

... AND I FEEL FINE

*Some say the world will end in Fire,
And also Ice
(A massive, all consuming pyre
Then endless winter, dark and dire
Upon its heels, to be precise).
On top of which, some blood and gore:
To decimate creation thrice
An epic War
Is always nice.*

– Robert Frost-Giant

Dear Solvers,

Discoveries in Guatemala earlier this year suggest that the doomsday predicted by the Mayans may have been about 7000 years premature. Don't breathe a sigh of relief just yet though: the myths and poems of the Norse have had the End of Days mapped out in much more elaborate detail for quite some time now, and it's looking pretty grim.

This year's set of puzzles provides a little tour of Norse cosmology poised on the brink of disaster. Can Ragnarök be averted? Solving these puzzles will yield a riddle, and its solution is this year's final answer.

A few things to note:

- 1) Confirm everything but the final answer by clicking the "Check Answers" link on the title page. Send me your final answer at markhalpin3 at gmail dot com. If you're so inclined, send me your individual answers as well, *after* they've been confirmed; this is purely to allow me to track solving trends for my own interest and doesn't affect anything else, and you're under no obligation to do so.
- 2) There's nothing in this intro or in any artwork throughout that relates to the puzzles beyond that which does so explicitly.
- 3) All puzzles may be printed out to solve, though online references may be helpful here and there.
- 4) If you enjoy the puzzles, you might consider tossing something into the tip jar linked to on the title page; your largesse is very much appreciated.
- 5) A book gift certificate will be given to the first individual or pair solvers (this year's suggestion is A.S. Byatt's lovely retelling *Ragnarök*), and speedy individual and team solvers will be recognized on the Leaderboard. In order to encourage more leisurely solving as well, an additional prize will be awarded to an individual chosen at random from anyone who submits a correct solution before Monday, Sept. 17, at which point hints and solutions to the puzzles will be posted. I'll be happy to provide hints at any point to anyone who doesn't care about the Leaderboard or prizes. The whole point of this endeavor is that it be fun, so if there's any way I can assist in that, please don't hesitate to ask.

Is it starting to look a little overcast outside? Might I suggest curling up with some puzzles?

Happy Solving!

Mark / Zebraboy

ALFHEIM

The enigmatic elves of Alfheim have traditionally been benign, but with their population ravaged and scattered by multiple invasions, it's impossible to tell an ally from an enemy.

A third of the clues in this puzzle are invaded by impostors determined to do you harm.

Another third of the clues are occupied by figures that would prove helpful were they not errantly distributed.

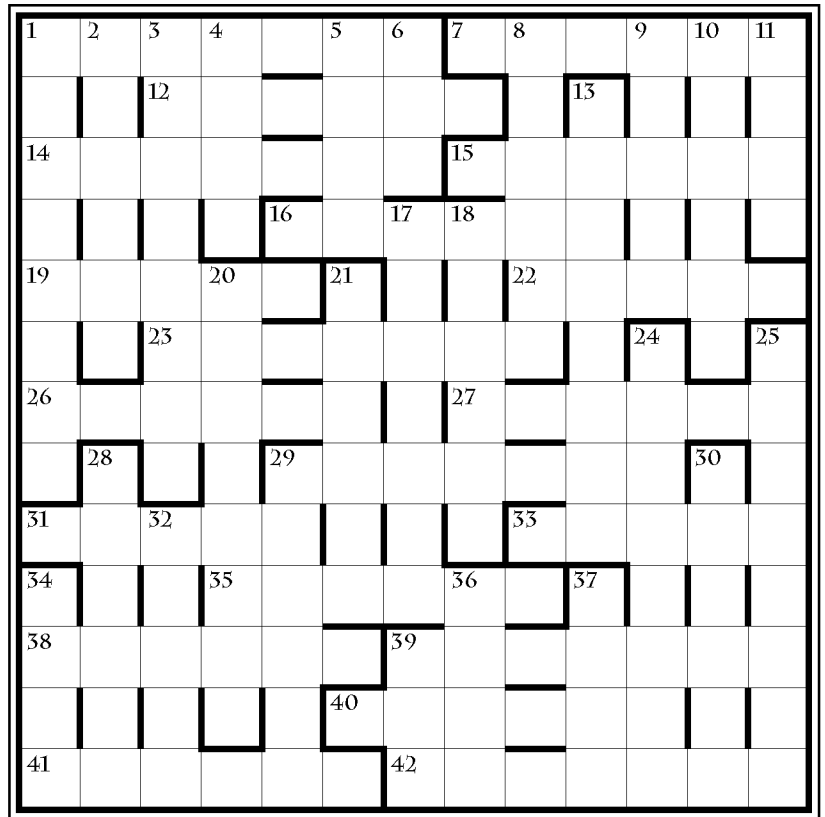
The remaining third of the clues are normal. The Nth letters from the Nth normal clues read in clue order will characterize the more nefarious set; understanding the nature of your foes might help you determine where in the grid to look for your final answer, barring complications.

ACROSS

1. A ruffle is seen (slightly vacuously) as a chi-chi affectation (7; 2 wds)
7. Mist enveloping New England state all the while (6)
12. Use pea soup to relax viper (6; 2 wds)
14. Letter carrier destroyed no-good stamp (7)
15. Al and Phil together suffering bad luck (6; 2 wds)
16. Clara misguidedly embracing French gallant (6)
19. Rain splashed about tot's bottom (5)
22. Military strength devoted to overthrow of nations' alliance (5)
23. Post written about extremely pert leer (7)
26. The first to put someone on a pedestal overlooked charge (6)
27. Senator Feinstein's help links Washington D.C. to Hartford, e.g. (6)
29. Stab criminal let inside duck habitat (7)
31. "The Law", hooker recalled, doesn't show bit of lenience (5)
33. Dude describing 25% of stunning shooting star setting (5; hyph)
35. Herbalist's brew: poison mixed in teas (6)
38. Makes loud noises seeing bit of silver inside chests (6)
39. I'm almost ready to go crazy around the end of June (7)
40. Gift ultimately succeeding; more surprisingly, engrossing daughter – that's new (6)
41. Child has a go at homework assignments (6)
42. Carelessly maintained inn lost facing (7; 2 wds)

DOWN

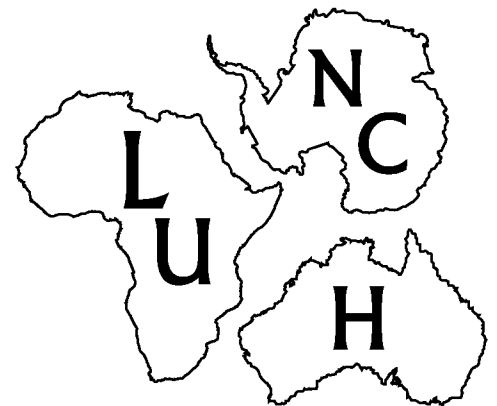
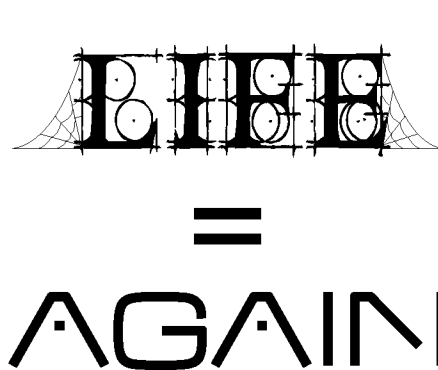
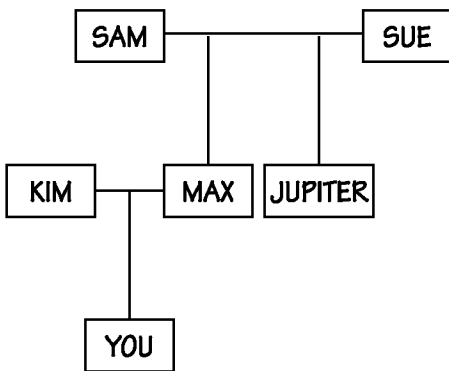
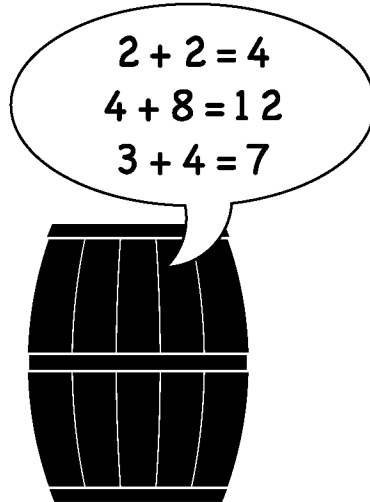
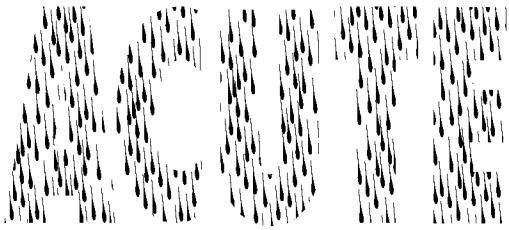
1. Add-on computer program left behind by yours truly at times (8)
2. Is old speakeasy something depicted on a map? (6)
3. Powerful man dismissing morsel of p \hat{a} te as "fancy liver" (8)



4. Renowned freeloader partial to cockatoos (4)
5. "Burn wand?!" mystic cried (4)
6. Stern Greek characters standing erect (3)
8. Guy, drunkenly seizing lady, falls – it's not pretty (6)
9. Malefic red horror suffused with demonic blood (5)
10. Ass whose head sister describes as a shade of gray (6)
11. Stare in amazement at gut on gorilla (4)
13. Election losers each snarl "crap!" so viciously (8; hyph)
17. City in Georgia losing head for song of a sort (7)
18. Road's dead-ending in factory? Yes; not in an abrupt way (6)
20. "A parrot's a riot!" Tim snaps (8)
21. Third of oats eaten by sows and horses (6)
24. Flying ace need not, ultimately, land in a row (8; hyph)
25. Rip tires out and give a lift to again (8; N13)
28. Rot etc. located at first in brewery (6)
29. Grille with Honda's symbol is my design (6)
30. Kind teaching assistant displaying first-rate composition (6)
32. Natter in Royal Society is irritating (5)
34. We hear "The Third Man" is quite effective (4)
36. Some insect nests give rise to commotion on island (4)
37. Sally provided replacement part for instrument (4)
39. Water that surrounds fast bird (3)

ASGARD

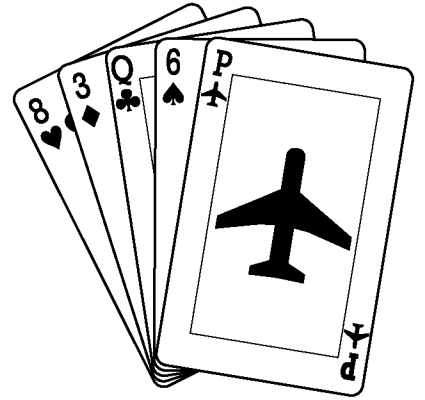
For aeons, bards have painted pictures with words capturing the wonders of Asgard, home of the Gods: the great halls of Valhalla, Bifrost the Rainbow Bridge, and so much more. Now invading armies have shattered Bifrost, and nothing in Valhalla is as it should be.



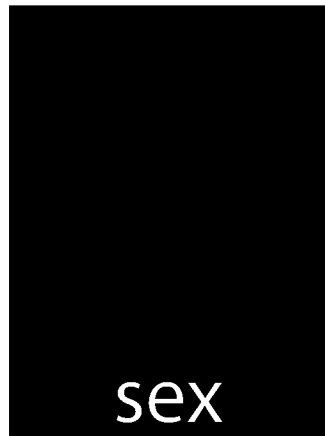
ASGARD-PG.2

WREX

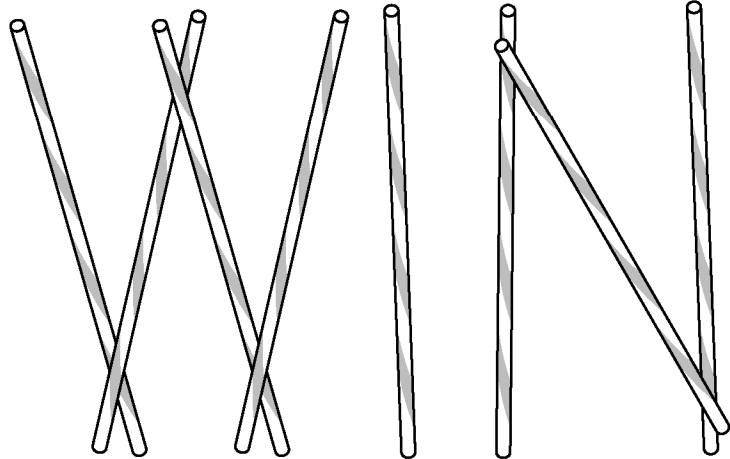
THOIBEEVYES



gator



**STOP
MEAT**



OMERTÀ

PICK

DANISH

FINE

TALES

WRITE

FLUKES

WITNESS

BAGGED

PLAYS

BOOZE

BOXER

VOILÀ

NEVER

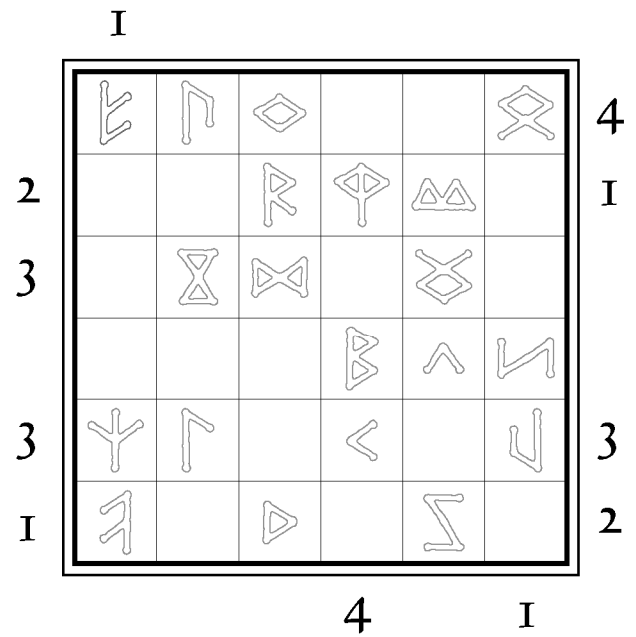
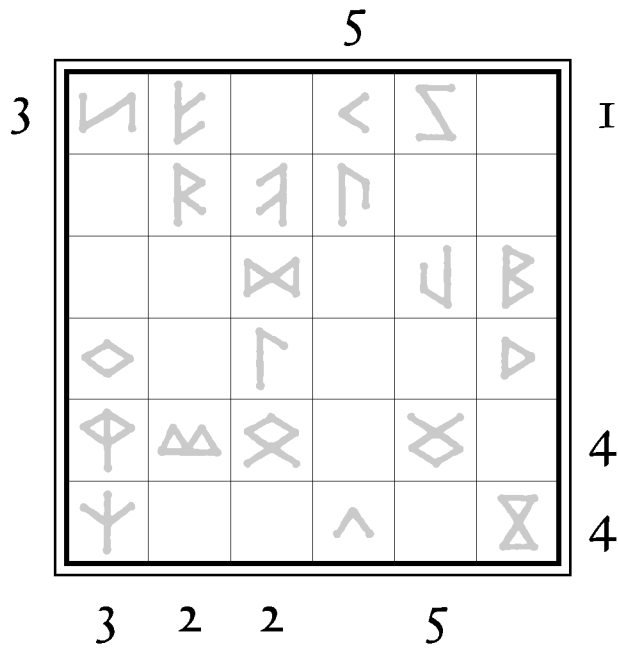
RETRO

401K

WRATH

JÖTUNHEIM

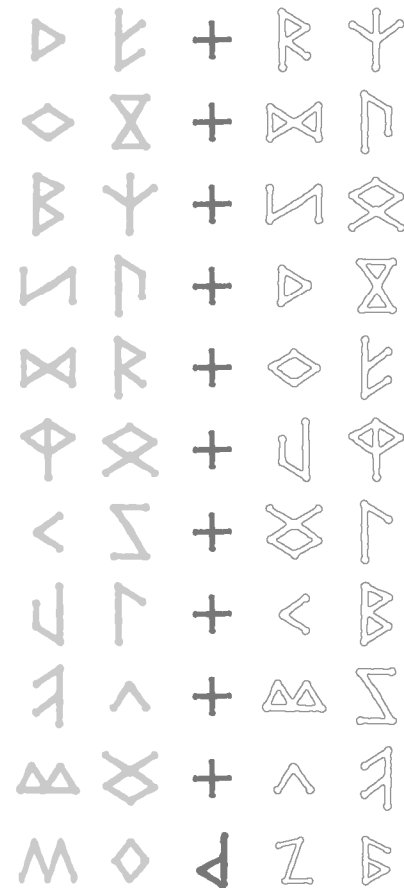
The great giants of Jötunheim, preparing for their final war, erect massive fortifications, piling boulders the size of mountains one atop the other until they seem to scrape the very sky.



In the puzzles above, each grid square contains a stack of boulders from 1 to 6 boulders high. Each height is used exactly once in each row and column. Numbers at the edge of the grid indicate how many stacks can be seen in the relevant row or column from that position, noting that any stack will not be seen if it's behind a taller stack.

In order to confuse their enemies, the giants have used their magic to make six stacks in each grid invisible. No more than one invisible stack occurs in any row or column, and no two invisible stacks in the same puzzle are identical heights. Invisible stacks are not accounted for in the numerical clues.

Transfer digits to the array at right (similar runes in different grids are not necessarily the same digit). Any "invisible" digit should be transferred as a zero.



MIDGARD

All around Midgard, the realm of mortals, humans cluster in their prototypical communities, terrified of what tomorrow might have in store.

BLISTEGYERLALONGWETBARXEICW (3 6 4; 7 4)
17, 11, 15, 16, 9

TWHEALBTLERUMEARKGIONITET (3 4 4; 5 6)
15, 8, 6, 10

TAWARITETRLUMIFLIFESPE (8; 5 6)
10, 2, 16

DENORROBSFSENIKEEAVARLAITEUR (3 13; 9)
9, 7

LATHEVDOLLASICTESUVIPAPETRA (2 5 4; 3 4 6)
1, 5

HTHIETKGAAREARUNTOOWAGVKEO (6 2 2; 3 5 4)
5, 8

DICEGGRORONANODALS (5 3 1; 6)
5, 13, 35, 36, 21

FSORGOBOREDASHODARLOUSENES (3 5 5; 3¹ 6)
1, 2

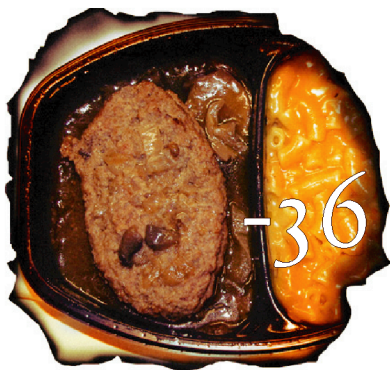
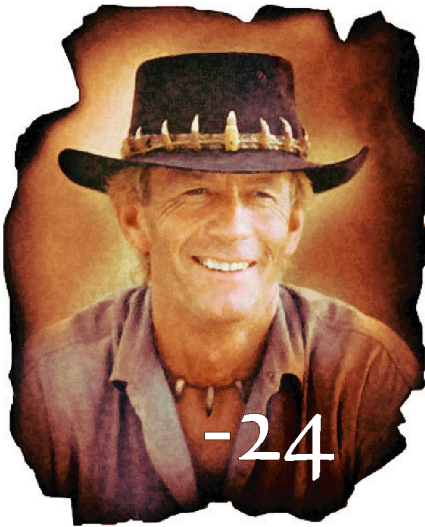
TAMPEKEREAGONYEMENT (4 2 2; 4 4)
2, 9, 3, 8

FACOWSLRITOTYTOPLWEANRSOUS (6 6; 10)
9, 8

ONHILGSHUTISHABWANKNAS (2! 7; 10)
6, 8

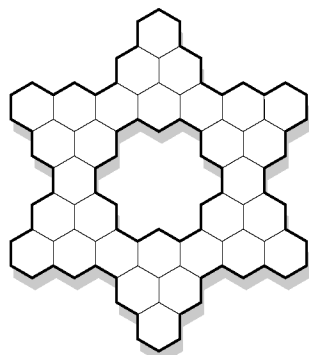
MUSPELHEIM

As Ragnarok looms, the blazing realm of Muspelheim rages out of control, its infernal flames sweeping across the entire land in a matter of days.



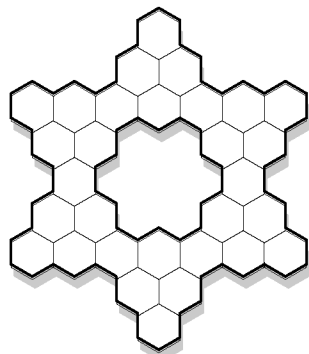
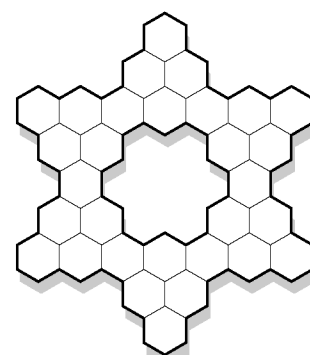
NIFLHEIM

Niflheim, frozen world of primordial frost and ice, disintegrates as the flames of Muspelheim spread. Even now it is wreathed in fog and mist.



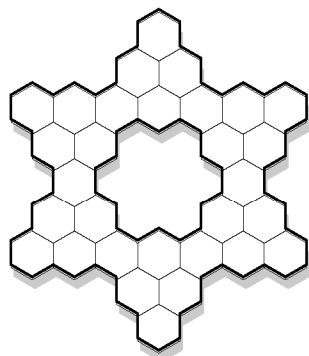
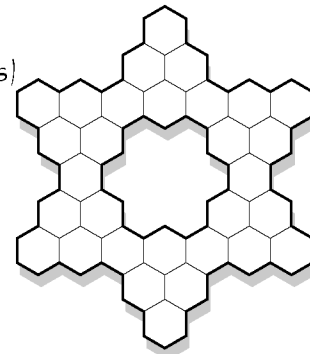
Alfresco (hyph)
 Appalling injustice
 College member
 Help settle a dispute
 Some toxic seawater (2 wds)
 Verisimilitude

Ancients, for instance
 Combatant
 Element #39
 Tartness
 Tuckered out
 Vagabond



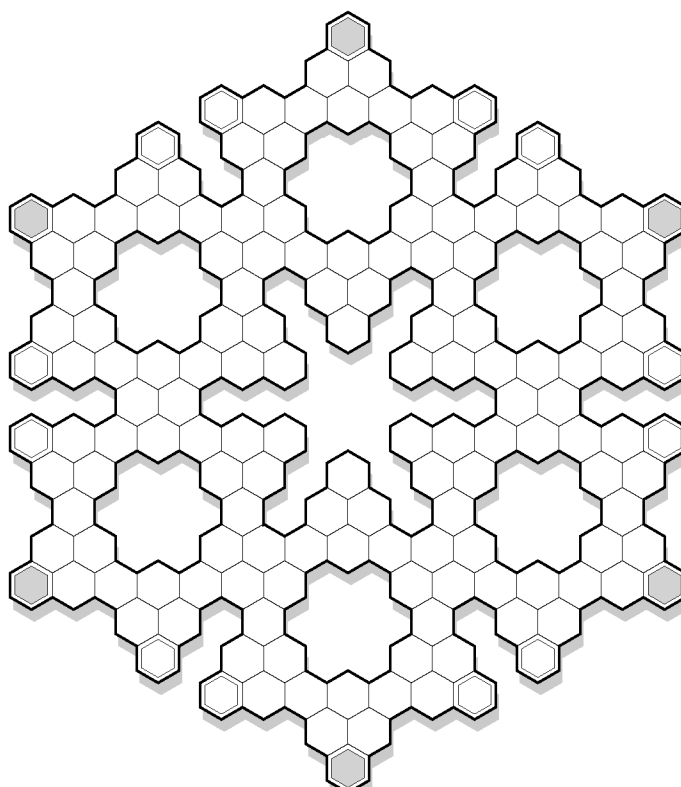
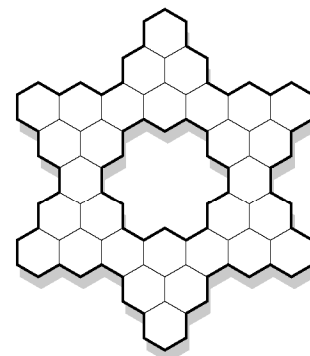
Asian asses
 Electra's brother
 Like Electra's countrymen
 Penelope's visitors
 Put into writing (2 wds)
 The whole ____

Breakfast bar bits
 Forming a picture
 Mythical mishap causer
 Pickle
 Robert Downey role (2 wds)
 Trying to lose



Canonized bishop of Paris
 Jack Russell, e.g.
 Persian Gulf locale
 Raising, as an eyebrow
 Salvage
 Wishful thinker?

Divide in three
 First American in space
 Grittiness, perhaps
 Like some leather collars
 Poppycock
 Swinging decade



Fill each small snowflake with the six seven-letter answers clued by one clue set. Enter each answer in a straight line, running in any direction. When the flakes are filled, assemble them in the larger grid, rearranging, rotating, and reflecting as necessary.

SVARTALFAHEIM

The dwarves of Svartalfheim toil deep underground to excavate the gems and gold from which wondrous objects are assembled. Now, though, earthquakes and upheavals are collapsing their labyrinthine tunnels, resulting in many blocked paths.

O Y S 12 E W X A M O T Y R R C F E H T
 U 23 N O V E M A N 11 9 G A A T R O F F
 L O L I E I N J A 8 I S P T N O 7 U E
 I M E N A M 22 A Y O 3 T N E G I S E R
 S E B O G R E P A N D D E K T R E V S
 T H T N A Y T O E N O I B E V K R N O
 I E L 18 W T 15 G S O 4 G T S I S Y B 27
 S R 6 U W S K I N N T 5 U E N I R K D
 A T M O E W N U T O U L B S T R U H Y
 L E D C N I M M Z Y K E 19 N K S E O R
 I L R D A H T I N G N R Y M G N G L G
 S L O D O E A N O 13 I O 28 N O I S O E
 V 2 F N A R L M Y T 17 H T S M I M 24 H
 T C F Y B B D A I I C E H T H L Y D D
 N O R 25 S O L D E Z O E A R C T O N U
 A S A Y H A F A 14 A H F L O T C D Y B
 A S E C 10 I F E R D A K 21 R T A D 26 H
 V P L A L A V E V 1 L N U T H N U 16 E
 O N A S U A P H E 20 S E V A E A M O R

1 3 3 2 3 3 5
 7 2 3 4
 8 8
 5 5
 5 9
 6 5
 9 5

5 2 1 3
 6 8
 8 4
 5 7
 6 7
 4 13
 9

6 2 8
 3 2 3 4
 3 8
 13
 3 2 3
 4 7
 13

5 3
 9
 3 4 5
 3 5 4
 3 3 6
 3 5 5
 8

Enumerations are given in alphabetical order.

VANAHEIM

Minor gods of fertility and procreation, the Vanir are also known for their ability to foresee the future. But in these dark and uncertain days, their prophecies have become increasingly vague, which is nothing to make smirky jokes about.

*A child who didn't act up yesterday may still bug you today.
Your lucky number: 2*

*A lobster dipped into boiling water doesn't pine for the sea.
Your lucky number: 1*

*A puzzled expression is the only kind some people possess.
Your lucky number: 1*

*Being stuck in mud will require strong soap.
Your lucky number: 1*

*Children should be brought up to avoid quarrels.
Your lucky number: 3*

*Don't be embarrassed to be a leader among men.
Your lucky number: 1*

*If you find yourself stranded, seek something of value there.
Your lucky number: 3*

*Many men have spoken foolishly about the game of poker.
Your lucky number: 3*

*The past is not yours to command.
Your lucky number: 3*

*Who has not wept loudly to see birds that cannot fly?
Your lucky number: 4*

*You are soon bound to be in a foreign land.
Your lucky number: 2*



YGGDRASIL

The giant ash tree Yggdrasil holds the nine homeworlds in its mighty branches. Dwelling among its limbs and leaves is the squirrel Ratatoskr. He seems unfazed by the dark clouds on the horizon as he skitters back and forth bearing insults between the giant eagle perched on Yggdrasil's highest bough and the wyrm Nydhogg who gnaws at its roots. A shrewd little creature, he could surely give you some insight if you could come up with the best words to summon him.

1E	2A	3J	4C		5D	6F	7E	8H	9C		10G	11B	12H
13D	14I	15J		16H	17F	18B	19E	20I		21G	22F	25D	24I
25B	26A	27F		28G		29B	30C	31D	32E	35A		34B	35A
36H	37G		38A	39J		40H	41B	42C	45I	44G	45J	46E	
47H	48C	49F		50B	51F		52G	55I	54F		55B	56H	
57G	58C	59A	60B		61F	62D	65I	64B	65G	66A	67H		

MATCH WITS WITH RATATOSKR

- A. TRULY LETHAL 66 26 35 38 2 33 59 17 51 52 11
- B. INTONATIONS 29 55 25 11 64 34 18 50 41 4 60 32 53 38 9
- C. none here 58 15 24 48 67 4 30 42 9 34 20 33 61
- D. INSTRUCTOR 5 62 13 31 23 18 3 36 5 58
- E. FORCES EFFECTIVELY 1 36 46 32 7 19 63 26 45 57
- F. EGYPT MONIKER 22 49 17 61 6 51 54 27 12 41 1 30
- G. OGEED MAYBE 21 10 65 44 28 37 52 57 31 2 48 44
- H. THEY'RE WARM 40 47 56 8 36 16 12 67 22 44 60 25
- I. TRUE ALL OVER 24 20 58 43 14 63 53 47 63 6 51
- J. SYNCHRONICITY 3 15 42 39 18 45 8 54 66 35