

Cunningly Wrought

by Ucaoimhu

Happy birthday! In this “cunningly wrought” puzzle, the Across and Down answers conflict at certain squares. Put *both* letters (Across and then Down) into each such square; the resulting letter pair will be the same in each case. Then:

1. If the *n*th square from the start of an Across entry has a conflict, circle the *n*th letter from the start of the clue. All these circled letters in clue order will spell out two figures associated with the letter pair.

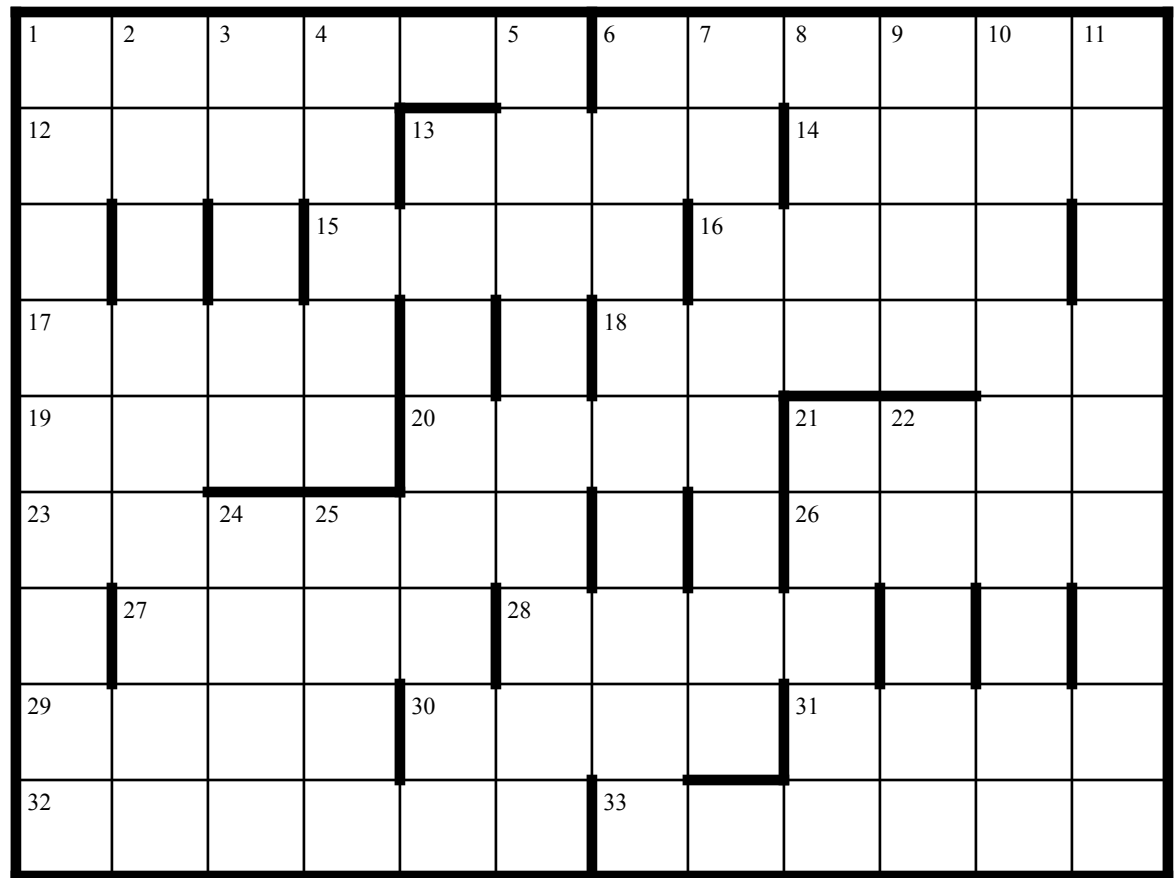
2. Repeat the process in 1 with “start” changed to “end” and “Across” changed to “Down.” The circled letters in clue order will spell out a figure associated with the letter pair — almost; it is missing one letter. Use the two figures from 1 as indexes into (respectively) the start and end of the rest of the Down clues, and read all the letters indexed from the start and then all those indexed from the end to get an identifying fact about the missing letter.

3. Two Across clues are wordplay-only; their answers, left to right, will say how the figures from 1 and 2 relate to the letter pair. Also, for each square with a conflict, top to bottom, read the letter in a wordplay-only answer that is in the same column; the result will almost (with the same letter missing as in 2) say what the letter pair symbolizes.

Finally, in each Across clue not used above, the wordplay yields a sequence of letters with one extra letter at the start or end. Take the letters at the start literally and the letters at the end figuratively; then add the letter pair to the result in two places to get one final important item.

ACROSS

1. Effort chiefly results in dishonor (6)
6. New hue that used to appear twice in a Crayola box (6)
12. Very large unit used by online typographers? (4)
13. Liquor about to envelop glowing, unstable particle (4)
14. Thoughtless speaker’s put pencil to paper (4)
15. A Québécois you perversely bit (4)
16. One lummoX upset a superstar (4)
17. Trick had to be employed (4)
18. Repost terrible clichés (6)



19. While Christmas endlessly gets recalled for ages (4)
20. Style popular before WWII or after December (4)
21. Actor Carney’s skills (4)
23. A hi-fi set mangled Speedwagon, say (6)
26. Actor Efron hugs Belgian and Greek character (4)
27. Tie rotated at both sides of neck (4)
28. Dark time for the French Canadian people (4)
29. Alter that clothing of scarlet hue (4)
30. Is negated informally by defrocked holy people (3’1)
31. Something fishy about NC SASE, e.g. (4, *abbr.*)
32. Spy group getting word from the Swiss banks (6)
33. Piece of bio in Times Roman is something a doctor checks (2 4, *abbr.*)

DOWN

1. Part of unwise quest rattled detached bone bits (9)
2. Place for a chip or scope Tuck refashioned (3 6, *abbr.*)
3. Author *After Rain, I Get More Seasoned* (5)
4. Vinegar, etc. helps to cover up cytosine (5)
5. Coin uncle destroyed with protonlike particles (9)
6. Nitrogen rendered a coconut worthless (2-7)
7. Eunice barely gets press speaking directly (8)
8. Computer game omitted tongue of an orator (2 2, *abbr.*)
9. Old animated Betty Bass loves leader of Persia (4)
10. Odd bits of excellence this cast offers those inclined to combine elements of disparate origin (9)
11. Again hit by a flightless bird, a sailor moaned (9) [NI3]
13. Esther’s uncle modified car I demo (8)
21. Arizona shamus from an old Mexican empire (5)
22. To bridle at English queen in Switzerland (5)
24. Affix meaning “inside” or “node,” randomly (4)
25. House, in part, is secure when standing on end (4)