

Strangers on a Grid by Ucaoimhu

Happy 2•20th, Dan! Now we can at last tell the dramatic tale of how 20 years ago, two mysteries crossed paths. Specifically:

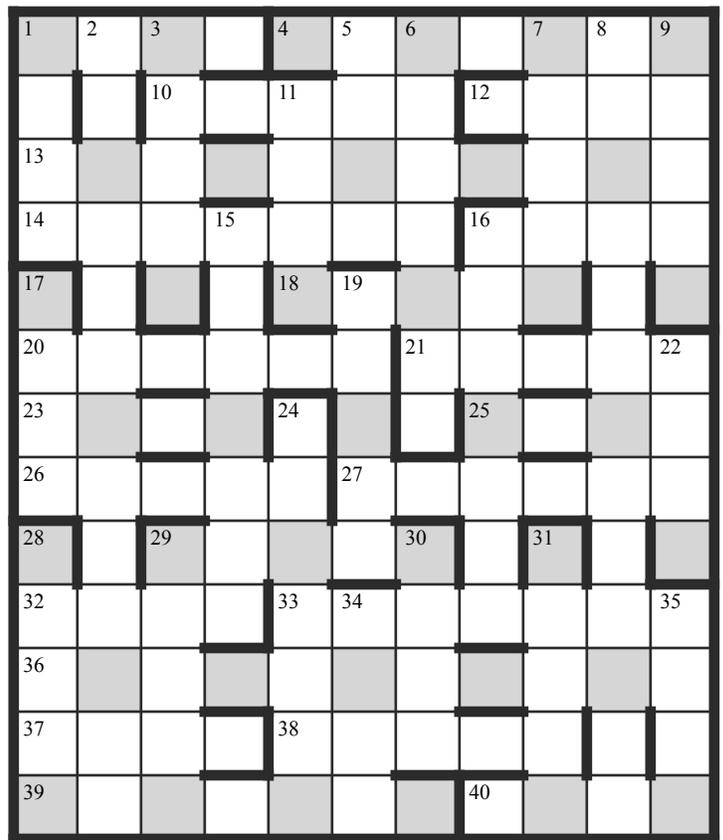
(1) In each of thirteen clues, one letter is incorrect, and must be corrected before solving. The correct letters, and (separately) the incorrect letters, both in clue order, will reveal what crimes were committed in 2002 and 2000 respectively.

(2) For each of seven clues, two letters of the answer must swap places before entry (altered entries include a hyphenated word); if these are the p th and q th letters of the original answer (where $p < q$), note the p th and q th letters of the *clue*. All the p th letters and (separately) all the q th letters, both in clue order, will name the two individuals who time-traveled from 2002 to 2000 and 2000 to 2002 respectively to commit the crimes from (1).

(3) There are two distinct bigrams (letter pairs), which each will occur in three shaded grid squares. For a given bigram, for each clue whose answer contains one of its squares (as the m th square from the start and the n th square from the end of the entry), note the m th letter from the start and n th letter from the end of the *clue*; the m th letters, and separately the n th letters, both in clue order, will tell what equipment swap one of the time-travelers from (2) had to make in order to commit this crime in their new setting. (Nine clues are involved here.)

(4) There were also masterminds behind both these crimes. In each of eight clues, the wordplay yields a letter sequence with one incorrect letter. The correct letters and (separately) the incorrect letters, both in clue order, will say what enormous resources the masterminds from 2002 and 2000 (respectively) had — resources that other individuals from 2000 and 2002 (respectively), of the same sort as those from (2), also had.

(5) For each shaded square that contains the abbreviation for a compass direction, connect the center of that square to the center of the shaded square that is a rook- or knight-move away in that direction, in a straight shot. This will spell out the first syllable and last syllable of the settings for the crimes of 2002 and 2000,



respectively. Also, the answers to the six remaining clues must each have a sequence of sounds (pronounceable as a syllable) deleted before entry; these will (in some order you must deduce) form the remaining six syllables of those settings. (Altered entries include a demonym, a playwright, and a farm sound.)

(6) Finally, redo (2), adding “from the end” after each instance of “th letters,” to get two relevant antonyms. Alter the topmost line drawn in (5) so it is described by one of these, and move it in the directions given by the other, to name the individual who was caught in the middle of this whole weird case.

ACROSS

1. Pinnace bites nose of Gorgeous George in *For The Boys*
4. Criminal ally sees something one readily buys (2 wds.)
10. Carolina folks' portal that's disgusting, like some columns
12. Endlessly, endlessly balmy island!
13. Ape-man rues beards not showing ruddiness in one's face
14. Merino bites cost-free rock named for the Emerald Isle [NI3]
16. “Gandhi in *Gandhi* (or any of five “individuals” mentioned in the intro) is to achieve a revolution,” I announce
18. At best, giving you a tie that's currently sod (*hyph.*)
20. E.g., Guinan and Worf are to film around the east of Capri
21. In Quebec and Wyoming, touching long hydrocarbon group
23. Meadows surrounded by each thing that provides happiness
25. Video game company ignores the first weight adjustment
26. Very wet, and thus very quiet in general
27. Fallow land owner's head repeatedly obstructs gun
29. Hubbub's upsetting Pop
32. Ink nude dogs on a duty-shirking biblical bridegroom
33. Teaching method based on relating sounds to the alphabet soup outside of Natchez & Columbus
36. Grouched about flop comedian reworked (2 wds.)
37. Sour letters from lawman protest “That's childish” (2 wds.)
38. E'en if Merkel's hoarser than some hoarse leaders (*var.*)
39. Gas in two orbs topless men tossed, mano a mano (*hyph.*)
40. Missing line sounded “Oi”-like, and was short

DOWN

1. Transition (e.g.) that Sue will take on
2. Nonobscure and barely wonky trio of llamas René Goscinny's beginning to mount (2 wds.)
3. Female commercial-makers crop up in Aden
5. Scottish word for “direct AI towards”
6. Ruby claims workers used threaded fasteners
7. *Ocean's 1.* should omit the final period
8. Tilting detector using light, bubbly lagers and Spanish port fit inside a gun (2 wds.)
9. With organized paths boy takes north and west of Encino
11. Epilation, ultimately with (heavens!) depilatory gunk
15. Non-Oxonian academic having good shape
16. Illuminated X inland with large symbolic arch? (2 wds.)
17. A camera's horizontal rotations give way to cartwheel
19. Midwestern people love having little beyond their kea
22. Imitate veterinarian holding the French minipigeon [NI3]
24. Announcement you make when your first scheme goes awry close to shelters gutless wimp left (2 wds.)
28. Trades that are so-so, great, average, and awesome, old bean
29. French river Tilly mentioned
30. Note (gevalt!) about work (2 wds.)
31. One peony received by Jiminy Cricket's former wife
34. Punish Olaf somewhat for greeting spoken *a usted?*
35. Banged Bay Area folks with soft pads, oddly (*abbr.*)