

TELEVISION

'Backstrom' is one pretty sorry character

Paging Dr. House. *Backstrom* is not the first — and won't be the last — TV series to embrace the template that gave Fox a hit in *House*: The arrogant, irascible, self-and-other-loathing, personally flawed but professionally brilliant protagonist. In *House* he was a doctor; in the short-lived *Rake* he was a lawyer; and in *Backstrom* he's a detective — but they're all variations on the same theme.

In terms of the initial impression it creates, *Backstrom* is not *House*, but that's not the crucial issue. The problem is that Rainn Wilson is not Hugh Laurie.

To be fair, this series from *Bones*' Hart Hanson, adapted from a series of Swedish mysteries, is asking a lot of Wilson. Backstrom has all of *House*'s

BACKSTROM ★★★
Fox Tonight 9 ET/PT

flaws without any of his wounded-warrior saving graces: He's a conceited, misanthropic, homophobic, racist, rude, overweight, alcoholic slob. Laurie brought a boyish charm to *House* and a sexual magnetism that helped explain why people would at least initially choose to be around him despite his problems; Backstrom is just one off-putting character-istic on top of another.

Unfortunately, rather than draw us in to the character, Wilson pushes us away. The performance isn't just charmless; it's overly defined and over-emphatic. There are many moments when you feel you're watching an actor make choices rather than watching a character simply be.



SERGEI BACHLAKOV, FOX

Detective Everett Backstrom's (Rainn Wilson's) business is solving crimes, not running a popularity contest.

And to make matters worse, early on, anyway, he's saddled with this intuitive "I'm you" approach to crime solving in which he puts himself in someone else's place. It's intriguing once, but it

soon begins to feel like a lazy way around the hard work of planting and discovering clues.

We don't have to like a main character. But we do have to be interested enough to invest our

weekly time in him or her, and odds are that only Wilson's devoted fans will survive that make-or-break point.

The shame is that Hanson has otherwise given Fox the same kind of solid entertainment he has provided in *Bones*. The structure is flexible enough to handle a variety of cases, and the supporting characters are distinctive and well-cast enough to handle their own stories. Any show with Dennis Haysbert as a preacher and on-the-side detective starts out on the plus side in my TV ledger, and this one adds good work from Genevieve Angelon, Kristoffer Polaha and, as Backstrom's gay roommate, Thomas Dekker.

They might be worth watching if the show sheds a few gimmicks. And Wilson might be worth watching in another show, if his style works for you. But together in *Backstrom*? Sorry, but no.

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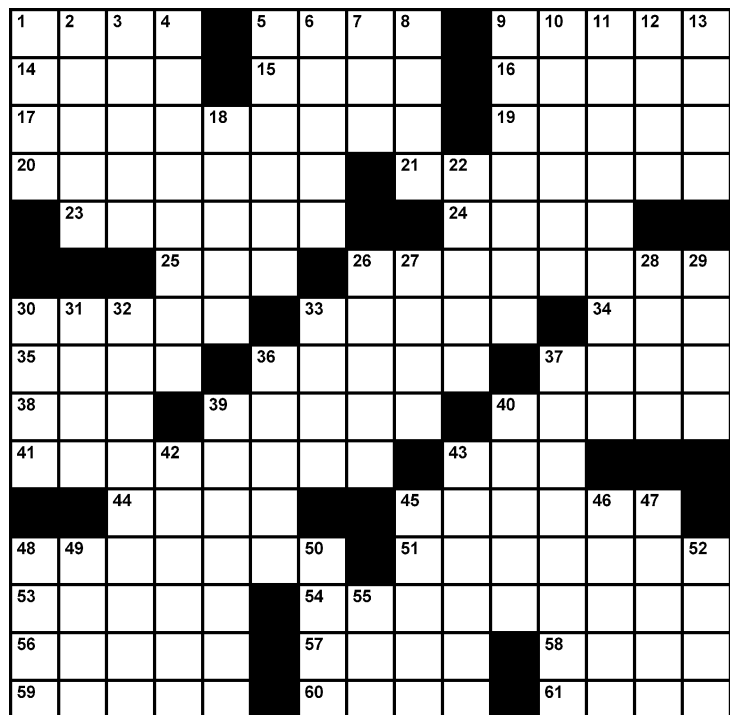
PUZZLES

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CROSSWORD
EDITED Timothy Parker
BY Kimberly Grant

PLAY BY THE RULES

ACROSS
1 Some nonfiction works, briefly
5 South American monkey
9 Like cryptograms
14 Calla lily family
15 Knowing, as a secret
16 Under's reverse
17 Accomplish or carry out
19 Digestive enzyme
20 Registers for school
21 In a brilliant way
23 Couch potato's perch, sometimes
24 State under oath
25 Owned
26 Deprived ones
30 Tree of the birch family
33 "Bolero" composer
34 Letter after Pi
35 Certain NFL team member
36 Pull a scam
37 Rug type
38 Down-for-the-count count
39 Not drunk
40 Clothesline alternative
41 Consequences
43 ABC incorrectly written by a hack?
44 Cream of the crop
45 Fortune-teller's cards
48 Rice with a nutty aroma
51 Acts of mimicking
53 Make analogies
54 Attempt much too often
56 Let through the turnstile
57 Neither under nor over par



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DOWN
1 Expressed, as a farewell
2 Hotel room amenities
3 Exotic
4 Make even
5 Like a knight
6 Occupied, as a lavatory
7 High, craggy hill
8 Itinerary stopovers
9 Small sailing ship
10 Moon of Uranus
11 Partner of "Be happy!"
12 Worse than bad
13 Recant or contradict

18 Where "I do's" are exchanged
22 Expert, as in language
26 Harasses newbies
27 Swear out a statement
28 "... of ___ I sing"
29 Emulate eagles
30 Palo ____, Calif.
31 In ___ of (rather than)
32 "I have no idea"
33 After-bath covering
36 Cupid's co-worker
37 Like koalas
39 Voiced sounds
40 Acted riskily
42 "Enter"
43 Some fowl
45 Spud
46 Bit of pageant trappings
47 Arrive, as darkness

48 Sheep's cry
49 Candy striper, e.g.
50 As previously given
52 European herring
55 What aves lay

Wednesday's Answer
E M A I L S K E W S F C C
L I B R A T T I T H E L E A
F L O A T S O N A I R O A R
T H E M E P I L O S E
C A F E W A T T N O D E S
U R L I R A A D D S
R I O P E R C A P I T A
E D U C A T E I S T H M U S
R A T C H E T E D A S H
B R I M H A Y G E E
E A S E D B E R G R E D S
S C H L E P S I E V E
I I I F L O O D L I G H T S
D E N O U T R E P A U S E
E R G E S T E R S L E P T

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CROSSWORDS ON YOUR PHONE
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WORD ROUNDUP
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 1/22

Find and Circle:
Seven four-letter words starting with O
___ bread (five-letter min.)
___ in "Runaway Bride"
Most populous California city: _____
Lucky or clean _____

Wednesday's answer: NEBRASKA GEORGIA FLORIDA ARIZONA NEVADA OREGON ALASKA MAINE TEXAS OHIO / POULTRY BEEF PORK / CHASE / HAITI / HOLA

QUICKCROSS
By John Wilmes 1/22

--> for the eye
Largest continent
Tiny drain -->
Greek god of love
Calendar time
Operator
Italian greeting
Old sailors

Wednesday's Answer
F A N S
E R I E
T I N A
E D E N

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UP & DOWN WORDS
By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 1/22

1. PRINCE
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

CALLING

Clues:
1. Duke of Cambridge
2. One of Alec's brothers
3. Brand of keyboard instrument
4. Place to hear some tunes
5. It's scanned at the store
6. Alias
7. Form of teasing

Wednesday's Answer
PLYMOUTH / ROCK
ROCK / CENTER
CENTER / STAGE
STAGE / CREW
CREW / CUT
CUT / BACK
BACK / OUT

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SUDOKU
Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

			8	6		4	9	
	8		2	3				
6			7	2				
8	4	7						
7						3		
				9	8		6	
	7		2				8	
		9	8			1		
1	5	3	4					

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SUDOKU FUSION
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Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

	3				
	2	4	5		
2	4	3			
		3		4	5
		2	6	3	
					5

DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★★★
Wednesday's Answers

1	6	7	3	2	4	9	8	5
8	4	9	7	1	5	2	6	3
2	3	5	6	8	9	7	1	4
5	2	1	4	3	6	8	7	9
7	8	4	1	9	2	5	3	6
6	9	3	8	5	7	1	4	2
4	7	2	5	6	1	3	9	8
3	5	6	9	7	8	4	2	1
9	1	8	2	4	3	6	5	7

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TXTPERT

Across
1. 846
6. 227266
7. 4653
8. 5323
9. 6366

Down
2. 642535
3. 26766
4. 9653726
5. 699436

Today's theme: **Elements**

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues.
For example: 2 could be A, B or C... and 5678 could be LOST

1 oo abc def
2 1 2 3
3 4 5 6
4 ghi jkl mno
5 7 8 9
6 p q r s t u v w x y z

Yesterday's solution

DON'T QUOTE ME

Comedian George Miller jokes about eating.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.
AGAIN EATING FOOD HUNGRY LATER SIX TROUBLE

“ THE _____ WITH _____ ITALIAN _____ IS THAT FIVE OR _____ DAYS YOU'RE _____ ”

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Wednesday's Answer: "Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves." - J.M. Barrie