He was leaning back in his office chair, feet up on the desk, casually flicking playing cards towards an empty wastepaper basket against the wall when Eric walked in, a takeaway coffee in each hand a packet of Jaffa cakes under one arm and festive deer antlers on his head.

‘No luck then?’ Eric asked as he placed the coffees and cakes on the desk and glanced at the litter of cards on the carpet.

‘Not yet’ he replied

‘Bet you a fiver the card that eventually goes in is a six or under’ Eric suggested

‘Aces high or low’ he replied

‘Mmmm ….. aces high’

‘You’re on’

Eric opened the packet and offered one to his workmate before scoffing one himself.

‘Not busy?’ Eric asked as crumbs spilled down his front.

‘Flat out like a lizard drinking!’ he joked as he flicked another card unsuccessfully towards the bin

‘How’s your Uni thesis going? What’s it called again?’ Eric enquired.

‘The Psychology and Human Dynamics of On-line Comment Forums,’ he replied ‘….and I should be finished sometime in the New Year with any luck. This job here with the Mod Squad is perfect. You wouldn’t believe some of the stuff I have to read and deal with in the Quick Crossword Comments section’

‘Interesting stuff then?’ Eric asked

‘Oh the things I’ve learned this year. Do you know some of these people actually meet up for “Gatherings” as they call ‘em? I mean that’s pretty weird for a bunch of strangers in an on-line forum’ he said

‘I dunno. If they get to know each other, where’s the harm?’ Eric asked

‘Yeah, I suppose. Seems like they mostly have a lot of fun on the site. There’s the occasional spat and a few times I’ve actually had to delete some comments but over all it’s not a bad place to be for them. People come and people go on the site but there is a hard core of commenters. We even lost one during the year. I think her name was Amy if I remember right - now she was a feisty one!’

The sound of his computer pinging alerted him to his Off Topic Recognition Software warning him of another transgression.

‘Aren’t you going to handle that?’ Eric enquired

‘Nah, couldn’t be bothered, they’re always at it - and anyway it is Christmas so let ’em splother to their heart’s content’ he replied as another card arced gracefully over the desk and plonked directly in the bin.

‘Woo hoo! Got one!’ he cried

Eric ambled over , retrieved the card and turned it over.

‘Bugger!’ he cursed, ‘it’s the bloody nine of digging implements (6)’