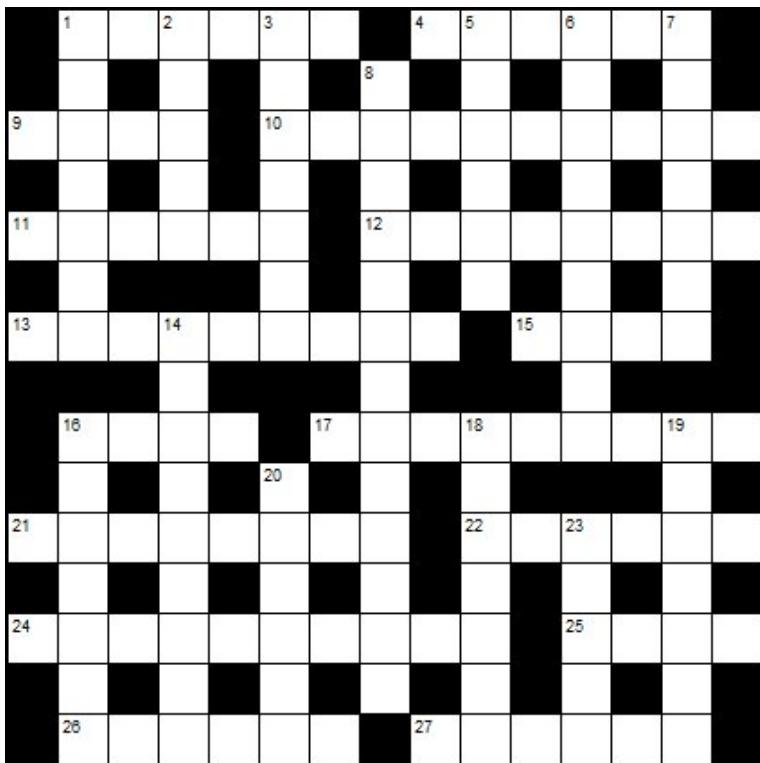


Puzzle by Pebble

This is a lovely puzzle with a variety of clueing devices, perfect cryptic grammar and evocative surface readings. This is Pebble's debut and I hope we will see more puzzles from her. Favourite clues: 13 across, 5 and 16 down. Sharp-eyed solvers may notice a ghost theme...



ACROSS

- 1 Flying from lair, eagle wheeled (6)
- 4 Work wearing that headgear (3,3)
- 9 Keen to see prima donna make a comeback (4)
- 10 Academic afraid of losing a submission (10)
- 11 Partially spend earnings to win (6)
- 12 Bandages around middle of wound causing constraints (8)
- 13 Playground mat is a symmetrical shape (9)
- 15 Short Roman outfit associated with old African state (4)
- 16 Criticise game play (4)
- 17 District officer confronting men initially crushed mutiny (9)
- 21 Game is favourite centrepiece of banquet (8)
- 22 Open a French company near the hub of market (6)
- 24 Raccoon, lemur or mongoose maybe followed after call (4-6)
- 25 Flat two, for example (4)
- 26 Large plant is rooted in empty sunlit lane (6)
- 27 Dirty – like a cave? (6)

DOWN

- 1 Five in a conga, perhaps, move forward (7)
- 2 Losing the opening card game is a bluff (5)
- 3 Endless craving for painkiller (7)
- 5 Laced shoe is neat for start of dance (6)
- 6 Organ's heard, followed by another instrument – that will wake you up! (9)
- 7 Investor taken in by recalled books is cross (7)
- 8 Naughty boy coddled headless doll in an unfeeling way (4-9)
- 14 Sailor seizes gunners' abandoned flag in battle (9)
- 16 Sort Eastern spices after grinding (7)
- 18 Former leader of mob more mature in conversation (7)
- 19 Restyle is arranged abruptly (7)
- 20 Old-fashioned place for the town hall maybe (6)
- 23 Short game of strategy on the top of toy box (5)