

Solution for Meta - Cardinals (Answer = NEARSTEPSINTOWILSONHALL)

The meta-puzzle was probably too hard this year; we'll definitely look into this problem for next year. However, for all those who want to know, here's how you do it.

First, you realise that the Cardinals seem to not have much of a role in the story (the only thing that has anything to do with Catholicism is Electress Sophia, the answer to 5.3 Address Book). If you read closely, there is a conspicuous amount of numbers written into the story, and so, knowing the alternate meaning of cardinal, it makes sense to extract the cardinal numbers. We considered the "II" in "Queen Elizabeth II" to be ordinal, and "twice" to be neither ordinal nor cardinal.

The numbers are:

11, 5, 7, 3, 8, 1, 9, 1, 1, 2, 10, 1, 6, 2, 6, 3, 8, 3, 11, 1, 6, 3, 3

Next, you might think, that's a lot of obfuscation just to hide a bunch of numbers, perhaps there is some other significance. The idea is that "card" are the first four letters of "cardinals" (you could also say it reads like "cards n' all"), and so, perhaps there is something to do with cards. You were supposed to take all the puzzle answers and turn each letter into cards by setting A = Ace, B = King, down to M = 2, then repeating for N = Ace, O = King ... Z = 2. We didn't hint this bit because, by coincidence, there was a cards puzzle that happened to use the exact same encoding we needed - if one changes the suit to no trumps, which is a sensible thing to do, given that there's no real reason for diamonds to remain trumps.

Once you have the hands, you need to take a bit of a leap of faith. You take the best poker hand (no flushes, because we removed suits) out of each hand - this was very obscurely hinted by the Queen having a (royal) flush, you weren't supposed to get it from this but since half the teams guessed poker for 4.3 Card Trick, we thought you might guess poker again for the meta-puzzle. Perhaps not. Anyway, the hands were:

- 1.1 THREEOFKIND
- 1.2 FOUROFACIND
- 1.3 THREEOFKIND
- 1.4 FULLHOUSE
- 2.1 TWOPAIR
- 2.2 FULLHOUSE
- 2.3 PAIR
- 2.4 STRAIGHT
- 3.1 HIGHCARD
- 3.2 FOUROFACIND
- 3.3 TWOPAIR
- 3.4 FULLHOUSE
- 4.1 TWOPAIR
- 4.2 TWOPAIR
- 4.3 FULLHOUSE
- 4.4 TWOPAIR
- 5.1 THREEOFKIND
- 5.2 HIGHCARD
- 5.3 HIGHCARD
- 5.4 FULLHOUSE

You then match the numbers up with the names of the hands, for example, 11+THREEOFKIND = N (the 11th letter). Three of the puzzles need to have two; we know this gives 1771 possibilities which is an unreasonable amount if you don't have a programmer on board, but you

can reduce this number by making some reasonable guesses.

Since the 5th puzzle is TWOPAIR and the 5th number is 8, this can't possibly match, so at least one of the Act 1 puzzles must have two corresponding numbers. If you assume that exactly one of the Act 1 puzzles has two, then the remaining two in the next 4 Acts aren't that dense, so you could just try assigning one per puzzle from 2.1 onwards, to obtain the middle of the string as TEPSTINTOWIL from 2.1 to 3.3. This makes sense - it's highly unlikely that the word "INTO" and what could be the end of "STEPS" and the start of "WILSON" could just coincidentally occur due to a mistake. At this point, you could actually just stop and dig near the steps into Wilson Hall (a very well-known Melbourne Uni landmark, for all those that don't know), which is where the prize was hidden.

Alternatively, with a little more trial and error, you could obtain the full phrase, NEARSTEPSINTOWILSONHALL.

The final prize was a collection of cards (not a pack, it actually contained selected cards from four identical packs), which, using the same key but with Hearts and Clubs going to the letters A-M and Diamonds and Spades going to the letters N-Z, a la 4.3 Card Trick with No Trumps as the suit, and the jokers used as spaces, you obtain a message, which reads:

Good work Boris. Your vodka will arrive shortly. Eddie and Germaine.

We had planned to confront with poker faces (no pun intended) anyone attempting to claim first prize by delivering these cards, insisting on knowing the location of the Ashes (it was to be presumed that Eddie and Germaine had successfully stolen them) before we granted anyone victory. Unfortunately, the guy that dug it up happened to be Mr. I-can-solve-Disc-who-wants-me-on-their-team, so we didn't get to have our fun.

An Apology:

This was a very long meta-puzzle involving a large number of steps; while each step in itself was reasonable, putting them all together turned out to be far above what was humanly possible. This was an oversight due to a lack of testing, but in our defence, we really didn't have enough people on board to full test everything.

We also, at the last minute, decided to make the meta-puzzle harder than it would've been by taking out many of the hints we intended to put in - this was because a very large number of teams had just cruised through the first few days, and we were concerned that the hunt would just finish before most teams had a chance to attempt the last few days with the hints that they might need. Obviously, this was a mistake - having a chokepoint on a single puzzle is not a good thing by any means.

Anyway, apologies for the rather anticlimatic finish (though I'm sure the teams who dug for it didn't think so), we can't do much about it now but we'll try to do better next year.

-- James Zhao

An Alternate Solution:

We set A = 2, B = 3, C = 4, ..., L = King, M = Ace, N = 2, O = 3, ...
Z = Ace. (We did this because we assumed that Ace was high, then
matched letters to the card values accordingly.) We then used this
cipher to convert all of the puzzle answers. (e.g. SPELUNKER becomes
7 4 6 K 9 2 Q 6 6.) We then took the highest possible hand for each
puzzle answer. (e.g. For SPELUNKER, the highest hand is a triple 6
with the next two highest cards K and Q: 6 K Q 6 6.)

Then, we wrote out the 23 cardinal numbers mentioned in the metapuzzle
storyline, i.e. 11, 5, 7, 3, ... , 3. We assigned them to each of the
puzzles in order, assigning two to each of Elitism, Card Trick and
Disorientation. So, the numbers 11 and 5 are associated with
SPELUNKER. We then took the corresponding ordinal numbers to the
cardinal numbers modulo 5, and recorded the corresponding card value
of the corresponding hands. So, for SPELUNKER, we take the 11th and
the 5th (i.e. the 1st and the 5th modulo 5) values of "6 K Q 6 6",
which are the first and last 6's respectively. We then referred back
to the puzzle answer for the letters that generated the specific card
values. (i.e. The first 6 was converted from E, and the last 6 was
converted from R. We therefore are left with E and R from the puzzle
answer SPELUNKER.)

Stringing together the 23 letters thus generated, we are left with
ERVAEWOZSIUTNUGEEMAECWW. When this combination of letters is
anagrammed, one gets "EVACUATE SEMEN URGE WIZ WOW". This seemed to
indicate that the ashes were hidden in the Union House toilets.

You can check our method yourself to see that it works. No doubt this
is yet another case of RBS (Roger Brucker Syndrome). Please try not to
let it happen like this in future, as it causes teams to waste a lot
of time, and causes them to do unpleasant things like sticking their
hands down toilet bowls in an effort to find an urn containing a
cremated wicket stump.

-- Adrian Khoo, Los Hijos Del Diablo