

Deadlines for H368

External GMs David Watts, John Walker, Jed Stone	1700, Friday 5 th April 2024
All my games	0900, Sunday 7 th April
Publication should be no later than	Saturday 13 th April
Missing items enquiries	Saturday 20 th April

Dates for H369 look as if they may be 17th, 19th, 25th May; 1st June 2024

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It's been an absolute delight over the last couple of years to see how Mike Parnaby has so smoothly taken on running United once I decided I couldn't manage it any longer. I've taken great satisfaction that the game hasn't folded, and of course I now have the huge extra fun of actually playing in the game. The first season was something to keep quiet about, but obviously my team-building was fairly sound, and we look certain – or, if your prefer, doomed - to join the big boys in Division 1 next season.

But I'm mortified that the most recent report points out for all to see that I attempted to play twelve players in last session's games. Oh, the shame of it!

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It hasn't always been straightforward, but I've always been able to use NHS dentistry. For several years I've had the most delightful and quite gorgeous Selma in Tring. But with some reluctance she told me recently she was having to switch to going private, saying that she wanted to be able to spend more time with her family and indeed her patients. I pointed out that I fully respected her wish to have more family time, but when my dentist says she wants to have more time with me it sends very mixed messages. Since as far as we can tell, my teeth are in a pretty stable condition, the costs won't be very different, so I've signed up to go private, and anyway there didn't really seem to be much alternative.

I often muse about the revolution in dental health. My parents were of the generation where people had all their teeth taken out as a 21st birthday present, or, romantically, as a wedding gift. I've got several teeth fewer than I started with, and many more with fillings. I don't think our son has ever had a filling in his life.

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Here's a situation from my daily life. I'm diabetic, so I like to have cereals with low sugar, which of course means they don't taste very interesting. So I use various condiments to spice them up. My favourite is ground ginger, which comes in a container with perforated holes at the top to allow me to tap some ground ginger onto the cereal.

Lots of experiment has let me discover I get my preferred amount with 21 taps. I don't have any great pride in doing this, so I tap as quickly as possible. But up pops a problem. I've discovered that I can tap considerably faster than I can count. At 82 I've obviously been counting for a long time, but I don't seem to be all that good at it. Either I tap quickly and lose count, or I have to slow down the tapping, or find a different strategy.

I'd like to invite everyone to help me here, and not only readers, but partners, children and grandchildren too. If you do 21 taps, how do you do it? How do you make sure you've done exactly 21? What actually goes on in your head when you're counting to 21?

Go on, give it a try. You don't need to buy any condiments – simply make your taps on a book or on the table. It won't take up much of your time, and I'll be interested to hear how it goes.

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I've been having lots of diverting chats with Mark Nelson lately, and he asked '*Have you thought about having congee for breakfast? Then you could have lots of interesting condiments!*'

What on earth is congee? A quick reference to Wikipedia was needed "Congee is a form of savoury rice porridge made by boiling rice in a large amount of water until the rice softens. Depending on rice-water ratio, the thickness of congee varies from a Western oatmeal porridge to a gruel It tastes like plain, unflavoured, fairly thick, hot rice cereal. You can put all sorts of flavourings in it. Congee is basically just a rice porridge."

I do quite enough cooking these days without making congee, thank you, and in any case there are two diabetics in this house, not just one, and I told Mark that Jill regularly warns me that rice puts up her sugar levels.

"I had a feeling that you would not find the idea of making congee, though it did not occur to me that it would not be a suitable food for a diabetic. That goes to show you that I've never had any close friends who were diabetic. I did consult the internet to see what he had to say about diabetics eating congee and it was very conflicting. Some sites said that it was a good choice, others said it was a bad choice. Other sites pointed out that you don't have to make congee from rice, you can use a variety of grains."

"Have you considered grating fresh ginger on your breakfast on your cereals?" Actually, yes. When my cousins Mary and Janet came from the USA last April they spent a couple of days in Tring, and Janet was keen to encourage me to use fresh ginger. As you'll realise, the experiment didn't last for long. It took ten times as long, involved as much grated finger as grated ginger, and at least as far as Marks and Spencer ginger was concerned, didn't taste significantly better.

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I admit I suffer from occasional – no doubt others would say frequent - attacks of pedantry. I'm offended by the use 'infer' when it's perfectly easy to use 'imply'. Likewise 'disinterested' when 'uninterested' would be appropriate.

And I've had two or three discussions lately with people who think 'acronym' is simply a posh word for an abbreviation. Choosing my dictionary carefully I find an 'acronym' is an abbreviation consisting of the first letters of each word in the name of something, pronounced as a word: AIDS is an acronym for "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome". 'RADA' and 'radar' and 'laser' are acronyms; 'snafu' is a colloquially acceptable prettying up of 'situation normal, all fucked / fouled up'.

But just as the line between 'infer' and 'imply' is becoming more and more blurred, some dictionaries are less picky about the one between 'acronym' and 'abbreviation', so let's move on.

I observe there are several potential acronyms which, as far as I know, never actually do get pronounced as a word. In all the crime series I've watched the detection agencies are invariably spelt out as C.I.D. and C.I.A. American dramas are set in the U.S.A., often in N.Y.C. or L.A.

As far as I know [or if you prefer A.F.A.I.K.] all of these are spelt out rather than used as pronounceable words. Other potential acronyms are ASAP, OBE, AOB, BO, BYO, PYO, AKA. I guess it's quite likely some people do actually say 'assap' or 'obe', but I've not come across them. So, is there a name for those words that are potential but non-spoken acronyms?

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And while we're at it, what about words where the abbreviation is actually less efficient than saying the words out? WWW is the perfect example, and needs nine syllables, three times as many as saying 'World Wide Web' in the first place.

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More words, this time Eponyms, and more plundering from Mark Nelson, who I suspect may have got it from somewhere else. None of these words warrant initial capitals these days, but Mark claims that all of them are directly derived from their innovators – I recognise the derivation in some but not all cases: boycott, braille, camellia, chauvinist, dahlia, diesel, dunce, gardenia, gerrymander, guillotine, hooligan, leotard, lynch, magnolia, ohm, pasteurize, poinsettia, praline, quixotic, ritzy, sequoia, shrapnel, silhouette, volt, watt, and zeppelin.

I probably knew about most of these, but 'dunce' and 'camellia' and 'leotard' were among a few that mildly surprised me.

And I guess there are several more eponyms that aren't listed – 'biro' and 'hoover' are the first that come into my mind.

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Pride of place in Mark's original list goes to bowdlerise, courtesy Thomas Bowdler, and the first[?] Shakespeare collection sanitised of all the rude bits. But Mark points out the slightly awkward fact that though the original book was "*anonymously published, subsequent editions had Thomas Bowdler as the author. Why was the first volume published anonymously? It was actually written by his sister, Harriet. This created a bit of a problem. How could a female-friendly version of Shakespeare, with all the inappropriate language removed, have been written by a woman? That would imply that Harriet understood all the inappropriate language.*"

More useful information from Mark about Thomas Bowdler; he has a chess opening, the Bowdler Attack, named after him.

I note that the online Encyclopedia Britannica says that Thomas Bowdler was a doctor of medicine, so I suppose it's reasonable to assume that family discussions could have tackled topics that most households didn't. But the EB article does not mention either Harriet's role, or the Bowdler Attack, so – thanks to Mark Nelson – anyone who's read this far can consider themselves better informed than the Encyclopedia Britannica.

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