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## Christmas countdown

Welcome to the December edition...

**By the time this arrives I'm sure you'll all be counting down the days to Christmas, whether it's due to excitement or if you just want life to get back to normal!**

Apart from the excitement of the big day, there's always lots of other things going on at this time of year – check out page 30 to see what great new films are on at the cinema this month and what's on at Solihull's Core theatre. If you'd rather curl up in the warmth of your own home, have a look at our book reviews on page 26 or try making panettone from our recipe on page 37.

For those of you that eat too much over Christmas and who want to help others, why not try the Lions Festive Walk from Baddesley Clinton National Trust and Hay Woods on 27th December (more details on page 6). There's a choice of different length routes so you can do what you're comfortable with.

I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Zoe

**Zoe Reece**

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**Email: [zoe@dorridgedirectory.com](mailto:zoe@dorridgedirectory.com)**

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# community events

## Santa and Snow Play at Touchwood

**Until 24 December**

Visit Santa in his grotto with his trusted team of elves ready to shower the region's lucky boys and girls with early gifts. Or kids can try Snow Play (free) on Juliet balcony and throw artificial snowballs. For a full schedule of events and grotto opening times visit [www.touchwoodsoliuhull.co.uk](http://www.touchwoodsoliuhull.co.uk) or call 0121 709 6900.



## Take That Tribute

**14 December**

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These boys are guaranteed to get the party started, performing hit after hit of Take That's greatest classics from the 80's to the present day. Tickets are £33 per person, including Tribute Act, 3 course meal & DJ. To book call 0121 711 2121 or email [sales@ramadasoliuhullhotel.co.uk](mailto:sales@ramadasoliuhullhotel.co.uk)



## Festive Feast

**18-22 December**

**Mell Square, Solihull**

Continental Street Market traders will be joining forces with local and regional producers as part of the Festive Feast event. Shoppers will be treated to flavours from around the world with a wide range of hot foods to sample and cold items to take home.



## 27th Lions Festive Walk

**27 December**

The Knowle & Dorridge Lions Festive Walk from Baddesley Clinton National Trust House & Hay Woods is in aid of Solihull Hospital Charity, CLIC Sargent and local causes. Includes 4 routes up to 10 miles and

new parking arrangements. Visit [knowleanddorridgelions.com/walk](http://knowleanddorridgelions.com/walk) for more details & to download the free entry form to complete and bring on the day.

## New Year's Eve Family Disco

**31 December**

**Crowne Plaza, Solihull**

Includes a festive 3 course meal, entertainment for little ones and big kids, and a disco until 1am. £47 per person, kids 12 and under £24.50, free for under 3's. Call 0121 623 9988 to book.



## KNOWLE LIBRARY

- **Jellybeans** - held monthly on a Thursday morning for story-time and rhymes for the under 5's 10.45am -11.30am
- **Monday Story Times** - Weekly story time and rhymes for toddlers and pre-school children 10.30am-11.00am
- **Under - fives** Rhyme Times at 2pm every Friday
- **Knowle Knit and Natter Group** - held monthly on a Tuesday 10.30am -11.30am
- **The Reading Café** - Monthly on a Friday morning 10.30am -11.30am
- **Self-Running Family History Group** - Monthly on a Tuesday 2.15pm -4.00pm
- **Reader's Circles** - Knowle Readers Circle meets monthly on a Friday 2.15pm
- **Knowle Library Self Running Readers Circle** monthly meeting Tuesday 11.00am -12pm
- **Poetry Group** - Monthly on a Tuesday 11.00am -12.00pm
- **Scrabble Club** - Adult Scrabble Club Fortnightly - Thursday 2.00pm



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THE HENLEY  
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# CHRISTMAS 2019 PARTY NIGHTS!

FRIDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> AND SATURDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER

**Lee Osborne** plus after show disco

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FRIDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER

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SATURDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER

**The Dreamettes** plus after show disco

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FRIDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER

**Lee Osborne** plus after show disco

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## Man Trouble!

It might be your dad, your brother or your favourite uncle. If you don't want to buy socks but you're darned (excuse the pun) if you do know what to buy them, you need our handy guide.

**Too cool** – If your problem recipient is too cool for a mundane gift try Rough Trade's Album Club ([www.roughtrade.com/gb](http://www.roughtrade.com/gb)). Each month your lucky man will receive a package containing the must-have album of the moment on cd or LP - your choice. For genuine cool it's hard to beat. Gift subscriptions start at £36 for three months.

**Too stylish** – If a chap has a unique style it can be tough to choose anything guaranteed to appeal to his sartorial side. A few years ago, I discovered Bivolino ([www.bivolino.com](http://www.bivolino.com)). Here your man can design his own shirt in 3D and have it custom made. The site has style advice and hints and tips on designing. It's actually rather addictive and I guarantee that if fashion is his thing,

he'll have fun. E-vouchers start at £23.

**Too much stuff** - Sometimes, and this is often the case with older men, they really don't want for anything and secretly dread having to dispose of unwanted smellies and sweets, and their drawers are already overflowing with socks and ties. In this instance a gift subscription to a magazine can be extremely welcome. There's a title for just about every interest, including current affairs, history, psychology and sport. Many can be purchased for downloading to a tablet or phone if that's his preferred mode of reading.

**Too Kind** - The final male is the trickiest to satisfy. He's grumpy and unappreciative, no matter what. So why 'too kind'? Well make lemonade from his lemons. In this case I'd recommend a charity gift so at least someone somewhere in the world will appreciate your festive generosity!

**Happy hunting.**



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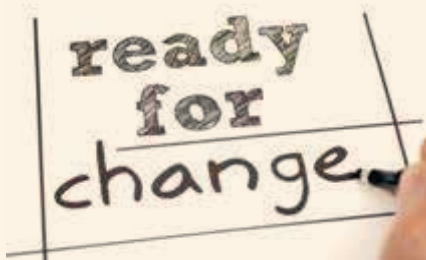
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The place where sun, sand and ski are all available, the Golden State has something to offer all year round. Whether you're wanting to strut down the Hollywood Walk of Fame, or hit the snow in Mammoth Mountain, the possibilities really are endless when it comes to California.

### 261 days of snow

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### Napa Valley

Over 400 wineries are on offer in Napa Valley, one of the world's premier wine regions. Take a leisurely stroll through the vineyards, chat with the winemakers, and sip on award-winning wines amid beautiful countryside. Wine isn't all that Napa has to offer though. Nature lovers can

cycle along a mountain trail or go hiking, foodies can indulge in handcrafted cheese or try creating mouth-watering appetizers. To enjoy the scenery to its fullest, try a hot air balloon ride or try the 18 holes at the Chardonnay Golf Club.

### The City of Angels

The Hollywood Hills Hike is a must-do - explore Griffith Park and take that Instagram-worthy shot of the Hollywood Sign. Search for your favourite celeb on the Hollywood walk of fame, then head down to Venice Beach and take in sweeping views of the ocean and mountains on a Segway tour.

### Leap of Love

At 8,200ft Leap of Love is for couples wanting to get married or renew their vows on the iconic


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Whether the sun-kissed California beaches or the redwood forests are calling you, the enchanted Golden State will hold your heart forever. A place where dreams are made, memories are cherished and the impossible seems possible, California needs to be next on your travel list.



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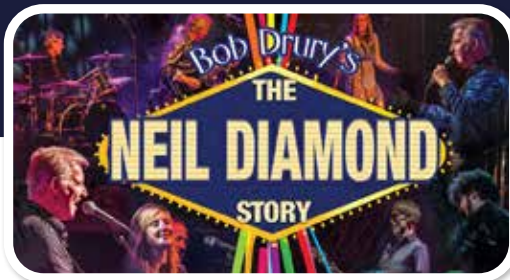
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# COMPETITION



## WIN 2 TICKETS

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**on 30th January, 7.30pm**

**The Core Theatre, Solihull (formerly Solihull Arts Complex)**

For your chance to win these tickets, visit the Core Theatre website page for this event - [www.thecoretheatresolihull.co.uk](http://www.thecoretheatresolihull.co.uk) - to find the answer to this question:

**What did Debbie McGee say about Bob Drury's 'The Neil Diamond Story'?**

Email your answer to: [thecoretheatre@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:thecoretheatre@solihull.gov.uk)  
– and please put 'Neil Diamond' as the subject line.

**Closing date for entries is 10th January. The winner will be drawn at random and notified by email after this date.**

**Please note there is no cash value nor exchange for this prize so please don't enter if you cannot attend the date shown above.**

### **About the show:**

Described in Las Vegas as one of the world's finest vocal tributes to Neil Diamond, Bob Drury has been astounding audiences with his vocal likeness for ten years during which time he has performed throughout the UK, Europe and in the United States for the American Neil Diamond Fan Club in both Nashville and Las Vegas.

Bob is joined by his amazing band this year and the show tracks Neil's journey from unknown and struggling New York songwriter to international mega-star. The music covers every stage of a staggering music career spanning five decades. Join in with all the favourites such as Cracklin' Rosie, America, Love on the Rocks, Play Me, Hello Again, Forever in Blue Jeans, Beautiful Noise, I'm a Believer, Red Red Wine and of course Sweet Caroline.

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## The Christmas Cracker Conundrum

Refuse increases by 30% over the festive season. Can you even remember the plastic tat that fell out of last year's crackers? Thought not. But if your Christmas table is not complete without a cracker there are alternatives.

Try **'12 days of Christmas crackers'** which include an eco-friendlier wooden toy. Recyclable Christmas crackers come with a snap, hat, a joke - **but no gift.**

Re-usable crackers can be filled with a gift of choice and some have refillable **'snaps'**. You can also make DIY Christmas crackers by saving cardboard toilet roll and rolling them in a pretty fabric or paper. Fill them with a handwritten joke and gift and tie with string at each end. **These look festive but are untied – rather than pulled apart.**



### Cracker jokes for DIY crackers

#### What does Santa do with fat elves?

He sends them to an Elf Farm

#### What did Santa do when he went speed dating?

He pulled a cracker

#### What's a dog's favourite carol?

Bark, the herald angels sing

By Sarah Davey



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# a good read

reviews By Willow Coby

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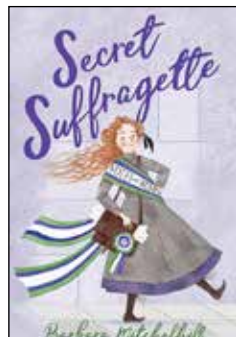
by Naomi Alderman



Look beneath the surface of British life and you will find many different communities and cultures – some more hidden than others. Naomi Alderman's 2006 debut novel deals with one such hidden, but long-standing culture: Orthodox Judaism. Ronit is a young woman living in New York. She emigrated to America as a way of escaping the strict Orthodox Jewish community that she had belonged to in London. But one day she receives a phone call. Her father – an esteemed and respected Rabbi – has died. Torn by duty, the desire for a sense of closure, and uncertainty of what she will find, Ronit makes the journey back home. At the very least she can clear out her father's house and maybe reconcile with some part of her past. However, this journey sets her on a collision course between her new modern life and traditional Jewry. Not least an encounter with her childhood girlfriend, Esti, and a reminder that tradition is a powerful force and one resistant to change. Received with some controversy when published this is a fascinating insight into a world that is often hidden. A community trying to hold onto their traditions when the modern world is changing. Brought up in a Jewish community, Alderman writes convincingly from the perspective of her characters and peppers the novel with Jewish theology, thought, and culture (including some delicious sounding Jewish recipes in the appendix).

## Secret Suffragette

by Barbara Mitchelhill



In the years just before the First World War the suffragette movement in England was in full swing and it is this that provides the setting for his historical novel. Daisy is 12 years old and dreams of following in the footsteps of Florence Nightingale and becoming a nurse. However, it's not

that simple. Born and bred in Bow, London, her family is poor with her parents working hard to try to afford even the basics. So, the pressure is on for her to leave school and work in the local factory. After all, according to her father, why does a girl need to be educated? Then one day the Suffragettes arrive and start holding meetings to encourage people to support their cause. Despite instructions from her father, Daisy and her mother sneak off to attend one. This single event leads to her family being turned upside down and propels Daisy into a world that she could never have imagined – yet one that seems perfectly normal and logical to us today. A world where women have the right to vote and live their lives as they wish. A world where the politicians will have no choice but to listen to the demands of education and rights for all. This is a great introduction to the suffragette movement for young readers, and it will no doubt come as a shock to many that women and girls were treated as second class citizens only 100 years ago.

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a taster of what's coming up...

CINEMA



Jumanji: The Next Level  
from 13 December

The gang is back but the game has changed. As they return to Jumanji to rescue one of their own, they discover that nothing is as they expect. The players will have to brave parts unknown and unexplored in order to escape the world's most dangerous game.

Cats

from 20  
December

Featuring Lloyd Webber's iconic music and a world-class cast of dancers, this film reimagines the musical for a new generation with spectacular production design, state-of-the-art technology, and dance styles ranging from ballet to contemporary, hip-hop to jazz, street to tap.



Playing with Fire  
from 27 December

When fire superintendent Jake and his elite team of firefighters come to the rescue of three siblings, they quickly realize that no amount of training could prepare them for their most challenging job yet - babysitters. The firefighters have their lives and jobs turned upside down and quickly learn that kids - much like fires - are wild and unpredictable.



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Santa In Love

20 to 24 December

Join Santa and his friends in this fun filled family musical complete with games, giggles

and Christmas songs. This show is aimed at the very young and their parents and Santa will be available after the show to meet your little ones and give them a present.



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## The Gift of Experience

**W**hen I was younger it used to drive me mad when my dad said 'I don't want anything for Christmas...' How could he say that? Then a couple of years ago I realised I'd become him. I don't want or even need more of anything. Many of my friends feel the same way. We don't want to add to plastic or clothes waste. We don't want clutter. Yet the pleasure of giving and receiving at Christmas is something most of us enjoy, so why not give a gift experience instead.

**A National Trust Membership** - Allows the recipient access to around 500 historic houses and gardens, industrial monuments, social history sites, and beaches.

**Tickets to see a favourite band or artist perform** - Or perhaps a local artist they've never seen, or music event they've never attended. Live music is a great night out, and even better if you gift two tickets so they can take a friend.

**An up-close and personal experience with their favourite animal or insect** - My friend loves hedgehogs so I paid for her to spend a day at the local hedgehog hospital. She learned all about hedgehogs and helped to feed and weigh them. She still talks about it today. You can buy 'meet the animal' experiences for every beastie from spiders to lemurs. There's bound to be something for the animal-lover in your life.

**Tickets to a movie marathon** - Whether your intended recipient is into sci-fi, horror, fantasy, musicals or old black and white movies, there will be an enterprising cinema or theatre running a specialist event. If they are not into a particular genre then a season pass to a cinema or theatre will allow them to watch whatever they want.



### **Wine, whiskey or gin tasting session**

- What could be nicer than sharing an evening touring a winery or distillery learning about the flavours and techniques involved in producing their favourite tipple.

**Cooking class** - Classes can be for a particular type of cuisine, like Chinese or Thai, or for a particular technique like bread-making. There are generally other like-minded souls there so your recipient will make new friends.

**Spa treatment day** - Life is stressful so very few people would turn their nose up at being pampered for a few hours.

**An escape room experience** - If your intended recipient is into puzzles try tickets to an escape room. It's a fun experience for everyone and a great gift for a family.

**A masterclass in something they love** - photography, juggling, golf, painting, writing...there are classes online and in the real world for any subject or skill you can think of.

### **The happiness we experience from acquiring things fades very quickly.**

Experiences are a bigger part of ourselves than material goods. We are the sum total of our experiences and they stay with us for longer because of the way they are encoded in the brain. Each time we think about the experience we feel that same sense of happiness we felt initially. **They are truly the gift that keeps on giving.**

**By Louise Addison**



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## Wine Wisdom -

### Which wine should you choose?

I was always a bit hazy about which wine to serve with which food. Then one day a chef friend explained that it was simply about marrying flavours that blend well or complement each other, much like cooking. I managed to get her to distil her wisdom into this handy guide.

**Fish** – A delicate fish calls for a delicate wine, such as Pinot Grigio. A robust fish with a rich sauce will require a more full-bodied white like Chardonnay. Salty seafood marries well with champagne.

**Chicken or Turkey** - Choose a full-flavoured white, like a white Côtes du Rhône, or a delicate red, such as a Frappato.

**Juicy red meat** – For beef or steak a rich red, such as a Bordeaux or Cabernet Sauvignon will work well or even a Rioja.



**Spicy dishes** – These require a spicy wine. Look for a Malbec, Syrah or Shiraz.

**Vegetarian food** - Medium reds, like Merlot, work well, particularly with tomato-based recipes.

**Cheese board** - Sauternes and Stilton are a perfect match, while Chardonnay works well with brie. A dry Rosé is a good all-rounder.

Remember, the main rule is to pair the characteristics of the dish with the characteristics of the wine. So, a buttery sauce will work well with white a wine also described as 'buttery'. **Experiment and enjoy!**

**By Tom Hancock**

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# Mini Panettone

## Little festive treats

**Preparation time: 45 minutes (allow 4-5 hours for proving time)**

**Cooking time: 20 mins**

**Makes: 6**

## Ingredients

250g good quality plain flour  
1 tsp dried yeast  
Pinch of salt  
100ml whole milk, warmed (not hot)  
3 eggs (Two beaten together, 1 extra)  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
50g golden caster sugar, plus extra for dusting  
100g softened butter  
Zest and juice of one orange  
100g raisins  
100g sultanas  
100g mixed peel (for non-peel-lovers you can substitute cranberries)

## Method

Soak the fruit overnight in the orange juice.  
Mix the flour and salt, the yeast and the milk

in a mixer with a dough hook. You can do it by hand, it just takes longer. Gradually mix in two beaten eggs and the vanilla. Knead until the dough is smooth and springy. Leave in a bowl, covered with a damp cloth and allow to rise until doubled in size.

Add the sugar, butter and the yolk from the remaining egg. Mix again, either with the machine, or by hand, until the dough is smooth again. Add the fruit and zest and knead quickly until it's all incorporated into the dough. Leave in a bowl, covered with a damp cloth, in a cool place for at least two hours until doubled in size again. You can leave it in the fridge overnight if you prefer. Line a large, six-holed muffin tray with paper cases. Divide the dough into six portions and roll into balls. Place one ball into each muffin case, cover with a damp cloth and leave for 20 minutes.

Heat the oven to 180C / 160 fan or Gas mark 4. Brush the tops of the panettone with the remaining egg whites and dust with caster sugar. Bake for 15-20 minutes until the muffins have risen and are golden in colour. Leave to cool on a wire rack.

Variation - Add some brandy to the overnight soak in orange juice for a little extra kick.



Preparation time: 45 mins  
Cooking time: 20 mins  
Makes: 6

## Have Yourself... ...a crisis-free Christmas

**O**ne Christmas our whole family came down with flu; in other years our dog died, the oven exploded, and we had a power cut, although thankfully not all on the same day! Most Christmases are wonderful but sometimes life gets in the way. With a smidgeon of forethought though, you can make all the difference.

First among potential disasters are digestive ones. **A plate of salmonella is definitely not top of most people's Christmas list!** Invest in special thermometers for ovens and fridges and check they're running at the right temperature.

Less serious but still unpleasant are tummy upsets caused by over-indulgence of rich food and alcohol. **Keep a supply of antacids and rehydration salts in your first aid box.** Also stock up on plasters and anti-burn spray because preparing sprouts and getting the turkey in and out of the oven can be surprisingly dangerous tasks, especially after a cocktail or two! Then there are the unavoidable hitches such as illness which, let's face it, can strike any time, even at Christmas. High temperatures and sore throats are no fun at all. Make sure you have ibuprofen and paracetamol to hand, both the junior and adult versions. Make two lists of emergency numbers. Include NHS Direct, an emergency dentist, your gas and electricity suppliers, an emergency plumber, electrician, vet and a locksmith. A garage and taxi service are useful too. Keep one list at home in an easy-to-find place and the other about your person.

**Don't forget to buy candles, matches,**



**a flashlight and some batteries just in case of a power cut.**

Finally, there are the avoidable disasters caused by poor planning. Make sure the car is serviced and full of petrol if you have to travel. If you're going abroad check all passports are up to date and that the dog or cat will be cared for. For peace of mind use boarding kennels or a professional pet sitter.

**Burglaries increase around Christmas because thieves know there are rich pickings to be had so check your security.** Also check

your household insurance is valid and that you have enough cover. Did you know that a third of parents forget to buy batteries for Christmas toys? Avoid disappointment on the day. Run through a check list before you leave the shop: do you need batteries, a battery charger, memory cards, a scart lead or an extra console controller? It's easy to throw the instructions out with the packaging and wrapping paper so take care, and furthermore, if you think there is something wrong with the gift DO NOT take it to pieces. You will invalidate your warrantee!

**You can't prevent all crises.** Prepare by all means but try to keep a sense of perspective and humour and hopefully you'll have a happy Christmas no matter what life throws at you! The year we all had flu we simply postponed Christmas and had the full works a few days later instead when we all felt much better.

**By Sarah Davey**

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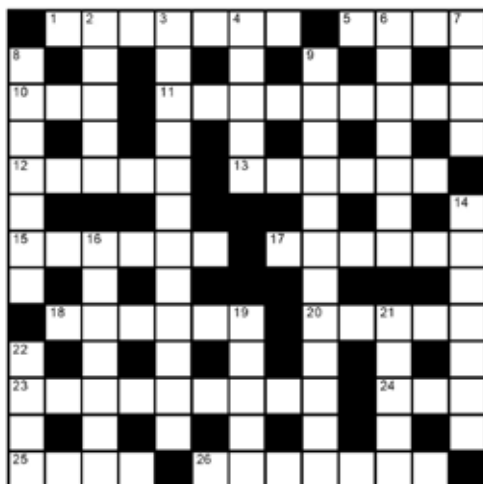
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# crossword



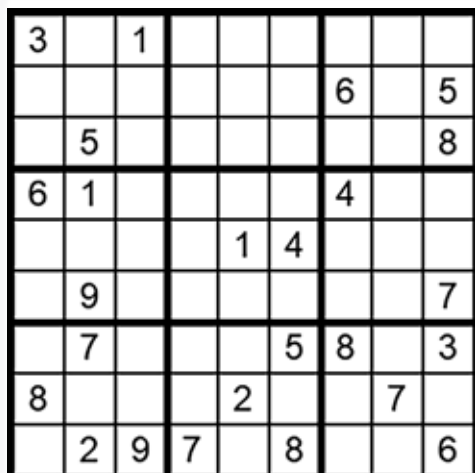
# clues

## Across

- 1 Outskirts of a city (7)
- 5 Follow orders (4)
- 10 In good physical shape (3)
- 11 Rotor blades that power a plane (9)
- 12 Ogle (3,2)
- 13 Clothes-maker (6)
- 15 Rounded paving stone (6)
- 17 Gentle bell-like sound (6)
- 18 Castle tower (6)
- 20 Ceremony, celebration (5)
- 23 Skittish, highly-strung (9)
- 24 Admiration (3)
- 25 Celtic stringed instrument (4)
- 26 Spotty infectious disease (7)

## Down

- 2 Disentangle, release (5)
- 3 Abhorrence, disapprobation (12)
- 4 Increase, improve (5)
- 6 Sandra \_\_\_\_\_, Speed actress (7)
- 7 Woollen thread (4)
- 8 Crime, infraction (7)
- 9 Unhesitating, resolve (12)
- 14 Small falcon (7)
- 16 Nightclub doorman (7)
- 19 Chart, diagram (5)
- 21 Delete, abolish (5)
- 22 Netting, tracery (4)



# how to play sudoku

## It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition. You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out! Sudoku is highly addictive.

answers on page 53



# Pilates

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## Crowd Cuckoo Land

### Can you trust crowdfunding?

Every day some new gadget appears that we never knew we needed.

Many of these new innovations are from the big companies, but more are now originating from micro businesses which use crowdfunding to raise their start-up cash. But what is crowdfunding and is it safe to buy from a company that may still be designing your gadget?

**Crowdfunding is replacing some of the more traditional ways which raised money to fund the development of an idea into a saleable product.**

Instead of borrowing from a bank or mortgaging their homes, entrepreneurs ask people like you to buy their products whilst they are still at the design stage. Websites like Kickstarter and Indiegogo have sprung up to highlight campaigns and manage the funding process. You can browse people's ideas, monitor progress, view promo videos and then choose from a range of purchase options to donate your cash and help the project get going. And this is where crowdfunding is not the same as buying a product. You give your money to the company and they promise to deliver your purchase as soon as they can. They don't guarantee to deliver, nor to give you back your money if they fail.

**So, there are some risks to crowdfunding.**

From big ideas to tiny niche products it's all there. By purchasing before the launch you'll get a great discount on the final retail price and earn a warm feeling that you really did help bring a product into existence. If you don't want to buy an item, you can usually



donate a small amount and receive some token thank you merchandise in return. Keep in mind that these projects are still mostly on the drawing board. Some sites like Kickstarter require the designers to have a prototype and be totally open about the state of the project; others don't. Read all the documentation and update information before parting with your cash. All projects carry the risk that the idea won't reach the manufacture stage, or that the developers will run off with the cash! **Delivery dates are generally over optimistic with most projects falling at least a little behind, so don't back a project with a delivery date in November if you need it for Christmas.**

Crowdfunding has produced some great success stories. Pebble Watches raised over \$20 million for its first smart watch and became a leader in that field before being bought out by Fitbit. The Exploding Kittens game raised \$9 million and is now selling through major high street shops. But others haven't done as well. Ellio Motors raised \$17 million for its 3-wheeler car but managed to burn through the cash and never produced a single vehicle. **So, take a look at what's out there, but do your homework and never invest more than you can afford to lose.**

**By Robert Grant**



# Kids' Page

Solve the clues then find the answers in the letter grid.

M	M	I	T	R	G	H	O	L	L	Y
C	O	M	E	U	W	O	V	N	L	S
O	O	D	M	D	F	Q	R	A	M	A
O	M	F	R	O	S	T	Y	R	F	N
O	W	O	R	L	D	O	A	B	W	T
A	A	D	Y	P	R	G	F	W	J	A
J	N	N	W	H	P	F	P	V	A	E
N	I	G	H	T	K	I	N	G	E	Y
G	U	J	E	B	D	R	O	R	T	G
H	A	U	A	L	D	S	H	Q	R	B
H	A	L	L	S	S	T	D	O	N	G

Hark the Herald \_\_\_\_\_ Sing  
 Ding \_\_\_\_\_! Merrily on High  
 Silent \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ the Red-Nosed Reindeer  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Claus is Coming to Town  
 Once in \_\_\_\_\_ David's City  
 The \_\_\_\_\_ Noel  
 The \_\_\_\_\_ and the Ivy  
 O \_\_\_\_\_ All Ye Faithful  
 We \_\_\_\_\_ Kings  
 Joy to the \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ in a Manger  
 Good \_\_\_\_\_ Wenceslas  
 Deck the \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ the Snowman

## RUDOLPH'S FIENDISH Festive Riddle

What can be FOUND ONCE IN the tree,  
tWICE IN the crACKERS but NEVER IN the  
puDDING?

## Did you know...?

10 MILLION turkeys are cooked each  
Christmas in the UK!

Answer to Rudolph's Riddle  
The letter 'r'



G	N	O	O	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
H	A	L	L	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
H	A	U	A	L	D	S	H	Q	R	B
G	U	J	E	B	D	R	O	R	T	G
N	I	G	H	T	K	I	N	G	E	Y
J	N	N	W	H	P	F	P	V	A	E
A	A	D	Y	P	R	G	F	W	J	A
O	W	O	R	L	D	O	A	B	W	T
O	M	F	R	O	S	T	Y	R	F	N
O	O	D	M	D	F	Q	R	A	M	A
C	O	M	E	U	W	O	V	N	L	S
M	M	I	T	R	G	H	O	L	L	Y

Word Grid Solution

## The Introvert's Guide to the Office Christmas Party

Office Christmas parties are queer affairs where we drink and socialise with folk we might not choose to drink and socialise with on any other night of the year. At best they offer a bit of cringeworthy fun, at worst they strike fear into our hearts. Introverts in particular struggle with enforced bonhomie at large events.

### For those of us who aren't social butterflies, what are our options?

Do we have to endure the occasion, or might it be possible to enjoy it?

**Dutch courage may seem like the only way to get through the evening but tanking up on alcohol will almost certainly make things worse.** Although it's a party in name, remember this is a work-related event so limit your alcohol intake to ensure you remain in control of your faculties, especially if under the influence you feel you might be tempted to give vent to your feelings of frustration at being passed over for promotion! A good rule of thumb is no more than two alcoholic drinks at any work function...**even a festive one.**

**It is estimated that at least 25% of the population are introverts so at least a quarter of your co-workers probably feel like you do about the party.** Look for people standing on the edge, fidgeting with their glass and looking awkward. These are your people so take a deep breath and strike up a conversation with them. Concentrate on effective eye contact when you introduce yourself. Get into the habit of noticing the other person's eye



colour. Don't worry about remembering it or commenting on it, just notice it. This helps to create an instant non-verbal connection and build rapport. It makes you seem confident, trustworthy and likeable.

**Have a few safe conversation topics in your armoury:** good ones are the weather, movies, restaurants, books (you can either find common ground or ask for and offer recommendations), and light news topics (steer clear of Brexit though, and anything to do with the election). Also avoid work talk, that's not the point of the event.

If you're stuck in a conversation with someone you find offensive, dull or with whom you have nothing in common it can be hard to keep a conversation going. A polite **'So nice to chat with you, catch you later...'** should be an adequate sign-off as you make your leave. The point of a party is to mingle so this won't seem unfriendly.

**Remember** - even if you would rather undergo root canal surgery than attend the office party it's worth showing your face. Go along, have a drink and a mince pie then make a polite-but-early exit if you really can't cope. People won't generally mind or even remember that you left early but they might question why you didn't show up at all.

**By Tracey Anderson**

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Knowle Surgery	0121 796 2777
Solihull Hospital	0121 424 2000
Spire Parkway Hospital	0845 850 1451

## Council

Solihull Council	0121 704 6000
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3	6	1	8	5	2	7	9	4
2	4	8	3	7	9	6	1	5
9	5	7	6	4	1	2	3	8
6	1	3	9	8	7	4	5	2
7	8	2	5	1	4	3	6	9
5	9	4	2	6	3	1	8	7
4	7	6	1	9	5	8	2	3
8	3	5	4	2	6	9	7	1
1	2	9	7	3	8	5	4	6

**Sudoku Solution**

from page 42

S	U	B	U	R	B	S	O	B	E	Y
O	N	N	O	D	U	A				
F	I	T	P	R	O	P	E	L	L	E
F	I	O	S	C	A	L	L	E		
E	Y	E	U	P	T	A	I	L	O	R
N			U			S	C	K		
C	O	B	B	L	E	T	I	N	K	L
E	O	A				V			S	
T	U	R	R	E	T		E	V	E	N
M	N	I	A	N	R					
E	X	C	I	T	A	B	L	E	A	W
S	E	Y	L	S	S	L				
H	A	R	P	M	E	A	S	L	E	S

**crossword Solution**

from page 42

# The Holly and the Ivy

By Rachael Leverton

*The holly and the ivy,  
when they are both full grown,  
of all the trees that are in the wood  
the holly bears the crown.*

There's no doubt that holly and ivy are synonymous with Christmas. This dates back to pre-Christian era when pagans used evergreen decorations in their mid-winter celebrations. It's not hard to see why they were attracted to these beautiful plants which offer a promise of better times to come during the most barren time of the year.

**Early Christians adopted them too and imbued holly particularly with Christian symbolism.** In the carol, ivy isn't actually mentioned again until the last verse which is a repeat of the first.

It has a cameo role because of earlier songs, such as 'The Contest of The Ivy and The Holly,' in which the attributes of holly (male) and ivy (female) are compared. Our ancestors lived close to the earth and the seasons and were open to symbolism. As modern gardeners we might be sceptical of the symbolism, but we can embrace the glory of these seasonal plants.

Ivy (Hedera) comes in many sizes, from the tiny-leaved '**Spetchley**' to the hand-sized leaves of '**Maple Leaf**'. It also comes in a beautiful variety of colours from the rich green, crimped leaves of '**Parsley crested**' which makes great ground cover, to the gorgeous red-stemmed yellow leaves of the climber '**Sunrise**'.

For winter baskets I'd recommend the lime-green '**Ursula**' and her grey-leaved friend '**Frederick**'.

Ivy is a doddle to grow. There are only a few things to remember. Cut it back in spring to encourage new growth and take cuttings between October and March when the growth is woody. Yellow varieties need sunshine and don't let any of it grow into your eaves. Other than that, it is your undemanding gardening friend.

**Holly (Ilex) is pretty easy-going too. It will grow almost anywhere except really water-logged soil.** It's tolerant of pollution, salt and wind and grows really slowly, so it's great for small gardens in the city and by the sea.

Protect it from rabbits if they frequent your garden as they love to eat the bark. Trim it in August if you have to and remove plain green shoots on variegated varieties. Take cuttings in the late summer or autumn. It does resent root disturbance once it's established so make sure you plant it in the right place first time.

Hollies are male or female but not necessarily named to help you distinguish. '**Silver Queen**' is actually male and '**Martin**' is female! You'll need both for berries so talk to an expert at the nursery or garden centre to be sure...or google the answer on your phone! If you only have room for one holly bush, grow a self-fertile variety such as '**J C Van Tol**'.

**Merry Christmas and Happy Gardening!**



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