

Bored Games

A COUPLE OF FRIENDS WHO ARE REALLY INTO CRYPTIC PUZZLES decided to play a game of Scrabble. One was an actuary, the other a dermatologist. In keeping with the spirit of puzzledom, two-letter words were not allowed. I told them that if the final layout had no more than two unchecked letters in a row, I would use it as the basis for this month's puzzle. I also asked that all one hundred tiles be used. In a regular Scrabble game, the game ends when there are no more tiles to draw and one player's rack is emptied. In this game, the other player got a last chance. I also asked that each player play in only one direction. The actuary started play and chose Across; the dermatologist worked Down.

The clues are presented in order. In addition to the number of letters in the main word formed, I also show the point total for each play. Premium squares (double and triple letter and word squares) and the 50-point bonus for using all seven tiles in one play apply as in Scrabble. In three cases, two words were formed, through a player extending an existing word. Each point total pertains to the entire play. Only the main word formed by a player is clued. Both blanks were drawn by the dermatologist, who used one in the fourth position of the first play and the other in the last position of the 10th play.

The puzzle is solvable as is. The point count helps determine a word's location. For example, the first Across play is worth 120 points. If you subtract the 50 bonus points for using seven letters, then cut the total in half for the double premium square that must be used in a first play, you will realize that the point value of the tiles (including one doubled tile)

1A	1B	1C	1D	1E	1F	1G	1H	1I	1J	1K	1L	1M	1N	1O
TRIPLE WORD SCORE			DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE WORD SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE			TRIPLE WORD SCORE
2A	2B	2C	2D	2E	2F	2G	2H	2I	2J	2K	2L	2M	2N	2O
	DOUBLE WORD SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE WORD SCORE	
3A	3B	3C	3D	3E	3F	3G	3H	3I	3J	3K	3L	3M	3N	3O
		DOUBLE WORD SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE		DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE WORD SCORE		
4A	4B	4C	4D	4E	4F	4G	4H	4I	4J	4K	4L	4M	4N	4O
DOUBLE LETTER SCORE			DOUBLE WORD SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE WORD SCORE			DOUBLE LETTER SCORE
5A	5B	5C	5D	5E	5F	5G	5H	5I	5J	5K	5L	5M	5N	5O
				DOUBLE WORD SCORE						DOUBLE WORD SCORE				
6A	6B	6C	6D	6E	6F	6G	6H	6I	6J	6K	6L	6M	6N	6O
	TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE	
7A	7B	7C	7D	7E	7F	7G	7H	7I	7J	7K	7L	7M	7N	7O
		DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE		DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE		
8A	8B	8C	8D	8E	8F	8G	8H	8I	8J	8K	8L	8M	8N	8O
TRIPLE WORD SCORE			DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				★				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE			TRIPLE WORD SCORE
9A	9B	9C	9D	9E	9F	9G	9H	9I	9J	9K	9L	9M	9N	9O
		DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE		DOUBLE LETTER SCORE			DOUBLE LETTER SCORE			
10A	10B	10C	10D	10E	10F	10G	10H	10I	10J	10K	10L	10M	10N	10O
	TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE	
11A	11B	11C	11D	11E	11F	11G	11H	11I	11J	11K	11L	11M	11N	11O
				DOUBLE WORD SCORE						DOUBLE WORD SCORE				
12A	12B	12C	12D	12E	12F	12G	12H	12I	12J	12K	12L	12M	12N	12O
DOUBLE LETTER SCORE			DOUBLE WORD SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE WORD SCORE			DOUBLE LETTER SCORE
13A	13B	13C	13D	13E	13F	13G	13H	13I	13J	13K	13L	13M	13N	13O
		DOUBLE WORD SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE		DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE WORD SCORE		
14A	14B	14C	14D	14E	14F	14G	14H	14I	14J	14K	14L	14M	14N	14O
	DOUBLE WORD SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE LETTER SCORE				DOUBLE WORD SCORE	
15A	15B	15C	15D	15E	15F	15G	15H	15I	15J	15K	15L	15M	15N	15O
TRIPLE WORD SCORE			DOUBLE LETTER SCORE				TRIPLE WORD SCORE				DOUBLE LETTER SCORE			TRIPLE WORD SCORE

HINTS

Hint #1. Alternative clue for 1-Across: With no deliberation, quietly having Elliott's friend replaced by Louis (7, 120)

Hint #2. A Scrabble board has the rows assigned numbers and the columns letters, the upper left square is 1A and the lower right square is 15O. The first letter of the actuary's (Across) moves are: 8D, 1H, 6F, 4K, 11J, 3C, 9M, 15M, 12D, 10D, 11B, 13I

The first letter of the dermatologist's (Down) moves are: 1H, 6F, 1L, 4O, 8D, 9M, 1E, 2C, 1J, 6F, 10G

Letter	Count	Points
A	9	1
B	2	3
C	2	3
D	4	2
E	12	1
F	2	4
G	3	2
H	2	4
I	9	1

Letter	Count	Points
J	1	8
K	1	5
L	4	1
M	2	3
N	6	1
O	8	1
P	2	3
Q	1	10
R	6	1

Letter	Count	Points
S	4	1
T	6	1
U	4	1
V	2	4
W	2	4
X	1	8
Y	2	4
Z	1	10
Blank	2	0



equals 35. The highest-scoring seven-letter word in the Scrabble dictionary is MUZJIKS, a variant spelling of MUZHIKS, which are Russian peasants, and it's worth 29 points. Come on, I would never use a word like that in a cryptic puzzle!

Actuaries especially will see the implications. There are only two possibilities for the first play: a 27-point word with an X or a J on the double-letter square or a 25-point word with a Q or a Z doubled. There are fourteen such words, but only four of them are common enough for me to use in a puzzle.

Nonetheless, figuring out the layout won't be easy. Since one person's challenge is another person's tedium, I've provided two levels of hints. The first hint involves the first Across play. The regular clue, my test solvers tell me, is tricky and requires knowledge not everyone possesses. So I have provided an alternative to the first clue. The second level of hints reveal the starting square for each player's move. Use them if you must.

This being an actual Scrabble game, there are no proper nouns. Everything is playable in Scrabble.

The final score was quite close, 455 (dermatologist) to 443 (actuary). These were very good players!

Thanks to Bob Fink, Eric Klis, and Jerry Miccolis for test-solving and editorial suggestions.

Across clues

1. Shakespeare's mistress may be in a bustle (7, 120)
2. What you don't want to do with the wheel: stop air duct (8,95)
3. To enter data after being in favor of early model (9, 74)
4. All-out attack on one of Santa's reindeer cut short (5, 26)
5. Tonnage at the limits of freeway weight (7, 28)
6. Irritable manner rolling over in grave (7, 28)
7. Coffee for the average guy (3, 10)
8. Hoagy is one who can play sometimes (3, 30)
9. Assistance for the acned, despite the odds (4, 8)
10. Intern offering crazy idea (4, 9)

11. Sloths within some *paises!* (3, 3)
12. When there's hardly anything left to play, pieces of Elgar never disappoint: tossing in Enigma Variations (7, 12)

Final score: 443

Down clues

13. Unfortunate draw involving innovative rook may be the reason for the delay (8, 92)
14. In the novel, Roxy, "moon" is a figure of speech (8, 74)
15. Volatile motley yields a great return (6, 24)
16. Random size test is most stimulating (8, 118)
17. Crush pumpkin after removing the top (5, 34)
18. Big cat found in Egypt and Syria once, after a frolic (6, 44)
19. A little lizard who came somewhere in between Tip and Nancy (4, 14)
20. Passage from Canada to LA upgraded (5, 14)
21. Fanatical king is beheaded (4, 8)
22. Uncertainties surrounding import tariffs (3, 24)
23. IPO going awry, it may have resulted from a pounding in the market (3, 5)
24. Aim to offend no officer (3, 4)

Final score: 455

Continued on page 48 →

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Solution to Previous Issue's Puzzle—How Can You Myth?

Across clues

- SEWING—Homophone of SOWING (“broadcasting”)
- SOMETIME—Pun on SOME THYME (“Any herb”)
- APT—Abbreviation of APARTMENT (“flat, Curt”)
- ARENAS—Anagram of “as near”
- ALCATRAZ—AL (“Alabama”) + CA (“California”) + TR (“part of central”) + AZ (“Arizona”)
- AIDS—First letters of “anyone in dire straits”
- USE—Anagram of “Sue”
- OUTRAGE—Anagram of “at GE: our”
- Middle letters of “Drunk”
- ESCAPES—Anagram of “as pesce”
- KEANU—Anagram of “a nuke”
- RESET—RES (“things in Latin”) + ET (“and in French”)
- RELEASE—Double definition
- BYE—Homophone of BY (“Via”)
- STUPOR—Anagram of “Sprout”
- COW—COW(ARD) from “a little chicken”
- TSAR—Anagram of “Art’s”
- GETS INTO—Anagram of “testing” + O (“only at first”)
- RABBIT—Reverse BAR (“tavern”) + BIT (“trifle”)
- ROE—Homophone of ROW (“pull”)
- STUDIOUS—STUDS (“Desirable men”) around IOU (“an obligation”)
- DUDES—DUD (“Turkey”) + ES (“Spain”)

Down clues

- EXAMINER—Reverse AXE (“Guitar”) + MINER (“One Who Digs”)
- PIKE—Double definition
- GAS PUMP—GASP (“OMG”) + UMP (“one you want to kill”)
- STRAYERS—Anagram of “Yes, Starr”
- OMICRON—OMInous CRONyism
- TACT—Hidden in “syntactics”
- MYALGIAS—Anagram of “Amyl gas I”

		P			R		O		C					
S	¹ E	W	² I	N	³ G		⁴ S	⁵ O	M	⁶ E	T	⁷ I	M	E
	X		K		⁸ A	P	T		I		A		Y	
N	⁹ A	R	E	A	S		¹⁰ A	L	C	A	T	R	A	Z
	M				P		Y		R				L	
A	¹¹ I	¹² D	S		¹³ U	S	E		¹⁴ O	¹⁵ U	T	A	G	E
	N		E		M		¹⁶ R	U	N		A		I	
	¹⁷ E	¹⁸ S	¹⁹ C	A	P	E	S			²⁰ K	²¹ E	A	²² N	U
E	²³ R	E	S	T				²⁴ R	²⁵ E	L	E	A	S	E
		N		O		²⁶ B	Y	E		O		S		A
	²⁷ S	T	U	P	O	R		²⁸ C	O	W		²⁹ T	A	R
		I			A		T		E					M
	³⁰ G	E	T	³¹ S	I	N	T	O		³² R	A	³³ B	B	I
		N		A	D		³⁴ R	O	E		I		S	
	³⁵ S	T	U	D	I	O	U	S		³⁶ D	U	D	E	S
		M			N		A			E				

- SECS—Homophone of SEX (“Madonna’s book”)
- TAKE—Anagram of “teak”
- SENTIMENT—Anagram of “ten times n”
- ATOP—AT (“with”) + OP (“original poster”)
- EAST—(F)EAST (“Banquet starting late”)
- NEAR MISS—Pun on “Closer to Biloxi, in brief”
- REACTORS—Anagram of “creators”
- LOWERED—(F)LOWERED (“blossomed after a fashion”)
- BRANDON—BRAND (“Spot”) + ON (with reference to “Let’s go, Brandon” a current political slur)
- SAD—SAD(ISM)—“cruelty has no end”
- BIDE—BIDE(N)—“the president isn’t finished”

With the proper letters removed from the diagram, PROCRUSTEAN MEANS can be formed, describing what one had to resort to in order to complete the grid. ▲

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