

Cursory Appearances

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Filling the grid by trusting the numbered clues will work almost everywhere. In a couple of cases though, such trust would be misplaced. For these exceptions, the setter has (elsewhere in the grid) provided pointers to point out what needs to be done. Stare at the grid, squinting if necessary, to find the pointers.

Once you've figured out what needs to be done, you can also fill in the first two blanks below (indicated by question marks). The third blank is supplied by Nina.

The conversation that follows might be an example of another ?????? ?????? exchange, this one taking place between ???????.

"Please 17 the 15!"

"Please be 16!"

"Hmph! 1d!?"

Across

- 1 A city right inside another? That's liveliness! (8)
- 5 She ate dinner, somewhat warm (6)
- 9 "Brexit's OK to dismantle." "This is exemplary, sir!" (8)
- 10 Brave characters fail ultimately, it is said (6)

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- 12 Finally got glasses as well (3)
- 13 Wanting PM election rigged? (10)
- 15 Hot sides, perhaps (6)
- 16 One in obvious suffering for a long time (7)
- 19 That very woman's husband feels badly about the last affair (7)
- 21 Apprentice, we hear, is following the order properly (2,4)
- 25 Drunk in the USA? AA putting an end to the misery! (10)
- 26 Almost sophisticated, lacks a powerful car (3)
- 27 Sexy quote about embracing Romeo on vacation? (6)
- 28 Also one who might help with transfers involving gold and ecstasy? (8)
- 30 Difficult passage of poetry in Greek (6)
- 31 Sit with legs on either side of sitar oddly and bewilder (8)
- Down**
- 1 Position: last (in height) (8)
- 2 Uneasy is a mind occupied by the team (7)
- 3 Clear obstacle (3)
- 4 Awkward bottom blast after sex (6)
- 6 Immunities offered by old-fashioned nepotism (10)
- 7 In the middle of live net broadcast about partners (7)
- 8 The Reverend's publications for women (6)
- 11 Noble man has spoken (5)
- 14 Novel about Anne, according to Susan, strangely captivates one with love (10)
- 17 Neat programming language to study (not R)? (5)
- 18 The world of top utilitarians: nihilism, inebriation, and poetry (8)
- 20 Disorder opening up in eastern city (7)
- 22 Impossible to recover totalled used van (7)
- 23 Find obnoxious date with online attempt (6)
- 24 It's what you do when you do not take part (3,3)
- 29 Paris-based explorers of high sea (3)