



Your taxi clatters across the gravel road, rattling and ringing across the silence of the night before pulling up to the oaken front doors of the Tudor mansion. You've hardly stepped out of the vehicle before the sergeant approaches you with a grave expression.

"Detective, I'm afraid you've arrived just in time for a real mess," the sergeant says, their voice low and serious.

You furrow your brow. "What are we looking at?"

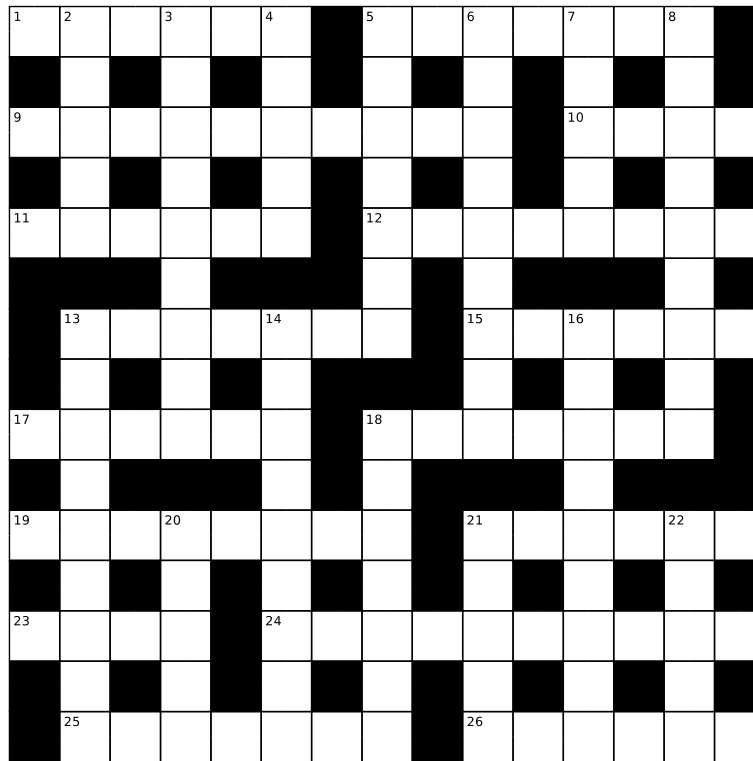
"We're still finding that out for ourselves, but it doesn't look pretty. It's going to be a long night."

You nod, your eyes scanning the details of the mansion's imperturbable face.

"Alright. Let's see what we're dealing with here."

Clue: Loplop Cryptic #019 [15x]

by George Ho



ACROSS

- 1. Ruby liquor, knocked back, put someone to sleep (6)
- 5. Loplop's second attempt to pen English puzzle (7)
- 9. Piece of data on electric vehicle... is it for an executive meeting? (5,5)
- 10. American Express moving up second half in inspection (4)
- 11. Breadwinner's musical skill initially not even recognizable (6)
- 12. Scheme of chief of police thronged by pliable cronies (8)
- 13. Officer sounds like a bit of an earful? (7)
- 15. Tame reminder to renew your Twitch membership? (6)
- 17. Sharp rock band to cover singles — not just one but two (6)
- 18. Nasty political accusations involving celebrity — spicy stuff (7)

- 19. Smoked outside of apartment? Apprehended (8)
- 21. Detective's crazed hustle (6)
- 23. False witness trains to backpedal (4)
- 24. I'm about to stuff fruit with trace of radium — it may bring death (4,6)
- 25. Repository rapidly emptied after a sign (7)
- 26. Painfully separate from small songbird near church (6)

DOWN

- 2. Super-super sound kind of treatment? (5)
- 3. Trio of detectives went fishing and unraveled... (9)
- 4. ...final part of cipher — done with perseverance, say? (5)
- 5. American in Michigan, California or maybe Oklahoma! (7)

- 6. Assistant improvised for some devilish people? (9)
- 7. Starts to examine yearningly... entranced, utterly possessed! (3,2)
- 8. Darn, you're going through the wringer all the time (4-5)
- 13. Tucked into coat, casebook's covering sources for investigation — every last caged talker (9)
- 14. State during picnic: "A ragu! Amazing!" (9)
- 16. Finger pointing at couple of blisters on a gigantic self (5,4)
- 18. Joe (Democrat) is over Illinois? Yes, confusedly (7)
- 20. Beat pair of thieves before holdup (5)
- 21. Shrill squealer is endlessly cunning (5)
- 22. Teen drama's emotional outburst starts in weed ingredient (3,2)