PLAYING HANGMAN WITH A K.G.B. SENORITA

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If you are one of the few who has never played the classic word guessing game of Hangman then may I suggest that you glance at either *Pears Word Games* or *The Mammoth Book of Word Games*, both of which extol the virtues of attempting play at an adult level with 'difficult' words as well as providing the essential framework of action. They also provide instructions for solving mystery statements such as (for example) a proverb. Naturally, if your only available opponent is Granny or one of your kids then you give that opponent 'easy' words whilst facing all manner of horrors dredged up from the murky depths of Web 2 or the OED which your opponent provides. And, yet, you can still win—thanks to the K.G.B!

The Soviet espionage establishment decided, many decades ago, to use the English language as its medium for the communication of secret information and made a statistical analysis of the words most commonly used. One finding was that the alphome AEINORST (easily recalled as SENORITA) contains the most-frequently-used individual letters in the language. All you need do is guess letter-by-letter with the alphome (or any of its transpositions such as ARSONITE, ASTERION, NOTARIES, NOTARISE or ROSINATE apart from SENORITA), and a skeletal framework--or nothing at all if the vowel is U, Y or W--should have begun to reveal itself. A natural appreciation of prefixes and suffixes is now brought into play and " Sorry, Granny, you've lost again!".

The virtue of this Russian cloak and dagger discovery is fully illustrated by comparison with two other highly flexible alphomes which have found favor elsewhere:

AEGINRST The 'supreme anagram' was explored to ludicrous extremes by the late Dmitri Borgmann and, more recently, brought back to almost rational levels by Jeff Grant in the February and May 1994 Word Ways. I dispute some of his individual findings, most notably verbal inflections drawn from Websterian inferences which are unsupported by the English Dialect Dictionary in the form Jeff presents. Substitute O for G and one returns to Moscow in the company of the senorita.

AEINRST Scrabble players drool over this mouth-watering assembly of a multiplicity of choice of seven-letter bonus words, irrespective of official reference works. Surely, at least one of them can be linked somewhere on the board? To give you an idea of potential, Pears Advanced Word-Puzzler's Dictionary (PAW-PD) provides thirty genuine words utilizing all seven of the alphome's letters and even mentions one, ATRINE(S), which

has no citation for assuming a modern verbal inflection to enable it to be included. The PAW-PD did not limit itself to words only found in either the OSPD or OSW, which constitute the validity limits for official tournament Scrabble. Once again, Russian research has triumphed. This alphome merely ignores SENORITA's O, making her NASTIER.

Those of you who are addicted to mechanical wordsmithery might care to assist capitalism's grannies by harnessing your computers to provide words which undermine Red wisdom. Note, however, that even such a 'horror' as the branch of chemistry concerned with fermentation procedures in brewing, ZYMURGY, still has you breathing with ....R.. and fully aware that neither U nor Y has been proposed. Knowing Granny to be the crafty gamesman she is, then has she utilized a J,X,Q or Z to transform .Y.UR.Y into a real word? But, has she now hanged you? In the standard version you have a maximum of nine errors before death claims you. Irrespective of word length, your ideal 'granny word' has eight errors in SENORITA; any fewer and you will need a logical argument to support inclusion on your list.

QUERY

"How I Wish I Could Recollect Pi" is Michael Keith's fine example of a pi-mnemonic, the word-lengths enumerating 3.141592.In Book II, Chapter 9 of Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, there exists the phrase "For a time I stood regarding..." -- 3.14159, an event that should occur typically once in 2.5 million words of running text (see Rex Gooch's "Letter Frequencies and Word Lengths" in the May issue). Can longer accidental pi-mnemonics be found in literature? This is an ideal task for the computer, much easier to program than the analogous search for short pangrammatic windows.