

RIMY RAVINE (solution)

by Ong Kah Kien

The first step is to solve the two sets of given clues. There are a few intended entry-points for each set which are more specific clues with unique answers. Having these more certain answers will help confirm two other answer patterns that will assist in the solving of the remaining clues – answers in each set are in alphabetical order, and the answer lengths in the two sets are all 5-letters and 6-letters respectively.

The table below summarizes the answers to the two sets of clues:

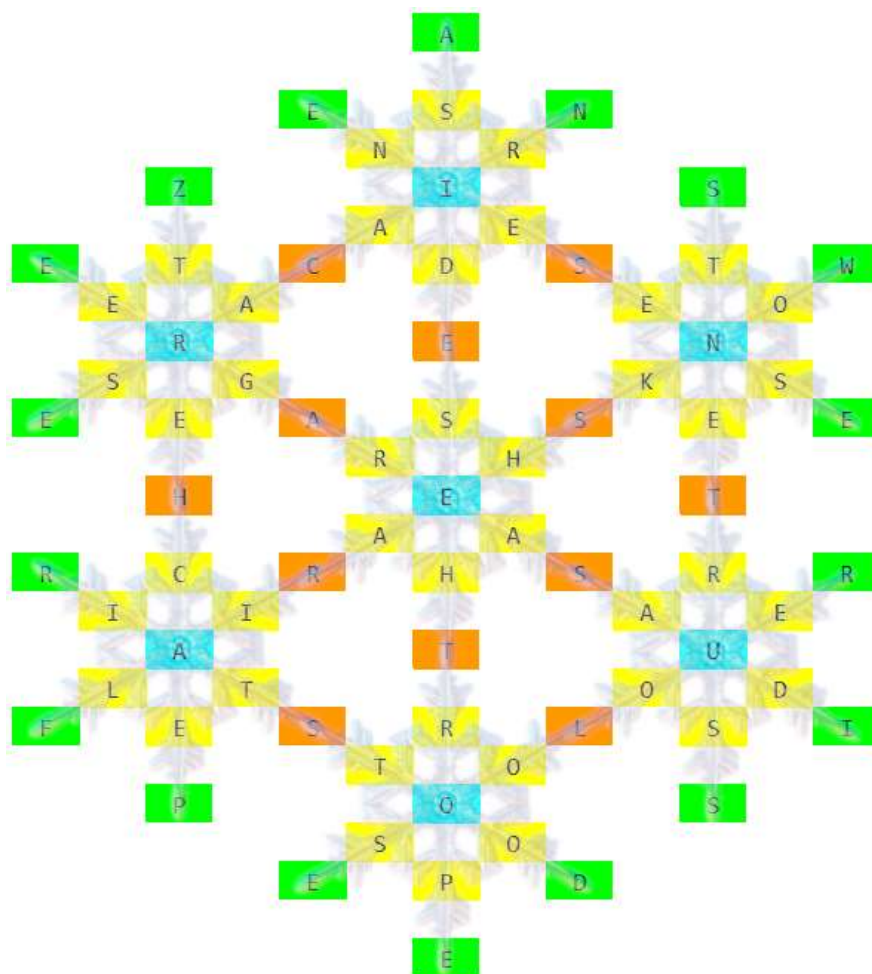
Dendrite clues	Dendrite answers
Concur, assent	AGREE
Surface extents	AREAS
Fourth-wall-breaking comment	ASIDE
Pile of rocks used as a marker	CAIRN
Fertile Scottish lowland beside a river	CARSE
Natural aptitude or talent	FLAIR
Unit of frequency	HERTZ
Like a tooth that is about to fall out	LOOSE
A commune in France just west of Cassen	LOUER
Nectarine-like fruit	PEACH
Mecca citizen	SAUDI
Paris' river	SEINE
Smell or touch, e.g.	SENSE
Cut wool off	SHEAR
Flight of steps	STAIR
Rose from chair	STOOD
Camping structures	TENTS
Objects nearby	THESE
Recurring theme	TROPE
Framework that supports a bridge	TRUSS
Arcane-detail experts	WONKS

Hexagon clues	Hexagon answers
Anthropological term used for a social group who all lived a similar number of years, e.g. amongst the Maasai (two words)	AGESET
Draw a response	ELICIT
The last emperor of the Vardhana dynasty	HARSHA
Monosaccharide	KETOSE
Fortifications with double parapets	REDANS
Flew high in the sky	SOARED
Battlefield units	TROOPS

As there are two sets of clues, with the first having more answers than the second, this suggests that for the next step, some matching up of the answers is required. There are 21 clues in the “Dendrite” set, and 7 clues in the “Hexagon” set. This hints that 3 of the Dendrite answers should be matched with each of the Hexagon answers, forming 7 groups.

The terms Dendrite and Hexagon reference the single snowflake image given, which has 6 dendritic arms and a hexagonal center. So, the 6-letter Hexagon answer could go along the outline of the hexagonal center, with each letter intersecting with an arm. Since there are only 3 Dendrite answers matched with each Hexagon answer, these 5-letter answers will form the whole axis comprising 2 arms, with the common middle letters intersecting at the center of the snowflake, and the second and fourth letters intersecting with the Hexagon answer. This then forms the basis for determining uniquely which Dendrite answers should be matched with which Hexagon answer, thereby forming 7 snowflakes.

As hinted by the flavortext on how the snowflakes “extend and amalgamate together”, the 7 snowflakes should be joined together into a bigger snowflake. And this could be arranged in a unique way by having 1 snowflake in the middle, and the other 6 snowflakes surrounding it, with the adjacent tips intersecting with common letters (indicated in orange below). Note that all the 7 Hexagon answers will read in the same direction (clockwise in the solution below) in the final arrangement. Finally, reading off the letters on the outermost tips (indicated in green below) in this same direction gives ANSWER IS DEEP FREEZE. So, the thematic answer to this puzzle and Ice Guardian’s magic is **DEEP FREEZE**.



Constructor's notes:

The Guardian puzzles are intended to be relatively straightforward puzzles, similar to the encounter puzzles. So, the majority would be word puzzles, and using a thematic variety grid is my chosen approach as it is interesting for solvers and allows for customized grids relating to that puzzle's element. For Ice, the well-known shape of a stellar dendrite snowflake provided me inspiration to use that as the variety grid. And also as a thematic link to combining multiple smaller grids together, akin to how snowflakes grow in a dendritic manner. The choice to only provide the snowflake image and not overlay the grid was an intentional one. I felt the main aha for this puzzle is figuring how the answers fit a snowflake, and how the snowflakes came together, which are steps that I wanted the solvers to enjoy the satisfaction of getting. In terms of the construction, it was quite constraining with all the letters being crossed like a typical crossword, and with the added challenge that adjustments to a snowflake tends to impact the surrounding ones too. I started with the most constraining parts of the extraction phrase, and as much as possible used interior substrings for Dendrite answers that are more common (but without repeating) and could potentially fit more possible terminal letters. This gave me greater flexibility for the tips which intersected with the other snowflakes, and enabled the grid fill to come together quite smoothly.