

GHOSTBUSTERS

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In "Our Move" in the November 1971 *Word Ways*, Darryl Francis demonstrated that the only safe opening move for the first player in the game of Ghost (players alternately add letters, and the one that first completes a word of four or more letters is the loser) is the letter L. He allowed only uncapitalized words from Webster's Third Edition to be used; specifically, he excluded all words labeled cap, usu cap, often cap, or sometimes cap. In the article, he invited *Word Ways* readers to determine the corresponding strategies for other dictionaries.

If the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary is the dictionary of record (with Webster's Ninth Collegiate for words of nine or more letters), the only safe letter for the first player is H. A summary of the winning strategy for the second player:

AQUIFER	....NOCTIAL	NGWEE	.....LES
....LEG1A	.....X	OQUASSA	..OOP
....VER	....P	PFENNIG	....STITE
BWANA	....SETUM	QUACK	....Z
CLABBER	....TES	..ELL	..UMEAU
..EEK	....VALENCE	..IFF	....P
..1VERS	.....Y	..OMODO	..YMA
..OBBER	FJELD	..RSH	UHLAN
..UCK	..ORD	RHACHIDES	VYING
..YSTER	GJETOST	.....S	WRACK
DWARF	1HRAM	..ENIUM	..ECK
....VES	JNANA	..IZOID	..1NG
..ELL	KNACK	..OMB	....KLE
....T	..EAD	..UBARB	.....Y
..1NDLE	..ISH	..YME	..ONG
.....ING	..OCK	....ING	..UNG
....E	..UCKLE	SGRAFFITI	..YNECK
EQUIANGULAR	.....ING	.....O	XANTHIC
....CALORIC	.....Y	TRAWL	.....N
....DISTANT	LLAMA	..EHALA	YCLEPED
....LATERAL	MBIRA	.....OSE	ZLOTY
....MOLAL		..IWEELY	
.....R			

If Webster's Ninth Collegiate is used as the sole authority, the winning strategy for the second player remains the same, with the exception of the letter N, which now becomes a second safe letter for the first player to use. (There is a minor change in the strat-

egy for the letter Z: ZLOTE,IES,Y are all possible responses.) The winning strategy for the first player is:

HAAF	NAETHING
...R	...VUS
.EFT	.EAP
.IKE	...R
...ING	...T
.OVE	.GULTRUM
.UCK	.LGGLE
.WAN	.....ING
.YTE	.OYADE
	.UANCE
	.YCTALOPIA

With perfect knowledge on the part of both players, Ghost becomes rather a dull game to play - one of the above strategies will always be followed.

In "Pocket Ghost" in the February 1973 **Word Ways**, Ross Eckler developed strategies for both Ghost and for Superghost, in which one is allowed to add letters to either end of the letter-set, for the Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary. The only safe openings for the first player playing the game of Ghost are H, J, and M, and playing the game of Superghost, A and O. (In the May 1978 *Kickshaws*, Ralph Beaman showed that a couple of minor modifications in the strategy were needed to accommodate the 1974 revision of this dictionary.)

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The editor has for sale for \$7 postpaid a hardcover edition of Dmitri Borgmann's Beyond Language (Scribner's, 1967). Send SASE for return of check (if book already sold) or telephone the editor (201-538-4584) concerning its availability.