

The Sixth Beatle

SOLUTIONS

The solver is presented with a packet of 5 puzzles and told that their goal is to find a secret pass phrase which, when told to Brian, will prompt him to reveal the identity of “The Sixth Beatle”. The solutions to the puzzles are:

Puzzle 1: Don’t Let Me Down

Each movie review clues a mashup of a sci-fi film and a Beatles song via the plot and year of the film and lyrics from the song. The brief sentence at the top of each review indicates which album the song is on via its acronym. For example, the first review’s title is “Absolutely horrid, disgusting noise”, with the acronym AHDN, the same as A Hard Day’s Night.

The answers are, in order:

Absolutely horrid, disgusting noise.

Sure, this 1968 “classic” invented an entire genre (or two) and spawned a bunch of sequels happening at different times of day, but was it worth it? I was expecting this movie to give me everything, but instead it just put me to sleep like a log.

A HARD DAY’S NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

Abominable, hideous, dreadful, noxious.

This 1981 fantasy caper wants to be whimsical but is actually just plain upsetting, leaving the main character in the lurch at the end when his parents explode. If the sun has faded away, I’m not sure a supreme being is going to save us.

ANY TIME BANDITS AT ALL

Mostly mindless trash.

This low budget 1984 classic is intense, but the life of someone doing the title job here is always intense. Is it the aliens? The cars? The beautiful people? The big brown bags? I sure as hell don’t know, but what a thing to do.

BABY, YOU’RE A RICH REPO MAN

Total bupkus.

So much in this 1985 time travel hit reads as just plain creepy today, even if the (worse) sequel's alternate timeline feels kind of prescient. I did enjoy all the period pop culture references, like that airline B.O.A.C.
BACK TO THE FUTURE IN THE U.S.S.R.

Particularly miserable.

Why would someone make a movie like this 2014 action snoozefest about a dog-loving hitman hell-bent on revenge? You know how hard it can be to appreciate a film like this, the way things are going? Very.
THE BALLAD OF JOHN WICK AND YOKO

Ridiculous.

Groundhog Day meets *Aliens* in this 2014 disaster about what would happen if time-looping extraterrestrials in Europe could anticipate humanity's every move on the battlefield. If you want to appreciate this one, turn off your mind, relax, and float.
EDGE OF TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS

Bad for sure.

I know people love this 1982 sci-fi horror classic, but I just don't find it plausible. There's no way that dog could run that far in that weather, and from that point on I just didn't buy any of it, especially the guy's head turning into a weird bug monster. I remember the first time I saw this (people tell me I'm lucky to have experienced it in the theaters), but I felt that way then too.
EVERY LITTLE THE THING

Pretty mediocre.

Is this 1996 fiasco patriotic or just dumb? THOSE SYSTEMS AREN'T COMPATIBLE!!! It's a miracle that a Sunday driver can steer the spacecraft the way he does. This is a one way ticket to boredom!
INDEPENDENCE DAY TRIPPER

Really subpar.

The space vampires in this campy 1985 horror classic with a Star Trek actor should have been terrifying, but they're not. I know I'll often stop and think about them and how they explode when they turn into zombies, even though some are dead and some are living.
IN MY LIFEFORCE

Horrible!

This 1997 action-driven mess posits the question: can two larger-than-life actors do impressions of each other for over two hours? (Answer: not really.) Forget the time or place — had it been another day, the film would have been just as dreary. I'VE JUST SEEN A FACE/OFF

What total BS.

What total BS. This saccharine 1999 Pinocchio ripoff starring a guy who got his start playing an alien on TV couldn't be worse, and audiences knew it. Please, let me understand!

I WANNA BE YOUR BICENTENNIAL MAN

Lacking in believability.

This 2019 sequel seems to be mostly about how much it sucks to live in Maine, especially if you grew up dealing with a homicidal shapeshifting monster. Seems like people in New England should already know this, but there is still a chance that they will see this wretched film.

LET IT CHAPTER TWO BE

Rubbish squared.

This 1976 crapfest makes living in geodesic domes look even worse than it sounds, but at least a computer's in charge of everything and people's hands look kind of cool. Sanctuary? That's the end, little girl, and it can't come soon enough!

LOGAN'S RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

Look, it blows.

This is a long-awaited 2015 sequel about a guy who spends most of his time getting carted around in a post-apocalyptic desert, then helps a bunch of women escape through the wild and windy night. You'll never know the many ways I've tried to like this movie!

THE LONG AND WINDING MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

Super passionless, like Hollywood can be.

This 2001 psychological "thriller" based on a Spanish movie from 4 years earlier features one of moviedom's most intense actors getting confused about what's real and what's just a result of him doing drugs (which he denies). He wanders from a boat on a river to a bridge by a fountain...the psychedelic imagery's a little on the nose here, don't you think?

LUCY IN THE VANILLA SKY WITH DIAMONDS

All right.

Watching this 1985 lycanthropic dud based on a previously existing work and starring a teen heartthrob would almost be worse for the residents of Tarker's Mill than the events in the movies. And guys, if you wanted to kill a werewolf, you should have made sure that he was dead. Bang! Bang!

MAXWELL'S SILVER BULLET HAMMER

Too bad!

This wry, special effects-heavy 1997 buddy comedy starring a politician's former roommate and a guy who sort of played himself on TV has promise, but it just never really gets off the ground. They should be chasing aliens instead of wasting their time singing in the dead of night!

MEN IN BLACKBIRD

Real shame.

This 2013 catastrophe about a midwestern alien just doesn't have a point of view and doesn't know where it's going. Moreover, it's an origin story we've seen at least once before. At least they didn't CGI the lead actor's moustache off in this one.

NOWHERE MAN OF STEEL

Lackluster, inane, banal.

A great director helms this 2018 monstrosity based on a book about why Gen X pop culture will save the (real and virtual) world. Move over once, boomer, move over twice, boomer...move over, and try not to fall asleep while you do it.

READY PLAYER ONE AFTER 909

Truly boring.

Weird shrimp guys from New Zealand push this 2009 allegory into "why are we doing this" territory, and the sound collage aspect makes that even worse. What is this, King Lear? Clearly the director is getting a little bit older and a little bit slower. Hard pass.

REVOLUTION DISTRICT 9

Notice that each mashed up title matches with an enumeration at the bottom. A HARD DAY'S NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD is 1 4 3'1 5 2 3 6 4, and the number before the slash indicates which letter to take: 14 / 1 4 3'1 5 2 3 6 4 thus extracts to T.

In order presented at the bottom of the second page, the extracted letters spell MINECRAFT STAR FLIPPED. The star of Minecraft is Jack Black, so the answer to the puzzle is BLACKJACK.

Puzzle 2: I'm Looking Through You

This is a pretty standard crossword, except for one twist: The four long Across entries each have one square with the name of a Beatle, which doesn't match with the intersecting Down entry. The solution to the crossword is:

A	L	T	J		G	A	L	A		A	V	O	I	D
N	O	H	O		U	F	O	S		L	A	T	H	E
A	G	A	R		I	I	I	I		O	N	I	O	N
L	Y	N	D	O	N	B	^N JOHN	S	O	N		S	P	Y
			A	Y	E			A	S	L				
	C	A	N	V	A	S	T	A	R	^O PAUL	I	N	S	
M	I	N		E	N	T	E	R	S		M	I	T	T
T	E	D	D	Y		E	N	D		N	E	N	E	H
A	L	O	E		T	E	S	O	R	O		A	G	E
	O	R	A	N	^O GEORGE	N	E	R	A	L	T	S	O	
			D	E	R				S	T	U			
T	S	K		S	T	^N RINGO	R	C	H	E	S	T	R	A
E	N	A	C	T		Y	U	R	I		C	H	E	T
R	U	R	A	L		P	L	E	D		A	O	N	E
A	B	A	T	E		L	E	D	A		N	U	D	E

Taking the letters from the Down entries that intersect the Beatle names in vertical order gives the answer NOON.

Puzzle 3: Eight Days a Week

This puzzle is a bunch of images, followed by a bunch of arthropods (mostly insects). The main insight is that each image clues a phrase that is an anagram of one of the bugs plus a letter. For example, the first image clues ALI PHD, which is an anagram of APHID + L. The images, extra letters, and bugs in page order are:

ALI PHD	L	APHID
ELBE	L	BEE
FLAY	A	FLY
HALF E	H	FLEA
IM HOT	I	MOTH
MS PAINT	P	MANTIS
NATE	E	ANT
OCCULT S	C	LOCUST
PERIODS	O	SPIDER
PION CROCS	C	SCORPION
SWAMP	M	WASP
TANGO	O	GNAT

Note that the answers are in alphabetical order. Taking the extra letters in order of the bugs on the bottom of the page gives the phrase POOL CHEMICAL, which clues CHLORINE, the answer to the puzzle.

Puzzle 4: Magical Mystery Tour

Each sentence in this puzzle should be completed with the name of a world capital. The answers are:

If you're a vocalist, to look your best while you SING A POREcleansing soap is recommended. It sounds crazy, but "Paul IS BONkers" might have been less controversial than saying he was dead.

When recording, you might have to over DUB LINES that you mess up on the first take.

Are George's guitar solos LOved more than John's?

Many metal bands' lyrics CAN BE R RATED, filled with cursing and violent imagery.

Every time I go on tour I GAIN 10 pounds from all the crappy food I eat.

Most people would RANK ARAM Khachaturian as the greatest Armenian composer of all time.

Hot take: I think A BULIfrog would sound better than Paul does on "Oh Darling".

I'd call "IMAGine" the best song written by any of the Beatles.

After I quit as a recording assistant I RAN A studio of my own for a while.

Professional conductors prefer A BATon to using just their hands.

Can you guess which MAN I LAVish with praise in my new love song?

The flavortext at the top of the puzzle indicates that one should take the countries corresponding to each capital. In order, these are:

SINGAPORE

PORTUGAL

IRELAND

NORWAY

AUSTRALIA

LATVIA

TURKEY

AFGHANISTAN

PERU

ALBANIA

MOROCCO

PHILIPPINES

and their first letters spell SPINAL TAP AMP, the answer to the puzzle.

Puzzle 5: I Want To Tell You / Oh! Darling

Each clue in this puzzle indicates a phrase with exactly five I's or O's in it, and the answer can be assembled from I's, O's, and the strings at the bottom of the page. The answers are:

All-knowing bad guy (10 7)	OMNISCIENT VILLIAN
One who's anti-sleeplessness (8 7)	INSOMNIA OPPOSER
Charged particles in rump broth(6 4 7)	OXTAIL SOUP PROTONS
Craniosacral smut (11 7)	OSTEOPATHIC EROTICA
Unobjectionable vowel combinations (9 10)	INNOCUOUS DIPHTHONGS
Belief system of a large bird (7 8)	OSTRICH IDEOLOGY
Suddenly no longer available, like a book (3 2 5 9)	OUT OF PRINT OVERNIGHT
Whiskey for an underground worker (4 5 7)	IRON MINER BOURBON
North African grain dish with a lot of data (11 8)	INFORMATIVE COUSCOUS
All the President's henchmen (4 6 7)	OVAL OFFICE CRONIES
Person who sells Rorschach tests (7 10)	INKBLOT PROPRIETOR
Sinful beginnings (7 7)	IMMORAL ORIGINS
Not the real Emma or Hunter (8 8)	IMPOSTOR THOMPSON
Weird popes from Tulsa (3 8 8)	ODD OKLAHOMA PONTIFFS
Deserves ravioli filling (2 6 2 7)	IS WORTHY OF RICOTTA
Required certified produce (10 8)	OBLIGATORY ORGANICS
Happy-go-lucky brother of Nick and Kevin (10 3 5)	INSOUCIANT JOE JONAS
Nonwithstanding unhealthy substances (2 5 2 6)	IN SPITE OF TOXINS

The 5 I's and O's hint at binary, so we take the binary values of each answer. These values, their decimal equivalents, and the corresponding letters of the alphabet (A=1, B=2, C=3,...) are:

OIIII	15	O
IOIOO	20	T
OIOOO	8	H
OOIOI	5	E
IOOIO	18	R
OIIIO	12	L
OOIOI	5	E
IOIOO	20	T
IOIOO	20	T
OOIOI	5	E
IOOIO	18	R
IOOII	19	S

I0000	16	P
0000I	1	A
I00IO	18	R
OI00I	9	I
IOIOO	20	T
II00I	25	Y

OTHER LETTERS PARITY hints that we should look at the other (neither I nor O) letters in each answer, and take their even/odd parity. For example, the first answer OMNISCIENT VILLAIN's other letters are MN SC ENTV LLA N, with the parity even-even-even-odd-odd. Identifying even = 0 and odd = 1, the other letters in the clues give the binary, decimary, and alphabetic values:

000II	3	C
00IOI	5	E
I00IO	20	R
IOIIO	24	V
00IOI	5	E
I00IO	20	R
OI00I	9	I
I00II	21	S
00IIO	6	F
I00IO	20	R
OI00I	9	I
OIIIO	13	N
00III	7	G
00IOI	5	E
000II	3	C
OI000	8	H
0000I	1	A
I00IO	20	R

This phrase CERVERIS FRINGE CHAR clues the character played by Michael Cerveris on Fringe, which is SEPTEMBER, the answer to the puzzle.

Metapuzzle Solution

The solutions to the puzzles, in order, are:

1. BLACKJACK
2. NOON
3. CHLORINE
4. SPINAL TAP AMP
5. SEPTEMBER

Each of these clues a number: 21, 12, 17, 11, and 9. The final night of Notacon featured a Beatles singalong with the following set list, which was posted on the screen with the lyrics:

1. I Want To Hold Your Hand
2. I Saw Her Standing There
3. Octopus's Garden
4. She Loves You
5. Yellow Submarine
6. Something
7. Little Help From My Friends
8. Ob La Di Ob La Da
9. Here Comes The Sun
10. Yesterday
11. Help!
12. Can't Buy Me Love
13. Lucy In The Sky with Diamonds
14. Lady Madonna
15. All You Need Is Love
16. Hard Day's Night
17. Get Back
18. Day Tripper
19. Taxman
20. Nowhere Man
21. I Am The Walrus
22. Blackbird
23. Come Together
24. Golden Slumbers / Carry That Weight / The End
25. Hey Jude

The songs corresponding to the numbers are, in order:

21. I Am The Walrus
12. Can't But Me Love

17. Get Back

11. Help!

9. Here Comes the Sun

The first word of each song forms the phrase "I CAN'T GET HELP HERE", which is the final answer, the secret pass phrase.