

The Atlantic PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

"SHORT AND SWEET"

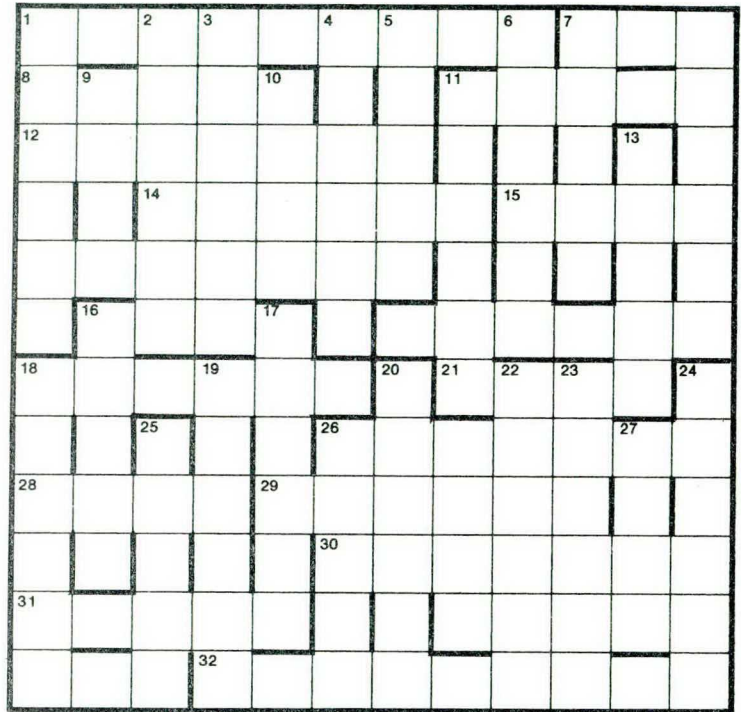
Words entered in the diagram (called "lights") begin and end at the heavy bars. The unclued lights are related. Other answers include two proper nouns, a variant spelling at 24D, and a possibly unfamiliar expression at 1A. Remember that punctuation in the clues may be used deceptively.

ACROSS

1. Europeans plot practical joke (6,3)
7. Acceptable behavior at parties? (3)
8. Faced with wrinkles (5)
11. Toast and cocoa (5)
12. About . . . about 101 years old (7)
14. Follow ocean about, returning stones (6)
15. Used to be wolf's mate (4)
16. Tax pool of sorts (4)
21. Cocks fight back (4)
26. A lot of hot pepper will lead to the asylum (7)
28. Propellers in uproar, spinning (4)
29. A French interior, with mirrored South American baths (6)
30. Overseer for regressive military program (7)
31. Nobody's dates (5)
32. Unproductive charms will make no rain fall (3,6)

DOWN

1. Bit of flouncing gets baby bent out of shape (6)
2. Put in casket, arrange seance (6)



3. Disquieted pig amidst flapping hens making beastly noises (6)
4. Attila gets set back in quest (4,2)
5. Rocking Beatle to Miss—a sort of nut (5)
6. Raise arm to point in sleep (6)
9. Civilization takes little part in reincarnation (4)
10. Parade a fault—obviously senseless (4)
11. Rock-bottom, head to toe (6)
13. Makes snare drums (5)
16. Beat the best (5)
17. Jerks make crude pass at liberated woman (6)
18. Gershwin's first song subject (6)
19. Maiden of mystery invited in disguise (6)
20. There's nothing in false drugs, but people go crazy when out of them (6)
22. Say! A freckly Indian! (6)
23. Burning to drink up what's in a flower (6)
24. Merest changes in rhythms (6)
25. It pays to sound sincere! (5)
27. Lump in bedclothes (4)

For detailed instructions, see the following pages

CLUE-SOLVING FOR BEGINNERS

Color of a ghost (5 letters)

Here is a crossword puzzle clue which, to the average American solver, should present no challenge. But in the Atlantic Puzzler, making its debut in this issue, the obvious and automatic answer (presumably *white* comes hurrying to your mind with a flap of linen) is not the correct answer; indeed, it cannot be the correct one, as you will see.

The Atlantic Puzzler is modeled after English crosswords, which differ from American puzzles in one important way: their clues appeal to the solver's imagination with some form of wordplay. Each clue presents an acceptable definition of the answer, but the definition is accompanied by a set of directions which either redefines that answer or provides some hints as to how it can be constructed. In other words, every clue has two parts: a more or less standard definition, and an auxiliary indication which, while contributing to the solution, puts on a little verbal magic show. That each answer is thus doubly defined may seem an advantage to the solver; but the auxiliary indication, with its twirl-of-the-cape, is apt to distract and mislead. The challenge and the fun of the puzzle is to see through the cluemaker's deceptions, to tease out the definition (which may be hiding anywhere in the clue) by rethinking—and often repunctuating—the clue's phrases. All appearances in a clue should be regarded as suspect; but remember that every clue has to yield a fair reinterpretation which directs you to the answer.

The following paragraphs will explain every type of device the solver can expect to encounter. Very simple examples will be used throughout, but none of the cluemaker's secrets will be withheld. The game may be bewildering at first, but the determined solver will quickly learn to recognize in each clue the hints for its solution.

1. DOUBLE DEFINITIONS

The simplest type of auxiliary hint in a clue is a redefinition. "Color of a ghost (5)" is of this type. *White*, while it may satisfy the phrase as a whole, fails to account for the two separate parts which the clue must offer. Is there then some word which will satisfy both the term *color* and the term *ghost*? There is indeed, and the quick-witted reader may have thought of it already: *shade*.

Here is another example:

Trim a tree (6)

Resisting the assumption that you want some 6-

letter word meaning "to trim a tree," you search instead for a word meaning both *trim* and *tree*. Practiced punsters don't have to test their brains very long before *spruce* comes sprouting up neatly.

Although double definitions are not complex, they can be deceptive if their two indications blend smoothly. At first glance, "Places for tennis games (4)" seems to require a 4-letter word meaning *courts*. But a good solver will realize that *places*, masquerading as a noun in the clue, actually wants *sets* as its synonym.

2. HOMOPHONES

When a word or phrase puns orally (*bear* and *bare*), the clue will signal the homophone with some such description as "sounds like," "in the ear," or "it is said." Here's an example:

Hear story to the end (4)

The clue tells the solver that a word meaning *story* will have the same sound as the answer, a word meaning *end*. The solution is *tail*. Another example:

It's said flies have blemishes (5)

Again, some deception has been laid on with *flies*, which parades as a noun in the clue. But *flies* is also an acceptable synonym for *soars*, and this word, when pronounced, has the same sound as the clue's desired answer: *sores*.

Here's another:

Choose a bass, you say, for an instrument? (7)

The clue's message is this: The answer, a 7-letter word meaning *instrument*, is homophonically related to some word or words meaning "choose a bass." The solution is *piccolo*, with its homophone *pick a low*. (The quirkiness of this association is hinted at by the question mark at the end of the clue; although punctuation in clues is likely to be sly, a question mark or exclamation point is often used in a spirit of fairness to warn the solver of a pun.)

3. CAMOUFLAGED CLUES

Occasionally the cluemaker will leave the desired answer embedded in the clue itself. The word *reach*, for example, can be fitted into a single longer word (*preacher*) or can be broken up inside a phrase without disturbing the order of the letters (*spare a child*). Whenever the answer to a clue is thus visible to the solver but disguised, tucked in a thicket of

letters, the cluemaker will give an appropriate signal, commonly, “in.” As,

Employed in house drains (4)
with the answer being *used*. See it?

Here are three more examples, with varying signals:

Peaks are visible to psychologists (4)

Some cats have to cut off whiskers (5)

Clue with interest, partially (4)

Once you have spotted the answers nestled in their hideouts, they seem obvious. But these camouflaged, or “run-along” clues, if not recognized, can be wonderfully misleading. What on earth do psychologists have to do with that first clue? And what is this nonsense about cats’ whiskers? The uninitiated are blinded, but the experienced solver ignores preposterous surface sense and looks for the directions: “visible [in],” “some [of],” “partially.” The answers are *tops*, *shave*, and *hint*.

Once in a while, an answer will be camouflaged in reverse, like this:

Being led back in single file (4)

Can you read the directions? Simply reinterpret the clue: a word for *being* is “led back” inside “single file.” There it is, plain as *life!*

Finally, be prepared for “peripheral” clues, like this one:

Jesters clear towns on the outskirts (6)

In other words, the outer edges of the phrase “clear towns” will make a word meaning *jesters*. The solution: *cl(ear t)owns*.

4. REVERSALS

Some words, when spelled backward, produce other words; the solver should watch for clues based on these curiosities. Warning signals for reversals include phrases such as “when returning,” “backing,” “back,” “from the rear,” or, if the clue is vertical, “ascending,” “rising,” or even “upset.” Here’s a sample:

Strike back for friends (4)

The clue is not asking for a word meaning *retaliate*, of course; it is asking for a word meaning *strike*, which, when spelled backward, gives the answer—a word meaning *friends*. The answer is *pals*.

Here’s one more:

Underwater transport rising to become land vehicle (3) (down clue)

Because the answer is to be entered in the diagram vertically, the solver should suspect the word “rising” of signaling an inversion. The answer is *bus* (inverted *sub*).

5. COMPOUND WORDS

When words break into convenient parts, the clue may define each part separately. Since the word *mangoes*, for example, breaks neatly into *man* and *goes*, a fair clue might read

Fellow leaves to get produce (7)

Here’s another example:

A bird has to fight and fight (7)

This is not a comment on our feathered friends’ struggle for survival; the clue is asking for a word meaning *bird* which has, as its components, two words meaning *fight*. Is there really such a word? Certainly there is: *sparrow*.

6. CONTAINERS

When convenient word parts occur not side by side but one within the other, look for such signals as “held in,” “in,” “swallowed by,” “imprisoned in,” or “surrounding,” “around,” and “about.” Consider, for example:

Tuck me in bed with a reindeer (5)

The “tuck in” of the clue seems to suggest a camouflaged answer, but a quick check of the phrase yields nothing sensible. Trying a fresh approach, interpret the directions this way: put *me* inside a word for *bed* to get a word meaning *reindeer*. A moment’s thought, and *Comet* arrives. Here’s another:

Yellow pig has eaten everything (6)

Rethink: for a word meaning *yellow*, let a word meaning *pig* “eat” (surround, contain) a word meaning *everything*. The solution: *s(all)ow*.

7. ANAGRAMS

Anagrams are words sharing the same letters in different arrangements (*comics* and *cosmic*; *unites* and *unties*). When the auxiliary indication in a clue involves an anagram, the cluemaker will obligingly signal the scrambling of letters. There is truly no limit to the number of words that may indicate an anagram; common among them are “changing,” “new,” “reforming,” “wild,” “bad,” “confused,” “drunk,” “out” (for “out of order”), and even “possibly,” “could be,” and “perhaps” (indicating the word’s potential for transformation).

Here’s an example:

Noises in restless slumber (7)

The clue says that the letters of the word *slumber*, when “restless,” will spell out a word for *noises*. The answer: *rumbles*. Here’s another:

Wild horses on the beaches (6)

With the answer, *shores*.

Sometimes the anagram signal can double as the definition, as in

Change later (5)

The word *change* serves as a direction, telling you to shuffle the letters of the word *later*. But the answer, *alter*, is also defined by *change*. This is an exception to the rule that clues come in two distinct parts, so be wary! (Other kinds of clues may also combine the definition with the instructions. Making a clue for the word *spool*, for instance, we might use a reversal, like this: "Loops turn around on one! (5)")

8. HEADS, TAILS, HEARTS, BITS AND PIECES

There are times when the clue will ask you to derive small clusters of letters—or even a single letter—in the process of constructing the answer. You will learn that "last of alphabet," for example, might be simply the letter *t*. Similarly, "the first of January" might indicate a *j*. "Boy at heart" could be the letter *o*, since *o* is at the very center of the word. This is a flexible device, and one which allows the cluemaker a number of elegant strokes: the letters *mo*, for example, might be signaled by the phrase "half-moon," and *jo* can come from "endless joy."

When one word transforms into another with just a small addition or subtraction (as *lake* into *slake* or *shear* into *hear*), the clue will dutifully signal the change. Here's a fair sample:

Headless guard shows the way in (5)

The directions say that a word for *guard*, minus the initial letter or letters, gives you a word for "the way in." Decapitate *sentry*, and there you are!

COMPLEX CLUES

You have now been granted a look at the cluemaker's bag of tricks, one device at a time. Your problem will be to decide which of these ruses is being employed in any one clue. Certain signals should already call out to you: if you see "in the ear," or "on the tongue," in a clue, you should be ready to pounce on a homophone; the sight of a phrase like "is self-evident in" advertises a camouflage. But a crucial warning: Some clues may involve more than one operation; for example, you may have to anagram one part of the answer while finding a synonym for the other part. Here is a complex clue:

There may be variations in the shape of the diagram of the puzzle from month to month, but the nature of the clues will not change. Readers are encouraged to keep these instructions for future use. The answer to this month's puzzle will appear in the October Atlantic.

Redhead gets false praise, and revives (7)

By this time you know better than to worry about the surface sense, and you don't go casting around for a 7-letter word that means, say, "feels better when flattered." Instead, you try to decide which word is providing the definition and which words are giving the instructions. The word *false* should alert you to the presence of an anagram, even though *praise* supplies only six of the seven required letters. The seventh can only come from *redhead*, a deceptive but fair indication for the letter *r*. A bit of scrambling, and you have *repairs*, an acceptable synonym for *revives*.

ABBREVIATIONS

When an unusual abbreviation is used in a clue, it will be signaled by some such phrase as "in short," "briefly," "cut down," or just "little." In this way, the letters *lo* might be supplied in a clue by "little Lois." On the other hand, standard abbreviations will go unmarked; you can expect "New York" to be *ny* and "saint" or "street" to be *st*. In addition, puzzeldom has its own conventional shorthand: "left" is often *l* and "right" is *r*; "time" can be *t*; the word "point" in a clue sometimes signals one of the four points of the compass, *n*, *s*, *e*, and *w*; the word "one" frequently stands for *i* (the Roman numeral I), "five" can mean *v*, "ten" can mean *x*, and so on; the word "note" may designate any of the letters *a* through *g* (the musical scale) or else *do*, *re*, *mi*, etc.; "measure" may refer to printers' measures (*em* and *en*); the letter *o* in a clue can be signaled not only by the word "nothing" but by the word "love" (as in a tennis score); "school" is often *u* (for university); "ship" or "steamship" can be *ss*; "loud" signals *f* and "quiet" or "soft" signals *p* (as in musical notation); and the word "about" can signal *re*, or else *c* or *ca* (as in "circa").

These and other abbreviations will become part of your working puzzle vocabulary in a surprisingly short time. It may take a few rounds of head-scratching and pencil-chewing before the various signals and warnings are clearly arranged in your mind, but if you are a lover of words and wordplay, the learning process will be painless. Soon the world of puzzle clues will cease to be abstruse and hostile, and will begin to yield ticklish surprises. The punster in you will rise up; the dormant urge to anagram will awaken. Before long you may find yourself scribbling your own clues: Is *hashed* a "fun house"? Can "hang heads" signal the words *string beans*?