

Foreword

This is a unique book of crosswords.

There are countless books of cryptic puzzles in print or online and almost as many books about how to set or to solve them. This one consists of Boatman's first 50 Guardian puzzles, plus solutions. So far, so normal.

What makes the book unique, though, is that he has added to each solution a commentary on how that puzzle evolved in his mind as he was in the process of creating it.

Boatman belongs to that class of cryptic crossword setter who is happiest when there is a theme running through all or most of the clues in a puzzle. But his solutions do not require the solver to have any esoteric knowledge of the theme in question. Boatman puzzles can be solved with pleasure without having to resort to Googling or specialist reference books.

His commentaries on each puzzle's solution describe how, in a good cryptic puzzle, there is a texture and a cohesion that goes beyond simply filling a grid and writing clues that observe the recognised cryptic conventions. Many compilers, especially with the help of modern software, can fill in a grid and write technically acceptable clues. Few, like Boatman, can regularly achieve a cryptic puzzle that leaves the solver genuinely satisfied with the time and effort expended.

Hugh Stephenson
Guardian Crossword Editor

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Introduction

My first crossword for the Guardian appeared in October 2008, and the fiftieth followed seven years later. This collection brings together all 50, with an additional bonus puzzle that was first published online in the Guardian's Genius slot.

Here, you'll find the puzzles, their solutions and an explanation of all the wordplay, fiendish or otherwise. Alongside the solutions, I've told the story behind each puzzle: how I thought of the theme, how it developed into the finished crossword, the ideas that never made it into print and the unlikely coincidences that emerged afterwards. You'll see something of my working methods and the relationship between setter and editor, you'll have another chance to solve my extra teaser clues and you'll hear from a few of the solvers who took the time to comment on the puzzles when they were first published.

All the puzzles appear as they were originally published, except in a handful of cases in which there were minor errors (usually my fault), which I've taken the opportunity to correct.

Compiling cryptic crosswords may be the most fun you can have on a commuter train without annoying your fellow passengers. It involves a lot of pulling together ideas, finding hidden meanings, hammering words into intractable grids and laughing at the results – there's a lot of silent laughter. You learn to see things differently (though, to be fair, you probably do that already), and you have the pleasure, if you're lucky, of seeing the reactions of your victims.

Whether you're coming to my puzzles for the first time, looking for older pieces that you may have missed in print, rediscovering half-forgotten favourites or returning to try again with a few that may have defeated you the first time round, I hope you have as much fun solving these puzzles as I had setting them, and that reading the stories behind them gives you new joy in your solving.

If you're developing an interest in setting crosswords, I hope you find the book a useful resource. Do learn from my mistakes, and see if it helps you to look at your work in a new light. If you're inspired by this to try your hand for the first time, do it! Have the courage to show the world that you see it differently; make words your playthings and enjoy playing the part of the evil genius; but remember, when you imagine yourself torturing your victims in your mountain retreat, that Bond always wins. Enjoy ...

Puzzles

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|----------------------|
| 1 | Beastly snacks | 26 | Boys & girls |
| 2 | Boatman's travels | 27 | Your number's up |
| 3 | Actors | 28 | Apples |
| 4 | The upper classes | 29 | Boatman's in love |
| 5 | Milk products | 30 | Moving home |
| 6 | In a state | 31 | Puddings |
| 7 | Conflict | 32 | In dock |
| 8 | Dead end | 33 | Shipping forecast |
| 9 | In a sense | 34 | Secret sequence |
| 10 | The beautiful game | 35 | Spooked |
| 11 | Dailies | 61 | Genius |
| 12 | What shall we do with
a drunken Boatman? | 36 | No end of trouble |
| 13 | A bunch of flowers | 37 | A merry dance |
| 14 | Fish & ships | 38 | Sweet revenge |
| 15 | Inside Boatman's head | 39 | A fast one |
| 16 | Crosspiece | 40 | Veggie cuisine |
| 17 | Animal house | 41 | Animal spirit |
| 18 | Whodunnit? | 42 | Boatman's way |
| 19 | Star formations | 43 | Selfish |
| 20 | Eleven of a kind | 44 | Getting the bird |
| 21 | A second puzzle | 45 | Freedom of speech |
| 22 | Under the weather | 46 | Party games |
| 23 | A fresh crop | 47 | Presidents on parade |
| 24 | Board games | 48 | Artists |
| 25 | Have faith in Boatman | 49 | Sing out! |
| | | 50 | Boatman's fiftieth |

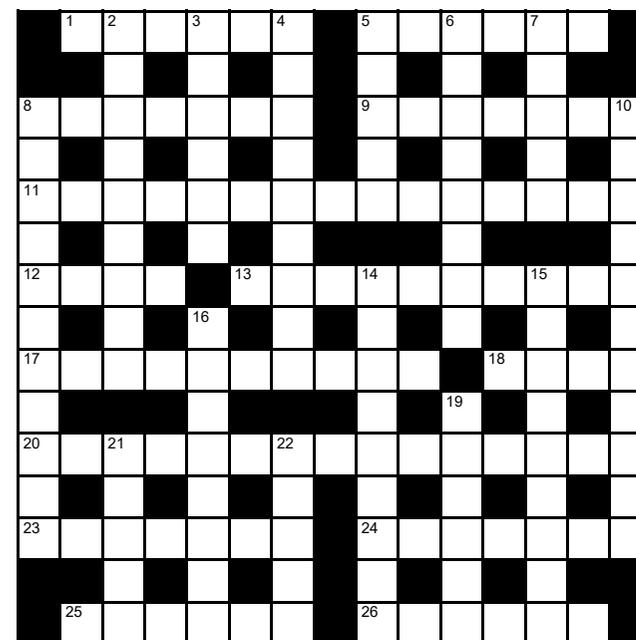
Spooked

Across

- 1/15 Long odds of tango and cha-cha foes dancing together (1,5,2,1,6)
 5 See 10 Down
 8 Awful, stumbling hag on dance programme missing trick, you say? (7)
 9 Harass people involved in wrongdoing (7)
 11 Much to-do from zealotry at heart, on and on, using psychic powers on dead? (1,3,2,4,5)
 12 See 10 Down
 13 Communicate with those we miss, who bequeath £10? (5,1,4)
 17 It's not vital to get tipsy from potion (2,2,6)
 18 Séance appears really inexplicable at first but, as you say, it's a fabrication! (4)
 20 Blame the frost? He's upset about a Xmas bloom (4,2,9)
 23 Morse, perhaps, out in sound and vision (7)
 24 Hollowly beatify dead souls? From the start, let them be (7)
 25 Phantoms from below, heralded by sulphur (6)
 26 Number (one transcending 50) and one of its qualities (6)

Down

- 2 70s rock instrument used in Wales (9)
 3 Perhaps put Boatman in work - a lot of it! (6)
 4 Back pointless meeting: the man is after nothing? That's a record (3,2,4)
 5 It returns the part the Church keeps (5)
 6 French perhaps sing solver's one anthem (8)
 7 Irrigation for Zimbabwe at last: an answer to prayers sent up (5)
 8 Creepy ghoul eats beast, exploits socially unacceptable growth promoted here (11)
 10/5Ac/12 Solver taking on psychic sees, as might appear hazily, the power of subliminal suggestion (3,6,2,3,7)
 14 After victory, reconstruct (liberate outright) (9)
 15 See 1 Across
 16 Presented headless first, it's said, for the dead came back (8)
 19 Soaring mountain road missing from visitant's haunt (6)
 21 A historic drink at pub (5)
 22 Potions said to cause livid hue (5)



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 Thursday 12 December 2013

*Boatman must respect one showing Spooner's
 supernatural wit (10)*

Spooked

Hugh suggested that I might like to try setting a ghost theme, by which he meant that a theme doesn't have to announce itself in the clues: it can emerge ghost-like from the solutions. I thought it might be fun if the ghostly message turned out to be about ghostly messages.

There are certainly plenty of set phrases that contain the word "ghost". A GHOST THEME wouldn't fit any of the Guardian grids, but A GHOST THEME'S would, and that led me to think about related concepts. A GHOST OF A CHANCE came quickly, but I worried about THEME'S until I realised that it might be hidden in a longer phrase. And so THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE came to be both the message and a comment on the medium by which the message was communicated, in something of the spirit of McLuhan's far-reaching comment on the relationship between form and content.

Even then, I had two alternative fills – the first three rows in the other contained A GHOST THEME'S TINY TIM DISMAYS EBENEZER SCROOGE, which was tempting to say the least, especially as the puzzle was to be published just before Christmas, but I couldn't think of a way to clue the Christmas Carol solutions without giving the game away, and I liked the ESP references in this version, which worked well with the "medium" aspects of the theme. The top two rows of the final grid suggest an echo of the original intent.

You can see the final result as a gentle meditation on ghosts, ESP and mediums, but Aztobesed and SumaHu got the point, discussing the business of the medium and the message in theguardian.com and concluding that one of the characteristics that distinguishes a work of art from, say, craft is that an artwork has a life of its own, in which ideas can come to the fore that its author could not have placed there consciously.

In 1/15 and 8 Across, I may have been watching Strictly Come Dancing while I was setting this one – Mrs Boatman certainly was. Concerning 2 Down, I played a glam organ in the 1970s, before I discovered the piano. Curiously, the younger Mrs Boatman was growing up there at the time.

Solution to teaser clue: COASTGUARD
Spoonerism = GHOST CARD



Across

1/15 (TANGO + CHA CHA FOES)*, 8 HAG* + StricTLY, 9 MEN inside TORT, 11 zeALOTry + ON + ON + ESP + LATE, 13 double definition, 17 (FROM POTION)*, 18 Séance Appears Really Inexplicable (it's a fabric, Asian!), 20 (BLAME THE FROST HE)*, 23 homophone = INSPECTOR (he's out, so he's not IN), 24 Beatify + GONE + S(ouls), 25 HADES after S, 26 E (e is transcendental) + L + EVEN.

Down

2 GLAM + ORGAN, 3 I inside (OP + TON), 4 TRYST - S + O + HE + LP, 5 IT reversed + THE Semi-&Lit, 6 homophone = YOU'RE A PAEAN, 7 zimbabwE + AMEN reversed, 8 GHOUL* containing ASS + uSES, 10/5Ac/12 THEE containing MEDIUM + (SEES AS MIGHT)*, 14 V + LIBERATE*, 16 HOSTED after RIP, 19 ALP reversed + GUEST - ST, 21 ALE + PH, 22 homophone = BRUISE.

I once wrote a critique of an early Picasso painting in which I found more symbolism than he could ever have intended

SumaHu