



The Games
Issue

CONTENTS



This ye-boT is one of the first paper toys I made for Paper-craft of The Day, my 365 Project for 2011. I started the project to help me get out of an artistic rut, but I almost abandoned the whole idea on day 5 because of this guy; as a beginner with spatial difficulties I had picked one of the most complex toys to make. It took hours and hours and lots of gluing and ungluing and building, disassembling and rebuilding but it was worth it. It's now day 231.

Room 641-A

4

Life lessons from
a short con

6

A classic puzzle:
the crossword

8

OBEY Amy Winehouse

10

Photos of fun
and games

12

The history of
the Vic Viper

14

Trench
Warfare,
a card game

16

Literary
games

COVER PHOTO

By Kronos_to_Earth of the sculpture
"Fathers and Sons", by Peter W. Michel (1999)



ugf

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dv brx pdb kdyh qrwlfhg, wklv hglwru'v qrwv lv lq d vlpsoh vxevwlwxwlrq fbskhu. Lw'v qrw URW13, ehfdxvh wrr pdqb Phllwhv fdq uhdg wkdw zlwkrxw wklqnlqj, dqg L'g olnh wkhp wr kdyh wr wklqn iru mxvw d prphqw, exw L glgq'w fkrv d pruh gliilfxow flskhu ehfdxvh L'p d ilup eholhyhu wkdw wkh gliilfxowb ri d sxccoh vkrxog eh uhiohfwhg lq lww vroxwlrq, dqg L mxvw grq'w wklqn wkdw d PhlIPdj hg qrwv lv zruwk wkh wurxeoh ri ghfrglqj dfurvv vrph fudcb fubswrjudskb vfkph.

Lq wklv lvvxh, zklfk L dsorjich iru ehlqj vrphzkdw wdugb (wkdw'v zkdw kdsshqv zkhq brx fdq'w sdb shrsoh iru vxepvlvrlqv — vrph ri wkhp iodnh rxw), zh orrn dw pdqb gliihuhqw dvshfww ri jdph dqg sodb, zkhwkhu wkdw'v wkh uhodwlyhob hdvb furvvzrug iurp Zrrgeorfn100 (sj. 6), wkh hawud olyhv ri d ylgrr jdph lfrq (sj. 12), wkh olwhudub wudglwlrq ri sdolqgurphv dqg uhyhuvdov, (sj. 16), ru Odqjxdjhkdw rq jhwvwlqj frqqhg (sj. 4).

Zh hyhq kdg Wuroo ghvllq d qhz fdug-vodvk-erdug jdph iru xv, (sj. 14), dqg Plnh Prqjr kdv d vwhqflo wkdw lv ghvllqhg wr eh fww rxw ri wkh pdjdcqlh dqg vsudbhg lq brxu idyrulwh (ohjdo) kdxqvv (sj. 8).

Vshdnqj ri kdxqvv — wkh qhaw lvvxh lv doo derxw ghdwk dqg wkh diwhuolih. Sohdiv vhqg xv jkrvv vwrvlhw, pxughuv, ixqhudo duudqjphqvw dqg dqhfrghv derxw glwfkqj wkdw Jrwk kdlufw brx kdg lq kljk vfkro.

Fkhhu!
[+] Nodqj Nodqjvwrrq

MeFi Mag

Volume 1, Issue 6, September 2011
www.mefimag.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

[klangklangston](#) (Josh Steichmann)

COPY EDITORS

[limeonaire](#)

[msalt](#) (Mark Saltveit)

[casarkos](#)

[jeoc](#) (Jasmine O'Connell)

[Eva Destruction](#)

[Unicorn on the cob](#)

[box](#) (Joe Hudak)

ART DIRECTOR

[Brandon Blatcher](#)

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

[kerning](#) (Ashley Perks)

MeFi Magazine is a publication created and produced by members of the community weblog Metafilter. It has no official connection with the site, nor do the owner or administrators of Metafilter endorse any particular view expressed in this magazine.

345 mefites were PAWNED during this issue.

Send all correspondence:
letters@mefimag.com

I ARRIVED IN New York City in 1981 with no job, no money, and only a corner in a Jamaica basement to live in; a couple of years later I was working as a proofreader and living with friends in a huge prewar apartment at Riverside Drive and 157th Street in Upper Manhattan, on a block that was a middle-class enclave in a largely poor, Dominican and increasingly drug-ridden neighborhood. On the plus side, we were a very short walk from the subway stop on Broadway, and the Dominican beer, Presidente, was delicious; on the minus side, it was just as hard to get people to visit as it had been when I was living in Queens, since I was still a half hour from midtown.

A SHORT CON

By Languagehat (Stephen Dodson)

One day I was accosted (very politely) on the street across from my building by a bewildered man with a foreign accent, clutching a slip of paper with an illegible address and phone number. He explained that he just got to the city and had only this contact, could I help? Of course I tried to decipher the scribbles, with no result. At this point a couple showed up: friendly locals, curious about what was going on. I explained. They got involved, and between us we managed to extricate a usable phone number, which one of the couple tried at a nearby pay phone.

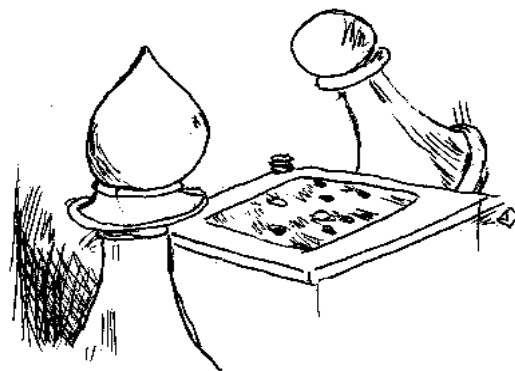
At this point the story gets murky. You forget details over the course of almost thirty years, all the more so when they're tied up with a story that involves shame and a feeling of stupidity. We wound up driving to a branch of my bank so I could take out cash to... to what? I don't remember. Furthermore, when I dashed back up to my apartment to get my bankbook, I couldn't explain the situation to the satisfaction of my roommates, who did their best to dissuade me from what to them was clearly a foolish course of action. I brushed them off, saying, "I don't have time to explain any further, but it's really important!" Off I went, withdrawing almost everything I had in my account (which fortunately wasn't much over a hundred dollars, thanks to my poverty), "lending" it to one of the couple, who went off to do something with it to help our new friend, then "repaying" it with what turned out when I got back to my apartment to be an envelope full of strips of torn-up newspaper.

I know what you're thinking, and that's what I'd have been thinking if I'd heard this story from someone else.

All I can say is that you have no idea how persuasive these guys can be unless you've experienced it. They awaken every helpful instinct you have and are very good at anticipating and lulling your natural suspicion. They are brilliant actors and storytellers, making you believe, for just long enough, a tale that on its own merits wouldn't stand up to a moment's thought. For that very reason, it can't be just a job to them; if it were, they couldn't carry it off so well. There's a reason it's called the "con game" — it's one of the infinite number of manifestations of homo ludens, man as game-player. This particular game is not only illegal but (in contrast to, say, jaywalking, at least in New York) socially unacceptable, but to a certain type of personality that just heightens the enjoyment, and I can easily imagine the intense pleasure one could get from pulling the wool over the eyes over a sucker.

In a way, it reminds me of a game I used to play as a teenager in Buenos Aires, a solitary game that demanded a crowd for its performance. I would walk down a busy sidewalk as fast as I could without coming into contact with anyone, swerving from one side to the other as I tried to anticipate the trajectories of the oncoming pedestrians. I wasn't causing any harm, but I was making strangers a part of my game, forcing them (as it were) to be a part of the action. Groups like Improv Everywhere go farther, openly bringing people into their activities in the hope of creating a memorable experience. Con artists do it for a living, taking not just your time but your money, but it seems to me part of the motivation doesn't involve profit — and the resulting experience is in fact intensely memorable, and educational as well.

In fact, I told my roommates, after it was all over and I'd gotten over the first shock and embarrassment, that it was worth it to me both as an experience and as a lesson. It paid off not long afterwards when I resisted the sob story of a fellow who claimed he needed money for a bus ticket; he was, it turned out, a heroin addict, and it gave me considerable satisfaction that both my roommate and my girlfriend at the time fell for it and "loaned" him money. I don't know that I'd go so far as to thank the little group if I ran into them again, but I'm not sorry they provided me with what I consider a valuable insight into the games people play. MFM



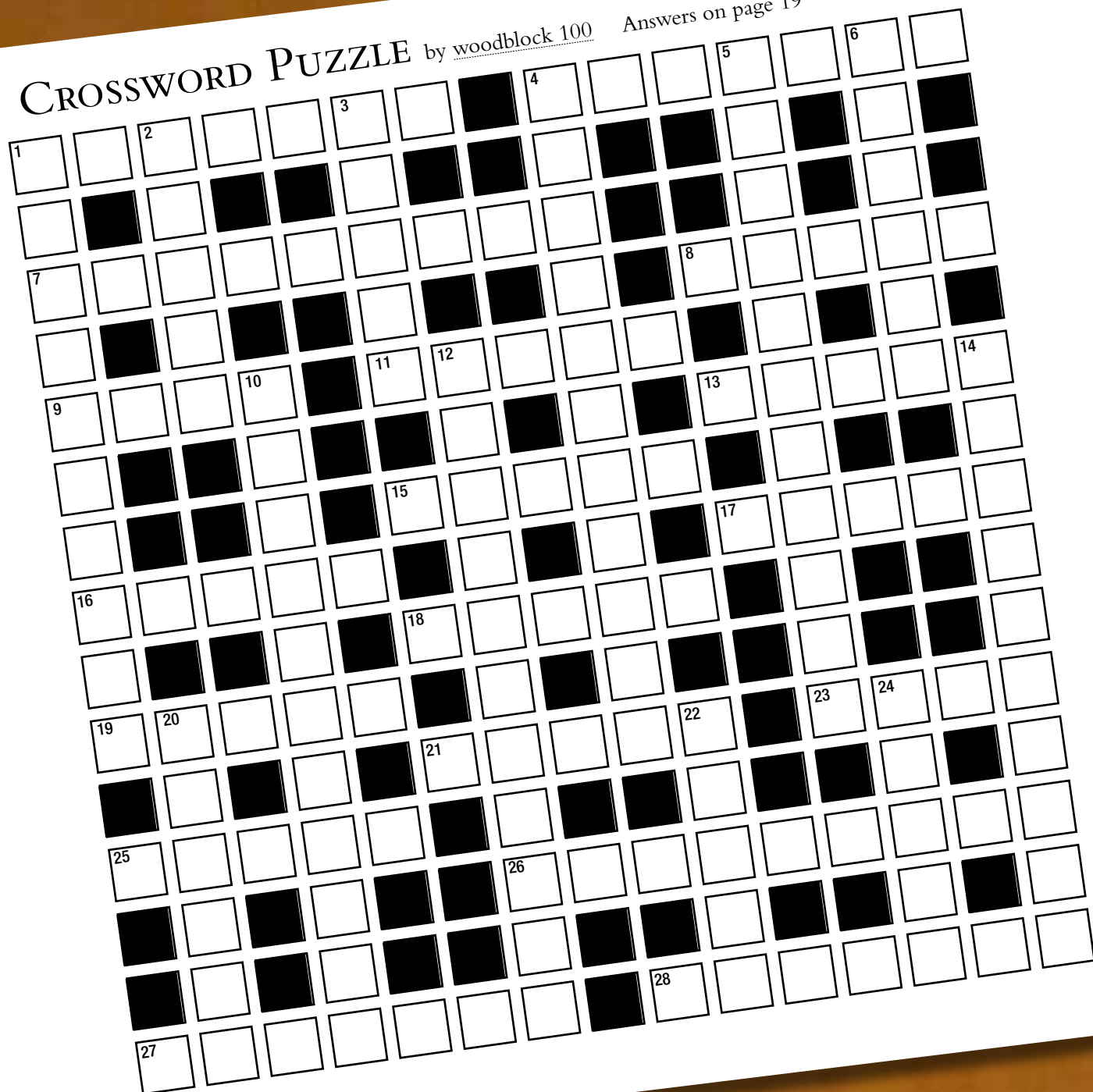
"King me"



Stuart Heath

CROSSWORD PUZZLE by woodblock 100

Answers on page 19



Across

- 1 Tears of joy without a sort of tune for a happy batsman (7)
- 4 What to do with her? Always making the wrong change! (7)
- 7 With plenty of this sort of thing, one wouldn't start to swear, "It's cold!" (9)
- 8 Smarting? From the heavy bag on your foot! (5)
- 9 Cockney chap leaves a mixed piece, to make a big blockbuster (4)
- 11 A nice form she loves to expel (5)
- 13 Captain got evidence of them taking a siesta on board (5)
- 15 Scouts marching to keep some of the bistro open (5)
- 16 Getting by without an arbitrator is rough going (5)
- 17 Hide it in the last ash can in the row (5)
- 18 He might be partly lonely behind iron bars (5)
- 19 Are none shaken by Obama's first? Perhaps surprised! (5)
- 21 "Where were you? You try standing here for hours!" (5)
- 23 Counter-productive way to live (4)
- 25 Victorian lady asks some of us to stop rudeness (5)
- 26 In America three hugs will do. Or maybe kisses will be stronger (3,3,3)
- 27 Does a revolutionary squeezing in some bad jokes deserve fisticuffs? (7)
- 28 Her feat was disordered, but still one for her cap (7)

Down

- 1 OK to go topless here, but is the light fitting? (10)
- 2 A turbulent reign in the silents (5)
- 3 The coxes may have a _____ decide in which _____ place their craft before the _____ the finish. (3,2)
- 4 The fair left Alabama, America without the Mexican treasure, but with the meat-eating lions. (11)
- 5 Place for rough justice in the grange? (7,4)
- 6 At this venue, even with parking, can they salvage a draw? (4,2)
- 10 We hear clearly that the agreement involves great revolutions (7,4)
- 12 In the tree, bravest ones turn out to have real backbone! (11)
- 14 From September to June, perhaps even the young royals echo the rest of us (6,4)
- 20 A back rub with that foreign water from the dresser (6)
- 22 Make a donation? In fact it helps (5)
- 24 The flowers were damaged from the vet chasing the cat (5)



AD ASTRA

by Mike Mongo

In my world, Andre the Giant has a posse — aka OBEY — was the first ARG (Alternate Reality Game). It was the rabbit's hole. That was 1991 to '92. I ran into my first Giant sticker in a walk-in cooler at a Charleston, S.C. convenience store. I'd seen the image before but it hadn't "clicked". I'd seen it but it wasn't until that moment that it registered I had seen it. (Later, we came to recognize that as Giant/OBEY's "aha" moment.)

In Giant/OBEY, before it became as famous (infamous; admired; despised; etc.), that moment triggered a new wonder and appreciation of our surroundings. People privately encountered the stickers and then privately pondered their value or meaning. It's how so many "players" came to be part of the Giant/OBEY game: Because each of us understood how fun it was to figure out what was going on — and went on to perpetuate that experience for others!

We started using stencils about the same time we started using stickers. Stencils are a lot more hardcore than stickers. (Especially offset printer-made stickers; the first million or so Giant/OBEY stickers were all hand silk-screened.) Someone surreptitiously has to do stenciling. We study stencils more. Stencils are graffiti and graffiti is a historically valid way to communicate through the static and ordinary noise of the norm.

The challenge is that all those kids who were playing Andre the Giant has posse got played when Giant went corporate. Giant got tamed when it became OBEY™.

So in the spirit of playing fair, I created a new stencil. OBEY is easily overturned by DEFY.

DEFY perpetuates the game, the goal being the continuance of mischievous fun.

Lastly, Amy Winehouse was brilliant, her passing a grave injustice. Therefore, Winehouse is the perfect contemporary standard for defiance.

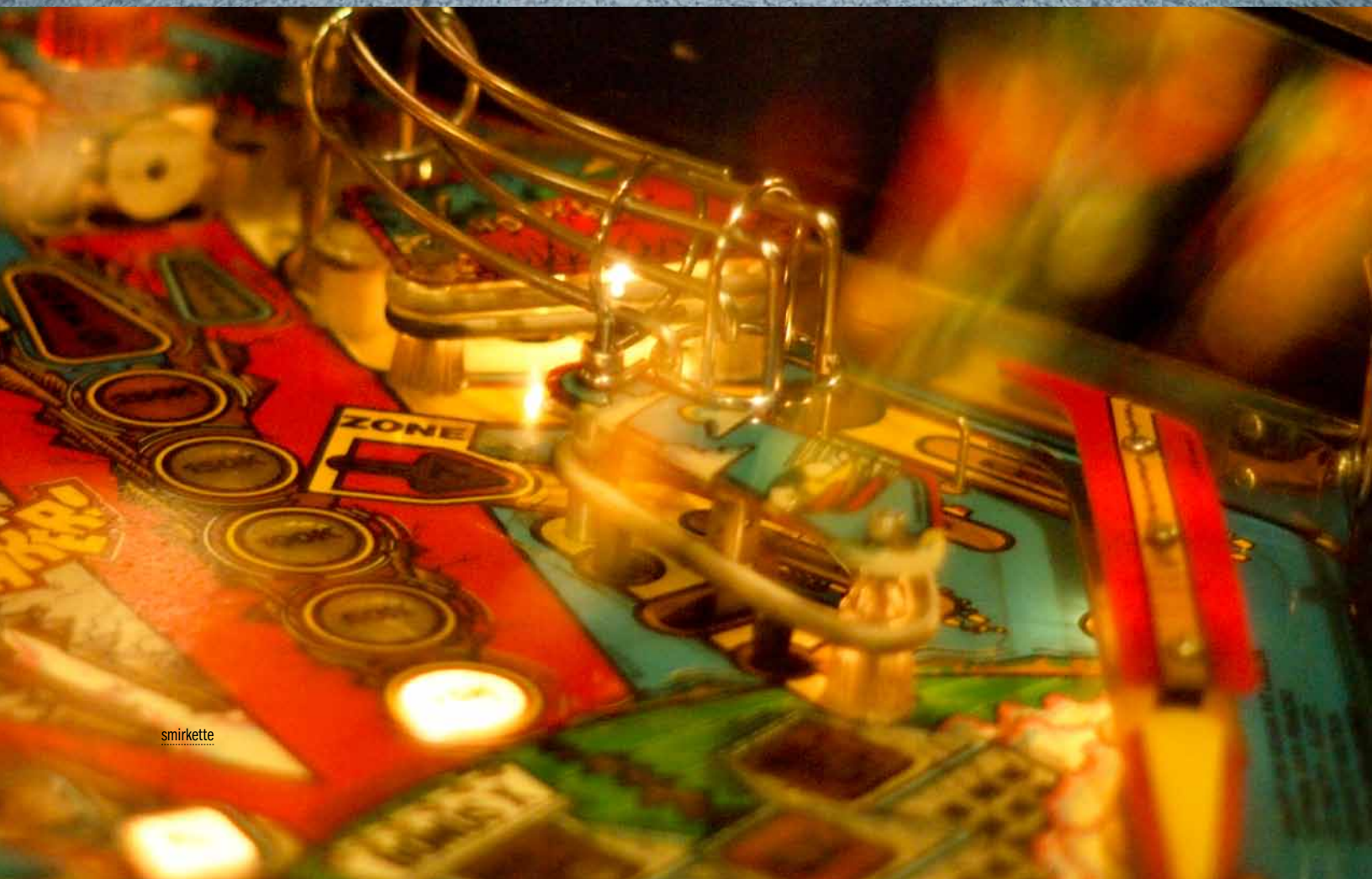
That's it. Game on. MFM



DEEY



youngergirl44 (Amanda Younger)



smirkette



Kronos to Earth



pjern

The Flying Snake

By Jharris (John Harris)



In 1985 Konami produced the arcade video game *Gradius*, an elaboration on ideas they had previously explored with the classic-era arcade games *Scramble* and *Super Cobra*. Like those games, *Gradius* is a side-scrolling shooter where the player is tasked to maneuver a jet or spaceship through a series of tight terrain situations while being attacked and fired at by a variety of enemies.

Making a jet the star of a game like this doesn't actually make a huge amount of sense. Especially in *Gradius*, the terrain scrolls by more slowly than your ship's reverse movement, presenting the visually awkward experience of being able to move backwards while the ship's engines are still clearly thrusting forward. (This isn't an issue in *Super Cobra*; your ship there is a helicopter.) Yet despite this awkwardness, the ship in *Gradius*, called the "Vic Viper," has proven surprisingly resilient over time, becoming something of a mascot for Konami as it has expanded into game cards (*Yu-Gi-Oh*) and OVA (original video animation) anime.

The Vic Viper has a distinctive design that screams out spaceship: an upraised fin, two wings, and a dual-pronged nose below a cockpit. It's sleek and recognizable, and although clearly inspired by both modern jets and *Star Wars*-style fighter ships, it is recognizable as its own thing. The game's creators must have been pleased with it. In order to show it off, Konami's graphic designers include entirely unnecessary banking animations for the Vic Viper in every shooting game it appears in.

The Viper has appeared in over a dozen games to date. Each of the *Gradius* games includes it, a series that includes at least eight games, more if you count divergent ports as their own games. The *Gradius* spin-off series *Parodius* has at least four games, with a cutesy-fied Vic Viper in each one.

And then there are the stranger appearances. The collectable card game *Yu-Gi-Oh* contains multiple cards based on Konami properties, and one of them is the Vic Viper (renamed "Gradius" in the U.S. market). Other surprising elements of the video games appear in *Yu-Gi-Oh* as well. Some of the enemies from that game also have cards, and even the odd glowing "options" or "multiples" markers – screen icons of fireballs that duplicate every shot you take – have their own card. There is also a card for the infamous "boss rush" level in most *Gradius* games, where a sequence of powerful "boss" enemies attacks the player one after another.

The Konami-produced anime OVA and TV series *Sky Girls* has a few episodes that feature first a prototype, then a production run of Vic Viper spaceships. The main characters of these episodes are the trendy anime prepubescent girls (with tails for some reason) flying robot



suits, but interestingly for a 2007 anime series, the Vic Vipers fighting alongside them are old-school, Star-Wars style fighter ships, with male pilots no less! Imagine that. Unfortunately, the consensus on the internet is that Sky Girls is pretty bad.

In video games, Konami has returned to the Vic Viper recently in their update series Otomedius. Unfortunately (and similar to the trendy design from Sky Girls), the Viper has been remixed into a kind of spaceship suit, worn by a scantily-clad young girl named Aoba Anoa. How a girl with so much exposed flesh withstands the rigors of space travel is not well explained.

The robot combat game "Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner" has a mech named after (and based on) some aspects of the Vic Viper design. A bonus mode in that game, "Zoradius," puts that vehicle into a shooter much like a 3D version of the Gradius games, complete with a number of Moai heads shooting rings at the player.

My favorite, and final, Vic Viper reference doesn't come from Konami at all. Some explanation is required first. In the Lego building community, the "Vic Viper" style is recognized as a type of spaceship model that resembles the ship from the Gradius games.

They were a specialty of Nate Nielsen, a devoted Lego builder who went by the handle nnenn. His Flickr photostream is still up, and still filled with tons of Lego spaceship goodness: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nnenn/>. Nnenn himself explains the basics of the Vic Viper design in an image in that stream: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nnenn/4026520389/>

The Lego building community was rocked when nnenn died in a car crash early in 2010. They put together a moving tribute at Brickworld 2011, where Vic Viper-style spaceship models were arranged in "missing man" formation. The Lego company itself even paid tribute to the deceased with the release of an official kit of a Vic Viper-style spaceship with a snake's head logo and the call letters NNENN.

You can see an online eulogy for nnenn at <http://www.brothers-brick.com/2010/04/13/farewell-to-a-legend-mourning-the-passing-of-nate-nnenn-nielsen>, and some of nnenn's Vic Vipers at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nnenn/4192324139/>. The nnenn memorial Vic Viper display in "missing man" formation at Brickworld 2010 is online at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/61671941@N00/4723436418/>. And the official Lego tribute to nnenn is <http://www.brothers-brick.com/2011/05/16/alien-conquest-7066-earth-defense-hq-includes-vic-viper-tribute-to-nnenn/>. MFM



TRENCH WARFARE

By Troll (Ryan DeKorte)



Trench Warfare is a simple but dynamic game that simulates the tactical conditions most notoriously witnessed in World War I. I created the Classic version of Trench Warfare (see Scenarios below) in 2007 when, suddenly bored with the static determinacy of the card game War, I was struck with an epiphany: “Hmm... This game would be a lot more fun if you could choose your battles... Ah-hah!” The rule-set presented below was developed and articulated solely for this edition of MeFi Mag; until now, the game has existed only as a concept.

Materials and Setup

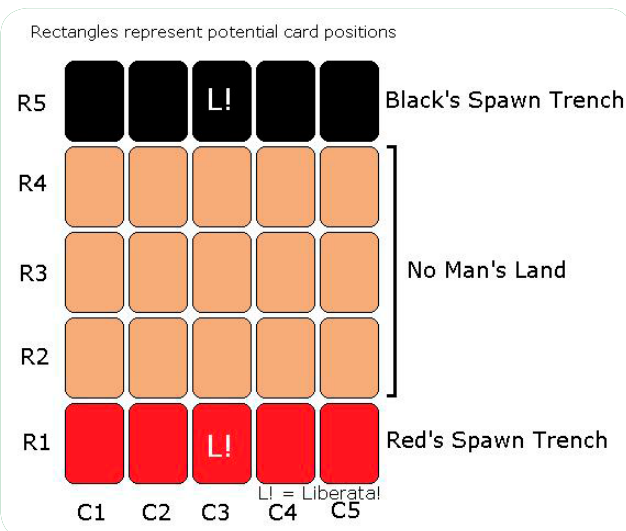
The game requires a normal deck of 52 playing cards, a flat surface, two players, and suicidal resolve.

The deck is shuffled and one player picks a card. The color of the card becomes that player's army. The deck is evenly split into Red and Black armies, or Reserve Decks, which are then given to each player and shuffled.

Both players populate their Spawn Trenches with five cards from the top of their Reserve Decks, leaving enough room between the trenches for No Man's Land. Red moves first, and the turn-based battle begins.

The Battlefield

The battle is waged on an imaginary grid, or map, of five rows (horizontal) and five columns (vertical). Thus the field has 25 coordinates, or possible card positions. The top and bottom rows are trenches. Each trench is respectively considered the Spawn Trench of the closest player. The center coordinate of a player's Spawn Trench is the Liberata. The three rows which lie between the trenches are No Man's Land.



The Armies

Each army is numbered at 26, with 13 ranks of two cards each. The card number signifies rank, which increases in ascending order (A [1], 2 – 10, J [11], Q [12], K [13]). The ranks consist of regular infantry (3 – 8), heavy infantry (J – K), and special cards (A, 2, 9, 10). The special cards are Barbed Wire (A), Sapper (2), Sgt. York (9), and Tank (10). An offensive modifier changes a card's rank when it attacks. A defensive modifier changes a card's rank when it defends. Any unit that occupies a trench is an “entrenched” unit.

Barbed Wire: defensive modifier (+13) in No Man's Land.

Sapper: offensive modifier (+13) against Barbed Wire in No Man's Land.

Sgt. York: offensive modifier (+5) against entrenched units.

Tank: may occupy the same coordinate as Barbed Wire (whether friendly or not). A Tank which shares a coordinate with Barbed Wire may be attacked; if it is defeated under the Bayonets scenario, the attacking unit must suicide on the Barbed wire (whether friendly or not). Tanks may also take two actions per turn.

All cards: defensive modifier (+1) to entrenched units against attacks from No Man's Land.

Actions

Unless otherwise specified, cards may not occupy the same space, and only one action (spawn, move, attack, or Liberata!) may be taken per turn. A player is bound to an action if they demonstrate intent. The turn is over once all legal action is complete.

To spawn, a card is removed from the top of the Reserve Deck and placed in the Spawn Trench. The player must declare a spawn position before they view the card.

To move, a card is repositioned to an unoccupied coordinate. All cards move one space per action. A card may only interact with a coordinate that immediately adjoins its position (North, South, East,

or West); no diagonal movement (or combat) is allowed.

To attack, a player indicates an attacker and a defender, and the following rules take effect. There are two possible outcomes to an attack:

1) The attacking card's rank is higher than the defending card, which results in the capture of the defending card. Captured cards are stacked face down in the attacker's POW Camp to the side of the game.

2) The attacking card's rank is lower than the defending card, which results in the suicide of the attacking card. Suicided cards are permanently discarded from play.

Equally ranked cards may not attack each other. Rank modifiers are applied at the beginning of combat. A card that has successfully captured an enemy card has the option to either advance to the captured card's position, or to remain where it is.

To Liberata!, a player must possess the opposing center trench position at the beginning of their turn and declare "Liberata!" This results in a trade of the card which occupies that position for all of their cards being held as POWs. "Liberata!" must be yelled in an obnoxious accent.

Victory

Victory is achieved when the enemy trench has been totally overrun.

Scenarios

Change the rules with these fun scenarios. Mix and match for maximum mayhem. Where unspecified or in contradiction, the default rule-set prevails.

Key: S = Applies to Setup; * = Highly Recommended.

Advanced Maneuvers: * Cards can move and attack diagonally. An offensive modifier (+1) is applied to diagonal attacks.

Artillery: A player may bombard the enemy trench thrice per game. The defender chooses any four coordinates in their Spawn Trench. Any cards that occupy those spaces are permanently discarded from play.

Bayonets: Attacker must advance to the enemy's position after a successful capture.

Charge: Players can send a wave of combatants towards the enemy trench. The cards that are furthest from their spawn trench in each column advance up the field until they attack a foe or occupy the enemy trench.



Classic: * Bayonets. No Tanks or Sgt. Yorks. The far right coordinate of each player's trench is the Liberata. The game begins with an unpopulated Battlefield.

Entropy: (S) Completely fill in the map with cards from the top of a full deck. The remainder of the deck is dealt in alternating order to each player. Chaos ensues.

Field Promotion: If a card is captured while its army is in possession of the enemy's Liberata, the captured card may trade places with the card that is occupying the Liberata.

Fog of War: * Cards are spawned face down.

Ranks are only revealed to the opponent during combat.

Handicapped: Suits factor into rank. Spades > Hearts > Clubs > Diamonds. Handicap is in Black's favor. Example: 7 of Spades trumps 7 of Hearts.

Mechanized: No Sgt. Yorks. No Sappers. Barbed Wire is invincible. Heavy Infantry (J – K) become tanks. All tanks are given an offensive modifier (+4) everywhere on the Battlefield. Tanks are permanently removed from play when kamikazied by Regular Infantry (2 – 9). Victory is achieved when all enemy tanks are captured or destroyed.

Multiple Decks: * (S) Play with two or more decks. Recommended for maps larger than 5x5.

Multiple Dimensions: * (S) Trench Warfare can be played on indefinitely large maps given a sufficient number of decks. An odd number of rows and columns works best (e.g. 7x7, 9x9, and 9x7). The grid shapes can also be irregular (e.g. diamond, hourglass, and ovoid).

Phalanx: Defensive modifier (+1) if adjoined to a friendly unit.

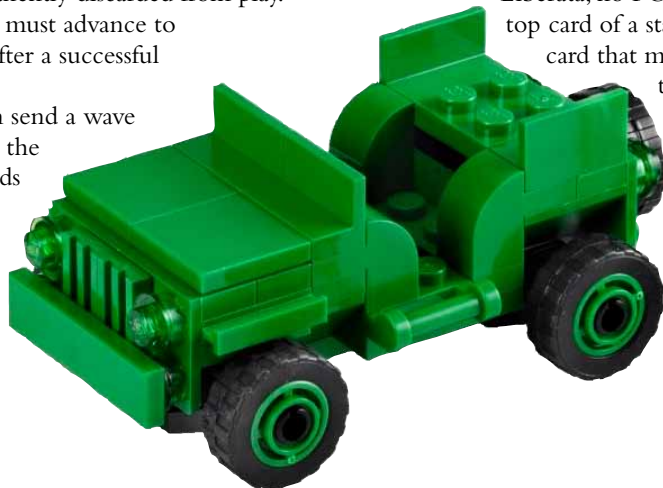
Reinforcements: One pair of adjoining cards can switch places at the end of each turn.

Tangled Wire: (S) Each player places a single immobilized enemy Barbed Wire in the center row of No Man's Land. No Sappers.

Turncoat: * (S) Each player draws four cards from the opponent's army and shuffles them into their Reserve Deck.

Zombie: * (S) Multiple decks. No special cards. No Liberata; no POW Camp. Cards can stack. Only the top card of a stack can move, attack, or defend. A card that most recently join a stack becomes the

top card. Player may spend a turn by moving a buried card to the top of the stack. Combat that is decided by a rank differential of three or more results in the permanent removal of the entire stack from play. Otherwise, the losing card is recycled to the bottom of the stack, or if not in a stack, flipped face down (inactive) for one turn. MFM





Literary Reversals

By msalt (Mark Saltveit)

"Sometimes it's necessary to go a long distance out of the way in order to come back a short distance correctly."

—Edward Albee, "The American Dream and the Zoo Story," 1961

All literature arguably involves word games — otherwise it's simply storytelling or folktales. Yet recognizable wordplay is often put down as mannered or "Hellenistic," and palindromes in particular get no respect as literature. In a just world, Howard Bergerson would have been the U.S. poet laureate, and Leigh Mercer would be a Nobel laureate for "A man, a plan, a canal: Panama." Instead, even the best palindromes are still considered trifles.

Yet even in this cruel world, reversals have a place in "serious" (that is, intellectually fashionable) literature. Top authors, from Vladimir Nabokov and James Joyce to Lewis Carroll and Edgar Allan Poe feature palindromes in their works.

In the 19th century, literary palindromes were the province of oddballs, the outsiders. They began with Poe, one of the first stars of American literature. In addition to writing poetry and horror stories, he worked as the editor of "Burton's Gentleman's Magazine" from 1839 to 1840. In that capacity, he often included amusing palindromes for his readers.

Remember that in his day, there was only one English palindrome that anyone knew ("Lewd did I live, & evil I did dwell"). Poe observed, however, that there were many palindromic words in English, such as "madam," "level" and so on, so that "we repeat extemporaneous palindromes daily, in utter ignorance of our talent."

In one issue, he quoted an old Latin oddity, in which each individual word was palindromic:

"Odo tenet mulum, madidam mappam tenet Anna."

(Otto holds a mule, and Anna holds a wet handkerchief.)

Better known is the “enigma” he wrote, a double acrostic, in which the first and last letters of the answer to each individual question spell out a final answer, “Madam.”

“First find out a word that doth silence proclaim,
And that backwards and forwards is always the same;

Then next you must find out a feminine name,

That backwards and forwards is always the same;

An act, or a writing on parchment, whose name,

Both backwards and forwards is always the same;

A fruit that is rare, whose botanical name,

Read backwards and forwards is always the same;

A note used in music which time doth proclaim,

And backwards and forwards is always the same;

Their initials connected, a title will frame

That is justly the due of the fair married dame,

Which backwards and forwards is always the same.”

The answers are, respectively, Mum, Anna, Deed, Anana, Minim, and Madam – the first and last letters of which each spell MADAM.

This puzzle was first published in the “Saturday Evening Post” in 1827, and Poe himself was almost certainly its author. But these tidbits were kept separate from his “real” works, in which reversals were deeply hidden if present at all — as if this wordplay were some deep shame, unlike the heavy-handed rhyme scheme of “The Raven.”

The other famous literary palindromist of the 19th century was Lewis Carroll, the author of “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” and “Through the Looking-Glass.” Unlike Poe, Carroll’s interest in reversals is obvious in his work. It only takes a second to see the palindromic implications of “Through the Looking-Glass,” in which almost everything is reversed after Alice passes through the mirror.

Fig 1: Sam Loyd’s “Was It a Cat I Saw” puzzle, based on the sentence from “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”



FIGURE 1

Grace Slick of Jefferson Airplane referred to “when the White Knight is talking backwards” in her hit song “White Rabbit,” though Carroll seems to have forgotten to include that part in his books. (Perhaps he was on drugs. Or maybe Slick meant the scene where the White Knight spoke — normally — while upside down.) But other reversals are not hard to find.

In “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland,” when Alice gets confused, the Queen says, “That’s the effect of living backwards ... it always makes one a little giddy at first ... but there’s one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways.”

And when she picks up a book containing the poem “Jabberwocky,” the type is backwards; she can only read it by holding it up to a mirror.

Fig. 2: Alice with Tweedledum and Tweedledee

There are other palindromic examples in Carroll’s two-volume “Sylvie and Bruno.” The first book features a fantastical sequence in which turning the “reversal peg” on the Outlandish Watch owned by a German professor reverses time. And the second book, “Sylvie and Bruno Concluded,” contains this passage:

“Sylvie was arranging some letters on a board – E-V-I-L.

‘Now, Bruno,’ she said, ‘what does that spell?’

Bruno looked at it, in solemn silence, for a minute.

‘I know what it doesn’t spell!’ he said at last.

‘That’s no good,’ said Sylvie. ‘What does it spell?’

Bruno took another look at the

mysterious letters.

‘Why, it’s LIVE backwards!’ he exclaimed....

‘How did you manage to see that?’ said Sylvie.

‘I just twiddled my eyes,’ said Bruno, ‘and then I saw it directly.’”

Later, after Mein Herr shows Lady Muriel how to make a Möbius strip type of purse by sewing the ends together reversed, she says, “I see. And a very twisted, uncomfortable, uncanny-looking bag it makes! But the moral is a lovely one. Unlimited wealth can only be attained by doing things in the wrong way!”

According to Martin Gardner’s “More Alice Annotated,” Carroll was fascinated by playing music boxes backward to produce what he called “music standing on its head.” In



FIGURE 2

"Isa's Visit to Oxford," Carroll refers to "playing a game of Reversi..." He even wrote letters to friends and relatives backward, both mirror reversals and word-for-word (as pictured).

Fig. 3: Backward letter from "Lewis Carroll" (Charles Dodgson) to Nellie Bowman.

Another time, Carroll wrote in his diary that he "invented what I think is a new kind of riddle: 'A Russian had three sons. The first, named Rab, became a lawyer; the second, Yrma, became a soldier. The third became a sailor: what was his name?'"

The answer is Yvan, since the sons joined the Bar, the Army and the Navy.

In the 20th century, palindromes were the province of modernists, writers seeking to break down language into glossolalic, "pure" language. (In other words, they weren't very good palindromists.)

The first was James Joyce, who established the two main uses of reversals in modern literature: the palindrome itself as postmodern language, pure form without meaning; and reversibility as a motif, a metaphor for refuting the concepts of logic and inevitable linear development, as Carroll has used it. (See my article "Ulysses in Reverse" in issue six of "The Palindromist" magazine.)

Many followed in his footsteps. Anthony Burgess gave a quick survey in the "London Times Literary Supplement" on March 8, 1987:

"Vladimir Nabokov ran diaper backwards and it became repaid. There had to be a meaning in that, though far below the dictionary level. Dylan Thomas discovered, belatedly, that live was evil reversed and went into a drunken stupor about it, or perhaps without it. In 'The Ascent of F6,' Auden makes Michael Ransom say 'All that lives is evil,' perhaps justifying the generalization, palpably false, because of the palinlogue."

The most distinguished and prolific of these was

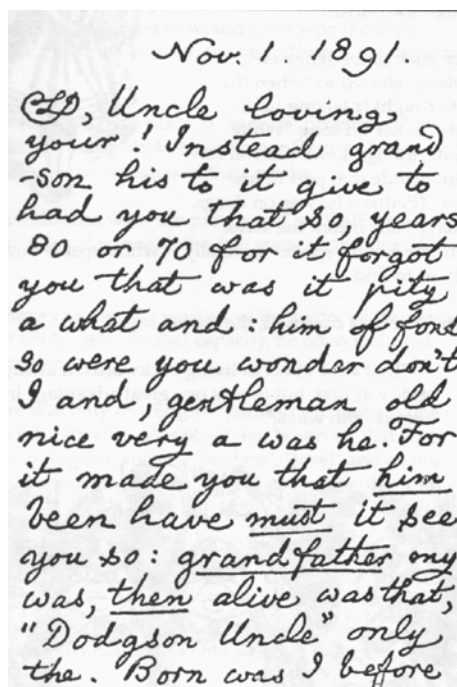


FIGURE 3

minotaur."

Nabokov used reversals in his better-known works, too. The most famous examples are in "Pale Fire" (see sidebar). In "Lolita," Humbert Humbert muses about Poe's use of "mid" and "dim." And Nabokov's novel following "Pale Fire" was "Ada," for heaven's sake. In that book, people live in an antiworld named "Demonia" or "Antiterra" and debate whether Terra exists.

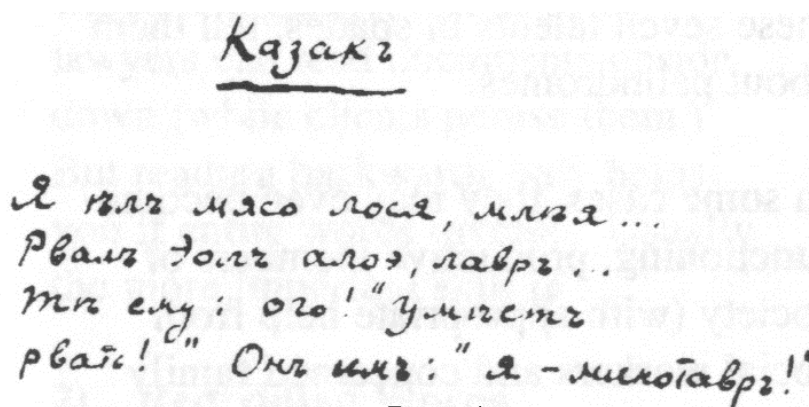


FIGURE 4

translation from the Russian version by Erika Greber reads:

"Take the word ropot [murmur], 'Cincinnatus' brother-in-law, the wit, was saying to him, 'and read it backwards. Eh? Comes out funny, doesn't it?' [—> topor: the axe]."

("Voz'mi-ka slovo ropot, govovil Cincinnatu ego shurin, ostriak, 'I prochti obratno. A? Smeshno poluchaetsia?")

Nabokov, best known for the novel "Lolita" and often considered the 20th century's best novelist. He was more explicit about the palindromes in his work than even Joyce.

Nabokov was born in Russia and wrote novels in Russian before moving to America midcentury. While living in Paris in the 1930s, he gave this handwritten Russian palindrome to Lucie Leon Noel (!) on the night she introduced him to James Joyce:

Fig. 4: Kazakz handwritten poem

"COSSACK

I was eating elk meat in great ecstasy

Aeolus tore at the purple of the laurels

They said to him, oho, he knows how to tear.

He said to them: I am the

Hero Van Veen's favorite sport is dancing on his hands, and the novel turns time itself upside down, following "Veen's Time."

One of Nabokov's best palindromes, though, was translated out of "Invitation to a Beheading," his brilliant dissection of totalitarian mind games. A literal

In the English translation, the answer (“axe”) is preserved by turning it into an anagram deletion: “start with the word ‘anxiety’ and take away ‘tiny.’” This captures the implicit threat, but loses the reversal. I’d suggest an alternate translation: “Read the word ‘examined’ backward and take away the ‘denim.’ Comes out funny, doesn’t it?”

After Nabokov, three writers published influential essays about obsession with palindromes. All wrote for “The New Yorker” in its heyday (and two are still there).

James Thurber, the humorist, wrote a piece about insomnia not long before his death, in which he described working words back at 3 a.m. Two of the examples he cited (which he credited to friends) have become famous:

“He goddam mad dog, eh?”

and

“Piel’s lager on red rum did murder no regal sleep.”

Thurber conceded that the latter was flawed, but later writers have “corrected” it to “Peel’s lager,” since the original product is forgotten anyway.

Poet and translator Alastair Reid wrote an essay in his 1961 book “Passwords” that succinctly defined the palindromist’s ultimate dream: “That somewhere within the confines of the language lurks the Great Palindrome, a nutshell which not only fulfills the intricate demands of the art, flowing sweetly in both directions, but which also contains the Final Truth of Things.” That essay also introduced his superior palindrome, which at the time was the longest known:

“T. Eliot, top bard, notes putrid tang emanating, is sad. I’d assign it a name: gnat dirt upset on drab pot toilet.”

Roger Angel, their colleague, wrote a piece for “The New Yorker” in 1969 that echoed both these pieces. “Ainmosni,” which has been reprinted many times, discussed palindromy as a (flawed) cure for insomnia and uncorked a ‘drome yet longer than Reid’s, featuring the fevered rantings of a World War II casualty. Sadly, it’s not that interesting or potent as either literature or palindrome.

Since then, the French Oulipo movement has taken up the banner of literary wordplay. Its adherents aim to write great literature while using various self-imposed constraints. The movement’s star, George Perec, wrote the novel “La Disparition” without using the letter E. His novel “Life: A User’s Manual,” based on a more complicated constraint, was a best-seller.

More to the point, Perec is the first major writer to publish a palindrome as a serious work of art. His “gran palindrome,” more than 500 words long, was published as a poem in one of his books of poetry. Understanding it is not easy, even in the original language. Francophones I have queried are split between finding it amazing and a chore. The work begins:

“Trace l’inegal palindrome. Neige. Bagatelle, dira Hercule. Le brut repentir, cet écrit né Perec. L’arc lu pèse trop, lis a vice-versa. Perte. Cerise d...”

(“Trace the unequal palindrome. Snow. A trifle, Hercules would say. Rough penitence, this writing born of Perec. The read arch is too heavy; read vice-versa. Loss. Cherry...)

Much later, it ends:

“Desire ce trepas rêvé: Ci va! S’il porte, sépulcral, ce repentir, cet écrit ne perturbe le lucre: Haridelle, ta gabegie ne mord ni la plage ni l’écart.”

(“Desire this dreamed-of decease: Here goes! If he carries, entombed, this penitence, this writing will disturb no lucre. Old witch, your treachery will bite into neither the shore nor the space between.”)

(Translations are by Oulipo member Harry Matthews, as quoted in Martin Gardner’s column in the February 1977 “Scientific American.”)

Since Perec passed away, nearly 30 years ago, it has not been clear who will join this lineage of great, palindromic writers. A German poet, Oskar Pastior, has staked a claim with his book of poetry “KopfNuß Januskopf: Gedichte in Palindromen” (which got a rave review in “World Literature Today”), but it is too early to judge his stature. Nonetheless, he has gone one step beyond Perec by publishing an entire book of acclaimed palindromes.

This line of great writers has steadily progressed toward embracing palindromes openly in “serious” literature, so that the most recent directly proclaim their palindromes as art. Quietly and steadily, palindromes are gaining some respect after all. MFM

Crossword Answers

1	C	2	E	3	N	4	T	5	U	6	R	7	Y	8	C	9	A	10	S	11	H	12	I	13	E	14	R
15	A	16	E	17	O	18	A	19	A	20	V	21		22													
23	N	24	I	25	G	26	H	27	T	28	W	29	E	30	A	31	R	32	N	33	E	34		35		36	
37	D	38	R	39	T	40	N	41	A	42	G	43	O	44	N	45	Y	46		47		48		49		50	
51	E	52	P	53	I	54	C	55	O	56	V	57	O	58	I	59	D	60	I	61	U	62		63		64	
65	L	66	O	67	E	68	V	69	S	70	N	71	A	72	P	73	S	74		75		76		77		78	
79	A	80	M	81	T	82	R	83	O	84	O	85	P	86	G	87	C	88		89		90		91		92	
93	B	94	U	95	M	96	P	97	Y	98	T	99	R	100	T	101	A	102	S	103	H	104		105		106	
107	R	108	A	109	F	110	E	111	L	112	O	113	N	114	R	115	O	116		117		118		119		120	
121	A	122	B	123	A	124	C	125	K	126	B	127	U	128	E	129	O	130		131		132		133		134	
135	U	136	T	137	T	138	R	139	Y	140	S	141	E	142	V	143	I	144	L	145		146		147		148	
149	P	150	R	151	U	152	D	153	E	154	A	155	I	156	E	157	Y	158		159		160		161		162	
163	E	164	I	165	T	166	I	167	C	168	T	169	A	170	C	171	T	172	O	173	E	174		175		176	
177	A	178	S	179	E	180	H	181	C	182	A	183		184		185		186		187		188		189		190	
191	P	192	U	193	N	194	C	195	H	196	E	197	S	198	F	199	E	200	A	201	T	202	H	203	E	204	R



flapjax at midnite