

September of the Puffins

Alex Walker, Sara Walker, Zach Barnett, Chris Yu

This puzzle consists of two columns of 10 nonsensical crossword clues, with enumerations. For each clue, the solver can find a phrase with similar meaning that fits the enumerations. While the resulting phrase is still nonsense, it can be turned into a real, common phrase by then taking antonyms on a term-by-term basis. The original data and their transformations are given below.

The clues in the right-hand column were given in alphabetical order. This suggests that the left-hand order is the extract order. To actually extract, notice that each antonymed phrase from the left shares a unique subpart with a phrase on the right. The first letters of these ten commonalities spell THERE OFF IN. We then apply the mechanic one more time to obtain HERE ON OUT, the answer to this puzzle.

Left-Hand Side Clues:	Answer Fitting Enumeration:	Antonym-ed:	Common Word:
Petyr Baelish (12)	LITTLEFINGER	BIG TOE	TOE
Cut-offs from the fridge (4 6)	COLD SHORTS	HOT PANTS	HOT
Castrate the live-action pirate from Spongebob Squarepants (3 6)	FIX PATCHY	BREAK EVEN	EVEN
Use CTRL+V incorrectly (5 5)	PASTE WRONG	COPYRIGHT	RIGHT
Group effort to imbibe a battenberg (4-8 13)	CAKE-DRINKING COLLABORATION	PIE-EATING CONTEST	EATING
Actress Glenn started responses (5 5 7)	CLOSE BEGAN ANSWERS	OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS	OPEN
Straighten out a Slinky (6 6)	UNCOIL SPRING	WINDFALL	FALL
In a chair, with no time for anything else (4 7)	BUSY SITTING	FREESTANDING	FREE
Recent focal points of skin aging (3 7 7)	NEW WRINKLE CENTERS	OLD IRONSIDES	IRON
Ancient body of water that needs to ask for directions (3 4 3)	OLD LOST SEA	NEWFOUNDLAND	NEW

Right-Hand Side Clues:	Answer Fitting Enumeration:	Antonym-ed:	Common Word:
A particular talent in moving ↘ (4 4 5)	DOWN LEFT FORTE	UPRIGHT PIANO	RIGHT
Abducted while at the office (8 4 4)	CAPTURED FROM WORK	FREE-TO-PLAY	FREE

Bland ice cream flavor, made even less spicy (4 7)	MILD VANILLA	HOT CHOCOLATE	HOT
Hoover that won't discuss its private life (9 6)	SECRETIVE VACUUM	OPEN AIR	OPEN
Lady regurgitating members of Riff's gang (5 6 4)	WOMAN PUKING JETS	MAN-EATING SHARKS	EATING
Like a tripod, snail, or yardstick (3-6)	ODD-FOOTED	EVEN-HANDED	EVEN
Local star in a secondhand store (4 3)	USED SUN	NEW MOON	NEW
Use the buddy system in the Alps (5 8)	CLIMB TOGETHER	FALL APART	FALL
Well-mannered fellow living near Europa-Park (4 9)	RUST GENTLEMAN	IRON LADY	IRON
What a bent stiletto needs (4 13)	HEEL STRAIGHTENING	TOE-CURLING	TOE

Authors' Notes

An early iteration of this puzzle produced the phrase THERE OFF IN as a cluephrase on the way to HERE ON OUT, but this version was ultimately discarded. Still, we liked the idea of turning nonsense phrases into common phrases via antonyms, so we expanded the original extraction mechanic into the main focus of the puzzle. We started by generating a large list of words with non-synonymous antonyms. This was done to ensure that solvers couldn't short-circuit the puzzle by noticing commonalities in the nonsense phrases. We then generated a list of words and phrases that used these highly-antonymable words which were also made up entirely of words with well-defined, clueable antonyms. All of these constraints led to us having a dataset that was just barely large enough to work and some truly ridiculous clues.

Some favorite phrases that could not be included are:

CAPTURED SUB (freedom)

DIVIDES OLD GREEK (Times New Roman)

DON'T BOLTS (donuts)

FOOT-YOU-UPS (hand-me-downs)

MISALIGNED ORANGE (true blue)

MOM ONGOING (popover)

SAD-STOP-POINTY (merry-go-round)

SANE HEAVEN (nutshell)

SECRETIVE BUTT HOTDOG (open-face sandwich)

UNDERSOMES (overalls)

USED ATHLETIC SHORTS (New Jersey)

VEGETABLE PARALLEL: USED ZENITHS (Animal Crossing: New Horizons)

YOU AREN'T RUSTWOMAN (I am Ironman)