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SCRABBLE/Sam Orbaum

HIGH BINGO

An elderly gentleman entered the Zahala Scrabble Club last week, claiming that he had never played a game of Scrabble in his life. The man with the jarringly familiar name of Karl Yitzhak Marx observed the first round of play, then, figuring that he had nothing to lose but a game, entered the fray himself.

Karl Marx, in his first game, played as his first word RETINAS, capitalizing on one of the most potent sets of seven letters — and certainly one of the most versatile: RETINAS can be anagrammed to spell no less than seven other words: ANESTRI, NASTIER, RATINES, RETAINS, RETSINA, STAINER and STEARIN.

The six letters of RETINA form the basis for high bingo-conduciveness. Add an I as the seventh letter, and you have INERTIA. Add an M for RAIMENT or MINARET, add a W for TAWNIER or TINWARE. In fact, 17 of the 26 letters of the alphabet may be added to RETINA to form a total of 48 possible bingos.

RETINA is a combination of six letters of high frequency. RETINAE (or TRAINEE) is mathematically the most probable of the 21,733 seven-letter words in the Scrabble dictionary, occurring with an approximate frequency of once in 13,870 random draws. That may sound like too much of a long shot to bother with, but you don't have to wait that long to get such a wonderful rack, because drawing randomly is hardly a strategy. During the course of a game, however, you will notice that your rack often comes close the RETINA□ (the □ representing the seventh letter), and it is just a matter of utilizing the unwanted letters to provide a potential RETINA□ rack.

If, for example, you are looking at a rack of AAINRTX, you should detect the makings of a bingo-potent rack: play away the AX for a good score, and you are likely to pick up an E for your game-breaking RETINA□. This strategy is called rack management, and is a major difference between a good Scrabble player and a great one.

Studying the RETINA list — and others like it — will help you recognize bingos and near-bingos where previously you might only have seen a rack full of impotent one-point tiles. The inexperienced player might be pleased with a score of 20 or 30 from the rack AEIKNRT, but by familiarizing himself with the RETINA list, KERATINE for 70 or 80 will come naturally.

RETINA is not the only six-letter bingo-root you should be watching form. SATINE is rated as the most potent of the more than 50 bingo-roots researched by

contributions to the *Scrabble Players Newspaper*. With SATINE on your rack, you have a whopping 96 percent chance of the seventh letter giving you a bingo. In fact, of the 94 tiles in the game other than the six of SATINE, only the J, Q and two YS render your rack bingo-less. Any one of the other 90 can form a total of 60 SATINE bingos!

As Karl Yitzhak Marx can tell, you RETINA is the opium of the Scrabble player.