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Hello Again!

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Today is January 15th, which is significant. For one thing, it means that this hunt is going to go into Gringotts *early*, as this is the final puzzle I need to set for the Ptruzzle Hunt. (It'll probably take me a bit to get it all adjusted perfectly, but whatever!) On another front? Death and Mayhem just won the MIT Mystery Hunt -- a hunt team that included your very own Stratton Vakirtzis! If you have ever participated in my hunts in the past, you're probably already familiar with Stratton. He's testsolved all of my "big" hunts, and he also *contributed* puzzly-goodness to the DUAL Hunt last year. He's in the process of setting a couple of puzzles for this hunt as well -- you'll see one today and the other on Friday! But now that Stratton and the rest of D&M know they need to write all the puzzles for next year's *Mystery* Hunt, it's great to have this hunt so close to being finished! (Best of luck, Stratton!)

One of the things I've talked about before is the work that goes into writing puzzles for a hunt. The bottom line? It is tough. An exacting science, once you get past the initial epiphany that leads to the puzzle idea. I mean, I have tried to keep the puzzles a little "smaller" than those in last year's DUAL Hunt, but it's still been a lot of work. Last year, there were a number of big, involved, four-star puzzles, a sprawling Konundrum . . . plus a huge final metapuzzle (co-written with Deusovi) to cap it all off. Adjusting the difficulty levels was an especially important thing to me this year (since last year went "hard" with the hard-half of that hunt). So I hope that's better. (Or anyhow -- I hope that at least we can preclude folks getting stuck at final extraction at the very end or anything like that again!)

But yeah -- writing an "easier hunt" didn't mean things were any easier as I tried to connect all of the bits of logic together. I still had to carefully monitor all the glyphs and graphics; all the dots and dashes; all the tiny-yet-possibly-crucial details. *"Have I double-and-triple-checked that every bit of each of the Google Sheets matches the .pdf version?" "Even though I want this to be all-caps, should I make it lower-case just to make sure nothing's unintentionally misleading?" "Is everything that has survived to this point perfect?!"*

And then, beyond all the myriad little things that demand your attention, there are the times when something will require lots and LOTS of time or work to finish. Like when an intricate puzzle will vex you as you set it, forcing you to raise your game to a whole new level. A puzzle you'll see Friday took a ridiculous number of tries before I set it -- fifty-eight attempts across eighty-three pieces of paper, to be precise! (Occasionally you have to fight it into shape!) But even when it's quixotic, it does pay off -- to old and young, veteran and novice solvers alike who get the end result of those thousands of minor details (every last one of them, as Sondheim wrote, a major decision!) which ultimately all resulted in something *bigger* than the sum of its parts -- something that hopefully turned out to be special and fun!

(And this year, all the puzzles will be done super-early!)

Anyway -- to get started? Re-read all "sub-zero" words!

Note: As always, all underlining, bolding, and italicizing is for effect, not part of the solve!

To access the hints page, remove the blank in http://happinessboard.com/2024ptruzzlehunt/616_____ .html
To submit your solution, replace the blank in http://happinessboard.com/2024ptruzzlehunt/616_____ .html