

Contagion
Scott Handelman
 Answer: **ENDURE**

First, complete the logic puzzle as presented. (Robins will be in **red**, and bats in **bold**.)

					Rule 1
					Rule 2
					Rule 3
					Rule 4
					Rule 13
					Rule 15

Rule 1 gives the grid dimensions; this is the only Yin-Yang solution with Rules 13 & 15 true.

	Two-Face (Harvey Dent)	KGBeast or Bane			Rule 7
Poison Ivy (Pamela Isley)		Firefly (Garfield Lynns)	KGBeast or Bane		Rule 9
Penguin (Oswald Cobblepot)					Rule 12
Deathstroke (Slade Wilson)					Rule 16
Deadshot (Floyd Lawton)		The Signal (Duke Thomas)	The Phantasm (Andrea Beaumont)		Rule 18
Harley Quinn (Harleen Quinzel)	The Joker (Unknown)				Rule 20

Phantasm and Firefly can only be in their given squares, locking Signal. Two females in the far-left column locks Poison Ivy; Two-Face in the top row places Harley, locking the Joker. The only three vertical villain spaces left for Penguin, Deathstroke and Deadshot are locked. Two-Face must also be locked to save room for a “Bat” in the left column.

Man-Bat (Kirk Langstrom)	Two-Face (Harvey Dent)	KGBeast or Bane	some Robin		Rule 5
Poison Ivy (Pamela Isley)		Firefly (Garfield Lynns)	KGBeast or Bane	some Robin	Rule 6
Penguin (Oswald Cobblepot)	some Robin	Killer Moth?	Batman (Bruce Wayne)	Alfred Pennyworth	Rule 8
Deathstroke (Slade Wilson)		Ratcatcher (Otis Flannegan)	Killer Moth?	some Robin	Rule 10
Deadshot (Floyd Lawton)	Commissioner James Gordon	The Signal (Duke Thomas)	The Phantasm (Andrea Beaumont)	Oracle (Barbara Gordon)	Rule 11
Harley Quinn (Harleen Quinzel)	The Joker (Unknown)	Batgirl I (Cassandra Cain)			Rule 14

Man-Bat is locked as “bat” for the left column. Four of the five other Robins must be in the given squares and another in the bottom row (but not below The Signal) to lock Batman and Alfred, in turn locking James and Barbara Gordon. Either possible Killer Moth space locks Ratcatcher.

The combined restrictions of the “bats” and “robins” also means that Cassandra Cain is the only viable “bat” for the last open “hero” space in the middle column. Kate Kane must have room for Azrael above her; Stephanie Brown as both a “bat” and a “robin” can’t be next to Duke Thomas.

Man-Bat (Kirk Langstrom)	Two-Face (Harvey Dent)	KGBeast (Anatoli Knyazev)	Robin (Damian Wayne)	Ragman (Rory Regan)	Rule 5
Poison Ivy (Pamela Isley)	Azrael (Jean-Paul Valley)	Firefly (Garfield Lynns)	Bane (Unknown)	Batgirl II (Stephanie Brown)	Rule 6
Penguin (Oswald Cobblepot)	Nightwing (Dick Grayson)	Killer Moth (Drury Walker)	Batman (Bruce Wayne)	Alfred Pennyworth	Rule 11
Deathstroke (Slade Wilson)	Batwoman (Kate Kane)	Ratcatcher (Otis Flannegan)	The Ventriloquist (Arnold Wesker)	Red Hood (Jason Todd)	Rule 14
Deadshot (Floyd Lawton)	Commissioner James Gordon	The Signal (Duke Thomas)	The Phantasm (Andrea Beaumont)	Oracle (Barbara Gordon)	Rule 17
Harley Quinn (Harleen Quinzel)	The Joker (Unknown)	Batgirl I (Cassandra Cain)	Red Robin (Tim Drake)	The Question (Renee Montoya)	Rule 19

The only “robin” square with an opening two below it locks Jason Todd and Renee Montoya. Only one of Killer Moth’s possible squares still has an open “robin” next to it, locking him and Nightwing. The far-right column still needs a “bat” in it, locking Stephanie Brown. The only vertical “hero” spaces remaining must be Azrael and Kate Kane. Ragman takes the last open “hero” space, locking him, the Ventriloquist takes the last open “villain” square. Rule 17 resolves Bane and Tim Drake, in turn resolving KGBeast and Damian Wayne to finish.

Once the grid is complete, now we decide who is ready for a pandemic... which depends on whether or not they usually cover their nose and mouth! (Covs and domino masks don’t cut it.) Using the provided images, those “properly equipped” are in green and the others in red.

Man-Bat (Kirk Langstrom)	Two-Face (Harvey Dent)	KGBeast (Anatoli Knyazev)	Robin (Damian Wayne)	Ragman (Rory Regan)
Poison Ivy (Pamela Isley)	Azrael (Jean-Paul Valley)	Firefly (Garfield Lynns)	Bane (Unknown)	Batgirl II (Stephanie Brown)
Penguin (Oswald Cobblepot)	Nightwing (Dick Grayson)	Killer Moth (Drury Walker)	Batman (Bruce Wayne)	Alfred Pennyworth
Deathstroke (Slade Wilson)	Batwoman (Kate Kane)	Ratcatcher (Otis Flannegan)	The Ventriloquist (Arnold Wesker)	Red Hood (Jason Todd)
Deadshot (Floyd Lawton)	Commissioner James Gordon	The Signal (Duke Thomas)	The Phantasm (Andrea Beaumont)	Oracle (Barbara Gordon)
Harley Quinn (Harleen Quinzel)	The Joker (Unknown)	Batgirl I (Cassandra Cain)	Red Robin (Tim Drake)	The Question (Renee Montoya)

Reading rows as binary (green as 1, red as 0) yields 5-14-4-21-18-5, and finally converting these numbers to letters via A1/Z26 yields the answer, **ENDURE**.

Author’s Notes

Scott: I had the idea for a mask-based binary extraction smack dab in the middle of 2020, right when mask mandates were sweeping the nation. I knew that our hunt was still a ways off, and was sure that either the idea would be done before our hunt (it wasn’t as far as I know) or mask-wearing would no longer be a topic of conversation. (This is, of course, sadly untrue.) Luckily we had the perfect round one answer for the topic.

I thought that a simple Einstein's riddle felt too basic for a hunt puzzle, so I started to look at Nikoli-style puzzles, and Yin Yang pretty quickly stood out to me for the reason I mentioned in the puzzle: the connection between heroes and villains, light and dark. I sat down with some graph paper and asked myself how much you could fill in a grid if you just knew 2 particular alignments and the fact that you had as many black cells as white. To my surprise, the answer was almost the whole damn thing. I threw an extra rule in there about one column having more villains than another to make the Yin Yang solution unique (inelegant, I know), and then drafted the rest of the clues, centering the solve around Bat people and Robins having their own rules of placement. I thought it came out pretty well.

When this puzzle was first tested, we did not provide any of the pictures that made it into the final draft, and testers found the mask aha pretty difficult, and a bit of a research slog to find out who canonically wore a face mask. I didn't really want this to be a research puzzle, so we dialed that back. This definitely increased the number of solves, but its early placement, difficult logic, unobvious aha, and non-trivial extraction (especially for newcomers who may not be familiar with binary) made it the most hinted puzzle in the hunt by a good margin. That said, I'm pretty proud of how it turned out.