

MAI TAI (answer)

by Peter Sarrett

Each clue yields a pair of words which differ only by their first letter. The words do not necessarily rhyme. The flavortext asks “What’s the difference?” For each word pair, subtract the first letter of one from the first letter of the other to get a third letter ($E - B = 5 - 2 = 3 = C$).

P	RISQUE BISQUE	Cream soup with sexual overtones
R	TOMB BOMB	Possible weapon of last resort for Lara Croft
I	DISTRESS MISTRESS	Worry an illicit lover
C	FOURIER COURIER	Deliverer of French mathematician's transform
E	ROUND WOUND	A person struck by a bullet probably has one
S	COW VOW	"As God is my witness, I will never chew my cud again!"
T	CATER WATER	Supply a party with a form of liquid refreshment
I	KOOK BOOK	Encyclopedia of eccentric cranks
C	BASEMENT EASEMENT	Permission to extend a cellar onto a neighbor's property
K	LAGER WAGER	A bar bet, perhaps
E	BULLY GULLY	Deep ditch controlled by a schoolyard thug
R	URANIUM CRANIUM	Radioactive board game, perhaps
A	LOBSTER MOBSTER	A made crustacean
F	HOWLING BOWLING	Werewolf Night at the lanes, perhaps
F	ZITHER TITHER	One who donates a stringed instrument to the Church
I	MISCOUNTS VISCOUNTS	Forgets to carry the one when tallying certain British nobles
X	ZEN BEN	Enlightened Jedi master or Other
E	HURRY CURRY	Prepare Indian food quickly
D	ATHOS' ETHOS	Musketeer's values
T	ANION UNION	Guild of negative particles
O	COVER ROVER	Put a tarp on Spirit or Opportunity
T	FILCH ZILCH	Come away from a robbery with zero, nothing, nada
A	FINGER GINGER	Rat on a television castaway
T	WASTE CASTE	Social class composed of garbage men and sewer workers
T	WOMBAT COMBAT	Battle of Australian marsupials
E	POSHER KOSHER	Food that meets certain dietary laws more elegantly
R	SUCTION AUCTION	Vacuum event at Sotheby's
E	HAMAS MAMAS	Sexy babes of militant Islam
D	EERIE AERIE	Strange and mysterious mountaintop retreat
C	GENIAL DENIAL	Warm, friendly refusal
L	CUTLET OUTLET	Shop selling breaded veal at discount prices.
O	PUNT AUNT	Drop-kick a certain relative
T	CHIPPER WHIPPER	Upbeat lion tamer
H	DEMON LEMON	Crappy car from Hell

PRICE STICKER AFFIXED TO TATTERED CLOTH is another clue of the same type, yielding a compound word comprised of two words with the same property as all the other answers in this puzzle—they differ only by their first letter. A PRICE STICKER is a TAG, a TATTERED CLOTH is a RAG, so the final answer is

RAGTAG.