

# THE RACKET

27



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Hi.

Can't even imagine how anyone is feeling right now.

Honestly, I don't even want to dip my finger into the cesspool of the collective psyche right now. I'd probably lose a knuckle.

I have so much to say about what is going on today. I have written it and I have rewritten it and I have erased and then written it again.

Because at the end of the day (this day in particular) everything boils down to one simple request:

## VOTE.

I don't care what your reason is. How you've convinced yourself that the act of exercising your ability to vote doesn't mean anything, that it can't change anything, that the electoral college will decide the damn thing anyways, and what does it matter the candidates are the same.

I promise you I'm more cynical than you are, that every one of these thoughts, in the very darkest hours of my mental being, have been spun and rolled and held up to the dimmest light - and each and every one of them are bullshit.

We and the world have - to varying degrees - suffered for four years under the rule of a person who can only be described as a monster. A vaguely human being who has taken what was already a fraying democratic process and torn it into pieces and hand-fed each dripping cut to his loyal wolves. A grinning demon who has drawn a jagged line down the center of the country for his own gain, worse, his own amusement.

Joe Biden isn't the answer to all of America's problems (no one is), but he and Kamala Harris will at least help to stabilize this mammoth barge of a societal institution currently gouting water into the political sea.

If you've convinced yourself otherwise, if you believe our current president has done anything to improve your life, hell, anything at all - I implore you to pull yourself away from The Trump Show for just a minute, drop the conspiracy theories, blink away the smoke and mirrors, and look at the state of our country after four years.

Think about the next four. Think about what could possibly come next.

If you haven't already voted - do it now. Wear a mask, walk to your polling station, be a part of the most important election of your lifetime so far.

This is the chance for change.

This is the chance to start the long and painful process of distancing ourselves from this nightmarish era in American history.

This might just be it.

'Till next time.

- N

The Racket stands against  
police brutality, racism and violence  
perpetuated towards BIPOC  
communities in all forms.

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**JUST  
FUCKING  
VOTE.**

**VOTE VOTE VOTE**  
<https://www.vote411.org/>

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**Cover Artist Statement:**

*These works live at the intersection of play and anxiety. The form of a paper airplane asks us to take our worries and send them aloft on the air; while the content of the news keeps us in a state of dismay.*

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***VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE***

[WWW.THERACKETSF.COM](http://WWW.THERACKETSF.COM)

# WE HAVE A PATREON

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We aren't in this for the money.

That said: there are costs in doing what we do.

Any help with those costs (and with the costs of future endeavors) would be greatly appreciated.

If not, we get it and we still appreciate you.

If so, we've got weekly micro-playlists, special recommend email and much, much more.

## THANK YOU TO THESE FOLKS

MATTHEW CARNEY  
CATHY & JOHN SANDERS  
HALLIE YOUNG  
JAMIE ENGELMANN  
CASEY BENNETT  
LILIAN CAYLEE  
LAUREN C. JOHNSON  
ANGIE MCDONALD  
QUYNH-AN PHAN  
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ALEX MACEDA  
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# **THE RACKET**

**27**





STONED GUY  
JERRY A.J.  
2020



# Childhood Fires

STRIDER MARCUS JONES

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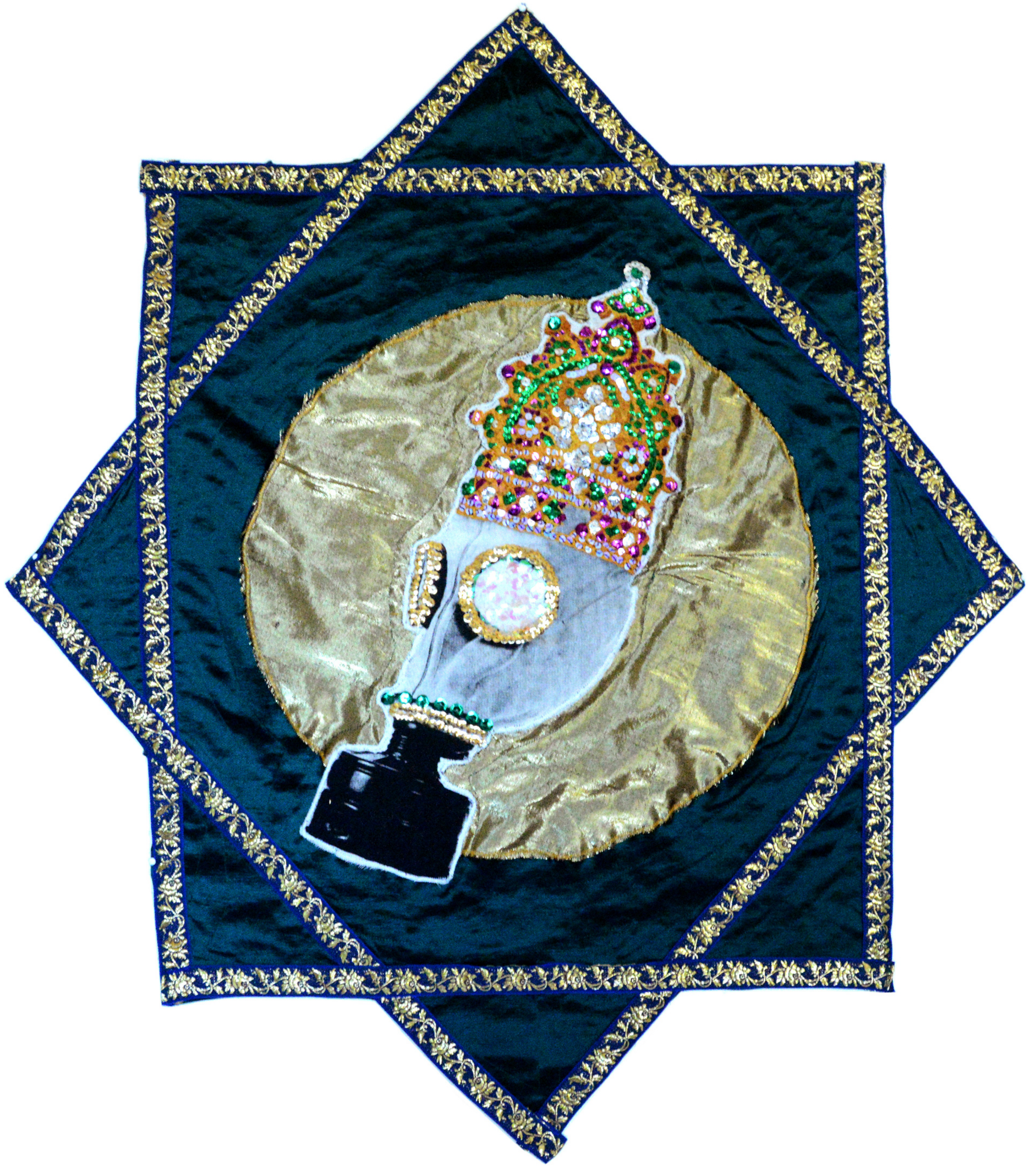
late afternoon  
winter fingers  
nomads in snow  
numb knuckles and nails  
on two boys  
in scuffed shoes  
and ripped coats  
carrying four planks of wood  
from condemned houses  
down dark jitty's  
slipping on dog shit  
into back yard  
to make warm fires

early evening  
dad cooking neck end stew  
thick with potato dumplings and herbs  
on top of bread soaked in gravy  
i saw the hole in the ceiling  
holding the foot that jumped off bunk beds  
but dad didnt mind  
he had just sawed the knob

off the banister  
to get an old wardrobe upstairs  
and made us a longbow and cricket bat  
it was fun being poor  
like other families

after dark  
all sat down reading and talking  
in candle light  
with parents  
silent to each other  
our sudden laughter like sparks  
glowing and fading  
dancing in flames and wood smoke  
unlike the children who died in a fire next door  
then we played cards  
and i called my dad a cunt  
for trumping my king  
but he let me keep the word





تاج, TAJ,

گوریلا جنگ کے ہتھیار (WEAPONS FROM A GUERRILLA WAR) PART OF THE INSTALLATION

ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO

2019



# Off Queen, Near the Senator

CAITLIN THOMSON

---

In the half dark entrance of the underground parking lot,  
a man stands with a bowler hat and a cigarette,  
exhale faintly illuminated by the overhead tube lightening.  
In the minute our car takes to pass him, I imagine a life  
that brought him here, a parakeet waiting for him  
at home, in his renovated loft apartment, the drawings  
his kids made for him this weekend magnetized to the refrigerator.  
He's not lonely, that's too cliché for him, with his skinny suit  
and his still there hair. This man is just waiting for what's next.  
That's why he's smoking, it's the thing he does  
when he's not kissing anyone in particular.



# The Garden of Persephone

R. BRATTEN WEISS

---

For a while, she went around sticking post it notes all over hell saying “fuck the fucking death god” and smearing pomegranate juice over his best white shirts and undies, but she never said she hadn’t gone willingly.

I just wish I had someone other than myself to blame, she said, passing me the split pomegranate. Juice was everywhere. Sad shades sighed behind us, wishing they could have some. She shooed them away, with a flap of her hands.

Everyone says it wasn’t your fault, I said.

That’s what makes me angriest, she said. I hate that they took away my agency. I told her I can’t imagine anyone taking away her agency. And it was true. She was the stubbornest person I knew.

But then there was a soft whisper among the shades, a rush of air, and her eyes widened. You have to go, she said.

It was him, of course. I hurried out.

It’s not everyone who will kindly stop for death. Most girls take off running, like I was. Others use their pepper spray. But the summer she met him, the hot days had rolled on forever with nothing but wheat and poppies and garden work, straw-haired boys on porch swings, and she was ready for adventure.

She was ready for skeleton horses and blood ritual, she said. Maybe the garden work had exhausted her with living things and sunlight.

She was ready for the crypt secrets of dead grandmothers and what they did with needles and threads, maybe sewed dogs heads onto men and men's heads onto horses, which is where all these mythical beasts came from.

That's not where the mythical beasts come from, I said. Most of them come from Zeus.

I doubt it, she said.

She was ready to see how loudly time might scream backwards, if they tied her to a wheel.

Then, the scene in the field with the dark horses and the scattered flowers. Everyone knows that story.

Afterwards, nothing that she'd hoped for ended up happening. They had to live very clean, fasting every Friday, to keep him lean and mean, all his bones on show. He liked her to dress in salmon pink and floral prints, brighten the place up, he said. She wanted to put on black leather and go chew owls' hearts and summon the naiads and forest gods from their enchanted pools, but all she got was that one pomegranate and an admonition to Be Good. It was hard for me to get to see her, and the death-pomegranates started making me ill, so I came up with excuses not to visit.

We stopped hearing from her, after a while. But sometimes, when I drive past their place I can see her, on winter days, crucified to her deck chair, her hands tender brown spiders, her hair a mess of fat snakes that do nothing but sleep.

She too has become a mythical beast and now she knows where they come from. And the winter goes on forever.





MAMMA  
DESIREE HOLMAN  
2009

# No Creature Ever Feels Safe

JACQUELINE SUSKIN

---

Every creature is always on guard,  
connected to the will to live.  
I'm held by my love of earth.  
I can feel our orbit. I sense  
the actual spinning motion.  
I'm embraced by an ancient  
Grandmother spirit and by  
the light of Desert Rose  
cradling my head. Even so,  
I find myself afraid. I'm lying  
in the wash, pretending to be the snake,  
belly and brow on the warm sand.  
What is it that I fear? Not death.  
Not the snake. *I'm afraid of men.*  
*I'm afraid a man will find me.*  
*I'm a woman alone in the desert.*  
I turn over. This seems wrong.  
I have my knife and I can see  
for miles in every direction.  
*I love being alone in the desert.*



A flock of fighter jets soar over me.  
The bombs start dropping  
out at the military base  
and the ground shakes.  
I start crying because I see  
where the fear comes from and instead  
of it being irrational, it's reasonable  
and loud. Two hawks appear  
to do a swirling dance. The moon is full.  
I see Datura close by. When it's dark  
I realize I need to release something old  
from the left side of my neck.  
I'm no longer just a small animal.  
I see myself as a warrior throughout all of time—  
various types of armor, once with a baby  
tucked under one arm, once with my hair  
in a knot high on top of my head, solitary  
and determined, carrying a sword.  
This is also when I first see  
the dead rat in my neck. *Is it really dead?*  
I can't tell, but I know it means  
something and it's time for a ritual.  
I make three small tombs  
to bury a bullet shell, a piece  
of tar roofing, and a nail.  
The Grandmother spirit speaks  
through a spindly chaparral:  
*no creature ever feels safe.*

*The tortoise in its burrow, cottontail in its den,  
mocking bird asleep in the yucca—  
always with one eye open, death  
imminent, and safety is a ruse that lasts  
but a moment. We all nearly get washed away  
in the yearly storms. Some of us perish,  
some of us root deep enough to hold on.  
The darkness wants you to forget how many times  
you've survived it all, that you're an animal  
with sharp teeth, too. I'll do what I can.  
I'll find a way to wake up the rat.*





FACE  
JERRY A.J.  
2020



# i think we

AYNA LI TAIRA

---

it's the world, honey-  
sweet (feather-shouldered  
rose-eyed sub-lime) lowness  
swallowing from within.

a monsoon on the radio.  
how's things, you say. it's  
getting late. could i  
turn, now,

and never leave.  
afloat is almost  
drowning. somewhere,  
a leaf falls in a

tragedy. elsewhere, some  
car lights are blinking.  
i think we come in  
waves, relentlessly.

**THE  
BACK  
PAGE**

BY  
LAURA JAYE CRAMER

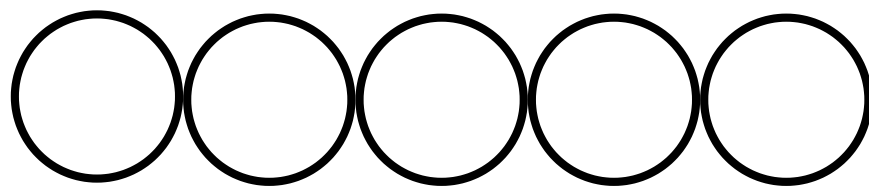
# THE WEEKLY MUMBLE

## WORD STUFF

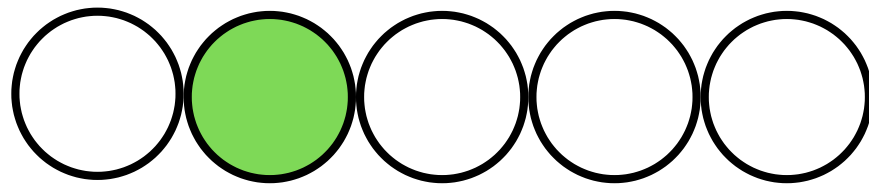
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Unscramble each Mumble to form five ordinary words.  
Then, arrange the green letters in the highlighted spaces to  
complete the punchline.

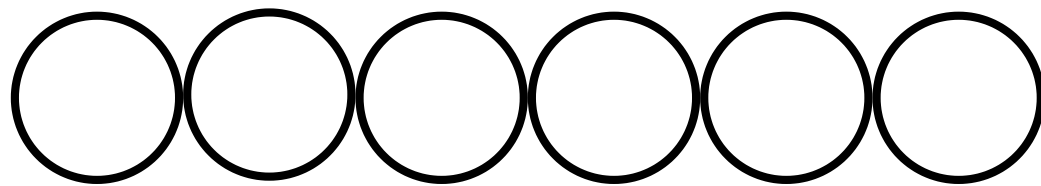
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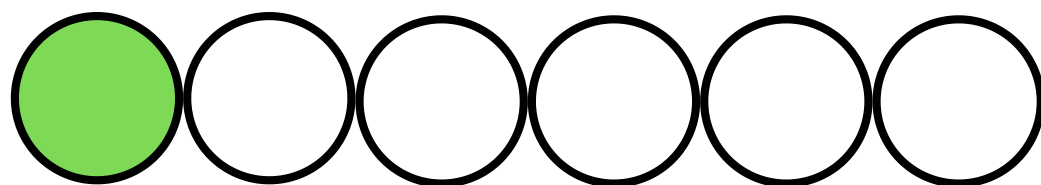
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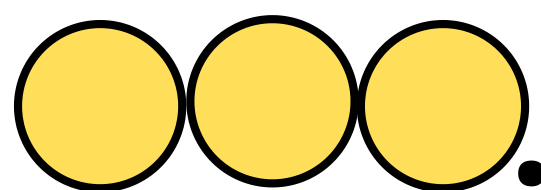
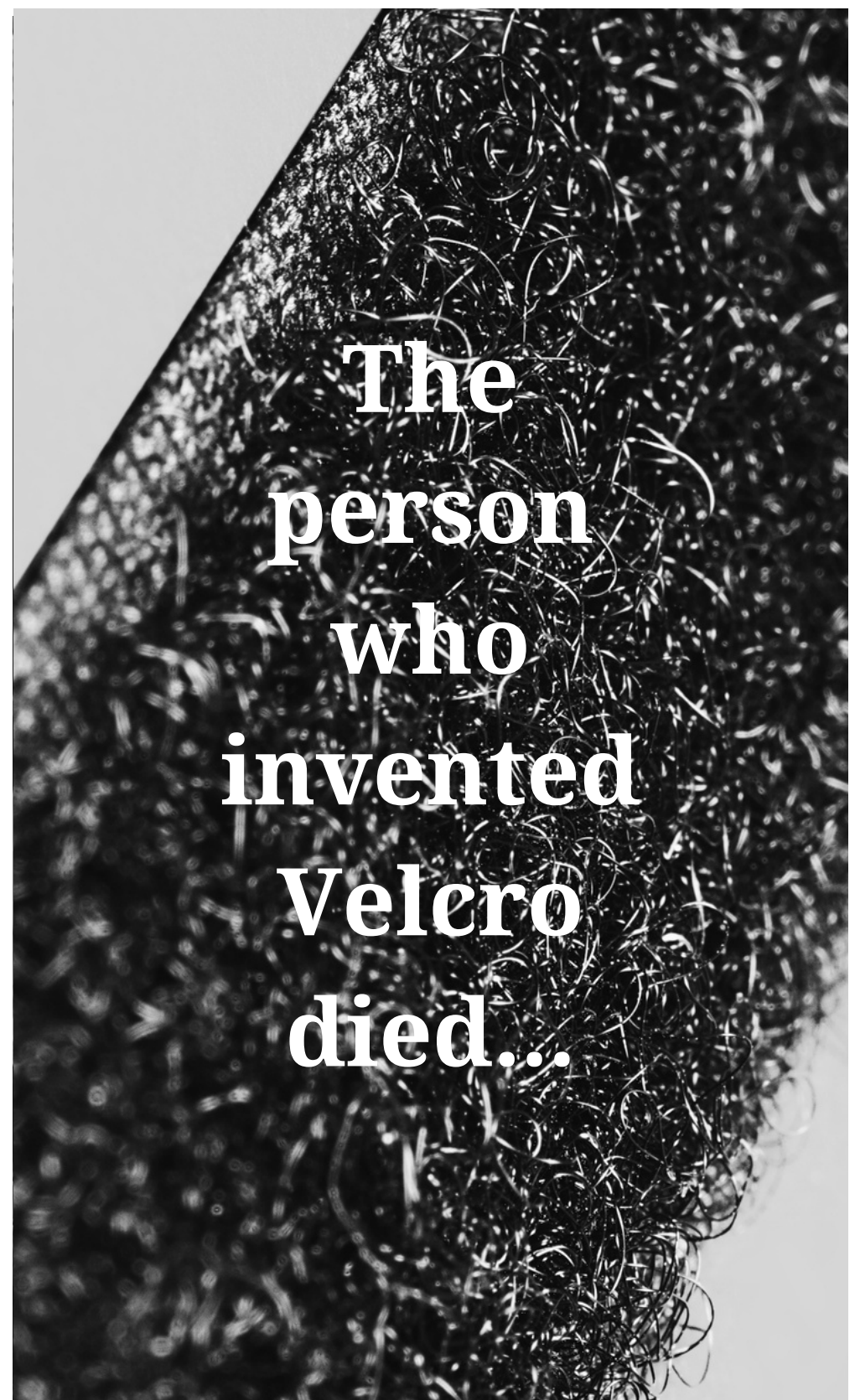
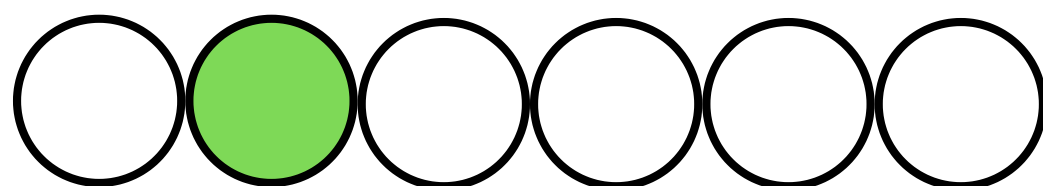
**ULSPCT**



**GELITP**



**HRFNCE**



(Answers next week.)

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Last week's answers:

*DITCH, DRANK, WOEFUL, EATERY, LOUNGE*

*I went to buy some cameo pants, but I couldn't find any..*

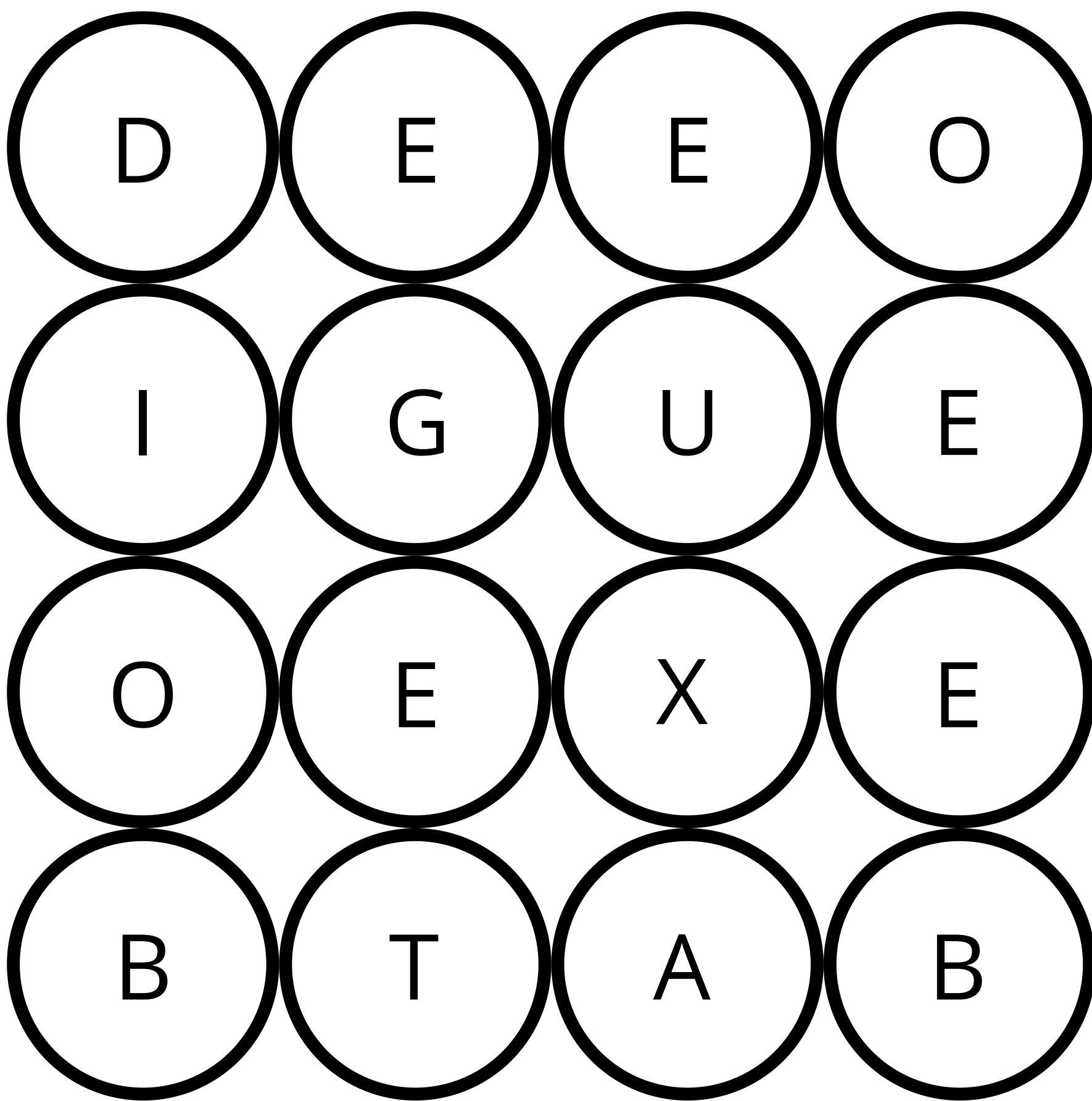


# BONGGLE

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Set a timer for three minutes (honor system!) to find as many words as possible within the grid by connecting letters horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

You know, like Boggle.



SCORING (by word):

three/four letter - 1 pt.  
five letter - 2 pt.  
six letter - 3 pt.  
seven letter - 4 pt.

---

Send your list of words and your score to:  
[theracketreadingseries@gmail.com](mailto:theracketreadingseries@gmail.com)

High score gets a shout out in the next issue!

# BONGGLE

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## LAST WEEKS WORDS

aff	men
ance	meno
ane	mensc
ann	mensh
anns	mna
cens	moa
ean	moan
ech	moe
eff	mon
emo	mona
ens	nae
eoan	naff
eon	nemn
fae	neon
fan	nom
fane	nome
fano	nomen
fife	oaf
fil	off
fiz	omen
foe	omens
foen	once
fon	one
fone	scena
iff	ziff
life	

LAST WEEKS WINNER:  
**Sterling Mayle**

TO BE A WINNER -  
SEND US YOUR  
ANSWERS!

# CONTRIBUTORS

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JERRY A. J.

FRANCIS BAKER

ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO

DESIREE HOLMAN

STRIDER MARCUS JONES

JACQUELINE SUSKIN

AYNA LI TAIRA

CAITLIN THOMSON

R. BRATTEN WEISS



**THE  
RACKET**  
READING SERIES



# WHO KNOWS?

+

PAOLO BICCHIERI  
TOM PYUN  
ELIZABETH BURCH-HUDSON  
ANNA HELD  
...AND MORE...

**THURS. 11/5**  
**ZOOM**

# THE RACKET

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**IT WAS,  
EVEN BRIEFLY,  
NICE TO KNOW  
YOU.**

