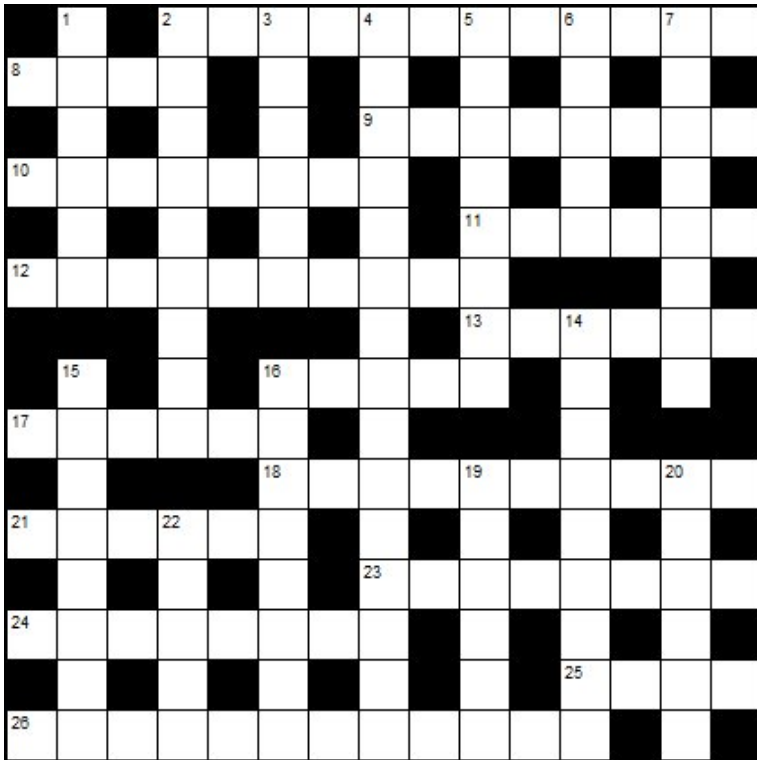


Puzzle by Italicus

This puzzle from Italicus has all the ingredients that make an outstanding crossword: adventurous and entertaining clues with impeccable cryptic grammar and believable surface readings. Favourites were 23 across, 5 down and 15 down. The last of these really was a laugh out loud clue for me!



Four clues, numerically linked, are not further defined.

ACROSS

- 2 Old-fashioned men inspect a hole in the ground (4-4,4)
 8,22 Mature knight embracing maiden in comfortable surroundings? (4,2,3)
 9 Soldiers claiming Paul Anka regularly used alias – quite the opposite! (4,4)
 10 Feature he included in government department study (8)
 11,25 Lady dines out with son (6,4)
 12 Earl backs moderate political party, an example of 4 (10)
 13 Record covered by Pink – “Relax” (6)
 16,19 Fell Moorish concoction (5,2,4)
 17 Boy’s idol leaving Europe on plane (6)
 18 One set about working in friend’s house (10)
 21 Unrest in Darfur or Equatoria (6)
 23 Choke and accelerator (8)
 24 Alfred returned and married good-looking French firebrand (8)
 25 See 11
 26 Elderly relative’s beginning to test queen’s chivalrous leaders (5,7)

DOWN

- 1 Don’t listen to Stravinsky, say, travelling round North East (6)
 2 Doctor ordered potatoes with healthy starter (9)
 3 Rising artist overcome by strange need to curry favour (6)
 4 E.g. Queen of hearts’ popular rival given the chop on Tuesday (8,7)
 5 Makes false report about Colonel capturing Lima (8)
 6 An Italian leader consumed by mother fixation (5)
 7 Most fleet-footed turn in Mel B’s torrid Tango (8)
 14 She may make sacrifices to get setter established in newspapers (9)
 15 Large Scottish lass, it’s said, is an enchanting type! (8)
 16 Local sportsmen, having drink in hotel, sent round memo (4,4)
 19 See 16 across

20 Coin synonym for bent (6)

22 See 8