

As in previous years, clues will provide you with two letters to fit into the answer grid below, spelling out a seasonal message. In each case you need to enter two letters from the answer, indicated by the numbers in square brackets after the letter count. In as many cases as possible this will include the first letter, but not always. For example, for the clue **'LEAVE HIGH GROUND (9 : [1, 6])**, the answer might be **PARTRIDGE (PART [= LEAVE] + RIDGE [= HIGH GROUND])**: You would then need to enter into the grid the first letter - **P** - and the sixth - **I**. Clues 44, 52, 72 and 73 are of a kind.

When you have worked out the message, send all your answers – clues and message - by email to: [abdemonpuzzles@gmail.com](mailto:abdemonpuzzles@gmail.com). Closing date: January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026, with the winner to be chosen at random from the entrants with the most correct answers.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	

1	Does war mean regular losses will occur? (4 : [1, 3])	46	Grumble (6 : [1, 5])
2	"Never put with the wrong end in front ..." (5 : [1, 4])	47	Lays eggs inside a paper bag ... (9 : [1, 7])
3	Doctor Lorna bandages wrist (9, 9 : [1, 13])	48	Ring of fire (8 : [6, 1])
4	Perhaps Anton noticed club member? (6, 7, 10 : [1, 21])	49	Form of prayer offered during short French dance (9 : [3, 5])
5	Charles and Carrie, maybe (10 : [2, 3])	50	Churches provide sanctuary for a loud, short European (9 : [1, 2])
6	Kind of pig – not a pig – sounds horrid (6, 4 : [1, 3])	51	Dramatic loss of time (8 : [6, 5])
7	Half-naked, with tousled hair (8 : [1, 6])	52	Stupid stories about journalist (10 : [1, 9])
8	Meandering European River (5 : [1, 2])	53	Loud noise overwhelms distraught Romeo (9 : [5, 8])
9	Pest needed help outside pub (5 : [1, 4])	54	Gone? Alleged to have gone astray (6, 5 : [1, 8])
10	Lavishly reward rebel (4, 7 : [1, 5])	55	Rock band led away (8 : [1, 2])
11	It's child's play (5, 3 : [2, 5])	56	Criminal re-enforcing plea (9, 6 : [14, 1])
12	A lad myself, surprisingly (9 : [5, 7])	57	Tumbling down Apple 'n' Pears (5, 6 : [4, 9])
13	Tilted to align changes (4-6, 3 : [1, 2])	58	Some French doctor at Job Centre (5 : [3, 5])
14	Get vibe – pat arm feverishly (7, 3 : [2, 10])	59	Decorative flags (7 : [2, 4])
15	Reading gospel I cannot find hidden meaning (7 : [4, 7])	60	Messing up girl's head in Humberside port (7, 4 : [1, 2])
16	Sleuths working around Gateshead – they might? (4 : [3, 2])	61	Try cold pâté, spread lavishly (11 : [6, 2])
17	Delightful shift from low to high (8 : [7, 8])	62	Sounds as if Spooner wants to reserve an Irish boat (10 : [5, 1])
18	Choice is between squash or netball (6 : [1, 5])	63	Agreement before the end of June (8 : [8, 3])
19	Tiny LED? (10 : [1, 5])	64	Puccini's <i>Madama</i> ... (9 : [1, 9])
20	Result of unlimited probing (5 : [2, 5])	65	Optimism augurs well, guarding hidden treasure (5 : [1, 4])
21	Mrs. Johnson? (8 : [1, 6])	66	Swingers' bar? (7 : [2, 4])
22	Hansom went clattering along (3, 7 : [1, 4])	67	Man, Pig, Rat, Cuckoo (9 : [4, 6])
23	Noah and Nelly's craft (7 : [2, 3])	68	Choose alien ship to begin with (7 : [7, 5])
24	What Robbie's loving instead? (6 : [1, 2])	69	Wedding card (5, 4 : [1, 2])
25	Technique when zip gets stuck?! (9 : [1, 3])	70	The middle two-fifths of a centimetre (4 : [1, 2])
26	Hear cockney let out a small cry (6, 3 : [1, 9])	71	Very cultured, without limits (7 : [3, 4])
27	The short dash (6 : [1, 6])	72	Transfiguration enraging her more ... (8, 7 : [1, 2])
28	Makes trellis a central feature (7 : [2, 3])	73	... as one lawyer's crooked (3, 7 : [10, 8])
29	Large quarry (6 : [5, 1])	74	Lad falls ill in Darwin's ship (4, 5 : [5, 2])
30	Fatboy Slim was one once (5, 6 : [9, 1])	75	Bang on (5 : [2, 4])
31	... while Nurse Pam patches up (8 : [4, 5])	76	The police set up ring leader (10 : [8, 1])
32	Support offer taking one side each (9 : [1, 7])	77	Offer <i>Gladiator</i> rapturous reception following comeback (6 : [2, 6])
33	Building up zoo: zebra and rhinos displayed from the outset (7 : [6, 7])	78	Reverse legislation in ponderous manner (7 : [3, 4])
34	Sean Connery or Rod Stewart ... (8 : [1, 7])	79	Turns pink, having done well (7 : [3, 2])
35	... or Rembrandt or Vermeer? (8 : [8, 1])	80	Jonathan or Taylor? (5 : [4, 5])
36	Dickens' character takes plenty of ale (9 : [1, 6])	81	Curious - or shy – elf (8 : [1, 5])
37	Point at mine, then dismiss (8 : [8, 1])	82	Room to move quickly (5, 6 : [1, 5])
38	Composed nicer tract (6, 4 : [1, 10])	83	Can a good sea make waves? (6, 5 : [1, 2])
39	Big in US night sky (6 : [1, 3])	84	<i>Butterfly</i> chorus met with disapproval (11 : [6, 2])
40	Isobar now links selection of points (4, 3 : [7, 2])	85	Sardines enter a whirlpool (6, 8 : [1, 8])
41	Litmus test measures from 1 out to 9 (7 : [5, 4])	86	Deck the hall, a robin too (3, 3, 7 : [3, 1])
42	Small and pale (4 : [1, 3])	87	Hope gas use is reduced by greenhouse effect (7 : [2, 5])
43	Right behind Tory party (6 : [3, 4])	88	Has kinetic energy about it (4 : [1, 2])
44	Chase Trump, perhaps (5, 6 : [8, 1])	89	It's pretty morsel, served daintily (6, 6 : [8, 1])
45	Poor thing in strong wind (11 : [2, 1])		