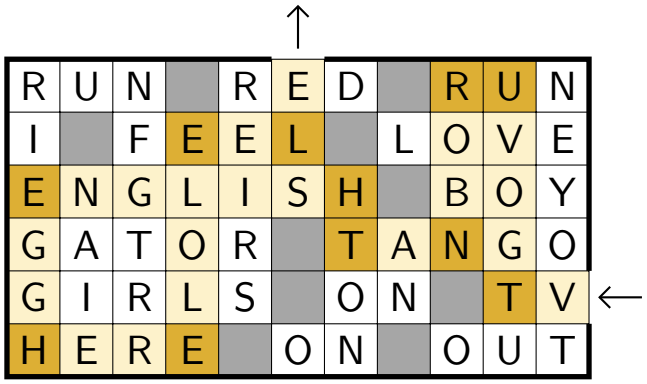
Meta on the Dancefloor (Solution)

– Alex Walker and Sara Walker –

This relatively-pure meta provides solvers with a 6×11 grid (with marked openings) and some flavortext. We find among our answer pool several song titles, each of length 11 when spaces are preserved. The flavortext "*from golden oldies to modern hits*" suggests that these song titles should be entered in the grid in chronological order.

To extract an answer, we solve an ice sliding puzzle. We view letters are ice tiles and spaces are obstacles (as indicated by the flavortext "*spaces are occupied by penguins who block your path*"). The unique solution through the maze using the fewest moves is indicated below. This path stops and turns on 11 squares in the grid. In path order, these spell **TURN THE HEEL**, our answer.



Construction Notes:

Early in development, we proposed a meta inspired by Pokémon's ice puzzle type; this concept was then adapted to fit the preliminary answer **TURN HEEL** through a dance or ice skating theme. The answer was eventually changed to **TURN THE HEEL** when we realized that **TURN HEEL** was too short to extract letters from six different feeder answers. (Note that in the grid above most feeders contribute a pair of consecutive letters to the final extract.)

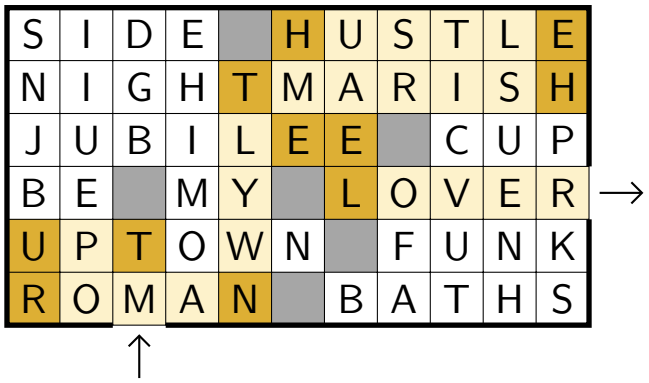
The feeders were relatively unconstrained in the original pitch. This made grid construction straightforward – we'd choose a pair of entry and exit points at random, add roughly ten reasonably-placed obstacles, and then check if the resulting ice puzzle had the following pleasant properties:

a. The ice puzzle should be solvable. (Cumulative odds: 1 in 3.[1])
b. The minimal solution should have 11 turns. (Cumulative odds: 1 in 224.)
c. There should be a *unique* solution of this length. (Cumulative odds: 1 in 303.)
d. The solution should extract letters from each of the six rows. (Cumulative odds: 1 in 7802.)
e. The path should span most of the width of the grid. (Cumulative odds: 1 in 18519.)

For a computer-assisted search, these aren't bad odds.

[1] The probabilities here depend on our particular algorithm for grid generation.

Things progressed without issue until we found the following grid, filled it out with UPTOWN FUNK, and had a terrible idea: If we can have **one** song in the grid, why not **six**? How hard could that be? And how hard could it be if we also wanted the songs to appear in chronological order?



As it turns out, **very hard**. We cobbled together a list of roughly 3000 songs of length 11 from a variety of sources: Billboard lists, songs on Platinum albums, discographies of best-selling artists, the top 10000 songs on Spotify, and a scrape of Wikipedia pages that end in the form `_(song)`. Unfortunately, many of our results were unusable because song titles can be recycled. In our desperation for more songs, we stumbled across the Million Song Dataset: a free collection of metadata for one million tracks. We are able to grab around 9500 songs with year data and the right length, which finally pushed us over the edge on constructability. (This list contained GATOR TANGO and GIRLS ON TV, for example.)

The title of this puzzle is a pun on the song *Murder on the Dancefloor*, by Sophie Ellis-Bextor. This song was released in 2001 but reentered the Billboard Hot 100 in 2024 following its appearance in the film *Saltburn* and ensuing popularity on TikTok.