

The Hunger Games

by Ucaoinmhu

Welcome to the Capital, where (in honor of the wooden anniversary of the Post Hunt) 24 characters have been sent into the forest to fight it out, armed only with hinges. (The two remaining characters will show up later on.) Of their fights, (a) 12 occur in the clues, where one letter must be “defeated” (replaced) by another before the clue is solved, and (b) 11 occur in the grid, where two intersecting words conflict, and of the two competing letters you must enter the “victorious” one that forms words in both directions. If (separately from the grid) you diagram who beats whom, with a dot for each competitor and an arrow from the loser of each fight to the winner, there will be eight paths through the resulting “tree” from a “leaf” (a competitor who never defeats anyone) to the “root” (the final victor), and each such path forms a word.

Also, in the grid, the two entries from each conflict in (b) form a shape that is either (i) a single hinge (a path with one right angle), or (ii) two or four overlapping hinges (a T or + shape); each of the “tree words” clues a word now appearing in the grid as either an arm of a hinge from (i) or a complete hinge from (ii). If you shade these clued words in the grid, you will see two items that would be useful in this struggle for survival; if you circle the victorious words from the three unused pairs of conflicting words, they will say what these items are, in general terms. And if you take the initial letter of each clue not involved in (a) or (b), and find the “victim” of that letter (for those with multiple victims, the last word of the clue indicates which path in the tree to use), these will spell out what experience enabled the final victor to find these items.

Finally, if you order the clues from (a) by defeated letter, the first letters of those clues will say what luxurious things the final victor received for winning, and last letters will say specifically what hinged item in Washington contained those things.

ACROSS

3. Designates St. Cuthbert to start carrying pine towards the west (6)
7. Illustrated book unfortunately is blocked by end of object (5)
10. You and Sgt. Fury both prematurely stop using anatomical symbolism (5)
13. Head of nunnery avoiding A&E’s old-style online fora (3’1, *abbr.*)
15. Doodad under a string causes worry (4)
16. Epidermal mark denoting prosperity (4)
17. Injure Romeo after afternoon affair (4)
18. Cure cured Brown, but only slightly (4)
19. Actress Delany barely met Perseus’s mother (5)
20. Dwelling east of Benedict X with pair of pigfish (4)
23. Each one is a fairy (4)
25. Sesquipedalian name in record book (4)
26. Mr. Kilmer tossed small cans (4)
28. Yellowish chip right inside slit next to ring (5)
30. Woven material used to make trousers for bird (4)
32. Wow — in Vienna, “Eggs!” is “Gezundheit!”’s prelude (5)
33. Kay fled after misdirecting a stoolie (4)

35. Entertaining, palladium-clad German’s weight (5) [NI2]
37. Oxonian’s silver fork finishes off a half-portion of urease (4)
39. Vacuous, alarmist and taciturn Mahler’s way of highlighting a name (4, *abbr.*)
41. Game machines acoustically simulate heavy breathing (4)
43. Eastern chants back in Cossack city in Russia (4)
45. Go up against a radical occupying a drossy person’s place (5)
46. The way to follow Charlie’s dog (4)
48. Computer logic gate Ann’d modified (4)
49. Himalayan creature is still near India (4)
50. Actress Thomas beheaded Guthrie (4)
51. A nurse assumes that is what Edith Piaf regrets? (4)
52. Utter nonsense about cross-holding guy the Clantons tried to shoot (5)
53. Agreeing to love Henry VIII, say (5)
54. Force half of them to decay (6)

DOWN

1. The Parisian has provided vitality (4)
2. “Dah-dah-dah,” to a telegraphist, sounds like a brief musical piece (7)
3. Spooky green-and-yellow aura (6)
4. On edge after taking the first couple of J-turns when fleeing Mexico? (3 2)
5. Daredevil’s opposite someone else with the same guardian? (6)
6. Irrational gent with hatch displaying Rembrandt work with dark spotting? (3 5 5)
7. Non-incompetent, outspoken guy on Rushmore facing George Will (4)

8. Telling lady to wear lace (8)
9. Ace’s ma’s beam flip-flopped in a minimal amount of time (4, *abbr.*)
11. In earlier times, 104 beseiging Eire gutted bug (2-6)
12. “Energy can come out of part of a ruby’s surface,” say! (4)
14. Science fiction writer David is 80% salt water (4)
21. Whit Stillman’s penultimate work endlessly exhibits pivoting (4)
22. Nabokov character that’s booing little Alan from *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (4)
24. Powdered and (in Germany) wrapped with a band (6 2)
27. Hysterically dunks Ken in an odorous hole in the ground (5 3)
29. Last of thanes has lawn on Stormy Key, an isle with many a Scot (4)
31. Where people might sleep with heartless Indianapolis athletes (4)
34. Disobeys back-street Romeo (7)
36. Gym ex-president Syngman, um, is said to be better suited for, say, wrestling (6)
38. Cheering up, Mr. Potter almost accepts that’s funny (3-3)
39. Read “Pika’s Neighbor Missing \$1000” the wrong way and it’s just super (1-3)
40. He who pities the fool taking Ecstasy over a period of time (4)
42. Kodak Theatre ceremony ignores old signs of old wounds (5)
44. Rotated stuff for artist Chagall (4)
45. Debuts of bright young nerds gratified one Governor-General of Canada (4)
47. Imitates those chasing a buck? (4)

