

In a Century of Letters . . .

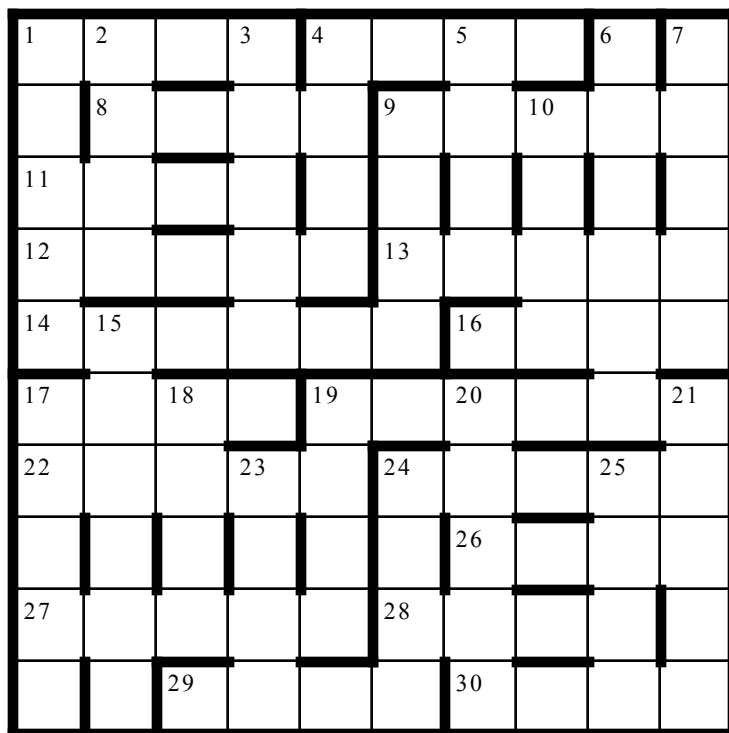
by Ucaimhu, December 21, 2013

Of all of the letters I have received over the years, the most remarkable will be described in this puzzle of over 100 letters. Specifically:

(1) 26 clues each contain an incorrect letter, which you must correct before solving. If the correct letters are ordered by their corresponding incorrect letters, the result will be an instruction which, if followed, should enable you to identify (a) certain letters that could be added *outside* the grid, and (b) certain letters that could replace other letters *inside* the grid. (However, if these additions/substitutions were made they would *not* generally form valid new entries in this particular puzzle.)

(2) The first part of the remarkable letter I received can be formed from the letters from (1a), starting with those to the south (in some order), then to the west, to the north, and lastly to the east (in some order). If you take the grid letters replaced in (1b), ordered by the letters replacing them, you will see what item in this part I was most startled to see in such an old piece of text.

(3) Finally, the clues not used in (1), which all work normally, are exactly those whose entries contain one or more squares where a replacement as per (1b) occurs. For each such clue, for each such square, if the square is the *m*th from the start and *n*th from the end of the *entry*, circle the *m*th letter from the start and the *n*th from the end of the *clue*. When all of these have been circled, the circled “*m*th letters” (in clue order) will spell out the middle part of the remarkable letter, and the circled “*n*th letters” (in clue order) will spell out the last part, at least as I imagine them.



ACROSS

1. Longs for one person that's almost stable (4)
4. Mull fifth of Chianti in Britain with a bad smell (4)
8. Endorsement a traveler obtains by biting zingers, primarily (4)
9. What's taught outspoken, folksy Ray to say "except if" (4'1)
11. Fops from each university reach each French river (4)
12. Vamper rued ignoring every other character, and informally said "Approach me!" (1'4)
13. Equip with weapons, archaically made from a rod gripped by crazy men (5)
14. Prays after tossing sou outside of Nevada (6)
16. Pierre's true vice, Kevin, involves bisected oats (4)
17. First pair of oblong boxes in front of really excellent cookie (4)
19. One rubbed out actor Feldman to start revolution (6)
22. In Belgium, Tuesday Weld finally hit revolutionary author (5)
24. Actress Holmes trashed IKEA stores west of Qatar (5)
26. Jet held by *Blue Valentine* author George (4)
27. French student's pix doubled in size almost endlessly (5)
28. Strangely, Anne is that German woman who sang about 99 floating, gas-filled orbs (4)
29. Superficially link Virginia with Bulgarian coins (4)
30. "Pipe" to the right of rocker Snider is log in pitch (4)

DOWN

1. Gave technical details about having spots on your stirrup, anvil, and hemmer (4'1)
2. Before the halfway point, Sven, um, produces an egg (4)
3. French rivet is, well, English (5)
4. Reputation — before noon — becomes iron-clad (4)
5. Denial uttered by a German square reaches your ear (4)
6. Heroin extracted from smoker's equipment is lost (6)
7. Earl and Nan turned up to embrace Mike as a friend (2 3)
9. Observe: Fay's belly, mirror-reflected, remains visible in the glass (4)
10. Fight wight underneath health resort (4)
15. Finally box at demonstration employing spoken language (6)
17. Ugly omen's a word for "all" that follows *Exeunt* in scripts for shows (5)
18. People from New York and Pennsylvania aid Ohio and North Hibernia (4)
19. Singularly, curs dig for ore (4)
20. Eliminated olden-style Oakland ballplayers wearing blood-like hue (5)
21. Once again, duck upset yon fleeing arachnid (5)
23. Went under, 500-0, after losing fifth (4)
24. Half of dale possesses an Osakan character (4)
25. The standard suffix used when naming subfamilies of organisms in a yew's core (4)