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Navigating Montreal's overwhelmed ERs

What Parc-Extension residents should know



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As winter peaks, hospitals across Quebec are bracing for a surge in emergency room visits, with overcrowding already reaching critical levels. Santé Québec is urging residents to ask themselves the “right questions” before heading to the ER, particularly in neighborhoods like Parc-Extension, where access to healthcare services can be a challenge.

The overcrowding crisis

Emergency rooms across the province saw a 5% increase in visits between January 28 and February 10 compared to the same period

last year. This amounts to an additional 500 visits per day, further straining an already overwhelmed system.

In Montreal, the situation is even more severe. The ER occupancy rate on stretchers jumped to 145%, significantly higher than last year's 125%. According to Santé Québec, this trend is expected to peak within the next week, exacerbating wait times and stretching hospital resources even further.

Dr. Gilbert Boucher, president of the Association of Emergency Medicine Specialists of Quebec, attributes much of this congestion to hospital bed shortages rather than an influx of patients with minor ailments. “For the past three weeks, 20 to 25% of stretchers

in Montreal hospitals have been occupied for over 48 hours,” he explains, underlining the urgency of the crisis.

Alternatives to the ER

A surprising statistic from Santé Québec reveals that half of all ER visitors have non-urgent conditions, and 70% of them have a family doctor—suggesting that many visits could be avoided.

To alleviate pressure on hospitals, officials are encouraging patients to explore alternative healthcare options, including:

- **Pharmacists:** Many minor ailments can be treated by pharmacists, who now have expanded prescribing powers.

- **Info-Santé 811:** The province's free telehealth service can assess symptoms and recommend appropriate care. Contrary to common belief, only one-third of 811 callers are directed to the ER—the rest receive guidance for home care, pharmacies, or medical clinics.

- **Walk-in clinics:** Some family doctors and CLSCs (local community health centers) have increased appointment availability.

A community perspective

In neighborhoods like Parc-Extension, where many residents face language barriers, limited access to a family doctor, and socioeconomic challenges, navigating the healthcare system can be especially difficult. The high immigrant population and reliance on public healthcare services make ER overcrowding an issue that disproportionately affects the community.

With limited nearby clinics and long wait times for medical appointments, many Parc-Ex residents feel the ER is their only option. However, local pharmacists and community health workers stress the importance of exploring alternatives before heading to the hospital—especially during peak flu season.

Flu season and preventative measures

On top of ER congestion, Quebec is experiencing a highly active flu season, with a positivity rate of 32% as of February 8. Dr. Luc Boileau, Quebec's national director of public health, is urging vulnerable individuals to get vaccinated, noting that this year's flu shot is over 54% effective—a strong rate for influenza prevention.

As the healthcare system struggles to cope, residents of Montreal, and particularly Parc-Extension, must make informed choices when seeking medical care. By using available resources wisely, the community can help reduce unnecessary ER visits and ensure that emergency services remain accessible for those who truly need them.

Man found dead in buried car

A 57-year-old man was found dead in his car, which was buried under snow, Tuesday morning, on a residential street in Parc-Extension, in Montreal

(NEWSFIRST) - The car was parked on Champagnier Avenue, at the intersection of Ball Street, in the Parc-Extension neighbourhood. The Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) responded to a 911 call.

The man was unconscious when emergency services arrived. Resuscitation maneuvers were performed, but the man was pronounced dead at the hospital. No signs of violence were observed on the victim, reports the SPVM.

The inquest has been transferred to the coroner's office, which will have to establish the exact cause of death.

Urgences-santé spokesman Jean-Pierre Rouleau invites the public to remove snow from their vehicle's exhaust pipe before starting the engine.

“Otherwise, there could be a buildup of carbon monoxide under the vehicle that will get inside the passenger compartment. It can have serious consequences,” he explains. To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, he also advises parents not to put their children in the car when the engine is running while they are clearing snow. “The last thing you want to do is start the vehicle. You really have to get the vehicle out of the way first.”

Montreal experienced two major snowstorms in four days. More than 72 centimetres of snow fell on the city on 13 and 16 February.

It should be noted that when a vehicle is buried under snow, “you should avoid starting the engine, turning on the ventilation and staying inside the vehicle.”

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OPINION & Editorial



Arctic energy and mineral race heats up *Nations scramble for Arctic oil, gas and minerals amid rising global demand*

“Go West, young man, go West... and grow up with the country” is a phrase attributed to Horace Greeley from the New York Daily Tribune back in 1865.

In 2025, the phrase might be updated to “Go North, young man, go North” as optimism rises about the potential of oil and gas and critical minerals in the Arctic.

Optimism about the size of the prize of Arctic hydrocarbons rose in 2012 when the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) assessed that the Arctic holds an estimated 13 per cent (90 billion barrels) of the world's undiscovered conventional oil resources and 30 per cent of its undiscovered conventional natural gas resources. The EIA has estimated that the Arctic may hold most of the world's remaining untapped oil and gas reserves.

Although the argument that U.S. shale production is peaking is questionable, the fact that production has grown more slowly in recent years (according to the EIA) is making the challenging but ample reserves in Alaska more attractive. More urgently, the Arctic could also be a vital supplier of critical minerals and the race for those minerals is “heating up the Arctic.”

The Arctic Economic Council's latest “Arctic Mining Report 2024” states that 31 of the 34 materials identified as essential for technologies like renewable energy installations and electric vehicle batteries are found in the Arctic, with Greenland having one of the world's largest deposits of nickel and cobalt, while Alaska has one of the largest zinc mines globally.

U.S. President Donald Trump's Jan. 20 executive order, “Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential,” reversed U.S. President Joe Biden's previous policies, reopened vast areas for drilling and mining, and expedited permits for projects, stoking enthusiasm for

development. Discussions of the challenges, geopolitical elements like tariffs, development costs, and project plans have begun.

I had the chance to catch up with Heather Exner-Pirot, a senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute and expert on transitioning from ambition to reality and scaling up investment in Canada's North. Exner-Pirot recognizes the geopolitical motivations behind Arctic development, including energy transition, defence and supply chains that are overly dependent on China.

“Trump is talking about Greenland for its critical minerals,” Exner-Pirot said. “Canada's talking about critical minerals and critical mineral alliances. That's positive. I'm definitely in favour of developing the region. But the flip side of that is the economic drivers. Commodity prices have not matched the rhetoric. Investment is still very difficult. Climate change doesn't make it cheaper. In many ways, it is more expensive because things like ice roads are more difficult to build because we have melting permafrost. The rhetoric and the reality are still far apart.”

The upside is that development would benefit communities and the Canadian military as much as resource companies. Infrastructure may be expensive, but sharing the burden for things like fibre-optic communications connecting to a mine could also benefit communities or a NORAD site. Ultimately, according to Exner-Pirot, every territory will have favourite projects.

I also spoke with Katie Kachur, VP of Government Relations West at the Canadian Propane Association, who further described the complications of Arctic development.

“The biggest challenge in Arctic energy development lies in balancing the unique

energy needs of rural, remote, and Indigenous communities with the broader goals of reliability, affordability, and low emissions,” Kachur said. “Unlike urban centers, these communities often face limited access to traditional energy infrastructure and depend on solutions tailored to their geography, climate, and cultural priorities. (They need) an approach emphasizing energy choice—offering diverse and flexible energy options that meet these unique needs.”

A growing trend in Arctic energy development mirrors efforts across Canada—direct engagement with Indigenous and remote communities to understand their energy needs and co-develop solutions. Policies emphasizing energy diversity, equitable access, and Indigenous ownership are gaining traction.

In Northern Canada, regulatory processes are under review as provinces and territories push for resource development. Streamlining regulations remains a key theme in 2025, driven in part by former Trump's push to fast-track federal permits, attract American investment and shorten approval timelines for major energy projects.

One of the largest projects is the \$44-billion Alaska LNG project, which aims to develop natural gas resources on Alaska's North Slope and transport them via a 1,300-kilometre pipeline to a proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant. New York-based Glenfarne and the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation are leading the initiative, which has attracted interest from Japanese trading giant Mitsui, a major LNG investor.

Given the high costs of Arctic infrastructure, Canadian stakeholders could look to this project for insights on funding strategies and development approaches in extreme conditions.

Maureen McCall

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Call 8-1-1 before going to hospital emergency, Santé Québec advises



Public health agency warns of pending flu season peak across the province

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Santé Québec, the agency that now oversees public health services all over the province, is advising patients and caregivers that with influenza rates up and the winter flu season almost peaking, turning up at a hospital's emergency department isn't necessarily the best course of action to take when there are other alternatives.

Challenging situation

According to Santé Québec, close to half the visits made by patients to emergency departments between February 4 and 10



Robin Marie Coleman, Santé Québec's assistant vice-president for access to health services, says calling 8-1-1 is often the best course of action to take before heading to a hospital emergency department.



Dr. Luc Boileau, director of public health for the province, said last week that flu activity in Quebec is elevated and we could be seeing the worst flu season of the past decade.

were by people whose needs were not in fact of an emergency nature.

"It is a challenge," Robin Marie Coleman, Santé Québec's assistant vice-president for access to health services, conceded regarding the misconceptions during a video conference call with journalists last Friday.

Long wait times

"This is definitely something we're trying to work on," she added, while agreeing with a journalist that wait times for some of the agency's services, such as the 8-1-1 medical triage phone central for non-urgent health issues, can be long, although less so in comparison to hospital emergency department wait times. "Sometimes the wait times are long," she said. "But to put

it in perspective, with the long wait times sometimes in the emergency rooms, it's better and healthier for people to stay at home if they have non-urgent care, and wait in order to be re-directed to a clinic directly with an appointment, rather than expose themselves in an emergency room when it's not an emergency situation."

Sometimes the best option

According to Coleman, 70 per cent of those patients who turned up at emergency departments in early February had family doctors, while others may have had other options available to them. In cases like these, she continued, "the best option is to stay safely at home if it's a non-emergency situation and be directly directed to the right service."

But at the same time, she acknowledged that the province's hospital emergency departments remain inadequate to handle the burden with which they are currently tasked. "We need to improve the different services, and first-line services, and make things much easier for people," she said.

Worst season in a decade

Late last week, the level of flu activity in Quebec was elevated, said Dr. Luc Boileau, director of public health for the province. He said Santé Québec was following the situation closely, since the province could in fact be facing one of its worst flu seasons in the last 10 years.

He said that in other Canadian provinces, like Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, the presence of influenza had been notably higher this year. "We expect the peak soon to be reached, or that it soon will be," he continued.

According to Dr. Boileau, it's never too late to be vaccinated against influenza, and that it is recommended especially for persons regarded as vulnerable, which includes those with compromised immunity and the elderly.

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Montreal police seek greater diversity in recruitment effort

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The Montreal Police Service (SPVM) has launched a recruitment initiative aimed at increasing diversity within its ranks, a move that could have particular significance for neighborhoods like Parc-Extension, where multicultural representation in law enforcement has long been a subject of discussion.

The provincial program, AEC Diversité policière et profil social, is designed to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds and those with expertise in social sciences. The initiative targets two main groups: individuals from underrepresented communities who hold a college diploma (DEC) or a bachelor's degree, and graduates in social sciences whose knowledge could contribute to more community-focused policing.

Successful applicants will undergo a 30-week training program in policing techniques, followed by 15 weeks of patrol and law enforcement training at the École nationale de police du Québec (ENPQ). Upon completion, they will be eligible to join the SPVM, which offers more than 150 different career paths within law enforcement.

The effort reflects a broader trend within police forces across Canada to improve relations with ethnically diverse communities by hiring officers who can better understand cultural



nuances, language barriers, and social challenges. In neighborhoods such as Parc-Extension, where many residents are immigrants or first-generation Canadians, interactions with police have often been marked by concerns over racial profiling and a lack of representation.

Community advocates have previously called for more officers with backgrounds that reflect

the populations they serve, arguing that a more diverse force can improve trust and cooperation between law enforcement and the public. The SPVM has acknowledged these concerns in the past and has introduced various measures aimed at strengthening ties with different communities.

With applications now open, the program

presents an opportunity for those interested in law enforcement to step into a career that could help shape the future of policing in Montreal. Whether the initiative will lead to meaningful change in community relations remains to be seen, but the SPVM's latest recruitment drive signals an acknowledgment of the importance of diversity in policing.



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MIL Montréal

A new level crossing connecting Parc- Extension and Outremont

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The City of Montréal has taken a significant step toward improving mobility in the MIL Montréal sector by approving an agreement with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company for the construction of a new level crossing. This initiative is part of a broader effort to enhance connectivity between the boroughs of Villeray–Saint-Michel–Parc-Extension and Outremont, which have long faced accessibility challenges due to railway infrastructure acting as a physical barrier. Along with approving the agreement, the city has also authorized the contract for the construction work, ensuring that the project moves forward efficiently.

A much-needed connection between neighborhoods

The new level crossing will be strategically located to link De L'Épée Avenue and Gare-de-Triage Avenue, creating a safer and more direct route for pedestrians and cyclists traveling between Parc-Extension and Outremont. Currently, these neighborhoods are divided by railway tracks, requiring residents to take longer and less convenient routes to cross between them. By adding this crossing, the city aims to reduce detours, encourage active transportation, and improve access to key areas within the MIL Montréal district.

The crossing is expected to play a crucial role in reducing the isolation of these sectors by allowing smoother movement between residential areas, commercial zones, and public transportation hubs. The improved accessibility will particularly benefit students, commuters, and residents who rely on walking or cycling as part of their daily routines.

A focus on accessibility and safety

Beyond simply connecting the two neigh-



borhoods, the project emphasizes universal accessibility and safety measures to ensure that the crossing can be used comfortably by all. Some of the planned features include:

- Removable chicanes for bicycles at both ends of the crossing to help regulate traffic flow and ensure cyclists navigate the area safely.
- Installation of bollards to define pathways and prevent unauthorized vehicle access.
- Clearly marked signage to guide pedestrians and cyclists while ensuring compliance with safety regulations.

By integrating these elements, the city aims to create an inclusive and user-friendly environment where individuals of all mobility levels can travel freely and securely.

Project approval and timeline

Before construction can begin, the agreement between the City of Montréal and Canadian Pacific Railway—as well as the contract for the level crossing's development—must receive final approval from the Montréal city council. This is a standard procedure to ensure that all legal, financial, and logistical considerations are properly addressed before work commences.

If approved as expected, construction on the new level crossing is scheduled to begin in March 2025, with completion anticipated by fall

2025. This relatively quick timeline reflects the city's commitment to addressing urban mobility challenges and improving infrastructure within the MIL Montréal district.

A step toward a more connected and accessible city

The new level crossing represents a significant investment in urban connectivity, particularly for residents of Parc-Extension and Outremont, who have long faced mobility restrictions due to the railway. By creating a safer, more efficient,

and accessible route, the project aligns with the city's broader goals of promoting active transportation and reducing physical barriers between communities.

As Montréal continues to grow and evolve, infrastructure projects like this play an essential role in ensuring that all residents, regardless of their mode of transport, can navigate the city with greater ease. The upcoming construction of the level crossing marks a meaningful step toward a more integrated, pedestrian-friendly, and sustainable urban landscape.

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THE CROOKED PATH

Q My boyfriend and I have only been dating 10 days, and I already want to end the relationship. It's not like he's psycho or anything. Actually he's really nice to me, but there are no sparks! I just know he's not the one for me, so why waste my time on something that won't last?

When we kiss he is overly aggressive, and I have to wipe the spit off my face! It's so gross. My problem is my sister is dating his older brother, and they would be mad if I broke his heart. Also, I love his whole family and don't want them to hate me for hurting him.

It seems cruel to break up with him so soon. Should I try to get him to break up with me? Dating is really complicated, but I know this is not working. Please, please, please help me!

Rhonda

A Rhonda, we have a German friend who has been divorced

many years. After telling us about the constant conflict in her marriage, she said, "The first time he called, my mother answered the phone. I said, 'Mom, tell him I'm not home.' But my mother made me come to the phone, and I ended up married to him."

Because she didn't follow her instincts, she didn't marry the right man. There is no rule which says the first one who dates you gets you. The rule says, as soon as you know it's not right, you end it. We get many letters from people who married someone they didn't even like.

There is a time to honor good manners, politeness, and the wishes of others, and there is a time to ignore all three. There is a price to be paid for following what others want. A character in an Ursula K. Le Guin novel makes a remark which can serve as wise advice. "I have given my love to what is worthy of love. Is that not the kingdom and the unperishing spring?"

Wayne

JACK AND JILL

Q I have been best friends with Penny since high school. A few years later I became good friends with Jack. A year after this Penny and Jack began dating. I moved across the country and maintained both friendships through phone calls. However when I returned home, things changed.

I was suddenly single, and Jack professed he'd had feelings for me since we met. One night we went out together, and he got drunk. When I took him home, he groped me. I would have let it slide, considering his condition. But after getting him inside his apartment, he pulled me down on his bed. I immediately left, but kept the information to myself, not wanting to make waves.

We stopped spending time together. I cannot be friends with a man who will so easily cheat on his girlfriend. This week, while visiting Penny, she asked why I don't speak to her boyfriend anymore. Apparently Jack told her I have thrown

our friendship away, and Penny is upset. I don't know what to tell her. She is considering marrying this man but telling the truth may lose her friendship.

Hailey

A Hailey, sometimes you can't win for losing, but when you have to lose, it's better to lose with the truth. Talk to Penny. Tell her three things. One, why you have to tell her what you are telling her. Two, what occurred with Jack. Three, why you didn't want to tell her.

Why must you tell? Because Jack is complaining to Penny without telling her why you are giving him the cold shoulder. Jack is lying to Penny because he wants to use her to get to you.

Penny may not believe you, and Jack will continue to lie. You cannot control their actions, but you can act to protect yourself. What do you know. It's unsafe to be alone with Jack.

Tamara

WAYNE & TAMARA MITCHELL are the authors of YOUR OTHER HALF (www.yourotherhalf.com)

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AVIS est donné par les présentes que le Dr Roger Hobden (78394) exerçant la profession de médecin (médecine de famille) à Montréal (Québec), a plaidé coupable devant le Conseil de discipline du Collège des médecins du Québec de l'infraction qui lui était reprochée :

- d'avoir, à Montréal, entre le ou vers le 9 novembre 1989 et le ou vers le 10 février 1992, fait défaut de rédiger des notes au dossier complètes (chef 2)

Le 7 janvier 2025, le conseil de discipline a imposé au Dr Roger Hobden une radiation du tableau de l'ordre pour une période d'une semaine sur l'unique chef de la plainte modifiée.

Le Dr Roger Hobden est donc radié du tableau de l'ordre pour une période d'une semaine à compter du 15 février 2025.

Le présent avis est donné en vertu des articles 156 et 180 du Code des professions.

Montréal, le 15 février 2025

Linda Bélanger, avocate
Secrétaire du conseil de discipline

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Week of FEBRUARY 23 TO MARCH 1

The luckiest signs this week:
ARIES, TAURUS AND GEMINI

- 
ARIES
 Before diving into a big project, take a moment to unwind and have some fun. Celebrate your promotion in good company. Embrace new challenges with open arms!
- 
TAURUS
 The idea of embarking on a journey or adventure will ignite your sense of wonder. You'll be able to free up the time and resources needed for a well-deserved vacation that promises a refreshing change of scenery and an escape from everyday life.
- 
GEMINI
 A disturbance is looming on the horizon. It will be the perfect opportunity to make some changes in your life and bring back your smile. Embracing change is the first step toward finding harmony in your life.
- 
CANCER
 Finding balance in your personal and professional life will require some give and take. After finalizing deals with potential clients or partners, get ready for exciting progress and positive outcomes.
- 
LEO
 This week is all about work. If you're on the lookout for a new job, you're likely to come across one that not only challenges you but also promises great prospects for your career growth.
- 
VIRGO
 If you're feeling dissatisfied at work, you'll make significant changes. This will help you secure a position that aligns with your dreams. You may find yourself in a management position or starting your own business.
- 
LIBRA
 Your home and family relationships need your attention. Once you've overcome these obstacles, you'll be able to pave the way for stronger and more harmonious connections with your loved ones and your significant other.
- 
SCORPIO
 Getting a new electronic device can be exciting, but it can also bring up a lot of questions. You may make multiple trips to the store to get all the information you need and ensure you're completely satisfied with your new purchase.
- 
SAGITTARIUS
 Embrace life with passion and excitement! You may receive a large sum of money, allowing you to indulge in some luxury. You'll go on a trip or participate in an activity that will impress everyone around you!
- 
CAPRICORN
 It's essential to take a break before diving into a big new project. Step away from your daily routine to help break up the monotony. You'll find inner peace by speaking your mind.
- 
AQUARIUS
 You may be easily distracted this week, which could be a sign of fatigue. After you've taken a break and rested up, your creativity will shine, and everyone will be amazed by the masterpiece you create.
- 
PISCES
 At work, various matters will require your immediate attention. This will be the perfect opportunity to level up your organizational skills, which will boost your productivity and lower your stress levels.

Coffee Break

CROSSWORDS

PUZZLE NO. 274

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12				13			14			
15				16			17			
18				19		20				
			21	22	23		24	25	26	27
28	29	30		31			32			
33			34			35		36		
37		38		39				40		
41				42			43			
			44	45			46	47	48	49
50	51	52		53		54	55			
56				57			58			
59				60			61			

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ACROSS

1. Pupil site
5. Catch a glimpse of
8. Cigar end
12. ___ and rave
13. Have being
14. Days of ___
15. High flier
16. London brew
17. Fix
18. Not busy
19. Complainer
21. 18-wheeler
24. Scattered
28. New York player
31. Sucker
32. Pond scum
33. Jug handle
34. Navajo or Sioux
36. Can material
37. ___ diver
39. Pave
40. Farm pen

DOWN

1. Bothers
2. Train track
3. ___ thin air
4. Simmers
5. Took a load off
6. Rain, e.g.
7. Time measure
8. Sign
9. Part of a foot
10. Large vase
11. Fourposter
20. Affirm
22. Landed property
23. Damage
25. Comics
26. Give forth
27. Disclaim
28. Untidiness
29. To ___ his own
30. Actual
35. Outlaw
38. Word of warning
43. Approached
45. Epic
47. Roof projection
48. Dog's hounder
49. House surroundings
50. Which person?
51. Pig
52. "___ Town"
54. Fate

Sudoku

PUZZLE NO. 967

			5	6				
					5			
	8	2						3
4				2				
	7							8
	9				4	5	1	
	1			9				4
		1			6			
6	3			4			9	

HOW TO PLAY:

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once.

Each 3x3 box is outlined with a darker line. You already have a few numbers to get you started. Remember: You must not repeat the numbers 1 through 9 in the same line, column, or 3x3 box.

Last Issue's Answers

CROSSWORDS

A	D	D		W	H	O	A		C	A	V	E
W	O	E		H	A	I	R		A	L	A	S
E	E	L		I	D	L	E		D	E	N	S
D	R	I	F	T			A	T	E			
			R	E	B	S		I	T	E	M	S
A	C	H	E		L	O	R	E		Y	E	A
C	H	E	E	S	E	B	U	R	G	E	R	S
E	A	R		O	W	E	D		A	D	E	S
D	R	E	S		R	E	A	P				
			T	O	M			G	E	N	T	S
A	B	L	Y		I	N	T	O		E	R	A
R	A	I	L		N	O	U	N		A	I	L
M	A	T	E		E	D	G	Y		T	O	T

Sudoku

5	3	9	1	2	7	6	4	8
7	2	6	3	4	8	5	1	9
1	4	8	9	6	5	7	3	2
6	9	2	5	1	4	3	8	7
8	7	1	6	3	2	9	5	4
4	5	3	8	7	9	1	2	6
9	1	5	2	8	6	4	7	3
2	6	7	4	5	3	8	9	1
3	8	4	7	9	1	2	6	5



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