

and *Die Hard*, so I have called it 'Die Alone'. Merry Christmas everyone!

Are you ready for the World Cup of Christmas Films? A whole host of seasonal classics all vying for your festive attention. But before the full roast dinner that is the voting, why not start with the glass of Baileys that is my selection of challenges?

★ CHALLENGE! ★

Can you identify the five genuine Christmas films on this list, hidden among five I have just made up?

1. THE SATAN CLAUSE
2. SANTA WITH MUSCLES
3. JACK FROST 2 - REVENGE OF THE MUTANT KILLER
SNOWMAN
4. THE TURKEY THAT ATE CHRISTMAS
5. RUDOLPH'S RABID RAMPAGE
6. A SLAY IN A MANGER
7. WHAT WOULD JESUS BUY?
8. SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE MARTIANS

9. NATIVITY 3 - DUDE, WHERE'S MY DONKEY?
10. IT'S CHRISTMAS EVE AND I CAN'T FIND THE END OF THE SELLOTAPE

Answers at the back of the book.

★ INFORMATION! ★

Of course Christmas Day is not just about films. It is also about deeper, more meaningful things, such as television. Below is a list of the five most-watched programmes ever broadcast on Christmas Day in the UK. You'll notice there is one big family entertainment show, but it isn't *Morecambe & Wise*, and there is also one film, but it's not *The Great Escape*.

1. EASTENDERS (1986 - Den leaves Ange): 30.15m
2. CORONATION STREET (1987 - Hilda leaves the Street):
26.65m
3. CROCODILE DUNDEE (1989): 21.74m
4. THE MIKE YARWOOD SHOW (1977): 21.4m
5. ONLY FOOLS AND HORSES (2001): 21.31m

Only Fool and Horses also finished sixth on the list, followed by *The Morecambe & Wise Show* from 1977, beaten by Mike Yarwood. How about *Crocodile Dundee* eh? I didn't see that coming.

★ CHALLENGE! ★

Can you guess some of the greatest Christmas films of all time simply from the names of three cast members? Some of these may have been the biggest stars in these films, but others have been taken from a long way further down the cast list.

1. WILL FERRELL, ZOOEY DESCHANEL, JAMES CAAN
2. MICHAEL CAINE, FRANK OZ, ROBIN WEAVER
3. CHERYL BAKER, DANNY GLOVER, MEL GIBSON
4. JOE PESCI, CATHERINE O'HARA, DONALD TRUMP
5. CAMERON DIAZ, KATE WINSLET, JUDE LAW
6. PAUL GLEASON, BONNIE BEDELIA, ALAN RICKMAN
7. ROBERT MITCHUM, BILL MURRAY, BOBCAT GOLDTHWAIT
8. BING CROSBY, DANNY KAYE, ROSEMARY CLOONEY
9. ANTHONY McPARTLIN, DECLAN DONNELLY,
HUGH GRANT
10. DAN AYKROYD, DENHOLM ELLIOTT, JAMIE LEE CURTIS

11. JAMES McAVOY, JANE HORROCKS, HUGH LAURIE
12. ALASTAIR SIM, GEORGE COLE, HATTIE JACQUES

If it helps, I don't think the actor in question 3 is Cheryl Baker out of Bucks Fizz.

Answers at the back of the book.

★ CHALLENGE ★ ★ AND ARGUMENT! ★

I ran a Twitter poll to see which one word people associated with Christmas. Below are the ten highest-scoring answers. Can you guess what they are, and once you have, do you agree with them?

1. P _ _ _ _ _ _ _
2. T _ _ _ _ _
3. S _ _ _ _
4. T _ _ _
5. F _ _ _ _ _

When *The Polar Express* was released in 2004 it was the most expensive animated film ever made, but the animation style put off many critics. *Rolling Stone* described it as ‘a failed and lifeless experiment in which everything goes wrong’, the *Toronto Star* said: ‘If I were a child I would have nightmares’ and CNN commented that the film was ‘at best disconcerting, and at worst a wee bit horrifying’. However, you can’t beat the combination of Tom Hanks and the North Pole and *The Polar Express* became the fifth-highest-grossing Christmas film in history, making \$307 million.

WRITE YOUR WINNER IN BOX 2 ON THE WALLCHART



3 GREMLINS vs ABOUT A BOY

Gremlins was released on the same weekend in 1984 as *Ghostbusters*. The gremlins themselves were originally to be played by monkeys, but the first monkey to be given a gremlin mask panicked and puppets were made instead. The three rules of looking after gremlins are:

- 1) No bright lights – much easier these days with those energy-saving light bulbs we have to buy.

- 2) Don’t get them wet – just like suede shoes and electricity substations.
- 3) Never feed them after midnight – I have always worried about rule 3 because I don’t know when it stops being after midnight? If I feed a gremlin at 7 a.m. am I still contravening the law?

In *About a Boy*, Hugh Grant’s character lives off the royalties of a Christmas song written by his father. In reality the song ‘Santa’s Super Sleigh’ was written by Pete Brewis, writer of countless TV comedy songs including *Spitting Image*’s ‘I’ve Never Met a Nice South African’.

WRITE YOUR WINNER IN BOX 3 ON THE WALLCHART



4 THE SANTA CLAUSE vs HOME ALONE 2

Both *The Santa Clause* and *The Santa Clause 2* are among the ten highest-grossing Christmas movies of all time. In the first one, Santa falls from Tim Allen’s roof and Tim Allen becomes contractually obliged to replace him. Tim Allen is a huge star in the US, but we don’t really know him very well in the UK.

11

GHOSTBUSTERS II vs SCROOGED

It's the battle of Bill Murray. Do you prefer the Bill Murray who clearly doesn't want to be in the sequel to his most famous film, or the Bill Murray appearing in yet *another* cinematic adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*? I think that if *Caddyshack* had been set at Christmas it would have got my vote here.

WRITE YOUR WINNER IN BOX 11 ON THE WALLCHART

12

MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS vs HOME ALONE

Lovely film though it is, I should point out that it would be rather inconvenient to meet me in St. Louis, as no airlines currently fly directly there from the UK. We would have to change in Paris or Frankfurt. I can't help thinking it might be more convenient to meet me in Chicago or New York, both of which are well served by flights from Gatwick, Heathrow and Manchester. Thinking it through in even more depth, it might just be best if we meet in Wolverhampton, or anywhere else that is central with good rail links? Perhaps Rugby or Crewe? If you do still want to meet me in St. Louis, however, it is worth

noting that, according to foodie websites, the two greatest culinary creations of the city are Goosey Butter Pudding and Toasted Ravioli.

When I ran the World Cup of Christmas Films on Twitter, *Home Alone* ran out as the eventual winner, beating *Elf* in a hotly contested final. But will it win your World Cup? *Home Alone* is notable for many reasons, particularly that it is the only film in history which rhymes with 'Jo Malone'.

WRITE YOUR WINNER IN BOX 12 ON THE WALLCHART

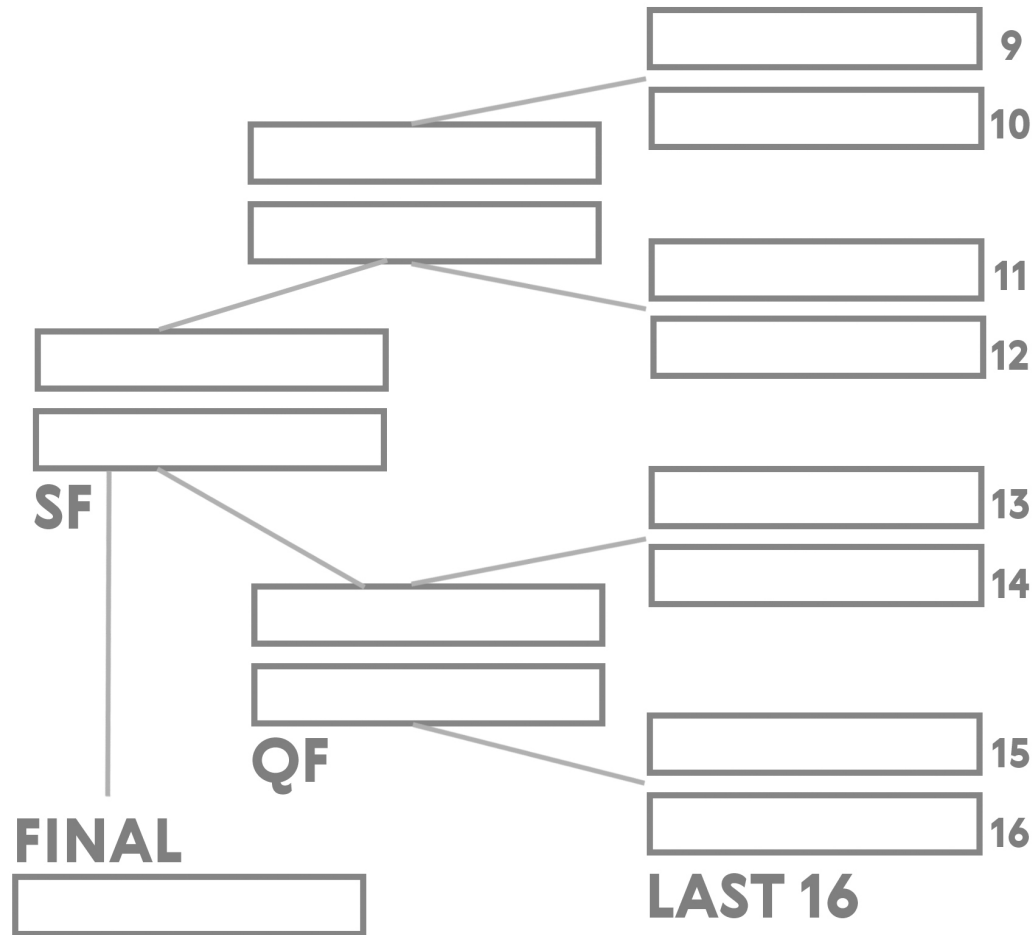
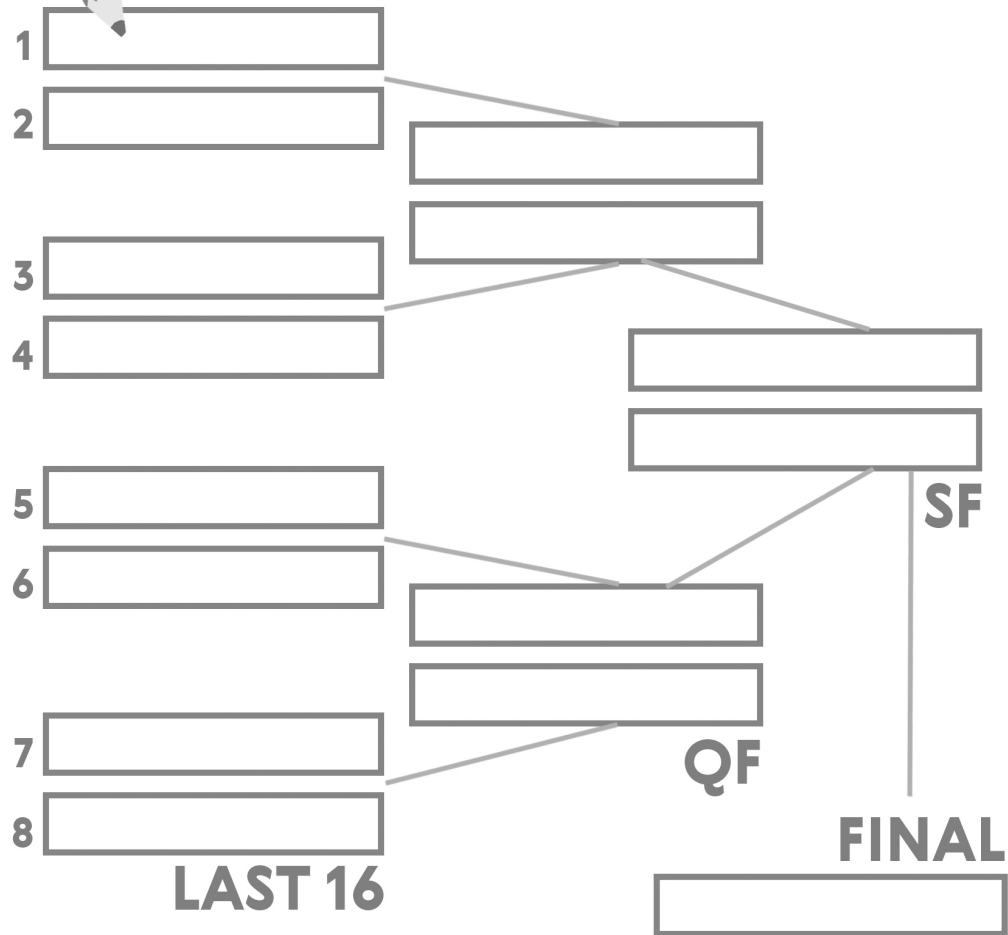
13

TRADING PLACES vs ARTHUR CHRISTMAS

In the film *Trading Places* the villainous Duke brothers plan to profit from frozen concentrated orange juice futures contracts after coming into possession of an unpublished Department of Agriculture report into the orange harvest. This form of insider trading was the exact subject of the following legislation passed by Congress in 2010.

Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, Section 746; Wall Street Transparency and Accountability Act, Section 136; Recommendation

CHRISTMAS FILMS



WORLD CUP OF CHRISTMAS FILMS**FAKE CHRISTMAS FILMS****REAL FILMS:**

SANTA WITH MUSCLES

JACK FROST 2 - REVENGE OF THE MUTANT KILLER SNOWMAN

WHAT WOULD JESUS BUY?

SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE MARTIANS

NATIVITY 3 - DUDE, WHERE'S MY DONKEY?

CHRISTMAS FILM CAST MEMBERS

1. ELF
2. THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL
3. LETHAL WEAPON
4. HOME ALONE 2
5. THE HOLIDAY
6. DIE HARD
7. SCROOGED
8. WHITE CHRISTMAS
9. LOVE ACTUALLY
10. TRADING PLACES
11. ARTHUR CHRISTMAS
12. A CHRISTMAS CAROL

CHRISTMAS WORD ASSOCIATION

1. PRESENTS
2. TURKEY
3. SANTA
4. TREE
5. FAMILY
6. BOOZE/ALCOHOL/DRINK
7. SNOW
8. JESUS
9. EVE
10. CAROLS

WORLD CUP OF BISCUITS**BROKEN BISCUITS**

1. BOURBON
2. RICH TEA
3. PINK WAFER
4. DIGESTIVE
5. FIG ROLL
6. GINGER NUT
7. CHOCO LEIBNIZ
8. WAGON WHEEL
9. CHOCOLATE FINGER