THE BIG CHALLENGE

DAVID L. SILVERMAN
West Los Angeles, California

In the November 1974 Kickshaws, we challenged Word Ways readers to select ten different letters from the alphabet so as to maximize the number of five-five letter-splits that could be anagrammed into words. We were careful not to specify rigid rules -- we dislike the Procrustean nature of most puzzle contests with cash awards, and we think that anyone willing to tackle this arduous research ought to have the privilege of determining xes own acceptable and unacceptable words. In the February Kickshaws, we suggested a simple weighting scheme designed to force readers to use common words whenever possible, and lightheartedly proposed a fictitious 12-volume set of logological goodies as a prize to the compiler of the best list.

At first, interest in this challenge lagged. Faith Eckler, using the letters in INTERPOSAL, managed (with the aid of some finishing touches by Dmitri Borgmann) to score 689 points on 101 completed pairs (out of a possible 126 letter-splits).

In order to receive credit for a higher score without improving that of another competitor's prior entry, Dmitri Borgmann used the letters of LORANDITES to score 744 points on 105 completed pairs:

ADEIL	ideal* snort*	ADILN	Ladin store*	ADLOT	dotal rinse*
ADEIN	Edina* strol	ADILO	aloid stern*	ADLRS	lard's* tenio
ADEIO		ADILR	laird* stone*	ADLRT	ratld noise*
ADEIR	aired* (lonts)	ADILS	dials* tenor*	ADLST	dalts norie
ADEIS	aside*	ADILT	tidal* snore*	ADNOR	adorn* tiles*
ADEIT	snorl	ADINO	adion	ADNOS	donas liter*
ADELN	laden* riots*	ADINR	drain* stole*	ADNOT	Donat riles*
ADELO	adelo- snirt	ADINS	dains lerot	ADNRS	darns* toile
ADELR	alder* Sinto	ADINT	daint loser*	ADNRT	(drant) loles
ADELS	deals* nitro*	ADIOR	Lents* radio*	ADNST	oriel* stand*
ADELT	delta* irons*	ADIOS	adios* lernt	ADORS	inlet* roads*
ADENO	anode* slirt	ADIOT	lerns (todai)	ADORT	lines* tardo
ADENR	redan toils*	ADIRS	lento raids*	ADOST	liner* toads*
ADENS	sedan* litro	ADIRT	noels* triad*	ADRST	darts* olein
ADENT	anted* roils*	ADIST	loner* staid*	AEILN	alien* dorts
ADEOR	adore* lints*	ADLNO	nodal* tries*	AEILO	elaio-
ADEOS	oades	ADLNR	sotie	AEILR	ariel don'ts
ADEOT	oated snirl	ADLNS	lands* Torie	AEILS	aisle*
ADERS	Nilot reads*	ADLNT	osier*	AEILT	alite dorns
ADERT	lions* trade*	ADLOR	(aldor) inset*	AEINO	
ADEST	dates* (lorin)	ADLOS	inert* loads*	AEINR	dolts* reina

AEINS	anise* (trold)	AENRS	snare* toild	AINRT	doles* train*
AEINT	lords* tinea	AENRT	antre solid*	AINST	older* saint*
AEIOR	Areoi	AENST	antes* droil	AIORS	Orias
AEIOS	(Eiaos)	AEORS	arose*	AIORT	lends* ratio*
AEIOT	aetio-	AEORT	linds orate*	AIOST	lernd ostia
AEIRS	raise*	AEOST	asote	AIRST	olden* stair*
AEIRT	irate* (londs)	AERST	indol stare*	ALNOR	edits* laron
AEIST	taise	AILNO	aloin drest	ALNOS	salon* tried*
AELNO	alone* dirts*	AILNR	dotes* larin	ALNOT	rides* tonal*
AELNR	doits learn*	AILNS	doter snail*	ALNRS	(doite) snarl*
AELNS	droit leans*	AILNT	doers* Latin*	ALNRT	idose
AELNT	Doris laten	AILOR	dents* -orial	ALNST	(dorie) slant*
AELOR	dints* orale	AILOS	aliso trend*	ALORS	solar* tined
AELOS	aloes* (trind)	AILOT	Italo- rends*	ALORT	dines* rotal
AELOT	alote rinds*	AILRS	noted* rails*	ALOST	diner* sloat
AELRS	laser* tondi	AILRT	nodes* trial*	ALRST	deino- slart
AELRT	dinos later*	AILST	drone* tails*	ANORS	arson* tiled*
AELST	least* Rodin	AINOR	delts noria	ANORT	slide* trona
AENOR	(roans) stild	AINOS	a ions	ANOST	aston riled*
AENOS	aeons* trild	AINOT	Taino	ANRST	oiled* rants*
AENOT	atone* dirls	AINRS	rains* toled	AORST	lined* roast*

David S. Robinson of Los Angeles chose the same letter set as Dmitri Borgmann, scoring a very creditable 728 points on 103 completed pairs. It is worth noting that he discovered word-improvements totalling 22 points in Dmitri's list, which would have raised it to 766 points on 108 completed pairs:

nolts 1 (pl. of nolt)
tedia 2 (+3)
Slert 1 (+3) (surname)
diota 1
Nordt 1 (+4) (surname)
nod'ls 1 (pl. of nod'l)
dieto- 1
altos 1 (pl. of alto)
NATOs 1 (pl. of NATO)
drant 1 (in Webster)
donas 1 (in MWPD, pl. of dona)

Working independently, Tom Pulliam used the letters of ANCHORITES to push the score up to 769 points on 112 completed pairs:

ACEHI	snort*	ACEOR	ocrea thins	ACHOR	roach* stein*
ACEHN	chane torsi*	ACEOS	caseo- thrin	ACHOS	chaos* inter*
ACEHO	instr.*	ACEOT	aceto-	ACHOT	cahot rinse*
ACEHR	reach* stion	ACERS	scare* thion-	ACHRS	crash* tenio
ACEHS	chase* nitro*	ACERT	crate* Shion	ACHRT	chart* noise*
ACEHT	cheat* rosin*	ACEST	caste* rhino*	ACHST	chats irone
ACEIN	aince short*	ACHIN	chain* store*	ACINO	Ciona Resht
ACEIO	oecia-	ACHIO	chiao* stern*	ACINR	cairn* those*
ACEIR	acier Tshon	ACHIR	chair* stone*	ACINS	Incas other*
ACEIS	saice thorn*	ACHIS	Achis tenor*	ACINT	antic* shore*
ACEIT	Caite shorn*	ACHIT	aitch snore*	ACIOR	Cairo hents
ACENO	ocean* shirt*	ACHNO	Ochna tries*	ACIOS	icosa-
ACENR	crane* hoist*	ACHNR	ranch* sotie	ACIOT	coati rensh
ACENS	canes (hotri)	ACHNS	chans Torie	ACIRS	sacri ethno-
ACENT	enact* Sihor	ACHNT	chant* osier*	ACIRT	artic shone*

ACIST	cista honer*	AEINR	Erian socht	AHIRT	arith.* scone*
ACNOR	acorn* heist*	AEINS	anise* torch*	AHIST	crone* saith
ACNOS	ascon their*	AEINT	(schor) tinea	AHNOR	cesti rohan
ACNOT	canto* shire*	AEIOR	Areoi	AHNOS	Hanos trice*
ACNRS	crans Hotei	AEIOS		AHNOT	antho- cries*
ACNRT	hoise	AEIOT	aetio-	AHNRS	(coite) harns
ACNST	hiero- scant*	AEIRS	arise* notch*	AHNRT	cosie anthr-
ACORS	Oscar thine*	AEIRT	Chons irate*	AHNST	Coire snath
ACORT	actor* shine*	AEIST	Chron.* saite	AHORS	cetin rosha
ACOST	ascot* Rhine	AENOR	chist (roane)	AHORT	since* Torah*
ACRST	carts hie on	AENOS	Aeson crith	AHOST	nicer* shoat*
AEHIN	crost haine	AENOT	oaten* chirs	AHRST	coine trash*
AEHIO		AENRS	Chiot saner*	AINOR	Arion chest*
AEHIR	const.* hiera	AENRT	antre ischo-	AINOS	Ainos retch*
AEHIS	contr.* (haise)	AENST	antes choir*	AINOT	anito serch
AEHIT	aithe scorn*	AEORS	arose* nicht	AINRS	cothe naris*
AEHNO	ahone crist	AEORT	chins orate*	AINRT	chose* train*
AEHNR	hearn stoic*	AEOST	rinch SEATO*	AINST	chore* stain*
AEHNS	ashen* toric	AERST	chino* stare*	AIORS	Orias tench
AEHNT	thane* siroc	AHINO	Hanoi crest*	AIORT	ratio* sench
AEHOR	Horae	AHINR	estoc hairn	AIOST	ostia rench
AEHOS	Hosea ((trinc))	AHINS	Hanis recto*	AIRST	Cohen stair*
AEHOT	Tahoe crins	AHINT	ahint score*	ANORS	arson* ethic
AEHRS	share* tonic*	AHIOR	haori scent*	ANORT	Echis rotan
AEHRT	heart* sonic*	AHIOS	centr- Hosai	ANOST	riche santo
AEHST	corni haste*	AHIOT		ANRST	trans.*
AEINO		AHIRS	cento hairs	AORST	niche* roast*

Since these two logomasters have chosen to interpret the loosely-stated rules in somewhat different ways, it is difficult to say which of these solutions is "best". Tom Pulliam was very strict in one respect, not allowing words on his list unless they appeared in boldface type in the dictionaries involved; on the other hand, he allowed abbreviations (arith., SEATO, instr.), multiword entries (hie on) and words from multiword phrases (rosha grass). Dmitri Borgmann allowed plurals of words in the MWPD (aeons, Lents, riots) or comparatives (older) to count as Pocket Dictionary words, worth 4 points each; however, he did not use abbreviations or multiword phrases. Both used gazetteer words (Edina, Coire). Few words in either list fall outside the Websterian dictionaries and only one non-dictionary word was used (trinc, from Rabelais).

In any event, the question of the most fecund set of ten letters remains an open one. It is rather likely that several different letter-sets are so close to each other in performance that the answer will depend upon the exact set of rules involved.