

Neat Crackers, What? by Ucaoimhu

The “Christmas crackers” seen in the UK are pretty much unknown in the US, so I’ve written this puzzle to describe their contents and possible history:

Snap. Pulling a cracker’s ends explodes the “snap” inside it. Enter each of five Across answers with three letters in one square, conflicting with the single letter a (completely normal) Down answer puts in that square; these squares form a line due southeast, and in that order the five triples from Across answers, and separately the five letters from Down answers, will each name the stuff that “snaps.”

Crown. The paper crown inside a cracker may derive from the crown that comes with the second of these three early-winter traditions, each altering five answers before entry:

1. Lord of Misrule. This topsy-turvy Yuletide figure decrees that in five answers, the “lower” must precede the “upper” instead of the other way around.

2. King Cake. This Epiphany treat contains *two* small monarch-designating items (a legume and a very old piece of currency); from five answers, one item or the other must be extracted.

3. Boy Bishop. On the fourth day of Christmas, this temporary cleric makes five answers more churchy.

Each **3** entry has the same length and straight definition as its answer; a straight definition for each **1** and **2** entry can be found within its clue. (26D’s entry is a bit uncommon.)

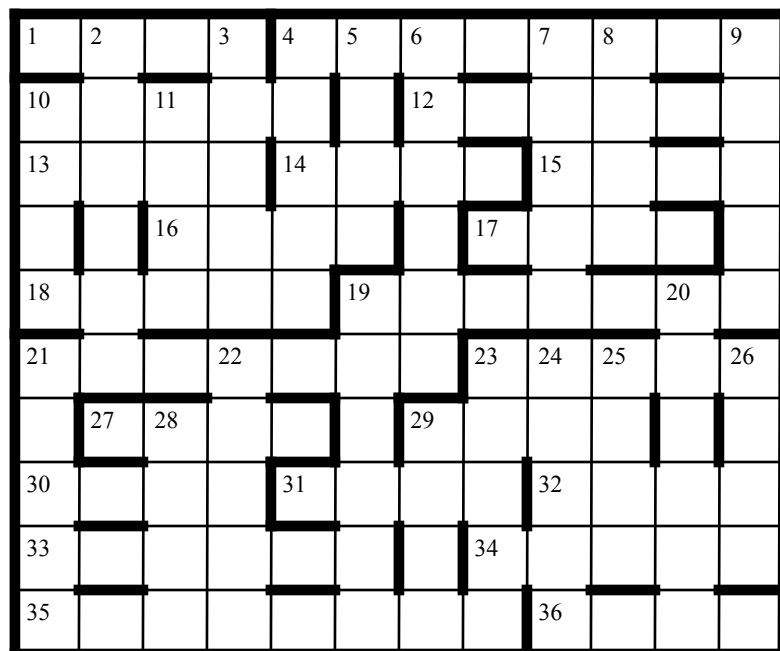
Joke. **1**, **2**, and **3**, in turn, may derive from an earlier “ad hoc leader” tradition with satirical origins. Each clue other than the ten from **Snap** and fifteen from **1**, **2**, and **3** has one extra letter, to be deleted before solving; in clue order, these will give the title of that earlier “leader.”

Gift. In the fifteen-letter **Snap** result, alter the last word as per **1**, **2**, and **3** in order (for **3**, getting a plural noun) to get often-sung-about Christmas items that are admittedly more pricy than the usual gifts in crackers.

Good Cheer. Circle the last *character* of each **Snap** clue and the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd character of each **1**, **2**, or **3** clue; the circled characters (in clue order, using the enumeration 3-2 5 2 4 9) will form an &lit cryptic clue whose answer (with enumeration 5 4) describes both the five-letter **Snap** result in the grid, and a way to celebrate!

ACROSS

1. Ignore barely, barely adequate little space
4. Solo maybe includes an antonym of “weather,” “moss,” “dozing,” and “munching” (2 wds.)
10. Not many goofy-sounding helixes in the pasta section
12. Steven from *Hard to Krill* is a mermaid?
13. Old bile-spewer Cromwell who went to war in 1642
14. Delineate causes of extravagant cough
15. British Colin, in Moldova, gets you a kind of cheese
16. Ladies I see around large room
17. Dub froufrou vocal sob at the end and start of *A Tulip*



18. Loopy part of care absorbs true Briton’s concentration
19. Spreads that heartily feed comic Mull’s flea (2 wds.)
21. Nonpointless structure Bo left is surrounded by moose
23. Oversized fliers about keeping front of rudder clean
27. Ickily, Tim & Donna like athletes that never fail to win
29. Mo (grin!) replaced key with a flat brace (2 wds.)
30. *Ringo* is preceded by a record some dog eats
31. If Snake and Molly aren’t there, use Selene as support for your forearm
32. Balt recalled elf, at times
33. Nurses take these garbanzos + lentils + ... + vetches
34. Leave some pegs and things attached to the mug
35. Luxury models having vacuous shorn players in back
36. Not commonly seen or read

DOWN

2. An orator’s platform Diana put between river and well
3. *Pomp and Circumstance* composer is remarkably regal
4. Everyone’s mat is getting elevated strain
5. Add plastic coatings to tellurium behind whirling beast
6. Series whose fourth part is *Au Pair Finishing House’s Cold Beer* (2 wds.)
7. Abe Patel’s novel-like shows you can defer watching
8. Part of Big Luke’s House of Rice (*var.*)
9. Ruby-hued, in a coat of arms Gus almost sticks to Les
10. A source of water and strange dark fluid
11. “Nonstandard” cannot be equated with “wrong,” Tina
19. Sequence of words Santa uttered
20. Coat Arizonan clothing lines with glitter on the bottom
21. Kind of action that uses the lawn to intimidate quiet friends is twisted (*abbr.*)
22. Kenosha puts out external baits for Seth’s son (*var.*)
23. Difficulties — caused by horses — with *High Sierra*
24. Hue selector picked up by the Earl
25. Cookie Monster prototype at the right, between Oscars
26. At a subsequent point, also does steep a mixture that’s topped with red
28. Work with elements that come after Ni, Np, and P
29. Said “items” before “axis” or “wildebeests”