

# 2021: It was the best of times; it was the worst of times

At the start of his novel, "A Tale of Two Cities," Charles Dickens wrote the following: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

He was talking about the schizophrenic whirl of political passion spawned by the French Revolution of 1789. He might just as well have been talking about the US of A, 2021. And what a weird year it was, starting on January 6 when impassioned citizens, unhappy with what they saw as election fraud, invaded the hallowed halls of our nation's capital.

Some saw this act as the better of our angels—engaging in a time-honored peaceful protest—and the worst of our government—in mismanaging a national election. Others saw it as the worst of our angels—lawless rioting—and the best of our government—being innovative during a once-in-a-century pandemic to ensure everyone's vote counted.

## I'm just sayin'

By Mike Carroll  
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Either way you see it, the assault on the Capitol was a poor attempt at "storming the Bastille," which is what the French revolutionaries successfully did to start their revolution.

I pondered thoughts like this last week as I sat for an hour in a long queue of cars at the Outlet Mall awaiting COVID-19 testing. Traffic for testing was so high that many cars were turned away. This demand for testing was all part of the reality-comedown from celebrating Christmas as we always had—before the pandemic—and wanted to again, to heck with the virus. Well, it showed us.

The Douglas County Health Department's testing site was the busiest place at the once

crowded mall. How sad. Only 9 retail stores remain open from the original 54 stores.

Beck and I fondly reflected on the mall's grand opening party in 1994: formal attire was worn by everyone; champagne flowed; smiles and congratulations everywhere.

And I remember those early years of Black Friday's midnight sales extravaganzas: large spotlights brought in to criss-cross their beams across the night sky, guiding out of town shoppers to this new shopping mecca; parking lots full, spilling over to lots north of Rt. 36; the long lines at Coach and other popular places, people standing outside in the cold, at 1 a.m., hoping to snag a bargain.

The mall has lasted 27 years

and brought the city direct profits of around \$10 million and indirect tax gains of additional millions. It has been a positive asset for the town—a hallmark of government at its best.

And as I sat waiting to ram a cotton swab up my nose, and twirl it around for 15 seconds, hoping not to sneeze or worse, I also became increasingly appreciative of the Health Department staff working hard, hustling out to each car, taking personal risks as they bent down to the open car window to deal with coughing customers.

I witnessed the same dedicated professionalism earlier in the week at my doctor's office. People showing up, taking risks, being brave.

And I thought how much I appreciated all those who showed up, stood tall, and took personal risk in serving their fellow citizen, whether as a health care worker, police/fire/emergency personnel, truck driver, grocery clerk, or just that person sticking their arm out the drive-through window to give me a cheeseburger (hold the onion, please).

At my exam, the doctor talked about Carle Hospital over-flow-

ing, about certain important drugs and supplies being in short supplies—being rationed based upon need.

And as I sat in this fast-food-like medicine dispensary car line, I thought: is this the future of medicine? Is this a taste of the health care rationing to come? If it is, I appreciate all the innovative ways health care professionals have devised to deliver invaluable services in dangerous times.

Just then a Tuscola police car drove by patrolling the area. I thought about the impossible job they have: draw your gun and shoot a second too quick and you're a criminal in the dock, charged with murder; draw it too slowly and you're another casualty of our drugs, gangs and guns violent subculture.

Violent times? Chicago led the nation in murders with 729 this year, its highest in a quarter century. And who wants to drive at night in Champaign anymore? Or even the day? Shop at home for us.

But they are still there, this thin blue line, protecting and serving, a bulwark against violent chaos. At least most of them

are still there.

Defund the police? What kook thought that up?

It seems to me this pandemic has greatly accelerated our previously slow-moving fiscal crisis and cultural wars—boiling up for decades—and has laid bare the limits of human endeavor and government potential. The Emperor too often has no clothes.

But the pandemic has also revealed our nation's and citizenry's best instincts for goodness and greatness. It has brought out the best in so many people who have sacrificed themselves, in small ways and large, to help others. And it has revealed our nation's unique gift for ingenuity, innovation and entrepreneurial "can do" spirit—from our scientists generating life-saving drugs at "warp speed" to the many schools, like Tuscola's, figuring out a way to keep our children in school—safe, fed and educated.

It's like an entire life of varied experiences has been compressed into one or two years during this pandemic, revealing to all of us the best of times and the worst of times.

mike carroll

# Looking for less bravado, more resolve

Last year, I resolved to not make any more resolutions. So far, that's been the easiest resolution to keep.

That's not to say that I have no resolve. It's just that my resolve needs no declaration. That's really all a resolution is: a declaration of an intent. An intent is weak enough on its own; a resolution is merely thumping on intent's chest. It's bravado and mostly meaningless.

It's good to set goals and even to write them down. Like a map or a recipe, goals provide direction. You're more

likely to reach your destination if you have a plan.

Part of the problem with resolutions today is that there are so many things that are out of our control. Over the past couple of years, a microscopic virus has had more control over our lives than we have.

It's easy to be angry about that. Job situations, financial status, family gatherings, public events and even weight loss and exercise have been impacted by the virus. A pervasive attitude that "might makes right" has led a lot of people to

resolve to "take back" their lives and return to normalcy despite the risks. Which, of course, has prolonged the pandemic.

My youngest granddaughter will turn 1 this month and my expectation is that her party will be a virtual event. I didn't get to see her or her brothers over the Christmas holiday as they were in quarantine. That loss of personal contact is a stab in the heart.

Thus, I understand the desire to defy the virus. In the words of Adm. David Farragut, "Damn the torpedoes; full

speed ahead." That's bravery if you avoid getting blown up; stupidity if you don't.

So, all the resolutions that I would likely make, if I made resolutions, take a back seat to my resolve to do what I can to evade the torpedoes. Things like wearing my mask, keeping my distance and being vaccinated.

Not doing those things is like playing chicken with a train. If you don't move off the tracks quick enough, the train will win. Getting hit by a train isn't bravery. Keeping off the tracks isn't cowardice.

## Ramblin' Man

By David Porter  
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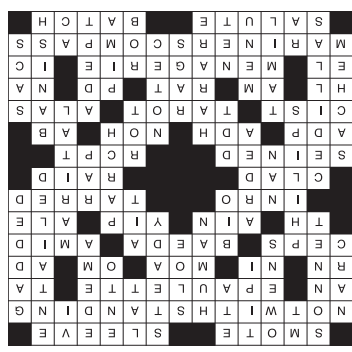
I think we need a little less bravado and a little more resolve. We need to stop putting ourselves in front of torpedoes and trains.

© Copyright 2022 by David Porter who can be reached at porter@ramblinman.us. I'd rather be a chicken than a statistic.

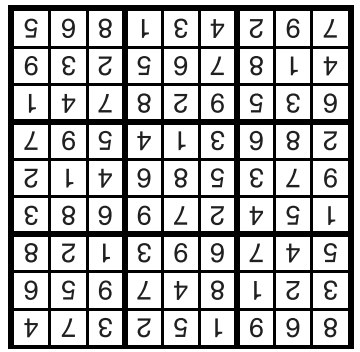
# PUZZLES

### CLUES ACROSS

- Struck firmly
- Shirt part
- Nevertheless
- Article
- Adornment
- Educator's helper
- Healthcare pro
- Atomic number 28
- Extinct flightless bird
- Mystic syllable
- College sports decision maker (abbr.)
- Edible mushrooms
- Venerable English monk
- Surrounded by



- Forming fractional numbers from 4 onwards
- Eastern France river
- Short cry or yelp
- Brew
- Ornamental box
- In a way, surfaced
- Attired
- Peculation
- Netted
- It shows you paid (abbr.)
- Payroll firm
- Antidiuretic hormone
- Japanese classical theater
- The first two
- Ancient burial chamber



- Type of card
- Expression of sorrow or pity
- Hectoliter
- Morning
- NYC subway dweller
- Law enforcement
- Sodium
- Elevated subway
- Facility where wild animals are kept
- Integrated circuit
- Seaman's tool
- Drink to
- Small group

### CLUES DOWN

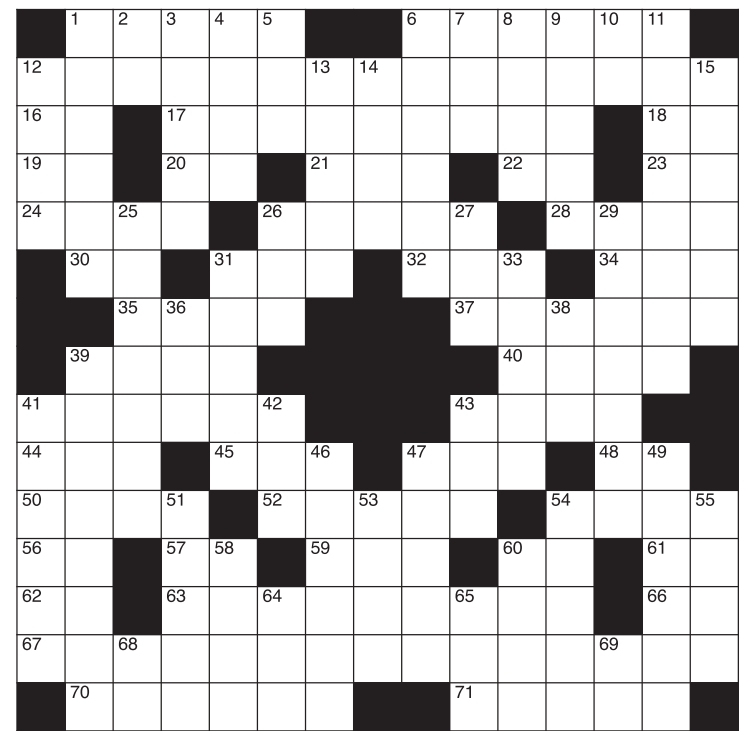
- Poem
- Everest is one (abbr.)
- Olympic legend Jesse
- Portable tent
- When you hope to get there
- Unwavering
- Back muscle
- Within
- Excessive fluid accumulation in tissues
- Six

- Involved as a necessary part
- 2002 Liotta, Patric film
- Living thing
- Type of gin
- Moved around in pursuit of fun
- Makes light bulbs
- Story of one's life
- Small island in a river
- A type of bliss
- Genus of large herons
- A way to make dry
- One's grandmother
- Vocal style
- Pronunciation mark
- American Indian chief or leader
- Insecticide
- Go bad
- Capital of Zimbabwe
- Polish river
- Cast out
- People of India and Sri Lanka
- Cleaning fabrics
- Very skilled
- Pouches
- Restaurant must-have
- Native Americans from Arizona

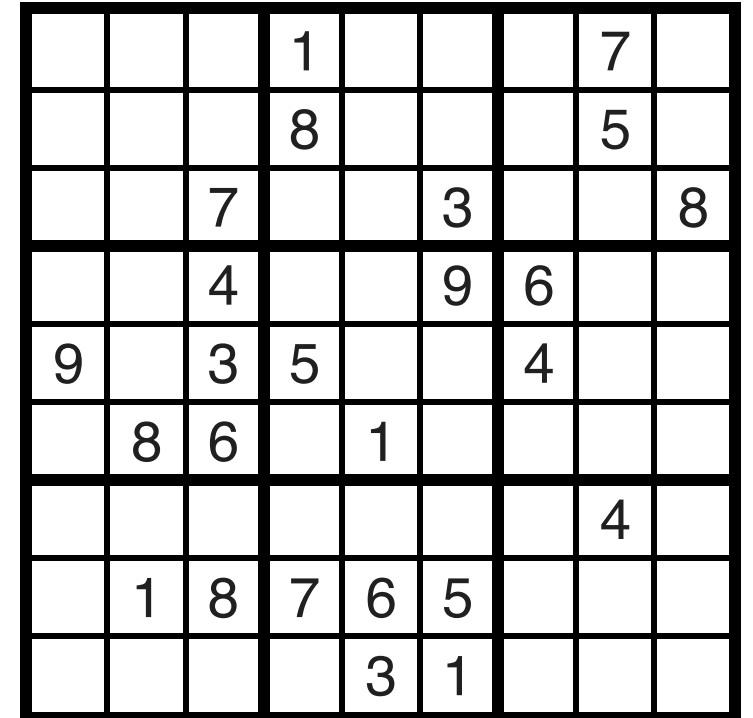
- Remaining after all deductions
- Fleece

- Dorm official
- It cools your home

## CROSSWORD



## SUDOKU



# HOROSCOPES

### ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20

Your finances need a little extra work, Aries. Start to focus on investments, money and other financial matters. Your mind is quick and you catch on quite fast.

### TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21

Romance is on your mind this week, Taurus. This is the time to focus on solidifying your relationship with someone special in your life or to find that perfect match.

### GEMINI – May 22/June 21

Matters involving work are at the forefront of your mind, Gemini. You may need to put in some extra hours on the job this week. Keep your head down and your efforts will be noted.

### CANCER – June 22/July 22

Cancer, you may be longing for an encounter with your romantic partner, but other factors keep getting in the way of

your date. You have to make romance a priority.

### LEO – July 23/Aug 23

An unexpected financial windfall lands in your lap, Leo. It is just the good news you need at this point in time. Start thinking about how to invest this unexpected gift.

### VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22

Business and personal successes are coming your way soon, Virgo. It could be a project that brings you financial gain or the development of a new friendship.

### LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23

Libra, whether it's a hunch or a tip from someone close to you, you have some valuable information that will come in handy in the coming days.

### SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22

A relationship reaches new heights, Scorpio. If you are unattached, you might find

a partner soon. If you have a significant other, he or she will become even closer.

### SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21

Sagittarius, draw your closest friends together and plan a gathering where you can exchange ideas and rekindle friendships. It's been a while since you socialized.

### CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20

A long journey is in your near future, Capricorn. It may come by way of a much-needed vacation, or you may make a move across country to follow a job or passion.

### AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18

Finances dominate your week, Aquarius. This could be related to a pay raise at work or a personal investment that pans out. One way or another, success isn't too far away.

### PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20

Pisces, a business partner may contact

you with some good news after returning from a trip. Prepare to join this person in a promising venture.

## FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

- JANUARY 2  
Dax Shepard, Actor (47)
- JANUARY 3  
Eli Manning, Athlete (41)
- JANUARY 4  
Jaeden Martell, Actor (19)
- JANUARY 5  
Bradley Cooper, Actor (47)
- JANUARY 6  
Irina Shayk, Model (36)
- JANUARY 7  
Lauren Cohan, Actress (40)
- JANUARY 8  
Genevieve Padalecki, Actress (41)