

Rookies Redux 2019 Hunt Tale

The ATH is always eagerly awaited in the respective homes of the Rookies (as we are now veterans of three ATHs I think we will have to retire this name now). In fact, to fend off withdrawal symptoms we like to do a past hunt in the summer. This year we had of course chosen the 2009 Dorothy L Sayers themed hunt, to get us on the wavelength of our setters.

The 2009 hunt, the relative difficulty of things like the parasitic number and the chess problem, the fact that we were convinced there was some code hidden in the final strangely-worded paragraph of the newsletter but couldn't crack it - all had the team captain concerned about what the main hunt had in store. Other team members just got on with solving the "we hope you enjoy..." code and the chess problem (but what to do with it?), so we were in good stead.

The comparatively long time between the newsletter poster and the main hunt being released meant we had lots of time to go down some weird avenues suggested by the poster. Including discovering that there is a racing greyhound by the name of Tally Ho Rainbow.

The clocks initially convinced us that the hunt would be released on 5 / 12 / 19. The team captain even got special permission from a pub quiz master to check her phone that evening just in case. But we had to wait a little longer...

We made steady progress on the main hunt once it was released. We didn't spot the Rendell theme very early, but neither were we embarrassingly late. Once we did spot her, one of our team mentioned that there was a blue plaque in her honour near Epping Forest... which we never followed up at the time.

We were steadily chipping away at every page except page 10; identifying the authors, reverse image searching the pictures, and googling the questions (note to self don't google "endless orgy" on work laptop). At this point we were blissfully unaware that there were links hidden in the location photos and of the whole metadata puzzle, which we did not spot until after Christmas.

By 2nd January we had all the pieces of the puzzle in terms of the snippets of instructions and just needed a starting place. Finally we cracked the page 10 code, a real "Avengers Assemble" moment with every member of the team solving a step along the way. Ruth Rendell's blue plaque was our starting point. We spent the rest of that day and the next doing as much online reconnaissance as we could on googlemaps streetview and geograph.co.uk. By the time the weekend came around we were fairly confident (previously excursions to ATH locations have always been much more speculative).

From Stevenage, Birmingham, Nottingham and South London we assembled at the Foresters Arms on 4th January. The route to the treasure was pretty much as our investigations had led us to expect. We had been warned about muddy boots and the boggy

furlong but even so it was pretty bad and one of our team fell into a particularly soggy spot and had to sit on a sheet for the car ride home.

Closing in on the Lost Pond, we encountered two other teams coming the other way after successfully finding the treasure. They were looking around in case they could find a secondary location, this time in tree 191 47 (the roman numerals were ambiguous). We were just happy to fairly quickly follow the instructions to 199 57, recover the treasure box (here the team captain was glad that not all team members were as short as her) and take our token. Lunch in the Foresters Arms was our reward.



We still had over a week to identify some snagging items on the main hunt and try to make something of the metadata puzzle we had belatedly stumbled across. The guesses for the snagging list were becoming steadily more elaborate e.g. the photographer who took the photo of the jet on page 1 is called Don, which was the name of Ruth Rendell's husband. I still like our answer for Terry Butcher more than the official answer: he and Harry Potter both suffered head wounds and bear the scars to this day.

As usual we overthought things and spotted a whole lot of themes, connections and entire puzzles that were never really there. But this "hexagonning" as we call it (ref. 2017 ATH) is all part of the fun.

We had lots to do with the metadata puzzle and by the final weekend we had solved everything including the words hidden in the first chapter of Make Death Love Me and that

they needed to go into a url path. We couldn't crack the final "printer's devilry" code (this team of crossword setters and solvers hangs its head in shame) that would tell us which order they went in. What else was there to do but try to brute force the thing by typing every combination of the 6 words ending .htm and then try again ending .pdf. 1680 combinations! Sadly to no avail as we did not try them with / between the words. Although we did realise something like this could be included, there were just too many variables when we didn't have the order.

Many thanks to the setters for an excellent, absorbing, frustrating, imaginative ATH.