

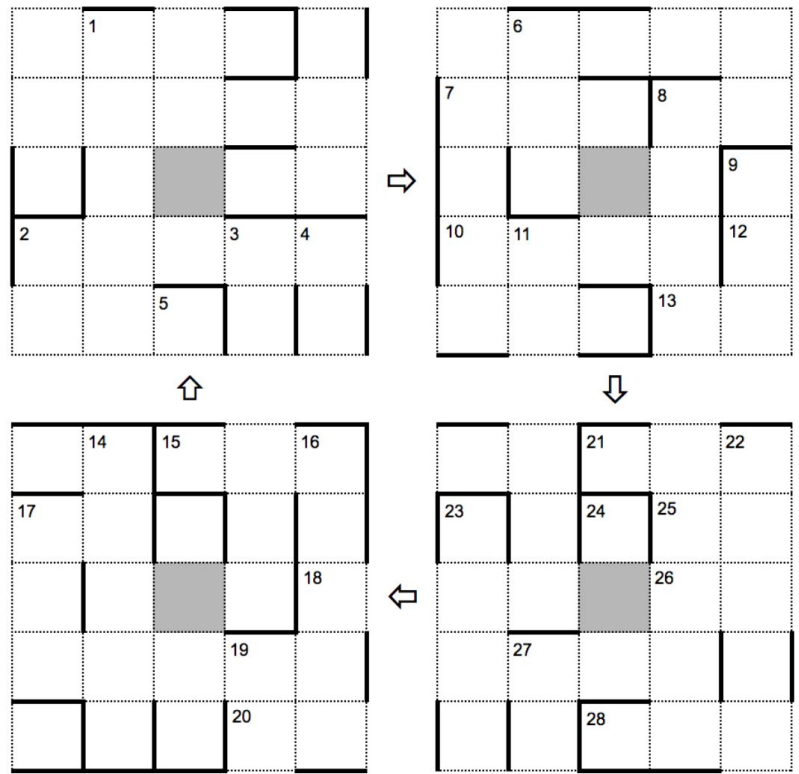
Zoom! by Hale

It's the fourth race of the season, and this one's taking *forever!*

Chart out the track, using the arrows as guidance; the course is deeper than it looks at first glance.

Many paths are unmarked; the racer bios below should help you navigate those areas.

When you're finished, follow the arrows once more to learn where you and these racers have found yourselves.



Across

2. Overthrow elite pitcher; lead cut in half (6)
7. Rob returned plug (3)
8. Some watercourse in Europe! (5)
9. Misbehave before start of executive function (4)
10. Technically, Rush is one, for starters! (4)
12. Turn last bit of sound off and drink (4)
13. State "I mean...", awkwardly (5)
15. Leftover *Dogfish Head* after excessive consumption (3)
18. Diplomacy scheme detailed twice (4)
20. Dead on demand (5)
21. Source: true—no, false—overturned (4)
25. Naked truth is hollow (3)
26. Serve a vacant cabaret (3)
28. Competition: me against alien (4)

Down

1. One hundred and one taking in timber scent (7)
2. Pitch to northeast (4)
3. Nappanee's constituents create sheet of glass (4)
4. Only credit uttered (4)
5. An individual in Indonesia (3)
6. Celestial body turned, quietly disappearing (3)
8. Walk noisily in custom pants (5)
9. Exchange drain with piece of wax inside (4)
11. Without backing of advocate, receive blame (3)
14. Former US attorney general mixes yeast (5)
16. *Purification* editor returning to Christ (5)
17. Black jack: double and hit, ultimately (3)
19. Fourth letter judged with second half missing (3)
22. Clue in unstable cores (6)
23. City in Michigan, next to a gaming center (5)
24. Admired person on the radio is vain (4)
27. Admired person on the radio is vain, mostly? (3)

Racer Bios

Catti

- Racing for unsaid (but implied) African nation
- Shot on the right part of foot
- Pronounced "Katie"
- Lost first three after horn blasts
- Sweetheart

Lisa Haywire

- After dropping second position, now, at the midpoint, in third
- Asian country on fire (Lisa's first half led to beginning of torchings)
- Mild and laid-back, at first
- One time extremely drunk
- Agile (admit it)
- Also, admit that primarily Sue, 50, changed tires (all but the last)
- Volume unit cut open
- Finally, spilled oil to the left

"Slim" Neal:

- Surprisingly resilient
- Changed brand of mouthwash

Noelle Vanderbilt

- Has inverted belly button
- Born the fourth of June, after noon
- Ultimately, the girl's name is... Noelle
- Intentionally neglects all introductions
- Reportedly German
- No number on/in jalopy
- Part-Japanese
- Martial artist (retired)
- In the middle of stunning year
- Dope video game creator
- Designed noted inn

Mae Wayne

- Oddly, average confidence
- Human
- Missing front part of transmission
- Liberal at heart

WHERE YOU AND THE RACERS HAVE FOUND YOURSELVES: