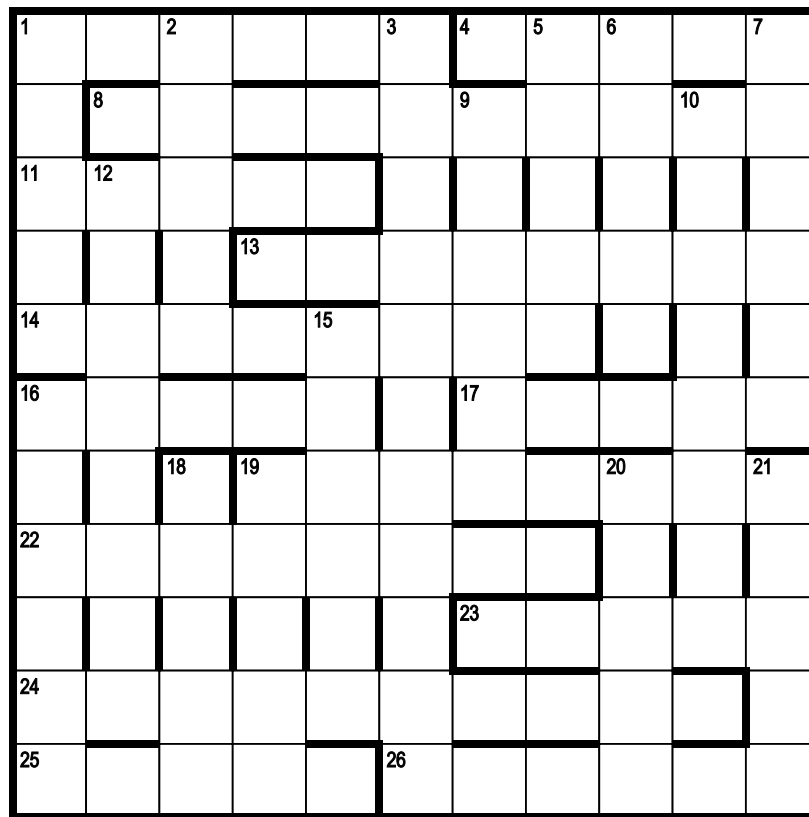


Cryptic 2023-09: Plundering Pirates

Darren Miller

Arr! Some pirates have stolen letters from the puzzle below to hide their misdeeds. Can ye find their secret? (8)

All the words need to drop a letter to fit in the grid. The grid entries may no longer be words once the letter has been removed.



Across:

- 1 Mixing brown to cover stains essentially produces a splash of color (7)
- 4 It falls back, getting into position for a reason (6)
- 8 Rearrange altar panels to reveal a spiritual realm (6,5)
- 11 Temporary accommodations for sexy, short elf and sister (6)
- 13 Make inquiries of faceless mask, avoiding glimpses of war wound (3,6)
- 14 A dog watcher has St. Peter upset about it (3,6)
- 16 Naked postgrad running from fierce creatures (6)
- 17 Boy grabs border like a loafer (4-2)
- 19 Feta and rice stirred together at a restaurant (9)
- 22 Caught in her net, even Pa came back quietly embraced by Ruby (9)
- 23 They say not many avoid get together (6)
- 24 French one, before getting involved in courtship, is not getting enough (11)
- 25 Initially, Calvin Klein goes crazy for lizards (6)
- 26 Backsliding drunk gives up last drop of gin and his awful language (7)

Down:

- 1 Was hospital originally under pressure to get clean? (4,2)
- 2 Picture-in-picture features in TV sets lacking true volume (6)
- 3 Two kings adopt the proposal after repealing decree to abandon ship? (4,3,5)
- 5 For example, Barbie or John Wayne's famous horse (6)
- 6 Amount of interest at usurious level (6)
- 7 Leading video engineers reject design and need an alternative to Comic Sans (7)
- 9 Tidiest, topless, and skinniest (7)
- 10 Spoiled onion dip containing egg is a safer type of drug (3-6)
- 12 Bored when skillet with the last scrap of bacon stuck inside caught in an oak, maybe (9)
- 15 Lumber for wild parties (7)
- 16 Newer and lower carbon footprint requirements (7)
- 18 Premiere of Star Trek had a good run (6)
- 19 Spooner claimed unusual cut of vegetable (6)
- 20 Oddly dancers hear backwards and forward (6)
- 21 Shaun has lost heart twice in soothing places (6)