Two Down

Patrick Duggan (SAR’11), who recently sold two crossword puzzles to the New York Times, talks about the high art and low pay of the highbrow game word game

BOSTONIAN: Is there a name for someone who makes crossword puzzles?
DUGGAN: “Constructor” is the term most people would use.

How did you get started making crosswords?
When I found out that crossword puzzles are all individually made by some person — that it’s not a company or a computer program that was making them — I wanted to figure out if I could do it. I just tried at it and eventually I got a good one.

Do you use some kind of software?
There are programs on the computer that can help you. If you have a string of letters with blank squares, they can give you a list of words that can fill it up. That’s definitely helpful, but it’s not going to help you make a crossword that’s going to be published by the New York Times or a major publication.

A computer can generate plenty of dictionary words, but what makes a puzzle desirable nowadays is the kind of colloquialisms and modern slang that you won’t find in a dictionary. You try to keep it as modern as possible.

Can you make a career of this?
No. It’s not a high-paying thing. You get about $200 per puzzle, even for the New York Times. And they’re somewhat time-consuming to make. So you’d have to be exceptionally skilled and have a lot of connections if that was something you wanted to do for a career. That’s not my plan.

Where are the toughest crossword puzzles in the world found?
The New York Times. The puzzles published late in the week, Friday or Saturday, are considered among the harder puzzles. The LA Times has reputable puzzles. There’s a cleverness to them that makes them more difficult and also more fun to do.

What’s the Holy Grail for crossword makers?
Most people would say the New York Times. It’s attempted and solved by more people around the country than any other.

Are there Chinese crossword puzzles?
As far as I know there are crosswords all over the world. The fifteen-by-fifteen square box is distinctly American. If you go around the world, there are different shapes and different formats and rules for how to construct an “American” puzzle. It’s definitely a concept that’s used all over the place.

What advice would you give someone who’s terrible at crosswords?
The only way anyone gets good is by doing them over and over and learning the words in crossword puzzles that you don’t use in normal language. There’s actually a term for the language in crosswords: “crossword-ese.”

IT’S IN THE BAG  Puzzle created for Bostonia by Patrick Duggan

ACROSS
1. Shot in the dark
5. Journalist’s
tslang
10. Laundry load
14. Cock and bull story
15. Quarantined, with “off”
16. Regarding
17. Wished undone
18. Race charges
20. Disney’s “Monsters, ___ ___”
21. Salon creations
22. 1988 action flick that spawned three sequels
23. Founder of “The Greatest Show on Earth”
26. Before, in poetry
27. Point of no return?
28. It’s often written in stone
30. “Religious”
34. Star Bill
36. Final, e.g.
38. Lady of the
knights
41. They can be tight or loose
43. Record label that first signed Elvis
44. Wet behind the ears
45. Stick figure?
47. Slept soundly?
49. Digs, in slang
53. “Of course! How could I forget?”
54. Fine-tuned
56. Problem
58. The Waterpne
59. Diddly-squat
60. “Hot damn!”
61. “I’m dead serious”
62. Half of a Las Vegas duo
63. To boot
64. Band with the hit “Manic Monday”
65. Hardly at all
66. Sea eagle
67. Competitor’s best stuff
68. “Fan 9 from Outer Space”
69. Kennel club reject
70. Hotel “freebies”
78. History book chapters

DOWN
1. Variety of poker
2. “Who’s your
daddy?”
3. Emmy award winner for “30
Rock”
4. Crash site?
5. O’Reilly’s passion
6. Up in the air
7. 3.14, for one
8. Have an interest in interest
9. Boston Bruins
Hall-of-Famer
Shore
10. Part of a payroll
11. It’s 53 miles away from the US
12. Big shot
13. Get a grip?
19. 6 years, for John
Kerry
21. Very sharp
24. Cartoon
supplier of Jet
powered roller
skates and such
25. Hodgepodge... and a hint to this
crossword’s circled letters
29. Talk turkey?
31. Bespectacled
hero of books
and films
32. One running the show
33. Peruses
34. Shell often used

with the

as a horn

Oldsmobile’s last
model
TV’s House
and Hower
Go for the
bronze?
Very sharp
Tabloid
State with a five-sid ed flag
It’s most likely to succeed
“Ooh, puh-lease!”
Nickelodeon’s
bilingual
adventurer
Part of LEM
Doctor’s orders
“Bear”

completely unrelated to bears
Boston: “tonics” elsewhere:
Twoosome in the
gossip columns
Drive...
Put in the mail
Popular waffle
brand
Science class
section
Grandfather to Bart and Lasa

Puzzle solution on page 66