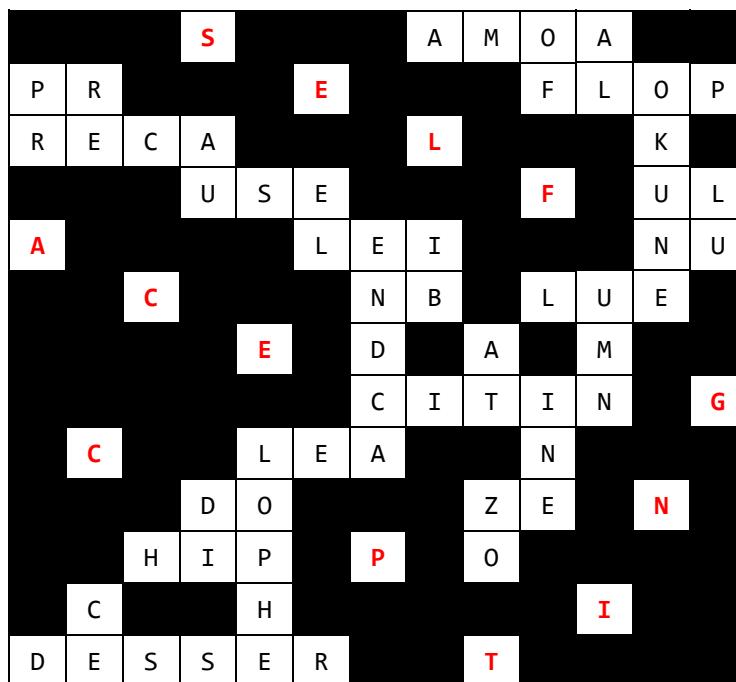


The Imperfectionist (solution)

by Ong Kah Kien

The answers to Across and Down clues are summarized in the tables below. Each answer fits in the crossword grid across a row or down a column, with the stated rule that there are cells which are gaps to be ignored/skipped over. Each answer letter is checked by two answers, so it is possible to figure out uniquely where the letters line up and where are the gaps in the crossword grid. The completed crossword grid is shown below, with the gaps surrounding 13 letters (shown in bold and red color), one on each row and column. The other remaining letters form one contiguous block. The 13 letters, read in grid order spell the thematic answer to this puzzle **SELF-ACCEPTING**. Note that the given example gap cells help to disambiguate between the position of the two Cs and the two Ns, which could otherwise swap columns.



ACROSS														Answers
1. Polynesian island group														SAMOA
2. Before the first three community cards are dealt in poker														PREFLOP
3. To reseal a boat's seams using waterproof filler again (variant spelling)														RECALK
4. Handy to have around														USEFUL
5. Jewish concluding prayer whose title means "our duty"														ALEINU
6. South Korean pop rock band that debuted in August 2009														CNBLUE
7. Dutch cheese														EDAM
8. Referencing as a source														CITING
9. Spotless														CLEAN
10. Twelve														DOZEN
11. Nile wader														HIPPO
12. Greek X														CHI
13. Final course														DESSERT

DOWN	Answers
1. Informal term used by Blathers to refer to a horse when he first appeared in <i>Oliver Twist</i>	PRAD
2. Short for reconnaissance	RECCE
3. Two schools in Singapore named after Chiang Kai-Shek — a main school and its former branch school at Yishun (initials)	CCHS
4. Some Arabs	SAUDIS
5. Hill in Limpopo with an elevation of 918 meters	SELOPHE
6. Conger catcher	EELER
7. Product display featured at a prominent part of an aisle	ENDCAP
8. Legal excuse story	ALIBI
9. Unleavened bread eaten especially at the Passover (plural)	MATZOT
10. Not connected to the internet	OFFLINE
11. Former students	ALUMNI
12. Hundred million years, in Japanese	OKUNEN
13. Bathtub stopper	PLUG

Constructor's notes:

The round 1 answers were challenging to construct thematic puzzles around for me, as one facet of these answers have already been used for the round 1 meta mechanic, and cannot be reused. For instance, after coming up with another thematic idea along the lines of gaps in character, I initially wanted to use word deletions, or filling letters in certain gaps to form new words. The eventual idea to extract letters surrounded by gaps was so as to not mark extraction cells in advance, which would be less elegant, and it also makes the grid solving easier. However, this extraction required quite a large number of gap cells, so I overlapped them where possible to reduce the number. My goal was to have as many letter cells as possible, so that the grid was not too sparse, and looked more elegant. Construction was challenging though, due to the number of cross-checked letters, plus the constraints in the position of the gaps and letters for the extraction. And I could not use automated crossword maker tools to help in the construction, as even the fancy ones did not cater for a Jumping Crossword with gaps. So everything had to be done manually, and I added another challenge/requirement to have the remaining letters form a contiguous block (similar to a Nurikabe stream), which would make the isolated letters stand out more, and make the grid look more elegant. In the end, I was quite satisfied with the results as I didn't have to use too many unusual words. The puzzle itself is intended to be relatively straightforward and easy to solve, and should hopefully be so. But to me, this is another example of how a puzzle writer could nonetheless make the construction process challenging through the puzzle design and striving for elegance.