

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 7

Introduction

The first rule of Flanagan's Running Club is everyone should talk about Flanagan's Running Club!

Now that I've sorted out the e-mail issues and this comes out from my website address without any issues, feel free to forward on to anyone you want, tell people about it the works, just get them to sign up.

Can I ask you all a favour, please can you review my book on Inkitt, and the link is below. Even if you don't take time to read it properly, please flick through a few chapters, give it ratings and a review and vote for it please. It may help me get it published.

<https://www.inkitt.com/stories/thriller/201530>

On This Day – May 4th (Be With You)



1256 – The Augustinian monastic order is constituted at the Lecceto Monastery when Pope Alexander IV issues a papal bull *Licet ecclesiae catholicae*.

1471 – Wars of the Roses: The Battle of Tewkesbury: Edward IV defeats a Lancastrian Army and kills Edward of Westminster, Prince of Wales.

1776 – Rhode Island becomes the first American colony to renounce allegiance to King George III.

1814 – Emperor Napoleon I of France arrives at Portoferraio on the island of Elba to begin his exile.

1814 – King Ferdinand VII of Spain signs the Decree of the 4th of May, returning Spain to absolutism.

1919 – May Fourth Movement: Student demonstrations take place in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China, protesting the Treaty of Versailles, which transferred Chinese territory to Japan.

1926 – The United Kingdom general strike begins.

1932 – In Atlanta, mobster Al Capone begins serving an eleven-year prison sentence for tax evasion.

1959 – The 1st Annual Grammy Awards are held.

1979 – Margaret Thatcher becomes the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

1994 – Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat sign a peace accord, granting self-rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

It's Star Wars Day

And it's Dave Brubeck Day

Plus it's International Firefighters' Day

And don't forget it's Anti-Bullying Day

Mapping The London Year

2006 – The Sultan's elephant appears in London.

This was a large-scale public performance spectacle created by the Royal de Luxe theatre company and involved a huge moving mechanical elephant, a giant marionette of a girl and other related public art installations. In French it was called *La viste du sultan des Indes sur son elephant a voyager dans le temps* (literally 'visit from the Sultan of the Indies on his time-travelling elephant.')

The show was commissioned by the French cities of Nantes and Amiens to commemorate the centenary of Jules Verne's death. Its procession around London lasted for four days, and it travelled to various other major cities around the world between 2005 and 2006.

Chuck D Presents This Day In Rap And Hip-Hop History

1993 – Run DMC release their sixth album “Down With The King” on Profile records.

Featuring production by the Bomb Squad, Pete Rock, Jermaine Dupri, Daniel Shulman, Q-Tip, and EPMD, who also appeared on the album. “Down With The King” peaked at number 7 on the Billboard 200 and topped the R&B chart.

Showcasing their evolving style, this innovative album boasted guest spots by reggae star Mad Cobra, and Rage Against The Machine guitarist Tom Morello. Singles include the gold certified title track, which reached number 21 on the Billboard Hot 100 and topped the Rap chart.

365 – Great Stories From History For Every Day Of The Year

1891 Mr Sherlock Holmes vanished today in Switzerland and was presumed dead, most probably at the hands of his arch-antagonist Professor James Moriarty, the ‘Napoleon of crime’. The celebrated London consulting detective was on a walking trip of several miles from the village of Meiringen to the hamlet of Rosenlauri, and had taken a recommended detour to see the falls of Reichenbach. Shortly before the detour, his travelling companion on the journey, a Dr Watson, also of London, had been called back to Meiringen on a medical emergency (which proved a ruse), so that Holmes was alone when he approached the falls.

Evidence gathered at the scene – two sets of footprints going towards the gorge but none returning – suggested that Holmes and his assailant met and struggled on the narrow path, then fell, locked together, into the abyss, their bodies unrecoverable in the ‘dreadful cauldron of swirling water and seething foam’. The crime-scene investigation, which was conducted by local police and Dr Watson, also found an alpenstock belonging to Holmes, his silver cigarette case, and his note to Dr Watson, evidently scribbled some minutes before the end, stating that he and Moriarty were about to have a ‘final discussion of those questions that lie between us’.

Holmes death was a serious blow – not only to crime prevention but also to literature. True to his mysterious form, however, Holmes reappeared in London almost three years later, in April 1894, to resume his career as the world’s first consulting detective. It turned out that it was Moriarty, and not Holmes, who had died in the falls of Reichenbach. Holmes was brought back – from the very brink – at the insistence of millions of his devoted fans around the world left shocked and grieving over his unexpected demise. For them the three years of his absence seemed more like ten – which in fact they were. “*The Final Problem*”, Arthur Conan Doyle’s story in which Holmes met his terrible fate was published in the December 1893 issue of the Strand Magazine. But Conan Doyle did not affect his detective’s remarkable reappearance until October 1903, with the publication of “*The Empty House*”.

Births

1923 – Eric Sykes
1929 – Audrey Hepburn
1967 – Kate Garraway
1974 – Tony McCoy
1987 – Cesc Fàbregas
1989 – Rory McIlroy

Deaths

1924 – E. Nesbit
2012 – Adam Yauch (MCA)

Number 1’s

Number 1 single in 2011 - LMFAO - Party Rock Anthem
Number 1 album in 1966 - The Rolling Stones - Aftermath
Number 1 compilation album in 1996 - Dance Zone Level Seven

Random Results

1985 – Tottenham Hotspur 4 – Coventry City 2
2013 – Leicester Tigers 32 – London Irish 20
2013 – Leicestershire Foxes 289 – Gloucestershire Gladiators 174, Leicestershire won by 115 runs
1984 – New York Knicks 100 – Boston Celtics 92
2017 – New York Rangers 4 – Ottawa Senators 1
1966 – San Francisco Giants 6 – Los Angeles Dodgers 1

Drabble

A drabble is a complete story that is exactly one hundred words long.

Food Magic

The boy’s friends were smiling and laughing, they were amazed at the fact that the food was floating up off the plate, through the air and into his mouth.

Every time a piece of food was in his mouth, one of the other boys cheered, and they kept encouraging him to do it again. He was almost halfway through his lunch when the teacher approached him from behind and shouted,

“Stop playing with your food young man, if I’ve told you once, I’ve told you at least a hundred times. Don’t levitate your food to eat. Use the fork Luke.”

Joke

A man comes up to the Mexican border on his bicycle. He's got two large bags over his shoulders. The guard stops him and says, "What's in the bags?" "Sand," the man answers. The guard says, "We'll just see about that get off the bike." The guard takes the bags and rips them apart; he empties them out and finds nothing in them but sand. He detains the man overnight and has the sand analysed, only to discover that there is nothing but pure sand in the bags. The guard releases the man, puts the sand into new bags, hefts them onto the man's shoulders, and lets him cross the border. A week later, the same thing happens. The guard asks, "What have you got?" "Sand," says the man. The guard does his thorough examination and discovers that the bags contain nothing but sand. He gives the sand back to the man, who crosses the border on his bicycle. This sequence of events is repeated every day for three years. Finally, the man doesn't show up one day and the guard meets him in a Cantina in Mexico. "Hey, Buddy," says the guard, "I know you are smuggling something. It's driving me crazy. It's all I think about. I can't sleep. Just between you and me, what are you smuggling?" The man sips his beer and says, "Bicycles."

Random Items

Fact

Thomas Cook was a 19th century Puritan teetotaler who organised the first ever “package trip” – a train from Leicester to Loughborough for people to attend a lecture on the evils of demon drink. This was so successful that further excursions were arranged and the travel agents we know today were formed.

Firsts

1875 – Matthew Webb became the first person to swim the English Channel

1926 – Gertrude Ederle became the first female to swim the English Channel

1961 – Antonio Albertondo became the first person to swim a non-stop double crossing of the English Channel

1981 – Jon Erikson became the first person to swim a non-stop triple crossing of the English Channel

Thought

Why is it that if someone tells you there are 1 billion stars in the universe, you will believe them, but if someone tells you a wall has wet paint you will have to touch it to be sure?

Forgotten English

Raftiness

Fustiness, staleness. The air is said to be rafty when it is misty, with an unpleasant smell. A general name for brewers' grain or hog wash.

Ambrose Bierce's Demon's Dictionary

ZEAL

A certain nervous disorder afflicting the young and inexperienced.

Words You Should Know

Prevaricate

This is a verb meaning not exactly to lie, but certainly to be economical with the truth: to mislead or avoid answering the question. “You said those flowers weren't from you,” she accused. “No,” he replied, “you asked me directly and I prevaricated.” You sometimes hear prevaricate used as if it meant procrastinate, but there is a clear difference: the procrastinator merely delays while the prevaricator intends to deceive.

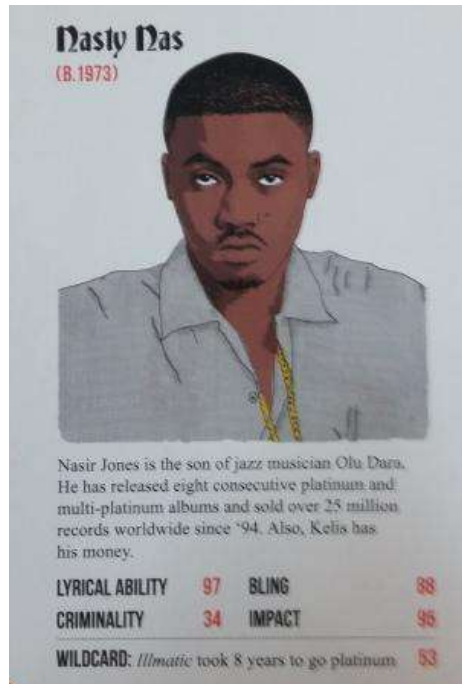
Popular Expressions – What They Mean And Where We Got Them

All Greek To Me

'It's all Greek to me' is used to mean that something is completely unintelligible to the speaker, Greek being a particularly tricky language to grasp because of its different alphabet.

It may have started out as an Anglicized version of the Latin phrase 'Graecum est; non legitur' meaning 'It is Greek; it cannot be read', which was often used by monk scribes in the Middle Ages, when Greek was falling out of use. It was probably popularized by Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1599), in which Casca says, 'For mine own part, it was Greek to me' (1:2).

Rappers of the Nineties Trumps



Quote(s)

Now it would appear that no-one knows who it was that said it. It also appears no-one knows what was said. But whatever it was it must have been a humdinger to make the new payroll team leader leave their job before lunch on the second day at work.

Going Underground

Queensway

Formerly called Black Lion Lane, was named from the Public House once on the corner of the street. It was re-named in honour of Queen Victoria soon after she came to the throne in 1837. It is suggested that the reason was that, as a child, this was the place of Victoria's favourite horse ride; she then lived only half a mile away at Kensington Palace. It was at first called *Queen's Road*, then *Queensway* from January 1938.

The station was opened as QUEEN'S ROAD on 30 July 1900; re-named QUEENSWAY 1 September 1946.

Top Ten

The 10 oldest cities in the UK, with the year their original charter was granted

No.	City	Charter Granted
1	Ripon	886
2	London	1066
3	Edinburgh	1124
4	Chichester	1135
5	Lincoln	1154
6	Oxford	1154
7	Nottingham	1155
8	Winchester	1155
9	Exeter	1156
10	Carlisle	1158

Cathedral Fact Files

Cathedral	Durham Cathedral		
Dedicated To	Christ and St Mary (Formerly St Mary and Cuthbert)		
Type	Medieval	Architecture	Norman
Religion	COE	Tower / Spire	3 Towers
Site Founded	995	Height (External)	218ft
Church Founded	1093	Height (Internal)	74ft
Bishopric Founded	635	Length	502ft
Current Bishopric Founded	995	Width	192ft

Thirty-Three And One Third Revolutions Per Minute

Nirvana - Nevermind

Nirvana's second album was released in September 1991 to much greater acclaim and commercial success than its predecessor "*Bleach*". It only ever managed to peak as high as number 7 in the UK charts, but did manage to spend over 200 weeks on the chart. In the US it made the number 1 spot, and was one of the biggest selling albums of the 90's. It is said to have sold over thirty million copies worldwide. Fronted by the somewhat tragic Kurt Cobain, with the quiet and unassuming Krist Novoselic, and on drums Dave Grohl, they were the band that brought rock back to the fore (under the label of grunge - much to the ongoing disgust of Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder). The album was produced by Butch Vig and released on the Geffen label and the legendary Sleeve Art was designed by Robert Fisher.

Track 1 – *Smells Like Teen Spirit* - In a period overwhelmed by dance music, this is the track that woke music buyers up to rock again. An instant classic, and the driving point for the album, there can't be many better track 1's anywhere. Managed to reach number 7 in the singles chart (the same as the albums top position in the album charts) in the UK, and number 2 in the US, where it went on to be the most played record on US radio in the 90's. The simple video has also managed to be voted best video countless times over the years by MTV and VH1 viewers. Used in countless mash-ups over the years as well, most famously with Destiny's Child's "*Bootylicious*". Has been covered over eighty times, including an appalling dance version in the mid-nineties, and later in Hammond Organ style by Pleasure Beach on the Acid Jazz label. Also got the full Weird Al Yankovic treatment in his parody "*Smells Like Nirvana*", and has been sampled more than sixty times.

Track 2 – *In Bloom* - The 4th single culled from the album managed a respectable 28 in the charts, and the video featured the first of many cross dressing appearances from Mr Grohl. Sampled five times and covered nineteen times.

Track 3 – *Come As You Are* - No I don't have a gun!!!! Heartfelt lyrics, though it would turn out, not strictly true. The 2nd single from the album, it also managed to crack the top 10. Contains a sample from Killing Joke's "*Eighties*", and has been sampled eleven times and covered over thirty times.

Track 4 – *Breed* - Slots in effortlessly in the midst of all the single releases, in one of the best album first sides ever put together. Sampled Link Wray's "*Run Chicken Run*" and sampled a couple of times itself, and covered a dozen times.

Track 5 – *Lithium* - Today I found my friends in my head. This was the 3rd single release from the album, and just failed to hit the top 10 peaking at number 11. Sampled five times and covered twenty four times.

Track 6 – *Polly* - Kidnap and torture never sounded so difficult, for the person doing the kidnapping and torturing. Sampled The 4-Skins' "*On The Streets*", and has itself been sampled four times, and covered eleven times.

Track 7 – *Territorial Pissings* - Just because you're paranoid, don't mean they're not after you, is probably Kurt Cobain' finest lyric, and one of the best lyrics ever. Sampled The Youngbloods' "*Get Together*" and sampled itself three times and covered nine times.

Track 8 – *Drain You* - Meanwhile, it's back to the realm of virtually unintelligible lyrics, which is how the group's first UK TV slot was introduced by Casey Kayem in the early hours of a Friday morning on America's top ten. Sampled twice and covered eight times.

Track 9 – *Lounge Act* - Being stuck as a later track on an album that has such a top six means that this track (along with 10 and 11) seem to get lost along the way. There's nothing wrong with the tracks and listened to in isolation are good tracks, they just get lost in such a stellar line up. Covered six times.

Track 10 - *Stay Away* - Monkey see and monkey do. Covered eight times.

Track 11 - *On a Plain* - All about self-love, which once again turned out to be not strictly true. Sampled once and covered ten times.

Track 12 - *Something In The Way* - Featuring Kirk Canning on Cello, slow and strangely haunting, and includes the later obligatory hidden track – "*Endless, Nameless!*", one of the first CD's to do so. Sampled twice and covered seventeen times.

Club Fact File

Leicester City	
Founded	1884

Turned Professional	1888
Admitted to the League	1894
Ground	King Power Stadium
Capacity	32,315
Previous Ground(s)	Victoria Park, Belgrave Road, Filbert Street
Previous Names	Leicester Fosse
Nickname(s)	Foxes, Filberts
Trophies	
League Champions	2015-16
Division 2 Winners	1924-25, 1936-37, 1953-54, 1956-57, 1970-71, 1979-80, 2013-14
League 1 Winners	2008-09
League Cup Winners	1964, 1997, 2000
Charity Shield	1971
League Seasons	
Seasons in Premier League (Top Flight)	50
Seasons in Championship (Tier 2)	62
Seasons in League 1 (Tier 3)	1
Seasons in League 2 (Tier 4)	0

Story Time

Road Trip

Nearly Home

It was the final day of their trip, the city of Santa Christo was on the horizon, they were nearly home. The homecoming was going to be a far cry from that they would have expected when they set off sixteen days before. There was going to be a lot of anger, a lot of tears, finally, a lot of blame. From their original party of twenty that had set off on this trip sixteen days ago, only two were returning, the two men walking to Santa Christo were John and Mark, they had no idea what had happened to the others, no idea where they were, with the exception of poor old Stan, who they had had to leave behind in Butchersfield three days before, when he had finally given up the ghost, dying in his sleep, something that Stan was probably glad of, given the extent of his injuries, and the pain he had been in.

The two of them had dragged and pushed Stan with them since their return from over the border, moving a lot slower than they had on their outbound journey. The last sixty hours or so had been easier going from a purely speed or effort point of view, but the mood which was already gloomy, turned even more sombre.

The two of them would have to tell Stan's wife he wasn't returning, but not even that was going to be their most difficult conversation once they got back. Seventeen other men were missing; some of them had wives and children, or lovers, plus other family. One of the missing – Bill – was due to be getting married next week, how were they going to explain to his fiancée just what had happened.

The Journey Begins

It had all been so different when they set off from Santa Christo sixteen days ago. The twenty of them had looked all resplendent in their matching outfits, their packs on their backs, full of all the necessary implements and supplies that they needed for their journey. They were going to make their way down the coast, stopping off at seven towns along the way to spend the night, before heading off for their next destination the following morning.

Night eight was what the trip was all about, they were going across the border into the Kingdom of Almaca, spending the night in Juanati, before turning around and heading back over the border, then back up the coast stopping at all the same towns as they did on the way down.

The twenty of them had known each other for more years than some of them would care to admit, some of them were closer than others, but they were all comfortable in each other's company, they knew each other's families, and over the years they had been on many trips together.

This trip was going to be different, it was longer than any they had done before, and it was a much tighter group this time around. There would normally be more of them, but this trip was limited to a maximum number, there had been some disappointed people, but that always happened for any trip.

As the group left Santa Christo, there was a large party of well-wishers there to see them off, loved ones getting a kiss or embrace before they waved them off for sixteen days. All of them would have people that they would miss, and there would be people who would miss them as well.

They strode out to their first stop at Elmland, spirits were high amongst the group, a lot of the conversation between them involved ribbing Bill about his forthcoming marriage, and how therefore this trip was going to be his last hurrah as a single man. They felt good as they moved along the road, drawing crowds as they made their way through villages on the route, they stopped in a couple to get some food and drink. Locals would come up to them to find out what they were doing and where they were going, the attention being due to it being unusual for a group of this size to be walking through their villages.

When they arrived at their inn in Elmland that evening, they got a warmer welcome than a group of twenty men travelling together could normally expect. They were whisked to their rooms so that they could leave their packs, clean themselves up after a day on the road, and change if required. Back down in the public area of the inn, the food and drink flowed quickly, their arrival had attracted a lot of attention, the inn filled up rapidly with numbers of attentive men and women, fawning over the party, with offers being whispered in ears, or shouted across tables. Musicians set up, loud music played, there was dancing, lively at first, becoming more intimate as the night wore on and the drinks took effect.

One by one the group dispersed, some by themselves, some with a local man or woman, even both in some cases. No one knew for certain what time the last of them had headed back to their rooms, but when they started to make their way down for breakfast the following morning, Charlie was still there from the night before, fast asleep on one of the tables, curled up with a bottle of wine still clutched in one hand.

The send-off from Elmland as they headed out to Jondale was nearly as good as the one from their friends and families back in Santa Christo at the start of their journey, kisses and embraces with people who were strangers little more than twelve hours ago.

The group as a whole were in good spirits, bouncing off each other with tales of the night before, but their pace was slower than yesterday, the after effects of the alcohol and the late night took their toll, they were thankful it was a cloudy day, a lot cooler than the previous few days had been. Again villages came and went, useful to get liquids on board to rehydrate, removing their thirst and making them feel like their normal selves as the day progressed.

Their evening in Jondale pretty much followed the same pattern as the one in Elmland, as did every night on their journey down to the border; eating, drinking, music, dancing, fornicating and passing out. The only wrinkle came on the sixth morning in the town of Lost Englos, they couldn't find Bob anywhere in the inn. His pack was in his room, but it was obvious he hadn't spent the night there. They searched the whole inn without success, before moving on to search the town. It took them over an hour, many hundreds of questions and rousing half the town before they eventually found him, tucked up in bed with the town's mayor and his wife. It took another half an hour to extract Bob from the bed, as the three inhabitants of the bed tried to persuade various other members of the group to come and join them in it.

The plan for the seventh night of the trip, their stop at Deagio, was to take it easy, to save themselves for the following night and their trip over the border into the town of Juanati. Some of the party stuck to that original plan, but a number of them, buoyed by the excitement of the previous nights didn't, which probably didn't help matters or the events that unfolded across the border in Almaca. Although it was a more low key night, they all enjoyed themselves, not knowing that it was going to be their last full night together as a group.

The Journey Back

Mark staggered back across the border, somewhere along the way during the night he had lost his pack, his only set of clothes were the ones he was standing up in, and even they were little better than rags now.

All of the group's plans had gone to rat-poo from the moment they had hit Juanati, everything since that point was hazy as hell. Mark had lost everyone else, and as he checked himself over, he found that he had numerous cuts, scratches, and the start of bruising in several places. He ached all over, once over the border he had collapsed in a heap wanting to cry. He hoped the rest had fared better than him. It was barely light as he lay on the ground, trying to find the strength to get back on his feet, so that he could carry on.

The group of them had agreed that if for any reason they got separated whilst south of the border in Almaca, they would head back to Deagio to regroup at the inn the following night. Mark dragged himself upright, before tentatively heading north on the road. He double checked the direction twice before starting, as he had no intention to go back to Almaca ever, let alone today.

It took Mark the whole day to get to the outskirts of Deagio, moving at a much slower pace than he had as part of the group the day before, then over an hour to find the inn. When he walked through the door in his dishevelled state, he received a very different welcome to that the group had received just two nights before. None of the staff wanted to make eye contact with him, or even speak to him. A curt response to his question about a room gave him a number and a key, but nothing else.

He traipsed up to his room, finding it tucked away in a part of the inn he hadn't even known about on his previous visit. The room was sparse, a far cry from two nights ago, having just a bed, a sink with a bar of soap, some tatty curtain and a hook on the back of the door.

He took off his clothes, washing them as best he could, before washing himself. His cuts stung from the contact with the soap, but washing made him feel a little bit more human than he had. He looked around for a towel to dry himself, before ending up using the blanket on the bed when failing to find one anywhere in the room.

He lay on the bed, resting his weary body, fading in and out of sleep. His dozing was interrupted by a knock on the door to his room; he dragged his carcass off the bed, wrapping the blanket around his naked body as he did so. Moving as quickly as he could he opened the door hoping to see one of his friends, but finding himself frowning when there was no one there when the door swung towards him. He stuck his head out of the door frame into the corridor, looking both ways, but there was no one to be seen in either direction. He looked down and saw a tray on the floor; it had some rough cut bread, some meats, and a lump of cheese and a jug of water on it. He was being given a clear message that he should eat up here in his room, probably to prevent him sullyng the inn's common area.

In some ways he was glad of this, he didn't feel like company after the carnage of the previous night, the food and drink may have been basic, but he wolfed it down all the same before slumping back on the bed, drifting off to sleep quite quickly.

He woke the next morning with the sun streaming through holes in the tatty curtains, shining on his face, making him blink furiously when he opened his eyes. He wandered over to the sink, splashed water on his face, trying to wake himself up. His clothes had dried on the back of the door, but they still looked filthy, plus in the light of day he could see they now looked a bit threadbare, something he had missed whilst washing them the night before. His body ached as he dressed, the basic bed still looked tempting to him, but he needed to move, he wanted to see if anyone else had made it back here whilst he had been asleep, It was something he should have asked when he arrived here last night, but the shock of the coldness of the welcome had left him unable to think properly.

Opening his door, he nearly tripped over another tray, laid out in the same way as the one from the previous night, as he went to step into the corridor. It was clear that he was still persona non gratis with the inn. The food was a bit stale, again a far cry from the feast they had all partaken in just two mornings ago. He ate it anyway before leaving his room, heading for the main part of the inn; he wanted to know if any of his friends had actually turned up during the night.

No one wanted to speak to him, he received no answers to his questions as everyone acted like he wasn't there, avoiding contact with him wherever possible. He was frustrated at every turn; blood was rushing through his system, growing louder in his ears, almost drowning out the voice that was calling to him. It finally registered that it was his name being called, and he turned, looking around the room until he saw John waving frantically at him from the same corridor he had stepped out of minutes before.

Mark gingerly made his way over towards John, happy that he wasn't completely alone any more. The closer he got, the clearer it became that John was in just as bad a state as he was, he had a thousand questions rattling through his mind, but only one came out,

"Have you seen anyone else?"

John replied slowly, "I was going to ask you the same thing, but I think your question gives me the answer to that."

"I haven't seen or heard from anyone else except Stan, I've got him with me, but he's in a bad way, there's a gaping hole in his side just below his ribs, I've stuffed it shut as much as I can, but he really needs a doctor."

"Surely the inn could sort that out," Mark shakily replied.

John shook his head before continuing, "They didn't want to let us in, let alone get a doctor for us, I had to threaten to burn the place down to get a room. They eventually relented and sent for a doctor, they said most were unavailable, finally one did turn up, but they took one look at Stan and I and point blank refused to help, walking out slamming the door behind her."

“The inn wants us out; to be fair it makes sense for us to leave and to get to Ivyboard as quickly as possible so we can get Stan to a doctor there.”

Mark nodded his assent, and the pair of them went to get Stan to head on to Ivyboard. It was their priority and there was little conversation between them, it seemed neither of them wanted to talk about their night in Almaca.

Movement with Stan was slow going and laborious, he didn't have much strength to move under his own steam, so when John saw an unattended handcart by the side of the road, they put Stan in it, and took turns wheeling him along. It took them most of the day to get to Ivyboard, and once at the inn, the reception they received made the previous night's greeting look positively warm and friendly. They were reluctantly given a box room between them, with food that was even more basic than that in Deagio. Finding a doctor proved impossible. John and Mark scoured the town looking for a doctor to treat Stan, those few that even bothered to answer their doors said no before being asked, others just didn't answer their doors despite obviously being there.

Back in the room the two of them tried to clean the wound, changing the packing using blankets, not caring what the inn thought, seeing as the inn obviously viewed them as an inconvenience. The wound really did look nasty; liquid was still seeping out, though it was nearly black in colour, rather than red. Whatever they tried, they couldn't stop the flow completely, furthermore the wound just smelt of death. None of them slept well, and unsurprisingly upon waking they found there was no breakfast for them.

A small positive was that they were thankful to find that the handcart was where they had left it the night before. As they set off that morning, John and Mark spoke briefly about the night in Juanati, neither of them really wanting to open up much, and their conversation was cut short by a pained cry from Stan, begging them not to talk about it. Suddenly feeling awkward, they carried on along the road in silence.

As they continued back to Santa Christo, each of their stops received the same level of antipathy from the locals, changing to open hostility from some. Even though the inns had known there were supposed to be twenty of them coming back through and staying in the towns, the inns claimed to be full, despite seeming deserted, and in Elgenwood the inn had been closed completely.

In Butchersfield they had had to leave Stan behind, he had died in his sleep at some point during the night, the two of them had decided to leave him for the inn to sort out, they felt it was a little bit of petty payback towards the inn for the poor reception they had received along their journey back from Almaca, and every town's refusal to have a doctor treat Stan for his wounds.

The people in the towns and villages along the route shrank back into their homes or into the shadows as the men came into sight, it was as if a warning had been passed along the grapevine that these remaining men, so celebrated on the journey to Almaca, were suddenly toxic, and that contact with the men would taint them as well.

The opportunity for people to feel that would soon come to an end, they were nearly home now, home to deal with a lot of angry people at once, friends, family of friends that were no longer with them. There would be questions from the authorities, the two men even thought they might end up in jail if the level of anger they were expecting came to fruition.

All of that would pale into insignificance compared to having to tell Bill's fiancée they had no idea where Bill was. It certainly wasn't going to be the homecoming they had hoped for when they had set out. It was going to be an angry mob shouting questions at them, that they had no answers for, or at least no answers that the mob would want to hear, nothing to comfort anyone's suffering.

One Night In Almaca

The twenty of them had left Deagio later than they had originally planned. They had all sorted out their packs thoroughly, all their weapons had been tested, and despite seven days of travelling they still managed to look as resplendent in their uniforms as they had on their first day marching out from Santa Christo.

The Murcians and Almacas had been at war for almost two years. A delicate truce had been in effect for the last month, a peace treaty had been signed by the two leaders of the nations – the King of Almaca and the President of Murcia – part of which involved technology developed by Murcia being given to Almaca, with gold going back in the opposite direction.

This group of twenty soldiers were taking the technology to Juanati to give to the Almacas; it had been dismantled and split evenly between the twenty packs they carried. Once they got to the royal residence in Juanati, they were to hand all the pieces over, then they would reload their packs with the gold from the Almacas to be transported back to Santa Christo, where the President's representative would be waiting to check it all. Once the gold had been tested and confirmed then two of the women that had invented the technology would go back to Juanati with a couple of guards, and they would build the technology for the Almacas.

That was the plan, but from the moment they were met at the border by a troop of Almaca soldiers to be escorted to Juanati and the royal residence, something seemed a bit off. Their fears were confirmed as soon as they had finished unloading their packs, a call had been given, but it wasn't to bring the gold in as agreed, a second troop of Almaca soldiers, all heavily armed appeared instead.

Peter, the leader of the Murcian group demanded to know the reason for the outrageous change to what had been agreed. The Almacas had just laughed, they had never intended to stick to the peace treaty, they certainly weren't going to hand over any gold, they informed Peter that they already had procured someone from the invention team that would build the technology for them, they didn't need the inventors to do it for them, and they certainly weren't going to be paying for it. Having this technology may not have meant a lot to the Murcians, but it was going to give the Almacas the opportunity to win the war.

Outmanned and over-matched, the Murcians were saved from instant annihilation by a twist of fate from Mother Nature. A sudden gale force blast of wind whipped through the hall in the royal residence, blowing out the vast majority of the lanterns lighting the room in a single fell swoop. The Murcians realising their chance, took advantage of the darkness and the confusion it caused to make a break for it, running and slashing in all directions, making for the doors and a way out of this madness. Given the circumstances, with the number of Almaca troops there, it was a minor miracle any of the Murcians had made it back across the border at all.

What had happened to the other seventeen of the Murcian soldiers wasn't certain, only the Almacas would be able to tell anyone that, but there was a very strong likelihood that they were all dead, slaughtered in a double cross, in an ill-conceived exchange to seal a peace treaty to a stupid war.

This is what John and Mark were faced with telling all the friends and relatives, their army commanders, and the President's man. Despite the chance that they would be severely punished for their failure, they still felt that they owed it to their missing or dead companions to get home and tell the full story as far as they knew it of what had happened on their road trip mission.

It was better for them all to be considered as failures, rather than as men who had taken the gold and ran.

Puzzle Corner

Quiz

Answers from Issue 6's quiz

1. Wonders of the ancient world - Great Pyramid of Giza, Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, Statue of Zeus at Olympia, Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, Colossus of Rhodes, Lighthouse of Alexandria
2. The Secret Seven - Barbara, Colin, George, Jack, Janet, Pam, Peter
3. Sail the seven seas - Arctic Ocean, North Atlantic Ocean, South Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, North Pacific Ocean, South Pacific Ocean, Southern (or Antarctic) Ocean
4. Colours of the rainbow - Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet
5. Michael Jackson number 1's - One Day In Your Life, Billie Jean, I Just Can't Stop Loving You, Black Or White, You Are Not Alone, Earth Song, Blood On The Dancefloor
6. Dwarves - Bashful, Doc, Dopey, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Sneezzy
7. Losers in Chelsea FA Cup wins - Leeds United, Middlesbrough, Aston Villa, Manchester United, Everton, Portsmouth, Liverpool

This Issue's quiz.

Name the seventeen solo artists or groups to have had more than twenty single releases in the UK on the Motown (or it's offshoots) label. The number per artist or group does not include their singles whilst part of a group. i.e. Lionel Richie's numbers do not include the singles by the Commodores who he was a member of. Nor does it count singles released as a duet, i.e. the single "Get It" by Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson, doesn't count to their numbers as solo artists.

Crossword

Mad!

Sudoku

Issue 6's Solution

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

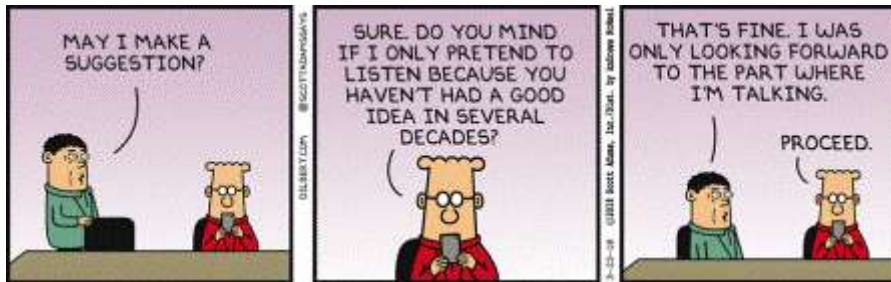
This issue's puzzle

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

Wordsearch

Panicked for a moment, then I found it on the start menu just under Excel.

Dilbert



Epilogue

If you want to catch up on old issues, Drabbles I've had published, or the random scribbling from a bored mind on my blog then they are all available at <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/>

Sign up to the mailing list on the home page there. E-mail any ideas or suggestions to kev@onetruekev.co.uk