque. If I said the Daliesque dreamscape was the breast I'd ever seen, then that would be a Freudian slip.

So what would my made-up word mean? At twenty I lacked the flair to invent a utensil or notable salad. My crossword job was only just beginning—a little premature for injecting self-made neologisms into the mix, if such an indulgence could ever be permitted. And that's when the verse idea hit home.

Edmund Clerihew Bentley was the trailblazer. I was a Drama and English teacher at the time, doing my first tour of duty at North Sydney Girls High School, when I asked a Year 8 class to write their own clerihews.

'What's that?' they asked.

'Here,' I said, handing out a xeroxed sheet. 'Use these for inspiration.' Four lines, the clerihew is a ragged biographical poem with a rhyming pattern of AABB. To give you an example, using the man himself:

Edmund Clerihew Bentley

Wrote humorous novels and columns intently.

But his lasting claim to fame

Is inventing this style of ill-scanning ditty that bears his middle name.

When not teaching, I was midway through fixing up a manuscript, that book called *Marzipan Plan* written back in Rome. One character in this carnival yarn is a tattooed woman who doesn't speak any language familiar to those around her. When not displaying her illustrious flesh to the paying public, she reads opaque seven-line poems that called on every word I could invent at the time:

Vanar thrame mitpa doma
Ep elg luldi onuc paun
Rarkue nac obar moda
Nus gwid vanar losp u pan
Omun omun logro choth
Shembla fhavo eubi hotch
Plell orh peeg lunthum spovern

I called them qerlams, the word I hoped would reach the dictionary one day, or at least do the rounds of Year 8 English classes. Instead of rhyme the poems call on anagrams, with a coupling pattern of ABAB-CCD. In other words, the third line ended with a mixture of the first line's final word, and so on. Line D in this case, the qerlam's finale, blended the seven letters opening each line—an acrostic with a twist.

Twist, no doubt, is the right word. I still have ambitions of endowing a word to English, but nowadays I'm less hallucinogenic about the plan. Naming the poem at the time, choosing the word for which I had high hopes, I felt obliged to enlist a U-less Q, since I'd spent too long during Scrabble games despising Qs for needing their sidekicks.

Needless to add, Operation Qerlam was a fiasco. The book did OK but the verse form never found its niche in the lexicon, unlike quiz or pandemonium. Probably best to summarise the fiasco as a clerihew:

David Robert Astle
Only has till
2040 or so, mixing letters at his desk,
To work out what it means to be Astlesque.

LAZY DOG — pangrams and alphabet jigsaws

Harking back to QUIZ, our answer for 13-Across, I'm prompted to move to the next related subject.

Stop. Have a second read of that last paragraph and what do you notice? Don't worry. It's not easy to see. Then again, if you share my obsession, you can't read a shopping list without this kind of thought simmering in your head. Milk cartons, cereal boxes, comic strips: anything that has letters will instigate an alphabet search. The twitch began in childhood and hasn't let up. Studying English in my final year of school, I spent as much time memorising the lines of Donne and Eliot as seeing if 'The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock' had a W.

So the opening paragraph, you're thinking, holds every letter of the alphabet. Or does it? Take a closer look to get a brief feel for the affliction I live with every day.

Correct, there's no Y. The sentence is one short of a bona-fide pangram, those quick-brown-fox creations that account for all the alphabet. The Master Puzzle follows suit, omitting a single letter. For all its KASBAHs and GEN-Xs, the pangram ambition fell one letter shy. Desperate as I was, trying various combinations to scoop up the whole ABC, I ended up sticking with the current entries, as they promised the richer spread of recipes. Still, the shortcoming galls even now, not that most solvers would notice. The quirk is like a Nina, a wrinkle in the cloth only fellow obsessives would see. So which letter is it? Creeping closer to a completed grid, treat that question as your sideline quiz.

But returning to brown foxes and those lazy dogs they hurdle, pangrams remain the Holy Grail for philologists—or people who love words. Years have been sacrificed to the cause of producing the shortest pangram possible, one with every letter appearing at least once and still making some kind of sense. Among the more notable executions, with letter count provided, are:

AMAZINGLY FEW DISCOTHEQUES PROVIDE JUKE-BOXES. (40) SIX BOYS GUZZLING RAW PLUM VODKA QUITE JOY-FULLY. (40)

JAIL ZESTY VIXEN WHO GRABBED PAY FROM QUACK. (36) OUICK WAXY BUGS JUMP THE FROZEN VELDT. (31)

Constructors pay similar heed when making grids. You won't be able to squeeze every letter into a puzzle, but SQUEEZE and PUZZLE sure help. That's why I jumped at VENEZUELA. The homophone idea was fun, and I know as a solver that I value any crossword which can toss a few high-scorers (using the Scrabble term) into critical junctions.

Nothing worse, piecing through a puzzle, sweating over every clue, and the setter continues to dish out SENSELESS, RESIDUE, TSE-TSE etc. These words have their place but as a compiler you can't afford to maintain that timidity. It's like the songwriter who can't escape the comforts of you/blue and me/see.

Amy Reynaldo, the Crossword Fiend blogger, labels the richest alphabetical specimens as Scrabbly, an adjective I'm happy to spread. In fact, with a bit of luck, Scrabbly may end up being the word Amy endows to English, a country mile ahead of the fated qerlam.

RECIPE PRECIS: EXOTICS

While strictly not a recipe of itself, the exotic clue presumes you have a modest grasp of other languages. Just the very basics, really, with the various articles (LA, EL, LE, DAS, DER, DIE) as well as other subtitle staples, such as JA, OUI, SI and *un poco más*. Exotic clues will state their target language, sometimes more subtly be naming a city rather than a nationality. Beyond this etiquette, any other foreign word is *verboten*.

HALL OF FAME: EXOTICS

An idée (not fixe) about epic (6) [Cinephile, FT]
Inaugurate church with articles in Le Figaro (6) [Times 8595]
Rallying but get a drug for pain? (8) [Alberich, FT]
Genius taken for a mug in his native land (8) [Sesame crossword, May 2005]
Here in Paris models posed around homes (9) [Cincinnus]

SOLUTIONS: Aeneid, launch, baguette, Einstein, domiciles, Casablanca

Picture the White House for Latinos (10) [Paul, Guardian]

QUIZLING 21.1

Israelis know the game as Mapolet—or avalanche. On the other hand, Danes prefer Klodsmajot, alias klutz. In Rio de Janeiro the same game's nickname translates as earthquake-tower, while you and I know it as the Swahili word for build. What game?

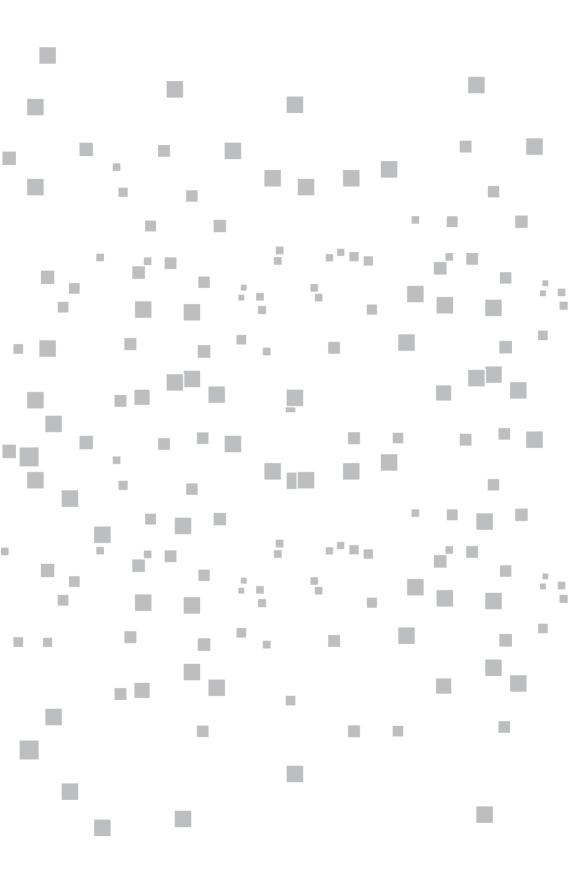
QUIZLING 21.2

Hip to a new era, the Vatican has converted modern words to old Latin. Can you link apathy, casino, dancing, flirt, gateau and shampoo to their translations below?

aleatorium, amor levis, capitilavium, ludus saltatorius, placenta farta, voluntatis defectio

QUIZLING 21.3

Can you place an Asian currency beside an Asian hardwood to sound out an Indonesian word adopted into English?



•		• .
	•	• "•
		• .



CHAPTER 22

Dope doubled his \$500 in seven days (4)

Crossword-making is as lucrative as dog-walking. Next time you drive down Malibu Road, admiring the homes of the rich and famous, know that puns and homophones didn't secure the collateral.

I live in a Californian bungalow, 16,000 kilometres from California, with three bedrooms, two kids, a Labrador cross and a wife whose annual salary, most years, puts my revenue in the shade. Are we happy? Last time I checked. Are we rich? Put it this way: does your house need painting?

It's only natural, then, that when money-making opportunities arise, they catch my eye. For all intents and purposes I'm the dope mentioned in our Master clue, out to double his dough in a short space of time and usually seeing his efforts backfire to varying degrees. Over the years the list has grown impulsive: teacher, copywriter, deckhand, columnist, mango picker, book reviewer, journalist, proofreader, Tarzanagram.

Be nice if we could tiptoe past that last one, pretend I never mentioned it, but this chapter's themes of idiocy, money and manipulation insist we go there.

Say what you like about the modesty of a puzzle income, the same job has catered to my gypsy disposition. Nowadays the Web has made most jobs that way, the ease of the internet erasing the necessity to be fixed in one place, though crosswording has enjoyed that bonus ever since I joined the club. If I gathered no moss for most of my twenties, tootling round Europe, getting lost in Latin America, at least I could glean a wage.

The *Herald* to be fair was good enough to tolerate my itchy feet. In those early days of Wordwit, when Ted Validas was responsible for the puzzles, I recruited Mum to act as go-between. For a year or more,

Heather Astle was Lee Starheath, turning my handwritten clues into typed copy and sending them to the puzzle department. Bear in mind that these were different times, when an electric Olivetti was the height of technology, and parents were selfless by definition. Of course Mum took a cut of my modest salary, plus she had the perk of personal updates from her eldest boy, slapdash travelogues sandwiched in between pangrams and spoonerisms.

One such letter confessed to playing Tarzan for a quid. This was 1983. I was 21 and had more muscles than sense, a fugitive from the European rugby tour. The rest of the team had flown back to Oz, leaving me to travel south to Torquay, the home of *Fawlty Towers*, to play a season with the town's local side.

The set-up was cosy: a new circle of friends, a bedsit with sea glimpses, the puzzle income, a chance to try some writing, but after a while the heater on the wall began to swallow the 50p coins like movie popcorn, the weekend sessions of lager and nightclubs tearing holes in the budget, and I could no longer rely on my knack for making riddles to keep the wolf away.

Summertime, Torquay is a different town, full of tourists and cockle merchants. The shutters on the ice-cream parlours lift and the pier is busy with people. A carnival sets up on the foreshore and all the hotels are booked to the gills. But that wasn't the Torquay I knew. Mine was Dickensian, cold and impoverished, with the only chance of employment being a night porter (which I didn't get) or wearing a pair of chamois around my hips and ululating.

The job was casual in every sense. Periodic phone calls, maybe twice a month, told me where and when I needed to appear in full Tarzan gear. Thankfully I could keep my Speedos on underneath the loincloth, but in zero degrees, an icy wind blowing off the English Channel, that was small comfort. Hence the manipulation. To every gig I took my lucky pair of woollen gloves. To get from A to B on a second-hand moped, I first wore the gloves to save my fingers from falling off. On reaching B, I rolled the gloves into a ball and stashed them down my jungle costume to save face, so to speak. Zero degrees can take its toll on a man, even a virile lummox like Tarzan. I felt obliged to maintain appearances on behalf of the hero's franchise.

The telegram racket was run by a girl called Helen who recognised a niche. Her dog was Lester, and the park where he ran doubled as Helen's office. When I first responded to the ad in the paper I said I'd like to be in charge of gorillagrams, figuring it stood to be warmer. But when Helen saw my rugby frame she pegged me as Johnny Weismuller for a 60 per cent cut, which was reasonable given I was the crossword-maker dragging his arse through the elements.

As for instructions, they were vague. For my debut gig, Helen said I'd be fine. The client is turning 40, she said. 'Her name is Pamela. She's having dinner at the Teignmouth Hotel in Teignmouth and it's a surprise. You're booked to arrive at eight. What more do you need to know?'

Riding the moped, my plastic overalls keeping out the sleet, I started reviewing all the other idiotic schemes I'd done to supplement my clue career. Neck and neck with Tarzan would have to be the early TV appearances. Only 21, I'd already been on a couple of quiz shows back in Australia. (That's the other reason QUIZ is in the grid, but in the last chapter I was too embarrassed to tell you.) *Sale of the Century* in 1981, no question, was my lowest public moment.

Getting selected was less about IQ than having an interesting job. Who cares if you don't know the capital of Chad, you make crosswords, yeah? That's quirky. That's good fodder. So the audition staff found me a slot and I went home to memorise the wives of Henry VIII, or whatever wedge of knowledge I never needed to reproduce on the night, only for disaster to strike.

In the ten years of playing contact sport I'd hardly suffered a scratch. By comparison, rugby is ten times safer than impersonating Tarzan in midwinter, but on the eve of my quiz spot I copped a flying boot to the eye, requiring 30 stitches. I rang the producers first thing on Monday and told them I'd had a mishap but thought I was all right to appear. In hindsight that was optimistic.

A dead spit for Frankenstein's monster, I gave the make-up girl a heart attack. She did her best to camouflage the surgical wire, slapping pancake on the mercurochrome, using wax pencils to replace my missing eyebrow, but nothing in her bag of tricks could remove my concussion. Again, I was the dope trying to double his loot—and lost. My reflexes were cactus. Those few times I managed to beat the buzzer I thought

Angel Falls fell somewhere in Africa and Jane Austen invented the pneumatic tyre. It was a nadir.

Novelty telegrams, by comparison, ran a close second in the Stupidity Stakes. Huddled on the moped, the sleet getting thick, it slowly dawned on me that I had no telegram to deliver. Apart from saying happy birthday to a stranger, maybe leading the table in song, I was a messenger without a message. After the Tarzan yodel, what did I have? The panic set my crossword knack into overdrive. *Think, apeman, think!*

In a backroom set aside by the publican, I peeled off my slicks and clipped on the chamois. I rolled up the gloves and improved my contour. I coughed and warbled, my mind racing through the pun reserves, trying to compose a piece of wordplay to see me escape from the bistro unscathed.

Sound FX: Tarzan howl

[Enter crossword-maker in loincloth. The pub is crowded. He has no idea what Pamela looks like. He asks the barman, who points to a table by the window. The crossword-maker beats chest, wails to ceiling.]

Crossword-maker (in Cro-Magnon voice): Me Tarzan, you Pamela. Me swing on vines all day, you divine. Tarzan live in jungle, Pamela treemendous. Me created by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Tarzan digs Pamela . . .

It was a train-wreck, with three cheers to finish. I gathered my cash, the slicks and my gloves, and didn't think hanging around for a Guinness was the smartest idea. Besides, the rain was getting heavier, my sniffle was worsening, and I had a crossword to make.

IS THIS YOUR CARD? — manipulation clues

Thumb through most how-to books on crossword-solving and you won't always find a category called manipulation. That's because the recipe is evasive. In showbiz terms, manipulation is close magic, the sleight-of-hand stuff you need to see in slomo before you can figure out how it works.

We've talked about deletions, where BASIL may lose heart to become BAIL, or a RABBIT can run short to be RABBI. By the same token, containers embrace the idea of insertion, such as COSMO gaining an I to reveal a Renaissance painter. And soon we'll enter the reversal realm where words take on new guises in retrospect. Falling in between all these is manipulation. Neither pure anagram nor straight deletion, manipulation is more a deft tweak, a lightning-quick move of the shells to make you lose the pea.

The clearest way to explain how this recipe works is to divide the subtle operation into two types—the switch and the swap. At first glance, they may sound like synonyms, but these next two subsections will help you set the styles apart.

The switch

Neo is a mystery to me. I don't know his real name, but he makes elegant crosswords for the *Financial Times*, including a nifty example of a manipulation switch. His (or hers) is the first sample, the second clue crafted by a retired Tarzanagram:

Prison caused change of heart—that's the aim (4) Row ending early for depleted foursome (4)

These two are twins, not just in answer lengths, but also in how they operate. For English solvers at least, *prison* is GAOL. After a *change of heart*—not with new letters, but a flip-flop of the vowels—you'll create GOAL, meaning *aim*. Reread the surface and you'll see how the wordplay has been shaped into a lyrical and enlightened thought.

The next switch deals with a heteronym. Remember them? Does DOES, say, equal female deer or hairstyles? Here the booby trap is *row*. I'm wanting you to think of the aquatic kind, boosting the deceit by involving a *foursome*, a standard crew for several Olympic events, but the truth is more about uproar—that sort of row, a RIOT in fact.

So what does the wordplay tell you? The key phrase is *ending early*. The ending of RIOT is T. Shift its position so that T appears earlier and hey presto: RIOT turns into TRIO.

Big deal—that's just an anagram. True, but manipulations are much suaver in their moves. Instead of getting you to scramble, they advise you

to slide a letter. Or a few letters, like this gnarly clue from Alberich, again of the *Financial Times*:

Cautious and vigilant when leaders advance (9)

Most readers won't crack this clue, not cold anyway. It's hard but beautiful, and worth a look to see the guile of manipulations.

Leaders advance, the phrase, whispers the idea of nudging two or more letters deeper within a word. Or possibly to the end, such as the leaders of MANOR advancing to the end to reveal NORMA. But what's the word that undergoes this change? Well, it's nine letters long and probably means vigilant.

That word is ATTENTIVE, though not your final answer. Don't neglect *cautious* at the start of the clue, the likely definition. Advance the leaders of ATTENTIVE several slots and TENTATIVE emerges. Tough but beautiful. In fact, we really are paddling in the deep end here, so don't panic if you can't get to the bottom of these clue styles.

Let's recap. We've looked at a letter switch, then a switch of letters plural, leading us on to a third switch option—moving the order of whole words. These two samples will help you see this wholesale approach, the first courtesy of Paul in *The Guardian*, the other of yours truly:

Stand by for armed robbery? On the contrary (6) Where silks may embellish space romance? Vice versa (9)

Treating words in a phrase as freight cars in a train, these manipulations are asking you to re-shunt the sequence. In both clues, the last two phrases—on the contrary and vice versa—are the signals for this switch. Armed robbery is a HOLD UP. Display the crime on the contrary and you make UPHOLD, or stand by.

The treachery lurking in the second example is *silks*. The material, right? Sorta. Here the material is playing slang for Queen's Counsels, the highest order of barrister. Can you name a place where silks embellish? Try a COURTROOM, which vice versa becomes ROOM/COURT, or *space romance*, just as the White House can turn into the house white, or an offshoot can shoot off. Which brings us to the second style of manipulation.

The swap

Perhaps the best way to grasp the difference between these two manipulation modes is to think that switches are internal, like two classmates exchanging seats for the school photo. Swaps on the other hand are external, where a classmate gives up her chair so that an outside student can join the lesson. Let's take it back to Tarzan:

Apeman dumping Liz, finally, for model material (6)

In equation terms, the clue is saying TARZAN—Z (*Liz finally*) + T (as in Model T) = TARTAN. Keeping with the ape world:

Ape altered face and ass (6)

The equation: MONKEY-M + D = DONKEY

Never will you be expected to scramble a word that's not presented in the clue. Such a sin is akin to the other great taboo—the indirect anagram. Elusive as manipulations can be, they give you clear pointers to the words you need, and a specific command on how to alter those words.

That said, this style of manipulation can really test your mettle, asking you to intuit the missing word (TARZAN or MONKEY) and then make an external trade. Your latest Master clue does just that:

Dope doubled his \$500 in seven days (4)

With no cross-letters to build on, this clue is not one you'd readily consider. However, that familiar phrase of *seven days* can only mean WEEK. Is that the answer? As it happens, yes. But why?

Cryptic shorthand resembles standard shorthand. The more familiar you become with the symbols, the quicker you grasp the message. T, we've just discovered, can be suggested by model, as well as *time* or *bone* (T-bone), *temperature* or *tonne*. Don't forget *shirt* too, as in T-shirt. And in more eccentric clues I've also seen T denoted by *junction* (T-junction) and *true*. In our Master clue the shorthand relates to numbers.

Romans were a godsend with their numbering system, pulling letters into the world of maths. Thanks to Caesar and Co, a girl like LIV

is permanently 54, while IMBECILES can misplace their figures to become BEES. Speaking of fools, our dope has \$500, or D. Double that and you get M, the Roman thousand. So how does WEEK play out? Or have you been fooled by the maths lesson?

Dope is more than just a ninny. The word is also slang for marijuana. Can you think of another synonym ending in D? (The WEEK theory should help here.) That's right, WEED. But WEEM is not the solution, let alone a word, because a thousand in business slang, leaving the Romans behind, is K, as in the sentence: Puzzle making pulls in some 40K per annum, explaining why some compilers need to teach, or write books, or dress up in chamois occasionally. Once anyway, a thousand weeks ago.

RECIPE PRECIS: MANIPULATIONS

A subtle customer, the manipulation clue has one of two tricks up its sleeve. The switch sees one letter being moved within the word, changing places, so to speak. If IRAN's leader is demoted, then RAIN may be the result, the I sliding down three slots, with no external letter being enlisted. The other trick is the swap, where a letter in a keyword is traded for an outside letter in order to spell the answer. Again, if IRAN has a leadership change, then anything from BRAN to GRAN is a possible result. Look for signs to suggest either action—rearranging within, or borrowing from without.

HALL OF FAME: MANIPULATIONS

Child the result had this couple married much earlier (4) [Times 8587]

External path, first to last (5) [Times 8611]

Horse and cart back to front? It's monstrous (5) [Puck, Guardian]

Canadian province with idiot president, degree going to head (8) [Paul, Guardian]

Singer from Switzerland replacing German in Bond movie (9) [Cincinnus, FT]

Acquire site and relocate a pub (3,6) [Gemini, Guardian]

SOLUTIONS: item, outer, hydra, Manitoba, goldfinch, gin palace

QUIZLING 22.1 What simple English word becomes its own past tense once its initial is transferred to the tail?

QUIZLING 22.2

Exchanging a letter per step, and mixing the new combination, can you progress from EMBRYO to FOETUS? But wait, there is a mild complication—you need to go via MOTHER. (Remarkably, our own five-step operation includes a slang for man, and 'to rear a child', with the other step inferring rest.)

QUIZLING 22.3

What four-letter word for layer

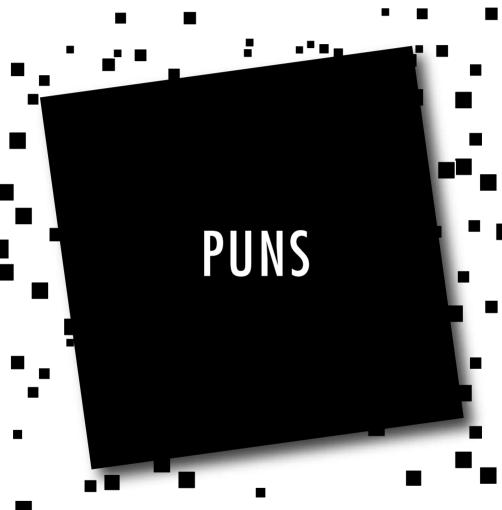
What four-letter word for layer

Becomes another player

In the laying art

Once L's the new heart?

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CHAPTER 23

Swinger's bar for partner pickups? (7)

Knock-knock.

Who's there?

Sarah.

Sarah who?

Sarah reason you're not laughing?

Maybe because puns, as they say, are the lowest form of wit. But if that's so, doesn't that make puns the foundation of all humour?

Knock-knock jokes are *toc-tocs* in the Transvaal, *klop-klops* in Amsterdam and *kon-kons* in Kyoto. The stuff of cute graffiti, vanity plates, headlines, slogans and kids' jokes: puns separate us from beasts.

Virgil cracked them. Homer and Dante did the same. *Don Quixote* is built on a formula of wordplay and swordplay. In Act II of *Macbeth* a boozy porter does a knock-knock routine, standing at the gates of Cawdor and jesting about English tailors, French hose and a roasted goose. True, the schtick may have lost some zing in the interim, but the gag reflex is immemorial.

Childhood teems with punny riddles and rhymes. To a young mind, puns present the elements of risk and creativity, testing both semantic and social boundaries. (Remember, though, no matter how far you push the envelope, it will always remain stationery.) Compared to the bigotry of so much adult humour, puns imply a wonder of how language operates. Instead of racism or sexism—or any other adult staple—the punster would rather describe two silkworms racing down a leaf, only to end up in a tie.

Studies suggest that the more dexterity children develop with wordplay,

the easier they will build social bridges and develop their own sense of confidence. Add to that the notion of hungry clocks going back four seconds, and puns of course have the added advantage of being funny—some of the time.

Categorically, puns fall into three main baskets. The first include our silkworms or the talkative yak—a wisecrack based on double meaning. Like the coffee shops that trade as Ground Zero or Daily Grind.

The second sort of pun mucks about with homophones, like the pushed envelope being somehow stationery or pirate earrings costing a buccaneer. Or subeditors forging such headlines as:

EMERGING OLYMPIANS COME FOURTH CIRCUS FIRE: HEAT INTENTS HAVANA BALL

Lastly there's the manipulation kind where words or names have been reshaped, like the sick pig needing *oinkment*, the sick bird *tweetment*, or kennels being designed by a *barkitect*. Or these inventive takeaway joints:

Just Falafs Kebabylon Marquis de Salade

Writing feature stories, I've tackled some dangerous assignments. I've shut my eyes to play blind cricket, warmed up a studio audience and dared to whip zabaglione before an Italian chef, but the riskiest gig dates back to November 2007, the day I agreed to enter the world of Christmas crackers. Of all Western customs the cracker is the bastion of the shabbiest puns known to humankind. Consume too many of these ageless riddles and you may lose your humour forever. In a foolhardy moment I'd agreed to meet the people responsible, the joke selectors and manufacturers. Then there was the horror of the riddles themselves:

Why was 6 scared of 7? Because 7 8 9 What's Tarzan's favourite Christmas carol? Jungle Bells Why did the journalist carry a ruler? To get his story straight. I swear, these three were among the better ones. Some involved Sherlock Bones, elephants on trunk calls and road-crossing chickens. Researching the story I discovered that corniness was crucial to the formula. Dodgy humour makes the perfect glue at the Christmas table, transcending age and gender, class and aesthetic, with everybody's joke as lousy as the next person's. Said one psychologist, 'We'd be disappointed if the riddles *weren't* painful to some degree. The best puns provoke a laugh along with a sigh as well.'

Unless of course you deem yourself above puns, too mature for the likes of tee-hee and knock-knock. Vaudeville veteran Les Dawson reckoned puns were the quickest way to lose an audience, while John Cleese, another star in the English galaxy, is attributed as saying that comedy has three rules:

- 1. no puns;
- 2. no puns;
- 3. and no puns.

Clinicians at the Levity Institute recognise this syndrome as 'punnus envy', an affliction common among groan-ups. But funnily enough, not crossword lovers. We can't resist a wry game of gotcha. Not just the foundation of all humour, they are surely a cornerstone of clue-making. Even the *Herald*, in its debut crossword of 1934, fell for the punny charms of a *mathematical reptile* (ADDER), with every setter adding to the tally ever since.

GROAN-UP HUMOUR — cute clues and misdirection

Americans call them cute clues, oblique definitions to highlight an answer's many tangents instead of relying on the usual dictionary extract or piece of trivia. Ben Tausig, a Gen-Xer who syndicates his puzzles widely in the States, has a flair for this clueing mode. Take these six, for example:

It may come to a head = IDEA
Into shootings and public hangings? = ARTY

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Proverbial battlers = SEXES

Apple for the teacher? = IMAC

Country album = ATLAS

Go home = JAPAN
```

Each has the potential to be styled into a riddle, so elegant is the word-play. Second to that, weary words are rejuvenated in the comical mode. Along with ADDER, ASP is the next chronic reptile of crosswords, a creature renewed by the cute clue: *Nile biter?*

You'll also notice, in Tausig's six, that only two involve question marks. This rightly suggests that experienced US solvers don't insist on punctuation to declare the mental twist.

Though when the twist is kinkier than usual, like these next four from a bevy of American setters, the question mark is commonly installed:

```
Something gays and straights have in common? = LONG A
Drive in the backseat of a car? = LIBIDO
Holiday cut short? = XMAS
Star of Westerns? = BADGE
```

By definition, not all of these can be described as pure-bred puns, yet they certainly embrace nimble wordplay, casting their answers in a fresh light in the same way riddles do. Like these clues, riddles pivot on a skewed way of thinking, a double meaning, a misdirection. Another reason, perhaps, why most US bloggers plump for the tag of cute clue, or daffy definition, rather than the stricture of pun.

Cryptics on the other hand have pun as a distinct recipe, the same category sometimes dubbed a tee-hee or riddle clue. Different from her quick cousins, the cryptic composer will almost always bring the question mark into play, as these three from the pen of *Guardian* setter Rufus illustrate:

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A young crab? = NIPPER
Well off? = SOUND ASLEEP
Hold hands? = STEVEDORES
```

Pun clues are indeed nippers. Their surface sense encourages you to look one way while the true answer stalks you from behind and—ouch.

Rufus does this beautifully in the last two samples. In both cases the solver can't be blamed for imagining very different outcomes, dreaming of wealth and intimacy respectively, when all the time the paydirt is waiting in slumber and the shipping yard.

Professionally, of all puzzle setters, Rufus is born to this clue style, as Roger Squires (his real name) once graced the stage and TV screen as a first-class magician. He knows the science of misdirection, getting the crowd to glance left while he dabbles with mechanics on the right. As a member of the elite Magic Circle, Rufus is also accomplished in patter, that other silken quality of good puns, lulling you with words you take to be innocuous, only to learn they pack a punch.

The Rufus trio also boasts brevity. As a whole, puns tend to be shorter than their mates since the formula doesn't demand the usual two strands to appear as separate pieces. Instead, wordplay and definition can be interwoven into one allusion. *First-class student* (a Rufus clue for INFANT) is entrusting the quip to bear both elements.

That said, length is not always the giveaway. Some prolong the gag, or take their full measure, as this *Times* bundle goes to prove:

```
Digitally produced image = FINGER PAINTING

Materially unaffected by psychotherapy? = SHRINK RESISTANT

Hail fellow? Well, Met = WEATHER BUREAU
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Maybe what you didn't want to see—one pun clue without any question mark, while another holds one in its centre. But the etiquette usually holds good, even if the clue length can fluctuate.

Take our Master clue, for instance. Hardly skimpy, compared to the cunning of Rufus, the five-word specimen at least sports a question mark. Let's take a look:

```
Swinger's bar for partner pickups? (7)
```

Where are your thoughts? Shadowy liaisons? Kiss-and-no-tell? That's the plan, of course: the wrong direction. You won't be shocked to hear

the clue has nothing at all to do with sexual antics, despite the surface sense. Indeed the answer is more aligned to an earlier headline, the one about the circus fire.

Change the kinky backdrop for the Big Top, and all the key words—swinger, bar, partner—take on a new glow. If partners are being picked up, it's not over sleazy one-liners, but very different lines, suspended from the upper reaches of the ring. TRAPEZE of course is the answer you're chasing, and one step closer to sealing the grid's second quadrant. Handily the Master Puzzle's other pun clue is 30-Across, along the frame, but before we go there let's take a break from the circus and throw the spotlight on a lesser known aspect of the puzzle story—the romance of partner pickups.

DOWN WITH LOVE — hidden proposals

Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon are lifelong partners and makers of some of the best cryptics in the world. This Pennsylvania pair has been creating deviant grids for the *Atlantic Monthly* until recently, as well as a weekly cryptic in Canada's *National Post*. At the time of writing, their work runs monthly in the *Wall Street Journal*. For some strange reason, US (or Canadian) cryptics are reluctant to succumb to pun clues, opting for every other recipe, including some of these exquisite anagram clues from the Cox and Rathvon stable:

Les, Tom, Dicky and Harry = MOLEST For Callas, a fabulous place to sing = LA SCALA

When not crafting clues, the couple collects fossils from the Devonian Age, listen to calypso music and play cupid for their solvers. Once anyway, back in September 2007.

The story began with an email from a young communications officer named Aric Egmont from Cambridge, Massachusetts, who wished to propose to his girlfriend Jennie Bass, a medical student. Every Sunday Aric and Jennie loved to collaborate over the quick in the *Boston Globe*, a feature created by Cox and Rathvon. Any chance, asked Aric, of lacing a proposal into the crossword? Romantics at heart, Cox and Rathvon warmed to the idea.

Popping the Question, the eventual puzzle, wove half a dozen nuptial phrases into the grid, from LET'S TIE THE KNOT to MAY I HAVE YOUR HAND. These longer entries crossed covert references to Jennie's family, friends and other passions. The last themed answer was clued as *Generic proposal* (a pun of Jen + Aric), which was Aric's cue to kneel with ring poised, and ask WILLYOU MARRY ME.

'She screamed and hugged me,' Aric recalled in a follow-up article on the coup. 'It took her a minute to say yes.'

I've hatched a similar plot, helping Australian Scrabble champ Paul Cleary propose to his girlfriend, seeding a grid a decade ago with words and names important to the couple. A few years later, to toast the wedding of Naomi Taylor, one of the many Taylors to oversee Fairfax puzzles, my cryptic played with something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue: a crossword theme as gift.

Lee Glickstein of California, a sporadic setter for the *New York Times*, also turned to puzzles to do his matrimonial work. His plan was to tie the knot with his partner, but just in case she had other plans, Lee turned his byline into Ken Stegicelli, masking his true identity on the page. The puzzle hinged on the all-important question, to which thankfully his beloved said yes, causing Ken to revert to a jubilant Lee and go book a chapel.

Our last star-crossed story has a bittersweet ending and involves the giant of Australian crosswords, Lindsey Browne. In his salad days, just after the war, LB fell in love with Nancy Moore, aptly a mixture of YON ROMANCE. In cryptic fashion, LB confessed his feelings with an inbuilt acrostic, the first letters of every Across answer spelling I LOVE NANCY MOORE. A few weeks later, once his paramour had been alerted to the secret message, Lindsey crafted a sequel: WILL SHE MARRY ME? Not long after that, brimming with the news, LB let his sharper-eyed solvers know the outcome: THE ANSWER ISYES.

The *Herald* was less than thrilled, quashing any future romantic updates in Lindsey's work. These were puzzles after all, not journal entries. Hitched and happy, the couple had four kids, only for cancer to strike Nancy down in 1959. The diagnosis was a brain tumour, compelling LB to sink his meagre puzzle income into a flight to Sweden, hoping the world's best surgeon at the time could work a miracle. Alas, Nancy lost her battle, leaving Lindsey with four small children, and next to broke.

The cure? More journalism. More cryptics. And a TV quiz called *Pick-A-Box*, where the cruciverbalist scooped the prize pool. Invited back by public demand, LB later appeared on a family edition with his second eldest, Adam, and won more cash. Owing to countless hours of researching clues, Lindsey had the perfect mind for trivia. In a tumultuous span of years, crosswords had given him a soulmate, and later the wherewithal to manage in her absence.

Little by little, recovering from the grief, and climbing out of poverty, LB went to a tennis day in Sydney's eastern suburbs. There a young social worker named Elspeth Knox, a lover of crosswords, felt almost starstruck, asking this handsome man on the baseline, 'Are you LB?'

'C'est moi,' he said.

Despite such pompous beginnings, Elspeth saw past Lin's airs and found a real sweetness, as well as a devoted father. 'A male chauvinist he may have been,' laughs Elspeth now, 'but he never swore. He told me that swearing demonstrated a lack of imagination or an ignorance of the great richness that is the English language.'

Elspeth agreed, and the two became fast friends. For only the second time in his life, LB was smitten, and a crossword, of course, seemed the only sacrosanct way to ask for the young woman's hand—this time keeping the powers that be in the dark. The response? ELSPETH SAID YES.

RECIPE PRECIS: PUNS

Think of the pun clue as a comical query, testing if a word can be shown in a fresh light, and you'll anticipate the question mark. The other signature is brevity, since wordplay and definition are entwined. One more tip: look for words that carry several meanings (shutter, for example, can be a louvre, or part of a camera, or maybe a door) and see where each tangent leads.

QUIZLING 23.1 Mix the ten letters missing from the riddle below to make its punny two. WH## BO#K DO YO# BUY # #AU#Y GRA##A#IAN?

QUIZLING 23.2

A famous English actor. Turn the last letter of his first name into a Roman numeral, and you spell a type of pain that bad puns can produce. Now turn the first letter of his surname into another Roman numeral, and you get a word for glee. Who is our man?

QUIZLING 23.3

What eight-letter word means
what eight-letter word means
potentially difficult, as well as
potentially difficult, as well as
provoking amusement? And what
provoking amusement? And what
provoking amusement synonym
other word—a three-letter synonym
other word—a three-letter synonym
of problem—also means to remedy
a problem?

CHAPTER 24

. . . Twister for openers? (8)

Twister, Cluedo, Trouble, Yahtzee.

I can measure my childhood in board games.

Monopoly. Sorry! Mouse Trap. Stock Market.

Life before high school almost seemed to follow The Game of Life itself—drawing cards, rolling dice, moving pieces, missing turns. Until Scrabble came along and I cooled on the game-hopping to focus on the one passion.

I doted on Scrabble. You could almost say I was singular about it. Mates would be roaming the real world meeting girls or forming garage bands while I'd be setting up the Scrabble board, seeing if my right hand could outscore my left.

For General Studies in Year 12 each student gave a talk about a personal interest. I chose Scrabble, or Scrabble chose me, and I stood there like a kook on day release, reciting the 59 words you can make with RETINA plus a blank.

CANTIER CERTAIN CRINATE NACRITE

The teacher feared I was speaking in tongues. A sweetheart called Beth had trouble looking me in the eye after I mumbled a sequence like 'ANESTRI, NASTIER, RATINES, RESIANT . . . 'And who can blame them? Half the words were hokum, even to me. RETAINS, I could

handle, plus STAINER and RETSINA. But if STARNIE or STEARIN promised 70 points, including the bingo bonus of 50, then that's all that mattered to my fixated way of thinking. In my late teens, language amounted to racking up points—pun intended.

I entered Scrabble tournaments. Verbal misfits much like me assembled in bridge clubs and community rooms around Sydney, carrying tiles like holy sacraments. Between games I swotted three-letter words ending in AE and devised ways to dump surplus vowels. I became close friends with DZO (a Tibetan yak) and XU (a former coin of Vietnam) and knew that KANS (Indian sugar cane) couldn't be stripped to KAN, singular. Across a year of tournaments I played cab drivers and professors, retirees and prodigies, creating dense knots of words that looked like pretzels written in Klingon.

At 20 I made the state's top echelon, though my nemesis was a bloke called John Holgate. With square glasses, wispy beard and a riotous vocab, John was everybody's nemesis. The Australian champ ran the library attached to the Paddington Women's Hospital, though I'm sure his primary occupation was digesting words ending in J or reliving great Scrabble clashes of the past.

We met a couple of times in his hidey-hole within the hospital to coinvent a new board game. Words of course were central to our plan. The board's shape resembled an eye, each player needing to complete a circuit before entering the retina where the final anagram lurked. Knower's Arc was a working title, and it never went anywhere. Though I did. Overseas. With a football team. And for most of my twenties, I hardly drew a blank in anger.

The reason was GAE, the Scottish verb for go. Or WAE, their word for woe. Either/or, I was sick of words existing purely to winkle a score. AGE and AWE were words I could abide, but GAE and WAE belonged with DODO and the MOA.

When I did eventually return to the game, it wasn't as competitor so much as partner, testing my wits against my wife or other friends, the scoring restricted to the backs of envelopes, and those envelopes flung once the box was packed away. Scrabble is now for fun, not maximum points. As for rules, you can only browse a dictionary with a word in mind, but you can't go fishing in vague hope. Wine is essential. As for

obscurities, only if you must, bearing in mind that EAST or SATE is sweeter than SETA and TAES, which are also passable, just. Aesthetics in a way count more than mathematics.

John Holgate kept in touch, usually disguised as John Le Gotha, sending letters via the *Herald* to comment on Wordwit puzzles, and Ted Validas replied warmly. Puzzles of course couldn't afford to have answers like NACRITE or CRINATE, which slowly went to erode my Scrabble dialect. I drifted from tiled letters to letters within squares, as well as words on the page. Somehow, the fewer 'Scrabble words' I seemed to know, the easier my writing became, as if I could communicate a story in the language of the people rather than that of a tribe of fanatics.

My Scrabble links fizzled almost as quickly as Knower's Arc, the board game, and soon Mr Le Gotha stopped corresponding altogether. Now and then, whenever Scrabble stories reached the papers, I scoured for John's name amid dispatches. No longer the all-conqueror, he still claimed a lofty rung in the rankings, not that we played in person to confirm it. In fact we didn't see each other for two decades, when an extraordinary coincidence threw us together in 2008.

The occasion involved eight bodies stuffed into barrels. The barrels occupied an obsolete bank vault in a small corner of South Australia called Snowtown, the end-point of a notorious serial killing back in 1999. I'd just written a short play about the case—*After the Avalanche*—and flew to Sydney for an open reading of the script.

Other plays, other crimes, were involved on the day. The reading arose from a competition run by a theatre company that had invited submissions for scripts about an Australian crime. I'd chosen Snowtown, while other writers tried their luck with Ned Kelly, the missing Beaumont kids, a stolen bike outside Safeways or the disappearance of publisher Juanita Nielsen.

For readers unfamiliar with the last case, the nutshell version is that Nielsen, a fierce opponent of corrupt land deals in Sydney's Kings Cross, and publisher of an investigative magazine named *NOW*, vanished in 1975, presumed murdered. Coincidentally the play readings were held in a community centre within the Cross, the same postcode where Nielsen was last seen, though the eeriness didn't end there.

The moment I entered the building I heard the siren song of Scrabble

tiles—the coin-like clatter as they spilt from board to bag. Climbing the stairs, I walked into the past. The giant whiteboard with names and scores, the prim rows of tables with racks and boards on top, the chess clocks had only one explanation: a Scrabble tournament was in full swing, the Trans-Tasman Challenge no less. A sturdy bloke of 50, dressed in black tracksuit with a kiwi embroidered over his heart, said, 'Yer right, are ya?'

'I used to play this game,' I said.

'Yeah, well—' His way of saying bugger off. Then I recognised the grizzled features of Holgate in the throng.

'That's John,' I said. 'We know each other.'

'He's playing,' said the bouncer, softly.

Time to go, I thought. 'I'll drop back later.'

The script readings were down the hall in a room of beige carpet and plastic chairs. Out the window was a view of the El Alamein Fountain. Late November, the day was hot, and by the time the fourth play was going through its paces the room was stuffy.

Night and Day at the Carousel Cabaret focused on the murder of Juanita Nielsen. Actors Anonymous, the group in charge, had enlisted a brunette who looked like a doppelganger of the missing editor. She stood in the make-believe nightclub, script in hand, rebuking the mobsters in the cocktail booth when her body started swaying. She staggered, clutching her chest as if she were shot, then slumped to the floor. Others in the room leapt to her aid, told her to lie on her side, open her collar, open a window—it was mild panic. 'Does anyone know CPR?' asked a director.

Better than that, I knew a network of smart people in the next room. I bolted down the hall and burst into the tournament, blurting, 'Is there a doctor here?'

No, but there was Glenda, a registered nurse from New Zealand. The only hitch, she was halfway through a game. In her eyes I could sense the addict's dilemma: do I save a life or make a killing with my X and blank? Her Australian opponent thought a life was more important and froze the clock, encouraging Glenda to run off and help.

John Holgate came too—he knew a bit about medicine, mainly of the gynaecological kind, as well as a lot of arcane anatomical terms such as AXILLA and NUCHAL, as opposed to where these parts may be located. As the Kiwi nurse helped bring Juanita Nielsen back to life, John and I chatted.

'So this is what you do now?' he said, glancing round the room.

'This and crosswords. I'm into scripts at the moment.'

'Plays you mean?'

'Dramas. Black comedies. With not a Gaelic verb involved.'

John's eyes lit up. 'You still remember them?'

'Gae, hae, kae—scary, eh?'

'You know you'd be welcome back any time. Melbourne has a very active Scrabble scene.'

'Nae,' I smiled, 'but thanks. It's great to see you.'

By the way, Juanita survived, and Snowtown was pipped by Ronald Ryan, the last man hanged in Australia. Once the ambulance arrived, Glenda won her *contestus interruptus* by a comfortable margin, but Holgate and his compatriots seized the Trans-Tasman trophy, 179 wins to 108. Some zingers across the weekend included MEGAVOLT and HAZ-INESS, not to mention the usual suspects of VUG, CWM and DZO.

TOURNEYS WITH A TWIST — crossword slamdowns and Lollapuzzoola

Scrabble is not the only word-game to enjoy its own tournament. When Holgate and I first locked horns in the Hakoah Soccer Club, back in 1978, playing JO and QI till the KINE came home, a man named Will Shortz saw a gap in crossword culture.

Shortz of course would go on to edit crosswords for the *New York Times* in 1993, but his passion for puzzles dated back to his teens. In fact, Shortz is the only known person to hold a degree in enigmatology, a course he helped construct in the early 1970s under the aegis of Indiana University, digging into the timeless and universal appeal of conundrums. Graduating, Shortz held down a handful of different editorial positions, always with a puzzle flavour. He also threw his energies into creating the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, or ACPT, back in 1978.

When the word went out, Shortz had no idea how many souls might attend. But on that first chilly morning in February, the mercury nudging zero, some 149 diehard souls turned up with pencils and registration forms. Thirty years later the ACPT draws 700 competitors, the event so big it's recently been forced to shift from Stamford to Brooklyn.

Dapper as ever, now in his fifties, Shortz still hosts the gig, explaining to signed-up solvers the ordeal of six crosswords jammed into the first day, then a championship playoff on Sunday—across three divisions—to see which players get to wear the chequered tiaras. For the last five years, in the heavyweight division, the winner has been Tyler Hinman, bagging his first trophy when only 20. To see Tyler attack a grid is to watch a house being built in time-lapse, every last piece thrown expertly into place. (In 2006, the movie *Wordplay* captured this feat, as well as shadowing three other super-solvers.) Tyler has an IT degree and now works as a Google programmer. To quote Will Shortz, 'Not all smart people solve crosswords, but all crossword solvers are smart.'

Yet as large as ACPT has grown, it's not the only tournament on the radar. We've already read about the *Telegraph* setting a stopwatch on its solvers, while *The Times* of London has intermittently conducted a tournament since 1970. Roy Dean, the first winner, not only won a silver cup but an ongoing job as compiler.

Yet the joker in the pack has to be Lollapuzzoola, a new American event first appearing in 2008. The new-born contest doesn't just boast a remarkable link to Scrabble, but also to Twister, the game outlined in our current Master clue.

Ryan Hecht and Brian Cimmet have been described as 'two nerds with microphones'. The pair produces an indie podcast known as Fill Me In, a weekly look at the *New York Times* crossword, with tangents and whimsy all part of the banter. Ryan is an actor and Brian a pianist. Each has two cats and a very understanding wife. The slogan on their blog, Ryan and Brian Do Crosswords, is Come On Brain, Think Smarter, which says a lot about their self-reproaching humour.

Thinking smarter two years ago, Ryan and Brian conceived of Lollapuzzoola, a crossword tournament with a shot of lunacy. In golf terms, measuring this newcomer against the ACPT is much like comparing a celebrity pro-am versus the US Open, but no less a gathering of the black-and-white faithful. Faith in fact is the key word, the contest held in a retrofit church in Queens, New York, sacred ground to anyone rapt by words.

The Community Methodist Church on 35th Avenue is where, in the 1930s, Alfred Mosher Butts invented Lexiko, later called Criss-Crosswords, before being christened Scrabble in 1948. Remarkably, Alfred's old Scrabble club still congregates in a room off the nave. The street itself is nicknamed Scrabble Avenue, while the signpost deserves a closer look, appearing much like this: $35 t_1 h_4 A_1 v_4 e_1 n_1 u_1 e_1$.

The pilot Lollapuzzoola featured a crossword by Barry C Silk that dwelt on the Scrabble theme, its key phrases—MAGAZINE RACK and ROOFING TILES—underlining the church's history. Another challenge required an organist to play snatches of tunes, with LA BAMBA and SEND IN THE CLOWNS serving as central answers. Yet the craziest idea was fashioned by Mike Nothnagel, under the title of *Compromising Positions*.

At first, solvers struggled to connect the entries—KNOT THEORY and HIT THE SPOT. But then the shrewder types looked twice at the incidental fill. Sprinkled among the smaller words were BLUE, LEFT, HAND, RED, FOOT, GREEN and RIGHT. Sound familiar? It does to a boy who grew up on board games. As Ryan Hecht explains, 'We used those terms as starting positions for the Twister game. The top three finishers of the puzzle got to play for a chance to win one hundred bonus points.'

According to one eyewitness, Michael Smith, alias PhillySolver in cyberspace, 'Some nimble minds were not as nimble of body.' Crosswords may merit their reputation for keeping our brains in shape, but there's nothing like gardening, swimming, yoga or Twister to maintain all our other parts.

Stretching the segue, turning back to puns, this recipe perhaps makes the greatest demands on our mental agility. Where most other clues bend letters or sounds, the pun contorts whole concepts, asking you to see a word anew. Meanings can be tampered with, idioms pushed, semantic or cultural links explored. If I say BOXER, do you think pug or pugilist? Maybe the answer is otherwise. A boxer could mean a packer (one who boxes), an undertaker, a trifecta punter, a comic-strip artist, even a crossword-maker, such is the elasticity of puns.

On top of this challenge, glancing at our next clue, is the messiness of the ellipsis, that line of dots connecting our Twister conundrum to the previous 29-Across. How do the dots work? I'll explain . . .

TWISTED THINKING — puns and the ellipsis . . .

Bird spotters can tell two types of sandpipers apart by the streaks on their breasts. Subtle hints, in other words, that distinguish two different species.

Crossword-makers rely on a different code to tell apart two types of solvers. Leaving aside the grids and the minutes (or hours) required to fill them, there is a method to separate the timid solver from the intrepid, the tyro from the pro, and it boils down to what question they ask when crosswords crop up as a topic. For a rough field guide to cryptic-solvers, I turn to this table:

What bloody language are they written in? (non-solver)
Is every clue an anagram? (non-solver with potential)
How can you pick the definition and the other bit? (promising beginner)
My favourite clue was XYZ. What's yours? (steady achiever)
How do those three dots work at the end of a clue? (experienced achiever with aspirations)

Needless to add, other questions get asked, the small-talk kind that aren't so quick to betray one's chops. Among these other FAQs are the following perennials, with my customary answer attached:

Which comes first—the words in the grid or the clues? ('Either/or, usually words then clues.')

How long does it take to make a crossword? ('An hour to interlock, then a few more hours to fine-tune the clues. Themed grids usually take longer.')

How the hell did you get into the whole business? ('Gae, hae, kae . . . sorry, what did you say?')

Returning to that mysterious string of dots, what editors label an ellipsis, I have a simple message. Relax—the dots are overrated. They loom too large in the mind of many solvers, causing undue anxiety. Tim Moorey, a veteran solver of English puzzles and author of *How to Master The Times Crossword*, puts it in plain English. The ellipsis, he writes, 'is merely a way of connecting two clues (sometimes more) to present a longer than normal clue sentence.'

Hence the pair of dotted clues in our Master Puzzle, 29-Across and 30-Across, can be dovetailed to read as: *A weir worker set Twister for openers?*

But since we've already solved the first of these clues, a charade for ADA-MANT, it's safe to say that each linked fragment can be tackled on its lonesome.

Usually. That's the unsaid warning to Moorey's simple message, since secret motives may lie behind the linking of two clues. In the Master example the link is purely grammatical. For ADAMANT, we have a clue that seems to invite more info: *A weir worker set*. Set what, you ask. The clue is ripe to be extended, and 30-Across can oblige, as the pun is lean and comfortably finishes what 29-Across began, completing the sentence that ADAMANT started.

Elsewhere, the link may be a definition element that two clues share. Here from my own swag is one instance of that overlap:

```
Issue shocking female . . . (5) . . . setter, objective on the outside (4)
```

The first clue is a basic anagram made scarier by the dots. SUSIE is the answer, with the word *female* the definition. Importantly, the same word carries over into the succeeding clue. So here we need to read this clue as *Female setter*, *objective on the outside*. ENID is the *female* we seek, since *setter* is I (the crossword-setter) enclosed in END, or *objective*. This way, the word *female* serves two clues as definition, accounting for the pair to be overlapping.

Tim Moorey, then, is right. The ellipsis marries two part-clues into a whole, but this union can be based on grammar logic or mutual definition. Or even, as in our next case, a mutual slice of wordplay:

```
Sterile noble discussed . . . (6)
. . . business party with right man in bull market? (7)
```

This time round homophones get the call-up, with BARREN your first solution, an echo of BARON, or *noble*. The audio signpost, *discussed*, then carries its workload into the second clue where we need to utter a synonym of *business* (MATTER). The answer's remainder comes from *party* (a frequent indicator of DO), plus R (*right*), which gives us MATADOR, or *man in bull market*.

And that, judging by your groan, is a pun. Being optimistic, keeping to Moorey's mantra of simple connection, let's treat the ellipsis in this case as the bridge in a halved sentence, rather than as a signal of overlapping wordplay, or a shared definition. Ditching the dots from our mind, therefore, we're faced with the clue:

Twister for openers? (8)

The question mark, we know, is an admission of mischief, a call for the brain to touch its toes, much as the Twister arrow will get you stretching. So what twists? What opens? Pun clues should provoke those framewidening questions. Don't get trapped by tunnel vision. Think outside the box, so BOXER may well be CRATER, or TWISTER could suggest DOORKNOB, and soon you'll find whole new hatches opening within. Knock-knock.

SCRABBLE VARIATIONS

Geoffrey Rush has been interviewed a thousand times. For a magazine profile, to make our encounter different, I played the word-loving actor in Story Scrabble, where no score was kept and any one tile could become a blank. Whatever word you made had to be the seed of a personal story. We got as far as DRIVEN (his unlikely opener, with no blanks), when freewheeling chat left the game behind. More reliable Scrabble variations include Clabbers, where you play your letters in random clusters, so long as they can be mixed to make a word. (Rush, say, might have played DNVERI for DRIVEN. I could then add A at either end, for INVADER.) Or Torus, where you imagine the board as a globe, allowing words to run off left and resume in the upper slot.

HALL OF FAME: PUNS

Candy eaten after chin-ups? (3) [Ben Tausig, US]
Punishment that's capital to a point (8) [Paul, Guardian]
Cultivated swimmers are spotted here (5,4) [Times 8530]
The entertainment here is taking off (5,4) [Alberich, FT]
Sluggish transport? On the contrary! (6,5) [Times 7940]
Ashes held in this? (4-7) [Times 8133]

SOLUTIONS: Pez, sentence, trout farm, strip club, bullet train, tree-hugging

QUIZLING 24.1

Each line combines two definitions of the same word. One points to the straight version, the other the pun version that needs to be said aloud. No room for pigs to suppress = STIFLE (STY-FUL). Be careful—the straight clue can come first or last.

Prohibit blue cradle? (7) Greek god minus 'omburg (5)

Genuine goose spin (10) Newsreader's guide to traffic jam (7)

Pub ghost examiner (9)

Spotted seabird wine (8) Trivial broth umpire (11)

QUIZLING 24.2

If the surfie is wiped out, and the baker pieeyed, how drunk did these other four get at the gala? As shown, some have more than one answer. You may well create your own fitting descriptions.

Meteorologist (1) Panel beater (3) Taxidermist (2) Soldier (3)

QUIZLING 24.3 Can you reconnect these 14 fragments to spell a punful cosmological question? No mixing is needed.

AN CH DZ EC EL EN HM IAIC NS TO TRULWO

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CHAPTER 25

Snub regressive outcast (5)

Till now we've been dealing in English and the secret language of words—anagrams, codes and the rest. But in these next two chapters we'll be talking in a tongue called Hsilgne, flipping everything we know and seeing what words reveal in reverse.

Turned on their heads, words can declare wonders. WOMBATS, for example, may well need sharp claws to STAB and MOW. Two more animals, ELK and CAT, can U-turn to spell TACKLE, while LAPTOPS must be popular with dogs, since SPOT, a common mutt, lies tail-to-nose with PAL, a popular pooch food.

That truth was echoed by an Australian racehorse called SIR LAP-FONAC, which managed to run a few events at country tracks before stewards twigged to the reverse logic and demanded a name change. In the same vein a greyhound blitzed quite a few Florida meets with the faux-Aztec name of CILOHOCLA.

Back in Oz, the small town of COLIGNAN in northwest Victoria has a neighbour called NANGILOC just up the highway. Further north, close to Queensland's Hervey Bay, the residents of a hinterland settlement were obliged by the shire, so the story goes, to conjure up a name for their patch of dirt. The edict paved the way for DEGILBO.

Without a stick of proof, I firmly believe CS Lewis coined his mystic kingdom NARNIA owing to the realm nestling in a reversed MOUNTAIN RANGE.

But that doesn't beat a war cemetery edging the Somme battlefields. Home to some 3000 dead, a giant share of these being Canadian soldiers, the French site is christened ADANAC Military Cemetery.

ADANAC, in fact, is also a lakeside tourist area in Ontario, just as ADAVEN is a one-horse town in Nevada, and Texas has regular hunting and fishing trade shows called SAXET.

Across the pond in Greece, where the RETSINA flows, the same wine can be capped by C and spun to make the word CANISTER, a vessel able to hold the liquid.

Sifting the Greek alphabet, OMEGA is a paradox, pairing AGE with MO, an eternity bang beside a nanosecond. Meanwhile IOTA, a word that also means a tiny piece, can swap initials to be become the equally small ATOM in the rear-view mirror.

Felons, be warned. If running from the law, don't run backwards. BAN, a word for outlaw, only offers NAB, a word for arrest. Later, feeling loveless in GAOL, you'll find cold comfort in forfeiting love (or O) and reflecting on LAG, a vernacular word for prisoner. Appeal against your sentence and you may be NULLIFIED OR REVOKED (which cradles OVERRODE, a third synonym, in reverse.)

What was your crime, by the way? Did you try to sneak past the GATEMAN with a bogus NAMETAG, or SCAM MACS at a swap meet? Are you a YOB BOY with a DAB of BAD, or do you LIVE EVIL? Perhaps you secreted ACID, the illegal drug, inside the legal version of MEDICATION? Maybe you chanced on the drug-lab formula, where POT can be switched to make a harder drug. Without going into details the recipe reads like so:

POT reversed = TOP TOP = first-class First class = CRACK

No less bizarre, PAT can change its central vowel to morph into PET, a synonym. Or take a spin, becoming TAP, a second synonym.

Shifting our focus to food and drink, the onion hides an amazing truth. A member of the BULB family, this tear-jerker reveals BLUB on the rebound. A Chinese waiter, meanwhile, asking if you'd like the WONTON to be served, may well invite the soup in reverse—NOT NOW. And should you be drinking at table, as laudable a local winery as DRAYTONS may be, I'd be wary of its flipside, since a red or white may be rendered green.

For Bob Smithies, a young lad growing up in wartime Lancaster, a similar retro-moment took place in his local fish-and-chip shop. There Bob was waiting for his haddock when he spotted GARTONS, the vinegar on the counter, and giggled. Dangerously, you'd have to say, since the impulse to manipulate words soon develop into Bob's fixation, the boy growing up to become one of the trickier *Guardian* setters, a man known as Bunthorne.

That's the risk of looking backwards—you may stumble on hidden wonders and go seeking more. Even as a kid doing chemistry I loved the notion that TIN sits forwards in PLATINUM and backwards in NITROGEN.

Or in geography, to look at LEBANON and intuit Cain, since he was the NON-ABEL of the Eden story. To realise a landscape as dry as the GOBI spells one wetland when lying east to west. Or come to see that BALSA, which is light, can be stood upside-down to be A SLAB, which generally isn't.

Years later, those schoolboy dabbles fostering a career, I was commuting on a Melbourne tram. By and large, of course, crossword-makers don't commute, but on this occasion a mate and I were off to a fundraiser in the city, both of us dressed in tuxedos, when one of those eternal questions came out of the blue: 'Seriously, what made you get into puzzles?'

By way of answer I pointed to the decal on the window—YARRA TRAMS. 'Read that backwards and that's what we're wearing.'

DEN RUT — reversal clues

Dylan Thomas knew the charms of Hsilgne, creating the town of LLAR-EGGUB for his classic radio play *Under Milk Wood*. In the same year, 1954, jazz composer Sonny Rollins released a tune of fast samba patterns called *Airegin*. The retro-virus was in the air. Even Dracula, in a scare-fest of similar vintage, opts for the alias of Count Aculard to put the villagers' fears to rest.

Good enough for poets and the undead, then it's good enough for puzzle-makers, the reversal formula warranting its very own clue category.

Already by default you've met half a dozen reversal signposts in the

first section of this chapter, words or phrases signalling a direction switch. These include *turn*, *spin*, *flip* and most variations involving *back*, like the opener in the batch below. The first two clues stem from my own puzzles, while the next two hail from the desk of Bob Smithies (alias Bunthorne) and a setter named Cincinnus:

Corporal punishment goes back (5)

Monstrous female gets abstemious rule rejected? (6)

Dr Seuss is involved with raising children (6)

A bit of advice about depression (3)

To crack the first clue, you need to reverse PARTS (or *goes*) to make STRAP, the *corporal punishment*.

Again in the second clue, the reversal signpost (*rejected*) is planted last, casting suspicion on *monstrous*, or *monstrous female*, as the solution's meaning, while the meat in the sandwich must be the fodder to switch.

Could OGRESS work? What about MEDUSA. Flipping the letters, ASUDEM feels warm, but still doesn't reflect the wordplay—gets abstemious rule rejected . . .

GORGON any good? Spin it and there's your breakthrough: NO GROG. The question mark is the inbuilt warning of the extended leap, a whole phrase on the turn rather than a solo word, and the monster has been slain.

So what is Bunthorne asking us to reverse in the third example? Let's take a closer look: *Dr Seuss is involved with raising children (5)*.

Scan the clue and guess what word is signalling reversal? Perhaps more than one word is doing that task. *Raising* seems the prime suspect, but how does *raising* denote backtracking? The answer lies in the vertical. As a Down clue, the reversal prompt has more to do with climbing than going back. Physically it makes sense. If answers are caterpillars, lying in the grid, then the bug moving from low to high is heading up, scaling, mounting, going north. Just as the bug, changing direction in the horizontal position, is retreating.

The second point about Bunthorne's clue is pedigree. Unlike the first two samples, this is not a pure-bred reversal, but a hybrid, blending the categories of reversal and hidden. *Raising*, you now know, alerts us to the

idea of an upward reversal. Couple this with the clue's central phrase—involved with—and the hidden mode enters the frame.

Difficult clue but this is Bunthorne. When Bob passed away in 2006, his obituary listed the man's many passions, all of which his puzzles enlisted at various times. You name it—jazz, wine, Dickens—and you'd need it, entering his grids. Here in this clue the topic is paediatrics, or is *Dr Seuss* a ruse? Raise the cluster of words and ISSUES will issue, another word for *children*.

As we'll discover in the next chapter, part two of reversals, the formula is a popular mixer in more complex recipes. Meeting hybrid clues, you should always keep the possibility of reversal alive, and double-check the wordplay for any talk of moving up or back.

Leaving us with the final example: A bit of advice about depression (3) Breezy on paper, this clue from Cincinnus is handpicked for a reason, namely the dilemma of a central signpost.

Remember the muddle the problem provoked with anagrams? If a cue to scramble sits amidships, then which side is the mixing fodder? Reversals can suffer a kindred curse. In this clue *about* is a subtle signal to U-turn, which is also treacherous, since *about* has also been a steadfast signpost among containers.

Can you sense the oxygen thinning? In the last few chapters we've learnt that recipes can blend, and now we're seeing how certain sign-posts—like about or off or without—can flag alternative approaches. This is how it should be, scaling the giddy peak of Mount Cleverest. The higher we climb the smarter we have to be, the more caution we need to exercise. Ravines are rife, most of these covered by thin sheets of ice. But at least those earlier answers have given us footholds to help with the final assault. And where hybrids are involved—like Bunthorne's example—or dilemmas emerge—like this latest clue—then we have the experience to get over the challenge. As every PHRASE unravels, we inch closer to becoming a SHERPA.

Here's my TIP then, my bit of advice about depression: step light, keep flexible and don't fall down any great PIT, your answer. In a sense, the clue tells you which word needs reversing, the signpost of about welded tighter to the first definition. Though in the end we needed to make a leap of faith, and look—we survived. And the summit is beckening.

Before we advance though, let's grapple with our Master clue:

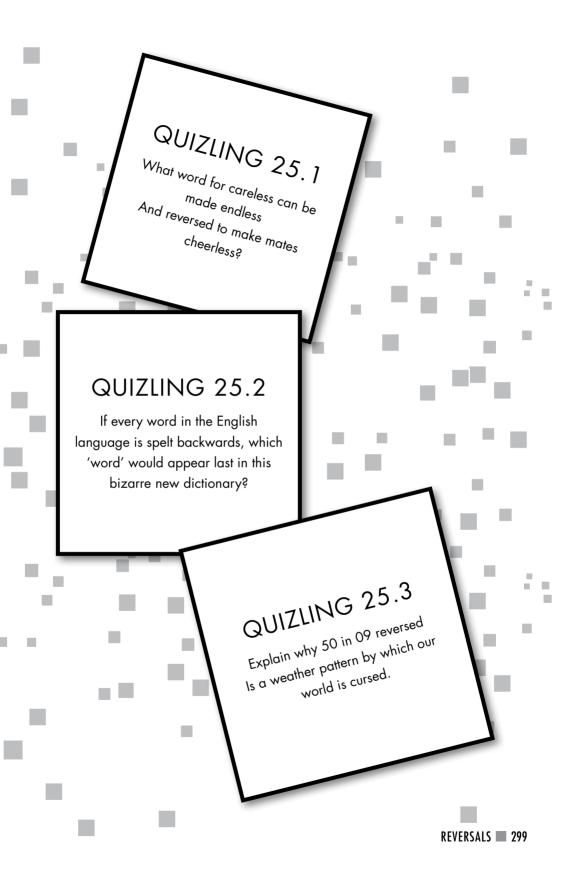
Snub regressive outcast (5)

In the grid our toeholds offer R_P_ (Any suggestions?) Remember we seek a word that's flippable, just like PARTS gave way to STRAP. Two words in fact, where one means *snub* and the other *outcast*, with *regressive* acting as signpost.

Yes, a central signpost again, but now the toeholds come into play. Without them, LEPER (an *outcast*) could be as legit a solution as REPEL (to *snub*). Fill it in. Adjust your crampons. We can almost see the peak.

RECIPE PRECIS: REVERSALS

Depending on how your answer lies—Across or Down—the reversal clue will tell you to turn your letters backwards—or upwards. On the horizontal, watch for such signposts as around, back, go west, mirror, receding, reflected, retiring, retreat, return, reverse, revolutionary, wheel and withdraw. For the vertical, beware climbed, flipped, hang-up, head over heels, invert, lifted, mounted, over, overturn, raised, rose, up and upset. Gnivlos doog.



CHAPTER 26

Pacific Islander immune to revolution (7)

As a bub you're loved by Mum—or Mom maybe—plus your dad, your nan and pop, even a big sis if she's around. More than loved, you are deified. In their eye, your every peep is a wow, every deed you did a minor aha. Developing into a tot, going from boob to pap, you learn to poop in the toot. No longer on the tit you have enough pep till noon when you hit the cot for more zzzz.

Living proof we are born to palindromes. Perhaps I'd better level with you in case you didn't notice—the first paragraph has 23 of the suckers, words spelt the same in either direction. Twenty-three and you're barely two years old. Stats don't lie.

KAYAK is a palindrome, as is RACE CAR. Both modes of transport mean the same in reverse, just like A TOYOTA. Words or phrases, makes no matter, so long as the result is identical on the rebound.

Versus our previous chapter, where stuff like STRAP and PARTS render new results when spun. Dimitri Borgman, one of last century's finest logologists (or word buffs), called this versatile bunch of words *semordnilaps*, where the likes of DOG makes GOD when chasing its tail.

For those keen to scare people at the next cocktail party, try breaking the ice by saying, 'Did you know that semordnilaps are also known as volvograms, backwords, semi-palindromes or anadromes?' And see how far that gets you.

Call them what you will, each term is really just a fancy label to describe the inner glee of a wine like DRAYTONS. When TURNED is turned, the wordsmith can imagine a randy lion racked by DEN RUT. Our language is riddled with these small wonders, where MUSLIN

can head west to spell two numbers of a sort, or STRATAGEM evokes gigantic harlots.

Palindromes, on the other hand, are spin-proof. Literally the word means 'running back again' in Greek. Twirl CIVIC all you like, these words don't budge for anyone. Get retrograde with RADAR, palindromes are incorruptible.

Somehow a figure named Sotades the Obscene, a poet dating back to 300 BC, is reputed to be the father of the palindrome—the ultimate dad if you like—but that's like saying Homer invented the comma, or Aristotle the dangling participle. Whether it was Sotades of Maroneia or Sedatos of Glenelg, the palindrome has long been a strand in the human tapestry.

A popular style of writing back in ancient times was called boustrophedon, which literally means ox-turning. If you think of a bullock pulling a plough, working his way along one furrow, then turning to haul the plough in the opposite direction, then you have the essence of the boustrophedon, where a writer like Sotades the Obscure might start his first line in standard fashion, left to right, only for the next line to pivot at the end, and travel right to left.

As for why this style was hip to Hellenic scribes, the debate continues. Maybe the reverse line reduced smudges on the papyrus, or abrasions on the tablet, or maybe the vogue was founded in our ancient fetish for words performing loop-the-loops. Across Greece and Italy, within the grounds of ancient temples, many fountains carry the palindrome of *Nipson anomemata me monan opsin*, which translates as 'Wash the sins, not only the face'.

Conquering Britannia, the Romans built new temples and cities, with one site near Gloucester offering a confounding palindrome to archaeologists. Known as the Sator Stone, the puzzle was unearthed in 1868 in modern-day Cirencester, a market town northwest of London. Was it a spell? A code? Here's how the original enigma appeared:

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS Viewing the square as one continuous line of text, reading left to right from the first S to the final S, the stone reveals a palindrome, but what did it mean? All sorts of theories bloomed in academia. Translating the text depended on where you divided the words. It means either 'The sower Arepo holds the wheels at work' or 'Arepo the sower holds the wheels with force'. Question being: who was Arepo? Was this just a word game or did the inscription carry a deeper significance?

Thanks to the puzzle's symmetry, the five rows matching the five columns, and the holus-bolus equal in reverse, a few scholars suspected the text to be an incantation of sorts. The idea was bolstered by the precedent of ABRACADABRA, this classical word of magic having that near-palindrome knack of being arranged into a pyramid of letters, spelling itself by degrees like so:

A B B R A C A D A B R A C A D

Note the diagonal 'rivers' of repeated letters flowing down the pyramid. This covert kind of patterning is a hallmark of many sacred words—think hocus-pocus or even TENET, our own expression of faith lying in the heart of the Sator Stone.

Without doubt, one of the more radical guesses about the stone's meaning was made by a German professor who reckoned the text to be some kind of code adopted by the first wave of Christians. With so many Colosseum lions to feed, the followers of Christ needed to keep hush-hush, explaining the fish-symbol of Yahweh and the furtive services conducted in the catacombs beneath the Eternal City. The Sator

Stone, said the intellect, was one more link in this secret chain, a talisman recognised only by the worshippers. The key piece of evidence for this cultish idea was based on an anagram rather than a palindrome.

Rearrange the stone's 30 letters and you can fashion a symmetrical cross, with the phrase PATERNOSTER crossing itself at the central N. Do a quick tally and you'll realise that two As and two Os are missing from the new combo. Herr Brain argued these were the Alpha and Omega of the Lord's message, a divine kind of punctuation that went to open and close the message. This last liberty alone tended to unglue the theory.

So who was Arepo, the wheel holder? Historians scoured the annals for any mention of the name in politics or on the battlefield but found nil. Maybe the verse was a religious metaphor? Yet whichever creed was implicated, it wasn't Christianity, as news of Pompeii came to light.

Amazingly, 70 years after the Sator Stone was found in England, a twin was uncovered in Pompeii, a carbon copy of the first stone with every letter in its place. The discovery went to cool the Christian theory by a few degrees, given how early in the millennium Mount Vesuvius had erupted, on top of the strong pagan evidence of Pompeii and its temples. In fact, the fluke of finding a second stone now encouraged scholars to favour the wordplay notion. Rather than a piece of scripture, the square was deemed a nifty alignment and nothing more, a palindrome broken into a tidy box, a feat so neat it warranted chiselling on the wall. Arepo and his wheel, in fact, could well comprise the world's first crossword, or at least evidence of mankind's enduring passion for the secret life of words.

NEVER ODD OR EVEN — palindromes from home and away

There she was, a beautiful woman in the grove, tempting the man to approach her with an extended hand and say, 'Madam, I'm Adam.'

Her reply of course: Eve. Our first scrap of human small-talk, putting palindromes (and damnation) in the air.

Only a few names, including Eve, are immune to revolution. The figleaf lady joins the elite of Anna, Hannah, Elle, Viv and Bob. Meanwhile

Anita is forever destined to wash the bucket in Spanish-speaking countries, trapped in the popular palindrome of *Anita lava la tina*.

Finns hold the record in the single-word category, with their majestic *Saippuakauppias*, or soap merchant, owning pride of place in the Babel dictionary. And should a Swede ever say, '*Ni talar bra Latin*' (or 'You speak good Latin'), then you can probably recite the Sator Stone better than most.

One of the world's best palindromes comes out of France, the jury swayed by the fact that the sentence can boast the rarity of a Q, as well as the fact that its meaning is sound overall if not a little scandalous: *Engage le jeu que je le gagne* (or 'Begin the game so that I may win').

Best known is the 1948 line by English palindromist Leigh Mercer, who celebrated a certain engineering feat with some engineering of his own: *A man, a plan, a canal—Panama!* This gem has been corrupted numerous times, with the pick coming from the pen of US sportswriter Roger Angell: *A dog, a plan, a canal—pagoda!*

Maths professor Peter Hilton, once employed as a code-breaker at Bletchley Park, reputedly had a hand in forging one of the sleeker palindromes, despite its length: *Doc, note. I dissent. A fast never prevents a fatness. I diet on cod.*

Dmitri Borgman, the late word-buff of Illinois via the Ukraine, styled several longer examples, with his most fluent effort invoking Rome: *A new order began, a more Roman age bred Rowena*.

Longer palindromes exist, of course, with most getting silly after crossing an invisible line. Or they read beautifully, only for a leftover spanner to wreck the works. Here's one by Anon, by far the most prolific palindromist, which opens with an easy grace only to founder by the finale: We repaid a no-name Pacific apeman on a diaper, ew!

This sample stems from *I Love Me (Vol 1)*, a zany omnibus compiled by US puzzle-nut Michael Donner. Among its pages is an infamous anti-palindrome:

Copywriters should learn to convey their ideas clearly and incisively without using gobbledygook that sounds like ekil sdnuos koogydelbbog gnisu tuohtiw ylevisicni dna ylraelc saedi rieht yevnoc ot nrael dluohs sretirwypoc.

Beyond this gimmick, there are palindromes of the outright ambitious variety. Surrey poet JA Lindon lifted the palindrome bar even higher by writing reversible verses. Bearing such titles as 'O Gnat' and 'Stacy's Super-Aware Pussycats', the poems may be seen as pieces of severe mechanics rather than of delicate lyricism. One line he cobbled evokes a modest pirate treasure: *Loot: slate, metal plate, metal stool*.

Which awakens ideas of the high seas, or Polynesia in particular. After double meanings on the Amazon, charades in Omaha and codes in the Kasbah, we need to swing the binoculars towards a Pacific palindrome. Let's view the clue:

Pacific Islander immune to revolution (7)

To get REPEL, our last answer, we obeyed the signpost, *regressive*. Here the wordplay embraces the spin-proof notion of the palindrome. HANNAH and ANNA can stand on their heads with impunity. A TOYOTA can cartwheel without its chassis taking a dent. Two clues from my own collection affirm the same truth:

Chopper blade can spin either way = ROTOR Stand-up act unchanged = DEED

The first is pretty clear. The second must accompany a Down entry, allowing a signpost like *stand-up* to function, telling you to 'erect' the solution for zero effect. Our current clue travels the same road. Also reading down, the answer won't change for being thrown upward.

A further help in netting the answer is knowing a palindrome's quality. If the answer ends in N, then logically N is also the islander's initial. Ditto for the U in Position 5 of the our answer—the same vowel logically taking up Position 3 as well. Which gives you the promising array of $N \cup U \cup U$.

Your solution of course is the Pacific solution of NAURUAN, a native of Nauru, who's liable to speak his own Micronesian tongue, plus English, though probably not the lingo of Southern India: Malayalam.

EVE ON REFLECITON — reversal clusters and ambigrams

Backwards or forwards, SENILE FELINES give the one message. We call this a palindrome. And thanks to Dmitri Borgman, we label a name like EDISON an emorednilap, as it spells NO SIDE in reverse, a departure from the source-word.

But really, aren't we splitting hairs? Who cares if HANNAH spells herself from right to left, compared to her little brother, LIAM, who goes postal on reflection? Both names defy the natural order of things. Volvogram, schmolvogram—I'm happy to treat both kids as palindromes. Both make sense in two languages: English and Hsilgne.

PAM and EVE, for instance, are both remarkable girls, both capable of changing direction—PAM spelling MAP and EVE staying EVE. The first girl has changed wholesale, while the second is notable for resisting change.

Or maybe she has. EVE, I mean. Let me explain.

Most words are nonsense in reverse, or hold only fractions of meaning within the bunkum. To conduct an experiment, let's take four more Pacific islands. Once flipped, Tonga, Tuvalu, Fiji and Samoa turn into AGNOT, ULAVUT, IJIF, ITIHAT. Mumbo jumbo in the main, though a few glimpses of words emerge within the new direction: NOT, LAV, HAT plus the domestic cleaner JIF, all lying inside the retro-versions. These little flukes go to fuel the stuff of reverse hybrids, where the setter has broken the answer down into smaller pieces, with at least one piece thrown in reverse. TAHITI, say, might be sliced into HAT + IT + I, with the solver asked to flip the opening fragment.

Those same four islands also confirm the rarity of PAM and EVE. For a word to make sense in reverse is the exception, whether that means retaining your own identity (EVE), or making MAP. This rarity alone throws the two categories (palindrome and emordnilap) into the one box. Further to that, how 'same' is normal EVE from EVE-in-reverse?

For starters, to make the illusion work you'd need to manipulate EVE's two Es, and make the point westward to complete the re-spelling, at least in your mind's eye. This may sound inane—or insane—but I'm not so sold on this idea of inviolability. SENILE FELINES, the opening example, needs all sorts of reorientation to complete the trick, with its Ls realigned and the word break altered. To get Zen for a moment, can the same girl return from the girl who made the outward journey?

TOOT might be closer to being a truer palindrome, as none of the letters needs realigning. Sorcery of this kind verges on the genre known as mirror-writing, where puzzle-makers and graphic designers treat words as physical constructions, each with their own contours and axes of symmetry. Fog up your bathroom mirror and vertically write TOMATO on the glass and you'll see the fruit appears the same as in its own reflection.

SWIMS is another minor miracle. Capsize this page and now read the word. What do you see? That's right: SWIMS. This is known as an inverted palindrome.

Step by step we are entering the mind-spinning world of ambigrams, a verbal marvel that arose during the early 1900s in *The Strand* magazine of London. Devised by a stable of various artists under the heading of Curiosities, or Topsy-Turvies, these early ambigrams presented *honey* and *chump* and other words written in strategic script. Overturn the magazine and you saw the same words intact. Are there other examples out there, asked one contributor.

In short, yes, as the art departments along Madison Avenue revealed during the 1960s, when ambigrams took off in earnest. A few deft touches and a company name like DMC (DeLorean Motor Company) could read the same when the logo is revolved. In a sense, the ambigram is the visual equivalent of a palindrome, where even a name as asymmetrical as wavelength or blacksmith can be massaged into itself when read upside-down. (Check out Angels & Demons, the Dan Brown thriller, and you'll see the first-edition cover can be read spine-left or spine-right.)

To finish on matters reversible, we turn to a pilot named Douglas Corrigan. While the Texan never invented a palindrome, or stylised an ambigram, his ridiculous deed of 1938 went on to inspire one of the century's great pieces of retro-journalism.

Corrigan was entrusted with the task of flying a single-engine plane from Brooklyn, NY, to Long Beach, CA, a four-hour flight that took the pilot a little longer, 27 hours to be precise. Corrigan blamed thick cloud and a faulty compass when asked to explain why the plane touched down in Ireland rather than California. Instead of mainland USA, the aviator had crossed the Atlantic by mistake. Though closer scrutiny of the 'bungle' reveals a measure of intent on Corrigan's part, the pilot being found to have carried surplus fuel and food supplies.

Genuine gaffe or not, the bloke came home a different man, much like BOB-in-reverse versus BOB flying eastwards. A tickertape parade marked his return, the man going on to write a best-selling autobiography as well as sponsoring a wristwatch that spun anticlockwise. But the headline to enshrine his name and resonate with palindromists on either side of the Atlantic appeared in the *New York Post* on 5 August of that year, reading LIAH YAW-GNORW NAGIRROC.

HALL OF FAME: REVERSALS

Overseas race (5) [Taupi, Guardian]
Direct from both directions (5) [Mudd, FT]
Communist party rising is more unusual (5) [Gemini, Guardian]
Also a revolutionary pick-me-up (7) [Crux, FT]
Pretentious Brazilian returning greeting in Paris (7) [Viking, FT]
Irregular design—zigzag on reverse (7) [Bonxie, Guardian]

SOLUTIONS: speed, refer, odder, reviver, bonsoir, wayward

QUIZLING 26.1 Hannah is one of few six-letter names that read the same either way. What's the only common six-letter word with this property? (As a clue, think of one sunbather versus another.) QUIZLING 26.2 'Anne,' said the palindromist to his assistant, 'I vote more cars race FROM WHERE TO WHERE?' QUIZLING 26.3 Written vertically in capitals, TOMATO appears unchanged as a reflection. What famous American Indian of eight letters can perform the same trick?

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CHAPTER 27

Seafood nibble causing pains for Spooner (4,5)

'Some are born to fame, and others are pitchforked into . . . Who's Who by an amiable accident. But not many men have achieved immortality by a happy slip of the tongue.'

So opens the *Herald*'s 1930 obituary of Reverend William Archibald Spooner—writer, preacher, lecturer, but most of all: bird-watcher. Sorry, word-botcher.

Remarkably, Spoonerism (later to drop its capital) reached the pages of the Oxford Dictionary while the man still lectured at the same university. Debatably the definition reads: 'the accidental transposition of the initial sounds, or other parts, of two or more words'. The debate is twofold.

For starters a *single* word like lockjaw can be spoonerised into jock law, and then you have the iffy business of *accidental*. Spooner fluffed his words, no doubt. Accidentally—that too. Manning both pulpit and lectern for 60 years, a fellow can be forgiven for tripping over his tongue. But where does a verbal goof end and folklore begin?

Says the same obituary, an Oxford undergrad named Arthur Sharp was a chief source of spoonerisms, invented on campus for the sheer fun of wordplay. Queer dean for dear queen, and so on. Many of these gags appeared in a collection of spoonerisms edited by Sharp, who also went on to pursue a career in preaching.

Allegedly, continues the obit, Spooner was only ever recorded as making the one eponymous booboo, and that was in 1879 when telling his congregation the forthcoming hymn was 'Kinquering Kongs, Their Titles Take' instead of Conquering Kings. If that's true, then all the other

slips like well-boiled icicles and half-warmed fishes were possibly cooked up by the student body.

Mind you, Spooner was fond of his own legend. Through press stories and humour columns, not to mention the world's foremost dictionary, the man became an accidental celebrity of the Western World. Or maybe a deliberate one? The debate goes full circle.

Nonetheless, whether or not the slung-tipper (tongue-slipper) was directly responsible for the following examples, the quotes lose nothing of their appeal. Factual or fudged, they're all spoonerisms:

To a lazy student, the reverend says, 'You have hissed all my mystery lectures and tasted nearly three worms. I must ask you to leave Oxford at once by the town drain.'

At a wedding, he advises, 'It is now kisstomary to cuss the bride.' And during another service, he tells a parishioner, 'I believe you are occupewing my pie. May I sew you to another sheet?'

Spooner spends a day looking for a pub called The Dull Man in Greenwich, when the tayern he wanted was The Green Man in Dulwich.

Notice too how most of these entail the exchange of internal syllables rather than the swapping of initial consonants, as typifies the modern spoonerism. Today, if a crossword-solver spoonerises *tailpipe*, say, they'd likely end up with PALETYPE rather than the nonsense of TILE PAPE, despite either tweak being a Spooner trademark.

Speaking of pale types, a lesser known aspect of the reverend was his paper-white skin. Falling short of a full albino, Spooner was an unusual character to behold. Colleague and biologist Julian Huxley described his friend in a tribute as 'one with very pale blue eyes and white hair just tinged with straw colour'. Chronically short-sighted, Spooner had to hold books only a few centimetres from his nose. Such eyestrain, the spectacles, the unusual pallor would inspire another Oxford don of the day to create a famous character. Can you guess who?

Here's a further clue: Spooner had seven children by his wife, Frances,

and was a familiar sight around campus, hastening from hall to chapel or back again. Observing all this was a maths professor called Charles Dodgson, alias Lewis Carroll, creator of the *Alice* books and himself a wordplay genius. Staggering to think that notable fluffer of words can brag of his own fluffy avatar in world literature, namely the White Rabbit.

Then there's the other issue of Spooner's brain. Without getting bogged down in clinic-speak, so much of Spooner's life embodied what we call the Absent-minded Professor Syndrome. Each of these reputed episodes stands as evidence:

Asked whether he likes bananas, vouches the *Herald* piece, Spooner replied, 'I'm afraid I always wear the old-fashioned night-shirt.'

According to cohort Huxley, Spooner remarked of a missing college fellow, 'I'm afraid that when he hears what we did at the college meeting yesterday, he'll gnash his tail.'

'Her late husband,' said Spooner of a church widow, 'was eaten by missionaries.'

It's bizarre to reflect that the lone clue category to salute an individual commemorates an Englishman who ostensibly suffered from a form of cerebral dysfunction. Even if these biographical scraps are hearsay, so much of the Spooner story suggests the man's mental miswiring.

Conjecture is rife, of course. Did Spooner suffer from a medical condition or was he just a natural at rubberising words? There's no point in drawing too long a bow. The diagnosis is moot and the clinic is shut—but the irony remains. This man, above all others, is said to be integral to the cryptic cookbook, yet in the same breath crosswords are preached as being a power of good against brain-fade. A kind of cryptic joke, perhaps, having one of history's greatest word-botchers central to a pastime praised for keeping words and memory intact.

Or so runs the anecdotal evidence. What are the white mice of Brisbane telling us?

CRACKERS AND CHEESE — mental stimulus and ageing

The Queensland Brain Institute is a neuroscience centre on the banks of the Brisbane River. Much like an office block of the mind, the Institute is dedicated to investigating how we think and how we might best thwart the onset of dementia.

One branch of research has been messing round with mice, seeing how their neurons fare as a result of exercise. 'Put an old animal on a running wheel,' said Professor Perry Bartlett, the centre's CEO, speaking to the *Courier-Mail*, 'and production of new nerve cells goes up more than twofold.'

Subsequently, the mice are better equipped to tackle the complexity of a maze, the vermin equal of a puzzle. In the same article, Bartlett echoes the idea thus, 'Keeping the brain in good shape through a combination of physical exercise and cognitive activity as basic as doing a cryptic crossword could be part of the key.'

The crunch of course is 'could'. CAT scans and mouse wheels can only reveal so much about the neural pathways. In 2003, American neurologist Dr Joe Verghese and his colleagues at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York published the results of a marathon study. The team kept tabs on 469 elderly citizens, none with dementia, and followed their fate for the next two decades, measuring their mental capacity at regular intervals. All the subjects gave details of how they stretched their brain and/or their body during that period.

On the brain side, the activities scoring highest were puzzles, reading, board games and playing musical instruments, with dementia less likely to occur among the subjects involved in these pursuits.

'According to our models,' Verghese wrote in the resultant article, 'elderly persons who did crossword puzzles four days a week (four activity-days) had a risk of dementia that was 47 percent lower than that among subjects who did puzzles once a week (one activity-day).'

On the body side, the best deterrent against mental fog was ballroom dancing, beating several other pastimes, such as general exercise, housework and babysitting. (Bear in mind, these were people over 80, so hang-gliding was out.) Though all categories rated favourably, a foxtrotting cruciverbalist with good social networks (and perhaps plenty of Omega-3) may have a better chance than most of making sense in their twilight.

Playwright Michael Frayn puts it well in the foreword to *Chambers Book of Azed Crosswords*. To introduce these devilish puzzles, Frayn writes, 'Here are a hundred of the precious pills all at once. And if one a week keeps the geriatrician away, a hundred together (perhaps taken in conjunction with a few bananas and bars of dark chocolate) must surely be the elixir of youth.'

Though perhaps a *Times* clue from 2008 says it even better. You may need to readjust your nerve cells to the anagram mode:

Of outstanding ability till brain decays = BRILLIANT

B-CHORD ON THE KEYBOARD — spoonerism clues and phrase answers

'Hey Dad,' said Finn, sniggering among his Year 8 cronies, 'say this quickly.' He slides a sheet of paper towards me and I read the familiar verse:

I'm not a pheasant plucker, I'm a pheasant plucker's son. I'm only plucking pheasants Till the pheasant plucking's done.

More than likely I peddled the same gag when I was 14, the spoonerism a staple of smutty jokes, lame riddles and cryptic crosswords alike.

From a setter's point of view, the spoonerism is a renegade tack to try when the obvious approaches misfire. Maybe the standard formulas are overused elsewhere, or a phrase is made for mangling in the Spooner tradition.

HIGH-BORN, another word for privileged, or blue-blooded, is one such entry. The awkward clump of consonants edges out anagram. Double meaning? HIGH has all sorts of tangents—school, intoxicated—but BORN far fewer. Maybe homophone: HI BORNE (welcome carried)? This is the clue-making process, the steady elimination of recipes until the right one emerges or a welcome variation comes along:

You'll be heartened to hear that every spoonerism clue will cite the word-botcher by name. While you may encounter a break from this rule, Spooner (the name) is your true watermark.

Kinder than that, this family of clues can sometimes provide you with the actual words you need to manipulate. In my HIGH-BORN clue, for example, if the crossword was geared to a simpler level, or the particular corner was difficult, I might consider:

Aristocratic Spooner to buy horn

These next two show similar mercy:

On-line guide might sap Spooner (4,3) Was Belle Spooner a biographer? (7)

The first clue hails from 2000, when terms like *online* and *sitemap* (your answer) had yet to shed their hyphens. BOSWELL of course satisfies the second clue, an overhaul of *Was Belle*.

Perhaps the time is right to say a word or two on spelling in regards to our latest category. So far, in the three spoonerism samples we've seen—HIGH-BORN, SITE MAP and BOSWELL—the transition from one phrase to the answer, via the fallible mouth of Reverend Spooner, has entailed a shift in letter patterns. When spoonerised, *might sap* yields SITE MAP, and not SIGHT MAP as a purer swap might involve. Same as HIGH-BORN, which twiddles *buy horn* (and not the nonsense phrase of *bigh horn*). In other words, the sound pattern is preserved in the transition, though often the letter clusters capturing those kindred sounds will vary. And just as importantly, no extra signpost is necessary to warn you of this spelling drift.

With that in mind, let's move away from the spoon-fed spoonerism, where the actual words in need of mangling are presented, and look at clues where the words in want of flipping are given indirectly. Like these:

Handy brew handy, according to Spooner = NEARBY (spoonerism of BEER NIGH)

Spooner's crone snoozes in mining dumps = SLAG HEAPS (HAG SLEEPS)

Tougher specimens are more interpretative, where the phrase to be spoonerised is not cut and diced as in the last two clues, but rolled into the one definition. Here's one such clue from my own backlist:

Free squat for Spooner? (3,2)

If the question mark doesn't warn you of a freer approach, then the fact that there seems to be only a single word to spoonerise is also an alarm. What word for *squat* has two syllables for starters, enough to tweak at least? Thinking from the other direction, what phrase meaning 'free' owns the letter pattern of (3,2)?

LET GO could work. Test the theory and spoonerise it. There's your reason for the question mark. GET LOW has been translated into *squat*, the solver needing to take that extra imaginative step.

Some compilers abstain from the spoonerism formula, while the *Guardian* trio of Paul, Araucaria and Orlando are recidivists. I'm a sucker for the reverend's charms as well. On average, solving my puzzles, you're liable to strike the recipe once every four crosswords, meaning the device was a must for the Master Puzzle:

Seafood nibble causing pains for Spooner (4,5)

On a scale of one to ten, this spoonerism clue nudges nine. A key reason is the apparent shortage of information, taking a leaf from the *squat* clue. Does PAUSING CANES mean anything? No. Do we need a new phrase meaning CAUSING PAINS? Not quite.

Coincidentally, another spoonerism clue I found in my archive links to seafood as well, its answer also a piece of encouragement at an impasse such as this:

Draw confidence from Spooner's fishcake = TAKE HEART

Regardless of how long it takes to nail this current clue answer, at least you know the recipe involved, which is one big plus. On top of that we have some helpful letters already installed, making the end-game a fairer battle. The layout is this:

$$C_A_/_C K$$

Different solvers make different marks to signify a phrase, either in the grid or in the puzzle's margins. Since this is our first phrase, I thought it timely to show you one technique, using slashes to measure out the spaces. Flukily, the very first phrase to appear in a crossword, as condoned by pioneer editor Margaret Farrar, was thought to be SOFT-SHELL CRAB, the creature breaking the monopoly of single word and name entries in the craze's early phases.

Does this piece of trivia help you grab the Master answer? Any tasty phrases spring to mind?

Standing in a fish-and-chippery some 80 years ago, a boy called Bunthorne saw the fluke of GARTONS Vinegar. Six months ago, waiting for my flake to fry, I started dreaming up the Master Puzzle in my head when I saw the Spooner richness of CRAB STICK. Like few other phrases, the snack can be switched around into a pair of synonyms: STAB and CRICK. And if that's you I can hear groaning, the nth victim of the spoonerism, then this one clue causes a third type of pain.

RECIPE PRECIS: SPOONERISMS

Spooner is your trigger. Whenever the reverend's name bobs up, start switching whatever initial clusters are on offer. The friendlier clue will give you the keywords cold—like SANE CHORE to yield CHAINSAW—while the tougher type will hint at the fodder in need of flip-flopping—in this case *rational task* may allude to SANE CHORE, and then you apply the spoon. (Notice in both examples how the CH transfers as a single piece, not just the C.)

HALL OF FAME: SPOONERISMS

Animal for which Spooner may have had money back (3,4) [Times 8385]

No drink? We looked for a spoonerism (3-5) [Araucaria, Guardian]

Ship, where Spooner gets to work its brake? (3,6) [Paul, Guardian]

Spooner to select milk product with legumes (9) [Boatman, Guardian]

Film star, according to Spooner, injures Greek hero (5,5) [Orlando, Guardian]

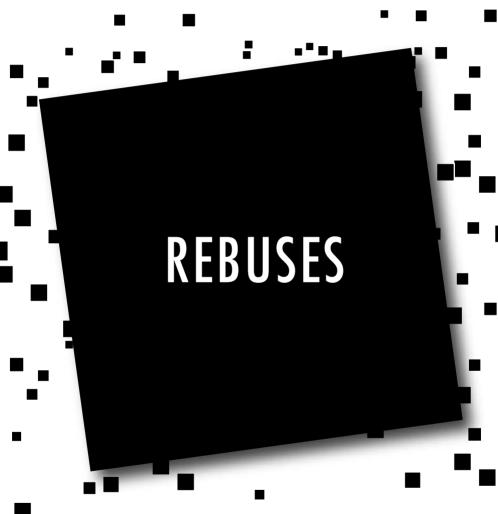
Melodramatic production sounds dull, given mistake from Spooner (5,3,7) [Paul again]

SOLUTIONS: roe deer, sea-water, oil tanker, chickpeas, James Mason, blood and thunder

QUIZLING 27.1 What simple warm-up exercise, Seeing athletes leave the ground, Can be spoonerised to make A 'shock' beside confound? QUIZLING 27.2 When spoonerised, this eating area found in most modern malls creates a word meaning 'spoke lovingly' beside a word meaning 'acted aggressively'. Name the venue. QUIZLING 27.3

In the reverend's deck of playing cards,
In the reverend's deck of playing cards,
In the reverend's deck of playing cards,
where the King of Clubs is the Cling of
where the King of Clubs is the Cling of
what cards can pair
Cubs and so on, what cards can pair
Cubs and so on, what cards can pair
Cubs and so on, what cards can pair
Floozies' fowl
U-boat noises

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CHAPTER 28

$$M_{__}E$$
 (4,2,4)

My physical fix for the first few years out of school was rugby. After six years of Heller and Xerxes, sport was a welcome antidote and I swigged it deep like an ice-cold Tooheys.

My parents cracked open the Spumante when I made it into a Communications course at the University of Technology, then called The Institute. Me, I saved the party-poppers for the day I graduated from prop in the school team to open-side flanker in First Grade Colts at Gordon, a club on Sydney's lower North Shore. Coming and going over six seasons I racked up more than 100 games with the club, a place that saw me evolve from smart-mouthed teenager to smart-mouthed twenty-something with a drinking problem.

Well, not really. Just Saturday nights, the novelty of booze combining with the camaraderie of kindred desperadoes; they were wonderful times, those parts I remember.

Being on the field was even more addictive. Skill-wise I wasn't on the Wallaby radar but I compensated for my deficits with exuberance. Moving up to the open-age teams, I enjoyed a loose-forward role in the medium grades and managed to hoist two premiership cups.

Yet for all the sweat and grunt my principal legacies to the Gordon Football Club were not sport-related, but verbal. With an ear for parody, I took to bastardising *Blueberry Hill* and a few Rolf Harris standards. I kept the tunes and overhauled the lyrics to suit a tribe of North Shore numbskulls, inventing vulgar ditties for the post-match singsong. Some of those numbers may still resound under the grandstand today, if I ever steel myself to return to the blooding grounds.

The *Tartan Times* was another landmark, a scandal sheet I scribed with a second-rower named Scoop. As the name suggests, Scoop was in charge of the dance-floor gossip while my beat was the Nyuk-Nyuk Department. If I wasn't spoonerising SMART FELLA, I was turning All Black legends into lewd anagrams. Each week an exercise in low comedy paraded as wordplay, which sounds pretty much like the crossword gig I've landed on a larger newssheet. Please, I implore you, should you ever find a few stray copies of the *Tartan Times* circa 1981, feel free to mulch your garden.

My proudest legacy, however, was doubtless the introduction of SCHULTZ BAKING POWDER.

For non-rugby readers, the sport is brutal poetry, with Team A trying to plant the ball down Team B's end, and vice versa, a battleground of bodies and scrimmages stretching in between. Part of the tussle entails what's known as a line-out, where the eight bulky types from Team A stand cheek-to-jowl with their counterparts from B, leaping for a ball that is tossed in from the sideline. To best disguise where your teammate is lobbing the ball, a code is used, and our code for several seasons was SCHULTZ BAKING POWDER.

The phrase is not original. At home, making primitive crosswords, I stumbled on the Schultz marvel amid the ramblings of Dmitri Borgman, our palindromist extraordinaire. SCHULTZ BAKING POWDER: can you spot the reason for the phrase's rarity? By way of hint, the best line-out throwers can toss the ball AMBIDEXTROUSLY.

Still no help? Scan the letters. That's right, 19 letters long and not a single letter repeated. Just west of Sydney, there's a Blue Mountains suburb called FAULCONBRIDGE which exhibits a similar magic, owning all five vowels without a repeat. Two other classics in this category are DERMATOGLYPHICS (fingerprint study) and UNCOPYRIGHTABLE, but these translate poorly in the heat of battle, schooling a bunch of rugby boofheads.

SCHULTZ BAKING POWDER, by contrast, was ideal. Three words allowed the line-out code to pinpoint one of three locations. Imagine the call was 'Limerick-65'. Ignore the numbers, a total red herring, and focus on the word's initial. Since the L of LIMERICK is in SCHULTZ, the thrower knows to hit the first position, the opposition oblivious of the system. If the call is '1-2-9', then ONE starts with O, meaning the final position, with O occurring in POWDER. Rivals had no chance. So

sound was the code that most grades in the club adopted the subterfuge, though not all.

The farce occurred on a drizzly day at Chatswood, our home ground. We were playing Randwick, our mortal enemies, with ten minutes left. With a finals berth on offer, and pushing hard for an upset, the rain thickened. The mud made the game a test of wills. Every yard was vital, every line-out win, every maul. A clumsy tackle saw Drano, our best jumper, wrench his ankle. Medics fetched a stretcher to cart him off.

Enter a plumber called Lurch, not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but his height was the key. If he could win the line-out jump we might steal the edge.

'Call is Charisma-99,' I yelled.

'What?' said Lurch.

I took out my mouthguard, made the message clearer.

'Ninety-nine what?' Lurch yelled back.

'Change call,' I belted out, thinking spelling was the hitch. 'Call is Horse-81.'

Lurch waves his hands. 'Hang on,' he said to the referee. He turned back to me and said, 'Where's the ball going?'

'King Kong-34,' said our jumper at Position Two, and the ball flew in. At the next break in play Lurch asked about the code. 'Schultz baking powder,' I whispered, and Lurch blurted, 'Huh?!'

The Randwick players relished the confusion. In close selection disputes during the week, the coaches choosing the best side for the paddock each Saturday, one reason I'd gained regular selection was my Rain-Man ability to decode enemy systems. In many ways I resembled a Station-X geek a few generations out of sync, with Randwick my Third Reich, so to speak. Even in this current mud-battle I'd already cracked the opposition code, reducing their throws to tatters, yet here was a plumber blowing our advantage as precious time was ebbing away.

'Who the fuck is Schultz?' asked Lurch.

'He's a code,' said the hooker.

'Time on,' said the referee.

I turned to the ref to explain the problem—a bit of gamesmanship, and the ref knew it. Early fifties I suppose, the bloke was a wry kind of character, a cowlick falling on spectacles the size of Art Deco ashtrays. At

first I tried the soft-shoe, told the ref that Lurch was new to the system. He needed briefing, I said.

'Brainwashing more like it,' said Cowlick. 'Get on with it.'

We had no option. The line-out was set. I filled my lungs and called 'Titanic-26' only for Lurch to swivel around and yell, 'Does Shultz have a T?'

The game was falling apart. Our code was compromised, our vision of finals melting in the rain. I toyed with names like FAULCONBRIDGE, or giving Lurch a crash course in fingerprints, but then the sub yelled out, 'Just throw the bloody thing and see if I can get it.'

Like I say, rugby is a test of wills. In the end, we may have won that battle. That part I can't recall. Though I do know Mr Schultz kept a low profile for the campaign's remainder.

GSGE — rebus clues and the elusive definition

Give me a dollar for every time I've heard the Scrambled Eggs Clue and I'd be living in the Bahamas with a Jacuzzi. Just as *The Shawshank Redemption* seems to be every second footballer's favourite film—I don't know why—so GSGE is the mug's idea of cryptic brilliance.

Answer: SCRAMBLED EGGS.

If you don't like that nomination, you have HIJKLMNO, which equals WATER. Get it? H-to-O. With number three on the punter's podium of brilliant all-time clues being NOEL, or more precisely: ABCDEFGHIJKMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ.

In recipe terms, such clues are known as rebuses, where a word or phrase is depicted by an array of letters and symbols. Literally, rebus is Latin for 'by things', drawing up on the notion of signs and alignments doing the customary job of words.

Fresh out of school I was hooked on these pictograms, as other sources call them. Yet to be a published puzzler I couldn't help loading my apprentice grids with rebuses, such as:

MOMANON = man in the moon

1D 2R 3A 4C 5U 6L 7A = Count Dracula

PREIST = clerical error

but but but but BUT = last but not least

GAMES magazine, the puzzle-making bible during the 1980s, labelled these gimmicks Wacky Wordies. Part of the *Playboy* stable, the magazine began life in 1977. Crossword guru Will Shortz edited the title for a time, the same mag nurturing many fine constructors such as Mike Shenk, Henry Hook and Brendan Emmett Quigley. Avant-garde grids, space-age visuals, giddy wordplay: *GAMES* was my equivalent of pornography, and just as awkward to buy. Distribution was patchy. The sales price fluctuated. The magazine went from bimonthly to monthly to new owners to hiatus, but was always worth hunting down if your thing was puzzling. Two milk-crates near my desk are loaded with back issues, so many of their ideas seeding the new crop of brainteasers we see across the Web and newsstands today. Still surviving within a new publishing house, *GAMES* Mark 2 is a shadow of its trail-blazing self, largely rehashing the best of its first two decades, Wacky Wordies included:

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r/e/a/d/i/n/g = reading between the lines
GLIBNESS = mixed blessing
JU144STICE = gross injustice
O _ ER _ T _ O _ = painless operation
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Rebuses, you can see, lack a definition. The whole thing is wordplay. $SK\pi Y$ doesn't talk about illusory rewards or distant dreams. Instead it's a cute way of denoting PIE IN THE SKY. Worse than that, getting pedantic for a minute, the same rebus disregards a homophone indicator, obliging the solver to transfer PI into PIE to get the answer. That's the audacity of the rebus, a devil-may-care approach which dodges convention in the name of being funny at best—or different at least.

I was going to explain why GSGE is the punter's pet clue. First up, the joke is there to get. Blind Freddie can see EGGS sitting in the mixture, and the idea of scrambling (letters or eggs) occurs promptly as well. In chess terms, GSGE is akin to a three-move checkmate memorised by amateurs with no deeper love of the game. In movie terms, it's *Shawshank*. Not a bad flick, but have you really explored everything that cinema has to offer?

GSGE is something a drunk uncle scribbles on a coaster and asks the kiddies to solve at Christmas time. A gimmick. A bar trick. The fact that

punters embrace it says more about their unfamiliarity with the cryptic rulebook than anything else. As God as my witness I'd be prepared to give the dollar back if the same GSGE-lover was aware of cryptic clues generally requiring a balance of wordplay and definition, and thereby agreed that HIJKLMNO is one element short, for all its cleverness.

Agreed, then, that the rebus is a heretic among true alternatives. This may also account for the formula's scarcity. More than wacky, the rebus divides solvers as much as gangsta rap can split an audience. Some solvers despise the recipe, while those in the GSGE camp, and some veterans to be fair, adore them. I'm split as well. If a rebus is original, and the answer makes me smile, then call me a fan. Going the other way, if a setter has lifted the idea from mothballs, or the answer is a stretch—no thanks.

Historically the rebus has amused us for centuries. Antique puzzle books devoted whole pages to this picture play, where letters were gained or lost, so spelling out a final message. This style, with letters pinched or added, is more in the manipulation mode, but at that time the genre was dubbed a rebus and it still exerts a hieroglyphic charm.

Italians devour the recipe. The cultish puzzle magazine *Settimana Enigmistica* is rife with simple line cartoons, the imagery laced with covert letters that infer various operations. On TV, game-shows like *Concentration* or *Catchphrase* focus on similar conundrums.

Rebus, you can start to see, is a wide umbrella. So many of the categories we've explored already—including deletion and insertion—could be portrayed in picture form, but as its own clue-type, rebus is all about the lettering and how it's exhibited. Here are four samples. The first two stem from *Guardian* regular Paul, while the last two are mine:

Paul is showing more mercy than your average rebus-monger, providing a glimpse of a definition in his two clues. The answer to the first is HOARSE, which means *husky*, and is made up of HORSE (or *GG*) around A: a visual interpretation of a container clue. Meanwhile his

second clue infers CERBERUS, the three-headed dog that guards the gates of Hades.

My own clues *allude* to a definition as well, though more faintly, going closer to the terse rebus tradition. The first answer is SHELL OUT, as the letters of SHELL have been dropped from the phrase *settle the bill*. While the last is EDUCATED GUESS, where *estimate* (GUESS) has its tertiary degree highlighted by capitals.

What about you, then—ready to make a stab at 3-Down, our lone rebus in the Master Puzzle? More or less, you say. Let's have a look:

$$M_{-}E(4,2,4)$$

Brutal this one, mainly due to the absence of definition, or even an allusion to one. More in the GSGE mould, the clue is all wordplay with zero hint as to meaning, though we do have some cross-letters for assistance.

The answer's last word obeys the pattern of L_S_. Is it LAST, LOST, LESS—these are the prime suspects. LOST and LESS in particular evoke the idea of missing letters, just as the rebus dashes infer. Something-something-LOST, or something-something-LESS. Even if undefined, we know the answer must be a familiar phrase or title, more or less.

Bingo. The pictogram captures MORE minus OR, hence MORE OR LESS. Half of you will be booing, declaring the clue unfair, but rebuses shrug the usual niceties, and I couldn't make a Master Puzzle without a taste of this polarising recipe.

More or less, this chapter's done, though we can't leave without the punch _____ to the ____-out story.

TWO SHOCKS IN SHORTHAND — Pitman and the other man

In the rebus spirit, I'll be brief. If ENTURY is shorthand for LONG TIME NO SEE, then this last section is shorthand for two comical shocks in my own rebus story.

This first is a minor disaster. Doing a Journalism degree, I thought it wise to also attend a shorthand course during the summer. Given the choice of Pitman 2000, the scrawl adopted by most stenographers, verses Pitman Script, a dummy version for lazy reporters, I went with the latter. My colleagues at the school were 99 per cent female and I felt like a sultan in his harem.

Over time I learnt how to doodle with guessable meaning and tap out 40 words per minute on an asthmatic Underwood. When summer school shut, the girls and I swapped addresses, CAJUSTSE (just in case). A few months later, eager to host a picnic for my 21st birthday, I dug up the contacts and sent out invitations.

Big snag being, I thought I'd be clever, putting all the picnic details in shorthand, a rebus for the girls to unravel. Twenty young women, I thought: a perfect foil for the 20 young footballers also attending, plus the 20 bohemians from uni. The ideal party mix, except none of the girls showed up. Not one.

Only later did the penny drop. I'd used the wrong shorthand. My Pitman for PICNIC resembled an intoxicated worm to their eyes. Basically I'd sent a love letter to 20 sweethearts in fluent Neptunian, when their own planet lay in a separate galaxy. Or harking back to Mr Schultz, I'd hollered a line-out code to 20 gorgeous Lurches and consequently the ball was missed.

So then, Rebus Twist Number Two. While Lurch himself made millions fixing people's pipes, I decided there was more profit to be had in crossword-making, assuming the *Herald* would be good enough to employ me. Sprucing up those early grids, in my last year of college, 1982, I sent them into Fairfax in the cocky belief they couldn't resist my panache.

I was wrong. They resisted for a year at least, the editor Ron Nichols, and the vaunted LB, both sending back multiple reasons why my stuff fell short of the mark. A principal beef was my rebus fixation. RUME-ONGIN may well translate as LONG TIME BETWEEN DRINKS, wrote Ron, but can't you find a better way to clue it?

Maybe plumbing was a better option after all, or breaking codes for some spy office in Canberra. In a weaker moment I even considered novel writing to be more lucrative, but little by little I took to improving my clues. I weeded out the rebus plague and tested the mainstream recipes, only to draw more criticism.

Trim your fat. Quell the puns. Disguise your wordplay. Fairer definitions etc.

Sheesh. Back to the drawing board. New grids, new clues, followed by more flak. Naturally LB's counsel was easier to hear—the setter a demigod in my eyes—but who was this Ron geezer anyway? Did he make crosswords? We'd never met before but that didn't stop the man's steady rebukes. After the third round of criticism I decided to take positive action. The Herald building, by coincidence, was a block from The Institute, where my course was winding up. One afternoon, after a tute, I skipped across to the Fairfax bunker on Broadway, in Ultimo, asking to see a man called Mr Nichols.

'Is he expecting you?' asked the woman at the counter.

'No.'

By the same token I wasn't anticipating the man to leave the elevator either. It was almost a rebus moment, seeing a familiar character in an unfamiliar setting, out of context, out of harmony with the norm. Certainly my brain felt out of whack as a diminutive chap with a cowlick crossed the floor, his hand extended, the glint in his eye magnified by those ashtray glasses of his.

'G'day ref,' I said instinctively.

'Call me Ron,' he said with a smirk. 'Ron Nichols.'

I tried to speak. My tongue was stone. I was b-o-u-n-d (spellbound).

RECIPE PRECIS: REBUSES

The layout says it all. The rebus clue is unique in its weirdness on the page, an assemblage of dashes or typefaces, perhaps a meaningless clusters of letters and numbers . . . though meaning will be lurking. With no definition, as a rule, the game is in your hands, as you try to find the word or phrase that lends meaning to the miscellary before you.

SIX OF THE BEST FROM MY REBUS ARCHIVE

XXSX needing XXXX? (7)

- cryptic clue (9)

PEEP (4,4,4)

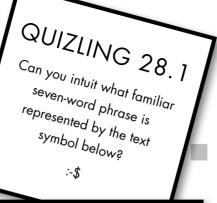
pASPalum (5,2,3,5)

COSMOS

COSMOS(8,9)

A\$\$ ASS? (1,4,3,3,5,3,4,6)

SOLUTIONS: thirsty, minuscule, look both ways, snake in the grass, parallel universes, a fool and his money are soon parted



QUIZLING 28.2

What five Graham Greene novels have been roughly encoded below?

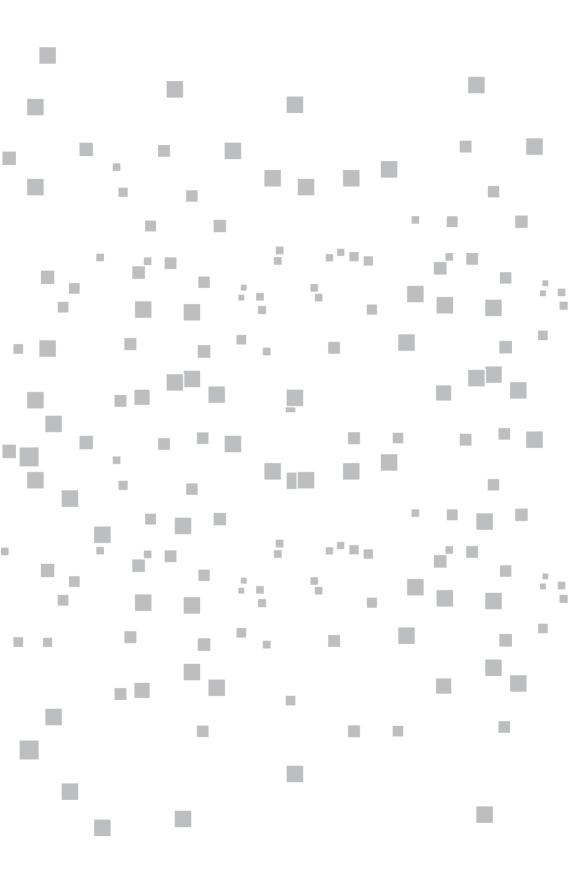
> SHUS (3,5,8) R(3,3,2,3,6)

ORE (8,4)

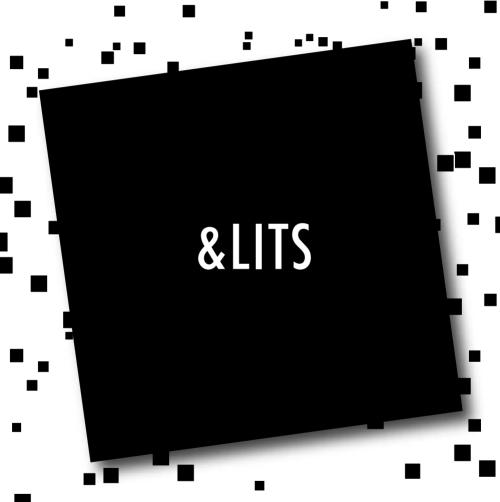
TT (3,5,2,3,6) nuestro hombre (3,3,2,6)

•

QUIZLING 28.3

Look closely. That's not an O in each cluster below, but a zero. With that in mind, can you reveal the river, the flavour, the country, the plant and two monsters on display? OE COR CAO PHOEO SAOCH MAROAN 

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		• . •	



CHAPTER 29

Central period in time-spread one spent!(7)

Thankfully, after making me jump a few more hurdles, the *Herald* eventually found a place for me on the roster. Ten crosswords a year—I was on probation until I earned my stripes. I came to discover Ron Nichols was a delightful man, while the rebus paled as a recipe compared to the splendour of the &lit.

Don't be daunted by its strange label. You've already met the &lit category before, back when we solved ETC, and you survived. In one regard the &lit formula is simpler than all the other clue categories by virtue of fusing both wordplay and definition into one unit. At least that's my rough-and-ready explanation. Ximenes does a better job, as he's the man who christened the genre in 1966:

The term & lit is short for 'This clue both indicates the letters or part of the required word . . . and can also be read, *in toto*, literally, as an indication of the meaning of the whole word, whether as a straight or a veiled definition'

To remind you, here's that clue for ETC again: *Partial set closer?! (3.)*. The clue can be read as a definition for ETC. Second to that, the same definition embodies the wordplay, all three words serving their dual roles.

But don't go thinking &lits only use the hidden tactic. Till now every category we've tackled has adhered to its own formula. Containers have contained and homophones have sounded, every clue keeping to its separate box. From this moment, however, those boundaries will evaporate as we enter the realm of &lits and hybrids.

Hybrids wait around the corner, the labradoodles of the cryptic pound, but let's first grasp how versatile the &lit can be. Depending on the approach a setter adopts, the &lit clue can play with puns or deletions, codes or even rebuses, whichever approach will accomplish the feat.

Spoonerism is a category. Reversal is a category. Whereas &lit is an ideal, the pursuit of oneness. Almost every clue we've met so far has faithfully carried the two necessary burdens—definition and wordplay. Both are separate, despite meeting harmoniously at a clue's midriff. The &lit clue takes intimacy to a new level, like the commingled souls of John Donne's lovers, where the two partners merge into an entity, and either lover fulfils the role of the other. The border is lost.

Solving ETC, we saw how wordplay was definition, and vice versa. Every word plays a double role. Obviously this is a hidden &lit. Time to see how the principle works with anagram &lits, both these samples fashioned by US duo Henry Cox and Emily Rathvon:

```
Is a bit less wobbly! = STABILISES

Hunan caterer's site, perhaps! = CHINESE RESTAURANT
```

See how the anagram signposts (*wobbly* and *perhaps*) unify with the fodder to become definitions of the answers? In the same vein, MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE could be defined by the wordplay *Drifting item belongs at sea!* Allow the 16 letters ITEMBELONGSATSEA to drift, and you'll end up with the phrase the very wordplay describes.

Not to be outdone, charades can also become charade &lits, with both those gems deriving from *The Times*:

```
Stop heading for takeaways! (4)
Creature in river! (5)
```

The alternative approach to cracking &lit clues is to look past the word-play and treat each one as an oblique definition. If you *Stop heading for takeaways*, what are you doing? What *Creature in river* has five letters?

When clocks or engines *stop*, they DIE. *Heading for takeaway* is a deft means of signalling the letter T, the head-letter of *takeaway*. Join these two pieces in charade style and you make DIET, or *Stop heading for takeaways*.

The river creature is harder, since *river* in cryptic-speak infers more than a few watercourses. Commonly the river will be British (like DEE, EXE, OUSE, TEST), but mainland Europe has some useful 'flowers' too: ODER, OISE, URAL, OB. Though the continent's prime suspect is Italy's PO, as applies in this second clue: HIP/PO (*in/river*).

You could argue that *creature* in our second clue has only a definition role to play and is surplus to the wordplay half. If oneness is the &lit ideal, then creature seems an adjunct to the marriage. Its wordplay role is negligible. That being said, the overall clue (*Creature in river*) is literally a HIPPO. Should the jury grumble, the clue could lose its full &lit status, being demoted to a charade clue with &lit pretensions. But let's not quibble, and revel in these two container &lits from *The Times*:

```
Sweet best to keep cold! (4-3)
Something carried about in box! (7)
```

Your first answer is CHOC-ICE (C inside CHOICE, or *best*), while FREIGHT (RE in FIGHT) solves the second. Succinct and elegant, &lit clues are like hen's teeth, as the ideal of fusion is elusive. Speaking from experience, they usually entail some minor epiphany at the drawing board when inspiration casts a new perspective on the answer. You suddenly see how a word like THEOLOGY, say, contains EGO, which seems the answer's counterforce. The leftover letters are THLOY, which gives rise to the anagram &lit:

Ego hotly disputed by this study!

That's the epiphany, realising for the first time how the answer's definition shares a delicate compatibility with the wordplay potential. Priest-like you marry two souls into one.

No doubt, after meeting a few &lits in a row, you've realised how the exclamation mark is a common feature. This is despite the lament of F Scott Fitzgerald, author of *The Great Gatsby*, who warned all aspiring writers that, 'The exclamation mark is like laughing at your own joke'. I can only imagine the great man was chiding novelists, since clue-writers have little choice but to tag &lits with the offending item. In Cryptopia,

punctuation is etiquette. Not quite a golden rule, the exclamation mark is certainly a dominant trait of the &lit formula.

Not that every exclamation mark needs to say the &lit mode is operating. Ximenes was once censured by a solver for stabbing his clues with far too many of the emphatic little critters. The solver, conceded Ximenes, had a point. The setter assessed his own work to see the plague of screamers (as printers dub exclamation marks) and consequently vowed, 'Now I try to use much more restraint in this matter and to use them only when I am exclaiming, or for a technical purpose . . .'

Because that's the gist. Occasionally a clue will shout by virtue of its message, with no &lit implicated. Here are two examples from my own bottom drawer:

```
'Tax!' yelled lunatic with triumph = EXALTEDLY

Retro French artist almost curses! = EGAD [DEGAS minus S, reversed]
```

Now and then the exclamation mark admits a clue's own cheek, like Paul's racy double meanings in *The Guardian*:

```
Molest a little higher! = TOUCH UP
Mad? They must be cracked! = NUTS
```

Of course, when the stars align and the setter is moved, cheekiness plus the rigours of &lit can combine. For me that moment came with WONDER BR A:

Naughty piece in fashion wardrobe!

After such a whirlwind trip the &lit label should hold fewer fears for you now. Call them literals if you like, as that's the way to tackle them—*literally*. Read them foremost as definition, and then go digging for wordplay, trying to spot the chosen formula. And remember, the exclamation mark can be your brightest beacon.

So far, among the Master clues, we've bumped into three screamers and each of these clues—KASBAH, GEN-X and ETC—own strong &lit tendencies. Connoisseurs can argue about their purity, but all three

cases see the answer's definition carried largely by the wordplay. Our current clue, 10-Across, is our final encounter with the exclamation mark, and again the &lit balance seems on offer. In the next section, let's do some literal un-mingling.

MEANWHILE . . . — double- and triple-barrelled &lits

Glance at the grid and you'll probably pounce on the answer. With every cross-letter locked in place, no other word fits the pattern. It has to be INTERIM. But that's less solving than sealing the gaps. For any puzzle fan the joy of cryptic crosswords rests in the clues. Were this a quick puzzle, I'd understand your haste. Why bother reading a prosaic definition if you've already hunched the answer?

However, a cryptic is more than a single puzzle. Each clue in fact is a tiny puzzle in a larger challenge. If nothing else, the pleasure of sampling these smaller conundrums should prompt you to see how INTERIM is reached:

Central period in time-spread one spent! (7)

Okay, let's work backwards. We have the answer in hand, so how does the clue get us there? Overall, in the &lit tradition, the clue reads as an approximate meaning of INTERIM, the time stretching between two points. Too approximate, perhaps, to please a sober dictionary, but sound enough on the puzzle page. So there's the definition—*in toto* as Ximenes decreed. What about the wordplay?

Focusing on the pieces, *central period* gives us RI, the middle pair of *period*. The next part, *in time-spread*, could be read as anagram fodder plus signpost. Is that the recipe in action? Reviewing what we've collected, RI + INTIME, the outcome of INTERIM is teasingly close, but we have too many letters. Effectively, spreading the eight letters around, we are left with INTERIM + I. How can we account for losing this final I?

Here's where the clue's tail comes to the rescue: *one spent*. Spending is another word for depleting. Once I is disbursed from the eight, we have the right fodder to render INTERIM. The clue, we've discovered, uses two categories—anagram and deletion. Some may call this clue style a

complex anagram, others would plump for hybrid, while this chapter prefers the triple-barrelled label of anagram/deletion &lit, just to underline how far we've come.

Not that our trip is over. Putting to bed the last &lit, we now face the labradoodles—alias the hybrids. The species might seem friendly enough but you'd be overlooking the nature of their labradoodle coat: curly.

RECIPE PRECIS: &LITS

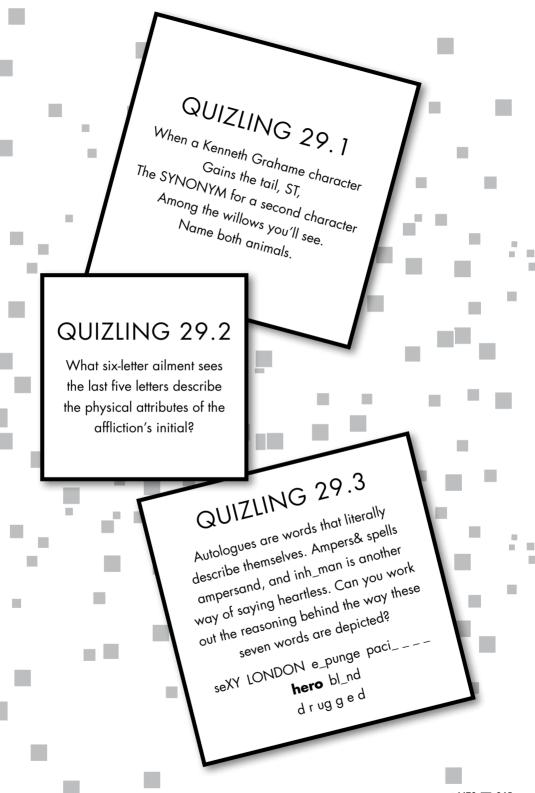
The pinnacle of clues, &lits mean 'and literally', as the wordplay literally acts as the definition. Many set free! (for example) doesn't just define AMNESTY, but the anagram wordplay yields the same answer. Unlike other categories, the &lit clue obeys any recipe with the customary rules, so long as the wordplay and definition are fused. Brevity and the telltale exclamation mark serve as your best guides.

HALL OF FAME: &LITS

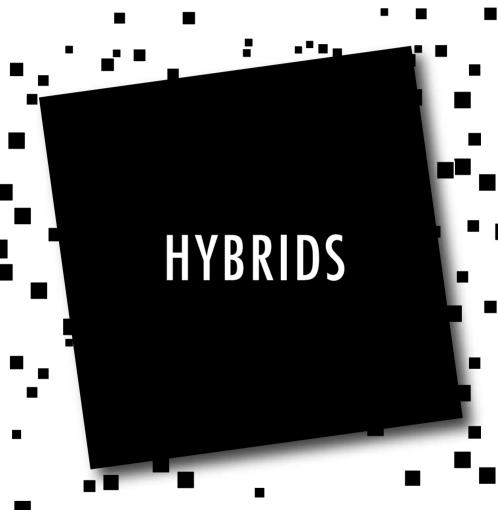
Leading pairs to animal home involved him (4) [Aardvark, FT]
Original back to nature author! (7) [Puck, Guardian]
Difficult case (section), ending in operation! (9) [Paul, Guardian]
Alternative, say, to the op? (10) [Times 8641]
Besides the previous filling, might this prevent another? (10)
[Paul again]

Result of a piercing tool! (10) [Henry Hook, US]

SOLUTIONS: Noah, Thoreau, caesarean, osteopathy, toothpaste, impalement



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CHAPTER 30

Almost completed month hosting upstart libertine (3,4)

'Know any good crossword songs?'

Not many really—good or bad. The gauntlet was thrown by Fintona College, a private girls school in Melbourne. To raise funds for an Aboriginal health clinic the school was staging a trivia night with a cryptic dimension. On a cool night in August 2009, 100 people gathered in the school studio, everyone dressed in black and white, all intent on solving a crossword, clue by Powerpointed clue. I was thrilled to take part. The Crossnight idea was inspiring—not to mention the cause—but to ice the cake we needed the right music.

Back in the honeymoon phase of crosswords, Broadway went gaga over the chequered squares, but now you need a bloodhound to sniff out puzzle references in titles or lyrics. A dozen artists alone, from the Bee Gees to Pink, have cut a number called 'Words', but could we go one better with a direct crossword mention? Come the night, students from Fintona's music department burnt a disc of 20 songs with a cruciverbal hint, including:

- 'Looking for Clues'—Robert Palmer
- 'Hip to be Square'—Huey Lewis and the News
- 'Across the Universe'—The Beatles
- 'Down on the Corner'—Creedence Clearwater Revival

Hiphop of course has lent a new chic to wordplay. There's even an artist called DJ Clue scratching the vinyl, and a guy called Method Man whose remix called 'The Riddler' is all about a lime-green psycho who

romped around my younger imagination. But nailing songs with specific mentions of interlocking letters is a taller order.

The night went well, by the way. We raised a few grand, solved a few clues, but the music challenge threw me into research. Using search engines and lyric databases I uncovered a bizarre medley ripe for the next Crossnight, assuming recordings of these tracks still existed. Among the weirder were:

- 'Crosswords' by Tim Finn, formerly of Crowded House. The track describes a couple out of sync with each other—he's down, she's across. In bed, he'll turn, she'll toss.
- 'Crossword' by Jethro Tull—'your brain on the train to test'.
- Two bands—Hoodoo Gurus plus Ian Dury and the Blockheads—mention solving a crossword at the airport. The first with success, but the Blockheads struggle.
- The Partridge Family, of all people, released an album entitled *Crossword Puzzle* in 1973, complete with themed grid on its canary-yellow cover. (Just as Neil Diamond, three years earlier, had converted his face into a dot-to-dot portrait on his *Shilo* LP.)
- Confucius, reckons Tori Amos in her 'Happy Phantom' song, does his crosswords in pen, while in 'Drug Me', the Dead Kennedys claim crosswords are a government conspiracy to sedate the masses.
- INXS mention crosswords and cigarettes in 'Simple Simon', not to be confused with XTC, whose 'Mayor of Simpleton' shuns the same puzzles with a passion.
- Maybe too thrashy for a girls' college are the all-German metal-heads called Cryptic Carnage. The combo began life in 1994, producing two albums, before the boys realised one Tarrago couldn't accommodate so many big hairstyles. Looking for crossword clues in the band's backlist I found 'The Wizard', 'The Guardians Awake' and 'High Hopes'.

By all means, hope away. There's nothing wrong with optimism in the face of a cryptic clue, even the harder hybrids. Keeping to music, we should listen to Stephen Sondheim, composer of stage shows, as well as constructing cryptic crosswords during the 1970s. His belief: 'The nice thing about doing a crossword is you know there is a solution.' Sounds an obvious thing to say, though compare that surety to all life's other problems. Crosswords are built for breakthrough, that piñata euphoria.

Curiously, still with music, our current clue has a faint underscore of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Let's segue to the second movement to see how the clue's composed.

UP FOR THE RUMBLE — slash method and hybrid clues

Hybrids can terrify beginners. What, you mean this clue is carrying two recipes? Or three? What chance do I have? Well, the same sort of odds as a triathlete, assuming the contestant can swim, run and ride a bike.

The fitter will finish faster, but if you can identify the multiple categories involved in any hybrid, then you'll reach the finishing line eventually. Just keep chanting that: your motto for the lonely road. *I can anagram, I can spoonerise*—and the home stretch will soon loom. Of course, some runners opt for iPods when eating up the kilometres, and here that ploy may work just as well, given the musical echo of our first official hybrid:

Almost completed month hosting upstart libertine (3,4)

The reason why rookies cower at the sight of hybrids relates to the lengthening of the mental question list. As a rule, facing a cryptic clue, the solver asks two questions:

- 1. Which part is the definition, and which the wordplay?
- 2. What wordplay recipe is involved?

Along come hybrids, with recipes plural, and the list gains a third question:

3. Where does one wordplay recipe end, and the next begin?

Clue division, in other words, needs an extra slash or two. Before we grapple with our *upstart libertine*, let's see the 'slashing' practice in action with a beastly schoolmate, as created by Crucible, a *Guardian* setter:

Beastly schoolmate misbehaved, caught out (9)

Divided into its correct pieces, Crucible's clue would look like so:

Beastly / schoolmate misbehaved / caught out

Section One is the definition. Two, you can tell, is the anagram, with fodder adjoining a clever signpost. The tail is a deletion, telling you to remove the *caught* (or C) from a scrambled SCHOOLMATE. In the early chapters we came across this style under the banner of compound anagrams, where SUDOKU minus U can be jumbled to make KUDOS. So there's nothing to fear. We've done the miles. Compound anagrams are just a form of hybrid clue. We've met them and beaten them already. We're ready for the main event.

Let's now break the schoolmate into an equation form, which helps to expose the mechanics further:

Synonym of beastly = scrambled SCHOOLMATE—C

Boiling it down further, compressing the recipes into a single wordplay challenge:

Synonym of beastly = scrambled SHOOLMATE

In case you haven't guessed, *caught* equates to C, a reference to cricket, the game most warmly embraced by cryptic-setters. The *Herald*'s LB was a sucker for the willow, in league with dozens of clue-mongers before and since.

Hugh Stephenson, the *Guardian*'s crossword editor, paralleled the two British ideals—cricket and cryptics—in an elegant column back in 2003. In his mind the two have much in common, including arcane laws and tacit conventions. He claimed, 'They are totally unintelligible to people who don't play the game themselves, even after long and patient explanation.' Add to that, he joked, either is liable to linger for days and still end in a stalemate.

Outside the analogy, there is that other boon of cricket, namely its

slew of terms, many of which seem custom-made for wordplay tools. Look no further than *over*, *off*, *on*, *out*, *in*, *run*, *slip*, *cut*, *test*, *drive*, *extra*—and *caught*. Most of these are perfect foils for a setter seeking to contrive a misleading surface sense.

American crosswords have no use for cricket and instead look to the handy abbreviations and heroes of baseball (RBI and OTT respectively) and football (QBS and LOTT). Crosswords mirror the culture of their solvers. American cryptics find other ways to infer the words in our swag of cricket jargon and the same applies to words like *try* and *lock* that in Australia are associated with rugby.

Anyhow, we've conquered Crucible's LOATHSOME example and played the sporting field, so let's hop across to Hawaii where super-triathlons were born, and compete against a hybrid from my own collection:

Hawaiian bloke held out long iMac? (3,3,9)

Stiffer challenge this time, with no anagram involved. Remember, hybrids present a three-level question: Where's the definition? Which are the recipes in action? How best to break up the clue? If it helps, the segments fall this way: Hawaiian/bloke/held out/long/iMac

Gaining cross-letters would be a major boost. So imagine our mystery phrase is one of the last to join the grid, much like our current hybrid. And, thanks to cross-letters, the middle word must be AND. Meaning we're seeking a *Hawaiian*, or an *iMac*, that's (3,AND,9).

But which categories are involved? Even when you suspect that charade and container are the agents in the Hawaiian example, there remains the puzzle of correctly dividing up the whole. Let's try an equation approach:

Phrase meaning *Hawaiian* = synonym of *bloke* inside synonym of *held* + word for *long* + *iMac*?

Feeling peckish? The answer is HAM AND PINEAPPLE, also known as a Hawaiian pizza. The breakdown goes like so—HA(MAN) D+PINE+APPLE. In a funny way, hybrid clues resemble pizzas, at least the Two-, Three- or Four-season kind you can buy. If standard clues

follow a single recipe, then hybrids combine two styles or more from the one menu. The kitchen may deliver a Mexicana/Vegetarian—two flavours in one—but ultimately the contrasting slices make the whole, just as a plain Margarita, or any other standard order, does.

Moving then from Margarita to Master, here's one more glance:

Almost completed month hosting upstart libertine (3,4)

With a lack of signposts, you can scratch out anagram. Then again, container looks probable, owing to a word like *hosting*. Second, we can suspect *upstart* as a pointer for U, which already appears as a cross-letter.

Says the grid, the first word is either DAN, DEN, DIN, DON or DUN—each a viable word or name. Which candidate is suggested by the wordplay? If we seek a *libertine*, then the phrase to yield the opening word must be *almost completed*. How does DONE minus E seem? Can you name a Lothario called DON? Mozart composed an opera about the rogue, one Señor Giovanni, based on the Spanish legend and the Byron poem. DON JUAN is your hombre, but how does the rest of the hybrid pan out?

Almost completed (DONE—E) month (JAN) hosting upstart (around U) = libertine

There you have it, a late splash of libretto and libido to see our challenge almost completed. Our first official hybrid combines deletion/charade/container, and you barely broke into a sweat. Like Mr Juan, you're equal to the hanky-panky.

READ MY LIPS — nobbled novels and lipograms

John Gadsby is a man of 50 living in Branton Hills, an imaginary town-ship lacking vigour. Not that Gadsby is all passion and pop, but this man gradually brings back that missing quality by inspiring a mix of young folk to form an Organisation of Youth, a group staunchly bound to spur on growth and add a bit of razzamatazz.

Sound odd, our good friend Mr Gadsby? Though making things

stranger is the fact that the paragraph above contains every letter of the alphabet, bar the commonest, E. And that was just 50 words or so. Multiply that by 1000, telling the Gadsby story from go to whoa, and you'll understand the feat that Ernest Wright accomplished in 1939. His novel—Gadsby: Champion of Youth—is a full-blooded lipogram, or text excluding certain letters. English has borrowed the word from Greek, with lipo- meaning to leave, and -gram a letter. Lipography in fact describes a typo of sorts, where a letter or word has been omitted. (In 1631, for instance, a new version of the King James Bible accidentally omitted the word 'not' from the Seventh Commandment, lending unexpected cheer to adulterers of that era.) Lipograms, on the other hand, are deliberate, the writer striving to tell a tale like Gadsby with one particular letter banished. Arising in Greece, the practice was born out of literary discipline and/or masochism.

Wright himself is a puzzle to unravel, the man dying days after his opus hit the streets, aged 66. He would have published *Gadsby* sooner, but none of the major players thought the gimmick worth a risk, obliging the author to self-publish. (What must have burnt Ernest even more was that the name of the vanity press—Wetzel—boasted two of his taboo vowels.)

The story of course is written in the present, as the –ed ending of the past tense was too restrictive. A stickler to the nth degree, Wright also dodged such abbreviations as St (for street) and Mr (Mister). In essence, working from a Tampa nursing home, Wright only had half the dictionary to draw on, an amazing effort. When it came to rejuvenating Branton Hills, Gadsby and his merry kids targeted a hospital, a library and any other E-free facility. In the local park they funded a bandstand as opposed to a gazebo or summerhouse—and definitely not a belvedere.

The novel has only grown in stature since Wright's passing, with French writer Georges Perec paying a literary tribute to it in his own 50,000-word lipogram called *La Disparition*, published in 1969. Later translated by Gilbert Adair as *A Void*, Perec's work recounts the story of a band of klutzes seeking the missing Anton Vowl, the whole mystery devoid of E.

Y, you ask. The group you should ask is Oulipo, or the Workshop of Potential Literature, to which Perec, Marcel Duchamp, Italo Calvino and other bohemians belonged. The Paris cabal formed in 1960, a syndicate intent on producing art under constraint. Writing a story, say, where no letter (g, j, p, q, y) descends below the line. Or composing an original proverb in which each word is a letter longer than its predecessor—a practice known as snowballing. Even my *Gadsby* synopsis, opening this section, somehow owns a lingering oddness thanks to the E-exemption, the kind of territory Oulipo relished exploring.

Shades of the famous nursery rhyme, given new life when translated without an O:

Mary had a little lamb,
The bleached and chalky kind,
And everywhere she went, the lamb
Was rarely left behind . . .

All this talk of avoidance and disappearance is apropos of the J in DON JUAN. As you'll recall, the Master solution carries the alphabet, bar one letter. An accidental lipogram, if you like. Or a thwarted pangram. This latest J represents the 25th and final unique letter in the mix, with only three answers to come, none of them destined to use the exiled F. Ironic really, considering our latest addition is a libertine. Of all sagas, even Perec or the brilliant Ernest Wright would surely struggle to translate *Don Juan* without a single F.

RECIPE PRECIS: HYBRIDS

A catch-all formula, the hybrid clue is capable of sweeping up any two or more of the recipes we've already come across. Hybrids can spook the rookie for the same reason, combining any category to break down the answer, but every rule we've met so far is still in effect. If reversal blends with anagram, then the two signposts (of recession and renewal) need displaying. Same with homophone and deletion—expect cues for sound and removal. Be alive to each word and try to distinguish which is signpost, which link, which fodder, and which definition. That way, you can break up the clue correctly, and stalk the solution step by step.

QUIZLING 30.1

What major hit written and performed by Bob Dylan only uses letters (as often as necessary) from the singer's own surnames (And what major hit by an English songwriter, appearing a year later, also follows the DYLAN

QUIZLING 30.2

Can you dredge up a well-known European river that not only sounds like a horse, but also can be mixed to spell a creature frequenting rivers?

QUIZLING 30.3

We have an American state in mind. Delete its opening M, and the remainder can be mixed to spell a particular European. Which state?

CHAPTER 31

Disorientated, guided east of tall grass zone one slashed (10)

We have B _ M _ O _ Z _ E _ to fill, so let's stop beating about the bush. Enter BAMBOOZLES—the obvious answer—and on we go.

Or wait. Maybe BAMBOOZLED is the answer. Champs can come unstuck making tournament slips like that, duffing one lousy square in their haste to complete the whole. Both words fit—but which is right?

We have two ways to check: the definition's case and wordplay. A past-tense definition must have a past-tense answer. New solvers—and setters too—can overlook this watertight contract. Without looking at wordplay yet, consult the definition's tense, and you should confirm that last iffy square:

Disorientated, guided east of tall grass zone

Tall grass zone? Sounds more like wordplay than a dictionary phrase. So try the other end and there's that beam of light we need: disorientated. The –ED ending in the clue must be retained in the solution. We're BAMBOOZLED no longer.

Remember this when parsing clues. *She* in isolation cannot signal HER or HERS. The case must agree. With verbs the trick is valency, a fancy word for how one word combines with others around it. As you know, verbs are divided into two camps—the transitive and intransitive kind, with quite a few swingers who sneak across the border.

In lay-speak a transitive verb requires an object to receive the action. If you chase, then you must be chasing something. Different from when you run, which doesn't require a fugitive as such. People can run for the

sake of it, no object needed. Of course run is one of those bed-hoppers that can answer to intransitive (*The athletes run*) or transitive (*The school runs the carnival*). These nuances matter when deciphering the definition element.

Imagine if *eat* is the straight part of the clue. This could mean NIB-BLE or DEVOUR, even ERODE or CORRODE, but misfires as a definition for FEED (in the sense of CATER), or SATISFY or STRESS (as in *to be eaten* by worry). A verb can't be asked to perform a function outside its job description, or turn back on itself from clue to grid. If the setter offers *itch*, then the solver shouldn't think SCRATCH.

Don't worry. I won't be reciting the subjunctive any time soon. Too many souls more learned than I (or is it me?) have wandered into the Grammar Jungle never to return. Language is treacherous, as good cryptic puzzles demonstrate. Or fake ones too. Take the outlandish case of English writer Sir Max Beerbohm.

The hoax occurred in 1940, entangling thousands. For all his literary flair, Beerbohm battled to solve the *Times* crossword, finding its clues 'disastrous and devastating'. So he plotted revenge, making a cryptic that looked like the real McCoy to the naked eye but made little sense on closer scrutiny. Next he persuaded the *Times* editor to collude on the prank, the nonsense puzzle running in June as a replacement for the genuine article.

The typeface was right. The pattern had symmetry. Everything seemed to be in place, even the tone and mood of Beerbohm's clues. *A Manx beverage*, for one, had to be a deletion clue (since Manx cats have no tail), but where was the definition?

I'm in the old Roman bath was another booby trap, possessing all the container hallmarks, yet solvers across London found no joy in NIMERO, or CAESIMAR, or any other combo that might lead to a sensible solution.

Pitying the solvers in advance, the editor ran Beerbohm's own confession on the same page as the bogus puzzle. As to whether every solver noticed the item, that could only be measured by the level of screams and teeth-gnashing across the capital. The admission spoke of men in armchairs 'with blank, set, fixed, pale, just-not-despairing faces . . .' In short, bamboozled. This was disorientation on a grand and sadistic scale.

Versus our current clue of course, a legitimate hybrid with BAM-BOOZLED the lock-in answer by virtue of the letter pattern, plus the clue's tense. Though before we delve into the intricate whys of 12-Across, let me continue to explore the idea of bafflement, as there are those times in Puzzleville, composing clues, when a dictionary can pull a Beerbohm on you, creating more questions than answers. As it happens, the prime example relates to the tall-grass world of horticulture.

WOOD FOR THE TREES — opaque definitions and Hookworm Syndrome

The word was *imparipinnate*. I turned to the *Macquarie Dictionary*, *Third Edition* (the *Herald*'s adjudicator), but the entry was less than lucid:

(adjective) pinnate with a terminal leaflet

Naturally I looked up *pinnate*, which wasn't much better. The first definition made sense (*shaped like a feather*), but the second bamboozled:

(of a leaf) having leaflets or primary divisions arranged on either side of a common petiole or rachis

So I looked up petiole, which thankfully was pretty clear:

the stalk by which a leaf is attached to the stem; leafstalk

Inspiring me to check out rachis, just to confirm I had pinnate sorted, only to enter more brambles:

the axis of an inflorescence somewhat elongated, as in a raceme

Adding further to my woes was the subsidiary definition:

b. (in a pinnately compound leaf or frond) the prolongation of the petiole along which the leaflets are disposed To a mug gardener like me that last bit sounds like the stem that veers off the stalk, holding the smaller leaves, but I could be wrong. You can't approximate at the coal face. The solver needs to know if they're chasing a stick or a leaf, and *botanical term*—the phrase—is so general as to be odious. Suffice it to say I scrapped IMPARIPINNATE, the only word to fit my tortured pattern, and went back to square one.

By and large, composing definitions is the simpler side of the job, though brevity can be a challenge. Facing DUMMY BIDDER one day, the more I dug into the real estate code of practice, the longer my definition grew. In the end I considered something like: *Colluder used to inflate house auction results, illegally in most states when the price exceeds the reserve.* Yuk. Better off trying: *False aspirant at auction?* Neither works wonders. You can see how tangled the task can become.

STEM CELL was a second nightmare. The best the *Collins Third Edition* could offer was *undifferentiated cell that gives rise to specialised cells, such as blood cells.* Well and good if the cell-word wasn't mentioned three times.

Poor clues stumble in similar fashion. Borrowing *pinnate* to explain *imparipinnate* is equivalent to a clue-maker defining CAR-BOMB as *explosive device wired to car*, or INCONSOLABLE as *incapable of being consoled*. I don't mean to be churlish. Both *Collins* and the *Mac* are fine dictionaries, but even the best can err on the side of recycling, allowing an element within an answer to recur in the definition.

Tiny words can sneak through the cracks, too. You can't clue TIP OF THE ICEBERG as the small noticeable part of a more complex problem. Why? Because the definition carries two words (the, of) that also exist in the solution. Better to try: Visible fraction linked to a larger problem. Obviously this advice is aimed at aspiring setters, but the point will also help you distinguish expert setters from not-so-expert.

The other peril to avoid as a clue-maker is the Hookworm Syndrome. Back at uni I secured my first regular puzzle job, crafting a weekly crossword for the student newspaper. A big part of the credit must go to Mr Hammer. I forget his first name. This was 1980. The media faculty was full of part-time Trotskyites and belligerent lesbians, those born with placards in one hand and megaphones in the other.

Fresh out of school, besotted by the anarchy, I was swept along by the constant protest. Less fees! More rights! Greater equality! One day we occupied the dean's office, refusing to move until certain undertakings were met. I can't recall the bugbear, nor the dean's first name, but we sat in his suite and chanted angry rhymes, most entailing radical wordplay.

Hammer and Sickle. Claw Hammer. Sledge Hammer. We worked all the angles. I warmed to the puns over the politics, and next week composed a 15x15 grid for NEWSWIT, the campus rag, loaded with all the other combinations we missed: hammer and tongs, If I Had A Hammer, Hammer Horror and more. The radicals loved it. Rabble-rousers stopped me in the hall to commend me on the HAMMERSTEIN clue, the hybrid that managed to blend our dean, Boris Karloff and South Pacific. I rang the NEWSWIT office, asked if they wanted a permanent crossword.

The gig turned regular. I had free rein, and added all sorts of undergrad rubbish, slowly getting the feel for a puzzler's responsibility. The art of losing gracefully. The Piñata Principle.

I dabbled with alcohol—the theme—and shaped Crosswit to resemble a beer bottle as a bonus hint. I went wild with rebuses and learnt how to be subtle without being unfair, and I clued HOOKWORM too: *Catch bait for parasite?*

'Nu-uh,' said Baz, my mate-cum-critic. 'Not a good clue.'

'Bad taste?'

'Bad clue.'

Hookworms, Barry reckoned, are called hookworms owing to their hook-like shape. So having *catch* as a clue for HOOK was weak enough, but plumping for *bait* to signal WORM was also shabby.

'Might sound picky, but you're really just defining each part without doing any wordplay. It's like, it's like . . . I dunno. It's like HOOKWORM. Do something different next time.'

He was right—it did sound picky. But the comment stuck, and Baz's wisdom has lingered with me, much like hookworm might. (Five years later, for a brief while, I asked Barry to babysit my puzzle correspondence while I was travelling, until I discovered his standard reply to all inquires was *Dear Solver, Get a life. Yours, Wordwit.*) But my friend knew his onions when it came to clue science, his commentary back on campus now a law I've tried to adopt, a cryptic commandment: *Thou shalt not use definition as wordplay*.

Easy, you'd think, but the trap is subtle. You can halve PIGEON into

PIG and EON, and experiment with ideas of glutton or porker (PIG), plus time and ages (EON), but don't expect the same impunity when clueing GUINEA PIG, for example. The fat little critter is named after the pig—so glutton and porker both seem a rehash. Ditto its name is deemed to evoke its origins of Guyana, meaning any wordplay about the country is also scratched.

On a subtler level, for a setter to highlight the LABOR chunk in ELABORATE can also equate to risky business. Both notions draw from the one well. LABOR as toil (in its US guise) and LABOR the party share their root. As for the solution, ELABORATE, that also joins the family reunion, given its Latin meaning 'worked out'—such as delicate ironwork, or a complicated plot. Or a hybrid clue.

HYBRID TANGO — wordplay sequencing

Disorientated, guided east of tall grass zone one slashed (10)

We know where the definition sits, as we also know the answer. But how does the wordplay play out? Write BAMBOOZLED on paper and apply the logic in reverse, seeing how the answer renders the clue, rather than vice versa.

Fittingly, this clue is elaborate. Leaner hybrids will step a solver through each wordplay segment, much as the DON JUAN example: DON + JA(U)N, one chunk at a time. But this specimen prefers to take two steps forward, then one step back. Let's slash the definition and focus on the wordplay:

guided east of tall grass zone one slashed

Jumping out is *tall grass*. If you're thinking BAMBOO, then you're on the money, accounting for most of the answer. Now to reckon the tail: ZLED. A practical way is to swap what we've already confirmed within the clue:

guided east of BAMBOO zone one slashed

Compass points are frequent on the cryptic page. Early in the book I confessed my temptation to convert NESCIENCE into six compass points and three Roman numerals. Whenever a word like point or direction appears in a clue, turn to the map. Just as mention of notes and keys can signify the tonic scale (do, re, mi etc), or A, B, C through to G.

Yet here, cruelly, ironically, *east* is more tied to orientation. If a word is a line on a chart, then west would represent the word's left edge, and east its end. Hence anything east of BAMBOO will lie to its right. (A similar game was played in the QUIZ clue, at 13-Across, where the word *behind* directed you to park the first-clued Z after the QUI.) But back to BAMBOOZLED, can you see how the cluster ZLED stems from the leftover wordplay?

Guided is another word for LED. This lies east of tall grass (or BAM-BOO). But what about that pesky Z? How's this explained in zone one slashed? The verb should nudge you in a deletion direction.

Can you see it? When ONE is slashed from ZONE, you're left with a Z, the final step in a complicated dance. On paper it goes like so:

Disorientated (BAMBOOZLED), LED east of BAMBOO Z

Disorientated? That's why I'm here to guide you. Don't expect to undo these harder hybrids at first blush, or second blush. But glean what pointers you can, because you never know what pointers will appear in the convoluted sequences of multiple categories. That's the good news. The bad? Those four letters—N, E, W and S—can occasionally bamboozle.

HAZY DEFINITIONS

Now and then a dictionary can only bamboozle. Take a look at these hazy definitions—all verbatim—from dictionaries that perhaps should know better.

blackman's potatoes: see early Nancy

Poisson's ratio: an elastic constant of a material, defined as the ratio of lateral strain to the longitudinal strain construed as a positive value

praltriller: inverted mordent

rupture wort: any of several small herbs of the genus Herniaria, as

the glabrous rupture wort formerly used to cure ruptures

sial: granite layer of lithosphere

spathe: conspicuous bract subtending a spadix velarise: to produce with velar articulation

QUIZLING 31.1

Grass skirt possesses a triple-S, as do these other Cinderella souvenir (5,7) Proles' battle (5,8) Where queens lie (5,3) Holy burner (4,5) It's dishwasher-proof (9,5) Harvard for one (8,6) Tasmanian moat? (4,6) S_{ewer's} X? (5-6) Sheriff often (7-6) Fastener (5,4) Horny bunch? (5,7) Where you swear (7,5)

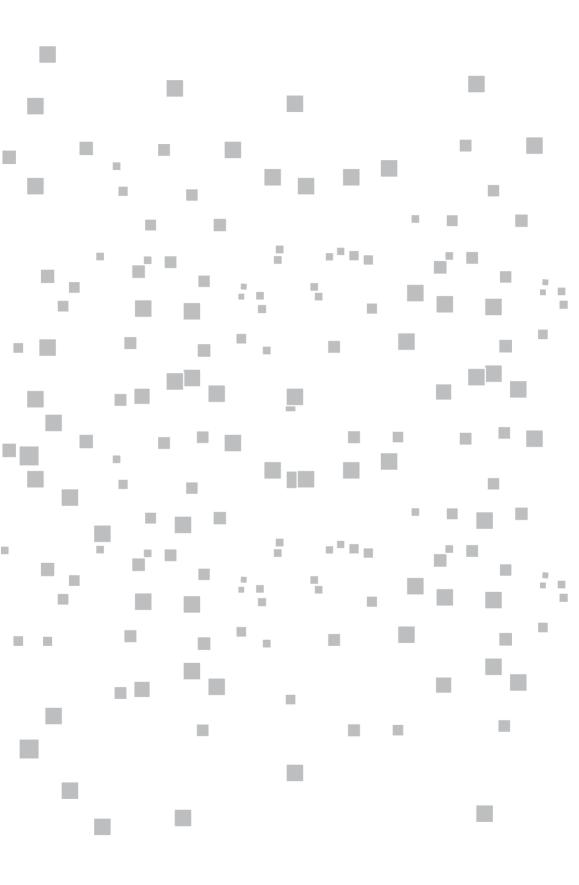
QUIZLING 31.2

Call yourself clever if you can sever An Italian city's head, And switch the remaining thread To reveal the vernacular for spectacular.

- " H ₁₁

QUIZLING 31.3

Can you switch one letter of Queensland's AIRLIE BEACH to its immediate predecessor in the alphabet, then 'develop' the new combo to spell two African republics?



CHAPTER 32

Press disrupt opening about Russian writer (8)

```
dizzy as a butterfly
with praise before
the catcher's expectant mouth
i love ...
i love to love ...
the holy attender understood
only music
as a rope down the throat
tied to ...
a net
```

Peter Valentine broke his poem into three clusters for a reason. Every word in that first group, from *dizzy* to *love*, has been supplied by the Across clues of the *New York Times* crossword published on 30 January 2006. The second verse comes from the Downs, while the answer grid has provided the coda—*a net*.

The title of this curious work—love, once noticed—stems from either clue or answer. Known as a crossword poem, the genre was invented by Valentine back in 2002 when his eye wandered over a tough Thursday fill. He saw the rich wash of language and attempted to create something beyond the puzzle. 'My poems pay attention to the incidental details,' he told Nikki Katz, author of Zen and the Art of Crossword Puzzles.

Valentine also makes haiku, using the crossword method. The one below, from early 2005, could act as the novice's mantra when seeking courage to wrestle cryptics. Its title is *law of enlightenment*:

how long the long way this push to independence so empty a threat

You can read more of Peter's magpie creations at www.hungrybut-scared.com. Or maybe you'd like to craft your own crossword poem based on the puzzle we're solving. This was my own ham-fisted effort, entitled 'Creepy Binoculars':

Why laugh for ignorance? Press on, absorbed in remedy, one twister completed, bar final pains.

Weather chaos. Expose new means to focus. Be partial and avidly get closer To superb revolution.

Climb trapeze, more or less.

Emily-Jo Cureton, another New York artist, has adapted crosswords a different way, selecting a handful of answers to prompt an illustration. On 26 August 2008, for instance, two Down answers (BROCCOLI and HYSTERIA) prompted Cureton to draw the vegetable bound in a straitjacket, the macabre image framed by the crossword-in-progress.

Hail or shine, seven days a week, Cureton maintained her crossword project for most of 2008, finding inspiration in the least likely answers. The phrase EAT UP, in combo with ORBS, saw Emily-Jo convert the puzzle to a video screen where Pac Man munches dots through the maze. On other days, conjoined twins infer SOME PEOPLE/MISS THE CUT. Or a large gent paces the grid in skimpy swimwear to capture BEHEMOTH and SPEEDO. (To see more, visit the virtual garret at www.emilyjocureton.com.) But be prepared for chills. The artist's gift

is finding darkness inside the black-and-white, like the torture scene for HOSED and SQUAT, or a lamb standing frozen in a wolf's gaze to represent OVINE and ALONE.

Talk of sheep leads us back to another style of crossword poem, this time a ballad written by Bluey the Shearer. His real name is Col Wilson, a bush laureate who couches his opinions in rhyme. Across the year his verse can be heard on New South Wales country radio, including a poem like 'Friday Cryptic Crossword'. The piece was aired in 2008, and sent by a mate as a warning, perhaps. You'll see what I mean from the opening burst:

I'm a cryptic crossword nut, addicted as a youth,
But I've never been an expert, if you want to know the truth.
I get the *Sydney Morning Herald* every single morning,
But I reckon Friday's copy should come with a warning.

I like the *Sydney Morning Herald*, except for every Friday. That's developed into the 'day I want to die' day. I'm forever optimistic, and I hope things will get better, As I try to best the Friday cryptic crossword setter.

I got two words the other week, 'utopia' and 'arena',
That was just to suck me in—a quick death would be cleaner.
This 'DA', the setter, he's not in it for gain,
He's a dedicated sadist who loves inflicting pain.

When he isn't setting puzzles, how does he fill his day? Dreaming up new tortures to be used by the CIA?

Seems one man's aquatherapy is another solver's waterboard. Crosswords can do strange things to people, some of whom are tormented artists. Or Russian writers maybe, like the shadowy figure appearing in 4-Across. Time to migrate from New York studios and outback sheds to Moscow, in a search for the scribe embedded in our second last hybrid, our second last clue in fact. Let's cross the Bering Strait.

ALPHABET SOUP — unique sequences and database skewing

Should *Russian* ever occur in a clue, think RED. It may not be the right answer, but it's the right reflex. Sixty years ago, when Uncle Joe was casting his shadow, and Reds were hiding under beds, the *Russian* reference excelled as a wordplay tool and has scarcely been retired, despite *glasnost* and free-market inroads.

RETIRED, for example, could be clued as:

Jobless Russian grabs wheel in America = RE(TIRE)D

Sandy Balfour, a crossword buff and author, could have used a Russian in his puzzle memoir, *Pretty Girl in Crimson Rose*. The title is a container clue, the first clue he ever grasped as a South African émigré in London, where *pretty girl* (BELLE) lies in *crimson* (RED) to render a word for *rose*: REBELLED. While the clue holds fond significance for Balfour, representing his cryptic awakening, a minor tweak could see the book's title reflecting the Soviet bloc:

Communist nabs ball-girl, Rose

Not as catchy, I agree, but proof that Ruskies can infiltrate a horde of clues, including their writers:

Press disrupt opening about Russian writer (8)

The letters in the grid are strong. Their pattern would seem to accommodate only one word or name. Take a look: _ U _ G _ N _ V.

Whoops, that V changes the landscape. Instead of red-Russian, or Russian-red (a handy tip for a future puzzle), this clue is diving into the Moscow phonebook. And why not? As that's the other great Russian legacy to clue-making—all those wild and Scrabbly surnames.

When Gorbachev stood down, I sighed. Not just the engineer of perestroika, the leader had such strong letters. So many Western statesmen have a glut of namby-pamby Os and Rs, but Gorby could hit

a puzzle with both barrels. He still can of course, emeritus style, but I lament the exit of any V-ending bigwig. English can't make nearly enough.

Brezhnev, Kasparov, Nureyev, Pavlov—Mother Russia has been benign. My heart sinks when a red star rises on the horizon, someone like Putin or Sharapova, only for their surnames to end with a whimper. In the crossword caper, the tail is critical, as the wilder a word's finale the more leeway you gain in the interlock. Putin (input switch) and Sharapova (A-Sharp medley + over, we hear) aren't bad of course, but small potatoes compared to that exhilarating V.

It can get pathetic. I live so much for crisscrossing I barrack for any horse in the Melbourne Cup, Australia's biggest race, that owns unusual letters. One November, back in 1986, the publican presumed I'd won the trifecta when the winner was announced. How could he imagine I was prancing the bar for purely verbal reasons, a horse like AT TALAQ giving future grids new hope?

Movie titles with odd patterns (*Antz*, *Xmen*, *EdTV*) get me going too, as do TV shows with peculiar sequences: CSIMIAMI, NYPDBLUE, NIP/TUCK. If they last a few seasons, that's all the better, cementing their future as grid fill. Like At Talaq, the prime weirdos are proven stayers.

In America, where interlocking is even more intense, the hunger for quirky combinations is acute. Best way to show you is by placing our last two ten-letter answers on top of each other like so:

M O R E O R L E S S B A M B O O Z L E D

Pretend that block is the bottom left corner of a grid, no spaces between them. To make a crust the US constructor needs to create words that flow downward into each column, ending in the letter-pairs of the ten vertical slots the pairing offers. Savage business. That's why you need as many eccentric phrases as you can grab. Let's step through this exercise to get a feel for the interlocker's art.

Reading left to right, looking at the vertical couples we have as endpairs, we have the softer combinations (MB, RM, EL and SE), and then the gnarlier challenges (OA, EB, OO), and finally the real hair-pullers (LZ and SD). Keep in mind that American puzzles require a setter to use each square twice, both horizontally and vertically.

LSD will do for the last couple, while the LZ obstacle could be leapt by SCHULZ, the creator of the *Peanuts* comic. Maybe SKILLZ, the gamer slang for proficiency, could also win a call-up. Now you see the importance of gathering fill with offbeat patterns, the Russians in a class of their own.

Eric Albert, an enterprising compiler from the US, has a strong nose for rare combinations. Back in the early 1990s, when computers were anvil-sized, Albert fed his database with umpteen words and names, each one rated according to their individual make-up. In the case of SCHULZ or GORBACHEV, both entries scored zero, the optimal ranking known as Fabulous in Albert's system, which only words and well-known names abounding in strong consonants could claim. NEW YORK, on the other hand, rated a single point, filed under Great, as the name is both complete and owns bold letters, yet not as striking as the clusters evident in the first two examples. This radical way of thinking, coupled with Albert's computer program that captured it, was a giant leap forward in the art of crosswording.

Prior to the Albert model, most American setters relied on grey matter only, or limited software tools that filled a grid with little sense of panache. Say you wished to create an interlock to occupy a 5x5 grid. Ask your brain, or ask ye olde computer, and the outcome may look like this:

STUNG TENOR UNTIE NOISE GREET

Not exactly shabby. The brain or bytes did good. But due to Albert's hard work, giving two points to JAWBONE (Very Good) or seven to ELLS (Boring), US setters have gained alphabetic muscle. Thanks to this new system, where Fabulous fill scores zero and Very Yukky (Pete D.) rates 12, the software has a deeper challenge—not just to fill blanks, but to aim to achieve the minimal score. Updated, the 5x5 may pop out this way:

CLUMP LUNAR UNZIP MAIZE PREEN

As a cryptic-setter, I use computers for a puzzle's stubborn junctions, where nothing in my wordlists or imagination seems to end in LZ, say. A quick key-tap, entering the letters in any crossword finishers (a growing niche of sites and software deals), will see the *Peanuts* creator save the day.

Software or not, my word-watching never sleeps. Every day I filter-feed magazines and conversations in hope of puzzle-ripe patterns. Take the world of music, for example. I may not like the tunes of DINO-SAUR JR or OUTKAST, but I adore those letters. In the classic realm I cherish TCHAIKOVSKY and PROKOFIEV—those wonderful Russians again—by virtue of their wacky spelling. (No wonder Russian Scrabblers only score a point for using P, H, C or B.) So let's unpick our next hybrid to name this man of letters:

Press disrupt opening about Russian writer (8)

Said another way, can you name a word meaning press, of any length, that ends in V? I'll speak for you—nyet. So Russian writer must be the definition.

We've met NABOKOV already, the Russian wordsmith, but he falls a letter short, in tandem with CHEKHOV. Can you name any others? If you know your literature, you're home and hosed, assuming your hunch obeys the recipes on show. Let's check for signposts to see what we're dealing with here.

Could *press* be an anagram signpost? Controversially yes, though some solvers and setters could object. If so, that would cast *disrupt* as your fodder, with no V in sight. Wrong theory.

How about *disrupt* then? Is that the anagram signal? More convincingly, yes, but again the fodder pickings are scarce. Besides, our established letters (UGNV) aren't really on display through the clue, another blow to anagram conjecture.

Disrupt in fact has better odds of being a container signpost, as ads disrupt a telecast just as inserted letters can break up words. But what disrupts what? Consult the grid again. Don't neglect those strong letters, and think of a small word meaning *press*, I urge you. Ah, URGE. There's the gap. In she goes, but disrupting what? Our doodling looks like this:

_URGEN_V

Either you know this novelist or you don't. If I told you the 1800s author of *Father and Sons*, Ivan Turgenev, shares my birthday along with King EdwardVII and a Puerto Rican rapper named Big Pun, would that be any use? Letter-wise, maybe, as TURGENEV can now be written as T(URGE)NEV.

It's a hard clue. Not just a hybrid, and a less familiar surname, but the cues for reversal (your second recipe) are low-key. *Opening* is a synonym of VENT. *About* is a muted signal to reverse, one of those sly prepositions that kick you in the shins. When URGE *disrupts* VENT that's *turned about*, you solve the Master Puzzle's penultimate clue.

I'm only guessing here, but TURGENEV would probably score two points in Eric Albert's software, the mighty letters countered by the author's slip from the public mindset. Just think. There's only 20-Down between frustration and fulfilment, assuming you can summon the divine powers of inspiration to crack the finale. Though beware. As Ivan Turgenev once said, 'Whatever a man prays for, he prays for a miracle.'

QUIZLING 32.1 Logically, what classic Russian novel (4,8) and animated feature movie (3,5) is a favourite among such actors as Uma Thurman and Pete Postlethwaite, plus director Hal Hartley, and writers Ray Bradbury and Mary McCarthy? QUIZLING 32.2 Starting with M, what pharmaceutical word meaning drug is a mixture of NO TIME around a street word for drug spelt backwards? Take all the time you need. QUIZLING 32.3 What aggressive ocean predator (4,5) is a mixture of fundamental • • • ship parts within a type of ship?

CHAPTER 33

New 24-across-coated pickup yet to be delivered (2,5)

If I say Lear, do you think jet or king?

For a few years, just to prove my inner nerd, I tried solving 100 consecutive crosswords in *The Times*, as they appeared in *The Australian*. The rules were simple:

- must be solved on day of publication;
- no mistakes:
- no cheating, including dictionaries, Googling and phone-a-friend.

I started off well. Reached double figures without losing stride. Six days a week, the clues kept coming, and I kept cracking them. The day I clocked 50—two months of steady solving—I celebrated with a tall Guinness. (The champagne could wait for the real milestone.) This wasn't my first time on the mountaintop. I'd scored a quick 70 across the summer, only to wreck my chances with a hybrid:

Violent thief about noon to steal from a person collecting in the Highlands (5-6)

I had every cross-letter too. Getting the solution was only a matter of time, I'd felt. One ray of light and I was home. These were the letters already in the bag:

$$M_N_O/A_G_R$$

Violent thief had to be MUGGER. In this case, about was a container signpost, unlike the reversal role it just played in the TURGENEV clue. Place MUGGER about noon (common shorthand for N) and then ... and then ...

I went with MUNGO-BAGGER, lacking Google to ease my doubts, or the patience to tease out the wordplay. The next day I learnt MUNGO-BAGGER meant nothing, while MUNRO-BAGGER is a climbing enthusiast who tries to scale every peak listed in *Munro's Tables*, a book detailing every Scottish mountain over 914 metres. The wordplay is a charade built into a container: MU(N+ROB+A)GGER. In view of the summit, I'd fallen short.

But not this time around. My gaze was fixed. The key to completing continuous grids is perseverance and an unshakeable will to resolve each impasse. Don't guess. Make those delicate slashes to isolate recipes and find where the definition is hiding. Ensure the wordplay renders the answer. Luck doesn't play a hand. But I wasn't stupid: to reach 50, then 60,70 puzzles in a row, you rely on a few intuitive leaps, just like a Munro bagger crossing a crevasse, praying you land on solid ground.

In my latest attempt, entering the eighties by then, I'd almost capitulated on BISH (a peculiar word for nonsense) and a strand of seaweed called CARRAGHEEN. I'd survived a chess obscurity called SMOTHERED MATE and made the right stab between ROTATED and ORBITED. Which way would you spin, facing this hybrid:

Love little accepted by communist that's made revolution (7)

Trouble being, both ROTATED and ORBITED work cryptically. *Love* in both cases is O, thanks to tennis. *Little* can be BIT or TAT, in a rag-trade setting. *Communist*, we know, is RED. So does the wordplay equation go O+R(BIT)ED, or R(O+TAT)ED? Cross-letters, of course, saved my bacon. The answer was ORBITED and I entered the nervy nineties. Then came the Lear clue:

Lines from Lear don't show fate, sadly, protecting a king (3,5,2,4)

Just like your current pickle, facing the Master Puzzle's remaining

blanks, I had every alternate letter, every one of them! Just unches to go yet I couldn't nail the last phrase:

THE SKINS ON SLAB? THE SKUNK OR SHAG? THE EKING OF SHAW? Let's agree the first word is THE. After that, who knew? I became so panicky I combed every scene of *King Lear* in search of that vital phrase. THE SKINK ON SCAB?

Relax, I told myself. Remember the mantra of LL Cool J—what is the trap? Where is the trap? Or take comfort in Azed's edict: a crossword has two elements—wordplay and definition—and nothing else. Put King Lear back on the shelf and focus on what the clue is giving you.

An anagram, I figured, with the signpost of *sadly*. Probably the fodder was DONTSHOWFATE. (Remember the clump theory we applied to RUSSNED, our first clue together?) Twelve letters—we needed two more. Wait, what does the rest of the clue say? *Protecting a king*—likely a container was the second recipe . . .

Let's think. If we scramble the dozen in DONTSHOWFATE, enfolding AK (a king in chess), then we may get my answer. Wrong again, it seemed, as there's no English word spelt AK_N_, is there? I went through Shakespeare again and found nothing, again. In the end I lunged at THE SKINS OF SEAL, since it sounded the least ridiculous, and opened the next day's paper terrified.

The truth hit hard. All this time I'd been romancing the wrong bloody Lear. The king bit was a red herring. The man I needed was Edward Lear, the maker of limericks, plus his other nonsense poems, including THE AKOND OF SWAT.

Who or why or which or what is the Akond of Swat, runs the opening verse, and the humiliation in my head.

Is he tall or short, dark or fair?

Does he sit on a stool, a sofa or chair . . .

I didn't care. I'd lost the fight. I fell in a heap and waited for the paramedics.

THE LAST LAPSE — end-games and cross-references

Most car accidents, I remember reading somewhere, occur within a short radius of the driver's home. This seems almost logical, since a driver is liable to be driving more often in his own neighbourhood. But the snippet rings true for a different reason. Namely, our brain tends to wander when our destination's close. In the case of home we complete the final few kilometres on autopilot. The car tends to steer itself, the motorist effectively the passenger.

In less familiar settings, the lapse has a different quality. In 2009, ferrying down the upper Mekong River, the scenery blurred the nearer I drew to Luang Prabang, the city where I was disembarking. My mind flitted to other concerns—securing luggage, finding a room—to such an extent that I missed the elephant bathing in the shallows.

Whatever the trip, familiar or exotic, that late mental fade can have its consequences. You overlook. You lapse. You slip, lulled into a sense of comfort or a state of low-watt anxiety.

Solvers are prone to emotions that similarly wax and wane. If the Master Puzzle ranks among your first cryptic ascents, then the prospect of filling the final blanks is exciting, almost blindingly so. And if this is your millionth, you've practically entrusted your pen to do the solving for you. Both mindsets can lead to broken bodies on the foothills.

My AKOND OF SWAT was panic. I'd never crept so close to a century of puzzles. One hundred solutions was my Luang Prabang and I smacked into the elephant.

Other times, when I might tackle four puzzles a day, I can scribble SCARPER instead of SCAMPER and blow the finale. Or look at the cross-letters and guess ARSEHOLES when AESCHYLUS was the preferred response, as you'd expect. Anxiety and familiarity have a history of jinxing any trip. So let's guard against both and read the ultimate clue:

New 24-across-coated pickup ready to be delivered (2,5)

The last clue, and yet our first cross-reference, where another answer is needed to read the full message. Sure, we did have the ellipsis pair of ADAMANT and TWISTER, joined by their mutual dots, but that was

more a marriage of syntax than a cross-reference. Either clue could be cracked in isolation. Our last clue is another matter.

24-Across is IRON. All that means, should you meet any more cross-reference in your travels, is implant the answer into the clue. This practice is rampant in themed puzzles, and will crop up in the customary stuff as well.

Another habit some setters suffer from is pairing up clues, so that IVAN TURGENEV, say, is a combination of two entries, where IVAN is 1-Down, and TURGENEV 24-Across. The etiquette for this tactic is the simple command of See X-Down, or Y-Across, a name or phrase's latter section sending you back to the mother clue.

But back to 20-Down. Now we have a clearer clue reading:

New iron-coated pickup yet to be delivered (2,5)

New murmurs anagram, an age-old signpost. *Coated* suggests container. *Pickup* could be reversal. No wonder this clue is last. The categories are piling up.

The anagram idea, looking at those cross-letters, feels right. The letters of IRON can easily be moulded into a framework, with I and O our two extremes. If that's right, what is the internal block that's being *coated*?

Could this be clued by *pickup*? We need three letters, as seven minus IRON equals three. And logically too, looking at the pattern, those letters are U_E (as IRON can't account for these two vowels).

IN UTERO? Or said the cryptic way, IN(UTE)RO? Congratulations, you've just been delivered. You've just bagged your Munro peak. You've just driven home in your brand-new pickup (or UTE in this neighbourhood), making the porch in one piece. You've solved the Master Puzzle.

OCTOPUS GARDEN — going slow and getting there

F of course is the letter we never used in the grid, though Fe for IRON is chemically close. F may well be your grading too, if the Master challenge is your first outing in the genre. (F for Fledgling, perhaps, or Fumble-fingered, Faint-hearted, Fresh-eyed.) At least that's the case when you

next strike out solo, hoping to climb minus mentor. You've already seen how skittish I became, staring dumbly at THE SKUNK OF SCAB or whatever else fitted, and that's after 35 years of addiction, in the course of which that punk on the train has developed into the four-hits junkie I am today.

Don't despair. It's not brain surgery. The cryptic art is even more delicate, more treacherous, more maddening—with far less at stake. Riding that train I became quite shameless at using published solutions to see why yesterday's puzzle was such a nightmare, trying to fathom why a giant flower could possibly mean AMAZON.

That's the stubbornness I recommend. Don't quit a crossword until you can figure out how half the clues operate, even if that means hindsight and a few sharp slaps on the wrist for being so misled. Just think—even if you unravel one of those stumpers, either on the day or after the event, then that can only mean you're advancing.

So put the pride on ice and give yourself over to the music of the clues. At least you know a few more notes now, like F for example, and that's enough to open any melody.

One puzzle solved, 33 clues later, you know that \$500 may mean D, or cheerleader C, or Russian is a likely RED. A worker might be ANT, and question marks can signal an inbuilt curliness. You know that words like *soundly* and *say* murmur homophone, and if Reverend Spooner was born near Albert Square then hairy clues may translate as *clarey ooze*.

You know swaps and switches are different types of manipulation, even if you're bamboozled by which switch is what. That's OK. Go slow.

Lying inside almost every cryptic clue, you know, is the yin-yang model of wordplay and definition, and these aren't easy to tell apart either. Don't worry. That's the game.

You know charades mean more than a parlour game, and hybrids can apply to more than cars with power points. And on top of that, we know that nescience is a fancy way of describing the vast gaps in our knowledge, whether you've spent half your life solving and compiling these symmetrical universes or are daring to enter a crossword for the first time. That's fine. Start ignorant. Little by little, get wiser, as any cryptic is sure to give you something, even if it's a cold sweat.

The other image I carry with me when solving elusive clues is the

octopus. By all reports this slippery creature is crafty in its camouflage and brainy too, using coconut husks as armour or waving its arms to imitate seaweed. At first sight the octopus is scary, yet it's harmless if treated with respect. Those tentacles look lethal but really they enable the animal to attach itself to objects from different angles, much like the eight-clue recipes—a choice of approaches. As for that defence system, squirting a black cloud if you lunge at it, it's only ink. Just remember that. It might drift into different shapes, and seem like a new peril, but the brave can reach right through.

So take that F and flourish. Improve on your grade with patience and suspicion. Test your nerve with the six mini-puzzles lying in the next section and see if the former mumbo jumbo has suddenly gained a shade of familiarity.

Now your brain is supple, bend it more, and find out what new regions it can reach—and I don't just mean Nauru or 16th-century Italy. The only place a crossword is black-and-white is on the page. That's what I discovered *in utero*, cocooned in the family Commodore, staring at ENSUE and wondering what other secrets might follow. I still wonder that, gazing at the next bed of clues. Every puzzle is a mystery tour, every clue a head-trip promising any number of destinations. Now that you know these things, you have my permission to get lost.

HALL OF FAME: HYBRIDS

Fat not left by supplier of beef and chicken (6) [Cincinnus, FT]
Senior priest holding mass at two in old city (7) [Viking, FT]
Before turning haggard, throw up (10) [Henry Hook, US]
Insect is tucking into a dead bug (10) [Times, 8600]
Family doctor warns about seafood (4,6) [Orlando, Guardian]
Argument about bodyline pitch that's preposterous (6,6)
[Moodim, FT]

SOLUTIONS: coward, Pompeii, heavenward, antagonise, king prawns, beyond belief

TO SOLVE-OR DISSOLVE?

Congratulations. You've reached the end—or the beginning. Even if you grasp only a portion of the tips in this book, you should have enough to infiltrate the next cryptic puzzle, and the one after that, making greater headway as you go. Don't forget to work backwards if unsure—check solutions with clues to see how they marry up. And look backwards over this book as well, visiting each recipe precis, and browsing the halls of fame. And look forward too—as six mini-puzzles lie beyond this page, from easy to slippery: the perfect chance to see how far you've come.

QUIZLING 33.1 There's one girl in King Lear who has LEAR strewn through her own name, and another who arises from strewing two adjacent words in this sentence. Name both.

QUIZLING 33.2

What décor items might elegantly encircle a light,

Where one half's a holy song swirled And the other, the intact underworld?

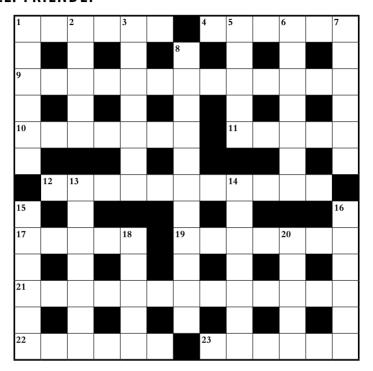
QUIZLING 33.3

By breaking in half a word that is part Of this puzzle's poetical start, And filling the gap with a jumbled version Of a second word in this diversion, You'll spell a hyphenated word relating To that which is awesome or exhilarating. What's the word?

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LEVEL: FRIENDLY

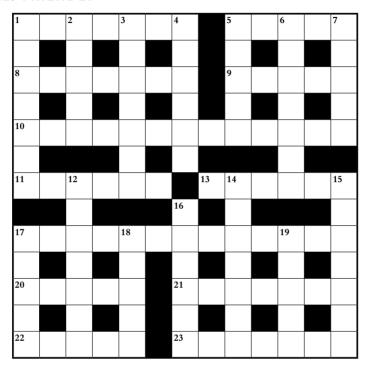


ACROSS

- Ali Baba's opening ingredient? (6)
- Sing inside mosque alcove (6)
- 9 Diet throwing out meat in gravies?! (13)
- 10 Mischief-maker altered Kremlin's facade
- 11 Fruit: melon, bananas (5)
- 12 Test for booze in bar? Yeah, let's rock!
- 17 Cross five Roman figures (5) 19 Spoken about bit of earth? (7)
- Guitar legend arranged carols and chants, heartily embraced by St Nick
- 22 Fuel runs out? Unlimited help required
- 23 Complete in diplomacy (6)

- Fierce skinhead gave a wave (6)
- House guest pens link (5)
- Dahl novel covering one troubled lad
- 5 Imitate chickens or another bird (5)
- 6 Puzzles offer cryptic meanings with no end of confusion! (7)
- Regret a muffin top during Lent (6)
- 8 Prepared the corn fats for breakfast?
- 13 Backward, though possibly poetic? (7)
- 14 Pressurise bigoted leader inside Arab nation (7)
- Still bitter after record write-up (6) 15
- 16 Elastic factory storing iodine (6)
- 18 GP sits on a bee (5)
- Pageant prize that's in a royal array, 20 primarily (5)

LEVEL: FRIENDLY

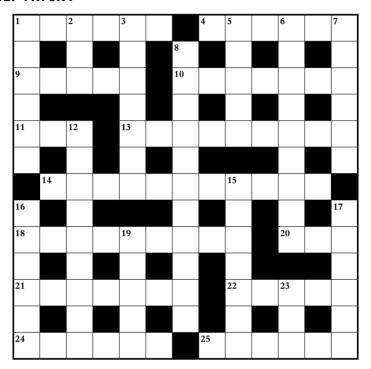


ACROSS

- Opposition leader travels for fruit (7)
- Half-judged as traitor (5)
- He left blithe Buddhist reindeer (7)
- 9 Flatten in the vein of marsupial? (5)
- 10 Perforates leaves (6,7)
- Relative one doesn't start—what a relief! (6)
- 13 Oil tax affected soup ingredient (6)
- 17 Caution copper suffering fixation (13) 20 Pay for cure (5)
- 21 Wild natives least modest (7)
- 22 Sucker caresses husky's tail (5)
- 23 Diet concerning private blokes (7)

- US singer Roy, or US grazer? (7)
- Spanish mate I leave after morning (5)
- Look that gutted Eastern newspaper (7)
- Upper House chosen at every assembly
- Batman villain a wild card . . . (5)
- . . . meeting regular nuclear villain with fangs (7)
- 7 Wee/cut? (5)
- Head student becomes perfect with right adjustment (7)
- Porn classification at times: topless, irksome (1-6)
- Pine-belt battle in Vietnam War (4,3)
- Feel the cold arrow pouch? (6)
- Provide bed and board, one way or the other (3.2)
- Scatty opener sacked, being malicious 18
- 19 Lodgers describe a major girder (1-4)

LEVEL: TRICKY

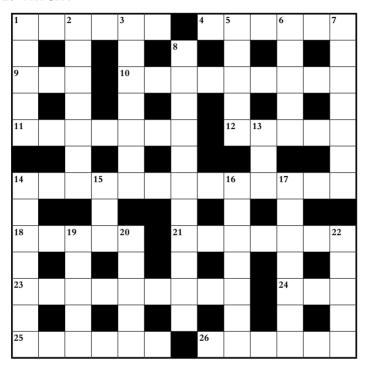


ACROSS

- 1 Sounded tender—acted dirty (6)
- 4 Cockney covering his bets on the side (6)
- 9 Some don't appreciate being readily available (2,3)
- 10 Allows curse about the French (7)
- 11 Limit small explosive (3)
- 13 John Hancock is repulsed by grand instinct (9)
- 14 Improbable airline cuts crackers (11)
- 18 Stirred, a poison must lose no volatile element (9)
- 20 Audience dumps jazz instrument (3)
- 21 Exaggerate general kerfuffle (7)
- 22 Reconciler half-turned to what's left (5)
- 24 That mess detailed London feature (6)
- 25 Dope rolled in dope (6)

- 1 Nullify spirit (6)
- 2 Snitch rejected pitch (3)
- One politician with 25-acrosses almost makes jam (7)
- 5 Yours truly penned hit play, while . . . (5)
- 6 . . . 99 praise one American toga drama (1,8)
- 7 Blast each heavy breather (6)
- 8 Big, elegant, wild predator, in conclusion! (6,5)
- 12 A surgeon finally cuts into kneecap, earning cigar (9)
- 15 Japanese warrior briefly disclosed about a retro spirit (7)
- 16 Happy to be twice spent (6)
- 17 Quietly left trade show, prepared to discuss missile (6)
- 19 Help to put ball in play (5)
- 23 Sound knowledge of court game? (3)

LEVEL: TRICKY

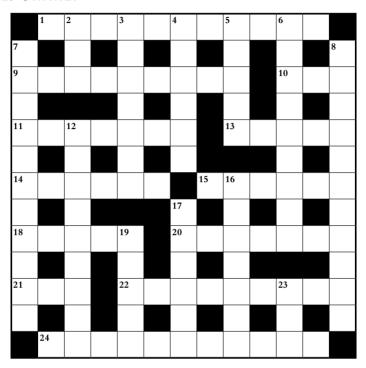


ACROSS

- 1 Recant mixed juice (6)
- 4 1-across ruined jog (6)
- 9 Snake's principal blood groups? (3)
- 10 Cattle base, we hear, in Sweden (9)
- 11 Crashing breakers wiped out a lunatic (7)
- 12 United claimed a European final, then fizzled (5)
- 14 Soldier, mid-fifties, can race poor hound (5-8)
- 18 A cricket team with over-meek openers given truth (5)
- 21 Porcelain saucer—a mica streak inlaid (7)
- 23 During brief month, shade colour (4,5)
- 24 Start off fascinated and fit (3)
- 25 Spell 4-across wrongly (6)
- 26 25-across struck Greek islander (6)

- 1 Rich man of 19-down flipped an old coin (5)
- 2 Greater extremes in range cause vexation (7)
- 3 Sterile gold reaches outspoken pilot (7)
- 5 Crooked quiz we backed (5)
- 6 Plant's ultimate sharp projection?! (5)
- 7 Supremo delays part-renovation (7)
- 8 Bugs Spooner's band tutors, maybe (11)
- 13 A shot in the past (3)
- 14 Exclusive aircraft for king and I in Paris on time (4,3)
- 15 Cheerleader loves affectionate sound (3)
- 16 Above ridge-top, snare climbing companion (7)
- 17 Collide into section of embankment (7)
- 19 Elected to help up nation (5)
- 20 Bewitching host clutches silver pin in centre (5)
- 22 Interrupt prosecuting squad (3,2)

LEVEL: GNARLY

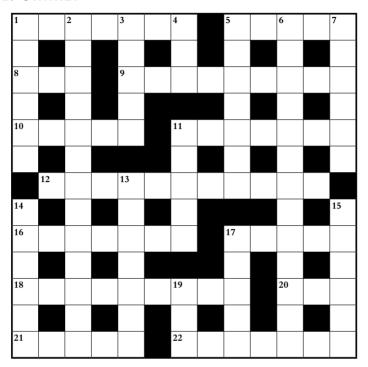


ACROSS

- 1 Past accomplishments suggesting song on album? (5,6)
- 9 Engulfed in loathing, one Swiss city to crash for months (9)
- 10 Camel droppings? (3)
- 11 Traumas plagued Indonesian island (7)
- 13 Poet's concern seen in cab? (5)
- 14 After success, go cold (6)
- 15 Journo sketch returned to boy (6)
- 18 Is a fact unlimited for Newton? (5)
- 20 X-rating perhaps of a Gabler flick? (7)
- 21 Objective tip (3)
- 22 Chandler detective we left to snare police ring for traveller (5,4)
- 24 Feel very low, suffering this?! (6,5)

- 2 Tease child initially from cradle (3)
- 3 Heard staff judge museum head? (7)
- 4 President touching on a profit one forfeited (6)
- 5 Elite clobber (5)
- 6 Nick eats Malta's exotic meat dish (5,4)
- 7 Soundly leaves more clichéd author under cover (5,6)
- 8 Manic hoarder bent ace (3,3,5)
- 12 Maul two German luminaries, it's said (9)
- 16 Pooch doomed rats! (7)
- 17 Brickie's helper in pub dispute (6)
- 19 Humped one wheel component onto telly, evenly (5)
- 23 Discovered greater mineral deposit (3)

LEVEL: GNARLY



ACROSS

- 1 Help to grab flightless bird for bozo (7)
- 5 Dispatches fellows in auditorium (5)
- 8 1-down spare field (3)
- 9 Truly deep vet, by all accounts (9)
- 10 State outright . . . (5)
- 11,12 ... 'You're a sole ray of light' and 'You deserve top perch'? (4,3,11)
- 12 See 11-across
- 16 Give notion I scrapped to hooligan (4,3)
- 17 Called old after limp ending (5)
- 18 10-across SP__? (4,2,3)
- 20 Life story blazes in our heads (3)
- 21 Terrible line of monarchs, beyond the original couple (5)
- 22 Vital actress Mae in Florida (3,4)

- 1 Practically manipulate bull in data centre (3,3)
- 2 Conservatives ring to disrupt certain reform sign (13)
- 3 Brat ignoring his first sin (5)
- 4 Swim in tzatziki? (3)
- 5 Mum designed sites for painter (7)
- 6 Relentless debate failing to convert (13)
- 7 Those who 10-across 'Wit and writer, Dorothy?' (6)
- 11 Rock f-fluff? (5)
- 13 Whiz-kid to snoop about regular coddling (7)
- 14 Impartiality, perhaps, upheld inventor(6)
- 15 Skilful commercial one observed amid drivel (6)
- 17 Absurd heir apparent's throne? (5)
- 19 Endlessly saturates tree (3)

• • •		• .
	• _	•



Quizling lists run horizontally, not vertically, like this:

A B

C D

E F

Q1.1

ASTOUNDING + T = OUTSTANDING

O1.2

Niger, Nepal, China: reign, plane, chain

Q1.3

Mad/nuts, trim/neat, stir/tease

Q2.1

Alphabeticise them: BELOW, GHOST, FIRST, ADEPT

Q2.2

Far/close, deny/admit, loose/tight, holy/satanic

Q2.3

Harley-Davidson motorcycles

Q3.1

Restful, enormity, violence, funeral, adultery

Q3.2

Upsilon + eta = epsilon + tau

Q3.3

PANIC-STRICKEN

Q4.1

Sophie Dahl, Gisele Bündchen, Kate Moss, Linda Evangelista, Heidi Klum, Christy Turlington

Q4.2

Bemoans, canyons, funeral, needily, citizen, coyotes, inaptly, wraiths

Q4.3

Hate heat, cures curse, begin binge, green genre, plum lump, adobe abode, late tale, below elbow

Q5.1

Race/dash

Q5.2

Cap+one, Scarf+ace

Q5.3

St/ring, st/ash, st/ripe, st/ratify, st/itching, St/Eve, St/Ella, st/ride, st/roll

Q6.1

Highlighter, accordion file, foolscap, felt tip, hole punch, staple gun

Q6.2

Tarot

Q6.3

NOTHING

Q7.1

Neck +tie

Q7.2

SON + ART + AD + SUM = NOSTRADAMUS

Q7.3

COUSCOUS and COS (lettuce)

Q8.1

Hurl earl, Ulster holster, axe hacks, armour harmer, harder ardour, anchoring hankering

Q8.2

Just+in+timber+lake

Q8.3

W/asp, f/ox, f/owl, b/ass, t/ern

Q9.1

VA(CAN)T

Q9.2

CamemBERT, gorGONZOla

Q9.3

Gone Baby Gone, Minority Report, Tomb Raider, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Clockwork Orange, Billy Elliot, Some Like it Hot, Eagle Eye, The Last Emperor, Educating Rita

Q10.1

Scarlet, carmine, carnation, caramel

Q10.2

Kenya (token/yam), Nepal (tone/palm), Peru (tope/rum)

Q10.3

National, scarab, retirees, available, excavate, embarrass, punster, clambake, mislays, bandannas. Other words are possible.

Q11.1

Singin' in the Rain

Q11.2

Monica Seles, Chris Evert

Q11.3

Musical lass; metal compound; sacred order; base, vile; tempest or monsoon; swimmer's ingress. (Other definitions are possible.)

Q12.1

SELECTED, REJECTED

Q12.2

Häagen-Dazs has a hidden agenda.

Q12.3

Look for a smaller word hiding inside the paired numbers when spelt:WOO (seduce), EVENT (contest), NET (clear) and REEF (gold, knot OR coral).

Q13.1

Drive, chip, hacker

Q13.2

Mushroom, boom, snowball, flourish, blossom and bloom

Q13.3

'Button up' is the same as 'pipe down'.

Q14.1

Rolling pin

Q14.2

Clip

Q14.3

Peer, affected, rider, entertain, steer, convention: SCRAPE

Q15.1

Kevin Spacey, Jacques Villeneuve, George Eliot, River Phoenix, Sandra Bullock, Corazon Aquino

Q15.2

Ale/ail

Q15.3

Assent/dissent (ascent/descent)

Q16.1

Spa spar, bury berry, laud Lord, your yore, whirled world, principal principle, needing kneading, peak pique, sauce source

Q16.2

Therefore (three/four)

Q16.3

Leek/pea

Q17.1

UK-'raine'

Q17.2

The list includes awe/or, eye/I, you/ewe, a/eh, auk/orc—and arguably quay/ki (life energy of Chinese philosophy) and eau/oh.

Q17.3

Lax, lacks, slack

Q18.1

A/bridge

Q18.2

Scarab, hornet, cicada, EARWIG

Q18.3

C/raven

Q19.1

Floridly and scabbarded

Q19.2

SQUEAKY (You can also create the rarer IMAGOES, CAESIUM, SEQUOIA, CAIQUES and SOMEWAY.)

Q19.3

Claire Danes (car/sedan)

Q20.1

GRANT (Harding, Carter, Obama, Clinton, Roosevelt), HAYES (Bush, Obama, Kennedy, Coolidge, Adams). Other combinations may be possible.

Q20.2

What's Eating Gilbert Grape?

Q20.3

A capsized calculator holds the key. The animals are DOE, BEE, EEL, DOG, IBIS, GOOSE, HEDGEHOG. Three can fly.

Q21.1

Jenga

Q21.2

Apathy/voluntatis defectio, casino/aleatorium, dancing/ludus saltatorius, flirt/amor levis, gateau/placenta farta, shampoo/capitilavium

Q21.3

Baht + teak = batik

Q22.1

Eat (ate)

Q22.2

EMBRYO-HOMBRE-MOTHER-OTHERS-FOSTER-FOETUS. (Other gestations are possible.)

Q22.3

TIER (TILER)

Q23.1

What book do you buy a saucy grammarian? COMMA SUTRA

Q23.2

Colin Firth (colic/mirth)

Q23.3

Ticklish, fix

Q24.1

Boycott, Atlas, propaganda, autocue, inspector, sauterne, superficial

Q24.2

Under the weather; smashed, wrecked, hammered; stuffed, had a skinful; tanked, bombed, shot. (Other states of intoxication could apply.)

Q24.3

Would Zen electricians chant ohm?

Q25.1

Slapdash (sad pals)

Q25.2

Fuzz (or ZZUF) is the most common tail-ender.

Q25.3

Fifty (L) in 09 reversed (ENINO) spells El Niño.

Q26.1

Redder

Q26.2

The full palindrome is ANNE, IVOTE MORE CARS RACE ROME TO VIENNA.

Q26.3

HIAWATHA

Q27.1

Star jump (jar/stump)

Q27.2

Food court (cooed/fought)

Q27.3

Two of clubs (clue of tubs), ace of spades (space of aides), six of clubs (clicks of subs), ten of hearts (hen of tarts)

Q28.1

Put your money where your mouth is

Q28.2

The Quiet American, The End of the Affair, Brighton Rock, The Heart of the Matter, Our Man in Havana

Q28.3

NILE, CLOVER, CANADA, PHOENIX, SASQUATCH, MARZIPAN

Q29.1

Mole + ST = MOLEST (Badger)

Q29.2

Scurvy

Q29.3

Prominent chromosomes (or mystery elements); capital letters; cross out; pacifist (no fist); bold type; no 'eye' in blind; spaced out

Q30.1

Lay Lady Lay; Layla (by Eric Clapton)

Q30.2

Rhone (roan/heron)

Q30.3

Minnesota (Estonian)

Q31.1

Glass slipper, joss stick, class struggle, business school, chess set, cross-stitch, stainless steel, press stud, Bass Strait, brass section, process-server, witness stand

Q31.2

Genoa (A-one)

Q31.3

Change E to D, and you'll find Liberia/Chad.

Q32.1

Since all the surnames contain their first name from left to right, the gang's two favourites are *Anna Karenina* and *Toy Story*.

Q32.2

Medication (NO TIME around ACID)

Q32.3

Bull shark (HULLS mixed in BARK)

Q33.1

Cordelia, Goneril (one girl)

Q33.2

LAMPSHADES: Lamps (PSALM) + Hades

Q33.3

BREATH-TAKING (THAT jumbled inside BREAKING)

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Mini Puzzle 1: Solution

S	Е	s	A	M	Е		s	Q	U	Е	A	L
Α		Ε		Α		F		U		N		A
\mathbf{v}	Е	G	Е	Т	A	R	I	Α	N	I	S	M
Α		U		I		Ε		I		G		Ε
G	R	Е	M	L	I	N		L	Ε	M	О	N
Е				D		С				Α		T
	В	R	Е	Α	Т	Н	A	L	Y	S	E	
P		Е				Т		E				P
L	I	v	I	D		o	R	В	I	Т	Α	L
Α		Ε		R		A		Α		I		I
С	A	R	L	o	S	S	A	N	T	A	N	A
I		S		N		Т		o		R		N
D	I	Е	S	Е	L		I	N	Т	Α	С	T

ACROSS

1 Sesame (pun) 4 Squeal (hidden) 9 Vegetarianism (anagram &lit) 10 Gremlin (manipulation)
11 Lemon (anagram) 12 Breathalyse (anagram) 17 Livid (charade of Roman numerals) 19 Orbital (container)
21 Carlos Santana (anagram/container) 22 Diesel (charade/deletion) 23 Intact (charade)

DOWN

1 Savage (charade/anagram) 2 Segue (hidden) 3 Matilda (charade/anagram) 5 Quail (double meaning) 6 Enigmas (subtractive anagram) 7 Lament (container) 8 French toast (anagram) 13 Reverse (lateral thinking) 14 Lebanon (container) 15 Placid (charade/reversal) 16 Pliant (container) 18 Drone (charade) 20 Tiara (code)

Mini Puzzle 2: Solution



ACROSS

Oranges (charade)
 Judas (deletion/charade)
 Blitzen (deletion/charade)
 Koala (charade)
 Shoots through (double meaning)
 Nephew (deletion/charade)
 Oxtail (anagram)
 Preoccupation (anagram)
 Treat (double meaning)
 Vainest (anagram)
 Patsy (charade)
 Regimen (charade)

DOWN

1 Orbison (charade) 2 Amigo (charade) 3 Gazette (charade/deletion) 4 Senate (hidden) 5 Joker (double meaning) 6 Dracula (anagram/alternation) 7 Slash (triple meaning) 12 Prefect (manipulation) 14 X-rating (charade/deletion) 15 Long Tan (double meaning) 16 Quiver (double meaning) 17 Put up (palindrome) 18 Catty (deletion) 19 I-beam (hidden)

Mini Puzzle 3. Solution

S	o	R	D	I	D		Е	D	G	I	N	G
С		A		M		В		R		С		A
О	N	Т	Α	P		Е	N	Α	В	L	Е	S
Т				Α		Ν		M		A		P
С	Α	P		S	I	G	N	Α	Т	U	R	E
Н		A		S		A				D		R
	U	N	R	Е	Α	L	I	S	Т	I	С	
U		A				Т		Α		U		E
P	o	Т	A	S	S	I	U	M		S	A	X
В		Е		Е		G		U				o
Е	N	L	A	R	G	E		R	Ε	L	I	С
Α		L		\mathbf{v}		R		A		A		E
Т	Н	Α	M	Е	S		Ν	I	Т	w	I	Т

ACROSS

1 Sordid (homophone/charade) 4 Edging (Cockneyism) 9 On tap (hidden) 10 Enables (reversal/exotic) 11 Cap (double meaning) 13 Signature (reversal/charade) 14 Unrealistic (anagram) 18 Potassium (subtractive anagram) 20 Sax (homophone) 21 Enlarge (anagram) 22 Relic (reverse/hidden) 24 Thames (deletion) 25 Nitwit (reverse/charade)

DOWN

1 Scotch (double meaning) 2 Rat (reversal) 3 Impasse (charade/deletion) 5 Drama (container) 6 I Claudius (charade) 7 Gasper (charade) 8 Bengal tiger (anagram &lit) 12 Panatella (container) 15 Samurai (deletion/container/reversal) 16 Upbeat (double meaning) 17 Exocet (deletion/homophone) 19 Serve (double meaning) 23 Law (homophone)

Mini Puzzle 4: Solution



ACROSS

1 Nectar (anagram) 4 Canter (anagram) 9 Boa (charade of blood groups) 10 Stockholm (charade/homophone) 11 Berserk (subtractive anagram) 12 Waned (container) 14 Lance-corporal (container/anagram) 18 Axiom (charade) 21 Ceramic (hidden) 23 Jade green (container) 24 Apt (deletion) 25 Trance (anagram) 26 Cretan (anagram)

DOWN

1 Nabob (reversal/charade) 2 Chagrin (container) 3 Austere (charade/homophone) 5 Askew (charade/reversal) 6 Thorn (charade &lit) 7 Remodel (hidden) 8 Cockroaches (spoonerism) 13 Ago (charade) 14 Lear jet (exotic/charade) 15 Coo (charade) 16 Partner (reversal) 17 Rampart (charade) 19 India (charade/reversal) 20 Magic (container) 22 Cut in (hidden)

Mini Puzzle 5: Solution

	Т	R	Α	С	K	R	Е	С	o	R	D	
G		I		U		E		R		o		Т
Н	I	В	Е	R	Ν	Α	Т	Е		Α	S	Н
O				A		G		A		S		Ε
s	U	M	Α	Т	R	Α		M	Ε	Т	Е	R
Т		Α		О		Ν				L		Ε
W	I	N	Т	R	Y		Е	D	W	Α	R	D
R		Н				В		О		M		В
I	S	Α	Α	С		Α	L	G	E	В	R	Α
Т		Ν		Α		R		G				R
Е	N	D		M	A	R	С	o	P	o	L	o
R		L		E		О		Ν		R		N
	Y	Е	L	L	o	w	F	Е	V	Ε	R	

ACROSS

1 Track record (double meaning) 9 Hibernate (container) 10 Ash (pun) 11 Sumatra (anagram) 13 Meter (double meaning) 14 Wintry (charade) 15 Edward (charade/reversal) 18 Isaac (deletion) 20 Algebra (anagram) 21 End (double meaning) 22 Marco Polo (deletion/container) 24 Yellow fever (anagram &lit)

DOWN

2 Rib (deletion)
 3 Curator (homophone)
 4 Reagan (charade/deletion)
 5 Cream (double meaning)
 6 Roast lamb (container/anagram)
 7 Ghostwriter (homophone)
 8 The Red Baron (anagram)
 12 Manhandle (homophone)
 16 Doggone (charade)
 17 Barrow (charade)
 19 Camel (charade/deletion)
 23 Ore (deletion)

Mini Puzzle 6: Solution



ACROSS

1 Airhead (container) 5 Mails (homophone) 8 Lea (deletion) 9 Reputedly (anagram) 10 Utter (double meaning) 11,12 Fish for compliments (pun) 16 Deal out (deletion/charade) 17 Paged (charade) 18 Spit it out (rebus) 20 Bio (code) 21 Nasty (deletion) 22 Key West (double meaning)

DOWN

1 All but (anagram/container) 2 Reactionaries (compound anagram/charade) 3 Error (deletion)
4 Dip (double meaning) 5 Matisse (charade/anagram) 6 Indefatigable (anagram) 7 Sayers (double meaning)
11 Flint (charade) 13 Prodigy (container/alternation) 14 Edison (reversal) 15 Adroit (charade/container)
17 Potty (double meaning) 19 Oak (deletion)

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