

Ruins (solution)

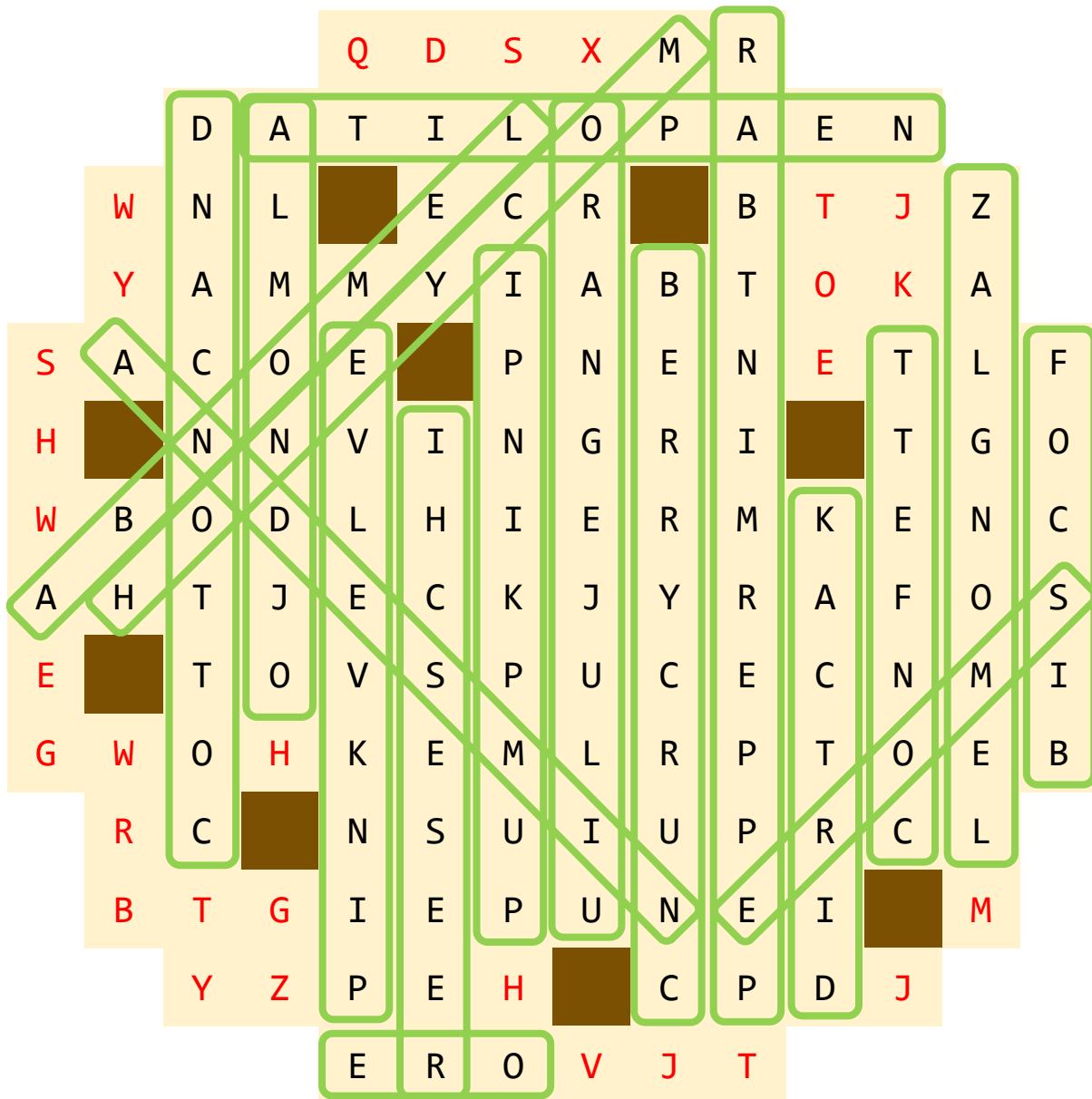
by Ong Kah Kien

This is a Word Search puzzle, so the first step is to find thematic phrases/words hidden within the letter grid. The last word in the flavortext “crumbl”, is not a typo, but a direct clue that hidden phrases are all [Crumbl cookie](#) flavors, which they are known to rotate weekly. The flavortext also hints “taste”, and the colored grid resembles a round chocolate chip cookie. All the 18 hidden flavors have unique word-length patterns, so can be unambiguously filled into the answer blanks on the second page of the puzzle in the provided ordering. And like the brand name, the flavor names within the grid have all been curtailed with the last letter missing. Reading all these last letters in the ordering of the given answer blanks yields the instruction phrase SHIFT REST BY KEY “OPEN”. So, the remaining 30 unused letters in the grid should form an encrypted string (QDSXWTJYOKSEHWEGWHRBTGMZYHJVJT in grid order) to be Caesar-shifted using the cipher key “OPEN”. Doing so reveals the plaintext clue phrase COOKIE FLAVOR THAT IS NO-FRILLS (FIVE). Solving this yields the thematic answer to this puzzle **PLAIN**.

The following table summarizes the hidden Crumbl cookies flavors, their positions in the grid (using x,y grid coordinates) , and the missing last letters:

Crumbl cookie flavor	Positions in grid (start coordinates and directions)	Missing last letter
SMORES	(14, 7) SW	S
BERRY CRUNCH	(9, 11) S	H
CONFETTI	(12, 4) N	I
BISCOFF	(14, 5) N	F
ANDES MINT	(2, 10) SE	T
LEMON BAR	(7, 13) SW	R
DIRT CAKE	(11, 2) N	E
ORANGE JULIUS	(8, 13) S	S
PINK VELVET	(5, 2) N	T
HONEYCOMB	(2, 7) NE	B
ALMOND JOY	(4, 13) S	Y
PEPPERMINT BARK	(10, 2) N	K
LEMON GLAZE	(13, 4) N	E
COTTON CANDY	(3, 4) N	Y
OREO	(7, 1) W	O
REESES CHIP	(6, 1) N	P
PUMPKIN PIE	(7, 3) N	E
NEAPOLITAN	(12, 13) W	N

The grid below shows the hidden flavors and remaining unused letters (in red):



Constructor's notes:

One of the puzzle types that I wanted to include in the hunt is Word Search, and looking for hidden cookie flavors seemed like a good approach. I stumbled upon Crumbl cookies and the idea of curtailing the hidden flavors for variety by chance, which also provided the means to yield an instruction phrase for the extraction. I used an encrypted clue phrase as I felt solvers could otherwise be too quick to figure out a plaintext clue phrase from observing the partial remaining letters in the grid during solving.