

Nine Is An Odd Number

by Ucaoimhu

In honor of this year's Best Picture nominees, taken in pairs, you must modify each Across answer before entry, so that five are Pitted, five incorporate soundless material, five involve a Homeric character, and five go south. (Modified answers include an NI3 variant spelling, a two-word phrase, and an Oscar winner.)

"But there are *nine* nominees this year," I hear you cry. Yes, one additional film has snuck in, thus wrecking my neat numerical scheme; the unclued entries at 12 and 42 Across will tell you what cunning thing the producers did to convince people that their film was really spiffy.

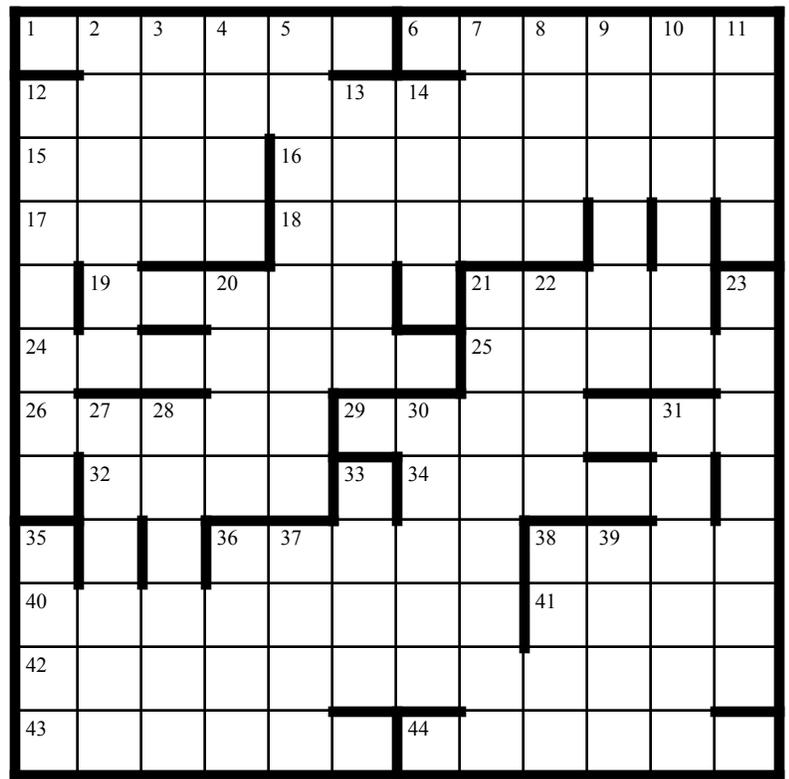
Meanwhile, all Down answers are entered normally, but in each Down clue the letter sequence clued by the word-play either (A) omits one letter of the answer or (B) has an extraneous letter added. Each letter of the alphabet is omitted or added in exactly one clue; this gives a canonical ordering for all the Down clues. For each Down clue, find *m* and *n* such that the omitted or added letter is in the *m*th position from the *start* of its answer or its clued letter sequence (respectively) and the *n*th position from the *end*; take (1) the *m*th letter from the start and (2) the *n*th letter from the end of the *clue*. In the canonical order, the A1 and A2 letters will each spell out one worthy production that did *not* get a nomination this year, and the B1 letters followed by the B2 letters will spell out a guaranteed winner; both of these situations result from the Academy's weird shenanigans with numbers.

ACROSS

1. Taste Al's cooking, if nothing else (2 wds.)
6. Ponderously move logs
15. *Glee* character that narrates *Evita* well
16. Second witticism about guys
17. Cleanse piece of rhodium coated with selenium
18. Creatures that interrupt picnics and topless raves
19. Incorrectly sort craggy hills
21. Villainous flatfish returns
24. Perverse young louse can . . .
25. . . . once again scrutinize gun- and phone-building alien
26. More-or-less real automobile
29. Mr. Romney, when in the Mediterranean, maybe does a somersault every so often (2 wds.)
32. For each illuminated character in *Evita*
34. Hot Dadaist's instruments
36. Republican couple almost completed ceremony
38. Melting taper is more appropriate
40. Impressionist's timeless leonine features
41. Run from circus animal striking your ear
43. Customers will lose 51 pennies
44. What Clark Kent puts on after doffing excellent hat

DOWN

2. One island with over two hundred cats on the inside (6)
3. E.g., musician Paul's caustic compounds (4)



4. Poet Pound, going around claiming "I will depict the river Leeds is on" (4)
5. Inaugurate leaders of interesting isle (2 6)
7. An n-shaped device used to secure a Belgian building without luxury features (1-3)
8. Ampersand at the center of mom's candies, in various colors (4)
9. Stone appliance in the kitchen (6)
10. Are slow to leave a cruise ship, say (6)
11. One individual named James who sang "Volkswagen Car" (4)
12. Yodeler's foot inside trap shows negligible damage (7)
13. Jean-Luc's under the composer of "Semper Fidelis" (5)
14. Seize the predecessor of George I (4)
20. Car-taking perhaps upset drug user (4)
21. Liz's father eschews the eastermost suburb in the DC area (8)
22. Brand of sneakers sported by mega-vamps (4)
23. Fully half of text appearing in unsatisfactory essay (7)
27. Briefly phrased, a college-level high school math class a friend criticized at the outset (2 4)
28. VCR button inscribed with small Spanish word meaning "what provides salvation" (6)
30. Michaelmas daisy, for example, is what's used to add liquid during cooking (5)
31. Spy with hairstyle and attire suitable for poolside (6)
33. Orvieto, say, is identified originally by number (4)
35. Spruce and chicle products getting cold in more than one truck (4)
36. Not until he touches Cindy's waist (4)
37. Wherever, ultimately, that thing forms a fissure (4)
38. At a great distance from a fine relic of Indiana? (4)
39. Papa, you know what follows "Phnom" on Wikipedia's "List of national capitals" page (4)