

ISOLATED ISLANDS (solution)

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The first step is to solve the two given Nikoli puzzles – Islands in the Stream, which gives the positions of the islands, and Slitherlink, which gives the path of the Water Guardian. The two puzzles follow their standard rules, except that there are also unclued islands with no numbers showing for the Islands in the Stream grid (which makes it harder). Both Nikoli puzzles have easy entry points, but solving these puzzles individually will only yield partial solutions before getting stuck without further logical inferences possible. However, the instructions also reveal an important information – that the Water Guardian’s path does not cross over any islands, which is therefore a dependency between the solutions for both Nikoli puzzles. In other words, in order for this condition to be fulfilled by both solutions, it is a constraint that provides additional clues to solving the logic for both puzzles. By using known information of the position of islands from Islands in the Stream, some possible Slitherlink paths can be narrowed down. And similarly, by using known information of the Water Guardian’s path from Slitherlink, some possible position of islands in Islands in the Stream could also be narrowed down. So, by solving both Nikoli puzzle concurrently and using the information from each to help make progress on the other iteratively, the full solutions for both puzzles can be inferred.

The next step is to overlay both solutions in the given letter grid, and use the provided information that the Water Guardian floods any island squares that it swims alongside against. Applying this reduces the number of remaining island squares after the Water Guardian’s swim. In Islands in the Stream, the water squares are darkened/colored in, while the island squares remain clear. Using this same pattern leaves only the letters in the remaining island squares visible (solution grid on the next page), which spell **EXPANDING SWELLS** in grid order. This is the thematic answer to this puzzle, and the Water Guardian’s magic.

Constructor’s notes:

When constructing puzzles, I always start from the possible themes related to the puzzle and its answer, and how these could be brought out by associated puzzle types or formatting, thus creating a memorable and fun linkage. In this case, the water theme is represented by the sea in the world map, with the Water Guardian depicted as a water serpent, and with atolls marking its domain. So, this inspired the idea of using the Nikoli puzzle types of Islands in the Stream (also known as Nurikabe) and Slitherlink. Typically, I will also avoid using standard Nikoli logic puzzles in a hunt puzzle, because they can be easily solved using automated online solvers. Therefore, I constructed this puzzle such that the two logic puzzles overlay on the same grid, and need to be solved at the same time, with information from each helping to solve the other. My original idea (which was a little more ambitious, but something I had done before), was to write these as double logic puzzles, using not just the same grid, but also reusing the same set of clues. However, that would be quite restrictive given the set of possible Slitherlink clues only range from the numbers 0 to 3. Hence I dropped that idea and used two different sets of clues for each puzzle, so that the puzzles could be less constrained and with a more interesting solution path. The additional step of flooding certain island squares is a way to make use of both solutions for the extraction, and also to avoid the final answer being easily guessed from either solution alone.

The following grid shows the Slitherlink solution in blue lines, and the Islands in the Stream solution in white squares, with the flooded islands in gray:

