

Just a Number

by Ucaoimhu

My birthday yesterday was a numeric milestone, but numbers can mislead. For one thing, one answer here *does* go where its clue number says, but *also* sneaks into the letter string produced by the wordplay in 24 clues! In each clue, if that answer sneaks into position *n* in the string, take the middle letter of the clue's *n*th word; these letters will say what was done here — which in another context would yield my age in every case.

All 24 other clues have a misleading enumeration:

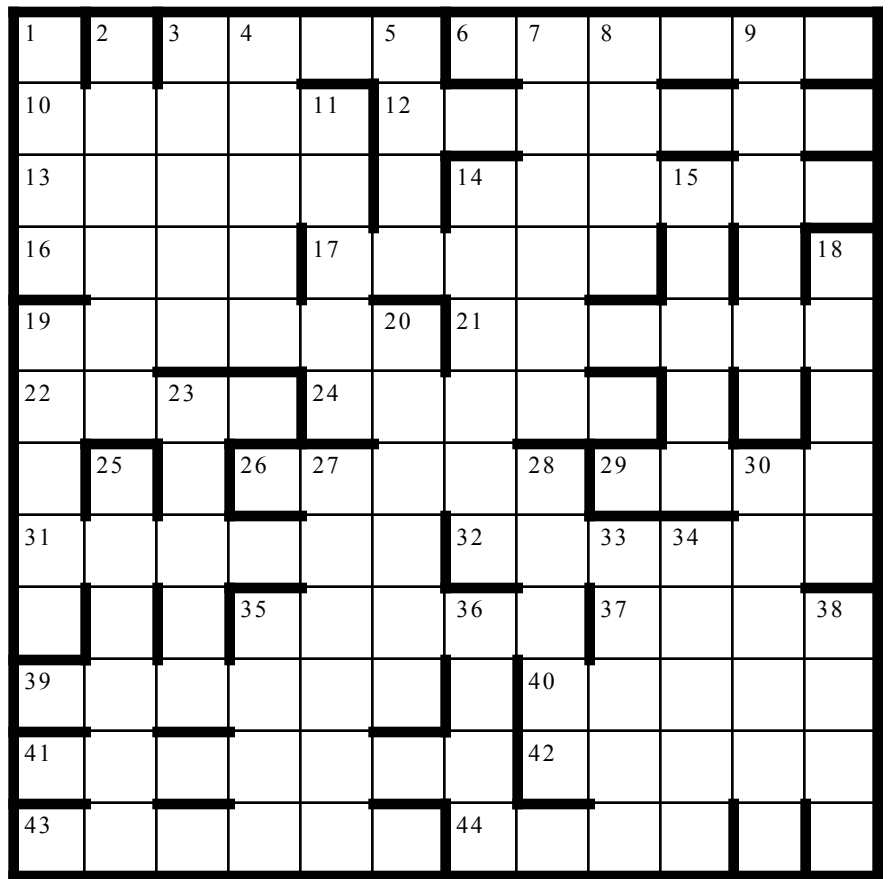
(1) For twelve, it is *too big*; you must add a letter to the answer before entry. (Altered entries include a given name, a var. spelling, and an abbr.)

(2) For four, it *isn't there*, a fact that is disguised by three symbols. Transfer each symbol into one (1) entry, either (a) before the added letter in an Across entry, or (b) turned 90° after the added letter (and joined to the next) in a Down entry.

(3) For the last eight, it *misrepresents how many words the answer has*. For each, if the first/last/only digit in the *given* enumeration is *n*, take the first/last/middle letter of the clue's *n*th word, respectively; these letters will say what each letter from (2a) is in relation to the one on the other side of the transferred symbol, and this is relevant to my birthday *arithmetically*. This will still be true if you change *given* to *correct*, (2a) to (2b), and *arithmetically* to *tastily*.

ACROSS

3. A Mexican coin made of lead and earth? Who cares? (4)
6. Pal of Little Orphan Annie, astonishingly, has pet (6)
10. Dale's shirtless servant (5)
12. Clearly seeing grief-filled Cobb in bed (3-4) [NI2]
13. Like, in part, a hip alto blocking "The The" in (3-2)
14. Sea creature's foot segments (6)
16. One *Frozen* reindeer's against upsetting Mr. Vereen (4)
17. Cancels unfilled video orders (5)
19. Comb makers outfitting small, ultimately superfluous people like Truman (5 1)
21. Billy Joel's home lent unusual support for Poe's (2-4)
22. Exam for prospective attorneys outside of Lou's club (4, abbr.)
24. Needing, primarily, to chase courageous black bird (5)
26. Flower is reportedly total fiction, Miss (4 1)
29. Screech, "Observe a dog!" (3 1)
31. Drive with enthusiasm alongside Victor Demetre I's successor to the Georgian throne (6)
32. Some hoi polloi east of nifty, chiefly Italian city (6)
35. For part of the gut fluid that helps digest aluminum (5)
37. Not worried about soothing substance (4)
39. Removes Delaware musician Paul (6)
40. Intensity of verb written 1.5 times (5)
41. Dress Rod and Bill Flack, who sang "Tryin' Times" (7)
42. Train one's students at Yale (5)
43. Being real — and eccentric, I sense (6) [NI3]
44. Secondary wager with Baffin's leading couple (4)



DOWN

1. Close associate of Butthead shuns English rental car company (4)
2. Removes hair from topless rich people (6)
3. Dancing in a tutu may involve these layers (1 4)
4. Actor who's cut from *The Avengers* and half of *Evil Outlaws* (5)
5. Underside doesn't depict Mike von Bismarck (4)
7. Stop running after tramp with informal clothing (6)
8. Skinny swimmers partly see (2-2)
9. Are not at all happy to start swilling ale or lager with actor Asner (3 3)
11. Always-nude silversmith Paul (5)
14. Short, terrible guy who was Tsar for a lunar month (6)
15. Resumes a Michael Jackson song where the coda has been shifted two steps upwards (5)
18. Times when one sees less of the First Lady (5)
19. Above dish containing no odd underwear (5, abbr.)
20. Rescues ship penetrated by hail (6)
23. Small bone from Nevada that's seized by security (5)
25. Started performance before Ken's last, minimally important acting role (6)
27. Decal externally borne by stands supporting the non-vital sluggards (6)
28. In Rome, beware of a hole in the ground (5)
30. The author kept endless, endless French wine (6)
33. A Dell machine, for example, hit a Welsh, Breton, or Cornish person (1-4)
34. Buggy young Lady Virginia has turned vacuous (4-1)
35. Roy G. Castellano is Currier's partner (4)
36. A pointed remark about a horse (4)
38. Tolkien creature, leaving cellar, ascends flat hill (4)