



Freewheeling Reversed Deletion (*!|*|'^4,^6)

Newton, MA

Ides of March 2009

Welcome to my birthday party. I thought it might be fun to share a “mini-ganza”.

This is intended to be a social “mixer” activity: I encourage you to form small teams with a mix of experienced puzzlers and novices. Of course, you’re welcome to ignore these puzzles during the party and solve them at home later if you’d prefer.

An “extravaganza” is a set of puzzles where individual puzzles yield answer words which, in turn, are used as “inputs” to a meta-puzzle. Often there are multiple rounds, and sometimes (as at the MIT Mystery Hunt) the meta-puzzles themselves yield solutions that are needed as inputs to a meta-meta puzzle. A “mini-ganza” is a small extravaganza with a single round.

For those who have not participated in a ’ganza before, here are some common tropes:

While sometimes the puzzles in an extravaganza are of a standard type (such as a crossword puzzle or a sudoku), they are more often puzzles that are created specifically for the purpose. In many cases, figuring out *how* the puzzle is supposed to be solved is actually the puzzle.

Always keep in mind that your result from any given puzzle will be a word or phrase, and in this case you know the lengths of each puzzle’s answer by looking at the metapuzzle.

Acrostics: A puzzle might lead you to a list of words. Once the words are placed in the correct order, reading the first letter of each word spells another word, which is the answer.

Diagonals: Like an acrostic, but you take the first letter of the first word, the second letter of the second word, and so on.

Indexing: Like diagonals, but each word has some sort of “index” number associated with it by some mechanism, and the index numbers tell you which letter of each word to take.

Numbers: A puzzle might lead you to a list of numbers. (For example, one Mystery Hunt puzzle consisted of aerial photographs of mile marks on the Boston Marathon route.) Taking those numbers as indexes into the alphabet (1=A, 2=B, etc.) spells out the answer.

Instructions: A puzzle might consist of a list of instructions to follow. Often they’ll be concealed or disguised, but following the instructions will result in you having all the letters of your word.

Disguise: A puzzle type might be disguised as another type, or a puzzle that’s actually about the biblical prophets might be written using names of U.S. Presidents instead. Look beneath the surface and try to see what’s really going on; often there will be a detail in the surface that will break the illusion.

Flavortext: Each puzzle has a title and usually some additional introductory text. These are called “flavortext”. Sometimes they only give you a joke or the setup for the puzzle, but sometimes they also have subtle clues to what’s going on in the puzzle. It often pays to read them carefully and consider whether any of the words might have a second meaning.

One more thing: Sometimes the puzzle will provide the answer word or phrase directly, but sometimes it will provide a word or phrase which *clues* the final answer. Pay attention to the “enumeration” (the length of the required answer) to see if you need to take one more step.

Confirmation: A good puzzle will include some element that by itself isn’t a clue to the answer, but which will give you a sense of confirmation once you’ve found the correct answer.

Have fun and good luck!