

Bear in mind I'm new at this COW caper, a little unsure about the judging protocol and the volume of notes expected in order to appease the creative caucus. First let me say this task was no picnic, the forum flooded by some primo clues. And second, congratulations to all COW-hands who joined the muster. I'm in the presence of sizzling minds.

My method of judging amounted to a series of passes, ticking those I admired at first glance, and then re-passing and ticking those – among the chosen batch – I liked even more, and so on. In that regard, I loved the Cryptic Definitions composed by Qix and Prolixic respectively:

**Qix**

Specialist in digital image enhancement (10)

**Prolixic**

“Many hands make light work” – not for me! (10)

The first was a fabulous IT red herring, while the second toyed cunningly with the well-worn proverb.

The clue swag also included some dazzling compound anagrams, which I ended up thinking may have taxed the solver too heavily, owing to the largish words (such as UNTIL, CLEAN and TALENT) that needed culling. A little too largish, I decided.

Other clues skated scarily close to indirect anagram in my books, including the intricate devices of Shyam and Interrobang. But other judges down the road will disagree with this impression, I'm sure. We all have our own styles and sense of fair, as befits a lively and diverse game as Anax hosts.

In the end my preferences fell this way:

Bronze to **SWK** for lucid calamity and a furtive definition:

Cranium injury for leading rank and file worker (10)

Silver to **Gazza** for an elegant and equally dramatic clue:

Hands-on specialist copper is hampered by terrible mist and rain (10)

Gold to **loonapick** for an ingenious sleight of hand that kept its literary trope throughout. Perhaps the definition may well have been index filer? Anyhow, here it is:

One filing damaged manuscript lost page I inserted (10)

Once again, warm applause to all of you. This week, as part-time judge, has proved to be a pleasure to participate, and an honour to adjudicate. Thank you cowboys, thank you cowgirls.