

A → P → R → I → L → 3 by Ucaoinhu

Prizes awarded this April 3 will be a bit shinier than in previous years; this puzzle shows how you, too, can get a shiny prize. In 18 squares, two answers will conflict. (No answer will intersect more than two such squares.) For each such square, follow this three-step process (starting at that square and visiting two others):

April 2 (Day of Contention): For each conflicting letter, if it is the *m*th letter from the start and the *n*th from the end of its *answer*, circle the *m*th alphanumeric character from the start and the *n*th from the end of its *clue*. One circled *m*th character will be L or R; the other, N, S, E, or W. Write the conflicting letter that gave the L/R to the (L)eft or (R)ight of the other conflicting letter in the square. Then go one square in the N/S/E/W direction.

April 1 (Opening Day): Write the “first of April” to the left or right (as per April 2’s L/R) of the letter in the square. Then make the left letter capital and the right letter lowercase. Finally, go to the square on the other side of the April 2 square.

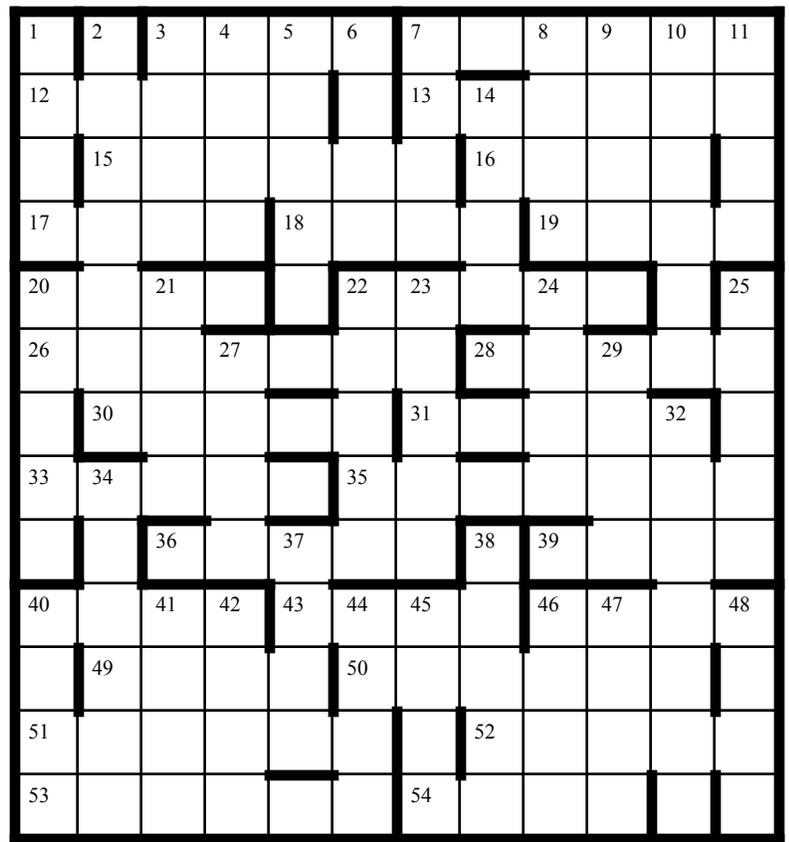
April 3 (A/B/C Finals Day): Go through this puzzle’s title, starting with A and following the arrows, counting off A, B, C, etc.; when you name the *original* letter from the April 1 square, note the title character you are now on. Write this character to the left or right (as per April 2’s L/R) of the letter in the square.

Lightly shade in the 18 three-square (April 1-2-3) lines you have found (there will be six depicting each of three items); these will illustrate how to get your shiny prize. The circled *n*th characters corresponding to the L/R *m*th characters (in clue order) will say more explicitly what you’ll need to do; those for the N/S/E/W *m*th characters will say more explicitly what this procedure’s purpose is.

Sound suspicious? Well, of the 28 circleless clues, 21 must have a single sound changed to another sound before solving; there will be seven changes of each of three types. Read the first and last letters in the other seven clues to see what all the above might seem to be (given when the ACPT starts); if you apply all three sound changes to the last word of what you’ve read, you will see what it really is.

ACROSS

3. White substance that encrusts center of highest row (4)
7. To remove official Treasury status from bunco investigators, in part (6) [NI2]
12. At the onset, note it has improved Little Caesar’s zip (5)
13. Prominent actor starts to choose, say, *Argo* (6)
15. Schooner’s fifth guy, exhibiting 98 m/s² of acceleration (3-3)
16. Gevalt! “Yoko” is spelled with an eta (2 2)
17. Listen to a group of seven, in time, not acting powerfully (4)
18. Lieutenant’s activity at the front necessitates caution (4)
19. In Scotland, is aware of a character from *Joy Story* 3 (4)
20. So, um, quote the scene (4)
22. Pathetic — i.e., sad — line in some clay (5)
26. Silly, wee gnat’s former prison in the UK (7)
28. A Hawaiian who entertained Dee by discussing west Ohio (3 2)
30. River mouth reflected glowing object outside of Tulsa (5)
31. Agent, for example, says “folks” again (5)
33. Bill, a clown from west RI, turned chic (5)
35. *Gypsy* lyricist initially claiming “age” is not idiomatic (7)
36. Lass with large, old winemaking firm (5)
39. Behold semi-lame Kinks song written by Ray Davies (4)
40. Never lets anyone else use “gosh” inanely (4)
43. Loud Earl has provided one of the wind instruments (4)
46. Causes distress to stout relatives, according to report (4)
49. Knight’s covering envelopes with many a stamp (4)
50. Oil Len mixed with a black alloy used in decorative art (6)
51. Danny, who was in *Moonstruck* and, originally, *Mad Ollie* (6)



52. Sweet, British-style actress Myrna drinks liters (5)
53. Made a debtor of slow, grasping character at end of siege (4 2)
54. Rite involving a priest’s wage (4)

DOWN

1. Young Frankenstein’s lab assistant rebuilt Gina (4)
2. Eve sloped, hitting your ear with saltpeter (7) [NI2]
3. Rip lunch apart, using choppers that Italian left in Wetumpka (4)
4. Sound of a corker from fair, captivating Indiana (4)
5. Plants from *Wings* that would be about a thousand dollars (5)
6. Incorrectly hear a mythic figure who is titanic (4)
7. American with Loewe’s who is queenly employer (4)
8. Worker who must drive and act cuttingly? (4)
9. A river running through Cornell (4)
10. Chips riddled with bits of onion would be archetypical (6)
11. Artfully cons sergeants and the like (4, *abbr.*)
14. Basil, in ’80s videos, is a companion for Joan, mostly (4)
20. About an hour after age will overwhelm Faraday at last (5)
21. Geisha’s clothing each foremother of the Greek deities (4)
22. One boat of a giant (2 3)
23. Tiny line on a letter shoots off in the wrong direction (5)
24. Cower, when embraced by cervine fool (4)
25. Jack lifted a weaver’s gizmo (5)
27. Kooky Gail’s brain tissue (4)
29. Nonlethal projectile material is around 2/3 French (4)
32. Bug blurted out, say, “I shot 173 under par on that hole”? (7)
34. Beast with a couch upset English setter’s housemate (6)
37. Assume a sprawled position atop Lambert — teehee (4)
38. Some of *Glee* lauds *Futurama* character with one keeper (5)
40. Rock that is black or pink, but not red (4)
41. Elmer Fudd-like Dale Stefani, who sang “Naughty” (4)
42. Mistakenly list dirge (4)
44. A place to lodge spurious spoken items like “11 + 14 = 25” (4)
45. 1051 pivoting after Fred’s first kick (4)
46. Bull’s offspring’s decapitated people like candidate Landon (4)
47. Gestate people’s documents, ignoring work problems (4)
48. Hadean rover remains audible (4)