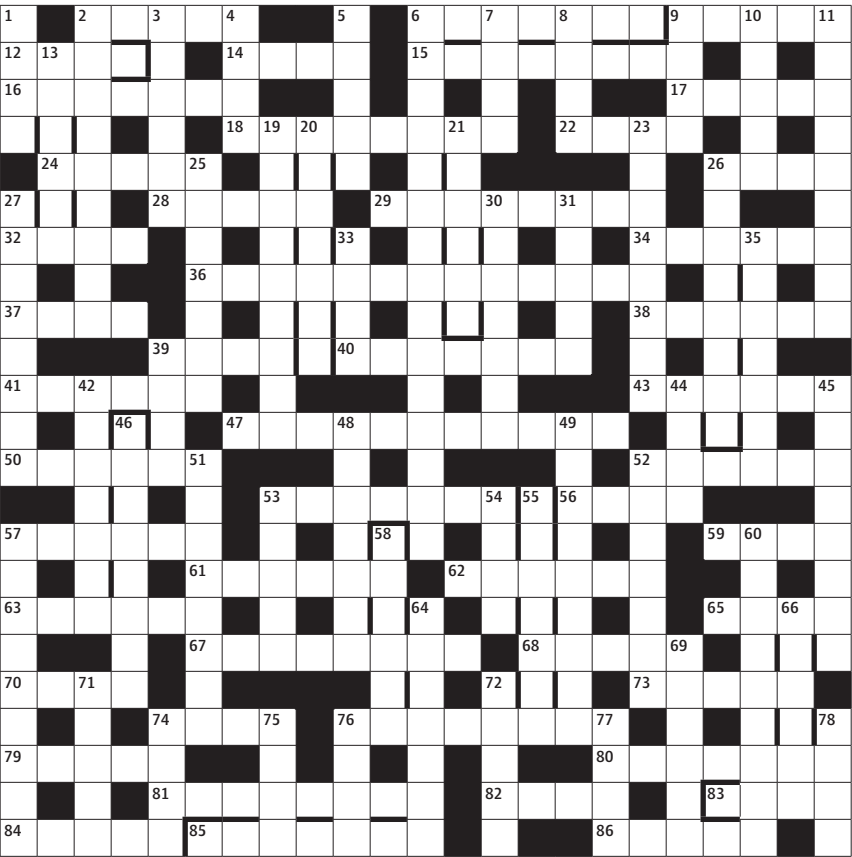


Guardian Xmas cryptic crossword
No 28,949 set by Maskarade



The GUARDIAN (52across) SETTERS' (3, 41, 44) PARTY (40, two words) is in full swing. The TREE (61,62) with ANGEL (6down, two words) on top is decorated with BELLS (5, 10, 38) and TINSEL in strands (24s, 50).

The BIRD (36, two words) is served with mashed POTATOES (1 and 22), GREENs (48, 59, 74across, 79) and SAUSAGES (19, 49, 80), accompanied by DRINKS (39across, 57down, two words). After the PUDDINGS (60, 75) come three items before CRACKERS

(7, 72, 76down) and CHEESE (8, 27), followed by a CAROL (81) about a PARTRIDGE (47, two words) in a felled PEAR TREE (76across). CARDS (9across's, 43) are opened before FATHER (54) CHRISTMAS (14) - or (2across 68) - arrives with PRESENTS (34, 56) for both the GIRLS (15, 45) - but not for the BOYS (14, 16)! And, finally, GAMES (2down, two words, 17, 69, 71) finish off the celebrations.

None of the solutions indicated above is further defined.

Across

- 6 What one of the dukes may possess (7)
12 Back story, we hear (4)
18 In temper, retiring detectives stand down (8)
26 Dean captures chorister's heart (4)
28 Finally drawing diagrams regularly for lively dances (5)
29 Gets into anonymous volume with chain letters (8)
32 Fast one hardly observed at Xmas, first of all (4)

- 37 Frame airline before start of hijack (4)
53 Show aggression to another driver - take a knife to him? (5,2)
57 Two short blokes dance (3-3)
63 Turns out with Chris and Steffi to begin with (6)
65 Guardsman regularly disclosed the Bear (4)
67 Last bit of work left on new stores in Alpine resort (8)
70 Ways of escape from the stables? (4)
73 Cash prize with strings attached? (5)
82 Stand up in shower (4)
83 Yank taking out Chinese bird (4)
84,78 Cut of meat from China to be cooked (9)
85 Ancient copper takes measures in court (7)
86 A shade uneasy at first, appearing in video (5)

Down

- 4 Large number of miles away from historical fiction novelist, Ms Seton (4)
9 Healthy Mancunian suburb (4)
11 Wrote rubbish about Spanish car and tandem (3-6)
13 Top child with love for sport (6)
20 Infection affected side like England (7)
21 Centres of multiple glaciers turning up on canton (6)
23 Fancies dodgy Pole (8)
25 Heard giant is secure (7)
26 Emperor's supporter with paper beard (8)
30 Having lost identity, Coleridge confused artist (2,5)
31 Photos of marksmen (5)
33 Up to no good, after end of shift (4)
35 Gemstone - red one out of place in container (7)
39 County borders (4)

- 42 Cricket side go off holidaying (2,5)
46 Tear trousers pulling these when parachuting? (8)
51 Rank site transformed in former homeland (8)
52 Versed in crosswords? (5,2)
53 Mutt at Number Ten is an oddity (5)
55 Blend of mostly tropical fruit (7)
58 Three-quarters of the mountains yield this aromatic compound (6)
64 Traveller in French country settles earlier (7)
66 Mini explosion which elicits a blessing (6)
74 Lustful desire harboured by male chauvinist (4)
77 City, then Hearts, finally beat Real (4)
78 See 84



The 10 correct entries drawn each week win a copy of The Language Lover's Puzzle Book by Alex Bellos.

Entries to: Guardian Crossword No 28,949, PO Box 17566, Birmingham B33 3EZ or by fax to 0121 742 1313 by Thursday 5 January. Solution and winners in the Guardian on Monday 9 January.

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