

Opening Monologue

To determine the Word Search of the Year - Presented by Hot & Cazique

After thirty years, the emcee of the Sphinxies is getting tired, and occasionally he leaves out bits of his opening monologue. Still, consummate professional that he is, he always manages to fill them in later. Each of the words missing from the first four paragraphs of the speech below can be found in a different sentence from the last five paragraphs, though perhaps not overtly...

Good _____, _____ and gentlemen. _____ you for being here in Los _____ for the 30th edition of the Sphinxie _____. Tonight we will be _____ the best and most _____ minds in the puzzling world, ranging from teenagers to the _____, from those who fill _____ grids to those who hide the words in word _____. Each of these glittering _____ statues is not merely a physical _____; it is a symbol of months, years, and even _____ of contributions to our craft.

Puzzles are a _____-dollar _____, but to those gathered here, it's not about the _____ ... it's about the elegance of a _____ constructed conundrum, the sort of masterpiece that _____ in a _____ next to the works of _____ Van Gogh. What's more, I enjoy a trip to the _____ as much as the next man, but no production of *Oedipus* or _____ could ever be as _____ as the immortal _____ between a solver and the constructor, who simultaneously attempts to _____ and frustrate, often generating the offspring of a grin and a _____.

When we _____ on the subway and see a solver lost in _____, chewing on his pencil's pink _____, we know that as a community, we can take some level of _____ for his enjoyment. Each of us is a _____ on a mental battlefield, a _____ on an ocean of wit, and an _____ ruling over a vast realm of punnery. Whether they think about it or not, the solvers of the world are _____ to all of you for the gifts you _____ for them.

But I've been staid and _____ long _____. Allow me to _____ the mood and tell you a candid story about how I came to be here tonight.

I left my **b**ug-infested apartment after spraying a bit of aerosol (die, roaches!) and set off for the ceremony. **E**n route I stopped to admire the marble monument (inscribed with MCMV) in Centennial Square Park. Inspired, I strode into the A terminal subway **s**top—or at least I tried to, but my metro card malfunctioned. I was **o**nly carrying a little bit of change, less than the cost of a fare to be sure. Left with **z**ero alternatives, I had to hoof it since my car's been having a slight engine problem. (And before you suggest buying old engine parts, believe me, I've made an **a**tttempt.) This was bad news since it's allergy **s**ea^son, and every plant I go near sends me into a sneezing fit. It **d**oesn't take an astrophysicist to see this is a recipe for unpleasantness.

Next, I passed by the hospital, where the trauma ward seemed unusually busy. Apparently at the local youth center, tainted beef had been **r**eceived and inadvertently served. "Poisoning children—is nothing sacred?" I told **m**yself as I passed. But in these **e**x^treme situations I need to cautiously control my temper or I tend to lose it. **I**t's sad; a man of my mental acumen ought to be able to restrain himself. Last time I exploded, **a** friend taped my outburst, and watching myself caught on camera served to teach me a lesson. Since then I've changed my ways, though there is still an occasional moment of **r**age.

Proceeding past the paper mill, I only went another **e**ighty feet before hearing a chorus of boos over the wall to my left. Why the morons who own the stadium use umpires that are so **e**rror-prone, I'll never know. **A** single missed call is fine, but six or seven in game after game is simply inexcusable. I know, many of you think I sound **j**ust like a snide cad, especially to those of you who have refereed games. You might **c**laim that the extra velocity today's fielders give the ball makes it impossible to be totally accurate. But having been a fan of the **t**eam one year, the lousy calls become impossible to ignore.

Things suddenly got **u**ncomfortable when the evil Dr. Micro, a loser I ousted from the Emcees' Union appeared. (It wasn't entirely my doing; Marvin, Deb, Teddy, and Chris all agreed with me, but I was the **d**eciding vote). He was wearing a bizarre cult-like robe—long sleeves, big hood, **v**arious runes, the works. Before I could **o**pen my mouth, Dr. Micro's sword was at my throat! Clearly insane, he placed me in a deep pit with **o**nly a small lantern set on the tiniest rug, gleaming in the darkness. I **f**eared for my life, as I could see a dead plumber and a deceased welder lying next to me. Looking up, I found myself face to **f**ace with an enraged ram, a ticked-off wolf, and a rabid moose. I tried to turn my communicator watch on or ingeniously call for help some other way, but as **y**ou can imagine, things were grim. Thinking **q**uickly, I remembered the Emcee Escape Pro video I had watched in host school.

I **c**arefully felt my way around a floor covered in dust (Ryan Seacrest showed me this technique). Blindly, I **t**hrust out my hands and grabbed the ram's surprisingly smooth ankles. Vaulting off the ram I leapt up and grabbed the pit's long rim; a ceiling rafter was fortuitously close enough for me to climb to **s**afety. I knew at that **i**nstant that this adventure would scare full years off the end of my life. But for now I was starving, and those arches over the hill indicated my favorite fast food **r**estaurant was nearby. I ordered a **n**ice salad, I established my location, and I planned my next move. I nibbled on some pita (Lent edited my diet so that I didn't get my usual Big **M**ac). All I could do was wonder what Esai, Lorne, or (heaven forbid) Keanu would do in such a **l**udicrous situation....