

Off the Beaten Path - Solution

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This puzzle is a cryptic crossword. It contains across and down entries, which enter into the grid as one expects. It also contains eight clues labeled "Creatures". Ignoring those for the moment, we fill out the acrosses and downs to obtain the following grid:

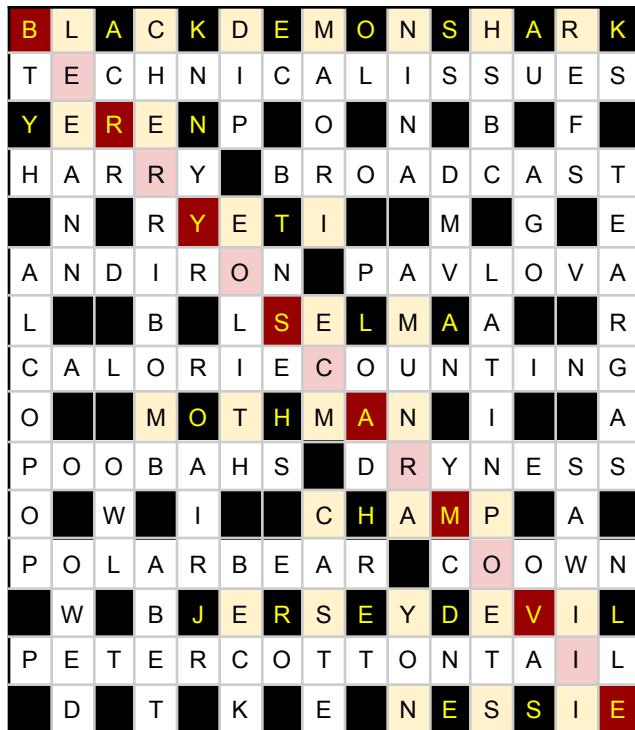


Across Clues:	Wordplay:
8. Tissues wrapped around squished niche lac bugs (9 6)	T(<NICHELAC>)ISSUES
9. Torment potter (5)	double def.
10. Bad, bad Castro went on air (9)	<BADCASTRO>
15. Fire, dog, and press (7)	AND+IRON
16. One who induces drooling with a dessert (7)	PAVLOV+A
20. Full House's Loughlin wins first Emmy, gets into creative accounting to lose weight (7 8)	LORI+E in <ACCOUNTING>
21. Pompous bureaucrats give degree to silly old bears (7)	P00(BA)HS
24. Desiccation of Scottish lake! (7)	DRY+NESS &lit.

27. Norm consumes wild boreal predator (5 4)	P(<BOREAL>)AR
31. Jointly go into business with new member of C-suite as leader (2-3)	COO+W+N
33. Bouncer throws out petite contralto (5 10)	<PETITECONTRALTO>
Down Clues:	Wordplay:
1. Two girls, famous for the song "I Hope You Dance" (6)	LEE+ANN
2. Crazy rich bomber has best friend: Angel Dust (6 4)	<RICHBOMBER>
3. Chip sauce is oddly drippy (3)	DrIpPy
4. Communist state for New Zealanders (5)	MAO+RI
5. Woman flipping over crustless panini (4)	pANINi rev.
6. UK bank has Bic gutted (4)	HaS+BiC
7. Judges unwind second half of transfer (4)	transFER rev.
11. D.C.-area license issuer (3)	double def.
12. Start again, don't stay in the past (3)	A+GO
13. Engineer rages at irritating aerosol (4 3)	<RAGESAT>
14. Oil the badly damaged flint (6)	<OILTHe>
15. Pop O'Clay knocked back uncapped hard seltzer (7)	POPOCLAy rev.
17. God among Barnum acrobats flipped (4-2)	bARNUM Acrobats rev.
18. Catullus and Ovid squander potential with first stanza (5 5)	<POTENTIAL+S>
19. German record label pioneered experimental chamber music (3)	Experimental Chamber Music
22. Beheaded fowl! (3)	fOWL &lit.
23. Affect wingless fairy (3)	fAIRy
25. I... I... I... was taken aback by slasher (3 3)	IIIWAS rev.
26. Actors on the radio station (5)	CAST hom.
28. Went into debt for ring and married (4)	O+WED
29. Encourage a wager (4)	A+BET
30. Blank and call back one excluded, getting irrational (4)	Ba(E)CK
32. Over there, in Pyongyang (3)	pYONGyang

We next consider the Creatures. These are ordinary clues, though part of the clue has been blurred to make it hard to read. The blurred texts all read some variant of "Cryptid", and we can solve the wordplay halves to find a variety of cryptids. These can be entered as acrosses in the

grid, alternatively between black and white cells. Once all are placed, note that every cell on the main diagonal has a letter in it. Reading the diagonal spells BERRY OSCAR MOVIE, a clue for the film MONSTER'S BALL.



Creatures:	Wordplay:
Inky devils listen [to a cryptid] (5 5 5)	BLACK+DEMONS+HARK
[Cryptid is an] unionized winner (5)	CHAMPION-ION
[Cryptid] athletic wear was making a comeback (6 5)	JERSEY+ (LIVED rev.)
Rebel alliance politician and naval leader [is a cryptid] (7)	MOTHMA+N
[A cryptid and] I were in Essen, all turned around (6)	E(I)SSEN rev.
String from tinsel-making [cryptid] (5)	tinSELMAking
Veiled soothsayer envisioned [a cryptid] (5)	soothsaYERENvisioned
Even so, I [am a cryptid] (4)	YET+I

Authors' Notes

The answer to this puzzle made us think of cryptids, and we love cryptic crosswords, so creating a cryptid cryptic seemed like an obvious choice. After several YOLO-based setting strategies, we read through the Cryptidz Fandom wiki and created a scored list of cryptids based on

notoriety and uniqueness. We also generated several cluephrases that would work across a 15-letter diagonal and used a crossword grid program to generate potential fills.

We considered attempting to come up with literal definitions for the cryptids but decided it would be more thematic to use blurry images of the word "cryptid" instead.

Writing clues was a joint effort. One personal favorite is 1D, which references the iconic cryptic clue by Roger Squires, "Two girls, one on each knee (7)".