

META: Poison Ivy

Scott Handelman & Jonah Ostroff (ft. Adam Maresca)

Answer: **BUGGY HOLLY**

The puzzle describes and hints a Tents and Trees logic puzzle, combined with a single looping tour of the rest of the board. The answers for this round all begin with the letters A through H, and hide a variety of tree within them; treating the substring trees as single cells, one can create the starting 8-by-8 grid with eight trees, then solve where the tents must be to allow a loop.

A	R	M	Y	H	ELM	E	T												
B	R	U	CEDAR	N	E	L	L												
C	L	OAK	R	O	O	M	S												
D	E	F	L	ASH	I	N	G												
E	Q	U	I	T	Y	FIR	M												
FIG	H	T	S	O	N	G	S												
G	R	APPLE	D	W	I	T	H												
H	A	B	I	LIME	N	T	S												

Starting from the top left corner and heading “east”, there is only one full loop of the open spaces in the grid; these can be numbered, and the numbers mapped to the original letters.

1	2	5	6	7		13	14		A	R	M	Y	H	ELM	E	T
48	3	4		8		12	15		B	R	U	CEDAR	N	E	L	L
47				9	10	11	16		C	L	OAK	R	O	O	M	S
46	45	44	43		19	18	17		D	E	F	L	ASH	I	N	G
	40	41	42		20				E	Q	U	I	T	Y	FIR	M
	39		31	30	21	22	23		FIG	H	T	S	O	N	G	S
37	38		32	29	28	27	24		G	R	APPLE	D	W	I	T	H
36	35	34	33			26	25		H	A	B	I	LIME	N	T	S

Reading the indicated numbers along the path in the given order spells how to preoccupy (or just bother) Poison Ivy long enough to save the park: some insect-infested **BUGGY HOLLY**.

Author’s Notes

Scott: Jonah was the one who had the initial idea of having some sort of tents loop puzzle, and together we brainstormed how that would work and whether solvers could be expected to intuit not only the base type of puzzle but that it was a rare variant of that type. Turns out they could!

Originally, the trees were much more constrained because the ordering of the answers in the grid was based on the trees being A-H. Unsurprisingly, this resulted in extreme constraint on the answers that we could use. We eventually settled on A-H as the first letters of the answers, which meant the trees could be whatever we wanted them to be.

When figuring out how to extract an answer, I realized that if we just gave positions along the path, we didn't even need to provide the solvers with a grid! We hoped that they would notice that the trees could condense to one square to make each answer eight characters long, forming an 8x8 grid... and again, by and large, solvers figured that out without too much trouble.

My favorite non-answer that was submitted during the hunt was JANELLE MONAE, which almost would have made a 10x10 version of the grid worth it.

Adam: Boy there were a lot of backsolve attempts on this set; many we considered but couldn't make work with the grid, many we never hit but had a "dang that's good" moment with, and even more that were definitely things that got submitted to the answer checker. See more in the wrap-up!