127 Letters by Ucaoimhu

In 9A 8:9–10, Ahasuerus's scribes send letters to all 127 of his provinces. This grid will also have 127 letters (including the one in the center and the three that will appear in each of the two outer columns), and in tribute to the swiftness of his letter carriers, three alterations must each be made to (i) a word in each of three Down clues (before solving), and (ii) each of three Down answers (before entry):

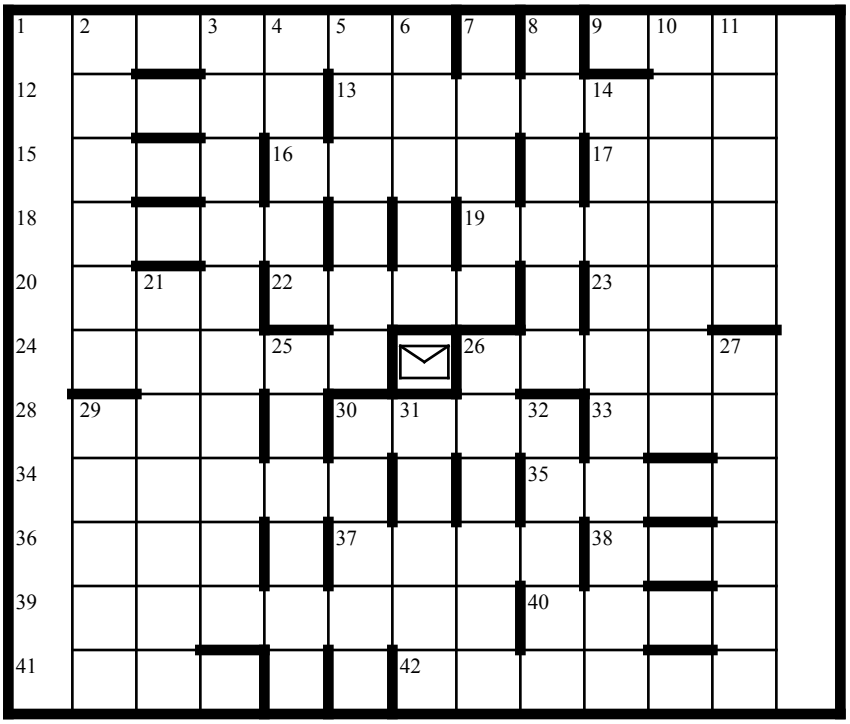
Running ahead. Move the center letter to the front.

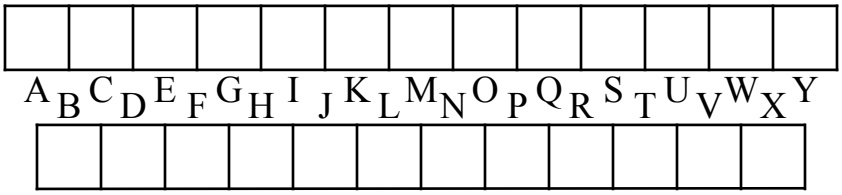
Double speed. Replace the center letter with the next *two* letters of the alphabet, in order.

Dashing. Put a dash through a letter (the same one in all cases) to get a different, archaic letter.

(Altered entries will include a variant spelling, a two-word Latin phrase, a two-word NI3 bird, a brand-name drug, and a comparative.)

The wordplay in each Across clue yields a letter string with one incorrect letter; below the grid, put the correct letter in the box labeled by the incorrect letter. The top row will name two lands, which are named (differently) in two columns of the grid; the above alterations get you from one to the other. The bottom row will list three obstructions that another passage about Ahasuerus's letter carriers describes them as overcoming; the "Z" letter replacement not used below the grid (which occurs in part of one of the lands) will indicate another such obstruction in a completely different way, in the grid itself.





ACROSS
1. Club he's swapped for Kent's new place in Florida (3 4)
9. Hex's cryptic bk. that inspired this puzzle (4, *abbr.*)
12. Mostly raid storage facility (5)
13. Mean UK royalty daunt Democratic revolutionary (8)
15. Unit measuring loudness of half of pronouns (4) [NI3]
16. Large QR code finally replaced cash in Italy (4)
17. Von Doom's face is vacant (4)
18. With 35, a phrase used to mean "Enjoy yourself!" or "Hi!" by three characters in Veadar (4 1)
19. Spun gold's attiring her people near [eastern land] (6)
20. Left Theodore W. Snuffleupagus's station in NYC (4)
22. Recalled Tevye, originally hired as a milk supplier (4)
23. Turn gem hollow (4)
24. Massless matter includes hot substance once thought to carry electromagnetic waves (6)
26. Empty zoos in additional Asian city (6)
28. Word following *nicht* in an expression meaning "Is that not true of Washington and Oregon?" (4)
30. Rebecca always conceals name of sports org. (4, *abbr.*)
33. *Times* describes plutonium-flanged fastener (1-3)
34. Partner at last makes Cleopatra's heart melt (6)
35. End of phrase started at 18 or 55 that's disgusting (5)
36. Type of avocado found in vichyssoise (4)
37. Offer a bit of caviar to keep Victor coming back (4)
38. Archaically think worm must turn (4)
39. Where one stores frozen stuff e e cummings chiefly put into sushi rolls (8)
40. Using words, except for long word following *vice* (5)
41. Walls of Norfolk Street home (4)
42. PR men nakedly twirling were selected in advance by lottery (7) [NI2]

DOWN
2. Scandinavian singer's stoop
3. Octet from Moscow in Dr. Ushakov's English river
4. 150 consume bit of sole
5. Person showing Ted is opening things up after the start
6. R&R-taking drinker's source of warless and earthy stuff in Rome
7. Believer in "natural theology" of the Italian saint
8. Grant's note makes French number delightful
10. Make points when opposing campy bed from Tucson internally, which will be escalated (*2 wds.*)
11. "Tear that gyrating alien beard" resembleth nonsense
14. Very truncated list of mistakes in British lexicographic work that's not as good as people think
21. Deer injected with small quantities of medicine
25. Heads from Dan Allen's showroom to one northern Pennsylvania city
26. Partner with pater, ultimately!
27. Wrinkle-filled stratagem involving urn
29. Quickly caked after the departure of Penny's neighbors
30. Some men, e.g., sue ruler from [western land]
31. Brittle exterior of reactor is problematic at first
32. Make like a tree, and get out of here