The Journal of Wordplay



#3 • Nov 2023

Talking Klingon with Its Creator

The CineNerdle App
Musician Anagrams
ChatGPT Can't Pun
Pentomino Letters
Alternating A's
Barbenheimer
(A Two-Way Synopsis)

Taxonomy · Redividers
Word Lipograms · More!

THE JOURNAL OF WORDPLAY

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T Campbell

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INTRODUCTION

T Campbell

When I was a kid, I decided one day to create my own language.

I started with the verbs. I figured that since "to be" was the simplest verb, it should be "aa," pronounced "ay-ay." "To do" was "ab," pronounced "Abe," and I'd work further down the alphabet as the verb-concepts got more complex. Nouns would start with "B," obviously, and nouns adapted from verbs would work like "baa" ("bay-ay").

My notes for Baa were jotted down on ballpoint pen on artists' paper and lost on a family vacation/reunion at Nags Head, North Carolina, depriving millions of their ability to speak the tongue today. A true tragedy.

But I suspect some of the *Journal*'s other contributors and readers have similar stories. If you spend enough time with language to notice its many weird features, you start thinking, "What if there could be a better way to do this?" If most wordplay involves playing games with existing words, then constructed languages—conlangs, for short—are like designing new games from the ground up. That's why a lot of fans are happy to meet Mark Okrand (page 15), who's taken the conlang exercise about as far as anyone can.

We got a lot more for you this time out. Lori Wike has some new visual and verbal forms to share. Louis Philips and Anil offer up numerous miscellanies. Don Hauptman's got anecdotes about his punning life and an ode to Twitter's troubles, while Gregg Siegel's cross-examining ChatGPT's reputation as a humorist. My own ChatGPT testing has been postponed, but I'm offering up a new taxonomy/systematic of wordplay, a second interview with the creator of CineNerdle, and a few more exercises for the film and lipogram lover. Darryl Francis is looking into alternating vowels and anagrammed singers. And Edmund Conti, Steven Fraser, and David Cohen are showing what the poetic mind can do with a creative set of constraints.

Let's get to it!

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE PUNNER

More Wordplay in Quotidian Situations, Original and Otherwise

DON HAUPTMAN
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When did puns become "dad jokes"? The expression has a pejorative connotation; it's the target of mild ridicule, such utterances being routinely disparaged as "corny" or "cheesy." Example from the Wikipedia page: "Q: Where does a sick fish go? A: The dock."

In a June 18, 2022, article in *The Wall Street Journal*, Jason Gay, the paper's resident humorist (and dad), defended the genre, reporting that he tells such jokes to his kids—and that he discovered a new appreciation for the genre in middle age. "But dad jokes . . . get a bad rap. Yes, they are not edgy, or political or especially clever, and they're generally ineffective on anyone old enough to get a learner's permit. They rely too heavily on wordplay, puns, and livestock. . . . And that's exactly what makes them great."

This is my twelfth compilation of puns deployed in everyday conversations, usually my own. I'm not sure if any will qualify as dad jokes. You be the judge.

Naturally, I tend to assume that all of my coruscating quips are original, including the ones that follow. Then I search and, in some instances, discover that I've been "beaten to the punch line" by hundreds or tens or "ones" of people. Of course, anyone can spot the opportunity for a pun in a common word or phrase, hence the frequency of independently duplicated creations. In such cases, I acknowledge earlier coinages via footnotes, although crediting all by name is usually impossible.

Amusingly, Google often labels my search terms as typos and helpfully offers corrections. If, for example, one searches "beyond the pail," a pun referring to Jack and Jill, one will see: *"Did you mean: 'beyond the pale'?"* No, I did not!

Here is the new batch of real-life conversational wordplay. . .

- Who has not experienced a disappointing romantic affair or marriage? When commiserating with friends, I call this a "Dickensian relationship": It begins with *Great Expectations* . . . and ends in *Bleak House*.

- At a theater box office, the clerk asked if I had a discount code. I quipped: "I have more codes than Julian Assange!"

- An author asked me to review his book manuscript. I thought the chapter endings were weak and suggested that, ideally, each should end with a bang, not a whisper.

- Recently, I stayed at an upscale hotel where, inexplicably, my room had inoperative heat and air conditioning. I reported that I had fiddled with the thermostat with no success, adding the ancient jokey bromide: “It can’t be my fault. My I.Q. is above room temperature.” Only afterward did I realize that the expression in this case had a somewhat literal reference.

- Another entry for the Complaint Department: I’m a member of a gym where the showers lack grab bars for safety. Concerned that the panjandrums might be clueless, I patiently explained that “grab bars” are not sleazy dives where patrons are assaulted!

- Attempting to avoid a family obligation by passing it off to another relative, I quipped: “Blood is thicker than *ought’er*.”

- I live in a high-rise apartment building. Last year, a dissident group of residents hosted a Zoom discussion. One contentious topic involved replacement of all the windows. A participant remarked that the board of directors should be more transparent about the issue. (I doubt that the pun was intended.)

- On another occasion, I thought I had spotted a neighbor, who later denied that it was he. I sent an apologetic email: “Apparently, I imagined seeing you.”

- On a podcast, a caller asked the host his view of the dangers of overthinking. Then another listener asked the identical question, and the answer was repeated. Was he overthinking?

- In the early stages of the pandemic, many Americans were baffled by the constantly changing official advice. Name for this phenomenon? “Covid’s Metamorphoses.”

- Last year, Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) was all over the news because he blocked various congressional spending bills. He is rated the most bipartisan senator, so could one say that “In my father’s House, there are many Manchins”?

- Whenever an appointment or commitment must be postponed, I quote Ms. O’Hara: “Tomorrow is another day,” archly adding: “Of course, *every* day is another day!”

Finally, although I obviously relish words, I’m not that skilled at games and puzzles. I confessed that one such challenge was “well above my play grade.”

CREDITS AND CLARIFICATIONS: “Loneliness”: A search generated 226 matches: a song, memoir, stage show, and other uses. Numerous matches for “whisper,” and “play.” “Covid”: More than 3,000 matches; the top one is a music video. “Manchin”: 24 matches, the best might be by Jeffrey St. Clair, editor of counterpunch.org. “Another day”: 12 matches, including on Japanese and Polish sites! All others are 100% original—I hope!

BLIGHT VERSE

Edmund Conti

I began my poetry career (snicker, snicker) writing light verse. I liked the rhyming and the scanning. Much light verse is four lines, rhyming ABAB, with a punny title and a usually lame ending. (I know, I wrote a lot of it.) After a bit, one becomes lazy, or careless or just more relaxed. Rhymes become off-rhymes, sometimes scansion is disrupted because you need one more syllable (or one less). Four lines may be too many. These are some of the thingies I've come up with. (We may have to find a better word than "thingies" for posting in *The Journal of Wordplay.)*

Fall

Two leaves.
One leaves.
One leaf.

Drake's Piece of Cake

The Spanish Armada?
Da nada.

Dante's Inferno

Just for the Hell of it
I read the whole of it.

The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions

Tried.
Fried.

Bad Day at Black Rock

The cattle cackled.
The fowl mooed.

Short Attention Span

The problem of being
a seventeen-year
locust
Is trying to stay
for sixteen years
focused.

Vegetarians

Mares eat oats
And does eat oats
And little lambs eat ivy.

And we eat them.

Excitement

Game seven.
Game's even!

On Becoming a Famous Poet

From a little no-name
To a little-known name.

People Like Us

Some are.
Some don't.

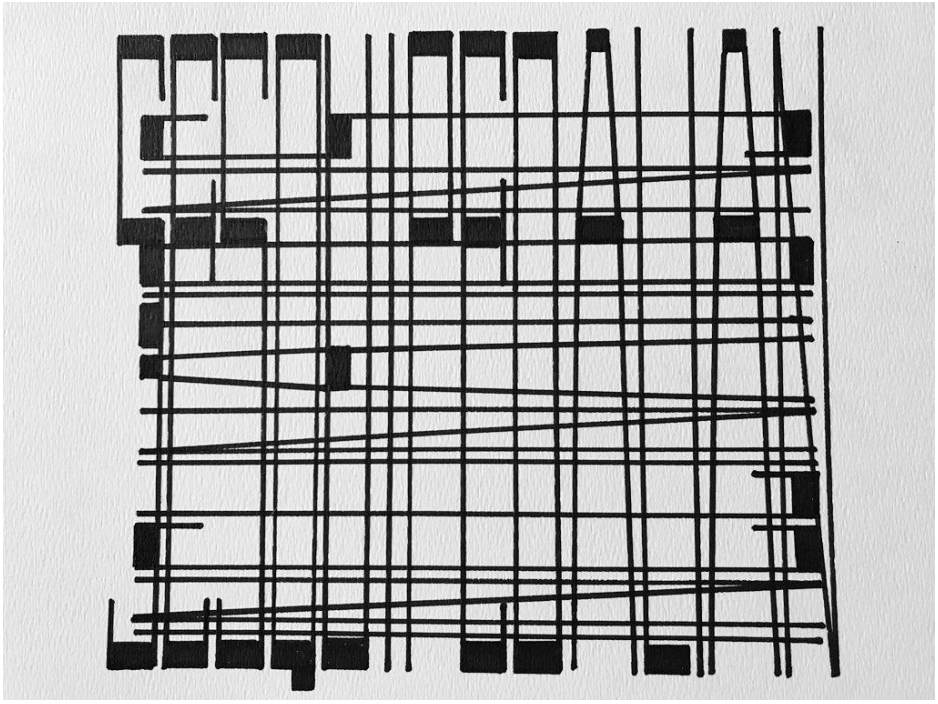
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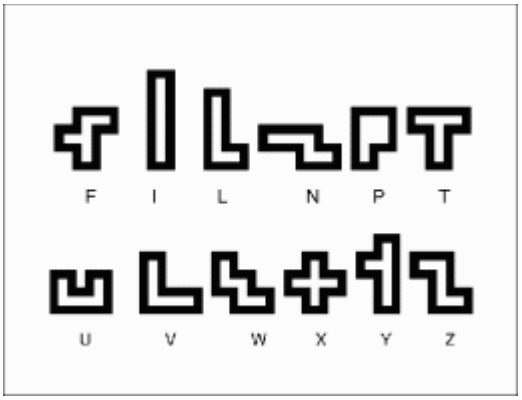
Lori Wike

Sesquipedalian Inclinations and *In Flux* are concrete poems that experiment with two different forms of visual wordplay.

While reading a cryptography blog about recently deciphered WWII-era postcards, I became fascinated by the steganographic technique of anamorphosis, used to disguise messages. I created *Sesquipedalian Inclinations* in a similarly steganographic style, using a Sharpie pen and a ruler. "Sesquipedalian" is written with extremely elongated letters, a literal play on its meaning of the overuse of long words. Since anamorphic images have to be viewed at an angle or inclination in order to become more legible, I rotated the page and wrote "inclinations" within the text of "sesquipedalian." The first image shows "Sesquipedalian" alone, viewed at an angle where it is easier to read, and the second image shows the completed piece.







Pentominoes are a set of twelve shapes consisting of five equal-sized squares connected by edges. The shapes resemble the letters F, I, L, N, P, T, U, V, W, X, Y, and Z, and thus make up a special kind of lipogrammatic alphabet or letterbank. As elegantly expressed by Guenter Albrecht-Buehler: "The pentominoes are not only pieces of a special jigsaw puzzle, but an alphabet for the composition of logically complete texts that can express ambivalence, paradox, and infinity. In contrast to all other literary, musical, or graphical alphabets, the alphabet of the pentominoes is complete: they are the only and all the variations on the theme of five squares. There is a complete inner logic to them. Indeed, they arise from each other by moving one of the five squares to another place in a never-ending circle."

(http://www.basic.northwestern.edu/g-buehler/pentominoes/speech.htm)

Tiling rectangles with the twelve letter shapes is a common pentomino puzzle and a 5x12 rectangle has 1010 different configurations. In *In Flux,* I made a set of Heraclitean-inspired pentominoes out of photographs of bodies of water from Utah, California, and Hawaii. I then arranged them into a series of 5x13 rectangles so as to include 5 extra squares of negative space in each one, formed into the shape of a pentomino letter. This negative space is thus a means of framing the text "In Flux."








WORD WEAVES

Anthony Etherin and Lori Wike

A word weave is a new constraint designed by Anthony Etherin that consists of three lines: the first two lines function independently and the third line weaves together the words of the preceding lines in an alternating sequence. In May 2023, Anthony and Lori performed a poetry collaboration at the annual European Poetry Festival in London hosted by founder and poet Steven J. Fowler. We wrote and performed the following ten short word weave poems at a venue fittingly called Rich Mix, with Lori reading the words in red and Anthony reading the words in black. Each poem follows the word weave constraint and a few of them also employ additional constraints, including tautograms, a Pi-digit sequence, compound words, and word-unit palindromes with compound splitting. A video of our performance can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=JGdlYP2ifMM

1.

Jumble up phrases with meaning.

Words make sounds unintentional.

Jumble words up, make phrases — sounds with unintentional meaning.

2.

“Forever,” think I.

I, therefore, am.

Forever I think, therefore I am.

3.

Remember: the word always questions.

That key must unlock itself.

Remember that the key word must always unlock questions itself.

4.

Where all rivers swim, time dreams.

Are the people awakening inside?

Where are all the rivers people swim, awakening time inside dreams?

5. *(I/F tautograms, then alternation)*

If intrepid in ideas, I imagine infinity.

Fearless foothold fixed fractures, fleetingly fragmented.

If fearless, intrepid foothold in fixed ideas fractures. I fleetingly imagine fragmented infinity.

6. *(Word lengths in third line reflect the first 25 digits of pi)*

Can calm reign by quiet until disturbed violently as hammered duress cursed?

I, a perfectly vexing foe, approach anxiety and awe with my will.

Can I calm a reign perfectly by vexing quiet foe until approach disturbed anxiety violently and as awe hammered with duress my cursed will?

7.

Clouds, in bright sea, hang us in liquid.

Gather the blue and, above all, the darkness.

Clouds gather in the bright blue sea and hang above us all, in the liquid darkness.

8. *(Last line consists entirely of compound words)*

To be never less bound, power cuts shadowed lines.

Night comes. The earth will cross over time.

Tonight becomes nevertheless earthbound. Willpower crosscuts overshadowed timelines.

9. (*Each line is a word-unit palindrome with compound splitting)*

Form cropped outcast type—tense—drawn with withdrawn, tense, typecast outcropped form.

Braids mirroring lines iron, I—in holding out, holding in—I iron lines' mirroring braids.

Form braids. Cropped mirroring outlines cast-iron type. I tense: indrawn, holding without withholding. Drawn, intense, I type iron-cast lines out, mirroring cropped braids' form.

10.

Blending in creates poetry that's rich.

Words turn meaning within a mix.

Blending words in turn creates meaning, poetry within — that's a rich mix.

SPEAKING ON KLINGON

T Campbell

Conlangs—artificially created languages—have a history stretching back centuries, but perhaps no one living has had more influence on their development than Marc Okrand, creator of Klingon and various other languages for Star Trek *and Atlantean for Disney's* Atlantis: The Lost Empire. *When I saw he was visiting my area, I jumped at the chance to speak with him about his work, the early influences that inspired it, and how science fiction continues to play with language in new ways.*

T: I know you started by studying Native American languages.

Marc: Linguistics in general but particularly American languages, yes.

T: The modes of speaking and the unique characteristics of each language strike me as somebody does strike me as a beautiful thing that many people will never get to encounter. And I'm wondering if the knowledge of those helped inform your later work in constructing languages and if you are, in some sense, bringing those ideas forward in a way that at least someone somewhere would get to encounter and appreciate.

Marc: For sure, yeah, absolutely. Because when you construct language, you have to make use of what you know and extrapolate from that. In studying general linguistics, you learn all kinds of different structures from languages all over the world, in terms of sounds and grammar and everything else. I studied mostly languages from two parts of the world in addition to English: Native American languages, mostly from the West Coast, and Chinese and languages from Southeast Asia. When I started working on Klingon in particular, influences from those two groups were at the forefront of it. I tried to avoid making them prominent because I didn't want Klingon to *be* either of those. But you can't help but be influenced by what you know. "This language in the Caucasus does this, this language in South America does that? Well, that's cool. let's make use of that. If not exactly that, just as a jumping-off point."

T: It strikes me that there's a risk, maybe more so today in our period of greater sensitivity. You don't want to come off as a parody of another known language.

Marc: And for Klingon in particular, that was a big deal, because of the time I was starting to work on Klingon, which was 1984. All we knew about Klingons at that time was what we'd seen in the original TV series. I knew a bit more after reading the script for *Star Trek III.* What we knew was *Klingons are mean and terrible and awful and belligerent and you wouldn't want to get near one*.

So I said, "Okay, when I make this language, I have to be sure that it didn't resemble any language on Earth." Because if it resembled, say, Thai, then everyone in Thailand was gonna get upset. "Why did you make the language of these awful people be like ours?" I was especially concerned that it did not resemble the Native American

language I'd worked on the most, because people would say, "Oh, he worked on that. So clearly it must be based on that."



I went out of my way to not make it that. After the dictionary came out, somebody at a university in the Netherlands wrote an essay or article comparing Klingon to the language I wrote my dissertation about to see if Klingon was really that and concluded, "No, it's not the same thing. There's some very general characteristics they have in common, but Klingon is not that language, it's its own thing." I was very relieved. I did take one suffix from the Native American language and put it in Klingon in basically the same phonetic form and with the same meaning—that was on purpose. A little Alfred Hitchcock thing. The guy who wrote the article didn't catch that.

T: I did notice a few little nods; you'd put in little puns and jokes and references—

Marc (smiling): Just coincidences.

T: Okay. Yeah, well, English certainly has plenty of those, no reason Klingon can't as well. Tell me a little about your work for the National Captioning Institute. I did a very little captioning on a low level. So it's an interest of mine, but I imagine it was a very different place when you were getting started there.

Marc: I started there before the captioning was on the air. So I was there from—not the very, *very* beginning, but pretty much. I didn't have anything to do with the technology, but I was involved in developing procedures and policies and worked on the first programs that were on the air with captions publicized as being on there.

The main changes over the years have been the technology used. We used to have custom-built computer console things. Everything was recorded on eight-inch floppy disks. The only way to transmit it to the broadcast was by taxicab or FedEx. That's all changed. And originally, we could only do programs that were on film or on tape, where

we could get a copy in advance. And we'd have to watch the show, then watch it over and over again and make sure everything was okay.



And then we developed a way to do shows that were live, like news and sports, and that was the big change. The original technology for that is still in use, it's based on what court reporters do, but hooked into a computer rather than printing out on paper. But that's changed to take advantage of speech recognition technology: now the captioner can listen and repeat everything, make corrections, do punctuation, indicate who's speaking. I'm not involved in the field anymore, but what's creeping in is real speech recognition. Siri doing the captioning, so to speak.

T: It's amazing how many leaps forward there have been. I'm conducting this interview with you while an app on my phone is quietly taking note of what we're saying and transcribing it as best it can.

Marc: The other thing that changed in captioning over the years is that closed captioning started on the air in 1980. They'd been captioning prior to that on films and on TV, but not closed captioning. Closed captioning, you can turn it on and off. PBS used to show *Masterpiece Theatre,* their big Sunday night drama from England. Now it's just called *Masterpiece*. They used to show it on Sunday nights uncaptioned, but on Thursday afternoon at two o'clock or something, it would show with captions. So if you wanted to watch it with captions, you'd have to wait for the rerun. People didn't have VCRs or streaming back then. So if you wanted to watch it with captioning, you'd have to do it at 2 p.m. on Thursday or whenever. But with closed captions, you could caption everything because if the viewer didn't want it, they could just turn it off.

But the philosophy in the early days was that closed captions would be edited. Untangling complex grammar, controlling vocabulary, stuff like that. The reasoning was, with a newspaper, magazine, book, if you read a sentence and go, "Huh?" you can read it over again. But the captions come on…they're gone…they come on…they're gone. So we wanted to make sure you could grasp it in one reading and still watch the program, not just stare at the captions. That's changed over the years. Things have become more and more verbatim. Now there's still editing going on, but mostly for technical reasons. The system can only go so fast. But I don't know what Siri or somebody else is up to.

T: There's always a little bit of disconnect I find when I'm watching a captioned TV show. It's not quite there yet.

Marc: Even with the taped stuff, it's up to the captioner to know what they're hearing. Every once in a while...

T: Sometimes they'll spell the name of a famous person wrong, *consistently* wrong…

Marc: Exactly. Because they don't quite know the context. So they come up with something that's not quite right. That's rare, but it happens.

T: Yeah, and mondegreens. That kind of thing. I understand that close to the same you were developing the initial Klingon for the *Star Trek* movies, they were also asking you to do a little work with Vulcan?

Marc: Vulcan came first! The first thing I did for *Star Trek* was a tiny bit of Vulcan in *Star Trek II.* There's a short scene where Captain Kirk, or Admiral Kirk as he was at the time, comes aboard the *Enterprise*. He has a short conversation with Mr. Spock and a female Vulcan character named Saavik. And then he goes on his merry way to inspect the ship and right after he leaves, Spock and Saavik talk about him. And when that was originally filmed, the actors were speaking English, because the script was in English. But in post-production, the editors said, "They shouldn't be speaking English to each other. They shouldn't be speaking Vulcan."



Well, they're not going to shoot the scene over again. So what I was hired to do was see what they said, look at their lips, and then come up with what was just gibberish,

just gobbledygook that when spoken would match the lips. And then they would dub that in and insert subtitles. One of the reasons they wanted to do this was because they wanted to change one of the meanings of one of the lines. So one of the subtitles means something slightly different from what the original line was. That was the easiest way to do that. For *Star Trek III,* I think they called me in for Klingon because I'd done this Vulcan. Had the Vulcan not happened. I don't know if they would have thought of me.

T: Maybe, maybe not. But was there any more work on Vulcan?

Marc: Yeah. As I said, the Vulcan for *Star Trek III* is basically gobbledygook. There had been Vulcan on TV before, but only names of certain items. And the only sentence was a one-word sentence: "Kroyka!" *Stop! Halt!* So there was that before me and then my gobbledygook. And then in *Star Trek II* there's a little bit of Vulcan and again, some thought to how that ought to be, but so little. Next was *Enterprise*. There was some Vulcan for that that I did. I did some Vulcan for the first JJ Abrams *Star Trek* movie. I don't know whether it made the cut and even if it did, it's sort of background shouting. But I did work on that and then a little bit here, a little bit there for the newer TV shows that are on now. I didn't do anywhere near as much as for Klingon.

Some fans have taken all the Vulcan that's appeared on all the TV shows, all the movies, all the novels and put it all together and made it coherent. I've looked at it. It's very, very clever. Very, very smart. But I don't know if anyone making films has looked at that or not.

T: It's still a richer tapestry to have done multiple languages for a single property and it's nice to develop that, but you're always up against the realities of what the production will allow.

Marc: It's interesting. Ever since Klingon in the movies, *Star Trek III, V,* and *VI,* that original-cast era, when there's been a movie or TV show featuring outer space aliens or people living in an ancient Earth society, producers have started to pay attention to the language in a way they hadn't before. For example, when *Avatar* was in production, James Cameron made a big announcement there'd be a new language called Na'vi, and "This language is going to out-Klingon Klingon."

T: Well, he's an ambitious fellow.

Marc: I don't know what it means to out-language a language, but *Avatar* is great, the new language is wonderful. The important point is it was very important to Cameron to have a good language in there.



And the same thing happened when *Game of Thrones* came along. There was already a language a little bit in the book, but producers wanted to make sure they developed it properly. All that started, I think, as a result of Klingon. Not because Klingon as a language is so magnificent! It may or may not be; that's not the point. The point is that the fans, the people going to the show, made a connection to it, and the producers noticed this and therefore said, "We're going to do it this way."

T: It really has changed the way things are done on every level. The sense that it's worth doing it that way instead of just running everything through a rot-13 cipher.

Did you start with the material that was already there that you knew you were going to have to kind of work around or did you start more with some fundamental ideas about how this language should be and then just try to nudge what was already there into it?

Marc: There was a little bit of Klingon in the first *Star Trek* movie, *Star Trek The Motion Picture.* So that was my starting point. It wasn't much. But I wasn't starting from zero. I had a set of sounds that I'd heard in that movie, and I had a set of syllable types. And I didn't know what the individual words meant except for one. But I knew what the phrases meant because there were subtitles.

I say "Except for one" because there was a one-word command, "Bah!" "Fire!" A command to fire the torpedoes. So that must be that. And there were certain practical requirements I had to pay attention to, which were different from if I were making a conlang on my own.



It was supposed to be an alien language. So what does that mean? That means it's not a human language. Well, what does *that* mean? What is a human language? What does it do? On the phonological side, there's only certain things humans can do with their mouth and nose and tongue. So I couldn't do anything other than that. I wanted to make it sound as different as I could, but because there were going to be human actors saying the lines, I couldn't do anything that *they* couldn't do.

But languages are patterned. Certain sounds tend to go together in the same language, certain sounds tend not to. I violated those kinds of rules. I put sounds together that are perfectly fine human sounds, but you probably wouldn't find them in the same language together in that way. The patterning is different. I'd be surprised if some human language had that particular collection of sounds. That was done to make the language sound not human.

In terms of grammar, same thing. I looked at what languages tend to do. So for example, the word order of the basic elements: subject, verb, and object. If you're gonna have a sentence like "Dogs bite people," in any language, those three elements have to come in some order or other. And in some languages, it's variable, you can move them around, and in other languages, it's fixed, they have to be in a particular order. And the possible number of orders is six. Object-verb-subject, subject- object-verb, object-subject-verb, subject-verb-object, verb-object-subject, verb-subject-object.

T: Right. With any three elements, you can order them in six ways…

Marc: And if you look all around the world in other languages, you'll find sample languages for each of those six. But some are far, far, far more common than others. The ones where the subject precedes the verb are a lot more common than the other kind. English has subject-verb-object and that's really, really common. Subject-object-verb is common. About 87% of the languages have those two patterns. The least common by far are the ones where the object comes first: object-verb-subject, object-subject-verb. So I picked one of those for Klingon. It's the least common on Earth, so in a weird way, it's the least "human." Not to cast aspersions against the people whose languages really do that.

T: But it feels less familiar.

Marc: Yeah, to most of the world, more strange and exotic. So the requirements of making an alien language imposed that kind of restriction, if that's the right word, on what I was doing. I had to think about all these things that were there before I started. Practical requirements of moviemaking, what could possibly constitute an alien language that's going to be spoken by human actors.

T: Yeah, you narrow things down with the knowledge of those requirements. I had a question that I'm not sure has been discussed within the *Star Trek* universe. Languages evolve and change and grow over the course of their existence as they're exposed to other cultures and various other influences? Has that been part of the story of Klingon? Is there a sense that the Klingon spoken by Kirk's opponents is measurably different than the Klingons spoken in Worf's time?

Marc: In that timeframe, no. In a broader timeframe, sort of. In Klingon culture, they talk about the ancient times, the founding of the Empire. And all these stories, whether they're mythological or real doesn't matter. There's been no overt discussion of that or use made; however, as a backstory, It's definitely there. I talked about the ancestors' language, an old version of Klingon. And so there's modern Klingon and there's Klingon dialects that developed from the ancestor's language. But no real use of that has been made in the shows, except for a teeny bit, they weren't thinking historically as they were thinking geographically or culturally. In *Star Trek VI,* there's some Klingons who speak a dialect. It's different from what the other Klingons are speaking. It's a very short scene, and people thought this actor was just no good. That's not true. It was *supposed* to be different.

T: I feel your pain there.



Marc: A lot of people got it, some people did. And in *Strange New Worlds,* there's a very short scene where they mention these Klingons are speaking a strange dialect of Klingon, which I worked up. But it's very quick; you can hardly hear it. So there's acknowledgement of variation. But the Klingons on TV are mostly speaking English anyway. The first season of *Discovery* being the exception to that.

But the lack of change in Klingon is not any different from the English spoken on *Star Trek* and all kinds of science fiction things. The English you hear Captain Kirk speaking and Captain Picard speaking or characters in *Discovery,* which is now into the 32nd century. When they speak English, it's exactly the same as what we're speaking right now.

T: Yeah, there's not much of a difference. You're right.

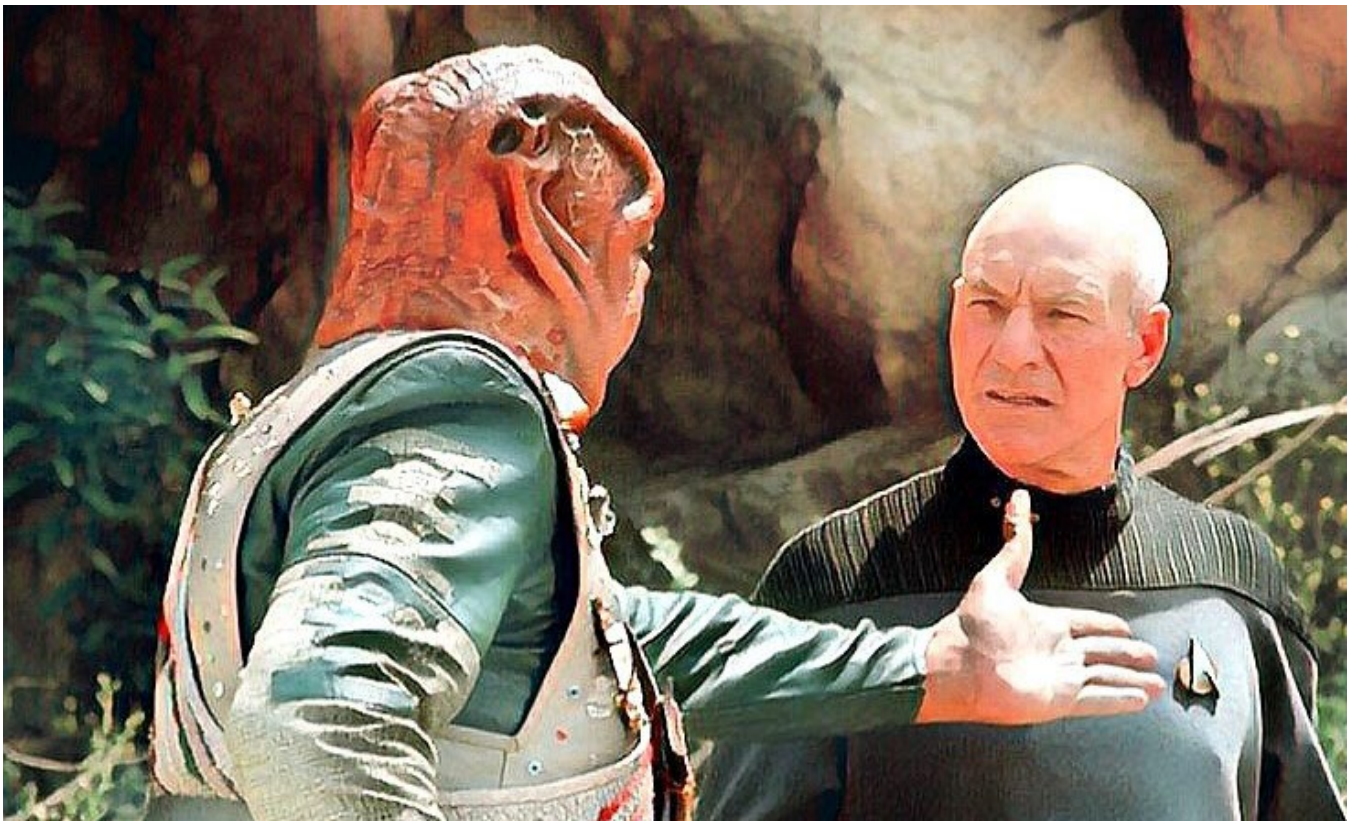
Marc: If you want to, you can say everyone's talking through the universal translator.

T: Speaking of the universal translator, I'm sure you get asked this one all the time, but did you have any input on the Darmok episode?

Marc: No, no. I wasn't involved with that at all. Interesting episode.

T: What was your take on it? Because it seemed like they were doing some intriguing things with language.

Marc: And not in the sense of English versus Chinese or something like that. Now we're doing some interesting things with the use of language in the way people talk. So the Darmok character presumably spoke his own language, whatever it's called. And he's talking to Picard who presumably speaks English. And the reason they're able to understand each other at all is because of this universal translator that's kind of there all the time. Let's say it's a lapel pin.



T: Or a subcutaneous implant or something.

Marc: What the Darmok character was saying was translated into English and it didn't make sense, not because it was grammatically wrong or because the words were meaningless, but because "What is he talking about?" What was missing and what Picard had to figure out was cultural references, not linguistic. Because the universal translator was taking care of the linguistic part, but it wasn't translating culture. So that's what they had to fumble around.

T: I think it might resonate--

Marc: The universal translator wasn't doing its job, but that's a separate argument, separate story.

T: I think it does resonate with certain fans who will get confronted with a certain difficulty, and they'll turn to a fellow fan and say, "This is kind of like when Kirk was on that planet and dealing with the Organians," and their fellow fan will go, "Oh, yeah," but talking to anyone else, they might as well be speaking an incomprehensible language.

Marc: Right.

T: We talked a little bit about *Star Trek VI,* and I understand that after the movie came out with its somewhat well-known line about *Hamlet* in the original Klingon, someone actually produced *Hamlet* in the allegedly original Klingon.

Marc: There's a lot of Shakespeare in that movie, but it's all in English. Originally in the script, it was maybe half-and-half English and Klingon, because it's the one Klingon character spouting the lines, General Chang, Christopher Plummer. But when you make a movie, things change day to day to day to day. So by the time the movie was done, there was one line, my Shakespeare translation, which was not in the original script, and that was "To be or not to be." So the way the way it comes up is the leader of the Klingon Empire, Gorkon, says, "I propose a toast to the undiscovered country." And everyone is like, "What?" And Spock says "Ah *Hamlet,* Act III, Scene I, Part of the 'to be or not to be' speech." And then Gorkon says, "You've not experienced Shakespeare until you've read him in the original Klingon." And then Christopher Plummer says "To be or not to be" in Klingon.



Anyway, because of that line, the Klingon-speaking community, mainly the members of the Klingon Language Institute, said, "We owe it to the galaxy not to translate but to *restore* the works of Shakespeare back to the original Klingon." So their first effort was *Hamlet,* because they already had "To be or not to be," so they only had the rest of the thing to worry about. And it's a brilliant, brilliant translation. When Hamlet in the English is in prose, the Klingon version's in prose; when it's in poetry, it's in poetry. In the Yorick scene in *Hamlet,* the gravediggers before Hamlet shows up are talking to each other in a strange dialect of English, so in the Klingon version, it's a strange dialect of Klingon. And then one pun after another in Klingon.

T: God. That's really hard to do.

Marc: To the best of my knowledge, there's never been a full production of the Klingon *Hamlet.* There have been productions of scenes. Go on YouTube, you can even watch some. But I've not heard of anyone doing the whole play.



T: But you were involved, I understand, with the production of a Klingon opera. With a title that is not one letter, as some people might believe, but is a three-letter palindrome.

Marc: The name of the opera is *'u',* which is the Klingon word for *universe.* And this was put together in a Netherlands theater company in The Hague. And it was years in the making. They workshopped it. Foundational or government support. And it's the story of the founding of the Klingon Empire. And the libretto was written in English, and then I translated it into Klingon when the opera was performed in the Hague.

There were several performances there and a couple other cities in the Netherlands, at least one in Germany and one in…Romania maybe? Someplace like that. The final performance, as far as I know, was in Berlin in 2013. There was some movement to try to bring it to America. That didn't happen.

I got in trouble with the music for that one…

T: In trouble? Why?

Marc: The composer sent me an email while all this was in the works. And he said to me, I understand that you said that Klingon has a nine-tone musical scale. And I said to myself*, I did? When did I say that?* But it turns out that in a book I wrote, I did say that. So he wanted to know how that works. What are the various tonalities and harmonies and vibrations? All this stuff on musical terminology and acoustic terminology. And I said to him, "Well, clearly, you've thought about this a whole lot more than I have! So do what you think is appropriate." And what he did was quit.

T: Oh, well…!

Marc: Not because of that. Something came up and he wasn't able to do the project. But before he left and turned it over to another composer, he wrote a musical theory of Klingon based on nine tones, and the next composer composed the music following that theory.

You can see bits and pieces of the opera on YouTube. There was a time where you could get a DVD with the whole thing. I don't know what the status of that is now.

T: I'll look into it.

Sadly, the DVD release was limited-time-only and its contents have not been shared online, making it a rare collectible. Star Trek: Strange New Worlds *considered a Klingon opera for its musical episode but opted instead for a quick scene where one Klingon puts the "K" into "K-pop." But as we reflected, in a shared universe with fans and pros alike building on each other's ideas…anything is possible in the world of tomorrow!*

APPLE SAUCE CHRONICLES – NOVEMBER 2023

Louis Phillips

What's the difference between tuna fish packed in oil and a movie star at a festival in Southern France?

One is in cans; the other is in Cannes,

**

DISC – A very brief discussion
DNUORG – background
LIO – oil change

**

PROTEST is the opposite of CONTEST

CONATION -- The turning of Democratic voting in the U.S., after the events of January 6th, 2021) upside down, backward, or every which way.

RESPONDEE-- a person who answers a question
using only accented syllables.

**

Accraphobia -- Fear of the capital of Ghana

**

PHIL SILVERS
Silvers, Phil
Performing in Phil-
adelphis PA.
Evoked much much laughter from me & my pa.

***

What's the difference between a person pretending to be more important than he or she or they really are and a dying woman preparing five or six different version of her last will and testament?

One is putting on airs; the other is putting on heirs.

**

"I love going to the ocean," Tom said littorally.

ESCA E P

**

NEW CHURCH HOLIDAY

LINT – Forty days devoted to cleaning out screens in washing machines and driers

**

What's the difference between a bill and a poem about a nightingale by John Keats? One is owed; the other is an ode.

If the novelist Carolyn See had been able to spot George Bernard Shaw walking past a children's playground on a beach, the following sentences could be written:

See saw sea see-saws. "See Shaw see sea see-saws," See said.

**

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF A LOCKSMITH

Locksmith
Likes math,
Leeks, moths,
Slacks, myth.
Lacks smooth
Manners.

**

A FILM WRITING INSTRUCTOR TELLS SOCRATES HOW TO IMPROVE SOCRATES' SCRIPT IN A PALINDROME

set arc, o Socrates.

**

A SUDDEN CHANGE OF HEART -- EARTH

**

What's the difference between Dr. Jekyll and a dictionary with a buffalo-skin cover?

One is Hyde bound. The other is hide-bound.

REPENTIMENTO -- penning a note of apology by writing over a previously written note or letter

**

TOUGH CHOICE

To go
To God
Or to go
To Togo
With Godot.

**

PALINDROME (A composition about Pinnochio)

AT A NOSE SONATA

**

What's the difference between a person confined to a wheelchair and FAUST?

One is disabled; the other is Dis-abled.

**

RESPONDEE -- a person who answers you using only accented syllables.

**

Do you think you can get me accepted to Marionette School?

Yes, but I'll have to pull a few strings.

**

All day long I like to make balsa airplanes and repair broken objects with rubber cement or Gorilla Glue. Can I make a living from my hobby?

I don't know. Is it the kind of work you really want to stick to?

A PALINDROME MISCELLANY

ANIL
Perth, Australia

These are a new-to-me accumulation. None is in Michael Donner's *I Love Me, vol. I*, but a couple are there in part. Related words are noted; most are unrelated.

dragging = niggard - Misers drag their feet on spending.

I garage peg a rag, I.
(**gardened rag**) - I hang my gardening cloth on a peg in the garage.

Giraffe, Jeff! - A rig? - The giraffe is Pat Grant's favourite animal after Jeff.
hey? = **eh?** - Synonyms, hey? (and ~homophones)

Know-it-all, appall at: "I, wonk." - A wonk is a grind, especially in a narrow subject like theirs.

O, bonobo, **bonobo, bonobo!** - An appeal to/for our closest kin, great peace model, endangered!

O, not a top potato? No. - To the hogs with you then! (Sorry, Charley.)

P up, pup. - It's what happens when you lie around on your back all day.

Put catnip, intact, up! - No way, Anil, the cat has a mind—and power!—of its own.

reporter = fret roper - Reporters are always looking for trouble and woe;
i.e., reporters = terror spies (anagram).

revelever (coinage) - party person lifestyle for life, forth and back at once

Rot-a-nest, Senator! - Rottnest Island near Perth? No, the rot nest is the Senate chamber.

S.A.: Caracas - (from a list of world cities cited by continent)

Set a loco "H": - chocolates! - crazy heroin substitute

sexes - two-way sex - (the best kind!)

Spoor—oops! - Leave no trace, they said!

states = set-ats

1. **Stave vats.**

2. **Stave off foe vats.**
How “eco rats” succeed in the barrel business: 1. make barrels; - 2. break competitors’ barrels.

stirrups = spurrits - Poor horse!

stolid: - Lo, cold-l lots.

stress = asserts - (The meaning similarity was known, but not the palindrome, surprisingly. I guess everyone got distracted by the delicious appeal of **desserts stressed**.)

Surviv’r, us. - Well, all but one of our letters survived.

I couldn’t decide which of these is best—if any! - You decide:

surreal: - **a err-us** - - - dictionary definition, freely translated
surreal: - **a tra-la-total art—a la err-us** - - - ditto
Surreal: - **a tra-la Dada, l’art a la err-us** - - 1920s Dada, forerunner of Surrealism.
Surreal: - **a Tra-la Sees *al.* Art—a la err-us -** Surrealism as alternativism
surreal: - **a tra-la Hal art—a LA err-us** - - - surreal *2001* spaced-out Hollywood Hal
surreal: - **a tra-la papal art—a la err-us** - - - For nearly two millennia! - Until Pope - Francis, the first realist/humanist pope I know of. - But I’m no historian, nor Catholic.

• ROTATOR PALINDROMES

six IX is. / (6 = 9) - Without a frame of reference 6 equals 9 by rotation, as all pervs know.
Or, florally arrayed, - **6: sIX IX is: 9.**

pun = **o’ sound** - Most puns are plays on similar or same sounding words.

“**undo pun**!” - Advice from an overly serious critic—of a type I’ve personally encountered, i.e., **a dope**. - (**e** = **a** inversion in some fonts, and is suggested in all common fonts.)

BARBENHEIMER SUMMARY

T Campbell

This summer, two hit movies, Barbie *and* Oppenheimer, *were celebrated for their differences. As an exercise in ambiguous language, I wrote a summary for both of them—at the same time.*

The movie begins with a transformative bright light over a barren wasteland, soon cutting to a shot of the staring protagonist, who already seems poised to change the world. The titular protagonist tiptoes through the early scenes, haunted by incongruous thoughts of death. Though established in their world, they have secrets that could cause their expulsion to its fringes.



The important action takes place in an improvised community in the western U.S., surrounded by desert. This is, for a time, the protagonist's place of power. Through it, they have far-ranging influence on events in the rest of the world. In the long run, though, the world starts to influence the protagonist back. They consult an aged, white-haired mentor about this, while the smaller-minded social climber attached to them both looks on, not really understanding their bond, even though he facilitated their meeting.



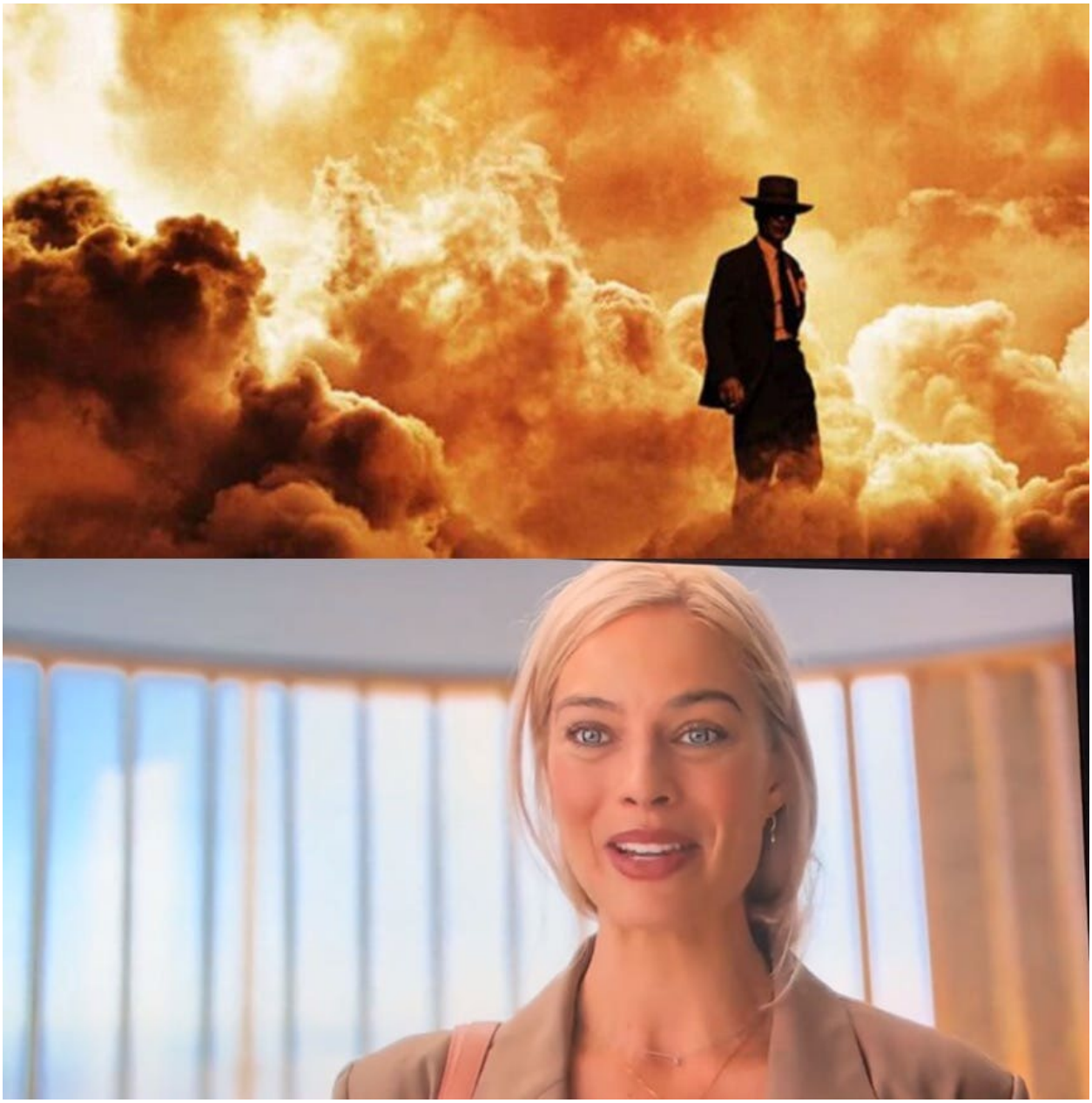
The greatest love in the protagonist's life is deeply unhappy. In their last scene together, the protagonist is not without compassion about that, and they do what they can to address it. But what they can do is only so much. Overall, they are a disengaged partner. The protagonist treats members of the opposite sex as more or less interchangeable, granting none of those people access to their own deepest feelings.

A guy you'll recognize for playing a Marvel hero is the most consistently villainous face in a sea of big-name actors playing small parts. He gets to sneer as never before. But the real villain is a system of destructive ideas running through society. That system of thinking infects everyone from the protagonist's once-trusted peers to the President. Only a community that believes in knowledge and enlightenment over bigotry and constant conflict can even hope to oppose it. That community does win a modest victory over it by the movie's end.

In some ways, the protagonist's belief in a better society is vindicated by this and by other moments seen along the course of the story. Their triumphs would be impossible if that belief weren't at least a little bit true.

In other ways, it's shown to be laughably naive. The consequences of their actions aren't as rosy as they once hoped, making them an exploitable commodity to more cynical sorts. This shakes their sense of self. When others accuse them of harming society, they're out of their depth and unable to fight back. Or unwilling. And on a global scale, the system they oppose will go on.

The film ends with the protagonist at a remove from the world and the footprints they've left on it. There's no going back to that old gated community. Their thoughts are consumed again, this time by images of a great void opening up, once unimaginable. It's now key to their view of themselves. And it's tied to mortality, their own and everyone else's. There is no mid-credits or end credits scene.



ALLITERATIVE MOVIES

T Campbell

So, how many movies have alliterative titles?

More than I can count easily!

IMDb has a few alliteration tags and Letterboxd has some volunteer-curated lists of alliterative movies (this one is extensive but misses recent additions like *La La Land* and *Blue Beetle).* But all the lists have glaring omissions and some have questionable inclusions. *(Wonka* was on one list, even though it's a one-word title, presumably because "Willy Wonka" is the title character's full name.)





And how strict do you want to be when you talk about an "alliterative title"? Should we allow any title with two words that begin with the same letter, e.g., ***T****eenage Mutant Ninja* ***T****urtles?* What about the horror film ***T****alk* ***t****o Me?*

Different strokes for different folks. For me, the most interesting alliterations are "pure" ones, in which the movie title (1) is at least two words long and (2) contains *only* words that begin with

the same letter. I'd also exclude movies where the titles just duplicate the same word, like *Liar Liar.* Those seem like their own thing.

The best-known "pure" alliterations I can find from sifting through the lists are as follows:

Gone Girl, Donnie Darko, Batman Begins, Pitch Perfect, Dirty Dancing, Blue Beetle, Freaky Friday, Fantastic Four, Fast Five, Brother Bear, Beautiful Boy, Peter Pan, Mad Max, Mafia Mamma, Wayne's World, Revolutionary Road, Bad Boys, Magic Mike, Ella Enchanted, King Kong, Due Date, Coach Carter, and *Funny Face.* Naturally, either version of *Freaky Friday* and *King Kong* qualifies.

If we loosen things up enough to ignore "stop words" like the *to* in *Talk to Me,* we can get a second list:

Guardians of the Galaxy, Pride and Prejudice, The Great Gatsby, The Sixth Sense, Memories of Murder, V for Vendetta, The Seven Samurai, Beauty and the Beast, The Seventh Seal, North by Northwest, The Karate Kid, Dumb and Dumber, Dancer in the Dark, The Blues Brothers, Dawn of the Dead, and *Mary and Max.*





Cutting it off here means excluding some movies I fondly remember, including *The Muppet Movie, The Dirty Dozen, Julie and Julia, War of the Worlds,* and *The Sword in the Stone.* You could put *Mamma Mia!* in either list, depending on whether you used its shorter title or *Mamma Mia! The Movie.*

What about simple alliteration threefers? Here I find *La La Land, What Women Want, Wild Wild West, Bye Bye Birdie, Beach Blanket Bingo, F for Fake,* and *Flesh for Frankenstein.* Note how often repetition or a stop word becomes part of these titles. Stop-word-skipping examples include *House on Haunted Hill* and *Sweet Smell of Success.*

Strings of four or more, with or without additional stop words, seem pretty rare. The only one I could find offhand was *Martha Marcy May Marlene,* a small film that was Elizabeth Olsen's first major role.

Any official list would also have to decide what kind of alliteration it's using. Is it "eye" alliteration, as in *Eagle Eye,* where two words always start with the same letter but not always the same sound? Or "ear" alliteration, as in *Horton Hears a Who!?*

Whatever method you use, alliterative titles seem genre-agnostic. You find them in comedies, dramas, thrillers, horror, and animated and superhero features…not too often in Westerns, but in most other places. They're in high-minded literary adaptations like *Sense and Sensibility* and broad, "dumb" entertainment like…*Dumb and Dumberer.* Overall, they don't represent too many blockbuster hits. But when a mid-range movie is looking to stick in a potential viewer's mind, alliteration can help give its title a little lilt.

WHAT'S BETTER THAN TARAMASALATA?

Darryl Francis
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taramasalata (or, as some would have it, taram**o**salata) is a Greek dish, a creamy, pink-colored fish pâté traditionally made from smoked cod's roe, mixed with garlic, lemon juice, and olive oil. Most word-lovers will have probably spotted this on restaurant menus, or recipes or other culinary ephemera, and will have noted the word's six A's, occurring alternately. But are there other words and names with six or more alternating A's? Let's take a look.

Here are a dozen other six alternating-A items, most originating in India or elsewhere in Asia:

Alapalawala is a village in Sri Lanka, located in the Sabaragamuwa province.

Mahajanapadas were kingdoms in ancient India, from the 6th to 4th centuries BCE.

Narayanapala was the seventh emperor of the Pala dynasty of the Indian subcontinent.

Narayanavanam is a town in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. It's located at 13.42° north, 79.58° east, with a population of around 38,000.

Paragahamada is a village in Sri Lanka, located in the Central province.

Salakanagara is a legendary kingdom in western Java that supposedly existed in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

Samavasarana is a divine preaching hall and object of worship in Jainism.

Takamagahara is the abode of the heavenly gods in Japanese mythology. It is also the name given to asteroid number 10831 which was discovered in 1993.

Valajanagaram is a small town in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, with a population of around 6000.

Varadarasanar was the surname of Mu Varadarasanar, a once prolific Indian writer, 1912-1974. Many of his books and audiobooks are still available.

Wadakahamada is a village in Sri Lanka, located within Central province.

Yavanajataka is an ancient text in Indian astrology.

While the dozen names above all sport six alternating A's, they are all proper names, using initial capital letters, and none will be familiar to readers. On the basis that **taramasalata**

appears in some collegiate-size dictionaries (such as *Collins English Dictionary* and *Chambers Dictionary*, but not the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*), and is spelled without an initial capital letter, my view is that **taramasalata** cannot be bettered in the "6A stakes."

However, let's take a look at these half-dozen specimens with seven alternating A's:

Amadalavalasa is a town in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Googling its precise latitude and longitude throws up slightly different numbers, but it's approximately at 18.4° north, 83.9° east. The town's population is about 40,000, so it's hardly an insignificant location.

Avadanasataka is an anthology in Sanskrit of one hundred Buddhist legends.

Ayadaragalama was a king of the First Sealand dynasty of Babylon.

Madanakamarajan is a 1941 film listed on the renowned film website IMDb. It looks like there's been a 1990 remake of the film, with the title amended to *Michael Madana Kama Rajan.*

Gajanayakagama is yet another small town in Sri Lanka, this one in Southern province.

And finally, here's one that has no Asian connection at all…

Hanaiakamalama, or Queen Emma Summer Palace, served as a retreat for Queen Emma of Hawaii from 1857 to 1885. It is a now a historic landmark, museum, and tourist site, a short drive from downtown Honolulu. Unlike all the other examples above, this one admits an annoying I, although the alternating-A property is retained.

Again, all will be unfamiliar to readers, and are proper names spelled with an initial capital letter. So while they might be better than **taramasalata** with their number of alternating A's, they don't really beat it when it comes to familiarity.

What next? Maybe I will explore words and names with alternating E's, I's, O's, U's and even Y's. Watch this space!

PALINDROMES, REDIVIDERS, SPOONERISM

Steven Fraser (with notes by T Campbell)

Steven has created palindromic poems and other "ludic constructions" on X/Twitter for years, and his account at https://twitter.com/Spoonerrhythms often brightens my day. I asked him to submit a sampling of his work and got these three mini-suites I'm proud to share with you! Note that the "Maws" title is duplicated because it is part of the palindrome, unlike the other titles.

PALINDROMES

Birds

Upgrade
Gaze, siren —
On a wasteland, auk sat.
I'd exile hate,
serene gene reset,
a helix edit.
A skua DNA lets a wan one rise, zag.

Smoking With Seabirds
Puff on,
rub cigar to stub,
sniff up.

Gannets I like,
esteem, meet, seek.
I listen, nag.

Puffins
(but so tragic!)
burn off up.

Classic Movies

Psychle

Moody motel.
Cycle to hotel,
Cycle to motel,
Cycle to hotel,
Cycle to my doom.

Maws

MAWS
I swam to hot wonder,
loopy, doomed.
A jaw!
A jade, moody pool, red now–
To hot maws I swam.

Birds *and* Classic Movies

The Birds
Auks, a swan, geese,
we mass, sort, ablate men o' war raw.
One met albatross.
Same, we see, gnaws a skua.

REDIVIDERS

"These are basically all the redividers I've done," Steven writes.

Untitled

Impossibly, then utterly in glowing rime
I'm possibly the nutter lying low in grime

Falcon

He, for ages, in my binoculars,
pecks offal,
contented in shadows.

He forages in my bin:
ocular specks of falcon,
tented in shadows.

Petrichor

Wood's carpet rich
orchestrates fall

Wood scar, petrichor.
Chest rates fall

Haiku Slider Redivider

heron in jade
hero ninja delights oft
in jade light soft

About the haiku, Steven adds, "This is similar to Lori Wike's one-line haiku featured in the first issue. The second line yields the first and third lines by redivision."

Night Flight

In rancor on a jet, somnolent, of low energy,
we average ones chew, hum and read.
Lights urging "Awake!" Flashes in the night.
Comet, or end of falling ashes of starlight?

In ran corona jetsom. No lento flow.
Energy weave, rage on, eschew human dread.
Light surging, a wake flashes in the night,
come to rend off all in gashes of starlight.

The Planets Fade (3-Phase Redivider)

I mark sunset, her ogre enraging as I, mad Earth old, orbit Saturn.
I, Neptune, Venus: dim medallions.

I mark sun's ether. O green rag in gas! I'm a dearth; old orbit's a turn.
I, Neptune, Venus: dim medal lions.

I'm ark's unset hero green, raging as I made art hold orb.
It sat, urn inept, uneven; us dimmed, all ions.

The Three-Body Problem (3-Phase Redivider)

Orbits of past awe burn.
Orb: it's of past, a web, urn,
or bits of pasta we burn?

Webspun (Redivider/Palindrome)

Pull a web, or…need its even word spool?
Pull awe-borne edit, seven words pool:
Loops drown, Eve's tide enrobe, wall up.

SPOONERISM

This one's another bird-related poem, making a set with "Falcon" and the bird-related palindromes!

Constrained

Ron's trained kite, a
constrained writer,

bites a rook,
writes a book:

Updraft Cries.
Up craft dries…

POETIC LICENSE REVOKED?

DON HAUPTMAN
New York, New York
donhauptman@nyc.rr.com

For the February 2020 issue of *Word Ways*, I wrote about the inaugural "Variations" contest in *The New York Times.* Readers were invited to submit comments on the news in the form of takeoffs on well-known songs, poems, and the like. Because of pandemics and other assorted crises, the second contest didn't take place until August 2023. Of course, I submitted another piece. Alas, this time my effort didn't make the grade. Sue Mermelstein, a *Times* Letters editor who created the contest, told me: "There were hundreds of submissions. Lots of good ones couldn't be chosen because of our limited space." Following is my rejected composition. Should it have been among the "winners"? As apiarists say: You judge the bee!

X-anadu

In Tesla's shop did Elon Musk

Create an app; 'twas most complex.

Where every feature can be found;

Yes—chat, finance, and stores abound.

And known to all as . . . "X" ?!

For Twitter, though, farewell was brusque.

Confounding those who deemed it best.

Brand equity was calmly trashed.

Its reputation, too, was bashed.

So will he fly the nest?

(With apologies to Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

CINENERDLE, CINE2NERDLE, CINENERDLE TOO: THE INTERVIEW

T Campbell

Nilanth Yogadasan keeps busy. He's the creator of CineNerdle, a jigsaw-style game where users assemble film stills, and Cine2Nerdle, in which users shuffle tiles into rows and columns. In an "original" Cine2Nerdle, the tiles represent aspects of movies—actors, plot points, title words, and other features—and their rows and columns represent the movies themselves. In a "reversal" Cine2Nerdle, the tiles are the names of movies, and the rows and columns represent aspects that they share. "Logical" Cine2Nerdles organize movies or their aspects by more complex rules. Yogadasan spared a little time to discuss the challenges of developing the games with me, especially the word games…all of which we'll probably be calling "CineNerdle" soon enough.



Figure 1: Sample Cine2Nerdle. Note how it links the films BRIGHT and BRIGHTburn and the ambiguous nature of a tile labeled "Doom," referring in this case to Mount Doom.

CineNerdle: I think you started playing back when it was still very much donation-reliant and everything I was spending to maintain the site was out of pocket.

T: Yeah, there seemed to be a period there where you were where you were like, "Thanks for making me popular, but please don't make me *too* popular because I don't know if I can continue to afford the server bills long enough." But I assume we're past that. I see more advanced advertising on the site now.

CineNerdle: It's been much better recently. Yes. Now of course we've incorporated the ads and so they have been maintaining the running costs. And now it's just been coming up with puzzles every day and then the logical puzzles every weekend. We're

still trying to keep things fresh and exciting and expand on the site. We have a couple of things, hopefully another game mode or another puzzle type coming down the pipeline. Soonish. Have you been playing any of the other daily puzzles out there again?

T: You mean other than yours? I mean, there are three Cine2Nerdles. At this point I'm back into Wordle, I still do Waffle, and there's this new thing from the *Times...*Connections? Not *entirely* dissimilar to the basic design of CineNerdle. I don't know if that was a direct influence or just, you know, great minds... [Connections has also been compared to the British game show *Only Connect.* Neither are movie-specific.]

CineNerdle: Who knows? Who knows where the inspiration comes from? I'm not too bothered. It was funny. I think a month or so ago, they did a movie-themed Connections. And it wasn't very good. And Twitter kind of went off on it a little. And then I think CineNerdle got a shout-out from Ken Jennings because of it. It was fun. I mean, the more, the merrier.

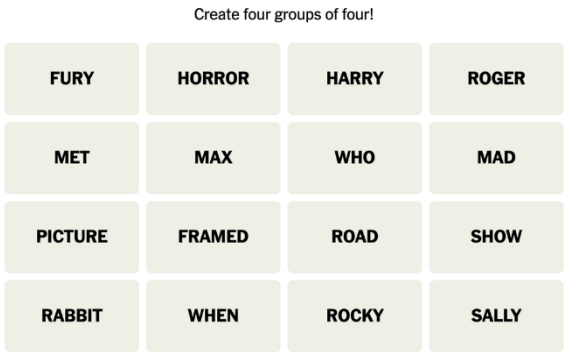


Figure 2: Connections' foray into film.

T: They were just visiting your wheelhouse; they weren't setting up shop there.

CineNerdle: Yeah, yeah.

T: So what do we call this thing? Because it's http://cinenerdle2.app. It's also officially titled Cine2Nerdle, but the Twitter account is just "CineNerdle," and yet it's using the Cine2Nerdle branding. It's okay for a new property to have an identity crisis, but I don't want to be referring to it by the wrong name.



Figure 3: Answer to the above puzzle.

CineNerdle: No. Yeah. Yeah, that's a good way to describe it. We are in a bit of an identity crisis. It started as CineNerdle. the original CineNerdle, which was just the flipping of the tiles and reviewing the sections of the frame. And then I wanted to make a sequel, so I called it Cine2Nerdle. But I never thought it would become as big as it did. The plan moving forward is, I might incorporate CineNerdle *into* Cine2Nerdle and then rebrand the whole thing as just CineNerdle.

T: Yeah, I appreciate the playful allusion to *2 Fast 2 Furious,* but that seems like a smart rebranding. Onward and upward. Speaking of the growth and the early aspects of the of the feature, is it safe to say that the the two-by-two puzzles are extinct? Is that no longer something that we do? The puzzles that use four movies instead of five movies?



Figure 4: Early Cine2Nerdle puzzles used the "two-by-two" format at left and the "two-by-three" format at center, but by now, the "one-by-four" format at right is by far the most popular. Users can submit their own puzzles, but only in the latter two formats.

CineNerdle: Yes, I think they are gone. And the ones that use five movies but have two crossing rows, they're almost gone too. They're more time-consuming and difficult to create just because of trying to get those connections across multiple movies. And when they do get posted to the site, a lot of people don't seem to like them.

T: I don't see too many three-by-twos among your four-star-rated puzzles. And I'm sure there's a reason for that.

CineNerdle: I think there's a certain subset who *really* like them because they are a bit more challenging.

T: I can see the argument for keeping them because they're more challenging. That subset, they don't want to see a tweet to everyone else that says, "We responded to your demands, and we're dumbing things down!"

CineNerdle: No, yeah, I don't want to do that either. The three-by-twos and two-by-twos, they're very fun. But they're also a bit more difficult to create on my end, especially after a few variations have been made. But if I am inspired at one point to make a few, where one just seems to work, then I'll maybe sneak one in once in a while. But the reception of them hasn't been great. And it might be because it's a challenge, but it also just might be because they only happen every once in a while. People get confused.

T: I feel like there's also an "incompleteness" issue. There's a sense of completeness when you finish a crossword puzzle. No matter how difficult that puzzle is. And with the way a three-by-two is set up, you've got these two tiles left over that aren't part of

anything. And sometimes you can get clever with those, but it still feels sometimes like, “This is a crossword, but there are two squares that you can’t fill out.”

CineNerdle: Yeah, yeah. That could very much be part of the lack of interest.

T: Relatively speaking. They have their cult following! Have you done any study of the themes that seem to recur over and over? I mean, a few are pretty obvious. You’ve got the actor names, the title words, the movie themes, the MacGuffins. But I’m wondering if you’ve had any further observations after having done this kind of thing for a year, about the aspects of movies that seem to seem to work for people and jog their memories.

CineNerdle: I think so, specifically with the reversal puzzles. I think the reversal puzzle is different in the way users play it versus the original: there are so many different possible connections movies can have to each other. And I’m still trying to work on the balance. It can be frustrating—and I think that’s reflected in the ratings—but it can be frustrating when you know that final green theme is something definitely real and definitely a connection between those four movies, but it’s not something players might have been looking for or trying to pay attention to.

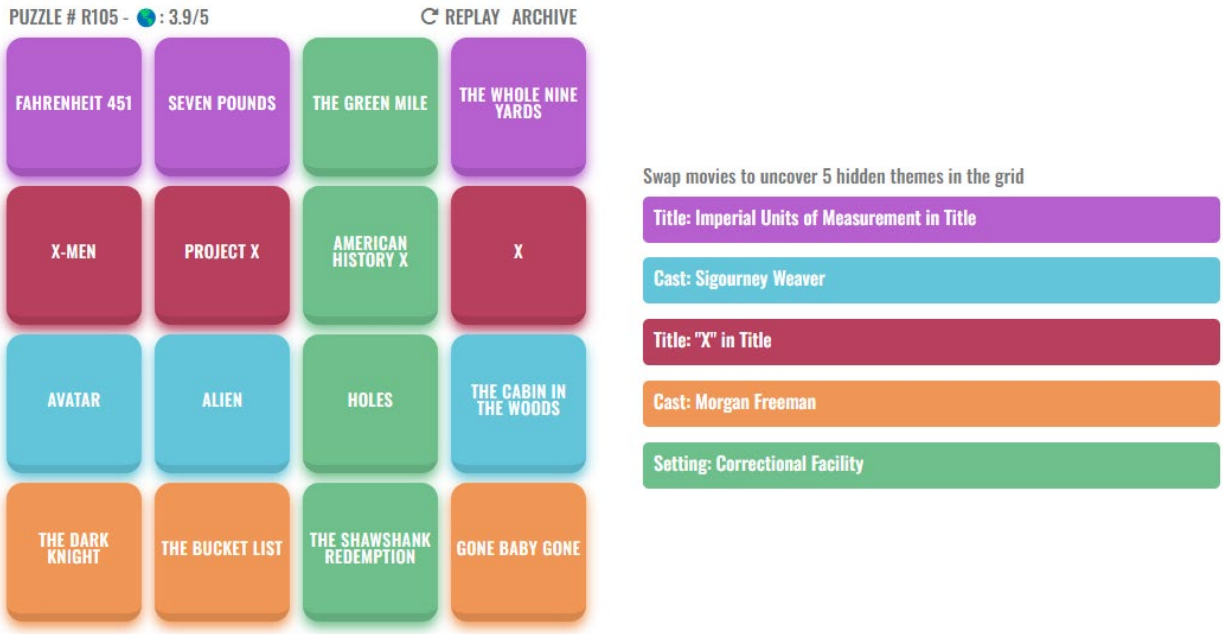


Figure 5: Not all reversal CineNerdles involve wordplay, but this one links movies by their title elements. Other aspects that join movies include cast, directors, setting, and plot elements.

T: Or even aware of sometimes.

CineNerdle: Yeah. So I’m still trying to find the balance when creating reversals. But I haven’t had as long with them—it’s been about a year of originals, about half a year of reversals. It’s been tough, because you want to keep them fresh and you want to change up the themes every once in a while, but people tend to like the ones that are

more direct, more straightforward in terms of the connecting item. So like if it's actors, directors, even composers or very obvious traits like talking animals or something about the title. One of the highest-rated reversal puzzles is where the green theme was pregnancy-related. I think it was like *Juno* and *Mother* and *Children of Men* and I can't remember what the other movie would have been. But that was, for some reason, a very highly rated puzzle.

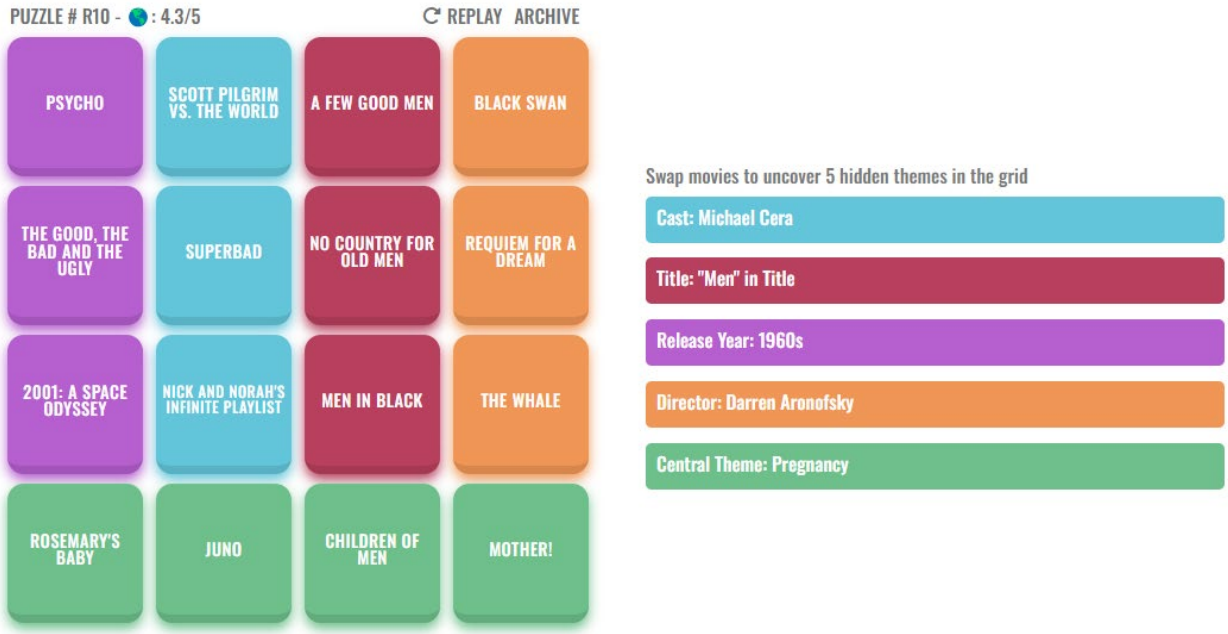


Figure 6: The fourth was Rosemary's Baby.

T: Have you considered a sort of click-for-hint interface?

CineNerdle: I am strongly considering adding it. I've actually seen streamers play, and even myself when I'm playing some of the user-submitted ones, it can get to a point where you have your four colors you've found and you're trying to find the fifth green one. And I think a lot of people get to a point where they say, "I'm just gonna start swiping randomly."

T: "They glow yellow when I get three out of four, so I'll find the yellows, see what happens…"



Figure 7: In CineNerdle, yellow is the color of "almost there." Any 75%-complete row or column has its tiles either go solid yellow or get a yellow halo underneath.

CineNerdle: You'll find the yellows, or maybe you'll just give up because it seems daunting at that point. So what I'm considering right now is to have a hint after a certain number of swaps. I'm still trying to think about it, really. But for the green movie, potentially having a hint, or for each of the movies having an extra title that's not a part of the puzzle. So for example, let's say we have the puzzle and then we got the red, the purple, the orange, the green, and the blue stripes underneath. We don't know what they are yet, but they each have an extra title under them that would connect to the titles that *are* in the puzzle. Which would add another layer of complexity to the game but also be helpful for trying to make connections.

T: In crossword puzzles, we sometimes have the idea of a meta puzzle, where you need to present some extra answer after the puzzle is done, and sometimes that answer is the unstated fifth theme answer…

CineNerdle: I think what people love is a very direct beam that connects movies and isn't related to a person involved with the movie. But there's only so many that you can make that are fun and maybe even a little cheeky. I'm still trying to make good reversal puzzles and original puzzles daily, but it's getting to a point where I may need some new inspiration.

T: I wonder about the correlation between the star rating and the solving rating. It seems, from my perspective, like there's a fair correlation overall. But I wonder if it's a little bit of a bell curve, where it's possible to be *too* easy to be as highly rated as ones that challenge you a little bit more.

CineNerdle: That's another area where I try to find the balance. The ratings and average scores are very obviously correlating. There is a zone like you talk about where the puzzles are too easy and then they're rated lower, so you'll have like a 4.5 solving average, but then 3.93 stars. There does seem to be a zone of like 4.0 to 4.3 where the correlations are just very strong, where those numbers go 4.1, 4.1 and 4.2, 4.2. I think the best puzzles when I'm looking back and reviewing them are the ones that have lower scores and higher ratings. So if I have a puzzle that's like a 4.0 average score, but

a 4.5- or 4.4-star rating, then I know what I made. I made a fun puzzle, because those are the ones where they were challenging enough that the scores were low, but then there was something fun about them that gave them a higher rating. And if I go back in the archive and look at those clusters where the rating is higher than the score, it's usually some fun idea. I would do those every time if I could, but it's hard to come up with really fun ones like those.

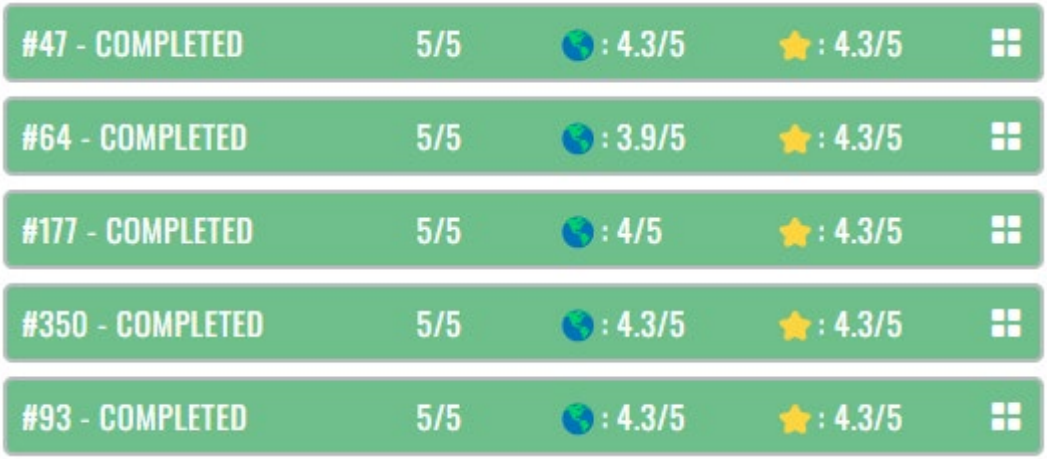


Figure 8: Puzzles #64 and #177, with user satisfaction scores ("stars") outpacing average solution scores ("globes"), are the sort Yogadasan aspires to make.

T: There are no star rankings for the logic puzzles. It seems like those are far and away the most challenging. Are you kind of protecting those a little bit too, so that they can reach the people who respond well to them without worrying about their star ranking as much?

CineNerdle: Exactly. I just anticipated that from the way ratings have been going with the regular puzzles. The logical ones are always more challenging in general. I'm considering maybe a more binary system: a "thumbs up, thumbs down" or "do you recommend or not recommend." But when you start attaching a rating to them, I think they're going to correlate to how many people are successful at completing them within a certain number of checks. And the other thing I was worried about, even with my logicals, is that sometimes the way I've worded it is wrong or could be better…but often the logic is laid out as it should be but interpreted incorrectly. But that is kind of the point of the logic puzzle to be able to parse out the wording and parse out what it actually means. If I say something like "All A24 movies are in row four," People expect all movies in row four to be A24. But that's not the case. It's just whatever number of A24 movies are in the puzzle, they're all in row four. That's a big one that happens with almost every other puzzle that has a clue like that.

T: I've seen you take that extra step where you say, "All movies in this row are A24 movies, but not all A24 movies are in this row."

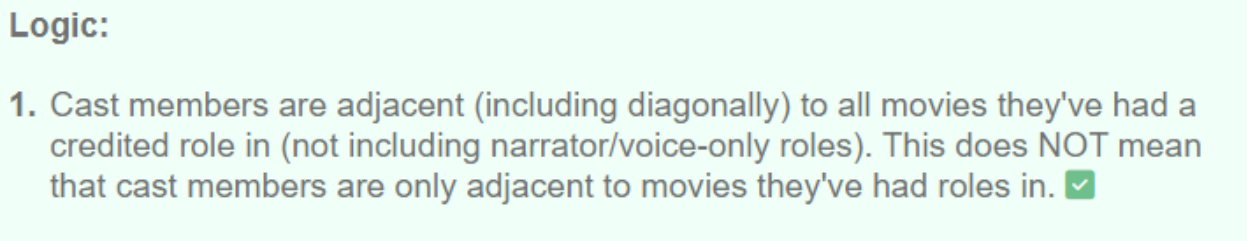


Figure 9: Instructions get specific.

CineNerdle: I want to refrain from making those clarifications because part of the fun of a logic puzzle is also trying to delineate the meaning. It's part of logic in general, even when you're dealing with these logic tests or these logic questions in your head. You have the fun of trying to figure out what is actually stated versus what you're interpreting. So I'm trying not to clarify as much, but I also want to make sure that the largest audience is still capable of playing and enjoying the game. It's another balance to try and strike.

T: It's all difficulty calibration. What's the most popular movie on CineNerdle? Is there one movie or a group of movies that seems to get referenced the most often?

CineNerdle: You mean among my puzzles or among the user-submitted puzzles?

T: Either.

CineNerdle: Among the user base, I'd say Nolan movies come up quite a bit. I get it! They're big, big blockbuster movies, and they're great movies. Those are probably the most popular movies because they're very recognizable and they're easy to use. They had huge casts, too. Amongst my own, I try to maintain a wider range. So even when I'm creating clusters, I'm always hitting Ctrl-F9 to see if I've used that movie recently or haven't used it in a while.

T: I know exactly what you mean. Obviously I haven't done as many as you have, but I've contributed enough user-submitted puzzles that I've started to think, "Now, wait a second. Didn't I reference this movie already?"

CineNerdle: With me, there probably is a pattern, but I haven't looked at it. So I don't know if I'm using one movie too much or not.

T: Sometimes it's best not to be too self-conscious about it. How is the business end of CineNerdle doing? I think that the first time you and I talked, this was not your day job. This was not anything you were going to be putting that degree of emphasis on. Have things reached that point?

CineNerdle: As of a couple months and a half ago, I made this my full-time, just working on CineNerdle. Right now, from the ads and from the ad-free subscriptions, it generates enough to help me keep the site going and then also, you know, keep me

alive. So, yeah, it's at a nice point. I love working on it. I love the programming side plus the movie sides, so it's a nice combination. And it does well enough for me to say "Hey, I can do this full-time now. And this is awesome." So that's what I'm doing now and I'm now trying to find ways to make this less transient, less part of the daily puzzle phenomenon that's been going on for like the last couple of years, and more of what might be a movie hub or a movie community hub or puzzle hub. I'm still trying to figure that out. Just gonna be trying a whole bunch of new and different things, seeing what sticks, and hopefully along the way building enough of a stable community that enjoys CineNerdle puzzles and content.

T: Seems like you're off to a good start.

MEAN SIDEWALKS

ANIL
Perth, Australia

• FRACTAL WEB CHARADES STORY

Web: It We Bit.
Web log > We “blog”!
We brave web rave.
We bed web ed.
We bought web “ought.”
“Web itch!”, we bitch.
Web led, we bled!
We battle web addle**.**
…We beat web, eat!
Webless we bless!

with a rejoinder from
Web Land: “*We*, bland?
We *brag!*” (Web rag)
We bonus ”web” onus!

• MORE COINCIDENTAL SELF-SIMILARITY

Seven(!) rhyming synonyms, all but two *unrelated*:
bump = hump = lump = clump = tump = plump = dump.

---

bump < echoic,* prob. rel. to boom, bomb
hump < hunk, hill, < thick end of a bone
lump and clump < rag, heavy piece < limp
tump (small mound or clump) < unknown, poss. from tump-line, headband packet
plump (a cluster or clump–of trees, birds etc; also a suggestive adjective) < unknown
dump < fall heavily, **thump**, < damp
* Others of these are probably also, at least secondarily, echoic.

Jeff Grant suggested adding **mump** (mumble, beg, cheat, but also origin of mumps, “cheek lumps/bumps”), **rump** (buttocks, < Scand.) and **stump**[y] (< stamp, < Ger, Du), all also ≈ synomyms of the above. Other suggestive words, not synonyms, are **flump** and **whump**, ≈ plop or **thump**. And **sump**, a depression, is sort of an antonym. Finally, to get political, add **Trump** to this list of piles and protuberance. Aptly, trump also means the sound emitted by the **rump** [< trumpet].

• NEWORDS

dark white: New name for non-racist whites, as racists would call us if they were at all clever.

alphabetics: the branch of logology that deals with manipulating or focusing on the alphabet; aka **letteral word play**, as opposed to plays on meaning, sound, numerics (except gematria), origins, word study, etc. I personally mix most types, especially meaning ('logistics') and alphabetics, but still I feel the new term deserves a niche. There's no exact synonym. Other coinages are possible, however, such as **letterology**, **alphabetology**, or my favorite, **LETTER RIP!** (This pun is on Google with a more random meaning based on alphabet soup.)

apatheosis: the very pinnacle of not caring

cock and ball story: a gay anecdote

coopposition: (You punctuate. An allied chicken coop position? A conspiracy theory against everything?)

cyence: The tendency, almost a code, of scientists to be cynical about seeing goodness in nature, man, or animals. I object to this abuse of objectivity to justify insensitivity. I know I was that way when I was a practicing scientist and I know its heuristic value within analytical thinking on a subject. But please limit this extreme objectivity to your field's journals and do not apply it in toto to broader public considerations.

enematic: forcing or scaring the shit out of one [used undefined in *Haywire Way Higher* ch.5]

exhaustipated: too pooped to poop [new definition of an old coinage from the Net; see Kickshaws, WW August,'14]

greenbrain effect: It comes when excess CO2 and worrying about it cause hallucinations, dreams, or voices, all in a cozy green garden. (Similar effects occur with heroin trippies, but at the cost of addiction.)

kilograph: a device for counting to 1000 (thousands of uses!)

kinderguardian: New job description, protecting kindergarten teachers from unruly kids—and v.v.

num: Too numbed to pronounce the 'b' sound. (Aren't we all? Num?)

posthuman: politically correct name for a postman

pubbly (n.): resumé padding—as in, pubbly shit, the cry forever ringing in the ears of academics

surprice hidden, unexpected additional cost

undermime fail your miming audition, killing your last hope of living on Art

Werewolverine A 'new' superhero or villain, famous X-Man bitten by a werewolf or wolf spider, or by another werewolverine.

• SOME REDEFINITIONS

Cooperation a farm chickens co-op corporation, operated by smart phones from their coops. (Compare cooposition above. No relation to Gary Cooper.)

domestic affairs cheating on the mistress

fucked up 'It's what you get for insisting on a superior position, lady,' says the m.c.p.

spice more than one spouse

spoiled fucked (a pun, especially for young girls in many old cultures)

• DESCENT, or my autobiography (*Chas. M. Chasm*) in a transitional word ladder.

CHARM
CHASM
CHAOS
HAVOC
WHACO!

• **OAR ODE**

I'd rather be an ODE than an OAR, that is, I'd rather be an owed than an ower. That is, I'd rather be a passenger than a driver. ODE = OWED, ROWED, RODE ROAD. OAR = OWER = ROWER, ROWED ROAD.

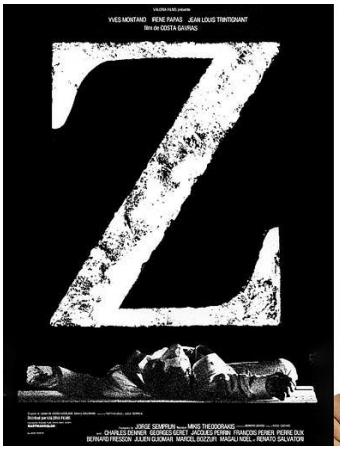
THE PALINDROME FILM FESTIVAL

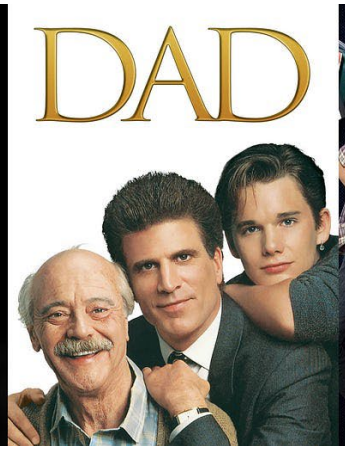
T Campbell

What movies would you screen for palindrome-lovers? There are about 68 palindromic film titles in my database: the 17 I picked out for today and tomorrow's updates are the most interesting of the lot.

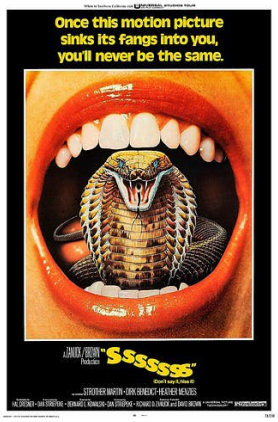
The best film named ***Z*** is an anti-fascist classic from 1969, set in then-contemporary Greece. Z is a leftist rabble-rouser who dies early in the film; the rest of it traces the price others pay for telling the truth about his murder. It starts by announcing, "Any resemblance to real events, to persons living or dead, is not accidental. It is DELIBERATE." (There's also a horror movie about an imaginary friend who turns out to be evil, but never mind that one.)

Dad is a sentimental comedy about three generations bonding for the first and sadly the last time, starring Jack Lemmon, Ted Danson, and Ethan Hawke.









#FBF is a smart teen comedy, with a likable lead character conducting a little light identity theft to get her parents back together. What could go wrong?

Sssssss is about the dangers of taking a summer job: you could end up working for a mad scientist who's plotting to turn you into a snake. And end up sticking with it for too long just because his daughter's kinda hot. Capitalism, am I right?

O is "what if high school were Shakespearean tragedy," only instead of adapting one of the stories about young people like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet,* it just goes right straight to *Othello, and honestly, I respect that choice.*

Elle is probably the most controversial palindrome-film, a thriller centered on some unconventional reactions to assault. Those reactions resonated deeply with some viewers even as they struck others as inauthentic…and it's the work of Paul Verhoeven, the Dutch provocateur known for over-the-top violence *(RoboCop, Starship Troopers) and* over-the-top sex *(Basic Instinct, Showgirls).* But for all that, the viewers it speaks to, it *really* speaks to.



π is the tale of a tortured genius who believes he can unlock mathematical truths that can predict the stock market and the future itself. He might be right, but he might also be going around the bend, and the powers-that-be who want him to succeed might be the ones who drive him into madness.

LOL is a hard one for me to parse. It's the kind of gross-out teen comedy that tests my patience a lot. But like Elle, it has its passionate defenders. If nothing else, its depiction of the social-media-soaked lives of teenagers in 2012, which felt over-the-top at the time, was probably pretty accurate in retrospect. As the use of social media keeps changing (teens haven't flocked to Facebook or Twitter in ages), this movie might attain the status of artifact.



W. blurs the line between satire and biopic, but what else could you expect from director Oliver Stone? This 2008 film is an interesting relic of am earlier era, before our current perspective on the Republican party.

M is a justly influential murder mystery with a young Peter Lorre at his creepy peak and stylish direction that's decades ahead of its time.

xXx is an early-2000s extreme skateboarder's idea of what "the next James Bond" should've looked like. But the stunts are cool, and if you've seen the Fast movies and enjoy Vin Diesel, this is him at his Vin Dieselest.

Here's a coincidence I was not expecting: a lot of palindrome movies feature some kind of hardened killer-secret agent type. Both ***Ava*** and ***Anna*** (stylized as *ANИA)* are a familiar stripe of femme fatale that also appears in *Killing* ***Eve:*** seductive, deadly, and at more risk from her own employers than from anyone she's been hired to kill. The movie *Hanna* also shows a younger girl kind of growing into that trope…and it might be worth cheating a bit to include that in the film festival instead: it's a much better movie than either of the others (and *Killing Eve* went off the rails after a while).

For the male equivalents, we've got *xXx* and ***AKA.*** The latter concerns an undercover cop who befriends a mob boss's young son. It's no game-changer, but it's well-made.



If you only see one Indian film, you could do a lot worse than to make it ***RRR,*** a phenomenally successful fictionalization of two real-life Indian revolutionary heroes, who never met in real life (and fought separate revolutions). But in the film, they're best friends turned tragic enemies turned heroic friends again. As Patrick Williams puts it on Letterboxd, this is "the best movie ever made about fighting colonialism with dance battles and armies of rampaging animals and most of all, friendship."

X is a horror movie featuring some would-be porno filmmakers in rural Texas who fall prey to an elderly pair of killers. Slasher films don't get much better than this: it's a smart, fresh take that came out in 2022 and has already launched a franchise, so far without even bringing anyone back from the dead!



But the most popular palindrome film in America is also the palindromiest one, ***Tenet.*** Far from just having a title that reads forwards and backwards, the movie has whole scenes that read forwards and backwards, as a nameless hero tries to prevent the future from revenging itself on the present. It also includes many references to the Sator Square, a famous Latin palindrome design.

Outside its wordplay appeal, aspects of the movie don't really make sense, and the parts that do make sense are so confusing they make *Inception* look like a bedtime story. But Christopher Nolan is one of the greatest directors of our age, so even his only real misfire is worth a watch.

SCRABBLEGRAMS

David Cohen (notes by T Campbell)

The challenge seems both childishly simple and devilishly hard: ***produce a piece of writing, using only the 100 letter-tiles available in a standard game of Scrabble****—no more and no less. Just as in Scrabble, the two blank tiles can be transformed into any letter. Cohen's first work in the genre was "Out Into Mid-Air," one of the pieces reproduced below, which won a* GAMES *Magazine contest and cranked up the difficulty by also being a comical limerick.*

More recently, Cohen's creations have been lighting up the site formerly known as Twitter via the Dave's Scrabblegrams account at https://twitter.com/dc_scrabblegram. He'll soon be releasing a book of them, Scrabblegrams, *available for preorder at https://penteractpress.com/store/scrabblegrams-david-cohen. In celebration, Dave and I teamed up to pick out the samples below…a breathtaking variety of subjects and approaches, but still only a fraction of his body of work with this wordplay genre.*

AI

First, AI could only answer
a few queries. And next, overnight,
it's like a robot juggernaut
diehard zombie apocalypse movie.

Out Into Mid-Air

A clown jumps above a trapeze,
Arcs over one-eighty degrees,
Out into midair,
Quite unaware
Of his exiting billfold and keys.

Aurora Borealis

View a vortex of crystal green,
jade paired with aquamarine,
a duo emblazoned in October skies,
lifting light upon our eyes.

Chess

Index
Pawn: forward a bit
Knight: a crazy "L" route
Bishop: diagonal
Castle: a side route
Queen: I move freely
King: I move just one

An Hourglass

AN HOURGLASS
D O U B L E J A R
I N V E R T E D,
S A N D B O X
O F T I M E.
A W A V E,
O V E R
N O W,
"U P
I
G O."
H E R
C O G S
Q U A K E
L A Z I L Y.
R O T A T E D
I N F I N I T Y
T I M E P I E C E.

[Note the poem's shape. Also, the underlined title is part of the 100 tiles. --T]

Mona Lisa

A revered work of wonder,
an object of unrivaled popularity,
you exhibit a god's enigmatic gaze,
a quintessential shy smile.

A Spider's Web
I wove a web,
ejected by
a silky quill.
A filamental
ring arose,
extruded for
a zone to hide
or hang a poor
unsuspecting victim.

Breaking Bad
See a chemist and a
delinquent junkie unforgivably
prioritize wealth, ego, power, and
sale of exotic drugs above morality.

Fibonacci Sequence
A golden ratio object had an
oddly zigzag-like infinite spiral, or
a sequence with every next number
a sum of a previous two.

Hamlet's Soliloquy: "To Be or Not to Be"
To be or not?
Valid question.

Life drags on, an agonizing
dream, rarely a joy.

But suicide? What comes
next if I never wake up?

Help!

Martin Luther King's *I Have A Dream* Speech
"I have a dream.

A world based not on color, but equality.
Invoking a mix of justice, hope...
Rising up, energized, we say:

free at last!"

Four Seasons
I enjoy a summer dive at the pool,
faded autumn leaves, hot cider,
a winter hike, a cozy quilt,
a flower box, a robin's egg in spring.

Joker
Joaquin Phoenix plays a
dark, devious, eerie, brutalizing,
severely disturbed rewrite of a
forgotten Gotham maniac clown.

Marie Curie
We gave her not just one,
but *two* Nobel Prizes
for a technique yielding
X-ray films, radioactive
isotope leakage, and radium.

King Solomon
Wise judge?

Even I know that opting for a razor
to slice a baby you claimed to love
is an extreme parenting disqualifier.

Duh!

Lighthouse
Perched on a
quiet promontory,
amid dark waters
surveyed in exile,
was a beacon
just blazing
to give out
a lifeline
of light.

Pandora's Box
A wicked gift box, laid ajar,
my plagues above whiz out too far,
grave consequences unrestrained,
'til in it only Hope remained.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
Self-actualization
Esteem, dignity, worth, value
True belonging
A job, home ownership, privacy
Adequate food, drink, air, sex

Michael Jordan
Michael "Air" Jordan's
quick reflexes defied gravity.
He'd get in a zone, rise above,
tongue was out, ball was up,
poetry in motion.

Haiku
Utilizing fixed
syllable count and order,
seven between fives.

Homage to antique
poetry across Japan:
"word origami."

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy
Dent. A lazy, towel-wielding jerk.
He ferries about the galaxy being
hilarious. Main cover provides
famous quote: DON'T PANIC.

Silence Is Golden
A squeaky wheel,
if too vocal or verbal,
may end up abandoned,
a rigid ring without grease.

Next time, just zip it.
Go for silence.

Venus Flytrap
Inviting you to a private room,
lured with a light bridle tease;
a relaxing pen of seduction,
before my jaws lock and squeeze.

Where's Waldo?
Go look for a bespectacled traveler
wearing a red-white top and jeans,
hiding in a mix of zany rooms,
ubiquitous yet elusive.

The Planets
One: is warm
Two: acid, ozone
Three: liquid water
Four: red clay
Five: a big spot
Six: a ring
Seven: a jokey name
Eight: blue
...and Pluto.

Rhapsody in Blue
Opens with the clarinet,
a glissando cadenza.
Five major melodies,
a work of unique virtuosity
led by exuberant arpeggios.

Titanic
Above, a cruise of luxury,
immortalized in a tragedy,
people in gowns,
then life jackets, drown
overboard in a quiet night sea.

The Far Side
See a wide variety of geeky
cartoons (just individual boxes),
e.g., a bug in little harlequin frames,
an anthropomorphized cow.

The 10x10 Challenge

[Here, Cohen ups the ante by only using ten-letter words. Assembled in the style of the classic game Space Invaders*, they may encourage you to imagine a backstory for it. --T]*



The Moon
(a sonnet using four sets of Scrabble tiles)
O faithful moon in heaven's silver sea,
Our prized eternal geologic bride,
You wax or wane adjusting ocean tide,
Eclipsing pools of dark tranquility.

Next daybreak came with no apology,
Again I wait while you above me hide,
A dim RSVP from back inside
A quiet rendezvous trajectory.

At dusk once more inexorably rise,
Just up above horizon's water edge,
Reflecting in a wave of liquid light.

Expect me in a violet sunset haze.
Abandon me all day, but I won't judge,
Forgive a day's prerequisite for night.

TRANSPOSALRY (PART 1)

Darryl Francis
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Longtime readers of *Word Ways* and *Interim* will know that I like transposals, lots of them. I've previously offered up transposals of the names of chemical elements, countries, capital cities, American cities, drugs, stations on the London Underground (metro) system, and a whole host more.

Now it's time to present some transposals for the names of musical artists and bands. I'm talking about artists and bands which have appeared in any of the Billboard charts—the hot 100, the bubbling-under charts, country charts, and so on. It's easy enough to find transposals of relatively short names - for example, Brenda Lee **(re-enabled),** Ed Sheeran **(enhearsed),** and Tommy Roe **(merotomy).** But I wanted to be more ambitious and go for longer names. I've amassed a large collection of transposals of artist and band names, all with ten letters or more.

Below are forty transposals of the names of artists and bands. There's a brief definition of each transposal, and—to provide a clue as to the artist or band—the title and year of one song which they charted with. It may not have been their first chart appearance or last or biggest. See how many artists and bands you can figure out. The *Billboard* chart dates here vary from as far back as 1935 to right up to date in 2023. The transposals range from a minimum of ten letters up to (even though I say so myself) an impressive 17 letters. Where the solution is a band name, it may or may not be preceded by **the**. I have a further forty transposals destined for a further TJOW article.

Transposal & Definition	**Song title (Year)**
waterfalls as in Niagara, Angel and Victoria	I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter (1935)
man-trained trained by man	That's Amore (1953)
chimley-pots a dialect form of "chimneypots," earthenware pots fitted on top of chimney shafts	Western Movies (1958)
party chief the chief of a party, especially a political party	Theme from "A Summer Place" (1960)
Spoliarium the title of a painting by Filipino painter Juan Luna, painted in 1884	Wonderland by Night (1961)
liberty horses circus horses which perform without riders	Twist and Shout (1962)
love-learned an adjective used in Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion*, an ode to his bride	Wait 'Til My Bobby Gets Home (1963)
alchemister an alchemist, a person who studies or practices alchemy	You've Really Got a Hold on Me (1963)

ashlarings items of masonry constructed of square hewn stones	Leader of the Pack (1964)
East Bethel a city in Anoka County, Minnesota, with a population of 11,786 at the 2020 census	Twist and Shout (1964)
permissions consents	People Get Ready (1965)
to this place hereon; hereto; hereunto	Cool Jerk (1966)
hatcheries establishments in which fish or poultry eggs are hatched in controlled conditions	Sugar Sugar (1969)
oscillates swings backwards and forwards; moves to and fro between two points; vibrates	The Good Times are Coming (1970)
radish tree a shortened form of 'horseradish tree', cultivated in tropical countries for its pod-like capsules, which are eaten fresh or pickled	Birds of a Feather (1971)
passenger list a list of passengers on a ship, plane or some other form of transport	I'll Take You There (1972)
Lake Barcroft a census-designated place in Fairfax County, Virginia, with a population of about 10,000; unsurprisingly, it has a lake	Killing Me Softly with His Song (1973)
narcoleptic lethargic, somnolent; affected with narcolepsy, a sleep disorder	I Shot the Sheriff (1974)
Palermitan a native or inhabitant of the Sicilian town or province of Palermo	Tear the Roof Off the Sucker (1976)
cosmodrome a launching site for spacecraft, typically in countries of the former Soviet Union	Easy (1977)
Tony Pollard an American football running back for the Dallas Cowboys of the National Football League (NFL)—born 1997	Here You Come Again (1978)
angel-water an aqueous extract of various flowers, especially rose and myrtle, used as a perfume or cosmetic	Magnet and Steel (1978)
retrogradely in a backward direction	Without Your Love (1980)
preterm labor labor that begins early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy	Addicted to Love (1986)
lags behind falls behind; trails	When I See You Smile (1989)
Ellenbergia a genus of flowering plants, with only one known species, found in Peru	Make It Like It Was (1990)
inline code computer code that is written into the body of a program, and may	The Power of Love (1993)

refer to code written in the same language or another	
plant-louse a small insect that infests plants	Set U Free (1995)
Owen Island any of various small islands—one in the South Shetland Islands, one in South Australia, and one in the Little Cayman Islands	I Love You Always Forever (1996)
Luis Rechani Agrait a Puerto Rican poet, journalist, and playwright (1902-1994)	What a Girl Wants (1999)
despairably this adverb doesn't appear in even the most unabridged of dictionaries, although the corresponding adjective **despairable** does; even so, an internet search reveals a few examples of **despairably**, such as this one: "such despairably absolute ignorance of all scientific method"	We Danced (2000)
Presbyterians members of the Presbyterian church	Womanizer (2008)
journoleads if you want to find up-to-date journalists who are writing about a particular subject, head over to journoleads.com	Whatcha Say (2009)
interembrace an undefined verb in the *Random House Dictionary*, presumably to mutually embrace	Turn On the Radio (2010)
splenisation the conversion of substance into tissue resembling that of the spleen	Hell on Heels (2011)
madeleines small rich cakes	Next to Me (2013)
Neal Ardley an English professional football manager, currently manager of York City	Young and Beautiful (2013)
Animated Dead *Night of the Animated Dead* is a 2021 American adult animated zombie horror film, an adaptation of the 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*	Die From a Broken Heart (2020)
Maura Harrington an Irish activist, a spokesperson for the Shell to Sea campaign—born 1953	Classic Man (2015)
Mae Harrington a woman who held the title of the world's oldest living person until her death aged 113 years, 343 days (1889-2002)	Made You Look (2023)

NOTABLE WORD LIPOGRAMS

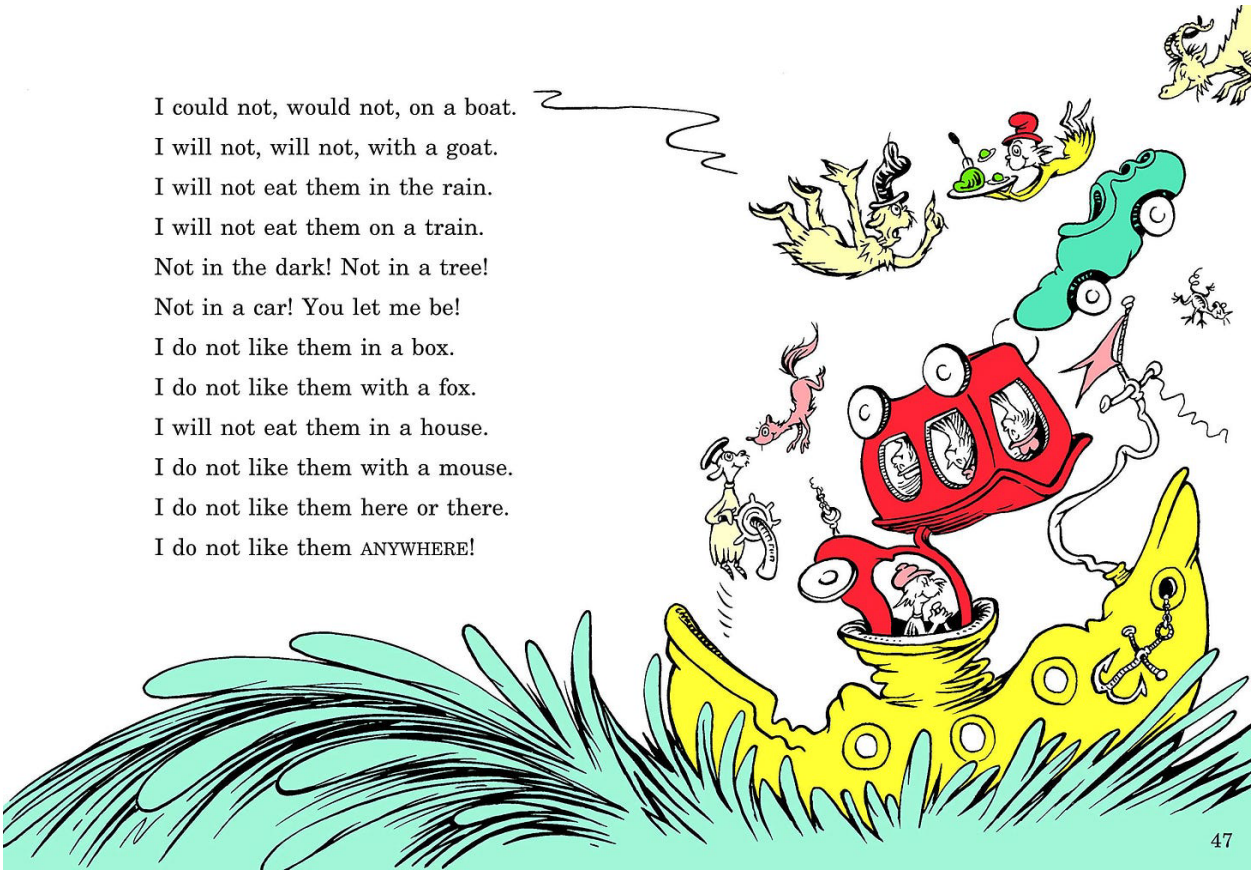
T Campbell

A **lipogram** is a piece of writing that works off an alphabet with pre-set, declared limits. Examples include novels that exclude the letter e and poems that use only the letters in a famous person's name. A **word lipogram** (as mentioned in *The Journal of Wordplay* #1) is a piece of writing that works off a limited *vocabulary.*

Like regular lipograms, word lipograms need to work off pre-set, declared limits to really count. Many ordinary sentences do not contain all twenty-six letters, and no piece of writing includes every word in existence. Some children's books are said to have "limited vocabulary," but those limits are usually vague. They're more based on intuition than on any restrictions you could nail down.

Here are a few more specific constraints.

1. **Seussian: *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss.** You've probably encountered at least one of these books, but you may not know that they were written under outside constraints. *CITH* was written using 236 of the 250 words recommended to Seuss by his publisher (with repetitions allowed, of course). Hearing this, a friend bet Seuss $50 that he couldn't write a book using just 50 words. *Green Eggs and Ham* won Seuss that bet.

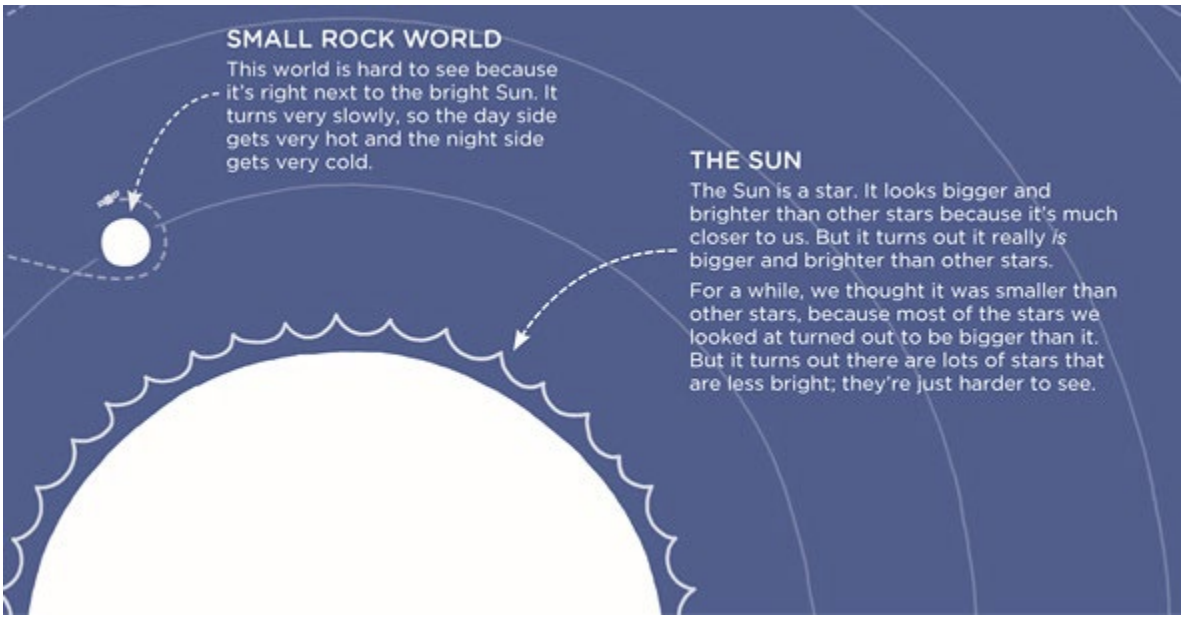


Children's authors have, of course, used even more constrained vocabularies than this, since some kids' books now have no words at all. Seuss, for his part, got less constrained after *Green Eggs and Ham,* and his later books are a lot more willing to just make words up. But it is impressive how *dense Green Eggs and Ham* is able to make its fifty words feel. Even in an adult reading…it's a hearty breakfast.

2. **Basic English: *The Rights of Man* by H.G. Wells and C.K. Ogden.** Ogden was one of the great thinkers on linguistics and spent the back half of his life promoting *Basic English,* a system of 850 English words chosen to do the work of 20,000. Ogden wasn't a promoter of dumbing things down. Rather, he wanted complex ideas to have a better chance of being understood, and not only by children but also by non-native speakers who had limited experience with English.

> In little more than a hundred years a complete change has taken place in the material conditions of existence. Invention and discovery have made it possible for men and news to get so much more quickly round and about the earth that the distances which kept nations and governments separate have almost been overcome. At the same time there has been such a great development of machine-industry, freeing men for work in other directions, that our powers of working with or against one another, and of using, wasting, or increasing the fruits of the earth are on a new scale, and it is hard even to make a comparison with earlier times. All through the past thirty years the rate of this process of change has been increasing and it is now not far from a danger-point.

Time hasn't been kind to Basic English. Controversial in its own day, it hasn't been updated since 1927, which leaves the basic-english.org website unable to describe itself. Most people who say "BASIC ENGLISH" today mean lowercase-b basic, not Ogden's system. While he was alive, though, Ogden found support from sci-fi authors like Robert Heinlein and H.G. Wells. Wells authorized some Basic English versions of his own works: you can read this one here.



3. **The thousand: *Thing Explainer* by Randall Munroe.** Munroe's exercise here is to describe everyday science using a limited vocabulary. That vocabulary? The 1,000 most common English words, as he determined for himself through a variety of sources. Mercury, for instance, is renamed "Small Rock World."

Often, *Thing Explainer*'s explanations are startlingly clear or yield new and interesting insights. Occasionally, they do get labored—but that's part of the tongue-in-cheek humor of the book and can make it more entertaining, not less.

A quick footnote: the "words" of Basic English and *Thing Explainer* are root words. "Explainer" is not on either list, but "explain" is, and "explainer," "explaining," "explains," and "explained" are usable as part of its "family." Probably "explanation/s," too. *Explanations* isn't as fun a title as *Thing Explainer*, though.

4. **Ophelian: *let me tell you* by Paul Griffiths.** Griffiths tells the story of Shakespeare's Ophelia using only the 481 words that are found in her dialogue in the original *Hamlet.* She's given the internal life that she mostly lacks in Shakespeare, and a growing sense of the limitations of her existence that allows her to escape the play's fate.

1.
Let me tell you how it was,
I know I can do this,
I have the powers:
I take them there.
I have the right.

My words may be poor
but they will have to do.
There was a time when I could not do this:
I remember that time.

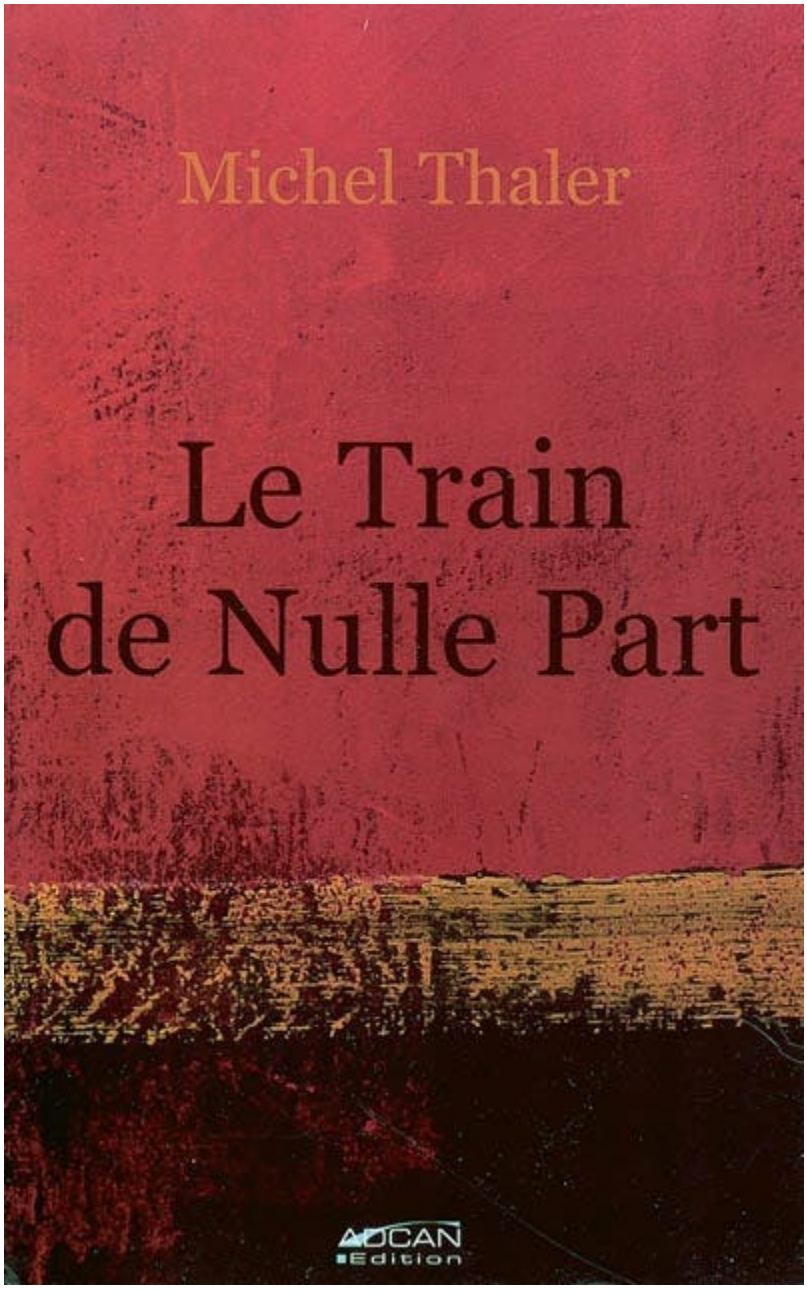
2.
O but memory is not one but many –
a long music we have made
and will make again,
over and over,

with some things we know and some we do not,
some that are true and some we have made up,
some that have stayed from long before,
and some that have come this morning,

Other examples of this kind of "derived vocabulary" include "Their words, for you," an exercise by Oulipian writer Harry Mathews. It uses the words found in just forty-six well-known proverbs.

Also, here's a protest poem using official words about the Witness Protection Program to subvert it. Here's some poetry using words found in selected writings of Virginia Woolf.

5. **Non-verb-al: *The Train from Nowhere* by Michael Thaler.** Thaler's work may be unique: a full-length novel without verbs. It's largely an impressionistic view of a train ride, beginning like this: *What luck! A vacant seat, almost, in that compartment. A provisional stop, why not? So, my new address in this nowhere train: car 12, 3rd compartment from the front. Once again, why not?*



Unfortunately, as far as I can tell, it's not very good. Critics have mentioned a lack of action, which seems to be inevitable in a verb-less book, but the excerpts I could uncover also seemed downright hateful of the speaker's fellow passengers, if not humanity in general.

Now, I can understand feeling a little hate for humanity during a long, cramped train ride. But that doesn't make it an enriching experience to read about. Thaler, you're already testing the reader's patience with this verbless, impressionistic style, and now you're going to insult them too? That's really the road you want to go down?

Also, Thaler seems more than a little disingenuous when he says (italics mine): "The verb *is* like a weed in a field of flowers. You have to *get* rid of it to *allow* the flowers to *grow* and *flourish. Take* away the verbs and the language *speaks* for itself." *Does* it, though? Try reading that passage without the verbs and see how far you get.

I'm not just bringing this up to pick on Thaler, though. I do appreciate how he's proven a verbless book is possible. Perhaps someone else can take that lesson and create one that's more of a gift to the world.

6. **"Nameless": *Whereabouts* by Jhumpa Lahiri.** Lahiri's work, published in English just two years ago, is a book without place names or character names. (More generally, it does allow a *few* proper nouns, such as the names of months.) Lahiri's unnamed narrator walks through an unnamed city. She's lost her sense of purpose and her enthusiasm for her work as a professor, and her one close relationship, with her recently widowed mother, never measures up to what she wants it to be.

Lahiri's language is poetic and powerful. Context clues hint that the narrator is living in Italy, as Lahiri herself did, but in a broader sense, it doesn't matter. Each chapter heading is simple, nonspecific scene-setting—"In the waiting room," "In my head," "In August"—and even as we share some of the narrator's dislocation, we get to know her city as she sees it. It's her only companion, and it's the one that she'll have to abandon if she's to grow.

On the Street

Now and then on the streets of my neighborhood I bump into a man I might have been involved with, maybe shared a life with. He always looks happy to see me. He lives with a friend of mine, and they have two children. Our relationship never goes beyond a longish chat on the sidewalk, a quick coffee together, perhaps a brief stroll in the same direction. He talks excitedly about his projects, he gesticulates, and at times as we're walking our synchronized bodies, already quite close, discreetly overlap.

Once he accompanied me into a lingerie shop because I had to choose a pair of tights to wear under a new skirt. I'd just bought the skirt and I needed the tights for that same evening. Our fingers grazed the textures splayed out on the counter as we sorted through the various colors. The binder of samples was like a book full of flimsy transparent pages. He was totally calm among the bras, the nightgowns, as if he were in a hardware store and not

7. **Length-Based: "Will Rose Pass Cobb?" by Eric Chaikin.** Some word lipograms will only allow words including a certain number of letters. For instance, you could compose a decent short work out of nothing but four-letter words. Chaikin already has, in the defunct (or at least dormant) online publication *Beyond Wordplay.* In this short piece, he reinterprets a key moment in sports history.



Rose sits tied with Cobb

Jack Buck here with ESPN — let's play some ball!

This Reds team, very good ball club — they come into this game with four wins plus just that lone road loss last week.

Pete Rose will face Eric Show. Rose sits tied with Cobb atop MLB's hits list. Just needs that next line shot — he'll hear that nice SLAP, then he'll know. Will Rose pass Cobb this game? Stay with ESPN... (fade) ...

"Just needs" looks to be a typo, but easily correctable to "Just need" or "He'll just need." Similar is "Dun Gin and a Rag Inn," an RPG rulebook made out of one-, two-, and three-letter words, by "dudewithtude." You can find it here.

8. **Beat-Based: The works of Paulose VD.** VD has made a name for himself in India by composing works using only one-syllable words. "Thoughts on the Site of My Old Home" is a 600-line poem, "Elegy Written at Elavor" was a 1202-line poem (title presumably excluded), and *Joy Lost* and *The Lost Home* are full-fledged books, with the latter at 1416 lines of iambic tetrameter. Though based in India, he writes in English. As you can probably guess from the titles, VD's work is thick with nostalgia and regret at the passage of time.

Or so I'm told. I haven't been able to find these works for myself, either online or for purchase. That usually raises my suspicions a bit, but *The Times of India* and the Limca Book of Records are both reliable sources, so I believe the works do exist. If you know anything about where the works can be found, give me a shout.

9. **Alliterative: "Mastermind."** The Real Frii, aka Christopher Elliott, was recognized in 2020 for creating *Mastermind,* a 724-word book with 340 words starting with the letter M.



That's 41.44%, not bad at all, and Record Holders' Republic argues it deserves a world record on that basis. It could be considered a word lipogram, since the non-M words seem to be limited to exclamations and prepositions.

However, I recall a 55-word short story that is *purely* alliterative, Glen Starkey's "Werling." I'm not usually too enthusiastic about fiction where the point is "This guy? He freakin' SUCKS." But something about Starkey's piece makes me smile:

Werling Werner was witless. Without worrying whether wife Wilma was working, Werling wasted wampum willfully. Worthless Werling was workless. When Werling woke wondering what wife Wilma was wanting, we wondered why Werling wanted women. Werling was without wisdom. Women want warmth. Wilma was wet. Werling Werner's weenie was worthless. Wilma went without. Woe was Werling.

There are also longer alliterative passages at the start and end of *Alphabetical Africa,* which uses only A-words in its first chapter, then A- and B-words, then A-, B-, and C-, and so on before reducing its range back down to A-words.

10. ***Never Again* by Doug Nufer.**

In this survey of "limited literature," I've excluded most works that use constrained writing but could theoretically include *any* word (or almost any word). For instance, there's rhopalism, where each word is one letter longer than the previous word, and pilish, where the length of each word maps to the digits of pi. (Pilish does, natually, exclude words that are longer than ten letters, but that's a trivial percentage of the total number of words in the language.)

But I did want to reserve special attention for Doug Nufer's book. It allows the use of any word in the English language—*but each word can only be used once.* Here's how the tale begins, as a gambler decides he'll break with old patterns by making sure to do nothing that he's ever done before:

When the racetrack closed forever I had to get a job. Want ads made wonderlands, founding systems barely imagined. Adventure's imperative ruled nothing could repeat. Redirections dictated rigorously, freely. Go anywhere new: telephone boiler-rooms, midnight grocery shooting galleries, prosthetic limb assembly plants, hazardous waste-removal sites; flower delivery, flour milling, million-dollar bunko schemes. Do anything once; then, best of all, never again.

No more gambling, horseplay, poker. Hyperordered strictures posit antipredictability, perhaps.

"References?" Herr Trollenberg interviews, cocked brow adjusting monocle glinting somber intent.

"Certainly."

The full *Never Again* is out of print, and even the promotional excerpt is an increasingly challenging read. I feel like this one's a noble experiment that is just too challenging, especially as a full-length novel. But I think there are brighter possibilities for variations on the idea. Maybe a book that just never uses the same *noun,* or *verb?*

CHATGPT, COPYWRITING, AND PUNNING—A VERY PRELIMINARY EXPERIMENT

Gregg Siegel

(Note: all ChatGPT generated content is in green.)

Like most writers, I have concerns about artificial intelligence and its much discussed, frequently written about potential to replace our skills.

As an advertising copywriter, I am immediately concerned about how ChatGPT[1]—a commonly accessed AI chatbot-style language generator—could impact my vocation. For sure, anecdotes about ad agencies or companies firing human writers in favor of ChatGPT-generated copy are becoming more and more common.

In addition, I am also intellectually curious and fascinated by ChatGPT's relative abilities around creativity and humor. More specifically, due to my affection for and participation in the world of competitive and performance punning, I am very interested in the chatbot's ability to understand and create puns, creative—usually funny—plays on words. Certainly, the idea that robots and artificial intelligence of all kinds are "logical but not funny" is a trope that goes back to the earliest works of science fiction.

To assuage my curiosity (and fear), a few months ago I decided to try out ChatGPT and put it to the test in both of these areas—at least in a preliminary, anecdotal fashion. I knew little about how to use it skillfully, and just worked intuitively.

Tie one on for size

As an initial experiment, I gave ChatGPT a directive to write copy for an ad on a generic/commodity item—the basics of which most people are familiar with. Simply, I inputted "Give me ad copy to sell my custom made ties," with no other information provided. Its output—provided, literally, in three seconds—began with:

ChatGPT

Certainly! Here's some ad copy to help you sell your custom-made ties:
"Elevate Your Style with Custom-Made Ties! [top hat emoji]
Looking for a tie that's as unique as you are? Discover our exclusive collection of custom-made ties, designed to suit your individual style and preferences. Whether it's a special occasion, a boardroom meeting, or a casual night out, our ties are crafted with precision and care to make you stand out.

This is perfectly acceptable consumer ad copy and would not be totally out of place in most forums. What the copy is lacking, however, is any specifics, the driver of effective persuasion, and could in fact be used to promote anyone's ties to any buyers anywhere, without differentiation.

[1] Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer

Indeed, to its credit, ChatGPT ends its transmission with:

ChatGPT

Remember to tailor the message to your brand's unique selling points and target audience.

And there's the rub, or one of them. ChatGPT cannot do that, at least not initially, and therefore is lacking the ability to impart what makes many ads most persuasive and effective. While using only generalities might squeak by when selling a general consumer item, invoking specifics-driven benefits are even more important in my personal niche of business-to-business copywriting, which tends to be very technical and unique—indeed, proprietary—to the company. ChatGPT cannot know,[2] for example, what a company subject matter expert knows on a topic, it just knows "what's out there." Worse, when it doesn't know something, it reportedly sometimes tends to just make stuff up and stick it in there anyway, which the user has to be savvy enough to identify and remove or suffer the consequences.

For example, if one were writing a brochure comparing the attributes of polyester to nylon, ChatGPT might, theoretically, do an okay job in providing some encyclopedia-level text.[3] Of course, that's not what a copywriter is likely to be doing. A more typical assignment might be comparing (or, actually, *championing)* Company XYZ's *specific* brand of polyester vs. nylon, and, of course, that it is not something ChatGPT could possibly have any clue about. The copywriter would have to interview the subject matter experts within the company to get the details that would be the ultimate background for the copy.[4]

Glutton for *pun*ishment

With ChatGPT's abilities around copywriting as a backdrop, let's try looking at its abilities around punning, a different kind of writing effort that often adds in even stronger elements of cleverness, invention, and especially humor—by most reports, something that ChatGPT—and AI in general—lacks the ability to create or even discern.

For the record, a pun is loosely defined as "a joke exploiting the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings."

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[2] As I understand it, ChatGPT was reportedly trained on a large corpus of text data collected from various sources on the Internet, although specifics seem to be somewhat guarded. Also, this extensive data sweep seems to have ended in 2021. So, compared to a search engine like Google, which is constantly scanning the environment, ChatGPT's information store is less current, but, of course, it has the demonstrated ability to work with the information intelligently, rather than merely quote it. Both of course, are limited to working with only what is available to them on the internet.

[3] Actually, when I prompted it in this regard, it still presented a number of technical details within its general discussion that I knew to be misleading or just plain wrong.

[4] Could ChatGPT write more effective copy if provided with extensive, specific, proprietary information? Most likely. Could it one day actually conduct expert interviews itself? I don't know, probably. Leave me alone. I'm hiding under the bed.

In performance punning, participants are given a topic and charged with punning on words that fit that category—cities, sports, body parts, celebrities, etc. For this experiment, I elected to try "countries"—a topic where the cues (i.e. country names) in the category are fairly plentiful but also known and specific so as to be unlikely to stray into the esoteric; multisyllabic for potentially juicy and diverse word deconstruction; and familiar to most listeners so they can quickly "get" the puns being presented.

For the record, original, quality country puns, as would likely be presented in popular performance punning events such as the O. Henry Pun-Off, The PUNDERDOME® or PUN DMV, might include:

- You know who's a great punner? USA great punner!
- You have a higher score—that's the way ITALYs up.
- Shopkeep, a CANADA best baked beans please.
- This TUNIS becoming quite an earworm
- Where would I like to go in Europe? The country that Paris is in, F'RANCEtance.
- I thought you were kidding—you were SYRIAs about that?

Note also that, in most pun events, it is de rigueur that the puns are constructed from the specific words in the topic—in this case, primarily the names of the countries, as in these examples—and are not puns on merely related words, or puns on unrelated words surrounded by a related theme.

Country cousins

I began with what I believed to be a simple and direct request to ChatGPT: "give me a bunch of country puns." The chatbot's response was unexpected:

ChatGPT

Sure, here are some country puns for you:

1. Did you hear about the farmer who won an award? He was out standing in his field.
2. Why did the scarecrow win an award? Because he was outstanding in his field.
3. What do you call a country musician who can't sing and dance? A bad line dancer.
4. Why don't cowboys take showers? They prefer to use their lasso.
5. Why did the cowboy buy a dachshund? He wanted to get a long little doggy.
6. Why did the tomato turn red? Because it saw the salad dressing.
7. Why did the farmer install a bell in his field? Because he wanted to have a cowbell concert.
8. Why did the chicken cross the playground? To get to the other slide.
9. Why did the farmer build a fence around his cow? Because he wanted to steer it in the right direction.
10. What do you call a group of cows playing instruments? A moo-sical band.

I hope these puns make you chuckle!

The obvious observation is that ChatGPT understood my use of the word "country" in its "rural" meaning as opposed to its "nation" meaning and provided output with themes related to the bucolic.

I include this initial misstep so that we can look at these puns provided as an additional means of comparison, and also to show that getting the chatbot to understand what you want can be an iterative and sometimes frustrating process. Its culture is different, and, like any "foreign speaker," its ability to understand and translate the idioms or expressions that native speakers use automatically without thinking is often limited. For example, in a later effort, I asked a different AI tool to "make up some jokes," and the results were unexpectedly imbued with references to cosmetics.

Indeed, there is a skill that one can develop—one that is quickly becoming an in-demand and lucrative professional title—called "prompt engineering," which specializes in effectively crafting AI requests to get the most effective and desired results.

Although very early in my prompt engineering career, I worked to modify my request to be, hopefully, more effective. Turning the operative word into a more specific noun rather than an ambiguous adjective, I inputted "give me a few puns on countries."

ChatGPT

Sure, here are some puns on countries:

1. I tried to make a joke about China, but it's over my Great Wall of humor.
2. I'm reading a book about anti-gravity, it's impossible to put down. It's like Hungary for more.
3. Why don't scientists trust atoms from Italy? Because they make up everything.
4. I used to play piano by ear in Scotland. It was a grand piano.
5. Why did the Greek restaurant stop serving gyros? Because they couldn't meat demand.
6. I asked my friend from Russia how many pairs of shoes she owned. She said, "I'm not Tsar of my closet."
7. I tried to make a joke about Australia, but it didn't land Down Under.
8. Did you hear about the Italian chef who died? He pasta way.
9. I was going to tell a joke about Germany, but it's a little Nazi.
10. Why do Norwegians put barcodes on their ships? So they can Scandinavian.

I hope these puns brighten up your day!

This time, the word country was understood as I meant it. However, as you can see, in a number of cases, ChatGPT took puns, or pun-adjacent jokes, and appended countries to them, often for no reason, to fulfill its "country" mandate. For example, in #3, "Why don't scientists trust atoms from Italy? Because they make up everything," there doesn't seem to be any reason to invoke Italy. The old, many-times-told pun works fine as "Why don't scientists trust atoms? Because

they make up everything," with the pun on alternate uses of the phrase "make up" (neither of them cosmetics).

Similar is #2, "I'm reading a book about anti-gravity, it's impossible to put down. It's like Hungary for more." Again, the first sentence is a well-known pun—or pun-adjacent—joke that has been told untold numbers of times for decades and is certainly not original. Why the second sentence, "It's like Hungary for more," was appended is a mystery. Ironically, that sentence constitutes the ONLY legitimate pun on an actual country name in the whole grouping, although punning "hungry" for "Hungary" is about as cliché and overused a country pun as one might find.

A subset of these results are the familiar pun jokes where the country is unnecessarily appended but is at least thematically appropriate. For example, #8: "Did you hear about the Italian chef who died? He pasta way," has no need to invoke Italy either, with the pun being on pasta and "passed a(way)," but pasta and Italy are thematically linked, providing at least a vague reason for its appending. Similar for more unfortunate reasons is #9, "I was going to tell a joke about Germany, but it's a little Nazi (nasty)." And, perhaps arguably, somewhere in the middle is #10, "Why do Norwegians put barcodes on their ships? So they can Scandinavian." The pun, "scan the navy in," while a fine, if non-original pun, is a deconstruction of a word describing a group of countries, rather than a single country, and might not be allowed in a formal pun competition. I would also add that a better construction of the setup, in pun competition terms, would be to say "people from Norway" rather than "Norwegians," so at least the literal name of a country is somewhere included.

The #5, "Why did the Greek restaurant stop serving gyros? Because they couldn't meat demand," is a perfectly fine, if overused, pun on meet/meat, but that cue is likewise not inherently related to a country. ChatGPT throws in "Greek" ("Greece" would be better of course) and "gyros" in an attempt to fulfill its country mandate.

In the #7, "I tried to make a joke about Australia, but it didn't land Down Under" the pun seems to be on the word "land" meaning both "understood by an audience" and "a nation," and is further appended to the phrase "Land Down Under" as a nickname for Australia. If I was to rewrite that joke for a standup, I might say "I was trying to write a joke that would make people in Australia laugh. But, unfortunately, it didn't *Land Down Under*." Still a bit awkward, but it now flows logically, although still no pun on an actual country name.

So, based on this isolated example, it seems clear that ChatGPT "knows" what a pun is, and although it doesn't seem to be creating anything new, or even presenting them exactly as requested, it is able to select puns from its vast data store of text and present and somewhat strive to adapt them to the request on demand.

Of note, there seems to be some anecdotal suggestions in the tech press—perhaps supported by preliminary research—that ChatGPT has "memorized" some number of phrases it has been told are classic jokes or puns, and sticks them in, perhaps arbitrarily, where it believes a pun is called for. The "outstanding in the field" pun I have seen cited in this way, and, indeed, it is presented twice in that preliminary rural "country" outing with varying effectiveness. My guess is that the "Hungary" pun might be a similar situation.

That said, at least three of the ten provided don't seem to make sense as puns, jokes, or even completely logical comments: #1, "I tried to make a joke about China, but it's over my Great Wall of humor"; #6, "I asked my friend from Russia how many pairs of shoes she owned. She said, 'I'm not Tsar of my closet'"; and #4, "I used to play piano by ear in Scotland. It was a grand piano." Certainly, there is content related to the invoked country in each (I'm guessing that the intimation in #4 is that some Scottish people may colloquially say "grand," meaning "excellent?") but otherwise these items seem to be fairly straight statements.

Live and learn

A number of months after these experiments, while writing this article, I decided to try to further refine the "puns on countries" request to see if it might lead to better results. I inputted "give me a few puns on countries where the pun deconstructs the name of the country," which seems like a more detailed request likely to get better puns.

ChatGPT

Sure, here are some country puns that deconstruct the names of the countries:

1. If you visit Egypt, don't be surprised if things get a little "pyrami-dramatic."
2. Australia is a "koala-fied" choice for a vacation.
3. Don't "Rome" too much when you're in Italy; there's so much to see!
4. When you visit Greece, it's only natural to have a "myth-understanding" of the history.
5. Russia's a place where you can always find some "Rus-sian" around.
6. When you're in Turkey, you'll "gobble" up the delicious food.
7. Traveling through Switzerland can be a "Swiss-take" adventure.
8. In Finland, you'll find the people are "Finn-omenal."
9. Norway is the place where things tend to "Norse"-ly happen.
10. In France, you'll have to "wine" down and relax.

I hope these puns add a bit of humor to your day!

My understanding is that in the interim there has been a newer generation of the ChatGPT engine released, and indeed the puns themselves seem stronger and seem to be more directly connected to the named country. However, some of the same mistakes are evident. It *still did not* pun on the country itself even though it said it would, with the puns still mostly just on related terms. #5 and #8 are the closest and could be turned into true country puns with a little work. And again, some of the items make little or no sense at all.

Of course, one could continue refining, perhaps giving ChatGPT specific examples of puns you like and don't like. Reportedly, on projects far more complex than this, users might go through dozens or hundreds of continually fine-tuned prompts, and input dozens or hundreds of pages of background documents for ChatGPT's edification. This seems a little beyond the parameters of this experiment. But it was eye-opening as to the possibilities.

As for me, for the foreseeable future, I plan to continue to write puns and copy—and everything else—using "I" rather than AI. It seems like a lot less effort. A lot less frustration. And a lot more fun.

A FURTHER SYSTEMS THEORY OF WORDPLAY

T Campbell

My attempts to map wordplay continue! Acknowledgments to Wikipedia and Chris Cole.

There were several issues with expanding my schema from the outline laid out last issue. I gnashed my teeth about the fact that my visual-phonetic-semantic schema had no spot for what we consider the simplest form of wordplay—puns. Or rather, too many spots for them.

Puns can be visual, relying on heteronyms (or homographs) like so: "The would-be conqueror ended up 'ruling' nothing but wastelands—he had gotten his just deserts." Some are phonetic, homophonic: "Look! It's the werewolf wizard, Hairy Potter!" Or they can play off shades of meaning in words that sound and look the same: "You call me a MAD scientist? Why, I'm FURIOUS!" Near misses can also be puns: "To animated gas salesman Hank Hill, his work is both sacred and propane." Is that a visual or phonetic pun? Hard to say.

In other words, puns cannot be confined to one part of this schema: they run all the way through it. After reflection, though, that feels correct to me. "Pun" is too general a term to work with the kind of classification we're going for here.

When does playful language become just…language? I had to ask myself this when getting into zeugma and grammatical syllepsis. What do those terms mean? In general, they mean one phrase or word with more than one interaction in a sentence.

These can be straightforward, as in "He sipped, then drank, then drained the drink," where "he" and "drink" interact with three verbs. Or they can be playful, as in "I held my nose and temper," where "I held" interacts with two nouns, with one use of "held" staying literal and the other entering a figure of speech.

There are overlapping definitions of the terms, but the playful uses of this concept are thought of as zeugma. So it got placed in the updated schema, whereas grammatical syllepsis did not. Other "edge cases" like this also called for thought.

And then there were different kinds of playing, different contexts of play. There are differences between how puzzlers play, how poets play, and how fiction writers play. Puzzle answers need more unwritten rules than poetry, because an answer has to be guessable and gettable. Poetic language is freer to be expressive, but only a fiction writer can create a brand-new language like Klingon.

Finally, my distinction between "visual" and "phonetic" styles of wordplay could lead to issues when the main oddity was a discrepancy between the two, as in silent letters. In those cases, I tended to follow the language of other subcategories, but those strike me as parts of the schema most likely to change.

I still wouldn't call the system on the following pages "complete and final." But at 255 categories to the original's 61, it's a big step forward. Here's what we have so far:

I. Visual
    a. Alphabetic
        i. Anagrams, Transpositions
            1. Reversals, Semordnilaps
            2. Blanagrams
            3. Jumbles
            4. Transaddition
            5. Transdeletion
            6. Transubstitution
        ii. Letter-Patterns
            1. Palindromes
            2. Letter Clusters
                a. Doubles
                b. Triples
                c. Quadruples
                d. Alternating Letters (Every Second, Third, Fourth)
                e. Five-Vowel
                f. Six/Seven-Consonant
                g. Consecutive Alphabetic
                h. Reverse Alphabetic
            3. Repeaters
                a. Tautonyms
                b. Head-N-Tail
                c. Start And End
            4. Neckouts
                a. Triple, Quadruple Neckouts
            5. Pyramid Words
            6. Isograms
            7. Cryptograms
            8. Natural Ambigrams
            9. Ordered Words
                a. Alphabetic
                b. Reverse Alphabetic
                c. Rollercoaster, Alternating
            10. Letter Math
                a. Sums
                b. Products
        iii. Letter Requirements
            1. Letterbanks, Lipograms
                a. Monovocalics, Univocalics
                b. Euryvocalics

        i. Ordered
    c. Supervocalics
        i. Ordered
    d. Type
        i. All Vowels
        ii. All Consonants
        iii. Hexadecimals
        iv. Roman Numerals
        v. Chemical Symbols
        vi. Postal Codes
        vii. Piano Notes
        viii. Morse Pattern
            1. Dots
            2. Dashes
            3. Consistent Combo
        ix. Keypad Pattern
            1. All Keys
            2. Odd
            3. Even
        x. Lowercase
            1. Short
            2. Tall
    e. Half The Alphabet
        i. First Half
        ii. Last Half
    f. Typewriter
        i. First Row
        ii. Second Row
        iii. Left Hand
        iv. Right Hand
2. Letter Musts
    a. Pangrams
    b. Nested Words
    c. Kangaroo Words
        i. Evenly Spaced
    d. Nested Anagrams
    e. Chronograms
3. Initialisms
    a. Acronyms
        i. Backronyms
        ii. Replacement Backronyms

- iii. Recursive Acronyms
- iv. RAS Syndrome

- b. Acrostics
  - i. Proper Acrostics
  - ii. Mesostics
  - iii. End-Acrostics
- c. Tautogram

- iv. Alchemies
  1. Additions
     - a. Of Single Letter
     - b. Of Multiple Cases Of A Single Letter
     - c. Of String
  2. Subtractions
     - a. Of Single Letter
     - b. Of Multiple Cases Of A Single Letter
     - c. Of String
  3. Changes
     - a. Of Single Letter
     - b. Of Multiple Cases Of A Single Letter
     - c. Of String
     - d. Consonyms
  4. Caesar Shift
  5. Letter Shift
     - a. Rot-13
- v. Charades
  1. Snowball, Rhopalic
  2. Reverse Snowball, Reverse Rhopalic
  3. Square Word
  4. Logogram
- vi. Guessing Games
  1. Hangman
  2. Jotto
  3. Wordle
  4. Ghost

b. Image-Specific
- i. Logo Designs
- ii. Ambigrams
- iii. Kinetic Typography
- iv. Image-For-Word
  1. Rebus
  2. Gramogram

3. **Emoji**

c. **Matrix**
   i. **Crosswords**
      1. **Cryptic Crosswords**
      2. **Snake Charmers**
      3. **Spirals**
      4. **Word Squares**
      5. **Scrabble**
   ii. **Word Searches**
      1. **Boggle**
   iii. **Ambiguous Word Arrangements**

II. **Phonetic**

a. **Similar Sounds**
   i. **Homophones**
      1. **Mondegreens**
      2. **Oronyms**
      3. **Gramograms**
      4. **Near-Matches**
   ii. **Rhymes**
      1. **Holorimes**
   iii. **Alliteration**
      1. **Tautogram**
   iv. **Assonance**
   v. **Consonance**
   vi. **Ear Anagrams**
      1. **Ear Reversals**
   vii. **Ear Palindromes**

b. **Unexpectedly Different Sounds**
   i. **Heteronyms**
   ii. **Eye Rhymes**
   iii. **Silent Letters, Ghost Letters**

c. **Onomatopoeia**

d. **Tmesis**

e. **Rhythm**
   i. **Meter**
   ii. **Syllabic Constraints**
      1. **English Haiku**

f. **Alchemies**
   i. **Additions**
      1. **Of Single Sound**
      2. **Of Multiple Cases Of The Same Sound**

a. Ubbi Dubbi

3. Of Syllables

ii. Subtractions

1. Of Single Sound

2. Of Multiple Cases Of The Same Sound

3. Of Syllables

iii. Changes

1. Of Single Sound

2. Of Multiple Cases Of The Same Sound

3. Of Syllables

a. Pig Latin

b. Dog Latin

III. Semantic

a. Word-Level

i. Homonyms

ii. Polysemes

iii. Capitonyms

iv. "False Friends"

1. False Cognates

2. False Comparatives

3. False Part-of-Speech Changes

v. Contradictions

1. Contronyms, Auto-Antonyms

2. Oxymoron

3. False Antonyms, Pseudantonyms

vi. Word Origins

1. Anglish

2. Loanwords

3. Fossils

4. Metanalysis, Affix-Clipping, Folk Etymology

5. Trade-Name Origins

6. Doublet

vii. Neologism

1. Phono-Semantic Matching

2. Portmanteau

3. Retronym

4. Part-Of-Speech Conversion

a. Verbification, Verbing

b. Nounification, Deverbal Noun

c. Adjectivication

viii. Irregularities

1. Unusual Plurals
2. Unusual Past Tenses
3. Unusual Spellings

ix. Naming
1. Ananym
2. Aptronym
3. Charactonym
4. Eponym
5. Pseudonym
6. Sobriquet

x. Double Meaning
1. Tone-Based
a. Double Entendre
b. Euphemism
i. Algospeak
ii. Doublespeak
iii. By Pronunciation
iv. Understatement
v. By Substitution
vi. By Metaphor
vii. By Obscure Or Foreign Words
viii. Periphrasis, Circumlocution
c. Dysphemism
2. Meaning-Based
a. Synecdoche
b. Epithet

b. Sentence-Level
i. Homophonic Translation
ii. Autograms
iii. Malapropism
iv. Zeugma
1. Diazeugma
2. Hypozeugma
3. Prozeugma
4. Mesozeugma
v. Paraprosdokian

c. Essay-Level
i. Broken English
1. Chinglish
2. Engrish
3. Spanglish

        4. **Franglais**
    ii. **Conlang**
    iii. **Non Sequitur**
d. **Style**
    i. **Irony, Sarcasm**
    ii. **Stylistic Imitation**
        1. **Bushism**
        2. **Trumpism**
        3. **Shakespeareanism**

In future editions, I'll provide definitions for any of these terms that are not widely used, and integrating more work from earlier *Word Ways* authors and other systematizers.

In the meantime, feel free to write in at tcampbell1000@gmail.com and let me know what I missed.

Work in progress!

ANSWERS

Transposalry

Transposal	Artist / Band		Transposal	Artist / Band
waterfalls	Fats Waller		Tony Pollard	Dolly Parton
man-trained	Dean Martin		angel-water	Walter Egan
chimley-pots	The Olympics		retrogradely	Roger Daltrey
party chief	Percy Faith		preterm labor	Robert Palmer
Spoliarium	Louis Prima		lags behind	Bad English
liberty horses	Isley Brothers		Ellenbergia	Regina Belle
love-learned	Darlene Love		inline code	Celine Dion
alchemister	The Miracles		plant-louse	Planet Soul
ashlarings	Shangri-Las		Owen Island	Donna Lewis
East Bethel	The Beatles		Luis Rechani Agrait	Christina Aguilera
permissions	Impressions		despairably	Brad Paisley
to this place	The Capitols		Presbyterians	Britney Spears
hatcheries	The Archies		journoleads	Jason Derulo
oscillates	Cass Elliot		interembrace	Reba McEntire
radish tree	The Raiders		splenisation	Pistol Annies
passenger list	Staple Singers		madeleines	Emeli Sandé
Lake Barcroft	Roberta Flack		Neal Ardley	Lana del Rey
narcoleptic	Eric Clapton		Animated Dead	Maddie and Tae
Palermitan	Parliament		Maura Harrington	Roman GianArthur
cosmodrome	Commodores		Mae Harrington	Meghan Trainor

