

**Sudoku** Mild No 14,919

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

**Difficult** No 14,920

**Fiendish** No 14,921

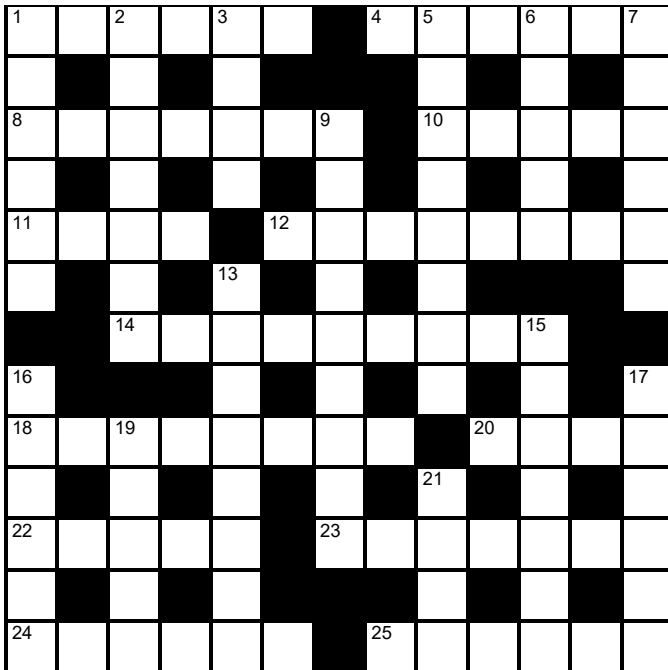
			1	7	3			
5		8				3		6
9		1				8		7
	7		9		4		1	
	9	4		8		6	3	
	6		3		7		8	
1				6				5

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

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The Times Quick Cryptic No 2678 by Teazel



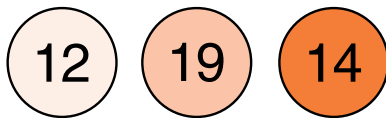
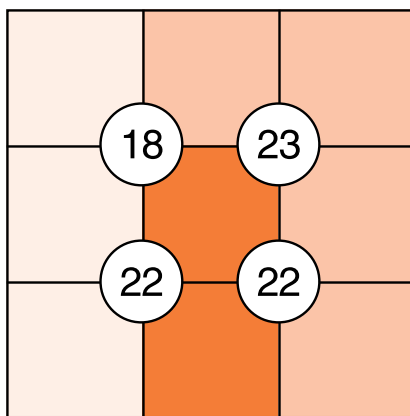
Across

- 1 This is how spies left informal gathering (6)
- 4 Peer is said to be childless (6)
- 8 Undemanding hilltop not very high (7)
- 10 An argument about River Dart (5)
- 11 Take side off piece of furniture to make it fit (4)
- 12 One that forgives a tale-teller (8)
- 14 Believer is quiet and strangely hesitant (9)
- 18 Spotted insect and hen, may one say? (8)
- 20 Mince remains hot to start with (4)
- 22 A friend from America returning by one Muslim country (5)
- 23 Where Dad can swim with ease? (4,3)
- 24 Foolish time to put identifying mark into deer (6)
- 25 Heat of battle at mountain height (6)

Down

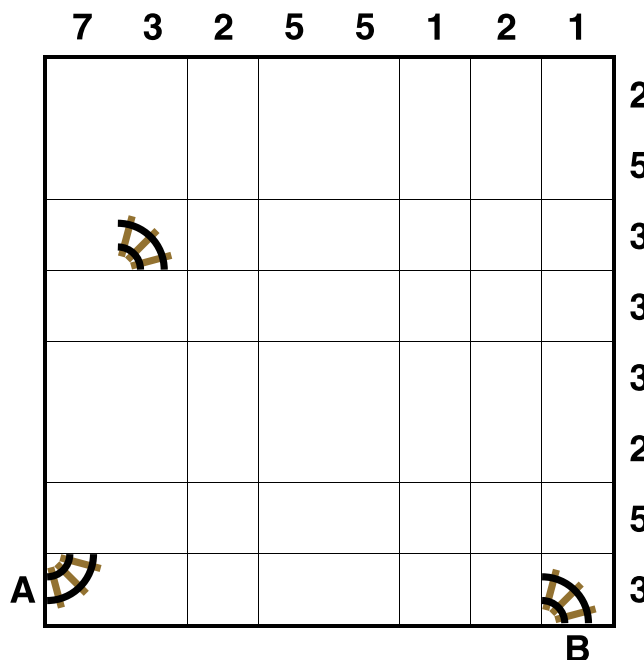
- 1 A little insult angers sovereign (6)
- 2 Primrose in part of animal's mouth (7)
- 3 With gold, artist creates special atmosphere (4)
- 5 Scotsman unfortunately died before broadcast (8)
- 6 Engineers manage a repeat broadcast (5)
- 7 Fresh flood defence for Notts town (6)
- 9 Suffered from exposure, but survived (9)
- 13 Assisting girl with jewellery (8)
- 15 Time to pay for freedom in the bar (7)
- 16 With a cutting edge, youth pierces couch (6)
- 17 Covering small area of unproductive land (6)
- 19 Ledger entry's extremely defective part (5)
- 21 Leaving word poor quality stuff is at start of auction (2-2)

Suko No 4118



Place the numbers 1 to 9 in the spaces so that the number in each circle is equal to the sum of the four surrounding spaces, and each colour total is correct

Train Tracks No 2247



Lay tracks to enable the train to travel from village A to village B. The numbers indicate how many sections of track go in each row and column. There are only straight sections and curved sections. The track cannot cross itself.

Word watch

David Parfitt

Derny

- a A unit of fabric thickness
- b A pacemaker's vehicle in track cycling
- c Habitually coming last

Dyslogistic

- a Conveying censure
- b Breaking apart easily
- c Explained with counterexamples

Jequiry

- a The act of questioning oneself
- b A substitute for liquorice
- c Legal impartiality

**Backgammon** Chris Bray

**The learning curve**

How long does it take to become a very good backgammon player? Go back 40 years and the answer would have been something like ten years. Nowadays that figure is something closer to two years.

First, we must define what very good means, and we can do that using Performance Ratings as calculated by modern computer programs. A PR of under 7.5 will give you a rating of expert. A PR from 2.5 to 5.0 will rate you as world class, and under 2.5 gives you a world champion classification.

A few players, such as Hideaki Ueda of Japan and the UK's Oliver Squire and Reece Hodges, attained PRs of under 4 in two years, but they are the exceptions, not the rule. For my stronger students I give them a target of reaching a PR of 5.5 and don't usually set a time limit.

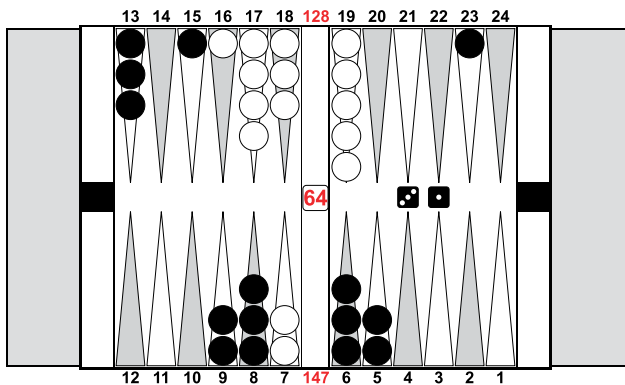
The reason the learning curve has accelerated so much since 1990 is the advent of the internet and neural net computer programs. In the past we might have thought that we knew what the

best move was in any given position but, in fact, we were often way off the mark. Nowadays we can be sure of the best move and thus we don't waste time learning bad habits.

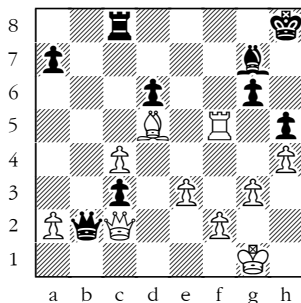
Look at this week's position where Black has a 31 to play. In the 1980s book from which it was taken, Black moved 15/12, 13/12, and the only comment made was that the play was obvious. With the benefit of XG analysis, we learn that the best move is actually 23/22, 15/12. Why is that the case?

Black wants to escape his rear checker so stepping up is very logical. 15/12 looks risky but the only five that White will hit with on her next turn is double fives. With all the other fives, she will play in her home board. Thus, XG teaches us that preparing to escape is more important than making the new point, and when we see a similar position in the future, we can apply that principle in our decision-making.

The certainty that this type of teaching provides enables us to make rapid progress towards those lower PR numbers.



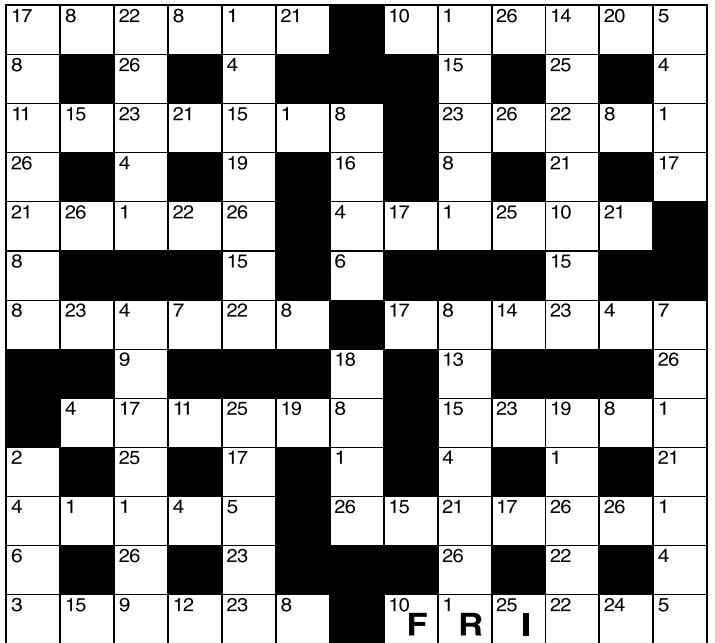
**Winning Move**



**White to play.** This position is from Akhilbay-Jarocka, Titled Tuesday, chess.com 2024.

Positions with opposite-coloured bishops can be hard to judge. The total lack of engagement between the two pieces often signifies that a draw is likely. However, when one side is attacking it can almost seem as though they have an extra piece. This is a spectacular example. How did White break through?

**Codeword** No 5217



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

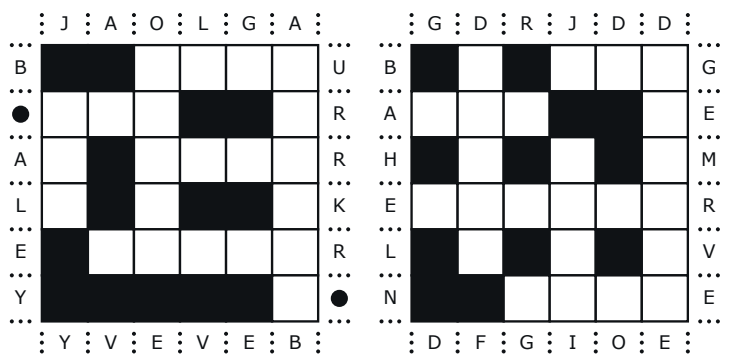
1	R	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	F	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	I	26	

Every letter in this crossword-style grid is represented by a number from 1 to 26. Each letter of the alphabet appears in the grid at least once. Use the letters already provided to work out the identity of further letters. Enter letters in the main grid and the smaller reference grid until all 26 letters of the alphabet have been accounted for. Proper nouns are excluded. *Yesterday's solution, right*

**Cluelines** Stuck on Codeword? To receive 4 random clues call 0901 293 6262 or text TIMECODE to 64343. Calls cost £1 plus your telephone company's network access charge. Texts cost £1 plus your standard network charge. For the full solution call 0905 757 0142. Calls cost £1 per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm).

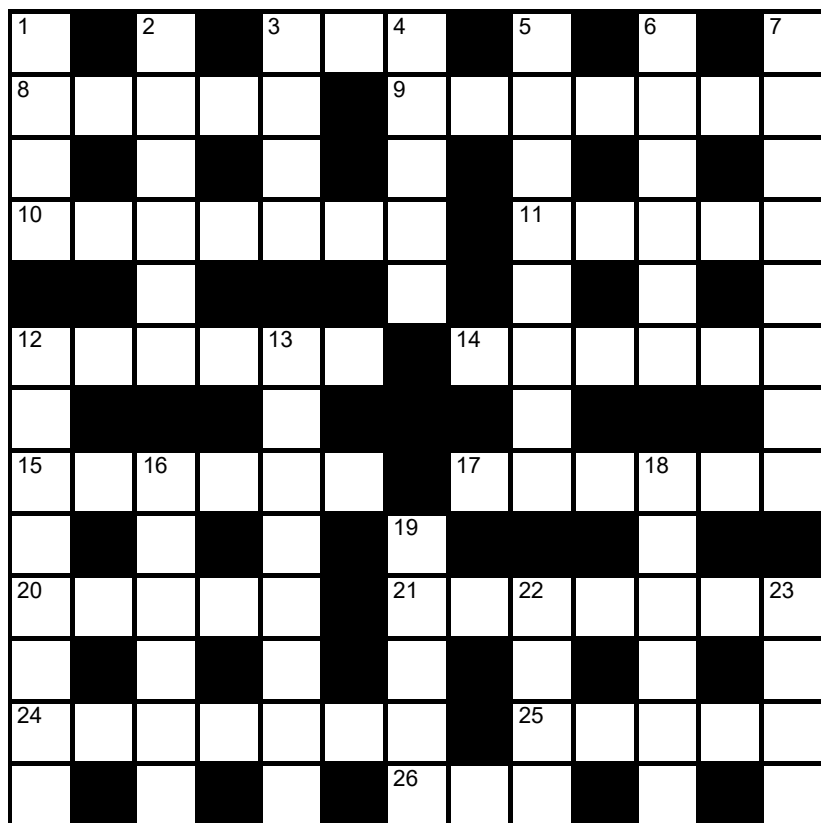
**Lexica** Easy No 7415

Hard No 7416



Slide the letters either horizontally or vertically back into the grid to produce a completed crossword. Letters are allowed to slide over other letters

times2 Crossword No 9533



**Across**

- 3 Bunch of banknotes, eg (3)
- 8 Wear away (5)
- 9 Defer, put off for later (7)
- 10 Set of DIY implements (7)
- 11 Spree (5)
- 12 Having a memorable tune (6)
- 14 Oesophagus (6)
- 15 Walking with long strides (6)

17 Prejudiced (6)

- 20 Hot water vapour (5)
- 21 Grave, solemn (7)
- 24 Condense (text) (7)
- 25 Tiptop, excellent (*U, not A*) (5)
- 26 Fish spawn (3)

**Down**

- 1 Religious faction (4)
- 2 Joint presenter (2-4)
- 3 Feeble (4)
- 4 Pub sport (5)
- 5 Nation of eastern Africa (8)
- 6 Aid for pouring liquid (6)
- 7 Consumed (food) (8)
- 12 Gargantuan (8)
- 13 Created using manual craft skills (8)
- 16 Verse writings (6)
- 18 Eerie, spine-tingling (6)
- 19 Michaelmas daisy (5)
- 22 Ready for eating (4)
- 23 Photograph; card game (4)

**Solution to Crossword 9532**



**Need help with today's puzzle?** Call 0905 757 0143 to check the answers. Calls cost £1 per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm).

**KenKen** Difficult No 6209

2÷	24×		90×	2-	
				6+	
2÷	3-		6+		14+
	15+				
24×		4-	1-		
7+			3-		

All the digits 1 to 6 must appear in every row and column. In each thick-line "block", the target number in the top left-hand corner is calculated from the digits in all the cells in the block, using the operation indicated by the symbol.

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**Futoshiki** No 4757

				4
		∨		
			3	
∧				
	<	<		
			∧	∧
			<	

Fill the blank squares so that every row and column contains each of the numbers 1 to 5 once only. The symbols between the squares indicate whether a number is larger (>) or smaller (<) than the number next to it.

**Kakuro** No 3716

			38	21			24	4	29	7
	4	6	3		3		11			
22							10			
								4		
37								32		
	16	30	4		26					5
24				13			17			
				17			21			
23				26			11			
	29					4			17	16
4			32			4				
			4							
14					24					
11						11				

Fill the grid using the numbers 1 to 9 only. The numbers in each horizontal or vertical run of white squares add up to the total in the triangle to its left or above it. The same number may occur more than once in a row or column, but not within the same run of white squares.

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**Quintagram®**

Solve all five cryptic clues using each letter underneath once only

1 Poet has residence by river (5)

— — — — —

2 Instrument from India encased in lead (5)

— — — — —

3 Rock's location in Colorado (7)

— — — — —

4 City, British, first linked to Circle Line (7)

— — — — —

5 Longs to nurse poorly Greek hero (8)

— — — — —

A	A	B	B	C	D	E	E
E	H	H	I	I	I	L	L
L	L	M	O	O	O	R	R
R	R	S	S	S	T	T	U

**Brain Trainer**

<b>EASY</b>	6	+5	x3	+11	x2	-14	50% OF IT	+8	x2	70% OF IT	ANSWER	
<b>MEDIUM</b>	74	x4	+76	+1/4 OF IT	-94	x2	50% OF IT	+89	30% OF IT	+99	ANSWER	
<b>HARDER</b>	138	x3	+974	+1/2 OF IT	x3	-876	70% OF IT	+863	+1/2 OF IT	-198	ANSWER	

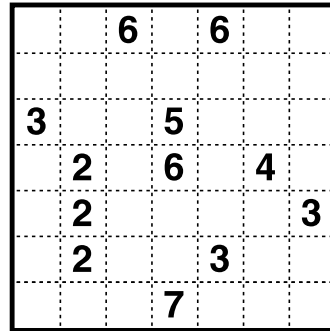
**Polygon**



From these letters, make words of **four** or more letters, always including the central letter. Answers must be in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, excluding capitalised words, plurals, conjugated verbs (past tense etc), adverbs ending in LY, comparatives and superlatives.  
**How you rate** 10 words, average: 14, good; 18, very good; 22, excellent

**Yesterday's answers**  
 bide, bier, bile, bird, birl, biro, bode, boer, boil, boiler, bold, bole, bolide, bore, bored, boride, bovid, bride, bridle, brio, broil, dobe, libero, lobe, lobed, **lovebird**, overbid, rebid, robe, robed, verb, vibe

**Cell Blocks No 5100**



Divide the grid into square or rectangular blocks, each containing one digit only. Every block must contain the number of cells indicated by the digit inside it.

**Set Square No 3719**

	+	3	x		= 56
x		x		+	
8	x		x		= 96
÷		-		x	
	x		+		= 37
=		=		=	
10		9		9	

Enter each of the numbers from 1 to 9 in the grid, so that the six sums work. We've placed two numbers to get you started. Each sum should be calculated left to right or top to bottom.

Please note, BODMAS does not apply

**Killer Moderate No 9472**

6	17		8		9		12
	20	11	22	23			
10			16		7	13	
						6	
12		7	12		5	23	
11			8	5	21	15	
16							5
8	14		20		10		
		17				16	

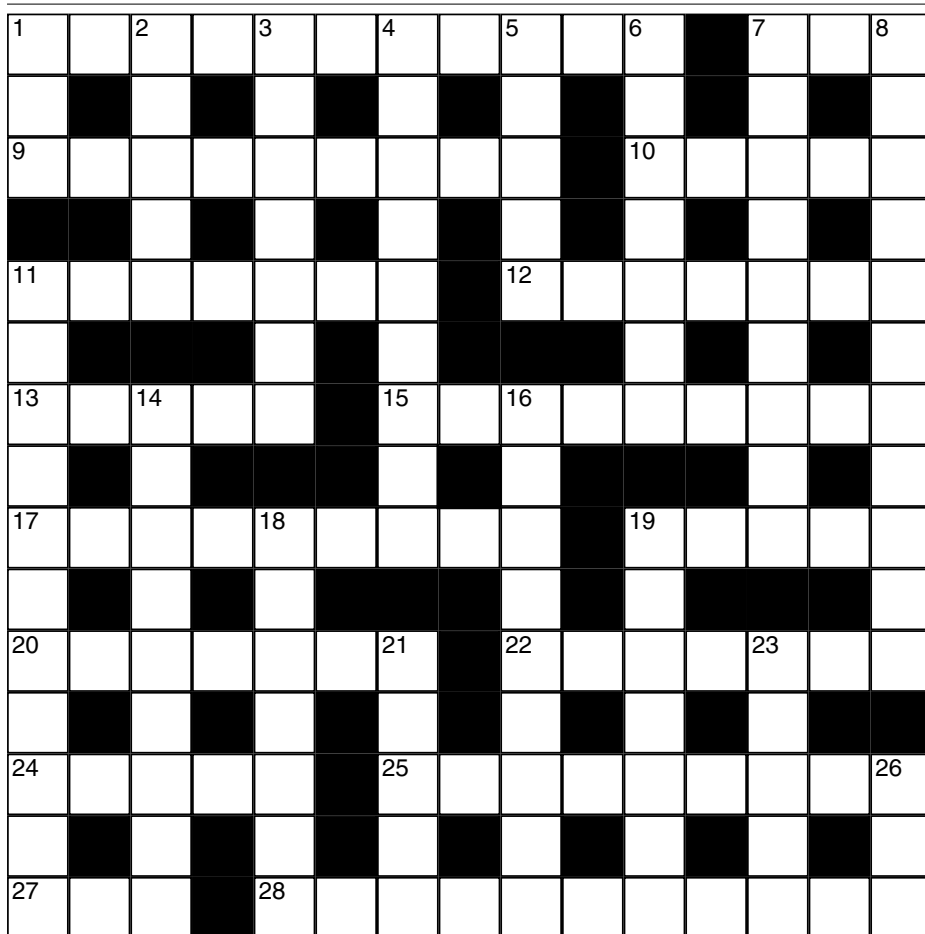
**Killer Deadly No 9473**

35				3	26	19	
	31						
		28	21	19	8		26
7						7	
					22		15
23	6			19			25
					9		
	33						
					16		7

As with standard Sudoku, fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9. Each set of cells joined by dotted lines must add up to the target number in its top-left corner. Within each set of cells joined by dotted lines, a digit cannot be repeated.

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Times Crossword 28,919



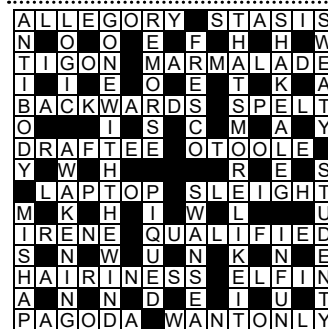
ACROSS

- 1 Blooming angry expression during riparian activity (11)
- 7 Elements making water good to keep for oneself (3)
- 9 Bet on clubs without experience, then left pools activity? (4-5)
- 10 Certain Muslims hosting very revered Hindu (5)
- 11 A little craft roughly shown by French composer (7)
- 12 Women's accessory model shows item I can't name (7)
- 13 Eastern translation of the inspiring 1 Down producer (5)
- 15 A bum intro, playing French folk music (9)
- 17 Producing plans, relative captures pawn before more valuable piece (9)
- 19 Furry animal, shy, with a lead twisted round (5)
- 20 Possibly go and haunt this place? (4-3)
- 22 Ashes holder punching Aussie bouncer in tour (7)
- 24 Tree resin extracted from lime leaning to the west (5)
- 25 Spooner's inhabited part of Western Europe's land (5,4)
- 27 Perhaps stuff Scot's to put back (3)
- 28 Thesp and France's main female novelist getting Oscar for musicals (11)

DOWN

- 1 Keep a watch on this uprising from Benin's capital (3)
- 2 Take place of officer knocked over by bouncer (5)
- 3 Dog around London area shows what retriever does? (7)
- 4 Mark and I keeping lots of coffee for Italian who worked in bars (9)
- 5 Where many films are made with family member (2-3)
- 6 Terrifying force once affected stoppage with power cut (7)
- 7 Husband shows Sue a way to control shock? (9)
- 8 Rival of Reading close to losing final, playing Inter (11)
- 11 Fare initially cheap on paper that's said to raise a smile? (5,6)
- 14 Child, say, in part of pool with lower energy, not disheartened (9)
- 16 Lifted a jewel with another picked up — it's a lot of work (9)
- 18 A slip crossing over large ditch (7)
- 19 Speed and ecstasy's under a hundred pounds (7)
- 21 Revolutionary women's movement with time for old, symbolic item (5)
- 23 This person, breaking funny bone, petrified mother (5)
- 26 Perhaps novice's news, entertaining for all (3)

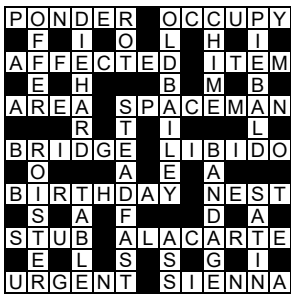
Yesterday's solution 28,918



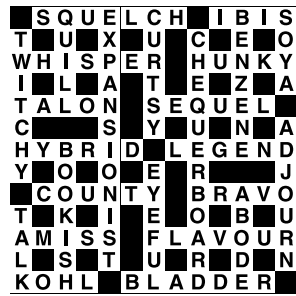
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Solutions

Quick Cryptic 2677



Codeword 5216



Kakuro 3715

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

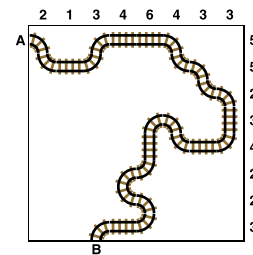
Sudoku 14,916

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

Tetonor 466

39	57	18	280
1 + 38	50 + 7	3 + 15	14 x 20
56	34	350	38
4 x 14	20 + 14	7 x 50	1 x 38
35	240	32	45
16 + 19	12 x 20	20 + 12	3 x 15
205	18	46	304
41 x 5	4 + 14	41 + 5	16 x 19

Train Tracks 2246



Sudoku 14,917

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

Cell Blocks 5099

2		2	3		
5					
	3			3	
	3	8		5	
8					2
3					2

Set Square 3718

6	x	4	-	8
+		÷		-
5	+	2	-	3
x		x		x
9	+	7	x	1

Lexica 7413

H					
U	S		C		
E	X	P	I	R	E
D	A		I		
	S		E		
A	D	M	I	R	E

Sudoku 14,918

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

Futoshiki 4756

4	5	>	1	2	3	
2	1	4	>	3	5	
3	4	5	1	<	2	
5	3	>	2	4	1	
1	<	2	3	5	>	4

KenKen 6208

6	3	2	1	4	5
4	2	3	6	5	1
5	6	1	4	3	2
1	5	6	3	2	4
2	1	4	5	6	3
3	4	5	2	1	6

Lexica 7414

S	C	H	E	M	A
U		R		D	
H	E	A	R		U
U		N			L
E		T			T
P	E	G			

Today's solutions

Killer 9470

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

Killer 9471

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

Cryptic Quintagram

- 1 Homer
- 2 Sitar
- 3 Boulder
- 4 Bristol
- 5 Achilles

Suko 4118

4	3	8
18	23	
6	5	7
22	22	1
2	9	1

Brain Trainer

- Easy 63
- Medium 237
- Harder 6,735

Word watch

**Derny** (b) A pacemaker's vehicle in track cycling (Collins) **Dyslogistic** (a) Conveying censure (Chambers) **Jequirity** (b) A substitute for liquorice (OED)

Chess – Winning Move

After 1 Rxx5+! gxh5 2 Qf5 Black is slaughtered on the light squares. White threatens the rook as well as 3 Qxx5+ Bh6 4 Qxx6 mate. Despite Black's extra rook, there is no defence, eg 2 ... Be5 3 Qxc8+ Kg7 4 Qg8+ Kh6 5 Be4 and mate follows