



THE COBURG MEDDLER

THE NAME-PENDING EDITION

Issue # 11
MARCH/APRIL

FREE COPY

MEET YOUR NEW COUNCILLOR

Monica Harte has been declared as the new councillor for the North-West Ward. Harte campaigned during the November 2020 election with the Sue Bolton Socialist Alliance Party.

Harte was caught by surprise with the second recount for the position taking place on Monday, 21 March 2022. She currently works night shifts as an emergency housing worker.

MORE ON THIS AT PAGE 4

This newspaper was written and developed on Wurundjeri Land. Sovereignty has not been ceded. If possible, people should contribute to the Pay the Rent campaign. This initiative funds groups that advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders: <https://www.invasionday.org/pay-the-rent-campaigns>



EL-HALABI RESIGNS FROM COUNCIL AMID COURT PROCEEDINGS

On 10 February 2022, Milad El-Halabi formally resigned from his position as Moreland Councillor for the North-West Ward.

Robert Richter, QC, announced El-Halabi's resignation at a VCAT hearing that has been deciding whether to order a new election in the North-West Ward due to suspected electoral fraud. Mr Richter is El-Halabi's legal representative

for both the VCAT hearing, and an associated criminal hearing, defending El-Halabi in a charge of electoral fraud, for which he was arrested last year.

STORY CONTINUES PAGE 3

----- COBURG NEWS UPDATES -----

CONTACT

thecoburgmeddler@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTIONS

We encourage submissions from readers and residents. Whether it is art, creative writing, exposes, opinion pieces or any other form of input, if you have something you'd like to share, please get in touch.

The deadline for the next edition is 12 June.

SCHOOLHOUSE STUDIO

Schoolhouse Studio have been busy pumping out exhibitions showcasing a variety of work from local artists and performers since they formally opened at the beginning of this year. Some of the events include a makers' market, various performance pieces, workshops for Papua New Guinean community members and exhibitions featuring over 15 arts.

This space has become a hive of creative activity. We're not sure the older community of coffee drinkers along the Victoria Mall necessarily 'got' the contemporary public dance performance by Deep Soulful Sweats that wove around them, however it was something different.



BRUNSWICK WEST DOG TO APPEAR IN LIAM NEESON EPIC

Two-year-old Brunswick dog, Winnie, was chosen to appear alongside Liam Neeson in the new action thriller *Blacklight*, filmed in Melbourne. While the much anticipated feature premiered last month, the Springeroodle has not yet seen the film despite numerous attempts by her owners to sustain her attention.

Rumour has it that Liam Neeson was particularly fond of Winnie, as they share similar interests.

We asked Winnie's owners if Coburg was Winnie's favourite suburb; they declined to comment and, with her recent stardom, Winnie has moved to Darebin.

LẠC LẠC OPENS

Lạc Lạc opens its doors to the flocks of hungry mall-sters once more, but this time under different owners. The new owners have informed us that they are keeping all the same menu items. One of the owners said that they hoped the quality would be the same and that they are looking forward to meeting Coburgians.

This editor had a vegetable phở

the other day, and can confirm the owner's hopes have been realised.

GET IN YOUR LANE, KENT

The council has been trialling the oddly controversial separated bike lanes on Kent Road in Pascoe Vale as part of the "Coburg to Glenroy Bicycle Link".

The initiative aims to make walking and cycling safer and easier for the community, though some residents are worried about a lack

of car parking for local houses and facilities.

On the other hand, the group advocating for the extension of the bike path, argues that "VicRoads and the Level Crossing Removal Authority have an obligation to provide a safe biking route North-South".

As the division between pro-bike lane and anti-bike lane ramps up, we have seen some interesting suggestions come to light:

I think we need less bikes. I saw an elderly pedestrian get hit by a speeding cyclist on Beaconsfield Parade yesterday on the shared pathway. Fortunately there did not appear to be serious injury but it could have quite easily resulted in death. Unfortunately you can not hear a bike coming and riders do not use their bells.



PAINTING FOR COMMUNITY

Earlier in March, experienced street artist, Tom Civil and his small team, were busy painting a large mural on the side of Schoolhouse Studios.

Civil commented that he saw great potential in the spot for linking the Coburg community with the art space. The mural forms a big part of the Coburg Courtyard project, which is state government funded under the COVIDsafe Outdoor Activation scheme.

Whilst the mural is a striking and welcome addition to Coburg's landscape, the temporary

porariness of pop-ups is an ongoing concern for a non-pop-up community. We hope this is not a stop-gap for a larger development project that will see the courtyard disappear, and disperse the artist community that has been gathering.

On Saturday, 2 April, Schoolhouse Studio will be hosting a 'Courtyard Jams' session, a family friendly and free event starting at 12pm.

BY AZ

EL-HALABI RESIGNS FROM COUNCIL AMID COURT PROCEEDINGS

STORY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Two women were also arrested on these charges; Milad's daughter, Tania El-Halabi, who is a director of a company called TheRealestEstate, and Milad's wife, Dianne El-Halabi. Dianne and Milad form two out of the four directors of the Coburg Market. If any or all three accused are found guilty of electoral fraud, this could disqualify them from holding a directorial position in any incorporated company.

For an obligatory recap, in November 2020, the Moreland Council election, which was conducted via postal vote, was marred by

allegations of electoral fraud in the North-West Ward. According to Elizabeth Williams, the Deputy Electoral Commissioner for Victoria, on 23 October 2020, 'alarm bells rang' when a voter requested a replacement ballot pack, despite there already being a record of that person voting. After this, a number of voters complained that they had not received their ballot papers in the mail. Following a swift investigation, it was found that 104 voters had returned 2 ballots under their name. This would presumably represent those voters who actually went through the bother of requesting a ballot paper before the election; however the number of residents who did not chase up their missing ballot paper is unknown.

After the election was declared, allegations were made that El-Halabi had been involved in orchestrating or otherwise assisting in the stealing of ballot papers from mailboxes and voting in the name of the residents.

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) immediately made an application to VCAT, asking them to decide whether a re-election was required for the North-West Ward. These hearings have not been finalised, and may be waiting for the wrapping up of the criminal investigation before VCAT can come to any conclusions. With regard to the criminal prosecution, the trio of accused are due back in the Magistrates' Court in May 2022.

MONICA HART, NEW COUNCILLOR

With El-halabi resigning, a countback of the votes for the North-West Ward took place on Wednesday, 16 March. A countback is a process by which the VEC recounts all of the votes that were made in an election, minus the ineligible candidates.

You might be wondering how the VEC has conducted the countback in light of the suspected voter fraud. According to a published VCAT decision from October 2021 in which the fraud was discussed, Judge Marks summarised that, in counting the votes, there were two 'groups' of results. 'Group A' excluded any votes where a replacement ballot pack had been requested, and as such, were safely included in the final election results. 'Group B' contained all the votes, including the ballots that had been returned twice. At that point, the VEC excluded 101 suspect votes from Group B, added them to Group A, and called the election.

A number of commentators have expressed concern that other votes may still have been subject to voter fraud. Following the election, the VEC isolated the time the fraudulent ballots were returned, and the impacted localities, to create a pool of other possible fraudulent ballots that were in Group A. In this pool there were 1813 ballot papers. Of this amount, 432 papers had declaration flaps which did not match the enrolment form. At this point in the investigation, however, it was too late to exclude these votes from the official count.

The countback following El-Halabi's resignation included all the votes included in the

original count; suspected fraudulent votes and all. This is why VCAT is currently deciding whether to order a re-election in the North-West ward; it seems probable that simply taking El-Halabi out of the picture as an eligible candidate, if he was indeed the person who committed or aided the fraud for his own benefit, may not go far enough to ensure the democratic integrity of the November 2020 local council election.

If VCAT makes the decision that there is a level of fraudulent activity that resulted in a significant difference to the electoral results (which appears likely, given that many candidates were separated by margins of 100-200 primary votes), then a re-election will likely be held. The question is; how long will it take for VCAT to make the decision?

On 16 March, the countback concluded in the announcement that Shaun Minehan, independent, was successful. Minehan unexpectedly turned down the position however, due to a planned move out of the area. This led to a second countback on 21 March which resulted in the success of Monica Harte, who accepted the position swiftly. Harte has a long history of activism. She has fought for the preservation and improvement of public transport, for housing rights and for workers' rights in the transport union. Harte ran for the November 2020 election as a candidate for the Sue Bolton Socialist Alliance.

This marks a significant shift in the [name pending] Council's political composition, skewing it to the left. Unfortunately, Harte's time on the Council may be limited with the VCAT hearing still on foot – she may need to make a big splash if she wants to hold her spot in the North-West Ward.

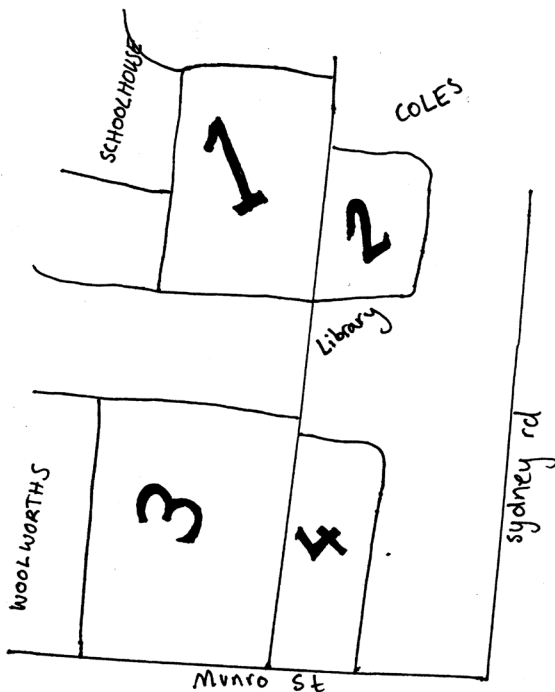
By AZ & BB

DEVELOPMENT FOR PEOPLE, NOT POCKETS

COBURG'S CAR PARK PROBLEM

The heart of Coburg is clogged with car parks, and surgery is required.

Stand outside the Coburg Library (our fair-weather friend) and you can see the extent to which car parks dominate the area. Coburg is an increasingly popular suburb, however the Big Four Carparks (see diagram below) surrounding Victoria Mall are often underutilised, particularly the one outside Schoolhouse Studio (formally 'the Second Coles').



There have been a variety of plans for developing these car parks over the years, most recently, the Council's Coburg 2020 Plan, which proposed a major overhaul of the car parks to facilitate new residential, retail and office buildings. This plan, which was presumably set to begin in 2020, has been unceremoniously dropped off the desk of the Council. It could be that COVID-19 triggered conservatism from prospective developers, or that the Council must honour historic arrangements over the space that may take an extraordinary effort to coordinate with developers, at potentially significant cost.

The Council owns 3 out of 4 of the large car parks. These areas were converted to car parks by charging retail and commercial properties in

the surrounding buildings a levy. As part of the arrangement, the Council agreed to ensure that any future plans with the car parks would always result in the same amount of car park spaces being available closeby. So, if the 3 large car parks are removed, new parking options will need to spring up somewhere in the area. This presents a challenge for the Council in considering ways to utilise the land, and surely presents a barrier to enticing certain investors for whom car parks are less valuable to than retail space.

The big question, however, is whether the Council will sell the land instead of lease it.

Recently, the Council chose to sell a parcel of land that surrounded the Coburg Historical Society in Coburg, to a private corporation, the Coburg Health Hub Pty Ltd. This decision was divisive, with many commentators and some decision-makers resistant to the idea of selling any publicly owned land, as once public land is sold, it is very hard to get back.

Public land is valuable, because decisions with what to do with the land are reserved for (ideally) democratically elected representatives. Decision-makers in Victoria are also bound by the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006, which requires them to always consider public interest alongside any other considerations e.g. revenue raising. Having privately-owned land host public benefits is always precarious; private owners do not need to consider public benefit at all when they develop land (apart from indirectly, when they abide by planning and environment laws). For example, the Coburg Commons, a community garden, is being hosted in the otherwise empty space owned by the Uniting Church, opposite the Coburg Library. The Coburg Commons crucially brings greenery, public events and volunteering opportunities into the area. However, those running the Coburg Commons have commented that their arrangement is strictly temporary and precarious, as the Uniting Church expressly reserves its right to develop the site for other uses, such as building apartments.

Similarly, Schoolhouse Studio has a 5-year sublet with Coles, who itself has a 10 year lease with [name pending] Council over the site that sits in front of two of the four major carparks. Coles' lease is due to end on 27 August 2026, which, in the scheme of plans for major development projects, is very soon.

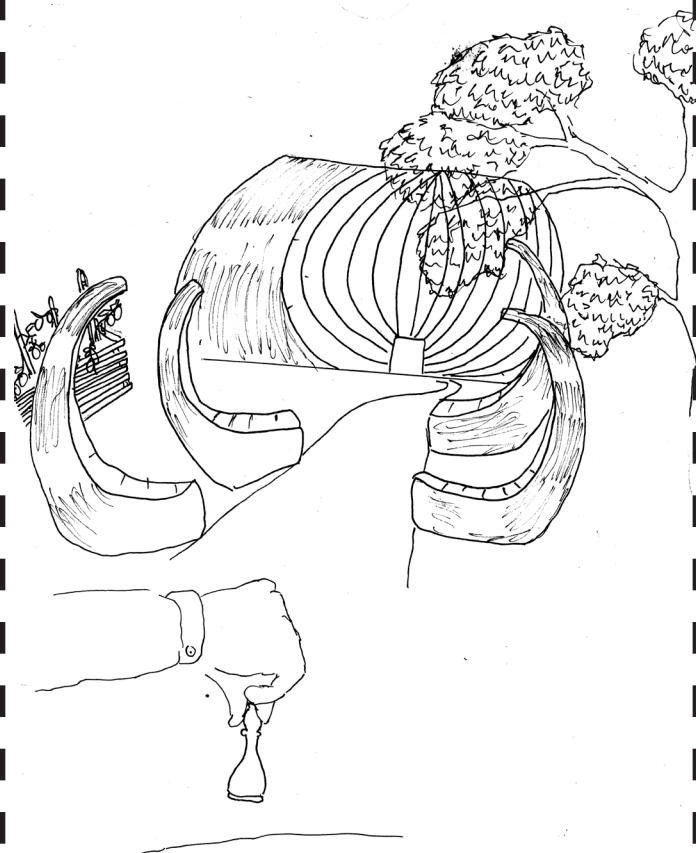
It is important that we act early to keep public space from being sold to private developers. To begin with, we need to imagine what the community might want from the area instead of more office buildings, retail or private apartments. For example, public housing or a large park.

Or, something more ambitious.

Picture this: as you look towards Coburg Station, from Victoria Mall, you see a multipurpose performance space, running Some Like it Hot on Wednesday evenings. The monthly rooftop table-tennis tournament is in full swing, above the unknowing heads of cinema-goers inside. Community gardens run all the way up to the doors, which are rarely shut. On the walk over, you pass a number of small tables with chess, backgammon and crokinole being played by young and old. Cars enter an underground car park, in safe distance from the people practising yo-yo moves.

Thank god, you think, as you narrowly avoid the public art performers, for the Upfield Onion.

By BB



TURN ON THAT BULB

I'M NOT DONE READING

...AT THE UPFIELD ONION!

BOOKMARK SERIES # 2

ARE PLANS TO REMOVE HARDING ST BRIDGE ILL-CONCEIVED?

The following article is drawn from a document that Gary Vines produced after learning of Council's plan to replace the Harding Street Bridge with a large, flat, truss style bridge with 3m high walls.

The proposed bridge has had very little opportunity for locals to access input (save for a survey on the colour and width of the bridge on the Council's website). However, there has been a long and concerted effort by local residents and environmental groups to repair the damage of 150 years of neglect and abuse of the creek valley. Much of the native vegetation and attractive character of the creek is the result of local people working together. Social history of this crossing and the former bridge should be considered.

Additionally, with any major project along the creek, potential discovery of Aboriginal artefacts should be considered- such as was the case during the creation of the DeChene Reserve bridge. Therefore, an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Plan should be undertaken, even if it is not mandatory under the regulations. Consideration should also be given to an assessment of potential historical archaeology on the site.

Ultimately, the combination of through truss and handrail that is being proposed is a tidy engineering solution, but it limits the aesthetic opportunities. Cable-stayed and suspension bridges are intrinsically more attractive, as evidenced by the recently completed bridge just north of Ceres.



Credit: Coburg Historical Society cc 1920

It is important to note that the most environmentally sustainable option would be to retain and reuse the existing structure as much as possible. Timber is a renewable resource, and while it needs periodic replacement, the replaced members can themselves be recycled to other uses.

The existing bridge suspension towers are more than 2.5 metres between members, so the required width can be achieved by reconstructing the deck and handrails reusing the existing suspension cables. If necessary, new timber (or steel) trussed side rails, deck and cables could be employed if the existing materials are deemed unusable. By suspending a new wider truss railing outside these, even greater width can be achieved with just a small pinch point at each end. Reusing the original towers would also mean that no vegetation would need to be removed and Melbourne Water would not have issues with any new structures in the floodway. It might be necessary to upgrade the cables and reinforce the towers, but the existing structure could be employed as a platform for threading new

cables, reducing construction costs.

Even if the reuse option is not followed, the proposed through-truss is a very poor design. It creates far more of a visual barrier both as an intrusive element in the otherwise natural appearance of the creek corridor, and for people using the structure. A better option might be to use a deck truss design, since there is no particular need to maximise clearance under the bridge. This would of course require a separate handrail, but most of the engineered structure would be below the bridge and so a lighter railing and safety fence could be used.

The most important aspect of the proposed reuse and reconstruction option is that it recognises the value of the local community in the restoration of the Merri Creek, through the hard work of thousands of people over many decades as well as ensuring the continued enjoyment of the creek by all users.

By Gary Vines

A campaign to 'Save the Harding Street Bridge' has been created by locals interested in keeping the current bridge.

The campaigners assert that more bridges are useful and that taking the Harding St Bridge down is unnecessary, and are asking for a second, more accessible bridge to be built nearby.

Visit <https://chng.it/LwSdkYwjQY> to join in on the campaign.

By SAS & BB



FEDERAL ELECTION - SUE BOLTON RUNS

While the prospect of a new federal government might not seem just compensation for Clive Palmer sending you unsolicited text messages, it's hard not to be a little bit invested in the upcoming election when your long standing local councillor runs for a seat. That's right, Sue Bolton dusts off her door knocking knuckles once again and hits the street with her campaign for the seat of Wills running for the Socialist Alliance.

Wills has been a safe labour seat for over 70 years (except for the 4 when it was held by popular independent, Phil Cleary), however, Bolton and the Greens, along with the other socialist and independent candidates, could feasibly tip the balance away from Twitter-happy incumbent, Peter Khalil.

Bolton has unshakable political foundations, rooted in the just distribution of wealth and resources. In communications with the Meddler, Bolton stated: "We have a social inequality crisis in Australia with a lack of affordable housing and people getting low or no incomes...The cost of living crisis needs to be dealt with by increasing people's incomes. The minimum wage and Centrelink payments need to be increased. We also have to make healthcare and childcare totally free as well as rent caps for private rental and a program to build one million public dwellings."

The urgency of the climate crisis also weighs considerably on Bolton's mind, commenting that "people in Australia are already experi-

encing the impacts of the climate crisis in 2022 with bushfires in Western Australia and flooding on the east coast. The government can rapidly cut greenhouse gas emissions by shifting to 100% renewable energy and phasing out fossil fuel use, mining and exports."

As the May federal election looms, we look hopefully towards a path that is not just business as usual.

By ES





LOCAL BID TO CHANGE OFFENSIVE NAME

A Special Council meeting in December 2021 kicked off discussions around changing the official name of Moreland Council. This came in response to a letter presented to Council last November citing the racist origins of the name Moreland. The letter was signed by representatives from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC), as well as other local leaders and community members.

The municipality of Moreland was created in 1994, amalgamating the Cities of Brunswick, Coburg and part of Broadmeadows. The State Government chose the name based on local land owner, Farquhar McCrae, who called the extensive land he acquired (without traditional owners permission) 'Moreland' - after a slave plantation his father and grandfather operated in Jamaica from 1770-96, which enslaved 500-700 people to produce sugar and rum. While the Council's website suggests that this recent information has led to their decision to take action, the street signs around Coburg suggest a selective blindness to the issue.

The letter to Council states that name contains "disrespectful insensitivity through direct association with both slavery and dispossession" and argues that retaining the name of Moreland goes against the Council's proclamation of support for respect and reconciliation. The in principle name change was passed by Councillors at the December meeting.

A change to the corporate name of Moreland Council must be granted by the State government, however the Minister for Local Government has shown his support for the renaming, offering to help facilitate the change of name once it has been decided on by local stakeholders, and has urged the Council to work closely with the WWCHAC in the decision.

March's Council meeting saw the process advanced and in coming weeks, WWCHAC will provide some name options which will be presented to the broader community for feedback via a survey. A final recommendation will then be made to Council on 1 June.

BY AZ



AN ECLECTIC CURATION OF MUSIC AND OTHER RADIO EPHEMERA. STREAMING 24/7 FROM PASCOE VALE SOUTH.

Local and international soul, groove, acid jazz, afrobeat, radio dramas, indie, ethio-jazz, electronic, italian soundtrack music and potentially harmful amounts of yacht rock.

FLAVOURS OF COBURG

Burger Edition

Once again, I've been compelled to pick and review an eatery within the suburb of Coburg. I've brought the good readers of the Meddler nothing but sterling reviews, 5-star ratings that have no doubt influenced your dinner choices. Such is the power I wield.

For this review, I tried a place recommended to me by 'The Great Algorithm': 300 Grams. In the past, I've deemed the prices a little high alongside the delivery and 'service' fee (whatever that is). But, with my wife heading out to hit the town while I stayed home to look after our cat, I thought: 'treat yourself'.

I ordered the Norfcote, the name echoing through my memories of adolescence at Northcote High. This was a simpler time, where we would yell out 'NORFCUT' to others wearing the hallowed purple VCE jackets on the 11 tram. I don't know why 300 Grams opted to call their burger the Norfcote, because it didn't taste like a public highschool. It tasted like a university education.

This gastronomic customer, as I will henceforth refer to the burger as, was hefty. But he carried it well. The patty tasted handmade, the cheese was drippin' and the beetroot stained my chin for days. This gastronomic customer was great to hang out with.

However, my order didn't stop there; I wanted a side. I never judge a restaurant by the



mains alone, I'm paying for a remote experience and by god, I was going to get it. So, I purchased the Mac Fries for an eye watering \$11 (is there a HECS option for these fries?). Now, this menu item was found in the 'On the Side' section. My question to 300 Grams is, why lie? Only a madman would think that the potion you gave me was a 'side'. Covered in pickles, diced onions and a cheese sauce; happily, I found it reminiscent of a Bic Mac.

All in all, it was a heavy meal that kept me seated well after I had completed it. Yes, it's more on the high end of the price range, but if you got the place to yourself and the only eyes are that of a judgemental house pet, why not treat yourself?

By Matthew Boehm

MALL-CONTENTS

Trish is a worker at the Der Partisan Bakery, which runs out of a small truck in a small parking lot at 10 Nicholson St, Coburg. Trish made us a chai latte and spoke to us about their experiences as a worker in Coburg.

TRISH: I've been with Der Partisan Bakery for about 6 years now. I worked for a few years to begin with, went off and did something else, and now I'm back.

MEDDLER: Was it rent-based reasons that Der Partisan changed from a storefront to a van model?

TRISH: Yeah – the leases along that part of Holmes St weren't renewed. I'm assuming the owners of the buildings were going to redo the tops of the stores there to put up new apartments,

but they never got around to it, so they've been sitting empty. That is, until recently; I think now it's a dentist.

MEDDLER: What's the story behind the name?

TRISH: Der Partisan were an anti-facist group in Germany. The baker's partner is German, and so he has taken a lot of his baking inspiration from there – and he's also a big history nerd.

MEDDLER: What's the deal with the faces in some of the breads?

TRISH: The baker actually made the tins that are used to bake those loaves. The faces are carved into a pottery bowl. The faces themselves are no one in particular; there have been a few different variations.

MEDDLER: Tell us about your experience is working at this corner of Coburg

TRISH: I love it; I have several jobs in this area. I work at the speech clinic down the road, and do a few other little things. I've been here for so long, I've seen the same people year after year, seeing their kids grow up. The feel of the area is really good; like we're all looking after each other. It's hard to break into initially, but after a year, I felt more like I was supported here.

MEDDLER: You're wearing a t-shirt that says 'Hardly Working' – what's your theory of work?

TRISH: It needs to be about the connections; if you don't have good relationships with your neighbours, customers and suppliers, then you're not going to go well. You need to be able to have each other's back and help people out. Especially after the lockdown. The connections can seem so tenuous after being stuck inside our own homes, so it's important to re-establish them.

MEDDLER: You seem to have a lot of jobs at the moment – do you imagine you'll always have lots of things going on?

TRISH: Well, I'm studying teaching at the moment. Although I'm not sure if I want to be a teacher at the end of it. I'm thinking about science education. So, still working with kids and still in an education role, but not in a classroom. I think that's my dream job. Call me, Melbourne Museum, I want to help run your educational programs! I really like science communication, especially for kids. I feel like it leads to critical thinking and being able to recognise what good information and bad information is. I think as a society, as evidenced by the pandemic, there was a lack of ability to differentiate good and bad information. Starting young

– and saying, 'so, this is a primary source, and this is a secondary source' is really important.

But, I like being busy. I like having several jobs and seeing the same people around Coburg. Seeing familiar people telling me 'Hey Trish! I'm watching the SuperBowl today!' feels good. I had someone come into the clinic the other week and say: 'Oh! You're the bread person who's always singing!'.

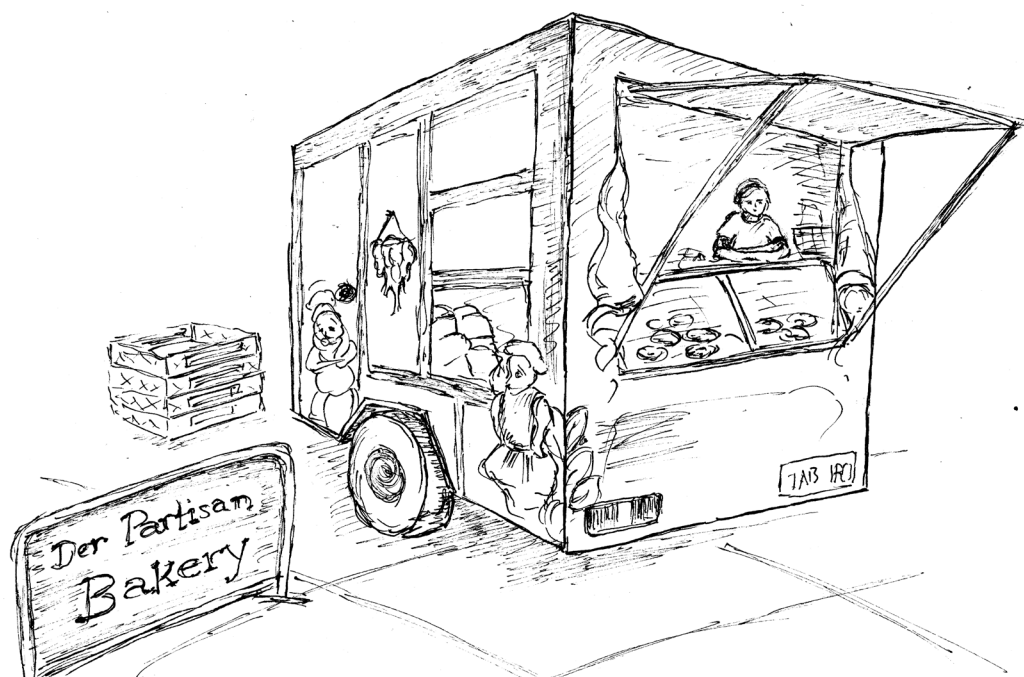
MEDDLER: Let's talk about this space – this little van you're in must be quite well-constructed to fit everything in it.

TRISH: Well, it's a bit of a clown-car. It's about keeping it organised. We had it painted by an artist, a local Japanese graffiti artist named BOMBG. I'm trying to keep things light and not mention the break in...Is this a Good Karma-like paper?

MEDDLER: Not at all.

TRISH: Well, we had someone break into the van a couple weeks ago. They broke the door down, the padlocks. They trashed it. It was pretty bad. It looks like they broke in, took the cash box and ransacked it and closed the door again. It was surprising, because this plot has been so good to us. Sometimes this spot can get sketchy, but I've never personally had problems. People can get weird about this area, but I think it's overblown and it's not fair.

*Der Partisan Bakery
10 Nicholson St, Coburg*



ARTIST OF THE MONTH



Artwork; The Frustration of Solitude
Acrylic on canvas.

Ghostgum – aka Madi Mercer – is a proud Wadawurrung woman that lives and creates in Naarm. Her works aim to highlight the importance of respecting and acknowledging the Blak lived experience, sovereign Blak land, and the need to invest in a personal relationship with all aspects of the beautiful Countries we reside upon.

STORM TROOPERS IN A TEACUP



Sometimes facism, if you're Spanish speaking, comes via a political coup. But Germans and Italians know that it sometimes comes via a thousand cuts.

Today, at CERES, customers are no longer to enter into the cafe. You have to sit at the outside tables, and there's a little disk stuck to the table with a QR code saying: 'order and pay here'. Below that, the disk explains: 'we appreciate you using this app, which can help us during staff shortages'. In other words, CERES Community and Environment park wants us to be complicit in replacing a staff member with a machine.

This new system presumably costs money to set up and use, however overall it is more profitable than paying for a staff member to take orders.

Now, my former housemate who was working there during my recent visit, is no longer needed to work on the till. Today she was picking up dirty plates and bringing them inside. She happened to walk past while I was complaining about the new system and commented that she liked it; she doesn't have to talk to anyone.

So, both the boss and the worker submit to the new regime, but for different reasons. The

boss likes it because they can avoid spending money on employing people and thus access greater profits. The remaining employed worker enjoys the system, not because there are less workers in the shop, but because they can now avoid social interaction - having to have a conversation with a person. Who knows where the old worker went? The resulting cafe system benefits rich capitalists from its contribution to increasing unemployment whilst it simultaneously destroys human interaction. Sound familiar?

Fascism doesn't just come from a bad man making a fascism. It comes from the everyday interactions of people who are willing to go along with it - who benefit from it. Some might not even realise they're in it, like the frog that sits in the boiling water that will never jump out, no matter how hot it becomes. You would think a park with the word 'community' in its name would be more amenable to putting humanity before profit.

German history books talk of the Night of the Long Knives. Could Australia's equivalent be the day Ceres installed a self-scan menu at their now outdoor-only cafe?

By Mordechai Kanarien-Vogel

MEDDLING MARY



Dear Meddling Mary,

One of my colleagues always needs to be the smartest person in the room. She always has to have the final word and will sometimes even throw barbs at me to make herself look better. She will do this in front of our manager and other staff. My other colleagues don't seem that bothered by it. It is really annoying and I am starting to make snide comments back to her. How should I handle this?

Sincerely,
Sick-of-smarty-pants

Dearest readers,

In this issue of Meddling Mary we are taking on the workplace, hurrah!

This sounds like a frustrating situation. It seems to me that your co-worker might be feeling insecure and this is why she needs to 'be the smartest person in the room'. Of course, this is no excuse to put you down.

As much as you can help it, avoid making snide comments back. I would recommend talking to her about the comments she makes about you. You could approach her about this in the moment, letting her know that a comment has made you feel bad. Or you could raise the pattern of behaviour with her in a separate conversation.

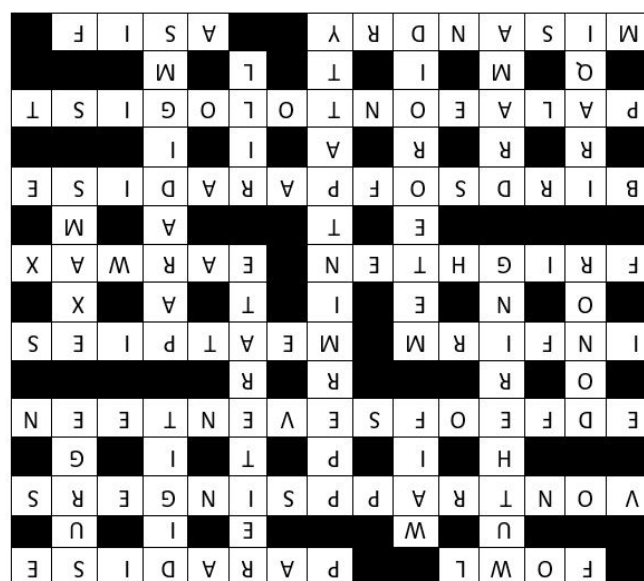
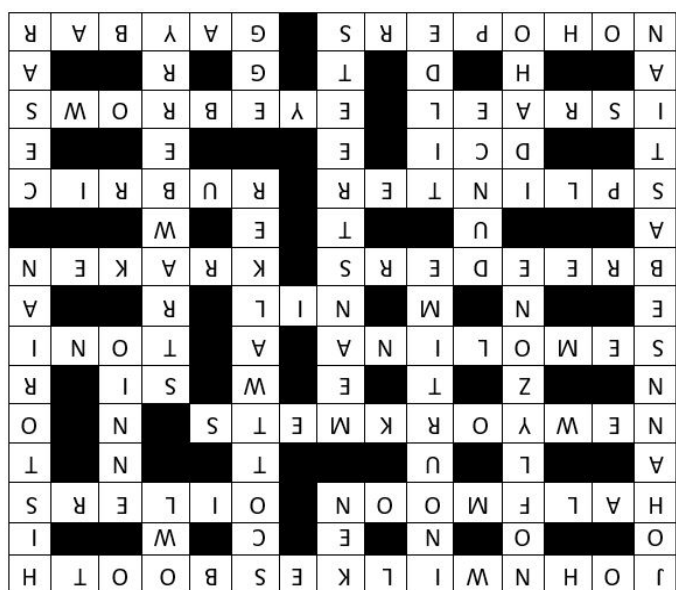
Ultimately, if her behaviour is making you feel uncomfortable your workplace should help you navigate addressing this issue with your colleague.

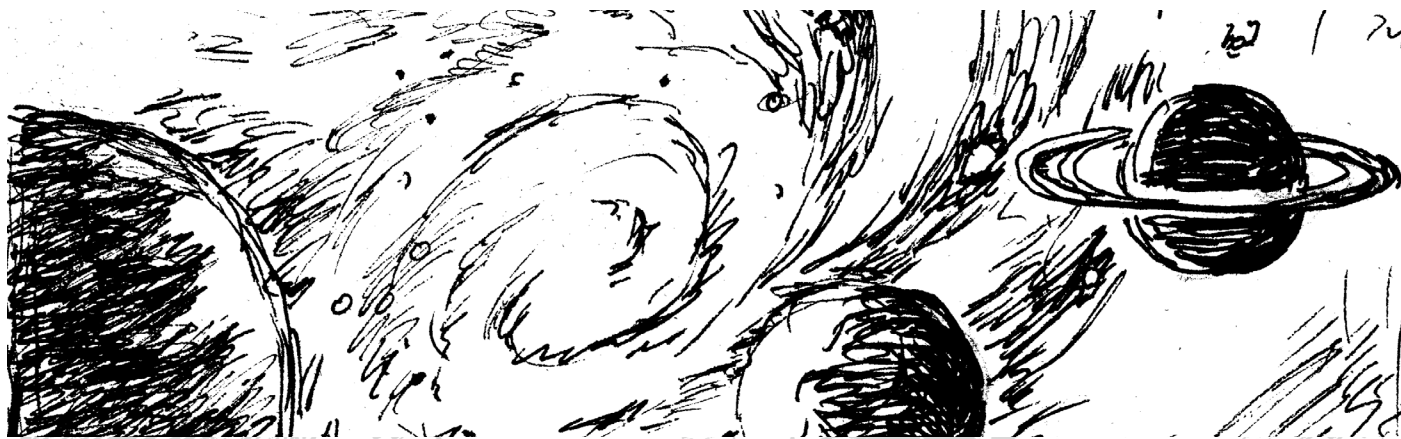
That being said, if she isn't putting you down, just let her posturing go. If you can see through it, I am sure that your other colleagues can too. Be the coolest person in the room and shaka her comments off.

Lastly, if all else fails, place two tablespoons of jam in her pocket, add a pinch of salt and a healthy dash of milk.

MM

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ANSWERS / CRYPTIC CROSSWORD ANSWERS





WHAT'S UP?

March and April will provide ongoing opportunities for viewing the five brightest planets, sometimes simultaneously- providing you're an early morning person. Throughout March, Mars and brilliant Venus can be seen high in the dawn skies, with Saturn below. For the first three weeks, Mercury will be there, too, descending daily to meet the fifth planet, Jupiter, ascending. On the 21st & 22nd, these two will be separated by less than 2° , very low in the east. This is the only time to see all five planets together, before Mercury fades into the morning twilight; look from about 6:30 am.

March 21st is also the date of the autumn equinox. Dawn on the 29th will present a striking triangle of Mars, Saturn and Venus, just above the almost-new Moon, with Jupiter just risen below. Although the evening sky is empty of planets, a compensation is the sight of the summer constellations in the west, disappearing now with the change of the season, and taking some of our brightest stars: Orion, the Hunter, with Betelgeuse and Rigel; Canis Major and Minor, the Large and Small Dogs, with Sirius and Procyon; Gemini, the Twins, with Castor and Pollux.

(CANIS MAJOR)

● Sirius

April mornings will continue the big planet show. On the 5th & 6th Mars will be within 0.5° of Saturn; close twins, almost, but Mars is slightly more orange. For a break from planet-gazing, try spotting a meteor from the Lyrid shower on the 22nd or 23rd. The most favourable time will be during the pre-dawn hours, looking north. The peak sighting rate can reach and exceed 18 per hour- although the peak may only last an hour or so.

Over all these weeks, the brightest lights in the night sky (apart from the Moon) will be Venus and Jupiter, and during April, Venus will draw away from the other planets to approach Jupiter.

According to the lore of the Boorong people of western Victoria, Chargee Gnowee (Venus), besides being sister to Gnowee (the Sun), is married to Ginabongbearp (Jupiter), chief of the ancient spirits. So perhaps it is appropriate that, as a culminating spectacle of this period, Venus and Jupiter will reign over the eastern morning sky on 30th April, separated by only 1° - and by even less in the next dawn. A magnificent sight, visible from about 4 am, and lasting into the morning twilight (about 6:30am)- not to be missed!

By Vlack

● Procyon
(CANIS MINOR)

● Pollux

● Castor
(GEMINI)

(ORION)

● Betelgeuse

Rigel

EARLY WESTERN NIGHT SKY

DR OKEY DOKEY

Local clown doctor answers your pressing medical questions

Dr Okey Dokey, do you have a cure for insomnia?

Ohhhh the dreaded sleeplessness! This is no joke. My good friend Dr Snorefalofagus the sleep hygienist says sleep hygiene is very important! So I reckon clean everything you can get your hands on - clean the oven, clean the bathroom, vaccum behind the couch, take out each little snore and give them all a good polish, unroll your dreams and take an old toothbrush and scrub all the peaks and valleys until they sparkle. And then you should have a clean sleep, and if not, you'll certainly be pretty tired which might also help.

If not, give me a call and I can talk to you about how to correctly sort your rubbish into greenwaste, soft plastics, recycling and landfill and I promise that will be boring enough to tip you over the edge. Love you!

WET BLANKET, CLEAN PAWS

As part of the [name pending] Council's Domestic Animal Management Plan - or, DAMP - the Council are asking residents to decide whether there should be a cat curfew, and if so, whether there should be any sanctions attached to it.

The Council is somewhat of a laggard in this domain. Across the Merri Merri, Darebin Council introduced a 7pm-7am cat curfew in January 2021. Here, cat owners do not get penalised if a cat is caught for the first time overnight, however release and registration fees apply in order to collect your cat from the Epping Animal Welfare Centre. Penalties may apply for unwanted cat-trespass on private property after the first offence, however.

Cats kill roughly 380 million wildlife per year, Australia-wide. In the Dandenong Ranges, a cat curfew assisted significantly with recovering local Lyre bird populations.

By AZ

VICTORIANS PARTY

Cnr Oscar Yildiz recently announced that he had created a new political party that would be running candidates in the Federal Election this year. The party is called the Victorians Party, whose candidates, according to the party's website, "...will not be political apparatchiks, staffers and unionists".

The party seemingly sprung up in response to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic by the Andrews Government. The party claims that the Victorians Party will ensure that 'for the first time since the Gold Rush, Victorians will have a better choice for a prosperous future for all Victorians'.

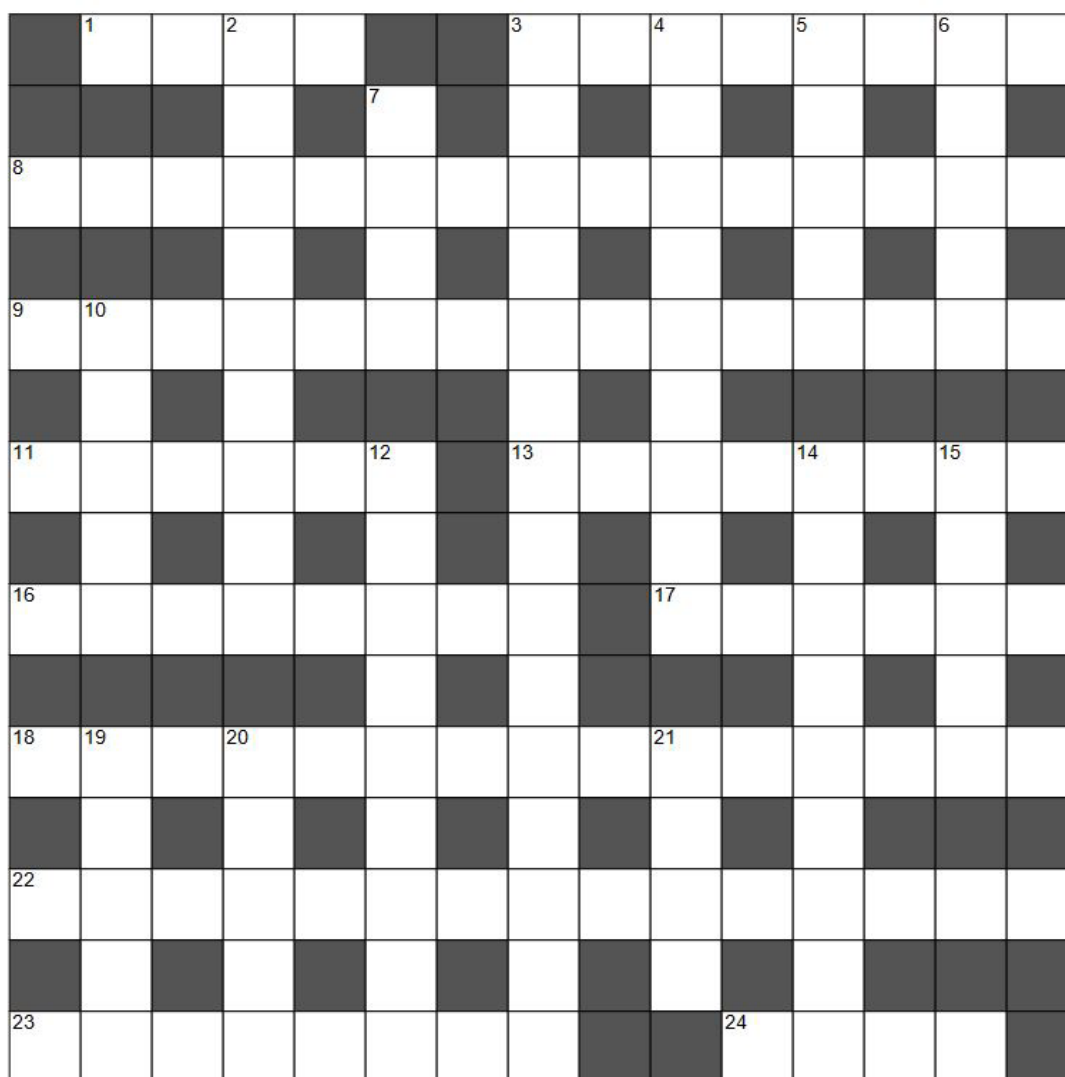
Two questions emerge from from this announcement: is the Victorians Party's romanticisation of the Gold Rush, an era marked by xenophobic policies, a warning sign, and should there be an apostrophe in the 'Victorians Party'?

By BB



CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

By Joe Foley



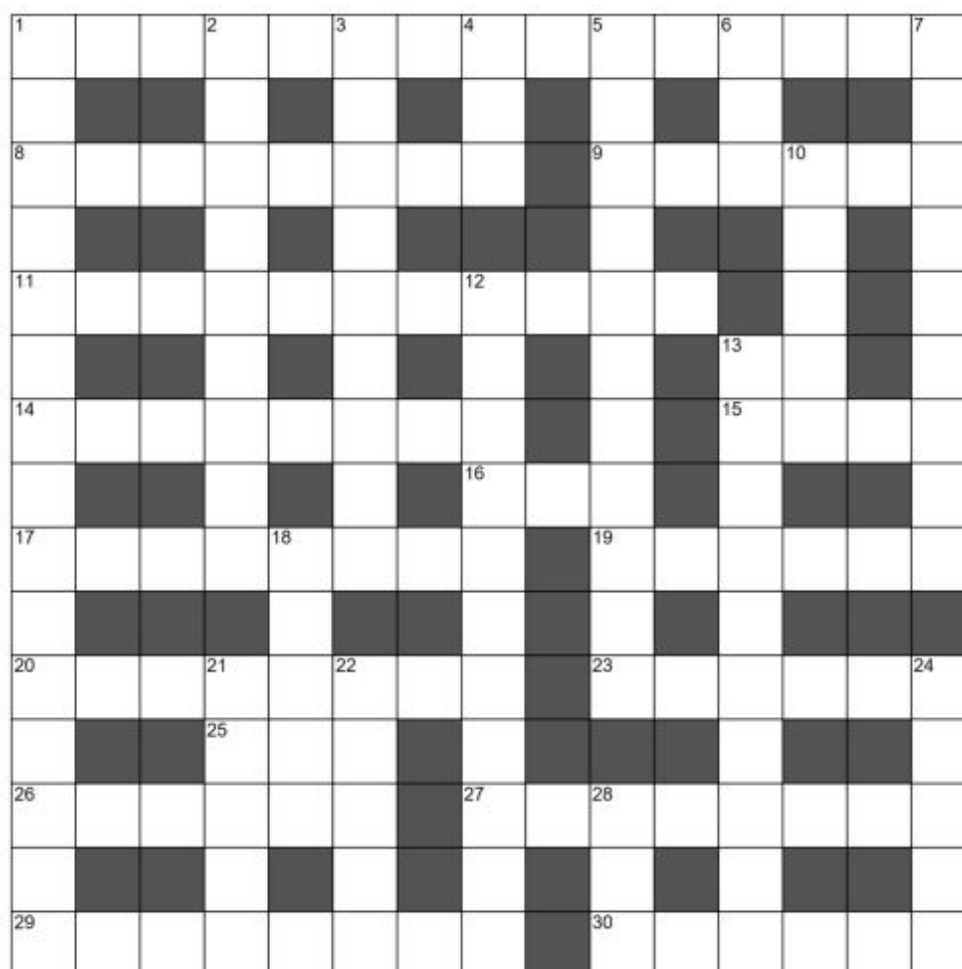
ACROSS

- 1 Force bird of prey into game. (4)
 3 Oasis have new rap ideas (8)
 8 Austrian company Vice President allowed confused patron to see sewing machines. (3,5,7)
 9 Nicks hit with faceless wedge and scored evens often with eagle driver. (4,2,9)
 11 Fashionable company is debilitated. (6)
 13 Crammed down at the footy, me and the pastie disagreed. (4,4)
 16 Marshland was haunted by virtuous spook. (8)
 17 Cerumen heard swab axe inbetweeners. (6)
 18 Boss afraid pride will harm tropical plants (5,2,8)
 22 A plot to add gasoline charged prehistoric excavator (15)
 23 Misery was without energy and instead is hatred of men. (8)
 24 Scrubbed fast after Jif cap was lost, yeah right. (2,2)

DOWN

- 2 Wagyu flanks smell off, bothering and wafty. (9)
 3 Herb provided hamburger to friend of Charlie Brown. (10,5)
 4 Eerie tart haunted once more? (9)
 5 Beginnings of David Ickes garrulous iguana talk, understand? (3,2)
 6 Big Sur geyser bottles up gush (5)
 7 Stray if following West Australian. (4)
 10 Benefactor backed Laver on inside scoop. (5)
 12 Falling star Ovid took five, succumbing to mere Metamorphosis. (9)
 14 Patterns aid Gramps crossing. (9)
 15 Chaotic sex in the morning can be physical or oral. (5)
 19 Mosul man reported every other inroad Qaid (5)
 20 Tundra magic displayed theatrical work (5)
 21 Small stream ended yonder at edged hills (4)

ANSWERS ON PAGE 14

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE CROSSWORD*By Ross Clark (@redchumpo)***ACROSS**

1 Which ancestor of Cherie Booth Blair, wife of former UK Prime Minister Tony, assassinated a US President? (4,6,5)

8 What can be a cafe in Coburg or a popular bay in Melbourne's south-east suburbs? (4,4)

9 What is the nickname of the NHL ice-hockey team hailing from Houston, Texas? (6)

11 Which NBL baseball side has played in blue and orange since the 1962 merger of the Giants with the Brooklyn Dodgers? (3,4,4)

13 What words means "if" in French? (2)

14 " ____ " pilchard, climbing up the Eiffel Tower, elementary penguin singing Hare Krishna. The Beatles, I am the Walrus. (8)

15 What given name is shared by Morrison (novelist), Kroos (footballer), and Braxton (singer)? (4)

16 What do folks write on the Coburg Good Karma Network when they desire a given away item that has already been claimed? (3)

17 Which band, The ____, were formed by Kim and Kelley Deal in 1991, and had their most recent record in 2018 with All Nerve? (8)

19 Which sea-creature from Norse mythology has attacked Mickey Mouse, as well as sailors in works by Verne and Hugo? (6)

20 Which mutated rat mentored the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in the sewers of New York in the 1980s? (8)

23 Which term in education means ‘column’ in Italian, and refers to the criteria that an assessor is looking for in a student’s assignment? (6)

25 Which police rank, given here as an acronym, is shared by the fictional characters Jim Taggart, Endeavour Morse, and Frank Burnside? (1, 1, 1)

26 Which is the only nuclear-armed state that has never officially admitted its possession of nuclear weapons? (6)

27 Which facial feature is missing from Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa? (8)

29 What is a colloquial term for a group of people or team with little chance of sporting success? (2,6)

30 Where did Electric Six want to take you in 2003? (3,3)

DOWN

1 What are the given names of the Leipzig-based composer who defined Baroque music and released many bangers in the 1710 and 20s including Cello Suite No. 1 in G? (6,9)

2 Which military action, deployed in Iraq and Bosnia in the 1990s, has been ruled out by NATO in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine? (2,3,4)

3 Which popular BBC radio show and podcast features academics discussing a topic and has been hosted by Melvyn Bragg since its launch in 1998? (2,3,4)

4 Which Scots word means to ‘know’ or to ‘recognise’, and is etymologically close to equivalent words in German, Dutch and Swedish? (3)

5 Which songwriter had a 1969 hit with The Old Man’s Back Again which lamented repeated Russian invasions of Eastern Europe after Stalin’s death? (5,6)

6 What type of animal is Wol in Winnie the Pooh? (3)

7 What profession links Karl Marx, Herodotus, EH Carr, Eric Hobsbawm, Henry Reynolds and

Simon Schama? (9)

10 What is the first name of the composer Morricone, famous for his epic soundtracks to Westerns such as the Good, the Bad and the Ugly? (5)

12 Which Scorsese film, starring Robert de Niro and Harvey Keitel was awarded #1 in Empire Magazine’s 2011 All-Time Independent Movies list? (4,7)

13 Which fruit is traditionally eaten at the Wimbledon tennis tournament? (10)

18 Which mildly insulting term for a slow learner is said to be derived from the surname of a 17th century Scottish Catholic theologian? (5)

21 Which US State, bordering both Canada and Washington, means “Behold the sun coming down the mountain” in the Shoshoni language? (5)

22 What’s the name of that little squiggle that appears in Portuguese and Spanish place names (and words) such as Sao Paulo and A Coruna? (5)

24 What award, named after the sculptor Baldacchini’s first name (and in-turn a Roman Emperor), is the national film award of France? (5)

28 Which popular food item is also the name of a short story, “The _”, by Andy Weir, in which the universe is an incubator for one collective consciousness which will one day become a God? (3)

ANSWERS ON PAGE 14

SHORT STORY OF THE MONTH

THE TELEVISION *By B Haughtley*

There had been an administration error. All dole payments had accidentally been multiplied by a factor of 10 and paid out twice. Every battler, burnout, anarchist, and person suffering under late capitalism was temporarily rich. We weren't worried about having to pay it back - we could afford justice now. We all chipped in for a QC and got to keep our spoils. I decided it was time for a new television.

The clerk was ushering me to the factory seconds section before I'd even set foot in the store. "We've got a great deal on a used Onkyo. Only downside is that the frame is cracked because a factory worker threw his ferret at it."

"That won't be necessary," I said, and flashed her my concession card. She blanched and understood right away. "Show me to the TVs that will blur my conception of the reality-entertainment divide."

The clerk led me to the section that reeked of money. I reeked of Champion Ruby. It was an olfactory match made in heaven.

"This television set is top of the line," she said. "On it you can watch God's crystal waters flow into the sanctity of all being."

I kneaded my earlobes sagely and nodded. "It's definitely speaking to me. May I cradle it for a minute?"

"Certainly, sir."

She tilted its corner into my awaiting breadbasket and I sat there like the Virgin Mary holding her OLED child for a moment.

"Yes, this will do perfectly."

Sports looked great on the television. Competitive falling, extreme pottery measurement and wet wet papershredding took up a lot of my time. Something was distracting me, though.

"Whey-oh-whey-oh-whey" my roommate was saying through the walls over and over. I

banged on the wall, but to no avail - my portrait of the Holy Spirit just fell off the mantle.

"Christ in the tomb!" I yelled, "Can I have a skerrick of quiet in here?!"

"I'm rehearsing," she said.

"I know, but I need passionate peace. I can't focus on the television."

"You watch it 24/7!"

We went back and forth like this for some time, but to no avail. In the end, I paid her to find a new place, and a bit extra to lock the door and glue it shut behind her. I needed to focus.



Illustration by Tyson Kalender (TheDrawingDroid on Etsy)

Eventually I grew tired of all the channels. The picture was sparkling and clear, like Crystal Pepsi, but the content was unsatisfying, like crystal deodorant. I was beset by yearning. At 7:06pm I was scanning through the channels again when I landed on one I hadn't seen before - channel 666. On it, I saw a very handsome looking fellow (myself) living out my wildest fantasies. Shooting a game of pool, eating at a restaurant, exercising - I was doing everything I'd ever dreamed. I was obsessed, so I watched for a few months, then another few. I tried to stand up a couple of times, but that wasn't really in the repertoire anymore. Ah well, as the French say.